G: This is Mark Greenberg. I am the director of the Florida Study Center at the University of South Florida, part of the Rosh Hashanah Library System. It is my pleasure to be with Dr. Samuel Proctor today, on August 24, 2002. We're in the history department library in Flint Hall on the University of Florida campus. We're going to spend the better part of a couple of days together doing a life oral history. With no further ado, let me start, Dr. Proctor, by asking you where and when you were born.

P: I was born in Jacksonville, Florida, on March 29, 1919.

G: What do you know about your family's history or heritage before they came to America, or their arrival?

P: Let me talk to you a little bit about my family, and I’m going to do it for both sides of the family. My mother’s side of the family, the Schneiders, came from St. Petersburg, Russia, in the early 1890s, directly to Baltimore [Maryland]. My father’s family came from Poland, and that’s the part I’m going to start with first of all.

Now this means that both families came from Eastern Europe, and that part of Jewish history is somewhat shadowy. But Jews were reported according to the archival records in Eastern Europe, probably about the year 1000. Some probably came up from the Middle East, others came from Eastern Europe, Germany, and so on. But whatever, that’s what they were, and they were there in very large numbers. My father’s family came from Lomza, Poland, and that was a sizable city and a city of some merit, both economically and intellectually at the time. It was also in the Lomza gubernia [an administrative territorial division of the former Russian Empire introduced by Tsar Peter I; Lomza existed until gubernia were abolished by the USSR in the 1920s], which was similar to what we would call a state here in the United States. My great-grandfather, my father’s grandfather, for whom he is named, was called Yonkel Bora. They gave them the Yiddish names, [it] would be Jacob Bora today, but he never came by anything. I know very little about him, except his name. I know nothing absolutely about his wife at all. I don’t know what his business was. I don’t know where he came from. I know the Jews had not been permitted to live in Lomza until after the end of the Napoleonic Period in 1815. He may not have even been born there, he may have emigrated, migrated in from some other place. But the point is, he was [there]. I know of at least two children that he had. One, of course, was my grandfather, who once again had the Yiddish name of Yudel, but later on became Julius, and his sister, Betsy, or Bertha. She was the one who immigrated first to the United States and settled and lived in New Haven, Connecticut. I’ll get to her later on. There probably was a third person, a third
son, but I don’t even have his name, it’s just a shadowy kind of thing.

My grandfather, Yudel – once again, I don’t know anything about his early life. His marriage to my grandmother, Ida Esther, I’m sure was an arranged marriage. He came from Lomza; she came from what they called Moshava, which is today Makow. She was three years older than he was. She was born in 1869; he was born in 1872. So, I don’t know whether she was considered an old maid or what, but anyway, he arrived in Moshava, and that became his home until he migrates years later to the United States. He made his living by being, of all things, a tzitzit maker. Tzitzits, you know, are the fringes that Orthodox Jews wear on their garments under their outer garments. And that’s what he did. He got the wool, he combed the wool, and he made tzitzits. I think he also assembled tallits [prayer shawls], they’re religious artifacts. He couldn’t have gotten very wealthy from that kind of business, but that was his profession. They had several children together. My father was the oldest of the boys, his brother Morris, and his younger brother, David. There were two female babies born also through my grandparents who did not survive, and they had no names as far as I know.

Now my grandmother had an interesting background. Her name was Ida Esther Rosenthal. Her father was a man who, in Europe, was called Tsyon, but in America later, I don’t know whether he adopted [a new name] or whether it translated into [the name] Nathan Rosenthal. He and his wife, who was named Mirl Hannah Rosenthal, were married. Nathan, I don’t know what his business was in Moshava. By the way, his father’s name was Herman and his mother’s name was Fannie. But the point is that he had at least two children, my grandmother and her brother, by the name of David Meir, and we think a third child named Joseph, because one of my brothers is named Joseph, and we think [that he] did not come [to America], and married a woman in Posnan, Poland. As far as I know, [Joseph] disappeared, although they probably stayed in contact with each other.

My grandmother’s father, Rosenthal, decides to come to America, and he leaves somewhere around 1869-1870. He comes to New York City. He later claimed when he was getting his citizenship that he had come in 1865, but that’s impossible if my grandmother was born in 1869. He comes to New York and he gets a job, I think as a peddler, and saves a little money and sends it back home to Mirl, his wife, with the understanding that she would now come to the United States with the family. She decided not to. Whatever reason, we don’t know. Maybe she was afraid, maybe the rabbi told her not to, maybe she thought this was a good opportunity to get rid of Nathan. But whatever, she refused to come. After about a year, maybe longer than that, after he had sent money and had written these desperate letters, when are you going to arrive, and so on, he gave an ultimatum. He said, I’m too young. He was, by the way, born in 1847, so he was a young man. He said, I’m not going to live alone, so he divorced her. Now I was never able to find in the New York records a record of a divorce. But he
must have given her a ghet [a no-fault bill of divorce legally issued by a rabbi], a Jewish divorce, because she marries again, and she would not have done that without the ghet.

So he lives in New York, on the Lower East Side, and he meets a woman by the name of Selma Wolfenheim. She later drops the "en" and is just Wolfheim. She's [descended from] a Jewish family from Prussia, who had also come over some time in the 1860s, and they decide to get married. They do that on March 29, 1873. At that time, he says this is his first marriage. I don't think he ever revealed to this new family that developed anything about his past, because when I began doing research in relatively recent years, the handful of descendants that still remain, all of this came as a mystery to them. In fact, they were skeptical of this whole story because they had never heard, absolutely never heard, anything about it whatsoever.

He gets married in her family's home; they lived on Orchard Street, down on the Lower East Side. All of them I suspect were relatively poor people. He's still a peddler, and they began building their family. The first child was named Flora. She was born in New York City in 1874, relatively shortly after, the marriage was just nine months before. The family at that time were living on Essex Street, once again on the Lower East Side. The second child was Jenny, and she was born in Brooklyn, New York. The third child was Della, and Della was born in Elmira [New York]. They left New York and they moved upstate. Della's husband was instrumental, as I understand it, in founding the St. Louis Summer Opera Series, and he began to develop a national reputation. The fourth child [is] still again a girl, by the name of Hattie, who was born in New York. By the way, he becomes a naturalized citizen in September of 1876.

In 1883, Nathan and the entire family move to St. Louis, Missouri. His brothers-in-law had a prosperous skin and pelt business there. St. Louis was an important port on the Mississippi River. Skins and pelts and furs, there was a big market for them not only in the United States, but in Europe; they dealt in that. Nathan had left his – whatever job he had – in New York, and moves to St. Louis. That becomes his home for the rest of his life. He goes to work for his brothers-in-law, and he had a variety of jobs over the years. He was on the road buying and selling hides and skins. Later he was a buyer in hides and wool for the Sachs Company in St. Louis, and still another company. He was Vice-President of the Purity Importing Company, which dealt in wines and liquors. Then, for the end of his life, he was in the wool business. Nathan died on February 25, 1925, while on a visit to his daughter Jenny in Nashville, Tennessee. The cause of his death was kidney failure. He was buried February 27, 1925, in the United Hebrew Cemetery in St. Louis.

Now the only thing I want to add about Nathan, because that's a part of the family that we've always heard about, and I guess I'm the first one that's unearthed these details on him: he obviously never made any effort to contact his original family. His son David came over to the United States, settled in Chicago,
[Illinois,] and raised a large family there. My grandmother, Ida Esther, came over and lived in New Haven [Connecticut]. She later moved to Jacksonville, Florida. They knew that Nathan was living in St. Louis, and he may have known where they were, but no effort was ever made to establish contact.

In 1915, my father, and I'll mention this later on again, my father together with a friend was hitchhiking across the United States, from New Haven to San Francisco [California]. There was an international exposition [the 1915 World's Fair was in San Francisco]. My father knew about his grandfather Nathan in St. Louis, and he made it his business to go there, and he contacted him. My father told him that his grandfather was very pleasant, did not ask very much about the family at all, obviously knew where they were. They had a very pleasant meeting. His grandfather did not invite him to his home or anything, he saw him at his office. That was the only contact that was ever made with Nathan Rosenthal's first family. So, he disappears from the history of our family.

Mirl, back in Poland, with her religious divorce, marries a man by the name of David Meir, who owns a small livery stable in Moshava. By the way, Moshava was the Jewish name for Makow. It had a pretty sizable Jewish population, it was fairly close to Warsaw [the capital of Poland], it was on a main route, the railroad route. It survived as a Jewish community until World War II, when the Nazis moved in. It's there today. The Jewish section of town has been destroyed, so there are no remnants at all, even the cemetery. But Mirl and David have children. His name was David Meir Fater. Many of those were lost in the Holocaust. But at least five members of the family survived the Holocaust. Several members of the family are living in Israel today, and we have made contact with them, and we know them and correspond with them, and have visited over there.

My grandmother had three children. I've already mentioned my father, Jack Proctor, Yonkel Bora Yidgavich became Jack Proctor, and there's a story there. His brother Morris [was] two years younger than he. My father was born in July 1896, my Uncle Morris two years later in 1898. His daughter Harriet lives in ____, Connecticut today. And their younger brother, David, was born in 1903. He died and is buried in Jacksonville also. My grandparents came to the United States after the turn of the century. My grandfather was in the Russo-Japanese War. He was conscripted by the Russian Army, [and] although he was married and they were not supposed to take married men, they did. He became a valet. He didn't have any special skills, and they didn't need tzitzit makers in the Russian Army at the time. He stayed in service. He never saw any fighting activity, until the end of the war; 1905, I guess, the Russo-Japanese War ends. Almost immediately after that, he leaves Europe, leaves Poland, and he comes to the United States by way of Ellis Island. He goes to New Haven, where his sister Betsy lived. Betsy had come over in 1893. She married a man by the name of Kevy Harrison. They had two sons, both have died very young. They operated a secondhand furniture store.
My grandfather became a peddler in New Haven, and he remained a peddler all the years that he lived in New Haven. He never became an American citizen; he was always an alien. Shortly after he arrived and saved enough money, he sent money back for his wife, Ida Esther, my grandmother, and their young son, David. David was now four years old when they came, in January 1909, leaving behind my father and his brother Morris with their grandmother, Mirl, until there could be money sent over for them. Shortly afterwards, that is exactly what happened. They left in July 1909 from Moshava. Now the grandfather, his step-grandfather, actually, with his livery stable, was able to get them across the border because they didn’t have any papers. They went from there by train to Rodderdam [the Netherlands], and they boarded the ship. They had steerage tickets, and, of course, as children they were even cheaper. The Newerdam, an American ship, was relatively new [and] had been launched in 1902. They sailed across the Atlantic to New York, where their family met them. Now my father was exactly thirteen years old when he made this expedition, but remember that the Russians believed that if a Jewish boy was Bar Mitzvah at thirteen, and an adult, that he was eligible to be conscripted into the army. So the Jewish families made every effort they possibly could to avoid that, because if they were brought in, sometimes it was for as long as twenty years, and they were lost. So my father traveled as being eleven years old. On the papers on the ship, he’s listed as eleven years old, and his brother is nine years old. They just reduced their ages by two years. I think that was a perilous journey, to go from Moshava, two young kids like that, on their own. I have never been able to figure out whether they went as part of a group or not, but I think not because I’ve never turned up any evidence to question that.

They come to the United States, they come to New Haven, and the family’s established there. My grandfather, as I say, had a little horse and buggy, and he went around buying junk and then they were selling it on the weekend, which is the traditional way they operated. My father was born in 1896. [It] is 1909, so he’s getting up in years. He did not know English, either to speak it, read it, or write it. He knew Yiddish, Hebrew, and he knew Polish, so he went to school. They had a special school for immigrants. They called it immediately the Greenhorn School. He went up as far as the fourth grade. By this time he was embarrassed by the fact that he’s almost a grown man and he’s in the fourth grade, so he drops out. He gets a job delivering the New Haven Register. The Jewish section was almost immediately adjacent to the old Yale campus, particularly the area where the law school was located. In those years, and maybe still now, the newsboys would deliver a newspaper to the professor’s office, and come around the end of the week or the end of the month to collect what was owed them. William Howard Taft, you know, when he left the presidency in Washington and went back to Yale as Dean of the Law School, he was one of my father’s customers. My father always took great pride in that.
Anyway, in 1915, he and a non-Jewish friend, whose name was Proctor, I think it was Harry Proctor but I’ve never been able to guarantee that, decided to go across-country. My father always had the wanderlust. They went to San Francisco. There was an international exposition there marking the opening of the Panama Canal, it’s [the] World Fair. That’s when he meets his grandfather in St. Louis. So they make that journey together, and they travel as brothers. My father greatly liked the idea of being Jack Proctor, rather than Yonkel Yidgavich. So later, when he became a citizen, he legally changed his name. And my family, my boys, have been eternally grateful ever since. As they said, how do you spell Yidgavich? He came back to New Haven, and from New Haven, he went traveling again. First to New Orleans. Then how he learned about employment in Jacksonville, I don’t know, but he moves into Jacksonville around 1917. He gets a job in the haberdashery store, where a man by the name of Schwartz ran it. He later, as it got closer to World War I, turned it into a military uniform store. That’s where he meets my mother, Celia Schneider.

Now let me go from the paternal side to the maternal side, my mother’s side. As I say, the family came from St. Petersburg, Russia. How they got there I don’t know. You will recall from your own history that when Austria, Russia, and Prussia divided Poland up, a large section of eastern Poland went to Russia, and it had a very heavy, large Jewish population. The Russians were glad to get the labor force, but they were not happy about them being Jews. The Empress, Elizabeth I, and then later Catherine the Great, set up what they called the Pale of Settlement [established in 1791 by Tsarina Catherine II to restrict Jews to the formerly Polish or Turkish border territories of the Russian Empire], where Jews could live, and if they went out for whatever reason, they had to have special permits.

Well, St. Petersburg was not within the Pale, but my great-grandfather, whose name was Samuel, and for whom I am named, was a tailor, and he had a contract with the military. He shortened pants or did whatever was needed. They were allowed to live in a special compound, and it worked advantageously for the children because they were able to get a better education than they would have normally. My grandfather Michael, for instance, became an engineer. Not an electrical engineer, but one that worked on the trains, and he was on the run from St. Petersburg to Moscow. Later, when he came to the United States, he was not able to get into the union in Baltimore because they did not accept Jews. He was never able to practice his skills over here.

Anyway, his father did not immigrate, but they had a large family. My grandfather Michael had three sisters, Sarah, Lena, and Rebecca, whom they called Reba, and who died at a relatively young age, sixteen, of tuberculosis. Then he had several sons. He had David, Jacob David – Jacob they dropped [because] it was too Jewish-sounding, they say – it became David Schneider, and Lewis and Abe. So it was a sizable family that migrated over to the United States directly to Baltimore, [Maryland,] and they operated a secondhand store at
214 Utad Street. That building, by the way, survived until about a dozen, fifteen years ago. I saw it when they were building the new baseball stadium there, which was just down the road, all of the buildings in that area were demolished.

My grandfather, Michael, who was not able to practice his engineering skills, held a variety of jobs in Baltimore. He was married to my grandmother, Rebecca Wolfson, whose father was also named Samuel; her mother’s name was Sofie. By the way, my grandfather Michael’s grandfather’s name was Samuel and his mother’s name was _____. They’re living in Baltimore, my grandfather has a variety of jobs, a large family that needs to be taken care of. He had all kinds of jobs. He was a tailor; I don’t know what he knew about tailoring. He even got a job one year as a lamp-lighter. They had gas lamps, of course, at that time, so how he got that job, and it only lasted one year, his appointment. They even operated, and my mother remembers this together with her brother David, they would bring milk in on the train in these large five or ten gallon containers, and then my mother and her brother would then divide this up into bottles, and they became delivery people of milk. That lasted only a while because they had a horse and buggy, and a donkey or mule or something, and the neighbors complained, so they had to get rid of that and that ended their dairying activities.

Anyway, my mother had an Aunt Sarah, Sarah Mehlman, Sarah Schneider. She married David Mehlman in Baltimore. David was a very handsome young man, with lots of different activities. He was a photographer, he did all kinds of things. They got connected up with somebody, and they bought a pawn shop in St. Augustine. This is how the family comes to St. Augustine. In 1907, they bought a pawn shop from a man by the name of Tarlinksy, on the corner of Washington Street and Bridge Street, and they moved down to St. Augustine. They never had any children of their own. They later brought Sarah’s sister Lena, and her husband, Abe, to St. Augustine, and they had an establishment on Washington Street, a saloon. The two families lived next door to each other. The Fagan family now lives in Jacksonville, and the Mehlman family survivors also live in Jacksonville and West Palm Beach.

Anyway, the Mehlmans have no children, and they’re desperate for children. So they bring my mother’s older sister, two years older than my mother, my Aunt Minnie, [to live with them]. My mother was born in November 1898. Aunt Minnie was born in November 11, 1896. She always said she was born on Armistice Day before there was an Armistice Day. Anyway, she comes to St. Augustine to live with the Mehlmans. It’s while she was there that she meets a man from Jacksonville by the name of Alexander Spevack. [He] would come over often from Jacksonville, [he] had friends there, played cards. So they got together, they liked each other; my aunt was a very handsome woman. Alex had a thriving business, a very fine dress shop on Bay Street in Jacksonville called Alexander’s. They were married in the Mehlman home in St. Augustine in 1916. They moved to Jacksonville, have a house on Beaver Street, and are living the
good life with young couples in Jacksonville.

The Mehlmans now don’t have anybody, so they brought my mother down from Baltimore to live with them. She comes to Jacksonville first because Minnie is now pregnant with their first child, my cousin Marjorie. My mother stays in Jacksonville until Marjorie is born, and then she comes to St. Augustine to live with the Mehlmans. She wasn’t there very long, long enough to take some piano lessons at St. Joseph’s with the nuns, but that didn’t last very long. She was not musically inclined. She didn’t like St. Augustine, thought it was too small. It was too dull. She didn’t like what the Mehlmans wanted her to do in the store and the house. So one day, when they were at the store and she was home – this was all plotted out ahead of time – she packed her things and she went to the bus station. She got on the bus and she came to Jacksonville. She left the Mehlmans behind. She left a note for them to tell them she was moving out so they wouldn’t think she was being abducted or anything. She moves in with Aunt Minnie and Uncle Alex, and she begins working in the store.

In the meantime, I told you my father was in Jacksonville, and he was working with Mr. Schwartz in the store a great cross street from what was then the railroad terminal. He lived with the Bono Family, the [founders of] Bono’s Barbecue. Of course, Mr. Bono then was a tailor; it was his son David that got into the barbecue business. They lived on Duval Street. There were several people that lived there, [it] is rumored. Anyway, my father would come up from Schwartz’s to up the road. It was only three or four blocks, and he met my mother. It was a love affair almost from the first moment. They dated, they went to the dances at the YMHA [Young Men’s Hebrew Association]. That area was a small ghetto for the Conservative and Orthodox Jews that had begun moving in, in the 1890s. One of the episodes, he took her boating in a rowboat or canoe or something on the Trout River, and the boat turned over. He always said, I saved your life. I think they were close to shore anyway, and waded to shore. But they were married in Jacksonville in May 1918.

Now remember my father is an immigrant at the time, and he no longer works for Mr. Schwartz. He gets a job in the shipyard. There were several shipyards in Jacksonville at the time, and he goes to work for one of the small ones in the inventory office. He always said, I don’t know how to build ships, but I know how to count parts. The shipyard was called Hilyer-Speringer-Dunn Shipyards. I don’t know anything about them, but he was an inventory clerk there. He worked until the end of the war.

They were married in 1918, and I’m born the following year. When they were first married, they lived on Monroe Street with my mother’s aunt, Lena Fagan. Then they rented an apartment on Duval Street, a two-story house, and they had the apartment downstairs. The Peltz family, Harry Peltz, lived upstairs. They became, from that moment, lifelong friends. It’s kind of an interesting turn that it was through their daughter that [my wife] Bessie and I met each other. She arranged our first date together. So the relationship with the Peltz family, as
I say, was a good one, and it continued from the time that I was a baby until they moved on.

When the war was over, the shipyards begin to close, and my father got a temporary job with a clothing store on Broad Street. Then through some connection, maybe it was through David Mehlman, [who had] St. Augustine connections, because they were still in the pawn shop business, and doing well in St. Augustine. Although they were to leave there pretty quickly because my other uncle, Abe Fagan, had the saloon, and, of course, Florida, along with the rest of the nation, went dry, and so they moved to Jacksonville. They had made money, though, in the saloon. My uncle, David Mehlman, who called himself Honest Dave, that was the name of the store, also had made money and owned a couple pieces of property. Small buildings on St. George Strait.

Anyway, my father, through whatever connection, gets a job on the Florida East Coast Railroad, which had its headquarters in St. Augustine. So, [while I was] a baby, we moved to St. Augustine. On the corner of St. George Street and Cathedral Place, where the Barnett Bank is located today, there was a building called the Bishop’s Building. There were stores downstairs, and there were small apartments upstairs, and that’s where we lived. Now, my father worked on the train, and you remember the old days, or maybe you don’t remember it, Mark. They had a dining car on there, but not too many people went to the dining car. They had these people going up and down the aisle selling sandwiches and coffee. That was my father. He was making the run from St. Augustine to Miami and back. In the meantime, my mother was operating a small gift shop-fruit stand-magazine place in the Florida East Coast Terminal. She didn’t own it, she was just working there.

I guess the greatest episode was in February of 1921, just a few weeks after the presidential election, [when] Warren G. Harding [Republican president from 1921-1923, when he died of a heart attack] arrives in St. Augustine. He had made a triumphal boat trip down, and he’s getting prepared for the inaugural, which in those years, you know, was March 4. He comes into St. Augustine, there were no security problems then as there are today, and my mother was there with me. As he was crossing through he saw me, and he walked over and picked me up. That was my contact with the Presidency, and he put me down. I thought they could have picked a more respectable president [for me] to be picked up [by], but anyway, that was my contact with greatness.

Shortly after that, my father had the opportunity to buy a small grocery store in Jacksonville on Myrtle Avenue, and that’s what they did. They left St. Augustine and moved to Jacksonville. In the meantime, my brother Myer was born in September 1921, and my brother Dave was born in September 1922. Myer on September 26 and David on September 16. David’s bris [ceremonial circumcision] was held in the synagogue because it was Rosh Hashanah. We lived on Elder Street, just around the corner. In fact, the earliest, absolutely the earliest memory I have, I couldn’t have been more than three or four years old,
although Myer and Dave were already born. My father didn’t get the grocery store, I think, until 1923. I got up, and in my nightgown I walked from the house, which was just a few feet away. We were there alone, you wouldn’t do that with children today, and walked over to the store. There was my mother and father wondering what was going on, and of course they quickly hustled me back home. The other early memory I have is my first episode in school. The building was East Riverside, and my birthday is March, that’s when I would have been six years old. But my father got the bright idea that I was smart enough to start early. So he registers me the previous September, and tells them I’m six years old, which of course I was not. Well, it wasn’t very long before they found out what my true age was and evicted me from the school. So that was my first beginnings as a student.

Later on, when we are no longer in the grocery business, and you’ve seen that picture of me then, that mom-and-pop store which my parents had. Those kind of stores were very common at the time, little neighborhood stores. The area that we lived in was a black neighborhood on one side of Myrtle Avenue, and a blue-collar section on the other side. Elder Street was just a one block street, it was not paved at all. We lived in that little cottage for a while, then moved across [the] street. I remember that. I had an apartment there. We never owned the property at all. The man who owned the building was [of] the Knauer family. They still live in Jacksonville. Then my parents’ store, and then next to that was a little dry goods store, Jewish-owned, and we knew them very well. Once again, their descendants live in Jacksonville, and continue to be friends. My father stayed in the grocery business about two years, then had an opportunity to sell it to a couple, the Eisenburgs, who came down for whatever reason from Atlanta. Then they sold it to the Meides, which was I guess a Syrian family that had a few stores like that. My father had the opportunity to buy a small department store on Florida Avenue in the 1200 block, which he did. So we moved out to that area, and had a small house right around the corner from the store. [We] lived there for a short while until we moved to 355 West Seventh Street, on the corner of Perry, to a big, two-story house.

In the meantime, my brother George is born on February 22, 1925. His name was supposed to be Joseph, but the doctor said, you can’t name him Joseph, this is George Washington’s birthday, and George and Joseph became George. The “Joseph,” I think, was that brother, my grandmother’s brother back in Europe, that we know nothing at all about. But obviously by this time he’s dead, and they know about it. So my grandmother insisted on naming him for him, and that’s the way it was.

Anyway, that’s the story of my early life. My father has the dry goods store, and we’re living in Springfield, which was near the synagogue now. It was not an exclusively Jewish ghetto, but there were lots of Jewish families in that area. I was close enough in those years to walk to the synagogue, which I did four times a week when I came home from regular classes, for Hebrew classes.
Our school, Ninth and Perry, is now Beulah Beal [Young Parents Center]. I
registered there in the second grade and then started the third grade. They
decided that I had enough skills, so I skipped the third grade and went into the
fourth grade. It went through the sixth. Then I went to junior high school, Kirby-
Smith, which was several blocks away, but close enough to walk [to] also. That
was the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades, and [I] did very well there. I
remember when I was in the eighth grade, there was a contest to write poetry,
and I wrote a piece about citrus. It won $10. I think the Civitan Club, or one of
the luncheon clubs, [held the contest,] and they invited me to the luncheon at the
Roosevelt Hotel [converted into a retirement facility after a 1963 fire].

G: Do you remember the poem?

P: [Laughter.] Right! I read the poem.

G: But do you remember it?

P: No, I don’t remember it. I think I ought to look it up in the paper, maybe it’s in
there. Then, I remember, each year we did a Shakespeare play in literature. In
the eighth grade, we did A Midsummer Night’s Dream, they decided to portray it.
I became the Duke, Duke Theseus, is it? It was such a marvelous success in
school that they put it on downtown in a small building that the veterans were
operating there. We did that for three nights. That was my experience on the
stage. I didn’t become an actor as a result of that. Then we moved from West
Street to Evergreen Avenue, and we lived there for a while.

G: Were these progressively larger, nicer homes?

P: Not necessarily. The biggest and nicest home was the one on Seventh Street,
Seventh and Perry. That was a very lovely home. None of them did we ever
own, they were all rented properties. But the one on Evergreen Avenue was very
nice. My grandparents lived across the street. There were six or seven Jewish
families in the neighborhood. My grandparents on my mother’s side, in the
meantime in the 1920s, had moved from Baltimore down to Jacksonville. They
operated a small clothing store, and not for very long. It was not successful, and
my grandfather had a sundry store. It was right around the corner from
Evergreen Avenue, and, as I say, we lived across the street from them. Their
youngest son [was] Nathan, who was three years older than I, and he and I
became best friends. He’s the one I lived with as a freshman when I came to the
university. He was a senior in chemistry at the time. Then from there we moved
to Riverside, and we lived on the corner of Ernest and West Street, in a house,
729 West Street. Then [we] moved eventually next door into a house that my
grandparents had lived in. All of these were rental to begin with, but my father
bought the second house at 735 West Street. That was the only piece of property they ever owned, though.

We then transferred schools. From Kirby-Smith – I had finished at Kirby-Smith, although we were living in Riverside. So it was a kind of cumbersome thing. I would leave school, this is when I was in the ninth grade, walk to where the Spevacks were now living in Springfield on Fifth Street, and stay there long enough until it was time to go to Hebrew school. I went to Hebrew school for one hour, Monday through Thursday. My father picked me up there, and then we went home. So it gave me a long day, but it didn’t seem, as I look back on it now, to be very arduous. There were a lot of other kids doing exactly the same thing. And I never became what you would call a Hebrew scholar, with all of that going to Hebrew school. When we transferred, moved to Riverside, the senior high school was Robert E. Lee. I went there the first year.

In the meantime, of course this is the Depression decade. When the boom bubble burst in Florida, and the hurricanes came in 1926 and 1928, it devastated the economy of this state. A lot of small business operators were wiped out, including my father. My father lost everything. He went to work selling sheets and blankets and so on. Mainly to black, but also to blue-collar white customers who were also very poor, and could only pay maybe fifty cents or a dollar a week. As I say, times were very hard for the Proctor family. In the summer of 1935, through a connection, I got a job working in a wholesale liquor place. A Jewish family owned it; it was Southern Liquors, one of the biggest in the state. In those years, we had just become wet in Florida a year or two before. The state collected an excise tax on each bottle. What you had to do was open up the cases, lay the bottles out on a flat surface, and put a stamp on there, affix a stamp on there. Then [you had to] pack the bottles back into the case, [and] seal them up so they could be delivered to customers. So I worked back there with a couple of Jewish guys. Erwin Canner, who was a good friend of mine, and a couple of the others. I was paid the lordly sum of $12 a week, which at that time was considered very nice.

G: Now, were you out of school at this time?

P: This is the summer of 1935. At the end of the summer, with consultation with my parents and a lot of indecision, I decide to drop out of school and to finish up at night school. And that’s exactly what I did. I worked from 1935-1937 and contributed money to the support of the household, and I went to night school. Classes were in Duval High School. There was a lady there, a teacher, who was very kind to me. I took the regular academic courses. I also learned how to type and do things like that. And I finished up with my class and graduated in June 1937. So, nobody was the wiser [of] my departure from the academic career.

G: So you were at the end of your sophomore year [when] you decided to leave,
and [you] did your junior and senior years in night school?

P: Yeah, two years.

G: How were you as a student?

P: How was I as a student? I was a very good student. Obviously, I had no problems. I took the courses I was supposed to take, and I obviously made decent grades. I don’t remember my getting on the scholarship roll at all, and I don’t know [if] they had scholarship rolls for night school. And I wasn’t the only one doing this – you see, at that time, this was not an unusual sacrifice to be making. Lots of people were doing the same thing. So in September 1937, I came to the University of Florida.

G: Okay, we’re going to stop there for a second. I’m going to work back a little bit because I have some questions about some of the earlier things you said. Much of what you told me about your family, I know, is your own research done in the last several years. How much interaction as a child did you have with some of the folks you told me about this morning? Did you know your grandparents well? Aunts and uncles, great-aunts and uncles?

P: I was very fortunate. It’s a long-lived family, and my grandparents on my mother’s side lived just several doors away from us. And I was very close to my grandfather, Michael. When I came home from school, I passed in front of their house, and almost always he was sitting under the porch in [a] rocking chair waiting for me to visit a little bit. He told me lots of stories. For instance, he told me he was in St. Petersburg the day in 1881 the tsar [Alexander II] was assassinated. He was downtown; he was, I think, eleven or twelve years old at the time, and he heard a commotion. He didn’t hear any shots, but he heard a commotion of crowd noises and people running. So he ran to where [they came from, and] by that time the police had arrived and had blocked off the streets, but he quickly learned what it was. Of course, this assassination of the tsar greatly weakened the position of Jews, because the courtiers were looking for whoever was responsible and blamed the assassination on the Jews. The situation became even more critical, and government-sponsored programs came about. And of course, this is what encouraged the large immigration to the United States, a hundred thousand plus or more every year. This is when my family, my mother’s family, left St. Petersburg. So in answer to your question, did I learn a lot, yes. I learned a lot from my grandfather, and I learned a lot from my father. My father talked a lot about his past, and I learned from some of the other members of the family. I was very family-oriented, and in some ways, kind of a favorite of the family. I was the oldest male grandson. So I regret the fact that I did not ask a million more questions. But at least it gave me a background of
things to work on.

G: Did the family speak Yiddish?

P: Only among themselves. My grandmother, my father’s mother, Ida Esther, spoke Yiddish all the time. In fact, they moved to Jacksonville in 1940 from New Haven. It was just the winters and all were too much for them, and my grandfather was too old to be a peddler and all of those things. But my grandmother had a black maid. Everybody had blacks working in the household at that time. So, as I remember, she talked Yiddish to the maid, and the maid talked southern to her, and they seemed to have communicated well with each other. But my mother spoke Yiddish always to her mother, they conversed in Yiddish, but not with us. My grandfather talked to me in English. It’s interesting also when my grandfather came over, he was still single, and he came to Baltimore because his aunt, Rachael Epstein, lived in Baltimore. My grandmother came over because her sister, Sarah Wolf, was living in Baltimore. They were just a young couple. My grandfather did not know how to speak Yiddish. They did not speak Yiddish in their home in Russia, they spoke Russian. My grandmother didn’t know anything but Yiddish. So my grandfather, to pursue this romance, had to learn how to speak Yiddish, which he became very accomplished in doing, and both of them had to learn how to speak English.

G: Did the family, were they proud of their Eastern European heritage?

P: Were they proud of it? Yeah. They did not try to forget their past at all. They had really not had an unhappy past at all, they had not been subjected to a lot of these things. I don’t think life was very generous for my father’s family in New Haven, and certainly he was not happy about being scooped up and put into the Russo-Japanese War, which he had no commitment for one way or the other. My grandmother never liked the Poles at all. She always, when anybody said anything about it, she gave a couple of spits. I think what happened, according to my father, is that she got into an altercation with a Polish police officer in Moshava, and they threatened to lock her up for a day or two. So she never was happy with them from that point on. Anyway, they came to New Haven as I told you, where my grandfather’s sister Betsy and her husband, Kevy Harrison, lived. I want to mention that the Harrisons had two sons. The second [probably means “first”] son died when he was four years old, he was scalded. A pot of hot water fell off the stove and burned him almost completely. The second son died of leukemia, acute leukemia. I have a vague recollection of them in the 1940s. They both died in 1943-44, and they’re buried in New Haven.

G: How about religion? Jewish holidays, foods. Tell me a little bit, especially as a young kid, how you celebrated holidays. What role, besides Hebrew school,
Judaism played in the family.

P: We celebrated every holiday. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur [were] particularly big. In those early years we walked to the synagogue, we did not drive at all. And sometimes, when we lived on Evergreen, it was a distance to walk, and it was hot.

G: Traditional service?

P: Traditional service. It was an Orthodox synagogue that was trending toward Conservative, but it was an Orthodox synagogue to begin with. The Orthodox synagogue had been organized in Jacksonville in the early 1900s. Rabbi Benjamin, who was not really an ordained rabbi but was the accepted rabbi there, married my parents. He officiated all the brisses, and everybody in the community loved him, and he was well-respected by everybody. From that synagogue, which was old and small, they moved to one out on Third and Silver Street. My father played an active role. He was on the board of the synagogue. And yes, we involved ourselves in all of the holidays. Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur. We got new clothes, we went to services, everybody in the family fasted on Yom Kippur, we always had big Seders, usually at my grandfather's house. Then when he got too infirm, my mother took over the role. It was not unusual for us to have twelve, fifteen, eighteen, twenty people at the Seder. Purim was a big deal. We went to hear the Magilla reading. That was a big operation. Sukkot, we all participated in that. We went to Sunday school in addition to Hebrew school. Me and all of my brothers were Bar Mitzvah. They didn't get big, extravagant parties in those years, but we did. And we had a very close family relationship, not only with my grandparents, but with my aunts and uncles. We didn't ever do anything alone. If there was anything in the family, all the family was included first of all.

[End side A1]

G: You were mentioning, as we switched tapes, about the family. Large family, got along well together.

P: Very large family, got along extremely well. Everybody kind of lived close together. My Aunt Minnie and her family lived just a few doors away from us. My grandparents lived five doors away from us on the corner. So we saw each other often, and nothing went on that went unnoticed by the rest of the family. You couldn’t do anything without them knowing about it and wanting to know why they hadn't been included. Now there had been a disruption in the family between the Mehlmans and the Fagans that went back over some business matters in the 1920s. But the Fagans withdrew from the family, and we never, ever, even to
this day, remain close to that part of the family. Their children grew up, their 
grandchildren grew up. We did not know them. We ourselves did not know the 
cause of the disruption, but it happened. That was the only failure in the family 
itself. We had relatives that lived in Baltimore. My mother’s brothers lived there, 
and we remain very close to them. If we ever went to Baltimore, we stayed with 
them. When they came to Jacksonville, they ate with us and they did things. So 
it was a very close, traditional family situation.

G: Tell me a little bit about cooking. I always like to ask about food. Old world 
recipes?

P: Yes. I wouldn’t say that my mother was the greatest cook in the world. In later 
years, after the decade of the thirties, and my father became more lucrative, they 
became party people. They loved to go out, and my mother particularly loved to 
play cards with her girlfriends for small stakes, penny and a nickel. But they 
played three, four, five times a week. So she didn’t have too much time to cook. 
But some things were [her] specialty. She knew how to make a gefilte fish like 
no other person in the world, and she was very careful on the kind of fish. She 
went to the wholesale fish market to get exactly what she wanted. She knew 
how to pickle herrings, and she became famous for that. I wouldn’t say she was 
the greatest baker in the world. When Purim came she would bake humentash, 
but you needed kind of a sledgehammer to get through the dough that she had to 
get to the prunes that were there. So on a score of about one to ten, I would give 
hers maybe about a five, or if I was feeling real generous, a six.

