

MATHESON MUSEUM, INC.

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Interviewee: Betty Thomas Graham

Interviewer: Mary Ann Cofrin

Transcriber: Ruth C. Marston

May 12, 2004

C: My name is Mary Ann Cofrin, and I am interviewing Betty Thomas Graham for the Matheson Museum, at the Lee Graham home on Kingsley Lake near Starke, Florida. Will you please state your full name and birth date for the tape?

G: I am Betty Thomas Graham, and I was born April 9, 1920, in San Francisco, California. My father was in the Army (Medical Corps) and stationed there.

C: Your parents' names were?

G: Margaret Smith Thomas and William Clark Thomas.

C: Who were Dr. Thomas's parents?

G: Dr. William Anderson Thomas and Bona Virginia Thomas, Bartow, Georgia.

C: He was a doctor, and most of his family lived in Georgia?

G: Yes. My mother was a Smith. She was Sarah Margaret Smith. My parents lived across the street from each other in Bartow, Georgia.

C: And Bartow is located near what?

G: Near Louisville, Georgia. At one time it was the capitol of Georgia and had a slave market in the middle of town, in Jefferson County.

C: So your father came to Florida in what year?

G: 1924.

C: He was married then?

G: Yes, he was married in 1918.

C: So he brought his bride to Gainesville.

G: His wife, son and twin daughters – Billy (William Clark Thomas, Jr.), and Betty and Virginia.

C: What is Virginia's middle name?

G: No middle name.

C: And you had no middle name?

G: That's right.

C: You were born in 1920 in California. How did your father and mother get to California?

G: By train. There were no commercial planes then. My father had been in World War I. He was a medical doctor and stationed in San Francisco. Then he was sent to the Philippines, and we all went to the Philippines when Virginia and I were just a few months old. Three babies on the ship.

C: Now, your older brother.

G: He was just a year old when we were born. William Clark Thomas, Jr., and his birth date is April 7, 1919. We were born on April 9, 1920, so that was three babies.

C: My goodness! Tell me what you remember about the Philippines, if anything.

G: Nothing. Living in the Philippines saved Mother's life because she had all kinds of help – houseboys, amahs, cook, etc. After a year in the Philippines, the family went to China for a year, and Mother had good help there, too. I don't remember any of it. My brother says he remembers a few things, but we were about two, I think. We were three when we came back to the United States. Billy was four.

C: Did you come directly to Gainesville?

G: No, we went to Bartow, Georgia. Daddy was still in the medical service and was sent to West Point for a year. While Daddy was at West Point, Mother and we children stayed with our grandmothers in Bartow. They lived across the street from each other. He went up for just a year and came home when he could. He traveled by train, of course. They wanted to settle down, and Mother's sister lived in Bartow, Florida, so he went to Bartow, Florida, to consult about going into practice. On the way down he stopped in Gainesville at Glass's Drug Store on the Square. A man sitting at the soda fountain started talking with him. It turned out he was Dr. Bishop. He said, "If you don't find what you want in Bartow, come on back here, because I can use some help." So Daddy decided to come to Gainesville.

C: What was Dr. Bishop's full name? Do you know?

G: Dr. John Bishop. Shirley Lazonby was his daughter, and Pixie (Millicent) Swearingen, and Elise Sebring. Her husband was a judge. His sons were Bernays, Howard and Donald. Dr. Bishop was not in good health at that time, and he died soon after we came here.

C: So you think you came here right at 1924, and you would have been four years old. You remember that.

G: Yes.

C: We have a wonderful article that I will make a copy of and attach to this interview. It tells about the early days of doctors in Gainesville. There were ten, it says here, and they are listed: Dr. Bishop; J.M. Dell, Sr.; Dr. DePass; Dr. Lassiter; Dr. Wright; Dr. J. Lee Summerlin; Dr. Smith; Dr. Hodges; Dr. Colson; and Dr. Elmore. I'm not familiar with all those names, are you?

G: Not Dr. Wright, but the other names are familiar.

C: Are you familiar with Dr. Elmore?

G: Oh yes. The Elmore's were a well-known family.

