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Interview with Samuel V. Wickliffe Regarding Campbellsville & Taylor County (FA 202)

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Folklife Archives Project 202 – Campbellsville/Taylor County Oral History Project
Interview with Samuel Wickliffe (B1 F23)

Interviewer: Lynne Ferguson

Interviewee: Samuel Wickliffe

Project: Campbellsville-Taylor County Oral History Project

Date: April 15, 2006

Location: 108 Eggers Street, Campbellsville, Kentucky, 42718

Transcriber: David Puglia

Note From Transcriber:

a. Interviewee Samuel Wickliffe is abbreviated SW.

Interviewer Lynne Ferguson is abbreviated LF.

b. An ellipsis indicates a sentence that is unfinished due to interruption. A dash indicates a sentence that is unfinished due to change of thought.

c. Square brackets are used to indicate additional information not taken directly from the words of the interviewer or interviewee.

Parentheses are used to indicate nonverbal actions.

d. In parentheses “laughs” means laughter by a single individual, “laughter” means laughter by both parties, and “chuckles” means the beginning of laughter that occurred while the speaker continued to speak.

e. Filler words such as “um,” and “uh,” were removed if I felt they detracted from the intelligibility of the sentence. Filler phrases such as “you know” were kept when possible.

Disclaimer: This transcription is as accurate and complete as possible. In any question of interpretation, the researcher is referred to the recording itself as the primary document representing the event.

[Begin transcription]

Lynne Ferguson: Testing, testing, one, two, three. This is Lynne Ferguson, and it's April 15, 2006. I'm in Campbellsville, Kentucky at the home of Samuel and Jean Wickliffe. They've both agreed to do an interview with me for the Campbellsville Greater United Oral History Project. Now Mr. Wickliffe if you would, would you please state your full name.

Samuel Wickliffe: My name is Samuel V. Wickliffe.

LF: And your address?

SW: My address is 108 Eggers Street, Campbellsville, Kentucky, 42718. My phone number: area code 270-465-3030.

LF: And Eggers is E-G-G-E-R-S?

SW: E-G-G-E-R-S. Eggers Street.

LF: Now, could you tell me when you were born?

SW: I was born on November the 23rd, 1927. I was born in Bardstown, Kentucky, which is in Nelson County.

LF: And that would make you how old?

SW: Seventy-eight years old.

LF: Tell me whereabouts in Bardstown you were born.

SW: I was born what we used to call being before the street was named. It was called Bucktown. Bucktown. Which is now near Capital M-U-I-R Avenue. And it's 210 East Muir Avenue. My original birth place.

LF: And your parents' names?

SW: My parents' name: Leon J. Wickliffe and Myrtle Holmes Wickliffe, from Bardstown.

LF: They're both from Bardstown?

SW: Yes, which is in Nelson County.

LF: Can you give me a little bit of background where they come from besides Bardstown. Were they always from the area?

SW: From the time they were from that area as to my knowledge. Now I know prior to that I think they came from - my dad I think he was - his father was I guess you would say bought into slavery and came out of, from what I understand, came out of Virginia. And he remained in Bardstown and some of the other siblings I guess went to some other area such as Ohio or someplace, from what I understand.

LF: That would be your grandfather?

SW: Grandfather yes.

LF: And moved there. Okay. Do you have any family history of how that happened. How he was bought out of slavery and why they ended up in Kentucky from Virginia?

SW: I really don't know that. All I know that just conversion with my sister and all. I got that little bit of information. But I guess just like any moving if we want to say North, whatever, West, whatever. It's just - happened.

LF: And your mother? She is Miss Holmes? She was a Holmes?

SW: Yes. Myrtle Holmes. She was a Holmes. And she married Leon J. Wickliffe.

LF: And as far you know about her family?

SW: No, not really. I don't know that much about the family. All I know is that I became (chuckles) part of the family as one of the siblings. (laughter)

LF: Now tell me... (audio cuts out)

SW: Well that's what it was. You know the last name, the Wickliffes, as we talked about. Yes. Where they took on, you know...

LF: Your grandfather?

SW: Through that. Yes, my grandfather. He took on whoever that particular time that was - you know.

