INTERVIEW III

Nicholas Stallworth McGowin
Chapman, Alabama
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Elwood R. Maunder: Nick, could you please describe this pocket watch which belonged to your father?

Nicholas Stallworth McGowin: It is a gold Waltham watch with his monogram, J.G.McG.,on the back. My father wore it with a large, heavy gold chain. Hanging from the chain was a Masonic fob that he always carried. I don't know what happened to the chain, but after his death my mother gave me the watch. It was given to him by the family of his older brother Alex who owned 25 percent of the W. T. Smith Lumber Company. Two years after its acquisition by the McGowins, Alex died, leaving a widow with four daughters. My father was somewhat of a foster father and de facto guardian to those five women for the rest of his life.

His sister-in-law was Emma Rankin from Brewton. Her family were Catholic converts, very devout Catholics. She was a remarkable woman, a very strong woman. Her investment policy over the years was to put the income after living expenses of hers and her daughters' Smith Lumber Company stock in State of Alabama bonds, federal bonds, and the obligations of my father and his other older brother, Joe [Joseph F.] McGowin. While the state bonds may have got down to fifty-five or sixty cents on the dollar, during the Depression, she never lost any sleep over any of those obligations. She and all her daughters were in very secure financial shape throughout the Depression. She wore black for the rest of her life after my uncle's death. She acted as guardian and she meticulously accounted for all the funds of her daughters until the end of her life.

Her lawyer, a cousin of hers, was Thomas M. Stevens who was a contemporary and great friend of my father.

He became one of the leading lawyers in Mobile and he represented my father; matter of fact, he handled his estate, although at that time he had taken over a general counselship of Waterman Steamship Corporation. Many years later, in fact just a few years ago, a young man in Mr. Stevens's old firm brought down to me some files. On examination of these I found they were the guardianship annual accounting of my aunt for these daughters. And Mr. Stevens's firm prepared the account. Of course, she didn't have to account formally, but that's the way she did business. It was a wonderful record of how she handled it. Incidentally, I delivered these to one of my aunt's grandchildren who lived on the West Coast to take back to his family. Later I asked him what had happened to them. He said that his mother and his aunt took one look and said they would bring back a lot of memories for them and they burned them up.

ERM: That's unfortunately true of an unusual amount of good family papers. People just don't want to be reminded, or they don't want to be burdened with carrying them on.

NSM: My father moved away from Brewton in 1903. We had our connections with the Bank of Brewton, the local bank, and I suppose for the rest of his life, he was a director of that bank. I remember when I was a little boy, getting on Number Five, the local train that ran from Montgomery down to Mobile and beyond. We'd get on at Chapman, about eight thirty. Papa always knew the train crew and enjoyed passing the time of day with them. We'd make the local stops--Evergreen, Castleberry, and so forth--and we'd get to Brewton about ten o'clock. He would take me across the square to my aunt's house, a big Victorian, white frame house, with Norman turrets at the corners, which she and all the family were proud of. It was built by my uncle not too long before he died. He would leave me there and go to the bank meeting and he would come back to my aunt's house for lunch and then we'd take Number Six back to Chapman in the afternoon.

ERM: What sources of finance did your father and his brothers have in launching their various business enterprises?

NSM: I would say the principal source of credit was always

the Merchants National Bank in Mobile. I don't know just when that relationship began, but my father was a great friend of Mr. Ernest Ladd, who was the president from my earliest recollection. Ernest, Jr. and I were classmates and fraternity brothers at the University of Alabama and he is now chairman of the board. Mr. Stevens, whom I mentioned before, was counsel for the bank. Incidentally, at the time of my father's death he was still paying notes to my Uncle Joe McGowin from whom he bought 20 percent of the stock in the company in about 1926. I think the purpose of that was to have enough stock to justify bringing my three brothers into the company.

ERM: What was the spread of ownership in the W. T. Smith Lumber Company? You mentioned the fact that Alex McGowin owned about 25 percent, is that right?

NSM: Yes. Joe started out owning 25 percent. My Aunt Jessie's husband, William E. Foshee from Brewton, was the son of [S. J.] Foshee who, I think, first acquired the company. Incidentally, he was my father's first cousin. Foshee and my father started out owning sixteen and a fraction percent of the company each, and the rest of the stock was owned by two cousins, John C. McGowin who was a first cousin, and Willis M. McGowin, who was a more distant cousin. Both came to Chapman as part of management. That ownership remained except for the purchase of the remaining 5 percent of my Uncle Joe's stock by the Will McGowins in the middle 1930s and, of course, the other 20 percent of that stock which had been acquired in 1926 by my father and through him, my brothers. A fraction of the John McGowin stock was bought by my brother Julian and my mother. Otherwise the ownership of the stock remained the same. At the time the company was sold it was all in the hands of descendants of of these owners.

ERM: By that time, I suppose, because of demise of earlier stockholders, the stock had been more widely spread among different individuals, although it was still within the family.

NSM: Yes,except for shares here and there for a director to qualify as a stockholder, too, I was a blood relative of every stockholder at the time of the sale in 1966. By that time some of the stock was

in trust, in estates, and so forth. But the stock roll at the time of the end of the company wouldn't have had more than sixty or seventy stockholders on it.

ERM: This departs from the central theme of what we are talking about, but would you clarify a little the whole matter of the sale of the property?

NSM: I think this is the kind of thing that you're not going to get the same version of from any two people. I'll as succinctly as possible give you my version. In the early 1950s we dissolved the Ray Sawmill Company which was a corporation acquired in the early twenties by my Uncle Joe and my father one-third each, Mr. Stevens, the lawyer, two-ninths, and the odd one-ninth was owned by W. T. Smith Lumber Company. We found that we could dissolve it, divide and distribute the underlying assets under what later became Section 333 of the Internal Revenue Code, the effect of that section being, except for accumulated and undistributed earnings, that there would be no immediate tax consequences to the stockholders from such a corporate dissolution and distribution, assuming compliance with certain technical requirements of the Code. In that case there were no accumulated, undistributed earnings and there were a comparatively small number of stockholders.

My uncle's stock was owned by his three children who were then still living; I guess one of them had died but his widow got all of his interest. The interest in my family was in six hands, including my mother. The Stevens estate was in trust,which was administered by the Merchants National Bank (two-ninths) and the odd ninth was held by the W. T. Smith Lumber Company. That company then had twenty-six thousand acres of land which was distributed pro rata among those stockholders by what's known as partition, in nine parcels, and it worked very well.

So this same idea was considered, starting in the middle fifties, with respect to Smith Lumber Company, the idea being that the 220-odd thousand acres of land could practically be partitioned among that many stockholders with the result that the stockholders would own separate parcels of the tract and could sell the stumpage off of it at a capital gains rate that would be much more advantageous to them in the long run than having

the corporation take the capital gains rate on timber severance, and pay ordinary income tax on operating profits with the stockholders paying ordinary income tax on the dividends. There was a lot of work on that idea over a period of years. We tried to work out a contract with St. Regis Paper Company under which the conversion operation could be continued and they would take the pulpwood product of the tract on a long-term basis. Finally, St. Regis broke off those negotiations.

ERM: Who were you negotiating with in St. Regis at the time?

NSM: Mr. [William R.] Adams was the president of the company then. I think Mr. [Roy K.] Ferguson, who had been chairman, was retired, but most of our negotiations were done with their regional attorney, McHenry Jones in Pensacola, who incidentally, I'm in touch with now. He's still counsel for St. Regis and has a private practice. I don't remember the other individuals.

ERM: What caused the breakdown of the negotiations with St. Regis, do you remember?

NSM: Well, the technical problems made a solution difficult. It would take me all day to go into all that, but it wasn't a question of bad faith or anything like that. At some point I personally reached the conclusion that the idea that partition among this group was practical was not really the case. I think it was an extremely difficult thing to work out. What we had worked toward was a predetermined partition so that everybody knew in advance exactly what he was getting, not a matter of division by allotment, so to speak.

ERM: Each one would know the particular acreage he would get.

NSM: Other lawyers who worked on it began to say that there were all sorts of bugs that would have made it extremely difficult to do. The mill was really the sticking point because no stockholder group in the company could take over the mill and operate it as a corporation for a number of years after this without violating the technical requirements of the Internal Revenue Code,compliance with which was necessary for the desired tax result.

This meant that we had to make some other arrangement about that. My brother Julian was a strong proponent of dissolution and his theory was that even if we had to junk the mill, we'd still be better off.

There was another side of the coin, in my opinion, and I never changed it, insofar as tax consequences and tax benefits to the stockholders were concerned. For estate tax valuation purposes, the stock had been valued for many years prior to this in the neighborhood of $50 a share. That was true of my mother's stock and she owned some 5 or 6 percent of the company at the time of her death in 1961, while this matter was still under consideration. When the company was liquidated five years after her death, it liquidated out at around $440 a share. In other words, if that had been true at her death, we'd have ended up with much of the underlying value having to be sacrificed to pay the tax.

To me the estate and gift tax advantages to a considerable extent offset the advantages of direct ownership of the underlying land because the immediate cost of the dissolution would have been, roughly speaking, a sacrifice of all the quick assets, all of the liquid assets, all of the plant, and so forth, all the conversion facilities of the company because that would have represented the accumulated undistributed profits and the payment of that tax would have eaten up all those assets.

My own conclusion was (this is my viewpoint you're hearing and you understand there are other arguments and other objections) that here we'd worked for sixty years to build up the productivity of the land, and we had acquired more land. We had, during this period, particularly in my generation's stewardship of the land, increased the tract from 140,000 acres to 222,000 acres. Every year my brother Floyd, presiding at stockholders' meetings,would say, "You have more stumpage now than you had last year at this time." And the stockholders realized throughout the period of the thirties, forties, and fifties that they could have more dividends, but they were building for the future. My own theory was that having done so, having built the thing up to a fine state of productivity, with the company completely debt-free, it didn't make any sense to sacrifice everything but the underlying land for the sake of income tax savings. I still think that.

I think continued ownership, after we took a look down the road, would never have been the same because I think at that point a lot of the stockholders were no longer content to go on getting dividends of 1 or 2 percent of the underlying value. As an illustration of that, back in the fifties, my brother Floyd was out on the West Coast talking to one of my Uncle Alex's daughters, who probably owned at that time 6 percent of the company. She asked him what her share of the underlying values of the company would be and I think he told her, "Maybe a million dollars." She said, "Floyd, now tell me how I can afford to buy a new car." That, looking back on it, may have been the handwriting on the wall. For this lady, the time had come when she was ready to eat; she didn't want to keep on with this building process. And that's understandable. In my own case I'd have been willing to get a relatively small income from this property because of the security it represented and the estate and gift tax advantages which made continued family ownership possible. Mr. Ed Leigh McMillan always strongly espoused that position. He said that these family-owned, closely-held sawmill companies had unparalleled tax advantages.

Back to our sale, after it was made some of the T. R. Miller Mill Company stockholders negotiated sales of their stock with Container Corporation which was looking to the Miller Company for its pulpwood supply, on roughly an underlying value basis. From then on the estate and gift tax advantages would certainly have been substantially reduced because the tax authorities would look through the book value--yield and profits and so forth--to the underlying values.

When the St. Regis negotiations were broken off, we looked around for other alternatives. Merger was discussed with American Can, Standard Oil of New Jersey, now Exxon, which at one time was considering getting into the wood products business, and others. Exxon told us then that it would take them several months to evaluate the thing. They were looking at other property in Louisiana, the management of which we were close to and with whom we'd worked on the St. Regis negotiations. What finally happened was that for antitrust and other reasons, they decided to take another tack, and these negotiations were broken off. We had extended

negotiations with American Can and we were lucky enough not to go with them. The merger proposition they offered would not have been advantageous because their stock is now worth substantially less than ours was then. The best that we might have taken was one with Weyerhaeuser, but they offered stock which in terms of market value was less than we could have gotten in cash for the company at that time, in the early sixties. But George Weyerhaeuser, now chairman of the company, with whom we discussed it, pointed out to us that "if you merge with us on the basis we're talking about, you'll own more stumpage per share than you own now." And if we'd had nerve enough and taken it, which we could never have persuaded the stockholders to do, it would have been a great deal for us because that stock is worth several times as much now as it was then. But that's hindsight. George later said to Earl, "I wish we had talked more."

Anyway after all those negotiations, there was so much opposition to continuation of the existing corporation that when the Union Camp negotiations came along we made the sale.

ERM: I presume there must have been a feeling of reluctance on the part of some of you because of the implications all this had for the community of Chapman and the people in it.

NSM: There was. I think that if the management had been willing to step up the cut and promise the stockholders a dividend based on a cut, say two-thirds of the growth a year or even 80 percent of the growth a year for twenty years no matter what, we might have had some chance of keeping it. But I think by that time intracompany relationships were such that it might not have worked. It's ironic to me that one of the arguments was, "Well, what are we going to do for management in the future?" Now, you have my nephew Greeley who's discharging much greater responsibility with great success; he's very highly regarded as a businessman, not only by Union Camp, the company he's with, but by everybody who comes in contact with him. His brother Floyd, who was working in logging and timber management of Smith Lumber Company, now has the contract to supply logs to Union Camp at

Chapman. In other words, he logs the tract now. But anyway that's water over the dam.

ERM: This whole matter came under review in the fifties and into the sixties at a time when the forest products industry was really beginning to have a new surge, wasn't it? With a little modernization of your facilities you could probably have cashed in on a good deal of this,what with the market for chips and per capita use of paper and all kraft products. It was also the time in which plywood was beginning to be recognized as a possible product of southern pine.

NSM: I think that this company represented something to the ownership that would have made it very difficult to do that. I think that an investment of $5 or $10 million in plywood and other facilities would have been regarded by them as necessitating debt, possibly compromising their underlying security. I don't think that any management would ever have been able to sell that to the stockholders. My brother Julian felt very strongly and correctly that although the price we got from Union Camp represented a then high current value, that value was going to keep on going up. And of course, he was right about that. It's multiplied two or three times over in the ten years since they bought it. Those of us in the family who put a lot of the money back into timberland have seen that investment do much better than the investment that most of us made in stocks and bonds. I did pretty well. I was lucky enough to put a good bit of mine back into land. Not as much as Julian. Julian worked out an arrangement with Union Camp in which he, in effect, bought back roughly his acreage in W. T. Smith Lumber Company land and, of course, he did very well with it.

ERM: Let's go back now to the main theme of this series of interviews which is your recollections of your father J. G. McGowin.

NSM: Suppose I start with my recollections of my father's physical characteristics. He was about five feet seven and one-half or eight. He used to say jokingly that, like his father, he grew his sons bigger than he was. I can say the same thing and I guess my brothers can too. His hair was thin and straight, but he kept it all of his life. Later in life, like many men of his time, he developed what we'd call a pot belly. He was always rather thin

and wiry in his appearance. He never took any exercise except walking and he did a lot of walking.

In his dress he was conservative. Most of his suits were solid color. He had them made by a tailor in Montgomery named Miller. I remember hearing at one point that he paid a hundred dollars a suit which at that time was pretty high. His shirts all had detached collars and it seems to me that in the winter he wore stiff white collars. He always wore cufflinks. He usually had a handkerchief in his coat pocket, often with a little scent in it. In the summer he wore a stiff straw hat.

In my earliest recollections of my father we were living in Chapman. He used to get up between five and five thirty. He had a percolator in his bedroom in which he made his first cup of coffee of the day while he dressed. His dressing for the day included a bath and I think I'm right in saying it was in a cold tub of water. At six o'clock every morning he was on the floor of one of the mills and he spent about an hour making the rounds of the operation, and he was back home,which was within easy walking distance of the whole operation, by seven o'clock for breakfast. He would be back at the office for the day about eight o'clock. His main meal of the day, the main meal of all of us in those days, was lunch which was at twelve o'clock. After lunch, he always took a nap. He schooled himself to do that. He'd take off his shoes, coat, and collar and tie, and lie down on a daybed in his bedroom. He slept, as we all did in those days, on screened porches the year round, on feather beds. He took this nap on the daybed and we could hear him snoring. He never had to be called. He'd sleep about twenty minutes, get up and a few minutes after one, he'd be on his way back to the office where he stayed until five. The idea of exercise to him was walking; and I suppose when he came home in the evening, particularly in the summer, he'd walk around the place, and drive out to what we then called the farm,where the family home was built in 1926, to oversee what was going on there.

ERM: This farm background gave him a very strong passion for the land.

