HUGH HOWELL, JR.

Recording begins while JAMES MACKAY*'s introduction is in progress.*

JAMES MACKAY [*Off-camera*]: And I wonder, is Andy Robinson [Robertson?] here? [*Waits for answer, which is inaudible but apparently "no."*] Well, I'm sorry, because he is an eye-witness; and he disputes everything that's being said [*laughs*]. So I'll have to ask Greg George or Eldridge Freeborn [*spelling*?] or somebody to watch him, and if he gets out of line--this not a very structured or formal thing. So if somebody gets up and starts arguing with us—a lot of Methodists out here [*audience laughter*]. A real pleasure, our star, I'll present him to you: Honorable Hugh Howell, Jr. [*audience applause*]

HUGH HOWELL, JR.: [*Rising*] I thank you very much. It's a pleasure to come here and talk with the DeKalb Historical Society. I was president of the society one time, but we didn't have as many members—total members—as we've got in this room here today. I'm quite honored that Jimmy Mackay would invite me to come and talk with you today. I told my wife that Jimmy had asked me to come and talk on the subject of "I Remember." My bride, Doris, who many of you know, she laughed real quick; and she said, "Uh-oh. You're in trouble." [*Audience laughter*] She reminded me how many times when I asked her such questions as, "Where are my socks?" or, "What time were we supposed to be at this party?" or, "What's that nice little old lady's name?" But at least I'll try; so if you'll just bear with me a little bit, I will try.

I appreciate Jimmy Mackay's remarks. Jamie [*sic; refers to Mackay*] and I've been friends for a long, long time. Jamie's done a good job and a great work for the DeKalb Historical Society. You know, Jamie's father and my father were at Emory at Oxford together. Then Jamie and I were at "big" Emory together, and Jamie and I now are in the Judson C. Ward Couples' Class over at Glenn Memorial Methodist Church; both of us are past presidents. I'm going to try to remember the admonitions of my bride, and I hope you'll bear with me a little bit.

Today I'd like to divide my remarks into three different segments: first, my memories of the early days of the DeKalb Historical Society; second, our introduction to—the introduction of the Howells and the many, many good times that we had at Tucker, Georgia; and third, our introduction to—and many, many fine times we had—at

Stone Mountain at the old Venable home, which—[*points to framed picture of columned house propped up on nearby table*]—is a picture of what it used to look like. It don't look like that now. So, with your forgiveness, I wonder if I could just sit down while I'm talking, instead of standing up? Any objections? [*Sitting*] If there are no objections, I'd like to do that.

You know, when I first got into the DeKalb Historical Society, and I heard these lectures, I've learned to do two very important things that they keep telling us to do: first, listen to what is said; second, talk to the older people in the area and see what they remember. And then you remember, too, what you see and what you hear. By the time I got into the DeKalb Historical Society, some of our active members—some of them are here today—David Ansley; Walter McCurdy, Jr.; Captain Benny Wilkins, standing back there by the door; Otis Norcross; Steve Furst [*spelling? Ferst? First?*]; Mrs. Hugh Trotti; Colonel Jim Vogel; George Jacobs; Roscoe Sneed; Judge—somebody George [*Looks up*], who was a judge, and I've forgotten what his first name was. [*Audience member supplies the name Homer.*] Homer. Homer George. [*Continues naming members of DeKalb Historical Society*]: Carl Hudgins; Julius McCurdy; Jim Cherry; Warrick [*spelling?*] [*last name inaudible—sounds like "Rizell" or "Riselle"?*]; John Oxford; Sue Grantham, who was our secretary; Wayne and Elizabeth Braswell; and Carlin Carter and his wife; and many, many others. But many of those—some of those are here now. Our dues in the society at that time were fifty cents per person per year.

MACKAY [*Off-camera*]: I move that we restore them. [*Audience laughter]*

HOWELL: Well, we thought that was absolutely ridiculous to have fifty cents per person per year. So we jumped the dues up to a dollar and a half per person per year. So many times—and [*to audience member*] Mr. Jacobs, you remember when we had to pass the hat? Pass the hat around the room and get up and get up enough money to pay the postage for our announcements. Roscoe Sneed's wife, Ruby, she was our editor, our treasurer, and our general flunky to get things done. And Sue Grantham was Roscoe's daughter; she was our secretary. Through the courtesy of Mrs. Hugh Trotti we used the downstairs room at the Decatur public library as our meeting room, and the cost to us was zero. That made it fine for us at that time. Mrs. Trotti was a past president of the DeKalb Historical Society. I believe she was the third president.

We were also very, very appreciative of all the nice things she did for us, including making this non-expense space available for us over in the library.

Carl Hudgins—the late Carl Hudgins, who we all love so dearly—he was a frequent speaker. I only wish that we had had videotape in those days so that we could have retained for others some of Mr. Carl Hudgins's great, great talks. I well remember one speaker that we had, Dr. John Goff, who spoke to us on how some of the streets and roads and creeks were named; and we used to ask him a lot of questions. Jimmy Mackay tells me that Dr. Goff was a professor at Emory. He spoke and wrote books on these things, the local names of roads and creeks—interesting names; and he would tell us why they were using these names, such names as Hard Labor Creek, Beaver Ruin Road, Peavine Creek, Lowergate Drive, Arrow Creek, Deer Pass Road— [*correcting himself*] Deer Pass Way, Hitching Post Trail, Old Post Road, Cocklebur Road, Snapfinger Road, Indian Trail, Hunters' Creek Road. A lot of those are interesting; we know what they're talking about, but why was it so important that they would name forever and ever, name a road or a creek or a trail—why would they name that? Dr. Goff was a great one at explaining it, and he was a much sought-after speaker for our DeKalb Historical Society.

