

Jim L. Gillis, Jr. interviewed by Bob Short
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Reflections on Georgia Politics
Jim Gillis

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BOB SHORT: I'm Bob Short and this another in our series of Reflections on Georgia Politics sponsored by The Richard Russell Library at the University of Georgia. Today I'm joined by Sheryl Vogt, director of the Richard Russell Library and we are in Soperton, Georgia

with a very special guest. Few families have had more impact upon Georgia's political and business life than the Gillis family of Soperton, Treutlen County Georgia. And we honored today to have Jim L. Gillis, Jr. as our special guest. Mr. Gillis, your family's political and business record goes all the way back to the late 1800s when your grandfather, Neil Gillis, founded a turpentine operation that evolved into one of the states largest timber and naval store businesses.

SHERYL VOGT: What was the primary family business before naval stores and timber?

JIM GILLIS: You're asking me questions you'll have to bare with me. I'm almost 92 and I'm not as sharp as I used to be but I'll be glad to talk to you about what little history I know, particularly naval stores and maybe a little politics. It's a pleasure to answer. But the naval stores business is one of the oldest businesses in the world. It goes back to Genesis in the Bible when they demanded Noah to treat his ark with pitch and of course it goes on and that pitch was used in lighting streets and various other purposes and water proofing and it was absolutely essential in the navy. Back then there were no metal ships, they were all wooden ships and they had to have this pitch to use in the cracks to seal them so the ships would -- in other words it was probably to them what fuel oil and gas are now.

And of course, when they made metal ships -- and now they've changed it, but that's the way the main naval stores originated. And of course, it came to America and the first company was Jamestown and I think one of the first exports was pitch. They had found these stumps and trees

up around Jamestown and they made this pitch and that was one of the first things but that's the way it got its name naval stores. And of course, the industry worked on down into North Carolina. They were reports in Jamestown that there were trees in North Carolina that would profusely bleed or secrete this resin and so the naval stores industry moved the pitch into naval stores in North Carolina. In fact, that's where North Carolina got its name, The Tar Hill State. And of course, in the naval stores it's produced in the coastal plains, going from North Carolina all the way into Texas from the fall line to the coastal areas. And it was during and after the Civil War one of the primary sources of income other than cotton in the South, so it was a tremendous part of the economy for years.

VOGT: What kind of pine tree produces?

GILLIS: Only two species, slash pine and long-leaf pine that grow in the coastal plains area or just north of here. In other words, the fall line, of course, runs in Georgia from below Columbus and Macon, to Macon, to Columbus and it is a native species, the slash pine and long-leaf. And long-leaf was the predominant pine in the older days for the simple reason they burned the woods and it was a lot more tolerant to fire than slash. And of course, long-leaf played out as the naval stores and the timber industry progressed.

VOGT: I understand when they collected the turpentine that initially they would collect it in the bottom of the tree. They would make, like, a bowl in the bottom of the tree?

GILLIS: It was a rather crude operation but with a big axe they cut a hole in the bottom of the tree and made a pocket and then they'd scar the tree and the resin would run down in this hole and they'd take a dipper and dip the gum out and, of course, that was the way it originated. And of course, that damaged the tree and then after they had worked the tree as much as they could and abandoned it, then they came along and cut it for timber. So it was really in naval stores and timber and then they clear cut it over and that's what we were left with. In the 20s and the 30s was all this cutover timberland and, of course, most of it was in farm land. And then when we started the reforestation effort in the late 20s and early 30s it was primarily slash pine that was planted. And, of course, at the present time they were putting emphasis on trying to plant long-leaf in order to try to restore that species but that's a government program that's in effect now.

VOGT: Now, you're about 100 miles from the coast here, so in the early days how did they get this to market? I've heard that it would go down the river through Savannah.

GILLIS: A lot of it was. The naval store business moved into Georgia after the Civil War and they -- up around the rivers, the Savannah and the Oconee and the Altamaha and a lot of it was shipped by barges and a lot of by the railroads, and a lot of it was shipped by rail. And, of course, the first market for the raw material was Savannah and Savannah became quite famous for all of its factorage houses. That was people down there that had organizations, businesses that would finance the farmers and naval store producers for money. They financed them and

the production begins in April and ends in October. The warmer the weather, the more production you get from tapping these trees.