My grandmother was also, neither one of them [were] great cooks at all. They cooked traditionally. Threw everything into a big pot, and that was it. They 
were too poor to serve caviar, but they were very Orthodox as far as food was 
concerned. They all kept kosher homes. My mother bought all of her meat from 
the kosher butcher. They would call up, she would tell them what she wanted, 
and within an hour or two he would deliver it from downtown all the way out to 
our house. So that’s how it operated. And as I say, Passover week we kept. 
We didn’t eat anything but matzo. We had two Seders. A few years, they tried 
making their own wine. My father was a concocter. He went into the root beer 
business one year, too [laughing]. Suddenly, in the middle of night, they heard 
these explosions. They thought somebody was breaking into the house. And 
what it was, it was the root beer. It was foaming off the tops of them. The corks 
or whatever was there, were exploding out. That ended his bottling activity. My 
mother said, that’s enough, you’re not doing any more of that. It’s surprising, we 
lived in a small house, with three bedrooms and one bathroom. My mother and 
father and me and my five brothers. And yet we seemed to have survived it. I 
don’t remember anybody thinking that they were deprived of anything.

G: How did you get along with your brothers?
P: Fine. Got along with my brothers very well. Always have, and continue with the surviving ones. We were very close. We talk to each other all the time. But growing up, of course, there was a variance in age, and they had their own. And then, of course, when the war came, and four of us were in service. I was at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, and I’ll tell you about that in a moment. My brother Myer was in the infantry in Italy. My brother Dave was a bombardier in the Air Force in England, and George was in the Marine Corps in the Pacific, and was badly injured in an incident in Okinawa [Japan]. But I got along well with my brothers. But when the war was over and everybody returned, of course, they took advantage of the G.I. Bill, and they went to the University of Florida. My brother Dave is the only one of the family who did not. He went to the University of Texas at El Paso, because he had married a girl from El Paso. And when he was ready for school, the university in Gainesville had already started the semester, and he didn’t want to lose any more time. All the rest of them were “Gators”.

But they developed their own friends. Kids that they had grown up with continued to be their friends through college. Our house was always a kind of a meeting place. And they would come, whether we were home or not, they would come into the house. My mother didn’t lock the doors, and it got to the point [where] she had this big salami. She would buy five-pound salami, and they would know which shelf [it was on]. They would just come in and fix their own sandwiches, and cook. And sometimes you found them, you walked in the house, and there was one of them sleeping on the couch or something [laughing]. Totally uninvited. These are friends they still have today, who recall, oh yeah. They call my mother by her first name, Celie, her name was Celia Schneider Proctor. Celie used to do real good [laughing]. But yes, I was very close to my brothers, very close to their wives.

G: What’s the difference in age? Remind me. You’re the oldest.

P: I’m the oldest. The youngest was Irving, who’s now deceased, and Irving was born in 1933. So we’re all fairly close to each other.

G: You were born in 1919, though.

P: I was born in 1919. My brother Myer was born in 1921. Dave was born in 1922. George was born in 1925. Saul, I think, was born in 1928. And Irving was born in 1932.

G: That’s fourteen years. So he’s born and you’re in the middle of high school. Did you have responsibilities? You have to change Irving’s diapers?
[Laughing.] I didn’t have to change his diapers. But everybody took it. Irving was mother’s favorite.

He was the baby.

He was the baby. Before Irving died, he’d had four wives. But we all got along very well together. And as I say, my two brothers in Jacksonville see each other and eat together often. We see and talk to them on the telephone two or three times a week.

So tell me again. Remind me of the extended family. You had two sets of grandparents in Jacksonville, correct?

Right.

Equal time split between them, that worked out well?

Well, the one that lived a few doors away from us, I saw every single day. The other grandparents who came down later, in 1940, lived on the other side of town near the synagogue, so they would be able [to go]. My grandfather went to services everyday. So they had a small apartment about a block away from the synagogue. So I saw them maybe once a week or twice a week.

You were already twenty-one by the time they arrived.

And they took great pride in me. When I became an appointed, that [means I] was only an instructor at the University of Florida, when my grandmother, my father’s mother, she went, I could have been the Prince of Wales. [She said,] my grandson is a professor [laughing].

Tell me a little about growing up in Jacksonville. You mentioned some neighborhoods. Did you interact mostly with Jewish kids? Was there a good mix between?

No, there was not a good mix. We had very few, very, very few non-Jewish friends. There were a few non-Jewish neighbors around that we were friendly with, but everybody we knew and socialized with were Jews. First of all, the neighborhood was not completely ghetto, but the neighborhood was maybe seventy-five percent Jewish. So you didn’t have to go out seeking people. And remember, I didn’t do my final two years at school, so I lost a lot of contacts I might otherwise have had with non-Jewish people. But my cousin, Clara Spevack, was only three months older than I was, and so we had some of the same classes. We walked to school together. And my cousin Marjorie. Clara’s now deceased, but Marjorie is still living in Jacksonville. We all went to school
together, so we had Jewish friends. We did not have many non-Jewish friends. And whatever mix there was in the neighborhood was a very casual mix.

G: Was the Jewish community in Jacksonville accepted by the larger community? Or were there good relations?

P: There was fairly good relations. There were no major anti-Semitic attacks or situations that came up. There were two synagogues. As I say, it started out Orthodox, but was becoming increasingly Conservative, as it is today. And my family continues to be active. My brother Saul was the president of the synagogue. They now call it the Jacksonville Jewish Center. In the 1920s, when they built this edifice, they thought they would have a synagogue and a recreation center. The Depression changed all of that, but the name stuck. So it’s still Jacksonville Jewish Center today. We remained very active in the synagogue. As I say, it was Conservative. There was a Reform synagogue of German-Jews that had been established in the early 1880s, the second oldest congregation in Florida. The oldest is in Pensacola. There was no close relationship between the Reform and the Orthodox. You did not have friends in the other, as though they were living in two separate cities in all. That was not unusual in the South. Bessie said that when she was growing up in Atlanta, having a date with a boy from the Reform is just like having a date with a non-Jewish boy. They were the same thing. And that was true in Jacksonville. Even today, while there’s a closeness, more of a closeness today, there’s still many of the old families that you don’t know anything about.

G: Recreation. Did you go out to the beach? Was there a Jewish beach in Jacksonville?

P: No, there was not a Jewish beach. Jacksonville Beach, which was about sixteen or eighteen miles away, was where everyone went on the weekend, on Sunday. Everybody went to the beach on Sunday. You went early in the morning. You lay out there and get sunburned, much more than was healthy to do, as we now know, but we did. So, all the Jewish community, the Jews that went to the beach, and lots of them did, were congregated down near the Casa Marina Hotel. There were benches along there, and that’s where you went. You brought your lunch, in a box of sandwiches, and you ate those on the beach. My parents never went in swimming, but we did because the bathhouse next to the Casa Marina had a pool. You could only get in with a key, so you’d pass the key back and forth between the fence so you only had to pay one admission. That was not an unusual situation at all. We did go to the beach often. There was a lot of activity on Sunday at the beach, including, there was gambling there. They had roulette, and my mother and her girlfriends who played cards there during the week went up to play roulette. They didn’t lose or gain very much, maybe ten
dollars, but they thought it was absolutely wonderful. And we were there from morning, we usually got out there about 11:00, until after dark. And that was the main activity. My father was always a great baseball fan. He would go to the baseball games, and he would take us along too.

G: Who was playing in Jacksonville at the time?

P: Jacksonville Suns. And we went to the movies a lot. There were a lot of theaters, movie theaters, downtown. I remember in early years, when I was a kid, that my mother would go once a week to the Palace Theater, which also had some acts, live acts. And she would usually take me, the others were too small. We went to the movie. Then we went to Woolworth’s or Cresses’ [department stores], which had dining. You know, one of those things, and get a drink. So there was a big time operation.

G: Let’s talk a little more about the Depression. You mentioned that your father’s, this would have been the department store, didn’t survive the Depression.

P: It did not survive.

G: And your decision to leave school, was in part, or in large measure, the result of the Depression and your desire to help.

P: It was totally as a result of the Depression and the need of the family for the money.

G: How did the Depression affect the larger Jacksonville?

P: All the same way. My Uncle Alex, who no longer – long ago had his dress shop. He had closed it and moved to New York with the family for a variety of reasons, and [when he] came back the Depression was on. He and my father worked for L. B. Price, the same company that sold goods on installment plan. Times were very hard in Jacksonville for the Jewish community, and, as I guess, for the non-Jewish community. And this was not an untypical situation. I don’t think we ever went hungry at all. I don’t remember being deprived of anything like that. On the other hand, I’m sure that my mother bought the things that were the least expensive. The banana boats used to come into Jacksonville, and my father would go down and buy a whole one of those huge stalks of bananas that had maybe a hundred or hundred fifty bananas, for maybe fifty cents or seventy-five cents. And he would hang it on the back door on the little porch in the back, and that was our dessert. You needed something, you went out and pulled off a banana [laughing]. When you emptied the stalk, you went and bought another stalk.
My parents were very close to each other, very close to each other. I'm sure there were arguments from time to time, but I don't remember anything ferocious. I don't remember anything threatening their marriage at all. It was a real love match, I think, from beginning to end. They were very close to their children. I mean, they were greatly concerned about our academic progress, and everything that we were doing. There was nothing that was secret from the family.

G: Did your mom continue to work? You mentioned she had –

P: No, no. My mother never worked outside of the home. She had worked in the store, both in the grocery store and worked in the dry goods store, but once that closed, she never left the home to work at all. She really had no skills to work. The jobs were very scarce during the 1930s, and after that my father's business improved, [so] there was no need for her to work.

G: How is Jacksonville changing during this time? Is it growing significantly?

P: It's growing tremendously. Jacksonville starts out by being, for Florida and for the South, a sizable city because it's a port city, and the railroads ran in and out of that. So it always had a growing population. And it was not yet competing with South Florida, although that was beginning as a result of the land boom of the 1920s. So Jacksonville was the paramount city. This is where the business operation, the banks, were located. This is where people went for capital investment. And then, of course, with the end of the war, things began to change dramatically. For one thing, there had been a lot of military activity in and around Jacksonville. Camp Landing, which was about forty miles away, was a training encampment which had at one time maybe as many as 70,000 [people]. They would come into Jacksonville on weekends. Then there was the Naval Air Area, which in itself had always been a military area, going all the way back to the Spanish-American War. Then during World War One it became Camp Johnson. So, a lot of those people stayed on. They liked what they saw, they thought the economic opportunities were good.

So Jacksonville began to grow. Of course since then it's been outdistanced by Miami, Tampa, Orlando. It's always been a politically conservative community. I think because the financial interest[s] are there, and people like Alfred Du Pont and Mrs. Du Pont live there [Alfred Du Pont moved to Florida in the 1920s, taking control of several Florida banks, the Florida East Coast Railway, and west Florida real estate which later became the St. Joe Paper Company]. It was the home for the Atlantic National Bank and the Florida National Bank. I think that was what made it as conservative as was. Integration did not come easy to Jacksonville, but the Jewish community got along very well. Jews did not really exert themselves visually in the early years. There were no
Jews who were members of the political community.

G: But there were the Delinskys.

P: There was a Delinsky in the nineteenth century, when Jacksonville was much smaller. Morris Delinsky, who was the mayor of Jacksonville, and also one of the founders of the Reform congregation in Jacksonville. But after that, in the twentieth century, you don’t get very much activity. The rabbi of the Reform synagogue, Reo Kaplan, did organize an inter-faith service for Thanksgiving that worked very well with the other ministers. But those were just isolated incidents that occurred.

G: Tell me about growing up in a segregated city. Did you have much interaction? At one point the store, you mentioned, was in a black neighborhood. Did you have much to do at all with African Americans?

P: Well, when we lived on Elder Street, and I was really a young child, it seemed to me, as I remember, we always had a black maid. Even when we were very poor, we had a black maid. You paid them about $2 a week, and they did, they washed, and they ironed, and they did all the things there. Also, when my father had the grocery store he had a small car, and there was a black man by the name of, I think, Julius, that drove the car. My mother never learned to drive, but she always had this chauffeur to drive her around. This enabled my father to get goods back and forth from wherever they were needed in the city. We had very little contact beyond the maids coming in. Although I didn’t think it was the least bit strange at the time, and nobody ever challenged it, the maids always came in by the back door. My mother always had [for them] their own plate and forks, as though you thought they would contaminate you if they ate out of [your] china. But you accepted that without any question about it. And my mother didn’t feed them that well. It seemed to me she had sardines and orange soda and so, but they thrived on it. So that was as far as it went. You really had no black playmates or black contact with individuals at all.

G: Certainly not at school.

P: Not at school. And I remember some of the black maids that we had who told stories about their families, stories I can’t remember today. Whether they were true or not I don’t know, but about slavery days and things like that. They themselves were not slaves, but their grandparents were.

G: This I think will be of special interest to Madison and to Rebecca: tell me about Florida before air conditioning.
P: [Laughing.] Well, you didn’t seem to notice that it was hot, but it was very hot in the summer. And not only that, you remember, we hadn’t figured out how to get rid of mosquitos in those early years. So we got plagued with a lot. It was very hot. At night it was hot, almost too hot to go to bed. My mother had this big black fan, which she turned on and sat in front of. And we sat out on the porch, or we went for a ride at night. My father would pull out the car, and we’d all get in it to go for a ride to cool off. I remember on occasion he got us outside, and he would get the garden hose and sprinkle it all on us to cool us all over. So that’s how life went on before there was air conditioning, because nobody ever thought about the possibility of providing some coolant that would make life livable for you.

G: Were iceboxes still the iceboxes where the ice delivery man came and put a big block in?

P: I remember that. We had one of the early refrigerators though, electric refrigerators. But a lot of things got delivered. We had milk delivered to the house every morning. We had the meat, the kosher meat, that came from Safer’s downtown. There were three kosher markets in Jacksonville at the time. Hammerman’s, Becker’s, and Safer’s, and my mother bought from Safer’s. There was also two bread companies, and they would come out too. So the bread truck would arrive with Jewish bread, bagels and so on. You didn’t have to go to the stores very much. Most of the stuff you wanted was right there delivered to your house. As I say, my grandparents kept kosher, my mother kept kosher. My mother, she loved to eat out, she loved to go to restaurants. She didn’t have any trace of food in the house, but it didn’t concern her. She went and had chicken or steak or something in a restaurant. My mother and father were very flexible.

G: When you were growing up, you mentioned Hebrew school for an hour after classes.

P: From 4 to 5:00.

G: And then Sunday school. What did your Jewish education comprise? What were you learning?

P: I don’t know that I was learning very much. We learned how to read Hebrew, which we did not translate. So I learned how to read Hebrew, which I know today when I go to the synagogue. We learned a little bit about the prayers, the Shamans one. I wouldn’t say that we had the greatest teachers in the world. Sunday school was more enjoyable. A lot of the Sunday school teachers were people from the community who volunteered their services. And you got some
Jewish histories and Jewish interpretation. Some American-Jewish history, I remember. And I was fascinated with it. I'd always been fascinated by history, and this was just another area that I did not know anything about.

G: You mentioned being fascinated by history, and this is obviously something we're going to need to talk about as we get into your professional career. Had you had many history classes as a junior high or high school student?

P: Yes. I took all the history classes, all the social science classes that they offered. But their curriculum was not a greatly varied one back in the 1930s. When I got to the University of Florida, of course, the situation was different. There were only three people in the history department when I came here, Jimmy Glunt [James David Glunt, chairman of the comprehensive humanities course], Ancil Payne, and James Miller Leake, [who] was the chairman of the department. Leake taught Southern history. He was a great Civil War enthusiast, and was very much interested in biographical history. Ancil Payne taught English history and medieval history. And Jimmy Glunt taught Latin American history, which I did not take very much of. In high school I took anything they offered. I took French for two years and did not learn anything much about it. I know how to say a few words today. I wouldn't call myself a French scholar in any way. But I took the academic thing. You had to take shops at that time, also. I remember I had a great deal of difficulty building a bird cage [laughing].

G: How were you in the maths and sciences?

P: Not very good. I think one of the problems that I had was when they skipped me in the third grade. There were certain fundamental math [elements] that I missed, which I regretted always. It was just, I needed that underlying part. Like my father, I couldn't build an airplane, but I knew how to count the parts.

G: Social life as a high school student? Did you have a crowd of friends?

P: Very little social life. First of all, if I was working, I got off at five o'clock in the afternoon. I didn't have real girlfriends at all. We went to parties and activities in which there was a crowd, but I had no special romance at that time in my life. And once again, you didn't have a lot of social activity because everybody was in the same economic boat that you were. I didn't have a car. I didn't have access to a car. So I traveled first, when they had them, [by] street cars. Then they were all replaced by buses. So if you went anywhere downtown, you went by bus. But you did an awful lot of walking, which didn't seem to be particularly unusual. For a little bit I worked, before I got the job at Southern Liquors, on the weekends – I was a package boy at the grocery store at Five Points. We would get off at 10:00 at night – on Saturday night the store didn't close till then – and we had to stay to clean up and get the vegetable bins back in order. Then I
walked from there, almost midnight now, to our house, which was a good mile
and a half through the park. I would hesitate doing that today.

G: Hurricanes, other storms? Especially in the 1920s.

P: You know, Jacksonville always escaped the hurricanes. The devastation of
South Florida in 1926 and 1928 was a heavy storm in Jacksonville, and trees
blew down and [there was] some damage to building. But it was not a hurricane.
So I've lived in Florida all of my life, and have never ever experienced a
hurricane. You know, one of the things I ought to tell you about is my experience
in World War II.

G: Yeah, I want to do that. Let me think. There were a couple of other things.
Movies? Radio?

P: We had a radio. A Spartan radio on Seventh Street. We listened to the radio. I
remember “Amos and Andy” was a favorite in the household, as it was. You
could walk down the street and not miss anything because every household, the
windows were open [because] there was no air conditioning, and you could catch
the entire program without missing anything and it did not interfere with your
walking. Yes, we listened to the radio a lot. We went to the movies. As I
remember, [a] single ticket for me was about twenty-five cents. And the
difference was when you were thirteen. And, of course, you were always trying
to convince them you were not thirteen yet. The woman selling the tickets would
look at you and say, I think you are. No ma'am, I'm not yet. I will be next week.
Sometimes you got away with it, sometimes you didn’t.

G: Were there particular shorts? The newsreels, I know, are important at this time.

P: Well, of course, when you went to the movies, you saw a lot. You saw the
feature picture, you saw the news, you saw at least one cartoon or comedy,
sometimes two. If you went to the Florida Theater, you also got a music
program. The organ was there. They’d stop the showing and you would sing
along with that, and they had the words on the screen. If you went to the Palace
Theater, there were acts that they brought in. So you got a lot for your money in
those years.

G: The newsreels. Especially as we get into the mid- to late thirties, things are
getting –

P: Very important. The *Time* magazine began putting out a series of newsreels.
You saw a lot of the build-up of military and Germany and so on that was going
on in Europe at the time.

P: First of all, we didn’t think we had anybody in Europe. We thought everybody had left. We didn’t realize that we had lost people in the Holocaust until well after the war itself. I really turned up more of that information than anybody. When the war was going on, now, of course, to begin with, you didn’t know about the Holocaust or the problems with the Jews, that came much later. But we didn’t ever know that we had anybody over there that needed to be saved or that kind of thing. I remember there was some talk around 1946-1947 about two women who had been saved. My great-uncle David in Chicago had kept up with them. But no effort was made, to my knowledge, to save them, and as it turned out, the two women ended up in Israel. The “March of Time” was what the newsreel was called.

G: I think we’ve done a satisfactory job with the young Samuel Proctor.

P: [I] lived a completely normal life growing up, nothing dramatic. We did not travel except to the beach. Occasionally [we went] to St. Augustine, particularly if we had visitors coming in from Baltimore. I mean, I didn’t get to Miami until 1939. I was grown by that time. We didn’t have the money, nor the interest, nor relatives to visit or stay with, and it was pretty unthinkable about staying in a hotel.

G: So you graduated high school in the evenings in ‘37.

P: Well, I went to the graduation, the normal graduation, along with everyone else. But all the courses that I had taken at Duval High School at night had been transferred to Robert E. Lee, so as far as their records are concerned, I was a normal student there. And there’s no indication on my diploma showing that I was not a normal three-year student.

G: How did you manage to get all those classes in, in the evenings, when everybody else took the same amount of time going?

P: Well, first of all, I had taken an excess of courses in my first year, not that many. And I took the number that I needed. I didn’t get into a lot of electives and that sort of thing, so I missed out on that. I didn’t have any art classes. I didn’t have any music classes. I didn’t have any P.E. I took the basic courses that I needed to take.

G: Were you athletic as a kid?

P: Never.
G: Not much of a ballplayer?

P: Not much of a ballplayer. I liked to go swimming, and we would do that when we went out to the beach. But you couldn’t do much swimming in the waves out there, and you did more socializing with your friends than you did anything else.

G: Were you an avid reader?

P: Yes, I was always an avid reader.

G: What did you read?

P: I went to the library often. When I was in junior high school and we had made the move, and I’d walk over from Kirby-Smith to my aunt’s house and then to the synagogue, I went by the library they had in Springfield. I was there so often that they got to know me. So they would save, for instance, all the *Tarzan* books that came in, the new ones. They’d put them aside so I would have first clock at them. I just read adventure stories. I read a lot of American history stories, which I enjoyed very much. But I was an avid reader. I wasn’t a buyer of books. I didn’t collect books at all, but I went to the library very often. I was there once or twice, maybe more often, every week.

G: When you graduated in late spring, 1937 –

P: I worked that summer, too.

G: At the same, at Southern Liquor?

P: Same, at Southern Liquors.

G: As you were finishing up, and knew you were going to graduate, was college a definite plan?

P: College was always a definite. College was a definite as far as I was concerned. College was a definite as far as the family was concerned. There was never any question but that I was going to college. Particularly, we already had two in college. My mother’s brother David, next to her, was a doctor in Baltimore. He had gone to John Hopkins University. That had called for a great sacrifice on the part of the family to get him through there. So we already had that example. Then my Uncle Nathan, Nathan Schneider, with whom was my friend, he was, as I say, also at the University of Florida. So there was never, ever, ever a question about am I going to college or not, it was just a definite that I was.

G: Was the University of Florida always where you were going to go?
P: That was the only one we ever considered. That was obviously the only one that we could afford. We certainly couldn’t afford anything out-of-state. But there was never any question; that’s the one I wanted to go to.

G: Do you remember how much it was to go to school?

P: Yes. The year I came, in 1937, we had no tuition then. So what you paid were fees. For the two semesters it came to about $60. And of that, I think $10 went to the infirmary, $3 went to the Alligator [the UF campus paper, later The Independent Florida Alligator], $8 were so you got all the athletic tickets free. So it got divided up like that. I think my first bill was $23.

G: What were your plans, in terms of a course of study?

P: Well, I was thinking already about law, to begin with. I was a little bit vague about things. First of all, I needed a job. When I came to the campus, I was able to get one without any difficulty because the NYA [National Youth Administration], which was a New Deal agency that had been set up, they helped students in the high school to finish high school and to go to college. It paid $15 a month, which is not very much, but on the other hand, it was a lot for that day and time. I would say at that time maybe, J. Ed Price [UF’s first counselor for World War II veterans] was in charge of allocating the jobs. He had an office in the basement of what is now Anderson Hall, and then we called it Language Hall. The dean of students, [Robert C.] “Bob” Beaty, had his offices in that building, and J. Ed Price was his assistant. I would say at least maybe fifty percent of the student body on the campus had NYA jobs. All the professors’ assistants, the men working in the cafeteria, the library students, were NYA, because the university didn’t have any money to hire students to do that. So this is where it came from.

My first job was [as] a student assistant for a man in the College of Business, economics. He had just come in, and he was turning his dissertation, Caldwell and Family, into a book, which the University of Tennessee Press was going to publish. He had an office on the second floor of – what is this building? – Flint Hall, which did not look as wonderful as it looks now. I worked there. Then I had a variety of other interesting jobs on the campus after that. That lasted about a year, then I worked for the General Extension Division down in the Seagle Building. They had two floors, and on one of the floors, they had a small library. In those years there were many, many schools throughout Florida, particularly in the more agricultural, non-urban areas like Lafayette County and Taylor County, that did not have high schools. If they had, they could not afford libraries. So this library was set up to furnish them, on a temporary basis, books. So we had cartons that would hold thirty or thirty-five books. The order would
come in from Starke, we need books for the third through the sixth grade. Then it was my responsibility – I had nothing to do with the purchase of the books – to go to the shelves and pick off three in literature, seven in math, and so on. We would pack them into these boxes, take them downstairs, there was a mail room downstairs, and they would go off to Starke for two months. All they had to pay was the postage on it. Then they would ship those books back and you would replace them with other books. This at least gave them the basic library that they needed. So I worked for a woman named Bernice Mims [head of the Departments of General Information and Visual Instruction] down at the General Extension Division for a while, and enjoyed that very much. I was dealing with books of course, which I liked very much. I got downtown everyday by walking.

G: How many students on campus? Did it seem like a crowded place?

P: Well, it was a very empty campus by comparison with today, of course. On the eve of World War II, there were about 3,200-plus students on campus – which doesn’t sound like very much, but it still made the University of Florida one of the largest universities in the South. There were a handful of women. Women started coming [to the University of Florida] in 1925, and by 1937, 1938, 1939, there were maybe about a 100, 125 women in law school, in agriculture, and so on. Although some of them were beginning to take the basic University College courses. We had our first cheerleaders, women cheerleaders, in 1937. Then, of course, the war came, and the explosion of students came in 1946.

G: What did you take first? How many years?

P: Well, remember that the University College was set up by Dr. Tigert [John J. Tigert, president of UF 1928-1947, Commissioner of Education during Harding and Coolidge presidential administrations] in 1934, and it went into full swing in 1935. Dean [Walter J.] Matherly, from the College of Business, was the first dean. They called it the General College. It later changed its name to University College. The concept in general education was being in practice in lots of universities. The system that we had here was a combination of what was at University of Chicago and the University of Minnesota. Robert Hutchins, who was the president of the University of Chicago [1929-1951, a vigorous defender of academic freedom], was a good friend of Tigert. Tigert leaned on him for a lot of suggestions and ideas. The idea was twofold. One, you should not overspecialize. A doctor needed something beyond just medical knowledge. He needed a little bit on religion, literature, music, and so on. These courses would give you that. Also, Florida desperately needed the kind of program that would educate you as quickly as possible because a large number of students dropped out after the first or second year because they couldn’t afford to stay. So the idea was that you would give them a general education. The C-courses, as they
came to be called, comprehensive courses, were six in number. The first one was later called American Institutions, it was first called Man in the Social World. Bill Carleton, who was probably the best orator we ever had at the University of Florida, was chairman of that department. It was a combination of history and economics, a little bit of political science, a little bit of contemporary religion, and so on.

G: But all about America?

P: All about America. It was a two-semester course. The second course was the physical sciences. You didn’t go into the laboratory, but you heard about chemistry, physics, and so on. The third course, because the first four were the freshman year, number three was Reading, Speaking, and Writing. They didn’t call it English, they called it that. That’s exactly what you did. You had reading assignments, which you had to report on. You had writing. You went [to] a writing lab once a week, and you wrote a small essay. You were judged on the way you wrote, your spelling, and so on. [It was] reading, speaking, and writing, [so] you had to speak. Occasionally, you had to get up and make a presentation before the class, a public speech, and you were graded on that. C-four had two parts, two semesters: one was math, and the other was a basic psychology course. C-five was the humanities, and that’s where you got art and music appreciation, religion, some philosophy. Though C-five and C-six were in the sophomore year. C-six was biology. You didn’t go to the biology labs often, although you had access to them. So every student who came in had to take those courses whether he or she wanted to or not. And at the end of the second year you got an associate of arts degree. You didn’t have a chance to take history. In your second year there were electives, and that’s when I began to select the history courses and the political sciences courses which I wanted.

G: How did you do in the various, in the six C-classes? Did you get through them okay?

P: I did fine, yeah, I had no problem. I wasn’t what you’d call a dramatic A-student throughout, but I was doing pretty good. My freshman year was kind of difficult for me to get started, learning how to study and taking these kinds of courses. But then I got turned on, and I would say that my bachelor’s degree was probably a good, strong B-plus. It was enough to give me a fellowship for my master’s.

G: In addition to working and taking classes, did you get involved in Greek life? Were there other activities?

P: I didn’t get involved in Greek life, although I’d had an invitation to join one of the two Jewish fraternities. They were Jewish fraternities because the non-Jewish fraternities were not allowed to accept Jewish boys in their charters; they could
only take white Christians. But I could not afford to belong to a fraternity. They invited me to dances, and I went. I participated in those kinds of, all activities that went on on the campus, social activities. I went to the various artists’ presentations, which were then in the auditorium. I participated fully. I worked on the Alligator. They had a couple of clubs and international relations clubs. I was active in that. So I played a role outside of the classroom.

G: What did you do for the Alligator?

P: I was a reporter, and went to a lot of counties. [They] had county clubs then, so I would go to their meetings and report on what they were doing.

G: Tell me about Gainesville. What did Gainesville look like when you arrived in 1937? Had you ever been to Gainesville before?

P: I had been to Gainesville once before, in 1933 or 1934. The first member of our family [to go to UF] was my second cousin George B. Mehlman, you know, Sarah Mehlman, I told you about them in St. Augustine. George and his sister, Bertha, were adopted, and George came to the University of Florida. He did his undergraduate work here. He was one of the earliest Jews in the ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps] program, he was a lieutenant. He graduated law school, I think, in 1933, and I came for his commencement. His mother and father, my aunt and uncle, invited me to come down. So I saw Gainesville then. I don’t have much memory of it. I remember the drive from Jacksonville being a long one because you had to go by way of Lake City, and then around. But when I came in 1937, of course, to live, I lived in a rooming house on what is now NW 15th, which was then Washington. If you know where the University Press is located, in that red brick building, it was across the street from that. Mrs. Johnson, a widow, ran it, and she rented out the rooms on the top floor. I think there were about four rooms. We paid about $7, maybe $8 a month. We provided our own linens and made our own bed. But she provided the room and the bathroom. There was one bathroom to service all the boys. There were about eight or nine boys that were living on that floor and utilizing it. That’s where most of the students lived if you didn’t live in the dormitories or fraternity house. It was close enough. [There were] very few, very few cars on campus at all, so you didn’t have any parking problem. What is now parking areas were grass areas at that time. Like the big stretch in front of Criser Hall, Peabody Hall, all the way to 13th Street, which is a giant parking lot, was a grass area at that time. I was intrigued, I mean, this was a beautiful campus then, as it is today. We had a wonderful library here. We had things that I had not had great access to, so I really relished everything here. I had made some good friends here. Of course, Nathan was here. We ate together. My $15 from the NYA, my second year I got promoted to $20 a month. My family sent me about $5 or $7 a month.
But it was easy to get along. You could easily eat on seventy-five cents a day here.

G: Where did you take your meals?

P: Where did I take my meals? I took them in the eating places. There was a restaurant right on the corner of what is now 13th Street and University Avenue. In the widening of 13th Street, that building was demolished. It was called the Varsity. The same family, the Hammonds, that owned the restaurant that became the Purple Porpoise, also owned the Varsity. You could get breakfast there or on campus. There was a small establishment in what is now the basement of Dauer Hall, the Florida Union. You could get breakfast for fifteen cents. Coffee, toast, and I think you could even get a small glass of orange juice for that price. Lunch was twenty-five cents. It included a meat and two vegetables, all the iced tea you could drink, and all the rolls you could eat. Supper was thirty-five cents. You could do very well and not be hungry at all. You weren’t eating caviar and that sort of thing, but that’s what everybody else was eating.

G: You mentioned friends. Are there some people that you recall from your undergraduate days, either that pop to mind or that you’re still friends with?

P: Well, I’m not close to any of them, but occasionally I will meet somebody on campus coming through. Oh, Sam Proctor, do you remember me? Oh yeah, I remember. I didn’t make any lifelong friends like that. I had a lot of casual friends.

G: You’ve got through at the end of your second year. You finished, I guess, what would have been the A.A. degree. You had your six comprehensive classes, and you were able to start specializing. How did you choose to specialize in what you specialized in, and then what classes did you take in that specialization?

P: By this time it was pretty sure [that] I was going to become a history major. By that time that commitment had already been made.

G: How?

P: I’m still thinking about going to law school, and a history major I thought would be a wonderful opportunity to add to my application for law school. I had no idea when or what was happening. Also, the war hysteria was beginning to build up around 1939, 1940. There was always that uncertainty of where am I going to be next week or next month or next semester for me and for all of the other students on campus. I was intrigued with the history program, and I had become a good
friend of Dr. Leake. I’d go to his office, which was on the south end of the first floor of Peabody Hall, and he would tell me about different courses. I took every course he offered, and I took all the English courses that Ancil Payne offered. I took a lot of the political science courses, and I also started taking French again. I had a pretty full schedule. I didn’t take any of the science courses, because once you finished the A.A. degree, you had met the requirements of the courses that you needed. So you were completely free to take the things that you wanted to take as far as your major was concerned.

G: Do you remember any of the papers you wrote as an undergraduate?

P: No.

G: Did you have to write a lot?

P: Yeah, you had to write a lot. Boy, you sure had to write a lot on exam. Dr. Leake gave essay examinations. He would stand up at the board and he would write twenty-five essay questions. Twenty-five essay questions which you were supposed to answer in three hours. The exams were three hours long. They were really involved questions. You had to know the subject and have done a lot of studying ahead of time. I mean, he didn’t say evaluate the Constitution, but it came pretty close to that. By this time I was getting A’s in all of the courses, particularly the history courses, I was taking.

G: Did you get involved in sports? You know, going to football, going to basketball.

P: Oh, I went to all the football games. You didn’t much go to the basketball games, we didn’t have much of a basketball program here, we were not very active. But I went to every football game.

G: How were the Gators back then?

P: [Laughing.] Well, great. Great.

G: Were these the days before national championships and the SEC [Southeastern Conference]?

P: No, we didn’t, no, we weren’t in them. We didn’t rank in those kind of things. The biggest game was the Georgia game. Along with everybody else, I went into Jacksonville for the Georgia game, thumbing my way into Jacksonville and having a wonderful weekend there. One of the two Jewish fraternities, now the Phi Lambda Phi, but then Phi Beta Delta, always gave a dance at the Roosevelt Hotel, and everybody went to the Phi-B-D dance. I remember enjoying that very much.
G: From lunch. This is Mark Greenberg, director of the Florida Study Center at the University of South Florida, and I’m with Samuel Proctor on August 24, 2002. We’re in Flint Hall at the University of Florida in the library. We’ve spent the morning together and have gotten you up to –

P: I’m still an undergraduate.

G: You’re still an undergraduate, but it’s about 19 –

P: 1939, thereabouts.

G: Things are starting to heat up in Europe. The Second World War will have, I guess, started that September. Tell me about your last couple of years as an undergraduate, and also your thinking about your future. Law school, other plans.

P: All right. The war is on in Europe, and we’re hearing about it in the newspapers. It’s still a long way away. We’re reading about it on the front pages of our local newspaper, the Gainesville Sun, and the Florida Times Union in Jacksonville. When we go to the movies we see the “March of Time.” But that’s as far as we get, we’re not personally involved in it yet. Life is going along pretty placidly here at the University of Florida. The ROTC program, of course, is heating up, because we were a land grant university dating back to the 1880s. We have compulsory ROTC for our freshman and sophomores, and of course, those who go beyond that were automatically made second lieutenants. I don’t think there was a stepped-up program there. There’s no awareness or getting ready for the United States to participate. Nationally there’s a lot [of] resistance to the United States becoming involved in the war in Europe. This is not our problem. This is their situation. Let them solve it. We’re not involved. We don’t want to go to war. There had been this negative attitude toward rearmament ever since the 1920s. Of course, we had dismantled our ships, including the U.S.S. Florida, which had been dismantled in 1932. The bell from that ship came to the University of Florida, and it’s still here in the north end zone of the stadium. That’s the closeness that we came. But obviously, as the war progresses, and as the Germans become more victorious and take over more and more of Europe, I think things began to be alarming to some people. On the one hand, we were saying, let’s not get involved, it’s none of our business. On the other hand, people led by Franklin Roosevelt and others are beginning to think about it from a positive point of view. For me, I’m a student. I finish up my sophomore year. I get out of the University College. I’m now in upper division, as we called
it, junior and senior years. I’m beginning to take the history and political science courses that I enjoyed so very much. My grades are excellent now, they’re all A’s, so I have no problems academically whatsoever. I’m still working on campus; I always have a student job on campus. I’m doing a variety of things that I enjoy doing.

G: Are you still ROTC, or did you stop after the first two years?

P: Oh, I stopped after two years. I hated ROTC. I used to get up on Thursday morning and hope it would rain so we wouldn’t have to have drill at all. Anyway, I was not involved in it, so I didn’t feel threatened in any way whatsoever. My program was coming to class, going home, doing my work. I went home regularly, although I did not have a car. Along with the other students, we hitchhiked everywhere. We wore the little orange beanie caps that we were given as freshman that identified us. Everything in Gainesville, all the business activities and the entertainment activities, including the movies, were all downtown. If you wanted to go downtown, you either walked the mile from 13th Street, or you sat in front of what is now the filling station, but was the SAE [Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity] house, with your little beanie cap on. Within seconds or minutes somebody stopped to pick you up and take you downtown. Then to come back to the campus, you stood in front the Seagle Building. You went downtown to the movies. There were no restaurants downtown. The Primrose Grill, that was seventy-five cents for dinner. You ate there if you had a visitor, but ordinarily you didn’t eat there.

