**Oral History Interview**

**with**

**Arlene Kirkendoll**

Interview Conducted by

Tanya Finchum

August 9, 2014

Spotlighting Oklahoma

Oral History Project

**Oklahoma Oral History Research Program**

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**Interview History**

Interviewer: Tanya Finchum

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The recording and transcript of this interview were processed at the Oklahoma State University Library in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

**Project Detail**

The purpose of the *Spotlighting Oklahoma Oral History Project* is to document the development of the state by recording its cultural and intellectual history.

This project was approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board on April 15, 2009.

**Legal Status**

Scholarly use of the recordings and transcripts of the interview with Arlene Kirkendoll is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on August 9, 2014.

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**About Arlene Martin Kirkendoll…**

Arlene Martin Kirkendoll was born in Pensacola, Oklahoma, in 1942 and was one of eleven children. Her parents were Wilbur and Frances (Daniels) Martin. Arlene attended Attucks School for grades one through eight and then integration occurred resulting in her attending Vinita High School for her remaining high school experience. Following high school, Arlene worked at Eastern State Hospital for twenty years before enrolling in the Rogers State nursing program at the age of forty-seven. She graduated from the two-year program and returned to work at Eastern State Hospital for seven more years. Then she held various nursing positions including a ten-year stint with Grand Lake Mental Health Center before retiring. Arlene married Charles Kirkendoll, Jr. in 1960, her high school sweetheart. They enjoy spending time with their four children, enjoy being grandparents, and continue to call Vinita, Oklahoma, home.

The Attucks School District was established in 1900, and Attucks School, a two-story brick school was built in 1916-17. It housed grades one through twelve and served the educational needs of African Americans in Vinita, Oklahoma. In 1939 the Works Progress Administration (WPA) built a gymnasium for the school. Following the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, the school was desegregated. The building is on the National Register of Historic Places. The alumni continue to hold reunions every two years.

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| **Arlene Kirkendoll**  Oral History Interview  Interviewed by Tanya Finchum  August 9, 2014  Vinita, Oklahoma | C:\Users\nykolai\Desktop\IMG_0479.jpg |

**Finchum**  *Today is August 9, 2014. My name is Tanya Finchum. I’m with Oklahoma State University. Today I am in Vinita, Oklahoma to speak with Arlene Kirkendoll and this is regarding Attucks School here in Vinita. So thank you for having us today.*

**Kirkendoll** You’re welcome.

**Finchum** *Let’s start with learning a little bit about you starting with when and where you were born.*

**Kirkendoll** Well, I was born in Pensacola, Oklahoma, out there on the lake, in 1942. I’m seventy-two years old.

**Finchum** *And did you have brothers and sisters?*

**Kirkendoll** There’s eleven of us.

**Finchum**  *And where were you in the order?*

**Kirkendoll** Third.

**Finchum**  *Third. And what did your parents do for a living?*

**Kirkendoll** They were just commoners. She didn’t do anything, just stayed at home and took care of all of us. He was a carpenter, basically. He could build and he did a lot of stuff like that. So just common laborer. He didn’t have any schooling.

**Finchum**  *Did you grow up on a farm or in town?*

**Kirkendoll** On the farm.

**Finchum**  *And what were a few of your chores? I’m sure you had some.*

**Kirkendoll** (Laughs) Since there was so many of us, the older ones had to take care of the younger ones. Course we had to wash dishes. We had to help do a lot of stuff. Every time she had a baby we have to do all that stuff, you know, because we couldn’t afford anything else. Stuff we do every day: dish washing, cleaning the house, and of course lesson-getting when I was going to school.

**Finchum**  *Did she raise a garden?*

**Kirkendoll** My grandfather did. We lived next door to them and he had a big garden on both sides of the house, so we had to do that, and can, and wash jars, and pick green beans. Yeah, all that kind of stuff we had to do.

**Finchum** *Good food though.*

**Kirkendoll** Yeah it was, especially in the winter.

**Finchum**  *Did they have chickens?*

**Kirkendoll** My dad had chickens, and ducks, and geese, and a hog, and all that stuff in town—rabbits. So we had to pull weeds for the rabbits, and feed the chickens, and catch the baby chickens when it rained, and just farm stuff we had to do even though we stayed right here in town.

**Finchum**  *So with all of that going on, what kind of things would you do for fun?*

**Kirkendoll** Oh, as soon as the sun went down it got cool, you know, no air-conditioning. We may have had an oscillating fan, you know. We played like hopscotch and stick horses and walked on stilts. Just stuff like that.

**Finchum**  *Did you make the stilts or…*

**Kirkendoll** Yeah, we did. I was a tomboy. My sister, (laughs) she didn’t like doing all that stuff, but I was the tomboy of the bunch. Anything the guys done I did.

**Finchum**  *Did you play sports then?*

**Kirkendoll** Now that’s one thing I’ve never liked. I actually never liked sports. Played jacks but ball, no. Didn’t like that at all. Didn’t even want to go.

