

YBOR 75

Interviewee: G. Blaine Howell

Interviewer: Alan Bliss

Date: June 5, 2003

B: The date is June 5, 2003. My name is Alan Bliss. I'm in Tampa, Florida at the Tampa Yacht and Country Club interviewing G. Blaine Howell. Mr. Howell I would appreciate it if you would tell us your full name please.

H: George Blaine Howell, Jr.

B: Where were you born, sir?

H: Tampa, Florida.

B: And when?

H: April 29, 1927.

B: Who were your parents?

H: My father was George Blaine Howell, Sr. My mother was Mary **Trice** Clewis.

B: Did you have siblings, brothers and sisters?

H: Yes, I had twin brother and sister. My brother's name was **Elonso** Charles Clewis Howell and my sister's name was **Mary Trice Howell**.

B: You were the youngest?

H: Youngest.

B: Your brother and sister were twins, is that right?

H: Correct.

B: Where did you go to school?

H: I went to local schools, **Gory Wilkson Junior High School** and **Plant High School** and the University of Florida.

B: I understand you went into the service after you finished high school, is that right?

H: Yes.

B: What year would that have been?

H: 1945 I went into the Air Corps and was in the Weather Service.

B: When you got out, what year was that?

H: 1947.

B: Then, did you go straight to the University of Florida?

H: Yes.

B: What did you do there.

H: I took the basic courses and then majored in real estate.

B: Was Ray Weimer teaching real estate there at the time?

H: I don't recall.

B: I'm thinking of a different faculty member. What year did you graduate from the University of Florida?

H: 1950.

B: What was your first job then after finishing at the University of Florida?

H: I managed some real estate holdings that the family owned, the Tampa Theater building and smaller buildings that they had small businesses in as well as Myrtle Hill Cemetery.

B: I see, so you went into a pretty diverse set of enterprises then.

H: Yes, I wore a lot of different hats.

B: What do you suppose was the part of that job that took most of your time?

H: In the beginning, probably managing the Tampa Theater building. In later years I went almost full time in managing Myrtle Hill.

B: Well, I'd like to turn the conversation back to your parents, and particularly your father. What was your father's full name.

H: George Blaine Howell.

B: Where and when was he born.

H: He was born in Ithaca, New York, May 5, 1892.

B: When did he die?

H: He died in October of 1960.

B: What was your father's education?

H: He went through local schools in Ithaca, New York and then to Dartmouth and then to Cornell for his law degree.

B: Do you recall when it was that he finished up at Cornell?

H: No, I don't. It probably would have been sometime right before WWI.

B: I understand that he went into the armed forces during WWI, is that correct?

H: Yes.

B: Do you know what he did in the armed forces?

H: He had a variety of jobs. He went in the army, his commission was a lieutenant, he came out as a captain or a major. I don't recall. He also did a small stint in the Air Corps.

B: Really?

H: Yes.

B: Was he a flyer?

H: No.

B: Did he ever talk to you about his experience in the Great War?

H: Nope.

B: Did he mention any people that he became acquainted with when he was in the service?

H: Well, I think he became acquainted with Eddie **Rickenbacker** during WWI.

B: He got out of the armed forces right at the end of that war then, is that right?

H: Yes, when the war was over.

B: What did he do after that?

H: He came back to the Ithaca, New York and went into law practice with his brother **John**.

B: Do you know what kind of law he practiced there?

H: Probably just general law, corporate law.

B: Now, he wound up in Tampa, Florida we know. Tell me, if you can, how it was that you believe he first found his way down here to Tampa.

H: He had a friend that was going on a trip to Havana out of Jacksonville. His friend at the last minute couldn't make it and he came to Tampa about 1920. His friend's girlfriend got him a blind date with my mother here in Tampa.

B: What was that friend's name?

H: Roger **Clack**.

B: What was your mother's name?

H: My mother's was Mary **Trice** Clewis.

B: Was she born in Tampa?

H: Yes, she was born in Tampa, February 21, 1898.

B: Who were her parents?

H: Her parents were **Elonso Charles** Clewis and **Amelia Monroe** Clewis.

B: **Monroe** was her maiden name and then she became **Amelia Monroe** Clewis.

H: Yes.

B: They came to Tampa from where?

H: Tallahassee, Florida

B: Mr. **Elonso** Clewis, your grandfather, where was he born?

H: He was born in South Georgia.

B: Do you recall when?

H: Yes, he was born in 1864.

