

DR. J. G. LESTER

JAMES MACKAY: [Begins mid-sentence] . . . J. G. Lester, who's going to give you his recollections of his coming to DeKalb County and what's happened since. [To Dr. Lester] You just sit there, if you want to.

J. G. LESTER: Well, right after World War I—

MR. MACKAY to audience: Y'all might want to come closer.

DR. LESTER: --I'll tell you right now, my voice is not as loud as [inaudible]. [Background noise of audience interferes with Dr. Lester's opening remarks.] . . . University here in DeKalb County. The chairman of the Engineering Department, Professor Peebles called me at my home, which was in Covington, just about a mile and a half away from Emory [at Oxford] campus, and said, "Jim, come over and help me pack up. Got to go to Atlanta." So I went over to help him pack. And from that time, after I got up here, he said, "Well, I want you to work for me." So I started working at Emory. Unfortunately for me, I was the youngest man at Emory at that time on the faculty. As a result of that, anytime they wanted any dirty work done, they'd say, "Lester, you're the youngest man. Why don't you take this over?" And I would take it over, like a fool, and do it.

Well, as Jimmy says, I have been—looked after janitors, I've had charge of [inaudible—sounds like "self-help"?], I had charge of the Department of Engineering, survey of the campus, athletic fields, and all that kind of stuff, I taught classes, I had charge of athletics—it's been just like this [gestures in circular motion with hands clasped] all along. I don't mind it. It has all been a good lesson to me. For instance [holds up right hand, showing four fingers whose ends have been severed], I don't know what I would've done without these nubs on that hand. I hurt them in the shop one day. And I went back there about two years later—no, about eight or ten years later, I guess—to do some work for the

department—and they had a new shop man. He says, “You know, Mister, they tell me that some damn fool college professor came down here and stuck his hands in that machine and cut it. That’s a dangerous machine.” I said, “Mister, you’re right on both counts.” [Holds up hand.] “I’m the evidence, and I’m the crazy man that you’re talking about.” Now, Dr. Baker had me help him with his museum. They had a lot of old plate glass in there, getting temperamental as time goes on, and children like to lean on the glass, and people would come in there that they can’t look at very carefully, so I’d always tell them, “Now, listen. Don’t lean on the cases, ‘cause, you see my hand?” And I already watched them looking at my hand when I made gestures, you know; they’d see that something was wrong with it, and they thought it was just a malformation till I told them I cut them off. I didn’t tell them I cut it off on a piece of glass, but at the same time, they got the idea that that’s what I was doing, that I was leaning on a piece of glass and cut the ends off. Well, they didn’t do it.

The longest job that I had on the side, other than teaching, was athletics. We had a man from Trinity, came down to look at the athletics. He got the idea he wanted to make him an intercollegiate athletic school. So he got a list of all the young alumni and sent letters out to them: “Send me so much money, and I’ll use that as a plan—fund—to sell Bishop Candler on letting us have intercollegiate athletics.” Well, either he decided he’d better not try to sell Bishop Candler on anything or else he never did want to do it, but he put the money in his pocket anyhow. He was cleaning up—he made lots of money. I had all sorts of friends writing me, saying, “Who is this fellow?” I’d tell them [inaudible], they heard about it—the college heard about it, called him in, and fired him right off the bat. They gave him the privilege to resign if he wanted to, because he had been using the mails to defraud, in a way. So they said, “Lester, could you take over athletics until June? Then we’ll get somebody to take your place.” I said, “Yes, I guess so.” Well, that June that he was talking about eight years later. And the same thing every year: teaching classes, teaching labs, go out [inaudible] athletics [inaudible].

When Emory, one time—I'm going to tell you a little [inaudible]—Jimmy told me that he wanted to learn something about the geology of DeKalb County, and that's the reason he asked me to come out. And now I'm talking about what happened to me, and I get tired of that. I've heard so much, on so many committees—somebody asked me the other day—Dr. Baker and I sat down, for instance, and started writing committees that we've been on at Emory. I don't think there's but one committee we wasn't on, and that was the committee that voted trustees. Every other committee, at one time, we had served on. I remember I was chairman at one time of the Retirement Committee. Emory had no retirement. At Emory everybody just died in the job. [audience laughter] So we had to figure out something. I told the committee, "Now, Dr. Cox says we got to have a retirement plan. What do you suggest?" I said, "Well, we've got to have an age. What do you think?" "Well, sixty-seven or sixty-eight looks like it would give us a long, long time." Well, I was just in my thirties—my very early thirties. And so when I got to be sixty-seven, they said, "It's time for you to retire." I'm not ready to retire; I had made a terrible mistake. Nobody wanted to retire at sixty-seven [inaudible] at a job like that, that everybody said was as hard a job anyway. [Inaudible] didn't have enough money to live on now [inaudible]. I will admit that it helps a lot, but can you imagine coming up here, getting \$83.33 a month? I [inaudible] took \$35 house rent every month. But I could take a dollar bill and go to Atlanta on the streetcar [inaudible] wet shoes down at the end of the car line, [inaudible]. Get on the trolley, go uptown, go to a movie, come back to [inaudible] and buy a chocolate milk or Coca-Cola—uh, hotdog—right next door there at Five Points, come home, and still have enough money left out of that dollar to pay the carfare home. And you know, you can't even think about a hotdog for that dollar now. But things have changed. That just shows that you can live through it and live out of it. Now, that's enough about me, that's enough. Anybody else want to talk to me, I'll try to tell them afterwards if I missed anything, but—I'm not bragging, I'm just proud of the fact that I had a chance to contribute that much to Emory. Part of me is there, and a part of Emory is here with me, always, I think.

