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Interviewee: Leo Wotitzki

Interviewer: Vernon Peeples

Date: May 5, 2000

P: **Leo Wotitzki** at his home on North Shore Drive in Charlotte Harbor, Florida, May 5, 2000. Leo, while I know a great deal about you and your past, the purpose of this interview is to record a lot of memories of your total life, beginning as early, I guess, as you can remember. So, I will start out by asking you when and where were you born?

W: In Punta Gorda, on May 19, 1912, in the old **Sandlin** house on **Red Esplanade**.

P: And that house is still standing.

W: It is still standing.

P: Do you remember anything of any particular importance, other than your birth, that was occurring about that time?

W: Well, I was pretty significant. [Both laugh.] No, except that my parents had lived over a store that my dad had inherited from his father down on **Marion** Avenue, and it burned in, I think, 1910, and they moved over to the Sandlin house where I was born while they were having a home built on **Gill** Street in Punta Gorda. I was about two weeks old when they moved over there. I do not remember much about living in the Sandlin house.

P: So, you do not remember much about the waterfront view of the Sandlin house.

W: No, I sure do not.

P: The names of your parents, both your father and mother?

W: **Edward** Wotitzki, and my mother's name was **Celia Hart** Wotitzki.

P: And you had one sibling, a brother.

W: **Frank**. He was born October 8, 1916. Like me, he is still navigating. He lives next door to me.

P: What does he do now?

W: That is not easy to answer. He is a lawyer, of course. He has retired, really. He operates his boat, about a forty-two-foot boat. He comes by the office everyday for coffee. He is always pretty active. He belongs to both yacht clubs here and is

fairly active in both of them. Other than that, I do not know what. His wife is not well at all. She has Alzheimer's, and he has a considerable burden there.

P: Leo, your grandparents both came to Punta Gorda at an early date, and I know that you know something about where they came from before they were here. Can you tell us something about that?

W: My mother's parents moved from Philadelphia to Savannah, Georgia, during the Reconstruction right after the Civil War. I remember, for example, my grandmother telling us on numerous occasions how she shook hands with Jefferson Davis one time. Then, they came on to Punta Gorda, must have gotten here in about 1887, 1888. My dad's parents came from New York. They all came from Europe when they were quite young. But, they (my dad's parents) came from New York and went to South Carolina. For what reason, I'll never...

[Break in interview]

W: ...Where were we?

P: You were speaking about your dad's parents.

W: Oh yes, they came to South Carolina, and my grandfather on my father's side must have been a very considerable entrepreneur. He started out there with a pushcart. He did not speak very good English. That was red neck country where it was easy to get killed, yet he was very successful there. He planted rice. What in the name of hell he was doing that, I do not know, but my dad said he did and was successful. That was along the east coast, I guess, in South Carolina, and they all got malaria and had to get out of there. They had seen, I guess, the brochures at the railroad published about opening up Florida, trying to get people in there.

P: Do you remember the name of the town in South Carolina?

W: I think it was **Walterboro**, but I am not positive. I should know.

P: And your grandfather's name?

W: It was Jacob Wotitzki.

P: Now, get back to the railroad.

W: Well, they loaded everything they had into a boxcar including themselves,

according to my dad's story, and came to the end of the railroad line, which was Punta Gorda, [to] a place some of us are fairly familiar with called the Y, where the tracks divided out on the south side of town. He was quite a fellow. He became a successful individual here. They arrived here, I would guess, in 1886 or the early part of 1887 because he was one of those, I believe, who attended the meeting when the group decided to incorporate the town of _____ as Punta Gorda, and that was in 1887. He was very successful, much more successful than my dad ever was.

P: Leo, let me digress a little bit and go back to Jacob Wotitzki and his ancestors. Do you recall where they came from in Europe?

W: Yes and no. The borders of those countries moved around because they were always in war with each other. I am quite sure Prague, which would have been in Czechoslovakia. My dad said that he could speak a little Czech, whatever that was, but that is where they came from. My mother came from probably what is now Poland, and her father came from Germany. He was an interesting individual, too. He was fifteen years old, and he came over here by himself. He had some relative somewhere, and he joined the Army, I guess probably to get a job or something. He wound up out in the Middle West fighting Indians.

P: His name was?

W: His name was Gus, **Gustav** Hart. Who was the American general that got everybody...the Indians killed a whole bunch of them...**Custard**. He was at some fort or camp or something in North or South Dakota and happened not to have to go out the day Custard went out or I would not be here. That is a kind of interesting sidelight on his life. I **brought on the Masonic** _____ and I looked on the old charter that was issued in 1890 something or another, and I see he signed it. So, I know somebody was there who signed his name.

P: You mentioned Jacob Wotitzki participated in the election to incorporate Punta Gorda. Do you remember any stories about that?

W: Sort of indirectly, I guess, Vernon. With **K. B. Harvey** who was, I guess, the ringleader in that group, they all walked to...

P: Pine Level.

W: Pine Level. I cannot remember any names. They all walked to Pine Level to file whatever papers were necessary to incorporate Punta Gorda. That was quite an accomplish too, I guess. More than that, though, I do not recall.

- P: There is a delightful story you told me about your Grandfather Jacob Wotitzki about when he was arrested.
- W: Again, he was kind of a controversial figure anyhow, and apparently he liked to go swimming. Out on the waterfront in Punta Gorda, there were not many people around. Somebody had him arrested and said that he was swimming nude. When they tried him in the municipal court, he said he was not nude, what they saw was the top of his bald head. He was cleared of that charge of indecent exposure.
- P: Do you know where your Grandfather Wotitzki's store was in Punta Gorda?
- W: Yes. That is the one that burned and chased my mother and father out _____ corner right across the street from where the professional center is on Marion Avenue. The professional center is 201 Marion. That would have been 301 Marion Avenue. There is a carwash there now. Sort of diagonally across the street from the Johnson building, which housed the first clerk's office.
- P: Now, your Grandfather Hart's store?
- W: It was down on Red Esplanade on the water. It was kind of a hardware general merchandise. He supplied the commercial fisherman who were around here. He had a dock built out into the bay where they could tie up there boats, called Hart's Dock, but that one, like everything else around here, burned down without any insurance. There was a fellow by the name of **Demry** who had something to do with the port. He had an office upstairs, I guess, in that building, and somehow they set the whole thing on fire and burned my grandfather out. At the same time, it burned the *Punta Gorda Herald*, which was located right on that corner, I think about where the **Pepper House** is. That is the corner across the street on Red Esplanade. But, that burned, the *Punta Gorda Herald* burned. That was, of course, started by my uncle and aunt. He sold it in 1901 to **A. P. Jordan**, but we started in 1893, I believe it was. I do not remember the date. Pretty difficult time for him and my aunt. Then, they rebuilt there on **Cross Street**. Do you remember. Well, Vernon will remember delivering groceries over there to my aunt. She did not hesitate if she wanted a pound of butter or a couple of eggs to call the grocery store on the corner and tell them to rush down there with it.
- P: Now that you mention your aunt, **Laura Wotitzki**, who married **Kerby Seward**, you have mentioned to me before about the problems that marriage created in the family.
- W: Well, first of all, my family was Jewish. My dad's father was not very enthusiastic,

to put it mildly, about her marrying Kerby Seward, one that did not bother much about any of it, I do not think. He was a Baptist, I think. So, when he died, which was a very sudden death—he had some kind of a cerebral hemorrhage or something—he left everything to my dad. My dad set my aunt and her husband up in business, and he wound up his life working for them after his second store burned without insurance.

P: You mentioned, of course, the ethnicity of your family being Jewish. Do you know what problems that caused to either of your grandparents in their early life in Punta Gorda?

W: It did not seem to cause very much, if any at all. A lot of nasty remarks and stuff like that, but dad always had a story to tell those folks. I am not going to tell some of them right now. Pretty scurrilous. But, no, they never caused us any trouble, really. I got elected with the legislature, in spite of all of that. I always have been a little bit outspoken.

P: Were these the only Jewish families in Punta Gorda?

W: Yes. There were no others that I can recall. A kind of interesting thing, it seems that in each one of these small towns, there was one Jewish family. I do not know why they came along. I guess they got a monopoly on business somehow. But, in Arcadia, there was the Rosen family, and one in Fort Myers. Each one of these little towns had one Jewish family. There were not many of us, though.

P: In the case of your Grandfather Jacob Wotitzki, who was very successful, do you know what he could attribute that success to?

W: Just plain drive. He was a self-starter. For example, he went down to what is now Boca Grande on Gasparilla Island and homesteaded a substantial part of that island. I do not know how he got there. He went down on a sailboat, I guess, and the mosquitos were so bad on that island that a person could hardly live. I simply do not know how he did it, but he **proved up** his homestead and owned that property when he died, and my dad proceeded to lose the whole thing. For example, when he started—I have other people tell me this—when he opened his grocery store, grocery and everything else, he would go out with his horse and wagon all over town taking orders for groceries. Then later on, he would fill all those orders and drive around and deliver them later in the day. Sort of like your dad, **Vasco Peoples**, with a grocery store delivering groceries to the fisherman, for the fisherman down to the docks. That is another whole story, too.

P: Was it Jacob Wotitzki who started the trading down the coast, all the way to

Chokoloskee and over to Miami?

W: It was. He had a sailboat. Probably sailed from Europe, I do not know, but he had a sailboat called **Molly Oar**. He and a crew of one periodically sailed down the west coast, from here down through the Keys, on occasions, and around, I think, to where Miami is located, trading with the natives. Kind of a remarkable individual, I am sure. I never did know him. But, he was successful. My dad also ran that thing for awhile. His crew was a fellow by the name of **Oscar Black**. You may have seen him, Vernon. Captain Black. They would go sailing down there, trading. My dad told me that one time they went into where Everglades City is now. It was kind of a place where some outlaws were hanging out. For some reason, they began shooting at them. They, I guess, got out of there, but he was, oh, **Alterman** and those outlaws that robbed banks, some of them were down there, I guess.

P: Alterman and the **Rice** brothers.

W: The Rice brothers. They escaped from all that somehow. He probably was having a few drinks along the way, to make it easy to _____. He did tell me, though, on one occasion they sailed all the way around to where Miami is now, and the water was so shallow there that they had to row. They had a rowboat that they rowed to shore. He, I guess, had a few drinks or something. Anyway, he said he wanted to sleep in a barn. When he woke up, he had a diamond stud. Now, why he ever had that, you know? He said that was gone. He did not know who took it, and he never heard of it again. But, they were pioneers, and I do not know how they survived. Some of those things were right spectacular.

P: I believe there is a story about your father and Captain Black and bad weather?

W: Oh yes. He said they ran into, probably, a hurricane when they were sailing back north along the coast. He said it looked like they might sink. Captain Black got worried and said, the Lord's good and the devil ain't bad, and he kept saying that. They did all kinds of weird things. He said that they captured a few sea turtles by jumping overboard. I do not know how they did it or what they did, but he told me about it. Anyway, they were interesting people, I am sure. Unfortunately, I did not record anything of those stories that they told me. I suppose that some of them probably were adorned a little bit with poetic freedom, but there was a lot of truth in them also.

P: Now, your father grew up in Punta Gorda.

W: Yes. He was, I think, ten or eleven years old. He was born in 1876. That would

have been 1886 or 1887, so he was ten or eleven years old when they got here. My aunt, I think she was a little older than he was. She was probably twelve or thirteen. And he grew up here.

P: What education did he have?

W: My dad? He went to the Citadel in South Carolina and was there, I think, for about three years. He got sick, again with the...there must have been a lot of mosquitos around or something. He came back, but he always kind of proud of that. He said it was the West Point of the South.

P: What education did your mother have?

W: She graduated only from high school in Philadelphia and went to a business college in Philadelphia and learned to do shorthand and typing and that sort of thing, which was a pretty good skill to have back in those days. She went to work when she finished all that, and she was just, probably, a teenager, for **Horn and Heart Arts**. That was a restaurant chain. They had these **automats**, they called them, where you go in and put a quarter in a slot and get a piece of pie and that sort of thing. She worked for them for several years and then came down to Punta Gorda to visit her aunt, Mrs. **Goldstein**, and met my dad. They were married, I guess, the same year, whatever year that was. [In] 1908, I think, they were married. I know they went up to Tampa and spent their honeymoon at the old Tampa Bay Hotel, which is now the University of Tampa.

P: You mentioned the Goldsteins. Tell us who they were.

W: **Well, what was his name?** Anyway, he was the brother of my grandmother, my mother's mother. I cannot tell you really how he came to be here, but he was one of those who arrived very early, opened a store. I think that the furniture store that he opened was right there where **Peoples' IGA** was for a number of years. He had a son, Harry Goldstein, who was another good story.

P: A lot of good stories about Harry.

W: Yes, and most of them are true.

P: His name was **Efrom** Goldstein, and her name was **Frederica**?

W: Her name was Frederica. Yes, I guess that is what his name was. I cannot remember for sure, Vernon, but I think that is correct. There was considerable family of them. They grew up in New York. Again, my grandmother told me one

time that she remembered the streets of New York being decorated **to record** that morning, black drapes and stuff, when Lincoln was killed. I am not sure about the time frame about those things, but she was there then.

P: Which one of your grandmothers spoke German?

W: I never did know either of my dad's parents. My mother's mother spoke Lord knows what, according to my mother. She said her father told her not to listen to the way her mother spoke because it was so bad, that it was a mixture of Hebrew and German and goodness knows what else. He came from Germany. I do not think he had a whole lot of formal education, but he was a pretty bright fellow. He did not want my mother and her sisters to learn to speak whatever language that was that his wife was using when she lapsed back into whatever the original language was. As I told you, she came from, probably, Poland.

P: Do you remember any of her quotes in her language?

W: Some of it was a little bit scurrilous. I remember one of her daughter's (one of my aunts) name was **Jeanette Hackinburg**. Her husband, my grandmother did not like, and I remember being up there one time visiting when he tried to tease my grandmother. He said, Grandma, you are in your second childhood. She said, well, ____, you are in your second jackasshood. That was one of the more mild things that she would say.

P: Is she the one that had a statement about the field marshals?

W: Yes. That was when we would get smart or disagree with her pretty strongly, she would say **da Lieber gut aud sie vergessen bafelt maschal su machen**, which was German for the good Lord forgot to make a field marshal out of you, trying to tell her what to do. She was quite a character. She was a rather handsome woman, but apparently her formal education lacked a lot.

P: When your parents got married in Punta Gorda, was your father in the mercantile business?

W: Yes. He took over my grandfather's business when he died. I think I mentioned that my mother and father were married in 1908. I am trying to say that he died in 1910, but it was before they were married. It was 1910 when that hurricane came through here and near about blew everybody away.

P: When did you first attend school.

W: 1918, and neither of you remember that. 1918, Punta Gorda. Ms. **Norma Pepper** was the teacher.

P: What was the school and your classmates like at that time?

W: Well, the whole school was in one building. Vernon, I suppose that building—though you saw that in your lifetime—was on **Cater Street**. The whole school from the first grade through the twelfth, all the students attended that school. I am trying to think of some of the folks that were in my class, but it begins to get vague after how many years, seventy, or more than that.

P: How long did it take you to learn to read?

W: I was almost born reading, I guess. Ms. Norma Pepper, was she living when you came here?

P: I knew her.

W: Ms. Norma Pepper taught the first grade. She started all of us off. I remember she got after me one day. I guess I was a little amorous. I kissed some little girl standing by me in line when we were having spelling. She [would] have spelling bees. She got after me about that. I think it was _____. I guess I continued it, the rest of my life almost. But, it was a real small school, and everyone knew everyone else. The town was small. Gosh, there were not 1,000 people in the town.

P: You had a rather brief musical career.

