

MODERATOR: . . . went on to Decatur High School, he was a DeKalb County attorney, had a role in drafting the legislation that changed the county's form of government from a single commissioner to a multiple-commissioner form. Earlier in his career he was an FBI agent. He probably has some fascinating stories to tell us about today, both life in DeKalb County and some of the ins and outs of changes in government.

GEORGE DILLARD, *to Moderator*: Thank you. Well, it's a pleasure to be with you. Glad to see so many of you being out on this blustery afternoon. I'm not accustomed to sitting while I talk [*audience laughter*]. My wife is going to make a few remarks, I'm sure. She'll first say she insisted that I write a speech, which I did. I may not use it, but I wrote it [*audience laughter*]. I see some familiar faces here in the audience. I know [inaudible] Mobley here. He lives out in the Belmont community, where we used to farm. Johnson [last name sounds like "Ed" or "Ebb"?] back there was in law school with me, and Don Clegg; Don was in the FBI. Johnson and I were on the—and Don were on the debating team at Woodrow Wilson College of Law. And Tom Faulkner was our coach. The main reason we had a debating team was because we wanted to go around and debate the girls' colleges [*audience laughter*]. And the main reason Tom wanted to be a coach was he didn't want to debate, but he wanted to go on tour [*audience laughter*]. We had some good times back then. We graduated back in 1940.

I appreciate the introduction, but you left out the commercial. I'm still in the practice of law [*audience laughter*]. I'm a partner in the firm of Dillard, Greer, Westmoreland & Wilson at 599 Peachtree Street. If somebody told me ten years I'd move my law office from Decatur to Tenth Street, I'd have told them they were crazy, but that's where I am now.

I'd like to kind of dispel a couple of rumors that have been going around. One is I am really not a native of DeKalb County, and [inaudible phrase] I'm not retired. I was having a little trouble the other day keeping up with the foremen going from one to the other—you know sometimes we run a little late, and I was running a little late to the next one, and I hadn't had time to eat lunch. So, I pulled into Chick-Fil-A and ordered a Chick-Fil-A and a Coke. I started to pay, and the lady says, very diplomatically, "Are you a senior citizen?" [*audience laughter*].

I says, "Why?"

She says, "Well, if you are, you get the Coke free."

I says, "Well, for a Coke, I'll confess" [*audience laughter*].

Now a little bit about my early history. I was born in Laurens County. My father was in the insurance business there. And if you ever want to know about trouble collecting insurance premiums, you sell a bunch of insurance policies to a bunch of cotton farmers and have a boll

weevil hit them, which happened in 1919. Well, he's to lose his agency. We went down to the Isle of Hope, where we lived for a short while. Then the Depression of 1922 [sic] hit, and we came to Atlanta. My father's mother had been a schoolteacher, and he had watched the farm and practices in Laurens County, and he decided he was going to take his five boys to the metropolitan Atlanta area and get in the truck farming business, which he did. We rode the train from Savannah to Atlanta and stayed at the Kimball House. Later on, it was a renowned old hotel at that time, where all the politicians met, and all the great political decisions of the state were decided, and I guess that's where I first had my touch of politics. Although I was too young to know it at the time, it must have been—[*To a new arrival*] Come on in, neighbor.

NEW ARRIVAL, *off-camera*: [Inaudible], neighbor.

GD: --I must have just absorbed it. [*More audience members arrive.*] Hey! There's part of a family going in. Come on up to the front. [*Inaudible comments as they are seated.*] My first remembrances of this area are of the Kimball House. My brother Bill ordered sliced tomatoes even for breakfast, which kind of amused the waiters. The large house that we lived in down in Palmetto, with a big porch in front, all—porch two-thirds of the way around the front. The yard was full of daffodils that I could pick and sell. An old mule, our first mule, died and got caught in a bog, and we had to pull him out with a block and tackle, so we didn't get [inaudible] farm crop that year. Then we moved to south Georgia [sic; means south DeKalb?], and I remember the coldest weather I'd ever seen was when South River froze over from bank to bank. And I remember Kelly's Chapel Methodist Church, that was where I joined the church. I was five years old. The church at that time, that church was a quarter station; that meant that you didn't have preaching but once a month. My mother taught Sunday school, and she made sure that Sundays the doors were open every Sunday, and I had to help build the fire in an old pot-bellied stove. There was a fellow named Frank Bradley that taught my Sunday school class. We had these little Sunday school cards that we used to [inaudible], and I collected those and kept them till I went away. One of them got lost in the move, when I moved up to Washington. I don't know whether they'd be worth anything today or not, but I'd like to have them if I could ever find them now. Probably they would not be worth as much as baseball cards, I'm sure. But they would mean a lot to me. And also, he let me listen to his crystal radio on the headset. That was before people had radios with loudspeakers.

