Recording starts after presentation has begun.

BOBBY BURGESS: . . . after forty years, you can't help but have that happen. But I did speak at "I Remember Hour," and several of the people here today—with their being particularly Justice Bell, who is kind of a role model for me, caused my career to expand in the police department. When I first came to the police department in 1957, I had no intentions of staying. I came to the police department, because I felt like that would be a good place for me to be, and I wanted to wanted to study law. I wasn't sure when I would get started or how I was going to do that, but I wanted to study law.

But anyway, as I was growing up a boy, and I became well acquainted with motorcycles and things of that nature, and so when I came to the county, the chief of police decided that I'd make an excellent motorcyclist. So anyway, I came to the county in '57 and started riding a motorcycle, and I come up to the courthouse to visit my father—my father worked in the courthouse here, this particular courthouse, and [inaudible phrase] new courthouse for forty-seven years. My family held that office of Clerk of the Superior Court back to my great-great-great uncle for eighty-seven years. But anyway, one day I was up here one day in my uniform, I had on my boots and all my riding paraphernalia, my sunglasses, and I looked like somebody out of a rogues' gallery, I know, with all that equipment on [rest inaudible; audio disturbance].

Judge Bell at that time was the solicitor general. He was later D.A., but at that time he was the solicitor general and prosecutor for the county. He walked down the steps and caught me out there in front, and he says, "When you going to do something with your life?" [*audience laughter*]. You know, Richard never was one to mince words. [Inaudible sentence] "When you going to do something with your life?"

And a little bit startled, but very respectful, I said, "I don't know what you mean."

And he said, "Well, you can get off that motorcycle before you break your fool neck, and [inaudible] to the police department, you need to be a detective. So, I thought about that for a few minutes, and he said, "Would you like to get into the Detective Division?"

And I said, "Yes, sir."

He said, "Well, I'll speak with the detective commander about it. You need to go on and educate yourself and go to school, do everything you can."

So, about a month later, when I was called into the chief's office, and I was being transferred to the Detective Division. So, at any rate, after that I rose on through the ranks, but I considered Mr. Bell as starting their careers over, and that career [inaudible phrase] riding a motorcycle [*audience laughter at inaudible, off-camera comment*]. At any rate, I always gave credit to my mother. My mother was a Coile, a big family here in the county. Of course, my father and she both went to Avondale High School. I saw some people here today who mentioned that they went to the old high school, which was located in a little two-story building at Rockbridge Road and Clarendon Avenue. It was called the Old Stone Mountain Highway then. And I see those people that went to school there with them and mentioned my mother to me, particularly. Everybody knew my father, but not that many really knew my mother.

Well, anyway, I used to be afraid—I was so afraid of getting up in front of a group of people like this. It caused anxiety, make you nervous, and as I was a young police officer trying to build a police department up in the county, the chief sent me around to make talks. So, I went to my mother one time, and I said, "Look, I'm really upset about it this. I don't do well, I get confused, I get stage fright."

And she said, "I'll tell you, Robert." Just don't talk about anything except what you know. You don't talk about things you don't know anything about, because if you do that, you'll be like [inaudible] a politician [rest inaudible]" [*audience laughter*]. So, I followed my mother's guide, not my father [rest inaudible].

I usually talked to young police officers. Forty years I have been with the department, this month, March 7, from 1957. I came to the department and spent forty years there. And I talked to young, energetic police officers who were out to save the whole world. And they mean well, but they are young, and they are full of fire and ready to go. And I always tell them—I use an eight-word speech, I call it: "Treat people like you want to be treated." And that's the little speech that I always give them. And usually I try to throw in a little bit of something to make them remember something that I said, because it's very difficult when you're dealing with twenty-five or thirty 21-, 22-, 23-, 25-year-old people coming into the police department. They're all excited. So, I tell them the story about listening to your elders, listen to what people tell you. This was something I learned from my father. And I told this story to them about the sergeant one

time, saw this young officer, and the young officer had found this gorilla. This gorilla had escaped from somewhere, and the young officer picked him up. And he called the sergeant, and he asked the sergeant what to do. And the sergeant said, “Take him to the zoo.” So, the young officer drove off with the gorilla in the car. The next day he saw him again, and the sergeant said, “I thought I told you take him to the zoo. You must not have listened to me.” He said, “I did. We had such a good time, we’re going to Six Flags tomorrow” [*audience laughter*]. I say that to you to tell you that you have to get these people’s attention a little bit, particularly young police officers, before you send them out here to do this very serious job.

