

AL 102

Interviewee: Helen Graham

Interviewer: Connie Llewellyn

Date: June 1, 1988

Helen Graham served as president of the Junior Welfare League in Gainesville from 1948 to 1949 and is presently a sustaining member. This interview is part of a series of interviews by Connie Llewellyn on the history of the Junior Welfare League.

Ms. Graham was born in 1920 in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Her father was in the lumber business. When she was ten the family moved to Gulf Hammock, Florida, and in 1935 they moved to Gainesville so her brothers could attend the University of Florida.

Ms. Graham went to Atlanta to live with an aunt, however. Public schools in Atlanta went only through eleventh grade, so she came to Gainesville and finished high school at P. K. Yonge Lab School; she graduated in 1938. Ms. Graham then enrolled at Florida State College for Women in Tallahassee (now FSU) and earned a two-year teaching certificate. She taught in Archer and at Kirby Smith school in Gainesville. Her husband attended the College of Law at the University of Florida. After moving to Maine for two years, she has been in Gainesville ever since.

Ms. Graham describes the Junior Welfare League as a "town and gown" organization comprised mainly of the wives of professionals and well-established Gainesville families. She highlights some of their service projects, including the school lunch program at Kirby Smith, the well-baby clinic (JWL workers did the clerical work, and doctors volunteered their time and services), the prenatal clinic, the tumor clinic, fund-raising drives (notably house-to-house canvassing for various drives and the Phi Delta Theta/Sigma Nu football game), and the Thrift Shop. She discusses the membership and attendance policies of the league and mention the "blue slips." A special memory is of the performance of *The Wizard of Oz* by the Suzari Marionette troupe for Gainesville's school children. Also mentioned are the Better Film Program, which was Saturday morning movies for children; *Culinary Crinkles*, the league's cookbook; and the league's sponsorship of a Girl Scout troop. She describes downtown Gainesville, primarily the places of business. Ms. Graham pays special attention to "Aunt Carrie" (Caroline LaFontisee McCollum Palmer), who was the founder of and driving force behind Gainesville's Junior Welfare League.

L: This is Connie Llewellyn. I am interviewing Helen Graham at her home in Gainesville, Florida, 6617 SW 35th Way. Today is June 1, 1988. We are going to be talking about the Junior Welfare League of Gainesville. Good afternoon, Mrs. Graham.

G: Good afternoon, Connie.

L: I would like to start today by getting some biographical information on you. Where were you born?

G: In Hattiesburg, Mississippi, in 1920.

L: What were your parents' names?

G: Do you want their first names?

L: I want the full names, please.

G: Florine O. Smith and Leonard Charles Smith.

L: What was your mother's maiden name?

G: Oliver.

L: Did you grow up in Hattiesburg?

G: No, I was born there, but I lived in a small town in Mississippi – as you know, they are all small towns – named Chicora. My mother went, of course, to the nearest hospital, which was in Hattiesburg. That is why I was born there. I have never lived there.

L: How far away is Chicora from Hattiesburg, approximately?

G: Approximately thirty miles or maybe a little more.

L: Did your mother go in the time you were about to be born, or did she have to go in several weeks early and stay with friends?

G: No. This was a mill town where my parents lived, and my father was involved in the lumber business. They had a mill doctor, of course, that could sort of take care of Mother along the way. He could advise her. But she had this doctor, Dr. Hightower, in Hattiesburg deliver me. Of course, I guess Mother knew about the time she should leave. That is about all I remember. As a matter of fact, you are asking me things I do not really know myself. [laughter]

L: Well, I was interested in that, because I am from a very small town in Alabama, and the closest hospital was in Selma, which was seventy miles away. Mother had to go six weeks before I was supposed to be born in order to be sure that she was going to be there at the right time, so she spent the last six weeks staying with relatives in the town where the hospital was. So it is nice that your mother could make the trip when she needed to. You grew up in Chicora?

G: No, I only lived there until I was ten years old. Then my father came to Florida to another small town, Gulf Hammock, which is between Inglis and Otter Creek.

L: Oh, yes, I know where that is. That is beautiful.

G: There is nothing there. It is all gone now. The mill and so forth – everything has been moved. I think there is a train, a locomotive, along the highway. That is the only way you would know of it. They used to use that to go out into the woods to get the lumber and bring it back. There was a saw mill and a mill that dressed the lumber. Then there was a basket mill – they called it a crate mill – for beans and vegetables and things like that.

My father's health failed – he almost had to retire – and my family moved to Gainesville about 1935. The reason they did was so that my two brothers could go to the University of Florida when the time came for college. They both graduated from UF. When we graduated from the little school [in Gulf Hammock] we had to go on the school bus to Bronson for high school. My parents did not want me to ride the school bus to Bronson, so I went to Atlanta to live with my aunt.

L: So you went to high school in Atlanta?

G: Only one year, because my parents moved to Gainesville in the meanwhile.

L: What was the name of the school where you went?

G: In Atlanta? O'Keefe Junior High. Every morning my uncle would drop me off at the Biltmore Hotel, and I would walk across several blocks to O'Keefe Junior High School.

L: I bet that was an interesting experience.

G: There were only eleven grades [in Atlanta at that time]. I know I was so upset, because algebra was offered in the eighth grade in Georgia. In Florida they started [algebra] in the ninth grade. In Georgia there were only eleven grades at that time. I think it was probably because of the Depression, and they did not have enough money to pay the teachers. There were separate high schools for boys and girls – a boys' high and a girls' high.

