

Harold Paulk Henderson, Sr. Oral History Collection
OH Vandiver 21A
James Coleman Owen, Jr. Interviewed by Dr. Harold Paulk Henderson
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EDITED BY DR. HENDERSON

Side One

Henderson: This is an interview with Mr. James C. [Coleman] Owen, Jr., in his law office in Griffin, Georgia. The date is March 16, 1994, and my name is Dr. Hal Henderson. Good morning, Mr. Owen.

Owen: How're you?

Henderson: Fine. Thank you for granting me this interview.

Owen: It's a pleasure.

Henderson: I understand that you and Governor [Samuel Ernest] Vandiver [Jr.] were at the University of Georgia together.

Owen: Yes, sir, that's right.

Henderson: Would you please discuss your time at Athens with the governor?

Owen: Well, our acquaintance started in September of 1936 when we entered as freshmen at the University of Georgia. We both ended up rooming in Joe [Joseph E.] Brown dormitory in Suite C upstairs, and we were right across the hall from each other. His roommate at that time was Louie [Charles Louis] Warlick, and my roommate at that time was . . . Louie Warlick was from Cartersville, and, of course, Ernie [was] from Lavonia. My roommate was Hugh [Edward] Hill [Jr.] from Griffin. And we began to see a lot of each other. We went through rush week together, and he and I both pledged to the same fraternity. So that made another tie right in the beginning between Ernie and me.

Henderson: How would you describe his personality while he was at the University of Georgia? Was he outgoing, laid-back?

Owen: [Laughter] He's anything but laid-back. This fellow, I can see it: the first time I met him I recognized the fact that he had a winning personality, and he has maintained that all his life. He was very generous, and he just had such a warm, cordial approach to anybody, whether it was a stranger or whether it was a life-long friend. He greeted them both the same way. I don't believe he has an enemy anywhere in the world. He might've differed with some people at that time in politics, but I don't think he has any just archenemies. You know, people respect this man, all that ever knew him.

Henderson: How active was he in campus politics?

Owen: Very active. I don't know of a man in my lifetime that's been any more active than Ernie Vandiver. He did his part; he was a member of many, many organizations; we were in a good many together; we had great times there; I saw him in his actions there then; and he's followed the same type [of] pattern all of his life. Ernie Vandiver's just a great man, a great Georgian.

Henderson: Did you have any indications while you were at Georgia with him that he had some future political aspirations?

Owen: Yes, sir [laughter]. He was very modest about these, but he, with his close friends, he would acknowledge it. If you questioned him long enough, he would acknowledge it. He wouldn't dare come out and say this on his own initiative. You had to sort of talk to him and let him confide in you before he would really admit it, but. . . . Well, his mother died when he was a young man. That left his father, and he had a sister, Berthine [Osborne Whitehead].

His sister was several years older than Ernie, and she was almost like a second mother to him-- just a few years difference in their age, maybe, what, six, eight, or ten? The family was just a great family. His father had served in government. He was on the highway department [State Highway Board], and at that time Ernie had been a strong ally of Eugene Talmadge, and he and Herman [Eugene] Talmadge were close friends. Then this grew and developed, and, of course, later he had ties with the Russell family, which we all know.

Henderson: Do you recall any amusing stories or events that occurred at the university involving Governor Vandiver?

Owen: Yes, sir. Let me just mention one that happened in the winter of the beginning, or say in January, of 1937. We were both to be initiated in our fraternity, and back in those days it seemed that you had to have a rigid initiation to really be what is called in fraternities "a brother in the barge," you might say. So we had learned what former freshman classes went through, and we were going to endure the same thing. And part of that consisted--after they went through all the tomfoolery at the fraternity house, along about nine-thirty or ten o'clock at night, they would take us all out, and there were seventeen of us, including Judge Bob [Robert Henry] Jordan in that same group, seventeen of us, including Jack Reed, who used to be editor of *The Red and Black* over there, just some great people. We were all chained around the neck. Each one had a lock there, and so we heard about this.

