

**The David and Barbara Pryor Center  
for  
Arkansas Oral and Visual History**

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**Arkansas Memories Project**

John B. Abbott

Interviewed by Kris Katrosh

January 27, 2009

El Dorado, Arkansas

## Objective

**Oral history is a collection** of an individual's memories and opinions. As such, it is subject to the innate fallibility of memory and is susceptible to inaccuracy. All researchers using these interviews should be aware of this reality and are encouraged to seek corroborating documentation when using any oral history interview.

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## Transcript Methodology

The Pryor Center recognizes that we cannot reproduce the spoken word in a written document; however, we strive to produce a transcript that represents the characteristics and unique qualities of the interviewee's speech pattern, style of speech, regional dialect, and personality. For the first twenty minutes of the interview, we attempt to transcribe verbatim all words and utterances that are spoken, such as uhs and ahs, false starts, and repetitions. Some of these elements are omitted after the first twenty minutes to improve readability.

The Pryor Center transcripts are prepared utilizing the *University of Arkansas Style Manual* for proper names, titles, and terms specific to the university. For all other style elements, we refer to the *Pryor Center Style Manual*, which is based primarily on *The Chicago Manual of Style 16th Edition*. We employ the following guidelines for consistency and readability:

- Em dashes separate repeated/false starts and incomplete/redirected sentences.
- Ellipses indicate the interruption of one speaker by another.
- Italics identify foreign words or terms and words emphasized by the speaker.
- Question marks enclose proper nouns for which we cannot verify the spelling and words that we cannot understand with certainty.

- Brackets enclose
  - italicized annotations of nonverbal sounds, such as laughter, and audible sounds, such as a doorbell ringing
  - annotations for clarification and identification
- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.

### **Citation Information**

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**Kris Katrosh interviewed John B. Abbott on January 27, 2009,  
in El Dorado, Arkansas.**

[00:00:00]

Kris Katrosh: We're with John B. Abbott today in El Dorado, Arkansas. Um—it's—uh—January 27, 2009, and we are at the Newton House—uh—which is a—a well-known historical home here in El Dorado. And—uh—Mr. Abbott, if—do we have permission to conduct your interview today and house it in the Pryor Center for Oral and Visual History?

John Abbott: Yes, sir.

KK: Okay, thank you very much. We're gonna talk about a number of things today. Uh—we're gonna talk about—start with your earliest memories. Talk about—uh—old El Dorado a little bit. We'll talk about your architecture career.

JA: Mmm.

KK: And—uh—your family.

JA: Mh-hmm.

KK: So—uh—I'd like to start—I always like to start with—uh—your very earliest memory as a child. What's the first thing that comes to mind when you think of your childhood?

JA: When I think of what?

KK: When you think of your childhood.

[00:01:05] JA: Oh. Well, I don't remember much about it in El Dorado because I left here when I was—uh—uh—about two years old . . .

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: . . . and moved to Camden.

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: But that's in south Arkansas [*laughs*], and—uh—I remember a few things up there. Uh—I started school there, so I got some memories in Camden. And I remember a lotta things that my mother and father had told me about El Dorado . . .

KK: Oh.

JA: . . . in the early days. And—uh—I was born over there about—uh—uh—on Summit and Block Street in a house that's a parkin' lot for the college now.

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: So I was almost downtown. And—uh—my daddy was superintendent of the schools here for five years. And—uh—uh—he went to Camden, and—and that's where I begin rememberin' things. But—uh—El Dorado was just a little country town back there then.

KK: Yeah.

JA: And I—I ran across an article that was at—published in the newspaper here—a—a—a number of years ago. And it was what El Dorado was like in 1908. That'd be a hundred years ago.

KK: Oh.

JA: And it was right interesting. [*Laughs*]

[00:02:21] KK: Yeah, I'll bet. Uh—what date were you actually born?

JA: May the sixteenth, 1912.

KK: Mh-hmm. And that was here in El Dorado.

JA: In El Dorado. Yes, sir.

KK: Okay. So you moved to Camden when you were about two.

JA: Two or three, yeah.

KK: Uh-huh.

JA: Somewhere along in there.

[00:02:36] KK: And so did you go to school in Camden?

JA: I went to school—uh—the first and second grades. And—uh—uh—then we moved again to Blytheville.

KK: Mmm. That's a pretty long drive.

JA: Yeah, well. We . . .

KK: In those days.

JA: . . . [*laughs*] we took a train.

KK: Oh.

[00:02:53] JA: We didn't even have a car then. Uh—Daddy didn't.

Uh—so—uh—uh—we—we were in Blytheville for one year.

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: And—uh—then he went to North Little Rock as superintendent of the schools there in [19]21, I believe it was—[19]21 and [19]22.

They had been closed down for lack of money.

KK: Ah.

JA: And—uh—uh—Daddy sometime had a re—reputation of bein' pretty good—uh—financial man.

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: And—uh—he—he got the school back on track and—for a couple years. And Paragould was havin' the same kinda trouble. And we went up there. I went through the fifth grade in North Little Rock.

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: And then in Paragould I went on through—uh—uh—uh—the eleventh grade. And while I was in Paragould in 1927, I spent—uh—a couple of months in Little Rock.

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: At the legislature. I was just a kid then. [*Laughter*] That's when they—they had pages that—uh—would stay the whole session, not like it is now.

KK: Uh-huh.

JA: And so I just went to Little Rock and—uh—lived in a boardinghouse. And—uh—I—that was the year of the Great Flood. You remember?

KK: Mh-hmm. Yes. Yes.

JA: And I was in the last—uh—train that went across the Baring Cross Bridge before it washed into the river goin' home at the end of the session.

KK: Wow! [*JA laughs*] So the water was pretty high, right?

JA: Oh yeah. Y—I don't think you could get in and out of Little Rock hardly at all. Maybe one or two we—places. But it was all blocked.

[00:04:37] KK: Was it scary to see the water that high when you were goin' over the bridge?

JA: Well—uh—not too much. I wasn't [*laughs*] too much concerned about it at that time. [*KK laughs*] But—uh—it—uh—was quite interesting. And while I was in—uh—uh—Paragould, I—uh—joined the Boys Scouts. And—uh—we came back to Little Rock in 1927 at the end of that year. And—uh—uh—they had a Confederate veterans' reunion in Little Rock in the summer of 1927, I believe it was. And our scout troop served out there as pages for the old veterans. And that was quite interesting. And



I've still got a little bar that you put on to identify—uh—you're workin' that veterans installation. And—uh—I finished high school in the famous high school. It was the first class—that—uh—was—uh—graduated from Central High School.

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: And it's quite different now. [*Laughs*] But—uh . . .

[00:05:49] KK: So that—that must've been a really amazing building to be in at that time.

JA: It was. It was. It was a—and it still is [*laughs*]. Uh—I know—uh—I—I—I had—uh—joined a—a Paragould boys' band and learned to play the cornet while I was in Paragould. And so I went on into the bands there at Little Rock. In high school band. And they practiced up on the top floor of that monument there.

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: And I member I had a auto-mechanics class down in the basement. And then I had a band rehearsal—practice right after that, and you had about five minutes to get from there to there. And—and there were no elevators. [*Laughter*]

KK: Ah, no.

JA: So that was—that was quite interesting. It was . . .

KK: Yeah, that—that's a beautiful building.

JA: Yeah.

KK: Uh—I mean, was that—coming from smaller towns for most of your life, was that shocking to see the size of that high school?

JA: Oh, not too much.

KK: No.

JA: Uh—it [*train whistle*]*—uh—it—it—that didn't bother me too much at all.*

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: It was—uh—worst thing was tryin' to get around from one class to the other [*laughter*] 'cause it was so big.

KK: Yeah.

[00:07:07] JA: Uh-huh. But—uh—then—uh—when I graduated from high school there in 1928—uh—they had started the Little Rock Junior College. Uh—Johnny Larson, he was the principal of the high school there. He was a good man. And he was se—set up a good faculty. And I went there for a couple of years. Well, really about two and a half years.

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: Because—uh—uh—that was in the Depression.

KK: Ah, right.

JA: And—uh—so I wound up—uh—uh—graduating from there with a—and I was interested in architecture. And so I was looking for a place to go to school. And—uh—didn't have any money

[*laughs*] . . .

KK: Yeah.

JA: . . . to speak of. Daddy was—uh—on a schoolteacher's—he was principal of the schools there—of—uh . . .

KK: Yeah.

JA: . . . he was—well, it started out as Lee School. Do you know where Lee School is?

KK: Hm-mm. No.

JA: Out on Twelfth Street and Pine?

KK: Oh, okay.

JA: I don't think it—it may not be used as school. It was a grammar school.

KK: Uh-huh.

[00:08:13] JA: Then later he was principal at East Side.

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: And then at—uh—West Side. He was principal there. And then—uh—he—he was retired. They retired him when he got sixty-five. I don't know whether they—I don't know whether they do that now or not still?

KK: Probably.

[00:08:31] JA: Well, it—they—he wasn't ready to retire. [*Laughter*]

And he got a job out in—uh—uh—Del Norte, Colorado, in a high

school. They paid him more money teachin', just classroom teachin', than he got as principal of the junior—at Little Rock. [Laughter].

KK: Well, it was a poor state, wasn't it?

JA: Yeah, and—uh—but—uh—my mother was—uh—havin' health problems . . .

KK: Oh.

JA: . . . and she didn't go out there. And so he came back in a year. And I had the sister that was dyin' of cancer. And she was still at home, so he came back home and went to work for Draughon Business College.

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: And he stayed there until he—uh—well, he—he just couldn't go anymore. They were good to him. They were real good to him. And—uh—uh—he stayed there. He was eighty-four years old when he quit. And he didn't live much longer after that.

KK: Mh-hmm. Yeah.

Trey Marley: Mr. Abbott, do you have a handkerchief?

[Tape stopped]

[00:09:32] KK: So you did the junior college thing, then you were lookin' for a college for architecture. You . . .

JA: Well, I went—uh—uh—the closest place I could find that we

could afford was University of Illinois.

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: You didn't have architectural schools around like you have now. There wasn't one in Arkansas. The other one I was considering—there was two—was one out at Stillwater, Oklahoma. And another one at Washington University in Kansas—I mean, in St. Louis. But you had to have a [*laughter*] rich uncle to go there.

KK: Yeah.

JA: And so—uh—I went to the University of Illinois and studied architecture. And—uh—I—uh—was up there a year. I took all my credits from Little Rock Junior College up there.

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: I took all the pre-engineering and—uh—that type of thing that I could get. And—uh—mostly all the work I did at—at Illinois basically was art and design and . . .

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: . . . architecture and that type of thing.

KK: Right.

JA: But I wasn't gonna able to go back another year. And I bought some books, classroom books—uh—structural engineering and—uh—uh—reinforced concrete. And I brought them home and—

uh—I studied them here.

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: And—uh . . .

KK: Where were you livin' then?

JA: Well, I was livin' in Little Rock then.

KK: Okay.

[00:10:57] JA: And—uh—uh—I went to work for—uh—Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company—uh—in 1932, I guess it was, or [193]3. And—uh—I stayed with them—uh—on up through—up to 1936.

KK: Oh, mh-hmm.

JA: When—but—uh—what I did at—uh—Pittsburgh, first I went down there and worked in the paint basement.

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: Takin' care of the paint inventory and shi—shippin' and unloadin' cars and stuff. [*Laughs*] And—uh—then I got doin' the design work for them on storefronts.

KK: Ah.

[00:11:39] JA: They had a big deal on storefronts.

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: So I would—the district—uh—salesman would have somebody that wanted to put in a new storefront or something, and then I'd go out on a special call to measure that up and draw 'em

some pictures of it. I've got several of those old pictures . . .

KK: Oh, good.

JA: . . . uh—in my files, but I didn't keep all of 'em. And—uh—uh—they would use them and sell 'em. I've got one—one here I think I did that's—it's not a—it was a shoe store originally, but it—I think the front's still like it was. And—uh—then—uh—uh—I was doin'—uh—Lion Oil had a—a—a program that they were puttin' in new for service stations that were goin' into the retail business.

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: That was in 1936. And—uh—uh—they answered a Pittsburgh ad [*laughs*] about how their products would do on stations and things and buildings. And—uh—uh—the sales manager there in charge of sales, he answered the ad. And he sent me down here to see him.

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: And I made him a sketch of a—uh—what possibly could be done on the fillin' station, and wasn't too long after that, he called me and wanted me to meet him at the Albert Pike Hotel in Little Rock.

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: Well, I met him. He offered me a job.

KK: Ah.

[00:13:17] JA: [*Laughs*] And so I moved on back to El Dorado. I had just been married a year.

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: I married my wife in Little Rock. Well, she was a—from Stephens, Arkansas. So she was from—goin' home, too. So—uh—uh—I came back to El Dorado then. And—uh—did fillin' stations for Lion Oil—uh—in Arkansas, Mississippi, Tennessee, and I think we had one in Alabama, but they didn't get much into Alabama and Louisiana . . .

