

UFLC 32

Interviewee: Donald T. Senterfitt

Interviewer: Denise Stobbie

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Donald T. Senterfitt is an eminent Florida counselor, particularly to banking institutions. He has served as the chairman of the executive committee of SunBank, Inc., the holding company for SunBank, and vice-chairman of the board of Sun Trust Banks, a partnership with Trust Company of Georgia. He has also served as president of the American Bankers Association.

Senterfitt was born in Marianna, Florida, on September 28, 1919. The family moved often, since his father was a Baptist minister, but they eventually settled in Brooksville. After graduation from high school, Senterfitt earned a degree in 1941 in economics at Carson-Newman College in Jefferson, Tennessee. He was also a member of the debate team and ran the campus book store.

He then went to Washington, DC, where he worked first as an elevator operator at what is now the Richard B. Russell Senate Office Building. He later worked in the office of Senator Charles O. Andrews of Florida. Senterfitt attended law school at George Washington University in the evenings.

When World War II broke out, he was classified 4F, but, with the help of the surgeon general of the army, he managed to enlist in the general service in 1941. Senterfitt recalls listening to F. D. Roosevelt's "Day of Infamy" speech before a joint session of Congress after the attack on Pearl Harbor, as well as a speech by Winston Churchill before a joint session. Senterfitt later secured an appointment to Officer Candidate School, where he trained in the tank destroyer corps. He recounts his military service.

He returned from the war in June 1946. Senator Andrews was ill and passed away a short time later, so Senterfitt moved to Gainesville to attend law school at the University of Florida. He volunteered at a local law office for experience. Senterfitt discusses such topics as his professors and courses, enrollment, women students, Harold Crosby's notes. He completed his degree in 1948.

Senterfitt wanted to work in Orlando, and he wrote letters to law firms there in search of employment. J. Thomas Gurney, Sr., had recently opened his own practice, and Senterfitt went to work for Gurney. Most of the work was in insurance. In 1951 Senterfitt formed a partnership with a former classmate, Nat Turnbull. Six years later they merged with Akerman, Dial & Akerman, a firm that represented banks. Dial had been general counsel for the Florida Bankers Association, and Senterfitt took over that work. In 1966 they founded SunBank, Inc., the holding company for SunBank. In 1977 they formed a partnership with Trust Company of Georgia which became Sun Trust Banks. Senterfitt was vice-chairman of that board from 1981.

Senterfitt discusses changes in Florida banking, especially mergers, agriculture, energy, customer service, and interstate and international banking. He notes that since Florida banks are so well diversified a downturn in one area, as agriculture, has not caused significant damage to banks' integrity. He credits backgrounds in economics and law with helping him in banking. Senterfitt has little time for leisure activities,

commenting that he truly enjoys his work.

[Donald T. Senterfitt is identified as *S*, and Denise Stobbie as *D*.]

D: Please state your full name.

S: Donald T. Senterfitt.

D: And residence?

S: 1801 South Summerlin Avenue in Orlando.

D: Your birthdate?

S: September 28, 1919.

D: Birthplace?

S: Marianna, Florida. That is in Jackson County.

D: Where were you raised?

S: I grew up several places around the state. My father was a Baptist minister and so we moved from time to time. I was born in Marianna, where my family had lived for several years before I was born. I left there at about age six or seven when we went to Lake City, and I lived there for a year and a half, approximately. From there we went to Crescent City. We were there only a very short time, a little less than a year, and then moved to Brooksville where I really grew up. I went on through grade school and completed high school there. So that is where I grew up. After high school, I moved to Jacksonville. My mother and father did not move there at that time; they came later. But I went there because I had a sister and brother-in-law living there, and I went there to find employment so as to try to save up some money to be able to go to college.

D: So you worked in Jacksonville?

S: Yes, for a year, principally at a real estate and rental agency there. At the time it was called Burbridge & Higby. Then from there I went on to college in Tennessee.

D: What were your plans? You wanted to go to college. Did you know what you wanted to study at that time?

S: I had a pretty good idea that I wanted to go into law at that time. I was not positive, and it was not an absolute burning thing. It was an impression or a conclusion that I had reached.

D: In high school?

S: It is hard to say. I guess to a degree it may have started in high school.

D: Did anyone encourage you to study law? Are there any lawyers in the family?

S: No.

D: What did your father do?

S: My father was a minister.

D: Oh, that is right.

S: A Baptist minister.

D: You just became interested in the law.

S: Yes.

D: Then you went off to Tennessee.

S: That is right, to Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Tennessee. That is a little town about thirty miles northeast of Knoxville. It was a rather small school at the time. It is still not huge, but much larger than when I was there.

D: Is that a church-related school?

S: It is a church-related school. Yes, there are literally scores of church-related, smaller colleges in Tennessee, and that is one of them.

D: Why did you choose to go to Tennessee rather than stay in Florida?

S: I had two brothers who had attended there before me, but that was only part of the reason. I really had thought that I would like to go to Stetson, where my father went to school. I went down and talked to the president of the university in Deland, and they were willing to offer me a scholarship and employment. I also talked to the president of Carson-Newman, and they were not in the position to offer me either a scholarship or employment, at least for the first year, and no absolute assurance of it thereafter. But even so, it was less expensive to go to

Carson-Newman than it was to Stetson, so I went there. I cannot tell you exactly why I did not give any serious consideration to the University of Florida at the time. The choice was mostly between Stetson and Carson-Newman.

D: You had some ties at both of those places. So you went off to Tennessee. What did you study there?

S: I majored in economics. I was on the debating team there and later was employed, I think, my second year. I finished in three years because I went straight through. I guess my employment might have started the summer after my first full year. I was running the small college bookstore there.

