

William Jefferson Clinton History Project

Interview with

Floris Tatom
Lewisville, Arkansas
16 August 2002

Interviewer: Michael Pierce

Michael Pierce: This is Michael Pierce. It is August 16, 2002. I am in Lewisville, Arkansas. I am here to interview Floris Tatom. T-A-T-O-M? Oh, I'm sorry. That's probably why the letter got waylaid. I'm here for the Clinton History Project. My first question is, when and where were you born?

Floris Tatom: I was born December 7, 1922, in the Shiloh-Methodist community in southwest Nevada County, Arkansas.

MP: Who were your parents?

FT: Lloyd and Minnie Cassidy Downs.

MP: Your grandmother's name?

FT: Sarah Louisa Russell Cassidy.

MP: Okay. That would make you first cousins with Virginia Cassidy?

FT: That's right.

MP: I'd like to ask you about your grandmother, Sarah Louisa Cassidy. Can you tell us anything about her?

FT: She was born in Alabama. She came to Nevada County with her parents. She was married to James Monroe Cassidy in 1882, and settled in Nevada County in

the New Hope Community in southwest Nevada County. It would be east of Hope, Arkansas, and west of Bodcaw.

MP: What was she like?

FT: She was very small and gentle. She was easy to get along with. She was appreciative of her family, which consisted of my parents and eight siblings in the family. Those were her grandchildren, and that was her family. To me, she was never unhappy—or she would never let us know she was unhappy. She had a lot of problems, and she had lost loved ones to grieve over, but she didn't burden us with that.

MP: Could you tell us about her husband?

FT: James M. Cassidy. They were married before 1880, before the courthouse in Covington, Alabama burned, so we do not know the exact date. They came to Arkansas with her parents, William James Russell, Sr., and her brothers and sisters. All of the Russell family came with her parents to Nevada County but one, and his name was John Simon. He had married a Petrie in Alabama, and they did not come to Arkansas.

MP: Where did James M. and Sarah Louisa live? Do you know where their homestead was?

FT: Do you mean in Arkansas?

MP: Yes.

FT: I think they moved to the New Hope community when they got here, and that was close to where all the Russells lived.

MP: Were all the children born in Arkansas?

FT: All five children were born in Arkansas.

MP: The youngest was Eldridge?

FT: James Eldridge Cassidy.

MP: Where did your mother fit in?

FT: My mother was the third. No, fourth. Uncle Eldridge was the fifth.

MP: Your grandfather died when?

FT: 1906.

MP: 1906. Can you tell us the circumstances of his death?

FT: He had left Hope, Arkansas, on the train with a neighbor. They had moved across Clear Creek south of the New Hope community, called Shiloh-Methodist community. He bought a house and 220 acres of land. That's James M. and Sarah Louisa. They were living there with their five children. In 1905, my mother married. She was the first to get married. In 1906, in November, he left Hope, Arkansas, riding a train with his neighbor, Jeff Beasley, who was formerly from Red Level, Alabama—Covington County. They went to visit relatives of both families. His mother was still living. There were twelve Cassidys born to Josephine and George Washington Cassidy. The father had died, and two sisters and one brother had died. Three Cassidys moved and came to Arkansas—one sister and another brother, Noah. His mother was sick, and they went to see relatives. When he got there, he was ill, and had developed pneumonia. He was carried to Sarah Louisa's brother's widow's home there in Red Level—Matilda Russell. He died soon after. A Dr. Terry was the doctor who pronounced him dead. He was buried in Red Level Fairmont Cemetery, in the old, old part. The

Fairmont Church and the Fairmont Cemetery are two years younger than the state of Alabama. It's an historic town.

MP: How did Sarah Louisa—"Lou" as she was known, survive after her husband died?

FT: They had the farm. As far as I know, she still had two sons and a daughter. Three sons, with Uncle Eldridge, but he was young, very young, and a daughter still living at home. My mother and father had moved across the county road into a smaller house. In 1907, Verner Lou Cassidy married Melvin Jones and moved to Hope.

MP: And that was . . .

FT: The other daughter.

MP: Your aunt.

FT: Yes. Then, her son, Colonel Zachariah Cassidy, visited relatives in Red Level, Alabama. He married and moved in 1908 to Red Level. That left Oscar and Uncle Eldridge with my grandmother. The house was sold in 1908, and they moved to a smaller house nearer the Methodist church in Shiloh community. That was 1910.

MP: Were they Methodists?

FT: No. This community once had a Baptist church there, but it had disbanded. There was only a Methodist church there. Across the creek where they first settled, the first church that they belonged to was the Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Church. The Russell—their families and others established it.

MP: Around this time, for the next twenty-five or thirty years, how did Sarah Louisa survive without any income?

FT: Oscar, the other son, married in 1912. She and Uncle Eldridge moved in with her brother, William “Bill” Russell, Jr. That was up in the New Hope community, near this church and family cemetery—old Ebenezer. She lived there with them. Uncle Eldridge, in 1920, was living with a relative, Isaiah Russell. In 1922, he married Edith Grissom. Then my grandmother moved backed to Shiloh with her daughter, the one who was living, Minnie Cassidy Downs and her husband Lloyd Downs, and her nine grandchildren.

MP: That would be you.

FT: That would be me.

MP: You were one of the nine grandchildren. She lived with you for about twenty-five years?

FT: That’s right. She passed away in 1945. But she visited often with her Russell family. She’d go back to the Fifth Sunday meetings at the Primitive Baptist church. My parents were members of the Missionary Baptist church, they [unintelligible] and Bodcaw number one, at different times. She’d go back to visit Bill Russell, George Russell’s family, and their married children. She would visit quite a bit with them. They were very good to her. That was her family.

MP: What was her relationship with Eldridge like?

FT: They said she worshipped Uncle Eldridge, and babied him through the years. He was a loving person, Uncle Eldridge was. If you work family history, back in those days, you’ll know that if you run census, you’ll find a lot of men that lived with other families, working on the farms. He left her brother’s. When she moved back to our house, to the Downs’ family in the Shiloh community, he lived

closer to Bodcaw with this cousin. He'd be a first cousin, Isaiah Russell. He lived with him for a while until he married and moved to Hope.

MP: This is an odd question. You've done extensive research with census records and church records, but you've heard all of these stories most of your life? Is that true?

FT: What I know is mostly about what happened when my grandfather died in Alabama. Then I remember her living with us. There's not a time that I can remember when she didn't live in our house.

MP: Do you have any vivid memories of Eldridge?

FT: We didn't see Uncle Eldridge as much as we could have. He lived in Hope, and back then, transportation wasn't the best. [There were] nine children in our family, and Virginia was the only one. If we visited, they'd come to see us. Another thing—we'd see them during illness or funerals. Right now, it's not a long way to come from Hope to the Methodist community, but then it was. Then we moved on to Old Falcon further south.

