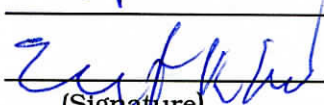


Harris County Archives
Houston, Texas

Oral History Collection

#5

An Interview with Ernest K. Shaw

Place of interview:	<u>Houston, Texas</u>
Interviewer:	<u>Annie Golden</u>
Terms of use:	<u>open</u>
Approved:	<u></u> (Signature)
Date:	<u>1/25/07</u>

Oral History Transcription (Abridged)
Ernest K. Shaw OH05
January 25, 2007

[Subject Index to the complete tape-recorded oral history can be found on page 65.]

Tape 1 Side A

000-220 Early Years in Terrell, Texas

ANNELISE GOLDEN: This is Annie Golden interviewing Ernest K. Shaw for the Harris County Archives Oral History Program. The interview is taking place on January 25, 2007 in Houston, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Shaw in order to obtain his recollections concerning Agricultural Extension Services. Good morning Mr. Shaw, thank you very much for doing this.

ERNEST K. SHAW: Good morning, good morning.

ANNELISE GOLDEN: Where were you born?

ERNEST K. SHAW: Terrell, Texas, Terrell as in Kaufman County thirty miles east of Dallas, between Dallas and Shreveport, Louisiana.

ANNELISE GOLDEN: What year were you born?

ERNEST K. SHAW: I was born in 1926, on August 29th.

ANNELISE GOLDEN: What were Terrell's demographics while you were growing up?

ERNEST K. SHAW: Historically, when I was growing up, it was a town of about 10,000 citizens and we had a Southside and a Northside. Most of the Caucasians in Terrell lived on the north side and most of the African Americans lived on the

south side of Terrell. The main street in Terrell was called Moore Ave, which was also Highway 80, which is now I-20.

ANNELISE GOLDEN: Is Terrell famous for anything?

SHAW: Yes, Terrell is famous for having developed the first demonstration in America for the Extension Service of the United States Government through the USDA, the United States Department of Agriculture. It is famous for that and when I was growing up as a boy, cotton was king. One of my colleagues, my father's colleagues, would always produce the first bale of cotton. They would put that bale of cotton at the American National Bank where Ben Gill, one of the long time pioneers of Terrell's business community, was the banker and this gentleman was an African American who would always produce the first bale of cotton even though the land on which he grew the cotton was not owned by him.

GOLDEN: Can you describe your childhood for me?

SHAW: My childhood was very dynamic, interesting. We moved twice during my early childhood. My mother's father owned their farm, which was about eighty acres and my father rented his land where he farmed. So, we lived on the Ben Gill farm and I am certain that Ben Gill was one of the people who was instrumental in bringing the gentleman there who helped to found Extension in America. But we lived there about four years when I first remembered myself I was living on a farm. We had cattle, sheep, hogs, chickens, and my mother grew turkeys, geese, ducks, guineas -- all the things that people needed. Of course we would always

have a large garden and she would can food for the winter and what she didn't utilize she would share with the community at large.

GOLDEN: Tell me about your parents.

SHAW: My parents were Herman Shaw and Julia Anderson. My father had been previously married, his first wife died and he had two sons, William and Levi. Later, he would marry my mother. My father was born in 1890 and he died in 1964. My mother was a few years younger and of course her name was Julia and she was a marvelous lady and taught us all the skills that she had. She never worked outside the home until we had graduated from high school. When I would leave home and go to school, she would have dinner ready when we returned home and I loved her very much.

We were members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, which is an old Methodist Church, the African American counterpart to the United Methodist Church. My oldest aunt, whose name was Ella Florence Anderson Wynn, her husband was the presiding elder, which would be the counterpart to the district director in the Extension Service, and he lived on Rockwall in Terrell and she was a teacher.

All of my mother's people were educated, if you will, in the sense that my grandfather was a teacher, as I indicated. He taught in Lawrence, Texas. Lawrence is a village about four miles west of Terrell. His wife died, Mamie, and my mother was still a young lady, a young woman and the younger children, siblings, did not have the same opportunities as did the older ones. This was

unique I thought because my oldest aunt went to school to whatever level they could afford to go back there and of course she became a teacher. My oldest uncle, he became a teacher and his name was R.Q. Anderson, Ray Anderson. Incidentally, his son was the first African American to earn a Ph.D. in Terrell that I am aware of. His name was H. Edison Anderson and he had earned a Ph.D. from Iowa State University. He was in music and he developed the a cappella choir at Prairie View which is the land grant university for African Americans located in Prairie View.

GOLDEN: Can you tell me more about your father?

SHAW: My father was a farmer -- a farmer's farmer. Much of what I learned and studied about agricultural I had utilized in just active activity growing up on the farm. Part of that was due to his association and relationship with Ben Gill, and also the fact the land that we farmed was owned by Mr. Gill. The first county agent who worked for Harris County through the Extension Service was involved with the African American community. I learned 4-H very early. 4-H stands for the development of the Head, the Hands, the Heart, and the Health. The 4-H motto and pledge is to make the best better. The pledge is, "I pledge my head to clear thinking, my heart to greater loyalty, my hands to larger service, and my health for better living, for my club, for my community and my country." This is national in scope but I learned it as a small boy and we did have Extension in our school environment in Terrell when I went through high school.

GOLDEN: You said your father farmed on the Ben Gill farm. What kind of things did

your father grow?

SHAW: Well we had a diverse group of crops, if you will. Primarily, cotton was the cash crop, corn, peanuts, sweet potatoes, this was at the level for the family primarily. But the cash crop that my father grew was cotton and corn, and we had cows primarily for milk, and chickens. My mother would take care of primarily the things that are associated with the farm and in the home -- chicken and eggs. She would sell eggs and we had a cow and sometimes we would sell milk and permit my sister to utilize the products to take music from one of the teachers in Terrell in the town, sort of a bartering system.

GOLDEN: Who picked the cotton?

SHAW: Well, I picked some of it and of course my older brother. I had two half-brothers and a brother and a sister. My sister's name was Julia Marie Shaw and she had five children of her own. My brother was named Charleston L. Shaw and of course, up until he was required to enter the war in World War II, he was three years my senior, so he caught most of the preparation of the land and terracing and putting down the fertilizer and so forth. We would also hire people from the town to come out, and harvest, and pay them by the pound. And of course, I would always go to the gin with my father to gin the cotton and separate the seed from the lint.

I found growing up on the farm to be a wonderful experience. I can't think of nothing that I did not enjoy. My mother would insist that following school that we must come home and do your chores and then after doing your

chores then you could, if need be, after you became older you could go back to town. But we had to walk, everything was walking which was healthy but we did not know how healthy that was back then.

GOLDEN: How long were you on the Ben Gill Farm?

SHAW: Up until I graduated from high school. I graduated from high school at the age of seventeen, Burnett High School. Burnett was a tremendous African American educator. He had a Master's Degree from Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. He had grown up in Waxahachie and the school board in Terrell had brought him to Terrell as the Principal in 1900. He died in 1944 that was the same year that I graduated from high school.

GOLDEN: Can you tell me a little bit more about your brothers and sisters?

SHAW: My bother was born in 1923 and he was a tremendous young man and he worked on the farm. He was interested in athletics, and he ran track. He was a fine fellow, he served his country in World War II as an engineer and had one daughter.

My sister's name was Julia, after my mother, and she was college educated. She went to a small college; an ecumenical school down in Tyler called Texas College. She majored in Home Economics and Music. She and her husband had five children. She had an excellent voice. The Andersons could all sing. We all had good voices and I could sing also. It sort of runs in a line so the church where we attended they would say, "If you don't have any Andersons there, you probably won't have a choir." That's how I grew up.

We'd leave school and go to the church and I think one of the tremendous benefits was that many of the teachers in the school also were members of the church so there was a continuation of education. Some of the theory and concepts you would learn at school you would apply them at church, like public speaking, socializing, and also the people, there was a warmth between the teacher and the student.

I remember I went to Prairie View in the seventh grade working at arithmetic. They had a program called the Interscholastic League. Keep in mind that this was during the era when schools were segregated and there was a separation, of course, you are aware of that. They had a unique way I thought of motivating the young people to grow and develop. You never had any idea that there were limitations on your growth. Our teachers had us to aspire to things that the young people today appear not to have a grasp upon. In other words, shoot at the sky if you want to hit the ceiling.

You also were imbued with the concept that you could be somebody, you could be something more as it were than the parents that raised you, and they worked to make that possible. I know when my sister went away to college much of the income they sustained from the crops went to pay her tuition. Later on, my brother and I volunteered for the service, he was drafted, and we would send home allotments so that our parents could have resources. That's when they moved from the farm. They moved from the farm in 1944 and built a nice little cottage on Rockwall Street in Terrell.

GOLDEN: So what did they do after they moved there?

SHAW: My father started working for the city of Terrell with the Sanitation Department and my mother she would work for some of the Anglo families across town, primarily babysitting, because she preferred to be up here then be at home, they were like her family. One, Reverend Mull, they had a daughter who had special needs and she would always be available when they went on vacation and things of that nature.

