

THOMAS VINSON

Recording begins in the midst of JAMES MACKAY's and THOMAS VINSON's setting up for presentation to DeKalb Historical Society (now DeKalb History Center). MR. MACKAY addresses the audience.

JAMES MACKAY: . . . equipment. A really adequate introduction—and I see people that are coworkers here with him [Dr. Vinson] in the development of our great health department and others that have known him. [To DR. VINSON]: This is what we call the studio audience, Doctor. [To audience]: He was past president of the Spalding County Medical Society in 1940; past president of the Georgia Gerontology Society. [To DR. VINSON]: Is that the one that I join now that I've got my Medicare card? Gerontology? [Audience laughter]

THOMAS VINSON [To MR. MACKAY]: Yeah.

MR. MACKAY: Past president of the Public Health Association. He has a series of degrees and many honors; and he—[To DR. VINSON] I've already told this group, Doctor, that we extend our deepest condolences to you on the loss of your beloved wife. It came as quite a shock to some of those here and to me because I missed that. We also learned that our past president, David Ansley, died in the last day or two; and that's a sadness. If you noticed in our last newsletter, we've lost four really stellar members of this society and several of our regular attendees here. Doctor, you have what every lawyer wishes he could have; and that is you've got the floor for sixty minutes, even though you got here seven or eight minutes late.

DR. VINSON: Well, I thought I had thirty minutes; and then you can ask questions [laughs].

MR. MACKAY: Well, you can do that. I will warn you, as I have warned everybody else, every time I see Andy Robertson out there, we got [sic] some eyewitnesses—and I say that just as a word of caution. But there's only one thing that I would say about Dr. Thomas O. Vinson is that in my skills--values, he measures at the peak of the scale as a caring person; and I think that's what we all yearn for in any individual and certainly in any profession [sic]. And I would say that most of the people I've met in the public health service have been attracted to that because of deep and caring concern about everybody. We got that out of Dudley Martin. He came up here and told about his same period with the fire department. And I think more than anything else I got out of his talk was that he just liked to put out fires, and he liked to rescue people. We've been very privileged with the caliber of leadership that we've had in our county government. So without further introduction at this time, you're on camera, be careful what you say, and we welcome you here.

DR. VINSON: Thank you very much. [*Rising, retrieving notes*] I had to write something down, and my good daughter helped me. [*Walks over to MR. MACKAY; voice inaudible as he speaks to MR. MACKAY.*]

MR. MACKAY [*laughing*]: You've got to say somewhere, now, because we've got the camera on you! [*DR. VINSON walks back to original position to face camera, he and audience laughing.*]

DR. VINSON: Well, you know, I came here in 1950; right after that we had an explosion—population. I remember [DeKalb County school superintendent] Jim Cherry, I think had to build a classroom a week for several years there. There were 136,000 people in DeKalb in 1950, and our [public health department] staff consisted of ten people. I'm going to try to condense this talk, so if I get to rambling, then, uh—

MR. MACKAY: This is a rambling place. You just ramble all you want to.

DR. VINSON: Well, it's been nine years since I've had anything to do with the health department, so I had to get the records—[*Dr. Vinson's words become inaudible as videographer discusses setup with Historical Society officer, off-camera, suggesting that Dr. Vinson be seated.*]

MR. MACKAY: Would you like to be seated? You might be more comfortable [inaudible].

DR. VINSON [*sitting*]: Well, this will help, too, because this thing has been written several times. [*Waves sheaf of papers, his notes.*] [Inaudible], condensed, like, because I ramble. Well, I appreciate what Jim said, because this is one of the key things in our whole program; and a bunch of the caring people are sitting back there that used to be on the staff—the chief of nursing--and I stole her from Fulton [County Health Department] [*laughs*]. And some others came over into the picture. I'm going to quit trying to condense things and just give you the key things that went on in the twenty-five years I was here. I think you'd like to hear me talk about things I'm proud of, instead of just citing a whole lot of stuff going [inaudible]. We could give you a lot of figures.

But the main thing I ran into when I came here were characters; one of them started with a "C"—Scott Candler. Another one started with a "C" was Jim Cherry. Now, you wanted to get things done, you had to run fast to keep up with them. But it was a lot of fun, and they were the most interesting characters I ran into. In order to get Scott's ear, I would ride on the back seat of [Leon] Country O'Neal's Ford car; and when he'd slack up a little bit, then I'd plug in something. And one of them was fluoridation, and I didn't know whether he'd listen to me or not. But I remember—[*aside, to MR. MACKAY*] I meant to ask you about this, whether it's

technically all right or not—but when I first came, I said, “Mr. Candler, Decatur doesn’t put any money in this budget.”

He said, “They haven’t got any.” [*Dr. Vinson and audience laugh.*]

I said, “Well, law says the principal city should pay half.”