W: Yes. Harry Goldstein was my mother's first cousin. He was a violinist, and he was good. He was a real fine musician, because his mother beat the tar out of him if he did not practice. So, my dad decided I was going to be a violinist, too, and they bought a violin about so long and he agreed to teach me. It did not go too well. He just could not stand it, I think. I practiced a little bit. That was when I learned I needed eyeglasses. I could not see, so they took me to see an eye doctor. **What was his name?** I know where he lives, out in Solana. I know it real well, but it is just like the rest of the names. It has escaped me. He said I needed glasses, though. When I was in the first grade in school, in 1918, I started wearing glasses, and I have been wearing them ever since. You know, that pair of glasses was in the garage behind my mother's house. I left the darn things there, and I should have taken them. They were about that big around. I must have had to squint my eyes to see through them. That was long ago.

P: Do you have any memories of World War I?

W: Yes. I remember when they used to sell what they called liberty bonds. I did not understand what the war was all about much, but Harry Goldstein's wife **Sophie**, I remember, came up to see my mother about buying a liberty bond. I just have a recollection of that, and one other thing. I was walking down to my dad's store, and there was a musical group. I think they were promoting the sale of bonds in the street. I stopped to listen to that, and somebody made a speech. I got the impression that the Germans were about to attack Punta Gorda. It scared the life out of me, and I ran down to my dad's store to get protection. That would have been, what, 1918, I guess, 1917. Those are about the only recollections I have of that period of time.

P: What did you do for recreation during those early years?

W: There was not any problem with it. You could go down and go crabbing, go swimming, play baseball out in the yard. There was a tennis court. To the extent that I am never very sympathetic when I hear talk about kids do not have anything to do. They got to have somebody to take care of their recreation. Well, we never had any trouble that way. We had some errands to do and some jobs to do, but there were plenty of activities for kids. A little older, we would go camping. Had a good time. We were not outlaws either. We did not do anything particularly bad. Probably stole a few watermelons and stuff like that, but that was to be expected.

P: Were you active in the Boy Scouts program?

W: Yes. You used to have to be twelve years old to get in, and I just could not wait. I got in, joined the Scouts, and finally became an eagle scout. I have a grandson now who is trying to do that. I had my old eagle scout badge—my mother had saved it—and I gave it to him. I said, now when you get one of your own, you can give me that one back. But, that was a good period of time. The scout master, the first one that I dealt with, was a fellow by the name of **Hadley**. He was a teacher in high school, and his wife was a teacher. In fact, she taught me in the seventh grade. Again, we would go out there. We did not have any formal camps and all that kind of stuff. We would just go. I remember camping one time up on Peace River there where they have the old phosphate mines. We were swimming out there in the river, and it was deep. Boy, it was deep. An alligator came and stuck his head up right close to us, and we all went ashore right away.

P: **Albert [W.] Gilchrist**, who lived in Punta Gorda, was governor of Florida from 1909 to 1913, and I know that your family had some contact with him.

W: Yes, my mother was his secretary here and, I guess, could have gone to Tallahassee, but she did not.

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W: Some character, whose name I do not recall, according to my dad, came up to his store and threatened to kill him. I do not remember who he was but, anyway, he said he was going down the street to get a drink and come back and kill him. So, my dad went and borrowed a gun from somebody, a rifle, and waited for the fellow to come back and, I guess, got the drop on him, told him if he does not get away and run, he was going to kill him. Well, he disappeared, according to my dad's version of the story, whatever that might have been. It was probably true. Hold it, now, I remember a little more about it. He said that fellow came up there and did some shooting. My dad was in the store, and this guy shot holes in tomato cans around him and, boy, that stuff was running down on him. Then, he was going back down the street and come back and kill him, kill my dad, and dad got that gun from somebody next door and that was the end of that saga.

P: Let us proceed with that a little bit. There was a man named **Doc Silcox**, who was a merchant on Marion Avenue.

W: Yes, that was also at that early time. He was, I guess, a self-proclaimed dentist, among other things. They also elected him, or hired him, to be town marshal. He had a new uniform, apparently, with some brass buttons and a fancy hat and the whole bit. My dad and a friend of his by the name of **Rogers**, they were young bucks and they decided that they did not like Silcox anyhow and that, that uniform was just too good for him, so they got a shotgun and loaded it with **bird shot**. When Silcox came down the street, they shot him. They punctured his uniform, [and] Silcox was trying to catch them so he could kill him. They escaped from him, but then later, they locked Rogers up in the old **callaboose**. A callaboose was an interesting place. It was a little frame building that had a cage in it that they locked people in. It had a peaked roof. I remember it. I do not think you do, do you?

P: I do.

W: Okay, and have a little **cord**. Anyway, they locked John Rogers up in there. He wanted to get out, so my dad was going to help him. He went and got a ladder up there, and he propped the roof up. Somehow, he got out of the cage and got out through the roof and escaped from the prison that way. You know, there was plenty to do around here in those days. [All laugh.]

P: Was your father active in public life?

W: Kind of outspoken. Yes, he was Charlotte County's first supervisor of registration, registration officer. He was appointed when the rest of the officers of the county were appointed when the county was created in 1921. He once ran for county judge against **Judge Trebue**.

P: S. F. J. Trebue.

W: S. F. J. Trebue. He probably would have been elected, but one of the lawyers in town, **Waltmeyer**, I believe it was, found the statute required the supervisor of registration, according to my dad's story, to resign. A person would have had to be out of the office of supervisor of registration for some period of time before he could run for another county office. Why, I do not know. I guess they figured he had too much control over the voting district. My dad had not resigned, so he had to drop out of that race. That was the extent of his formal political career. My mother and I used to help him. He used to copy the voting list _____. Those books are around somewhere, I guess, some of them are. We used to help him copy the books over so they could send them out. I think he kept the originals, or something, and they sent them out to the precincts when there was going to be an election. For whatever reason, he copied those darned books. I know that.

P: When you went to high school, do you remember anything particular about that, when you graduated and what activities were generally available?

W: I graduated in 1929. All of sixteen of us so it was kind of easy, I was the valedictorian of that class. I had to make a speech, which the principal, **A. E. Riley**, wrote for me, and I recited it. I knew it by heart. The high school, well, there were not many people in it. It was a small group of folks. There were sixteen in my class. I remember most of them. **Daniel McQueen**, who was later county agricultural agent here and one thing and another. **Bill Johns**, I do not know whether you remember him, but his sister **Louise** married **Sheriff Lipskin**. It did not last very long. She was about a third his age. A story about Lipskin, too. He never said anything. He was the most silent man. We thought that he must be devastating to crooks and criminals. The only time he ever shot a gun that I know anything about was one night he had a little too much to drink. There was a little lunch stand across from the **arcade** building and **Maxwell's** Drugstore down on the east end of Punta Gorda. He went in there and shot a couple holes in the ceiling and scared everybody to death. That was the only time I ever heard of his firing a gun, but we thought he was devastating to criminals. Anyhow, getting back to high school, I was just trying to think. If I remember correctly, there were probably three of us out of that group of sixteen who went to college at all.

McQueen went to NC State, and I went to the University of Florida, as you well you know, Vernon. **Lawrence Cowling**, I do not know where he went to school [but] I believe he went. I do not think anyone else did. Maybe one or two of the girls in that class took nurses' training, which was about the only thing girls could find to a career at all back in those days.

P: Leo, earlier you mentioned about the hurricane of 1910. There were some others, [like] the hurricane of 1921 which flooded Punta Gorda.

W: I remember that very well. There was not very much wind in Punta Gorda. Apparently, the hurricane blew up off the coast and just backed water up here. We left home in a boat. Fortunately, the water never did get into our house, but it was splashing against the floor. You could hear it. **Wallace Marbly** came. He ran the drugstore down the street. He came polling a boat up there, and we got into the boat. He polled it down to the old **S_____ Hotel**. My dad's store was in that hotel building. We sat on the porch and watched the tide come up. Somebody had an automobile—there were not many in town—across the street, and we watched the water go up on the wheels on that thing. There were boats going up and down Marion Avenue, power boats too. The day after the hurricane, I remember seeing a power boat tied to a post down where U. S. 41 crosses Marion Avenue. It was an old building. There was not any U. S. 41. That was a railroad street, **King Street**. A boat tied there. I never did know how they got that boat out and moved. It certainly did not float away.

P: All right. Now, the hurricane of 1926.

W: That was a real hard one. That sort of tore things up. It blew the water out of the harbor. It kind of flooded back in afterwards, but my recollection about that is that, mostly, while it did not do any harm to our home, **Jim Cooper**, who ran Cooper's hardware—well, he ran it [but] he did not run much of anything—he came up to our house in the middle of the night and called my dad. He said, you better come on down. He said, this storm is blowing the front door of the store open. That was **Seward's store**. My dad said, all right. Anyhow, Jim Cooper left. My dad got dressed. I thought I better go with him. I was thirteen years old or so. We started, and we walked down toward the store. The wind would come in gusts, and you had to hold on to something. It was that hard. Pieces of roof and metal would go sailing across. It was kind of scary. Now, we went down there and we got to store. The door was open, and Jim Cooper and some more drunks were standing there in the door enjoying themselves. They just wanted him to come down there. My dad had one of these old straw hats. I do not know if you ever saw a _____ straw hat. You see them, **puff warmers**, on the stage sometimes. He had one of those. Jim Cooper pulled that off my dad's head. My dad was a

little fellow, and Jim Cooper was about six feet three. He got that off of my dad's head and threw it out in the middle of the street. A gust of wind hit it, and I am sure that hat must have gone seventy-five miles an hour right down the middle of Marion Avenue east, and I do not think it has been seen since. I do not believe anyone was killed around here in a hurricane. Very few people ever have suffered that kind of loss here, like they did around Lake Okeechobee and places like that at other times.

P: The next significant hurricane is the one I think you are referring to, in 1928 when so many people drowned around Lake Okeechobee.

W: Also down in the Keys, I think.

P: Do you remember how that affected Punta Gorda?

W: I do not recall any particular effect. We had the storm, but by the 1926 standard, it was not a very bad storm.

P: 1921 was a big year in Punta Gorda, the year that the first bridge was opened, and that was the year that Charlotte County was created.

W: I remember they had a fish fry in Punta Gorda. Of course, if you had a fish fry, you had mullet. They did the same thing in 1931 when the second bridge was opened. The railroad ran special trains down here to bring people from all over. Everybody wanted some mullet at the fish fry. There was a considerable celebration. I do not remember too much about it because I was just nine, ten years old. I do remember when the county was created—I was in the first or second grade in school—when there was an event of some significance like a fire or something, the old ice plant whistle would blow, the steam whistle. The ice plant also ran the generators that furnished electricity in Punta Gorda. That thing went off on November 11, 1918. We were pretty excited, and my teacher said the war was over. That, I remember. Getting back to the hurricane thing, that was about it. And the bridge opening, the one in 1931 which was ten years later, was quite a thing. The new bridge was named the **Baron Collier** Bridge, and Baron Collier was here. The governor, who was I believe Doyle Carlton [1929-1933], was here. There were thousands of people in Punta Gorda eating those mullet.

P: When you graduated from high school and went to the University of Florida, that was a pretty big experience.

W: It sure was. Really, I do not think I had ever been to Gainesville before. I was sixteen years old when I graduated. I remember the county ran out of money

during that spring. They had to close the schools a month early, and I was afraid that was going to disqualify me from going to the university. I had to work most of my life for one thing or another. I worked for the newspaper for \$6 a week and stuff like that. Anyway, I got admitted, and it came time to go to Gainesville. My dad and mother had a, what, 1925 Dodge car, and they drove me up to Lakeland to catch a train. I do not know why I could not have gotten on it here. Anyhow, I got on the train at Lakeland and went to Gainesville, where I had never been. I did not have a dormitory room or anything. But, a fellow in Arcadia, **Orwell Rosen**, had recently graduated from the university and belonged to a fraternity up there. He gave them my name, gave me their address, and said, you go by there, they will take care of you. Well, I did not know what a fraternity was or anything else. When I got to Gainesville and got off the train, there was not a darn soul around the station. I did not know where I was, and it must have been at least a mile out to the university from down there on West Main Street in Gainesville. I was looking around trying to decide what to do, and everything I owned was in a little old trunk. Some student came along. He said, would you like a ride to the university? He said, I will take you out there for \$0.50, which was about what I had. I said, yeah. He had a Model-T truck. It was not anything, just a couple of seats. We tied my trunk onto the back of the thing, and I sat with him. We went out there, and I had that address. I remember it now: 1410 West University Avenue. We drove up out there. I did not know a soul in the world. I did not know a thing about it. Rosen, I think he had told somebody that some weird freshman was coming up there. I sort of went in, and I said, I was told to stop. He said, well, come on in. I lived there for four years. I wound up being president of the thing. That was an experience, the University of Florida.

P: How did you finance that first year?

W: I had saved enough to get by one year. After that, I ran out. I was trying to take pre-law down in the arts and sciences college, **AB**. I ran out of money, but I had a chance. The state was giving scholarships, a competitive exam. I took the exam and won a scholarship in the teacher's college. I about as much desired to be a teacher as I would have today to be an astronaut, but I figured an education was an education, no matter what, so I took it. It paid \$100 a semester. By that time, I knew enough people. I had a job waiting on tables in the boarding house up there for my meals, and I got elected treasurer and house manager for the fraternity and I got my room rent-free. I was one of the wealthier students around there my second and third and most of my fourth year at the university. Anyhow, that is how I became a schoolteacher. That was a good experience.

P: What subjects did you do the best in, and which ones did you do the worst in?

W: I liked to study. I had a major in math, a major in science, and in English. I got a life graduate state certificate which qualifies me, if anybody would give me a job I guess, to teach school today. It has English on it. I never taught English, never undertook to do that, but I taught math, as you well know, and most of the sciences in high school. Those were the things I enjoyed. Languages, I could not manage them too well.

P: French?

W: No. I took Latin. The reason I did that was my dad wanted me to be a lawyer, and he said a lawyer has got to know the Latin. Well, if it required a good knowledge of Latin, I never would have made the grade. That was about the end. I had to take a language when I was a freshman at the university. For some reason, I signed up for French. I will never forget that professor. His name was **Brunet**. He walked and he looked like he was coming apart. He was the most uncoordinated fellow I ever saw. He would come in and say something in French, and I did not know what he was talking about. I do not think anybody else did. There was one student in that class. He was Florida's first All American football player.

P: **Dell Vansickle?**

W: Dell Vansickle, yes. He sat on the front row, and another fellow who was a friend of mine forever from Fort Myers, taking pre-law, was sitting on the front row, and I was sitting on the front row, and none of the three of us knew what was going on, really, but we had to have that course. I guess the professor knew it because we all passed. Dell Vansickle was a handsome young man. After he left Florida, he went out to California and got in a movie. He was a stunt man or something. I do not believe I ever saw his name up on anything, but he made his living out there for years. _____ lawyer in Fort Myers. He is dead too now, but he was a real nice guy. He was an uncle of John **Shepherd**. I do not know whether you know Johnny Shepherd. Do you know Johnny? His uncle, I guess his father's brother—I do not know, it may have been his mother's brother—anyway, he was an awful nice fellow. He and W. A. Shepherd were partners, and Johnny joined that firm later. He is now retired, I believe. His brother got to be a Presbyterian preacher, I believe it was. **We can get off into** Lee County here in a minute.

P: Your freshman English class? You had to write papers of some kind?

W: Yes, we did.

P: What I am thinking about, now, is one of the better students in the class who became the editor of the *Tampa Tribune*, **James Clandenin?**

W: Oh yes. He left there. He went one year. He was a great writer. We used to have to write stuff all the time, and the professor would read the better ones. He never read any of mine, but he used to read Clandenin's. He left Florida and went over to Clearwater and worked for that paper. Then, he went to the *Tampa Tribune*. Yes, I never would have thought of his name in 100 years, Vernon, but I sure knew him well. There were some interesting people in those classes, but I it is hard to recall them right now.

P: He was the one who coined the words "porkchop gang," which they use frequently to describe the more conservative members of the Florida legislature.

W: Yes. When I was there though, Vernon, mostly we were called the small county block. I think that after I was gone, they inherited the name of the porkchop gang.

P: Now, your military education?

