

Buckhead Heritage Society

Oral History Project

Interview with James Frazer Durrett, Jr.

January 12, 2012

Interviewer: Erica Danylchak

ERICA DANYLCHAK: This is an interview with James Frazer Durrett, Jr., of Atlanta, Georgia. Mr. Durrett was an attorney with Alston & Bird and its predecessor firms for over forty years. The interview is being conducted on January 12, 2012, at Lenbrook. The interviewer is Erica Danylchak representing the Buckhead Heritage Society of Atlanta, Georgia. Mr. Durrett, thank you so much for joining us today. We really appreciate your time.

FRAZER DURRETT: Thank you very much for asking me.

DANYLCHAK: I wanted to just start by asking about where you were born and when.

DURRETT: March 23, 1931, at Emory University Hospital.

DANYLCHAK: And where was your family living at the time?

DURRETT: They were living at 1109 West Peachtree Street in a quadriplex that was owned by Dr. Marion Luther Brittain, who at the time was president of Georgia Tech. His daughter, Mrs. Spann Milner, was one of the tenants there, and my parents were good friends with the Milners.

DANYLCHAK: And what did that area of West Peachtree Street look like at the time, in the '30s?

DURRETT: Well, since I was one to three years old, the only thing I remember is Hawk's Drugstore was on the corner of, probably West Peachtree Street and Thirteenth Street to the west. And it had telephone number which was Cherokee something or other. And so the first word I think that I ever was told I talked about was Che-kee, Cherokee, which was Che-kee. And that's all I remember about 1109 West Peachtree.

DANYLCHAK: And where did your family move after that?

DURRETT: They moved to 80 Thirteenth Street, which was just down the street. And when I was three years old they moved to Muscogee Avenue, 38 Muscogee Avenue. And that would have been about 1934.

DANYLCHAK: Do you know what prompted your parents to move further north?

DURRETT: No, I don't know what prompted them to move. I think they were looking for a house because they had been in rental properties for so long. Much later my father told me that you ought to always buy the cheapest house in the richest neighborhood you could afford. And this house was fairly small. Mother negotiated and bought it while my father was out of town.

She had a strong mind and she figured she could convince her husband to do something later. And the reason they were able to buy it was because the couple that owned it had gotten a divorce. And it was in the wife's name and she was, I think, in New York, and so it was a long-range negotiation. They were able to get it for, I think, ten thousand dollars, which at that time seemed like to me a lot of money, but with inflation it's a drop in the bucket today.

DANYLCHAK: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

DURRETT: I had one brother, who was nine years younger. His name is Bill and he's an engineer. A retired engineer. But more importantly, he's a blacksmith, which is what he really loves to do. He's an artist really.

DANYLCHAK: So he does that in his spare time, a hobby for him?

DURRETT: Actually, that was what he did when he, he left engineering, because he wanted to be a blacksmith. And he's now, nine years younger, he's 71 now and getting physically where it's difficult for him to do blacksmithing. But for the last twenty years that's what he's been.

DANYLCHAK: And what profession was your father?

DURRETT: My father was an investment banker in a very small investment banking firm called J. H. Hillsman and Company. It was owned by the C&S National Bank. And when the legislation was passed separating investment and commercial banking, all the commercial banks had to sell or get rid of their investment banking subsidiaries. And the C&S, much to my father's delight, financed the sale of J. H. Hillsman and Company to four officers of Hillsman, including my father, fully financed it. They didn't have to put up a dime. So he was always very grateful for that.

DANYLCHAK: I'm sure. So how long then did your family live on Muscogee Avenue?

DURRETT: My family, my mother and father moved when he was in his 70s to the Habersham. At that time it was an apartment building in Buckhead. And my, they gave the Muscogee home to my brother, and he stayed there about ten years and then sold it. He wanted to get out of Atlanta. He wanted to move north. Atlanta had gotten too big for him.

DANYLCHAK: Well, we'll get into some of those changes a little bit later. What schools did you attend when you were growing up in Buckhead?

DURRETT: Well, the first school I attended was a kindergarten next to E. Rivers School. And I thought I'd never forget the name of the principal there but I don't remember it.

DANYLCHAK: Miss Bloodworth?

DURRETT: Yes, yes.

DANYLCHAK: We've heard about Miss Bloodworth's kindergarten.

DURRETT: Yes, Miss Bloodworth's kindergarten. And then I went to E. Rivers for seven years and then I went to North Fulton.

DANYLCHAK: Do you have any particular favorite memories from E. Rivers?