C: Anyway, this is a very interesting article. It tells about where the two hospitals were. One of them was owned by Mrs. Williams and was on old Roper. It gives the address in here. That was for white folks only, and then there was another one called Mrs. Jenny Rowe, and she was in the 1000 block of N.W. 3rd St., and that was for the colored folks. It tells about the early days of medicine and about Dr. Thomas performing the first operation at the new Alachua General in 1927, so he wasn't here very long, and they had only fifty beds. I will attach and that tells the whole thing. Now, how long did your father live? Do you remember what year he died?

G: He died in 1972, at 81.

C: He was a very distinguished doctor here and was loved by everyone in the town of Gainesville. I remember a lot of things about him. You probably remember the stories about him. Mother used to say when he would come to the house; he would sit down for a minute and the next thing you'd know he had dozed off.

G: That was true.

C: I guess he didn't have a lot of sleep in those days. Anyway, tell me some stories that you know about your dad.

G: Well, many of the stories about him are in a little book entitled "His Hand was on My Shoulder" by two nurses, Faye Thomas and Virginia Perkins.

C: I have heard of that book. I'll find out if they have one at the Matheson and they may.

G.: People have said that he would stop by their house and go to the refrigerator to get a glass of milk. One lady said, "You mean you charge me for that visit?" He ate a large piece of pie, as well as a large glass of milk.

C: I also heard that he sometimes fell asleep while driving. Is that true?

G: Yes. Once, he felt a hand on his shoulder, shaking him awake. He opened his eyes and a train was right in front of him on Main Street. He said he knew whose hand was on his shoulder.

C: It kept him from crashing into the train.

G: That's right.

C: He was always available to everybody. You didn't see a lot of him at home growing up.

G: No. We were not allowed to use the telephone for social visiting, because patients would call the house looking for him, so the telephone was mostly for business. We could use it but we couldn't socialize on it.

C: So tell me what your early memories of Gainesville are.

G: Life in Gainesville, I felt, was a very happy time for me. I remember it as an ice cream town. Almost every drug store had a soda fountain, so if you went to the drug store, that meant going for ice cream, mostly chocolate and vanilla and strawberry. Many years later, when my children came along, there was Howard Johnson's with 22 varieties of ice cream! The Pine Grove Inn, which is no longer there, but was in a pine grove near University Terrace, was where one could get a butter pecan shortie, butter pecan ice cream with chocolate syrup. Good! Then there was Thrasher's, which was near the Gainesville High School. Then Wise moved next to the Florida Theater. Glass's was one of the early drug stores, right across the street from the courthouse on University Avenue.

C: Where did you go to school?

G: I went to Westside School, which was Gainesville High School. It had grades 1-12.

C: Where did you live?

G: We lived on University Terrace, out toward the University.

C: That was about one block from what is now 13th Street?

G: Yes.

C: University Terrace was a dead-end going north from University Avenue.

G: The Addison Pound's, the Cox's and the Erdman West's lived there.

C: Who were your best friends?

G: Many of the first graders went all twelve grades through high school with us. Jack McGriff, Gordon Johnson, David McRoy, and Ralph Turlington were some of them. When we reached 9th grade, we went to P.K. Yonge Laboratory School, where we attended grades 9-12.

C: You changed to P.K. in the 9th Grade.

G: Yes.

C: You and Virginia were always very close?

G: Ginger (Virginia) and I did nearly everything together. I never knew what it was like to be lonely. We were not identical but we did look alike. My grandmother called one day and she said, "Which one of you is across the street?"

We lived on University Terrace until we were in the 7th grade. Then we moved to a house by the Duck Pond. In the 9th grade we started going to P.K. Yonge. The Eastside School just went through the 7th grade, so we met students from the other side of town then. Olive Dell, Ann Crago, and Lee Graham were special friends. We knew them throughout high school.

C: They were your age or a year older?

G: Same age.

C: Lee was the same age as you? Did you date Lee in high school?

G: Yes. We sat together in the 9th grade at P.K. Yonge. We didn't go steady, but we always did things together. We had feelings for each other. It was not until he had graduated from the University of Florida and went into the service that he asked me if I would wait for him when he could get out of the service and I said yes.

C: Tell me, did you participate in sports in school?

