

**Interview with
Amanda H. Anderson
by Courtney L. Gale,
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Released Form signed by Amanda H. Anderson
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Note: In the original transcript there were blank spaces.
These have been indicated by [blank space] in the following text.

Amanda Anderson Interview

CG: All right. I'm Courtney Gale. And I am here talking with Amanda Anderson, who was a 4-H extension agent in West Virginia for a long time. And I'm here with the Oral History Program of Appalachia, trying to get down stories and uh, information that way to be recorded in the archives of the Oral History Program. All right, when were you born?

AA: Oh, I was born in 1914.

CG: Yes. Well, we're just trying to find out basic information to begin with. Are you from West Virginia to begin with?

AA: I was born in Virginia, but I've lived most of my life in West Virginia.

CG: Where were you living in West Virginia when you were an agent?

AA: I was living in Bluefield, West Virginia, and I covered two counties: Mercer County and Wyoming County.

CG: Where are you now? Where are you living now?

AA: Now I'm living in Dunbar, West Virginia, just beyond Charleston.

CG: Are you still working now?

AA: No, I'm retired.

CG: Good for you. Are you married?

AA: Widow. I'm a widow.

CG: Do you have children?

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AA: I have two daughters, and they were both 4-H girls when they grew up.

CG: What kind of education did you have?

AA: What kind of education? (**CG:** Mmm-hmm, growing up) What do you mean? My qualifications?

CG: Uh, where did you go to school, how long did you go to school?

AA: Oh, I went to school-, I went part of my elementary and high school in Virginia, and I went uh, to Bluefield State College, which was then Bluefield Institute, a year and a half high school, then I did four years of college at Bluefield, at what is now Bluefield State.

CG: What were you studying there?

AA: Home economics.

CG: Is that how you got involved in the extension program?

AA: That's part of the reason I got involved in the extension program. Because uh, I've also done a little bit of graduate work at all the other colleges since then. But uh, I was teaching in Wyoming County during World War II when I found out about a job with the extension service. And I was first hired as what they called a war food assistant. And there was an opening that came for a home demonstration so, from then on, from 19 and 44, to 19 and 59, I was the home demonstration agent for Mercer and Wyoming Counties.

CG: So how old were you when you were coming up here and working with the camp, and uh, directing things?

AA: Oh, honey, I would have to count up to see how old I was at that time. I had two daughters who were going to school. I guess I must have been in my oh 30's, late '30's, possibly in my

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'30's, going into my '40's.

CG: What made you really want to be involved with 4-H camp?

AA: Oh, because I liked working with children. And it was a part of my job to direct the 4-H camps, I mean, the 4-H projects in the two counties. And of course, one of the opportunities for the 4-H'rs was to uh, be able to come to the 4-H camp during the summer. That was one of the requirements of the job, to uh, bring children to the 4-H camp. We could not go into uh, we could not take the uh, African American children to white camps. So this was the only camp that was available to us.

CG: The clubs, the 4-H clubs that you were helping with the projects and everything throughout the rest of the year, were they uh, were the clubs segregated as well? (**AA:** Oh, yes) Were there black clubs and white clubs?

AA: ...they were segregated. Everything was segregated at that time.

CG: And did you only work with African American 4-H clubs?

AA: That's right, that's right. African America 4-H clubs, home ec clubs, and so forth, in the, in the two counties.

CG: What kind of-, what kind of activities, just day-to-day activities, were going on at the camp?

AA: At the camp?

CG: Yeah, what was, what was there for them to do at the camp?

AA: Well, see, you see the agents, it ended up that we, the counties that were far away from the actual camp scene, uh, we were financially, financially we were unable to have camp in our own counties. So, we combined, the administration combined several county, counties together.

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So, I was near McDowell County. I worked fairly well with the uh, agent in McDowell County. And I knew the agent in Kanawha County. So we combined our camps and during the summer, the uh, uh, Kanawha, Mercer, Wyoming and McDowell Counties came together and had 4-H camps. And...

CG: Was ... was this an all-age camp, or was-, did you have a younger and older camp?

AA: No, we-, at that time, we had uh, an all-age camp beginning from 9 years old to uh, what is the 4-H club age? (**CG:** Uh, 21) Up to, yeah, so uh, it, we had.... But, later years it ... it developed. Then we had what we called uh, uh, an older camp, a state wide camp that uh.... And it was, you know, they came from all over for that. But that would be a different time ...[inaudible due to horn honking] _

CG: [inaudible]

AA:carry on the regular camp activities, you know, [blank space] and flag raising and classes....

CG: What sort of classes were taken then?

AA: Well, we, our classes were basically sort of in keeping with our projects, you know [blank space]work was involved doing projects. And uh, most of the time I, we, within the camp, though, we divided them into age groups. Like all 9, 10, 11 year olds. Then 12, 13, you know, we divided them into groups. And we had uh, oh, projects, health classes, swimming, recreation. And each class ... also, we divided them into tribes. You know, we had [blank space] Cherokee (**CG:** Delaware, Seneca and Big Foot) yeah. And uh, that was the daily, that was the daily routine for the uh.... And we had uh, camp fire.

