

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection
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Dean Rusk interviewed by Thomas J. Schoenbaum
circa 1985

SCHOENBAUM: I have the chronology of your ancestors. I wanted to ask about the story of your great-grandparents coming to this country. You said they came through Charleston. Who told you this and how do you know this? Can you supply any details of the voyage?

DEAN RUSK: Apparently, three brothers came over from northern Ireland. They were Scotch-Irish. They came over from northern Ireland at about the turn of the century, from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century: early 1800s. My family thinks it has a rat-gnawed log of the ship on which they came over, but that log does not mention them in any way so we don't know. In any event, the word passed along from generation to generation that they landed in Charleston. Then one or another of them moved up to the Pendleton district of South Carolina, up in the John [Caldwell] Calhoun area. And as a matter of fact, a Rusk built up the old stone church over at Pendleton. It's still standing.

SCHOENBAUM: Was that your great-grandfather?

DEAN RUSK: I am not sure; I think it might have been a brother of his. But then my great-grandfather, David Rusk, moved from there and staked out some land in Cherokee County, a considerable amount of land which was still Indian country. He and my great-grandmother are buried in the little family cemetery in Cherokee County. Their stones are still there and I was intrigued to see that my great-grandmother was born in 1776 in Ireland. But at least four of us have spanned the entire life of this country as an independent country, which means that we are either very old or our country is rather young. My sister [Margaret Rusk] had accumulated family trees and you can have access to those. My brother Parks [Rusk] has those. There is an historian of the Rusk Family Memorial Association who is gathering this sort of material together and there are other groups of the Rusk family in California and other places who have done some of the same thing. As far as our background on this side of the Atlantic is concerned, it's reasonably complete. We have never been able to establish any contact with members of our family on the other side, back in Ireland. My great-grandfather established the land on which our family started off, and his son, my grandfather James Edward Rusk, continued on that land and had eleven children. And then with the death of my grandfather, this land was broken up into different pieces for members of the family.

SCHOENBAUM: What was your grandmother's name? Your grandfather was named James Edward Rusk. Do you remember your grandmother's name?

DEAN RUSK: Oh, dear.

SCHOENBAUM: You didn't have that. I could find it.

DEAN RUSK: It's in the family records. It would be easy to find. The first thing I remember in my life was her funeral. I was three years old and the funeral was in Cherokee County. And her sons sang at the funeral. I remember that very well.

SCHOENBAUM: Was it an old country church?

DEAN RUSK: Yeah. No, I think the funeral may well have been at the old home place and then she was buried there in the family graveyard.

SCHOENBAUM: Your father [Robert Hugh Rusk] and your mother [Frances Elizabeth Clotfelter] were very well educated, especially for that time.

DEAN RUSK: This has happened to families all over the country. My father was the only one of eleven children who went to college. He went to Davidson College and then to Louisville Theological Seminary.

SCHOENBAUM: Is that in Kentucky? Louisville, Kentucky?

DEAN RUSK: He was headed for the Presbyterian ministry. Three of my father's five children went to college and all of his grandchildren went to college. But that is happening all over the country.

SCHOENBAUM: It was unusual for your father to do that much education at that time. He must have been a very special, distinct person.

DEAN RUSK: Well, he was expecting to be a Presbyterian minister and the Presbyterian Church all along has insisted upon an educated ministry. So he felt that if he wanted to be a Presbyterian minister he would have to go to college. Davidson was the college he selected. We have some records of him at Davidson: class of 1894. He was center on the football team. He played the violin in those days. But then when his father died, I am not sure that he actually took a degree at Davidson. I think he might have left in his senior year because of the death of his father. But when the time came to divide up my grandfather's lands, the other brothers and sisters decided that since my father had gone to college that that was his share of the estate. And so my father did not get any of the lands bequeathed by my grandfather. Then my father had a throat problem which made it difficult for him to speak out: a very soft spoken man all of his life. In those days, to be a preacher you had to be able to shout, particularly here in the south. So he left the ministry, did some school teaching, and then finally found his way back to Cherokee County where he started farming on a little forty-acre farm that actually belonged to one of his sisters.

SCHOENBAUM: He didn't have lands himself. That's why he had to rent it from his sister.

DEAN RUSK: That's right.

SCHOENBAUM: What kind of throat problem did he have?

DEAN RUSK: I don't know what it was. But it was something that limited the power of his voice. He had it all of his life. It wasn't cancer or anything because he wouldn't have survived as he did. But he just couldn't--he was a very quiet-spoken person.

SCHOENBAUM: Then he got a job at the post office in Atlanta and moved to Atlanta?

DEAN RUSK: Yes, that little forty-acre farm in Cherokee County was a man-killing place to make a living on. He had an annual cash turnover of maybe a hundred dollars a year: maybe a few bales of cotton, eggs sold to the country store, and a few things like that.

