

# Transcript of OH-00147

Frances Estevez and Rodrigo J. Moure

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

Agriculture  
Antique and classic cars  
Cuban Americans  
Hispanic Americans  
Immigrants  
La Plata (Md.)  
Plastics industry and trade  
New York (N.Y.)  
Rural conditions  
Transportation

## Tags

Charles County infrastructure

## Transcript

John Wearmouth [J]: This is John Wearmouth interviewing Mr. and Mrs. Rodrigo Moure at their home in Fredericksburg, Virginia at 406 Hanover Street. The date is February 2, 1988. This is part of the Charles County Community College Oral History Program. The emphasis of this interview will be on the history of the La Plata area roughly during the 1930's and 40's and this covers a period or deal with a period we haven't done much with so far. Mrs. Moure was Frances Estevez and she was born in Preston, Cuba. They moved to Charles County in 1932 from the New York City area. From the city proper?

Frances Estevez Moure [F]: From the city.

J: Okay and her father was Daniel Lopez Estevez and he was born in Lugo, Spain and her mother was Marina Estevez and she was born in Logroño, Spain. Frances graduated from La Plata High School what year?

F: 1936.

J: 1936 okay. Mr. Moure, Rodrigo John nickname is Rod naturally and he also lives at 406 Hanover Street in Fredericksburg and he was born in Havana, Cuba and during most of his working career he's been involved in historical restorations both in Charles County, Maryland and for the past eight years roughly in Fredericksburg. His father was Ramiro Moure born in Santiago de Compostella. His mother was Angela Soto Moure. And you graduated in New York from high school. What year?

Rodrigo John Moure [R]: 38.

J: Okay that's the introduction. Did I miss anything germane or important? Frances how long did your folks live in New York City?

F: They arrived in New York City in 1918—1923.

J: What took them there? What was the attraction?

F: Well my father had been a copper smith working with the United Fruit Company in Cuba. He had left Spain when he was 17 because there was no work and he had borrowed money from a man in the area that he lived who wanted to see the youngsters get out and do something with their life. So he loaned him money enough to go to Cuba and at that time it was before World War I and there was a lot of industry going on in Cuba. He went to Cuba he learned to become a coppersmith and he was under contract with United Fruit Company to put roofs on their mills, on their sugar mills, and do the copper installations for running their sugar mills.

J: Very demanding precise craft.

F: Right. He was with them for quite a few years. It was during that period he became ill with copper poisoning. So they told him that he had to leave the warm climates and go to a cooler climate because it would reoccur. At that time they probably believed that he would stay ill. So it was during that period that he heard that his father was very ill and dying so they decided to take the money they had and go to Spain. So they packed—

J: How many children did they have at this time?

F: At that time there were three of us. Let's see yeah it was my oldest brother and my other brother and myself and that was it. No George, George there were four of us. They went to Spain and they got to Spain about three days before his father died and they stayed in Spain for about a year. A little over a year and at that point my mother said she didn't want to stay in Spain because things were so bad and so poor that she wanted to come back to, you know, back to this.

J: Had life been easier in Cuba?

F: Life was good for them in Cuba. Life had been very good for them in Cuba. They had saved money and he was working and they were very happy in Cuba and liked Cuba very much. But at that point they decided that since he couldn't go back to the tropics they would come to the states. That's when they decided to come to the United States and live and thought life would be better for them there than it would have been to raise children in Spain with the poverty that was around them.

J: Did this turn out to be true in their opinion?

F: It turned out yes.

J: Okay and so how long in New York City?

F: They stayed in New York from 1923 to 1932.

J: Okay and when did the big break come, the decision to leave New York City? Why was it made?

F: The decision was made right after the Wall Street crash in 1929. They were running an apartment house. They were running it for this man I guess like an agent would be. After the crash it got so bad that the agent was losing the house. I mean the owner. It was at this point that my mother knew that there was nothing going on and they were seeking good roof and shelter and to get the children away from a bad situation. She figured that going to the country would be a better place for them.

J: Okay so first in general she wanted to get out of New York and into the country but no particular region or area or state?

F: No particular region. In fact she had looked at several or they had looked at several places in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and she liked some of those places. It was during this time that one of the agents from the Stark—

J: Stark.

F: Stark Realty said why don't you go away from the New York area? Why don't you go into Maryland you can get a good buy in Maryland. So he made some arrangements with him and they came down looked at the farm and decided that it was a good buy and decided to buy it. So that's what they did.

J: And how did was your father's health at this time?

F: My father was in good health. He was a very active man.

J: So some doctor gave him so good advice.

F: Yes he was in good health.

J: Now your father and mother had no experience whatsoever in agriculture?

F: None whatsoever. Except maybe for flower garden or a few vegetables.

J: A lot of courage. And how many children at this time?

F: Well they had one child while they were in Spain and then later they had another child so there were six of us at that point.

J: Okay now let's get Rod down to Charles County. We got to move him in. So you were born in Havana. How long had your family lived in Havana?

R: Three years.

J: Three years.

R: And that was the quota necessary to get a quote of entry into the country.

J: Into the United States?

R: Yeah see because when they tried to come in direct they were told that they would have to make residence, they would have to wait eight years, for quota of entry. So by going to Cuba made residence there for three years and they could come in.

J: What caused your family to make the decision to leave Spain?

R: Well it was also an economic situation you know.

J: Economic upward mobility opportunities?

R: Right.

J: And what did your dad do?

R: Oh he was a fine cabinet maker. His services were always in demand. He started making bakery peels. Do you know what that is?

J: No I don't.

R: A bakery peel is right—is the oven the shovels that you take the bread out of the oven with. He got so expert at doing those that there was a tremendous demand for those all over so he just couldn't make enough of them. So—

J: This pizza revival would have thrown him.

R: Yeah so he was always very active in the woodworking.

J: Now did the Moure's have any kin in the states at all?

R: No.

J: Okay so you're coming here cold.

R: Right.

J: Did your dad have any job prospects at all?

R: No.

J: Just confident that he was skilled.

R: No matter where he went he always got a job.

J: Alright now when you came to the states you moved to New York City?

R: Mhm.

J: This was your first contact point here?

R: No I'm sorry, no I'm sorry. We went into Tampa. You know because that was a direct—

J: That would have made more sense.

R: Port of entry. Then from there we went to Cleveland and from Cleveland we went to Chicago and lived there for two or three years I think. Then we went to Michigan.

J: Michigan, where in Michigan?

R: In Capac, Michigan. That's about 60 some miles north of Detroit. We had a friend there that had a big farm so we all worked on the farm. That lasted for about five years.

J: Okay and how many children in the Moure family at this point?

R: Oh man.

J: More than three?

R: Oh yeah we were—

F: 12?

R: 13 kids altogether so by that time I think we probably had about eight or nine.

J: I guess I should—you mother didn't have a vocation outside the home?

R: No that was her—

J: That was it.

R: Vocation, didn't have vocation.

J: Alright so eventually you ended up in New York City?

R: Yeah.

J: About what year did the Moure's arrive?

R: I think probably the first time we got there was about 1921 I think. So we all immediately got jobs. The fact that we had good dexterity you know we could get jobs anywhere. There were five of us that could work. If one of them worked we could pay the rent and if another one worked we could eat and so on. So we made it alright.

J: So you built in social security program. Very good.

R: So we kept you know getting into larger, better apartments and so on. Made out alright.

J: At this time how well did the family handle their new language?

R: Very well. The kids jumped right into it and had no problem at all. My mother was the last one to really become fluent in English but my father got along real good with it.

J: That's understandable. Did either of your parents understand English at all when they left Cuba?

R: No. They probably got smatterings of it in Cuba but not a full language conversation.

J: So at that time anyway they didn't feel alone because there were hundreds of thousands out there who couldn't speak English.

R: Yeah but they [got] between sign language and pointing at stuff they could find what they wanted.