MP: How long would it take, in the 1920s, to go from Hope to the old Methodist community? Do you have any idea?

FT: No. I'm not for sure about it.

MP: With a wagon, it would take a while.

FT: We didn't go to Hope in a wagon. I've heard them say they'd go to—living in south Lafayette County, people traveled to Camden. They'd go to Hope, too. When the railroads came through, they'd go to Stamps down in Lafayette County, shopping.

MP: Do you remember your first time going to Hope?

FT: No, I do not. I know we went to Hope. My older sister—one lived in Hope, and one lived in Patmos. I remember going to Uncle Eldridge's and Aunt Edith's when I was a teenager and visiting Virginia. Just for a visit. I was up there visiting relatives, but I was with her just for a day.

MP: What was Virginia like?

FT: Virginia was a very loving person, I thought, and very devoted to people. Anyone who spent all their working days being a nurse had to be good, and have a good relationship with people, especially sick people.

MP: You and Virginia are about the same age?

FT: I was born in 1922. I believe Virginia was born in 1923.

MP: In the early 1930s, 1940s, what was Hope like?

FT: Well, we lived in south Nevada County. In fact, it was closer for us to come to Stamps than to go to Hope. Hope was a thriving place. People, I believe, would go there to the hospital. Prescott was the county seat for Nevada County, but a lot of people went to the hospital in Hope for illness. They probably bought things. In 1905, this receipt I found in an old Bible—my grandmother had paid freight on some cookware from the Iron Mountain Railroad. That's in the museum there.

MP: On Hervey Street in Hope?

FT: The railroad museum.

MP: Oh, okay. That one.

FT: They had to go there for that, when they'd ordered something. Doing genealogy and having an antique shop, I found out that people were going through the

country selling glassware, and traveling photographers would make all these photographs for people in the country that you'll see.

MP: Like peddlers with wagons.

FT: Yes. They'd send the dishes back, the stoneware and Depression glass, in barrels. People would pay for them. They were very, very inexpensive. Dishes in barrels with shavings wrapped around them. That's what I've been told when I was buying antiques.

MP: When did you get married?

FT: 1945. In November, after my grandmother died that spring.

MP: Whom did you marry?

FT: Samuel Wade Tatom of Stamps.

MP: Where did you live after you got married?

FT: We lived in Stamps.

MP: You got married the year before Bill Clinton was born. Were you aware of his birth? Did you see Virginia?

FT: My grandmother died in the spring of 1945. Uncle Eldridge and Virginia came to our home in Prescott to visit my grandmother. My grandmother was very, very sick. Back then, you didn't go to the hospital unless you had surgery. The doctors came to your home. Virginia thought we—my mother and myself and other sisters—had taken such good care of my grandmother. She died in our home. Virginia had married then. Uncle Eldridge remarked to me how much he thought of her husband, Bill Blythe. Of course, he died. You know all about the accident and all. Bill was born later. I knew when Bill was born, but I didn't

keep up with the families as much, unless there would be sickness or funerals. Of course, my son Sammy is one month younger than Bill. Bill was born in August and Sammy in September.

MP: You only saw Virginia and Bill at funerals?

FT: Before I married, I was working at the hospital in Prescott, the Coronado Hospital. I believe it was Coronado. I get that mixed up with Julius Chester. That was in Hope, I believe.

MP: Yes.

FT: She was there working. She was married.

MP: She was working in Prescott?

FT: No, she wasn't working in Prescott. She was doing some private work, private nursing. I was with her some. At different times, we'd see her, as I said, during sickness or death. Other times, they would come to see us. I'd see them. We'd visit Uncle Eldridge, Wade and myself, several times in Hope before he moved to Hot Springs. But I didn't go to the grocery store, and I didn't see them that often because we were in a different location and we had our big family. We were just busy, I guess.

MP: Did you ever meet Roger Clinton?

FT: Yes, I've met Roger.

MP: What was he like?

FT: I don't know Roger that well. I've met him at different things since Bill was president.

MP: Oh, I'm sorry.

FT: You're talking about Sr.? No, I did not know Roger Clinton, Sr. Sorry. When we were in Arkansas Baptist Hospital—my sister was in an accident in Hope—we were there and Virginia found out that we were there, and she came down to see us. He was there, and he was critically ill. It may have been when he passed away. I'm talking about her husband, Roger. She came down. She found out that we were there with my sister.

MP: Did you talk to her about Roger?

FT: Well, no. We didn't talk about it. I did not know that Virginia had a hard life until I read her book because that was never discussed with us. We did go to see Uncle Eldridge. He was in Hot Springs. Wade and I carried my parents to a Hot Springs hospital, and Roger and Virginia were living together then. But we did not see him that day. Aunt Edith was there, and went with us to the hospital to see Uncle Eldridge.

MP: Can you describe Uncle Eldridge? What was his personality like?

FT: Very, very, very loving and very considerate.

MP: Can you think of any incidents or anecdotes that really demonstrate this?

MP: We just weren't around him that much. We didn't get to see enough of him. He just had his busy life, and we had ours. We didn't see him, and he didn't come. The Russells were the ones that my grandmother visited when she wasn't at our house. That was a lot to do with churches, going to church. The reason that she went to live with him was to help him with his three boys, and Uncle Eldridge was young. His wife had died, and the daughters had married. She went there for

a reason, to help him, and it helped him and it helped her, and Uncle Eldridge.

But, she didn't have to go because she had a home at our house.

MP: After you got married to Wade Tatom, he embarked on a political career?

FT: Yes. When we first got married, we had a large sawmill here in Stamps. We lived in Stamps. He ran the commissary. They had a big store there that had everything. That was after the war [World War II], when things were still scarce. Then he started working with operating engineers, union jobs. We moved around. Sammy, when he was in the third grade, went to three different schools because first, he [Wade] worked out here at the Arkansas Power and Light, then he was transferred when they built the field house in Fayetteville. I don't know if you remember or not, but it collapsed while they were first building it. Wade was with the operating engineers. The iron, somehow, didn't hold up. Then, we moved to Hamburg to work. I joined three PTA's [Parent/Teacher Association] that year! [Laughter] We decided that we were going to come back home, and that's when Wade got into politics. Well, he worked at Stamps Auto for a while selling cars. He was good, too. Then he got into politics, and for twenty-six years we worked in county government at the courthouse.

MP: Both of you worked?

FT: Both of us worked. I worked both for and with him. I didn't say I just worked for him because I worked for the county, too! I was taking care of the people who came to the courthouse.

MP: He was both sheriff and treasurer?

FT: He was treasurer for six years.

MP: When was he treasurer and when was he sheriff?

FT: Let's see. We were there for twenty-six years.

MP: What year did you retire?

FT: 1984.

MP: So, 1958.