We had a very good rapport between the races in Terrell. On my way to school, if Mr. Gill would come through there he would stop and allow me to ride and always encouraged me to stay in school and do the best that I could. He would send us cards from wherever, he would always buy him a new car in the summer at Buddy Allen Chevrolet, and he would send my daddy cards. He would be in Cheyenne, Wyoming, or Denver, Colorado, and I would always look at those cards and be excited about it. So when I made my first trip across the Atlantic to Liberia I sent him a card and he was happy and pleased that I was not only had gotten a good education but that I was making an effort to help others that were less fortunate.

GOLDEN: Were your two half-brothers much older than you?

SHAW: Yes, well one was at home that I can remember, that was William Shaw and he had twelve children, incidentally, him and his wife. My other one was Levi and he moved to Dallas but he was very good, I mean we didn't have a separation

because one was so called half and the other one was whole. But they were a few years our senior. Their mother was named Mary and she had passed on.

GOLDEN: You spoke about Terrell being the first city in Texas to experiment with Agricultural Extension. Did you grow up with the advantage of Extension Services?

SHAW: Yes.

GOLDEN: Did your father or family utilize those services? Can you explain that?

SHAW: Yes, my father did. We had two agents one African American or black and the other one Anglo or white. We also had two ladies in the same relationship but the women primarily worked with the other women and men worked with the men. Well, we used to kill hogs back there, kill about three or four hogs in the winter to have adequate meat or protein in the cold weather. There was a Mr. Whitaker, he was the Negro county agent, that was the official title back then, Negro County Agent, and he was a very well-trained man. He taught things like curing meats, terracing, diversion planting, planting two rows, and skipping one; all this had to do with the care of the soil and getting more benefit from the farm. And I feel sure that he and the Anglo or white county agent worked hand in glove, one with one set of people and one with the other. Of course, a number of African American landowners, there were quite a number of landowners, then there were sharecroppers. But, in my case, my grandfather bought land in Kaufman County in 1866 so it went back that far and we still own farmland in Kaufman County.

I came home from Tuskegee, I'm a graduate of Tuskegee, which was founded by Booker T. Washington in 1881, in my sophomore year and we were at church. One of the gentlemen had commended my father about me going to college and so forth. We were having dinner and he said, "Ernest, what is it exactly you're studying at Tuskegee?" Well, I said, "I'm studying agriculture and I am going to major in chemistry and agronomy." Not being a formally trained person, my father said, "Doesn't that have something to do with farming?" I said, "Yes sir." He said, "Boy as much as you hated to pick cotton you're studying that." He was good farmer and man and he taught us to take care of yourself, do your work well, and help others when you can.

GOLDEN: How hard was it to pick cotton?

SHAW: Well I didn't have a real problem with it. We talked a little about what the bolls would do to your fingers. But, like most things, once your fingers were hardened off as it were, you know it was not a problem. Now the problem for me, as a person, was having to bend over and reach down to pick the cotton. I remember on one occasion I was standing up a little more than I should rather than bending over. My father said, "You need to bend over and pick a little faster." We'd pick a little over two hundred pounds in a day.

GOLDEN: Per person?

SHAW: Per person, and I would say, "Well my back hurts," and he said, "You don't even have a back, you have a gristle." So, it was a good experience. I have no regrets in that relationship.

GOLDEN: How old were you when you started picking cotton? Did you start young?

SHAW: Young as maybe seven or eight years old. Now keep in mind my daddy's involvement. He was over the farm so we would hire people to come from town who maybe didn't have jobs or they needed family income for the winter and they would come and we would pay them. My mother would keep the weights and my daddy would handle the weights and tell them how much they earned. Then he would go on Friday and go to the bank and my mother would have him a clean pair of khakis or blue jeans, take a bath, and go get the money. Go to the bank and I would go with him some of the times. It was a good experience.

I think I know why I studied agriculture. I mean there are those who for what ever reason they didn't think much of becoming a farm agent or farm agriculturist but that's what I wanted to do when I went to Tuskegee. And I lived next door to a family, the Hendersons, and this gentleman became a veterinarian because he didn't go to the service and we were good friends. So, when I came out of World War II I knew exactly what I wanted to do.

GOLDEN: How did your mother benefit from the Extension Services?

SHAW: Oh, mattresses, they had mattress-making, food preservation, new recipes. They had a home economics club where the women would get together and do things. She loved flowers, all kinds of flowers, roses, the garden.

We would take corn to the mill, corn that have been pulled, dry corn, take it to the mill and here again like bartering we would give the mill so much then they would make our corn meal for us. And, you could get that back and use it to

make cornbread. The only thing we really had to buy was sugar and because we would kill about three or four hogs every year and take the fat and make lard.

GOLDEN: Isn't there a hog-killing season?

SHAW: November and December. Also we did not have indoor plumbing; we had outhouses. We didn't have draw water or a refrigerator. I mean we had an icebox. You would put a signal up indicating if you wanted fifty or a hundred pounds of ice and you would put it in a so-called icebox and wrap some newspaper around it to keep longer and so forth. We also grew watermelons and cantaloupes, and berries -- we grew it all.

GOLDEN: You grew everything.

SHAW: We grew it all and my grandfather, much of it I learned from him because he had dispensed with teaching when I really knew him the best which was about the late forties, and he would peddle. 'Peddle,' you know what that means. He would go and take his produce across on the so-called white side of town and sell. We had a horse and a mule. The horse was named Roadie and the mule was named Dan. No, I got that backwards, the horse was named Dan, and the mule named Roadie.

I would go with him sometimes and I learned a lot because I would take berries. We'd have berries and plums and sugar cane. During the Christmas season, we would cut down trees and I would merchandise them myself to the people. On his way back through the so-called black community, he'd have a few things left and the ladies would come and see him or see him out on the road.

They called him Professor Anderson, and they said, “Professor what do you have left?” He said, “Well, I got a few little things here, what would you like?” He’d have some few little watermelons, different other things, berries, plums. But he was a businessman, if you will, because they would ask, “Well, how much is that? I don’t have but thirty-five cents.” He would say, “Give me that.”

Tape 1 Side B

107-165 The Great Depression

GOLDEN: You grew up right in the middle of the Depression. How did that effect you on the farm?

SHAW: Do you want me to speak from my viewpoint or the community?

GOLDEN: You could do both. Both would be good. However you want.

SHAW: Well, we never had that much beyond need. But, because the basics of food, shelter, and clothing we always had it, it was always adequate. We would always have enough to share with other people. We’ve always helped people and we’ve always been helped by people.

I remember this well during the deep Depression. We had a lot of people, black and white, were on freight trains and I’ll never forget this Anglo had come across our field and he came to the back door and asked my mother, “Lady, can you offer me some food? I’m hungry.” She said, “Ernest, fix him something to eat,” or however she did it. Bottom line was that if we had something, other people had something.

On Mondays my father would be plowing and we were using animals, not tractors at that time.

GOLDEN: Plows?

SHAW: When I left, going to the Army, I mean Air Force, Air Corps in 1945, my dad had just left the farm, but when I left the farm they were still using mule power rather than horse. I'm talking about animals.

GOLDEN: I understand, yes.

SHAW: But we grew up with plenty, just pure and simple. We had cucumbers, squash, watermelon, you name it, we had it. But, we worked and you know we enjoyed, you know we ate good, and we ate healthy food.

GOLDEN: Sounds like it.

SHAW: We grew it ourselves.

GOLDEN: Did your mother make your clothes for you?

SHAW: No, no, she made some of my sister's clothes but I can't recall her making any of our clothing.

GOLDEN: What about shoes?

SHAW: No.

GOLDEN: I know, but did you go to the store and buy them or did you have new shoes growing up? My dad grew up in the Depression, he lived in Illinois, his father was a butcher, and they grew up very poor. He said he never ever remembers getting a pair of new shoes. He always had to wear a pair of his older brother's shoes and stuff them with paper.

SHAW: I know when my brother Charleston went into the service, I think he went in 1943, I wasn't glad to see him go, but I was looking forward to cutting his suit down so I could wear it. Because he had it made in Dallas, you know it was tailored made. But, we had most of the things we needed.

Now we had for instance before we left we lived on two Gil owned properties. One was in a place called College Mound and the other one was where now the Terrell Tribune is located called the City Park of Terrell. My father bought some property in South Terrell. Go right through Terrell down Moore Ave. Historically, all the Anglos lived on the north side and all African Americans lived on the south side and the business entities were all on Moore Ave on either side.

GOLDEN: Where would you go to buy your sugar and your stuff you needed? Were there black owned grocery stores or did all this have to be purchased from the white stores?

SHAW: No, that's what I was alluding to earlier. They had, I remember, Green Grocery which was [owned by] an African American gentleman. His wife taught me in the second grade and third grade. There were several so called black owned businesses. Particularly like the undertaker and things like that, beauty shops and barbershops that are back to basics as it were, that looks like what's going on now. So that's Separate but Equal so called doctrine or law as it was "gave Negroes an opportunity to grow in business like ways and sell products to their own people."

Tape 2 Side A

001-194 Korean War and World War II

GOLDEN: Did you receive any medals?

