

PETE ROLADER
Interview Conducted July 19, 2010

PR = Pete Rolader
UM = Unidentified Male
CW = Chad Wright
E – Erica Danylchak

CW: This is an interview with Donald William Rolader known by his friends as Pete of 432 Lakeshore Drive of Berkley Lake, Georgia. Born in a log cabin on Moore's Mill Road,¹ Mr. Rolader is a descendant of one of the original and most historical Buckhead families. Father of three and a career attorney we are grateful for Pete's accounts this afternoon on July 19, 2010 at Pete's residence. The interviewer is Chad Wright representing the Buckhead Heritage Society, Atlanta, Georgia. That's the formality. Mr. Rolader thank you so much for having us in your home this afternoon and can't tell you what a privilege it is to be here with you and learn about your family and your life in Buckhead.

PR: Well, I appreciate you coming here because of my physical condition it's difficult for me to go someplace else. I thank you for the trouble of coming here.

CW: Well we've got an ideal setting; the camera can't see it but you've got a nice lake and everything to look out on, lots of birds and trees and everything so we thank you. First question and kind of an overview is to kind of build up to how your family came to Buckhead and the history going back to maybe William Joseph Rolader and what brought him to Georgia and then also to Buckhead and from there we'll expand out a little bit. Tell us a little about William Joseph Rolader, when he came and what brought him to Georgia.

PR: William Joseph Rolader's sister whose name I do not remember², they came here from, immigrated from Prussia which is part of Germany back in the middle 1840s.³ They came with their parents but their parents died during the passage and William Joseph and his sister came ashore at Charleston as orphans and the people in South Carolina and North Georgia cared for them as foster parents as they wandered from South Carolina down into Hall County, Georgia. And from there William Joseph found his way down to Buckhead. His sister went to Texas. What caused this immigration according to the history that I have is that there was an "Obama" depression in Germany at that time and the wealthy people of Germany were paying a fee for passage to America and to purchase a homestead in Texas. But since these children's parents died they had nothing left so they were cared for by the good people of South Carolina and Georgia.

¹ Pete was not born in the Rolader cabin on Moore's Mill Road. However, his father was.

² William Joseph Rolader's sister's name was Mary Magdalena.

³ Documentation confirms that they immigrated in 1828.

Now coming to Georgia and Buckhead they found this property on Moore's Mill Road at the intersection of Northside Drive and purchased it from the Clark Howell estate. Mr. Howell was a big property owner and I think judge around there for a while and Howell Mill Road was named for him. But W.J. and his brother, Lorenzo Dow Rolader purchased, you won't believe this, 50 acres from the Howell estate for the large sum of \$800.00.⁴

CW: What year was that?

PR: It was in the middle 1840s, I don't know exactly which one.⁵

CW: Right. That's a good investment.

PR: Yes. And we still have some of it. So that's how they got to Georgia. Now, William Joseph somehow got into the pottery business⁶ and Lorenzo Dow turned out to be a minister and he preached at Center Congregational Church a little further down Moore's Mill Road and William Joseph –

CW: In which direction would that have been on Moore's Mill?

PR: Well it would have been going west I guess.

CW: So towards present day I-75?

PR: Yes.

CW: Okay.

PR: On past I-75; no between Moore's Mill and I-75.

CW: Okay.

PR: Then WJ, I reckon he got into the pottery business by marrying Arrie Cofield, I don't know.⁷ That's my grandmother. I forgot what [William Joseph's] wife's name was, I think it was Anne Gunter.

⁴ William Washington Rolader bought this property on Moore's Mill Road, not William Joseph Rolader. William Joseph Roder had property in the northeast corner of Land Lot 97 of the 17th district.

⁵ A Fulton County record documents the date as 1849.

⁶ William Washington Rolader was the first member of the family to enter the pottery business. William Joseph was never a potter.

⁷ William Washington, not William Joseph, entered the pottery business and married Arrie Cofield.

CW: Anne Gunter is what we have.

PR: Anne Gunter, that's right. I'm a generation ahead of myself. And, [William Washington] established the pottery business there on Moore's Mill Road which continued on down through my father's time. My father did not turn pottery but he was – I call him an entrepreneur, he hired a potter and he handled everything except the making of the pots and made a business out of it. Then he and his brothers Clark and Homer formed the Rolader Springs Water Company which . . .do you want me to go into that right now?