The next day I read in the paper where Atlanta was declared the principal city [*audience laughter*].

So the same thing happened with a fogging machine we needed to control insects in and around Decatur. And it’s hard to get to one commissioner, because he’s so busy. So I talked to Ms. Gude [spelling? Goude? Gould? Goode?], his secretary; and she said, “Well, he’s interested, but he’s so busy. Just go by with the machine and fog him”—which we did [*audience laughter*]. Just fogged the whole building. And he waved it “OK.” So that worked out pretty good.

Another time I had gone up to see him, and I went in and talked to Ms. Gude [spelling?]. She said, “The best thing to do, just go out in the hall and listen. You’ll hear him.” And sure enough, if you stayed out in the hall long enough, you could hear him on one side of the room dictating a letter. You had to learn how to operate in this—particularly in this fast-growing area. Because Scott was never—there was no doubt—I’m just throwing this in because I was an old scout master--I think he was the first scout master in the state of Georgia. [*MR. MACKAY confirms.*] And I have a lot of respect for him. But as I said, I didn’t know whether he’d listen to me or not. Several weeks later he and I were invited to talk to Jim Cherry’s principals. So we went over, and he [Candler] was the first speaker—amazing, of course. And he announced we got fluoridated water, and that was the first I knew anything about it [*audience laughter*]. I had done a lot of work; I had done a lot of preparation. I had told him that the American Dental Association had OKed it, the American Medical Association, the Georgia Dental Association, the Georgia Medical Society. Our medical society was just in the process of having a charter drawn up; Dick Smoot drew this up, and we—so we had a place to go. Been going to [members’] homes, but we did go to Emory. But the dentists didn’t organize for some little while, so I had to individually go to each dentist and get the approval [for fluoridation]. So I told him [Candler] all these people had approved it. There wasn’t any question about it, because they learned from [inaudible] in Texas, where they had four parts [fluoride] per million [gallons? of water], they didn’t have any dentists; and everybody had good teeth [*audience laughter*]. But what tickled Scott so much was the fact that when he came out of the meeting, he said, “Now, you heard what we say, we’re going to fluoridate; so you be sure to get Buck Weaver”—that’s the manager of the water works—“and [inaudible name] from Charlotte, North Carolina, to see how to do it.”

Of course, we had to stand by a machine—our machine—and so we got back and discovered the [inaudible] of fluoride was huge—one part per million. And pretty soon Scott got some letters. And one of them was, this woman said that every time she drank this water, it made her nauseated and sick at her stomach. So I asked [inaudible] if he could get somebody out, send one of these here, and see if they were drinking our water. He came back and said, “No, they’re drinking Atlanta water” [*audience laughter*]. Then there was another one he liked so much. This man had—his teeth were worn down to the gum, he said, and he loved to eat sweets, but he just couldn’t do it much. But after drinking that fluoridated water, he said that he could eat anything [*audience laughter*]. That’s really [inaudible] a good bit.

Another thing we did, through his [Scott Candler’s] help, and we always looked to his help, of course. All you had to do was convince him or half-convince him, and he’d have the thing [inaudible]. I said, “We need to get the message out where people are.” And he [sic—means “I”?] said, “Well, now, they’re working on a—Pattillo Group’s working on a Presbyterian church down there. And I’ve been looking at a Boy Scout hut, thinking maybe we could use that.”

And, “Oh, no,” he said, “you can’t meet anyplace like that.” Mr. Pattillo, while he was there finishing that job, they built one of the prettiest little health centers you’ll ever see. And I was on the program [for the dedication of the health center]—I hadn’t mentioned this to anybody—I was a little upset and nervous, so I took one Nembutab—a half a Nembutab. These nurses [in the audience] know what I’m talking about. And by the time my time came to talk, I was ready to sleep [*audience laughter*]. I at least calmed down.

But just to show you how far he was ahead of things, he had--we built a health center and a library at the recreation center in Doraville; and we’re just getting around to that now, making it a comprehensive thing. They had a library [inaudible phrase]—we had to have a place for the nurses to operate out in these suburbs. And Jim [Cherry? Or does DR. VINSON mean “Scott Candler”?] said, “If I can get credit for anything, it’s getting good people.” There’s a bunch of them sitting back there now [in the audience] that’s carrying on what we did.

In order to get this fluoridation approved, I talked to the dean of the [Emory] Dental School, Dr. Buhler, and he said he could let us have the entire senior class, eighty dental students. And the local dentists agreed to close their offices for two days and supervise. What we were trying to do was get a baseline to see what the decayed, missing, and filled—DMF as they called it, the decayed, missing, and filled teeth. And at the end of five years, we repeated it. End of ten years we repeated it again. We’ve been so lucky in so many ways. Not only having the cream of the crop when it comes to people, but the CDC was located in the midst of

it. I can trace right quick where it came from—it was Boisfeuillet Jones, I imagine. Anyway, that's been a tremendous help to us.

