

Harold Paulk Henderson, Sr. Oral History Collection  
OH Vandiver 04H  
Samuel Ernest Vandiver Jr. Interviewed by Dr. Harold Paulk Henderson (Part H)  
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Cassette #450 (18 Min., Side One only)

**EDITED BY DR. HENDERSON**

Side One

Vandiver: Professor [Robert H.] Cobb, who was a very small man who was called Peanut Cobb--but not to his face--was the debate coach. And he assigned me the affirmative. I had to argue for socialized medicine which, of course, I didn't believe in, but I had to present my argument as best I could. And I did work very hard and we did have the debate on Honors Day before the entire school. And the boy who had won it two years before was the other side and I fortunately won the debate and won the J. M. Proctor medal, which was the debate medal for Darlington. And the boy who I debated against was a junior. He came back the next year and won it again. So he won it three out of four years, but I did beat him out one year, the year I was there.

I remember one of the teachers, a Mr. [Warren Randolph] Langston, came up to me after the debate. He was a very conservative gentleman. [He] said, "Where in the world did you find all that bull about socialized medicine?" [Laughter] I said, "Well, I studied pretty hard and found out about what other countries were doing." And I said it didn't mean that I believe in it. I just had to argue that side.

Henderson: When you were attending the public schools of Lavonia were you ever elected to class president or any office, or were you involved beyond sports?

Vandiver: Uh, yes. To the best of my memory I don't think we had class officers in grammar school.

Henderson: How 'bout in high school?

Vandiver: In high school I think maybe I was elected president of one of my classes. I don't remember . . . maybe my sophomore class, sophomore year. When I went to Georgia I became more active in extracurricular activities. I was elected president of my lower class, freshman law class and president of quite a few other things that we talked about yesterday. I don't see any reason to repeat them.

Henderson: Right. Do you remember who your . . . undergraduate school--who was your roommate?

Vandiver: In undergraduate school my roommate was Jim [James Coleman] Owen [Jr.]. He was the son of a dentist from Macon. I roomed with him for four years. Now the first year I was there I lived in Joe Brown dormitory, and I roomed with a boy that I had known at Darlington named Louie [Charles Louis] Warlick, W-a-r-l-i-c-k. I roomed with him for the first two years I was at Georgia and then with Jim Owen, the son of a dentist who was a fraternity brother of mine. We roomed together for four years. And then the last year I think I lived in the fraternity house.

But these have friendships have lasted a long time. Louie Warlick, I remember very well, was one of the finest old boys I ever knew. He was not a great student, but he was a wonderful person. He had good character. He had joined the same fraternity that his brothers had joined when they were in college. They all went to Mercer. And I joined another fraternity, but we still roomed together.

He never married. His father died rather early and he looked after his mother. And after his mother died his sister was sick, and he had to look after her, and he had a responsibility all

during his life at a time that he ordinarily would have married. He looked after them, and he was one of the most loyal political supporters I ever had. If anybody said anything about me that he didn't like, he'd fight them. We remained great friends as long as he lived. After his sister died he was all alone, and he wasn't married. He had a drinking problem. He'd never drunk a drop at the University of Georgia when I knew him, but he had a drinking problem, and it shortened his life considerably.

Jim Owen, who I roomed with for four years--I spent last weekend at Highlands, North Carolina, with Jim and his wife, Betty [Sybil Elizabeth Russell Vandiver] and I did. We were always very close friends and members of the same fraternity, double-dated, and just almost as close as real brothers as well as fraternity brothers. Jim went to law school. He graduated from academic school before he went to law school so he was there a year longer than I was. I took what they call a combined course. I took all of my electives, got my required work off and took my electives the first year in law school. And so I got my AB degree in four years, and then two years later got my law degree.

Henderson: Now was he your roommate while you were going to law school?

Vandiver: Yes, he was for several of those years.

Henderson: What did you like about law school?

Vandiver: Well, I'd always thought I wanted to be a lawyer. My father encouraged me. He wanted me to have a profession. Nobody in my family had been lawyers, but I decided at an early age that I did want to be a lawyer. And I was a debater in declamation and that sort of thing, things that naturally turned towards that area. I decided my freshman year that I wanted to be a lawyer so I went right toward that objective.

Henderson: What did you like the least about law school?

Vandiver: Well, I had some professors that were not the greatest in the world. I had some real good ones, but I had one or two that I was not overly fond of, and I disliked their courses and I didn't do as well in their courses either. If you don't like your teacher you don't do as well. I enjoyed the moot court practice that we had where we would take a case and try it before a senior who would be the judge. I remember the lawyer that I opposed in my first moot court case was Hoke Smith, Jr. and he was the grandson of old Governor Hoke Smith, Sr. His father was Marion Smith who was a prominent lawyer in Atlanta, and Hoke Smith had been governor and had been secretary of the interior, I believe. Anyway, Hoke was a fine young fellow that I got to know and enjoyed working with. We had our first case, tried our first case against each other and had a lot of fun out of it.