Well, we had another fraternity brother up the hall. He and I then decided we would go to the ten-cent store and get some depression soles for our shoes. So we took the soles off. We glued these depression soles on, they called them then. I think you bought them for fifty cents a pair, and we had some older shoes we had. They didn't have soles back in those days. I think

everybody had to get their shoes half-soled several times before they wore them out. But anyway, we got either two or three one-dollar bills and stuck them in one shoe, and then we had a hacksaw. We broke the hacksaw half in two and put that in the other shoe. The other fellow's named Albert Boyd. He did the same thing. [He was] from Jacksonville [Florida].

So I had one shoe in it with a couple of one-dollar bills, and I had hacksaw in the other one, and he did too. We did that so if they found one pair of shoes there with them, then they'd think they'd discovered anything we had. They wouldn't go through everybody's shoes. So, anyway, we got out and we found that we all chained to that tree, and we were tired and worried; we'd been through it. It was a cold--it wasn't exceptionally cold but just a winter night. We finally sawed these chains in two with the saws, and then we had to get out and locate a ride home. Some guy came by in a truck about that time. It must have been--well, anyway, it was about approaching midnight, and so finally we hailed him down. We had enough money to pay him to take us back to town. We must have been six or eight miles outside of town. But that's one night we'll never forget, just a bunch of foolishness with a bunch of boys, but Ernie endured that well, and he was one of the first ones to get sawed through, and I was too, so we started going out looking for a ride home [laughter].

Henderson: Who were some of his classmates and fraternity brothers who later would help him with his political career?

Owen: Okay. Bob Jordan, of course, was very close to Ernie. Bob too was the man that just had a number of friends. He served in three branches of government, and very few men have ever served in three branches of government. He started off in the Senate of the state General Assembly. Then Ernie had another close friend, who was Bob [Robert Claude]

Norman over from Augusta, a very close, personal friend of Ernie. Ernie later appointed Bob to the state--down in Savannah What is the . . . shipping? I forget what the . . .

Henderson: Georgia Ports Authority?

Owen: Ports authority, Georgia Ports Authority, yeah, that's right. [Laughter] At this age you get things in the computer; it's just hard to get them out [laughter].

Henderson: I can understand. Okay, do any others come to mind, or are those the two major [figures]?

Owen: Well, 'course, having. . . . He and Herman Talmadge were real close in government, and Herman would come back over to school to do many other things, and I think he and Ernie saw a good bit of each other. But [unintelligible] Ernie had so many friends it's just hard to come in here now and single them all out. Many of his friends just did exceedingly well. I know one was a young man, a younger fraternity brother of ours, named Audrey Tucker. Audrey Tucker took a number of photographs of Ernie. He photographed all the legislators and such of this sort, while Ernie was governor. He has a number of photographs. That might be an interesting contact for you to get to, to see some of the people that he's photographed and contacted with Ernie.

Henderson: Let's discuss academics at the University of Georgia. How difficult was it to maintain a good academic record there? Did you have to study a good bit, or did you have some free time and rest and relaxation?

Owen: [Laughter] Well, at that time we had--the cities, of course, Atlanta, Savannah, Augusta, Columbus, all those had twelve-year schools, but most of the high schools in Georgia were eleven-year schools. Ernie lived in Lavonia; they had an eleven-year school, but his father

was foresighted enough to require him to go to Darlington before he went to the University of Georgia. So when Ernie got there, he came with that one-year additional preparation. Ernie's one year older than I am. That's where that one-year was. I came right straight from an eleven-year school there.

The boys got along all right. I think that one-year, though, made a great difference. We noticed boys there from Episcopal High and Darlington and these other schools, GMA [Georgia Military Academy], would come there, and for about six months they were ahead of us. So we had burn a little more midnight oil than some of these boys did that had that extra year. After about six months then we were all back almost to about even, but we had to make up for a little of it there. They could get by probably with less study than we could.

Another close, personal friend of Ernie's was a fellow named Howell Hollis [Jr.] from Columbus, and Howell was in the Senate there, and he was a lawyer in Columbus and very active. He went to Episcopal High, but he came back. 'Course, he had that six months advantage just like Ernie did. While some of us, what I call country boys, up there were [from] eleven-year schools. But I think that the professors just put it up to you, said, "You young men are going to get out." We had about six hundred in our freshman class there--boys, and he [a professor] said, "You're going to get out and get into the world." He said, "If you're going to prepare yourself, fine." He said, "If not, this is not the place for you to be."