J: What was the attitude of those born in America towards your people coming into the job market at this time? Do you remember any unpleasantness at all?

R: No the unpleasantness—not really because we made our way you know and I think people respected us for what we did.

J: Okay I think is right very important. About what time was thought given to leaving for other pastures greener or otherwise? That is New York.

R: My father since he had a large family if one of the kids got sick or something then he looked for a better climate somewhere. So when we left New York we went to California.

J: Oh for heaven's sakes.

R: See so imagine we always thought large families have to stay in one place because they're too large to move. Not for him. He packed them all up and took them to California. And there again the same thing came up. You see—

J: Did you go by rail?

R: No automobile.

J: By automobile?

R: Yeah oh yeah.

J: Boy one automobile?

R: Two. We had a 1922 Packard.

J: [Inaudible].

R: And we had a 1916 Dodge I think.

J: Okay touring types? Touring cars?

R: Mhm. See the Packard was touring.

J: Was that Packard an [inaudible] six do you remember?

R: No that was a twin six.

J: A twin six?

R: Mhm.

J: Seven miles to the gallon.



R: It was owned by the president of International Harvester and my father became friends with him and he told him he said, "With your family you ought to have this car." He said, "Oh I can't buy anything like that." He said, "Oh I'll make it up to you go ahead and take it." So he bought he for very little money you know.

J: Was it practically new at the time?

R: Oh yeah it was—he had about seven or eight cars and you know one less car to take care of.

J: What an experience going from coast to coast under fairly pleasant travel conditions for those days.

F: Except sometimes they got to places where there were no roads and they had the ferries that they had to whistle for.

Unidentified Voice [U]: Or they had to open gates.

F: And they had to open gates and cross fences.

R: Yeah.

J: Many flat tires?

R: Many.

J: Many.

R: Remember one time we had to—there were so many detours. See now you get to a place, the end of a farm and then the next farmer didn't want traffic so they'd detour you around somewhere. So we went to a detour one time where they had cut trees. They had cut this tree right near the railroad and the railroad was down about oh maybe 50, 60 feet down below and this was on a hill side. And the trunk of the tree and the drop where the railroad was probably maybe a foot in between. So we all got out of the car and my dad drove the car through that and then after we passed that we all got back in.

J: What season of the year did you make this trip?

R: It was early fall.

J: So it was fairly pleasant?

R: Yeah it was pleasant yeah.

J: Any illness on the trip at all?

R: No.

J: Everybody stayed healthy. What did—

U: Did you camp along the way? Did you tent?

R: Yeah most of the time.

U: You took a tent?

R: Mhm.

F: [Inaudible] slept in the car and on the ground.

R: Yeah mhm. We went through Tennessee one time and we were at one area where we had a flat tire. So we were repairing the tire and we heard this noise up on the bank and we looked up and there was a double barrel looking down on us.

J: Thought you were from Washington.

R: Yeah so this fellow said, "What are you all doing down here." And we said, "Oh we're fixing the tire." He says, "Well fix it and get."

J: And you did?

R: And we did.

J: These were tires and rims together?

R: Yeah.

J: How many spare tires per car?

R: Two. Two.

J: Two on each.

R: Because see the Packard had two spare tires. One on each running board.

J: On the running board or on the fender [welt].

R: On the fender [welt]. But he had bought before we left he had bought six Dayton Thorobred Tires.

J: Wow.

R: So you know to minimize the trouble fixing tires. And that was a good move. Another time I remember we were traveling on this little road at night and we'd gone, we didn't find any place to park or anything. So there was an area in the road where there were just piles of gravel that they were going to fix the road or something. And so we got out and looked around. The gravel felt good and warm from the days sun so and it was cool so we camped there that night. So as we got up the next morning we noticed that we had stopped at the right time because the road started going downhill. So we walked down on the road and there was a little ditch on the side and all

these little squiggly Water Moccasins running all the way down to the river. As we went down the road ended. There was no more road just water. We looked across and there was the Tennessee River. Now we could have driven right into the river that night and that would have been the end of it.

J: Yeah think of that.

R: So we called across and there was a little ferry there. The man waived back and he says, "Half hour, half hour." We said, "Okay." So then he came over and then we drove into the ferry. It was a one car ferry.

J: I was gonna ask.

R: Yeah and it had a rope that he pulled you know and he pulled us across the Tennessee River. And then the worst part of it was getting off the ferry because as you get off the ferry you immediately went up hill. So we had all gotten out of the car and just he in the car. And as he got off the ferry and started going up the hill the back wheels kicked the ferry back and the back wheels hit the water but he was going so fast by that time that he started going up the hill. So when he got up on top of the hill then he came back and paid the man for the ferry ride.

J: Okay how many days did it take?

R: Oh golly I don't know just months I guess. Maybe a month.

J: At least one month?

R: Yeah.

J: Now how did he get from there to Charles County, Maryland?

R: Well that was a long ways to go because then after that we went to—we went on the way down south and we were going to go to New Orleans but we didn't get there. We stopped at Columbus, Mississippi and then we liked the town and we rented a little house and he went to the rail road yards and it was the Columbus and Ohio railroad. And he immediately got a job just like that.

U: So you never got to California?

R: Oh we had already been to California. No, no, not yet [Laughter]. But we went to Columbus and we stayed there three years. The knowledge of his carpentry spread around and he they asked him to build what is known now as the most comfortable caboose that was ever introduced into the railroad systems. So he did that and they were very pleased with it. But then he got tired of doing that and he loved antiques so he set up an antique shop and he did very well with that.

J: In the same town?

R: Mhm.

J: Now what years are we talking about? Late 20's?

R: Golly I don't know. No—

J: Had the Depression yet?

R: No, no, no it was, no, no hadn't come to that yet. This was in the 20's. By that time it was 21 I think. 21, 22 something like that. And then from there he got tired of that because he made some friends in New Orleans. It was the [Stern] art galleries in New Orleans. They hired him to travel in Europe and buy antiques for them. So he started that so we moved to New Orleans.

J: Did he ever work again as a carpenter?

R: Oh yeah. Never stopped really.

J: I think it's probably—

R: But not you know—

J: He was so much more than a carpenter wasn't he?

R: Oh yeah.

J: A journeyman cabinet maker at least of that caliber.

R: Oh yeah he was a very fine cabinet maker.

J: A wood worker.

R: Yeah.

J: Did he design too?

R: Yeah he did beautiful veneers. You know all that there's no end to it. So then from there to New Orleans we stayed there three years. We withstood four floods in New Orleans and one of them—[inaudible] water in the house. We had a two story house and the water came up almost to the ceiling of the first floor and then of course we slept in the second floor.

J: Were you living in the old part of town?

R: No, no that would be French section. No this was out in the outskirts.

F: But your father's antique shop?

R: Yeah well that's the last thing that broke the camel's back there because he had a beautiful antique shop in this [inaudible] building on Royal Street and Jackson Square and that was right in the French section there. That last flood that came, that was the fifth one, it just flooded the whole city. All his antiques just went. All mud and all the beautiful upholstery that he had. All the beautiful veneer works and everything else. It was all so he just—he couldn't even open the

door because the mud was so about that deep and so he just said, "Let's go." So we packed up and left. Then we went to New York City.

J: Back to New York City?

R: Then we all got jobs immediately. That's where I learned the plastics business. Making plastic ornaments and plastic buttons and things of that nature. The fact that we were so adaptable to any kind of manufacturing or workmanship or anything like that. There were long lines of people waiting to get jobs and we walked right up and got the jobs. A lot of these people had no experience in working. They just needed a job you know to produce. So—

J: What kinds of plastics were these? This was after the celluloid period?

R: Beginning of the celluloid.

J: Oh the beginning of it really?

R: Yeah you could get any color you wanted as long as it was grey.

[Laughter].

J: When did Bakelite come along?

R: Then—oh that came much later. About five or six year later. We would dip the colors in aniline dyes and put acetone. You know and we'd dip it and we'd get the reds and blues and greens any color you wanted. And as it grows [wasn't] [inaudible] nothing but that just dipping all day long.

F: Was this celluloid?

R: Mhm and later on they started [inaudible] celluloid in colors and that was a different situation. But then DuPont came out with their acrylics, nylon and that's the first time that something different had come out in plastics. I met this chap who was the PR man for DuPont. They had offices in the New York Empire State Building. He used to come to my shop and he just loved to come over there and chat with me. And then he said, "Can we make anything out of this material?" And he said, "Let's start making things." So he would bring you know a handful of that stuff and we would start making out of [nylon]. It was the first time that a pure transparency was introduced into plastics. So we made an exhibit in the ground floor of the Empire State Building in one of the windows on fifth avenue there and then the window was split in half. We put a partition there. One area was bright lights and the other one totally dark. So we got this plastic rod you know this nylon rod and we ran it from the light all the way across through the wall and onto a Bible that was on an easel. You see and it would shine the light right on that little easel you know and you could actually read from light that came through that road.

J: So it was a good conductor.

R: Yeah it was a real boon for it. And this little fellow's name was Peter B. Dan.

J: Sounds like a Dutchman.

R: Yeah I'll never forget him. He was a little dynamo.

J: Well how'd you get from Charles County now from there?

R: Oh well still—

J: We got to get you down to La Plata.

F: He doesn't want to talk about it.

J: Well after an exciting life I can't blame him.

[Laughter]

J: How could you settle down?

R: Well after all that plastics experience then we left and then we went to California.

F: Again?

R: No not again that was what we went there for. So that's when he started making those peels again. And making the peels he developed one that he got a patent on. So this company in Detroit, the H. N. Basket Company they used to make these large wooden baskets interwoven with wire. All of the A&P stores and all of the department stores would use them to transport goods from warehouses to stores.

J: Including food?

R: Including food. [Inaudible]—

J: Used to carry heads of lettuce and cabbage? That sort of?

R: Oh yeah. Yeah just throw them all in. Each store would use their own you know. The produce stayed the produce and dry goods the dry goods. But he developed this patent where the handle of sometimes they were about 20 foot long would fit into the peel and he would groove it out so the handle would fit in. Then he put like a hollow sleeve in the handle and then he had a bolt that would come in and screw into that and go into the peel from the top instead of from the sides because that caused a lot of damage to the bakers all the time because you their little stove would get so hot and [and tear the gloves and everything]. So this way the hands didn't touch metal at all. You see so he tried to patent them and then this company from Detroit heard about this and they came over to see him. They wanted to buy his patent and of course he didn't want to sell it. So they said how about coming to Detroit with us and set up a plant here and we'll make them. So that's what he did. So then we moved to Detroit and then we started making them. We had a good size plant.

J: You still had the 22 Packard?

R: Yeah.

J: Did you reach Michigan?

R: Yeah, yeah that stayed with—

J: They went back home [didn't it.]

R: So then we started making peels but there we made them so that we'd ship them all over the country. They would come out you know and wholesale lots. We shipped them to all the bakery supply houses all over the country.

J: Now where did you live in Detroit?

R: On Harmon Street. Right now Woodward Boulevard.

J: How far from Grand Boulevard? Out or toward town?

R: It was just about a block and a half from the Woodward Boulevard.

J: Okay now from Detroit where do we go?

R: Well then in the midst of all this was when the crash came you see. So the company, they didn't go broke but they stopped operations. They made it seem like that was the end of the patent. So he turned it over to them and we took off. Then we thought well we'd go down south again we went to back to New Orleans. We looked around there was nothing down there at all. No jobs no nothing to do. So we turned back around and came back up to New York. We got off there and all got jobs right away. So then that went on till well I guess that went on...bought this little button factory in 1936 and then we ran it.

J: In New York?

R: In New York. And then we ran it for several years and then branched off into novelty jewelry. We were making novelty jewelry and I set up an office on 5th Avenue. 417 5th Avenue on the tenth floor. A nice office that was just catty-cornered from Lord & Taylor's. I would show my sample lines you know to the best department stores I could sell to. [The gambles] a part of Macy's. But J.C. Penny's didn't want to [make there's since I didn't pack them]. All the fine shops there, [inaudible phrase]. Then I had one customer in Boston, one in Miami, and then [inaudible] in Texas. And that's about all I could handle. In the meantime I was commissioned by Harrison Foreman who was explorer of Tibet. He had written three books on Tibet and he gave me copies to read so that we had oriented with Tibet. He was writing his fourth book and he asked me if I could reproduce Tibetan jewelry which he had brought with himself. He brought bushels of it. Then to make get the Tibetan replica and convert it into something American women could wear. So when the 1939 World's Fair came along we were instrumental in setting up the Tibetan exhibit. We had a dais in the center of the floor about three foot and a half and made out of polished oak and so on. And then we had a flood lamp up on top and a faint light came down and it would flood right over the top of the Tibetan monk that was sitting there cross legged praying this Tibetan rosary. And I had made the rosary for him which was 12 foot long with these inch

and a half in diameter and every tenth was a replica of a human skull. The 108 beads represented the 108 bibles of the Buddhist religion. You see so it was really an interesting activity. And on the perimeter of the room were showcases. Glass showcases with dim lights on it and it showed what I had made and in the back the Tibetan [inaudible phrase] all throughout the room. It was really a very successful—

J: I think of saying a few Hail Mary's with that.

F: Yeah no he still hasn't gotten to Charles County.

J: Yeah bring us down to Charles County.

F: He evades the subject.

R: Where are we? No this was 39 and we met in 39 okay so we're right close.

J: Yeah we're getting there okay.

R: So then we had a sort of a US mail [courtship] that was about six months or so. Then the time came for us to start thinking about Charles County. So we went down there and [inaudible phrase].

J: How many Moure's came down?

F: Not right then just him.

J: Okay.

F: It wasn't until the war that the Moure's came down.

J: Okay.

R: So in 1939 I proposed and in 1940 we got married in Sacred Heart Church.

J: So are you in La Plata okay there we are.

J: Frances give us a picture of how your mother and father got into agriculture. Brand new didn't know the song, didn't know the climate, didn't know the people, didn't know the market. What on earth was life like for your father as a brand new farmer the first two or three years? How'd he get his feet wet? What did he have to overcome?

F: Very, very difficult. They moved into the farm which was very decrepit condition.

J: How old was the building?

F: The building we think went back to about 1840. It may have part of it may have been a little earlier but 1840 was when I think the large addition was added, the third addition.



J: Had your mother and father seen this building before they arrived? Did they know exactly where they were coming?

F: Yes they had come down prior to buying the farm. They had come down and looked at it and my father being a carpenter somewhat he knew you know how to make things and I guess they thought it was better than living in the city that they could grow their own food and have a roof over their head. At that point in time I think that's primarily what they wanted to do. To get the children away from the city. So they bought this decrepit farm. They had never farmed. They didn't know a thing about tobacco. They just went around and tried to see what the best way. I had a couple of brothers that were teenagers and they did a lot of the footwork and they'd go and help neighbors cut tobacco and work with them and learned enough to get us started.

J: Did the local agricultural agent help? Did the family find him cooperative and helpful?

F: At that time we didn't know too much about the local agent. We just mostly relied on just trial and error and some good neighbors. Mr. Dyson helped us a great deal, William Dyson.

J: Do you know [Burch Bee] Dyson by any chance?

F: No I don't.

J: This may be his Uncle William who passed away four or five years ago. Okay what time, what season did you move into the house?