But the main thing—the next “C” in this group is Jim Cherry. And you try to keep up with him, you've got to run, too. So it was a lot of fun, because I used to run [inaudible] [*audience laughter*]. But I got used to that. Jim employed Dr. Thad Hollingsworth and six teachers for an exceptional-child program. And we found out about that time that we had to desegregate the schools, so Hamilton High was abandoned. So we were looking for a place to have a setup for the exceptional children. And talking to him—he was on the Board of Health—he said, “You can have Hamilton High if you want it.” So we took it. I'll never forget going out there, and Sam Moss was cleaning it up, and I heard him jumping on somebody and saying, “Don't you know you've got to do better than this? Jim's probably coming in here!” [*audience laughter*] It pleased us a good bit. And Ms. Cook is still with them and is up at the old [inaudible—sounds like “veterans”?] hospital up on—way up on—whatever that street is; and she is really one of the best. But we soon decided we needed four more acres. He [Jim Cherry?] said, “Well, you got two sites out there—four acres each. You could take your pick.” So we took one so we'd have a workshop for the exceptional children out at—by Hamilton High. One reason Ms. Cook decided to go up to the new place, the place [Hamilton High location] was broke [sic] into too much. But that was not part of the thing.

Anyway, we—as the nurses will tell you, if you want to ask questions, [inaudible clause about “experts in the nursing field”], I know they, too, can tell you. [*Looks out into audience.*] Where was [inaudible]? And what we wanted to do was get nurses out where people were so they could know what they [inaudible] and work with them more closely. I could give you some lurid things, but I won't do it. But we got one—most every time there was somebody [inaudible], it was real good. We got Mrs. O'Leary, used to be principal of Girls' High School. She told me later that they used to have a Girls' High School and a Boys' High School. But she said the girls didn't like it much about joining with the boys because they didn't want to lower their standards [*audience laughter*]. Pretty interesting.

Another thing, [name inaudible—Vernon? Brandon?] and I used to go out occasionally to Scottdale Mills to the cafeteria. You could get real good food out there. I bumped into Mr. Julius Scott and also Milton Scott. He [Julius or Milton?] saw me one day and said, “I was talking to John Shields [spelling?] down in—head of a company in Griffin—and he'd like to have a program like you have down there.” And that's when we already decentralized, so I found one of the nurses after we'd been looking for a long time—Madeline [spelling?] Davis, I believe it was. She went out, and they furnished a place for her to stay; and she worked with the people

in that area. She was supposed to have been a medical missionary, and I knew her at Emory way back when Emory Hospital was called Wesley Woods—Wesley Hospital. And we didn't have any churches, so we had a—started to say [inaudible; sounds like "Piedmont P.U., but"] [inaudible]—over there, and we got a basketball team; and the nurses won the state championship. And some of you may like to know what they wore. They were wearing bloomers, but they were pretty good [*audience laughter*].

Well, we first came, as I said, we worked very closely with medical suppliers, medical society, and had just organized, as I said, Dick Smoot wrote the first charter and got it going. At that time we had one pediatrician, Jake Lester, who was a classmate of mine; one obstetrician, [name inaudible—sounds like "Lon" or "Ron" "Matthew" or "Matthews"?]—he delivered my youngest—and all of them were born at Emory, but you go over to Emory now or Johns Hopkins or Mayo or some other place, they don't deliver babies over there anymore. Anyway, our medical profession worked real closely with us and helped to completely wipe out polio because my family and I would come back from Daytona Beach, and I would dread the next two weeks, which was the incubation period for polio. But along came the Salk vaccine, and pretty soon we had that Sabin vaccine. We had great help here from the doctors here to help us put it over.

Then we had a great problem with rabies. You know, there was one time when this was the leading milk-producing county in the state, and they had to saw down a lot of wood to make pastures [inaudible] sawdust piles. And the foxes would go in there and have their young ones. And then they'd get rabies and bite some of our dogs, and the dogs or the foxes would bite some of the cows. This upset some of the citizenry, so Mr. [Scott] Candler decided he'd better get rid of this situation. So he told Mr. [sounds like "De-Jonny"], "Now, you go out and get two thousand steel traps." And he made a—explained this to the senior Boy Scouts. [*Aside*] What is it—the higher group?

FEMALE VOICE OFF-CAMERA: Explorers.

