

2012.3.34

ANDREW (ANDY) ROBERTSON

*Recording begins in the midst of JAMES MACKAY's welcoming comments and introduction of guest speaker Andrew Robertson.*

MR. MACKAY: . . . whether he had shot himself in the foot, I mean [*audience laughter*], and said he might have stuck his foot in his mouth. Just don't know. But anyway, we hope he makes a full and speedy recovery. But just as in the case of Dorothy Nix, we are getting an extra helping. *To MR. ROBERTSON, in audience, off-camera:* In fact, some of the people in this audience said that they would not have been out on this wintry day to hear Manuel [possibly referring to Manuel Maloof?], but to hear you now is a different thing. *Audience laughter* And we are continuing to have a rich, rewarding experience here. *To then-DeKalb Historical Society executive director, off-camera:* Bob, do you have any announcements or anything now? *To general audience:* Our director. Most of you have met him. He'll be here at the reception. Bob Covey [spelling?], we're delighted to have as our executive director. Is there anything you'd like to tell them?

*Camera pans to MR. COVEY [spelling?], standing, in the audience:* We aren't sure about March, but we do have two speakers for April.

MR. MACKAY, *off-camera:* Well, tell them about it. I think it's a marvelous team.

MR. COVEY [spelling?]: We have Mr. John Ridley and his sister.

MR. MACKAY: And his sister, Caroline Howard.

AUDIENCE MEMBER (sounds like Mrs. Furse), *off-camera:* You don't mean it!

*Camera pans back to MR. MACKAY, at the front of the room:* Well, that's a good team.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera:* Who! And that's next week? And the next?

MR. MACKAY: No, that's—

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera:* Next month?

MR. COVEY, *off-camera:* April

MR. MACKAY: That's right.

MR. COVEY [spelling?]: And the way that—

*Camera pans back to MR. COVEY.*

MR. MACKAY, *off-camera*: Oh, and Whit Smith will come. Whit has it on his calendar. Whit was born in Decatur, like Nina over here. And he's been our clerk of court for eight years. *Camera pans back to MR. MACKAY.* And we think it's safe to have politicians up until the qualifying [inaudible] closes. *Audience laughter* But beyond that we are a nonpartisan group. *Looks toward back of room.* Well, now, here comes our secretary, Alice, and you just look fully restored. ["Alice" responds *off-camera* that she is "fully restored."] Well, we've got a good time coming up. We always appreciate Fran Broadnax with her skills with the camera, because we're recording this for posterity. And, on the other hand, if you lose the tape, posterity might lose out. And we taped His Honor here, the former mayor, and somebody lost the tape, and [to ANDY ROBERTSON, seated *off-camera* in the audience] then I think you said that some sinister force messed up your little cassette.

MR. ROBERTSON, *off-camera*: This is my third time.

MR. MACKAY, *to audience*: This is the third time.

MR. ROBERTSON, *off-camera*: Third effort to be [inaudible].

MR. MACKAY: Well, you're not going to strike out this time; you're going to knock the ball out of the park. And I must say that I was delighted to have the assignment from Bob Covey [spelling?] to see if we could recruit him [Mr. Robertson]. And to show you that I am an experienced politician, I called his home and sort of got his wife's permission. To MR. ROBERTSON, seated *off-camera* in the audience: I notice she didn't come up here, did she?

MR. ROBERTSON, *off-camera*: She [rest of sentence inaudible]. *Audience and MR. MACKAY laugh.*

MR. MACKAY: Well, anyway, if you will come up, you have an hour, and then we're going to have our reception, and we are honored to have former mayor and raconteur ANDY ROBERTSON. MR. MACKAY walks *off-camera* and sits in the audience.

MR. ROBERTSON, *rising and taking his place at the front of the room, on-camera:* Thank you, Jimmy. Despite our genial host presiding officer's expertise in the field of politics, something's obvious to me that he is a little weak in nomenclature. He called me "former mayor." Now, that is reserved for those who left office voluntarily. Those of us who retired at the public request are known as "ex-mayors." *Audience laughter*  
[Additional comment rendered inaudible by audience laughter.] Now, --

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera:* That should be interesting!

MR. ROBERTSON: I gave Jimmy [Mackay] no argument. He caught me over across the street having a cup of coffee, and he said, "Manny's fallen out. Will you help?" I think he thought he was going to have to beg me a little, and I said, "Sure." *Audience laughter* I'm always ready. I have one speech and, oh, about twenty-five or thirty subjects for this speech. Now, you know, this is—for an egotist, this is a great fling, this "I Remember Hour." It gives me a chance to talk about the person I love best, and that's me, you see. *Audience laughter* I talk for an hour about myself; and if you get some little sense of the history of Decatur from it, then everybody's happy.

Now, I have spent my entire life here—and I mean in the City of Decatur; I don't mean a block outside or—but in 1906 these things happened:

- Agnes Scott became a four-year college—and by the way was the first school in Georgia to be accepted [accredited] by the Southern Accrediting Association [now SACS--Southern Association of Colleges and Schools].
- The San Francisco fire occurred.
- Ansley Goss [spelling?] Drugstore, which many of you think of as being Fred Scott's pharmacy, came into being.
- And I was born.