But we had a revival at Kelly's Chapel on a hot August evening. I was sitting there in the church, and I had trouble keeping awake. There was a fellow by the name of Boss Snow that was holding the revival. He had a big, booming voice, and he'd hit the chancellor, and he yelled, and I was about half-asleep. And he hit the chancellor, and that woke me up. And he yelled out

and said, "Repent and be baptized, or you're all going straight to hell!" Well, that kind of scared me, because I'd been taught that hell wasn't a good place to go. And it sounded to me like he was about to get up a crowd right then [*audience laughter*]. So, when the invitation was given, I slipped out and was going to church, and I'll have to confess that I felt that warm feeling that we Baptists and you Methodists ought to use when we talk to our Baptist friends about conversion.

Well, we lived in the south DeKalb area, where we tried to do a little truck farming. The main industry in DeKalb County at that time was dairy farming. And if you've ever tried to raise vegetables among a bunch of rocks and clay, you can understand why people grazed cattle and milked cows in this county. We moved to the banks of the Peachtree Creek, where we lived on a large farm that is now Johnson Estates. We grew vegetables there and hauled them into Atlanta in a springboard wagon and an old 1924 REO truck. We had a drought in 1925, and we dammed up Peachtree Creek and flooded those bottoms to grow vegetables. Well, not only did that provide us water, it gave us fertilizer as well. And we had a pretty good crop that year.

We moved from there to Lithonia, and you know Decatur has always had parking problems. The older members of the family moved on down to Lithonia in that REO Speedwagon truck. It was called a Speedwagon because it could get up to fifteen to twenty-five miles an hour and had been known to pass a streetcar in town [*audience laughter*]. Well, it fell my lot to follow along in a two-horse wagon. So, we traveled along Johnson Road and out Clairmont to Decatur and around the square and Sycamore Street and on out to Covington Highway and the community [*inaudible*]. Well, all these roads were dirt at that time, except just a little bit around the square in Decatur. But when we started around the courthouse square, we ran into a traffic jam. There was so many buggies, wagons, and horses tied around the courthouse square—in clear violation of the 1916 ordinance that prohibited such [*inaudible*]—that we could hardly get through.

But we moved on and grew our vegetables in the area of the Belmont community. I went to the Belmont Elementary School, which was a two-room school there. The teachers, as I remember, were Irene Phillips from Redan, Miss Effie Biffle, and Ms. Sam Thompson, who lived in the Belmont community. Well, the schooling facilities were not just as great in DeKalb County as they are now, but we had a little tutoring at home. Both my parents had been schoolteachers. When I was six years old, Dr. Ballard, who was editor of the *Western Christian Advocate* and who had performed the marriage ceremony for my mother and father, gave me his library, a library that had been his family library. He had some daughters who had graduated from Wesleyan College. In that library were such books as *Ivanhoe*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, all of Jack London's books. You know, I learned to read Jack London. The first

thing I learned to read really was Jack London's books. And I always loved Western stories, stories of the outdoors. I think my best current storyteller is Louis L'Amour, because he's [inaudible] about the same thing as Jack London. We also had *Pilgrim's Progress*. And I remember we would read in the evening, before the fireplace, particularly in the winter time. We would take turns: the kids would read, my mother and father read. We read the Bible through at least twice and *Pilgrim's Problem* [sic; means Progress?] once. And part of *Ivanhoe*, although I don't know whether we ever finished *Ivanhoe* or not. But I remember those books, reading those in the evening.

So, when it come time to graduate and go on to high school, we had to take a standard exam on each [inaudible] in high school. I was the only one of the children who did not attend Berry College. It was hard in those days for places where we lived to get an education; so of course, my brother and my sister went to Berry. But by the time I was of high school age, they had gotten school buses in DeKalb County. So, I was able to ride to the school bus to Lithonia and finished there. And even though I finished with honors in my class, you couldn't get a scholarship anywhere. I didn't have money to go to school, so naturally I had to get a scholarship. Couldn't get a scholarship on grades alone. But Mr. Clark Harrison kind of saved me. He offered me a scholarship to draw on school commerce, and I didn't have to pay anything until I graduated and got a job. Well, I don't know if you read Clark Harrison's book, *The Long Way Home*, but he mentions in there that his father recruited the county attorney from behind a plow. If you ever have any questions about who that was, [rest of sentence inaudible].

Finishing grammar school or finishing the grammar school of commerce, I entered into Georgia Tech. That's when I found out—in the evening classes—when I found that I could not draw a straight line, even with the aid of a ruler. I gave up the idea of being an architect. And I entered this Georgia Division or Atlanta Division of the University of Georgia; it's now Georgia State, in pre-law classes. Went from there to Woodrow Wilson, where, at the highest salary that I had obtained from having got one of the highest-paying salaries of the graduating class of my graduating class of law, seventy-five dollars a month, I not only was able to pay back Mr. Harrison's money but I was able to borrow money to go to law school. This courthouse has been very great to me. It is here that I stood the bar examination. It was here that I was sworn in as a defender of the bar of Georgia. It was here that I tried my first lawsuit some seven and a half years later. This room, I tried a lot of cases, a lot of them condemnation—I'll get to those in a little bit.

Well, I got an appointment in the FBI [inaudible phrase] in October of 1940. I got a telegram appointing me as a special agent of the FBI at the salary of \$3,200 a year, and I didn't

know there was that much money in the United States [*audience laughter*]. So, I went up to Washington and finished training school, and my first office was Boston. I hit there, and it was forty degrees below zero and a forty-mile-an-hour wind, and I'd never even owned a topcoat in my life. So, the first purchase I made was the heaviest coat I could find. Well, I stayed there for about six months; and in the meantime, I'd come back down to DeKalb County and got a good-looking gal here to marry me and carried her back up there. And we had our honeymoon in Boston and New York.

I was transferred to New York during the war—or just before the war, really—on special assignment doing sabotage work. I reported to an assistant director by the name of E. J. Connolly [spelling?], who was in charge of that [inaudible—section? specialty?]. And I was put on surveillance work. And he called the fellows in that was put on surveillance work, and he gave us a list of people that we were supposed to follow, and he says, “You make your hours whatever you want to. All I want to know is what these people do from the time they get up in the morning till the time they go to bed at night” [*audience laughter*]. And he says, “I want you to follow them, and I don't want you to be made”—that is, identified. He says, “If you lose them or if you are not [inaudible] to get made”—that is, you blow the tail—“don't bother to come back and talk to me, just mail your credentials in.”

Well, we worked on that case, which was commonly known as the [inaudible—sounds like “butane”?] case. That was my first experience actually in trying a case that fell apart, although I didn't try it. We arrested this espionage ring, which was a peacetime ring. The other agent and I arrested one of them in a little German library up in 86th Street. As we started the arrest, he started tearing up something, paper, and we grabbed at his wrist; and it was call letters for a radio station in Berlin. So, we were able to identify that, and we used that during the war in some of our espionage activity. But we tried those cases in Brooklyn, Southern District of New York, Brooklyn, and I was in charge of helping with the documents. We had about three file cabinets of documents, and I've often wished, Don, that I had somebody to prepare a prosecutive summary for me and sit in the courthouse and tell me what document to use next when I was trying a lawsuit. Well, that was our job.

I was also given the assignment to work with the ONI and G2—that's the Office of Naval Intelligence and the Army's intelligence, and we were interviewing people who were returning to the United States as repatriates. Well, we boarded the S.S. [spelling? Sounds like “Drotmanhome”?] out at Quarantine. Quarantine is part of the outside of the harbor of New York—it's an area where all the incoming ships have to stop until they're cleared to come into the harbor. So, we boarded, as was customary, a Coast Guard boat; and it was cold and in the

wintertime, and the waves were high. We went from down at the Battery up to board this ship, and they threw a Jacob's ladder down for us to climb from the little Coast Guard cutter up. Well, that was like climbing up the outside of a five-story building with the wind whipping you back and forth and the water down there. The first step I took, I looked down. From then on I didn't look at anything except the next ring, the next rung of that ladder, until I was aboard.