CW: Well we'll touch into that. Yeah, that is going to be something we will definitely want to get into. We'll go into more detail there. And so those are your uncles, Clark, Homer and WW, right?

PR: Clark and Homer; WW was my grandfather.

CW: Was your grandfather.

PR: WJ was the one that came in; WW was his son and my grandfather.

CW: I got you.

UM: Your grandfather.

CW: And William Joseph, WJ, did he build the cabin on Moore's Mill?

PR: The best record I have is that [William Washington] and Lorenzo bought the cabin from somebody and had it moved to Moore's Mill Road. They both occupied it until [William Washington] got married; [then Lorenzo] went up the road about 500 feet and built himself a house and both of them lived there all of their lives.

CW: And that would be, when you say Lorenzo would that be WW?

PR: No that's Lorenzo Dow. WW's brother.

CW: WW's brother. And they lived in the cabin together.⁸

PR: Yes.

⁸ They only lived together for a month or two. William Washington bought the land in December of 1879 and was married in February of 1880.

CW: Is that correct? And so those are the sons of WJ?

PR: Yes.

CW: Did WJ ever live in the cabin or?

PR: No not that I know of.

CW: He never did. Okay. And you were born in that cabin, correct?

PR: No I was born across the street from it.

CW: Across the street.

PR: My father was born in the cabin. He and his seven brothers and [two] sisters.

CW: Can you describe that to us? Was it still – I assume it was still there when you were born.

PR: Yes. I was born across the street. What happened, my grandfather, W.W. Rolader gave each of his children a plot across the street and so what happened was that he had all of his children right there with him, most of them. Some moved away but that part of Moore's Mill Road was inhabited by cousins and I can well remember each Christmas morning Homer, the younger of the brothers that had no children, he would wake everybody up by walking out in his front yard shooting his 12 gauge shotgun and waking all the kids up and from that time on it was pandemonium. We all wound up in the cabin for a Christmas feast.

CW: Describe that cabin a little bit.

PR: Well by the time I came along it had been expanded because for W.W. to raise all those children he didn't have enough room for beds in that one-room cabin so when I came along it had several other rooms added to it but in the original log cabin was a huge fireplace, larger than mine here and that was the only heat in the cabin. No electricity, they used kerosene lamps and that fireplace and as I say we had Christmas dinner there and when I came along all of us cousins across the street, one of our primary jobs in the wintertime was to be sure that Granny Rolader had plenty of logs on her front porch to keep her warm. If we didn't we got the switching.

CW: And Granny Rolader would be Arrie Cofield.

PR: Arrie Cofield, that's right.

CW: And we touched upon the pottery, now Arrie's family also was a well-known Buckhead pottery family as well.

PR: Yes. Her [brother] was Will Cofield and I remember him.⁹

CW: Describe a little bit about the pottery operation on the grounds of the log cabin. Where did the clay come from and the sand and where did they fire it and how was all that handled?

PR: The pottery was located on the right-hand side of the house looking at it closer to the side toward Northside Drive and back behind the cabin, down the lower level was the vein of clay and we all called it the clay pits and what they did was dig the clay out from under the ground, the pits were like oh about shoulder high or something like that and to dig it out and put it – I guess early before my time with wagons but when I came along they hauled it out in pickup trucks and brought it up to the pottery and just to the left of the pottery was a mill, grinding mill. It had mules and horses that pulled the poles, turned the grinder, that mule or horse walked around and around and ground the clay.

CW: What color was the clay? Was it Georgia red clay?

PR: No this was white clay, potters clay and just a vein of it and the rest of the dirt up there was red. In fact that part of Moore's Mill Road where we lived was called Red Ridge and it's amazing how that vein of white clay existed in all that red clay. And, to the left of the clay pits my grandfather, W.W. had built we call it the fish pond and that's where all of us cousins learned to swim, in there skinny dipping. And after the clay was brought up and ground in the mill, the grinder, then it was brought in and pressed through hardware cloth to get the rocks and foreign matter out of it. After that point the potter took it and made it into balls the size that the piece of pottery it was going to make would be and he would put that on the wheel, the potter's wheel which he propelled with his right foot with a kick bar at the bottom, turned the wheel around, with his hands he shaped the pottery. At that point he moved the pottery over to make 2 x 6's and put them on the boards and they would get a board full it would be carried outside to dry in the sunshine. And when a cloud came up everybody in the neighborhood would come in a hurry and get those fresh pots under the roof before the rain came. Then after they had dried, the water was out of them and they were white then we had brick kiln built in front of the shop and with a fire pit in front of it and a sand floor in the back between the fire pit and the chimney.