DURRETT: Well, it's not a matter of favorite. It's a question of whether I can remember. I do remember a couple of teachers I had. Mrs. Erwin. I think I might have had her for two separate classes. Mrs. Davenport in the seventh year. Bob Lashley in the third year. I remember that because my brother was born when I was in the third grade. And Mrs. Osterhout. One memory I have. I was a very well-behaved kid. Never got in trouble. But I got in a fight with Ralph Langford, and we both had to go to Mrs. Osterhout's office. And I remember the absolute humiliation of having to go to the principal. That's my favorite memory because I think now, that's the one thing I did that I'm most proud of, [chuckles] is actually getting into a fight.

DANYLCHAK: And what did your parents say about that?

DURRETT: Oh, I don't think, I can't remember anything that they thought about it or said about it. The only thing I remember about my parents and my E. Rivers sojourn, was that I had neglected to fill up a notebook. I don't remember what it was in. And my mother discovered that. And I was just going to not hand it in, because I thought it was not worth doing. She made me in a one day's time fill up an entire four-months' worth of that notebook. That's what I remember. I don't think I would have done that if I were her, but my mother was a former school teacher, and so she was persistent.

DANYLCHAK: And how about North Fulton? Do you have any particular memories, particularly being president of the student body, as you mentioned on your biographical questionnaire?

DURRETT: No. The one thing that I remember most about North Fulton, well, there were a number of things, but one I do remember is that E. Rivers burned down while I was at North Fulton. And you could see the smoke from that fire, there. And so I and everybody else there at North Fulton at the end of the school day, walked down to E. Rivers to watch the fire. I don't think I have ever in my life seen more people I knew at one time than were standing around watching that fire burn. What happened, I'm fairly sure, is that the caretaker there was burning wasps' nests out of the upper reaches, and managed to ignite the floors, which had been oiled for ever since E. Rivers was built. And it just went up in a conflagration even though it was a stone building. But the floors were enough to burn out the entire building. So I saw everybody I'd ever known I think there. That's the main thing I remember about North Fulton. The rest of it is that, my senior patrol leader from my phenomenal Boy Scout troop named One Peachtree Heights, it was at the Covenant Presbyterian Church on Peachtree, that was the sponsor of it. It had a procedure where you had to get, pass a merit badge or a test by the third week of every month or you had to run a gauntlet if you didn't, which was a belt-line of everybody else in the troop. You had to run three if you didn't pass by the third week. And five more if you didn't pass by the end of the month. Now today, you know, that would have been stopped immediately. But it wasn't then. It was considered a significant boost to keep passing tests and merit badges. And over half of the people in our troop got their Eagle, well over half. I don't know how many. I think there were more Scouts in that troop that got their Eagle than in any other troop in the United States. I can't swear to that. But with that sort of background. Also we had the requirement that you went on a hike every month, even in the middle of winter. And I was twelve years old that time, that was the entry level into Boy Scouts. And the first hike I went on was a bicycle hike from the troop out to Stone Mountain. I think that was about nineteen miles. And I remember getting about fifteen miles on my bike, which was not easy to pedal for a twelve-year-old. And I just gave out. And they put me in the car, and a friend of mine named Ben Milner, who was three

years older that I was had to get on my bike, because Ben had been riding in the car, and go on in to Stone Mountain. We slept out on the top of the mountain, I recall. And it was, oh—you would wake up in the middle of the night, and at that time there wasn't as much peripheral light in Atlanta. It wasn't as big a city. And you could see every star in the heavens. So that was a significant memory from that time. I, at that time I would have still been at E. Rivers.

DANYLCHAK: What other activities earned a merit badge from Boy Scouts?

DURRETT: Oh, golly. Well, I can't recall the names of them. One was identifying birds. Hiking. I probably could refresh my memory but I can't help you with that much. But I managed to get an Eagle. I had twenty-one of 'em. Interestingly enough, I had two sons who were in the Scouts. Jim, my oldest, did get his Eagle. Mac, number two, passed all of his merit badges and didn't do some administrative stuff necessary to get his Eagle. And I asked him why. And this was an interesting phenomenon with Mac, because he's very independent-minded. He said, "The Eagle is not important, Dad. It's what you do to get it that's important. I did all that. And I just wasn't interested in applying for the Eagle." I thought that was an interesting reaction. It wouldn't have been mine, but I admire it anyway.

DANYLCHAK: Can you tell me about any other extracurricular activities or sports you were involved with at either E. Rivers or North Fulton?