FT: 1958, yes. He was treasurer for six years. He was chosen to be the secretary and treasurer of the Arkansas Treasurer's Association on his second term. Then he was elected president of the Arkansas Treasurer's Association. When we had our banquet, Joseph Barr was the Undersecretary of the Treasury for [President] John F. Kennedy. He was our guest speaker. Wade had to introduce him. He told Wade and the audience—and it was filled with legislators and all the treasurers—that it was the best introduction that he'd ever received. He had so many children, and Wade had put in there that he was worthy of taking care of our money because he was such a family man [laughs]. He had to take care of money with all that family! Then he [Wade] was elected sheriff from 1964 to 1984.

MP: How did he get elected treasurer the first time?

FT: Before he married, he worked for Petrie grocery store. For his retirement, they did an eight page magazine section in our daily newspaper—not daily, our weekly: the *Lafayette County Democrat*. He told them his life story. [Whispers]

MP: Okay.

FT: He drove a peddling truck down in Long Township, below Stamps, and close to Dyer, the river bottom at Bradley. He knew the people. Then he sold cars. They'd always come back for another car. He was that kind of a salesman. He

was just like people. He ran, and was elected. Then when the sheriff, who had been there several years, died at a national convention and they had to appoint someone to fill in, they wanted him to run for sheriff. He did, and he was elected. I think he had four points. He didn't have to have a runoff. For twenty years, he was the sheriff and collector.

MP: He was a Democrat?

FT: Democrat. Very much Democrat.

MP: One thing I want to do with this interview is get an idea of what Lafayette County politics were like.

FT: Lafayette County politics? You have to like people, and you have to do for people. They are close to each other. That's what we did every day. We didn't work for votes, we worked for people.

MP: When you say, "do for people," what do you mean?

FT: In the courthouse, I worked in the collector's office. See, he was sheriff and collector. When they couldn't get a fee waived—the farmers are the people who lived in the lower part, down on the river bottom, or down in Walker's Creek, or up in the Lowe's settlement close to Falcon. Or, north up here at the county line. If they came twice a year, they wanted to see Wade Tatom, the sheriff. They didn't go to the deputies. [Laughter]. You know who they'd come to if Wade wasn't in!

MP: He's the guy signing the letter saying . . .

FT: They came to me, and I would find Wade wherever he was and tell him he needed to 10-19 to the courthouse, and he would. [Editor's note: In police speak, "10-19" means "return to office."]

MP: Yes.

FT: They wanted to see the sheriff twice a year. They came one time to buy car licenses, and one time to pay taxes. There were certain people who wanted to see him. The year we went out [of office], they got the computers. Ours was the old fashioned way, which really worked well for politics.

MP: How so?

FT: I worked the [unintelligible] book. We worked it out, and at the end of the year, when the tax year was closed, I went through all the files. If there were people who missed it, or something was missed—not our fault, could be their fault. I felt obligated to them. Some people forgot [to pay] their taxes, that paid it every year; they were notified.

MP: Yes.

FT: That's how I helped Wade with his votes. This is something. We had a Jessie James Newton, a black elderly man in Stamps. We had a radio operator, Mrs. Gladys Martin Owensby, and she was once our representative. Everyone would listen to her radio program out of Magnolia. Jessie was always wanting her to tell something about him. He lived alone in a little house, down in the black part across the railroad tracks. One day, Wade had to go down and see Jessie about something. When he got to the porch, Jessie was knelt down by his bed praying. So, Wade just sat down on the front porch and listened to the prayer. When he

got through, he said, “Jessie, I heard your prayer. That’s been an inspiration to me today. It was well worth my trip to come to see you.” He just thought that was the grandest thing for the sheriff to say to him. So, one year, Jessie hadn’t paid his little old tax. It was hardly anything. I said, “Wade, somebody or one of these deputies has got to carry this tax receipt by Jessie James Newton’s.” I went ahead and stamped it “paid,” and told him how much to send back—the money. Wade sent the chief deputy to Jessie Newton’s house for a special delivery. The next year, do you think Jessie came and paid his taxes? He was waiting for that visit again. That went on for three or four years. In 1985, at the last of the year, Wade said, “Okay, Jessie.” He carried it himself. He said, “Now, I won’t be here next year, Jessie, to deliver this to you. You’re going to have to get someone, or mail it in, or do something to pay your tax.” He said, “Well, Mrs. Tatom will be there to take care of me.” He said, “No, she won’t. She’s going to retire with me!” Little things like that are what matters.

MP: The personal contact.

FT: That’s right.

MP: In the mid-1970s, Bill Clinton entered politics.

FT: Let me tell you about the convention. I didn’t go with Wade to the conventions because I was busy, and I thought I’d be in his way. He never missed a Democrat convention. He was very popular up there because he was good. He came back and he said, “I want to tell you, Floris, I wish you’d been with me.” I said, “Well, why didn’t I get to go?” He said Bill was running for Attorney General, and he said, “He had a film showing about your Uncle Eldridge.”

MP: A film?

FT: A film on Uncle Eldridge that he showed at that convention. I'm trying to remember if he was going to leave the Attorney General's office and run for governor. I think he was running for Attorney General, though.

MP: It was 1976?

FT: When was he Attorney General?

MP: He was elected Attorney General in November, 1976. He was elected governor the first time . . .

FT: Well, I'm not for sure. He was running for Attorney General. It was a great film. He said, "You would have been so proud of your Uncle Eldridge." I said, "Well, I didn't get to go." But I didn't want to go. I felt that I'd be in Wade's way. He'd feel that he'd have to see about me or something, or take care of me. From then on, I got a letter when Bill ran for governor. I really did politic for him, very much, and Wade said I really [laughs] pushed him hard. [Laughs]

MP: At the county level, what does that mean?

FT: Everyone thought, if you get the sheriff and the county judge for you, you were in good shape. It used to be this way, but I don't know how it is now. The people listened to the sheriff, and whoever he was for. When Bill ran for governor, Joe Woodward from Magnolia ran, also. Wade received a letter from Joe Woodward's mother, who was a good friend of his. It said, "Dear Wade, I know you're going to help my son be elected governor." It was signed, "Mary Woodward," and her last name, because she had remarried. That broke Wade's

heart because [laughs] he knew he had to be for Bill Clinton. In the fall, we had another opponent over in Garland City. Lynn Lowe ran on the Republican ticket.

MP: He's from Garland City?

FT: Yes. Just across the river.

MP: He's always listed as [being] from Texarkana.

FT: He has a farm in Garland City. I think he lives there. I don't know. He may have a home in Texarkana, too. Anyway, Harvey Hound, our druggist who was on city council, was thinking about or wanting to be appointed representative for someone, but he didn't know if he could hold both offices. I said, "Harvey, why don't you get an attorney general's ruling?" I was kidding him, of course, because Lynn Lowe was his roommate in college. [Laughter] He couldn't be for Bill Clinton. He had to be for Lynn Lowe, who was his best friend, even though he was a strong Democrat. Every once in a while, you have to be for your best friend. That fall, you know.