While we were interviewing—we had to interview each one; there were three of us. We interviewed each one of these people who were coming back. Well, the Customs agent had scraped the paint across the label on a cigar box and had discovered a thousand-dollar bill. It was against the law at that time to bring back into the United States more than \$250. And so, he reported this incident to us, and we interviewed him, and he had a big, long story about trying to get back home and being shot, had to run across a bridge in Zurich, Switzerland, and he had some evidence that that had happened. Well, we talked to him for some time and then started [inaudible] clothing he had. I discovered an unusual little knot on one of his buttons. So, we removed the button, and then there was a piece of cotton that was impregnated with material that you make invisible ink with. He had been enlisted in the espionage to come here and send messages back to Germany. So, with that, we made a case against him, and we ultimately tried him in New Jersey and convicted him, which I think was the first wartime espionage agent that was [inaudible]. I think that was the first time and the last time that [inaudible—wife's name—Mary Lynn?] had ever been in court with me. I had to testify for two days in that case, and our son Doug was born in New York, so she carried Doug over there and sat in court while I testified one day. And I guess that was Doug's first experience in the courtroom.

I stayed with the FBI about twelve years, and last year and a half I was there I was assistant to the director of the administration of the Civil Rights section. I decided I wanted to come back home, so I quit; I came back. I just wanted to kind of set my roots somewhere. The FBI is a great place; but it was not the place where you want to—if you were able to bring up a family. So, I wanted to have my roots here and somewhere, so I we moved here to DeKalb County, and I opened an office to practice law right across the street there in the Masonic Temple Building with—I shared spaces with Tom Davis and Bobby Stringer [spelling?].

I had been here about a couple of years—oh, I guess, maybe a year—when the Subversive Activities Act of 1953 was passed. A fellow by the name of Lamar Sizemore, who was a deputy assistant attorney general and later became a good friend of mine, went down to the FBI to get somebody to help him, and they said—well, there was a lady agent out there, “We can't help a private or a governmental agency. We do our investigations on our own, not for somebody else who is a former agent practicing law in Decatur.”

So, Lamar came out here and talked to me, and said, "Somebody said that you were acquainted with the Communist activity in the South."

I said, "Yeah, I know every Communist in the Southeast—all four of them" [*audience laughter*].

Well, I was appointed a deputy assistant attorney general and worked basically with that Subversive Activity bill and with other matters. We would work with the GBI at night and keep an office open here in the daytime. There was a fellow in here at that time by the name of Homer Bates Chase that was a full-time paid organizer for the Communist Party. So, I identified that fellow and turned him over to the FBI, whatever they wanted to do, follow him around and see where he went. But we also engaged in some investigation in other matters, other than just the Communists and related to that bill. We felt that it was an obligation on a governmental agency, particularly the GBI, to identify anybody or any group that was potential trouble, like insofar as public safety and welfare was concerned.

And I think that really came in good later, because we have identified some of a Moslem [*sic*] group, we've identified the main people in the Ku Klux Klan, we have identified any number of these organizations that were at that time on the list of dangerous organizations listed with the Attorney General of the United States, which I think came in helpful later, particularly during the time of the—when we ultimately came into the Civil Rights problem here. I've been appointed—I was county attorney at that time. I still have been consulting with the governor of the state. And when the threat of busing came up, and the governor was put on notice that they were going to have busing the next morning, Ernie Vandiver called Griffin Bell and Lamar Sizemore and Peter Zack Geer to the [governor's] mansion to discuss what was going to be done. Some of them wanted to put them all in jail. Griffin Bell and I held out for letting them ride, but bring in the GBI to be sure, but put them in plainclothes and follow the buses to be sure there was not an incident. Well, about four o'clock in the morning we get—convinced the governor that that was the thing to do. And that is what took place, and we did not have a single incident. And I think that Atlanta, to its credit, ought to be given credit for having dealt with this crisis without really any incident. I think that is something we can be proud of this entire area.

I recall that just before that I was the New York City in the office of some of the officials of Chase National Bank, where we were delivering one of our first issues of bonds. We were having dinner with some of those officials, and one of them asked me—the Civil Rights Act had just passed, and they asked me how I thought we were going to live with this in the South, particularly in the Atlanta area. I told him, "We're going to live with it better than you will in New

York City.” I think that has been true. I think we need to give a lot of people a lot of credit for that.