If we talk about DeKalb County some, and you want to know something about its history, let's talk about this a minute. In all the rocks of the Earth's crust, they are, for the most part, more or less radioactive. Those around Stone Mountain and Lithonia—that's old Stone Mountain, what they call "Little Stone Mountain," Mount Arabia—those are all outcrops of granite rock in DeKalb County, just on the edge of it, they're radioactive. There are some other rocks in the county that were pushed into these granites at one time when they were already in place or almost in place. Now, Stone Mountain, of course, is the biggest of the outcrops. And some man at Stone Mountain told me once, said, "Whatcha doing down there in the rock?" Understand, I had a Geiger counter, counting the count [?]. He said, "What's that doing?" I said, "Oh, it's just making a noise so I'll know it's still working." So we talked, and he said, "Well, if you know anything about these rocks-- if you want to know anything about these rocks—I'll be glad to tell you." He said, "Now, all the rocks in DeKalb County are either male or female. [audience laughter] Female [inaudible], female apples, female plants, and female—everything in the world, and male. But you'll have to have rocks. Now, Stone Mountain is a mama of all the other outcrops. Now, the daddy is Little Stone Mountain, down in Lithonia and Conyers. Now, if you figure it out, you'll find out that there's something about each one of them in all those rocks." He's right, in that there is something about all granites that's just alike, or they wouldn't be granite. That's the definition of the word, so to speak. Stone Mountain is probably older than some of the other rocks in the county, but not much more, if you go by the number of Geiger counter counts that you can take every minute how it goes. We read in the paper, for instance, about people in some place because they've got a plant there that uses atomic energy, and it's leaking, and people are being evacuated. Did you realize that people in Stone Mountain—the city of Stone Mountain—Lithonia, living all the time in radioactivity which goes on, and they don't come out with children with two heads and things like they talk about what these other people are going to have if they stay there, you know. And this is stuff—a lot of it is poppycock. It doesn't work that way. During time I know--during the [inaudible]—well, right after the

war, when they were—when they put everybody to work on the WPA or something like that, there were thirty or forty men whose lives were really saved by having to work at Stone Mountain in all that radioactivity and drink all that spring water out there that they say will make your hair curl and all that kind of stuff. Well, they didn't have any hair to begin with, so wasn't worried about that. But the whole business is, as those rocks, which I have named, were first put into the Earth's crust, they were in molten condition, and there was Earth over them, or they would not have been there. Stone Mountain, for instance, slowly came and melted its way up and up, up, thousands of feet through rock that was already there—ancient rock—finally came up here and stopped. [Demonstrates with hand gestures.] There was still rock above there. Then it cooled. Then, as time went on, erosion—millions of years of erosion—wind, air, water, snow occasionally, ate on it and finally washed it away. The rocks around it were older and more decayed than Stone Mountain [inaudible], so Stone Mountain stayed there as a knot. So did Little Stone Mountain; so did all the other mountains that you see around and about this part of the state. They all came up into the Earth's crust, and it was older—even the coastline of Georgia was older—than that part. At one time the sea was up almost from Macon, all the way—a little bit this side of Macon—all the way across the state of Georgia. Now it's to Augusta and places like that. And that rock is younger than this rock, but it came up. Now, if it had reached Stone Mountain, it would have covered it up. But it didn't. Stone Mountain was already a prominent thing; maybe it was the daddy and the mother of all the other rocks—who knows? But anyhow, it was a lookout point for the Indians. There were paths that went to Stone Mountain; they moved from there. There is not a cave on Stone Mountain; people tell you there is, but there's not. They once started to try and make one, and it didn't work out. The monument's there and it's a wonderful thing. They moved a lot of granite to get it out, but you know more about that than I do.