W: Oh yes. We had to take ROTC. It was mandatory in those days. You had to have two years of it. I was out in the field artillery. It was a very interesting thing. The uniforms they gave us were World War I uniforms. We learned to drill, but then we had to learn to ride horses. It was horse-drawn. That was before they had so many vehicles. That was kind of interesting. The first year when we were freshman, we had to ride the horses that pulled the guns and the caissons. Of course, some of us would get to sit on the caisson—that is the ammunition carrier—and they did not have any springs on them. They were wagon wheels and they would just shake your teeth out, but that was better than riding those horses. We had to ride the _____ horses and follow orders. They were all hand signals, which I never did learn to understand. I always tried to avoid getting on the lead horse because the fellow on that had to know which way to go. We had a mess out there on that drill field every time we had a drill. I remember one time when we were learning to ride, we took a ride one time out behind the Gainesville Country Club. We were riding along and a limb struck my cap and knocked it off, so I stopped and got off the horse to get my cap. In the meantime, all the rest of the company had gone ahead. I got on, and that horse started off. I could not control him. I could not get my foot over. I could not get up in the saddle, and [it was] a big horse. I finally got on him, and when we arrived, **Captain Barkow** had the whole company in a big circle. A big **bush** was in the middle, I remember. Here I came, totally out of control, flat on my back on the top of that horse. The horse just wanted to get with the rest of the horses. That horse jumped over all those bushes, and I was still on the top when he landed. Just about broke up the whole thing. Everybody roared. When it calmed down a little bit, Captain Barkow said, great riding _____. That was pretty much my military experience. I remember at the end of the second year, you could volunteer if you wanted to, take

advanced military. Well, we were all positive that there were not going to be anymore wars. That was 1930, 1931. So now, those of you who want to volunteer and take advanced military over here, and the rest of you get over here. I got over there, and that wound up my military career. It was interesting. I remember Captain Barkow had a good-looking daughter who went to Gainesville High School where I had to practice teaching.

P: The social life at the University of Florida. Of course, at that time, it was for men only, but I am sure that there was maybe not adequate but there was certainly an ongoing social life.

W: Yes. A lot of fellows used to hitchhike—and it was not easy to hitchhike, either, because there were not that many cars—over to Tallahassee, where there were girls, on the weekend. I never did try that. When we had parties of some kind and invite girls to come in, everything was very strict. I remember we had a house party one time, and all the fellows had to move out of the fraternity house and the girls moved in with, I think, two chaperones. You would not even think of such a thing [as] they all live together in the dorms today. That was a different world we lived in.

P: Now, this was Prohibition.

W: Yes. We had parties. We had a black guy who was the janitor in our fraternity house. He told us he could get us some beer. This was during Prohibition. So, he rounded up a couple of tubfuls of beer. We got ice to put in it and went out in the woods and had us a big party, just the fellows. We could not get any girls to go with us. They had more sense, I guess. I also remember when the Prohibition was repealed, right after Roosevelt took office. Before it was repealed, they knew it was going to be, and there were a couple of places that started selling beer in Gainesville. Well, the fellows, we would all line up to get a beer. It was just a big thing to do, drink some beer. It was different. Before that, we drank moonshine, or homebrew.

P: Was that hard to get?

W: No, it never was. That same black fellow used to bring us moonshine. One time, they got him for doing something, arrested him. A police officer came up to the house there, said we got this boy of yours down there. I forget what he was in for. He said, do you want to do something about it? We said, yeah, we need him, he has got to clean up the house. So, we went in the police car and went down there and bailed him out. He could not have taken much money because we did not have much. That was back, that was the highlight of our carousing.

P: Athletics at the University of Florida.

W: Let us see. **Clyde Crabtree** was the little guy who was quarterback. He was good, too. He was quite a ball player. Florida had a pretty good team back in 1930, 1931. I remember the stadium was open. We played Alabama and, I think, lost, if I remember correctly. A fellow who was kind of a star on that team in addition to Clyde Crabtree was a fellow who was later school superintendent, I think, and that was _____. He got into all kinds of trouble.

P: **Floyd Christian?**

W: Floyd Christian, and there was one in Manatee County. Floyd was the one who got into the trouble. I forget what it was, some kind of _____. He got his hand in the wrong money pot or something. But the stadium, I remember when I first went to games in 1929, there was not any stadium there. Where the stadium is was a sinkhole, they called it. There were a lot of those around North Florida. It was just a great big sinkhole with a bunch of bushes in it. They went in there with mules and **scoops** and just kept going around digging it out bigger and bigger until they got it the size they wanted it and built seats in there. That was the first stadium. I have not been up there in a number of years, but I saw a picture of it. I mean, you could not even see where the entrance was.

P: How big a role was athletics in the life of the university then?

W: Not very great. The problem, I think, was that, economically, times were bad. You could not afford to do very much, and the university was small. We had, what, 3,000 or 4,000 students, which was the biggest thing I had ever seen. There were less than 500 kids in the whole public school system here. I went up there and that place had maybe 3,000 or 4,000 students, and it was huge. Now, they got 45,000 and about the same number in Tallahassee.

P: How did you travel back and forth from Gainesville to home?

W: Hitchhiked. You did not have any [other] way. You did not have any money to buy a bus ticket, or I certainly did not. I remember my first trip back home, I started hitchhiking and I got down to Micanopy, if you know where that is, right south of Gainesville. Anybody would be crazy to take a ride to Micanopy, but I did. Besides that, it started to rain. I stood there for awhile, and **J. T. Rhodes**—he spent all his mother's money, and he had a Model-T Ford—he and a couple of other fellows came by, and they saw me and stopped to pick me up. There was a rumble seat in this thing, and it was raining. When I got in, they put me in the rumble seat. Again, it sounded like we were a bunch of drunks, but I never drank

very much. Anyway, they had moonshine they were passing around, and I needed something to keep from freezing to death. They brought me home. That was my first trip. That was the only way you could travel. I remember a fellow, **Carroll Lancaster**, graduated from high school along about my time. He went to the University of Florida. He took advanced military, and he loved his uniform. He came home wearing the whole thing with his sword and his officer's saber. He was standing out there on the corner to hitchhike back to Gainesville. Somebody stopped by and said, general, where is your horse? I remember that. That upset him a lot. Carroll taught school later. He died. Most all of them are gone except me. I am a **comparable** survivor, in spite of things.

P: During your last year or two, you were majoring in education and trying to get through. When you graduated, what did you do?

W: Well, I could not get a job teaching school, and I was supposed to teach two years or I would have to pay back the \$600 I had received. I did not know how I could ever pay back \$600 for anything. So, I went back to work for the *Punta Gorda Herald*, where I had worked before. I worked like the dickens for that whole year. It got me up to \$15 a week then, which was not bad money. Most people did not have anything. I worked there for a year. It got to the point where I would write the paper, go out and get the news, sell ads, set the type, run the press, make up the forms, the whole works. I earned my \$15 a week real good. Anyway, the second year I was out, I was offered a job at Crescent City, Florida, teaching all the math and science in that school. [End of Side 2, Volume 1.]

P: ...after graduating from the University of Florida, and then you went to Crescent City to teach school.

W: I taught there for one year. In the meantime, I was trying to figure out some way to make a living. I taught in Crescent City, and that paid me \$85 a month for eight months and I had to live in a boarding house. It was rather interesting there, too, because two little old ladies ran that place. The school board ran out of money during the year and I did too, and I could not pay for my room and board. I told them, I said, now, I do not have any money, but if they ever pay me, I will pay you, if I ever get any money, I will pay you. But, I cannot. I do not have any money. They said, well, we are going to trust you. By the end of the year, they got up some money and paid us. I did not go back because in the meantime, the second year, there was a vacancy in the school here in Punta Gorda. The first year, I tried to get a job here, they would not hire me because I was from here. The second year, they gave me the same job I had at Crescent City, teaching all the math and the science. I taught all that the next year here, and then the second year I started teaching here, I had taken a civil service exam, thought,

well, I would go to work for the government and make my fortune. So, in the winter of 1936, I got an offer of a job in Baltimore setting up the Social Security system. So, I went up there. That job paid \$120 a month. It was all right, but it did not require very much intelligence. I had to write code numbers on all these Social Security registration cards that people had to fill out in those days. I can recall, out of all those millions of cards, they had them bundled in groups of, I think, about 500. I ran into a package to code of cards from Punta Gorda, Florida. It was just unbelievable. I was there for awhile, about six months. At the end of the time, our job was to file those cards. I imagine they are still looking for them if they have any interest in them because they had rented a lease space there in Baltimore, by the acre really. I never saw so many filing cabinets in all my life, and they piled these cards up on trucks that you pull around. We did not know what we were doing. You open a drawer and throw them in. I read in the newspaper later, after I had been back for a long time, they were having trouble finding those things. I could not imagine that they ever were able to find them. We did not know anything about filing or anything. I had a telegram from the *Punta Gorda Herald*, that if I would come back they would pay me \$35 a week. I thought, well, that is better than what I am doing. So, I got on the train and came home and went to work for the *Punta Gorda Herald* for \$35 a week. They could not pay it every week. Sometimes, we would take it out in trade, like somebody would bring some chickens in there, or all sorts of things. I worked there until the war started. They would not have me in the service because I could not pass the physical. They ran out of teachers at the high school. That was in 1941, I guess, 1940, 1941. So, I went back and taught. That time, what did they pay me? \$101 a month, I think.

P: Let us go back to Crescent City for just a moment. Do you remember anyone whom you knew then, or taught, who comes to mind?

W: I cannot think of any names, but every now and then, they have a reunion up there of various classes. Somebody has my name on the list, and they send me an invitation. I always write them a letter and tell them I cannot come. I probably would not recall any of them. I lived in this boarding house. It was called The Gables. It had been, I guess, an Antebellum home, maybe. A fellow who lived in the room right down the hall from me was a single Episcopal minister up there. He was a nice fellow. He and I got to be real good friends. On Saturday night when he would get right down to where he had to get his sermon ready, he and I would go down to the drugstore and buy a couple of cigars and come back and go up to his room and smoke them. We had a bottle of whiskey and we would have a drink of that, and he would do his sermon. He used to bother me about coming to church. Finally, I went one Sunday night, I remember, and he called on me to take up the collection. He was a nice guy.

P: Wasn't there one student who later became a lawyer as a member of the Florida Supreme Court?

W: Oh yes, he was a senior that year in high school, **Ray Earle**. Ray was a bright guy. He lived across the street from the high school. I first sort of noticed him, aside from the fact he was a bright kid, we had these Jewish holidays which I never did bother with, particularly, but one of them, Rosh Hashana or Yom Kippur, he was out of school that day. He came back with the excuse and I said, well, I should have been out too, I am sure, but I did not feel like I could do that. We became good friends. I talked him into going and joining the fraternity I belonged to at Gainesville when he went over there. He became, I think, president of Florida Blue Key. A real good lawyer. He was the partner of **John Matthews**, who was a member of the senate. Well, there was a father and son, John Matthews, Jr. Ray got a job while I was still in the legislature, and he came over to Tallahassee. He was working for one of the governors. I guess they still do it. The governor always had some people reviewing bills coming through to see if he needed to veto them or if he should sign them or whatever. Ray worked for _____. He was really bright. You know, he retired from the Supreme Court, got to old to stay, and went to work for Holland & Knight. To follow that a little bit, when we had that case against the city of Punta Gorda, a class action case, we had to have some good testimony about attorney fees. So, I called up Ray. Oh yes, he said, I can do that for you. We sent them up the file and he sent down an Affidavit, and it worked like a charm. But, he was the most distinguished one. I understand they had a parade up there, and he was kind of an honored guest of some kind at that parade three or four or five years ago. I have not been in Crescent City in a good many years. The principal of the high school was a sport, too. He liked to play around. His wife, I think, had some sort of a mental problem, I believe. He may have had, too. I remember he asked me one time to—I do not know why he trusted me—he said, let us go over to Daytona, which was not too far from Crescent City. I had a date with somebody, one teacher, and things went from bad to worse over there. I cannot even tell that story. He was a nice guy, though. He was a little upset. I did not stay there that next year because I was offered a job doing what? That was when I first taught in Charlotte County, I guess, afterwards.

P: Leo, your first venture in elective politics was when you ran for school superintendent in 1936.

W: That is correct. That was kind of another interesting thing. The teacher who won, I was teaching in high school and she was teaching in the room next to me, **Sally Jones**, she had taught me in the sixth grade. The superintendent, whose name was **Paul Eddy**, had resigned to go to Tallahassee to work for **Colin English**, so

there was a vacancy. I do not know what the job paid, probably at least \$200 a month and I was making \$101, so I decided to run for county school superintendent. Sally Jones did also. If I had any sense, I would have known that she was win, but it turned out not to be a bad idea. I went all over the county and called on all the people and made all the speeches and did all those things and still lost, and it was just a good blessing that I did. It would have been terrible to be in a position like that. That was in 1936, and that was when I went to Baltimore, I guess, and stayed up there about six or eight months. Decided I would never be president, from that location, and I came back to work for the *Herald*.

P: Let us look for a minute at politics in 1936. They still had the poll tax.

W: Yes, that is right, Vernon. That is a good story, too. You had to pay \$1 a year poll tax in order to be allowed to vote, and people were really poor. I remember going to a house out in the western part of the county. I knocked on the door, and when I went in, there were two or three chairs in a room with two women and a child. That was all. I talked to them about voting for me, and they could not anymore pay the poll tax. The husbands were commercial fisherman who were on a limit of, I guess, 100 pounds of mullet a week. They got \$0.03 a pound for them, \$3 a week. At any rate, the poll tax simply disenfranchised lots of people. I remember a couple of fellows came to see me. They said, we can get you some votes but we got to pay the poll tax. I said, how much, across? I forget what it was, \$5 or \$10, but I knew they were lying to start with. They were going to stick the money in their pocket and go get something to drink. I said, well, I am sorry, I just cannot afford it. Let it slide, but that is the way the situation was. People were simply poor, that is all. All of us were, but we did not know we were deprived because everybody else was in the same condition we were. It was a rough time. At any rate, I did not get elected, thank goodness.

P: It was politics, though, that was very personal.

W: Oh yes, there were not any real philosophical issues. She wanted a job, for example, and so did I, period.

P: And this was all really in the Democratic primary.

