

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

Side One

Henderson: Governor, let's go back to the days of your governorship. What were your hobbies, and how did you relax while you were governor?

Vandiver: Well, really, I didn't have very many hobbies. About the only way I had the opportunity to relax was playing golf. Most of my friends were golfers, and we did spend a few hours on the golf course every week. And that was my main relaxation--that and being with my family on trips. Vacation trips were about the only time that I had to relax.

Henderson: How would you describe living in the governor's mansion?

Vandiver: Well, we lived in the old governor's mansion, the one that had been the governor's mansion for many many years. I think every governor . . . Cliff [Clifford Mitchell] Walker had lived in it first. The oldest governor's mansion was where the Henry Grady Hotel once stood. And then they had moved from there up to Ansley Park and had purchased this old granite mansion. And it had been the executive mansion for many many years. Cliff Walker was governor back in the twenties. Senator [Richard Brevard] Russell [Jr.] lived there. In fact, when my wife was a little girl, she used to spend a lot of time with her grandmother, who was the Senator's first lady. The Senator was never married, and his mother stayed at the mansion and acted as hostess for her son during the time he was governor. So my wife was quite familiar with the mansion. I had never been there except on official occasions.

It was a comfortable place. It was old. We had pets that we kept in the house. One of the members of the legislature gave me a little Chihuahua dog which was our main pet there at the mansion. This legislator's name was Warren [Simeon] Moorman, and he was from Lanier County in south Georgia, and so we named the puppy Warmo, after Warren Moorman, and Warmo was about our only pet that we had at the mansion. The children loved him and I did, too. He was a gentle, sweet little dog.

Actually, the mansion leaked. It had some places in the roof where it was very difficult to repair it because it was so old, and there were times when you had to run to the kitchen and get pails that we could stick under the leaks so that it wouldn't wet the floor in the mansion. It was time to build a new mansion or get a new mansion.

During my term as governor I proposed that they formulate a committee to study the possibility of buying a new mansion or building a new mansion, and that committee was formed, and I think J. B. [John Brooks] Fuqua, who was in the legislature at that time, was chairman of that committee. They consulted with many architects. Henry Green was the authority on furnishings, and I think he was the one who did most of the furnishing of the new mansion.

But we thought it was comfortable. The children loved it. It was big, airy. The only thing that that sort of set us apart [was that] they always had a state patrolman who was close by, and we had four state patrolmen who took turns in the State Patrol office to give security. As most governors do, or I did during the period of great stress, I had threats on my life. And at one time, I even carried a pistol for a while. I didn't know what I was going to run into.

On one occasion, we had a man that walked up to the front door of the mansion, and the State Patrol couldn't see him, and he was in the lobby of the mansion before my wife could keep him out, so it was necessary that you had some security and some help out there because there are people who are mentally unbalanced that would come in and try to take over the conversation and the mansion if you'd let them.

But we enjoyed it. The children had a wide yard to play in. We had tennis courts there, played a little bit of tennis. During the time that it was icy and snowy, we had a hard time getting up to the mansion. It was on the top of a little hill, and it was rather steep, and it was hard, unless you had four-wheel drive or chains on your car, to get into the mansion during the bad weather, inclement weather. But all in all, I enjoyed it. I think all the governors who had the chance to live there enjoyed it. It was a comfortable place, and we felt at home there. We had plenty of room, and the children were at an age where we didn't have to uproot them from all their friends. They made new friends in the neighborhood.

[Laughter] I remember one time my baby girl, Jane [Brevard Vandiver Kidd], had just learned to ride a bicycle, and we were discussing some legislation with the legislature, and the Ku Klux Klan decided they were opposed to that particular piece of legislation. Maybe they were opposed to something that I had done or said. Anyway, they demonstrated out in front of the mansion there, and we got a little bit afraid that my daughter was visiting a neighbor that had a child about her age. And we called our neighbor and told her we would send a state patrolman over there to pick up my daughter. And she said, "Well, she's already gone." And so Jane, who was about six [or] seven years old, was riding her bicycle, and the Ku Klux Klan was in her way, and she said, "Oogie, get out of my way! Get out of my way!" and rode right

through the middle of the demonstration without any fear at all. She's my daughter who's interested in politics. She has taken an active part in politics, and is now in Athens, serving as Congressman Don Johnson's district manager and is enjoying her work. I think she enjoys politics.

Henderson: Why don't you discuss you children while we're at this point?

Vandiver: Well, I'm very proud of all of my children. My son Chip [Samuel Ernest Vandiver, III] was our first child, and he was born a little over a year after Betty [Sybil Elizabeth Russell Vandiver] and I got married. And our second child [Vanna Elizabeth] was born in Atlanta at Decatur at the Emory Hospital. Both of them were born at Emory Hospital. And my third child, Jane was born at Georgia Baptist Hospital, but they went to the same clinic that my wife and her brothers went to when they were born. And I'm proud of my children.

My son graduated from Darlington, had good grades. He went to the University of Georgia, and he got his A.B. degree, and then he graduated from law school. He served two years as chief clerk to Supreme Court Justice Robert H. [Henry] Jordan, who was a friend of mine, and he asked Chip to serve as his assistant. The he came back and lived in Lavonia for a year after he left that job, and then he and his first cousin, Bob [Robert Lee] Russell [III], decided that they wanted to see if they could make it on their own, without the Russell and Vandiver name, so they went to Alaska, and they got up there and didn't have much money. They had to drive taxis to make money before they passed the bar exam, but they both studied and passed the bar exam in Alaska, which is quite difficult, because it's such a young state, and they really used the California bar exam, which is very difficult to pass. But they both passed and opened up a law office in downtown Anchorage and practiced law there for ten years. I

know one of the justices of the Supreme Court, who had known Chip when he was over there with Justice Jordan, went to Alaska and went by to see Chip and visited with him. And when he came back he made a special trip to come by and tell me that, well, his words were, "Chip is a damned good lawyer, so he was real busy when we went in there but he took time to sit and talk with me and to help me in my trip to Alaska." He stayed there ten years, and they had . . . he married there.