One project, which Walter McCurdy, Jr., and I worked on and took it up, tried to get up a little booklet containing a copy of the corporate charter and the minutes up to that date. Well, frankly—[*to off-camera audience member named Dorothy, possibly Dorothy Nix*] Dorothy, you have one. Can I have it please? Frankly—

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER [*off-camera*]: Don't let him have it, Dorothy. He's got one in his office. [*Audience laughter*]

HOWELL [*receiving slim, paperbound volume from off-camera audience member*]: Thank you. [*Holds book up for audience.*] This is it. It's from 1947 to 1965. Walter and I got this up, the corporate charter and the minutes. I have to admit that we did have to reconstruct some of the minutes that we couldn't quite find. [*Audience laughter]* But it at that time was a list of the present officers and members and a list of the past presidents. And we'd learned this in the historical society: We took each of the then-living past presidents and asked them to make some comments on what they had done while they were president of the historical society. And all of

this is in a little book that we put out, Walter and I did; and I understand that there are several copies of it-- [*Asks audience member to pass around book as he hands it to him or her off-camera*.] several copies of it in the historical society office. We worked on this thing a long time, and most of the past presidents were quite happy to cooperate and give us information. Some of them said, "Well, if you don't remember it, [*laughs*] I'm not gone tell you!" [*Audience laughter*] As I understand it, that we now, from Peggy [Hill] that we now have over some sixteen hundred members this last year. And we were shooting, at the time that I was president, we were shooting for a hundred; and if we'd ever gotten to a hundred, we probably would have moved to disband, because that was just a utopia of everything. Our congratulations, though, go to President Peggy Hill and your officers and directors for the real good job that you're doing.

Let me next turn to the second portion of my remarks, my memories of the introduction—the Howells' introduction of [sic] the great times around Tucker, Georgia. One of the great ladies who worked with the DeKalb Historical Society over the years is Alice Park. [*To audience*] Is Alice here? [*Off-camera audience member answers that she is out of town*.] She's out of town? Unfortunately. Alice called me about being here, coming today, and gave me great latitude what I could say. Alice's late husband was the great Hugh Park, who was a dear friend of my papa's. He was a very friendly fellow and a tremendous sense of humor. He wrote this daily article in—I believe it was <u>The Atlanta Constitution</u>. [*Audience members correct him*.] [<u>The Atlanta] Journal</u>! [*Covers mouth*] 'Scuse me. It's called "Around Town." Being circulated around right now is a copy of a clipping. It's somewhere here, and you might take a look at it. But permit me to quote from this article, "Around Town," that Hugh Park wrote. It was entitled "How to Become a Millionaire." Quote:

> Hugh Howell, Sr., made a fortune off some land he bought forty years ago on what is now the Tucker-Stone Mountain road, Hugh Howell Road; and there's a little country story behind it. What was once his eight hundred-acre farm is now a posh residential district, Smoke Rise. Mr. Howell believed firmly in the old saying, "Buy land when you're young, keep it, and it'll

> take care of you when you get old." Right after he came from Atlanta—to Atlanta—from Warren County to practice law, he was sitting at the dinner table with his wife and children.

I'm quoting—still quoting from this clipping that's going around, being circulated right now. Quote:

> Hugh Howell, Jr., then six, suddenly looked up and asked one of those questions that children are apt to ask at the dinner table: "Mama," he said, "what's a privy?" Mr. Howell was aghast. Both he and his wife had been raised in the country. "This boy's six years old," he exclaimed, "and he doesn't even know what a privy is! Well, we're going to go buy him one this afternoon." Dinner then was known as lunch.
>
> So they all got in the car and drove around on a dirt road. Tucker, of course, was real country at that time. He found a fifty-acre dirt road—farm road—a fifty-acre farm, and he bought it. The privy question had become a nostalgic catalyst because he'd been thinking for some time that their four children should have room to play and animals to play with. Soon he and his family began living out there in the summer with horses and dogs and so forth.
>
> Mr. Howell gradually added to the farm until the farm consisted of some eight hundred acres, which tenant families farmed for him while he was practicing law in the city. He remodeled the old house on the original place but decided to build a new privy. It was a three-holer with a crescent moon over the door and considered one of the finest in the neighborhood. [*Audience laughter*]

Unquote. That's what Hugh Park had written. Hugh Park is writing about a funny story that happened some fifty-eight years ago. Papa bought the Rosser-George place first, which is now at the corner of Marthasville Road and Hugh Howell Road. It was about sixty acres of land. Had a little house up on a little hill; had another house down—many of you are familiar with the area there on Hugh Howell Road near Marthasville Road. And there's—looks like a telephone company—little red-brick house right next to it—that was part of this same property.

Being city boys and girls, we all, we children all thought it was real funny that to get water we had to haul it in buckets all the way up this hill. And we used to watch, and watch these farm boys bring this water up to the house, which we finally got some water going.

Then Papa saw some land next to it, and he bought it—up on—where a lot of Smoke—where Smoke Rise is now—Strathmore Road up to McCurdy Road up to where Paul Brown's house intersected. That's McCurdy Road and Hugh Howell Road. We never were able to buy any of the land from Paul Brown, although all of Paul Brown's boys all worked for us on our farm.