SHAW: Well, let's see, I was in World War II in the Philippines on July 4, 1946, with MacArthur, as an enlisted man. Of course, I received that medal primarily for being there when we ceded to the Philippines their independence. That was when the Philippines became independent, July 4, 1946. They each had specific good conduct, Korean Service Medal. I guess the most significant medal if you will looking at medals in the order in which they come down from the President of the United States is the Congressional Medal of Honor, the Distinguished Service Cross, the Silver Star, the Bronze Star, and then the Soldier's Medal which is for you know like saving a person who is drowning. But the Silver Star goes back to World War I but it has to be legitimized by the officers or men who saw it occur.

I was probably one of the first African Americans to be awarded the Silver Star at that time. General Thornburgh came up and they had a band and all that good stuff. But, you know I really had no interest in that. In fact, when they asked me to come down from up in the mountains where we were disposed my attitude was, "What the hell have I done now?" Then I come down there, and they give me a pressed uniform, pressed fatigues, and I see this helicopter come down there and he pinned that medal on me and I am still wearing it. I was

honored, of course, but I did no more than what was appropriate to do and another man would have done. I didn't see it as any thing out of the ordinary. I'm delighted and proud to have been so honored. You know because there were a lot of men and women of course who have earned outstanding awards or should be so honored. I say I represent other people who did much more if not the same, unsung, just one of those moments.

GOLDEN: Were you there until the end when Heartbreak Ridge was finally taken or had you gone home by that time?

SHAW: No, I was there.

GOLDEN: You were there. What I can remember from history classes is the taking of Heartbreak Ridge took about seven or eight months.

SHAW: Yes, I was there. As I said, the 2nd Division, which is the Indian Head Division, they took the brunt of that. The 7th Division lost five thousand men. The 2nd Division lost about nine thousand men and I have documents on that. That was one of the most devastating, it wasn't just a battle but it was a period you know when that took place. You know as a lieutenant you are about what you are about and you don't get the big picture. You're just carrying out your role at that level so you don't really know quite what's going on. You just carry out orders and do what you're told and try to survive.

GOLDEN: Now did you have a medic in your platoon?

SHAW: Yes, well yeah I think he was assigned to Service Company. So my point being that when I had to go on that reinforced platoon in the attack when I lost Corporal

Nash, he had volunteered to operate the flamethrower and he had gone on a patrol the previous day, and that really devastated me to lose a man like that. Because he didn't have to go. But I didn't have anyone else in my platoon who could operate a flamethrower and he volunteered to go and he didn't make it back.

GOLDEN: What were the M.A.S.H. units like, the hospitals? What do you remember?

SHAW: All I remember was going back and there were so many fellows who were needing help. I was not injured to that extent so I went on back up the Hill.

GOLDEN: So you just received stitches or a band-aid, you didn't have to go in to surgery?

SHAW: No, no, I sure didn't.

GOLDEN: When did you go home?

SHAW: Well, Easter Sunday, 1952, I was in Kansas City on a train on my way back to San Antonio. So I had come back through reversing the way I had gone. Came back through Japan, took a ship back to Seattle, took a train from Seattle to Fort Sam, Sam Houston, San Antonio. The reason I remember so well that Easter Sunday I had been made a so-called train commander. My job was to keep the roster on the fellows that were on my coach and so forth. Then in Kansas City the train stopped. They wouldn't stop right in the city they would go on the outskirts because guys were getting off the train. And, when I arrived in San Antonio there was a sergeant there, they still had desks where they have soldiers there to meet you know new soldiers or whatever, and he said, "Well, lieutenant do you got

your roster?" I said, "Yeah, but I lost a lot of them." He said, "No problem, this often happens, where can we drop you?" I said, "Well, take me to the airport," and they brought me over to the San Antonio Airport and I flew into Houston. And believe it or not, we went out that night and some of the fellows asked me, "Where you've been?" I said, "Uh?" "We've missed you." I wanted to share a little of what I had gone through but they ignored me and kept drinking beer. You know Korea was called the forgotten war.

GOLDEN: So the train that you were on was that a military train or was that a private train?

SHAW: No, it was a military train.

GOLDEN: So you weren't segregated, obviously.

SHAW: No, no, as a matter of fact, do you mean racially segregated?

GOLDEN: Yes, yes, exactly.

SHAW: No, as a matter of fact when I came back from the Philippines in 1946 segregation was diminishing. Because I had gone over in the bowels of the ship, I mean it was so devastating down there you had to roll in three or four levels. On the way back I had become a sergeant and we were so called integrated, Anglos, African Americans whatever.

GOLDEN: When you got home did you out process?

SHAW: I was separated at Camp Beale, California, and like I say I only spent a couple of nights there and then we were out of there. I came on back to Terrell, my

hometown. That had to be in November of 1946, yes, because I entered Tuskegee in February of 1947.

GOLDEN: I was talking more about the Korean War.

SHAW: Oh the Korean War, what was the question?

GOLDEN: How did you out process.

SHAW: As an officer see, I'm still a Reserve Officer. R.O.A. I still have I'm still a member of the R.O.A. of the United States. So, I was in Fort Riley, that's in Kansas, Junction City and Manhattan. Kansas State is at Manhattan. Well, like I said, I had been recalled involuntarily as it were so everything was winding down and I was a first lieutenant at the time and I was having to drive twenty-two miles and I was rooming you know and I had to drive out to the base to blow out the basic training. And in my own mind, I thought that was a little much to have had to go through combat and so forth and then not have adequate housing if you will. But, of course that's the way the world goes. But, some folks who could not afford it but hadn't gone overseas to fight if you will, you know were they were initially housed on [base]. One of them, I think he was a personnel sergeant, he was of African descent, African American, and we had been talking at the club and I told him that I wanted to get out of this man's army and he said, "Sarg, you're not going anywhere." And being an officer is not a bad deal it's a pretty good life particular when you grew up on a cotton farm. But he said, "Well, you're not going anywhere." I said, "Yes I am too. I'm going to get out of here."

I had in mind to return to school anyway cause had I not been called back to the service I was going to go on a Fulbright Scholarship.

I was just about at it and this other thing happened so anyway I left the service and I didn't know which way to head my car and I ended up back in Terrell. We're talking about two different wars but I realized that I had outgrown Terrell if that's the way to say that you know I wasn't going anywhere fast in the environment and situation.

So I wrote to Tuskegee and they said come on if you're willing to sleep in the attic. They had a big attic with no tiers in there, you know, which I went. That was in February of 1947 and I graduated with honors in May of 1953. I had a good experience with Tuskegee. I loved Tuskegee. Tuskegee, if you get the opportunity, it's the history of that university has been awesome. It's one of the things I tell people particularly of African descent that you ought to be afraid to die until you've gone to Tuskegee, Atlanta, and Africa. But I've been back several times and, I think I told you, in 1981, or did I tell you that, I was awarded the Tuskegee Alumni Emeritus award during the Centennial Anniversary.

GOLDEN: You get home after the Korean War, what is the first thing that you want to do?

SHAW: Go to a club. Get a cold beer. Yeah.

GOLDEN: What was your career plan after the Korean War?

SHAW: Well, you know, I don't think I had any significant plans. Let's see, in 1952, I was married at the time. We were going through a little, whatever, at the time, and

I was trying to find myself. I think I had a brother living here in Houston and we were very close. Charleston was born in 1923 and I was born in 1926, so he was my big brother. I came here and stayed with him a few weeks, he was always kind and nice, and my sister was here also. They had both moved to Houston with nice jobs. So, we rented a duplex apartment, my wife and I, and of course, I wanted to get back into the job market so I resigned my position as a county agent in order to go to Africa, because I went to Africa in 1956 to Liberia.

GOLDEN: So what did you do before you went to Africa?

SHAW: I was a county agent.

GOLDEN: How did you get that? Can you tell me more about that?

SHAW: Through Prairie View. Well, okay after I came back, in order to go to graduate school, we kind of missed Rutgers.

GOLDEN: You can back up and talk about that.

SHAW: Well, after I graduated from Rutgers I came back to Texas and I was on the trail for the doctorate, I earned a masters in 1955, and of course, I had to seek a new job opportunity. At that time, all African Americans went through Prairie View, which is now a part of the A& M system. They found a place for me in a place called Milam County, Cameron, Texas, that's over in Central Texas near Waco. I went there and worked for two and a half years and it was kind of slow going. But everywhere I have gone as a county agent I think, hopefully I left the environment better than I found it in terms of educating people and so forth.

I left Milam County and moved to Freestone. I went to Freestone County in 1962, I really enjoyed that, and I worked hard and I helped a lot of people, a lot of young men and women in 4-H, mustn't forget 4-H. Developing the Head, the Hands, the Heart and the Health and many of them went on to college, some went to Prairie View, and some went to other schools. And, of course, I worked in agriculture with southern peas: blackeyes and creams. Had about seventy-five farmers in a co-op type environment where we were sending peas, cucumbers, and gherkin cucumbers all the way to California Safeway stores. Helping farmers, landowners, and people to buy homes and live a better life. I stayed there until 1966. I came here as county agent on June 20, 1966.

GOLDEN: Let's back up just for a little bit to clarify this. After the Korean War, you got your master's degree.

SHAW: Right.