D: So you went to school full-time and worked?

S: Yes.

D: You had worked for a year after high school and then went away to college?

S: Yes.

D: Did your interest in law stay with you when you attended Carson-Newman?

S: Yes, and I enjoyed the debating work there.

D: Do you think that helped to prepare you for law?

S: I think so, although not for law as such. It gave me some experience in the give-and-take of debate, which is frequently involved in trial practice, at any rate.

D: You earned your degree in 1941. Did you enroll right away at George Washington?

S: No, I guess it was almost right away. I had been drafted, so I went home and went out to Camp Blanding to be inducted in the army. I was turned down for physical reasons, so I came back to my sister and brother-in-law's house, packed a bag, and got on a Greyhound bus and went to Washington. I walked into the office of Senator Charles O. Andrews, who at that time was the senior United States senator from Florida, and told him I wanted a job because I wanted to go to law school. He had known my father; my father and he had known each other years and years before.

I first got a job in what they call his "patronage," operating an elevator in the senate office building. At that time, there was only one senate office building; there are now three. That is now called the Russell Senate Office building, named after the late former senator from Georgia. Then I had a

chance to go on the capitol police force. I was going to enroll in George Washington University's law school and go to law school at night. I went on the police force and continued to go to law school and then moved to Senator Andrews's office as an aide. At that time, they did not have the size staffs they have now. On the administrative staff, there was what they called a secretary and then an assistant secretary, and I was assistant secretary. I was the second man on. It was a combination of administrative staff and legislative staff.

At that time, the only staff were of the secretarial type, that is, typing and that sort of thing.

D: So you moved right up.

S: People were going into the service before I did. I wanted to go into the service, but I did not want to go in as limited service which looked like the only possibility. The wife of the senior secretary in the office was secretary to the assistant surgeon general of the army, and she arranged for him to interview me to see if he thought that I could go in on general service. He did, and he sent a directive out to the induction center, I think it was at Fort Myer, Virginia, though I am not positive. It was one of those right outside the district. So I was able to enlist as general service.

When I headed back to the office, Senator Andrews was right peeved at me, because during a lot of the time that I had been there (the war had already started) a lot of what we were doing was processing applications or helping people process their applications for direct commissions into the service. He said to me, "All of the people that we have helped get direct commissions, and you go off and enlist." But that was the way I wanted to do it. If I could earn a commission, that would be fine, but I did not want to get it through political influence.

D: So you enlisted and fought them.

S: Yes. I decided though that since the war had already started I should go. I was very fortunate being on his staff. I was able to be in the house gallery when President Roosevelt made his declaration of war addressed to the joint session of Congress – the "Day of Infamy" speech. I stayed there and heard the vote in the house. The one, lone dissenting vote was a female member of the House. Then I went over to the Senate gallery and heard the vote there. So it was quite an interesting time.

D: That was the vote whether to declare war?

S: Declare war, yes. I was also able to be in the gallery when Winston Churchill addressed the joint session. That was a very interesting experience as well.

D: So you were getting a good background while working there.

S: Oh, yes.

D: Let me go back for a minute now. How long did you operate the elevator?

S: I do not remember.

D: Just a short time?

S: A relatively short time. This was all very compressed. I went up there the summer of 1941, and it was a little over a year and a half total that I was there. I went in the service in the late fall of 1942.

D: When did you enroll in law school at George Washington [University]?

S: Just shortly after I got there.

D: So maybe that fall of 1941.

S: It could have been. See, they had a continuous session. George Washington, being a school located in the District [of Columbia], they had a huge night program going as well as a day program, and it just ran year round. I went up there probably in June, I guess, but I do not have any clear recollection. It was very shortly after I went up there that I started. I had been accustomed to going to school year round at my undergraduate school, so I started in with whatever they had at the time. It was probably summer school.

D: Did you have any idea maybe from working in the elevator how close we were to going to war? Did you ever hear anything?

S: Of course, we read and heard on the radio news reports of what was going on over in Europe and what the Nazis were doing in some of the surrounding countries. We were disturbed by it, hoping, of course, though, that it would not occur. But then came the Pearl Harbor attack, and that was it.

D: So even before Pearl Harbor it was pretty big in the news?

S: Oh, yes, what was happening in Europe and to some extent the Japanese build-up.

D: So you were working in Senator Andrews's office during the Pearl Harbor attack?

S: I was, yes. By that time I was in his office.

D: And you were in law school at night. When did you leave Washington for military service?

S: It would have been, I guess, late fall of 1942.

D: So the war was already pretty well under way at that time. Did you serve overseas?

S: Oh, yes. When I first enlisted I asked for and was assigned to a relatively new branch of the service, a tank destroyer corps. That was principally headquartered at what was then Camp Hood, Texas. So I was out there. Later I went to Officer Candidate School and earned a commission there as a second lieutenant in tank destroyers. I served in a couple of locations at Camp Hood and at North Camp Hood, and then later at Camp Atterbery, Indiana, just outside of Indianapolis. There was apparently an anticipation of the invasion of Europe by the United States forces. They began moving people out of their branches of the service – anti-aircraft, tank destroyers, and others – into infantry. So I was sent to a special school for infantry officers at Fort Benning and then back to Camp Blanding, where I trained recruits, new inductees into the army.

I then went overseas and got over there in time to join the 108th Division in the Ardennes. After the Battle [of the Bulge], the 108th Division was nearly wiped out. We were reconstituted as a regimental combat team and went back on the attack. It was during that time that I was hit. I went through field hospitals, the hospital in Paris, and back to the United Kingdom. I was in a hospital for a total of about six months, I guess. By that time, the European war was over, so I was on occupation duty for some period of time until I came back home June 1, 1946, I believe.