Saw some land across the road and up a place on McCurdy Road, and he bought it. It turned out to be an interesting story. Most of you know the old granite rock house on Houston Mill Road, now owned by Emory University. I suppose it's sort of a guesthouse for Emory now. That house on Houston Mill Road was built by Henry J. Carr in 1922. As college students at Emory, we were friends of the Carr children; and we would swim in their swimming pool, and we'd ride their horses out on the dirt Houston Mill Road. Mr. Carr was a genius; he was a pioneer. And he installed a ram—many of you know what a ram is, to pump water. And he'd installed a Delco system to light the house, the barn, the pool house, tennis courts, and the walkways. That's on what is now Houston Mill Road—nice, pretty, paved road. Well, the house that we bought on McCurdy Road was Harry [sic] J. Carr's summer house. For at this summer house we found a barn full of batteries, water pipes for the several houses, barns, big springs—so this same Mr. Carr had been out at Tucker off of what is now Hugh Howell Road and had provided water and lights for his big house as well as for all of the tenement [sic] houses, the swimming pool, the barns—and what a coincidence that turned out to be.

Papa then saw some five hundred acres of land on down the road. That was the Judge Luther Rosser property. Many of you remember Judge

Luther Rosser. In his later days he was, I guess you would say, the executive director or executive secretary of the Sigma Chi fraternity. His office was in the old Colony Building on the third floor, and we were up on the fifth and fourth floor, Papa's law office was. Judge Rosser's place was some five hundred acres, which ended at Hightower Trail, which is now near the Mountain West Road. We never were able to learn the real meaning of this Hightower Trail out in DeKalb County. It's sort of like a land line or something. But we never learned the real meaning of Hightower Trail.

Papa kept on buying land. He finally had about fifteen hundred acres of land. We must remember that what is now the Hugh Howell Road just did not exist. There was a dirt road from Tucker on down to the Rosser Road, to McCurdy Road—roads would run around in that area, little dirt roads. But there was nothing like what we have now as the Hugh Howell Road. In fact, what is now Hugh Howell Road would start at Tucker, and it would come on out to Rosser Road and turn to the left and end up on the Lawrenceville Highway just inside of the Gwinnett County line.

In 1936 and 1937 the Highway Department came out and talked to Papa about—told him they wanted to plan a road to go all the way from Tucker right on up to the face of Stone Mountain; and that would run right through his fifteen hundred acres of land. And they talked about buying the land, they talked about condemnation of the land—to build the road. I was always very close to my papa; we practiced law together for twenty years. I respected my papa very much, but I really thought he had lost his mind when I heard him tell these engineers—state engineers—that if they needed roadway to build a road all the way to Stone Mountain, they could have it. Free. I later heard him tell the Georgia Power Company people, "Free." Southern Bell people, "Free." The DeKalb County water people, "Free." Now, I really thought he had

lost his mind. He had all of this land here; and yet, when I realized that by giving this land away, he was encouraging the opening up of some fifteen hundred acres of land—which, as you know, is very free out there now—turned out to be a very, very wise move.

The road was finished in 1938. That was the same year that Papa made an unsuccessful race for governor against Ed Rivers. Gene Talmadge was running against Walter George; Papa was running against Ed Rivers. We held our breaths, just in case Ed Rivers—Governor Ed Rivers—would all of a sudden find out about this road and stop it during this political campaign. Well, I don't know if he knew about it or didn't know about it; I don't know. But he didn't stop the road. And so Hugh Howell Road was finished in 1938.

Back to the house: Improvements were made. We made a lot of improvements. This was our summer home. Papa got some of the black boys on the place to build a great-big chimney inside and build a big mantelpiece, but nothing was on the mantelpiece. Then one day Papa represented a fellow down below Fayetteville. Didn't have any money to pay a fee with; and the old man said, "Well, I'll tell you what I got out here in my barn—a great-big clock." Big face on it—double face on it--about this big [*holds up arms to demonstrate size*], big wood thing. "I'll give you that clock for your fee." So we all got in the Buick, drove down, had to leave the back doors open with clock stuck out both ends of it. [*Audience laughter*] It was painted this gold color like you paint—sometimes they used to paint radiators with. We put this clock up on the mantelpiece. One time we had a party out there; and a fellow who was an expert with woodworking, he took his knife, and he scratched a little bit on that clock, and he says, "Hey, this is mahogany. Let me refinish it." He did. It turned out it was a mahogany clock. Somebody else came along at one of our parties and said, "Hey, I'm a watchmaker. Let me see if there's any machinery inside to make it run." He did and said, "Yes, it

works." We started getting interested in this thing then. We went back down to Fayetteville. The old man was dead, but his children were there. We asked them, said, "Where did you—where did your papa get this clock from?" And the son, who was an older man at that time himself, said all he'd ever heard him [his father] say was that this clock came out of the old capitol, which was where the Western Union building is now up on Marietta Street. Well, that sounded real interesting. So we started—we'd make the clock run. We had a little thing to make the clock run—and a great-big old key to crank it up. Papa was friends with Judge Sibley up in Marietta. Judge Sibley liked to work with clocks, and they took a big, old stump of a—stump of a tree and put one of those faces in that end of the stump. And the last time I saw it, Judge Sibley still had that up in Marietta.

Papa was in politics. At that time he was chairman of the Democratic Executive Committee. And, of course, it was fashionable at that time—and maybe now—for politicians to be farmers. See, we had all this land out there. And we—all of a sudden we acquired chickens and turkeys and pheasants and dogs and geese and pigs and cows. But on the horses—I only had one horse, and that was my pony. I was getting on up a little bit; I was about sixteen, seventeen years old. And on the weekends I didn't have any—I could ride my pony, but my friends who would come to see me didn't have any horses to ride. Well, Gene Talmadge—Governor Gene Talmadge--was out there frequently; and he said, "That's a bad situation. Some of our horses over at the Governor's Horse Guard—" you remember, over here on Boulevard?—"some of those horses really need to be in a pasture on the weekend" [*audience laughter*]. So Papa agreed to let him put some of his polo ponies out in our place on the weekend. And whenever we had a party, we had eight, nine good horses we could get out and run and play and chase each other.