B: During the time of the Civil War, then.

H: Yes.

B: Do you recall the circumstances under which he left South Georgia and wound up in Tallahassee?

H: Yes, his family moved out of Georgia, and in 1965 when General Sherman started torching the southern part of the state of Georgia, they moved to Tallahassee. He was a year old.

B: So they were, in a manner of speaking, sort of refugees from the Civil War.

H: Yes.

B: Tallahassee looked like a more peaceable place at the time.

H: Right.

B: You're grandfather, as an infant, wound up coming to Florida. Did he live in Florida for the rest of his life as far as you know?

H: Yes, he lived in Florida the rest of his life.

B: Mr. Clewis would up going into business in Tallahassee, what business was that?

H: He was in the loan business and also worked for an abstract company in Tallahassee.

B: It was there, I suppose, that he met your grandmother, Miss Monroe?

H: Yes.

B: How did Mr. Clewis wind up coming to Tampa?

H: His future father-in-law sent him down here to invest in real estate in Tampa, about 1885.

[Break in tape]

B: We have your grandfather coming to Tampa at the behest of his future father-in-law, Mr. Monroe. About what year was that do you suppose?

H: 1885

B: What did he do when he got to Tampa?

H: He bought some real estate. Of course Tampa was a very small, little fishing village. He bought some real estate on the north end of town.

B: Was it business property or residential real estate?

H: It was both. At the time he bought it, it was public, all residential.

B: I gather from what you've said to me previously that he liked Tampa.

H: Yes.

B: What do you suppose it was about Tampa that attracted him at that point, any idea?

H: I have no idea. [Laughing.]

B: It was as you say, a small place.

H: That's right, it was a very small place.

B: Although, the railroad had come to Tampa recently.

H: Yes.

B: It was apparently starting to grow.

H: It was starting to be a boom town.

B: So, Mr. Clewis may have perceived there were opportunities.

H: [There were] opportunities here.

B: He married miss Monroe, came back to Tampa, and they started a family.

H: Yes, they moved back to Tampa permanently in 1890. They started a family and I think there was six children, but my mother and one of her brothers were the only two that survived childhood.

B: Wow, that was a tough round.

H: Right, well diseases were almost incurable, like pneumonia and that type of thing.

B: Your grandfather and your grandmother raised two children to adulthood. One of them was your mother, Mary **Trice** Clewis, and who was the other?

- H: The other was **Elonso Charles** Clewis, Jr.
- B: Which was the older of those two?
- H: My mother
- B: She was the older. Was your mother educated in the schools here locally in Tampa?
- H: Yes, well, locally. She went mainly to private schools and she also went to a finishing school in Washington, D.C.
- B: Do you recall the name of any of the schools she went to?
- H: No.
- B: It was after she completed finishing school that she came back to Tampa, then?
- H: She came back to Tampa.
- B: About when would that have been?
- H: Well, she was born in 1898, so say she got out of those schools at twenty [years old] it would have been about 1918.
- B: Your grandfather, **Elonso** Clewis, did you know that man?
- H: Yes, we moved in with Mr. Clewis when my grandmother died in 1933. He didn't die until 1944. At that time I was seventeen years old when he died, and lived with him for eleven years, so I knew him very well.
- B: You got to know him quite well indeed. What business was he in?
- H: He was in the banking business.
- B: How did he get into the banking business? That was in Tampa, right?
- H: He got into the banking business with a friend of our, his name was **Colonel Peter O. Knight, Sr.**
- B: That was a brand new bank?
- H: Yes, that was a brand new bank that **Colonel Knight** was starting.
- B: What was the name of that?

H: The Exchange National Bank

B: Mr. Clewis became, evidently, a partner with Mr. **Knight** at that bank.

H: Yes.

B: They continued to operate The Exchange National Bank through both of their lifetimes?

H: Yes. As I say, Mr. Clewis died in 1944.

B: Did Mr. Clewis have other interests besides banking that he was involved in as far as business is concerned? J

H: Yes, in the beginning he started Tampa ____ Title Company, which at that time was I think the only title company here in Tampa. He was also very active in the agricultural field. He was the one that started the sugar cane industry in Clewiston, Florida. Clewiston was named after him.

B: About when would that have been?

H: That would have been probably in the late teens or early twenties.

B: Did he maintain his business interest in the sugar growing business in South Florida?