So in the wintertime while you did all your preparatory work and you made your production in the summer and they would finance these farmers and then they in turn would ship that product to Savannah. And it was, it was shipped by rail and water originally, yes.

VOGT: Now, I know that for a long time you've been a member of the American Turpentine Farmers Association. How did that help production of the turpentine and making it a lucrative business?

GILLIS: After the Civil War as I said, cotton and lumber and naval stores, that was about the only commodity you could sell. We didn't have pulp mills. We didn't have these outlets for livestock and that was the primary income that we had. You had probably in the 20s and 30s, early 30s, you had hundreds of little turpentine stills, little distilleries. Every man would get enough production to operate a still and he'd make his own turpentine and rosin and then it was disorganized. In other words, if the price was good they'd tap a lot of trees and if it was bad-- there was no organization to it at all. And so a lot of the producers, Judge Langdale and large producers, realized they had to organize in order to try to get some kind of orderly marketing and to try to stabilize the industry which they did and that was a big salvation to the industry. And they worked through the association and had signed up the membership which they paid dues and through that organization they were able to go Washington. But being a seasonal crop,

primarily June, July and August, three heavy producing months in March there would always be so much on the market, of course, in the supply and demand, so they created these commodity credit programs for naval stores. And then if price was really low they could place the turpentine and rosin in the Commodity Credit Loan Program.

And then in the wintertime when it wasn't producing any then it could be redeemed and that, kind of, helped stabilize the industry. They also, as I said, there was lots of timber back then. It wasn't any problem and most of these people producing gum, they owned some land but they leased timber from the neighbors and farmers and all. And so the timber was-- they cut small timber which was not good and the larger the tree the better the production. But through that they created a government program, The Naval Stores Conservation Program where you had to meet certain credentials in order to qualify which paid a little part of the program but it really-- but there were any numbers -- in particular in merchandising the turpentine and rosin and advertising and they associate-- without the association I don't think the industry would have lasted near as long as it had.

SHORT: Who are the main users of naval stores?

GILLIS: Well, back then there was a lot of it used in soaps and particularly paints and varnishes. Rosin was used in varnishes, and then paper size, all your newsprint with that resin in it today. They are actually products used in the process of making paper. It has from chewing gum to shoe polish to most anything you can think of and it involved a lot of uses and, of course, the

turpentine itself was used in paint thinners and a lot of your Vic salves which you've heard about has got a base of turpentine in it. But the chemical end of it is a pretty big end of it now.

VOGT: Now, Bob mentioned that your grandfather Neil Gillis was the first one in your family to produce the gum naval stores?

GILLIS: Right, right. There's really no accurate records as to when it was, but from the best I can determine it was in around probably 1890 and along in that area that he had a turpentine still and he had a couple of brothers. My granddaddy was always in politics and farming and so the three of them together organized a little business and started it then and then it involved from them with my daddy whenever he got involved in it and really had the foresight to promote the business and that's where it started. It started through my grandfather and his two brothers.

VOGT: Do you think there'll be anyone from the next two generations of Gillis' to carry on the family business?

GILLIS: Oh, yeah, I think so. We, of course, naval stores. We won't go into that right now but it ceased production in 2001 but the farm land and timber business-- the same land that my great-great-grandfather came in 1819 is still in the family. Of course, we've added lot of property and that's primarily our business now is the timber business, growing pine trees.

SHORT: So naval stores are not as prominent in your business?

GILLIS: No, as I said naval stores was about the only cash crop for a long time. We produced cotton. We didn't have tobacco in this area until the 30s and then the pulp mills came in, in the late 30s and up until then naval stores was about the only cash product. But after 1940 and the war started, that's when we really went to making changes. And so still a lot of gum naval stores were produced up until it went to dwindling in the 70s and the timber prices went high. And the saw mills didn't particularly like these faces where it's been scarred and we had labor, unfortunately it was practically all hand labor and labor prices, of course, after 1940 the people left and went to the shipyards and various places and a lot of them didn't come back. And labor began to get scarce. It was plentiful at one time and then tree got to be valuable for a saw mill and poles and various other wood products.

