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Interview with Juanita Goggins

Juanita Goggins

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LOUISE PETTUS ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview #XXX
LAST NAME, First

GOGGINS, Juanita

Description of interviewee

At Winthrop: Date range

Interviewed: Full date

Interviewer:

Index by:

Length: hh,mm,ss

Abstract: (a) In his four July/August 2007 interviews with Earl Wilcox, Robert Bristow detailed his thoughts and memories of his time at Winthrop. (b) Bristow spoke of the time period of the 1940s through 2007 and on the follow topics: W, X, Y, and Z. (b) Bristow also offered his opinions on how Rock Hill and Winthrop have changed between the 1970s and today. (b) Bristow also discussed his pre-Winthrop career, his childhood, and undergraduate work. (c) This interview was conducted for inclusion into the Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections Oral History Program.

Keywords:

Interview Session I (April 14, 1981): Digital File

Time Keywords

00:00:00 *Start of Interview*/Interviewer's Introduction

00:00:19 *Question:* Mrs. Goggins, could you please tell me where you were born and who your parents were? *Answer:* Alright. I was in Pendleton, South Carolina, and um, my parents was um, Willie Willmon and Lillian Van der Burr, Willmon-Aikens.

00:00:35 *Question:* Okay, and um, what was your father's occupation? *Answer:* My father was a farmer.

00:00:45 *Question:* Okay, alright. Um, could you describe your early family life for me? *Answer:* Okay, um, we um, we were an extremely close family, a large family. Um, my mother had nine children. Um, we um, we were very poor, or we thought at that time we were very poor. [Laughs] I found out later we were really doing alright. Um, we um, [pauses] worked in the gardens a lot. Everybody had chores that they were expected to do. Everybody helped out on the farm. Everybody helped out with the

- house, and um, you know, I think it was, you know, very important as I look back now in helping to establish a sense of responsibility because um, you know, you knew what you were supposed to do and you did it and you really didn't question it very much.
- 00:01:55 *Question:* Okay, can you tell me a little bit about your school days? *Answer:* Oh um, my school days were, you know, very, very, um, exciting. Um, we had very little materials to work with as I look back now and as I compare them, you know, with present-day schools. But um, we had a sense of dedication and purpose and, you know, you really went to school because you wanted to go, it wasn't really the fact that you were expected to go or that you had go. Sometimes I think it was because of all the things you had to do at home, and you know, and the responsibilities that you had, but um, there was a real zest for um, learning. Um, I graduated from high school as an honor student, although when I went to college I found out that I thought I knew a lot more [laughter] than I knew. But, I had a good high school experience.
- 00:03:15 *Question:* Okay. And what college did you attend? *Answer:* South Carolina State in Orangeburg.
- 00:03:20 *Question:* And what did you study? *Answer:* Home Economics Education with a minor in [inaudible] Sciences.
- 00:03:25 *Question:* Okay. And what did you do after graduation from South Carolina State? *Answer:* Well, um, I came to York County in York at the um, then Jefferson High School and was a home economics teacher.
- 00:03:42 *Question:* Okay, and how many years did you teach there? *Answer:* Oh, I taught there about six and a half years.
- 00:03:50 *Question:* And when and where did you meet your husband? *Answer:* I met my husband during that teaching experience in York. My husband came to Rock Hill to start a dentist practice and I mean,
- 00:04:03 *Question:* And his full name is? *Answer:* His full name is Horace Goggins.
- 00:04:08 *Question:* Okay. And what did you do before you became involved in politics here in Rock Hill? *Answer:* Okay, um, well, as I just said, I taught school. Um, I um, gave birth to my son and I think that was [laughs] the real beginning of um, my career in politics because it was really during that period of time that I was home taking care of him that I got more and more involved in community affairs. Um, I did a lot of support-type things for various civic groups and okay, like doing the sit ins. I was never the kind of person who could you know, go very nicely along the streets. [Laughs] And you know, and accept the unpleasantness

of the demonstrations, but I did do quite a few things behind the scenes during the sit ins.

