

MATHESON HISTORICAL CENTER

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWEE: Charles Pinkoson

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May 25, 1995

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P: My name is Charles Pinkoson. I was born on December 3, 1921, so am 73 years old. The day I was born was the last football game of my uncle, Tootie Perry, at the University of Florida. On this date my daddy had to make the big decision of whether he was going to go to the football game to see my uncle finish playing or whether he was going to stay home. He decided to stay home and that way there was peace in the family.

B: Dr. Pinkoson, would you like to tell us about some of your early experiences in Gainesville as a child?

P: I started in kindergarten and at that time I think they put me in one kindergarten when I was about three years old and then I did so well that I repeated as a four-year-old and I finally started in school at the Kirby-Smith School - that's on the east side of Gainesville. I went there for three years and then I switched over to the elementary school over at GHS because my family had moved from the east side of Gainesville to a house right in front of GHS. That way I didn't have to go very far when I went to school so they let me walk back and forth.

B: Dr. Pinkoson, your family has been in Gainesville for a long time. Would you like to tell us about some of their early experiences when they first came here?

P: My father's daddy was a farmer and their home was on University Avenue right across the street from where the Seagle Building is today. When my daddy was growing up, he was interested in police work and detective work. He worked for the railroad as a detective for a while and then he was a policeman for a while. In the early 20's he was sheriff at one time and then he was chief of police for a while. The police force was not very large at that time and the town was not very large - I guess Gainesville had somewhere between 5,000 and 10,000 people in it. The University also was not too large at that time.

B: Your mother I know was from a prominent family, the Perrys. They've been here a long time. Would you like to say something concerning them?

P: My mother was born in Rochelle. My daddy was born in Gainesville, of course. She was a school teacher for a while and after she had taught school for a while she and my daddy were married. My daddy was in his late 30's and my mother was 23 when they married so there was a good deal of difference in their ages. My daddy was into police work and did that most all of the time. However, we did have a farm. The farm was located where the Law School is now. When I was a little boy we would go out there and see the animals and things.

B: You had two sisters.

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- P: One of my sisters was a teacher and she taught Fifth grade in the Kirby-Smith School. She taught a number of the fine gentlemen and ladies of Gainesville. Then she moved to Dallas, Texas, to be with my other sister, who was a dietitian and had married a physician who was practicing in Dallas. They both moved to Dallas and at that time I was going to medical school. This was after I finished GHS, which at that time was located on University Avenue. I graduated in 1939. The last year that I was in GHS we had a fine group of fellas that played football but unfortunately our greatest success was tying two games. The rest of them were close games but we did not win them. After leaving GHS, I went to the University of Florida as a freshman. I attended one year and then decided that maybe I should go out to Texas because my brother-in-law was a physician. I enrolled in Baylor and went there for two years. After two years I was able to get in Tulane Medical School and as it was a little closer to Gainesville than Baylor, I decided to go to Tulane. I finished there in 1945. The day I graduated from Tulane, August 14, 1945, the War was declared over. Japan surrendered and so it was a very fine graduation. Not only did the War end but also I graduated from medical school. After medical school I was in Charity Hospital, which was a big hospital in New Orleans. I stayed there one year and then had to go in the service for a couple of years. After being in the medical corps for a couple of years, I returned to New Orleans and took a residency in Eye, Ear, Nose, and Throat. After finishing, I came back to Gainesville in 1951, to the hometown that I had always wanted to live in. When I started out in practice, there were about twenty physicians in Gainesville, and it was a very close knit group. The town was small, probably 15,000 - 20,000 people here at that time. The University had grown to probably in the neighborhood of 10,000 students. When I attended the University in 1939, they only had 3,000, so the University had started growing, but even then it was nothing like it is now when they have close to 35,000 - 40,000 students at the University.
- B: When you came to Gainesville to practice medicine I think you were married. Your wife is from New Orleans isn't she?
- P: While I was taking my residency at Charity Hospital, I met my wife who worked in the Brain Wave Station as a secretary. We got married just as I was finishing up my residency. We moved to Gainesville and were looking forward very much to being in Gainesville. After we had been in Gainesville about two weeks, my wife came down with acute appendicitis and I had the privilege of really getting to know Dr. Babers, who removed my wife's appendix. As I said, when I started in Gainesville there were only a few doctors here. After I had been here for a few years, the University of Florida decided to locate a medical school here and Dr. George Harrell was the first dean. He came early to recruit people and to get the medical school started. He did an excellent job and was a fine man. Since the medical school started, it has grown from a very small start to where there are many buildings. There are

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probably over 1,000 doctors in town now, including those at the medical school. Not only do we have the medical school but also the V.A. Hospital, the Alachua General Hospital, and the North Florida Medical Center. Medical services in Gainesville are certainly as good here as any place that I know of. We certainly have wonderful medical facilities.