L: Now, was this a private school?

G: No, no, it was a public junior high school.

L: At the end of eleventh grade, did one graduate and receive a diploma?

G: Yes. The junior high [started in the seventh grade and] went through the ninth grade. The tenth and eleventh grades were in the high school. It was just

different.

L: Yes, it sounds kind of interesting. And then you moved to Gainesville.

G: Then I came back to Gainesville and went to P. K. Yonge Laboratory School. I think mine was the third class to graduate from P. K. Yonge Laboratory School. I graduated in 1938.

L: What did you do after you finished high school?

G: I went to Florida State College for Women [in Tallahassee, now Florida State University]. That was during the Depression. My father was not well, so I decided to go for an L.I. degree.

L: What is that?

G: That is a two-year teaching certificate you could get, which I got. Then I taught school for one year in Archer, fifth and sixth grade, and then the next year I taught at Kirby Smith. I was there for only one year because in the meantime I got married.

L: So your teaching career lasted two years?

G: No. During the war, they had a terrible time [finding teachers]. A lot of the teachers left the teaching profession and went into welding, office work (secretarial), [or something for the war]. Camp Blanding opened, for one thing, and took a lot of the teachers from Gainesville, because they could get better paying jobs out there. We were making I think only eighty-five dollars a month. I was vacationing with my mother-in-law in Daytona when Mrs. Metcalf, the principal [of Kirby Smith] at the time, called and asked, "Would you please come back up? We are desperate." My mother-in-law said, "Go help them out," so I came to Gainesville and taught again that year. Then I taught part of another year.

Mrs. Walter Murphree took my job because my husband was being sent to Bangor, Maine. He was in Newfoundland and had come back to Bangor, and I wanted to join him. We lived for two years in Bangor, Maine. Then came back to Gainesville, and we have been here ever since.

L: So you have seen a lot of changes in Gainesville.

G: Oh, yes.

L: You were at Florida State College for Women for two years, so you must have

come back to Gainesville in 1940.

G: Yes, because I was married in 1941. I started [teaching] in Archer in 1940, and in 1941 I was married.

L: The look on your face when you were telling me about teaching in Archer made me wonder if it was a really interesting experience.

G: Oh, there is a good story behind that, let me tell you. They did not have a cafeteria, of course. I remember one of the teachers, the coach, there. As you know, coaches also taught chemistry and other subjects. Some of the children would come on the bus, and they did not have anything to eat all day long. With the tiny bit of money I was earning, I would buy [the children] fruit, like apples, and the coach said, "You should not do this. That is the way they live."

The heat in my school room was from a tiny pot-belly, wood-burning stove, and I declare, when we would be in there with the windows down, with the [children's] sneakers and bacon and whatever food they had [brought for] lunches, the odor in the room would almost drive you nuts. I had to stand near the window and crack it a bit so I could survive [laughter].

L: It sounds like it was a real experience.

G: It was. Many things were funny then.

L: I can imagine. Tell me about when you were invited to become a member of the Junior Welfare League.

G: Well, it was a very funny experience. I think it was in the afternoon when Sarah Beard came to my house to tell me that I had been invited to become a member. Meanwhile, I already knew it, because I had been to Boltin's filling station, and Temple Boltin had told me.

L: Oh, it was supposed to be a secret?

G: Yes, it was a secret in those days.

L: Now, how did that work? How did they keep it a secret?

G: Well, they voted maybe the night before, and the next day the person who was in charge of membership called on you and invited you.

L: So you really did not even know that you were being considered.

G: Oh, indeed not. Oh, no. It was so secret. It was almost like a sorority. That is the way I felt about it. I am so happy they are not doing that this day in time. But no, you did not know a thing about it; you did not know you were being proposed or anything.

L: How did the community perceive that sort of thing? Is that the way social clubs were conducted in general during that time?

G: Well, actually, I do not know. Aunt Carrie McCollum, a very active civic leader in Gainesville, helped organize the Junior Welfare League. Maybe it was from the Junior Woman's Club that the league was formed. Some of the older members, the charter members, will have to tell you how they formed. That was the only social [club], the Junior Woman's Club, I guess. I really do not know, because that was before my time. I do not recall any other social organizations in Gainesville. Then the league was fairly social in a way. I mean, the girls got together.

L: Right. In a way, that is sort of an exclusive image.

G: It was in those days, and that was one of the things that bothered me a lot of times. There were so many eligible ladies who, from year to year, [were eligible]. Finally, most of them that I could think of made it before they were too old. I was so young [when I was asked to join]. I was married when I was twenty, and I think I was taken in when I was either twenty-one or twenty-two. I think the deadline was thirty-five – I am not sure, but I think it was – and I could see that so many more people were more eligible (I thought) than I was, but I think they felt sorry for me because my husband was overseas.

L: I suspect they saw your potential and knew they needed your good work.

G: I do not know about that.

L: How did the members of the organization get to know you in order to consider you, if it was a secret and you did not know you were being considered?

G: Well, it was a tiny town.

L: Okay.

G: Goodness knows, we had very few people. Most of the streets were not paved. I mean, I can think of my mother's street, [SW 10th], for instance, where I lived. And I knew practically everybody in the League.

L: So it was really a very homogeneous group.

G: Very. Well, I hate to admit it (I do not know whether I should tell you this), but they always had the Town and Gown. You have heard of that before, I am sure. It was a group of girls whose husbands were at the University or worked in town.

