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NELMS and SAMS FAMILIES  
(1930-1950)

*Recording opens with the four principal participants and moderator seated, facing the camera, around a coffee table in front of a stone fireplace. An audience is also present, off-camera.*

MODERATOR, *rising, introducing each participant in turn*: And I'd like to introduce you to the participants. This is Mr. Edward Nelms; Mr. Wallace Nelms, his brother; Dr. [sic] Richard Sams; and his brother, Marion Sams. We're so grateful to you for contributing your time this morning and for all of you for coming to share this experience with us. I'm going to sort of interview you; but I don't imagine that you'll need much from me, because I expect you have lots to talk about. Can you hear me all right? [*The participants indicate that they can.*]

Richard warned me that I needed to speak out.

MARION SAMS, *laughing*: Yeah, that's for me.

MODERATOR: But I usually don't have to be told that, because I have a tendency to speak loudly as it is.

WALLACE NELMS: It's [for] all of us.

MODERATOR: Your two families have a very interesting history; but before we get to that, I thought it might be interesting to learn how both families came to DeKalb County—how long your families have been here, when you came, and under what circumstances. Why don't we start with the Nelms family?

EDWARD NELMS, *to WALLACE NELMS*: I'll take that to Wallace. He's got a good memory [rest of sentence inaudible].

MODERATOR, *to WALLACE NELMS*: Wallace, let's make sure you speak toward the microphone. [*Microphone, in the middle of the coffee table in the center of the group, is moved toward Wallace Nelms.*] You can pick it up if you'd rather.

WALLACE NELMS: I don't think I have to. I talk pretty loud, too. I speak from hearsay and from what I've been told by my parents and my aunts. My grandmother on my mother's side came to DeKalb County from Eufaula, Alabama, and married a Richard Stokes. And how they acquired their property--I don't know exactly how they acquired their property, but they acquired a good bit of property. My dad, Will Nelms—I don't know where they came from; but I've been

told that they came from South Carolina and that he, my grand—my great-granddad, purchased his property by cutting cord wood for 33 cents a cord. And in the process of cutting it, cord wood, he purchased fifty-odd acres of land, from which he developed a plot that he had a farm on. And we're subsequently still recipients of his hard work and his dedication to his family.

MODERATOR: About what year would that have been, Wallace, do you remember?

WALLACE NELMS: No. I'm seventy-three years old; and, as far as I can—I've always lived there where I'm living. And my dad lived on the property prior to that, so I've assumed that they came there directly from slavery.

MODERATOR: Mm-hm

WALLACE NELMS, *looking toward EDWARD NELMS*: Now, Edward may have something to add to that.

EDWARD NELMS: Yes, that's the way I recall it, too. It's the same, yeah.

MODERATOR: And I remember that, before the development had started out this way, your property was basically intact until not too many years ago, wasn't it?

WALLACE NELMS: Oh, yes ma'am, it was.

MODERATOR: Well, I trust you've done well since then. *Laughs*

WALLACE NELMS: Well, now, if you speak of things monetarily, we haven't done well at all. (*MODERATOR makes inaudible response.*) We haven't used it to that advantage. We've always wanted to have it as an inheritance that was given from God. And we've always wanted to hand it down to our children and our grandchildren and keep it in the family.

MODERATOR: Good!

WALLACE NELMS: And there have been people who have come by and offered astronomical amounts of money for it, but we just felt like it just was worth much more than that to us.

MODERATOR: Oh, good for you. I thought you'd sold some of it off.

WALLACE NELMS: No

MODERATOR: Good—great. *Turning to RICHARD SAMS*. All right, what about your family? When did the Sams [sic] get here?

RICHARD SAMS, *laughing*: Well, that's a long story. But the Sams [sic] came right after the Civil War and settled out there at what is now Sams Crossing. And the great-grandfather settled there, and then our grandfather moved across the street and had a nice home there. And Mother and Daddy grew up there, next door to each other; and then when they married, they moved over to Druid Hills. So we've kind of settled in here about three generations ago, [*Glances over at Marion Sams*] wouldn't you say? And they came from South Carolina originally. And, of course,

there were people here that they corresponded with that kind of enticed them to come here as a good place, good land—and they were farming people, too. And so they settled on the outskirts of Decatur, just east of the—where the Avondale MARTA station is right now.

And J. A. Sams, our grandfather, worked for the NC&StL [Nashville, Chattanooga, and St. Louis] Railroad. So the railroad used to run an accommodation train into Atlanta every day from Stone Mountain, and it would stop anyplace that there was a passenger to be picked up. And so J. A. Sams would stand there at the crossing, and the train would always stop and pick him up; and so before long they began calling it the “J. A. Sams railroad” [*general laughter*]. So that’s—that’s where we came from.

MODERATOR: All right, how did your families connect? You [*referring to the Sams family*] were in Druid Hills, you all [*referring to Nelms family*] were out here off of LaVista—how did—

RICHARD SAMS, *to EDWARD NELMS*: Edward, you—

EDWARD NELMS: Well, yes, OK. We grew up, as Wallace said, we grew up on the small farm that he was talking about. But at that time farming land was—the small farm was diminishing, you know. And we’d do yard work around the Druid Hills area, and that’s how we made contact with the Samses. My father went to haul topsoil—we called it leaf mold, sometimes compost—to put around their flowers and shrubbery; and we got acquainted with the Samses in that way. And Daddy worked for them, and I started working for the Samses. And the Sams family got to be to us—Wallace and I, we really cherished it, the way that Mr. Sams, their [Marion and Richard Sams] father, organized the family.

If I could take it on from there, in the summertime he would—had a home in the—a camp in the mountains, in the Blue Ridge area. It’s called—they called it “Sam Hill.” And in the summer Mr. Sams had it so well organized that he would send the children—he was—he practiced law. And during the week he would hardly ever stay up there with us during the week, but on the weekends he would always be there with the family. And he would go to Dalton, Rome--different places to try cases right here. And Marion, Charlie, Dickie, and Eddie was the four boys then. And I went up to take care—had me a little house there, back beside their house. And I could just go on and on and tell you about the times that I enjoyed there. In fact, I learned how to swim in Lake Blue Ridge. Mr. Sams would get me in the water up to my shoulders and swim gradually toward the shallow, and that’s where I learned how to swim, in Lake Blue Ridge. I’ll never forget it. In the summer he would invite some of his friends and his wife’s friends—Mr. and Mrs. Sams’s friends—up to spend the weekend and have a good time. And then the next weekend he’d invite some of Marion’s friends up and have a weekend, and then some of Charlie’s friends. And Dickie

and Eddie got a little bit envious about that. They said, “I don’t get to invite nobody up here!” I never forgot that [*general laughter*]. So he’d invite some of them up to spend the weekend with them also.

But there’s one thing I remember about Mr. Sams [inaudible] myself. He had a boat; but he didn’t get those big Chris Craft or Garwood boats, because he knew [inaudible] those boys, and they might get hurt. He was very, very farsighted, I think, in the family that way. And—[*Seems to lose his train of thought.*] Something is slipping my mind—he would—[*Idea returns.*] About that safety in boats—he had it as a family law that Marion and Charlie—because which—all of those boys were good swimmers—as small as Dickie and Eddie were, they were good swimmers—but he had the law that Marion and Charlie would always have life preservers in their boat before they took off out on Lake Blue Ridge. But Dickie and Eddie would have to have life jackets on before—they had to have life jackets on. I thought that was a really good measure of safety there.

MODERATOR: And you spent the entire summer there?

EDWARD NELMS: Yes, I spent the entire summer there. I’d come back to North Decatur Road to their home and cut the grass and keep up the lawn [inaudible], and then we’d go back there. It was really, really good.

MODERATOR, *to WALLACE NELMS*: What about you, Wallace? Were you there or not?

WALLACE NELMS: Oh, yeah, I was very much there. They couldn’t have counted me out, no kind of way [*general laughter*].

RICHARD SAMS: We even taught Wallace how to swim, too, didn’t we?

WALLACE NELMS: No, you never taught me how to swim. I don’t know why, but you didn’t. The remarkable thing about my relationship with the Sams [sic] is that Dickie and Eddie needed somebody to play with, and I was the perfect person for that. They were avid readers, and their parents wanted them to read a lot; so they got all these little big books, nobody probably—they don’t make things like that—

RICHARD SAMS: The “Big Little Books”?

WALLACE NELMS: Yeah. And they read those things, and they’d always trade them off. They had all the latest comic books, and we’d trade those off. So I became an avid reader, because I was having association with them. They had all the latest toys. I look at these things on television, and I don’t see how these kids can have any fun with these things that they play with now. We had real, real toys. And we’d go out in the sandbox and play with them. We’d go up in the—what was that room called on the east side of y’all’s house?

RICHARD SAMS: Sun parlor

WALLACE NELMS: Sun parlor! We had every toy mentionable in there. And we were just like inseparable. And I worked—I'd go to work with Edward during the school year—school time of the year. Edward would go over there and work every Saturday. And he had a list of things he had to do, and all I had to do was play with [the two younger children, Richard and Edward, "Dickie" and "Eddie"].

[Several conversations start at once, all rendered inaudible because of general laughter.]

RICHARD SAMS: That's because Eddie and I were always fighting [*laughs*]. And so Mother decided that Wallace was the best peacemaker we could have.

[Someone—unclear who in the midst of laughter and voices—says: That was a wonderful experience.]

MODERATOR: Well, let me ask you this: Where did you go to school?

WALLACE NELMS: I went to school—we went to a one-room school in our neighborhood.

MODERATOR: Really? Did you go all the way through school--

WALLACE NELMS: I went to a one-room school through seventh grade, and I left there and went to school, in what is now called Scottdale, to Avondale High School for Negroes.

MODERATOR: How did you get there, Wallace?

WALLACE NELMS: We walked.

MODERATOR: You walked.

WALLACE NELMS: Yes, ma'am.

MODERATOR: Good gracious. Mm.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera, barely audible*: How long did it take you?

MODERATOR: How long did it take you, she said?

WALLACE NELMS: About an hour or sometimes an hour and a half, depending on the weather, depending on which way we had to go. We had to go through the big creek woods. If it was muddy, we went down North Druid Hills Road and came back up Lawrenceville Highway and then went back through Washington Park; it took us a little longer. But sometimes the creek would wash the foot log out, so you couldn't go the big creek road—[*To Edward Nelms*] you remember, we had a foot log across the big creek, and we couldn't walk through the creek, so we had to go the long way. But that's the way we went to school.

EDWARD NELMS: Mm-hm. Now, there's something I want to get in about Dickie and Eddie. Like they say, they was the two smaller children. And Eddie would just like to have fun, he wanted to have all kinds of fun. And he'd get on Dickie. He'd aggravate Dickie. Dickie would get so aggravated [*laughs*], and Dickie would get a plank or anything he could get his hands on, and

Eddie would just be [inaudible]. [*Demonstrates by shrinking down in his chair with his hands covering his head and laughing.*] They just loved to have fun. But Dickie said, when he hit him, “That’ll teach you!” [*Laughter*] [*To Richard Sams*] Remember that, Dickie?

RICHARD SAMS: “Got you last! Got you last!” I have to tell about one story that happened up at Sam Hill. When Edward [Nelms] was up there, he had a white dinner jacket that he used to wear around dinnertime. And, lo and behold, [*Refers to photo album in his lap.*] there’s a picture in here. When the lake was down, there was a steep, red-clay bank. And we stood on that red-clay bank, and we made a little parachute out of a handkerchief. And we had this parachute with a rock on the end of it. We’d throw it out; and as it would come down, we would throw rocks at it. Well, Eddie [Sams] reached over to grab a rock, and I was standing right behind him, and I cut loose just about the time he stood up. And this loud “Whap!” And he grabbed the back of his head; and when he saw all of the blood, he started screaming. Well, Edward [Nelms] ran down the hill and grabbed poor Eddie up in that white dinner jacket. It was as red as your vest by the time he got up there. And I thought I had killed my brother [*general laughter*]. So Edward remembers that.

EDWARD NELMS: That’s right, yes.

RICHARD SAMS: He saved him. He had a good cut on the back of his head.

EDWARD NELMS: Yeah.

MODERATOR: Well, what do you all remember most, other than that, about your times together at the lake or over at your house?

RICHARD SAMS: Marion, you haven’t [inaudible].

MARION SAMS: Well, I don’t know. I was sort of delegated to be the skipper of the boat, as far as aquaplaning was concerned. In those days there was no such thing as a water ski—that was unheard of. And the aquaplane was nothing more than a board with a couple of holes bored in there for ropes so you could hold onto it. And you’d stand there; and, when you got up enough speed, you could stand up on the aquaplane, and it would take you around the lake. So I remember getting Edward up on that. And after a few tries he got up on there all right. He did a very good job.

MODERATOR: But not Wallace, who didn’t learn to swim [*laughter*].

WALLACE NELMS: Still don’t swim.

MARION SAMS: We pulled him [Edward] around on the aquaplane, and we really had a good time. We sure did, doing that. Of course, nowadays you’ve got so many new things on the

water—sports that we didn't have then. I think that aquaplane we had, we made that, I think, out of wood—planks. And so—

RICHARD SAMS: We towed it behind a twenty-horsepower motor, too.

MARION SAMS: I don't know if it was even twenty horsepower, an old Johnson motor. And it did very well. But we had more fun. And doing things like that and playing in the mud, and just— We found an old, derelict boat, due to a storm or something that occurred on the lake, and we found that old boat to have sunk. And we took joy out of dumping the water out of that boat and making a sail for it, sailing around the lake on it.

EDWARD NELMS: That boat—that motor he had was an Evinrude.

MARION SAMS: Yeah.

EDWARD NELMS: Evinrude. It would go. It went really well.

MARION SAMS: Evinrude—you're right.

EDWARD NELMS: Marion would like to get—I'd say, sometimes on Sundays—Marion would like to get out there and run on that boat. He'd—I think he give out of gas, I think once, and somebody pulled him in [*laughter*].

MARION SAMS: That was a lot of work, too.

EDWARD NELMS: We had a lot of good times.

MODERATOR: Didn't somebody tell me, too, that you brothers remember cotton growing along Clairmont Road near the VA Hospital?

EDWARD NELMS: Yes

WALLACE NELMS: Well, not where the VA Hospital is, though, because that's where [Asa] Candler had—he had his cows over there [on the Lullwater estate].

EDWARD NELMS: That's right.

MODERATOR: Candler cows [rest inaudible]

WALLACE NELMS: They grazed that area there. Cotton was where Toco Hills [sic] is.

MODERATOR: Really?

WALLACE NELMS: Uh-huh

EDWARD NELMS: Right across the street from where Kroger and—

WALLACE NELMS, *to Edward Nelms*: What's the man's name that they tore the house down?

EDWARD NELMS: [First name inaudible] Arnold

WALLACE NELMS: Arnold. The Arnolds had a farm over there.

RICHARD SAMS: The house--they just tore it down, the old home place.

WALLACE NELMS: And we picked cotton—we picked cotton for them lots of times.

EDWARD NELMS: We sure did.

WALLACE NELMS: Spencer and [inaudible]. Right where that shopping center [Toco Hill?] is.

MODERATOR: What years would that have been?

WALLACE NELMS: Wow, that probably—that would've been sixty, almost seventy years ago.

EDWARD NELMS: It was.

WALLACE NELMS: I was about four, five, or six years old.

EDWARD NELMS: LaVista wasn't even paved running through there. We picked peas, picked cotton, gathered Mr. Arnold's crops. Right where you see all that shopping center. Every time I go there—

WALLACE NELMS: Wasn't no trees there at all.

EDWARD NELMS: No trees at all.

RICHARD SAMS: How much land did Mr. Arnold own there?

WALLACE NELMS: He had a lot of land.

RICHARD SAMS: He did?

WALLACE NELMS: Well, I guess in the sense that we call a lot, maybe not as much as they call a lot of land down there in Thomasville and in that area; but I call it a lot of land, because--

EDWARD NELMS: Yeah

WALLACE NELMS: --he had far more than he could handle himself. He had to hire people to come in and—

EDWARD NELMS: That's right.

WALLACE NELMS: --turn it, cultivate it, and then harvest it, which is what we did a lot of. Did a lot of harvesting for people.

MODERATOR: Well, with Atlanta being so close by, I guess there was ample opportunities for people who had farms or dairies to sell their products right next door.

WALLACE NELMS: Right. When you made your first statement about how we came to know the Sams [sic], Edward mentioned the fact that they had sold cow manure and—

EDWARD NELMS: Topsoil

WALLACE NELMS: --topsoil to people for their gardens. In addition to that my mother sold eggs and butter and also vegetables, figs, and things like that, to people who lived on North Decatur Road, [inaudible—several people talking at once, none of whose conversation is audible], Springdale, Oxford [inaudible].

RICHARD SAMS: Everybody knew the Nelms [sic] that lived in Druid Hills. Because Junior— Junior—you didn't even mention the rest of your family, but Junior was delivery man for—

WALLACE NELMS: Right

RICHARD SAMS: --Jeffreys [spelling?] Drugstore at the Emory Village for years.

EDWARD NELMS: That's right.

RICHARD SAMS: And now, Spencer worked for—

WALLACE NELMS: Jones's Pharmacy. He worked for Jones's Pharmacy.

RICHARD SAMS: But I want to ask you, now, who was Cliff Nelms? He was a carpenter. Of course, he was related--

WALLACE NELMS: Yeah, he was our daddy's first cousin, my—our second cousin.

RICHARD SAMS: Your second cousin?

WALLACE NELMS: Yeah

RICHARD SAMS: And he did a lot of the carpentry--

WALLACE NELMS: Woodworking

RICHARD SAMS: -- on our house.

WALLACE NELMS: That's right.

RICHARD SAMS: And I thought maybe that's where the connection came from.

WALLACE NELMS: He was a master carpenter. He was a master carpenter. Yeah, yeah.

RICHARD SAMS: Yes, he was good. And Daddy would never have anybody but Cliff.

WALLACE NELMS: That's true. He was one of the best.

RICHARD SAMS: The painter—what was his--? Who--? [*Thinks*] Hodges

MARION SAMS: Yeah, Hodges. The painter. He was a painter.

[*Wallace Nelms and Edward Nelms are engaged in brief, inaudible conversation.*]

EDWARD NELMS, *reaching out and touching Wallace Nelms on the arm*: Do I know him?

WALLACE NELMS, *laughing, to Edward Nelms*: [Inaudible] what he said—what he said about you? [*General laughter among those present*] Tell them that story, Edward. That's something that's funny.

MODERATOR: Maybe you should leave out the parts that you should leave out [*laughter*].

EDWARD NELMS: [Inaudible response to Moderator] Well, Mr. Sams, he-- we got the story together about going to the boat, he--Mr. Sams would like to go fishing, like to go down to those little small coves. He wanted to put down an anchor so the boat would stay—you know, how a boat would stand still when it's anchored down. So he was asking do we have any window weights at home. We did, so we got the window weights and [inaudible] to Mr. Sams. We was

going down to the railroad. And when we got there, we were a little late. [*To Moderator*] I'll leave out one part [*laughter*]. We got there, and it seemed that we were late, but we weren't late. We was a little late, but I was telling Mr. Sams about it, and Hodges was there. Hodges was listening, and Hodges—he was the painter—he said—he told Harriet—[*To Richard Sams*] You remember Harriet?

RICHARD SAMS: Oh, yes

EDWARD NELMS, *to Moderator*: She was the house woman—she was the cook and house cleaner. And after I told Mr. Sams about it, he said—he told Harriet-- [*To Wallace Nelms*] Now, Harriet told us, didn't she?

WALLACE NELMS: Uh-huh

EDWARD NELMS: He says, "Do you believe that story?" He said, "That's the biggest lie that ever was." Says, "They was saying that because they was late." [*General laughter*] We didn't know how to tell them. We didn't know—all we knowed was to tell the truth. [*Laughing*] I never forgot that.

MODERATOR: You remember him well.

EDWARD NELMS: Yeah, I do.

RICHARD SAMS: Old Hodges. He was something else. Always chewed his cigar.

EDWARD NELMS: Yeah, that's right. That's right. [*Laughs*]

RICHARD NELMS: Always had a cigar.

MODERATOR: Well, you all grew up and graduated from high school. Was that about the time World War II broke out?

EDWARD NELMS: Yeah, it was around '40— I know I went in the service--

WALLACE NELMS: '41

EDWARD NELMS: I left the Sams [sic] and went to the service in '43, early part of '43. I believe you did, too, didn't you, Marion?

MARION SAMS: Yeah, I went out, it was about February—early March of '43. And--

WALLACE NELMS, *to Edward Nelms*: Spencer volunteered in '41.

MARION SAMS: I was at Tech at that time, Georgia Tech.

[*Wallace and Edward Nelms have a brief, inaudible exchange.*]

MODERATOR: And did your families stay in touch during the war years?

RICHARD SAMS: Not only did they stay in touch—and Edward, I've got something that I found among my father's papers that I want to—with your permission I would like to give it to the

archives of the DeKalb Historical Society. [*Retrieves letter from photo album in his lap.*] This is a letter Edward wrote—

EDWARD NELMS: Oh!

RICHARD SAMS: --to my mother and father on Christmas, December the 20<sup>th</sup>, 1943. And you were—I don't know exactly where you were—you said, [*reading from letter*] "113<sup>th</sup> 17<sup>th</sup> Guard Squad."

EDWARD NELMS: Guard Squad, yeah. I was Guard Squadron—MPs in day and guards at night. Yeah, that's right.

RICHARD SAMS: Where? Where were you?

EDWARD NELMS: I was in Richmond, Virginia.

RICHARD SAMS: In Richmond.

EDWARD NELMS: Richmond, Virginia, yes.

RICHARD SAMS: This letter is—well, it's obviously very dear to my father. And he saved it with all of his special keepsakes. And it's a thank-you letter for a Christmas package that we had sent to Edward at, I guess, in Richmond, Virginia. And I think it's just very, very dear. And with your permission—

EDWARD SAMS: I appreciate that.

RICHARD SAMS: --I would like to contribute it to the archives, because I think things like the letters from soldiers to home and from home to soldiers are something I know the [inaudible] of the Historical Society very much wants to have in their archives. It's a very important part of my history. Marion, you haven't said much about the war experience. Maybe you could tell them a little bit about where you were sent.

MARION SAMS: Well, I was sent to Fort Eustis, Virginia; but then they had a program called the ASTP program. It was an army specialized training program. What it boiled down to was the college and universities were being drained of personnel and students. And so what they decided to do was to take out certain members of the armed forces and send them back to college and to—for use later on and might use them for OCS or Officers Candidate Schools [same as OCS] and training. And so I signed up for that with many of my friends. And we went to—I was personally sent to University of Pittsburgh, and the program lasted about—I think about six months. And it was suddenly terminated because—mainly for political reasons. The mothers of the servicemen that were in combat at that time were upset that certain other soldiers were being sent to universities for school, and so they discontinued the program. It was unlike the Navy V-5 and V-12 programs, which dealt with the Air Force, Navy Air Corps, and the fleet. They kept their

programs; they kept their contract and their word with their members. But the army didn't. They canceled the programs out and sent us back to the troops, as I said. Half of them went to the infantry, and I was very fortunate and went to the field artillery at Fort Bragg. And eventually I was sent overseas in the European Theater of Operation, just in time for the Battle of the Bulge and the rest of it. So that's where I served my time. When I got out, of course, I didn't want anything more to do with the army. [*Wallace Nelms laughs.*] However, after I attended Emory, I decided that I'd like to be a reservist; and so I joined the Naval Reserve and got a commission there as a reservist. And I stayed in there thirty-four years in the Naval Reserve and enjoyed my time there very much.

MODERATOR: Well, you know, thinking about Druid Hills and looking at some notes that you have provided, Richard, back when you all were children, some Druid Hills families kept some livestock and chickens in their yards, you said; and the Clanders on Briarcliff Road [1256 Briarcliff Road] operated at their house a zoo and a swimming pool for the public—

RICHARD SAMS: They actually had that. That was before I was born. I think the zoo succumbed to public pressure. Marion—

MARION SAMS: It quite a zoo. [*Many conversations ensue at once; all inaudible.*] At nighttime you could hear the animals roaring. And they had a big tiger called Jimmy Walker, and he was a beautiful Bengal tiger. I think later Mr. Candler turned that tiger over to the Atlanta zoo or did something with him. But I remember one occasion that one of the monkeys got out of the cage and went into some lady's car up on Briarcliff Road and stole her pocketbook [*general laughter*], and it was a—and she was going to sue the zoo; and I don't know what happened. But it was quite humorous in those days.

MODERATOR: But there were live—was livestock kept by Druid Hills families?

MARION SAMS: Oh, yes. Mrs. Ferrar, [*spelling?*] [*Richard Sams corrects or confirms pronunciation of name*], who lived on Springdale, backed up to our house. She had a chicken coop there and several other things there. And on one occasion--it was right after the war—one of our dogs went into the chicken coop and got some of the chickens. She was very nice about it; and so mother told me, says, "We're going to have to get rid of that dog." So I got rid of the dog. I didn't want him to repeat that performance again. But that's what happened.

RICHARD SAMS: There were a lot of homes there that had chickens. And during the war everybody did a Victory Garden—remember that? And a lot of people had chickens, and Louis [*Lewis?*] King on Springdale had a cow.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: The Matthews [*sic*] had a cow on Oakdale Road.

RICHARD SAMS, *to off-camera audience member*: You all had a cow?

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: Yeah, and Louie Newton up the street had a sheep.

RICHARD SAMS, *to off-camera audience member*: He had sheep?

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: Uh-huh

RICHARD SAMS: So a lot—actually, part of it was a carryover from Druid Hills having been rural; but as much came from the idea that people who moved into that neighborhood originally came from rural neighborhoods. And they brought those things with them. Chickens were important. Eggs were important.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: And it was the Depression.

RICHARD SAMS: And the Depression.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: And it was nice to have milk in the backyard.

RICHARD SAMS: Absolutely. And there was a certain amount of security to that, especially during the war. While Marion and Edward—[*to Edward Nelms*] now, Edward you were—were you in Virginia all the time?

EDWARD NELMS: Most of the time. When the war had—when VJ Day, VE Day, we was still—scaling down; and I was sent to Greenville Air Base, where there was a—I ended up being a refueling operator; and I worked on the [fly? flat?]*—on the [fly? flat?] line maintenance. And I was sent from Richmond—I stayed at Richmond two and a half years. Most of my time I spent in Richmond. And I went to Greenville, South Carolina. I stayed there about three months, and I left from there and went to—was really scaling down--I went to Mitchell Field in New York, the headquarters of the first Air Force; and that's where I was discharged—at Mitchell Field, New York.*

WALLACE NELMS: February—July—March the sixth, 1946.

EDWARD NELMS: That's right.

RICHARD SAMS: Were you in the military police the whole time, or--?

EDWARD NELMS: Yes, sir, that's right.

RICHARD SAMS: Well, now, Wallace and I remember from back home--I'm sure Wallace remembers all the rationing. And I don't know if you all had to do—had the air-raid warnings out there or not, but we had—the siren would go off; and we would have to darken the house and pull the shades. And my father was an air-raid warden. And they had certain practices that--they gave everybody a tank and a pump, and you filled it full of water. And you had a helmet and an armband, and they had practices. They would send off the air-raid warning; and the next thing you know, these—a lot of them were at night. And so the wardens had to gather in somebody's

front yard as designated place. So one night my brother Charlie—we had a—we'd turned the old chicken house into a workshop, a woodworking shop. And Charlie decided that he was going to make an incendiary bomb, and he made—turned this—out of wood, and he painted it silver, and he put some cotton in the back of the fins. And when the air-raid warning came off, Charlie took the bomb and put it out in the front yard and set fire to it [*general laughter*]. Well, the neighbor—the neighboring air-raid warden came down with his .45 pistol in his hand and his helmet on, and his name happened to be George Washington, to add to the story. But Daddy and George Washington squirted out the incendiary bomb, and it was known all over Druid Hills that that was the night that we were attacked [*general laughter*].

MODERATOR: Well, you all—you didn't—your roads weren't paved for a—quite a number of years. Do you remember about what year, say, LaVista was—was paved?

*Inaudible brief discussion among several people.*

EDWARD NELMS: We'd been going to school in that one-room church up there during that time. It was—must have been in the '30s, somewhere in the '30s [*inaudible*] when they first paved it. And they put just plain tar on it. And we'd get our feet—we'd get our feet in the tar, and it was something.

MODERATOR, *laughing*: Oh, goodness! Well, now, isn't there still a small church in your community that dates back quite a long, long ways?

WALLACE NELMS: Oh, yeah. You're talking about the church that we recently rebuilt that's out on LaVista Road—my church, it's Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church. It's—we celebrated our 133<sup>rd</sup> anniversary yesterday.

MODERATOR: Really!

WALLACE NELMS: But it wasn't always there. Originally it was over in what we call the Washington Park area, which is Jordan Lane, right next to the—used to be a Shoney's there right on Lawrenceville Highway [*between North Druid Hills Road and DeKalb Industrial Boulevard*]. It's an Indian restaurant now—it's probably an Indian restaurant now, but that's where it originally was. And it was a boxcar that was--had been put over there from the Georgia Railroad—Georgia Railway, set there; and they moved it from that area to its present location where our church is now on LaVista Road. And it's an old congregation, a lot of old people. If you go in the cemetery, you can see headstones dating way, way, way back. A lot of people [*inaudible*]

MODERATOR: Well, now, do most of the people still live in the community, or do they come from throughout the area?

WALLACE NELMS: A lot of the folks still live in the community, but a lot of folks did like you just mentioned—a lot of folks got rich, took the money, and ran. There used to be a very large black community in that whole area. As matter of fact, where the Oak Grove shopping center is was black property. All the way up Fair—well, up here to [inaudible—sounds like “Lizzie”?] Cemetery—from there was all black. But a lot of folks, they just got tired of waiting for progress; and in the '30s and the '40s found out they could move to New York or New Jersey, Chicago, Detroit, and places like that, and—

MODERATOR: Probably a lot of that after World War II, when young men were traveling--  
[Both Mr. Nelms and Moderator talk at the same time; both comments are inaudible.]

WALLACE NELMS: A lot of them prior to that. A lot of my mother's brothers and sisters, they left prior to the World War. They just could not wait. Well, they were fair-complected [sic], and a lot of them passed [for Caucasian], really, some of them, a lot of them did. And so they left; and when they left, the children who were left with the property, they just didn't want to be bothered paying the taxes on it. They just sold it. We managed to hang onto ours, and I'm glad that we did.

MODERATOR: Well, how many Nelms [sic] live on the property today?

WALLACE NELMS: Well, in my family all of my children live there, except one; and she has a lot to build [on], and I hope she'll eventually build her a house there. Edward still lives there. His children have bought homes in the other parts of DeKalb County, but they own the property. They eventually plan to develop some of it or in some ways keep it in the family and allow it to be of benefit for the remaining members of the family—it's a trust sort of thing. But may I say something else about the Sams family--

MODERATOR: Yes, indeed

WALLACE NELMS: --that I feel very important and needs to be said. Our relationship is--is real deep. And if I get sentimental, you'll have to forgive me—

MODERATOR: Certainly

WALLANCE NELMS: --because I'm a very sentimental person. And they were always--just always there for us. When you have nothing—[To Richard Sams] when you mentioned the air-raid thing—[To Moderator] We didn't even have electric lights then. So it was [inaudible]. They—they accepted us at faith [sic] value. When we'd go into their home, we were just like one of the family.

RICHARD SAMS, *quietly*. That's right.

MODERATOR, *to Wallace Nelms*: Well, now, were members of your family sort of the first—the first people that started working or selling produce or whatever in the Druid Hills area? In other words did—

WALLACE NELMS: There were other folks that bought. But they [the Sams family] were the people who reached out to us and sort of pulled us in. [*Visibly and audibly moved*] I can never forget Thanksgivings and Christmases.

MODERATOR: And do you all--?

RICHARD SAMS, *to Wallace Nelms*: You can't forget Harriet. You mentioned Harriet.

WALLACE NELMS: I'm not through. [*General laughter*] They'd always have a gift for us, always. No exceptions.

EDWARD NELMS: That's right.

WALLACE NELMS, *becoming emotional*: And that was the first time I'd ever seen turkey set on the table with all the trimmings, family around it, just a wonderful [inaudible]--

EDWARD NELMS: Exactly, yeah

WALLACE NELMS: --of what human beings ought to be about. Nobody excluded. That was wonderful. The world misses that sort of thing. That sort of thing makes life pleasant for everybody.

RICHARD SAMS, *quietly*: That's right.

WALLACE NELMS: And when I see Dickie, he's the same way now. He hasn't changed. I haven't changed.

MODERATOR: Well, maybe he [Richard Sams] should have. [*General laughter*] It sounds as if he was sort of a trouble-maker.

*RICHARD NELMS makes an inaudible comment.*

WALLACE NELMS: I just can't understand how he got hooked up with these rocks, though. [*General laughter*]

RICHARD SAMS: Well, that's a long story I won't go into. I will say--I mentioned Harriet, and Edward mentioned Harriet. And I really—I need to tell you a little bit about Harriet [*Pauses, becoming emotional*] if I can keep from getting too sentimental. But Harriet knocked on our door in 1939 after a long absence. Her mother and father worked for our grandmother and [grand?]father at Sams Crossing. And Howard Moore and his wife lived in the country like Wallace and Edward. And Harriet went off and went to the big city. We lost track of her for years, Daddy said. But in 1939 she came and knocked on our door, and this was just about the end of the Depression. It was still a pretty hard time at that time. And she said, "Mr. Sams, I come to work

for you till I die.” And she did. She worked for us, she took care of us, she cooked, she cleaned, she was always there. And she kept—when Wallace wasn’t there, she kept Eddie and I apart.

[*Laughter*]

But Harriet had a very, very special part of our life, too. And when Mother and Daddy moved out there to Druid Hills, and right at—being very fortunate that Daddy was an attorney—and even during the Depression attorneys did well because there was always somebody in trouble—they could afford to help people. But the attitude was not just, “I’m giving you a job.” It was, “You’re part of us.” And very clearly this Nelms family and all of them—Spencer included and Junior and Will, their father—they were all as much a part of our family. And we had a special house for Edward up at Sam Hill that was “King Edward’s House.” And he was King Edward up there, and that’s exactly what we called him.

EDWARD NELMS: Exactly. Yes.

RICHARD SAMS: Marion, do you have anything to add to that?

MARION SAMS: No, I don’t think so. I think you’ve done a pretty good job. Those things—you can’t measure those things in any kind of certificates or degrees or anything. It’s just something that comes from the heart. And it comes with association. And it never lets you go; it’s always there. And I think that’s the bond we’ve always had with them. And I know that at times when Harriet’s husband departed this life, we had trouble with the funeral group that arranged for the funeral. And they went out there after they buried him, they went back with—I never will forget—a bulldozer and dug up the coffin and all. And she came up to my office there, Harriet did, crying; and so we got in touch with my aunt, Kay Lucia [spelling?]*—Katie—Johnson, and she was a Sams. She contacted the manager of that cemetery, and they went out—we went out to be sure that they fixed that grave back up the way it was supposed to be. But she just came up heartbroken, and I never will forget that day. And those things happened, and they were—that was a real tragedy in her life, and so we did the best we could to make it good for her. I don’t know, there were a lot of little personal things that come up; they’re hard to remember as time goes by.*

RICHARD SAMS: Well, one of the things I think it really points up is that there’s a relationship that’s created here between these two families that very few people this day and age even knew existed in the Southland. I think, to a large degree, this is why, if you look at history and the years after we grew up, and when segregation became an issue, that the people of this area handled the integration of the two races so much better than other areas of the country.

*WALLACE NELMS nods in agreement.*

RICHARD SAMS: DeKalb County knew its people, and there was a relationship that very few people recognize today. That's why I thought this would be important for us to talk about this, that there's a--there's a bond between us, and there always has been. And we aren't unique. Practically everybody in DeKalb County was this way. I'm sure that everyone—[*Looks off-camera to address an audience member.*] I know Joe had [name inaudible—could be “Camellia”?]

“JOE,” *off-camera*: And Reverend Ernest Moore

RICHARD SAMS: And Ernest Moore. Ernest was a stalwart in the community as far as everybody was concerned. Everybody loved Ernest. And our cousin gave him the old Houston Chapel to live in till he died. And so there was a bond there that existed among the people in the 1930s to 1950s, when the issue came to a head. And we can see—look back and see how unjust it was. But at a point when we were faced to solve a social problem and we did the best we could, it was done with the best methods because we knew each other.

EDWARD NELMS: That's right.

RICHARD SAMS: And I think that says a lot for this county.

MODERATOR: I think it does, indeed. What comes to mind when you think about this county during your childhood years? What kind of place was it?

EDWARD NELMS: Well, for me it's—one thing, the vast changes, and I—that's what makes rich, precious memories stand out, so you can remember the times when, well, it was just the country stores. There was Clyde Anderson on the corner of LaVista and—

WALLACE NELMS: North Druid

EDWARD NELMS: --North Druid Hills. Cheek's had a--Cheek had a store right up here where the--at the intersection of Oak Grove where they're building the—right across from where they're building the—

WALLACE NELMS: New Wallgreen's

EDWARD NELMS: Yeah, uh-huh. And then on up here Langford [Lankford?] had a store. And then from here all the way to Tucker up LaVista Road, it was dirt. And they had families of farms and private dairies. That's all you would see. Now it's nothing but just commercial businesses.

RICHARD SAMS: Do you remember Hello World?

EDWARD NELMS: Yes [*Scattered laughter*]

MODERATOR: What was that?

[*Several conversation fragments, all inaudible.*]

RICHARD SAMS: Tell them about Hello World, Wallace. You remember it, don't you?

WALLACE NELMS: I remember. It was—really, it was a bus stop for the—what did they call it? Stage?

EDWARD NELMS: Not Greyhound, but Trailways.

WALLACE NELMS: Trailways, yeah. It was a Texaco station right there on the corner of Montreal and Lawrenceville Highway.

RICHARD SAMS, *nodding*: Montreal and Lawrenceville Highway. And Mr. Chewning ran the store there. And he had—he had copied from a radio program that always began with, “Hello, World!” So he put a big sign up on the side of his filling station that says, “Hello, World.” And everybody knew where “Hello World” was. So if you gave somebody directions in those days, you said, “Well, you go to ‘Hello World,’ and you turn right.” [*General laughter*] Or, “You go beyond ‘Hello World’ three miles, and you’re in Tucker.”

MODERATOR: And today you would probably say, “You go to where ‘Hello World’ used to be and turn right.”

RICHARD SAMS, *laughing and nodding*: That’s right.

MODERATOR: And so you have to be a native to understand.

EDWARD NELMS *laughs and makes an inaudible comment*.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: We were also known as Pea Ridge around here, too.

RICHARD SAMS, *nodding*: Pea Ridge.

*Several participants express agreement.*

RICHARD SAMS: Now, why was that? Where did “Pea Ridge” come from?

WALLACE SAMS: That’s a good question.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: Do you know?

WALLACE NELMS: That’s something the Wilsons and the Fraziers and the Chewnings, they ought to know that.

RICHARD SAMS: That’s like Peavine Creek. I don’t know where that came from.

MODERATOR: Did they grow peas? I mean, where did--

WALLACE NELMS: Mr. Charles Wilson grew about some.

EDWARD NELMS: He had a large farm.

WALLACE NELMS: Mm-hm

EDWARD NELMS: He had a lot of—he had a big farm. He’d rent property in that farm there. He probably would know. Well, do you know Aikens? They figure big in this community, the Aikens [sic]. Luke Aikens, Milt Aikens, P. Aikens—no. They own part of this property back here.

MODERATOR: Oh, really?

WALLACE NELMS: They were very prominent in Oak Grove community.

EDWARD NELMS: Oak Grove, yeah.

WALLACE NELMS: Oak Grove United Methodist Church, the whole Aiken [sic] family.

EDWARD NELMS: Cheeks, Aikens, Kirklands--

WALLACE NELMS: Aikens and Cheeks and Kirklands

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: Kirklands married Aikens.

MODERATOR: What—do any of you in the audience have questions or comments?

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: I have a comment.

MODERATOR: Yes

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: I had the privilege and pleasure of being associated with Wallace's daughter at Montclair School--and she was Cheryl [spelling?] Nelms—even went to her wedding. And she was a lovely lady, young lady, and an excellent math teacher. So she is—has positively touched the lives of many students in DeKalb County and helped them master math. And she's helped the teachers [*laughs*] when some of us were having problems getting ideas across to the children. So I can understand. I admired her then, but I didn't realize the rich heritage she had, and I do now. I can understand how she's such a remarkable young lady.

MODERATOR: And does she still teach in DeKalb County?

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: I don't know, because I retired.

WALLACE NELMS: Yes, she does.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: I know she's gone up in the--does she still—is she still in DeKalb, isn't she?

WALLACE NELMS: She's still in DeKalb.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: And still—and we are lucky to have her. And Marion and Richard, I wish you would tell about when your mother graduated from [Agnes] Scott and was keeping the secret of her marriage, and—you know that little—that story, when she boarded the train? Or maybe everybody knows it.

MARION SAMS: Well, they lived next door, as Dick said—

RICHARD SAMS: To each other

MARION SAMS: They lived next door, so they grew up together.

*Meantime, WALLACE NELMS and EDWARD NELMS have a brief exchange:*

WALLACE NELMS: Did you know that?

EDWARD NELMS: I heard that, yes [inaudible].

MARION SAMS: Dad was about ten years older than Mother. And so he had to sort of wait around, even after the First World War. He served there and then came back and started practicing law, so he waited on her. And the day she graduated from Agnes Scott, they got married that same day, right after the [graduation] ceremony. And things have changed since then. [*Reaches into his jacket's inside pocket and retrieves a small book.*] I was going through my mother's affairs some years ago, and I came across a little book. It's called "Student's Handbook, presented by the Young Women's Christian Association of Agnes Scott." It's dated 1920, and my mother was a graduate of the class of 1923. And so this book was quite revealing as to the relationships and some of the folkways and mores of dating and of young Agnes Scott students, the strictness that they had. I notice one part of the book says it "prohibits the use of interlined books in class and books with marginal notes. It's considered a breach of the Honor System. Girls should not sell such books without erasing the marks." [*General laughter*] "If the interlining, etc., cannot be erased, girls should not purchase such books." I mean this is sort of the honor system in those days that existed.

And they gave penalties. There's a student government at Agnes Scott, and they issued what they called "knocks." If you got a knock, that was bad. And they say, "Knocks may be given for noise made during Quiet Hours and visiting after lights [out?] and unnecessary talking after lights." And it goes on and on with Code of Conduct. And then they—under the name of "Chaperonage," they say, "All new students shall be constantly chaperoned by older students during their first four visits to Atlanta" [*laughter*]. "Chaperonage is required. This is a requirement for (a) automobiling with men, (b) absence from campus after Time Limit, and any evening entertainment in town, in which case the following rules must be observed." And then they go into a complete list of checking in and checking out of Agnes Scott at that time. I'd like to take this book and--on behalf of my mother and donate it to DeKalb Historical Society--

MODERATOR: How wonderful! Thank you, Marion.

MARION SAMS: --and to have as a reference for what the customs were at Agnes Scott in those days, 1923. And by the way, since I dated a few Agnes Scott ladies when I was coming along, most of these rules were still in full force and effect [*general laughter*]. I had to check 'em in and check 'em out.

MODERATOR: Well, Sue Ellen, do you want to accept this [book], as well as this letter?

*Sue Ellen Mears [Owens?] comes up from audience and, on behalf of the DeKalb Historical Society, accepts book from Marion Sams.*

SUE ELLEN MEARS: I do. I'm so excited. Thank you very much.

MODERATOR: And the letter from—

RICHARD SAMS, *handing Sue Ellen Mears a letter*: Here's the letter. [*Sue Ellen sits down.*]

MODERATOR: --from Edward [Sams] as well.

RICHARD SAMS: One of the things that I would add about my mother and father was—I don't know if Daddy ever told you this, but one of his friends—Daddy was standing at the graduating ceremony—Mother's, at Agnes Scott—and listening to what was going on, and one of his friends said, "Gus, when are you going to marry that girl?" And he said, "I don't know." But he had the ring in his pocket [*laughter*], and they married that afternoon. But the payoff was when they decided that night to go on their honeymoon, they left—they went down to Brookwood Station—to get onboard the train to go to Washington [D.C.] and to Niagara Falls, and as they got to the train station, here were all of her classmates on the same train [*laughter*].

MODERATOR: Oh, really!

RICHARD SAMS: So much for privacy!

MODERATOR: That's right.

RICHARD SAMS: So they all enjoyed razzing the two newlyweds all the way to Washington. So that was quite a—quite a—

MODERATOR, *acknowledging question from audience*: Elaine?

ELAINE [last name unknown], *off-camera*: Where did they go to high school?

RICHARD SAMS: Daddy went to Donald Frazier in—which was a military school in Decatur and then on to the University of Georgia from there, [*to Marion Sams*] didn't he?

MARION SAMS: Yeah, he went around to the University of Georgia.

RICHARD SAMS: Mother went to Decatur High School. Of course, at that time Decatur High School was Girls' High and Boys' High. They were totally separate. And that's quite a story in itself.

MODERATOR: Anybody else have a question? Yes, sir.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: I don't they think they asked the Nims—Nelms?

MODERATOR: Nelms

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: What was the name of your school? And the school that you went to, was it Hamilton High School? Was it Hamilton?

WALLACE NELMS: The elementary school that I went to was Mount Zion. It was named for our church.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: Right

WALLACE NELMS: And the high school was Avondale High School for Negroes.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: Mm-hm

WALLACE NELMS: William Patton was principal there when I graduated.

RICHARD SAMS, *to Wallace Nelms*: And y'all had to walk all the way to Avondale?

WALLACE NELMS: Yes, sir. Well, Scottsdale, really. The school was in Scottsdale.

MODERATOR: That's still a ways.

RICHARD SAMS: But that's still a ways.

WALLACE NELMS: Yeah, it was. But we were used to walking, because we never had a car. We didn't have no—I always walked anyway. Anywhere we went, we walked.

RICHARD SAMS, *to Wallace Nelms*: How did you all get to our house?

WALLACE NELMS: Now, the amazing thing was how did we get clothes delivered? Because my grandma washed for just about everybody from the Oak Grove section to Tucker. Well, my grandparents—

MODERATOR: How did she?

WALLACE NELMS: --had a Model-A Ford.

EDWARD NELMS: Mm-hm

WALLACE NELMS: And they piled the clothes in the car. I don't know how they got them piled in there, but she did washings for just about everybody. And when she delivered her clothes, the car would be empty by the time they got to Tucker. And usually my mother would have sent to Cofer Brothers in Tucker to have them bring back a 25-pound bag of flour.

EDWARD NELMS: Yeah

WALLACE NELMS: And it was our job to walk up to our grandmama's house and carry that 25-pound bag of flour home. [*Wallace Nelms makes inaudible remark.*] But that was the way we got any kind of money. There was—you didn't have any money period, because everything you ate, you raised. And there was no work. I mean, you couldn't buy a job. No work at all.

EDWARD NELMS: People you knew, like the Samses [*rest of sentence inaudible*].

WALLACE NELMS: Yeah, who—lots of times they'd buy it from—they didn't need it. They just bought because they knew you needed the money.

EDWARD NELMS: Yeah, that's right.

WALLACE NELMS, *to Richard Sams*: For which we are grateful. The Leaches [*spelling?*] across the street would buy because they knew we needed the money. But those two families were the bedrock of the economy of our family for years.

EDWARD NELMS: Yeah

WALLACE NELMS: Up to the time that the war started, because Spencer worked for us. Spencer off and on worked for—Julius worked for us, Edward worked for us, I did, too.

EDWARD NELMS: Robert

WALLACE NELMS: And Robert, too. So that was our only means of having any kind of money.

MODERATOR: Well, Wallace, you mentioned your mother washing clothes for a lot of people.

WALLACE NELMS: Yeah

MODERATOR: And then delivering them

WALLACE NELMS: Right

MODERATOR: So I gather that the clothes were picked up—

WALLACE NELMS: My grandmama picked the clothes up. We couldn't—we didn't have no way to pick them up. My grandmama picked them up, brought them--and then she had her washing--my mother had her washing, and my grandmother had her washing.

MODERATOR: And we're not talking washing machines here, are we?

WALLACE NELMS: Oh, naw, we didn't even have electricity.

EDWARD NELMS: Yeah, a regular old rub board and a cooking pot--wide-mouth cooking pots.

RICHARD SAMS: Remember our old wash house?

WALLACE NELMS, *laughing*: Yeah.

RICHARD SAMS: It's gone now. [Inaudible sentence]

WALLACE NELMS: You tore it down?

RICHARD SAMS: Had to. It was falling down.

WALLACE NELMS: OK, OK.

MODERATOR: So, a wash pot with a fire under it?

WALLACE NELMS: With a fire under it.

EDWARD NELMS: Had to go get hot brash [sic] and heat the pot [*voice trails off*].

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: Make your own soap

WALLACE NELMS: Make your own soap, yeah, right. Lye soap from your—from having to kill the hogs the year--the fall before. You made your lard, you cooked your lard-- When you made your lard, you made your lye soap. Because you get you some lye and mix with that grease, and you make your lye soap.

MODERATOR: And then the ironing.

WALLACE NELMS: Aw, yeah. I got irons. I still got irons. I told Dick about that.

RICHARD SAMS: You told me you had flat irons.

WALLACE NELMS: I got a lot of stuff that we kept for years.

RICHARD: And you had a basket you picked cotton with?

WALLACE NELMS: Cotton basket. Got a cotton basket, right. And the stitches [?] that we weighed it with.

RICHARD SAMS: That's amazing. I wish you'd have brought it.

WALLACE NELMS: Yeah. Well, one of these days we're going to set up a display, and we can show some of it.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: We got one! I have a place! [*laughter*]

MODERATOR: We have a museum

RICHARD SAMS: I got to tell one other story about Wallace. Now, Wallace was a storyteller. And we used to sit in the sandbox when we weren't fighting and he was taking care of us. And Wallace would tell us a story, and I still remember: [*singing*] "Mama killed me, Papa ate me, brother sucked my bones, and they buried my head upon the marble stone." [*General laughter*] You remember now, don't you?

MODERATOR: That's a scary story!

RICHARD SAMS: That was the horriblest, scariest story I ever heard of! But I never forgot it. And—but we got even. Marion got even with Edward [Nelms] up at Sam Hill when we made Edward come in the house and listen to the "Lights Out" program at night, which was so scary.

MODERATOR: On the radio?

EDWARD NELMS: On the radio

RICHARD SAMS: And Edward--we would all sit there at the steps and listen to the radio; and then Marion and Jack Merlin [*spelling?*] and who else would sneak out after the program was over and Edward had gone to sleep, they sneaked out there and started walking around his house and moaning [*laughter*].

EDWARD NELMS: That scared me!

RICHARD SAMS: Edward [Nelms] came in the house. "Mr. Sams!" Scared to death!.

WALLACE NELMS: That's how William [last name inaudible] did me one time. With his [*rest of sentence inaudible*].

EDWARD NELMS: That's some story.

MODERATOR: And you have a scrapbook from Sams [*sic*] Hill—1938, right?

RICHARD SAMS: Daddy--Daddy kept pictures of everything in the first few years when we bought the place, and I will show some of these pictures later on. But I brought it because there are pictures. Here's a picture of Edward in his uniform when he came by to see us while he was on leave. I think I gave you a copy of this. [*Passes photograph to Edward Nelms.*]

EDWARD NELMS: Yeah, I have a copy of this. You can pass it around.

RICHARD SAMS: There's a picture of Ed and me and Wallace out behind our house. There's a picture of Marion in his uniform when he was home on leave and a picture where we all used to play, Wallace and Ed and I—in fact, the whole family in what we--Daddy had left a sandbox. And every kid has to have a sandbox. We spent hours in that sandbox, and during the war years that's where we played war.

WALLACE NELMS: Yeah, we did a lot of battles there.

RICHARD SAMS: The other thing we haven't mentioned, and Wallace said, "You gotta bring a picture of Zip." We had I don't know how many dogs, but Zip was a special dog. [*Holds up photograph*]

WALLACE NELMS: Yeah, my favorite.

RICHARD SAMS: A little Boston terrier that was the best squirrel dog in the world.

WALLACE NELMS: He was like a member of the family like [*voice trails off*].

RICHARD SAMS, *balancing photograph album on his lap*: But there's a picture in here in the Sam Hill album. It was a place we dearly love, and we still have it--it's up on Lake Blue Ridge. And the—there's a picture in here of Edward in that old boat you were talking about, and there's a picture in here of--I thought we had Edward on the water--on the aquaplane, but I couldn't find that one. But here's Wallace in the boat and on the steps.

*Tape skips, losing the rest of Richard Sams's comments about the photo album and picking up again mid-sentence. Conversation seems to be centered around the towns en route from Atlanta to their destination in north Georgia.*

RICHARD SAMS, *to Marion Sams*: . . . [inaudible, sounds like the first syllable of "Canton"]—well, Marietta and Smyrna and then Woodstock--

MARION SAMS: Yeah, Marietta, Marietta.

RICHARD SAMS: --and Canton, and then--

WALLACE NELMS: We [inaudible] got through Jasper--

RICHARD SAMS: Jasper

WALLACE NELMS:--[inaudible] because Talking Rock was the next one.

RICHARD SAMS: But when we got to Jasper, that was the ice cream stop.

WALLACE NELMS: Yeah

RICHARD SAMS: If we had behaved ourselves, we always stopped at the drugstore in Jasper and got an ice cream.

WALLACE NELMS: Right

MODERATOR: When you got out into these rural areas, did people think there was anything unusual about this black family and white family traveling together?

WALLACE NELMS: No. I never experienced anything like that.

RICHARD SAMS: I don't think—there weren't any—I don't remember a problem at all.

WALLACE NELMS: I don't either. No problem. I would—I thought—I had heard it said that Copper Hill was a bad place, but—

EDWARD NELMS: Yeah

WALLACE NELMS: Copper Hill was—it was Ducktown.

EDWARD NELMS: Right, yeah.

WALLACE NELMS: But we never had—we never encountered any kind of problem.

EDWARD NELMS: That's right.

WALLACE NELMS: Never did.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: Edward, in your defense, you couldn't have been late for Augustine's fishing tour, because everybody was late. Nobody got up as early as Augustine. And he always found that the best fish were always up the other end of the lake.

EDWARD NELMS, *laughing*: Yeah.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: So he would take that little boat that you were talking about, with about a 25-horse[power motor] on it--I'll never forget—puttering through the fog, putt-putt-putt-putt-putt-putt-putt-putt-putt, all the way up to the lake. There were never any fish up there. It was a good time.

WALLACE NELMS: Took an hour to get there.

MODERATOR: Anybody else have a question or a comment?

EDWARD NELMS: Well, I tell you, Mr. Sams was really organized.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: Ma'am? Mount Zion Church—it probably--I guess it started around 1870? Do you—did you bury there at the church? What's probably the oldest stone at the church?

WALLACE NELMS: I don't know what the oldest stone is at the church because really, to be honest with you, had they been—they were burying there, sure. But our means were so meager that most of the early people who are buried there don't have a stone at all. What they did was

they'd just go find a nice, big rock—a big, flat rock—and put it at the head of each grave. So there are a lot of graves that are at the back side of the cemetery that have no official markings or datelines at all.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: What is the earliest stone read?

WALLACE NELMS: I'd say the earliest one would probably be in the early [19]30s. Yeah, because before that, people didn't have means [inaudible] to get an etched stone. I mean, the prettiest one I first saw was one that Dee put at Stella—that was Estella Roe [spelling? Row? Rowe?].

EDWARD NELMS: Mm-hm

MODERATOR: Anyone else?

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: I was wondering if the Roe [Row? Rowe?] family still lives in this area.

WALLACE NELMS: Yeah. They're probably more prolific than we are, as far as number-wise.

EDWARD NELMS: Yeah

WALLACE NELMS: People just know us because—I don't know, for some reason or other, my dad had a way of being accessible to the people in power. When you are poor and you're black and you have no power—and when I think about power, I think about—I used to hear—they'd talk about your dad [Mr. Sams], and they'd say, "He's a member of the Georgia legislature. He's a member of the Georgia legislature." Was he a member of the Georgia legislature at times?

MARION SAMS: Yeah, he served two terms from DeKalb County, representing in the legislature. I think it was during [Governor] Ed Rivers's administration. And after the second term he refused to run again, and that was the end of his political career.

MODERATOR: But that was impressive to your—

WALLACE NELMS: Well, now that I fully reflect back on it, I think about it now, here he was, he was a member of the Georgia legislature. They had a white primary. Now, we couldn't even have voted, even though we were close friends and knew him, even if we had wanted to support him, we couldn't—we wouldn't have been able to do it because they had a white primary here. So, I mean, just think about—when you think about things like that, but even so, it's still no reflection on our relationship with the family.

*RICHARD SAMS makes an inaudible comment.*

MODERATOR: When did you vote for the first time?

WALLACE NELMS: 1948

MODERATOR: 1948

WALLACE NELMS: That's the first time I voted.

MODERATOR: How about you, Edward?

EDWARD NELMS: I don't vote. I never did vote. [*Laughs*]

MODERATOR: Just decided against it, huh?

EDWARD NELMS, *laughing*: Yeah. Leave in peace and get along with people, but I don't vote. I'm not—I'm non-political.

MODERATOR: Non-political.

EDWARD NELMS, *laughing*: Yeah.

WALLACE NELMS: That [1948] was the first time I had a chance to [vote]. I was eighteen.

MODERATOR: And where did you vote?

WALLACE NELMS: Rehoboth Elementary School. [*Laughs*] Over right close to where "Hello World" is.

RICHARD SAMS, *laughing*: Over by Hello World!

MODERATOR: Well, you had a ways to go, didn't you?

WALLACE NELMS: Oh, it wasn't too far. I'd have walked to have gotten that privilege, if I had to. I didn't have to, but I would have.

MODERATOR: When--you said that your--was it your father or your grandfather had a car?

WALLACE NELMS: My grandparents, yeah. My grandmama had a car. She was in kind of a—in black families, the women were primarily the dynamo that kept the family going.

EDWARD NELMS: The leader of the family, yeah, the most recognized.

WALLACE NELMS: Because for the most part they didn't want to marry a black man to be in a position of power or prominence. A woman could get far more done economically, socially, or however than a man could. So you had to play a submissive role. I've seen my dad do it so many times. I used to get so angry with him. I said, "Why do you do that?"

EDWARD NELMS: Yeah

WALLACE NELMS: "Why do you let that happen to you?" But he was protecting me.

EDWARD NELMS: Yeah, but—

WALLACE NELMS: He loved me that much that he told me the parameters to which I had freedom where I could go, where I could not go, places I should not—things I should not do, to keep me safe. And I appreciate him for that.

EDWARD NELMS: Yeah

MODERATOR: Well, do you remember the first car that your dad had, and--?

WALLACE NELMS: Yeah, we bought a 1925 Model-T Ford from—

WALLACE and EDWARD NELMS, *in unison*: --Model-T Ford from Georgia Tech [*Both laugh.*]

EDWARD NELMS: Paid fifteen dollars [inaudible].

MODERATOR: Fifteen dollars? What did you pay for gas, fifteen cents a gallon?

*Both Nelms brothers speak at the same time, rendering their comments inaudible.*

EDWARD NELMS: That was a good little car.

RICHARD SAMS: It worked. It ran.

WALLACE NELMS: Dad used it in parades. They were getting rid of it.

EDWARD NELMS: That's right.

WALLACE NELMS: It didn't have a top on it. It was open.

EDWARD NELMS: Open—little old truck. What you call a little truck? Half-a-ton T-Model—white truck. It was run good. We were so glad to get that thing. [*He and Wallace Nelms laugh.*]

RICHARD SAMS: For fifteen dollars

MODERATOR, *to Nelms brothers*: Did you know how to drive?

WALLACE NELMS: I didn't. Edward could drive. Spencer could drive.

EDWARD NELMS: I did.

MODERATOR: Did you learn to drive in your grandmother's car?

EDWARD NELMS: No, I never did learn to drive in that. I learned to drive in Daddy's—this truck that Daddy got, and then go all through the place—Oakdale, Springdale, Oxford Road—all through, selling vegetables, especially in the springtime. And they [customers] could get it from the store, but they knowed Daddy's were fresh. We'd go down in the bottoms [inaudible] and gather that--those produce up in the morning and get it and carry it off [inaudible]. And they like—Daddy was cheaper, too. Daddy's was—vegetables were cheaper and fresh. Daddy had—they made good Southern vegetables.

WALLACE NELMS: He sure did. It was always his motto to have watermelons for sale by the Fourth of July.

EDWARD NELMS: Yeah. Always made it his business to have watermelons ready to be ripe by the Fourth of July.

WALLACE NELMS: We sold a lot of them to the Emory University cafeteria. And once we found out—once I got a job there, and when they found out my daddy had watermelon, they [rest of sentence inaudible] [*laughter*].

RICHARD SAMS: They bought them all.

MODERATOR: So you started working at Emory?

WALLACE NELMS: Yeah, I worked at Emory cafeteria down there for Mr. Jenkins a lot—while I was in school I did.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: When did your father die?

WALLACE NELMS: He died in 1959.

RICHARD SAMS: '59

MODERATOR: Well, I know that after we break up, everybody here will think of some question that we wish we'd asked. But I'm sure that we can call either of these families—

*[Richard Sams indicates that an audience member has a question.]*

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: Who came up with the idea of cutting things out in anchors and wheels and sailboats?

RICHARD SAMS: That was my father.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: Way ahead of time. This is almost like scrapbooking. *[Several people talk at once, rendering comments inaudible.]*

RICHARD SAMS: He did, he did that. He spent hours putting those things together. And, of course, when you got prints back, you had multiple prints. So he would take the extra prints and make these little—he would draw them—draw out of an advertisement, and then he would trace it off, and then he would cut the—cut the pictures out and make the little pictures.

2<sup>nd</sup> MODERATOR *[Sue Ellen Mears Owens?]*: Because this is for historical documentation, I would like to end it by saying this is March 10, 2003; and this a program of the DeKalb Historical Society "I Remember Hour." And I would like each of our guests to take a turn telling us their name and age, if you don't mind, today, on March 10, 2003, so I'll start with you.

MARION SAMS: Well, I'm Marion Sams. I've been introduced before, but I'm seventy-eight years old. I'll be seventy-nine this coming April.

RICHARD SAMS: And I'm Richard Sams, and I was--I will be—well, I just turned sixty-eight.

WALLACE NELMS: I'm Wallace Nelms, and I'm seventy-three.

EDWARD NELMS: And I'm Edward Nelms, Sr., and I'll be seventy-nine June 12<sup>th</sup> this year.

2<sup>nd</sup> MODERATOR: Thank you very much for sharing these memories. Richard had told me about this, and then we passed it on to Wilma, who's in charge of our "I Remember Hour," and what a wonderful thing it would be to capture the story of these two families for our history. And what I would love to do is get you in front of some children. And I know you guys have already done it at Oak Grove, but I'd like to get with more children so that they can see what wonderful relationships you have and the stories of your schooling and your churching and the great

heritage that you've left for us and you continue to give, so thank you very much for sharing your stories with

us today.

END OF INTERVIEW AND DISCUSSION SESSION.

RECORDING CONTINUES WITH STILL PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE "SAM HILL 1938" PHOTO ALBUM.