CG: Did you have a council circle every night?

AA: Oh, yes. The children usually enjoyed that, the council circle. Because the tribes had to

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kind of compete with each other.

CG: Did uh, I know that through my years of going to 4-H camp, at the county camps at the end of the week uh, one of the tribes wins a spirit stick. Was that still going on then?

AA: Mmm-hmm, mmm-hmm. Yeah, we-, I've forgotten-, it's been so long now I've forgotten what, you know, exactly what we used. But uh, each tribe would.... Well, I think we even, you know, chose a tribe each night which one was the best or whatever. The best scouting report or whatever. But uh, those [blank space] we carried on the normal 4-H activities.

CG: So the entire year, you were an extension agent, you were working with clubs, working with projects, helping the kids, planning camps ... what does that one, what did that one week in the summer, when you could actually come up here and be in the middle of all of it, what did that one week mean to you out of the rest of the year?

AA: Well, as an agent, it allowed me the opportunity to work a little bit closer with some of the boys and girls who were-, and they would come from different communities. And of course, then we tried to develop their projects, because later in the year we would go to the state fair, do projects up at the state fair. And uh, then it became uh, the older ones, usually it was the older ones who would get a chance to come back to the uh, all state camp. So, that gave some criteria to go on, and then it uh, it ... it helped to enlighten the people in the community on what the extension program was all about.

CG: Yeah, I think fairs do that a lot, a lot more than most things in 4-H. How did you see ... what sort of meanings did you see uh, the children getting out of this? Not necessarily just the experiences, but what sort of lessons did you see the campers learning just be being at 4-H camp?

AA: I felt that uh, in many instances I tried, I watched some of my uh, 4-H'rs learn to communicate or get along with uh, children from other areas. And uh, it gave them an experience to uh, many of them, to be able to get away from home and see what the rest of the

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state sort of looked like. I always felt like, I felt real proud of myself at one point, because I was riding on the bus in front of two little boys from Bluefield to Clifftop. And we came right by the Bluestone Dam, which is the New River, down around Hinton. (CG: That's where my church camp is, I'm quite familiar with it) And I heard one little fellow say to the other one, 'Oh, man, look at that river.' See, the area he was from was basically in mountains, more or less. And he said, "Man, look at that river. I bet it's the biggest one in the world." And I just felt like it opened up his ideas that he had just never seen anything [inaudible]..., been able to do before. And they could take that back in the community and tell their friends about that. I mean, I thought that that was just one of those little things that you wonder what you-, what a child is learning, you know (CG: Right). That is what you're asking for them in learning.

CG: Well, the Bluestone Dam is just an impressive site any way.

AA: Well, yes, it wasn't the dam as much as the river.

CG: What people from camp did you remember the most? Was it, was it campers who particularly stood out, or ... uh, different counselors...?

AA: Well, it was always that. We learned a lot from each other. And uh, I mean, I... I learned about, I learned some things to do to try to help me do a better job from my coworkers. And of course, sometimes it would take a long story to tell about some of the campers and all, that I was, you know, impressed with. But uh, it was all a learning process, in my estimation, by everyone.

CG: What people, what people did you meet through doing camp up here, that you stayed in touch with?

AA: Well, many times, not only my immediate co-workers. The uh, many of the specialists from West Virginia University, from the two colleges, would come in and give us, and give help. So, I learned to like maybe have someone come up and give swimming lessons from the college. And sometimes some of the specialists in the agriculture extension field would come. And of

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course, we had the opportunity to know them a little bit better.

CG:[blank space] from all over?

AA: Yes.

CG: Did you find that knowing those people from this camp helped you out later in life (**AA:** Oh, yes) knowing these people?

AA: Yeah, I run into some of them, even today, I run into people I haven't seen since 1951.

CG: Wow, that must be quite an experience. What other sorts of activities do you remember going on out here, through the extension agency, besides just camp? Would, were there any sorts of conferences or classes, or things held out here?

AA: Uh, during the year, not only did we have the older youth state camp, we-, see, home demonstration agents worked with adults also. We called-, we had what we called homemakers, we had homemakers clubs where you might know them as women's clubs. Uh, and in every county we had homemakers clubs. So, during the summer, or during the year there were uh, who was the uh.... director of the home demonstration program, instituted a homemakers encampment. So, when we had the homemakers encampment, that was from the whole state, all the agents from throughout the whole state. There were about 13 or 14 agents scattered throughout the state. So, and those counties, those women came together and learned all the, we also had projects for homemakers. So therefore, they have uh...they were able to meet together and form new relationships. In fact, we have one lady here who, today, who was at one time the state president of the homemakers encampment. So, those kinds of things developed out of the 4-H camp. Because the extension program-, the 4-H camps came first, and then this was a result of the [blank space] So I guess this was a result of broadened everybody's knowledge and relationships.

