

Melanie Johnson and Charles Cleveland interview: May 24, 2004**AP Local History Project**

The following interview was conducted on behalf of the Oral History program of the Washington County Museum and Century High School. The interviewee is Charles Cleveland. The interviewer is Melanie Johnson. The interview took place on May 24, 2004.

Melanie: First question! Uh, what has your involvement been with the Hispanic community in Hillsboro so far?

Cleveland: I've been involved on several levels. I've been a soccer coach for the last 30+ years, and during that time, I've worked extensively with the Hispanic students who traditionally, culturally, play soccer, and, uhm, that has been one area. The other main area has probably been with - beyond the classroom - with the summer migrant program. I have worked in the program for over a four year period when it was first instituted back in the 80s. During that time, I taught social studies both as the head classroom teacher and as an assistant. Beyond those two specific examples, my work has been extensive in international high school here at Hillsboro High School, which has attempted to incorporate the students, and specifically Hispanic students, and this past year, we were able to incorporate seven, and look forward to more next year, in the State Model United Nations program.

M: So, uhm, what is your kind of understanding of what the migrant program does -- did and still does?

C: The biggest issue is that a lot of these students from Arizona, Texas, California, have to leave school before the completion of the last term in their home schools, because their families are required economically to move to areas where they have the opportunity to work in the fields, simple as that. And so they don't get credit for that final term at their home schools. The whole purpose of the migrant schools was to allow these students, who would work long hours during the day in the fields to have a place to come, dinner was provided, and then they were able to take at least two courses. The migrant school was divided into two main areas - one was credit and one was non-credit. A lot of school age young adults who were not enrolled necessarily in a US high school could take what could be termed as... English as a Second Language courses, uh, which would improve their English. Some of them were vocationally-based, shop and technology, but for the students who were enrolled in a US high school, the key was that they not get behind in terms of credit, which would increase the chances that they might drop out because they get so far behind. So they were able to take two classes and to gain a full term's worth of credit by coming every night, Monday through Thursday, for, let me think... four hours each evening. And during that time, they would take two hours in each of the two courses that they needed credit in. And so, uh, one of the most difficult things was trying - was dealing with, trying to trace what it was they needed (transcripts...), trying to first recruit. We would go out to the migrant camps, and we would sign kids up. We would let parents know that this was available. We of course had to have their permission. The kids had to be willing to put in the time and the effort. They had to be willing to miss very few days before they were dropped, because there just wasn't enough time, seat time, for them to get credit if they weren't there

virtually every day. And after a full day's work out in the fields, it took quite a commitment to see the program all the way through.

One of the things this program... what's the word I want?... allowed, which wasn't necessarily part of the curriculum, was a social outlet. These kids may have been from various states to be able to come together beyond the fields, where there's not a lot of time for social interaction. This was a place they could come, eat, there was a break in between the classes, a little time for recreation... You know, they're teenagers. So this was actually a motivating factor in large part, because, beyond the camps, there wasn't opportunity to socialize.

The school district would pick them up on buses, deliver them to the program, and then, at the end, would take them back to wherever their temporary housing was. Now, the program did allow local students to attend also, if they were classified as migrant within the last five years, I believe. Even though they were considered a permanent resident, they could still, uhm, take courses to make up for any deficits on their transcripts or for enrichment or to help them get a jumpstart on the next year. And, like the out-of-state students, they would usually be involved in, but not always, they would usually be involved in work in the fields. And again, this was an opportunity to meet new kids and share common culture, and so that aspect of the summer migrant was a bit of an added benefit.

M: Uhm, when exactly - I mean, what year was the migrant summer school started?

C: I believe it was... I want to say, 1980. That was my first year, and I worked through '84, and that's the best of my recollection. Originally we were housed at Evergreen Middle School the first year, then out to Glencoe, which was new at the time, then back to Evergreen for the next couple years, and I think my last year was actually out here at Hilhi. But Evergreen, I think, was a good place geographically. A lot of the kids seemed to come from the North, and it just seemed to be a centrally located place, and the facilities were really good for this particular activity.

M: Did you become fluent at all in Spanish, or later on -?

