

MATHESON HISTORICAL MUSEUM
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Interviewee: Shirley Swearingen Gregory

Interviewer: Bob Clayton

Transcriber: Ruth C. Marston

December 13, 2004

C: My name is Bob Clayton. Today is December 13, 2004, and we are at the home of Shirley Swearingen Gregory. Shirley, this interview is being done under the auspices of the Matheson Historical Museum. It will be transcribed and written about Alachua County and Gainesville, Florida. First of all, for our report, Ms Gregory and I were in the same class at Gainesville High School, but she learned a lot more than I did. Where were your parents from originally? How did they get to Gainesville?

G: My father was born in Gainesville, and my mother was born in Aucilla, Florida.

C: Your father's name was?

G: Thomas Jackson Swearingen, Jr.

C: Your mother was a what before she became a Swearingen?

G: A Bishop.

C: She was a Bishop, and she was from the Aucilla Bishop's that ended up in Gainesville?

G: Dr. John Bishop was her father.

C: Did he have other Bishop's in town that were related to him?

G: No.

C: Buster and Howard and that crowd were not related?

G: Those were his children and grandchildren. Not Buster. He had 9 children. One boy died when he was two years old, but the rest of them lived. There were Bernays, Constance, Pixie or Millicent, Donald, Howard, Wilbur, Shirley, and John. Oh, I left out my Aunt Elise. She belongs up there after my mother.

C: Pixie was your mother.

G: Yes.

C: Her name was Millicent, like your sister's name.

G: Yes.

C: Your sister was my partner cheerleading at Gainesville High School. That was a long time ago. What did your dad do here in Gainesville?

G: He did several things. He was a pharmacist and then he was a fireman and an electrician.

C: Most of the family settled here in Gainesville, didn't they, or did you have any that lived very far from Gainesville? Your mother's brothers and sisters – did most of them settle here?

G: Most of them did, or they lived here a good many years before they moved on. My Uncle Donald was here and he went to work for Prudential Insurance. The reason they left was he got a promotion to move to another city.

C: Some of them you mentioned, like Wilbur and Howard and Bernays, certainly settled here and were part of the Gainesville history. Now, when were you born?

G: October 1, 1927.

C: You're telling everything, aren't you!

G: I certainly am. I have to tell them all, so they'll realize how old I am.

C: Where were you born? Here in Gainesville?

G: Yes.

C: Whereabouts? In the hospital or at home?

G: Alachua General.

C: You were born in a hospital. Pretty fancy.

G: Dr. Thomas was here then.

C: W.C. Thomas.

G: My grandfather had died then.

C: Where did you live?

G: Well, I know we lived in one of the little houses over on Pleasant Street. Do you remember where Louie Burkham lived over there? My Uncle Howard lived in this house that my mother lived in before he did.

C: That was on Pleasant, but was it in the northeast section of town?

G: It was in northwest because that's 3rd Street.

C: It's west of Main.

G: Yes. That would be 3rd Street now.

C: Seminary Lane dead-ended into Pleasant Street, if I'm not mistaken.

G: Yes.

C: That's 5th Avenue, where Seminary Lane was. Who were some of the folks that lived in that neighborhood?

G: I don't know any of them. I was two years old when we left there and moved back to my grandmother's house over by The Park.

C: When was that when you moved there?

G: That was in 1929 when we moved back to my grandmother's.

C: Which was where?

G: It was what used to be Seminary Street and old Virginia Avenue, in the northeast section of Gainesville, right behind the First Methodist Church.

C: Oh yes.

G: We didn't have a name for it then. We called it The Park. After I left Gainesville and came back, I found out it had a name.

C: Do you mean the park behind the Methodist Church? I don't know right now what the name of it is. I never knew it had a name.

G: Well, it has one now, but I've forgotten what it is.

C: I guess that's called progress.

G: Oh yeah.

C: Is the house that you moved into from the hospital still there?

G: Yes, it's still there.

C: And the house you moved to when you were two years old – is it still there?

G: Yes it is.

C: Do they look pretty much the same?

G: Well, a young man has bought the Bishop house there by The Park, and he has gone in and renovated it and done a lot of things, but he has kept everything possible exactly like it was.

C: Do you know his name?

G: Bill Johnson. He works for the city.

C: When you started school, where was your first class? Do you remember what building?

G: At Kirby-Smith.