He married a California girl [Michelle Fleming South] who was working for Alyeska which was the oil company that was the pipeline company that brought the oil from Prudhoe Bay down to the point of shipment. They tried to get a job there at Anchorage, Alaska, to get a job searching titles before they passed the bar exam, and I think his wife, who was personnel manager for the company, helped him get their jobs so maybe, I'm sure they were appreciative of that fact. At least they had something to do that had to do with law before they passed the bar exam, that they could do. And he married this California girl in Alaska, and they had one child, Regina Leigh Vandiver, who is now thirteen years old. And then they moved back from Alaska about 1987, I believe it was, and now they have another child named for me and for Betty, who's Samuel Ernest Russell Vandiver. He's only one year old, and he's the joy of our life, really. He lives just down the street from us, and we are enjoying watching him and seeing him develop. We think he'll be a fine young fellow.

My daughter [Jane] has two children. She married David [Alexander] Kidd [Sr.], who lived just around the corner from us in Lavonia. I don't think she ever loved anybody but David in her whole life. They went together in grammar school, high school, and she went off to Queens [College] to go to the first year of college, she was home every weekend, so she could

see David. And after she graduated [from the University of Georgia], she and David got married, about twenty years ago, and they have two fine children. They have my oldest granddaughter, Elizabeth [Kidd], who's fifteen years old and is more interested in her learner's driver's license than anything else right at this time. Then I have another grandson [David Alexander (Alex) Kidd, Jr.] who will be eleven years old in early October, and his great interest is football, basketball, baseball, swimming, and anything athletic. They both attend school there in Athens.

My other daughter loved Athens so much that when she graduated from the university she just had to stay in Athens. And she got a job with Family and Children's Services. She worked for Family and Children's Services for ten years, and then she decided that what she would like to do would be she would like to be a librarian, or what they call today a media specialist. And so she went back to the University of Georgia. I tried to get her to let me pay her way, but she wouldn't do it. She did it with money she had saved. And she got her Master's degree and is now serving as a librarian at a middle school in Franklin County. She still lives in Athens and commutes daily, but she's thinking about building a house here in the county and it would be closer to school. So all in all, I'm proud of all of my children. I don't have any geniuses, but I have some good children, and I'm proud of them. I think they have feeling, which I hope I imparted to them and that Betty imparted to them, of wanting to be in public service. And at least two of them are now. My son, however, is practicing law right now, but he is not as politically inclined as I am, but I think maybe he might run for something someday. Maybe he'll run for mayor of Lavonia. [Laughter]

Henderson: Governor, as a young man and as governor, did you have time to read any, and if you did, any favorite books that come to mind?

Vandiver: Oh, I was an avid reader in grammar school and high school. I think I probably went to the public library more than any other child in school. I read all the usual books that you read when you're young--Tom Swift books. My family bought me some great books, which I still have and have passed on to my children that I read all the way through grammar school. I didn't read as much in high school. I got interested in girls and athletics a little bit in high school and cut back on my reading some. I played football and basketball and tennis and did the usual things that a high school student does. But I didn't read as much as I . . . I do love to read, though. My eyes are not quite as good as they used to be, and I can't read for long periods of time, but I do still read. Most of my reading, however, right now is keeping up with the news and financial publications. I do do some investing. So I try to keep up with the market and try to have enough income to live on comfortably.

Henderson: Let's talk a little bit about your wife. What role did she play in your political career?

Vandiver: Betty is a joy in my life, I'll tell you. If I had lived for a hundred years, I couldn't have found anybody that would have been sweeter and more understanding than she has been. Anything that I decided to do or set my head to do, she was in back of me 100 percent. She always was willing and happy to give advice, and it was generally good common sense. People love Betty. She's a compassionate person. She loves children and grandchildren as much as any grandmother or mother I ever saw. And she's been a wonderful wife to me. I know when we first got into politics, and I ran for lieutenant governor, we had an old Pontiac,

about a 1952 Pontiac. It didn't have any air conditioning. We got in it at the beginning of the campaign, and we stayed in it until the campaign was over. We would go to little towns and large towns, go up and down the street. She'd go up one side, and I'd go up the other. I think because of her great personality she probably got a lot more votes than I did. Anyway, she was so helpful, and she always helped me with anything that we jointly decided that we wanted to do. And, as I say, if I lived a hundred years, I couldn't have found anybody that would even be her equal.

Henderson: When you had a political decision to make, did you always consult her or occasionally consult her? Was she brought into the decision-making process?

Vandiver: When I had some real important decisions, I did discuss them with my wife. Daily decisions that you have to make, not great moments, I didn't worry her with them. The decision to go to the legislature and ask that all of the segregation laws be repealed and keep the schools open was one that we discussed at great length. We were on our knees a great deal of the time, seeking guidance jointly to try to do what was the right thing. And we jointly made the decision that we couldn't live in a state where there was a constant state of flux and change and riots and that sort of thing. And a million children walking the streets, the schools closed and the colleges and universities closed. I don't believe they would have stayed closed long because the courts wouldn't have let them, but at least that was the law in Georgia then and that was the decision we had to make because we had taken an oath to follow the law of Georgia. And as I say, we spent a lot of time seeking guidance from the Almighty. I think we made the right decision. We haven't regretted it. I guess I made a lot of enemies, and I had a lot of



people who disagreed with me, a lot of my own friends disagreed with me, but I still think the decision was right.

