

“I Remember Hour” The DeKalb History Center

James Venable

May 28, 1982

JAMES MACKAY, Interviewer: All right, today is August the 28th, 1982, and we are videotaping a very well-known and outstanding lawyer in our county for the records of the DeKalb Historical Society. Mr. Howard Worley, who is making this tape for us [sic]. Now, we have one hour, and I'm going to present to you here Mr. Jimmy Venable, and I want him to range over his whole life and times here in the county. And I think a good beginning point is that since this county is just 160 years old and everybody except the native Indians has come into this county, tell me something about the background of your family, Mr. Venable, and how they happened to come to DeKalb County and where you were born and that sort of thing.

JAMES VENABLE: Well, my ancestors settled in Richmond, Virginia, in 1683. Captain John Venable and Abram Venable played a very prominent part in the Revolution, the war between England and the colonies. And I had a great-great uncle who was a professor who taught Greek in the University of Virginia, and during the Revolutionary War my ancestors conscripted the ox teams and the neighbors there to aid the colonies during the bloody conflict, and after the revolution had ceased the war, they were sued, and Patrick Henry defended them in the lawsuit and won it.

A few years thereafter, five of them settled over in Jefferson, Georgia. In 1842 James Venable, whom I'm named after, was the first man in the world to submit himself as a guinea pig for Dr. Crawford Long to administer ether there in Jefferson, Georgia. In 1942 Jim Farley, Postmaster General, dedicated a postage stamp to Dr. Crawford Long, and I represented the Venable family, and Dr. Frank K. Boling represented the medical profession; he's now dead.

My grandfather settled in Atlanta when it was Marthasville. He was clerk of the court during the War Between the States. And Venable Street out there near Georgia Tech, he owned that property, lived there, and died in 1879. My family played a very prominent part in Atlanta there when it was Marthasville. My grandfather and the Venable family, there were five sons and three daughters there. My father was named Clarence Venable, and he many years ago moved to Lithonia. He lived in Fulton County but moved down to Lithonia there. The Venables owned Pine Mountain and Arabia Mountain at Lithonia, and they purchased from the Southern Granite Company Stone Mountain about 1874 for \$40,000, trading Big Ledge, now known as Davidson Granite Company, as a part payment for Stone Mountain. You've heard it said that Stone Mountain sold for a shotgun and a mule. Of course, the Venable brothers paid \$40,000 over a period of years, and now that Stone Mountain was in the granite business from about 1874 right up to 1928. They built--the Cuban capital was built out of Stone Mountain granite, the Brooklyn Bridge. All over the world and all over this country, granite from Lithonia and Pine Mountain—curbing, the granite curbing. They used to pave streets in Atlanta with Belgian blocks long before the days of asphalt and concrete all over the country. They'd name each city [skip in recording?] its curbing--Cincinnati curbing, Cleveland curbing, Atlanta curbing—its granite curbing.

I would like to say this, that I was born in DeKalb County at Lithonia Georgia. Lithonia, Georgia, is named after a Greek word meaning lithos, meaning rock. My mother was a Reagin [*spells*]. She was born there in Lithonia as well as myself there. My grandfather on her side with four other brothers participated in the War Between the States. Three of them was killed, and two of them survived. My great-great uncle was a sheriff of DeKalb County here. He used to live over here on the Courthouse Square where the C&S Bank building is. The county jail was there when I was a young boy. I remember the old courthouse, wooden courthouse there. On Saturday morning I used to witness to wagons and buggies there with farmers with their produce who sold it to the natives and people lived in and around Decatur, Georgia there. My uncle was the sheriff there for many years. I remember one thing about him, that he was a great horseman. They had a fine stallion horse that used to race at Lakewood there, won many medals and honors there, named Gold Core. No one could handle that horse or look after him, except they had a black man they had named, I think--I've forgotten his name there. He wouldn't let anybody pet him, wouldn't let anybody else fool with him. He was a very dangerous horse, I remember that real well.

Mr. Mackay: Where is the house that you were born in? Is it still standing?

Mr. Venable: No, the house that I was born in is out near Pine Mountain on what you would now call Rockbridge Road, set back some a thousand feet east going towards Pine Mountain.

Mr. Mackay: Did you go to school down there?