H: No, he started planting sugar cane. He came into some land through the bank and he went down there and the only thing that the Indians were growing down there at the time was sugar cane. Being of an old farming stock, he thought well if that's what the natives are growing, then maybe that's what I ought to grow. He started planting sugar cane down there and eventually US Sugar got involved in it and he started leasing his acreage to US Sugar. He did that until the time of his death.

B: He still owned, although he didn't have an active managing interest in it.

H: Right, no, he had no management in it. He just leased the land to US Sugar.

B: Is the ownership of that land still in your family?

H: No, eventually US Sugar bought all that land.

B: Mr. Clewis was a man with some diverse business interest then, and you got to know him pretty well. I guess I'd be curious about his personality. Was he a cheerful kind of a personality, a gregarious, outgoing type, or a more serious minded man?

H: He was very quiet, very steady. He was from the old, old school. He put women on a pedestal and they better _____. [Laughing.]

B: A southern gentleman.

H: A southern gentleman.

B: Did he have a pronounced southern accent?

H: No, not particularly. Of course I have kind of a southern accent so I don't recognize it in other people.

B: Yeah, yours is very mild. Was he politically active at all? Did he favor one political party over another or one set of candidates?

H: No, I never heard Mr. Clewis talk about politics. Of course he was interested in local politics. Tampa went through some pretty rough times back in his day.

B: Would he ever talk about local politics when you were around to hear?

H: No.

B: Who were his good friends other than Mr. **Knight**, they became involved in business together? Were they close friends as well as associates?

H: Yes, they were close friends and I think most of his friends were business friends. Mr. Clewis really didn't have many hobbies per se. He worked.

B: Who were the other people that you count among his close friends?

H: Well, it was Mr. **Benicker**. I don't recall all of them, you might ask my brother that.

B: Do you recall him being particularly critical of anybody or any types of people in general?

H: Anybody that lied or cheated, he had no use for.

B: Did you ever meet Mr. **Knight**?

H: Yes, but as a youth. I really didn't know Mr. **Knight** personally. I knew his son and his wife, **P. Earl Knight, Jr.** They were my parents age, so I knew them.

B: **Peter O. Knight** had a son, Peter **Knight**, Jr. Was there any other children?

H: Yes, I think there was one other brother, but he didn't live here in Tampa I don't

think.

B: Well as I understand it, Mr. Clewis and Mr. Knight, we've established, were partners in a bank, The Exchange National Bank, or business associates in that bank. Your father, George Howell, came to Tampa and met Mr. Clewis' daughter, Mary Trice Clewis. What happened next? They wound up getting married.

H: Right, they corresponded and they got married February 2, 1922.

B: Was that here in Tampa?

H: Yes, that was at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church downtown.

B: After they got married did they live here or up north?

H: No, they went back to Ithaca and my father was in a practice law with his brother **John**.

B: So, they moved straight away back up north to New York in 1922. Apparently, somehow forces prevailed on your father to relocate back down here to Tampa with your mother.

H: Yes.

B: How did that come to be?

H: That would have about 1926 they moved back. My brother and sister, who were twins, they were born in Ithaca, January 7, 1924. I was born here in Tampa in April of 1927.

B: So, your older siblings started growing up in the North and then your family moved down here to Tampa. Why did they come to Tampa?

H: Mr. Clewis and Colonel Knight offered him a position with The Exchange Bank. They needed a younger person in there as they were getting along in age.

B: Even though they both had sons neither of those sons wanted...

H: Neither one of the sons was interested in the banking business at all.

B: Your father then, Mr. Howell, he worked for The Exchange Bank for the next about fifteen years or so until just the beginning of WWII.

H: Yes, he left The Exchange Bank in 1939 to take over a Tampa shipbuilding corporation.

- B: As near as you can recall, how did your dad get along with Mr. Clewis?
- H: He got along very well with him. He was like my father's second father and my father was just like a son to Mr. Clewis.
- B: Your father's father, your grandfather Howell, he was no longer living by this time.
- H: No, Mr. Howell died when my father was still in college, so he died probably when my father was nineteen or twenty years old.
- B: What about your grandmother Howell?
- H: My grandmother Howell lived until sometime in the middle to late 1930s.
- B: Did you ever meet her?
- H: Yes, I met her. We used to go to Ithaca when we were younger to spend a month or two in Ithaca, New York. She had a lake place there along Lake **Cayuga**, and we used to spend a month or six weeks up there every summer time, and then she made some trips down to Florida.
- B: No doubt in the winter time for her to come to Florida.
- H: Yes.
- B: That worked out to be a pretty good deal. Summer in upstate New York would be a welcome rest from Tampa in August. How did your dad get along with Mr. Knight? Were they friendly as well?
- H: Yes, yes they got along. Of course, as I say, they were quite a bit older than my father.
- B: Do you remember meeting Mr. Knight?
- H: No I don't, but I'm sure I did at sometime or another.
- B: No particular recollections of him or what he was like?
- H: No.
- B: You grew up in Tampa, then. As we've heard, you went through your educational experiences all in schools here in Tampa. Your father was working in the bank when you were very, very young, and then you would have been about thirteen or fourteen when he took over the ship yard.