DURRETT: I was not a good athlete but I was interested in it. I broke my shoulder playing ball, football, because I only, the only shoulder pads I had were far too small because I had gotten them when I was younger, and so they slipped down. I cracked my shoulder making a tackle. This was, you know, just sandlot ball, Boy Scouts. A friend of mine on the other team said, "You just have got a dislocated shoulder. Let me pull it out." So I fortunately didn't let him do that. But it happened on the day that I was going to get my driver's license, when I was sixteen years old. And I couldn't get the license because I couldn't drive, because I was in a brace for about three or four months. And for somebody who'd been looking forward to getting a driver's license, that was a terrible burden. Because I was interested in dating, and dating was really enhanced if you had a car. So that was a burden I had to bear, but that's one of the few I can recall.

DANYLCHAK: So how long did it take you to go back and get your driver's license?

DURRETT: My recollection is it was three or four months. The first time I was ever out was, at North Fulton I was to be some sort of usher at a Christmas pageant. And this was the first time at night I had the car out by myself. And I was late. And I noticed there was a parking place fairly close. So I wheeled into it. And the reason it was there, unbeknownst to me, was that the manhole cover at the far end of the parking place, the cover was off. And so I drove the car, first time I'd been out in it, I drove the car and the right front wheel went down into this hole. So it was resting on the axel. I went in and did my duty, got out, and I've already mentioned Ben Milner once. His home was fairly near North Fulton. So I walked up there to see if he could get me some help. So three people were there shooting basketball. They all came and they all lifted up on the frame of the Buick while I got in and gunned the motor. And very fortunately no one else was there, because it was after all the other cars had gone. I came out of that hole like a cork out of a bottle. And you're in reverse, and you don't really know how to control a car going in

reverse that fast, but I managed to avoid anything else. That was one of the things I will never forget.

DANYLCHAK: You mentioned that one of the reasons you wanted a car was so you could start dating in earnest. Where were the places that you would go on your dates after that?

DURRETT: Oh, Fox Theatre, or any downtown theater. All of the dates that I can recall early on were always to a movie. And afterward to get a chocolate soda or something like that, and drive her home.

DANYLCHAK: Did you ever go to the Buckhead Theatre?

DURRETT: Oh, yeah, Yeah. But usually, I would always walk to the Buckhead Theatre or the theater at Garden Hills. And that was just, usually, much earlier before I could ever drive, you would walk up to the Saturday afternoon show. And you would have, oh, a cartoon, and a serial, and at least one feature. And I think it would probably be 25-cents, something like that. And everybody was at that theater on Saturday afternoon. I actually got thrown out of the theater once, for wrapping caps for a cap pistol around a bb. And then as the show was going on you'd throw it against the wall, and it would explode. Not a loud noise, but just a pop. And that was, I was not the only one doing that, but I was escorted out of the theater.

DANYLCHAK: And where else right downtown in Buckhead would you go? Would you go to Jacob's Drugstore after the theater?

DURRETT: No, if we went to the drugstore it usually would be Wender & Roberts in Buckhead. I've been to Jacob's, but Wender & Roberts was the place. I don't know why. We all went. I imagine it was because of what you could get to drink there. One thing about Buckhead I will mention happened when I was seven years old. We had a, my mother didn't, couldn't drive, and so we had a black worker who was, did everything. He cut the grass, he drove my mother to the grocery store, just whatever needed to be done. And at that time in the '30s, you can't imagine how far a dollar went. My recollection is, my father gave my mother ten dollars every week. And she bought all the groceries with that ten dollars. But anyway, Joe was his name. He was to take me to Buckhead to get a haircut. I was seven years old. And I got my haircut and there was no Joe there. Now where a black man could have gotten a beer in Buckhead in 1938, I don't know. But I suspect he managed to figure out where. So he wasn't there. And so I walked home from Buckhead, age seven. And my mother had told me never to cross Muscogee Avenue unless she was there. So I walked home and I got on the opposite side of Muscogee Avenue, walked down from Peachtree, and hollered. And she came out. She about fainted. She said, "What are you doing?" And I said, "Mother, you told me never to cross Muscogee." Well, she fired Joe. And I made her hire him back. I was not going to have that on my conscience. I don't know how many streets I crossed to get down to where I hollered for her, but I crossed 'em all. And I can vaguely remember where that barbershop was. It was on the western side of Peachtree or Roswell Road, right about where they join. And I think it was next to the theater. But I'm not positive. Anyway.

DANYLCHAK: What else was in the area at the time? The theater, a drugstore, a barbershop. Anything else you can remember?