That’s how you moved around. On the weekends, as was true in my case, I went to Jacksonville. I would hitchhike, with my little beanie cap, out to the Waldo Road and East University Avenue. You stood on the corner there. If it was a big weekend, there might be a dozen or so boys out there, and you took a number so that you got on in order. If you were going to Tallahassee, you stood in front of what is now Denny’s and the Holiday Inn on the corner of 13th Street. [It] was another fraternity house, I think Phi Kappa Phi was there. The beanie cap was your entry into everything. [If] people knew you were a University of Florida student, they had no hesitancy in picking you up, and nobody was suspicious of anybody in those years. You picked up people easily along the roads, and did not get into any troubles or difficulties as a result. So, that’s how life went along for me. Then Pearl Harbor comes. The whole situation, dramatic situation, changed. I’m in my senior year now.

G: Where are you on December 7, 1941?

P: I was in Jacksonville that weekend. Not apprehensive, along with anybody else. Sunday morning, my father’s in the living room with the radio on. He heard about it first of all, and immediately called out for all of us to come in and listen. We
spent the rest of the day, that Sunday, listening to the news as it was coming over the air. For some strange reason, I decided to go downtown to see if there was any activity there. I had to go down by bus, which I did. Absolutely desolate. There wasn’t anybody on the street. There were no cars moving. So, I got back on the bus and came back home. Wasted time, as it turned out.

The next day, Monday, there was a lot of talk on the campus. You began to hear about boys who were saying I’m going, I’m going, I’m leaving. This is December now, the end of the semester. I remember Tigert called an assembly for the auditorium. I went to that along with everybody else, at which time he cautioned everybody of taking any precipitous moves. He said, we don’t know where we are. We don’t know what’s going to happen. Stay in school, finish up the semester. You need your education. The government will decide where you want to go and how you want to go, and all of those wonderful things. That’s the way it turned out. As it turned out, there were a number of students who did not come back after Christmas. They went home and they decided to go into the military. The university made arrangements to give them credit, because at the end of the Christmas holidays, when you came back to school in January, you had two weeks still of classes. Then you had your exams. Then there was a week break, and the new semester started in February. They gave them credit depending upon their grades and so on. So nobody lost any hours or anything.

I was not affected by that. I wasn’t going into the military or anything. So I finished up my senior year here, once again, majoring in the history classes and the political science classes that I took. I took political science mainly from Manning Dauer, who was the acting chair of it. History and political science were a single department, and did not divide until 1949. Dr. Leake was chairman of both, but Manning really ran political science. He would become the first chairman of political science when the division took place. Rembert Patrick [renowned professor of Florida and Reconstruction history, a member of the Florida Historical Society] was also already on campus. He would turn out to be the first chairman of the history department when the split finally took place. Anyway, I became aware of the possibility of getting a fellowship on the Masis program. I’d already taken so many courses, I had overtaken on courses, that I really had enough hours to meet the requirements for a master’s degree. What I needed, however, was to write a thesis and to take a language. Well, the French [track] was an easy one, I took it without any difficulty. I wish I knew now as much French as I knew then. So that left writing a master’s thesis. I knew I did not have much time because it became available, I think, in July, and it would run through until the next June 30. I had but really twelve months to do a master’s thesis.

G: Had you received any kind of draft notification or had any idea when you would be drafted?
Nothing, nope. I had registered for the draft. We had to register here on campus. Anybody who was eighteen, eighteen I think, or twenty-one, I’ve forgotten. They set up tables over in the basement of what is now Dauer Hall. They had a place down there where they had billiard tables, and they moved those out of the way. They also used Bryan Lounge upstairs. I registered for the draft. The guy registering me was a good friend and a fellow student, Sidney Aronovitz from Miami [1920-1997, judge in US Second District Court for the Southern District of Florida], whose brother [Abraham Aronovitz] was once the mayor of Miami.

Did you have any choices? Were you able to make any?

You didn’t make any choices. You just registered for the draft. You did not indicate any branch of service or any kind of military activity that you were interested in, or that the government wanted you to be interested in. I received a card, which I still have. Anyway, I went to see Dr. Leake about a master’s thesis title. I said Dr. Leake, I’d really like to work on something dealing with Florida. By this time, my interest was Southern history, and most particularly, Florida history. He said, I would not encourage that. He said, I have nothing against it, obviously, but, he said, we just don’t have any research sources here in Florida. He said, I don’t know where you’d get enough material to do a master’s thesis. He said, by the same token, I don’t know where else you’d go unless you’re redoing something that somebody else has done.

Well, I remembered when I was in junior high school, in Kirby-Smith, we had a newspaper called the Echo. I think I was the co-editor of the Echo. Each issue had come out maybe once a month. It was not a big deal at all. Each issue carried a biographical sketch of one of the teachers, and I remembered that the art teacher in the sketch, which I did not write and I did not know her at all, said that she was the daughter of a former governor of Florida, Napoleon Bonaparte Broward [1857-1910, riverboat operator who ran guns to Cuba before successfully running as Florida’s Progressive governor (1905-1909) by challenging corporate interests while promoting Everglades drainage for citrus farming]. I don’t know why that little item stuck in my mind, but I told Leake about that. He said, why don’t you go to Jacksonville and see if you can run her down, she may still be living. So I hitchhiked into Jacksonville. I went to the school board office in downtown Jacksonville. I gave her name, and I’ll think of it in a minute, and sure enough, she was still an active teacher teaching art at a school out in east Jacksonville. I took the bus and went out there, and found her room. [I] let her know that I wanted to talk to her about what I wanted to talk about. She said, school will be out in about a half-hour. Wait for me and we’ll talk. So that’s what we did. We went to her office and I told her what I wanted to do. She was immediately taken up with it, immediately supportive of it. She said, well, we have papers, we have my father’s papers. But of course, they don’t belong to me, they belong to my mother, and she is visiting my sister Betty in Connecticut.
She said, but I have the car, [so] why don't you come with me to the house and we'll talk a little bit. So we drove into Jacksonville to their house on East Church Street, a house that was built – a two-story, big, rambling house – shortly after the 1900s, or maybe even before then. A wooden house. The Browards were poor. They had no money at all, and the thing desperately needed painting. But it was comfortable and had a lot of the original furniture in it. I met her daughter, Doris Drake.

We went upstairs onto the second floor in the big hallway, and there were all the papers in letter boxes, on two or three shelves that had been attached to the wall. [It was] very near an open door, so that you got the constant movement of wind and insects and so on. I began looking through the papers. They had not been cataloged at all, they had just been stuffed into these letter boxes a long time ago. When Broward died in 1911, he was the president of a tugboat company. Mrs. Broward, [for] whom Broward Hall on this campus is named, ran the operation for six, eight, or ten years, and then sold it. So when she sold it, she moved all of the personal papers and business papers into these boxes into the house. They said, why don't you go ahead and get started on the project. She said, I don't think my mother's going to object to it at all, she's probably going to support it very enthusiastically. That's what happened when Mrs. Broward came, and I became like a member of the family, [by which] I mean they welcomed me all the time.

G: You did the research in their home?

P: In their home.

G: What did you find? Tell me about the papers.

P: Well, the papers said everything. The papers had a lot of, there were some business items from the tugboat company, but they mainly dealt with his political life. Everything from the time that he was appointed sheriff back in the early 1880s, at the time of the yellow fever epidemic. It went right on through his whole career. I put the papers in order. Which they later came to the University of Florida as a result of my persuasion, the family gave them. In addition to the papers, I had his daughter and granddaughter right there, and his sister, Hortense, was still living in Jacksonville. They set me up with a lot of people to meet and talk to. So I had, it turned out, very rich sources of material on Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, both before and during the time that he was governor.

G: Did you know anything about him before?

P: I knew a little bit, not very much. Of course, I quickly learned all there was. I
read everything that was available, which was not very much at all. [This] was true of every Florida governor. As it turned out, however, he became, in my evaluation, the strongest governor. [He was] the most effective governor of the first half of the twentieth century in terms of the kinds of programs that he endorsed. He was anti-business. He was considered a liberal, not on the race matter because there was no such thing, but on support of public schools and on taxation. Of course, for the Everglades, he did a lot of damage down there because he built the canals which drained off the water, and overdrained the area down there. But his idea was good, that you drained this water off and you have all this fertile land that can be converted into farmland and get people jobs and an income. Anyway, I start my work. In addition to the Broward papers, I needed the newspapers. I needed the Florida Times Union, which began in the 1870s as a Republican paper in Jacksonville, and they also had an afternoon paper there, the Jacksonville Journal. Both of those, there was no microfilm in those days, but the papers were bound in these large binders. I went down and I met Mr. Caleb King, who was the editor of the Florida Times Union, and told him what I was trying to do. He was very supportive, very cooperative, too. He made arrangements for me to use all of the papers. He brought all of the papers into this room, and gave me a desk and a place to work. That’s when my work began, and you remember I’m working against time because I only have less than a year to do all of this.

G: You’re living in Jacksonville full-time?

P: No, not at all. What I did was to come to Jacksonville on either Wednesday evening or Thursday, and I went directly to the Florida Times Union. I worked in the Times Union papers turning sheet after sheet after sheet, which was fascinating because, of course, you read the ads and you read a lot of stuff, taking notes. I worked there all day Friday. Then I left there about four o’clock on Friday afternoon, and I went out to the Broward house on East Church Street, and I worked there Friday evening. [Then I] came back and worked all day Saturday until evening. Then on Sunday, I went back on the highway and I came back to Gainesville. I did that every week. Every week I came to Jacksonville and I worked at the Times Union a full day, and at the Browards’ a day and a half, almost two days at the Browards’ counting night time.

G: Did you have responsibilities in Gainesville that forced you to –

P: Well, I had job opportunities. I was doing work here with professors [that] I was working on. Plus I had a tutoring job, too.

G: What were you tutoring?

P: They had asked me if I would tutor this guy who wasn’t doing very well, and they
wanted to pay me $50 a month. I said, I’ll take it. So I had a lot of responsibilities.

G: What did you tutor him in?

P: History. I don’t know what’s ever happened to him, but I got my $50, and I think he passed all right. Anyway, I nearly killed myself. As it turned out, I wrote a 560-page master’s thesis. That was stupid. What I should have done is to just do his governorship, which I could have done in a couple hundred pages. But I started with the family. His grandfather, John Broward, had played a political role in Florida. The family’s history was very interesting, and I got all of that. Then I got caught in the yellow fever epidemic, and the sheriff, and the Corbitt-Mitchell fight, and it was one exciting thing after the other. Then he builds the Three Friends, the tugboat that takes the military goods and patriots to Cuba before the Spanish-American War. To do research, absolute brand-new research, and to write a 560-page thesis in two semesters, eight or nine months, was a phenomenal job. Remember I’d not only had to write it, I had to get it typed. My cousin Bertha Mehlman typed it for me. She charged me all of $15, and I provided the paper for the thing. So, I got it done, I got it finished, and I got the master’s degree in the June 1942 commencement. I’d got my B.A. in June 1941, so I got my master’s in 1942. I don’t know if anyone else has beaten that record or not. Then, of course, the master’s thesis became the basis for the biography on Broward later on [Napoleon Bonaparte Broward: Florida’s Fighting Democrat, Gainesville, University of Florida Press, 1950 and 1993].

G: What did Leake say when he saw your 560-page –

P: Well, he was very pleased with it. But it was a joking matter because people would see me, [E.] Ashby Hammond [professor of Florida history; Professor Emeritus of the History Department] was on the faculty by this time, Rembert Patrick, and they would say, here’s Proctor coming with his book. He called my master’s thesis my book. Anyway, I did it. That takes me up to the summer of 1942, and I’m away from Gainesville now, back to Jacksonville.

I thought I would be able to get a commission in the Navy. Well, I couldn’t. My eyes, none of those things worked out. So I had to sit back and wait for the draft to hit me. To make up the time, I got a job working in the U.S. Army Engineer’s office in Jacksonville. I went there, and my job was to work in the office checking the contracts that the military entered into for food, clothing, and for whatever they did. I’m there now about four or five months, not knowing anything about law, and not really needing to know a great deal. The chairman, the head of the department, calls me in one day and he says, Proctor, how you doing? I said, fine. I certainly wasn’t going to say bad, and I was doing all right. I was satisfied, and I was getting my pay at the end of every two weeks. He said,
well, I've got a new assignment for you. He said, I'm going to send you to Miami, we're opening up a project there called the 36th Street Army Depot. He said, we're moving in some trailers, and we'll have some soldiers there, to make food available to them. He said, we've got to pave the area, it's not going to be a big deal. We're going to let about a dozen contracts maybe, and I want you to be the man in charge of the contractors, it's not a big thing. He said, if you have a problem, I'm as close as the telephone.

So, I packed my things and I go down to Miami on the train. I get off at 14th Street, which is where the depot was then. I take a bus out to where the office is. Well, we go out 36th Street to the end of the line, and the bus driver says, this is as far as I go. I don't know if you know Miami, but it's where the fronton [jai-alai arena] is now. I got off the bus with my two suitcases and stood on the curb, and pretty soon somebody came along and picked me up. When I explained what I was looking for, he took me there. What I found was a one-story, ramshackled wooden building that had been built back in the 1920s, when they hoped to develop that as a boom-time project and didn't. It had no water, none of those things yet. The man in charge was an army major, and he was very nice. Two or three other non-military people were in the office, and that's how I got started. His name was Blaise Nemeth. Major Nemeth went into the nearby suburb and went to the clerks. [He] said, I've got half a dozen people who are working on this new project, and we need housing. So the clerk made arrangements with people that he knew in the community who would rent out rooms. I had a very nice room in this house that had been built in the 1920s. The room had been built for a servant, so it had a separate entrance and a bath and so on. So I started working there.

Well, very quickly this small job of the 36th Street milit. Army Depot turned into a major project, because they launched the plans for the North African invasion. They turned this into a big base because the soldiers could come down, then move down to Recife, Brazil, and cross over to Africa, which was the shortest way and the safest way. What we were to do in that small way turned out really to be the 36th Street Airport today. The international airport is where all of this started. Of course, it covers many, many, many, many acres more than what it did back in 1942. Anyway, I worked there in Miami, doing very well in charge, and I became more adept at correcting and detecting the errors on the contracts and so on. The draft notice came through. Well, Nemeth was very upset that they were calling me right in the middle of all of this, so he got me a draft deferment. He asked me if I'd mind, and I said no, the longer I stay out the better I like it. So he got me a draft deferment for six months, which was the only one I could get.

Then, in July 1943, I went into service. I was called in [to] Camp Landing, Florida. That starts another interesting story. I'm there like all of the other recruits. You know, you've got your clothes off, they're checking your heart and all those kinds of things, assigning you space in a tent, and giving you the
clothing you needed. The call came out, and I hear my name over the loud
speaker to come to an office. I found the office and went in and saluted to the
officer who was sitting there. He said, Proctor, sit down, I want to talk to you. He
said, I’ve been going through your papers, and I’m interested in you. He said, I
want to tell you about a project that we’re developing that you might be interested
in. Up until then, the army had not been drafting illiterates. But now, with the
African campaign and with the manpower situation, [it] meant that they needed
them. What they did was to set up what they called special training units to
provide these people with a fourth grade education, as far as reading, speaking,
and writing were concerned. They would come in, they’d be drafted like
everybody else, and they would go to classes on the base or the camp for four or
five hours in the morning, and take classes in reading. [It was] basic reading
because these were grown men, but many of them were illiterate. You were
giving them reading material like for the first or second grade. You weren’t trying
to get them a great education, but you wanted them to be able to sign their
names instead of putting an X for the payroll. You wanted them to be able to tell
time, to read a road map, to do things that would help them not get lost or
whatever it was. So, he said, these special training units are being set up and
we’re looking for people who have an education to work in them. He said, are
you interested? I said, I certainly am, that’s right down my alley. So he assigned
me to one right then, he put me in the office. I was not in the classroom, but I
was in charge of the G.I.’s who were the teachers. Immediately I got elevated, I
was a corporal. The first week I was in service, I became a corporal. Which is,
in itself, it kind of doesn’t often happen.

Anyway, I worked in that for several weeks, several months in Camp
Landing in Starke. Then I got transferred to Camp Shelby, Mississippi. There I
continued with the special training units. Once again, I was the individual who
did the assignments of the noncoms to go into the classroom. Not alone, but [it
was] mainly me. [I] created new materials. We would get our reading and other
materials from Washington in packages, but I started a little newspaper, which
then they would write, giving them the writing experience. I created some
reading materials for them, nothing very elaborate, involved, or too difficult to do.

So that’s how I spent my time in the military. I remember the first time I
went home, about two or three weeks after I was drafted, with that stripe on my
shoulder. My mother said, what is that thing doing on your shoulder? I said, I’m
a corporal. She said, impossible. They don’t promote you the first month you’re
in service. I said, well, they did in my case. So I became a technical sergeant
eventually. I was always enticed to go to officer’s candidate school, but I wasn’t
about to leave the position, the job, or the work that I was doing. I was really
enjoying my job. I was the most non-military person you ever saw. I never was
on KP duty, I never fired a gun even in training when I was in service, I never
went on a hike. I did absolutely no basic training whatsoever. I lived in the tents.
I ate, obviously, the food that everybody else ate noncom, and wore a uniform. I was very chummy with the officers, because the officers were assigned, too, to these things. They were supposed to be doing the job I was doing, assigning. So they were just sloughing off, they were depending on me to do it. They would come in the office and say, Proctor, is everything all right? [I would say,] yeah, then they would take off. I would be left behind in the office, of course.

Anyway, that was the story of my military career. I got to know some of the people in the nearby town of Hattiesburg. I remember the Adler family. Joe was in the army in the same kind of program that I was, so, of course, he was near home. They invited me to have dinner with them on occasion. There weren’t many, there were no more than maybe four or five Jewish families in Hattiesburg at the time that I knew of.

G: What did you think of Mississippi in general? Did you get much out of the Hattiesburg area?

P: Well, my contacts with Mississippi were fine. I’d heard all these terrible stories. Camp Shelby was not the greatest paradise in the world. It was an ugly camp in an ugly area of the state. We occasionally were able to get an opportunity to go to Biloxi and Gulfport for an evening and have dinner down there, which we did. The nicest thing is that we were close enough to New Orleans [Louisiana] so that we could go there with a weekend pass. That was very nice, because there were dormitories for a dollar a night in Mercy Hospital. They had set aside an area for G.I.’s. There were some other places that you could go to get a bed and a shower. Being in New Orleans was very nice. Of course, it was crowded with G.I.’s. Everywhere you went the streets and sidewalks were crowded, but it was very pleasant. I didn’t see very much of Mississippi. I never got to Vicksburg, for instance, but the parts I saw I liked. I went to Jackson a couple of times, and you know, as you drive through, there was nothing wrong with anything there, you said.

I was there from the fall of 1943 until the early part of 1946. I got out in March 1946. The end of 1945, however, they disbanded the special training units because the war is over and they don’t need them anymore. So they transferred me to the counseling program. It was my job to counsel G.I.’s, mainly coming back from overseas, about educational opportunities, where to go to school, how to apply for the G.I. Bill, or if they had particular health needs, if there was a sight impairment or whatever. They sent me to New York, and I was there for about a month or six weeks, I've forgotten. [I was] in this training program in which they took you around to different places. During the day you had classes and counseling and so on. But it was very pleasant, because you didn’t have to work all day. On Park Avenue, they had a place, 79 Park Avenue, I think, was the address, where they had tickets for the military. All the shows in New York, all the concerts in New York. All you had to do was appear there in
uniform and pick up what you wanted. Well, I had my evenings free and my weekends free. I must have seen twenty plays. I saw everything that was in New York and ran out of places, and went to Philadelphia one weekend. I'd fallen in love with the New York theater. Anyway, I was then released on March 2, 1946.

G: I want to come back and ask you a few different questions. The vast majority of your teaching took place at Camp Shelby.

P: My teaching both of those activities started in Camp Landing.

G: Remind me again, how long were you teaching at Landing before you went to Shelby?

P: About five months.

G: What kind of folks, I mean obviously they’re illiterate, largely African American? Some whites, both?

P: No, no. A lot of them were from Appalachia, and you did not have integrated classes. Everything was segregated. The only integration that you had, as I remember, at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, was the hospital. In the wards you had black and white patients, but you didn’t have them anywhere else on the camp. These classes were either all-white or all-black. These were people, some of them were adults, and it was amazing what they didn’t know. Some of them had never used a flushed toilet before. It seems strange now today, but fifty years ago that wasn’t strange. They didn’t know how to tie shoes, so we had to teach them things beyond just reading and writing.

G: When did you begin to learn about what was going on to the Jewish community of Europe?

P: You began hearing stories about it, I think, by the end of the 1940s. But they were so horrendous, so horrible, you really didn’t believe them. You really did not believe that those things were happening. You didn’t know how the rumors got started. You just couldn’t give them serious thought, to think that they were actually taking people purposely and murdering them. I mean, that was just beyond comprehension. I don’t remember any rebellion against it. I do remember [hearing about it], at least, on two occasions, though. I was in New York with my father, and one time we went to a big rally in Madison Square Gardens. Rabbi Steven Wise [Reform pioneer and Zionist, founder of the American Jewish Congress] was the speaker. He was telling about the horrible things that were happening in Germany, and the necessity for the American
Jewish community to push Washington to do something about the situation, to change its attitude toward allowing Jews to come into the United States. I don’t know that it did any good, but I remember we were there.

G: Where were you when you heard about D-Day [the invasion of Normandy, France during World War II on June 6, 1944]?

P: D-Day? Well, I was in camp when we heard about D-Day. Earlier, we had been shocked by the death of Franklin Roosevelt [April 12, 1945] that had come in on radio, and I remember hearing about that. I was outside of the cabin, and somebody said, listen to this, and they announced that Roosevelt was dead. Then we saw the pictures of the procession from Warm Springs to Washington and all. On D-Day, of course, there was a lot of enthusiasm, a lot [of] celebration, and a lot of activity in the dining room, but VJ Day [August 15, 1945] is in my mind more. This is another interesting thing. They moved troops around the country. Camp Shelby was a training camp, so after they finished their basic training or whatever, the detachment moved to where it was going to be located for its next stop. They moved by freight trains and whatever was available. I went along as the medic in many cases. I knew absolutely nothing about medicine. I mean, if anything was serious they would take it, but I was there if somebody had a headache, if somebody had an allergy, and I had my little case.

Anyway, I was taking a group from Camp Shelby, Mississippi, to Ft. Washington in Oregon or Washington state. It was a nice trip. We went all up the central part of the United States. I went to all fifty states, forty-eight states then. We get to Seattle, Washington, or wherever it was, and we drop them off and sign the papers. Then I had my leave. I had arranged to have a two-week leave. You accumulate leave time. I was going south to San Diego [California] because my brother George, the Marine Corps man, had been badly wounded in Okinawa. He was in the hospital in San Diego and I was going to go see him. So I start south. I’m in San Francisco. Now, then you could not come directly into San Francisco, you had to stop. I was on a bus in Oakland, then [I had to] cross the ferry into town. I remember as we were crossing on the ferry we got the word on the dropping of the bombs on Hiroshima. Everybody, you could tell from the action and from their faces, was thrilled to death that that had happened. It was obvious it was the very end of the war. Anyway, we go on into San Francisco, and we’re there maybe a day or so, and I go south by bus to Los Angeles. I’m getting closer to San Diego now. As it happens, I was in Los Angeles, in Hollywood, when the VJ news came through. Of course, it was a tremendous jubilation. Shouts and whistles were blowing, horns were tooting, and so on.

G: Jubilation in the streets?
P: Jubilation in the streets. Horns tooting and so on. As it happened, I’d already been there a day or so, and I had made arrangements, had signed to go to the home of Edward G. Robinson [stage and screen actor and real-life philanthropist best remembered for his portrayals of gangsters]. Hollywood personalities made their houses [open to the public]. He was a famous art collector, and it was to see his art. I don’t know whether we went into the house or not. Because of the event, he cancelled that program. I also did go to the home of a well-known comedian. I think his name was James Gleason [he likely means Jackie Gleason, who portrayed Ralph Kramden on *The Honeymooners* TV series]. I think so. Anyway, I went to his home, and I remember he had a swimming pool in the backyard. I didn’t go swimming, but there were other G.I.’s there too. I met Bela Lugosi [Transylvanian stage and screen actor best known for his portrayal of Dracula in the 1931 film version of Bram Stoker’s novel]. He was swimming in the pool with his daughter. I thought it was his granddaughter. He looked so much older than she did. Anyway, on VJ-Day, that night there was this huge concert that was only for the military, and I was there. Almost every star in Hollywood, Danny Kaye [Renaissance man and gifted actor of film, television, and theater], Frank Sinatra [unique “swing” vocalist and actor], I mean, everybody you could possibly, possibly think of was there. [They] did a performance or a skit, or just said “Hello” and “We bring you greetings,” or that kind of thing. Then afterwards there was a dance, and I went to the dance. I danced with the famous German –

G: A German actress? I know who you’re talking about. I can picture her, I just can’t remember her name.

P: I got a wonderful picture of her, too. She was a beautiful woman. I didn’t get a chance to dance with her very long because somebody tapped me on the shoulder. Anyway, I met a lot of people there that night. I don’t know if you remember the name Alexis Smith [Canadian who achieved minor Hollywood success as an actress in the 1940s], I kissed her. I had a good time there. The following day I left and went down to San Diego to visit my brother George.

G: Tell me about him. What had happened to him?

P: Well, he had been in a, I guess some sort of an enclosure on Okinawa, and a bomb exploded and set the building afire. He was caught in there and was badly burned. He still has scars on his legs from the burn, from the fires that were there. He was in the hospital maybe six weeks or more, and I visited him. Then I left and went by El Paso [Texas]. My brother Dave had been stationed at Fort Bliss, then he went to school in El Paso. He had met Celie Goldberg, and they got engaged. So I stopped there to meet the Goldberg family, to let them know that Dave was really Jewish [laughing], and that he was safe. Then I went back
and was able to get into Mississippi. So I really did a circuitous trip and got a lot done, and it was very fascinating.

G: It seems, not necessarily strange, but unfortunate, that your military service extended by almost a year at least after this surrender in Europe.

P: Well, that was not unusual. You got out on the basis of points, and they counted the number of months that you were in service. If you were overseas in combat, the points accumulated. I didn't have much to go on. I didn't come in until July 1943, and I certainly did not have any military service at all. So I was among the last, but not last, to get out. My last months in there turned out to be very pleasant, I was in New York.

G: You know the war is over and you're figuring it's just a matter of time until you get out.

P: And of course you are planning your own future. I knew I still wanted to go to law school, so I made a lot of inquiries and started writing a lot of letters, and I was getting some positive responses. For instance, I got a response back from Yale accepting me, but on just the smallest scholarship support. Very small, it was almost nothing. I got a much bigger offer from Ohio State, it was a full fellowship. I had made up my mind that that was where I wanted to go, because the money counted a lot, and Yale didn't impress me that much. So that's where I was planning to go when the big offer came from the University of Florida.

G: Tell me about that.

P: Well, my brother Myer, the one next to me who had been in Italy, was already out of service. He was in school here. He was in political science with Manning Dauer. He was married to Marjorie, and they were living here. They did not have any child at that time yet, but they did have a daughter [later], and they moved into Flavet ["Florida Veterans" campus housing area]. Anyway, Myer is walking down the hall of Peabody, this is obviously after March 2, sometime at the end of March or early April, and he meets Bill Carleton. Bill, you know, was the chairman of the freshman social sciences course. Bill stops Myer, whom he knows, and chats a minute. [He] says, how's Sam? Myer said, oh, he's just fine. Where is he? Oh, he's home in Jacksonville, he's out of [the] service. Bill brightens up his face. He said, that's wonderful news. Myer thought, what's he got to do with it? That's wonderful news. [Carleton] said, I'm going to call him. So he goes into his office, which was in the basement at Peabody Hall, and he places a long distance call to me in Jacksonville. He says, Sam, I just saw Myer. I know you're home. He said, I want to talk to you. I said, about what? He said, about teaching. I said, Bill, are you crazy? I said, I don't know anything in the
world about teaching, and I'm going off to school in the fall to Ohio State. He said, listen, we're overwhelmed with students. The G.I. Bill had passed, and from 600 students in 1945, they now had registrants of 6,000 students. I mean, it was the most dramatic turnaround you can imagine. He said, we have them coming and going. He said, if you don't do any more than just stand up in front of the room and call the roll, it will be better than nothing. I thought to myself, I could use the money to buy clothes and all. So I go to Gainesville and talk to Bill, and decide to do what he wanted me to do, to teach. That's what I did that summer.

G: What were you teaching?

P: Social sciences. The freshman social science course, that's all. Classes were just overwhelmingly large. You had the G.I.’s there, and they were all serious students. They weren’t playing around because they had already lost this time. What they wanted was to get a degree and get out, get a job, and get rich. So they didn’t mess around. They came to class, they did everything. In addition, the state now insisted that school teachers had to have a degree. A lot of them didn’t have it, so a lot of them started coming to summer school. So the classes, and they were all in temporary buildings then, were eighty, ninety, a hundred. Fortunately you gave [a] machine-graded test then, and the board of examiners was in the Seagle Building, so that saved some time. Anyway, I taught that summer and I loved it. I enjoyed it thoroughly.

G: What content? Tell me a little bit about what was social sciences class. What topics were –

P: Well, we taught – the syllabus, which is what we taught from, had been written by Bill Carleton and Paul Hanna [professor of humanities and social sciences]. They covered all aspects of American history, but not the traditional way. You didn’t start with Christopher Columbus and go through chronologically. The same thing was true of the economics areas. What you had were big questions that were raised, and you were supposed to discuss these things in class. Not necessarily come up with a final answer of this is the way that you did it, or this was wrong. It was mainly to encourage discussion. Of course, there was enough on it so that you could have questions on the test, and the questions of course were all machine tests, so you had choices and you picked out the one that was the correct one. Anyway, we had classes, and [the] full classes [were] very active. The campus was unbelievably busy because you had all of these students. Remember when they came, there were no facilities available for them here. There had been no construction on the campus except a dormitory that they had gotten federal money for. They were able to finish the first unit of what is now Dauer Hall, which was then the Florida Union. In fact, they had to close
Murphree, part of Murphree, because it was in such bad shape and they didn’t have the money to rehabilitate it. But now, suddenly, overnight, you need these laboratories, classroom buildings, libraries, and everything else.

George Bowman, who was the vice-president for business affairs, made arrangements to bring these military buildings. [They were] mainly from Camp Landing. There was a WAC [Women’s Army Corps] station over at Lake City, but other places. He had brought them in from other places. The federal government, of course, was glad to get rid of them for a dollar a building or something. Once you bought them, you had to figure out a way to get them from Starke to Gainesville, which was not easy at all. There were not many movers of buildings available. And once they got onto the campus, you needed a roofer, and you needed a plumber, and you needed an electrician. Once again, you didn’t have many of those available in Gainesville. Even with good wages you didn’t have them, because if they were living in Jacksonville, there was plenty of work for them to do there. They didn’t have to come to Gainesville. So there were a lot of trying conditions here. A lot of trying conditions.

G: Trying conditions space-wise.

P: Well, I was going to say, in every block almost on this campus there was a temporary building. Right where we were, for instance, there was a two-story temporary building. They used everything they possibly could. We had classes in [the] evening, a lot of classes in the evening. Even some Saturday classes. First of all, housing was a problem. They had some military barracks out where the airport is today. They converted those into places for students to live and ran a bus back and forth between it and the campus, which was not an easy way to operate, but that’s what they had. Then they began having women. We weren’t co-educational until the fall of 1947, but women who were veterans, of course, had the right to come. And many of the veteran students that came had wives now. We didn’t have families before the war, and those women wanted to go to school, too. So that was a problem. You didn’t have any women’s restrooms, for instance, in these buildings.

Everywhere there was construction going on. It was hard, in some instances, to maintain class because of the hammers that were going on. In front of Library East there was a one-story building that was used for registration, and then they turned it into a library reading room. Everywhere you looked, except on the Plaza of the Americas, were temporary buildings, and huge numbers of students. Even the problem of parking [first] began to be a problem because a lot of these people had cars that pre-dated the war. There had been no car manufacturing during the war itself, but the cars still ran. Not easily, but they did.

So all of those problems were there. But the university got through the problems, and the students were excellent. As I said earlier, they were anxious to get out, and they did everything you asked them to do and then some. Plus
the fact you couldn't fool around with them. You started talking about England, they had been to England. They'd been to a lot of places that the instructor had not been. So I found it to be the best [group of] students that I ever dealt with at the University of Florida. I was very excited and pleased. When the end of the summer approached, Bill talked to me about continuing. I said, Bill, I love what I'm doing, but I cannot afford to do it. I've got to take this fellowship and think about my own career. He said, well, let me suggest the possibility of having Ohio State postpone the fellowship for you. He said, we're working out a lot of deals with universities around the country. So I said, well, see what you can do. A couple weeks later he called and said that everything is taken care of at Ohio State, and they'll write you. [They] have postponed the fellowship until the fall of 1947. So I stayed on for one year with the idea that I would teach 1946-1947, two semesters. By the summer of 1947, I was committed to doing what I wanted to do. I wrote to Ohio State and thanked them for their generosity, and decided that this was what I wanted.

[End side B3]

G: As we switched tapes, you remembered the German actress that you –

P: I'm going to say that right now. The actress, the beautiful person that I danced with and whose name I forgot a moment ago, was Marlene Dietrich [German stage actress noted for her “bedroom eyes” who moved to Hollywood, starring in a number of American films before withdrawing from the spotlight]. I don't know how I could have forgotten that. But I remembered that when I was a baby I dealt with the president of the United States, Warren G. Harding, and now when I'm a G.I., it's with Marlene Dietrich. So I guess I'm improving my standards.

G: It's the summer of 1947, I guess, right? That's when you make the decision to forgo Ohio State law school –

P: And to stay in teaching. I had the rank of instructor. The rank for two years is an instructor, 1946-1948, then assistant professor.

G: I wanted to ask you, when does it become a profession or a career for you in terms of, did they offer tenure track at that point?

P: Well, it was much less formal than it is today. First of all, the chairman decided who got tenure or not. I remember that you didn’t talk about tenure very much. I got a letter from Bill, I guess in 1949, after I'd been here, maybe 1948, telling me that I had tenure. It was as simple as that. I didn’t get it from the dean, I got it from the chairman of the department.

G: In ’47 and ’48, are you continuing to teach the social science class?
P: Only the social sciences. I did not teach anything for the first three or four or five years except the social sciences course. Patrick was teaching Florida history. The numbers of that were not overwhelming, and he was able to take care of that very well by himself. It was only later on, with the growth of the university and the interest in state and local history, that I began to be able to teach Florida and Southern history.

G: You have a master’s degree and a manuscript that people, still today, think is your dissertation, 560 pages [on] Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, but it is only [for] a master’s degree.

P: It was only a master’s degree.

G: How do you earn your Ph.D.?

P: Well, when I decided that I was going to stay in teaching, I knew I needed a Ph.D. if I was going to get anywhere. In the summer of 1948. In the meantime, I had met Bessie and we had gotten engaged.

G: Let’s finish this story and then we’ve got [that].

P: But that summer before the wedding I went to [the University of North Carolina at] Chapel Hill. That was where I thought I would get my degree. I would go there in the summers and worry about the dissertation later on. So that’s exactly what I did. I took a course from Fletcher Green [member of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill history department faculty from 1936-1966]. I’ve forgotten two or three courses, [but] whatever the summer curriculum was. I did very well, got good grades. [I] loved Chapel Hill. [It’s a] magnificent campus [with a] beautiful library. I liked the instructors I had. I had no complaints about it whatsoever, nothing.

So I finish up the semester, I come back to Jacksonville, get ready, go up to Atlanta, and we get married and spend the first year here in Gainesville. The next summer, the summer of 1949, although I had committed myself to Chapel Hill, we decided it would be wiser from a money point of view and everything else, for me to go to Emory and live with her parents in Atlanta. She wanted to be close to them. Her father had asthma, and she just wanted to be close to them, and it made a lot of sense. So I took courses at Emory, which I thoroughly enjoyed, too. I had no problems whatsoever.

G: [Do] you remember who you studied with there?

P: I don’t remember names like that. It was while I was in Atlanta [that] the phone
rang one day. It was Manning Dauer on the phone, calling me from Gainesville. I thought something had happened here. Manning said, explaining the reason for the call, that the university – this is 1949 – was getting its plans ready for its centennial celebration in 1953. They had just had a meeting in Dr. [J. Hillis] Miller's office [UF president from 1947-1953, who focused primarily on building construction and increasing staff for the expanding postwar university]. He and [Henry] Phil Constans, who was then chairman of the Speech Department, were the co-chairmen of the arrangements, [and they] had met. I don't know who else was at the meeting, he didn’t tell me. They decided that the university needed a history, and they wanted to persuade me to be the person to do the history. What he said was, I’m just leaving you with the idea now. I’m not trying to persuade you to do anything, but when you come back at the end of the summer we’re going to have a meeting in Dr. Miller’s office to talk about this. I was intrigued with the idea, but I knew nothing about where the archives were, if we had any archives, or whatever. So I come back to Gainesville for the fall and I’m teaching. We have the meeting in Dr. Miller’s office, which was then in Anderson Hall.

G: This is the fall of 1949.

