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Mark Greenberg: Well, here we are. This is Mark Greenberg, and I am the director of the Florida Studies Center at the University of South Florida, part of the USF Library system. It’s my pleasure to be with Dr. Samuel Proctor today on the twenty-fourth of August, 2002. We’re in the History Department Library in Flint Hall on the University of Florida campus. We’re going to spend the better part of a couple of days together doing a life oral history. With no further ado, let me start, please, Dr. Proctor, by asking you where and when you were born.

Samuel Proctor: I was born in Jacksonville, Florida. March 29, 1919.

MG: What do you know about your family’s history or heritage before they came to America, or their arrival?

SP: Let me talk to you a little bit about my family, and I’m going to do it for both sides of the family. My mother’s side of the family, the Schneider—S-c-h-n-e-i-d-e-r—came from St. Petersburg, Russia in the early 1890s directly to Baltimore [Maryland]. My father’s family came from Poland. That’s the part I’m going to start with, first of all.

Now, this means that both families came from Eastern Europe. That part of Jewish history is somewhat shadowy. Jews were reported according to the archival records. In Eastern Europe, probably about the year 1000, some probably came up from the Middle East. Others came from Eastern Europe, Germany, and so on. But whatever, that’s what they were. They were there in very large numbers.

My father’s family came from Lomza—L-o-m-z-a—Poland, which was a sizeable city and a city of some merit, both economically and intellectually, at the time. It was also in the Lomza guberniya, which was similar—a guberniya is similar to what we would call a state here in the United States. My great-grandfather, my father’s grandfather, for whom he is named, was called Yankel Borrach. They gave him the Yiddish names. [It] would be
Jacob Borrach today. He never came by anything. I know very little about him, except his name. I knew nothing absolutely about his wife at all. I don’t know what his business was. I don’t know where he came from. I know that Jews had not been permitted to live in Lomza until after the end of the Napoleonic Period in 1815. So, he may not have even been born there. He may have immigrated, migrated in from some other place. But the point is, he was.

I know of at least two children that he had. One, of course, was my grandfather, who once again had the Yiddish name of Yudel, but later on became Julius. His sister [was] Betsy or Bertha, and she was the one who immigrated first to the United States and settled and lived in New Haven, Connecticut. I’ll get to get later on. There probably was a third person, a third son, but I don’t even have his name. It’s just a shadowy kind of thing.

My grandfather Yudel—once again, I don’t know anything about his early life. His marriage to my grandmother, Ida Esther, I’m sure was an arranged marriage. He came from Lomza. She came from what they called Makova, which is today Makow—M-a-k-o-w. She was three years older than he was. She was born in 1869; he was born in 1872. I don’t know whether she was considered an old maid or what. But anyway, he arrived in Makova, and that became his home until he migrates years later to the United States.

He made his living by being, of all things, a **tzitzit** maker. **Tzitzits**, you know, are the fringes that Orthodox Jews wear on their garments under their outer garments. That’s what he did. He got the wool, he washed and combed the wool, and he made **tzitzits**. I think he also assembled **tallits**; they’re a religious artifact. He couldn’t have gotten very wealthy (laughs) from that kind of business. That was his profession.

My grandmother—and they had several children together. My father was the oldest of the boys, his brother Morris and his younger brother David. There were two female babies born also to my grandparents, who did not survive, and they had no names as far as I know.

Now, my grandmother had an interesting background. Her name was Ida Esther Rosenthal. Her father was a man who, in Europe, was called Tsyon—T-s-y-o-n—but in America later—I don’t know whether he adopted or whether it translated into Nathan Rosenthal. He and his wife, who was named Mirl—M-i-r-l—Hannah Rosenthal, were married. Nathan—I don’t know what his business was in Makova. By the way, his father’s name was Herman, and his mother’s name was Fanny. But the point is that he had at least two children: my grandmother and her brother, a man by the name of David Meir—M-e-i-r. We think a third child named Joseph, because one of my brothers is named Joseph and we think so, who did not come. He married a woman in Poznań, Poland, and as far as I know disappears, although they probably stayed in contact with each other.

My grandmother’s father, Rosenthal, decides to come to America. He leaves somewhere around 1869, 1870. He comes to New York City. He later claimed, when he was getting his citizenship, that he’d come in 1865, but that’s impossible if my grandmother was born
in 1869. He comes to New York and he gets a job—I think as a peddler—and saves a little money and sends it back home to Mirl, his wife, with the understanding that she would now come to the United States with the family. She decided not to, whatever reason; we don’t know. Maybe she was afraid? Maybe the rabbi told her not to? Maybe she thought this was a good opportunity to get rid of Nathan? But whatever, she refused to come.

After about a year, maybe longer than that, after he had sent money and had written these desperate letters—“When are you going to arrive,” and so on—he gave her an ultimatum. He said, “I’m too young. I can’t—” he was, by the way, born in 1847, so he was a young man. He said, “I’m not going to live alone.” So he divorced her. I was never able to find in the New York records a record of a divorce, but he must have given her a get, a Jewish divorce, because she marries again, and she would not have done that without the get.

He lives in New York on the Lower East Side. He meets a woman by the name of Selma Wolfenheim—W-o-l-f-e-n-h-e-i-m. She later drops the “en;” it’s just Wolfheim. She’s [from] a Jewish family from Prussia, who had also come over some time in the 1860s. They decide to get married, and they do that on March 29, 1873. At that time, he says this is his first marriage. I don’t think he ever revealed to this new family that developed anything about his past, because when I began doing research in relatively recent years, the handful of descendents that still remain—all of this came as a mystery to them. In fact, they were skeptical at this whole story because they had absolutely never heard anything about it whatsoever.

Anyway, he gets married in her family’s home. They lived on Orchard Street down on the Lower East Side. All of them, I suspect, were relatively poor people. He still is a peddler. They began building their family. The first child was named Flora. She was born in New York City in 1874, relatively shortly after; the marriage was just nine months before. The family, at that time, were living on Essex Street, once again on the Lower East Side. The second child was Jenny. She was born in Brooklyn, New York. The third child was Della. Della was born in Elmira. They left New York, and they moved upstate. Della’s husband was instrumental, as I understand it, in founding the St. Louis Summer Opera Series. He began to develop a national reputation. The fourth child, still again a girl, by the name of Haddy, who was born in New York.

And then in 1883—and by the way, he becomes a naturalized citizen in September of 1876. In 1883, Nathan and the entire family moved to St. Louis, Missouri. His brothers-in-law had a prosperous skin and pelt business there. St. Louis was an important port on the Mississippi River. Skins, pelts, and furs were—there was a big market for them, not only in the United States but in Europe. They dealt in that. Nathan had left whatever job he had in New York and moves to St. Louis, and that becomes his home for the rest of his life.

He goes to work for his brothers-in-law, and he had a variety of jobs over the years. He was on the road buying and selling hides and skins. Later he was a buyer in hides and wool for the Saks Company in St. Louis. For still another company, he was vice president
of the Purity Importing Company, which dealt in wines and liquors. And then for the end of his life, he was in the wool business. And he dies in—let me see. (shuffles papers) Nathan died on February 25, 1925, while on a visit to his daughter Jenny in Nashville, Tennessee. The cause of his death was kidney failure. He was buried February 27, 1925 in the United Hebrew Cemetery in St. Louis.

The only thing I want to add about Nathan, because that’s a part of the family that we’ve always heard about, and I guess I’m the first one that’s unearthed these details. He obviously never made any effort to contact his original family. His son David came over to the United States and settled in Chicago [Illinois] and raised a large family there. My grandmother, Ida Esther, came over and lived in New Haven. She later moved to Jacksonville, Florida. They knew that Nathan was living in St. Louis, and he may have known where they were, but no effort was ever made to establish contact.

In 1915, my father—and I’ll mention this later on again—my father, together with a friend, was hitchhiking across the United States from New Haven to San Francisco [California]; there was an international exposition. My father knew about his grandfather Nathan in St. Louis, and he made it his business to go there. He contacted him, and my father told him that his grandfather was very pleasant. He did not ask very much about the family at all. Obviously, he knew where they were. They had a very pleasant meeting. His grandfather did not invite him to his home or anything; he saw him at his office. That was the only contact that was ever made with Nathan Rosenthal’s first family. So, he disappears from the history of our family.

Mirl, back in Poland with her religious divorce, marries a man by the name of David Meyer, who owns a small livery stable in Makova. By the way, Makova, was the Jewish name for Makow. It had a pretty sizeable Jewish population. It was fairly close to Warsaw. It was on a main route, the railroad route. It survived as a Jewish community until World War II, when the Nazis moved in. It’s there today. The Jewish section of the town has been destroyed, so there are no remnants at all, even in the cemetery.

Mirl and David have children. His name was David Meyer—F-a-t-e-r. Many of those were lost in the Holocaust, but at least five members of the family survived the Holocaust. Several members of the family are living in Israel today. We have made contact with them. We know them, correspond with them, and have visited over there.

My grandmother had three children. I’ve already mentioned my father, Jack Proctor. Yankel Borrach Yutkovitch became Jack Proctor, and there’s a story there. His brother, Morris, [was] two years younger than he. My father was born in July 1896. My uncle, Morris, was born two years later, 1898. His daughter, Harriett, lives in Moosup, Connecticut today. Their younger brother, David, was born in 1903. He died and is buried in Jacksonville, also.

My grandparents came to the United States after the turn of the century. My grandfather was in the Russo-Japanese War. He was conscripted by the Russian army, although he was married. They were not supposed to take married men, but they did. He became a
valet. He didn’t have any special skills, and they didn’t need tzitzit makers in the Russian army at the time. He stayed in service; he never saw any fighting activity until the end of the war.

Nineteen aught-five [1905], I guess, the Russo-Japanese war ends. Almost immediately after that, he leaves Europe, leaves Poland. He comes to the United States by way of Ellis Island. He goes to New Haven, where his sister Betsy lived. Betsy had come over in 1893. She married a man by the name of Kevy—K-e-v-y—Harrison. They had two sons. Both have died very young. They operated a secondhand furniture store. My grandfather became a peddler in New Haven. He remained a peddler all the years that he lived in New Haven, and never became an American citizen. He was always an alien.

Shortly after he arrived and saved enough money, he sent money back for his wife, Ida Esther, my grandmother, and their young son David. David was now four years old when they come in January of 1909, leaving behind my father and his brother Morris with their grandmother, Mirl, until there could be money sent over for them. Shortly afterwards, that is exactly what happened. They left in July of 1909 from Makova. Now, the grandfather—his step-grandfather, actually—with his livery stable, was able to get them across the border because they didn’t have any papers.

They went from there by train to Rotterdam [Netherlands]. They boarded the ship. They had steerage tickets, and of course, as children, they were even cheaper. They boarded the ship in Rotterdam, the Noordam. It’s a Holland American ship. It’s relatively new; it had been launched in 1902. They sailed across the Atlantic to New York, where their family met them.

Now, my father was exactly thirteen years old when he made this expedition. Remember, the Russians believed that if a Jewish boy was bar mitzvah at thirteen and an adult, he was eligible to be conscripted into the army. So the Jewish families made every effort they possibly could to avoid that, because if they were brought in, sometimes it was for as long as twenty years, and they were lost. My father traveled as being eleven years old. On the papers on the ship he’s listed as eleven years old, and his brother is nine years old. They just reduced their ages by two years. Anyway, I think that was a perilous journey to go to Makova, two young kids like that on their own. I have never been able to figure out whether they went as part of a group or not, but I think not, because I’ve never turned up any evidence to question that.

Anyway, they come to the United States. They come to New Haven. The family is established there. My grandfather, as I say, had a little horse and buggy, and he went around buying junk and then they were selling it on the weekend, which is the traditional way they operated. My father, now—he was born in 1896, and this is 1909, so he’s getting up in years. He did not know English, either to speak it, read it, or write it. He knew Yiddish, he knew Hebrew, he knew Polish. So, he went to school. They had a special school for immigrants. They called it immediately the Greenhorn School. He went up as far as the fourth grade. By this time, he was embarrassed by the fact that he’s almost a grown man and he’s in the fourth grade.
So, he drops out. He gets a job delivering the *New Haven Register*. The Jewish section was almost immediately adjacent to the old Yale campus, particularly the area where the law school was located. In those years, and maybe still now, the newsboys would deliver a newspaper to the professors’ office and come around at the end of the week or the end of the month to collect what was owed them. William Howard Taft, when he left the presidency in Washington, went back to Yale as dean of the law school. He was one of my father’s customers. (laughs) My father always took great pride in that.

In 1915, he and a non-Jewish friend whose name was Proctor—I think it was Harry Proctor, but I’ve never been able to guarantee that—decided to go across country. My father always had the wanderlust. They went to San Francisco. There was an international exposition there marking the opening of the Panama Canal—World’s Fair. That’s when he meets his grandfather in St. Louis. So, they make that journey together, and they travel as brothers. My father greatly liked the idea of being Jack Proctor, rather than Yankel Yutkovitch. So later, when he became a citizen, he legally changed his name. My family, my boys, have been eternally grateful ever since. (laughs) As they said, “How do you spell Yutkovitch?”

He came back to New Haven, and from New Haven he went traveling again, first to New Orleans. How he learned about employment in Jacksonville, I don’t know. He moves into Jacksonville around 1917. He gets a job in a haberdashery store, where a man by the name of Schwartz ran it. He later, as it got closer to World War I, turned it into a military uniform store. That’s where he meets my mother, Celia Schneider.

Now, let me go from the paternal side to the maternal side, my mother’s side. The family came from St. Petersburg, Russia. How they got there, I don’t know. You will recall from your own history that when Austria, Russia, and Prussia divided Poland up, a large section of eastern Poland went to Russia. It had a very heavy, large Jewish population. The Russians were glad to get the labor force, but they were not happy about them being Jews. The empress, Elizabeth¹ first, and then later Catherine the Great², set up what they called the Pale of Settlement where Jews could live. If they went out for whatever reason, they had to have special permits.

St. Petersburg was not within the Pale, but my great-grandfather, whose name was Samuel, and for whom I am named, was a tailor. He had a contract with the military. He shortened pants or did whatever was needed. So, they were allowed to live in a special compound. It worked advantageously for the children, because they were able to get a better education than they would have normally. My grandfather Michael, for instance, became an engineer. Not an electrical engineer, but one that worked on the trains. He was on the run from St. Petersburg to Moscow. Later, when he came to the United States, he was not able to get into the union in Baltimore because they did not accept Jews. He was never able to practice his skills over here.

¹ Elizabeth of Russia (1709-1762) was the Empress of Russia from 1741 to 1762.
² Catherine II of Russia, also known as Catherine the Great (1729-1796), reigned as Empress of Russia from 1762 to 1796.
His father did not immigrate, but they had a large family. My grandfather Michael, he had three sisters: Sarah, Lina, and Rebecca, whom they called Reba, and who died at a relatively young age—sixteen—of tuberculosis. He had several sons. He had David—Jacob David—Jacob they dropped; it was too Jewish sounding, so he became David Schneider—and Louis and Abe. It was a sizeable family that migrated over to the United States, directly to Baltimore. They operated a second-hand store on 214 Eutad Street—E-u-t-a-d. That building, by the way, survived until about fifteen years ago. I saw it. When they were building the new baseball stadium there, which was just down the road, all of the buildings in that area were demolished.

My grandfather Michael, who was not able to practice his engineering skills, held a variety of jobs in Baltimore. He was married to my grandmother, Rebecca Wolfson, whose father was also named Samuel. Her mother’s name was Sophie. By the way, my grandfather Michael’s father’s name was Samuel, and his mother’s name was—I’ll think of that and put it in later. (laughs) It slipped my mind for just a moment.

MG: You’re doing awfully well so far.

SP: (laughs) Somewhere. Anyway, they were living in Baltimore. My grandfather has a variety of jobs [and] a large family that needs to be taken care of. He had all kinds of jobs. He was a tailor, although I don’t know what he knew about tailoring. He even got a job one year as a lamp lighter. They had gas lamps, of course, at that time, so he got that job, and it only lasted one year. Disappointment. They even operated—and my mother remembers this, together with her brother, David—they would bring milk on the train in these large five or ten gallon containers, and then my mother and her brother would divide this up into bottles. They became delivery people of milk. That lasted only a while because they had a horse and buggy, and a donkey or mule or something. The neighbors complained, so they had to get rid of that, and that ended their dairying activities.

My mother had an aunt, Sarah. Sarah Mehlman, Sarah Schneider. She married David Mehlman—M-e-h-l-m-a-n—in Baltimore. David was a very handsome young man with lots of different activities. He was a photographer; he did all kinds of things. They got connected up with somebody, and they bought a pawnshop in St. Augustine. This is how the family comes to St. Augustine. In 1907 they bought a pawnshop from a man by the name of Tralinsky on the corner of Washington Street and Bridge Street. They moved down to St. Augustine. They never had any children of their own. They later brought Sarah’s sister, Lina, and her husband, Abe, to St. Augustine. They had an establishment on Washington Street, a saloon. The two families lived next door to each other. The Fagan family now lives in Jacksonville; the Mehlman family, also, survivors live in Jacksonville and West Palm Beach.

The Mehlmans have no family and children, and they’re desperate for children. They bring my mother’s older sister, two years older than my mother, my aunt Minnie. My mother was born in 1898, November 1898; Aunt Minnie was born in 1896 on November 11. She always said she was born on Armistice Day before there was an Armistice Day.
She comes to St. Augustine to live with the Mehlmans. It’s while she was there that she meets a man from Jacksonville by the name of Alexander Spevak, who had come over often from Jacksonville—had friends there, played cards. They got together. They liked each other. My aunt was a very handsome woman. Alex had a thriving business, a very fine dress shop on Bay Street in Jacksonville called Alexander’s. They were married in the Mehlman home in St. Augustine in 1916. They moved to Jacksonville, have a house on Beaver Street, and are living the good life with young couples in Jacksonville.

The Mehlmans, now, don’t have anybody, so they brought my mother down from Baltimore to live with them. She comes to Jacksonville first, because Minnie is now pregnant with their first child, my cousin Marjorie. My mother stays in Jacksonville until Marjorie is born. Then she comes to St. Augustine to live with the Mehlmans. She wasn’t there very long—long enough to take some piano lessons at St. Joseph’s with the nuns, but that didn’t last very long. She was not musically inclined.

She didn’t like St. Augustine: it was too small, too dull. She didn’t like what the Mehlmans wanted her to do in the store and the house. One day when they were at the store and she was home—this was all plotted out ahead of time—she packed her things, and she went to the bus station. She got on the bus, and she came to Jacksonville. She left the Mehlmans behind. She left a note for them to tell them that she was moving out, so they wouldn’t think she was being abducted or anything. She moves in with Aunt Minnie and Uncle Alex, and she begins working in the store.

In the meantime, I told you my father was in Jacksonville. He was working with Mr. Schwartz in the store right across the street from what was then the railroad terminal. He lived with the Bono family—the Bonos’ Bar-B-Q. Mr. Bono was a tailor—it was his son David that got into the barbeque business—and Florence Bono. They lived on Duval Street. There were several people that lived there, as roomers. My father would come up from Schwartz’s to up the road—it’s only three or four blocks—and he met my mother.

It was a love affair almost from the first moment. They dated; they went to the dances at the YMHA [Young Men’s Hebrew Association]. That area was a small ghetto with the Conservative and Orthodox Jews that had begun moving in in the 1890s. On one of the episodes, he took her boating in a rowboat or a canoe on the Trout River, and the boat turned over. He always said, “I saved your life.” (laughs) I think they were close to shore anyway, and waded ashore. They were married in Jacksonville in May of 1918. Remember, my father is an immigrant at the time, and he is not— (shuffles papers) I’m looking for something here, and I think I have found it.

He no longer works with Mr. Schwartz. He gets a job in the shipyard. There were several shipyards in Jacksonville at the time. He goes to work for one of the small ones in the inventory office. He always said, “I don’t know how to build ships, but I know how to count parts.” The shipyard was called Hilyer-Sperring-Dunn Shipyards. I don’t know anything about them, but he was an inventory clerk there. He worked until the end of the war. They were married in 1918, and I’m born the following year.
When they were first married, they lived on Monroe Street with my mother’s aunt, Lina Fagan. Then they rented an apartment on Duval Street—a two-story house with an apartment downstairs. And the Peltz family—P-e-l-t-z—Harry Peltz lived upstairs. They became, from that moment, lifelong friends. It’s kind of an interesting turn. It was through their daughter [that] Bessie and I met each other; she arranged (laughs) our first date together. The relationship with the Peltz family, as I say, was a good one. It continued from the time that I was a baby until they moved on.

When the war was over, the shipyards begin to close. My father got a temporary job with a clothing store on Broad Street. Then through some connection—maybe it was through David Mehlman’s St. Augustine connections, because they were still in the pawnshop business and doing well in St. Augustine, although they were to leave there pretty quickly, because my other uncle, Abe Fagan, had the saloon, and of course Florida, along with the nation, went dry. So, they moved to Jacksonville. They had made money, though, in the saloon. My uncle, David Mehlman—called himself Honest Dave; that was the name of the store—also had made money and owned a couple pieces of property, small buildings on St. George Street.

My father, through whatever connection, gets a job on the Florida East Coast Railroad, which had its headquarters in St. Augustine. As a baby, we moved to St. Augustine, on the corner of St. George Street and Cathedral Place, where the Barnett Bank is located today and where there was a building called the Bishop’s Building. There was storage downstairs, and there were small apartments upstairs. That’s where we lived.

My father worked on the train. You remember the old days—or maybe you don’t remember it, Mark. They had dining carts on there, but not too many people went to the dining cart. They had these people going up and down the aisles selling sandwiches and coffee. That was my father. He was making the run from St. Augustine to Miami and back. In the meantime, my mother was operating a small gift shop/fruit stand/magazine place in the Florida East Coast terminal. She didn’t own it; she was just working there.

I guess the greatest episode was in February of 1921, just a few weeks after the presidential election. Warren G. Harding arrives in St. Augustine. He had made a triumphal boat trip down, and he’s getting prepared for the inaugural, which in those years, you know, was March 4. He comes into St. Augustine. There were no security problems then as there are today. My mother was there with me. As he was crossing through, he saw me, and he walked over and picked me up—that was my contact with the presidency—and he put me down. I thought they could have picked a more respectable president to be picked up, but anyway, that was my contact with greatness.

Shortly after that, my father had the opportunity to buy a small grocery store in Jacksonville on Myrtle Avenue. That’s what they did. They left St. Augustine and moved to Jacksonville. In the meantime, my brother Meyer was born in September of 1921. My brother Dave was born in September of 1922. Meyer on September 26 and David on September 16. David’s bris was held in the synagogue, because it was Rosh Hashanah. We lived on Elder Street, just around the corner.
In fact, absolutely the earliest memory I have is—I couldn’t have been more than three or four years old, although Meyer and Dave were already born. My father didn’t get the grocery store, I think, until 1923. I got up, and in my nightgown I walked from the house, which was just a few feet away, and we were there alone—you wouldn’t do that with children today—and I walked over to the store. There was my mother and father wondering what was going on. They quickly hustled me back home.

The other early memory I have is my first episode in school. The building was East Riverside. My birthday is March. That’s when I would have been six years old. My father got the bright idea that I was smart enough to start early. He registers me the previous September and tells them I’m six years old, which, of course, I was not. It wasn’t very long before they found out what my true age was and evicted me from the school. That was my first beginnings as a student.

Later on, when we are no longer in the grocery business—and you’ve seen that picture of me in that mom and pop store, which my parents had. Those kinds of stores were very common at the time, little neighborhood stores. The area that we lived in was a black neighborhood on one side of Myrtle Avenue and a blue collar section on the other side. Elder Street was just a one-block street; it was not paved at all. We lived in that little cottage for a while, and then moved across the street. I remember that. I had an apartment there. We never owned the property at all. The man who owned the building was the Knauer family—K-n-a-u-e-r. They still live in Jacksonville. And then my parents’ store; next to that was a little dry goods store, Jewish-owned. We knew them very well. Their descendants lived in Jacksonville and continued to be friends.

My father stayed in the grocery business about two years. Then [he] had an opportunity to sell it to a couple, the Eisenbergs, who came down for whatever reason from Atlanta [Georgia]. They sold it to the Meides—M-e-i-d-e-s—which was a, I guess, a Syrian family that had a few stores like that. My father had the opportunity to buy a small department store on Florida Avenue in the 1200 block, which he did. We moved out to that area and had a small house right around the corner from the store, and lived there for a short while, until we moved to 355 West Seventh Street, on the corner. It was a big two-story house.

In the meantime, my brother George is born in 1925. He was born on February 22. His name was supposed to be Joseph, but the doctor said, “You can’t name him Joseph; this is George Washington’s birthday.” Joseph became George. The Joseph, I think, was my grandmother’s brother back in Europe that we know nothing at all about. Obviously by this time he’s dead, and they know about it. My grandmother insisted on naming him for him, and that’s the way it was.

Anyway, that’s the story of my early life. My father has the dry goods store. We’re living in Springfield [Florida], which was near the synagogue now. It was not an exclusively Jewish ghetto, but there were lots of Jewish families in that area. I was close enough in those years to walk to the synagogue, which I did four times a week when I came home.
from regular classes for Hebrew classes. Our school [at] Ninth [Street] and Perry [Street] is now Beulah Beal [Young Parents Center]. I registered there in the second grade, and then started in the third grade. They decided that I had enough skills, so I skipped the third grade and went into the fourth grade. It [the school] went through the sixth [grade].

Then I went to junior high school, Kirby-Smith, which was several blocks away, but close enough to walk, also. That was the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades. I did very well there. I remember when I was in the eighth grade, there was a contest to write poetry. I wrote a piece about citrus, and it won ten dollars. I think the Civitan Club, or one of the luncheon clubs, invited me to the luncheon at the Roosevelt Hotel.

MG: Do you remember the poem?

SP: (laughs) I read the poem.

MG: But do you remember it?

SP: No, I don’t remember it. I think I ought to look it up in the paper; maybe it’s in there. Then I remember each year we did a Shakespeare play in literature. In the eighth grade, we did Midsummer Night’s Dream. They decided to portray it, and I became the Duke—Duke Theseus, is it? It was such a marvelous success in school that they put it on downtown in a small building that the Veterans was operating there. We did that for three nights. That was my experience on the stage. I didn’t become an actor as a result of that.

Then we moved from West Street to Evergreen Avenue, and we lived there for a while.

MG: Were these progressively larger or nicer homes?

SP: Not necessarily. The biggest and nicest home was the one on Seventh Street, Seventh and Perry. That was a very lovely home. None of them did we ever own; they were all rented properties. But the one on Evergreen Avenue was very nice. My grandparents lived across the street. There were six or seven Jewish families in the neighborhood. My grandparents on my mother’s side in the 1920s had moved from Baltimore down to Jacksonville. They operated a small clothing store, and not for very long; it was not successful. My grandfather had a sundry store. It was right around the corner from Evergreen Avenue, and as I say, we lived across the street from them. Their youngest son, Nathan, who is three years older than I am, he and I became best friends. He’s the one I lived with as a freshman when I came to the university. He was a senior in chemistry at the time.

From there, we moved to Riverside. We lived on the corner of Ernest [Street] and West Street in a house, 729 West Street, and then moved, eventually, next door into a house that my grandparents had lived in. All of these were rental to begin with, but my father bought the second house at 735 West Street. That was the only piece of property they ever owned, though.
We then transferred schools. From Kirby-Smith—I had finished at Kirby-Smith, although we were living in Riverside, so it was kind of a cumbersome thing. I would leave school—this is when I was in the ninth grade—walk to where the Spevaks were now living in Springfield on Fifth Street, and stayed there long enough until it was time to go to Hebrew school. I went to Hebrew school for one hour, Monday through Thursday. My father picked me up there, and then we went home. It gave me a long day, but it didn’t seem, as I look back on it now, to be very arduous. There were a lot of other kids doing exactly the same thing. Anyway, I never became what you’d call a Hebrew scholar with all of that going to Hebrew school.

When we transferred, moved to Riverside, the senior high school was Robert E. Lee. I went there the first year. In the meantime, of course, this is the Depression Decade. When the boom bubble burst in Florida and the hurricanes came in twenty-six [1926] and twenty-eight [1928], it devastated the economy of the state. A lot of small business operators were wiped out, including my father. My father lost everything. He went to work selling sheets and blankets and so on, mainly to black, but also to blue/white [collar] workers—customers—who were also very poor and could only pay maybe fifty cents or a dollar a week. As I say, times were very hard for the Proctor family.

In the summer of 1935, through a connection, I got a job working in a wholesale liquor place. A Jewish family owned it. It was a Southern Liquors, one of the biggest in the state. In those years, we had just become wet in Florida a year or two before. The state collected an excise tax on each bottle. What you had to do was open up the cases, lay the bottles out on a flat surface, and put a stamp on there, affix a stamp on there, then pack the bottles back into the case, seal them up so they could be delivered to customers. I worked back there with a couple of Jewish guys: Irwin Canner, who was a very good friend of mine, and a couple of the others. I was paid the lordly sum of twelve dollars a week, which at that time was considered very nice.

MG: Were you out of school at this time?

SP: This is the summer of 1935. At the end of the summer, with consultation with my parents and a lot of indecision, I decide to drop out of school and to finish up in night school. That’s exactly what I did. I worked from 1935 to 1937 and contributed money to the support of the household. I went to night school. Classes were in Duval High School. There was a lady there, a teacher who was very kind to me. I took the regular academic courses. I also learned how to type and do things like that. I finished up with my class and graduated in June of 1937. Nobody was the wiser (laughs) of my departure from the academic career.

MG: So you were at the end of your sophomore year. You decided to leave and did your junior and senior years at night school?

SP: Yeah, two years.

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1 Referring to the 1926 Miami Hurricane (September 18, 1926) and the 1928 Okeechobee Hurricane (September 16, 1928).
MG: How were you as a student?

SP: How was I as a student? I was a very good student. Obviously, I had no problems. I took the courses I was supposed to take. I obviously made decent grades. I don’t remember my getting on the scholarship roll at all. I don’t know if they had scholarship rolls for night school. And I wasn’t the only one doing this, you see. At that time, this was not an unusual sacrifice to be making. Lots of people were doing the same thing.

So, in September of 1937, I came to the University of Florida.

MG: Okay. We’ll stop there for a second. I want to work back a little bit, ’cause I have some questions about some of the earlier things you said. Much of what you told me about your family I know is your own research done in the last several years. How much interaction as a child did you have with some of the folks that you’ve told me about this morning? Did you know your grandparents well? Aunts and uncles, great-aunts and uncles?

SP: I was very fortunate. It’s a long-lived family. My grandparents on my mother’s side lived just several doors away from us. I was very close to my grandfather, Michael. When I came home from school, I passed in front of their house, and almost always, he was sitting under the porch in a rocking chair waiting for me to visit a little bit.

He told me lots of stories. For instance, he told me he was in St. Petersburg [Russia] the day in 1881 that the Czar [Alexander II] was assassinated. He was downtown—he was, I think, eleven or twelve years old at the time. He was downtown, and he heard all the commotion. He didn’t hear any shots, but he heard a commotion of crowds that were—crowd noises and people running, and so he ran to where—by that time the police had arrived, and had blocked off the streets. He quickly learned what it was.

Of course, this assassination of the czar greatly weakened the position of Jews, because the courtiers, you know, were looking for whoever was responsible and blamed the assassination on the Jews. The situation became even more critical. Government sponsored pogroms came about, and of course, this is what encouraged the large immigration to the United States, a hundred thousand plus or more every year. This is when my family, my mother’s family, left St. Petersburg.

So, in answer to your question, did I learn a lot? Yes. I learned a lot from my grandfather, and I learned a lot from my father. My father talked a lot about his past. I learned some of it from some of the other members of the family. I was very family-oriented, and in some ways, kind of a favorite of the family. I was the oldest male grandson. Today, I regret the fact that I did not ask a million more questions. But at least it gave me a background of things to work on.

MG: Did the family speak Yiddish?

4 Alexander II of Russia (1818-1881) was the Emperor, or Czar, of the Russian Empire from 1855 to 1881.
SP: Only among themselves. My grandmother—my father’s mother, Ida Esther—spoke Yiddish all the time. They moved to Jacksonville in 1940 from New Haven. It was just—the winters and all were too much for him, and my grandfather was too old to be a peddler and all of those things. My grandmother had a black maid. Everybody had blacks working in the household at that time. As I remember, she talked Yiddish to the maid, and the maid talked Southern to her. They seemed to have communicated well with each other. My mother spoke Yiddish always to her mother. They conversed in Yiddish, but not with us. My grandfather talked to me in English.

It’s interesting, also: when my grandfather came over, he was still single. He came to Baltimore because his aunt, Rachel Epstein, lived in Baltimore. My grandmother came over because her sister, Sarah Wolf, was living in Baltimore. They were just a young couple. My grandfather did not know how to speak Yiddish. They did not speak Yiddish in their home in Russia, they spoke Russian. My grandmother didn’t know anything but Yiddish. My grandfather, to pursue this romance, had to learn how to speak Yiddish, which he became very accomplished in, and both of them had to learn how to speak English.

MG: Did the family—were they proud of their Eastern European heritage?

SP: Were they proud of it? Oh, yeah. They did not try to forget their past at all. They had really not had an unhappy past at all. They had not been subjected to a lot of these things. I don’t think life was very generous for my father’s family in New Haven, and certainly he was not happy about being scooped up and put into the Russo-Japanese war, which he had no commitment for one way or the other. My grandmother never liked the Poles at all. When anybody said anything about them, she gave a couple of spits. (laughs) I think what happened, according to my father, is that she got into an altercation with a Polish police officer in Makova, and they threatened to lock her up for a day or two. So, she never was happy with them from that point on.

Anyway, they came to New Haven, as I told you, where my grandfather’s sister Betsy and her husband Kevy Harrison lived. I want to mention that the Harrisons had two sons. The second son died when he was four years old. He was scalded; a pot of hot water fell off the stove and burned him almost completely. The second son died of leukemia, acute leukemia. I have a vague recollection of them in the 1940s. They both died in 1943, forty-four [1944], and they’re buried in New Haven.

MG: How about religion? Were Jewish holidays, foods—? Tell me a little bit, especially as a young kid, how you celebrated holidays, what role—besides Hebrew school—Judaism played in the family?

SP: We celebrated every holiday, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur particularly big. In those early years, we walked to the synagogue. We did not drive at all. Sometimes, when we lived on Evergreen, it was a distance to walk, and it was hot.
MG: Traditional service?

SP: Traditional service. It was an Orthodox synagogue that was trending towards Conservative, but it was an Orthodox synagogue to begin with. The Orthodox synagogue had been organized in Jacksonville in the early 1800s—I mean, the early 1900s. Rabbi Benjamin, who was not really an ordained rabbi but was the accepted rabbi there, married my parents. He officiated on all the brises. Everybody in the community loved him, and he was well respected by everybody. From that synagogue, which was old and small, they moved to one out on Third [Street] and Silver Street.

My father played an active role. He was on the board of the synagogue. Yes, we involved ourselves in all of the holidays: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur. We got new clothes; we went to services. Everybody in the family fasted on Yom Kippur. We always had big seders, usually at my grandfather's house. Then when he got too infirm, my mother took over the role. It was not unusual for us to have twelve, fifteen, eighteen, twenty people at the seder. Purim was a big deal. We went to hear the Megillah reading. That was a big operation. Sukkos we all participated at. We went to Sunday school in addition to Hebrew school. Me and all of my brothers were bar mitzvah. They didn’t give big extravagant parties in those years, but we did.

We had a very close family relationship, not only with my grandparents, but with my aunts and uncles. We didn’t ever do anything alone. If there was anything in the family, all the family was included, first of all.

MG: You were mentioning, as we switched tapes, about the family: large family, got along well together.

SP: Very large family, got along extremely well. Everybody kind of lived close together. My aunt Minnie and her family lived just a few doors away from us. My grandparents lived five doors away from us on the corner. We saw each other often, and nothing went on that went unnoticed by the rest of the family. You couldn’t do anything without them knowing about it and wanting to know why they hadn’t been included—you just ordinarily [did].

There had been a disruption in the family between the Mehlmans and the Fagans that went back over some business matters in the 1920s. But the Fagans withdrew from the family. We never ever, even to this day, remain close to that part of the family. Their children grew up; their grandchildren grew up. We did not know them. We ourselves did not know the cause of the disruption, but it happened. That was the only failure in the family itself.

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5 In Judaism, the Megillah is a scroll of parchment that contains the story of Esther, traditionally read in synagogues to celebrate Purim.

6 Sukkos, in Judaism, celebrates the harvest and commemorates the period during which the Jews wandered in the wilderness after the Exodus.
We had relatives that lived in Baltimore. My mother’s brothers lived there. We remained very close to them; if we ever went to Baltimore, we stayed with them. When they came to Jacksonville, they ate with us, and they did things. So, it was a very close, traditional family situation.

MG: Tell me a little bit about cooking. I always like to ask about food. Old World recipes?

SP: Yes. I wouldn’t say that my mother was the greatest cook in the world. In later years, after the decade of the thirties [1930s] and my father became more lucrative, they became party people. They loved to go out. My mother particularly loved to play cards with her girlfriends for small stakes: penny and nickel. They played three, four, or five times a week.

She didn’t have too much time to cook, but some things were specialties. She knew how to make gefilte fish like no other person in the world. She was very careful with the kind of fish. She went to the hotel fish market to get exactly what she wanted. She knew how to pickle herrings. She was not the greatest baker in the world. When Purim came, she would bake hamantaschen, but you needed a sledgehammer to get through the dough that she had to get to the prunes that were there. So, on a score of about one to ten, I would give her maybe about a five, or if I was feeling real generous, a six.