We had some nineteen daily workers out there; and they were assigned different tasks, like working on the fence, milking the cows, gathering eggs, plow, working the fields, work around the house. And this Purina Feed Company, up here on DeKalb Avenue, that truck was almost a daily occurrence coming out to deliver some of the food for some of these—for some of our animals. Many of you that know the area and know the time we're talking about know we had a big, white fence just on one side. It'd be one side—it'd be the left side as you were going out towards the mountain [Stone Mountain]. The fence was about a [sic] eighth of a mile long—what is now Hugh Howell Road. And every summer Papa would get me and some of my boy friends to get us to paint that fence, that white fence. And they'd paint it with a formula provided us by the second—by the commissioner of agriculture, Tom Linden [spelling?]. It had alum and some other stuff in there. We didn't care what it was—it was just a long fence. We had to prepare it.

Papa was a long-time lawyer for the Pullman Company. As you recall, the company had these big shops out here on DeKalb Avenue, where the Pullman Company would bring a car into these Pullman shops. Once it had one million miles on it, they'd take it completely apart and rebuild it. The foreman of the woodworking shop—a big, fine Swede—asked Papa if he and his family could spend the winter in our Tucker house. The answer was yes, but the rent to be paid was for the foreman and his family to build a Pullman room like a smoking-car lounge on a train—build that onto the house. We never suggested to him where he might get any parts or anything [*audience laughter*]. They did build the room. Many, many DeKalb Countians, including some of them today—and [*to Mr. Mackay*] Jimmy, I know you were there—remember the Pullman Room at the Hugh Howell place near Tucker. And it was pretty close to being a good Pullman room; it had some windows on them [sic], and you couldn't open them, you know, like in a Pullman car [*audience*

laughter]. We children would be a little mischievous sometimes, and there would be a lot of people sitting in the Pullman car [room]; and we would give this signal to each other, and all of a sudden we would start—the children would start—rocking [*sways back and forth in seat to demonstrate*] [*audience laughter*]. And some of the older people that were sitting in the room, you know, they'd get to looking around and [*imitates person with motion sickness/nausea*] swallowing. Well, they had to--finally they'd have to leave; they were just sure it was moving [*audience laughter*].

We had a lot of company. We had big, beautiful oak trees. We planted dogwood trees and redbud trees—big, beautiful trees. You could sit on the front porch and look out at this. We had a lot of company. One of our constant friends to come visit with us was Governor Gene Talmadge and Miss Mitt. And one of his favorite—one of Gene Talmadge's favorite, I guess pranks, you might call it, well, he'd wait till my mother would be sitting there, Papa, there'd be some other people sitting on the front porch rocking; and then Gene Talmadge would come up with something like, "Hugh, I tell you what you need to do to this place." And Papa would say, "What's that, Governor?" And Gene Talmadge said, "Well, you need to cut down all these oak trees and all these dogwood trees and all these redbud trees and plant some cotton" [*audience laughter*]. You can imagine that my mother didn't think too highly of that idea.

I can recall and I can remember Senator Dick Russell being there; Senator Walter George; Bishop Arthur Moore—used to be a very frequent person to come out and visit with us; Judge Jim Davis; Ben Fortson; my Boy Scout Troop No. 65 from over at St. Mark Church; Doug McCurdy from out here at Stone Mountain was very frequently there. Herman was there—Herman Talmadge was there frequently. He thought that was kind of calm; that was too calm. I think he didn't like it very much.

Papa had some three trucks, and every weekday in the summer they would haul compost from the stockyards out on Howell Mill Road in Atlanta and put it in the fields. He had one more truck that would haul lime every day—every weekday, put it in the fields. He was good friends with the man who managed the Henry Grady Hotel. So we had one truck that would go to the Henry Grady Hotel every morning, 4:30, 5:00; and that was big sport for us in the summer to ride in that truck. We'd pick up the hotel swill and garbage and bring it out and feed it to our pigs. We also were the lawyer for the Colonial Bakery out on Moreland Avenue and DeKalb; and the truck would daily go out and get this day-old bread, get a truckload of day-old bread and soak it in water in big barrels and feed it to our pigs. Our pigs really did just fine.

My three sisters and I always had company on the weekends. Papa and Mother had much company, church people. We had Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts and bar associations and Masonic and fraternity groups. And then came World War II.

For a little bit, let's jump over to 1946 and 1947. I'm back from the war and healthy and practicing law with my papa. We decided to sell the land on Hugh Howell Road. No one seemed to be interested in buying it. Oh, we did sell a little bit. Several local real estate companies were completely unsuccessful in trying to sell any of that land on Hugh Howell Road. We gave land to Jim Cherry to build a school on. We gave land to a church to build a church on. And then one afternoon I put up a "sold" sign on a lot about halfway down to the mountain [Stone Mountain]. [*Aside to Mr. Mackay*] Jimmy, I swear I think that was by mistake; I didn't mean to do that [*audience laughter*]. Immediately everybody got interested. They sold a lot! So this was in 1954. So Papa had just sold about all the land on Hugh Howell Road to Bill Probst—you know, the man who developed Smoke Rise. We kept back two lots—four lots, two for Papa and two for me. My wife wanted to have a house on a

road that says "Mrs. Hugh Howell, Jr., Hugh Howell Road." Bill Probst talked us into selling him those, too.

This left the Howells with no place to go on the weekends and the summer. My three sisters and I, now, we became very vocal about this. Papa'd sold all our property over there on Hugh Howell Road. One day in January 1955 Papa put us all into a car and drove us to the back side of Stone Mountain, where there was a great-big, white, abandoned house. He announced—Papa announced that he and his friend John Henson had bought the house. You can imagine how it looked. No one had lived in the house; no one had been there—legally—for probably some fifteen years. This is a picture of the house as we restored it. [*Points to framed picture of two-story, columned house to his right.*] It's a painting of the house as we restored it. But you can imagine that the only people that we know that they tell us was in that house during this period of time was maybe some old rascals that couldn't have anywhere to live over the weekend, and they'd go knock in a window on the front porch. But they didn't disturb the house itself. We took a look at it, and we promptly named the house "The Monstrosity." It looked like a monstrosity—no paint, no nothing, no [*inaudiable—sounds like* sweep*?*], no nothing. And this was Colonel Sam Venable's summer house on the back of the mountain. It included Lake Venable, which was down at the bottom of the hill, right on down in front, the only lake at the mountain besides, I guess, Julius McCurdy had a lake back, would be back over the right shoulder of the house. It included about 134 acres of land. It included a houseful of good, usable, old-fashioned antique furniture. All of the rooms [ceilings] were very high, like this room that we're in today. The furniture was big, antique—you couldn't get it in and out of the doors; and you couldn't put it into one of the houses that are the size that they build now. This house was two-and-a-half stories high. It had a [sic] attic room, about which I'll tell you a little bit later on. The cooking stove,

when we got it, was a big, wood-burning stove about as big as you might find in a restaurant. We replaced that with an electric stove. Water came to the house from the right rear [*points to painting*] back over here from a big spring, which again had a ram in the big spring; and there was [sic] storage tanks in the back of the house. The only heat was from a tremendous fireplace in the livingroom; the chimney was two-and-a-half stories high. The living room was two-and-a-half stories high. And the fireplace was so big I could put myself, this table, another chair, and somebody in that chair inside of the fireplace. It took logs to burn—it would take two of us to bring the logs in to throw them on this fire. In fact, the fire[place] was so big, we sort of figured that Gutzon Borglum might have had a hand in designing it.

In 1980 Jim Cherry asked me to write a little story for use in one of the Historical Society's Heritage Tours, which was in April. Before we go any further, let me quote briefly what I wrote: "Stonehaven"—[*aside to audience, breaking from quoted material*] My mama required us to change the name from "Monstrosity" to "Stonehaven." [*Continues to read from text*]:

> Stonehaven, the summer home of Hugh Howell and his family, was also the summer home of Sam Venable, who owned Stone Mountain and about a thousand acres of land surrounding the mountain. Reportedly it was built about 1900. Mr. Howell and an associate purchased this house, some 134 acres of land, including Lake Venable, in 1954. The site was a favorite meeting place of the Indians years ago because of the high ground and the plentiful spring. The three-storey livingroom, two twin staircases which led to the second floor, the trap-door hidden ladder which carries one to a secret room of the third floor, the mammoth fireplace, the traditional Southern mansion front porch all make for a Tara-like home with grand views of Stone Mountain. Reportedly Venable used it basically for a secluded summer home. His winter home was a beautiful stone home at the corner of Ponce de Leon [Avenue] and Oakdale Road, which is now St. Anne's Lutheran Church. [NOTE: The home is now St. John's Lutheran Church, not St. Anne's.]

[*Breaks from narrative and addresses audience*]: And now is one of the exhibits that we're passing around because his kinfolks was [sic] kind enough to bring it and show it to us. That house, by the way, on Ponce de Leon Avenue—when we got our house, it was full of great-big, mammoth antique furniture. We went to this house on Ponce de Leon Avenue—this is before it was made into a church; and that house was full of great-big, beautiful, usable antique furniture.

> Papa held it open to his church, political, fraternal, and social friends. Under Venable ownership, the only approach was on the back side of the mountain and over the dam of the Venable lake.

[*Breaks from narrative and addresses audience*]: I'm still quoting from something I wrote for Jim Cherry.

> Horses and buggies were used, and the entire area is honeycombed with cement strips to accommodate the buggy wheels.

[*Breaks from narrative and addresses audience*]: All over this whole area—front, back, all the way down to the mountain, down to the lake—these strips, cement strips about four inches wide, the idea being that Mr. Venable had apparently was [sic] the buggy's wheels would ride smooth on these strips, and the horse pulling the buggy would have traction in between.

> Those strips were there, and they're still there throughout that area, so many of the strips are.

[*Breaks from narrative and addresses audience*]: Well, they had this one Lake Venable, which is down at the bottom of the hill.

> We built five extra feeding small lakes, which were well stocked with fish. And when the Stone Mountain Memorial Association gained title to the Venable Lake in 1960, they got that lake.

[*Breaks from narrative and addresses audience*]: Let me stop just a moment and inject something here. Jimmy Mackay told me, "Be sure to write down whatever you're gone say." But I'm not gone write this down. The negotiations for the sale of Lake Venable by Papa to the Stone Mountain [Memorial] Association—all the negotiations were performed on this front porch in a couple of these big, old Brumby rockers. Scott Candler was in one of them, and Papa was in the other. I was sitting way over here somewhere. They made us get away. Papa's whole idea was, "I'm not gone sell you the lake and then you charge me so many dollars to come over to the mountain."

Scott Candler said, "Well, what do you want?"

Papa said, "I want a gate that I can go into Stone Mountain when I want to."