GOLDEN: And where did you get that?

SHAW: Rutgers. Founded in 1766, third oldest University in this country.

GOLDEN: And, in what year did you enter Rutgers?

SHAW: 1954.

Tape 3 Side A

001-043 After the Korean War

GOLDEN: So, what did you do after the Korean War?

SHAW: After the Korean War, I took a job with the Cooperative Extension Service of the Texas A & M University System.

GOLDEN: Okay and what did you do?

SHAW: I became a Negro Extension County Agent in Angelina County in Lufkin, Texas.

GOLDEN: Who were your clients?

SHAW: The African-American community.

GOLDEN: What year was that?

SHAW: 1952.

GOLDEN: 1952. You were still segregated.

SHAW: Precisely.

GOLDEN: What did you do with these clients? What were your responsibilities?

SHAW: East Texas is primarily the belt where we grow timber. It is the whole of East Texas. I helped to teach skills in growing pines and saving the environment and working with boys and girls on ways and means to utilize the resources of that area. Of course, Lufkin is a mid-size town in a sense that it has about four or five major industries, so I helped to educate the community on making use of the resources where they lived, which included timber. There was a Lufkin trail, a company, and a town called Diboll, with timber industries, so I guess you could say I was teaching adult education to utilize the resources of that community.

Also, had several 4-H Clubs to enable the boys and girls to enter college, most of them would go to Prairie View. At that time, Prairie View was the

primary, if not the only, state supported school of higher education for African-Americans in Texas. And, of course, they had a number of ecumenical schools in the area in Tyler and places like that, but they were under the church administration.

GOLDEN: What was the population of Angelina County?

SHAW: At that time, I'd say about 25,000.

GOLDEN: What portion of that was African-American?

SHAW: I'd say one-third.

GOLDEN: One-third. How did, I am calling them clients, how did they find out about Agricultural Extension?

SHAW: The gentlemen who preceded me had been a county agent. His name was E.C. Johnson and he was an excellent agriculturist, county agent, as you will. So, I just sort of moved into his footprints and kept going. He chose to go into teaching rather than cooperative extension and that left an opening for a new agent. I was just leaving the Korean War and that gave me the opportunity to use my professional skills as a county agent. Because where I had gone to college, which was Tuskegee University, at that time it was called Tuskegee Institute, in order to teach it was required that you have Texas history, as well as having a degree or certificate in teaching. And by training, knowledge, and skill I'm an agronomist. Agronomy is a science of crops and soils, which is primarily chemistry and biology.

GOLDEN: O.K. I'm going to back up a little. How did you find out about this position?

SHAW: Well, I had gone to Tuskegee and I was in touch with the Dean of Agriculture, who was a gentlemen named L. A. Potts. He had worked previously at Prairie View and the Negro colleges in that era were quite allied one with the other in the southern states because, in fact, the southern states were the primary areas where the people of African decent had their own institutions of higher education.

Tape 3 Side A

067-086 Towns served in Angelina County

GOLDEN: How many towns did you go to in Angelina County?

SHAW: I'd say five to seven, we're talking about towns and villages, if you will, I'm talking about those I remember, Cedar Grove, and I mentioned one a minute ago and of course, Lufkin itself, Huntington, there were a number of small villages, Diboll. In most of these areas, I would have a 4-H Club. It was associated with the school, here again, at that time schools were legally and directly segregated by race, so where I was invited to do so, I would work with the principal of that school and organize a 4-H Club.

GOLDEN: Did you have an office?

SHAW: My office was in the black community and I was in the office with a dentist and next door was a medical doctor, so it was a core for education and professionalism in that town. It was not far from the school.

GOLDEN: What town was that?

SHAW: Lufkin.

GOLDEN: Lufkin. Did you live in Lufkin?

SHAW: Yes, I lived in Lufkin.

GOLDEN: Was that the central office?

SHAW: Generally, most county extension offices are headquartered in the county courthouse. I will give an account, for instance, in Harris County I was down at 406 Caroline for twenty years. But, in this case, back there if you will, we were generally out in an area where most of the black folk lived.

Tape 3 Side A

109-124 Other Negro Extension Agents

GOLDEN: Were you the only agent or where there other agents working with you?

SHAW: In most of the counties, and at that time, in the State of Texas, for Negro Extension work and that's how I was titled, we had male and female. There were several counties that only had one or the other. Generally the lady would work with the eligible girls and women, and the gentleman or the man would work with the men or the producing farmers and boys. Of course, we had the 4-H kids Pig Program. The Sears and Roebuck Foundation was very helpful to the Extension in Texas by providing projects for these young people. We would teach them, using these projects as a basis and then that would enable us not only to have a reason for visiting. Also even the Houston Livestock Show is an outgrowth of that philosophy. In other words, the one we just finished, most of those kids are in either 4-H or FFA. At that juncture, we had NFA. The meaning for that was New

Farmers of America. That was a Negro branch and the Anglos were Future Farmers of America.

GOLDEN: So, the Negro branch was called New Farmers of America.

SHAW: NFA, New Farmers of America and, of course, the headquarters was in Tuskegee, Tuskegee University in Lincoln County, Alabama. They would have their national meetings at Tuskegee.

Tape 3 Side A

156-181 Segregated 4-H Clubs

GOLDEN: Your 4-H Clubs, where did you meet?

SHAW: Generally, well, we had three levels of clubs, school-based clubs, not church because, you know, we have a constitution, and it means we have a separation of church and state. In some instances, we had community clubs where you met in the church, in the rural communities and, of course, homes and lodge halls primarily and in homes. Every kid nine to nineteen is eligible in this country to become a 4-H member. In fact, in Harris County, I had twelve clubs during a twenty-year period, right here in this county. Some of them went all the way to the National, which is in Washington, but we have the State 4-H round up at College Station. But, back in that period, we would meet with the Negro boys and girls in Prairie View. That's how the H.S. Estelle Camp evolved. That's primarily 4-H but the district agents would expect and require us to bring a certain

amount of money to pay for some land that we later transformed into the H.S. Estelle 4-H Camp in Huntsville, Texas. And, it's still going today.

GOLDEN: Did you just work mainly with the boys, or did you work with boys and girls?

SHAW: It depended on the county. You see, I've worked in five Texas counties:

Angelina, Guadalupe, Milam, Freestone, and Harris. In Freestone County, they did not have a Negro lady agent, so I worked with the girls and the boys, so, it depended on the situation. In other words, it was not so well defined that it was only based by gender. It was not gender defined, but generally, I worked with boys, particularly in Angelina County, because we had a lady there, her name was Mrs. McCullough, and she sort of trained me, if you will, about the ins and outs of the Extension. Sears and Roebuck Foundation provided these chickens. Each kid that she would select would get a hundred baby chicks and the boys that I was providing leadership to would get a pig, and then they would be required to bring this pig to the show. Then we would give out ribbons for the winning pig, after he had grown to be a shoat. Of course, this would launch that kid into another departmental division.

Some of those kids went on to become outstanding citizens with college degrees. In fact, there is a young man that I'm working with now who's a medical doctor and he's making a \$100,000 dollar contribution to the University of Galveston, I mean, the medical school at Galveston, on the 31st of the month. His name is Harmon Kelly and he grew up as President of the 4-H Club that I was

head of there, if you well. Now county agents aren't heads of clubs, you work with the community and the leaders and they become the officers. My point being, I was his county agent and the significance of that is, he became an M.D., a medical doctor, and his daughter went to Brown University, she is also a medical doctor. They have a very successful O. B. Gyn practice in San Antonio, and this coming 31st, which I believe is next week, they are having an activity for him and we are putting together a little synopsis of what he did when he was in 4-H. Not taking credit for it but young people can move from one echelon to another if they are given guidance and counsel.

GOLDEN: Now, you have talked about the chickens and the pigs, who paid for those?

SHAW: The Sears and Roebuck Foundation.

GOLDEN: What was that about? I know who they are but...

SHAW: I think this was emulated from A&M and Prairie View. They in turn, would request or ask us would we like to consider those programs in our counties. We would go into the communities and ask some of the leaders if we get the program, would y'all like to help us sustain it. Then the Foundation would replenish the program, let's say a pig didn't farrow, and there was some reason why they would replace that with another animal or give the money for its replacement, so it was self-propitiating.

GOLDEN: You talked about shows. What kind of shows? Fat Stock Show?

SHAW: Yes.

GOLDEN: Where were they held?

SHAW: At that time, they were being held at Hockley. That's between Prairie View and Houston. As I indicated, we were divided into three districts, the Negro part of the Extension program, and I happened to have been in the southern district. Of course, the winning five kids would have five projects and then we would have a local show and depending on which kid had the best animal. They would be asked to bring that animal to the district show and from the district show to the state show. The State show was in Dallas during the era of the State Fair, so it was self-perpetrating, very educational and it enabled these young people to do things that are very basic if you will, that is, learning how to keep records, how to feed the animals appropriately, how to talk about it. It was excellent and it was what I would call it, an indirect way of teaching basics. You know, because we were always encouraged to don't just go out and look at the animal, look at the kid and see how he's doing, because sometime they would make it sound so important about the animal until you don't worry about the boy and think about the hog. And, in this occasion, we'd say, now you know we're going to kill that hog, but we're not going to kill that kid so we want to be sure we have our whatever in the right order.