And Georgia set a pattern, really, for the southern states, most of them. I know that Florida and South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia and Georgia and Tennessee have followed very much the same course we did, after we had made the decision. Alabama was different because George [Corley] Wallace had been elected on the grounds that he would stand in the schoolhouse door and prevent integration of the schools. Well, the end result of that was that he ended up having an agreement with the assistant attorney general of the United States, where he would stand and where the assistant attorney general would stand and at what point he would move and let the assistant attorney general come in and take over the schools, that sort of thing. But that didn't help, that was not good public relations for the state. It didn't slow down integration at all; in fact, it speeded it up. Mississippi, of course, had a terrible time. When Governor [Ross] Barnett was governor, the president had talked with Governor Barnett, and he had agreed that he had to follow the Supreme Court, although he disagreed with it, but the people of Mississippi pushed him into a corner so that he had to make decisions that went to the detriment of the people in Mississippi. I think he was a good man, an honest man, but I don't think he made the right decision, and it cost some lives when they had riots over there, and it cost Mississippi its good name. Much like Arkansas did when they had the riots in Little Rock. And Louisiana had a difficult time because of some of their leadership, but the majority of the southern states were like Georgia.

We realized that the only recourse was to secede from the union. We tried that once before and didn't come out so well, and I don't think anybody seriously considered it. But we

had to follow the laws, and we did. I'm a lawyer, and I took an oath to uphold the law and to follow the courts, and I would be violating my oath if I did not uphold the law, even though I disagree with it. And I did disagree with the method that they used. I thought that if they left the situation alone, if they hadn't been in such a big hurry to politically ram this thing down the throats of the people of the South, that it would have evolved. Things would have changed naturally and normally, and we could have avoided some of the situation where children, because of the busing and the discord and the unhappiness with the situation, didn't receive the kind of education they should have. They missed out on a real good education because they were so caught up in this segregation/integration fight. And I believe that if the courts had left it alone, and if they had kept it out of politics, it would have evolved eventually. And everybody would have been better off than the way that they determined to do it. I disagreed with that.

Henderson: Okay. Let me ask you some questions about how. . . . Well, here's the question: How would you describe Ernest Vandiver in the following categories? As a husband.

Vandiver: Well, I try to be a good husband and a good father. I pray every night that the Lord will make me a good husband and a good father to my children and grandchildren. I couldn't have a better wife, had I lived a hundred years, than I have. I've tried to provide a good education for all my children. All of my children have degrees from college. My son has two degrees, and one daughter has two degrees. As they go along in their business and their efforts, I've tried to help them get started and to give them advice as well as help them financially. And I've tried my best to be a good husband and a good father, and I hope I've succeeded. It might be better to ask them about it.

Henderson: How would you describe yourself as a politician?

Vandiver: Not a very good politician, really. I'm a little bit too outspoken. And I say things that maybe a good politician would not say. I enjoy people, but the burden of campaigns and hard footwork when you're trying to get elected to an office are certainly not pleasurable at all. There have been a lot better politicians than I am and have been, but I don't think anybody has tried any harder to serve the people of the state than I have. I've tried to make the right decisions. I've made mistakes. I think anybody who's in public life, if they never have made a mistake, they haven't done very much 'cause you do make mistakes when there are so many decisions to be made. If you make a mistake, you try to correct it, but, like I said, I don't think I'm a very good politician. I hope that what I have done, though, has been right and that I've served the state well.

Henderson: How would you describe yourself as a person?

Vandiver: Well, I'm an average person. I think I have all the qualities of a good person. I've tried to live that way. I have been a member of the church [First Baptist Church of Lavonia] I joined when I was twelve years old. That's been over sixty years ago. I have served my church. I've been deacon. I've served as chairman of [the board of] deacons. When we've had problems, I've tried to help solve them. We've just completed a new family life building here in Lavonia at the Baptist church. I contributed as much as I could financially to that. I have served on the board of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for about eleven years. I served out one term, and I was elected for two more terms. I contributed financially to them and to the young people who are ministers of tomorrow. I don't think I'm a religious fanatic, but I was raised to believe in God, and I'm a Christian. I've tried my best to live a good life, but I have faults. I know that. Sometimes I fall out with people who I think are doing things wrong,

and maybe I hold a grudge too long, something like that. That's not very good. I wish I was less like that. But generally I've tried to do what I thought was right. I found out when I was governor that about half the people want you to go one way [and] about half of them want you to go the other way. In the end, you have to make the decision, and if you make the decision that you think is right according to your conscience, you come out pretty well. And that's what I tried to do. 'Cause you can't satisfy everybody in politics. You're going to make some people mad. Some people get mad because you don't wave at them, and maybe your eyesight is so bad you can't see them. But I do know that I have political enemies, and I'm glad of the enemies I have because I think the reason I made them was the right reason. And I have strong friends that have stood by me through thick and thin, and I appreciate it and thank them for their friendship and their loyalty to me. I always sought as much as advice as I can [sic] when I've had decisions to make. Didn't always follow it. But I did there again what I thought was best. That's about the sum of it. About as much as I can say.

Henderson: When the history of the state of Georgia is written, what is Ernest Vandiver's place going to be in it?

Vandiver: Well, the historians will determine that. I won't have any choice. I could say what I hope it will be. I hope that they will say that I made the right decision, the big decisions, at the right time and I did make the decisions that were right for the state. I realize I've made mistakes, but I've always tried to be of service. That was taught to me by my mother. That anybody in politics ought to be there for the right reason, and the only right reason to be in politics is to be of service. And all the pomp and circumstance doesn't mean very much. What really means a whole lot is your attitude, what you did and how you did it and why you did it.

Henderson: Governor, let's continue our interview. I'm interested in how the Vandivers got to the United States. Could you discuss that?