Mr. Venable: I went to Lithonia High School, and I went to a private school--Ms. Annie Mooney, who taught music. I was her pet student there. I was about seventh or eighth grade; the rest of them were first on through the fifth and sixth grade. They had about forty students. I used to go to school over the drugstore there on Main Street in the building there--a rock building--just west of the city, along the Main Street there. She had a school there, a private school there. I left Lithonia in about 1920 or '21, started going to school in Atlanta, Georgia, at an old tech high school in portable buildings. I finished there, then I went to Georgia Tech and studied civil engineering and finished that, and then I was with the city as an engineer. I laid out Candler Field there when it was only one hangar. Beetle Blevins and Doug Davis said that now it's one of the fastest-growing airports in the world. Then I made the geodetic survey for the city. The government loaned the city the instruments in which to make this survey. I spent many a night out on Stone Mountain, [and] the Candler Building. We were at 90 points some ten, fifteen, twenty miles outside the city, ninety-foot towers plumb bob over a monument planted in concrete. We would turn it at angles; we'd point a lamp--a high-powered lamp--from the top of Stone Mountain to the Candler Building and these other points, all lamps. We'd turn the angles at night time between these various points to get the minutes, degrees, and seconds.

After that survey was finished, and I set the sea-level elevation on every manhole in Atlanta, taking the size of the pipe and the size of the pipe going in and out and the sea-level elevation, and I set a monument of sea-level elevation over here in front of the

DeKalb County Courthouse there at the end of the steps there on a brass tablet. It gives a height: Atlanta ranges from about 1,060, top of Stone Mountain, about 1,660.5 feet above sea level; Atlanta's about 1,050. Up around Davison-Paxon-Stokes—I mean Davison now--it used to be Davison-Paxon-Stokes--there is a marker there. I set markers all over the city. In case of a war or in case of fire destroying the city or any part of it, we could relocate it by these everlasting monuments there.

Mr. Mackay: Well, when did you get interested in law?

Venable: Well, I started studying law when it was the city at night time. I finished law school June the fifth, I got admitted June the fifth, 1930, on the diploma. You didn't have to stand examinations then.

Mr. Mackay: And you have been a working lawyer since 1930?

Mr. Venable: Yeah, I been practicing law, never had a vacation, been in forty-four states, learned something every case. A lawyer lived never lived that knows everything about law. I learned something in every case.

Mr. Mackay: Do you like the practice? You must like it.

Venable: Yeah, I do. I've never sent a client a bill--don't have time, never had the sense enough to charge much, like most lawyers [laughs].

Mr. Mackay: So how did you happen to practice in so many states?

Mr. Venable: Well, I represented a lot of criminal cases when I first started there. I been in forty-four states, some civil and criminal cases, and all of the states are practically the same in their procedure except the state of Louisiana--it's Napoleonic or French law. I went down there and defended the Black Muslims and then taken that \$25,000 and promoted the Klan. [chuckles]

Mr. Mackay: Well, now that you get into that, you mentioned a while ago that you had belonged to all of those secret societies, and I realize that they are secret, but you might tell us something about them and how strong they are and what you think their function is.

Mr. Venable: Well, I belonged to the Masonic, I've been a Mason. I've been an Odd Fellow, Junior Order Red Men, Elks, and Moose, and I've been in the Klan since 1924. When the Klan dominated politically the United States we had governors—Clifford Walker, while he was governor of Georgia, was on the Imperial Board of the Klan. We had six governors of Georgia, six mayors of Atlanta, we had several presidents, senators, and congressmen, mayors all over the United States. In Fulton County Sheriff James R. Larry [spelling?], who was sheriff for fifty-two years, was on the Imperial Board; Judge Paul Ethridge, one of our judges and county commissioner, he represented the Klan--he was on the Imperial Board while Governor Walker was on the Imperial Board. But the

world doesn't record these facts; it don't tell you that we had presidents, senators, and congressmen.

Mr. Mackay: What about your church connection?

Mr. Venable: I'm a Presbyterian, North Avenue Presbyterian, that's my membership is there. My family gave that granite that built that church, the Venables did, there at North Avenue and Peachtree.

Mr. Mackay: Tell me about a little more about Stone Mountain and Gutzon Borglum. How did he come here? Did you work with those people?

Venable: Yeah, I knew Gutzon Borglum. He's a sculptor, sculptor, he--while he was here in Atlanta, he always stayed at the Venable home at Oakdale and Ponce de Leon, I knew his wife and his son, young Borglum. He started the carving. First this mountain was given to the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Then World War I come on, and they couldn't get it off the ground, and eventually they created the Stone Mountain Association. The first people to head it was Randolph--I forget--he was a brother-in-law of Ruben Arnold--Randolph Smith, Randolph something--I've forgotten his name. He was the first president of it. I remember when Roger Winter, a publicity agent; his wife was connected. They had an office in the Hurt Building for a good many of years there. When they eventually got the monument--the coin, the fifty-cent coin, was minted by the United States Congress. It said it couldn't be done because the South was traitors to our country; therefore, it would be impossible to ever get a coin minted. The Klan was so powerful politically at the time, we were successful in getting the coin--the fifty-cent coin--minted, through Congress there, and a million and a half of them were minted; and very few of them was ever spent to carve that mountain. It was squandered otherwise through the Association.

