

Transcript of OH-00033

Gertrude Wright McWilliams

Interviewed by
John Wearmouth

on
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Typographic Note

- [Inaudible] is used when a word cannot be understood.
- Brackets are used when the transcriber is not sure about a word or part of a word, to add a note indicating a non-verbal sound and to add clarifying information.
- Em Dash — is used to indicate an interruption or false start.
- Ellipses ... is used to indicate a natural extended pause in speech

Subjects

Navy-yards and naval stations

Depressions

World War, 1939-1945

Segregation

Transportation

United States Naval Ordnance Station (Indian Head, Md.)

Indian Head (Md.)

Civil service

County government

Women politicians

Wills

Inheritance and succession

Inheritance and transfer tax

Tags

Register of Wills
Depression, 1929

Transcript

[Tape 1]

John Wearmouth [J]: This is John Wearmouth interviewing Gertrude W. McWilliams at her home in La Plata at Hickory Ridge at 300 Hickory Circle. She's only lived in La Plata how long?

Gertrude Wright McWilliams [G]: Two years.

J: Two years but she's really an Indian Head girl.

G: That's right.

J: Right yeah. She was born in Indian Head in 1919. And one of the most significant features of her life is that she was the Register of Wills for Charles County Maryland from 1958 to 19—?

G: 89.

J: 89. Which makes her quite possibly one of the longest—

G: 89 it would've been 90. I retired December 1990. If this is 91.

J: Right. Yeah so we're talking about what 32—?

G: 32 years.

J: Years as Register of Wills.

G: Right.

J: And this was an office a public office that many people take for granted. It's a very, very old one in the annals of Western civilization and certainly has been in Southern Maryland a very critical and responsible office for a number of reasons which we will discuss as we go along. May I call you Gertrude?

G: Sure.

J: Call me John and we have been acquainted for some time. And now we will start off with her life in Indian Head. Let's see her dad was Clarence Daniel Gardiner. And her mother was Etta Agnes Adams and they were from also from the western part of the county. Her mother's from Pomfret and her father's from Pisgah. Let's see the date is May 9th, 1991. And this is another one in the interviews in the Charles County Community College Oral History Program. I think we can get right into this. How many children were there in your dad and mother's family?

G: There were two girls and four boys.

J: Okay.

G: My sister.

J: And if you could name them from oldest to youngest?

G: Uh yeah. Agnes [Inaudible]. Agnes was my oldest sister and she ended up being a Vice Principal at Indian Head. She was a school teacher and she had three boys. She was married to Charles [Buoy]. She was Agnes [Buoy]. Married Charles [Buoy] and then they had three, three children. Then it was myself which was Etta Gertrude Carpenter which I married [Sherby] Wright and we had two children. And then he died in 68 and I married Phil McWilliams in 89.

J: And the names of your children?

G: Were Barbara Jean [Inaudible] and then she married Griffin. And the other girl was Judith Anne Hooper and she has three children. Walter being the third, Laura Lee, and Sherby Wright Hooper.

J: Okay now where did—

G: And then I had four brothers. Do you want the names?

J: Oh yeah. I forgot.

G: The four brothers then I—. Clarence Mitchell Carpenter was my oldest brother and he had—he had a handicap. He was a—he was retarded we found out that he was retarded. Then I had three more. I had Clarence Daniel Carpenter and then we had it was named after my father and then we had [Lenual] Pembroke Carpenter it was named after my mother's father. And then we had John Williams Carpenter. Of course they all had children and—

J: Are all living today?

G: All living today.

J: That's remarkable.

G: Yeah the only—my mother and father are both dead. But my four brothers and my sisters still living.

J: So your father would have celebrated his 100th birthday in January of this year?

G: Yeah.

J: Okay.

G: And he worked—

J: And your mother would have been 98?

G: Well I guess.

J: Tomorrow? Yes. She was born in 93. Okay now where in Indian Head was your family home when you were growing up?

G: Well we when I grew up on the Navy Base. My father's father had a store in Pisgah an undertaker business and my father told me he went to—. His father sent him to school to learn to be an undertaker. And at first you didn't have to embalm people. When he learned that you had to embalm people he couldn't handle it. Anyway he went—came to the Naval Ordnance Station and got a job. And they built a house.

J: What was the name of this undertaking business?

G: It was the Carpenter's—as far as I know—it was the Carpenter's Undertaking.

J: Okay and what was the name of your—

[Tape Breaks]

G: Possibly gonna blow up all of Charles County. Because of the lines they were running. And they had a man come down from Baltimore to put the phone in. But then if you were sick in Marbury they would go and use the phone to call my grandfather in Pisgah and somebody in turn would tell Doctor, Doctor [Vitnel] to go.

J: Okay so a line was strung between two Carpenter places of business?

G: Places of business. That's what it was.

J: I see. About how many miles would that be?

G: Well from Pisgah to Marbury.

J: That's five, six miles.

G: At least.

J: Oh yeah maybe seven.

G: But they, you know, they weren't the telephone poles like they all today they were like trees you know that were cut down.

J: Oh yeah, yeah. Where was the Carpenter's store in Marbury? Is the building still there?

G: Yeah. Mrs. Doane's ended up with it which it was the old Doane's store 'cause then the Doane's boy was—

J: Was that where the [Inaudible] were by any chance?

G: No. No this was up— This was up next door to going past the Marbury Baptist Church up. I don't think there's a store there but it was Doane's and they have ended up having a candy business. But [Inaudible] was down on the corner.

J: At the main intersection?

G: At the main intersection.

J: The old main—

G: This was up the hill.

J: I see.

G: Between Church of God and I don't think it's a store there now. But Missy Stone said the Doane's [Inaudible phrase]—

J: How was that name spelled? Doane?

G: D-O-A-N-E.

J: Okay. There was a very old Charles County name, Charles County name like that but many, many years ago so they may not be from here. Okay now what was the housing community called at Indian Head. Did it have a name?

G: No it was the just—we called it—you lived on the reservation which a lot of people—. It was a native reservation. It belonged to the natives.

J: Okay was this a brick house?

G: No a wooden house. And anyway we were only I think the second people to live in the house. It was built during the first World War. Of course most of those houses were I think during the first World War.

J: They were pretty well built weren't they?

G: Well built.

J: Government houses.

G: Yeah. And we—I knew everybody practically on the base. Nobody locked the doors or anything. You had freedom it was a lovely place as a child to grow up in. We thought of La Plata as being in the country. And we were in the city because we had water and sewage and electricity. Which in the other part of the county electricity was just starting to come in. But we had water and sewage. And then of course we had tennis court and we even had a movie theater. For five cents you could go to the movies.

J: Did this lead to a little bit of resentment on the part of some of the other Charles County people?

G: I don't know—

J: The lifestyle of the government employees and their families was far above.

G: Yes.

J: What was found in those days elsewhere in the county.

G: The only thing that I know that we when I was in school playing ball La Plata was our biggest enemy. We felt like it was an army navy game when we were playing you know. But maybe I don't know. We didn't travel around the county that much because we had everything there. I walked to school and I could walk to the movies. So when your father took you in the car for a ride you either went to your grandmother's or an aunt or something. We didn't visit that much now. We did go to church picnic which we used to go back to Pomfret to church picnic. But my father was raised Methodist so I used to go to the Methodist church to certain things too.

J: Where we went for a while.

G: Yeah.

J: Gertrude, this is kind of a tough one, about what percentage of the youngsters that you lived with on the reservation were not natives of Charles County? You were running into young kids born in a lot of other places.

G: Oh yeah we had—I had a very—. First place we didn't seem to have the prejudices that I learned that people over in this section did and I think it had to do because of the Navy. Now, now I went to an all-white school and Pomonkey was—you know the black school.

J: Right.

G: And then down on the base, on the base the blacks all had a certain section on the base there was all—. There were just white people that were living next door to me. But we had kids from uh see the Navy. I remember two or three kids at Holloway and Buck and a couple of them like that that their fathers were commanders. And then during the—. This was before the course the second World War and we had a woman Mrs. Smith. Her husband was a Captain on a ship. He was out at sea and she lived next door to us. The Navy was very generous about housing back then too. 'cause after my father there were ten engineers when he went to work for the government and all of them were laid off but him. Because the war—after the war was over. But he stayed.

J: What was your father's first job in Indian Head? He must have been taken in as a relatively unskilled technician.

G: Probably yes. He worked—I guess he worked on a railroad line.

J: On the railroad?

G: Uh huh. And that's what he did. See there and then he worked and our father was a brakeman and then a well they a fire a fireman and then they went up to be an engineer.

J: Okay did he know Mr. [Rainsford]? Does that name ring a bell?

G: Yes. I'm sure he did.

J: Probably. How important was that rail communication system that the Navy had?

G: Well that was the only trans—

J: Really unique.

G: Yeah.

J: [Inaudible phrase].

G: That was the only transportation that—well when I say transportation it wasn't transportation. It just hauled freight. It wasn't a railroad that hauled people it was all freight. And it went from Indian Head to White Plains. And they had no turn table. So they pushed the cars over and they

had to come back. There was no turn table because my father once told me that he went ahead and backed up the same amount, you know because of that.

J: Were civilians allowed on occasion to ride that?

G: Not really. But I—

J: But they did anyway?

G: Well what hap—I remember when we were kids my father took a cousin of mine Audrey Robey who lived down by the railroad track. And my father and we, we stopped the train and we got on down below the hill and went to White Plains which was quite a thing for us.

J: Did you know Azalea Robey? Who lived between Bennsville and the railroad track?

G: No but I'm sure my father—

J: And she got on the train there one day—

G: I'm sure—

J: Because of knowing someone.

G: That's probably—

J: Yeah she tells that story of the train stopped and it was such a big thing.

G: Uh huh that's right.

J: She may be related to this other Robey.

G: Well see, uh well probably yeah probably. Because see my father he would've—he was very understanding of very children and teaching them and this was quite a thing to teach, to ride on a—. In fact I've only been on a—in my whole life time I've only been on—that was the first train I'd ever been on and the second train I went on I went from New York City to White Plains, NY which was really a ride in my way of thinking.

J: Oh yeah for heaven's sakes yeah. About what year was that that you took it?

G: Oh that was about 1960.

J: Okay.

G: That would've been 1960. So I—see living on the base we didn't have much desire to—well you couldn't afford to.

J: Yeah the outside world then didn't really offer you very much that you didn't have.