I was appointed as assistant county attorney in 1955. Wheat Williams had appointed Pierre Howard as county attorney, and Pierre had been very active in helping him, and he asked me to be county attorney—assistant county attorney, rather. I don’t know why they really selected me, except that I had not been back here long enough to be identified with the other side. And I had had some governmental experience, but most of all, I guess, I agreed to work cheap. So, I was appointed assistant county attorney; and then when Pierre resigned in the fall of 1955, I was appointed county attorney. At that time DeKalb County was still basically a dairy community. It had a population of 135,000; it grew to a little over half a million by the time I resigned in 1984. But at that time, it was basically rural. But we experienced some phenomenal growth in the decades that followed.

I guess it was about my second day after I was appointed assistant, Pierre called me to his office and pointed to the table over there that had a bunch of documents on it. He said, “I have a bunch of stuff I just got from the State Highway Department. I want you to take a look at [inaudible].” Well, it was twenty-five condemnation cases—that is, condemned property for the right-of-way of I-85. Well, I carried them back to my office and started going through them. I began to recognize some of the most prominent names in the county. And I inquired of some of these people around the building, around the square about this, and they said, “Well, those folks are all a member of the courthouse crowd.” Well, the “courthouse crowd” didn’t bother me too much, because I didn’t know who they were. But having to condemn some of the property of some of the most prominent people in this county, where I knew I was going to invoke their wrath because the State Highway Department had not offered them enough money, I knew I was on the bottom of the totem pole.

Well, we proceeded to try those cases with some great success, and there was a fellow by the name of Country O’Neal [spelling?]; he was a right-of-way agent. I had been wrestling with a number of the county problems for some time and had gotten to know Scott Candler pretty well. A lot of credit ought to go to Scott Candler for getting this county started, for getting the water system and the sewer system started.

But I asked Mr. Candler one day, I said, “How did you get along in your administration with all the things that were coming up—the new things in the county, the water system and all these things and zoning had just got started and whatnot?”

He said, “It was very simple. I had Julius to tell me what I was doing was all right. And then I had Country O’Neal to say if it wasn’t, you didn’t do it.”

So that's a pretty good system. It reminded me of something later that I was in a seminar over in Athens for city and county attorneys. And Harold Sheets, who had been a longtime county attorney in Fulton County, was there. And one of the younger lawyers in the meeting asked him, "Chief, to what do you owe your success as county attorney?"

He says, "It's very simple. When the commissioner asks me a question, I ask him, 'Have you done it yet?' And if he says yes, I tell him, 'That's OK.' And if he says he hasn't done it, I say, 'Don't do it!'" [audience laughter]. Well, it's a good little philosophy. If any public official really had enough doubt about what he was supposed to do that he had to ask the county attorney, it's probably something he ought not to do.

County O'Neal deserves a spot or two in the history of this county. He was a great fellow. I got to know him well. He was a right-of-way agent, as I mentioned. Now, he had two expert appraisers: a fellow by the name of Charlie Hedenberg [spelling?] and another by the name of George Wood. And we tried these cases right successfully, which led, I think, the late Judge Hubert to comment one time that Charlie Hedenberg and George Wood at that time had never seen property in DeKalb County that was worth more than a hundred dollars an acre [audience laughter]. Well, we did put a lot of hundred-dollar-an-acre appraisals before the jury, I'll [inaudible]. Had a lot of [inaudible].

But I'm a great admirer of Robin Harris. Robin is a great fellow in this county. He started out, I believe, he was [inaudible] to practice law when I came here; and he went over to Julius McCurdy to handle some of the county stuff while Julius was county attorney and then went on to a distinguished career with McCurdy, Candler & Harris. Had a great career in the General Assembly of Georgia. But among some of these cases we've tried, I [think? thank?] some of the old friends of Decatur Federal. And I don't believe Robin'll ever forgive me for having—getting one of the state's appraisals upheld in the trial prompted—we were [inaudible—trying? applying?] for Mr. [inaudible—Chessie? Chester?]. The right-of-way had kind of divided his farm. Robin was contending that not only was the property worth more than we had it appraised, but he was entitled to recover consequential damages because the highway split his pasture into four quarters. And he had one of those [inaudible] that had a big board there that showed how before he could get from here to here from that part of the pasture where his barn was and where he had to go, and how afterwards it was split up in four pieces. And he just couldn't get it together. Well, you know, it's kind of hard to sell the jury on consequential damages when the piece of property that you own is bisected by an interchange for the limited-access highway, and you're [inaudible] to having four quarters of that interchange. That really ["does"? "doesn't"?] hurt your property [inaudible] [audience laughter]. I was reading in the paper last Sunday where