SCHOENBAUM: Was there a market in Cherokee County where you went to market?

DEAN RUSK: There was a country store about three miles away on the little river which is still there and run by the same family. And then we went either to Roswell or to Woodstock for our shopping, usually trading. You would take something in and trade it for salt and sugar and things that you needed. We grew our own food on that little farm: a few hogs, chickens, a cow, one horse. And we, in fact, grew a fair amount of our own clothing or used flour sacks out of which my mother made underwear and things like that.

SCHOENBAUM: Did she spin? Did she take the cotton and spin the cotton?

DEAN RUSK: She did a lot of quilting. There was some of that but not a great deal. You could buy yard goods in those days quite inexpensively at Roswell or Woodstock.

SCHOENBAUM: Were shoes homemade at that time or were they made by a cobbler in town?

DEAN RUSK: Well, we were barefooted when the weather permitted it. But father always cut our own hair and cobbled our shoes. Of course, as the third son I got hand-me-downs, almost never got anything new. But my father himself built the little house in which I was born with his own hands. I have a picture of it: a two-bedroom house with a kitchen/dining room area in it, wooden clapboards; one of the first houses in that area to have had glass windows. Most of the others simply had shutters. But that life was very hard on my mother. She was in poor health a good deal of the time because she was working so hard and doing so many different things. So about 1912-13 he came to Atlanta and got a job in the post office on the last day before he would have become too old to go to work for the post office.

SCHOENBAUM: What did he do for the post office?

DEAN RUSK: First, he was a mail carrier. For years he carried mail on foot, walking sixteen miles a day, covering the same route twice a day. And I have many memories of him coming home and putting his feet in a big tub of water to soak them out after a sixteen-mile march with a load on his back. Then he moved from letter carrying to a clerk's job in the post office: first there in West End where we lived and then over the Inman Park area, little Five Points in Atlanta. From West End, as my older brother Parks began to earn more, my brother built a little place out on Hudson Drive, off Highland Avenue, and we moved there most of the time that I was in high school. Then my father built a house on Morningside Drive which is still standing, in which my

older sister lived almost until her death. It was one of the first houses to be built in the Morningside area, which is now fully built up. But in those days there were only two or three houses out there. And so I graduated from high school while we were living in Morningside Park. My parents wanted me to have a new suit to graduate from high school in, but when you move from the knickerbocker boy's style into the long trouser men's style, the prices jumped considerably. And so the new suit they bought me was one of the old knickerbocker style suits. So I was the only boy in class who graduated in a knickerbocker suit. We read everything that came to hand. My father had a few books and we devoured things like the *Farmer's Almanac*, and various weekly publications, and Sears Roebuck catalogue, and of course, the *Bible*. We studied the Bible intensively.

SCHOENBAUM: Did you have readings out loud of the *Bible*? You speak in a distinctive speaking style that very flows very well. You know how to use words. Did that come from reading the Bible? So many people did learn from that. Was it a King James Version?

DEAN RUSK: You see, on Sundays we were not permitted to play games like "cowboys and Indians," "cops and robbers," things like that. About the only thing we could do on Sunday would be to go for walks or to memorize the Bible, and I memorized a lot of the Bible in those days. And I got some--they used to call them pearls. The church would give you a little pearl for various pieces of the Bible which you had memorized. And I had a long chain of pearls for things that I had memorized: excerpts from the New Testament such as the thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians, and several of the psalms, things like that. But I have read the Bible through several times in my life. But then we had a lucky break. When we moved to West End in 1912 or '13, the Joel Chandler Harris Library was two blocks away. That was a children's library, the Uncle Remus/Joel Chandler Harris. But they had a lot of other books for children and we just absorbed all sorts of things.

SCHOENBAUM: Do you remember what your favorite books were specifically or what heroes you had in those days? Who you admired? What authors you admired?

DEAN RUSK: As kids we were interested in the adventure stories for kids, like the Tom Swift books, and the Swiss Family Robinson, Robinson Crusoe, the Rover Boys, and things like that. But there was also some other serious reading.

Alongside of that was, again, a lucky break in elementary school. Lee Street School, which I attended, was the teacher training school for elementary teachers in the Atlanta School System. So, we not only had a select group of classroom teachers regularly assigned but they had fifteen to twenty of these teacher candidates around at all times to help out in a classroom with projects and things of that sort. Then, in retrospect, one of the best breaks I had was in the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh grades each year we had a Carpenter's Geographic Reader. Each volume concentrated on a particular area of the world. One would be on Latin America; one would be on Asia; one would be on Europe; one would be on whatever it was. And our projects and activities were built around that particular theme for that year. So at that early stage we learned a lot about the rest of the world.