F: We moved in July. It was July ninth and it was hot. And the people that were living in it were the Moran's. They were Edward and Robert Moran. They were brothers and they had been farming the farm for a good many years. They couldn't meet the mortgage so the bank was really selling out, selling them out. So they had six months to stay in the house. So that meant they had to be out like at Christmas time in 32. We had moved in July so we lived in part of the house and they lived in part of the house. It was rather difficult because my mother couldn't use the kitchen. She had to wait until they used it first. I remember the first Thanksgiving Day that we had there we couldn't use the oven so my brothers and mother and father made a spit and they roasted a turkey on the spit and we had Thanksgiving dinner.

J: Outdoors?

F: Outdoors. So it was quite—it was very difficult. We had no running water. We had been used to toilets and running water and electricity. We had none of that. We had to go down to the spring to get water. Had to get water to wash clothes by the bucketful's. We were city folk.

J: Which section of the house were you living in?

F: We were in the larger part.

J: Okay the higher, the most recent?

F: Right the most recent part. Then of course after they left—

J: No electricity?

F: No electricity not till after the REA came through. That was in the 40's or late—no it was—

J: After World War II?

R: About 41 I think.

F: No, no it was, no it was before.

R: It was?

F: Yeah it was during Roosevelt's time.

R: Yeah that's right you because you had electricity when—

J: Could have been as early as 38.

F: 38. 38 would be about right.

J: That's when the generators at Pope's Creek were cut in.

F: Right that's when it was.

J: So you were lucky you got it pretty early.

F: Yes.

J: How about heating? How did you heat that first winter?

F: We had no heat. Oh it was terrible. It was woodstoves. We only had one big woodstove in what they called the dining room which was really like a family room. The kitchen had a woodstove that they cooked on. The stove in the dining room was a heater that heated the dining area and that little other room that my mother and dad used for a bedroom. Upstairs there was no heat at all.

J: What seeped through the floor boards.

F: The floorboards we could the first winter we were there we could see the rugs being lifted off the floor from the cold air that was coming. Of course the house was in terrible condition and it was a cold, cold winter. It was a very hard time for them but they were pioneers.

J: Winter of 32?

F: Winter of 32 and beginning of 33. At that time they were selling tobacco to the Baltimore markets. So the first few years that we were there every cent of the money that we made on the tobacco was taken up by the tobacco companies because they would warehouse the tobacco and then sell it and they'd get whatever they wanted for it and then they'd give you what was left after they charged you for storage. So the poor farmers could never make it. It was a terrible thing.

J: Now at this point there were still no warehouses?

F: No warehouses.

J: You didn't have this system that exists today.

F: No warehouses whatsoever.

J: Who did your father deal with in La Plata? Who was the local go between or the commission agent?

F: Wilson Bowling.

J: Wilson Bowling.

F: Wilson Bowling. He was the one that started—he would buy the tobacco at the barn. This was later because my father didn't like that situation of shipping it being charged shipping charges and never knowing what you were getting and not getting enough to pay your taxes after working a whole year. So Wilson Bowling came by and he at that time was trying to get his own tobacco warehouse going. I guess a group of them. It was at that point that they came and they said, "We'll buy the tobacco right from your barn."

J: Cash on the hog shed.

F: Cash. Cash. So they—

J: A whole new ballgame.

F: They thought that was much better because they had the cash in hand. They could pay their debts. They knew what they were getting. It wasn't a blind thing like when they sent the hog's heads to Baltimore and they laid in a warehouse for months and they got charged for storing it.

J: And then a penalty for bad tobacco.

F: Right. So they just found that that was much better. They could sell it. Mr. Bowling would come in or his men would come in and take the tobacco out of the barn put it in hogs head's and haul it away and dad would get his money.

J: Who prized it? Who put it in the hog's heads actually? Wilson Bowling's people?

F: His people.

J: Well that was a help right there.

F: Yes.

J: Who stripped?

F: All of us.

J: The whole family?

F: The whole family.

J: I'll bet that was an experience.

F: That was an experience. I didn't do too much of that because I had you know all these brothers that did it. Every now and then they'd get tight and—

J: How many brothers were able to help?

F: I had four brothers that were able to help.

J: Were there any other girls?

F: No I was the only girl. I had five brothers and myself. Two of my brothers were younger but they were still able to help.

J: Frances what was La Plata like? What were your early impressions the first few times you went into town in the very early 1930's? What did you see? What are the sights, sounds, conditions, road conditions, store conditions? Merchandise what was available? Where did you buy? Who were the people you liked and trusted during those first years when you knew nobody?

F: My mother used to deal at Hughesville at the store at Hughesville.

J: What was the merchant?

F: Bowling's Store. It was a general store. It was a big store. Very country it was a clapboard building. A huge clapboard building and they had everything there. So of course the people that lived on the farm the Moran's used to shop there. At that time my mother we didn't even have a car so we used to go to the store with the Moran's because that's where they shopped and had a credit account. That's how they started buying there but they had just about everything you would need there that was—

J: Dry goods?

F: Dry goods.

U: Is that store still there?

F: No it burned, it burned.

U: Where was it?

F: It was right—you know where the railroad track is where the intersection of Hughesville and the one that goes to Benedict? Okay it was on this corner. It was this is the corner that goes to Benedict and this is the one that goes to Charlotte Hall. It was right in this corner.

J: Where the parking lot—

[Everyone talking]

F: Yes, yes.

J: Yes right. That's right, right exactly.

F: And it was a big, big store and the Bowling's were very, very nice people.

R: The Mathew's were [inaudible].

F: What Mathew's? At that time there were just Bowling's there.

R: Oh okay.

J: What was his name? What were the given names of these Bowling's?

F: My mother could tell.

J: Because there are so many.

F: George Bowling I think was one of them.

U: Oh it's the judge's.

J: His family.

F: No, no, no uh—uh. They were not related. George Bowling's family came from Virginia. They were an entirely different set of Bowling's. The Bowling's were very sure to let you know that they were not. The crummy ones they called the ones that had come Virginia.

J: Today they're the ones that have made it.

F: I know because they're hard workers. George was one of them. George Bowling. George W.

R: And his brother.

F: He had a brother Mortimer, Mortimer Bowling.

R: That's the one.

F: Mortimer Bowling and George Bowling. They had inherited the place from their father. They were running it with their father. They were very helpful to us. They told our parents about the right kind of seeds to get and if they thought my parents were overbuying on something you know because we had been used to city life and the more conveniences. You know they would say, "Well now I don't really think you would need this."

[Tape Interruption]

J: Okay so you did most of your shopping during the early years in Hughesville. Why did you— what took you into La Plata? Certainly there were some things in La Plata that required—

F: Well of course we had to go to school and we went to school in La Plata. Then of course we made friends with different children and activities were closer by in La Plata than they were to Hughesville or to Newport. We went to Newport for church and then we found it was much more convenient to go to—

J: St. Mary's?

F: St. Mary's in Newport. St. Mary's in Newport? No it was....

R: I don't remember.

F: It was in—no it's not St. Mary's in Newport.

J: Catholic church in Newport?

F: It was the Catholic church. It was—

J: It's St. Mary's now. Maybe it had a different....

F: It had the French....

R: Oh yes the French monk that?

F: Yes. Anyway we went to the church in Newport and then we found that it was easier for us to get to La Plata to go to church so we were not supposed to because that wasn't our district but we ended up more or less going to La Plata. So we got involved more with the activities there. Then we would do our shopping at Bowling's store and our banking at the bank.

J: Which bank?

F: It was county trust. And it was—

J: Where was that located now in the early 30's?

F: That's where Bowling's Store is.

J: Alright the corner, the corner entrance—

F: Right it was a very pretty bank building.

R: It wasn't on the corner but it was next to the parking lot.

J: Didn't it have a corner entrance?

F: No, no, no it had—

U: I think it did.

F: It did. The building had a corner. The corner was cut off.

J: It was a nice brick building. That's right, that's what I mean by corner entrance.

F: And that was the front entrance and it was right off Charles Street. Right where Bowling's Store is now. Right next to it was a little store. Was a little A&P Store with just a little long wooden building. La Plata looked like a western town, very western. When we moved there, there were no sidewalks in La Plata.