they were proposing to put an outer Perimeter. And I was looking at it, and I got a little fifty-two-acre piece of ground out there that I'm raising cattle on. And I woke up one morning almost in a cold sweat. Suppose someday I wake up and they have put that perimeter through that farm and made an interchange with Highway 78, and my cow pasture's cut in four pieces? [*audience laughter*] Well, it's almost too much to wish for, isn't it?

Well, back to DeKalb County. I guess one of the biggest lickings I ever took in the trial of a condemnation case occurred in this very room. I was trying a case and this fellow represented himself. Judge Vaughn was presiding. And I don't know whether any of you knew Judge Vaughn or not, but he was a great jurist, had the patience of Job, and was just absolutely as fair as he could be. He let this fellow testify. He didn't want anything; he wanted to testify. And I couldn't cross-examine him much, because I didn't want the jury to get sympathy for him. And if I ever question, I want an answer; and he'd have a stock answer: "They ain't paying me enough, and I don't want them to take it. Just go away and leave me alone." Well, the jury just gave him money, every cent he wanted [*laughs*]. But it's awfully hard to try a case when somebody represents himself, I tell you, because judges most times will lean over backwards to help somebody.

One of the other cases that I inherited was one to get a right-a-way for a sewer line out in the Ashford-Dunwoody Road area; it was across a piece of land owned by another cattle fellow by the name of Red Spruill. The county was condemning a right-of-way at—I think they had appraised it at something like \$500. Most people back in those days would give the right-of-way for a sewer or water line, because it would be a great asset to your property. Well, he didn't want it. Or at least he wanted [*rest of sentence inaudible*]. He came to my office many times, and I got to know him pretty well.

The last time he came to me, he says, "George, you're just ruining me."

I said, "Red, I thought the thing was making you rich."

So, we went to trial. We [*inaudible*] room right next to this room, right next door, where I tried the first case, where I still think it's the greatest courtroom in the state of Georgia to try cases. We were sitting there getting ready to strike the jury when Red walked over to me and said, "Is that \$500 offer still good?"

And I said, "Yes."

So, we settled the case. I think he was just testing me to see how much he could finally get.

But he finally put it to me, though. Later we had to condemn another piece of that land, to widen the right-of-way for Ashford-Dunwoody Road, and you know what had happened to

prices out in that area. And when the judge had charged [inaudible] fair market value for the price of land, we got kind of stuck in that one. But the county didn't have to pay it; the developer did. He'd had [inaudible] right-of-way clause. But the Spruill family is a great family of this county. I don't know how many of you've known them. That was my first contact with the Spruill family.

When I first came here, of course, I told all the other lawyers around that I'd take care of any of their overflow. Well, I had made acquaintance through Lamar Sizemore of a friend of his, a senior partner of his, a fellow by the name of Will Buchanan. And he called me one day and said, "George, I've got a little case out there in DeKalb County, involves a sharecropper. I wonder if you could handle it."

I said, "Yes, sir, Mr. Will. I [inaudible]." So, it was Red's farm; he was farming all that land up there now that's Ashford-Dunwoody and Perimeter Center, practically all the way up to Sandy Springs. I guess they must have owned several thousand acres at that time. And he was sharecropping part of that land for corn. And I don't know whether the sharecropper got drunk and he ran him off, or whether the sharecropper got drunk and just left or whether the sharecropper just left. But anyway, Mr. Spruill had the corn plowed out. And when they had harvested the crop, the sharecropper sued him for his share. And we defended on the basis that the sharecropper, by not plowing the corn, had abandoned the crop and that the owner had a right to go ahead and cultivate the crop and harvest it; and we won. I suspect that's probably the last sharecropper case that's tried in this county, but I doubt that we've got many sharecroppers out here now.

To go to some of the interesting things that the county comes to mind, I think the first crisis that I ran into as county attorney came in the fall of 1955. We had been informed by the bank that we could not spend any more money that year, because the Constitution of Georgia forbade the spending of more money than you could collect in any one year from taxation; and we had already spent all the money that taxes could possibly be. So, I applied a little ingenuity to try to get the county through the end of the year, which we struggled through.