**Finchum**  *Did the house have running water and electricity?*

**Kirkendoll** It had running water after a while and it had electricity, finally. We had a coal oil lamp for a long time, so we had to get our lessons when we got home from school, early. We didn’t have any—just had that one oil lamp and a whole houseful of us. So you had to get lessons when you got home from school. You didn’t have time to play, you had to get your lessons first and then play.

**Finchum**  *Well describe the house you grew up in.*

**Kirkendoll** It was very, very modest. I think when we stayed down on Second Street we just had like a living room and a kitchen. Then when the house burned down—our house burned down. Then we went—moved up on Third Street and we had a living room and a kitchen and one bedroom. So we all had beds in the living room. Beds everywhere.

**Finchum**  *And was heated with coal or…*

**Kirkendoll** No, we had gas. Now when we stayed on Second, where the house burned, we did have a coal potbellied stove. We did, I forgot about that, we did.

**Finchum**  *When it was time to go to school, first grade, where did you go?*

**Kirkendoll** I went to Attucks, and walked. We did not have a ride, we did not have transportation, there was no buses. We had to walk.

**Finchum**  *About how far was that from…*

**Kirkendoll** From where we lived? Oh Lord, let’s see…it seemed like longer probably because we had to walk. It was from one end of town. We call the north end and the south end. We lived in the north end up by the cemetery, and the school was down—you know where the school is down there.

**Finchum**  *We’re going to visit on the way out.*

**Kirkendoll** Okay, so yeah. We had to walk that. I would say, oh, I guess a mile. I don’t know, I’m not very good at that either. It seemed like forever, very long.

**Finchum**  *Took about twenty or thirty minutes?*

**Kirkendoll** Yeah.

**Finchum**  *Would your pack your lunch?*

**Kirkendoll** Yes we did, such as it was. It was modest to none sometimes, you know. Potted meat sandwiches, you know, you can get potted meat and you could mix a little mayonnaise with it. Or if you didn’t have that, just potted meat and an egg and spread it on bread. Sometimes we didn’t have bread, because she’d make biscuits a lot, you know. Rather than take the biscuit and be embarrassed, we just didn’t take anything. (Laughs) Yeah, so it was rough. It was rough.

**Finchum**  *And what years were you at Attucks? Grades? What grades?*

**Kirkendoll** First grade, went to first grade there. We had no such thing as kindergarten when we were going to school. There was no such thing. I went to first grade through eighth grade.

**Finchum**  *Do you remember any particular teacher that sticks out in your mind?*

**Kirkendoll** They were all pretty rough because they wanted us to learn, you know. Mr. Blye and Ms. Hardrick I thought was the two hardest teachers we ever had—that I ever had. I thought they were extremely hard. You know, after you get grown and look back you think they were just looking out for our best interests. Boy, when I was going to school I did not like them very well. (Laughs) Did not. Did not.

**Finchum**  *Did you have a favorite subject?*

**Kirkendoll** No, actually I did not. We had home ec, and I kind of liked that. Thinking back on it, I just can’t remember anything I really liked. I was a good reader and a good speller. I could draw good. I was so shy, basically, when I was a kid going to school and stuff. I don’t know if it was still from being so poor and not having anything, but if I could not be forefront, I liked that better. I did not want to be seen. I just wanted people to leave me alone. (Laughs)

**Finchum**  *Did they have special programs like plays and musicals and things like that?*

**Kirkendoll** Yeah, we always had—every year we’d have a Christmas play, you know. I liked that. Of course I was shy, you had to say poems in front of everybody, the audience, parents, but I didn’t like that.

**Finchum**  *Was Attucks geared toward getting kids into college or just into a trade or did it really matter at that point?*

**Kirkendoll** I think it—no, I don’t think so. I think Mr. Blye did. He did the math you know, and he was really determined you got math. I don’t remember them ever expressing like, “Guys you need to learn so you can go onto college and be this.” I don’t remember anybody ever saying that to us. I’m not saying they didn’t. They may have, I just don’t remember that.

**Finchum**  *Would you interact with the teachers outside of school like at church? Or that type of thing?*

**Kirkendoll** No.

**Finchum**  *What did they do for punishment—discipline? How’d they discipline?*

**Kirkendoll** Stick. (Laughs) Mr. Blye had a paddle, thick paddle, big handle you know.

**Finchum**  *He used it?*

**Kirkendoll** Yes he did. He wasn’t shy about that.

**Finchum**  *On boys and girls?*

**Kirkendoll** Yes, certainly did. Ms. Hardrick, she would—I know one kid she would hit his hand with her stick-ruler like that. She was—everybody don’t learn alike and he had such a difficult time, bless his heart. Seemed like she was picking on him all the time. (Laughs) I guess she just wanted him to learn. Boy, I thought she was awful mean. (Laughs)