MP: Yes.

FT: He said, "Do you think I'm going to do that?" Of course, I was kidding him to begin with. Bill won, but you know that Bill lost the second time.

MP: Yes, I do.

FT: You know why, too, don't you?

MP: Excuse me?

FT: You know why he did?

MP: Actually, I've heard what other people have said.

FT: Do you want me to tell you why? Do you want to know?

MP: I want to know.

FT: Okay. I worked in the collector's office. I had to sign a card when [people] bought their car license, [saying] that they did not owe any tax. Delinquent tax. They told me every day, day after day, that they were mad at Bill Clinton because he raised the car tags. Wade told Bill one day, "You need to go to McNeil out of Magnolia, Arkansas, to go to that all-night gospel singing." Bill said, "Oh, I want to go. Let me know." He had the president of whatever the committee was call Bill and invite him. So, he did. Sammy came with him. Sammy, my son, was working for Bill. They flew in a little old airplane. Someone flew him to Magnolia airport. He wanted Wade to meet him there. I was with Wade in the sheriff's car. Wade said, "I'm not going to stay all night. You can get a trooper or someone to carry you back to that airport." Sammy was with him. We got in the car, and he said, "Well, how am I doing?" That's what he'd say every time. "How am I doing?" He wanted you to brag on him. Wade said, "You're doing okay. You're doing all right." I didn't say a word. He and Sammy were in the back seat. He kept asking Wade. He said, "Sure enough, I want to know how I'm doing." He knew that I wasn't talking. He finally said, "Well, Floris, how am I doing?" I said, "You're not doing too well." Sammy said, "Now, Mama, this is a fun trip." I said, "If you don't want him to know it, just let him not know it." I just up and told him what they were saying. He turned to Wade and said, "What can I do?" Wade said, "Well, you go back to the legislature, bring it up again and tell them that you made a mistake. Have them redo that, and get your money for the highway from somewhere else. We're not against it. Floris or myself. Most

people who travel the interstate know that it's in bad, bad shape. The people who live on a fixed income who never go to the interstate are the people who are going to vote against you. When they got their license tag, it was just like a letter from you [saying], 'Sir, your license is going up.'" They voted him out. He didn't do what Wade told him to. I'm sorry to say that, Bill, but you didn't. He went back up there and some of his advisors told him that it wouldn't make any difference. He lost the election. He called Wade that night, no telling how many times. Wade had a pretty hard race that year because they found out we were working for Bill, and they were just a little upset at Wade for being for him after they had to pay more for their license. Anyway, all in all, it helped him. I think it helped him with where he is now, and with all of this. He went back and said to Wade, "What should I do?" They never usually run on the second term. Wade said, "Do you want to be governor again?" He said, "More than anything in the world." Wade said, "Get back in there. Now is the time to run again. Don't wait. Run this time, and tell the people from day one that you made a mistake." That's what he did. Then the Arkansas County Association, of which Wade was on the board for years and years, endorsed him fully and they went to work for him. All the county officials did. Bill did, too. You know, Bill is a great politician.

MP: Did he ever come down to Lafayette County?

FT: All the time.

MP: What type of events would he come to?

FT: He wanted to speak at our church, and, of course, you know who fed him that day.

MP: Excuse me?

FT: Who had him for lunch. Me! He ate right here. Wade kept bringing people in. I said, “Wade! Everyone wanted to come eat lunch because, see? We’re such a friendly family.” [Laughter] There’s no telling how many people Wade brought down here. He was going to dedicate the Faulkland plant down here that afternoon.

MP: When he came for lunch, what was he like?

FT: Just like me. Like us. He just loved us so much, and he felt kin to us so closely. Our politicking with him. You’d think I’d been with him all of his growing up. I had a bank made for Chelsea. I went to ceramics, and had a large piggy bank for Chelsea. That thrilled him to no end.

MP: When he spoke in your church, what was his speech like?

FT: I can’t remember [laughs]. There were a million people there, and all the relatives came to hear him. He’s a great speaker. He’s a Baptist, but he went to Methodist [Church] with Hillary a lot.

MP: Yes. So, he’s a good church speaker?

FT: Yes, he is. He’s good on the Bible too.

MP: How was he on the campaign trail?

FT: Great.

MP: Did you ever go around with him?

FT: Oh, yes. When he first came to Prescott—when he first announced, we were there. Of course, Wade knew everyone. We went for the reception, and Virginia was there. We went to the reception after the speaking. Any time that Bill was going to speak in Magnolia, or Texarkana, or anywhere close, he wanted Wade to

be there. The governor's office would call and tell us. One time, they called and asked if we'd like to come—we were retired—to a Junior Chamber of Commerce meeting. Bill had a little trouble in Magnolia, so he needed Wade's help. There were a lot of Republicans over there.

MP: Was that his only trouble in Magnolia?

FT: He had a little trouble in Magnolia, in the city. He was going to speak, but I didn't know that when they called. I said, "Why are you asking us? We're old." They didn't tell us that they'd called from the capital to come. I said, "If you're inviting me, do you expect me to pay for my ticket?" I was kidding with them, of course. We went. Bill was there and so glad to see us. I said, "I guess we came for you." He said, "I know you did, because I told them to call you." [Laughter] So that was good politics for Wade to be there and let everyone know that he was kin to him and supported him.

MP: Did his problems in Magnolia . . . ?

FT: He didn't lose Columbia County. He just had some people who were . . .

MP: Was it fallout from beating Joe Woodward?

FT: Some of it.

MP: That had to be 1978, I guess.

FT: Other than when Frank White won, that's the first time we ever had a Republican headquarters in Lafayette County.

MP: You're kidding me!

FT: I'm not kidding you.

MP: Did Winthrop Rockefeller never have one?

FT: We have a few registered Republicans. Very few, but they vote in the fall like they want to.

MP: I'm going to flip this over before it runs out.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

MP: The relationships in this state are amazing. After you and your husband retired, did you continue to work for Bill Clinton?

FT: Yes, we did. [Laughs] While Wade was sheriff one time—I'm not for sure if he was retired. I can't remember this. But after we'd started buying antiques . . . No, he was still sheriff because it was when he was first running. They were going to have a speaking over at Lake June in the black part of town. Wade always got the black vote. He knew them. They knew us, and Wade treated everyone the same. I said, "We need to put up a few signs of Bill's on this route, so he'll see them." This happened years later. This lady called, a little black lady and a real nice person. She said she had some things she wanted to sell us if we wanted to come and buy them for our antique shop. She said, "Mrs. Tatom, you know what I remember about you?" I said, "What's that?" She said, "Well, you and the sheriff pulled up in front of my house, and there was a tree out there by the street. You were in the car with the sheriff, and he got out to nail up that sign. You got out of that car [laughs] and got that hammer and nailed that sign up for him." [Laughter] I said, "What do you mean?" I couldn't hardly remember it. She said, "It tickled me so that you had to get out and hammer up that sign for the

sheriff of Lafayette County.” I said, “Well, he probably wasn’t getting it straight.” She said, “That’s probably right.” I did all that for him.