C: Out in East Gainesville?

G: Yes.

C: Across from where the Matheson Museum is. It used to be the American Legion.

G: I think they used to call that Eastside, didn't they?

C: That was Eastside School.

G: Eastside Elementary School.

C: Yes. You went there to how many grades?

G: We went there five grades because the 6th grade they were remodeling that school, and we had class at the Boy Scout hut behind the First Methodist Church.

C: That's right. I went the first semester at Epworth Hall at the First Methodist Church. The second semester was in the Scout hut, and Miss Crater, I think, was my teacher for the second semester. Helen Davis was the teacher for the first semester. Did you have Miss Crater?

G: We had Mrs. Williams.

C: Did you go in the morning or afternoon?

G: We went in the afternoon. We played Monopoly all morning.

C: I went in the morning. That's why we had different teachers in the same classroom. Give me the names of some of your teachers that you remember.

G: Well, Miss Hammond was my 1st grade teacher. Free Duncan was my 2nd grade teacher. Lucretia Thompson was my 3rd grade teacher. Miss Pinnell was the 4th. My 5th grade teacher was Mrs. Lindsey, and my 6th grade teacher, of course, was Mrs. Williams.

C: Of course, you know this is a test! We're just checking to see how your memory is! You're passing so far. Now, after the 6th grade, my wild guess would be that you went to G.H.S. in the 7th grade and you graduated from high school in that same building.

G: Right.

C: Who were some of your classmates? Do you remember the names of some of them?

G: There was Martha Nell Tison, Carolyn Powell, Isabel Smith, June Johnson, Elizabeth Shaw, Glen Hathaway, Paul Everett, Bobby Clayton. I'm really racking my brains out.

C: Billy Bashaw.

G: Billy Bashaw, and who was the Hale boy?

C: J.N. Hale.

G: He would run down the hall and holler, and Mrs. Roberts would go out there and try to quiet him down.

C: That was the worst thing that we did back there was to maybe yell and run down the hall, compared to what they do now. Now, I remember who they were, but tell our audience who were your best friends back then?

G: My best friends? There were about five or six of us that hung around together most of the time. They were Isabel Smith, Carolyn Powell, June Johnson, Elizabeth Shaw, and Martha Nell Tison.

C: A motley crew, if I ever heard one.

G: We had all kinds of personalities in there. You know that. Whatever kind you were looking for, there was one like that.

C: Back then, they did not have girls' sports at G.H.S., if I recall.

G: No, they didn't, and you know I have several G.H.S. annuals or yearbooks from when my mother went to G.H.S., and they had a girls' basketball team and my mother was on that team. Mary Cox was on there and my aunt Kate Daughtry

- that married my uncle Bernays was on there. They were all dressed up and they had their picture in the annual.
- C: Now, you're talking about something that the Matheson Museum would love to have if you could loan it to them.
- G: I have several of them. They were all of Gainesville unless some of them were my father's, but he was in there, too.
- C: That's the kind of thing that the Museum loves to have, and it would be on display and you would get credit for it – "On loan from Shirley Gregory" and so forth. If I recall correctly, only the boys had athletic teams. The girls did have physical "ed".
- G: Yes, we had physical "ed" three days a week. That was where we played volleyball and softball and basketball, but you did that in your physical education class.
- C: On the stage.
- G: On the stage. That's right.
- C: Now, during your lunchtime, do you remember any particular activities going on?
- G: I remember we got in Rex Andrews' car and drove home. Do you remember Rex's Model-A? Somebody told me they used to laugh and watch us. Here was all the smoke coming out the window.
- C: Also, if I recall correctly, during the noon hour there was some jitterbugging going on on the stage.
- G: Yeah, they had music. Not everybody went home for lunch, but most of us did.
- C: I did.
- G: If you came back early, you could go in there and dance.
- C: Can you imagine what that would be like today if they tried that! Now tell me, when you got out of Gainesville High School, what happened to Shirley then?
- G: Well, I went to Florida State College for Women for two years. The University had an extension up in Tallahassee that some of the boys from that area or West Florida came over there to go to school. It was out at Dale Mabrey Field. You could get on a bus and ride to it. Anyway, they officially changed everything in '45 to coed and I came back down to the University of Florida.

C: When did you meet the man of your life?