00:05:18 *Question:* And then in 1972, you became the first black woman from York County to be a delegate to the South Carolina State Democratic Convention. How did this come about, and what was some of your experiences at this convention? *Answer:* Alright, [pause] Well, I have to admit that one of my plusses during that time *was* the fact that I was black *and* the fact that I was a woman. That's where the emphasis was in the Democratic Party during those years to um, increase the number of blacks and women. Women's participation, you know, at the convention, and people felt that it was time for women to be heard. And I, as I said, I had been involved in the community, and had been involved in politics here at the local level, so I was encouraged to offer myself as a candidate and I did and I won.

00:06:30 *Question:* Very good. Also in 1972, you were the first black woman in the history of South Carolina to be elected to the national Democratic Convention. What were your feelings on this and what were some of your experiences at the national convention? *Answer:* Oh, it was really very, very exciting. Um, that was um, you know, a first experience for me. I had never seen such a um, cross-section. Of people at any place before in my life, and that was really overwhelming to me. Another thing that really impressed me that I still think about and, you know, I just think it's really the greatest thing in this country, is the fact that it doesn't matter who you are, you know, whether you know, whether you are a black girl from Pendleton, South Carolina or whether you are Hubert Humphrey or what have you. One vote is all you have, and your one vote is as much as anybody else's vote.

00:07:45 *Question:* So it was a great honor for you? *Answer:* And that was really a great honor for me. Um, if I could just say that leading up to the um, convention I had just been real, real impressed with the um, the telephone calls that I got from people like Edmund Muskie and Hubert Humphrey and people like that and it was, it was a real experience.

00:08:12 *Question:* Well then who did you support in the convention? *Answer:* Okay, um, [pauses] that um, was a very, a very, very difficult choice to make. Um, there was the Shirley Chisholm, who was, you know, running as a, how shall I put this. In other words, not expecting to win, but as an experience. And although I had tremendous respect for her and what she was doing, I felt that I could not um, waste my vote with play. And so, our votes, it was necessary to change our votes from one level to the next but I eventually supported the nominee of the party.

00:09:15 *Question:* Okay. What are your feelings on, is it a lot of politics at the convention,

or is it a lot of socializing? You know, you see on t.v. now and there's so much socializing going on. What are your feelings on this? *Answer:* Well, there's a lot of um, there's a lot of both. One thing that sometimes is not evident to the person who's looking on is that in all that socializing there's also a lot of politics. It is, I suppose you might say, a sophisticated way of getting a lot of politics done. I think the social side of it adds a lot of excitement to the trip and to the tremendous amount of hard work that's necessary for you to do. But um, basically speaking, the politics far outweigh the social side of the convention.

00:10:15 *Question:* And now that it's all past about Watergate and the pardon of Nixon, what are your feelings on that? *Answer:* Okay, what's my feeling about politics in general?

00:10:25 *Question:* Well, about the Watergate, what all happened with Watergate and the pardon of Nixon. *Answer:* Okay, um, [pauses] I didn't really think much about the pardon of Nixon. Um, I um, I questioned that, although, you know, I do recognize the fact that, you know, he was the president and perhaps the fact that he had to give up the office might have been more punishment than, otherwise. Watergate, I think, was a terribly unfortunate thing. I thought that it was fortunate in that um, we came to grips with it and we came to realize what was going on and therefore it was possible to attempt for us to, you know, to clean up our act. I think that um, Watergate was another [pauses] plus really, in that, you know, American democracy really does work, and um, although there are times when, you know, like anything else things get, [pauses] get going in the wrong direction, that, you know, with our form of government and our form of democracy we can get it back in focus. I do think that it's very unfortunate as I started out to say, inasmuch as a lot of people who already felt that, you know, politics are extremely corrupt and no politicians are honorable and that kind of thing. I think it increased their feelings in that direction and I think that, you know, it's going to take some time for the country to overcome that feeling but I do think we're on our way.