J: You just walked in the road?

F: You just walked along the edge of the street. Just along the edge of the street and the cars could come whizzing by. There was a—it was a tarred highway through La Plata but the streets were just dirt. The post office was right there at the corner of Oak Avenue in a little tiny long building, wooden building. It was a very narrow post office. The earth had—the level of the road had been added onto so that you had to step down into this little post office.

J: Great in heavy rain huh?

F: Well that's right. It was just a very narrow little place. The post mistress I think she was Mrs. Yeats at the time. She had—

J: I think you're right.

F: Just little—you'd call and you'd go in and you'd ask for your mail and she would hand you your mail.

J: You didn't have a box number?

F: Oh no there was a post office [desk] which we own, which is upstairs, which was in that first post office. She had these little cubby holes in there and she would just pull your mail out of the cubby holes.

J: Did you ever ask her how many people were using the post office?

F: Of course at that time I wasn't interested. You know I just went in to get my mail or whatever. Or you know we'd have rural mail delivery. So it was just something special that you'd go into the store for. I can always remember it because it was dark and little and different you know.

J: What are the scents? What did it smell like?

F: The smells?

J: Yeah.

F: Well of La Plata I don't remember so much the smells but on the farm the tobacco in the barns and the first summer we were here the honeysuckle.

J: These were new to you kids weren't they?

F: Very new and there was a lane that went into the house from the state road. It was so overgrown that there was just an archway of honeysuckle. It was absolutely beautiful.

J: Tunnel like?

F: It was like a tunnel and in the spring when that honeysuckle was in bloom you thought you were in heaven. It was just, just wonderful. We loved it. We loved the farm and we loved the animals. We loved—you know it was hard living but it was a beautiful living.

J: Some real rewards.

F: Very, very nice.

J: What about the school Frances? You had come from a pretty good school system?

F: Yes we'd come from New York which had a fine school system.

J: Did you experience any kind of academic shock?

F: Well we had more than that I guess. There were some teachers that were very southern that were not always nice to northerners. They would actually call us Yankees.

J: Who did that?

F: I remember one—

J: We know some of them.

F: We had an English teacher. Shall I mention her name?

J: Why not? We probably know her.

F: She was Ryan, Gertrude Ryan from Waldorf. She was very biased about northerners apparently and I had a couple of barbs with her. I remember writing a story once, we had an essay or something to write, and I was writing about this colored lady that had gotten off the bus. All of a sudden all the hands went up and they were shaking so she stopped the class and asked them what was that I had said that was wrong. And they said, "She called a colored woman a lady." And it hurt me so badly because I was not aware of this terrible feeling and I was just stunned. I was a very shy little girl but I just stood there and looked at her and I said, "Well I know some colored women that are more ladies than some white women that I know" and I sat down. I was maybe 14 years old.

J: Must have been hard.

F: And it was very, very difficult. Another time I remember reading she had asked us—



J: Helped you toughen up a little bit didn't it?

F: She asked us—she was asking me to read and I was reading this little story and it said something about water. It was just getting to water and she stopped my reading just before I got to that word—no just after I said the word "water". She said, "I thought you Yankees always said, "water" [pronounced with short a vowel sound]." I said, "Well I'm sorry. I always was taught to say "water"." But all—it was just little things like that that you know brought the fact that you were not a native Marylander and Charles Countian to boot. But the very interesting thing was that we were an intelligent bunch of kids and of course—

J: Some of them really went places didn't they?

F: Yeah well you know we knew how to speak English well and we had had more culture I guess in a sense or were exposed in the city to other things that some of these children had not.

J: Who were some of the other teachers there in the mid 30's?

F: Well it was Jane Grey she's still living and she was an elementary school teacher but very good. There was Mrs. Cooksey. She was not a Cooksey then she was Ethel Hearn.

J: Ethel Grey Hearn Cooksey. [Inaudible].

U: She just died.

F: Yes.

J: [Inaudible].

F: She was beautiful too. She was also a grade school teacher. When I got to Charles County I was in high school.

J: Hard time to change wasn't it?

F: Yes. Mr. Sommers was principal and I think there were like 350 kids in the whole school.

J: Did he teach actually?

F: Yes.

J: How was he as a teacher?

F: Well he was a good teacher but he was also—he had pets. He had very definite pets. I mean if you came from a family that had some social standing in the community he was a little more active listen you know. But he respected our intelligence and he was very good you know to my

brother Henry who was an outstanding student. Of course I came along and I was pretty smart so they had to admit that we weren't just common white trash.

R: Who was the teacher that was the wife of the director of the school?

U: McDonough's School?

R: McDonough's School.

J: Mrs. [Rike].

R: Mrs. [Rike].

F: Oh she was beautiful. Now she was a true lady. She was a true southern lady.

J: They were from where originally?

F: She'd come from Baltimore area—

J: Not Southern Maryland.

F: No, no she was a Johnson. I think she was some relation to Sir Francis Scott Key's family. She was up and the Governor Johnson and the old early government.

J: That's right they came from the Hagerstown Frederick area the [Rike's].

F: Right she was a very cultured woman. She did a lot to help me. She was an artist and she encouraged me—there was no art education in the school at the time—and she encouraged me to draw and to paint. She would criticize and critique my work and she loved poetry and English. She was a beautiful, beautiful human being.

J: That's great.

F: The kids had a way of diverting her. She would get to talking about her you know ancestors and things that had happened. The kids would get her started on it so she wouldn't teach but it was so interesting to hear her but they would do it purposefully you know to get her off track.

J: Johnson was one of Thomas Stone's best friends.

F: She was very proud.

J: Thomas Stone studied under him for the law. When did you start going to Sacred heart?

F: I never went to Sacred Heart—oh you mean to the church?

J: To the church.

F: Maybe 1936.

J: The old building of course?

F: The old building. Maybe 35.

J: Who were some of the priests there that you can remember during the?

F: Well there was father...Hannagan? Hannagan. There was an elderly priest there when we first went. That's another example of bias. My mother and I—this friend that we had a Stonestreet boy I used to go with. He had taken my mother and I to church in La Plata because we didn't have a car. He had gone to pick up his aunt and father so he left us at church and we were of course new to the church. We thought well we wouldn't—you know everything, everybody had a pew and it was a rented pew and had the name on it. So he dropped us off at the door of the church and he went to pick up his dad. We went in the church and we sat down in the end, the last pew right by the door waiting for him to come to tell us what pew to sit in because they had a pew. So we sat down and a lady walked into church and she looked down at us. My mother and I kneeling there and she very angrily turned around and she went into the confession and a few minutes later a priest comes out of the confessional and he says to us, "Would you please move and go upstairs to the gallery" where the organ was. He said, "Because this pew is a rented pew and Mrs. Cox didn't want anyone sitting in it." Well we were so taken back by this and we thought well if we go upstairs we'll be in with the black people and we had long learned that you didn't sit with the black people or even associate with them which was you know—

J: Where did you learn that? In Charles County?

F: Well we learned that in Charles County from some of the black people that my mother would call—well we had a woman that would come in and help her you know in the kitchen and all. She would call her Mrs. [Ramey]. Mrs. [Ramey] tells mother, "Mrs. Estevez please don't call me Mrs. [Ramey] because you're down south now you have to call me Mary." So my mother was sort of shocked. We had never had this kind of prejudice.

J: Did you realize you were going to come into this type of society?

F: No, no, not at all. Neither did my folks because they had never been—I mean they had lived in Cuba and they had been black people, and mixed people, and white people but they had never encountered that type of segregation before. So when we went into the church the priest had come out and said well we didn't know what to do. So we went outside and stood outside until my friend came and he took us into the pew where he and his dad—

J: What was the name of this friend again?

F: His name was Robert Stonestreet.

J: Okay who was this older Stonestreet that told you that cute story about Mr. Posey?