P: Phil Constans is there, and Manning is there, and I don’t know who else. Anyway, they’re telling me about the book, a history of the university. They didn’t say about a book, [but] a history of the university which they want me to do. I tell them about my plans to get a degree at Chapel Hill and to work on my Ph.D., now that I’m a member of the faculty. Dr. Miller said, of course we don’t want to discourage your working on the Ph.D., that’s what you need to do, but why don’t you take all of your courses elsewhere, transfer them all back to the University of Florida, do your dissertation on the history of the university, and get your degree here? Well, that made a lot of sense, because I could get it at full pay. So that’s exactly what happened. I never went back to Chapel Hill. I took some correspondence courses and they agreed to let me take some University of Florida courses. I took my German exam here, which was a little bit ridiculous because I didn’t know very much German. But I was fortunate.

Let me just stop and tell you about my German experience. I knew some German because I knew Yiddish. I could understand Yiddish, and there were a lot of words that you know that are similar. I began, on my own, reading German fairy tales. Grimms’ Fairy Tales, Little Red Riding Hood, Snow White, and so on, that I picked up in the library here. I knew enough about the story so that I could learn something. I began increasing the quality and the quantity of the stuff that I was working with. When I got up to a book that dealt with a man who had been shot down during World War II in the Atlantic and was able to save himself by floating on a raft or something, I said, well maybe I’m ready for the exam. So I applied for it and I was given the exam, a big sheet of paper like that. I was very
fortunate because the paper that I had to translate dealt a lot with Charlemagne’s campaigns. While I didn’t know very much about Charlemagne’s campaigns, it had a lot of geographic places there which I could easily translate. I could begin to put things together, and obviously it was enough because they passed me on my German exam. Anyway, I start working on the history of the university.

G: So you took some courses at Chapel Hill and at Emory, and then some more correspondence courses from Chapel Hill. Did you have to pass, what we now call today, comprehensive exams or anything like that?

P: No.

G: So you just earned enough credits to begin dissertating?

P: Right. So I start working on the history of the university. I had an office in Library East up on the fourth floor, a little cubby hole office. In the meantime, the Florida Historical Society had moved onto this campus through the help of Rembert Patrick. So we had its library up on the fourth floor of Library East, also.

G: Where had it been previously?

P: St. Augustine. Anyway, I found out about the institutions that had predated, preceded the passage of the Buckman Act [1905 state legislative act consolidating Florida universities into the University of Florida in Gainesville, the Florida State College for Women, and the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College for Negroes]. There was very little on them, very little. There was not even a listing of the men who had served as principal or presidents of these schools. So it was following one step after the other. I went to Lake City on several occasions and got to meet some of the people there. Through them I was able to get some of the yearbooks, and some of the other paraphernalia, that dealt with the Florida Agricultural College. The same thing was true here. There were still some people whose grandparents, grandfather had gone to the East Florida Seminary [that] still had a catalog here [or] a poster there. I was able to pull these things together. It was not easy. It took me about a year and a half to two years to just gather the data that I needed to do the writing.

G: Let me ask you a couple [of questions]. Now the East Florida Seminary, [is that] a Baptist [seminary]? Tell me just briefly.

P: When you use the word seminary in the nineteenth century it has nothing to do with religion, it’s another name for an educational institution.

G: It was located in Lake City.
P: No-no-no-no. Let me give you a little bit of this for the record. When Florida became a territory in 1821, two years after that Congress turned over to the territory some land, about 92,000 acres of land. It had not located the land yet. It was public land for the future support of our education. In the 1830s, 1837 to be exact, Congress passed a bill authorizing the establishment of a University of Florida, naming it University of Florida, appointed a fourteen-member board of trustees, and stipulated that at least half of this public land that they had given in the twenties could be sold or disposed of. That would provide the income necessary for the buildings, faculty, and so on. Well, nothing happened. I mean, they passed it, but no university came out of it. In 1845, when Florida became a state, the federal government turned over additional land to Florida, about a half million acres plus two more townships, another 90,000 acres for higher education. So it was a substantial amount. But once again, it hadn't located it anywhere and no selling process had yet been set up. In 1851, the legislature in Tallahassee said, we're now concerned about higher education and we want to establish at least one, and maybe two, institutions of higher education. They issued an invitation to communities all over Florida [that] if you're interested in getting this institution, what are you going to give us in the way of money or land or both? Well, they had no response from anybody.

In the meantime, a man had come down from Vermont by the name of Gilbert Dennis Kingsbury [founder of the East Florida Seminary]. He brought with him the idea of setting up a private school in Ocala, which he did. Ocala was just a little village at the time, so it provided support for the local kids in the community. He opened the building in 1852. He and others hear about this invitation from Tallahassee. He says to the board of trustees, which is what they had for this little school, why don't we offer our property to the state and we'll have the school, and the state will pick up the tab for the teacher's salaries, and so on? Well, that made a lot of sense to the taxpayers in Ocala. So he goes to Tallahassee and he makes this emotional speech telling about the wonders of Ocala and its future, its economic and population growth, and all of those wonderful things. Well, the state hadn't received any other offers, so it accepted the Ocala offer. Thomas Brown, then the governor [Florida's second governor under statehood, 1849-1853], on October 6, 1853, signed the bill which took over a heretofore private institution, East Florida Seminary. It became a public institution, the East Florida State Seminary.

It remains in Ocala through the Civil War. It's opening and closing, particularly when the war begins, because the faculty, they only had two or three faculty left. It was really just a local school. At times they didn't have any students older than fourteen years. The first year of the school was kind of haphazard. Gilbert Dennis Kingsbury had been very popular. By the way, coming down from Vermont to Florida, he changed his name to S. S. Burton. Why I don't know, but that's the way he went [into] Florida. Anyway, there was a
faculty of four in this little school including himself, two men and two women. One of the women was a woman from Vermont. As it turned out later, it was his girlfriend, Laura. He brought her down. Everything is going along fine until one day Laura finds out she’s pregnant, and it wasn’t the kind of thing you can hide in little ol’ Ocala. So everybody immediately thought it was Kingsbury or Burton. He denied it, of course, but it made sense that he would be. So they had an open meeting and he offers to resign, and they immediately accepted his resignation. So she resigns, also. That was 50 percent of the faculty, so the University of Florida closed its first year.

G: What's it called? Is it not still East?

P: East Florida State Seminary.

G: So the name “University of Florida” –

P: University of Florida does not emerge until the Buckman Act is passed [in] 1905. I just said that facetiously. Anyway, here in Gainesville there’s a man by the name of James Roper who comes down from North Carolina, first to Tampa, and then Gainesville. He’s also an educator, and he opens a private school on the corner where the Florida Theater is now. They call it The Palace. As you go down to the corner there was a penny store there, for a long time now there’s a night club there. He had a little building on that corner which was too small, so they bought property where the Methodist Church is on Northeast First Street for $5. That’s where his school was located. He goes into politics, he becomes the state senator from Alachua County, and in 1866 he puts through a bill which transfers the East Florida State Seminary from Ocala to Gainesville. He turns over his property to the state and they begin to operate. It stays here in Gainesville as the East Florida Seminary, beginning to give collegiate degrees in the 1880s until 1905.

The second school is the Florida Agricultural College in Lake City. It starts out as a result of the Morrill Land Grant Act [July 2, 1862, signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln], which was passed by Congress during the Civil War. [It] gave each state 30,000 acres for each representative it had in Congress for the purpose of setting up schools of industry, engineering, and so on. Well, the southern states became eligible after the war, and Florida received its 90,000 acres in 1870. [Florida had] two senators and one congressman. Then there was the question of where was this college going to be located. David Levy Yulee [1810-1886, U.S. Senator from Florida, 1845-1851 and 1855-1861; known as the “Father of Florida’s Railroads”], who had made a lot of money on the construction of the railroad, offered land here in Alachua County. But they needed money also in the city, and this county just didn’t have the money, so they looked elsewhere. They then looked at Eau Gallie, Florida. They bought land there, cleared it, put a fence around it to be an agricultural
place for the cattle, put up a couple of barns, and other things.

The election of 1876 came along, which ousted the Republicans and the Democrats came in. Well, the Democrats refused to have anything to do with that campus because it had been enacted by the Republicans, so they abandoned that without ever [having] the first day of classes there. Years later, the buildings were turned into a small tourist motel. Then they started looking again. In 1844, they accepted Lake City’s offer, and the Florida Agricultural College opened there, and the Florida Experiment Station came four years later. There were two other schools. One was down in Bartow, which had started as a private school, The South Florida Military Institute. The state took it over and changed its name to South Florida Military College. It was not co-educational as the other schools were. Then the fourth school was the St. Petersburg Normal and Industrial School – “normal” was teacher training, which the state took over in 1902. Those were the four schools abolished under the Buckman Act, together with the school for women, the school in Tallahassee was co-educational to begin with, the school for blacks in Tallahassee, a teacher’s training school in DeFuniak Springs, and an agricultural institute in Kissimmee.

All of those were abolished by the Buckman Act. The new universities were created. [There was] one for white male students to be located east of the Suwannee River, one for white females west of the Suwannee River, and one for black students. They created a board on control [and] charged it with the responsibility of locating these institutions together with the State Board of Education. There was no problem with the black school [and] no problem with the women’s college, which was known as the Florida Female College until 1909, when it became Florida State College for Women. The big controversy was over the University of Florida’s location. A number of cities claimed their interest in it. Jacksonville said, we’re the largest. St. Augustine said, we’re the oldest city. Ocala said, this is where it all got started. But the two main contenders were Lake City and Gainesville. Lake City thought they had it in the bag because they had a good campus, they had some decent buildings including a museum, they had faculty including some Ph.D.’s, it was in a good location not far from Jacksonville, [and] the railroad ran through Lake City. They didn’t really make a big fight for it, but Gainesville did. Mayor [William Reuben] Thomas, Thomas Senior [leading Florida businessman], and others, formed the P.R. Committee. They roamed Florida and they promoted Gainesville wherever they could.

When it came down to the final results, it was Gainesville by a very narrow margin that won. They located the university here with the idea that they would stay in Lake City for one year because they had the buildings and the campus there, [so they could] get this campus ready because there was nothing but trees here. So that’s what happened during the fall, winter, and spring of 1905-1906. They cut down the trees and they built Thomas and Buckman Halls and a small building on the campus where Turlington is now located. They opened in September 1906.
G: You unearthed much of this research?

P: Yeah. Almost all of it.

G: So it’s both a centennial anniversary that the school administration is going to use, and it’s your dissertation. Tell me about what the school does with all of your research. How was the centennial celebrated, and what role do you play?

G: First of all, I end the dissertation in 1906. That’s all I had time to do. So I never went beyond 1906, which is what the university was mainly interested in, the post period. But I had done a mammoth job in finding this earlier material. I had wanted the University Press to publish the first volume, which they were reluctant to do until I did the second volume. So I didn’t concern myself, I became interested in other projects. To gather the material for it, Miller not only appointed me the Historian, but the University Archivist. I became the first archivist on campus because, as I found documents and so on, I didn’t want them to get lost. We had already lost giant amounts of things. I had them transfer everything we possibly could to this cubby hole I had on the fourth floor of Library East. Miller said, you need a title. He said, they won’t pay any attention to you. They may not pay any attention to you even with the title, but he said, you’re going to be the University Archivist. So it was as simple as that. In the old days they could do a lot of things they can’t do today.

G: The Napoleon Bonaparte Broward book, what’s happening to it during the late forties?

P: Well, I completely on my own decided to try and convert that into a book, which I did. I rewrote it page after page, leaving off a lot of the early stuff on the family history and so on because I needed to cut it down. Then I turned it over to Bill Haynes [professor in College of English and UF’s first Director of the Press], who was the director of the press. He had been a member of the English faculty, but he was now directing the press.

G: How old was the press at this point?

P: About six or seven years old. The press had come into being, also, quite interestingly enough. The state was going to celebrate its 100th anniversary in 1945, [because] we became a state in 1845. The state institutions, all the institutions, were asked to participate in that activity. Well, Patrick had come onto campus, and Dr. Tigert invited him to write a history of Florida because there was no history of Florida available. That’s when he began the work on the *Florida Under Five Flags*. They planned to publish [it] in the paperback edition,
then send [it] out free to high schools and institutions around the state.

In the meantime, there had been an investigation of the university because of a death of a student in the infirmary. During the war, about 1944, I think, before the war was over, this student who was a diabetic went into a diabetic coma. They put him in the infirmary. There was no doctor on campus at that time, but a couple or three of the doctors in town took care of students, and they sent an emergency call to whoever it was. They were so terribly busy downtown because they were understaffed there, [that] there was six or eight hours before there was a response, and the boy dies. The family is notified, and that's the way it was. In 1945, a full year or maybe even longer than that, a letter arrives from the mother of this boy to the president's office, filled with all kinds of accusations about neglect, and so on. She had some political connections in Governor Millard Caldwell's office [1897-1984, Florida governor, 1945-1949, and later Chief Justice of the Florida Supreme Court], but I don't know exactly what they were. Anyway, there was a member of the Board of Control, a doctor from Live Oak, I think, who didn't like Tigert. He launched an investigation of the university, charging neglect and all, and the student's death was just an example of what the university wasn't doing. It led to some hearings, and some nasty things were said about Tigert, a lot of untrue things were said about him. It was implied that he was an alcoholic for instance, and that he had gone to the funeral of one of the deans and was so drunk he fell into the grave. Actually, it turned out; he was at a land grant meeting in Chicago at the time. When all of that happened, they were reluctant to start distributing *Florida Under Five Flags* as a freebie, so they had to figure out a way to get it done. They created the University of Florida Press to publish it, and it's a hardback edition for trade.

G: Now who's the “they”? Who spearheads this?

P: Well, certainly Patrick and Tigert were the two main responsible for that, and I don’t know who else. Bill Haynes was a professor in the College of English, and he became the first director of the press. Fortunately, he had a very smart wife, Helen Haynes. She wasn’t on the payroll at all, but she did a lot of the editing and the work on the press. So that was their first publication. So they had a book or two or three out when I presented my Broward [manuscript] to them.

G: Which was when?

P: What?

G: When did you present the manuscript?

P: I guess about 1950. No, earlier than that.
G: Do you recall, was it before you started working on the history of the university?

P: I was doing both of them at the same time. About 1950-1951, I presented it to the press, and they accepted it. I don’t remember a big deal, but they had sent it out to a couple of readers. I worked with the lady. It was a very small staff. They were on the fourth floor of what was then the law school, Bryan Hall. [It was] just two or three people up there working at that time. [Then] it came out.

G: In?

P: ‘53, I think, '52 or '53.

G: And you finished the manuscript that was essentially the University of Florida from 1853 –

P: From 1853-1906.

G: Am I correct in thinking that it’s really through your research that the University of Florida is able to accurately date itself to 1853?

P: Yes. It’s through me that it dated itself accurately to 1853. Although, on the seal to begin with, starting in 1905 with the Buckman Act and the abolishing of these schools, 1905 is the date on the seal. That’s the way it was for a long time. In fact, in 1930-1931, the University celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary, its silver anniversary. There was a big international Latin American conference here. That’s when they named the plaza the Plaza of the Americas. Dr. Tigert was never happy about the fact that when he went to other universities as a representative of the University of Florida, in the academic procession he was way down at the end of the line because they place you based upon the origin of your school. So he was able to get the dean of the law school and a couple of others over there to look at the possibility of doing something about the situation. They found that there were two or three funds. One of them was the Seminary Land Act, all that land that had been given to the state for higher education by Congress. They had begun selling that off, and the income from that had been distributed to the institutions. That was still going on after 1905 after the Buckman Act. On the basis of that continuation of funding support, they decided to see if they could not change the date on the seal. The Attorney General of Florida agreed, and that’s when they came up with the 1853 date.

G: But you needed to, essentially, prove it.

P: Yeah.
G: And that was your job. So they knew. I mean, they're celebrating their 100th anniversary in 1953, asking you to write a history, but they still need some proof that it is in fact their 100th anniversary.

P: Well, that's what they got, so in 1953 we celebrated the 100th anniversary. In 1936, without any fanfare and without any publicity whatsoever, the date on the founding of the university was changed from 1905 to 1853. The date on the seal was changed. If you look at the publications, in 1935, it's 1905, in 1936, it's 1853.

Now, Tallahassee immediately was aware of the change. They had had a free school in Tallahassee in 1826, which the state took over in 1827, just as they had the East Florida Seminary four years earlier. So Tallahassee changed the date on its seal from 1905 to 1827. That's the way they went until two years ago when Sandy, whatever his last name is, the president of Florida State University [Talbot “Sandy” D’Alemberte, President of Florida State University, 1994-2003], got the idea of changing the date on their date to 1851. [That] is when the legislature sent out the invitation but nothing happened. He wanted the university to follow suit. Well, I was asked, and I said it was ridiculous to change the date from 1905 to 1853. It would be even more laughable now to change it to 1851, so they haven't done that. But Tallahassee has changed its date to 1851. We're going to celebrate a sesquicentennial next year, the 150th anniversary.

G: What became of the research for your dissertation?

P: Nothing was lost. All the archives that I had collected, all the notes that I had made, all the documents that I had collected, all of the correspondence, and I had huge amounts of that, and information. I didn't do any oral history interviewing yet, but I talked to a lot of people in Lake City and elsewhere. All of that was saved, and all of that is now in the University of Florida Archives. A lot of pictures.

G: When does the university confer a Ph.D. on you?

P: In 1958.

G: So why the gap? Your research is finished.

P: Well, my research is finished [up to] '06, but I still needed a little bit more. I don't know what it was.

G: How many Ph.D.'s had the history department conferred prior to you receiving yours? Was there a Ph.D. program?
P: There was a Ph.D. program, yeah. I think the first Ph.D., I did a check on this a few years ago, it was in the 1950s. So I think maybe two or three had already been given. I know I was not the first one. A man who taught at the University of South Florida, in fact, was the one who got the first Ph.D. [A] very heavy-set guy with a mustache, I've forgotten his name.

G: So in 1958 you receive your Ph.D. How is your teaching changing? How are your responsibilities on campus changing in the fifties?

P: Well, as always, I was involved in more things than I should be. I continued my activities of collecting data wherever I possibly could [for my] manuscript. I didn't turn anything down. Whether it was a piece of junk or not, I kept it. As I say, all of that is in archives now, unless they've thrown some of the useless stuff away, which I would have encouraged them to do. I taught Florida history on the second floor of Peabody [Hall]. I taught a night class, three hours a night, [and] had a very large turnout. I had no teaching assistants then, so I graded all of my own papers. I thoroughly enjoyed it whatsoever. I continued to teach American Institutions, the C1 course, and from time to time I taught a course in Southern history. So I taught, at least to begin with, about four courses a semester. In the early 1960s, Rembert Patrick, who had been, really, the editor, but he carried the [title of] assistant editor [of the Florida Historical Quarterly] because Julian Young was still around and alive [and] he carried the title, although Mr. Young didn't do anything anymore. Rembert Patrick, or Pat, as we called him, was the editor. [Herbert] Jack Doherty [a professor of social sciences] was the assistant editor, and I was in charge of the book reviews. Pat decides to leave here and accept a position as graduate research professor at the University of Georgia. He turns over the editorship to Jack Doherty. Jack is just getting settled in that when he's offered the chance to become chairman of the American Institutions course, which I strongly advised against. But he liked the fact that it carried that title, and it also carried an increase in money. So in 1962, I guess it was, I became the editor of the Florida Historical Quarterly.

G: Before we touch upon that, how did you get a chance to start teaching Florida history if Rembert Patrick had been principle?

P: Well, because it got to the point where you could teach a second course. Mine was the catch-all of the night class on the second floor of Peabody Hall. He taught the Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

G: I think we need to get caught up with your personal life. You’re married through much of the 1950s.

P: Let me tell you about all of that, too. I’m not married at the end of the war when I
get out of service. I’m living in Jacksonville and I’m living at home. Then I move to Gainesville to teach and I live in a room. There was no apartments here. The real estate situation was very tight here, very tight. One day I get this call from this friend in Jacksonville. I told you about our association with [the] Pelles family. Helen Pelles Diamond tells me, you’re coming to Jacksonville this weekend, I’ve got somebody I want you to meet. Bessie was coming down from Atlanta. She had a new alligator pocketbook, I guess it was, and she was looking for alligator shoes to match because she and her mother were going to go to Europe. They were going to go to England. Her mother is from England, [and] she had not been there. Many years the war is over now and they’re going. They went on the Queen Elizabeth I. So she’s coming to Jacksonville to look for shoes. Helen Diamond says, I’m sure you’ll find shoes, and the re’s somebody I want you to meet. I was the somebody. So that’s what we did. Under Helen Diamond’s tutelage, and Helen Diamond, who lives in Jacksonville, still takes credit for all of this, we met. I liked her, and she obviously liked me, but she goes off to Europe.

G: Tell me about [what happened] before she goes. You took her out?

P: I took her out. She was there for a weekend. We took her out and she goes back to Atlanta. I didn’t see her anymore, but we started to correspond. Shortly afterwards she goes off to Europe. I thought about her a lot, but I’m in Gainesville and she’s somewhere else. I don’t remember this exactly, but I’m sure she’s right, when she got back there was a letter from me that I had written saying, I hope you are still single. So we took off from there. This is, I guess, late 1947 or early 1948. I began going to Atlanta, meeting her, meeting her family, [and] getting along very well with everybody. We had a wedding on September 8, 1948, in her brother and sister-in-law’s house.

G: How many times had you seen her prior to getting engaged?

P: I don’t know. Prior to getting engaged maybe a dozen times, because I’d been to Atlanta a lot.

G: You get married. Big wedding? Well, if it’s in a house –

P: We get married and we go to New York on our honeymoon. [We] had a wonderful time. [We] saw “A Streetcar Named Desire” with Marlon Brando [and] stayed in this nice hotel facing Central Park. As it happened, her cousin had gotten married just a week before us, and they were in New York on their honeymoon, too. So we got together with them a lot, ate together and all. Then we left New York by train and went to Baltimore, where my uncles and aunts lived. We met the family there and they had a big party for us. Then we came to Jacksonville and Gainesville. As I said, rentals were very tight here. There was
no apartment buildings then. But there was a house over in East Gainesville that
had been converted to four apartments. We were able to rent one of the upstairs
apartments, furnished. What had been a front porch had been screened in, and
that became our bedroom, which, it was cold in the winter. Next to it, what had
been a large bedroom now became our living room. Next to it was a bathroom,
and next to it was the kitchen. You had to go through the bathroom to get into
the kitchen.

That created a problem once because one day, there’s a knock on the
deroor. I had come home from class hot and tired. We didn’t have a car, so I was
doing a lot of walking. I had decided to cool off by taking a bath. We didn’t have
a shower. So I take off all my clothes and put them in the bedroom, which is the
former screen porch separated by this living room. I’m in the bathtub when the
doorbell rings. Two ladies had come to pay a social call on Bessie. In those
olden days, you remember, women came to greet new brides and new residents
and so on. Well, one was Mrs. Leake and one was Mrs. Payne, Ancil Payne’s
wife. Well, Bessie immediately closed the door into the bathroom, of course, but
I’m trapped in the bathtub. They’re sitting there, chatting about the weather and
about Gainesville and all. I could hear them, but meanwhile, my clothes are on
the other side of them. Finally, in desperation, I hear Bessie say, would you like
something to drink. I knew it was time for me to get the hell out of there because
she would have to open the door to come through. So I dart out of the bathtub
and got into the closet. I stayed there until she got the drinks. Of course, she
saw what was going on as she passed through. Eventually they left. Well, I
guess I shouldn’t put this in the tape but I’m going to do it. As it turned out, when
she asked the two women if they wanted a drink, Mrs. Leake said, yeah, about
that much. So Bessie got her some ginger ale, about that much. Later on, very
later on, we found out that Mrs. Leake was an alcoholic, and that what she meant
was a real drink.

G: When do the kids come along? When’s Mark born?

P: Mark was born in 1951, three years after we were married, [in] July. We were
married on September 8, 1948, and we’ll be celebrating our fifty-fourth
anniversary in a very few days. Then Mark was born in July 1951, and Alan was
born in July 1954.

G: Where were you living when Mark was born?

P: Well, we had moved out of that apartment, which we didn’t like and was
overpriced, but we had no choice in the matter. They built the Greenmore
Apartments. I don’t know if you know where they are, but they’re two blocks
down University Avenue. There’s a bank down two blocks, [and] just in back of
that are some apartment buildings. Bessie learned about those buildings, and
she was able to line up our name on a list. So we moved into a one-bedroom apartment, brand new. It was very nice [and] close to the university. That's the way it was. Our first car was a secondhand car that I bought from Ashby Hammond, a Chevrolet.

G: Tell me about Mark as a baby.

P: Well, Mark and Alan were both wonderful babies. Almost as good as Natalie [laughing].

G: I take it you were happy with boys?

P: We were very happy. We were very pleased. Our parents were very pleased with Mark and Alan. They were good babies, smart babies, they caused us no trouble. They weren't sick or obstreperous or anything like that. We enjoyed it very much.

G: You didn't mind they weren't daughters.

P: No. I mean, they were good, happy children. Bessie had involved herself, already, very actively in the Jewish community, so we had built up a coterie of friends here. We went to synagogue often, not because we were that religious, but it became a social thing to do. We had a lot of non-Jewish friends. There was a lot of more camaraderie in the department than you would find today. Of course, it was much smaller then than it is [now]. You knew everybody; you knew their wives. People entertained each other at their homes. Not big, formal dinners, but a lot of things like that which I don't think happen anymore. I mean, each semester the chairman of the department had a reception for new faculty. I think that would seem rather strange to them today, but that was true. So we had a lot of good friends. We went to the movies, we went out to eat together a lot. We went as a family, the kids came along. There was a cafeteria in the shopping center on Main Street, which is no longer there. We ate there a lot with the kids.

G: When did you build the house?

P: 1954. We bought the lot the year before and we had an architect and a builder, Fred Mason, who had built other houses for people we knew. We built the house just exactly the way we wanted it, and at the price we wanted it. Of course, if you tell people what you paid for it then it's ridiculous, it's almost hard to believe.

G: And you're still in that house today?

P: What?
G: That's the house you're in today?

P: That's the house we are in today. We moved in [in] August 1954. Alan was about three weeks old when we moved in there, and he grew up in that house. Mark was three years old.

G: You mentioned the Jewish community. Tell me about the Jewish community in Gainesville in the forties and fifties.

P: There had been Jews living in Gainesville since the 1860s. The Moses Endel family came down from Virginia in the 1860s, and there had been Jews here ever since. Not large numbers at all. You had one [family] that lived here for a while you were interested in.

G: The Brown family, yep.

P: You never had more than eight or ten or twelve, that kind of thing. None of them [were] rich. All of them [were] operating small retail stores around the downtown courthouse square, grocery stores, sundry stores, shoes stores, that sort of thing. They maintained a Jewishness. They held services in private homes. If there was a big event they brought in a rabbi. When one of the Endel boys, for instance, got married in the 1880s, they brought the rabbi in from Savannah to officiate. In 1882, the synagogue was organized in Jacksonville. To begin with, it was an Orthodox synagogue. Within a very short time it became Reform. The two Endels from Gainesville [Marcus and Jacob Endel, owners of M. Endel and Bro. dry goods store, and later their own clothing companies] were among the charter members of that synagogue. Anyway, that's the way it operated until the twentieth century.

In 1920-1921, Joseph Weil arrives here. Alex Brest was the first Jew to serve on the faculty. He was out of Jacksonville, an engineer. He didn’t stay here very long. He went to Jacksonville, went into private engineering business there, and made a huge amount of money. When Jacksonville University was organized they began to work with him. If you go to the campus now, there’s an Alex Brest aquarium, Alex Brest dormitory, Alex Brest tennis complex. Anyway, Joe Weil was a good friend of Alex Brest, both of them were engineers. When Weil got married in Baltimore, he and Mrs. Weil came to Florida on their honeymoon. On their way back [to] wherever they were going, Pittsburgh or Baltimore or wherever it was, they stopped in Gainesville to visit Alex Brest. Alex said, there’s a vacancy on the faculty here, and Joe Weil didn’t have a job, why don’t you apply for the position. Weil did and he got the job, so he became a member of the Gainesville community. Under his leadership, the Gainesville Jewish community began to develop more of a visibility, a consciousness. He
wasn't the only one, but he was the one that was best-known.

Anyway, under his leadership, a congregation was formed in 1921 and was chartered. [They] immediately began making plans for the erection of a synagogue. Once again, they had had services in private homes, and religious services were in the Messianic temple, the second floor of the Messianic temple on Main Street. They bought a lot – not easily, because there was no money in Gainesville in the Jewish community. They bought a lot, and I think they paid about $4,000 for it, and then they arranged to build the building, which is still standing today. In 1928, they dedicated the building. That became the synagogue right on through the thirties. In the meantime, the Jewish community is growing a little bit. Joe Silverman arrives in 1932 or 1933, the Grossman family comes in, the Copplawoods family comes in. So around the eve of World War II, you have about twenty or twenty-five families here, substantially more than in earlier years.

G: Are they still mostly merchants, or are some of them associated with the university?

P: Very few [are] associated [with the university]. Weil was here, and by this time, Weil is a dean of engineering. Very few Jews [are on] the campus. One or two, but that was it, and they stay here for a short time. There wasn't any anti-Semitism, but there wasn't any pro-Semitism either, here. There wasn't a large Jewish enrollment, but there was a substantial number. Both of the fraternities were full. So the community starts to grow. In the war period, because of the presence of a few Jewish students, but even more importantly, the fact that Jewish soldiers were coming into Gainesville on the weekend, they had a Jewish chaplain here. They didn't call him a Hillel director, but a Jewish chaplain, a Rabbi Youngerman.

In the meantime, the B'nai B'rith had become interested in developing Hillel on the campus. There was a man from Jacksonville by the name of Philip Selber who was here as a student in 1935. He just died earlier this year. Philip got together two or three students and they went down to Palm Beach, where the Florida B'nai B'rith was holding its annual convention, and made a plea for the establishment of a Hillel at the University of Florida campus. [The] B'nai B'rith agreed that it was a good idea and gave them $200 to get the thing started. They came back, and there was a house on the corner of University Avenue and Tenth Street. I don't know if you know where the Georgia Seagle house is, [but] directly across the street on the corner there's a little flower shop there now. Behind it, there's a two-story, grey-painted house. That house stood on the corner where the florist place is now. It was later moved, [because] where the florist place is now was a filling station. Anyway, it was in that house that the first Hillel was organized. With the $200 they rented two rooms in that house [and] had some magazines and things there. Then when the war was over, and
suddenly there was this tremendous increase in student enrollment at the University of Florida, including Jewish enrollment, then B’nai B’rith became more interested in doing something on a more established basis. So where Hillel is presently located, that was a dirt street at the time, that lot was purchased for $5,000. A recreation building was secured from Camp Landing, I think for $100 or something, but it had to be moved. It was moved, and put onto that lot.

It became not only the Hillel for the Jewish students, but kind of a social center for the Jewish community. We would meet there. Once a month a group would hear news and stories about Israel and so on. There was a lot of, once again, work between the women. They baked cakes, they did things for the students. We had our Sunday school classes upstairs. All of those things were happening. But once again, everything was growing. The Jewish community was beginning to grow with the growth of the university. Jewish faculty were coming in. When the medical center opened that brought a lot of new Jewish faculty, the growth of the Veteran’s Hospital administration here. So Hillel became too small. So we bought property. I was the president of the congregation at that time. We bought property on the corner of 33rd Street and 16th Avenue, which 16th Avenue was just then getting paved. We bought four lots. We built the building with the idea that it would be the first of two units, that it would be the educational building and later we would build a synagogue itself. In the meantime, we used the downtown building for synagogue and turned this into an educational building. Eventually, we closed the place downtown and we sold that property. We consolidated everything into one building and we were exploding in that. Then through Phil Emmer [South Florida builder who founded Emmer and Company in 1954, now Emmer Development Group, and is responsible for many of Gainesville’s homes and apartment communities], we had the opportunity to buy the land where the synagogue is now located, and we built the present building.

G: Which isn’t too far away.

P: Well, it’s not too far away, but it’s about a mile beyond that. We have now about 300 families in the congregation. There’s been a drop in the congregation because we now have other alternatives, as a Reform congregation. There’s a lot of people who, at one time when we only had one synagogue, that was it, but now they have the opportunity [to go elsewhere].

[End side B4]

G: [The] Jewish community of Gainesville. While we took a break, you asked me to ask you what were you doing. How were you involved in the congregation?

P: Well, to begin with, as I told you, the congregation was very small [at] the
beginning of the 1950s, but growing. But we did not have a rabbi. Pop Grossman, Frank Grossman, was a ____, and he conducted the service. Others like me, Dick Dresdner [Richard David Dresdner, professor of chemical engineering], and Ted Landsman, tried to do the English readings and do a little sermon from time to time. I played a very active role in the community, very active in the synagogue. Bessie played an active role in the sisterhood. She was very actively involved in that. I was elected president, I think in 1957 or 1958. I inaugurated a lot of things. The Friday evening late service I did. I started the first bulletin which went out, and a junior congregation on Saturday. [There was] a lady here in town by the name of Gussie Rudderman, Mike Rudderman, whose family had been living here a long time and had been very active in the synagogue. Gussie and I decided while I was president that we needed to do something revolutionary about the looks of the synagogue. As it happened, there was a man that had a store in downtown Gainesville, Sam Michaels, who was changing his air conditioning in the store. He said, I'll give you this air conditioner, [but] I don’t know if it will work or not. But we took it and we were able to get it fixed and install the air conditioning. Up until that time they had just used a big fan, which was not very comfortable on the holidays. We had black benches in there, and Gussie got the idea of painting all of them white. My wife’s family is in the floor covering business, and my brother-in-law gave us enough very fancy floor covering, blue, I think, I’ve forgotten. We built a new ark. Nobody saw any of these things because nobody came to services in those early years. [On] Rosh Hashanah night, we opened the synagogue. When people came in and saw it they could not believe the transformation that had taken place. I mean, they were absolutely amazed to see white and light and cool and all of those wonderful things.

Anyway, I was president for one year. They wanted me to run again. I said look, I’ve done my job enough to last five years. But I continued to be an active member of the board. When we bought the property on 32nd and 16th Avenue, where our second building was located, I was very much involved in the acquisition of those lots and also in the construction of that building. Cupert Construction Company built the building, and I had known them because they had built buildings on the campus, including the DEP house on Fraternity Row. So I’d gotten to know a lot of people, and they were the low bidders on this. They did a very good job. As I say, this was supposed to be just the first unit of two, [but] it never happened because we outgrew it too quickly. Now we’re right where we are and we’ve outgrown what we have. They’re talking about building onto the social hall, building onto the classroom building, and doing all those wonderful things. All we need now is money.

G: Let’s come back to your university career. We have one major research project in the early 1950s, you’ve got the history of the University of Florida. Are there other [projects]? Are you publishing articles at this time on other topics? What
are your research interests in addition to the [history of the University of Florida]?

P: All of these things that I deal with from that point on and continuing deal with Florida history, Florida political history, some Jewish history, [and] some Southern Jewish history. That was a secondary interest of mine, not a minority interest, but a secondary interest. So I was publishing things in both of them. I was becoming very active in the Florida Historical Society, not only from the quarterly point of view, but in the administration, in helping to set up the annual meetings and doing a lot of those things. One of the things, and Patrick has to be given the credit for this but I was also involved and Jack Doherty was involved, we turned it into a larger organization, a more visible organization, and one in which the academic community played a much more forceful role. Up until the end of the 1940s it was an organization of a few dozen people. Maybe a dozen, fifteen, twenty-five at the most, would turn out for the annual meetings. Papers were given about little local subjects, an institution, a woman’s club meeting, or something like that. We turned it into, as I say, Patrick particularly, turned it into a larger-scale organization. Part of it was the fact that the quarterly itself had moved from Pensacola, with Mr. Yonge [Philip Keyes Yonge, 1850-1984, active in Florida’s educational system and a president of the Florida Historical Society], to Gainesville. When he presented the P. K. Yonge Library to the University of Florida, he came himself as the curator. He was the editor of the Florida Historical Quarterly, so he brought that with him. The university agreed to support the quarterly, which it did until recent years, so that in itself gave it more of an academic atmosphere than it had had before. It continued to attract the academic community involved in either research, writing, or teaching Florida history at all of the [Florida] universities, but that’s no longer true, I understand, with it.

I was involved in the quarterly. I was involved in the society and [was] very active in the society in every way. I knew everybody, all the members. We tried to alternate [presidents]. One year we would have an academic as the president, [and] the next year a non-academic, so that everybody had representation. I became very involved in the American-Jewish Historical Society. I went to my first meeting there about 1949-1950, and read a paper on the Jewish life in Florida, if I remember correctly. The society was still in New York then, it had not yet moved to Waltham [Massachusetts]. I continued to play an active role in the American-Jewish Historical Society. I went to the annual meeting, I became a member of the academic advising counsel, and I, once again, knew people in the organization and got along very well and enjoyed it.