LF: And from Virginia? So whoever had owned his family or your family in Virginia, they took their last name from?

SW: Yes, they took the last name and when they came to Kentucky that was the name he was known by. Then I think he had I don't know how many other brothers and sisters that maybe some went to Ohio, and they took on ever what name that was.

LF: Ohhh. So you have siblings - you family with lots of different surnames.

SW: That's true. What is happening you know every year - well every so often - I get where it gets through the mail about you know how to trace a family tree, but I never have followed up on that. I know I've had some Wickliffe that's- well they came from Wickliffe that's in Ohio or someplace and several other places but really to follow up on that we haven't.

LF: That is quite interesting. That would be like putting together a puzzle.

SW: Yeah. I know it. Just like the family tree. I have said one time that I thought I would purchase this book and see just if I could find out anymore about the Wickliffe family.

LF: That would be really interesting. So would you tell me a little bit about when you came to Taylor county. What were the reasons for coming to Taylor county?

SW: I came to Taylor county in the Fall of 1956, and the reason why I came here, we had a principal here - this is before integration - at Durham High School. And we had a principal here at that time named Mr. M. J. Strong. And prior to that when I got out of service, and I was in Bardstown, Kentucky, then I helped to coach a seventh and eighth grade team at Bloomfield Middle School. And the principal at Bloomfield Middle School, he was a friend of M.J. Strong and he told me that they had an opening here at Durham high school, and I applied for the opening, which was coaching and teaching. See at that time, at that time, we were not departmentalized, so we had to teach and coach.

And so I came in the Fall of 1956, and I've been here in Campbellsville ever since, and I retired in 1987 after teaching - now see at that time we were not integrated when I first came, but it was a part of the Campbellsville Independent School System. You know we talk about separate but equal but which it was not equal. So after teaching thirty-one years in the Campbellsville Independent School System, I retired and that's the status of me.

LF: So let's see you retired in '87 so okay let's see since you came to Taylor county as an adult really we probably want to know more about not about being raised or where you were raised, we will a little, but about the changes of when you came to Campbellsville and settled here. Where did you settle? Where did you live?

SW: Well, when I came to Campbellsville I first lived on Baptist Street. And there I was not married when I came. And I roomed with the Johnson family. Reverend Walter Johnson's mother. I roomed with her. Then in '59 that's when I got married. And we had our own place then, which was a street over on Durham street. We lived with at that time Mrs. Ethel Louis. Then shortly after that she passed, and we continue to live in that home on Durham street. Then in - it was '77 - '77 we moved to this location which is 108 Egger Street, and we've been here ever since 1977.

LF: Okay tell me about when you came, what were the conditions and what was it like teaching and coaching at Durham high in like '56, because that's when you said - what was it like in the late fifties?

SW: Well it was still in the late fifties you know we were still segregated, but we were a big family, and in teaching in the Durham high school which were the grades one through twelve then we were limited to a certain kind of space but yet we had a larger classes then, and as far as myself I can see I taught from the part of the fourth grade through high school, but my basic grade was the sixth grade that I taught and I'd coach basketball at Durham High School. And we were a big family, and we knew that we were in a position as Durham High School to do great things and we did great things with no more than we had according to other schools in Campbellsville and all, we were a great school

LF: How would you in your knowledge compare the facilities and the tools that you had including books to what the white school was like?

SW: Well in comparing those, our facilities that we had, we know at that time that they were second, and we know that our books and things that we had at that time were handed down. After they got what they wanted and used what they wanted to use, then we got what was left. And sometimes some of the books we didn't have enough to go around to each student in the class, and some of the students we had to double up and so of the books, and we know they were books that had already been used, although they came probably from the state department to the white school first, and what we got, we go the things they had used and handed down to us. But we made the most out of it. And I think that as far as I'm concerned the teachers at Durham High School did an

outstanding job of preparing the students at that time for their future endeavors. And I say this: I think they did more because they took more interest in the students at that time then later on after integration, because I know in some classes as long as the student was not a discipline problem they could participate or stay in, you know, within the classroom and all. But if they were a discipline problem, if they thought they were a discipline problem, they would put them somewhere to themselves and not give them the attention that they needed. And I think that's one thing that hurt our students during that period of time when we first talked about integration by not - some of the teachers who were prejudice then and didn't want integration did not take interest in helping the students to prepare themselves to receive their diploma and to find their rightful place in society.