My grandmother was also—neither one of them were great cooks at all. They cooked traditionally, threw everything into a big pot, and that was it. They were too poor to serve caviar. But they were very orthodox as far as food was concerned. They all kept kosher homes. My mother bought all of her meat from the kosher butcher. They would call up Safer’s, and she would tell them what she wanted. Within an hour or two, he would deliver it from downtown all the way to out to our house. That’s how it operated.

As I say, Passover we kept. We didn’t eat anything but matzo. We had two seders. A few years they tried making their own wine. My father was a concoctor. He went into the root beer business one year, too. (laughs) Suddenly in the middle of the night, I heard these explosions. They thought somebody was breaking into the house. What it was, it was the root beer, foaming off the tops and the corks or whatever was there were exploding out. That ended his bottling activity. My mother said, “That’s enough. You’re not doing any more of that.”

It’s surprising. We lived in a small house with three bedrooms and one bathroom—my mother and father, and me and my five brothers—yet, we seemed to have survived it. I don’t remember anybody thinking that they were deprived of anything.

MG: How did you get along with your brothers?

SP: Fine. I got along with my brothers very well, always have, and continue with it. We were very close. We talk to each other all the time now. Growing up, of course, there was a variance in age. They had their own.
When the war [World War II] came, three of us—four of us were in service. I was at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, and I’ll tell you about that in a moment. My brother Meyer was in the infantry in Italy. My brother Dave was a bombardier in the Air Force in England. And George was in the Marine Corps in the Pacific, and was badly injured in an incident in Okinawa. I got along well with my brothers.

When the war was over and everybody returned, they took advantage of the GI Bill and they went to the University of Florida. My brother Dave is the only one of the family who did not. He went to the University of Texas at El Paso, ’cause he had married a girl from El Paso. When he was ready for school, the university at Gainesville had already started the semester. He didn’t want to lose any more time. But all the rest of them were Gators.7

They developed their own friends. Kids that they had grown up with continued to be their friends through college. Our house was always kind of a meeting place. They would come whether we were home or not. They would come into the house. My mother didn’t lock the doors. It got to the point—she had this big salami. She would buy five pounds of salami, and they would know which shelf. They would just come in and fix their own sandwiches. Sometimes you walked in the house, and there was one of them sleeping on the couch or something, totally uninvited. (laughs) These are friends they still have today. Oh, yeah, and they called my mother by her first name, Celie. Her name was Celia Schneider Proctor, Celie. Celie used to do real good. (laughs) Yes, I was very close to my brothers, very close to their wives.

MG: What’s the difference in age, remind me? You’re the oldest.

SP: I’m the oldest. The youngest is Irving, who’s now deceased. Irving was born in 1933. We’re all fairly close to each other.

MG: You were born in nineteen [1919], though.

SP: I was born in nineteen [1919]. My brother Meyer was born in twenty-one [1921]. Dave was born in twenty-two [1922]. George was born in twenty-five [1925]. Saul, I think, was born in twenty-eight [1928], and Irving was born in thirty-two [1932].

MG: That’s fourteen years. He’s [Irving] born, and you’re in the middle of high school. Did you have responsibilities? You have to change Irving’s diapers?

SP: (laughs) I didn’t have to change his diapers. Everybody took—Irving was my mother’s favorite.

MG: He was the baby.

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7 University of Florida alumni, named after their mascot, the Gator.
SP: (laughs) He was the baby. Before Irving died, he had had four wives. We all got along very well together. And as I say, my two brothers in Jacksonville see each other and eat together often. We talk to them on the telephone two or three times a week.

MG: Remind me of the extended family. You had two sets of grandparents in Jacksonville, correct?

SP: Right.

MG: Equal time split between them? That worked out well?

SP: The one that lived a few doors away from us I saw every single day. The other grandparents, who came down later in 1940, lived on the other side of town near the synagogue. My grandfather went to services every day, so they had a small apartment about a block away from the synagogue. So I saw them once or twice a week.

MG: You were already twenty-one by the time they arrived.

SP: They took great pride in me. When I became an appointed instructor at the University of Florida, my grandmother—my father’s mother—I could have been the Prince of Wales. “My grandson is a professor!”

MG: (laughs) Tell me a little bit about growing up in Jacksonville. Mention some neighborhoods. Did you interact mostly with Jewish kids? Was there a good mix?

SP: No, there was not a good mix. We had very, very few non-Jewish friends. There were a few non-Jewish neighbors around that we were friendly with. But everybody we knew and socialized with were Jews. First of all, the neighborhood was not completely ghetto. The neighborhood was maybe 75 percent Jewish. You didn’t have to go out seeking people.

And remember, I didn’t do my final two years at school, so I lost a lot of contacts I might otherwise have had with non-Jewish people. My cousin Clara Spevak was only three months older than I was. We had some of the same classes. We walked to school together. My cousin Marjorie—Clara’s now deceased, but Marjorie is still living in Jacksonville. We all went to school together. We had Jewish friends. We did not have many non-Jewish friends. Whatever mix there was in the neighborhood was a very casual mix.

MG: Was the Jewish community in Jacksonville accepted by the larger community? Were there good relations?

SP: There were fairly good relations. There were no major anti-Semitic attacks or situations that came up. There were two synagogues. As I say, it started out Orthodox, but it was becoming increasingly Conservative, as it is today. My family continues to be active. My brother Saul was the president of the synagogue. They now call it the Jacksonville Jewish Center. In the 1920s when they built this edifice, they thought they
would have a synagogue and a recreation center. The Depression changed all of that, but the name stuck. It’s still Jacksonville Jewish Center today.

We remain very active in the synagogue. As I say, it was Conservative. There was a Reform synagogue of German Jews that had been established in the early 1880s, the second oldest congregation in Florida. The oldest is in Pensacola. There was no close relationship between the Reform and the Orthodox. You did not have friends in the other. It’s as though they were living in two separate cities. That was not unusual in the South.

Bessie says that when she was growing up in Atlanta, having a date with a boy from the Reform center was just like having a date with a non-Jewish boy. That was true in Jacksonville. Even today, while there’s more of a closeness today, there’s still many of the old families that you don’t know anything about.

MG: Recreation. Did you go out to the beach? Was there a Jewish beach in Jacksonville?

SP: No, there was not a Jewish beach. Jacksonville Beach, which was about sixteen, eighteen miles away, was where everyone went on the weekend on Sunday. Everybody went to the beach on Sunday. You went early in the morning, you lay out there and get sunburned—much more than was healthy to do, as we now know, but we did.

All the Jewish community—the Jews that went to the beach, and lots of them did, were congregated down near the Casa Marina Hotel. There were benches along there. That’s where you went. You brought your lunch in a box of sandwiches. You ate those on the beach. My parents never went in swimming, but we did because the bathhouse next to the Casa Marina had a pool. You could only get in with a key, so you’d pass the key back and forth between the fence so you only had to pay one admission. That was not an unusual situation at all.

We did go to the beach often. There was a lot of activity on Sunday at the beach. There was gambling there. They had roulette. My mother and her girlfriends who played cards during the week went up to play roulette. They didn’t lose or gain very much, maybe ten dollars, but they thought it was absolutely wonderful. We were there from morning—we usually got out there at about eleven o’clock—until after dark. That was the main activity.

My father was always a great baseball fan. He would go to the baseball games, and he would take us along, too.

MG: Who was playing in Jacksonville at the time?

SP: Jacksonville Suns. We went to the movies a lot. There was a lot of theaters, movie theaters, downtown. I remember in earlier years when I was a kid that my mother would go once a week to the Palace Theater, which also had some acts, live acts, and she would usually take me; the others were too small. We went to the movie. Then we went to the Woolworth’s or Kress’s, which had dining—you know, one of those things—and get a drink. It was a big-time operation.
MG: Let’s talk a little bit more about the Depression. You mentioned that your father’s—this would have been the department store?—didn’t survive the Depression.

SP: It did not survive.

MG: And your decision to leave school was in part, or in large measure, the result of the Depression and your desire to help—

SP: It was totally as a result of the Depression, and the need of the family for the money.

MG: How did the Depression affect the larger Jacksonville?

SP: All the same way. My uncle Alex, who no longer had his dress shop—he had closed it and moved to New York with the family for a variety of reasons, and came back. The Depression was on. He and my father worked for L. B. Price, the same company that sold goods on an installment plan. Times were very hard in Jacksonville for the Jewish community, and I guess for the non-Jewish community. This was not an untypical situation. I don’t think we ever went hungry at all. I don’t remember being deprived of anything like that.

On the other hand, I’m sure that my mother bought the things that were the least expensive. The banana boats used to come into Jacksonville. My father would go down and buy one of those huge stalks of bananas that had maybe 100 or 150 bananas for maybe fifty cents, or seventy-five cents. He would hang it on the back door, on the little porch in the back, and that was our dessert. If you needed something, you went out and pulled off a banana. (laughs) When you emptied the stalk, he went and bought another stalk.

My parents were very close to each other, very close to each other. I’m sure there were arguments from time to time, but I don’t remember anything ferocious. I don’t remember anything threatening their marriage at all. It was a real love match, I think, from beginning to end. They were very close to their children. They were greatly concerned about our academic progress and everything that we were doing. There was nothing that was secret from the family.

MG: Did your mom continue to work? You mentioned she had—

SP: No, no. My mother never worked outside of the home. She had worked in the store, both in the grocery store and worked in the dry goods store. But once that closed, she never left the home to work at all. She really had no skills to work. The jobs were very scarce during the 1930s. After that, my father’s business improved. There was no need for her to work.

MG: How was Jacksonville changing during this time? Is it growing significantly?
SP: It’s growing tremendously. Jacksonville starts out by being for Florida and for the South a sizeable city, because it’s a port city, and the railroads ran in and out of that. It always had a growing population. It was not yet competing with South Florida, although that was beginning as a result of the land boom of the 1920s. Jacksonville was the paramount city. This is where the business operation, the banks, were located. This is where people went for capital investment.

Then, of course, with the end of the war, things began to change dramatically. There had been a lot of military activity in and around Jacksonville. Camp Blanding, which was about forty miles away, was a training encampment, which had, at one time, as many as seventy thousand [personnel]. They would come into Jacksonville on weekends. There was the naval area, which in itself had always been a military area going all the way back to the Spanish American War. During World War I it became Camp Johnson. A lot of those people stayed on. They liked what they saw. They thought the economic opportunities were good. So, Jacksonville began to grow. Since then, it’s been outdistanced by Miami, Tampa, Orlando.

It’s always been a politically conservative community, I think because the financial interests are there, and people like Alfred du Pont and Mrs. du Pont lived there. It was the home for the Atlantic National Bank and the Florida National Bank. I think that was what made it as conservative as it was. Integration did not come easy to Jacksonville.

But the Jewish community got along very well. Jews did not really exert themselves visually in the early years. There were no Jews who were members of the political community.

MG: There were the Dzialynskis.

SP: There was a Dzialynski in the nineteenth century, when Jacksonville was much smaller, Morris Dzialynski, who was the mayor of Jacksonville, and also one of the founders of the reform congregation of Jacksonville. After that, in the twentieth century, you don’t get very much activity. The rabbi of the Reform synagogue, Israel Kaplan, did organize an interfaith service for Thanksgiving that worked very well with the other ministers. Those were just isolated incidents that occurred.

MG: Tell me about growing up in a segregated city. Did you have much interaction with—at one point the store was, you mentioned, in a black neighborhood. Did you have much to do at all with African Americans?

SP: When we lived on Elder Street and I was really a young child, it seemed to me, as I remember—we always had a black maid. Even when we were very poor, we had a black maid. You paid them about two dollars a week. They washed and they ironed, and they did all of the things there. Also, when my father had the grocery store, he had a small car. There was a black man by the name of, I think, Julius that drove the car. My mother

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8 Dzialynski (1841-1907) was mayor from 1881 to 1883. He held several other political offices, including city council, city treasurer, and municipal judge.
never learned to drive, but she always had the chauffeur to drive her around. This enabled my father to get goods back and forth from wherever they were needed in the city.

We had very little contact beyond the maids coming in. Although I didn’t think it was the least bit strange at the time and nobody ever challenged it, the maids always came in by the back door. My mother always had their own plate and forks, as though you thought they would contaminate you if they ate out of your china. But you accepted that without any question about it. My mother didn’t feed them that well; it seems to me they had sardines and orange soda and so on. But they thrived on it. That was as far as it went. You really had no black playmates or black contact with individuals at all.

MG: And certainly not at school.

SP: Not at school. I remember some of the black maids that we had who told stories about their families, stories I can’t remember today—whether they were true or not, I don’t know—about slavery days and things like that. They themselves were not slaves, but their grandparents were.

MG: This, I think, will be of special interest to Madison and to Rebecca. Tell me about Florida before air conditioning.

SP: (laughs) You didn’t seem to notice that it was hot, but it was very hot in the summer. Not only that, but we hadn’t figured out how to get rid of mosquitoes in those early years. We got plagued with a lot. It was very hot. At night it was hot, almost too hot to go to bed. My mother had this big black fan, which she turned on and sat in front of. We sat out on the porch until things—or we went for a ride at night. My father would pull out the car, and we’d all get in it and go for a ride to cool off. I remember on occasion he got us outside, and he’d get the garden hose and sprinkle it on us (laughs) to cool us all over. That’s how life went on before there was air conditioning, because nobody ever thought of the possibility of providing some coolant that would make life livable for you.

MG: Were ice boxes still the ice boxes where the ice delivery man came and put a big block in?

SP: I remember that. We had one of the early refrigerators, though, electric refrigerators. A lot of things got delivered. We had milk delivered to the house every morning. We had the kosher meat that came from Safer’s downtown. There were three kosher markets in Jacksonville at the time: Hammertime, Becker’s, and Safer’s. My mother bought from Safer’s. There was also two bread companies, and they would come out, too. The bread truck would arrive with Jewish bread: bagels and so on. You didn’t have to go to the stores very much. Most of the stuff that you wanted was right there, delivered to your house.

As I say, my grandparents kept kosher; my mother kept kosher. On occasion, my mother —she loved to eat out. She loved to go to restaurants. She didn’t have any trefa [non-
kosher] food in the house, but it didn’t concern her if she went and had chicken or steak
or something at a restaurant. My mother and father were very flexible.

MG: When you were growing up, you mentioned Hebrew school for an hour after class
every day.

SP: From four to five o’clock.

MG: Then Sunday school. What did your Jewish education—what were you learning?

SP: I don’t know that I was learning very much. We learned how to read Hebrew, which
we did not translate. I learned how to read Hebrew, which I know today when I go to the
synagogue. We learned a little bit about the prayers, the Shema\(^9\) and so on. I wouldn’t say
that we had the greatest teachers in the world.

Sunday school was more enjoyable. A lot of the Sunday school teachers were people
from the community who volunteered their services, and you got some Jewish history,
some Jewish interpretation, some American-Jewish history, I remember. I was fascinated
with it. I’d always been fascinated by history, and this was just another area that I did not
know anything about.

MG: You mentioned being fascinated by history, and this is obviously something we’re
going to need to talk about as we get into your professional career. Had you had many
history classes as a junior high or high school student?

SP: Yes, I took all the history classes, all the social science classes that they offered. The
curriculum was not a greatly varied one back in the 1930s. When I got to the University
of Florida, of course, the situation was different. There were only three people in the
history department when I came here: Jimmy Galant, Ansel Paine, and James Miller
Leake. Leake was the chairman of the department. Leake taught Southern history. He was
a great Civil War enthusiast and was very much interested in biographical history. Ansel
Paine taught Latin American—well, no, Ansel Paine taught English history and medieval
history. Jimmy Galant taught Latin American history, which I did not take very much of.

In high school, I took anything they offered. I took French for two years and did not learn
anything much about it. I know how to say a few words today. I wouldn’t call myself a
French scholar in any way. I took the academic things. You had to take shops at that time,
also. I remember I had a great deal of difficulty building a bird cage—(laughs) bird
feeder.

MG: How were you in the maths and sciences?

SP: Not very good. I think one of the problems that I had was when they skipped me in
the third grade, there was certain fundamental math that I missed, which I regretted

\(^9\) The Shema is an affirmation of Judaism and a declaration of faith in one god.
always. I needed that underlying part. Like my father, I couldn’t build an airplane, but I knew how to count the parts.

MG: Social life as a high school student: did you have a crowd of friends?

SP: Very little social life. First of all, if I was working, I got off at five o’clock in the afternoon. I didn’t have real girlfriends at all. We went to parties and activities in which there was a crowd, but I had no special romance at that time in my life. Once again, you didn’t have a lot of social activity because everyone’s in the same economic boat that you were. I didn’t have a car. I didn’t have access to a car. I traveled first, when they had them, streetcars, and then they were all replaced by busses. If you went anywhere downtown, you went by bus. But you did an awful lot of walking, which didn’t seem to be particularly unusual.

For a little bit, before I got the job at Southern Liquors, on the weekends I was a package boy at the grocery store at Five Points. We would get off at ten o’clock at night—on Saturday nights, the store didn’t close until then—and we had to stay and clean up and get the vegetable bins back in order. Then I walked from there—almost midnight now—to our house, which was a good mile and a half through the park. I would hesitate doing that today. (laughs)

MG: Hurricanes, other storms? Especially in the 1920s?

SP: Jacksonville always escaped the hurricanes. The devastation of South Florida in twenty-six [1926] and twenty-eight [1928] was a heavy storm in Jacksonville. Trees blew down and some damage to buildings, but it was not a hurricane. I’ve lived in Florida all of my life and have never, ever experienced a hurricane.

You know, one of the things I ought to tell you about is my experience in World War II.

MG: I want to do that. Let me think. There were a couple of other things. Movies, radio?

SP: We had a radio, a Spartan radio, on Seventh Street. We listened to the radio. I remember *Amos ‘n’ Andy* was a favorite in the household.10 You could walk down the street and not miss anything because every household—and the windows were open; there was no air conditioning—you could catch the entire program without missing anything and it did not interfere with your walking. Yes, we listened to the radio a lot.

We went to the movies. As I remember, single tickets for me were about twenty-five cents. The difference was when you were thirteen. Of course, you were always trying to convince them you were not thirteen yet. The woman selling the tickets would look at you and say, “I think you are.” “No, ma’am, I’m not yet. I will be next week.” Sometimes you got away with it, sometimes you didn’t.

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10 *Amos ‘n’ Andy* was a radio sitcom that aired in various formats from 1928 to 1960. The title characters were African Americans portrayed by white actors.
MG: Were there particular shorts? The newsreels, I know, are important at this time.

SP: When you went to the movies, you saw a lot. You saw the feature picture, you saw the news, and you saw at least one cartoon or comedy, sometimes two. If you went to the Florida Theater, you also got a music program. The organ was there, and they’d stop the showing. You would sing along with that, and they had the words on the screen. If you went to the Palace Theater, there were acts that they brought in. So, you got a lot for your money in those years.

MG: The newsreels, especially as we get into the mid to late thirties [1930s], things are getting—

SP: Very important. The *Time* magazine began putting out a series of newsreels. You saw a lot of the buildup of military in Germany and so on that was going on in Europe at the time.

MG: What did you think? What did the family think? You still had relatives in Europe.

SP: First of all, we didn’t think we had anybody in Europe. We thought everybody had left. We didn’t realize that we had lost people in the Holocaust until well after the war itself. I really turned up more of that information than anybody. So when the war was going on—now, of course to begin with, you didn’t know about the Holocaust or the problems with the Jews. That came much later. We didn’t ever know that we had anybody over there that needed to be saved or that kind of thing.

I remember there was some talk around 1946 or forty-seven [1947] about two women who had been saved. My great-uncle, David, in Chicago had kept up with them, but no effort was made, to my knowledge, to save them. As it turned out, the two women ended up in Israel.

*The March of Time* is what the newsreel was called.\(^\text{11}\)

MG: Okay. I think we’ve done a satisfactory job with the young Samuel Proctor. You finish high—

SP: I led a completely normal life growing up, nothing dramatic. We did not travel except to the beach, occasionally to St. Augustine, particularly if we had visitors coming in from Baltimore. I mean, I didn’t get to Miami until 1939. I was grown by that time. We didn’t have the money nor the interest nor relatives to visit or stay with, and it was pretty unthinkable about staying in a hotel.

MG: So you graduated high school in the evenings in thirty-seven [1937].

SP: The graduation was the normal graduation along with everybody else. All the courses that I had taken at Duval High School at night had been transferred to Robert E. Lee

\(^{11}\) This newsreel series, created by Time, Inc., ran from 1935 to 1951.
[High School]. As far as their records are concerned, I was a normal student there. There’s no indication on my diploma showing that I was not a normal three-year student.

MG: How did you manage to get all of those classes in, in the evenings, when everybody else took the same amount of time going—?

SP: First of all, I had taken an excess of courses in my first year. Not that many. I took the number that I needed. I didn’t get into a lot of electives and that sort of thing, so I missed out on that. I didn’t have any art classes, I didn’t have any music classes, I didn’t have any P.E. [Physical Education]. I took the basic courses that I needed to take.

MG: Were you athletic as a kid?

SP: Never.

MG: Not much of a ball player?

SP: Not much of a ball player. I liked to go swimming. We would do that when we went out to the beach, but you couldn’t do much swimming in the waves out there. You did more socializing with your friends than you did anything else.

MG: Were you an avid reader?

SP: Yes, I was always an avid reader.

MG: What did you read?

SP: I went to the library often. When I was in junior high school and we had made the move and I’d walk over from Kirby-Smith to my aunt’s house and then to the synagogue, I went by the library they had, (inaudible) library in Springfield. I was there so often that they got to know me. They would save, for instance, all the Tarzan books that came in. The new ones, they’d put them aside so I would have first crack at them. I just read adventure stories. I read a lot of American history stories, which I enjoyed very much. I was an avid reader. I wasn’t a buyer of books. I didn’t collect books at all. I went to the library very often. I was there once or twice, maybe more often, every week.

MG: When you graduated in, I guess, the late spring of thirty-seven [1937], what—

SP: I worked that summer, too.

MG: Same, at Southern Liquor?

SP: Same at Southern Liquor.

MG: As you were finishing up and knew you were going to graduate, was college a definite plan?
SP: College was always a definite. College was a definite as far as I was concerned. College was a definite as far as the family was concerned. It was never any question that I was going to college. We already had two college [graduates]. My mother’s brother David was a doctor in Baltimore. He had gone to John Hopkins University. That had called for a great sacrifice on the part of the family to get him through there. So, we already had that example. Then my uncle Nathan, Nathan Schneider, was my friend. He was, as I say, also at the University of Florida. There was never, ever, ever a question about am I going to college or not. It was just a definite that I was.

MG: Was the University of Florida always where you were going to go?

SP: That was the only one we ever considered. That was obviously the only one that we could afford. We certainly couldn’t afford anything out of state. There was never any question. That’s the one I wanted to go to.

MG: Do you remember how much it was to go to school?

SP: Yes. The year I came in 1937, we had no tuition then. So, what you paid were fees. For the two semesters it came to about sixty dollars. Of that, I think ten dollars went to the infirmary, three dollars went to *The Alligator*,12 eight dollars went and you got the athletic tickets free—football and basketball and so on. It got divided up like that. I think my first bill was twenty-three dollars.

MG: What were your plans in terms of a course of study?

SP: I was thinking already about law to begin with. I was a little bit vague about things. First of all, I needed a job. When I came to the campus, I was able to get one without any difficulty because the NYA [National Youth Administration], which was a New Deal13 agency set up to help students to finish high school and to go to college. It paid $15 a month, which was not very much, but on the other hand it was a lot for that day and time.

I would say at that time J. Ed Price was in charge of allocating the jobs; he had an office of the basement of what is now Anderson Hall. Then we called it Language Hall. The Dean of Students, Bob Beaty, had his offices in that building. J. Ed Price was his assistant. I would say at least 50 percent of the student body on the campus had NYA jobs. All the professors’ assistants, the men working in the cafeteria, the library students, were NYA, because the university didn’t have any money to hire students to do that. So, this is where it came.

My first job was a student assistant for a man in the College of Business Economics. He had just come in, and he was turning his dissertation, *Caldwell and Family*, into a book, which the University of Tennessee Press was going to publish. He had an office on the

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12 *The Alligator* is a newspaper run by University of Florida students. It is now called *The Independent Florida Alligator*, after becoming financially and editorially independent in 1973.

13 The set of programs and policies designed to promote economic recovery and social reform introduced during the 1930s by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.
second floor of what is this building, Flint Hall. It did not look as wonderful as it looks now. I worked there. Then I had a variety of other interesting jobs on the campus after that. That lasted about a year.

Then I worked for the General Extension Division down at the Seagle Building. They had two floors. On one of the floors, they had a small library. In those years, there were many, many schools throughout Florida, particularly in the more agricultural, non-urban areas, like Lafayette County, Taylor County, that did not have high schools, and if they had, they could not afford libraries. So, this library was set up to furnish them, on a temporary basis, books.

We had cartons that would hold thirty or thirty-five books, and the order would come in from Starke: “We need books for the third through the sixth grade.” Then it was my responsibility to go to the shelves. I had nothing to do with the purchase of the books. I’d go to the shelves and take off three in literature, seven in math, and so on. We would pack them into these boxes and take them downstairs. There was a mailroom downstairs. Then they’d go off to Starke for two months. All they had to pay was the postage on it. Then they would ship those books back, and you would replace them with other books. This, at least, gave them the basic library that they needed.

I worked for a woman named Bernice Mims—M-i-m-s—down at the General Extension Division for a while, and enjoyed that very much. I was dealing with books, of course, which I like very much. I got downtown every day by walking.

MG: How many students on campus? Did it seem like a crowded place?

SP: It was a very empty campus by comparison with today, of course. On the eve of World War II, there were about 3,200-plus students on campus. That doesn’t sound like very much, but it still made the University of Florida one of the largest universities in the South. There were a handful of women. Women started coming in 1925, and by 1937, thirty-eight [1938], thirty-nine [1939], were maybe about 100, 125 women in law school, in agriculture, and so on. Some of them were beginning to take the basic university college courses. We had our first two cheerleaders, women cheerleaders, in 1937. Then, of course, the war came, and the explosion of students came in 1946.

MG: What did you take those first—I should ask how many years—

SP: Remember that the University College was set up by Dr. Tigert\textsuperscript{14} in 1934 and went into full swing in 1935. Dean [Walter Jeffries] Matherly from the College of Business was the first dean. They called it the General College. It later changed its name to University College. The concept and general education was in practice in lots of universities. The system that we had here was a combination of what was at the University of Chicago and the University of Minnesota. Robert Hutchins, who was the president of the University of Chicago, was a good friend of Tigert, and Tigert leaned on him for a lot of suggestions and ideas.

\textsuperscript{14} John J. Tigert, UF president from 1928-1947.
The idea was twofold. One: you should not overspecialize. A doctor needed something beyond just medical knowledge. He needed a little bit on religion and literature and music and so on. These courses would give you that. Also, Florida desperately needed the kind of program that would educate you as quickly as possible, ’cause a large number of students dropped out after the first year or second year because they couldn’t afford to stay. The idea was you gave them a general education.

The C-Courses, as they came to be called, Comprehensive Courses, were six in number. The first one was later called American Institutions; it was first called Man in the Social World. Bill Carleton, who was probably the best orator we ever had at the University of Florida, was chairman of that department. It was a combination of history, economics, a little bit of political science, a little bit of contemporary religion, and so on.

MG: But all about America?

SP: All about America. It was a two-semester course. The second year was the physical sciences. You didn’t go into the laboratory, but you heard about chemistry and physics. The third year—I mean, the third course, because the first four were the freshman year. Number three was Reading, Speaking, and Writing. They called it English; they called it that. That’s exactly what you did. You had reading assignments, which you had to report on. You had writing. You went to a writing lab once a week, and you wrote a small essay. You were judged on the way you wrote, and on your spelling and so on. Reading, Speaking, and Writing, you had to speak. Occasionally you had to get up and make a presentation before the class, a public speech, and you were graded on that.

C-4 [Course 4] had two parts, two semesters. One was math, and the other was a basic psychology course. C-5 was the humanities. That’s where you got art, music appreciation, religions, and philosophy. C-5 and C-6 were in the sophomore year. C-6 was biology. You didn’t go to the biology labs often, although you had access to them.

So, every student who came in had to take those courses, whether he or she wanted to or not. At the end of the second year, you had gotten your associate of arts degree. You didn’t have a chance to take history. In your second year, there were electives, and that’s when I began to select the history courses and political science courses, which I wanted.

MG: How did you do in the six C-classes? You get through them okay?

SP: I did fine, yeah. I had no problem. I wasn’t what you’d call a dramatic A-student throughout, but I was doing pretty good. My freshman year was kind of difficult for me to get started learning how to study and taking these kinds of courses. Then I got turned on, and I would say that my bachelor’s degree was probably a good, strong B+. It was enough to get me a fellowship for my master’s.

MG: In addition to working and taking classes, did you get involved in Greek life [fraternity]? Were there other activities?
SP: I didn’t get involved in Greek life, although I had an invitation to join one of the two Jewish fraternities. There were Jewish fraternities because the non-Jewish fraternities were not allowed to accept Jewish boys. In their charters, they could only take white Christians. I could not afford to belong to a fraternity. They invited me to dances, and I went. I participated in all of the activities that went on at the campus, social activities. I went to the various artist presentations, which were then in the auditorium. I participated fully. I worked on The Alligator. They had a couple of clubs and international relations clubs. I was active in that. I played a role outside of the classroom.

MG: What did you do for The Alligator?

SP: I was a reporter, and went to—a lot of counties had county clubs then, and so I would go to their meetings and report on what they were doing.

MG: Tell me about Gainesville. What did Gainesville look like when you arrived in 1937? Had you ever been to Gainesville before?

SP: I’d been to Gainesville once before, in 1933. The first member of our family was our second cousin George B. Mehlman—M-e-h-l-m-a-n. You know, Sarah Mehlman; I told you about them in St. Augustine. George and his sister Bertha were adopted. George came to the University of Florida to do his undergraduate work here. He was one of the earliest Jews in the ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps] program. He was a lieutenant. He graduated law school in 1933. I came for his commencement. His mother and father, my aunt and uncle, invited me to come down. I saw Gainesville then. I don’t have much memory of it. I remember the drive from Jacksonville being a long one. You had to go by way of Lake City and then around.

When I came in thirty-seven [1937] to live, I lived in a rooming house on what is now Northwest Fifteenth, which was then Washington. If you know where the University Press is located in that red brick building, it’s across the street from that. Mrs. Johnson, a widow, ran it. She ran it out of the rooms on the top floor. I think there were about four rooms. We paid about seven dollars, maybe eight dollars a month.

We provided our own linens and made our own bed, but she provided the room and the bathroom. There was one bathroom to service all the boys. There were about eight or nine boys that were living on that floor utilizing it. That’s where most of the students lived. If you didn’t live in the dormitories or in the fraternity house, that’s where you lived. It was close enough. Very few cars on campus at all, so they didn’t have any parking problem. What is now parking areas were grass areas at that time—like the big stretch in front of Criser Hall, Peabody Hall, all the way to Thirteenth Street, which is a giant parking lot, was a grass area at that time.

I was intrigued. Gainesville—this was a beautiful campus then, as it is today. We had a wonderful library here. We had things that I had not had great access to, so I really relished everything here. I had made some good friends here. Of course, Nathan was
here; we ate together. My fifteen dollars from the NYA—my second year I got promoted
to twenty dollars a month. My family sent me about five dollars, seven dollars a month.
You could easily eat on seventy-five cents a day here.

MG: Where did you take your meals?

SP: Where did I take my meals? I took them in the eating places. There was a restaurant
right on the corner of what is now Thirteenth Street and University Avenue—the
widening of Thirteenth Street, that building was demolished—called the Varsity. The
same family, the Hammonds, that owned the restaurant that became the Purple Porpoise,
also owned the Varsity. You could get breakfast there or on campus. It was a small
establishment in what is now the basement of Dauer Hall, the Florida Union.

You could get breakfast for fifteen cents: coffee, toast, and I think you could even get a
small glass of orange juice for that price. Lunch was twenty-five cents. It included a
meat, two vegetables, all the iced tea you could drink, and all the rolls you could eat.
Supper was thirty-five cents. You could do very well and not be hungry at all. You
weren’t eating caviar and that sort of thing, but that’s what everybody else was eating.

MG: You mentioned friends. Are there some people that you recall from your
undergraduate days, either that pop to mind or that you’re still friends with?

SP: I’m not close to any of them, but occasionally I will meet somebody on campus
coming through. “Oh, Sam Proctor, do you remember me?” Oh, yeah, I remember.
(laughs) I didn’t make any lifelong friends like that, but I had a lot of casual friends.

MG: You got through at the end of your second year. You finished, I guess, the A.A.
[Associates of Arts] degree. You had your six comprehensive classes, and you were able
to start specializing. How did you choose to specialize in what you specialized in, and
then what classes did you take in that specialization?

SP: By this time, I was pretty sure I was going to become a history major. By that time,
that commitment had already been made.

MG: How?

SP: I’m still thinking about going to law school. A history major, I thought, would be a
wonderful opportunity to add to my application for law school. I had no idea when or
what was happening. And also, the war hysteria was beginning to build up around 1939,
1940. There was always that uncertainty—where am I going to be next week, next month,
or next semester?—for me and for all of the other students on campus.

I was intrigued with the history program. I’d become a good friend of Dr. Leake. I’d go
to his office, which was on the south end of the first floor of Peabody Hall. He would tell
me about different courses, and I took every course he offered. I took all the English
courses that Ansel Paine offered. I took a lot of the political science courses. I also started
taking French again. So, I had a pretty full schedule. I didn’t take any of the science courses, because once you finished the A.A. degree, you had met the requirements of the courses that you needed. You were completely free to take the things that you wanted to take, as far as your major was concerned.

MG: Do you remember any of the papers you wrote as an undergraduate?

SP: Well, no.

MG: Did you have to write a lot?

SP: You had to write a lot, and boy, you sure had to write a lot on exams. Dr. Leake gave essay examinations. He would stand up at the board, and he would write twenty-five essay questions, which you were supposed to answer in three hours. The exams were three hours long. They were really involved questions. You had to know the subject and have done a lot of studying ahead of time. I mean, he didn’t say, “Evaluate the Constitution,” but it came pretty close to that. But by this time, I was getting A’s in all of the courses, particularly history courses that I was taking.

MG: Did you get involved in sports: going to football, going to basketball?

SP: I went to all the football games. You didn’t much go to the basketball; we didn’t have much of a basketball program here. We were not very active. But I went to every football game.

MG: How were the Gators back then?

SP: Well, (laughs) great. Great.

MG: Were these the days before national championships and the SEC [Southeastern Conference]?

SP: We didn’t rank in those kinds of things. The biggest game was the [University of] Georgia game, and along with everybody else, I went into Jacksonville for the Georgia game, thumbing my way into Jacksonville and having a wonderful weekend there. One of the two Jewish fraternities—now the Phi Lambda Phi, but then Phi Beta Delta—always gave a dance at the Roosevelt Hotel. Everybody went to the Phi B. D. dance. I remember enjoying that very much.

Part 1 ends; part 2 begins

MG: This is Mark Greenberg, Director of the Florida Studies Center at the University of South Florida. I’m with Samuel Proctor on the twenty-fourth of August, 2002. We’re in Flint Hall at the University of Florida, in the library. We spent the morning together, and have gotten you up to——
SP: I’m still an undergraduate.

MG: You’re still an undergraduate, but it’s about 19—

SP: Nineteen thirty-nine, whereabouts.

MG: Things are starting to heat up in Europe. The Second World War will have started that September. Tell me about your last couple of years as an undergraduate. And also, you’re thinking about your future: law school and other plans.

SP: The war is on in Europe. We’re hearing about it in the newspapers. It’s still a long way away. We’re reading about it on the front pages of our local newspaper, the Gainesville Sun, the Florida Times-Union in Jacksonville. When we go to the movies, we see The March of Time. That’s as far as we get. We’re not personally involved in it yet.

Life is going along pretty placidly here at the University of Florida. The ROTC program, of course, is heating up. Because we were a land grant university dating back to the 1880s, we have compulsory ROTC for our freshmen and sophomores. Those who go beyond that were automatically made second lieutenants. I don’t think there was a stepped up program there. There’s no awareness of getting ready for the United States to participate.

Nationally, there’s a lot of resistance to the United States becoming involved in the war in Europe. This is not our problem. This is their situation. Let them solve it. We’re not involved. We don’t want to go to war. There had been this negative attitude toward rearmament ever since the 1920s. We had dismantled our ships, including the USS Florida, which had been dismantled in 1932.15 The bell from that ship came to the University of Florida, and it’s still here on the north end zone of the stadium. That’s the closest that we came.

Obviously, as the war progresses and as the Germans become more victorious and take over more and more of Europe, I think things began to be alarming to some people. On the one hand, we were saying, “Let’s not get involved. It’s none of our business.” On the other hand, people like Franklin Roosevelt and others are beginning to think about it from a positive point of view.

But for me, I’m a student. I finish up my sophomore year. I get out of the University College, and now I’m in the upper division, as we called it, juniors and senior years. I’m beginning to take the history and political science courses that I enjoyed so very much. My grades are excellent now. They’re all A’s, so I had no problems academically whatsoever. I’m still working on campus. I always have a student job on campus. I’m doing a variety of things that I enjoy doing.

MG: Are you still ROTC, or did you stop after the first year?

15 USS Florida (BB-30) was a Florida-class battleship in commission from 1911 to 1931. Not to be confused with the USS Florida (SSGN-728), which is an Ohio-class submarine still in service as of 2009.
SP: I stopped after two years. I hated ROTC. I used to get up on Thursday morning and hope it would rain so we wouldn’t have to have drill at all. I was not involved in it, so I didn’t feel threatened in any way whatsoever. My program was coming to class, going home, doing my work.

I went home regularly, although I did not have a car. Along with the other students, we hitchhiked everywhere. We wore the little orange beanie caps that we were given as freshman that identified us. If we wanted to go downtown—and everything in Gainesville, all the business activities, the entertainment activities, including the movies, were all downtown—you either walked the mile from Thirteenth Street downtown or you sit in front of what is now the filling station, but it was the SAE house, with your little beanie cap on, and within seconds or minutes, somebody stopped to pick you up and take you downtown. Then to come back to the campus, you stood in front of the Seagle Building. You went downtown to the movies. There were no restaurants downtown [except] the Primrose Grill. That was seventy-five cents with dinner. You ate there if you had a visitor, but ordinarily you didn’t eat there. That’s how you moved around.

On the weekends, as was true in my case, I went to Jacksonville. I would hitchhike with my little beanie cap out to the Waldo Road and East University Avenue. You stood on the corner there. If it was a big weekend, there might be a dozen or so boys out there. You took a number, so that you got on in order. If you were going to Tallahassee, you stood in front of what is now Denny’s and the Holiday Inn on the corner of Thirteenth Street. It was another fraternity house; I think Pi Kappa Phi was there. The beanie cap was your entrée into everything. People knew you were a University of Florida student. They had no hesitancy in picking you up. Nobody was suspicious of anybody in those years. You picked up people easily along the roads, and did not get into any troubles or difficulties as a result.

So, that’s how life went along for me. Then Pearl Harbor comes, and the whole situation changes. I’m in my senior year now.

MG: Where are you on December 7, 1941?

SP: I was in Jacksonville that weekend, not apprehensive, along with everybody else. Sunday morning, my father’s in the living room with the radio on, and he heard about it first of all and immediately called out for all of us to come in and listen. I did. And we spent the rest of the day that Sunday listening to the news as it was coming over the air. For some strange reason, I decided to go downtown to see if there was any activity there. I had to go down by bus, which I did. Absolutely desolate. There wasn’t anybody on the street. There were no cars moving, so I got back on the bus and came back home. Wasted time, as it turned out.

Well, the next day—that was a Sunday—the next day, Monday, there was a lot of talk on the campus. You began to hear about boys who were saying, “I’m going, I’m going, I’m leaving.” This is December now, the end of the semester. I remember Tigert called an
assembly for the auditorium—and I went to that, along with everybody else—at which
time he cautioned everybody against taking any precipitous moves. He said, “We don’t
know where we are; we don’t know what’s going to happen. Stay in school. Finish up the
semester. You need your education. The government will decide where you want to go
and how you want to go,” and all of those wonderful things.

That’s the way it turned out. As it turned out, there were a number of students who did
not come back after Christmas. They went home, and they decided to go into the military.
The University made arrangements to give them credit, because what you had at the end
of the Christmas holidays, when you came back to school in January, you had two weeks
still of classes, and then you had your exams. Then there was a week break, and the new
semester started in February. They gave them credit depending upon their grades and so
on. Nobody lost any hours or anything.

But I was not affected by that. I wasn’t going into the military or anything. I finished up
my senior year here, once again majoring in the history classes and the political science
classes that I took. I took Political Science mainly from Manning Dauer, who was the
acting chair of it. History and Political Science were a single department and did not
divide until 1949. Dr. Leake was chairman of both, but Manning really ran Political
Science, and he would become the first chairman of Political Science when the division
took place. Rembert Patrick was also already on campus. He would turn out to be the first
chairman of the history department when the split finally took place.

I became aware of the possibility of getting a fellowship on the master’s program. I’d
already taken so many courses—I had overtaken on courses—that I really had enough
hours to meet the requirements for a master’s degree. What I needed, however, was to
write a thesis and to take a language. Well, the French was an easy one. I took it without
any difficulty. I wish I knew now as much French as I knew then. So, that left writing a
master’s thesis. I knew I did not have much time, because it became available, I think, in
July, and it would run through until the next June thirtieth. So, I had twelve months to do
a master’s thesis.

MG: Had you received any kind of draft notification?

SP: No. I had registered for the draft. We had to register here on campus. Anybody who
was eighteen, I think, or twenty-one; I’ve forgotten. They set up tables over in the
basement of what is now Dauer Hall. They had a place down there where they had
billiard tables, and they moved those out of the way. They also used Pryan Lounge
upstairs. I registered for the draft. The guy registering me was a good friend of a fellow
student, Sidney Aronovitz from Miami, whose brother was once the mayor of Miami. 16

MG: Did you have any choices? Were you able to make any—?

16 The brother in question is Abe Aronovitz, who was Miami’s mayor from 1953 to 1955.
SP: You didn’t make any choices. You just registered for the draft. You did not indicate any branch of service or any kind of military activity that you were interested or that the government wanted you to be interested in. I received a card, which I still have.

I went to see Dr. Leake about a master’s thesis title. I said, “Dr. Leake, I’d really like to work on something dealing with Florida.” By this time, my interest was Southern history and most particularly, Florida history. He said, “I would not encourage that. I have nothing against it, obviously, but we just don’t have any research sources here in Florida. I don’t know where you’d get enough material to do a master’s thesis. By the same token, I don’t know where else to go, unless you’re redoing something that somebody else has done.”

Well, I remembered when I was in junior high school in Kirby-Smith, we had a newspaper called the *Echo*. I think I was the co-editor of the *Echo*. Each issue—it came out maybe once a month; it was not a big deal at all. Each issue carried a biographical sketch of one of the teachers. I remembered that the art teacher in the sketch—which I did not write, and I did not know her at all—said that she was the daughter of a former governor of Florida, Napoleon Bonaparte Broward.¹⁷ I don’t know why that little item stuck in my mind, but I told Leake about that. He said, “Why don’t you go to Jacksonville and see if you can run her down? She may still be living.”

I hitchhiked into Jacksonville. I went to the school board office in downtown Jacksonville. I gave her name, and I’ll think of it in a minute. Sure enough, she was still an active teacher, teaching art at a school out in east Jacksonville. I took the bus and went out there. I found her room and let her know that I wanted to talk to her about what I wanted to talk about. She said, “School will be out in about half an hour; wait for me and we’ll talk.” That’s what we did. We went to her office, and I told her what I wanted to do. She was immediately taken up with it, immediately supportive of it. She said, “We have papers; we have my father’s papers. Of course, they don’t belong to me; they belong to my mother. She is visiting my sister, Betty, in Connecticut. But I have the car; why don’t you come with me to the house, and we’ll talk a little bit?”

We drove into Jacksonville to their house on East Church Street, a house that was built—a two-story, big, rambling house—shortly after the 1900s, or maybe before then, a wooden house. And the Browards were poor. They had no money at all. The thing desperately needed painting. But it was comfortable, and it had a lot of the original furniture in it. I met her, and I met her daughter, Dorcas Drake. We went upstairs onto the second floor in the big hallway, and there were all the papers in letter boxes on two or three shelves that had been attached to the wall, very near an open door so that you got the constant movement of wind and insects and so on.

I began looking through the papers. They had not been catalogued at all. They’d just been stuffed into these letter boxes a long time ago. When Broward died in 1910, he was the president of a tugboat company. Mrs. Broward, [for] whom Broward Hall on this campus

¹⁷ Broward (1857-1910) was governor of Florida from 1905 to 1909. He was also a member of the Florida House of Representatives, and was sheriff of Duval County.
is named, she ran the operation for about ten years and then sold it. When she sold it, she moved all of the personal papers and business papers into these boxes into the house.

So, they said, “Why don’t you go ahead and get started on the project? I don’t think my mother is going to object to it at all. She’s probably going to support it very enthusiastically.” That’s what happened when Mrs. Broward. I became like a member of the family. They welcomed me all the time.

MG: You did the research in their home?

SP: In their home.

MG: What did you find? Tell me about the papers.

SP: The papers had everything. The papers had a lot of—there were some business items from the tugboat company, but they mainly dealt with his political life. Everything from the time that he was appointed sheriff back in the 1880s at the time of the yellow fever epidemic, and it went right on through his whole career. I put the papers in order. They later came to the University of Florida, as a result of my persuasion; the family gave them.

In addition to the papers, I had his daughter and granddaughter right there. His sister Hortense was still living in Jacksonville. They set me up with a lot of people to meet and talk to. I turned out very rich sources of material on Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, both before and during the time he was governor.

MG: Did you know anything about him before?

SP: I knew a little bit, but not very much. I quickly learned all there was. I read everything that was available, which was not very much at all, as was true of every Florida governor. As it turned out, however, he became, really, I think, in my evaluation, the strongest governor and the most effective governor of the first half of the twentieth century, in terms of the kinds of programs he endorsed. He was anti-business. He was considered a liberal—not on the race matter, because there was no such thing, but on support of public schools, taxation. He was for the Everglades. He did a lot of damage down there because he built the canals, which drained off the water and over-drained the area down there. But his idea was good, that you’d drain this water off and you’d have all this fertile land that can be converted into farmland to give people jobs and an income.

Anyway, I start my work. In addition to the Broward papers, I needed the newspapers. I needed the Florida Times-Union, which began in the 1870s; it’s a Republican paper in Jacksonville. And they also had an afternoon paper there, the Jacksonville Journal. There was no microfilm in those days, but the papers were bound in these large binders, and I went down and I met Mr. Caleb King, who was the editor of the Florida Times-Union, and told him what I was trying to do. He was very supportive—very cooperative, too. He made arrangements for me to use all of the papers. He brought all of the papers into this
room and gave me a desk and a place to work. That’s when my work began. Remember, I’m working against time, because I have less than a year to do all of this.

MG: You’re living in Jacksonville full-time?

SP: No, not at all.

MG: Oh?

SP: What I did was to come to Jacksonville on Wednesday evening—either Wednesday evening or Thursday. I went directly to the Florida Times-Union. I worked in the Times-Union papers, turning sheet after sheet after sheet, which was fascinating; you read the ads and you read a lot of stuff, taking notes. I worked there all day Friday.

I left there about four o’clock on Friday afternoon. I went out to the Broward house on East Church Street. I worked there Friday evening and came back and worked all day Saturday until evening. On Sunday I went back out on the highway and I came back to Gainesville. And I did that every week. Every week I came to Jacksonville and I worked at the Times-Union a full day and at the Browards’ a day and a half—almost two days at the Browards’, counting nighttime.

MG: Did you have responsibilities in Gainesville that forced you—

SP: I had a job opportunity that I was doing some work here with professors I was working on. Plus, I had a tutoring job, too.

MG: What were you tutoring?

SP: They asked me if I would tutor this guy who wasn’t doing very well, and they wanted to pay me fifty dollars a month. I said, “I’ll take it.”

MG: What were you tutoring him in?

SP: I had a lot of responsibility.

MG: What did you tutor him in?

SP: History. I don’t know what’s ever happened to him, but I got my fifty dollars, and I think he passed all right.

Anyway, I nearly killed myself because, as it turned out, I wrote a 560-page master’s thesis. That was stupid. What I should have done is to just do his governorship, which I could have done in a couple hundred pages.

I started with the family. His grandfather John Broward had played a political role in Florida. The family’s history was very interesting. I got all of that, and then I got caught
in the yellow fever epidemic, and the sheriff and the Corbett-Mitchell fight.\textsuperscript{18} It was an exciting thing after the other. Then he builds the *Three Friends*, the tugboat that takes the military goods and patriots to Cuba before the Spanish-American War. To do absolute brand new research and to write a 560-page thesis in two semesters, eight or nine months, was a phenomenal job. Remember, I not only had to write it, I had to get it typed. My cousin Bertha Mehlman typed it for me. She charged me all of fifteen dollars, and I provided the paper for the thing.

I got it done. I got it finished, and I got the master’s degree in the June 1942 commencement. I got my B.A. [Bachelor of Arts] in forty-one [1941], June, so I got my master’s in forty-two [1942]. I don’t know if anybody else has beaten that record or not. Then, of course, the master’s thesis became the basis for the biography on Broward later on.\textsuperscript{19}

MG: What did Leake say when he saw your 560-page—

SP: He was very pleased with it. It was a joking matter, because people would see me—Ashby Hammond was on the faculty by this time, Rembert Patrick—and they would say, “Here’s Proctor coming with his book.” They called my master’s thesis my book. Anyway, I did it.

That takes me up to the summer of 1942, and I’m away from Gainesville now, back to Jacksonville. I thought I would be able to get a commission in the Navy. Well, I couldn’t. My eyes—none of those things worked out, so I had to sit back and wait for the draft to hit me. To make up the time, I got a job working in the U.S. Army Engineer’s Office in Jacksonville. I went there, and my job was to work in the office checking the contracts that the military entered into for food and for clothing, and whatever they did.

I’m there now about four or five months, not knowing anything about law and not really needing to know a great deal. The chairman—the head of the department calls me in one day, and he says, “Proctor, how you doing?” I said, “Fine.” I certainly wasn’t going to say bad, and I was doing all right. I was satisfied, and I was getting my pay at the end of every two weeks.

He said, “I’ve got a new assignment for you. I’m going to send you to Miami. We’re opening up a project there called the Thirty-Sixth Street Army Depot. We’re moving in some trailers, and we’ll have some soldiers there and make food available to them. It’s

\textsuperscript{18} This was a bare-knuckle fight between James Corbett and Charles Mitchell held on January 25, 1894. The Duval Athletic Club, backed by wealthy businessmen, negotiated with the fighters’ managers to hold the fight in Jacksonville. Neither the city’s government nor its citizens were enthused about hosting the fight, due to its violence and brutality, and the citizens sent a petition to Governor Henry L. Mitchell in an attempt to stop it. When the fighters arrived in December 1893, Broward, who was then the sheriff of Duval County, arrested them. Jacksonville’s attorney general refused to file charges, so the fighters were released, and the fight’s organizers threatened to sue if the state or city attempted to interfere with the event. Sheriff Broward was presented with an injunction forbidding him to stop the fight, which Corbett won. Afterwards, Broward sued to have the injunction overturned, but in 1897 it was upheld by the Florida Supreme Court.

\textsuperscript{19} *Napoleon Bonaparte Broward: Florida’s Fighting Democrat*, published in 1950.
not going to pave the area. It’s not going to be a big deal. We’re going to let about a
dozen contracts, maybe, and I want you to be the man in charge of the contracting. It’s
not a big thing. If you have a problem, I’m as close as the telephone.”

I packed my things, and I go to Miami on the train. I get off at Fourteenth Street, which is
where the depot was then. I take a bus out to where the place is, the office. We go out to
Thirty-Sixth Street, to the end of the line, and the bus driver says, “This is as far as I go.”
I don’t know if you know Miami, but it’s where the Fronton is now.20 I got off the bus
with my two suitcases and stood on the street, on the curb. Pretty soon, someone came
along and picked me up. When I explained what I was looking for, he took me there.

What I found was a one-story ramshackle wooden building that had been built back in the
1920s. They hoped to develop that as a boom time project and didn’t. It had no water,
none of those things yet. The man in charge was an Army major. He was very nice. Two
or three other non-military people were in the office. That’s how I got started. His name
was Blase—B-l-a-s-e—Nemeth—N-e-m-e-t-h. Major Nemeth went into the nearby
suburb and went to the clerks, and said, “I’ve got a half a dozen people who are working
on this new project, and we need housing.” The clerk made arrangements with people
that he knew in the community, who would rent out rooms. I had a very nice room in this
house that had been built at the 1920s, and the room had been built for a servant, so it had
a separate entrance and a bath and so on.

I started working there. Very quickly, this small job of the Thirty-Sixth Street Army
Depot turned into a major project, because they launched the plans for the North African
invasion. They turned this into a big base, because the soldiers could come down and
then move down to Recife, Brazil and then cross over to Africa, which was the shortest
way and the safest way. What we were to do in that small way, turned out, really, to be
the Thirty-Sixth Street Airport, today. The international airport is where all of this started.
21 Of course, it covers many, many, many acres more than what it did back in 1942.

I worked there in Miami, doing very well. I became more adept at correcting and
detecting the errors on the contracts and so on. The draft notice came through. Nemeth
was very upset that they were calling me right in the middle of all this. He got me a draft
deferment. He asked me if I’d mind, I said, “No, the longer I stay out, the better I’ll like
it.” He got me a draft deferment for six months, which was the only one I could get. In
July of 1943, I went into service. I was called in in Camp Blanding, Mississippi—
(laughs) I mean, Camp Blanding, Florida.

That starts another interesting story. I’m there like all of the other recruits. You know,
you’ve got your clothes off, and they’re checking your heart and all of those kinds of
things, and assigning you space in a tent and giving you the clothing you needed. The call
came out, and I hear my name over the loudspeaker to come to an office. I found the
office, went in, and saluted the officer who was sitting there. He said, “Proctor, sit down.

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20 The Miami Jai-Alai Fronton. A fronton is a type of arena used to play jai alai and other similar sports.
21 The Army had its own airfield in this area, near the Thirty-Sixth Street Airport. The two were merged in
1949 to become Miami International Airport.
I want to talk to you. I’ve been going through your papers, and I’m interested in you. I want to tell you about a project that we’re developing that you might be interested in.”

Up until then, the Army had not been drafting illiterates. Now, with the African campaign and with the manpower situation, it meant that they needed them. What they did was to set up what they called Special Training Units to provide these people with a fourth grade education, as far as reading, speaking, and writing was concerned. They would come in—they’d be drafted like everybody else, and they would go to classes on the base or the camp for four hours, five hours in the morning, and take classes in reading, basic reading. These were grown men, but many of them were illiterate, so you were giving them reading material like for the first or second grade. You weren’t trying to get them a great education, but you wanted them to be able to sign their names instead of putting an X on the payroll, you wanted them to be able to tell time, to read a road map, to do things that would help them to not get lost, or whatever it was.

He said, “These Special Training Units are being set up, and we’re looking for people who have an education to work in them. Are you interested?”

I said, “I certainly am; that’s right down my alley.” He assigned me to one right then. He put me in the office. I was not in the classroom, but I was in charge of the G.I.s who were the teachers. Immediately I got elevated. I was a corporal. The first week I was in service I became a corporal, which is itself—a—(laughs) it doesn’t often happen. I worked in that for several months in Camp Blanding in Starke.

Then I got transferred to Camp Shelby, Mississippi. There I continued with the Special Training Units. Once again, I was the individual who did the assignments of the non-coms [non-commissioned officers] to go in the classroom. I—not alone, but mainly me—created new materials. We would get our reading and other materials from Washington in packages. But I started a little newspaper, which then they would write, giving them the writing experience. I created some reading materials for them, nothing very elaborate or involved or too difficult to do. That’s how I spent my time in the military.

I remember the first time I went home, about two or three weeks after I was drafted and took care of. I went home with a stripe on my shoulder. My mother said, “What is that thing?” (laughs)

I said, “I’m a corporal.”

She said, “Impossible; they don’t promote you the first month you’re in service.”

I said, “Well, they did in my case.” I became a technical sergeant, eventually. I was always enticed to go to Officer Candidate School, but I wasn’t about to leave the position or the job or the work that I was doing, because I was really enjoying my job.

I was the most non-military person you ever saw. I never was on K.P. [kitchen police/patrol] duty. I never fired a gun, even in training, when I was in service. I never
went on a hike. I did absolutely no basic training whatsoever. I lived in the tents. I ate, obviously, the food that everybody else ate non-com, and wore a uniform. I was very chummy with the officers, because the officers were assigned, too, to these things. They were supposed to be doing the job I was doing. They were just sloughing off. They were depending on me to do it. They would come in the office and say, “Proctor, is everything all right?” Yeah. They would take off. (laughs) I would be left behind in the office, of course. Anyway, that was the story of my military career.

I got to know some of the people in the nearby town of Hattiesburg. I remember the Adler family. Joe was in the Army in the same kind of program that I was. Of course, he was near home. They invited me to have dinner with them on occasion. There were no more than maybe four or five Jewish families in Hattiesburg at the time that I knew of.

MG: What did you think of Mississippi in general? Did you get much out of the Hattiesburg area?

SP: No, not much. My contacts with Mississippi were fine. I’d heard all these terrible stories. Camp Shelby was not the greatest paradise in the world. It was an ugly camp in an ugly area in the state. We occasionally were able to get an opportunity to go to Biloxi and Gulfport for an evening and have dinner down there, which we did.

The nicest thing is that we were close enough to New Orleans so that we could go there with a weekend pass. That was very nice, because there were dormitories for a dollar a night in Mercy Hospital; they had set aside an area for G.I.s. There were some other places that you could go to get a bed and a shower. Being in New Orleans was very nice; of course, it was crowded with G.I.s. Everywhere you went, the streets and sidewalks were crowded, but it was very pleasant. I didn’t see very much of Mississippi. I never got to Vicksburg, for instance. The parts I saw, I liked. I went to Jackson a couple of times. As you drive through, there was nothing wrong with anything there, you see.

I was there from the fall of 1943 until the early part of 1946. I got out in March of 1946. The end of 1945, however, they disbanded the Special Training Units, because the war is over and they don’t need them anymore. They transferred me to the counseling program. It was my job to counsel G.I.s, mainly coming back from overseas, about educational opportunities: where to go to school, how to apply for the G.I. Bill, or if they had particular health needs, if there was a sight impairment or whatever. They sent me to New York. I was there for about a month or six weeks—I’ve forgotten—in this training program, in which they took you around to different places. During the day you had classes in counseling and so on. It was very pleasant, because you didn’t have to work all day.

On Park Avenue, they had a place—79 Park Avenue, I think, was the address—where they had tickets for the military. All the shows in New York, all the concerts in New York, and all you had to do was appear there in uniform and pick up what you wanted. Well, I had my evenings free and my weekends free. I must have seen twenty plays. I saw
everything that was in New York and ran out of places, and went to Philadelphia one weekend. I’d fallen in love with the New York theatre.

I was then released, on March 2, 1946.

MG: And just before we talk about [that], I want to come back and ask you a few different questions. So, the vast majority of your teaching took place at Camp Shelby.

SP: My teaching and both of those activities started in Camp Blanding.

MG: Remind me again. How long were you teaching at Blanding before you went to Shelby?

SP: About five months, six months.

MG: What kind of folk—I mean, obviously they’re illiterate. Largely African American, some white, I suppose?

SP: No, a lot of them were from Appalachia. You did not have integrated classes. Everything was segregated. The only integration that you had, as I remember at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, was the hospital. In the wards you had black and white patients. You didn’t have them anywhere else on the camp. These classes were either all white or all black. And these were people—some of them were adults. It was amazing what they didn’t know. Some of them didn’t know—had never used a flush toilet before. It seems strange now today, but fifty years ago that wasn’t strange. They didn’t know how to tie shoes. So, we had to teach them things beyond just reading and writing.

MG: When did you begin to learn about what was going on to the Jewish community of Europe?

SP: You began hearing stories about it, I think, by the end of the 1940s. But they were so horrendous, they were so horrible, you really didn’t believe them. You really did not believe that those things were happening. You didn’t know how the rumors got started, but you just couldn’t give them serious thought to think that they were actually taking people purposely and murdering them. That was just beyond comprehension. I don’t remember any rebellion against it.

I do remember at least on two occasions, though, I was in New York with my father. One time we went to a big rally at Madison Square Garden, and Rabbi Stephen Wise was the speaker. He was telling about the horrible things that were happening in Germany and the necessity for the American Jewish community to push Washington to do something about the situation, to change its attitude toward allowing Jews to come into the United States. I don’t know that it did any good, but I remember we were there.

MG: Where were you when you heard about D-Day\(^{22}\)?

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\(^{22}\) D-Day is the day on which the Allied forces invaded France during World War II (June 6, 1944).
SP: D-Day? Well, I was in camp when we heard about D-Day. Earlier, we had been shocked by the death of Franklin Roosevelt that had come in on radio. I remember hearing about that. I was outside of the cabin, and somebody said, “Listen to this!” and they announced that Roosevelt was dead. Then we saw the pictures of the procession from Warm Springs to Washington and all. On D-Day, of course, there was a lot of enthusiasm and a lot of celebration, and a lot of activity in the dining room.

V-J Day really is in my mind more. I had taken—this is another interesting thing. They moved groups around the country. Camp Shelby was a training camp. After they finished their basic training or whatever, then the detachment moved to where it was going to be located, its next stop. They moved by freight trains and whatever was available. I went along as the medic in many cases. I knew absolutely nothing about medicine, but I had my—I mean, if anything was serious there, they would take it, but I was there if somebody had a headache, if somebody had an allergy, and I had my little case.

Anyway, I was taking a group from Camp Shelby, Mississippi to Fort Washington in Oregon or Washington State. It was a nice trip. We went all up the central part of the United States. I went to all fifty states—forty-eight states then. We get to Seattle, Washington, or wherever it was, and we drop them off and sign the papers. I had my leave. I had arranged to have a two-week leave. You accumulate leave time. I was going south to San Diego, because my brother George, the Marine Corps man, had been badly wounded in Okinawa, and he was in the hospital in San Diego and I was going to go see him.

I start south. I’m in San Francisco. Then, you could not come directly into San Francisco. You had to stop. I was on a bus in Oakland and then crossed the ferry into town. I remember, as we were crossing the ferry, we got the word on the dropping of the bombs on Hiroshima. Everybody—you could tell from the action and from their faces—were thrilled to death that that had happened. It was obvious it was the very end of the war. Anyway, we go on into San Francisco and we’re there maybe a day or so, and I go south by bus to Los Angeles. I’m getting closer to San Diego now. As it happens, I was in Los Angeles in Hollywood when the V-J news came through. Of course, there was a tremendous jubilation: shouts and whistles were blowing, and horns were tooting and so on.

MG: Jubilation in the streets?

SP: Jubilation in the streets, horns tooting, and so on. As it happened, I’d already been there a day or so. I had signed up to go to the home of Edward G. Robinson—Hollywood personality; he was a famous art collector—and it was to see his art. I don’t know whether we went into the house or not. Because of the event, he cancelled that program. I did go to the home of a well-known comedian. I think his name was James Gleason—I

23 Warm Springs, Georgia was where Roosevelt was when he died on March 29, 1945.
24 V-J Day, or Victory in Japan Day, August 15, 1945, the day on which the Allies announced the surrender of Japanese forces during World War II.
think so. I went to his home, and I remember he had a swimming pool in the backyard. I didn’t go swimming, but there were other G.I.s there, too. I met Bela Lugosi. He was swimming in the pool with his daughter. I thought it was his granddaughter; he looked so much older than she did.

But anyway, on V-J Day, that night, there was this huge concert that was only for the military. I was there. Almost every star in Hollywood—Danny Kaye, Frank Sinatra—I mean, everybody you could possibly think of was there, and did a performance or a skit, or just said hello. “We bring you greetings,” and that kind of thing. Afterwards, there was a dance. I went to the dance, and I danced with, uh—the famous German—?

MG: German actress? I know who you’re talking about. I can picture her. I just can’t remember her name.

SP: I got a wonderful picture of her. She was a beautiful woman. I didn’t get a chance to dance with her very long, because somebody tapped me on the shoulder. Anyway, I met a lot of people there that night. I don’t know if you remember the name of Alexis Smith? I kissed her. I had a good time. The following day, I left and went down to San Diego to visit my brother George.

MG: Tell me about him. What had happened to him?

SP: He had been in—I guess some sort of enclosure on Okinawa. A bomb exploded and set the building aflame. He was caught in it and was badly burned. He still has scars on his legs from the burn from the fires that were there. He was in the hospital maybe six weeks or more. I visited him, and then I left and went by El Paso. My brother Dave had been stationed at Fort Bliss, and then he went to school in El Paso. He had met Celie Goldberg and they got engaged. I stopped there to meet the Goldberg family and to let them know that Dave was really Jewish (laughs) and that he was safe. I went back and was able to get into Mississippi. I really did a circuitous trip and got a lot done, and it was very fascinating.

MG: It seems—not necessarily strange, but unfortunate—that your military service extended by almost a year, at least, after the surrender in Europe.

SP: That was not unusual. You got out on the basis of points. They counted the number of months that you were in service. If you were overseas in combat, the points accumulated. I didn’t have much to go on. I didn’t come in until July of forty-three [1943], and I certainly did not have any military service at all. I was among the last, but not the last to get out. My last months in there turned out to be very pleasant. I was in New York.

MG: You know the war’s over. You’re figuring it’s just a matter of time until you get out. What are the—

SP: Of course, you were planning your own future. I knew I still wanted to go to law school. I made a lot of inquiries and started writing a lot of letters. I was getting some
positive responses. For instance, I got a response back from Yale accepting me, but just the smallest scholarship support—very small; it was almost nothing. I got a much bigger offer from Ohio State. It was a full fellowship. I had made up my mind that that’s where I wanted to go, because the money counted a lot. Yale didn’t impress me that much. That’s where I was planning to go when the big offer came from the University of Florida.

MG: Tell me about that.

SP: My brother Meyer, the one next to me, who had been in Italy, was already out of service. He was in school here. He was in Political Science with Manning Dauer. He was married to Marjorie. They were living here. They did not have any (inaudible) at the time yet, but they did have a daughter, and they moved into Flavet. 25

Anyway, Meyer’s walking down the hall of Peabody [Hall]—this is obviously after March 2, sometime at the end of March or early April. He meets Bill Carleton. Bill, you know, was the chairman of the freshman social sciences course. Bill stops Meyer, whom he knows, and chats a minute, and says, “How’s Sam?”

Meyer said, “Oh, he’s just fine.”

“Where is he?”

“He’s home in Jacksonville. He’s out of service.”

Bill brightens up his face, and he says, “That’s wonderful news!”

(laughs) Meyer thought, “What’s he got to do with it?”

“That’s wonderful news. I’m going to call him.”

He goes into his office, which was in the basement of Peabody Hall, and he places a long distance call to me in Jacksonville. He says, “Sam, I just saw Meyer. I know you’re home. I want to talk to you.”

I said, “About what?”

He said, “About teaching.”

I said, “Bill, are you crazy? I don’t know anything in the world about teaching, and I’m going off to school in the fall to Ohio State.”

He said, “Listen. We’re overwhelmed with students.” The G.I. Bill had passed, and from six hundred students in forty-five [1945], they now had registrants of six thousand students. It was the most dramatic turnaround you could imagine. He said, “We have

25 Flavet Village was a section of housing reserved for married veterans and their families.
them coming and going. If you don’t do any more than just stand up in front of the room and call the roll, it’ll be better than nothing.”

I thought to myself, I could use the money to buy clothes and all. I go to Gainesville and talk to Bill and decide to do what he wanted me to do, to teach. That’s what I did that summer.

MG: What were you teaching?

SP: Social sciences, the freshman social science course, that’s all. Classes were just overwhelmingly large. You had the G.I.s there, and they were all serious students. They weren’t playing around, because they had already lost this time. What they wanted was to get a degree, get out, get a job, and get rich. They didn’t mess around. They came to class, they did everything. In addition, the state now insisted that schoolteachers had to have a degree. A lot of them didn’t have it, so a lot of them started coming to summer school. The classes—and they were all in temporary buildings then—were eighty, ninety, a hundred [students]. Fortunately, you gave machine-graded tests then. The board of examiners was in the Seagle Building. That saved some time. I taught that summer, and I loved it. I enjoyed it thoroughly.

MG: What content? Tell me a little bit about—what was social sciences class? What were you—what topics?

SP: The syllabus, which is what we taught from, had been written by Bill Carleton and Paul Hanna. They covered all aspects of American history, but not the traditional way. You didn’t start with Christopher Columbus and go through chronologically. The same thing was true in the economics areas. What you had were big questions that were raised. You were supposed to discuss these things in class, not necessarily supposed to come up with a final answer or this is the way you did it or this was wrong. It was mainly to encourage discussion. There was enough on it so that you could have questions on the test. The questions, of course, were all machine tests, so you had choices, and you picked out the one that was the correct one.

We had full classes, very active. The campus was unbelievably busy, because you had all of these students. Remember, when they came, there were no facilities available for them here. There had been no construction on the campus, except a dormitory that they had gotten federal money for. They were able to finish the first unit of what is now Dauer Hall, which was then the Florida Union. In fact, they had to close Murphree [Hall], part of Murphree, because it was in such bad shape. They didn’t have the money to rehab it. Suddenly, overnight, you need these laboratories and classroom buildings and libraries and everything else.

George Bowman, who was the vice president for business affairs, made arrangements to bring these military buildings—mainly from Camp Blanding, but there was a WAC [Women’s Army Corps] station over in Lake City, but other places. He had brought them in from other places. The federal government, of course, was glad to get rid of them, for a
dollar a building or something. But once you bought them, you had to figure out a way to get them from start to Gainesville, which was not easy at all. There were not many movers of buildings available. Once they got onto the campus, you needed a roofer and you needed a plumber and you needed an electrician, and once again, you didn’t have many of those available in Gainesville. Even with good wages you didn’t, because if they were living in Jacksonville, there was plenty of work for them to do there. They didn’t have to come to Gainesville. There were a lot of trying conditions here.

MG: Trying conditions, space-wise?

SP: I was going to say, in every block, almost, on this campus there was a temporary—right where we were, for instance, there was a two-story temporary building. They used everything they possibly could. We had classes in the evening—a lot of classes in the evening—even some Saturday classes. Housing was a problem. They had some military barracks out where the airport is today.26 They converted those into places for students to live and ran a bus back and forth in between it and the campus, which was not an easy way to operate, but that’s what they had.

Then they began adding women. We weren’t co-educational until the fall of forty-seven [1947]. Women who were veterans, of course, had the right to come. Many of the veteran students who came had wives now. We didn’t have families before the war. Those women wanted to go to school, too. So, that was a problem. You didn’t have any women’s restrooms, for instance, in these buildings.

Everywhere, there was construction going on. It was hard in some instances to maintain class, because of the hammers that were going on. In front of Library East, there was a one-story building that was used for registration. They turned it into a library reading room. But everywhere you looked on campus, except on the Plaza of the Americas, were temporary buildings. And huge numbers of students. Even the problem of parking began to be a problem, because a lot of these people had cars that predated the war. There had been no car manufacturing during the war itself, but the cars still ran—not easily, but they did. All of those problems were there, but the university got through the problems.

The students were excellent. As I said earlier, they were anxious to get out, and they did everything you asked them to do and then some. Plus, you couldn’t fool around with them. You started talking about England, they had been to England. They’d been to a lot of places where the instructor had not been. I found it to be the best students that I ever dealt with at the University of Florida. I was very excited and pleased.

When the end of the summer approached, Bill talked to me about continuing. I said, “Bill, I love what I’m doing, but I cannot afford to do it. I’ve got to take this fellowship and think about my own career.”

He said, “Let me suggest the possibility of having Ohio State postpone the fellowship for you. We’re working out a lot of deals with universities around the country.”

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26 Gainesville Regional Airport, which was Alachua Army Airfield during the war.
I said, “Well, see what you can do.”

A couple weeks later he called and said that, “Everything’s taken care of. Ohio State, and they’ll write you, have postponed the fellowship until the fall of forty-seven [1947].” I stayed on for one year with the idea that I would teach 1946-1947, two semesters. But by the summer of forty-seven [1947] I was committed to doing what I wanted to do. I wrote to Ohio State and thanked them for their generosity and decided that this is what I wanted. I was—let’s see, I was here in forty-six [1946] is when I started, June of 1946.

MG: Do you remember the German actress that you—?

SP: I’m going to say that right now. The actress, the beautiful person that I danced with, and whose name I forgot a moment ago, was Marlene Dietrich. I don’t know how I could’ve forgotten that. I remember that when I was a baby I dealt with the President of the United States, Warren G. Harding, and now when I’m a G.I., it’s with Marlene Dietrich. I guess I’m improving my standards.

MG: It’s the summer of forty-seven [1947], I guess. That’s when you made the decision to forego Ohio State law school.

SP: And to stay in teaching. I was at the rank of instructor. The rank for two years was an instructor, forty-six [1946] to forty-eight [1948], and then assistant professor.

MG: I wanted to ask you, when does it become a profession or a career for you? Did they offer tenure track at that point?

SP: It was much less formal than it is today. The chairman decided who got tenure or not. I remember that you didn’t talk about tenure very much. I got a letter from Bill in forty-nine [1949] after I’d been here, maybe forty-eight [1948], telling me that I had tenure. It was as simple as that. I didn’t get it from the dean; I got it from the chairman of the department.

MG: In forty-seven [1947] and forty-eight [1948] are you continuing to teach the social science class?

SP: Only the social sciences. I did not teach anything for the first three or four or five years except the social sciences course. Patrick was teaching Florida history. The numbers of that was not overwhelming, and he was able to take care of that very well by himself. It was only later on, with the growth of the University and the interest in state and local history, that I began to be able to teach Florida and Southern history.

MG: You have a master’s degree and a book—or a manuscript, I should say—that people still today think is your dissertation. Five hundred and sixty pages [on] Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, but it is only a master’s degree.
SP: It is only a master’s degree.

MG: How do you earn your Ph.D.?

SP: When I decided that I was going to stay in teaching, I knew I needed a Ph.D. if I was going to get anywhere. So the summer of 1948—in the meantime I had met Bessie and we had gotten engaged—

MG: Okay. So, let’s finish this story, and then we’ve got—

SP: —and were planning for the wedding in September. But that summer before the wedding, I went to Chapel Hill. That’s was where I thought I would get my degree. I would go there in the summers and worry about the dissertation later on. That’s exactly what I did. I took a course from Fletcher Green—I’ve forgotten, two or three courses, whatever the summer curriculum was. I did very well, got good grades. Loved Chapel Hill: magnificent campus, beautiful library. I liked the instructors I had. I had no complaints about it whatsoever. Nothing.

I finish up the semester. I come back to Jacksonville, get ready, go up to Atlanta, and we get married, spend the first year here in Gainesville. The next summer, the summer of forty-nine [1949], although I’d committed myself to Chapel Hill, we decided it would be wiser from a money point of view and everything else for me to go to Emory [University] and live with her parents in Atlanta. She wanted to be close to them; her father had asthma, and she just wanted to be close to them. And it made a lot of sense. I took courses at Emory, which I thoroughly enjoyed, too. I had no problems whatsoever.

MG: Remember who you studied with there?

SP: I don’t remember names like that. It was while I was in Atlanta. I was—the phone rang one day. It was Manning Dauer on the phone calling me from Gainesville. I thought something had happened here. Manning said, explaining the reason for the call, is that the university—this is 1949—was getting its plans ready for its centennial celebration in 1953. They had just had a meeting in Dr. [J. Hillis] Miller’s office. He and Phil Constance, who was then chairman of the speech department, were the co-chairmen of the arrangements. I don’t know who else was at the meeting; he didn’t tell me.

They decided the university needed a history. They wanted to persuade me to be the person to do the history. What he said was, “I’m just leaving you with the idea, now. I’m not trying to persuade you to do anything, but when you come back at the end of the summer, we’re going to have a meeting in Dr. Miller’s office to talk about this.” I was intrigued with the idea, but I knew nothing about where the archives were, if we had any archives. I come back to Gainesville for the fall, and I’m teaching. We had the meeting in Dr. Miller’s office—

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27 Fletcher Melvin Green (1895-1978) was a history professor at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.
MG: This is the fall of 1949?

SP: —which was then in Anderson Hall. Yeah. Tigert Hall isn’t built yet. Phil Constance is there and Manning is there, and I don’t know who else. They’re telling me about the book, a history of the university—they didn’t say about a book—a history of the university, which they wanted me to do. I’d tell them about my plans to get a degree at Chapel Hill and to work on my Ph.D. now that I’m a member of the faculty. Dr. Miller said, “Of course, we don’t want to discourage your working on the Ph.D.; that’s what you need to do. Why don’t you take all of your courses elsewhere and transfer them all back to the University of Florida and do your dissertation on the history of the University and get your degree here?”

That made a lot of sense because I could get it at full pay, so that’s exactly what happened. I never went back to Chapel Hill. I took some correspondence courses, and they agreed to let me take some University of Florida courses. I took my German exam here, which was a little bit ridiculous because I didn’t know very much German, but I was fortunate.

Let me just stop and tell you about my German experience. I knew some German because I knew Yiddish, I could understand Yiddish, and there were a lot of words, as you know, that are similar. I began, on my own, reading German fairytales, Grimm’s fairy tales—*Little Red Riding Hood* and *Snow White* and so on—that I picked up in the library here. I knew enough about the stories so that I could learn something. I began increasing the quality and the quantity of the stuff that I was working with.

When I got up to a book that dealt with a man who had been shot down during World War II in the Atlantic and was able to save himself by floating on a raft or something, I said, “Maybe I’m ready for the exam.” I applied for it, and I was given the exam, a big sheet of paper like that. I was very fortunate, because the paper that I had to translate dealt a lot with Charlemagne’s campaigns. While I didn’t know very much about Charlemagne’s campaign, it had a lot of geographic places there, which I could easily translate. I could begin to put things together. Obviously it was enough, because they passed me on my German exam.

So anyway, I start working on the history of the university.

MG: So, you took some courses—

SP: At Chapel Hill and Emory.

MG: —at Chapel Hill and at Emory, and them some more correspondence courses from Chapel Hill. Did you have to pass what we now call a comprehensive exam, or anything like that?

SP: No. No.
MG: So you just earned enough credits to begin dissertating.

SP: Right. I start working on the history of the University. I had an office in Library East up on the fourth floor, a little cubbyhole office. In the meantime, the Florida Historical Society had moved on to this campus through the help of Rembert Patrick, so we had its library up on the fourth floor of Library East, also.

MG: Where had it been previously?

SP: St. Augustine. I found out about the institutions that had preceded the passage of the Buckman Act. There was very little on them, very little. There was not even a listing of the men who had served as principal or presidents in these schools. I was following one step after the other.

I went to Lake City on several occasions and got to meet some of the people there. Through them, I was able to get some of the yearbooks and some of the other paraphernalia that dealt with the Florida Agricultural College. The same thing was true here. There were still some people whose grandfathers had gone to the East Florida Seminary and still had a catalog here, a poster there. I was able to pull these things together. It was not easy. It took me about a year and a half to two years to just gather the data that I needed to do the writing.

MG: The East Florida Seminary, a Baptist—tell me just briefly of it.

SP: When you use the word “seminary” in the nineteenth century, it has nothing to do with religion. It’s another name for an educational institution.

MG: It was located in Lake City?

SP: No, no, no. Originally—let me give you a little bit of this for the record. When Florida became a territory in 1821, two years after that, Congress turned over to the territory some land, about ninety-two thousand acres of land. It had not located the land yet. It was public land for the future support of higher education.

In the 1830s—1837 to be exact—Congress passed a bill authorizing the establishment of a University of Florida, naming it University of Florida, appointed a fourteen member board of trustees, and stipulated that at least half of this public land that they had given in the twenties [1820s] could be sold and disposed of. That would provide the income necessary for the buildings and faculty and so on. Nothing happened. They passed it, but no university came out of it.

In 1845, when Florida became a state, the federal government turned over additional land to Florida: about a half million acres, plus two more townships, another ninety thousand

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28 The Buckman Act, passed in 1905, created the first system of higher education in Florida, three universities which were to be governed by the Florida Board of Control. SP goes on to describe more about the act, which was written by Legislator Henry Holland Buckman.
acres, for higher education. It was a substantial amount. Once again, it hadn’t located it anywhere. No selling process had yet been set up.

In 1851, the legislature in Tallahassee said, “We’re now concerned about higher education. We want to establish at least one and maybe two institutions of higher education.” They issued an invitation to communities all over Florida: If you’re interested in getting this institution, what are you going to give us in the way of money or land, or both? They had no response from anybody.

In the meantime, a man had come down from Vermont by the name of Gilbert Dennis Kingsbury. He brought with him the idea of setting up a private school in Ocala, which he did. Ocala was just a little village at the time. It provided support for the local kids in the community. He opened the building in fifty-two [1852]. He and others hear about his invitation from Tallahassee, and he says to the board of trustees, which is what they had at this little school, “Why don’t we offer our property to the state, and we’ll have the school, and the state will pick up the tab for the teacher’s salaries and so on?” That made a lot of sense to the taxpayers in Ocala.

He goes to Tallahassee and he makes this emotional speech telling about the wonders of Ocala and its future, economic growth, population growth, and all of those wonderful things. The state hadn’t received any other offers so they accepted the Ocala offer. Thomas Brown, then the governor, on October 6, 1853, signed the bill, which took over a hitherto private institution, East Florida Seminary. It became a public institution, the East Florida State Seminary. It remains in Ocala through the Civil War. It’s open and closing, particularly when the war begins, because they only had two or three faculty left. The students—it was really just a local school. At times they didn’t have any students in there older than fourteen years.

The first year of the school was kind of haphazard. Gilbert Dennis Kingsbury had been very popular. By the way, coming down from Vermont to Florida, he changed his name to S. S. Burton. Why? I don’t know. That’s the way he went in Florida. Anyway, there was a faculty of four at this little school, including himself: two men and two women. One of the women was a woman from Vermont. As it turned out later, it was his girlfriend, Laura. He brought her down.

Everything is going along fine, until one day Laura finds out she’s pregnant. (laughs) It wasn’t the kind of thing you can hide in little old Ocala. Everybody immediately thought it was Kingsbury—or Burton. He denied it, of course, but it made sense that he would be [the father]. They had an open meeting, and he offers to resign, and they immediately accepted his resignation. She resigns also. That was 50 percent of the faculty, so the University of Florida closed its first year.

MG: What’s it called? Is it not still East—?

SP: East Florida State Seminary.
MG: So the name University of Florida—

SP: The University of Florida does not emerge until the Buckman Act is passed, 1905. I just said that facetiously.

Here in Gainesville, there’s a man by the name of James Roper—R-o-p-e-r—who comes down from North Carolina, first to Tampa and then to Gainesville. He’s also an educator. He opens a private school. On the corner—you know where the Florida Theater is now? They call it the Palace—as you go down to the corner; there’s a penny store there for a long time now, there’s a nightclub there. He had a little building on that corner, which was too small. They bought property where the Methodist church is on Northeast First Street for five dollars, that property. That’s where his school was located.

He goes into politics. He becomes the state senator from Alachua County. In 1866 he puts through a bill, which transfers the East Florida State Seminary from Ocala to Gainesville. He turns over his property to the state. They begin to operate. It stays here in Gainesville as the East Florida Seminary, beginning to give collegiate degrees in the 1880s, until 1905.

The second school is the Florida Agricultural College in Lake City. It starts out as the result of the Morrill Land Grant Act, which was passed by Congress during the Civil War, which gave each state thirty thousand acres for each representative it had in Congress for the purpose of setting up schools of industry: engineering and so on. The Southern states became eligible after the war. Florida received its ninety thousand acres in 1870: two senators and one congressman.

Then there was the question of where was this college going to be located? David Levy Yulee, who had made a lot of money on the construction of the railroad, offered land in here Alachua County. But they needed money also, and the city and the county just didn’t have the money. They looked elsewhere. They then looked at Eau Gallie, Florida. They bought land there and cleared it, put a fence around it for the—it being an agricultural place—for the cattle, put up a couple of barns, and other things. The election of 1876 came along, which ousted the Republicans, and the Democrats came in. The Democrats refused to have anything to do with that campus, because it had been enacted by the Republicans. They abandoned that without ever having the first day of classes. Years later, the buildings were turned into a small tourist motel.

Then they started looking again, and in 1884 they accepted Lake City’s offer, and the Florida Agricultural College opened there, and the Florida Experiment Station came four years later. There were two other schools. One was down in Bartow, which had started as a private school, the South Florida Military Institute. The state took it over and changed its name to South Florida Military College. It was not coeducational, as the other schools were. Then the fourth school was the St. Petersburg Normal and Industrial School. Normal was teacher training, which the state took over in 1902. Those were the four schools abolished under the Buckman Act, together with the school for women—the school in Tallahassee; it was coeducational to begin with. The school for blacks in
Tallahassee, a teacher’s training school in Defuniak Springs, and an agricultural institute in Kissimmee—all of those were abolished by the Buckman Act.

The new universities were created: one for white male students to be located east of the Suwannee River, one for white female students west of the Suwannee River, and one for black students. They created the Board of Control, charged it with the responsibility of locating these institutions, together with the state board of education. There was no problem with the black school, no problem with the women’s college, which was known as the Florida Female College until 1909, when it became Florida State College for Women.29

The big controversy was over the University of Florida’s location. A number of cities claimed their interest in it. Jacksonville said, “We’re the largest city.” St. Augustine said, “We’re the oldest city.” Ocala said, “This is where it all got started.” The two main contenders were Lake City and Gainesville. Lake City thought they had in the bag, because they had a good campus, they had some decent buildings, including a museum. They had faculty, including some Ph.D.s. It was in a good location, not far from Jacksonville. The railroad ran through Lake City. So they didn’t really make a big fight for it, but Gainesville did. Mayor [W.R.] Thomas and others formed the PR committee. They roamed Florida, and they promoted Florida—I mean, Gainesville—wherever they could.

When it came down to the final result, it was Gainesville, by a very narrow margin, that won. They located the university here with the idea that they would stay in Lake City for one year, because they had the buildings and the campus there, and no one could get this campus ready because there was nothing but trees here. That’s what happened during the fall and winter and spring of 1905-1906. They cut down the trees, and they built Thomas and Buckman Halls, and a small building on the campus where Turlington [Hall] is now located. They opened in September of aught-six [1906].

MG: You unearthed much of this research writing your—?

SP: Almost all of it.

MG: So it’s both a centennial anniversary that the school administration is going to use, and it’s your dissertation. Tell me about what the school does with all of your research. How is the centennial celebrated, and what role do you play?

SP: First of all, I end the dissertation in 1906. That’s all I had time to do. I never went beyond 1906, which is what the university was mainly interested in, the post-period. I had done a mammoth job in finding this earlier material. I had wanted the University Press to publish the first volume, which they were reluctant to do until I did the second volume. I didn’t concern myself. I became interested in other projects.

29 Until 1947, when it became coeducational and was renamed Florida State University.
To gather the material for it, Miller not only appointed me the historian, but also the University Archivist. I became the first archivist on campus. As I found documents and so on, I didn’t want them to get lost; we had already lost giant amounts of things. I had them transfer everything we possibly could to this cubbyhole I had on the fourth floor of the Library East. Miller said, “You need a title. They won’t pay any attention to you. They may not pay any attention to you even with a title, but you’re going to be University Archivist.” It was as simple as that. In the old days, they could do a lot of things they can’t do today.

MG: The Napoleon Bonaparte Broward book, what’s happening to it during the late 1940s?

SP: I, completely on my own, decided to try to convert that into a book, which I did. I rewrote it page after page, leaving off a lot of the early stuff on the family history and so on, because I needed to cut it down. Then I turned it over to Bill Haines, who was the director of the Press. He had been a member of the English faculty. He was now directing the Press.

MG: How old was the Press at this point?

SP: About six, seven years old. The Press had come into being also quite interestingly enough. The state was going to celebrate its one hundredth anniversary in 1945; we became a state in 1845. The state institutions, all of the institutions, were asked to participate in that activity. Patrick had come onto campus, and Dr. Tigert invited him to write a history of Florida because there was no history of Florida available. That’s when he began to work on Florida Under Five Flags, which they planned to publish in a paperback edition and then send out free to high schools and institutions around the state.

In the meantime, there had been an investigation of the University because of a death of a student in the infirmary. During the war, about forty-four [1944], I think—before the war was over—this student who was a diabetic went into a diabetic coma. They put him in the infirmary. There was no doctor on campus at that time, but three of the doctors in town took care of students. They sent an emergency call to whoever it was. They were so terribly busy downtown because they were understaffed there. It was six or eight hours before there was a response. The boy dies, the family is notified, and that’s the way it was.

In 1945, a full year or maybe even longer than that [after the boy dies], a letter arrives from the mother of this boy to the president’s office filled with all kinds of accusations about neglect. She had some political connections in Governor Millard Caldwell’s office, but I don’t know exactly what they were. 30 Anyway, there was a member of the Board of Control, a doctor from Live Oak, I think, who didn’t like Tigert. He launched an investigation of the university, charging neglect. This student’s death was just an example of what the university wasn’t doing. It led to some hearings, and some nasty things were

30 Caldwell (1897-1984) was governor from 1945 to 1949. He also served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1933 to 1941, and was a Florida Supreme Court justice from 1962 to 1969.
said about Tigert. A lot of untrue things were said about him. It was implied that he was an alcoholic, for instance, and that he had gone to the funeral of one of the deans and was so drunk he fell into the grave. Actually, it turned out he was at a land grant meeting in Chicago at the time.

When all of that happened, they were reluctant to start distributing *Florida Under Five Flags* as a freebie. So they had to figure out a way to get it done, and they created the University of Florida Press to publish it. It’s a hardback edition for trade.

MG: Who’s the ‘they’? Who spearheads this?

SP: Certainly Patrick and Tigert were the two main responsible for that, and I don’t know who else. Bill Haines was a professor in the College of English. He became the first director of the Press. Fortunately, he had a very smart wife, Helen Haines, who did a lot of the—she wasn’t on the payroll at all, but she did a lot of the editing and the work on the Press. That was their first publication. They had a book or two or three out when I presented my Broward to them.

MG: Which was when?

SP: What?

MG: When did you present the manuscript?

SP: I guess about 1950.

MG: So this was—

SP: No, earlier than that.

MG: Was it before you started working on the history of the university?

SP: I was doing both of them at the same time. About fifty [1950], fifty-one [1951], I presented it to the Press, and they accepted it. I don’t remember a big deal, but they sent it out to a couple of readers. I worked with the lady—it was a very small staff. They were on the fourth floor of what was then the law school, Bryan Hall. Just two or three people up there were working at that time. And it came out.

MG: In—?

SP: Fifty-three [1953], I think. Fifty-two [1952] or fifty-three [1953].

MG: You finished the manuscript that was essentially the University of Florida from 1853 —

SP: From 1853 to 1906.
MG: Am I correct in thinking that it’s really through your research that the University of Florida is able to accurately date itself to 1853, or that it had been established?

SP: Yes. It’s through me that it dated itself accurately to 1853, although—on the seal to begin with, starting in 1905 with the Buckman Act and the abolishing of these schools, aught-five [1905] is the date on the seal. That’s the way it was for a long time. In fact, in 1930, 1931, the university celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary, its silver anniversary. There was a big international Latin American conference here. That’s when they named the plaza the Plaza of the Americas.

Dr. Tigert was never happy about the fact that when he went to other universities as a representative of the University of Florida, in the academic procession he was way down at the end of the line, because they place you based upon the origin of your school. So, he was able to get the dean of the law school and a couple of others over there to look at the possibility of doing something about the situation.

They found that there were two or three funds. One of them was the seminary land act. All that land that had been given to the state for higher education by Congress, they had begun selling that off. The income from that had been distributed to the institutions. That was still going on after 1905, after the Buckman Act. On the basis of that continuation of funding support, they decided to see if they could not change the date on the seal. The Attorney General of Florida agreed. That’s when they came up with the 1853 date.

MG: But you needed to essentially prove it.

SP: Yeah.

MG: And that was your job. So, they knew. They’re celebrating their hundredth anniversary in 1953, asking you to write a history, but they still need some proof that it is, in fact, their hundredth anniversary.

SP: That’s what they got. In 1953, we celebrated the hundredth anniversary. In 1936, without any fanfare, without any publicity whatsoever, the date on the founding of the university was changed to 1905 to 1853. The date on the seal was changed. If you look on the publications in 1935, it’s 1905. In 1936, it’s 1853.

Tallahassee immediately was aware of the change. They had had a free school in Tallahassee in 1826, which the state took over in 1827, just as they had the East Florida Seminary four years earlier. Tallahassee changed the date on its seal from 1905 to 1827. That’s the way they went until two years ago, when Sandy—whatever his last name is; the president of FSU[^31]—got the idea of changing the date on their date to 1851, which is when the legislature sent out the invitation, but nothing happened. He wanted the university to follow suit.

[^31]: Talbot “Sandy” D’Alemberte, president of Florida State University from 1994 to 2003.
Well, I was asked, and I said it was ridiculous to change the date from 1905 to 1853. It’d be even more laughable now to change it to 1851. They haven’t done that. But Tallahassee has changed its date to 1851. We’re going to celebrate a sesquicentennial next year, the 150th anniversary. (laughs)

MG: What became of the research for what I guess is your dissertation?

SP: Nothing was lost. All the archives that I had collected, all the notes that I had made, all the documents that I had collected, all of the correspondence, and I had huge amounts of that. I didn’t do any oral history interviewing yet, but I talked to a lot of people in Lake City and elsewhere. All of that was saved. All of that is now in the University of Florida Archives. A lot of pictures.

MG: When does the University confer a Ph.D. on you?

SP: In fifty-eight [1958].

MG: Why the gap? Your research is finished.

SP: My research is finished in 1956, but I still needed a little bit more. I don’t know what it was.

MG: How many Ph.D.s had the history department conferred prior to you receiving yours? Was there a Ph.D. program?

SP: There was a Ph.D. program, yeah. I think the first Ph.D.—I did a check on this a few years ago. I think it was in the 1950s, so I think maybe two or three had already been given. I know I was not the first one. A man who taught at the University of South Florida, in fact, was the one who got the first Ph.D., a very heavyset guy with a mustache. I’ve forgotten his name.

MG: So, in fifty-eight [1958], you received your Ph.D. How was your teaching changing? How are your responsibilities on campus changing in the fifties [1950s]?

SP: As always, I was involved in more things than I should be. I continued my activities of collecting data wherever I possibly could, manuscripts. I didn’t turn anything down, whether it was a piece of junk or not. I kept it. All of that’s in Archives now, unless they’ve thrown some of the useless stuff away, which I would have encouraged them to do.

I taught Florida history on the second floor of Peabody. I taught a night class three hours a night, had a very large turnout; and I had no teaching assistants then, so I graded all of my own papers. I thoroughly enjoyed it whatsoever. I continued to teach American Institutions, a C-1 course. From time to time I taught a course on Southern history. I taught, at least to begin with, about four courses a semester.
In the early 1960s, Rembert Patrick, who had been the—really the editor, but he carried the assistant editor [title] because Julian Yonge was still around and alive. He carried the title, although Mr. Yonge didn’t do anything anymore. Rembert Patrick, or Pat, as we called him, was the editor. Jack Doherty was the assistant editor. I was in charge of the book reviews. Pat decides to leave here and accept a position as graduate research professor at the University of Georgia. He turns over the editorship of the Quarterly to Jack Doherty. Jack is just getting settled in that when he’s offered the chance to become chairman of the American Institutions course, which I strongly advised against, but he liked the fact that it carried that title, and it also carried an increase in money. In 1962, I guess it was, I became the editor of the Florida Historical Quarterly.

MG: Before we touch upon that, how did you get a chance to start teaching Florida history if Rembert Patrick had been?

SP: It got to the point where you could teach a second course. Mine was the catch-all of the night class on the second floor of Peabody Hall. He taught the Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

MG: I think we need to get caught up with your personal life. You’re married through much of the 1950s.

SP: Let me tell you about all of that, too. I’m not married at the end of the war when I get out of service. I’m living in Jacksonville, and I’m living at home. Then I move to Gainesville to teach. I live in a room—there were no apartments here; the real estate situation was very tight here, very tight. One day I get this call from this friend in Jacksonville. I told you about our association with the Peltz family. Helen Peltz Diamond tells me, “You’re coming to Jacksonville this weekend. I’ve got somebody I want you to meet.”

Bessie was coming down from Atlanta. She had a new alligator pocketbook, I guess it was, and she was looking for alligator shoes to match because she and her mother were going to go to Europe. They were going to go to England. Her mother’s from England; she had not been there in many years. The war is over now and they’re going. They went on the [RMS] Queen Elizabeth 1. So, she’s coming to Jacksonville to look for shoes. Helen Diamond says, “I’m sure you’ll find shoes, and there’s somebody I want you to meet.” I was the somebody. That’s what we did. Under Helen Diamond’s tutelage—and Helen Diamond, who lives in Jacksonville, still takes credit for all of this—we met. I liked her, and she obviously liked me, but she goes off to Europe with her mother.

MG: Tell me about before she goes. You took her out?

SP: I took her out. She was there for a weekend. We took her out, she goes back to Atlanta. I didn’t see her any more, but we started a correspondence shortly after she goes off to Europe. I thought about her a lot, but I’m in Gainesville and she’s somewhere else. I don’t remember this exactly, but I’m sure she’s right. When she got back, there was a letter from me that I’d written saying, “I hope you are still single.” We took off from
there. This is late forty-seven [1947] or early forty-eight [1948]. I began going to Atlanta, meeting her, meeting her family, and getting along very well with everybody. We had a wedding on September 8, 1948, in her brother and sister-in-law’s house.

MG: How many times had you seen her prior to getting engaged?

SP: I don’t know. Prior to getting engaged, maybe a dozen times, because I’d been to Atlanta a lot.

MG: You get married. Big wedding?

SP: We get married and we go to New York on a honeymoon. Had a wonderful time, saw A Streetcar Named Desire with Marlon Brando. We stayed in this nice hotel facing Central Park. As it happened, her cousin had gotten married just a week before us, and they were in New York on their honeymoon, too, so we got together with them a lot, ate together and all. Then we left New York by train and went to Baltimore, where my uncles and aunts lived. We met the family there, and they had a big party for us there.

Then we came to Jacksonville and Gainesville. As I said, rentals were very tight here. There were no apartment buildings then, but there was a house over in east Gainesville that had been converted into four apartments. We were able to rent one of the upstairs apartments furnished. What had been a porch had been screened in, and that became our bedroom, which was cold in the winter. (laughs) Next to it, what had been a large bedroom now became our living room. Next to it was a bathroom. Next to it was the kitchen. You had to go through the bathroom to get into the kitchen.

That created a problem once, because one day, there’s a knock on the door. I had come home from class, hot and tired. We didn’t have a car, so I was doing a lot of walking. I decide to cool off by taking a bath; we didn’t have a shower. I take off all my clothes and put them in the bedroom, which is the former screened porch, separated by this living room. I’m in the bathtub when the front door bell rings. Two ladies had come to pay a social call on Bessie. In those olden days, you remember, women came to greet new brides and new residents and so on. One was Mrs. Leake. One was Mrs. Payne, Ansel Payne’s wife.

Well, Bessie immediately closed the door into the bathroom, of course, but I’m trapped in the bathtub. They’re sitting there chatting about the weather and about Gainesville. I could hear them, but meanwhile my clothes are on the other side of them. Finally in desperation, I hear Bessie say, “Would you like something to drink?” I knew it was time for me to get the hell out of there because she’d have to open the door to come through. I dart out of the bathtub and got into the closet. I stayed there until she got the drinks. Of course, she saw what was going on as she passed through. Eventually they left.

As it turned—well, I guess I shouldn’t put this in the tape, but I’m going to do it. As it turned out, when she asked these two women if they wanted a drink, Mrs. Leake said, “Yeah, about that much.” So, Bessie got her some ginger ale, about that much. Later on,
very later on, we found out that Mrs. Leake was an alcoholic and that what she meant was a real drink. (laughs)

MG: When do the kids come along? When’s Mark born?

SP: Mark was born in 1951, three years after we were married, July. We were married September 8, 1948. We’ll be celebrating our fifty-fourth anniversary in a very few days. Mark was born July of fifty-one [1951], and Alan was born in July of fifty-four [1954].

MG: Where were you living when Mark was born?

SP: We had moved out of that apartment, which we didn’t like. It was overpriced, but we had no choice in the matter. They built the Green-Mar Apartments. I don’t know if you know where they are, but they’re two blocks down University Avenue. There’s a bank down two blocks. Just in back of that are some apartment buildings. Bessie learned about those buildings, and she was able to line up our name on a list. We moved into a one-bedroom apartment, brand new. It was very nice, close to the university. That’s the way it was. Our first car was a second-hand car that I bought from Ashby Hammond, a Chevrolet.

MG: Tell me about Mark as a baby.

SP: Mark and Alan were both wonderful babies, almost as good as Natalie. (both laugh)

MG: I take it you were happy with boys?

SP: We were very happy. We were very pleased. Our parents were very pleased with Mark and Alan. They were good babies, smart babies. They caused us no trouble. They weren’t sick or upset or anything. We enjoyed it very much.

MG: You didn’t mind they weren’t daughters?

SP: No. (laughs) They were good, happy children. Bessie had involved herself already very actively in the Jewish community. We built up a coterie of friends here. We went to synagogue often, not because we were that religious, but it became a social thing to do. We had a lot of non-Jewish friends. There was a lot more camaraderie in the department than you would find today. Of course, it was much smaller then than it is. You knew everybody. You knew their wives. People entertained each other at their homes—not big, formal dinners, but a lot of things like that, which I don’t think happen anymore. Each semester, the chairman of the department had a reception for new faculty. I think that would seem rather strange to them today. That was true.

We had a lot of good friends. We went to the movies. We went out to eat together a lot. We went as a family; the kids came along. There was a cafeteria in the shopping center on Main Street, which is no longer there. We ate there a lot with the kids.
MG: When did you build the house?

SP: Fifty-four [1954]. We bought the lot the year before. We had an architect and a builder, Fred Mason, who had built other houses for people we knew. We built the house just exactly the way we wanted it and at the price we wanted it. Of course, you tell people what you paid for it then, it’s ridiculous. It’s almost hard to believe.

MG: And you’re still in that house today?

SP: What?

MG: That’s the house you’re in today?

SP: That’s the house we are in today. We moved in August of 1954. Alan was about three weeks old when we moved in there. He grew up in that house. He was three weeks old, and Mark was three years old.

MG: You mentioned the Jewish community. Tell me about the Jewish community in Gainesville in the forties [1940s] and fifties [1950s].

SP: First of all, there had been Jews living in Gainesville since the 1860s. The Moses Endle family came down from Virginia in the 1860s. There have been Jews here ever since. Not large numbers at all. You had one that lived here for a while that you were interested in.

MG: The Brown family.

SP: You never had more than eight or ten or twelve, that kind of thing. None of them were rich. All of them were operating small retail stores around the downtown courthouse square: grocery stores, sundry stores, shoe stores, that sort of thing. They maintain a Jewishness. They held services in private homes. If there was a big event, they brought in a rabbi. When one of the Endle boys, for instance, got married in the 1880s, they brought the rabbi in from Savannah to officiate.

In 1882, the synagogue was organized in Jacksonville. To begin with, it was an Orthodox synagogue. Within a very short time, it became Reform. The two Endles from Gainesville were among the charter members of that synagogue. That’s the way it operated until the twentieth century. In 1920, 1921, Joseph Wile arrives here.

Alex Brest—B-r-e-s-t—was the first Jew to serve on the faculty. He was out of Jacksonville, an engineer. He didn’t stay here very long. He went to Jacksonville, went into private engineering business there and made a huge amount of money. When Jacksonville University was organized, they began to work with him. If you go to the campus now, there’s an Alex Brest Aquarium, there’s an Alex Brest dormitory, an Alex Brest tennis complex.
Anyway, Joe Wile was a good friend of Alex Brest. Both of them were engineers. When Wile got married in Baltimore, he and Mrs. Wile came to Florida on their honeymoon. On their way back, wherever they were going—Pittsburgh or Baltimore, wherever it was—they stopped in Gainesville to visit Alex Brest. Alex said, “There’s a vacancy on the faculty here,” and Joe Wile didn’t have a job. “Why don’t you apply for the position?” Wile did, and he got the job. So, he became a member of the Gainesville community.

Under his leadership, the Gainesville Jewish community began to develop more of a visibility, a consciousness. He wasn’t the only one, but he was the one that was best known. Under his leadership, a congregation was formed in 1921 and was chartered, and immediately began making plans for the erection of a synagogue. Once again, they had had services in private homes then, and religious services were in the Masonic temple [Freemasons] on Main Street. They bought a lot, not easily because there was no money in Gainesville in the Jewish community. They bought a lot. I think they paid about four thousand dollars for it. Then they arranged to build the building, which is still standing today. In 1928, they dedicated the building. That became the synagogue, right on through the thirties [1930s].

In the meantime, the Jewish community is growing a little bit. Joe Silverman arrives in 1932 or 1933. The Grossman family comes in. The Koplowitz family comes in. On the eve of World War II, you have about twenty or twenty-five families here, substantially more than in earlier years.

MG: Are they still mostly merchants, or are some of them associated with the university?

SP: Very few associated—Wile was here, and by this time, Wile is a dean of engineering. Very few Jews on this campus; one or two, but that was it. They stayed here for a short time. There wasn’t any anti-Semitism, but there wasn’t any pro-Semitism either here. There wasn’t a large Jewish enrollment, but there was a substantial number. Both of the fraternities were full. The community starts to grow. In the war period, because of the presence of a few Jewish students—but even more importantly that Jewish soldiers were coming into Gainesville on the weekend—they had a Jewish chaplain here. They didn’t call him a Hillel director but a Jewish chaplain, a Rabbi Yungerman.32

In the meantime, the B’nai B’rith had become interested in developing Hillel on the campus. There was a man from Jacksonville by the name of Philip Selber, who was here as a student in 1935. He just died earlier this year. Philip got together two or three students, and they went down to Palm Beach, where the Florida B’nai B’rith was holding its annual convention, and made a plea for the establishment of a Hillel at the University of Florida campus. B’nai B’rith agreed that it was a good idea, and gave them two hundred dollars to get the thing started.

They came back, and there was a house on the corner of University Avenue and Tenth Street. I don’t know if you know where the Georgia Seagle house is. Directly across the

32 Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life is a foundation that supports Jewish student organizations on college campuses.
street on the corner, there’s a little flower shop there now. Behind it is a two-story, gray painted house. That house stood on the corner where the florist place is now. It was later moved. Where the florist place is now was a filling station. It was in that house that the first Hillel was organized. With the two hundred dollars, they rented two rooms in that house, had some magazines and things there.

Then when the war was over and suddenly there was this tremendous increase in student enrollment at the University of Florida, including Jewish enrollment, then B’nai B’rith became more interested in doing something on a more established basis. Where Hillel is presently located—that was a dirt street at the time—that lot was purchased for five thousand dollars. A recreation building was secured from Camp Blanding, I think for a hundred dollars or something. It had to be moved, and it was moved and put onto that lot.

It became not only the Hillel for the Jewish students, but kind of a social center for the Jewish community. We’d meet there once a month to hear news and stories about Israel and so on. There was a lot of, once again, work between the women. They’d bake cakes. They did things for the students. We had our Sunday school classes up there. All of those things were happening.

But once again, everything was growing. The Jewish community was beginning to grow with the growth of the university. Jewish faculty were coming in. When the medical center opened, that brought a lot of new Jewish faculty, the growth of the Veterans Administration here, the Veterans Hospital. Hillel became too small.

So, we bought property. I was the president of the congregation at the time. We bought property on the corner of Thirty-Third Street and Sixteenth Avenue. Sixteenth Avenue was just then getting paved. We bought four lots. We built the building with the idea that it would be the first of two units, that it would be the educational building and later we would build the synagogue itself.

In the meantime, we used the downtown building for the synagogue, and turned this into an educational building. Eventually, we closed the place downtown, and we sold that property. We consolidated everything into one building. We were exploding in that. Then, through Phil Emmer, we had the opportunity to buy the land where the synagogue is now located, and we built the present building.

MG: Which isn’t too far away.

SP: Well, it’s not too far away, but it’s about a mile beyond that. We have now about three hundred families in the congregation. There’s been a drop in the congregation, because we now have other alternatives. There’s a Reform congregation here, and a lot of people who—at one time, when we only had one synagogue, that was it, but now they have the opportunity.

*Part 2 ends; part 3 begins*
MG: While we took a break, you asked me to ask you what you were doing. How were you involved in the congregation?

SP: To begin with, as I told you, the congregation was very small at the beginning of the 1950s, but growing. But we did not have a rabbi. Frank Roseman was our cantor, and he conducted the service. Others like me and Dick Gresner and Ted Landsman tried to do the English readings and to do a little sermon from time to time. I played a very active role in the community, very active in the synagogue. Bessie played an active role in the Sisterhood. She was very active and involved in that.

I was elected president in, I think in fifty-seven [1957] or fifty-eight [1958]. I inaugurated a lot of things. If I had an evening late service I did. I started the first bulletin which went out, and a junior congregation on Saturday. Then a lady here in town by the name of Gussie Rutterman—Ike Rutterman, whose family had been living here a long time and who had been very active in the synagogue—Gussie and I decided while I was president that we needed to do something revolutionary about the looks of the synagogue.

As it happened, there was a man who had had a store in downtown Gainesville, Sam Michael, who was changing his air conditioning in the store. He said, “I’ll give you this air conditioner. I don’t know if it’ll work or not.” We took it, and we were able to get it fix and install the air conditioning. Up until that time, they had just used the big fan, which was not very comfortable on the high holidays. We had black benches in there. Gussie got the idea of painting all of them white. My wife’s family is in the floor covering business. My brother-in-law gave us enough very fancy floor covering—blue, I think; I’ve forgotten. We built a new ark. Nobody saw any of these things, because nobody came to services in those early years.

Rosh Hashanah night, we opened the synagogue. When people came in and saw it, they could not believe the transformation that had taken place. They were absolutely amazed to see white and light and cool, and all of those wonderful things. Anyway, I was president for one year. They wanted me to run again. I said, “Look, I’ve done my job enough to last five years.” But I continued to be an active member of the board.

When we bought the property on Thirty-Second Street and Sixteenth Avenue, where our second building was located, I was very much involved in the acquisition of those lots, and also in the construction of that building. Cooper Construction Company built the building, and I had known them because they had built buildings on the campus, including the TEP [Tau Epsilon Phi] house on Fraternity Row. I’d gotten to know a lot of people, and they were the low bidders on this. They did a very good job. And as I say, this was supposed to be just the first unit of two, and it never happened because we outgrew it too quickly. Now we’re right where we are, and we’ve outgrown what we have, and they’re talking about building onto the social hall and building onto the classroom building and doing all those wonderful things. All we need now is money.
MG: Let’s come back to your university career. We have one major research project in the early 1950s. You’ve got the history of the University of Florida. Are you publishing articles at this time on other topics? What are your research interests?

SP: All of these things that I deal with from that point on deal with Florida history, Florida political history, some Jewish history, some Southern Jewish history. That was a secondary interest of mine. Not a minority interest, but a secondary interest. So, I was publishing things in both of them.

I was becoming very active in the Florida Historical Society, not only from the Quarterly point of view, but in the administration and helping to set up the annual meeting. Patrick has to be given credit for this, but I was also involved, Jack Doherty was involved. We turned it into a larger organization, a more visible organization, and one in which the academic community played a much more forceful role. Up until the end of the 1940s, it was an organization of a few dozen people. Twenty-five at the most would turn out for the annual meetings. Papers were given about little local subjects: a women’s club meeting or something like that.

We turned it into—as I say, Patrick particularly—turned it into a larger-scale organization. Part of it was the fact that the Quarterly itself had moved from Pensacola with Mr. Yonge to Gainesville. When he presented the P. K. Yonge Library to the University of Florida, he came himself as the curator. He was the editor of the Florida Historical Quarterly. He brought that with him. The university agreed to support the Quarterly, which it did until recent years. That in itself turned it into—a gave it more of an academic atmosphere than it had had before. It continued to attract the academic community involved in either research, writing, or teaching Florida history at all of the universities. That’s no longer true, I understand, with it.

I was involved in the Quarterly. I was involved in the Society, very active in the Society in every way and to everybody, all the members. We tried to alternate. One year we would have an academic as the president, the next year a non-academic, so that everybody had representation.

I became very involved in the American Jewish Historical Society. I went to my first meeting there in 1949, 1950, and gave an article, read a paper on the Jewish life in Florida, if I remember correctly. The Society was still in New York then. It had not yet moved to Waltham [Massachusetts]. I continued to play an active role in the American Jewish Historical Society. I went to the annual meeting. I became a member of the academic advising counsel. I, once again, knew people in the organization, and got along very well and enjoyed it.

MG: You assumed the editorship of the Quarterly in—?

SP: About sixty-two [1962], I think.

MG: Tell me about your editorship. It’s a long editorship, lasting—
SP: Thirty-one years. I enjoyed every minute of it. I realize now that I probably had undertaken more than I needed to, although I didn’t feel harassed or taken advantage of at any time. I was teaching. By this time I was teaching at least two courses each semester. I had established the Oral History Program in 1967, and I was the editor of the Quarterly. I was the editor of the Quarterly, as you know, with a single person as the assistant editor, and the secretary in the office who was doing all the correspondence for everything.

MG: As you think about your editorship, especially in the early years, did you have a philosophy as an editor, what you were looking for?

SP: My philosophy was not something that was sitting there waiting for me to develop. I wanted it to be more academic, intellectual, and more in-depth than it had been. I thought it was important for people to have local information, but I didn’t think the Florida Historical Quarterly was the place to put all of that. I wanted to have things that had statewide interest. I wanted the articles to be well-organized, well-researched, well-written, and I think we were able to get that. I worked out the system of sending articles out to a board of editors, which had not been done before.

I instituted a much broader book review program than had ever been done. During the 1930s under Mr. Yonge, he didn’t review books at all unless they were major things dealing specifically in Florida history. I broadened that out during the time that I was editor so that we reviewed books that dealt with Florida, certainly, but also books that dealt with Southern and national topics if they impacted Florida, like a biography of Martin Luther King Jr., for instance.

I think we turned the Quarterly into a very substantial journal. Pat Dodson, who was very active in the Florida Historical Society, operated an advertising agency in Pensacola. He volunteered to have his agency redesign the Quarterly. That’s when we adopted the blue cover and using the picture on the cover, which I thought was very effective.

MG: Tell me about the state of Florida history. When you wrote your Napoleon Bonaparte Broward master’s thesis, how many, quote, “Florida historians” existed?

SP: Very few. Charlton Tebeau was probably the best-known Florida historian at the time, down in Miami. He was a very effective teacher, had a large student following, and would eventually do that History of Florida. In Gainesville, I guess Rembert Patrick was the best known, particularly as a result of his Florida Under Five Flags. Other than that, you had almost nobody. Over in Tallahassee, you had nobody that was associated with Florida history at the university. You had Dorothy Todd, the state librarian; she was very interested. There was no University of West Florida. There was no University of South Florida in those early years. Everything was concentrated at Miami or the University of Florida.

MG: But the numbers continue to grow. You’re publishing the Quarterly.
SP: The numbers continue to grow. With the growth of those universities and the expansion of those faculty, they began to include Florida history on their curriculum. They began to find people who could teach Florida history. So, Bill Rogers emerges; Martin LaGodna, who has since passed away, at the University of South Florida; Bill Coker at the University of West Florida; Jane Dysart at the University of West Florida. You can begin to name those that began to emerge in the fifties [1950s] and the sixties [1960s] and the seventies [1970s].

MG: Did you have trouble finding things to publish? Did you have a glut of material?

SP: We never had a problem of really worrying about filling out an issue of the Quarterly. We always had articles that were waiting to be accepted and waiting to be published. There was never a starvation that we went through, wondering are we going to have enough articles for the next issue so that we can publish it on time? That did not happen. We always had more books to review than we really had room to review. We had to be careful, since the Society was paying the printing bill. We had to be careful of how many pages we printed, because it jacked up the price and we might not be able to afford it. We were getting increasingly more support from the University of Florida, in terms of what they were willing to pick up the tab for.

MG: Tell me about the relationship between the Quarterly and the Society in those early years. The Society offices were still in St. Augustine?

SP: The Society had moved from St. Augustine to the University of Florida. It had lost its chance to get rent free in St. Augustine. With Rembert Patrick’s ability and his influence at the University, and with the library and the University, they moved it to Gainesville. A member of the University of Florida history faculty, Williamson, began to also work with the Society. He went out into the field gathering manuscripts and so on. The Society brought over one woman as secretary, a lovely little old lady whose name I cannot call, and they were on the fourth floor of Library East, two large rooms there. One room was used as the library, and one room was used for their office activity. I was around the corner. They were there for about three, maybe almost four years.

University of South Florida opens up. They wanted the collection, because they thought they were going to teach Florida history and make it a big thing. Upon that agreement, they moved the collection from Gainesville to Tampa and installed it in Special Collections there. As it turned out, South Florida did not use the collection very effectively for Florida history; it did not get into Florida history for a long time. The secretary, or whoever was in charge of Special Collections then, paid for by South Florida, also became the director of the Florida Historical Society Library, which is what they would not do for Nick Wynne.

MG: Are you developing relationships with graduate students at this time? When do you start mentoring graduate students and having master’s and Ph.D. students under your—
SP: I think I was starting it in the fifties [1950s] already. Graduate students were appearing in my classes. I don’t remember who my first graduate student was, but by the end of my career, I had about thirty master’s and Ph.D.s that I had taken care of during the years.

MG: Were most of them or all of them Florida historians?

SP: All of them were Florida historians, yeah.

MG: Tell me a little bit about who went through your classes. Not just the graduate students, but future leaders of the state.

SP: Well, shall I start with Bob Graham? (laughs) Bob Graham was in my Florida history seminar, about 1957, fifty-eight [1958]. I’ve forgotten whether Bob was already married or not, but he was a young student on campus in graduate school. He was there with Norman Lipoff from Palm Beach. You might know him because he was a TEP. Stuart Blumberg (laughs) I knew very well, and a couple of other people that I knew, Neil Chonin from Jacksonville. I would say that’s one—but they have come and gone. You teach fifty years, you touch the lives and the lives touch you in many ways. It would be difficult to start thinking of individuals, because I’ve had no continuing relationship with them.

MG: But there are several prominent Florida historians. Eugene Lyon was one of your students, is that right?

SP: Eugene Lyon was one of my students. I’d forgotten about him. I was on his committee. Lyle McAlister actually chaired his dissertation, however. Sherry Johnson was one. You can keep naming them, and I’ll see whether they were or whether they were not [my students].

MG: (laughs) Let’s finish up with the Florida Historical Quarterly. You go through, I know, a series of editorial assistants, and I’m proud to have been your last.

SP: I was very pleased, and I needed the support that I got. I could not have operated it without the editorial assistants or, as Mr. Brown would say, the assistant editors. I didn’t care what title they had, because their responsibilities didn’t change at all. Without them, it would have been impossible to have continued. I was doing too much, and I depended upon them for editorial expertise and all kinds of things. I wanted to be the one to make the decision, and I always insisted that I run the Quarterly without outside interference. I didn’t want anybody on the board or anybody in the Florida Historical Society office to tell me what to do and what not to do. I’d gone through that once, when one of the—there were presidents and maybe one of the

34 Prominent attorney; UF Hillel occupies a building that bears his name.
35 President and CEO of the Greater Miami and the Beaches Hotel Association.
36 Prominent attorney, director of litigation for the Southern Legal Counsel.
directors wanted me to institute a genealogy section in the Quarterly. I resisted that. That didn’t make them happy, but I said, “I’m running it, and I’m making the decisions.” I know that has changed dramatically now.

MG: For me, of course, there’s a gap. I know the Quarterly’s early history. Then we get into the later periods, into the nineties [1990s], when things begin to change. Unless I’m missing anything, you’re essentially the editor of the Quarterly from sixty-two [1962] until—

SP: Nineties [1990s], yeah.

MG: Into ninety-six [1996]—

SP: For thirty-one years.

MG: Or, no, not ninety-six [1996]. Ninety-four [1994]?

SP: Ninety-three [1993]. I retired then, and I thought that was it. Then George Pozzetta was the editor, you remember, and George died suddenly, and that left you to run things. I came back out and used my name as the editor of the thing for one year.

MG: But the way in which—there are some issues surrounding the leadership of the Florida Historical Society. I’m not sure if you’re comfortable talking about it, but things change, unfortunately. By many people’s assessment, it’s unfortunate, that things begin to change in the eighties [1980s] that affects the relationship between the Quarterly and the University of Florida about a decade later. What’s your relationship with the Society as we get into the late eighties [1980s] and early nineties [1990s]?

SP: My relationship with the Society continued to be very warm, very close—very intimate, in fact—until the middle of the 1990s. I did not have a problem with the Society in any way whatsoever. I was not unhappy with anything, until they started the move to move it away from the University of Florida. They resented the fact that it was at the University of Florida. The other universities, particularly [University of] Central Florida, wanted to do anything which they felt would demote the University of Florida, whether it was the Society, the Quarterly, or the engineering world, or whatever it might be. They endorsed anything that came along.

Nick Wynne, I think, wanted to become more and more in control of everything they went through. I guess he felt that as the director, he had the right to do that. He resented the fact that I was running the Quarterly from the University of Florida. The University of Florida did not do anything. We didn’t ask the Society for anything. The Society didn’t offer us anything. So, that’s when the relationship began to cool down. As you know, it turned out that they were able to get University of Central Florida to agree to take on the responsibility, to do some of the things that the University of Florida was doing as far as money support was concerned, and they seemed to be willing to do that.
MG: Some in the Society might claim that, by the late eighties [1980s] or into the 1990s, that the University of Florida had essentially taken over the *Quarterly* and thought that it was its own journal.

SP: The thing was, they were just imagining that, because the situation had not changed any time from the fifties [1950s] on. I mean, the fact is I was the one who was running the show, not the University of Florida. But the fact is I was at the University of Florida, so they made that identification as though it were. It had never changed. It was exactly the same over the years as it always was. We never added to our responsibilities or power, and we didn’t diminish any of it either.

The leadership in the Florida Historical Society became increasingly unhappy with the University of Florida’s role in the *Quarterly*. They also became unhappy, I think, about the *Quarterly* itself. They felt it was too academic. It was too, quote, “intellectual” for the kind of member they wanted to attract in the Florida Historical Society. The people that they were trying to move into it, people interested in Florida history, but not necessarily college people and so on, would be turned off by highfalutin’ articles. They wanted more of the day-to-day kind of thing that you find in *American Heritage*. That philosophy was encouraged by the leadership of the Society. I was unwilling to make the changes there. I was not willing to make it any more intellectual or more involved than it had always been. I just didn’t want to change the status of the *Quarterly*.

MG: Let’s talk about oral history. It’s the—

SP: Have we finished with the *Quarterly*? You think we’ve said enough?

MG: (laughs) We could name names—

SP: I’ve named Nick Wynne. I haven’t named anybody else, because I don’t know anybody else to name. I’m not going to name anybody else that I don’t know.

MG: Yeah. Obviously I’m involved with you, because I am your last editorial assistant, and then I’m George Pozzetta’s assistant, and then you and I are back together for a year before it leaves for Central Florida. Of course, I have my own views of this thing, which are not relevant here.

SP: I think that we were publishing an excellent journal, well-recognized, not only in the South, but nationally. I think we were achieving the goals that we had set for the *Quarterly* when Patrick took over in the 1950s. I had not deviated from that path at all.

MG: I want to think—kind of an overview of the *Quarterly*. Is the *Quarterly* changing Florida history? Is the *Quarterly* a response to changing? Are you trying to be out in front of how Florida history is done?

SP: I don’t think that any of those things are happening. I think the Society’s membership has declined so precipitously in the last few years, and that the *Quarterly* is not being
read by as many people as it once was. You don’t find it’s being footnoted in articles and books and journal articles elsewhere, which I’m very sensitive to, as it once was. I don’t think it’s made the impact, either in the South or within Florida itself. People used to come up to me and say good things about the Quarterly or things they didn’t like about the Quarterly, which at least indicated that they were reading the Quarterly. There’s no reason for them to say that now, because I’m not the editor and have nothing to do with it whatsoever today.

MG: It was your goal while you were the editor to make the Quarterly the foremost?

SP: I think we achieved that. It was certainly one of the foremost journals in the South. I think it was a very effective journal as far as the status.

MG: We can come back to the Quarterly as things occur to us. Let’s talk about oral history. We’ve got a few minutes left on this tape, and then we’ll stop for the day.

SP: How did it come about?

MG: Yeah. It’s a whole brand new field of study. Where were you when all of this revolution was—?

SP: Oral history begins, as you know, at Columbia University in 1948. It had been thought about a long time, and some activity—which you might call oral history, although it wasn’t—had been involved: in the 1930s, for instance, when the WPA [Works Progress Administration] project was the Florida Writers Project, and interviews were gathered here. They weren’t taped interviews, but they were gathered. They were interviews. People like Zora Neale Hurston, for instance, went out and interviewed individuals and wrote down the answers. Stetson Kennedy from Jacksonville was another one who was involved. There were many others. They gathered a lot of important information. Not only from the descendents of the slaves, but Crackers 37, fisher people, and people whose stories might otherwise have been forgotten.

So, there was that kind of activity going on in Florida, and it was going on in other states, too. The Florida Writers Project was not an isolated situation; you had North Carolina, South Carolina, all over the United States. Even before World War II, you had what we today would label embryonic beginnings oral history. And you even had some taping. The Smithsonian Institution, for instance, had taped some of the music of some of the western Indians, for instance, on tape recorders that we would consider very archaic today: wire recorders and things like that. It was not until after World War II when a lot of the taping apparatus became more available.

A program starts at Columbia University. It’s very successful. It went to the shakers and makers of history: Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, for instance, Herbert Hoover. People like that were being interviewed. Everybody took pride in the fact that now you not only had their memories, but you also had their voices. Other universities began to move on to the

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37 Florida Cracker refers to colonial-era pioneer settlers of Florida and their descendants.
scene. University of Texas began a history of the oil industry. University of California at Berkeley started an Earl Warren project, eventually did about 160 tapes on Warren starting from his life as a student, going all the way through his academic life, his political life, the work on the Supreme Court, and so on.

By then, Moshe Davis, who had been in New York, a good friend of the people at Columbia University, had made aliya [38] and was in Israel. He had always been interested in community history, Jewish community history. He knew all about oral history from his association with Columbia. When he got to Israel, he set up an oral history program there with Holocaust survivors, which was not easy because he realized that people remembered best in the languages that they were familiar with. It was a problem of not only getting the Holocaust survivors to cooperate and talk, but to get the right kind of people with the right kind of language qualities to do the questioning. But they were able to do it, and of course, that program still continues today.

By the middle of the 1960s, there were about sixty oral history projects—most of them relatively small, but some larger like Berkeley—in existence in the United States. We were not yet involved in the thing. They had a meeting at Lake Arrowhead, California to decide if there was a future for oral history and, if so, what was that future going to be? Was it going to be history? Was it going to be anthropology? Was it going to be archives? Was it going to be library? What? They decided to accept the invitation of the representative from Columbia University to send out a notice to institutions all over the United States, notifying them of a meeting the following November, 1966, at the Asilomar, which was the country home and now the conference center for Columbia University. [39] It had belonged to the Harriman family. The notice for the University of Florida came to the library.

In the meantime, I had become more and more identified with Florida history here because of the Broward activity and so on. I lamented the fact, as I was doing research for articles and other things, how poor we were as far as our library resources were concerned. We fortunately had the P.K. Yonge Library here, but the operation in Tallahassee was miserable. They had nothing there but the State Library, which occupied space in the basement of the old Supreme Court building. So, when the invitation came—and I realized, too, that we had all of these wonderful politicians walking around like Spessard Holland, [40] for instance, and others, that we could just tap their memories.

So, when the invitation or notice came to Margaret Goggin, who was then the librarian and a good friend, and I had this office in the library, the archives office, Margaret said to me, “Why don’t you go to this meeting—I’ll pay your way—and see where it stands, if this is something the University of Florida wants to become involved in.” So, I did. I

[38] Jewish immigration to Israel. According to the Israeli Law of Return, any Jew is entitled to emigrate and settle in Israel, and will automatically be granted citizenship.

[39] The Asilomar Conference Grounds is located in Pacific Grove, California. SP means the Arden Conference Center, which Columbia University owned from 1950 to 2005.

[40] Holland (1892-1971) was governor of Florida from 1941 to 1945. After his term, he became a U.S. Senator and held that office until his death.
went to New York. We met at the Columbia House in New York City. We went by bus up to Asilomar. It was an unbelievable meeting.

MG: Who was there?

SP: Well, Frank Freidel was there. [Henry] Commager was there. Alfred Knopf was there. You name it. (laughs) The leading people in that area were there. I’d never been to a meeting where I found more first-rate people like that, all assembled under one roof. The building itself was beautiful. It was set in this park, and it had snowed just before we arrived, a light snow, so all the snow was on the trees and on the ground. There were deer grazing. (laughs) The house itself had these little maids that were there serving coffee and hot chocolate. There were bowls of apples strewn around. Anyway, it was fun. Out of it came the organization of the Oral History Association.

I came back to Gainesville all enthusiastic. Margaret said, “Let’s give it a try.” I had an office then in Library West, the old P.K. Yonge Library on the fourth floor. You remember that, because of the Quarterly. I had that little office in there. We had a typewriter. We had a four-drawer filing cabinet. I had a student assistant then. I think we were paying thirty-five cents an hour for it at that time. And we developed an oral history program. We got teaching resources to build us a recording set. We didn’t have any money to buy a recorder, so they built one with two microphones on it. Margaret did put up some money for tapes.

The first interview I did, as I think I’ve told you, was with Marna Brady, who was the first Dean of Women on campus. She had come here upon the invitation of Dr. Miller. He had met her at Columbia when she got out of the Marine Corps; she was working on a Ph.D. there. Marna was our across-the-street neighbor and a good friend. She agreed to do the interview, so the first interview I did was with her. Maybe I told you the story. We did it in our back yard, which turned out not to be a wise thing, because later on we heard the sound of bugs going through and so on. We didn’t realize how sensitive the microphones would be. The fact is, it was a very good interview. She answered all of my questions, very cooperative.

She goes home, and I started to play the interview, and I got nothing but a blank. I was very upset about it, and I thought there was something wrong with the tape recorder that they had made on campus. So, I took the tape to the campus on Monday and played it on a real tape recorder, and I still got a blank. I realized that I had forgotten to hit the record button. I had gone through two and a half hours of recording without ever recording anything. I explained to Marna that the machine had malfunctioned. We redid the interview, and it was as good the second time as it was the first time. So, that started us on the oral history project.

The big leap was when we became involved in the Doris Duke support. I had a telephone call one day from this man from the University of Utah, [who] identified himself and said, “I understand you have an oral history program in Florida.”
I said, “Yes, we do.” I didn’t tell him how penny-ante it really was. “In our library, yes, sir. It’s interested in Indian history, yes, sir.”

He said, “I’d like to come down and talk to you and some of your colleagues about an oral history project dealing with the Seminole Indians.”

Since he was paying his own way, I said, “Come on.”

John Mahan was the chairman of history. Charles Fairbanks was the chairman of anthropology. There were a couple of anthropology students who were working on the Florida Indians. We all got ready for the visit. He came. We entertained him very nicely: took him to lunch, showed him around the campus, the library, and all of those things. He was here for two days, I think, and left and went back.

He said to me, “Why don’t you prepare a budget of if you were going to start an oral history program? We want a one-year program with the Florida Seminoles. Prepare a budget.” Well, John Mahan and I had never had a penny up until that time. We had a homemade tape recorder. So, we put down a lot of things. It came to about forty thousand dollars. We sent it out to Utah, and didn’t hear anything for a couple of weeks. I thought what he did was got it and threw it in the garbage can.

Then the phone rang, and it was he. He said, “Proctor, I got your budget. It’s not worth a damn.”

I said, “What’s wrong?”

He said, “You’re in north Florida, and the Seminoles are in south Florida in Hollywood. How are you going to get down there? You need transportation, don’t you? Do you have a telephone? Anyway, I’ve approved the budget, but I increased it to sixty thousand dollars.” (laughs) That’s really what put us on the map.

Before it was all over, we got about $240,000 from Doris Duke. She had begun giving support to oral history programs in the 1960s, mainly to western universities, six or seven of them: South Dakota, New Mexico, Utah, for a short while to UCLA. Her argument, or at least her foundation argument, was that the library was filled with books about Indians all written by non-Indians. The tape recorder would give these otherwise voiceless people an opportunity to talk. The one year with the Seminoles they thought would be a good idea. That’s where we became involved in it. Before it was over, they gave us $240,000. Most of it went to sponsored research. It didn’t go through the Foundation. The University didn’t take anything off the top. Since Mahan and I were already on the payroll, we didn’t take anything. So, we got a lot of action out of the dollars that we spent.

Eventually, after the first year—and it worked successfully. Mahan, Fairbanks, and I went down to Hollywood. We met the leaders of the tribe, who liked the idea and pledged their support. As it turned out, they didn’t do very much, but at least they were cooperative,
and certainly were not negative in any way about anything. We did that the first year. Then they asked us to expand it beyond that and turned it into a southeastern Indian project. They really wanted us to go into the Caribbean, too, but I knew that that was foolish. We didn’t have the expertise. We didn’t have the personnel to move that far away. So, that’s what we did.

MG: Who did the work? Who were your oral historians?

SP: Well, it depended upon where we were going. In Virginia, we did very little. We worked with a woman faculty person at one of the universities, I think in Norfolk or so on. In South Carolina, when we worked with the Indians there, we worked with two local people, including an Indian woman, Frances Wade. When we did the Indians in Alabama, the Poarch Indians, we worked with a professor, an anthropology professor at FSU. So, it depended entirely upon where we were going. We didn’t try to do much of it ourselves.

Tom King—I don’t know if you remember Tom. Tom worked with me on the Quarterly for a while. We sent him down to work with the Seminole Indians. He went down with his family, lived in a trailer, and became friendly with a lot of Indians. He did a lot of excellent interviews. Tom is now the director of the oral history program at the University of Nevada at Reno.

Anyway, that’s the story. We collected about eight hundred interviews with southeastern Indians. We created a Center for the Study of Southeastern Indians, with me and John Mahan as the co-directors of it.

pause in recording

MG: Even though we’re in the middle of our fifth tape, we’ve switched days. Today is now August 25. We are continuing an oral history. Mark Greenberg of the Florida Studies Center, and Dr. Samuel Proctor, esteemed professor of the University of Florida. Same location. We are going to continue. We left off yesterday afternoon talking about the Oral History Association, and I think—

SP: The Oral History Program.

MG: Excuse me, right. The Oral History Program. We were talking about the Duke money that you received and the southeastern Indians program. Let’s just finish up with that. What was the outcome?

SP: The Doris Duke money that came in, about $240,000, it came to sponsored research, and the fact that we didn’t have to take anything off of the top really put us on the track of big-time operations. Of course, it allowed for travel, and we were able to use the new money for things other than just the Duke project. The purpose, of course, was to secure interviews on Indians living in the southeastern U.S.
John Mahan and I together formed the Center for the Study of Southeastern Indians. We determined that we would limit it to—the northern border would be Virginia, down through Florida, the Everglades, the Miccosukee and Seminole Indians, and from the Atlantic Ocean over to the Mississippi River. We would not go beyond into Louisiana Indians or the Oklahoma Indians at all, or the urban Indians there. We did work with urban Indians, eventually, in the Baltimore area, Indians who had left South Carolina during the war years, looking for jobs and had moved into the Baltimore/Washington area. Their families still lived there. They were mainly working in industrial activities.

So, that was the outcome. We were very successful with the Duke money. We spread it very beautifully, very wisely. We got about nine hundred interviews. We really reclaimed or recovered a lot of history that otherwise would have been lost. Many of these Indians did not know very much about their own history. In this interrogation that we were doing, a lot of it came to the surface. All of the tapes have been transcribed. They’ve been used for a variety of purposes over the years. They’ve been very successful. So, it was money that was wisely spent. After about 1974, the Doris Duke Foundation, which had its offices in New York on Fifty-Seventh Street, decided not to support oral history any more. They went into other activities.

MG: What sorts of things did you do with the money? I’m thinking particularly about technology. How were the interviews conducted? What did the office look like in the days before computers?

SP: Well, we’d always had a problem with office space. I had an office in the P.K. Yonge Library on the fourth floor of Library West. I had a small area there, even before oral history, because of my editorship with the Quarterly. We needed to be close to sources so we could check out the authenticity of footnotes. When the oral histories begin, then it begins very slowly. We interviewed only people in the general area, because we didn’t have, to begin with, any money for transportation. All of the early tapes had to do with the history of the university, which made sense anyway because I was the university historian. That was very fortunate, because we caught a lot of memories that went back as early as the early 1920s: people who were involved in the establishment, some of the early schools on campus, journalism, this general college.

So, the money was used, as I say—I moved out of the space in P.K. and moved around the corner to a larger office. Then we needed even more space. The museum [Florida Museum of Natural History] had recently been completed. J. C. Dickenson, after a visit from John Mahan and me, agreed to allow us to move there, which we did on the first floor where Anthropology and Archaeology has its offices. To justify and to explain what we were doing there, I became the curator of Florida history for the museum. Although I did not have many responsibilities, people were giving things: manuscripts or artifacts involved in Florida. I was asked to look at them, evaluate them to decide if they were authentic, and that sort of thing.

We were very happy with our space there. We had two nice rooms. I had a beautiful office. I used some of the Duke money to buy some furniture. We carpeted. All of the
bookcases in there came from Raiford. The convicts [at Florida State Prison] manufactured bookcases; a lot of offices on campus were furnished that way. We had an office next door where the secretary was located, and where the students, who were working on the Quarterly and also doing the transcribing, were located. We were there for about twenty years. With the growth of the museum, it was obvious they needed the space. Eventually, we moved out there to Yon Hall. We were there—

MG: First Anderson [Hall].

SP: Yes, that’s right. We moved from the museum to Anderson, in offices that at one time the registrar had used: very small, constricted space, But in the meantime, we had turned over a lot of the tapes, the file cabinets, to the library, which was going to be the eventual destination of all of the material anyway. From there, we went to Yon Hall, and from Yon Hall, we’ve moved to Turlington.

MG: Tell me about technology in the early years. You mentioned using a reel-to-reel for your very first interview.

SP: No, I didn’t use a reel-to-reel. I used a regular machine, but it was one that was locally manufactured on campus. Teaching Resource created it for us. We had reel type machines. And we were getting, in addition to the tapes that we were ourselves collecting, we were getting from local historical societies gifts. Lakeland Historical Society sent us up a collection of interviews they had done with old-timers in the area. Many of these came to us on reels. So, we had two reel-type machines that came to us as a gift from the library, and we used those. Then we were able to transfer those to audiotapes.

MG: Those very first interviews that you did, were they done on the audiocassettes?

SP: Yes, all of them were done on the audiocassettes. I did not record on anything other than the audiocassettes. We thought that the reel-type would give us a clearer sound from music tapes, but we weren’t in the business of collecting music, although we do have some Seminole music in there.

MG: Tell me a little bit about other significant projects within the Oral History Program, topic-wise. You obviously started with Indians—

SP: The biggest thing, I think, was the university history. About 90 percent of them, I did. Others have done others since then. We did about four hundred interviews. I tried to spread it so that I got a broader picture. For instance, I got a number of the librarians to get a history of the library. I did a series of interviews with all of the chairs of the history department. We did interviews with people in the various sciences. We did a whole string, and continue to do interviews with people who are connected with the medical center, starting right from the very beginning with the original faculty. I tried to spread it around the campus. We even did some of the Charlie Beckham—let’s see. You didn’t do that one. I’ve forgotten who did that; one of the early coaches. We got a lot of that stuff.
Our technology was pretty much the same as it is today. You take a tape recorder, which in those early years we bought from Radio Shack for about sixty, seventy dollars, put a tape in the machine and start it.

MG: Early transcriptions—did you have dictophones?

SP: Obviously, we didn’t have computers in those early years. So, they put dictophones on, listened with the ear, and typed what they heard coming through the machines. It was a long, arduous process, obviously.

We did have a public relations point of view, because we transcribed everything that came through the ears: the sentences that did not end, the wrong pronouns, all of the things. We did not have time or money to edit and correct things and then retype a sixty or an eighty or a ninety page manuscript. We sent it out raw to the individual, explaining that it was a raw tape and that it would be cleaned up later. Well, a number of people were offended by that. They thought we had added the incorrect—the mistakes.

I know there was one man here in town who, when he heard and saw his manuscript, there were a lot of “you know’s.” “You know, you know.” He objected to that. He said, “I don’t talk that way. I asked my wife. She says I don’t talk that way. Some smart aleck in your office did that on purpose.” Of course, we had the tape. So, we had those kinds of problems. Once computers came, it cleared things up. We were able to move more rapidly because we were able to correct things very quickly on there. Although, once again, we still send out the manuscript to the individual for checking, make sure the dates are accurate, the names are spelled correctly and so on.

MG: With the Duke money gone by the mid-1970s, how was funding?

SP: It was not an easy kind of thing. We were finally able to get the provost office—Gene Hamp mainly, was cooperative always—to pick up the tab for the secretary. We were able to get Roberta’s salary.\(^{41}\) What he did was to allocate money, and it went through the dean’s office so that we never dealt directly with the provost office in Tigert Hall. And also, the dean added a little bit to it. We never had an abundance of money.

We had a graduate student who was always assigned to us from the history department. He was mainly—sometimes it was a she—was to work on the Quarterly. Occasionally, very occasionally, we were able to use that person for an oral history, but that was not his or her primary responsibility. We had some volunteers, not many. We did not go after volunteers, and perhaps we should have. Julian has worked them very effectively.\(^{42}\) We just struggled along. The money came from Tigert Hall, from the dean’s office, and from History. To begin with, for a relatively short while, a couple of years, we got a little bit of support from the library, but not very much.

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\(^{41}\) Roberta Peacock was the Oral History Program’s administrative assistant from 1980 until 2009.

\(^{42}\) Dr. Julian Pleasants was the Oral History Program’s director from 2001 to 2007, and is currently the director emeritus.
MG: By the time I came along in 1990, you had an oral history coordinator, a graduate student from the history department, as well as someone working on the Quarterly.

SP: No, no, we never had more than one person from History. That’s all they were willing to give us. Some years I had to argue to get that.

MG: I’m trying to think. When I started, we had a rather heavyset guy who went on to—

SP: Yeah, but he was not paid by History.

MG: Oh.

SP: You’re talking about the guy who later goes to law school and goes out to Pensacola.

MG: Exactly.

SP: He was a native of Gainesville.

MG: I wish I could remember. So, where did he come from? Where did the funding come from, ’cause that was a helpful position for you. He was essentially—

SP: That money came from the dean’s office.

MG: As I recall, you had Roberta, who goes back how many years with you?

SP: About eighteen, nineteen years now. (laughs) It seems like forever, even longer than that.

MG: You had an oral history coordinator, a graduate student.

SP: Who was responsible for supervising the activities. Roberta didn’t do that. The coordinator did that. He turned over the tapes to be transcribed and assigned the individuals the jobs they were supposed to do.

MG: When I started with you, I was your graduate research assistant, but spent some time as an audit editor. You effectively made use of—

SP: Everything.

MG: —of me, and taught me how to do oral history.

SP: Well, that was not an unusual way. Out of necessity, we had to do those things. You weren’t the first one (laughs) to be multi-purposed.
MG: I’m glad you did it. I wouldn’t be an oral historian today if it wasn’t for you. Let me ask about other projects. We talked about the medical school, the University. Were there other significant blocks of interviews?

SP: Yes. Through the cooperation of Jean Chalmers, who was then on the city commission and then later mayor of Gainesville, she was able to get us money—I think about fifteen thousand dollars, if I remember correctly—to do a project on the blacks of Gainesville. That was a very effective one.

We were able to contact a local man by the name of Joel Buchanan. He did it on a volunteer basis, but he knew everybody. He got along particularly with elderly blacks. What we were trying to get was teachers and preachers and people who had been in business along Northwest Fifth Avenue, kind of a middle class. Joel was just perfect for that. He enjoyed doing it. That was a very effective project that we did. That was a very successful project, the black history of Gainesville. We called it the Fifth Avenue Project, because most of the people were living in that general area.

We found the people that we work with, some of the political activists, some of the ministers, to be very cooperative and happy that we were gathering this kind of information. Everything was transcribed. We made a copy available to each person, and we had a reception in the library, as I remember. We invited all the individuals that we had interviewed to come to us that night. I spoke and Joel spoke. We had refreshments. I guess we did it at the museum, not the library. We gave each person a copy of the transcript.

We did, in addition—we did, of course, many different projects: small, medium-sized, some large. One of the ones I remember was a history of the Jewish community of West Palm Beach. They had gotten a small grant and approached us. I did a lot of the interviewing myself. I went to West Palm Beach and talked to people about the history of the community, where people came from, and what happened to them over the years. Those transcripts are in our collection today. We did interviews on the Jewish community of Jacksonville, using volunteers to work there, including my cousin, Doris Proctor.

So, as I say, over the years—remember, we started in 1967, and our first interview, the one with Marna Brady, was 1969. Now we have, according to Julian’s count, about 3,800 interviews in the collection. It’s the largest oral history archive in the South, and really one of the major ones in the United States.

MG: What kind of usage did you get by researchers and other folks throughout the years?

SP: Usage? Well, it was not as widespread as I had hoped it would be. Part of it was because we didn’t really know how to advertise ourselves. You don’t put a notice in the Alligator and say, “We’ve got all these oral history tapes.” I found that even in the history department, there were dissertations and theses being done, and we had material available that would have been useful to the researcher. They did not know about it. So, that was a problem. For a long time, the stuff just laid there, and it was not being used very much.
That has changed now, over the years. We have now students all the time using it. Right from the very beginning, the news media took advantage of it, particularly the *Gainesville Sun* and the *Florida Alligator*, as you can imagine, with the tapes that we had on the history of the University. We’ve had increasing numbers of individuals who are using the material. You can see that it’s being quoted. When Julian came aboard, he was responsible for launching the effort to name the oral history for me, which went through the procedure here on campus, the committee on naming buildings and projects. It has since been called Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, but I have a difficult getting Roberta to say that when she answers the telephone. She just says, “Oral History.”


SP: Sixty-six [1966]—sixty-seven [1967]. At the Asilomar, the conference center belonging to Columbia. I said sixty-six [1966]; it was November 1967. As I think I said earlier, I was absolutely enthralled with the conference and the people who were there. Where are you going to find a conference where you’re sitting at the table having dinner with Freidel and Commager and Knopf and people like that?

I came back to Gainesville, and I talked to Margaret Goggin, the librarian; she was most cooperative, as always. We set up the program. At this meeting, we launched the Oral History Association. So, right from the very beginning, I could be called one of the founding members—not the only one, obviously, but I became a dues-paying member. I began going to the annual meetings and getting to know people. The Oral History Association, to begin with, was very small, limited number of people who joined the organization, although they tried to broaden the base of membership as much as they possibly could. In the early years, because of the small number involved, we were able to go to places that were environmentally nice, so that we went to some very beautiful places around the United States.

The membership increased, it became increasingly larger, and because I was one of the most faithful attending, I became involved in the administration of the organization. I first served on the board for three years, which was the period that was allocated. Then I became vice president of the organization, and then in 1975 I was the president. The meeting that year was in Asheville, North Carolina. I was responsible for the program.

One of the interesting things that happened in setting up that program: Some weeks before the meeting, I was on a plane coming out of Washington, sitting back in the economy section, and this man comes in. The seat next to me is vacant, he sits down, and we begin a conversation. I recognized him immediately. It was Dean Rusk.\(^43\) Dean Rusk by this time had left Washington, and he was teaching in the law school in the University of Georgia. So, he was en route back to Atlanta, Georgia. I took advantage of his presence and began a conversation. We were together on the plane about two hours. When he began asking me what I did and I told him about oral history, he evidenced his distrust of oral history: the fact that you were asking people to remember things that

\(^{43}\) Rusk (1909-1994) was U.S. Secretary of State from 1961 to 1969.
happened twenty-five years earlier, and what might happen to the material when you placed it in a public archive. So, he was just generally—others were like that. I remember Barbara Tuchman was also one that was hesitant about the validity of oral history.

Anyway, by the time we got to Atlanta, we had become very chummy. I told him about the meeting that was coming up, and I asked him if he would be willing to be one of the speakers to talk about the negative parts of oral history. He said, “Here’s my card; stay in touch, and I’ll see. I can’t tell you what my calendar’s going to be.” As it turned out, he was free and able to come, and he attended the meeting. He gave a talk on Friday evening at our dinner meeting. Bessie and I had a reception for him. We had a suite, as the president, so we had a suite for him; we took pictures of me and Dean Rusk together. He left the following morning; he didn’t stay for the rest of the conference. I said, “Mr. Secretary, be sure to send me a bill of your expenses.” He sent me a bill, I think for eighteen dollars, for his gas from Athens to Ashville and return. We had provided him with a room, but there was no honorarium, no nothing except the eighteen dollar bill that he had.

I continued being active in the Oral History [Association] as the past president. I obviously knew all of the leaders in the organization as I continue to do today, although the organization is much larger today. It’s like the history department faculty: new faces, new people, new names, most of which I don’t recognize anymore.

MG: What was the purpose of the association, especially as you talk about Dean Rusk and whether or not oral history is valid?

SP: When oral history begins to develop in the 1950s and 1960s, there was the question: is this a professional activity? I mean, this is something that was brand new. People had not been doing research using a tape recorder. The traditional way was to go into a library with a pencil and a pad to gather your material, write it down, and then transfer it to whatever you were working on. Now, suddenly, tape recorders appear on the scene. A lot of people were hesitant about them. And tape recorders were not as sophisticated as they are today, anyway.

There was the question as the programs began to develop. When they had the meeting at Lake Arrowhead in sixty-six [1966], there were approximately sixty projects in the United States that they counted. There may have been more than that, but that’s what they always give as the figure. There was the question that if we gather this material, what’s going to happen to it? The American Historical Association said, “This is a history project. Why don’t you just affiliate with us?” The [American] Library Association said, “Well, this is going to be the final destination of these archives. Maybe you ought to be part of us.” That was what it was. These national organizations were looking for new members, and this would be an opportunity for them to gather.

So, the meeting at Lake Arrowhead was to decide whether they would become part of an already existing national organization or strike out on their own. That’s why Louis Starr, who was the assistant director of the program at Columbia University, invited us to come
the following year to the conference center to discuss and to decide what we wanted to do. The decision in sixty-seven [1967], then, was to strike out on our own and to become an independent organization.

MG: Do you remember those deliberations? What was the rationale?

SP: The rationale was that yes, we are history and yes, we are library and yes, we are archives, but we’re separate, and we don’t need to be a part of another existing organization. We’re talking, now, just about a few dozen people. The Oral History Association was not a giant organization. It’s still not a giant organization.

At that time, there were other oral history programs elsewhere in the world. I think I told you about Moshe Davis’s efforts to gather interviews with Holocaust survivors, which were converted to tape in a program the New York Times had—microfilm, not tape. They no longer do that. But we have some of those microfilms here in the library; other libraries, of course, throughout the country acquired them also. The rationale was that we could do it on our own. They say it was a small, very cohesive group that got along beautifully together. We enjoyed getting together for the annual meeting. The programs began to develop. Obviously oral history was going to become a very popular research activity.

In addition to the program in Israel, others began to develop. The American association was always the largest and the most influential in the world. We cooperated once with the program in Canada. In fact, our 1976 meeting was in Canada, which kind of made it interesting because that was the bicentennial year and we were going outside of the United States. In time, the International Oral History Association was organized. I never became involved in that, but a number of the individuals in our organization became officers and members of that.


SP: We didn’t dream of all of that back in the 1960s and 1970s. I carried a tape recorder that, as I say, we bought from Radio Shack, and we were glad to get the sixty dollars to buy it. We had some tapes, and we had a yellow pad and a pencil, and that was our equipment. And as I say, to begin with, we made a lot of mistakes. My interview with Marna Brady, for instance, was in my backyard, and we got a lot of extraneous noise. We finally learned that we needed a special kind of a microphone that checked the wind velocity so we wouldn’t get that kind of noise coming in, because when you worked with the Indians, often you had to work outside.

MG: Are we still—you see a bright future?

SP: I see a very bright future, of course. Julian Pleasants, who now directs the oral history program here at the University of Florida, took over for me. He’s doing an excellent job. He’s not overwhelmed, but he’s been approached very often to do projects. We’re
constantly being called on the telephone by people who know somebody who has this wonderful story to tell who’s living down in Tavares or in Panama City, and we have to always say we don’t have any money for transportation. What you need to do is get some local historical society or some local agency to do the project for you.

Julian is approached to do a lot of kinds of oral history activities, very interesting projects: the Everglades restoration, for instance, [and] the contested presidential election in Florida, are just some of the things we’re involved with. I’m working on, as my time allows me, and I don’t strain myself at all, but I’ve been gathering interviews with top business leaders in Florida. I’ve recently done one the last month with Clark Butler from Butler Plaza. He tells a very interesting story. Out in Pensacola in early July I did one with Fred Levin, the guy who gave the money for the law school naming. I’ve got another one scheduled later this month or early next month with Luther Coggin in Jacksonville, the automobile magnate. I’m going to set one up with Bill Emerson, the alumni who was into stocks and investments in the Atlanta area for many years. I’m also doing things dealing with the history of the medical center.

MG: Tell me about your relationship—or at least, the Oral History Program’s relationship—to the Foundation. I know by the time I get here in 1990, there’s a strong relationship going on.

SP: There’s a strong relationship. I think that I was the binder. I was the individual because I was active in the Foundation certainly as a fundraiser, although I wouldn’t say I brought millions into the Foundation at all. But I became in some ways, and Ralph also, the representative Jew on the campus. When they were trying to massage somebody in the Foundation, we were utilized for luncheon or dinner or whatever it might be. Because of my interest in oral history, that was part of the baggage that I carried into this kind of a relationship.

Now, in more recent years, the Foundation has asked us to interview individuals, which helps to open the door for things that they want to do. This top business leaders of Florida, for instance, is a very effective instrument for them to use. It really flatters somebody when you say, “We want to do an oral history interview. The story of your life is interesting and important. It will become part of the archives.” In the early years, people used to wonder what’s going to happen to this when you told them it was going into a library; anybody was going to be able to come in and get all of this information. We assured them we weren’t looking for tabloid information. Now people are very flattered. Some of them, I know, wonder, “Why are you not interviewing me? Aren’t I important enough to be interviewed?” From this point of view, the Foundation has played an effective role. We wish they would do more in terms of money support.

MG: Why don’t we talk a little bit about the American Association for State and Local History? There’s a tie between the two organizations.

SP: That’s an organization that got started after World War II to do exactly what its title talked about. Of course, with my interest in local history and Florida history, it was made
to order for me. I became involved in the organization, went to its annual meetings, served on its board for a number of years, and played an effective leadership role in the activities of the association. I got to know all of the important people, they got to know me.

In the 1970s, at the time of the bicentennial, one of the projects that the association took on to do was to encourage a book for each state in the union. I was on that publications committee. I know that the one I was totally responsible for was Gloria Jehoda’s *Other Florida*. I knew Gloria. She had done book reviews for the *Quarterly*. She was a good friend. I went to Tampa, sat down with her. She was not at all reluctant. It wasn’t the kind of traditional history of Florida that I was seeking, but it was what she was writing. It’s a book, I guess, which is still in print today, although she’s no longer living today.

Increasingly, the association became less interested in local history and more in museums. As a result of that, I began to fade away from it, because museums was not my dish. I didn’t want to get involved in that kind of thing. I’m not a part of that organization, but up through the 1970s I was a very active member and a very active participant in its annual meetings and in all of its activities.

MG: Did you serve in any leadership role in the organization?

SP: Well, except I was on the governing court for three years.

MG: Want to turn to some of your UF activities?

SP: Yes.

MG: The Center for Jewish Studies.

SP: Okay, that’s an interesting project. The religion department operated here with Delton Scudder as the chairman of it. Actually, the history of the religion department goes back all the way to World War I when there were some soldiers on campus as a result of a contract that the university had entered into with the army. The YMCA [Young Men’s Christian Association] located itself on the campus in a small building, about where the infirmary is located today. It became the major recreational activity on the campus. The campus was small, and there wasn’t much else for the regular students to do, either.

When the war was over, Mr. White, who was the director of this YMCA, continued to operate. Dr. Murphree, the president of the university, was a dedicated Christian, although he was a liberal man, and there was no bigotry involved there—although he was anti-Catholic, and made no bones about that. He encouraged the YMCA to stay on campus. Mr. White wanted to organize a building on campus. They knew, though, that church and state would disallow the legislature from appropriating money for a church building on the University of Florida. So, they transferred their goals to a recreational center to be known as Florida Union. They began collecting money there.

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44 Albert Murphree, UF president from 1909-1927.
William Jennings Bryan, who now has moved from Nebraska to Miami, Florida, is a friend of Dr. Murphree. They had met at church meetings, state meetings, and national meetings. He came to Gainesville on occasion; at least a half dozen times he came to Gainesville as a guest of the Murphree family, and spoke on campus and was involved in lots of things. He agreed to become the chairman of the fundraising for this building.

They did raise some funds. They were not totally successful. Part of it is because the boom was collapsing just at the time that they were raising money. They had deposited a lot of money that they had raised in a Gainesville bank. The bank closed, and they lost that money. But there was some that was still remaining, and when they built what is now Dauer Hall, but then was Florida Union in the 1930s, they were able to use that money.

The religion department continues to be active. They claimed responsibility for that money, so they were given jurisdiction over the second floor in the Union building; it was the only area of the building in which you could not smoke. Delton Scudder had his offices there. There was a little reading room up on that floor. If you walk down, you see all of the same things there today.

With the growth of the university in the 1950s and early 1960s, they begin to expand the religion department, expand the curriculum, and so on. They decide to experiment. They bring—and I remember Scudder talking to me about this—Michael Gannon in as an instructor. Mike Gannon was a priest. He came over from St. Augustine to be in charge of what they then called Crane Hall. That building no longer stands, but in its place is the Catholic Student Center today, on the corner of University Avenue and Nineteenth Street. Mike Gannon was hired as, I think, an adjunct professor. He was very effective. When they decided there was no protest about a Catholic, it was safe to bring a Jew onto the campus. Scudder did whatever search was necessary, and Barry Mesch arrived here to be a member of the faculty.

In the meantime, there was a growing number of Jewish students on the campus. Hillel was here for some of the activities, but there was no academic program. One morning—and I don’t know who was responsible for calling it; maybe it was Mesch or somebody else—we had a little informal gathering at Joe Silverman’s house. We had it there not because Joe was that dedicated to the religion, but it was close to the campus. I remember we started talking about the need to organize a Center for Jewish Studies. It came out of that, with the cooperation of the Department of Religion. Barry Mesch became the director for the Center of Jewish Studies.

MG: Do you remember the year?

SP: About 1973, I think. He, as a result, added some courses in American Jewish history and some Biblical history. In addition to Mesch, eventually there were about two or three other people added with the growth of the curriculum and the growth of the student enrollment. Well, Barry was a very effective teacher and a real intellectual. He was not great when it came to raising money and that sort of thing. After a while—and I say a
while, maybe ten or twelve years—Barry decided that he needed to spend his time more effectively writing a book, which would give him a promotion, rather than just trying to raise money for the Center for Jewish Studies. He gave the notice to [Charles F.] Sidman, who has now arrived on campus, the dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, that he’s giving that up.

Sidman called me into the office. He said, “Proctor, what are we going to do?”

I said, “We’re going to get a replacement. We’re not going to let this die.”

He said, “You’re right, and you’re the replacement.”

I said, “Chuck, I’m not the replacement for the Center for Jewish Studies. It would be laughable to appoint somebody like me. I am not anybody that’s recognized. I’m not an American Jewish historian, or any other kind of Biblical historian. I’m Florida history, Southern history. You can’t appoint somebody like me to a program. You’ve got to get a scholar.”

He said, “We don’t have any money for a line item,” because Barry Mesch was still holding on to his line item. “What I want you to do is to explore the availability of money. You’ll see how successful you are. Come back, and we’ll talk.”

Well, I conferred with Ralph. What I did was to propose a letter, which Ralph read and edited somewhat, and made up a list of people to send it to, individuals that I had gotten to know, mainly through the TEP fraternity that we had stayed friendly with, individuals I knew from Jacksonville—anybody that I thought we could tap for money. I wrote this letter and said, “I’m putting a thousand dollars into the pot. These are the reasons, and this is the program, and this is what we’re trying to do. We don’t want the program to end here at the University of Florida. Will you support it? Will you put a thousand dollars, or will you put anything in it?” I didn’t know what to expect, but I was not very optimistic, because I’ve gotten letters like that myself and have not responded to them.

But it was absolutely amazing. Within week, three, four, five weeks, the checks began to arrive. Before we turned around, we had collected maybe eighty, eighty-five thousand dollars, which was a phenomenal amount when we were asking for a thousand dollars or less from these people.

So, I went back to Sidman, and I said, “It worked. We got some money.” He was also absolutely amazed that it happened and that it happened so quickly. He said, “All right, we’re going to hire somebody. I’ll find a line item, and we’ll keep this money that you’ve raised for programming.” So, that’s exactly what they did. They set up a search committee with me as the chairman of it.

Warren Bargad was our person that came aboard. We went through the regular search process of advertising and getting letters back and making it a smaller and smaller pot. Warren happened to be in Israel at the time. He had all of the credentials. He came here
from a college in Chicago. He was the assistant dean there, so he had the administrative experience. He had worked in Israeli (inaudible), so he had the academic support that was needed. He was young and energetic. We were very pleased to get Warren, and he did a very good job as a teacher.

Once again, like Barry Mesch, he was not a very good fundraiser at all, so a lot of that responsibility continued to be mine. That’s where the Melton money came from. Sam Melton, out of Ohio, had been in the plumbing business manufacturing plumbing parts, and had made a lot of money. He had a winter home in Boca Raton, a small condo right on the beach. He was married to Florence. It was a second marriage for both of them. She was very much interested in education.

Sam had become interested in the University of Florida in sort of a very interesting way. There was a graduate student here working on a Ph.D. in psychology. Ted Landsman—who is no longer living now; he’s deceased—was his director. This guy, an Israeli, needed money, so one day he went to the library, and he found ten or twelve foundations and individuals that might be willing to support him. One of these was the Melton Foundation. He writes a letter to each one of them. Shortly afterwards, he gets a letter back from Sam Melton saying, “I’ll support you.” He wasn’t asking for a giant amount, a couple or three thousand dollars a year. Sam did not see him at all, never met him, but he was willing to support him. So, that was his first contact with the University of Florida.

Upon that basis, we decided to exploit it a little bit. We went down to Boca Raton—he and Florence were there for the winter—with the idea of asking for six hundred thousand dollars for a chair in the Center for Jewish Studies. He laughed at that. He thought it was ridiculous. He wasn’t going to give that amount of money to the University of Florida, although he had founded and subsidized the Center for Jewish Studies in Ohio State. He’d also put a lot of money into the Jewish Theological Seminary Educational Program in New York. We knew that he wasn’t anti-education or anti-centers for Jewish studies.

While we were there and had said no, I went into the kitchen with Florence. We were getting some drinks for everybody. There were only four or five of us there. She said, “Don’t let Sam scare you off. You might not get six hundred thousand dollars, but be persistent. Don’t leave here without getting some money.”

As the afternoon continued and our discussion continued, he agreed to give us a hundred thousand dollars. That’s what we came back, very enthusiastic, came back to Gainesville with. The idea was that we would put the hundred thousand dollars into the history department and hire somebody to teach American Jewish history or Jewish history. Later on, we got another hundred thousand dollars from Sam Melton. Sam is now deceased, but Florence is very much alive. She’s just celebrated her ninetieth birthday. She’s been going around the country organizing the Melton educational programs. They were very supportive to Israel. They helped found a high school there, which carries Sam’s name. So, that’s how the Melton money came.
Now, as I understand it, the Melton money has been transferred to the Center for Jewish Studies. It’s not lost at all. But Sam was very persistent. When he gave the money, he didn’t give a check to the Foundation. He said, “I’m going to give you bonds. Either you will agree to use my money to buy U.S. Treasury bonds, or I will buy them myself.” At the time that he was buying them was during the Carter administration, and the interest rates were 14, 15, 16, 17 percent. That’s where those bonds are right now, earning a very substantial amount of money. I would say Sam was smarter than almost anybody else that was involved.

They came to Gainesville one time. Criser was president, and we met together in his office. That was their only visit here. Bessie and I became good friends of theirs. I did an oral history interview with Sam, upon Florence’s request; it’s in our business leaders file. We’ll hear from her for Rosh Hashanah. We’ll get a note from her.

MG: What became of Jewish studies under Bargad? Did it grow?

SP: It grew in terms of the curriculum and the number of people involved. It never had its own faculty, and that’s true with all the centers. It’s continued to attract scholars from other departments: history, political science, anthropology, and so on. It’s brought some Israelis over to teach; either they were already in the United States or came over to teach for a semester. The program has grown so it attracts both Jewish and non-Jewish students. Hebrew is now accepted as a language for the master’s and the Ph.D. Jewish history is an acceptable major. It will not be long before they’re offering the master’s degree. It’s growing. It grew under Warren, and it continues to grow under Ken Wald, who is a very effective administrator.

MG: Tied to the Center for Jewish Studies is the Price Judaica Library. How did that come about?

SP: Well, the Prices received a letter one day from Bill Stone, who was the major fundraiser at the Foundation. It was a letter that was being sent out all over encouraging people to make gifts to the University of Florida through the Foundation: money, land, or whatever. The Prices had some land here in Gainesville on Twenty-Third Avenue. They decided to turn that over to the University, for tax purposes. That’s what happened. The evaluation was about four hundred thousand dollars. It was up there near where Ryan’s Steakhouse is today, University Avenue and Twenty-Third, not exactly on the corner but near there. That was a very large gift. We had never gotten anything like that.

In the meantime, we had acquired a library. That, too, goes back to earlier years. I was always interested in the acquisition of Jewish books. Of course, they weren’t going to allocate very much money in the library to acquire Jewish books. They didn’t have much money for any kind of books, to begin with—this, now, going back into the late 1940s, early 1950s. There was a rabbi in Jacksonville. He and I became good friends. Through him, that Reform rabbi, he was able to get the Jewish Chautauqua Society to make a contribution of books, which we could select, every year. He would send the list down,

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and I would work with the librarians and we would select the books. So that, in a very small way, began to build a collection.

Then, of course, with the creation of the Center for Jewish Studies and the development of programs, courses, you needed research materials available. Even though you weren’t offering graduate courses, students were doing research papers and so on. The library began to grow. The library itself allocated more money. The religion department allocated money. So, things began to happen.

Barry Mesch had an uncle living in Chicago, Rabbi [Leonard] Mishkin. Rabbi Mishkin had been a major book collector over the years, including a lot of magazines and journals and that sort of thing, and had bound them together and had full sets of things. He and his wife were thinking seriously about moving to Israel. This is in the, I guess, maybe the latter part of the 1970s. To do that, he needed to dispose of a lot of things, including his library collection. We knew about it because Barry Mesch’s nephew let us know about it. We became very interested in it: the fact that it was so voluminous and it had a lot of publications which had been lost in other libraries, particularly overseas libraries during the war, that it was sought after. Six or eight universities were interested, but we had the inside track because of Barry.

The university asked Charles Berlin from Harvard University, who was the Judaica scholar and librarian there, to go out to Chicago, which he did, to look at the collection and to give us an evaluation. He came back just bubbling. The letter he wrote said, “Don’t pass up the opportunity of acquiring this. It has material that we do not have at Harvard and which they do not have at Columbia. It’s one of a kind.” It then meant that we could buy it. We needed two hundred thousand dollars, which was the price that Rabbi Mishkin set and which was a great bargain price. The Foundation didn’t have the two hundred thousand dollars.

So, Bill Stone and I went from one end of Florida to the other in an effort to collect that amount of money, which we thought was going to be relatively easy, ’cause there were a lot of rich Jews living in Florida by now. Jews are interested in education, and Sam Proctor knows everyone. All he has to do is ask for the money, and it’s like a faucet being turned on. Well, we got turned down, turned down, turned down, in place after place after place. We even had some people who told us—Jews who said, “I don’t support Jewish causes.”

We came back to Gainesville without being successful at all. Harold Hanson was then the vice president of the university. Harold said, “We’re not going to lose this opportunity. After all, when I was growing up in Minneapolis,” or wherever it was, “I was a Shabbos goy.46 We’re going to get that collection.” So, the university put up the two hundred thousand dollars. That’s how it came about, and we acquired the collection. That immediately put the University of Florida on the map, and we made space available.

46 On Shabbos, the Jewish day of rest, certain types of work are prohibited under Jewish law. A Shabbos goy is a non-Jew who performs these acts and services for Jews on Shabbos.
It was about this time that the Prices gave us the land. It was my suggestion then that we name the library for the Price family. Their father, Isser, was already dead, but their mother Rae was still living. It was my idea that if we named the library that they would be very generous, which they weren’t particularly. Very friendly to the university and very friendly to the Foundation, very friendly to the Center for Jewish Studies, but no real money has come out of it, although they’re working on the Price family right now. That’s what we did. We named the library the Price Library for Isser and Rae Price. We had a big dinner one night here. A lot of people were invited and came. They recognized me, and gave me as a gift a set of The Jewish Encyclopedia, which was a magnificent gift. We now have a top-notch librarian in charge over there.

MG: Yeah, how did Bob Singerman come?

SP: Just through the library; it was part of a search. He applied for the job, and they offered it to him. They’ve never regretted it one minute. He’s been wonderful.

MG: Nor have I. He was incredibly helpful in my dissertation.

SP: The only unhappy thing is that when they were reworked, Library East, they did not have room for the Judaica Library. They put it down in Norman Hall, where the Education Library is located. It’s really out of the way. It’s not easy to get there. According to the plan, there’s going to be an additional library constructed just in the back of Library West. When that’s done, and I think they do have the money for that, then the Judaica Library is supposed to move into that space.

MG: Baccalaureate.

SP: The baccalaureate, which was an activity of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, was concocted by Michael Gannon. He thought that was a good idea, and it turned out to be a very successful idea. It was given on Friday afternoon, the day before commencement. The students who were getting degrees were invited to come, together with their families. The very first time, I was asked to do a little sketch on some aspect of Florida history—or University history, not Florida history. That’s what I did. The first year—the library holds about nine hundred seats, I would say they were about two-thirds empty—two-thirds full. From that point on, it was standing room only. Every year I gave a little humorous business. It became very popular. I continued to do it for about ten or twelve years. When I finally decided to retire in 1996, I said, “That’s enough.”

MG: When did the baccalaureate start?

SP: Um, I would say about eighty-eight [1988] or eighty-nine [1989], without really knowing. You have to give Mike Gannon credit for the whole thing.

MG: Was it just Arts and Science students, or university-wide?
SP: Arts and Science students only. It was very nice. It was at five o’clock in the afternoon, which was pleasant. It lasted just one hour. The Civic Chorus of Gainesville sang, and outside there were tables with some punch and cookies. It was really very nice.

MG: I remember going. I thought you had given—when I graduated in 1997, I thought you gave a talk that year.

SP: I gave the commencement address. I’ve given the commencement address twice: once, I think, in 1978 or seventy-nine [1979] and then in ninety-six [1996] or ninety-seven [1997].

MG: It wasn’t the year I graduated, I remember that. Was that the commencement address about that professor at UF who had been fired back in the twenties [1920s] for use of a textbook or something? I remember working with you on a wonderful story. I wish I could remember his name.

SP: Well, there was a man here who had been fired earlier. He was chairman of the history department. This was back in 1911. He had written an article, which challenged—

MG: The Dunning School.

SP: —the business of slavery and whether it was really moral or not. It so upset some of the Confederate organizations, like the Daughters of the Confederacy, that they brought pressure against the university, and they forced his resignation.

MG: I remember—and that’s the story. Was that a commencement or a baccalaureate? I remember you gave an address.

SP: It was a baccalaureate address.

MG: It was a baccalaureate address.

SP: When I gave the commencement address both times, I gave kind of an overview of the history of the university, because on both occasions, the commencement address was limited to twelve or thirteen minutes. I tried to give a light, humorous kind of thing.

MG: You mentioned earlier—which was yesterday—your role as curator in the library of the university materials.

SP: No, a curator at the museum.

MG: Excuse me, at the museum.

SP: To justify our using space down there, J.C. Dickenson named me curator of Florida history.
MG: When you were working on your 1853 to 1906 history, did you have a responsibility in the library?

SP: I had an office in the library because of the *Quarterly*.

MG: But no title.

SP: I had no title. But I was always very close to the P. K. Yonge Library from the very beginning. I was a good friend of Julian Young and a very good friend of Rembert Patrick. When the P. K. Yonge Library was in Library East on the first floor, on the south end under the stairwell, I had an office there right next to Rembert Patrick so that I could do the work that I needed to do on the history of the University and my other activities. This is before I become involved on the *Quarterly*. I was very much part of it, although they never had a formal advisory committee. I really served in that capacity as far as the P. K. Yonge Library was concerned. Ms. [Elizabeth] Alexander\textsuperscript{47} depended upon me a lot, considered me one of the strongest friends of the P. K. Yonge Library, as the whole library did.

MG: The reason I ask is because at some point, you’re going to be designated the University Historian. You’ll get involved in various things like the building identification, and the preservation of the historic campus. How do you get the designation University Historian?

SP: When I started working on the history of the University, upon the invitation of J. Hillis Miller, he was the one who named me historian in 1951, long before these other activities become—I become involved in it. I became the University Historian at the time I began working on the history of the University. When I began collecting material—manuscripts and catalogs and everything I could lay my hands on, and storing them in my office, which is where we were—I became the archivist. I needed that kind of title as I went around to offices. I couldn’t say, “I’m Sam Proctor, collecting documents.” “I’m Sam Proctor, the University Archivist, collecting documents.”

MG: That was the title I couldn’t remember. You carried archivist title and historian title.

SP: And the historian title. I’m no longer the archivist, but I’m still the University Historian.

MG: Was there much activity on your part as University Historian, many responsibilities between the fifties [1950s] and the beginning of building identification, or is that going on during that time?

SP: It’s always going on. I never had any arduous responsibilities, nothing that overwhelmed me, but I’m always there like a sitting duck. Increasingly, over the years, I become the source of information. Of course, I realize that it’s easier to call me on the telephone than to do your own research. So, that has happened. It goes up and down. As

\textsuperscript{47} Formerly the director of the P.K. Yonge Library.
you get close to homecoming, I’m overwhelmed with telephone calls from kids writing articles for the Alligator. Year after year, “When did homecoming start? When did Gator Growl start? When did this start? When did that start?” They don’t have time to look at the Alligator for last year. It’s easier to call me. So, that’s what my historian responsibilities have always been.

I give talks, obviously, on the university history. I know a lot of university history. Obviously I have collected a lot in my mind, and I have a pretty good number of documents that I can refer to. But it has never been a major activity. I’ve never been compensated for it. It’s just part of the things that I do.

MG: Gator History, how did that come about?

SP: Gator History came about because of my interest in University of Florida history. Together with my colleague from Key West, who collected the photographs and who was responsible for publishing the volume, I wrote the script for it, and we published it. There were three or four printings of the thing. It was very successful. We had a big book signing when it first came out. That night we may have autographed a hundred books.

Everything was going along fine until the company doing the publishing down in Ft. Lauderdale disappeared. They went into bankruptcy and just closed up. We were left adrift. What we needed, because they had sold out all the existing copies, was to get a reprint. With the organization no longer in existence, that was difficult. For a long time, we had no way of contacting them, and they have never resurfaced. There was the question of who had the copyright, because they had it, they published the book, and yet they’re not there.

The University of Florida Foundation finally decided that the people down there no longer owned the copyright. I don’t know whether that was legal or not, but that was their decision. So, the copyright came to the University. They wanted me to write a new chapter, because when I had finished, I was through the Marshall Criser period, about 1996. It needed a new chapter. I had thought that I would do that, but with the passage of time, postponing it, “I’ll start on it next week, next month, next year,” nothing has happened. The likelihood, being very realistic, is that nothing is going to happen.

MG: But they’ll republish the book? I believe it’s still out of print.

SP: It’s still out of print. You can’t find copies of it, yes. There’s going to be an effort made by two people, one from the library and one from the English department, to publish a photographic history of the university in time for the sesquicentennial next year. You know, sometimes I regret—I would still be famous if I published it. I’m ready not to do it.

MG: You’re involved in building identification. What does that mean?

SP: If you look around, particularly at the buildings in front of the Plaza, there are pedestals, and there are pedestals so that people in wheelchairs can come up and read what’s on the plaques there. They identify information about who the individual gave its name to the building and a little bit about the building itself.

It all came about maybe ten years ago. One Sunday morning, a Sunday morning like this, an alumnus from Orlando was walking around the campus, or was riding on his bicycle around the campus. He was over at Tigert Hall. There are two or three students walking around, too. They came over to him and said, “Sir, who was Dr. Tigert?” Who was Tigert? This building is named Tigert Hall. He was absolutely appalled that University of Florida students would not know who Tigert was. I don’t know why he would expect that they would, but he was unhappy about it.

On Monday morning, he went to the Foundation and complained. He said, “We’re going to do something about this.” He gave them a hundred thousand dollars to fund building identification. That’s all he said he wanted. They came to me with the idea that I would write these plaques that would go on that. We had enough money to get about two or three a year up there. So, that’s what I’ve been doing. We’ve just put in one in Leigh Hall next door. Anderson Hall went up about last month. The one out here will go up next week. I’m working now on five of the dormitories.

Part 3 ends; part 4 begins

MG: How many buildings have been identified since you started this project?

SP: Let me think for just a minute. Benton [Hall], Peabody, Criser, Anderson, Flint [Hall], Floyd [Griffin-Floyd Hall], Leigh [Hall], the auditorium—eight buildings. And five more—no, nine buildings, because Dauer Hall has also—ten buildings, because the Reitz Union has been identified. The pedestals are there, as I said, the reason for pedestals, rather than stands.

I gather information, which is not easy because, although we have good archives now by comparison with earlier years, a lot of stuff was not saved. The archivist that’s in the library now is top-notch. It’s still hard to find out exactly how much a building costs when it was constructed in the 1920s. I don’t know if that’s really necessary to know, but it’s an interesting item to know.

Right now I’m looking for information on Mr. [Henry Holland] Buckman, for whom the Buckman Act was passed. All I know right now is he was a successful lawyer, lived in Jacksonville, came to the Legislature. In his capacity there, he introduces the Buckman Act. But before it’s over, I’ll have enough to do the 120 or 130 words that I need for Buckman Hall. I’m going to get that done in the next couple of months.
In addition, they started a new publication on campus two years ago called *Florida*. You may get it, I don’t know. It’s a large one. In it, I do a column each time called Proctor’s Prowess, or something, (laughs) about buildings or activities on campus.

MG: I guess tied to the building identification is the preservation efforts. How did you get involved in preserving—?

SP: I became interested in the preservation program way back in the 1960s. I was one of the pioneers of that, as far as this campus was concerned. I had been involved in the state activities with Senator Bob Williams from west Florida. Williams had been a very, very conservative senator, and lost the election when Haydon Burns was the governor. Burns offered him several jobs. He was going to become head of whatever agency handled allocations to poor people. I don’t think that agency operates the same way today.

There was such an arousal on the part of people throughout Florida that you would have this conservative monster in charge of a liberal organization like that, that he withdrew, and accepted the job of being director of the Center for Florida History and Archives. Everybody said, “What the hell does he know about that?” He turned out to be an excellent administrator. He learned a lot, and he surrounded himself with people like me who knew more than he did, and he was willing to listen to you.

Under his leadership, and with encouragement from the feds from the Department of Interior, he created the review committee for the National Register [of Historic Places], which you know is a procedure that you go through. You nominate properties, houses, stores, various things, and if they meet the criteria, the nomination goes to Washington and is listed in the Department of Interior’s National Register. Bob Williams creates that in Florida.

Because of the friendship with me, I become a member of the original committee. Blair Reeves, who’s always been interested in preservation—he’s on the architect faculty—is also a member of the committee. During its earlier years, it met here in Gainesville in the museum. Later on we met in Tallahassee. I remained on the review committee for maybe twenty or twenty-five years. In the last part of it, I was the chairman of it for several years. As a result of that association, I became very much supportive of preservation.

When this campus was built, the four focal points around the Plaza of the Americas was this building right here, Flint, which was a science building built for science courses, and that’s what its name was for a very long time. Across the way, also facing University Avenue, is the building we now call Anderson Hall. When it was built in 1913, it was a building set up for the social sciences and math, but the administration was in that building, including the president’s office. And then, Peabody Hall, and then the agriculture building, Floyd Hall.

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49 Burns (1912-1987) was governor from 1965 to 1967. He was also mayor of Jacksonville from 1949 to 1965.
All of those buildings dated back to the very beginnings of the University of Florida. They were indeed old. They desperately needed rehabbing. They were not air conditioned. They had all kinds of problems. The University wanted to demolish those buildings and to build new buildings. There was this wonderful attraction of new buildings. They could be air conditioned, they could be modern, they could be all those things. I decided—I don’t mean overnight I decided, but this is one of the things I was going to make an effort to try to save. With Blair Reeves’s support, there was no problem there. He and I could work together very easily. We were friends then. We continued to be friends today.

The movement starts, but there was strong support for demolition. Bob Bryan in the provost’s office favored demolition. Sidman favored demolition. You had a lot of strong voices that wanted to get rid of the old and come up with the new. Fortunately, the state went into a recession in the early 1970s. There was the reluctance on the part of the legislature to appropriate money to tear something down, so they didn’t do it. Those buildings were saved as a result of the economic situation. When we began to come out of the recession, by that time the preservation movement had become stronger and it had more advocates and supporters. They were reluctant to do anything about it.

They had made all kinds of efforts. For instance, they had brought an engineering firm down from Atlanta to inspect the agricultural building—as it was originally called, not Floyd Hall—with the argument that the walls had been weakened as a result of planes during World War II coming out of Jacksonville, training planes, breaking the sound barrier and, of course, weakening the walls. Well, as it turned out, they had not broken the sound barrier until 1947, not during World War II. Although they had expected a very negative report from the engineering firm, it came up with a very positive statement: There’s nothing wrong with this building. The walls are fine. It does need some painting and some rehabbing, but it’s a very fine building. Don’t tear it down! So, we saved those buildings.

The third person who joined the fight was Roy Hunt from the College of Law. Roy was interested in preservation, in fact taught a course in the law school on preservation law. He came to us with a lot of knowledge and a lot of understanding. My student assistant then was Steve Kerber. Steve is now the archivist at the University of Missouri in Edwardsville. Anyway, Steve, of course, was on our side of the thing. Steve went out and did research on eleven of the historic buildings on the campus. We quietly, Blair and I, because we were on the review committee, put those buildings on the Register. They were not nominated by the university. We just put them on the Register.

Then, with the help of Roy Hunt, we created a historic district on the campus, which had never been done before, and put it through the review committee in Tallahassee and sent it on up to Washington. Well, when the [Board of] Regents learned—first the administration, and then when the Regents learned about it, they were very upset that we had taken this action on our part. What are these three pipsqueaks down in Gainesville doing? But it was already done then. They passed a resolution, though, saying that no

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50 Proctor means Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville.
other university could do it without Regents approval. I don’t think any other university has tried to set up a historic district. That’s the way it all came about. Nobody would dare tear down buildings today.

I think it’s interesting to note that when O’Connell arrives on campus, the auditorium is in desperate shape. The auditorium had been built in the 1920s. Originally, it was supposed to be part of an auditorium administration building. It was supposed to be in the form of a “T.” The top of the “T” was to be administration. Well, there wasn’t enough money in the 1920s to do that. In fact, the building had been scaled down from its original plan. It had grown shabby. There was no air conditioning. It was not comfortable. The seats were bad. The sound was not good. All of those terrible things were happening. It was on the list to be demolished, also.

When O’Connell arrives as president in sixty-seven [1967], in some way he thought that he could recreate the kind of campus that he had lived in when he was a student here in the 1930s, that he could get freshmen to wear rat caps, that they could do all of the things that they could do or not do as freshmen. And among other things, he wanted to hold on to the buildings. He was appalled by the idea that they would tear down the auditorium.

He called Blair Reeves and me into his office one day, and he told us that he was going to try to save the auditorium, but he needed some ammunition. He asks Blair to write an essay about the architectural significance of the building, why it was so special and all of the wonderful things. He asked me to write an article, a paper, on the uses of the auditorium: what famous people had played there, what orchestras had come, and in what way had it been used for ceremonies, the invocation of Phi Beta Kappa and funerals and all kinds of things like that, which gave him the kind of ammunition he felt he needed when he went out to the alumni.

He was successful, as you know. When he left here, they had not finished the reclamation of the auditorium. That was finished under Marston. The auditorium today, of course, they built an addition on to the front of it with a music room, which Mrs. [Frances] Reitz was responsible for getting furnished. The inside of it is very beautiful today. When you tell people today that that building was threatened with demolition, nobody really can believe it. This building they were going to tear down?

MG: While we’re talking about buildings and preservation, how has the campus changed? I know it’s a much, much larger campus than it was when you arrived. Talk to me a little bit about when buildings were built and why the O’Connell Center, for example. The clock tower, how far does that go back—or the bell tower?

SP: When the campus first opens, there were 357 acres. It was nothing but pine forest here. They had to chop down the trees in order to get the first buildings erected. There wasn’t a giant amount of money at all, but buildings didn’t cost a lot in those early years.
Buckman and Thomas Hall together came to about seven [point] five thousand dollars, eight thousand dollars. You can’t put a bathroom in today for that amount of money. The original buildings followed a plan that had been drawn up by the first architect that had been hired by the Board of Control, which had a quadrant which we now call the Plaza of the Americas. The buildings were to be located around that quadrant. That’s exactly where they are today. They have followed the original plan.

They had an interesting driveway that started at Thirteenth Street and ended up just beyond where Thomas Hall is today on University Avenue, in the form of a half moon, and one that matched it on the south end of the campus, just beyond the auditorium. Over the years, both of them became foot paths rather than driveways, and eventually both of them disappeared. The last of the northern one disappeared when they built Library West because it was right in the way. In fact, Dean Harrison, Will Harrison, is now designing a plaque, which I’ve helped him with, which is going to tell about that first driveway and show where it was located. There is a sketch of it. Anyway, that’s where the original buildings were. That’s where they were until the end of World War II.

There was some construction on campus in the intervening years. Although Florida was poor, and money was hard to get, it was the leading university. So, whatever money went to building construction came to the University of Florida. Florida A & M and the university in Tallahassee, Florida State College for Women, were really at the short end of the stick.

So, over the years, you had the buildings around the plaza, plus the auditorium and the [agricultural] experiment station. Beyond that, on the south end of the campus, you had farmlands, which the College of Agriculture and IFAS [Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences] operated. There was a small pathway that ran from the back of the auditorium south to where the museum is located on Museum Road. The police station, in the 1920s, that was built where WRUF [is]; that was the first radio station on campus. Dean Joseph Weil from the College of Engineering was responsible for its design and the ordering of its equipment and so on.