G: You assumed the editorship of the quarterly in –

P: About ’62, I think.
G: Tell me about your editorship. It’s a long editorship, lasting –

P: Thirty-one years. I enjoyed every minute of it. I realize now that I probably had undertaken more than I should or needed to, although I didn’t feel harassed or taken advantage of at any time. I was teaching, by this time I was teaching at least two courses each semester, I had established the Oral History Program in 1967, and I was the editor of the quarterly. I was the editor of the quarterly, as you know, with a single person as the assistant editor, and the secretary in the office who was doing all the correspondence for everything.

G: As you think about your editorship, especially in the early years, did you have a philosophy as an editor? What you were looking for?

P: My philosophy was not something that was sitting there waiting for me to develop, but I wanted it to be more academic, more intellectual, [and] more in-depth than it had been. I thought it was important for people to have local information, but I didn’t think the Florida Historical Quarterly was the place to put all of that. So I wanted to have things that had statewide interest. I wanted the articles to be well-organized, well-researched, and well-written, and I think we were able to get that. I worked out the system of sending articles out to a board of editors, which had not been done before. I instituted a much broader book review program than had ever been done. During the 1930s, under Mr. Yonge, he didn’t review books at all unless they were major things dealing specifically in Florida history. I broadened that out during the time that I was editor, so that we reviewed books that dealt with Florida, certainly, but also books that dealt with Southern and national topics if they impacted Florida, like a biography of Martin Luther King [Jr.], for instance. So I think we turned the quarterly into a very substantial journal. Pat Dodson [Mayhew Wilson Dodson, 1929-1975, encouraged historic preservation in Pensacola, FL], who was very active in the Florida Historical Society, operated an advertising agency in Pensacola. He took it upon himself, he volunteered, to have his agency redesign the quarterly. That’s when we adopted the blue cover and [started] using the picture on the cover, which I thought was very effective.

G: Tell me about the state of Florida history. When you wrote your Napoleon Bonaparte Broward master’s thesis, how many Florida historians existed?

P: Very few. Charleton Tebeau [author of A History of Florida (1971), professor at the University of Miami] was probably the best known Florida historian at the time, down in Miami. He was a very effective teacher, [he] had a large student following, and would eventually do that [with the] history of Florida. In Gainesville, I guess Rembert Patrick was the best known, particularly as a result of his Florida Under Five Flags. Other than that, you had almost nobody. Over
in Tallahassee you had nobody that was associated with Florida history at the university. You had Dorothy Todd, the state librarian, and she was very interested. There was no University of West Florida and there was no University of South Florida in those early years, so that everything was concentrated at Miami or the University of Florida.

G: But the numbers continue to grow.

P: The numbers continue to grow. With the growth of those universities, and the expansion of those faculty, they began to include Florida history on their curriculum, and they began to find people who could teach Florida history. Bill Rogers [professor emeritus of history at Florida State University] emerges, Martin LaGodna, who has since passed away, at the University of South Florida, Bill Coker [deceased professor emeritus of history at the University of West Florida], [and at the] University of West Florida, Jane Dysart [professor of U.S. history, a member of the historical/underwater archaeology faculty]. You can begin to name those that began to emerge in the fifties, sixties, and seventies.

G: Did you have trouble finding things to publish? Did you have a glut of material?

P: We never had a problem of really worrying about filling out an issue of the quarterly. We always had articles that were waiting to be accepted and waiting to be published, so there was never a starvation that we went through wondering are we going to have enough articles for the next issue so that we can publish it on time. That did not happen. We always had more books to review than we really had room to review them. We had to be careful since the society was paying the printing bill. We had to be careful of how many pages we printed, because it jacked up the price and we might not be able to afford it. But we were getting increasingly more support from the University of Florida in terms of what they were willing to pick up the tab for.

G: Tell me about the relationship between the quarterly and the society in those early years. The society officers were still in St. Augustine?

P: The society had moved from St. Augustine to the University of Florida. It had lost its chance to get rent free in St. Augustine. With Rembert Patrick’s ability, and his influence at the university with the library and the university, they moved it to Gainesville. A member of the University of Florida history faculty, Williamson, began to also work with the society. He went out into the field, gathering manuscripts and so on. The society brought over one woman as secretary, a lovely little old lady whose name I cannot recall. They were on the fourth floor of Library East. There are two large rooms there. One room was used as the library and one room was used for their office activity, and I was around the
corner. They were there for about three, maybe almost four, years. [The] University of South Florida opens up, and they wanted the collection because they thought they were going to teach Florida history and make it a big thing. So upon that agreement, they moved the collection from Gainesville to Tampa and installed it in special collections there. As it turned out, South Florida did not use the collection very effectively. [They] did not get into Florida history for a long time. But the secretary, or whoever was in charge of special collections then, paid for by South Florida, also became the director of the Florida Historical Society Library, which is what they would not do for Nick Wynne [executive director of the Florida Historical Society].

G: Are you developing relationships with graduate students at this time? When do you start mentoring graduate students and having master’s and Ph.D. students under your [wing]?

P: I think I was starting it in the fifties already. Graduate students were appearing in my classes. I don’t remember who my first graduate student was, but by the end of my career I had about thirty master’s and Ph.D.’s that I had taken care of during the years.

G: Were most of them or all of them Florida historians?

P: All of them were Florida historians, yeah.

G: Tell me a little bit about [it]. Who went through your classes? Not just graduate students, but future leaders of the state?

P: Well, shall I start with Bob Graham? Bob Graham [former Florida governor and U.S. Senator] was in my Florida history seminar about 1957-1958. I’ve forgotten whether Bob was already married or not, but he was a young student on campus in graduate school. He was there with Norman Lipoff [prominent Florida lawyer and UF Levin Law School graduate] from Palm Beach, whom I had known because he was a TAB. Stuart Blumberg [president and CEO of the Greater Miami & The Beaches Hotel Association], who I knew very well, and a couple of other people that I knew. Neil Salonen from Jacksonville, I would say that’s one. They have come and gone. If you teach fifty years, you touched the lives and the lives touched you in many ways. It would be difficult to start thinking up individuals that I had because I’ve had no continuing relationship with them.

G: But there are several prominent Florida historians. Eugene Lyon [adjunct professor of history at UF, archaeologist and historian of early Florida colonization] was one of your students, is that right?

P: Well, Eugene Lyon was one of my students, I had forgotten about him, and I was
on his committee. Lyle McAlister [UF professor of history] actually chaired his dissertation, however. Sherry Johnson [assistant professor of Latin American History at Florida International University] was one. You can keep naming them and I’ll see whether they were or whether they were not.

G: Let’s finish up with the Florida Historical Quarterly. You go through, I know, a series of editorial assistants, and I’m proud to have been your last.

P: Well, I was very pleased, and I needed the support that I got. I could not have operated it without the editorial assistants or, as Mr. Brown would say, the assistant editors. I didn’t care what title they had myself because their responsibilities didn’t change at all, but without them it would have been impossible to have continued. I was doing too much, and I depended upon them for editorial expertise and all kinds of things. I wanted to be the one to make the decision, and I always insisted that I run the quarterly without outside interference. I didn’t want anybody on the board or anybody in the Florida Historical Society office to tell me what to do and what not to do. I’d gone through that once when one of the presidents, and maybe one of the directors, wanted me to institute a genealogy section in the quarterly. I resisted that and that didn’t make them happy, but I said, I’m running it and I’m making the decisions. I know that has changed dramatically now.

G: For me, of course, there’s a gap. I know of the quarterly’s early history, and then we get into the later periods into the nineties when things begin to change. So unless I’m missing anything, you’re essentially the editor of the quarterly from 1962 into –

P: [The] nineties. Yeah, for thirty-one years.

G: ‘94.

P: ‘93. I retired then and I thought that was it. Then George Pozzetta [ethnicity and immigration historian, professor of history at the University of South Florida] was the editor. George died suddenly and that left you to run things. I came back out and used my name as the editor of the thing for one year.

G: There’s some issues surrounding the leadership of the Florida Historical Society. I’m not sure if you’re comfortable talking about it, but things change, unfortunately. By many people’s assessment, it’s unfortunate that things begin to change in the eighties that affects the relationship between the quarterly and the University of Florida about a decade later. What’s your relationship with the society as we get into the late eighties and early nineties?
Well, my relationship with the society continued to be very warm, very close, very intimate, in fact, until the middle of the 1990s. I did not have a problem with the society in any way whatsoever, I was not unhappy with anything, until they started the move to move it away from the University of Florida. They resented the fact that it was at the University of Florida. So the other universities, particularly with [the University of] Central Florida, wanted to do anything which they felt would demote the University of Florida, whether it was the society, the quarterly, or the engineering world, or whatever it might be. So they endorsed anything that came along. Nick Wynne, I think, wanted to become more and more in control of everything that went through. I guess he felt that as the director he had the right to do that. He resented the fact that I was running the quarterly from the University of Florida. The University of Florida, you know, did not do anything. We didn't ask the society for anything, and the society didn't offer us anything. So that's when the relationship began to cool down. As you know, it turned out that they were able to get University of Central Florida to agree to take on the responsibility to do some of the things that the University of Florida was doing as far as money support was concerned, and they seemed to be willing to do that.

Some in the society might claim that by the late eighties or into the 1990s, that the University of Florida had essentially taken over the quarterly and thought that it was its own journal.

Well, the thing was, they were just imagining that, because the situation had not changed anytime from the fifties on. The fact is, I was the one who was running the show, not the University of Florida. But the fact is, I was at the University of Florida, so they made that identification as though it were [true]. But it had never changed. It was exactly the same over the years that it always was. We never added to our responsibilities or power [and] we didn't diminish any of it either. The leadership in the Florida Historical Society became increasingly unhappy with the University of Florida's role in the quarterly. They also became unhappy, I think, about the quarterly itself. They felt it was too academic. It was too "intellectual" for the kind of member they wanted to attract in the Florida Historical Society. That the people they were trying to move into it, people interested in Florida History but not necessarily college people and so on, would be turned off by highfalutin articles, and that they wanted more of the day-to-day kind of thing that you find in American Heritage. That philosophy was encouraged by the leadership of the society, and I was unwilling to make the changes there. I was not willing to make it any more intellectual, more involved, than it had always been. I just didn't want to change the status of the quarterly.

Let's talk about oral history.
P: Have we finished with the quarterly? [Do] you think we’ve said enough?

G: Well, I mean, we could name names.

P: Well, I’ve named Nick Wynne. I haven’t named anybody else because I don’t know anybody else to name, and I’m not going to name anybody else that I don’t know.

G: I mean, obviously I’m involved with you because I am your last editorial assistant. Then I’m George Pozzetta’s editorial assistant, and then you and I are back together for a year before it leaves for Central Florida. Of course, I have my own views of this thing which are not relevant here.

P: I think that we were publishing an excellent journal. [It was] well-recognized not only in the South, but nationally. I think we were achieving the goals that we had set for the quarterly when Patrick took over in the 1950s, for I had not deviated from that path at all.

G: I want to think [of] kind of an overview of the quarterly. Is the quarterly changing Florida history? Is the quarterly a response to changing? Are you trying to be out in front of how Florida history is done?

P: I don’t think that any of those things are happening. I think the society’s membership has declined so precipitously in the last few years and the quarterly is not being read by as many people as it once was. You don’t find it’s being footnoted in articles and books and journal articles elsewhere, which I’m very sensitive to, as it once was. I don’t think it’s made the impact either in the South or within Florida itself. People used to come up to me and say good things about the quarterly, or things they didn’t like about the quarterly, which at least indicated that they were reading the quarterly. Well, there’s no reason for them to say that now, because I’m not the editor and have nothing to do with it whatsoever today.

G: But it was your goal, while you were the editor, to make the quarterly the foremost [of journals].

P: And I think we achieved that. It was certainly one of the foremost journals in the South, and I think it was a very effective journal as far as the state is concerned.

G: We can come back to the quarterly if things occur to us, but let’s talk about oral history. We’ve got a few minutes left on this tape and then we’ll stop for the day.

P: How did it come about?
G: Yeah. I mean, that’s a whole brand new field of study. Where were you when all of this _____?

P: Oral history begins, as you know, at Columbia University in 1948. It had been thought about [for] a long time, and some activity, which you might call oral history, although it wasn’t, had been involved. In the 1930s, for instance, one of the WPA [Works Progress Administration] projects was the Florida Writer’s Project, and interviews were gathered here. They weren’t taped interviews, but they were gathered. They were interviews. People like Zora Neale Hurston [African American folklorist and author], for instance, went out and interviewed individuals and wrote down the answers. Stetson Kennedy [a collector of folklore and oral history who exposed Southern racism], from Jacksonville, was another one who was involved, and there were many others. They gathered a lot of important information, not only from the descendants of the slaves, but crackers and fisher-people, and people [whose] stories might otherwise have been forgotten. So there was that kind of activity going on in Florida, and it was going on in other states, too. The Florida Writer’s Project was not an isolated situation. You had North Carolina, South Carolina, [and] all over the United States. So you had, even before World War II, what we today would label embryonic beginnings [of] oral history. You even had some taping. The Smithsonian Institution, for instance, had taped some of the music of some of the western Indians. Of course, [it was] on tape recorders that we would consider very archaic today, wire recorders and things like that. But it was not until World War II when a lot of the taping apparatus became more available.

A program starts at Columbia University, and it’s very successful. It went to the shakers and makers of history. This is Eleanor Roosevelt [humanitarian who transformed the role of First Lady as wife of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt], for instance, Herbert Hoover [Republican president, 1929-1933]. People like that were being interviewed. Of course, everybody took pride in the fact that now you not only had their memories, but you also had their voices. Then other universities began to move onto the scene. [The] University of Texas began a history of the oil industry. [The] University of California at Berkeley started an Earl Warren Project [governor of California and controversial US Supreme Court Chief Justice (1953-1969)]. They eventually did about 160 tapes on Warren, starting from his life as a student [and] going all the way through his academic life, his political life, the work on the Supreme Court, and so on. Moshe Davis [1916-1996, visiting professor at Hebrew University in Israel after 1959, where he founded the Institute of Contemporary Judaism], who had been in New York and a good friend of the people at Columbia University, had made alia, and was in Israel. He had always been interested in community history, Jewish community history. He knew all about oral history from his association with Columbia. So when he got to Israel, he set up an oral history program there.
with Holocaust survivors, which was not easy because he realized that people remembered best in the languages that they were familiar with. So it was a problem of not only getting the Holocaust survivors to cooperate and talk, but to get the right kind of people with the right kind of language qualities to do the questioning. But they were able to do it, and that program still continues today. By the middle of the 1960s, there were about sixty oral history projects, most of them relatively small, but some larger, like Berkeley, in existence in the United States.

We were not yet involved in the thing. They had a meeting at Lake Arrowhead, California to decide if there was a future for oral history, and if so, what was that future going to be. Was it going to be history? Was it going to be anthropology? Was it going to be archives? Was it going to be library? What? They decided to accept the invitation of the representative from Columbia University to send out a notice to institutions all over the United States, notifying them of a meeting the following November 1966 at the Arden House [donated in 1950, the first conference center in the United States]. [This] was the country home, and now the conference center for Columbia University. It had belonged to the Harriman family [ambassadors W. Averell and Patricia Harriman, who granted both the Arden House and a generous endowment for the Harriman Institute of interdisciplinary Russian studies at Columbia University]. The invitation, the notice, came to the University of Florida, came to the library.

In the meantime, I had become more and more identified with Florida history here because of the Broward activity and so on. I lamented the fact, as I was doing research for articles and other things, how poor we were as far as our library resources were concerned. We fortunately had the P. K. Yonge Library here, but the operation in Tallahassee was miserable. They had nothing there but the state library, which occupied space in the basement of the old Supreme Court building. I realized too that we had all of these wonderful politicians walking around, like Spessard Holland [Florida lawyer, namesake of the UF Law School administration building, Florida Senator 1932-1940] and others, if we could just tap their memories. So when the notice came to Margaret Goggin [director of libraries at UF], who was then the librarian and a good friend, and I had the archives office in the library, Margaret said to me, why don’t you go to this meeting? I’ll pay your way and [you] see where it stands, [see] if this is something the University of Florida wants to become involved in. So I did. I went to New York, we met at the Columbia house in New York City, [and] we went by bus up to the Arden House. It was an unbelievable meeting.

G: Who was there?

P: Well, Frank Freidel [Jr., Harvard professor of American history] was there, [Henry Steele] Commager [professor of American history at Amherst College] was there, Alfred Knopf [publisher, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.] was there. The leading people in
that area were there. I had never been to a meeting where I found more first-rate people like that all assembled under one roof. The building itself was beautiful. It was set in this park, and it had snowed just before we arrived. [It was] a light snow, so all the snow was on the trees and on the ground. There were deer grazing out. The building of the house itself had these little maids that were there serving coffee and hot chocolate. There were bowls of apples strewn around. Anyway, it was fun. Out of it came the organization of the Oral History Association. I came back to Gainesville all enthusiastic, and Margaret said, well, let’s give it a try. Well, I had an office then in Library West, the old P. K. Yonge Library, on the fourth floor, you remember that, because of the quarterly. I had that little office in there. We had a typewriter, a four-drawer filing cabinet, [and] a student assistant, I think we were paying thirty-five cents an hour for it at that time, and we became an oral history [program]. [We] developed an Oral History Program. We got [the] teaching resources [department] to build us a recording set. We didn’t have any money to buy a recorder, so they built one with two microphones on it. Margaret did put up some money for tapes.

The first interview I did, as I think I’ve told you, was with Marna Brady, who was the first Dean of Women on campus [1948-1966]. She had come here upon the invitation of Dr. Miller. He had met her at Columbia. When she got out of the Marine Corps, she was working on a Ph.D. there. Marna was our cross-street neighbor and a good friend, and she agreed to do the interview. So the first interview I did was with her. Maybe I told you the story. We did it in our backyard, which turned out not to be a wise thing because later on we heard the sound of bugs going through and so on. We didn’t realize how sensitive the microphones would be. But it was a very good interview [and] she answered all of my questions very cooperatively. She goes home and I started to play the interview and I got nothing but a blank. So I was very upset about it and I thought there was something wrong with the tape recorder that they had made on campus. So I took the tape to the campus on Monday and played it on a real tape recorder and I still got a blank. Then I realized that I had forgotten to hit the record button. So I’d gone through two and a half hours of recording without ever recording anything. I explained to Marna that the machine had malfunctioned. But we redid the interview and it was as good the second time as it was the first time. So that started us on the Oral History Project.

The big leap was when we became involved in the Doris Duke support [heiress to the J. B. Duke fortune, a philanthropist contributing to numerous social and cultural causes through the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation]. I got a telephone call one day from this man from the University of Utah who identified himself, and he said, I understand you have an Oral History Program at Florida. I said, yes, we do. I didn’t tell him how penny-enny it really was. And a library? Yes, sir. That’s interested in Indian history? Yes, sir. He said, I’d like to come down and talk to you and some of your colleagues about an oral history project dealing with the Seminole Indians. Since he was paying his own way, I said,
come on. John Mahon was the chairman of history, Charles Fairbanks was the chairman of anthropology, and there were a couple of anthropology students who were working on the Florida Indians. So we all got ready for the visit. He came and we entertained him very nicely. [We] took him to lunch and showed him around the campus and the library and all of those things. He was here for two days, I think, and left and went back. He said to me, why don’t you prepare a budget [as] if you were going to start an Oral History Program. [He said,] we want a one-year program with the Florida Seminoles, prepare a budget.

Well, John Mahon and I had never had a penny up until that time. I’d had a homemade tape recorder. So we put down a lot of things. It came to about $40,000 dollars. We sent it out to Utah and didn’t hear anything for a couple of weeks. I thought what he did is got it and threw it in the garbage can. Then the phone rang and it was he. He said, Proctor, I got your budget. He said, it’s not worth a damn. I said, what’s wrong? He said, you’re in North Florida and the Seminoles are in South Florida, in Hollywood. How are you going to get down there? He said, you need transportation, don’t you? And do you have a telephone? Anyway, he said, I’ve approved the budget, but I increased it to $60,000. So that’s really what put us on the map. Before it was all over we got about $240,000 from Doris Duke. She had begun giving support to oral history programs in the sixties mainly to western universities, six or seven of them, [in] South Dakota, New Mexico, Utah, [and] for a short while, to UCLA. Her argument, or at least her foundation argument, was that the library was filled with books about Indians all written by non-Indians. The tape recorder would give these otherwise voiceless people an opportunity to talk. So the one year with Seminoles they thought would be a good idea, and that’s where we became involved in it. As I say, before it was over, they gave us $240,000. Most of it went to sponsored research. It didn’t go through the foundation, so the university didn’t take anything off the top. Since Mayan and I were already on the payroll, we didn’t take anything. So we got a lot of action out of the dollars that we spent. It worked successfully. Mahon, Fairbanks, and I went down to Hollywood and we met the leaders of the tribe, who liked the idea and pledged their support. As it turned out they didn’t do very much, but at least they were cooperative, and certainly were not negative in any way about anything. So we did that the first year, and then they asked us to expand it beyond that and turn it into a Southeastern Indian Project. They really wanted us to go into the Caribbean too, but I knew that that was foolish. We didn’t have the expertise [or] the personnel to move that far away, so that’s what we did.

G: Who did the work? Who were your oral historians?

P: Well, it depended upon where we were going. In Virginia we did very little. We worked with a woman faculty person at one of the universities, I think at Norfolk or so on. In South Carolina, when we worked with the Indians there, we worked
with two local people, including an Indian woman [named] Francis Wade. When we did the Indians in Alabama, the Poarch Indians, we worked with an anthropology professor at FSU. So it depended entirely upon where we were going. We didn’t try to do much of it ourselves. Tom King [dissertation based on oral histories of Seminole Indians led to his Ph.D. from UF in 1978], I don’t know if you remember Tom, [he] worked with me on the quarterly for a while, we sent him down to work with the Seminole Indians. He went down with his family, lived in a trailer, and became friendly with a lot of Indians. He did a lot of excellent interviews. Tom is now the director of the Oral History Program at the University of Nevada at Reno. Anyway, that’s the story. We collected about 800 interviews with Southeastern Indians. We created a center for the study of Southeastern Indians with me and John Mahon as the co-directors of it.

G: Well, even though we’re in the middle of our fifth tape, we’ve switched days. Today is now August 25, 2002. We are continuing an oral history: Mark Greenberg with the Florida Study Center, and Dr. Samuel Proctor, esteemed professor of the University of Florida. [We’re at the] same location and we’re going to continue. We left off yesterday afternoon talking about the Oral History Association.

P: The Oral History Program.

G: Excuse me. Right, the Oral History Program. We were talking about the Duke money that you received and the Southeastern Indians program. Let’s just finish up with that. What was the outcome?

P: Well, the Doris Duke money that came in, about $240,000 that came to sponsored research, and the fact that we didn’t have to take anything off of the top, really put us on the track of big-time operations. It allowed for travel, and we were able to use the Duke money for things other than just the Duke project. The purpose, of course, was to secure interviews on Indians living in the Southeastern U.S. John Mahon and I together formed the Center for the Study of Southeastern Indians. We determined that we would limit it to the northern border, [which] would be Virginia down through Florida, the Everglades, the Muskogee and Seminole Indians, and from the Atlantic coast over to the Mississippi River. We would not go beyond into Louisiana Indians, the Oklahoma Indians at all, or the urban Indians. We did work with urban Indians, eventually, in the Baltimore area. [These were] Indians who had left South Carolina during the war years looking for jobs and had moved into the Baltimore/Washington area, and their families still lived there. They were mainly working in industrial activities. So that was the outcome. We were very successful with the Duke money. We spread it very beautifully, very wisely. We got about 900 interviews, and we really reclaimed, or recovered, a lot of history
that otherwise would have been lost. Many of these Indians did not know very much about their own history, and in this interrogation that we were doing, a lot of it came to the surface. All of the tapes have been transcribed, they've been used for a variety of purposes over the years, [and] they've been very successful. So it was money that was wisely spent. After about 1974, the Doris Duke [Charitable] Foundation, which had its offices in New York on 57th Street, decided not to support oral history anymore and they went into other activities.

G: What sorts of things did you do with the money? I'm thinking particularly about technology. How were the interviews conducted? What did the office look like in the days before computers?

P: Well, we'd always had a problem with office space. I had an office in the P. K. Yonge Library on the fourth floor of Library West. I had a small area there, even before Oral History, because of my editorship of the quarterly. We needed to be close to sources so we could check out the authenticity of footnotes. When the Oral History [Program] begins, and it begins very slowly, we interviewed only people in the general area, because we didn't have, to begin with, any money for transportation. So all of the early tapes had to do with the history of the university, which made sense anyway because I was the university historian. That was very fortunate, because we caught a lot of memories that went back as early as the early 1920s. [We had] people who were involved in the establishment of some of the early schools on campus, journalism [and the] general college.

I moved out of the space in P. K. [Yonge] and moved around the corner to a larger office. Then we needed even more space. The museum had recently been completed, and J. C. Dickinson [appointed director of the Florida Museum of Natural History in 1961], after a visit from John Mahon and me, agreed to allow us to move there, which we did, on the first floor where anthropology and archaeology had its offices. To justify and to explain what we were doing there, I became the curator of Florida history for the museum. Although I did not have many responsibilities, people were giving things, manuscripts or artifacts involving Florida, [and] I was asked to look at them, evaluate them to decide whether they were worth [anything], [see] if they were authentic, and that sort of thing. So we were very happy with our space there. We had two nice rooms. I had a beautiful office. I used some of the Duke money to buy some furniture. We carpeted. All of the bookcases in there came from Rayford [site of the Florida State Penitentiary], the convicts manufactured bookcases. A lot of offices on campus were furnished that way. We had an office next door where the secretary was located, and where the students who were working on the quarterly, and also doing the transcribing, were located. We were there for about twenty years. With the growth of the museum it was obvious they needed the
space, and eventually, we moved out of there to Yon Hall.

G: First [you moved to] Anderson [Hall].

P: Yes, that's right. We moved from the museum to Anderson, in offices that at one time the registrar had used. [It was a] very small, constricted space. In the meantime, we had turned over a lot of the tapes, the file cabinets, to the library, which was going to be the eventual destination of all of the material anyway. From there we went to Yon Hall, and from Yon Hall we've moved to Turlington.

G: Tell me about technology in the early years. You mention using a reel to reel for your very first interview.

P: No, I didn't use a reel to reel. I used a regular machine, but it was one that was locally manufactured on campus. Teaching Resources created it for us. We had reel-type machines, and in addition to the tapes that we were ourselves collecting, we were getting [tapes] from local historical societies [as] gifts. Lakeland Historical Society sent us up a collection of interviews they had done with old-timers in the area. Many of these came to us on reels. We had two reel-type machines that came to us as a gift from the library, and we used those. Then we were able to transfer those to audio tapes.

G: Those very first interviews that you did, were they done on the audiocassettes?

P: Yes. All of them were done on the audiocassette. I did not record on anything other than the audiocassettes. We thought that the reel-type would give us a clearer sound for music tapes, but we weren't in the business of collecting music, although we do have some Seminole music in there.

G: Tell me a little bit about other significant projects within the Oral History Program, topic-wise.

P: The biggest thing I think was the university history, all of which, well, I would say about 90 percent of them, I did. Others have done others since then. We did about 400 interviews, and I tried to spread it [out] so that I got a broader picture. For instance, I did a number of the librarians to get a history of the library. I did a series of interviews with all of the chairs of the history department. We did interviews with people in the various sciences. We did a whole string, and continue to do, interviews with people who are connected with the medical center, starting right from the very beginning with the original faculty. So I tried to spread it around the campus. We even did one of the early coaches. So we got a lot of that stuff. Our technology was pretty much the same as it is today. We took a tape recorder, which in those early years we bought from Radio Shack for
about $60-70, put a tape in the machine, and started.

G: [In the] early transcriptions, did you have Dictaphones?

P: Obviously we didn’t have computers in those early years, so they put Dictaphones on, listened with the ear, and typed what they heard coming through the machines. It was a long, arduous process, obviously. We did have a public relations point of view, because we transcribed everything that came through the ears. [We typed] the sentences that did not end, the wrong pronouns, all of those things. We did not have time or money to edit and correct things, and then retyp[e] a sixty, eighty, or a ninety-page manuscript. So we sent it out raw to the individual, explaining that it was a raw tape and that it would be cleaned up later. Well, a number of people were offended by that. They thought we had added the mistakes. I know there was one man here in town who, when he heard and saw his manuscript, there were a lot of “you knows,” and he objected to that. He said, I don’t talk that way. He said, I asked my wife [and] she says I do not talk that way. He said, some smart aleck in your office did that on purpose. Of course, we had the tape. So we had those kinds of problems. Once computers came, of course, it cleared things up and we were able to move more rapidly because we were able to correct things very quickly on there. Although once again, we'd still send out the manuscript to the individual for checking, to make sure the dates are accurate, the names are spelled correctly, and so on.

G: With the Duke money gone by the mid-seventies, how was funding occurring?

P: Well, it was not an easy kind of thing. We were finally able to get the provost’s office, Gene Hemp [longtime administrator, vice provost of UF until 1999], mainly, was cooperative always, to pick up the tab for the secretary. So we were able to get Roberta’s salary. What he did was to allocate money, and it went through the dean’s office, so that we never dealt directly with the provost’s office in Tigert Hall. Also, the dean added a little bit to it. We never had an abundance of money. We had a graduate student who was always assigned to us from the history department. He was mainly, and sometimes it was a she, was to work on the quarterly. Occasionally, very occasionally, we were able to use that person for an oral history, but that was not his or her primary responsibility. We had some volunteers, not many. We did not go after volunteers, and perhaps we should have, because Julian has worked them very effectively. So we just struggled along. The money came from Tigert Hall from the dean’s office and from [the] history [department]. To begin with, for a relatively short while, a couple of years, we got a little bit of support from the library, but not very much.

G: By the time I came along in 1990, you had an Oral History Coordinator, a graduate student from the history department, as well as someone working on
the quarterly.

P: No, no. We have never had more than one person from [the] history [department], that’s all they were willing to give us. Some years I had to argue to get that.

G: I’m trying to think, because when I started, we had the rather heavy-set guy who went on –

P: Yeah, but he was not paid by [the] history [department]. You’re talking about the guy that later goes to law school and goes out to Pensacola.

G: Exactly.

P: He was a native of Gainesville.

G: I wish I could remember. So where did he come from? Where did the funding come from? Because that was a helpful position for you.

P: Well, that money came from the dean’s office.

G: So, as I recall, you had Roberta, who goes back how many years with you?

P: About eighteen or nineteen years now, it seems like forever. Maybe even longer than that.

G: And you had an Oral History Coordinator, a graduate student.

P: Who was responsible for supervising the activities. Roberta didn’t do that, the coordinator did that. He turned over the transcripts, the tapes to be transcribed, and assigned the individuals the jobs they were supposed to do.

G: When I started with you, I was your graduate research assistant, but spent some time as an audit/editor. So you effectively made use of –

P: Everything.

G: Of me, and taught me how to do everything.

P: Well, that was not an unusual way [to do it]. Out of necessity we had to do those things. So you weren’t the first one to be multi-purposed.

G: And I’m glad you didn’t. I wouldn’t be an oral historian today if it wasn’t for you. Let me ask about other projects, we talked [about] the medical school [and]
university. Were there other significant blocks of interviews?

P: Yes, yes. Through the cooperation of Jean Chalmers [Gainesville real-estate agent and prominent civil rights activist], who was then on the city commission, and later mayor of Gainesville, she was able to get us money. I think about $15,000, if I remember correctly, to do a project on the blacks of Gainesville. That was a very effective one. We were able to contact a local man by the name of Joel Buchanan [the first black man to attend newly desegregated Gainesville High School in 1964, member of the UF department of special and area studies]. Joel, and he did it on a volunteer basis, knew everybody, and he got along particularly well with elderly blacks. What we were trying to get was teachers and preachers and people who had been in business along Northwest 5th Avenue, kind of a middle class. Joel was just perfect for that, and he enjoyed doing it. So that was a very effective project that we did.

[End side C5]

G: [When] we switched tapes, you were mentioning Joel Buchanan and the black history of Gainesville as one of the projects.

P: That was a very successful project, the black history of Gainesville. We called it the 5th Avenue Project because most of the people were living in that general area. We found the people that we worked with, some of them political activists, some of the ministers, to be very cooperative, and happy that we were gathering this kind of information. Everything was transcribed and we made a copy available to each person. We had a reception in the library, as I remember, and we invited all the individuals that we had interviewed to come to us that night. I spoke, and Joel spoke, and we had refreshments. I guess we did it at the museum, not the library, and we gave each person a copy of the transcript. We did, of course, many different projects, small, medium size, [and] some large. One of the ones I remember was a history of the Jewish community of West Palm Beach. They had gotten a small grant and approached us. I did a lot of the interviewing myself. I went to West Palm Beach and talked to people about the history of the community, where people came from, and what happened to them over the years. Of course, those transcripts are in our collection today. We did interviews on the Jewish community of Jacksonville using volunteers to work there, including my cousin, Doris Proctor. Remember we started in 1967, and our first interview, the one with Marna Brady, was 1969. Now we have, according to Julian’s count, about 3,800 interviews in the collection. It’s the largest oral history archives in the South, and really one of the major ones in the United States.

G: What kind of usage did you get by researchers and other folks throughout the
years?

P: Usage? Well, it was not as widespread as I had hoped it would be. Part of it was because we didn’t really know how to advertise ourselves. You don’t put a notice in the Alligator and say we’ve got all these oral history tapes. I found that, even in the history department, there were dissertations and theses being done, and we had material available that would have been useful to the researcher, and they did not know about it. So that was a problem. So for a long time, the stuff just lay there and it was not being used very much. That [has] changed now over the years. We have now students all the time using it. Right from the very beginning the news media took advantage of it, particularly the Gainesville Sun and the Florida Alligator, as you can imagine, with the tapes that we had on the history of the university. We’ve had increasing numbers of individuals who are using the material. You can see that it’s being quoted. When Julian came aboard, he was responsible for launching the effort to name the oral history [program] for me. [He] went through the procedure here on campus, the committee on naming buildings and projects. So it has since been called the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, but I have a difficult time getting Roberta to say that when she answers the telephone. She just says “Oral History.”


P: At the Arden House, the conference center belonging to Columbia. I said ‘66 [earlier], [but] it was ‘67, November 1967. As I think I said earlier, I was absolutely enthralled with the conference and the people who were there. I mean, where are you going to find a conference where you’re sitting at the table having dinner with Freidel, Commager, Knopf, and people like that. I came back to Gainesville and I talked to Margaret Goggin, the librarian. She was most cooperative, as always, and we set up the program. At this meeting we launched the Oral History Association. So right from the very beginning I could be called one of the founding members, not the only one, obviously, but I became a dues-paying member. I began going to the annual meetings and getting to know people. The Oral History Association, to begin with, was very small. [It was] a limited number of people who joined the organization, although they tried to broaden the base of membership as much as they possibly could. In the early years, because of the small number involved, we were able to go to places that were environmentally nice, so that we went to some very beautiful places around the United States. But the membership increased, it became increasingly larger.

Because I was one of the most faithful attending, I became involved in the administration of the organization. I first served on the board, I think for three years, which was the period that was allocated. Then I became vice-president of the organization, and then in 1975, I was the president. The meeting that year was in Asheville, North Carolina, and I was responsible for the program. [This is]
one of the interesting things that happened in setting up that program. Some weeks before the meeting, I was on a plane coming out of Washington, [and I was] sitting back in the economy section. This man comes in and the seat next to me is vacant, and he sits down and we begin a conversation. I recognized him immediately, it was Dean Rusk [1904-1994, U.S. Secretary of State under presidents Kennedy and Johnson]. Dean Rusk, by this time, had left Washington, and he was teaching in the law school at the University of Georgia, so he was en route back to Atlanta, Georgia. So, of course, I took advantage of his presence and began a conversation. We were together on the plane [for] about two hours. When he began asking me what I did and I told him about oral history, he evidenced his distrust of oral history, the fact that you were asking people to remember things that happened twenty-five years earlier, and what might happen to the material when you placed it in an archive. So he was just generally – others were like that. I remember Barbara Tuchman [1912-1989, author and historian noted for her works spanning the Black Plague to World War I] was also one that was hesitant about the validity of oral history. Anyway, by the time we got to Atlanta, we had become very chummy and I told him about the meeting that was coming up. I asked him if he would be willing to be one of the speakers to talk about the negative parts of oral history. He said, well, here’s my card. Stay in touch and I’ll see. I can’t tell you what my calendar’s going to be. Well, as it turned out, he was free and able to come, and he attended the meeting. He gave a talk on Friday evening at our dinner meeting. Bessie and I had a reception for him. We had a suite, as [I was] the president, so we had a suite for him. We took pictures of me and Dean Rusk together. He left the following morning, he didn’t stay for the rest of the conference. I said, Mr. Secretary, be sure to send me a bill of your expenses. He sent me a bill, I think, for $18 for his gas from Athens to Asheville, and return. Of course, we had provided him with the room. But there was no honorarium, no nothing, except the $18 bill that he had.

So I continued being active in the Oral History [Association] as a past president. I, obviously, knew all of the leaders in the organization, as I continue to do today, although the organization is much larger today. It’s like the history department faculty, new faces, new people, [and] new names, most of which I don’t recognize anymore.

G: What was the purpose of the association? Especially as you talk about Dean Rusk and whether or not oral history is valid.