And then your foreign competition, People's Republic of China, they're the largest producers of gum naval stores in the world. We were at one time in America but they are now and have been and they could produce turpentine and gum turpentine and rosin and put it down in the ports here on the east coast cheaper than we could produce it here. So between those three things, between labor and the high price for the timber and the competition eventually just played out and there wasn't enough. There was still some being produced but not enough to warrant a processing plant to operate.

SHORT: Well, I was going to ask that question. Did you do your own processing?

GILLIS: Yes, sir.

SHORT: Here in Soperton?

GILLIS: At one time in the 20s and 30s there was probably 2,600 here in Georgia -- turpentine still, little distilleries and they produced their own turpentine and rosin. And of course in the 40s they got some central processing plants and they could clean the gum better and better processing methods and they could get a product, they could guarantee a melting point in the rosin and then you had at that time a lot of these small farmers. They wouldn't make enough to own a little still or something, so that would give them a central market where they could take maybe eight or ten barrels, any amount, they could take it to this processing plant, they'd weigh it and pay them for it. And we had about, oh, I guess 15 plants here in Georgia. We had plants in Douglas and McRae and Vidalia and Tifton, Valdosta, Brunswick. It was close enough that you could deliver your raw material to it which was good because it, kind of, standardized the product but about the 40s was the end of the small turpentine stills. As I said, there was about 2,600 of them at one time.

SHORT: Did you sell to a broker or do you sell directly to your customer?

GILLIS: Your gum?

SHORT: Yes, sir.

GILLIS: As a producer, they had a plant in Swainsboro, they had a plant in Vidalia, they had one in Baxley and one in McRae and usually you had an opportunity to get the best price you could out of it, you see? But all were good and all paid virtually about the same price, so it was just a question of the farmer, where he wanted to deliver his product.

SHORT: Well, let's talk for a minute about Jim L. Gillis, Jr. I noticed you were born in McRae--
-I'm sorry.

GILLIS: -- McDonough.

SHORT: In --

GILLIS: Locust Grove.

SHORT: Locust Grove, I'm sorry. But you lived most of your life Soperton?

GILLIS: That's right.

SHORT: What was Soperton like back in those days?

GILLIS: Soperton was created about 1900 before Treutlen county, of course. When the railroad came through that's what got Soperton started. And my mother was from Henry County from Griffin and my daddy, they had gone to school in McRae and then they went from there up to Locust Grove and that's where he met my mother in school up there. And I was born in Locust grove and daddy was in the process of building a home down here, so when they got the home built, I was a few months old and I was here, so I've been here most of my life.

Soperton along with all these other small towns -- we had two or three car dealers. We had about four or five doctors and transportation then wasn't like it is now. I can remember when I was real small riding in horse and buggies and in fact when I was in the first grade or two I had a neighbor, we lived about three miles out in the country and he had a little horse and buggy and I rode with him for about a year coming to school. Then they got the school bus system but a lot of these little towns, of course, they're having a hard time now with all these larger stores and it's changed but in a lot of ways they haven't changed a lot. But it was a central point then. You bought your groceries here, you had your doctors here. In fact, now we have doctors that are here but they come from Dublin or Swainsboro or some place and they're temporary and most of your stores, of course, like everywhere else, the Wal-Marts and all your larger chain stores have people that go somewhere to trade and they're having a hard time. Most all these little small counties and small cities are struggling.

SHORT: Before we get too far away I would like to talk with you for a minute about the creation of Treutlen County. That was your grandfather who was in the legislature and your father.

GILLIS: No, my grandfather was in the Senate.

SHORT: Yes, sir.

GILLIS: And my father was in the legislature.

SHORT: Yes, sir. Okay.

GILLIS: They were the two that created the county in 1917 and there's an article there that I want to give you a copy of that tells about my father visiting all the legislators all over Georgia. He'd just go and talk to them about getting votes. He said if they asked him to spend the night, he spent the night and he ate meals with them and he got to know them. But the two of them created the county in 1917.

SHORT: And the county was created from--

GILLIS: From mostly Montgomery, some Emanuel, mostly Montgomery and Emanuel Counties.