LF: Because of their race?

SW: Oh yes. That's what - yes. And because see I know we're sitting in meetings when they integrated that some of them of them didn't want and too wasn't ready for integration. That's what they said. They didn't want integration. But it was something that they couldn't hinder in the end because it was there, and there was a time. See there's a time for everything under the sun. And that was a time for it to come about, I think. So according to the cycle that we are a part of.

LF: Give me a year we're talking about when you sat in on the meetings, you know, integration. About what year was that?

SW: This year, this was I think probably when we integrated, and what they did when they integrated, they took the high school first. Then they took what we call the middle and elementary or the elementary at that time because it went one through eight. And then that was around '63, and when they first had their I guess school-wide teacher's meeting when, all the teachers came together along with the superintendent...

LF: Oh yeah tell me about that.

SW: (laughs) And it was something to behold because that's when you had some of the teachers who were, you know, prejudice, if you want to say it. They didn't want integration. And what they weren't going to do, but they know in order to remain a teacher in the system they would do as they are supposed to do according to the superintendent at that time which was handed down from the state department or else they would not longer be a teacher in the system at all because that's something that they couldn't - as a teacher that they must obey or else they would no longer be a teacher in the system itself.

LF: Well how did it go with teacher integration? How did that happen for you?

SW: Now as far as myself I know I (laughs) - it went - you know it went well with me as far as myself because I think what helped us too by taking the high school first, and I was in the I would say elementary, at that time we'll say one through eight. And by

taking the high school first, and you know that's just like anything else, there was (laughs) the breaking point there. And then when they took the rest of us the next year, I think we were able to move into it more peacefully than maybe the high school. And we didn't have that many high school teachers anyway when they integrated. I know Mr. H.R. Richardson was one of the high school teachers. And I don't know whether or not that first year Mr. Avery went or not. It was only one or two as I can remember. Because the principal at that time Mr. M. J. Strong, he went to Louisville. He went to Louisville and took [interviewer mumbles something] - yes - as a principle in Louisville. Then we had some of the other teachers went back to their home, I think. We didn't have any because (pages turning) - I believe he was Mr. Richardson. Then later his aunt. I know Mrs. ??Fro Allen??. And (inaudible) my wife. Well not at that time, but we you know...

LF: That's the second year?

SW: Yes.

LF: And where did you - what school did you move into?

SW: Well see all of it is Campbellsville Independent School System, but from Durham was still open. And at that time, I (inaudible) that sixth grade level. I moved over to the elementary school which was over on I guess on Main Street, West Main. And the reason why we didn't have enough room at the Durham High School, and I stayed over there until they added more room at the Durham High School at that time, which became - is the middle school now.

LF: The new Durham school?

SW: Well really it was already the new Durham school when I came here because I came here in '56 and I think they moved in '54 into the new Durham school, but they added more rooms to the new Durham school, then we moved back up to I'll say to Durham school.

LF: And that was a sixth grade area - for the sixth grade - or middle school then?

SW: Yes, it was added. Yeah they moved them. See I was - they had to add but they moved the fifth grade up. But they didn't move the fifth grade up until after see because I was at the sixth grade level.

LF: And so you stayed at the same level that you were teaching as the schools were integrating?

SW: Yes

LF: Did you still continue to coach?

SW: Yes I did. Yes - yes at middle school I coached basketball and football. Then at one year I had to coach the track team over to the high school. That's because they needed someone at that particular time. And also I had baseball also at the middle school too.

LF: Tell me let's see you had from '56 to '87 that's a long time and I bet you saw a lot of changes in every segment of it. What was the biggest difference that you saw from - well i know you talked about now it was a big family...

SW: Yes.

LF: ...before integration. And after integration I'm assuming that really changed. Do you think - would that be the biggest change you think? What's the biggest difference for the schools, you know, over those years.