W: Oh yes, there were no Republicans, which was sort of a blessing because when

you had the primary, it was all over. After that 1936 election, though, I lost, of course, in the first primary. The second primary, they asked me to work on the polls, at one of the polling places. A fellow by the name of **Harry Gregors** came into vote. I looked on the book, and he was a registered Republican. I said, Mr. Gregors, there are not any Republicans on the ballot, and you cannot vote. Why can't I vote? I said, because you are a Republican and this is a Democratic primary. He said, I always have. And I do not doubt it, but I would not let him vote. He sure was mad with me. It was a different world. It did get kind of politically nasty, though, when I ran for the legislature the first time. If it had not been for Vernon's father, I would have gotten beat. His father, Vasco, and I and a fellow by the name of **Frank Smoke, Sr.** ran. Smoke was employed by the **Babcock** interests. They had the Babcock Florida Company and all that. Vasco was eking out a living over at the grocery store, had not been here very long, really. I was working over at the *Herald*. We had a kind of a more or less benign sort of race up through the first primary. Smoke almost beat Vasco and me, but Vasco got eliminated and decided to help me. I finally won by four votes, and he got them for me. It was a group of fifteen people he got absentee ballots from for me. There are a lot of stories in connection with that. You do not want to go into any of that right now. Just before the second primary in that election, so I could have a Democratic party, which was the only thing there was, I decided to have a rally, a political rally, in the circuit courtroom here. It was presided over by **Earl Farn**, who was trying to be a friend of everybody so he really a friend of nobody. We got up there to speak, and our's was the only **race** that the people came out to hear anything about. Frank Smoke said, well, you ought to speak first. I said, no, I am not going to speak first. Your name starts with S, mine starts with W, you speak. We got to arguing. Earl Farn was jumping on in, you know how he did. Finally, I kept going until I knew that Smoke was so nervous he was shaking all over. He had his speech on some little three by five cards and he was jumping all over. I said, well, I believe I kind of got him. So, I agreed to speak first. I knew that the Babcocks were not popular, just because they were successful mostly, I guess. The old squire Babcock, one of the clan, he was not a very friendly fellow but there was not really any harm in him, a great big guy. I saw him sitting in the balcony up there in the courthouse, and I said, you know, I have been told that my opponent is being supported and backed by the Babcocks. Now, I said, I cannot believe that because there is a squire up there in the balcony and I would not wish him off on anybody. Well, it just brought down the house. Everybody was laughing. It does not sound very funny now, but it was then. They had been spreading rumors around, or trying to, to the effect that I was some kind of a foreigner or something, so I said, you know, somebody has been saying that I am a foreigner of some kind. I said, my family has been here since the town started. I said, if there is a foreigner in the race, it must be my opponent. He came down here from Georgia during the **river state boom** and just stayed on. Well, that

brought down the house again. Between that speaking and Vasco's help, I won by four votes that time. But, that got kind of personal then. It was not long after that, old Frank Smoke got a job as chief enforcement officer for the state Game and Freshwater Fish Commission. He went down to La Belle and Hendry County and got drunk and was driving along some road there, and he stopped and left the motor running, just stopped out in the middle of the road and passed out. He had a partial bottle of whiskey and a pistol on the seat beside him, so they picked him up and put him in the pokey. I did not know about this but the next morning—this was long after I had served in the legislature—he got bailed out. I think **Otto Fry** and Earl Farn went down and got him out. The next morning, I guess it was, about daylight, he came to my house, Frank did, and he said, Leo, you got to help me. I said, what is the matter. He told me and he said, if the governor hears about that, he is going to fire me. Now, the upshot of it was that I went to Tallahassee. Earl and Otto went there to La Belle to settle the case somehow, and I went to Tallahassee and talked to Millard Caldwell's man, **his executive assistant up there**. This guy said, well, if the governor finds out, he will fire him. I said, well, you are not going to tell him, are you? He said, no, I am not going to tell him, just tell him to be careful. We saved Frank's job. Another time—if we get into my political stories, we will go on and on—the sheriff, **Fred Quidinaw**, who weighed about 250, 300 pounds, he was allowing **Bolita**, which was the Cuban gambling game, to operate in Charlotte County. I do not know, they threw the Bolita, I think, once a week, and there was always a huge crowd out in that _____ section, out near **Ward's Bar**. It stirred up a lot of turmoil, and somebody reported that to the governor's office. That was also to _____ (**I cannot recall that fellow's name**). He was the one who knew about it. I did not know any of this at the time. I just happened to be in Tallahassee. I went into the governor's office and this fellow said, how well do you know the sheriff? Well, I know him real well. He said, well, you better tell him something for me. I said, what is that? He said, if he does not shut down the Bolita, the governor is going to throw him out of office. I said, well, I certainly would be glad to do that. So, I drove back home and went over to Fred Quidinaw's house. It was at night. He was already in bed. I went over there and said, Fred, you better shut down the Bolita. He said, why? I said, because they know about it in the governor's office and they are going to throw you out if you do not. He said, how much do they want? I said, they did not say anything about wanting anything, except you better shut it down. So, he did. Along about the same time or immediately after that, a fellow by the name of **Max Wayne Whidden**, who was the Bolita man around here, came to see me. In fact, he was parked out in front of my house when I went home one evening, late. I said, Max, what do you want? He said, well, I think you are a friend of ours. Well, yes, so what do you want? Well, I think you are entitled to be paid as much as the sheriff and the chief of police. I said, how much is that? He said, \$100 a week or something, \$125. I said, well, to tell you the truth, I am not going to touch. I do

not want any of your money. Well, you got to take it. I said, no, I do not, I will not do it. I was running for re-election and he kept insisting, so I finally took it. It was in an envelope, sealed up. Every week, he would bring me one of them. I would take them down to the newspaper office where I was working. A. Jordan was the head of the paper, and I told him what I thought it was. I said, I have not counted any of it, and I do not know what is in there. I do not want to know. You keep it. So, he did. When the election was over and I won, I called up Max Wayne Whidden. I said, come over, I need to see you. He came over, and I handed him all those envelopes. I said, I do not know what is in these envelopes. You brought them to me, but you take them and go with them. That was the total amount of bribery I had in my political career.

P: Let us go back to 1938 and that campaign. Your opponent in the second primary, I think, had a problem of falling asleep in opportune locations.

W: Oh yes, that was the truth. That was the driven truth. Are you at all familiar with Punta Gorda? There is a banyan tree down on the waterfront near the motel. My opponent, Frank Smoke, drank too much, and he lived about 200 feet from there. Well, he did not quite make it home one day, passed out under that banyan tree, on the leaves there. Nobody bothered to give him any assistance. They just kept riding by and looking at him. A couple of my strong supporters came down to the office and said, do you want to go see Frank Smoke, and they told me. I said, no, I would not go near that place. But, I said, I do not care how many other people do. So, they increased the crowd. It took all that to win by those four votes.

P: What motivated you to run for the Florida House of Representatives?

W: Well, I kind of got interested in politics back, I guess, when **Tom Butler** served in the House. I think he ran because Earl Farn euchred him out of a job of county attorney, appointed by the county commission. So, Tom ran for the legislature and passed a local bill making the office of county attorney elective, which gave Earl a lot of trouble trying to stay in office. I talked to Tom during that period of time. I said, Tom, I would like to go to Tallahassee. Well, he said, there is nothing I can give you. He had a secretary he took up there. I began to be interested in it, and I was working on the paper there. I would get the political news. That is what caused me to be interested in it. **J. T. Rose**, later on, ran and served one term and got a job with the state, and there was a vacancy. I said, well, something to do, I will try it. I did not have any political agenda, really, at the time. I just was interested in serving. I do not believe I had ever been to Tallahassee.

P: Do you remember any local or state issues that were involved in the campaign?

W: I seriously do not. The problems that we had were simply that there was not any money in 1938. The Depression simply was not over, and it was sort of a matter of survival. That is what it amounted to. Very little happened during that session. A fellow by the name of Fred [P.] Cone was governor [1937-1941]. He was an old fellow, probably near about as old as I am now, but he was in bad health. He had a heart attack. He had a brother by the name of **Branch Cone**, who had his hand out. Fred Cone just vetoed everything that was passed, nearly. His predecessor, David Scholtz [1933-1937], had gotten the Florida Highway Patrol started for the first time. Fred Cone closed it down. It was not restarted until Spessard Holland became governor [1941-1945]. That was sort of the environment that we were in. It was just a matter of dealing with a few local issues and trying to pass an appropriation bill, which just did not have much money in it. That was about the way it was.

P: What was your impression of the WPA and the other specially created federal agencies to help relieve the economic conditions of the Depression?

W: Well, you know, they were ridiculed a whole lot, but they did a lot of good and they kept people from starving to death. For example, in Charlotte County, they rebuilt the seawall on the waterfront. They did a good job. It is still standing. The original one had fallen in. They built a building which is no longer there, the old community hall. They did a lot of road construction and that sort of thing, and they gave people jobs that paid them enough money so they could keep body and soul together. It was just a terrible time. My mother worked for awhile in the distribution office where they provided, I guess, welfare baskets of food to people. It was awfully hard. I do not think, unless you lived in that era, that you could visualize it. So, my \$101 a month, I was all right. It finally got to be \$35 a week, some weeks. I remember when I worked for the newspaper, FDR became president and they passed the first wages and hours law. When it was held to be applicable to newspapers, they had to raise my pay. The minimum pay then was \$0.30 an hour, I believe it was, which was a considerable increase in pay. I remember A. Jordan said, I do not see how we can do that, support that, and he was probably being truthful. I cannot paint you a picture, really, of the circumstances that people were living in, how near this country was, perhaps, to just rioting. I do not know what they would have rioted about. Food riots, maybe. It was awful.

P: Do you remember what the government gave away to people, in terms of foodstuffs or bedding or whatever it might have been.

W: I should. I saw enough of those packages. They had all sorts of things, staples like potatoes and I do not know what, Vernon, cured meats and some clothing. It

was not much. I remember the old man **Gibbs**, who ran the pool room here for awhile, lived out north of **Cleveland**, out on **Joe Washington Loop Road**. He told me they just threw out that food package on the road. I said, what? Yeah, not good. I thought, you old fool. Some people were that way. But, if FDR had not come along and had not done some of the things that were done at that time, our system of government could have collapsed, I think.

P: What do you recall about the ____ planning project, or the efforts to do away with the mosquitos, or the **sewing** room?

W: Boy, they did have a sewing room and the mosquito control. That was operated in Charlotte County by our friend **Charles F. Johnson**. His job was to get mosquitos killed. They did dig a few ditches so the tide water could get them into the mangroves and out. But, his job was..he killed them by **feeding sides**. Filled them up with sawdust mixed with oil and drop that in them ditches and things so there would be a continuous layer of oil on the water. It would choke the mosquitos to death. That was his deal. He was real proud of that, it seemed to me like. He was one of our first environmentalists.

P: 1939 would have been your first legislative session. How did you get from Punta Gorda to Tallahassee?

W: I had a family car. It was a 1933 Plymouth, I think. I drove up there. My secretary, **attache**, was the daughter of **Emily Johnson**, the chairman of the county commission. In fact, she was a senior in high school, and I was teaching her. He asked me to take her up there. They needed all the help they could get. So, I took her. She made the same as I did, \$6 a day, for sixty days. But, I had mileage for a round trip. They counted the mileage from Punta Gorda to Jacksonville and across to Tallahassee. It was farther that way, and I got \$88.60 for that. I will never forget, my total was \$448.60, plus a sheet of \$0.03 postage stamps every day so I could communicate with my constituents, most of whom did not care anyhow, I guess, because I did not use many stamps. I really do not remember a whole lot that occurred of any substantive nature during that session.

P: In 1938, during that legislative session, what was the overall mood of the people and of the legislature?

W: The attitude was just one of trying to survive. There was not much philosophical debate about anything except hunger. In the legislature, I am trying to think..it is so hard to remember names. The Suwannee River music ____...

[End of Side 1 Vol. 2]

P: _____ at his home in Charlotte Harbor on May 17, 2000. It is a continuation of the earlier interview that we did with him a couple of weeks ago. Now, I know, Leo, we covered a lot of the first part of your life the first time, but I am going to just mention some names to you and these will be mostly from earlier time, just so that we have some idea as to what your recollection is of these particular people. The first one would be Doc Silcox.

W: I never knew Doc Silcox, but I knew a lot about him because my father knew him. He called himself, I think, some kind of a dentist. I doubt he had any education much of any kind. He also had a job as city policeman in Punta Gorda, and they bought him a new uniform with brass buttons and a policeman's hat and all kinds of things. My dad was a young fellow at that time. He and another fellow by the name of John Rogers decided that Silcox just was not entitled to look so pretty, so they waylaid him one night and fired a load of bird shot into him with his uniform and then, of course, ran. He was going to kill them, but somehow he never did. Rogers later got put in jail, but I think it was for another offense of some kind. My dad got him out. He was put in jail in the calaboose in **Herald Court** in Punta Gorda. It was an old round kind of a frame building with a cage in the middle that they put the prisoners in. It had a peaked roof on it. Vernon may have seen that old thing. Anyhow, my dad got a ladder, he told me, and climbed up there and pushed the roof up, and somehow Rogers got out of the cage and then climbed out through the roof and escaped. That is sort of my recollection of old Doc Silcox. He had some sons, not all of whom were admirable really. Some of them were all right. **Orlando** Silcox was a painter. **Adam** Silcox worked for the railroad, I guess. He had a truck, and he carried whatever it was, shipments, around town. He later turned it over to **Harry Blazer**, who later turned it over to **Thurston Leffers**. Then, the whole thing disintegrated.

P: Is Doc Silcox the individual who had the store on Marion Avenue who sometimes would take a rifle and shoot down the street that your father...?

W: I believe that is correct, but I do not specifically recall that. There was a lot of threatening going on, but nobody ever was able to hit anyone else with this firing.

P: Kerby Seward.

W: Of course, he was my uncle by marriage. He married my aunt, my dad's sister. I do not know much, really, about his background, except that his father was once county school superintendent for old Manatee County. When the county seat was Pine Level. He used to visit whatever schools they had with a horse and buggy

through the woods. I know about that. But, Kerby Seward, lots of stories about him, and most of them are true. He learned to be a printer and a writer and worked in various places typesetting, some on daily newspapers up north somewhere in Ohio. About 1895, I guess, he came back here and started the *Punta Gorda Herald*, and he married my aunt. My dad's father was upset about it because he was not Jewish, and that was a terrible thing. But, they made it for about sixty years together. But, he started the *Punta Gorda Herald*, and it was an important undertaking. He had a partner, whose name I cannot remember offhand, to start with, but he set all the type, did all the thing I did later when I worked for the *Punta Gorda Herald*, set all the type, got all the news, sold all the advertising. Had a motto on the front of the newspaper, which said, In God We Trust, **All Others Cash**. They sold the paper. They had a subscription at \$1 a year. When I started working there, it had gone up 100 percent. It was \$2 a year. I guess he did a pretty good job, but the paper burned. Fire started in a two-story frame building across the street that housed one of my grandfather's stores, **Gus Hart**. That burned, the paper burned, everything in it pretty much was destroyed. It was about a year later, I guess, when he was able to start it up again. He ran it until 1901, or 1902 maybe, when it was sold to the Jordan family, a fellow by the name of A. P. Jordan, who was an old newspaperman from up in Georgia someplace. He had also been in Leesburg, Florida. That family continued, pretty much, to control the *Punta Gorda Herald* through the boon years of the 1920s. During that time, a fellow by the name of **Paul Garrett** came to Punta Gorda from Coraopolis, Pennsylvania, and he bought a half interest of the paper and retained it until he died in 1935. But, the Jordans continued to control it. I worked there from about 1927, when I was in high school, off and on until 1950, when I went to law school at the University of Florida. An interesting experience and one that I would not take a lot for, although when I started working there, my salary was \$1 a day, six days a week from morning until night.

P: Switching to a more recent era, **Judge W. R. Roberts**, the county judge of Charlotte County.

W: Well, Charlotte County's first judge appointed by the governor, Governor [Cary A.] Hardee [1921 to 1925] when the county was created was a lawyer by the name of **Steven F. J. Trebue**, who was a nephew, I believe, of the founder of Punta Gorda. He was a very well-educated fellow. He was a graduate of Washington & Lee University. After his death, whichever governor it was—I do not remember anymore—before I went to the legislature I am sure, appointed Judge W. R. Roberts. Now, he did not have any education much of any kind, but he was a nice old guy. He had a lot of kids. He had one son and a whole bunch of pretty daughters. Judge Roberts continued to serve as county judge for quite a number of years. There were a lot of events that took place while he was county judge.

For example, it seems that when they counted the ballots after an election and before the canvassing board met to do the official whatever they do, he seemed to have control of the ballots. I can remember in 1940, when I was a candidate for re-election, my opponent was a lawyer in Punta Gorda by the name of **Bill Sinclair**. Now, that is a whole story in itself, but I was not quite sure what Judge Roberts might do about those ballots. It looked like I had won pretty well, but I would drive by the courthouse to look in the window and one night I saw Judge Roberts and Bill Sinclair sitting in his office. That scared the stuff out of me, when actually nothing happened. Judge Roberts was a common old cracker. He spent a good deal of his life down in Cuba. His wife was a Cuban. I can well remember my last experience with him. While I was in the legislature, prior to every session after the election, there was a kind of informal caucus and entertainment thing for legislators, in various places. This particular time, it was in Tampa. It was after Judge Roberts was no longer county judge. He had been defeated by a fellow by the name of **Lawrence Robinson**, who was weird, and who died fairly **soon [after]**. At any rate, I was in Tampa for this caucus. It was at the old Tampa Terrace Hotel. I was walking along the street in front of the hotel and ran into Judge Roberts. At the time, he was living with one of his daughters in Tampa. I visited with him a few minutes. I said, Judge, there is a big party going on inside here, and we got a dinner and all kinds of entertainment. I said, I tell you what, why don't you go with me? Oh, he said, I would just love to do that, but I got to tell my daughter where I am. I said, well, come on. We went in there and we got on the phone and called his daughter, and I took him to this party. The old fellow really enjoyed himself. After it was over, of course, he departed, and I never saw him after that. He died, **I guess**. I do not think he lived very long. That is sort of my recollection of Judge Roberts.

