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An Interview with

MRS. RUTH SOLOMON

September 2, 1977

Interviewed by

Daisy M. Greene

Mississippi
Department of Archives and History
and the
Washington County Library System
Oral History Project:
Greenville and Vicinity

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Interviewee: Ruth Solomon

Interviewer: Daisy Greene

Title: An interview with Ruth Solomon, September 2, 1977 / interviewed by Daisy Greene

Collection Title: Washington County Oral History Project

Scope Note: The Washington County Library System, with assistance from the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, conducted oral history interviews with local citizens. The project interviews took place between 1976 and 1978. The interviewees included long-term residents of the Greenville-Washington County area in their late 50's and older.

Narrator: Mrs. Ruth Solomon, Greenville, Mississippi.

Interviewer: Daisy Greene, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

Date: September 2, 1977.

Place: William Alexander Percy Library, Greenville, Mississippi.

Subject: Mr. Herman W. Solomon, Greenville Educator.

GREENE: Mrs. Solomon, will you give me a thumbnail sketch of your background?

SOLOMON: My name is Ruth Bruss Solomon. I was born in Austria March 15, 1910. My family came to the States during World War I and arrived in Chicago, Illinois June 16, 1916.

GREENE: You are from Chicago and Mr. Solomon was from Greenville. How did your paths cross, Mrs. Solomon?

SOLOMON: My first job after finishing school was as an assistant to a dress designer. This happened to be the dress manufacturing business that my husband travelled for. His return from a western trip coincided with my first day there and we met. Three years later we were married and came to Greenville when he became principal of E. E. Bass Junior High School.

He began writing when our daughter, Joan, was an infant, beginning with children's stories, some of which were published by the Saalfield Publishing Company.

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Besides writing the history of the Hebrew Union Temple and memoirs of his school days, and finally, the history of the First National Bank, he also wrote poetry and numerous stories for his own pleasure. So the story of his school days and his administrative years in the Greenville Public Schools are in his own words.

GREENE: Does he mention anything about his primary schooling?

SOLOMON: "The longest journey," said Confucius, "begins with the first step." On Monday, September 26, 1904, I took that step to grade one. Sixty-three years later, June 30, 1967, I made the last step to mark the end of my travels on that path. Fifty-four of the sixty-three years were spent on the job in the Greenville Public Schools as pupil, teacher, and administrator.

Clutching the hand of an elder brother I passed through the portal of the first grade, the "sanctum sanctorum" of Miss Nellie Griffin. Considering the fact that it, for me, housed the Ark of the Covenant of all learning, it was a quite modest 'holy of holies', one-half of a two-room wooden building equipped with a pot-bellied coal stove, and a galvanized water bucket and dipper (sanitary drinking fountains were a year or so off, our first being a simple hydrant turned upside down). All plumbing was in an outside building, which housed the W.C., the euphonism for "bathroom", not being in common usage yet."

"In olden days when a Jewish child began the study of

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the Pentateuch, a drop of honey or a honey cake was placed on the first page, thus ever thereafter study and learning would be sweet.

Miss Nellie's gentleness and all-embracing love for the little ones making that gigantic step from the microcosm of the home to the microcosm of the school, provided that bit of honey for the eager little seekers after truth under her guiding hand. A few days and her embryo scholars were hers body and soul. You behaved because it pleased Miss Nellie and pleasing Miss Nellie was your chief aim in life. You learned your tables, the first three, and your reading words, because a word of praise from Miss Nellie was of more importance than the achievement.

Teaching came naturally to Miss Nellie. Her father, Judge Griffin, had a small private school before public schools became a part of the community's, "modus vivendi."

Miss Maun Bryan, another of Greenville's great pioneers in primary education, used to tell a story illustrative of the Judge's love for patience with the very young.

One day a teacher sent a small boy to the Judge for talking back. 'Son?", said the Judge, 'what did you say that was bad?' 'Judge, sir', replied the lad, I just said 'that Lawyer (so and so) - naming a brilliant but not handsome attorney - was an ugly man,' and, 'God knows he is, Judge.' 'God knows he is' was the Judge's corroborative reply to an obvious statement of fact. When the teacher came for the boy she found him

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comfortably cuddled on the Judge's lap absorbed in a story the Judge was reading."