MP: How many signs would you put up in a campaign?

FT: Wade was very strongly for David Pryor when he’d run. Very much for David Pryor. He’d politic for David Pryor. We’d put them up, but Bill got, at the last, where he’d have people come to put up the signs. I thought he needed a few on his route, so we just put up a few extra [laughs]. Wade was always his coordinator for the county. When he ran for president, Wade was the one that got the money. Every county had a quota to make up. Wade had some help with that. He asked another man to help with that because Wade was getting older, and he was retired. We went over our quota for the money.

MP: How do you raise money? I’m ignorant about that.

FT: The sheriff knows who to see. The sheriff knew who to see to go get money for campaigns, for people.

MP: Just make phone calls?

FT: Not for himself, now. They came to him if they wanted to give him some. He didn’t ask for himself, but he asked for David Pryor and Bill Clinton.

MP: He would make phone calls?

FT: He’d go personally. [Laughs] You don’t make phone calls, you go personally. You get that check right there.

MP: How many people in Lafayette County would donate?

FT: Oh, I don't know how many. But they did. A lot of them. Wade didn't have to go. Many of them would send it in themselves, you know, after Bill started running. Starting out, though, it makes a difference.

MP: Yes. In 1992, his early money to run all came from Arkansas.

FT: Yes. They had a quota for Lafayette County. Lafayette County is a small county. When Bill was going through his problem up there . . .

MP: Which problem?

FT: You know the problem I'm talking about.

MP: Monica Lewinsky?

FT: Yes. Senator Bumpers was our friend, too. A very good friend. He spoke at our church, and Wade picked him up. He was late. He had to get there. He was supposed to get there at 11:00 [a.m.] for church. He is a great speaker, too. He's almost [laughs] a preacher. He said that the sheriff went over the speed limit. [Laughter] He said that he had to get him back there, you know. He told him, "Sheriff Tatom, you are a rare politician." He said, "What do you mean, Senator?" He said, "Anytime anyone is going to run for district or state office, or even national, they come to you first. You tell them if you're for them or against them. You stay with them. That's a rare politician. Not many county officials will do that." When he got up and made the talk at the Senate hearing for Bill Clinton—I think he'd already retired from the Senate . . .

MP: I think he'd announced that he wasn't going to seek reelection.

FT: You think he was still senator?

MP: Yes, he was.

FT: Well, what I can't understand then, is that I wrote him a letter. I think he was retired, I have to beg your pardon. I've still got the letter that he wrote me back, and I wrote him and thanked him for what he did. He wrote me back on the job he was doing. He was still in Washington, DC. Working.

MP: Yes.

FT: He thanked me. I said, "I want to tell you that you are a rare person. I know what you did for Bill Clinton. I listened to it." I wrote him what he'd said about Wade. I said, "Now, I'm paying this tribute to you." He wrote me back about the letter that I wrote him. But he did that for him. Bill was appreciative of it. I read that they had what he said to the Senate on display at one of the showings.

MP: It's an amazing speech.

FT: I know. I heard every bit of it. Once, we went to the Chamber of Commerce banquet in Stamps after we were retired and Bill was president. [John] Robert Starr was the speaker. Wade said, "You don't want to go, Floris." I said, "Yes. I'm going." He said, "Well, he's going to talk against Bill Clinton." I said, "Well, I'm going. That doesn't matter." So we did. He did talk against him, and we knew who had him there. [Laughter] We know everything, see, because we've been in it a long time. [Laughter] When it was over, I said, "They didn't even introduce Mrs. Starr, and she was sitting up there by him. Let's go up there. I know that's who it is because I know everyone else. Let's go speak to her, Wade." And we did. Wade said, "I agreed with one thing that Robert said today, Mrs. Starr." The press was listening to this, our little *Lafayette County Democrat*. "Harry Truman was the best president we'd ever had, and I agree, up until now."

And he told Robert Starr, “Up until now, with Bill Clinton.” She said, “Go tell him, Sheriff Tatom. Tell him what you think.” They still called him “Sheriff.” So he did. He got his picture taken with Robert Starr. She was listening to everything, and it was on tape. So it was in the paper, and I sent that to Bill. That was his job to do that—John Robert Starr. His job was to talk and say what he wanted to about people, so you don’t fall out with people like that.

MP: You don’t make money selling newspapers saying, “This guy’s a good guy.”

FT: Compliments don’t get you anywhere, do they? [Laughs]

MP: No. Did you and your husband campaign for David Pryor?

FT: Wade did more than I did. I campaigned for Bill Clinton and Wade Tatom.

MP: [Laughs] Wade Tatom.

FT: Wade did. He did that. David was appreciative of it. David put Wade on a lot of boards. He was on the Academy down in Camden for all those years. They have one officer, one chair. He stayed on it. The training academy.

MP: The Police Training Academy?

FT: Yes. He was also president of the Arkansas Sheriff Association, and he was the year they started the Boys’ Ranch. Wade was president.

MP: What have I neglected to ask you about Bill Clinton?

FT: Pardon me?

MP: What have I forgotten to ask you about Bill Clinton?

FT: You know how devoted he was to his mother, and to his grandfather, Uncle Eldridge. I know he was to his grandmother, too, because she kept him so long and taught him a lot. She just wanted everything to be okay, and for him to learn.

I think if he could have, he'd have been reelected. I also think, and I don't care if this is anywhere, that if Al Gore hadn't distanced himself away from Bill Clinton, he'd have won Arkansas and Tennessee.

MP: And West Virginia.

FT: I don't know about West Virginia, but he would have been president if he had. He was advised, and I saw that all the time. He didn't act himself, I didn't think. But I don't know him that well, you see. Bill took advice from people, but he did a lot of his own thinking. You know he did in the end. He'd think on his own, and add to it because he was that smart, and is that smart. Al Gore listened to the wrong people. They tried to change him, and that got worse. He thought he'd bring that out about what a family man he was, and he went to the extreme on that. He lost the election, but he won the vote. If he'd have carried Arkansas and Tennessee, he would have won.

MP: He [unintelligible].

FT: I know. Just one of them. It was terrible that he lost those two, I thought.

MP: What do you think Bill Clinton has meant to southwest Arkansas?

FT: This has been what I've had people tell me. If people dislike Bill, they hate him. But it's the people who would dislike anyone. I don't care who you are, if you're a public figure, you're going to do things, and people are not going to agree with you. But the ones who like him, love him. Tenderly. They still talk to me about him all the time. There's no comparison. I've been to Hope and all these places when he'd speak, and I've also been when the others elected came to speak.