Vandiver: Yes. I can tell you to the best of my knowledge. Of course, the history has been passed down from one generation to another. The information that I have is that the Vandiver family, my part of the Vandiver family, came from Alkmaar in Holland. And they came over in the 1600s, and they first came to New York when New York was New Amsterdam maybe, when the Dutch came over. And subsequently the Vandiver family moved from New York to Pennsylvania, down to Delaware and Virginia and North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. My father was born here in Franklin County. My grandfather was born in Franklin County in 1848. And my great-grandfather, Benjamin Pinkney Vandiver, came to Georgia from South Carolina--Anderson County, South Carolina. And he was the son of Edward Vandiver, who had, I believe, to the best of my recollection, had about twelve sons, and half of them stayed in South Carolina, and the other half of them came to Georgia. The ones who stayed in South Carolina, most of them, were Baptist preachers. The ones who came to Georgia were generally engaged in farming and agricultural interests as were most of the people who lived in that day. And I can sit right here at this point and be within fifteen miles of my great-great-grandfather's farm on the Vandiver side and my great-great grandfather's grave on my mother's side.

I owned the farm that my great-grandfather Bowers owned. The farm that my grandfather Vandiver owned my father bought from him. [Editor's Note: Vandiver gave the farm to his children.] It was right on the edge, on the border of South Carolina and Georgia. He had about six hundred acres of land. And my grandfather was getting rather old, and my

father, his wife had died about 1911, so he was living by himself. He had a six hundred acre farm. He had tenants who were helping him work the farm. But he was living by himself, and my father became worried because he was afraid something would happen to him and he'd be there by himself, so my father asked him if he'd sell the farm to him. He agreed that he'd sell it to him. Grandfather thought that was great 'cause he could just stay right where he was if it belonged to his son, but my father had other ideas, and he built a little house right across the street from us for my grandfather to live in, and so we would be close to him and could look after him. My grandfather thought he was going on just as he was, and my father made him move. He said, "You've got to move now." Said, "I've built you a house right across the street from us, and you can live in that house, and if there's anything you need or we can do for you, we'll do it. [It was a] brand new, nice little house, two-bedroom house; he never spent one night in it. That wasn't what his idea [was]. He had that stubborn Vandiver streak, that stubborn Dutch.

Anyway, he spent the rest of his life visiting and staying with his children. He had eight or nine children, and he had a lot of sisters who were still living at that time. Most of his sisters lived up until the nineties. They were in their nineties. So he lived with his children and his sisters and his brothers until he died. And he never spent one night in that house that my father built for him. He lived his life like he wanted it. He suffered a great deal in his last years. He had cancer. He had a skin cancer on the back of his neck, and he didn't get to the doctor in time to have it worked on. They did have radium treatments back then. And he being a working man and out in the sun a lot, he'd gotten cancers on his nose. I remember they did use radium on those cancers. He had two little holes in his nose where that radium had eaten through and

killed the cancer. But the one on the neck he didn't get to in time, and it caused him a great deal of suffering in his later years. He lived to be eighty-four, and he read his Bible every day. I remember seeing his Bible sitting by the fire. In his eighties he knew his life was not going to be too much longer because of his suffering, but he didn't die from the cancer, the skin cancer. He died from pneumonia; he got pneumonia and died.

I sat on his knee and talked with him. He was the only grandfather that I had the privilege of knowing. All the rest of them were dead when I was born. But I did talk with him a lot, and I do remember him telling me about the battles that he was in during the Civil War. I was interested as a kid in learning all about it. I remember asking my grandfather if he ever shot a Yankee. And he said, "Well, I have shot at them. And I've seen them fall, but I hope my bullet didn't kill them. I hope I never killed anybody." He was a very religious man and hoped he didn't kill anybody. He was only thirteen when he joined the Confederate Army. His father was already in the army. He tried to join locally here in the unit that they had, and he was a rather small man. He wasn't but about five [feet] four [inches]. And he wasn't but thirteen years old, and they knew how old he was, and they wouldn't let him join. But he was so determined to join that he walked all the way across north Georgia to Floyd County and joined the Confederate Army over there where they didn't know how old he was. And they were anxious to get anybody they could get anyway because it was a difficult, difficult time in our history. And he spent most of his time over in northwest Georgia during the Civil War. He was in those battles when Sherman came down from Tennessee and burned Atlanta and made his march to the sea. Of course, he wasn't in all those battles, but he was in some of them. He was wounded. It was not a wound that would kill you. It was one that hurt him very much. It hit

him in the leg, the bullet did. It caused him some pain, but it was not something that he would die from, that he was injured that seriously.

He used to tell me about going to Confederate conventions. He said he'd go to some of these conventions and some of the old soldiers would dance. They'd have dances, and they'd dance all night. Said sometimes they'd wake up dead the next morning. They'd overdo it. But anyway, I became, as most young boys did at that time a Son of the Confederacy, Confederate veteran. And have been very loyal. I know that my family didn't fight the battle over slavery. We didn't have any slaves on my father's side. They fought because they thought that the Constitution says all those rights that are not set out in the Constitution are reserved to the several states. When the central government in Georgia, in Washington began to impinge on those rights, of course, that was the main cause of the Civil War.

Slavery was one of the causes but not the main cause. I enjoyed talking with him. He came to visit us on occasion. And since he was the only grandfather I had, I did try to find out as much as I could from him. He got typhoid fever when he was in the army. He said that he drank some polluted water and got typhoid fever and said the doctor told him that the worst thing that he could do was to drink water, the medical doctor at that time. He said he got so thirsty that he would have done anything for a drink of water, and he remembered that there was a spring about a mile away. And he said he crawled on his hands and knees to that spring.