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: . . . or Oklahoma. It was mostly Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee. [00:13:53] And—uh—uh—then—then the war came on.

KK: Uh-huh.

JA: And—uh—I was still workin' for Lion Oil, but we wasn't buildin' any fillin' stations.

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: So they were—uh—uh—workin' with the government, tryin' to get the government where they could build us a Ozark ordnance plant out here, which was a chemical plant. And I helped some on the paper work . . .



KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: . . . and—uh—gettin' that together. Then they got that goin', and I—they moved me out to the refinery.

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: And—uh—they were gettin' ready to—uh—build a synthetic rubber plant. And—uh—I worked a whole lot more on that one than I did on the one out here.

KK: Yeah.

JA: And then they got that one, the synthetic rubber plant called butadiene.

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: And we built it, and I did the structural design on all of it. Had some really interesting pro—projects out there.

KK: Yeah.

JA: And I learned a lot about refinery that I didn't know. [*Laughter*]

KK: I'll bet.

JA: Uh-huh.

KK: Crash course, huh?

[00:15:01] JA: Yeah. But then after the war, after that all got settled, I told 'em I wanted to do a little more work. But they were nice enough to me to where while I was workin' for them, I could do some other work . . .

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: . . . out, and then they helped me in it.

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: And durin' that time—uh—I designed a—a gymnasium for the high school. It's on the National Register.

KK: Wow.

[00:15:24] JA: It's—uh—still over here at the college, on the college campus now. And I also—uh—uh—did—uh—the muni—municipal airport building, the mu—mun—municipal building out there during that time and several little ol' houses scattered around here and there, [*laughter*] includin' my own. So they were real nice about that. And so then I—uh—moved outta their offices and had my own office. And I ran a—a office from about nineteen—uh—[19]46 or [194]7, I guess it was, or [194]8, I don't know exactly which. Uh—was more—more or less just a one-man operation.

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: I did have a one good man, Charles Cameron that—uh—served. He was born in 1925. And he—uh—was raised down here at Wesson.

KK: Oh yeah. Uh-huh.

JA: Yeah, he was a—he walked in my office one time. I believe it

was in 1949. And I didn't know him at all.

KK: Yeah.

JA: And said he was lookin' for a job. And I visited with him a while. And he had—uh—uh—was drafted into the army. And he served with Patton in the Battle of the Bulge . . .

KK: Wow.

JA: . . . over there, but he never would talk about it much. And I understand that. I didn't question him.

KK: Yeah.

[00:17:00] JA: But—uh—and then he had done a—after he got back out of the army, he had gone a couple of years over here at—uh—uh—A&M is what it was then.

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: It's now Southern Arkansas University.

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: And—uh—he—uh—got a degree over there in some arts and sciences. Then he took a—went to Kansas City and—and had a year's work in some draftin and some mechanical and architectural draftin'. So I offered him a job. And you know, he's still workin' up there?

KK: Wow. [*Laughs*] You might wanna wipe your mouth one more time there. That's great. That's amazing.

JA: [*Moves*] Oh.

KK: There you go.

JA: I've got kinda a little paralysis in my . . .

KK: Yeah, that's fine. No problem.

JA: Mh-hmm.

KK: If you don't mind us reminding you, it just looks a little better.

JA: Yeah. Uh-huh. So . . .

[00:17:55] KK: Well, that's—that's neat. So—uh—so, you know, for a person coming out of the Depression, you actually got some good opportunities.

JA: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

KK: You were, I'm sure, happy to have . . .

JA: Mh-hmm. Yeah.

KK: . . . the job even in the paint basement.

JA: Mh-hmm.

KK: What—I mean, times were hard, right?

JA: No, I d—I think I—I think I was makin' \$75 a month at Pittsburgh. And I think when I came down here to Lion, they give—I got a hundred dollars. [*Laughs*] And—and then it got a little better as time went on. Mh-hmm.

KK: Yeah, that sounds about right. We interviewed someone yesterday who used to make \$1.50 a day . . .

JA: Mh-hmm.

KK: . . . and then—at the grocery store, and then moved over to workin' on the oil platforms and made \$4.50 a day.

JA: Mh-hmm.

KK: And that was big money.

JA: Yeah, it was.

KK: In the [19]20s.

JA: Mh-hmm.

KK: And so—uh—you know, I know it was—had to have been tough. Uh—so when you were workin' for the Pittsburgh, you just did whatever they wanted you to do at first, right?

JA: Yeah.

KK: Because you just tryin' to get a job.

JA: Mh-hmm.

KK: Uh—and I know it was hard to get a job.

[00:18:58] JA: Well, it was rather odd. I had taken—uh—uh—shorthand and—uh—uh—typin' in high school. And they were lookin' for a—a male secretary. The boss was. Well, that's what he hired me for. Well, then—I mean, I wasn't too good at it. [Laughter] I had my fingers crossed. And—uh—before I went to work—uh—uh—the—uh—boss of the Arkmo Lumber Company—uh—had a son, and—uh—and they sold paints for Pittsburgh.

KK: Yeah.

JA: So—uh—they were right close with the boss, and he—uh—put the pressure on them and wanted to give that fellow the job. So he called me in there, the boss did. Says it's—"You need to go down in the basement and learn more about this paint and stuff." [*Laughter*] It tickled me to death 'cause he didn't know it, but I didn't—I didn't partic—particularly want to be a secretary.

KK: Yeah.

JA: But—uh—it worked out fine.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:20:04] KK: Well now, I know you mu—they must have known about your drafting and architecture schooling while you were there. But how did you get to start designing those stores? Because that seems like that would be a hard transition to let them let you do that. How come they let you—how did you convince them to let you design those storefronts?

JA: I don't know that I convinced them particularly. They knew I had done some—I mighta even done some—in my spare time, done some scratchin' around there and so forth. But—and then talkin' to them, and I guess they tried me out on one or two.

[*Laughter*]

KK: Yeah.

JA: It worked out real nice.

[00:20:46] KK: Now you didn't finish architecture school, right?

JA: No. Uhn-uhn.

KK: So did you get to be an official architect? How did that—I mean, was there a process to be called an architect at that time?

JA: No, there wasn't. There was no licenses, requirements at all. And course, when they put the license in [*KK laughs*], I'd been doin'—designin' houses and buildin's and workin' for Lion Oil and designin' their stations for three or four years, and I grandfathered in on that.

KK: Makes sense. Yeah. I see now. I wanted to hear about that.

JA: But I'm a life member of the American Institute of Architects, emeritus now. And I've been a registered architect since they started. [*Laughter*]

[00:21:39] KK: Yeah. So you say you won that, you know, that nice award for the gymnasium that you designed.

JA: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

KK: And I was just wondering, I mean, that must have really helped your practice to have that award. How did you apply for the award, or how did you find out about the award?

JA: I didn't have anything to do with gettin' the award. I don't know

who did that, somebody at the school, I guess. But . . .

KK: Was that good for your career though, to have that?

JA: Yeah. Mh-hmm. It didn't hurt. [*Laughter*]

[00:22:18] KK: I would imagine. You know, when you were talkin' about bein' a page at the legislature . . .

JA: Yeah.

KK: . . . and bein' at the boardinghouse, what kind of things would you do as a legislative page?

JA: I'd just run errands for the senator. I was his personal page—senator from Paragould. I've forgotten what his name is.

[00:22:44] KK: And then when you were—you also talked about sorta being a page for the 1927 Confederate . . .

JA: Yeah.

KK: . . . celebration. Did you hear some interesting Civil War stories that you can recall?

JA: No, not that I recall.

KK: But those were actually veterans of the Civil War.

JA: Mh-hmm. That was one of the last—I don't whether they've had one since then or not. But it was one of the last ones. It may have been last or the next to the last, but it was—those old men camped out there in tents and stuff out there in Fair Park.

[*Laughs*]



KK: And they were gettin' pretty old by then, right?

JA: Yeah. Yeah. Mh-hmm.

KK: Yeah.

JA: In [19]27. Mh-hmm.

KK: Yeah. So they were probably in their eighties.

JA: Mh-hmm.

KK: If they were twenty years old in 1860s then that, yeah—that woulda made 'em pretty old.

JA: Mh-hmm.

KK: Well, that had to be interesting though.

JA: It was.

KK: To see that camaraderie.

JA: Mh-hmm.

[00:23:47] KK: And did that make an impression on you?

JA: Yes, it did. I've always remembered that. I don't guess it made as much of an impression as it should have 'cause I was kinda young. *[Laughs]*

KK: Right. How old were you when you did that? Do you remember?

JA: Yeah. Let's see, that was in 1920—summer of 1927 and I was born in [19]12 . . .

KK: So you were about fifteen or . . .

JA: So. Yeah. Mh-hmm.

KK: . . . sixteen years old?

JA: Mh-hmm.

KK: And when you were a page in the legislature, what year was that? Do you remember?

JA: That was the—in [19]27—in the spring of [19]27.

KK: Oh, that was also in [19]27.

JA: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

KK: Okay. So both things.

JA: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

KK: And did you get any kinda pay for that, or did they just put you up?

JA: I got a little pay, I think. Well, now, you know, I really don't remember.

KK: But you were able to live.

JA: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

[00:24:39] KK: So tell me about meeting your wife.

JA: [*Laughs*] Well, she was in Little Rock. She had gone to Central College in Conway, the Baptist college. And she met a young man from Hendrix, and they got married in, let's see—well, it—I don't know just—don't remember just what time it was. But he died in just about a couple—less than a couple years. And he

was Bob Drummond of the Drummond Funeral Home people. And she was—stayed livin' in Little Rock there, and I—Pittsburgh had a Christmas party or a New Year's party or something. We were gonna go over to Belvedere [*laughs*] at Hot Springs. And that night it was about like it's been out here today, foggy, and it was too dangerous, it looked like, to drive over there back then. The roads weren't like they are now. [*Laughs*]

[00:26:00] KK: What were they like?

JA: Pretty bad. It was paved all the way to Hot Springs, but it went all the way around, twistin' around in the hills and stuff. And Terry [*unclear words*] lived at Hot Springs.

KK: Yeah.

JA: We called him and said, "We're not gonna go there. We're gonna go out to"—what was that place out on Hot Springs highway? The nightclub out there, and we—anyhow, we all went out there. And a fella I worked with, young man I worked with, had a date with a girl—well, he had a date with my wife. And I didn't have a date. About that time, he said, "I'll get you a date with her roommate." And so we worked that out. [*Laughs*]

KK: Yeah.

JA: And I had a blind date with her roommate. And I was drivin' the company car at that time where I was travelin' quite a bit around

the state. So we went to the party and had a good time. And Alice had a umbrella, and she left it in the car. I accused her of doin' it on purpose, but she says she didn't. [*Laughter*] So she called me and wanted to know if I had her umbrella. And I said, "Yeah, I'll bring it to you." So it started off right there.

[*Laughter*] And a year later we were married.

KK: Wow. Just 'cause she left an umbrella in the car you got . . .

JA: Yeah. Uh-huh. And . . .

KK: What was her maiden name?

JA: Grayson—Alice Priscilla Grayson.

KK: Alice Priscilla Grayson.

[00:27:42] JA: It's from an old, pioneer family in south Arkansas.

Her Grayson ancestors settled up there in Ouachita County in 1880 about.

KK: Okay.

JA: And then her other—her mother—grand—great-grandmother's family was the Hawkins. And they settled there in 1841. And let's see, Zachariah Taylor Grayson, one of John Grayson's sons, married Alice Hawkins, and they're my wife's grandparents. And they all lived up there in Ouachita and Nevada County. And the old man came over here—old man Grayson came over here with a pretty good buncha money from outside of Knoxville,

Tennessee. I mean, of Chattanooga, Tennessee. And he bought a bunch of land up there around where White Oak crake is—White Oak Lake is. And it got all pretty well sold off from the family. [00:28:59] And it was—some of it came up for sale here, just in the last couple of years.

KK: Oh, yeah?

JA: Some of this family—and my grandson bought 143 acres of the part that belonged to his ancestor.

KK: Oh, that's nice.

JA: And then another eighty acres came up, and he was outta money, and he made me buy it. [Laughter] And it's just a quarter a mile from the part he bought. So we just want to get it back in the family. The one I bought had—it had a pine plantation on it and had pine trees around. They were—I guess they're now ten or twelve feet tall, just growin' good. And the one he bought has—about half of it had been clear-cut and had reseeded. Had a good stand of little pines comin' up like this. And the other half of it had some pretty good stand of ?versatile? pine.

KK: So that's good land then.

JA: So. Yeah.

KK: And it's back in the family.

JA: Mh-hmm.

[00:30:07] KK: So you met your wife and—at the party, and you took her umbrella back, and you guys started dating?

JA: Yeah. Yeah.

KK: What was the typical date like in those days? Did you guys go to the movies? You go to dinner?

JA: Well, we'd go to the movies and ride around. [*Laughter*] We'd drive over to Benton and back.

KK: Yeah.

JA: They had a pretty fair road there. And I don't know. It wasn't—and we'd do a lot of dancin'.