There's no way they can come up to Bill Clinton—the crowd, the approval, and the cheering. He's just good. Now, that's all.

MP: One last thing I'd like to ask you. What role did you play in the Clinton Birth Museum in Hope?

FT: I was invited to everything they had up there. I went from start to finish.

MP: Who started planning it?

FT: This is private, and they had a board. [Whispering] A Mr. Frazier, I believe his name is George, was the first director. He's from Hope. He's an elderly man, and he's nice. At first, we were in a tent meeting, and then out on the lawn out there. I saw the house after it was redone.

MP: The house on Hervey Street?

FT: Yes. With nothing in it. I went back when they furnished it, and that's when I thought they needed some of the family things there. I donated my grandmother's photograph. She's in a chair, just not long before she died. It had been enlarged, and it was in the same old frame. It was not an important photograph; it was just a simple Kodak enlarged, but he liked it—the President did. I had kept the hand-hooked rug that my mother made. She made it for all of her family. I thought that that needed to be there. That's going to be a national birthplace. It's in front of the fireplace. My Uncle Eldridge's sister had made it. The old photograph of the Cassidy family. My grandmother's and mother's things were left with me. All of the photographs that I thought Bill wanted of Virginia when she was growing up, and things belonging to Uncle Eldridge and Aunt Edith and Virginia, I sent to him. He should have had them first. I had some of the originals left, and

I donated them to the birthplace. The high chair of Sammy's is there because the one they had there didn't work.

MP: Wrong time period?

FT: That's right. I had an antique shop, and I knew this one was the age of Bill's because he and Sammy are the same age. It was wooden. The antique shop down here redid it for me for free. The baby bed is upstairs, but it hasn't been donated yet. Also, some clothes and two little framed plaques that belonged to my grandmother to put in the nursery. A doll, a rubber doll. They said Bill liked it. It belonged to my younger son. Some of these things . . . I have more that I kept for myself, but that's there forever, and it needs to be there. It's his relatives'. There was a doily. Wade's mother went to school with Aunt Edith in Lafayette County, and I donated a doily for her. There are two things from the antique shop from that period. One was a vase, and I told them that they could put roses from the rose garden in it, if they wanted to. One was a crystal bowl. I said, "You need to keep fresh apples in it because I know he brought fresh apples from the grocery store." I just gave them some advice. They appreciated what I gave them. There were several more things that I didn't mention, but that I thought needed to be there. Bill was pleased. I got a letter from Hillary. I had written her. For a while, she couldn't open her mail, and you know why.

MP: Because of the anthrax scare?

FT: Yes. She finally wrote me and told me how much he appreciated what I had put in that home.

MP: We haven't talked about Hillary. Did you meet her during . . .?

FT: I was with Hillary a lot. She especially liked Wade. They were very good friends, Wade and Hillary.

MP: When did you first meet her?

FT: All the time, right when he was first elected governor. She'd come with him every time. She didn't come the day when he ate lunch here, but she'd come to the speeches and all. We'd see her at conventions. They were always there. I'll tell you this before we finish. At the last, when Bill was reelected, we were there. We were just about through with our years. I've forgotten what year that was. Wade was so glad that he was going to sit out there with everyone else and not be at the head table. He was just relieved.

MP: This was at a Democratic dinner?

FT: No, this was at a sheriff's convention in January, and Bill had just been reelected. We walked into the banquet hall, and the executive secretary said, "Sheriff, you're supposed to go to the head table." He said, "No. I'm not in that this time. I'm going to sit back there and have a good time." He said, "No. The new governor wants you to introduce him." He said, "But, I'm sorry, Mrs. Tatom, there's no room for you." I said, "Okay. That's all right." Wade went on up there with him, and I had to get my own [laughs]. I'd just been a big help to Wade, but he didn't worry about that. So when he got up there, I just found a place with the seasoned sheriffs, you know, to sit with. He was making his introduction, and he could really talk, Wade could. He'd really do better just from talking, instead of writing it and reading it. He talked about Bill making his mistake, what he did wrong, and that he was going to do so much better and be

one of the best governors we'd ever had. At the end, he said, "I worked hard for Bill Clinton." I was just sitting there. I was just watching him, looking right at him. He said, "I had to. My wife made me." Why he said that, I don't know, but it was the truth. Everyone laughed. It was the biggest laugh you've ever seen. That TV camera, I don't know if it was [Channel] 7 or 4, turned on me. They knew me, you see. It tickled me so, and Bill got a big kick out of it, too. He said, "My wife made me." I didn't have to make him, but I did push him.

MP: Was Hillary involved with this somehow?

FT: With what?

MP: I thought I asked you about Hillary.

FT: Yes.

MP: Then you told that story.

FT: Yes. What do you want to know about Hillary? She didn't come to the dedication that day. Was she already a senator then?

MP: I don't know.

FT: I don't remember that. She didn't come to the birthplace dedication.

MP: Did you ever talk politics with Hillary?

FT: Yes, when we'd be together at the conventions. We always went to the mansion. I was with Hillary a lot. Hillary is smart.

MP: What about Chelsea?

FT: I've never been around Chelsea that much. I just haven't. But I think she's done really well. I think she was just a model daughter.

MP: Yes. This is off the record, we'll get rid of this later, but . . .

FT: Is it off?

MP: No, it's not off. I think they did an amazing job raising her.

FT: And she was acceptable to it. She was bred well. She was ready for it, and she accepted it. Some children don't accept it, and it's a problem to people. They had no problem there. I think everything has worked out. I think Bill is just a . . . I wrote him a letter after we came back. I didn't go to see him until the last minute. I just never got up there.

MP: To Washington DC?

FT: I could have gone. They told me all the time. Anne McCoy said, "Mrs. Tatom, I'll meet the plane at the airport if you'll fly up here. I'll sleep in the room next to you, if you'll come. I'll take all your meals with you. We'll do anything you want if you'll just come up here and stay a while." I said, "I cannot change planes in Atlanta, Georgia." Sammy and they and I went to Christmas the year before he went out.

MP: To the White House?

FT: To Washington DC.

MP: What was the White House like?