As I told you, my father worked for this county forty-seven years. And Sue Ellen wanted me to reminisce some about this square and the things that I remember about it. And it’s true that if you don’t have a volume of it, and I’m sure most of the people in this room that’s members of the Historical Society and really have a love of this county do have a copy of it, but I’m ashamed to say that I have torn my house all to pieces, and I can’t find mine, my copy of *Vanishing DeKalb*, because it’s really a—I don’t know how many times it’s been in print, but I did have a copy of it. And as soon as I leave here today, I’m going to find it somewhere and go over it again. But it does go back to all of the old families and the families that started it. You know, all of this started in 1822. Actually, DeKalb County was cut out Henry County, and all of the [inaudible] getting the land and so forth, they came out of the Carolinas and Virginia. And there was a land grant, and you could get 202½ acres of land in a lottery for nineteen dollars. And that’s the way it all started. Now, [inaudible phrase] at that time, there was no Atlanta, there was no Fulton County. And the land belonged to the Creek Indians, and it had been designated Henry and then DeKalb, but the lottery was drawn in 1822 up at Henry County.

So, from there we go to where we are today. And, of course, that was a long, long time before the things that I remember. But my great-great-great grandfather came out of the Carolinas here and settled in the Wesley Chapel area and raised fourteen children. And most of the county was agricultural—dairy farming--and, of course, political circles, government service. And it has a most, most interesting history. And I could sit for hours and listen to my uncles and my family members and my granddaddy

and my daddy talk, because that's all the really knew, that's all they really talked, is the county and what it was all about, their great love for the county. I always like to say that we're the poor Burgesses now, but we would have been the rich Burgesses back then, had my grandfather not been the kind of person that he was. He ran the general store, and so he [inaudible] things of that nature and materials to farm with on Covington Highway. And at one time he owned the bulk of the property from Snapfinger Creek to Panola Road to all the way back to I-20 now. I would like to have had it today [*laughter*]. But anyway, during the Great Depression all of that was lost [inaudible phrase]. You come in and charge them [inaudible] and pay for it when the crops come in, and all that went down the drain and all the land and everything else [inaudible phrase] in those years.

My daddy came to work in this courthouse when he was eighteen years old for my great-uncle Ben Franklin Burgess. Eighty-seven years [inaudible] he held clerk's office, except for one time for four months. There was a gentleman who ran against him because he'd been in office so long. His name was Mr. Freeman. He was an ambitious politico type, and he decided he was going to get elected to some office, and he ran for several offices. At one time he was the county commission [sic], DeKalb County Commission [sic]. But anyway, he ran against my Uncle Ben Franklin Burgess, my great uncle, and he ran on the platform that it was time for a change; Burgess had been in the courthouse too long, so we needed to make a change—that was the whole platform. And so anyway, he got elected. And when he got elected, four months later he came to my uncle and said, "Look, if you'll come up here and do this job, I'll just give you the check every month, and I won't run against you again, because I don't want to do that much work" [*audience laughter*].

The clerk's office is not and was not an office of really enjoying politics and sitting back and watching everybody else do the work. The clerk's office was the record-keepers of the county. And by law all the fees, discharges, all the—everything that was done is recorded in the office of the clerk of the court. But my dad's job at eighteen years old for my uncle was driving a car. He was raised on a farm down near Panola Road, as I said, with about seven sisters and two brothers, and there was no work; there was not anything for him to do other than work in the store. So, he went to Atlanta

Business College, and my uncle—my daddy's brother—who was clerk before that, he went to the law school in Atlanta. And they came up here and landed in the Decatur area and would go back and forth to the home there near Lithonia, as they could; Covington Highway was dirt. But his main job is my uncle [inaudible] decided he didn't like to drive. And he had this old car, and my dad was driving back and forth to the Ponce de Leon ballpark to see the Crackers play baseball. And that was basically his job when he was a young person here in the courthouse.

With all of that said, I was up to Decatur on Saturday. I had one brother—there was two of us boys—of course, he was born much later than I. He was eleven years younger, and unfortunately he met with a very tragic accident, which some of you might remember, because in those days everybody remembers everything that happened. But he was run over and killed on a Cushman motor scooter. So that was in 1956, and it left me the only child. But while we were young, I would—[*To audience member who just arrived*] Hey, Calvin!

AUDIENCE MEMBER (apparently Calvin, *off-camera*): How you doing?

BB: --we would come—we lived out on East College Avenue. And I was born on Rockbridge Road, and we moved to the duplex right down on Candler, and then we rented a house on East College Avenue in a place called Sams Crossing. And about the biggest entertainment we had, we had the railroad track running behind us and the streetcar running in front of us going to Stone Mountain. So, you had the choice of sitting on the railroad embankments and hobos get kicked off the railcars or watching [inaudible phrase] riding the trolley cars going to Stone Mountain on Saturday night. So, it was quite entertaining, because the cars stopped right in front of our house. And you know, streetcars were really [inaudible] back then [inaudible].

But anyway, one time we [inaudible] own our own home. My dad didn't make a lot of money working at the courthouse. So, he bought us a house from an old judge at that time named [inaudible] Morgan, and moved seven doors up the street. So, I've never lived more than three miles from the courthouse in my whole life. And that's true now; I live right off Columbia Drive, past the Methodist Children's Home. But when I would come up on Saturday—they held court five and a half days. There was always something going Saturday morning, and then Decatur would be wide-open for

everybody to come in. I would come up East College Avenue, across the railroad, and then Sycamore Street. I'd leave about nine o'clock on Saturday morning, and I guess me and my friends broke down every magnolia tree between Sams Crossing and Decatur, climbing in them, because we'd take two or three hours coming all the way to Decatur and sit on the cannon outside—either this cannon or the cannon over here and wait for my daddy to come down and give me a quarter. Twenty-five cents could do a lot in those days, an awful lot, because this was a big town—we had two theaters. We had DeKalb Theater on this side of the square and the Decatur Theater on this side of the square. So, I'd sit on a cannon till my daddy came down and gave a quarter, and that would get me in the show to buy a big bag of popcorn, big candy bar—a Baby Ruth or a Butterfinger this long, and [inaudible—could be "a cola"?], and had to be home by dark. That's what it was all about, and that's what you really learned to love and really learned to care about.

But it's frightening, too, because no air-conditioning in this building, and some of the trials and some of the oratory that would go on here among the prosecutors and the lawyers here in Decatur and cases that we tried would be frightening to a young person, because it was who could out-scream the other most of the time, though, and they did, before the jury. I remember one particular prosecutor, Mr. Roy Leathers, who I think could out-scream them all. And so, I would hear all that. It would just drift out these windows on this side [rest of sentence inaudible].

When you came up the square and came up to a grocery store, dime store—we had three ten-cent stores, they called them five-and-dime. We had McCrory's, [inaudible] we had [inaudible name—sounds like "Wise"?], and then over on this side, we had Woolworth. And coming on around the square, we had a couple of small grocery stores. We had Shields Market and another little market, and we had a Wright's ice cream parlor. That's where you could go down and get a chocolate ice cream this big on a cone, it'd get all over me and make me mad. And then you came on up, and you had the record shop, and, of course, DeKalb Federal was there and a couple of women's lingerie shops were on the square, [inaudible—sounds like Bowers?] Shop and [inaudible—sounds like Burns or Fern's] Shop. And right across the street was Scott's Pharmacy, and up above that was a small radio station, and then next to that was King

Hardware, and then the streetcar stop, and all Decatur stopped right there, on McDonough Street, facing the high schools, which was Boys' and Girls' High School. I remember there was a barber shop right there, and my Granddaddy Coile used to bring us up on Saturday night because the barber shop had this gigantic shower in the back, where all the men could—where everybody who didn't have a bathtub at home could come take a bath, I guess it was supposed to last a week [*laughter*]. But it had this giant bench and all in there. It was called [inaudible—could be Panthers?] Barber Shop. And all I wanted for Granddaddy to do was for him to come up here and get in that shower back there, because it was humongous, and everybody was in there [inaudible], and it looked like a whole [inaudible—sounds like "ceiling and frame"?] back there. And then next to that was King Hardware, as I said. If you can believe this, there was an alleyway down between King Hardware and the little filling station. You don't call them service stations; it was a little filling station, had two gas pumps. And you went down behind that, and you can bring your animals up here, maybe your horse to shod [sic] right here. And Cady [spelling?] was a blacksmith right there, [inaudible] right now right about where part of the new courthouse stands. And on that corner was the little Amoco station.