C: My background was in German. Fortunately for me, all of the students that I was directly involved with spoke English fairly well. They were taught English, they were expected to learn in English, and I usually had one of the two adults, either the aide or the head teacher, usually had some language proficiency. So if I was the head teacher, I usually had an assistant who was Spanish-proficient, in case something needed to be explained. But for the most part, the kids that were in the credit courses spoke English pretty fluently anyway. It was just a matter of trying to determine-- because we had freshman through seniors. You know, we had fourteen through eighteen year olds all in the same class. It was probably reminiscent of what it was like back in these one-room schoolhouses. Fortunately I just had to focus on social studies, but I had kids taking, who needed credit in geography and US History and economics and, uhm... civics, so, depending on what their home school required, we had to make up sometimes quite a few individual plans. Where we could, we would of course group students based on age and curricular need, so myself and the aide could get around to everybody that needed helped. Then we dealt in some lessons in curricular information that was fairly general to the social studies that would cross all the content areas, where the kids could work together as a class. As a

teacher, that was the hardest part. Working with the kids was not hard at all. For the most part, the out-of-state kids were polite, they were courteous, they were respectful, and I think they were, in a lot of ways, probably pretty tired after a full day of work. So I never once, in the four years of I was involved, had any kind of a discipline issue at all. It was made pretty clear that any-that this was an opportunity for them, that they didn't have to be there. We wanted to the numbers to... we wanted to get as many kids involved as possible, because funding depended on it, so there was that logical economic reality. Of course, this was government funded.

And, uhm, on the other hand, we wanted as many kids as possible to get credit, to be successful, and to hopefully - you know, one of the goals of the program was to break the cycle that had become pretty common, where the students of migrant families end up dropping out of school and turn... only have one option, which would be to continue on in the migrant lifestyle, and our goal was to kind of break that cycle and get the kids through high school, get a diploma, and hopefully they would find alternative ways to make a living in the future. So that was our goal for them as a program.

M: So did you feel that mostly - that most the kids were open to learning and they weren't, you know...

C: Yeah, you know, it's like any adolescent teenager. School is difficult; it's particularly difficult after a hard day's work. We had them - of course, there was no out of class assignments, no homework. Everything was done right then and there, which is another reason why attendance was so important... because one, they didn't have time, and two, we didn't have the resources to allow them to take books home or anything. So I remember bringing materials and books from my classroom. We, of course, summated lists to the director, who would try to get what we needed, in terms of additional resources, but so much of what I used were things that I used on my class. If it was something, for example, like economics, where I didn't have a lot of resources, I would need to go and talk to other teachers before the end of our normal school year and try to get resources that I could have available. So as a teacher, that was the most difficult part. Dealing with the students was the easy part. The same goes for the kids who were not involved in the credit recovery. They were just happy to be there. A lot of them didn't have any kind of permanent homes in the US. A lot of them were directly from Mexico, and again, they were just happy to have the opportunity to be there at all, so they did not take advantage of the situation.

Culturally, it was... it was... As a social studies teacher, I thought it was wonderful. There were a few, not very many, Caucasian kids. Every once in awhile, we'd get a migrant family, which, in history, in the past, was much more prevalent than Hispanic families, but... very, very rarely. Some Asian families occasionally. But for the most part, they were Hispanic, and, for the most part, they were from Mexico.

M: Uhm, so backtracking a little bit... why exactly did you choose to get started working with the migrant program?

C: Originally, young teacher, young family... and to supplement income. Teaching is what I knew, and here was a chance in the summer. I had the days and go in the evenings, and it was a

second job. After the first year though, it was just really a good positive experience. After getting over the difficulty of having to develop different mini-courses for so many different kids, then it was a lot easier, so I just enjoyed it. The faculty was great; all the teachers -- the certified teachers - were from the district, and some I knew well, some I didn't and got to know. And then most of the aides and assistants were ESL aides here, but, uhm... it was just camaraderie, which was really nice.