DR. VINSON: Explorers. And give them two dollars for each foxtail or fox ear. And pretty soon—I don't know how much it cost; Mr. Candler said do it, so we did it—and rabies soon disappeared. Except, when we [inaudible—could be "pulled" or "withheld"?] some state funds from Baxley-- I see one of the girls in here, went up and said if I was going up there to help inoculate these dogs, she was going, too. And she and Nell went up there and had coveralls on or something. But I was right pleased when Dr. Thome came up, and he was bigger than anybody else. And two fellows came up and said, "What you doing up here?" And he said, "I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing, inoculating dogs." Anyway, we—[*Looks out into audience and addresses an audience member.*] [Name inaudible—sounds like "Bull"?], I

think that was you and Nell who went up there to help him. When you find out you inoculate dogs a little different from what you do human beings. You don't have this bare skin; you just pull up their neck and stick the needle in there, and "Next!"

FEMALE VOICE OFF-CAMERA [Possibly NELL?]: You know, we didn't even sterilize the needles. [DR. VINSON *and audience laugh.*]

DR. VINSON: We decided we were going to get on back home [inaudible], and pretty soon I did, too. But I'll always love this fellow [Dr. Thome]. I always [inaudible]. He was a big, big fellow. One of the young fellows walked up there, and he said, "What are you doing?" And he [Thome] said, "I'm doing I'm supposed to be doing." "Why is he here helping?"

Anyway, polio and rabies and TB—and a new thing came into the picture was ringworm of the scalp. Don't know if any of you have ever seen ringworm of the scalp, but the best way to see it is for the woodlice [sic—means head lice?]. [Woodlice are "pill bugs," about a half-inch long.] [Also, ringworm is a contagious fungus and is not caused by lice infestation.] What the thing moving, one of the leading dermatologists in Atlanta called me, and he said, "My kid goes to one of the schools out there. Do you mind if I go out there and check the whole school?" I said, "No. Can I help? Can I go with you?" And he said, "Of course." We ended up finding about six woodlice [sic—means head lice?]. And we had several nurses who were checking them, looking at the back of the neck, where they—what they were doing, going to see the movies, they'd put their head on the back of the chair. And they had a ring of ringworm of the scalp. It wasn't a funny thing if you got it, and I was always scared one of mine would get it, too, but with the woodlice [head lice?], with plenty of help from volunteers—and in this county, any time you want somebody to help, all you've got to do is suggest what it is.

But the area where we needed most help was in the field of mental health. Dr. Paul Schrader, whom many of you knew—he looked like William F. [sic] Powell. He was the first psychiatric pediatrician to come to Atlanta. And we had known him in Griffin, because we used him down there. He and Dr. Bill Kaiser [spelling? Kiser?], who was a pediatrician and come out to help [inaudible—sounds like "Ms. Bradley" or "Mr. Bradley"?], who had just come onboard as the first full-time medical worker in the health department in the county. Then we had—there was a forum that was called over at Emory University with three very prominent citizens: Dr. [inaudible—could be "Candler," "Chandler," "Cameron"?], who was assistant director of psychiatry; Jake Ward, who was the dean of students; and a fellow named [James] Mackay, set up this thing. And it really got [inaudible] so we could take off with it [inaudible]. And as it happened, right after that Mr. Russ Colombo [spelling?] down in Lithonia asked us if we could send somebody down to check every child who was coming into school for the first time. And

what do you think we found? There were two things: one was dental caries, and the other was emotional problems. So this was a big help and really got things going somewhere.

From there we got a grant from anywherever [sic] you could get a grant. Going so fast you had to jump fast to keep from having somebody run over you. But we got Dr. [inaudible—sounds like “Dy-lin”?] and a group of specialists [inaudible] which were in developmental evaluation. This means—it’s a big word, but it means little folks and growing up and catch anything early. She was a big help to us, and soon after that we got the best man in the country, I guess—it was Dwayne [inaudible; could be “Maxson” or “Maxstead”?] To give you an idea how good he is, when--he was on the Emory staff, but he worked for us. We just paid Emory, so it didn’t matter to us, [inaudible] just so we got what we wanted. [*To off-camera audience member*] I think you knew him over there, didn’t you? And he just was a—he set up a program, fit it into the new program in new quarters over in the new building and had the best program, I think, in—recognized that he had one of the best programs in the nation. And he worked hand-in-glove with Ms. Cook up at the center up at Brookhaven School, I think. It’s been nine years since I [inaudible].

I’d like to read to you this from the annual report. We had a health educator and most of the specialists you could hope to get in a health department. But the report on the health—this is a health educator writing. This was [inaudible] Anderson. This is the 1965 annual report. [*Reads from report.*] “The report on the health situation in DeKalb is a highly satisfactory one. Health-wise DeKalb is in good condition. The death rate is lower than the state and national rates. This even includes such killers as heart disease, cancer, and accidents. The immunization level exceeds the national and state rates. There have been no cases of polio since 1960 and no rabies in humans in years.” [*Looks up from report.*] But we did have two bats—we had one or two bats in ’62, three bats—I didn’t know until then that bats had rabies, but they’re awful-looking little things. And one of the Emory professors, one flew down at him; and he hit it with a broom, and we sent its head off, the bat off, and he had rabies.

