

Harold Paulk Henderson, Sr. Oral History Collection  
OH Vandiver 04A  
Samuel Ernest Vandiver Jr. Interviewed by Dr. Harold Paulk Henderson (Part A)  
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**EDITED BY DR. HENDERSON**

Side One

Henderson: This is an interview with former Governor Ernest Vandiver. This interview takes place in his home in Lavonia on September 14, 1993. My name is Dr. Hal Henderson. Good morning, Governor.

Vandiver: Good morning, Hal, how are you?

Henderson: Good to see you again.

Vandiver: Thank you, feeling great.

Henderson: Good. Let's begin this interviewing today by talking about your parents. Would you discuss for me your parents and the influence that they had on your life?

Vandiver: Yes, I would. I'd be delighted to, Hal. My mother [Vanna Bowers Osborne Vandiver] was born in Canon, Georgia, which is a little town about eight miles from here. And she was the daughter of John M. [Merritt] Bowers, who was the youngest son of a Job Bowers. Job Bowers is my great-grandfather, and I still own the home place where he lived. Bowers' family, the one we are descended from, came from Virginia, when he was about twenty, a little more than twenty years old. And he was proud of the Revolutionary War, and when he came to Georgia he married a Miss Charity Wilson, and they were married and he went off to war as a private in the Revolutionary army, and when he came home, when his wife became pregnant, on furlough--he was a private. He came home on furlough, and while he was at home in Canon, Georgia, he was captured by the Tories. They shot him and killed him. But that baby

that was born of that marriage was William Bowers, and he had some fourteen children. And one of them was named Job after his father who was my great-grandfather. So the Bowers family has been ensconced in this area for well over two hundred years. My great-great grandfather was killed and is buried about ten miles from here in the old Henley churchyard, and my great grandfather had also had a large family. And my mother's family was large. So the Bowers family has had some influence on this area for many, many years. Bowersville, which is close to here, was named for the Bowers family.

My mother was a beautiful, young lady. I have a picture of her that was taken when she was older. They're not too many photographs made in the early part of the century. She was born in 1881. She worked with her father, who was a minister. He was a Baptist minister, but he was not ever satisfied with the Baptist religion, and he founded a new church that was more amenable to his beliefs and it was the Universalist Church, which still exists in Canon, Georgia.

I don't know about my grandfather's education, but he taught my grandmother--my mother almost as if she had gone to college. He bought a little newspaper over in Alabama from a man, and it was called the *Universalist Herald*. He printed this newspaper. My mother helped in the printing office and studied and worked with him there. And then she was a great, voracious reader, and was more or less self-educated. She married very young. She was only sixteen years old when she married. She had two children that came from that marriage. [One was] my sister, Mrs. Whitehead, Berthine Osborne Whitehead, who's still living. She's eighty-seven years old now. [The other was] my brother [Henry Pitchford Osborne]. [They are actually my] half-brother and half-sister. My [half brother] . . . died in 1966.

My mother was determined that all of us would have a college education. My sister went to Wesleyan College in Macon and graduated. My brother spent five years at Georgia Tech getting his education. That was one of things that she insisted [on], that her children get a college education. Back in those days not everybody had the opportunity, but, through her desire that we have an education, she insisted that we do it, and we did, all of us.

She was a wonderful person. Everybody in this town loved her. She had high blood pressure, which could be treated now very easily, but at that time there was no medicine that they could give her. So they told her that her only way she could get her blood pressure down was to rest, and she was a very energetic person and couldn't rest very much. So she died when she was fifty-nine. She was president of the woman's club here. She was president of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. She was in a Sunday school class in the Baptist church although she retained her membership in the Universalist church in Canon. She imbued my sister with the desire to be of service, and my sister, even at eighty-seven, is--up until last year--remained as president of the woman's club in her hometown. [Laughter]

So it's been a family that was determined to be of service to the people. My mother had a great influence on me. She was so energetic and so ambitious for all of her children. She died, as I said, much too early. She died at fifty-nine. She had a massive stroke, a cerebral hemorrhage, and died at fifty-nine.

My father [Samuel Ernest Vandiver, Sr.] was always interested in politics, and my mother was not very interested in politics, really. And I would say sometimes, "Well, maybe I'll run for office." My mother would say, "Well, politics is so corrupt. I just don't want you to have any part of that." I remember telling her that if I am elected to office I intend to be an

honest politician. She said, "Well, I hope you are." That's one thing I remembered when I first ran for office that I was certainly not going to do anything in my political career that she would be ashamed of. And I hope I did it. I don't think she would be.

But it was very unusual. The Baptists and the Universalists, of course, are at odds with each other. But my mother was so beloved that they opened up the Baptist church here in Lavonia, and had her funeral in the Baptist church. The funeral sermon was delivered by a lady Universalist preacher. I don't think anybody in the Baptist church had any thought of becoming a Universalist, but they loved her enough to let her have her funeral in the Baptist church here in Lavonia where I am a member and have been for some sixty years, or a little more than sixty years. She was a beautiful person and greatly beloved by everybody who knew her. She and my father married when she was thirty-six years old, after her first husband had died. I was born when she was thirty-eight and my father was forty-two, so it was a late part of the child-bearing years that I happened to be born in, but her ambition for me and for my brother and my sister, I think, was the driving force in my life.

Henderson: What values did your father instill in you?

Vandiver: My father had several professions. He had what was known as an inflammatory rheumatism when he was about sixteen or seventeen years old. He tells me that the doctor told my grandfather that the only thing that would save his life would be to amputate his leg. Well, he was born in 1876, so this was in the early nineties, and it was not quite as easy to amputate somebody's leg as [it would be today]. He said that the surgeon had a saw that he was going to saw his leg off with. Anyway, he told my grandfather that he didn't want to have

surgery, and if he was going to die, he was going to die with two legs. He walked on crutches for about for about two [or] three years.