Let me mention also that there were two levels of the program; there was a grade school level, too; an elementary level that did go during the day, which was really great because of current laws, these kids could not go work in the fields. Therefore, they were able to have a place to go to while their parents and older siblings were working, and again, provided some nutrition, provided structure, a safe environment, continued education opportunities for them. Smaller kids during the day and older kids in the evening.

M: And, so, uhm... I'm assuming that you just kind of left the migrant program to work on like, full time teaching and...

C: Yeah, at some point, I had to go back to school myself, and, as families grew and those time commitments took a little bit more of my priorities, along with getting my own master's degree and all that. Summer is one of the best times to do that, because there's just too much going on during the year to take too many night classes. So after about four years, I just kind of had to make the decision to not return. But interestingly enough, my son, who just graduated from the University of Oregon with a degree in Spanish and International Studies and Business, one of his best friends was a Hispanic student whose parents had immigrated, and my connection with that community as a result and through coaching continued even after I left the migrant program.

M: So in the past, whatever, twenty years or so that you've been working as a Social Studies teacher, have you noticed a sort of gap between regular school-attending Hispanic students and non-Hispanic?

C: Yeah. In the regular classroom, they, the district, divide the students into different levels, based on their English proficiency and how long their families have been in the area. So the only kids that I see directly, even though I may have a Spanish-speaking aide, are the students that are mainstreamed, and their level of English proficiency is such that, although they may not be able to interpret some of the concepts, which is why we have the aide, their English is pretty reasonable.

I spent last summer down in Guadalajara where my son was doing an internship, and what I got to experience what it's like to be on the other side. They don't speak English and I had to adapt to both culture, language, and all the things that these students have to deal with in coming here. I came back with a real appreciation for the difficulties. We had to pick up the language in bits and pieces to survive, and it was a real eye opener. To come here without any English background and come into the US school system and have to speak English to survive, while at home all you speak is Spanish, is a lot of pressure, and I've noticed through the years, during back to school nights and parent conferences, the kids are having to do the interpretation. I'm having to speak through them to their parents. I've seen more and more come.

The one thing I realized when I down in Mexico is that there are some communities of Canadians and US retirees that are, you know, pretty tight knit, and you would naturally kind of... If I were down there permanently, I would probably find myself gravitating toward that group. So it's not strange to see them to the same thing here, just out of comfort. We have... One of the hardest tasks I had as a coach was to get these kids to come out for high school athletics. First of all, a lot of them are still working during the time that soccer starts in the fall, and a lot of their families depend upon their incomes even in after-school jobs. For the most part, they have not played structured sports where they came from. A lot of street games and pick-up games. They don't have the clubs and soccer moms that drive them everywhere and organize these clubs from age six on up. It was difficult trying to convey to them that they had to be to practice on these days on time, etcetera, etcetera, because they played for fun. They would be much more willing to play on the men's teams on Sunday then they would be to come out for the high school teams during fall. I coach several men's teams, and I would see players who went to high school, playing for a men's team when they could be playing for my team. It was a real struggle to get them to come out. Eligibility is an issue. I spend a lot of time trying to keep kids eligible, because school is a struggle - the time, the expectations on them from home, the difficulty with language and other cultural barriers. So there's a lot for them to put up with. The MITA program was a great opportunity for the kids who were not permanent residents, because it gave them a chance to catch up or give them a jump. I had kids in the past - at that time I was coaching at Glencoe High School - I had kids who would maintain their eligibility through the migrant program so that they could come out for soccer in the fall. But those were all things that I had to go out and explain and, since I didn't speak Spanish, to find somebody who could talk to parents, and that was always kind of a difficult task.

One of the things I've seen more and more over the last twenty year sis that more of the students are getting involved in mainstream high school activities, which is important, and more parents attend parent nights now. The hardest thing is communication though. I know the district has spent quite a bit of money to have --- to hire people here at the schools to communicate to the parents at home. Another one of the benefits of the migrant program is the personal contact we can have with the parents, at least as far as the local kids go. As far the kids that are from out of state, we hope that they go back and maintain their eligibility and graduate so they can get their diplomas.