We took every opportunity for years to use this multitude of resources that you’ve got here in DeKalb County. We should use all of the state and federal funds we could get as long as they let us have them. And we worked very closely with the Communicable Disease Center—I think they call it now the Center [sic] for Disease Control. They were a lot of help in the measles vaccine program and the mosquito survey and, of course, the immunization survey.

Well, we used volunteers. Sometimes—not in our department, but in some departments—they outworked the workers. So we had six hundred volunteers who assisted in school health services. That’s a lot of women to help—most of them were women, because

they assumed like they did when I was in medical school—this was during the Depression, and my wife was teaching school. And we couldn't afford to get married, because she'd lose her job. Back then, women, you know, if a woman got married, they assumed she married a breadwinner, and so she had to quit. We couldn't afford that, so—this was in the little Presbyterian church there that I could go to Augusta. She sang in the choir, and I sat up there with her, and she was the soloist; and every time we'd come out of that choir loft, [inaudible, possibly the organist's name] would play "The Wedding March." [Inaudible] for four years [*audience laughter*]. Anyway, the Junior Service League gave us terrific assistance with the hearing program. And as I understand it, they even have now over at DeKalb General Hospital [now DeKalb Medical Center], they screen newborn babies to check their hearing early. So this was—the Lions' Club, of course, have [sic] always assisted in vision programs. PTA volunteers are really invaluable to the school health program. The Red Cross, Arthritis Society, Cancer Society, and the National Foundation [sic] and the TB Association. I've been a little bothered about the TB Association. When I get my letter or subscription for the TB thing [inaudible], I think.

Anyway, I'd like to list some of the things again that DeKalb was first in: the first with [public water] fluoridation; the first full-time mental health worker [inaudible] and followed by Ann (Anne?) [last name inaudible]. The first nursery school and kindergarten association in the state of Georgia was here, and a workshop was put on. Mrs. [Edith] Bassett was the first president and [inaudible]. And Fulton [County] got wind of it, and so they organized, and then the state organized; and now they have a state organization for daycare centers. And the first health educator was [inaudible—could be "Mary Lee" or "Marilyn"?] Anderson; and if we ever got off the track, she'd get us back. She was a former teacher and taught teachers, so she knew what she was talking about. Anyway, the next thing was the developmental evaluation team with Dr. Don [inaudible—could be "Elliott"?] followed by Dr. Dwayne [inaudible—could be "Maxson" or "Maxstead"?]. Then we began to—we moved into a brand-new building, but we put the dental clinic now on the first floor because it was on the third floor. I could see one of them [the patients] coming straight down on that cement. But the nurses moved in there, and they did something; I don't know what they did it for. But they put a tub in there with a hundred pounds of ice. Just to show how hot it was. We soon got air-conditioning [*audience laughter*]. Anyway, it was a good strategy.

Some of you don't know, we—Rockdale County asked to tie onto DeKalb, so we agreed to it. And Ms. [inaudible name], who's in with us now, was a director of not only the [inaudible] nursing program and all of its ramifications in DeKalb County but [also] Rockdale. And then

later on Clayton County and Gwinnett County asked to tie on. Now I think you're back to one. I don't know; I haven't been around in a good while. But I think we just had the best staff and the best facility that money could buy. And you can't buy—you can buy facilities, but you can't buy personnel.

[*Looks at notes. Speaks to MR. MACKAY, laughing.*] I put down here, "Before I sit down." I didn't know I was going to sit down. I thought I'd be standing up over there. [*MR. MACKAY laughs.*] I'd like to mention one other person who had a very positive effect on DeKalb indirectly, and that's my wife. And that's it. [*To MR. MACKAY*] Now, you said you wanted to ask some questions.

MR. MACKAY: Well, you got all these eyewitnesses. I would like to say, Doctor, in this great DeKalb history roundup we're doing, we're calling on people that have been intimately involved in some facet of the life of this county to write it up, as you have done; [*Camera pans out to show both MR. MACKAY and DR. VINSON onscreen.*] and at the end of this year we hope to have a great collection of reminiscences such as this. And I hope that seems to be in pretty good shape like it is, but I would tell you that we would like those interesting remarks to be in the archives of the society; because we're looking to the publication of the history of— [*DR. VINSON hands his notes to MR. MACKAY.*]—fine, thank you. Oh, you had something in your whiskey box over there to give the society. [*Points to cooler on the floor next to DR. VINSON's chair.*] [*Audience laughter*]

DR. VINSON [*laughing, picking up cooler*]: This is my [inaudible] for food.