And he was determined to have an education. 'Course he was born during the Reconstruction period. My grandparents on both sides suffered greatly because of that period of our history. His other brothers were not so interested in education. The family at that time was supposed to all work together, so he wasn't as interested in education as he should have been. My father had the determination to get an education, and so he told me that sometimes he'd be reading at night and his father would come in and he'd have the quilt over his light so his father couldn't see him, and come in and make him put out the lamp because he didn't want to burn up the kerosene and so forth. Anyway he was determined that he was going to be a teacher, that he was going to get an education. He went to the old state normal college in Athens, and he would work a quarter and come back and teach a quarter. You didn't have to have a certificate back in those in days. He would work and then go back, and I think he told me that each quarter he had to get up fifty dollars so he could attend college and that forty-eight [dollars] of that was tuition and board and laundry, and he had two dollars to spend for each quarter. So you can see how determined he was to get an education.

After he completed his education he took the teaching exam and they said he made one of the highest grades that had been made on the teacher's examination, and he taught school in ten different places over the state. I think he felt that [he] learned as much teaching school as he'd learned going to school, or maybe more. [Laughter] But anyway, he did teach in ten different schools and every place he would go he would buy a little piece of property. He wanted to invest his money that he was making, he wanted to invest it in something, and he'd

buy a little land. After his death I had to go around over the state at places where he had taught and sell off this property which, of course, we had no use for.

But I know I opened up my campaign at Dublin, and Cadwell, Georgia, was one of the places he taught. Some of the older people remembered my father and his teaching there. He had a little piece of property at Cadwell, which I had to sell. But he was a determined man. He overcame his illness, and he walked on crutches, as I say, for a couple of years. And then he was able to do away with his crutches. After he had taught for ten years he felt like he needed to make more money than he was making. Teachers were not paid very much in those days. So he got into the insurance business, and he sold insurance [for] Traveler's Life Insurance Company for ten years, and traveled and learned to be a salesman. After that stint of life insurance, selling life insurance, he decided to come home and begin to buy up property and be a farmer, and that was when he married my mother--after he'd taught school for ten years and sold insurance for ten years. He was forty-two.

He was always interested in politics. He never ran for any office in his life, but he always took a stand, and if he believed in somebody, he would work for them real hard in this county and in this whole area. He carried me to many a political speakings [*sic*]. I remember one of the earliest was when Senator [Richard Brevard] Russell [Jr.] was running for the United States Senate. He'd already been elected governor for a few months, and a vacancy occurred. He appointed Major [John Sanford] Cohen, who was editor of *The Atlanta Journal*, for that interim period, and then he ran for the U.S. Senate when that term expired.

I remember going over to what is now called in our county Fort Lamar. It was over in the Sandy Cross section, and Senator Russell made a speech and I recall that one of the big

issues-we were a farming area, and the cotton was baled in jute. If you remember the way they used to bale cotton. Somebody put a tax on jute, and that was one of the main things he was going to do for the farmers was get that tax taken off the jute, so it would help the farmers. I was fascinated by him and by the reaction of the people that were there and were listening.

Then my father became a friend of Eugene Talmadge in a rather unusual way. The incumbent agricultural commissioner was named [John Judson] Brown. Eugene Talmadge, of course, was from Telfair county and McRae. They made an agreement that they would have a debate. They would debate once in Elberton, which is thirty miles from here, and then they would go to Telfair County and have another debate. My father had not known [Eugene] Talmadge until that time, but he went to the debate in Elberton. And he was fascinated by Talmadge and his delivery and his youth and energy, and he became an ardent supporter. And he was so fascinated that when he [Talmadge] spoke in Telfair County, he drove all the way to Telfair County to hear the debate there. And as I grew up I went to political speeches, Talmadge speeches, other political speeches that were made at that time.

I recall when I was eighteen years old that Talmadge spoke in Royston, Georgia, and they asked me to make a little speech and introduce Talmadge when he was running against Senator Russell. And I did, I had a tremendous crowd of people from this area. So I guess that was my first political speech at age eighteen. Talmadge seemed to be appreciative of my speech, and he asked me to come and speak at another area when he spoke up at Dalton. But when we got to Dalton--I had my speech all prepared--he had called out the National Guard to keep a union from stopping a plant from working. And Dalton was one of the few counties in

the state where they were unionized. And so it was such a difficult tense time up there that Talmadge cut his speech very short and I cut mine out. [Laughter] So I didn't speak.

My half brother happened to be living in Dalton at that time and I went up there and was spending my time with him. But then over the years we'd always go to the openings of the Talmadge campaign. One year in Albany, I remember, we'd carry a group of supporters with us. So I guess my interest in politics sort of came [about] because of his [Vandiver's father's] interest in politics. As I say, he never ran for office. When my mother died in 1941 then Governor-elect [Eugene] Talmadge asked my father if he would serve on the state highway board. He thought it would be good for him to get away from home, 'cause my mother had died in January, and he thought it would help him get over his grief, if he were active in something. And it did. It was something entirely new for him. But he served on the three-man highway board. Made a lot of friends. I still run into friends that he made while he was serving on the highway board.

And in my campaigns some of my support came from the fact that my father had formed friendships when he was on the highway board. So he had a great influence on me. He was a good businessman. He accumulated land. He had, at the time of his death, about thirty-five hundred acres of land that he had bought, most of it in the Depression when land was cheap. I know he bought one hundred-and fifty-acre farm, paid a dollar an acre for it. And he bought another little farm close by that he paid fifty cents an acre for. This was in the depth of the Depression. He was sort of like the man that didn't want any more land except that that adjoined him. And he did buy quite a few farms. And he looked after them. That was back in the days when you had tenant farmers. There were about thirty separate farms that he would

look after. And he'd try to see each one at least once a week. And then, if he'd missed somebody, he'd try to go and visit with them on Sunday. And he was greatly beloved and thought well of by all the people who worked with him.

Henderson: How did he meet your mother?