FT: I talked to him all the time, and had everything ready. I talked to Anne one day and said, "Well, we're coming. You won't believe it, but we're coming." With Sammy's schedule, we didn't tell them for sure that we'd go. It was Christmas time, and closer relatives were in the [unintelligible] part. It was better for us, anyway. Scott, my grandson, went, and Sammy and his wife. I said, "It's going to be a Sunday that we come to the reception. We're coming back Monday and

tour the White House. I've got a favor to ask you." She said, "What's that, Mrs. Tatom?" I said, "I want you to send someone to pick us up at this hotel." I can't think of the name of it. It was a new one that they'd just started. It was a real nice one. I think it was about two blocks from the White House. "I want you to pick up our luggage and keep it there, and then take us to the airport." She didn't say anything. I said, "Are you still there?" She said, "I'm thinking, Mrs. Tatom." [Laughter] She'd never had anyone ask her that. She said, "Okay, okay. We'll do that." Sammy said, "Momma, you didn't have to do that." Good gracious! We had to get a taxi—and I don't like to ride in taxis—to ride to the reception. It was cold, and we had to walk a pretty good ways. They couldn't drive us up to the door for the reception. We saw a lot of people we knew, and I got to see the people I'd been talking to all these years. Bill was so glad to see us, and Hillary, too. She was so glad. We stayed for a while. We were going to walk out, and we had to walk down this street to get this taxi, and there wasn't a taxi. We had to walk a little way, and it was cold. We got to this place where we had eaten, a real nice restaurant, a high-priced restaurant. And they were new, too. They'd opened it up, but they had recommended it for us the night before. They were going to get us a ride, but they didn't exactly know all the taxis, because they were new. I said, "You go and find one, because I'm not leaving this place. I'm not walking any more in this cold weather." So they did get us back. The next morning, we got ready to go back to the White House. Bill was so busy, and I told him that Sunday evening, "You are going to come back to the White House to have pictures taken, aren't you?" He looked at me, and he couldn't answer me. I just

didn't take my eyes off of him. I kept looking at him. He said, "Well . . ." I said, "You've got to! That's one thing you have got to do is come back for this. I'm sorry I've waited this late, but you've got to come back." He said, "Okay. I'll be there." Caroline Hubbard was up there helping us. Sure enough, here came the van, the big thing from the Secret Service people to pick us up at the hotel. He said, "I'm here to pick up the Tatoms." They didn't ask for one bit of identification or anything. They put us in that van, and took us right to the door. They kept our luggage, and Caroline carried us all through the place. Bill called, and he was at the Capitol. He called and said he'd be there in a few minutes. That was the day that Dan Rather was going to have an interview with him. They kept fussing, and wanted everything out. They told them, "You can't come in here until the president gets here with some of his closest relatives, who are waiting for him." So Dan Rather had to wait for me! [Laughter] Isn't that something? Let me go get the picture that he made.

MP: So he's never refused you anything you've ever asked?

FT: Anything I wanted him to do for other people.

MP: This is great. [Reading] "Dear Floris, Thanks for starting out with me and coming to see me at the end of a career in public life that you gave so much to. Love, Bill." That's wonderful. That is wonderful. When he came and campaigned here . . .

FT: Have you turned it off?

MP: It's back on.

FT: That day, he was sad. I wrote him a letter after he got out of that and was in New York. I've got the phone number, and my letters go straight to him up there. I said, "I want you to rest a while. I want you to read. Drink an extra cup of coffee and read all of the paper that morning. Get your 'Upper Room' and read it," because I know he gets one from the Methodist church, because I know he goes to the Methodist church. "Take it easy for a while, and don't be in such a rush. And, don't be sad. You have so much to be thankful for. You were reelected! You were not defeated. You retired." I wrote him a letter just like I would my own children.

MP: Great.

FT: He's got them all, I guess. Caroline said he did.

MP: In fact, I've been to the warehouse in Little Rock where they keep all of his records. It's huge. Huge!

FT: I don't know how they're going to display any of it.

MP: I think very little of it is going to be on display.

FT: That quilt better be there! I made him a quilt, and hand did it—pieced it and quilted it. I told him I was going to expect to see that because I do know that they are going to put hand-made domestic items in presidential libraries.

MP: I thought you meant like the letters and such.

FT: Oh, no. They can't do all that.

MP: Was he ever late when he was down here?

FT: Oh, good gracious! He's always late!

MP: Was he later than Bumpers?

FT: Yes! Bumpers just got in there late at the airport. Bill was known to be a few minutes late, now.

MP: Did it ever cause problems?

FT: No. He got by with it. They were so glad to see him. He came down here to a centennial that we had, after we'd retired. He got up and made a speech. He didn't call my name, but he said, "I've got relatives here. If they don't agree with me, they tell me so." And everyone knew [laughs] who it was.

MP: He didn't have to say who it was.

FT: No, he didn't. But, that's all right. It's going to be the best and biggest library that's ever been built.

MP: It's going to be beautiful.

FT: Why anyone wouldn't be pleased!

MP: There are just people who aren't.

FT: They are jealous, some of them. There may be some reason for it. We never know, do we? I was going to make you a picture of this, but the copy machine, the good one, was not working up at the courthouse.

MP: Is there anything about Bill Clinton that I haven't asked you that you'd like to get on the record?

FT: I don't guess. I know more about him . . . I know how he loved his family and appreciated everything everyone did for him. I know he never failed to thank us. I know we didn't see him growing up like the Grissoms did, but that wasn't his fault or Uncle Eldridge's fault. A mother usually carries their family to her house, to their homes. I don't know about Bill, but Virginia missed a lot not being with

us. She'd have had a lot of her Daddy's characteristics. She's a lot like her father, I think.

MP: In what way?

FT: In her family way. Loving. Aunt Edith was a professional, you might say. These people who've talked to you know more than I do. I just know Grandma didn't go there, but I don't know why. But she wasn't displeased with her. I never heard her say that she'd displeased her. Never. I don't think she ever considered thinking about it, or let that worry her. She had other good thoughts, and she wasn't that type of person. If she couldn't please her, I don't know what she meant by that. I know she wasn't jealous of her. I know she didn't resent her because—anyone taking care of her son? She was proud. I don't know what they meant by that. I'm sure Virginia heard her say it. She surely didn't write it without hearing it. She heard her say it. She might have just thought that, too. But that's not a problem.

MP: Thank you for taking time to sit down with me. Thank you very much.

FT: I think Uncle Eldridge never did know these people in Alabama. Neither did my mother. But they think he's great, these kin folks.

MP: In Alabama?

FT: I like the history, the deep down history, and the way that they lived and how they did back then. It's good to know your ancestors, too. I met a first cousin of his who was a Blythe. She said she'd been at the mansion a lot—at the governor's mansion—but I never did meet her. There were just so many Clintons there.

There were a lot of Clintons that were there for that, when he was governor. I don't know what they thought about the book.

MP: When did you meet the Blythes?

FT: I met her that night, at the . . .

MP: Governor's mansion?

FT: No, I didn't meet her at the governor's mansion. I met her in Washington DC, the night of the reception.

MP: Oh.

FT: I found out who she was, and Caroline Hubbard told me. Her father was an older brother to Bill's daddy.

MP: That would be his first cousin.