G: Our major sport was ballroom dancing. Gainesville was a fun place to grow up in those days. The University was not coeducational. We danced every weekend. The Woman's Club had a group called the Little Women. My mother was a Woman's Club member so I became a member of Little Women. They put on nice dances. We invited about three boys to every girl. Mary Parker McCraw taught ballroom dancing for a number of years, and most of us enjoyed those classes. So we had a grand time with dancing and social life. There were a

- couple of high school sororities and fraternities. I was active in L.S.S. Many boys were in Aran Akbar. All put on dances.
- C: I suppose they had a high school football team. Do you remember much about that?
- G: There was a football team at Gainesville High School, but not at P.K. Yonge.
- C: Did you have any special teachers in grade school or high school that stand out in your mind?
- G: Mrs. Clara Olson taught Latin at Gainesville High School. The White sisters were outstanding, as was Dorothy Smith in math. Mrs. Boutelle taught English. Mr. Hal Lewis in social studies introduced us to the state prison at Raiford. Mrs. Broward Culpepper was a great favorite at P.K. Yonge. Clara J. Carson put on the operettas and operas. I enjoyed it. Sometimes I played the piano. I had music lessons from Mary Hyatt McCaughan for a number of years. She is now in her 90's and in Tallahassee. Her mind is sharp.
- The Davitt girls moved across the Duck Pond from us when they moved to Gainesville when we were in the 7th or 8th grade. Mary was my age, and Louise a little younger. May married Gordon Johnson from my 1st grade class. Louise married Winston Summerlin, who grew up in Gainesville.
- C: Who do you remember in your neighborhood?
- G: The Davitt girls – Mary and Louise. Josephine Stock, Peggy Reynolds, Betty Jackson, Betty Esslinger, Eloise Smith – all nearby. Then May Hampton was up on Oak Street. Martha Baxter, Jane Bishop and Mary Swearingen were nearby. We used to skate together. The park was a great place for skating. Claire Tillman and Yvonne Cody lived near the park.
- C: That's right, and it was right behind the Methodist Church. Then the old airport. Did you ever go out in that area?
- G: Yes, Stengel Field.
- C: Now it's one of the big parks in Gainesville.
- G: I remember that Carl Stengel rode a motorcycle and he flew an airplane. He was on the police force, I believe.
- C: Did you know him? Was he around your age?
- G: No, he was older.

C: Do you remember the fire in Gainesville in 1938?

G: Downtown? Oh yes.

C: Did you get to go see it? A lot of people I know did get to go see it. It was in the middle of the night.

G: No, I saw it the next day. They've built nice stores, but I have fond memories of the way it was before the fire. I remember the courthouse and then the important stores around it. Wilson's, Geiger's, Burnetts Mens Clothing, Glass's Drug Store, Stock's, Woolworth's, The Thomas Hardware, Tench's Shoe Store, Cox Furniture, Chitty's, Smith & Hooper's, McCrory's, Piggly Wiggly, Baird Hardware, etc. Then Leibowitz-Edelstein's was down the street and had really nice clothes.

I remember Burnett's so well. Betty Burnett was a couple years younger than I. Her mother was one of Gainesville's favorite ladies, as were Mrs. Lucia Gibbs. Mrs. Addison Pound (Annie), and Mrs. M.M. Parrish.

C: And then on the east side was the Phifer Bank?

G: Phifer Bank and then McCrory's Five & Ten. Baird Hardware was there, and Fred Borland had the Piggly Wiggly in there.

C: Well, we've pretty well walked around the square. We've covered that very well. There were some other stores not too far away. Tell me a little bit about your brother growing up, your older brother. You said he was just a year older. Were you fairly close growing up?

G: Well, Bill skipped the 2nd grade, so he became two years ahead of us in school. He didn't go to P.K. Yonge. He stayed at G.H.S. the whole time. He graduated and went to the University of Florida and then during the war, just before World War II, he went to Cornell Medical School. He was in New York until he went in the Army and was sent overseas. Golf was his first love.

C: Had he finished his medical degree before the war?

G: No, he had some more work to do at Cornell and the New York Hospital. At the end of the war, he returned to Gainesville long enough to marry Brenda Wiltshire from Argentina, and they went back to New York. He graduated, then went to Johns Hopkins for an internship and then came back to Gainesville. He and Lee's brother, Henry Graham, practiced medicine together for a while. They had been to Cornell and had the same teachers and thought a lot alike. Billy was never interested in obstetrics. He liked to find out why things worked the way they did. Golf and medicine were his two interests.