CW: Where would the sand come from? Do you know?

⁹ Arrie's father was Thomas Cofield, who was also a potter. He died in 1913 and is buried in an unmarked grave at Sardis United Methodist Church. He learned the trade from his father-in-law, Bowling Brown.

PR: I really don't know.

CW: Nancy Creek maybe?

PR: Maybe so, could have been. Someplace close. And, at that point the potter very meticulously sat that kiln full of pottery so it had to have so much space between stacks to make it burn evenly then about 5:00 to 6:00 in the afternoon they would build a fire in that fire pit and fire that kiln all night long with cord wood and then when it reached a certain temperature and the potter, the potter he was the leader in this thing, he would say all right boys it's done now and they would put a piece of metal over the hole where the fire wood was chucked in and let it stay closed overnight. Then the next day in the afternoon after things had cooled down it was time to go in there and get those pots and bring them out and if hell is any hotter than that kiln was after firing I don't want to go there.

CW: Now the glazing too, they would be glazed before they were put in the kiln.

PR: Yes. They had what I called wash tubs with the glaze in it but they bought it from someplace and then they would dip the pottery that was to be glazed, dipped them in that wash tub and sit them out, they would dry on the pottery until they put it in the kiln.

CW: Do you know what kind of glaze they would use?

PR: I don't – I never did ..

CW: Alkaline or a salt?

PR: It wasn't salt. What was the first?

CW: An alkaline glaze.

PR: I think that's the kind it was. It came out like you see these pots here.

CW: Right. So you've got some to your left there.

PR: Yeah, that type of glaze whatever it is.

CW: Okay. So brown, so it probably is – it could be an alkaline glaze.

PR: That's the color they made.

CW: And why pottery at the time? Who would come and buy it, what was it used for?

PR: You see these jugs? Back in those days they tell me that I.M. Rose [Distillery], I think his name was, made for Rose's whiskey here in Atlanta. Those are whiskey jugs.

CW: Okay.

PR: And that's what they were used for. Then back in those days it was very little refrigeration and people would put their milk or perishable products in these pottery containers and lower them down in the well to keep them cool and to keep them from spoiling. That was another big use and flower pots for flowers and they made lots of what they call flue liners that you put in fireplaces and stoves to line the chimney to make them fireproof. Those were the main products of the pottery.

CW: Okay. And so W.W. started the pottery on Moore's Mill and his son – which of his sons carried on the tradition?

PR: My father, Ivon.

CW: Ivon did.

PR: Yeah.

CW: But you said he hired other folks to come continue the operation.

PR: Yes.

CW: And you mentioned his brother started Rolader Spring Water.

PR: Yes.

CW: What year would that have been?

PR: It was going as soon as I was old enough to remember so it must have been around, I was born in 1924 and it must have been between 1924 and 1930.

CW: Okay. And where was the spring?

PR: The spring was – springs were on Randall Mill Road off West Paces Ferry just before you get to where Marietta, I think they call it Marietta Parkway, not Marietta Parkway, the old 41 Highway across Moore's Mill.

CW: All right. Okay so you're a little bit towards Vinings?

PR: No back towards Buckhead from there.

CW: Okay, got you so maybe where Nancy – where Westminster School is right now?

PR: No back closer up this way.

CW: Closer, okay. And did the family own the land that the spring was on?

PR: Yes. Somehow they kept accumulating land. I don't know – this was down East Beachwood Road, you maybe familiar with it. This is where the springs, where Randall Mill just across the other side of Randall Mill from East Beachwood. You know where it is?

CW: Okay. Yeah I know where you're talking about. And that subdivision actually I think is Rolader Springs if you look on the subdivision map, I think that area comes up as Rolader Springs.

PR: It probably does.

CW: Yeah. Okay I know exactly where you are.

PR: I plowed a mule down there plenty of days.

CW: And so tell us a little bit about the water company and who did they service, residential, commercial.