Mr. Mackay: Well, you know, I know the circumstances got Gutzon Borglum in trouble. I know Julius McCurdy said that he was arrested. Why was he arrested?

Mr. Venable: He was arrested because he got mad with the Association, and he destroyed his models down there, and they taken that for destruction of those monuments and taken out a warrant for him, and he fled into the state of North Carolina and was arrested there. And at that time Borglum was closely connected and a member at that time of the Klan; and we were so powerful, and my uncle, Samuel Halkner, an old bachelor, my father's brother, was Treasurer of the Klan of the United States at that time, and we were so powerfully and politically connected, the Klan was, that we were successful in getting him released without extradition.

Mr. Mackay: So in other words, he was never tried, is that right?

Mr. Venable: He never was tried for it. [inaudible]

Mr. Mackay: Tell me your earliest recollections about the mountain itself. We've heard stories that there was a hotel down on top of it once. Another was that there was an Indian fort up there. Do you know any of those to be true?

Mr. Venable: Well, I've heard it myself, of course. Cloud Street, in front--Aaron Cloud, 'way before the war, had a tower called Cloud's Tower on top of that mountain there, and a dance hall under it, [inaudible] that was the early history, the early--anything known about the mountain, that's--I've heard about the Indians, and I think the Indians long before they were sent West did occupy a portion in and around that mountain. The Venables accumulated [sic] the mountain in the early 1870s from the Southern Granite Company. They traded a quarry, a rock quarry at Lithonia, known as Big Ledge--now Davidson Granite Company or Southern Granite Company, I believe, owns it now--and paid \$40,000 in the trade over a period of years. That's how the mountain come into their possession.

Mr. Mackay: How do you feel about what they've done with it? Are you reasonably well satisfied?

Mr. Venable: Well, I'm not satisfied with the monument, Borglum is the only person that could have finished that mountain. It's a disgrace, but the public don't know it. It's a Roman horse. He's cut his legs off at his knees--it's not Traveler [Robert E. Lee's horse]. Borglum's monument was real Traveler, the horse was. It is a disgrace to our society, but the public don't understand it. It thinks it's a great monument there. Borglum's monument would have been an everlasting attraction for the world. His [Lee's] horse—he was mounted on his horse; he had a real Traveler horse there. Borglum's monument and his sketches, it would have been a thing that would have attracted the world in art had he been left alone and allowed to finish the monument there.

Mr. Mackay: How about telling us some of the most famous crimes or criminal trials that you can recall, not necessarily just in DeKalb, but let's start in DeKalb.

Mr. Venable: Well, in DeKalb County, probably the famous trial, I mean there are several of them. One of them was the boy that kidnapped and buried this Mackle girl there, Gary Krist, I defended him. And I defended a black man that killed Mr. Henry Heinz, the gentleman that married Mr. Asa G. Candler's daughter, Mrs. Owens, that lived at Briarcliff and Ponce de Leon, there. [Mr. Heinz's home was actually located at Ponce de Leon Avenue at Lullwater Road.] Laylock went in there late on Sunday night to rob and to kill and to steal, and killed Mr. Heinz. He was arrested shortly thereafter and signed a confession and tried him over here [inaudible]. They had to sleep the jurors in the courthouse; we couldn't get facilities for them. I tried that. It was a hard case, tried it about a week, and was successful in saving his life.

Then I defended the Black Muslims in Louisiana. They had trouble with the police; the police interfered and invaded their church or temple. That was a terrible and a bad case. That was one of the hardest cases.

Mr. Mackay: A lawyer that admired you, Jimmy, said that you did not have any bias in the courthouse, that you would defend anybody that you felt had a cause of action or a right.

Mr. Venable: I have, I've defended--and half of my clients are black people there. I defended the Communist Homer Chase in Atlanta when it was unpopular. When Judge Duke was prosecuting him, I was successful in keeping him out of trouble. I defended Indians, I've defended Communists, black people, people of all nationalities; I hold no ill will against any race, color, or creed.

Mr. Mackay: What do you think about our court system? Do you think it works pretty well?

