

MATHESON HISTORICAL MUSEUM
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Interviewee: Margaret Thomas Hawkins

Interviewer: Mary Lou Hawkins

Transcriber: Ruth C. Marston

October 25, 1997 – November 17, 1997

Q: Hilda Ross, teacher of autobiography writing techniques, decided that Margaret could probably write her memoirs better by using a tape rather than writing it out, so we're just experimenting here this morning, so sit tight.

M: I do know that my grandfather, Gabriel Phillip Thomas, was a doctor and they moved to Gainesville from South Carolina. My mother's parents came from Germany. My mother was brought over here by her parents from Germany, and they lived in Brunswick, Georgia, and sometimes in Savannah. She was a very beautiful person, and I understand that when my father met her, that was it! My father was actually my mother and father. My mother became ill and it was very sad that she was ill at the time when I needed her the most, but my father did a pretty good job of getting me grown and up here.

I am anxious that you know that I did go to Kirby-Smith School that is still in operation here in Gainesville. It was a wonderful school. I loved it there and while I was kept very busy as John Henry, who was 15 months older than I, had a speech defect and I had to translate to the teacher whatever he wanted to say or answer. We were put into the first grade together. I was so busy helping him and translating for him that I failed to go into the second grade, but he went to the second grade. I caught up with him in the third grade and then we went all through school together in the same grade, same room, until father decided that it was best for me to go to St. Joseph's Academy in St. Augustine, Florida. I was unhappy leaving my brother, but I thought it was a very wise decision, also, because I did spend most of my time translating for him.

My father was instrumental in getting the University of Florida in Gainesville. He was at that time Mayor of Gainesville and Senator of Florida. In fact, he took his horse and buggy, which he had because he had a stable here in Gainesville, and actually moved the University here, including the books and so forth from the main office. It was a great day when he arrived. I was not born at that time.

Since there was so much transportation had to take place in my family, my father bought a car called Brisco. They are not on the market anymore, but my brother and I had the complete use of the Brisco.

When I was about fourteen, I went to St. Joseph's Academy in St. Augustine. My father said he had heard me say many times that I wished I had a sister so that's why he sent me to the St. Augustine convent and I would have many sisters. This turned out to be true, but they were not the kind of sisters I meant. I really enjoyed it there and I made many friends. The sisters were so good and generous and so helpful. If you didn't understand an assignment, they were very happy to work with you. I had a room to myself. Most of the rooms were occupied by three to five girls, but my father saw to it that I had my private room, which I appreciated all the years that I spent there.

I want you to know that I love that Hotel Thomas very dearly. When it was my home and then when it became the hotel and now the Thomas Center. It's hard to explain just how much I did love my home. My father, who was very close to me, came home one evening and said, "Margaret, Sis he called me most of the time, I want you to know that I sold our home today." Of course, that was the most drastic news I could ever have received. I couldn't hold back the tears. It just broke my heart to know that he had sold our home. Then he came home again the next day and said, "Well, Sis, I bought it back." So that's the original story of the Hotel Thomas and Thomas Center.

I also would like to tell you about my reaction to the sale of the home. It was very severe, so much so that my father decided that he would send me away, so he planned a trip for me to take a cruise from Florida to Europe. Of course, I was very excited. I went alone and everything worked out beautifully, but when I returned home, I found out that the main reason for sending me was that he didn't want to sell the home again but he had to make use of it so he decided to build Hotel Thomas. I was very happy about it, and that's why he sent me to Europe so I wouldn't change his mind!

The outcome of my trip was that I was on a boat and met some Catholic ladies that became somewhat interested in me because I was traveling alone. At that time I was about thirteen to fourteen. We saw a bull fight in Italy which was pretty drastic. I didn't like that too much except I was making history – the first one in my family to see a bull fight.

From there, we went to the Vatican and the ladies I was with, because I was the only child on the ship, hovered over me and took care of me. They were Catholics, and they knew I went to a Catholic school, so they were anxious for me to see the Pope. So we went to the Vatican and the guards opened up their spears until the last set of guards, and they shook their heads. I couldn't go in – improperly dressed, they said. I had on a white dress that had panels on the front, so these ladies just ushered me over to a store next to the Vatican and one of them took off her black petticoat and put it on me. It hung from my waist down to my ankles and covered up that part. Then they bought several veils, black veils, that they draped over my head and shoulders. Then I bought one armful of rosary beads that I could take back to the sisters at the Academy. We got through and the guards didn't even recognize me, so they just ushered us on through into the Pope's audience room, so I did have my audience with Pope Pius XI.

I was very happy coming back to Gainesville and being with my brother. He was such a wonderful brother and a wonderful friend. We used to go to church together and to Epworth Hall at the First Methodist Church in Gainesville and all the activities they had at the hall. In fact, he says that I was his best girlfriend. Of course, that pleased me no end that he thought I was very important. By this time he was talking very well and doing very well in school. He was always on his own as far as school was concerned.

Of course, it was time now for us to decide what we were going to do after school. We had John Bostick, who was a close friend to both my brother and me, for dinner, and my father raised the question, "What do you want to do?" John Bostick said that he wanted to be a doctor. My brother said he wanted to be that kind of person who sits in church and when the preacher says something very meaningful that he was going to say, "Amen." So then I thought, "I don't want to say amen," so I decided to go to college and I chose State College (Florida State College for Women in Tallahassee, now Florida State University).

My father had put my mother's car up on blocks because she was not well enough to use it, but he decided to have it worked over and gave it to me to have for State College. That I enjoyed very, very much. I could come home when I wanted to. In fact, I worked up a little business – transportation business. I was bringing home so many Gainesville girls for free and decided that I should charge a little bit for it so it would at least pay for my gas, so I had a business.