DURRETT: Yeah, there were two hardware stores. Buckhead Hardware and King Hardware. And the main thing I remember about Buckhead Hardware, there were two brothers who, I think, owned it and worked there. And if my, my memory fails me and I can't recall their names, but I knew them well. And when I got married, we were fortunate enough to travel to Europe and spend three months in Europe with money that both sets of parents had given us. This was in 1956. And I don't think the dollar has ever been as strong as it was at that time. We had a budget of seven dollars and a half a day. That was to take care of food, lodging, gasoline. Not really purchases of stuff we were buying to bring home, or ship home. And not, didn't cover the cost of the Volkswagen that I bought. A friend of mine who was in school in Holland, bought it for me. But we bought in Holland a Dutch oven and carried that Dutch oven all over Europe, because Mother said this is a quality oven. It was orange, naturally iron, not steel, I don't think. And I walked into Buckhead Hardware after I got back and there on the wall was that Dutch oven. I could have bought it in Buckhead. But I bought it in Holland and carried it all over Europe for no reason at all. That's a pretty good Buckhead story.

DANYLCHAK: That's a good one. Did most people go and do their primary shopping right there at the Peachtree-Roswell split in the '40s and '50s?

DURRETT: Somewhere along Peachtree within a half mile of central Buckhead, there was a Kampers, K-A-M-P-E-R-S, where my parents shopped mostly, that was fairly close to where North Fulton High, if you came up to Peachtree from there. I think Kampers was probably in the Garden Hills area, shopping area. And that's where my recollection is that my mother shopped mainly. Also Fred's Fruit Stand, which was across from E. Rivers on the other side of Peachtree. Fred was a, he had come up during the Depression, and at that time there was no shopping center there. And he, there was nothing there except as I recall, a place you would never go because it was a jungle. It was where the creek was back there. And so Fred set up, he was a squatter. He set up his fruit stand on Peachtree there. And much later, when Ward Wight developed that shopping center there, Fred had gotten adverse possession of that strip along there. And Ward had to buy him out, and I am absolutely confident that Fred and his entire family could retire on what Ward had to pay him to get that strip. But everybody, when you came home, for example, from church, we went to the First Baptist Church in Atlanta, we would always stop at Fred's Fruit Stand, and get fruit. And that was an institution then.

DANYLCHAK: And how long did Fred operate?

DURRETT: I am guessing he operated through the '30s and the '40s, and my guess is the shopping center got done in the '50s. So he would have been there twenty years at least.

DANYLCHAK: I want to move on to your education outside of Atlanta. But first you made a stop at Emory University, is that correct?

DURRETT: Yes. My folks told me when I graduated from North Fulton that I could go to Tech or Emory. That was my choice. I wasn't interested in being an engineer so I picked Emory. And I guess there were five or six classmates of mine from North Fulton who went to Emory. My recollection is we almost all pledged the same fraternity.

DANYLCHAK: What fraternity was it?

DURRETT: KA. Knights of Alcohol.

DANYLCHAK: I bet you have some stories about that.

DURRETT: No, not that I want to tell.

DANYLCHAK: Not for the tape. So you moved on fairly quickly, though, to Princeton, is that right?

DURRETT: Well, it wasn't all that quick. I went for four years to Emory.

DANYLCHAK: And what was your degree in at Emory?

DURRETT: It was an A.B. in history. I was a nominee at Emory for a Rhodes scholarship, which I did not get. But I was one of the ones that was selected from the state of Georgia. As a second prize, I guess, they put me up for a General Education Board scholarship, which was, the General Education Board was a subsidiary of the Rockefeller Foundation. And I was the beneficiary of, clearly, an effort to protect southern graduates who were interested in teaching in college and who presumably had an inferior education, to go to an Ivy League graduate school and hopefully get a degree, come back, and teach in a southern college. And hopefully bring up the intellectual quotient of those benighted southern colleges. So I got this fellowship and I went to Princeton. And I discovered—because I wanted to be a teacher. I was uninterested in being a scholar. I enjoyed being in the classroom and I thought I would have enjoyed being a teacher in a classroom. And I was pretty good at being in the classroom. But I discovered that my peers at Princeton looked down their nose at the members of the faculty who were good teachers. And they thought that that was, you were sacrificing what you should do, which was to study and write books which no one would read on esoteric topics which no one else had published on. And that was not what I was interested in. And so I, I discovered when I moved from our home, when I was in my 70s, I discovered my grades from Princeton. And I'm not bragging about it, but I think it's interesting that I was the only student in my class to get an Excellent—grades were Excellents, Very Goods, Goods, and Fairs, or fail—I was the only person in my class to get an Excellent, and I got two of them, which I didn't know until I found my grades when I was in my 70s. And that, nobody believed that a guy who came from a southern school could have ever done that well. But I did, and I'm proud of that, but I'm more proud of the fact that it showed that Emory didn't do too bad about educating me.