M: I'm not exactly sure what it's like at Hilhi, but at Century, there's kind of a "Multi-cultural" soccer league and then there's also the kind of like regular - "regular" - varsity soccer league, and stuff like that. Do you have that here at Hilhi? Do you feel that people still tend to separate?

C: We do. I would like to see the Multicultural as basically... the Hispanic league. There are kids that play for that that don't play - especially girls. We have a lot of girls, a lot of my students, are playing for the girl's team, but they don't play for the school's team in the fall. And I would like to -it would be nice if... you know, neither one of the soccer coaches here at Hilhi are on campus, and it would be nice if somehow the two groups could, at all the schools because I know all the Hillsboro schools, especially with girls, tend to struggle with numbers a bit... and it would be nice if these teams could get together. I think it's just a question of communication. I think not having the coaches on campus makes it difficult for them to know this program is going on. These are all great opportunities to pull this community, the kids, into the mainstream high

school experience. I have noticed a lot more Hispanic students running for Student Council positions and being involved in the different classroom activities and Senate and stuff like that, which is great. We have the Hispanic club here that is very strong, but I know that our head ESL teacher is really trying to get the kids integrated, and that's why I've been working with her to get kids into the Model United Nations, which should be a very international experience, but it does require a pretty high level of research and understanding, and language is a hurdle that needs to be overcome.

At the same time, the kids that went down this last spring in April had a great time, so we're using them as a recruiting tool, to get more kids involved in that respect.

M: So why exactly do you feel that - well, I don't want to call it segregation... why do you feel that this separation of two teams is really even accepted or acceptable?

C: Because it's easy. The fact of life is that we have coaches that are not involved as teachers here, in all the high schools, partially for economic reasons. There have been staff cuts, and everyone's overwhelmed; I have 40 kids in my two US History classes, which I have several Hispanic students. Without my aides, I'd have a real difficult time helping them, and they would have a difficult time. I don't think the administration considers... although, to talk to them, they would say "Oh yeah, this is important!", but they're overwhelmed with budgetary issues and other things like that.

To me, everything is too big in our school system, and everybody's overwhelmed in terms of other responsibilities, and there's nobody to say "Let's set up a meeting between the coaches of the Hispanic team and the high school team. Why don't we have the high school coaches come out and coach a couple days, introduce themselves so the kids know them..." Since I retired from soccer coaching... I used to work quite a bit with the ESL teacher, and go and talk to her classes and recruit, but now that I'm not directly involved and with my workload, it's just really hard to find somebody who will see the need and take the time to do that. It's an issue that should be addressed - the question is, who's going to address it and how? It's part of the district's strategic plan to create more opportunities, safe opportunities, comfortable opportunities for Hispanic students. You'll still find segregation within the cafeteria and things like that. Even when the kids went down to MUN, during their free time, they would group together, because that's where their comfort zone is. These are really, really difficult barriers to overcome. Again, having been down in Guadalajara, you feel very isolated and, you know, if we would have known some other Americans, we would have definitely hung out and gravitated towards them. It was great, I think, to be forced to have to interact with the culture down there and not have a choice.

As Hillsboro grows and its Hispanic population grows, there will be more opportunities. When I went to Hilhi as a student, we had one Hispanic family in Hillsboro that I was aware of, we had two Hispanic students in Hilhi, brother and sister, and that was it. One adopted African-American girl... otherwise, Hilhi was white. To the extreme. And having taught the International High School here and having had kids from all over the world come and be part of the International Studies class, it was great to see the differences, especially Europeans, that they had in how they viewed multiculturalism. They all spoke multiple languages because they had to. We

don't have to speak any other languages but English. In Europe, they have to interact with French and German and Spanish cultures.

I noticed, when we had a group of Spanish kids come over for a couple of weeks, they were extremely rude to our Hispanic population. I mean, the Mexicans, which are predominantly the kids that we have, are mestizos, so they're Indian. Some of them physically... it's very obvious that they have a large amount of Indian blood. So to the Spanish kids who look extremely European, these were the... the lower cousins. They didn't want anything to do with them. They also made me realize that similar language, religion, and even, to a large extent, cultural connections, don't necessarily get rid of hatred and bigotry. I felt a little bit protective of our kids after the way some of the Spanish kids acted towards them. But you'll even find that between Mexicans and Guatemalans. We tend to lump all of the Latinos into one group, and that could be from our general lack of understanding of geography and culture, and we usually use terms like Asian-Americans, but Asian-Americans will see Chinese and Vietnamese and Cambodian and Laotians... and it's probably a little bit difficult for European-Americans to... we don't separate here people of English and French and German ancestry. So maybe we're not as sensitive to that because it's not a big issue in our lives.