"What, if any, teacher training institutions Miss Nellie attended, or what degrees she won, I know not. In these days of accreditations, standardization or certification, I doubt if she could have made it, but she belonged to that inspired and inspiring group of first grade teachers, which included Carrie Bowen, Maud Bryan, Norma Tucker, and many others.

Our family moved to Greenville in July 1903. Why my mother did not enroll me that fall, since I was already six, I have never determined. Thus, when I enrolled in 1904 I was seven years old, a rather uncommon practice, when many parents enrolled five year old's. Perhaps, because I was the youngest of six children she was reluctant to send me to face, without her sheltering presence, the problems independence would bring.

However, I have been eternally grateful because she was unknowingly applying a quite sound principle of educational psychology, maturity. She would have called it using common sense. Being the youngest of a large family I was indulged, not only by parents but by my older brothers and sisters, so that to my physical immaturity, always below normal in height, was added social immaturity.

School procedures were not entirely new to me. I had gone to kindergarten in Helena, Arkansas, my birth place. I remember we learned how to make paper chains, paper mats, and

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I also remember too vaguely to record, my first love affair.

When my two older brothers would study their lessons, especially in winter, I would sit close to them as they sat sprawled on the floor of the family room where the great fire burned, and listened as they recited their tables or spelled their reading words. Besides, the great fire complemented the feeble light rays of Mr. Edison's new carbon filament electric bulbs and the old style gas lights,

Thus, by age seven and entry into grade one, I knew the first three tables and the usual words of the primer: cat, sat, here, there, baby, etc. and was adept at deciphering such momentous sentences as, 'Where is the baby?' or 'Can the baby see the cat?' Consequently, the first few weeks of school were a ball to me. Secure in the knowledge that I could sound off with the required tables in arithmetic and could follow the accounts of the baby's activities with his pets, I never bothered to prepare home work.

Pride is, I believe, one of the seven deadly sins, certainly it goeth before a downfall. Mine was as sudden and complete as 'humpty dumpty's'. Miss Nellie called us up to the spelling line. Such words as here, there, how, I rattled off with the ease that goes with assurance. Then Miss Nellie pointed to me and said, 'field'. Was it English, I had never heard it or seen it. However, relying on what phonetics I knew I made a noble try - 'f-e-i-l-d'. I have never since misspelled that word, and ever after that I studied my homework."

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"It was in grade one that I met Miss Emma Ody Pohl, the first public school physical education teacher in the state. Miss Emma's father, Theodore Pohl, was at one time president of the school board. Mr. Bass lent Miss Emma to the state I. I. & College, later known as M.S.C.W., to set up a physical education department in 1908. The loan became a gift for she never returned. The story of her life and achievements at M.S.C.W. is well covered in a booklet published after her death and fittingly named, 'A Pohl of Memories', a copy of which is in my library.

To a first grader, Miss Emma was a harbinger of a new era. Only 18 when she became Mr. Bass's P.E. teacher her every gesture and movement symbolized the vitality of youth. She would come bouncing into the room, clad in bloomers like the men's plus-fours of the twenties, an innovation she had acquired from her months of European study.

Standing at attention before us she would say, "Children, I want it so quiet you can hear a pin drop." Then she would reach for the back of her belt, take out a pin and drop it, and though in this era of many decibels, it seems hardly possible we heard the 'ping' as it hit the floor. Maybe it was a larger than usual pin but it surely made audible contact with the floor.

After the first few weeks of grade one, Miss Nellie and Miss Beatrice Fulwiler, the second grade teacher, frequently called me in during the lunch recess and had me read

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for them. I did not discover their motive until one day after this reading session they told me that I was to report to the second grade room the next day. Fortunately, this happened on a Friday, so I had the weekend to cushion the shock.

The second grade went from the fourth table and reading rather long stories. Reading did not bother me too much but all the way home (to the 200 block on North Broadway), I repeated to myself in a sort of litany, 'I'll never learn the fourth table, it's too hard.' That was one weekend I devoted a lot of time to my arithmetic book and reader. For believe it or not, we had homework in the primary grade and rote learning was not forbidden. While modern methods of teaching reading are undoubtedly superior to the alphabet, word, sentence sequence of those days, we did learn to read.

In spite of my fears I must have learned the fourth table to Miss Beatrice's satisfaction, for she kept me and arithmetic was her specialty."