Vandiver: My mother, after her first husband died, went ahead and built her house that they had planned to build and had not built before her first husband died. And the man who was painting her new house in Canon was a friend of my father's, and he told my father about my mother and said, "There's a lovely lady, who lives in Canon, Georgia." [He] said, "I think you ought to make her acquaintance." And so my father went down to Canon. And the painter who was painting the house introduced them. They went together for over a year, [and] they finally married.

And we lived in this house that my mother had just built for four years. And my father commuted from Canon to Lavonia, which is eight miles. He commuted every day on horseback. He rode his horse up here in the morning and rode back at night. And, finally, he persuaded my mother that it'd be a lot easier to move to Lavonia where his business was. And so we moved and rented a house for a year while they were building the house that I grew up in. I was four years old when we moved up here. So that's the way we got to Lavonia.

He became interested in developing a mail order business on [*sic*] cottonseed. We in this area have a particularly dry season, usually in the fall, [so] that when you pick the cotton, the seed [is] more likely to sprout and grow into cotton than [in] those areas where it's so wet. So he built him a gin and a seed-house. And he bought the seed from the Delta Pine Landfarms

in Mississippi. And he would bring it over here and grow it into [sic] this area. And then he would sell the cottonseed over the entire south. He had a mail-order business.

He sold seed from Texas to North Carolina, cottonseed. It was "Vandiver's Heavy Fruiter" [laughter], and he would sign a contract with all the farmers in this area and give them the cottonseed, and they would agree to come to his gin and sell him the cottonseed after it was ginned. They were interested in the cotton more than they were the seed anyway. But he had a substantial business throughout the South selling cottonseed. That was part of the time that I was growing up. I was interested in his business.

Henderson: What was it like growing up in Lavonia?

Vandiver: Well, it was wonderful. It had all the great attributes of a little town. Everybody knew everybody else's business like most towns and knew their family history. I know my first grade teacher was a Miss Sarah Stovall, who had gone to school with my father. And she was such a fine teacher and made a great impression on me, although she was a firm disciplinarian, scared you half to death. But she had good order in her classroom. [Laughter] And after she taught me in the first grade she moved up and joined the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh grades. You had several teachers--you'd have a homeroom teacher, and then you'd have your mathematics teacher, and your English teacher, your history teacher, and the teachers would rotate among the classrooms. And Miss Sarah Stovall came up and was teaching arithmetic and math in those classrooms. That's where I met Miss Louise Dixon, who is now Mrs. Louise [Dixon] Aiken. She was a young teacher from Millen, Georgia. When I got into the fourth grade, she was my homeroom teacher. I'm seventy-five years old, and that teacher is still living. She was such a pretty young lady that we all fell in love with her. And she married

a local man and had a family, and he died and she married another local man, and he died after a good many years, and then she married a third time. And her husband died. . . . She's outlived all of her husbands [laughter], but she's a charming little southern lady who came from Millen, Georgia, and was an excellent teacher and meant a great deal to me starting out in the fourth grade.

Henderson: What does a young boy do for entertainment growing up in Lavonia?

Vandiver: Well, we had tennis courts. We had high school football, and we played grammar school football, and when we got to high school, we played high school football. We had basketball. We had a tennis court. Where my son lives is where one of my father's friends had a tennis court just down the street, and we spent a lot of time playing tennis there. Then my father gave some land to the city of Lavonia in honor of my mother, while she was still living, and they made it into a city park. And they built two tennis courts there, and we spent a lot of our time playing tennis and basketball and football. It was a very full life.

In the summer my family sent me to a camp up near Clayton, Georgia, a little town called Wiley, Georgia, and it was Camp Dixie for boys. I was nine years old, I think, when they sent me. That's where I learned to swim, and there were boys from all over the South. In fact, most of the boys were either from Texas or from Georgia. They were scattered, some from Arkansas, Mississippi, and North and South Carolina. So I did have an opportunity to meet with boys from all over the South at that time. I went for five summers up there, two months each summer as a camper, and then the owner of the camp asked me to come back as a counselor. I spent two more years up there, so I had a total of seven years in camp. And we

always had a very busy summer. So growing up in a little town was great, and I wish my son had had the opportunity to have all the things that I had. He had some of them.

He was born in 1948, and at the time he was born I was managing Senator Herman [Eugene] Talmadge's first campaign for governor. So after he was elected, he called me and asked me, told me he wanted me to be a part of his administration and asked me what I wanted to do. Well, [Samuel] Marvin Griffin [Sr.] had been adjutant general and had just been elected lieutenant governor, so I figured maybe that might be a good place to start. And I was qualified to be adjutant general, and I was adjutant general for six years. That, of course, is the governor's chief of staff and [head of] the National Guard. At that time we had about twelve thousand young men in the National Guard of Georgia. It was right after the war, and you were required to be in the reserve or the National Guard. I think some of my happiest days in my career were spent as adjutant general. I got to know boys from all over the state. And they were some of my strongest supporters when I ran for office.

Henderson: Let me go back to your childhood just a moment, Governor. What was the most pleasant memory you have of your childhood, if you could pick one?

Vandiver: Well . . . I had a teacher when I was six years old, a Mrs. [Marshall] Allison who taught what they called "expression" back in those days. And they call it "public speaking," I guess, now. And I remember when I was in about the eighth grade that we used to have these district meets, and in 1932 [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt had just been elected president of the United States. His inaugural address was great, and I memorized that inaugural address of President Roosevelt and used it as my declamation in the district meet. Fortunately, I won the district and then went on to the state. I think probably I was the most excited and

happiest about that. I think probably two of the happiest moments were [during] my last year at Camp Dixie. I was chosen as honor camper, which is the highest you could get, and I later found out that Ellis [Gibbs] Arnall had gone to Camp Dixie and had been chosen as honor camper. Carl [Edward] Sanders had gone to Camp Dixie, and [there] seemed to be something in the water up there that made you interested in politics. But the two happiest moments, I guess, in my childhood were winning the declamation on district basis and when I was named honor camper. We had co-honor campers the years I was named honor camper. There was a boy from Washington, Georgia named Bob [Robert Claude] Norman, and I'd met Bob when I was at the district meet; it'd been held in Washington, Georgia. He and I became fast friends, and it was the first time in history, I think, that they'd ever had two honor campers, so Bob Norman and I were both honor campers. We have been friends now for over sixty years. When I was governor I appointed him chairman of the ports authority, offered him several other positions because I had absolute confidence in Bob and he was such a close friend, such a good friend. That was a childhood friendship that developed into a life-long friendship.

Henderson: What church did you and your parents belong to and were you involved with church activities?

Vandiver: Yes, I was. My mother was a member of what they call the TEL class. I don't know what exactly those initials meant, but she attended the Baptist church. I attended the Baptist church here in Lavonia with her. My father was not a member of the church. Why he didn't join the church I never quite knew because he came from a religious family, and his grandfather was one of about twelve children, and six of those children became Baptist preachers. My grandfather, I recall, was very religious. I don't know why my father never

joined the Baptist church. I know that when I joined at about age twelve--I joined during a revival along with a lot of my schoolmates--they attempted to get my father to join, but he didn't join, and I don't know why. I never knew. But he lived the kind of life, or even better life, than a lot of people who were members of that church. He always treated people fairly and honestly, and he was known as a man that if he told you something, you didn't have to get it in writing. He meant it.

My grandfather on my mother's side, as I said, founded the Universalist church in Canon. His brother, Uncle Billy Bowers, who was the oldest child of Job Bowers, and my grandfather was the youngest child, they both were Baptist preachers. Uncle Billy remained a Baptist preacher, and my grandfather felt that the Baptist church did not encompass all that he wanted to believe in, that he did believe in. And so he helped found the Universalist church. [It's] still in Canon. It's not very active; there are not very many members, but we still have our Bowers reunion at the old Universalist church in Canon. In fact, we just had it last August.

Henderson: As a young boy did you ever get into troubles that required your parents to discipline you?

Vandiver: Yes, I guess like every boy [laughter] I got into it. I didn't break any law, but I did get into trouble. I know one time when my parents were away, there was a pretty little girl down in Royston, Georgia, that I had met, and I took the car, my mother's car, she had a Buick, an old Buick. I did take her car, and I tried to disconnect the speedometer [laughter] so she wouldn't know that I had used it. And this friend of mine and I went to Royston and had dates with these two girls in Royston. When I got back, I tried to reconnect the speedometer and couldn't do it, so I got caught red-handed. [Laughter]

My mother found out about my using the car. Like all kids, I guess, I sometimes drove too fast. I do remember the chief of police told my father one time that I was driving too fast. [Laughter] I got chastised for that.

Henderson: When there was any discipline to be done, did your father do the discipline or your mother?

Vandiver: My father did all of it, practically all of it. We had a little peach orchard in the back of my house where we lived, and the switches were plentiful there. He'd always make me go get the switch to discipline me with. I got into the usual troubles, I guess, for a high school kid. I was just [unintelligible] for grammar school. I discovered girls when I first went to high school. My schoolwork suffered some because of girls and football, and my father was very firm in letting me know that education was the first thing that I needed to make a priority.

Henderson: While you were in school what were some of the extra-curricular activities you engaged in?

Vandiver: I played football. . . was on the football team. Wasn't hard. . . .

Henderson: What position?

Vandiver: Well, I played end, and I played fullback. Wasn't very hard to make the team. We didn't have but thirteen people out for the team and just had two substitutes. So I didn't have any real athletic ability, but I did make the team. And I played basketball, and I was on the tennis team. We had a tennis team, and I played tennis. When I went to Georgia I played on the freshman tennis team, but my sophomore year about the time the tennis season started I got the measles. They kept me in a dark room in the infirmary over there. They said it would ruin your eyesight if you had too much light, people who had the measles. Being an only

child, I never did have any childhood diseases until late. I was a sophomore when I got the measles, and I got the mumps from my daughter when I was an adjutant general. I nearly died. For ten days, I had a high temperature of about 103 or 4. I was in bed for about two or three weeks, and when I finally got out of bed, the doctor told Betty [Sybil Elizabeth Russell Vandiver], "I'm glad we could save him." She said, "Save him? What're you talking about? He just had the mumps!" [Laughter] He said, "Yeah, but he had the mumps every way you could have the mumps!" She said, "Well, why didn't you carry him to the hospital, or let him go to the hospital?" He said, "He was too sick to go to the hospital." He said, "You could take care of him just as well as they could at the hospital." So I had a close call. I didn't realize it at the time, but it took me really several months to get over that sickness. Old fashioned mumps.

Henderson: Let me go back to your half brother and half sister. Now, had they already left home by the time that you had come along?

Vandiver: My brother was at Tech [Georgia Institute of Technology] when I came along, when I first remembered him. He was student at Tech. My sister had gone to school at Canon, but after we moved to Lavonia, she took her senior year here in Lavonia before she went to Wesleyan [College]. And my brother ended up as a builder, a developer. He built what they called back in those days--you don't see many of them now--outdoor theaters. He got to be sort of an expert in that, and he built a theater here in Lavonia. I persuaded my father to build a movie-house here in Lavonia so we'd have some entertainment. My brother built it. And I remember that was another one of our recreations--going to see the movies, usually cowboy movies on Saturday.

End of Side One

Side Two

Vandiver: [My father] felt that I didn't have as good a foundation as I should have to go to college. He told me one day, said, "Listen, go and visit several schools." And there was a man who came to visit us named William Tate, and he at that time was a professor at McCauley High School in Chattanooga. So we went up to Chattanooga and visited McCauley, and we came back down through Rome, Georgia, and visited Darlington School. We also visited Baylor while we were in Chattanooga. And I thought that since I was going to live in Georgia, I'd rather go to a Georgia school. So I decided to go to Darlington, and my father was right. I didn't have as good a foundation as I should have. I didn't know how to study. But I learned at Darlington how to study. We had a study hall every night, and if your grades were good enough you could study in your room; if they weren't you went down to the study hall. [Laughter] And my grades initially were not too good, but by the time I graduated, I had learned how to study and graduated in the upper 10 percent of my class. That education at Darlington was a time when I made some great friends, who I later have kept up with. When I went to the University of Georgia, it helped me more than any other thing that could've happened. My father was absolutely right because they had a great school there, and when I left the governor's office, we came back to Lavonia in the middle of the year, and [my son] finished out that year at Lavonia's school, but I wanted him to go to Darlington, too. So I sent him to Darlington for his last three years of high school. And Darlington has meant a great deal to me. The people who were there, the professors that were there, and the friends that I made, I think, made a substantial change in my life.

Henderson: Was there one professor over there that really had an influence on your life?

Vandiver: Yes, one that had the greatest influence on my life was a man by the name of Roland B. Parker. He taught history. He was one of the finest people I have ever known, one of the greatest teachers. [He] made his classes just fun; you wanted to go to them. You'd hate to miss a class. And I think that he was my favorite teacher of all. After I left Darlington, he went to the University of North Carolina and became a registrar at the University of North Carolina. I had one teacher here in Lavonia who really made, I think, a tremendous impression on me. She was a Mrs. [Ligon] Maret. She married a Mr. Ligon Maret, who was a businessman here. She was a Brooks, and she came from Royston, Georgia, and she was a sister to [David William] D. W. Brooks, who you may have heard of. She was one of the great teachers that I had. She was one of those teachers that just inspired you. You were lucky if you have one, and I had two that I considered really great teachers.

Henderson: I understand that while you were a young boy your parents hired a speech teacher to work with you. Why did they do that?

Vandiver: Really I was six years old when I first started that, and a Mrs. Allison was what they called an expression teacher. I think they wanted me to have poise when I was speaking. I think my father probably wanted me to be a speaker. I think maybe he had ambitions for me to get into politics. In fact, a man came by my office last week and said that his mother was still living and that he had talked with her recently. She told him that my father stopped at her house, and I was in the car, and that he told her that "I want you to meet the

future governor of Georgia." [Laughter] I don't know whether those stories are apocryphal or not, but a lot of people have told me that.

Henderson: Well, now, I had heard that when you were born your father made the same statement.

Vandiver: Yeah, I think he did.

Henderson: Is there some truth to that?

Vandiver: They say that it is. [Laughter] I can't say from knowledge, but I've had a lot of people tell me that.

Henderson: Why is it someone like your father, who apparently was very interested in politics, never decided to get in politics himself?

Vandiver: I think he was too busy. He was a businessman. He worked hard, and he got started really a little late in business because he sold [insurance] and taught for twenty years, and he was sort of trying to catch up.

Henderson: Why do you think he left the teaching profession? He wanted to make more money or. . . .

Vandiver: I think that had something to do with it. He loved teaching. And he's told me stories about some incidents that have happened. Some of them we probably ought not to [laughter] put on television. You can edit this one out if you want to, but he was down in Calvary, Georgia, which is way down in south Georgia, you may know here that is, south of Bainbridge, right on the Florida line.

Henderson: Uh huh, I've heard of it.

Vandiver: Every Friday afternoon, they would have a recitation period. They all would perform, and the parents would come on Friday afternoon. Maybe not every Friday afternoon, but on special occasions they would have it. Some of the older boys got hold of one of the younger boys. They all went to school in the same room. It was a one-room schoolhouse. Some of the older boys got hold of this young fellow, and when all the parents got there, they each had to have their recitation. The boy's parents were there, and this little fellow got up, and said, "Here's to Mr. Vandiver. When he was young and in his prime, he could have gotten married any old time, but now that he is old and his balls are cold, he couldn't get married to save his soul." [Laughter] He didn't tell me that story. He told somebody else, and they told me that story. He said that it was a hectic time there, with all the parents there and with that little kid who didn't really understand what he was saying.

Henderson: It seems like then your father was a very outgoing businessman. What were the business activities he was involved in? You said he was in insurance?

Vandiver: Yes, he was insurance for ten years, Traveler's Life Insurance [Company], and then he started accumulating land and was in the farming business. Then he built two gins in this area, one over about five miles in the country and one here in town. He sold cottonseed all over the South. I remember his literature, "Vandiver's Heavy Fruiter," and he'd get testaments from people in Texas and Mississippi, all of them about what a great cotton came from his seed, and he'd put all that in his literature and his mail-order business. He had several employees who were doing nothing but working in the mail-order business.

Henderson: How would you describe his political philosophy, and did it have any influence on shaping your political philosophy?

Vandiver: Yes, he was a conservative, and, as I said, he grew up during the Reconstruction. Times were hard. They didn't have, at all times, enough to eat. This was a period of our history, when he was young, that the carpetbaggers were in the South. It made it extremely difficult. My grandfather was a Confederate veteran. He ran away from home when he was thirteen years old. He tried to join here in Franklin County. They knew how old he was in Franklin County--he wasn't but thirteen--and he was small in stature. They wouldn't let him, but he walked all [the way] across to Floyd County, all the way across the state, and joined the Confederate forces over there.

[Background conversation with another person.]

Vandiver: Let's see, where were we?

Henderson: You were talking about your father's political philosophy and Reconstruction?

Vandiver: Oh yeah, well, he was very much a conservative.

Henderson: Was he a [Franklin] Roosevelt man?

Vandiver: Well, he was in the very beginning. Of course, nobody in the South could tolerate the Republican Party in those days. They remembered too clearly what happened after the war, and they blamed Abraham Lincoln and the Republicans for a lot of their problems. So practically everybody was a Democrat. We didn't have a Republican party in Georgia at that time. He was a supporter of Roosevelt. I remember he went to the inauguration. He was on Governor [Eugene] Talmadge's staff. He went to the first inauguration, he and my mother. They went up on a train with all the governor's staff, and he was quite impressed with Roosevelt. He got a little bit upset with Roosevelt. He was director of the bank here, one of the

directors. Roosevelt closed all the banks, you know, had a bank holiday. Our little bank never did close. He said he wouldn't close it. If anybody wanted their money, they could come get it. He had it for them.