I was in school at Tallahassee at the Florida State College for Women and my brother and his wife were going to have their first baby, the first baby in the family. I was so excited the whole time – just really happy about it. All of a sudden, I got a telegram saying the baby had arrived. The baby was named Suzanne. Although I usually asked permission from my father to come to Gainesville for the weekends, or whatever, I didn't have time this time. I just got in the car all by myself and drove to Gainesville directly to the hospital. When I got in and got into the elevator, who was on the elevator but my father and he wanted to know what was I doing there. I told him I was doing the same thing that he was doing. I was going to go see that baby!

Q: Margaret, tell me a little bit about yourself, who your parents were, and where you grew up.

M: I grew up at the Thomas Center. It was called Sunkist Villa when I was a child. I loved it there. I always will.

Q: Your parents were Major and Mrs. Thomas?

M: Yes they were. Major William Reuben Thomas and Catherine (Katie) Kraus Thomas. She was from Brunswick, Georgia.

Tom: Her son, William Thomas Hawkins, enters and states: I was looking for this woman in the paper this morning. At church everybody came up. I didn't know people read the *Gainesville Sun*. Maybe they saw the pictures, but so many people came up and told me how marvelous it was. What a beautiful, beautiful picture. I'm so proud of you. What is this, a new tape recorder?

M: That's what Margaret gave me.

Q: We're taping her memoirs.

- T: Perhaps we should turn it off while we talk?
- Q: No, you're going to be great on there. Margaret, you can tell more about him later. You've got some great stories about him.
- M: Yes, I do.
- Q: We were talking about the home where you grew up and your parents. Let's hear more about that.
- M: I had four brothers and I kept up with each one of them. We had a very happy childhood – all of us. One of the things I remember a great deal about is that I watched our yard man, who was Chinese. His name was Fy and he used to spend a lot of time with the younger ones of us, John Henry and myself and our good friend, John Bostick. We called ourselves the Three Musketeers.
- Q: How old were you then?
- M: Preschool.
- Q: Four or five.
- M: Maybe six or seven. One of the things I remember very clearly is that when Christmastime came, his first Christmas there, he gave all the family very nice gifts for Christmas. I thought that was wonderful of him – to be with us a short time and give us all gifts. We were very proud. When Christmas was over, when the first of the month came around, my father got the bill for each gift that he had bought for the family.
- Q: He was pretty ingenious.
- M: That was Fy. My father paid the bill, but he explained to him that we don't do things like that in America.
- Q: What did you used to do for fun? What were some of your games and things that you played with?
- M: I had a pony that I dearly loved and I spent a great deal of my time on my pony riding or just walking somewhere where I could see and hear what was going on.
- Q: I bet there are a lot of stories about your pony.
- M: We had a tennis court in the corner of our yard, and that's where all the children in the neighborhood would come, so we always had something to do. All the boys loved to play tennis, and I loved to watch. I can remember very well sitting on my

pony, very relaxed and sitting on my pony backwards, and I was watching the game when all of a sudden one of my other brothers came up and slapped my pony on the rump, and away we went to the barn. But strange as it may sound, I wasn't even frightened. I knew the pony knew the way home. He was just going a little bit faster than usual.

Q: Were you riding frontwards or backwards?

M: Backwards.

Q: Did you ride every day?

M: Not quite every day but most every day.

Q: Did you ride with a saddle or just bareback?

M: I had a saddle. That's where I held on most of the time.

Q: Who saddled the horses?

M: Whoever happened to be in the barn. There was a lot of help around. I never did saddle myself.

Q: Did you have a lot of horses in your barn?

M: No, we didn't. We had cows. My father had the White House Hotel as well as the Hotel Thomas. No, at that time we didn't have the hotel at this particular time, but he just had the family, so he furnished the White House Hotel and the family with milk from our cows.

Q: Isn't that great. So they had fresh milk every day. Did they pasteurize it?

M: No, they just got the milk and used it.

Q: It's hard to imagine cows there in that part of town.

M: In the picture of the barn that we show at the Thomas Center, you can see some cows.

Q: Were they Holsteins – black and white?

M: I don't remember just what kind of cows they were, but I assume that they were Holsteins.

Q: What did your pony look like?

M: Brown and white, mostly brown with some white designs on it.

Q: What was his name?

M: Jack.

Q: Did you get on him by yourself?

M: Yes. I had a box I climbed up on, just like I tried to do out at your farm, but I didn't go fast enough.

Q: A few weeks before this, Margaret went out to our horse farm with me. I walked around a corner to see her trying to mount our mare Bonita. Margaret had instructed her daughter-in-law, Julie Hawkins, to hold the horse while she got on. I had to stop her because, due to her left hip replacement, riding is not something she can do! She was very chagrined, because she wanted her picture taken on the horse.

Margaret, where else did you like to ride?

M: Just around home and also we had a big back area there. We had 6.2 acres, so I had plenty of places to ride. What is now the Duck Pond and Sweetwater Branch was all our back yard. We had a big pasture, and the cows used the pasture and I used it with my pony. It was fun.

Q: How did you get to school when you started going to school?

M: We walked. Talking about school, they put John Henry and me in the first grade together. John Henry had an impediment in his speech and I was the only one who could understand what he was saying, so I would tell the teacher what he was saying, what all his answers were. At the end of the year he passed to the second grade and they held me back. He got ahead of me in school, but it didn't last for long because I decided to catch up with him. I did all right, and in fact I did so well that they skipped the second grade and put me in the third grade with John Henry.

Q: So you were back together again.

M: Yes.

Q: Did he still need you to interpret for him or had he learned to communicate by then?