" I have the dubious honor of being the last teacher of German in the Greenville Public Schools. The year was 1917-1918, my first year in teaching. Naturally, when we joined France and England in the War, all things German were taboo. Hamburger steak became 'liberty steak', sauerkraut became 'liberty cabbage' and orchestras avoided Back, Beethoven and Brahms.

The unit system of high school credit, however, required two years of a modern language for any credit, so

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second year German had to be offered for the last two-year students of the previous session. Philip Davidson, now Dr. Philip Davidson, retired president of Louisville, Kentucky, University and for Reva Schwartz of Greenville. The text was 'Schiller's, William Tell, the translation of the opening lines of which was, "Hurry up Jenny, pull the boats in," (A storm was brewing.)

"But, back to grade two before I find myself graduated without finishing elementary school. The promotion to grade two righted the apple cart upset by my late enrollment. I was now with my age group, not for long, however, for Mr. Bass, the superintendent, without any previous preparation, suddenly announced that all of us in grade two who did good work would be promoted to grade four by-passing grade three. What prompted the decision we never found out, nor did it become a promotional method in the years that followed.

Grade four meant Miss Lutie Baugh, a small person with a rather highly pitched voice whose movements were quiet and rapid. In geography one day we were told to locate Illinois on the double-paged map at which our books were opened. Perhaps, as a sign that I would soon need glasses, I could not find that state. Forgetting for the moment the number in the class, I called for Miss Lutie's help. Not giving her time to answer me, before I knew what was happening Miss Lutie stood behind me, her hand on the back of my head, which she promptly and forcefully pushed down to the map, my nose landing where the two pages met,

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and in her shrill small voice said but three words, 'There it is.' To this day, given any center fold of the U.S.A., I can point to Illinois promptly."

"The great event of the fourth grade was the new school near Central Avenue, from which it got its name, with a campus extending the whole block between Theobald Street and Broadway. Later the name was changed to Ella T. Darling Elementary School after its first and long-time principal."

"In these days of the new mathematics where geometry is brought down to lower elementary grades, a problem in grade four which stumped my whole family, would be considered routine. I can still remember what part of the page it was on in the text we then used. What is the relation of a one inch cube to a two inch cube?"

GREENE: Were married teachers employed in the Public School System?

SOLOMON: "In the early years of the century married teachers were the exception. Our fifth grade teacher, Mrs. Dancy, was our first, and until we finished we had only one other, Mrs. Beckwith."

GREENE: Does he mention other outstanding teachers?

SOLOMON: "Miss Ella Darling was probably one of the most outstanding teachers, and she was also principal of the school. Though Miss Ella's office was just across the hall that was the longest walk I had ever taken, on a disciplinary problem. Besides one of the accoutrements of her desk was a

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neat little vase filled with peach switches in a variety of lengths and diameters. When I came before the 'judgment seat' with another student, Miss Ella, seeing that I was already punished enough by the disgrace of being sent to the principal, said simply, 'Those who break the law must suffer.' 'Young men, this is not the first time.' The peach switches, however, remained in "status quo ante" for both of us."

GREENE: Was there still another outstanding teacher?

SOLOMON: "By the time I reached the sixth grade, there had been changes in teacher assignment. My second grade teacher became my sixth grade teacher, much to my delight, because she was Miss Beatrice Fulwiler. She was an inveterate scrapbook keeper, two of which became mine through the generosity of her niece upon her death many years later. Included in one was one of her favorite phrases - and I used it many times as a teacher - 'If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.' The other scrapbook contained the names of all her pupils by classes, according to the year. The former I gave to the principal of the Beatrice Fulwiler School, with a heavy brass owl clip for holding test papers, Miss Beatrice had used for years. The latter went to the superintendent for inclusion in the memorabilia of the school system.

It was in grade six that I received my one and only grade of 'U', unsatisfactory. I missed the first month of that school year because during the summer I had typhoid-malaria, being confined to bed for the larger part of the

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summer. The only diversion I had was to read, and this I did often. When the fever finally left me I was blessed with a good case of 'pink eye', or 'conjunctivitus', so that my entry into grade six was further delayed. Naturally, I had a lot of catching up to do and my first assigned subject, physiology, was my Waterloo. On the first report I received, that year was the 'U', plainly written in such size that it could not escape parental eyes. In apology for my becoming an academic cropper, let it be recorded that so many were in the same predicament that the physiology test was withdrawn as too difficult for sixth grade abilities.