SCHOENBAUM: That was the time of World War I. Were you acutely aware or did that all seem far away? I suppose Washington--far away.

DEAN RUSK: Well, aware of it to a degree because a good many of our relatives had gone off to the war, and we were interested in that part of it. And also nearby where we lived in West End was the old huge [Asa G.] Candler warehouse which had become a war supply storage area, and they brought German prisoners of war in there to labor in this big warehouse.

SCHOENBAUM: Did you meet any of them?

DEAN RUSK: Sure. I would go down and stare through the fence. One or two of them came to our home once for a meal. We were near Ft. McPherson, and I spent some time near Ft. McPherson as a kid watching them drill and so forth.

SCHOENBAUM: What were these German prisoners doing? Were they just doing laboring jobs?

DEAN RUSK: Doing labor around the warehouse.

SCHOENBAUM: Were they enclosed or kept? As prisoners they were allowed to--

DEAN RUSK: They were enclosed behind a big fence and there were a handful of guards, but there was no problem with them.

SCHOENBAUM: How did you happen to invite them to your home for a meal?

DEAN RUSK: Struck up a conversation with them. I think the real formative years for me were there in West End, circumstances that greatly stimulated my imagination. For example, we were half a block away from Old No. 7 Firehouse, of the Atlanta Fire Department. And when we first moved there these fire trucks were pulled by horses, and it was fascinating to go down there. I spent a lot of time around the firehouse watching them train the horses and see the automatic way they got their harness on in case of a call. And the boiler which ran the pump to pump the water was simply a big furnace standing upright on a cart drawn by horses. And we could see the firemen stoking that furnace on the way to a fire. And at night it was a very spectacular sight.

We also lived right alongside of the Central of Georgia Railroad, the main line between Atlanta and Macon. And that was a source of a lot of interest, because a half a block in the other direction was a railroad switching tower. And we could go up there and sit around watching the man pull his levers and route the trains. We learned how to anticipate how far away the train was by sticking our ear on the railroad track and listening for the sounds. Just after World War II there was a very severe coal shortage. It was very difficult for poor people to pay the prices of coal. So we learned when the coal trains came through that if we kids, we were very small at that time, got out and threw rocks at the men on the train, they would throw coal back at us. So we would gather a bucket full of coal that way. The cop on the beat would normally be sitting down at the firehouse chewing the fat with the firemen, and he would watch us and laugh because he knew we were not trying to hit anybody. We were just trying to pick up some coal.

Then right cross the railroad track, almost literally a stone's throw away, there was a huge ice manufacturing plant. And we went over there a lot, sat on the rafters sucking ice while we watched them make these huge blocks of ice. Of course, I delivered ice to a lot of people, when I was young, in my little red wagon. We had iceboxes in those days instead of mechanical refrigerators, and they had to be stoked with ice.

SCHOENBAUM: You mention the firehouse, the icemaking plant, and the railroad. What did they stimulate in your imagination?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I think it sort of expanded the range of your imagination. Next door to the fire plant [sic], there was a Karo syrup factory. We would go in there and suck on pieces of sugar cane and watch them boil up the Karo syrup. Behind these two plants was an industrial dump, and we could go over there and find the most amazing things which we could make things out of: out of the things that were thrown away in that industrial dump. Then when I was about seven or eight years old, I went to work for a little grocery store just across the railroad tracks, run by a man named [Claude] Leatherwood. My job was to go out and take orders from his customers and then come back and we would fill them, and I would go back and deliver them in my little red wagon. That little store served both the poor whites and the poor blacks. I spent a lot of time in the miserably-housed black community just across the railroad track from me.

SCHOENBAUM: Was that your first contact with black people? You said there were no blacks in Cherokee County.

DEAN RUSK: Yes, that's right.

SCHOENBAUM: You got to know of some them as people?

DEAN RUSK: Yes. When we were small it was rather amusing: twenty-nine days out of the month we would play together as friends. But then about once a month we would choose up sides for "cops and robbers" or "cowboys and Indians." And of course they were always the Indians and they were always the robbers. It was natural to select on a racial basis when you divide up like that because you could identify who was on which side. And we progressed from flips, slingshots, to bows and arrows, finally to BB guns. I remember once going home with a homemade spear about four feet long in the lobe of one of my ears to have my mother take it out. It's lucky we survived all of that. But then when we started to high school, high schools were segregated and we more or less lost contact.

SCHOENBAUM: The Lee Street School was also segregated?

DEAN RUSK: That's right. But in the neighborhood at home we saw a lot of the blacks.