C: Now you finished high school, and we've talked about the fun you had dancing and you and your sister going to Little Women dances and high school sorority dances.

G: Oh yes. L.S.S.

C: They had high school sororities back then, which are now banned. They've been banned for many, many years.

G: We had a good time.

C: Then you finished high school.

G: That was in 1938.

C: Just before the war started.

G: Virginia and I were fortunate in that we went to Arlington Hall Junior College in Washington, D.C. and to be in Washington at that time was very interesting. People in government – we got to see them at meetings and were invited to different affairs in Washington. Roosevelt was in office. We went to the White House for teas. Lex Green, from Starke, invited us to a number of events.

C: Who is Lex Green?

G: He was a Congressman on Capitol Hill for many years. His son, Buzzy Green, is a judge in Gainesville.

Peter Marshall came out to have services. He was the famous Presbyterian minister with a Scottish accent. Even later, when Lee went to seminary, a friend of mine and I went to Peter Marshall's Presbyterian Church on Sunday evening while our husbands stayed home with our children. In Washington, you put on a hat wherever you went in the city. I remember the first football games in Gainesville that I went to at the University of Florida, we wore hats and gloves. We were outfitted in Gainesville, too.

C: Hot as it was.

G: As hot as it was, we dressed up. Some things have really changed.

C: You mentioned football games at Gainesville. That was when you were in high school that you went with a University student. It wouldn't have been Lee because he was your age.

- G: That's right. Lee said the seniors in high school – the boys – went hunting and fishing.
- C: And the girls dated the University boys.
- G: That was the first year that mother would let me go with a University boy.
- C: Any special beau from the University that you recall or was Lee the special one?
- G: Oh, Lee was the special one. Helen Smith Graham and I double-dated a lot. She was in our high school class, too. She was going with Bobby Bodiford, and I was dating his stepbrother, Chester Bigger. Helen Bodiford, the mother of Bobby, was Chester's stepmother. We did things together all the time until Bill Graham came on the scene.
- C: Bill Graham, by the way, is Lee Graham's first cousin, and we have interviewed Bill Graham. It's very complicated to keep all these Graham's straight, I'll tell you that. So then your sister and you were in Tallahassee for your final two years.
- G: We both had jobs with the Department of Education, really the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. I enjoyed it.
- C: Now, did Virginia stay in town too and you lived together and got an apartment?
- G: We rented a house with two other secretaries. One was Gov. Spessard Holland's secretary. The other was secretary to the state director of the Highway Patrol.
- C: What was your degree?
- G: I had an AB in English; Virginia a BS. Both us went back one semester for a secretarial course, "War Emergency Secretary", at Florida State College for Women. We had fun working in the Capitol, seeing everybody and feeling the excitement.
- C: That would have been just about the beginning of World War II.
- G: Yes.
- C: And you stayed there for how long?
- G: We graduated from college in '42. Virginia didn't stay but one year and then left and married Grover Alison in Gainesville. I stayed on for another year.
- C: So you were waiting for Lee to come back home.

G: Lee had graduated from the University of Florida in June 1942 and received a commission through ROTC, so entered the service as an officer.

C: So when did you get married?

G: August 1, 1945, when he came back from China. In China, his job was really to help Chinese troops learn how to use American equipment. There was some fighting, and the Japanese were nearby. John Alison, of Gainesville, was over there flying with the Flying Tigers, so he saw him. Wade Hampton was stationed over there, so they saw each other.

C: That was quite an experience. Well, Lee is being interviewed as we speak, so there will also be an oral history on Lee Graham, named after his father.

Do you remember much about the theaters in Gainesville when you were growing up? Movie theaters were always a big thing, weren't they?

G: Yes. We weren't allowed, when I was really young, to go often, but I remember there was a Lyric Theater on Main Street near the post office. I remember Elise Bishop Sebring used to play the piano. She was one of Dr. Bishop's daughters. Then the Florida Theater opened on University Avenue.

C: Did they have the Saturday morning matinees when you were growing up in Gainesville?

G: Not that I remember.

C: Do you remember much about war rationing when you were in Tallahassee? That would have affected you.