F: That was Robert's father Charles Henry Stonestreet.

J: Oh yeah and where did they live?

F: They lived in the grange. They had lived there, the family had lived there for a hundred years. They were very aristocratic but they were after the Civil War of course they had nothing. They were just wiped out. They had a mortgage, an 11,000 dollar mortgage, which was a huge amount.

J: Yeah that would hurt today.

F: And they—he had told—I remember him saying that he had paid the 11,000 dollars over five times in interest and he had never been able to pay on the principal.

J: What a dream, what a dream.

F: But he was the one that said that he remembered when Adrian Posey came to La Plata in a wagon. And old farm wagon pulled by two mules and he didn't have money enough to buy a pair of shoes and he was wearing odd shoes.

J: Did he indicate what part of the county Posey had come from?

F: I think he had come from the lower part like toward lower Newburg area down in that area. Down in—

J: Well this would probably have been very, very early maybe 1870 or so because within 20 years Arian Posey was a very powerful political figure.

F: He was a powerful—

J: He went up fast.

F: Yes and he built this beautiful house and they had money and he loaned money and he made money on loaning money. He was an attorney. He became an attorney. So he had a powerful influence in La Plata. I mean what he said people did.

J: In the 30's were the Posey's recognized as being part of the banking community?

F: Well they were not recognized as being part of the banking as far as I knew at that time. But they had—you could tell that they had influence in the fact that they were Posey's and they lived

in a fine house and that they were well to do. So you know they were very I guess in a way influential in a sense. But there were no men attached to that family at the time, at that time. There was a Mrs. Adrian Posey and she was a beautiful, beautiful, wonderful lady.

J: What was her maiden name? I never heard.

F: I don't remember her—

U: [Inaudible] Howard?

J: She may—

F: Yes she was a Howard.

J: Yes, yeah, you're right. Yeah you're right.

F: She was a Howard. And she was a very—

J: Distinguished, aristocratic—

F: Distinguished and kind gracious lady.

J: How did you meet her?

F: Just from going to church primarily.

J: Oh I see okay.

F: And then of course—

J: Her daughters were with her once in a while?

F: Her daughters were with her. Then because of my relationship with the Stonestreet's I would take Ms. Stonestreet to parties and things. Functions at the Posey's so I got sort of in with knowing who they were and they who I was and it was that sort of relationship.

R: Was [Inaudible] part of that?

F: No.

J: Okay Rod back to you. You finally ended up back in Charles County. You mentioned a bit of correspondence that went on between you and Frances. Where did you first meet? How did you hear about this girl?

R: Well I had a lot of friends in New York and one of them happened to tell me about this girlfriend of hers that was down in Maryland. And she says, "Someday when she comes up here I want you to meet her." I said, "Okay call me sometime and when she comes and we'll get together." So this went on I guess maybe four, or five, six months and then one day she calls me says, "Hey Rod guess what that girl from Maryland is going to be here tomorrow. Do you want to come meet her?" I said, "Sure." And she says, "Well can you meet us at the park six o'clock tomorrow morning?"

F: [Inaudible] Park.

R: I said, "Six o'clock in the morning on Sunday morning? Are you out of your mind?" And she says, "No that's when we're going to meet. We're going to go horseback riding." I said, "Well look I'll see if I can make this because I've got a hard day tonight and I don't think that I'll be able to make it." So anyway by the time I got all dressed for riding and all that it was eight o'clock when I walked up to the stables and she was sitting on the porch of the stable and the first thought that came to her mind she says, "Doesn't he think he's something." She hadn't met me yet but that was her first impression.

F: We had waited for you at the house for two hours and I was furious. I said any fellow that makes a date with you and he's supposed to meet and isn't here on time I don't think we should wait for so we left and we went to the park and we waited. She had her riding boots and her boyfriend and they went of horseback riding. My riding boots hadn't arrived so I didn't have a way to get on a horse so at that point I just sat there and I didn't even know if he was coming or not and I didn't give a hoot if he did or didn't. So in saunters this creature all shine spit and polished all in his beautiful little outfit.

J: Did he have riding gear?

F: Riding gear, all this riding gear. I looked over at this man and I think, "He thinks he's something special." So he walked up to me and he said, "Are you Frances?" And I said, "Yes" and he said, "I'm Rod." That's how we met.

J: Isn't that something. So—

R: So we went for a boat ride.

J: A boat ride. You and you're ready for the horse.

R: [Oh I cared the lady cared] so they had boats and we went for a boat ride.

J: So Rod when you came to Charles County it was by yourself. No members of the family came with you or followed later?

R: No.

J: What did you do? What was your first job in Charles County with this kind of a background what on earth was there to do in Charles County for a man like you?

R: Well the first time that I came down I came down for her birthday. Then after that I went back and then I don't think I came back for quite some time after that. It was almost a 12 hour ride from New York City to La Plata in those days.

J: Did you drive?

R: Oh yeah. I had a big 32 Chrysler Imperial. Thank goodness for that because otherwise I couldn't have made it. The Crain Highway from Baltimore down was about 10 foot wide and in places the shoulders were about a foot below the concrete so if you ever fell off of that you'd never get on again. So I was start driving at six o'clock Friday afternoon and I'd drive all night until six o'clock the next morning. By that time I would have been at Brandywine and sometimes I couldn't remember what happened between Baltimore and Brandywine. I'd just know that I was going but I didn't know where or how and fortunately concrete is white instead of asphalt which is black you know so it was easier to follow the road. But no cars anywhere it's just all by yourself while coming—

J: Was this a sedan coop?

R: No it was a phaeton.

J: Phaeton wow.

R: It was a beautiful car.

J: But that was an impressive [inaudible].

F: Well I wasn't concerned about the automobile.

J: That was impressive. Well but in La Plata that would've been a little bit spectacular.

R: Yeah I'd like to have it now. I could [retire].

J: Yeah. Was that a six?

R: 12. No eight, straight eight.

J: A straight eight.

R: Straight eight, beautiful. [Inaudible phrase].

F: But then he's talking about when he came back to live in La Plata. This was in April of 1941. And he wants to know—

R: Yeah after we came back to New York. Yeah okay—

J: Well let's get you married first of all. What's the date of your wedding now?

F: February 21, 1940. So we're soon to have our 48th wedding anniversary.

J: Oh boy all those years.

R: We were married in Sacred Heart Church.

F: In La Plata.

J: And who married you? Who was the priest?

R: Father oh golly don't tell me I've forgot his name. He was such a good friend to us.

F: Golly I saw his name the other day. I can't remember either.

R: Well and my brother Bob came down with me because he was going to be my best man. Anyway we were married in the church and then we went down to the farm for a reception. It was real good.

J: Who were some of your friends that attended the reception? It was just you and your brother from your family?

R: Yeah that's all.

J: And nobody else from New York?

F: Then our family of course. Then we had—

R: [Cruella].

F: No [Cruella] wasn't there. It was Theresa was my best—Theresa was my brother's wife. She was a Willet from over near Pomfret. We had like a wedding breakfast. The Stonestreet's were there. Ms. Schooner who was a county health nurse was a good friend. I can't remember altogether who was there but it was like maybe 30 people or so.

J: Was your mother pleased with this fellow?

F: She seemed to be.



J: Your mother and father thought you'd done alright?

F: They were both yeah—

J: With a car like that I mean gee.

F: No I you know—

R: No I don't think the car—

J: From the big city.

F: I don't think that impressed them very much. They weren't too—but they liked Rod. I think they....

J: So where did you set up housekeeping?

F: When we came to La Plata we set up housekeeping in the old laundry that was down below what is now Willow Lane. There was this long building there that was—

R: The old shop building there.

F: And Rod had his shop. His woodworking shop on one end of it and then we had a little apartment on the other end of it. That's where we lived when we first went to La Plata. It was just a shack looking building and we fixed it up and it was real cute inside.