P: Paul Eddy.

W: Paul Eddy worked for the *Punta Gorda Herald* during the latter part of the real estate boom of the 1920s. He just did not fit the mold, though, of Punta Gorda and Charlotte County. He came from somewhere up north, I guess, but he worked for the *Herald*. The *Herald* was going downhill like everything with the Depression coming on. He decided to run for county school superintendent. I think he withdrew when he was going to get beat, and he went up to Tampa and worked as a reporter. He wrote an aviation column for the *Tampa Tribune*. He was married to a young woman, whose name I cannot remember now, but she lived in Nocatee. She was a nice gal. He left Tampa, though, and went to Tallahassee. The latter part of his life, he worked in the state Department of Education up there. I do not know whether he was there when he died, or not. That was Paul Eddy. He and I did not get along very well, just because I am kind of a cracker type, and he was called a Yankee. It just did not work. That was the

year Sally Jones beat me for school superintendent.

P: All right. Let us talk about Sally Jones.

W: Sally taught me when I was in sixth grade. She was a member of an old cracker family. She had three brothers, **Charlie** and **Ferg** and **Neli (Cornelius)**. They were all right people. Sally was the only one who had any formal education to amount to anything. She went, I believe, to Florida State College for Women, FSU. I do not know whether she ever finished at that time or not, but she taught the sixth grade in Punta Gorda. Prior to that, though, she had taught down in Chokoloskee. You might know where that is. It was pretty primitive, too, when she taught school down there. Later on, she taught in the high school at the same time I did. In fact, her room was right next to mine. When Paul Eddy got out of the way in a race for superintendent, he got out of the way, really, because Sally decided to run. I thought, gosh, here I am making \$101 a month. I bet you superintendent must make as much as \$200. So I said, well, I will run. It was kind of presumptuous for me to do that because she was popular with the people, but I ran. We worked real hard and got beat, which, really I guess, was one of the more fortuitous things that ever happened to me. It would have been a terrible thing to get to be a political **hack, living**...oh, that would have been awful. But, Sally was all right. She was good to us when we were kids. I remember one time, a bunch of boys, she went out camping with us, slept out in the woods. I do not know why she ever did that. But, she was a nice person.

P: **Matt Wigs.**

W: Well, Matt was part of the contingent from the coast of North Carolina that started coming to the west coast of Florida in the winters back in the late 1800s and early 1900s to do commercial fishing, when they could not do it, I guess, up there. So, he was one of that North Carolina group. Uneducated but a good citizen. A rough-talking guy. A lot of stories about Matt. He got elected, for example, to the county commission. He did a lot of good things, too. The county was trying to build some roads and streets, and he would go out and supervise construction and do all sorts of things. He was actually in the marine repair business. He had a place on the old city docks. One of the stories I have told a lot of times, he told it to me and I sure it is true. When he ran for re-election to the county commission, he was not your ordinary campaigner, politician. One of the folks from down on Pine Island **Road and the lower folks** came to see him in his boat repair place and said, Mr. Wigs, I am going to vote for you and so is my wife, but, you know, my wife is not going to be able to get to the polls. Matt said, why not? Well, he said, she needs a pair of shoes. He said, can you help me? He said, get out of here, you so and so, said, she is your wife, you buy her the

shoes. And he threw the guy out. It was kind of interesting because his place of business was up here. It had some **scats** going up pretty high off the road. I do not know why it did not kill that _____. Anyway, that is a picture of him. Matt also liked to do skeet shooting. He was an all right guy. Vernon's father was chairman of the board of the county commission during much of the time Matt was on the board. That was a unique organization. There was Vasco, **back _____ when I knew** what really was going on, and Matt Wigs and a fellow from Charlotte Harbor here by the name of **Wes Vickers** and another one by the name of **Carl Far**, from out at the Englewood area. He was a pretty bright fellow. Who else? **Shooby Locklear**, whose virtue was not great, but he was all right. But, Vasco ran the thing. County attorney was Earl Far, who had been accustomed to running everything until Vasco got to be chairman. He made Earl shut up, which was quite an accomplishment. I always liked that. I was working for the newspaper most of that time, and I would go over there. They did not have anything like an agenda for those meetings. They just went over there. My brother's present wife was a clerk of that court during that time. She would bring in a list of whatever she thought needed doing, and that was the agenda for the day. But, I would go over there to cover the meeting, which was always entertaining. Every time I would come over there, Matt would say, why you little so and so, what do you want? I would say, why you snaggletooth old so and so, this is what I want. That is the way it went. Kind of an informal thing, but those guys were conscientious [and] they worked hard. They had nothing to work with, they had no money, and they did a good job for the county. Vasco did the best job of anybody during that era because he did a great deal towards getting some roads built in this county. They were an interesting lot. I remember one time. It is kind of hard to relate times, but I was in the legislature anyway, and Vasco wanted to have a little meeting about the compensation that the county commissioners were receiving. At that time, the legislator from the county controlled it. I just introduced a local bill and passed it, and that was it. So, we had a meeting. It was in the back of Vasco's store. It was the whole county commission and me, sitting on some feed sacks back there. They told me that what they wanted to do was to raise the pay of the county commission from \$50 to \$75 a month and to give the chairman \$100. I said, well, I will do that. So, I introduced the bill and passed it, and I never heard, nobody ever reacted to it. It was a different economic era, a different time, but it was all right. It was a good time.

P: Now a non-political personality, **George W. Gatewood**.

W: He was, I believe, a Methodist preacher, an **itinerant** country Methodist preacher. He lived here for many years. I do not know a whole lot of his background. He came from upcountry, up somewhere. He wrote things. He wrote

a couple of books, sort of, that my friend A. Jordan who ran the *Herald* rewrote and edited and printed for him. He was an interesting individual, too. He conducted church services out in the country for folks. I do not remember where. He and I were pretty friendly. He used to come over to the *Herald* office and visit, but I do not remember a whole lot of detail about him. He was the father of some interesting folks. He was grandfather to **Hugh Adams**. He was father to Hugh's mother, of course, and lived here quite a few years until his death.

P: All right. Now, switching from personalities, how would you describe your political philosophy and your association with the Democratic party?

W: Pretty Democratic. I do not know, if you had to classify me, it would be pretty easy, I think. You would say liberal, but that has to be defined because the Republicans like to say that liberals are people who want to throw away all the money. I define it as making government serve the people. Education, health care, the environment. If those things make me a flaming liberal, that is what I am. I have never been one who favors just throwing away money for the fun of it, but I have never been against levying taxes when it was necessary to do it. It seems to be the philosophy today among the prevailing group of politicians that are taxes are bad. Well, I do not think so. I do not think that there is anything that we spend our money for that buys anything greater than the freedom that we have and the education that we have and the associations that we enjoy, and that is paid for with tax money. There is nothing that we buy, in my judgement, that is even equally important. That is sort of my philosophy in a nutshell.

P: What do you remember about Franklin Delano Roosevelt when he first became president [1933-1945]?

W: I remember his speech, the only thing we have to fear is fear itself. The New Deal. I remember his acceptance speech when he was first nominated. I think it was in Chicago. He flew out there in an airplane, and that was just unheard of in those days. I am sure he gave his acceptance speech there. But, it was a great one. Of course, he followed Herbert Hoover [1929-1933], who presided over a disaster. This nation when FDR became president, I think, was as near to revolution as it has ever been, or as any nation has ever been without actually reaching it. People were hungry. There were no jobs. There was nothing. It was awful. And he made things happen. He, I guess, was probably our greatest president, maybe along with Lincoln, who saved the nation. I could go on about him a lot _____. I started to go to his second inauguration in 1936. At the time, I had been teaching school here. I had taken a civil service examination and was offered a job when they were setting up the Social Security system, offered a job in Baltimore. It paid \$120 a month, and I was making \$101, I believe it was,

teaching in Punta Gorda. So, I quit in December of 1936 and went to Baltimore for \$120. It was not exactly a wise decision, of course, because it cost more to live in Baltimore than Punta Gorda, and my money began to dissipate. Anyway, while I was there, it was during that winter, and it was during the spring of 1937 when they had the inauguration of FDR. I planned to get on the train and go down to Washington from Baltimore. Well, the day of the inauguration was freezing cold with sleet and snow and stuff, and I thought, well, I'd better stay alive. So, I did not go. I do remember that.

P: In 1938, you ran for the state House of Representatives.

W: That was an interesting campaign, 1938. Three people ran for representative. I had just been bit by the political bug in 1936 when I ran for school superintendent and got beat. I had never been to Tallahassee, but I decided to run. Vasco Peoples, Vernon's father, ran. He had not been here but a couple of years maybe, Vernon?

P: Since 1933.

W: It had been that long? And, the third candidate was Frank Smoke, Sr. I worked pretty hard. I do not think Vasco did much, except run his store. I do not know what Frank Smoke did, but he almost beat Vasco and me both in the first primary. I do not remember what the vote was, but it came close to having a majority. I beat Vasco out, not by much, and Vasco decided to help me for the second primary and really was responsible for my being elected because I won by four votes and he made contact with a group from the Grove City/Englewood area. I think they were show people who were traveling. He got absentee ballots to them and got their votes. I am quite sure that I would have lost had it not been for those fifteen votes. The campaign itself was pretty interesting because Frank Smoke was kind of different. He did not have any business being in the legislature for sure. But, he worked for the Babcock Florida Company at that time, and they were the only people that had any money. So, somehow with their support, or somebody's support, he got all these votes. Well, he decided that he had won after the first primary. That turned out to be his fatal mistake because I worked even harder and had Vasco's help, and we beat him. He started celebrating, and I think I told you the story about that. Did I tell you the last time about the public speaking engagement that we had?

P: Yes, you did. Leo, were there any real issues in the campaign, or was it essentially a campaign of personalities?

W: Personalities. Except that behind the scenes, although I did not realize it I guess

at the time, there was a movement led by the **Dupont** interests to substitute other levies and eliminate taxes on real estate. They elected to keep **Harris Wood**, who worked for them. He got elected to the Speaker of the House. I am sure that was a motivating thing, but it was never talked about in the campaign. In fact, I did not realize it until I got to Tallahassee, but beyond that, just personalities. That is how it was the first time. Other things arose in the subsequent elections.

P: Now, this was the **Alfred I. Dupont Estate** that you are referring to?

W: That is correct.

P: When you arrived in Tallahassee in the spring of 1939 for your first session, what was your reaction?

W: Well, I had only been there once before, right after the election when I won. There was a fellow who lived here by the name of **Charlie McClain**. He had a job as a kind of a **straw**_____ for the state road department, the road maintenance thing, and he was about to be fired for whatever reason. He did not have any money, I guess. Fred Cone was firing people. It got to be such a thing that they wanted me to go to Tallahassee and save his job. So, he and I and his daughter Florence, we went to Tallahassee, and I was going to go see the governor about this important position. Well, the governor had [suffered] a heart attack. Fred Cone was the governor. His brother Branch, who was not noted for walking the straight and narrow, was his executive assistant. I went in there to see him. He kind of snarled at me. I did not have too much courage back in those days, I guess, but we saved Charlie McClain's job and came back to Punta Gorda. That was my first trip to Tallahassee. That was in the old governor's office. I do not know if you ever saw that one, Vernon. It was in the old Capitol. Go in the front door and turn to the left and down at the end of the hall. It was not a great suite of offices like later. Then, when I went to Tallahassee, I was very fortunate when I first went there. I had been working and was working for the *Punta Gorda Herald*. I was what you call a stringer, a correspondent to the *Tampa Tribune*, AP, and anybody else who would let me. So, I walked up into the House Chamber when I first got to Tallahassee, and the Tallahassee correspondents for the various news services and newspapers were having some kind of a meeting up there. I just sort of walked in and started visiting with some of them, told them I was kind of a country cousin of their's, and we got to be real friendly. There was **Malcolm Johnson**. I met him at that time. He was a young reporter for the Associated Press, working with another fellow I knew real well. Another good friend of mine from the *Tampa Tribune*, two of them from the *Tampa Tribune*, and *Florida Times Union*. **I cannot recall the names of these folks**. They were

all my friends almost forever. **Alan Morris**, was later chief clerk of the House, worked at that time for the *Miami Herald*. I met all those folks on that first occasion, and it was pretty fortuitous because we just became real good friends. When things were about to happen they were concerned about or something, they would come tell me about it. It was pretty great. Another thing that was interesting, too, my desk was on the left side of the House, second row back, and there was a table next to the Speaker's rostrum up in the front of the House. That was the press box. There were usually, oh, about half a dozen reporters there.

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P: Okay.

W: That was my initiation to the legislature. There were some other people who were extremely helpful to me. I met a fellow by the name of **Charlie Rosenberg**, whose family owned the Rose Printing Company that did all the state printing. He was helpful to me. The legislature was largely rural, of course, it was controlled by the small counties. We had nothing like one man one vote in those days, so that if you stood for something and got a little support from what we called the small county block, later called the porkchop gang, you could accomplish some things. The large counties in the state just had very little influence. The largest three counties had three representatives each, Dade, Hillsborough, Duval. There was another one. There were more than three.

P: Polk and Pinellas.

W: Yes, Polk and Pinellas had three representatives each. The next group had two, and all the rest of the counties had one. So, Dade County, even at that time, must have had 500,000 in it with three representatives. I represented Charlotte County, which had maybe 5,000 people in it. My vote counted just as much in the legislature as one of those representatives from Dade County. If you really wanted to be fair about things, that was not fair, but it stayed that way until the U. S. Supreme Court changed the law. But, the small county people, the legislators, all one party and all of that. But, it seemed to me like most of the folks were pretty conscientious about things. We had very little money to work with, almost none until a few years later when I helped pass the sales tax. We did a few things, but not much. The first session I was there, Fred Cone was still governor. All he did was veto stuff. Governor David Scholtz just before that had started the Florida Highway Patrol. Fred Cone shut it down. Just almost nothing happened, I guess, that first session, but I got a pretty good education. Then, in 1940, Spessard Holland was elected governor, and World War II was on the horizon. Spessard really led Florida out of the, I guess, middle ages. For

example, the counties had issued millions of dollars in bonds for the purpose of building highways through the counties. Most of them were parts of thoroughfares through the state, like U. S. 41 and roads like that. Spessard Holland proposed that the state take over all those road bonds that the counties could not pay, nobody was paying taxes, and that they being funded from gasoline taxes. That was perhaps one of the most significant things that happened in that era, but there were a lot of others. For example, a lot of public health legislation. The military moved into Florida in 1940, thousands for training, and there were all kinds of problems with venereal disease and I do not know what all so that Holland proposed a lot of public health legislation. I cannot remember the events, but I remember some things, like he proposed increasing the price of automobile tags. Governor Holland did. I was opposed to that because it was hard enough to pay for the ones we had. I was talking to a fellow from Punta Gorda by the name of **Alton Moore**, who was a friend of the governor's, and I said, I am going to get up and have something to say about that. Well, he went and told the governor. I guess the governor got hold of the Speaker, who was **Dan McCarty** in 1940. I stood up the whole debate, waving in the second row, you know, which looked right in the Speaker's face. He would not recognize me. He would not let me [speak]. I was waving my arms, I would yell, and he did not pay any attention to me. They passed the bill, and I voted against it. That is the way it was.

P: In 1939, what entertainment was there in Tallahassee?

W: Well, Rose Printing Company put on a barbecue. There was not very much else. We had a reception at the governor's mansion. There was not a whole lot. I cannot even remember anything special.