End of Side One

Side Two

Vandiver: But at that time the doctors told him not to drink any water because they were afraid there'd be some toxic substance in the water. Most of it was polluted at that time



with the war going on. Anyway, he drank all the water he could hold, he said. Then after the war he came on home to his father's and he married the girl who lived on the farm next door, and she was a [Elizabeth] Vaughters, V-a-u-g-h-t-e-r-s, Vaughters. He was a Vandiver, and they both were of Dutch descent, so their children were mostly Dutch. And they say the Dutch are pretty thrifty people, and I think that was handed down through my family. We always tried to be thrifty. My grandfather's farm eventually ended up . . . I inherited it from my father when my father died in 1951, and later, it was right on the other side of what was then the Tupelo River. And it was in South Carolina, on the Georgia-South Carolina line. And later they decided to build a lake here, multi-purpose lake, for power and for recreation and so forth, and about a third of that land was taken by the government to build the lake, which left about two-thirds of it near the lake. And I kept it for many, many years. I didn't sell it until, I think, in the 1970s, I sold it to a developer in Atlanta, who bought it and has held it, and now there are many developments over there. I was never a developer so I knew I was not qualified to develop it. But it turned out to be more valuable than we thought it was when they built that lake there. My father loves land, too, and he bought many farms, and so we've been sort of in the land business and real estate business in recent years, sold and bought real estate.

My mother's father was John M. Bowers, John Merritt Bowers. He was named for a friend of theirs, a relative of theirs, and he married a Mary Duncan, who was of Scotch descent, and my mother's people were of Scotch descent. They had quite a few children. My grandfather was the youngest of twelve children, and his father was Job Bowers, and I inherited his farm from my father and have since given it to my children. And Job Bowers was the son of

William Bowers, who was also the son of the original Job Bowers who came from Virginia to Georgia. So my family has been in this area for over two hundred years.

Job Bowers was killed by the Tories. He was captured by the Tories when he came home to be with his wife, and their son was born and is buried down at the old Henley Church here in Hart County, which is next door. And his son William, who is the son that was born of his marriage, the only son he had because he was killed, had twelve or thirteen children. The other Job Bowers, the grandson of the first Job, had twelve children. Back in those days the big families were the ones that fared best because they could all work together. Uncle Billy Bowers, who was quite famous in his day, was the oldest son of Job Bowers, my great-grandfather. And my grandfather, John M. [Bowers], was the youngest son. So the oldest and youngest son were the ones that I heard most about.

Uncle Billy was a strong unionist. He didn't think we ought to, he didn't think in the War Between the States that we ought to secede, which made him very much in the minority. Most people thought we should. But the story goes, and it's been checked out, that when Abraham Lincoln ran for the presidency, that the only two votes he got in Georgia was Uncle Billy Bowers and the man who worked for Uncle Billy Bowers, who voted like he did. And he wasn't on the ballot. He couldn't be on the ballot that they had to vote on, so they wrote his name in. And the only votes that he got in Georgia were from Uncle Billy Bowers, and Uncle Billy was a very strong-minded person. He was a Baptist preacher. He was a railroad man. He built the road from Bowersville, which was named for the Bowers family, to Hartwell. He was president of the railroad company that built that. He worked with the authorities on the road that went from Elberton to Toccoa and joined the Seaboard Railroad and the Southern Railroad,

which is in Toccoa. And then he decided that West Bowersville, which later became Canon . . . there was East Bowersville and West Bowersville, and there was so much confusion in the mail that they decided to name West Bowersville "Canon." And so he decided to build a railroad from Canon to Carnesville. And he bought an engine, paid thirty-five thousand dollars for it. And he had an engine and one car, and he built the railroad from Canon to the Broad River, and he got to the Broad River and he ran out of money and couldn't build a bridge across the river and never did get the railroad to Carnesville. Well, a cousin of mine has the bill where he paid for the railroad engine, and he named it "Tom Peter." And Tom Peter Railroad had excursions that went from Canon to the Broad River and that wasn't but a period of about forty-five miles, so it wasn't much of an excursion, but it was about the only way he could acquire any money.

But Uncle Billy was in the state senate back in the 1870s. He was quite an individual, and, as I said, he was a unionist. And he was interviewed by Henry Grady, Henry [Woodwin] Grady that was then the editor of the *Constitution*, and my Uncle Billy was in Atlanta and was interviewed by Henry Grady. All of that is in the Bowers family history, and that takes it back about as far as we know. Job Bowers who came from Virginia was killed so young in his life by the Tories that we never did know where the family came from, where he came from. I had a cousin, Russell Bowers, who tried his best--he lived in Virginia--tried his best to run down where Job Bowers came from but was never successful. But we do know the Vandiver line that came from New York in the time of Peter Stuyvesant and when the Dutch were the settlers of New York. They came down the Atlantic Seaboard and lived in all of those states. I was down at Mayo Hospital about six months ago, and I was having a physical examination, and they called for Dr. Vandiver to come to the desk, and I thought maybe they had gotten me mixed up

with somebody else, so I went to the desk, but there was a Dr. Vandiver, who was from Missouri. And I had heard of the Missouri branch of the Vandivers, and so I met him. I had never met him before. He came from Missouri to Jacksonville, Florida, and I had come from Georgia. And he was the nephew of William Bowers, who was in the United States Congress, and he was sort of a stubborn fellow, and when they tried to pass a bill that he did not like, he said, "I'm from Missouri, and you'll have to show me." [Laughter] And now Missouri is known as the "Show Me State." And it came from Congressman Vandiver who was representing his district in Missouri at that time. And this Dr. Vandiver, who I met at Mayo Clinic, knew all about those Vandivers who were in Missouri. It was very interesting to talk to him about it. We'd never met or had never heard of each other before, but we ran into each other at Mayo Clinic. That pretty much is the way things are.