SCHOENBAUM: In high school you had a remarkable teacher, Preston [H.] Epps. What did he look like then, and why did he--

DEAN RUSK: Well, in those days, the high schools in Atlanta were differentiated. Boys High School and Girls' High School were the college preparatory schools. Then they had Tech High or

Commercial High for those who weren't planning really to go on to college. So Boys High School in those days was very much like the Boston Latin School. It had a very rigorous program of English and Latin, Greek, mathematics, science, and so forth. And I was very fortunate to have been in a high school like that because when they later made all of the high schools all purpose, I think they lost a good deal of the cutting edge of the rigorous discipline they had at Boys High School.

SCHOEBAUM: What kind of discipline? For instance, I went to a high school where the priests administered corporal punishment. They used to hit us over the chest.

DEAN RUSK: Oh, there was corporal punishment in those days. As a matter of fact, my mathematics teacher in high school, O. K. [Othma K.] David, had a paddle in his classroom. And if somebody goofed up, didn't do his homework or failed a question, he would put it to the class to vote, thumbs up or thumbs down, whether that guy should get an application of that paddle which was called Sternonium. Usually, most of the thumbs went down, so we had some good whacks across the bottom. Then in high school from the very first I was in ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps], beginning at the age of twelve. ROTC met at 7:30 in the morning. In those days everybody took ROTC unless they had a doctor's excuse. It was just taken for granted that everybody would take ROTC.

SCHOENBAUM: You mentioned a Sergeant Short who was a remarkable person. Was he a classmate or--

DEAN RUSK: No.

SCHOENBAUM: Why was he remarkable?

DEAN RUSK: Well, he was detailed to be the principal regular army instructor at the Boys High ROTC, and he was very good. There was a major in charge of all the high schools in the area and Sergeant worked under him, but he got us to where we could drill very effectively, and we did some marksmanship, and we did a few other things like that: much too much attention paid to drill, as such, in those days. I became the commandant of the high school ROTC when I was a senior at the Boys High School. Once a year they would have a parade at Piedmont Park of all the ROTC units in all of the high schools in Atlanta and Fulton County. It was a very big affair, brigade, strength. And I was designated to be the cadet commander of that brigade exercise in my senior year. It was there that I had my first brush with the press. At one point in the ceremony the cadet commanders were to come forward and present flowers to their respective sponsors, their girlfriends whom they had designated as sponsors. Well, when I moved forward to present the flowers to my sponsor, the *Atlanta Journal* and a photographer came in and wanted to substitute Miss Atlanta for my girl and let Miss Atlanta receive the flowers, you see. And I refused right there in front of all this big crowd. Miss Atlanta was Estelle Bradley who went on from there to do a little acting in Hollywood afterwards.

SCHOENBAUM: Why did you refuse?

DEAN RUSK: Well, it was my girl, my sponsor, and I wasn't going to have it. Also I was fortunate in my last year in high school to get to be the school page editor for the *Atlanta Journal*. Each week they would run a full page of letters from school kids all over the city. Each class would designate its correspondent, and they would write in. And it would be my job to go down to the Journal and sort through those, paste them together, and make up the full page for the *Journal*. And I got forty dollars a month for that, which was big money in those days. And I sat there in the Journal editorial room just right under the rail of the City Editor, Harlee [W.] Branch [Jr.] and I knew most of the named writers of Atlanta in those days working there on the *Journal* and *Constitution*.

SCHOENBAUM: That didn't stimulate you to a career in journalism? What did you want to do with your life at that time?

DEAN RUSK: Up through high school I was giving some thought to the Presbyterian ministry. We had been very active in the church when I was growing up. On Sundays we went to Sunday School, morning service, then young people's organization late in the afternoon, called Christian Endeavor, and then Sunday evening service. So we spent most of Sunday at church. And I had been very active in the young people's organization called Christian Endeavor. As a matter of fact, when I was about twelve, I think, I was president of the state Christian Endeavor, the Junior Christian Endeavor. I traveled around different towns for meetings in an old T-Model Ford. I drove it myself. They didn't have driving licenses in those days.

SCHOENBAUM: So, religion meant quite a bit to you.

DEAN RUSK: Religion was a considerable part of our lives when we were growing up. For example, on Sundays we were not permitted to read "funny papers." We had to put them aside and wait 'til Monday to look at them.

SCHOENBAUM: This is the influence of your parents?

DEAN RUSK: Yeah. No cards in our house.

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BEGINNING OF SIDE 2

SCHOENBAUM: When you were in high school did you go on trips to Washington or--?

DEAN RUSK: Not outside of Georgia. Families in those days visited each other a great deal. So each summer I would always visit on the farms in Cherokee County with relatives and also in Rockdale County where my mother had grown up. And I always thoroughly enjoyed that time on the farm.

SCHOENBAUM: So, your boyhood was primarily concerned with family and friends and that particular geographical area, that very tight-knit circle?

DEAN RUSK: Well, all of us first cousins in my generation got to know each other very well. We spent time with each other. My children don't know their first cousins. Things have changed considerably on that-- don't really know them.

