

**MATHESON MUSEUM, INC.**

**ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

**TOUR OF THE DOWNTOWN AREA**

**GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA**

**with**

**JOHN BRASINGTON**

**and**

**BOB CLAYTON**

**February 1, 2002**

B: Hugh Chandler used to have that old brick building. That was the Gulf Oil distributorship.

C: I remember that. We are now at the corner of N.W. 16<sup>th</sup> Ave. and Main Street, going right down where the railroad track used to come in Gainesville.

B: That's right. This is old North Main Street. On the right hand side used to be the City Dump, right here where the Gainesville Shopping Center is.

C: Oh yes, where that new Publix is used to be the City Dump on North Main.

B: When Hugh Edwards turned it into a shopping center, he told me he was surprised that the place floated.

C: That it floated! Hugh Edwards did a lot of building here in town right after the war.

B: Yes. He did a lot for a lot of people.

(Pause)

Now this is as far as the city used to come, right here.

C: North of 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue was country, huh.

B: Oh yes.

C: Yes. 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue used to be Boundary, didn't it?

(Pause)

B: I used to live at 715 N. Main Street, and it was right across from the Gainesville Candy Company. It was right where that building is there.

C: Yes, where the wood stove and fireplace center is now.

B: Everybody used to turn right there to go to the Hotel Thomas. The White House Hotel used to be on this block up here where the Sun Trust Bank is, and the train used to stop right here and let the people go over and eat.

C: We're riding down North Main Street right where the train used to run.

B: Now, right about here is where I got off of the train on March 20, 1926.

C: Right in front of where the First Union Bank is.

B: The depot was right there. The old courthouse was right there where the new courthouse is. Al Canova used to have a drugstore on that corner over there.

C: I used to carhop there.

B: Woolworth was right on that corner.

C: Porter's Café is where Canova's Drug was.

B: The Royal Restaurant used to be on that corner.

C: Where the Soul Train is.

B: Woolworth was there that Subway is now.

(Pause)

C: Now we're coming back up on South Main Street, from S.E. 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue. We're going to turn right, by where Stringfellow Supply Company was.

B: A long time ago the Gainesville Stock Market used to be here, before the war.

C: Out west of where Stringfellow Supply was.

B: They used to sell fertilizer right over in that place – I don't remember what his name was. That used to be the Texaco Oil distributor place over there that Mr. Taylor ran. The trains used to go right along here.

C: Yeah, into Main Street. And Colclough Hill was behind us. We're crossing Depot Avenue headed north now.

B: Now, that's Baird Hardware's warehouse. They used to ship stuff all over the state out of that warehouse. This used to be our body shop over there. This used to be Cox Furniture Company.

C: Yes, their big warehouse was where Geo Solutions, Inc. is now.

B: Oscar Thomas' dairy used to run out of this place right here, and they used to have good ice cream in there.

C: Yes. On the corner right by the fire station. I remember I used to get ice cream in there. They had a concrete floor. I remember that.

B: This is where the city is building the new courthouse.

(Pause)

C: Right there where Whiskey River is.

B: It runs all the way through the block to the bank.

C: That's where the Sovereign Restaurant.

B: No, that's a little farther.

C: Okay, it's a block east.

B: This is Beasley Williams' Furniture.

C: Rice Hardware was right there on that corner across the street from Beasley Williams.

B: And this was the back entrance of our old agency. We used to come out right here.

C: Yes, your back entrance was on S.W. 1<sup>st</sup> St., which used to be Garden Street.

B: That's right. Now this used to be the Arlington Hotel there, and a long time ago U.S. 441 used to come and turn at this corner going to Ocala. They used to put up a lot of tourists there, and they would store the car over there in the garage with us. A lot of times I would wash a car in the nighttime for 50¢, and the people would give me a 50¢ tip, so I would get \$1.00 for washing it.

C: That's on the corner of S. Main and S. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave.

B: See that building across the street there.

C: Tench Building 1887.

B: Benmont Tench's daddy built that building.

C: Where Artist Studio is now.

B: Mr. Tench's daddy used to run a shoe store. You remember. Up here in this tan looking building.