L: Tell me a little bit more about the make-up of the membership of this group. You just alluded to part of that here.

G: You mean the people that belonged to it, speaking of the Town and Gown situation?

L: Yes.

G: Well, my husband, at that time, had not yet completed his law degree. He was still in school for several years after he came back from the service. And others were in different professions in town. I know Seldon Waldo was a practicing lawyer here. So many of them [had husbands who were lawyers] and doctors and merchants and so forth. Percy Beard was a [track] coach [at the University]. Idell Cherry's husband [H. Spurgeon Cherry] was an [intramural] coach. [Cherry was professor of physical education and head of intramural athletics, 1942-1946. Ed.] There are others that I cannot recall right off the top of my head who were connected with the University of Florida. So that was an issue in town, not so much in the league. I did not coin the phrase "Town and Gown"; you could read about it in the paper.

L: I know what you are referring to. I was interested in knowing if the membership was made up largely of "local people" or if they did assimilate people who moved into the community, such as through the University, into their membership. It sounds to me like you are saying they did.

G: Yes. Girls whose families had been here for years and years were more or less the beginning of the league. Then as the people moved to Gainesville [they were asked to join]. I think the year I was president we had some transfers that were from the Junior League.

L: The national?

G: Yes, and they came into the Junior Welfare League. One was from New York. They were from different places. Yes, they were accepted. They had to live here a little while for people to get to know them. I think [the policy was that] you had to live here three years, or one year if your husband was a Gainesville boy, or something to that effect, before you could be proposed for membership. I cannot recall all that, but it is in the minutes, I am sure, or in the by-laws. [That is how it was] in those days. I am sure it has been revised many times since.

- L: Certainly. What happened after you were invited to join? What did you do immediately?
- G: They had the same thing that they do today. I do not recall whether they call it a provisional [membership] or not, but I think they did. First you observed all the different projects. At the time [I joined] they were feeding lunch to the children over at Kirby Smith School. That year they discontinued that. Then we had the well-baby clinic and the prenatal clinic. We helped with all the drives. Goodness knows, for years the League tried to get the heart, the cancer, and different large drives to come under one heading so we would not have to go house to house for every single drive that came along. We did all that.
- L: Now, was that the spearheading of the movement for the United Way now?
- G: That I do not know. It probably was. There were individual [drives], [such as the heart and cancer associations], that would not [combine with other groups], particularly the Red Cross. I recall one year after I got out of the league, after I finished my seven years, I was co-chairman [of the Red Cross] with Dick Mills, a lawyer here, for Alachua County, and I began to see a little reason for their wanting to be separate drives and not [combined]. I should not talk about that much because I really do not know much about where the money [went] – what remained in the county that we collected and what went out and so on. I cannot recall that. That has been too long ago.
- L: But the league did a lot of the house-to-house canvassing?
- G: Oh, indeed. Actually, there was an area [of town assigned to me where] the people did not see me but once a year when I came begging for money. I begged and begged all over. We were divided into sections, like blocks, and you would be responsible for a section. You had to get your own workers and so forth. We would do the whole town.
- L: I see. That was a big job.
- G: It was. But they did really well.
- L: Tell me a little bit about the provisional course. What was the purpose of it?
- G: It was to inform new members about the different projects of the league. Have you ever seen the little blue book we had?
- L: I do not know that I have.

G: We had a little blue book (it was small) with by-laws and so on and the officers. It was published each year, and you had to know everything that was in that little blue book. At the end of three months (maybe it was) you took an exam. I remember so well when I took mine. The house is no longer there; I think it is a taco place [on University Avenue] now. [laughter] We had an exam, and everybody was so nervous, but I know of no one that ever failed it. It is that sort of thing. Then we had a little party afterwards; usually there would be a little tea and cookies or something. And that was that.

L: So you really were learning about the organization, then.

G: You learned about the organization. You observed; you had to observe everything. It is very much the same as the league does now. Do [prospective members] observe before they [actually join]?

L: Yes. I think they also have some instruction on the community and the community's needs. But they do have a whole section on the league, both at the local level and, I think, the national affiliation.

G: Well, it has been so long. Of course, we collected salvage from every place we could find.

L: Now, what did you do with that?

G: Well, the league had what we called the Thrift Shop. You took your salvage down there, and certain girls marked the salvage and certain ones sold it.

L: So this was a project?

G: This was a project, and every bit of this money that we made went right back to the community. Lottie Schaffer, I remember at that time, was in charge of the central welfare. We would pay for tonsillectomies and so forth. Everything that was made through any [of our projects] went right back into the community.

L: Who did you sell these salvaged goods to?

G: Well, mainly I suppose you would call them indigents. Mostly the black community. We had a favorite old lady that used to come in. We used to let her put five cents or ten cents down on something to hold it for next week. One day this lady came in and selected a few things, and every time she would decide on something she would say, "Wrap it up," and then the next one, "Wrap it up." [laughter] It was so funny. We had different people come in. We had a fellow by the name of Hezekiah that used to come in, and he would buy all kinds of things. [He would buy] clothes for women – not only for men, but for women, too. We do not know what he did with them, but he would come in and buy

them [every week].

L: So you priced them for people that could not afford to buy at retail prices?

G: Oh, yes. [We charged] twenty-five cents or fifty cents for a dress. There is nothing to compare with today. And I will tell you, I think the salvage this day in time is a lot different from what we had.

L: Yes, probably so.

G: It was either out of date or pretty well worn when we would get it. But we did ask them to have clothing clean and pressed.