My great-great-grandfather and my great-grandfather are buried side by side in the old Henley Churchyard. My grandfather is buried in Canon. And my father is buried here in Lavonia. My other grandfather is buried in the Pleasant Hill [Baptist Church] Cemetery, which is just about three miles north of Lavonia. And my great-grandfather gave the land for a Baptist church over in what was known as the Red Hills Section and is the Broad River Baptist Church. And he's buried there. And his father is buried there, who was William Edward Vandiver. So within an area of fifteen miles practically all of my ancestors that I know about are buried. We love this part of Georgia, and didn't want to leave it.

Henderson: Who were you named for, Governor?

Vandiver: I was named for my father. My father was named for his uncle Sam. His name was Samuel Vandiver. And the name Ernest came from when my father was born some

of his aunts came and saw this young baby, and they said, "He looks so earnest." [Laughter] So they named him Samuel Ernest, and there was some association or relationship with the Pinkney family in South Carolina. Back in those days they gave them three names. My grandfather was named William Isom Pinkney Vandiver. My father was named Samuel Ernest Pinkney Vandiver. My name is Samuel Ernest Pinkney Vandiver. My son's name is Samuel Ernest Pinkney Vandiver. My grandson is named Samuel Ernest Russell Vandiver. He brought in the Russell family instead of the Pinkney family because really we didn't know much about how the Pinkney got into the name.

Henderson: Well, now, do you use Pinkney in your name?

Vandiver: I do not use it and never have used it.

Henderson: Ah.

Vandiver: My father didn't use it either. But my grandfather did. He was "Bill" and they called him "Bill" and "Pink." But my father never used it, and I never used it, and my son has never, although it's on the birth certificate that way. So this is our part of the world, and we stay pretty close to it. We didn't travel too far away from it.

Henderson: Let me ask you, how did your mother and father meet?

Vandiver: My mother was married twice. Her first husband was a Mr. Lee Osborne. She lived in Canon. She was a Bowers. She was Vanna Bowers [Osborne], daughter of John M. Bowers. And she married Lee Osborne. She married rather young. She wasn't but sixteen years old when she married, and her husband who she married was thirty-two years old. So he was quite a bit older than she was. They lost one child, and then they had two more children, my brother Henry [Pitchford] Osborne and my sister Berthine Osborne, who married a [Hiram]

Whitehead from Comer, Georgia. She's Berthine Osborne Whitehead. They are half sister and half brother [to Vandiver], and I was my father's only child, but I always felt like my half brother and half sister were just as close as if they had been full-blooded. We were all just very close, although they were very much older than I. My brother went to Tech [Georgia Institute of Technology] and I didn't see him very much except when he'd come home from Tech, and my sister went to Wesleyan, graduated from Wesleyan College in Macon, and she taught school in Danielsville and Bowman and then in Comer, where she met her husband Hiram Whitehead in Comer and married in Comer and still lives there today. She's going to be eighty-seven years old next month. She's not in very good health. She's in a wheelchair. But she has always been such a vibrant member of our family. She has been a great part of our family; she was always included in everything that we did. Right amusing the way things happen in Georgia. She roomed with Sam [Samuel Augustus] Nunn's [Jr.] mother in Wesleyan College [laughter]. And they were not roommates but lived on the same hall. And Sam Nunn's mother's family is all from in this area. They were the Mauldins and the Cannons, and Sam's mother was a Cannon. And she married Mr. Nunn from Perry, but she always came back to this area. This was her home. She lived a few miles from here in the Shoal Creek area. So Sam has his genesis up in this area, too. His father was from Perry, and the Nunns are all from Perry. One of the farms that I own was owned by Sam's great-uncle, known as Cannon Farm, between here and Carnesville. So his family was from this area, but they went to other parts of the state. I ran into Cannons at Hawkinsville. I ran into Cannons in Leesburg, Georgia, and every one of them always supported me just wholeheartedly in any race I was running in, and all the Nunns did,

too. They were very good friends of mine. Even though Sam and I ran against each other--we ran for the same office--we've remained very good friends, very close friends.

Henderson: Do you remember how your mother met your father?

Vandiver: That was a question that you asked me before, and I got off the track [laughter]. Yes, I do. My mother and her first husband had planned to build a new home. The architect already, they had the plans made, and they were almost in the process of getting ready to build it when he became very ill, and he died at forty-eight years old. He had Bright's disease, I think they called it back then. A kidney ailment for which there was not much treatment at that time. And he died at forty-eight, and my mother had been married for sixteen years. He told her before he died to go ahead with the plans and build the house just like they'd planned. She did. And was in the process of building the house and having it painted, and at that time, my father was living in Lavonia and working in Lavonia and had started his career. And the painter happened to be a friend of his. He told my father, who was a bachelor--he'd never married [and] he was in his late thirties--told him that there was a lovely widow who lived down in Canon and he thought they ought to get together, they ought to meet. So my father somehow arranged to get to Canon, went to talk with his friend the painter, and met my mother, and they fell in love. And they were married in 1916 on my father's fortieth birthday. And my mother at that time was about thirty-four years old. I was born in 1928 after they'd been married for two years. My father lived until 1951, and my mother died in 1941.

That sister that I was telling you about who's still living was twelve years older than I. Of course, she was almost like a mother to me, my mother died so young. Well, she died in my early twenties. And so my sister was sort of a surrogate mother to me and has been so good to

me. Now she's in very poor health and we're trying to take care of her real well. We keep somebody with her all the time. We're afraid she'll fall and break her hip. At her age that could be fatal. Anyway, my father married my mother and they lived in Canon for four years, until I was four years old, six years until I was four years old. And he had a big fine black horse, and he commuted from Canon to Lavonia for those six years. It was eight miles to Lavonia [and] eight miles back, so sixteen miles a day he rode his horse. And finally they decided that they would move to Lavonia, closer to his business. And built a house next to his little office, which I showed you today, so he'd be close to his business, and his gin and his properties were in that area. And my mother became a very devoted and wonderful citizen of this town. She attended the Baptist church, although that was not her church. She did attend the Baptist church. She was president of the women's club and the Sunday school class. She was very much interested in Tallullah Falls School, which was the school that was founded by the Women's Club of Georgia. My sister has continued that interest, and my wife is a member of the women's club, mainly, I think, because she thinks that my mother would have wanted her to be, although she never met my mother. And my sister has been on the board of Tallullah Falls School, been a trustee there for many years. Now she's emeritus, [now that] we've gotten to be of some age. But as long as she was able, she'd go to the trustee meetings even though she was emeritus. She was that interested. And she remained as president of the women's club until about two years ago. When she got so she was not able to go to the clubhouse that was built for the women's club, she'd have it at her house because she was president. And they'd all gather in her house. So my family has been a family, as I stated before, that was interested in service, trying to be a



good citizen, trying to serve your community. And I have a heritage that I have to try to live up to.