CG: What did uh, what was probably the biggest, most important change in camps that you

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saw after integration?

AA: Well, all I can say is, by the time that they, I retired in 195-, 1 mean, I didn't retire. I moved and had to find another job, because I could not get a transfer in extension service. So, therefore, I had to leave the extension service in 19 and 59. But uh, I did, in my location, keep in contact with some of my extension friends. And it seemed to have broadened the horizon for many of the 4H's by being able to go to camps within their own county. You see, we had fewer children who could go out of the county. And that's what we had to do, we had to go out of the county. But when they were able to go into their own county, I think maybe it helped the children to broaden their horizons. I'm not sure, I'm not, I've not kept up, been able to keep up with it that well.

There are, there are some people who, who would argue that integrating the camps, after this camp was a place where African American campers could come, these children could come and relate to each other in the African American community for a week. There are some people who would argue that kids today are missing out by going to an integrated camp because they don't have the experience of going to an all black camp. Do you think uh, do you think the campers are missing out on any part of heritage by integrated camps, or do you really think it's broadening everyone's horizons?

AA: Well, I think I've got a little bit old to pass judgment on much of that. But uh, I, I think that the uh, I don't, I really see, I'm not in close contact with most young people any more. I, I do feel that uh, we uh, the African Americans gave up a lot more than uh, than I, than maybe that it was worth. I'm not sure. I'm not sure about that.

CG: Because [blank space] experience now?

AA: I, I could not ever understand why, when you integrate, why do you, why do you have to get rid of the African American camp, why it could not be integrated into the program. Just like they closed the African American schools. Why could they not be integrated into the total program. That's where it becomes a problem in my mind. So, I can't say that, that I would never be uh,

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one to, I don't think, uh, say that. But there have been lots of problems, lots of problems. We lost much of our heritage. And our children are not taught that heritage.

CG: People lose the history.

AA: Yeah, people lose sight of, of another culture's heritage. So when we lose sight of, of uh, of cultures heritage, then that culture loses. So, that's where the, some of the loses, came in.

CG: I wanted to also ask about, at the camps, the activities that the boys and girls were doing, were the boys and girls doing the same things, or were they separated for part of the times, or was it always both boys and girls together doing the same things?

AA: No, I can't remember now. Uh, it's according to what they-, what kind of class that they were doing. Because I think like ...I don't remember that part very well. Whether we had the boy and girls separated in classes or not. I know they were not separated in tribes. (**CG:** Right) The tribes were mixed with boys and girls. But I can't remember whether the boys, whether they were, did separate classes or not. I don't remember that part.

CG: What was the main importance of this camp to you, in general?

AA: Well, it was somewhere ... it was a camp. See, in Mercer and Wyoming County we didn't, we-, in Wyoming County there was not an extension program anyway. And uh, for anyone but the African Americans. In Mercer County there was a 4-H camp. But we could not attend the 4-H camp. So that gave somewhere for us to be able to go to camp. That's what this camp did for us.

CG: How do you-, how do you think uhm, the community that you were living in saw the camp? What do you think their view of 4-H and of, uh, 4-H camp was?

AA: See, they, they uh, see your, your, most of your counties are more urban than agriculture. So, only, only those who were the more outlying areas were uh, interested. But we had 4-H

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clubs, like at that time, Bluefield was the largest town in Mercer County. And we've had 4-H clubs in several of the schools. And had several homemakers clubs. So, otherwise, there were homemakers clubs or, in all of the, in most of the communities where you had a larger uh, African American population. It was built on population. It was just where you found most people who wanted to get together and do a job. See, the homemakers uh, were feeding their families and clothing their families, gardening, doing, doing those kinds of things. Most of the communities were coal mining communities. So, you uh...I guess they were interested enough, that we could go in and live there.

CG: What is, what is the first story that pops in your head, and is just a crazy story that happened at camp out here?

AA: Camp out here? I can't remember. I remember the little boys going out on a hike one morning, and coming back with copperhead snakes. The leader had taught them how to get the snake. And I remember them bringing the copperhead snake in, and of course, I went in the other direction [laughing]. I guess that would be one of those....

CG: Yes, I was interviewing Mildred Jones and she said that they, that they would go out and just catch 4 or 5 snakes each. And I said, "Well, what would you do with them?" And she said, "Well, kill 'em, what do you think? [laughing]"

AA: That wasn't one of my things. And of course, in the 4-H camps, we didn't, they would go out on scouting trips and they'd come back and report. But they brought this copperhead snake back this particular day (**CG:** Quite a report), for their scouting report that night.

CG: They were just gonna keep it in camp?

AA: Yes. They kept it.

CG: Well, thank you very much for talking with me. It has been very, very helpful.

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AA: I hope so. _

CG: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW