

Transcript of OH-00149

Rita Irene Cooksey

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

Genealogy
General Stores
La Plata (Md.)
Race relations
Segregation

Tags

La Plata Tornado 1926

Transcript

John Wearmouth [JW]: This is John Wearmouth interviewing Rita I. Cooksey at her home 4545 Connecticut Avenue NW, Washington, DC. The date is January 27, 1988. This interview is part of the Charles County Community College Oral History Program. We will concentrate to some extent on Mrs. Cooksey's memory of her girlhood in La Plata and this will be in support of the La Plata Centennial history which will be produced later this year. We know she was born there in 1916 and left in 1928. So we're talking about only a 12 year segment of her history and that part of her life we hope will give us a little bit of insight into what La Plata was like for other young people her age growing up there in the 20's. What's the earliest date you can remember? How far back can you go in history and where were you living at the time we go back?

Rita Irene Cooksey [RC]: Well we were living on the main road and it was right down from the courthouse. It was across from the Mudd home.

JW: The Sydney E. Mudd?

RC: The Sydney E. Mudd home. The next place on the outside of the road was Sacred Heart Church.

JW: What about this home? Who had lived in it originally? The Maurice family?

RC: That's right. Mr. Maurice had built the home somewhere around 1895 to 98 and they had lived in it approximately 20 years. When my father bought it in 1915 when he was married.

JW: How do you remember it? As being a pleasant place to live? Was it a comfortable home?

RC: Oh yes it was a very nice home. It had a huge kitchen and the kitchen went out onto a back porch and that went on into a family sort of a kitchen garden. I always had a dog and a cat. Upstairs there were five bedrooms and they were always fun to be in. The bathroom was a real curiosity as time went on because it had been made from a room and it was extremely large. The tub had feet on it.

JW: How large is large? Was it square, rectangular?

RC: No it was a bit of an oblong and it—oh I don't know how really. It would be about I'd say something around six or seven feet by about nine or 10.

JW: So it was a rather generous size for a bathroom.

RC: Yes it was a small, small bedroom. The tub was huge. How they ever got it in I'll never know.

JW: A cast iron type?

RC: Oh yes.

JW: Did it have feet was it glazed?

RC: Yes it had feet. It was glazed. Of course the water supply in comparison to the tub was very poor. That was the—we had—

JW: Where did the water come from?

RC: We had a big tub, wooden tub, up on the third floor and that fed the tub. Then of course you heated the water downstairs in a kettle to provide the hot part of it. It was fine in the summer time, just delightful.

JW: So came down and some came up.

RC: That's right and the window looked out over the kitchen garden and that was very, very nice.

JW: Out to the back of the house?

RC: Out to the side of the house. Then in the garden too was a lovely grape arbor.

JW: Which side? Towards the courthouse?

RC: No towards the church. Towards the church.

JW: Oh alright south side.

RC: There was a lovely—I don't know who had planted the grape arbor—but it would be comparable to a city block. It had I don't know and can't imagine the variety of the grapes there but I would say there had to be at least six different kinds. They were unfortunately it didn't get kept up. After I left La Plata when I was 12 I came back each summer so but it was minimum upkeep of the outside. Things like that just keeping the weeds from undergrowth and that sort of thing. But my grandmother used to make grape wine from the grape arbor.

Roberta Wearmouth [RW]: Wasn't Mr. Maurice quite a horticulturist?

RC: I think that he—

JW: According to his granddaughter that's true.

RC: Yeah I think he was interested particularly in fruit trees. Throughout this orchard as we called it. I think the plot was about seven acres. The original when my father got it. They were lovely, lovely fruit trees. Pears and peaches and loads of apples. It was beautiful in the spring

time. I don't know whether he just used it as an orchard or not. After my father died and we left there to come on back in the summer time it was rented to various farmers as a place to grow tobacco. So tobacco crops were amid the fruit trees.

JW: So what—where did you go to school your very first year?

RC: I went to the La Plata public school. That's the one that was well it was a little distance from the house. It was past the railroad track and up on a little hill. That's the one—

JW: Did you walk? Were you able to walk from there as a youngster?

RC: Yes I guess I was. That's the one that was destroyed by a tornado.

JW: Do you remember the day?

RC: Vaguely.

JW: Were you in the building?

RC: No, no I was very fortunate. Irene Bowie and I had gone to the dentist. The storm we were there when it all passed. When it was all over I remember a woman running up to the door and saying, "The school house has blown over, the school house has blown over."

JW: Which dentist's office were you at?

RC: I don't remember his name.

JW: Doctor Posey by any chance?

RC: No I don't think that was it.

JW: A La Plata dentist?

RC: Yes.

JW: [Sasser]?

RC: [Sasser] I think it was [Sasser].

JW: So you were not far from the school when that disaster?

RC: That's right.

JW: That's right. Almost in line.

RC: That's right. So you know and of course I don't think I don't know how old I would have been at the time. Nine or 10.

JW: About 10 I would guess.

RC: I don't remember—you know, I remember the town being so upset about it because so many people lost at least one child. It was probably the greatest catastrophe that had struck the community for many, many years.

JW: From that day to this nothing like that has occurred. Did you lose any friends?

RC: Two cousins. I lost two cousins.

JW: And their names were? They were Cooksey's?

RC: They were Cooksey's.

JW: Do you remember the name of your teacher there at that time?

RC: No I don't.

JW: Well it may have been Ms. Gray.

RC: Yes it could have been.

JW: I don't know the name of the other teacher but there were two teachers there that day and they both survived. Can you tell us something about your family, your father, his career, his parents, where was he born?

RC: As far as I know he was born in Dentsville. I assumed that my grandfather and grandmother must have been dead when I was born because I don't remember ever seeing and really I didn't hear too much about them. My father went to Charlotte Hall before high school and then he went to Georgetown law school. After that he practiced in La Plata. Somewhere along the way he was a state attorney.

JW: Was he a contemporary of Sydney Mudd Sr.?

RC: Well—

JW: Or Jr.? About what year was your father born?

RC: Well he finished at Georgetown in 1905.

JW: He was a contemporary of Sydney Emmanuel Mudd Jr. and also of his brother Griffin Mudd. Those two I think were in law school at the same time at Georgetown. Your father had to

be in some of their classes there. Sydney Mudd joined the faculty about 1909 but he was there as an undergraduate at least through 1906. His brother Griffin was probably there a couple of years longer. So that's interesting. They had to have known each other fairly well.

RC: Oh yes we knew Sydney and Tom Mudd lived across the street.

JW: Right okay. How close was your family and the Mudd family? Did you visit back and forth occasionally?

RC: Well no the Mudd's had a tennis court and Mrs. Wilmer who lived there—I think she was the sister of Tom and Sydney—she was very gracious about letting me use it. Everything was very friendly. I seem to remember that she used to have like Sunday get-togethers and whatnot for I think they were political rallies really. My father of course went. My father was a Republican and they were Republicans so there was a tie there. [But no there were] we had no neighborly problems. Mrs. Wilmer kept parrots. Beautiful parrots and I don't know what species they were or what their—

JW: In the house?

RC: She kept them in the house but she also would put them in—there was a bush that was near the road, the state road, and the parrots would be put there. There were two of them. They would pick up everything you said and repeat it back to you. They were terrific. Noisy but terrific. We loved them. I thought they were the greatest things going.

JW: Do you remember ever seeing the famous old Sydney Mudd bandwagon?

RC: No.

JW: Alright this was before your time. They're actually musicians that Sydney Sr. imported from Baltimore. A group of 10 or 12. A typical German brass band type group and that gave him a lot of publicity down here on his campaigns and during his stumping around Southern Maryland. It was a very famous well known group and we fortunately have some pictures of it. So this was just a shade before your time like maybe 10 years. Do you remember ever seeing Sydney Jr. the congressman?

RC: Yes, yes I think I saw him but I didn't know him. It was Tom that he seemed to get to know.

JW: He was the youngest I guess of the children?

RC: I really you know don't know but he was there. He married a girl Anne Murray. Anne Murray was a friend of one of my aunts.

RW: And she's still living isn't she?

RC: I don't know.

RW: Somewhere in Washington?

JW: Yes, yes, yes.

RC: Is she? Well she was a just utterly delightful person. Just wonderful.

JW: We should talk to her.

RC: So I don't know but she and one of my aunts were friends.

JW: She was not a Charles County girl was she Anne Murray?

RC: No I think she was from Washington.

JW: That's what I've heard.

RC: But she truly was she was so gracious.

JW: What impressions do you have now of growing up in La Plata in the 1920's? Street scenes, what things still stick out that you could pull out of your memory? People you saw on the streets, conditions of the sidewalks if any and streets, stores in town, pleasant memories? Do you occasionally reminisce and go back to those days?

RC: Well I'm not too much that type of person but I think everything was very pleasant. You knew everyone. Everyone spoke to you. There was absolutely no fear. You just didn't see strange faces. If there was a stranger I'm sure the stranger was always with someone you knew. I remember there was a little hat shop. I don't know the name, Bowling's maybe. It was down from Bowling's Hotel. There was the most I thought the loveliest lady who ran the hat shop.

JW: Was this on the ground floor?

RC: Yes. I don't know what else she sold. I mean I can't imagine a hat shop being very profitable by itself in La Plata. Anyway and of course see even as a very small child I always had the connection in Washington with my mother's people. See my mother died when I was two. So consequently, she died in the flu epidemic of 1918. So consequently I spent all my vacations and everything like that with my aunts my mother's sisters.

JW: Now these were Jones girls?

RC: These were Jones girls.

JW: Now the really Jones girls?

RC: That's right. So of course my father just turned all of my clothing problem over to them.

JW: Now these were granddaughters of Thomas A.?

RC: Yeah.

JW: And you are a great granddaughter of Thomas A. Jones of Pope's Creek of Huckleberry and Ravens Crest?

RC: Yeah all in that area somewhere.

JW: Okay and friend of Colonel Cox at Bel Alton?

RC: Yeah. So but everything was you know—there was a dance at Chapel Point every Saturday night. As you got older you could go. We always went—

JW: How old is older? How old did a young lady have to be before she was allowed to go to that dance?

RC: Oh I would say I was I guess I went when I was 17. I don't [inaudible] when I was 16 or not. I may have gone when I was 16 because I had cousins that would always go. We just went there wasn't the idea of dates. We just went. I mean some people had dates of course but I mean we just went.

JW: With a group usually?

RC: Oh sure and the group could be you know anywhere from six to 12.

JW: Okay now when did you leave La Plata more or less permanently?

RC: 1941.

JW: Oh okay so you lived there permanently until—

RC: No, no we went back for the summers.

JW: Oh I see okay.

RC: We kept the house. My father died in 1928. So from 1928 to 1941 we went back in the summertime.

JW: Alright and you lived here in Washington?

RC: In the winter.

JW: So you were able to keep in touch with what was going on down there?

RC: Yes.

JW: And when you went back you lived in the house the same place on what we now call St. Mary's avenue? Old Maryland Route 3.

RC: Yeah that's right.

JW: The old main road. So you were able to keep in touch with some of your school friends too this way?

RC: Yes Catherine Turner is the one—I don't know her married name—she's the one that I remember the most. She lived in Spring Hill as it's called.

RW: When you say we did you have brothers and sisters?

RC: No my grandmother. When my mother died my mother's mother my grandmother came to live with my father and me. It was a very good relationship. Everybody got along beautifully together.

JW: So for 10 years there in La Plata your grandmother was the hostess, the house manager, your stand in mother, and full time grandmother?

RC: That's right.

JW: You got along well?

RC: Yeah we got along well.

JW: And what was her name?

RC: Sarah. Sarah Jones.

JW: Sarah.

RC: So that all worked out. I used to go to the courthouse. I remember that when I guess when my father was state attorney he had an office there.

JW: A short walk?

RC: Yes about I guess a block. A long block maybe. I remember a Mr. Albritton there. I think he was the clerk of the court or some such things as that. And he was delightful. He had a—I don't know whether she was secretary or an assistant, her name was Mattie Owen and she was delightful.

JW: Oh yes she is still alive.

RC: Is she?

JW: We want to talk to her but she's very reserved.

RC: Yeah well she was very, very, very nice.

JW: See now I can tell her that I talked to you. She would remember you?

RC: Oh I think so yes.

JW: Well this is great. These are the things that we enjoy talking about so just go on I mean.

RC: Course her father was Doctor Owen. As far as I know he's the only doctor I guess that I ever had. Fortunately I don't think I ever had nay—

JW: Where was his doctor's office when you were going?

RC: In their home.

JW: On what street?

RC: Well—

JW: Near where the school was?

RC: No you went up the main street you know past the courthouse toward the railroad track and you turn. You made a right hand turn in there somewhere.

RW: Oak, I think it's Oak Avenue. Was it next to the parsonage the rectory of the—I think they lived next door to the rectory, the old rectory.

JW: If you cross the railroad tracks?

RC: No it was before you got to the railroad.

JW: Then at Lagrange Avenue at that time?

RW: Lagrange or Maple?

RC: Where Jimmy Mitchell had his office.

RW: Alright Lagrange.

JW: Right there near where the *Times Crescent* building was?

RC: Yeah you went around the corner and their house was back up there.

RW: Their house was taken down to build the new post office.

JW: Okay that would be about right.

RC: Oh that was a beautiful home. It was lovely.

JW: We have no pictures of that either but the Owen sisters might.

RC: So that was nice. I remember that.

JW: How do you remember him as a person?

RC: Mr. Albritton?

JW: Mr. Owen, Dr. Owen.

RC: Dr. Owen oh I think he—

JW: Gentle?

RC: Yes just quiet. I don't think he made much of a splash. Just a quiet man.

JW: Did he make house calls? Do you recall occasions when he did?

RC: Well as I say we were very fortunate. I don't think we ever needed but I'm sure he did. Yes I'm sure I remember hearing people say that he came. It was very—he was very just a very average man. I guess I don't remember that he had any extraordinary physical appearance or anything of that sort.

JW: What was Mr. Albritton's first name do you recall?

RC: I want to say Warren but I wouldn't be sure.

JW: Well it sounds like [inaudible]. I think you are right.

RW: Well I think she's right because some of those books are W. M. A. you know they took the clerk's name in initials.

RC: Yeah and they wrote by hand. This was all by hand because I used to think it was quite a chore to sit there all day and write by hand. His office was right across the hall from my father's office and that's how I happened to get to know him.

JW: Who were some of your father's colleagues and peers in the legal profession during the 20's?

RC: Well of course Judge Mitchell. Walter Mitchell and he was also a really dear friend to my father. Edward Edelen. I think maybe there was a man named Carrico. Then at the bank there was another lovely man that I remember [inaudible]. His name was Bernard Howard. I think the bank was owned by a man named Posey.

JW: Was this the brick bank on the corner?

RC: Yes the Bank of Southern Maryland [inaudible]—

JW: Building's still—

RC: Still there and I still have a stock that my father bought.

JW: Is that right?

RC: Can you believe it?

JW: Marvelous.

RC: Well it has turned into a gold mine believe it or not.

JW: Is that right?

RC: Back in 1928 I remember a major decision as to whether or not to give the bank 1,000 dollars because it was in such sad shape. I don't know how that 1,000 dollars was worked but it had to do with the stock and my father was on the board of directors at the bank. So it had to do

with the stock and Judge Mitchell decided that the path of wisdom was to give the bank 1,000 dollars. I don't—you know at that time I was what 13, 14 years old. I could have cared less so long as I had my spending money. So anyway he did and now the bank has become part of the Maryland bank shares corporation in Baltimore. It's a big concern. It has oh you know it has split and split and split again.

JW: Sounds like [Par Gas].

RC: I had an opportunity to buy [Par Gas] and didn't.

JW: Oh dear.

RC: I thought anything in Waldorf can't possibly flourish.

JW: True but it's out of Waldorf now. It's in New Jersey we just found out.

RC: Yeah but I mean that was another. But that was the story of that. But anyways this Mr. Howard. Bernard Howard I think—

JW: What was his job?

RC: Well you know as I look back on it.

JW: Head cashier or something of that—

RC: Or the manager. I think he could've well been the brother in law of Mr. Posey. The Howard's home which was a lovely white thing set in a beautiful lawn. I think they're—

JW: On what street?

RC: Well that was on the street that went down past the courthouse the other way down the hill.

RW: Washington.

JW: Okay that's the house that is now next door to Wells Posey. These were his grandparents and he built his house right next to theirs.

RC: Well the house that was there next to the Howard's in those days I think my father's my home in La Plata. There was no road there you know. I think his and the Howard family helped joined. Then next to the Howard's was a place called the Maple's where the Posey's lived. I remember now they had a fire at the Maple's. I remember that and that was a big home. I guess it was the biggest home in La Plata. Just lovely and Mrs. Posey—I don't remember Mr. Posey. Anyway Mrs. Posey she was lovely, lovely lady.

JW: Do you remember some of her daughters?

RC: Yes one was named Catherine and then one was named May. They were friends of my father and I think they were also friends of my mother. But anyway, that house burned but Mr. Howard was at the bank and I guess my father was determined I was gonna learn banking or

something and so I'd be sent to the bank and I'm sure they did all kinds of crazy things for me as just a poor kid.

JW: Excuse me did you say the Howard house was near the old Posey house?

RC: It's next to it.

JW: Alright then I made a mistake. I know exactly where it is.

RC: It was our house the back of—

JW: A very large house.

RC: [Yeah it was that] and then the Maples which was the Posey house was next to that. And then that burned down but it was rebuilt. Rebuilt I believe fairly like the old home. I think it was I'm sure it had some changes but. It had a glorious entrance of maple trees on either side.

JW: Well that's gone.

RC: Yeah so.

JW: Who were some of the prominent figures around town that you might meet from time to time on the street other than Judge Mitchell? He was someone probably known to just about everyone. The Dr. Owen, anyone else? Did you know Mr. Hallie by any chance? Richard Hallie.

RC: Oh yes, yes he was there seemed to be quite a division there. You had the Bank of Southern Maryland or whatever it was called Maryland national or whatever and the *Maryland Independent* paper. That seemed to be one little phase and then the other phase was the *Times Crescent* and the Charles County Trust Company. There seemed to be two. If you supported the *Times Crescent* you also used the County Trust Bank. That type of thing. Judge Mitchell was the democrat who [owned] that side and my father was a republican.

JW: That's true the *Independent* was at one time published in that red brick building on the corner. So they had it all rolled up the nice, neat ball of wax. It was a political economic thing.

RC: Yeah it seems to me like that was the way. Mr. Hallie was guiding light of the—

JW: Of the other bank.

RC: Of yeah the Charles County Bank.

JW: Where was it located do you remember?

RC: The bank? Yes it was [sudden]—

JW: Or Mr. Hallie.

RC: I think it was next to that old hotel. There was a hotel by the railroad track. Bowling.

RW: The building was there when we moved there in 1950. That's where we would bank.

JW: Okay with the corner entrance? Okay.

RW: And then he took that building down when they enlarged Bowling's Store.

JW: I see okay.

RW: And Bowling's the enlarged Bowling's Store came right up to the site of that old hotel.

RC: I don't remember Bowling's Store. Was it right next to the hotel?

RW: It was no the bank was in between.

RC: Of Bowling's Store? Bowling's Store is probably where the hat shop was that I was talking about.

RW: It might be.

JW: Oh I think you're right. Incidentally according to Mrs. L. K. Farrell...senior...her father in law Mr. T. R. Farrell had a hat shop on the second floor of Farrell's Store by the train station. She remember how well they served the public. So apparently there was always, at least after 1900, at least one ladies hat outlet in La Plata.

RC: Well I guess you know as you see my outlook was so different because Washington was always a part of my life. It seems to me that every major thing that happened was always in Washington but that was because of my aunts and my father. See naturally he wasn't married so we would come and spend the holidays with them. Of course that was natural because my grandmother naturally wanted to be with them. It was her family you see. So it's a little bit of an odd circumstance but it didn't seem odd at the time. I mean you know. As I say fortunately everybody got along so beautifully together.

JW: So your father's family were well enough off to send him to Georgetown which took some money?

RC: Yes.

JW: Now and then.

RC: It does now that's for sure.

JW: Did he have brothers or sisters?

RC: Oh yes there were 12 brothers. 12 in the family.

JW: Who were some of these brothers?

RC: Well there was Fairfax. Then there was one we called Deli, his name was John Delmer. I don't know where the Delmer came from. Then there was James, Ford, Ben. Two of them died young. I don't remember them. Tilden and Elly. I don't know what Elly's name was. That was what he was called.

JW: Was Fairfax younger than your father?

RC: No my father was about in the middle I think of them. Fairfax was the oldest.

JW: And he's still alive?

RC: Oh no.

JW: Which Fairfax are we talking about.

RC: You are talking Fairfax's father. His name was William Fairfax and there was also a son William Fairfax.

JW: Then I guess it's the son that we know.

RC: Yes.

JW: Right and until a few years ago he lived at this old house exchange which may have been called by some other name.

RC: That house was just flat to the ground. It wasn't very attractive.

JW: Well no we're not thinking of the same house. We'll have to talk to him someday and find out where.

RC: The house it was flat to the ground and had a just a flat porch on the front.

RW: Well I think Mr. Cooksey said that he bought that from his father. They could never raise 12 children in that house.

JW: No....

RC: No that wasn't—he was one of 12 children. My father was one of 12 children. This the Fairfax's father was the oldest of that.

RW: Okay but there was a Cooksey homeplace. Even though they owned exchange I think it was somebody else lived there. Either it was tenant or and then Fairfax and Ethel bought it from the estate apparently.

RC: I think at one time it was a sizable farm because there was a road that went through it. Across the road lived the oldest son of the older Fairfax, Willy. He had a sizable farm. As I understand it I don't know whether the father gave it to him or sold it to him when he married. So now that it seemed to me like the place was pretty large.

RW: I think today it's over a 100 acres isn't it?

JW: I don't know.

RC: So based on that it could have been one of those land grants you know.

RW: There was a mill. Was there a mill on it?

JW: I think one time.

RC: Oh really? But the house itself was not particularly attractive.

JW: Do you remember going along the main street of La Plata let's say going from your home along the south side toward the railroad tracks. What buildings would you have passed? Can you remember? Starting with the very end of your street.

RC: Well there was a hotel on the corner. I can't remember its name now.

JW: Was Cochran's Store in business then?

RC: Yes Cochran's Store was in business and that was the store that we used.

JW: That was very near to your house?

RC: Right up the street [same street] right there. Then I think there was a grain store next to the—

RW: Norris's?

RC: Norris's grain store.

JW: Just before you got to Cochran's?

RC: Cochran's that's right. Then I guess my father owned the land up to that part. That was part of this place where the house was and that's where he built those or had built was building when he died those little bungalows.

JW: Right there're about four in a row there right yeah.

RC: There are three one way and three the other last time—

JW: [Inaudible] call that Cookseyville.

RC: Do they? And so—

JW: And they're kept up well.

RC: Yeah so that—

JW: One's a doctor's office now.

RC: Well that was the—that was that street. Then as you would make a turn to the right there was a hotel. Well the courthouse was in front of you. You make a turn there was a hotel and I don't know what its name was.

JW: Was it called the Will's Hotel then? At one time it was.

RC: I think it was. I think that's right because I think when my father and mother were married the house wasn't finished. The renovation on the house wasn't finished and they lived at the Will's hotel for you know a few weeks or so until the house was finished. That's right it would have been the Will's Hotel.

JW: That building's still in good condition.

RC: Is it? Then seems to me there was a service station next to the hotel as you went along. Then I don't know. Seems to me maybe you came to the *Times Crescent* building. I don't know whether any other lawyers besides Judge Mitchell had their office there or not. Then I guess it was Bowling's and the bank and then the hotel and the railroad station. Then across the railroad station was Bowie's. That was an ice cream parlor.

JW: Right across the track on the east side.

RC: Yeah I loved Bowie's.

JW: You remember that?

RC: Yes. And Mrs. Bowie I think managed the—I think it was a restaurant too. I don't think I ever ate there but she managed the ice cream part I know and that was very nice.

JW: Was there a counter and stool type set up or all tables and chairs?

RC: No little tables and chairs if I remember right.

JW: Okay.

RC: Then the restaurant was further to the back. They lived there. That was also their home.

JW: Up above?

RC: I think probably to the side and above yeah. Then I think the post office. If I remember right that ended it. Then across the street from the post office was the town hall. I don't remember that anything ever went on there that I went to see but it was there. Then there was a store and I don't remember much about it except I vaguely remember the man it was a Mr. Ruben and he was Jewish and as far as I know he was the only Jewish. Probably the only foreigner in the whole place. My father must have done business with him. In addition to this little store, and they lived over the store, he was a trapper. Trapping primarily muskrats I think. And basically as I look back on it now I think the man was a furrier. I think he knew the whole business. I seem to remember my father saying he was from Russia. My father must have done the legal business for him. I don't how long they'd been there but they moved to Baltimore. I don't think there was any racial problem because I don't think they ever took part in anything but they were different because they were Jewish. As you look on it now it seems—

JW: And the store was between the city hall and the track?

RC: No I think it was the other way.

JW: The other side alright this would be the DeAngelis building just east of the city hall?

RC: Yeah. So—

RW: Was your father allowed as a state's attorney to have a private practice?

RC: I don't know. I really I don't know. And I don't know he was state attorney continuously. I'm not sure of that.

RW: Seems out here would have been so little business.

JW: Was this an elective or appointed position in those days?

RC: I think it was elective.

JW: How old was your father when he passed on?

RC: Oh 48 or so maybe.

JW: What carried him off?

RC: He had pneumonia.

JW: What stories do you recall hearing about the flu epidemic in La Plata? It touched your family very directly and personally.

RC: I don't think I ever understood the flu epidemic until many, many years later. It was simply my mother had died with the flu. Then she had an uncle, my grandmother's brother who also died with the flu.

JW: Was he from that area?

RC: No he was from Washington and it was said as though it was very bad you know. She died with the flu, he died with the flu and that was it. There was no big deal made of it. Of course people did not speak of death too much. Particularly the children I don't think.

JW: So you were two when your mother passed? You can't remember her at all?

RC: Oh no I have no memory.

JW: Who were some of your friends that you used to try and keep in touch with until 1940 or 41.

RC: Well I think Catherine Turner would be the one that at most I'd get in touch with her. And then Irene Bowie. I think that was about it. Because you see there were so many cousins on both sides of the family that there was never any need to go outside the family. As I got older and could drive my grandmother loved visiting all her brothers and sisters and in laws and cousins.

JW: And most of them were in the La Plata Dentsville area in Spring Hill?

RC: They were in Charles County. Charles County yes. Then of course the great recreation in the summer time were the church picnics we went to. Didn't make any difference what the religion was we just went to all the church picnics.

JW: It was diversion and entertainment.

RC: That's right. That was a Saturday afternoon.

JW: Where were some of these held now?

RC: Well there was one at Pomfret, Sacred Heart had one. Bryantown, I think Bryantown had a real big one.

JW: Now were you a Catholic family?

RC: My mother was a Catholic, my father was an Episcopalian. My mother's family were Democrats my father's were Republican. So I learned at an early age to get along with all of them.

JW: And to walk both sides of the street carefully.

RW: Do you remember Marshall Hall?

RC: Yes, yes but my memory of Marshall Hall wasn't from La Plata. It was from Washington. My aunts lived on Capitol Hill at that time and they went to Old St. Peter's Parish which is one of the oldest churches in Washington. Every summer they had a church picnic at Marshall Hall and you went on the boat to Marshall Hall. I guess they rented the boat for the day just for that excursion.

JW: The church?

RC: The church and that was oh that was a big event. You know, picnic lunches and all. So my memory of Marshall Hall is from that area not from La Plata.

JW: Well how about Chapel Point? What did that look like?

RC: Well no Chapel Point I thought it was absolutely lovely. Its beauty was natural and it had this pavilion and that's where the Saturday night dances was held. Had some old bath houses there that today you would hold up your hands in horror but they were adequate and the beach believe it or not was very nice for a short space. Looking at it now I still think that beach in those days was extremely nice.

JW: I'll bet it could be yet.

RC: Then of course it was a small section because then it became just went down to the water you know. But there was a small part there where the sand was lovely and it wasn't—the depth of the beach wasn't too much but it was really very nice.

JW: Looking toward the point itself would this have been off to your left? The Potomac side of the point?

RC: Looking over as you went down the hill.

JW: Yes.

RC: And well I think really the beauty of the thing was it was all around. It wasn't I don't remember that there was any—

JW: It was kept clean and neat?

RC: Oh it was beautiful.

JW: Did you ever meet Mr. Jarboe?

RC: No.

JW: Who used to help maintain it while he was going to medical school in Washington during those years.

RC: Not that I know of. There was a priest—no he wasn't a priest. He was a brother. Brother—

JW: Carly?

RC: Brother Carly.

JW: Mr. Jarboe was his assistant managing the Point.

RW: Dr. Jarboe.

JW: Dr. Jarboe yes.

RC: Well this was Brother Carly and I seem to remember that I thought he was a bit of a character this Brother Carly. He was the one responsible for Chapel Point as far as I knew you know.

RW: Did you ever go into the hotel there?

RC: At Chapel Point? No I don't think so.

RW: As you went down the road turned left and the hotel was on the—

RC: That's right. No I don't think we ever did that.

JW: Dr. Jarboe was born in that hotel. His family lived there. He has been a practicing surgeon in Charles County since about 1950. Just retired a year or not too long ago.

RC: No I don't think—what used to happen was in the summer time somebody would get together and pack a whole bunch of children maybe two women would get two cars and you know take eight or ten kids and go down to the water and just let us splash around and bring us home. That sort of thing. It was very nice. Then you know well for instance if I was included then they'd come back to my home and my grandmother would have ice cream and cookies and things of that sort. It's a little social.

RW: Were the peers in pretty good shape then so that boats could come in? Steamers?

RC: No I don't remember. I think the rowboats and canoes were about the only thing. No there was nothing big there.

JW: What about traffic on the streets of La Plata? Did you see much horse drawn—many horse drawn vehicles during the 20's?

RC: No.

JW: They were still pretty much into automobiles?

RC: Walking. People were walking.

JW: Walking more than now I suppose?

RC: Oh yeah. There were no sidewalks on the side streets of course. There was a sidewalk on one side of the street. It was by the bank. I think that went all the way up—

JW: Wood or concrete?

RC: I think it was concrete.

RW: Before Mitchell's Supply was in that building didn't they sell automobiles there early?

RC: Wasn't that the Howard? Mathews Howard?

JW: They were up where Bruce Davis is now.

RW: Oh they were up in—

JW: Yeah. That cement block building was Mathews Howard. Did your father own an automobile?

RC: Oh yes. I don't ever remember that—

JW: That he didn't.

RC: Yeah and people talk about these things, people my age. I don't remember that we didn't have a car or we didn't have a telephone or we didn't have electricity.

RW: Or a bathroom.

RC: Or a bathroom. Yeah you know I meet people and some of them even a little younger than I and they'll go on to all of this bit and I think well we never had that. I think La Plata was a very civilized place.

JW: Did you feel that you were a little more fortunate than some of your peers in the quality of life and your living standards?

RC: No I don't think so because La Plata didn't have—

[Tape Interruption].

JW: So you put together these notes ahead of time and if you want to read through them those that we haven't already touched on go ahead and do that and fill in as thoughts occur to you now that you haven't jotted down here. You did talk to us about the Ruben's for example.

RC: Yeah and then as I say I'm sure going to the post office for mail was—

JW: And is this—where was it located at this time?

RC: At the far end of the street?

JW: Close to the track? Did you—

RC: Past the track.

JW: You crossed it and it was on a corner of that first street there? Oak Avenue and Charles?

RC: Yeah.

JW: Do you remember who the post master or post mistress was?

RC: No. No I don't.

JW: Alright.

RC: But I do remember—

JW: How old were you when your mother first allowed you to walk to the post office and back?

RC: My grandmother.

JW: Your grandmother yes right.

RC: Well I imagine I was really young.

JW: Seven or eight years old?

RC: Yeah because everybody you just walked out the door and walked up the street and I was at my father's office you see.

JW: And everybody you met knew who you were?

RC: Oh sure and I knew them.

JW: And knew who your father was?

RC: Yeah and I knew them. There was no—and I'm sure I wasn't allowed to go any time that there would have been any problems you know. One thing I remember is that they had a bus that came from I don't know where it started from. Maybe Bel Alton or something like that and it went to Washington. The same man drove it all the time. I imagine there was just one trip a day. Once in the morning and back in the afternoon.

JW: And this bus had to come right by your house?

RC: Right by the house because we were on the main road. I used to get on the bus when I was a very small child. You got on the bus there and it stopped right in front of your house and I don't remember ever paying the man anything so maybe my father had taken of it or I don't know how that worked but I don't ever remember paying him. Maybe it was a dollar or so and I just handed it to him with no commotion, no tickets or anything. Then my aunts lived on 6th Street SE. When we got 6th and Pennsylvania Avenue he would stop the bus I'd get off and walk the block and a half to my aunt's house.

JW: All by yourself?

RC: All by myself. And I'm sure I did that when I was oh nine or 10 years old. Yeah today you know of course kids do a lot of things today too but there was no problem with that and the only caution was be careful crossing the avenue. But that man that same man I knew his name at the time but I don't remember it. He just ran that bus. I want to say it was called the Tidewater Company.

JW: I think you're right.

RC: Yeah but anyway he was just delightful. You were entrusted to his care no problem. Then let's see here. We talked about Bowie's. Oh about the hotel across the street from the post office.

JW: The one that was called the new Will's Hotel when it was built. What was it called when you were growing up there?

RC: I think probably that. I think it was the Will's Hotel. I used to eat there occasionally with my father.

JW: Can you describe the dining room? Was it on the first floor?

RC: It was on the first floor and all I remember is that it had tables with big white table cloths that came all the way almost to the floor. Other than that I think it was very—the table cloths were very white very well kept. It was for a child it was nice.

JW: A rather impressive place to eat?

RC: Yeah. Well my father used to take me on trips to Baltimore occasionally and I can't remember the name of the hotel. I want to say it's the Southern in Baltimore but it was one of the old Baltimore hotels and of course they had just an elegant hotel. After you'd eaten and stayed there well of course it didn't seem as nice.

JW: How did you get to Baltimore?

RC: Well sometimes we drove but we usually came to Washington by car and took the train to Baltimore.

JW: You didn't take the train from La Plata?

RC: No. Probably because my father would leave my grandmother off in Washington. Then we would go to Union Station and get off in Baltimore. Apparently what his business was apparently in the neighborhood of the station. I think it was all in downtown Baltimore. We would just stay one night and come back. After work why you know it would be a movie or quite often I think it was a concert because I think my father was very fond of music.

JW: Now this name Mack you mentioned a few minutes ago, who was she? This lady who worked in the—

RC: Oh [Mattie].

JW: The hotel.

RC: Oh Lizzy Mack.

JW: Lizzy Mack.

RC: Lizzy Mack. Yeah Lizzy Mack was the cook at the hotel. She was a—I think everybody in the area knew her. She lived down the road from us.

JW: Down St. Mary's Avenue?

RC: Yeah in a black settlement that was there.

JW: Down in that valley that dip?

RC: Yes down through there.

JW: Okay where the Catholic cemetery is today.

RC: Yeah where Lizzy lived they always had big parties on Saturday night. That was part of the week. Quite often the sheriff had to be called and it got kind of rough.

JW: Did you hear any of the goings on from your place in the quiet summer nights?

RC: No, no it was too far down. I was sure it was at least a mile down the road. So but Lizzy was I think she was sort of a town character because she was a fabulous cook and everybody knew her.

JW: How old a person was she?

RC: Well at the time she must have seemed old to me but I'm sure looking back on it she probably was 40, middle aged. Ancient at that time.

JW: You were about eight or 10?

RC: Yeah that's right.

JW: Who was the sheriff? Did your father know the sheriff pretty well?

RC: Somewhere along the way my cousin Vernon Cooksey was the sheriff.

JW: Robert Vernon Cooksey oh yeah.

RC: But I don't remember that was before or after my father dies.

JW: Well we have interviewed him so I can tell you it was shortly after. Like about a year or two.

RC: So I remember when I went to get my driver's permit I still kept my even though I lived in Washington nine months of the year I still kept my residence as Maryland. I'm not sure I guess Judge Mitchell had decided that was the thing to do—

JW: Did you say he was your guardian?

RC: Yes.

JW: And how long did that go on?

RC: I think people come of age at 18 in Maryland. It didn't stop then he kept looking after me till he died. I lost my thought here about that...oh when I was going to get my drivers permit I was 16. I think Vernon was the sheriff at that time and of course it was a lot less than it is now. So I went to get it. They came once a week or once a month from Baltimore and the fellow saw my name. He wanted to know whether I was related to Vernon. I said, "Yes." So he gave me my permit I never did take the test.

JW: Oh boy just by knowing the sheriff.

RC: Same thing. Let me close the door here. Now let's see here.

JW: Were you ever an observer of the driving tests that were given to young people in those years?

RC: No I don't think I really no. I don't think it was too much of a test. I think really course that would have been...about 1932 or 3 and I don't think it was very strict. There weren't that many cars.

JW: Yeah didn't have to.

RC: It was a different time. Okay we have that. Oh when I was in La Plata I went to Sacred Heart Church. That was the church we went to, my grandmother and myself.

JW: A very short walk away.

RC: Yeah just walked over to it. We always sat in the same place all the time and so did everybody else. It was very prescribed. Of course the black people there was a balcony, small balcony. The black people sat in the balcony.

JW: A bit closer to heaven.

RC: So when you see all of these—you go to some places and you see the churches with the balcony and they explain what they were for young people don't really realize that but that was exactly the way it was. Nobody thought a thing about it that was just the way it was.

JW: Do you have a feel for what the percentages were in the congregation white and black?

RC: No I don't but—

JW: More of one or?

RC: Oh there were more white people than black but in thinking of it I think that there were a fair number of black Catholics. Although I don't remember that they, other than coming to church I don't remember that there was any other activity in which they participated. It was really, it's kind of sad now that you think about it. I mean they did not have their choir or anything of that sort.

JW: What was the relationship from day to day, the realistic down to earth relationship between black and white in a community like La Plata? Anything that you remember?

RC: I think it was just peaceful coexistence I think. You didn't think anything you know about it. They were black and you were white and unfortunately I think you had the attitude that they were to do the hard work. I think that they were maids. Helped they came to do the cleaning. They came to do the laundry. Types of work like that. Yet in the fields they worked side by side with white people. But I don't think there was ever any hostility.

JW: In other words they themselves often appeared at least to accept this rule as being normal for them.

RC: Yes, yes. I think—I just don't think anybody ever questioned it. That was the thing about it. They had their ways of doing. The white people accepted that as their way of doing and as I say

looking at it now it was not a good situation. But at the time I remember thinking on occasion we always had a black man around the house to do things around to keep the house going on the outside, the yard, the grape harbor, things of that sort. That man ate in a little room that was off the kitchen. He ate the same things that we did. Whatever we had he had. There was no discrimination there but he didn't eat with us. Now as I look back on that and I think even at the time there was one fellow that worked for us and his last name, I assume it was his last name, was Ball. We called him Ball. I do not know his background or anything of that sort but I liked him so much. I always thought it was too bad that you know I maybe questioned why doesn't he eat with us.

JW: In retrospect, and that's such an easy way to do it, to what extent do you personally feel that white people hobbled themselves through these traditions? That's a toughie.

RC: Yeah I'm not sure I think the economics of it just was laid out. The black people had no skills other than domestic type things and farming. I think that they became very attached to the families with which they worked and I think the families became very attached to them. When I was a child there was a black girl that helped take care of me and her name was Corine. From what I can understand I think the whole family just thought she was absolutely wonderful. I don't know how true it is but I understand that when she married my father helped get him started in the service station business. Now I don't know whether he bought the business and turned it over to him to manage or how that worked. Whatever it was this man was very successful. He was a very good and this Corine apparently was just delightful and I don't remember her. I don't know how long she stayed with us. It couldn't have been you know too long. But the whole family just thought she was wonderful. She apparently thought we were great.

JW: Well I ask the question and I don't often ask it I have to be a little careful but I have talked to elderly white people who while they wouldn't admit it I felt hurt themselves by sometimes not doing a job that they could have done and could have done well because it was considered nigger job. People who couldn't afford to have that attitude were really pressed into that stance whether they personally accepted it or not. So it's my feeling that maybe in this way both black and whites were hurt by this.

RC: I don't think it was—course I think there's another thing though that enters into it. You know like today we have all of the appliances in the kitchen and all and everything. I don't think there's much way that a woman with six or more children could have kept up with farm life without some help.

JW: Oh I agree.

RC: And so I think this idea then what happened was that the woman of the house took on the less strenuous and the better jobs if there is such a thing. Then the black woman took on the harder work and unfair as it is or was I think that circumstances just played an awful lot in that. Then the economics of it the people who had help I remember now I remember this. That when

we would go to La Plata for the summer we would have a girl come in maybe two or three days a week at most. We paid her a dollar a day. Now she probably worked maybe four hours but at the end of the week she probably you know she had maybe been paid three dollars at the most. Now and there was one girl who wanted to work for us because we paid more than other people and yet I'm sure we didn't overpay. I think we paid the going rate. So but I think the thing was that our work was not as hard. She liked the things that we did. And we would let—she was very—Edith. We used to have a lot of company from town on the weekends and she loved the idea of serving.

JW: Are we talking now about the late 30's?

RC: Mhm. She loved that, loved being part of it. Of course some of the guests would give her a little money you know so she made out pretty well you know.

RW: They did tip then? Is that right. I never heard that.

JW: That's interesting.

RC: Mhm. Well for instance just say that my uncle and his daughter would come. I imagine when he left he'd give her a dollar. So she got a dollar and we probably weren't paying her more than a dollar for the whole day maybe by that time two dollars. So and then like if there was someone else. I know when my aunts would come down they would maybe stay a week or so. They'd always give her a couple dollars. But she made it very plain that if she had the option to work for us we would have first choice. Of course another thing that when my aunts came of course they were from Washington and any old clothes that they had or what not they would always bring them for Edith you see because—

JW: She was married? Had a family?

RC: As I look back on it how dumb you are as a child. She showed up one day with this darling little girl and it was her little daughter. So of course I thought the child was just adorable. I don't know how old I was by then. I think maybe 13 or 14. And I'm going on about the child and thinking just how you know oh she was just so dressed up in a cute little dress and everything. So I think we brought her into the back porch and gave her some oh we wouldn't have had ice cream because no we didn't have a freezer. So I guess it was punch and cookies or something and everything. So after she left you know I was saying and I remember saying who's her father? You know just you know because on the farms you had people and you knew the father and everything and I remember my grandmother saying I don't know. Years later it struck me that that was a very peculiar answer from my grandmother. I'm sure you know the child was illegitimate. Of course instead of telling me that you know she just played dumb. She just didn't know. For some reason I do not think that there were too many illegitimate children among the negroes at that time. I think that—no I think because cousins who lived on the farm and they had the tenant farmers those they had the black man, his wife, four or five children. That was I mean it was a strong family life.

JW: Much more orderly.

RC: Yeah. The black people had a strong family life and then they socialized with the black family on the neighboring farm. There was a lot of intermarriage.

JW: When you left La Plata as a permanent residence did you have to have anyone come and stay in the house to guard it while you were here in Washington? Was there ever any security problems?

RC: No, no, we did lock the door. [Laughter]. We locked the door.

JW: How completely furnished was it?

RC: Completely.

JW: Were your mother and father's things still pretty much in the house?

RC: Yeah sure. This cut glass that I told you a lot of that was sitting on the sidewalk. Yeah and it was no—the only thing that had to be done to close up the house was to call Max Mitchell and tell him we were leaving and please cut off the water. That was the sum total of what it took to close the house.

JW: What were the heating arrangements in that house for cold weather?

RC: Little tin stoves.

JW: Room size heaters? Space heaters.

RC: No they were little round stoves and they had a little pipe that went into the chimneys. Each room had a stove.

JW: No basement?

RC: There was a basement which would really be more like a wine cellar. It was used for storing home canned goods.

JW: Root or fruit cellar.

RC: Yeah that was all. It wasn't very big. The house was very light and airy. The I would say the kitchen was oh it was such a big place. Now the kitchen did not have one of those old, big kitchen ranges that everybody talks about. It didn't have that. There was an oil stove.

JW: Kerosene?

RC: Yes I guess it was yes.

JW: How many burners?

RC: I think it had six.

JW: So it was a good size.

RC: Yeah and then not when I was a small child but somewhere along the way we got a refrigerator and I don't think it had a freezer compartment on top I think it was just a refrigerator.

JW: But an electric one?

RC: Electric one.

JW: Did it have a ball on top or any sort of a—

RC: Yes I think it was the old general electric type yeah. But that was a great thing because then there was no more worrying with the ice.

JW: How did you get the ice there before the electric refrigerator was brought in? What was the source of it?

RC: Someone must have delivered it to us through some arrangement. I don't know what it was but that must have been the way it worked.

JW: Did your mother—your grandmother take you grocery shopping with her once in a while? Or did she not do her own grocery shopping.

RC: No she didn't do much grocery shopping. I think she called Cochran's Store and that was the way that it worked. They I don't know whether they delivered it or my father picked it up. I don't remember now.

JW: Do you remember being inside Cochran's Store?

RC: Yes.

JW: What are some of your impressions now? Scents, sights, vibrations?

RC: Well Cochran's Store sold everything I think I mean in addition to groceries I think it had other things. The thing as I thinking about the other day. You went in you bought whatever you wanted and walked out with it but of course in the meantime some clerk had scribbled down on a little piece of paper of some sort what you bought. Then at the end of the month they just sent the bill. I don't think you ever—I don't know whether you knew what things cost or not. I mean I'm sure as a child I never worried about it.

JW: Do you remember the names of any of the clerks who worked for Mr. Cochran?

RC: No I don't but they were always real nice. Of course they helped you. You never helped yourself. I imagine I seem to think my grandmother would just give me a piece of paper with what she wanted and you just went in and handed it to them.

JW: That's all there was to it? You just stood there?

RC: Yeah and they'd give it back to you like if it was a pound of coffee or whatnot. But then I think the regular order, the big order, was simply called in. Or else maybe she gave it to my father and he left it and picked it up or something. Then the A&P came.

JW: Now where was the located? That first A&P.

RC: That was well it was up there by the *Times Crescent* building. I guess it was toward the railroad track it was the next —

JW: Was it close to the bank that was on that side of the road?

RC: Yes I think it was. Yeah and of course everybody loved that because it carried variety and other fresh things were good and all the name brands that you knew those days. The only problem was that of course you had to—they didn't deliver. You had to—I don't guess any of the stores delivered come to think of it.

JW: And was this a cash and carry basis dealing with the A&P Store?

RC: Far as I know because I remember I took the money with me. It wasn't a credit thing no. Course [there again] by the time that opened we were only there in the summer time.

JW: To what extent did—

RC: Gus Owens was the—he was the manager.

JW: So he was there a long time. Till it closed I guess.

RC: Was he? Well he was the manager.

JW: [Mattie's] brother.

RC: But we liked that.

JW: There were different scents weren't there in those older grocery stores?

RC: Oh.

JW: The oil on the floor. Maybe sawdust if they sold meat.

RC: Just well and of course it was dark. You know I had problems couple little windows in the front maybe.

JW: No fluorescent lights.

RC: But and then they had the counters you know the long counters and everything. I don't remember too well but I think I liked going there. I think it was—but I don't think I went too often. My grandmother and father apparently took care of that very well. Then as I say we always had this man around the house doing yard and field work and things like that. I imagine he may have picked up some of the orders.

JW: How about penny candies? Were there any favorites for you as a young girl that could be seen behind glass in a grocery store?

RC: I don't seem to remember that too much. I think there was a little something in a yellow wrapper. I think they were called Mary Janes maybe.

JW: Oh they're still my favorite you can still buy them. They still pull fillings out of your teeth. Seriously it cost me 60 dollars once about five or six years ago. Do you remember Dr. George Hoge incidentally did you ever meet him the dentist?

RC: No.

JW: He started practicing in 1932 in La Plata. You just sort of missed him. Just retired.

RC: Did he?

JW: Wonderful guy. Wonderful person.

RC: Yeah I don't remember too much about the penny candy. [There again see] there was always great communication between Washington and La Plata. My aunts came often and they came on the train that stopped there in La Plata.

JW: Oh they did okay by way of Bowie.

RC: Yeah by way of Bowie. So of course they always I think brought the candy so—

JW: You had a pretty nice life for a young girl I'll tell you that sounds great. That sounds—

RC: Yeah three aunts to keep me going.

JW: Did you not even once ride the train down from Washington?

RC: No.

JW: I'll be darned.

RC: I don't ever remember doing that.

JW: That's the one big thing you missed.

RC: Missed yeah. No because as I say I know that my father always—would you like some more coffee?

JW: Later.

RC: Okay but now I think you see that was because of my grandmother. It was to keep my grandmother in touch with her home in Washington you see which I don't know whether they thought at the time that she came that that was going to be a permanent.

JW: Was she born here in Washington you grandmother?

RC: No she was born up near Gallant Green.

JW: Oh yes okay.

RC: Her name was Goldsmith and her mother's name was Montgomery.

JW: By this time she had become a city girl more or less?

RC: Oh yeah. So as I say I really don't know whether when my mother died and she came I don't know whether it was with the thought she'd be there a few months. Maybe they thought my father would remarry you know.

JW: And she had been a widow for some time had she?

RC: Mhm. So—

JW: And did she have other children other than?

RC: Mhm. Yeah see this one aunt you see is—there were six girls. My mother and there was one who had died. There were four living.

JW: And apparently they were young adults and able to take care of themselves.

RC: Oh yes.

JW: To what extent did your grandmother oversee your dress for the style, the clothing for school, for church, for everyday use.

RC: I think my aunts did that I would think.

JW: What were some of your favorite things to wear? Let's say to school. Were there favorite styles of clothing as far as you're concerned or materials or fashions?

RC: No you know I don't think I've ever had to...clothing has never been one of my big deals. I like nice clothing. But so far as loads of it or anything like that I don't think I've ever been that enamored of clothing. Whatever I think also children today have such a tremendous interest in their own clothes. I really think then whatever they gave me I wore. I don't remember that I had too much to say.

JW: So you liked their taste whatever it was?

RC: Yes, yes.

JW: And they apparently knew you well enough to buy what they felt you would like.

RC: Oh yes and I don't think—I think my father gave them open hand to buy whatever they thought was. I mean as I say see the relationship was good you know. In other words just do whatever you think.

JW: Sounds like a very pleasant life. You had the best of both worlds.

RC: Yeah.

JW: What did you and your dad do together? What did you enjoy doing with your father?

RC: Well he used to take me down on the farm.

JW: He had no son so you were the everything.

RC: Yeah I don't know when he bought the farm. He bought a farm that's called Ashley and I guess it was about five or six miles from La Plata. He rented it out to tenant farmers of course. But I think he must have loved the farm because he was born on one. I guess he liked it. So I don't know how he managed free time but anyway if he was going to the farm maybe you know after work in the summer or so he would take me and I loved that. He was always great about explaining animals. Oh like if you run across a little tortoise you know he'd pick it up and show it to you and of course I liked dogs and cats and they were always available. Of course he and his brothers used to go hunting which I did not—

JW: Was he a confident outdoors person?