Now, you can take your choice of which of those things had the greatest impact on the area. But in any event, since that day I have lived in the City of Decatur; and I intend to die in the City of Decatur. In fact, I ride by about once a week to my cemetery lot and look in it and make certain that ain't nobody buried in my place. *Audience laughter*

I was old enough—too young for World War I and too old for World War II old enough—too young for World War I, too old for World War II—that was a physical disability of some kind—and I have never spent a Christmas away from Decatur. I've spent eighty-two—or eighty-one—Christmases. And I've been here, and my mother died two years ago. And if she'd lived another month' she'd have been 102 years old. So—she didn't die here in Decatur, because she was living with my sister. When she was ninety-five, I finally got her out of the old home and sent her up to see my sister; and I asked my sister, I said, "I'm sorry this happened to you." And she said, "I didn't invite her. She just came." *Audience laughter* That was Mom. She thought she ought to be with her daughter, and I guess that's right.

But I attended the public schools here. Then I graduated from high school in 1923; then I attended Mercer University. I went to Mercer because of its law school. I knew that I was going to follow the law—well, I practice [practiced?] private law enough--which I didn't. But I knew from high school days that I looked with favor upon the law. To MR. MACKAY: And this is the strange thing, Jamie. Emory had only graduated one or two law school classes. In '23 I didn't know—I assumed that Emory was going to have a fine law school, like it has. But I didn't know then--only two. The University of Georgia Law School at that time was teaching—some of you don't remember this—they were following the textbook system instead of the casebook system. And actually, that's where they had trouble with scholarship. Now, a football player, he'd end up in the law school. *Audience laughter* They reorganized it in 1927, and from that time on in particular, under Nina's [Nina Rusk Hosch] husband's [J. Alton Hosch] dominancy, it became a very, very fine law school. And Mercer had an old law school at that time. The president of Agnes Scott, Dr. [Paul] McCain, had graduated from there. The president of Georgia Tech was a graduate of Mercer, and Dr. Sanford, who was dean of the system—chancellor—were all Mercer graduates. So I went there, and partly I went there—and I've left this for last—because my daddy, who thinks he invented the Baptist Church, said, "That's where I'll pay your way, son." *Audience laughter* So that's—that may have been the main reason I went.

And I started working early as a boy, in grocery stores and drugstores. And as late as 1928 there were twelve grocery stores around the square—now, when I say, “around the square,” I include one block each way, down to the old Candler Hotel, down to City Hall, down Atlanta Avenue, and down Clairemont. And there were at night—now, I’m talking about—when I say, “They were around the square,” we had eighteen grocery stores, counting from Oakhurst over on College Avenue, down College Avenue. And we had a couple of drugstores over on that side of town. And we had nine soda fountains around the square, down, and we had two picture shows.

Now, what’s happened? We’ve had a complete reversal of the situation. Everybody came home from Atlanta at 5:00 to family life in Decatur. Now everybody leaves Decatur at 5:00 and goes home to Tucker, to Conyers, to Lithonia, to Stone Mountain, to Redan, to Dunwoody, to Chamblee. And people, this—I like to insult my friends that are living so fine up in Dunwoody. I say, “Do you know, you actually brag about living in Dunwoody.” And I said, “I never knew anybody would admit it till [inaudible].” *Audience laughter* And Tucker? Oh, my God. But now people brag about living in Stone Mountain—particularly Stone Mountain. They’ve got some of the most beautiful homes in this county in Stone Mountain—Smoke Rise. There’s been a complete reversal, and the automobile brought it about. Back when I worked in grocery stores, a lot of them delivered. The ones that didn’t deliver, you sent your maid or your little boy with a red wagon and a note to the grocery store. Everybody lived within a couple of blocks of the Courthouse Square. People wanted to live on the railroad. Now you get as far away from it as you could.

But transportation—it’s like—early Georgia was founded—well, any town. Any big town were [sic] founded on a river, transportation. Then came steam, and steam spread out the town. But Georgia [Atlanta?] is an unusual city [sic], in that it’s founded not on any navigable stream, but purely as a projection of projected railroad lines. And the state—City of Decatur is a creation of the legislature. DeKalb County was formed in 1822; and then it formed out of Henry, Fayetteville [Fayette County], and Gwinnett. And it grew so—and that was after the Indian treaty at Indian Springs. And it grew so fast that they had to create DeKalb County out of that. And they said to five men, “Go and buy a land

lot." *To off-camera audience member for confirmation:* Two hundred six and a half acres [sic]? I think that's what it is. And they did. So this town of Decatur didn't grow up around the trading post. It didn't grow up around a river crossing. It really—five men put their finger on the spot and says, "There." Now, possibly what did influence them was this land lot, where this courthouse sits on. It's the highest point in this area, and the Indian trails crossed here. There were about four or five of them.

Which reminds me of something else: I'm old enough—I was in high school when they changed the name to Clairemont from Webster Street. Prior to being Webster Street, it was Shallowford Trail. And then there was the Dunwoody Trail. And there was various trails. The Georgia railroad is built on an Indian trail toward Augusta, because it's on high ground. There's—you don't have—doesn't have to ford a river; it travels a ridge. And, of course, Stone Mountain was for many generations of Indians there, I guess, a religious spot. We know that it was a lookout location, and we know that several tribes met there, apparently under an amnesty agreement; because when the Creeks and the Cherokees met, they didn't meet often. They didn't like each other any better than the Israelis and the Palestinians right now.