C: Yes. He had the first x-ray that I ever saw. He used to x-ray your feet to see if the shoes would fit.

B: Now that Confederate soldier standing there, when I was going to high school, I used to walk through there and I used to see him everyday.

- C: You know that in all the Southern towns that have a Confederate soldier, they all face north, so when they come back, we're ready for them. If you go to any Southern town, the Confederate soldier on the courthouse square always faces north. See, you've learned something today!
- B: Right. On the left where the clock is used to be Vidal's Drug Store. They sold all the books that you had to have for school. Every grade that I went my dad had to buy books, but my brother behind me got free books. Now we're coming to the Sweetwater Branch up here in a minute.
- C: Yes, past this light. Alachua County Courthouse and the Library.
- B: The Gainesville Library used to be right along here on the creek.
- C: Yes, and there's the old American Legion building, which is the Matheson Museum now, where my wife happens to be working this morning.
- B: This house right here belonged to the Phifers. Mrs. Ira Baird used to live right here. It's a shame they took those row houses. Mr. J.R. Fowler, who ran the Star Garage, lived right here.
- C: Corner of 8<sup>th</sup> Ave. and E. University.
- B: Haymans used to live in that house. Winston, I believe, lived in that house.
- C: Fred Winston?
- B: No. Fred Winston lived back near the hospital. His daddy built the Florida Field. More or less, a long time, the east side of Gainesville was the nicest part of Gainesville, but it all went to pot pretty quick.
- C: Yes, that's the evolution of things. Now maybe it will come back. They've got some pretty trees in East Gainesville, I'm telling you.
- B: We're just passing the Coca Cola bottling plant on E. University Avenue.
- C: We're turning left now onto the Waldo Road.
- B: The Seaboard Railroad track used to run right along the side of Waldo Road.
- C: Yes, along the east side of Waldo Road, the railroad track did run.

(Pause)

C: We're getting ready to turn left on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue. I remember right over there on the northwest corner of Waldo Rd. and 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue was Harris Field.

B: And a long time ago, Alachua County had a fairground over there. They had a big old wooden building that they had exhibits in, and on the outside they played baseball and football and everything else. Bleachers were back in there.

C: We're headed west on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

B: There's the roundabout.

(Pause)

C: We're now in the Duck Pond area.

B: I think that house right there was part of a barn of the Thomas Dairy.

C: At N.E. 7<sup>th</sup> Ave. and The Boulevard there was a barn from the Thomas Dairy. There used to be the Thomas Hotel right there.

B: We used to think these were nice streets.

C: Now we're coming back up to N.E. 1<sup>st</sup> Street. This used to be U.S. 441 here.

B: Right. It used to be Alabama St. and is now N.W. 6<sup>th</sup> St., and it was 441.

B: This used to be the main drag going to Chicago or Atlanta. When you got into the City of Gainesville, there was a big arch over the road up there that said, "Gainesville."

C: Yes, the city gate.

B: Dr. Smith built this house and this house. Do you remember Dr. Smith?

C: I don't think so. I don't recall him.

B: His daughter married Earl Deck.

C: Oh yeah, Sarah.

(Pause)

C: The city limits used to be right in here.

B: Maybe a little farther out.

C: Yes, because I used to live over here on Pine Park, which is on the left, and we were just outside the city limits. The city limits were right about here at 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

(Pause)

C: N.W. 23<sup>rd</sup> Ave. now headed toward 13<sup>th</sup> Street. We're going to turn left onto 13<sup>th</sup> Street, and I'll bet you we end up back at Brasington's. I remember down here on the corner of 13<sup>th</sup> St. and 16<sup>th</sup> Ave. Mr. O.P. Wells had his hatchery, a chicken hatchery.

B: O.P.'s son is still around here.

C: Oh yeah. I think he lives in Starke.

B: I think we sold him a car the other day. The Chevrolet agency he started went busted. I was surprised. People came there one day with 18 trucks and hauled off even the chairs behind the desks and everything – even some customers' cars.

C: Oh gosh. We're now back at Brasington Automobile Agency, and John, I thank you very kindly for this. We're going to get this typed up and this will go in the files, also. Thank you, sir.

B: I appreciate it.