KK: Ah.

[00:30:40] JA: We went to a lotta dances. It was a different—durin' the Christmas holidays, why, they just had one dance right after the other, the different people. And I remember one time Daddy [*laughs*]—I started out, and he said, "Oh, you're not goin'. You've gone too many times." [*Laughter*] "You need to rest a while." But . . .

KK: That sounds like a lotta fun.

JA: Yeah, it was. It—I couldn't go to the kind of dancin' they doin' now. [*Laughter*] But Alice—I lost her three years ago.

KK: Oh, man.

JA: She would've been a hundred years old if she—she was a little older than I was.

[00:31:25] KK: So you guys were married for how long?

JA: About seventy years.

KK: Wow.

JA: We just lacked bein' seventy years when she died.

KK: Man, that is somethin'. So you guys really did share your lives together.

JA: Yeah. Yeah. Uh-huh.

[00:31:39] KK: Now what did she like to do? I mean, did she ever work? Or did she just raise family? Or how did—what did she do?

JA: Well, she looked after me. [*Laughter*] No, she . . .

KK: A full-time job, right?

JA: When I married her, she was takin' a course in some kind of a—I don't think they use it anymore. What—office machine that they don't use anymore now. I've forgotten the name of it. And she was takin' a course in that. But she never did do any real work. In fact, it was right interesting down here. I needed some help one time, and I usually kept a secretary girl. And she said, "Well, let me do that." So I let her come down and work a while. Well, she didn't like that much. [*KK laughs*] And she

finally said she just had to go. She told everybody I fired her.  
[*Laughter*] So that was the joke in the family all the time, that I  
fired her. But she was a sweet girl. And she liked gardenin' and  
trees and stuff. And she inherited a little timberland from her  
father. And we had lots of fun goin' up. Instead of hirin'  
somebody to spot the timber, we'd go out and mark it ourselves.  
I would select the trees to cut and paint 'em, and she would  
mark it down in the book. And we did that lots of times. It'd  
take us a long time to do a forty acres, but—'cause I was  
workin', we'd do it on weekends and . . .

KK: Yeah.

JA: . . . some other times. But . . .

KK: That's something fun to do together—be outdoors and . . .

JA: Yeah, yeah. We enjoyed it very much.

[00:33:31] KK: Yeah. So she liked the outdoors quite a bit.

JA: Oh, yeah. Mh-hmm. She spent a lot of time outdoors.

[*Laughs*]

KK: Yeah, yeah. Well, that's nice. That's nice. And you know,  
gardening is a lot of fun, and it also, of course, makes your  
house really nice.

JA: Mh-hmm. Mmm.

[00:33:46] KK: Where did you guys live?



JA: Mmm?

KK: Where did you live?

JA: Live?

KK: Uh-huh.

JA: I lived here in El Dorado.

KK: Yeah, but did you live in the same house you're in now?

JA: Yeah, built it 1938. Am right there now by myself. [*Laughs*]

KK: And so you designed that house, right?

JA: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

KK: So did you do anything unique with that house when you designed it? Did you do anything special?

JA: Well, it—no, nothing particularly special. It's just a good, substantial house. It wasn't like the ones around it too much. You can—it kinda stands out now, even. You drive down Main Street at Main and Yocum. I did add on to it. Made an addition to it in, let's see, when was that? That was about 1975.

KK: What did you add on?

[00:34:45] JA: I added a—well, I changed the bathroom. I had one bathroom in the original house. And I tore that one out and rearranged it into another location. And then I added a big room at the back with a fireplace, a wood-burning fireplace in it. And another bath with a shower that I didn't have in the other

bathroom. And it had a vaulted ceiling in it.

KK: Mmm. Yeah. Sounds nice.

JA: And it's kind of combination livin' room and bedroom. [KK  
*laughs*]

KK: Yeah.

JA: We got two twin beds in it. And then the fireplace is sittin' in the middle of the end. And it—beams up this here way. And the bookcases on the side, and they're full. [*Laughs*] We got a—some chairs—nice chairs . . .

KK: Oh.

JA: . . . and a couch there in front, so it's been right handy. We—my wife fell and broke her arm here about—must've been about ten or twelve years ago from now. And the doctor wouldn't give her any anesthetics to set it because she was—her age.

KK: Oh.

JA: And the thing was broken. It wasn't just a fracture. It was just broken.

KK: Oh, my goodness.

JA: And we had to go—live with that for about six or seven years.

KK: That's tough.

JA: And so when she did that, we moved back into the back room, and . . .

KK: Make it easier on her?

JA: Yeah. Yeah. 'Cause I had to kinda watch her a whole lot closer.

KK: Yeah. Well, you designed a lotta buildings in this area.

JA: Oh, yeah.

[00:36:48] KK: We should talk a little bit about your architectural resume because, you know, that's probably a big part of your work life. So I know you did the Lion Oil storefronts or the paint storefronts, I'm sorry, then the Lion Oil stations.

JA: Mh-hmm.

KK: And if I remember correctly, those stations, some of 'em had arched—did they have—did some of them have arched columns or arched windows in 'em?

JA: No. Hm-mm.

KK: It seemed like they had sort of a—were they all squared off? I couldn't remember. I remember the signs. And I remember seeing those stations, but it's been a while since I've seen one. I don't think they have 'em anymore.

JA: There's one—there was one of 'em built at the foot of the Broadway Bridge in North Little Rock. It's gone now. But they—all of 'em have been torn down.

KK: And then you built a gymnasium here for the high school, right?

JA: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

KK: And then so—after that did you start getting more work for yourself?

JA: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

[00:37:49] KK: And then you opened your own shop. Now what year did you open your own business?

JA: Oh, it was right—must've been around 1946 or [194]7.

KK: So you didn't go into the war?

JA: No, I was workin' for the Lion Oil. And we were doin'—building their rubber plant out there.

KK: Oh. Right.

JA: I was doin' war work.

KK: Right, right. I understand.

JA: Uh-huh.

KK: I talked to somebody else who . . .

JA: They got me deferred. I was on the number three, I think, to get drafted. And they got me deferred and put me on the . . .

KK: Because you were helpin' with the war effort with Lion Oil.

JA: Yeah, yeah. Mh-hmm.

KK: Okay. Gotcha. Gotcha. So but you had friends and knew a lot of people who went to the war, right?

JA: Oh yeah. Mh-hmm.

KK: Yeah.

JA: Mh-hmm.

[00:38:36] KK: So you went through the Depression. You went through War World II. You started your own company. What was it called when you started it? Did you have a name for the . . .

JA: Just John B. Abbott, Architect.

KK: There you go. Sounds good. And you were by yourself for a while.

JA: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

[00:38:50] KK: And then you met this gentleman who was lookin' for a job.

JA: Well, yeah. Mh-hmm.

KK: And his name was?

JA: Charles D. Cameron.

KK: Okay. And so you and Charles worked together. I guess you designed, and he drafted.

JA: Well, he developed to be a pretty good designer himself. And he now is an associate member of the arkans—American Institute of Architects.

KK: Oh, my goodness. Yeah, okay.

JA: So Charles has been a real steady and good fellow to work with.

I appreciate him so much.

KK: Well, and he just walked in the door. That was just kinda lucky.

I guess things work out that way sometimes. Well, that's remarkable. So the two of you and a secretary, I suppose . . .

JA: Yeah.

KK: . . . pretty much were the office?

JA: And once in a while I picked up somebody else, but they didn't do too good. [*Laughs*] When I'd get kinda busy.

KK: Yeah. But they didn't work up to your standards enough to keep 'em, huh?

JA: Hm-mm. Didn't help me any.

KK: Ah, well. [*Laughter*] There you go. That's not good.

JA: No, that's . . .

[00:39:55] KK: So tell me about some of the types of buildings that you used to build and where you used to build them.

JA: Well, I guess outside of this area and the fillin' stations I did for Lion that were scattered around, I did one building for Lion in Memphis that was not a fillin' station. I built a division office building for 'em over there on the Mississippi in Tennessee. Office building down there on the—you know, it's like close to the river.

KK: Yeah.

JA: Yeah.

KK: Was it a—was it more than one story?

JA: No, it was just a small office. And then at Brinkley, I did a housing project, a government housing project. And . . .

KK: Well, that's pretty different.

JA: Yeah. Mh-hmm. And I think I did two up there.

KK: Now did they give you some parameters on that? [*TM coughs*]  
Like how many units . . .

JA: Oh, yeah. Yeah . . .

KK: . . . and how many . . .

JA: . . . yeah, yeah . . .

KK: . . . bedrooms and all this kind of stuff?

JA: Yeah, they . . .

KK: And how much it needed to cost or . . .

JA: Yeah, they did have all of that.

[00:41:14] KK: Okay, so you had to work within their specifications.

JA: Oh, yeah. Mh-hmm.

KK: Did you get to do anything interesting with that or was it just such a . . .

JA: No, not too much.

KK: Yeah.

JA: They—you have to do all the site-plan work, too, you see. The

roads and all of that. 'Course . . .

KK: That sounds like a pretty big job.

JA: Yeah. Well, you always have some associates on something like that. It'll get pretty big.

KK: Yeah.

JA: And your mechanical and electrical stuff. But all of my—most of my work in the early days was—I did most of the engineering myself.

KK: Oh, okay.

JA: Did electrical and the architectural and the structural and the plumbin'.

KK: Was that a—that would be unusual today, right?

JA: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

KK: Okay, so in those days . . .

[00:42:06] JA: And that's a different ballgame. You go up there to the office now where the boys are workin', and it's all done—I think Charles is the only one that uses a pencil much.

[*Laughter*] They've got computer experts up there, and they. . .

KK: Yeah.

JA: . . . punch these buttons, and it's amazin' what they come up with.

KK: Yeah, I guess it's a lot faster.



JA: Well, it is. Uh-huh. [*KK laughs*] But looks like they doin' a whole lot more work. I mean, you get a set of specifications now, and they're that thick [holds fingers about 2" apart]. When I used to write one, it'd be about like that [holds fingers about 1" apart]. But some of that is government regulations that's made this go up there. And then the drawings are the same way. I d—I'd get a buildin' drawn on four or five sheets, and they may have fifteen for the same thing.

KK: Yeah.

JA: There's an awful lotta waste that goes in there.

KK: Yeah, I understand. [00:43:05] So how did you learn how to do the mechanical and the electrical and the plumbing? I mean, how'd you learn . . .

JA: Well, that's where I bought the books that I came home with. [*KK laughs*] And I studied 'em at home.

KK: So self taught, basically.

JA: Yeah, yeah.

KK: And then as you built buildings or saw buildings being built from your plans, did you get—you think, did that help you improve . . .

JA: Oh yeah. Mh-hmm.

KK: . . . in your mechanical and electrical and plumbing skills?

JA: Mh-hmm.

[00:43:28] KK: When you worked with contractors, did you find that was helpful too, that you learned a lot?

JA: I would—I . . .

KK: When you worked with a contractor, like a plumbing contractor, did you learn a lot from that as well?

JA: No, I taught them.

KK: Oh. [*Laughter*] There you go. That's great. That's great.

[00:43:47 ] TM: Kris, can we go back to his, like, early childhood and more childhood stuff and maybe even his parents and stuff like that?

KK: Yeah, I think we'll go back to it. But so tell me some more about some of the actual buildings that you built. Were there particular kinds that you built beyond the ones you've described? Did you do schools or hospitals or . . .

JA: Yes, here in El Dorado, I've either designed or remodeled, added on to almost every school buildin' in town. Not every one of 'em but almost.

KK: That's here in El Dorado?

JA: Yeah. Mh-hmm. And see—you see, most of those buildings were built back before you had air-conditionin'. And in those old buildings, you had a big window space to let light in—natural

light. They didn't have usually but just one light—drop light.

[Laughs] It was a daylight school.

KK: Yeah.

JA: It wasn't fixed for night. But now, you see, you've got artificial light, electricity, and neon lights and all that stuff all—fluorescents. And they—you build that for a certain eye level.

KK: Yeah.

JA: And you do that with your lights. Well, then those—when you got air-conditionin', you lost a lot of heat through those glass windows.

KK: Yeah.

[00:45:15] JA: So you'll go around and see these buildings in El Dorado now, most of 'em, you'll see that those windows have been closed up. And you may have a little window over here, a little window over there, and a panel in the middle. And I did most of that. And had a school—and then there were some new schools that we built right after the war that you still didn't have too much air-conditionin' in 'em. And some of them have that same thing.

KK: Yeah.

JA: So then the old post office down here that they're tryin' to sell now, back in the [19]50s, I guess it was, we remodeled that

thing completely. It didn't have air-conditionin' in it. And I got my friend at Little Rock, Blaylock, to do the electrical and the air-conditionin'. They rewired it and air-conditioned it. But I did all the architectural and structural work on it. And then I've done some nursin' homes. Did a nursin' home here in El Dorado, Hudson Nursing Home, and added on to it. It's the best one in town. And I did a nursin' home at Star City. And let's see, I did a fifty-bed hospital at Nashville.