NSM: That's true. And farming continued to be his hobby. He'd say that plowing was a good way to do your thinking, watching the furrow made by the plow or

something. He always regretted the fact that none of us ever plowed. His lifestyle was similar to that of his older brother Joe in Mobile to whom he was closer, I suppose, than to any other member of the family. I think it's worth noting here that he maintained a closeness to the other branches of the family, his brothers' and sisters' families, that other members of his generation did not maintain. As I said, he had a special relationship with my Uncle Alex's widow and her children. That relationship was much closer than that of the other members of the family to them, although they were all on good terms. My Uncle Joe had a place which he called Spring Lake some twenty miles west of Mobile of which his family still own some thousand acres, but they've sold the homesites. I remember being taken by my father to Mobile and frequently, instead of staying at my uncle's house in town, we would all go out and spend the night at Spring Lake.

My uncle had deer kept in a pasture of several hundred acres and not long after that, my father had the same setup here. We had deer back of the house in Chapman and other deer in a big fenced area of what we now call Edgefield. In due course, the deer escaped and I think their descendents are still roaming the woods around here. Keeping pheasants, peacocks, swans on the lake, horses to ride, fruit trees, was something that both my father and my Uncle Joe were interested in. But the idea of golf and tennis, just taking exercise for exercise's sake, I can't imagine either one of them ever doing that. You suggest that my father was interested in something productive rather than purely recreational, such as a sport would be. That may well be true, I never thought of it in that particular way. What you're saying is that farming was productive.

That reminds me of something and that is his relationship with the people who lived on the farm in addition to the employees at the mill. Certainly his attitude was paternalistic. He had quite a knack for personal relationships. He had an interest in people, a real concern for them. He knew them, knew their families and kept up with their problems. He was solicitous of them. I remember that one of the ladies who worked in the Stevens law office down in Mobile told me years later that when he came into that office--which he would have done only

infrequently--he always knew not only her name but the names of all the other secretaries and the others working in the office and had a special word of inquiry about them and their families. Families in a broader sense meant a great deal more to him, and to probably all of that generation, than they do to the present generation. He wanted to know who people were; he did know who they were, of course, in that age, whether they were in Mobile or Chapman, particularly the families who stemmed from the Brewton area. He knew and he placed them and that was important to him, certainly where marriage was concerned. I suppose you'd say he was snobbish, but he wanted to know what kind of family the person who was marrying into our family came from. If they didn't come from one of the families he thought was good, he wouldn't like it. He would always say to the girls in our family, "Marry a good provider."

ERM: This was a time in our history when community life and family life had much stronger roots than they do today. We've gone through quite a transition in the last thirty years to a more transient, rootless society in which community and family and certain other institutions have become weaker than in the past. As you look back over the time of your upbringing as a young man and your life within the McGowin family, what do you see as having been the forces or events that were moving toward the breakdown of that structure?

NSM: In the era of which we're speaking, which ended January 1, 1934, with my father's death, I don't recall being conscious of any forces like the breakdown of the role of the family in society, which is what you're suggesting.

ERM: Were conditions of family life still solidly established up to that period of your youth?

NSM: I think they were.

ERM: Did you see the rapid development of new technology as having any impact on this?

NSM: I didn't foresee it at that time, certainly.

ERM: I think it did work toward undermining family roots.

NSM: I think more than anything else what broke it down was the welfare state. In those days if you had a sick aunt there wasn't anyplace to put her except the home. If that meant personal inconvenience and sacrifice to the other members of the family, well, that's just the way it was. Of course, that's no longer true. People simply have been relieved personally of that kind of responsibility with the result that the necessity of family solidarity and strength no longer exists.

ERM: What impacts did World War II have on all this? Do you recognize any?

NSM: I think the general mobility of population was one thing. A good many of the Chapman people moved to Mobile and, of course, I see them from time to time. I represent some of them and I always stop and talk to them, and they all seem to me to look back on the life in Chapman as a happy one. I think that as a childhood, it was absolutely unmatched. I cannot conceive of a happier circumstance to have come up in. For one thing, the surroundings were beautiful. Just across the railroad from Chapman was a beautiful swamp, with great hardwood trees. Across the pasture from the school and the church in Chapman was one of the last stands of virgin longleaf pine, a flat area without underbrush; it was cathedral-like in its beauty. That plus the freedom and the tight community life. Of course, segregation was a way of life but within that framework everybody knew everybody else because you saw them everyday. It was quite simply accepted that everybody knew their place, if you want to put it that way, and by and large, stayed in it. Rightly or wrongly, it made for stability and it made for a freedom of communication that has simply been lost. Maybe I see it through a sentimental or romantic haze over a span of forty years, but I still think that the life of a child in a suburban community which my children have had can't touch the sawmill community life we had.

ERM: What do you remember most fondly of your boyhood and particularly how you and your father related to each other during that time?

NSM: I think my relationship with my father was not unusually close nor one of unusual congeniality. Of course, we always respected, loved, and really

venerated him. While my mother's contribution to the family life was immense, I always had the feeling that he was the one who made it all possible. He was the good provider and that was one of his favorite terms. He gauged his brothers-in-law and others by whether they were good providers and he didn't think much of a man who wasn't. He made the household possible and it was the family life of our household that was, to me, such a great memory. We were always congenial.

My mother's sister Stella, who was the postmistress at that time, lived with us as part of the family. She's the one who would read to us and she taught our kindergarten and our Sunday school classes,and she really made quite a contribution to us as far as a taste for reading and so forth. My mother was very interested in music. She was a wonderful lady, full of warmth. She used to take us to Montgomery to hear Galli-Curci or Paderewski or to see Pavlova dance, which not many women would have taken the trouble to do, but she loved it and now that's part of our lives.

To get back to your question. My father was not particularly interested in those things, but certainly he liked the idea of our having them. As Earl was saying last night, he was an extremely well-informed man. He never read a novel, never read a biography, very seldom saw a movie, never saw a football game, but he liked live theatre. He enjoyed going to New York and seeing Broadway plays from time to time. His sources of information really were from the daily papers and the Literary Digest and his business contacts.

ERM: He was a regular reader of the New York Times, I was told.

NSM: We used to get the New York Times at noon the second day. Mail service being what it is today, unless you pay a premium for an air edition, you get it three or four days later. And all of us came up reading it regularly. I don't know just how much he read it, but certainly he kept up with what was in it. My point here is that his lack of interest in a lot of things may have limited our area of congeniality. Of course, he was completely uninterested in sports, which we all followed, as most people did in that time; it was really the beginning of a

great interest in sports in this country. That just meant that there was that much less left for us to talk to him about. But it didn't, certainly, keep us from respecting him. It didn't make for any constraints in the household, or in the amount of communication.

ERM: How did he seek to share with you boys his great love of farming and of gardening and of animal husbandry?

NSM: I don't know that he did. It was simply there. We saw him enjoy it and we shared it. I remember going hunting with him, although it was never a particular interest of mine. Mr. Lyons,who was the head of McGowin-Lyons Hardware Company, which my Uncle Joe, my father, and Mr. Lyons formed in Mobile when they bought out a bankrupt hardware stock in 1913, was a great friend of his. The Lyonses had come from Escambia County and I'm sure their families had known each other in the nineteenth century. He gave me a .410 shotgun when I was a boy and that's the only gun I've ever owned. I never shot it many times.

ERM: In other words, your father never sought to impose upon any of you his own particular interests in the land or in the business.

NSM: Oh, I don't think he had to. I think it was a way of life for us. I think we wouldn't have had the life we did except for the company and for the business. Of course, my brothers early on were taken into the business and certainly they never looked back. It wouldn't have mattered. In my opinion, they couldn't have had a happier, more rewarding life any other way, because it opened up the kind of life which they were suited for. The friends they made were basically through their business and college.

ERM: How did it happen that the bent of your life went in other directions? You're the one brother who did not follow the business.

NSM: Well, I always felt that there wasn't room for another one in the company, and I don't think there was. I think it would have been a mistake for me to do that. We always recognized the fact that it

was remarkable that the three of them performed as congenially as they did as a team because as you know they ran the company for a long period. Certainly, they were all strong individuals. I'm sure they all wanted to be recognized as making a substantial contribution. I think they all were recognized, each in his own way, as making a very strong contribution to this business, to the industry, and to the business community of the state. I think their activities and offices in trade associations bear that out.

I need to get back to the question. I don't know, I just happened to decide to be a lawyer and I've enjoyed my work. I was never too much involved in the company's affairs until the last eight or ten years of our ownership.

ERM: How did your family's religious background and you're father's strong association with the Universalist Church have its impact on you as children growing up?

NSM: I think that had relatively little impact on all of us. We had a Sunday school to which we all went every Sunday morning. My mother and aunt used to teach classes there. We had a community church at Chapman. The Universalists had a pastor from Brewton who came up one weekend a month and he always stayed with us at our house. He conducted services Sunday morning and Sunday evening and would go back to Brewton on Monday. The Millers in Brewton, my family, and the Foshees were the principal supporters of the Universalist Church in Brewton, the pastor serving Chapman one weekend a month. My father and my mother were active in the state church organization. The impact on my generation, in particular, was really slight. There was a man named Lyman Ward who came down from New England and started what was then known as a boys' industrial school at Camp Hill, Tallapoosa County, Alabama. He and his wife were Universalists although the school was nondenominational. My family knew the Wards and I'm sure my father supported him. It finally evolved into a small military school and I am now chairman of the board. It's a fine school and one of the two remaining boarding military schools in the state.

ERM: How would you evaluate your father's interest in education, both for you and for the children of the community here in Chapman? It seems to me that

he had quite pronounced ideas.

NSM: You've already been told about his own children, and speaking for myself, he wanted us all to get not only an education, but he wanted us to get what he considered the best education. He certainly saw to it that Chapman always had the best school possible. In those days the teachers did not usually live close by, and had to stay in local homes. One of them was a cousin of my mother, and I remember when she taught here. I guess she's the only one who lived with us as part of our household for the school year. My father had misgivings about the influence of educators; he felt that education of the type that was evolving in this country was not an unmixed blessing. He had misgivings which I'm sure the events of the sixties, particularly, would in his mind have been borne out if he'd lived to see them.

ERM: Is that why he urged you all to take your higher education in part, at least, abroad?

NSM: I don't think that had anything to do with it. I think that while he supported education, probably the ideas of many educators even at that time were too liberal for his tastes. Maybe he thought they didn't stress the home virtues as much as they should. I'm just guessing; I really don't have any very definite ideas about that.

ERM: Can you recall any stories or anecdotes that might be helpful in revealing the character of your father concerning his relations with the people who worked for him here in the mill and on the farm?

NSM: As I say, he was authoritarian and how much that was a matter of his character and individuality and how much it was a part of the mores of the times, I don't know. But certainly he was the boss. Whatever the source of his authority, I don't remember its ever being questioned, certainly not by any of us, and I don't remember its ever being questioned by any of his employees or the people in the community. He called the turn. By and large, he probably ran things to suit most of the people. I don't think they would have resented the fact that he had that authority. He could be stern at times. I told you the story last night about his catching the hunter.

Well, this was a long time ago. Earl said he doesn't

ever remember hearing that story and actually, I don't remember telling it to anybody else. I have a recollection of being nine or ten years old and being out hunting with my father one afternoon when we lived in Chapman; we were just taking the dogs probably a mile or two away. We came across a white man who worked for the mill hunting in an area where no one was supposed to hunt and my father talked to him about it. After a brief discussion, my recollection is that he took the man's gun and simply broke the stock of the gun. I don't think you ought to let that play too much of a part in your picture of him because I think it could be misleading. He wasn't given to that kind of summary, rough justice.

ERM: In other words, that was not typical.

NSM: No, and this is only conjecture on my part, but I think his feeling must have been that this was a man who ought to have known better. He probably had some position of responsibility in the mill hierarchy and he thought, "Well, we can't have this, now." And I think his idea was that this was the end of the matter and I'm sure it was.

I think when you describe a relationship as one of paternalism, you ought to look at both sides of the coin, because with that paternalism is responsibility and very sincere concern for the welfare of these people. I think that when the Depression came along and there was the decision of what to do, concern for the welfare of those people certainly dictated that he continue the operations. He must have realized that once you shut a plant like that down, it's not easy to start it up all over again. Certainly the company lost money for some years of the Depression and while wages were low, undoubtedly, in my mind, everybody concerned was much better off for their jobs being continued at low wages than to have been lost. It would really have been catastrophic for most people if they had been lost. As far as the farm families were concerned, those who were tenants on our home property, most of the men, as heads of those households, worked at the mill, and their families were part of his concern, too. At Christmastime my mother used to deliver baskets to each one of their houses. It was just a token, but I think it was an expression of her and my father's concern for their welfare.

ERM: This was a company town, wasn't it?

NSM: That's right.

ERM: Could you describe how the matter of justice was meted out in a company town like Chapman? To what extent was your father responsible for it? How did he deal with infractions on the part of the people of the local community?

NSM: Well, as Earl explained last night, he had the town incorporated and he more or less nominated the mayors who conducted Monday morning police courts. One of his motivations was that it was much more convenient than having the accused taken to Greenville twelve miles away with a couple of witnesses, which would disrupt operations at home. I'm sure the guilty parties were much better served by having the matter disposed of in Chapman at the company office rather than somewhere else. Other than that, I really don't known too much about it.

My father believed in work. From the time I was a little boy, in the summer I would have a job of some sort. I remember one summer I worked at the supply house. It was one of the most boring summers I ever spent, I can tell you, and while it certainly wasn't onerous, as I did have time to play tennis and some time off, the idea was that I had to work. That was the only really full-time contact I had with the operation of the company and I don't have any recollections from that experience of how he handled infractions of the rules. I think that it was all done on an ad hoc basis. As far as absenteeism from the job is concerned, I'm sure there were no published rules. I guess there were fixed rules of some kind but they were all verbal.

ERM: Your father had a great respect for the law, I gather.

NSM: Oh, yes. He didn't take the law into his own hands. And for that reason I think the incident with the man and gun was highly atypical really. Maybe that little police court of the company wasn't really any different from any other police court at the time. The same kind of justice was dispensed there. He certainly had a great concern and, I'm sure, felt a direct concern for the order and security of the town. As I told you, I have a recollection of his

being called out at midnight one Saturday night to look into a shooting involving a black and a white. I don't remember the details of it. When he left the house, I had no doubt in my mind that he could cope with the situation and undoubtedly he did.

ERM: Did he have the force of personality that would put a quietus on whatever was at hand?

NSM: I think the particular personality you were dealing with had a lot to do with it because people by and large knew they were going to get fair treatment. As far as the household was concerned--here again it may have been part of the times--we certainly all knew what the rules were. We stuck to them. I see this in terms of what family life has come to later. When mealtime came, you were in your place at the table. You didn't straggle in even five minutes late. If we were due back on a certain day, and we weren't going to be back by dark, he wanted to know where we were. It was all right if we stayed another day, but he wanted to know. He didn't want to sit down to supper or dinner wondering why we weren't back. That had a great effect on me and I've always insisted on that with my children, and I think I've gotten the message across to them. I I think that's a facet of family solidarity.

ERM: As a boy growing up himself, I'm told that he was assigned to particular chores, one of which is described as driving an ox team to Brewton to get supplies for a little store that was maintained on the farm. I presume like many other youngsters of his generation growing up in that kind of a situation, he had regular chores to perform as a member of the family.

NSM: I have practically no recollection of that life. I remember a few visits to his older brothers who stayed on the farm, that was my grandfather's home, but I really don't know too much about that.

ERM: The question I was getting around to had to do with your own boyhood. You mentioned you were given work to do during the summers. Did you have any regular chores to do?

NSM: No, I didn't have any. I don't remember doing yard work which was the typical household chore of that time. And we had stock; we used to kill hogs, as

the term was. My father took great pride in my mother's ability to make good sausage. Hogs were slaughtered in the first cool days of fall. We had a smokehouse on the place for home. It took an outside man to keep the yard, keep the vegetable garden, to look after the stock and flowers. Then we had a chauffeur who did double duty with the heavy inside work. He'd wait on the table and so forth. Then there was a cook and a maid. Those four were the staff of the household. I guess because we had that kind of a staff, I didn't have to mow the lawn or anything like that. But I can remember my playmates, some of my contemporaries, having something like that to do.

ERM: What deference did the people of the community show your father in his role?

NSM: There was a certain warmth in his relationship with all of them.

ERM: How did they address him?

NSM: Mister Greeley. Never anything but that. Of course, there were so many McGowins around that everyone of them had to be addressed by his first name. I think they had a lot of warmth and in many cases affection for him. I get that in talking to people--there are not many of them left who really remember him--and I don't think many of them disliked him. He had a lot of namesakes among the employees' families.

ERM: Were there any other outward manifestations of deference to him in his role in the community when he appeared at the mill or on the street?

NSM: I can't think of any. He was a man that you didn't displease. He was a lifelong cigar smoker and he smoked a lot of them, but he just detested cigarette smoking, particularly in young people and women. Cigarette smoking at that time wasn't as common among women as it is now. But I would say that young people and these women friends of the family would show him deference by not smoking in his presence because they knew he didn't like it.

ERM: Was your mother of a similar mind?

NSM: Well, she didn't smoke, but I think that's the kind of thing of which she would have been a little bit

more tolerant, more liberal. Certainly my brothers who smoked wouldn't think of it; I've never seen them smoke around him. I guess he knew they smoked, but they showed him the deference of not smoking in his presence. I may be wrong about that.

ERM: Of all of you in the family, who do you think of as being most like your father?

NSM: I don't know. I just don't have a good answer to that question. We lived in a different age. His life was spent in a situation almost unique. There were just so few of those. He spent the last thirty-odd years of his active life in an area where he was the boss.

ERM: I gather that he was generally, through his life, a man blessed with good health up until he had his appendicitis.

NSM: I don't remember too much about that, but I remember he used to go to a doctor called Thayer in Baltimore at Johns Hopkins. He went two or three times for checkups, but I don't recall his ever having any serious illness. Of course, you know, he died as a consequence of an operation for his ruptured appendix. I was in England when he died. My understanding was that he waited too late and then he had to do it. And he died a week or so later.

ERM: The records that I've looked through would indicate that he'd had an appendectomy some years prior to his death. Adhesions developed in the wake of that appendectomy, and it was to remove these by a second operation that led to his suffering an attack of pneumonia.

NSM: You may be right about that. I haven't discussed this with anybody else in the family for forty years. As I say, I wasn't here at the time.

ERM: What was your father's attitude towards public health? How did he deal with the health problems of Chapman?

NSM: There was a so-called town crew and, of course, there was a company doctor. I'm sure that he would have had the town crew take care of any situations that the doctor considered ought to be taken care of. Other than that, I don't have any recollection.

ERM: There was a doctor here all through the years you were growing up?

NSM: We had what was known as contract practice. He was paid by the company for his services, which consisted of giving such medical treatment as was needed by anybody in town. He lived right in the town and he was provided a home. The doctor that I remember, and I think probably he delivered my sister and me, was named Keener Tippins. His family came from Brewton. A lot of the people who were white-collar employees of the town came up to Chapman from Brewton. There were two doctors, brothers, named Tippins, who were here for a while.

ERM: Your mother had quite a great interest in travel that your father didn't share to the same extent. She enjoyed traveling throughout the world and made several trips or cruises.

NSM: The only trip that I can remember her making to Europe during his lifetime was in 1925 when she and my sister went over, right after Earl left Oxford.

ERM: As I recall, your mother kept rather interesting diaries of some of the years of her life. Olive Spann has taken the trouble to type this up. Your mother was also interested enough in writing to take a number of courses where she used her trips and her memories as material for course work. It's a very interesting record of some of the family history. Have you read any of that material?

NSM: Yes. She took that trip in 1925 and she and my sister and Earl traveled on the Continent and came back at the end of the summer. Then my sister married Keville Larson in 1931 and after that they went to London where my brother-in-law was employed by a Canadian paper company. In 1932 my mother went over and had a visit with them and went to the Continent with my sister for a short time then. My father died in January 1934 and as I recall, those were the only trips of any length that she ever made without him, although I'm sure she made some to New York to stay with my sister when she was up there. Maybe she'd made some before then to the West Coast, but she hadn't really done all that much traveling during his lifetime except

with him. She certainly liked to do it and I think as we were saying last night, with him it was a matter of responsibilities. His business came first and I don't think he would have wanted to be gone for more than a couple of weeks on anything but a business trip, certainly not much longer than that. Of course, in those days, a trip to Europe meant a month and a half or so, because it was five days both ways by ship.

ERM: He took the responsibilities of both the company operations and the community management pretty seriously so he couldn't be gone too long.

NSM: It was his primary responsibility in life. Of course, I don't know just how much value he put on his personal presence here for most of the time. I'm sure part of it was taste. I don't know that he would have particularly enjoyed a trip to Europe. Maybe he would have, but most of the travel he did was business except when we were young. He'd take us on a trip to show us the world, show us the big cities. But even most of those, in my recollection, had some business connection. He would see other people for business reasons.

ERM: He did have some involvement in outside organizations like the Southern Pine Association.

NSM: Of course, that was business related. I don't think he was ever head of it, but he was certainly an effective force. I recall other lumbermen, roughly of his vintage, telling me that if he got up to say something at one of those meetings, everybody listened because he didn't speak unless he had something to say, I guess.

One thing that I think is revealing, and this is just my own recollection, is that he felt strongly about politics. Of course, he was conservative and always voted Republican. He had a picture of Coolidge over his desk. I remember he had a picture of Harding in his office for a while. One of the things that he felt strongest about was the 1920s Ku Klu Klan. It has always riled me to hear people say, "Well, in those days everybody belonged to it." That's likely to be said in connection with the fact that Hugo L. Black, who was appointed an associate justice of the Supreme Court by [Franklin D.] Roosevelt, was shown in 1937 to have been a card-carrying member of the KKK.

Black took a trip to Europe right after his appointment--after a Pittsburgh newspaperman had done research and established the fact that he was a member of the Ku Klux Klan, which had not come out on the Senate floor when his confirmation was being considered. Some mention was made of his Klan association, but Senator [William E.] Borah, his friend across the aisle, got up and said there was no proof of that and he suggested that the Senate go ahead and vote for his confirmation, which was done. I like to compare that incident with the Profumo affair in England thirty years later, where they fired [John D.] Profumo not just because he had played around with this call girl, but because he'd lied about it on the floor of the House. Black didn't lie about it, but he certainly must have known what Borah was saying, also realizing that if he'd gotten up then and said, "Yes, I was a member of the Klan," he probably wouldn't have been confirmed. But the point is that with all the to-do about the Klan, people would say,"Everybody down there belonged to it." That's not so. My father recognized it for what it was, hated it, and he took great delight in expressing those sentiments to people he knew, or had reason to think for business or other reasons, were members of the Klan.