SCHOENBAUM: What is your impression of your father now? What was your impression then and what is your impression now of your father? He died during the Second World War when you were in India. [Sigmund] Freud says that the most traumatic time for any man is the death of his father. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

DEAN RUSK: Well, my father was a very intelligent, quiet kind of person. He was devoted to family. He married an educated woman, relatively educated. My mother had gone to, I think it was a state Normal school at Milledgeville for a time, and became a school teacher. So she was also very much interested in reading. As a matter of fact, I learned to read and write at home before I started school, when I was too young to go to school. When I entered Lee Street School I took an exam from a teacher and started in the second grade rather than in the first grade. I remember on this exam the only question I missed was when she asked me to spell "girl" and I spelled it "gal." I remember now her smiling. When I started to school at Lee Street School, we had an experimental open air school out in the backyard of the school. That was a square building divided into four schoolrooms, divided by inner walls. But the outer walls were all open to the weather.

SCHOENBAUM: On four sides?

DEAN RUSK: Yeah. Well, you had two inner walls because they faced the other classrooms. Then you had the two outer walls. We were in those outdoor school throughout the year, including the bitter cold winter. We had a big curtain we could draw up in case of rain. And in cold weather they provided big woolen bags that we could step into and pull up around our waists. And in really cold weather we would heat some bricks at home and bring them wrapped up and put them in the bottom of the bag to keep our feet warm. Then about every couple of hours the class would pause and have cocoa--the teacher would serve hot cocoa. Well, we all loved it. I went through three years of that. I remember on one occasion going down with two or three others to testify before the Atlanta Board of Education in behalf of continuing this outdoor school. But they finally closed it up. I think it was too hard on the teachers. But I had some marvelous classroom teachers in elementary school and some fine teachers in high school.

SCHOENBAUM: Was Epps the finest?

DEAN RUSK: Well, he was the vice-principal and taught, among other things, Greek. And I was in his Greek class for three or four years. And he just brought our minds alive by getting us into these great questions and great ideas that the ancient Greeks had come up with.

SCHOENBAUM: You were reading the original Greek? Anaxagoras?

DEAN RUSK: Sure, sure. The Anaxagoras and Plato and Homer. I remember one year in his Greek class, that was made up of teenage, normal fellows, went out to his house once a week to read the Odyssey because in class we only had time for the Iliad. And Mrs. [Preston] Epps would serve cookies and hot chocolate. He was an inspiring teacher. He later, after he finished his Ph.D. at Chicago, began teaching and wound up as the Kenan Professor of Classics at the University of North Carolina. He died only a year ago.

SCHOENBAUM: His second wife [Miriam Epps] is apparently still living in Chapel Hill?

DEAN RUSK: Yes, and I kept in touch with him throughout his life by visits and correspondence. I always looked upon him as being one of the great men in my life.

SCHOENBAUM: Can you define why he was an inspiration at that time in your life in a particular way, other than he was an inspiration and a good teacher? Is there any specific thing that stands out in your mind? Any ideas?

DEAN RUSK: Well, when we would read dialogues of Plato or things of that sort we would come across these aphorisms or ideas and sayings. And he would pause and we would talk about those ideas and what they meant in terms of what life is all about and so forth.

SCHOENBAUM: So his technique was not only to teach the language but also the ideas?

DEAN RUSK: That's right. But in the process we learned the language. I was a sort of freak when I got to Oxford as far as American Rhodes Scholars are concerned because I arrived over there with eight years of Latin, and seven years of Greek, and that was very unusual for Americans over there at that time. And I found myself fitting in easily into the classical schooling of these English boys who went to Oxford from their public schools.

SCHOENBAUM: In high school, what else did you take besides Greek and Latin? You took mathematics?

DEAN RUSK: English. And we also emphasized spelling, which to this day I am almost a nut about, because I do think that people ought to be able to spell, particularly professional people. But we used to have regular classes in spelling. We'd have spelling bees and things of that sort. It is sort of amusing though, my spelling teacher one year was a big fellow called [William E.] Bill Fincher, who actually had been an All American football player at Georgia Tech. In those days every coach had to teach something, so they put him to teaching spelling. Well he didn't know how to spell, but he could at least follow the letters with his finger in the spelling book. And so we learned to spell. He was fascinating for us boys because he had one glass eye, and once in a while he would take that eye out right there in class and polish it off and put it back in. We thought this was something. The principal of Boys High School was [Herbert] H.O. Smith, one of the truly great educators of all time. He had been a Harvard man and he really insisted upon good performance. He just wouldn't tolerate sloppiness and laziness and things like that. We had a pretty well-disciplined high school experience.

SCHOENBAUM: When you graduated you went to work for Augustus [M.] Roan in the law office.

