

Supplemental Interview with: Milton Brownlee
February 21, 1996

(New tape. There may be a gap here.)

B: The whole place is about three and a half miles north of Starke. It's on the Raiford Road. Now this is not the road that goes to the prison directly, but it goes into the little town of Raiford. My mother was always very active, wanting to get things improved, and she just, her main purpose in life was to get the road paved out there to Raiford. And so when Charlie Johns was governor he had that road paved and he named it Maude Brownlee Road.

P: How about that! How many acres is that, or how many was it when you came up on it?

B: Let's see. Eight hundred acres.

P: What did you raise on it?

B: We raised a basic crop of corn, but we didn't sell it back in those days. We used it for the mules and the _____. We used it as feed. But our main crops were what we called truck crops. We raised twenty-five acres of strawberries and that was back in the days when there were a lot of strawberries grown. At harvest time, it took two hundred and fifty people to pick them. It was a very highly manned labor deal raising strawberries. And we raised beans and peppers and cucumbers and sweet corn and then he planted enough corn to carry the mules through, and then they had us, too, because we carried corn to the grist mill, ground our own meal -- I mean had it ground -- it's a grist meal. We had about, I guess, about three hundred acres. I think it was five hundred acres that was under tillage and three hundred acres in woods land. And this flat country up there, they call it the flatlands in Starke, they loved pine trees so we took care of them.

P: Did you turpentine those pine trees?

B: Yes, we did.

P: Slashed them?

B: Yes. We bleached it out. Mr. _____ installed the turpentine. And then we cut a lot of timber, and we had a little sawmill on the place and we sawed all the lumber we needed. In fact, that old house up there was built, when they built it, the style then was to build them up off the ground because of the mosquitoes. That house was built seven feet off the ground on big piles. Of course, that made a wonderful place for workshops and everything else under the house. It was up off the ground pretty far.

P: It was supposed to be to avoid mosquitoes?

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B: That was the deal. You see, malaria was very prevalent in those days. But I don't, that's what my grandmother always told me. And all of that lumber that was -- they lived in just an old shanty for about a year while they were building that house and they sawed all that lumber for that place.

P: You had your own sawmill?

B: Yes. And it was . . .

P: You had to let the lumber age, didn't you, after you cut it?

B: Yes, they'd sun dry it. But when I was growing up, we had electricity but it was a Delco light plant. My father was very progressive, not only a progressive farmer, and we had a water tank. We pumped water with a gasoline engine up into it, and we had running water. But a Delco was direct current and you didn't have appliances, so all we had was lights. Later on, we would haul ice from Starke and we had a sawdust pile under the house and we'd bury that ice. We didn't have any refrigerator, so we had to eat up things pretty fast. Of course, it wasn't any trouble because my father always worked I guess ten or twelve hands, we'd call them, and they gave them dinner. Gave them a dollar a day and dinner, and then when _____ got into office, my father thought he'd have to quit farming because they were paying \$1.50 in the WPA. But he went to \$1.50. That wasn't from eight to five. It was sunup to sundown. But we got along good. We always had plenty to eat. You know during the Depression, we were pretty self-sufficient on the farm. We bought very little in town. In fact, Mr. A.M. Darby ran the grocery store in Starke, and my daddy always had a credit there because _____ turnip greens and mustard greens, potatoes, and all that stuff. My mother made butter with milk. Six Jersey cows, and two people in the family drank milk, but we used the cream to make butter. We were self-sufficient pretty well.

P: You had a lot of chores growing up then?

B: Oh yes. My brother and sister did, too. They worked. But my brother never liked to farm. It happened that when he was ready to go off to college that my father was doing real well in strawberries, so he went to Auburn and got his pre-med work and then went to Atlanta Southern Dental College, in Atlanta, which is now in business. That's the Emory Dental College now. And when I came here to the University of Florida, I was taking pre-med. I didn't know whether I wanted to be a dentist or a doctor but after about a year, I decided I wanted to stay in agriculture so my father was dismayed. He was all against it, but I studied agriculture and then worked for the government. When I got out in 1935, the Depression was still here and no jobs, so I went back to farming for

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about six months and then finally got a job in the Department of Agriculture in Jacksonville for eighty dollars a month. I worked there, and that job played out in about a year and a half, and _____ Chemical Company offered me a scholarship to come back and get my Master's degree, and I came back and got my Master's degree. Then I couldn't get a job. The government put me back on the same job at eighty dollars a month, so I quit and came back, and Bill Shands had bought out the American Oil Company and I ran that for three years and then I went in the service. I had gotten a commission out at R.O.T.C. I was offered a permanent commission in the Marine Corps, but I didn't want it, and by the way, a friend of mine who graduated from high school with me in Starke was offered it and he took it and he ended up coming down the Marine Corps.