While the growth was steady, remember that we start out with 103 students in 1906, the first year of operation on this campus, and on the eve of World War II, there are about 3,200 students. The growth was steady, particularly after 1920, but there was no need for a giant number of buildings. Suddenly, there is this explosion of students under the G.I. Bill after World War II. I’ve already told you about all the efforts to bring temporary buildings in to try to handle the situation, which really was critical.

Then there begins construction. Money had accumulated in the state during the war years, when they were not willing to spend money on infrastructure or anything that didn’t have to do with the war effort. The money was in Tallahassee. The legislature was in Tallahassee. The legislature was in Tallahassee. Many of the members of the legislature were graduates of the University of Florida, and they had brothers, and now sisters, and children who were going to the University of Florida. They were very generous in their allocation of funds for the development of this campus. A new gymnasium was built, an addition on to the
infirmary, an addition on to the student union building, new dormitories came into existence. All of those things were happening.

As the University grew in size, so did the campus. The campus ended, originally, about where the O’Connell Center is now. That property, which is now the parking lot, was the parade ground for ROTC. Remember, as a land grant university, the first two years were compulsory military. They had both infantry and artillery. The artillery called for horses, and there was a horse stable there about where the O’Connell Center itself is located today. That’s the way it was, as I say, until the end of World War II. Then, with the growth of the university and the expansion of buildings, they began to look beyond that point. The expansion of the stadium, for instance, begins. And then—

MG: Was the stadium always located in its present—?

SP: The stadium was always located there. The original playing field was at the north end, right at the corner of where the O’Connell Center property at Cross Street and University Avenue is located. It was called Fleming Field. That was the original area. Just to the east of it, as you get towards Thomas Hall—and Thomas Hall starts out originally as an administration/classroom building, but by 1915, it is a place for the students to live. It’s a dormitory then. Outside of it was what they called Murphree Field, named obviously for Dr. Murphree, until the stadium was built in 1930.

The original stadium held 2,200 seats. Of course, it’s grown considerably there. That’s where the campus ended. With the growth of the campus, they began to expand west where the Thomas Center is. What they did was to develop athletic grounds: a baseball park, a track. Those kinds of activities began to develop there. Also, they then developed even farther where woods had been at one time, and where in the 1930s students went out with guns and shot rabbits and squirrels and so on, and nobody was concerned about it the least bit. Now they chopped down those trees, and they designated that area for Flavet and then for Fraternity Row.

The fraternity situation came about because of the University. The University was able in some way—I’ve forgotten what the details of it were—to acquire a million dollar loan in the early 1950s from the state. They then divided that up into ten portions and made money available to sororities, a hundred thousand dollars each, a loan to build a sorority house. The A. Phi [Alpha Phi] sorority, under the leadership of Mrs. Weil and Dean Weil, were in that first category of a hundred thousand dollars. Then the university was able to get a second million-dollar loan to be paid back. They were able to buy bonds, and as rent came in, they paid the money back. They then made the allocations available to fraternities. That’s when the TEP fraternity becomes involved.

But the point that I want to make is that begins the growth of the University in that direction. Then they built the law school where it is now. That was to be the end of the campus. Nobody thought they would go beyond that. Now, of course, Hull Road takes you all the way out to Thirty-Fourth Street, and with the conference center across the street, we’re beyond Thirty-Fourth Street now.
The growth was steady after the 1940s. It continues to be steady today. I, for instance, used to marvel at all the empty land that we had. Now, I find that there’s not very much empty land. Everything is being filled up with the buildings.

MG: I was just amazed when I came in 1990, twelve years later. There’s that enormous physics building on a spot where there was nothing. There’s dormitories way out on Radio Road now. They’ve built that chapel. It’s absolutely incredible. Where’s this money coming from?

SP: A lot of it has been private money. A lot of it is private money. The Bowman Center is an example. George gave a million dollars for the construction of that, and the state has matched a lot of those gifts. About half the money has come in from the state; half of it from private donations. There’s no money been made available for dormitories, but that is on the basis of bonds. They borrow the money, they pledge the bonds, and as the rent money comes in, they pay it off.

MG: How has the history department changed in the last fifty years or so? You’ve been a member. You were a full-time member until ninety-six [1996], and you’re still—

SP: It’s mainly—it’s grown. I think that’s the easiest way to describe it. It’s grown from a department that had three members in the 1930s until now when it’s got forty or fifty people in there. It’s grown because the student body has grown. There’s been a demand for new kinds of courses. Nobody in their wildest dreams ever thought that the University history department would teach a course in Italian history or German history, or anything like that—Russian history. You taught American history, you taught English history and some Latin American history, and not much Latin American history. That was the end of it. And that was true of universities everywhere; certainly in the South it was true of universities. Then, of course, with new students coming in and new interests being generated, the situation has changed considerably.

The history department we have here today, from the administration point of view, the curriculum point of view, the relationship of students to the department has changed. I mean, here we’ve got a whole building dedicated to history. In the old days, you had two classrooms over in Peabody Hall. So, yes, there’s been a change, a dramatic change. I don’t think there’s been a change in the philosophy of the department. It’s not a restrictive department at all.

Faculty come and go. I think a lot of young faculty come in here from elsewhere, from Ivy League schools, thinking this is the end of the world, and that they’ll stay here a year or two or three years and get a better offer. That does happen to a lot of people. When they get here, they realize this isn’t the end of the world and that it’s a very beautiful community and a very nice community to live in, and a very good university that we have here.
But there’s a rapid changeover. I retired in 1996. At that time, I knew everybody by his or her first name. I was friendly with everybody, but that’s no longer true today. In the old days, there was a lot of camaraderie among the faculty. You knew the faculty because you not only were in offices next door to each other, but you went out to dinner with each other. And occasionally—well, more often than occasionally—there were parties and get-togethers, not big expensive parties, in which the faculty all came together. So, you not only knew the faculty members, you also knew their wives and members of their family.

MG: I know the department grows. In the—I guess it’s the seventies [1970s], there’s a Chapel Hill group here.

SP: There always was a Chapel Hill group, not only the seventies [1970s]; going back to the 1930s there was a Chapel Hill group. Rembert Patrick was from Chapel Hill. Ashby Hammond was from Chapel Hill. They came here because there was a job opportunity available to them.

MG: As I understand it, the story that I’ve been told is that it’s Doherty who’s the first of that post-World War II generation that brings [David] Colburn and [Gus] Burns and Pleasants.

SP: Doherty was here long before they arrived on campus.

MG: But he’s the one that hires.

SP: No, no, no. Well, in a way, yes, that’s true, because in the early 1960s, about sixty-one [1961], sixty-two [1962], Jack becomes the chairman of the American Institutions course. So, yes, he hires them. When Colburn and Burns and the others come here—and I was a member of that faculty—they come into the University College, which had originally been called the General College, and it had its name changed after World War II to University College. So yes, that’s where they came first, and then become part of the history department.

The University College was never really fully accepted. The members of the faculty there, while they were all good and upcoming and all, they didn’t get the same pay as members of the history department. The people in the history department kind of looked down on the people in the University College. Then when Sidman arrives, there’s the merger of the two, and University College goes out of existence. Individuals then become members of the regular faculty, with a few exceptions. Jack Doherty, for instance, would never come into the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. They still had some freshmen who were taking the basic courses, and that’s what Jack did, until his sudden death.

MG: The practice of history has changed a lot since you wrote your master’s thesis and some of your early works. There are poststructuralists. There’s deconstruction. There’s postmodernism.

SP: Most of which I don’t understand. I’m a traditionalist.
MG: Tell me about that.

SP: “He was born in 1957, and he died in 1997.” I try to fill up the in-between. I’m a narrative historian, and that’s not the most popular type of historian to be today.

MG: Do you have much to say to the younger historians?

SP: I don’t communicate. I’m retired. In fact, I bought a t-shirt a couple of years ago when the cruise ship stopped in St. Thomas, which says, “I am retired. Don’t ask me to do a damn thing.” Occasionally I wear that. (laughs)

MG: As part of the history department’s growth and the growth of some other areas on campus, there are the Samuel Proctor scholarships.

SP: That came about largely as a result [of] the impetus of David Colburn. People began asking at the time of my retirement, What can we do? We didn’t think that we could get enough money for a professorship, although we probably could have, or a chair. So, it was David who came up with the idea of graduate scholarships. We were very successful, really much beyond what we thought in terms of the money that would come in. Money came in largely from my family. Luther Coggin, I think, gave twenty-five thousand dollars. We had some very generous contributors. Each of my brothers gave a good [amount of] money. My sons gave money. The sum today is over four hundred thousand dollars.

It hasn’t been—it doesn’t work exactly the way I would like it to work. They were supposed to give two fellowships a year; they only give one, although they’ve got the money to. It’s the best scholarship that they offer in the history department. It’s about eighteen thousand dollars. The recipients were supposed to be named the Samuel Proctor Scholars. I don’t think they even know who in the hell Samuel Proctor is. I’ve never met any of them. The whole thing has kind of gotten lost. But it does the job that it was created to do—it provides money for research—in this case, at least for one student, not two.

Anyway, we had a big banquet in the Reitz Union. All of the people who have contributed money were invited, all of the administrators. The Reitzes were there. The Marstons were there. In fact, it was probably the last public appearance by Mrs. Marston. Lombardi had recently come to the campus. Lombardi gave this talk, which you may or may not have heard about. Lombardi got up and said that he had recently met me and was very impressed—you know, all the wonderful things that Lombardi would say when he gets cranked up.

He said, “Every university has an icon. When I was at Indiana, there was an icon, which was somebody who knew the history of the University. You could go to him and get the information you were looking for. He had been there forever. We had the same thing at

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Johns Hopkins when I was there. I fully expected that there would be an icon at the University of Florida when I arrived. Sure enough, when I asked, they said, ‘Sam Proctor is the guy you’re looking for.’

“When was he here? When did he come? Tell me a little bit about him.’

“They said, ‘He came here in 1937.’

“Goddamn, that was before I was born!’ Anyway, I expected to see an old fart, (laughs) but I found a very delightful creature.” He was very nice from that point on. When he said “old fart,” Mrs. Reitz supposedly turned to Dr. Reitz and said, “What did he say?” (laughs) He became famous for the four letter words he used on public occasions. That was just something very mild, as it turned out. It was sort of startling for the group, particularly for the kind of dinner party we were having at the Reitz Union.

MG: I remember visiting him to talk about your festschrift, which is the next thing I wanted to ask you about. I met with him in his office, and his language was so sailor-like it almost made me blush. (SP laughs) I think he used the F-word about four or five times.

SP: Oh, yeah.

MG: I’m thinking—it was jarring, but he was, I thought, a really engaging and interesting person. (SP laughs) Let’s talk about the festschrift.

SP: The festschrift came about—once again, I was not responsible for initiating that. I think Canter Brown and you were the ones who were really responsible for coming up with the idea and putting everything together. I think you were a little bit discouraged to begin with by the negative response that you had on campus here. Colburn wasn’t particularly enthusiastic. I don’t know what reaction you had from Lombardi. Lombardi would not say no if you already had the money, but he wasn’t going to offer anything. I don’t know, you see, because I was not part of that, but I gathered that that was not something that anybody stood up and said, That’s exactly what we need and we want to do it, and so on.

MG: There was the issue that we faced. While I was involved in the project, I wasn’t a driving force. The University Press of Florida was not pleased with the direction the festschrift was taking under—essentially, the primary role that Canter and Bill [Rogers] played. So, we did. It turned out that, rather than publishing with the University Press, which wanted the book to go in a more academic direction with a more scholarly introduction and that sort of thing, we ended up raising money to publish the book essentially privately—the Sentry Press.

SP: Where did you get the money?

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MG: We raised it amongst your family.

SP: Okay. My sons, I know, were very generous.

MG: We raised money amongst your family and friends. The money that was raised went to Bill Rogers Sentry Press.

SP: Which did a splendid job.

MG: Then Rose Printing was the printer.

SP: The book that was turned out was one that you could be very proud of, and would have been something, I think, to enhance the University of Florida Press. Anyway, the book was published, and as you know, it was distributed, and I think it went into a second printing, but I’m not sure about that.

Right now, the leftover copies have been acquired by the Foundation. As of tomorrow, they’re moving out of my office to the Foundation, where they’re going to be mailed out by the end of the week, a copy to each public high school library in Florida. The money that was earned—several thousand dollars—will go into, as my suggestion, the scholarship program that was set up in the Center for Jewish Studies. My two sons, Mark and Alan, created a scholarship program last year, a very generous scholarship program named the Samuel and Bessie R. Proctor Scholarships. It’s growing to almost a quarter of a million dollars. This money from the Festschrift will go into that pot.

MG: One of the reasons that we worked on the festschrift, besides to honor you, was to do more to preserve Florida history. Tell me about the role of Florida history on campus from the time you got here to the state of Florida history on this campus today.

SP: When I first came in the 1930s and the 1940s, Florida history was not considered something that you taught on the college level. It was something that local people were interested in, if their families had lived in the community for three or four generations. There were so many new people moving into Florida, certainly in the post World War II period, that they didn’t have time to worry about the past. Very little effort was being made by any of the state agencies or local agencies to preserve the past. Buildings were being torn down with the construction of new buildings, new roads, subdivisions, and all of these things. New is what we want. Different is what we want. We’re looking to the future, not to the past. So, Florida history was not considered anything. It wasn’t disrespectful; it was just one of the things that was ignored.

Patrick came here not as a Florida historian, but as a Civil War scholar. He had done that book as a dissertation on the Confederate cabinet, which he later turned into a book, which Chapel Hill published, which won him a lot of support. When he comes to Gainesville to teach at the University of Florida, he teaches Civil War history, U. S. history, not Florida history. When he became interested in the writing and publication of

56 *Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet.*
Florida Under Five Flags, and you remember I told you that story of how that brought about the creation of the University of Florida Press, he begins to turn his attention to Florida history. In 1944—Pat’s been here about nine years, and he did not serve in World War II.

In the meantime, in 1944 Julien Yonge arrives with the P. K. Yonge collection from Pensacola. The connection there had, once again, been Patrick’s. When Patrick was working on the Florida Under Five Flags, there were very few resources that he could find to use, even in a book as small as that. He went out to Pensacola, and he met Mr. Yonge and the members of Mr. Yonge’s family. Mr. Yonge was not married, but his sister Marjorie was there. They took to Pat, and Pat took to them. They became good friends.

The collection, which had started out many years earlier by Julian Yonge and his father P. K. Yonge, and which was just something very small and they funded it themselves, and it had grown so that they were no longer able to house it in the house. They had a little one-room building in the back on their property, which was their little library. Now, it had become too small. Mr. Yonge was advancing in age. P. K. Yonge, his father, was dead. He had no children, so he began to be concerned about the disposal of it. They’d had some offers, I understand, to sell the collection or to move it outside of Florida, but they were determined to keep it in Florida. Through Pat’s persuasion, they decided to turn it over to the University of Florida.

Mr. Yonge came with the collection as the curator. He was an elderly man and somewhat frail, but his whole life was dedicated to that library. He even had a cot. He was very hard of hearing. He kept the library open at night if anybody wanted to use it. Very often when the bell rang he could not hear it, so he had the cot there to spend the night there on the nights he was locked in the library. (laughs) Everybody just laughed about that and accepted that’s Mr. Yonge—or Mr. Julien, as everybody called him.

The library came in forty-four [1944], and Pat became not the curator of it, but very much involved and had an office right next door to Mr. Yonge. That increased his enthusiasm for Florida history. He then becomes the chairman of the history department in 1949, whereupon he has the opportunity to introduce a course in Florida history, which he would teach, which he did, and did a very good job. He was a very effective teacher. There was never any negativism about teaching a course in Florida history. But it was not overwhelmingly large. He had a few dozen students who came Monday, Wednesday, and Fridays. It was an undergraduate course. They were not offering Florida history on the graduate level yet. That’s the way it started.

MG: How did the faculty grow? You begin teaching Florida history.

SP: I begin teaching Florida history and Jack Doherty begins teaching Florida history. Even more so am I involved when Pat leaves to go to the University of Georgia as a graduate research professor there, and Jack leaves teaching and goes into chairmanship of the American Institutions course. That leaves me, then, as the sole proprietor of Florida history.
MG: But Gannon will come.

SP: Gannon will come. Gannon didn’t teach Florida history to begin with. Gannon’s an adjunct, and is here as a priest. His main responsibility was in the religion department.

MG: Are there anyone—Colburn writes a book on Florida.

SP: Colburn never taught Florida history. Colburn never taught Florida history. He writes the book because of his interest in civil rights, not because of his interest in Florida.

MG: And Pozzetta, who’s an immigration historian, will still—

SP: Once again, George did not teach Florida history.

MG: But he writes about it.

SP: He writes it, as with the passage of time more and more people, of course, begin to use Florida for research purposes, to publish articles in the Florida Historical Quarterly, occasionally in the Journal of Southern History. So, with the passage of time—and this is true of all the states, particularly in the South—there’s an increased interest in its history, a desire to learn more about it and preserve what we had. This is why the preservation movement is successful, because people now are responding to it and supporting it.

MG: You retire in ninety-six [1996]. Michael Gannon continues to teach, but his health is declining.

SP: He is retiring. This is his last semester right now. I really retired in ninety-three [1993], because when I was in the military, I was able when I came here, under the retirement program, to buy my three years back in the military. I was covered right from the very beginnings of my retirement to 1943, even though I did not start teaching until June of 1946.

In 1993 I had fifty years in the retirement program, but only forty-seven years in the classroom. I wanted the fifty years in the classroom, so I stayed on for three more years. I could have stayed on longer if I wanted, but I wanted to stay on until June of ninety-six [1996], and that’s exactly what I did. My formal retirement came in ninety-six [1996]. I was entertained by the Lombardis. They had that big party at their house. They had asked us to send in a list of a hundred people that we wanted, which I thought was very generous because they initiated that completely on their own.

MG: I remember being at that party. But, Gannon is going to retire. What’s the future of Florida history?

SP: The future of Florida history is very dim on this campus. We have had a growing lack of enthusiasm for Florida history for the last ten years, even before I retired. It was
obvious that the people here who are on the faculty are much more interested in more exotic history: the history of the Balkans, for instance; the history of North Africa, for instance. African studies have been very, very popular. I don’t know that we have that many students taking African courses, but we have an awful lot of classes in African history. Latin American history has become a lot of courses. When you look at that list of individuals who are teaching here, you don’t find any of them that are interested in Florida history at all, and very few other than Bert Wyatt-Brown who is interested in Southern history. The future is very dim for both of them.

The responsibility has now been turned over to the University of South Florida, because it’s filled the vacuum that needs filling. They do not have any plans that I know of to hire somebody to teach Florida history, although we have all these wonderful collections in the library, and we have students who would take courses in Florida history and students who would do research in Florida history, but they’re discouraged from doing so. Last year, supposedly there was a line item being made available by the dean for Florida history. With the cutback in funds, that was the first one slashed off the list. Gannon and I lament and, you know, tears flow as a result. I’m not very optimistic about it. As I say, I’m retired; don’t ask me to do a damn thing.

MG: Why teach Florida history?

SP: Because it’s important. First of all, it’s a fascinating story, Florida history. It’s a long, rich, wonderful story. It’s a story of a lot of people who came here with nothing and who built a wonderful state, and so for no other reason, it should be taught. People should know—children should know where they came from, where their families came from. This is an opportunity to learn about it from people who are academically inclined, who are knowledgeable, and who will be able to discuss these things with them.

MG: People have argued that one of the problems with Florida or Florida culture is the fact that so many Florida residents have come from someplace else.

SP: That’s true.

MG: This isn’t necessarily something you and I want to talk about on tape, because we’re both preaching to each other’s choirs as the director of the Florida Studies Center at the University of South Florida, the sense of history as a way of building community. How do you get a whole bunch of folks who’ve come from someplace else to buy into their new adopted home?

SP: I don’t buy the fact that people who have just arrived are not interested. I have found from my own experience talking to these people, working with these people, that some of those are the most curious of all about the past. Where did this happen? I’m living in Gainesville; tell me something about Gainesville.
MG: Let’s go on a little further, and then we’ll break for lunch. I have Hillel here on the list. We’ve talked about Hillel a little bit, but not recent, not post-1970. What involvement do you have in Hillel? How does Hillel grow? What role, what purpose does Hillel serve?

SP: I think that I’ve told you about Hillel’s coming: people like Philip Selburn and others who bring it here in the 1930s, and the little role that it played in World War II with Rabbi Yungerman coming in as the chaplain; and then the real development of Hillel in 1948 with the purpose of that property where Hillel is located today and the structure of that building.

I was very much involved with Hillel at that time, both on the local level—we had a B’nai B’rith lodge, I was the president of it—and on the state level. I went to B’nai B’rith meetings, and at that time B’nai B’rith was the chief financial supporter of Hillel. That’s no longer true today, but it was very true then. What went on in Hillel on this campus—and this is where most of the Hillels were located, although they were trying to get one started at the University of Miami in the 1940s—was of concern and of interest to the people in B’nai B’rith. There was a lot of support for a building. It’s a recreation building that had been brought over from Camp Blanding. Obviously, it’s not the kind of image that they wanted to set for Hillel at the University of Florida.

With the support of the state B’nai B’rith, funds were collected. National B’nai B’rith put money in, and we began construction of this building, as I was on the building committee, and my name is on the plaque outside of the building today. We had used a local member of the College of Architecture, Sidney Carter, who was Jewish, who left about two-thirds of the way through because he got a job as a city planner for Augusta, Georgia. It was turned over, and they had followed Sidney’s plans. We had a lot of discussion about what went into the building. The building was designed for about eight hundred students. That’s about what the maximum was on campus at the time. It wasn’t a very religious-oriented student body at the time. They liked Hillel because they got served meals over there occasionally.

pause in recording

MG: Back to Hillel. They built the building for eight hundred students.

SP: We built the building for eight hundred students. Not a very religious-oriented student body, but it was used, and it was also used by the community as we had used the earlier building, the temporary building. There were two rooms upstairs, which became our first Sunday school. A lot of activities. I remember, for instance, Alan’s bris was in the Hillel House. We didn’t have a mohel here, but we had a rabbi, Dr. Blank, a Jewish doctor who did it. We had a little reception there in the front room of the Hillel House. So, it was used for a lot of different purposes by the community. We had a small synagogue building at the time. There was a lot of camaraderie.

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57 A mohel is a Jewish man who performs the ritual of bris on a baby boy eight days after he is born.
Hillel now brought a director in that was sent in by the national Hillel office. We had nothing to do with the selection. So, some years we got a very Reform rabbi who bought his meat need in the A&P [supermarket]. The next year, we had a very Orthodox rabbi who wouldn’t answer the telephone on Saturday. We got along with them. They came in and worked at the synagogue. They came for Friday evening services and gave a talk, and sometimes for Saturday morning services.

They tried to hold religious services at Hillel. Sometimes they were successful; sometimes they were not. But it didn’t make any difference whether there were six people or sixteen people or sixty people. They went ahead with the program. Generally speaking, we had good Hillel directors. Not always the best, not always were they enthusiastic about Gainesville. Gainesville was not New York City or Chicago in the early 1950s. It may not even be that today. Generally speaking, we got along well, the two communities.

I played an active role in the synagogue. I played a very active role as far as Hillel was concerned. I knew all of the directors well and got along very well with them, so I had no argument about them at all. With the passage of time, my own job responsibilities began to grow. I was no longer as involved in the sixties [1960s] and seventies [1970s] and eighties [1980s] as I had once been. On occasion, the various directors have tried to organize faculty programs. They’re trying to do that right now. We tried luncheons where you brought your own sandwiches and got together for discussions. That’s the way it’s gone.

I was an active Hillel person, a real strong activist, and now a strong supporter. This year, in the spring, Hillel created a prize, an award, a life achievement award, which they call the Gator Prize. I was the first recipient of that. There was a reception for me. They held it over on the law school campus; there was a building over there. They invited the Jewish faculty, served refreshments, and gave me another one of the plaques for which I don’t have room enough to hang. But anyway, it’s called the Gator Prize, and it’s a life achievement award.

MG: Why is Hillel important?

SP: Hillel is important because of any other of the religiously-oriented students: it’s a place for Jewish students to gather. Now that we have six thousand plus Jewish students on campus, it’s one of the largest Jewish schools in the United States. It has the largest enrollment of any school south of Washington D.C. I found in the last four or five or six years almost like a renaissance of Jewish interest. Jewish students are now coming to Hillel. You’ve got a director over there now, Andy Koren, who is young himself and who seems to know how to generate the kind of program to attract the students over there.

Lots of things are going on. I think the agitation in Israel is making students more Jewish-conscious, and in need of getting together and talking about things. There have been programs available on this campus, and I’m sure elsewhere, of students going to Israel over the summer. There’s been a great response to that kind of a program. I think the College of Architecture for the last two years, and I understand they’re going to do it
again, builds six sukkahs on campus. (laughs) I think that’s a wonderful example of cooperation and getting along together. It’s another example, it seems to me, of a growing consciousness on the part of young Jews of who they are, where they’re coming from, and the need to know more about things of the past and the present.

MG: We were talking about Hillel before we broke for lunch, and I had asked you about its importance on campus.

SP: Well, Hillel, of course—we’ve already gone over the history of it, so we know that it began to blossom after World War II, and the present building was constructed in 1952 for approximately eight hundred students, none of which seemed to be that dedicated to Jewish activities. Now we have approximately six-thousand Jewish students on campus.

The estimates are that it will increase by another two thousand in the next five to eight years, so that there will be eight thousand on this campus, coming not only from Florida, but mainly from Florida, but all over the United States and also from foreign countries. There are a sizeable number of Israeli students here. Obviously, that’s going to continue to increase. There are Jewish students from the Latin American countries, from the Caribbean islands. So, the need is there. Not only because of the increased numbers, but also because in the last several years, as I began to say earlier, there seems to be a renaissance of Jewish thinking and attitude among the students, at least on this campus.

Now, I think part of it is because of the tenuous situation in the Middle East and the fact that Jews everywhere, including Jewish students, feel somewhat threatened by what’s going on in the world. But the point is that they are committing themselves and becoming more active than they were. This doesn’t mean that every Jewish student is going to appear in services every Friday night, but it does mean that more students are doing it than was true ten years ago.

The holidays are coming, and that will call for large numbers. They will have services in the auditorium. They will have them in the school. They will have them in Hillel itself. Now, because of the growth of the student body and the involvement of Jewish students, this Hillel House is woefully inadequate. A new Hillel House is going to be constructed in the block immediately west of the Foundation. That land’s already been purchased. It’s free and clear. They hope to break ground in January. The architects are working on the final plans for the new building. It’ll be a very sizeable building, and I hope a very handsome building.

There are a lot of questions that were raised. Is this too far from the center of the campus? The students themselves said, “No, we’re on bicycles, and we walk, and that’s not too far at all.” Secondly was the question of parking. If you’re going to have something at Hillel, where are people going to park? Well, you do have the O’Connell lot directly across the street. It’s not going to be easy to find parking there during the day, because everybody

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58 A sukkah is a temporary structure with a roof of leafy boughs, bamboo sticks, etc., built by Jews for Sukkot to commemorate the tabernacles of the Exodus.
else in the world is looking for a parking place. For evening activities, it will be very available. There’s a red light—a traffic light on the corner to direct traffic.

I think it’s going to work out very successfully. They’ve been pretty good about money. A local person gave them the money for the purchase of the property, a little bit over a million dollars. Norman Lipof and Buddy Shorstein, among others—Norman Lipof, particularly—have been fundraisers. They have been very successful in getting money. They don’t have all they need, and that’s been the big question. Should they build a building the size they really need, or should they build a building according to the size of their pocketbook? They haven’t resolved that question yet. (laughs)

MG: Tied to Hillel, at least in terms of its Jewish content, is the Southern Jewish Historical Society, which I could have asked you about or should have asked you about a little earlier when we were talking about some of your associations and some of your professional activities, but now’s as good a time as any. Tell me how the Southern Jewish Historical Society got started, and what your involvement in all of that was.

SP: The Southern Jewish Historical Society goes back to the 1950s. At the time, I had never heard of it, and was not the least bit involved in the thing. I understand it operated for four or five years and then went out of existence. In the nineteen–seventies [1970s], maybe?—there was a meeting in Richmond, Virginia—Saul Viener was one of the people responsible for that, and there were others; I was not—at which they were going to talk about Southern Jewish history. A number of people were invited to read papers.

I heard about the conference, and I went to the conference. It was very successful, not only in the kinds of papers that were delivered and the quality of the papers, but the mere fact that people were all there together, all interested in Southern Jewish history, and all willing to learn and do more. And so, people wondered why were we having this meeting and letting everybody go back home and forget about it. Why not try to continue the activity? So, the idea of trying to have an organization developed, and we called for a gathering, because that’s what it was—we didn’t have an organization yet—the following year in Raleigh, North Carolina. I was there. There probably were maybe two dozen, three dozen people who were there.

We always remember laughingly one of the things that happened on Saturday night. We were having, quote, “The Banquet,” which was just a handful of people by comparison with banquet sizes today. We were served fish. Well, in some odd, peculiar way, the fish had been taken out of the freezer and had bypassed the stove. Nobody knows how that happened. They got them in front of everybody’s plate. The vegetables were hot, the salad was there, but the fish was absolutely, solidly packed in ice. You couldn’t even punch it with a knife. Everybody turned to everybody else and said, “What’s with the fish?” Of course, they were very embarrassed. They had to pick it up; we had to wait until they thawed it out and cooked it. Nobody has ever explained what happened, whether it was a joke or whether it was not. That’s when we got started.
Over the years, people have come and gone in the organization. People who were playing an active role ten years ago no longer are coming to meetings. It’s been a growth organization. It’s met at various places in the South. I think it’s had—what is this meeting coming up, twenty-six or twenty-seven or something like that? It’s had every single year. It hasn’t missed any years at all. It’s met everywhere in the South: several times in Charleston, a couple of times in Raleigh. It’s met in Jacksonville, Florida once. It’s met in Miami once. It’s met in New Orleans a couple of three times. It’s been widely dispersed. In recent years we’ve had a relationship with a Jewish organization, the historical organizations in Texas; and also in Louisiana outside of New Orleans itself. We’re meeting in Shreveport, Louisiana this year.

The papers that are given are usually very excellent papers given by reputable scholars—not necessarily trained historians, however; sometimes by locals who do a very good job. It operates like every other professional organization. Book exhibits go on. People get together. There’s a lot of camaraderie there. Then they’ve started publications: a once a year collection of essays, which Mark Bauman and Rachel Heimovics [Braun] are responsible for. They’ve turned out, I think, three or four very reputable magazines. So, the future looks bright. I served through the offices there, including two years as president of the Southern Jewish Historical Society. I thoroughly enjoy the meetings. It’s the one I try to go to most of all during the year.

MG: Why a Southern Jewish Historical Society? Why not just get involved in the American Jewish Historical Society?

SP: I was also very much involved in the American Jewish Historical Society. But it has been focused over the years, and continues to be focused, on the area from the New England states through New York and Baltimore. This part of the country has been ignored as though it did not exist. Depending upon organizations like the American Jewish Historical Society will never bring about the evaluation and analysis of Southern Jewish history in the way that the [Southern Jewish Historical] Society itself now does. In fact, the American Jewish Historical Society recognizes that, and although in earlier years they were opposed to it, they now encourage regional organizations. The Southern Jewish Historical Society has been one of its most successful regional organizations. It’s strong. It’s liquid. It has annual meetings, good meetings with good papers. It is attracting an increasing number of members.

The American Jewish Historical Society does a good job at preserving American Jewish history and the individuals who are associated with it. But when it comes to local history outside of the Boston-New York-Philadelphia area, they’re not concerned at all. Although they would deny this, they make little effort to collect documents or books that deal with regional history. I don’t think you’re going to find very much on Southern Jewish history in the collections in New York or in Boston.

MG: I remember I didn’t on Savannah. There was relatively little.

SP: And yet it has a rich history.
MG: Let’s talk about Tau Epsilon Phi.

SP: All right. Tau Epsilon Phi is one of the two oldest Jewish fraternities on campus. It was organized in 1925. Pi Lam [Pi Lambda Phi], which started out as Phi Beta Delta, predates it. Tau Epsilon Phi comes into existence in February of 1925. It was mainly a group of Miami students, Miami Jewish boys and a few from Jacksonville, about twenty of them. Some of them were living together in rooming houses. Some of them had known each other from home, where they had gone to high school together. They felt isolated on the campus, because they were precluded from going to any of the other fraternities. The non-Jewish fraternities, as they were known, had in their national charter that they could only take in white Christian boys. So Jewish boys were not—they didn’t have to worry about the African Americans because they were not on the campus.

The chapter was organized, and it had various houses. It ended up in the 1930s in a house on University Avenue, which is the one that the Independent Florida Alligator now occupies as its headquarters. That was the TEP house beginning about 1934. I was not involved in the TEP fraternity as a student at all, and certainly not in the immediate postwar period.

MG: So what got you involved?

SP: Well, I’m getting ready to tell you. Nineteen forty-eight, I get married. We come to Gainesville—that first apartment, I told you, with the made-over house in east Gainesville. We moved into the Green-Mar Apartments, which is one block from the TEP house. I’m a young faculty member. We didn’t have any big friends or anything, but there were several local people like (inaudible) who were members of the fraternity. They asked, and we agreed to serve as chaperones. In those years, they had chaperones at dances and social activities. I think that’s a lost art today. We went to their activities. They liked us; we liked them.

In 1950, the fraternity celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary, at which time they made me an honorary member of the fraternity. Shortly afterwards, they entangled me as their faculty advisor. I served as their faculty advisor—or their financial advisor, which I am right now—ever since 1949. I’ve been very actively involved in the fraternity, although I try to steer clear of it today. I don’t go to the house. I don’t get myself involved in day-to-day activities. That’s beyond me. They need people younger than me, more energetic than me, to become involved like that. I’m the senior statesman.

Anybody who’s been in the fraternity in the last fifty or sixty years knows me and knows who I am—and people that we got to know socially, because although they were students and I was faculty, the age difference wasn’t that great. Remember that you’re still dealing with veterans during the fifties [1950s]. Many of these have remained friends right down to the present time, and still we consider [them] close friends today. Norman Lipof, for instance, who I mentioned earlier is the chief fundraiser for Hillel, was a student here in
the 1950s. Bessie (laughs) was the one who introduced him to the girl he married. They always remember that. That’s true of dozens and dozens and dozens of them.

Shortly after I became the advisor and began playing a very active role, I worked with a number of people who had been in the fraternity in the 1920s and 1930s, particularly one man called Aaron Kanner—K-a-n-n-e-r. Aaron had graduated law school here and was a practicing attorney in Miami, a very distinguished lawyer, well recognized and well respected. He never got over being a TEP. He and his wife came up to every football game. They stayed with us. Really very close, dear friends right up to the end of their lives. Their children, both sons, live in Miami today.

We became conscious of the fact that the fraternity could borrow a hundred thousand dollars from the university. Remember, I told you that we were part of the second million dollars. The first million dollars had been distributed mainly to sororities. We were involved in the second million dollars. We could make a selection of space on Fraternity Row. That’s what we did. We worked through the university architects, not the architecture department—College of Architecture; we didn’t work there. There was an architecture department then on campus where they made local decisions, rather than the way they operate today out of Tallahassee.

We went through the procedure of letting a contract and building a fraternity house. I was involved because I was the major senior TEP right here in Gainesville. In every step of the construction of the house, if there was a problem the architects or the builders needed solved, I was the one they called, and I was the one who went out to the site. I didn’t resent it at all. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed the work I was doing with the TEPs then. I enjoy the work which I’m doing with the TEPs today.

As I say, I’m probably the best known TEP in connection with this fraternity that’s surviving today. I’ve been recognized several times by the national organization. About twelve years ago I was named Man of the Year by the fraternity. They had a big banquet in my honor at the Fontainebleau [Hotel] in Miami. I’ve gotten several awards from them. I mentioned that just a minute ago. That’s the way it goes. I do not concern myself any more with day-to-day problems over there. The (inaudible) comes to see me about once every two or three weeks and gives me an update about what’s happening over there. That’s all I want. I get the financial reports from the accountant, and if it’s trouble, I ask why. That’s it.

MG: What—

SP: We’re going to have a big reunion in December in Orlando. We do that every two years. Everybody looks forward to it, but it’s only for old timers. The only people that are invited to the reunion are those who were in the fraternity prior to 1959.

MG: What role has the fraternity played on campus? Have they been involved in some significant university events? Why are they important?
SP: In the early years, Jewish fraternities particularly were not involved, because if they were excluded from being members of other fraternities, they were not welcome in the campus organizations. For instance—and this is not anything that the university concerned itself with. They were not concerned about the lack of recognition or the exclusion or anything else. That was not a matter of concern in the same way as it became in the 1950s with the integration crisis. Nobody was attempting to integrate Christians and Jews on the campus. If a club or organization or fraternity was white Christian only, so be it. That was their business. They could do as they wanted. So, you did not find many Jewish students—of course, there weren’t many on campus—who were either in or out of fraternities playing an active role in campus activities. It wasn’t until the 1940s that you had a Jewish boy who served as president of the student body.

MG: Nineteen forty [1940]?

SP: Nineteen forties. I think it was Louis Safer from Jacksonville, but I’m not positive about that. The same thing was true. It was years before Jews were accepted and recognized in organizations, like, Florida Blue Key.

Now, in more recent years, and I’m saying in the last fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, thirty years, perhaps since the 1950s, the situation has changed considerably. First of all, TEP fraternity became one of the largest and most politically active fraternities on campus. So did the Pi Lams. Moreover, there were other Jewish fraternities that came on to the campus. By sheer numbers, they had to be recognized. The situation had changed. Being white Christian was no longer as popular in the 1960s as it had been in the 1930s. While there were still many barriers as far as Jewish students were concerned [there were] not nearly as many as there had been in previous years, which gave Jewish students, fraternities and others, the opportunity to make an impact on the university.