GOLDEN: Now the state show that was, like the State Fair, am I right?

SHAW: Right.

GOLDEN: Was that segregated too, or did they show with the white kids too?

SHAW: No, none of that showing without regard to race occurred until after the Civil Rights Act of 1964. As a matter of fact, everything that had to do with Negroes

was done primarily through Prairie View, but it does not mean that the people at A&M and Prairie View were not, you know, they were just following the law.

GOLDEN: Your kids, were they successful with their animals?

SHAW: Very successful, very successful. I say that because the pig served as an anchor as well as a projection. I can name a hundred kids across time who have done exceedingly well as citizens and that's our ultimate goal, not the pig. The pig was just a means to the end, not the end.

GOLDEN: Did they have certain times they were to go and show?

SHAW: Yes.

GOLDEN: And was it in a different location?

SHAW: Right.

GOLDEN: Was that better than where the white kids showed their animals?

SHAW: I don't think so. Frankly, you know, this was the state of our nation at the time in this jurisdiction and most folk had adapted to it. And we were going on with life and living and I think it went very well. As a matter of fact, in many instances, and you didn't ask me for this, to some extent some of the benefits, there are many. There are those that might have worked to the disadvantage of the Negro people to the extent that they were having to maybe be in charge or be the lead person, they then became the subordinate. And you know, leadership evolves through experience. You learn to do by doing.

GOLDEN: Did you have to report to someone? I know you had to make some kind of report and send it to the Commissioners Court and to the State and to the Federal governments. Did you have to do that?

SHAW: Yes, monthly, there was a form, I think it was called a 228. Anyway, the bottom line was it had from 1 to 31 and you, meaning the person, would list the most significant thing that you did in a given day or week and then write narratives about the outcome, your goal, who, what, when, why and how. This would be sent to the local district agent and they, in turn, would combine the programs and send them to the State.

Tape 3 Side B

042 – 055 African American Men’s Groups who helped 4-H

GOLDEN: When you worked in Angelina County and the other counties too, were there any African American businessmen’s groups, that helped with the Fat Stock Show? Did you ever run into that?

SHAW: Oh, yes. In fact I went to a meeting just last Wednesday, there were twenty men there, two ladies, and it emanated this group called the Houston Business and Professional Men’s Club, was an outgrowth of the Negro Pig Show, historically, it is fifty-seven years old. We were on a downward travel so we were trying to rejuvenate but, yes, here again, where you had separate but equal so-called, you know, our people if you will, had to paddle their own canoe. And when people

function out of need based on the need. My wife used to say, “You know, growth comes about when need and opportunity comes together.”

GOLDEN: That’s true.

Tape 3 Side B

168-194 – Divisions of Extension Service

GOLDEN: What services did you offer your clients? What were they looking for from you?

SHAW: Well, here again, you know, in the Extension Service of this country, there are four major areas that the whole country embraces through the Secretary of Agriculture, I assume, coupled with the state land grant universities, which there are fifty plus seventeen, and that is agriculture and natural resources. What we used to call Home Economics, they call it something else now, but it is the same thing. Historically, you know, it was women, men, boys, and girls, black and white. The four major areas, countrywide, would be, as I say, agriculture and natural resources, which includes environment and things that relate to nutrition, when intended to be more women oriented, if you will, 4-H and youth, and then CRD. When I was here on the staff, I was program leader for CRD, which meant Community Resource Development, which was an all-covering area. I could

work in a larger community of need by being in that area, which I was very appreciative of.

GOLDEN: What if Hispanics needed help. To whom would they go?

SHAW: I'm sorry?

GOLDEN: Hispanics, you talked about the Hispanic population.

SHAW: Yes, I've worked with the Hispanics. In fact, I have a radio program that was in Harris County, and in Guadalupe County, which was down near San Antonio. The Hispanics were literally segregated by, they did not call it race, they called it by a language, but I think to some extent, it amounted to the same thing. At that time, I don't know if we knew how to characterize so called Hispanics. They were never enslaved as a people, that we are aware of, historically, so even in the military, you know, they were not treated where they had to join segregated units.

Tape 3 Side B

216-276 – Liberia, West Africa 1956-1960

GOLDEN: Where did you go to after Guadalupe County?

SHAW: I went to Africa for four years. Liberia.

GOLDEN: How did you get to Africa?

SHAW: Well, I was in graduate school at Rutgers. I had gone over from New Brunswick to read a paper in Washington. The Dean, Mr. Potts, who was a former dean at Tuskegee, came to the seminar, came to my hotel, and asked me what my plans were. I was there for the doctorate, but I stopped short. But, I told

him I was on leave from Texas, that if I didn't stay for the doctorate I'd have an opportunity to go back with the Extension and he thought, well, are you up here getting all that higher education to be a county agent. Because, really, the requirements of a county agent are good and very solid but I'm saying, you don't need a lot of research-based knowledge. The way I see a county agent's format is being intelligent enough to visit and share with the people at the university, who are the so-called specialists and also, be at the level of the clientele that he is supposed to be helping. If you get too research oriented then you really can't help that person who really needs basics, so, anyway, he said they had this project starting in Liberia and he would like to enter my name in. I had just returned from Korea in combat at Heartbreak Ridge three years ahead of that and I promised myself when I got off that ship in Seattle that I wouldn't be leaving again these hallowed shores of America. So, I said, "Well, I don't know, sir, but you can put my name in but I don't think I would be interested."

Anyway, I went to a football game at Homecoming in Prairie View and he had written me a note to the country director there at Prairie View and asked me when the next time I was on campus to stop by. I went to his office; his name was T.R. Solomon, Dr. Solomon. He would secure the people and they had a country director over in Liberia. He asked me if I would be interested, that I had the kind of educational background, both theory and practice, which is what a county agent does, and you had the educational background of the university, and I signed on and went and stayed four years.

GOLDEN: And what year was that?

SHAW: 1956 till 1960. I left Liberia on my birthday, which was August 29, 1960, coming back through Europe and to America. I went, just after showing my projects at the State Fair in Dallas, in 1956. What I remember mostly was that Louis Armstrong was on, what they call, Big Tex, there in Dallas and he was playing his horn and I said, to myself, "What am I doing getting ready to go to Africa?" But, I was there for four years.

Tape 3 Side B

276 – end - Responsibilities in Liberia / Firestone Rubber Plant

GOLDEN: What were your responsibilities?

SHAW: They employed me primarily to develop a rubber plantation for the local communities. The function of my job was to teach the village farmers. Firestone had a large 50,000-acre rubber plantation and my job was to assist the local village farmers how to best grow and utilize and sell their crops for the most benefit. It was really a take off from being a county agent, the same thing. But the money for the project had emanated out of the State Department and that was called ICA, the International Corporation Administration, which is now the AID, Agents for International Development, which is still alive and well. This was 1956 and this was ahead of the Peace Corps. We entertained the folks who came from the pre-Peace Corps and went down to Ghana and we put them up in Liberia.

GOLDEN: So the Federal Government funded the rubber plant.

SHAW: Well, basically, they did. Prairie View wrote a proposal and I'm sure it was with other schools, too. As I understand it, they wanted Tuskegee but something occurred that they didn't get Tuskegee, so they accepted Prairie View.

GOLDEN: How many other people went, just you?

SHAW: No. There were about forty-eight people in the project. We were at a place called Booker T. Washington Institute and it was in Kakata, Liberia, and we had our format. It was really a glorified high school and these students would come from these various villages and they housed them there, kind of like dormitories, I enjoyed it. It was an opportunity to teach at the base level and the motivation by the kids was outstanding. They wanted to learn. This money was coming from the State Department through the ICA and then Prairie View administered the program.

GOLDEN: That makes sense. Now, who were these other people, were they black and white or all black.

SHAW: Mostly all black, except for Philco had a sub-project under the jurisdiction of the program and they were all white, whatever that means. They were 99 percent African Americans.

GOLDEN: You basically went in and taught them through the school how to grow rubber plants or trees.

SHAW: And then I also, my other job was to plant rubber for the school so it would have some income. I went through the whole process. I had workers then I had students and I did a little research.

GOLDEN: Where did you live?

SHAW: We had nice housing and about three houseboys to take care of your basic needs in terms of care of the environment and, you know, cutting the grass and serving and all these good stuff, the kind of things that was the norm in those days.

GOLDEN: Did your wife go with you?

SHAW: Yes.

GOLDEN: How did she like it?

SHAW: She enjoyed it. They played bridge most of the time and would go to the Firestone, you know, it was in the bush and it took some adjusting to cope. She stayed about two years. She had enough of that.

GOLDEN: She wanted to come home.

SHAW: Yes.

GOLDEN: Did other people bring their wives or husbands? Was there a mix of men and women or just all men?

SHAW: Yes. We had two women on staff. One taught clothing and that was a Mrs. Solomon, she was later Mrs. Solomon, Solomon married the guy who had hired me and a Ms. Fields, she taught office machines. That was for the African girls.

GOLDEN: How many students were there altogether?