So they weeded out a few there, but it wasn't too many. You knew then if your parents paid forty dollars to put you in school over there--the first quarter. The next two quarters were thirty-three dollars each. If they spent that much money in depression days on you, you knew better than to come home. My father had farms out here. He told me, said, "Son, if you get

over there, and you get embarrassed, and you can't pass your work, don't sit over there and flunk out. You call me." He said, "I've got some tenant farmers down here. Now, they'd like to have another hand down there." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, just don't get embarrassed. Let me know. I'll go and pick you up, and we'll bring you home, and let you go out on the farm and work a year or two. Then I think you can go back over there and get with it." [Laughter] He meant that, so I think all fathers sort of made threats to us when we were at-- we'd better go to work.

Henderson: What did you and Governor Vandiver do for rest and relaxation?

Owen: Well, of course, all the fraternities over there and other organizations too required freshmen to get out and get active in various things. So we got into intramural sports. Ernie was great on tennis, [a] great tennis player. He was on the team at Darlington, he was on the freshman team at Georgia, and he lettered his freshman year in tennis. That was a good, active sport. Then we were required to go out for touch football, go out for the baseball team, go out for the basketball team, and all like that. Ernie had done some of these in high school, so that kept us pretty well active, and it too, it gave you a little relaxation when you go out, get involved in a good touch football game that afternoon, come in and get a good shower, come over and get some supper, and then go get down to your lessons, and get ready for the next morning.

Henderson: Did he discuss with you his entry in the lieutenant governorship race in 1954? Did he get your feelings on that?

Owen: [Laughter] Not only that, but the lieutenant governor's race prior to that. See, he started off with lieutenant governor, and he was in that race. Ernie did one smart thing there

that--one of the first men to do this--he came out with postcards. [He] had his picture on the front of it. He knew so many people in every county. In the county seat he had close, personal friends of everybody, and so he would get these photographs. I know he told me he had them. I wrote and told him. I said, "Ernest, send me a bunch of them here." So I went down and I took all the civic club rosters I could get, and I wrote--I addressed them myself. Now, I didn't get some lady to come do this for me; I did this in my spare time. I addressed these to--this is my hometown; I've lived here--a native of Griffin. I had neighbors, friends, my parents had neighbors and friends. I addressed it to all of them, and he did this all over. Those postcards went out from a personal friend telling you about this man, and I want you to meet him next time he comes--this type of thing. So he won the lieutenant governor's race, I think, on these postcards. 'Course, he had a lot of other ways. That postcard among his close friends got him many, many votes.

Henderson: Where did he get the idea from of sending out the postcards?

Owen: I think it was his own idea. I think that originated with him. I hadn't seen that done with politicians yet, but you see how smart it was in him to do [*sic*]. This gave a connector between his friend and that friend's friend, so therefore my friends here in Griffin, they felt like they were close to Ernie because they had his postcard there. When he's lieutenant governor, they felt proud to have voted for this man when they got to know who he was and all about him. I'd see them at Sunday school, I'd see them on the street, I'd see them at civic clubs, and [unintelligible] they [would] ask questions, you know, about how delighted they were to be among his friends, political friends. I think it was very effective, very effective.

Another thing too, this young wife of his, Betty [Sybil Elizabeth Russell] Vandiver. He and Betty would go into a town, and Betty would take one side of the street, Ernie would take the other, and they'd walk down [the street]. They went in every store in each little town. When they got to a town--they would skip a whole town, but they wouldn't go to town and go to the north side and not go to the south side. They went to both sides of that town, and they crossed the railroad tracks and went there. They went to every little store, and Betty would be on one side of the street, he'd be the other, and then they'd cross and swap awhile. That was very effective, very effective.