This is a town that epitomizes to me the finest living we have enjoyed, and that is because we have the advantages of a small-town living, and yet we—this creature that we helped create, Atlanta—we helped create the City of Atlanta, of course—it offers these opportunities to enjoy small-town living. And so now it's a little bit different but not too much different. Now that we all live with our windows closed because if air-conditioning, you don't hear noise so much. But I can go out now in my neighborhood—I've been in—built this house right after I got married; been married forty-eight years—I can go out now in a summer evening and hear babies crying. In other words, more young people—there are a number of young people moving back in. They're finding these homes that were built about that time as maybe a little bit better construction, I don't know, but maybe. Anyway, a lot of young people are buying and reconditioning them. So we'll have a lot of babies in our neighborhood again, and it's good, it's good. I enjoy seeing it.

But we won't have—we never can go back to the--everybody uptown at night. If you didn't have anything else to do at night, you came up to Tatum's or [inaudible]'s before Tatum's and got a Coca-Cola, if nothing else. And you knew you'd see all these friends there. And I think when—in 1966, when Tatum's sold out, that was the end of an era. I went to a birthday party Sunday for Mrs. I. W. Cousins, the mother of Tom and [inaudible—sounds like "Bill"?] Cousins. She was eighty years old, and her husband had been dead several years. But the children gave her this [inaudible] birthday party. And she was telling me, she said, "I was riding around the Decatur square with Andy Robertson, and I saw this gorgeous hunk of a man in Tatum's store, and I said, 'Who is that?'" And I slammed on the brakes, and I said, "If you want to meet him, I'll just—" So that was the way she met her husband. And I. W. Cousins was a close friend of mine, a football player out at Oglethorpe, and he was a great-big boy, and he had a black sweater on with a great-big gold "O," see, and a gorgeous hunk of a man, as she said.

But it's a great town. Now, of all those grocery stores and all those pharmacies around town, there's really only one real grocery store as far as I know in Decatur, and that's the Big Star [on Commerce Street near South Candler] down next to the cemetery. And I know good and well that somebody's going to buy it someday and develop the land there--condominiums there or something. The automobile caused all of this. Parking space—we didn't have to have parking spaces. Two or three parking spaces in front of these doors, where these courthouses--where these places were. So, as [inaudible], land is too--land costs too much in Decatur or any small town to buy a parking—to buy a big parking lot. You can't afford it. So with the automobile the face of America changed, not only Decatur, but the entire face of America's changed.

Now, I recall the fact that at night most everybody—you could come to Decatur, and you could see all of your friends. They were here, that's it. Now, my father came from thirteen miles out in the country, Klondike. That was before the days of free mail delivery, and it was six miles to Lithonia. So--it was 1898, I believe. And so he wrote to the Post Office Department and said wonder if we couldn't have weekly or biweekly delivery of mail out here to this little community? They wrote back and said that they

were willing; suggest a name. And he said he suggested three names, and they said, no, they were already taken. And he said he was reading a weekly newspaper, which was all they got, and he saw the word *Klondike* in there. And he said he's not sure he knew what Klondike was, that it was a gold strike; but he said he was so far away then, no communication. He'd heard a vague rumor about a gold strike in California [sic], but—so they accepted Klondike. So then mail began to come out there twice a week. They'd drop it—horse and wagon'd bring it out, and they'd drop it in the grocery store on the corner. And my father would go there on these two days, and people would come in from a mile or so around. So that was Klondike. Well, years later his youngest brother, Raymond Robertson, went down and bought the crossroads a mile down and put up a little building on each corner; and Klondike moved a mile down the road. So the Robertsons are connected with Klondike, that great community down there close to the South River.

Now, my mother's people were a little different. My great-grandfather came home from the Civil War. He was shot in the knee. Now, I don't know whether he was going from them or coming toward them. *Audience laughter* [Inaudible brief comment] But anyway, he said there must be a better way of making a living than plowing. They all—the Burgesses all lived up and down Covington Highway. And I saw where one of them died, a distant cousin of mine, died this week down there, still living in his old homeplace at Bellmont [spelling? Belmont?].

But anyway, he—they said, "Why don't you run for office?"

He said, "What office?"

They said, "That clerk's job's a pretty good job." Said, "You get—every time somebody files a paper, you get to put some of it in your pocket." Which is the fee system, which is what everything was. So he ran for Clerk of Court in 1885 or '75, I forgot. And the Burgesses decided to own the Clerk of Court [position] until Whit Smith, the first one that hadn't been a Burgess. There was my great-grandfather, of course, I didn't know. And then my great-uncle, Uncle Ben. Then there was Little Ben, who wasn't his son, but it was his nephew. Then there was Little Ben's brother, Theron, who just quit in the middle of it because—claims about ill health. I don't think there's any reason in the

world, except the fact that it didn't pay as much money as it used to pay in the fee days. The tax collector and clerk of court were the two best jobs in the courthouse.

And so down here where Kroger's grocery store was and where now, I think, it's under control of Decatur Bank and Trust—they're renovating right now, where the flea markets were—that was where my grandfather built his Decatur home. And then on down the street, just beyond Dr. Sanders's office, is where my mother's mother lived. And she had a—there were two genteel boarding houses in Decatur, and you had to—if you were coming here, a young boy just to be fed to the lions in the big city, from South Georgia, you were told to stay either with Miss Andess [spelling?] Rogers, who was my grandmother, or with Miss Scofield. Those—they were right down there [points], right close together. And most of the young men who came to Decatur in those days, that's where you'd find them. Now, my grandmother was an invalid, and she had this boarding house. And so I had an aunt, my mother's sister, who was—she later was Mrs. Dr. Owens—she died here recently. She lived to be about ninety-six. But my mother almost every afternoon, after she got me off to school and Daddy off to work and got things settled in her own house, she would go over there and sort of help at her mother's.