The TEP fraternity and the Pi Lam fraternity, as I say, were politically active. They supported candidates. They were elected to public office on campus. They were involved in every way in the activities on the campus. They got into trouble just as easily as the non-Jewish students and fraternities, and they got out of trouble.

MG: Do you remember having to bail somebody else or get involved?

SP: Yes, yes. (laughs) Yes, I do. That’s so distant. I’m trying to forget it. Yeah, we’ve had couple of people who have been in jail.

MG: Mosaic.

SP: Mosaic? Well, the Mosaic had an interesting meaning. Mosaic is a collection of Jewish Florida, which is in a museum in Miami. Sometime in the 1980s, I received a letter from not a rabbi—maybe he was a rabbi—in Miami telling me that a group was trying to put together a small, Jewish exhibit in Fort Lauderdale. They had heard about me being the Jewish historian, and by this time I was recognized as the Jewish historian in Florida, and they wanted my help. I get letters like that from time to time, and they end
up immediately in the garbage can. That’s where this one ended up. I did not respond to it at all.

Two or three weeks later, I got a telephone call from this man. He said, “Did you get my letter?” I said yes. He said, “Well?”

I said, “Tell me more about your project.” He started talking to me about it, and I said, “Now you’re being a little bit more specific. I’m more interested. You were too vague before.”

He said, “I want you to come down here, and I will pay your way.” That was the magic words there. “I will pay your way.”

What was transpiring is there was a lady by the name of Laura Hopsin in Fort Lauderdale, who was the program chair for a Jewish home for the elderly there. She had decided to put together an exhibit dealing with the history of the Jewish community of Fort Lauderdale. They thought I could be the advisor and help them collect pictures and artifacts and so on, which I learned when I went to the meeting in Fort Lauderdale.

Well, it very quickly became a project much broader than that. They decided to expand it into a history of the Jewish community of south Florida and to go all the way from Boca [Raton] down to Key West and gather it, and then let it then move around different places in the south. Then it began to develop even beyond that. Not overnight; this is now taking weeks and months to generate.

They decided to turn this into a Florida exhibit. That had never been done before. Nobody had really examined the history of Jews in Florida. We knew that there were no Jews during the first Spanish period because of the exclusion policy of the Spanish government. It wasn’t until 1763 when the Spanish left and the British came in that the situation began to change. We think that there may have been some Jews as members of crews of some of the early ships: secret Jews, marranos. But there’s no guarantee, and there’s no way in the records to find that. We began to know about Jews in Pensacola and Mobile in the 1760s.

Mosaic begins to be interested in that history, gathering not only information but artifacts wherever it possibly could, pictures wherever it possibly could. It was able to entice a woman by the name Marsha Zirovitz from Orlando, who was a wonderful organizer, a real excellent fundraiser, had all the qualities that an embryonic organization—because that’s what this is turning into, from an exhibit to an organization—she had all the qualities that they were looking for. She was able to not only collect a lot of artifacts—pictures, all kinds of things—but also to entice a lot of people who were interested. She got money from the state. She was able to convince the state and its grants program to support this kind of a project. While they were not overwhelming in the amount of money, they were giving money, which was making it possible to develop Mosaic.
Then Marsha concocted the idea of moving Mosaic, the museum, around the state of Florida, and to have people on the local scene—Pensacola, Jacksonville, Sarasota, Tampa—to take on the sponsorship, to raise money to support the museum exhibit, to find a place for the exhibit to last for a couple of months, to have women who would serve as docents, to do all the things necessary to make this successful—and to collect a lot of local stuff, which they would then leave behind in the community so that the community could build on that and have its own historical apparatus. That’s the way it began.

It went around the state of Florida for over two years, successful everywhere it went. It was then placed on exhibit in Washington D.C. at the B’nai B’rith building. There was even talk about taking it to Israel, which did not happen; it was too expensive and all of those kinds of things. Anyway, the exhibit ends, the Mosaic ends, and the question then is what are we going to do with all of this material? A lot of people had just given it, whatever it was. And there was no way to—you couldn’t sell the stuff. What would you do with it? There was a growing sense that there needed to be a permanent place.

In the meantime, I’m involved in this. I keep saying they, but part of it is me.

MG: How was it you?

SP: For instance, when the exhibit came to Jacksonville, I had been actually able to help collect data. I was there to read the manuscripts, to read the script, to correct things, to come up with the historical data that they needed. I was that kind of an individual for the exhibit as it moved all over Florida in several places. When it opened in Orlando, I went down and gave an opening talk. When it was in St. Petersburg, I did the same thing. I was involved in Mosaic right from the very beginning, and continued to be, and continue to be right down to the present time.

When it got to the end of its travels around Florida and Washington, then there was the question of what do you do with it? They found a synagogue in Miami Beach that had been designed by an outstanding architect in the 1930s and had been a thriving synagogue. But with the passage of time, people either died or moved away. What had been an almost exclusively Jewish section in South Miami Beach now was a Latin section, and very few Jews lived there. As a result, the synagogue was struggling to make a minyan [quorum]. It was not operating at all.

Money was gathered, and they were able to buy the synagogue. It was in very bad shape. I was on the committee at that time. When we went into the building, it was in unbelievable condition. It looked like what this building looked like before they did the renovation. Under the leadership, the smart, adroit leadership of Marsha Zirovitz, they got the money, the talent, and the skills that were needed to put it into first-class operation. Mosaic now is the Jewish Museum of Florida—not of Miami, but of Florida, although it's located in Miami. It’s been very supported by the community. It has officers from all over the state. I’m a member of the Society. I have participated in a number of the programs. A few years ago I went down, and they were launching an oral history program, and I did a workshop for them down there.
MG: Henry Green is involved at some point.

SP: Henry Green was involved in it. Henry Green was the director of Jewish studies at the University of Miami. I don’t think he holds that post anymore, but I don’t know. He fell out with the Southern Jewish Historical Society, but mainly he fell out with Mosaic, although he had been involved with them and had worked with them. As I understand it, he sued them. That ended abruptly the relationship. So, he has nothing to do with them, and they have nothing to do with him. He also has nothing to do with the Southern Jewish Historical Society, because when the Society met in Miami, and Marsha Zirovitz was the chairperson for the program committee—

Pause in recording

MG: When they met in Miami—

SP: When they met in Miami, Marsha Zirovitz was the chairperson, and this controversy between Henry and the organization and particularly between Marsha, flared up, and Henry would have nothing to do with the meeting. He did not attend the meeting, and he withdrew from the Southern Jewish Historical Society. He’s never participated in anything anymore. To my knowledge, he’s no longer the chair of Jewish studies in Miami, but I don’t know that for sure.

MG: The Matheson Historical Museum.

SP: Okay, the Matheson Historical Center is located on East University Avenue. It came about largely as a result of a number of individuals interested in preserving the history of Gainesville and Alachua County. Gainesville’s history goes back to 1853, and the County’s history goes back to even earlier than that. It’s like every other community. There’s this growing feeling of looking to the past rather than completely to the future and trying to find out where we came from.

In Gainesville, the second-oldest house was owned by Sarah Matheson, right near the downtown post office. Mrs. Matheson was always conscious of the fact that she had no children. Her husband had been the mayor of Gainesville.59 She was afraid that she would die, and there would be no record of her family’s participation in the history of this community. What would happen to her house, which was filled with fine Victorian furniture? She became interested and tried to encourage other people like me to become interested in founding an organization, which would become a historical society that would do something about holding on not only to her property, but to other properties; not only real estate, but artifacts and so on. And that’s what happened.

There were a number of people who became interested in it, the project. One of them was a doctor whose name was—I’ll think of that in just a minute—who became very

59 Christopher Matheson was mayor for eight terms, serving from 1910 to 1917. He was also a state legislator.
interested and [was] a close friend of Sarah Matheson. He was a historian, also, even though he was a practicing physician, a cardiologist, a pretty good historian. He, too, had been collecting a lot of artifacts over the years. He was looking for a place to deposit them.

On East University Avenue, there was this building right next to the library that had been constructed in the 1920s for the American Legion as a clubhouse. They had used it for many years. They had rented it out to fraternities for dances, all kinds of things. In the last twenty, twenty-five years, though, they no longer needed that building and were not using it anymore. They allowed it to deteriorate so it was no longer rentable. This group that had organized in Gainesville, including me, was able to buy the building for a very decent price—I don’t remember how much—and then to renovate the building. That’s exactly what happened.

Today, it’s a beautiful building, and it serves as a historical museum for Gainesville and Alachua County. For instance, I, who was interested in the Jewish history of Gainesville and had collected pictures and documents and so on, I’ve been turning those things over so they now have a collection of Gainesville/Alachua County Jewish history. I figured this was the way to preserve them. What would happen to them after I’m gone? Others have done exactly the same thing.

MG: In addition to contributing materials, have you played other roles with the Matheson Historical Center?

SP: I’ve played other roles with them. I’m getting ready now—they’re going to do an elder hostel soon, and I’m going to be one of the speakers. I’m going to talk on the history of the Jewish community of Gainesville. So, yes, I’ve been a contributor of materials. I’ve been a participant in their various programs.

MG: Is (inaudible) there now? Wasn’t she there at some point?

SP: No. If she was, I’ve forgotten or didn’t know.

MG: The Bicentennial Commission.

SP: Yeah, let me go back and talk about that. Nineteen seventy-six [1976], the United States celebrated its two hundredth anniversary. The planning of it meant that it was going to be a giant celebration all over the United States. Each state was encouraged to organize its own bicentennial commission. That’s exactly what happened in Florida under the leadership of Bob Williams, you remember, who was now the director of archives and history in the state, and Pat Dotson, who I mentioned before is the P.R. man out in Pensacola who redesigned the Florida Historical Quarterly for me. Pat and I were very good friends.

Earlier than that, earlier than the bicentennial activity, Pat and others were interested in preserving the heritage of some of the older communities in Florida, particularly St.
Augustine and Pensacola, which were the two first capitals of the state. They were able to get the legislature to set up preservation boards for each of these cities. Later there were more; there was one for Key West, there was one for Tampa.

With some funding, with the idea of trying to, quote, “save” as much as it possibly could, in Pensacola they found that there were maybe a dozen properties—houses—that went back into the nineteenth century, and a couple of them even earlier than that. And so, under the leadership of Pat Dotson, the preservation board was set up in Pensacola for the purpose of creating a historical district. They hired me as their historical advisor. I was there in the 1960s with the various buildings that they were trying to preserve.

Once again, we were weakened as a result of not having documents. I went to Washington to the Library of Congress to see what I could find on the West Florida papers. When the British left Florida, they were able to take some things with them. I mean, they were free to take whatever they could, but there was a limit to size and space. A lot of those papers remained in Florida when the Spanish returned and then when the U.S. returned. In fact, during the Civil War, the West Florida papers had been taken up to Alabama and buried and then unburied. A lot of them had been lost as a result. Those were the ones that were saved, went to Washington. I went to Washington, and I was able to collect what was still there and put it on microfilm. That microfilm is in our library, and a copy of it is in Pensacola. It’s as a result of those kinds of documents and others that we were able to do some things in Pensacola.

This begins my working relationship with Pat Dotson. When the bicentennial [committee] is created, it’s created in 1969, and Claude Kirk is the Governor. Pat is a Republican. He had been closely involved with Claude Kirk. He had handled all the P.R. and publicity for Claude Kirk’s campaign. Because of his interest in history, Claude Kirk appointed him as the first chairman of the Florida Bicentennial Commission. Pat immediately appointed me as a member of the commission. It was at the very end of Claude Kirk’s administration, followed by Reubin Askew.

Well, for some reason, Askew refused to recognize the appointments made by Claude Kirk, so he reappointed everybody on the committee. I was appointed by Claude Kirk and reappointed by Reubin Askew, so I was doubly appointed. People were appointed from all over the state. There were a couple of black legislators. There were some women that were appointed. There were about maybe a dozen people. When Pat left the chairmanship, the overall chairperson became the lieutenant governor of Florida. Tom Adams was the Chair at one time. Each of us had a different responsibility. My responsibility was to be chairman of the publications committee. We met once a month, and we met in different places. We always had a lot of work to do.

Upon my recommendation, the Bicentennial Commission agreed to do twenty-five reprints, facsimile reprints of out of print Florida. I got this idea because at the time of the Civil War centennial, which was just a few years earlier than that, Rembert Patrick had been the chair. Pat had worked out an arrangement with the University of Florida Press to publish out-of-print old important Florida documents. They had been very well received.
They did a run of a thousand, and they sold out almost immediately. They did about ten or twelve of them under that first series.

So, we decided to do it again. I would select twenty-five books, which I did with the cooperation of some of the librarians. Elizabeth Alexander, for instance, told me about ones that people had come in looking for there. I was the overall general editor. It was my job not only to select the books. The Bicentennial Commission accepted my recommendations completely, and I would find a scholar who would edit the document, to add an index if there wasn’t one there, and to write an introduction to it. Then I would write a short introduction to each volume.

We published twenty-five volumes. That created something also because in the publication which the University of Florida Press did, as a general editor, I received a rebate of 5 percent in the royalties. The editors, I think, got 10 percent or 12 percent. After about two or three years, somebody complained that I was a member of the commission and that I was using it. The Florida Ethics Commission recommended that I leave the Bicentennial Commission—I’d been on it now for about four or five years—which I did. There was no big deal about that.

In addition to the twenty-five volumes, we had five conferences, which I organized at various places in Florida: one is here in Gainesville, one in Tallahassee. We invited scholars to come in and deliver papers, and we did one of Florida during the American Revolution, Florida in the Caribbean, Florida in whatever. We published those five volumes, and then I worked out an arrangement with a professor over at Florida State University to do a history of Florida during the American Revolution.

When it was all over—that wasn’t the only thing that the Bicentennial Commission did, but by comparison with other states, we had accomplished as much or more than any other state in the union in terms of some very positive things, not wasting money, and getting some lasting things done. I played a very, very active role in the Florida Bicentennial Commission.

MG: I think we’ll stop here with your professional roles and organizations you belonged to. Let’s talk more about Gainesville: how the town changes—

SP: And my private life.

MG: Right, and your involvement in Gainesville socially. You’ve lived here almost continuously, except for the war, since 1937.

SP: Right. Absolutely. We were married in 1948, so our two sons were born in Gainesville. We’ve played an active role in the community, not only in the Jewish community, in the synagogue and Bessie in the Sisterhood, in B’nai B’rith—I was president of B’nai B’rith—but also in the non-Jewish activities. We were very active, for instance, in J.J. Findley, the elementary school that both Mark and Alan went to. I served one year as the president of PTA [Parent Teacher Association]. Together, along with any
other parents, we organized a Halloween festival every year, sold baked goods and other kinds of things to raise money for the school. I remember we raised enough for air conditioning. The school board wouldn’t let us buy air conditioning because other schools couldn’t afford to do it, and they didn’t want them to be jealous of the fact that Findley had, quote, “a rich clientele” and were able to do it.

We enjoyed our relationship with the teachers and with our neighbors. We always had excellent neighbors. We built the house we’re living in in 1954. Obviously we have not moved from there. We’ve had some of the same neighbors over all of these years. We’ve had the same friends that we had in the 1950s. Many of them are still around, and many of them we still see. So, we’ve always been outgoing people. Both of our sons are the same way.

They grew up in happy homes. They had good friends. Alan still has many of the friends that he went to school with, that he was in Cub Scouts with. They’ve kind of clung together over the years. In fact, when they were grown and each of them were getting married, the parents gave a party for the Cub Scout who was getting married, and we gave each one of them a silver tray with their names engraved on it. Mark was the same way.

They were active in school. They were both on the school patrols directing traffic. They were in the various organizations. They were both excellent, excellent students. They were not professional athletes—they weren’t on the football teams or anything—but they were playing basketball and playing baseball. They were doing all those kinds of things, which they enjoyed very much. They liked to go to the Gator football games. They lived really good lives. They were never in any trouble. We never had dope problems. We never had alcohol problems. We never had school absentee problems. They took pride in what they were doing.

They were fortunate in that they had grandparents. Bessie’s grandmother came to visit every winter for two months. That was a good, strong relationship with the two boys. She was a wonderful person, and they got along beautifully with her. They loved my father, and of course, he thought that they were the salt of the earth. He was very proud of having two grandsons, particularly Jewish grandsons. (laughs) We lived in that house, very comfortable; it was not ostentatious or anything.

In the summer we would go to the beach for two or three weeks, usually over in St. Augustine Beach. We would rent a cottage or something over there. We went to Atlanta frequently to visit the family there. We drove up. We didn’t have an air-conditioned car, which meant we had to start about four o’clock in the morning to avoid all of the heat. You didn’t have interstates either, so you had to take other routes to get up there. We enjoyed that.

We were very close with my family in Jacksonville. We were very close with Bessie’s family in Atlanta. We had seders together with the family in Jacksonville, either in Gainesville—usually they came to our house, for about sixteen or seventeen years. With
children and grandchildren, we don’t get together for those kinds of activities as much as we once did.

I would say that, all things considered, we were very fortunate people, in that we were able to lead very happy lives, and were not beset by a lot of terrible tragedies that happened. Nobody got desperately sick. People died, of course, old people, but they died natural deaths. We just lived normal, good lives, which we enjoyed. I enjoyed getting up every morning and seeing what the world had to offer.

MG: Air conditioning will change life all over the South. Did the house you built in 1954 have air conditioning?

SP: No, it did not have air conditioning. It did not have central heating. We had a heating element in the central part of the house in a closet. That was the way houses were built at the time. About five or six years later, we installed heating, central heating, and then shortly after that—well, we first installed window air conditioners. That took care of the front part of the house. The couch in the den opened up into a bed. Alan and Mark slept there in the summer to take advantage of the air conditioning. Then we disposed of the window units, and we installed central air conditioning. Then in the 1960s, about sixty-eight [1968], I think, we installed the pool. They love that. Growing up, they thought that was wonderful. They dived and swam almost every day. Now I’m sorry we have it. We don’t use it. It’s just a burden and an expense. When Rebecca was here last month with her girlfriend, they were in it all the time, so I guess we’re not going to get rid of it.


SP: Right. I retired in ninety-six [1996], officially. We had already loved to travel. I’d fallen in love, for instance, with New York City and the theater way back in the 1940s. The first play I ever saw in New York was in 1940. It was Al Jolson. It was not a very good play, but Jolson was, of course, a great favorite. I remember he came down at the end of the performance and sat in the chair and sang about fifteen of his famous songs. Of course, it was enthusiastically received. During the war years in the kind of work that I was doing and knowing the officers and so on, I was able to get full benefit of passes. Whenever I had a long enough pass, I went to New York, and I went to the theater. I saw everything: *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel*. You name it; I saw it.

That continued. Bessie likes the theater. When we were in New York for our honeymoon, we saw *A Streetcar Named Desire* with Marlon Brando. We saw *Mr. Roberts* with Henry Fonda. We’ve been to New York maybe fifty times over the years. We’ve seen a huge number of plays. I saved the playbill of every play we ever saw in New York or Chicago or Washington, or elsewhere. Last year I gave all of them to the library. They have a theatrical section over there in Special Collections. I was glad to get rid of them and deposit them somewhere where they would be taken care of.

We continue. We were in New York over the fourth of July. We saw four shows while we were there, including *The Producers*. We love New York. We like shopping in New York,
not that we need anything. We like going to Carnegie’s [Delicatessen & Restaurant] for corned beef. We just like travel. We had traveled with Mark and Alan when they were growing up, in the car to various places in the United States. We saw almost all of the eastern United States, the mountains, some of the battlefields. They claim that I stopped at every historical plaque along the way so that we could read it. That’s an exaggeration. We went to Washington together, to Williamsburg together. We had a lot of fun, and it created a lot of memories for them. Bessie has continued; we’ve been to every one of the fifty states, including Hawaii and Alaska.

We became interested in cruising. We did a cruise together with one of my colleagues in 1964, out of Miami to Nassau, a four-day cruise. It was very pleasant but very different from the kind of cruising you do today. We got a cabin for four, which included two beds, upper and down beds, which you now put kids in. Fortunately, we were able to use the top layer for our suitcases. Both of us couldn’t get dressed or undressed in the room at the same time. Coming back—going over was wonderful. Nassau was wonderful. Coming back we came into the tail end of a hurricane; Dora, I believe. I got miserably sick. When I got to Miami, I said, “This is it. I’m never going to get on a ship again in my life.” That was strengthened when some time in the 1960s, we were down in Melbourne [Florida], I think. We were going on a deep sea fishing trip for a half day. When I got on that little boat and it started bouncing, I began to die again. That convinced me.

But then in the seventies [1970s], we began to do river cruises and others. We’ve gotten to the point of enjoying it thoroughly: the leisure of it and the relaxation of it. We’ve been to the same places so often we don’t really get off the ship; we are not either one of us great shoppers, so we’re not looking for anything to buy. We’re just looking for a place to relax. We’ve done together fifty cruises. We’ve gone to lots of places. We never went to China, which I’m sorry about, or Japan, but we’ve done almost everything else in the rest of the world.

Part 4 ends; part 5 begins

MG: —visits to practically everywhere in the world.

SP: Everywhere in the world, all the Caribbean, a little bit of Latin America—Brazil particularly. We’ve been down many of the main rivers of the world—the Rhine, the Elba River, the Danube—several times. We’ve been to Alaska three times. We’ve been along the Pacific coast. We’ve been to Vancouver and Victoria and that area.

And in addition, we’ve done a lot of land things, too. We’ve been to the northwest. We’ve been to many of the sites like the Grand Canyon. We’ve been to Las Vegas a few times, Los Angeles, San Francisco a half a dozen, a dozen times. So, we’ve seen a lot of the United States. We’ve seen a lot of Europe. We’ve been to Europe maybe forty times. We’ve been to England a number of times. We’ve been to Scotland several times, Holland, Germany, Russia twice, Poland, a lot of Eastern Europe. We’ve been to Greece several times, Italy several times. We’ve been to some of the places in north and eastern Africa a little bit.
So, we’ve done our share of seeing, and we’ve done it with family. My sister-in-law, Bertha, has gone with us, or my brother-in-law, Perry, and Evelyn have gone with us. My brother Saul has gone with us occasionally. So, we usually have not traveled alone. We’ve traveled with the Lowensteins two or three voyages. And we thoroughly enjoy, as I say, the relaxation. We get off very little. It’s not as easy for Bessie anymore, because she has arthritis in her knees, so she doesn’t walk as much as she once did. But it hasn’t stopped her from doing that. She still has her many friends; they still have the “Lunch Bunch” every Thursday. They get together and eat together.

We eat out a pretty good bit, about half the time. With the Lowensteins, they would eat out every single night, but I don’t like eating out that much. And so, for instance tonight, after eating out two nights in a row, I’m going to insist on eating home tonight. But everything else goes along very smoothly.

MG: One thing that I recall, from when I was your graduate student—and you were just mentioning health and those sorts of things—you had a real scare, back in the seventies [1970s]?

SP: Sixties [1960s].

MG: Tell me about that.

SP: I had an esophagus problem, which came on very suddenly. In fact, just earlier than that, together with Blair Reeves, we had gone to Palm Beach. Blair had become involved in this Historical American Buildings Survey that the Library of Congress conducted, in which they measured old houses, old properties, and took pictures for preservation purposes. The Library of Congress wanted a job done on Mar-a-Lago, Mrs. Mary— what’s her name?

MG: Oh, gosh. We have an article in the Quarterly about it. Not DuPont.

SP: Not DuPont.

MG: I know exactly what you’re talking about. I’ll think of the name.

SP: Three names.

MG: Yeah.

SP: Anyway, they wanted that property surveyed, and they hired Blair and me. So, we went to Palm Beach. She was gone, the house was closed; but Jimmy, the butler, was there. So we had free access to the house. We went over it a thousand times: all the bedrooms, the wine cellar—she had a bomb shelter there—the kitchen, the bathrooms, everywhere. Gorgeous property, absolutely. Everything was, you know, magnificent. And

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60 Mar-a-Lago was the home of Marjorie Merriweather Post, who was the owner of General Foods.
so, we worked there a week, and I did a history of the house from documents that Jimmy had, and Blair did all the other work that was needed.

I wasn’t feeling well towards the end of that visit. We came back to Gainesville, and I became increasingly nauseated, increasingly what I shouldn’t be. So, I called the doctor one day, and I told him how weak I was and how woozy I was, and it was getting worse. He said, “Why don’t you meet me over in the emergency room at Alachua General,” which I did, and when he checked me, he said, “You’ve got to get into the hospital. You’ve got an ulcer, and you’re losing blood. You’ve got to be taken care of.” So, I check into the hospital, and they start giving me blood transfusions. Well, the blood was going in one end and going out the other. It was not making much of a help to me.

Well, our very good friend Harry Pistowsky, who lived around the corner from us, was concerned, too. Harry was Chairman of gynecology and obstetrics at Shands. He said, “You’re coming over to Shands. I’m going to see if there’s room. If there’s no room elsewhere in the hospital, you’re going to the obstetrics floor, but you’re coming to Shands.” So, that’s what I did. They moved me by ambulance one late afternoon. I’d been in Alachua maybe five or six days. And I went over there, and the following morning they took me down to surgery.

They were going to put that light down to see what they could see in my stomach and so on. I remember when it went down, I suddenly went out. What had happened is the esophagus, the end of the esophagus where it went into the stomach, had rotted, or erupted or whatever. Fortunately, I was in surgery, so they could operate immediately, which they did. It was about a four or five hour operation. I knew absolutely nothing about it, but they called the family in. I was in Shands for maybe three weeks, almost a month. I don’t think they allow you to stay that long today. But you can see, I got all right.

MG: So, they had to reattach your esophagus to your stomach?

SP: Right. And I’ve never had a single bit of reaction to it ever since.

MG: The story I heard was they almost lost you.

SP: They almost lost me, I understand later on; I wasn’t aware of being nearly lost. And the same thing—the other major thing was when I had this heart valve put in two years ago. We had gone to Baltimore for a family get-together. My cousin’s son was being bar mitzvah. It was a wonderful weekend. I wasn’t the slightest [bit] weak; nothing wrong with me. We come back on the plane; I’m flying into Jacksonville, where we had left our car.

From the moment I got off the plane and entered the terminal, I was having problems breathing. I mean, it was just suddenly one minute I was fine, the next minute I wasn’t. And it was difficult for me to go from our gate to where the luggage was. I thought I wasn’t going to make it because of the breathing. But I then recovered, and we came
back. Bessie drove the car back to Gainesville, and I had no problem. I had no problem on Monday. Tuesday, it started again, so I called my doctor, Dr. Slatten, and he said, “Come on down. Let’s see what’s happening.” I had no pains, no nothing that’s typical of a heart attack at all. He said, “Maybe you’re having a secret heart attack.” He checked, and he said, “No, that’s not it. You may be on the verge of cardiac arrest. We’ve got to get you into the hospital immediately.”

So, we go from his office into North Florida [Regional Medical Center] and check into the hospital, and the test showed that it was this valve. So, they took the valve out. I got caught on Memorial Day, so they weren’t doing anything, so I was actually there about two or three days I didn’t need to be. They put in this pig’s valve, and that’s been everything. From time to time, I hear, “Oink, oink!” but other than that, it’s fine.

MG: Tell me about it. You told me a funny story about the pig valve, and your concerns. They gave you a choice, right?

SP: They didn’t give me any choice, they just told me. When the surgeon told me about it, I said, “Do you realize you’re putting a pig’s valve in a Jewish body?” He said, “You’re not going to eat it, you know!” (laughs)

MG: That’s the story I wanted to hear. And you’re feeling well?

SP: I feel fine. Fine.

MG: You’re exercising?

SP: I exercise four times a week. I go to cardiac rehab once, either Tuesday morning or Thursday morning. I go to the gym Monday, Wednesday and Friday and work out, and on the weekends—of course, I didn’t do it yesterday and today—I walk in the mall, usually about four miles. So, I’m very athletic.

MG: Good. I want to talk a little bit about Mark and Alan and your granddaughters. There’s a story, a very tragic story, with Mark and his first wife.

SP: Well, I was going to say, one of the saddest times for us involved Mark’s first wife, Terri Coggin Proctor, whom we loved very much. She was almost like a daughter to us. She and Mark had started going together when both of them were in law school here. Terri was the daughter of Luther Coggin in Jacksonville, a very affluent but a very nice family. She was a wonderful person. They went to law school together and dated, although not exclusively; they did go out with others. And then Mark got a job in Jacksonville, in the City Attorney’s office. She followed him to Jacksonville and got a job also, in a lawyer’s office there.

And then after a while—Mark had been there maybe a year—he had an offer to go to Tallahassee to become the attorney for natural resources. When he got there, he got into the middle of—they were having a scandal in that department. As it turned out, the
chairman that headed that department went to jail, and several of the other members. Well, as they were leaving, Mark was being bounced up. (laughs) He was moving up the ladder because of the vacancies that occurred. So, he moved up about in two months which ordinarily would have taken him about two, three years. In the meantime, Terri had also come to Tallahassee.

MG: They were dating seriously?

SP: They were dating now seriously, but living separately. She got a job also in one of the state agencies as a lawyer. And then, they got married in a very splendid society wedding in Jacksonville. Blanche Coggin—I mean, there was nothing—she had the money, and she didn’t spare any expense. Even the flowers she had flown in from Holland. When they left to go to the hotel and all, a helicopter took them, and we didn’t throw rice, we threw rose petals. (laughs) So, that just tells you.

Anyway, Mark gets the opportunity to get into this law firm, the Levin law firm. One of his special areas was natural resources, and so environmental cases were what were bounced onto his desk. He went out to Pensacola, they rented a very nice house, and Terri got a job also in the firm. So, they were working together, and they were moving up. They had bought some property at the beach, and they were getting ready to build a house. That place they were living in was just rented, so they went out and took a condo at the beach, rented a condo at the beach.

They came home from work one afternoon, about 5:30, 6:00. Terri was very athletically inclined, and so she was going to do the laps in the pool, which she did every night, anyway. Mark was up in the condo on the fifth floor or the eighth floor or whatever it was. He said he went out on the balcony and looked down, and she was swimming. So, he went back to put on his suit, because the pool was right next to the bay and she was always a little afraid somebody would come in off the bay in a boat. So, Mark was going down; got to be the protector.

When he got down, which was less than five minutes later, she was floating on top of the pool. She had had a heart attack, which is what the autopsy showed. She didn’t realize she even had a bad heart. None of us knew that. We were on a cruise on the Danube River, and we heard about it as we were coming into Budapest [Hungary]. Her parents were on a vacation in the Hawaiian Islands when they heard about it. So, of course, we made arrangements immediately to get back to Jacksonville.

MG: When was this?

SP: Nineteen eighty—I think 1985, or eighty-six [1986]. Mark stayed single about four years, and then he met Mary Frances, who’s also a very lovely person, treats us like visiting royalty. They’ve been a very happy couple. Madison was the result of that marriage.

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61 Levin, Papantonio, Thomas, Mitchell, Echsner, and Proctor. Frederic G. Levin is the attorney for whom the University of Florida’s Levin College of Law is named.
MG: Is—not that it matters, of course. Is Madison adopted, or is she—?

SP: No. Rebecca is adopted.

MG: Excuse me, I got that—

SP: That’s Alan and Susan’s child, and she’s the one that just had the bat mitzvah. Madison is going to be eleven years old—no, twelve years old—in October, and Rebecca’s going to be thirteen years old next month.

MG: Tell me a little bit about Alan and his career and his family.

SP: Well, when Alan left here with an undergraduate degree, he went to Georgia State and took an MBA. He worked for a short while as a buyer in Davison’s Department Store, which is now Macy’s. He wasn’t happy there. And then he went to work in the bank, a good job, but once again Alan didn’t like that. He was isolated—Alan is a very people-oriented person. The opportunity came for him to go into the training program, and he did that. They sent him to New York for six weeks.

MG: Training program for what?

SP: It’s an investment. So, he came back, and he’s been moving up ever since. He is in a beautiful three-story house. They have two wonderful cars. They have a very substantial income. So, they live well. And Mark, of course, is in the Levin firm. He’s a senior partner. He’s president of the firm. He does very well, too. Both of them are workaholics; they really work very hard, so nobody’s given them anything. They both enjoy what they’re doing. So, they’re happy warriors, happy campers. Mark has been involved in lots of important cases. He’s a valuable, valuable asset to the firm. They live in a gorgeous home, and they enjoy Madison and we enjoy Madison very much. She’s a real prima donna.

MG: I know that both Mark and Alan have been enormously generous and loving to you, as you and Bessie have gotten older.

SP: Very much so. There is absolutely nothing that we even remotely suggest that they do not do. Mark overwhelms us with—you know Harry and David, the fruit place that’s in—well, anyway, we’re in the Fruit of the Month club. We get two deliveries a month. For some reason, in April he decided to send us tomatoes also. So, there’s constantly packages, boxes, things that are coming in. Both of them have been very—and, in addition to that, their wives have been very generous.

MG: Yeah. And they’re, of course, very philanthropic, which they learned from their mother and father, as you’ve shown.
SP: Both of them can afford to do a lot more than I can do. But they’ve been very philanthropic. Mark participates in a lot of Jewish things, but his wife is not Jewish, so it’s not the same way as it is with Alan. But there’s nothing that happens Jewish-wise in Pensacola in which Mark is not involved in. So, both of them, yes, are very philanthropic. Mark has done exceedingly well, exceedingly well, and so has Alan. And we’re proud of both of them.

MG: In 2002, you’re going to be eighty—?

SP: —four, next March.

MG: So, what’s the future hold?

SP: Well, let’s see, what is the future? Next year, we’ll finish and do tape nine or tape ten, won’t we? Find out what’s going on with all of us this year.

MG: We’ll have to keep up. But do you have some projects that you intend to complete?

SP: Well, I’m trying to do—I really want to do this history of the family, and I’m going to get it done and I’m going to try to get it printed or published or whatever and distribute it to the family. That’s my big project now. I have a very large correspondence that I try to keep with. As I say, I read a lot. I read daily three newspapers—Gainesville Sun, Florida Times-Union, the New York Times—plus what I read on the computer: the Washington Post and usually a couple Israeli newspapers. I try to read books. So, I keep up with the correspondence. We have a nice, active social life. As I say, we go out to eat a lot. We go to parties and receptions. We go to the football games; we’re going this next week to the football game. We’re fortunate in that we often get invited to the president’s box. So, life goes merrily on.

MG: You have still responsibilities on campus. You’re still the University Historian.

SP: I’m the University Historian. Right now, we’re getting ready to celebrate the sesquicentennial next year. For instance, this last Tuesday, I met with them over in Publicity. They’re putting together a video on the history of the university, so they interviewed me for that. So, yes, there’s always constantly things to do and things that I enjoy doing.

MG: And you still come by the Oral History Center, named for you.

SP: Every day I’m at the Oral History office.

MG: What are you doing over there these days?

SP: Well, I’ve got my computer, and it seems to me I’m always busy, or else I’m getting dressed or undressed to go to the gym. Monday, Wednesday and Friday I leave out of
there at two o’clock ’cause I’m over there two hours. By the time I get back and get dressed, it’s four-thirty, time to go home.

MG: Are you going to continue with being University Historian indefinitely?

SP: Oh, yeah. There is absolutely nobody else who knows all the history of this institution, and there—I don’t know anybody that’s getting ready for it. Some of them might say, “Who in the hell cares?” (laughs)

MG: Well, there’s certainly longevity on the part of historians, and there’s longevity in your family. So, at age ninety-five or a hundred—

SP: Ninety-five or 103, that’s right.

MG: You’ll still be University Historian.

SP: Well, if I’m not, it’s all right, too.

MG: Oh, you know, there’s one thing that I forgot to ask, as we finish up here. You were named Distinguished Service Professor of History.

SP: Right.

MG: Tell me about that.

SP: That came about—of course, you had the assistant, the associate, and the full professor. All of those I went through. In the early 1970s, they created—the Board of Control, or the Board of Regents, created a new line above full professor, Distinguished Service Professor. You had to be nominated by your department, and come up with support letters and show that you had been actively involved in the community and doing service projects and teaching and doing work with graduate students and so on. And so, the department nominated me. They had started out the year before—Manning Dauer had been number one. I was number two on the campus. So, that’s how it came about. I got a notification letter from Steve O’Connell, which carried with it a very nice salary raise, and I was happy. I hadn’t solicited it, so it came as something of a surprise.

MG: And there are now several more.

SP: Oh, yeah. In fact, they’ve now dropped “Service;” they just call them Distinguished Professor. And it’s true at all the universities. You have them at the University of South Florida. There probably are about—oh, maybe a dozen or twenty at the University of Florida.

MG: Is there anyone else on the University of Florida campus who’s been here longer than you?
SP: No. And when I—I retired in ninety-six [1996], Jerry Schaffer, who was our vice president for business affairs, checked the records, and he said there was no other person who had served that long—faculty person—in the State University System, that there was one handyman, a maintenance person, who had come in January of forty-six [1946]—I came in June of forty-six [1946]—but no faculty person.

MG: And you’re still, although you’re—is your status fully retired? Are you still—you’re not on the payroll any longer.

SP: I’m not on the payroll, since ninety-six [1996].

MG: So, all your work is—

SP: So, all of my—we live off of my retirement pay—which, as it turned out, became more generous than my regular pay because of the tax situation—and Social Security. So, you know, I guess I shouldn’t be saying it, but we have more income than we need to live on. (laughs)

MG: And you’re now a volunteer.

SP: Well, (laughs) I call it pro bono. I wouldn’t do it if I didn’t enjoy doing it, and I look forward to continue doing it over the years. I am happy to be working with Julian; of course, I enjoy the Oral History Program. I like being involved in the university history. I enjoy, obviously, feeling that I’m needed and that I’m playing a role on the campus, which I presume I am.

MG: You certainly are. Well, thank you.

*end of interview*