But the county's old, has rock, and it has some very old rock in it and at the same time it has some new rock in it. The rock which is new are the sands—things that come [inaudible], phosphate, and

things of that type—are from [unclear—sounds like “Greece”?] or runoff from Stone Mountain or that other elevated piece of rock. I guess, if you stop and try to say that Stone Mountain and the other igneous rocks—and they’re called igneous because they’re formed by fire or heat—any of those rocks would count a possible thirteen counts per minute at least on any Geiger counter that you took out over them. There is a rock down here on the way to—south, on the Macon Highway going south, before you get to Jonesboro, a green rock down there, a metamorphic rock, that means it’s passed through a change, turning from one type of rock into another, it’s more radioactive than that. But there are holes drilled in Stone Mountain, as all of you know, to put up guywires and things of that type, during the quarrying stages; and if you were to put a little Geiger counter down in that hole, it would just go wild— [rapidly] tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick—like that. Normally it’s [slowly] tick----tick----tick----tick—you can get that in anybody’s yard.

I remember once when I was asked to come to the hospital at Emory to run a radioactive count on a lady there. She had visited her daughter in Hollywood, and she was an elderly lady. And her daughter told her, “Mama, you ought to have some of the wrinkles taken out of your face and hands. You have too many wrinkles to be my mother.” And so they had this man to bring about smoothing her wrinkles. And she was unconscious, and the doctor asked me if I would bring my Geiger counter over there and run it over her body, with a nurse. And we started at her feet and came up to her body; and the closer we got to her face, the more counts we got. When we got up to her face and her wrists, the Geiger counter was flying, thirty-five and forty counts a minute. Later on, when we got down to her feet, it didn’t count at all, maybe one or two counts, something like that. So it was obvious that somebody—some doctor, some quack in California—had injected radioactive salts into her face to smooth the wrinkles out, to make it enlarged. As it got fatter, it just smoothed the wrinkles out and did the same thing [gestures with hands, indicating procedure done on hands]. It was peculiar to look at her hands, just as smooth as a fifteen-year-old girl’s, and yet above her wrists, wrinkled like my arms were—

old, except they were older, she was older than I was. The doctors here in Atlanta had this man barred. They were natives of Stone Mountain—the young lady was, and her mother had left here to go out there. She's been used to radioactivity all her life in Stone Mountain; and yet this was what they had to do to straighten the—whatever it was she had, wrinkles, I guess; that's what everybody else has, old age or something. It regenerated the flesh in some way. Now, this has nothing to do with the geology of DeKalb County. I realize that, and I'm just rambling. That's what Jimmy asked me to do. [To Mr. Mackay] Now, Jimmy, if you want me to stop on this, you just—

MR. MACKAY: No, this is fine.

DR. LESTER: --just hold up your hand, and tell the man to cut it off.

MR. MACKAY: No, this is your hour—you use it as you see fit.

DR. LESTER: Well, the last time I was with this group was with other people—with Dr. Baker. We both, as Jimmy says, we both came here in 1919. We met accidentally. He was in biology; I was in engineering. I was [inaudible] into a dormitory, and he was coming out of the dormitory; we actually just ran into each other. Both of us were so small, I guess we had our heads in the air or something—we didn't see each other. Ran into each other. But we have become close friends through the times. And we've worked together on all the projects that both of us have had. He did not work with me one time when I had charge of the dormitories. And you know, I had charge of that, I was just going to keep it for a month, but Dr. Cox's months stretched out sometimes whole years without realizing it. So while I was doing that, I also had charge of the janitors. Well, he came and said, "The drain in the embalming room in the medical school is stopped up. Please come and unstop it." And the only person I could get was myself to go do it. I never had been in a place like that. I didn't care about where they were. But I did go in there and find the drain and get it unstopped. And then I rose up, and [inaudible] a suspended body which was in the process of being embalmed. And that is the first and the last time I ever went

into that building. I've never been so startled in my life. I never thought that that was the way things happened.

A few years after that one of the doctors were preparing a test up on the second floor, where they had to put soot on a piece of tape so they could record on it. And something happened—gas got into the room, and finally flames set it on fire, and everything exploded. Tables were blown off of the floor and hit the ceiling, the boys jumped out the window—all of them said that they were blown out the window, but they jumped out, because they all landed on their feet, and nobody got hurt. Dr. Cox got excited, and he came running out there. He said—also, I was also in charge of the dining hall. He said to me, “Lester, give these boys anything they want to eat.” “Yes, sir.” Well, the boys took full advantage of that, as you can imagine. I think there were sixty men in that class, thirty men in that particular explosion. We sold at least ninety T-bone steaks that night. They all wanted a T-bone steak. And I don't blame them. I tell you, it's an experience to see your desk go flying up against the ceiling, your instructor hanging out of the window, one leg broken and all that kind of stuff. Shoot, I wouldn't go into that building for anything. Right now, I'll pass by it, and I think about it every time. Unless something really happens, I'll never go back in there. Does anybody have a question?

MR. MACKAY: Why don't you tell them about pushball, since that's extinct?

DR. LESTER: Oh, well, somewhere Dr. Cox read about pushball. He asked me, he said, “You know anything about pushball?” And I said, “Well, no—yes, I've played one game with it when I was in the Navy.” He said, “Well, I want to buy one.” So I said, “All right,” so I went and bought one from a dealer downtown. If you've never seen a pushball, it's about six feet in diameter, looks like a basketball, with rubber bladder on the inside that is inflatable and a leather cover on the outside. Looks very much like a great big basketball, about six feet in diameter. The idea is that you're supposed to push against it, and then you get it up in the air, and you push it across to another team, and that's the way you play

the game. So Dr. Cox said, "Let the freshmen and sophomores have it." So we got some freshmen, I was on one side; the sophomores were on the other. Stood out there and asked them to pick five men each to come out. Five men got on one side to push the ball that way and five men on the other side. I blew the whistle. The ball went up in the air, was pushed up in the air, and the fight started. All of both classes came. And because they couldn't get in to push, they decided to push—pull a guy out and throw him down. And I never saw so many bruised jaws and sore heads and hurt arms. The matron was also the nurse, and she took all the lobby of two dormitories, all the hallways in those two dormitories, and she put them on the floor, put them on mats, put them on cots, anywhere they could. And we had, I think, about three hundred and some-odd boys temporarily in the hospital. But they just did that, you know how boys are. Some of them didn't even have a scratch. Some of them weren't even sore, but they made out like it was just terrible. I tell you, boy, that thing killed me. [inaudible]

But then later on they bought another one. The boys took it to Agnes Scott and rolled it into the girls' dormitory. Then the president had trouble with what to do with the boys and how to get the ball back to Emory again. They couldn't find a truck to haul it in, so they just told the boys, "You put it out there. You roll it back out to Emory." If you saw anybody a long time ago rolling a great big ball down the street, that'd be my boys bringing the ball back to Emory. All they had to do was unlace the thing and deflate it, and they could've carried it back to Emory [inaudible—Commons?], but no, they wanted to brave back out and say where they took it off. It's a great sport if you don't mind killing somebody. [inaudible] to hurt somebody; but, of course, back then, they didn't care how bad they got hurt [inaudible].

MR. MACKAY: Dr. Lester, would you talk about the history of the Emory Museum, when it got started, and what you think about museums generally, and maybe what you think the Historical Society ought to preserve?

DR. LESTER: Since—I would like to take this opportunity to thank the museum directors downstairs for doing the museum work here. I think it's wonderful; you've done an excellent job. The museum at Emory started at Oxford with a bunch of armor—Japanese—that some missionary sent over, some other things from Japan and China, and about, oh, maybe five or six hundred specimens of birds which Dr. LaPrade [spelling?], one of the preachers down there, had collected. And they stayed at Oxford, and then when Emory moved up here, the museum was still there, and nobody was looking after it. And so they asked—Dr. Cox decided that he'd get a man to be curator, and he got a man named [inaudible—sounds like "Faddy"?]. Dr. [?] came to us from somewhere up in Virginia, I don't know where. And all the stuff was brought up here from Oxford—coins, birds, armor—all the trinkets and everything else. And also about that time Dr. Shelton, who was teaching Bible history at the university's Methodist Theological School, got interested in traveling, and so got some man in town to give him a bunch of money, and he went off and bought a bunch of mummies and things like that to put in the museum to make it more of a museum that students could use in theology and everything else. The [Faddy?] was interested in snakes, bugs, things of that type, and he collected a tremendous insect collection. I remember once they put him in the library at the university, the Candler Library, and the librarian, Ms. Jimmerson [sp?], claimed the bees he put in there got out and came around and stung her and all of her helpers, and she wanted him out of there right away. So they moved him out, packed his stuff up, and put him somewhere in the building. Later on they moved it out from there, asked Dr. Baker if he would take him, he took it, and they put him in the basement in the administration building. Stayed there a year, and the roof of the administration building caught on fire, so the fire burned and scorched up the specimens in the museum, too. Although it was on the bottom level, timbers fell through the ceiling. And then later on they built Bishops Hall and thus put the museum in Bishops Hall. And it was built for that, but then later on, they decided they didn't want it there, and moved it out to where it was in the old law building library in the old law building. And that's where the museum was

when it was disbanded the second time. And they're going to have a museum someday, but it won't be a museum like that. There are a lot of things that have been given away. Fernbank has gotten some of it, the museum at Oxford has gotten all the birds, and other things have been sent to various places. What's going in there is going to be an art museum; and this, I think, is sort of foolish because you've got the High Museum and another art museum coming along, and now to make a third one, it's going to saturate with too much art stuff, I think. And people are—you know, you can look at that stuff all right, it's pretty, nobody objects to looking at pretty stuff, but you want to learn something some time; and half the time you don't know what they're talking about when they draw a picture. My daughter gave me some colors when I retired and said, "Daddy, you've always taught drawing and so forth. Why don't you start painting?" "OK." And she said, "What is that, Daddy?" So she has my first picture, and she doesn't know what it is yet, and I don't, either. [laughter] I had no idea what I was doing. And so, it's just one of those things. But I think museums are essential. I think it's an indication of the integrity of the school or town or city or just a community if they have a museum, because it does preserve things, and a lot of things are worth preserving. I grant you, more and more it looks like to me that what we need instead of a museum are prisons or something. It looks like the only thing we're preserving are criminals these days. But that's not true, of course. [inaudible] and I were talking about that coming out here. And a lot of good things. And I am for museums. I'll argue with anybody about it; you take your museum, and I'll take mine. I'll enjoy mine, and you can give yours away. [laughter] [inaudible]

MR. MACKAY: Are there questions from the audience?

[Unidentified woman in audience]: I was going to ask you to tell about the cow down at Oxford at Seney Hall, about it being put up on [inaudible]--.

DR. LESTER: Seney Hall?

[Woman in audience]:--Seney Hall, with the cow—

DR. LESTER: That was given by a man named Seney, who was a friend of Bishop Andrew. Bishop Andrew was my great-grandfather. And he was a friend of Bishop Emory's. And he suggested the name Emory for Oxford. That appealed to Mr. Seney, and he gave the money to build Seney Hall, which was the only [inaudible] constructed building there and the chapel at one time. The chapel was where we met every day, and that's where Emory students learned how to tell lies, because they'd ask them Monday morning, "How many of you went to church on Sunday?" Well, you had morning service to go to, evening service to go to, and Sunday school, so you could hold up three fingers. And so the last man on the inside of the aisle would go down and take the roll, and he saw three or one or two, and he'd say, "Well, there's just so many this way and so many that." And everybody lied about it a little bit. There wasn't any reason to, but you just got in the habit, you know. [inaudible] Later on they started building the gymnasium, and the little house that they had for the gymnasium was turned into a shop. And so then the library was built, and they had the chemistry building, [inaudible—Few?] and Phi Gamma Halls, which were the debate halls—one for the non-fraternity men and one for the fraternity men--they were all men, there wasn't any women there then—and the chapel and Seney Hall and the language hall.

I will tell you something, you know we had the most wonderful teachers, in my opinion that I've ever known at old Oxford. But we had one that didn't belong in college teaching. I won't call his name, but he taught Bible, and he insisted that he would have his classes on Friday afternoon in the big science lecture hall. Everybody in class had that one class—you had to go. And you could get him off on any subject. And I had a good friend there named Jeff McCord—some of you know the McCords, you know, Jeff was a comic. We had class one day, and [the instructor said], "Young gentlemen, you should all be grateful. Here we sit in this—on these comfortable chairs, with God's glorious sunshine streaming through the windows, to study His holy word. Mr. McCord?" "Oh, Professor, before you get started on your question: As I was coming to class today, I ran across a mother partridge and her brood. Would you mind talking on mother love for a few minutes?" Well, he talked on mother love for the whole

hour. [laughter] And then everybody got up and left. Then we had a math teacher, who went blind and memorized the book. And he would come in, and the chair would always be taken off the platform it was on. So he'd come in, he'd feel around for his chair, and Mr. McCord would say, "Professor [name inaudible—sounds like "Pete"], you having trouble with your chair? Let me help you look for it." And he knew where it was, because he already had his hand on it. He'd shake the chair for him and take it up and give it to him, Professor Pete [?] would sit down and send us to the board. When he sat down, those that didn't know anything about class would just go out the back window. And three or four of us would stay there—would have to stay there—to work on the problems, because he was going to assign problems: "Mr. Stephenson, take so-and-so. Mr. Connors, take so-and-so. Mr. So-and-So, Mr. Lester, Mr. McCord." Well, there wasn't anybody left but Mr. McCord and Connors and me, and [inaudible], sometimes he was in there too. The four of us would do all this working problems. And he didn't know the difference; he'd ask you what you were doing. He'd say, "What was your next step?" And you'd tell him. And it came to the end, "Well, I don't know, Professor." "Oh, your next step is to sit down. That's all right." He was absent-minded. I remember once, after he came to Emory out here, he met his daughter, who worked in the Alumni Office. And he said, "Aha." He always started a greeting with, "Aha." "Aha, Miss Virginia. And how is your father this morning?" And she said, "He's doing very well, thank you, sir." He never knew that he was talking about himself.