M: Yeah, I kind of noticed that too. I was thinking about that the other day, how we don't call people who are from India Asian. They're just kind of... Indian... anyway, I noticed your "Class of '69" thing up there, but you already answered my question - that Hillsboro was so white. I didn't really realize, I guess... maybe how white the schools were? Were there still migrants here?

C: But you didn't see them in the schools. First of all, back then, we would get out sometimes in late May so that all the local kids could go out and pick berries. A huge amount of the labor involved was from teenagers and kids, junior high kids. The labor laws weren't such that... it was as big of an issue as it is now. So all of the farmers had buses and all of us knew exactly which farmer we were going to pick for. Part of it was social and part of it was economic, but I would say the major influx that I noticed really started happening at the end of the sixties into the seventies. We got a lot more families coming up here, and a lot of them decided to stay even though a lot of the work was seasonal. That was the big thing back then --- they might have been here, but they were up in the migrant camps. They left, and they didn't stay. So you didn't see them in schools as much. Once they were able to find year-round employment, they stayed. One of the biggest factors economically is that so much of the agriculture is now going to nurseries, which can be a year-round job. Christmas trees and things like that. So families that would usually move on are able to find year-round employment and could put down roots. A lot of them would still return home, depending on what their status was - whether they're legal, illegal, whether they have green cards, whether they don't. They might return to see family and not be able to get back into the states legally. A lot of kids around Christmas will still be gone a month to go back down there.

When I was in Mexico, I was able to go with my son's friend, his school friend that he grew up with here, to the village when his family's from. You know, his grandparents still live there, his cousins and things. They're a very traditional Mexican farming village, and his brothers have come up here with a family and have been able to go down and buy acreage and now make a

very good living, when originally they were just migrants and had very little. But the family down in Mexico now has a pretty good life. That's why a lot of them come up here. So stability is definitely very good for them economically. It certainly helped agriculture around here. A lot of the farmers voice their concern about toughening the laws and the deportation of illegal aliens because they depend on the labor force. You don't see American kids out in the berry fields anymore. It's just a change in our cultural and societal norms. Economically, this area, although a lot of people claim that it is an economic burden, in some respects, because of the social programs that that community requires, economically, it would be a lot of stores and farming jobs that depend on them would probably notice if large numbers weren't here in large numbers. It's still a controversial topic now, and it's a real politically charged issue. As a teacher, I teach whoever comes into my classroom. I really enjoyed getting to know the kids in the migrant program, and for the most part, that culture is very respectful to authority and to adults, and, again, when I down in Mexico this summer, how unbelievably polite the people, especially the kids, were.

M: Then if you perceive them to be so polite, why do you think there's become this perceived image of "Mexicans" - Hispanic people - as violent and angry gangsters?

C: You didn't see any of that early on. It's something that's developed. Some of it is imported from Southern California, where the Hispanic community is much older than it is here. You see the same kind of social issues with other minorities, African-Americans for example, where poverty, a lack of hope, a lack of future, a lack of opportunities kind of put individuals.. Females at the mercy of often males, and males at the mercy of society, where you tend to have no other way out. Frustrated, angry, and crime comes with that, as well as drug abuse.

That's one of the most important aspects of the migrant school, which would to try and break that cycle, because I think, in any group of people, if there's not a focus on education, then those children, statistically, are more likely to fall back into the same routine. Breaking the cycle through education is the key for any group.

M: Kind of going back to a general point-of-view, how do you feel the Hillsboro School District has done dealing with culture and language differences between the Hispanic community and kind of.. everybody else?