SHAW: I'd say about 150. Yes, they had dormitories.

GOLDEN: What did you really teach them? Did they go to regular high school?

SHAW: I taught them basic agriculture and I learned a lot from them. They taught me some things too. About, I say that in a sense of the natural fauna and flora there is different from here. I'm glad I had taken advance degrees at Rutgers, you know, having studied higher education in the areas of soils and science, I could understand the basics of the environment and the altitude and temperature and the rainfall and all this good stuff. It was a matter of adapting to the situation.

GOLDEN: The students, what were their ages?

SHAW: Generally, they would be older than our kids in this country would. I'd say, young adults.

GOLDEN: Young adults, like high school, sophomore or freshman in college?

SHAW: Right. They only had about two schools at that time in that whole country.

Tape 5 Side A

000-012 – Liberia

GOLDEN: How big is Liberia?

SHAW: It's about the size of Ohio. In fact, it's compared to Ohio in terms of area.

GOLDEN: When was the rubber plant built? Do you remember?

SHAW: From Firestone?

GOLDEN: Yes.

SHAW: I'd say, I don't know precisely, but it had been there for some years.

GOLDEN: So, it was already there when you got there.

SHAW: Yes. Our mission was to assist the people in the educational process to make use of this tremendous resource that had been brought over there from America.

The women shopped at Firestone stores. A good outing for them was to get a vehicle to go to Firestone, because they had a commissary there and we could get a lot of the foodstuff that was not available, generally, but Firestone had their own families over there, too, so we sort of utilized their resources. They became very friendly to us so we were a nice community of people.

Tape 5 Side A

075-085 – Labor in Firestone Rubber Plant

GOLDEN: Who helped you plant. Was it the students or was it the people of the villages?

SHAW: Both. I had a work crew.

GOLDEN: Were they paid?

SHAW: A dollar a day. I had a demonstration garden where I would teach the students. But now being as agrarian as they were in coming from villages, like I said, most of what I knew, they knew, too. They probably didn't know how to calibrate and measure and utilize scientific methods but they were very bright. You know, they had been living this way for years. Sometimes you have to observe, learn and listen and keep your mouth shut.

Tape 5 Side A

219-229 – After Liberia

GOLDEN: What did you do when you came home?

SHAW: I started looking for a job, as it where, because I had resigned to go on this project. I moved to Houston and a gentlemen, a Mr. Clark, from Prairie View, this is 1960, and I went down and visited with him and he said they had two counties open, one was Milam County and another county, and he would be delighted to have me assume either one of those. He said why don't you go and think about it and come back, and that was at Prairie View. How you ever been to Prairie View?

GOLDEN: No, I haven't, not yet.

Tape 5 Side A

300-333 – Clients in Milam County

GOLDEN: Who were the clients in Milam County?

SHAW: Same as in Freestone and others.

GOLDEN: Were they farmers looking for help or where they day laborers who had their own gardens looking for help?

SHAW: In Milam County, they were both. What I'll show you when we finish, this person, who happened to have been a 4-Her. In fact he was president of one of our 4-H Clubs, he donated \$100,000, I think I told you about this, but anyway, my point being, that his father worked in a plant, an aluminum plant, a lot of other folks, he's what we called piece work. Spend time, like most small towns in

Texas; you have your firemen, and a lot of folk who in the reserves, many of them also had jobs back in the town where they came from. So they do several things in order to carry on and be productive and have enough to be, you know, to pay for their homes and food and shelter. Those small towns had some advantages that I think they don't exist in that manner in the cities and this is one of the limitations, I think, for 4-H Extension in these urban metropolises.

Tape 5 Side B

000-185 – Freestone County Agricultural Extension Agent

GOLDEN: How long were you in Freestone County?

SHAW: Four years. From 1962 to 1966.

GOLDEN: Where is Freestone County?

SHAW: That's between here and Dallas, about 150 miles from here and it's on Highway 75. And it had an array of large numbers of African American producers, landowners and I wanted to apply some of my skills and knowledge in the agronomic field, so this district agent, whose name is R. H. Sanders, he said if Mr. Clark would release me, he would recommend me to this Freestone County. Mr. Clark said, "Well, if you want to leave Milam County and go to Freestone, you have my permission," and that's how I went to Freestone County. Here again, this was, we're talking about the sixties and this was an era when opportunities for minorities or African Americans were in progress. The Civil Rights Act passed in 1964.

GOLDEN: People were just plain tired of it.

SHAW: That's right. The Voting Right Act passed in 1965 and, of course, the Brown vs. The Board of Education Law passed in 1954, so it was a time when everything was moving and those kids who came through that era, most of them have done exceptionally well in a lot of ways. They were responsive and responsible and they could be guided or led and they wanted a better life and our job was to open up opportunities for them and teach.

Many folks don't realize, I guess, the role and mission of county agents but it's fundamentally education. We don't sell anything. We work in a given County at the pleasure of the [Commissioners] Court, which they have done through A&M University. They are glad to have us here, I feel that way, countrywide, but I'm saying, because we bring a lot to the table and it's up to the people to utilize it. That's one of the limitations that I see, particularly in the African American community, with many of them having come from rural areas, let's say a generation ago, and yet they have forgotten that this resource exists. So, one of our challenges would be to make it possible for them to know that when they interact or make contact with their Extension office, which is in every county in this country, that they are dealing with a person, a trained educator who is not trying to sell them a product. So, we support commercial industries and they support us by paying the monies that we earn for our work.

GOLDEN: That's true. That's a good way of looking at it. So, you really started in the early 1950's with Agricultural Extension and right now we're talking about 1966.

Did you see a lot of change going in the Agricultural Extension?

SHAW: Oh, yes, industry, just about, now when I say industry, I mean the agricultural industry. The small farmer is, I won't say, is in the position of the whooping crane but we've lost a lot of farms, family owned farms, where they have chosen to sell and move to the cities. A lot of small towns have been overrun with interstate highways and so, you know, the traffic diverts and passes by them and they have to move on. We've gone into global farming; many of our fruits come from Central America, and so forth.

GOLDEN: Would this be a result of progressive farming?

SHAW: It's a result of science. And science and, I mean, commercialization, I mean, like the banks and farms are no different, cattle, livestock. A lot of those folk, who, and when I say science, I was just chatting with a gentlemen who is with the Texas Department of Agriculture, he was saying, these folk who come here from Central America, South America, Germany, Europe, wherever, they come to look at the animals as they stand. When I went to Africa, a group called the Hereford Foundation sent us some bulls to cross breed with these short, African shorthorns, which was a very small animal. The Tsetse fly become a problem for us, my point being, that now they look at the animal but they use the sperm, they buy the sperm and then they fertilize the animals, you know, like they do with children, I mean, in that manner, to have babies and so that's a whole new dimension, even

since I left. In other words, they sell the sperm, rather than the animal. All they want to see is the background on that animal and all that's science. You know, what I like to say about life, and I think it's true, life is chemistry and chemistry is life. You know, we don't hear people using the term often, but almost everything, without exception, has a chemical foundation, including us as people, as human beings. To understand science, which is to understand chemistry, which is a science, and to hear a child or a kid or a person say, you know, I don't like science, I don't care about chemistry, that's almost a contradiction.

GOLDEN: Yes, it is.

SHAW: It's a contradiction. Now, you know, I don't know where the point of diminishing returns comes in, but it's somewhere out there. I just think the opportunity to grow up on a farm, as I did, and having had a chance to visit the countries of the world and four continents. Then to reach people and see them grow and develop is a, there's not a value you can put on that as long as you have your food, shelter, and clothing.

Tape 6 Side A

000-046 – Growth and Change in Extension Service

GOLDEN: I had asked you a question about the growth and change in Agriculture Extension. You worked quite a long time for them.

SHAW: Twenty-nine years.

GOLDEN: What kind of growth did you see in those twenty-nine years?

SHAW: I saw it move from a divisional program whereby farmers were family farmers, or had lived on family farms, to corporate farming. They started to diminish in numbers and size of enterprises and many moved to cities. Much of this began really after World War II, when men came back from the service. The G.I. Bill, which was signed in 1944, made a significant difference in opportunities for people from farms and small towns and rural areas and cities. So, Agriculture just sort of moved in the same direction, meaning that farms got larger. If research increased along with the research on technology, the computer, and things of that nature, that, whereby, it became more of a businesslike, which has always been a business, but it was a small farm business, but now it's a corporate business.

GOLDEN: What kind of growth did you see within the agency itself?

SHAW: Well, from a standpoint of opportunity, as the climate, meaning the social climate of the country changed, the climate in the Extension Service changed. For instance, I first joined the Service, or became a member of the Texas A&M University System in 1952, just after leaving the Korean War. In fact, I became a member of the Extension Service September 3, 1952, in Lufkin, Texas. At that time, things were quite segregated racially and people, me being an African American, we worked fully, if not totally, with the African American producers and farmers and small town people.

That changed with the emergence and the passage of the Civil Rights Act, which was in 1964, and of course, the Voting Rights Act passed in 1965. Since the Act was a Federal act enumerated by the Federal Government of our Country,

African Americans were given more opportunity and equal access to all the resources that were available to all other citizens. We, in turn, as agents, were able to transmit that into the larger community and we also were able to get more formal education.