P: Was there any problem with Leon County being officially dry?

W: Oh no. It was officially dry, but you could sit on the front porch of the Floridian Hotel and look to your right, right across the street, to the side of a building there to people going in and buying a bottle. When we would go out to eat, we would probably take a bottle along and put it down under the table. There was always plenty of booze, all the years I was up there. I guess by the time my session was over, my big lower right desk drawer was full of whisky bottles. Somebody was always giving me one. We had some legislators, though, who did not have much to take on. They would try to drink it all up.

P: What do you recall about lobbyists, generally speaking, in those early legislative years?

W: They did not have a whole lot of influence. They did not have any money. Nobody had any. I guess some did, but I cannot at this point even think of one who really did much of anything. Somebody, maybe, from one of the departments downstairs in the Capitol would come up to talk about some bill that they had, but as far as an army of lobbyists is concerned, it did not exist. I never heard of any such thing as the kind of money that has been in circulation since. You know, the campaigns of the legislature, when you were running for election, there was no local radio. Nobody hears any radio. You put a little ad in the paper once in awhile and go around the county. It cost me a couple hundred dollars to run. If it had cost much more, I could not have run, anyway. But, that was the way **back then**. I do not think I ever had any contributions. I may have had some.

P: When you needed more information about a bill, who did you consult?

W: It was pretty hard to do. You would just have to go to the chief clerk's office and look in the bill. There was no source of information other than the newspaper people, the press. They sort of kept up with what was going on. If you needed any information other than that, that was the only place. Of course, there was created later the thing called the legislative reference bureau, headed by an old friend of mine from the University of Florida, **Sherman _____**. He sort of invented by himself, I think. He probably had some model from someplace. He would do brief summaries of the bills that were introduced and circulate them around. That was the very first, but that was toward the end of my time there, I guess, probably 1947. Maybe it was as early as 1945. I do not know. I was there when he was drafted and hauled off to the service, so that would have been in about 1944 or 1945. It must have started after he came back.

P: How about legislative humor when you were in session?

W: There was a lot of that, just a lot of it. That kept life from getting too boring. I do not remember which session it was, but as an example, there was a fellow from Orange County, a representative by the name of **Tyn Cobb**. He fancied himself to be a reformer in the area of elections, but he was a nuisance. He just bothered everybody, a pest. Anyway, this was during the war. He introduced a bill to take the names of the presidential elector candidates off the ballot, a perfectly sensible thing to do, but this was during the war and he was a nuisance. So, that bill was coming up for debate one day. I went over to the other side of the chamber to talk to my friend, **Archie Clement**. I had prepared an amendment to kill the bill, strike out the enacting clause. I said, Archie, do you want to go along with this? He said, oh yeah, sure. I got up and introduced my amendment and made a speech about patriotism, [that] here we are fighting a war to give people the right to vote and this man is trying to take away the right. Perfectly **stupid**.

Then, Archie got up **with black humor**, pointed his finger and said, Tyn, you are a good man but you are running with the wrong crowd. None of it made any sense, but his bill was slammed down with a roar in the House. It was just out of pure ornery-ness, but that is the kind of humor that we had.

P: Was there any newspaper reaction to that?

W: The only one I can recall [was from] **Carl Handlin**, who was editor and publisher of the *Fort Myers News Press*. He thought that bill ought to be passed. I guess as soon as it got down there on the wire, I got a telegram from him. He said, have you lost your mind? I wish I had that telegram. I do not know what [I did with it.] I told him why we did it after the session was over, the next time I saw him. He said, have you lost your mind?

P: Where did you live in Tallahassee during a legislative session?

W: At the residence of **W. V. Not**. It was an Antebellum home on **West Main** Street. I had a great big room which **Vernon** occupied with me for awhile at one time. My room had one of these four-poster beds in it. It was probably built before the Civil War, just like the house was. You had a have a footstool to get up on the bed. If a person fell out of that bed, it would kill him or something. Vernon did not get to sleep on that one. He had a cot on the side. But, the home was interesting because it was owned by W. V. Not, who had been state treasurer for years and had been nominee for governor and was defeated by a fellow by the name of Sidney J. Catts [Florida governor, 1917-1921], who ran against the **Pope** and the **Demon** _____. I do not know what all he ran against. Everything was terrible. But, he beat Not. Anyhow, I enjoyed living there because a lot of times I would come in, he would be sitting on the front porch or someplace and we would stop and visit. Another thing, too. A senator from Fort Myers, **Jim Franklin, Sr.**, lived up there. One of the more able people who was fairly ineffective because of the tone of voice that he spoke in. It was kind of a strange thing. He always sounded as though he were snarling when he spoke, and he was not. Anyway, he lived up there, and he and I, late in the afternoons, used to sit up there and have a drink in his room. He would have one drink and I would have one, and we would sit there and visit. We got to be real good friends. I know that years later after we were both out of the legislature, after I was out of law school, a vacancy occurred in the circuit judgeship. He called me from Fort Myers and he said, do you want to be circuit judge? He said, I can get you appointed today. I said, I guess I would kind of like to, but I cannot do that. My brother and I are trying to start a law practice, and I will have to turn it down. But, we were that friendly. I had an opportunity then to be circuit judge. Before that, I had an opportunity to be appointed county judge. When Lawrence Robinson died, Holland was governor

and **Ralph Davis** was his executive assistant. I had been helpful to the governor. That was at the beginning of 1941. Ralph called me from Tallahassee and he said, we got a vacancy down there in the county judge position. He said, if you take it, you can have it by noon today. **I thought, I am not a lawyer.** I think it is ridiculous. No, I do not want to be county judge, but I appreciate it. So, I have had an opportunity to be a judge twice, and I missed it.

P: Well, when you were first elected, do you recall how many members were in the House and how many women and how many blacks and how many Hispanics?

W: Yes, I sure do. Ninety-five white men in the House and thirty-eight white men in the senate.

P: And all of one political party.

W: All of one political party, the first session. Then, we got **what's-his-name** from Orlando, a Republican.

P: You got a Republican elected from Orange County in, that was maybe, 1943?

W: I think it was 1943. I remember it was such an unheard of thing that there was a movement there to deny him his seat, which the House has the constitutional right to do. It is **the sole judge of the** qualifications of its members. I got up and made a speech, like a fool. I said, he cannot do any harm. There is only one of him. Just leave him alone, or words to that effect. He did retain his seat. He was totally ineffective, but since then I have thought I probably poisoned the well, or let him poison it.

P: During your first few sessions where you had Governor Cone and Governor Holland, were these people that, as a legislator, you got to know personally? Did you feel like you knew those two governors on a personal basis?

W: Oh yes. I did not know Governor Cone real well because he was pretty much out of circulation, but Spessard Holland, I knew real well. For example, one weekend—I think it was a long weekend for some reason—I was going to come home. I guess I was in the governor's office. For some reason, I happened to tell him that. He said, well, I am going to Bartow. That was his home. He said, **the patrol** is going to take me down there. He said, why don't you ride with me? So, they shuttled us all the way down, and he sent me on down to Punta Gorda. Yeah, we were really very friendly. I had another experience with Spessard Holland, for example, when he was governor. It is another story, but it is kind of interesting. There was an issue of Punta Gorda municipal bonds, \$30,000 worth,

which was a pretty good sized issue, way back when it was issued. Those bonds were found in a defunct bank, over at First National Bank, stuffed on top of the vault. The bank building had been bought by the mother of a local lawyer, **Lamar Rues**. I do not know how they got in circulation. Do not ask me that. At any rate, those bonds were in circulation and it was apparent that the city was going to have to pay them, but they were actually a duplicate set of bonds. The defect in them was not apparent, but I found out later what the defect was. They were supposed to have facsimile signatures on the interest coupons. They signed them all, so they said. At any rate, they were a duplicate issue of bonds. This, again, was before the 1941 session. The city was receiving one-third of the county's share of racetrack revenue. It was, I do not know, a few thousand dollars a year, but it was significant. They were getting it under what was called a population bracket bill, which was about to go out of business, for whatever reason, and they needed it to be reinstated. I remember they had a big meeting at the Chamber of Commerce. A representative from the **Krummer** Company was there. They were the bond people.

P: Where were they from?

W: Orlando. **R. E. Krummer** Company. I believe the representative who was there was a fellow by the name of **Les Brown**, who was the father-in-law of **Buck Brandon**. Anyway, they demanded, and they had a considerable group [with] the city council and all of that, demanded that I pass a local bill reinstating that division. I said, well, I will do it, provided first that, that \$30,000 worth of bonds is turned into the city at no expense, no cost. Somebody paid a little money for them. There was considerable turmoil there. I said, well, I am simply not going to do it. I will divide it between the school board and the county commission. This \$10,000, \$15,000, \$20,000, whatever it was a year, was a considerable amount of money. \$30,000 was a lot of money for the city. It is hard to realize now. They spend that much by mistake. But the pressure, boy, you cannot imagine. I had two bills drawn. One was to divide it up three ways, and one divided it between the school board and the county commission. I just sat on the thing, and I kept getting telegrams and demands and all kinds of stuff. Finally, I think right almost at the end of the session, I had a call from A. Jordan—he was the manager of the *Punta Gorda Herald*, the principal owner—he called me and said, Earl Farn brought me in a bunch of bonds. Did you count them? He said, yeah, \$30,000 worth. I said, how about the interest coupons. He said, they are all there, I counted them. I said, what are you supposed to do with them? He said, I am supposed to give them to you. I said, I tell you what, A., you lock them up in the safe, and I will pass that bill for them. That is the way the racetrack money got restored. Again, you talk about sums of money like that and it is insignificant today, but it was quite a significant factor in the economy at that time.

P: Leo, when you were first elected, the process in place for selecting a Speaker?

W: I must have told you most of my stories. In 1938 after I was elected, we had a caucus of the House. It was right outside of Tampa. I stayed in Tampa, and I will never forget it. I guess we nominated **Harris Wood** to be Speaker. No, we did not at that time. It is hard to remember. At any rate, the representative from Hardee County was a barber. His brother was a Methodist preacher here in Punta Gorda later. A fellow from not La Belle but down on the lake there was caucus chairman or whatever. He was presiding. He was a banker.

P: **Elbert Stuart?**

W: Elbert Stuart, yes. Elbert was presiding. This fellow from Hardee County, I will never forget. **They called the rules of the House**, and for some reason, we used some proxies. Those who held proxies for somebody, when that person's name was called, they would say, here by proxy. Well, this poor fellow from Hardee County had never heard that word before, so when they called his name, he said, here by proxy. It just broke up the meeting. Things like that. But, the Speaker was nominated and, in fact, elected at a caucus the night before the legislature convened in 1939. That was **G. Harris Wood**. He was a great fellow. As I told you before, he worked for the Duponts, and they expected him to get rid of real estate taxes. After the session, they either fired him or he quit, and he went to work for the Consolidated Land Company, which was pretty well-controlled by the **Treadwool** family in Arcadia. He lived down in De Soto County. As a matter of fact, he had an emergency appendectomy at the Arcadia Hospital and died there. A fairly young man. He was **able**, just a great person.

P: Did there seem to be any ____ of any special interest in the selection of the Speaker?

W: Could have been, but I saw no signs of it, unless G. Harris Wood's selection was influenced by the Duponts, which was very probably. But, nobody ever bothered me about it. They did not think I made any difference anyhow. I probably didn't.

P: What you were speaking about, I believe, were the Democratic caucuses when they were nominated, and then, of course, the election was the night before.

W: Yes, that was it. There was not any other party to have a caucus but, you know, it was not a one-sided thing. The divisions were pretty vigorous. The debates were sometimes tough and mean, but they were not on political lines, mostly. They were on philosophical lines, what you stood for, which is not always true today anymore.

P: In the House, you had ninety-five members, and you had some number of people who were the significant leaders, however many that might have been. I am sure they were clearly identifiable, as to who had the power and the influence and who did not.

W: Yes, that is true. They were a fairly limited number. Of course, the Speaker was Harris Wood during that early session. There was a representative from Jacksonville, a very able guy. At one time, the lawyer partner of Jim Franklin in Fort Myers. **I cannot recall his name**, but he was a very good representative and exerted quite a bit of influence, mostly because of his ability. At that time, who were the leaders in the House that first session? A fellow from west Florida. He was a former Speaker and had come back. Again, **I cannot recall his name**. He became a circuit judge later.

P: **E. Clay Lewis.**

W: Yes, Jr. The rest of us were mostly new members, but some of them pretty quickly became pretty outstanding, like **Dan McCarty. Fuller Warren** was there, but Fuller was full of conversation mostly. He made good speeches, though. Who else? Of course, Archie Clement. These fellows, it was pretty early in their careers. It was kind of a whittling out process that sort of began about that time. I cannot remember any of the others right now.

P: What relationship was there between the House and the senate?

W: It was all right. We used to fuss at that some, but we got along.

P: Did one branch seem to be more liberal or conservative than the other?

W: No, I would not think so then. Everybody was conservative. You pretty much had to be because we did not have any money to deal with. There was no such thing as, for example, what are now called turkeys **getting on** the appropriations, getting on the committee and all. Now, because there is money, you can get projects inserted in the appropriations for your area on occasion, especially if you are in good graces with folks. Well, there was not any money anyhow. As a matter of fact, during all those years I was there, I never aspired to be on the appropriation committee because it looked to me like all they did was suffer, trying to put together a budget with no money.

P: The proxy system of committee voting?

W: Yes. That, I understand, was eliminated along the way, but I thought it was very

effective. One example of it occurred in 1949. I was chairman of the education committee in the House, and during that session, a bill was introduced under the sponsorship of the Florida Bar to require all applicants for admission to the bar to take the bar exam. Prior to that time, a graduate from an accredited Florida law school was automatically admitted. That bill was introduced. I did not pay any attention to it. I was not a lawyer at the time. But, I began to get frantic phone calls. I got one from **Dredon Far**, who is just retiring now, and **Elmer Friday**, who is a retired circuit judge. They were saying, do something about that; if we have to take the bar exam, we may never get admitted. I thought, well, maybe I could help them. I got up one day, and the bill had been referred to a judiciary committee, which was a **proper** _____ referral. I moved to refer it jointly to the committee on education, which had one lawyer on it. The motion prevailed. I had to call a meeting of the committee. The Florida Bar folks, gosh, most of them from over there in the senate were over there beating on me all the time about it, so I thought, well, I better get some arrangements made. I went around and saw all the members of the committee and got proxies and got them to pledge if they came to the meeting they would vote to kill the bill, all except one, the lawyer on there. He was a lawyer from Pinellas County. A nice guy. He said, I cannot do that, they will kill me. I said, well, it ought to have one vote, you vote for it. We had this public hearing on the bill, and the halls of the Capitol were absolutely jammed with law students that we had to restrict their time, so much time for each law school. They could select their speaker, and then the representatives of the bar. All that got through and **called** with a vote. Everybody was there. I still had the proxies in my pocket. Called the role around the committee, and everybody voted no except that one lawyer who voted aye. I adjourned the committee and started out the door. I remember a couple of those guys from the senate collared me and said, you did that. I said, I did not do anything, [but] it must have been have been a lousy bill; you could have gotten more than one vote for it. So, it died. Fortuitously, it served me well because in 1950, I was defeated for re-election in the House and went to law school. Then, the 1951 session came up, and that bill was introduced again in the legislature. The law students unanimously elected me to go to Tallahassee and do something. I went over there, and the first person I met when I went upstairs in the Capitol was **John Allison**, who was a lawyer from Tampa. He was doing the lobbying for the bar. He looked at me and he said, I know what you are here for. I said, what? He said, the diploma privilege bill. I said, yes, how is it doing? He said, well, we are taking care of it. I said, what are you doing? Well, he said, anybody presently in law school gets admitted automatically, and it is only those in the future who will have to take the bar exam. I said, thank you very much, give me a copy of that. He did, and I went back to Gainesville and I was kind of a hero. I had not done a darned thing. I did it all two years previously. Anyone who has been in public life and all, Vernon, me, you wind up with a bunch of plaques. I have one relating to

that. Last year, I guess, the relics of my law school class had a meeting in Gainesville at Homecoming time, and they **docked** a kind of an informal resolution and had a plaque made commemorating the fact that I got them all admitted to the bar. I think there were a lot of people admitted. You know, there was Miami. The law school at Miami was a disaster in those days. They had classes in theaters. Anybody could go to law school down there. That is what caused the thing to start with. Anyway, that is a long story...