P: Well, when oral history begins to develop in the 1950s and 1960s, there was the question, is this a professional activity? I mean, this is something that was brand-new. People had not been doing research using a tape recorder. The traditional way was to go into the library with a pencil and a pad to gather your
material, write it down, and then transfer it to whatever you were working on. Now, suddenly, tape recorders appear on the scene. A lot of people were hesitant about them, and tape recorders were not as sophisticated as they are today, anyway. When they had the meeting at Lake Arrowhead in ‘66, there were approximately sixty projects in the United States that they counted. There may have been more than that, but that’s what they always give as the figure.

There was the question, now if we gather this material, what’s going to happen to it? Well, the American Historical Association said, this is a history project, why don’t you just affiliate with us? The Library Association said, well, this is going to be the final destination of these archives, maybe you ought to be part of us. So that was what it was. These national organizations were looking for new members, and this would be an opportunity for them to gather. So the meeting at Lake Arrowhead was to decide whether they would become part of an already existing national organization, or strike out on their own. That’s why Louie Starr, who was the assistant director of the program at Columbia University, invited us to come the following year to the conference center to discuss and to decide what we wanted to do. The decision in ‘67, then, was to strike out on our own and to become an independent organization.

G: Do you remember those deliberations? What was the rationale?

P: The rationale was that, yes, we’re history, and yes, we’re library, and yes, we are archives, but we’re separate and we don’t need to be a part of another existing organization. We’re talking now just about a few dozen people. The Oral History Association was not a giant organization, [and] it’s still not a giant organization. At that time there were other oral history programs elsewhere in the world. I think I told you about Moshe Davis’ efforts to gather interviews with Holocaust survivors, which were converted to microfilm in a program that The New York Times had. They no longer do that, but we have some of those microfilms here in the library. Other libraries throughout the country, of course, acquired them also. But the rationale was that we can do it on our own. As I say, it was a small, very cohesive group. They got along beautifully together. We enjoyed getting together for the annual meeting. But the programs begin to develop. Obviously, oral history was going to become a very popular research activity. In addition to the program in Israel, others began to develop. The American [Oral History] Association was always the largest and the most influential in the world. We cooperated once with the program in Canada. In fact, our 1976 meeting was in Canada, which kind of made it interesting because that was the bicentennial year and we were going outside of the United States. In time, a international Oral History Association was organized. I never became involved in that, but a number of the individuals in our organization became officers and members of that.

G: Here I am. It’s 2002, late in 2002, and I’ve got a digital video camera, lavaliere
ear microphones, I’ve set up lights, and my camera’s on a tripod.

P: We didn’t dream of all of that back in the 1960s and 1970s. I carried a tape recorder that, as I say, we bought from Radio Shack and were glad to get the $60 to buy it. We had some tapes and we had a yellow pad and a pencil, and that was our equipment. As I say, to begin with, we made a lot of mistakes. My interview with Marna Brady, for instance, was in my backyard, and we got a lot of extraneous noise. We finally learned that we needed a special kind of a microphone that checked the wind velocity so that we wouldn’t get that kind of noise coming in, because when you work with the Indians often, you had to work outside.

G: You see a bright future?

P: I see a very bright future, of course. Julian Pleasants, who now directs the Oral History Program here at the University of Florida, who took over for me and who’s doing an excellent job, he’s not overwhelmed, but he’s being approached very often to do projects. We’re constantly being called on the telephone by people who know somebody who has this wonderful story to tell who’s living down in Tavares or in Panama City. We have to always say we don’t have any money for transportation; what you need to do is get some local historical society or some local agency to do the project for you. But Julian is approached to do a lot of kind of oral history activities. Very interesting projects. The Everglades restoration, for instance, [and] the contested presidential election in Florida are just some of the things that we’re involved with. As my time allows me to, and I don’t strain myself at all, I’ve been gathering interviews with top business leaders in Florida. I’ve recently done one [in] the last month with Clark Butler from Butler Plaza here, and he tells a very interesting story. Out in Pensacola, in early July, I did one with Fred Levin [prominent Pensacola attorney who in 1998 gave the UF law school the largest cash donation gifted to a public law school], the guy who gave the money for the law school naming. I’ve got another one scheduled later this month, or early next month, with Luther Coggin [philanthropist and donor to the University of North Florida who made his fortune by gradually purchasing car dealerships in North and Central Florida] in Jacksonville, the automobile magnate. I’m going to set one up with Bill Emerson [retired senior vice president and national sales director for Merrill Lynch, prominent UF business school donor], the alumni who was into stocks and investments in the Atlanta area for many years. I’m also doing things dealing with the history of the medical center.

G: Tell me about your relationship, or at least the Oral History Program’s relationship, to the [University of Florida] Foundation, because I know by the time I get here in 1990, there’s a strong relationship going.
Well, there's a strong relationship. I think that I was the binder, I was the individual, because I was active in the foundation. Certainly as a fund-raiser, although I wouldn't say I brought millions into the foundation at all, but I became, in some ways, and Ralph also, the representative of Jews on the campus. When they were trying to massage somebody in the foundation and so on, we were utilized for a luncheon or dinner or whatever it might be. Because of my interest in oral history, that was part of the baggage that I carried into this kind of a relationship. Now, in more recent years, the foundation has asked us to interview individuals, which helps to open the door for things that they want to do. This top business leaders of Florida [interview series], for instance, is a very effective instrument for them to use. It really flatters somebody when you say, we want to do an oral history interview, the story of your life is interesting and important and it will become part of the archives. In the early years, people used to wonder what's going to happen to this when you told them it was going into a library and that anybody was going to be able to come in and get all of this information. Of course, we assured them we weren't looking for tabloid information. But now people are very flattered. Some of them, I know, wonder, why are you not interviewing me? Aren't I important enough to be interviewed? From this point of view, the foundation has played an effective role. We wish they would do more in terms of money support.

Why don't we talk a little bit about the American Association for State and Local History. I guess there's a tie between the two missions.

All right. That was an organization that got started after World War II to do exactly what its title talked about. Of course, of my interest in local history and Florida history it was made to order for me, and I became involved in the organization. I went to its annual meetings, served on its board for a number of years, and played an effective leadership role in the activities of the association. I got to know all of the important people and they got to know me. In the 1970s, at the time of the bicentennial, one of the projects that the association took on to do was to encourage a book for each state in the Union. I was on that publications committee. I know that the one I was totally responsible for was Gloria Jahoda’s Other Florida. I knew Gloria because she had done book reviews for the quarterly and she was a good friend. I went to Tampa, sat down with her, she was not at all reluctant. It wasn't the kind of traditional history of Florida that I was seeking, but it was what she was writing. It's a book, I guess, which is still in print today, although she's no longer living today. But increasingly the association became disinterested in local history and more in museums. As a result of that, I began to fade away from it, because museums was not my dish and I didn't want to get involved in that kind of thing. So I'm not a part of that organization, but up through the 1970s I was a very active member, and a very active participant at its annual meetings and in all of its activities.
G: Did you serve in any leadership role in the organization?

P: Well, [not really,] except I was on the governing board for three years.

G: [Do you] want to turn to some of your UF activities?

P: Yes.

G: [The] Center for Jewish Studies.

P: Okay, that’s an interesting project. The religion department operated here with Delton Scudder [UF Department of Religion founding chairman from 1946 into the 1970s] as the chairman of it. The history of the religion department goes back all the way to World War I, when there were some soldiers on campus as a result of a contract that the university had entered into with the Army. The YMCA [Young Men’s Christian Association] located itself on the campus in a small building, about where the infirmary is located today. It became the major recreational activity on the campus. The campus was small and there wasn’t much else for the regular students to do, either. When the war was over, Mr. White, who was the director of this YMCA, continued to operate. Dr. Murphree [UF’s second president, 1909-1927, who organized the university into four separate colleges], the president of the university, was a dedicated Christian, although he was a liberal man and there was no bigotry involved there – although he was anti-Catholic and made no bones about that. He encouraged the YMCA to stay on campus. Mr. White wanted to organize a building on campus. They knew, though, that church and state would disallow the legislature from appropriating money for a church building on the University of Florida, so they transferred their goals to a recreational center to be known as Florida Union. They began collecting money there. William Jennings Bryan, who now has moved from Nebraska to Miami, Florida, is a friend of Dr. Murphree. They had met at church meetings, state meetings, and national meetings. He came to Gainesville on occasion, at least a half dozen times, as a guest of the Murphree family. [He] spoke on campus and was involved in lots of things, and he agreed to become the chairman of the fund-raising for this building. They did raise some funds, [although] they were not totally successful. Part of it is because the boom was collapsing just at the time that they were raising money. They had deposited a lot of the money that they had raised in a Gainesville bank, and the bank closed and they lost that money. But there was some that was still remaining, and when they built what is now Dauer Hall, but then was Florida Union in the 1930s, they were able to use that money.

The religion department continues to be active. In some way, they claimed responsibility for that money, so they were given jurisdiction over the
second floor in the Union building. It was the only area in the building in which you could not smoke, and Delton Scudder had his offices there. There was a little reading room up on that floor. If you walked down [there] you see all of the same things there today. Well, with the growth of the university in the 1950s and early 1960s, they begin to expand the religion department, expand the curriculum, and so on. They decide to experiment. They bring, and I remember Scudder talking to me about this, Michael Gannon [Distinguished Service Professor of history at UF] in as an instructor. Mike Gannon was a priest. He came over from St. Augustine to be in charge of what they then called Crane Hall. That building no longer stands, but in its place is the Catholic Student Center today, on the corner of University Avenue and 19th Street. Mike Gannon was hired as, I think, an adjunct professor, and he was very effective. So when they decided there was no protest about a Catholic, it was safe to bring a Jew onto the campus. So Scudder did whatever search was necessary, and Barry Mesch [specialist in medieval and modern Jewish thought, later Stone/Teplow Families’ Professor of Jewish Thought at Hebrew College] arrived here to be a member of the faculty.

In the meantime, there was a growing number of Jewish students on the campus. Hillel was here for some of the activities, but there was no academic program. So one morning, and I don’t know who was responsible for calling it, maybe it was Mesch or somebody else, we had a little informal gathering at Joe Silverman’s house. We had it there not because Joe was that dedicated [to] religion, but it was close to the campus. I remember we started talking about the need to organize the Center for Jewish Studies. It came out of that with the cooperation of the Department of Religion, and Barry Mesch became the director of the Center for Jewish Studies.

G: Do you remember the year?

P: [It was] about 1973, I think. He, as a result, added some courses in American-Jewish history and some Biblical history. In addition to Mesch, eventually there was two or three other people added with the growth of the curriculum and the growth of the student enrollment. Well, Barry was a very effective teacher and a real intellectual, but he was not great when it came to raising money and that sort of thing. After a while, and I say a while, maybe ten or twelve years, Barry decided that he needed to spend his time more effectively writing a book, which would give him a promotion rather than just trying to raise money for the Center for Jewish Studies. So he gave the notice to [Charles F.] Sidman, who has now arrived on campus, the dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, that he’s giving that up. Well, Sidman called me into the office, and he said, Proctor, what are we going to do? I said, well, we’re going to get a replacement. We’re not going to let this die. He said, you’re right, and you’re the replacement. I said, Chuck, I’m not the replacement for the Center for Jewish Studies. I said, it would
be laughable to appoint somebody like me. I am not anybody that's recognized. I'm not an American-Jewish historian or any other kind of biblical historian. I'm Florida history, Southern history. I said, you can't appoint somebody like me to a program, you've got to get a scholar. So he said, well, we don't have any money for a line-item, because Barry Mesch was still holding onto his line-item. He said, what I want you to do is to explore the availability of money, and you'll see how successful you are and come back and we'll talk.

Well, I conferred with Ralph. What I did was to compose a letter, which Ralph read and edited somewhat, and made up a list of people to send it to. [These were] individuals that I had gotten to know mainly through the TEP fraternity that we had stayed friendly with, but [also] individuals I knew in Jacksonville, anybody that I thought we could tap for money. I wrote this letter and said, I'm putting a $1,000 into the pot, these are the reasons, this is the program, this is what we're trying to do, and we don't want the program to end here at the University of Florida. Will you support it? Will you put $1,000 or will you put anything in it? Well, I didn't know what to expect, but I was not very optimistic because I've gotten letters like that myself and have not responded to them. But it was absolutely amazing. Within weeks, three, four, five weeks, the checks began to arrive. Before we turned around we had collected about $85,000, which was a phenomenal amount when we were asking for $1,000 or less from people. So I went back to Sidman and I said, it worked, we got the money. He was also absolutely amazed that it happened and that [it] happened so quickly. He said, all right, we are going to hire somebody. He said, I will find a line-item, and we will keep this money that you have raised for programming.

So that is exactly what they did. They set up a search committee, with me as the chairman of it. Warren Bargad [died 2003, specialist in Hebrew literature who was appointed Samuel Melton Professor of Jewish Studies and director of the Center for Jewish Studies at UF in 1985] was our person that came aboard. We went through the regular search process of advertising and getting letters. [We] went through [them], making it a smaller and smaller pot. Warren happened to be in Israel at the time. He had all of the credentials. He came here from [Spertus] College in Chicago. He was the assistant dean there, so he had the administrative experience. He had worked in Israeli poetry, so he had the academic support that was needed. He was young and energetic, so we were very pleased to get Warren. He did a very good job as teacher. He, once again, like Barry Mesch, was not a very good fund-raiser at all. So, a lot of that responsibility continued to be mine. That is where the Melton money came from. Sam Melton [businessman and philanthropist who has donated more than $15 million to Jewish education], out of Ohio, had been in the plumbing business, manufacturing plumbing parts. [He] had made a lot of money. He had a winter home in Boca Raton, a small condo right on the beach. He was married to Florence, it was a second marriage for both of them. She was very much interested in education. Sam had become interested in the University of Florida
in sort of very interesting way. There was a graduate student here working on a Ph.D. in psychology. Ted Landsman [a clinical psychologist who taught at UF, active in the Gainesville Jewish community] who is no longer living, he is deceased now, was his director. This guy, an Israeli, needed money. One day, he went to the library and he found eight or so foundations that might be willing to support him; one of these was the Melton Foundation. So he writes a letter to each one of them. Shortly afterwards, he gets a letter back from Sam Melton saying, I will support you. He wasn't asking for a giant amount, just $2,000-3,000 a year. Sam had never met him, but was willing to support him.

That was his [Sam's] first contact with the University of Florida. Upon that basis, we decided to exploit it a little bit. We went down to Boca Raton, he and Florence were there for the winter, with the idea of asking for $600,000 for a chair in the Center for Jewish Studies. He laughed at that. He thought it was ridiculous. He was not going to give that amount of money to the University of Florida. Although he had founded and subsided the Center for Jewish Studies at Ohio State. He had also put a lot of money into the Jewish Theological Seminary Education Program in New York. So, we knew that he was not anti-education or anti-centers for Jewish studies. While we were there, and he had said no, I went into the kitchen with Florence. We were getting some drinks for everybody, four or five of us that were there. She said [to me], don't let Sam scare you off. She said, you might not get $600,000, but be persistent, don't leave here without getting some money. So as the afternoon continued and our decision continued, he agreed to give us $100,000. That is what we came back to Gainesville with. The idea was that we would put the $100,000 into the history department and hire someone to teach American Jewish history or Jewish history. Later on we got another $100,000 from Sam Melton.

Sam is now deceased, but Florence is very much alive. She just celebrated her ninetieth birthday. She has been going around the country, organizing the Melton Educational Programs. They were very supportive to Israel, they helped found the high school there which carries Sam's name. So that is how the Melton money came [to UF]. Now as I understand it, the Melton money has been transferred to the Center for Jewish Studies. It is not lost at all. Sam was very persistent. When he gave the money, he didn't give a check to the Foundation, he said, I am going to give you bonds. He said, either you will agree to use my money to buy US Treasury Bonds or I will buy them myself. Well, at the time that he was buying them [it] was during the Carter Administration, and the interests were fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen percent. That is where those bonds are right now, earning a very substantial amount of money. I would say that Sam was smarter than almost everyone else that was involved. They came to Gainesville one time, [Marshall] Criser [UF alumnus who presided over the university from 1984-1989 before retiring in order to practice law] was president and we met together in his office. That was their only visit here. Bess and I became good friends of theirs. I did an oral history
interview with Sam upon Florence’s request. It is in our [Florida] Business Leaders project. We will hear from her for Rosh Hashanah.

G: What became of Jewish Studies under Bargad? Did it grow?

P: It grew in terms of curriculum and the number of people involved. It never had its own faculty, and that is true with all the centers. But it has continued to attract scholars from other departments – history, political science, anthropology, and so on. It has brought some Israelis over to teach, either they were already in the United States or came over to teach for a semester. The program has grown so [that] it attracts both Jewish and non-Jewish. Hebrew is now accepted as the language for the master's and the Ph.D. Jewish history is an acceptable major. It will not be long before they are offering the master's degree. It is growing, it grew under Warren [Bargad], and it continues to grow under Ken Wald [political science professor and director of the Center for Jewish Studies at UF]. He is a very effective administrator.

G: Tied to the Center for Jewish Studies is the [Isser and Rae] Price Judaic Library. How did that come about?

P: Well, the Prices [Jack and Samuel] received a letter one day from Bill Stone, who was the major fund-raiser at the Foundation. It was a letter that was being sent out all over, encouraging people to make gifts to the University of Florida through the Foundation – money, land, or whatever. The Prices had some property, some land here in Gainesville on 23rd Avenue, and they decided to turn that over to the University for tax purposes, and that is what happened. The evaluation was about $400,000, it was up there near where Ryan’s Steakhouse is today, Main Street and 23rd Avenue. Not exactly on the corner, but near there. So, of course, that was a very large gift. We had never gotten anything like that.

In the meantime, we had acquired a library. And that too, goes back to earlier years. I was always interested in the acquisition of Jewish books. Of course, they were not going to allocate very much money in the library for Jewish books. They didn’t have much money for any books to begin with. This is going back into the late 1940s to early 1950s. There was a rabbi in Jacksonville, and he and I became good friends, and through him, the Reform rabbi, he was able to get the Jewish Chautauqua Society [interfaith education program of the North American Foundation of Temple Brotherhoods] to make a contribution of books which we could select every year. So he would send the list down and I would work with the librarians and we would select the books. So that, in a very small way, began to build a collection. Then, of course, with the creation of the Center for Jewish Studies and the development of programs and courses, you needed research materials available. Even though you weren’t offering graduate courses, students were doing research papers and so on.
So, the library began to grow. The library itself allocated more money, the religion department allocated money, so things began to happen. Barry Mesch had an uncle living in Chicago, Rabbi [Leonard C.] Mishkin, who had been a major book collector over the years. [His collection] included a lot of magazines, journals, and that sort of thing. He had bound them together and had full sets of things. He and his wife were thinking seriously about moving to Israel, this now is in the 1970s. Of course, to do that he needed to dispose of a lot of things, including his library collection. We knew about it because of Barry Mesch, [who] was his nephew and he let us know about. We became very interested in it. The fact that it was so voluminous, and it had a lot of publications which had been lost in other libraries, particularly overseas libraries during the war, that it was sought after. There was about six or eight universities interested. We had the inside track because of Barry. The university asked Charles Berlin, from Harvard University, who was the Judaica scholar and librarian, to go out to Chicago to look at the collection and give us an evaluation. He came back just bubbling. The letter that he wrote said, don’t pass up the opportunity of acquiring this, it has material that we do not have at Harvard and which they do not have at Columbia, it is one-of-a-kind. So, it then meant that we could buy it.

So we needed $200,000, which was the price that Rabbi Mishkin set and which was a great bargain price. But the foundation didn’t have the $200,000. So Bill Stone and I went from one end of Florida to the other in an effort to collect that amount of money, which we thought was going to be relatively easy. There were a lot of rich Jews living in Florida by now and Jews are interested in education. Sam Proctor knows everyone and all he has to do is ask for the money; it is like a faucet being turned on. We got turned down, turned down, turned down in place after place after place. We even had some Jews who said, I don’t support Jewish causes. So we came back to Gainesville without being successful at all. Harold Hanson [physicist and UF dean from 1969-1971, at which point he became the vice-president for academic affairs] was then the vice-president of the University. Harold said, we are not going to lose this opportunity. He said, after all, when I was growing up in Minneapolis or wherever it was, I was a shopasko. He said, we are going to get that collection. So the university put up the $200,000. That is how it came about and we acquired the collection.

Well, that immediately put the University of Florida on the map, and they made space available. It was about this time that the Prices give the land, and it was [a] suggestion then that we name the library for the Price family. Their father Isser was already dead, but their mother, Rae, was still living, and it was my idea that if we named the library [after them] that they would be very generous. Which they weren’t particularly; very friendly to the university, the foundation, Center for Jewish Studies, but no real money has come out of it. Although they are working on the Price family right now. So that is what we did. We name the library the Price Library for Isser and Rae Price. We had a big dinner one night here, a lot
of people were invited and came. They recognized me and gave me as a gift a set of the Jewish encyclopedia, which was a magnificent gift. So we now have a top-notch librarian in charge over there.

G: How did Bob Singerman [author and Judaica Librarian at UF] come?

P: Just through the library. It was part of a search and he applied for the job and they offered it to him. They have never regretted it one minute. He has been a wonderful asset.

G: Nor have I. He was incredibly helpful with my dissertation.

P: The only unhappy thing is that when they were re-working Library East, they did not have room for the Judaica Library, and they put it down in Norman Hall. [That is where] the education library is located. So it is out of the way, it is not easy to get there. But, according to the plan, there is going to be additional library [space] constructed just in the back of Library West. When that is done, and I think that they do have the money for that, then the Judaica Library is suppose to move into that space.

G: Baccalaureate.

P: The baccalaureate, which was an activity of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, was concocted by Michael Gannon. He thought that it was a good idea, and it turned out to be a very successful idea. It was given on Friday afternoon, the day before commencement. The students who were getting degrees were invited to come together with their families. Right from the very first time, I was asked to do a little sketch on some aspect of University history. That is what I did. The first year, the auditorium holds about 900 seats, it was about two-thirds full. But from that point on it was standing room only. Every year I gave a little humorous business. It became very popular. I continued to do it for about ten or twelve years. When I finally decided to retire in 1996, I said that is enough.

G: When did the baccalaureates start?

P: I would say about 1988 or 1989. But you have to give Mike Gannon really credit for the whole thing.

G: Now, was it just arts and sciences students? Or university-wide?

P: Arts and sciences students only. It was very nice. It was five o'clock in the afternoon, which was pleasant and it lasted just one hour. The Civic Chorus of
Gainesville sang, and outside there were tables with some punch and cookies. It was really very nice.

G: I remember going. I thought, when I graduated in 1997, you gave a talk that year.

P: I gave the commencement address. I have given the commencement address twice, once in 1978 or 1979 and then 1996 or 1997.

G: That was not the year I graduated. Was that the commencement address about that professor at UF who had been fired back in the 1920s for use of a textbook or something? I remember working with you on a wonderful story. I wish I could remember his name.

P: Well, there was a man here who had been fired earlier, he was the chairman of the history department. This was back in 1911. He had written an article which challenged the business of slavery, about whether it was moral or not. It so upset some of the Confederate organizations, like the Daughters of the Confederacy, that they brought pressure against the university and they forced his resignation.

G: I remember that story. Was that commencement?

P: That was a baccalaureate. When I gave the commencement address, both times, I gave kind of an overview of the history of the university. On both occasions, the commencement was limited to 12-13 minutes. I tried to give light, humorous kind of things.

G: You mentioned earlier your role as curator at the museum.

P: To justify using space at the museum, J. C. Dickinson named me curator of Florida history.

G: But when you were working on your 1853-1906 history, did you have a responsibility in the library?

P: Well, I had an office in the library, because of the quarterly.

G: But no title?

P: I had no title. But I was always very close to the P. K. Yonge Library from the very beginning. I was a good friend of Julian Yonge, and a very good friend of Rembert Patrick. When the P. K. Yonge Library was in Library East, on the first floor on the south end, under the stairwell, I had an office there, next to Rembert
Patrick. [That way] I could do the work that I needed to do on the history of the university and my other activities. This is before I became involved with the quarterly. I was very much part of it. Although they never had a formal advisory committee, I really served in that capacity, as far as the P. K. Yonge Library was concerned. Ms. Alexander depended upon me a lot, considered me as one of the strongest friends of the P. K. Yonge Library, as the whole library did.

G: The reason I ask is because, at some point, you are going to be designated the university historian. You will get involved in various things like the building identification, the preservation of the historic campus. How do you get the designation?

P: When I started working on the history of the university, upon the invitation of J. Hillis Miller – he was the one who named me historian in 1951, long before I become involved in these other activities. So I became the university historian at the time that I began working on the history of the university. That is when I began collecting material – manuscripts, catalogues, and everything that I could lay my hands on, and storing them in my office, which is where we were. I then became the archivist. I needed that kind of title as I went around to offices, I couldn’t say, I’m Sam Proctor, collecting documents. I’m Sam Proctor, the University Archivist, collecting documents.

G: That was the title that I couldn’t remember. So you carried archivist title and historian title.

P: I am no longer archivist, but I am still the university historian.

G: Was there much activity on your part as university historian, many responsibilities between the 1950s and the beginning of building identification? Or is that going on all that time?

P: It is always going on. I never had any arduous responsibilities. Nothing that overwhelmed me. But I am always there like a sitting duck. Increasingly, over the years, I become the source of information. Of course, I realize that it is easier to call me on the telephone then to do your own research. So, that has happened. It goes up and down. As you get close to homecoming, I am overwhelmed with telephone calls from kids writing articles for the Alligator. Year after year, when did homecoming start, when did Gator Growl start, when did this start, when did that start? They don’t have time to look at the Alligator from last year. It is easier to call me. So that is what my historian responsibility has always been. I give talks, obviously on the university historian. I know a lot of university history. I have collected a lot in my mind. I have a pretty good number of documents that I can refer to. It has never been a major activity. I have never
been compensated for it, it is just part of the things that I do.

G: *Gator History*, how did that come about?

P: Well, *Gator History* came about because of my interest in University of Florida history. So together with my colleague from Key West, who collected the photographs and who was responsible for publishing the volume, I wrote the script for it. We published it. There were three or four printings of the thing. It was very successful. We had a big book signing when it first came out. That night we may have autographed 100 books. Everything was going along fine, when the company doing the publishing down in Ft. Lauderdale disappeared. They went into bankruptcy and closed up. We were left adrift. What we needed, because they had sold out all the existing copies, was to get a reprint. With the organization no longer in existence, it was difficult. For a long time, we had no way of contacting them. They had never reappeared. They have never resurfaced. There was the question of who had the copyright, because they had it, they published the book, and yet they were not there. The University of Florida Foundation finally decided that the people down there no longer own the copyright. I don’t know whether that was legal or not, but that was their decision. So the copyright came to the university. They wanted me to write a new chapter, because when I had finished it was through the Marshall Criser period, about 1986. So it needed a new chapter. I had thought that I would do that. With the passage of time, postponing it, I will start on it next week, next month, next year, nothing has happened. The likelihood being very realistic is that nothing is going to happen.

G: But will they republish the book? I believe it is still out of print.

P: Oh, yeah, it is still out of print and you can't find copies of it. There is going to be an effort made by two people, one from the Library and one from the English department, to publish a photographic history of the university in time for the sesquicentennial next year. You know, sometimes I regret how I would still be famous if I published it, but I am ready not to do it.

G: You're involved in building identification. What does that mean?

P: If you look around, particularly in the buildings in front of the plaza, there are pedestals. There are pedestals so that people in a wheelchair can come up and read what is on the plaques there. They identify information about who the individual is that gave its name to the building and a little bit about the building itself. It all came about ten years ago – one Sunday morning, an alumnus from Orlando was walking around the campus near Tigert Hall. There were a few students walking around, too. They came over to him and said, “Sir, who was Dr.
Tigert, this building is named Tigert Hall.” He was absolutely appalled that University of Florida students would not know who Tigert was. I don’t know why he would expect that they would, but he was unhappy about it. On Monday morning, he went to the Foundation and complained. He said, we are going to do something about this. He gave them $100,000 to fund building identification. That is all he said he wanted. So they came to me, with the ideal that I would write these plaques that would go on that. We had enough money to get about two or three a year up there. So that is what I have been doing. We have just put in one in Leigh Hall next door, Anderson Hall went up last month, and the one out here will go up next week. I am working now on five of the dormitories. [End side C6]

G: I abruptly ended our discussion of the building identification project, because I had to change tapes. How many buildings have been identified, since you started this project?

P: Grinter, Peabody, Criser, Anderson, Flint, Floyd, Leigh, the Auditorium, Dauer, Reitz Union – ten buildings. The pedestals are there. I gather information, which is not easy, because although we have good archives now, by comparison with earlier years, a lot of stuff was not saved. The archivist that is in the library now is top-notch. But it is still hard to find out exactly how much a building costs, when it was constructed in the 1920s, I don’t know that is really necessary to know, but it is an interesting item to know. So, right now I am looking for information on Mr. Buckman, for whom the Buckman Act was passed. All I know right now was that he was a successful lawyer, lived in Jacksonville, came to the legislature and in his capacity there he introduces the Buckman Act. Before it is over I will have enough to do the 130 words that I need for Buckman Hall. I am going to get that done in the next couple of months. In addition, they started a new publication on campus two years ago called Florida. You may get it, I don’t know. In it I do a column each time called Proctor Prowlesses about buildings or activities on campus.

G: I guess tied to the building identification is the preservation efforts. How did you get involved in preserving some of these buildings?

P: I became interested in the preservation program way back in the 1960s. I was one of the pioneers of that, as far as this campus was concerned. I had been involved in the state activities with Senator Bob Williams from West Florida. Williams had been a very, very conservative senator and lost the election when [William] Haydon Burns was the governor [1965-1967]. Burns offered him several jobs. He was going to become head of whatever agency handled allocations to poor people. I don’t think that agency operates the same way today. There was such an arousal on the part of people throughout Florida that you would have this conservative monster in charge of a liberal organization like
that, that he withdrew. He accepted the job of being the director of the Center for Florida History and Archives. Everybody said, what in the hell does he know about that? He turned out to be an excellent administrator. He learned a lot and he surrounded himself with people like me who knew more than he did, and he was willing to listen to you. Under his leadership, and with encouragement from the Feds, from the Department of Interior, he created the review committee for the National Register. You know, that is a procedure that you go through, you nominate properties, houses, stores, various things, and if they meet the criteria, the nomination goes to Washington and it is listed in the Department of Interior's National Register. Well, Bob Williams created that in Florida.

Because of the friendship with me, I became a member of the original committee and [Frank] Blair Reeves [professor of architecture], who has always been interested in preservation and is on the architecture faculty, was also a member of the committee. During its early years, it met here in Gainesville in the museum, later on we met in Tallahassee. I remained on the review committee for many, twenty-five years. The last part of it, I was the chairman of it for several years. As a result of that association, I became very much supportive of preservation.

When this campus was built, the four focal points around the Plaza of the Americas were Flint, which was the Science Building – built for science courses, and that is what its name was for a very long time; across the way, also facing University Avenue, is the building we now call Anderson Hall – when it was built, in 1913, it was a building set up for the social sciences, math, and the administration was in that building, including the president’s office; then Peabody Hall, and then the agriculture building, Floyd Hall. All of those buildings, of course, dated back to the very beginnings of the University of Florida, they were indeed old. They desperately need rehab-ing, they were not air conditioned, and had all kinds of problems. The university wanted to demolish those buildings, tear them down, and build new buildings. There was this wonderful attraction for new buildings, they could be air conditioned, they could be modern, they could be all of those things. Well, I decided, I don't mean overnight, I decided, but this was one of the things that I was going to make an effort to try to save. Of course, with Blair Reeves’ support, there was no problem there. He and I could work together very easily, we were friends then and continue to be friends today.

So, the movement starts. There was strong support for demolition. Bob Bryan [professor of English, vice-president for academic affairs] in the Provost office favored demolition. Sidman favored demolition. So you had a lot of strong voices that wanted to get rid of the old and come up with the new. Well, fortunately, the state went into a recession in the early 1970s, and there was the reluctance on the part of the legislature to appropriate money to tear something down. So they didn’t do it. Those buildings were saved as a result of the economic situation. When we began to come out of the recession, by that time the preservation movement had become stronger and it had more advocates and
supporters, they were reluctant to do anything about it. They had made all kinds of efforts. For instance, they had brought an engineering firm down from Atlanta [Georgia] to inspect the Agricultural Building, as it was originally called, now Floyd Hall, with the argument that the walls had been weakened as a result of planes during World War II coming out of Jacksonville, training planes, breaking the sound barrier, and, of course, weakening the walls. Well, as it had turned out, they had not broken the sound barrier until 1947, not during World War II. Although they had expected a very negative [response] from the engineering firm, it came up with a very positive statement. There is nothing wrong with this building, the walls are fine. It does need some painting and some rehabilitation, but it is a very fine building, don’t tear it down. So we saved those buildings.

The third person who joined the fight was [E. L.] Roy Hunt from the College of Law. Roy was interested in preservation, in fact he taught a course in the college of law on preservation law. He came to us with a lot of knowledge and understanding. My student then was Steve Kerber. Steve is now the archivist at the [Southern Illinois University] in Edwardsville. Steve was on our side of the thing, and he went out and did research on eleven of the historic buildings on campus. We quietly, Blair and I, because we were on the review committee, put those buildings on the Register. They were not nominated by the University, we just put them on the Register. Then, with the help of Roy Hunt, we created the Historic District on the campus, which had never been done before. We put it through the review committee in Tallahassee and sent it on up to Washington. When first the administration and then the regents learned about it, they were very upset that we had taken this action on our part, you know, what do these three pipsqueaks down in Gainesville [think they are] doing. It was already done then. They passed a resolution, though, saying that no other university could do it without regents’ approval. I don’t think any other university has tried to set up a historic district. That is the way that it all came about. Of course, nobody would dare tear down buildings today.

I think that it is interesting to note that when [Stephen C.] O’Connell [UF alumnus who presided over the university, 1967-1973] arrives on campus, the auditorium is in desperate shape. The auditorium had been built in the 1920s, originally it was supposed to be part of an auditorium/administration building. It was supposed to be in the form of a “T,” the top of the “T” would have been administration. Well, there wasn’t enough money in the 1920s to do that, in fact, the building had been scaled down from its original plan. It had grown shabby, there was no air conditioning, it was not comfortable, the seats were bad, the sound was not good, all of those terrible things were happening. It was on the list to be demolished, also. When O’Connell arrives as president in 1967, in some way he thought that he could recreate the kind of campus that he had lived in when he was a student here in the 1930s, that he could get freshmen to wear rat caps, that they would do all the things that they could do or not do as freshmen, and among other things, he wanted to hold on to the buildings. He
was appalled by the idea that they would tear down the auditorium. He called Blair Reeves and me into his office one day and he told us that he was going to try to save the auditorium. He needed some ammunition. He asked Blair to write an essay about the architectural significance about the building, why it was so special and all of the wonderful things. He asked me to write a paper on the uses of the auditorium, what famous people had played there, what orchestras had come, and in what way had it been used for ceremonies, the invocation of Phi Beta Kappa, funerals, and all kinds of things like that. That gave him the kind of ammunition he felt that he needed when he went out to the alumni. Well, he was successful, as you know. When he left here, they had not finished the reclamation of the auditorium, that was finished under [Robert Q.] Marston [UF president, 1974-1984]. The auditorium today, of course, they have built an addition to the front of it, with a music room, which Mrs. Reitz [wife of UF president J. Wayne Reitz, 1955-1967] was responsible for getting furnished. The inside of it is very beautiful today. When you tell people today that [the] building was threatened with demolition, nobody really can believe it. They say, this building, they were going to tear down?

G: While we are talking about buildings and preservation, how’s the campus changed? I know it’s a much, much larger campus than it was when you arrived. Talk to me a little bit about when buildings are built. Why the O’Connell Center, for example, [is built]. When does the Clock Tower [get built]? How far does that go back?

P: Of course, when the campus first opens, there were 357 acres and it was nothing but pine forest here. They had to chop down the trees in order to get the first buildings erected. There wasn’t a giant amount of money at all, but buildings didn’t cost a lot in those early years. Buckman and Thomas Hall together came to about $75,000-80,000. You can’t put a bathroom in today for that amount of money. Anyway, the original buildings followed a plan that had been drawn up by the first architect that had been hired by the board of control. [It] had a quadrant which we now call the Plaza of the Americas. The buildings were to be located around that quadrant and that’s exactly where they are today. They have followed the original plan. They had an interesting driveway that started at 13th Street and ended up just beyond where Thomas Hall is today, out towards University Avenue, in the form of a half moon, and one that matched it on the south end of the campus just beyond the auditorium. Over the years, both of them became footpaths rather than driveways, and eventually both of them disappeared. The last of the northern one disappeared when they built Library West, because it was right in the way. In fact, Dean Harrison, W[illard] Harrison [professor of chemistry and dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences]], is now designing a plaque, which I’ve helped him with, which is going to tell about that first driveway and show where it was located. There is a sketch of it.
Anyway, that is where the original buildings were and that’s where they were until the end of World War II. There was some construction on campus in the intervening years. Although Florida was poor and money was hard to get, it was the leading university and so whatever money went to building construction came to the University of Florida. Florida A&M and the university in Tallahassee, Florida State College for Women, were really at the short end of the stick. So over the years you add the buildings around the plaza, plus the auditorium and the experiment station. Beyond that, on the south end of the campus, you had farm lands which the College of Agriculture and IFAS [Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences] operated. There was a small pathway that ran from the back of the auditorium south to where the museum is located on Museum Road. In the 1920s, the police station was built for WRUF, that was the first radio station on campus. Dean Joseph Weil from the College of Engineering was responsible for its design and the ordering of its equipment and so on.