**Finchum**  *Was there an opening ceremony or a pledge of allegiance? That type of thing?*

**Kirkendoll** Oh yeah, we had to do that every morning. Stand up and pledge allegiance to the flag.

**Finchum**  *Did you say a prayer, too, back in those days?*

**Kirkendoll** Yes, before whatever. (Laughs) Yeah we did. That was understood that that had to be done.

**Finchum**  *And what was the playground like?*

**Kirkendoll** Oh, we had an old swing set over there, and a slide, and merry-go-round. That was about it.

**Finchum**  *They had a gym?*

**Kirkendoll** Yes.

**Finchum**  *Did you have gym in there or was it just for sports?*

**Kirkendoll** Well, sports, yeah. Like I said, of course we had…

**Finchum**  *P.E, physical education?*

**Kirkendoll** No. Just programs, when we had a program we had it out there in the auditorium. No, we didn’t go in there for anything other than that. I can’t remember what we did when like it was raining or too cold to go outside. I can’t remember what we did do. Stay in the classroom, I guess.

**Finchum**  *Did you go to sporting—well, you didn’t like sports, so I don’t guess you went to the basketball games and such.*

**Kirkendoll** No, no, sure didn’t. (Laughs) Did not like it.

**Finchum**  *Do you remember the year when you had to change from Attucks to the Vinita High School? How that went?*

**Kirkendoll** It was kind of—wasn’t really traumatic, it just was…I didn’t like it at all because we just weren’t used to that, you know. Just us down there, so I really didn’t like it. So we had to get used to those…we were black kids and then here come white kids. So then we had to get used to them, because we just didn’t interact much. Even when we were kids playing, we didn’t have white friends, basically. That was kind of a really—change for us. We had to transition, you know, because of that.

**Finchum**  *Did you get to stay with some of your friends in the classes or were you by yourself in some?*

**Kirkendoll** I can’t remember being with…some other black kids, some of them came from out on the creek, Pryor Creek. I can’t remember offhand if I was with any of my original classmates or not. I don’t remember, I don’t think so. We were scattered. That was another adjustment, because during lunch breaks you just kind of stood around, and yeah.

**Finchum**  *Those are hard days and a new school, too. Any of the teachers go?*

**Kirkendoll** Mr. Ryan went.

**Finchum**  *One familiar face then. Were you bussed or did you have to walk?*

**Kirkendoll** Had to walk, always walking, (laughs) still walking, yeah. Actually, it was a little shorter because we went from over there and crossed over there instead of all the way down to Attucks. We had to walk everywhere we went. We didn’t have a car. Our family didn’t have a car, we couldn’t afford one.

**Finchum**  *Well, describe the neighborhood that your grew up in then.*

**Kirkendoll** Just an old weedy neighborhood, (laughs) houses here and there, you know. Actually, my husband’s family lived just right down the street from us, on the south side of us. The north side was another friend of ours, the Martins. They were a different set of Martins, but they were Martins. Across the street was the Parks and they lived in a little two-room house over there. My grandparents lived across the alley back there. Now they had a bigger house because my uncle was in the service and he built them a house while he was in the service. So they were fortunate enough to have a bigger place, and an indoor bathroom, eventually. (Laughs) So they was kind of—they had more than we had.

**Finchum**  *Did you attend church, was church an important part of you growing up?*

**Kirkendoll** Oh yeah, we went to Sunday school and church. If you went out Saturday night, you went to Sunday school. No matter what time you got in you was going to go to Sunday school, so might as well get prepared for that. (Laughs) Then we had to go back in the evening on Sunday for bible study. We had to frequent church when it was open.

**Finchum**  *Did you sing in the choir?*

**Kirkendoll** I can’t sing a lick. (Laughs) My mother could sing really good, and she was the only one. None of us kids could sing at all. I don’t know why. My father never—he never attended church.

**Finchum**  *Was your mother the disciplinarian at home?*

**Kirkendoll** Yes, pretty much. He didn’t say much.

**Finchum**  *With eleven children, she’d have to be able to control them somehow.*

**Kirkendoll** Yes.

**Finchum**  *What would be some of the things she would fix you for supper? Well let’s back up, did you call it supper or dinner?*

**Kirkendoll** We called it supper. We had breakfast and supper. There was no in-between.

**Finchum**  *No lunch?*

**Kirkendoll** You just sucked air in-between. (Laughs) In the summertime we picked stuff out of a garden, you know, carrots, and radishes, and stuff like that, potatoes even. No, she’d cook breakfast. Oh, she’d get up and make biscuits and you know, we couldn’t afford no light bread. She’d get up and make biscuits and cook a little rice and oatmeal. When my uncle and them come down they had money, and so they would buy bacon and sausage and Post Toasties. Oh, I thought that was something, because we didn’t ever have it, you know. Suppers—my father, he would go hunting and kill rabbits and stuff like that, squirrels. In the winter we’d have—we had lots of beans, lots of beans and lots of rice, lots of taters. (Laughs)

**Finchum**  *Dried beans or green beans?*

**Kirkendoll** Dried, yes.

**Finchum**  *Pintos?*

**Kirkendoll** Yes. We’d have those a lot.

**Finchum**  *That’s my favorite. How did you meet your husband?*

**Kirkendoll** I don’t know, we just lived down the street from each other. We just developed into this. (Laughs)

**Finchum**  *What would you do for dates?*

**Kirkendoll** Oh no, we’d go out to Pryor Creek and round to the show and stuff like that, yeah.

**Finchum**  *What was Vinita like, the town itself like when you were in high school and younger?*

**Kirkendoll** Believe it or not, Vinita hasn’t changed that much. No, they’ve tore down some buildings and stuff, but overall it hasn’t changed really that much. It’s become more dilapidated, I guess. (Laughs) No, it hadn’t changed that much. Some businesses moved out and stuff like that.