Of course, Betty was a Russell, she was well known, and her father and her uncle and all were just--that united two great families when they married. So anyway, I think that made Ernie Vandiver a great Georgian, having all these friends he did, and he made personal contact with them. He didn't try to do it by radio. He didn't try to do it--he wanted to go out and shake hands with each one; he did it; he took the time to go do it. Once they met this man they could look--we used to have washwomen over there. One woman came in one morning, said, "Mr. Vandiver says--opened them big, pretty, blue eyes--says, 'I got to get your clothes out of here and get them washed.' Says, 'You tell me which shirts you want me to take.' Opened them big, pretty, blue eyes." [Laughter] We kidded him about opening them big, pretty, blue eyes for years [laughter].

Henderson: Prior to becoming lieutenant governor he was adjutant general. Did that help in any way his candidacy later on for being lieutenant governor?

Owen: Yes, sir, a great foundation, a great foundation. 'Course his father, having been on the [board of the] highway department, had a lot of political friends too. So when Ernie was

adjutant general he contacted, I know, because, his father being on the [board of the] highway department, they handed out the roads to all these counties. So the county commissioners in every county knew the name Vandiver. So he went there as adjutant general--"Oh, yeah!" You know, so they'd shake his hand. "I know you and I know your dad." So that's the way he got started off as adjutant general too, going around the state. He made many friends during those four years too.

Henderson: Now besides sending out the postcards, were you involved in his campaign for lieutenant governor in any other way?

Owen: Well, I didn't go out with him, but, now, for instance, Ernie would go around and speak. I remember he came here. One night he came here. He went down to Zebulon, Georgia. Twelve miles south is this county seat of Pike County, and they had a gathering there. I introduced Ernie to that gathering. When he ran for governor down at Macon at the conference, I nominated him for governor. The bad part about that was they had a speaker [microphone] that wasn't near as close as the speaker I'm talking to right now. It was hard to pick up in the back of that building; you had so much confusion going on. I regretted that, but, anyway, they had about five thousand people down there for that, and that was one of the highlights of my life, is having the honor to nominate Ernie Vandiver for governor at the Democratic convention, state convention.

Henderson: Back then I don't think there was any campaign finance laws. Do you recall anything about campaign financing? Was he able to get money from throughout the state, or did he have some large benefactors? How did he go about raising money?

Owen: He raised money from all these friends that--see, right here in Griffin, Georgia. Now, of course, you have your banks, your industries, and such as this that contribute to most all campaigns. They want to contribute. They get one fellow at a bank to contribute to one candidate; one at another bank to contribute another. They all do that. He got share of those, but where Ernie really got his support, just like old Gene Talmadge got his, when he'd go to speak they'd take the hat off some fellow, and they'd pass that hat around. He got quarters and nickels and dollars and dimes that way everywhere he went. Here we'd have somebody come up and they'd say, "I want to make a contribution to your friend." And I'd say, "That's great." I said, "You do this: you make your check out to him and I'll get it to him." We'd send it in to his headquarters, but it'd be somebody here. It'd be a next-door neighbor; it'd be some fellow I'd known for years, some of the guys I schooled with here all around. Then you had lawyers all around the different counties too.

So these people just came in and did so much voluntarily for Ernie. He worked at it though. He didn't just lie down and just say it's going to fall into place. Oh, no, he organized it; he worked for it. But I don't think he--of course, I know this--I know that all the banks in Atlanta, they all contribute to governor's campaigns. You know, he got all that too. He didn't miss a lick. He did well with it.

Henderson: Now while he is lieutenant governor, [Samuel] Marvin Griffin [Sr.] is governor. What was their relationship?

Owen: Well, Marvin thought he was there. He thought he could run roughshod over Ernie, and he soon learned that he couldn't do that, having been a predecessor. I know when Ernie would play touch football, if he had some guy coming and the man carrying the ball,

Ernie could put a good block on him. He put several good blocks on Marvin Griffin during his campaign and he did it well; he did it as a gentleman but he knew how to do it, and he not only knew but he did do it. He eliminated Marvin Griffin really as an adversary. He just got him out of the picture, and at that time Marvin was fading, but, anyway, he still had a lot of what today they call rednecks. But, you know, I always respect a redneck. A redneck, to me, meant a man that got out and farmed and tilled the earth, and he went to Sunday school on Sunday morning and all that type of stuff. Ernie got those votes too, the same ones that Marvin Griffin was getting. So they were competing for that same vote, but they began to swing over, at least in all these counties around here--I'm sure all the state of Georgia. But Ernie played that smart.