The next year put me among the top men on the totem pole. Grade seven was to the grammar school as the senior class was to the high school. We were not only the highest in grade rank, but literally at the top of the stairs in a three-story building. Here we first experienced departmentalization, for in addition to the special teachers in art, music and gym, we had Miss Lizzie Harbison for arithmetic and history, and Mrs. Beckwith for English, spelling and writing. Some of Mrs. Beckwith's expressions have stayed with me throughout the years - "is, are, was or were, am, being, been, parts of the word 'to be' cannot take an object;" 'to hop, to skip, to jump, to run are infinitives'; 'My country 'tis of thee, tell me not' when she had received an unusually odd answer to a given question; "I have fought, bled and died" when she was about to abandon hope of teaching a specific item, e.g., 'the difference

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in the spelling of receive and believe.'

"High School began with the eighth grade, since in many states there were only eleven grades in the public school system. Complete departmentalization began here and the subjects were identified with teachers. Miss Comfort taught algebra, Miss Susie McCutchen and Miss Inez Montgomery, English, so that my memories are of individuals rather than grades. There are two exceptions, my first day as a freshman and my last day as a senior."

GREENE: So he encountered the departmental work in the sixth grade or was it the eighth?

Miss Carrie Stern, immortalized in William Alexander Percy's 'Lanterns on the Levee' was the first public school art teacher in the state. She also taught history. At that time history was no condensed or fused subject known as "Social Studies." Just as you had four years of high school mathematics or English, so you had four years of history in chronological order - Ancient, Medieval and Modern, the famous 'M and M', English and American. Miss Carrie encouraged our reading by giving us extra credits for outside reading, and by saving the last few minutes of the history period to read to us from the Classics pertinent to the era we were studying, if our lessons had been good.

We read and loved Ben Hur, Quo Vadis, the Last Days of Pompeii with our Ancient History, aside from the extra points laid up for ourselves in the process. Miss Carrie's reading was most dramatic. It was our privilege, granted to only a few,

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to have her present "The Tale of Two Cities", with a full measure of its great drama. From that famous opening sentence, 'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times; it was the Age of Wisdom, it was the Age of Foolishness, it was the Spring of Hope, it was the winter of despair' to that noble and tragic ending; 'It is a far, far better thing that I do, that I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known.' We sat enraptured and the tears of the girls flowed copiously as Miss Carrie read the last page.

Some years later, when I was teaching Latin at Greenville High School, I, too, had a reading list for extra credit. On it was the old reliable, "Quo Vadis". Miss Carrie advised me to have the permission of the parents before I let the students, especially the girls, read it. Her reason, there is one chapter which described (in muted tones) a Roman orgy.

"In junior and senior years our Latin teacher was Miss Elma V. Lawrence from Chicago, where I found out about fifteen years later, she had taught my wife and her brother when they attended Tuley High School. She was affectionately known as the 'Tuley Terror' in deference to her great scholarship and capacity for work qualities, which she instilled in many of her pupils. She was a student in every sense of the original meaning of that word, derived from the Latin 'studeo', to pursue with zeal. Her pupils soon became infected with that zeal for scholarship and were not aware of the amount of work it required because it was done willingly. A sense of

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accomplishment was the award. Miss Lawrence was a believer in the saying, 'A busy pupil is a good pupil.'

When I became principal I gave that formula to many a starry-eyed novice in the teaching field, filled with the theory and practice of teaching as found in texts on education, anxious to use methodology propounded in the 'prof's lectures'.

If I seem to devote a large amount of space in these memories to my study of Latin, the reason is simple. As Mr. Bass was one of the causes of my choice of teaching as a profession, Miss Lawrence and my college teacher, Professor Samuel Ball Platner inspired me with the beauty of Latin literature in the Latin language. If Mr. Bass's influence said "choose teaching", 'theirs said choose Latin as the field in which to teach'. "

"Miss Lawrence did not subscribe to the philosophy of the popular jingles then current -

'Latin is a dead language
As dead as it can be,
It killed the ancient Romans
And now it's killing me. '

GREENE: What honors did Mr. Solomon receive during his high school days?

SOLOMON: "In my senior year the Interstate Bank of New Orleans offered each year a Gold Medal to a senior who excelled in general proficiency. The excellence was determined by scholastic average plus an essay on a subject selected by the bank. For our class it was 'The Immigration to the South', with special reference to Mississippi and Louisiana.'