SHORT: So then you're off to the University of Georgia.

GILLIS: Yes, sir. I graduated here in 1933 and I was 15 years old. I got an education that came pretty fast. I was scared I was going to flunk out. I studied pretty hard and made the Dean's List and then I found out that you could have a good time, so I, kind of, mixed it all in together.

SHORT: With a degree in forestry?

GILLIS: Yes, sir.

SHORT: Did you know when you went to the university that you wanted to be a forester?

GILLIS: Yeah, I think so. Well, we had this land and I loved trees and I'd had FFA projects. I had planted some trees and then, of course, the naval store business was big then. So I haven't regretted it. I graduated in '37.

SHORT: And came back home?

GILLIS: No, there were 18 in the graduating class and two of us got jobs and I worked in Baxley as an assistant district forester for six months and then headed home. My daddy was in

the legislature and he was primarily running it -- my uncles then were real old and weren't able to run the business and they had, I don't know how many families at one time. We had our own operation living on our property and adjoining over 100 families, over 100 employees.

Somebody had to come in that would be here. The business just couldn't run itself, and so I fell into it and I didn't work my way into it. When I got here I was in it. When I was in Georgia I went to business school at night. I was going to get a business school education, so I got into shorthand and I decided that if I was going to have to do that for a living I'd come back home and do something else. Anyway it worked in well because that business school helped me a lot when I moved in here. They kept most of the records on the back of a paper sack and social security started and the employee paid one cent and the employer played one cent. So it was a beginning.

SHORT: But you found time then to run for the state Senate.

GILLIS: That was in '38 when I came back January of '38 and I was in the Senate in 45 and 46. And we rotated, Emanuel and Laurens and Treutlen County and so when it was Treutlen County's time, several of them encouraged me, particularly my father and so I was in the Senate. I believe the next term or the next one they did away with that unit system and had by popular vote for all the counties involved. But I was married and had three babies and being in Atlanta didn't blend in too well with my politics. And then between my father and my brother, why they liked the city and I didn't, so it worked out good. I stayed here and ran the business. We did lots

of farming and I had people that lived on these farms. Today I imagine there were 300 or 400 farmers in Treutlen County and it went from cotton and it went from tobacco and everybody was growing hogs and then a few cattle. In fact, after 1940 after World War II these farms, they were left and these farms, kind of, went to dwindling and whenever we'd convert them into pastures and run livestock and then it went from the pastures and row crops slowly into pine trees.

And now I think there's five or six farmers left in Treutlen County and one of them is a sod farmer and they're all big but that's all the farming we got. The rest of it's in pine trees. That's pretty well true all over the southeast because we can grow pine trees on any type of soil but there's been a lot of changes in that. The economy is what drove everybody out of the farming business. They just couldn't pay for it and I think the large farmers now are really not making a lot of money. Fertilizers \$300, \$400 a ton. I don't know what it is. It just about doubles, it goes up so much. You're familiar with what the economy is now.

SHORT: Were you in Atlanta during the three governors fight?

GILLIS: No, sir.

SHORT: You weren't there?

GILLIS: No, Ellis Arnall was governor when I was there.

SHORT: And was your brother Hugh in the House?

GILLIS: Yeah, I think he was in the house for seven or eight years and then he went from the House to the Senate. I think he was there around 56 years, he ran a long tenure. He can tell you that. He had a long, long record and, of course, my father was involved with the highway department for about 24 years.

SHORT: But you didn't get out of politics. You came home and became a county commissioner.

GILLIS: I was mayor five years and then county commissioner and at one time the grand jury appointed the commissioner and, in fact, I was county commissioner for 40 years. I had, I think, opposition twice. I was very fortunate.

SHORT: Some people say we have too many counties in Georgia. Do you agree with that?

GILLIS: Well, being from a small county there's a lot of advantages and disadvantages but I think the economy, unless these small counties can go to consolidating services and make some changes -- I don't think you're going to have consolidation by legislation. You're going to have it by necessity. In other words, the economy's going to demand it and I think eventually you're going to have it. As it is right now a county's financed just about two ways, sources of income

primarily. That's ad valorem taxes and sales taxes and there's a limit to your sales tax but seems to be no limit to ad valorem taxes. And something's going to have to give. And your education, I think the federal government demands the state to have all these different criteria they have to meet and then the state passes that onto the counties. And in fact about half of the tax money we collect goes into education. But I don't know. It boils down to the economy and whether they can afford it. That's going to be the main thing.

VOGT: Most of your young people in Treutlen County today, where are they working? Are they working here in the county or are they going to surrounding the counties.

GILLIS: Very few. Most of them have to go somewhere else for a job and the ones that want to go to college they go to college and then, of course, they've got a choice of specializing in what they might do.

VOGT: Have you had much immigration in this county? Do you have many Asians or Hispanics.

GILLIS: No, not permanent. We've got some. We are having more from India coming in and buying stores and gas stations and then we have these big farmers, they're growing tobacco and they're growing Vidalia onions and everything they grow, they've got hand labor. And they live in Toombs County. Pretty heavy population around Glenville and Reedsville and Tattnall

County and, of course, we got a lot of them here. Most of them migrate from one county to the other, but we don't have a big population, no. But in some counties they do and I didn't realize it but in North Georgia, Dalton, these textile mills and poultry plants and all are heavily dependent upon them and they want to work. Without them I don't know what would happen to the production.

Of course this immigration question, I don't want to get into that because as you know from what you read in the paper everyday that's a hot topic today.

VOGT: Are there any plans for, sort of, a renewal of this community trying to build it up, rebuild it?

GILLIS: Oh, yes, ma'am. Every little county, they've got a development authority and they've got a chamber of commerce and they've been working diligently to get industry into these places. Dublin up here in Lawrence County and Statesboro -- with the sales tax, it's really designed for the consumers. I mean, you spend your money and that's why you pay your tax and so just for an example, in Soperton and Treutlen County they usually go to Vidalia or Swainsboro or Dublin and Dublin has really grown. And, of course, that's the north end of the county about 15 miles, and so commuting is not a bad trouble. They've got a 200 bed hospital up there and they've done an excellent job in getting big industry, all different kinds. Of course, our Congressman Vincent up there, Lawrence County was his favorite. He put in a big VA hospital and they've gotten just any numbers of industry. They've done a great job of doing that.

We've got a development authority here that's doing a real good job. In fact, we've got one of the first in the world I think of producing ethanol from cellulose, from trees and it's in the process of being built now.

And it's going to be a tremendous thing and they're going to produce the raw material and my understanding is they're going to truck it by rail and then, of course, it's close to I16 but then they have ethanol plants and we are 70 miles from Macon and about 100 from Savannah and they're going to have plants there to refine it and make the finished product. But it's in the process of being built now which we hope will be a big help to this area. And of course, they're looking at getting the raw material from a radius of 75 miles of here and it looks very favorable. There's no question about the raw material. The raw material's here and everywhere you look you can see little planted pines of all ages. So we hope it materializes and I imagine with the price of gasoline now at \$4.00 everybody else is hoping we'll have a cheap source of fuel.

SHORT: Well, I hate to change the subject but I would like to talk to you for a minute about Mr. Jim, your dad. Twenty-four years in the highway department. They tell the story about when these county officials used to come to the state capital. They didn't want to see the governor. They wanted to see Mr. Jim.

GILLIS: Well, I was born in politics and he was, as I say, in '17 he was in the House of Representatives and then he came back and he was farming and he got involved with his father and uncles in developing Soperton naval stores and he really got into that. And in the late '20s

and early '30s, that grew from just a small operation to a big operation. I remember when I was a boy he was up at 4:00 every morning. In other words, you had all these laborers and you went to the woods to install your cups and to do this and he didn't send somebody. He went with them and he worked hard at that. And then when I came back that, kind of, relieved him. For me to talk about my daddy, that's really, kind of, a tender spot in my heart because he just left it up to me and if I had had the optimism, in other words, back when this land was cheap he believed in the land and when property came up in this area -- the North owned the South between the Federal Land Bank and John Hancock and New York and Mutual and these different companies, they had all this farmland. The farmers went broke and these factorage houses, the turpentine people, they wouldn't loan money on land but they'd lend it to you on a lease. But my daddy, you could almost buy land and all for what the lease was worth and he believed in the land.