M: He could communicate pretty well on his own from then on.

Q: Did the other children understand what he was saying?

M: No. No one could understand what he was saying. I always had to say, "John Henry says so and so."

T: Did he get made fun of in school?

M: No, they didn't make fun of him because he was such a precious boy.

T: They respected him?

M: Yes, they respected him, they loved him, and he had many friends. Another thing that helped is the fact that the doctor said that John Henry and I both needed to have our tonsils out. The reason for this was because when we both were younger we were having a lot of colds and things so the doctor advised my father to have our tonsils taken out. They took me first and they put the operating table up in the connecting bathroom between my father's room and my room. They took me in first to have the surgery. Unbeknownst to anyone else, they didn't have eyes on John Henry, and since he loved me very much and didn't want me to be hurt, he sneaked into the operating room, so to speak, and watched them take out my tonsils. Consequently, when he was called and he had to go on that table, he had a terrible time because of the memories he had of my being hurt, but he got through with it and we both fared very well after that.

Q: Was it a common thing then to do surgery at home like that?

M: We didn't have a hospital here.

Q: That was before Dr. Lucretia Robb opened her clinic?

M: Yes, no hospital at all. We got along fine, and that's when the doctor found out that John Henry's tongue was tied and they clipped it and he got so he could do pretty well.

Q: Do you remember the doctor's name?

M: Dr. DePass.

Q: What other things did you have on the grounds area – your pony, your tennis court.

M: My father built a tall scaffolding the proper distance from the street, and put down a heavy rope and had a croaker sack tied on the end of the rope and they would get it up to us on the scaffolding and we would fly through the air. That was fun!

Q: Holding on to it! And where would you land?

M: We'd let the swing die down. It was fun. It was right in front of the Thomas home. The tree that it was on has been taken away, but several other big trees are there though. That was one of our most important pastimes.

Q: Was it really tall? Did you need to go up high to get on?

- M: Yes. We had the scaffolding built to help us get on.
- Q: When you were on the scaffolding, how did you get the rope?
- M: They threw it to us. Then they had a small rope tied on to it where we could pull it in to us.
- Q: A croaker sack. Was there something in the sack?
- M: It had something in it. Straw. So we could hug it.
- Q: Is a croaker sack a big burlap bag?
- M: It wasn't too big because we had to get on it, sit on it, and have our legs around to help us stay on.
- Q: Where did that name come from? Croaker sack? What was that used for?
- M: I always used it in connection with riding that swing.
- T: Did you all petition your dad to get him to do that, or did he come up with the idea on his own?
- M: He did it on his own. He thought it would keep us entertained.
- T: What a great guy.
- M: It was fun, flying through the air.
- Q: And when you stopped, how far were you from the ground? How far was it to jump off?
- M: We usually tried to get back up on the scaffolding.
- Q: Did your feet touch the ground?
- M: No. Not unless it died down. If it became still, then we could stretch out and touch the ground.
- Q: Did you play outdoors every day?
- M: All day. I can still hear my mother calling, and she would say, "Mar- gar – ret, John Hen-ry." That just goes running through my head for all these years.
- Q: Did you have a snack when you got home from school?

M: No, not usually.

Q: You'd just go right out to play.

M: Yes. We'd go out to play. We had a secret place on top of the barn. If you could see the picture of the barn, you could see this square room. That's where we would meet with some of the neighborhood children. That was our private hideaway. It was fun.

Q: How did you get up there? Was there a ladder or what?

M: No, we had to climb from one floor to the other. Somehow we had a lot of boards, so it may have been nailed onto one beam inside that we could hold onto and made a ladder.

Q: Did you have a lot of secret business to carry on?

M: Oh my, very important secret business. We loved it. Every time I see a picture of it now, it causes me to have a little thrill.

Q: What did you wear to school? Did you wear dresses?

M: Yes. Skirts and blouses.

Q: What kind of shoes?

M: We had tennis shoes for play. I think we either a slipper or laced shoe.

T: Did you play in your skirts and dresses or change for your play?

M: We just played in what we wore to school. We didn't change.

Q: What about feed for the cows? Did you have enough land to grow hay there or did that have to be brought in?

M: That was brought in.

Q: But they were milked right there in the barn?

M: Yes.

Q: What time did you come in for dinner?

M: We were usually called in about 4:30 because we had to have our baths and dress for dinner. Of course, we ate at the White House Hotel.

- Q: So your mother didn't have to cook. Now tell us about your brothers. Start with the first one.
- M: Of course, the one that I dearly loved and was so close to was John Henry. We were inseparable. We played together and went to school together, and as we grew older we went to Epworth League together.
- Q: Epworth League, that's the Methodist Church group?
- M: Yes. The Epworth hall is still here. We used to go there every Sunday. Whenever they had any kind of thing to do, we were right there to do it – like picnics and things they do at church.
- Q: What was the age difference between you and John Henry?
- M: Fifteen months. We went all through school together. I even requested of my father that he let me come back to Gainesville and go back to the school in the 12th grade with John Henry so I could graduate with him. I only went to Gainesville High School one year, my senior year.
- Q: He must have been a very special person.
- M: He was. I had my diploma, which I gave to my son Thomas Hawkins. The diploma has my name on it and also my father's name. He was Superintendent of Schools at that time.
- Q: Is there anything else you want to add about John Henry right now?
- M: He was the most wonderful brother anyone could ever have. He was very attentive to me. He went to the extent that he would carry my books to school for me.
- Q: But you all didn't fight like most brothers and sisters do?
- M: No, we never did fight. I had three others that I could fight with, but not John Henry.
- Q: That's great. That's a real special relationship to have had.
- M: I'd like to tell you one thing now about my brother Phillip. He came to me one day and said, "Sis, I want you to do something for me." I said, "Okay, what can I do for you, Phillip." He said, "I want you to ask Father if I can go down to Vero Beach to see this girl that I've met and I like real well." I said, "Why don't you ask him yourself?" He said, "Because if I ask him he'll say no, but if you ask him he'll say yes." So I asked him and Father said, "Sure he can go." So Phillip went to the dresser in my father's room and on the mirror he put, "No mun, no fun. Your son. Phil" So that's how he got his money to go.