DANYLCHAK: So what motivated you to go to Harvard? After deciding you didn't necessarily want to teach—

DURRETT: Well, I wanted to keep going to school because I was pretty good at that.

DANYLCHAK: What made you want to choose law?

DURRETT: Well, it was, the only reason is, I didn't want, I was unequipped, could not have practiced medicine, and wasn't interested in it. I never took any chemistry courses, never took any biology courses. I didn't want to go to business school. The only thing I didn't know what it was, was law school. But I didn't know I didn't want to be a lawyer. My father wasn't a lawyer. I didn't know anything about being a lawyer. But I wanted to keep going to school. And so I took the, I got admitted to Harvard, and I'm very fortunate. It was an entire accident. I love practicing law. And I was actually able to teach, also. Not what I wanted to teach, but I taught at Emory as an adjunct professor of law in courses that they didn't have anybody on the faculty at the time

teaching. Which was estate and gift tax and estate planning. And so that's why I went to Harvard, because I wanted to keep going to school. That was the only thing I didn't know what it was.

DANYLCHAK: And you mentioned to me earlier that you met your wife at Harvard.

DURRETT: Yes. She was in my class. Unfortunately—it was the third class at Harvard that had admitted women. There were 540 students, twelve of whom were women, in that class. Cree discovered that no one would hire a woman, even if she got out of law school. Excuse me, no one would, no one in a *firm* would hire a woman. And so she decided after one year there wasn't any reason for her to continue. It wasn't until the '60s, really, that firms started hiring women. And during the last, oh, six or seven years of my practice, we hired in our firm more women than men, usually. It was fairly close. And the reason was that, by and large, the top graduates of any law school, the best law schools, the top graduates would be predominantly women.

DANYLCHAK: So what field did your wife end up going into?

DURRETT: She went into social work. And one, I might mention this, one time she and her roommate were out in Framingham, and it was March, whenever St. Patrick's Day is in March. And the biggest snow storm I can recall ever hitting Boston occurred at that time. And she was stranded in Framingham. And she and her roommate had to walk back into Boston in a snow storm. And when she got there they had to put her to bed and feed her soup, because she couldn't hold a spoon. So that's how I remember she was a social worker.

DANYLCHAK: So after you graduated from Harvard Law, you came back to Atlanta. Was your intention always to come back?

DURRETT: Oh, sure. I was not, I had no interest in practicing in New York or anywhere else. And it was the most fortunate—it was my home—but it was the most fortunate thing I ever did, because from the time, I'd say four or five years after I got back to practice, Atlanta became, I think, the best place in the country for a young person getting out of law school to come and practice.

DANYLCHAK: Why is that?

DURRETT: Because Atlanta was exploding in growth. And the economic opportunities here were just everywhere, and all the firms were expanding. When, before I went back my third year to law school, I was lucky. You could take the bar exam after two years of legal study. And most people did. I took it and passed it. So I went back for my third year and I'd already passed the bar. And some people, for example, two people I will mention, Bobby Jones, who was my partner, and Jimmy Sibley of King & Spalding, for different reasons, had passed the bar after two years and never went back and got their law degree. So neither one of them did that, and that wasn't all that unusual. But I was not of them. I did. But it was nice to be back the third year, and already having passed the bar and not having that pressure on you. And it turned out, I did far less work my third year. I played bridge or Hearts every afternoon. I had a car for the first time in my life, that was mine, my third year in law school. And I was engaged. And so I didn't do a whole lot of work. And I made the best grades I made in three years. And I kept wondering, if I had quit working earlier, would I have done better. But one never knows.

DANYLCHAK: So you came back to Atlanta and you began working for Alston & Bird, correct?

DURRETT: No, I came back to Atlanta and worked for a firm called Bird and Howell, which eventually became Alston & Bird. Then we merged with four lawyers from Jones, Williams, Dorsey & Kane. Hugh Dorsey did not come with us. He went with another firm. But the others did, and there were, there was Bob Jones, two Ralph Williamses, Sr. and Jr., and Ed Kane came with us. And that was a merger about 1961, I think, somewhere in there. And then in 1988 Jones, Bird & Howell merged with Alston, Miller & Gaines. And we, each group, they had 95 lawyers, we had 37, and each of us picked out one name. Because it was fashionable to have two names in a law firm by then. And it became Alston & Bird.