D: So you remained on occupation duty until the end of the war?

S: Well, the war was totally over before I got back. I had missed out in a number of engagements in which to acquire points to go home while I was in the hospital, so I stayed on occupation duty until the latter part of May of 1946.

I returned and went directly to Washington and back to Senator Andrews's office. He fell ill and was in the [U.S.] Naval Hospital in Bethesda, Maryland. It was obvious that he was not going to be able to run for re-election because of his health, so I decided then to come back to Florida to the University and finish law school. The only way I could stay up there was because I had the job. I was driving down to Florida, and on the way I heard on the radio that Senator Andrews had died [September 18, 1946]. So I came on into Gainesville and registered.

D: You went directly to Gainesville, then? Did you know if you would have work there? Had you made any arrangements?

- S: No. At that point I had a little bit of money saved from being in the service. I did have veteran's school benefits. I also was planning to be married. The lady that I was going to marry was working in Jacksonville, and I knew that she could get employment in Gainesville. With the two together, I thought that I could make it all right.
- D: So you moved to Gainesville. Where did you live when you first got there?
- S: In Alachua.
- D: You did? Outside of town.
- S: Yes. Before going to Gainesville, and before leaving Senator Andrew's office, I had some contacts with a businessman in Gainesville that was going to build a four-unit apartment house, very plain, on what was then West Masonic [Street] (SW Second Avenue). It was supposed to be ready by the time I got there, but with construction delays and all it was not ready. So I found a room in a tiny little hotel – dignified with that term – in Alachua, and I moved in there. I took evening meals at a little boarding house up the street from the hotel. The hotel did not have any dining facilities. It did well to have anything.
- D: That is a pretty good distance. How did you commute?
- S: I had a car. Later, I sold it while I was in law school.
- D: Then did you eventually move into Gainesville?
- S: Yes, when the apartment building was completed. It was just a small four-unit apartment house. By that time I was married. For a little while the brand new wife was in that little room out there in Alachua, but it was not long before the apartment was ready, and we moved in there.
- D: What was your wife's name?
- S: My wife at that time (I am no longer married to her) was Theda. I have since then remarried.
- D: So you came back, married, and then enrolled in law school?
- S: I had enrolled in law school before that. I had enrolled in law school for the fall semester. I was going to law school while living out in Alachua.
- D: So you were already in school. You had a bit of a jump on veterans returning

who still had undergraduate school to finish up. I have noticed a little bit down here about lines or things like that when you enrolled. Do you remember the admissions process?

S: Yes, it was very smooth. Again, I had known Mrs. Pridgen, Ila Pridgen [librarian, College of Law library].

D: You knew her?

S: Yes, for a number of years. As a matter of fact, I ran into her son in Europe during the occupation. I called her from Washington, from Senator Andrew's office, and told her I wanted to enroll. So she had it about all prepared when I got there. I did not stand in any lines.

D: She was a good person to know. From what I have heard, she pretty much ran the place.

S: Oh, yes. I think there is a lot of truth to that.

D: So you enrolled. Do you remember seeing lines on the general part of the campus?

S: I seldom went over there.

D: So it was pretty much separated. You stayed at the law school. You did not have any reason to go on to campus?

S: No, I very seldom went over to the other parts of the campus.

D: Where was the apartment you moved to? Was that close to the law school?

S: Yes, it was on West Masonic Street.

D: I wonder where that was. I will have to check into that. Was it within walking distance to the school?

S: Oh, yes. It was about five blocks.

D: Then you had a kitchen, and I imagine you ate your meals at home.

S: Oh, yes.

D: I understand a lot of people lived and ate at boarding houses, like Ma Ramsey's. Did you ever eat there?

S: I never ate there, but I knew about the place.

D: So you started school. How far along were you in law school?

S: I cannot tell you accurately, but it was far enough along that I was able to finish at Florida in February of 1948 by going straight through.

D: And you enrolled in June 1946, or was it that fall?

S: Probably fall.

D: Fall 1946. So just about a year and a half. You had already had your freshman law classes?

S: Yes, and part of the second year, you could say, too.

D: What classes stand out in your mind?

S: The classes, I guess, that stand out in my mind were the course on Evidence and the course on Common Law Pleading.

D: [Clarence J.] Teselle taught Evidence. Who taught Common Law Pleading?

S: Dr. [Clifford W.] Crandall.

D: Were those good courses? Did you learn a lot in there?

S: Yes, they were. They were very good courses. Those two professors stand out in my recollection as well.

D: Compared to George Washington, at that time, was it a small law school?

S: George Washington's enrollment was much larger, particularly because of its evening program. There were lots of people employed in Washington who were doing the same thing I was when I was there, that is, working and going to law school. That is not the only one. I would guess, though, the majority of their students were. So its enrollment was much larger on that account. I do not know that its day program would have been significantly larger. I really do not know what the numbers were.