- Q: I think he had that figured out from the very beginning. And that young woman he went to see was Peggy, his future wife. Where did you tell me her home town was?
- M: Vero Beach.
- Q: He was driving south to Vero Beach.
- M: That always fascinated me how he got down there. They were married shortly thereafter.
- T: How old was he at that time?
- M: He was about twenty-one.
- Q: He was how much older than you?
- M: He was the third son, Phillip Everett Thomas and she was Margaret Schnee was her name.
- Q: What would you like to tell us about your other brothers. There were two more?
- M: Yes. My oldest brother was Clarence.
- Q: Do you remember what year he was born?
- M: I don't know, but to me he was a very important person. He was grown up.
- Q: He was about seven or eight years older than you?
- M: More than that, I think. He would have been ten years older.
- Q: So he was a pretty big boy when you were born then.
- M: There's a picture somewhere showing him and the baby carriage with me in the carriage. He used to volunteer to take me for a ride. I don't think my parents realized what he was doing, but he would take me over to a street near the home but it was kind of a small hill. He would get me all set and then he would let me go.
- Q: Your mother would have had a heart attack! When you were just a baby, he did this?
- M: No, I was a little girl. The last time he did it I landed in Sweetwater Branch.
- Q: No wonder you were such a daredevil! He started you on that path when you were just a baby.

- M: I've got a picture of that somewhere.
- Q: Did your parents ever figure out he was doing that?
- M: I don't know. It was fun for him.
- Q: Was it fun for you or were you scared?
- M: No, I wasn't scared. That's how I learned to go with the flow.
- Q: So that was Clarence Strouse. Where did the Strouse come from?
- M: They named him Strouse after a friend, but he didn't like that name so he changed it to Stephen.
- Q: He did that legally?
- M: He just did it.
- Q: There's one other brother.
- M: "W.R.", William Reuben, Jr. was the second William, Jr. The first baby that was born to them was named Junior but he died, so then they had these other boys and the last one they named William Reuben Thomas, Jr.
- Q: Was he close enough for you to play with, or was he pretty much palling around with Phillip and Clarence?
- M: They were all three kind of grown up, from my perspective. I loved them but I didn't play with them or anything like that. John and I were too busy to be stymied by brothers.
- Q: Did you have a lot of children nearby your home that you played with? John Bostick is one you mentioned. Who were some of your other playmates?
- M: Shirley Lazonby. I have loved her all these years.
- Q: You all went to kindergarten together, didn't you? And first grade?
- M: Yes.
- Q: It seems like I recall you telling me a cute story or two about you and Shirley getting into mischief.
- M: I was the one that got into mischief. She would help me out of it.

- Q: I thought she was your partner in crime?
- M: No, she tried to save me. I just loved Shirley.
- Q: Did she live right there by your home?
- M: One block from us. The house is still there.
- Q: Which street?
- M: Near the back of the Methodist Church, right across the street on the corner. Her father was a doctor.
- Q: What was her maiden name?
- M: Bishop. I never will forget when we were about, I guess we were in about the 4th grade, and there was a boy that always tried to aggravate us. I thought one day, "Well, I'm going to fix him." I got one of those round erasers that has a brush on it with a hole in the middle. I put a pin in the hole and when he got up to go to the front, when he came back – he was sitting right in front of me – I put that in his seat, and he sat on it. So I ran out of that school real quick, and Shirley was right behind me to protect me.
- Q: See, by running, then they knew who did it!
- M: We got to the top of the hill there and I was caught and told to come back to the school.
- Q: Who caught you?
- M: He told the teacher, and she saw my contraption.
- Q: Straight pin you mean? You brought that from home. Now I want to know what happened after they caught you and made you come back to the school building.
- M: I had to go back and sit there for a while, couldn't go home to play. That was punishment for I was always ready to get home.
- Q: That was worse than getting licks. What was that boy's name? Do you remember?
- M: Emory Fowler.
- Q: Did you get along with him sometimes?
- M: Yes, we got along pretty good, especially after that.

Q: After that you were friends?

M: He sat right in front of me for a long time. It was really kind of a friendly gesture.

Q: That's really hard to believe. As we go along, I know you'll think of more little stories like that so I want you to be thinking about them.

M: I'll speak out if there's something I want to say.

Q: And we'll talk about them as you remember them. I really like hearing about the children that you played with. That's really neat.

M: Having that tennis court was just a wonderful thing. We had a beautiful tree down across the road from the tennis court that had pecans and one day my brother threw a heavy stick up into the tree and tried to knock down some pecans. After he did, he said, "Everybody run," so I ran and stopped and it came down and hit me on the head. Then I put my hands to my head and I said, "I've been killed. I've been killed." Spurred blood. I made more or less a joke out of it but we all went to tell my mother that I had been killed. She took me to the doctor and he had to take a lot of stitches on my head.

Q: Was it on the crown of your head?

M: Yes, right on the top. But I ran.

Q: Now if you had tried to run and catch that stick, you never could have done it.

M: That's one thing that certainly happened. We had our bicycles, you know. We used to love to ride them. We just lived on them.

Q: How old were you when you got your first bike?

M: I should say about six or seven.

Q: Do you remember learning to ride it?