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The oldest continuous award of the many given each year at graduation was the Joe Weinberg Mathematics Medal for the best average in that subject for all the high school years. Mr. Weinberg was himself a graduate of Greenville High School, of the Class of 1892. Before he died at the age of ninety-two, he had made provision in his Will for a perpetuation of this award. I received both awards. "

GREENE: In what year did he finish high school and where did he go to college?

SOLOMON: " I graduated June 9, 1913. Two days later I reached my sixteenth birthday and long trousers. At least I would not be embarrassed by entering college in knickers. Thus, ended nine wonderful years.

(Turned tape)

SOLOMON: In late September of 1913 I set out for Cleveland, Ohio and Western Reserve University. Greenville schools and teachers had given me a firm enough foundation to hold my own with the graduates of the large city schools, the prep schools and the well known private academies.

No matter where I might live, whenever I came home and school was in session, after greeting my parents I was off to see my teachers. How fortunate to have gone to school at a time when teachers were scholars with a firm foundation in the liberal arts. Mr. Bass had a saying, 'You can't train scholars unless you, yourself are one.' Now-a-days teachers like doctors are specialists. "

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GREENE: When Mr. Solomon went to college, what aid was available to students as now? Government aid?

SOLOMON: "When I left home I had a letter of introduction to Mr. M. A. Black, president of the Wooltex Company, in Cleveland, and a $60.00 scholarship obtained by Rabbi Emanuel Sternheim who was serving the Hebrew Union Temple. The Company was a ladies' coatsuit industry and I was hired to be one of the crew of special delivery boys. The job was to deliver personally those parcels too late for regular delivery. My pay was $4.50 a week. There were, however, no deductions and we were still on the gold standard. The cost of higher education had not yet skyrocketed. By actual accounting, my expenses for a year, including transportation, board and room, car fare and tuition, was $500.00."

GREENE: $500.00 a year?

Did he have a job?

SOLOMON: Yes, he had a job.

"In making my deliveries I had to use the streetcar. Cleveland had the best system in the entire country. The trips were often long. Much of my required reading was done on these trips. I remember carrying a pocket edition of the New Testament, required reading for Bible I and II, and during the year two term papers were required, the result of our reading. The subjects I chose were, 'The Life of Christ' and 'The Life and Letters of Paul'. I made an 'A' in both, in both semesters, then I became self-conscious about my ignorance of the Old

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Testament so set out to read it, a few pages every night.

When I returned in 1914 for my second year I was determined to find something more remunerative and less time consuming than special delivery. I had worked for a new Star Shoe Store in Greenville for over two years, so I felt that I knew enough of the business to warrant a job in Cleveland. We were, however, in a recession because World War I had started, and for the time being foreign trade was at a standstill.

I was aiming for the May Company, the largest department store in Cleveland. Fortunately, for me, the buyer was a college man, a great friend to Western Reserve boys who must work their way, so for that year I worked three days a week and made $9.00. In my junior and senior years I was put on the regular payroll and made enough with salary and PM's to pay my expenses after railroad fare.

In 1913 Adelbert College, the undergraduate department of Western Reserve University, was a small institution with about 500 students in the four grades. There were practically no dormitories, hence my room in a private house approved, of course, by the college. Having no dormitory life, unable to rise to the bait of the first fraternity overtures because of finances, and leaving immediately for work after my last class, I had little time for social life, or participation in extra curricular activities.

My library work had to be done by night, visits to the college reference rooms or Sunday visits to the Public Library.

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I remember seeing only one football game versus our arch rivals, Case School of Applied Science, now a part of the consolidated University."

GREENE: While he was at Western Reserve, what was his major and what was his minor?

SOLOMON: "By this time I had decided to make languages my major, mathematics my minor, in addition to German and Latin, which I took for the full four years. I had Greek two years, French one year and Italian a half year. "

GREENE: Were the graduation ceremonies at Western Reserve as elaborate as they are now?

SOLOMON: "In April 1917 we declared war on Germany. Western Reserve issued a moratorium on class attendance and the connected study for all students in good standing who volunteered to replace truck gardeners, laborers enlisted in the armed services. Cleveland was a great center of agriculture.