As far as a campus, George Washington is located in downtown Washington, so it had no spread-out campus. It had a lot of buildings for the whole university mostly grouped in a fairly tight area, but some of them were a little scattered. The law school was in one or two buildings on, I think,

- Seventeenth Street, Northwest. But I cannot remember positively about that.
- D: You said the number of students in the classrooms varied. Did it seem crowded to you to the classes?
- S: Well, some of them were. Some of them were held in the second-floor auditorium of the old law school. The other classes were fairly full, but the number of students in any particular class varied from class to class.
- D: By the time you entered University of Florida was the curriculum set for you, or could you choose electives? Could you decide what you were going to take?
- S: There may have been. I think Common Law Pleading was probably a requirement, and there may have been one or two others, but I had reached the point where for the most part I could select the courses I wanted. A lot of that stuff is a little hazy in my mind now.
- D: It has only been almost forty years; I cannot imagine why.
- S: And very little has happened since then.
- D: You entered University of Florida when a lot of other returning veterans were finishing their undergraduate degrees. While you were at the College of Law did you notice increasing enrollment by the time you graduated?
- S: I guess some, but not any overwhelming numbers.
- D: And it was the beginning if 1948 when you graduated?
- S: In February, early February I might say. So I really completed the first semester of that full year, I guess, in the latter part of January.
- D: Were you readily accepted by other students, being a transfer student?
- S: Yes. I did not notice any difference. A lot of them had been in the service at that time and had been away. Some of them knew each other from before. I knew very few of them from earlier on. But there was no difference in acceptance that I was aware of.
- D: How had you known Mrs. Pridgen?
- S: That is lost in antiquity. I do not remember exactly what it was, but she had some contact with Senator Andrew's office from time to time. I got to knowing her through that.

D: Was she the dean's secretary at that time?

S: She was in the dean's office. I was not sure whether she was his secretary or his mentor.

D: Going back to that second-floor auditorium that you mentioned at the law school, was that the court room?

S: I guess it was.

D: Was it set up like a court room?

S: Well, it had mostly theater-type seating in it. And I guess there was a bench up there.

D: We have seen a picture from the 1930s or 1940s, and there was a jury box and a judge's bench.

S: I guess there was, but I never did participate in the practice court things. I had a couple of classes there, but I was not in there an awful lot except for those classes.

D: I know you said you did not have any practical experience. Was practice court optional?

S: Oh, yes.

D: Was that an extra-curricular activity?

S: I do not know whether they got credit for it or not. I would assume they must have gotten some sort of credit. But I opted to go to work in a law office downtown. He was a sole practitioner. (For the life of me that name escapes me at the moment. It will probably come to me in the middle of the night.) But he was also, I believe, in the state legislature, or had been. In any event, I worked without any salary. I told him I would be willing to work there just for what practical experience I could get. So I did, and I got a great deal of practical experience out of that.

D: So you worked there throughout law school?

S: I do not think I started immediately, but I started very soon after arriving in Gainesville.

D: You did not get paid?

- S: No. That did not bother me. I had enough to get by on; I did not have anything to spare, but enough to get by on. I was more interested in the experience that I would get and what I could learn than I was in trying to earn extra dollars.
- D: So that occupied most of your time, then, between school and work. You were not involved in student government?
- S: No.
- D: In your classes, do you remember women students?
- S: Yes, there were not many, but there were a few. I am going to say two or three. That is about all I remember. There may have been more in some classes that I was not in.
- D: What about your classes at George Washington? Were there women there?
- S: Yes, there were a few, but, again, [it was] predominantly male.
- D: Did [women] students stand out if they were called on in class?
- S: Well, I do not recall at George Washington, but at Florida they did about as well as anyone else. There was nothing particularly stellar about them, but neither were they idiots, by any means. I can recall specifically only one really. She was from Key West, and she had a brother in school at the same time, I think.
- D: They were not given a hard time or anything like that?
- S: No. As Chesterfield Smith said to you, it was a fairly mature bunch of students there. Most of us had been out for about four years, and the wartime experiences did a lot.
- D: What would you say the average age was in your classes?
- S: Oh, let me see. I started when I was about twenty-seven. I guess there were some younger ones who had not been in the service that long or had not been in it at all. But I would think that most of them, or a good many of them, were around the same age that I was, from twenty-five to twenty-eight.
- D: Tell me a little bit about the comparison you made about your schooling at George Washington and at UF. Were you challenged in your classes?
- S: I would say in some of them. Some of them were almost totally lectures. There were others that required student participation pretty heavily. Evidence, for

example, and occasionally in Professor [James W.] Day's Real Property courses.

That was a good course, too. I would say that one stands out as well, and he was an excellent professor. But most of us bought Hal Crosby's notes, too. I do not know if you have ever heard of those or not.

D: No.

S: Hal Crosby was a law student who was also very proficient at shorthand and typing. He made a lot of money by selecting courses, ones that would lend themselves to that, taking copious notes in shorthand in class, and transcribing them. Then he sold them for about twenty-five dollars each. A lot of students bought them. That was not a crib thing; it was just something that you could review as you got on toward examination time. You took your own notes, as well, in class, and in the margins of your book you take case notes and all that. Hal earned a fair amount of money at that, and they were very helpful to those of us that used them.

D: So he took the notes when he had the class and sold them. Now, was this done behind professors' backs?

S: No, I do not think so. I think that it was pretty well known. It was nothing. There was not any cribbing or anything of the sort involved in it. It was simply a secondary source of studying for the course. If he did any editorializing or drawing of conclusions you did not always agree with it. But he did not do a great deal of that. He mostly gave what the professor's thoughts were.

D: That is interesting. And that was pretty widespread, law students' buying his notes?

S: A lot of them did, yes.

D: I imagine that was quite a sum of money back then.

S: I was in one of the classes that he was in, and he would turn his notes out from time to time, not just at the end of the year. As far as I can recall, the only one that I used was his Real Property.

D: For Day's course?

S: Yes.

D: Professor TeSelle, when you were there, must have been getting pretty old.

S: Well, anybody over fifty looked old to us at age twenty-six or seven. But yes, I

think he was getting a little feeble. He walked with a cane, but he was pretty tough.

D: He was?

S: Oh yes. I do not mean he was anything but fair; he just was a tough professor. You did not go into that class unprepared. I would rather cut the class than to go to it unprepared.

D: Did he call on you in class?

S: Oh, yes.

D: How did you do in there?