Remember that we start with 103 students in 1906, the first year of the operation on this campus, and on the eve of World War II there are about 3,200 students. The growth was steady, particularly after 1920, but there was no need for a giant number of buildings. Then, suddenly, [there] is this explosion of students under the G.I. Bill after World War II, and I’ve already told you about all of the efforts to bring temporary buildings in to try to handle the situation, which really was critical. Then there begins construction. Money had accumulated in the state during the war years, when they were not willing to spend money on infrastructure [or] anything that didn’t have to do with the war effort. So the money was in Tallahassee and the legislature was in Tallahassee. Many of the members of the legislature were graduates of the University of Florida and they had brothers, and now sisters and children, who were going to the University of Florida, so they were very generous in their allocation of funds for the development of this campus. A new gymnasium was built, an addition onto the infirmary, an addition onto the student union building, new dormitories came into existence, all of those things were happening. As the university grew in size, so did the campus grow. Now, the campus ended, originally, about where the O'Connell Center is now. That property, which is now the parking lot, was the parade ground for ROTC. Remember, as a land grant university the first two years were compulsory military, and they had both infantry and artillery. The artillery called for horses, and there was horse stable there about where the O'Connell Center itself is located today. That’s the way it was, as I say, until the end of World War II. Then, with the growth of the university and the expansion of buildings, they began to look beyond that point. The expansion of the stadium, for instance, begins.

G: Is the stadium always located in the same place?
The stadium was always located there. The original playing field was at the north end, right at the corner, of where the O'Connell Center property, across the street, and University Avenue was located. It was called Fleming Field, and that was the original area. Just to the east of it, as you get toward Thomas Hall, and Thomas Hall starts out originally as an administration classroom building, but by 1915 it is a place for the students to live. It’s a dormitory then. But outside of it was what they called Murphree Field, named obviously for Dr. Murphree, until the stadium was built in 1930. The original stadium held 2,200 seats, of course, it’s grown considerably there. But that’s where the campus ended. Then, with the growth of the campus, they began to expand west where the Thomas Center is. What they did was to develop athletic grounds, a baseball park, a track, those kind of activities began to develop there. They also then developed even farther where woods had been at one time, and where in the 1930s students went out with guns and shot rabbits and squirrels and so on and nobody was concerned about it the least bit, they chopped down those trees and they designated that area for Flavet and then for Fraternity Row.

The Fraternity situation came about because of the university. The university was able, in some way, I’ve forgotten what the details of it were, to acquire a $1,000,000 loan in the early 1950s from the state. They then divided that up into ten portions and made money available to sororities, a $100,000 each loan, to build a sorority house. The A Phi Sorority, under the leadership of Mrs. Weil and Dean Weil, were in that first category of $100,000. Then the university was able to get a second $1,000,000 loan to be paid back. They were able to buy bonds, and as rent came in they paid the money back. They then made the allocations available to fraternities. That’s when the TEP fraternity becomes involved. But the point that I want to make is that [that] begins the growth of the university in that direction. Then they build the law school where it is now. That was to be the end of the campus. Nobody thought they would go beyond that. Now, of course Hull Road takes you all the way out to 34th Street, and with the conference center across street, we’re beyond 34th Street now. So the growth was steady after the 1940s [and] it continues to be steady today. I, for instance, used to marvel at all the empty land that we had, and now I find that there’s not very much empty land. Everything is being filled up with a building.

I was just amazed. You know, I came in 1990. It’s twelve years later [and] there’s that enormous physics building on a spot where there was nothing. There’s dormitories way out on Radio Road. They built that chapel down there.

Baughman Center.

It is absolutely incredible. Where’s this money coming from?

A lot of it has been private money. The Baughman Center is an example.
George [Baughman] gave $1,000,000 for the construction of that. Of course, the state has matched a lot of those gifts. So about half the money has come in from the state and half of it from private donations. There’s no money that’s been made available for dormitories, but that is on the basis of bonds. They borrow the money, they pledge the bonds, and as the rent money comes in they pay it off.

G: How has the history department changed in the last fifty years or so? You’ve been a member. You were a full-time member until 1996, and you’re still [part of it].

P: It’s grown. I think that’s the easiest way to describe it. It’s grown from a department that had three members in the 1930s, until now, when it’s got forty or fifty people in there. It’s grown because the student body has grown. There’s been a demand for new kinds of courses. Nobody in their wildest dreams ever thought the university history department would teach a course in Italian history, German history, Russian history, or anything at all like that. I mean, you taught American history, English history, and some Latin American history, and not much Latin American history. That was the end of it, and that was true of universities everywhere. It certainly is true in the South of universities. Then, of course, with new students coming in and new interests being generated, the situation has changed considerably. So the history department that we have here today, from the administration point of view, the curriculum point of view, [and] the relationship of students to the department have changed. I mean, here we’ve got a whole building dedicated to history. In the old days, you had two classrooms over in Peabody Hall.

So yes, there’s been a dramatic change. I don’t think there’s been a change in the philosophy of the department. It’s not a restrictive department at all. Faculty come and go. I think a lot of young faculty come here from elsewhere, from Ivy League schools and so on, thinking this is the end of the world and that they’ll stay here a year or two or three years and then get a better offer. That does happen to a lot of people. When they get here they realize this isn’t the end of the world and that it’s a very beautiful community, a very nice community to live in, and a very good university that we have here. There’s a rapid changeover. I retired in 1996, [and] at that time I knew everybody by his or her first name and I was friendly with everybody, but that’s no longer true today. But in the old days, there was a lot of camaraderie among the faculty. You knew the faculty because you not only were in offices next door to each other, but you went out to dinner with each other and occasionally, well, more often than occasionally, there were parties [and] get-togethers, not big, expensive parties, in which the faculty all came together. You not only knew the faculty members, [but] you also knew their wives and members of their family.
G: I know the department grows. I guess it’s [in] the 1970s [that] there’s a Chapel Hill group here.

P: There always was a Chapel Hill group. Not only in the 1970s, [but] going back to the 1930s there was a Chapel Hill group. Rembert Patrick was from Chapel Hill, Ashby Hammond was from Chapel Hill, and they came here because it was a job opportunity available to them.

G: As I understand it, the story that I’ve been told, is that it’s Doherty who’s the first of that post-World War II generation that brings [David] Colburn, Burns, and [Julian] Pleasants.

P: Oh, Doherty was here long before they arrived on campus.

G: But that he’s the one who hires those professors.

P: No, no, no, no. Well, in a way, yes, that’s true, because in the early 1960s, about 1961-1962, Jack becomes the chairman of the American Institution Scores. So yes, he hires them. When Colburn and Burns and the others come here, and I was a member of that faculty, they come into the University College. [That] had originally been called the General College and had had its name changed after World War II to University College. So yes, that’s where they came first, and then [they] become part of the history department. The University College was never really fully accepted. The members of the faculty there, while they were all good and upcoming and all, didn’t get the same pay as members of the history department. The people in the history department kind of looked down on the people in the University College. Then, when Sidman arrives, there’s the merger of the two and University College goes out of existence. Individuals then become members of the regular faculty, with a few exceptions. Jack Doherty, for instance, would never come into the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. They still had some freshman who were taking the basic courses, so that’s what Jack did until his sudden death.

G: The practice of history has changed a lot since you wrote your master’s thesis and some of your early work. There are post-structuralists, there’s deconstruction, there’s post-modernism.

P: Most of which I don’t understand. I’m a traditionalist.

G: Tell me about that.

P: He was born in 1957 and he died in 1997, and I try to fill up the in-between. I’m a narrative historian, and I know that’s not the most popular type of historian to be
today.

G: Do you have much to say to the younger historians?

P: I don’t communicate. I’m retired. In fact, I bought a t-shirt a couple of years ago when the cruise ship stopped in St. Thomas [United States Virgin Islands] which says, “I am retired, don’t ask me to do a damn thing.” Occasionally I wear that.

G: As part of the history department’s growth, and the growth of some other areas on campus, there are the Samuel Proctor scholarships.

P: That came about largely as a result of the impetus of David Colburn. People began asking at the time of my retirement what can we do. We didn’t think that we could get enough money for a professorship, although we probably could have, or a chair, so it was David who came up with the idea of the graduate scholarships. We were very successful, really much beyond what we thought, in terms of the money that would come in. Money came in largely from my family, but Luther Coggin [gave money]. Luther, I think, gave $25,000. We had some very generous contributors. Each of my brothers gave a good [amount of] money, my sons gave money. The sum today is over $400,000. That doesn’t work exactly the way I would like it to work. They were supposed to give two fellowships a year. They only gave one, although they’ve got the money to [give two]. It’s the best scholarship that they offer in the history department. It’s about $18,000. The recipients were supposed to be named Samuel Proctor Scholars. I don’t think they even know who in the hell Samuel Proctor is. I’ve never met any of them. The whole thing has kind of gotten lost. But it does the job that it was created to do, it provides money for research. In this case, it leaves for one student, not two. Anyway, we had a big banquet in the Reitz Union. All of the people who had contributed money were invited. All of the administrators [were there]. The Reitzs were there, the Marstons were there, in fact, it was probably the last public appearance by Mrs. Martson. It was a very good end. [John V.] Lombardi [UF president, 1990-1999] had recently come to the campus, and Lombardi gave this talk, which you may or may not have heard about. Lombardi got up and he just said that he had recently met me but was very impressed. You know, all the wonderful things that Lombardi would say when he get cranked up. He said, every university has an icon. When I was at Indiana [University] there was an icon, which was somebody who knew the history of the university, you could go to them and get the information you were looking for, had been there forever. He said, we had the same thing at John Hopkins when I was there, so I fully expected that there would be an icon at the University of Florida when I arrived. Sure enough, he said, when I asked, they said Sam Proctor is the guy you’re looking for. He said, when was he here, when did he come, tell me a little bit about him. So they said, well he came here in the 1930s, 1937. He
said, Goddamn! That was before I was born. Anyway, he said, I expected to see an old fart, but I found a very delightful creature and he was very nice from that point on. But when he said old fart, of course, Mrs. Reitz supposedly turned to Doug Reitz and said, what did he say? Of course, he became famous for the four-letter words that he used on public occasion, so that was just something very mild, as it turned out. But it was sort of startling for the group, particularly for the kind of dinner party that we were having at the Reitz Union.

G: I remember visiting him to talk about your festschrift, which is the next thing that I wanted to ask you about, and I met with him in his office. His language was so sailor-like it almost made me blush. I think he used the “f-word” about four or five times.

P: Oh yeah.

G: It was jarring, but he was, I thought, a really engaging and interesting person. Let’s talk about the festschrift.

P: Well the festschrift came about, once again, I was not responsible for initiating that. I think Canner Brown [visiting history professor at Florida A&M] and you were the ones who were really responsible for coming up with the idea and putting everything together. I think you were a little bit discouraged to begin with by the negative response that you had on campus here. Colburn wasn’t particularly enthusiastic, and I don’t know what reaction you had from Lombardi. Lombardi would not say no if you already had the money, but he wasn’t going to offer anything. I don’t know, you see, because I was not part of that, but I gathered that that was not something that anybody stood up and said, that’s exactly what we need and we want to do it, and so on.

G: Right, because there was the issue that we faced, while I was involved in the project, I wasn’t a driving force. The University Press of Florida was not pleased with the direction the festschrift was taking, under essentially the primary role that Canner and Bill played. So we did, it turned out that rather than publishing with the University Press, which wanted the book to go in a more academic direction with a more scholarly introduction and that sort of thing, we ended up raising money to publish the book, essentially, privately.

P: Where did you get the money?

G: Well, we raised it amongst your family.

P: Okay. My sons, I know, are very generous.
Right. We raised money amongst your family and friends, and the money that was raised went to Bill Rogers of Century Press.

Which did a splendid job.

Then Rose Printing was the printer.

I mean, the book that was turned out was one that you could be very proud of, and would have been something, I think, to enhance the University of Florida Press. Anyway, the book was published, and as you know, it was distributed. I think it went into a second printing, but I’m not sure about that. But right now, the leftover copies have been acquired by the foundation, and as of tomorrow they’re moving out of my office to the foundation, where they’re going to be mailed out by the end of the week, a copy to each public high school library in Florida. The money that was earned, several thousand dollars, will go, at my suggestion, into the scholarship program that was set up in the Center for Jewish Studies. My two sons, Mark and Allen, created a scholarship program last year, a very generous scholarship program, named the Samuel and Bessie R. Proctor Scholarships. It’s growing to almost a $250,000. This money from the festschrift will go into that pot.

One of the reasons that we worked on the festschrift, besides to honor you, was to do more to preserve Florida history. Tell me about the role of Florida history on campus from the time you got here to the state of Florida history on this campus today.

Well, when I first came in the 1930s and the 1940s, Florida history was not considered something that you taught on the college level. It was something that local people were interested in if their families had lived in the community three or four generations. There were so many new people moving into Florida, certainly in the post-World War II period, that they didn’t have time to worry about the past, and very little effort was being made by any of these state agencies or local agencies to preserve the past. Buildings were being torn down, with the construction of new buildings and new roads and subdivisions and all of these things. New is what we want, different is what we want. We’re looking to the future and not to the past. Florida history was not considered anything. It wasn’t disrespectful, it was just one of the things that was ignored. Patrick came here not as a Florida historian, but as a Civil War scholar. He had done that book as a dissertation on the confederate cabinet [that] he later turned into a book, which Chapel Hill published and won him a lot of support. When he comes to Gainesville to teach at the University of Florida, he teaches Civil War history [and] U.S. history, not Florida history. But when he became interested in the writing and publication of Florida Under Five Flags, and you remember I told you
that story, of how that brought about the creation of the University of Florida Press, he begins to turn his attention to Florida history. In 1944, Pat’s been here about seven, eight, or nine years, and he did not serve in World War II.

In the meantime, in 1944, Julian Yonge arrives with the P. K. Yonge collection from Pensacola. The connection there had once again been Patrick’s. When Patrick was working on the Florida Under Five Flags, there were very few resources that he could find to use, even in a book as small as that. He went out to Pensacola and he met Mr. Yonge and the members of Mr. Yonge’s family. Mr. Yonge was not married, but his sister Marjorie was there, and they took to Pat and Pat took to them. They became good friends. The collection, which had started out many years earlier by Julian Yonge and his father P. K. Yonge, was just something very small and they funded it themselves. It had grown so that they were no longer able to house it in the house, and they had a little one-room building in the back on their property, which was their little library. Now it had become too small. Mr. Yonge was advancing in his age; P. K. Yonge, his father, was dead, and he had no children. So he began to be concerned about the disposal of it. They had had some offers, I understand, to sell the collection or to move it outside of Florida, but they were determined to keep it in Florida. Through Pat’s persuasion they decided to turn it over to the University of Florida. Mr. Yonge came with the collection as the curator. He was an elderly man and somewhat frail, but his whole life was dedicated to that library. He’d _____ a cot. He was very hard of hearing, so at night – he kept the library open at night if anybody wanted to use it – very often, when the bell rang, he could not hear it. He had the cot there to spend the night on the nights that he was locked in the library. Everybody just laughed about that and accepted [that] that’s Mr. Yonge, or Mr. Julian, as everybody called him.

So the library came in 1944, and Pat became, not the curator of it, but very much involved and had an office right next door to Mr. Yonge. That increased his enthusiasm for Florida history. He then becomes the chairman of the history department in 1949, whereupon he has the opportunity to introduce a course in Florida history which he would teach, which he did and did a very good job. He was a very effective teacher. There was never any negativism about teaching a course in Florida history, but it was not overwhelmingly large. I mean, he had a few dozen students who came Monday, Wednesday, and Fridays. It was an undergraduate course, they were not offering Florida history on the graduate level yet, and that’s the way it started.

G: How did the faculty grow? You begin teaching Florida history.

P: I begin teaching Florida history and Jack Doherty begins teaching Florida history. Even more so am I involved when Pat leaves to go to the University of Georgia as graduate research professor there, and Jack leaves teaching and goes into chairmanship of the American Institution’s course. That leaves me, then, as the
sole proprietor of Florida history.

G: But Gannon will come.

P: Well, Gannon will come, but Gannon didn’t teach Florida history to begin with. Gannon’s an adjunct. Gannon’s here as a priest. His main responsibility was in the religion department.

G: Colburn writes a book.

P: Colburn never taught Florida history. He writes the book because of his interest in civil rights, not because of his interest in Florida.

G: Pozzetta, who’s an immigrationist.

P: Well, once again, George did not teach Florida history.

G: But he writes about it.

P: He writes it as with the passage of time. More and more people begin to use Florida for research purposes, to publish articles in the *Florida Historical Quarterly*, [and] occasionally in the *Journal of Southern History*. So with the passage of time, and this is true of all the states, particularly in the South, there’s an increased interest in its history, a desire to learn more about it, and preserve what we had. This is why the preservation movement is successful, because people now are responding to it and supporting it.

G: You retire in 1996. Michael Gannon continues to teach, but his health is declining.

P: He is retiring. This is his last semester right now. I really retired in 1993, because when I was in the military I was able, when I came here under the retirement program, to buy my three years back in the military. So I was covered right from the very beginnings of my retirement to 1943, even though I did not start teaching until June 1946. So in 1993, I had fifty years in the retirement program but only forty-seven years in the classroom. I wanted the fifty years in the classroom so I stayed on for three more years. I could have stayed on longer if I wanted, but I wanted to stay on until June 1996, and that’s exactly what I did. My formal retirement came in 1996, and I was entertained by the Lombardis. They had that big party at their house. They had asked us to send in a list of 100 people that we wanted, which I thought was very generous, because they initiated that completely on their own.
G: I remember being at that party. But Gannon’s going to retire, what’s the future of Florida history on this campus?

P: The future of Florida history is very dim on this campus. We have had a growing lack of enthusiasm for Florida history for the last ten years. Even before I retired, it was obvious that the people here who are on the faculty are much more interested in more exotic history. The history of the Balkans, for instance, or the history of North Africa. African Studies has been very, very popular. I don’t know that we have that many students taking African courses, but we have an awful lot of classes in African history. Latin American history has become a lot of courses. When you look at that list of individuals who are teaching here you don’t find any of them that are interested in Florida history at all, and very few, other than Bert Wyatt-Brown [UF professor of US social, political, and Southern history], who’s interested in Southern history. The future is very dim for both of them. The responsibility has now been turned over to the University of South Florida, because it’s filled the vacuum that needs filling. They do not have any plans that I know of to hire somebody to teach Florida history, although we have all these wonderful collections in the library, students who would take courses in Florida history, and students who would do research in Florida history. But they’re discouraged from doing so. Last year, supposedly, there was a line-item being made available by the dean for Florida history, and with the cutback in funds that was the first one slashed off the list. Gannon and I lament and tears flow as a result, but I’m not very optimistic about it. As I say, I’m retired, don’t ask me to do a damn thing.

G: Why teach Florida history?

P: Well, because it’s important. First of all, it’s a fascinating story, Florida history. It’s a long, rich, wonderful story. It’s a story of a lot of people who came here with nothing and who built a wonderful state. So for no other reason it should be taught and people should know, children should know, where they came from and where their families came from. This is an opportunity to learn about it from people who are academically inclined, who are knowledgeable, and who will be able to discuss these things with them.

G: People have argued that one of the problems with Florida, or Florida culture, is that so many Florida residents have come from someplace else.

P: That’s true.

G: This isn’t necessarily something you and I want to talk about on tape because we’re both preaching to each other’s choirs, but as the director of the Florida Study Center at the University of South Florida, the sense of history as a way of building community. How do you get a whole bunch of folks who’ve come from
someplace else to buy into their new adopted home?

P: I don’t buy the fact that people who are just arrived are not interested. I have found, from my own experience, talking to these people, working with these people, that some of those are the most curious of all about the past. Where did this happen? I’m living in Gainesville, tell me something about Gainesville.

G: Let’s go on a little further and then we’ll break for lunch. I have Hillel here on the list. We’ve talked about Hillel a little bit but not in recent time, not sort of post-1970. What involvement do you have in Hillel? How does Hillel grow? What role, what purpose, is Hillel serving?

P: Well, I think I told you about Hillel’s coming, people like Philip Selber [and] others who bring it here in the 1930s, and the little role that it played in World War II with Rabbi Youngerman coming in as the chaplain. Then the real development of Hillel in 1948, with the purchase of that property where Hillel is located today and the structure of that building. I was very much involved with Hillel at that time, both on the local level, we had a B’nai B’rith lodge [and] I was the president of it, and also on the state level. I went to B’nai B’rith meetings, and at that time B’nai B’rith was the chief financial supporter of Hillel. That’s no longer true today, but it was very true then. So what went on in Hillel on this campus, and this is where most of the Hillels were located, although they were trying to get one started at the University of Miami in the 1940s, was of concern and of interest to the people in B’nai B’rith. There was a lot of support for a building. This recreation building that had been brought over from Camp Landing obviously is not the kind of image that they wanted to set for Hillel at the University of Florida. So with the support of the state, B’nai B’rith funds were collected, national B’nai B’rith put money in, and we began the construction of this building. I was on the building committee and my name is on the plaque outside of the building today. We had used a local member of the College of Architecture, Sydney Carter, who was Jewish, who left about two-thirds of the way through because he got a job as the city planner for Augusta, Georgia. But it was turned over and they had followed Sydney’s plans. We had a lot of discussion about what went into the building. The building was designed for about 800 students. That’s about what the maximum was on campus at the time. It wasn’t a very religious-oriented student body at the time. They liked Hillel because they got served meals over there occasionally.

G: Back to Hillel. They built the building for 800 students.

P: We built the building for 800 students. [It was] not a very religious-oriented student body, but it was used. It was also used by the community as we had used the earlier building, the temporary building. There were two rooms upstairs
which became our first Sunday school and a lot of activities. I remember, for instance, Allen’s bris was in the Hillel house. We didn’t have a mohel here, but we had Dr. Blanc, a Jewish doctor, who did it. We had a little reception there in the front room of the Hillel house. So it was used for a lot of different purposes by the community. We had a small synagogue at the time, so there was a lot of camaraderie. Hillel now brought a director in that was sent in by the National Hillel Office. We had nothing to do with the selection, so that some years we got a very Reform rabbi who bought his meat in the A & P, then the next year we had a very Orthodox rabbi who wouldn’t answer the telephone on Saturday. But we got along with them. They came in and worked at synagogue. They came for Friday evening services and gave a talk, and sometimes for Saturday morning services. They tried to hold religious services at Hillel. Sometimes they were successful, sometimes they were not. But it didn’t make any difference whether there were six people, sixteen people, or sixty people, they went ahead with the program. Generally speaking we had good Hillel directors. [They were] not always the best, not always were they enthusiastic about Gainesville. Of course, Gainesville was not New York City or Chicago in the early 1950s, it may not even be that today, but generally speaking we got along well, the two communities.

I played an active role in the synagogue. I played a very active role as far as Hillel was concerned. I knew all of the directors well and got along very well with them, so I had no argument about them at all. But with the passage of time my own job responsibilities began to grow, and I was no longer as involved in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s as I had once been. On occasion, the various directors have tried to organize faculty programs, and they’re trying to do that right now. We tried luncheons where you brought your own sandwiches and got together for discussion. So that’s the way it’s gone. But I was an active Hillel person, a real strong activist, and now a strong supporter. This year, in the spring, Hillel created a prize, an award, a life achievement award, which they call the Gator Prize, and I was the first recipient of that. There was a reception for me. They held it over on the law school campus. There was a building over there. They invited the Jewish faculty, served refreshments, and gave me another one of the plaques for which I don’t have room enough to hang. But anyway, it’s called the Gator Prize and it’s a life achievement award.

G: Why’s Hillel important?

P: Well, Hillel’s important because, as any other of the religious-oriented students, it’s a place for Jewish students to gather. Now that we have 6,000-plus Jewish students on campus, it’s one of the largest Jewish schools in the United States. It has the largest enrollment of any school south of Washington D.C. I have found in the last four or five or six years, almost like a renaissance of Jewish interest. Jewish students are now coming to Hillel. Of course, you’ve got a director over there now, Andy Coren, who’s young himself and who seems to
know how to generate the kind of programs that attract the students over there. Lots of things are going on. I think the agitation in Israel is making students more Jewish-conscious, and the need of getting together and talking about things [has grown]. There have been programs available on this campus, and I'm sure elsewhere, of students going to Israel over the summer, and there's been a great response to that kind of a program. I think, in kind of an interesting way, the College of Architecture here, for the last two years, and I understand they're going to do it again, builds six sukkas on campus. I think that's been a wonderful example of cooperation and getting along together. But it's another example, it seems to me, of a growing consciousness on the part of young Jews [of] who they are and where they're coming from, and the need to know more about things of the past and the present.

[end side D7]

G: We were talking about Hillel before we broke for lunch, and I had asked you about its importance on campus.

P: Well, Hillel of course, as we've already gone over the history of it we know that it began to blossom after World War II and the present building was constructed in 1952 for approximately 800 students, none of which seemed to be that dedicated to Jewish activities. Now we have approximately 6,000 Jewish students on campus. The estimates are that that will increase by another 2,000 in the next five to eight years so that there will be 8,000 on this campus coming not only from Florida, mainly from Florida, but [from] all over the United States and also from foreign countries. There's a sizable number of Israeli students here, and obviously that's going to continue to increase. There are Jewish students from the Latin American countries [and] from the Caribbean Islands. So the need is there not only because of the increased numbers, but also because in the last several years, as I began to say earlier, there seems to be a renaissance of Jewish thinking and attitude among the students, at least on this campus. I think part of it is because of the tenuous situation in the Middle East and the fact that I think Jews everywhere, including Jewish students, feel somewhat threatened by what's going on in the world. But the point is that they are committing themselves and are becoming more active than they were. This doesn't mean that every Jewish student is going to appear at services every Friday night, but it does mean that more students are doing it than was true ten years ago. The holidays are coming and that will call for large numbers. They will have services in the auditorium, they will have them in the auditorium up in the medical school, [and] they will have them in Hillel itself.

Now, because of the growth of the student body and the involvement of Jewish students, this Hillel house is woefully inadequate. A new Hillel house is going to be constructed in the block immediately west of the foundation. That
whole block. That land’s already been purchased, so it’s free and clear. They hope to break ground in January. The architects are working on the final plans for the new building. It will be a very sizable building, and I hope a very handsome building. There were a lot of questions that were raised. Is this too far from the center of the campus? The students themselves said, no, we’re on bicycles and we walk and that’s not too far at all. Secondly was the question of parking. If you’re going to have something at Hillel, where are people going to park? Well, you do have the O’Connell lot directly across street. Now it’s not going to be easy to find parking there during the day because everybody else in the world is looking for a parking place, but for evening activities it will be very available, and there’s a red light, a traffic light, on the corner to direct traffic. So I think it’s going to work out very successfully. They’ve been pretty good about money. A local person gave them the money for the purchase of the property, a little bit over $1,000,000. Norman Lipoff and [Samuel] “Buddy” Shorstein have been, among others, Norman Lipoff particularly, [who] had been fund-raisers, and they had been very successful in getting money. Now, they don’t have all they need and that’s been the big question, should they build a building the size they really need, or should they build a building according to the size of their pocketbook. They haven’t resolved that question yet.

G:  Tied to Hillel, at least in terms of its Jewish content, is the Southern Jewish Historical Society. I should have asked you about [it] a little earlier when we were talking about some of your associations and some of your professional activities, but now’s as good a time as any. Tell me how the Southern Jewish Historical Society got started and what your involvement in all of that was.

P:  Well, the Southern Jewish Historical Society goes back to the 1950s, at a time that I had never heard of it and was not the least bit involved in the thing. I understand it operated for four or five years and then went out of existence. In the 1970s maybe, there was a meeting in Richmond, Virginia. Saul Viener [founding president of the Southern Jewish Historical Society] was one of the people responsible for that, and there were others. I was not. They were going to talk about Southern Jewish history and a number of people were invited to read papers. I heard about the conference and I went to the conference. It was very successful, not only in the kinds of papers that were delivered and the quality of the papers, but the mere fact that people were all there together, all interested in Southern Jewish history, and all willing to learn and do more. People wondered why were we having this meeting and letting everybody go back home and forget about it. Why not try to continue the activity? So the idea of trying to have an organization developed. We called for a gathering, that’s what it was, [because] we didn’t have an organization yet, the following year in Raleigh, North Carolina. I was there and there were probably two or three dozen people who were there. We always remember laughingly one of the things that
happened on Saturday night. We were having the “banquet,” which, as I say, was just a handful of people back ____ sizes today, and we were served fish. Well, in some odd, peculiar way, the fish had been taken out of the freezer and had bypassed the stove. Nobody knows how that happened. I remember they got them in front of everybody’s plate, the vegetables were hot, the salad was there, but the fish was absolutely solidly packed in ice. You couldn’t even punch it with a knife. Everybody turned to everybody else and said, what’s with the fish? Well, of course, they were very embarrassed. They had to pick it up, we had to wait until they thawed it out and cooked it, and nobody’s ever explained what happened, whether it was a joke or whether it was not. But that’s when we got started.

Over the years, of course, people have come and people have gone in the organization. People who were playing an active role ten years ago are no longer coming to meetings. But it’s been a growth organization. It’s met at various places in the South. What is this meeting coming up? Twenty-six or twenty-seven or something like that. It’s met every single year. It hasn’t missed any years at all. It’s met everywhere in the South, several times in Charleston, [West Virginia], a couple of times in Raleigh [North Carolina]. It’s met in Jacksonville, Florida, once. It’s met in Miami once. It’s met in New Orleans a couple or three times. So it’s been widely dispersed. In recent years we’ve had a relationship with the Jewish historical organizations in Texas, and also in Louisiana, outside of New Orleans itself. We’re meeting in Shreveport, Louisiana, this year. The papers that are given are usually very excellent papers given by reputable scholars – not necessarily trained historians, however, sometimes by locals who do a very good job. It operates like every other professional organization. Book exhibits go on. People get together. There’s a lot of camaraderie there. [Now] they’ve started publications, a once-a-year collection of essays which Mark Bauman and Rachel Heimovics are responsible for, and they’ve turned down four very reputable magazines. So the future looks bright. I served through the offices there, including two years as president of the Southern Jewish Historical Society. I thoroughly enjoy the meetings. It’s the one I try to go to most of all during the year.

G: Why a Southern Jewish Historical Society? Why not just get involved in the American Jewish Historical Society?

P: Well, I was also very much involved in the American Jewish Historical Society, but it has been focused over the years, and continues to be focused, on the area from the New England states through New York and Baltimore. This part of the country has been ignored as though it did not exist, so depending upon organizations like the American Jewish Historical Society will never bring about the evaluation and analysis of Southern Jewish history in the way that the society itself now does. In fact, the American Jewish Historical Society recognizes that,
and although in earlier years they were opposed to it, they now encourage regional organizations. The Southern Jewish Historical Society has been one of its most successful regional organizations. It’s strong, it’s liquid, it has annual meetings, good meetings with good papers, and it’s attracting an increasing number of members. The American Jewish Historical Society does a good job in preserving American Jewish history and the individuals which were associated with it, but when it comes to local history, I say outside of the Boston, New York, Philadelphia area, they’re not concerned at all. They make little effort, although they would deny this, to collect documents or books that deal with regional history. I don’t think you’re going to find very much on Southern Jewish history in the collections in New York or in Boston.

G: I remember I didn’t on Savannah. There was relatively little.

P: And yet it has a rich history.

G: Let’s talk about Tau Epsilon Phi.

P: All right. Tau Epsilon Phi is one of the two oldest Jewish fraternities on campus. It was organized in 1925. Phi Lamb, which started out as Phi Beta Delta, pre-dates it, but Tau Epsilon Phi comes into existence in February 1925. It was mainly a group of Miami students, Miami Jewish boys, and a few from Jacksonville, about twenty of them. Some of them were living together in rooming houses. Some of them had known each other from home, where they had gone to high school together. They felt isolated on the campus because they were precluded from going to any of the other fraternities. The non-Jewish fraternities, as they were known, had in their national charter that they could only take in white, Christian boys. They didn’t have to worry about African Americans because they were not on the campus. So the chapter was organized and it had various houses. It ended up in the 1930s in a house on University Avenue, which is the one that the Independent Florida Alligator now occupies as its headquarters. That was the TEP house beginning about 1934. I was not involved in the TEP fraternity as a student at all, and certainly not in the immediate post-war period.

G: So what got you involved?

P: Well, I’m getting ready to tell you. [In] 1948 I get married and we come to Gainesville. The first apartment I told you [about] with the made-over house over in East Gainesville. We moved into an apartment, the Greenmore Apartments, which is one block from the TEP house, and I’m a young faculty member. We didn’t have any big friends or anything, but there were several local people, like the Ruddermans, who were members of the fraternity. They asked, and we
agreed, to serve as chaperones. In those years, they had chaperones for
dances and social activities. I think that’s a lost art today. So we went to their
activities. They liked us [and] we liked them. In 1950, the fraternity celebrated its
twenty-fifth anniversary, at which time they made me an honorary member of the
fraternity. Shortly afterwards they entangled me as their faculty advisor. I served
as their faculty advisor or their financial advisor, which I am right now, ever since
1949.

So I’ve been very actively involved in the fraternity, although I try to steer
clear of it today. I don’t go to the house [and] I don’t get myself involved in day-
to-day activities, that’s beyond me. They need people younger than me, more
energetic than me, to become involved like that. But I am the senior statesman.
Anybody who has been in the fraternity in the last fifty or sixty years knows me
and knows who I am. People that we got to know socially, because although
they were students and I was faculty the age difference wasn’t that great,
remember that you’re still dealing with veterans here in the 1950s, many of these
have remained friends right down to the present time [and] still we consider close
friends today. Norman Lipoff, who I mentioned earlier as the chief fund-raiser for
Hillel, was a student here in the 1950s. Bessie was the one who introduced him
to the girl he married, and they always remember that. That’s true of dozens and
dozens and dozens of them.

Shortly after I became the advisor and began playing a very active role, I
worked with a number of people who had been in the fraternity in the 1920s and
1930s, particularly one man called Aaron Kanner. Aaron had graduated law
school here and was a practicing attorney in Miami. [He was a] very
distinguished lawyer, well recognized, and well respected. He never got over
being a TEP, so he and his wife came up to every football game and they stayed
with us. [They were] really very close, dear friends right up to the end of their
lives. Their children, both sons, live in Miami today.

We became cognizant of the fact that the fraternity could borrow $100,000
from the university. Remember, I told you that we were part of the second
$1,000,000. The first $1,000,000 had been distributed mainly to sororities. We
were involved in the second $1,000,000, and we could make a selection of space
on Fraternity Row, and that’s what we did. We worked through the university
architects, not the College of Architecture, we didn’t work there. There was an
architecture department then on campus where they made local decisions rather
than the way they operate today, out of Tallahassee. We went through the
procedure of getting a contract and building a fraternity house. Well, I was
involved, because I was the main or senior TEP right here in Gainesville, in every
step in the construction of the house. If there was a problem the architects or the
builders needed solving, I was the one they called and I was the one who went
out to the site. I didn’t resent it at all, I enjoyed it. I enjoyed the work that I was
doing with the TEPs then, [and] I enjoy the work which I’m doing with the TEPs
today.
As I say, I’m probably the best-known TEP, in connection with this fraternity, that’s surviving today. I’ve been recognized several times by the national organization. About twelve years ago I was named man of the year by the fraternity and they had a big banquet in my honor at the Fontainebleau [Hilton Resort] in Miami. I’ve gotten several awards for them, I mentioned that just a minute ago. So that’s the way it goes. As I say, I do not concern myself anymore with day to day problems over there. The chancellor comes to see me about once every two or three weeks and gives me an update on what’s happening over there, and that’s all I want. I get the financial reports from the accountant, if it’s trouble I ask why, and that’s it. We’re going to have a big reunion in December in Orlando. We do that every two years and everybody looks forward to it, but it’s only for old-timers. The only people that are invited to the reunion are those who were in the fraternity prior to 1959.

G: What role has the fraternity played on campus? Have they been involved in some significant university events? Why are they important?

P: Well, in the early years, Jewish fraternities particularly were not involved because if they were excluded from being members of other fraternities, they were not welcomed in the campus organizations. This is not anything that the university concerned itself with. They were not concerned about the lack of recognition or the exclusion or anything else. That was not a matter of concern in the same way as it became in the 1950s with the integration crisis. Nobody was attempting to integrate Christians and Jews on the campus. If a club or an organization or a fraternity was white Christian only, so be it, that was their business [and] they could do as they wanted. So you did not find many Jewish students, of course, there weren’t many on campus, who were either in or around fraternities, playing an active role in campus activities. It wasn’t until the 1940s that you had a Jewish boy who served as president of the student body.

G: 1940?