MR. MACKAY [*laughing*]: Oh, I thought you were bringing some specimens for us! [*audience laughter*]

DR. VINSON [*retrieving papers from cooler*]: These are—what these are—this was a—one of the best—and I hate to give them away, because I had such a hell of a time finding these things. I thought we had them in the library—and copies of these in the library—and also in the state library. I found one over here in this [Decatur] library. I had to take it back because I signed it out. [*Hands papers to MR. MACKAY.*] But this is a—the DeKalb County Health Department is a [inaudible] up there, and this is the only copy I have.

MR. MACKAY: Are you presenting these to the [DeKalb Historical] Society? Or just loaning them?

DR. VINSON: Well, I'm presenting that other one, because—

MR. MACKAY [*handing one set of papers back to DR. VINSON*]: All right.

DR. VINSON: --my wife told me not to do this, but I did anyway. When--she wrote it up. I put her name on there.

MR. MACKAY: Splendid. [*Opens large paperbound book.*] That's the *History of the Development of the Mental Health Program of the DeKalb County Department of Health*. We thank you for that, and that will go in our archives. Now, do you have any other goodies?

DR. VINSON: I don't believe so. I'd better hang on to these [inaudible]. [*Puts the other set of papers into the cooler.*]

MR. MACKAY: I want to ask you a question, and then we got [sic] plenty of time to hear from the floor. The first twenty years that I practiced law out here, and I'm in my thirty-ninth year, I don't recall seeing a drug-abuse case in the courts. In this last twenty years, it has crept up like a nightmare. The number of people who are addicted to alcohol—I think it was a serious problem in those first twenty years, say, from '50 to '70—but in the last fifteen years the number of young men and women and some of various ages that come into the courts that seem to have destroyed their mental health and, to an extent, their physical health—this is an easy question for you: What's going on?

DR. VINSON: Well, I—this is something I overlooked, because I—my daughter was coaching me. And I rushed through the mental health program, which was a--as you know, you helped us get it up on the road. But the director of our alcohol and drug program was on Channel 30 [local Public Broadcasting affiliate] recently in MacNeil-Lehrer, which I watch all the time [inaudible]. And all he does now is work with the medical profession on drug and alcohol problems. And don't think they don't have a problem.

MR. MACKAY: I wondered if you were willing to talk about what you think is going on in our society. What do you attribute this phenomenon to?

DR. VINSON: Of course, I think it's—it goes back to the home, to a large extent. [Inaudible; could be "for this reason" or "I was just reading"?] —my daughter and her husband bought our home [inaudible]. But then they moved over there where they're right close to the school that my grandson goes to. And sometimes you might think I'm prejudiced about schoolteachers, because my mother was a teacher—my mother-in-law, my wife, and oldest son. I just think they're the most [inaudible] people. Any [inaudible].

MR. MACKAY: Well, they certainly are. I think that I asked you a blockbuster of a question, but in thinking of public health, it's something that pervasively affects the body politic. The population—I'm getting to where now I'm apprehensive even driving, particularly at night, because, seeing the courtroom over here, I see the number of people who are heavily under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

DR. VINSON: Well, the man who built my home, Mr. Fortenberry, was killed by a head-on drunk—ran in, and he couldn't get out of the way. Hit him head-on; killed him and his wife.

MR. MACKAY: I'll open up the floor now for questions—free for all. Any questions you'd like to ask?

DR. VINSON: [*Says something inaudible about "legal fees."*]

UNIDENTIFIED MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER [*off-camera*]: Maybe you could explain, Doctor, the move from building to building during your tenure.

DR. VINSON: What was that, Dave?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER [*off-camera*]: Tell the group about the changes in locations of the Health Department during your administration.

DR. VINSON: Well, now, I was the third person. The director of public health was Dr. Harrison, then Dr. Everett [spelling?], and then I was next.

MR. MACKAY: The physical location. That is, the housing of the department.

DR. VINSON: Well, I meant to mention that Scott Candler asked Professor McCain [former president of Agnes Scott College] and Dr. Everett and me if I knew a health—a place to put a hospital. Professor McCain and I—we were—I argued a little bit about the size of the lot. It's great-big, you know, about ten or fifteen acres; and I said something about it, being partly Scotch [*laughs*]. And he said, "You know, I've learned from experience at Agnes Scott—don't scrimp on property." Well, we were glad that we got four acres to put the health center on there over there. And there's plenty of room for anything else they want to put between the health department and the hospital [*inaudible*].

I meant to get on something that's—I don't know why I overlooked it—but we have got one of the best emergency ambulance programs, I think, in the United States. I know from personal experience. But the man who deserves the credit for this case was [undertaker/funeral director] old Horis Ward. He had more ambulances than anybody else, and he decided that ambulances needed people on there who had special training. And you had to have a whole lot of training. I know one night I—kids on drugs and had a wreck back of me, and I walked over with some of the neighbors. Policeman came up; looked mighty young. But he looked at them, and I heard him ask the fellow driving the car--he just tried to straighten out a curve or something like that—tore out a fence I'd put there.