So I came home from school on Church Street, even though I was living on North Candler. Came home on Church Street most of my grammar school days. Now, there were a lot of big boys on Church Street, and I was a little boy. And like in the nature of boys they would beat me up on the way home. Well, the schoolteachers would make them stay in and allow me time enough to get home, but I'd go around the corner and wait on them. *Audience laughter* You know, that's the nature of boys. There was Snooks [spelling?] Fisher and Paul Smith and Ed Wade and a whole bunch of them, my close friends. But those days I was a little fellow, and they would—they'd get after me.

But this—my father was not what you would call by today's standards a highly educated man. But for his day and time he did pretty well. There were no public schools; he went to a community school. Then in high school he went to what they called an academy in Lithonia, run by a man named Andrew Beck; and my father graduated at some great age at Andrew Beck's academy. Then he went one year over to Athens to what they

called the "normal school" then. It's a coordinate college later. And then it was where they put the coeds [from the coordinate college or from University of Georgia?], and then the Navy owns it now over there in Athens. So he went one year there, and that qualified him to teach school. So he came back and taught school at Wesley Chapel, and that's where he met my mother. She was a student of his at Wesley Chapel. She was fourteen; I think he was twenty-two, something like that at that time.

Anyway, my roots are completely within the county. All on my mother's side, people are buried at Wesley Chapel [Methodist Church, at the intersection of Snapfinger Road and Wesley Chapel Road]. And I told her the other day, we were driving past there on I-20, I said, "If your grandparents and great-grandparents knew there was a whiskey store over there across the street, they'd rise up out of that grave." Because they thought they were being buried out—see, Wesley Chapel Methodist Church is the oldest Methodist church in the county, or was— [Aside to audience, off-camera] it still exists, doesn't it? [Several people respond in the affirmative.] But it's not at the same place. I mean, the building is leased to somebody else. [NOTE: At the time of this recording the historic white frame church building was still standing at the intersection of Wesley Chapel and Snapfinger Roads. At some point, new sanctuary and education buildings were built along Wesley Chapel Road, and the white frame church building was demolished in 2010. At the time of this transcription in 2015, the cemetery is still located at the back of the vacant lot where the old church once stood.] But they—that graveyard—they haven't left two inches of it that's unused. In fact, I've got an older brother who died in infancy—two, three weeks, a month—and we can't even find that [his grave] now.

But I'll tell you where I got my name. My name is Andrew Burgess Robertson. Daddy was a kind man, but he didn't ask anybody before what he was going to do; he just did it. So he named his son Andrew Beck Robertson, after this professor. And when Mother heard about it, she hit the ceiling; and she said, "I'm not going to embarrass you by—you told everybody it's 'Andrew B.,' but," she said, "I'm going to take the 'Beck' out and substitute 'Burgess' for it." *Laughs* So that's the way I got my name, Andrew Beck. [NOTE: His gravestone in the Decatur Cemetery reads "Andrew Burgess Robertson."]

I'll tell you what he did. I appreciate it now. I didn't quite--wasn't mature enough to appreciate it. I think people have spot—I think a child's never too young to have a spot memory. Now, they can't have a cohesive, chain memory till they get eight or ten years older. But I remember two or three things that my father did. He was very proud of me, apparently. I don't know why, but he took me everywhere. The first thing I remember—he didn't have anything to do with this, now—that is, my father didn't. The city of Decatur put in waterworks in 1909. We'd had outside plumbing—I mean, outhouses on the back of the house. And they built it—the tank, the old water tank, which was torn down several years ago, and they had it all complete except the top. And they were working on putting that top on, and two men fell down in there. And we had two young doctors in Decatur at that time. One of them was Dr. Ansley, who was the father of Bob Ansley and Ham Ansley, who later were doctors here. And then we had a Dr.—oh, the other one?—oh, Dr. John Goss. And they climbed up there down in that thing and sent work back down because they didn't have stretchers or anything that could go up those ladders. And they said, "Get some quilts!" And I'll never forget them coming over to our house, where I was sitting on the porch watching them. I was over on—lived on Trinity at that time. And watched them lower—killed them both—lower those bodies down in the quilts. I remember that. Now, there was nothing else connected with it.

Now, another thing I remember: My father took me to hear Billy Sunday. Well, now, y'all think Billy Swaggart is something. If they'd had TV, nobody would have ever known anybody but Billy Sunday, because Billy Sunday had been a professional baseball player, and every night he got to the bat. "And the Devil's going to throw me a fastball." *Pantomimes hitting a baseball with a bat.* And then he'd slide. He'd get a hit, and he'd slide into first base. He'd slide into second. He was really hilarious. And they were tent-show people in those days. Just as big actors as they are today, except they didn't—they just passed the hat, passed the hat, passed the hat. So I went to see Billy Sunday. One day he told me, said, "There's a lady who lives here that you've got to know. She's a great lady, Miss Mary Gay."

So down we go to Miss Mary Gay's house on Sunday. It was on the corner of Marshall Street and Ponce de Leon, facing Ponce de Leon. They later turned it around and moved it to the back of the lot and built a filling station on that corner. But we went down, and I had not known that Miss Mary Gay was already a little bit, shall we say, "disorganized." *Audience laughter* And she told me—and I remember this just like it was yesterday—she was a little—reminded me of a little sparrow running around; she never was still. She never wore anything but black taffeta. And she was all over Decatur, all up and down Decatur. She told me that day, she said, "I'm going to take your shoe and sock off." She said, "I'm going to kiss you, kiss your foot." She said, "Someday you will be able to brag that the great Mary Gay kissed your foot." *Audience laughter* I've still got the foot. *Audience laughter* Show it to you.