I had some great friends in law school. We have a reunion every five years, and we celebrated our fiftieth reunion this year--last year [1992]. Our class adopted a few other lawyer friends of ours and brought them into the class of '42. But we do have a reunion every five years, and the permanent president of the class is Bob [Robert Claude] Norman who was president of our senior class, senior law class. And the treasurer is Verner [Franklin] Chafin, who is Dr. Verner Chafin who is a professor in law school and was valedictorian. He was the smartest one we had in our class. They say sometimes that the ones that make all A's make the professors, ones that make the B's do fairly well, C's do fairly well, and the D's make all the money. [Laughter]

I made some good friends in law school that were. . . . When I decided to run for lieutenant governor they all got together and we had a breakfast in Atlanta, and they paid my

entrance fee. Then when I ran for governor the same group got together and paid my entrance fee. We adopted one fellow that didn't go to Georgia, Griffin [Boyette] Bell. He went to Mercer, but Griffin was always a good friend of ours so we made him an honorary member of the class of '42. And Griffin was a close friend of mine and was my chief of staff when I was governor, and a very good lawyer and has had a wonderful career.

When John [Fitzgerald] Kennedy was elected president I wrote a letter to President Kennedy recommending him for a vacancy which was on, at that time, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. And President Kennedy appointed him to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, and he served on that court for twelve years. In fact he had to rule on the county unit system and some of the other things that we had discussed and tried to do during the administration.

This law class, we had a video of it, made of this last one. I've got it upstairs if you want to take it with you, take a look at it. Bob [Robert Henry] Jordan was one of my closest friends, Robert Jordan, who later became chief justice of the Supreme Court. We've kept in touch fairly well with the boys that we--particularly in law school, haven't done as well in academic school, keeping up with them.

Henderson: How would you classify your academic career? Were you an average student, above average student? Did you make all A's, some B's, some C's?

Vandiver: I was an average student.

Henderson: Average student.

Vandiver: I didn't make all A's and I didn't make many D's. I was sort of in the B and C category.

Henderson: Did you find that you had to study a great deal or that you didn't spend too much time studying, you had other things you wanted to do?

Vandiver: I had a very active extracurricular schedule. But I did have to study hard, and I had to study a little harder than some of the other boys, boys who had grown up in a family of lawyers where their father was a lawyer. [They] had an easier time. You have to learn a new language almost when you study law, and they had grown up with the language. It was all new to me because nobody in my family had been a lawyer. And so I did, I did study hard. I studied hard and I made average grades. I didn't make, I was not a great student.

Henderson: You mentioned Griffin Bell yesterday when we were talking about people involved in your administration. I failed to ask you about Griffin Bell, so let me ask you today. What did he do in your administration?

Vandiver: Griffin Bell was my chief of staff, and that is--the way it's handled in Georgia--the chief legal advisor rather than a military chief. [The chief of staff acts as legal advisor rather than as a military advisor.] Griffin was a brilliant lawyer and a fine lawyer, and is still a fine lawyer and is still practicing even though he's seventy-five years old. He was in on most of the decisions that we made. We sought his advice very frequently.

There was also another lawyer who was a close friend of mine named Lamar [W.] Sizemore, who's a member of the firm in Atlanta . . . that he and I worked very closely on, particularly the honesty in government bills that we presented, the first bills that we presented when we went into office. And we got all those bills passed in the first session. You have more power and more strength in the first session than you ever do again. It diminishes as you go into your third and fourth year.

That was because you could not succeed yourself. If you could succeed yourself, as the law provides now, you wouldn't lose your authority and your strength as quickly. But you get to be a lame duck in your fourth year, and you got people running for office. They're looking to the next governor. They're not looking to the old fellow who's going out of office.

Henderson: Henry [Getzen] Neal, what was his role in your administration?

Vandiver: Henry Neal was a very fine lawyer and was my assistant attorney general. He had been in a law firm in Thompson, Georgia, with the Knox brothers in Thompson. One of the brothers, Bob [Robert E. Knox], was the lawyer, and Henry had been in his firm. And he was a very ardent supporter of mine. He worked very hard for me. He was in on all the decisions we made during the campaign; he was part of the campaign group. He was appointed, got him appointed assistant attorney general and assigned him to the executive department. And Henry was a very close advisor and a very good friend as well as an advisor. I had absolute confidence in him, in his legal judgment, and I knew his advice was the best that he, he gave it to the best of his ability, and he had a lot of ability. We've remained friends over the years since I left office thirty years ago. He became, at the end of my term, he became executive director [secretary] of the Board of Regents, and he has served now for the last thirty years as executive director of the Board of Regents. He's seen things go and come and things happen over three decades there.

He is a very interesting person because he's been so close to the university system, and he knows probably more about the history of it and what's happening in the university system than any other person, maybe other than the chancellor. But he does advise the chancellor and

the members of the Board of Regents on legal matters and on political matters. Henry was a good politician so he was doubly efficient in that job. You need to be both.

Henderson: Governor, that completes my questioning of you today. These have been very good interviews these two days and I want to thank you for them.

Vandiver: I've enjoyed it more than I can say, Hal. It's given me a chance to think about things I hadn't thought about in a long time [laughter]. It's jogged my memory. I hope my memory hasn't been too faulty.

Henderson: No, I commend you for your memory. You have a real good memory.

Vandiver: I hope I've been accurate. But I've enjoyed it and I hope we have some future discussions if they're necessary.

Henderson: I'm sure we will. Thank you.

End of Side One

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