M: Oh yes. We were told that our job in helping to keep the house nice was to sweep the sidewalks and the porches. John and I thought that was really great. We were glad that it was our job, and we had some brooms and we kept all the sidewalks swept. We would get on our bicycles and sweep.

Q: Sweeping while you rode?

M: Yes.

Q: Who taught you to ride?

M: I think I taught myself. Just got on and fell off enough times to learn to stay on.

Q: I'll bet your mother was watching from her window.

M: My mother was not very well.

Q: Where did you used to ride?

M: Around the home. We had plenty of places to ride.

Q: Did you have a sidewalk?

M: The same one that is there now.

Q: Your father was instrumental in getting those sidewalks put in, wasn't he?

M: He had the sidewalks there for the home, you know, before the hotel was built. That's where we rode our bicycles mostly, but I got to ride over to the Beisler House without even holding on.

Q: Was that a long way away or was it near you?

M: It wasn't too far away.

Q: Whom did you play with there? Who did you visit with?

M: I didn't play with anyone there really. She was just a good friend.

Q: What was her name?

M: Georgia Beisler. She had a daughter named Elaine.

Q: Was Elaine near your age?

M: No, she was younger than I.

Q: So you went to see the family.

M: Just wanted to have somebody to go to.

Q: Were you allowed to ride your bike to school?

M: We walked. John and I always went together. He'd carry my books even. He was wonderful.

Q: Did he ride bikes with you?

M: Yes. We were almost inseparable. We did everything together.

Q: You weren't too far from the downtown area. Were you allowed to go down there on your bikes?

M: There was no desire to. It was more fun riding at home. You know our home was called Sunkist Villa. We had two great big white bulbs (lights) that were under cover on top of each gate with that printed on it: Sunkist Villa. It was a beautiful place.

Coming back to my brothers, as I said, we ate all our meals at the White House Hotel and William Reuben, Jr. and John Henry and sometimes Phillip loved to play a game, to play like I was a ball and they would push me back and forth.

Q: When you were a baby?

M: I wasn't a baby. I was about seven or eight years old. I entered into the game. I thought it was fun, too. It kind of made me dizzy. One of the boys – maybe it was W.R. -- decided he wasn't going to play any more so he just walked away, but my other brother had already pushed me so I went into the post. It hurt but I didn't think too much about it and I just put my tam-o'-shanter on and went into the lobby to wait for my father to be ready to take us home. I felt sleepy and all but that was all, but when we got home I took my tam-o'-shanter off and it was filled with blood.

Q: That's a little hat, right?

M: Yes. I had to go and get stitches in my head again.

Q: Where were these stitches?

M: On top of my head, kind of to the side. I'm sure the scar is still there.

Q: Did Dr. DePass sew you up this time?

M: I can't remember who did it.

Q: I wonder if you had a concussion at that time?

M: I just don't know. I don't remember too much about it.

Q: Did they twirl you when they pushed you? Is that what made you dizzy?

M: No, they just kind of pushed me so fast, real fast. They thought it was a wonderful sport. They stopped all of a sudden. They didn't tell me they're going to stop. I was on the way.

Q: That was at the White House Hotel? Did you walk over there for dinner?

M: We walked there most of the time. Sometimes my father would pick us up and take us but most of the time we would meet him there. He enjoyed going over and having a cigar.

Q: Did you have a car at that time?

M: We always had a car. He had a beautiful car for my mother but she didn't get to use it. It was a Lincoln. My father had it on blocks, but when I went to college at Florida State University in Tallahassee, he took it off the blocks and had it all washed and cleaned out and gave it to me to have at school.

Q: That was the car that you took to Tallahassee. You had a business, I understand.

M: I did. I got to where I was taking girls back to Gainesville. I had the car. It was a 7-passenger car with two seats in the back that pulled out. My friends kept wanting me to take them to Gainesville. Some of them had boyfriends and they wanted a ride, and I thought, "This is for the birds. If they want to ride, they ought to pay something to ride." So I started charging them and I had a notebook that I kept all the appointments in of who was going to ride each week, so I had free passage home by taking my friends.

Q: You were pretty smart. You were an entrepreneur.

M: I was in school at Tallahassee at the Florida State College for Women and my brother and his wife were going to have their first baby, the first baby in the family. I was so excited the whole time – just really happy about it. All of a sudden, I got a telegram saying the baby had arrived. The baby was named Suzanne. Although I usually asked permission from my father to come to Gainesville for the weekends, or whatever, I didn't have time this time. I just got in the car all by myself and drove to Gainesville directly to the hospital. When I got in and got into the elevator, who was on the elevator but my father and he wanted to know what was I doing there. I told him I was doing the same thing that he was doing. I was going to go see that baby!

Q: That was the same day she was born? Did you have to cut class?

M: Yes, I did. I cut everything except going to see Suzanne, but imagine my chagrin when I walked into the same elevator with my father.

Q: And that was your first niece and your father's first grandchild?

M: Yes. She was just precious.

Q: Do you remember having a car in your family then, from your earliest memories?

M: Oh yes. We had two cars, but one of them was on blocks – the one that I had later.

Q: What did your father drive?

M: Mine was a Lincoln, and he had a Chrysler at that time.

Q: Were they roofed or closed in?

M: Closed in. Sedans. I could carry eight girls home, counting myself.

Q: I wonder if there are any photographs of them. How old were you when you learned to drive?

M: About thirteen.

Q: Did you get a driver's license?

M: We had a Brisco, and my brother and I drove it.

Q: What is a Brisco?

M: It was a car.

Q: B-r-i-s

M: c-o

Q: Just like the bicycle. You just got in it and went?

M: I didn't have any formal lessons.