G: Gas rationing, meat and sugar. Each of us, as working girls, had coupons, so we got along fine. When Lee and I got married, food was still rationed but a lady at the hospital, Alachua General Hospital, was a friend of Daddy's and she said, "I'll make the wedding cake," because she had sugar.

C: You were married in Gainesville?

G: Yes, at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church. I was raised in the Baptist Church, but our minister, Dr. McCall, was out of town for the summer, and this was the 1st of August 1945. A dear friend, Rev. Mr. Stoney, was in Alabama but Bill Stoney came back for the wedding and did the ceremony at Holy Trinity.

C: And Lee's family was Episcopalian.

G: Yes, and Lee had always been very active there. He said that he grew up there and this will be in his story. Elizabeth Shands was the youth director. She was so

- enthusiastic and he told her years later, “Elizabeth, you were one of the reasons that I stayed active in the Episcopal Church,” and she cried.
- C: How much older than you and Lee was she?
- G: Six or eight years older.
- C: She was interviewed a long time ago. In fact, I did her
- G: She’s had her 90th birthday.
- C: Okay, you and Lee got married and you stayed in Gainesville?
- G: No, he was still in the service. We have not lived in Gainesville since we were married. The war wasn’t over. He was sent to Fort Polk, Louisiana. It used to be Camp Polk. Soon the war was officially over, and he was accepted at Virginia Seminary, in Alexandria, Virginia, to study for the priesthood, in October 1945.
- C: Did you know that this was going to be his calling?
- G: Yes, he told me beforehand. I said, “I don’t see how I can possibly be a minister’s wife.” He said, “Well, if you want to marry me, that’s what you’ll have to be.” It has been a wonderful life. We’ve met so many fine people, and we’ve always had a pleasant place to live.
- C: So you were married before he went to seminary.
- G: Yes. We were in Alexandria, Virginia, for three years during his seminary training, and I enjoyed living there. I worked in the office at Park Fairfax, a housing development near the seminary. They were very nice to seminary students and their wives.
- C: Now tell me about your children.
- G: Our first child, Marian, was born while we were in Virginia. She was named after her grandmother Graham (Mrs. Lee Graham, Sr.).
- C: That was Lee’s mother.
- G: We moved to Florida when Lee graduated. We were in Panama City for a few months and then sent to Port St. Joe, a delightful little town. We enjoyed being there. Some of Lee’s relations lived there – Virginia Towson and her mother, Mrs. Harry Towson (Sue). It was a small town, but everywhere you go in the church, you meet wonderful people. It has been a good experience. Our second child, Bill, was born in Gainesville, but our residence was Port St. Joe.

C: You came home just for the birth and Bill was delivered by Dr. Winston Summerlin.

G: That's right.

C: But back in Port St. Joe, you were telling me about a garden.

G: Port St. Joe was a mill town and yards were neglected. Many of the residents didn't expect to be there long. Two or three ladies and I formed the Garden Club. I wrote a regular column for the newspaper, with garden notes about what to do when it was time to plant, etc. That was fun. Lee said I did all the writing and he got out and did the digging. We planted pine trees all over town. There were practically no trees there, so we got a big load of pine trees and planted trees. Some years later, a friend on her Christmas card said, "Betty, I want you to know that my pine tree is so big." I'm so proud of that.

C: So you really got a great thing going.

G: We really did. Many there had Coca Cola bottles around their flowerbeds and things like that. One lady said, "I had no idea what to do. I wanted things to be pretty, but I didn't know what to do." We encouraged her. She went to flower shows and ended up opening a flower shop. It just made her life.

It was in Port St. Joe that Bill developed polio.

C: He was named for your father – William Clark Thomas Graham. How old was he when he developed polio?

G: He had his second birthday in the hospital.

The pediatrician came over and looked at Bill. He held him and said, "He has every symptom of polio." I just said, "Thank goodness!" He told me later, "You made the strangest remark. I've never had a mother respond that way." I thought he had encephalitis.

Warm Springs was having an epidemic of chicken pox so refused to take new patients.

C: So you couldn't get him in Warm Springs?

G: He was in the Tallahassee Hospital for a month, and then in Miami at Variety Hospital for three months. He finally was allowed to come home and finally learned to walk by pushing Marion's doll carriage. Marion was twenty months older than Bill.