S: I think I did fairly well. That was one of my better courses. I did not have a perfect examination paper, but it was very close to it.

D: Did you study a lot?

S: Law school was a business for me. The time I was not working in the law office I was studying. I had lost time, and I just did not feel that I had any time to waste. Plus, I wanted to do as well I could because I realized that my whole future depended on it. So I spent a good bit of time studying.

D: How did you do? Were you satisfied with your final scores?

S: Yes. I would have liked to have done better in some of them.

D: Did you study in the library?

S: Occasionally. Most of the time I studied at home on the table in the kitchen that we had.

D: Were most of the professors at that time, I do not want to say old, but getting up in years? Had most of them been on the faculty a good time?

S: Yes, I guess you would say most of them were. Dr. Day, Mr. Teselle, Crandell, Dean [Harry R.] Trusler, and the professor that taught corporate law, a course on corporations. His name escapes me at the moment. I do not have an annual for that year.

D: This is it. There is a section just on the law school. Here we go. The setup is different. I went through before to see if you were in here, and I did not find your

- picture. Here we go. College of Law.
- S: Maybe they did not pay much attention to us because we were midgets, mid-year graduates. There is Teselle, Day, "Danny" Clark – Vernon Clark, I guess it was. [Dean] Slagle was the one that was getting along in years. [Frank E.] Maloney was a younger one. And of course there is Mrs. Pridgen; she is listed as the librarian.
- D: And who is that? [Stanley L.] West [librarian], I guess.
- S: [Sterling G.] McNees – I do not even remember him. Bertan Andrews, I do not remember him. Stanley West. This annual is amazing to me, how many of them I do not know. Of course, some of them were the June graduates. I did not get out into a lot of the activities.
- D: Was [Frank E.] Maloney teaching when you were there?
- S: Yes, I think right at the last.
- D: Did you ever have any classes with him?
- S: I think I did.
- D: Now, he was just out of law school. Is that right?
- S: I think so. Not very long out of it, anyway.
- D: How was that?
- S: I do not have any outstanding vivid recollections of his class. I remember being in a class of his.
- D: "Legal eagle." Do you remember that, being called legal eagle? I have seen that a couple of places.
- S: No. Yes, people refer to it that way.
- D: Was Dean Trusler teaching when you were there?
- S: It seems to me that he was, but I have a very hazy recollection of it.
- D: Do you remember classes with him? I have heard that he lectured with his eyes closed.
- S: I cannot remember what he taught. Sometimes I think I remember being in a

- class, and other times I am just not very sure at all. Is this the senior class here?
- D: Yes. Did you have any help finding employment when you were getting ready to graduate?
- S: No.
- D: So you did that on your own?
- S: Yes, I did.
- D: And you said you went to work in Orlando. How did you go about finding that job?
- S: I wrote a number of letters. I knew I wanted to come to Orlando, so I did not write anywhere else. I wrote several law firms here in Orlando. I came down and interviewed with maybe two of them. I am really not all that positive. Mr. Gurney, that is, J. Thomas Gurney, Sr., had recently withdrawn from a rather large firm, Giles & Gurney, and was practicing almost solo. He had one associate – well, he was not exactly an associate – who had his offices there and did some of the work that Mr. Gurney had. So I went there. I was the first full-time associate there, and he was a well-established attorney at that time. Giles & Gurney had been one of the largest firms around. Gurney was also chairman of the Board of Control at that time. The time I was down there and interviewed, he had to go up to Gainesville that evening for a Board of Control meeting, I think, the next morning. So I rode back to Gainesville with him in his car. He later extended an offer to me to come to work for him.
- D: That was a prominent law firm, and that was right out of school.
- S: Yes, it was. I was very pleased. I think my starting salary was about \$50 a month higher than the going rate at that time, for some reason I do not know. I was getting \$200 a month.
- D: Wow! From what I have heard, that was good.
- S: A magnificent salary.
- D: Were you prepared, coming out of law school, to begin?
- S: Well, I think the work that I had done in that law office helped me a good bit. But you are never really fully prepared. You are really just beginning the learning process when you finish law school. Law school sort of teaches you how to learn and how to think and to analyze. You could not do without it, but you

picked up an awful lot of it after you get into a practice.

D: Was it a process of self-learning after law school, or did you have someone teaching you the ropes?

S: I do not know exactly how it was in other firms, but Mr. Gurney, for example, did a lot of insurance defense work. One of the clients was Allstate Insurance Company. A lot of these companies used an independent insurance adjuster. The one that we dealt with mostly was a chap named Thomas J. Hollis. He had an insurance adjusting firm. When I first started with Mr. Gurney, a good bit of the work that I did was handling these insurance claims, the defense of the insurance suits, and settling claims before they got to court. I got a lot of practice from that standpoint from the adjuster. Mr. Gurney, of course, supervised what I did and gave a few pointers. But it was mostly the toss in the pot, and you learned how to do it.

D: Did your economics background help you out?

S: Oh, I guess some. As far as I am concerned, pre-law undergraduate work ought to be a broadly based thing and not designed specifically for any profession, in law or otherwise. Maybe it is a little different if you were going into medicine, but I just think you ought to go into whatever interests you – liberal arts, history, and all of those things, and not try to get business law and stuff like that. That does more to confuse you, I think, than anything else.

D: How long did you work there?

S: From February 1948 to the beginning of 1951. It was just short of three years, I think.

D: When you graduated were jobs plentiful?

S: I would not say so. A lot of the people I knew had connections in their home towns, and they sort of gravitated back to those. I did not sample the job market anywhere but Orlando, as I said. I selected Orlando as the place I was going to live, and I was going to find a way to make a living. And I got here.

D: You liked Orlando.

S: Yes.