L: Now, the Thrift Shop has been in several different locations. Could you tell me a little about where and when?

G: Well, when I first went in, it was on SW 1st Avenue. It could have been some place before that. Then next it was on 1st Street. Then we had to move, although I am not sure why. The rent went up or some reason I cannot recall now. So for a year I do not believe we had the Thrift Shop. Then Louise McMullen and Whitey [her husband, who worked for the *Gainesville Sun*] let us use their garage. It had a dirt floor, and it was cold and hot. But they were so kind to let us use it. Louise and Whitey were very wonderful to do that for the league.

L: Now, was she a member of the group?

G: Yes. You went, whether you had your baby sitting outside in the car or not. Oh, I can remember once I had to take one of my children – he was sick or something – because my maid was not there that day. Louise was so sweet to let him come in and visit with her.

L: But you had to keep your appointment anyway.

G: Oh, you did, yes. And if you did not, you got a pink slip.

L: I have heard about those. You need to tell me what that means.

G: If you got more than three, you were asked to resign, if I recall right. You did not want a pink slip. I cannot remember much about [what they did about] being tardy. It seems to me there was something about if you were late, but I cannot remember.

L: I heard something about blue slips, too, but I do not really know what they were.

- G: I think if you were late, you were penalized, too, but I do not recall much about that. It has just been too long.
- L: Well, I think it has changed several times since then, too.
- G: I am sure it has.
- L: But it is always interesting to know how things were done at one time. Now, you were president in 1948 and 1949?
- G: Yes.
- L: What sorts of projects was the league taking on at that time?
- G: Well, we had the well-baby clinic. Dr. Raymond Camp came and spoke to the league. I was just looking at this, if you will just give me a second.
- L: Certainly. You are referring to the league scrapbook.
- G: I am referring to the league scrapbook, because I cannot recall. He came to us and said there was such a need for a room [at Alachua County Hospital] for young children to be furnished with beds and play toys and things that would contribute to their recovery. One was designated, and it was named for Ella Mae Canova, who was a deceased member of the Junior League, one of the founders.
- L: This was the pediatric wing at Alachua County Hospital?
- G: Yes, the pediatric wing. Anyway, we had the tumor clinic, the prenatal clinic, the well-baby clinic, and, of course, the Thrift Shop.
- L: Now, how did all these clinics operate?
- G: Well, they had a room at the hospital, and different doctors would come and donate their services. Dr. Maxey Dell and different ones. All the doctors gave their services free. They would be there on certain days. We manned them and did all the clerical work, such as appointments and whatnot.
- L: I see.
- G: And different members of the league were in charge of those clinics. One of the big money-making projects, if you call \$1,500 or maybe a little more [a "big" money maker], was the annual football charity game between the Phi Delta Theta fraternity and the Sigma Nu fraternity.

L: Right. Tell me a little bit about that.

G: All right. I understood from reading in the scrapbook that [these two fraternities] had a ninety-nine-year contract. The Junior Welfare League and the [Junior] Chamber of Commerce were the co-sponsors of it, and they sold the tickets and made all the preparations for it. It was played every year, and the proceeds were divided between the two organizations. We also used that for our welfare projects. That went on for years. I am not sure why they stopped doing that, because according to the scrapbook there was a ninety-nine-year contract between the two. I am not certain, but I know the year I was president one young man was hurt and was taken to the infirmary. He was unconscious. Bill Rion at that time was in charge of the Jaycees, and he and I went right to the infirmary to see how that child was. He was fine. It was nothing serious.

L: Now, Bill Rion was head of the Florida Union at that time, was he not?

G: I believe he was.

L: Well, I figured maybe that is why you were telling me that you all went to the infirmary, because he had an "in" at the University.

G: These football players were students at the University. We went to the infirmary just to check on the young man. The league co-sponsored the game, and [we wanted to see] if there was anything we could do, because these were children from out of town. I do not think this boy that was injured was from Gainesville. I could be wrong, but I think something came up about the problem of injuries.

L: Well, that would be a liability.

G: I think so.

L: But I think it did continue on into the early 1950s.

G: Oh, yes, it continued for a number of years. I noticed that it was discontinued later on, and I just wondered why. That was long after I became a sustaining member.

L: What year did you resign from the league?

G: Well, to tell you the truth, the next year I was out.

L: Following the year you were president?

G: Right. I stayed in part of 1950. Also, during that time, we were permitted to

make two years in one if we were out of town with our husbands who were in the service. So not only was I president, which you are not supposed to have to do much of anything other than what that required, I was on committees just like any of the other members. I was doing double duty. At that time I had three children, and it was really a pressing time for me. But I did that double time. I stayed in half of the year, because as the past president it was [traditional]. Bunch Powers became president after my tenure. She was elected in 1950.

L: Yes. So membership at that time was for a set number of years?

G: Seven years.

L: Then you graduated?

G: Then you were sustaining. It was not an age limit like it is today. It was just seven years.

L: So you just served for seven years, and then your term was over. Was there a sustainer group that was organized at that time? Did you continue to be a member of the league as a sustainer?

G: To tell you the honest truth, I do not remember when the sustainer group was formed. I know later on they did organize a sustainer group. But you were out. I mean, when you finished, you just finished.

L: So there was no continuing obligation or continuing membership at that time?

G: No, not to my knowledge.

L: Tell me a little bit more about the war years. You have alluded to that on a couple of occasions, for instance, when your husband was out of town and you were able to be away with him some way. But during the time you were still in Gainesville during the war years, how did that affect the membership and what projects the league could take on?