H: Yes.

B: Do you recall seeing the ship yard, going over there to visit much?

H: Oh yes, I was in the ship yard off and on quite a bit during the war. I didn't go into the service until 1945.

B: Your dad took over the management of the ship yard from the Kreher family?

H: Yes.

B: What was the ship yard like when your father took it over? Do you remember what it looked like and what kind of condition it was in?

H: It looked like a high-class junk yard in my opinion [laughing].

B: Where was it exactly?

H: It was in disrepair because they had not had too much business. The ship yard was originally started during WWI. Of course from WWI to the late 1930s there wasn't too much ship building going on in this country during the Depression years. The ship yard was located here in the Port of Tampa.

B: Was it on the other side of the Ybor Channel?

H: Yes.

B: Right across from downtown then, and sort of across from Sutton Island, what's now **Carbor** Island?

H: Yes, well it was a little south of that, not much.

B: What was your father's concern with the ship yard when he took it over? What was it that got him involved in operating the ship yard? He had been a banker and trained as a lawyer.

H: Yes, and at that time in the late 1930s the government knew that we were going to eventually get involved in the war in Europe. They came down here looking for a young, vigorous person that knew financing. They didn't necessarily have to know anything about building the ship. They had all the engineers and that type of people to do that type of work, but they wanted someone that knew finance and that end of the business. Apparently, everyone recommended my father. The government then came to him and offered the position.

B: You'd say your father was a person of vigorous personality?

H: Yes.

B: A lot of mental and physical energy?

H: Right, a lot of physical energy. He was going every minute.

B: Sounds like he was a very different personality from your grandfather, Mr. Clewis.

H: They were complete opposites [laughing]. Maybe that's why they got along so good.

B: I was just about to wonder if maybe there was something to that old saw about opposite personalities functioning well together.

H: In fact I'll tell you a little story about the first time Mr. Clewis ever met my father. As I say, my father had a boisterous voice. He could whisper and you could hear him a mile away. The next day after my mother had a blind date with him, her father, Mr. Clewis, said now princess you be careful of that guy, he looks like a dangerous character to me. [He said this] because he came in with all the boisterous and outgoing, charge-type attitude and Mr. Clewis was a very laid-back southern gentleman.

B: Apparently, your father was able to persuade Mr. Clewis that he wasn't too dangerous.

H: That's right.

B: How do you suppose he did that?

H: I have no idea. Probably being a lawyer he was very persuasive.

B: I was about to ask. Was he good at persuading people around to his point of view in most cases?

H: Yes, in most cases.

B: Was he inclined to be disagreeable with people who didn't see things his way? Did he tolerate people with different ideas?

H: I think he respected their views. He might not think they were right.

B: Was he a Democrat or a Republican?

H: I would say he was a Republican.

- B: Although, he probably had to belong to the Democratic Party.
- H: Yes, to get along in Florida you had to back in those days. Florida really didn't become sort of a Republican state where there were Republicans running until the middle 1950s.
- B: What did your father think of Franklin D. Roosevelt?
- H: He didn't have much use for him.
- B: What was his complaint about FDR?
- H: Well, he just didn't like his liberal attitude or giving things to people that they didn't deserve.
- B: Would you say that he would have supported Herbert Hoover in the 1932 election do you suppose?
- H: That I don't know. I was five years old.
- B: Yeah, a little too early. But you don't think that your father approved of the New Deal then.
- H: No.
- B: Do you remember him talking about any political candidates that he was particularly enthusiastic about?
- H: Yes, he approved Mr. **Holland**.
- B: That was would be Senator **Spencer Holland** the US Senator from Florida.
- H: There were a few local politicians that he got along with alright.
- B: Did he ever mention **Bob Chancy** who was the mayor of Tampa?
- H: Yes, he was friends with him, and also **Courtney Campbell**.
- B: Who was **Courtney Campbell**?
- H: He was a county commissioner here for a long time, but then he went to Tallahassee as a State Senator.
- B: As far as local politicians he got along well with **Bob Chancy**. He supported him politically?