The next year the delegation of the General Assembly decided that they were going to implement what had been the recommendation of the [inaudible—sounds like "Griffin Hagan"] Report that was set up and put out, I think, sometime around 1954, and there had been submitted to the voters of this county a straw vote as to whether the form of government should remain a single-family [sic—means "single-commissioner"?] commission form or should be a multiple-commissioner form or city manager form. Well, the League of Women Voters got behind the city manager form, and they had the most votes for any one proposition; but the

other two propositions combined exceeded the city manager. So the delegation decided that they would stick with the commission form of government rather than the city manager government and instructed us to draw a bill that would, as best we could, keep the advantages of the single commissioner to have one person that you could go to and get answer and keep the advantages of a multiple commission while having multiple thinking on such things as zoning, the budget, the general policies of this county and to somehow come up with something that would satisfy the county manager people.

Well, Tom Davis and Dan Greer and I took the drafting of this bill. And we drafted a bill that provided for a multiple commission [sic]. It provided for the chairman to be the chief executive officer [inaudible phrase]. And we provided that there would be an executive assistant to the chairman that would basically be the chairman's alter-ego for administrative matters that would be charged with the basic day-to-day operation of the county, which turned out to be a good bill. The Legislature later kind of monkeyed it up a little bit, because some people just don't understand how county government works and thought that they were giving the chairman a little freer power by giving him a veto power. But I tell you right now, the right to vote's a lot stronger than the veto. You can come a lot nearer getting your policies put through if you can vote on it, rather than have to veto [rest inaudible]. The delegation was James [last name inaudible], Hugh McWhorter, and Guy Rutland, Jr. And they were a great delegation. I worked with them for several years, and they did a great job in representing this county, and then drafted with us—introducing some of the—a great number of pieces of legislation that we had to draw [rest inaudible].

Well, [inaudible phrase] that [inaudible] basic type of government that was not permitted under the Constitution that required a referendum, so we had to propose that we sent the referendum in the fall in the year '56. Well, when budget time came up in '56, Mr. Wheat Williams, who was the sole commissioner at that time, having had the experience of being short of money in the previous year, and still having to face the payment of some of these debts that we had some way been able to gyrate around so that they fell due in the next year, [inaudible] in [inaudible—sounds like “a tie”?] that not only paid off all the current debts of the county but was sufficient to run the county for a year; and that was a tremendous tax increase.

Well, when the referendum was placed before them, there were two propositions on it—the approval of the referendum. One was for the—Mr. Williams would stay in this county as the chairman of the first quarter, before there'd be a new election. Well, the voters came in and decided they wanted a new election. So, he was in effect voted out of office, which shows you

that you really can't raise taxes and get reelected; and you don't have to "read my lips" for that [audience laughter].

Well, Claud Blount [spelling?] was the first chairman, I believe, under the new commission. Claud, I guess, most of you remember him. He was—had the First National Bank branch right across the street here [inaudible phrase]. He was probably one of the most conservative bankers in the area, and that's the way he ran the county. But he retired—I was at the dinner when he retired, when they gave him a retirement dinner. One of his cohorts kind of characterized Claud such as this: "You know, Claud left the bank, he opened his filling station. And a fellow drove in there with a Cadillac sitting on empty, and tells Claud, says, 'Fill it up!' and Claud says, 'Won't a half a tank do you?'" [audience laughter] Well, when he left office, not only was DeKalb County solvent, but funds had been squirreled away in so many accounts that [inaudible]. But he was a great administrator. Good man.

Charlie [last name inaudible] brought to the county probably the best technical leadership and Dan Sweat as the executive assistant. Dan, as you know, has gone on to great prominence in the Atlanta area. But they couldn't lick the garbage problem. The county was changing from that time from a series of single private haulers to where [inaudible] in the county itself would pick up the garbage. And naturally some of these people who were being dealt out were not really picking up the garbage. The county had not really been set up to immediately take it over. And then they had a sleet storm, where all the streets filled up with debris and pine boughs and whatnot. And Brince Manning took a lot of pictures of that, and he got elected, basically, I think, from just garbage. Garbage is not a popular thing, but I think we are pretty fortunate in this county that the county back in those days and in the years to follow took some rather seismic steps in getting landfill sites that may last us for [inaudible] time.