Henderson: In the 1958 legislative session there's a major confrontation between Lieutenant Governor Vandiver and Governor Griffin, that's over the rural roads program. Do you recall that fight?

Owen: Oh, yeah [laughter], yesiree. All of Ernie's friends recall that, yeah.

Henderson: What was it about?

Owen: Well, Marvin thought he could just call the shots. He had a way--he had, of course, support with all the Talmadge friends and allies too. But then Ernie began to get the people there of integrity in that political group, and they came on Ernie's side, whereas Marvin did not get those topnotch, real people. The people I'm talking about would be the presidents of the small banks like the bank down here in Zebulon, Charlie Gwyn, for instance, a strong supporter of Ernie Vandiver, great man, fine man, salt of the earth. He was probably a supporter of Marvin Griffin before that, but I know that he came over to Ernie's side and

supported him well. So Ernie picked up all this crowd, and that's the reason he won his fight with Marvin Griffin.

Henderson: What was the extent of your involvement in that fight?

Owen: I was not in the legislature. I worked for Ernie among our close, personal friends, among the lawyers I knew at the bar and such as this, and I did everything I could. But I did not go and join in his campaign and take off for the summer and go around and do that. I continued to practice law, but I could still find many, many opportunities. Each and every day I'd find some opportunity to help endorse Ernie Vandiver. I believed in him and I knew him as a man. He had so many friends that did that all over, doing the same thing that I was doing. That's the reason he was a winner. All these friends just backed him to the hilt.

Henderson: In 1958 when he runs for governor he wins an overwhelming victory. What do you attribute that victory to?

Owen: Perseverance. He and Betty worked together as a team, and this showed the family unity that he had here, with Betty going with him and his wife right side by side. This meant so much, I think, to the people. I'll always attribute . . . and Ernie wanted this, and Betty was delighted to do it. Not many ladies would want to leave home and go do this, but, you know, she had heard politics all of her life, and she came there. Now, another thing too: the Russell faction, they had a big following here from Chief Justice [Richard Brevard] Russell [Sr.], and Senator [Richard Brevard] Russell [Jr.], and all that family, and then Betty's uncles. So Ernie worked with that faction, and they endorsed him strongly. That was a big help too, a big help.

Henderson: In that election Mr. Vandiver makes a statement, "No, not one." Did he ever discuss with you whether he should make that statement or not?

Owen: We'd discuss this [laughter] virtually every time we'd get together. In those days that would be discussed, yesiree. He discussed that with all his close, personal friends. At that time they had so many different philosophies and such as this. He had been such a close friend of Herman Talmadge, and, of course, Marvin Griffin was trying to get those people to come back over into his camp, and it think Ernie did this to sort of seal the coffin on Marvin Griffin's grip of those people and say "No, not one."

At that time I think he felt like that that could be done during his administration, but things moved faster in Washington than Ernie had anticipated then. He probably could see this coming down the years, but he didn't think it was going to come quite as fast as it did. [Dwight David] Eisenhower had just been out, and I know when we nominated him there we mentioned the bloody bandits of Eisenhower out in the Mississippi. Of course, the governor of Alabama was standing in the door and all that at this time, but Ernie handled that well. He missed his timing on that, but he got the group [in] back of him that were about to leave to go back to Marvin Griffin's camp had he not done that. Then after he did it he talked to Mr. [John Adams] Sibley up in Atlanta and some other people there that were--they were not [unintelligible]--they never were Griffin's family. They were the type of people that would support Walter [Franklin] George and Dick Russell and these people.

So when they talked to Ernie, then Ernie had to come back on that. That later hurt him in his campaign for the Senate. But at the time Ernie did this, had he not done that, he may not have been successful as he was because Marvin Griffin might have captured so many of these

people at that time. And you know we go through life. If you make an error in your way, don't sit there and try to compound it. Admit your error and go ahead and do it. Ernie did that, and he came in and he turned around. He tried to explain this [unintelligible] as best he could to the people. He got it across to his true friends. Some of them that were looking for another opportunity might have defected, and I think it had to be [unintelligible], yes. I really do. But that was not the whole factor there. [Cut off]

Henderson: Let me go back to the "No, not one" statement. Was there any division among his advisors prior to him making that statement as to whether he should or should not do it?