He once had a cow, and one of the social clubs at Emory at Oxford, called the Owls, and part of the initiation of the Owls was to give a man a Coca-Cola bottle and one match and tell him to go into Professor Pete's [?] barn and milk that milk bottle full of milk from his cow. Now any of you who know anything about—a cow is used to a certain person milking them, and they don't like for anybody else to milk them for a while. They have to get used to them. So this boy went in with his bottle and a match. The first thing he did was strike the match and startle the cow, and she started kicking around. Then he started to milk the cow, and, of course, she jumped and kicked, and he [the professor] heard the noise,

and he took a candle and went out there to see what it was. Well, Mrs. Pete [?] had a clothesline hanging up in the backyard. I don't know how he got by the clothesline, but he got up close to the barn, and one of the people that was doing the initiating shot off a gun right down by the side of the stalls and scared the boy that was in there. But Professor Pete [?] by that time was in the barn, too; and when that gun went off, he tore up to the house. Now, remember that he was partly blind and an old man—he was as old as I am, I'm sure. And he got by everything but the last clothesline, and he [inaudible] [gestures to indicate the clothesline's catching across the throat or around the neck] [laughter], and it just turned him right around and put him on his back [claps hands] on this nice, grassy backyard [inaudible].

One time he got on his horse, and he was facing the tail of his horse in the saddle. [laughter] Somebody said, "Mr. Pete [?], where are you going?" He said, "I'm going after the mail," which was in that [points] direction. He said, "But you're faced wrong." He said, "Ah, but you don't know which way I'm going after the mail." [laughter]

So when you have people like that and then people—take Dr. Barnell [spelling?], taught history—I mean, taught physics. And he was the only great cigarette smoker that ever taught at Emory. He was almost a continuous smoker, except when he was lecturing. He told the same jokes every class. And he took him out a little book, and he was never able to turn another page for another joke. And so, there was about twenty-five of us in the class, and we met outside once before class took in and said, "Let's don't laugh when he tells a joke today, let's sit perfectly still." OK. Well, we told everybody but Jeff McCord—Jeff was late. And Jeff sat—not knowing any physics, not wanting to know any physics—just wanted to get by—sat right in front of the professor just like this [reaches out and points; inaudible]. And he told the joke, and nobody said a word but Jeff. And Jeff said, "Whaah, whaah, whaah!" Like that. Didn't try to laugh, just made a noise. Dr. Barnell [spelling?] looked at him and said, "Mr. McCord,

leave my class.” So Jeff realized that the class had pulled something on him, and he’d go thumb his nose at the class. But when he ended up [demonstrates by splaying hand in front of face, with thumb on nose], why, he was looking at Dr. Barnell! [laughter] Dr. Barnell dismissed him from class, and he said [Jeff?] he took a carton of cigarettes, went to his [Dr. Barnell’s] house that night, and talked from 8:00—had supper about 8:00—till 2:00 in the morning before he’d [Dr. Barnell] let him [Jeff] come back to college. Otherwise he [Jeff] was going to have to go out of school for laughing at his [Dr. Barnell’s] jokes.

But I wouldn’t want to do that, really, because he’d [Dr. Barnell] read his prayers that way—pray in chapel. He’d always reach in his back pocket [demonstrates by reaching into his own back pocket] or reach in here [reaches inside front of blazer], take out a little book, open it—same book he gave the jokes out of [laughter]. I don’t know what he was [inaudible], maybe he just knew the scripture, I don’t know. He always read the same passage, I know that much.

MR. MACKAY: Did they put the cow on top of Seney Hall while you were there [at Emory at Oxford]?

DR. LESTER: No, never put a cow up there. I’ve seen Dr.—Professor Pete’s [spelling?] buggy up there several times. And that was always on top of the chapel. Now, they couldn’t put it on Seney Hall. There was no way to get up on the roof of Seney Hall. Only thing they could do, they could climb up to the clock, get out there and turn the hands around all sorts of ways. And when time chapel started, it’d be 1:00 in the afternoon—wasn’t supposed to go to chapel then, of course. But, yes, I’ve seen his buggy up there, I’ve seen Dooley sitting up in the buggy—which was the skeleton, you remember. And we used to have a Dooley in our paleo [paleontology] class, but somebody stole it. I don’t know where he is now.