00:12:39 *Question:* Yes ma'am. You're a member of the South Carolina and National Black Caucus. What is the Black Caucus and what were its goals? *Answer:* Okay, the Black Caucus um, included the black members of the state legislature. Its goal was, or is, to promote legislation that, um, that hopefully will benefit the minorities and the poor and will look out for their interest. Its purpose is also to um, to protect minorities and the poor in um, you know, in legislation that is being presented by other people and to try to make sure that, you know, groups of people, particularly, those people who have very little voice in government, um, that they are not being taken advantage of, you know, in the legislature.

00:13:50 *Question:* Okay. In 1973, you were a board of the South Carolina Department of Youth Services. How did you become a member and what were the duties of the

organization? *Answer:* Alright, um, how I became a member kind of [laughs] escapes me at the time. Um, except I remember I was, there was a vacancy on the board,

00:14:20 *Question:* Like by Governor West? *Answer:* Yes, and I was, um, I was asked, you know, by Governor West if I would consider serving on the board to [inaudible]. And of course I was honored and I um, then he of course appointed me. And um, it was um, it was at that time that I truly realized that when you were appointed to the board, that you know, that you had to be approved, that that appointment had to be approved by the House and by the Senate. And I thought, wow, well I will never, [laughs] I'll never make it through all of that. So I was tremendously honored.

00:15:15 *Question:* Okay, and then in 1974 you became the first black woman ever to be elected to South Carolina general assembly by defeating an incumbent white man. What were your feelings on this then, and how do you feel about it now? *Answer:* Okay, um, [pauses] I feel um, I feel very humbled about it. I'm very proud, um, I will just always be very, very grateful that people of York County saw fit to take a chance on me in representing them in the South Carolina House. Um, with, you know, with the incumbent, Mr. [Petty?] that I defeated, um, you know, it was not a, it was not a personal sort of thing. It was the feeling that, um, the seat was not being represented to the maximum for all the people in York County and um, that there needed to be a change. And in fact, that was my slogan, "it's time for a change" [laughs]. And um, it, you know, it turned out well. The thing that really worried me so much was that, the um, the former representative was a member of the Ways and Means Committee, and this is kind of like, you know, a real blue ribbon for any county to have a representative on the Ways and Means Committee because as you know this is where the money comes, um, comes into play. And counties are, counties are usually better off when you have a member, and I thought um, you know, that I did not want to do the county a disservice of, you know, having them elect me in his place and lose that representation, so I said that if, if they would elect me that I would attempt to get the seat back for them. And they did and I felt committed to do that, and I did get the seat back. Um, in doing so, I became the first woman ever in the state, and the first black since Reconstruction to serve on the Ways and Means Committee.

00:17:54 *Question:* How did, when you were campaigning, how did the people of York County react to you? Did you have type of experience that you could describe? In York County when you were campaigning for your seat? *Answer:* Alright, alright. Okay, overall I was surprised, pleasantly surprised at the, you know, the matter that the people of York County received me. Um, I think the um, the biggest thing that I had to overcome was um, the fact that, you know, some blacks had run in the past for various offices, um, that many of them, and I don't say this critically,

But, had, had not really run with putting forth all of the effort that they could to win because they thought that it was an impossibility to win. So I had to convince people that I was really serious that I really did intend to win. And being a woman didn't help me a lot either, because what I found that was, was that even a lot of women thought that it might not be the proper thing, to do. So I had that to overcome. I did have, um, you know, a few uncomfortable experiences. You know, I was not well-received, but they were so few as compared with people who were willing to listen to what I had to say, you know, and to see me as a person, and um, you know, to be interested in what my views were. And there were times that I went places just like in some of the, um, the rural sections of the county, in what was traditionally conservative white areas, and there were times when I went in just a little bit hesitant expecting a great turnout and um, most of the times I got a real welcome reception. One gentleman surprised me when he said that, um, he said that it was time for York County to have a pretty gal in the [laughs] in the legislature. And I was expecting a real [inaudible] so that did me a world of good.