And back whenever he died I don't think he had about \$5,000 life insurance but he had a lot of land, though. He believed in the land and if I'd had the foresight he did, of course, I'm not suffering now but no telling where we would have been. But he loved people and he loved to help people and as I say, anything, he was good to me and quite an inspiration. I was real close to him and after I came back in here he didn't worry about the business anymore. They say that's what politics is, is people and he spent a lot of time with the little man, people that anybody else --

SHORT: Well, if I remember correctly he served with almost every governor in the latter part of

the 20th Century except Marvin Griffin and Jimmy Carter.

GILLIS: Ellis Arnall.

SHORT: Ellis Arnall. He didn't serve with Arnall? But he was a very powerful man and they sought him out for political advice and assistance and he certainly deserves credit for electing several Georgia governors.

GILLIS: Oh, yeah. There's an article here in the Atlanta Journal. This was in '69 and there's a right interesting little story there about my father. He was up there in the middle of it with them but he did.

SHORT: Popular guy. Let's talk for a minute if you will about some of your civic efforts. You were very active in the Soil Conservation Service and the Georgia Forestry Commission?

GILLIS: Right. I got the community interested in it and we've got one civic club, The Lions Club. And in fact, I was just recognized for 70 years of service, but being into land I was very much interested in soil and water conservation. They organized in the '30s and '40s these soil conservation districts and we had five counties. Started out with three and wound up with five and I started that in '39 and our district was the old Ohoopsee River District and in fact, I was in when they organized the State Soil and Water Conservation Committee. But anyway the first

president was Mr. Holson back from Winder and I was the second president of the association of sewer conservation districts, district supervisor and still am but I'm fixing to give that up but it's local of this district. But I was chairman of the state committee for years and the greatest program we had was all these Watershed Program from North Georgia, in fact, some in middle and south Georgia.

And then, of course, water then, it was a question of flood control. Build these big dams and they were constructed to where they could hold much more water than a normal basin and when you had a flood, why, that would stop it and keep it from just flooding everything down. Up in the mountains there, when they had a flood it gushed out of there and then a lot of them used it for a water supply. Lake Tobosofkee up here was our project but that's been a real interesting deal. And of course, being in the timber business I was associated with the Georgia Forestry Association from the time I came back here and I eventually was president of that. And then they organized the American Turpentine Farmer's Association in '36 I believe and I came back in '38 and then in '39 they had a vacancy and I became a member of the board of the American Turpentine Farmer's Association.

And then when Judge Langdale resigned as president I was president of the association, well, I still am but their business has ceased now. But I've enjoyed--all the jobs I've had haven't paid anything but I've really enjoyed the work and the people that are involved in it.

SHORT: Speaking of the water and our water shortage, is there anything we could have done to prevent it?

GILLIS: That's a good question. We're dependent particularly from the middle of Georgia south on our sub terrain, on our underground water supply and that's something now that's demanding more and more attention. We've wasted water. We haven't had any water problems up until the last few years and, of course, now they're seeing more need for these reservoirs, particularly up in North Georgia. You've got rock formations and you don't get your underground water like we have down in this part of the country and then there's a limit to that. But I guess until you need something we don't really recognize what could have been done. I'm sure if we'd had the foresight we could have built more reservoirs. We could have managed it but your population is using so much water and your population is increasing until it's at the point now that we're going to have to utilize everything that we can from reservoirs to conserving water and that's an important question. I don't know but it's getting a lot of attention now, so I'm sure it'll work out.

SHORT: Does the state of Georgia harvest as much timber as we have in the past?

GILLIS: Well, the demand now -- you know when your economy goes bad it affects everything and it's certainly affected the timber business. Right now we're not producing as much because there's no demand. In other words, it's at low ebb right now but I don't know. In the timber business it's like everybody else. We're just hoping that this economies going to bottom out and pick up again which I'm certain it will because there's a lot of people that have put all their eggs

in one basket and they've planted the land in trees and they're expecting to get some revenue out of it.