I think later his philosophy was influenced maybe by Talmadge, who was an extreme conservative, very conservative. Talmadge didn't like some of the programs Roosevelt was promulgating, and so I think my father went along with that view, became even more conservative. I know my family had always supported Dick Russell; they supported him for governor, and they supported him for the Senate. I remember hearing my mother say, "Well, it's all right for a young fellow to be ambitious. He hadn't been governor very long, but he's ambitious, and he wants to go to the Senate. I think we ought to be for it." We were for it. I remember there wasn't much communication back in those days like we have now. I remember a little biplane flew over Lavonia [and it] had "Vote for Richard B. Russell for U.S. Senate." Everybody ran out to see the airplane 'cause it was unusual to see it. But then when Talmadge ran against Russell, my father stuck with his old friend [Talmadge], who had been his friend for about ten years at that time. And 'course we're close to Barrow County, and it would be considered Russell country, but my father got out and worked real hard, and Russell didn't carry Franklin county but by about thirty votes.

Henderson: Hmm.

Vandiver: I know he was known as such a strong Talmadge man in our county. I guess I was, too. But when Betty and I got married, she had an aunt, Marguerite Russell Bowden, [who] said, "I wonder why Betty is marrying that Talmadge man. That is a terrible thing."  
[Laughter]

Henderson: Let me go back to your experience at college. Why did you decide to attend the University of Georgia?

Vandiver: Well. . . .

Henderson: And what did you major in once you got there?

Vandiver: Most of my friends here went to the University of Georgia. Classmates that I had in high school were there. I was a year behind most of them because I went to Darlington for a year after I'd graduated. But the University of Georgia at that time was close, and a lot of alumni [were] from this area. There were a lot of boys at Darlington that were going to Georgia, friends of mine. And I might have had politics in mind, getting to know people from all over Georgia. I guess I did because I sort of grew up in politics. So I was pretty active in college, and active in college politics. I was president of my fraternity twice. I was president of Phi Kappa literary society. I was president of the Interfraternity Council. I was president of Blue Key. I was a member of ODK [Omicron Delta Kappa], an officer in ODK. I was elected to Sphinx, which is the highest honor you can receive at the University of Georgia. I guess I had politics in mind at that time, because I was extremely active in everything. My grades were not all that great, but I was active in campus politics.

Henderson: Now what were you majoring in?

Vandiver: I majored in history. And I took a combination course. I could get my AB degree by taking all my electives in my freshman [year] in law school. So I took all my required courses the first three years, and on the fourth year my electives I took in law school. In two more years I graduated from law school and got my AB degree and my LL.B degree in six years.

Henderson: When did you graduate, Governor?

Vandiver: I graduated in 1940 [unintelligible]. I got my AB in '40 and got my law degree in '42.

Henderson: Umm-hmm. Were there any professors there that had an impact on your life?

Vandiver: Yes, I had several very fine professors that had an impact. There was a Dr. [Harry A.] Shinn, who was one of the great teachers that I remember. He had been general counsel for the Bank of Italy in California, which later became the Bank of America. And he had a heart attack. His doctor told him that he was going to have to leave his job as counsel for the Bank of Italy, and he thought the quiet of a college campus would be a great [place] for him to be, so he came to the University of Georgia as a professor and was one of the most popular professors there. Dr. Shinn was his name. Then I had a Dr. [James A.] Spruille, who was from South Carolina, and was also a Rhodes scholar, who made a great impression on me. He was probably the most highly educated professor that I ever had. He inserted a lot of humor in his teaching. Dr. [John Alton] Hosch, was dean of the law school. He taught several classes. He had, in fact, Dr. [Robert Ligon] McWhorter, who was a famous football player. He was the first all-American football player from Georgia and is a person that I respected and dearly loved, but he had his course in a notebook. And he would come in, and he would open up his notebook, and he would look down at his notebook and never raise his head [laughter] during the whole class. He read everything that he taught us. He taught us criminal law, and I think maybe tort law. He was not one of my favorite teachers, although he was one of my favorite friends. But they all had an influence on me, each one of those teachers did.

Henderson: When do you decide that you want to go to law school?

Vandiver: Well, I think after I graduated from high school that I decided that I wanted to go to college and eventually be a lawyer. And I sat down with my father, and my father gave me a piece of paper and told me to write down everything that I wanted to do--that was my freshman year in college--with my life. I wrote down that I would like to be a member of Sphinx, which was the highest honor you could achieve at Georgia. And then I'd like to go to the legislature, and I would like to be governor of Georgia. They didn't have lieutenant governors at that time. In fact, M. E. [Melvin Ernest] Thompson was the first lieutenant governor that we had that was elected. Then I would like to go to the United States Senate. And he kept that piece of paper. He didn't live long enough to see me accomplish anything except my college activities. And he died in '51, and I was appointed adjutant general in 1948, so I was adjutant general during his lifetime, but I was elected lieutenant governor in 1954, which he didn't live to see, and then governor in 1958.

Henderson: After you earn your law degree, you enlist in the Army Air Force and serve as a bomber pilot. Why the Army Air Force?

Vandiver: They had had several air patrol flight-training courses over at the University of Georgia, and I got interested in flying. I learned to fly at the University of Georgia. We flew the old cubs, and I got my private license at the University of Georgia in extra time that I had. So, I loved to fly, and learned to love to fly, and decided I wanted to be a pilot. And, so I went to, after I graduated from law school, it [was] right amusing. Most of the pilots were very young. They wanted them to be young. They didn't want them to be married. They wanted

them to be, not have any ties that would cause them to be careful, I guess, or to be afraid of flying.