Mr. Venable: Well, our system works pretty good, but we'll never be able to get justice in our country unless we--and I've been advocating to--educate our jurors. I have requested that we make it mandatory, pass a law that every juror that sits on a case have four hours per month, twelve months, and go through all types of mock trials and let him or her understand and ask questions where they can fully know how to protect life, liberty, and the property rights of human beings. Until we do that, I've got very little faith in our jury system in this great country.

Mr. Mackay: Is that because you have seen juries coming in with verdicts that were well-intentioned but wrong?

Mr. Venable: Yes, sir, that's one reason. The jurors--and it's no walk of society that you don't have to have experience, secretaries, typists, brick masons, carpenter--people of all white-- life--have to have some experience in, some teaching, and some education in the field in which they are called on to administer justice, and I say it's mandatory that we do that to give people their rights and their day in court.

Mr. Mackay: You mentioned another famous matter that you knew about, and that was that Temple bombing, back there. What connection did you have to that trial?

Mr. Venable: I defended those boys when it was indicted there, placed George Bright on trial there, and had a mistrial in that case, seven-to-five for acquittal. That was perhaps one of the hardest cases because the Jewish people spent many thousands of dollars, and the news media tried them weeks after weeks after that thing. It was very a hard case, and I was very successful in getting him a mistrial.

Mr. Mackay: They didn't prosecute it beyond that point, did they?

Mr. Venable: Yeah, they prosecuted. We tried it a second time; but in the meantime, Rube Garland went down and solicited the case and got disbarred in the trial of that case, and the third day of the case he tried to get me to participate back in with him, and I failed and refused to do so.

Mr. Mackay: Tell me, how old are you now?

Mr. Venable: I am seventy-seven years old; I'll be seventy-eight January the fifteenth. It's coincident that my birthday is the same as [Martin] Luther King, and I'm probably in the opposite direction of his thinking.

Mr. Mackay: Now here I'd like for you to comment here, at your age, what do see happening, what trends do you see happening that you think are good, and what trends do you think are bad?

Mr. Venable: Well, our county--I hate to say it, and I hate to see it--our country is in bad shape because the morals of our country's failed, and the religious field has failed us, and when those things fail, then the nation usually falls. The United Nations, I say--and I'm against it--I think we should get out of the United Nations, and the United Nations should get out of this country. It is a incubator for socialism, communism, and it's advocating one world government, it is on the trend of that, and we've adopted three steps in the direction of one world movement. We've adopted the metric system, we've adopted the liter system, and I was raised on pints, quarts, and gallons. The metric system—being an engineer, I know something about the metric system, but the average person don't know anything of that nature of the measurements, and I'm against those things.

Mr. Mackay: Well, it's not making much headway, as a matter of fact.

Mr. Venable: Well, no, it hasn't made too much headway, there. Although the one thing that the United Nations has sponsored, eighty-three countries have adopted the genocides treaty or convent, which prohibits me, if I live in Canada or eighty-two of the other countries, of saying anything detrimental against any race, color, or creed by print or mouth, and I'm against that. I think freedom of speech should always prevail. I make a lot of mistakes in criticism sometimes. It makes all of us correct obviously.

Mr. Mackay: Back on the subject of the Klan, I know that much of the Benson jurisdictional fights and so forth and people disputing who is the leader of the Klan. Do you think it's well-defined now?

Mr. Venable: Well, the Klan today--there are about four major groups and about forty-two smaller groups in the United States. I've been in the Klan since 1924, when we had presidents, governors, mayors, senators--people of all walks of life. We reached the stage of approximately nine million; we dominated this country politically. During the Alfred Smith and Herbert Hoover race, the Klan was so powerful we were successful in electing the Republican president, Herbert Hoover, because Catholics had always fought the Klan. In order to be Klansman or a Klanslady, you had to be native-born white of the Christian faith and owe no allegiance to any foreign country or subject here. I have had the opportunity to be a Mason, an Odd Fellow, and other secret fraternities; and there is no organization that I know in America today that the degree work is more deeper and more in the religious field than that of a Klansman. You never become a Klanslady or a Klansman until you take the third degree, and it takes about ten and a half hours to confer