**Finchum**  *Were there places you couldn’t go because you were black?*

**Kirkendoll** Yes.

**Finchum**  *Were there?*

**Kirkendoll** Couldn’t work at Eastern State Hospital for years, and years, and years. Yeah, that’s just the way it was. They finally opened that up, so we could go to work out there. You know, actually I think that was the place that was most significant—thing that was most significant that we didn’t integrate with. We didn’t go to their school, of course, for those eight years that I knew. Of course there was a lot of years previous to that. Couldn’t go to the Vinita hospital. They had a Vinita hospital right over here. We weren’t allowed to go there and we weren’t allowed to work at Eastern State Hospital. That’s the only three things that I can remember offhand that really stood out. I’m sure there were some other things that we didn’t notice, because we just kind of stayed over there on our side of the track.

**Finchum**  *Would you ever drive into Tulsa?*

**Kirkendoll** I never went to Tulsa until we got married. Never did.

**Finchum**  *And when was that? When did you get married?*

**Kirkendoll** (Laughs) Nineteen sixty…we’ve been married fifty-three years, fifty-three, yeah so. We never went anywhere, we didn’t have a car. We couldn’t go anywhere, we just couldn’t afford it.

**Finchum**  *Well you said that you went through Vinita High School until grade eleven and then you go your GED [General Educational Development].*

**Kirkendoll** Yes.

**Finchum**  *And then what did you do after that?*

**Kirkendoll** Just worked at Eastern State for twenty-seven years. Actually, I worked out there twenty years until I went to nursing school.

**Finchum**  *Before you went to nursing school?*

**Kirkendoll** Yes.

**Finchum**  *So you were older when you went to nursing school?*

**Kirkendoll** Yeah I was forty-seven when I got my nursing degree.

**Finchum**  *Good for you.*

**Kirkendoll** Yeah, believe it or not I was always—I tell my pastor this, he gets tickled. When I was a kid I spent so much time daydreaming about—we were so poor you know? I spent so much—I couldn’t wait until I could get old enough to get a job. That was my life’s goal, was to get a job. I just wanted a job and didn’t care what kind of job it was, and we didn’t know much about stuff. You know all this new stuff now. Back then I knew there were truck drivers and nurses. My first dream was that I was going to be a—I thought that was so neat, those big trucks coming through. I thought, “Well, when I get up I think I’ll drive a truck, eighteen-wheeler.” Can you imagine me driving—so every time I tell my pastor that he just gets a tickle. (Laughs) I said, “Well funny thing about it is I have no directional sense, and I can get lost in Vinita when the sun goes down,” you know. (Laughs) So I can see me driving a truck, but anyway...but then I wanted to be a nurse, so I finally got that accomplished.

**Finchum**  *So what did you do at Eastern State? What was your job for those twenty years?*

**Kirkendoll** I would just an aide, nurse’s aide. They called them mental health aides back then, you know. Help the patients, take them to meals, bathe them, and all that kind of stuff, just daily care of patients. We had to do charting and stuff like that.

**Finchum**  *And you just decided to go for your RN [Registered Nurse] degree?*

**Kirkendoll** Yes. Well, see I worked two jobs. I worked out there, and then I worked at Cinch, TRW Cinch. For ten years I would leave that job and go to that job, so I did that for ten years and ten months. Then I quit working two jobs and that’s when I went to nursing school to…

**Finchum**  *So you were already used to long hours?*

**Kirkendoll** Yeah.

**Finchum**  *So studying…was it hard to back at that age?*

**Kirkendoll** Oh yeah, but what was so ironic, when I was going to Attucks I always made A’s and B’s the whole time I was down there, the whole eight years. It was really easy for me you know. When we integrated my grades fell. I was not used to the way they taught and done things, you know. I always considered myself to be a very smart person, and boy was I in for a rude awakening when I went to college. That was a change. That was not as easy as I thought it was going to be.

**Finchum**  *What was the hardest class?*

**Kirkendoll** Microbiology. I thought that was the hardest subject. I think it was because I just thought it was a waste of time. I just couldn’t see how microbiology was going to connect with nursing. Anyway, I do see now. I thought that was the hardest class, the hardest.