So they decided they'd send all of the cadets to a college so they'd have a little college training, too, a little college background. So after I had graduated from law school, and got into the Air Force they sent me back to college with this group of younger boys. They sent me to Decatur, Illinois, to James Millikin University. That was after we'd got through basic training, which we had in Miami. But we went to James Millikin, and I was up there three or four months with these younger boys. And then, they seemed to have an idea that the further away from home you were the better off you'd be in training, so they sent us, my group, to California. I went to Santa Anna, California, for my aviation cadet training, basic training.

Then I went to Santa Maria, California, for my pilot training, for my first pilot training. [I] flew the old Steerman bi-wing plane. And then I went to Marana, Arizona, which is just out from Tuscon for my basic training. Then they sent me to Pecos, Texas, for my advanced training. And, in the meantime, I ruptured an eardrum. I was doing acrobatics, and I lost too much altitude too fast, and I had a bad cold, and it blew out my left eardrum. But I was able to continue my training, and got through with it, but I kept, every time I'd get a bad cold, my ears would get stopped up, and I, for about four or five months, I couldn't hear anything out of my left ear. But it repaired itself, as they will do, and I did get through basic--through advanced training, got my commission, got my wings, and went to Yuma, Arizona. They trained me to be a co-pilot on the B-17. And I began to have ear trouble again, and they sent me back to Santa Anna for a medical evaluation, and they kept me in Santa Anna for two or three months. I had bad sinus trouble, and that dust out there in Arizona, I think, irritated it somewhat.

I had met a flying evaluation board, and they wouldn't let me fly. They took me off flight status. They said that they were afraid there'd be some permanent damage there, and they didn't want me to have any permanent damage, and they had a lot of pilots anyway at that time. So they sent me back to Yuma, and since I'd graduated from law school, they assigned me to the legal office. I was defense counselor in court martial cases for about two years of my service. Some of them friends I made there were great friends. One of them was an assistant district attorney in Los Angeles. The head of the legal office was a man from Louisiana, Jim Leithead, who I kept up with. I got so I was handling myself pretty well, and I was defense counselor, and the trial judge advocate, Jim Leithead, was on the other side. He was a prosecutor, and we [conducted trials before] a military board. The colonel at the base appointed the board. He appointed that board to do what he wanted them to do. [Laughter] He wanted them to find, if somebody was charged, he wanted them to be guilty.

Well, I got about four or five individuals off, so the colonel changed the board and wouldn't let me be defense counselor anymore. [Laughter] So I became an advisor to the airmen out there who would come in with their problems. I was lucky in that I had some cases that I could win, but a court martial back in those days was nothing. It was not fair, really, because the colonel dominated the board, and if they didn't do what he said, then they changed the board.

Henderson: After your military service you come back to Lavonia and you practice law. Why did you come back home to practice law?

Vandiver: Well, I came back because my father was here. My mother had died, and my father was here. Right after I got back, they had a mayor's election. At that time the mayor was

elected for one year. And a lot of my friends asked me to run for mayor, and the incumbent mayor was retiring. I got into the mayor's race and didn't have any opposition. I was elected mayor when I was about, I guess, twenty-six or -seven years old. Somehow it got in the paper that this young fellow was the youngest mayor in the United States had been elected over here in North Georgia. They wrote a big story about it in the Atlanta papers. Some young fellow over in Douglasville, Georgia. He was a little bit older than me. Anyway, we thought about organizing a young mayor's association. Anyway, I served that one-year as mayor and went back to law school during that period to get my mindset back into practicing law. I'd been flying and been in the Air Force for over three years.

So I went back to law school for that period of time, and then my father had a friend over in Winder named Joe [Joseph Dillard] Quillian, that he had met on some occasion. Joe asked my father to ask me to come by, and so I went over there and talked with Joe. He had been practicing at that time thirty years. He was one of the leading lawyers in the whole area. He said if I would come with him he would make me a partner, and it'd be the firm of Quillian and Vandiver. So we organized the firm over there, Quillian and Vandiver. I practiced . . . . About that time Betty graduated from the University of Georgia, and I had met Betty before. We'd had one date, but we argued politics the whole date, and we didn't get along too well [laughter]. But after I got over there and started practicing law, I asked for a date, and we started going together. We started going together in May, and we became engaged in June. Her father was a federal judge at that time. He was off holding court. He'd be gone for four to six weeks sometimes. When he came back home from one of these long trips his wife said, "I think Betty is getting serious about this young lawyer in town, getting serious about getting married."

And he said, "To whom?" [Laughter] "Well, this young lawyer who's practicing with Joe Quillian." As it turned out, Betty had two brothers that went to Darlington, and we got to be friends. Betty and I went together, had a lot of common interests, although I'm considered older than Betty. I'm nine years older than she is. But the war interfered with a lot of us getting married. We didn't get married during the war. Thank goodness I didn't, 'cause I wouldn't have found Betty if I had gotten married.

But anyway, we got married in September. I practiced law over there in Winder. And the next year was . . . I've left out . . . I didn't pass the bar exam before I went into the Army. So I came back and went to a refresher school and passed the bar exam. After that I went into practice with Joe Quillian.

Henderson: Let me come back to your practicing law in Lavonia. Apparently, you did not practice here very long.

Vandiver: No, not really. In fact, I was going to, I was taking refresher courses most of the time.

Henderson: Okay. Why did you decide to run for mayor of Lavonia?

Vandiver: A lot of my father's friends asked me to. At that time, the mayor made fifty dollars a year.

Henderson: [Laughter] Big money.

Vandiver: It wasn't really big money, but it had some prestige, and the mayor had to do everything. You had to hold court. Any misdemeanors or violations of the law, you were the judge. If a dog barked in somebody's backyard, and it was a strange dog, they'd call the mayor.

That was the first thing they'd do. I found out when you're mayor of a little town you're awfully close to the people. [Laughter] They get to you in a hurry.