G: We, my mother, we went to Washington shopping and that was another thing that we had living over there living on that base. When I became a teenager we could go down—. My father got a pass from the government. Go down to the new dock get on a boat the old [Burso] and we could go to Washington. And for about a quarter you know it didn't cost—I think it was 10 cents or you could get three tokens. And we could ride to the museums and the Washington monument and we sight-see.

J: You were really better off than we are the kids today.

G: Yeah.

J: It's a total trip to get into Washington today.

G: Yeah. Yeah we got on the [Burso] and then you had to be there and come back. But they'd always—

J: Do you remember how long it took? That [Burso] was a relatively fast boat. It had been a torpedo boat in fact.

G: Yeah. Well it didn't take very long because—

J: 30 minutes maybe?

G: I had no I—tu know when you're a kid 'cause we enjoyed the trip. It seemed like to me it was very short time. But it seemed like to me we'd have three or four hours in Washington to sight see around or do whatever we wanted.

J: Where did the [Burso] dock?

G: At the Navy Yard.

J: Okay on the Anacostia River.

G: Yeah. And the old [Bacchus] brothers. I don't know if you ever remember that but that was outside the gate and we'd always stop in there to get a sandwich.

J: [Inaudible phrase].

G: A restaurant.

J: Fast food?

G: No. No but—

J: But probably fast anyway.

G: Fast compared to what we'd been used to.

J: So how did you get from the Navy Yard downtown to Lansburgh's and—.

G: On a street car. We would get on a street car.

J: Remember what it cost?

G: I think it was a dime. I think it was dime. Yeah.

J: So we're talking about—

G: And what was funny back then—

J: 1940 to 45?

G: Oh no it was before that.

J: Before that?

G: Oh gosh no. No I was got out of high school in 37. So it had to be before. It was before the second World War.

J: Okay so you were—

G: It was before the second World War.

J: Early teens.

G: Early teens that's right.

J: Who were some of your best friends over there growing up and what happened to some of those families? Did some who were navy people move away never to be seen again?

G: That's right. A lot of the—

J: Hard, hard to see them go wasn't it?

G: Right yeah.

J: Kids though when they're friends for a couple years that's a that's an eternity.

G: Yeah.

J: To lose a friend that in your teens is tough any time. So that was one of the drawbacks wasn't it?

G: Yeah but—

J: Break up of—

G: But you also always realized that this was gonna happen you know.

J: Yeah. Did you ever think Gertrude that because of living there under those conditions you had education opportunities even beyond school that just weren't available to youngsters in Southern Maryland?

G: No I never thought of that.

J: Through association—

G: With the people.

J: With new ideas brought in from outside with people who were not only well educated but whose parents often were college graduates too.

G: That's right.

J: And that was a big thing in those days. Not so big now but for a child to be able to say before nine, before World War II, my mother went to college or my dad went or they both went that was pretty rare in most places.

G: Yeah. Well see my sister Agnes she went four years to Towson.

J: Uh huh. That's [inaudible phrase].

G: Yes it did. Because there were five children home. And now my—what I remember about the salary that my father made I remember when I was a teenager he made \$39.84 because we tried to talk him into giving us the 84 cents for allowance divided between Agnes and I.

J: You mean 39 dollars?

G: And 84 cents a week. That's what he made. And he had six children and they ended up. But you see one advantage was that the housing was subsidized because I think our—it seemed like to me our rent was around 25 or 30 dollars a month.

J: For how large a house? What size?

G: Three bedrooms. Three bedrooms and a bath upstairs. And then a living room, dining room, and we had a sun porch and a kitchen downstairs.

J: Is that house still standing do you know?

G: And we had a garden. No. but I have pictures of, of Calvin Road. I lived on Calvin Road. And they took down Calvin Road. I was trying—which it was a shame that—

J: How far was this house from the housing put up on the around the green?

G: Okay village green where the old post office was which is now the senior citizen.

J: Right yeah.

G: There was be the village green and then you went up I think it was Earl Road and then Calvin Road would be the next road.

J: You went toward the river?

G: I went towards the river.

J: Alright okay.

G: In fact we were the last, last street on the river. You know we could walk back—actually in back of my house was Davis's cow pasture. Now that's how—. Well of course during the war well I mean during the Depression Davis's lived there and I guess Mr. Davis probably worked for the government but they had cows out in the back of their house which was in the back of our house too. And it was their cow pasture and they supplied milk to the base.

J: Could you see the river from your house?

G: No you'd have to walk back there.

J: What on earth is back there today?

G: Well that's—

J: [Inaudible phrase].

G: Okay. In back of where Calvin Road is now they have—well during the second World War they built all of these houses where it was Wilson Road and now it is. Well I don't want to call them trailers they're more like a mobile home park back there. That's what's back there now. But when I was a kid I mean we could walk back there and we'd go down to the river and go swimming.

J: Sounds like a choice piece of real estate.

G: It is. It is. It overlooks—

J: The government still own it?

G: The government still owns it. Yeah now they deeded where the village green is to the town in recent years. But there's a fence up there and all in the back—all back to the Potomac River they have the choice property. Yeah.

J: Okay. In your words Gertrude what was the overall economic and sociological impact of the Navy tenancy and the village of Indian Head? Who did what for whom?

G: Well there wasn't a big split. The Navy helped Indian Head and Indian Head helped the Navy. You mean the people that lived off the base?

J: Yeah, yeah, right.

G: Yeah they helped one another. Well now here would be example to me when I think about it I remember the Catholic church had nuns—. We didn't have to go to Catholic schools so they had these nuns to come in and teach us catechism for summer school. I went to summer school with these nuns. And they lived—the Navy they negotiated something so the Navy let them have one of the Navy base houses to live in for nothing. Yeah. As far as I know it was for nothing.

J: What order were they with do you remember?

G: Little Sisters of Charity.

J: Okay alright.

G: But they in turn taught the Navy kids as well as the—

J: Professional teachers. Highly professional.

G: Yeah. Yeah. Course they—see the Navy—well Captain Lackey course that was before my time but was one instrumental in getting that high school there for the kids. A lot of people—. That was as far to my knowledge that is the first high school in Charles County.

J: The first, yeah you're right yeah.

G: But it didn't belong to the county. And the first teachers you know what their rating was? They went as janitors 'cause there was no billet for teachers in the Navy.

J: Oh that's interesting.

G: So they went—they were employed as janitors or a laborer or something like that, you know.

J: Yeah of course that's all changed now.

G: Oh absolutely.

J: I used to work for the Navy education program and they did have well civilian grade, grade five, seven, nine, whatever teachers overseas.

G: Yeah. But I'm talking about now this was back.

J: 19—

G: 19 yeah.

J: How old were you when you started school?

G: I was about seven I guess when I started school because what happened when we lived down in what we would call below the hill which was down around the Glymont area.

J: Yeah, yeah.

G: And then we got older my mother insisted on my father moving up on the hill because there was no transportation for kids to go to school you know there wasn't—and we couldn't walk that far so we moved on the base and then we could all walk to school. And that seemed to be the number one problem back as far as education was through the county there was no transportation.

J: How near did you live to the [Gehring] Road, the houses built by Mr. [Gehring].

G: [Gehring] well see I was—

J: Little cottages—

G: Yeah. I was further. We were—

J: Closer to Glymont?

G: No. Oh you mean when I—when I was—

J: When you lived down the hill below there.

G: Oh no. I lived down by well I guess you'd say where Popular Lane is. I lived on the Indian Head highway. In fact that house is still there that my mother and father built. In fact let's see—

J: So you were up on the new road? You weren't on the original down the hill?

G: Yeah I was on—I was on the original road going yeah. I'm not on 210. I was on the original road. In fact Indian Head Inn. Have you ever seen that it's a motel?

J: Yes.

G: Well that property joins my—

J: Yeah it's rather new.

G: Yes.

J: Right. Okay

G: Well it's on the back road. See 210 is a very new highway you know.

J: Do you remember when 210 was?

G: Absolutely. I used to drive work in Washington and—

J: Well you would've—

G: Yeah, so. We didn't have 210 then when I worked up there.

J: Well I guess everybody knows by now how important Indian Head and the Navy were to education in Charles County. What about in other fields of academia life? Libraries. What library facilities were made available by the Navy?

G: We had a library down at the—we had what we called the recreation hall and in the recreation hall there was a library and a movie theater.

J: Oh okay.

G: And they had you know we had a tennis court out beside that. But we always had a library. I never remember—and I remember once having—when I was growing up before that there was a—they had a big building for a library. Always had libraries. And they cared and as of today there are a lot more technical books that people pull out of the library over at Indian Head than they do over here.

J: Now that makes sense.

G: Yeah.

J: Was the librarian a Navy employee?

G: Yep. And a lot of times she would be a widow whose husband had died or—

J: A service man [inaudible phrase].

G: Yeah in fact I know a Mickey Tide who, Helen Tide, you know Mickey Tide, but she was the town counselor—

J: Oh yes I've been reading about her in the paper recently.

G: Okay. Well Mickey—

J: She's about to retire?

G: Yeah well Mickey's mother was used to work at the recreation center and take tickets when I was young. But the Navy, like [Hollow]—. I don't know if you ever remember Lester [Hollow].

J: Yes I do.

G: Okay and Huck [Hollow] see they were all—Huck and them were my husband's age or about the same age and their father was killed. He was an electrician and he was killed. And they, the Navy—

J: At Indian Head?

G: At Indian Head. And the Navy let her stay there and she raised those children. She didn't have to move out. That would not be true anymore. You know now everything is so many rules and regulations and you had rules and regulations but people bent the rules to help somebody. But now it seems like—

J: There was a humaneness to it that's slipped away from us.

G: I think so. It's what we called using common sense.

J: Yeah. [Inaudible phrase].

G: Yeah I know.

J: Okay so there's that now what about, what about medicine? What support did the Navy give the community outside of the gates?

G: Outside of the gates? Well they had Doctor [Vitnell] you know? I mean um yeah Doctor [Vitnell] but they it was in Marbury and then they had Doctor Mitchell that was off the base that he lived on Indian Head Avenue. Now Bill that I married see his family lived off the base. He went to school with graduated with my first husband and I graduated with Marie Gardiner his wife. And Marie and I lived on the base but Bill lived off the base.

J: Was Doctor Mitchell a rather elderly man?

G: Yes I remember him as just being elderly.

J: 'cause I have some indication of his being of his having been a physician as early as 1910.