Q: Was there a lot of traffic on the streets?

M: Not much. Back then Gainesville was just a nice, comfortable town.

Q: Where did you drive?

M: I didn't go very far, just around the Thomas home. I had a good friend named Doris Black, and I would go down and see her.

Q: This is October 26, 1997. This is a recording of Margaret Thomas Hawkins' recollections and memories of her early life at the Thomas Center, in particular about her brother John Henry.

M: John Henry was fifteen or sixteen months older than I, but we were almost like twins. We were always together and loved each other very dearly. We had three other brothers that I admired and respected a great deal, but I didn't have the same feeling for the others that I had for John Henry. Their names were Clarence, who was the oldest, then Phillip, and then William Reuben, Jr., then John Henry and I. We were inseparable. I loved him and he loved me. We had a third member of our select group. John Bostick was a neighbor. We had a hideout in the barn, which was just our room, our clubhouse. It was fun climbing up to it, and you could see all over the Thomas grounds. We often referred to ourselves as the three musketeers, but as we grew older, we had more responsibilities. One of the responsibilities John Henry and I had was to keep the yard nice by keeping the sidewalks swept. In order to get it done well, we got on our bicycles with a broom, and we learned how to ride our bicycles and sweep the sidewalk at the same time. We also did that using our skates so it wasn't a chore to us; it was really fun.

Q: There were sidewalks all around the Thomas Center?

M: Yes. Some have been added now, but the major ones are still there.

We had many neighborhood friends. Whenever it was a rainy day, John Henry and I would take them down to the basement, which is there now, and we would play Cowboys and Indians. It made an ideal place for us to play. We spent many hours down there.

Q: What did the basement look like then?

M: Under the porch area it was all dirt, but we played under there, too. The main part of the basement is very beautiful now. When I go down there, I have that same feeling of playing Cowboys and Indians. During the hotel days, the Officers' Club was there and men from Camp Blanding would come over and they were always welcome. They had complete use of the basement, and they loved it.

Q: Were there activities down there for them?

M: No, but they could bring their own bottles. We had a cubby-hole shelf made for them, where they could keep their own bottles. We didn't sell it.

Q: Was it like a restaurant?

M: More like a club; we didn't serve regular meals.

Q: It was furnished?

M: It was just nice for them to have a place to come to and visit with each other and have a drink.

Q: If they came in from Camp Blanding, that's about 45 minutes away, isn't it?

M: Not more than that I think, but that's how they came. They would drive in individual cars.

Q: Margaret, the hotel had an atrium when it was a home – a garden inside. Can you tell us about that?

M: Yes, it was very beautiful. It was not built up. You would go down the steps and there you were on a little sidewalk that went through the middle. They had a hose right by the door. Every time we came in we had to go there if we were dirty at all, which we were most of the time. They had a hose and they would hose us down before we could come into the home.

Q: Cold water?

M: Cold water, you bet. In that atrium, in the right-hand corner as you down the steps was a banana tree that had real bananas. We were really proud of that! We also had an orange tree planted in the atrium. The most important thing to me was a beautiful, beautiful poinsettia that grew up to the second floor; in fact, up to the screen that went over the atrium, and then it grew back down to the middle of the porch. It was a beautiful big red poinsettia.

My mother used to sit up there a great deal. She had beautiful hair and she would wash her hair and sit there and let the sun dry it. I can just picture her there. She was a beautiful person with such beautiful hair.

Q: Was her hair black?

M: No, it was brown, with a little auburn.

Q: You told me the switching story one time, about getting switched. What was that about?

M: My mother called the two boys in, Phillip and W.R., and they didn't come, so she had to call them two or three times. My father happened to be home, and he was a disciplinarian, so he just took a switch and said he was going to give them that switch so they would remember next time. My mother intervened and took the switch from him and said, "Switch me instead." Then my father took the switch from my mother and told her to switch him. He said, "Don't switch the boys. Switch me instead," and she did!

Q: Where were you when you saw this happen?

M: Behind the door.

Q: Do you remember how old you were?

M: I think I was around nine or ten.

Q: This is Wednesday, November 5th, 1997, and Margaret Hawkins is going to give us another recording telling about her adult life in Gainesville, Florida.

M: My father was very anxious for me to know all about the Hotel Thomas, which I dearly loved as well as he. During the summertime I worked as a housekeeper and would sit at a desk in the Hotel Thomas and finally my father asked me how I would like to be manager of the hotel. I was very complimented and very proud that he would even consider having me do that, but he was anxious to try to keep the Hotel Thomas open during the summer. Always before, he had closed it up and just waited for the winter people. My brother Phillip, who had been manager for many years, went to the White House Hotel to operate that for the summer, so I had his place at the Hotel Thomas. It was a very serious commission for me to have that position. I knew that my father was trying to make it pay off because he had kept it closed during the summers before, so in order to make it pay for him, I decided that I would have the bellboy who had worked for us for years, be our night clerk. In other words, we didn't have a full house at all and I felt he would be very capable to have the office. I always came down early in the morning to make sure everything was okay.

On this particular morning, the phone rang and this voice said, "How come you locked me out of the hotel last night? I couldn't get to my room. All the doors were locked, and so I came up to the White House Hotel, so this is where I spent the night." So I told him to come on over. I knew it was Sam Hawkins, because he was one of our residents though I had never met him. When he arrived, he tried to act like he was indignant, but he really wasn't. I told him to just go ahead and find his room now, and I apologized. When I called a bellboy to come to the desk and I asked him, "Why did you lock the doors last night in the Hotel Thomas?" He said, "Miss Margaret, I was so sleepy and I locked up real good so I could go to sleep on the porter's bench. That's what I did. But I didn't know that he wanted to come in." So, that was our first big booboo!