If I learned nothing else during my tenure as a hired man, I learned the difference between unhitch and unharness. My boss had told me to take the horse and implement sled to the barn, unhitch him and come to dinner. Once arrived at the barn I proceeded to take off the complete harness, skillfully avoiding any tangling, then I proudly hung each item on the proper peg and consigned the horse to a stall. Dinner over, my boss accompanied me to the barn to lay out the afternoon's work. He took one look at my masterpiece and explained, 'I told you to unhitch him, not to unharness him.' Like my first

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misspelled word, I've never forgotten the distinction.

Our graduation was sudden and simple. We were notified to report to the Chapel on a certain day, where without any of the ceremony attendant upon the granting of the degrees we had obtained, with none of the "pomp and circumstance" of processions with the colorful hoods of the "doctors", caps and gowns, we were simply presented our diplomas. Thus, though I have earned both the AB and Master of Education degrees, I have never worn a cap and gown. My Master of Education diploma was sent to me by mail, earned in the summer, granted in the fall.

My final transcript showed the following honors: Freshman - President's prize in Latin; Sophomore - Two year honors in German; Junior honors, Phi Beta Kappa; Senior - Graduation summa cum laude, second semester honors.

I had been selected by Mr. E. E. Bass, Superintendent of Greenville Public Schools, to teach Latin. After the 1917-1918 session I enlisted in the Army and was stationed my entire service at Jefferson Barracks near St. Louis, and discharged in July 1919 and returned to Greenville and my Latin classes at Greenville High School.

During my senior year at Western Reserve University I had applied for and been granted a scholarship at the University of Minnesota in order to earn my Masters' degree. There was, however, the War and I would have had to postpone my acceptance until I had finished my military service. Then too,

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I was anxious to become independent of my father, even for the partial support that he provided for my college years.

Mr. Bass had offered me a position as Latin teacher so I returned the grant to the University of Minnesota, and in September of 1917 I faced my first class.

At the time Mississippi law required all prospective teachers to take an examination before a license was granted. If your grade was in a certain category, you were awarded a lifetime license; if it was not that high but still above the average, you earned a three-year license; if it was below that the license you obtained was good for only one year. At the end of the period covered by the two limited licenses you must attend summer school in a Normal School or University, repeat the examination with license granted as above.

As a prospective Latin teacher I took examinations in agriculture, history, arithmetic, algebra, theory and practice of teaching, spelling, etc. , etc., but not one question on Latin. Yet, I was awarded a lifetime license to teach in that field. My salary was $75.00 a school month of four weeks for 10 months. One of my freshman pupils dropped out to take a job with the railroad. His salary was $60.00 per calendar month, with only a seventh grade education."

GREENE: What were his feelings the first day he started to teach?

SOLOMON: " On my way home at the end of that first day, I remembered the same journey when I was promoted from

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grade one to grade two. With every step I chanted a similar litany, 'I'll never be able to teach those children.' Some were only a year or two younger than I. It would be another year before I could vote, but as I had faced the fourth table, and beyond, and second grade arithmetic and prevailed, I must have bearded the 'educational' lion in his den for that was the first day of 45 years of teaching.

I had mentioned my salary of $75.00 per month, yet I should have paid the school some sort of tuition fee for the many things I learned that first year, things never mentioned in the professor's lectures - never found in a text book. I learned a most important lesson, never to try to bluff pupils. Note, I write, 'try to bluff' for you never succeed. They're instinctively aware of 'hot air', or the diplomatic lie to cover lack of knowledge.

I learned that pupils are honest, the liar, the cheat, is the exception. My senior class tests and examinations were given under the honor system. Pupils like fairness. You get from them the behavior you expect from them, they will work for you as hard as you work for them.

They never resent deserved correction. When the first pupil I had expelled as principal returned on a visit as an adult he sought out the teacher whose report was the cause of his expulsion and apologized for his misconduct. I learned that pupils appreciated teachers who would listen to their side of a story, who would not laugh at their problems, who would be a

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trustworthy confidant, but they did not want teachers on a 'buddy, buddy' basis.

They wanted teachers on whose knowledge they could call for a solution to their perplexities, on whose wider experience they could depend. Above all they wanted teachers who liked adolescents, teachers who never lost their empathy for youth, as they acquired the wisdom of age.