D: Why? What attracted you?

S: Well, I just thought that it was a nice size place, an attractive place – beautiful, I

would describe it. It was centrally located, and it had a lot going for it. So I decided that is where I wanted to live.

D: So you practiced there for three years.

S: Then a chap named Nat Turnbull, who was in my same class, came to Orlando. I had known Nat; he had been in Senator Andrew's office before I was. He left to go in the service before I did. When he was in the office, I was still on the police force and working part-time in the senator's office. On a patronage job you always have to go up and do some filing or some other work in the senator's office. So I had known Nat there and had seen him once or twice during the course of military service. We spent a lot of time together, he and his wife and my wife and I, at each other's homes.

He was coming to Orlando, and he went to work for Charles Andrews, Jr., the firm of Andrews & Patterson. He and I formed our own firm in 1951 and practiced until mid-1958 as Turnbull & Senterfitt. We had offices in Winter Park, as well as Orlando. It was still a small firm; I think we had only two associates. At the time we merged with the firm of Akerman, Dial & Akerman, and the firm became Akerman, Turnbull & Senterfitt. (Billy Dial was going into the bank over here full-time.) Maybe it was Akerman, Turnbull, Senterfitt & Eidson. Yes, it is.

D: And Mr. Dial went with which bank at that time?

S: Well, at that time it was called the First National Bank at Orlando. It is now SunBank, N.A. There was no holding company at that time. We formed the holding company in 1966.

D: I wanted to ask you about that. Had you already begun to specialize in your law practice?

S: At the time the two firms merged in 1958, I had not. It was a pretty general practice. I was fairly heavy in estate planning, in wills and trusts, but I did a little bit of everything – property work, real property work and litigation.

D: When did you become interested in banking? How did you get involved?

S: Billy Dial had done most of the bank's work. The firm represented the bank. In other words, he was the lead attorney for the bank representation and also for the Florida Bankers Association. I stepped into that role when he left the firm. I was then thrown into it and liked it very much. I liked the banking aspect of it, so over time my world sort of evolved heavily in bank representation and banking law work, representing both the Florida Bankers Association as well as the bank here.

D: That was called First National Bank at Orlando at that time?

- S: The First National Bank at Orlando, at that time, yes.
- D: So when he went with the bank, he stepped down from the other position.
- S: From the law firm.
- D: And representing?
- S: Oh, yes.
- D: And as lead attorney for the Florida Bankers Association. You stayed in that capacity for a long time, from what I have read in your biography.
- S: Yes, I continued to carry that representation until I left the law firm at the end of 1980.
- D: I also read something about Hernando State Bank, that you had worked there, or that you had had an account there.
- S: No, I did not work there. While I was in high school, I opened my first bank account there. I knew Alfred McKethan there. They had a very small bank at the time. It has grown a lot. We have since acquired that bank; it joined the SunBank family. I am on the board of that bank now.
- D: So you just stepped into the banking industry when Mr. Dial left, and decided you liked it and stayed.
- S: So in 1980 – well, earlier than that – we had formed a holding company, and I was one of them. By that time I was a director of the bank, and we had formed a holding company. I was one of the organizing directors of what is now SunBanks, Inc. When it first started off it was First at Orlando Corporation.
- D: You formed the holding company in 1966?
- S: Right, but it became operational in 1967.
- D: How many people were involved in that?
- S: In the holding company formation?
- D: In forming it.
- S: Oh, golly, I am trying to remember. [There were] maybe a dozen directors. I just do not remember for sure.

D: What was your role in that?

S: I was one of the original board of directors on it and worked in connection with its formation.

D: And the holding company is now called SunBank, Incorporated?

S: Yes. Of course, we have since merged with Trust Company of Georgia, and that, what we refer to as the grandfather holding company, is called SunTrust Banks. Long before that, I think in 1977, I think I became chairman of the executive committee of SunBanks. In 1980, they asked me if I would come on board full-time as vice-chairman, and I did on January 1, 1981. I still hold the position at SunBanks, but I am also vice-chairman of SunTrust Banks.

D: Are those separate banks under the holding company? Are those two separate holding companies?

S: Two separate holding companies. The banks in Georgia are still called Trust Company Banks, and the banks in Florida are still called Sun Banks.

D: How many banks were involved when you started this?

S: When we first started?

D: Yes.

S: Five or six.

D: How many are there now?

S: Let me see. I think we have twenty-seven in Florida and about seventeen or eighteen in Georgia. We have over three hundred offices in both states.

D: What was that like for you personally to be involved in the founding of the [SunBanks]?

S: Well, it was very interesting; it was fascinating. These affiliated banks, the ones we started with, the original five or six, were all what are called legal affiliates. The majority of the stock in each of them was owned by the same individuals in the others, so they were legal affiliates. We put those together first and then began adding more after that. That was an interesting process to watch it grow and be a part of its growth.

D: The years that you have been involved in banking, how has banking in Florida

changed?

S: Oh, my, how long do we have? There have been such huge changes taking place, and that have taken place, over that period of time. We have seen the combinations of banks through the enlargement of Barnett [Bank] and Atlantic [National Bank] and the Florida National [Bank] group and many others. That is one part of the changes.

D: The big groups?

S: Yes, the combinations of banks into larger holding company groups. Then there are always battles to be fought in the legislature because various interest groups will be proposing legislation that could be hurtful to the banking industry and the public it serves. So you are fighting those, and also pushing legislative programs for banking. During all that period while I was representing the Florida Bankers Association I did a lot of the lobbying. At first Alfred McKethan was a sort of a volunteer part-time lobbyist, and I used to help him a great deal. Then the Florida Bankers Association engaged a full-time lobbyist in Tallahassee. I still continued to work for them. I did a lot of lobbying work myself and also in the Congress. I enjoyed that, too.