G: I'm sure that's true.

J: And used to travel as far as Pomfret.

G: I'm sure that's true too.

J: To treat members of the Spalding family and that's on one of my early tapes.

G: Because he delivered as far as I know all of us children.

J: Did he live next door to the Bryant's?

G: Yeah right down on yeah. There's two houses in between but at one time it could've been next door. But talking about the Navy now. The Navy. We went down to the Navy and has a physical. When as school kids did. Another thing if you had measles or anything—

J: With no charge?

G: With no charge that's right. See that's what really helped when I think about my father with all those children.

J: When the fringe benefits for a family were tremendous and wonderful.

G: That's right. The idea I think was to keep the families together you know. And they helped them every way they could. And keep them happy. If you keep the family happy the—

J: Keep your trained skill deployed there.

G: Yeah.

J: On the job.

G: On the job.

J: Yeah.

G: But I remember once having the measles and the Navy came up, [Corman] came up and put a big sign on the door, "Measles." And I couldn't go out. You couldn't go anyplace. I remember measles, whooping cough, and chicken pox were three things and they put a sign on the door that you couldn't, you couldn't go to school, you couldn't go to the yard, you know.

J: Did the Navy take advantage of its position there through offering any kind of technical training to young people in the community?

G: Absolutely. A lot of my friends that I grew up with. Their parents couldn't have afforded to send them to college back then. Okay they went under the apprentice program which was the best thing that could have ever happened. There were a lot of apprenticed electricians that became first class electricians. And then they in turn would go and take courses from different things to further their—

J: I just talked to a young man a couple days ago. Not so young anymore. Donald [Roe]. Andrew's son.

G: Okay.

J: Andrew and Claire's son down and he was telling me that that's how he got where he is today. And he will be retiring this year.

G: Yes. Uh huh.

J: But that's the Navy just was his world creating for him the life that he had.

G: Well that's what a lot of my friends. That was the same thing. Like Thelma [Buoy] that's our County Treasurer's husband and I graduated from high school together and he went to work down there.

J: What was her family name?

G: She was a Mattingly.

J: Oh yeah. How related to Charles?

G: Uh I don't—I'm not sure.

J: Niece possibly?

G: No I don't think they were that close. I think they there—. The Mattingly they were from over at the Pisgah—in the Pisgah area. But I'm not sure exactly how—

J: You know you're reinforcing a very strong impression that I have building on and that is that the loyalty of the Indian Head civilian people toward the Navy was really tremendous.

G: Yeah well a whole lot—

J: And the gratefulness. The gratefulness people have not forgotten what their world could have been like if they for example had a father who was just making it as an undertaker in Pisgah. That would've been a whole new world for you people. No question about it and the future not too great because once you got locked into a life like that what could you do to break it? You were really stuck there. So the Navy not only created a new world but offered prospects or something better.

G: That's right.

J: Through training and better health, let's face it, better health and transportation. What about day to day household needs like groceries? Soaps? Beverages? Where did you folks shop when you lived on the reservation?

G: Well we had Minnie Robey who had a store there and we used to go to Minnie Robey's store and shop. And then we had an A&P. Mr. Tucker was in charge of the A&P.

J: That was still there when we moved in.

G: Yeah and then Fanny Slaven had drug store you know too.

J: I talked to [inaudible].

G: Did you?

J: [Inaudible phrase].

G: Yeah but no it was—

J: Did you buy at the commissary? As—

G: No.

J: Okay [inaudible phrase].

G: No I don't even think that they probably didn't even—if they did then I don't remember you know doing any of that type thing. When you would—. Thinking about the Navy you know like they were my—I was 16 before I found out we had Maryland State Police. You know because they were—Marines patrolled the whole world.

J: Yeah the [SP is not]—

G: Yeah. Now if my—I remember one of my brother's being involved with breaking out some windows and they probably—. Well brother my father they took him down before the Captain you know and they really got it. But nowadays that's when I think about teenage crime. You know it would've been a statistic but it was corrected right away. It wasn't—you didn't have to go to court and all this stuff.

J: Very personal confrontations.

G: That's right. Yeah. Scared the heck out of them when you went down before the Captain.

J: Yeah I suppose he never had any trouble after that.

G: Yeah. Actually it would—most of the time when I was there after the war, we had a Commander which I understand they're cutting back now taking the Captain out and putting the Commander back. I don't know. But [that was way].

J: To what extent Gertrude were non-Navy families benefited by Indian Head?

G: Well I would say.... You know it's like when Doctor Susan came there. You know he lived—. He wasn't in the Navy or anything but he was the doctor for, for the people. And then Doctor Mitchell I guess had died by then you know but he delivered the children. And but they had access to the golf course and—

J: Yeah that's the sort of thing.

G: Yeah.

J: And entertainment? The rec hall?

G: The rec hall.

J: They'd go there and play?

G: Yeah.

J: Basketball?

G: Yeah.

J: Dance?

G: Yep.

J: Was there a bowling alley on the base anywhere?

G: No. Well it—now down beyond the gates they also had a recreation hall and mostly they were for the young Marines. Now the young Marines in that group were separate from us as civilians. I'll have to say there was a distinction there because the only way you could go on down there would be if one of them invited you.

J: Now what do you mean down there?

G: That's if you go on the base right now you have to go beyond a gate. There's a gate there with a guard.

J: Okay. right.

G: And that's on the point. That's where the factory is plus all the officers lived down there. See it was only the civilians mostly that lived out in the area.

J: Okay so when you were growing up down there meant through the main gate.

G: Through the main gate.

J: Into a controlled security area.

G: Into a controlled security area.

J: Yeah okay.

G: Yeah and they had more fringe benefits than we did in that they had a swimming pool and they had access to the golf course but a lot of people like a doctor or someone like that could use the golf course. They would—the Navy always made friends with the business people because they in turn you know helped them.

J: They were the most influential members of the civilian community.

G: That's right. 'cause I belonged to the Indian Head Business Association. In fact, [Mike's Brick's] father was instrumental in starting that business association. And that's because he was a policeman detective in Washington and then came down to Indian Head after his stepfather was Pete Schroeder who had a bakery. And Buster came down and they opened up club Maryland which was partly next door to the gate on the base.

J: In what building was it?

G: It's—

J: Is that building still there?

G: It's still there. Still there. The biggest one.

J: The one next to the Longhorn?

G: It is the Longhorn.

J: It was Longhorn.

G: It was the Longhorn. It's the Longhorn now.

J: I hear Mr. Schroeder suffered a tragic untimely death. Did you ever hear about that?

G: You mean Buster?

J: Mhm.

G: Buster not Schroeder, [Sprague].

J: Oh I mean Mr. Schroeder.

G: Now Mr.—

J: What was his nickname?

G: No. Pete Schroeder. He was an old man when he died.

J: Right yeah.

G: Yeah but I didn't think it was untimely. But see Buster was his stepson.

J: Which one was asphyxiated?

G: That was Mike's father.

J: Okay. [Somebody misinformed me] [inaudible phrase].

G: Yeah no, no, no. That was Mike's father Buster. And Buster was a baker. 43. He was the youngest person I knew when he died. He and my husband were good friends.

J: And you know who told me Dick Tugman. And Dick Tugman read about it in a newspaper way out in Colorado when he was going to school out there.

G: Yeah well it made headlines and it also made the Reader's Digest. I had some information on that because it was out of the ordinary thing you know to happen. And—

J: I guess people generally hadn't known how dangerous carbon monoxide [things] were.

G: Well also what they—because he had been on the—he'd been with the police a detective in DC and they were trying to bring in—they were doing a lot of investigating about did it really was it accidental or not so. You know, you know for [inaudible]. See but—

J: [Inaudible phrases].

G: Like a tutor you know sued. Which was in the paper sued General Motors. But because of the car. They changed the design of the car that he was driving. The car had big intakes on the side for fresh air and that's what they think had happened. But they did change the design of the car but she didn't get any she—

J: About what year was this?

G: Must have been 46 or 47 something like that. But I'm thinking about—I was thinking about Judy was born. Yeah it was probably something like that. I could I'm sure if I looked around I could find the information.

J: Yeah well anyway I guess probably it's probably not too to put on tape. During the 30s when you were in your late teens who were considered the shakers and movers of the Indian Head civilian community?

G: See now I probably wouldn't have paid that much attention to it but the only thing I remember once these friends of mine were in an automobile accident and they had to go before Judge Mattingly. He was the old magistrate systems of JP, Justice of the Peace. So and they were in the Mattingly's were the Democrat politicians and the McWilliams's were the Republican politicians. Now Bill probably could have told you more about that because see he lived off the base. His father worked for the government but he was a councilman or whatever they call—. I guess they called them councilmen back then. Over here in La Plata I remember my—I remember when I got out of high school to find a job was pretty tough and a lot of boys went in just before that had gone in to the CC camp because see the base had practically, you know, they weren't employing people so [inaudible]. Then the second World War started they started bringing in more people and things started really picking up after I got out of high school.

J: Do you remember any threats to the employment during the Depression years before fears of World War 2?

G: Of people losing jobs?

J: Yeah.

G: Oh my goodness yes. Now that's when we lost a lot of friends. I remember—I can't remember.

J: So the Depression really was felt?

G: Yes because your neighbors moved out and there were a lot of vacant houses.

J: Oh I see alright.

G: But you know being a kid then I—it was just that you lost a friend. You didn't—you never thought about. I thought the only thing that made you poor or wealthy was how many kids you had. You had to divide it more ways. Because most people that lived where I lived made approximately the same salaries. You know there wasn't a big—

J: What was the average size of those families? Children wise?

G: Children wise I would say three to six.

J: Okay.

G: I mean I don't—

J: Hasn't changed a great deal.

G: No I don't remember real big, big families right off hand. You know, that lived on the base, lived near me.

J: So many of the country people that I've interviewed well in their 80's and 90's you know report families of eight to fourteen.

G: Uh huh yeah.

J: Eight to fourteen. Fourteen is the all-time high and I won't tell you who that is but you know her very well.

G: Well let's see I mean when I think about it on my street there we had two or three. You know they were professional people they were college graduates which was really something then. Mr. Kray, Raymond Kray and—

J: How is that spelled?

G: K-R-A-Y.

J: Okay.

G: And Mr. [Farmer] I mean um Thames and he was chemical engineer.

J: How was his name spelled?

G: Thames? I think Mr. Thames spelled it T-H-A-M-E-S. I'm not sure of that.