MR. MACKAY, *from audience, off-camera*: [Inaudible] bragging.

MR. ROBERTSON: Show it to you. Now, she was quite a character. Everybody loved her. She was a real heroine, and-- The last house moved off the square still exists, it sits right back of where it sat here on the square. It's Dr. Houston's home; they just moved it back when he built these little stores along here. [Refers to Dr. Houston's house at 418 Church Street, just south of East Ponce de Leon; shops behind the house face in opposite direction toward old courthouse on the square.] And Miss Mary Gay was uptown all the time. And sometimes it would be raining, and she would run in people's houses. Now, if you ever look at that house [Dr. Houston's house], which is down next to that auto upholstery place [131 East Ponce de Leon Avenue], facing Church Street, you'll see a side door around. And the story is that Dr. Houston said when he was building, said, "We'll put a little room in here with the door opening out on the porch and where Miss Mary Gay can come in out of the rain if she wants to." Anyway, she--eventually she was declared completely incompetent and in 1918 died down at Milledgeville.

Now, another lady that my father insisted on taking me to see, and I'm so glad, she lived where the [Greyhound] bus station is [333 Commerce Drive, formerly Columbia Drive], over on what we called Pate Street then, and Hillyer—Line Street, something. That was Mrs. Compton. Mrs. Martha Lumpkin Compton. She was the lady for whom

Marthasville was named. She was the first white child born in Terminus. Terminus was never incorporated. Terminus was truly a Latin name for where the roads terminated. There is a story, which is apocryphal, which is not true, that they intended to stop the Georgia railroad in Decatur and that the women were very vociferous about the fact that they didn't want to have railroad locomotives chugging around back and forth and blowing smoke and coal and dust on their clean wash, which was hanging on the line on Monday. And that's not true. They never intended to stop it; it just makes a good story. But Mrs. Compton, she was completely *compos mentis*; and she was very classy. Where Miss Mary Gay was just like a little bird, running all around, Mrs. Compton sat on the porch and rocked; that's all she did. And I never saw her dressed in anything but what in those days was referred to as a "Mother Hubbard." Any of you know what I'm talking about? *Several audience members answer in the affirmative.* Mother Hubbard was a loose-fitting—usually muslin--soft material.

But there was no PTA when I started to school. It was organized—PTA was organized in 1913, and I started school in '12--1912. Decatur got Mr. Treadwell to come here as superintendent of schools in 1902; and at that time, where the drive-in window of the Decatur Bank—the Decatur Federal [inaudible] [250 East Ponce de Leon Avenue]—was a rock building, which had been an academy. Everything was called an academy in those days. And then the Presbyterians had operated a very fine private school down in the block across from where the First Baptist Church is [on Clairemont Road] on the other side of the street up to Church Street, an entire block, called Fraser—Donald Fraser [School for Boys]. The Presbyterians in Decatur--even though the Methodist Church had the first church, 1825—the Presbyterians, you have to give them a tremendous credit because of their extreme interest in education. When I say Presbyterians, I'm talking about the Scotts chiefly and the Candlers.

The Scotts are still the backbone of the church, part of the backbone; and they believed that we should have a school for girls and a school for boys. So they created this institute, Agnes Scott Institute, and created Donald Fraser military school—boarding school. And some of you may remember Susan Gardner, who was active down in the

Presbyterian church and is now in a nursing home down in Thomaston, Georgia. Her father was a principal of the boarding school--Donald Fraser—and Dr. Gaines, who retired as a minister, Presbyterian church here, then took over the Agnes Scott Institute and set out to make it a college. And I'm old enough that I have known all of the presidents of Agnes Scott. Now, there was no reason for Dr. Gaines to know me, but I knew him, and—because my family took advantage of entertainment which was offered, particularly if it didn't cost anything. And the Blackfriars at Agnes Scott gave wonderful outdoor Shakespeare performances. And I—it gave me a love—not a knowledge of, but I express it, truly a love of Shakespeare that I have never lost. So I would see Dr. McCain [sic]. He'd come in the grocery store and drug store as well—I mean Dr. Gaines. But Dr. McCain I knew extremely well.

Decatur boys grew up with the thought that they were going to marry an Agnes Scott girl. And I would have, if I hadn't made the mistake of hiring a very attractive secretary. *Audience laughter* But [inaudible aside comment]. But anyway, then [former Agnes Scott president] Wallace Alston and I were of an age, classmates; we went all through school together in Decatur before he went to Emory. And then, of course, Dr. [Marvin] Perry came [to Agnes Scott], and I was—my short acquaintance with him, I figured he was a very much thing [sic?]. And then, of course, I have had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. [Dr. Ruth] Schmidt, the first woman [president]. It's time, I think, for a woman president of Agnes Scott. And I've been on one or two programs with her—very capable woman, a woman of strong beliefs; but she's still extremely capable.

So the—Decatur grew under the aura of education. Now, then when Agnes Scott developed into a four-year school, and Emory moved [from Oxford, Georgia] and became a vibrant and growing true university, and Georgia Tech was in Atlanta, and then there were the evening schools. And Georgia State [University]—I followed Georgia State's growth with great interest because my—I think everybody in college has a best-loved professor. My best-loved professor was George Sparks, and he came here to start what was then the Tech Evening School of Commerce. So I watched it and watched what he was doing and what he was building. And when he told me one day, he said, "Andy, I've got enough money,

I'm going to buy that old Ivy Street garage right behind the Hurt Building," I thought he was crazy. But that was the beginning of the modern Georgia State [University]. That was taken and converted into classrooms and is called the Sparks building [Sparks Hall] now, I believe.