DANYLCHAK: You mentioned Bobby Jones.

DURRETT: Yes.

DANYLCHAK: What was that experience like, working with him?

DURRETT: Well, it was one of the most fortunate things in my life, really. I was the young man in the firm that worked with Mr. Jones on legal matters and had a chance to get to know him. He was crippled at the time. I never knew him as a golfer. He had a disease that was a, the name of it was syringomyelia. It was a neurological disease, so that, and the way I describe it is, nerve endings going out from the spinal cord decay. And so the initial thing that you would notice is that your extremities--your hands and your feet--you can't control them anymore. And so he was crippled. And he was, initially he could walk with aluminum canes that fastened around his arms. He could go that way. Eventually he was in a wheel chair. I had a couple of trips with him which were memorable. He and Cliff Roberts, the two of them founded the Masters. They also were joint managers of a firm called Joe Roberts Corporation, which owned Coca-Cola Bottling plants in Central and South America. And Bob got to the point where he felt he could no longer do that. And so he agreed, they agreed, to sell the company, the stock in the company to a firm in New York. And there was really nothing for a lawyer representing, as I was, representing the sellers, to do, because it was a cash sale, other than to, to accomplish whatever was necessary at our end that the buyer needed to have done. And this was going to be closed at the offices of Shearman & Sterling in New York, which at the time, this was the early '60s, was the largest law firm in the country. It had 155 lawyers, and it was, its offices were down on Wall Street. And so when I got there, and it was the day before the closing--well, I should tell you the story about the trip up there. We flew, there were three of us: Bob Jones, Arthur Howell, and myself, flew up to New York in a Convair 880, which was a new airplane, which two weeks before we flew they were testing it out, out at Hartsfield Airport. And it flew into the ground and killed the crew. So that wasn't very, you know, you're a little more nervous than usual. This was the month before, I think, that we went. So we got on the airplane and the, there came over the intercom the announcement that the pilot had discovered we had taken on too much gasoline. And he was deciding whether to siphon it off on the ground, which would require some delay, or just blow it out from the air. And so we sat there. And the stewardess came back, and Mr. Jones said, "Miss?" She said, "Yes?" He said, "Is the pilot having a hard time making up his mind?" I say that because that was typical of Bob's wit. We got off the airplane at night in Idlewild Airport, now John F. Kennedy, and I noticed we weren't up, we were still out on the concourse, we weren't up at the gate, but we were getting off the airplane. So I got off, following Arthur and

Bob. By the way, I never called him Bob while I knew him, because he was always Mr. Jones. But I can't call him Mr. Jones now, because it sounds so formal and that's not really the way I felt about him. Anyway, we get off the airplane. There is a limousine down at the bottom of the stairs. There was a cop on a motorcycle in front. At that time the police had red, not blue, lights. And a cop behind the limousine, with a red light going. We get in the limousine, Arthur and I in the back, Bob is in the front with the driver. And we take off from that concourse going sixty miles an hour, with sirens and lights going. And we get halfway to Manhattan. And Mr. Jones is kind of slumped down in the front seat. And he turns around and says, "Boys, when you get the key to this city, sometimes it comes in handy." I thought that was wonderful. When we got to the closing—the day before, I discovered that the buyer, the bank lawyer at the law firm had had a nervous breakdown, and none of the papers had been prepared. And I couldn't find anybody at Shearman & Sterling who would tend to this. And I knew that if those papers weren't prepared that Mr. Jones would blow up. He didn't want to stay in New York any further than he had to, and none of us did. So I commandeered a secretary, and I prepared the closing documents on behalf of the bank and the buyer. And I get to the closing the next day, and I tell the bank vice president, you need to read these documents, because I prepared 'em, and I don't represent you or the buyer. He said, "I'm not going to read those documents." And I said, "Why?" He says, "I don't rely on the security agreement you prepared." I said, "What do you rely on?" He said, "A corresponding balance in my bank." Which meant that he required the buyer to keep cash in his bank equal to the amount of the loan. And I remarked on how, later, to a friend of mine who was a former banker, I said, "You know, if that loan goes into default, he'll read those documents then." And he told me, he said, "Frazer," this was an ex-banker, he said, "Don't ever overestimate the intelligence of a banker." So that was one of my experiences in New York that, with a large law firm they couldn't be concerned with preparing a document because their senior associate, who wasn't a partner, had had a nervous breakdown and was home in bed. The final story I'll tell about this trip is when we were checking out, and Arthur was looking at the bill. And he said to Bob, "Good God, Bob, they've charged you a dollar apiece for Coca-Colas." And Mr. Jones didn't, he didn't waste a minute. He said, "Arthur, this is the only place in the world where they charge what they're worth." Coca-Colas were selling for fifteen-cents I think at the time in Atlanta. I thought that was a remark that needs to be kept in the Coca-Cola history somewhere.