DEAN RUSK: Yes, he was a young lawyer with a one-man law office. But he also did a good many other things like producing the Georgia Tech football program and catalogues for conventions of district nurses and things like that. So much of my work had to do with selling advertisements in these things and then getting the copy and collecting and things like that.

SCHOENBAUM: So, you didn't do legal work: searching titles and things like that?

DEAN RUSK: No, no, because he didn't have much legal work. He later became a judge. The idea was that I was going to work a couple of years and save up some money to go to college on. But I didn't make enough beyond what I had to spend to save up very much. So that part of it didn't work out very well. But it was a very useful experience. Then one other thing which turned out to be quite important: In high school I had gone out for basketball and got cut from the squad on the first day. Well, that sort of made me mad, so during those two years I played a lot of basketball at the YMCA there on Lucky Street in Atlanta, and we had a Sunday School league, and I was on the West End team. Learning that basketball turned out to be important to me later on because I played four years of basketball on the varsity team at Davidson, and that had something to do with my qualifying for a Rhodes scholarship.

SCHOENBAUM: You qualified for the Rhodes on the basis of primarily your basketball emphasis?

DEAN RUSK: No, primarily on the basis of my grades.

SCHOENBAUM: Oh, right. But Rhodes is a combination of grades--

DEAN RUSK: You're supposed to have a little demonstrated interest in athletics and sports and that sort of thing.

SCHOENBAUM: Yeah, athletic skills, and the basketball was the sport.

DEAN RUSK: That was the sport that helped at that particular point.

SCHOENBAUM: Could we turn to Davidson? I know Davidson quite well. I know my old dean, Dixon Phillips, is on the board there. You probably know him.

DEAN RUSK: Oh, I know Dixon Phillips.

SCHOENBAUM: He's a judge and he's a good friend of mine.

DEAN RUSK: Yeah. He used to be dean at Chapel Hill.

SCHOENBAUM: Yeah. And he and I are still good friends. So I know Davidson quite well. Is Davidson physically the same as when you went there? Does it look much the same?

DEAN RUSK: Oh, it has been much developed in terms of physical facilities. The Presbyterian Church sets a very high standard for education. So this was a pretty strong liberal arts school, much stronger today than it was then; but it was good then, relatively speaking. I arrived at Davidson College with perhaps a hundred dollars, and I had to work like the dickens to get my way through and borrowed some money in the process.

SCHOENBAUM: You said in earlier tapes that right from the time you entered you had your eyes set on a Rhodes Scholarship. That's kind of unusual that you would point toward it. Did you consciously think about it?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I had this thirst for education that had come out of my family, and I had in mind education beyond Davidson at some point. I didn't know how I was going to do it unless I got a scholarship and there were the Rhodes Scholarships. So I had that in mind all along. My German professor at Davidson, Guy Vowles, himself had been a Rhodes Scholar back at the beginning of the century: one of the earliest of the Rhodes Scholars. And he became my advisor and counselor on this whole process. It turned out that he was on the State Selection Committee when I came before the State Selection Committee. I did various things to work my way through college. I waited on tables. I was fortunate in that the year I arrived at Davidson the student bookkeeper and assistant teller in the little bank in our village was graduating, so somehow I got that job and held it for four years. And that experience in that little bank was a very good experience.

SCHOENBAUM: What did you do specifically in the bank?

DEAN RUSK: I was the bookkeeper, in terms of running the posting machine, and had to balance the books every day. And then I was an assistant teller and would fill in at the teller's window.

SCHOENBAUM: You dealt with the public when they came to make deposits?

DEAN RUSK: Yes, right.

SCHOENBAUM: How long did you work there? Four years?

DEAN RUSK: Right. Four years.

SCHOENBAUM: What hours? How many hours a week?

DEAN RUSK: I would work from about two in the afternoon until the books balanced, and then on Saturdays. In the summertime I would work there more or less full time.

SCHOENBAUM: So your summers were spent at Davidson too.

DEAN RUSK: At Davidson, although a couple of summers I worked in a big bank in Greensboro, North Carolina.

SCHOENBAUM: What bank there?

DEAN RUSK: I forget the name of it: one of those banks that went broke during the Depression.

SCHOENBAUM: Where did you live when you were at Davidson? In a dormitory?

DEAN RUSK: Yes.

SCHOENBAUM: Is it still there?

DEAN RUSK: The old Georgia dormitory has been torn down now and, I think, they have a new one there. My senior year I lived in an old building which had one living apartment in it. It was the armory for the ROTC people. I lived out there in that building for one year, no two years maybe. Of course, I was very active in ROTC at Davidson as well. I was the Cadet Commander my senior year.

SCHOENBAUM: So at Davidson you continued Greek and Latin.