Tape 6 Side A

228–268 - Mr. Shaw's Role as an Agronomist in Extension Services

GOLDEN: Now, being an agronomist, were you highly sought after in Texas with the Extension Program or do other people have the same skills?

SHAW: Because I am an agronomist, I'm board certified even today I pay my dues annually, but really, my work was not as an agronomist. My work was as a county agent. A county agent is sort of a generalist and, of course, part of that reason was because I'm of African descent, mixed African descent, I guess, and there was no opportunity at that time for me to be employed as an agronomist. That's how I ended up going to Rutgers, because Prairie View did not offer agronomy as a major. At that time, African Americans were not privileged to go to Texas A&M, so the differential between the costs for going to New Jersey to graduate school or going to Texas A&M was paid by the State of Texas.

I think I was unique in that since because I believe I'm one of the few, if not the only African American to get this out-of-state aid. Now, there were a lot of young African Americans who were studying medicine and dentistry and things like that, but I think I was told that I was the first person of African descent to get the out-of-state aid because I wanted to major in agronomy. The reason why I wanted to major in agronomy was because I had gone to Tuskegee and got a broad education in soil and crops.

GOLDEN: Do you feel that your skills and knowledge were under utilized while with Extension?

SHAW: Well, to some extent yes I feel like, on the other hand, you know I'm delighted that I was able to move into a chasm where by I could be a broader base. In agronomy you deal with a lot of research and you are not working with the public as a county agent you're working with people. That's why I went back and took a degree in Guidance and Counseling because you know when you're working with plants and animals they don't talk back, but when you're working with people you got to know how to approach them and how to get results that you are seeking.

Tape 6 Side A

323-336 – Freestone County and Harris County Extension Services

GOLDEN: So, you were in Freestone County before you came to Houston, correct.

SHAW: Yes, I was in Freestone County from 1962 until 1966.

GOLDEN: It says you were recruited to Houston.

SHAW: Well, I asked to come here.

GOLDEN: You asked to come, O.K.

SHAW: I'd married Naomi Ellison Shaw, who was from Houston and she was not accustomed to this rural environment and her mother was living on Holman Street and I'd have to bring her home every weekend, so it looked like a real opportunity to get assigned here and so I asked for it and they presented it to me.

Tape 6 Side A

367-396- Harris County 1966 - 1986

GOLDEN: You came to Houston in 1966. How long were you with Harris County?

SHAW: January 31, 1986.

GOLDEN: What kind of differences did you see in Harris County verses the other counties?

SHAW: Huge.

GOLDEN: I knew it would be.

SHAW: Huge. My wife used to say, you're not in Kaufman County, you're not in Freestone County, because I'd leave here in the morning early and, you know, I tried to work in each county precinct, and I think I did. Because, here again, Extension is fundamentally based on the demonstration method showing learning

how to do by doing. There are four commissioners and, in Harris County with it being so diverse, the interests in one area might be different than in another.

Tape 6 Side B

000-046 Responsibilities in Houston

GOLDEN: What were your responsibilities when you came to Houston?

SHAW: I became the agent for Community Resource Development, CRD, and that was my primary focus. I became the coordinator or the program director for Community Resource Development. Usually, in all counties, where they have basic interest and need, they have a specialist at College Station who often times, depending on the areas of need, he or she or they organize the program focus for the whole state and, in my case, it was Community Resource Development. That dealt with the environment, organization, leadership, and things that related to those interests.

GOLDEN: Was that a promotion for you?

SHAW: It was a quite a promotion.

GOLDEN: Did you work with whites and African Americans?

SHAW: Yes.

GOLDEN: Clients and co-workers?

SHAW: Right. Yes, as a matter of fact, in Hockley today, they have a community [center], and also in Tomball and Huffsmith, that my leadership through the local leaders enabled them to have the community centers and they are still going. Yes,

I worked with, I would say, a predominance of the audience that I targeted or that I was able to reach. Well, let me put it this way, as time passed I started to move programmatic activities from the more rural areas to the small towns and then from the small towns into the city. Trying to make sure that the people were aware that Extension covered all bases and all citizens were eligible to utilize this resource because their taxes made it possible for it to exist.

GOLDEN: Where was your office located?

SHAW: 406 Caroline.

GOLDEN: Was that your main office or did you have an office anywhere else, like within the precincts?

SHAW: No, I had no other office for the twenty years I worked on the staff, 406 Caroline. But, really, a County Extension Agent spends about five-eighths, six-eighths, of his time in the field. We have a secretary and all of the materials and functions and the facilities are provided through the auspices of the Commissioners Court. The staff, which supports the agent who comes from A&M, is provided through the auspices of the county Commissioners Court. The county agent, through research and evaluation, coming from the people, decides what program activities best fit the needs of that county and that comes from the people rather than from the agent, because agents change, but the people remain there and they pay the taxes.

GOLDEN: Were you the only agricultural agent in Harris County at that time or was there another one?

SHAW: There were several. There's usually an agent for each program area like I indicated. Depending on the extent of the need or the density of the need, there might be more than one, you know, appointed to that, you might have two people, like 4-H, they have several agents who are 4-H agents.

GOLDEN: Were you involved in 4-H when you came to Houston?

SHAW: Oh yes, I was quite involved. In fact, I had several clubs. I guess much of that was self-determined to some extent because I have always had an interest in young people and their growth and development, particularly African Americans, and the educational process. I worked closely through leaders, an agent works with the kids indirectly but much of the leadership for 4-H clubs emanates from the community and the leaders decide what the projects are that are conducted by the boys and girls.

Tape 6 Side B

085-124 Clients in Harris County

GOLDEN: Who were your clients? What were the gender and the demographics when you came to Harris County?

SHAW: Well, civic clubs, groups, organizations, non-profit groups, unincorporated towns, townships and within the confines of these groups, I would make an effort to have a committee and the committee would, in turn, provide us with needs that they had that the Extension Service could facilitate. Also, Houston being what it is, or Harris County, with all these institutions of higher education, many times

they would link up with the Extension, because Extension serves all the people if the people have a choice for it and know its resources, because it's a part of the Federal government, a part of the country at large.

GOLDEN: What do you remember most of your clients really wanting to learn?

SHAW: Basically, wanting to learn about that agency in terms of how to make the best use of it, from that vantage point, but the knowledge that I found most needed would be how to, well for instance, in agriculture, like fire ants. Mostly, plants and animals and things of that nature. It kind of varied, you know, you never know what the next question is going to be. I think that's why extension people are called county agents. The word is non-descriptive in the sense that it doesn't capture what an agent is.

A county agent is fundamentally an educator, just like teachers, you are a teacher, one is a teacher, I am a teacher. But I'm saying, even in your own mind, you don't think of yourself because we think in traditional patterns, you know, and we think of a teacher as someone who's got a chalk board and a room and people sit down. The first thing I see when I go in an educational environment is that seats are welded down to the floors and people are sitting back to back and the first thing we do is change that around so folk can get to know each other and communicate. So, communication is significant. Anyone who has used Extension they tend to be more flexible and, of course, with an adult learner, you know, you have to start where they are and go where you can carry them in the interest of their growth and development.

Tape 6 Side B

275-294 - Harris County Extension Services and Livestock Shows

GOLDEN: Were you involved in stock shows, county fairs with Agricultural Extension?

SHAW: Oh, yes. Every county I've served, we had, and of course, much of what you focused on was a function of what the commodities were for that particular area. For instance, in Guadalupe County, the gentleman that I followed, his name was R.A. Sanders, and he was long on livestock, so we had livestock shows. At that time we had segregated programs by race and the Chamber of Commerce would provide a percentage of the resources that they would make available for the boys and girls, for the Negro kids and so much for the Anglo kids. It would be up to Agents, both FFA and 4-H to work that out to the betterment of the community at large.

Tape 6 Side B

295-392 - Fat Stock Shows

GOLDEN: Now in Houston, the Fat Stock shows, where did the kids get their cows or pigs?

SHAW: Well, that's still going on and we just finished one, as you know. Many of those youngsters, I'd say seventy-five percent of them, maybe eighty-five, they start off in 4-H. They come from their counties where they grow livestock and so forth, but that's also a commercial enterprise, a magnificent commercial enterprise, the

point being that in the calf scramble that kid is either FFA or 4-H and these are to some extent under the jurisdiction of the Extension Service. They are selected on the basis of certain other criteria and if they meet the criteria, they are selected to participate and then when they win a calf or pig in the scramble, I don't think they have a pig scramble, they have a calf scramble still going, then they are given so much cash money. I think they are allowed \$300 and through their Agent or 4-H teacher, they might add money to it and buy a nicer stock, and they are able to raise that animal or pig and bring him back the next year. The businessmen, or business people of that community would pay a premium and that's how they win this large sum of money. It comes so enormous up to this point the way the program works now, as I understand it, is they don't always, say they sell their product for \$50,000, they don't get all of that money themselves, it goes into a pool and they try to promote education.