B: Dr. Pinkoson, out on 441 I remember a place called Pinkoson Springs. Did your family have any ties with that?

P: My father built Pinkoson Springs in 1925. At that time it was located in a place called Hague, which is about ten miles from Gainesville. To pinpoint it a little bit closer, the road that enters Turkey Creek, which is now called Heritage Links, is just east of the entrance to where the springs would have been. We kept that for a few years and when I went off to college my mother sold the springs and they changed the name to Magnolia Springs. It was there for a while and eventually was closed down. Now the little creek is still there but there is nothing out there but a lot of concrete.

B: Also, as I remember, there was a place here in Gainesville back in the 30s called Pinkoson's Prairie. Is that right?

P: We had a farm located where Hogtown Creek goes underneath the surface to the aquifer. It's called Haile's Sink, and I think it has other names too. That's where Hogtown Creek ends. Also, this farm was where Kanapaha Pond was located. The County now has a park there and they also have Kanapaha Treatment Plant. GRU is located there. We sold this piece of property in about 1940 or 1941 to a Mr. Dickinson. He sold half of it I think to Mr. Proctor. At that time land in Gainesville was not worth too much. When we sold the land, which was a little bit more than a section of land, it sold for \$15.00/acre. At that time that was a pretty good price for Gainesville land.

B: As I remember, your family also sold the old farm that was located where the Law School is now, to the University of Florida.

P: Yes. When I was getting ready to go to medical school, Dr. John Tigert and Mr. A.P. Black talked to my mother about possibly buying the farm that had been in the family for a long time. This land was adjacent to the University on Newberry Road. The University bought the land, which was about 90 acres, and on this land they have built the tennis courts, a number of fraternities, and the Law School. We enjoyed having it as a farm but I think the University decided they needed it more for the growth of the University and so we sold it to them and that helped put me through medical school.

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B: Dr. Pinkoson, when you came here to start your practice in Eye, Ear, Nose, and Throat, how many Gainesville doctors were specializing in that?

P: When I came to Gainesville there were three doctors practicing Eye, Ear, Nose, and Throat: Dr. D. T. Smith, Dr. Albert Love, and Dr. Scott were in partnership. For a while Dr. Smith and I practiced in the same building. After I'd been here about a year, my mother decided to move to Dallas to be with my sisters. That left her old house on University Avenue vacant so I moved my practice over there. We renovated the old house and I stayed there for about ten years. After that I moved over near Alachua General Hospital and stayed there until I retired in 1985.

B: When you started practicing in 1951, would you like to tell us what an office visit cost in relation to what it cost when you retired in 1985?

P: When I came back in 1951, fees were quite low. At that time an Ear, Nose, and Throat visit ran about \$3.00. If you did an eye exam, which usually took about an hour, then that fee was about \$10.00. Also, salaries were very low so fees were also very low. Of course, at that time, \$1.00 was worth much more than it is now. School teachers at that time were making probably about \$100.00/month. If you made no more than that you still didn't have any trouble buying groceries because they were certainly very reasonable. The cost of living was low. Eye, Ear, Nose, and Throat had changed so that most doctors did either ophthalmology or did ear, nose, and throat work (otorhinolaryngology). So, in 1966 I quit doing ear, nose, and throat work and just did ophthalmology. At that time my practice was located on S.W. 4th Avenue near Alachua General Hospital. When I first started in practice the hospital was located on 10th Street and I think probably had a little over 100 beds. They had a small emergency room and I know when my wife had her appendectomy, a private room cost \$14.00/day. So, things as I said were very reasonable in 1951. Also, insurance at that time was very reasonable. Everything was such that it was really a blessing to live here. Most people didn't make much money, but you didn't need too much. Most people were very happy. As I said, the medical school had not started, so there were only about 20 doctors when I started. It gradually built up. After the medical school came in, that attracted a lot of doctors and some of the doctors who attended the medical school decided to stay in Gainesville because it was such a wonderful town. Also, doctors on the outside, because the medical school was here and later the V.A. Hospital, were attracted here. Now I would say that probably we have around 1,000 doctors in Gainesville. The medical practice in Gainesville and the hospital facilities are certainly first class and it is a blessing to live in a town where you know that if you get sick, although it is quite expensive to be ill, you get first class care.