H: Yes.

B: How about **Courtis Hickson**?

H: **Courtis Hickson** also. They were all good mayors.

B: _____ and those guys.

H: Right.

B: How about State Senator George Sheldon? Do you remember him ever mentioning that name?

H: Yes I remember it being mentioned, but I don't recall his feeling toward him.

B: How about **George Smathers**, the man who wound up taking over Clark Pepper's seat?

H: Yes, he got along with him very well.

B: He supported **Smathers**?

H: Yes, Smathers.

B: I assume from what you say that it's probably safe to say that your father was not an admirer of **Claud Pepper**.

H: No.

B: How about **Leroy Collins**, what did he think of that man as governor?

H: I don't remember him saying anything yea or nay about him. He like Governor **Doyle Carlton**.

B: **Doyle Carlton** had been Governor in the late 1930s, about the time he took over the shipyard I believe, and during the war. How about **Millard Caldwell** who served as governor in the late 1940s?

H: Yes, he got along with him alright.

B: He approved of Governor **Caldwell**.

H: Probably the only politician, state or federal, that he really didn't like was **Claud Pepper**.

B: In local politics, do you recall whether he had much to say yea or nay about the

mayor who succeeded **Curtis Hickson**, that would have been **Nick Nucchio**?

H: [laughing] He didn't have too much to say, but I don't think he was a fan of his by any means.

B: Any idea why that would have been?

H: No, I have no idea.

B: How about the man who came after **Nick Nucchio**, **Julian Lane**?

H: Yes, he would have gotten along with Julian.

B: He was a supporter of Mayor **Lane's**?

H: Yes.

[Break in tape]

B: Starting back up here again now, we have it that your father, Mr. Howell was a supporter of **Julian Lane**, who was mayor. Mayor **Lane's** family had been in the dairy farming business before he got involved in politics, isn't that right?

H: Yes.

B: What part of the county was that?

H: It would be the northwest part of Hillsborough County.

B: What's there now?

H: That is where the present day **Carolwood** subdivision, development, is. It's practically as city up there now.

B: It's part of the city of Tampa?

H: Yeah, part of the city of Tampa.

B: But back at that time it was well outside the city.

H: Oh, it was out in the boon docks.

B: You speculated that perhaps the **Lane** family acquired that property through tax certificates, tax deeds, savings and things.

H: I would imagine some of it did, but land was so cheap back in those days that

they probably never paid over \$.50 an acre or something for them. That's my guess, because they had to have a lot of acreage to support a large dairy. An acre of scrub land doesn't support too many cows.

B: **Julian Lane** became mayor in 1959 and one of the first things that he had to contend with as mayor was the new movement for desegregation in the South, which came to Tampa about that year with some sit-ins at the lunch counters downtown in Tampa. Mayor Lane, then, at that time in 1959 formed a biracial commission in Tampa to try to keep a lid on some of the conflict that he was concerned was going to arise in Tampa. I'm curious, since your father was from up north, whether he had any particular views about desegregation as it was starting up in Tampa in the late 1950s.

H: I don't ever recall him having any strong views one way or the other about it. We lived a way of life down here and that's what we lived. There weren't too many rebel rousers back in those days.

B: Do you remember was he supportive of what Mayor Lane was trying to do?

H: Yes, I think he was supportive of that, and of course then he died soon after that in 1960.

B: Did you ever here him mention the name of a man named George Simons? That's the name of the man who was Tampa's municipal planning consultant for many years, in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s.

H: No, it doesn't ring a bell with me at all.

B: How about a guy name Tom Standifer who work for your father on the Community for Economic Development during WWII, did that name ever come up?

H: What was his name?

B: The last name was Standifer. His initials were **T.V.** and everyone called him Tom.

H: I don't vaguely remember the name, but I don't recall the man himself.

B: How about Matt **McClosky**?

H: Yes, Mr. **McClosky** was in the ship building business also. They were building experimental concrete ships for the government.

B: They started a ship yard in Tampa during the war, which I guess they were

competing with your father's ship yard.