So when they sold the—when Papa sold Lake Venable to the Stone Mountain [Memorial] Association, there was—and there still is today—if you go out in front of the house, walk straight down the hill to the big fence, there is a gate. There is one key. Papa had the key—the only key. And I don't know what ever happened to it. We never used that key.

[*Mr. Howell glances back at paper on table; intermittently reads from it, looks up, and ad libs. At this point it is not clear when he is quoting and when he is speaking extemporaneously.*] When Papa bought this virtually abandoned big home and almost 134 acres of land, it had all of this beautiful furniture, including the secretary—the desk—of the wartime governor—the War Between the States-time governor—Joe Brown. It was a big, beautiful desk. It was in great shape. The last I saw it, it still was in good shape; and I think it's in Bill Probst's basement right now. But that was in the livingroom—this desk was in the livingroom. Water was furnished by this ram and electricity by the Delco system; but we changed that into modern, aggressive facilities. Unquote.

That's what I wrote for the DeKalb Historical Society. Well, let's go back to "I Remember" a little bit. Sam Venable had a little white house—say, thirty feet by thirty feet—which was in back of this big house, which he had a little sign on it: "Wohelo." Do you remember what that is? "Work, Health, Love" for the Campfire Girls. Just a little house back here with that sign, "Wohelo." We found at the big springs, which would be [*points to picture*] at the back right of the house, many, many, many Indian artifacts—not just arrows but, I don't know, looked like maybe it was a jar or something like that. All sorts of nice Indian artifacts there. We found the furniture—and I got some of it before we sold it, but most of it was so big that I couldn't use it in my house.

The only entrance to the house while Sam Venable owned this property was from the mountain side, over the dam, up by the side of the lake, and then on up these strips up to right in front of the house. We found hanging on the wall of the dining room an autographed picture of Gutzon Borglum, who apparently—and from what people have told me, it's probably what happened—probably lived at Stonehaven while he was carving on Stone Mountain. On that picture that was hanging in the livingroom—in the dining room, there was a message to the effect: "To Colonel Sam Venable, with appreciation for his hospitality"; and it's signed "Gutzon Borglum."

As I referred to before, Papa and Judge Henson—John Henson—bought the house in January of '55. Somehow Papa sold some land off the back of the place. He bought out Henson's share in 1955. Mother got mad at us for keep calling this thing "the Monstrosity," so she got us to call the house "Stonehaven"; the road, Stonehaven Road; the Lake, Stonehaven Lake—none of this "Monstrosity" business.

If you were standing on the front porch of this house, looking at the mountain, which is [*points*] over here, the property to the left of us was owned by Jimmy Venable and, I believe, Judge Hubert Morgan. The

property to the right of us was owned by Julius McCurdy; and there's a lake there, but it didn't come down and touch the mountain. Only thing we changed in this house was we brought in modern electricity, put some modern water pumps down in the spring, modern kitchen and telephone, and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of gallons of white paint. [*Points to picture of house.*] These columns on the front porch, they really were telephone poles. One time we hired these boys to get up on a ladder at the top and start painting white paint. By the time they got on down to the bottom, and they said, "Well, I finished," you'd look back up at the top, and that wood had absorbed all the paint. And you'd say, "Go back up and start again." The end posts rotted out. We had to get the telephone company to bring their experts and equipment to replace these poles. You know, they had equipment that they could hook up to the top of the house, push it up a little bit, pull out the rotted pole, push the new pole in, let the top of the house back on, which we appreciated very much.

The front porch was very hospitable. It was large enough to house these—accommodate twenty-four or more of these Brumby rockers. And whatever kind of party you had, whether it was a church party or a shrine party or whatever it was, that's where everybody would end up, sitting in one of those rockers on the front porch, rocking. There was a place—equipment there for a hammock, which apparently Colonel Venable had had a hammock there. You could actually see people--if you just focused your eyes to the skyline of the mountain, and you kept your eyes on this skyline, if a fellow walked by with a white shirt or a girl a girl with a real bright dress—if you watched, you could see those people with your naked eye. The front porch—looking at the back of the mountain here—of course, there were a lot of limbs and leaves got in the way, so we got some off-duty telephone company guys to go out. We didn't cut down any trees, but we did limb-up some trees, and we topped some trees. But

you could see—well, you could sit on the front porch in one of those Brumby rockers and rocking—you could sit there and look at the skyline of the mountain. We really just cut a vista there.

We had a lot of company there. I made it a point to try to talk with the older people in the neighborhood. We wanted to find out some of the history of this marvelous place, and nobody seemed to know anything about it. But some of the things that we ran across was [sic] some stories like old Dr. Willis McCurdy and Stone Mountain. We all, many of us, remember old Dr. Willis McCurdy. He was a great fox hunter, and he brought in a bunch of fox [sic], turned them loose over in the mountain—[*addressing audience member*] you remember that. There was no barbed wire around. I see some of his kinfolks right in our audience here. And so there was nothing for us to be sitting on the front porch, rocking in the Brumby rockers, and way back over in the hollow you would hear the beginning of a fox hunt. We'd quickly turn off all the lights and sit there on the front porch. You'd hear this fox hunt closer, closer. These were the fox who Willis McCurdy—Dr. Willis, Sr.—put out there. And next thing you know, sitting on the front porch, lickety-split, there'd go the fox right there in the front yard, wouldn't say anything, just sit there. Lickety-split, here come the dogs, and finally here come a whole lot of real tired hunters [*audience laughter*]. Well, there got to be packs of wild dogs in and around the mountain, and they and the foxes got to cohabiting. Everybody was afraid that rabies was going to break out, so we had to, through the government's sponsorship, we had to kill the foxes. And we did it with traps. They'd [the government] bring you the traps, they'd bring you the bait. My wife and I caught, I guess, two fox. But after I put a bullet right through the head of one of them, he stood right up and looked at me and then fell over dead, that ended my fox hunting days [*audience laughter*].