And that's one thing like I mentioned about this plant up here, we're going to have to have more processing plants to handle it.

SHORT: Are we importing too much lumber?

GILLIS: From Canada, yes. No question about it. They don't have to pay any stumpage up there. See, the government owns it all and they can send lumber down here and their lumber is white looking and it's soft. No trouble. You can drive a nail in it but it doesn't have the strength that this long-leaf and slash pin--the Georgia Pine--does. But people like it, these builders, because they can build faster with it and they put out a good product other than that but if I were building a house I wouldn't want it in it because the termites will have it before you know what's going on. And then, too, it doesn't have the strength to weather storms and different things.

SHORT: Has NAFTA helped or hurt the timber business in Georgia?

GILLIS: I don't know. I'm not too familiar with our export markets and what actually has been exported but I guess it's a two way sword I guess, two edged sword.

SHORT: How do today's environmental regulations affect your industry?

GILLIS: Well, I don't know that regulations that they've got, we're living with them and I think they're within reason. Some are and some aren't but you're going to have not anything if you suit everybody, but overall I think we see it necessary.

SHORT: I'd like to ask you this question. You've helped Georgia progress from just another southern state, to the empire state of the South. What, in your opinion is responsible for our emergence as a leader in the southern states?

GILLIS: Well, that's not only a good question, it's a big question. But I think probably Atlanta, your big cities. We've been a hub in the airline business, Atlanta has. We've gotten a lot of big industry in these cities and Savannah and we've had a good support. I think our water supply and our climate, our soil, we just got things in Georgia they don't have in most of these other states, particularly your western states and northern states. I think it's been a combination of all your industries and everybody working together trying to promote it.

SHORT: Do you think political leadership has had a role in it?

GILLIS: Yes, sir. No question about it.

SHORT: When do you think that that turned?

GILLIS: Pardon?

SHORT: If you look back on our political leadership in the state, at what point do you think that we begin to progress more industrially and federally?

GILLIS: I'd have to give that some thought. I think it really begins in the 40's with World War II and that's when we brought in a lot of industry. A lot of these big industries were still there and since then we've acquired more but I think it started in the middle of the 20th Century.

VOGT: We're in the Gillis family cemetery in Treutlen County with Mr. Jim L. Gillis and Mr. Hugh Gillis and Mr. Jim L., why don't you tell us about the oldest grave in the cemetery.

GILLIS: The oldest grave is down the smaller graves, that tall grave, the granite is a memorial that we put up there in memory of Murdock Gillis and Katherine Gillis. That was my great-great-grandfather and grandmother and they came into this area in 1819 and he died in 1829.

And he had several children which are buried along this line we're in now and they were a lot of ladies back then. There was no transportation and you had a lot more old maids that you have in this day and time. But on the other side, Katherine Gillis on the other side, I believe, she would have had to have been born in 1754 and they migrated from Scotland, Northern Scotland, the Isle of Skye. And I think more than likely they had potato famines and the terrain was rather rocky

and not much that you could cultivate and they were hungry and they were looking for that.

A lot of people migrated into Wilmington, North Carolina and that's where most all the ships came in and it got kind of crowded around Wilmington, I'm assuming, and they heard about the pine barrens. That's what this country is know as, the pine barrens and probably had a little livestock and so they heard about and that's when they moved in here. It was in 1819 and they probably had, I don't know, probably bought a cow and probably had some staple groceries but this is where they settled.

VOGT: There wasn't much of a life here raising cattle was it in this area?

GILLIS: Well, they probably had sheep. Well, they had to survive and, of course, they would grow a little sugar cane and make the sugar and have the meat and have a garden, have potatoes and corn and they survived is right. And they had to go once or twice a year to get staples like salt and other provisions but it was a rough life. No doctors. How they survived I don't know but they got a land grant and then his oldest son, John, he brought him down in 1829 and kind of looked after the family and stayed until Katherine died, his mother. And then John, he had a big family. He's buried in here. But then all of them in this area that we're in right now it's been settled. It's rather interesting, a couple of salesmen came through here in 1825 from North Carolina and they were collecting where they had financed these pioneers with I guess supplies and so on collecting and they kept a diary of their travels and they mentioned going into Williamson Swamp. That's up above here at Louisville and coming on down and spending the

night on McLamore's bridge on the Ohoopce which is about six or eight miles over here.