J: Okay.

G: I'm not sure about that.

J: Now the name [Farmer] that was one of the big ones wasn't it? Among civilian hierarchy.

G: Yeah now he lived down there. He was like the head honcho as far as civilians were concerned I think. And it was—see I should—but if I remembered correctly he had something to do with smokeless powder. You know inventing smokeless powder.

J: Yeah I guess he was a physicist or a chemist.

G: Yeah and—

J: Maybe one of the most highly paid.

G: Yeah what I remember about him when we were kids we'd go down for Halloween and gosh he'd give us a quarter and we thought he's got to be a very wealthy man.

J: That's big money.

G: That's right.

J: What was Halloween like in those days? That was a nice community for kids.

G: Yeah it was. It really was.

J: Was everybody ready for it?

G: Yeah. And nobody was afraid to go out. And the worst thing that they ever did was they always put a chair up a flag pole or—

J: Real mean.

G: Real mean. Or put trashcans in the middle of the road.

J: What were some of the things that you would collect? What little goodies did the kids especially want? Cash? Pennies? Nickels?

G: No. Well I remember when I was a kid and gosh I had boxes of—

[Tape Interruption]

J: All in all Gertrude growing up in Indian Head as part of a big the community and with your dad part of the Navy establishment was a good experience for you and your family anyway you want to look at it?

G: Absolutely.

J: Looking back now it gave you perspective and a lease on life and a start in life? You and your brothers and sisters? That very few youngsters had in Charles County in those days outside of Indian Head area.

G: I'll tell you—

J: Two different worlds.

G: Yeah. Tell you what I was thinking about the very few—well in my family all my family is still living there. Right around that area except one my brother Johnny who ended up going to Florida you know [inaudible]. But and he didn't till he retired. But what I'm saying, your whole life, your social life, your working life, and everything. Like my father never worried about a traffic jam because he worked and lived in the same place and his children went to school. You know there wasn't a big bus transportation problem.

J: Life was pretty un-stressful wasn't it.

G: Uh huh. Yeah. The only stress—

J: So to go to work he just jumped the fence or went through it and you were there?

G: Yeah.

J: How far—where was the building that your dad worked in most of the time?

G: Well it was down what I call—. See he was for the engineers was down in the valley I guess you'd say. Down towards—

J: On the Potomac side?

G: On the Potomac side yeah.

J: On the Point?

G: Well actually on the Point see the base the main the secret part of the base which we you know we never talked about the base that much because our parents said, "Look we don't everybody to know what they're doing down here." You know so you didn't in particular during the second World War you know. They were really instrumental in—. Saying you never talked about what went on there.

J: Yeah. What was the impact on your lives of World War Two and the really considerable influx of new people? How did that change your life style?

G: Yeah well one thing with me personally, it really made me grow up because I didn't know how the other half lived. I really didn't. I can remember people coming in and they didn't know how to flush toilets and do things like that which we all took for granted. Now because see they were recruiting them from like West Virginia and places that they lived were on the farm and they were coming in as laborers and that type of thing because they were recruiting everybody—

J: And their children would have to jump right into school with the rest of you.

G: Yep.

J: And that must have been tough on everybody teachers included.

G: Well it seemed to blend in and work very well. But you know to for someone to steal something was just out of the—never hardly heard of.

J: Isn't that nice.

G: And but then when the second World War came and then we had all these people then we started—there was more of a discipline problem with certain things that I can remember. But see during the second World War see I was out of school and I was in school which was a shock to me because all in school I had been taught the first World War was a war to end all wars and we'd never survive another war. So and then here I get out of school and my all three of my brothers end up in the military, you know.

J: Yeah gee. Did you ever work for the Navy Department?

G: Yeah just temporarily.

J: During the war?

G: No. Let's see I had—Barbara Jean was born. See Barbara Jean was born in 38. I graduated 37, got married, Barbara Jean was born in 38, then Judy was born four years later, 38, 39, 40, 42. She was born 43. And so I was really had children I was taking care of.

J: Had you and [Sherby] known each other for quite some time?

G: Went to school together. He lived down the street yeah—

J: Did he ever work for the Navy?

G: Yep. Only during the war and he hated it. He hated it. He couldn't stand the discipline. You know you had to be there, you worked from seven to—

J: Regimentation.

G: Regimentation.

J: Yeah, yeah.

G: You know you had to be there at a certain hour and everything. And the reason he went to work for them they were have—. He had worked in Washington before. [Colonial Fuel Log] and he was a good [oil burn] mechanic electrician and he got his electric license and that type of thing. And he knew also—he not only did oil burners but air conditioning and the Navy was desperate for those type of people because all the others were gone in the war and of course he was a man with two children. Which kind of exempt you to start with you know. And so anyway he went down and worked for the Navy and when the war was over he left. He said—

J: So he was there how long about three years?

G: Yeah three or four years. And I loved it because I had lived up at Fenwick. We had moved up to Fenwick and I didn't have plumbing and I had never lived without plumbing. We had—so but it was beautiful little place right up there—

J: Was this your first home as a married?

G: No, well, no, the first place I lived was up in Washington. And we had an apartment in Washington in, well it was in a—we didn't have any money—it was in a woman's house. It was three rooms in her house that she rented out. But anyway when I moved on the base I was back in heaven because I had—

J: Where did you move to?

G: I moved right about three streets over in the new section. See they built all new—

J: Closer to the green?

G: No. Opposite closer to the river.

J: Oh.

G: I lived on East Wilson. And East Wilson was right up where you were talking about it was close to the river.

J: Oh yeah now were these houses later moved?

G: Yeah they tore them—

J: [Inaudible] some of them.

G: No they tore them all down. No [Pothouse] was built. No [Pothouse] was built on its own. That—

J: Right where it is now?

G: Right where it is now. The only thing they moved [Pot Heights]. Then they built took moved some of the houses some of the houses at the [Pot Heights] over to [Perry Wright] which was a black community. They still had a black and white community.

J: Woodland Acres or something—

G: Yeah well I guess that's what it is now. Uh huh. But it used to be [Perry White] but they moved them over there. But that was to employ to bring more people in because the base was filled up. You know they were see 'cause it was civilians and—. But this was privately

contracted. Privately contracted so anybody could live there that could afford to do it. But I think it was government money. It was subsidized government money.

J: What—

G: It was excellent low cost housing because what it ended up having the people controlled it. In other words a lot of people—. There's certain things you know you can't leave junk cars in your yard and all this stuff so it was some kind of control.

J: And there still is?

G: Still is uh huh still is.

J: What did World War Two do to the town of Indian Head? Any new businesses established? What did local businessmen do to meet the demands of a really big jump in population?

G: Well yeah all kinds of little old businesses—

J: Must have just tripled.

G: Yeah it did. Uh huh. And you know what World War Two helped to which being Register of Wills I've seen two or three blacks that I knew that lived down in Nanjemoy or Riverside were women and they ended up owning little pieces of land and raising families and were self-sufficient and self-supported. And that's because during the second World War the Navy ran a bus down there to pick them up. They didn't have transportation that's the number one thing what I've seen is what causes people to live in poverty is because they have to have transportation and now not only transportation but insurance. So you can never get, you know, I mean if welfare would realize that they if you furnish people transportation and furnish them money until they got on their feet but right now if you hold a job you can't get welfare and most of the time women are afraid. I'm thinking particularly women are afraid. You know, other words they're afraid to lose that little check in particular if you've got a child. But if you want to make people self-sufficient you got to help them with [those things]—

J: The Navy ran Defense Department buses way out into the Boondocks? [Inaudible phrase].

G: Yeah what they did they contracted it. They didn't—they contracted which the man which they contracted to made money too. But then they bring the women work down on the powder line. You know they sorted the powder. Or tested powder and of course a lot of them stayed on. But it gave them a good start.

J: Yeah. Did the World War Two experience for Indian Head change the way of life over there permanently? That you had known you and your family before the war? What were some of the lasting effects of World War Two on Indian Head if any?

G: Well. Well. I don't know. It opened up Indian Head to well prosperity as far as business people were concerned . I mean a lot of people made lots of money you know during the second World War. That were just plodding along up to that point.

J: What kinds of people were these? What were they doing for a living.

G: Well like if you were selling cars or you had a grocery store or you had a little bar room you know.

J: Ice cream parlor.

G: Ice cream and well bowling alleys. You know see you had a—. And Reese's I remember John Reese had a place in right off the base and the kids could go and you could get something to eat and they could dance too. You know, things like that.

J: Huh. Did it have a name?

G: Yeah it was called Reese's as far as I know.

J: Reese's.

G: That's what we always said—

J: Where was it located?

G: It's right off of [Strauss] Avenue and you know where they village green starts? Well it was on your left in that building right there it's right next to the Fire Department. It's next door to the Fire Department. That building now I think it's housing in there. I think somebody bought it and made it into housing. But that used to be Reese's. I don't—. Like I hear people talk about Shorty Michael's here in La Plata.

J: Oh yes.

G: Same principal. Same Principal.

J: Did Indian Head have anything near a classy eating establishment during the thirties? Where would you go to eat in Indian Head if you really wanted to do that?

G: Well of course if you were a family and a kid, my parents went to church dinners and things like that. I remember my mother once going to the Mayflower with the daughters of Isabel but you never went out to a restaurant. With that you went to Marshall Hall or Chapel Point. Those were the two places. There—Gillin had a place during the war there too but it was like a little tavern. There wasn't any. Now the only place that I would say when I was growing up that every now and then you did have supper down at we had the Naval Powder Factory Hotel. And that had a—

J: On the station?

G: On the station.

J: On the reservation?

G: On the reservation.

J: Was it that was a pretty decent place, pretty decent building wasn't it?

G: That's right. Yeah. And 'cause I remember being a kid we'd go—come from school we'd stop at the kitchen and they'd probably give us a cookie or something you know the cooks there. But the school teachers that came in would live at the Naval Powder Factory Hotel.

J: Did you go all the way through school in the [Lackey] school?

G: Yep. No. I went to—I went down—I went further down on the base.

J: Oh did you?

G: Where now you can go through the gate but the gate wasn't there then when I went down. But I'd go down on right all the way down on [Strauss] Avenue by the recreation hall. That's where I started it. And then we moved it was called [Larry], [Larry] building I believe it was. Then I moved up to Lackey when I was in seventh grade.

J: Where was the colored Elementary school in the 20's?