RC: No I would say that he enjoyed the outdoors but it was not a major part of his life. I am not real clear about this but I think he gave me a horse for one of my birthdays. It was a great disappointment because I didn't like the horse.

JW: Oh dear. Did you have a carriage house there of some sort?

RC: A barn. It was a barn.

JW: A barn. That was built or designed for a horse or too I suppose a buggy?

RC: Yes it had stalls and everything. Of course there was never a horse there until this one came and I don't know what happened to the horse. I don't know whether it was to have been housed there or not but anyway.

JW: Did your father ride at all?

RC: Oh yeah he could ride. But their riding he and his brothers oh it was a plebian form of horse fox hunting I guess. This uncle that who's name was Deli apparently he just loved this fox hunting. I think my father and a couple other brothers used to humor him and go with him. But no I think all of them you see they grew up on farms.

JW: Now was Robert Vernon Cooksey's father a close kin of your father's father?

RC: You know I don't know. I don't know whether they—I don't know how that worked.

JW: They were from Mt. Victoria down towards Cobb Island.

RC: I don't know whether they were brothers or not you see.

JW: Could have been in that generation.

RC: I don't know how that—I just knew that Vernon was a cousin. I just knew that Vernon was a cousin but I never knew any more about him than that.

JW: Was your father a fastidious dresser? In this one photo I'm looking at here he looks like a very good looking man and very dapper and fashionable. Do you recall?

RC: Well he was short. He was on the short side. I think he always dressed very well. I seem to remember he wore a lot of grey. He had his suits made by—I think it's still in business or not it's here in Washington. It was called I think Wilners.

JW: I've bought from them myself.

RC: Have you?

JW: Yes.

RC: Well I think I seem to remember—

JW: W-I-L-N-E-R-S.

RC: I think that that was the store that he used. So you know I don't remember. Of course in his work he always had on a tie and jacket and everything. I guess I never thought of him in other dress.

JW: Did he entertain much at the house business associates, law office peers?

RC: No not too much. I think that's probably because it was my grandmother and not his wife you see. He would bring people home with him occasionally. But now a lot of the family would come. They were always dropping in. Yeah that was—they were great on dropping in. Just as you dropped in on them.

JW: These are the Cooksey side?

RC: The Cooksey's yeah. They would stop by. They went to the Christ Church there on Sundays and quite often they'd come by after church.

JW: That was a hop skip and a jump.

RC: Yeah. So they would stop by after church. Sometimes my father went to church with me. Sometimes he went at the Christ Church. He had a very dear friend who was a Jesuit priest a Father Tom Ward. I don't know whether he had known him at Georgetown or whether he knew him. He was the pastor of the church at Pomfret.

JW: Oh St. Joseph's.

RC: So I don't know how that relationship came about but they seemed to enjoy each other's company very much. They were very, very close friends.

JW: What did the young people do for library services when you were getting into your teens let's say 12 on?

RC: I seem to think that on the courthouse grounds there was a small building and there was a library there.

JW: Second floor? First floor?

RC: I'm not sure.

JW: Brick building?

RC: Yes it was brick, small brick, and I don't know—

JW: Just in the courthouse yard practically?

RC: Yeah.

JW: Okay this was the jail.

RC: No the jail was on the other side.

JW: Oh there was a different.

RC: Jail was on the other side and this was—

JW: Oh wait a minute there were two jails Rita.

RC: Oh okay two jails.

JW: The library was in the very first jail when they no longer used it as a jail.

RC: Okay.

JW: And you're right down at the other end was the more modern completed the year you were born building.

RC: Okay because I went to the jail a time or two. When my father would go he'd take me with him. I got to trot along to a lot of things. I don't think I ever used the library because there again my father would have my aunts buy me books. He was great on books. Books were one of his big things. Poetry he liked and so when they came they would bring books.

JW: Were any of your father's brothers of the intellectual mode as your father evidently was? Was he a bit unique?

RC: Well in looking back on it I think my father was highly intelligent. At the time I don't guess and for a long time I'm not so sure I thought he was that. I think he was a man of he had tremendous foresight. You know how there're some people who just can look into the future and kind of put it together. So I think he had a lot of foresight. But I think this Uncle Deli as we called him I think Uncle Deli was probably very, very bright too.

JW: And what did he do in life?

RC: He was a farmer but I seem to think that he was—

JW: And who was their mother? What was your father's mother's maiden name?

RC: Cash.

JW: Cash? Now that's an unusual local name.

RC: And I know nothing about my grandparents on that side. It's too bad because I'm sure that the only thing I remember hearing about that grandmother was that my grandmother Jones thought she was a lovely lady.

JW: That in itself is revealing.

RC: Yeah so I mean that's the only thing I've ever heard about it. My father's middle name is Cash.

JW: That's right. When did you get your first own radio?

RC: I doubt that I was too young. We shared all those things when they first came out. I remember—I do remember the old Crystal sets. My aunts had one of those but we only had one.

JW: How about record players? Victrola?

RC: We had a Victrola. There again it was a family thing. I don't know I'm not sure that the people that I knew and grew up with I'm not sure that the children had their individual things like they did today.

JW: Okay I was wondering. Again this is worth making a record of.

RC: I mean we had those things. My aunts particularly two of them were great music lovers. Course I took piano lessons from I don't age eight to 14 or something like that. They bought all of the good records and played them on this you Victrola. The kind with the little dog.

JW: Right this was the crank up. His master's voice RCA.

RC: That's right yeah.

JW: What were some of the cultural opportunities available in La Plata let's say from 1925 to 1940?

RC: You know I don't think there were any. I think that's probably why when I left La Plata I didn't course at 12 do you have regrets when you're going to move to the city. There was no unknown for me because I was going to what I knew. It wasn't as so—I mean I had been in that home so much so it wasn't new. But I don't think there was—now they had the fair. They always had the county fair.

JW: Where was it then?

RC: Down past La Plata somewhere.

JW: South of town? Outside town?

RC: Yeah and they had the tobacco festival and the tobacco queen. Of course this Uncle Fairfax his wife was great on growing flowers and she loved the fair because I think she had prized dahlias or something. So they took great—that was a great interest for them. Then of course in the summer they had the picnics. Then the Sacred Heart Church had a strawberry festival every summer. I think it was in June. But so far as—well maybe I just never took part in them but.

JW: No symphonies visited town for example?

RC: No that's what I was saying when you mentioned it.

JW: Or professional musicians?

RC: When you mentioned the town hall. I don't remember that you know I said what went on in the town hall and I can't come up with anything. There must have been something. Maybe there were plays that they felt I wasn't up to see.

JW: There were dances there but these dances were I think not for children. These were for adults.

RC: Well now see like at Chapel Point—

JW: Probably unchaperoned.

RC: Yeah and see like Chapel Point now you could go to that but so far as anything like. And maybe some of the women had book reviews. The men used to get together to play poker. That was like Saturday night maybe they played poker. But I really cannot think of anything that—

JW: Nothing special provided for the diversion of young people?

RC: I don't even—I never took part in sports so I wouldn't know but I don't remember that they had the various teams competing against each other. I think there was a baseball team.

JW: There was [inaudible] and Sydney Mudd was on it.

RC: But as I say I really so far as I don't remember doing things like that. But now there again I have to point out that—

[End of Tape]