DANYLCHAK: Well, we'll certainly bring it to light, that's for sure. Do you have any other particular favorite memories from your work at the law firm?

DURRETT: I loved to practice law. And I don't think, any memories I have would all be about professional matters that I don't want to discuss.

DANYLCHAK: Sure. Well, we do want to discuss your involvement with the Howard School. Can you tell me a little about that institution and its mission?

DURRETT: Well, it was a school for what I will call learning disabled students. That's not appropriate language nowadays because people don't want to consider students as being disabled. The word now is learning differences. And there's a great deal to that. But I use it because nobody knows what learning differences are. It was established by a Mrs. Howard in DeKalb County, in Decatur. And I had always thought of it as really a Decatur institution. When I went, agreed to go on the board, I was asked by Joe Asher to go on the board. Joe had been on the board, and the Asher family had supported the school for a long time. And Joe asked me to

go on the board. He didn't know me at all, but he knew my wife, because they had worked together on charitable boards. So Joe asked me because Cree said she couldn't do it. So he asked me, and so I went on the board. And at that time we had one campus, on Ponce de Leon. And the campus was where the, was a home that another member of the board's family had owned. And then they built a separate school building next to that home on Ponce de Leon. Later we established a campus in Roswell. Bought property, got supported by the Campbell Foundation and the Woodruff Foundation particularly. We couldn't have done it without their support. And I was, then became the chairman of that board. Years passed, and it became evident that we really needed to consolidate the school. And to consolidate it probably in another area. And so we made the decision to buy property that was, I thought, the armpit of Atlanta at that time. Shows you what I know about property values. Fortunately we had then succeeding me a chairman of the board who did know about property values. This was Cecil Phillips. And Cecil convinced us that we should buy this property that was due west of Bacchanalia, if you know where Bacchanalia is, up on the hill. It was right next to where there was a fabric outlet which, everybody who bought fabrics went there to buy. And I thought the neighborhood was just horrible. But that was, perhaps that's the reason we were able to afford it. We bought it, and we have now built a campus there. And the school is very successful. And I think the year after we bought that property the value of it had doubled in price. So we were really fortunate. The school is in excellent hands now. I've been off the board now for two years, I believe. But I'm very proud of the success of that school.

DANYLCHAK: Well, I want to talk a little bit, I want to shift the focus back to Buckhead for a few minutes, and how the community has changed. What are the biggest differences in the community now versus when you were growing up and first starting in your law practice?

DURRETT: Well, the number of people. I mean, the Buckhead I grew up in, there weren't any buildings more than two or three stories high. And I don't need to talk about what it looks like now. I never dreamed it would ever look like what it looks like now. The differences are that when I was seven years old, I walked home from Buckhead, and I am guessing I would see a car on Peachtree Road about every minute. That's about it. And most of the time you'd look and you could see maybe one or two cars. That was it. All the way home I might have passed fifty cars, walking from Buckhead down to Muscogee. Now there are condominiums, you know how high they are, all along Peachtree Road, that used to be just houses. Even the houses, those that were large, are nowhere near the houses that were built at the turn of the century. How in the world people could get around in a house as big as most people were buying at that time I'll never know. But at any rate, the difference in Buckhead is it looks like, it looks like Wall Street now, and it didn't then.

DANYLCHAK: Are there any special places that you used to go that have been lost, stores or restaurants or places where you congregated with friends?

DURRETT: Well, the only restaurants I recall growing up were the Frances Virginia Tea Room—

DANYLCHAK: Where was that?

DURRETT: It was on Peachtree Street about, somewhere around where, sort of across from Macy's. I don't think Macy's is downtown anymore, but where Macy's used to be. It was on the

eastern side of Peachtree. Well, you know, all of the movie theaters that I remember downtown aren't there anymore. So I can't tell you that. But the Frances Virginia Tea Room was on Peachtree downtown. The Varsity is still where it was. The, I can't even remember the names of the places we used to go and eat on Peachtree, when I was in high school. The Pig & Whistle was one. But all of those are gone now.