Lee got a call to Birmingham, Alabama. We said, "Perhaps we can get proper medical attention in a bigger city," so we went there and we loved Birmingham. That year Lee received a call to a new church in Crestline – an area of Birmingham, Alabama. The medical facilities were better there, so we went.

Lee III was born in October 1951.

C: So now the children were Marion, Bill and Lee.

G: While in Birmingham, we added two more sons, both red-headed, to the family. Jimmy and Robert (James Herschel on January 21, 1956, and Robert Andrew on December 21, 1957).

C: Well, tell me about Birmingham. Marion was going to school there, I guess. How did Bill get along?

G: He got along fine and was full of enthusiasm for school. In spite of having polio, he was athletically inclined. In junior high, he was the manager of one of the teams – football – although he was in a wheelchair at that time. He finally had surgery at Warm Springs to stabilize his legs. But he has always been very enthusiastic about sports and music and things like that. He couldn't play any sports, but he got his letter.

They didn't have integration. It wasn't begun until the last of our stay up there. That was a rough time. It was especially rough on Lee because the people in our area, a lovely area of Birmingham, were very determined not to have any blacks. The schools were not integrated because there were no black people living in our area, and there was no busing. Most of the people were determined not to have any integration.

C: So none of the schools were integrated then. This would be in the 60's.

G: Yes, in the early 60's. No, they were not. When they tried to integrate the University of Alabama, Lee was scheduled to preach the baccalaureate sermon at the same time that the governor said that he would stand in the doorway and there would not be a black person admitted. We were very apprehensive, but we had police cars all around us. There was no riot. But when Lee was called to Tallahassee's St. John's Episcopal Church, we thought it would be good.

C: What year did he go to Tallahassee?

G: In February 1964 we moved to Tallahassee. It was good to see the American flag again. The Confederate flag was being flown in Alabama.

C: I guess Alabama was more segregationist than Florida was. There was still trouble, though, I guess, all over the country.

G: Oh yes. In Tallahassee schools were integrated. But in Tallahassee, with the black college there, you have an intellectual black community, with more PHD degrees than a lot of places, well-educated people, and that makes a difference.

C: So when you moved back to Florida, you had five children. You were a busy lady. You were a busy, busy mother and didn't have time to think about working or doing anything.

G: My life didn't revolve just around children. In Birmingham, I was active in church activities and served as chairman of Christian Social Relations for the Diocese. That job required speaking at various churches at a difficult time. Serious Bible reading became a part of my life. I was also active in getting groups to visit mental patients and encourage changes in mental hospitals. Good changes were made.

C: Are your children married?

G: Yes. Everybody except Marion. She has gone into missionary work, and is living in Romania. We went to see her last year over there and it was delightful. She has been sick recently and came home to have some surgery. Somebody from Romania called every day. She is still in the United States and won't go back until this fall.

C: The four boys are all married.

G: Yes. We have five grandchildren. Jim married a girl who had a little boy, so he adopted him. He's our only boy.

C: Oh my. After you had all those boys.

G: We have four granddaughters. The two older girls went to Vanderbilt. The oldest one, Jessica, graduated from the University of Florida Medical School one week and the next week she was married in Tallahassee. She went into OB/GYN. She tried to find something else that would be less confining but it turned her on. Both my grandfather and my father were in it. So she's at Chapel Hill now. She's married and her husband is being very patient with her, but she is looking for another field to go into, maybe fertility or something like that.

The second granddaughter, Elizabeth, – we call her Ellie – is in Atlanta and enjoyed working there.

These are Bill's two daughters. Three others haven't finished school yet.

C: This is one of Jim's children?

G: Yes. Lee doesn't have any children. He lives in Atlanta and Robert lives in Charlottesville, Virginia.

C: So you've got them scattered around. You've got lots of places to visit, haven't you?

G: Yes, but they all like to come here to Kingsley Lake.

C: Now you come to Kingsley Lake every summer for just one month.

G: Right. To clean up and make repairs.

C: And all the family comes while you're here.

G: Yes, and afterwards, too. We have a cottage out back – the little house – where we usually stay.

C: And you use Lee's mother's house, too?

G: No, we don't. It hasn't been kept up.