Story is that Colonel Venable, and knowing about Switzerland and all that's in some of the stories the older people in the neighborhood were telling us, that he had seen about goats; so he bought some billy goats. And it seemed like it was a great sport—[*Train whistle sounds in background*.] Y'all remember that train whistle, now; I want to say something about that train whistle in a minute. It got to be great sport for the young boys in Decatur to catch the five-cent streetcar from Decatur out to Stone Mountain on Friday afternoon and to go up to Colonel Venable and ask him, say, "Can I have one of your billy goats?" And, of course, Colonel Venable was a good businessman; but he also was a great man. He'd pause awhile, and he'd talk to the boy about who the boy was and what he was doing in school and what he was doing out here. After a long pause, he said, "Well, I'll tell you, Sammy. You can have one of my billy goats; but I'm real busy right now, and I can't take time to go up there and catch it. Now, you go up and catch it. Just one, now. You go catch that billy goat, bring him down here, and show him to me, and yes, you can have one of my billy goats." Well, you know the answer to it. Nobody ever caught any billy goats [*audience laughter*].

Lake Venable, which used to be down at the bottom of the hill, right in front of this house, had bass and bream and catfish in it. We devised many means for keeping intruders out of Lake Venable. I'd just gotten back from the war; I was a marksman with a rifle, and Papa was a good shot. Sometimes we'd take a couple of shots at a limb over a fellow that was over there fishing and drop the limb in front of him. We hired a real mean caretaker. He was an ex-convict; he just looked mean. We gave him a shotgun and some bullets. I told him what our problem was. He came back to us and told us that the word was around the Stone Mountain village, "You better stay away from down there at the Venable Lake. There's some crazy people down there. [*audience laughter*] They're gone shoot you. So you better stay away from there." Of course, that's

exactly what we wanted them to do. They'd been having free run of the place for fifteen years. And now they said, "Uh-oh. We better stay away from those crazy people doing that shooting."

The DeKalb County sheriff—I don't know, it might have been Sheriff Broome or somebody—kept after us, said, "Please, please, please drain the lake"—Lake Venable [*points next to picture for reference*] down at the bottom. "Surely, surely if you drain the lake, many, many unsolved murders will be solved; stolen automobiles and other stolen things will be found in the bottom of the lake." Well, Papa played hard-to-get on that; but then he said, "All right, I'll do it." They brought the convict camp out, told the convicts that "Any of the fish that you catch with your hand and hold onto and take it back to camp that [sic] the cook will cook that catfish for you." So they had the whole convict camp there. That was quite a sight there that afternoon. They drained the lake there, let the convicts catch the fish with their hands, and they were putting them in their pockets, borrowing somebody else's pocket to put the fish in. But you know what? They didn't find any bodies, they didn't solve any crimes, didn't find any stolen automobiles in the bottom of that lake.

As I said, when we bought this property, we had this Lake Venable, and that's all. But you had--the whole area is honeycombed with springs—fresh, good, clear-water springs. We built [*points to picture*] over on that side—Jimmy Venable's side of the property—we built three additional lakes fed only by springs. We'd build a lake fed by a spring; and then we'd build another lake fed by all of this water and some more springs; build another lake fed by one lake, two lakes, and some more springs; and that would go into Lake Venable. On this side [*points*]—the McCurdy side—we built only one big lake, stocked it with bass and bream, and we had, I suppose, we had a very fine fishing season. I say, "I suppose." My wife and two boys and me would sit on the banks to catch a fish. I'd buy them good poles, and I'd buy them good bait, and they

were pulling in the fish; and I was still standing there watching them. I didn't do so good on that.

The big sport that we had out at the lake was to buy fishing corks—you know, little corks like you use on a fishing pole. We'd throw these—we'd get a bunch of our friends together—and throw these corks out onto the lake, a little distance between each other. The wind and the current would actually make these corks moving targets. We'd then back up on a hill with .22 rifles and take shots at them. This is more of this reputation about this shooting gallery down at the Venable home. And a near miss didn't count; you had to get a direct hit.

Some of those I remember talking with about the history of this place was Ben Burgess, our clerk [of DeKalb County Superior Court]; Judge Jim Davis; Judge Frank Guess's brother—what was his name?

MACKAY [*off-camera*]: Marion.

HOWELL: Marion Guess; Judge Frank Guess. Marion Guess—Judge Marion Guess used to ride a horse all around in this area. He could tell us a lot of interesting things. Jimmy Venable and Shorty Hutchinson [*Spelling? Could be* Hutcheson, Hutchison?]—Shorty Hutchinson [*spelling?*] is the zoning expert up in Fulton, Atlanta—there was a house down right at on [sic] Lake Venable, and this is where Jimmy Venable and Shorty Hutchinson [*spelling*?] used to hang out. And both of them have told me that Colonel Sam Venable wouldn't let them come up to this big house, but they stayed down at the lake house. The lake house burned just about the time that we bought the property.

We talked to Hugh [*spelling*? *Sounds like* "Jer-den"; *could be* Jordan, Jerden, Jerdan, Jerdon], Randy Medlock; and there's an old man named Paul Brand [*spelling? Could be* Brandt *or* Brant]. I'm sorry that's all I can tell you about his name. Paul Brand [*spelling*?] was one who knew a lot about this house and about the property.