And across the street was the jail. It was a red-brick building, and the sheriff at that time was named Jake Hall [spelling?]. And I spent a lot of time in there. Jake Hall had a very, very lovely granddaughter [*audience laughter*], and used to run me out of there all the time. She was a little older than I was. I was fascinated by [inaudible phrase]. Ms. Hall ran the jail. She fed the prisoners, and Sheriff Hall had the [inaudible] in the county police department was very, very, very strong. And you came on around the square, you had the laundry, Morgan's Cleaners, on down on Atlanta Avenue, and you had a Kaiser-Frazer dealership right after the war. You know, Kaiser and Frazer built some cars, and then you had A. O. [inaudible last name] Ford, and you came on around, and you got over here and you had the Masonic Temple Building, which [inaudible phrase] downstairs, Woolworth's, and the DeKalb Theater. And sometimes I can just come up here and walk around—and I do that quite often. When you get older, you start thinking about all these things; and I'm glad I'm able to remember those. I come up here, and I walk around, and I look at all that and think about it, think about

what a pleasure it was to live here in DeKalb and be raised here in DeKalb and for the people who love DeKalb like we really did.

I remember one particular case, and it was fascinating to me as a young person. You have a lot of cases, as I mentioned, at the courthouse. One day, the—they tried most everything in this courthouse then. There wasn't any other court areas away from here as there was later on, when the state court was down in the other building. But there was a serious divorce case that went on up here that day, and I was waiting for Daddy to come down and give me my quarter. And a person hid behind this pole, right here, the big columns that are there now. And he waited on his wife to come out [rest of sentence inaudible]. And it was a very, very, very ugly, ugly, gruesome sight for a young lad like me to see all that running down the courthouse steps and watching them have to clean that up. But that's the way things were over here. You never knew, and that's the way things are today. They really haven't changed. A lot of things that have changed are the types of crime and things that we have and numbers and so forth. But some of the meanness and ugliness in this world has been with us many, many years and will be with us many, many years in the future, I'm sure. But we are from a good county. We're from a diverse county. And we're from a county now that's learned from our mistakes and have learned to get along.

As I said, 1822 the county was cut out, and everybody got their land. And there was two churches: there was Macedonia, and then there was—I think it was DeKalb's first, Macedonia Primitive Baptist—and then there was Nancy Creek Primitive Baptist. And then, in 1823, this—this building was right here, a wooden courthouse. And then in 1825 they had their first school. Decatur had their very first school, and it's recorded in [*recording skips*] two cents a day for kids to go to school. And then two more churches came along, and in 1829 they built a better courthouse. Then in 1842 the wooden courthouse burned down, burning all records, in this particular area right here. And then in 1843 there was a city called Marthasville—it was formed, but it was in DeKalb County, which was later changed to Atlanta, that was for the Western and Atlantic Railroads, which met there. Then you have the third courthouse built, and it was brick with Stone Mountain granite columns here, and it burned down. So, then we ended up with the courthouse that we have now.

In 1861—and it's fitting that we talk about the history of our cannon right now, because it's 175 years old this year. [First part of sentence inaudible], and I consider it a distinct privilege for y'all to invite me here to let me go into some of these things with you. But then in 1864, when the war was raging, the North came through the Tucker area to the Stone Mountain area and cut off [inaudible] road there. And there's about 150 or more Confederate soldiers buried out there. That cut off the supply lines from Augusta and Savannah to Atlanta. And if you go now into the Cyclorama and look at the [inaudible due to audience noise], that's looking—that drawing is looking from the [inaudible] here down DeKalb Avenue. So, a lot of history there. 1871 we had Doraville, 1881 Clarkston, 1885 we had a great tornado [inaudible]. It absolutely destroyed the county; it was devastating. 1886, the first Coca-Cola soft drink was bottled in Atlanta, and in 1889 Agnes Scott College was born, 1889, Agnes Scott. And then in 1896 there was a political effort to move the county seat from here to Stone Mountain, and there was a big, big battle in the legislature at that point.

I think all of this will be interesting to y'all, because I'm trying to carry you back to what makes us—what makes this county so great, what makes it so important to us. Then we had the city of Edgewood, the city Kirkwood, the city of Chamblee. A lot of people never realized, they thought those were just areas, but they were incorporated at one time and actually had many, many more cities in DeKalb than we have now. We've got nine now, including the city of Atlanta.