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W: ...kind of an infamous sort of an activity, always somebody preying on the poorest folks around. These people would advance people who were in need money against their salaries. They would lend them a few dollars and take back all of it, taking assignment of all their wages. It was a pretty terrible thing. I guess in an effort of some sort to alleviate the problem, rather than just put them all in jail, they passed the small loan act—I **forget the name** of it now—which allowed 42 percent interest, which was urged by these people to be just wonderful. Well, I was supporting legislation to kill the salary buyers' thing and, at the same time, to reduce the interest rate at the small loan companies could charge folks. It is, again, hard to recall details, but it seems to me the salary buyers thing, we got rid of them, but the legislation to reduce the interest the small loan companies could charge, we did not get anywhere. I recall going before the committee on banks and loans, and Elbert Stuart, I think, was chairman of the committee on banks. I made my presentation. He said, go on, Leo, now, **are you all finished**, before we kill it? That is what happened. I did not get anywhere with that one. But, that is kind of a short synopsis of the thing.

P: Right. Another major issue was no fence legislation.

W: That sure was. By 1939, the pressure, I guess, was on quite a bit to get cattle off highways. Some of the counties were passing local laws, but it was thought to be death to you if you voted for one of those fencing laws. I can recall in 1939, I voted against two or three of them, just because I did not have any better sense. But, I came home and I got to looking around Charlotte County, and I got re-elected. I announced that Charlotte County had to get the cattle off the roads and I was going to pass the local law—that was before there was a statewide law—and I was invited to a meeting of the Charlotte County Cattlemen's Association. Now, that was an interesting meeting. Let's see, **Prazelle**, the Babcock interests, the **Reibold** family, they were all there. They told me, now, we do not want you to pass the fencing law. I said, well, I am going to, but I will make a concession: you will have six months to fence up. Well, they said, if you pass one, we do not want it to penalize us if the cattle get out and **kill** somebody. I said, **it is going to have**

teeth in it, too. I must have been crazy. I do not know. Anyhow, the air just flows around me. I went up to Tallahassee and passed the darned thing and got elected the next time, so I guess it was all right. But, after I passed the thing, when I was up for re-election the next time, an old lady at Charlotte Harbor—I say she was an old lady, but she was not as old as I am now; nobody is—she had always voted for me. Her husband made moonshine, and I forget what she did. Anyway, I went to her house, knocked on the door, and she said, I am glad you came by here, I am going to vote against you. I said, why? Well, you just about starved my cow. I said, why did I do that? Well, she said, I could let her graze around, and now I got to tie a string around her neck and keep her penned up. It is terrible. I said, well, I sure am sorry but I tell you what, I am going to run two years from now and you will be over it by then. Maybe you will vote for me that time. But then, when Fuller Warren was elected governor [1949-1953], that was kind of a key aspect to his program, to pass a statewide fencing law. It was part of the business of bringing Florida into...get it out of prehistoric times, I guess.

P: When you were considering the local bill requiring fencing, did you receive a petition from _____?

W: Oh yes, I sure did. I had two of them. After I went to Tallahassee, during the course of the session, I got a petition. I do not know how many names. A bunch of people on there against it, wanting me to vote against it. It wasn't but just a few days I got another one for it, and it had about the same names on both petitions. That is another thing. I wish I had some of that stuff, but I just let it all get away from me. That is a true story. It was the funniest thing you ever saw.

P: While we are on cattle, I have to ask you about Representative **Joe Peoples** from Glades County.

W: Well, Joe Peoples, Sr. and Joe Peoples, Jr., I served with both of them. Uncle Joe, well, I was quite young. I do not know how old he was, but it was not long before he died, at any rate, in 1939. But Old Uncle Joe, his seat was right next to mine in the House. He was a huge man. He was an interesting old fellow, too. He would come to Tallahassee and, for example, he would get his fingernails manicured. I do not know why he did that, but he did. And he would put his false teeth in, but then when he would smoke a cigar (and he smoked a lot of them), he would take his teeth out and put them in his pocket and he would eat most of that cigar. You know, he would run it back and _____. He was sloppy and he would bite it off and [makes spitting sound]. And his seat was next to mine, and I would have to dodge it. But, he was interested in only two things. One was canals and drainage, and, of course, cattle, and the other was Lake Okeechobee fishing. Anything else, what would happen [was] if there was any bill affecting

those things, he would poke me in the ribs, and he was a big guy. He near about killed me. He would say, now, lookit here, Leo, you with me on this one? Oh, yes sir, I am afraid not to be. And I would vote with him. But, if it was anything else that I might be interested in, he would say, lookit here, Leo, how are we voting on this one? So, I always had a vote on the things that were important. He and I were good friends. Uncle Joe died, it must have been, soon after that session. I remember going to his funeral—I do not think you were there—in Arcadia. There was such a huge crowd there that you could not get in the funeral home. They had a speaker outside. Somebody sang Home on the Range, I remember. But then, his son, Joe Peoples, Jr., was elected to the House. Joe ran into a problem because his house was located over in Hendry County. Was it Hendry?

P: Glades.

W: Well, he was elected from Glades, but his house at that time was located...

P: Highlands.

W: Highlands County, that is correct. Well, what they had to do was move the county line, rather than move his house, and that happened. Joe Peoples, Jr., well, he was the same kind of character as his father. His father, I think, had actually served a little time in the pen for branding the wrong cattle, but nobody held it against him. He was later tax collector, I think, of maybe De Soto County. At any rate, Joe Peoples, Jr. sort of followed the same course that his father had, but [there was] kind of a memorable thing that he did. There was a piece of legislation that was sponsored by a guy from Palm , Beach County. **I can see him, but I cannot recall his name.** Something about Lake Okeechobee or something he was against, and he was chairman of the committee. **This Joe** was chairman of the committee. It was right at the end of the session, and he got the bill, had it in his desk, and would not call a meeting, and they were putting the pressure on him. So, one day before the end of the session, I came in and his desk drawers were all pulled open and empty. Joe was nowhere to be seen. What he had done, he packed up everything, including that bill, and went back to Glades County. Oh, there was an uproar around there. This guy over on the east coast tried to pass a copy of the bill. Well, you cannot do that. You have to have the original bill. Whatever the bill was, I do not remember anymore, but it failed to pass.

P: That was a real pocket veto.

W: It was. He stuck it in his pocket and left. But, Malcolm Johnson again. Malcolm came over to me. I had shut the desk drawers. He said, anything in his desk? I

said, no, go ahead and look. He said, no, I would not touch it. Oh, I said, here, and I opened the drawers. There was not anything in there. But, Joe was another one. He used to come see me occasionally over here. He got into all kinds of trouble which is irrelevant to this story, but he died with a brain tumor. His family fought, and his wife stole everything from the kids. It was a terrible thing. You went to the funeral, I think.

P: During your tenure in the legislature from 1938 to 1950, a continuing controversy involved commercial fishing...

W: Yes. As far as we were concerned here, it was generally a controversy between Lee and Charlotte Counties. The only industry we had here that gave employment to people was the commercial fishing industry. There were tourists in the wintertime, but commercial fishing was just about it. The folks down in Lee County—there was a long history of this sort of thing—were forever trying to restrict and limit commercial fishing, in favor of sports fishing. The problems got to be pretty mean. The *Fort Myers News Press* and its editor was forever pounding on Charlotte County, not getting anywhere because they could not get their bills past me. There were pressures here in Charlotte County. I know the 1939 session, for example, there was big turmoil about commercial fishing in Alligator Creek. There was the **Alapachee** Lodge that belonged to **Luke Calder**, a wealthy fellow. They got all heated up because the commercial fisherman were going up the creek there and **sanding** it out or something. It got to be a pretty heated thing, so I got hold of one of the meanest, nastiest commercial fisherman you ever heard of, a fellow by the name of **Jim Jones**. I said, you all do not need to fish way up in that creek, do you? He said, no, not really. I said, why don't we make a compromise? Let's pass a local law stopping fishing at some point in the creek. Well, they thought of a place called the **Devil's Elbow**. Why that is, God only knows. I do not. He said, we will not fish above the Devil's Elbow. Well, I passed the local bill prohibiting commercial fishing above the Devil's Elbow in Alligator Creek in Charlotte County, and everything settled back down peacefully. It was different in Lee County. The Lee County line pretty much cut off the mouth of Charlotte Harbor, so that they had some laws down there relative to net lengths, mesh sizes, and all sort of things like that, that were not illegal in Charlotte County. But, if the Charlotte County fisherman wanted to, for example, go over on the Gulf side to _____ some mullet out of the Gulf or someplace, they had to go into Lee County, and they were forever arresting them, every time they would go across the line. The controversies got kind of dangerous, I guess, for a period of time. It antagonized the editor of the *Fort Myers News Press* against me, among other things. He helped beat me, too. After that, several years later, I saw **Bill Spear**. I think he still may be living, [although] I have not seen him in many years. He said, you know one thing I did wrong? I said, no, what is that? He said, opposed

you. He said, you should not have been defeated. Well, thank you. Big help.

P: **Dean Darling.**

W: Oh yes, you know Dean Darling State Park down there. He was one of the original conservationists, and he wanted to save snook. Well, that was all right, but then in 1938 or somewhere back in there, there was a real spell of cold weather, a real freeze. The tide was low, and snook by the millions were numbed. They just came to the surface. People were out there picking them up, pulling _____, throwing them in their boats. They sold thousands and thousands of pounds of mullet. Well, his program was to prohibit the commercial taking of snook. He had this bill up there, and they were going to pass it. I got tired of fighting it, so I got me a bill drawn to take all of Boca Grande out of Lee County and attach it to Charlotte County. I caught him up in the gallery one day. I said, now, here is what I am going to do to you, we are going to take Boca Grande and the whole works away from you if you do not get away from those snook and leave us alone. You know, I intimidated him. He left, and I forgot about my bill. I could not have passed it anyway. That was Dean Darling. I have not seen Dean Darling since that session of the legislature, whenever it was.

P: 1950, the state of public education in Florida.

W: Earlier than that, I guess, Vernon.

P: 1948.

W: The whole thing, and my participation in it and such leadership as I was able to give to it, started in 1944. The state was providing very little, if any, funding for public education in this state. It was up to the counties' local school districts. They had the counties divided up into districts, and if they wanted to raise taxes, they had to get everybody to vote on it, and people would not. It was a disaster. So, Holland was about to go out as governor. Millard Caldwell had been elected and was going in, and Colin English was state school superintendent. They appointed a group called the Citizens' Committee on Education for Florida. Except for me, it was a very distinguished panel of people. There was **Katherine Abbey Hannah**, who was an historian. She was a university professor at _____. We had an executive director by the name of Dr. **Edgar Morefit**, who was a genius, and another one by the name of **Dr. Johns** from the university of Florida, who was a genius. We had the president of Gulf Life Insurance Company, my friend **Richard Simpson** who was Speaker of the House. I wish I had gotten out

those plaques. They had the pictures on them. At any rate, it was a group that I was real proud to be a part of. Anyway, we met all over the state until 1947 and devised what was called the minimum foundation program, which really created a revolution in education in Florida. It is still amazing to me that, that drastic change in things could have been accomplished all at one time. For example, the state began to require teachers to have an education. That sounds pretty simple, but it used to be that any nice little old lady who was good with kids could teach in elementary grades. Things like that. It provided for massive and huge funds into the county school systems, allocated to the counties on the basis of a formula, which was determine their relative ability to support their own schools, so that the relatively wealthy county was required to pay more of its own cost than a relatively poor one. For example, Charlotte County per child in school was deemed to be a relatively wealthy county on the criteria. De Soto County was in horrible shape, so they got more money per child from the state than we did. In addition to that, there was created the system which we now have of community colleges in Florida. That was a feature of the law. The school board members cut off their salaries and gave them mileage when they went to the school, so they got it all back there. It was a massive change in direction for education in Florida. As far as I am concerned, in my whole lifetime, that is the high point. We passed the darn thing in the House, but I remember, just before it was voted on in the House, the committee had a final meeting down in the governor's office. I have to say, the governor was a real good friend of mine. I was sitting right at the corner of his desk. We were all sitting around in there. He said, there is one thing I am going to require. The law provided for additional money for capital outlays so you could build schools and provide other things, busses, provided for \$300 per teacher unit. Teacher unit is the number of students in average daily attendance. They call it something else now. But, he said, I think that counties ought to do more. I am going to require, you are going to have to put in there, that the counties have to come up with an extra \$100 per teacher unit in order to get that money. Well, it just screwed up the formula pretty bad, so I said, you know, Governor, we got that bill so we are going to pass it, and we can pass it like it is. He stuck his finger in my face, and he had one about that long, and he said, if you do, I will veto it. I said, well, that puts a different complexion on it, [and] we will have to do it like you want it. There is a postscript to that story, too, because he went out of office and Fuller Warren was elected in the 1951 session. I was chairman of the education committee again. I got an amendment to take that foolishness out. Millard Caldwell was back in his law office, and I went over there to visit with him one day. I said, I thought I ought to come over here and tell you, we took out that \$100 you crammed down our throats. He said, you are making a mistake. But, that created a demand for a great deal of money. It turned out the state did not have it. In 1951, Governor Warren recommended a number of tax levies. One was for a severance tax on phosphate and timber and goodness

knows what all, and they were all killed. There were enough lobbyists around by that time to begin to kill legislation. Did I tell you all about sales tax thing? At any rate, the 1949 session ended, and there was no balanced budget and constitution. They were supposed to balance the budget. You cannot budget for deficit spending. So, soon after the session was over, a meeting was called, a secret meeting out of the Sunshine...there was not any such thing as the Sunshine Law anyway. The leadership of the House and the senate met in an orange grove down in Kissimmee. The orange grove was owned by a lawyer from Kissimmee named **Kenny Steed**, who was the governor's friend. I will never forget the governor showing up in his limousine out there in the woods, or in the middle of that orange grove. It was just a little old frame house. I did not make a note. I should have, but I never recorded the names of those who were present. My memory fails me pretty much now, but I know it was the leadership of the House and the senate, Roy Collins, Archie Clement, the chairman of the appropriations committee who was from St. Augustine, whoever it was, and so on. But, we sat around there. Every one of us had been, and were still, philosophically opposed to a sales tax because it was to tax the bottom level of people more. It was 100 percent sales tax on people with small income. We sat around there and talked about it, and there was no alternative. So, we decided to pass a 3 percent general sales tax with lots of exemptions. The governor had run as an opponent. I remember he said—_____ the statute there—well, do not call that a sales tax. So, we did not. Section one of the sales tax law is, this act shall be known as a revenue act of 1949. Nobody would know why that section is there, except somebody like me. I think, probably, that I am the only survivor of that meeting, and I do not suppose there is any record of it anyplace, not unless some other person who was there recorded it. At any rate, the governor called us into special session. We were there for, I do not know, a while, and we passed the sales tax. I came home and around all the retail places, they had oatmeal boxes with slots in the top, or cigar boxes with slots, my name on one and Governor Warren's on the other, to put the sales tax money in. The next election, I lost by **four** votes, but that was not a terrible thing. I had won by four votes the first time I ran. And, it was a blessing. I did not need to be there anymore. I went to law school after all that.

P: What was the impact on public education in Florida as a result of the passage of the minimum foundation act, and particular the funding of it.