DANYLCHAK: Are there places that you used to frequent when you were growing up or in your early career that are still here that are special places to you?

DURRETT: Well, I can remember one that's not still here. Abraham's Delicatessen, which was at Garden Hills. Had the best sandwiches I've ever come across in my life. The one thing I remember about him, they shredded all of the lettuce that they put in the sandwich. So they heaped shredded lettuce in the sandwich. And I'll tell a story which perhaps would be considered inappropriate, but it's such a great story I need to tell it. I took a friend of mine, a fraternity brother named Bob Beckham, who had an exquisite sense of humor, into Abraham's and we had one of those sandwiches. And he ordered French fries. And the waitress came up, she said, "You want a fork for those potatoes?" And he looked at her and he said, "No, ma'm, I'll pay for them." That's what's called an off-color story, but it's the truth. And that's what Abraham's was, and it was an institution, which isn't there anymore. You know, Wender & Roberts, I think it's still there, isn't it, or is it?

DANYLCHAK: There's one at the shopping center at West Paces Ferry and Northside.

DURRETT: No, no, not that one. But the one in Buckhead is no longer there anymore? No, there's no institutions in Buckhead anymore. The theater is still there, but it's not a moving picture theater.

DANYLCHAK: Do you remember any large events in Buckhead, any special events that kind of brought the community together when you were growing up?

DURRETT: Other than E. Rivers burning down, no, I don't remember any large events in Buckhead when I was growing up. I would daresay there were no large events in Buckhead when I was growing up. All the events were small. I walked from Muscogee to North Fulton. I didn't have a car. And I was too old to ride a bike. And there were pretty girls who would go to school at the Catholic school there that I enjoyed walking, seeing every morning as I walked.

DANYLCHAK: I would daresay that the annexation of Buckhead into the city of Atlanta was a very influential event in the community and it probably changed the community quite a bit. Do you have any sense of what the impact of that was?

DURRETT: Well, when, before that annexation the city limits were at 28th Street. The guy that was responsible for that annexation, I bought the house on Ridgewood Road from. His name was Phil Hammer. He had a firm called Hammer Siler Associates. They were city planners. And Phil was very in with Hartsfield, very influential on his judgment, and he told Hartsfield at the time that Hartsfield was considering what became known as the "Plan of Improvement," which was the name they gave to the annexation effort. Great name. Who could be opposed to a Plan of Improvement? He told Hartsfield that if this passes, you'll not be able to control the population of Atlanta. If it doesn't pass, you will be able to control the population of Atlanta. Well, the mayor was uninterested in controlling the population of Atlanta. He wanted it to grow. So he

threw his efforts behind it, and it got passed. Phil then moved his firm from Atlanta to Washington, D.C. But he was the person that was responsible for, I think, for the expansion of the city limits.

I do want to say one thing about North Fulton when I was there, which I think was really important. When I ran for president of the student body, I had one plank in my platform, and that was that we were going to have a baseball team. Well, I got elected. And the next year I went in to the principal, who had changed. We had a new principal. And I won't go into names. And I said, "Mr. So-and-So, we need to have a baseball team." "No, I don't think we're going to have a baseball team." Well, we did. We ended up having a baseball team. And at that time athletes who played football played football. The others played basketball, ran track, and that was the three sports we had. And then the baseball team. And they called for everybody who wanted to play baseball to come out and they would try them out. At that time everybody from Sandy Springs were farm kids. They rode the bus in to North Fulton. They were what, I hate to say it, we would call red necks, because they were farm kids and they plowed a mule, and their necks were red from the sun. They came out for the baseball team. When the dust cleared, one football player made the baseball team. All the rest of the baseball players were from Sandy Springs, and they rode the bus in. And nobody had known their names, because they always got on the bus and went back. They didn't hang around. They got names. That is the most significant thing I have ever done in my life in terms of its effect, in my judgment. I am serious about that. These kids got names. And that baseball team ended up winning the North Georgia championship, and the top pitcher, from Sandy Springs, who pitched for the North Georgia All-Stars against the South Georgia All-Stars at Ponce de Leon Park, was a left-hander from Sandy Springs. They knew how to play baseball, and us Buckhead guys didn't.

DANYLCHAK: That's a wonderful story. Do you have anything else that you'd like to share that I've missed over the last hour or so, that you'd like to share?

DURRETT: I'm thankful that I recall that story, but no, I don't have anything else.

DANYLCHAK: Well, I thank you so much for your time today. This has been such a pleasure for me, to listen to your memories.

DURRETT: Thank you.