DEAN RUSK: Yes, but I found at Davidson I could pretty much coast along on my high school Greek and Latin because we were at least the equivalent of what they were teaching at Davidson. So that was a snap for me. I took Greek under the same professor with whom my father took Greek when he was there. This was a very old fellow named [C.R.] Harding. We had good professors in political science, history, and English. I think English is a very important thing for people to study, develop one's writing ability, and again, spelling.

SCHOENBAUM: So, that was from 1927 to 1931. Were you aware of--were you a baseball fan, for instance, in the heyday of the Yankees?

DEAN RUSK: I didn't become a baseball fan until we lived in New York when I was at the [John Davison] Rockefeller Foundation. I wasn't much of a fan before that as far as the major league sports were concerned. But my wife Virginia and I have always been automatic "hometown" fans. When we lived in Washington we'd root for the Washington Senators and that didn't do us any good. They were pretty poor. But, I still have a lifetime gold pass to Yankee Stadium. I have only used it once, I think, in my life. I don't know whether it still applies to the new Yankee stadium. This was for the old one. I played some tennis at Davidson, but I didn't make the team. We had a good many missionary sons at Davidson, living in places like China and Japan and so forth. They played a lot of tennis, so we had a pretty good tennis team. I didn't qualify for that.

SCHOENBAUM: Were you aware of the economic decline? Was that a big part of your life, or was that pretty much remote from--

DEAN RUSK: Well, it didn't affect us in the family all that much because we didn't have any resources to lose. I mean, there was no place to fall as far as we were concerned. One curious

thing: my father when he was a mail carrier, for some reason which I still don't understand, decided to buy some plots of land at Panama City, Florida. And he would pay about five dollars a month for this acreage. And many years later my mother, after his death, was able to sell those plots of land for a substantial amount of money. Turned out to be a boom. But imagine my father, with the small income he was on, buying some plots of land in Florida.

SCHOENBAUM: When you were at Davidson did you seek out certain subjects, certain professors?

DEAN RUSK: Well, it was at Davidson that I, in effect, abandoned the idea of going into the ministry. I became very much involved in political science, international law. We had a lawyer on the faculty who taught international law, government, politics, things of that sort.

SCHOENBAUM: You said you wanted at that time to be a professor.

DEAN RUSK: I began to think about college teaching as a career, and that lasted until I was called to active duty in 1940 by the army. When I studied law at Berkeley my hope then was to be a college or university professor in international law. And after a thirty year detour, I finally made it. But, Davidson was a good experience. We were a student body of about six hundred in those days, so you knew everybody. You knew everybody in your class. Those friendships continued over the years. At our fiftieth reunion we had about fifty of our class back for the fiftieth, which is quite good.

SCHOENBAUM: In your ROTC at Davidson, was that mainly drill or did that involve--

DEAN RUSK: We had a greater variety of things in ROTC in college than we had in high school. In between our junior and senior years we went off to summer camp.

SCHOENBAUM: Where did you go for summer camp?

DEAN RUSK: Anniston, Alabama. The head of ROTC at Davidson through much of my time was a wonderful army officer, Colonel William R. Scott, who turned out just to be too old to have a major part in World War II. But he was handsome, attractive, stern sense of discipline, good sense of humor, and we all adored him. He was a really fine officer and served Davidson very well. I used to visit him in Washington when I was Secretary of State when he was in a rest home of some sort.

SCHOENBAUM: In those days, one didn't think of the military as a career as one does today?

DEAN RUSK: Not really. When you left Davidson you knew that you would have a commission and that you would be in the reserves, but I never gave any serious attention to a full-time military career. Although I did have all through Davidson a strong interest both in international affairs and in the Army. That interest continued. I just barely graduated from Davidson in one sense because I was so busy I neglected my physics experiments. For about four days before my graduation I had to spend pretty much almost twenty-four hours a day making up

all these physics experiments so I could get my physics grade and graduate. But in the process, I managed to make Phi Beta Kappa.

SCHOENBAUM: What was it like growing up in the South? Were you conscious of the South as a separate geographic region and somehow different--different culture, as many people in the North think of it?

DEAN RUSK: When I was very small, we were very much aware of the impact of the Civil War, and particularly the Reconstruction days. There was still a good deal of regional bitterness about that experience and black Republicans. If you said Republicans in those days you'd say black Republicans. And there was a good deal of prejudice toward Catholics, Jews, blacks, foreigners of any kind. In closely-knit communities like that, there was a very strong sense of "we" and "they." When I was growing up in Cherokee County anybody from across the river was a foreigner.

SCHOENBAUM: It's really unusual that you seem to have moved pretty freely away from any sense of provincialism very early in your life.