H: No, because they were experimental work. They never perfected the concrete ship as such because there was, as I understood it at the time, half of the ship was wet all the time and the other half was dry all the time. The reason they tried to experiment with concrete instead of steel because pouring concrete was a lot faster, a lot cheaper than steel ships. I think towards the end of the war they towed a lot of those concrete ships to England and they were used for breakwater right after D Day when they were building a harbor and a landing area after the beach had been secured. I think they took them there and sank them. That was the starting of the bulkheads in there so they'd have a protected port right there on the English Channel.

B: Do you remember ever meeting Mr. **McClosky**?

H: No, but I'm sure I did at some point in my life.

B: Your father apparently was a sociable personality and given to entertaining.

H:: Yes, of course during the war he had to do a lot of entertaining because the government people and the navy people, they were launching ships pretty fast out there during the war. He always had to have launching parties and that type of thing.

B: Did he and your mother entertain at home quite a bit during those years?

H: Yes, they mostly entertained at home.

B: That would have been at the home that you shared with Mr. Clewis, which was along Bayshore Boulevard.

H: Right, 2509 Bayshore Boulevard.

B: They seemed to enjoy those kind of affairs or was that a burden to them to have to do that?

H: Well, after so long it gets monotonous. I think they enjoyed meeting the navy people and other people, civilians, that attended those parties.

B: Do you remember any people in particular that you might have recalled meeting during those parties?

H: No, because at that time I was in high school and I wasn't exactly interested in parties with a bunch of old people.

B: Your father served on the board of directors of the Eastern Airlines starting in the 1930s when Mr. **Rickenbacker** formed that airline.

H: No, he bought the airline. Eastern was an existing company and he bought it. It was a very small airline at the time and he bought. I think it was in 1939, and he asked my father to be on the board.

B: We've established that they most likely met during the Great War.

H: Yes, or shortly there after.

B: Did you ever meet Mr. **Rickenbacker**?

H: Oh yes, many times. They had board of directors meetings of Eastern here off and on all during the war. [He was a] fabulous man.

B: What was your impression of him as a personality?

H: Absolutely charming, and the women all loved him. [laughing] My wife just went goo goo over him.

B: Was that because he was sort of heroic person or because of his personality?

H: His personality and his mannerisms. Everything that guy had done, so much of his life racing automobiles and flying airplanes. The last time I saw Mr. **Rickenbacker** he came down for my father's funeral in 1960. That was the last time I ever saw Mr. **Rickenbacker**. I think he died shortly after that.

B: Was he a personality like your father, outgoing and sociable?

H: Yeah, he was a little bit of an **adventurist** I think. I think if it had a little bit of danger involved in it, I think he loved it. Anybody who would race automobile would have to have that type of spirit.

B: Was there any type of that to your father's personality do you think?

H: Nope. My father respected him very much, not only as a hero and all that in the service, but as a businessman and as a person.

B: Who else do you think would have been people that were in that category as far as your father was concerned, people that he admired or respected particularly and had high regard for? Any names stick out?

H: No, I don't recall any.

B: Who were his close friends in Tampa? I've heard mention of a man named

Dusty Crowder.

- H: Right, he and my father were very close friends. He was a great gin rummy player, and he had about six of them, which included doctors and lawyers and insurance people. They played gin rummy at least once a week. I guess my father was like most any business man, I think he kept his business friends separate from his personal friends. Even though he did business with his personal friends, they were personal friends first and business friends second.
- B: Who were the regular members of his gin rummy group, do you remember any of them?
- H: Well, there was **Carl Borane**, he was head of the telephone company here; **Horace Knowlton**, he was a surgeon; **Chubby** Allen, he was an attorney. That's all I can remember right off hand.
- B: **Carl Borane** was the head of the telephone company?
- H: Yes, the M_____ Telephone Company, which was a local telephone company.
- B: Would you say that he and your dad were more personal friends or business friends?
- H: Personal friends.
- B: Do you remember Mr. **Borane**?
- H: Oh yes, I remember him. [He was] a very nice person, easy going. Of course running a big business like a telephone company, you have to blow your stacks every now on to **get the hard heartened hat off**, as most any businessman has to do. **Dusty Crowdar** was in the general insurance business.
- B: Was he one of the gin rummy players?
- H: Yes.
- B: Was your father a cigar smoker?
- H: Oh yes, he very seldom ever smoked a cigarette, but he smoked his cigars. He smoked a pipe also.
- B: He was a sailor also, right?
- H: Right, of course being in Ithaca he grew up on Lake **Cayuga** where his parents had a home there. He grew up sailing these **big east gales**, which is a great

lake boat because lakes don't get too big of waves. So, he kind of grew up boating, and his brother John did also. They both sailed and he fooled around with boats just about all of his life, mostly sail boats. He didn't get a power boat until the early 1950s.