Henderson: When you were growing up in Lavonia, we've already talked about your childhood, did your parents expect you to work? Did they give you jobs to do?

Vandiver: They certainly did. I had jobs to do from the time that I was able to do it. Back in those days, most families had a cow. Instead of the dairies bringing the milk, you had your own cow. My mother taught me to milk a cow when I was about eight years old. And from the time I was eight years old until I graduated from high school, it was my duty to milk [the cow] morning and night. And I did. And I got to where I was a pretty good milker. Back in the days before you had the machines they have today. But I had that to do, and I remember we had a lady, old black lady, who lived in back of our house there, who had been part of the Bowers family, really, had grown up with the Bowers family in Canon. And I spent many hours reading the Bible to her. She couldn't read or write. And if anybody could read the Bible, she'd ask them to, and I'd go to her house, and she'd have peas and cornbread cooking in there. And it'd smell so good, I'd go in and eat a big piece of cornbread and a bowl of peas. And Aunt Laura [Bowers] was just wonderful to me. I know I was playing football and I'd come in all tired and beat up and I had the job of milking. I'd get Aunt Laura to do my milking for me. She was sweet enough to do that for me when I was so tired.

My father had cattle and he baled a lot of hay. I worked with the hay baler when I was a child. First job was keeping the old mule going around that ran the hay baler. When the hay would press, it would get real hard for the mule to make it, and you had to keep the mule going to get him to go on around and press the hay into bales. My father had a little two-acre patch

that was not too far from the house, from our house. And he gave that to me to work when I was six years old. I couldn't plow it or plant it, but I could help hoe it, and I hoed cotton from the time I was six years old until I went off to school. That little patch was mine. It was designated as mine, and I'd make a couple of bales of cotton off of two acres almost every year. I couldn't hoe it all, and I couldn't pick it all, but that was part of my growing up. My father said he started working when he was nine years old, and he wanted me to know how to work. People around Lavonia will tell you that that was the way I was raised--to work. Those were chores that I had to do. It was my responsibility.

Henderson: Did your parents, while you were growing up, did they take you on any trips?

Vandiver: Yes, they did. And that was one thing that I'm so appreciative of. Every year on their wedding anniversary--at that time the crops would be laid by--and my father would plan a trip. And we'd go for two weeks. They'd take me out of school. They'd make arrangements with the teacher, and we would go to Florida, back in [the days of] the old Ford T models and A models. I remember getting stuck in Florida sand on one trip down there. We'd visit relatives who were down there. Then the next year we'd take a trip to Washington, D. C. My father each night would ask me to write down what I'd seen that day and what had impressed me. He took me to Washington monument. We went one time--Congressman Paul Brown was our congressman at that time--and he showed us through the national capital. He also carried us over to the Supreme Court where the Supreme Court was meeting. At that time the Supreme Court met in the national Capitol. They didn't have their own building. I remember going to the Supreme Court room and sitting there for a short while. I remember

going to the Lincoln Memorial and reading Lincoln's immortal words in the Gettysburg Address. I remember going out to where George Washington lived, and I remember the guides telling us about the story of George Washington could throw a silver dollar across the Potomac River. It was a standard joke that the dollar went a lot further then than it does now. And that was when I was a child. [Laughter] We'd visit relatives sometimes in Virginia. I had an uncle, my mother's brother, who was also a Job [Bowers], that we'd visit. And then one year when I was six years old, my family carried me to New York, and we got on a cruiser, a boat, and came from New York to Savannah on that boat, which was a great experience for a young fellow. I remember I got sick. I remember getting seasick, but it was a wonderful experience for me.

So each year as they took their trip--they called it "the trip"--and it always started on his birthday. They were married on my father's birthday, so the anniversary and the birthday were the same. That was the day we always left to take our trip. I was born on my mother's birthday. We celebrated same days very frequently. My mother was born on July 3, and I was born on her birthday. But I had a good childhood. My parents wanted me to learn; they wanted me to travel; they wanted me to know about the history of our country. I remember up in Virginia we'd go to the Civil War battlefields and go through those beautiful valleys of Virginia, the Shenandoah Valley. At an early age I had a chance to travel some, and my teachers always said that they thought the trip would do me more good than the ten days I lost in school. [They] always made arrangements for me to leave on that day. Some of those trips were very inspirational. Later, when I was taking public speaking, I had to memorize Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Although Lincoln was the president when we lost the War Between the States, he was greatly revered in the South because they thought if Lincoln had lived the South would have

been treated far better than it was after he was assassinated. I had a lot of fun when I was in the army air force. I used to kid some of those Yankees and tell them, you know, "Lincoln" was a bad word down where I came from. And they couldn't understand it because he was almost an idol to them. But we enjoyed those visits and I thought they meant a great deal to me.

Henderson: The traveling . . . did it carry over when you became a parent? Did you do the same thing with your children?