The young like limits, they like to know where the safety line is drawn, beyond which they should not venture, lest they be caught in the undertow. They know as they mature this line will extend further and further, giving them more room in which to achieve their adulthood. Neither parents nor teachers earn the abiding love and respect of the young by permissive discipline. The word 'discipline' is of noble origin from the Latin 'discipulus' meaning pupil, which in turn comes from the Latin verb 'disco', to learn, to learn how. So discipline should not be taken as synonymous with punishment, but rather with "training and education."

GREENE: Mrs. Solomon, did your husband serve in the armed forces and, if he did, what was the nature of his work?

SOLOMON: " By the end of my first year of teaching I had passed my twenty-first birthday. Now we were deeply involved in a war and I had registered and was eligible for the draft. Rather than wait for the draft to catch up with me I decided to enlist. By enlistment you stood a better chance of getting into the service you desired, at least that was the

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current opinion, so I set out for Chicago to enlist in the Navy, hopefully to be assigned to the Great Lakes Naval Training Station there, where I was turned down. I wasn't tall enough.

So, I made an about face and went to an Army Recruiting Center and signed up for the Signal Corps. My first destination was Jefferson Barracks for induction, to be assigned thence to the branch of the Signal Corps. The fates decreed otherwise, it was mid-summer, hot as only Chicago and St. Louis can be, and to a troop train resurrected from some ancient storage barn - no fans, no screens, and the dust of the ages on the plush seats.

We reached the barracks in mid-morning, tired, dirty and thirsty as we stood in the first of many lines we would form in front of the Receiving Headquarters. A Sergeant came to the porch of the building and called, 'Can any of you fellows type?' The idea of a little privacy, a cool drink or refreshing bath was most tempting - up went my hand. From that day until the date of discharge all I did was type forms, adding payroll computation later. Therefore, when some of the now thinning ranks of World War I veterans get together and begin to reminisce about their service days' adventures I can only add that I issued computation of rations, travel pay allowances, coffee money, or travel orders.

In the meantime, I had written Mr. Bass, who assured me there was a place waiting for me in Greenville schools. I might, however, have to teach mathematics, since the Latin

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teacher who replaced me would remain in that capacity, there being enough pupils to require two sections in some grades. Thus, I became the first Latin-Mathematics combination among the teachers of Mississippi, for I never met another in all the years I taught in the state. The junction of these two subjects presented no hardship, for I was a bigamist in my attachment to both. The universality of the language of mathematics was even greater than that of Latin and Greek.

GREENE: When he returned to Greenville from the War, was he immediately employed in the School system?

SOLOMON: "You never signed a contract with Mr. Bass. The simple statement that there was a place for me meant that I was hired. It was a gentleman's agreement on both sides. At the end of the school year if you were not taken aside and told that it would be perhaps better if you sought employment elsewhere, you knew that your nonexistent contract was renewed.

For the 1919-1920 session I received a large increase in salary to a $100.00 a month. That first post war year Mr. Bass had me teaching even Physical Ed. He did not know, although I was in the Army almost a year I had no military training. "

GREENE: All you have read, Mrs. Solomon, shows the serious side of Mr. Solomon. Did he sponsor extra curricular activities during his teaching years?

SOLOMON: "Filled with the enthusiasm of youth I took on many extra curricular duties, among them were the organization

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of a cheering section, inter-scholastic athletics and coaching plays. In the former capacity I introduced one of the Western Reserve's classical yells in the original Greek, taken from a Greek tragedy. In the latter activity I revived a tradition of a senior play, abandoned after the fiasco of Sheridan's, 'The Rivals'. Miss Carrie had tried it with our class but we lacked sufficient numbers for casting, so she postponed it until the Class of 1914, presenting it then in its three hours of boring entirety. During the years I coached, among others, 'Come Out of the Kitchen', 'Nothing But the Truth', and 'The Charm School'. "

GREENE: I know Mr. Solomon liked teaching but the pay was little. Did he ever try other ventures besides the teaching?

SOLOMON: "When a boyhood friend, fired with reports of the fortune to be made in the Florida boom, approached me with plans for a business venture there in the city of Orlando, I yielded to his "siren's song", although I had not lost my enthusiasm for teaching. I presented my resignation about the middle of 1925-1926 session.