**Finchum**  *Well when you dropped out of Vinita High School was it to get married or to…*

**Kirkendoll** Yeah, I got pregnant and dropped out.

**Finchum**  *So how many children do you have?*

**Kirkendoll** Four.

**Finchum**  *Four, and they would not have gone to Attucks.*

**Kirkendoll** No. Not even after they changed it to Southeast, they didn’t go down there.

**Finchum**  *Well did it ever have a cafeteria, Attucks?*

**Kirkendoll**  No.

**Finchum**  *Not while you were there.*

**Kirkendoll** I don’t know if they had one later on, that I can’t remember. Seemed like they may have after they got to be an alternative school, it may have. I don’t remember. At Attucks, there wasn’t.

**Finchum**  *Have you stayed friends with some of your classmates from that time period?*

**Kirkendoll** Mostly all of them, yes. Two of them has passed on, but yeah. We have the reunion, you know, every two years and they come.

**Finchum**  *Quite a few people come back?*

**Kirkendoll** Yeah. Course a lot of them has passed on too, you know. I’m seventy-two so you can imagine how old those other ones are. (Laughs) Well you’ll probably meet some of those that were. His cousin, I think she’s on the list to talk to some of you guys, and she went to school down there years and years before we ever did.

**Finchum**  *Well did all the other ten of your siblings spend at least a little time there?*

**Kirkendoll** All of them but—let’s see, I think Donna Mae, Wade Russell…Yeah, I think all of them did but two.

**Finchum**  *Do you feel that that experience at Attucks helped you later in life?*

**Kirkendoll** I really don’t know. Course I know school always helps you later in life, but as far as anything specific, no. I can’t think of anything other than they taught us to be responsible, you know, and that you had to learn.

**Finchum**  *And you had to do your lessons by coal light for a while?*

**Kirkendoll** That coal oil lamp, yeah. (Laughs) We did everything by that.

**Finchum**  *Do you recall your first day at Vinita High? Anything particular about that day? Had to be tough.*

**Kirkendoll** Yeah it was. I thought it was really—like I said, I was so shy you know. We just kind of just went and it’s like you felt like you didn’t belong. You know how you feel out of place.

**Finchum**  *Anyone say anything mean to you?*

**Kirkendoll** No, you know they never did. I never had any trouble with that, never had any trouble. I don’t know if anybody else did, but I don’t remember anybody ever bothering me. Kids would tease us, you know. A lot of guys that I went to school with work at First National Bank or did you know. No, as far as being treated we didn’t have any trouble with that. I always felt like we were ignored by the teachers because of their method of teaching, you know. We were not used—our school was small, and we were so used to almost having a one-on-one thing. Then when you went to school up there, it’s like you were just kind of lost in the room.

**Finchum** *So about how many would be in your classroom at Attucks?*

**Kirkendoll** Oh, I don’t know, eight or ten. We had two classes in each room because it was so small. So there’d just be so many on this side and so many on that side. You can imagine with that there wasn’t too many. You wouldn’t have like thirty and forty kids in one room.

**Finchum**  *Like, first and second graders were together?*

**Kirkendoll** Yes.

**Finchum** *And then at Vinita it was twenty-five or thirty in a room?*

**Kirkendoll** Yeah, the whole class full was one grade.

**Finchum**  *That would make a difference.*

**Kirkendoll** Yeah it did. Of course then you had—we were all poor-like I call it and then when you integrated there were some of those that were “rich kids” you know, so it was quite an adjustment period, for me it was. Some of them it may not have bothered them, but it bothered me. I’m a person that likes to…I’m resistant to change, period. I still do that now. If I get in a rut I just soon stay in there not have to get in another rut. I just like to keep, keep, keep, you know. So I’ve always been resistant to change even though I adapt to it and go on. I’ve always resisted it.

**Finchum**  *Well with that many children, how did your mother clothe that many children? Did she sew?*

**Kirkendoll** Oh Lord no.

**Finchum**  *She didn’t sew.*

**Kirkendoll** She didn’t sew anything, no. A lot of secondhand, hand-me-downs. We didn’t have Goodwill stores back then, but people knew you had a lot of kids and they were always giving you stuff. We wore a lot of secondhand stuff. We very rarely got anything new. Course back then they had Ben Franklin and McClellan’s here. Those are really cheap stores, kind of like a Dollar Store nowadays. So yeah, once in a while. Then my sister, when she got—she was the oldest one. She finally got where she could get a job working you know, and so then she would buy stuff for like me and her. She actually—she was the one that helped get us an extra room on the house, because she worked and they made a bill and she paid the bill. Yeah, so we were just poor. (Laughs)

**Finchum**  *But you were family. Did everyone get along pretty well?*

**Kirkendoll** Pretty well, yeah. Of course kids fight, but it was never anything we didn’t deal with.

**Finchum**  *How about holidays like Christmas, Thanksgiving, that type of thing?*

**Kirkendoll** Usually they were really happy days. Once in a great while we would have—I remember some years we didn’t have anything, but usually we did. Wasn’t anything elaborate, didn’t get a lot of gifts, but we had plenty to eat.