The General Assembly in 1914 enacted a law that allowed the counties form county police. There'd never been any county police before 1914. The sheriff had been responsible for all law enforcement in the county. And if they decided that it wasn't politically a good situation to have for one elected individual to be in charge of all law enforcement, it wasn't adequate [inaudible] for controlling that area, and they let it be allowed for the county police division to be formed. And then in 1915 the first officer was appointed, a gentleman named [name unclear—sounds like "Millard B. Nash"?]. He got appointed as a police officer by petition. So, what you could do if you wanted a police officer in your district, you could get together and have everybody to sign a petition and send it to the Commissioner of Road and Revenue to appoint one. And he appointed

the first police officer in Tucker to work in the Tucker district for fifty dollars a month in 1915 after that in [and?] 1914.

Then, in 1916 there was [inaudible phrase] crowds at Stone Mountain. I don't know how the travel was, I wouldn't be that familiar. But there were some cars, I know, but Stone Mountain was drawing humongous crowds of people, out of control, they couldn't control that. And so, they appointed a J. W. [inaudible last name—sounds like "Bolchan"?], the commissioner did, for a hundred and fifty dollars a month. And it says in the minutes that his [inaudible] and he's to welcome visitors and hold the crowds and count crowds at Stone Mountain, which was drawing visitors from all over the world.

Now, in 1916—I got ahead of myself a while ago—this building was gutted by fire again. And the outer walls were intact; the interior was burned. And it was redone at that point. This is the courthouse we're in today. In 1916 also, the United Daughters of the Confederacy decided that they were going to build the monument on the side of Stone Mountain, and they leased the mountain—they leased that side of the mountain from the Venable family for that big Confederate memorial. And here's another interesting point: the U.S. government bought the land in 1917 [sic] for a military base, and the famous Alvin York, who was the World War I hero, he trained there with our American soldiers there, at the—they called it Camp Gordon [sic] in World War I. It had belonged to a fellow named H. P. Tilly, all that land did. That's where Tilly Mill Road came up. And Mr. Tilly got in some serious financial situation, serious problems, and he sold that property to H. P. Candler, the person that was responsible for Coca-Cola [sic].

In 1919 Lithonia was formed, and then the illegal liquor traffic became rampant in the county. The problems that DeKalb County had back then were different in nature, but this was an area where there was a lot of whiskey stills, liquor stills, and illegal un-tax-paid liquor was being made in the county out in the boondocks and was then transported into Atlanta. And the bulk of the liquor, when you come out Clairmont Road from the [inaudible], and the rest was coming in from the Lithonia area, that was going into the Atlanta area.

In 1919 we had our first officer killed, right by the railroad underpass on Ponce de Leon in Atlanta. We didn't have a good county force at that time; we didn't even have a chief of police. A fellow named John Wesley Webb was appointed a county police

officer. And the way they got the call—this is very interesting—right down in the basement area of this little building is a door to the outside. It really was like you're going into the basement. But that was the police station, that was the county police headquarters. And they had [inaudible; audience noise]. They didn't have any radios, so they had a north car and a south car. And when the car wasn't busy, it would circle the Court Square, and if the light was on, they'd come in and find out what [inaudible] needed help. So, you can imagine, with 269 square miles of county, how long it took to get the police.

This is a very interesting point: DeKalb County, in 1920, when Eleanor Raoul was the first female graduate [sic] of Emory University Law School, and she chaired a drive to get women's right to vote. And in 1921 the commissioner appointed more police officers, and they had raised their salary in 1921; they were making $150 a month. And in 1923 a DeKalb native, Rebecca Latimer Felton, became the first female U.S. Senator. I found that very interesting [*voice trails off*] that back in 1923 we had a U.S. Senator, which is something you wouldn't imagine [inaudible] going on during those times, but that's true. And then in 1923 Commissioner Nash, he got real upset with the police department because the officers seemed to be more politically involved than they did enforcing the law, and they went against him in his campaign; so, he fired the whole police department. And then on October 21 in that same year--that was in September--the grand jury got mad at the commissioner and put them all back to work. And then again in 1923 Augustus [sic] Borglum began work on the Stone Mountain carving, [inaudible] the Confederacy. And he defaced the mountain, and the mountain caused so many problems out there until later on they discharged him. The mountainside, this side of the mountain, they said was ruined forever. Then in 1925 they hired Augustus Lukeman, and he worked on that and got it partially done to create a new carving. And after three years he was only partially done—he only had it partially done. He ran out of—END OF RECORDING

Transcribed by CS