ERM: Did the Klan ever surface in the local community?

NSM: Certainly there was a Klan organization at Georgiana, three miles away, and one in Greenville. We used to think that a lot of business people in Greenville, who damned well should have known better, were members of the Greenville Ku Klux Klan. Probably the same in Georgiana, too, but I'm sure there was never any such organization in Chapman.

ERM: You say that your father always voted the Republican ticket.

NSM: There weren't any Republicans to vote for as far as local or state politics were concerned. But we never had a system where you couldn't vote in the local elections even if you weren't a member of the Democratic party.

ERM: To what extent did he take an active role in politics?

NSM: Never any. I'm sure he gave money to his favorite candidate. I do remember in the 1920s he was a good

friend of W. W. Brandon, who was governor then. He was the one who kept voting for Oscar Underwood in Madison Square Garden in the 1924 Democratic convention in New York. I remember not long after that, Governor Brandon and his legal adviser, and Judge Mayfield, were down from Montgomery for a weekend of fishing or something. We had a fish fry by the lake. My father called on Governor Brandon, who let us have what had then become a sort of byword "Alabama casts twenty-four votes for Underwood." But my father certainly never ran for any office. I don't think there was anything particularly significant about his views.

ERM: He never became in any way actively connected with anyone in the state legislature?

NSM: Well, of course, Earl went into the legislature during his lifetime. I'm sure that my father approved of that or Earl wouldn't have done it. Earl served in the legislature for twenty years, after that he served as the head of the state Department of Conservation and later the Alabama State Docks Department.

ERM: I found in the records of the family and in the company records a good deal of evidence that your father was a prolific letter writer. He was particularly good at his correspondence with you boys and Estelle; whenever his wife was away, he wrote frequently to her.*

NSM: I hadn't really thought of it for a long time, if I ever did. Maybe I just took it as a matter or course. As I think I mentioned earlier, certainly we were brought up to feel the importance of keeping in touch. I was with a navy air squadron in World War II as a ground officer. You certainly kept in touch with a plane in the air and you sweated it in, as we used to say, to be sure it got back all right. That's the same idea he had. We were responsible for each other and you couldn't discharge that responsibility unless you knew where the others were. I'm sure that affected me and I think it did my children. There's a much stronger sense of that with them than there is with some of their contemporaries. I want to know where they are, so that I can get in touch with them almost all the time.

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*For copies of letters written by J. G. McGowin to Essie Stallworth McGowin see Appendix B, pp. 113-18.

We had a lady living in our household when our children were small, which gave us freedom to travel that we otherwise wouldn't have had. Even when we went away to Europe, we were never gone more than three weeks at a time. I saw to it that those at home knew where they could reach us almost by the hour. I left telephone and hotel numbers and we still do that sort of thing. I'm sure that comes from him and it's all part of the protection which family solidarity affords.

ERM: He kept in touch with his brothers and their families, too?

NSM: Well, he kept in touch in a general way and was always concerned for their welfare, but how frequently, I just don't know. He knew how they were getting along. If they had any problems with their children, he knew all about these.

ERM: Were there any regular celebrations of the family that brought you all together?

NSM: No, I don't remember any real family reunions. We'd get together for weddings and funerals and that sort of thing. I don't know whether this has been mentioned or not and I don't know how significant it is as far as my father is concerned. It is illustrative of the close connection that the family has always maintained and it still maintains. My aunt's family lived in Brewton, but they haven't really lived there since she died just a few months before my father died. By that time her daughters had all married. The connection there was with the Miller family, a long family friendship going back over several generations. Back in the twenties, during the Christmas season, we used to have progressive dinners in both places. The Brewton people would come to Chapman--whole families, two or three generations--and the families in Chapman would put on the dinner and we'd have a course at each house. Then later sometime during the season we'd go back to Brewton for the same sort of thing. That really wasn't so much family as it was that particular connection.

Woody, it's fine to make money in oil; it's fine to make money from the kind of appreciation of land values we've all seen, but I'm proudest, as far as my family's record is concerned, that through good years and bad, they toughed it out in a very competitive area and came out on top. Only the best

stood the test of time.

All members of the family should put down, in whatever form of organization suited best, their own stories from the beginning as a rough document that would serve as a basis for anything more polished and smooth that they or others might want to make of it. With the tape recorders and typing and so forth, it's easy to do that and you can't put in too much. You can always take out. Every detail you put in has some chance of being of interest to future generations.

ERM: Well, it's like the research historians do. We throw out a big percentage of our notes. We never know what we're going to find, when a note we take is going to be just the thing we need.

NSM: To illustrate, a lot of chance meetings, chance acquaintanceships, can have a very significant effect in the fortunes of a family, the fortunes of an individual. In my business particularly, a law school friendship may mean handling a matter that goes on for several years. And I think when you look at what we've done for the last few hours here, you wonder about things. Who were my father's friends? What was his routine when he lived in such and such a place? How did he spend his time? How did he spend his leisure time? What were his interests? What did he read?

ERM: There are lots of details that need to be plugged in and added on.

NSM: Even if it runs to what would be two or three book lengths, you never know what part of it might have some significance.

ERM: Absolutely. Nick, I greatly appreciate your giving me this time. I know it was a time when you were very busy with family affairs.

NSM: I was happy to do it.