G: Well, this does not have anything to do with it, but I was thinking that during the war, school teachers had to do all the clerical work related to rationing, the ration books.

L: I did not know that.

G: We got a little citation from the president [of the United States]. Do you want to hear this?

L: Sure.

G: Also for oil rationing.

L: The teachers did this part, too?

G: Yes. Some of the blacks would come in, and we would ask how many cubic feet [of space they needed to heat], how many gallons [they would need], and we had to figure all this out. Someone would say, "Well, about from here to here to here," and we would think that is sort of 10' x 10'. Then we would ask how many 10' x 10' rooms they had, and it was by guess. We teachers did that.

L: Was this after school hours?

G: I think we did it on Saturdays, it seems to me. Yes, the teachers did a lot during the war.

L: It seems like it. I did not have any idea.

G: I cannot recall whether the league had anything to do with this or not. I remember we had to keep all our cans and clean them and smash them, and they were collected. And we had a place to take all our papers. We had a big boxcar where we would take them, and it would be packed. Really, the league members would come and go, because as their husbands would leave, where they could they would join them. The league gave them leaves of absence for them to go; there was no problem with that.

L: Did the membership subsequently reduce considerably?

G: Oh, yes, indeed it did. In fact, gosh, when we had fifty members at one time, we thought that was absolutely wonderful. But thirty-five, I think, was as many as we had while I was president. I do not recall exactly how many, but it was small. And you had to make a lot of time available for the different projects you worked on.

L: Now, at that time, was the obligation that you took on for a certain number of hours a year?

G: It was a certain number of hours per week, per month.

L: How did that work?

G: Well, as I recall, we could sign up for the projects we preferred to work on. The chairman of each project was appointed by the president, as I recall. She may

have been elected. You could probably find somebody who knows more about this than I. But they signed up, and you had to fill those appointments when they came or get someone else to do it. You could trade places, trade jobs with people.

L: A lot of the women who were members of the Junior Welfare League did have small children.

G: Oh, indeed. That was a terror. However, it was inexpensive in those days help-wise. You could get a sitter for a dollar a day. Most all my friends had help full-time. I know I did, and most of them did.

L: In addition to women who were in the league that may have had small children, did you have very many members who were career people and worked outside the home for pay?

G: No, I do not recall many of those.

L: You talked about the year that you taught school. Was that before you became a member of the Welfare League?

G: I taught only one year before joining the league. The Thrift Shop was open only on Saturday, and those that worked [Monday through Friday] could do their hours there.

L: So there was something available for them, too.

G: Oh, yes, always. I recall that is how that many of them took care of their hours.

L: Where were the membership meetings held?

G: It is no longer there, but the meetings were held in the old city hall, down in the basement where the police station was located. They had a little auditorium, and it was there.

L: Did your group rent the use of the hall?

G: No, I think it was donated to us. We usually had our board meetings in the homes of the different members, and then we had our meeting of the group in the city hall.

L: What time of day were the membership meetings held?

G: At nighttime, usually at 8:00 at night.

L: What about the board meetings?

G: At night.

L: They were at night, too?

G: Yes, most all. I cannot recall any time we did not have them at night.

L: I saw in the minutes some discussion about making your hours, the hours that were required for you to volunteer. There were regular hours and there were "potential" hours, and I wondered what potential hours were. There were two categories.

G: I do not know. What year was that? That may have been after 1949.

L: I think it was in the early 1940s. It was during the 1940s, but I am not sure just what year.

G: Well, it is possible it was before I was [a member]. I do not recall what that meant. I am sorry.

L: That is okay. I have asked several people, but nobody can remember. I am just curious about the semantics there. Now, the year that you were the president was when the league began a cultural program in Gainesville.

G: Well, actually, it was the year before.

L: Okay. And you were chairman of it.

G: Yes, I was chairman. I had several people assisting me. As I told you, when it came up, I went down to Tampa. The Junior League of Tampa was having the Suzari Marionette performance, and I went down to one of their performances to see what it was like. I was just dumfounded. I thought it was the most wonderful thing I had ever seen and that the children just must see it. So I came back, and after I made my report they voted to do it, thinking that they probably would not make any money but would just break even. All we wanted to do was be able to sell enough tickets to pay for it, which we did not. But we had some wonderful anonymous donors that gave money so all of the children could see it at Kirby Smith. I recall that, and that pleased me so that all the children were able [to attend]. All the rooms turned out into the auditorium. They did the *Wizard of Oz*.

L: So it was done through the school system?

G: Yes. Then we went to P. K. Yonge, and they let us use their auditorium. We had two performances there – one in the daytime and one that night. We had a total of four performances. Only one person performed, and she wondered if she could complete [the four performances because of] her voice. She said she had never done but two performances in a day; I think she usually did one at around 2:00 or 3:30 in the daytime and then one at 8:00 at night. But it worked out very nicely. Then they had another one the next year, the year I was president. The second year we had another performance of the *Snow Queen*. The Claire Tree Major [group] from New York performed that one.

L: This was a marionette performance, also?

G: Yes.

L: This was a departure, now, in that up till this time the league had been doing largely welfare-oriented projects. Is that right?

G: Right. I cannot recall anything before that of this sort of culture. Also, another thing [that we did] – it seems to me it was about the time I was president; it may have been a little bit before, but I think it was when I was president – was we sponsored a Girl Scout troop. It was so difficult [for the girls to find someone to sponsor a troop]. The children needed that, so we did sponsor one.