B: Did he maintain his sailing hobby even after moving to Tampa?

H: Yes, of course once he went to the ship yard, from 1939 to 1945, he really didn't have time. He was spending most of his time in either New York or Washington D.C. during the war. Right after the war, 1946, he bought a forty-eight foot **scooner**. All of us enjoyed that, my brother and I. They used to have a race from St. Petersburg to Havana, Cuba in the late 1940s. We went on that trip for that four or five years. Then, when Castro took over in the early 1950s they stopped it. Then, we went in many local regatta from here to Fort Meyers and different places around the West Coast.

B: Did your father enjoy flying?

H: Yes, I'm sure enjoyed it, but he wasn't an enthusiastic flying person. He flew because he had to, business purposes, between here and New York and Washington. Many times during the war he took the train. At that time we had a train service from here to Washington. You left here about three o'clock in the afternoon and got in to Washington I think about nine o'clock the next morning. He said he really kind of like that because he could take his work with him, get on the train at three o'clock, do a couple of hours work, go in and have a nice sit-down dinner, get up the next morning after a good night's sleep and felt refreshed. He went back around airports all the time.

B: Was he gone to Washington quite often during the war years?

H: Quite often between Washington and New York, between the two. Well, dealing with the navy you had to be in Washington a little bit.

B: Do you recall ever hearing the name of a Tampa fellow who represented the city in Washington named **Francis Judd**?

H: Yes, I know the name but I never knew the person. You don't know what he did for a living.

B: How about Gill Rob Wilson, does that ring a bell?

H: No, that doesn't ring a bell at all.

B: Alright.

H: As I said, there were hundreds of people...

[End of side A1]

H: Most of this is by osmosis. You know you live with it day in and day out [laughing].

B: When your father took over the shipyard, you said it looked like kind of junkyard. Did that bother your father?

H: Yes, because he was so meticulously clean. He used to always say there could be an excuse for a man to have patches on his pants, but there's never an excuse for having dirt on his pants. He just liked things in a neat and orderly fashion. He probably spent the first year and half out there cleaning it up. I can remember him coming home from the shipyard and one time he said you know we were digging down putting some new waves in, we got down as far as six feet and we were finding sheets of steel six feet under the ground where over the years the dirt had just blown over it. It was in that type of disrepair. During the war the Tampa Ship received any number of awards for being a well run, neat, clean ship yard operation.

B: You think that had a lot to do with your father's sort of disposition toward that kind of operation?

H: Yes. The ship yard even had people that did nothing but go around picking up paper and cleaning up the roadways, this type of thing. The only place that you really couldn't keep clean in the ship yard was down the dry dock area. That's always been kind of the rough section of ship building. Why, I don't know, but it is.

B: Did he seem to get satisfaction out of running the ship yard?

H: Yes, I think he thoroughly enjoyed it. He loved fooling around with boats and some of the biggest pleasures he would get. Some of the ship's captains would send him back pictures of the boats, that the ship yard had built, under bombing attacks when they were overseas in the South Pacific. He really enjoyed seeing those. It was a good moral booster for the employees at the ship yard because it showed their work was really in the middle of things. You know when you show a ship and bombs are bursting in the water around it, you figure what you're doing is really worth while.

B: Would you say your father was a patriotic kind of a personality?

H: Yes, I don't think openly, but he was a true red-blooded American [laughing]. He needed like people pushing us around.