[Unidentified male audience member]: Brother Mackay, I wanted to ask this gentleman, I wanted to ask him a question and also make a statement. But I think that I was one of the first people

to live on the Emory campus. Our house, which was just an ordinary DeKalb county farmhouse, sat exactly where the Emory Hospital sits today.

DR. LESTER: I declare.

[Audience member]: I was four years old, and they had employed a man by the name of Arthur Tufts—

DR. LESTER: That's right.

[Audience member]: --and my father worked for Arthur Tufts, and they graded the campus to build the school with—

[Unknown speaker]: Mules.

[Audience member]: --three teams, fastened to a scoop with wheels on it. And they had about three—one man couldn't man it—it took about three men to hold the handle to keep it from flipping over while they were loading.

DR. LESTER: They took your house down before they started grading.

{Audience member}: Yes, sir. And—

DR. LESTER: I remember. I remember where you lived. I don't remember your name—you were a young boy.

[Audience member]: We lived there in 1914.

DR. LESTER: That's right. And when did you—they built the hospital in the twenties, the early twenties, didn't they?

[Audience member]: Well, I lost account of what happened in the interim time.

DR. LESTER: That's when they built the hospital. We lived in one of the faculty houses up there. The first year, I lived in Covington. I commuted in the morning on the accommodations back in that [inaudible]. Same train. Mrs. Lester stayed down there. Later on we got a house here on campus and were able to live there.

[Audience member]: Yes sir.

MR. MACKAY: Will you comment on intercollegiate sports? You've watched that now most of this century.

DR. LESTER: Jimmy, I will say this: I'm not opposed to intercollegiate athletics at other schools. But I think I've lived and taught enough at Emory so that I'd hate to see Emory go into intercollegiate football or baseball or basketball. Now, if they want to have golf or something like that, that's all right. But if you have big crowds to come every Saturday on the campus or following some train somewhere, I'm just opposed to it. I guess it's just because I knew so much of the other. But we've had two or three flare-ups with somebody wanting to have intercollegiate basketball, as well as other [inaudible] trying to raise money for it. That gymnasium they're building over there—have you seen it?

MR. MACKAY: I have. It looks like—

DR. LESTER: I don't know what in the world it's going to be. I don't know. Looks like they've got enough seats out there to seat half of Atlanta, if they ever have a game out there that they want to come to.

MR. MACKAY: Would you venture to comment on coeducation?

DR. LESTER: Oh, yeah. That's all right. [Laughs; audience laughter] Let me tell you, I enjoy teaching girls. And every year, for the last fifteen years that I taught, somebody made us—got us to act as advisors for certain groups. And they would give you about twenty-five or thirty boys and girls

together. And I would write to all of them before they came to college. These, now, were freshmen. I would write to every one of them, just a personal letter telling them that I'd be willing to help them in any way I could. And we met them and talked to them and everything. But the girls were the only ones that ever came in, but they wanted to cry a lot. I just bought me a package of tissue and had them right there. When they started sniffing, I could just reach in get two or three of them and hand them to them and let them cry. But it's all right. They were smart. They have put the boys on their toes. No two ways about it.

MR. MACKAY: Would you tell us how you were attracted to teaching? A little about your family.

DR. LESTER: Well, I lived about a mile and a half from the Emory campus, as you know. And my father was a very ordinary man and at that time he had gone through the third grade in grammar school. His mother had taught him. He himself was well-educated. I have heard him speak any number of times and never heard him make a grammatical error. He read Shakespeare to us at night around the fireplace and all sorts of stories. He also took one thing out of *Little Men*, I think is where it came from, where somebody whipped their father once. And my brothers and I got to chucking rocks at each other while Mother was gone to the missionary society, and he decided he was going to let us whip him. That was the worst thing I ever had to do. But he would go to Oxford and talk to students over there, and sometimes—you see, that was the only activity other than Covington High School—that we had around there. There wasn't any picture shows there, wasn't any movies. And so when Emory had a commencement with gymnasium exercises, everybody would go. It wasn't but about a mile and a half from our house. We'd go in a horse and buggy. And then they set up fraternities over there, and you could go over there and have your fraternity meetings, fraternity parties, things like that.