Anyway, I've watched that thing grow; and a lot of people are not aware of the educational opportunities that are offered there. They have one of the finest insurance and banking faculties anywhere; and it was a Decatur man, who was Dr. Sparks's right-hand man. George Manners was—helped him through it. He was a young man fresh out of college when he came as Dr. Sparks's right-hand man, and between them—and, of course, that was the foundation that was laid. Noah [Langdale], the present president, was the man with the personality that really built it into what it is. It's a great institution.

But people began to move in here. Families would come from small towns where they had made money farming or manufacturing—small manufacturers, leather tanning, and so forth. They'd come here and put their daughters at Agnes Scott, their sons at Emory or Georgia Tech, and then we had one or two of what we used to call finishing schools, like North Avenue Presbyterian and Washington Seminary for Girls. I've seen many a family come in here, like, well, the Rutlands came here for that reason; the Chapmons [Chapmans? Not clear which family he's referring to, current or historic; and if historic, how far back] came here for that reason; the Allens came for—one of the Allen families, many of the Allen families—and all over town—the Skeens [spelling?] came here for that reason. All over town were families coming here to put their children in college. And it made for a wonderful atmosphere in the school system. Now, we've never had a great many men teachers—nearly always women [inaudible] teach in the grammar school. Usually in the high school you had a principal that was a man and maybe a coach of some type—chemistry professor [sic] who doubles as a coach.

Now, we have a place—the [Decatur] Cemetery over here—that we call the "new cemetery" and the "old cemetery." Well, now, the new cemetery started burying in that in 1913. The two oldest graves that I know of over there are Charlie McKinney's half-sisters'. The next one, which created quite a surge of grief and sadness in Decatur, was a

very fine young man, who was Decatur's idol [sic; means "ideal"?], clean and decent and everything a man could be, high school student. [The student athlete's name was Davis Chambers.] Decatur High School was playing Marist [in football], and he got his neck broken and died. And there were editorials in the paper. Bishop [Warren] Candler had an editorial in the [DeKalb] *New Era* that said, "This dangerous game should be outlawed. It will never be played on the Emory campus. I will see to it." Well, they played intermural [sic; means "intramural"] football when I was going there. Played some good football. But they had a game—pushball—played once a year between freshmen and sophomores, and that put more people in the hospital than all of the football has ever done. *Audience laughter* And one time the Emory boys pushed the thing all through Decatur and [inaudible] a spill over some substance, and they got in over at Agnes Scott and some way got it in through the main door, and left it in there. And when the Agnes Scott girls came down, there it was, drying in the lobby out there.

But you can see the growth. You go over to the new cemetery, and you see a family here, and a family here, and a family here. Then you get on a little further out, and there's other families. Now, John Wesley Weekes and I and Dick McMaster and English McGaughey [spelling? McGarry?], we're all buried close enough—going to be buried close enough together over there that I've already told them probably on Hallowe'en night we'll get up and meet over there, have some meetings. I've got a lot of friends right around my lot over there, so I know where I'm going to be.

But the football thing changes, picture changes. We went to—after Davis was killed, they banned football in Decatur at high school. And also, see Decatur was a little bit narrow-minded. Also the fact that it was Marist, a Catholic school—even there, I'm sure there was some connection. *Audience laughter* And so we didn't play football [for the next six years]. I was a junior in 1921, and we discovered that our new chemistry teacher that was coming for his first job at Decatur High School had played quarterback on Oglethorpe's first football team. Oglethorpe started playing football in 1920. So we all got excited. See, boys that had any athletic ability, they didn't go to high school in Decatur; they went to Tech High and Boys' High, because we just didn't have it [a football

team]. We had a sorry boys' basketball team—I was on it. It was pretty sorry. We had a state championship girls' team; and they were so much better, we boys couldn't even scrimmage them. They were rough. They won all kind of state medals. But when we found out that this man had been—he was Mr. Boswell—[inaudible; sounds like "Ben Porter"?] he's from Greensboro, Georgia, down in railroad—everybody came from down in Georgia Railroad [sic]. They didn't--I think they started out to go to Atlanta, and I think when they got to Decatur and found out it was the last stop before Atlanta, they got scared and got off the train in Decatur; and then they stayed here. Talking about the Johnsons and the Everetts and the Turners and the—anyway, the school said all right. The Board of Education had a rush meeting; and they said, "All right, you haven't got any schedule. If you get together a schedule, we'll give you jerseys and stockings." Now, if you're going to play football, you've got to buy your own helmet, your own pants, your own shoulder pads, your own shoes; well, we did. We bought them and had a pretty good little old football team, pretty good, first year. Then next year these Decatur boys started coming back to Decatur High School, because they figured, "There's a starting football team, and I can be a star on that. I'm a substitute at Boys' High, but I'll be a big star." So they began to come back, and then Decatur had a reign of football eminence like very few schools have ever had and--high schools in the state—and became the—in 1950 were the real champions of everything in the state, the big school. Now it's—that was a quad-A school. Now it's class—I mean, it's double-A; and if they won a football game this year, I didn't hear of it. It's got a good basketball team.