KK: Wow, that's a big project.

JA: Well, it was a Hill-Burton project. Back to then it was—I wouldn't attempt to do a hospital now. They've got so complicated and . . .

KK: Yeah.

JA: . . . and that was a—just a little country hospital. We had one operatin' room in it. [*Laughs*] And it was fifty-bed hospital. [00:47:24] Then at Fordyce, I added—I remodeled part of that hospital and added on to it. I think we added twenty-five or thirty beds to it. And later on I added another little wing to it for the nursin' home area at Fordyce. Then I did a federal office and a post office at Magnolia, and a similar one at Star City. And then I remodeled a—and added on to the post office at McGehee.

[00:48:01] KK: Those are federal jobs, right?

JA: Yeah. Uh-huh. And there's another one at Monticello we added on to. The one in McGehee was kinda interesting [*laughs*] the way it happened. On those government jobs, I worked with Blaylock on it. You know, he did the mechanical and electrical, and I did the architecture stuff. Well, they called us—said they wanted to do a job at Monticello. So we went down to Dallas and visited with 'em. And we kinda talked about it and said, "We don't know whether we wanna take it or not." We got kinda tired of the government regulations . . .

KK: Yeah. Yeah.

JA: . . . and red tape. You'd have to make a set of preliminary drawings and send 'em to kan—I mean, to St. Louis for the Post Office Department to check 'em. And you'd do that about three times. And then you got this one, and it'd take forever to get 'em done. And you're just always messin' with it. We said, "Well, I don't think we'll"—so we decide we'll go down there and talk to 'em. And we had about made up our mind we were gonna tell them we wasn't gonna do it. They said—we're sitting there—"We've got another one over here at McGehee we want you to do." I said, "Well, we don't know [*laughter*] whether we wanna take on all of that or not." They said, "Well, we'll"—

Senator McClellan [*clears throat*]*—*my voice is bad . . .

KK: Oh, that's okay.

TM: Want some water?

KK: You want some water or somethin'?

[00:49:36] JA: Mmm. "Senator McClellan wants us to get this done in a hurry, and we'll cut out all of that stuff. You just make up these preliminary plans and bring 'em down here, and we'll sit here, and we'll get those people from St. Louis to come down here. We'll just sit right here and iron it out, and you go on and go to work." We said, "Okay, we'll do it." We got that one at McGehee done and finished before we even got started good on the one in Monticello. [*Laughter*] But they can cut out that red tape if they want to.

KK: Right. It didn't change anything really.

JA: Hm-mm. Hm-mm.

KK: 'Cept some—yeah.

JA: [*Laughs*] Now let's see what else . . .

KK: Well, so that's a lot further than just El Dorado.

JA: Oh, yeah.

KK: You were all over . . .

JA: Oh, yeah.

KK: . . . south Arkansas for s—particularly.

[00:50:26] JA: Yeah, let's see where—what else. I did some school work remodeling, added on some classrooms at—it was fair—I mean, Cullendale at that time, but it's combined with the Camden School District now. And it's a different—I don't think they're even using those buildin's anymore. And . . .

KK: So this is through the late [19]40s and early [19]50s . . .

JA: Mh-hmm.

KK: . . . and into the [19]50s.

JA: Mh-hmm.

[00:50:57] KK: And how much—I mean, did you continue for a couple more decades to do this type of work?

JA: Well, I haven't been really active in it since my wife got sick. And it's been about twenty years really.

KK: Yeah.

JA: But I still have a interest in the firm.

KK: Right.

JA: But . . .

KK: But you continued to . . .

JA: . . . most of my work was done as a individual . . .

KK: Right.

JA: . . . myself.

KK: Okay.

JA: I did some work when I got some partners but not too much. I fuss with 'em, but they don't pay any attention to me.

[*Laughter*]

KK: So you kept right on workin' in the [19]60s and the [19]70s.

JA: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

[00:51:38] KK: Well, a lot changed in architecture in the . . .

JA: Oh, yeah. It's . . .

KK: Yeah.

JA: . . . different deal now. [*Knocking sound in background*]

KK: Yeah, yeah. And in the [19]60s and [19]70s, I know energy savings was a real big deal. Right?

JA: Mh-hmm.

KK: So you designed for that type of—that kind—that concern, right?

JA: And asbestos.

KK: Ah. [*Laughter*]

JA: Whew. A lotta that seems to me like it's kinda silly. But a lot of it's not. There's some of it is—but you take a floor tile that's made with a little asbestos in it to bind it, the only way that can do anything is it's got to be ground up and worn off. But that's such a impossibility—not impossibility, but . . .

KK: I mean, if you just kept it sealed and waxed it would never . . .

JA: Mh-hmm.



KK: But I know . . .

JA: But they're tearin' down some buildings down here on South Washington now, and there was a picture in the paper this morning about a asbestos man comin' out of there that was cleaning it up. Now what all he's gonna do, I don't know. I just never got interested enough to pay any attention to it. I never had a problem. [*Laughter*]

[00:52:53] KK: Yeah. That was a different era for sure. What's the one building you think you're probably most proud of? Do you have a particular building that you really feel . . .

JA: Well, I don't—I guess, the stadium down here. I did all the structural design on that reinforced concrete, and I learned it all from the book I brought from Illinois. [*Laughs*]

KK: Wow, that's something. What year was that about that you built the stadium?

JA: Nineteen forty-six, I believe, or [194]7.

KK: So that thing will be around for a long time, won't it?

JA: Yeah.

KK: It's a strong building.

JA: And I think it's the nicest lookin' and the most comfortable stadium in the state.

KK: Well, that's good.

JA: Have you seen it?

KK: I haven't. But I need to go see it. We'll probably come back here in the spring and . . .

JA: Yeah.

KK: . . . photograph a lotta this when the weather's pretty. And so your wife didn't work during these whole periods, right?

JA: Hm-mm.

[00:53:50] KK: She's—now did you raise some children?

JA: I've got one son. He was born in 1939. It was a Cesarean operation. The doctor said, "Well, I might pull her through another one." But that was a different ballgame then, too, from what it is now. And so we didn't have any more. But he's right at seventy years old now. And he married a girl here from El Dorado. And when he got grown, he didn't wanna study architecture, I don't think. I had him up in my office for a while when he was in high school, kinda helpin' out, but he didn't like that at all. He [*laughs*] wanted to get outside.

KK: Yeah.

JA: So I said, "All right." My—I had a brother-in-law that died about that time. And he had a herd of cattle over at Stephens. And that's where my wife's people were. And I said, "Well you just go over to Stephens, and I'll buy those cows, and you can look

after them." Well, that suited him fine. So he found a little ol' house over there and bought it and moved over there. And let's see, I think he had—Alice Ann was just a baby then—that's his daughter. She was a baby. And he started foolin' with those cows. And then it got where you couldn't make any money outta them. And he—we sold the cows. And he kept lookin' after timberland over there. And just worked into that. Now they—he has two children, a son and a daughter. [*Clears throat*] And both of the families have some timberland. Charlotte's, his wife's family, had some timberland here in El Dorado, in Union County. And so they've gotten into the timber business. And they—and then my grandson, their son, he's in it pretty big. He's buyin' and, in fact, he's plantin' lots of timber. He just got through plantin' the ol' home place over at Stephens. Monday, I believe it was, he told me he'd just planted. I said, "Did you ever get that planted?" He said, "Yeah, just got through with it yesterday." [*KK laughs*] So . . .

KK: So that turned out okay.

[00:56:53] JA: Oh, yeah. Yeah. But he's a—I'm proud of my grandchildren. Johnny has the manager of the cross-county department at AmerCable out here. They're a real nice company. And he seems to be able to do pretty well as he

pleases. He's been buyin' timberland and replantin' it. And you know, so—and likes to duck hunt.

KK: Mh-hmm. [*JA laughs*] That works pretty well together.

JA: So he bought him a tract of land down on the Louisiana line in Luder Creek bottom. That's a swamp that goes down there. They call it the swamp. And they built a—he and his partner—he got a partner in that, I think. And they built 'em a little shack down there, where they can spend the night. But they get down there from home in fifteen minutes. [*Laughter*]

KK: Wow.

JA: So they were down there this weekend. And—but they doin' real well.

KK: Well, that's awful nice.

[00:58:10] JA: And my granddaughter, she's a psychiatrist. She has her own office here in El Dorado. And—interviewin' people. And she had a contract with some government agency where she checks to see if they're tellin' the truth and what kinda—what they can believe—what they can tell 'em when they get money from the government. I don't know all about it. But she don't tell me much about it. [*Laughs*] But they've got one little boy. And my grandson has two boys and a girl. One of 'em's in Central College at Conway. I think this is his last year, and he's

goin' into—he been takin' pre-pharmacy.

KK: Ah, yeah.

JA: And he's—he said—they said—"They look like they don't have to do—they got good workin' hours [*laughter*], and they make lots of money." And I said, "Well, I don't know whether you're gonna go into it or not." But that's what he's plannin'.

KK: Well, they—he won't have any trouble findin' a job, I can tell you that. [*JA laughs*] They need a lot of pharmacists.

JA: Yeah. Uh-huh.

TM: Kris, I need to change tapes.

KK: Okay.

[Tape stopped]

[00:59:26] KK: All right. Well, let's go back to—you moved around quite a bit as a kid because of your dad's work in the schools.

JA: I did what?

KK: You moved around as a child . . .

JA: Oh, yes. Uh-huh.

KK: . . . because of your dad's work . . .

JA: Yeah.

KK: . . . in the schools. But it sounded like you were in Little Rock for quite a while.

JA: I was. Mh-hmm.

KK: What range of age were you in—or what grades were you in in Little Rock?

JA: Well, I finished high school in Little Rock. I'd had one year in high school, and I musta been fifteen.

KK: Yeah. Now and bef—and so where did you spend most of your school years? Did you spend most of your school years in Little Rock? Or other . . .

JA: No. Huh-uh. All I spent at Little Rock was one year in high school and two years in junior college.

KK: Okay. So—and I know you were in Blytheville for a while.

JA: Paragould.

KK: Paragould.

JA: I spent the—Paragould was probably the most.

[01:00:25] KK: What grades were you in Paragould? Do you member?

JA: What . . .

KK: What grades?

JA: Well, I—let's see, I must've—I know it was all of junior high school. And on up through the tenth grade.

KK: So when you were in . . .

JA: Through the eleventh grade 'cause it—twelfth grade was in Little Rock.

[01:00:49] KK: Okay, so when you lived in Paragould, what was Paragould like in those days? How big was it, and what was goin' on?

JA: Well, Paragould—it was a—I guess you called it a kind of a railroad town. I think there were two railroads crossin' there. That's where it was supposed to get its name. Did you ever hear that?

KK: No. Tell me about it.

JA: Let's see, there were two railroads come along there, and the one of 'em was named—had a president named Para-something. And another one—I can't remember just how it went. But they took—made—the name Paragould was made from two names of officials in the railroads.

KK: Mmm. I see.

JA: Now they—which they were, I don't know right now.

KK: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm. And so as a railroad crossing, I guess, a town kinda built up around that.

JA: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

[01:01:40] KK: Uh-huh. And so in junior high when you were there, what did you guys—did—let's see—did you—you probably didn't have a car back then, right?

JA: Oh, no.

KK: So how did you get around, and what did you do? What . . .

JA: Walk.

KK: Pretty much walk everywhere you need to go?

JA: Let's see, maybe Daddy did have a car then. No, I don't believe so. Let's see, I know he had a car when we left North Little Rock. I guess he had a car of some type there because he had one in North Little Rock. And then, I think, at Paragould—I mean, at Blytheville—he quit school work at Blytheville. Mother taught school. She got a job teachin' math and science. Math and science teacher is hard to find, and a woman one in particular. *[Laughs]* So he decided he would sell insurance. Well, by the time the midterm came around, he decided he wasn't gonna sell insurance anymore. *[Laughter]* So he went back to Peabody College to work on his master's degree. And he finished that up in—that semester, in that summer semester. And he—we had a car there at Blytheville. And that summer we went to Kentucky, to my grandmother's place in Kentucky, which is north of Nashville. And Daddy was at Nashville. So he came over there and took us into Kentucky and drove the car. And we crossed the river on the ferryboat. *[Laughs]*

[01:03:37] KK: What kind of car did he have? Do you remember?

JA: He had a—I guess it was Ford.



KK: You don't remember what model it was? What year was that?

JA: Oh, gosh. I don't know what the model—what it was—I don't . . .

KK: Yeah.

JA: I just [*laughs*] . . .

KK: You remember what it looked like?

JA: No. Uh-uh. And—yeah, he was bound to had a car.

[01:04:00] KK: So but when you were in Paragould, everybody walked to school, right? And walked to the grocery store and . . .

JA: Yeah.

KK: So if you wanted to go to the movie or something like that, you would walk, right?

JA: Mh-hmm.

KK: Was everything fairly close together then?

JA: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

KK: Yeah.

JA: Mh-hmm. It was pretty close.