Q: And your first meeting with Sam.

M: My first meeting with Sam.

Q: And what did you think about Sam?

M: Well, I was so chagrined that he couldn't even get to his room that I didn't have much to say to him, but he wouldn't give me any peace. He kept teasing me because he was locked out, and then he started asking me to go out with him. It had always been my policy not to go out with any of our male residents, but after about three or four invitations I thought, "Why not?" Besides, he had been helping me a great deal at the office and he sent letters out to all the government employees that he knew that Hotel Thomas, Gainesville, Florida, was headquarters. It was surprising how quickly we picked up business, and my father was very pleased. Sam couldn't have done

anything else that would have pleased him more than helping to let it be known that the Thomas Hotel was open for business all summer. So they became good friends.

Then Sam wanted me to go out to dinner. I turned him down three times and then finally I thought I had better go; he may move out. So I accepted his invitation to go to Keystone Beach. They have an old hotel there (The Inn on Lake Geneva) that served delicious meals, so we had a very, very nice dinner and we enjoyed seeing the water at Keystone Heights, Florida, on Lake Geneva about 25 miles northeast of Gainesville, and visiting with some of the summer guests there at that hotel. After that he continued to help me more and more. He even came behind the desk to help sign in some of the guests. So we became good friends. As the business grew better and better, I liked Sam better and better.

Q: How long did he stay? The whole summer?

M: Yes, he was there supposedly indefinitely month by month. Finally one evening he said, "Margaret, how would you like to be married to a red-headed guy?" He had red hair so I knew that was my invitation. I told him that would be fine, that I liked red hair, but I wanted to have six children. He said, "That's all right by me." So that led to our marriage on October 2, 1935. We had a very happy life together and did end up with our six children, plus one more.

Q: Tell us about your wedding.

M: The wedding was beautiful. The ceremony took place in what is now called the Spanish Court. A friend of my mother's, Mrs. McNinley, was very much interested in my marriage, so she asked if she could decorate the Spanish Court. Of course, I told her I would be real happy for her to do it. It so happens that she was a member of the Catholic Church on Main Street, which was not far away, and she asked permission to use their red carpet and also the standing candelabra, so it was decorated beautifully. She had palms brought in and banked them in the back part of the court, and she had the red runner running all the way down, and the standing candelabra on each side of the red carpet. I think she had about twelve on each side. She found some doves – where I don't know – but she had them flying around above the court.

Q: I bet that was beautiful.

M: It was. It was very beautiful.

Q: The wedding ceremony was held in the Spanish Court?

M: Yes. My brother Phillip's two little girls were in the wedding, and they looked adorable. They were beautiful children. I had my nephew who I wanted to be part of it, too, but he became shy. Although he looked great in his white suit and looked so nice, he wouldn't go down the aisle.

Q: Which child was that?

M: Bill Thomas, son of W.R. and Cornelia Thomas.

Q: He wouldn't go down the aisle?

M: No. Everyone who stayed for the reception thought he was just precious, so it didn't matter. Elizabeth and Nancy stole the show. (Elizabeth and Nancy Thomas, daughters of Phillip and Peggy Thomas)

My father had given this nice reception for Sam and me, and after the ceremony we went off with the usual procedure, having rice thrown. I think some of it was bird seed. Anyway, we told everyone that we were leaving and we said goodbye. Before leaving, I told the bellboy that we weren't actually going to leave, that we were just going to drive around a couple blocks and we were going to come in the side entrance. I had arranged to have it open because it was rather late then after the reception, and we decided we didn't want to drive. So I told the bellboy, don't call that room, just keep it blocked out, just don't call that room. Anyway, we did use the room and were there only ten or fifteen minutes when the phone started ringing. I found out that it was a party at the Women's Club and somehow they found out that I was still there, so they had a long line and they called that room all night long! The next morning I went and I said, "I thought I told you not to ring that room." His response was, "But Miss Margaret, they said if I didn't ring that room, they'd come up here and ring my neck!" So we decided to go on to Montgomery, Alabama.

Q: So you left in the middle of the night or you stayed all night?

M: We stayed all night. We were to have breakfast with Sam's mother, who came for the wedding, and my father. We were going to have a goodbye breakfast. So we had the breakfast, but we got going pretty soon.

Q: Tell us about your trousseau, your going-away outfit, and about the clothes that you had.

M: My father had sent me to Jacksonville to do whatever shopping I wanted to do. I had a beautiful wedding gown. It was velvet, and my veil was made from lace that my father brought me from Venice, when I was about thirteen years old.

Q: Your veil is now in the Thomas Center.

M: That's right. It's in the Thomas Center now, and it's beautiful.

There are so many things to tell it's hard to know what to tell next.

Q: Take your time. We have plenty of time. Let me go get the photograph of your wedding, and we'll talk about some of the people who were in your wedding while we're looking at the photograph.

M: All right. I am very proud to say that Mary Lou has that photograph on her piano and that she has kept that picture in that special spot ever since they built their home. I have always felt very proud to think that she has remembered me in such a way. She is here with the picture now. I will start from the left.

This is my brother Clarence. This is Peggy Gracy and my brother Phillip and my good friend, Hazel Lee Baird, my father and myself and Sam, Bill Watson (his best man), my cousin Iris Tigert and my brother John Henry. This is Ruth Sinclair and this is my brother W.R. Of course, I had my father and all my brothers in my wedding.

Q: And this is Elizabeth?

M: This is Elizabeth, and this is Nancy.

Q: Was Omerea, Billy's twin, here then? How old would she have been? Omerea was Bill Thomas's twin sister, the daughter of W.R. and Cornelia Thomas, and Margaret's niece.