J: So you lived real close to the tracks?

F: Well no it was down below the hill from the tracks.

R: Down by the creek.

J: Oh I'm sorry okay.

R: Down by the creek right on Route 6. Route 6 by the creek right there [inaudible].

F: Yeah not too far. Every now and then it would flood.

U: Was it called Clark's Run then?

F: Yes. It's always been Clark's Run as far as I know.

R: Now you asked me what I did.

J: Yeah did you find it difficult to break in?

R: Well very much so. One of the first things that I did I made a sample line of novelty jewelry and real fancy buttons and so on and I took myself to Washington and I went [Inaudible] you know because I was used to that type of [strategy]. I showed them my sample line and she says, "Oh these are beautiful." I said, "Well I made them especially for your store if you'd like to have them you know I'll make some more." She says, "Oh we can't buy anything in this store. Everything has to come out of New York." I said, "Well you mean to tell me if I go to New York now and sell them to you from New York you'll buy them?" She said, "That's about right." So I gave up, forget it.

J: Think of that.

R: So then I went back home and started doing the different types of carpentry work.

F: You were refinishing.

R: Refinishing and I made some windows for...who was this fellow that had the house behind the Howard Johnson's over there? You know it? The house where the ice man—

J: Howards?

F: Howards.

R: Miller's. There were some windows in that house that had rotted away and they asked me if I would make some for them. And I made some things for Charlie Stevens too for Habre de Venture wasn't it? Yeah. Then I did some things for Rose Hill.

U: What sorts of things did you do?

J: For Habre de Venture now.

U: Habre de Venture.

R: It was something to do with the pantry and some connection there. Mrs.—no wasn't a Mrs. there at the time there was just Charlie Stevens wasn't it?

J: Yeah, yeah.

R: And then he would bring things to the shop you know for me to put something together for him or something and then he would go back and install it and so on.

J: How long did it take you Rod to feel at home in La Plata? This is a big break for you too. At your age you weren't a youngster. Frances was young and viable and you know flexible. You were a young adult.

R: I started to make a living refinishing furniture and so on. I think I can do a pretty good job. People come in in a hurry sometimes. "Oh I have to have this so and so is coming to our house by such and such date can I have it by then?" So I'd rush and try to get it done for them so they'd come in pick it up. They said, "So send me a bill." You know and that would go on. So I'd go onto the next job you know and do something for them. This was the easiest way to go hungry slow and easy. There was all the work that you did and all the things that were turned out and you'd have a hard time making a living out of it.

J: I'd be willing to bet you some of them owe you yet.

R: Oh yeah, yeah.

J: No real thank you.

R: Yeah. But after a while of doing this—do you remember [Coleman Back]?

F: Charles [Coleman Back].

R: He was working with the Ginn Company in Washington.

J: G-I-N-N?

R: Yeah.

J: The office supply?

R: Yeah and they were starting a school supply department and he asked me if I would want to come up and work with him. So I went over there and the owner...God what was his name?

F: Mr. Ginn?

R: Well that was his nickname but he was...anyhow he said, "Well I'd like to give you a job but I'd like to meet your wife." I said, "Okay." So next time we went over there I took Frances up with me and I got the job.

J: There you go. [He] knew class.

R: Well he's just clever. He was a very clever man.

F: I guess that—

R: Kaiser.

F: Yes Mr. Kaiser. I guess he—

R: He was a clever man and he didn't want anybody that was going to have any family trouble so this is how he sized them up you know. So I started working with him and I started making some money and start doing very well.

J: You were commuting?

R: Yeah commuting from La Plata.

J: Before you went into service?

R: Yeah.

J: Right during the war then.

R: So then I started doing very well with that and then I....

F: Rod it wasn't. It was after the serviceman.

R: You're right. You're right it was after the service yeah. Yeah because [Coleman Back] had come back you know.

F: Yeah because it was right—

R: Yeah well prior to that I kept on doing.

F: Restorations.

R: Restorations and that's when I did the courthouse and then did some work at Christ Church and worked on the Bushwood church in Sacred Heart I think it was and Bushwood and that place was—

J: Frances during the first part of that 30's decade can you help us put together downtown La Plata? Let's say walking along the north side of Charles Street from about....

F: The high school?

J: Well—

F: The high school was—

J: Let's come in from the east end of town toward where you lived. Let's say you walked into town. Did you ever by any chance walk all the way in from Apple Grove into La Plata?

F: Oh yes. I missed the school bus.

J: Alright take us through all the way to the school. You walked in. What were the stores on your right as you progressed right? On your right.

F: As I walked into La Plata?

J: On the north side of Charles Street.

F: Okay there was an old laundry building. They called it a...let's see. Let me get my bearings. There was a wooden building. A long wooden building on the right hand side that is now part of the not the theatre but the one across the little street that goes down in there that used to be like a dry cleaning shop.

U: DeAngelis.

F: DeAngelis—but that was before DeAngelis. There was just an old run down store. I don't even remember anything being in it. There was just an old junky looking store.

J: And this was before you came to the DeAngelis?

F: DeAngelis was later.

U: They were later inhabiting that building.

J: We're talking about the same structure?

F: Same structure. Then you cross that little street and there was the town hall. The town hall was right there where the drug store was and it was a long narrow building. You've probably seen pictures of it in the paper. It burned the year that we were in New York. It burned somewhere in 1940. I remember getting a newspaper clipping. The town hall when I first came to La Plata was the movie house. That's when Jack Taylor used to come up from Mechanicsville, Maryland and on weekends like on a Sunday he would have movies there. That was the only thing to do in La Plata go to the movies. In front of that there was a big empty mound of dirt. Francis Hopper who was one of the prominent gentleman in the community at the time he was retired from Hopper [McGuire] in Baltimore. He owned a house on Oak Avenue he and his wife. His wife was a Stonestreet. She had married—he was a prominent attorney and he had died. Delozier? I'm not sure about him but anyway she married Mr. Hopper and they were well to do. Mr. Hopper had been all over the world. He couldn't stand this plot of nothing. So he conned me into helping him plant petunias. We put a circle of stones around this dirt pile and planted petunias in it.

J: In front of what building?

F: In front of the town hall. Beyond that was the southern—it was not southern [states] it was gosh a farm—

J: Close to the rail road track?

F: Right next to it.

R: Right on the river.

J: Alright that's right.

F: And of course there was the railroad station and the little building there and Mr.....

R: There's a general store.

F: No, no.

R: Dry goods store.

F: No that was not there. I'm trying to think of the man that ran the railroad station.

U: Sanders?

F: Sanders.

R: Sanders.

F: He was a really nice person. Then of course there was that T. R. Farrell and sons. Then there was their house. Then there was the—

R: Coca-Cola?

F: No Coca-Cola...that was built later it seems to me.

R: It was there when I came in.

F: Was it? It may have been there. It may possibly have been there but I don't recall it there. And then right next to it was the hardware store. Then right next to that was Stumble Inn and right next to Stumble Inn was another house like a residence. Right next to that was Butch Bailey's house and little store. Right next to that was the bank. The bank building was a bank on the lower floor. On the upper floor was the *Maryland Independent*.

R: That's right.

F: Beyond you'd cross the street and there was the courthouse. Beyond the courthouse was the school.

R: Christ Church.

F: Christ Church and then the school.

J: And nothing down beyond the school on that side?

F: Nothing until you got to—

J: And US 301 did not exist?

F: Did not exist. And—

R: St. Mary's Avenue was the main thorough through.

F: Yeah you came from Washington on St. Mary's Avenue.

J: Okay.

F: And then—

J: So going back home at night on the other side?

F: Okay on the other side was the store at the corner of Barnes—wasn't Barnes then. It was Cochran, Cochran's Store. There was the telephone building first. There was a telephone building that was moved later that you moved.

R: Mhm.

F: Back into that. That was the old phone building. C&P Telephone building.