and about 40,000 dollars' worth of paraphernalia. It's much deeper than anything that I have ever witnessed in the Masonic lodge. We've got one degree, the Knights of the Flaming Sword. It takes twenty-three and a half hours to confer it there. These people running over the country say they know anything about the Klan, the Klansmen; the key you know about two hours' initiation. But really you never become a Klansman till you complete the third degree, the Knights of the Great Forrest [spelled "Forest" in some Klan literature], named after Nathan Bedford Forrest, who was the first Imperial Wizard, and his son was a Grand Dragon of Georgia, lived out there on Forrest Avenue, and black people have been successful in changing that name of that street out there after Ralph McGill there. He lived the third house, right at Glen Iris, on Forrest Avenue. I went to school with Nathan III. He finished military college at West Point. He died in 1946. I was acquainted with his father, who was the Grand Dragon of Georgia and the son of General Nathan Bedford Forrest, perhaps the bravest general, he and Stonewall Jackson. He had twenty-nine horses shot from under him, Nathan Bedford Forrest. History doesn't recall these facts.

Mr. Mackay: Well, now, I want to talk to you about some of the most vivid personalities you have known; and while we're on this topic, Tom Watson is probably the most colorful politician that has lived in this century. What do you think about --

Mr. Venable: I would say--I would say I would classify him as perhaps the greatest during our century.

Mr. Mackay: And you got to hear him—did you hear him speak in DeKalb County?

Mr. Venable: Yeah, I remember when I was a young boy, Thomas Watson. He published *The Watsonian* paper that people would knock you down to get one of them. All what we call the salt of the earth was subscribed to his paper.

Mr. Mackay: Of course, you were too young to have ben around during the Leo Frank case, weren't you?

Mr. Venable: Yep, I was too young I remember and read a great deal about it and have used the decision now sometime in court.

Mr. Mackay: Now, tell us about some other vivid personalities that you associate with DeKalb County in particular. Talk about Asa Candler—you knew him.

Mr. Venable: Well, I lived for many years next door to Mr. Asa G. Candler. They lived in the Candler home they built there [on Ponce de Leon Avenue in Druid Hills, Atlanta]. The Venable home was next door. I knew him real good. He lived there alone for many years except his chauffeur; then his daughter, Mrs. Owens, who married an Owens, and she lived with him after she separated from her husband, and then she married Mr. Heinz, Henry Heinz. He was killed by a Negro that I defended over here in DeKalb County Courthouse during World War II, where we had to sleep the jury in the courthouse because of lack of facilities.

Mr. Mackay: Can you describe his personality?

Mr. Venable: Well, Mr. Candler, I knew--I used to go over close the fence and talk to him as a young boy there. I can see him today--he wore, always dressed up, immaculate. He had a chauffeur named Bill. I can hear him today hollering [in falsetto], "Come here, Bill!" [chuckles]

Mr. Mackay: What about Rebecca Felton? She was before your time, wasn't she?

Mr. Venable: Well, I knew her, that's all; but I was a young boy there. I didn't know too much about her.

Mr. Mackay: I'd like to go back. You mentioned the failure of the religious field. What do you think has happened? How has the church changed since, say, you were a boy?

Mr. Venable: Well, I'd like to say this in reference. I know we got some good ministers, but our society has brought it around. A minister is almost prohibited--he'd lose his job or be kicked out if his church if he teaches from the holy writ there. Very few of them teach from the holy writ. I have recognized and I use the Bible a great deal, some quotations, during the trial of cases there. It's the law of all laws, the book of all books. Today I am ashamed of it from all over our country that have long-bearded and long-haired white people. Holy writ it condemns a man with long hair; it commends a woman. It condemns a woman wearing any part of a man's wearing apparel. And then further over in the holy writ it condemns these gays there that we have so much trouble in this country today over and society is faced with. In the twentieth chapter of Leviticus, I think, it condemns man lying with a man there. But the ministers don't seem to teach from the holy writ as it is written, and that's reading—that's fallen down [inaudible--falling down?]. Then another thing, our young society, our government has brought around our change of the old--what we call the old "Uncle Toms," the black people refer to these old [people] that won't accept the civil rights law as it is written because our government has brought it around by taxing us to death, and a man's wife is forced to go out into the field and seek employment and the children are left at home and not properly supervised over, that's what we're facing in this country [sic].