**Finchum**  *Did they do programs at Attucks around Christmas time?*

**Kirkendoll** Yeah, and at church.

**Finchum**  *Church was a big deal.*

**Kirkendoll** Yeah, we looked forward to that. We knew there was going to be something extra in the bag and you know, stuff like that. Holidays were kind of a good time for us, like Halloween and stuff you know, because we would go trick-or-treating and get lots and lots of candy and oranges and apples—stuff that we didn’t get ordinarily. I think Halloween was probably our most favorite day, holiday, if you want to call it a holiday. (Laughs)

**Finchum**  *So the church would fix a bag of goodies for Christmas? What would be in it?*

**Kirkendoll** Like an apple and orange and candy, they gave to everybody, peanut brittle and that little ribbon candy they used to make.

**Finchum**  *Do they still do that?*

**Kirkendoll** The church?

**Finchum**  *Yes.*

**Kirkendoll** Yes.

**Finchum**  *The bags at Christmas?*

**Kirkendoll** I think the other churches do, but at our church last year we gave out, and the year before we started giving out, gift certificates from Wal-Mart. It was simpler because we were trying to give everybody, the kids, everybody a little gift and a bag of candy so then we decided it was easier to just get a gift certificate and let them buy what they want. It’s easier to please kids. When they get to a certain age, you can’t hardly please them, (laughs) so we started doing that with the gift certificates.

**Finchum**  *Well, when you were younger I guess that fruit was not something you did have regularly.*

**Kirkendoll** Yeah.

**Finchum**  *Still can’t believe you went back to nursing school at forty-seven! That’s impressive really.*

**Kirkendoll** You sound like one of the RN’s out there that I work with. That’s what she said. I had to get all my kids grown. Actually had grandkids when I went to nursing school. Then my oldest granddaughter graduated from nursing school this year, so we took a before and after picture. (Laughs) We thought that was funny, sent it to my daughter in Florida.

**Finchum**  *She went maybe because you went.*

**Kirkendoll** I don’t know. She went to OU and graduated with a zoology degree and then she went back to nursing school.

**Finchum**  *Is yours a four-year RN?*

**Kirkendoll** Just two.

**Finchum**  *Then you worked at Eastern State until you retired. Or have you retired?*

**Kirkendoll** Yeah, I did. (Laughs) I worked out there for twenty years and went to nursing school and went back out there because they had a program where they would pay educational leave. So I did that, and then I had to work. So I went back to work and I stayed out there and worked. I worked out there twenty-seven years. Then I quit there and I went to work at a nursing home. I didn’t like that. I was there about two months, three maybe. Then I quit that and went to work for a home health agency and I was there three years. Then I went to Grand Lake and I worked ten years down there. Then I left there—actually, I didn’t leave. They got rid of all the nurses, changed the whole program over. Then I got into the Oklahoma Forensic Unit, worked six months. Then I haven’t worked ever since.

**Finchum**  *Forensic?*

**Kirkendoll** Forensic Unit. Yeah, I worked out there six months and then I quit. Haven’t worked since, I’m done. (Laughs) Nobody will probably hire me. My niece works out there and she was telling a nurse that I was a nurse, and so they were needing a nurse out there so she asked her to ask me if I would consider coming back to work. I said, “You tell them no, absolutely not.” I am not working anymore. I do not want to go through any more policies and procedures and none of that stuff.

**Finchum**  *Well what are you doing with your time?*

**Kirkendoll** Oh I try to quilt, I make quilts. Then I keep my—I have great-grandkids. I babysit with them about every day. Plant a garden, can stuff.

**Finchum**  *Still using some of the skills you learned as a kid.*

**Kirkendoll** (Laughs) Yeah.

**Finchum**  *Who taught you to quilt?*

**Kirkendoll** Oh this lady who used to—Bessie Gill. She moved to Arizona I think, but she started me on that. I go to a quilting class now, one day out of a month. We do a block. Then there used to be a lady that had a quilt shop up here in town and I was taking some classes from her, learning some stuff from her—techniques.

**Finchum** *Did you do it by hand or by machine?*

**Kirkendoll** Both.

**Finchum**  *You said your mother didn’t have time to quilt, so she wouldn’t have taught you. Did you start this after you retired or before?*

**Kirkendoll** Before.

**Finchum**  *When did you have time?*

**Kirkendoll** (Laughs) At my first arts and crafts things that I did I learned how to crochet and knit. This lady at work, Dora Belle Simmons, her and Roberta Rice taught me how to crochet and then I just graduated from different stuff.

**Finchum**  *Using your hands, and creative too. Do you have a favorite memory from Attucks? Or two?*

**Kirkendoll** Oh, not really. I just enjoyed—you know I enjoyed my classmates . We were all pretty close, I guess you’d call it. Was just like eight of us, so we were all just very close and we still are, the ones that are still alive. Those basically were just the memories I had down there.