L: Now, was this at the beginning of the Girl Scout movement in this area?

G: No, I will not say that. There were always projects that were needed, and maybe by our sponsoring one Gainesville could have more troops to make it available to more children. Usually it was a neighborhood group of children the same age where two mothers or so would be the leaders of the troop.

L: So you did not form these troops largely for the children of the members. This was for another segment of the community.

G: Oh, no, [it was for the community]. I do not recall how long that continued, but we did have several Girl Scout troops.

L: There is another project I wanted to ask you about, and that is the Better Films Program that the League undertook, the films for children.

G: That was after my time.

L: The Saturday morning movies.

- G: Oh, Saturday morning movies. Well, [we got into that project because] the parents thought it would be very nice for the league to select movies that were appropriate for the children to see on Saturday mornings.
- L: There was no rating system then, the way there is today? No PG?
- G: No, no, no. You could tell by the title of those things. Elizabeth Congelton, I recall, did such a wonderful job of selecting the movies. The children would go down [to the] Lyric Theater around 9:00 or 10:00 for a couple of hours every Saturday morning. They looked forward to it.
- L: Now where was that located?
- G: That was located just in front of the old post office, which is now the Hippodrome [State Theater]. There are law offices there now.
- L: Was this project a big hit with the community?
- G: Well, it certainly was with the mothers. [laughter] All the children could go. It was well publicized; I know in the paper there always would be a little write-up. I noticed in the scrap book there were quite a number of reports that had been in the paper. So it was well publicized through the paper. I seriously doubt that we had to pay for anything that we put in the paper. We would just submit it, and they would publish it.
- L: You had a good working relationship with the press?
- G: Oh, they were very good. They were so nice about everything in those days.
- L: In looking through the minutes of these years – I think this was about 1947 – I noticed that the colored community requested that the films be made available to them, too. I do not know, from the way it was written in the minutes, if it was shown at a separate theater, if there was even a colored theater in Gainesville, or if it was made available to the black children at the same theater as the whites.
- G: I am so sorry to say I do not know. I cannot recall. Elizabeth Congelton was in charge. I would almost be sure that it was made available to them. They used their churches a lot of times for things. They had the old Rose Theater, and I would not be a bit surprised if that is where they showed that.
- L: Was that a black theater?
- G: Yes. It was a Quonset hut. Have you ever seen those old Quonset huts, the long, tin buildings with the round roof?

L: Yes, I think so.

G: There was one of those called the Rose Theater, and it was down in the colored section of the town.

L: You mean around NW 5th Avenue?

G: Yes, it was on 5th Avenue, nearer town from 6th Street, across the railroad tracks. It was down there on the left-hand side of the street.

L: Well, I did notice from what I read in the minutes that it was made available to the colored children, but I just did not know where it was shown to them.

G: Well, I would say that it was at the Rose Theater. If it was not, it was probably in one of the churches. They did not have a recreation center at that time, although they did later. The church was the social gathering place for all of the colored people.

L: There was something else from the minutes that I noticed that had to do with the black community that I wanted to ask you about, and that was that there was a lot of interest in the Welfare League in helping the Negroes secure hospital facilities. This was in the late 1940s. There was some discussion in the minutes about whether to build a hospital for the Negroes or whether to build a Negro wing onto the county hospital. I think the way the league got involved was through their premature baby care that they were already offering to the hospital. You had mentioned this pediatric wing in honor of Mrs. Canova. They were offering preemie baby care in that facility, and the league was trying to decide whether it would be possible to divide that operation and allow black babies to be cared for there, too, so the nurses that were taking care of the white preemie babies would also take care of the black children.

G: I am sorry, but I do not recall.

L: I was just interested in that, because it was the first time I had ever seen anything written about the idea of having a Negro hospital in Gainesville. I do not think it ever really got off the shelf.

G: There was a colored wing [in Alachua County Hospital].

L: Oh, really?

G: Yes.

L: Of the Alachua County Hospital?

G: Of the Alachua County Hospital.

L: Well, that must be the option they decided on.

G: I think so. I do not recall that in my tenure, but they did, yes.

L: How long, I wonder, did the Negro wing exist?

G: I do not remember; I do not know.

L: I guess until integration.

G: Yes, I would say so.

L: I think it was also maybe how much they could afford or whether they were indigent, you see. It probably had a lot to do with that, too, because it would have been impossible for most of them to pay.

G: I would say that. I know from my own experience with my own help, when they would have babies or be ill we would try to help them out personally. I did a lot for them. Through the years, goodness knows, you did everything you could to help them out, because they were having a pretty tough time of it. I have a feeling that is the way it worked. They were indigent, and their health care was paid for by the county.

L: These were also the type of clientele that the league was serving through your clinics, is that right?

G: Yes.

L: I also read where there was a cookbook published in the early 1940s. I have not seen a copy of that, but I would love to.

G: I have one.

L: Well, I am going to have to take a look at it.

G: All right. I would be glad to show it to you.

L: I understand the name of it was *Culinary Crinkles*.

G: Correct.

L: Tell me a little bit about it.

G: Well, that was published before my time. My mother-in-law has a recipe in it, and I still use her recipe for dream cookies. Anyway, all the good cooks in Gainesville were invited to submit recipes, and they were selected and published. Really and truly, some of the best recipes in town are in that cookbook. One is Sunny Harper's mother's congealed [salad recipe]. In fact, I saw it in the paper – it had been published. There were an awful lot of good cooks in Gainesville.