J: Just a frame structure?

F: Just a frame building two stories.

R: [Inaudible] up on the next—

U: Like a house?

F: It's a house.

U: Like it's a home?

F: It's a house.

U: Okay.

F: They moved it across [for] the back.

R: [Sort of a gamble roof house.] The only one—

F: That was the telephone company. It had two huge trees in front. Maple trees it could have been. They were there until not too long ago when they built Farrell's.

R: They made a parking lot.

F: Yeah they had the C&P Telephone Company. Then they had Cochran's Store and that was a general, general store. And then there was a Hawkins building. And then—

U: The hotel.

F: The hotel it was Hawkins Hotel. Then they had the gas station was always there. Then they had this empty building. Mathews and Howard building and it was an ugly—

J: Cement block?

F: Cement block building. And then beyond that was Shorty Michael's restaurant. It wasn't Shorty's at that time it was just empty and then Shorty bought it.

R: It was Shorty's before you got to that building.

U: Between the garage?

R: Yeah.

F: Between the garage.

J: Between the gas station?

R: Mhm.

F: Yeah.

J: In what we now call the Davis building?

F: Yeah it was between the Davis building.

R: And then Shorty bought that.

F: Yeah but that was just an empty store. It was just an empty building. When I first went to work for Mudd & Mudd I was 18 and that's what I looked at all day long. I mean from my little back window I looked into the back of—this was on top of the Stumble Inn. I looked across the street at this ugly Howard building and at the empty building that later became Shorty Michael's.



Then beyond that what was beyond that? That's where the little street was that had the A&P Store.

R: Well there's a building there where Stephen's is now.

F: Oh yeah that was there that was—

J: Another frame building.

F: Mitchell, Walter Mitchell's office right there.

R: Mhm the elderly Walter Mitchell.

F: Yeah the elderly Walter, Walter J. Mitchell. Then across from there was the A&P Store. Bowling's Store first.

J: Post office right?

F: No, no.

R: No, no the bank.

F: It was Bowling's Store.

R: Yeah, yeah you're right.

F: Then there was A&P Store. Bowling's was just a little narrow little store and the A&P was the same. Just a little low ceiling structure. The A&P and then the bank building.

R: And the bank [inaudible].

F: Right and then beyond the bank building was....

R: Bowling's Hotel?

F: Bowling's Hotel. But before you—

R: [Inaudible] Bowling.

F: Yeah Bowling's Hotel. But before you got to that you got to the right next to the A&P Store was yeah Bowling's Hotel. That's right.

J: What did Bowling's Hotel look like in the early 30's? Had it been modernized yet?

F: No it was like an old western.

J: Large and square?

R: Think of a hotel in the western pictures and it was just like that. Right next to the railroad.

F: It wasn't actually square. The front of it was perpendicular but the building itself was almost at an angle and they tell me that some of the rooms inside were like corners. They were—

U: Pie shape?

F: Yeah pie shapes. It was the hub. It was really a hub of activity.

J: What took place there? What sort of activities?

F: Okay they had all these men that would come from salesmen and they would stop there and you know rent rooms while they went on their little trips. They also used to furnish lunch for most of the people that came to La Plata. They had some black cooks in there that were excellent.

J: Was there a dining room? Formal dining room?

F: There was a dining room and they black waiters and the black cooks in the kitchen.

J: Do you have any feel for how many people could be seated in that dining room at one time? How many tables?

F: I would say at least six that I can remember.

J: Six tables?

F: Yes.

J: Four to six people at a table?

F: But during court week and they'd you know fill out everything. I think they'd open up rooms. It was a very busy place. It was also gambling. There was a lot of gambling going on.

J: What kinds of gambling?

F: Well Thursday nights cards. And then for big stakes I understand. The word, you know, everybody knew this. The words was that during court week everything shut down because the grand jury would meet and they didn't want any problems. That was fine.

J: Well did it still have the two story porch on it in the 30's?

F: I don't remember a porch on it. It may have had—yes it had to have a porch. It did have a porch. Yeah I remember it with a porch.

R: Either fell down or took it down.

F: Yeah it had gotten very bad but it was on there.

R: But they shared that prominence with Stumble Inn too.

F: Well Stumble Inn was yes. Stumble Inn had their little gambling too the two of them they had different crafts.

J: So Mudd & Mudd had an office in Stumble Inn?

F: Up over the Stumble Inn.

R: Upstairs.

J: Who were the other people who had offices upstairs?

F: Judge Wilmer.

J: Judge [Ellison] Wilmer?

F: No it was Joe Wilmer. He was State Senator.

J: Okay and who else?

F: That's all. The other room was the gambling room.

J: Upstairs?

F: Upstairs like on the Thursday when I came to work or Friday morning the place would be filled with smoke and they'd come up and clean it out. They'd spent the night there gambling.

J: That stale tobacco smell?

F: Stale tobacco.

J: Whiskey smell?

F: Yeah.

J: Great scents.

F: But you know it was just you knew that's what went on. Nothing you could say or do about it.

J: Okay what building would you next come into after you crossed the track heading east?

F: There was Bowie's. Bowie's Restaurant.

J: Okay. How many do you think they could seat at a time?

F: It was a small place but it was always pretty well filled up.

J: Big as this room?

F: Just about not much bigger than that.

J: Maybe 25 by 25 feet?

F: Just about. It was like they had taken one of the big rooms in their house downstairs and made it a sort of a family restaurant. It was very—

J: Good old country cooking.

F: Yeah it was a very pleasant little place.

J: How'd they handle the heat situation in the summer? Fans, air conditioners, what?

F: No air conditioners. They didn't even think of an air conditioner.

J: Any effort made to increase the comfort?

F: Very little because electricity hadn't even really come into La Plata.

J: Okay what could you buy at Bowie's at a noon meal?

F: Well you could have chicken salad sandwiches and little salads and homemade pies and—

J: No multi course type formal?

F: No, no, no I don't remember—

J: Hot sandwiches and mashed potatoes?

F: Yes right. Corn you know roast beef or something like that.

R: It was mostly a lunch and trade.

F: Yes lunch and trade and of course—

J: Did they serve three meals a day? Was there a breakfast?

F: I don't remember that. I don't remember that. But it was a family run affair you know.

J: The Bowie family.

F: I think one of the sons was Howard Bowie. Howard Bowie? One of the sons went to Baltimore and became a doctor. Doctor Bowie.

J: Ah yeah that's right. He went to—graduated from high school. Okay what was next then beyond Bowie's?

F: Okay beyond Bowie's was another little store. I don't know what was in it. I don't remember what was in it but there was a little store there. I guess that's where the western auto would be now in that area. The next building was—

R: Western Union was there too.

F: Huh?

R: Western Union.

F: Later yeah that was later though. I don't remember what was in this other little building.

J: When do we come to the post office?

F: Right then.

J: Was it there on the corner?

F: Yeah that was right there on the corner. That was a narrow little building.

J: One story? Two?

F: It's funny I don't remember how—

J: Frame?

F: It was frame. It may have been a two story building.

J: Alright now what was on the corner across from that on the same side of street?

F: Nothing.

R: Town hall.

F: No.

J: On the same side of the street.

R: Oh the same side of the street.

J: Where there was a Texaco station.

F: There was nothing, just nothing. It's just beyond that where Louise Mathews house was. That's the only thing that was near. That was an empty lot.

J: Do you remember—excuse me—the house that was on the lot where the hospital was built?

R: Yeah I remember that.

J: The 1938 hospital.

F: Oh sure.

J: What did that look like and who lived there?

F: Well that was Henrietta Roberts house. Henrietta Roberts was Judge Mitchell's secretary. She was a little tiny lady, very efficient.

J: A Ms.?

F: A Ms. she never married. She lived in this house by herself and she owned all the land where the hospital is. She gave the land to the hospital. Yes she did.

R: We bought 22 acres from her.

[End of Tape]