- 00:20:45 *Question:* How was your campaign funded? *Answer:* Okay. Um, my campaign was funded a good deal by my husband, to whom I am still very grateful to and um, by friends and supporters.
- 00:21:05 *Question:* What was your biggest expense while you were campaigning? *Answer:* Um, [pauses] if I can remember specifically, I'm pretty sure it was the printer's bill, because I'm great for [laughs] for having a lot to say and wanting to make sure that every idea got well-circulated whether it was a good idea or not. So I'm the person who's usually in and out of the printer's when I'm doing something.
- 00:21:37 *Question:* Okay. Did you handle your own financial matters, or? *Answer:* No, I did not handle my own financial matters. Um, Rev. [Debian?] Jones, who was a strong supporter and um, a well-respected gentleman in the community handled my finances [inaudible].
- 00:21:57 *Question:* Okay. Could you describe just briefly a little bit about your campaign platform? *Answer:* Okay, um, [pauses]. Let's see now, um, we um, we talked about trying to improve the [inaudible]. We talked about mainly representation for the under-represented, under-represented meaning black, meaning poor whites, meaning farmers, meaning labor, and groups like that. We um, let's see, we emphasized the fact that um, you know, that these groups had never really had a voice in the general assembly. I talked about myself a lot in terms of having been born poor, having been born a farmer, having been educated in inferior schools comparatively, just actually kind of took my life. Oh, I'm sorry, having been a teacher, and um, I included the teachers in that [laughs] under-represented group, so what I did really was to kind of take my life and the various things that I had

been through in my life, related them to different groups of people that, you know, that I was trying to appeal to, so that they could see that there was no way that I could not have their interests at heart because I was in fact, you know, one of them and truly did understand their problems and their concerns.

00:24:10 *Question:* What were some of the dos and the don'ts you had to learn once you were at the House? *Answer:* Okay, um, *do* listen more than you talk. Um, [laughs] Let's see, if you commit, be slow on committing yourself. If you do commit yourself, um, whether it's on a vote or what have you, then don't change impromptu without informing those to whom you have committed first, to first. Um, don't believe everything you hear, let's see, don't um, introduce legislation on a whim. Do research your legislation thoroughly, um, do consult experts in the field, both in terms of pros and cons on whatever you do, something I still believe a lot in. Don't um, don't just trust an idea you might have on the spur of the moment without making sure that you have substantial facts to back it up.

00:25:50 *Question:* Okay. Did you feel any advantages or disadvantages to the fact that you were the first black woman in the House? *Answer:* Well, [pauses] there were, there were disadvantages. Um, there's the disadvantage of, of being the double token. There is the, the um, disadvantage of everybody feeling like they've got to get to know you. There is the disadvantage of feeling sometimes as if you represent women and you represent black people and knowing that whether you like it or not, that very often what you do and what you say, that people interpret as being everybody's idea that you in any way represent when very often you did not intend it to be that way. So there is the disadvantage of feeling like you must constantly separate yourself from a group of people that others are feeling that you represent, because you do want to hold on to some degree [laughs] of your own identity. And um, you know, you don't want to convey to anybody that everything you say is what everybody who happens to be black or who happens to be a woman [laughs] is thinking also.

00:27:40 *Question:* [Laughs] Okay, um, what was some of the policies or bills that you supported strongly? *Answer:* Okay, um, first of all I, um, I'd like to mention the kindergarten bill which we presently have in operation, that I am the primary author of. That's my, that's my finest hour there. When I see those little fellas going to school and I know that it was my bill that did it. Um, other things that I supported very strongly were things like, um, making sure that, um, that sickle cell became a viable part of the Health Department. Let's see, [laughing] a whole lot of stuff, I'm having a hard time.

00:28:48 *Question:* Okay, what are your feelings on the ERA? *Answer:* Oh, um, I'm a very, very strong support of the ERA. Yes. Um, [long pause] Let me think, let me think. [Laughs] Oh this is terrible.