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B: A time or two you mentioned farming concerning your family. Would you like to tell us about some of the farms and where they were and how people farmed then in relation to how they farm now?

P: As I said, my granddaddy had a farm on University Avenue and as my daddy grew up, he also bought some land. When I was a boy we had a farm that was located where the Law School is. We had a few cows there. Later on we bought a farm out where Hogtown Creek and Kanapaha Lake are located. We had some cattle out there. We also acquired a farm that was on what used to be Michigan Avenue and the Millhopper Road, now 43rd Street. Michigan Avenue later became 16th Blvd., so the farm was located in that location. In the winter time we'd drive the few cows that we had from Kanapaha Farm over to the one that we had on the Millhopper because they had things that they could eat in the winter time at that place. The Millhopper farm is now where the Barnett Bank and the Marketplace Shopping Center are located, so things have changed in that area. When my wife and I had lived here for a year or two, we decided to build a house there and we moved out off of 16th Blvd. At that time 16th Blvd. was a dirt road. However, we had heard that soon it would be paved, so we knew that not only could we go to town on a paved road from 16th Blvd. but we could go on the Millhopper Road and we would have two ways to get to town. At that time, we lived about four miles from the office and it seemed like we were very far out in the country. Nowadays it is close to the middle of town. We have enjoyed living out in that area and seeing the town grow. It certainly has grown a lot. When I first came back here, the farming business was certainly much bigger than it is now, but with increasing costs of labor and materials, Alachua County is not quite the farming center that it used to be. Although there are still a lot of fine farmers, there are just not as many as there used to be.

B: You said that you grew up on University Avenue. Would you tell us how it was back in the 30's in relation to how it is now in the 90's?

P: We moved to University Avenue in 1930. At that time University Avenue was a two lane street. Across the street from us is what was known as the Theta Chi House and on each side of us was a vacant lot. On that lot they had beautiful oak trees. After we had lived there for a while, the lot on our left side became a bowling alley and the lot on our right side became a filling station. We had some mighty fine people associated with that filling station, one of them being Mr. Bynum, whom I used to see from time to time and he tells me that he used to talk to my granddaddy from time to time. Mr. Perry, my grandfather, had a stroke and he loved to sit out on the front porch after he had recovered enough to get around a little bit and watch the cars go by and talk to people like Mr. Bynum when they came by. The thing that we probably enjoyed most is we used to love to see the parades from the University. Every now and then after a football game or before a football game they'd have what is called freshman shirttail parades or pajama parades, particularly if they had a victory. They were

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all happy, and they'd go down and sing and dance in front of the movies and hope that they'd let them come in and see the movie. I think that after a while they did start letting them come in and see the movie, just to keep things quiet and let them enjoy the celebration. Living on University Avenue was really a treat and not only did my granddaddy like to see the people go by but so did everyone in the family. We enjoyed living on University Avenue.

B: Would you like to tell us about how the Atlantic Coast Line Train used to come through the middle of town on Main Street and go by the courthouse.

P: As I understand it, they used to have a regulation saying that the train had to go through town no faster than a man could walk. The train would come slowly through town and every now and then they'd have to almost back up to get through town. When they got to the middle of town they'd stop at the train station and people would get off. I understand the White House Hotel was near where the train stopped so some of the people would get off, have a meal, and then get back on the train and continue on to Jacksonville if they were heading north. The train went right through the middle of Main Street and if you were going east to west or west to east, if the train was there, you either had to stop or turn right or left and go around the train. Then they also had one a little further west called the T&J Railroad and it also went right across University Avenue, about the 600 block. It could also cause a little congestion. That train station was where the Santa Fe Junior College is now located. The trains used to be a big part in Gainesville's life and that is probably the reason that the county seat was moved from Newnansville to Gainesville. That was one of the fortunate things, that Gainesville was a big railroad center for a while. Now, I don't think passenger service is even available in Gainesville. It certainly was something that we enjoyed for many years.

B: Dr. Pinkoson, we thank you so much for your time. We will have this transcribed for editing by you.

P: Thank you.