Since this is to be a book of school memories I quickly pass over my few years, five, in the world of business. I learned some valuable lessons in those five years, foremont among them being that all business agreements should be written, signed, sealed and witnessed in advance of implementation; a second bit of wisdom was to avoid booms unless you can be in

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at the "borning." We arrived in Orlando after the boom and before the collapse.

After two years I liquidated my shares of the business venture and headed for New York on my only ocean voyage, Savannah, Georgia to New York City, there to seek my fortune, but my fortune did not lie in New York so I betook myself to Chicago, where I had a brother, to do further searching.

I had two great experiences in Chicago, the second being a sort of consequence of the first. Through a strange quirk of fortune I became a traveling salesman for a prominent dress manufacturer, a vocation I had always thought of as great adventure and romance. Reality too soon brought a change of mind on that score. The romance came in the by-product. One fall returning from my far western territory I met a young lady who later became my wife. We were married in July 1930. Mr. Bass asked that I return to Greenville as principal of E. E. Bass Junior High."

GREENE: Mrs. Solomon, wasn't Mr. Solomon retained two years longer so that he could handle the integration of Bass Junior High School?

SOLOMON: Yes, that's true, so he didn't retire until 1967, having been kept two extra years when Bass Junior High was integrated in the city. Retirement was marked by a reception at the H. W. Solomon School, where he was presented a gift, a check to be used for a trip abroad. There we visited Rome, Athens, Florence, London and Israel, places he had

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taught about for so many years.

(End of tape one)

GREENE: We were talking about his trip abroad.

SOLOMON: On our return he ran the Teacher's Credit Union for about two years and when he was offered the opportunity to teach Latin at St. Joseph Catholic School he accepted it, because Latin was his love. In leisure time he wrote 'The History of the Hebrew Union Temple' and later, 'The History of the First National Bank', plus numerous children's stories for the young grandchildren. He was available for talks to Clubs of all kinds and church groups where he spoke on both the Old and the New Testaments, so he never actually retired or lost his love of learning and teaching.

I have been asked, 'What kind of influence do I think my husband left on the community?' Daily people stop me to tell me what he meant to them, so I know it was a profound influence. It is difficult to select any one person or any one thing that has been said to me, but these two brief quotes, I think, explain it all. The first was written by a pupil who went to Junior High in the mid-thirties and he said, 'Mr. Solomon was indeed my Einstein and I shall ever be grateful for the guidance and support which he has given me. However, in his spirit, Mr. Solomon wants the ones of us still here to carry on. I cherish this, and I'm glad that I can still write you and wish for you the very best in this most trying period'.

Another letter, also from a former pupil, said,

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'Mr. Solomon was one of the finest, wisest, most decent men I ever knew. He helped to shape me as teacher and principal, but also as adviser, friend and in the truest sense of the word, philosopher. A community such as Greenville is fortunate when it has one person whose sense of commitment to basic values is above the average. In Herman Solomon, generations of Greenvillians had someone whose commitment to those values could have been a model for the Nation. '

I would be remiss in not stating that boredom was never a facet of my husband's life. His interests were always varied and numerous. The year our house was begun he was at Wayne State in Detroit, working on his Master's degree.

He passed an antique shop daily, and finally succumbed to the lure and purchased several pieces which were shipped home, hoping I would like them too. I did, and as the years passed, we acquired more, some from family and several for sentimental reasons.

One of these treasures is the chair Mr. Bass had used for so many years. Their relationship made it imperative that Herman acquire the desk chair which had belonged to the first superintendent of Greenville schools.

The other piece is the library desk given to the high school by Hollis P. Huntington, who came through the area when the railroads were being built. When the new high school was furnished, the desk was to be discarded. He brought it home and with the help of the late shop teacher, George Comeaux, he

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rebuilt and refinished it, and it is beautiful. There are many initials carved on the desk and wads of chewing gum had covered the underside. It was a labor of love.

Gardening was another hobby. One fall when he was working in a flower bed he lost his Phi Beta Kappa key. Curiously two years later, while turning over the dirt, he found it in the same bed.

Over the years he acquired many books, a great many on math, some of them I've given to our grandson, who inherits his grandfather's passion for this subject. My son, Herman Solomon, M.D. of Wichita, Kansas and my daughter, Mrs. Jerrold Groner of Highland Park, Illinois are indeed proud of the influence their father conferred on the thousands of students whose lives he touched.

(End of Interview)

(Transcribed by Vivian Broom)

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