I think the key, and it still is, is about education for the boys and girls. But, in the process, it's all of the things that happen between the time the kid wins that animal and he brings him back and then all that has occurred to him, or her, or them prior to the time that they were able to participate. And coming from rural areas and backgrounds they have utilized their skills that they have acquired both in school and in the process of keeping records. They have done all the things that a business person would do, as a child, and they are able to develop the whole person. That's what I would like to say, that 4-H develops the whole person.

GOLDEN: What's a calf scramble?

SHAW: That's where the kids are, you know, are in a big arena and they have already prepared them to scramble and then they have to catch the calf. If they catch the calf, they have to put the rope on him and then pull him to the point they should be and they will give him a certificate to buy a calf for the next year. In fact, the last year I was in Freestone County, we had a young kid that won a calf, I called up there about less than six months ago, and now he has a horse ranch in Wortham, Texas.

GOLDEN: Let's say you had a kid in 4-H who wanted to raise a cow or calf or pig and they didn't have any money. Were you able to help them?

SHAW: Yes, now that's where industry and corporations came in. We had a Sears Foundation, and I'm sure it still exists, and this was to some extent, when some years ago they would provide five pigs to each county that wanted to participate.

Tape 7, Side A

000-019 Fat Stock Shows and 4-H

GOLDEN: So, it had to go through A& M first.

SHAW: Right, they were the headquarters for the overall program and they had a person who would delegate it to provide the leadership. And, if the agent of that county wanted to participate, they would provide the money to keep the program going. For instance, in my case, we would get five pigs and four gilts and one boor and then the 4-H young people would be asked if they were interested or they would

write a narrative why they wanted to grow a pig. They would come back and have a county show and then a district show and then a state show and whoever won overall they would be given premiums in a cashed check. And for the girls, and this was some time ago, they would be allowed to have a hundred baby chicks and then they would grow those chicks to full adults and some of them they would sell, others they would keep as hens and use them for eggs. This was teaching the commercial process and also in the process, they were learning nutrition, record keeping, care of the animals or it could be plants, sometimes they would have gardens.

GOLDEN: You mentioned FFA.

SHAW: Future Farmers of America.

GOLDEN: How involved was Agricultural Extension in FFA?

SHAW: They are similar programs. This FFA is school based. Extension is community based. So, I think both of those programs come through the jurisdiction for resources to some extent from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, but FFA stands for Future Farmers of America. Now prior to the time that we had racial integration in the South, officially and legally, African Americans were called New Farmers of America in FFA and I think that emulated from Tuskegee with Booker Washington. That's an interesting area in itself. I have a copy of the list that Booker Washington, who founded Tuskegee, in 1881, had a great influence on Extension and particularly for African Americans in this country. Of course,

the kids who were in NFA up until that was integrated, they would go to regional meetings in their district and state meetings in Tuskegee.

GOLDEN: You mentioned to me that business men in Houston helping with the children getting an animal, how much involved were they and who were they?

SHAW: Well, I went to a meeting just two-weeks ago in the case of the African American community, they had what they called the Negro Pig Show. The purpose and function of it was to involve Negro people in the whole of the livestock show. And, of course, being mostly a small producer and entrepreneur they were asked to, the Negro business people were asked to participate at the level of purchasing some of your own products from kids that come from your ethnic background they did this, we're talking some years ago, and they created the Houston Business and Professional Men's Club. I think today it's fifty or sixty years old. But the origin of it was to bring about that transition because there were a lot of African Americans on farms and there were a lot of African Americans who had businesses, which is not true today, of course, not comparatively speaking. This enabled them to get together and they liked each other and those who were profitable enough kept going, kept going, and then when we went through the integration process they just went on with their program as businessmen.

The goal and objectives now for that group is to enhance and to make available and give young African Americans, or so-called black young people, attractive run on and make them aware and give them some place to learn how to

utilize leadership and help somebody to pattern after or serve as mentors to them.

So, it's being revitalized right now.

GOLDEN: Whom did you enjoy working with the most, adults or the 4-H kids, or FFA kids?

SHAW: That would be a hard, I guess in a way both, because by training your leaders they are hands on with the children. So, I think maybe I enjoy to some extent working with both but maybe more so with the adults in terms of being able to transmit knowledge that they needed so they, in turn, could transmit it to the target audience. One of my concepts and thoughts now and even in the timing is I work with people who work with people. Meaning that, you know, as a professionally trained agronomist or agriculturist person who works, reads, and keeps abreast, well sometimes you can't transmit that directly to the source that needs it so there has to be an interface whereby this person can grasp what you are trying to get across. So, I enjoy personally working with folk who have enough cognitive knowledge and skills to grasp the subject matter without having to base it down too much.

Tape 7, Side A

100-136 Clients seeking help from Extension Service

GOLDEN: If a client called and said, "I just can't get my tomato plants to grow well," would you physically go out there or would you give them advice over the phone?

SHAW: In the short run, you would ask them to provide specimen. If it was something that you had no knowledge of or didn't give credence, to that particular growth, you could put it in a container and send it up to College Station where there is a pathologist and, you know, oh yes, the same with the soils. We have a soil book, I mean not book, but a box they will send to any citizen and for a very meager amount, they will analyze the soil as to its constituents. Then send it back and suggest the pH and pK, and what they recommended you use depending upon what you, just like when you take a blood sample.

GOLDEN: Does the client have to pay for any of that, or is it free?

SHAW: Like I said, no, it isn't free. But it's just cost for service.

GOLDEN: That's not bad.

SHAW: If you called the office today and tell them you have a soil that you wanted to check the pH on or see why my plants are dying, they would talk to you first and then send you a package and you would send it direct to them.

GOLDEN: Now, is that something new or was that something that you could have done when you first started working for the Extension Service?

SHAW: Oh yes, we have always done it, still doing it. We have a number of urban gardeners who do this as volunteers now, meaning they answer questions. They are trained by the horticulturists or the pathologists, whatever the specialty is and they, in turn, service the telephones by answering the questions. One way we multiply the efforts and the resources of the county agent with the massive audience like we have in Harris County is teaching volunteers to answer questions

that are relevant and occasionally they will have clinics, workshops and bring specialists down from College Station who are highly trained. They will teach them and then things that they don't know, they have access to these resources, so it's a total picture, a total program. That includes, other than things that grow, and, also organization and leadership.

Tape 7, Side A

167-185 - Harris County Clients

GOLDEN: What do you remember most about your clients?

SHAW: The warmth and the openness to being receptive and then wanting to share what they know.

GOLDEN: Did you ever learn from your clients?

SHAW: Most of the time, yes. I mean, you know, I think I told you I lived and worked in Africa for four years in Liberia. I had been charged to go there to plant rubber, coffee, coco, bananas, and tropical crops. I had to learn by listening to them and then utilizing my technical skills and knowledge from studying and in higher education, you know, at Rutgers, to get a grasp on it, so I knew why and they knew how. That's the difference between a professional to me and a well, my wife used to say, "He who knows how will have a job, but he who knows why will be his boss."

GOLDEN: What was your biggest challenge, while being an agent?

SHAW: Well, my biggest challenge of being an agent was to impart what I had gained in terms of knowledge to the target audience in a way where it would transcend my existence and probably carry over to thereby affect their way of life.

GOLDEN: Did you work with Mexican Americans or Asian Americans while in Harris County?

SHAW: Yes, I worked with, in fact, my last supervisor was a Hispanic, and I had a radio program in one of the stations where I would go once a week and this would be radio spots that were provided from A & M. And, of course, in Precinct 2, across the San Jacinto River we had Hispanic communities that were a part of the total program. And then I had leaders, each one of our major areas would have a program sub-committee and we have an overall committee and the overall committees supposedly represent the whole of the county. There are people, I think, as I have learned it, that about thirty-five people who make up this committee. And, of course, and then the major program areas, which there are four or five, which includes Home Economics which is about nutrition and foods and Agriculture and then 4-H and youth and community resource development. Each one of these would have a sub-committee and the chairman of that sub-committee would also, he is a part of the overall committee, so that's how the whole thing comes together. And annually they get together and plan, based on the wishes of the people who are part of the overall committee, what the program thrust will be for a given period. So they write long-range programs, so it's not just, you know, not having a map. The important thing is to get all echelons into

the program appropriately so that they can utilize the service that their country provides through the Extension Service and that's for the County Director and the people who make it up including the Commissioners Court.

Tape 7 Side B

007-019 - Advice for New Agents

GOLDEN: What kind of advice would you give a new county agent, Agricultural Agent?

SHAW: Oh, number one to listen and be slow to make judgments and get to know the important people both who are responsible for him or her or them being there and also the elected officials who are responsible for the budgets. And then the key leaders out in the larger communities to include ecumenical as well as Chambers of Commerce, schools, churches. It's very important, because people work with extension people based on need. You have two kinds of people, people who you need and people who need you. A State Director shared that with me when I first came to Houston.

Tape 7 Side B

051-053 - End Remarks

GOLDEN: Mr. Shaw I appreciate you taking this time to speak with me on your experiences with Agricultural Extension and your life experiences.

SHAW: Thank you, Thank you very much. I appreciate having the opportunity to share.

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Oral History of Ernest K. Shaw

* Indicates sections that were transcribed. All tapes are available at the Harris County Archives archives@hctx.net.

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