Then another bad element that is hid in all of our societies is this drug [marijuana]--I have never seen as many cases of drug all over the nation. I had a first case in 1934 a boy named Howard Curtis in Fulton County--married, had a family, and got to smoking cigarettes called "mugglers." They come from New Orleans, twenty-five cents a cigarette, nothing but marijuana. He got hopped up on those things, got jealous of that girl, caught her out at a café out there on Bankhead Highway, shot her heart out, and tried to kill himself. I used Dr. [first name inaudible] Owenby [spelling? Could be Ownby?] to get on--to be one of the--he went to school with Will Rogers. Dr. Owenby [spelling?] lived at a Georgian Terrace, had this big sanitarium in Stone Mountain. He said he first come into contact with marijuana in [World] War I. He told the effect of this drug on this boy; said he had the mentality of an eleven- or twelve-year-old child and was able--three trials led to one with the chair. Last time they tried him, they stayed out--the jury did--

twenty-three hours and gave [him] life. That was the first case on eleven states in the United States to have a statute in Georgia and ten others. Shortly thereafter some famous aviator killed a multi-millionaire hopped up on it in Miami, and then and all of the states.

This drug is in every school; it's in your army. The government turns loose thousands upon thousands of young Vietnam soldiers, black and white, [inaudible], ruined their life, no institution. It's the worst thing that's hit our country, and the Russians brag about taking this country without firing a shot. They've got us drugged to death in this country, and society must do something to prohibit it. It's in all of our classes, in all of our schools, in all branches of our government, some of our people addicted on drugs. It's a terrible thing, and we've got to do something about it.

Mr. Mackay: You mention the decline in morals that you were concerned about, you touched on some of it there, but you might elaborate on that? Do you think we're getting too greedy, or what?

Mr. Venable: Well, I am from the old school; I'm probably as narrow-minded. My grandmother wore her dresses down to her shoe top. I never--and if we'd ever seen a woman with paint and powder or smoking a cigarette, she would have been classified as a prostitute during my days there. It hurts me to see our white ladies and even black ones and black men and white men running along the streets with their shorts on, almost--if it happened at forty years, forty, fifty years ago, they'd have been taken down for public indecency. It is a disgrace to see our society as it is now dressed on many of our streets all over this country there, I'm against it. We've got to do something about it.

Mr. Mackay: How do you feel about gambling in our society?

Mr. Venable: Well, gambling is a bad field. I'm against it. I've never gambled in my life, I've never touched a drop of liquor in my life--beer or wine, I've never smoked a cigarette. I am not a fanatic. Reason I never smoked a cigarette, country people said cigarettes would give you consumption--that was TB. I never heard it called TB until I was twelve, fifteen years old. They called it consumption. There's no cure for it. That scared me to death, the reason I never touched one. And I saw whiskey--my whole family, relatives, and friends--make a fool out of them, so I never touched a drop of it, wine, or beer in my life.

Mr. Mackay: Will you talk to us about some of the judges that you dealt with when you first started practicing law here in DeKalb County?

Mr. Venable: Well, Judge John B. Hutchison was one of the first judges I remember trying a case. He's from Jonesboro, Georgia. He couldn't drive an automobile; he used to ride the train up to Atlanta, and some of the lawyers would go up and pick him up in a T-Model Ford there. Then Judge James C. Davis was one of our judges here for a long time there. And a lot of our--E. D. Thomas, Judge Pomeroy over in Fulton County, I knew all of them. Judge Verlyn Moore there, I've tried in there.

Mr. Mackay: Give us your recollections of Roy Leathers. He was Solicitor General when I hung out my shingle.

Mr. Venable: Roy Leathers was prosecutor here. He was a lawyer—I believe Leathers & Verner or Verner & Leathers. John Verner and Roy started practicing law, and then he was elected solicitor. He made a good solicitor. Roy fought hard. He went to night school and studied law. I think he was--first he told me he used to drive a milk truck, and he saw--went on Washington Street in Atlanta, knocked at the door there to collect the bill, and the lawyer come and ordered him out and told him to come around the back, and that turned him, and he decided to be a lawyer, and he made a good solicitor.

Mr. Mackay: What about any recollections about William Schley Howard, Sr.?

Mr. Venable: Mr. Howard was perhaps one of the finest criminal lawyers that ever lived in Georgia there. I watched him when I was a young boy, used to come down to Stone Mountain to fish in the Venable lake. I've known him nearly all my life. I don't think there's ever been a man equal to him since. He was the old time; he was a great orator, he knew how to handle people. He could talk in simple, everyday language to a jury; and he was very successful in his law practice.

Mr. Mackay: What about Gene Talmadge? Did you know him well?

Mr. Venable: Yeah, I knew Mr. Talmadge real good. I've been to his home, when he built his new home there. I knew his son Herman. I been associated with him in several cases when he was a young lawyer. He was great orator, and he was a great statesman.

Mr. Mackay: Did you ever know any real native Indians in this county?

Mr. Venable: No, I never did know any native Indians in this county.

Mr. Mackay: Have you represented Indians?