M: She wasn't in the wedding, but I'm sure she was there.

Q: It was her brother who wouldn't go down the aisle, right?

M: That's right.

Q: Were their dresses white? Nancy and Elizabeth?

M: Yes. They looked like big dolls. They were precious.

Q: What color were the bridesmaids' gowns?

M: They were velvet and were all the same color – I think they were blue.

Q: Look at all the palms back there.

M: She had those put there. See the wedding veil?

Q: Yes.

M: I don't have a picture showing the doves, but there were doves flying around, too.

Q: It's wonderful to have this photograph. Look at the veil, draping all around you.

M: This was all lace. Then I am happy to say that the wedding dress and the veil were also worn by my daughters, Kathryn and Margaret.

Another interesting thing that happened that night, just before we were married. Sam came rushing up to my room and said, "I forgot my tie." Someone said, "Go tell Bill Watson. He's your best man." So they called for Bill Watson and Bill said, "Just don't panic. I'll take care of it." He was gone only about five minutes and came back up to the room with a tie. We all in unison said, "Where did you get it?" He said, "I took it off Desbro, the head waiter."

Q: How beautiful. What a story! So you left Gainesville and went to Alabama?

M: We went to Montgomery, Alabama.

Q: For your honeymoon. Where did you stay there?

M: We stayed in a hotel for a few days until we could find an apartment. My Gainesville friend who had lived there for quite a while helped us find an apartment, so we had a very nice apartment just about two blocks from her home. We felt very fortunate.

Q: Sam had a new job?

M: He had a job working for the government. He was a lawyer. We made friends pretty fast there because we already had some friends there and they introduced us to more, so it was a very nice beginning. He helped me with some of the cooking. He knew more about it than I did because I had eaten at the Hotel Thomas or at the White House Hotel, so I knew how to boil water, but that was about all.

Q: Did you work at that time?

M: No. I was just trying to be a bride. Our stay in Montgomery was a very happy one. I will tell you about leaving there soon.

Today is Wednesday, November 19, 1997. Margaret is continuing her memoirs with stories about the births of her children.

M: After our wedding in Gainesville, we moved to Montgomery, Alabama, where Sam was working as a lawyer with the U.S. Government. We soon realized that we were going to have our first baby, and we were both very excited the whole nine months. It was very exciting when the time finally did come and Sam took me to the hospital and said he would be back, that he wanted to go and take a shower and get cleaned up to greet the new arrival. He was a little late getting to the hospital. When we asked him what delayed him, he said he was sorry but decided that since he was going to take a shower to get cleaned up for a baby that he'd better clean up the inside, too, so he took a big dose of Milk of Magnesia and then he couldn't leave home! So he was teased a great deal about being clean in and out. But he loved the baby. She was precious. She was just about two weeks old when we had to move to Raleigh, North Carolina. We had a good trip. We spent the night in Atlanta, Georgia, and we were tired but happy and proud.

Q: You were moving there then?

M: Yes. We lived in North Carolina about three or four years – or it was two years.

Q: Was Sam born there?

M: We moved back to Gainesville, Florida, and shortly thereafter we knew that our next baby was going to arrive. We were living in a house that my father had given us and my back door went right through the back yard to John Henry's back door. He was a doctor and he had one room fixed up downstairs for a delivery room, so I just had to walk out our back door and into his back door to the delivery room. Sam stayed home to take care of Marie. Dr. W.C. Thomas assisted John Henry in the birth of Sam, Jr. The nurse went over and knocked on my front window that opened into the bedroom and awakened Sam and she told him that he had a son and everything was just fine and he could come over whenever he wanted to. He rushed over and was very, very thrilled with that baby boy. All he could say was, "I was the last of the Hawkins. I have a son, but I was the last of the Hawkins." He was very proud.

My third baby was Thomas Hawkins, named William Thomas for his grandfather. He was a precious baby. He was a big baby and I had problems afterwards. After his birth, I had a hemorrhage but Dr. Thomas got it stopped within three days. It was just a slight hemorrhage but he didn't want it to get any worse. Everyone was very proud of another boy.

Addendum by Mary Lou Hawkins, Interviewer (Mrs. Thomas Hawkins)

Margaret and Sam Hawkins lived in Gainesville, Florida, until 1943, when Sam took a job with the federal government and they moved to Atlanta, Georgia. He worked for the Commerce Department and for the Civil Aeronautics Association, later known as the Federal Aviation Agency. In 1953, Sam was transferred and they moved to Fort Worth, Texas.

Margaret and Sam had seven children: Marie (b. Dec. 3, 1936); Sam (b. Sept. 19, 1938); Thomas (b. Oct. 13, 1941); Kathryn (b. Aug. 26, 1943); Margaret (b. Mar. 24, 1946); John (b. April 7, 1947); and Jim (b. Sept. 24, 1957).

Sam Hawkins passed away in October, 1974. In 1990, at age 80, Margaret returned "home" to Gainesville, Florida, where she lived at the time these tapes were made in 1997. She resides at The Atrium, a retirement residency, and is a member of the Thomas Center Advisory Board. She actively participates in the Alachua County Public School history education program by serving as a docent at the Thomas Center, sharing stories of her childhood growing up in the Thomas home, now the William Reuben Thomas Cultural Center, with third grade students as they visit the Thomas Center on school field trips.

Margaret attends the First Methodist Church of Gainesville, where her father was a founding member and where she was baptized. She is a founding member of the Junior League of Gainesville, a member of the Patio Club of Gainesville, and a member of Kappa Alpha Theta Sorority.

She is much loved by her family and friends. Her charm, personality, and wit continue to captivate all who meet her.