KK: Yeah.

JA: I think we lived about six or seven blocks from downtown and about three blocks from the school. The one school, although then when I got into junior high, it was a little further away. It

must have been five or six, seven blocks away. But no problem.

KK: Did anybody ride bicycles to school?

JA: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

KK: Did you have a bicycle?

JA: No. Hm-mm.

KK: You just walked?

JA: Hm-mm. Mh-hmm.

[01:04:55] KK: So you know, your parents lived in these different houses as they went from town to town. Did you—did they—did these houses improve as you went along, or were they all about the same?

JA: Well, let's see. The house we lived in in Camden is still there. And it was a—'course, you didn't have any central heat. You had stoves. And the house we lived in in Paragould was a two-story house. And we had a little coal heater in the downstairs and had a wood-burning thing in the hall upstairs, and there were bedrooms around it. And we'd all—Daddy'd get up and build a fire. And us kids would get up and huddle around that stove out there finishin' our dressin'. [*Laughs*]

KK: I'll bet. No doubt.

JA: Yeah.

KK: Yeah. So . . .

JA: But . . .

[01:06:02] KK: So coal stoves. I haven't heard much about coal stoves.

JA: About who?

KK: About the stoves that ran on coal.

JA: Yeah.

KK: I haven't heard a lot about that. Tell us a little about the coal fireplace or the coal stove.

JA: Now this was just a big ol' potbelly stove, iron—cast-iron stove. And it burned coal. And one of my jobs was to come home and fill up the coal box.

KK: And was that kind of a smelly—was coal kind of smell a little bit different than the wood?

JA: Oh, yeah. Mh-hmm.

KK: But I guess you were happy to have the heat.

JA: Yeah. [*Laughter*]

[01:06:42] KK: So where did the coal come from? Did you have to bring it in in a bag, or was it in a . . .

JA: No, they just bring it out and dump it. And you'd have a coal pile out there in the backyard somewhere or a bin, a coal bin, or whatever. And you'd go out and bring some of it in where it'd keep dry.

KK: So it needed to be dry to work right?

JA: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

[01:07:06] KK: Okay, yeah. It sounded like to me that one of the biggest ways to socialize was to goin' to dances. Did you do that even when you were in school? In junior high and high school?

JA: Well, that was more when I got back to Little Rock. I wasn't interested in that [*laughs*] when . . .

KK: You know, some of the people we've talked to in your age group, you know, went to high school dances and stuff . . .

JA: Yeah.

KK: . . . and that was . . .

JA: Oh yeah.

KK: . . . kinda the way they did their socializing. So how else did you do socializing, or did you play in sports, or did you . . .

JA: Well, we—there in Little Rock, we would—this was mostly while I was in junior college. The group that we—it was just kind of a small group. We didn't have too many there. And we all knew each other. And somebody almost every weekend or two would say, "We gonna have a dance out at our house." And had a Victrola. And we'd—several couples of us would get wound up out there at that house. Then maybe next week it'd be another place. And scattered around.

KK: Yeah. We had one person tell us recently that she used to put the Victrola on the back of her car.

JA: Do what?

KK: She would put a Victrola on the back . . .

JA: Oh.

KK: . . . of her car. And they would drive around tryin' to play records [*JA laughs*] while they were drivin' around. Did you ever see anybody do that?

JA: No. [*Laughter*]

[01:08:50] KK: I thought that sounded kinda unusual. That was fun. So you weren't down here when the oil boom was goin' on much, were you?

JA: No, we missed that.

KK: You knew about it, of course, I guess.

JA: We were in Camden when that was goin' on. Of course, it affected Camden—affected some—not near like it did down here.

KK: Did they have a refinery in Camden . . .

JA: No.

KK: . . . or did they just have workers come through?

JA: No. There was a refinery up at Smackover. Still is. We had several refineries [*rustling noise*] around here and there back in that days. But I thought of something I was gonna—Oh, yeah.

[01:09:34] My daddy's name was Thomas C. Abbott. And during the oil boom after we moved to Camden, there was a Thomas Oscar Abbott, a lawyer, moved from Oklahoma into El Dorado. But they got their mail mixed up. See Daddy had just moved from here up there. Well, somethin' come in with T. O. Abbott and him—they were this—said, "Well, he's moved to Camden." [*Laughter*] Up there, they had a time with it for a while.

KK: I could see how that would be. I mean, in those days you just used . . .

JA: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

KK: . . . to write the name and the town, right, and that was it.

[01:10:19] Was Blytheville a real different in—town compared with these other places?

JA: At Blytheville?

KK: Uh-huh.

JA: Oh, yes. It's a Delta river town. It's close to the river there, and it's swampy. And the main thing I remember about Blytheville is two things. I broke my arm there. [*Laughs*] And I was at school swingin' on a parallel bar up here. I was just swingin' back and forth. And the bell rang. Well, I forgot to get me another grip. [*Laughter*] And I slipped and fell and hit on

this arm. Broke this elbow in the joint.

KK: Whew. [*JA laughs*]

JA: See, I can't bend it down as far still.

KK: Ah.

JA: And I remember that. I got into the line. At that time, your boys lined up on one side of the school, and the girls on the other . . .

KK: Oh, okay.

JA: . . . to go in. You had a boys—you've seen these old schools have boys on one side and girls on the other.

KK: I have seen that. Yeah.

JA: Mh-hmm.

KK: Yeah, used to keep 'em apart.

[01:11:28] JA: Yeah. [*Laughter*] And I tried to reach up. I had my books in one hand, and I tried to reach up and take my cap off to go in the building, and teacher saw me. She said, "What's the matter, John?" I said, "Well, I can't do anything." They took me outta class then and set that bone and put it up. But then when they got the cast off of it and everything, I still—it was stiff. I couldn't move it. They put me on the dinin' room table, and the doctor broke that thing back. And they put it back up this way. And it worked that time. [*Laughs*]

KK: Shoo. Well, that's the tough way . . .

JA: So I remember that.

KK: Man, I'll bet.

[01:12:12] JA: And another thing I remember, I could go out in front of the house. Your drainage was terrible. And it had—didn't have any paved roads much. And they had a drainage ditch just right on the side of the road in front of the house. Well, if it'd get good and wet there, the wet season, I could go out there and catch some crawfish. *[Laughs]* So those are about the only two things I remember real good there.

KK: About Blytheville? Is that specifically about Blytheville?

JA: Yeah. Uh-huh.

[01:12:42] KK: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Now Little Rock was a much bigger town.

JA: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Little Rock was entirely different.

KK: So where did you live in Little Rock?

JA: Well, I lived in walkin' distance of the high school *[laughs]* on Eighteenth Street that was. Eighteenth and Schiller, I believe. The streetcar went around out that way. The streetcar turned right about—came on that. And then we—Daddy rented that house. And then in a few years, he bought one on Schiller Street at 2014 Schiller, other side of Wright Avenue. And it—still



you could walk to school. [*Laughs*]

[01:13:32] KK: And then did you used to ride the trolley by yourself?

JA: Do what?

KK: Did you used to ride the streetcar?

JA: Oh yeah.

KK: Did you used to—could you go by yourself? Or did you . . .

JA: Oh yeah.

KK: How much did it cost to go on the streetcar, do you member?

JA: Nothin' much. Ten ce—ten or fifteen cents. And you buy tokens and [*laughs*] . . .

KK: And did you used to go to downtown and stuff?

JA: Oh yeah.

KK: Yeah. On the trolley? [*TM coughs*] On the streetcar?

[01:14:04] JA: One thing I didn't tell you about Little Rock that I did up there. Let's see, I laid outta school one year at the beginnin' of the Depression. And I got a job. I was—finished junior college—two years there. And I was takin' some night courses, but first I got a job with Ken Cole at—he was the developer there. Do you—are you familiar with that name?

KK: No, not really.

JA: Yeah. Well, he developed Normandy. You know where Normandy's at?

KK: Yes. Uh-huh.

JA: He developed Normandy. And I worked on some houses in Normandy. And I'd ride the streetcar from—catch it there close to my house at—on Schiller, and we'd drive down—go downtown and change—transfer to the Pulaski Heights. And they would go out there to white—what they call it, White City? The swimmin' pool was out there. It's the end of the car line at Hayes Street. And it'd turn around. And I'd ride the streetcar out there and then right there at Normandy, it was right below it there.

KK: Yeah, about a block down, wasn't it? From where the . . .

JA: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

KK: . . . streetcar ended. Yeah.

JA: And I don't know whether—it's not there now, but originally there was a tombstone pilaster there at the entrance with the thing on it. Do you remember that?

KK: Mh-hmm.

JA: Well, I designed those.

KK: Oh yeah?

JA: [*Laughter*] Yeah, for Mr. Cole.

[01:15:56] ] KK: So you did some of the design of that subdivision?

JA: No, nah I didn't. I just piddled.

KK: Ah.

JA: I was a bookkeeper. I kept the time and so forth. And I piddled around. And I just could do what I wanted to. If I wanted to help 'em paint a little, why, you didn't have any union stuff.

KK: Yeah.

JA: Anybody could do anything. And I did a lot of that kinda stuff in my spare time. Learned a lot of what to do and what not to do.

KK: So that was good experience for you?

[01:16:26] JA: Oh yeah. Yeah. And then I went to night school at junior college, pickin' up some more engineering work that I couldn't—wouldn't be—good enough—so that—I had forgotten to tell you that.

KK: No, that's good. That's neat because I, you know . . .

JA: I think we built about—I think it was one or two old houses on there they remodeled. And built about four or five more before the Depression hit and shut it down. But on the Fourth of July that summer, I guess I was one of the early people that rode down the hill there at—what do you call it, comin' out of Prospect Terrace, you come down the hill on . . .

KK: Cantrell? Is that Cantrell?

JA: Cantrell Road. Bein' paved—it had been paved and opened up.

KK: Yeah, yeah. That was a big deal.

JA: I was takin' the payroll downtown [*laughter*] to the bank—down

to the lawyer's office, I think, down there, that handled it.

[01:17:43] KK: Yeah. So this woulda been in the late [19]20s then when you were doin' this. Right before the Depression—is that what you said?

JA: Not late [19]20s. It was early [19]30s.

KK: Early [19]30s, okay.

JA: Wait a minute, let's see.

KK: 'Cause the Depression was in [19]29 and [19]30, right? And on into the [19]30s.

JA: Okay, I got out of high school in [19]28, [19]29, [19]30—I finished [19]30. About [19]31.

KK: Well, it was still in full swing at that point.

JA: And then [19]32, I went to Illinois. Yeah, that's right. Mh-hmm.

[01:18:16] KK: And what did you do in Illinois?

JA: I went to the University of Illinois. Studied architecture.

KK: And how did you pay for school?

JA: Hmm?

KK: How did you pay for the school?

JA: Well, my daddy borrowed on his life insurance. I didn't know that till later. [*Laughter*]

KK: Oh. Well, that was nice of him.

JA: Yeah.

KK: Made a big difference in your life.

JA: Yeah.

KK: It was very important.

JA: Well, I . . .

KK: And how did . . .

JA: . . . I grew up with three sisters, and now that's an adventure.

[Laughs]

[01:18:50] KK: What's—now what were your sisters' names?

JA: Edith Miller was my oldest sister. She was older than I was.

She was born here in El Dorado. And she's not livin' now. And she didn't have any children. And then my next one was Mina

Garrard. The Miller and the Garrard names are from my

Grandmother Miller and my great-Grandfather Garrard from

Kentucky. And then Mina went to Henderson for a while, and

then she went to Washington as a—let's see, who was she—I

guess she was workin' for John McClellan, I believe, for a while.

And then she transferred into the Corps of Engineers and was

workin' up there. And then she got involved with the Saxon

boy—Saxon—Dr. Saxon from Little Rock—son—he was in the

army in Washington at the time. And they got married, and he

didn't want her to—he wasn't responsible at all. He just—and so

she got rid of him pretty quick. [Laughter] And—but in the

meantime, she had become pregnant. And she—I didn't know this till later. This was all [*laughs*] . . .

KK: Yeah.

JA: . . . hush-hush back in that day and time. But she came—went to New Orleans. And they said she had cancer. And they did operate on her and removed a tremendous cancer. But she was also pregnant at same time. And they took the baby. And they put it up for adoption. I didn't know this till about ten years ago. [*Laughter*]

KK: Oh, my.

[01:21:17] JA: All of it. I knew she was down there. But she did have cancer. And she came back to Little Rock and stayed at home there and still worked for the engineers. And she died in 1927, I believe it was, after a pretty bad time. But then I got in touch with this daughter, and she lives in California. And she was adopted by a nice group of parents that sent her to SMU. And she got a good education. And she married an engineer out there. And she's got two children and four or five grandchildren. And she's been to see me two or three times, and she's just as sweet as she can be.

KK: Aww. That's nice. [01:22:07] Now if would, can you spell your sisters' names 'cause I'm not sure I heard 'em right.

JA: Well, Edith Miller Abbott.

KK: Yeah.