D: Back in Washington?

S: Yes, we get back up there every now and then. And I did a lot of work with the American Bankers Association.

D: You continue to be involved with the American Bankers Association.

S: Rather heavily, yes.

D: Are you serving as president now?

S: Yes.

D: How long is that term of office?

S: Well, I served one year as president-elect and then this year as president. They are each one-year terms.

D: What is that like, the responsibilities that you are taking now?

S: They are pretty heavy. We have many, many legislative and regulatory issues. There are many problems facing banks. The agricultural-sector banks are having severe problems with the past situation in agricultural production and

lending. The energy-oriented banks are beginning to experience problems. We are working constantly on those issues. The so-called tax reform bill has provisions in it that could really be very harmful to the industry as well as to the industry's customers, so we have been working on much of that.

We are commencing on an initiative, that I have started, for expanding the customer service opportunities for banking, that is, for banking to be able to offer a broader array of financially oriented products and services. So we are making a concerted effort to try to get legislative and regulatory authorization to expand what we can offer our customers.

D: It keeps you busy.

S: Yes, it does. It is taking up 85 to 90 percent of my time right now.

D: Overall, what do you consider the status of the industry right now? Are we in pretty good shape?

S: Oh, yes. The industry is sound. There are troubled areas in it, of course. I just mentioned a couple of them. But on balance it is sound and well capitalized as an industry.

D: Being located in Florida, have you expanded into international banking?

S: SunBanks, before we merged with Trust Company, was in international lending, and the Trust Company was to some extent. So we continue to have an involvement in international lending. We have some international exposure to sovereign borrowers as well as to private-sector borrowers. We deal with that in the A.B.A. [American Bankers Association]. (We have to be careful, because A.B.A. also stands for the American Bar Association; they are both called A.B.A. I usually refer to the American Bankers Association.) We are dealing with the problems of the Third World right now.

D: In what way?

S: In seeking to provide some responses to the Baker initiative. Secretary [of State Howard] Baker proposed an initiative at the fairly recent international monetary fund meeting in Seoul to develop and work out solutions to the problems posed by the very heavy Third World debt.

D: Have you also been involved in automating the banking industry?

S: Of course, we have automated a great deal. As an executive officer of the holding company, we have been involved in expanding our automated teller base and getting those ATMs all around the state and in Georgia as well. But I have

not had the day-to-day work in connection with that, in this case on the policy level.

D: It is wonderful. I love those twenty-four-hour tellers.

S: Yes.

D: What do you consider some of your greatest accomplishments in both fields, in law and in banking?

S: I think the greatest thing about it was that I thoroughly enjoyed every bit of both areas. I would not say that I had any major accomplishments. I tried to contribute to both. Some people asked me after I left the law practice and came with the bank full-time if I liked the banking business. I said yes. They said, "Do you like it better than law?" I said, "No, I like both." I have always thoroughly enjoyed what I was doing. So that is it.

D: That is terrific. Did law give you an advantage as you entered banking?

S: Oh, absolutely. There is no question. The analytical requirements of the law are helpful in banking. It is very helpful to have a well-grounded knowledge of the banking laws and regulations. Of course, I had been heavily involved in those. While I was counselor to the Florida Bankers Association I was responsible for drafting most of the banking legislation that is now in the Florida law books, and I recodified the banking code in 1979 and 1980. It has a great many helpful advantages.

D: What about, especially in this area of Orlando, the agriculture problems and freezes that hurt the orange groves? Has that had a big effect on banking?

S: I think nothing can compare with the banks in the Midwest. For one thing, our loan portfolio is much lower. The banks in this area, I think, are much more highly diversified, so an occasional problem with an agricultural loan [is not as detrimental]. We do not have the consequences to the extent that it does to the smaller banks out in the Midwest that have 25 to 50 percent of their loans in agricultural-related loans.

D: So it is not only the farmers that are suffering but the banks as well.

S: Yes, they tend to. But I do not think the Florida banks have had a severe problem on account of the agricultural situation. There may be some over in the Panhandle that are having it a little tougher, and some of the smaller farmers over in the western part of the state are having pretty severe problems, I think. But, again, taking Florida as a whole, its economy is much more diversified, so problems do not become systematic in its effect.

D: It is a good state for banking?

S: Oh, yes. It is a market everybody wants to get into.

D: Is that right? What about the relationship in Florida with banks in New York, or getting involved in any way with that?

S: We have always, of course, had correspondent relationships with our state banks and banks in New York City, and we get along fine with them. The Florida legislature did not want to go with a nationwide interstate banking arrangement that the New York money center banks wanted. But nationwide interstate banking is on its way to reality. It is being done at the state levels. Already about twelve states have enacted laws that will position them for permitting full nationwide interstate banking by 1989, one-half dozen more are considering such legislation. So it is evolving. It should be an evolutionary process rather than revolutionary. The only difference, really, is that the money-center banks recognize that the regionalization concept is an almost necessary transition. The principal difference between their views and the views of many of the state legislators is that they wanted to put a time certain into the bill when they would become open to nationwide banking, and most of the legislature, initially, at least, did not want to do that. They said we will take a look at it later.

The A.B.A. is committed to a position that ultimately there should be nationwide interstate banking permitted and that it really should come about through a planned federal arrangement. But there is no consensus in the A.B.A. for any specific time period or federally mandated requirement for this to come about. It is continuing to happen, but mostly at state levels.

D: As banking gets in to more and more interstate banking, what effect will that have on the consumer, the bank patrons?