Owen: Well, I remember, for instance, in this area here he had a group, and they had a meeting. Judge Sibley was down in Columbus with it, and in all the areas here--Peter Zack Geer [Jr.] at that time was Vandiver's executive secretary, and Peter was a strong man on "no, not one," strong, strong. He kept trying to push Ernie to stick with it. So Ernie then decided he go ride over the state and just get a poll of people. So from here I asked Clyde Nichols to go-- he was a wholesale grocer; I asked Dave [David] Arnold to go; I asked John Newton to go, whose father-in-law owned John D. Bell's here; and we had the four of us went down [sic] on this thing, at the meeting down there.

I remember Clyde Nichols, the grocer here, he came out, and he said at that meeting, when he was asked questions there about it, he said, "Well," he said, "Mr. Sibley, let me say this," he said, "I think things are going to get worse before they get better." It was remarks like that, but now we had four strong people here from Griffin. Then we had a good many liberal, what I call liberal, Democrats at that time. They heard we were going down, so then they jumped in the car and ran and got down there maybe an hour or two later than we had gotten

there. So later on they came in and tried to put in their two cents worth, but they were not really Ernie's strong supporters. They were very liberal Democrats that came down with that then. But there were enough of those at that time for Ernie to see that the state was divided, and I think he made a wise judgment for what he did. Even though you say, "Well, a man gives his word and he goes back on that word [sic]." If you see that it's the thing to do in the best interests of the people that you represent doing it, I think Ernie did the right thing, yeah.

Henderson: Did you play a role in or hold a position in the Vandiver administration?

Owen: Yes, Ernie, when he first got in, he called and said, "Jim, once I heard Herman Talmadge say while he was governor that the nicest appointment a governor could ever make [was] if could get some of his closest friends to be on the Game and Fish Commission, because he said on that thing you went out with great sportsmen, went out with so many fine, just good people all over the state." He said, "I would like to appoint you to that." I said, "Thank you, Ernie. I'd like to serve you." I served on that for a couple of years. I remember when Eisenhower came down [and] we went down together to that and hunted on some of the farms down there with him.

Then later there became a vacancy on the Board of Regents, about two years after that, and Ernie appointed me to the Board of Regents. I served there an expiration of one year, and then Carl [Edward] Sanders appointed me again to the Board of Regents and I served that term out. So I served about ten years on the board, but Ernie appointed me to both those two positions while he was governor. Ernie did this. For instance, Joe [Joseph Dillard] Quillian [Jr.], Ernie's law partner called me, said, "Jim, you never have mentioned to Ernie anything about an appointment to any of these appellate courts." He said, "You know, Ernie's not going

to talk to anybody about them," but he says, "he's got so many friends all over the state," he says, "I can't understand why you haven't [unintelligible]. A good many of your friends have." So I told him. I said, "Joe, I'm here, my parents are getting along in years, and right now I'm just not in a position to pull up my roots here and move to Atlanta. And I just better hold off a little bit, and besides, I'm just enjoying the practice of law so much I believe I'd rather be a player than I had to be an umpire up sitting on a bench calling the shots about objection overruled or whatever it is." It's a lot more fun to be a player sometimes than it is to be the other, even though you get so many enjoyments maybe out of writing good decisions.

I see all these great decisions that these fellows wrote that Ernie put on the courts here. It's just amazing. That would be a wonderful thing to do in life too. For that reason I maybe regret it, not having done it, but at that time my mother was sick, my father was not too well, they were both here, and I had two children, a wife. If I had to move them to Atlanta, and I was worried about getting them into schools up there. At that time I was concerned about would I have enough money to afford maybe to join some of the clubs up in Atlanta such as this and provide that for your family. I had a lot of reasons, but Joe Quillian, he talked to me either two or three times about this. He just didn't talk to me one time about it.

