**Lee Robinson**

Lee Robinson was born and raised in Springfield, Ohio in 1946[?]. He moved to Yellow Springs when he was in high school because his mother had been there before and she believed that it was a good idea for Lee and his brother to finish their high school years in Yellow Springs. His father was an electrical engineer at the Wright Patterson Air Force Base. They lived in at 210 Dawson Street but sold that house and build a new one in Omar Circle.  Lee started ninth grade when he moved to Yellow Springs he realized how far behind he was and that his level of English was below average. He received tutoring during the evenings so he could improve his skills.  During his high school years, Lee participated in track and field and also played basketball. While he was in high school he worked mostly in the dining room at Antioch College. His Yellow Springs High School graduating class had 45 students. After graduating he went to Central State University from 1961 through 1965 and majored in History. In a 2015 interview he noted that Central State was very conservative, the total opposite of Antioch College. Central State Administrators focused on respecting elders and they could never disrespect the school under any circumstances.

During the 1960’s the black community was made up of people that were born in Yellow Springs and those that were coming in from other states. Many blacks from other places were coming because Yellow Springs offered them good employment and overall, a better lifestyle. The biggest employer at the time was Wright Patterson Air Force Base. The black community had access to good jobs and some of their children would attend black colleges. Lee observed that the parents preferred not to be involved in political issues because the repercussions could be negative for them. They were afraid of losing their jobs because it was very hard to get them. Central State University did not want their students getting involved in any demonstrations. Lee was present during the Gegner Barbershop anti-segregation demonstration in 1964 but he did not participate in it. He saw from the distance people taking sides in favor or against the
demonstration.  When the police started arresting people, many backed off.  The demonstration on Xenia Avenue created a sense of division among people. Their parents always encouraged their education and told them that education was the most important thing to be focused on. Lee remembered that they advised that the problems of the South would be addressed by the people in the South and that they shouldn’t get involved in it. Lee believes that the division revealed by the Gegner’s demonstration still exist today. The type of emotions and feelings in that day are the ones that people carry for life. Lee remembered that Charles Wesley, the president of Wilberforce promoted the idea of promoting a good image for the school. The image was very important for Wilberforce and Central State because the image could affect the school. They had to be very careful because the funding of their schools was involved. A bad action from students would result in a cut of their funding. Black students did not have the opportunity to speak freely because it could have a negative impact. . Lee noted that that the Gagner demonstrations were the result of attempts to test the Ohio Accommodation Law that outlawed discrimination based on race.

After graduating from Central State, Lee was hired by Bernay’s Laboratories in Yellow Springs. He started doing inspections and later moved up to become a dimension inspector. Bernay Laboratories was a precision rubber manufacturer. They became a supplier in the automotive industry with their Yellow Springs plant located on Dayton Street at East Enon Road. As the company grew it became unionized. Lee worked at Vernay until he retired in the 1990s.

Kensy Zelaya

Source: “Lee Robinson Interview” The WYSO Civil Rights Oral History Project, 2015