SW: I think the biggest difference to me first before integration we were a close-knitted group and being a close knitted group, we knew our students, and we knew them name by name. But after integration to me the group wasn't as close knit because of the environment at that time and being, you know, spread out more, and you couldn't - like you would at the Durham school where you would be in contact with your students every day as a close knitted group. But after the integration and you know being the system it was you were spread out more, and you couldn't stay up on top of, you know, each student like you could when you were there at Durham High School.

LF: What did you notice in regards to parents' participation. Did that really change to or was that somewhere still participate?

SW: I think it changed some because the parents before we integrated I know as far as the PTA organization, the parents in other words, because you knew everyone in the community and by ignoring those in the community which was we talking about the Durham community at that time, the word of mouth got around much better and easier than it did after integration because I think sometimes you have it where they think, well this is after integration, that they don't listen to them like we did when were the small and close-knitted group. And it's, you know, like their voice in other words doesn't carry. You know, I think that's one thing because I've heard them say that well they going to do what they want to do regardless. And I think that's one thing has been a part of it (chuckles) too. And even (chuckles) even know, we don't have - now I'm talking about - don't have the participation - well we may be getting a little bit more now than we did of participating in a black - being a part of, you know, these various organization things within the school itself. Now I think it's coming back a little bit more now than it, you know, but we didn't have that problem before integration.

LF: Because you're saying that children didn't participate as much in school events after integration or...

SW: In the various organizations as they did before because, you know, a certain amount was required of them, and, you know, letting them know and talking to them up front that this is just as much as important for you to help you along as when - to find your rightful place in society. And all of this is the preticipate.

LF: One thing that I talked to - to people and students who went to Durham - they all talk about how much they remember the May Day celebrations. Tell me a little bit about that from the teacher's perspective.

SW: (chuckles) Well that was one of the big days of the year that we have as far as the May Day. You know, we had it set aside, we would all - as a school now. As a school. I know - let me just say this - I know now they do it since the system is as broad as it is, they have certain times that they have. Like the middle school will have theirs, the elementary will have theirs separate, but we all had it before integration, we all had it the same time. And we would go out, they would have like wrapping the May Pole, we would have, you know, different other games and all which you had everybody participating at their grade level and you know give awards and all to various winners. Then we just made that a big day. And it was something, I think, at that time, it was something to behold. And it brought a closeness there too because everyone just like preparing yourself in the classroom, you prepared for that May Day festival also.

LF: As a school?

SW: As a - yes.

LF: Well what else do you - tell me what else do you think is important that people should know or understand about teaching in Campbellsville in the fifties, sixties, seventies, and eighties. You've got to do (chuckles) four different...

SW: I think - yes - before integration, teaching in Campbellsville, and especially I'm talking about teaching at the black school, at the Durham High School, then I believe that if the teacher could teach at Durham high school, they can teach in any given situation. Because, even today, because they were prepared to teach at that level, whatever level they were teaching at, and they can do it today because you know we have so much - we're talking about the basics, reading, writing, and arithmetic. If you don't have your foundation, your basics for that, you're not going to make much progress. And I think, I just think we, when I say we talking about as a (inaudible), a time have gotten away from that. But now they seem to be going back to the basics because they're finding out, if they don't have the basics, you're lost. You're lost. You'll find in a teaching situation, it's going to be hard to instill into these students and prepare them for the future or prepare them for college or going wherever they're going, trade school, if they don't have the basics.

LF: Now let's go back and get a little bit about your life. You grew up in Bardstown?

SW: I grew up in Bardstown, Kentucky. I went to Bardstown Training High School, which was one through twelve. Then when I finished Bardstown Training High School, I got a scholarship, and I went to Winston-Salem, at that time, Teacher's College, which is now Winston-Salem University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and I was there - I graduated from Winston-Salem in '52. And I deferred - see at that time we had the Korean conflict going on, and they deferred me to finish school at Winston-Salem, and after I finished they said I could go into the army, and I would be shipped overseas, and I would stay two years. And I decided to - or I could volunteer for the Air Force - so I decided to volunteer for the Air Force, and I stayed in the Air Force four years. And I got out in '56. So when I got out in '56, then in the Fall of '56 is when I started teaching here at Durham High School. Then I did work at U of L above my - I had a B.A. and B.S. degree, Bachelor of Science. Then I did work above that at the UL. But I had my tour of duty in the service, so it was a great tour of duty.