And then they came through this area right here and spend the night with a Murdock Gillis. This is in 1825 and he was real nice to them and wouldn't let them pay for breakfast and then they forded Pendleton Creek. All our property is on Pendleton Creek, but that diary kind of confirmed the fact they were here then and, of course, the family has been here every since. And it's a fact that everybody in here with exception of a few are members of his descendents.

VOGT: So it wasn't really until after the Civil War that the families started to prosper economically, is that correct?

GILLIS: Well, I don't know. No, they were getting land grants in the 1840s and 50s. I know John who was Murdock's oldest son -- and he must have been a good business man -- and he acquired quite a bit of property. One grant was for 800 and something acres and he got other grants. Anything you could grow you had to grow--they used it to make a living and they take and grow corn and of course, they made meal and grits out of the corn and have corn to feed the livestock. And then the trees, the whole country was covered with original pine, long-leaf and slash pine. And, in fact, in that article there's those two guys and they refer to that they can ride ten or 15 miles and see nothing but pine trees and seldom ever see a leaf because it was just rye grass which is a native grass here. But it was right interesting.

Of course, my grandfather and father and all of the family were buried here.

VOGT: I was saying earlier that in a real pine forest that you could drive a horse and buggy through it without any obstruction, is that not correct?

GILLIS: You can see the old brick back around this way. The men at Pendleton Creek about a mile down here and on the banks of that they found him a spot where the clay would make brick. And they went down there and worked up the mud and with their feet and made brick and took an ox cart and hauled it up here and put this brick wall around that stuff. And of course, this part is new but that's the older part.

VOGT: So how many Gillis' are buried in this cemetery, do you know?

GILLIS: I couldn't tell you that off hand but all these graves you can see are Gillis graves.

VOGT: And are the Gillis' members of a particular church in Treutlen County or--

GILLIS: Well, they were born in the springs down here which is an old community. My granddaddy, John, he gave them the logs to build the Baptist church. I think some of them were Methodists. What their religion was back in Scotland, I don't know.

VOGT: Might have been Presbyterian.

GILLIS: Probably.

VOGT: So most of the family is still buried here today?

GILLIS: Right, right. And we have young ones that own lots here, so we have a cemetery committee and five people on it and we've got a pretty good little cash reserve and we keep it up. It won't be long before I'll be a member out here. I got a brother here on my right, he's close behind me. But anyway, the young ones they own lots out here, so I'm real happy that we'll be perpetuated for a while anyway.

VOGT: Any talk of those who might be outside the brick wall yet? I know at the Russell family cemetery they actually have a couple who are outside the brick wall now. They're starting to sell lots outside the brick wall.

GILLIS: Well, I don't think we'll worry about that any time soon. The cemetery does own the property, they own about 15 acres. They own the land around here and the drive as they come in, the cemetery owns it, so it'll be perpetuated.

VOGT: It's a lovely spot. It's just beautiful here.

GILLIS: I appreciate you saying that.

VOGT: I think if you had to rest in a place and you knew where you were going it's a lovely place to be. Your grandfather's house is now that bed and breakfast inn, did you all see that?

GILLIS: Yeah, that was his house. It was built in 1910 and it's still in the family.

VOGT: It is a beautiful house. It's really pretty. Is your father's house still standing?

GILLIS: Yes. My son Jimmy lives there. The old house is John who's the father on my granddaddy it's up there. There's not a nail in it. It was put together with pegs. I think it was probably built--John whenever my great-granddaddy died, they lived in here. Usually they had the cemetery in the old days close to where their home was and so I'm assuming that that's where they were.

VOGT: Mr. Hugh, do you like being back in Treutlen County and not going to Atlanta?

HUGH GILLIS: I'm enjoying the rest.

VOGT: You are?

GILLIS: Sure am. And I made a few trips up there with the Ports Authorities and several of my

good old friends still there said, “You better be glad you're not up here now.”

[Laughter]

[END OF RECORDING]

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