G: I'm trying to think. I met him in 1947. The reason I remember is because I had a date with the young man that married my sister Millie at the Pike House. He was there that night, and that was the night that our football team beat North Carolina State and they put the bonfire in the middle of University Avenue and everybody was whooping and hollering. I think it was the only game Florida won that year! I met him at the Pike House that night and I was with Jim Armour, who was my date that night. He married my sister.

C: Jim Armour did? And you married Howard Gregory.

G: Yes.

C: What did he do? What was his work?

G: He sold insurance for years.

C: Did you live here in Gainesville?

G: No, we lived in Quincy. Then we moved to Ocala and he went to work in sales. He worked for a hardware/lumber company in sales. Later on he went to work for a big lumber company and he traveled all over to Crystal River and Homosassa.

C: Cox Lumber?

G: Yes, Cox Lumber. That's who he worked for until he got sick.

C: Shirley, tell me about your children. Names, how many, and where they are.

G: We had five children – 3 boys and 2 girls. In order of their births, they are Milton, Elise, Connie, Bishop, and Donald. My middle son (Howard) Bishop passed away two years ago. Milton lives in Ocala; Elise lives in Orlando; Connie is in Oviedo; and my youngest, Donald, lives just southeast of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

C: When did your husband pass away?

G: 1977.

C: Is that when you moved back to Gainesville?

G: No, I moved back to Gainesville in '79.

C: Your mom lived with you for a while, didn't she?

G: When I moved here, she lived in her home at the lake, but she lived with me the last 3 ½ years of her life.

C: I remember meeting her here. Going back to your school days, on the athletic things, since the girls were not involved, who were some of the boy athletes on the football team? You mentioned Glen Hathaway. I know he was.

G: John Cox, Duck Cawthon, Harold Wallace, and Lee Scruggs.

C: John Cox and Lee Scruggs were also in your class. I remember that.

G: Yes. Paul Everett, I think, played.

C: Coolidge Davis.

G: Yeah. My brother played high school football when Buster Bishop, my cousin, played. Mother would get us all in the car and we could go to Ocala to the games or to Jacksonville. We went to a good many of the football games. All the Davis's played, so I have to stop and think exactly who was in there.

C: I know that the more names you've mentioned – and you've done a great job of mentioning names – all these are cross-referenced. Other people mention those same names. Lee Scruggs may be mentioned by six other people in the oral history program.

G: Did J.B. play?

C: I think J.B. played guard or something like that. Jim Bishop. Now, I'm asking you to bare your soul now. What did you all do for fun back then in your spare time, other than getting in Rex's car and driving?

G: Well, let's see.

C: For instance, on a Saturday afternoon or a Saturday morning, what went on?

G: Most of the time, some of the girls just usually got together and just gossiped, I guess you'd call it now.

C: But you see, not being a girl, I didn't know what went on.

G: Well, we just talked and gossiped about what was going on at school and who was going with who and whatever. All that kind of stuff.

C: Who had a car? Did any of you all have a car?

G: Not that they owned, but we could always get a car.

C: Just borrow your folks' car and ride along University Avenue to see what guys were hanging around in front of the Florida Theater.

G: Back then, when the University was all a men's college, the University people would stand out there with their rat caps on and thumb rides back to the University and we could pick them up and ride them back out there and pick them up and bring them back. They were always going to the theater, to the Florida Theater.

C: Do you remember what theaters we had back then?

G: Of course, at first we only had the Florida and the Lyric. We went to the Lyric as kids. You'd put your nickel in and go to the movies on a Saturday morning. Then they built the State Theater down from the Florida Theater.

C: I don't know whether you read the advance sheet or not, but the final question is going to be "In your opinion, what do you think has been the biggest changes that you've seen in Gainesville?"

G: Well, I just simply have to say, "Bigness." The city gets bigger and bigger and bigger. The University is bigger. There are more people here. When you have 48,000 students here, there weren't even that many people that lived in Gainesville when we were growing up.

C: That's true.

G: Everything has spread. It has spread and spread and spread.

C: You have to have a car now to get around town.

G: Absolutely.

C: It used to be you could almost walk from home to school, except those that went to P.K. Yonge. That was too far. Shirley, can you think of anything we haven't covered about your life that you don't mind going down in history. You'll be famous after this! You realize that, don't you?

G: I really can't think of anything.

C: Thank you very much, Shirley.