But now, another thing—talking about being a little narrow-minded, I never went to school on Monday in my life; I went on Saturday. And, of course, the obvious reason why the City of Decatur—that was the Jewish Sabbath; and they [City of Decatur administrators] assumed that if they had school on Saturday [end of sentence; sic]. So—now, that was changed in '31. So I never in my life, till I went off to Mercer University, did I know what it was to go to school on Monday; and it just seemed like the world turned upside down to me.

Talking about that Mercer thing: Daddy drove me down there on Sunday. In those days to get into college—now, I got two grandsons, been sweating out college for two or three years before they got there. They have to take tests, and they take more tests, and then they take achievement tests, and they take aptitude tests, and they study hard. They take college work to get extra credit. [First few words of sentence inaudible] all I had to do was go down there, Macon, and run and say, "Here's my transcript. What's the tuition for the first term?" That's all. I didn't answer many questions, except they did require me to—and the same way at the University of Georgia, any school. If you had the sixteen units, high-school approved units, and you could write them a check, you were in.

Anyway, my daddy drove me down on the Sunday it opened, and on—it was a Chevrolet touring car, we called it—not a convertible, that was a two-seater—coupé, they say. But this was a touring car; and on the backseat, bumping up and down, all the way down there, was this trunk, the same trunk he had bought to go his one year to college [inaudible]. So I still got it up in my attic. But anyway, that trunk was bumping along and bumping along; and we got stopped for speeding in Griffin, because everybody did. The only paved road between Atlanta and Macon was Spalding County, and everybody speeded up when they got to Spalding County. Spalding County had more policemen per mile than any county in the state, because that was their income. Anyway, we got fairly close down there; and my father said, "Son, your mother wants me to talk to you."

And I said, "What about?"

And he said, "Well, let me put it this way." He said, "Do you know about girls?"

And I said, "Yes, sir."

And he said, "I told her you did." And that was my—that was our father-and-son talk. *Audience laughter*

And so—well, now, let's go back to Ansley-Goss drugstore a little bit. Today it's frowned on, doctors having drugstores. But in those days it was extremely ethical and perfectly proper. A doctor had a doctor's office, and he had a drugstore. So Dr. Ansley's father-in-law, old Dr. Goss, they went in together. And we had an apothecary store here in town; it was purely drugs. But [they] opened this swank drugstore on the corner, marble

fountain, and everybody, that's where they hung out. That's where everybody went; that's where politics were discussed. The first Sunday in June was something I always remembered, because that was all-day singing here in this courthouse. People came to sing "fa-so-la" [Sacred Harp, shaped-note] singing, they called it, you know. They'd stand up and read the words, and then you'd sing the notes. And it went on all day; and, of course, no air-conditioning, the windows were wide-open. You could hear it all over town, that fa-so-la singing. And country people would come and bring their baskets; they'd hitch their mules and their horses all over town. They would be hitched to the depot and down Clairemont, which was Webster Street then, and down Ponce de Leon. And they'd stay there all day, and they'd visit. Some would come in and sing, and others—well, Ansley-Goss had a barrel painted red, and they had about twenty dippers with wire handles on them that they'd hang around the rim. And they contributed free lemonade, and anybody could go there and get free lemonade. That was the social center of Decatur, and it was where things happened. Now, remember, till--

WOMAN's VOICE FROM THE AUDIENCE, *off-camera*: And you drank out of the dipper?

MR. ROBERTSON: Huh?

WOMAN's VOICE FROM THE AUDIENCE, *off-camera*: They drank out of the dipper?

MR. ROBERTSON: Oh, sure. *Audience laughter* Sure, you drank out of the dipper. My gosh, we used to—at my grandfather's house, we used to go with dippers. Sure, you drank out of a dipper, unless—

MAN's VOICE FROM THE AUDIENCE, *off-camera*: [Inaudible] medicine.

MR. ROBERTSON: I don't know what you thought they drank out of—sure wasn't champagne glasses. *Audience laughter* But that's where things happen. When Davis Chambers had his neck broken on the football field, over behind the old high school building, he was carried to the drugstore and pronounced dead there.

There was a town drunk, and I won't mention his name because he probably has some people—family—left; but he was always at battle with the authorities. He was a

brilliant—you've read of these characters, like Faulkner's novels. They's brilliant characters, but they just never had a job, stayed drunk all the time, had ten or twelve children—the town sort of looked down on them. But he could write prose like George Bernard Shaw. I haven't read any more beautiful prose than he could write. And he would hold forth in the drugstore, and people'd listen to him awhile and go. And he wrote to *The [DeKalb] New Era* and the—so he got mad one day at just the general people around him. He went up to the Ansley-Goss Drugstore, pulled out a gun, shot himself right there in the drugstore. He got even with folks. See, I mean, back in those days they took their opinions pretty strong.

But everything—remember, until Emory opened—the hospital building, about 1922 or three—anyway, there was no hospital anywhere close to Decatur. Now, the only way they could get you downtown to Grady or to Wesley Memorial Hospital, they called it [Emory] then, which was later bought and moved out here, you had to—there were ambulances--the roads were—you had to wait for an ambulance. Maybe Turner could take you, but the things were horse-drawn, what I'm talking about. They could have loaded you on a train, if one had come along at the right time. But there was no way to get you to a hospital, and people died; and they usually got them—the only thing they could think of was, "Take them to the drugstore."