G: In the 20's that was down—that was further down on the base. That was down on what we call the neck.

J: Swan Circle?

G: Swan Circle that's what it—there was Swan Court and then—

J: Mary Neal has described that.

G: Yeah.

J: [Inaudible phrase]. Did you ever meet Mary Neal?

G: Oh I'm sure, yeah.

J: [One of the really great black teachers of all time in this county]. And that's where she was assigned after having taught at a black school on Jackson Town Road in the booniest place in Charles County after having just arrived from her home in I think Pennsylvania.

G: Uh huh.

J: She told me she cried when she saw it. But the next one two years later was the best assignment she could've got. Swan Circle black school there on the reservation. Real heat and electricity and inside plumbing.

G: And you know now when I—when I was telling you about the nuns that taught us catechism? Now the blacks and the whites all went to school to learn religion. You know we never—they I remember being criticized about that when I went to high school but—at the Catholic church. We had Glymont church we had St. Mary's Star of the Sea. But they were both integrated. You know there wasn't any—they were just both integrated.

J: And that was a phenomenal thing too wasn't it.

G: Yeah.

J: That integration could take place and exist at least survive and I guess some progress was made too which may have made it easier later to go to completely integrated school. Now when you were going to school at Lackey that that was segregated wasn't it?

G: Yeah.

J: And what year did you graduate again?

G: 37.

J: 37.

G: Yeah I graduated in 1937.

J: From the original Lackey?

G: From the original Lackey—

J: On the green?

G: On the green.

J: Okay. And what ever happened to that building should never happen [inaudible]. Wasn't that sad?

G: Yeah.

J: Just took it down.

G: But we, we had a big shindig you know when they did that and I've got pictures of it. Paintings of it and everything.

J: Oh for heaven's sakes.

G: Yeah. Oh yeah. When you talk about the loyalty you'd be surprised they had, the classes that came back. In fact Barbara Jean was instrumental in getting that organized and [inaudible] and—

J: What year did this take place this big shindig?

G: I don't know I guess I'd have to look that up too.

J: 15 or 20 years ago?

G: Yeah.

J: I think I can just barely—

[Tape Breaks]

J: Had you ever given any thought as a young woman to getting involved in politics in anyway?

G: Yes. Well I never thought of getting involved but I apparently was politically oriented because like when we would have—if there was a debate most of the time I'd end up on the debating team. Then I remember once going to the Mayflower Hotel which was quite experience for a luncheon and it was they selected two or three people from each one of the high schools and we went to a conference a national conference. So I guess I did in a way. And when I graduated from high school I read the class will.

J: Oh for goodness sake's.

G: Yes so maybe I was destined to be Register of Wills. But I was always—I wasn't thinking of politics. Well the first thing when I went to work over at La Plata I got appointed as Clerk to the Trial Magistrate and I went to the legislature to try to get driving training in school because I saw so many accidents and there were always young people involved.

J: About what year was this now?

G: 57, 56.

J: Who was the Trial Magistrate?

G: Well that was Martin Chris was the Trial Magistrate so I thought that was about 56, 57, 58. And then the new—you know they changed—it was an appointed job the Clerk to the Trial Magistrate.

J: Was this a new position?

G: No.

J: A new job?

G: No. Uh uh. It was part time. It was a part time job and what you did, you recorded all the traffic violations and that type of thing. It was three days a week and then before I left it started being full time. And now, of course now most of that stuff's on computers. A lot of it was—

J: So this Trial Magistrate's office job was step number one really wasn't it for you to get acquainted with the center of political power in Charles—

G: That's right.

J: Which it was.

G: Uh huh.

J: Which it was.

G: Well I, yeah.

J: And now how old were you at that time?

G: Let's see that was what did I say? I was born 1919 and this was 57. So I was what 40, 38, 35, something like that.

J: Yeah still had two youngsters at home?

G: Yeah, yeah.

J: Okay.

G: But you know my grandfather had been a judge of the orphans court and when I started to get involved which when my kids were in high school we fought to get the [band]. So when you say getting into politics, that's all politics.

J: That's right.

G: That's all politics.

J: That's, that's, that's the start of it.

G: But politics to me is helping people get something they want or need for the betterment of a community which is how you know you only get started. And but I had done things like that which really helped me then when I finally, when I ran. But it was just suggested to me that—

J: What had you been doing in Indian Head just prior to accepting this magistrate's court position?

G: Oh well I had been working in Washington for the [Grand Lodge] of the International Association of Machinists. And I worked on [dead men] up there that was really ironic.

J: So there's politics again in another way really.

G: Well no that wasn't—the Machinist union wasn't politics as such. Well maybe it was I don't know but I never thought about it as politics. I didn't get the job because of, I got it because I knew a friend and I was looking for a job. But anyway I had to have an operation so I didn't want to drive back and forth to Washington. And then [Earl Milstred] who was a friend of ours who ended up running once for Sheriff. He didn't make it. Ran against I think it was against uh Buddy Garner to tell you the truth. And anyway I didn't want to drive back and forth and this was a part time job and that's how I went and got into that.

J: Well isn't that something.

G: But my, my, my father's, my father's people were all Republicans my mother's people were all Democrats and I heard, would hear my father and them talk about it. And I remember my mother once when I got out of high school brought me over here and introduced me to Walter Mitchell to see if he could help get me a job someplace I can't remember what it was, you know. But I think it was up on the hill someplace, you know.

J: Walter Jenifer Mitchell.

G: Yeah.

J: [Looked like James] his father.

G: That's right.

J: So you really sort of grew up.

G: Yeah.

J: Under conditions in which you at least brushed up against politics—

G: Oh yeah.

J: And differences, and differences in a political—

G: Yeah well see I got into politics as much as anything to help John Parran be elected.

J: Oh did you?

G: That's when I really got into politics. And because my husband and I—it was the first time that someone from over the Indian Head area—because see we couldn't vote when I lived on the Navy base. You couldn't vote.

J: Oh for heaven's sakes.

G: No we had no—see my father wasn't in politics as such in fact most people that worked for the Navy were afraid to voice opinion, afraid they'd lose their job or something. So you never really got that.

J: Even when I was with the government you know in the 50's and 60's that feeling was still there.

G: Yeah it still is today contrary to what people think. It still is today. But anyway I came over here when they told me about this job. Came over and I was, it was definitely political because I was interviewed by Rudolph Carrico. And I'll never forget going in there and somebody told me that another woman wanted the job and I told him I didn't want to take the job away from anybody and he said, "Mrs. Wright if you don't take it we're going to give it to another Democrat." So I thought well I'll take it.

J: Where was his office?

G: Right across from the courthouse in the [catacombs] where his son is.

J: Where his son is alright.

G: Where his son is.

J: Okay.

G: So that's how I really— And Judge Chris was a Republican and we used to have many interesting conversations. But I really helped people in that office. Because most people they come in the courthouse they're afraid.

J: What did you think of the operation of the Trial Magistrate's office?

G: I thought it was a darned good system and you got good justice chief.

J: [Eyeball to eyeball].

G: That's right but it was a [cheap]. It wasn't a whole bunch of rules and regulations. You could go in the court too without an attorney you know. But now everything you have to have an attorney and there's court costs and everything but a lot of—

J: Was Captain Chris pretty good at the job?

G: Yeah.

J: What had he done in the Navy do you remember?

G: No I don't. But we had a rapport because of me being raised on a Navy base I guess.

J: Hadn't he been assigned here at one time?

G: He was. He was at Indian Head at one time yeah. And his, let's see, his wife's brother was Doctor [Orn]. She was an [Orn]. Sherby my husband and Doctor [Orn] and them were nice friends.

J: He lived over in the Fenwick area?

G: He lived over in Fenwick. Sherby got to know him good.

J: Okay well that certainly adds up.

G: Yeah.

J: Right now how did you slide from this into running for Register of Wills? Who—. What were the influences that nudged you in that direction?

G: Well the—I had this appointment which was under the Democrats and then the system changed and then the Republicans had the appointment so I figured I was gonna lose my job.

And one of the attorneys who I helped attorneys in that field too said to me, "Why don't you run for Register of Wills." Georgetta Croft was not going to run. And they said it's the best job for a woman in the courthouse. And—

J: Why for a woman?

G: Well there weren't any other women elected jobs really in the courthouse back then. You know—

J: So it was darned near the only job—

G: That a woman—

J: In which a woman might be successful.

G: Yeah and there'd only been—I was only the third women that had ever run for the job. The first one—

J: Who, who was third one now that we haven't mentioned? Georgetta Croft.

G: There was no—well she didn't run see. There was the first woman who beat George Wade was Ruth Cooksey Carpenter and Vernon Cooksey was her brother.

J: So you're going back a few years.

G: I'm going back. From 1934 to 47 she was the Register of Wills. Yeah Ruth Carpenter. Ruth Cooksey Carpenter. Her husband had gotten killed. Gotten shot. It made headlines and she was a widow and had I think five daughters. But she—

J: Alright she was shot at the bridge. He was shot at the bridge.

G: Bridge right. And she had five daughters. I'm sure that—

J: The sheriff's brother in law. Robert Vernon Cooksey's brother in law.

G: Uh yes.

J: Brother in law.

G: That's right.

J: And that's how Robert Vernon Cooksey got in to the Sheriff business.

G: Okay.

J: According to his interview.

G: Okay. Well now he became a County Commissioner. And then he got Ruth to run for that job. So then she ran and then Edelen Posey came in and ran against her in 47 and she won the job and was there till 55. And then she married a military man. She was a widow and married a military

man. So and then so Georgetta Croft was appointed and she was not gonna run again. So then I said I'm gonna run. I went home and talked to my husband and he said if you think you can win go ahead and run. So I said, "I'll try". And my father had you know knew a little something about politics he had worked for Evan Monroe. He'd worked for Evan Monroe because he had retired and had come over here and he was a Deputy Sheriff you know too. So he was a big help. But anyway I just threw my hat in. I know I'll never get that Mary McMathews ran for Judge of the Orphan's Court and Louise Earhart and myself we were the only three women that were running. And the first meeting that I went to I could see that the men were not interested in these picayune jobs. In their minds they wanted the Senate and the legislature and the county commissioners. So we teamed up together and we toured this county and all of us were successful.

J: Isn't that something.

G: Yeah.

J: Now let us have those offices again. Linked to the name. Which three offices were you three ladies running for?

G: Okay I was running for Register of Wills.