So I--well, anyway, I think that if I had seen Ernie, as close as we were, I believe he would have looked for an appointment like that if I had really, really wanted it. But Ernie was just so great. He had so many friends that he had known while he was lieutenant governor and governor, those in the legislative branch, all of them. He just had solid, good business friends.

Henderson: During the 1960 presidential campaign Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is arrested in Georgia and Governor Vandiver plays a role in getting him released. Were you involved in that in anyway?

Owen: No, but I followed it closely. I talked to a lot of Ernie's friends about it, and on occasions I'd see him and chat with him about it. You see, when you keep a man like that in jail, you just make a martyr out of him. Really he . . . well, I think about the march over in Selma. Sometimes I think that--I look at Marvin Griffin as a rabble-rouser, but at the time Dr. King had--he called it the non-violent thing, but there he could make such impassioned speeches. He had the black people--I think we were almost getting on the verge of anarchy at that time, and to leave him down there in a jail--Ernie did the right thing to release him. He wanted to be in jail. The longer he'd be there the better.

The ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] got so involved in that thing. I've always been strongly opposed to the ACLU. I think it's one of the worst things that ever happened to the state of Georgia and ever happened to our country. I think the Communists must have financed that organization [laughter]. I was just delighted once when I heard they had a yacht down at Miami, Florida, where they found drugs all on the yacht, so they confiscated the twenty million dollar yacht from the ACLU. I thought that was one of the best things that our government ever did.

Henderson: There is some talk that President-elect [John Fitzgerald] Kennedy is going to appoint Governor Vandiver to be Secretary of the Army, and Governor Vandiver eventually says that he does not want to be appointed to that position. Were you involved in that episode in any way?

Owen: No. No, but, of course, I knew about the episode, yeah.

Henderson: In the 1960 legislative session the Sibley committee was created. What was the purpose of the Sibley committee?

Owen: I think Ernie wanted to find out. He had made the statement "No, not one." I think he wanted to find out as to whether he wanted to be another governor that was pictured as standing in the door as the governor of Alabama did, or as to whether he was going to come in and say, "Look, let's don't have a revolt down here. Let's don't have anarchy. Let's try to handle this scene peaceably." You know up at Kent State and all they had these riots, and later they had the riots out and breaking all the windows out in the California banks and such as that. I think Ernie could see all that coming on, and I think that he . . . well, that had a lot to do with Ernie's decisions in these, I think, the trend of the times.

Henderson: He has to deal with the desegregation crisis. Did he seek your advice and counsel on how to deal with that crisis? I'm talking about at the University of Georgia.

Owen: Oh, at the University of Georgia. No, Ernie didn't--he would talk to his friends to sort of get their ideas as to how they felt. He knew that he could talk to people that he had trust and confidence in, and they wouldn't tell him something that might not be their true convictions, but these friends would level with Ernie, and he frequently talked to him, which is a smart way to do. He kept up with the pulse of the public, and he got solid, good feelings from these people. There was no sham in them where some guy was wanting to get some appointment, this, that, and the other. Ernie's true friends did not do that. Ernie's friends would level with him. Well, Ernie was smart on the way he handled it, I think, and the way he got informed about it. It wasn't some guy seeking maybe some political plum and just going to

doctor him up on one side or the other, whichever way he thought would be best. I think Ernie got the genuine feeling of the people by doing what he did.

Henderson: Going back to the Sibley committee and its recommendations, did he discuss with you what his actions should be as far as the Sibley committee?

Owen: Well, we talked about it a good bit. Peter Zack Geer called me and said, "Is anybody going from Griffin?" I told him at that time that I had three people that I was going to go down to Columbus with. It was that type [of] thing, but at those times too, occasions I'd be in Atlanta, we'd be there on meetings and all, the Regents board and such as this, and other times too I'd try to go by. I kept in close touch there with Ernie in office. Of course, you get so tied up there in the mornings. I didn't try to go by during the busy part of the day just to chat with a friend. That's not fair to him. He's only got so many hours of the day, but we kept up. I knew how Ernie felt, and he knew how his friends felt all over the state too. [Cut off]

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