- B: He ran the ship yard until the end of the war, 1945. He had an ownership interest in the ship yard?
- H: Yes, I don't really recall the financial arrangements, how the government handled all that in the late 1930s when they started taking over so many of these, not only ship yards but airplane factories. I don't think they ever got into the automobile part of it. As you know, during the year the automobile companies they didn't make automobiles they were making tanks and jeeps and this type of thing. I don't really know the ins and out of the financial arrangements of buying these ship yards and then turning them over to an individual and then buying them back or exactly how it worked out.
- B: At the end of the war he either sold or resigned from ship building.
- H: Right, from the ship yard and he went back into the banking business with the first savings and trust company.
- B: Now, he had been an officer with The Exchange National Bank up until he left in 1939 to run the ship yards.
- H: Right, he was head of the trust department for The Exchange Bank.
- B: But after the war, instead of going back to The Exchange he went to the Savings and Loan, which I understand had been started some years before by your grandfather, Mr. Clewis.
- H: Right, First Savings and Trust Company was started in 1914 because at the time The Exchange Bank did not have a trust department, so Mr. Clewis started that in 1914 to handle the trust business in Tampa.
- B: Was Mr. Clewis active in running that business up until his death in 1944?
- H: Yes, well he got stomach cancer probably about 1941 or 1942, a couple years before he died, and of course then he couldn't. He was bedridden the last couple of years of his life, but he was active up until that time, yes.
- B: Was it soon after that, did he take over that institution after the ship yard?
- H: Yes, he went back and then he severed the relationship with The Exchange Bank because there were overlapping stockholders and overlapping board of directors, that type of thing that was allowed back in those days in the banking business. Then, in 1947 he turned the First Savings and Trust Company into Marine Bank and Trust Company.
- B: That's Marine Bank and Trust Company?

- H: Yes, and he went into commercial banking. So then, the Marine Bank was a full-service bank.
- B: That severing of the relationship between Exchange and the First Savings and Trust Company, was that done amicably and agreeably on both sides?
- H: Yes, they transferred the stock out for whatever value it was.
- B: Then, when your father turned the Savings and Loan into a commercial bank would it be fair to say that they were competing with the Exchange at this point?
- H: Yes, they went into commercial banking and then they were competing. At that time there were about five other banks in Tampa, although the three main banks were still the First National, Exchange, and then the Marine.
- B: Did the fact that the Marine went into competition cause any dissent or disagreement on the part of the former Exchange partners?
- H: Well, competitors are competitors. He had evaded a lot of new things in the banking business that the older presidents of the First National Exchange didn't exactly agree with. When my father remodeled the first building, after we became the Marine Bank and Trust company, he was the one that eliminated all the marble and the higher grills up in front of the tellers' cages and all of that. He put in deep blue carpeting and all mahogany teller counters and all of that. What really got the other bankers worried was that he started loaning money to the shrimpers, loaning money on boats. I think at that time that was kind of a no no in the banking business; you didn't loan money on boats. They all thought he was crazy loaning money on shrimp boats. He said I have enough knowledge I can look at a boat and tell whether it's something we want or not.
- B: That was considered a high risk loan?
- H: Well I don't think he considered it particularly high risk but the other bankers did and they wouldn't touch it. Then, after they saw what he did with them in three or four years, then they all started .
- B: What was it that you suppose inspired him to take an interest in making loans on commercial shrimp vessels?
- H: I think his interest in boats. He knew boats pretty well, small sailboats to ocean going ships, and I think he had the knowledge which the other bankers didn't have that he could go out and step on board a boat and tell really whether it was worth any money or not.
- B: Was there any particular borrower who came to him to ask for a loan?

- H: No, most of the shrimp, the big ones, were **Singleton** and I think the **Versaggi** family.
- B: I'll have to look that one up.
- H: You could ask my brother about that because he was the one that was in the packing business. Jack **Salomon**, of the **Salmon** family, were big shrimpers. Most of their boats were up north of Jacksonville. They all lived here in Tampa and their home office was here in Tampa.
- B: So, your father was given to some innovative ideas about the banking business. Do you suppose that had something to do with inspiring him to kind of go off on his own a little bit with the Marine Bank?
- H: Well, I think so. At that time, all through back in the middle 1940s, the banking business was still pretty stable I think. Most of the presidents of the banks were kind of staid. My father was far from being staid. [laughing] In other words, he had ideas of what it ought to be like and that's what he went out and did.
- B: Do you believe he was successful with those ideas?
- H: Yes, he was very successful.
- B: So, he was still going strong running the bank when he died.
- H: Oh yes, as I said, he died very suddenly. He was still very active in businesses.
- B: What was his age when he died?
- H: He was sixty-eight, but he lived longer than his brother or his father did.
- B: I think I've reached the end of my list of questions. Can you think of anything you'd care to add about your father?
- H: No, but I will say this. I think he was a good father. I never had any questions about his decisions or how the three of us kids were raised. I think he did what was best for us.
- B: Well, he seems to have done a good job by the evidence that I can see. Well with that sir, I'm going to conclude the interview and say thank you for the record, and we'll stop the tape here.

[End of the interview.]