L: It was a money maker; the proceeds went toward the league's projects?

G: Yes. Jill Roberts did a lot of the illustrating for it. She was a member of the league some years back. She was very artistic, and she helped with the cookbook. It is a cute little book. I will be glad to show it to you.

L: I heard that it was sold through Miss Terry's gift shop.

G: Right.

L: Tell me where that was.

G: All right. It was [next to the Florida Theater], almost directly across [the street] from where the Primrose Grill was, and it was called Miss Terry's. She had a little book shop, and she had some little gifts in there, too. That was the only place you could find gifts. That was probably before Miss Bessie Rutherford opened her shop, which was a little bit later. Of course, it no longer exists. I learned to knit when I was in high school in her little shop. It was a gift shop, also.

L: Did she sell yarn and all, too?

G: Yes. She had a little area in the back [of the shop] where you could come and sit and learn to knit, and she would sell you yarn. She had rows of shelves full of little gifts for sale. She also did hem stitching. Oh, gracious, she was a great hem stitcher. Ladies were having hem stitching put on pillow cases and linens. I am not sure, but it seems to me she did some initialing. She was very artistic and a wonderful lady. Always a miss; [she never married. Her shop was the beginning of Rutherfords', which is now closed.]

L: Yes. While we are talking about businesses that were in town during this period of time, what was on the square?

G: Well, we had a Piggly Wiggly.

L: Which side was this?

G: That would have been on the east side.

L: Where Cox's is today, on that side of the square?

G: No, it was where the park is now. Do you know where the park is? All that was stores. McCrory's was in the middle of the block, and Baird Hardware [was on the other corner]. The whole block is gone now. There was a dry goods store between McCrory's and Baird Hardware called Smith and Hyde, I believe.

Then you came around to Wilson's [Department Store], which was on the northeast corner. My husband's family owned that building for many years. We just sold our interest in that recently, in the last five or six years, I guess it was. And then there was City Drug. I am trying to think of the name of the people that had the City Drug Store. And we had a Royal Cafe.

L: Now, was this on the same side as Wilson's Department Store?

G: Yes. The Royal Cafe was at the end of the block, I guess it was, on that corner. Where Soul Train [men's store] is was a restaurant at one time, and along in there Miss Geiger had her store, next to Wilson's.

L: What was Miss Geiger's store?

G: It was a dress shop. She carried dresses and hats, and we would have a fashion show. I know I modeled hats for her many times when they had little fashion shows.

L: Where would you have the fashion show?

G: At different places. At the Thomas Hotel [now the Thomas Center] I was in one, and I believe it was the Women's Club where I was in another. I cannot remember any other places.

L: Now, what about over there where Parker's [office equipment] is today?

G: Years ago Sears & Roebuck was there.

L: I did not know that.

G: That is where Parker's is now. And Jay's Dress Shop was in the same block. Going down the street, on the corner of Main Street was McDowell's Furniture Store. It was there for years and years. Of course, now it is a bar, I think, or something of that nature. Then, of course, on the northeast corner was Cox's [furniture store]. I cannot remember

when Cox's was not there. I cannot remember any other [businesses on the block]. Then, of course, there was the old brick courthouse [in the middle of the square].

Further down, going west on University Avenue, the Presbyterian church was on the right-hand side where a bank is now, First Florida Federal. Chesnut's [office supplies] moved into what used to be Woolworth's, the five- and ten-cent store. That was up near the Presbyterian church. Then in the next block was the Primrose Grill, and across the street was the Coffee Pot. Clyde English owned that, and it served the best pecan pies you ever ate in your life. The Firestone [service station] was the last place of business that I can recall [on the same side of the street as the Presbyterian church]. There were beautiful, old homes all the way out [to where the University campus began.]

L: They are all gone now.

G: They are all gone. One of the houses that was on the corner where the Florida Theater is now was the Ludwig residence. It was a big, two-story, white house. It has been moved out on [what used to be called] Newberry Road [now SW 2nd Avenue], just across the street from the entrance to the University Golf Course, down in Golfview. Do you know where that is?

L: Yes.

G: Dr. [Glenn] Summerlin [Gainesville physician] bought the home and lived there for a while. I do not know who lives there now. His father was married to the lady who [originally] owned the house.

L: So that house was moved instead of being destroyed?

G: Yes. Most of the others, I think, were destroyed, torn down. I cannot recall whether they were moved, but that one is still around.

L: So basically people did their shopping downtown.

G: Yes.

L: That was where everything was. That is interesting to think about what the town was like back then.

G: That was it. Of course, the Episcopal church [Holy Trinity] was on NE 1st Street, and the telephone company was across the street from the side of the Episcopal church. (I cannot recall what street that is.) That little building in there was all the telephone company had. Back of where Chesnut's is now was the train station, located on N. Main Street.