One time the mayor, while I was mayor, Mr. [Robert] Beasley was mayor pro tem, and I was over at the university, and I couldn't get back to hold court. They had a rape case that came before the mayor, and, of course, that's a felony. Mr. Beasley didn't have any experience much with the law, and so he tried that rape case in mayor's court. [Laughter] Really the only thing he could do was bind him over to the superior court, where it could be tried as a felony. And he tried that case in mayor's court and found the boy guilty, this black boy, guilty of raping this other fellow's wife and fined him ten dollars. [Laughter] But the tragic thing about it was the husband of the wife who was allegedly raped, after he heard what the mayor had done, that he was just going to fine him ten dollars, he waited for the defendant, and when the defendant walked by the filling station, just up from the city hall there, he killed him. 'Cause he thought that was all that was going to happen to him. And it was such a tragedy that I never did miss another court because that was a terrible thing to happen to somebody who didn't know anything about the law.

I really was not practicing much law at that time. I was in a period of time when I was getting refreshed on my, getting my mindset back into law.

Henderson: What was it about Betty Russell that impressed you, and it begins to dawn on you: "I would like her to be my wife."

Vandiver: Hal, before I went into the Air Force, this Quillian, Joe Quillian, had asked me, I had a period of three or four months before I could get in, asked me if I'd come over there and just be in his office. I hadn't passed the bar at that time. I'd graduated from law school.

And I did just to get the feel of the law practice, and Betty was sixteen years old at that time, and I was just graduated from law school. She was in high school, and I met Betty at that time . . . but I think the judge would have shot me if I'd asked her for a date, [Laughter] because I was too, so much older at that time.

So after the war, a friend of mine and I went back over to the university and we were looking for a date. This housemother of one of the halls over on Ag Hill, forgotten the name of that hall, anyway, had been a good friend of this other man before the war. So we went by to see her, and we sort of asked if there were any nice girls around there that we could get a date with. So she called Betty and another girl, I've forgotten who the other girl was, and we went out and got a co-cola [Coca-Cola], and they had a hotdog, and argued politics the whole time. She said she was for Hoke O'Kelly. I don't know whether you remember Hoke O'Kelly, or not. He was running, and she wasn't going to be for Talmadge. So she was for Hoke O'Kelly. We argued a good bit, but then after I got back from the . . . started practicing law over in Winder, we met again and started going together. I asked her for a date, and she was going with a person rather seriously at the time, but she'd already got a job. She had a job, and [unintelligible] just graduated from law school. She was graduated in sociology, and she was going to a hospital in Atlanta and do social work and [had] a job all lined up. But we fell in love, and she came over and met my father, and my father just loved her. He just thought Betty was great. I think maybe the judge was satisfied that I wasn't too bad a fellow. My mother-in-law, oh, she was such a sweet person, just wonderful. I don't know, we just got together.

I had worked prior to coming over there with Herman [Talmadge] when he was elected governor by the legislature. Gene Talmadge had asked me to serve as his aide, because of my

father's association, and he died. And then the legislature elected Herman, and Herman called me and asked me to come over and serve as his aide, as his father had asked me to, and I did, during that period of time that he served as governor elected by the legislature. But when the Supreme Court ruled that [M. E.] Thompson would be the legal, was the legal governor, then Herman walked out and said he'd leave it up to the people to decide. And all of us who were with him walked out at the same time, and that's when I came back to Winder. When Betty and I were married, my college roommate was my best man, and Herman Talmadge was one of the groomsmen. I got a picture of Herman as one of the groomsmen. He was very young at that time. We kept our association up, and one day he called me up and asked me to manage his campaign. We'd worked together during several of his father's campaigns, and so I did.

Henderson: Before we talk about that campaign, Governor, let me run through some elections, and you just tell me what your involvement was in this particular election, whether it was you may not have been involved or maybe you were involved.

Vandiver: Sure.

Henderson: How about the senatorial campaign of 1936, when Gene Talmadge runs against Senator Russell?

Vandiver: Russell? Yes, I was, as was my father, an ardent supporter of Gene Talmadge, and had made my first political speech at age eighteen down in Royston.

Henderson: Did you know that you were going to give that speech?

Vandiver: They asked me to, the people who were in charge of the program. The man who was in charge of the program was Linton Johnson, and he was the grandfather of this boy

Don Johnson, who's just been elected to Congress. He'd been active in politics with my father, and he asked me to be on the program, and I did.

Henderson: Did you write the speech out in advance?

Vandiver: Yeah, yeah, I wrote it out in advance, exactly. They didn't give me too much time. I had [laughter] to limit my time, but with the public speaking and debating that I had done previously, I think I was able to make a fairly good speech.

Henderson: What kind of crowd was there?

Vandiver: They must have had thirty or forty thousand people there. It was the biggest crowd I've ever seen, nearly. The only crowd that was bigger was the crowd that, some of the crowds that Herman [Talmadge] had when he was running, and the one that I had when I opened my campaign in Dublin. I've got a picture of that crowd. I like it. I don't know whether you've seen that picture or not. It was a tremendous crowd. Jim [James Lester] Gillis [Sr.] was managing my campaign.

Henderson: Did you try to style your speeches after Gene Talmadge? He was a great orator, I'm told.

Vandiver: No.

Henderson: How would your style compare with, say, Gene Talmadge's?

Vandiver: No, I was not at all, my style was altogether different. I didn't try to imitate anybody. I tried to do it my way. I didn't try to imitate [Gene] Talmadge or anybody else. Since [Richard] Russell's really my idol . . . after the Talmadge campaign was over, I came to admire Senator Russell tremendously because he was one of the greatest statesmen we've ever had. But I didn't try to pattern my speaking after anybody really.

Henderson: How about the senatorial campaign of 1938?

Vandiver: That was a campaign [in which] Walter [Franklin] George was challenged by Gene Talmadge. President Roosevelt came to Barnesville, Georgia, to make a speech, and Walter George was on the platform. He [Roosevelt] made this speech and came out in favor of [Lawrence] Camp. . . . [Cut off]

End Of Side Two



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