JA: And Mina Garrard Abbott.

KK: Yeah, so Mina is spelled . . .

JA: Mina, *M-I-N-A*.

KK: Okay.

JA: That's my mother's name.

KK: And Gary is *G-I—G-A* . . .

JA: *G-A-R-R-A-R-D*.

KK: Oh, okay. Good.

JA: Not Garret, not *E-T*.

KK: Yeah, right.

[01:22:31] JA: That comes from a Governor Garrard of Kentucky.

He was one of the first governors of Kentucky and served two terms. And that's quite a history of—in Kentucky. And my mother's grandfather was named James Garrard Abbott. I mean, James Garrard Miller. He has—no, it wasn't—he married Mary Ann Miller. And I'm gettin' it right, Mary Ann Garrard.

[*Laughter*] I'm all turned around!

[01:23:05] KK: I understand. So you had three sisters, right?

JA: Three of 'em.

KK: So you had Edith Miller and . . .

JA: Yeah. I had one older and two younger.

KK: And then you had Mina Garrard . . .

JA: They gave me lots of trouble at times. [*Laughter*]

KK: Yeah. So Mina was one. And Garrard was the other, right?

JA: No, Mina Garrard was all the same name.

KK: Garrard was all the same name. Okay. So who was the third sister?

JA: Edith Miller.

KK: Okay.

JA: That's their both name, Miller.

[01:23:30] KK: There was one more sister though, I didn't get the name of.

JA: Jane Thomas.

KK: That's it.

JA: Now Thomas is from my daddy.

KK: Jane Thomas. Okay.

JA: Yeah.

KK: Good. I just wanna make sure I get those names. All right.

JA: Now Jane lives in South Dakota now. She's got four children. One of 'em's deceased. And I don't get to see 'em much anymore.

KK: Yeah. [*JA laughs*] Pretty far away.



JA: Yeah. Uh-huh.

KK: Yeah, I understand. Well, okay. Well, what have we not talked about so far that you'd like to talk about?

[01:24:01] JA: Hmm. Well, the Lord's been good to me.

I've had very little sickness. I've had a broken ankle and a broken elbow. And I have very little experience in bein' in a hospital. Now, I guess this last year I was in the hospital more than any time. And I've had an interesting life. [*Laughs*]

KK: Yeah, it sounds like it. It sounds great. Really got to do a lot of interesting things. You know, when you get to do things like build buildings in different places or design things . . .

JA: Yeah.

KK: . . . you get to meet a lot of people.

JA: Yes, you do.

KK: You know, and I think that's fun. That's really interesting.

[01:24:52] JA: I always liked to supervise my own buildings. Rather than—up there at the office now, they've got a man that that's all he does. And they don't get out on the job much at all. Well, I—that's one of the things I enjoyed is gettin' out there and seein' the people and seein' what they were doin' and how they were doin' it.

KK: You know, and you learn from each other. And . . .

JA: Yeah. I just—I can go around town here now, and I see people that I know their face. They've worked on my jobs, and I've seen 'em. But I don't—can't tell what their name is.

KK: Yeah.

JA: I ran into a fella just the other day. And I was out walkin', exercisin' out at the mall. And I walked a little bit. A fella said, "Hi, Mr. Abbott." And I looked at him and said, "Wait a minute, I know you [*laughs*], but—I know your face."

KK: Yeah.

JA: And he told me who he was. He was a electrician that had worked on one—some of my jobs.

KK: Oh, that's good. That's neat.

JA: So I see that all the time.

KK: Yeah.

JA: And it's—I like it. [*Laughs*]

[01:25:56] KK: Yeah, that's nice. That's a real nice thing. You know, things have just changed so much over the years. One of the reasons we like to do these interviews is to hear the differences between like when you were a child and like the way things are today. What are some of the big changes that you've seen in your lifetime? What's some of the . . .

JA: Oh, goodness.

[01:26:23] KK: I mean you—there were hardly even any cars at first, right?

JA: Oh yeah.

KK: You member when the first car you ever saw, like in Camden or—were there a lot of cars in Camden when you moved there? You were still real young.

JA: Well, there might've been some, but I don't recall the cars. I recall mostly wagons and that type of thing.

KK: And when cars started comin' in to Camden, was that a—was that—did the kids used to go out and watch those? Was that a—something that was exciting to see?

JA: I don't remember anything about cars much. I remember an airplane came in there one time and landed out on the field, and everybody wanted to go see it.

KK: I'll bet.

JA: When it was in Camden.

KK: Yeah, I bet that was a rare thing to see.

JA: That was after World War I.

KK: Was it a biplane?

JA: I don't remember that. [*Laughter*] I couldn't tell you what it looked like. See, I was just about six or seven.

[01:27:23] KK: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. You remember the first

time you ever rode on an airplane?

JA: Well, I guess it was when I went to Colorado one time. Colonel Barton was the president of the Lion Oil, and he had a—out on the Gunnison River—he had a little summer house out there, and he wanted me to go out there and see somethin' about it. And let's see, I guess that was about the first time. I went out here and caught a flight into—I believe, to Little Rock. And then into Denver, Colorado. And I had to change planes there. And I got in there at night. And I went to the Brown Palace Hotel. I don't know why I didn't have a reservation or somethin', but they didn't have any room. And they finally put me up in a showroom. Where they show the tr . . .

KK: Like a conference room?

JA: Yeah. And pulled a cot in there. And I had to get up early in the mornin' to catch this plane out. And it was late startin' out. And we went through Monarch Pass. And it'd snowed in the night. This was the first of September. [*Laughs*]

KK: Wow.

[01:29:06] JA: And it snowed in the night. And I look out this way, and you see snow on the ground. I look out this way goin' and look up, and it was comin' down. [*Laughter*] So we landed in Gunnison. And I went out and looked at the cabin and got all I

needed there, and we couldn't get out of Gunnison. [*KK laughs*]  
And so I had to layover there a day or two before it got where they could even—bus could get through the pass.

KK: Yeah.

JA: And when they got through the bus, so I got on into Amarillo, Texas. And I got out to the airport, and I still couldn't get a flight. But while I was there in the airport, Buck Carter came out and said, "What you doin' out here?" He was Lion Oil's pilot.

KK: Ah!

JA: He said, "I'm goin' out to get Colonel Barton and Mrs. Barton and takin' 'em back." I told him what my—he said, "Well, I tell you, if you're still here when I come back, you can go back with me." And so that's what happened. [*Laughs*]

KK: Well, that worked out pretty good for you.

JA: Oh, yeah. But it was a—but I guess that was about the first airplane ride I'd ever took.

KK: And those was all just prop . . .

JA: I never have done much airplane ridin'. [*Laughs*]

[01:30:25] KK: But those were all just prop planes, right? They were just . . .

JA: Yeah. Just . . .

KK: . . . propellers and . . .

JA: . . . little one-engine plane.

KK: One-engine plane. And how many passengers would be on a plane like that?

JA: I don't think over three or four, five. Three, four maybe.

KK: Did you have an airline stewardess on your plane?

JA: No, no. Huh-uh.

KK: You just . . .

JA: No, you just had to get in and sit down. [*Laughter*]

KK: And did people smoke on the plane? You remember that?

JA: Mmm?

KK: People used to smoke on those planes, didn't they?

JA: Oh yeah.

KK: Yeah.

JA: I never did get to smokin', thank goodness.

[01:31:08] KK: I wanted to talk a little bit more about when you were in Little Rock because, as you know, it was a different time.

[*Rustling noise*] And kids could just get on a streetcar and go all over town. And people didn't really worry about that as much, did they?

JA: Hm-mm.

KK: So you were a young teenager, I guess, or . . .

JA: Yeah.

KK: And do you remember all the big department stores downtown in Little Rock?

JA: Do what?

KK: All those big department stores they used to have . . .

JA: Yeah. Oh yeah.

KK: . . . downtown.

JA: Mh-hmm.

KK: Were you there during Christmas when they had up all the lights? And . . .

JA: Oh yeah.

KK: . . . windows and all that? Tell us a little bit more about what that looked like 'cause pe—that doesn't exist anymore. What was that like?

JA: Now let—what did you m—say this again.

KK: The Christmastime . . .

JA: Yeah.

KK: . . . in downtown Little Rock when all the stores were all fixed up?

[01:31:56] JA: Well, it was a busy place downtown in that day and time. 'Cause I know we—I'd be downtown with Daddy, and sure he'd been all over the state teachin' in school. And you'd be surprised how many people would come up to him and say well,

"Mr. Abbott," and he—"Do you know me?" And sometime he'd—you know, when they was little kids . . .

KK: Oh.

JJ: . . . and they'd grown up. And he said, "Well, I kinda know your face. But I don't know your name," or something. But he would have that happen lots of times when we'd be downtown on the street in Little Rock. People would come in from the state. They're doin' their holidays and shoppin'. And it was interesting that way.

[01:32:40] KK: You member how it was all decorated, and there were lights up . . .

JA: Yeah.

KK: . . . everywhere?

JA: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

KK: It was kinda like a big city.

[01:32:48] JA: Oh yeah. Talkin' about—I designed—do you remember Bauman Store down there? On Main Street.

KK: Yes. Yeah.

JA: I designed that front that was on that. [*KK laughs*]

KK: I do remember it very well.

JA: Erhart and Eichenbuam, I think, were the architects on it. And they called Mr. Jones and said they wanted to have me do it for



'em. [*Laughs*] So I did it. And they—and we put it in. But it was their job. [*Laughter*]

KK: Well, that happens sometimes, doesn't it?

JA: Yeah. 'Course, I was lookin'—at that time, I was lookin' after the construction for Pittsburgh. And anytime they had a storefront, why, I was runnin' the crew that put it in. I did Stiff's shoe store up there the same way.

KK: Oh, okay. Yeah.

[01:33:49] JA: But they all gone now.

KK: Yeah. I understand.

JA: That's just Stiff's shoe store—Stiff's jewelry store.

KK: Oh yeah.

JA: Ol' man Perry Stiff.

KK: I member that.

JA: I've got a coffee table he gave me out there and I—when I was doin' that, he was closin' out a branch of the store there. And he gave me a coffee table. And he gave me somethin' else. Some piece of silver. I've forgotten what it was now. But he was a good ol' man. [*Laughter*]

[01:34:25] KK: Well, that was nice. So your dad was teaching and being a principal and all this. So was your mom the main discipline for your family? Or was your dad still the

disciplinarian?

JA: Well, you didn't cross either one of 'em. [*Laughter*]

KK: They were in charge, huh?

JA: Yeah.

KK: Yeah.

[01:34:52] JA: My mother was a math and science teacher. And she taught—what she—I don't how in the world she came from Kentucky to De Queen, Arkansas, back in about 1907, [190]6 or [190]7—a young lady—to teach school in De Queen, Arkansas, by herself. No family around anywhere. I've wondered about that a lot, and I never did ask her. After she'd gone, then I got to wonderin'. But she was in De Queen, Arkansas. And Daddy was—did—taught school in Alabama two or three months at a time when the crop was laid by. Then he'd go to Peabody to get his education. And he got that done. And he got a job as superintendent at Cheneyville, Louisiana. Just outside of Alexandria.

KK: Okay.

[01:35:58] JA: He needed a math and science teacher. So he checked with the University of Kentucky and their placement department and got in touch with Mother, and he hired her. Well, I've got the letter where she wrote him, said she hoped

she would make him a good teacher.

KK: Oh.

JA: And to see about gettin' a room to—a boardinghouse or somethin'.

KK: Yeah, yeah.

JA: And so she went down there and taught a year with him. And they got married at the end of the year.

KK: Wow, that's great.

[01:36:28] JA: And then they decided they would go back to Kentucky. And there was a little—somebody was organizin' a little college up there, but they didn't work out, and so then he went to North Little Rock as superintendent of schools after that. And she—Mother—she had two children then. No, three. She had three children. And they were puttin' in this—a lot of this testin' of the pupils. School testin'.

KK: Oh, man.

JA: And Mother took charge of that for the schools over there. And we—she hired a housekeeper to come and look after the children in the daytime. And she—well, the school was just across the street from the house. [*Laughs*]

KK: Oh, okay.

JA: We lived on—right at the foot of the Broadway Bridge . . .

KK: Yeah.

JA: . . . and the old high school there—the grade school was over on Fourth Street.

KK: Oh yeah. Very close.

JA: You member? There's an old, red brick—is it still there?

KK: I don't think so. [*TM coughs*]

JA: I don't know. I haven't been up there in a while.

KK: I don't think so.

JA: But that's what we—let's see, where was I?

KK: I . . .

[01:37:50] JA: Oh yeah. And—oh, at Camden, she taught school in the high school—math and science in the high school down there one year. And her sister came down from Kentucky. And her son. And stayed with us for a year. And she didn't like it, and she went back. So after that one year, Mother didn't teach anymore.

KK: Oh, okay. Yeah, yeah. So by then, she had all the children, or . . .

JA: Yeah.

KK: Four children?

JA: No, she had one—Jane was born in Paragould.