- L: So you mean the next block where there is a bank.
- G: Yes, where the [First Union] bank is now, on that corner. Also in there was a hotel above what is now the back end of Chesnut's. Across the street from that was another building that was called the Brown Hotel. The Drummers stayed there. It was called the Brown House at one time, years and years ago.
- L: Okay. I am trying to think of the name of this building. It is a large, stone building. Is it the Masonic Lodge?
- G: Yes. That has been there as long as I can recall.
- L: Was the hotel next to that, or where was it in relation to that building?
- G: No, it was directly across the street from Chesnut's. Chesnut's goes to the end of the block, and it is just across at the end of the block. That was the Brown House.
- L: Okay, so it was across Main Street. There was one on Main Street a couple of blocks south of University [Avenue] that has just been made into a county annex building, I think. It is on your right going south. That was a hotel.
- G: The Commercial Hotel.
- L: Yes, the Commercial Hotel.
- G: There were two more further down the street.
- L: On that same street?
- G: Yes, further down the street.
- L: And you also had the Thomas Hotel at that time.
- G: Yes, that had been there for a long time. It was there when I came here many years ago. But it was then a hotel; it was not a residence when I came to Gainesville. Many social events in Gainesville were held in the Thomas Hotel--dances and so on.
- L: I read that the Junior Welfare League held lots of them there when they were doing fund raisers.
- G: I will tell you another place that was used--it is no longer in use--and that was the American Legion Hall. Goodness knows, we had many of our dances there.
- L: Where was that located? East University Avenue?

- G: Across the street and a little further down toward town from Kirby Smith School.
- L: Okay, it was on the east side.
- G: And the old library was there, too, just down beyond that.
- L: Tell me a little bit about the social events that the Junior League had for fund raisers. Especially the dances.
- G: Oh, my, the dances were something they looked forward to. The New Year's Eve dances. I read someplace in here [the scrapbook] that we had 350 people. That was a lot of folks in those days! I was on the admissions [committee] once. We decorated the ball room and worked hard, and we sold all our tickets to everybody.
- L: So it was not a party just for Junior Welfare League members?
- G: Oh, no. It was a community affair, and we were making money trying to sell the tickets. It was fun. We had an orchestra--Toby Dowdy. Did you ever hear of Toby Dowdy?
- L: No.
- G: He was sort of country music. I cannot believe we used him at the dance. The [Gainesville] Woman's Club was another place where they had bridge parties and other socials. "Little Women" were the children of the mothers who belonged to the Woman's Club. Angus Merritt (he is alive today) used to play his records for the little women's dance for many years when I was in high school.
- L: Oh, he did this for the kids to dance to?
- G: Yes. That was just for the community. We were talking about social activities.
- L: Right, yes. I did not know that about him.
- G: Yes. Ask Angus Merritt about playing for all the Little Women dances. He could tell you a lot about it. He is a person who could tell you a lot of things about Gainesville, I am sure.
- L: He is an interesting man.
- G: You know Angus then?
- L: Yes, a little bit. Tell me a little bit about Aunt Carrie [Caroline Julia LaFontisee

McCollum Palmer].

- G: I did not know Aunt Carrie very well. I can say that I thought she was one of the loveliest, most generous women I have ever met. She did so much for so many people, the kinds of things that you would not know about, but they just happened. At one time she served lunch at her house, sort of like a catered lunch. She was married the year I was president, I believe, and left Gainesville and went to Georgia. But I did not know her very well.
- L: Was she very much involved with what work the Junior Welfare League was doing? Was she still the sponsor?
- G: Well, I think it was the year I was president, or a little later, that she was named the sponsor for the league. The league was really formed, as the girls will tell you, on her front porch. I have heard Rodney Bishop and several of the founders of the league talk about how they started it and how Aunt Carrie was the real cornerstone of it all.
- L: I just wondered how actively she stayed involved over the years.
- G: Oh, she was very active in the Catholic church. In fact, I do not know the distinguished title she had, but one was conferred upon her. [Mrs. Palmer received the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice award from Pope Pius XII. Ed.]
- L: I think she received several national honors.
- G: Oh, yes. She was terribly active in that. She was always very active. I do not know how it came about that she interested the girls in the league. She must have realized they needed something of this nature in this town.
- L: I talked to her niece, Louise Kincaid, about the beginning of the league, and she told me some interesting stories about her aunt. What she related to me was that Aunt Carrie went to Lakeland, I believe it was, to one of the Florida Federated Women's Club meetings and learned that several other groups in Florida had started a Junior Welfare League patterned after the national association but were not necessarily members of it, and that she came back to Gainesville and decided it was something that Gainesville needed, and it was something that the women of that age in Gainesville needed to be a part of, so she proceeded to form it.
- G: Oh, I am glad you told me, because I never did really know that, how she conceived the idea. But I can tell you this. The year I was president, a group of about four ladies from this league went down to Clearwater, and they established a Junior Welfare League down there patterned after ours. We left [a copy of] our little blue book [with them], and they were able to start their own [league]. I am sure they went national a long time

before we did, because they were a large-enough community.

L: Right, and that does play a part in it.

G: Oh, yes, that was one of the determining factors. The population must be so much.

L: Was there a statewide affiliation among the Junior Welfare Leagues in Florida when you were a member or president?

G: At one time, yes, there was, but whether it was while I [was a member, I do not recall]. I seem to think no, but it may have been.

L: I think that it disbanded during the war, and I was unclear as to just exactly when it started back up.

G: I cannot recall just when it did. I do not recall attending any or having anybody from our league, but there again I have forgotten. I just have to admit it.

L: Well, I have enjoyed talking to you about these things this afternoon. Do you have something that you would like to add that I have not touched on?

G: Oh, I think you have covered everything.

L: Well, I really have enjoyed it, and I appreciate your giving your time and helping us in this project.

G: Well, I am delighted to have helped you. It has been a pleasure being with you and talking to you today.

L: Thank you very much.

G: I hope everything I have said is correct. If it is not, just forgive me.

L: I think that you are very accurate with this.

[End of the interview]