**Finchum**  *Did it have a library?*

**Kirkendoll** No.

**Finchum**  *No library?*

**Kirkendoll** No, we didn’t have a library.

**Finchum**  *Well, if you’re standing at the front door going in kind of walk us through the school. What’s on the first floor? And then I think there’s a second floor.*

**Kirkendoll** Yes.

**Finchum**  *Kind of take us through.*

**Kirkendoll** When you first go in down the hallway up to the right was Ms. Barker’s room. That was the first and second grade over there. On the left was a room, that was third and fourth grade over there. Then you go on down the hall and Mr. Blye’s room was on the left. He just taught all classes. Then on the right was Ms. Harris—had that room. I can’t remember if that was fifth and sixth. First, second, third, and then it was fifth and sixth. Mr. Blye did the math, and then you kept going on down the hallway and had either bathroom on the left there, and you go down a little incline there. Then you would be in the gym and that was it.

When you first come in the door here you made a little right turn and go up the stairs, and that will take you to the second floor, which it had the same thing: a room over here and a room over there, room over here and a room over there. That was the end of that because it had nothing up there. The home ec room was on the left. The last room on the left was the home ec room. Mr. Ryan’s room was the first on the left, and Ms. Armstead, I think, was on this side. I can’t remember who was down there. I can’t remember who was over there—Ms. Holly taught home ec to us. Of course they’ve had different teachers. They had some previous to that, but I can’t remember who was on that right second floor hall. Anyway, I can’t remember who it was. (Laughs)

**Finchum**  *I’m assuming no air-conditioning so the windows would have to be up during the warmer days?*

**Kirkendoll** Yes.

**Finchum**  *For heat?*

**Kirkendoll** Radiator thing, yeah.

**Finchum**  *Where was the principal’s office?*

**Kirkendoll** Mr. Blye was over there. I think he was…was he the principal or superintendent? I can’t remember. I think he was the principal, Mr. Blye. He was the head man over it down there, so whatever his title was. But in his office was like a room here and then it had a little, we called it the candy room, but it’s where his office was and he kept just stuff back there. We did have—now we did have a candy room, a pop room in Ms. Hardrick’s side over here on the first floor on the left. There was another little room back in there they kept all the pop and candy. Like a little commissary-type thing, yeah. I forgot about that. They used to give out—like who ever made the most A’s in a class would get a case of pop. That was interesting because, you know, people—we couldn’t afford nothing like that. If you thought you were going to get a case of pop at the end of the year, at the end of the semester, with all A’s and stuff, that gave you something to look forward to.

**Finchum**  *Did you get one of those?*

**Kirkendoll** I did.

**Finchum**  *Okay, good.*

**Kirkendoll** One year I got all A’s, but like I said I was all A’s and B’s all the time anyway. I think the only C I got one year was in music or something. Like I said, I can’t sing a lick. (Laughs)

**Finchum**  *Have perfect attendance every year?*

**Kirkendoll** Yes, you had to go. You know all my brothers and sisters had measles and chickenpox and whatever and I never caught any of them, whooping cough, none of that. Every one of them had it and I never had it. Course we had some old fashioned remedies, we did. I don’t know if they worked or not, but I didn’t have it.

**Finchum**  *Like what?*

**Kirkendoll** (Laughs) Well we had goose grease that you’d rub on your chest for a cold and put behind your ears, and on the bottom of your feet. We had garlic buds that you put in your shoes and just silly stuff like that.

**Finchum**  *What would that do? The garlic buds?*

**Kirkendoll** Kept them from having the whooping cough and stuff. Really I don’t know if it worked, we did it you know. They all had it, I didn’t have it, but we had all kinds of silly remedies. My grandfather was—he could make up more old remedies and stuff. He was into herbs and stuff, you wouldn’t believe everything he used. Plus he was a good jelly-jam maker. She made a lot of homemade bread, but he did all the sweets. My childhood was good. You know we were really poor, but we didn’t realize how poor we were because that’s all we knew. Now that we have more, we know how poor we were. So I guess God works his miracles. He let us not know anything past this point. So we survived and did okay even though we were poor.

**Finchum**  *Are there any family traditions that have been passed down? Even recipes count.*

**Kirkendoll** (Laughs) No, offhand I can’t think of anything. Of course we still do that stuff. We don’t use goose grease, but we use stuff like that behind your ears and bottom of your feet. Just different stuff we do. You know we just—like when I can green beans and just that stuff.

**Finchum**  *Use a pressure cooker?*

**Kirkendoll** Yes.

**Finchum**  *You had any explosions?*

**Kirkendoll** Never have.

**Finchum**  *Were you involved with homemaker clubs then?*

**Kirkendoll** No.

**Finchum**  *The homemaker—or your mother? Was she a homemaker, like home demonstration club?*

**Kirkendoll** Lord no. We were just living.

**Finchum**  *I mean they teach you how to can so I was just wondering.*

**Kirkendoll** No, they just learned from their parents, just passed up.

**Finchum**  *Were your parents born here in Vinita?*

**Kirkendoll** No, they were born out there on the river.

**Finchum**  *And have they always lived here in Oklahoma or did…*

**Kirkendoll** Yes.

**Finchum**  *…their grandparents come from someplace else?*

**Kirkendoll** Now that I don’t know. I think his, some of his people, may have come from Texas or somewhere. I don’t know that for sure.