J: Okay.

G: Louise Earhart, Louise Mudd Earhart was running for Judge of the Orphan's Court. And Mary McMathews was running for Judge of the Orphan's Court.

J: I see.

G: And they were all elected. We had, let's see who else was on that.

J: What was Henry Middleton running for in—

G: Judge of Orphan's Court too.

J: That's what I thought.

G: Uh huh. Because see there were the two women and then the men and we carried—we won everything in 58. The Democrats won everything. That's when John Cooksey, [Eddy Berry], and John Sullivan ran for County Commissioner which they won. John Parran, John Mitchell, [Sam Linton] won [inaudible]. And but then Pat Mudd stayed in as Clerk of the Court. Franklin [Renkler] as Treasurer. You know he stayed. You know two Republicans stayed in. But yeah it was Henry and Mary [Neck], and Louise [Cox].

J: Well—

G: And Evan Monroe was assured.

J: While you were running for the office of Register of Wills did you do any background studies on the nature of the office? Did you really know what your responsibilities were going to be?

G: Yeah only because working in the Trial Magistrate's office I was associating with attorneys. And Jimmy Mitchell, which became Judge Mitchell, he gave me a—I told Jimmy, I said, "Jimmy I've gotta have a book on testamentary law," and he gave me a book on testamentary law and then I read it. But the only thing I knew that I was gonna collect inheritance tax for the State of Maryland and serve as Clerk to the Orphan's Court. I and you know registering wills was, that was a little part of the job, you know, it was a little part of the job. And I read the book but you really don't understand it's more on job training but I did know how to relate to the law book. And then when I—then I also got a had an order to come in to order those books and I got to talk to him, Mr. [Canter]. And he was talking about another new Register. And he was the one that suggested, "You all should have some kind of organization so you can help one another out." And that's when I, we organized the Register of Wills Association because then—

J: That first year, 58?

G: That first, yeah well we started that first year but it was 60 before we got it off of the ground about 1960. But I learned that there was a—. At this meeting we sent out notices to these other Registers and we Ruth Stark was from over in Easton. She was one of the best Registers so sometimes if I got in trouble I could call her. But also we had a little advisor in the Attorney General's Office. The only time you'd ever get in trouble was mostly was to do with inheritance tax where an attorney was arguing a point on what the inheritance tax.

J: How many women were Registers of Wills when you started out let's say in 58?

G: Uh there, I think there were around 11.

J: Out of how many?

G: Uh 24.

J: [Darn near half].

G: Yeah I think there were—I think there were 11 back then. But...

J: Were there any special paper qualifications required to run for and hold this office?

G: To hold this office you had to be a certain age and you had to have—I think it cost you it seemed like to me it was 50 dollars it might have been 25. But no—but you know you had—you'd need somebody that had average intelligence, could learn to do, and longing and help people. 'cause see the attorneys were doing all the technical side. Your number one thing was to make sure you got the proper tax. As far as the controller was concerned.

J: How is that tax determined now? How was it determined in 58?

G: In 58? Well it was seven and a half percent for a collateral heir and one percent for a direct heir. And the one percent for the direct heir has not changed since then. But the seven and a half percent went up to ten percent now on collateral heir. But there's no tax if it's—

J: Now what do you mean collateral heir for the purposes of this?

G: This thing a collateral heir? A direct heir would be husband, wife, children, mother, and father. But nieces, nephews, aunts, and uncles all collateral heirs or anybody else.

J: Or anybody else?

G: Anybody else is a collateral.

J: Okay. Who were—who were some of the people that were your best supporters during those early learning years? Who did you count on for help, advice, counseling?

G: Yeah well I—

J: To get this thing—

G: I would talk, would talk to Judge Baldwin.

J: Okay.

G: And then we had someone in the Attorney General's Office. And then I had like I said this friend Ruth Stark that was from over in Easton and I could call her. Plus I learned that the best thing to do like a lot of those opinions were very helpful too if you read, read the opinion. The attorney's you were dealing with were, were they wanted to help you so they in turn helped them. So all those attorneys were very helpful like Rudolph Carrico, and gosh Jimmy Mitchell, and [Theo] Diggs, Lewis Jenkins. You know they were all, they were all helpful. You know they didn't try—they weren't trying to pull something over on you. They were all honest straight forward trying to get the job done. And Pat Mudd he was very good too. See Pat was Clerk of the Court.

J: Named off a really stellar list of people. Some are gone now.

G: Yes.

J: Did the job offer any surprises to you?

G: Yeah, yeah I guess so in a lot of ways. Well first place I never considered the guardianships, you know. See you had guardianships and to me it was a very—

J: Some real, real headaches in that?

G: What guardianships?

J: Yeah.

G: Oh yeah. I mean yeah. Particularly not at first but now there's getting to be so much guardianships because now to go to school years ago if somebody died you didn't have to have a guardian appointed. You went to live with Aunt Minnie and Aunt Minnie sent them to school. But now because of I guess busing and all this stuff you—everything's zoned so if a child isn't

live with a parent it's got to have a guardian. Also they want it I think for suit purposes. So there're lot's more of those, you know too. But I you know working in the Trial Magistrate was a very good training ground for Register of Wills.

J: It must have been. Yeah.

G: Because you also learned about the law there you know too.

J: What, what was the population of Charles County in 58?

G: In 58 it was 35,572.

J: And how much the year you left the office?

G: Oh let's say there's what 100,000 isn't it?

J: About 100,000.

G: Yeah.

J: Oh let's say 90 anyway.

G: I know.

J: So we tripled the population. Now did the tripling of population did that, was that reflected in the difficulty of the job? Quantitatively and qualitatively? What did it do to the burden that your office had to deal with?

G: Oh well I started out there—. See one of the number one things too to be which I should have said a while ago is record keeping because this business of collecting inheritance tax you gonna get in trouble and can be sued and all that stuff. But the most important thing is to keep good records and I've had people tell me that Charles County had some of the best records you know in the United States. And I asked him guy once what they contributed it to and said, "Because somebody had interest enough to look after them. They didn't put them in a basement." Because you know when—. Well like I once had all that stuff bunch of stuff put on film and then sent it up to Hall of Records because there wasn't any place to store it. But a lot of Registers or people would store it in the basement and it would deteriorate so I guess that had some bearing. But back in now 58 as far as the—we had 6,200 Democrats and 6,100 Republicans. Well in 88 we had registered Democrats 20,000 and only 13,000 Republicans. I don't know what you could contribute that to except Roosevelt. You know that type [inaudible].

J: How much staff did you have working for you in 58?

G: In 58 I just had one deputy. And that she was a big help to me. [Dora Sonoras], [Dora Sonoras] had been a Deputy Register of Wills. And so I called her and asked her would she come in and she came in part time. And then I and now there are three girls in there.

J: Okay so the total staff today is how many people?

G: Three.

J: Three including the Register of Wills?

G: No four including her.

J: Okay.

G: 'cause you got a book keeper and somebody recording and then somebody taking care of small estates and that type of thing. Transferring titles to cars and.

J: How much did you get into the operations of office? The nitty gritty when you didn't have a staff that could just do all the work?

G: I did everything.

J: And you sit back at the desk and supervise.

G: I did everything. I did everything at first. I did the indexing, recording, the book keeping, the payroll, everything.

J: A lot of clerical work.

G: It was just like running your own business. [So you too]. The Register of Wills right now is independent little organization of the state government. And it's like running your own business. You get collect inheritance tax. You get 25 percent of that to run your office. And you then you sent the rest. You withhold 25 percent to run the office and sent the rest to the State of Maryland once a month.

J: And that's a big responsibility.

G: Yeah.

J: Alone.

G: Yeah and then at the end of July if you have whatever excess fees you have if you run your office and had enough left paid all those salaries and everything. Then what you have left over you send to the state.

J: What's the largest amount that you ever sent to the state?

G: Oh gosh I don't know.

J: That's a sticky one.

G: Yeah I don't know. I don't know.

J: What were the submissions like during the first two or three years of your tenure?

G: Well see if you—if I didn't have enough money to run the office then you would, the state you would send in a like a [check] and get money for your salary you know. In other words the state had a fund where all registers they set up a budget for the Register of Wills. So sometimes the wealthy counties paid the poor counties. But I have not had a deficiency I don't think for quite some time. But I was trying to think when I—I forgot what you asked me now but when I went in I can't remember that—

J: Well the largest amount that you have submitted to the state?

G: Yeah I oh I—

J: During all your years in office.

G: I can't remember right off hand. I mean—

J: What would have been considered a pretty good?

G: Let's say 5 or 600,000. See you could have one estate. If you had a collateral estate you know like we've had a couple of, you know, I've had three or four of them. Quite a few million dollar estates. Course a million dollars isn't so much anymore. 'cause of before I left I think we had 2 or maybe it's 5 million. You know I just lost track. But it's a big hunk of real estate. See that's what really brings it up and if it's a collateral heir. See they're going to get a big chunk of that.

J: It's ten percent now?

G: It's ten percent uh huh. So if you—like this one big estate we had they left it to a friend. Left their assets to a friend.

J: So that's a collateral definitely.

G: Yeah and it was a hunk of real estate and I'm sure the woman didn't know how much it was worth. It seemed like to me it was something like 2 million you know. But I think the person who handles the estate a lot of times will get, they can get commission. You know 10 percent of the first 20,000 and 4 percent all over that but it's allowed by the court. You know I mean it doesn't mean you're gonna get it off the top of the personal property. Now the largest commission I ever remember was somebody well I read this and I always try to keep track of stuff like that was this guy got a million dollars in commission. I think it was a million dollars he got in commission. But it was J. Paul Gate's estate see. So that wasn't—

J: It doesn't happen every day.

G: No. It wasn't so—it wasn't really so much you know.

J: What has happened to the compensation of the Register of Wills during the past 30 years?

G: You mean pay wise?

J: Right.

G: Well, on the average they've increased it about 5,000 every year. That's what it was [inaudible]. But they go to the board of public works and negotiate salaries.

J: Oh.

G: Every, we generally instead of each individual going we now have an organization and we have a salary committee and they go to the board of public works to negotiate it.

J: So it's entirely out of the hands of the county people?

G: Oh no it has nothing to do with the county at all.

J: That's interesting.