C: In one respect, they have made a commitment. We could certainly use more funds and resources. I think the parent nights, the newsletters home, the people who the District has hired to contact parents one-on-one and interpret, is crucial. I think it would be extremely intimidating to have to go in and talk to my child's teachers if I did not know the language, or to have a meeting with administration, and so they work really hard for that. I think, at the same time, there could be a tremendous amount done to create more academic opportunities for Hispanic kids to become part of the mainstream. It's a real risk for them ----

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C: - to be ridiculed, to feel inadequate because of their language or their ability to understand, and nobody wants to be put in that situation. There's a real controversy about whether they should be only taught English or whether it should be bilingual education. At least here at Hilhi and it's probably a District policy, based on their level and how long they've been here, it starts out bilingual and eventually they get to the point that they are taught totally in English. I think, again, the most important thing is that they need to see a relevance that has to come from home and that's where working with their parents, making them understand that - helping them understand the advantages to having a high school education, which they may or may not have had, because in Mexico, there's a huge discrepancy between opportunities for some Mexicans, especially those with a strong Spanish heritage, versus the Native population. There's a huge, huge amount of discrimination, and you see that in the education opportunities, which of course transfers to economic opportunities. And so those who come up here, education is the key that opens all the doors. If you haven't been raised that way, though, there has to be a huge attitude shift, which is really difficult. And it's difficult for the kids to take that chance, that they won't be seen as inferior.

We've been really fortunate here, at least over the last couple of years, to not have - beyond an isolated incident here and there - to not have a major racial tensions, and I attribute that to the work that the ESL department does in trying to get the kids involved.

But there's a lot more we could do if we just had more resources, more one-on-one, more people to work with them, and that has to be a commitment not just by the District but by the State. They have to look at schools with large minority populations, and those schools need to be given more resources. That's editorial there. And, quite frankly, Lakeridge does not need the same as maybe Hillsboro does.

M: Do you feel that Hilhi has the highest population of Hispanic students?

C: You know, that's a good question. I'm not sure. I think we're at about 10%. They keep changing the boundaries, and with Liberty opening, I'm not sure how they've redrawn and adjusted, because one of the District's goals is to have some kind of a balanced socio-economic level within the schools to provide students with the opportunity to be around people with different ethnic origins and economic groups, so that they get a more realistic view of diversity and the world. So I know that was a goal of the District, but I'm not sure, since Liberty was built, if we have more, less, the same... Hilhi's population didn't change very much. Century's population, of course, changed quite a bit and will change more next year, once Liberty has seniors. I know that we have a large freshman class, and what percentage of that incoming freshman class is Hispanic, I'm not really sure.

There are, you know, pockets of Hispanic students, and, again, having been down in Mexico, I can see where that would easily develop based on comfort and connectedness. So how the District chooses to divide up its attendance area has a lot to do with that.

M: Okay! Do you have anything else you'd like to tell me?

C: Uhm, only that I think that there needs to be a commitment on lots of different levels. There needs to be a commitment nationally, because the kids who come up here who don't stay are just as important to America as a country, as a society, if there go back and they graduate and they get credit, so the program that's provided by the summer migrant school is extremely important. Locally, it's important. Continued programs that don't necessarily provide opportunities by segregating but provide opportunities by integrating all the students in the school community are really important, and unfortunately, regardless of what people say, it does come down to financial resources. You have to have the people, you have to have the numbers that are workable, you have to have the money to provide the opportunities.

I'll just go back to my Model United Nations, that's not funded. It makes it really difficult for some of these kids to come up with the money to go down there. It'd be great if we had money for scholarships. I end up paying for some of the kids to go down there out of my own pocket, because I think it's really important. So that's the kind of program that could - you know, the kids who went down had a really great time, they want to go down again... but we really need the funds and that's money. Maybe it's the people who say, you know, "The schools don't need anymore money," or maybe it's where the District and the State decide to put the money that's part of the issue. But in terms of Hispanic kids or the minority populations, if we want them to become part of the community, if we want the non-Hispanic students to feel comfortable with them as part of the community, you've got to put your money where your mouth is, and I think there's a lot more that could be done.

M: Okay!

C: The end! (laughs)

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