DEAN RUSK: Well, I had had that earlier experience with the black people living across the railroad from roe when I was a kid, so I didn't have strong feelings of a racial sort at any time. Of course Davidson, in those days, was segregated. But then when you got to Oxford you found people there from every race and country in the world. I have never been among those Southerners who thinks that he understands the black. I had a long talk with Ralph [Johnson] Bunche about this once, on the business that a black in America lived in two worlds: the world in which there are white people and the world in which the blacks are all by themselves. And these are just two different worlds. And the white man finds it very difficult to penetrate that other community where the blacks are by themselves. I got some taste of that when I was delivery boy for this little grocery store. I would go into the black neighborhood to take their orders and deliver the goods. And they would be sitting on the porch talking, and sometimes they would simply ask me to sit on the steps and wait a few minutes. And I could hear the kind of talk they had among themselves, and I came to sense pretty early that the blacks among themselves are very different people than when there are white people present because they didn't look upon me as anything. I was just the delivery boy, so I was able to listen in on some of this talk. But I think it was the experience at Oxford and in Europe that erased any possible remnants of any feelings about race in my experience.

SCHOENBAUM: In those days there was not any trace of a movement toward integration, was there, in the late twenties in Georgia?

DEAN RUSK: Not really.

SCHOENBAUM: Even the churches?

DEAN RUSK: No, the churches were segregated.

SCHOENBAUM: Did it ever cross your mind that the changes that we have today would ever occur? Did it ever cross your mind at that time that these changes would occur?

DEAN RUSK: Well, I sometimes thought that it was too bad that the [Oliver] Brown against Board of Education decision did not come in 1945 rather than in 1954, because at the end of World War II millions of Americans were coming home from experiences in which they were working and fighting alongside of people of all races. In India, for example, we were completely dependent upon the Indians for our very survival out there as a military organization. And had the Brown decision come at that point, I think many more people would have accepted it readily. But by 1954 a lot of these people had come home to the South and had gotten reacculturated into the old attitudes, so it became difficult in some places.

SCHOENBAUM: But at that time, in the twenties, this was kind of always the way it had been and always the way it would be.

DEAN RUSK: Just taken for granted. We didn't even play inter- high school sports with black schools or in elementary school. We played volleyball against other schools, but we never played against black volleyball teams.

SCHOENBAUM: Was there a sense of "we" and "they" against the North too? I suppose there was among the general--

DEAN RUSK: To a degree. There was still, again, the hangover from the Reconstruction days. It is too bad that [Abraham] Lincoln and [Robert Edward] Lee did not live longer to work together for the reconciliation of North and South and avoid much of the bitterness of Reconstruction because a lot of the things that happened during Reconstruction, military government in effect, got tangled up in the racial issue and that delayed the time when these racial problems were subject to easy resolve.

SCHOENBAUM: You don't subscribe to the theory that Reconstruction was actually a beneficial time to the Civil Rights Acts in 1970's at that period of time?

DEAN RUSK: No, those are just a bunch of damn Yankees imposing their views on us. But indeed, it was that radical Yankee group in the Congress that was largely responsible for the character of Reconstruction. Had Lincoln lived, I think that would have been different. No, you see, our theory growing up was that Robert E. Lee and his men got so tired winning battles they finally lost the war. We were very proud of Robert E. Lee as a general and as a tactician. He was one of my early heroes, and still is to a considerable degree. He and George [Catlett] Marshall have so many things in common.

SCHOENBAUM: Was Lincoln a hero of yours growing up?

DEAN RUSK: No. Robert E. Lee was much more the hero in those days. Some time ago I somehow got hold of the senior oration which my father made at Davidson, and I was very struck with the fact that his senior oration was very much along the lines of Henry [Woodfin]

Grady's famous speech on the reconciliation of North and South. He was a very forward looking man, my father.

SCHOENBAUM: Sounds like your father had every right to be more of a leader in the community than perhaps he was. I don't mean that he wasn't a man of substance, but it sounds like his career was very much tilted by his throat problems, and that he had the capacity to be much of a leading political figure or--

DEAN RUSK: Well, my grandfather was a leading political figure in the community. He was, although not a lawyer, the Justice of the Peace for that area. And when two neighbors had a dispute, he would meet with them out under an oak tree somewhere and they would settle it. Very rarely did problems in our neighborhood go down to the County Courthouse at Canton. My grandfather was a colonel in the Confederate Army, I think largely because when he went to join the Confederate forces he took a hundred men with him.

SCHOENBAUM: Do you know where he fought? Do you know any of the details about his--he fought in the East, not in the West? In Virginia?

DEAN RUSK: That's right. Yeah. I just don't know anything about his experience. There might be some military rolls over in the archives in Atlanta showing what units he was with. We never looked into that. My grandfather [David Felix Clotfelter] on my mother's side was also in the Confederate Army as a bugler. He died before I was born, but he carried a dum dum bullet with him the rest of his life. And after my own experience in the army with buglers, I sometimes wonder if one of his own men did put that dum dum in him.

END OF SIDE 2