I think my greatest inspiration came from Dr. Whitman [spelling?] Milton [Melton?], who taught English, and J. B. Peebles, who taught engineering. And I know once, walking home from classes with a boy who lived in Covington, whose father owned a big dry goods store, he said, “Why don’t we quit going to school? We’ve been going to school for I don’t know how long. We’ve learned all we’re ever going to learn. Why don’t we quit?” I said, “No.” He said, “What are you going to do with yourself?” I said, “I’m going to be a schoolteacher.” And I had an uncle who was a doctor in Mobile, and he just raised Cain with me, called me a fool, never have any money—he was right about that, never did had any money. Never expected to have a whole lot. Emory’s retirement fund is not one of these things that’s glorious, you know, because they started so late, it hadn’t been built up very much. It’s got a few pennies in it, but that’s about all. You make it somewhere else. And the salaries were all right; we lived, and [inaudible] a lot of years and enjoyed it. We lost a child, and we had a child, and we’re very proud of our daughter. She lives in Macon now; we get to see her about once every month. And, of course, as time goes on, each year there’s another year behind us. And I don’t expect to live as long as Dr. Baker has already lived—he’s going to be about 110 his next birthday. [laughter] Tell you a [inaudible] thing that happened to him—he was somewhere and some fellow dropped a dime, and he couldn’t quite reach it. He bent down and couldn’t quite get it, and he said, “Mister, would you get that dime for me?” He [Dr. Baker] said, “Yeah.” He [Dr. Baker] just reached down, got it, and handed it to him. He said, “I certainly appreciate it. You know, I’m an old man—I’m seventy years old.” [laughs] And here he [Dr. Baker] was, a ninety-two-year-old man [inaudible] [demonstrates by reaching down and pretending to pick up something and hand it to someone]. [laughter]

MR. MACKAY: Aren’t you and Mrs. Lester the senior couple in the history of this university?

DR. LESTER: Yes, the oldest couple that is living. And Mrs. Lester is the oldest lady, with the exception of one, and that’s Mrs. [spelling? Harp?]. Mrs. [spelling?] Harp is incapacitated right at the

time. [inaudible sentence] “I’m the oldest living woman at Emory with common sense.” [laughter]
[inaudible] Sometimes she doesn’t think she has it, but really [trails off].

MR. MACKAY: Are there any other questions from the audience?

[Unidentified male audience member]: Let me just ask one question about the Soapstone Ridge over there, Dr. Lester. Is that a later formation from Stone Mountain, or what is the difference—

DR. LESTER: Yes sir. That’s really not soapstone. It acts like soapstone. It’s a very [inaudible] form of pyroxinite. And I don’t mean anything except it is a rock which came into the Earth’s crust through the granite and cooled. And then, because of the fact that it was in a bunch of schistose rock—and I mean by that layered rock, very thin layers—once you get down onto that and just [rock? rotten?] and even though it’s not so rotten that it won’t hurt it, because it is a hard rock, as you know. And then there are two of those things in the county. One of them’s like that big rock in front of the [old] courthouse, which is a piece of diabase, and that’s an igneous rock that comes in as a [inaudible— sounds almost like “Titan”]. And when Dr. Allen and I did some work on it—on diabase in Georgia—when we wrote our paper and sent it in to the national magazine people to be published, we always wrote in parentheses what everybody called it at that time. They called it a “nigger head,” because it was so big—and, of course, we couldn’t do that. So we had to go ahead and call it some kind of spheroid. Well, to show you how tough that rock is [inaudible phrase], since it has a black color, it’d be fine if they would crush that and [inaudible] and put asphalt on it and have black without any danger of ever turning white on it or reflecting anything. Well, when they hauled the first bunch of it—you can take it right out yonder [points] and find it—pile it up, haul it close to Yellow River, haul in the crushing material, built the crushing machine, ran once over, and broke it all to pieces. [Seems to be referring to the machine and not the rock, but this is unclear.] That stuff is tough. And you can beat on it, and beat on it, and beat on it, and when [inaudible], it just won’t break for you.

MR. MACKAY: Any other questions?

[Unidentified male audience member]: What year do you officially give as the year that Emory moved from Oxford to its present location?

DR. LESTER, rising: I'm a little bit deaf—I just didn't hear you—

[Unidentified male audience member]: What year do you officially give as being the year that Emory moved from Oxford to where it is now?

DR. LESTER, sitting: Nineteen nineteen. Moved in the summer of 1919—1918, actually. We went into the summer, and in the fall we opened up in 1919. That was the first class, met that year. And I graduated with the class of 1918, which was meeting down there [refers to Oxford]. There was a school of theology at Emory before that—before the college. I'm talking primarily about the college, which, as I said, moved up in 1919. The school of theology was there, the law school was there, and the medical school. But they had just been opened.

MR. MACKAY: Mrs. Lester just came home from the hospital, and Dr. Lester came over here on very short notice, and I think we ought to give him a round of applause for [inaudible] [applause]. We have refreshments, and I know you'll want to speak to our guest. I have to take him home in about ten minutes.

END OF RECORDING