FT: Yes. He's just my second cousin. That's close. She's nice. She was very nice. She got in line with us, and I visited with her. I don't think they knew much about him until he was in politics. I don't know if he visited them when he was growing up or not. I don't know that. I just don't know. I don't know what Virginia did. Virginia had a hard time, which was the way she did everything. She was a strong person, but she'd taken care of her family. I just didn't know that she did have that hard of a time. I think Dick Kelley [Virginia's fourth husband] was good to her, very good to her. I like Dick Kelley. I met this [Jeff] Dwire [Virginia's third husband]. His father built the nursing home over in Stamps. Jeff Dwire's father. Sammy married the Fullers' daughter. My son married Alvis and Katherine Fuller's daughter, Ann.

MP: Okay.

FT: That built the nursing home. And, Jeff Dwire and Virginia and Mr. and Mrs. Fuller were good friends. They were there. I didn't even know—to tell you the truth, I was so busy here in Lafayette County, I did not know that Jeff Dwire's father built that nursing home until that day. My mother was in the hospital. It wasn't when she died, it was when she was in the hospital and Virginia went by to see her. She and Jeff Dwire.

MP: What was Jeff like?

FT: I thought the way that I knew him, he was nice to me. I'd never met him before that. She thought he was great—in the book—and how good he was to Bill and Roger.

MP: Other people have suggested the same thing.

FT: I just don't know. If you could have ever talked to Dale Drake, she could have told you a lot more than I have about the growing up. She said, "Eldridge lived with us." Eldridge didn't live with her too long—with her parents—I [have] the census.

MP: You can't put anything over on you.

FT: You don't think so? But he was with them a lot, you understand? He was living there with their father. He was with the Russells a lot. The Russells were very good to him, and he had a right to love them because they were good to him and he grew up with them. He was younger than those three. He looked younger in that photograph. My grandmother? That was her family, and she talked about those children of Bill Russell's—George Russell. They're both buried at the old cemetery. Let me tell you this before I go. I have just put out—in fact, I bought

it—and my friend out here, Harry Jr., who has the monument place, just this month erected it in the Ebenezer cemetery. He put it beside my grandmother. He put a plaque, a marker, in memory of James Cassidy.

MP: Oh.

FT: I bought it in 1997. He wouldn't let me pay for it, but I selected it and he had it made. I said, "Now I'm ready for that to be put there." He put it out there. He said, "You go up there and put a flag down where to put it." I didn't want to go with them up there because it's a gravel road, a bad road. I told my youngest son, and he went up there with me. I said, "I think this is just that old wagon road. They came in here with those covered wagons. Probably that's just the way it looked." Nevada County is not the richest county. That's in the lower part. When I went back to look at it after they'd put it up, and I'd put up the flags, and cleaned my grandmother's grave, they had been down there to grade it. I guess they heard that someone was telling them what I said. [Laughter] They don't have blacktop roads. We don't have any gravel roads in our county. We had a prominent, really good county judge when Wade was sheriff, and he got a lot of help. He was a good judge. I did do that. I paid for that. I had that done. It's about the same thing, except that I put "Great Grandparents of President Bill Clinton," including Grandma Cassidy, on the monument. I thought that needed to be on there, don't you?

MP: I think it should.

FT: I wrote him when I went to Alabama and asked him if it was okay to put it on there, and he was thrilled. He was glad that I did that. He should be, but I think

he deserved it. I think the people down there needed to have it done, to see and know.

MP: Yes.

FT: It's something to have a president of the United States for eight years from Arkansas. I don't understand people. Just think about how much better off we were at one time, than we are now.

MP: Two years ago?

FT: That's right. I can't believe it.

MP: Thank you so much. I've really enjoyed talking to you. Let me know if you have anything else to add.

FT: I don't know if I have anything [laughs] else, but I really worked on this for you.

MP: Yes. Thank you so much.

FT: Some of this, like the family sheets and different things . . . If you start wondering Of course, I haven't told you everything on there, but I didn't have to because you've got this.

MP: Is there anything that's not in the papers or on the tape?

FT: I don't know of anything I want to say.

MP: Okay.

FT: I guess I've said all that's good that I could say.

MP: Thank you so much.

[End of recording]

[Recording begins again]

FT: Will it work now, just like that?

MP: Yes.

FT: When I was in Alabama in 1997, to buy the monument for James Monroe Cassidy, my grandfather, I talked with the people who erected the monument. He told me to go to a certain person, and I can't remember his name right now. He was a retired important person in Covington County. He had written some books on the important people—the history of Covington County. When I went in, he was in a real small space in the back of his son's department store. He had some real primitive furniture there. The first thing that I did was to admire his furniture there, and ask him some questions about it. He didn't think I knew what I was talking about, but I did because I had owned an antique shop. I told him why I was there, that I wanted to know if he had anything written on the Russells and the Cassidys of Covington County. He said, "No, Mrs. Tatom. I've only written about important people." I said, "Oh?" He said, "Yes. People who have been . . ." I said, "Well, none of them may have been legislators or doctors or professors or something like that, but I think the Cassidys and Russells were very important." He said, "Why do you think that?" I said, "They produced a president of the United States." He said, "Yes." He said that he knew I was coming. He had already been told that I was coming, and that he knew who I was. I could tell by that. He said, "I didn't vote for Bill Clinton." I said, "That's okay. Why didn't you vote for Bill Clinton?" He said, "I'm a Republican." I said, "Are you a registered Republican?" He said, "Yes, I am." I said, "I have one question. Were you always a Republican, or did you change after you had a successful life in your business, and became a Republican?" He said, "I've always been one." I said, "I can handle that. The ones who change for other

reasons are the ones that I disagree with.” He said, “I will tell you, though, that one of my relatives married a Cassidy.” I said, “Which one?” He said, “His names was James Potts.” I said, “Do you mean Matilda Jane that married James Potts?” He said, “How do you know that?” I said, “I know it all. I’ve been here before, and I have the history. Do you want a sheet on George Washington Cassidy and some of your relatives?” He said, “Yes, I would like it.” He made copies of what I had in my book. He said, “I’ll tell you what I’m going to do, Mrs. Tatom. I’m going to walk with you across the street to the courthouse, and we’re going to look something up for you. I like you.” I said, “Well, good, and I’m glad I came by to see you. I’m sorry you didn’t think the Cassidys and the Russells weren’t important, because they were.”

MP: What did he look up for you?

FT: He didn’t find it. I’d already been to the courthouse. I was looking for something when I was there in 1985. I went to the courthouse and saw where Josephine had left all of her children personal things. I noticed she didn’t mention anything about James. But she died after James died, you see. They had that 420 acres. He died with no will. He died pretty young, George Washington Cassidy. He had those twelve children when he died. To settle the estate, they worked it through the law someway. They had someone there to buy it, and then they divided it. It showed where the three from Arkansas had signed statements on their part. I don’t know if they got paid for it or not, but I thought it could be the way that he bought his farm. I don’t know that. I’m talking about James—with some of the

money they sent him from the estate. I don't know that, and no way can I prove that.

[End of Interview]

[Edited by Rebecca Willhite]