LF: And where were you? Were you in Korea or on Air Force or where were you?

SW: I did my basic training in San Antonio, Texas. Then I left San Antonio, Texas, and I went to Biloxi, Mississippi.

LF: Oooh, I know where that is too. (laughs).

SW: Biloxi has an airborne - I was studying to become an airborne radio operator. And we had to pass eighteen words a minute penciling, this is the code, see the morris code, see that? And we had to pass twenty-five words a minute typing in order to become an airborne radio operator. Then after I was finished school in Biloxi, Mississippi, then I shipped out to Fort Benning, Georgia, and at Fort Benning, Georgia, we had an attachment there was a Lawson field, Lawson Air Field. And the reason because Fort Benning that was a paratrooper school, and we had to take them up on low-level formations and they, you know, would just out of planes and all. Then after my being at Lawson field in Fort Benning, Georgia, then I shipped over seas to Japan, and I went to my base in Japan was Brady Air Force Base, which was in southern Japan, and on the island of Kyushu Island, that was my base. Then when I first went over we had to fly, well we had a crew, we had a pilot, a copilot, an engineer, and I, myself, was a radio operator. What I did, I kept manifests, kept records, what we had on board and etcetera and I, you know, we had the ??lizon?? equipment. I had transmit messages and things of the sort, and if the pilots radio, something happened to it, if it, you know, where it wouldn't work, then I had to set it up on my ??lizon?? equipment.

LF: You translated coded messages?

SW: Coded messages. See we had symbols just like we had a book, and we had cue symbols, like we could send this letter and they would know what the message or signals - know what the messages were. And then I had (laughs) I had, they had from what we call special service. They - the pilot and the copilot - you see the pilot was in charge, and we were up at one time and his equipment went out, his voice equipment, and I had to set it up myself, and from that time on he requested me every time

(laughter) that he went out to supply - wanted me to be his radio operator. And I had ??Louis Otis?? somewhere, you know it's been so long, and I had that information in my records and all.

LF: And he was very secure with you?

SW: (laughs) Then what we did, we would fly from Japan, at that time that was the Korean conflict, to Korea, and we would would, you know. we'd call them "courier runs." Sometimes we would go, we would, you know, bring - carry mail. We would bring soldiers back on what we call "seven day rest leave," R and R's. Then sometimes we would bring back the wounded Americas, we would bring them back to Japan. And the foreigners who were wounded, we would bring them back to what we call Pousson. And then we would also have "stiff lips," those who were killed, then we would bring the Americans back to Japan to be shipped, you know, back home, then we'd bring the foreigners back to Pousson. And we just had all, you know, these the things that had to be done. Then we were, you know, Korea's hilly country. Then at times they had a lot of, at that time, well there was, you know, North Koreans. They would come out of the mountains and attack aircrafts, so we had what we called - we flew the Charlie 46 - which was a transport plane, had twin engines, and since they had been attacking then they had a little T-29 with a machine gun mounted on it after we took off. They had that after you know so many hours in the air to follow us to see if they would attack us so they would in turn (laughter)...

LF: You, you were, you were, you were gonna, yeah... (laughter)

SW: Kind of a guinea pig (laughs)

LF: I was going to say, that would be a little dangerous...

SW: It was. It was.

LF: Lure the out so that they could shoot them...

SW: Because all we had, we could check out, we, you know, wore a flight suit which was one piece and we could carry a forty-five, that's, you know, all we could...

LF: But your plane didn't have any guns?

SW: No, no, we didn't have - it was just transport. But, then we also, at that time, you know, trying to get the North Koreans to end the fighting and see if you fly up - see it was sixteenth parallel in Korea - we always supported the sixteenth parallel to carry cargo and different, you know, then if you go over the sixteenth parallel, see y'all tour it as a C2 mission up over the C1 mission, and at night, see you have your ground crew, and that might which is the army, you would have airway flight. They would tell you where to cross going over into North Korea above the sixteenth parallel, and what we had, we had two Koreans on too, and what we would do - drop propaganda leaflets.