00:29:20 *Question:* Did you do a lot of work with the youth services? *Answer:* Yes, yes, but you're asking for specifics. Specific bills, yes. But now with Youth Services, it was primarily a funding thing. Um, I um, thank you for getting me started, thank you. Alright, I, um, I also supported other bills in reference to the child government area, the adoption bill, um, bills in reference to um, alcoholic beverages and control, like the um, like the, you know, like being able to get some wines in whiskey stores, some that women could buy. You know, wines for their dinner tables without going into liquor stores. Um, supported a lot of education bills. I'm proud to say that I received, I have two awards on my walls as being a supporter of education.

00:30:40 *Question:* How nice! Okay, you were a member of the South Carolina Advisory Commission to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. How did you become a member, and what were some of the committee's duties or responsibilities? *Answer:* Okay, alright. That was a um, a national appointment I'm proud to say. And what, what the duties of that commission include is actually kind of being like a, like a guard in reference to the protection of rights of citizens in this area. One of the big things that we did was to study various sections of um, of South Carolina. You know, without calling the name of the place, we um, a group of us on the commission did a study, um, in an area in South Carolina where there was alleged job discrimination because of race, and we spent the entire weekend, both pro and con in order to um, to try and justify in our minds whether or not the rights of those concerned had been violated. And so it was those type of things that we did. It was a very dedicated group of people you know, very often gave up weekends to, you know, to go off and to do things for the commission.

QUESTION: Okay, you were part of a delegation to Boston study modern juvenile correction efforts in order to better serve South Carolina Youth Services. What were some of the suggestions made at this delegation and what did you bring back to South Carolina?

ANSWER: Alright, um, what I brought back to South Carolina was, um, something that I'd really like to see more of. We had the experience of seeing a school district where no one actually got thrown out of school. The school was geared to promote total education for everybody. Um, if um, a girl was pregnant, she could only take six weeks off. She had to come to school almost up until the time that the baby was born and she had to get right back in school after the baby was born if she was less than 18 years old. If um, a child had severe discipline problems, the child was taught, was taught how to behave. They attempted to have a program for everybody on every educational level, be it wood-work, sewing, um, reading class. The impressive thing about it was that they used a great deal of semi-professional people and a lot of the people were parents and there were volunteers and it was amazing to see how many people freely, would freely give up their time to teach whatever skills they might have to whatever level of the school population that needed that level, that needed that particular skill. And many of

these classes were housed, you know, in old houses and old buildings that were not being otherwise used and what have you, throughout the city. It was not just, you know, all housed, everything was in the school building proper. So that was really a grand experience for me seeing what efforts that they had gone through to education their population and not only that, but to have each person achieve some goal in terms of an educational experience.

QUESTION: Okay. In 1974, you were a delegate to the National Democratic Party Policy Conference. What were some of the accomplishments of this conference?

ANSWER: Well the main accomplishment at that conference was to try to assess the [laughing] disaster of the '72 convention and to plan a new direction for the next convention that hopefully be a successful convention.

QUESTION: So, in other words, it was like a new time to pick up and to plan for the future.

ANSWER: Right.

QUESTION: In 1976, you became a National Democratic Committeewoman for South Carolina. What exactly is a committeewoman and what was some of your duties?

ANSWER: Alright, the national committeewoman helps to represent the state at National Democratic functions. You are a part of a committee of four, which is the National Committeeman, the um, State Party Chairman, and the um,

[00:05]

Vice Party Chairman. And you attend National Conventions, attend National Committee meetings that come fairly frequently during the year, and you help to um, plan policy for the Democratic Party and to you know, assess goals and that sort of thing.

QUESTION: Okay. How many times did you serve in the South Carolina General Assembly?

ANSWER: Alright, I served two and a half terms.

QUESTION: And you resigned.

ANSWER: And I resigned, yes.

QUESTION: You were a member of the International Platform Association. What is this organization and what all does it entail?

ANSWER: Alright, this organization is a um, a group of people who are supposedly well-versed in the arts of speaking to others and communicating ideas.

QUESTION: Okay, you attended a training workshop at the U.S. Office of Education Regional Training Center in Miami. Why did you attend and what was the theme?