P: 1940s. I think it was Louis Safer from Jacksonville, but I’m not positive about that. The same thing was true, it was years before Jews were accepted and were recognized in organizations like Florida Blue Key. Now, in more recent years, and I’m saying the last fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, thirty years, perhaps since the 1950s, the situation has changed considerably. First of all, TEP fraternity became one of the largest and most politically active fraternities on campus, and so did the Phi Lambs. Moreover, there were other Jewish fraternities that came onto the campus. So by sheer numbers, they had to be recognized. And the situation had changed. Being white [and] Christian was no longer as popular in the 1960s as it had been in the 1930s. While there were still many barriers as far as Jewish students were concerned, [there] were not nearly
as many as there had been in previous years, which gave Jewish students, fraternities, and others the opportunity to make an impact on the university. The TEP fraternity and the Phi Lamb fraternity, as I say, were politically active. They supported candidates, they were elected to public office on campus, and they were involved in every way in the activities on the campus. They got into trouble just as easily as the non-Jewish students in fraternities, and they got out of trouble.

G: Do you remember ever having to bail somebody out or get involved?

P: Oh yes, yes, yes I do. But that’s so distant I’m trying to forget it. Yeah, we’ve had a couple of people who have been in jail.

G: Mosaic.

P: Mosaic? Well, mosaic had an interesting meaning. Mosaic is a collection of Jewish Florida, which is in a museum in Miami. Sometime in the 1980s, I received a letter from a rabbi in Miami telling me that a group was trying to put together a small Jewish exhibit in Ft. Lauderdale, and they had heard about me being the Jewish historian. By this time I was recognized as the Jewish historian in Florida, and they wanted my help. Well, I get letters like that from time to time, and they end up immediately in the garbage can. So that’s where this one ended up, I did not respond to it at all. Two or three weeks later I got a telephone call from this man. He said, did you get my letter? I said, yes. He said, well? I said, well, tell me more about your project. So he started talking to me about it. I said, well, you know, now you’re being a little bit more specific [and] I’m more interested, you were too vague before. He said, I want you to come down here and I will pay your way. That was the magic words there, “I will pay your way.” What was transpiring is [that] there was a lady by the name of Laura Hopson in Ft. Lauderdale who was the program chair for a Jewish home for the elderly there, and she had decided to put together an exhibit dealing with the history of the Jewish community of Ft. Lauderdale. They thought I could be the advisor and help them collect pictures and artifacts and so on, which I learned when I went to the meeting in Ft. Lauderdale.

It very quickly became a project much broader than that. They decided to expand it into a history of the Jewish community of South Florida, to go all the way from Boca [Raton] down to Key West, and gather it and let it then move around in different places in the South. Then it began to develop even beyond that, not overnight, this is now taking weeks and months to generate. They decided to turn this into a Florida exhibit. That had never been done before. Nobody had really examined the history of Jews in Florida. We knew that there were no Jews during the first Spanish period because of the exclusion policy of the Spanish government. It wasn’t until 1763, when the Spanish left and the
British came in, that the situation began to change. We think that there may have been some Jews as members of crews of some of the early ships, secret Jews, *Marranos* [Spanish Jews who kept their religion a secret because of fear of persecution], but there's no guarantee and there's no way in the records to find that. We began to know about Jews in Pensacola and Mobile [Alabama] in the 1760s.

So Mosaic begins to be interested in that history, gathering not only information, but artifacts wherever it possibly could [and] pictures wherever it possibly could. It was able to entice a woman by the name of Marcia [Kerstein] Zerivitz from Orlando, who was a wonderful organizer, a real excellent fundraiser, [and] had all the qualities that an embryonic organization [needs]. Because that's what this is turning into, from an exhibit to an organization, [and] she had all the qualities that they were looking for. She was able to not only collect a lot of artifacts, pictures, [and] all kinds of things, but also to entice a lot of people who were interested and she got money from the state. She was able to convince the state, in its grants program, to support this kind of a project. While they were not overwhelming in the amount of money, they were giving money, which was making it possible to develop Mosaic. Then Marcia concocted the idea of moving Mosaic, the museum, around the state of Florida and to have people on the local scene, Pensacola, Jacksonville, Sarasota, Tampa, take on the sponsorship to raise money to support the museum exhibit, find a place for the exhibit to last for maybe a couple or three months, have women who would serve as [docents, and] all the links necessary to make it successful. [They would] collect a lot of local stuff which they would then leave behind in the community so that the community could build on that and have its own historical apparatus.

So that's the way it began. It went around the state of Florida for over two years, successful everywhere it went. It was then placed on exhibit in Washington D.C., at the B'nai B'rith building. There was even talk about taking it to Israel, which did not happen. It was too expensive and all of those kinds of things. Anyway, the exhibit ends, the Mosaic ends, and the question then is, what are we going to do with all of this material? A lot of people had just given whatever it was. You couldn't sell the stuff. What would you do with it? So there was a growing sense that there needed to be a permanent place. In the meantime, I'm involved in this. I keep saying they, but part of it is me.

G: How is it you?

P: Well, for instance, when the exhibit came to Jacksonville, I had been actually able to help collect data. But I was there to read the manuscripts, to read the script, to correct things, [and] to come up with the historical data that they needed. I was that kind of an individual for the exhibit as it moved all over Florida. In several places when it opened, in Orlando, I went down and gave an
opening talk. When it was in St. Petersburg, I did the same thing. So I was involved in Mosaic right from the very beginning and continue to be, right down to the present time. When it got to the end of its travels around Florida and Washington [D.C.], then there was the question of, what do you do with it? They found a synagogue in Miami Beach that had been designed by an outstanding architect in the 1930s and had been a thriving synagogue. With the passage of time, people either died or moved away, and what had been an almost exclusively Jewish section in South Miami Beach now was a Latin section and very few Jews lived there. As a result, the synagogue was struggling to make [money], it wasn’t operating at all. So money was gathered and they were able to buy the synagogue. It was in very bad shape. I was on the committee at that time, and when we went into the building it was unbelievable the condition [it was in]. It looked like what this building looked like before they did the renovation.

Under the leadership, the smart, adroit leadership of Marcia Zerivitz, they got the money, and they got the talent, and they got the skills that were needed to put it into first-class operation. Mosaic now is the Jewish Museum of Florida, not of Miami, but of Florida, although it’s located in Miami. It’s been very supported by the community. It has officers from all over the state. I’m a member of the society [and] I have participated in a number of the programs. Two years ago I went down. They were launching an oral history program, and I did a workshop for them down there.

**G:** Henry Green is involved at some point.

**P:** Henry Green was involved in it. Henry Green was the director of Jewish studies at the University of Miami. I don’t think he holds that post anymore, but I don’t know. He fell out with the Southern Jewish Historical Society, but mainly he fell out with Mosaic. Although he had been involved with them and had worked with them, as I understand it, he sued them. That ended abruptly the relationship. So he has nothing to do with them and they have nothing to do with him. He also has nothing to do with the Southern Jewish Historical Society because when the society met in Miami and Marcia Zerivitz was the chairperson for the program committee, this controversy between Henry and the organization, and particularly between [him and] Marcia, flared up. Henry would have nothing to do with the meeting. He did not attend the meeting and he withdrew from the Southern Jewish Historical Society and he’s never participated in anything anymore. To my knowledge, he’s no longer the chair of Jewish studies in Miami, but I don’t know that for sure.

**G:** The Matheson Historical Museum.

**P:** The Matheson Historical Center is located on East University Avenue, and it came about largely as a result of a number of individuals interested in preserving
the history of Gainesville and Alachua County. Gainesville’s history goes back to 1853, and the county’s history goes back to even earlier than that. It’s like every other community. There’s this feeling, this growing feeling, of looking to the past rather than completely to the future, and trying to find out where we came from. In Gainesville the second oldest house was owned by Sarah Matheson, right near the downtown post office. Mrs. Matheson was always conscious of the fact that she had no children. Her husband [Christopher Matheson, mayor of Gainesville 1910-1918] had been the mayor of Gainesville, and she was afraid that she would die and there would be no record of her family’s participation in the history of this community, and [she feared] what would happen to her house, which was filled with fine Victorian furniture. So she became interested, and tried to encourage other people like me to become interested, in founding an organization which would become a historical society that would do something about holding on, not only to her property, but to other properties, not only real estate but artifacts and so on. That’s what happened.

There were a number of people who became interested in the project. One of them was a doctor who became very interested, and [he was] a close friend of Sarah Matheson. He was a historian also, even though he was a practicing physician, a cardiologist. [He was] a pretty good historian. He too had been collecting a lot of artifacts over the years and he was looking for a place to deposit them. On East University Avenue there was this building, right next to the library, that had been constructed in the 1920s for the American Legion as a clubhouse. Well, they had used it for many years, they had rented it out to fraternities for dances, [and] all kinds of things. In the last twenty, twenty-five years, though, they no longer needed that building and were not using it anymore, and allowed it to deteriorate so it was no longer rentable. So this group that had organized in Gainesville, including me, was able to buy the building for a very decent price, I don’t remember how much, and then to renovate the building. That’s exactly what’s happened. Today it’s a beautiful building and it serves as a historical museum for Gainesville and Alachua County. For instance, I, who was interested in the Jewish history of Gainesville and had collected pictures and documents and so on, have been turning those things over. So they now have a collection of Gainesville-Alachua County Jewish history. I figured this was the way to preserve them, [because] what would happen to them after I’m gone? Others have done exactly the same thing.

G: In addition to contributing materials, have you played other roles with the Matheson Historical Museum?

P: Well, I’ve played other roles with them. They’re going to do an elder soon, and I’m going to be one of the speakers and talk on the history of the Jewish community of Gainesville. So yes, I’ve been a contributor of materials [and] I’ve been a participant in the various programs.
Is Walda Metcalfe there now? Wasn’t she there at one point?

No. If she was, I’ve forgotten or didn’t know.

The Bicentennial Commission.

Yeah, let me go back and talk about that. [In] 1976, the United States celebrated its 200th Anniversary. The planning of it meant that there was going to be a giant celebration all over the United States. Each state was encouraged to organize its own Bicentennial Commission, and that’s exactly what happened in Florida. Under the leadership of Bob Williams, you remember, who was now the director of archives and history in the state, and Pat Dodson, who I mentioned before, is the PR man out in Pensacola who redesigned the *Florida Historical Quarterly* for me. Pat and I were very good friends.

Earlier than that, earlier than the bicentennial activity, Pat and others were interested in preserving the heritage of some of the older communities in Florida, particularly St. Augustine and Pensacola, which were the two first capitals of the state. They were able to get the legislature to set up preservation boards for each of these cities with some funding, with the idea of trying to “save” as much as it possibly could. Later there were more. There was one for Key West. There was one for Tampa. In Pensacola they found that there were maybe a dozen properties, houses, that went back into the nineteenth century, and a couple of them even earlier than that. So under the leadership of Pat Dodson, the preservation board was set up in Pensacola for the purpose of creating a historical district. They hired me as their historical advisor, so I was there in the 1960s with the various buildings that they were trying to preserve. Once again, we were weakened as a result of not having documents.

I went to Washington [D.C.], to the Library of Congress, to see what I could find on the West Florida papers. When the British left Florida, they were able to take some things with them. I mean, they were free to take whatever they could, but there was a limit to size and space and so on. So a lot of those papers remained in Florida when the Spanish returned, and then when the U.S. returned. In fact, during the Civil War, the West Florida papers had been taken up to Alabama and buried and then unburied, and a lot of them had been lost as a result. The ones that were saved went to Washington [D.C.]. I went to Washington [D.C.] and I was able to collect what was still there and put it on microfilm. That microfilm is in our library and a copy of it is in Pensacola. But it is as a result of those kinds of documents, and others, that we were able to do some things in Pensacola. This begins my working relationship with Pat Dodson.

When the bicentennial is created, it’s created in 1969, and Claude Kirk is the governor [1967-1971]. Pat is a Republican, and he had been closely involved with Claude Kirk. He had handled all the PR and publicity for Claude
Kirk's campaign. Because of his interest in history, Claude Kirk appointed him as the chairman, the first chairman, of the Florida Bicentennial Commission. Pat immediately appointed me as a member of the commission. It was, at the very end of Claude Kirk's administration, followed by Reubin Askew [Florida governor, 1971-1979]. Well, for some reason, Askew refused to recognize the appointments made by Claude Kirk, so he reappointed everybody on the committee. So I was appointed by Claude Kirk and reappointed by Reubin Askew, so I was doubly appointed. People were appointed from all over the state. There were a couple of black legislators. There were some women that were appointed. There were about maybe a dozen people. When Pat left the chairmanship the overall chairperson became the lieutenant governor of Florida, Tom Adams was the chair at one time [Askew’s lieutenant governor, 1971-1975].

Anyway, each of us had a different responsibility. My responsibility was to be chairman of the publications committee. We met once a month and we met in different places. We always had a lot of work to do. Upon my recommendation, the Bicentennial Commission agreed to do twenty-five facsimile reprints of out of prints [of] Florida. I got this idea because at the time of the Civil War Centennial, which was just a few years earlier than that, Rembert Patrick had been the chair. Pat had worked out an arrangement with the University of Florida Press to publish out-of-print old, important Florida documents. They had been very well received. They did a run of 1,000 and they sold out almost immediately. They did about ten or twelve of them under that first series, so we decided to do [it] again. I would select twenty-five books, which I did with the cooperation of some of the librarians. Elizabeth Alexander, for instance, told me about ones that people had come in looking for there.

I was the overall general editor. It was my job not only to select the books – the Bicentennial Commission accepted my recommendations completely – [but] I would find the scholar who would edit the document, to add an index if there wasn’t one there and to write an introduction to it, then I would write a short introduction to each volume. We published twenty-five volumes. That created something, also, because in the publication, which the University of Florida Press did, as the general editor, I received a rebate of 5 percent in the royalties. The editors, I think, got 10 or 12 percent. Well, after about two or three years somebody complained that I was a member of the commission and I was using it. So the Florida Ethics Commission recommended that I leave the Bicentennial Commission, I’d been on it now about four or five years, which I did, there was no big deal about that. In addition to the twenty-five volumes, we had five conferences, which I organized, at various places in Florida. [There was] one here in Gainesville [and] one in Tallahassee. We invited scholars to come in and deliver papers. We did one on Florida during the American Revolution, Florida in the Caribbean, Florida in whatever, and we published those five volumes. Then I worked out an arrangement with a professor over at Florida State University to do a history of Florida during the American Revolution. So when it was all over,
that wasn't the only thing that the Bicentennial Commission did, but by comparison with other states we had accomplished as much, or more, than any other state in the Union in terms of some very positive things, not wasting money, and getting some lasting things done. I played a very, very active role in the Florida Bicentennial Commission.

G: I think we'll stop here with your professional roles and organizations you belonged to. Let's talk more about Gainesville. How the town changes.

P: And my private life.

G: Right, and your involvement in Gainesville socially. You've lived here almost continuously, except for the war, since 1937.

P: Right, absolutely. We were married in 1948, so our two sons were born in Gainesville. We've played an active role in the community, not only in the Jewish community, in the synagogue, and Bessie in the sisterhood and B'nai B'rith – I was president of B'nai B'rith – but also in the non-Jewish activities. We were very active, for instance, in J. J. Finley, the elementary school that both Mark and Allen went to. I, for instance, served one year as the president of PTA [Parent-Teacher Association]. Together, along with many other parents, we organized a Halloween Festival every year [and] sold baked goods and other kinds of things to raise money for the school. I remember we raised enough for air conditioning, but the school board wouldn't let us buy air conditioning because other schools couldn't afford to do it. They didn't want [them] to be jealous of the fact that Finley had “a rich clientele” and were able to do it.

We enjoyed our relationship with the teachers and with our neighbors. We always had excellent neighbors. We built the house we're living in in 1954, obviously we have not moved from there, and we've had some of the same neighbors over all of these years. We've had the same friends that we had in the 1950s, many of them are still around and many of them we still see. So we've always been outgoing people, and both of our sons are the same way. They grew up in happy homes. They had good friends. Allen still has many of the friends that he went to school with, that he was in Cub Scouts with. They've kind of clung together over the years. In fact, when they were grown and each of them were getting married, the parents gave a party for the Cub Scout who was getting married and we gave each one of them a silver tray with their names engraved on it. Mark was the same way. They were active in school. They were both on the school patrols directing traffic and they were in the various organizations. They were both excellent, excellent students. They were not professional athletes. They weren't on the football teams or anything, but they were playing basketball and they were playing baseball and they were doing all
those kinds of things, which they enjoyed very much. They liked to go to the
Gator football games. So they lived really good lives. They were never in any
trouble. We never had dope problems. We never had alcohol problems. We
never had school absentee problems. They took pride in what they were doing.
They were fortunate in that they had grandparents. Bessie’s grandmother came
to visit us every winter for two months, and that was a good, strong relationship
for the two boys. She was a wonderful person and they got along beautifully with
her. They loved my father, and of course he thought that they were the salt of
the earth. He was very proud of having two grandsons, particularly Jewish
grandsons.

So we lived in that house very comfortably, it was not ostentatious or
anything. In the summer, we would go to the beach for two or three weeks,
usually over in St. Augustine Beach at Crescent [City]. We would rent a cottage
or something over there. We went to Atlanta frequently to visit the family there.
We drove up. We didn’t have an air-conditioned car, which meant we had to
start about 4:00 in the morning to avoid all of the heat. You didn’t have
interstates, either, so you had to take other routes to get up there. We enjoyed
that. We were very close with my family in Jacksonville. We were very close
with Bessie’s family in Atlanta. We had seders together with the family in
Jacksonville, either in Gainesville [or Jacksonville], usually they came to our
house, for about fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years. Now, with children and
grandchildren, we don’t get together for those kinds of activities as much as we
once did. I would say that all things considered, we were very fortunate people in
that we were able to lead very happy lives and were not beset by a lot of terrible
tragedies that happened. Nobody got desperately sick. People died, of course,
old people, but they died natural deaths. We just lived normal, good lives, which
we enjoyed. I enjoyed getting up every morning and seeing what the world had
to offer.

G: Air conditioning will change life all over the South. Did the house you built in
1954 have air conditioning?

P: I know it did not have air conditioning and it did not have central heating. We had
a heating element in the central part of the house in a closet, and that was the
way houses were built at the time. About five or six years later, we installed
central heating. We first installed window air conditioners, and that took care of
the front part of the house. The couch in the den opened up into a bed, so Allen
and Mark slept there in the summer to take advantage of the air conditioning.
Then we disposed of the window units and we installed central air conditioning.
Then in the 1960s, about 1968, we installed the pool. They loved that. I mean,
they, growing up, thought that was wonderful. They dived and swam almost
every day. Now, I’m sorry we have it. We don’t use it, and it’s just a burden and
an expense. But when Rebecca was here last month with her girlfriend, they
were in it all the time, so I guess we’re not going to get rid of it.


P: Right, I retired in 1996 officially. We had already loved to travel. I had fallen in love, for instance, with New York City and the theater way back in the 1940s. The first play I ever saw in New York was in 1940. It was Al Jolson [Jewish entertainer who starred in *The Jazz Singer* (1927), the first talkie, based on his own life]. It was not a very good play, but Jolson was, of course, a great favorite, and I remember he came out at the end of the performance and sat in a chair and sang about fifteen of his famous songs. Of course, it was enthusiastically received. During the war years, in the kind of work that I was doing, and knowing the officers and so on, I was able to get full benefit of passes. Whenever I had a long enough pass, I went to New York and I went to the theater. I saw everything – *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, you name it, I saw it, and that continued. Bessie likes the theater. When we were in New York for our honeymoon, for instance, we saw *A Street Car Named Desire* with Marlon Brando, and we saw *Mr. Roberts* with Henry Fonda. So we’ve been to New York maybe fifty times over the years, and we’ve seen a huge number of plays. I save the playbill of every play we ever saw in New York or Chicago or Washington or elsewhere. Last year I gave all of them to the library. They have a theatrical section over there in special collection, and I was glad to get rid of them and deposit them somewhere where they would be taken care of.

And we continue [to go]. We were in New York over the Fourth of July, and we saw four shows while we were there, including *The Producers*. So we love New York. We like shopping in New York, not that we need anything, we like going to Carnegie’s for corn beef, and we just like travel. We had traveled with Mark and Allen, when they were growing up, in the car to various places in the United States. We saw almost all of the eastern United States, the mountains, some of the battlefields. They claimed that I stopped at every historical plaque along the way so that we could read it, that’s an exaggeration. We went to Washington together, to Williamsburg together, so we had a lot of fun and it created a lot of memories for them.

Then Bessie has continued the operation. We’ve been to every one of the fifty states, including Hawaii and Alaska. We became interested in cruising. We did a cruise together with one of my colleagues in 1964 out of Miami to Nassau, a four-day cruise. It was very pleasant, but very different from the kind of cruising you do today. We got a cabin for four, which included two beds, upper and down beds, which you now put kids in. Fortunately, we were able to use the top layer for our suitcases, but both of us couldn’t get dressed or undressed in the room at the same time. Going over was wonderful, Nassau was wonderful; coming back, however, we got in the tail end of a Hurricane, Dora, I believe, and I got miserably sick. When I got to Miami I said, this is it, I’m never going to get
on a ship again in my life. That was strengthened when, sometime in the 1960s, we decided, we were down in Melbourne, I believe, we were going on a deep-sea fishing trip for a half-day. When I got on that little boat and it started bouncing, I began to die again, and that convinced me. But then, in the 1970s, we began to cruise, do river cruises and others. We’ve gotten to the point of enjoying it thoroughly, the leisure of it, the relaxation of it. We’ve been to the same places so often we don’t really get off the ship. We’re not either one of us great shoppers, so we’re not looking for anything to buy. We’re just looking for a place to relax. We’ve done together fifty cruises. We’ve gone to lots of places. We never went to China, which I am sorry about, or Japan, but we’ve done almost everything else in the rest of the world.

[End side D8]

G: You’ve done fifty different cruises to practically everywhere in the world.

P: Everywhere in the world. All of the Caribbean, a little bit of Latin America, Brazil particularly. We’ve been down many of the main rivers of the world, the Rhine, the Elba River, the Danube several times. We’ve been to Alaska three times. We’ve been along the Pacific Coast. We’ve been to Vancouver and Victoria [British Columbia, Canada] in that area. In addition, we’ve done a lot of land things, too. We’ve been to the Northwest. We’ve been to many of the sites like the Grand Canyon. We’ve been to Las Vegas [Nevada] a few times, Los Angeles, San Francisco [California], half a dozen to a dozen times, so we’ve seen a lot of the United States. We’ve seen a lot of Europe. We’ve been to Europe maybe forty times. We’ve been to England a number of times, we were into Scotland several times, Holland, Germany, Russia twice, Poland, a lot of Eastern Europe. We’ve been to Greece several times, Italy several times. We’ve been to some of the places in North and Eastern Africa a little bit. So we’ve done our share of seeing. We’ve done it with family. My sister-in-law Bertha has gone with us, or my brother-in-law Perry and Evelyn have gone with us. My brother Saul has gone with us occasionally. So we usually have not traveled alone. We’ve traveled with the Lowensteins [on] two or three voyages.

We thoroughly enjoy, as I say, the relaxation. We get off very little. It’s not as easy for Bess anymore because she has arthritis in her knees, so she doesn’t walk as much as she once did, but it hasn’t stopped her from doing that. She still has her many friends. They still have the Lunch Bunch every Thursday, they get together and eat together. We eat out a pretty good bit, about half the time. With the Lowensteins, they would eat out every single night, but I don’t like eating out that much. For instance, tonight, after eating out two nights in a row, I’m going to insist on eating at home tonight. But everything else goes along very smoothly.

G: One thing that I recall from when I was your graduate student, and you were just
mentioning health and those sorts of things, you had real scare back in the
1970s?

P: 1960s.

G: Tell me about that.

P: I had an esophagus problem which came on very suddenly. In fact, just earlier
than that, together with Blair Reeves we had gone to Palm Beach. Blair had
become involved in this historical American buildings survey that the Library of
Congress conducted, in which they measured old houses [and] old properties
and took pictures for preservation purposes. The Library of Congress wanted a
job done on Morrowlogo, Mrs. Mary, what’s her name?

G: I don’t know. We have an article in the Quarterly about it. Not Du Pont.

P: No, not Du Pont.

G: I know exactly what you’re talking about, I’ll think of the name.

P: Three names. Anyway, they wanted that property surveyed, and they hired Blair
and me. So we went to Palm Beach. She was gone, the house was closed, but
Jimmy, the butler, was there, so we had free access to the house. We went over
it a thousand times. All the bedrooms, the wine cellar, she had a bomb cellar
there, the kitchen, the bathrooms, everywhere. [It was a] gorgeous property,
everything was magnificent. So we worked there a week and I did a history of
the house from documents that Jimmy had, and Blair did all the other work that
was needed. I wasn’t feeling well toward the end of that visit. We came back to
Gainesville and I became increasingly nauseated, increasingly what I shouldn’t
be. I called the doctor one day and I told him how weak I was and how woozy I
was and it was getting worse. He said, why don’t you meet me over in the
emergency room over at Alachua General [Hospital], which I did. When he
checked me he said, you’ve got to get into the hospital, you’ve got an ulcer and
you’re losing blood and you’ve got to be taken care of.

So I check into the hospital and they start giving me blood transfusions.
Well, the blood was going in one end and going out the other. It was not making
much of a help to me. Well, our very good friend Harry Pistowski, who lived
around the corner from us, was concerned, too. Harry was chairman of
Gynecology and Obstetrics at Shands, and he said, you’re coming over to
Shands. He said, I’m going to see if there’s room. He said, if there’s no room
elsewhere in the hospital, you’re going to the obstetrics floor, but you’re coming
to Shands. So that’s what I did. They moved me by ambulance one late
afternoon. I had been in Alachua maybe five or six days. I went over there, and
the following morning they took me down to surgery. They were going to put that light down and to see what they could see in my stomach and so on, and I remember when it went down I suddenly went out. What had happened is the esophagus, the end of the esophagus is where it went into the stomach, had rotted, or erupted, or whatever. Fortunately, I was in surgery so they could operate immediately, which they did. It was about a four- or five-hour operation. I knew absolutely nothing about it, but they called the family in. I was in Shands for maybe three weeks, almost a month. I don't think they allow you to stay that long today. But you can see, I got all right.

G: So they had to reattach your esophagus to your stomach.

P: Right, and I've never had a single bit of reaction to it ever since.

G: The story I heard was they almost lost you.

P: [That] they almost lost me, I understood later on. I wasn't aware of being nearly lost. The same thing, the other major thing, was when I had this heart valve put in two years ago. We'd gone to Baltimore [Maryland] for a family get-together. My cousin’s son was being Bar Mitzvah and it was a wonderful weekend. I wasn't the slightest [bit] weak [and there was] nothing wrong with me. We come back on the plane. I'm flying into Jacksonville, where we had left our car. From the moment I got off the plane and entered the terminal, I was having problems breathing. I mean, it was just suddenly. One minute I was fine [and] the next minute I wasn't. It was difficult for me to go from our gate to where the luggage was. I thought I wasn't going to make it because of the breathing. But I then recovered and we came back. Bessie drove the car back to Gainesville and I had no problem. I had no problem on Monday. Tuesday it started again, so I called my doctor, Dr. Slaten. He said, come on down [and] let’s see what’s happening. I had no pains, nothing that's typical of a heart attack at all. He said, maybe you’re having a “secret” heart attack. He checked [and] he said, no, that’s not it. He said, you may be on the verge of cardiac arrest. He said, we've got to get you into the hospital immediately. So we go from his office into North Florida and check into the hospital, and the tests showed that it was this valve, so they took the valve out. I got caught on Memorial Day, so they weren’t doing anything, so I was actually there about two or three days I didn’t need to be. They put in this pig’s valve and that’s been there ever since. From time to time I hear “oink, oink,” but other than that it’s fine.

G: Tell me about it. You told me a funny story about the pig valve and your concerns. They gave you a choice, right?

P: The didn’t give me any choice, they just told me. When the surgeon told me
about it, I said, do you realize you’re putting a pig’s valve in a Jewish body? He said, you’re not going to eat it, you know.

G: That’s the story I wanted to hear. And you’re feeling?

P: I feel fine.

G: You’re exercising.

P: I exercise four times a week. I go to cardiac rehab[ilitation] once, either Tuesday morning or Thursday morning. I go to the gym Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and work out. On the weekends, of course I didn’t do it yesterday and today, I walk in the mall, usually about four miles. So I’m very athletic.

G: I want to talk a little bit about Mark and Allen and your granddaughters. There’s a very tragic story with Mark and his first wife.

P: Well, I was going to say, one of the saddest times for us involved Mark’s first wife, Terry Coggin Proctor, whom we loved very much. She was almost like a daughter to us. She and Mark had started going together when both of them were in law school here. Terry was the daughter of Luther Coggin in Jacksonville, a very affluent but very nice family, and she was a wonderful person. They went to law school together and dated, although not exclusively, they did go out with others. Then Mark got a job in Jacksonville, in the city attorney’s office. She followed him to Jacksonville and got a job also in a lawyer’s office there. Then after a while, Mark had been there maybe a year, he had an offer to go to Tallahassee to become the attorney for natural resources. When he got there they were having a scandal in that department. As it turned out, the chairman, the head of that department, went to jail, and several of the other members. Well, as they were leaving, Mark was being bounced up. He was moving up the ladder because of the vacancies that occurred. So he moved up in two months what ordinarily would have taken him about two or three years. In the meantime, Terry had also come to Tallahassee.

G: They were dating seriously?

P: They were dating now seriously, but living separately. She got a job also at one of the state agencies, as a lawyer. Then they got married in a very splendid society wedding in Jacksonville. Blanche Coggin, there was nothing she didn’t [do]. She had the money and she didn’t spare any expense. I mean, even the flowers she had flown in from Holland. When they left to go to the hotel and all, a helicopter took them, and we didn’t throw rice, we threw rose petals. So that just tells you. Anyway, Mark gets the opportunity to get into this law firm, the Levin
law firm [Levin, Papantonio, Thomas, Mitchell, Echsner, & Proctor]. One of his special areas was natural resources, so environmental cases were what were bounced onto his desk.

He went out to Pensacola, they rented a very nice house, and Terry got a job also in the firm, so they were working together. They were moving up. They had bought some property at the beach and they were getting ready to build a house. That place they were living in was just rented, so they went out and rented a condo at the beach. They came home from work one afternoon, about 5:30 or 6:00. Terry was very athletically inclined, so she was going to do the laps in the pool, which she did every night, anyway. Mark was up in the condo on the fifth floor, or the eighth, or whatever it was. He said he went out on the balcony and looked down and she was swimming, so he went back to put on his suit because the pool was right next to the bay and she was always a little afraid somebody would come in off the bay in a boat. So Mark was going down to kind of be the protector. When he got down, which was less than five minutes later, she was floating on top of the pool. She had had a heart attack, which is what the autopsy showed. She didn’t realize she even had a bad heart. None of us knew that. We were on a cruise on the Danube River and we heard about it as we were coming into Budapest [Hungary]. Her parents were on a vacation in the Hawaiian Islands when they heard about it. So, of course, we made arrangements immediately to get back to Jacksonville.

G: When was this?

P: I think 1985 or 1986. Mark stayed single about four years, and then he met Mary Francis, who’s also a very lovely person. [She] treats us like visiting royalty. They’ve been a very happy couple, and Madison was the result of that marriage.

G: Not that it matters, of course, [but] is Madison adopted?

P: No, Rebecca is adopted. That’s Allen and Susan’s child, and she is the one that just had the Bat Mitzvah. Madison is going to be twelve years old in October and Rebecca is going to be thirteen years old next month.

G: Tell me a little bit about Allen and his career and his family.

P: Well, when Allen left here with an undergraduate degree, he went to Georgia State and took an MBA. He worked for a short while as a buyer in Davidson’s Department Store, which is now Macy’s. He wasn’t happy there. Then he went to work in the bank. A good job, but once again, Allen didn’t like that. He was isolated. Allen is a very people-oriented person. The opportunity came for him to go into the training program, and he did that. They sent him to New York for six weeks.
G: Training program for what?

P: As an investment. So he came back and he’s been moving up ever since. He lives in a beautiful three-story house. They have two wonderful cars. They have a very substantial income, so they live well. Mark, of course, is in the Levin Firm. He’s a senior partner. He’s president of the firm, and he does very well, too. Both of them are workaholics, they really work very hard, so nobody’s giving them anything. They both enjoy what they’re doing, so they’re happy warriors, happy campers. Mark has been involved in lots of important cases. He’s a valuable, valuable asset to the firm. They live in a gorgeous home and they enjoy Madison, and we enjoy Madison very much. She’s a real prima donna.

G: I know that both Mark and Allen have been enormously generous and loving to you as you and Bessie have gotten older.

P: Very much so. There is absolutely nothing that we even remotely suggest that they do not do. Mark overwhelms us. Do you know Harry and David? Well, anyway, we’re in the “Fruit of the Month” club. We get two deliveries a month, and for some reason, in April, he decided to send us tomatoes, also. So there’s constantly packages, boxes, [and] things that are coming in. Both of them have been very generous. In addition to that, their wives have been very generous.

G: And they’re, of course, very philanthropic, which they learned from their mother and father.

P: Well, both of them can afford to do a lot more than I can do, but they’ve been very philanthropic. Mark participates in a lot of Jewish things, but his wife is not Jewish, so it’s not the same way as it is with Allen. But there’s nothing that happens Jewish-wise in Pensacola in which Mark is not involved in. So both of them, yes, are very philanthropic. Mark has done exceedingly well and so has Allen, and we’re proud of both of them.

G: It’s 2002. You’re going to be eighty –

P: – Four next March.

G: So what’s the future hold?

P: Well, let’s see, what is the future? Next year we’ll finish up and do tape nine or tape ten, won’t we? Find out what’s going on ____ this year.

G: We’ll have to keep up, but do you have some projects that you intend to
I really want to do this history of the family. I'm going to get it done and I'm going to try to get it printed or published or whatever and distribute it to the family. That's my big project now. I have a very large correspondence that I try to keep with. As I say, I read a lot. I, daily, read three newspapers, The Gainesville Sun, The Florida Times Union, and The New York Times, plus what I read on the computer, The Washington Post and usually a couple Israeli newspapers. I try to read books. So I keep up with a correspondence. We have a nice, active social life. As I say, we go out to eat a lot, we go to parties and receptions, [and] we go to the football games. We're going this next week to the football games. We're fortunate in that we often get invited to the president's box. So life goes merrily on.

You still have responsibilities on campus. You're still the university historian.

I'm the university historian. Right now, we're getting ready to celebrate [the] sesquicentennial next year. For instance, this last Tuesday I met with them over in publicity. They're putting together a video on the history of the university, so they interviewed me for that. So yes, there's always constantly things to do and things that I enjoy doing.

And you still come by the oral history center named for you.

Every day I'm at the oral history office.

What are you doing over there these days?

Well, I've got my computer and it seems to me I'm always busy or else I'm getting dressed or undressed to go to the gym. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday I leave out of there at 2:00 because I'm over there two hours. By the time I get back there to get dressed it's 4:30, time to go home.

Are you going to continue with being university historian indefinitely?

Oh, yeah. There is absolutely nobody else who knows all the history of this institution, and I don't know anybody that's getting ready for it. Some of them might say, who in hell can?

Well, there's certainly longevity on the part of historians, and there's longevity in your family, so at age 95—

95 or 103, that's right.
G: You'll still be university historian.

P: Well, if I’m not, it’s all right, too.

G: There’s one thing that I forgot to ask, and kind of, as we finish up here, you’re named distinguished service professor of history.

P: Right. Of course, you had the assistant, the associate, and the full professor, all of those I went through. In the early 1970s, the Board of Regents created a new line above full professor, distinguished service professor. You had to be nominated by your department and come up with support letters and show that you had been actively involved in the community and doing service projects and teaching, and doing work with graduate students and so on. So the department nominated me. They had started out the year before, Manning Dauer had been number one. I was number two on the campus. So that’s how it came about. I got a notification letter from Steve O’Connell, which carried with it a very nice salary raise, and I was happy. I hadn’t solicited it, so it came as something of a surprise.

G: And there are now several more.

P: Oh, yeah. In fact, they’ve now dropped service, they just call them distinguished professor. It’s true at all the universities. You have them at the University of South Florida. There probably are about maybe a dozen or twenty at the University of Florida.

G: Is there anyone else on the University of Florida campus who’s been here longer than you?

P: No, and when I retired in 1996, Gerry Schaffer, who was our vice-president for business affairs, checked the records, and he said there was no other faculty person who had served that long in the state university system. [He said] that there was one handyman, a maintenance person, who had come in January 1946, I came in June 1946, but no faculty person.

G: Is your status fully-retired? You’re not on the payroll any longer.

P: I’m not on the payroll since 1996. We live off of my retirement pay, which, as it turned out, became more generous than my regular pay because of the tax situation, and Social Security. I guess I shouldn’t be saying it, but we have more income than we need to live on.
G: And you're now a volunteer.

P: I call it pro bono. I wouldn't do it if I didn't enjoy doing it. I look forward to continue doing it over the years. I am happy to be working with Julian. Of course, I enjoy the oral history program. I like being involved in the university history. I enjoy, obviously, feeling that I'm needed and that I'm playing a role on the campus, which I presume I am.

G: You certainly are. Well, thank you. We've been together about eight and a half hours.

P: Is that what it is?

G: If we've left anything out, we'll get together again later in the term.

P: I can't think of anything we've left out, Mark.