So that really was the—and then Whit Smith—Whitfield Smith, our Ordinary—his grandfather in 1912 opened a drugstore right on the corner—well, it's where the—just beyond where the Huddle House was and where Weekes Brothers [inaudible] what was Weekes Brothers'. That was the second one in Decatur. And then there was one over across the railroad called Huie's [Huey's?] Drugstore. Now, the only building in Decatur which is used at this time for the purpose for which it was built is Britt's Barbershop, that I can see right here. *Looks out window.* Now, that was called the Hopkins Building, built in 1915; and the Austin brothers went in there and purchased it as a barbershop, and it has been continuously in use. Now, there's no other building in Decatur that has continuously been used for the purpose for which it was created.

Now, I was born--over on the southeast corner of North Candler Street and Howard Street there's a great-big brick building there, was called Atlanta Telephone Building. And my father was manager of a grocery store in there, one of Gene Rogers's grocery stores. There was some vague connection to our family, Rogers—my grandmother married a Rogers, but anyway, that wasn't the reason that he as working there. But as a perquisite for that job he got a little cottage right next to that, and I was born right next to that, within a hundred feet of the depot. Now, I don't take people by there and show them where I was born, because on that land now is the veterinary hospital [Decatur Veterinary Hospital, established in 1930 by Clay Christian von Gremp, DVM, who practiced there until the late 1970s]. And I know if I told them I was born where the veterinary hospital is, I'd get some pretty saucy answers and remarks. *Audience laughter* But anyway, that was where I was born, right there on—that building is still in operation. I don't know; some kind of fancy woodwork—they sell woodwork material or something in there. [Could be referring to shop in that location owned and operated by carpenter Dwight Wilkinson.]

But I remember when the Turners [A. S. Turner & Sons Funeral Home] came to Decatur. I saw two two-horse wagons loaded with furniture coming up North Candler Street. I was sitting on the front steps and a couple of kids with me. And so I found out that the Turners were moving from Conyers to Decatur. Mother always—in those days—now when somebody moves in next door, we don't even know who they are and haven't got any idea—but in those days you'd take a tray of biscuits up there or something, you know, soup. You go up and—Dad found out they were good Baptists, and so that fitted right in with my mother and father, despite the fact that my mother was a Methodist till she was thirty years old.

I started out—I jump from thing to thing, as you can see—I started out going to church with Mother at the Methodist church [Decatur First Methodist Church], in what they call the chapel [formerly the main church building, now the church's chapel, at the corner of Commerce Drive and Sycamore Street]. Now, everybody has one place that's sacred to them; to me, that is my sacred spot. I feel a sense of awareness, of

omnipotence [sic], of—whatever you want to call it—as soon as I walk in there. And I don't feel like talking and-- Well, we graduated from high school in that church, because we didn't have a place big enough. I married—we married—my wife was a Methodist, strong Methodist—still is—related to the Quillians. And, you know, they say that Sam Jones, the great Methodist evangelist, said that God called one Quillian, and they all came. *Audience laughter* But, now, I didn't get to hear Sam Jones—he was a little bit before my day. But then I was married there. My only daughter—only child—was baptized there. And then, when in 1973 I retired and got up a fiftieth anniversary meeting of our high school class, we had that there. So I feel—when it looked like maybe the church was going to sell it [the chapel], wasn't going to restore it like they did, John Weekes and I used to talk. John would say, "Now, if we get enough money, we'll buy that church and set up our own church."

And I'll say, "You preach, and I'll take up the collection." *Audience laughter*

And he said, "No, I'd planned on taking up collection myself." *Audience laughter*  
[Inaudible sentence] Miss old John.

But that is—that building is old enough that it has some—I think some value, historical value to it. And also it's a—I notice now that the Korean church, which uses it, that they have been accepted into the [Methodist] Conference. So I didn't realize that it was that strong. I don't know what the qualifications are for being accepted into the Conference.

But—and I'll close with this: The ten years—despite any other—whether I've had any mention or notoriety or something, anything—the ten years that I value the most in my life is something that I gave freely. I spent ten years on the City Commission of Decatur. Now, in those days we had a one-cent postage stamp—a one-cent postcard. And if I sent every registered voter in Decatur a one-cent postcard, that was more than I got for being a commissioner. Got three hundred dollars—Scott Candler, immediately when I came on there, he was the only lawyer. And when I came on there, he said that he thought he had the power under the charter to make me the recorder. Well, I don't think he had it, but he did it anyway; so I had to be recorder. I went to the city hall every morning at 7:30

every morning—the old police court; then when I became mayor, I signed all the checks. Then I got in my car, and I got caught half the time for speeding on the way to Atlanta, trying to get to my office, where I'd just been fining people for speeding out here.

*Audience laughter* And I did that for ten years, and I am very grateful for having had the opportunity to give to the city of Decatur ten years, and that's what it was, in return for the wonderful eighty years that I have received from being a citizen of Decatur.

Thank you. *Audience applause*

MR. MACKAY: Well, you've certainly deepened our whole appreciation of this town that we're privileged to work in or live in, and I thank you, and we're going to treasure that tape. *Audience laughter*

MR. ROBERTSON, *holding up papers for MR. MACKAY to see*: I brought all my notes. *Audience laughter*

MR. MACKAY: Well, I think you'd be good for a number of afternoons like this, and I think this crowd is ready to sit and listen to you.

MR. ROBERTSON: I could spend a whole afternoon on Scott Candler alone. He was my hero and also one of my greatest trials. *Audience laughter*

MR. MACKAY: Well, he's the most vivid—he is one of the most vivid personalities that I've ever seen. And you're supposed to lead the way into the courtroom, and I hope all of you will stay [for the reception afterward]. And Ruby, we thank you.

END OF RECORDING