KK: Oh, okay. Yeah.

JA: Nineteen twenty-five.

KK: And she was the youngest then, right? Jane was the youngest?

JA: Yeah, she was the youngest. I was born—my two—my oldest sister and I was born here in El Dorado. And Mina was born in Camden. And Jane was born in Paragould.

KK: Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean, it just sounds like [*JA laughs*] you had a really good family, and you had a really good . . .

JA: Yeah.

KK: . . . successful . . .

JA: Well.

KK: . . . life yourself. And what other kinds of things did you like to do other than your architecture? Did you have any hobbies?

[01:38:59] JA: No, not particular. I was a Boy Scout. I guess that was as much of a hobby as I had. I'm an Eagle Scout.

KK: Yeah.

JA: And I had about forty-some-odd merit badges. And I served as junior assistant scout master on the troop there in el—in Little Rock. And then at—for a while, they organized—a fella that worked for me at Pittsburgh. In fact, I hired that fella, Dan Miller. And he was—I don't know that he was doin' it, but we set up a Sea Scout troop.

KK: What's . . .

JA: And Dan was a skipper, and I was the first mate. [*Laughter*]

[01:39:53] KK: And what kind of sea scouting did you do?

JA: Well, I'll tell you. [*Laughter*] There's two things that—  
outstand—it didn't last too long, but you member there was a  
pontoon bridge at Russellville?

KK: Oh, okay. Mh-hmm.

JA: Well, they disbanded that pontoon bridge at that time, and they  
had some of those old barges left up there. And somehow or  
nother, the group that was sponsorin' us happened to—got—they  
give us one of those barges. Well, somebody loaned us a truck.  
And Dan was gonna bring the boys to get that barge and bring it  
into Little Rock. So I drove the truck up there and hauled 'em  
up there. I didn't come on the barge. [*Laughter*] But they  
came on down and got it to Little Rock. And we finally sunk it  
there. [*Laughter*] And that was the end of the barge. But then  
one time I took a troop—a bunch of 'em from Pine Bluff—from  
Little Rock to Pine Bluff on the river. We had several—I think  
there was five or six boats. Some of 'em were canoes. And the  
river wasn't like it is now. [*Laughs*]

KK: How . . .

JA: It had lots of sandbars in it.

KK: Oh, yeah.

JA: There's several places we had to take out and drag those boats across the sandbars where the water—because there wasn't deep enough water to float 'em. And we turned over two or three of 'em. [*Laughter*]

KK: That's . . .

JA: And we finally got down to Pine Bluff. But it took us two days.

KK: Yeah.

JA: But we had a good time. [*Laughter*] So that's about all I remember about the Sea Scout troop. [*Laughter*]

[01:41:48] TM: That sounds really neat. [*Clears throat*] Can you remember any specific animals you mighta seen, or can you tell us a little bit more of what the river was like then, and what that campin' trip might've been like? That sounds really cool.

JA: Well, I don't remember seein' any animals particular. But it was a new experience. We saw a lot of things that we—the sandbars and the way the banks were there. And no, I—in later years I got with my brother-in-law at Stephens—I got doin' a little huntin'. I never did do a lot of huntin'. But we had a lot of fun squirrel huntin' . . .

KK: Yeah.

JA: . . . until he died. And course, in that day and time, you had plenty of open land and fields. It's all grown up in pine, and the

quails are gone. The habitat changed. And we don't have that at all anymore.

KK: Did you used to eat those squirrels?

JA: Oh yeah, I liked 'em. [*Laughter*]

KK: We were hearin' somebody yesterday talkin' about squirrels.

That they used to eat 'em even as a . . .

[01:43:04] JA: And we did some quail huntin'. Howie did a lot more than I did. I never did get to quail huntin' much. And duck huntin'. I never liked that. I know one time we went up a—we were squirrel huntin', and we went up in Nevada County up there on some of the ol' land that the family had owned. And squirrel huntin'. We went over and topped the hill and looked down into a place where the beavers had dammed up the creek. And it was covered with ducks. I never saw so many ducks in my life. [*Laughter*] And I said, "Well, now what are we gonna do to see if we can get some of those?" He said, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll take ol' Sam." That was the dog. "I'll take him around this way, and you go this way." And we had the ducks between us. And he looked at his watch. And said, "Set your watch just like mine, and at such-and-such a time, I'll turn ol' Sam loose. And you shoot the ducks when they come over you." Well, that worked just fine, and here came the ducks. I had an



old twelve-shot—gauge shotgun. Had six loads in it. [*Laughs*]  
And he turned that dog loose, and those ducks come up over  
me. I shot. Boom, boom, boom. I shot six times and started  
gatherin' up the ducks. And I said—had five of 'em. And I said,  
"Well, that's all of 'em." He said, "Nah, you got another one."  
[*Laughs*] So we found that. And he made me carry those damn  
ducks [*laughter*] back home. Said, "No, you killed 'em. You  
gotta carry 'em."

KK: Well, he had the easy part of that job.

JA: Yeah. Oh, Howard was quite a character. We had lots of fun.  
He had a camp up on the river, a camp house. And we'd spend  
a lot of time up there fishin' in the Ouachita River up above  
Camden.

KK: Yeah. So . . .

[01:45:07] JA: In fact the first deer I ever killed was up there.

KK: So who was Howard again? Just so . . .

JA: He was my brother-in-law.

KK: That's your brother-in-law. Okay.

JA: Alice's brother. Uh-huh.

KK: Okay. You guys had a good time together.

JA: Yeah. Oh yeah. He died young. Had cancer.

[01:45:31] KK: Well, let's see. What else? Still got some tape in

there, huh?

TM: Yeah, we're doin' fine. Yeah. [*Clears throat*] You remember much more—you mentioned the [19]27 flood and that bridge that got washed out. Do you remember more about the [19]27 flood and that experience of what was goin' on?

JA: Well, not too much except that everybody was concerned about it. Course up at Paragould we didn't—we were livin' there at the time. But I was in Little Rock. Paragould was on Crowley's Ridge. So they had water on both sides of 'em. But they weren't affected too much.

KK: Oh. They were up on a little high . . .

JA: Yeah, on Crowley's Ridge.

KK: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JA: So Crowley's Ridge ran all the way down to Helena. And all of that over on the east side, that was all flooded. And on the south, it was pretty well flooded all the way down to Little Rock, and it was a mess.

[01:46:31] KK: Yeah. I mean, how long did it take for that water to go down?

JA: You know, I don't remember. But it was a pretty good while. It had a pretty good backlog.

KK: How old were you then? Let's see, fifteen?

JA: Then? Yeah.

KK: Fifteen maybe.

JA: Mh-hmm. That's about when it was.

KK: Did that affect school or anything or . . .

JA: Hmm?

KK: Did that affect school or . . .

JA: It didn't at Paragould.

KK: Yeah.

JA: But it probably—I'm sure it did down here in the Delta. Bound to have.

[01:47:06] KK: How did World War II affect your community?

Where were you during World War II? Were . . .

JA: Right here.

KK: . . . you back in El Dorado? How did that affect the community?

JA: Well . . .

KK: You had rationing and all that, right?

JA: Hmm?

KK: You had rationing.

JA: Oh, yes. Rationin' and gasoline that had coupons. [*Laughs*]  
Was tryin' to get gasoline, and there was a black-market trade in  
it. [*Laughs*] Some people got 'em that didn't need 'em, and  
they'd sell 'em. And . . .

KK: Yeah, I guess there was a black market in everything.

JA: Yeah.

KK: Just about.

[01:47:47] JA: And the timber sawmills. See, we had a lot of—the sawmill business has changed a lot and—since then. Back then you had a little sawmill just—every county had several sawmills. Like here we had—gosh, in this county there musta been ten or twelve. Little—some of them were groundhog sawmills that they'd move from place to place. And others was small sawmills. But you don't have them anymore. It's all big companies. And they haul 'em. Distance don't make any . . .

KK: Yeah.

JA: . . . difference. You used to have to—if—you almost had to have a sawmill in twenty-five miles of you to sell your timber. They didn't—it cost too much to haul that much farther.

KK: Yeah. Yeah, didn't they build . . .

JA: But now they'll . . .

KK: . . . used to build temporary . . .

JA: . . . load it up in these big trucks and take off and haul it fifty, sixty miles or more.

KK: But didn't they used to build temporary tracks and things to move that timber? Or how did they move it? They just drag it?

JA: Well, the loggin' equipment is entirely different, too, now. I was watchin' 'em loggin' a tract my grandson had. And they came in there, and they cut those trees and drug 'em with a tractor up to another machine. They would—and they picked it up and—with a machine and put in on there. And it would pull that log through there and strip the limbs off of it. And then they'd chop it off at the end. And then they put it on the log truck. And from the time they got there, they were—a man didn't touch his foot on the ground. It was all done mechanically. From cuttin' the trees to gettin' it on the l—truck. And then they hauled it to the mill, and the mill picked it up mechanically, too. *[Laughs]*

[01:50:05] KK: And how did they used to do it?

JA: Well, they drew the crosscut saw. Two men would get on there, crosscut somethin' and drop it. And lay it down on there. And then they'd cut it into links. They's all tree links stuff now. And they cut it into links dependin' on their judgment as to which—whether that would make a better sixteen-foot log. Or they may have a bad place up here—a tree—a knot. And it may, instead of sixteen, they cut a twelve foot outta that or fourteen foot. And then they'd leave the ol' tops there to rot. Until they got to usin' 'em for pulp wood. So then they'd come in, and mules—they used mules back when I first started lookin' at it. And

those mules would—they'd put a grabber on the log and drag it wherever they wanted. And then they'd load it on the truck. They'd have chains. They'd go down from here down this way, and they put that log on here, and then they'd have this swingin' this back over the truck. And the mules would get over here, and they'd pull that chain up, and they'd roll that log over into the truck. And that's the way they loaded 'em back when I came back to south Arkansas.

KK: That's some tough work.

JA: Huh?

KK: That was some tough work.

JA: Yeah.

KK: And I guess dangerous maybe, too.

JA: Yeah. Mh-hmm. One of those logs get away and slip—killed 'em right quick. But there were a lot of people hurt that way. But let's see, what was I . . .

[01:52:01] KK: And so that's why you needed to have a sawmill nearby. Because . . .

JA: Yeah.

KK: . . . you couldn't—it was hard to get around and . . .

JA: Yeah. And those mules, they'd leave them out there in the woods. And they'd build a—they all had to have a place where

there was water. Go down to a little creek, a little well or spring or something, and they'd build a little temporary barbwire fence around it, they'd leave those mules there in the night.

KK: And they just graze and . . .

JA: Yeah.

KK: . . . drink the water and go back to work. Tough life for a mule.

[*Laughter*]

JA: Back in that day and time, there was a pretty good market for mules.

KK: I'll bet. I'll bet.

JA: But it began to play out pretty quick, and I don't know where you'd get a team of good mules now.

KK: You know, they—I see there are still some mules here in town. I don't know if anybody uses 'em for anything really. [*JA laughs*]

[01:53:04] TM: Where do you think all the lumber was headed? Was it being used to build up El Dorado and the area, or was it headin' out somewhere else, you think?

JA: I beg your pardon?

KK: The . . .

TM: Where . . .

KK: The lumber, does it—did it stay here in town . . .

JA: Who?

KK: . . . or did they get it all shipped out of town?

JA: What, the lumber?

KK: Yeah. Did they sell it off to other people, or was it used to build things here?

JA: Well, most of my framin' lumber came from a sawmill right out here on the j—between here and Calion. I think it cost me about thirty dollars a thousand. [*Laughs*] Prob . . .

KK: A thousand linear feet?

JA: Yeah. Board feet.

KK: Man.

JA: A linear foot and a board foot.

KK: That's inex—that's not very much money. [*Laughter*]

JA: A board foot. It's one inch thick, and it's twelve inches square. That's a board foot. It's a square foot, one inch thick.

KK: Right.

JA: See, if you've got a four-inch-thick one, you've got four board feet.

KK: I see what you're saying. But a thousand for thirty dollars sounds . . .

JA: Yeah.

KK: . . . pretty good to me. By today's standards. [*Laughter*]

JA: Yeah, it'd be about three or four hundred dollars now.



KK: Yeah.

JA: Dependin' on the quality of the wood you're gettin'. Some of it is higher than that if you get into the hardwoods and the good grade of hardwoods.

[01:54:28] KK: Now when you were orderin' wood as an architect and a contractor, was the wood a lot better in those days? Was there more good wood?

JA: No. I don't think so. You just had to be c—they had grades that they were supposed to go by, but some people didn't grade it as good as others. And I 'spect you get a little better grade—they— a little more. There's not as many of 'em, and they're more, oh . . .

KK: Straight and . . .

JA: Well, like, they're bigger companies, and they have more pride in what they're doin' than some little ol' jackhog sawmill come out here. There no tellin' what they'll do to you. [*Laughter*]

KK: So you had to . . .

JA: If you don't know . . .

KK: . . . be careful.

JA: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

KK: Yeah. That's part of your job though, right? Was . . .