C: But you have room for everybody. That's good. You must look forward to that every year.

G: We do.

C: But you don't come into Gainesville much.

G: We don't have time with everybody out here. We mainly get to the grocery store in Starke.

C: Well, Gainesville has changed a lot. I guess you see that.

G: That's true.

C: You see a lot of changes that you like or not.

G: Yes. Gainesville and the University of Florida are beautiful.

C: And your sister, where does she live?

G: She's no longer living. She lived in Tallahassee, but died ten years ago.

C: She had children?

G: Three. Her children stay close to our family.

C: So they're all grown, I guess.

G: Right. Margaret Wiles and John Alison. John lives in St. Augustine; the other son, Tom, lives in Tampa. They come to Tallahassee fairly often and always stay at our house.

C: Can you think of anything we've omitted that you want to tell me or tell the Matheson Museum?

G: After being in Tallahassee for nearly 20 years, we moved to Memphis, Tennessee, where Lee had a position at a downtown church – Calvary. I was very involved with the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill and helped get NAMI established in Memphis. We were able to get a training program for police to handle the mentally ill more realistically and humanely. While in Tallahassee, I also participated in ministry to the mentally ill. This seems to be a calling for me.

I would also like to mention another organization I have been involved with – Faith at Work. I have participated in workshops for Faith at Work in the past.

Both of these organizations have enriched my life.

C: We didn't talk a lot about your mother. She was a wonderful lady and active in so many things in Gainesville.

G: Her life was answering the telephone and taking care of the family. One night she knelt to say her prayers and heard herself saying, "This is Mrs. Thomas speaking."

C: Wonderful! The other thing we didn't talk about, because I know your Dad took your family to the mountains every summer.

G: Oh yes, Waynesville, No. Carolina.

C: You went for a month or just two weeks?

G: He took my mother, but Virginia and I went to camp. My brother stayed with my cousin in Georgia. They had four boys and one girl. Their daughter stayed with us in the summer.

C: So you didn't get to go to the mountains all the time.

G: That was Mother's vacation. We went to Camp Mt. Mitchell, which was up in the mountains.

C: I understand they played bridge a lot.

G: Oh they did, but that was after I was grown. Mother didn't play cards growing up. We were grown and married when Lee said, "You ought to play cards." She said, "Maybe I should. I guess the children are grown and I don't really think it's a sin to play cards." She had been raised that it was a sin.

C: Right.

G: She learned to play cards and was very good at it. She had a good mathematical mind. She really enjoyed it and made it pleasant for Daddy. The Jackson's next door enjoyed playing at any hour, so when Daddy would come in at 9:00 or 9:30 they would get them over to play cards for a couple of hours.

C: Your dad had already played bridge.

G: Oh many years. He had to have something to help him relax.

C: So he probably played with some men?

G: No, he played bridge mostly with neighbors and played golf with men friends. He played bridge up at the Bishop's house. The Bishop's were on the corner of Seminary Street near the Duck Pond, and he would stop by there to play bridge. If you were big enough to stand up at the card table, then you learned to shuffle and you played. Shirley was there and Pixie was there. It was just a good time.

C: Pixie was your father's secretary?

G: Office manager and secretary.

C: This has been a pleasure. I have enjoyed it so much and I hope you have.

G: I have, but I've talked too long.

C: No, you haven't. We could go on and on. If you think of anything we've left out, we can certainly add it. We can make any corrections, and we'll give you a final copy. The Matheson Museum appreciates what you're doing for us. Thank you so very much.

G: I started coming out to the lake with Olive Dell Ryder when we were really quite young and her aunt lived in this spot.

C: Oh, did she? Who would her aunt have been?

G: Mrs. Joe Wilson from Starke. Mrs. Wilson's parents built the first cottage here. The Sam Dell, Seniors, spent their honeymoon in a tent right out here in front. Years later, Olive and I were very close, but when you get married and have

children, you move on to other things, but once she was up here and her son had one child named Olive and one named Sam. I would hear them call from the dock, "Olive, Sam," and I thought those spirits are just hovering over this lot because you would hear the same names being called down through the years.

C: I like to hear family names. They don't do it too much any more, but I think it's a nice heritage to have all those family names.

We could talk on, but thank you again.