Mr. Venable: I represent the Creek Indians east of the Mississippi. They got a reservation in Cairo, Georgia. Neil McCormick and Peggy McCormick--they play gospel music, the most beautiful gospel music I've ever heard—they've played in Nashville, Tennessee, for fourteen years and all over the country there.

Mr. Mackay: Thinking back about how the Europeans came in here and dealt with the Indians, in retrospect, do you have any opinion about that?

Mr. Venable: Well, I think it was a sad thing that we had to take the country and push the Indians west. They've been mistreated, and I am very sympathetic with them, knowing that it was their country, and we come over here and pushed them west out there and just taken all of their land and pushed them. And many of them died during that bloody struggle, that war between the natives and the colonies, here.

Mr. Mackay: Now I'd like you to describe the DeKalb County of your boyhood. What--it certainly wasn't anything like it is today.

Mr. Venable: No, it was thinly populated when I was born. I was born at Lithonia, Georgia, there. I used to--you used to--we didn't have but one paved road. I remember when they floated a million-dollar bond issue to put [pave] Ponce de Leon from Decatur to Stone Mountain. They had some money left over there, that road, Ponce de Leon Avenue when they paved that. I remember Mr. L. T. Y. Nash; he lived over on Rock Chapel Road in Lithonia, a country fellow. I used to ride in a buggy and horse with him when I was a child from out near--over to Lithonia there; I knew him. Our county--I remember when Covington Road was just a dirt road. You'd get stuck if you had a T-Model, down about Snapfinger Creek. You couldn't travel a lot; we didn't have any paved roads. Thinly populated. I remember when this old courthouse was burnt when I was a young boy there. The building there burnt; they built a new one over there. [In 1916 the DeKalb County courthouse on the square in Decatur burned in a mysterious fire; the rebuilt courthouse was completed at the same location in 1918. In 1967 a completely new courthouse was built on West Trinity Avenue, and the 1918 building is now the DeKalb History Center.]

Mr. Mackay: You know, the news reports say they believe that that was burned by the crowd that got beat on that particular election day. You think that may be the case?

Mr. Venable: Well, I heard it, and I believe that it was burned deliberately, burnt by some people during this--political faction. There was two of them there, defeated one faction.

Mr. Mackay: Did you ever go up to Camp Gordon during World War I?

Mr. Venable: Yeah, I went up there as young boy out of high school trying to get a job.

Mr. Mackay: Describe it.

Mr. Venable: To carry water where they had hundreds of carpenters up there, was paying water boys to carry water round in a tin bucket there for seven dollars a day. I tried to get one, but I failed and didn't get it.

Mr. Mackay: Describe what was actually up there.

Mr. Venable: Well, they was building wooden buildings up there for army barracks and everything up there. It was a big movement there. They had hundreds of people working there. Some worked day and night to get the thing where we could get our army off of the ground and trained.

Mr. Mackay: You know, our Historical Society records say that Sergeant York trained up there.

Mr. Venable: Yeah, I've heard it that York did train up there. I remember when they gave him all the publicity many years ago.

Mr. Mackay: Now I want you to talk a little bit about state government. You've seen that change a great deal.

Mr. Venable: Yeah, I've seen our state government change a great deal.

Mr. Mackay: You feel it's gotten too big, too?

Mr. Venable: It's gotten too big. Our whole government system, all over our country is overcrowded, even our educational field. I remember when they ran this county with a superintendent and two women--Mr. Rainey, I guess you remember him. Now they got two big office buildings, a hundred—we're overloaded with worthless employees all over our government--state, county, and cities, and we've got to do something about it. It's got too big for its use. And we got to do--and our government, the United States government, that's the thing where every walk of society must bring some pressure on the Congress and Senate of the United States to do something about our indebtedness. Likewise in DeKalb County, and as you know it, probably seventy-five percent of our taxes go for our educational field, to [inaudible—sounds like “retired moms”?] for the educational field; about twenty-five percent is used for the public use. I'll have to commend the Catholics. They have their own schools, they pay taxes toward the common schools; and if we'd do that, we'd be growling about it. You'll have to commend them. Unless we do something to curb our powers in our government, our public officials, President of the United States by executive order today can give away a million--ten million dollars. We are doing too much for the other world. We today owe trillions and trillions of dollars. We give to foreign countries in the last ten years in figures almost impossible to write. We owe trillions and trillions of dollars; and we owe more money, our government does. And we're printing useless certificates every day that you and I--I'm trying to get the figures to see what our government owes in interest and principal. And I'll venture to say--and take the population and see by the population of what we owe in interest and debts today that each child two days old or two hours old will probably owe ten to fifteen or twenty million dollars [inaudible]. How are we going to live and exist in that situation in this country [inaudible]? The Congress has gone crazy; the governments have gone crazy there, squandering money. I remember when you could buy three pounds of ground coffee for a quarter, five pounds of sugar, two pounds of round steak for a quarter, a nickel loaf of bread, and look what you pay for it today. I work for three people--taxes, insurance companies, and grocers; and I'm sick and tired of it. Taxes is my main take-away in this country.