When the Nixon wave of Republicanism spread through the county, a fellow by the name of Bob Gould was elected. Bob was in the office several months when he called me in and said, "George, they tell me that you are a Democrat. I've known you a long time, you're a good lawyer. You've done a good job as county attorney, but they tell me I ought to fire you because you're not a Republican." I said, "Bob, if that's the criteria [sic], you don't have to fire me. I just quit." Well, [inaudible] that's probably the best thing that happened to me, because I was promptly employed to represent some owners of the same land group—some of the same properties owned by the Spruills out there--to challenge the zoning ordinance. Well, when the Zoning Ordinance of 1956 was adopted, all of the land in DeKalb County that was dairy farming or that was being put in any type of agricultural use—which was the most part of the county at that time—was just arbitrarily put in a holding zone of R100, which was single-family residence

requiring about 1,500 square feet of land for the lot or agricultural, R150. Well, this property, which is now—and was then—near the area of the developing part of Perimeter Center and Perimeter Mall, was still classified for agricultural. So, we challenged the validity of the zoning ordinance and a previous bill, previous decision [inaudible words] old rule, the previous decision of the Georgia Supreme Court that upheld that [inaudible] body could be just as arbitrary as they wanted to. I did declare that portion of the ordinance, as applied to the county to that particular piece of property, as void, being unconstitutional, of not bearing a reasonable relationship to the health, welfare, safety, and morals of the community. Doug had just joined my office. He'd just graduated from Mercer [inaudible], and he was in my office when that decision came down, and we'd won it. And I guess that was probably the first indoctrination into what is now our bread and butter.

I was reappointed as county attorney by Clark Harrison. Clark said that he reappointed me, not necessarily because he thought I was a great lawyer, but he liked [inaudible]; and he was afraid Frances would get mad at him if he didn't [audience laughter]. Well, one of the greatest disappointments, I think, of my career in the FBI came under Clark's administration. We had gotten a lot of constitutional amendments to provide to give this county basically the same rights as a city. Now, you had to get [inaudible] to a constitutional amendment to do that. So, I discussed with Clark this problem and suggested that we have a bill that would have to be submitted to the people that would [inaudible—create?] the City of DeKalb. My wife [rest of sentence inaudible] [audience laughter]. OK.

Well, we drew what was the City of DeKalb bill that was submitted and voted down. I think that was probably one of the greatest disappointments, because I think the City of DeKalb bill is still one of the most needed things that we have in this area. DeKalb County has all of the problems of a city, but it receives none of the city grants, receives none of the money that is doled out to cities. So that is something that I would hope one of these days to see taken care of.

Since my wife is calling time, [audience laughter] I'll close with this. Walt Russell fired me, and Manuel Maloof hired me back. Well, Doug was in the law office at that time, and he didn't want me to take the county attorney's job back, so he split out and formed his own firm. He said he could make more money suing the county and couldn't represent them, and he proved that to be right [audience laughter]. In 1984 he persuaded me to come join him, and that's where I am now. We're in the practice of law on Tenth Street, still handling mostly zoning and land-use matters.

I don't need to [inaudible]—you know, I'll get on to some of the commissioners, I can't [inaudible] them all, except my wife's [inaudible—"frowning"?]. I can't help but mention Manuel Maloof, though he doesn't need any mention, I don't think. But Manuel is a great guy. He is one of the most dedicated public servants I think I have ever seen and one that doesn't mince any words; he gets right to the point. I kind of miss him. I have a little trouble getting my days started without getting that morning call, "You S.O.B."—except he doesn't use that diction [*audience laughter*]—"that ain't the [inaudible] I wanted!" Well, I'd say, "Chief, I don't write the law. I just read it."

It's been a pleasure being with you today [*audience applause*]. If anybody has any questions that want to stick around, I'll be glad to answer them, but I know I've run overtime.

MODERATOR: That was fascinating. We have some refreshments in the Superior Courtroom, if you'd like to follow our guest of honor in.

GD: I want to show you a picture a little before you go. [Holds up picture.] We were asked to inspect the Chattahoochee River one time. I'm going to get killed for this [*audience laughter*]. But that's a picture of Bill [inaudible—Helms?] and me [*audience laughter*]. [Inaudible comments]

END OF RECORDING

Transcribed by Claudia S