LF: In North Korea?

SW: In North Korea. Yeah, everything, you know, worked pretty good.

LF: Never got shot down?

SW: Never did. No. Never did. I guess that was Him being on our side. (laughs)

LF: Well tell me a little bit about your family. When were you married?

SW: We got married in 1959.

LF: And you have children?

SW: We had two children. I have a son that's in - he lives in Franklin, Kentucky, and he has family. His name is Samuel L. Wickliffe, and he is married and he has two step daughters. Then I have a daughter that's a Lori W. Wickliffe-Wyatt. W-Y-A-T-T. And she lives in Illinois. She's north of Chicago. And she has her own - she's a veterinarian, and she has her own business.

LF: North of Chicago?

SW: Yes, which is a suburb of Chicago.

LF: Now they both grew up here?

SW: Both finished high school here in the Campbellsville Independent School System, and both went to Western. My son really today I guess he needs a semester in the summer to get his degree, but he hasn't, but my daughter went to Western and she finished at Western four years. Then she went to Tuskegee, in Alabama, and she finished vet school there. The she did an intern at Lafayette, Purdue, an intern. Then she worked a while with two other vets. And now at the present she has her own.

LF: We've got about fifteen more minutes. What changes in the community has affected you family you think most here in Campbellsville?

SW: Well, really, the changes in the community, I just...

LF: You can just think about it.

SW: (laughs)

LF: Here's another one that you might want to think about too. What - has there been one incident in Campbellsville that has affected your idea of the community in a negative or positive way. Can you think of one thing, you know, that has?

SW: Well, the only thing that I can say pertaining to that, I don't think it has, but I'm a type of individual myself in the community, I want to see the community as a whole, you know, learn that people in the community learn to get along better one with another. In other words everybody - all of us are different.

LF: Thank goodness.

SW: And if we were not then this would be a terrible place in which to live. When I say the world would be because we're all created in the image of God, and we are going to have to learn to live together as a family because that's what it's all about. I think the reason why now why things are the way that they are is too many of us want to be set aside - what I mean by set aside - we want to do the way we want to do and think the way that we think and all that's the right way. But all of us are in this thing together and regardless of what transpires and even just like we say denominations and all, well your denomination is the most segregated part of everything now, even nowadays. And that should of been the starting point, but when it started then that was a dissatisfaction then. And now I say this is man-made. We've got to live together and not think yourself more highly than anyone else. And He's going to make the final separation anyway, our lord and saviour Jesus Christ. We can't do it. We can't do it. All we can do is just live by the golden rule.

LF: Is there anything else- let me tell - what church - oh I've got down here about what church - what church do you attend?

SW: Now I'm a Methodist, and I attend Fannie Chapel Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. And my church is off of Broadway, which is on Durham Street. It's on Durham street. And it's 204 Durham Street. And we are part of what we call the second episcopal district, which are Methodists. We're talking about it's made up of ten districts, and we are in what we call the second episcopal district. When I talk about the ten I'm talking about all over the, you know, covering the United States and some of the foreign countries as well.

LF: There are ten. And you all are part of the second. Okay.

SW: Second episcopal district.

LF: What else would you like people to know about you or Campbellsville?

SW: Well, I would just like to know that I've been here since '56. I've found to be a good place to live. I've had the opportunity several times to leave Campbellsville, but I've decided to stay, and at this time, you know, I'm satisfied. And I'm glad that I didn't pull stakes. And I've learned a lot about Campbellsville and people here in Campbellsville, and to me there's not a better place you can live than Campbellsville.

LF: So it's home, huh?

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SW: It's home. Yes. Although now, although Bardstown is just less than an hour drive, but this is home.

LF: Thank you very much.

SW: Okay. I hope something may have been said.

LF: Oh yeah. I think you had a good insight, especially about teachers, and I'd been real curious about how the integration went with teachers.

SW: Yes.

LF: But I'm going to turn it off now.

SW: All right.

[End Transcription]