Mr. Mackay: Do you have any view about the high interest rates we pay now? Younger person can't really get going in business anymore.

Mr. Venable: We can—no country--society can live under ten percent. Here you got fifteen to twenty-one percent. A young couple can't pay six or seven hundred dollars for a house and a car note. They can't buy one.

Mr. Mackay: You know, bankers say that they are charging such high prices because it's fighting inflation. Do you believe that?

Mr. Venable: No, I don't believe that. The world bankers, the international--every president--you'll have to commend the Jewish people; they're dominating control of world money there. Every president elected, he has full power on the cabinet because they are in position to loan money to our nation there.

Mr. Mackay: You know, when I was in the legislature, there was a legal ceiling on interest.

Mr. Venable: Yeah, I remember that.

Mr. Mackay: Don't you think there ought to be a cap put on interest, by law?

Mr. Venable: I certainly agree with you. They ought to put it, and it ought to stay there. A poor person--all of us have to borrow money sometime. And interest, I'm not--it ought to stay from nine cents [percent?] on down. I'm in favor of putting a cap on it.

Mr. Mackay: Now, you have a reputation for being very generous with your legal services. I want to ask you to assess our legal system now in terms of the poor person. Do you feel a poor person can get justice in this legal system?

Mr. Venable: I don't feel that our poor people can get legal services or legal justice in our system as it now exists.

Mr. Mackay: What can we do about that?

Mr. Venable: As I said before, the first problem that we face in this country is the jury--there's a system of selecting jurors that are not qualified. As I said, they ought to have that training and education. And we ought to--I know we got legal help for these unfortunate people, but most of them, as I watch it, are young lawyers, inexperienced, they appoint; and most of them lead the defendant up before the court with a trade [plea bargain], and trade them off there. I watch them a great deal, and many of these poor devils are innocent, and many of them are guilty. I don't think they take the time to give him or her their day in court.

Mr. Mackay: Would you be willing to give up that jury system to the extent they have in England in which the judge is passing on facts as well as law?

Mr. Venable: Well, I would myself, yes.

Mr. Mackay: You think we'd get better results?

Mr. Venable: I think we'd get better results, yes.

Mr. Mackay: All right, let's talk about the selection of judges. I've been disappointed to see the newspapers criticize the result in the Supreme Court race in which Richard Bell and Jack Dorsey came out on top. They talk like the voters don't know how to pick candidates. I don't know of any other scheme that I would favor, and I want to know if you would be in willing to getting away from the election of judges.

Mr. Venable: Well, I think all public officials should be elected by the ballot box, and what hurts me, that our white people of this nation of our state and our county, the Negroes have learned, the black people have learned, two things. They have learned the ballot box and the boycott. I looked out my window in front of the courthouse for forty-two years in Atlanta. In 1959, in the national election, around Fulton County courthouse, there's four or five thousand black people four blocks around that court house, forty lines, and 150 whites. I knew we's gone. Our white people won't register to vote. The black people have learned to register to vote, and we've got to exercise that, or else our country is going to be dominated by the inferior race of black people.

Mr. Mackay: I want to thank you for this interview. You've got two minutes, and you're talking to young people maybe twenty years from now that are looking at this tape, Jimmy. Have you got any final advice or comment you would like to make to the young people who are moving out into the world?

Mr. Venable: I would like to say this to the young people of the world today that you better do something to help your government, you better advocate and you better use the ballot box as I have heretofore mentioned, because that is your own salvation. The people of our nation and the people that are qualified won't get into to politics. The public of our nation will not select at the ballot box a person qualified. They're usually the one that's more popular, one that can speak the most beautiful English, or one that has the most money, or one that occupies the biggest political job, he or she is elected instead of someone qualified. And my advice is for all young people to use the ballot box to vote and register, from dog catcher on up. Else you're going to lose your way of life in our great country.

Mr. Mackay: Well, I certainly do thank you, and thank you, Howard Worley, for this tape.

END OF RECORDING

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