ANSWER: Alright, um, why I attended [laughs] was um, you know, was the fact that I had been selected. You know, selected to attend. Frankly, I don't remember the specific theme, you know, in terms of a title, but it's goal was to um, to try to assess, you know, where we are educationally-speaking and um, to, you know, to come up with some mechanisms for broadening the scope of education.

QUESTION: In 1973, you became the founding and the president of the Rock Hill-area Sickle Cell Anemia Foundation. Why was this foundation formed and how was it funded?

ANSWER: Okay, um, this organization was formed to bring about an awareness to our area about the plights of many of its citizens who are not necessarily, but mainly black citizens, who by no fault of their own usually have very short lives. They, you know, live a life of um, illness. They are usually, they are often hospitalized much of their time. They um, they have tremendous financial burden on their families, if I can put it like that. They are, you know, unlike cancer victims and victims of other illnesses, have gone unnoticed, and most people do not even know that sickle cell anemia exists. And it was funded through contributions of the public.

QUESTION: How often is it in Rock Hill now?

ANSWER: Oh, [clears throat] right now is not as active as it should be. There is a, um, a effort now to get it going again. I have to admit that um, so much of it laid so heavily on my shoulders that um, during the time I was in the General Assembly, it suffered from that. Well, it suffered in one day, in that it was not as much activity going on in the area and as much awareness but in the meantime my experience in the legislature did grant some state recognition, so I guess overall it was worthwhile. My recent illness too has not been [inaudible] but we do plan to be very, very active again.

QUESTION: Okay. In 1976 you were a member of the Board of Trustees at Friendship Junior College. What are your feelings on the possibility of the college going bankrupt and how do you think this will affect our community?

ANSWER: Alright, um, I am very upset about the fact that, you know, it may be going bankrupt, and I feel that if it does that um, you know, there's going to be a segment in our society who cannot fit into the traditional educational institution, and therefore will be denied an education.

QUESTION: Okay. You were a member of the NAACP. How active is this in Rock Hill?

ANSWER: Very.

QUESTION: Okay. You were a member of the York-Chester-Lancaster County Mental Health Mini-Grant Team.

[00:10]

What was this organization and how did you become a member?

ANSWER: Alright, there again was an appointment. [inaudible]

QUESTION: You were appointed by who?

ANSWER: Um, by the um, York County delegation.

QUESTION: Okay, and what is the duties of the organization?

ANSWER: Alright, the duties of the organization is to um, make the public aware of the um, you know, the problems of the mentally ill, to um, to [pauses] to assist in making sure that the program remains viable and effective, to keep abreast of, um, developments in that field, and um, to hopefully to see that our area implements all of the developments and ideas that they can.

QUESTION: You served on the sounding board for a team of high school students during integration adjustment period in the public schools of Rock Hill. What did this all entail?

ANSWER: Well, mainly um, mainly being a good listener. Um, to a great deal, it um, it entailed, um, you know, simply saying what [inaudible tape malfunction] ..try not to overreact, try to make sure that you're being fair, you know, well what did you do to the situation to add to when things got out of hand? Um, basically to try to help all young people accept themselves and their role in what was going on, and hopefully try to help them get through a very difficult time in their lives without, you know, without losing their ability or their self-esteem and to try to help make sure you know, that they were being fair to others in dealing with vetoes.

QUESTION: Okay. You were, are, a legislative appointee to serve to feasibility of electing school board members in the Rock Hill District Number 3 by wards. What was the results of this study?

ANSWER: Not much. [Laughs] Not much at all.

QUESTION: Did they switch to elect by wards?

ANSWER: No, they did not. [still laughing] That's why I said not much. We put a tremendous amount of work, um, into that study but it did not get very far.

QUESTION: Was this disappointing to you?

ANSWER: Yes. [Laughs]

QUESTION: Okay, you were a member of the York County Democratic Women's Council. What does this council do and how active is it in Rock Hill now?

ANSWER: Okay, that council is very active in Rock Hill now and, um, what it does is, you know, kind of support the state policies. Its um, basic goal is to keep the Democratic Party active and viable in the county to um, make sure that the party politically, um, [inaudible tape malfunction] you know, um intelligence...

00:46:58 *End of interview*