G: It's all state. And another—the reason the state has always been very generous with the registers is because our, we have never cost the state any money. Our offices haven't. It gives a large amount of money to the State of Maryland. I mean it's self-sufficient. Like they were talking about the Clerk of the Court see has had a deficiency in the last 10, 15 years but the registers haven't because of all those big counties. And not only that it's just like the estates that I have or had in the last ten years see they're like World War Two people dying that made lots of money during the second World War. That's what I contribute it to.

J: You really get a feel for the overall economic condition of a county don't you in that office?

G: Yeah.

J: You really do.

G: Mhm.

J: And that's the nitty gritty. What is the—

G: You know what real estate's pretty well doing.

J: Yeah. Yeah. What was the working relationship between your office and the Orphans Court?

G: We had an excellent relationship.

J: And who did what for the other?

G: Well I really—when I went in there of course we had Henry Middleton and Mary [Nick] and Louise. But actually they that was county responsibility. They were to provide everything for them but I really picked up which in the record was the State of Maryland but they sat in my office. They had a table in my office and they sat in the office. They met, back then they met—

[Tape 2]

J: What sort of working relationship would there be normally between the Register of Wills and the Clerk of the Court Office? How did you support each other who depended?

G: Well I served as their clerk. You kept the minutes for the meetings, you set up the schedule, you really you know carried the ball and they made the decisions. They have a legal—they use a legal advisor too from the Attorney General's Office and of course I would always write the [finding] or. I was just like their, you know. We had a good—

J: A very close.

G: close relationship. We really did.

J: And with you and Pat Mudd.

G: Yeah.

J: Being there together over this period of time it must have developed into a pretty smooth operation.

G: It was. It worked out really great yeah. But I've been past President of our Register of Wills Association. Served on the legislative committee and then in 68 Governor Agnew appointed me to the Henderson commission. We had two Registers and I was one of them. The other one was Jim Robey from up in Allegheny County. But Ruth Stark had been appointed and she recommended me because she was gonna leave and she recommended me. And she was what I thought one of the best Registers we had in the State of Maryland at that time. But no the Orphans Court really they met two days a month and they sat in my office. And now they meet every Tuesday. We meet every Tuesday.

J: Now how did your operation impinge on theirs? What did you do for them?

G: Well I kept [whatever cases]. See they got involved because of a dispute most of the time. They or they had to prove all commissions. They had to prove all the commissions so attorney would come in petition the court to prove the commission. So I would record it, record that. If there was a hearing, if someone objected to it then we set up a hearing. I'd you know set up all the hearings. So and then when there were guardianships it was the same thing. But you kept minutes. And now in some, in some of the registers office's they have their own clerk secretary. In other words the judges have their own like in Prince George's County. The Register of Wills just goes over and picks up the minutes. But I stayed in there with the court and did everything you know. But normally they just have their own secretary.

J: Let's go back a little bit to the organization of the association. I think that's interesting. Had there ever been one before?

G: No.

J: A state organization association of Registers of Wills.

G: Nope not to my knowledge.

J: And you were one of the prime movers?

G: Prime movers.

J: And what, what was it about your job that made you think that this was worth doing?

G: Well because you had common problems. You know in other words if you're Register of Wills then it doesn't make a difference where you are you're gonna all, all of them run into the same problems you have the same duties and same responsibilities. And then you could exchange ideas and also we wanted to get uniformity. In other words what we tried to do if you wanted to open an estate say on the Eastern Shore you should file the same form you do in Charles County or Baltimore City or Baltimore County. That's what we were trying to do.

J: And this had not always been so?

G: That had not always been so.

J: [Inaudible phrase].

G: Yeah some Registers you know would—you know had their own forms and everything. But everything started to growing. So we started. And also we were thinking in terms you know when computers come in and all this stuff, you know you need—. This shouldn't be any different to opening an estate in Baltimore County and Baltimore City than it is in Charles County or Garrett County.

J: And I suppose there are differences from one state to another?

G: Yes.

J: Was there ever a national association of registers?

G: Yeah they, it wasn't of registers but they have a National Association of Recorders they call it which like in other words the Clerk of the Court. 'cause see the Clerk of the Court his duties, clerk to the judges, you know, which and it's record keeping. He keeps, I keep wills which is just as good as a deed if you will something to somebody, and he had the land records and everything. But they tried once in here—. Well when I started on the Henderson Commission that was appointed after they tried to get the new constitution in to do away with the Register of Wills.

J: About what year was this now?

G: Uh the, that constitution gosh I have more stuff on that.

J: 60...68—

G: Well I know that the—. When I was appointed it was Register of Wills at 59 you started the Register of Wills and then I served on that Henderson commission. I was thinking it was the Henderson Commission was formed after—

J: What was the purpose of—

G: The new constitution?

J: Yeah of trying to do away with elective jobs.

G: They wanted to keep control. That's the way we thought about it. We thought they were trying to keep control. But the new constitution would have done away with—. It would have been more on a government thing. You would have had the legislature you know would've be elected and you didn't have all these little jobs to be elected that they thought discredited the others. They didn't need to be elected. They wanted to be appointments. And appointments are control.

J: Sure they are.

G: Yeah. And of course one reason I guess I object I'd had appointment and lost out and I ran for Register of Wills and made it what eight times. So see the first three times I had opposition. First time I had a woman. Next two times I had men. But then I lost my husband and became a widow and I guess that was sympathy thing too. And I'd established myself in the office. But this new constitution I was having to be President of the association. And of course I made headlines with that because—

J: The Registers of Wills Association?

G: Wills were the first one that we [spirited a job] objecting to it. You know objecting [inaudible].

J: And you were successful.

G: Yes we were.

J: The new constitution just never—

G: But they're gradually putting it in. Because one of the things was to they ended up with the District Court. That was all in there see they wanted to get that. There's always been jealousy between courts from time one. But they wanted to—. The Trial Magistrate was considered a picayune job you know so they wanted to make it so you had to be attorney. See you didn't have to be attorney you know. So then they wanted to upgrade. And when I say they it was a group of attorneys and some of the politicians that you know—

J: When did that be—when did that go into effect? When did the old Trial Magistrates system pass into—

G: Well in 68 that failed. I think it was 70 but I gosh you all quoting me on this but the Trial Magistrate went out it seems like to me it was 70 or 75.

J: I think so too. So there was Judge Chris and who followed him now?

G: John Muir.

J: John Muir and anybody after John Muir?

G: Let's see.

J: [Inaudible].

G: No he was a District Court.

J: [Inaudible].

G: See now, now he was the first I think District Court judge.

J: I think you're right. Yeah.

G: I think he was. With that he was—. Dick Clarke was a District Court judge too to start with. So no I guess it was Dick Clarke who was the first, had the first appointment. 'cause see then what happened up on the state level they set up a District Court system and they had one chief honcho you know. Judge, gosh I forget so much of this stuff. But anyway that the system was set up so you had one judge that was the head honcho and then you had districts. And then Judge Clarke I think was our first District Court judge. But then the chief judge of this district came from St. Mary's County and I can't remember who all those were. But anyway that's when that system went into effect. But I to me I'm not sure it's improved anything but that's just my opinion. I'm out of politics now.

J: I wonder of the lawyers themselves really feel that the District Court system was an improvement over the Trial Magistrates?

G: Well I think there are attorneys in there just making their living out of DWI's and stuff you know that go into the District Court so they certainly would approve it. In other words we've gotten per capita person in the United States I bet we have more attorneys than any other place in the world. So they've all had to make a living so I guess you do it with rules and regulations. And see it's a stepping stone. See first place, the old Trial Magistrate didn't have to be pass the bar but the District Court judge has to be a member of the bar.

J: They need a law degree and?

G: And that's right you have to be a member of the bar. And so see that—. There's more openings for jobs for the younger guy. And young attorneys would go into the District Court and then it's a stepping stone to Circuit Court or Court of Appeals or whatever.

J: There's only one District Court judge sitting at one time? How large are these districts?

G: Well the districts are the counties. Except in some—I'm not sure about Baltimore City. They're probably in the district. But our District Court judge is Charles County. Charles, St. Mary's, and Calvert I think are the district but there's one judge in each county. But I think they can get more. I think it's based on population to the judge.

J: Should be.

G: Yeah.

J: What other offices in the courthouse did you frequently come into contact with? How about the Treasurer's Office? Was there any—

G: Oh sure. Treasurer and Assessor too. See because you were dealing with real estate. You know transferring real estate.

J: Right, right.

G: So you came in contact with the Clerk of the Court, the Assessor, and the Treasurer. Yeah we all worked together.

J: What did the Treasurer's Office depend on you for?

G: Well we sent—well the Assessor's Office we in turn sent them and showed that property was transferred to this. We had a form back then. Now they have to do it by deed. See so in other words if you inherit a piece of property it's got to be deeded out. So it, the Assessor has to be notified and the Treasurer's notified that it's into a new name and that type of thing.

J: So I guess you knew Mr. Garner.

G: You mean?

J: Rudolph.

G: Oh yes. Uh huh. I knew him and [inaudible phrase]. Yeah. But we all—we had a very good relation, working relationship really when I think about it. But you know when talking about politics and gosh I [inaudible] thought off the top of my head but I remember Pat Mudd and I—I

respected him very much and he was very nice to me when I first went there because he obviously Indian Head coming into courthouse and [inaudible]. I was elected a Democrat and he was a Republican but he was always nice to me. Well I had when I was in the Trial Magistrate's Office I had had—I worked with Pat then—and I had had a notary seal and John Thomas and they and Senator Monroe then, James Monroe from Waldorf, got into some argument in the legislature over dog tags or something. But anyway when my renewal came up for my notary fee he took it away from me. He didn't renew it. I made headlines with that. I said, well I was so angry that he took [Jack Parran's] away and he took mine away. But it came out in the headline you know and I'd go in the bank and somebody'd say, "[That's right] a shame that he took that notary away from you nice lady." But all of that, you know it's little things that help you in election more than big things. You know because it would amaze you how many people remembered that. And you asked about the training. You know the first time that for any meeting for me to go to for anybody asked me if I knew how to register a will or if I knew what they was. Do you know one of the questions I had? I was over—we were over in Pomonkey and a woman got up and asked me if I was against integrated housing. I told her no I wasn't because I'd moved to Chapman's Lane Road I'd moved in Pomonkey and I said, "You none of you objected to me moving here." But that was the wrong person to really ask but that was the big issue so. That was the big issue.

J: Did you familiarize yourself eventually with the wills of centuries past? Did you ever have the opportunity to survey the work done 100 years ago, 200 years ago by Registers of Wills of Charles County?