Vandiver: I did as best I could. I know when I was governor, we had a governors' conference in Hawaii for the first time, before Hawaii became a state. And I carried my children all the way across the United States to California, and then we flew to Hawaii. They had the experience of watching the Hawaiian dances and the clothing of the Hawaiians and enjoyed it tremendously. My son was with us on this trip, and he was telling us this morning about how he almost got killed with a surfboat. Carl [Edward] Sanders was also on that trip, the governors' conference, and he was looking after Chip, and Chip had his little accident, but Carl was there and helped and, as he said, he saved his life.

We took other trips. We went to Florida. We took them to Florida a good bit. They've been to New York. Frankly, they didn't travel quite as much as I had an opportunity to because I was an only child. To get three children and a wife and everybody in a traveling mode was a little bit harder than it was with one child. But I did the best I could. I carried them when I could and where I could.

Henderson: Let me change directions a little bit. When you were over at Darlington, you were over there for a year. Who was your roommate and [who were] your closest friends over at Darlington?

Vandiver: My roommate was a boy by the name of Fred Stem. And he was from Darlington, South Carolina, and going to Darlington School. And he was quite an interesting person. Fred had spent the first eleven years of his life in Turkey. He was the son of a man who was in the tobacco business, and he was in Turkey for the purpose of buying Turkish tobacco to send back to the United States to blend with the American tobaccos to make cigarettes and pipe tobacco. And so he spoke French very fluently and Turkish. Of course, he was the only person [at Darlington] who could speak Turkish. But we did study French at Darlington. He had gotten an injury when he was a young boy. He was out flying a kite, and the kite came down and hit him in his eye. He lost one eye. But he was a brilliant young fellow and did extremely well. He later went to the University of North Carolina, and I sort of lost touch with him.

But the man who had the most influence on me at Darlington was a man by the name of Roland Parker. Pete Parker, we called him. He wanted us to call him Pete; we didn't call him Professor or Doctor. He was a proctor on our hall where we lived, and he taught me history, and I could hardly wait to get to his class. It was such an interesting class, and he was such a wonderful fellow. He had a great big nose, and some kids kidded him and called him Buzzard Beak. And they'd draw pictures of Buzzard Beak on the blackboard. He'd come in and he'd just laugh and have the most fun with us about it. But anyway he was just one of the nicest people I've ever known. I remember I was smoking at age seventeen when went to Darlington; I had my parents' permission. But you could smoke in your room in front of your roommate. If somebody else was in the room, you couldn't smoke. Well, I was smoking, lying on my bed, and another person came into the room, and I continued to smoke. Well, Mr. Parker's room was

right close to ours, and he happened to open the door to tell us something, and I saw the door open and I put that cigarette under the bed. I have never seen a cigarette give off as much smoke in my life. It just poured out, and he just sort of grinned. That was toward the last of my year at Darlington, and he put me on campus for the last week that I was there. I didn't get to go to the dance; I didn't get to go out with my girlfriend, who I had fallen in love with. I missed my senior week because I broke the rules. I had no choice except to be on campus.

Dr. [Clarence Rothwell] Wilcox was the president of Darlington. He was a fine man. He originally came from Elberton. He was a marine in World War II, and he had been a boxer when he was in service and at one time had fought Gene [James Joseph] Tunney, probably in an exhibition match, not a real match. But anyway everybody loved Dr. Wilcox. His first wife had died and he married a younger lady who was very attractive, and Dr. Wilcox and Mrs. Wilcox and their children, [who] were of his first marriage, all lived up in the president's home on the hill. We had a professor up there, Dr. [Richard Murrell] Yankee, who was one of the great people that I know.

I had such fine teachers up there that I was determined, if I were able to, to send my son back up there, if I could, and so when my term as governor was over in January, we came back to Lavonia, and he went to school here for the rest of the year. And then we sent him to Darlington for his last three years, where he got a fine education, a fine foundation to go to college. And he never had any problem in college with his college work. I did have a rule with my children. I told them, my two daughters, that you've got to go to a girls' school the first year. I don't want you to go to [the University of] Georgia or any other coeducational school until you've gone to a girls' school for one year. But if you maintain a "B" average, I'll let you

transfer wherever you want to. And after the first quarter at the school that you go to, if you maintain your "B" average, I'll buy you a car. But I said, if your average ever gets below a "B," the car will come home. And I treated all three of my children the same way. My oldest daughter, her car stayed at home one quarter, while she was at the university. My son's car never stayed at home because he made good grades, and my youngest daughter, I think, maybe lost one quarter of the use of the car. But that car is mighty important to children over there in the education, and they'll work hard to keep it.

When I was there, I walked all over the place. We didn't have a car. My first year at the University of Georgia was 1936 after I graduated from Darlington. I joined a fraternity, which was right expensive back in those days. But I spent the first year that I was over there six hundred dollars. My father said he thought that was pretty much to spend in a year at the University of Georgia, but the following years I spent that and a little more probably. Anyway, I was not a spendthrift. I didn't throw money away. Didn't have a car to drive and the only time I got a car was after my mother died in 1941, I was still in law school, and my father let me have her car after she died. We didn't need it. So I did have a car my senior year in law school. But that was back in the Depression days when a dollar was really a dollar.

Henderson: Over at Darlington, what were some of the extracurricular activities you were involved in?

Vandiver: Well, I went out for the football team, and I didn't weigh but 140 pounds, and really I wasn't big enough to play football. I didn't make the football team. I did try to make the tennis team. I wasn't good enough to make the tennis team. They had what they call the J. M. Proctor Debate that they held once a year on Honors Day. Since I had been in

declamation and debating in high school, I decided I'd go out for that debate. It was held before the entire school. The teachers and all of the students were there. There was a boy there who had won it the last two years. He was a boy from somewhere up north, I thought a very good speaker. I decided to go out for that, and I worked very hard on that debate. I remember the debate was whether or not we should have socialized medicine.

End of Side Two





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