S: Well, I think it is going to continue to help. Banks will be able, particularly in the business areas, to handle the loans of growing businesses without having to participate part of those loans out to a bank elsewhere. The maximum amount that can be loaned to a particular borrower is related to a percentage of the bank's capital and surplus. So as they grow larger, then they have higher lending limits.

As far as the consumer goes, there are many advantages. For example, we are working toward, even though we have separate banks in Florida and groups of separate banks in Georgia, the day when if you bank at SunBank you would be able to cash a check at any SunBank in Florida. There is a lot of convenience in that. Or go to the automated teller machine, which you can do now, and get money. As banks continue to combine they will be able to offer a greater variety of services, assuming that we can open up some of the legislative and regulatory strictures on it. But this is not to say that small independently

owned community banks will go away, because they will not, and they should not. They will continue to prosper. There will always be a place for well-managed community banks. There is a place for both.

D: Did you say that you would be able to cash a check at any SunBank? You cannot do that yet?

S: In Florida it is well on its way, especially with the ATMs you can. You can get funds with your plastic. But the rest of it is well on its way. It is in process of full instrumentation. But that requires a huge investment in the data processing end of it. So you go into your own town, and they can immediately punch a button to make sure you have funds to cash a check. It requires a considerably larger investment in equipment, both hardware and software, for a bank in Miami to be able to know whether your bank in Gainesville has available funds in your account.

D: So it sounds like you are involved more with the regulations and the policies now.

S: Well, as president of the American Bankers Association that is a large part of the work, that is, working through the membership to establish the policies and the objectives for the industry as a whole. That is a necessity and one of the principal roles of an elected leader in that association.

D: Was that a goal of yours? To make it to the top of the A.B.A.?

S: Not a long time ago. I looked at the way banking was growing and the problems that it was having, the changes that were taking place, and how we were adapting to them. I thought that we could do better, and I thought that I could provide some leadership in that. So I decided that I would try to get in a position where I could provide that leadership.

D: What about your responsibilities here at SunBank?

S: Well, fortunately I have some very cooperative colleagues who have taken over a lot of the day-to-day work that I was handling before.

D: What did the day-to-day work include?

S: I was involved pretty heavily in the external expansion program of SunBanks, that is, mergers and acquisitions and other sorts of things. The legal department reported to me. For a while the risk management group did; the usual things that have to be done in a position of that sort.

D: What is it like to keep up with a bank this big?

S: It is not easy, particularly when you are gone as much as I am. I am gone for three or four days during the week. When I come back I spend a day and a half just trying to catch up with what is going on.

D: I do not imagine you keep banker's hours.

S: I never have.

D: On days.

S: Weekends. It does not bother me, though, because I enjoy my work. I do not have any particular hobbies. I do not play golf. I do not play tennis anymore. Long since I have had to forego hunting and fishing. I just enjoy what I am doing.

D: You have also been active in the community. Is that right?

S: I have had some involvement. You have my bio. It has got pretty much what I was interested in.

D: And the law firm continues to carry your name?

S: Yes, although I have no connection with it. A number of years before I left there we decided to institutionalize the firm name and settled on Akerman, Senterfitt & Eidson. So I left and agreed to let them continue with that.

D: What are your future plans?

S: I do not have any plans to retire, if that is what you are asking.

D: No. I would not even think of that, not as involved as you are.

S: Of course, I am past what a lot of people think of as the normal retirement age. But I intend to reduce my obligations to the trade association, lighten up and become more heavily involved again in working with the holding companies.

D: I have found in the law profession, and you being an active professional, that there is not a set retirement age. I have been interviewing men who were approaching ninety who were still in the law office. Is part of the secret to stay active?

S: I guess everyone has his own secret, if that is what it can be called. But I think that staying active certainly has a lot to do with it. A lot of people – a number of

people, anyway – who retire do not have anything particular to do. They get tired of playing golf seven days a week pretty quickly, and some of them tend to sort of vegetate. The longer you can stay both physically and mentally active the better off you are. Your muscles will atrophy if you do not use them. It is the same way with your intellect, I suppose.

D: Is there anything else that takes up your time? Do you travel much? Do you allow for any leisure time? Well, leisurely travel I would say.

S: I have not been able to do any leisurely travel, but this job involves tremendous amounts of traveling. The year I was president-elect I think I spoke to twenty-three state bankers associations. I have thus far for this year something like thirty-four or thirty-five major addresses, many of them at state bankers associations. Last week I spoke to the Economics Club of Atlanta, and prior to that I spoke to the Orlando Economics Club. Later I will be speaking to the Florida Economics Club of Tallahassee. So I give presentations not only to banking groups but to non-banking groups as well. I have been a delegate to the International Monetary Conference, and a meeting of that last May was in Hong Kong. I went up early and had some conference with banking officials and government trade officials in Japan and in China. In China I was a guest of the Bank of China and visited their ministry of trade and with their Bank of China officials. This year the International Monetary Conference will be held in Boston. It is an engaging sort of life.

D: So you have not done any leisurely travel. You do enough business related.

S: I get around all over.

D: Do you consider law to still be a background, a good education for anyone considering banking?

S: Oh, absolutely. I think it is a good background for anybody going into almost anything in business.

D: Can you think of anything we have not covered that you would like to talk about?

S: I think that we have pretty well covered the waterfront.

D: So you say your life pretty much revolves around banking?

S: I guess.

D: Sounds like it. It is good you enjoy it. You would be in trouble if you did not.

S: Oh, yes, that is true.

D: You probably would not be in banking if you did not. Well, I certainly appreciate all the time that you have spent.

S: Well, I am glad to do it.

D: You have helped to fill in some blanks about the [law] college's history. It helps to talk to people that were there.

S: I do not know that I have added very much.

[End of the interview]