W: It created a revolution, just really a revolution. Teacher pay went up. My wife was a teacher up in Georgia, and she somehow heard about it. She was teaching home economics. She came to Florida, so I got a wife out of it. The community college system, and you know what a wonderful thing that is, just blossomed all over the state. It first started as an adjunct to the county school system. It was an

amendment. Then, later on, it was changed so that [there was] a community college governing board of some kind that manages it. There was a lot more administrative control, which, you know, becomes good and bad, but teachers were paid more decently. I got up to \$1,300 that last year. I think that it was the most important thing that happened in Florida during that era, and one of the most important things in any era, to this state.

P: After you were defeated, you then went to law school.

W: Yes. I always wanted to. When I first graduated from high school in 1929, I had saved up enough money to get through one year, and my folks did not have any. I was taking pre-law. I was in arts and sciences. After that first year, I was out of my money, and so was the whole family. So, I took a competitive examination for a scholarship, a state teachers scholarship that paid \$100 a semester, and I got it. I went back to the University of Florida with that \$100 and worked for the *Punta Gorda Herald* that summer and saved, probably, \$100, and I had a job up there, always doing something. I was house manager for the fraternity and got a room rent-free. I waited on tables in the boarding house and got my meals, and I had that \$100 a semester. I was living high there at the University of Florida, from 1929 to 1933. I never could go back to law school. Then, after I got out in 1940, I guess it was, my brother got out of high school, and he went to the university. I tried to help him a little bit. I did not have much, but I was able to help him. He had some pretty good jobs, too. FDR was president, and the National Youth Administration gave him a job. He was kind of secretary/paper grader for a professor up there. I think he got \$0.25 or \$0.30 an hour. He got in the business of buying and selling old gold. I do not know how, but he and a couple of other fellows went around the state buying up old junk and then reselling it. And, he had a laundry route. So, he got out. Every now and then, he would go run out of money, and I would have to give him some, which I did not have much of. So, I never did get back around to it again until—I went into politics and all—I was defeated.

P: After you graduated from law school, you got married.

W: Yeah, right away. I could not let that woman get away.

P: When were you married and to whom?

W: February 22, 1953. I remember that one. In Statesboro, Georgia.

P: And your wife, who is **Zena Cox**, had taught here during the last years that you were in the legislature and the last years that you taught in Punta Gorda.

W: Yes. She left here, stopped teaching here, I guess it must have been, the same year that I was defeated and I was going to law school. [She] got a job in Deland, and she taught there until I got out of law school and we were married and came here. I did not have a job. I do not even know how we got home.

P: Your wife was teaching.

W: Yes, and that was about it, too. Well, she was helping her parents, and I do not know how, but it worked out.

P: And you lived in Punta Gorda continuously since then, and now you have three adult children. [Will you tell me] the names of your children, and do you remember what years they were born?

W: I better. **Ed** was born in 1956, **Mary** in 1957, and **Hal** in 1960. As a matter of fact, Hal is going to be forty years old on the 22nd, and I am going to be eighty-eight years old the day after tomorrow, on Friday.

P: After you returned here, there was one monumental U. S. Supreme Court decision, *Brown versus Board of Education*.

W: Sure was, and it was so right. Did I tell you about my experience about the black fellow's application to get into the law school at the University of Florida? It sort of relates to that. **Hawkins** was his name. During 1949, Hawkins made an application for admission to the law school at the university. They had no reason, really, to deny him, except that he was black. It created a considerable uproar. It was during the legislative session. They had a special cabinet meeting and invited me to come down there. Roy Collins was chairman of education in the senate, and I was on the House, and two or three other members. The governor said, we've got a serious problem here. This black fellow wants to get into the University of Florida. Should we create a separate law school, or what can we do? Again, I opened my big mouth, I guess. I said, I do not think you ought to try to start another law school. I said, politically, what you are going to have to do, it seems to me, is deny him admission. The supreme court is going to say, admit him, and then admit him and forget it. You know, there was not an adverse comment. Everybody agreed, and that broke up the meeting. But, subsequently, when I went to law school, he had not been admitted. I forget all the ramifications of that. The dean of the law school, **Henry Flynn**, asked me one day what I thought about that and what the students' view was. I said, I do not know. I was elected president of the student bar association. I said, I will find out. Everybody studied nearly up in the law library, so I went around the law library asking them all. I said, what would you do about that? Said, if the guy can pass, let him come.

Said, not going to bother me any. Nobody gave a hoot, completely, unanimously. I went back down and told the dean. He said, _____ I will tell you what I am going to do. I am going to fix it so there are no names on the exam papers, so they are all anonymous, just put the social security numbers on so that there is no question that everybody gets graded fairly. I said, that is fine. But, as you know, of course, he never did ultimately get admitted there, but it would not have created one ripple in that place. And I must have talked to nearly all of them, all the law students. But, that is that story.

P: The integration of the public schools in Charlotte County.

W: I did not have very much to do with that, but Hugh Adams was one of my ex-students, still is one of my ex-students. He became an appointed school superintendent. As a matter of fact, that is another feature of the minimum foundation law which was important. The county school superintendents were all elected. We fixed in that law so that the office would be made appointive subject to referenda in the counties. A referendum in Charlotte County said, sure, appoint him because we had pretty incompetent superintendents. De Soto County is still elective, I think. Anyway, Hugh Adams was one of the early appointees, may be the first one, I do not know, to that position. He was there when, the dates kind of elude me, but early in the...

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P: ...graduated from law school and got married and came back to Punta Gorda, you entered the practice of law.

W: Yes, sir.

P: And that was in partnership with your brother.

W: Yes.

P: Anything special about that?

W: Only that, I guess, he had come back here when he got out of law school in 1940 and opened up a law office, which was a pretty sad case because there was not any business. He rented a two-room office in the old post office _____. I think his rent was \$3 a month, and his light bill was \$1.50. Some months, he did not take in that much. So, on a part-time basis, he went out and helped **Tom Knight survey**. Tom Knight measured lands for the pasture refund program. He did that awhile. When I went to the legislature in 1941, I took him along as my _____. It

was the most money he had made yet, \$6 a day. Well, let's see. He became an assistant attorney general during that period, too. Sort of, again, the _____. By the time I came back here, forces were coming back from the war. **It was during the world war.**

P: I know that you became involved in the community. You had always been involved in the community. One of the areas was in education, and another involved in the local hospital.

W: Well, that goes back, I guess, to the time before there was a hospital. A group of us, including, I guess, the principal, who was **W. D. Clement**, decided that it was time that we had some kind of a health facility in Charlotte County. We decided we would try to get a county-supported hospital of some kind. The issue was put on the ballot in some election back then—that was before World War II—on not a binding basis, and people voted it down. It was after the war, when Clement came back from the service, that steps were taken to try to organize a hospital. He was the main promoter of it then, and he was a pretty hard-headed ornery fellow, which I guess it took to get the thing going. They formed a group. I was not a member of that group. They formed a corporation for profit. **Lamar Rose** and **J. T.** and Dr. Clement and **Edwin Roundtree** and one or two more and soon discovered that would not work. They had to get contributions, so they converted it into a corporation not for profit, a charitable type corporation, and began to get some money. They got some from the lady in Boca Grande who was such a philanthropist.

P: **Mrs. Louise Crownenshield.**

W: Yes, Mrs. Crownenshield, and a number of other people, and started building the hospital as they got money. They built an eighteen-bed institution, which was really kind of a fire trap, among other things. But, they did it. Some of that old building is still there, of course, as the center portion of the existing hospital. The hospital went through a lot of difficult times. Among them was the fact that Dr. Clement did not want to have anyone exercise any jurisdiction over him or it. During most of that time, all of that time, very early in the game, I became a member of the board of directors of the non profit hospital, Charlotte Hospital, association. While Clement and I had always, since he came to Punta Gorda, been good friends, we pretty soon came to a parting of the ways because we just could not put up with what he was doing. Finally, this was long after I was chairman of the board, we brought in some new, younger, better trained physicians. Dr. Clement still was recalcitrant, did not want to cooperate with

anyone. He brought the X-ray machine into the hospital, just a board that stood in the hall. The newer doctors said that his surgery was defective. They seriously objected to what he was doing, endangering lives, as I understood it. At any rate, the medical staff recommended terminating his privileges at the hospital which he had started. That came to the board, and we voted to terminate him. That stirred up the community terribly, just an awful uproar at that time. I think Vernon was at that time a member of the board, and at some point in these proceedings, we had a meeting at his office, Vernon's office. Dr. Clement brought his attorney, and there was an army of people outside pounding on the door and making noise. They wanted us to get out or do something. Anyhow, Clement had to stay. During the course of that meeting, Vernon or somebody had piled up some metallic stuff in the back of his office, and it fell on the floor and made a racket. We thought the place was being bombed or something. It was a pretty sensitive situation, but, really, there was no solution at that time. Clement claimed that the hospital really belonged to him and another fellow. The basis of his claim was that when the land was bought for the hospital, he had a provision in the deed that said, unless the land were used for a hospital and only for so long as it was used for a hospital could they retain it. If they ever stopped, the hospital would revert to the seller, who was a lady by the name of Mrs. **Carlton**. So, out of all of that, Clement claimed he owned the place and said that we could not throw him out, and he filed suit against the hospital. It is hard to remember the ramifications of the suit, but it went through one hearing and the judge threw him out, and he was out of the hospital. It was about that time that St. Josephs over in Port Charlotte opened up, and they were delighted to have him. They were delighted to have anybody who could bring some patients. So, that was really the end of him, as far as the hospital was concerned. But, the hospital had some other rather traumatic experiences. We brought in a doctor, name was Reilly, who had been—I do not know whether he still was or not—a board certified radiologist. We brought him in to run the radiology department that we had established. He became so obnoxious. He wanted to run the place. He really mistreated patients. For example, he would insist that all the patients who needed radiology should be placed on stretchers or whatever and lined up in the hall early in the morning, and he may show up at eleven o'clock. Things like that. I am talking about a span of years, [and] it came to this: we were paying him some percentage of the gross receipts of the X-ray department, and he demanded that it be greatly increased. He came to the board meeting—you were there, and maybe your memory is better than mine—and suggested that he would quit, I believe, unless we agreed to this. I do not believe I even waited for the rest of the board to say anything. I said, well, when will you leave? Go. He walked out, and he did not leave, did not do anything. Finally, we had to terminate his privileges, but when we did, he was a real rebel rouser. He stirred up the other doctors on the staff, and by that time, we had quite a number. So, they went on a strike. We were left with **Dr. Maxwell**

and **Dr. Shed** and a little doctor who later died, about three doctors to operate that hospital. We had no radiology, or no radiologist to run the department. Our administrator was able to bring in a radiologist from Fort Myers periodically to do that, but he was intimidated away by these people. Of course, litigation ensued and went on for some period of time. But, Reilly was real trouble. We finally got rid of him, but it was a pretty terrible experience. In the course of all of that, though, the members of the board, we were a corporation not for profit, a voluntary hospital. We were pretty desperate to keep the doors open. Our administrator, a fellow by the name of **Bob Bruce**, was very friendly with the Adventist Church healthy system, headquartered in Orlando. Remitting all the details, we agreed to give them the hospital if they would continue to operate it, which turned out to be quite a good decision because they ran a good institution, they brought in lots of new doctors, [and] they added to the hospital, built a great deal. Did a wonderful job, actually. Ultimately, here five, six, seven years ago, sold it, I think, for about \$40,000,000 cash, and it is going all right.

P: Leo, do you remember the year that the Charlotte Hospital Association gave the hospital property to the Adventists?

W: I was trying to think of that, Vern. I have to relate it to something, to some event. It was when all of those things occurred and we were in just desperate straits, but I cannot tie it to a date, Vernon. It was quite a long time ago. It must be twenty-five, thirty years ago.

P: The height of the controversy lasted about a year.

W: I would say so. All kinds of libel suits and you name it, they were there.

P: The hospital was in court on six different occasions.

W: Was it that many? One thing that happened, Reilly and his supporters—and there were quite a few of them—filed charges with the state board of health, I think, which had supervision of the thing. I think the idea was to close the hospital down, if I am not mistaken. A meeting was called in the courthouse in Punta Gorda for a certain date, and a representative of the state board of health came down and he was going to preside. Well, one of my then law partners by the name of **Charlie Cheese** had an inspiration. He said, let's see ____ **maybe** we can shut that down. The night before the hearing was scheduled to start the next morning, he and I prepared a motion for a restraining order, and we took it over to the courthouse. We knew that **Judge Gerald**, the father of the present Judge Gerald, would be here that morning. We stood in the clerk's office until Judge Gerald arrived, and we told him what it was all about. This crowd of people had

already gathered upstairs in the county commissioner's meeting room. Oh, he said, is that right? He said, do you have an order prepared? We said, yes sir. Well, then give it to me. He signed it. We handed it to a deputy sheriff and walked upstairs to that meeting, or where it was about to convene, with the deputy. The deputy handed it—**we managed a copy**—to this fellow from Tallahassee. He had opened up his briefcase, and he was ready to go. He looked at the order and read it. He did not say a word and put all his papers back in his briefcase. He closed up the briefcase and walked out the door. Charlie Cheese and I stood there just about to explode, it was so funny. All these people were going to kill me, I guess, and I just would not die. So, that broke up that meeting. It was really after that event and just the total breakdown of things that we gave the hospital to the Adventists.

P: Who was the attorney who represented the hospital association and the litigation that we had?

W: The first part of it, it was Jim Franklin, Sr. Again, I was a lawyer, but I was chairman of the hospital, and I did not feel like it was appropriate. That was when John Hathaway represented Clement, who was going to own the place. Jim Franklin was a good lawyer, a very good lawyer. He lost a lot of cases. He was a state senator. He lost a lot of arguments because of the way he spoke. He spoke like he was snarling all the time, and he really was not. He was a very good man. Anyhow, he won the case and through them out. That was another aspect of that. Interesting ____.

P: I know that you were involved in supporting several school bond issues, as the leading advocate for them, and you were involved in the chartering of two different banks. One was a savings and loan. Certainly, you were on the Edison Board of Trustees and served as chairman of the Edison Board of Trustees in Fort Myers. And, you certainly played a key role in the getting the land contributed by Charlotte County for the Charlotte County campus of Edison. Certainly, you were involved to the fullest extent possible in the effort to create Florida Gulf Coast University, and you now serve on the foundation board. Another activity was the organization of the group that built the professional center, which is on Marion Avenue today, certainly one of Punta Gorda's finest additions for professional offices. I think you have been involved in about everything of a positive nature in Punta Gorda and Charlotte County throughout your entire life. You have seen a lot of change.

W: Gosh, yes. I was just looking in some of that stuff that I had written. When I was, I guess about, five years old or so, every afternoon, my mother would get me all cleaned up and dressed up and walk me to the corner of Marion Avenue there by

the Methodist Church. Had a telephone with a crank on it. Call my dad and tell him to watch out for me. She would put me on the street to walk to his store. I would go down there. The street was not paved. It had been paved with oyster shells to keep wagons from sinking in. I walked down there, and he would take me across the street to **Mobley's Drugstore** for a nickel ice cream cone. That is one of my early recollections. It is so different now.

P: How has the population changed?

W: Well, it has changed, of course, in numbers dramatically, and it has changed in outlook, background, philosophy, everything. We were all country people, small town, friendly mostly. If we were not friendly, we were mad. Today, of course, we are, relatively speaking, a large area with many fewer interpersonal relationships throughout the community. That would be about the difference, I think, Vernon.

P: What do you see for the future of Charlotte County?

W: Well, if we get rid of all the Republicans, I think it would be **a pretty good county**. Seriously, I do not see anything but good. Things just have to work themselves out. It seems like somehow, the innate decency of people kind of comes to the surface. Sometimes, you get pretty discouraged about how long it is going to take, but it does.

P: Is there anything I should have asked you that I have not?

W: Probably. I cannot think of it, Vernon. When I get that stuff straightened out the best I can, you may want to look through it.

P: I would love to do that. Well, it has been a very pleasant experience having the opportunity to interview you for Florida Gulf Coast University in our oral history project, and we thank you.

W: It has been kind of fun. My remarks have not been very well-organized.

P: Well, it is all there.

W: My thoughts scattered all over.

[End of Interview.]