JA: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

KK: Check the materials.

JA: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

[01:55:27] KK: Did you used to have to check the—like the concrete and stuff too to make sure it was made right? And . . .

JA: Oh, yeah. Uh-huh.

KK: How did you test the concrete?

JA: Well, I could look at it.

KK: You could pretty much tell by lookin'?

JA: Mh-hmm.

KK: You ever catch anybody cheatin'?

JA: Well, I've had 'em tear out some of it at times. No, I was involved actually in some concrete production just for that one reason. Because I—we were havin' trouble getting good, sandy gravel in here. It had clay in it, lumps of clay. It was comin' from over here in Calhoun County. Well, I was concerned about that—havin' to turn down a lot of it. And some of it, they dig it out of the river, and it had a lot of lignite in it. And lignite comes from—washin' down mostly from Ouachita County. They're some surface deposits up there. So there's a couple—a fella and I got talkin' about it, interested. And a boy came back from the army—after the army. And he—I don't know how we got involved with him. But he could get some equipment from the

army for a good price because he had served in the army. So we decided we would form a little gravel company. We called it Ouachita Aggregate Company. And he got a dragline, and we bought a truck. Bought a—made a loan from the bank down here. And bought one of the first dump trailers, I guess, that was around here. We—it was a Fruehauf ten-yard dump trailer. And we had to go down to Louisiana to pick it up. And we leased a gravel place up here in Calhoun County and started haulin' some gravel. And in the meantime, we built a washin' plant. And I designed the washin' plant. And we had a me—a tool-and-die company out here build it. And we set it up, and we got to shakin' this—the vibratin' screen. We put the gravel in there, and it would separate it. And it would wash the clay out of it and—where they had been just been kinda diggin' it out and dumpin' it. And we got a pretty good gravel out of that. And then later on, the boys—I got out of it, and they got into the—put 'em a concrete plant in here in El Dorado. And they're still operatin'—the Concrete Service company. And—but I don't know where they're gettin' their gravel and sand now from. I had been out of it so long [*laughs*], I don't know.

[01:58:46] KK: Well, that's interesting that you felt like you could just do your own.

JA: Yeah.

KK: It was just better to do your own.

JA: I was always kinda curious like that. I could—wanted to figure why things were workin' [*laughs*] and why. And so, "Well, I can do that." [*KK laughs*]

KK: Now are you a member of the . . .

TM: Kris, we need to change tapes.

KK: Okay.

[Tape stopped]

[01:59:08] JA: Have you seen the college over here is puttin' out a annual booklet?

KK: Oh, no. I didn't know that.

JA: The *South Arkansas Historical Journal*?

KK: Oh, good. No, I hadn't seen it.

JA: And I've had three articles in there about the schools.

KK: Oh, I did read—I did print out one of those. I got it right here actually.

JA: Huh?

KK: I printed one of those out from the—they put it on the internet, and I printed one of those out. [*Flips through pages*] "A Survey of Architecture in Union County."

JA: Yeah.

KK: That's you, right?

JA: There's three articles of it there. Yeah.

KK: Okay.

JA: The last one just came out . . .

KK: Oh, good. Well, I'll get that one, too.

JA: . . . in December.

KK: Yeah. Okay, everybody rollin'?

TM: Yeah.

JA: Well, it just gives a bunch of—I told 'em I wasn't gonna try to do any research on it. That I just—off the top of my head, I'll just—so some things I've missed, and some things maybe might be wrong because I didn't—I kinda . . .

KK: But you basically wrote a history . . .

JA: Yeah. Uh-huh.

[02:00:13] KK: Tell us a little bit about what the history is about.

JA: Well, it—about the schools in Union County. And I started out with the beginning, what the Indians did, building tepees and log houses and that type of thing. And brought it on down to—up to let's see, the first edition started there and came on up, I think, to just before World War I. Then I take World War I to World War II in the Depression. And that's when most of the building was done here in El Dorado. And then the last one was kinda

finishin' up, and I coulda done a lot more on it. But it—I was mostly interested in Bodenheimer Park down here, where the stadium is? It was—I think it was one of the interesting things in El Dorado that has happened in my lifetime. It was—it—you know who Bodenheimer was?

KK: No, actually I don't.

[02:01:32] JA: O. L. Bodenheimer was a national commander of the American Legion back in that time after World War I. And he was from El Dorado. And the post, American Legion post decided they would raise some money in honor of Bodenheimer. Well, they didn't have a lot of grants and that type of stuff back there. And they were just a published subscription. Several of the moneymen, Colonel Barton was one and—I think. And I don't remember. There's two or three more. And then a lot of little folks. And they bought this tract of land out here. Well, it's almost downtown now. It was on the edge of town at the time they bought it. They bought it in the [19]30s. I don't remember exactly the time. And they were going to build a building out there that they would have a headquarters for the American Legion.

KK: I see.

[02:02:48] JA: And also a municipal auditorium and so forth in it.

And I designed the buildin' for 'em. This was after the gymnasium over here. And that was in 1940 and [19]41. Oren Harris was our congressman. And they had the WPA goin' then. So we sent these off to the Washington for—to try to get a WPA loan. And I got a letter from Oren back that said that everything looked fine. Said, "There's only one thing—we'd have to take the American Legion off of the name." [*Laughs*] So somewhere along there, I don't know exactly where, they'd—these trustees fixed that thing into the city's name where the city could get the name on it. And then I got a letter back from Oren. Said, "They have cancelled all of that program because they are gettin' ready for war." And those drawings or the picture is in this last edition of this bulletin. And I think it's a nicer-lookin' deal than they got out here now. [*Laughter*] But it fell by the wayside.

KK: Yeah.

JA: But that—we did come back and build the stadium there with a published subscription, the same kinda thing, everybody give their money. And built it. But before they built the stadium, the American Legion took what money they had left in order to build the—what we call the TAC House now. Well, I designed it, too. And it—we run out of money. And we got most of it finished up like they wanted. But we got it where they could use it.

KK: Yeah.

[02:04:53] JA: So they used it, and it's still not all the way completed. But they recently did some remodelin' on it. And they—the school took it over. And what happened, the real estate man was gonna sell the thing to Walgreen and gonna tear that buildin' down in between the street and the stadium there. But how they were gonna do it—there's a—in the deed, it cannot be used by anything except educational and recreation. Well, the people raised so much Cain about it when they found out what was goin' on that they had to back off of it. And the school took it over, and they air-conditioned it better. And changed up the windows and did some things I didn't like. *[Laughter]* But anyhow, it's still there. And then they built a Boys Club by published subscription at the same type of thing. So things out there were all built mostly with just the people . . .

KK: Yeah.

JA: . . . in El Dorado, the individuals doin' it.

KK: That sounds great. Well, tell . . .

JA: And it's been one of the most successful things for the recreational people in El Dorado. See, they used that TAC House—they had the TAC House there for a long time. That was a teenage club. And then the girls and the boys got—had



different ideas about how they wanted [*laughter*] to entertain themselves. And so that kinda—it ran on here, I guess, for fifteen or twenty years. But then it just kinda fell by the wayside. The Boys and Girls Clubs taken it over now. And the school has the lower half of it, where the American Legion people had it. The school is usin' that for the headquarters for the athletic department with the stadium right there at it. So that's one of the nicest places I think they've had here. That and the arboretum.

[02:07:09] KK: That's nice. So what's your involvement with the historical foundation and this house?

JA: Hmm?

KK: What's your association with the foundation and the house here?

JA: Well, I did the original drawin's and supervision of fixin' this up. Course, they've done a lot of work since then. But—and we didn't have any money either. [*Laughs*] But they've got money now. But we didn't have any money. We had to poor-boy it. And it was in pretty bad shape. This foundation was settled. They had some big ol' sills under there that had rotted out, and it had settled in places. And we had to level it up. And that was a job. One man did most of it. He got under there, and he would jack it up and so forth and so on.

KK: Man, that's some hard work. Yeah.

[02:08:19] JA: And we didn't know what it'd looked like at the front.

I've got some stuff out there in my briefcase that I've—it's got some pictures of what we were workin' from. And I finally determined about what it—what we thought it actually originally looked like. There was three or four things there that coulda been a little bit different. But that's about what we did with it.

KK: So it's been restored to its . . .

JA: Oh yeah. It's—to pretty well what it was originally. Now these—you know, it was originally over here a block away from here. You knew that, didn't you?

KK: Yes.

JA: And it was moved, and it was facin' that—south. And we turned it to face it east. We didn't do that, but that was already done. And these two buildings back here that are up here together, if you look at 'em close, they don't have the same characteristics that this buildin' has. Well, they were outhouses before. One of 'em was a kitchen. And I don't know what the other one was. But they were all like this, and we was over here when I got to lookin' at it. And we fixed up one of 'em for a kitchen and the other one just for a room.

KK: And so . . .

JA: But this is pretty well restored to what it was as near as we can think.

[02:09:57] KK: So what's the name of this house, and where did it come from?

JA: It—well, it is the Newton House. We started out callin' it the Rainey-Newton House 'cause Andrew Rainey, I think, was the man was one of the originals settlers of this land. And I don't know the history of it too well. But he didn't build the house actually. But he somehow was involved in the land, I think. And John Newton built the house. And he was a planter. And I think he had control of the land back here between here and new—and Calion.

KK: And when was this house built?

JA: Eighteen forty-eight, I believe. It's out here on the thing. I think, it's [18]48.

KK: It's been around a good, long time.

JA: Mh-hmm.

[02:10:59] KK: Okay. So the foundation is movin' forward now. It's really—Diane and others are startin' to really . . .

JA: Oh, yes. Yes, it's—they've got some—some pretty good people have donated some pretty good buncha money to it. So, but it was hard to start with. I know when we built these chimneys on

the thing, the chimneys weren't on it. They were originally. There's an old picture right there that's—it shows the chimneys on it. But they weren't on it at all. And I think I called one lady—she was right interested in the thing here. And we were—and she did a lot of the supervisin' of the workers. She was real interested in it—Mrs. McKinney. And I called her. Rachel—I said, "Rachel, we need some money." These chimneys, we were talkin' about 'em before. She says, "Well, John, how much is it gonna cost?" I've forgotten what I told her—what I had to have then. And she says, "Well, I'll buy one of 'em, and I'll get my sister [*laughter*] to buy another one." And I don't know who got the others of 'em up but . . .

KK: That's nice.

JA: We got 'em . . .

KK: That's great . . .

JA: So that's the way we did things back there then.

[02:12:40] KK: Sure, yeah. Absolutely. [*JA laughs*] Well, what else do you wanna tell us today about? Have we covered it?

JA: Well, another thing I didn't tell you—about the Art Center.

KK: Oh, good.

JA: That's been a real—one of the best things we've had. It was an old armory, National Guard armory. And they were abandonin'

it, and gonna move out here on the—built 'em a new place out in the industrial district. And I don't know all the details of how it came about. But I think they sold it, and a few people raised enough money—I think it was \$35,000. But anyhow, it got into the name of some trustees. [02:13:30] And a fella by name of Jess Merkle who came here and brought the JM Poultry plant here when we first had a poultry plant here. And he was very successful and made lots of money. And Jesse and his wife, I guess, were responsible a whole lot for that thing goin' on. So we took that old gym—it had offices—two-story buildin' in the front. And behind that was an armory. I mean, a drill hall with a high ceilin' that was about ideal for the auditorium. And I took that thing and designed it for an auditorium. And the—and it's just about like it was then, now. I don't think they've done anything to that other than upgrade the lighting system and the sound system and the stage with some curtains and stuff. We just poor-boyed it. We just got enough in there where you could call yourself havin' it. And it's taken off. And there's somethin' goin' on down there all the time. Now we've added on to it. My firm added double the size of the front. I didn't do much of it, but my firm did. And made another art gallery. And that upstairs is for classrooms and that type of thing. I did build an

addition on it to the east after it was first built. Then they built this front addition on. Then they've got a lotta storage rooms—temporary buildings at the back that they use for scenery . . .

KK: Yeah.

JA: . . . and that type of thing. And they have something goin' on down there all the time. The little kids go down there for art classes. And they go down there for drama classes. I got a little ol' great-grandson about ten years old, and he's down there two or three times a year in some kind of a play or somethin'. And course, I always go. [*Laughter*] But that's been a real—and that's right next to the Bodenheimer Park. It's not in the park, but it joins it. So that whole complex is one of the nicest things in town.

[02:16:04] KK: Well, it must be exciting and mean a lot to you to have been involved in that.

JA: It i—it does. I've been fortunate.

KK: Well, you about ready for some lunch?

JA: Mmm?

KK: You about ready to have some lunch?

JA: Well, we might. [*KK laughs*]

KK: What about you guys, we got it?

TM: We're good.

KK: You got anything else you wanna ask?

TM: I can't think of anything right now. Watch your head here if you're gonna get up. Okay. Great.

KK: You did a fantastic job. [*JA laughs*] Very good.

JA: Well, thank you.

[End of Interview 02:16:35]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]