**Finchum**  *I had read there were some Cherokee freedmen in this area. Do you know if any of your relatives were?*

**Kirkendoll** We all are.

**Finchum**  *So maybe some from Tennessee, South Carolina, Georgia area.*

**Kirkendoll** Yes, see our grandfather, my father’s father, we can’t trace anything from them people. I don’t even know who his father was. So I don’t know where they come from, don’t have a clue. I know we were told my grandfather was well over six-foot tall, my grandpa, and his brother was a behemoth, seven feet tall. They were really tall people.

**Finchum**  *They’d be playing basketball today, wouldn’t they?*

**Kirkendoll** Probably. (Laughter) Then there was a dispute that my grandmother’s, my aunt actually said that they weren’t Cherokee they were Osage. They all got freedmen cards even though a lot of them were, actually had some Indian blood in them and there’s shown basically on my father’s side. I took his picture to a lady over in Grove and that’s what she told me. She said this man is definitely a Cherokee. I said I know—we know. We never could prove anything, had the paperwork or nothing so they classified them as freedmen.

**Finchum**  *Well have you always lived in Vinita? I mean in this area?*

**Kirkendoll** Yes.

**Finchum**  *Not ventured too far from here.*

**Kirkendoll** No, just take a vacation and come back.

**Finchum**  *It’s home.*

**Kirkendoll** Yeah, it’s home. Well my husband never wanted to leave. All his brothers and sisters moved to Wichita and different places. I guess he felt like he needed to stay here to take care of his parents I guess, and grandparents. We never went anywhere. I always wanted to, but what do you do? (Laughs)

**Finchum**  *Working two jobs, it’d be hard to…*

**Kirkendoll** Yes.

**Finchum**  *…to find time to even travel.*

**Kirkendoll** Yeah.

**Finchum**  *Good life more or less?*

**Kirkendoll** Yeah, I don’t think I have any problems. None.

**Finchum**  *Did he play basketball? Your husband?*

**Kirkendoll** No.

**Finchum**  *He was tall, which is why I asked.*

**Kirkendoll** I know but he never played any kind of sports.

**Finchum**  *And you were born in forty-…*

**Kirkendoll** Forty-two.

**Finchum**  *So your siblings would’ve been too young to go to the war, and you said an uncle went?*

**Kirkendoll** No, I had nobody go to war. I had a brother in the Navy and one in the—as a matter of fact, two of them, but no wars.

**Finchum** *You were born after the Depression so you don’t have any memories of that. I’m going through the years. Do you remember voting for the first time?*

**Kirkendoll** Yeah, I don’t think I voted when I could have the very first time. I didn’t feel like it was no—it was going to profit me nothing. You know after you get older and more wiser and figure things out. I figured it was my civic duty to go vote. Of course now I don’t miss.

**Finchum**  *I understand the gym was a WPA [Works Progress Administration] building, but it was already there when you went too*.

**Kirkendoll** Like I said, some of the people you talk to later in the day may have. It may have been built when they were there or shortly before they went. Yeah, someone more in their eighties.

**Finchum**  *Who were the rivals for Attucks, do you know?*

**Kirkendoll** I don’t have a clue.

**Finchum**  *Not into sports so…*

**Kirkendoll** (Laughs) I know they played, you know, but no, I don’t have a clue.

**Finchum**  *What is it about Attucks that keeps people together with the reunions? What keeps them coming back to those do you think?*

**Kirkendoll** I think it’s just sentimental stuff, you know. We just don’t want to lose that heritage stuff, you know. It just keeps us…like I said, you know when you’re young you don’t pay attention to all that stuff. Then when you get older, simple stuff like that becomes important to you, so we don’t want to lose that. We’ll try to keep that going as long as we can. Like I said, we’re thinning out you know. But we did include sons and daughters of Attucks attendees so we can keep it going. Have somebody to keep the tradition going. Just sentimental, and when we have our reunion we always go there and then use that one room for registration and sort of re-gathering the first day.

**Finchum**  *When it actually changed over, integrated, did it change the neighborhood very much?*

**Kirkendoll** No, I didn’t think so. Just less kids down there of course.

**Finchum**  *People didn’t move away or…*

**Kirkendoll** No.

**Finchum**  *And your neighborhood was mostly segregated at that time too?*

**Kirkendoll** Yes. Well we had people like in the next block down that were white, Smiths and Daniels and different ones. We didn’t have any problems with them. Just neighbors, but that’s about as far as it went. We didn’t have any—they were just in that neighborhood, just in our neighborhood.

**Finchum**  *They’d come over to the house to play?*

**Kirkendoll** Yeah, we had a vacant lot that was on a side street there, so we kind of congregated there and played.

**Finchum**  *Is there anything else you want to add before we finish?*

**Kirkendoll** No, not really. I think it’s interesting you are doing this.

**Finchum**  *Well, I appreciate you coming and sharing.*

**Kirkendoll** Thanks.

**Finchum**  *It’s been a pleasure.*

**------- *End of interview*** *-------*