But anyway, the policeman said, "Will you take the breath test?"

And he said, "No."

He said, "Well, then, I'm going to book you."

And the other one, blood running was out his ears and his mouth. The mother was rather distraught. The policeman had called in the meantime what is now 911. And in just a few—I done cranked up over there while he was talking. And in no time he's—I went over there

to the mother. I didn't know who she was. I said, "Listen, he is getting as good attention as if you had taken him to the hospital. And better than some. Because he knows what he's doing."

And so Horis Ward was the one that arranged for a trip for me and Dudley Martin, who was fire chief, to go down to Jacksonville [Florida] to see how—their ambulance program. And on the way back I said, "This is one of the finest I ever saw." But I said, "The medical profession doesn't accept it [inaudible]." And he said, "That's your problem."

And I came back, and I went down with John [inaudible—could be "Earl" or "Irving"?], who was president of the medical society, and Luke Benton [spelling?] and Henry Palmer [spelling?] and two or three others to Jacksonville. We were in the room with the cardiologist who was heading it up and insisted that we pay everybody over a dollar, because he said, I don't get paid but a dollar a year, and I don't want you to pay anybody over fifty cents." None of his workers made a dollar and fifty cents, he said. So we got down there and got to talking to the cardiologist [inaudible]. And John [Earl? Irving?] said, "What year were you at Emory?" He told him. He [John] said, "Hell, that was my class!" *[laughs; audience laughter]*

But we didn't have any trouble at all when we came back. I was saddened by my wife's own problem. I tried to find Dr. Benton to thank him for saving my wife's life a year ago when she had congestive heart failure. And now he's gone. Freeman Simmons is in the same category, and some others are. We've had terrific support from the medical profession. Of course, now, we've got, instead of one pediatrician, we've probably got ten or fifteen; and we've got, I expect, about twenty-five—I know all the ones, I could list all them that were here when I came on the scene. But I don't know why I overlooked that, though. That's one of—I think one of the biggest—in fact, the cardiologist, when my wife said, "Could I go down to Macon?" and he said, "No way." He knew she's been over to Emory and had a catheter put in her heart and examined that way.

But these people in the emergency room are not interns. These are people like Freeman Simmons and Luke Benton [spelling?—you just don't find them every day, terrific general practitioners. And they know what to do because—Luke, I think, recognized my wife; and he immediately put tubing into her arms and legs, because her heart was not able to pump blood through her lungs; and she said that she felt like she was in the bottom of a pool and couldn't breathe, which is a horrible feeling. You dial 911, and they're there in no time. They know what they're doing. I went out one time [inaudible] friend of mine, said he had a chance to go fishing, but I [inaudible] going to give an exam to all these firemen. So I said, "I'll be glad to go out there and sit with them." [Inaudible phrase] I saw old Dudley Martin. I said, "What are you doing out here?" She [nurse] said, "Every time we have an examination, he takes it. And

he always makes 95 or better.” Now, he has since retired. One day I’d been over there to see him; and somebody had been over on the golf course playing, and lightning had hit him. And he [Martin?] went on and had lunch; and when he came back out, it was thirty minutes later. He turned on the radio [inaudible], brought him [the stricken golfer] around where he could breathe. And he [Martin] saved his life. The point is, they don’t move them unless they stabilize them.

MR. MACKAY: Other questions?

AUDIENCE MEMBER [*off-camera*]: I wondered if you’d also had the [inaudible] cooperation with Rock Howard. I had the opportunity over at Emory to know him some years, and he was [inaudible] interested in the water pollution problem in the state. Did he also work with you in the county?

DR. VINSON: Oh, yes, he [inaudible]. Another thing he did—and I wasn’t going to mention it—was the sanitary landfill. Because we went out, and the expert lived in DeKalb, for sanitary landfills. And he put on coveralls and went out there and showed him how to run it [landfill mechanical equipment] down and bring in garbage and then dump three feet of dirt over it. As soon as he left, we quit doing that. And so one of the buildings out there, the dog pound, just settled down in this garbage for a year. But we had the expertise out here, and we didn’t have to go anywhere hardly [sic] ever to get an expert in any field. [Inaudible] to lived in DeKalb.

MR. MACKAY: Other questions? [*Pauses for questions.*] Will you discuss Grady Hospital—just any views you have about it?

DR. VINSON: What I decided to get done years and years ago was some kind of report back to us, since we pay, I think, ten million or more now. Incidentally, we’ve got a great branch of Grady out here at East Lake Meadows [former housing project located near East Lake Golf Course, bounded by Second Avenue and Glenwood]. I meant to mention that. And we’ve got two doctors from the public health service. Instead of going to the military, they can come do this. And the housing man gave us two houses, and they were combined [inaudible], and it’s actually run by Grady. But what I had thought we ought to do and get some feedback on who was admitted to Grady, so that our nurses would know; and they could visit them and, in a lot of cases, keep them from going back to the hospital. That’s a big place.