This was a great place for us to have our friends and to entertain--barbecues and fish-fries. It was nothing for us to have a party there and bring in some friends and have the food catered. We'd bring in—have Melear's Barbecue come in, and we'd serve 200, 300, 350 people. They'd set up some tables out in front. Each side had a porch, which you could use; and there was a big dining room table that they could use. We enjoyed that very much. Thinking about this train whistle that came by, came a minute ago, you remember the Stone Mountain Scenic Railroad? [*Points to audience member*.] I know Steve Ferst [*spelling?* Furst?] does. He was on the board of directors. Well, the railroad [sic] would come around the mountain about every forty or forty-five minutes. Jimmy Mackay and I are on the official board out at Glenn Memorial United Methodist Church. One time, years ago, when Eugene Drinkard was our preacher, we decided we were going to have the official board meeting, instead of over at the church, we were going to have it on the—we were going to have it at Stonehaven. Well, of course, they had dinner beforehand; and every forty minutes you hear this engine, and he would just really blow when he'd get on this side of the mountain. Finally it went on, and they—well, everybody got to thinking about the frequency with which this train would—the whistle would blow. So they had the official board meeting out on the front porch. And, of course, when it got just about time for that forty minutes to elapse, everybody's sitting there looking at their watch; and when the train came by blowing, "Whoo-hoo-hoo!" blowing, they'd all start laughing. They took those official board minutes, the tape of them, took those to the church for the Wednesday night supper. And you can imagine the laughing, because the people there were sitting there watching their watches to time for the forty minutes.

We used to let the Shriners come out and the Methodist Children's Home, the Grace Methodist Church, the James L. Mason—we got some

Masons here today—James L. Mason bible class. Chris Harvey used to bring his Avondale Estates Lions' Club and his—have their family outings out here. I was—at the time I was teaching thirteen- and fourteen-year-old boys and girls in Sunday school at Glenn Memorial. We used to have little Saturday afternoon outings, take them out, fix them a hotdog—that wasn't what they were interested in. They wanted to go climb the mountain, and they'd run up the mountain, those energetic young people. Bishop Arthur Moore was frequently a guest, and he'd bring usually some of the members of his cabinet with us [sic]. The nuns over at St. Thomas More Church over here on Ponce de Leon, the nuns would come to Papa each year and say, "We'd like to use Stonehaven for one week or ten days." And we'd tell that old ex-convict caretaker, "Now, don't you let anybody in or out." They'd lock the door and then report to us that these nuns, for about ten days, would have just the time of their lives, playing baseball, playing games and fishing and hiking and running. And they did this for many, many years. We used to have wedding receptions with the Shrine banjo band to furnish the music.

Let me briefly describe the house—I know the time is running short. In the livingroom there's this big fireplace. As I say, it's a fireplace that this chair and me and the table all could get inside of the fireplace. It was there, and we thought Gutzon Borglum probably had built it. To the right was a dining room with a thirty-foot-long mahogany dinner table that we could just entertain all the kinfolks and everybody else, Christmas and Thanksgiving. The kitchen was a big, big kitchen, which, once we took that big-old woodstove out of there, we had more room. We had a servants' bath in the back, the big screened porches on either side. Upstairs is some five or six bedrooms, three or four baths. Everybody says, "What did this six-foot-two bachelor, with a home over on Ponce de Leon—what did he need with all of this?" To entertain. It had big, twin staircases going up from either side as you enter the house to a

landing on the second floor. Then there was a landing up between the second floor and the roof. There was a—only way you could get to that was by a trap door with a ladder, which was behind this great-big chimney. This truly was a Tara-type house with so many fond, fond memories. Finally my Papa was getting old; Mother was having problems with her vision—she's ninety-two now. My three sisters and their children all wanted to stay in Atlanta, go to the parties, do all the different things that young people want to do. My wife, my two boys, and I loved Stonehaven; and we used it very, very often. In May of 1969 Papa sold Stonehaven to Bill Probst, along with all of this big, beautiful—but very large--furniture in the house. These things that I have been telling you about are some of the happiest days, fondest memories, of my life.

Tucker, Hugh Howell Road, Stonehaven—thank you for letting me reminisce with you this afternoon. [*Audience applause*]

MACKAY [*off-camera, to HOWELL*]: I don't see how that hour could be surpassed this year, but we're going to try to keep up with this standard. I want to ask you one question. I've always heard that your grandfather was a Civil War veteran. Is that right?

HOWELL [*nodding*]: He was, yes sir. He was.

MACKAY: That's quite a span. The other thing is that to show you how sharp Mr. Hugh Howell, Sr., was, he was so generous that our church [Glenn Memorial United Methodist] benefited, we went down there, and the county bar [Association?]—I've never known anyone to be more generous with a place of this kind. And being somewhat naïve, I just thought there was no limit to Mr. Howell's generosity; and I was high on this business of acquiring Stone Mountain for the state. And I said, "Mr. Hugh, it'd be wonderful if you would just leave this place to the state of Georgia" [*audience laughter*]. He said, "Jimmy, I'm going to do it on the same day you deed your house" [*audience laughter*]. End of conversation! I want to apologize to any members of the Judson Ward

[Sunday school] class [of Glenn Memorial United Methodist Church] that might have come out on that cold day a week ago, because we announced that you would speak only in that class. But due to some problems of scheduling staff members and so forth, we have shifted the "I Remember Hour" to 4:00 p.m. on the fourth Thursday in each month; and I ask you to make a mental note of that because we've been running for two years on the third Thursday. We hope that you will—we know some of you must leave—we hope--[*RECORDING ENDS*]

Transcribed by CS