G: Yeah they haven't changed that much.

J: That's what I was going to ask.

G: They have not changed that much yeah. I went back to look up all the Registers of Will you know.

J: Oh did you?

G: Yeah. And like there was a John D. Carpenter back then 1862. And D. Jenifer was the Register of Wills in 1850—1846 to 1851.

J: When was Merrick in the office?

G: Merrick?

J: William D. in the 40's.

G: William D. Merrick was 1832.

J: Way back then.

G: Yeah and then yeah there was a Jenifer. Daniel Jenifer in 1781. William Daniel Jenifer 1779. But see my grandfather was elected 1915 reelected 1919 the year I was born.

J: That's interesting. And how long did he serve your grandfather?

G: Well 1915—1919. But I'll tell you one thing you'll love when you're doing this. I don't know for sure if they could've served. You know I don't think you could serve but maybe two terms or something like that. Because I see where there were people that ran for County Commissioner and then they switched over there for Register of Wills and then they'd go back to Sheriff and they kind of switched the jobs around. You know to make them career [oriented]. So I think maybe, maybe the law said that you couldn't—you could only run for four years or two terms.

J: What is it now?

G: Oh there's no limit.

J: No limit no?

G: You're elected for four years and you can keep running until you run out. But no there was a Humphrey Barnes there and you know.

J: That's a pretty distinguished old family.

G: Yes.

J: It's found as an honor. I think with them it was a big honor—

G: That's right.

J: To be the Register of Wills and it may be in those days they had more political clout too as a result of this.

G: And I don't think they worked it like full time. It wasn't a full time job. And another thing they had a Crier of the Court. 'Cause there was a James D. T. Mason I know he was a Crier of the Court back in 1878. And I think he was the one you know that that did the recording of the wills and everything. He was a special—it wasn't the Register of Wills that did all of that type thing. It was kind of a special thing.

J: Has the Register of Wills for Charles County ever lost any of its records at all?

G: Not that I know of.

J: So—

G: They weren't burned you know when the courthouse burned they were put outside.

J: Right yeah. Well fortunately those two wings down there were fire proof anyway. They had slate roofs and walls two feet thick between the wings and the main building so they could have just locked the door and walked away and nothing would've happened. So—

G: Maybe that's what did happen?

J: Yeah it was I mean this whole story about the records being carried out is a lot of nonsense. Didn't happen because Roberta and I have read all the old newspapers that we can get our hands on that describe the fire. Newspapers printed in Alexandria, Baltimore, and in Charles County.

G: Did they ever decide how it started?

J: Pretty much yeah. It was arson.

G: And they wanted to move the courthouse.

J: Oh yes somebody was hired to do it.

[Inaudible with background noise].

Unidentified Voice: [Inaudible].

G: Still talking.

J: I'm not sure we've resolved any great problems but we've discussed a lot of great issues.

G: Yeah.

J: Anyway if you had it to do over again what would you like to do if somebody hired you now to go into the office of the Register of Wills, reorganize things, streamline things, and get the office ready for the next century? Is there anything you would like to do if you had carte blanche, the money to spend, training programs, equipment, systems design or redesign?

G: Yeah I probably would have a systems design so that you know you could go in there and plug in to a name and know where that name, where you could find that will you know.

J: Yeah that would be the main thing. What's the staff right now like?

G: Well there's still there's four people.

J: Okay. I wonder how—

G: I mean including the Register.

J: Right. I wonder how long they'll be able to go along with that? Has the work load increased significantly from year to year during the past 15 years?

G: Yeah. Yeah.

J: Okay. So they might have to beef the staff up a little bit.

G: Yeah and the biggest thing that's increased is wills of the living that we record.

J: Now that's interesting.

G: And I contribute that to St. Charles with all the young people moving in. Now when they start dying off you gonna have, you know, it'll really be an increase. But the wills of the living have gone—

J: How do you like that? The concept of it?

G: What the?

J: Will of the living and—

G: Yeah well it's a lot of responsibility. A lot of Registers don't like it because it's in a fire proof cabinet and I started out with one and now I think I've got about there's three there at least.

J: So it's a big thing.

G: Yeah.

J: It's a big thing.

G: But see you can file your will there for a dollar and it's a confidential record and it's sealed. They have to seal it when they bring it in. That's where everything starts. I mean in other words people that read and see on television where wills were lost. Gosh I once had a—they couldn't find this man's will they just knew he did it. They finally found it under the rug in the living room when they started cleaning the house up. You know but people sometimes put them crazy places.

J: Roberta's reading back issues of the *Port Tobacco Times* you know there was an article in the *Times* recently where one of the Barnes located a will 30 years old and he located it in just this way. It had been hidden by a wife somewhere in the house and apparently it was valid. It was valid it was something, things had just been hanging [inaudible] they couldn't sell [that house].

G: Yeah particularly if they knew that there was one in existence. Of course it's a criminal offense not to file the thing. [I mean] it's nothing to distribute. You should file the thing.

J: I wonder what, what changes there've been in the past in the century in the percentage of people who die testate and intestate? You ever taken a look at that picture?

G: No. But people are much more will conscious.

J: I would gather.

G: Even, even very young people. But you know in Maryland if everything's drawn between husband and wife the State of Maryland makes the will if you don't make one they make one for you.

J: Oh.

G: So yeah in other words if you, husband and wife and everything goes to one or the other if one dies 'cause it's all jointly and then it's evenly divided amongst the children. But if you didn't have any children like Judge Diggs didn't have a will so everything is divided equally he knew amongst his sisters and brothers or whoever's dead their nieces and nephews.

J: And certainly he was aware of what was there?

G: Yeah right uh huh. So but everybody's situation is different. And if you got second marriage and two groups of children and all that stuff see you have to take all that in consideration.

J: That's interesting. Has our changes in society the divorces and the multiple marriages what sort of problems have arisen for Registers of Wills because of those complexities?

G: Well one of the sad things that is children with just somebody living together. 'Cause the woman doesn't realize that she has no, no claim whatsoever. If you just living with a man you have no claim without your name is on something. Now if she can prove if he is taking those children off his income tax and notoriously and openly declared to be his children they can inherit from him but she can't.

J: Now does that law change from state to state?

G: Yes. Definitely.

J: What is it for California for example?

G: I don't know you mean people that aren't married?

J: Yeah. [Inaudible phrase].

G: I don't know for sure but they have—. Well we don't have any such thing as the common law. Now in the District [DC] they have a common law. In other words if you live with a man for a length of time then you are his common law wife but it's not true in Maryland.

J: Okay well that's interesting so as a common law spouse in some states you have a valid claim?

G: Claim right.

J: To his estate.

G: But not in Maryland.

J: Okay I wonder how common is that? How many states roughly are like Maryland? Quite a number?

G: I don't think so.

J: So Maryland is pretty conservative in this area.

G: Well but the jury they try to be very good to widows 'cause in some states— You know in Maryland even if you made a will and left your widow out— If you were married to a woman and left everything to your children or your girlfriend she can still come in and get a third. She can refuse to take the terms of will and get a third.

J: Okay well that's good.

G: Yes. But in some states that's not true. I think some of the southern states she's just cut out. But see Maryland what their thinking was that we not gonna support her. [It's the man that can].

J: So the social changes of the second half of the 20th century have had a direct impact on the responsibilities of a Register of Wills?

G: Yeah. That's right.

J: More in some states than in others.

G: Yeah.

J: You've got the—you've got homosexual relationships and marriages.

G: Yeah.

J: What's the picture in Maryland on that?

G: Well I don't think—

J: Where two women or two men claim they are married and live together as—

G: They've gotta—they've got to make a will and will it to them. They cannot just get it. In other words they wouldn't have any legal claim. I don't think there's any such thing as a homosexual marriage in Maryland. Some states do have it. I don't think so in Maryland.

J: That's going to be a mess in the future.

G: Yeah uh huh.

J: And single parent households. What are some of the problems that can arise from that if any?

G: Well a lot. That contract you really ought to read that that fine print in that contract because it means more than you think.

J: Yeah there's some tremendous cases that's appeared in the courts recently on just this problem.

G: Yeah.

J: Somebody said well he or she took me in I lived with them a certain number of years and he or she died and they ruined my life and my reputation and I want to claim this part [inaudible]—

G: Well I'll tell you what's sad too is foster children that don't even know they're foster children and then somebody comes in and says they aren't and then they're out. But I think the parent never thought to make a will and if they made a will they would've been okay.

J: I wonder what has been the impact of all of this on the legal professionals? It's changed their lifestyle a little bit too the professional.

G: Yeah well they get—

J: They're making a little money on it for sure.

G: That's right.

J: And the poor Registers of Wills they're not in a position to capitalize in any way.

G: No.

J: Except with a few headaches.

G: Yeah.

J: Were you beginning to run into that sort of thing?

G: Oh yeah.

J: During the last years?

G: Yeah.

J: Here in Charles County?

G: Yeah.

J: More and more.

G: But you know I used to speak to groups around the county and after I'd speak to them people would come up and ask me little things like that that they wouldn't ask an attorney or a judge or anybody. I remember once a woman had they had never been married and had five children and had just never—. First place her—. His wife had been living and finally she died. They just lived together. But nobody in the neighborhood new it. And I told her she would absolutely be out you know so they ended—. She wanted to know what to do. I told her go down to St. Mary's and get married. You know or some place. You know because she didn't even want the—. But I told her that that marriage was a contract. You know a lot of people don't realize it's a contract. It's a binding contract.

J: Yeah that can—that can lead to a complete destruction of a life.

G: Yeah uh huh.

J: Yeah so there must be someplace that spouses can go and get free counseling. They're all afraid to go to a lawyer you know.

G: Well it's expensive you know. But I just try to help them. Now you know you're forbidden to practice law. You know, you have to be careful about giving legal advice. They write that in the law make sure you couldn't give legal advice. But now with the senior citizens you know we had to put out—they put out a pamphlet on probate and in fact I put out a little old pamphlet before that even came about.

J: And that's legal?

G: Yeah but this was see it's just general you know. But now the senior citizens have gotten on about it.

J: Yeah. Have you found out that senior citizens are much more conscious and aware?

G: Absolutely.

J: Of probate problems.

G: Absolutely.

J: I think you're right too. Yeah in fact not many years ago people didn't know what probate even meant.

G: Well they probably didn't have anything to probate.

[Tape 2 Ends]