MR. MACKAY: You’re not running for any office right now, are you?

DR. VINSON, *laughing*: No.

MR. MACKAY: Well, I’d like you to comment on the present legal position of abortion, whether you as a public health doctor would change the law in any respect.

DR. VINSON: Can I go one step beyond abortion?

MR. MACKAY: Yes, sir. Just any comment.

DR. VINSON: I was doing family planning way back before I was even finished with medical school. And I think every child should be a planned child. Now, as far as abortion, I think if the fetus gets up to a certain stage, I don't think it's too good. I believe in every child being a wanted child. That's the reason I was so interested in family planning [inaudible]. The last thing--you know, my parents thought they were going to get one preacher out of four boys. Two studied law, and two studied medicine. So they didn't get [inaudible]. [To MR. MACKAY] The one that you know out in Dallas is a lawyer. [Laughing] Still leads the singing at SMU. That's a hard question to answer. I don't want to--

MR. MACKAY: Well, I wasn't bringing it up because it was controversial, but you hear so much superficial comment. Just as a lawyer and a former legislator, I haven't been able to see where the legislative branch, made up of mostly lawyers, ought to get into that issue, which strikes me as a [sic] intensely personal health, spiritual, and moral problem.

DR. VINSON: You never can tell. For instance, what is the background? For instance, one of the honor graduates at one of our high schools in Georgia came up here, and by her doctor, and he said come up here and see if I could help her. Well, I was on the board of this Mountain View Home; and we had a room vacant, so she stayed out there for a while, until she could arrange for the adoption. She didn't want to adopt; she wanted her own child [sic]. And her husband wasn't worth a darn; he was another high school kid. These kinds of things could happen, and we had—and the nurses supervised—what's the name of this place up here in--?

MR. MACKAY: Florence Crittenton

DR. VINSON: Florence Crittenton, yeah. They work very closely with Florence Crittenton and the girls there. The last thing I'm thinking of was giving them some money. I've signed a living will, and my wife has, too. And my family doctor, who is, if you care to meet him, Tim [inaudible—could be "Hartman" or "Hardin"?].

[Inaudible] asked me, called me one day and said, "Who's your doctor?"

[Inaudible] I said, "Tim [Hartman? Hardin?], why?"

"Reckon he'd see me?"

I said, "You can ask him. I don't know whether he will or not."

"Reckon he'll see my wife, too?"

I said, "Ask him."

Then I told Dr. [Hardin? Harman?], I said—now, he's cut out of a timber—he used to sit next to me in Sunday school class and interrupt Judge Hubert when he's speaking at times. But he didn't mean any harm.

MR. MACKAY: I think another contribution that your department has made that's not only mental health and getting mentally ill people out of jails but [also] being concerned about the plight of people who are incarcerated—because I remember when you first came here, wasn't the old jail still standing down here?

DR. VINSON, *nodding*: Sure was. Like a catacomb.

MR. MACKAY: And I remember going down there and a man brought out a rat this long and a newspaper and said, "I won. We had a fight all last night."

DR. VINSON: I went in there to see a mental case, and said, "Don't I recognize you?" He was a big man on the Emory campus way back then. I didn't know what his name was, but I knew he was a prominent person. And at one time they locked up two sisters from Scottdale Mill and put them in the jail. So I [inaudible phrases] Caroline Clarke; she had a heart big as gold [sic]. And [inaudible sentence]. She didn't mind [inaudible] if she didn't agree with them. Mrs. Jones in the Ordinary's office was there with Katherine Mann.

I had seen something in Griffin I never had seen before; it shook me up: a mother being taken to Milledgeville [state mental hospital] and her child crying to stay with the mother, and they pull it away from her and take her on down to Milledgeville [inaudible]. There's a reason I selected one psychiatrist, Dr. [name inaudible] because I saw him down there; he was going down to make a trip with Dr. Morris and Katherine Mann and I. While we were in there talking to the psychiatrist about the patients, this woman just walked in there. Instead of telling somebody to take [inaudible], he just put his arm around them [sic] and headed on back out, so. This thing kind of got you going. Anytime we could keep somebody from being put in jail, we did. I told—and she knew she could call me any time, day or night, if I could handle it at all. Because at that time I had a [inaudible]. But we've had the same cooperation from Marion Guess. He's one of the kindest-hearted people I've ever known.

MR. MACKAY: Are there any other questions? [*Pauses for questions.*] If not, we're going to stand at recess. I hope I can see you all down at the State Archives Building. [*To audience member, off-camera*]: Do you need some lead time?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: No. We'd like to invite everyone to come in for re—
RECORDING ENDS.

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