P: I remember that story from the last time. Is there anybody up on the farm now that is related to you? Is it still in the family?

B: My brother lives there.

P: Your brother. How many acres does he have?

B: I think about six hundred and forty.

P: It's still a big farm.

B: Yes. But he leases it to cattle people. No road crosses there or anything. I still own a third of it. He bought my sister out, but I still own a third of it, but I just made a deal with him that he'd run it, pay all the bills, and then any income he gets I don't get any income from it. It goes to him. I don't know. Somewhere down the line, I hate to sell it. It's good land. Excellent land.

P: Why is so good, Milton?

B: It's a heavy loam soil and we've been offered some good prices for it because it's just three and a half miles from Starke, but he doesn't want to sell it and I don't either. I mean I don't need the money and so I don't know what will happen to it. He has one son, adopted son, and I don't know what will happen to it. I'm very fond of that place. The old house is still there. He lives in that house.

P: Do you get up there to visit at all?

B: Oh yes. I go up and see my brother about twice a month. We ride around over the farm. He's eighty-seven. He still drives the tractor and bowls.

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P: Does he look like you?

B: No. Very small and very thin.

P: I'll be. Takes after your mother or your father?

B: My mother. Well I do, too. She was short, stocky. My father was tall and he was six foot four and weighed about two hundred pounds. He was a big man. Never had a bad habit in his life - didn't smoke, didn't drink. He was on that farm out in the open all the time and then Parkinson's Disease hit him.

P: Too bad.

B: (slight gap here).

Even though they worked for us, he saw that they had good houses and had plenty to eat all the time, even during the Depression. Well, I can't remember back any further.

P: Well, we're picking up good. Then the great-grandfather was Earl Johnson. Right?

B: No, that was my sister's husband.

P: Okay.

B: My great-grandfather was named John _____ Brownlee.

P: I'm trying to get all these people's names. The paternal grandmother was Sarah Elizabeth _____. She died when she was ninety-eight.

B: Yes. And her first cousin named Marlene Morrison, she married Stonewall Jackson. She was Stonewall Jackson's second wife, so we were very esteemed in the Confederacy.

P: That's interesting. Morrison, one of the high points, or the low points of the Confederacy. Now, _____ Weeks was your mother.

B: My mother.

P: She was the daughter of William T. Weeks and born in South Carolina. Do you know what part of South Carolina?

B: Ninety-eight, South Carolina.

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P: Oh, such a town name?

B: Yes.

P: Oh, my goodness. Where is that near?

B: I don't know. It's up above Greenville somewhere.

P: I'll be darned. Have you ever been there?

B: No, I never have.

P: Near Greenville.

B: They migrated from England to there. The Brownlee side came from Scotland. My daughter went to Sweetbriar and she won a year's study at Edinburgh at St. Andrews, and she said that she went to a cemetery over there, and there were many Brownlees buried there.

P: Now, Mack (?) Turner was your grandmother? Right.

B: Yes, she was my grandmother.

P: She was your paternal grandmother?

B: Yes.

P: So you were kin to Sam Dell, S.T. Dell, Jr., because

B: Our mothers were sisters.

P: Your mothers were sisters. Okay.

B: And I'm kin to Ann _____, Ann Long _____, because my father and her mother were sister and brother. The Longs had a son named Gus and he went to Annapolis.

P: Oh, Lord, he was President of Texaco.

B: Yes, and then he was President of Texaco and he went back in the Navy in World War II and served there.

P: What was his rank?

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B: He was a commander, I think.

P: Is he still alive?

B: Yes. He's ninety-eight years old.

P: Where does he live?

B: He has two homes. They bought the Cabot Lodge out on the east shore in Virginia. It's a big farm. Then he also has a home in Miami. I think now that he is staying mostly in Miami because of the weather. He married a Senator Walsh's daughter. He was a very powerful senator and he was General Counsel to Texaco, so that's what gave him the opportunities that he had. He had the wherewithall to make it go.

P: I remember they called him back in after retirement and he straightened things out for Texaco.

B: Yes, he dropped out as President and was Chairman of the Board. Then he retired and then they called him back, and he served as Chairman of the Board and President until he got them straightened out.

P: That tells you something about him. Good, I think we've got everybody named here. Let me just stop a minute and take a look.