PR: The water company had. . .the business was furnishing the drinking water to the office buildings in Buckhead and downtown Atlanta. And back in those days they had to – there were no electric water coolers in Atlanta and you see the cooler sitting over here, the water company furnished those coolers and Uncle Homer handled the delivery on his truck and went everyday, five days a week at least to downtown Atlanta and to Buckhead and put fresh bottles of water in each of the coolers and then to keep it cool, it was Atlantic Ice & Coal Company back then, old Atlanta outfit, I don't think they are in operation anymore but they followed our truck and put fresh ice in them every morning. And so that was the business and you won't believe this that the price that spring water is selling for today but a jug like you see sitting up here, five gallons for 50 cents delivered.

CW: That's not too bad.

PR: The only thing was the inventory was cheap.

CW: Right, exactly. And they would reuse the bottles? They would come back and wash them or would they just fill them back up?

PR: Oh yes. No they would come back and we boys would wash them. I spent many an afternoon.

CW: Where would you wash them?

PR: In the spring house because the springs were of course ground level and the next level up was the bottling room and above that was this huge cedar tank and it pumped the water from the springs up into that cedar tank and filled the bottles by letting the water flow by gravity down pipes. You could bottle about 4 or 5 bottles at a time and then the fun was loading them on the water truck and we boys would work and wash bottles and load the truck in the afternoons and get paid by taking turns driving the water truck up the long driveway to the public road. We were too young to have a driver's license so that was our pay for washing the bottles.

CW: And so you – who else would help you? You mentioned the children so would that be some of Homer's children and some of Clark's children?

PR: Homer didn't have any. Clark's children and my brother, Dr. Ike Rolader and some of the other cousins, mainly Clark's kids and my brother and I and that was the big trip of the day and then as bonus compensation Uncle Homer who had no children, on Sunday morning would take all of the boy cousins from across the street back down behind Granny Rolader's house to the fish pond with a bar of Octagon soap in his hands, we would all go skinny dipping for a bit and then take that bar of soap and get the down spout where the water came out of the pond and get our baths and come back and get dressed and go to Sardis Church.

CW: Let's talk about Sardis a little bit too now that mentioned Sardis. Now you've had some of your relatives were preachers at Sardis. Is that correct?

PR: Yes W.J. Rolader was ordained by the Methodist Conference.

CW: So the patriarch, W.J. was an ordained Methodist.

PR: Yes and Lorenzo Dow was ordained in the Congregational Church.

CW: Okay. And did both of them preach at Sardis?

PR: Lorenzo Dow preached on its Center Congregational Church and W.J. preached at Sardis and was a circuit riding preacher and served other churches in the area.

CW: And most of your family I assume went to Sardis since the tie was there.

PR: Yes.

CW: Did Lorenzo have much of a draw at his congregational church?

PR: His was much smaller than Sardis. Sardis wasn't big then but about the church services, all of, not all but most of W.W.'s children, my uncles, my aunts attended and were members of Sardis Church so every Sunday we were all in church but it was a habit for all of us boy cousins to sit on the front pew so they could see that we behaved and I remember one Sunday in particular we were sitting up on the front pew and I was misbehaving and all of a sudden this big hand caught me by the shoulder and marched me down the aisle and out the door of the church across the cemetery. It was my father and when he got through switching me, I thought he was going to leave me there and from that day forward I've been a born again Christian.

CW: So do you continue to still try to get down to Sardis?

PR: I went and served about every official capacity in that church until my wife came down with cancer of the throat and lost her voice box and died here about 22 years ago. When she got sick I had to stay home with her but up until then me and my son and daughters all just practically lived in that church and back in those days as to the social life, most of it was centered around the church.

CW: Tell us a little bit about that. What a typical Sunday or Wednesday be, or the weekly progressions in and out of the church, what would your religious life be in Buckhead at that time?

PR: We went to Sunday School and the 11:00 services and most every Sunday it was a habit for somebody to bring the minister home to have dinner with them and have a nap before he went back to preach Sunday night, the second service on Sunday and then the youth of the church would have Valentine parties and Easter Egg hunts and various excuses so that all of our really friendships were tied around the youth in the church and we would take hayrides to Stone Mountain and God knows what. I remember back in those days the church had fish fries and chicken dinners and donut sales and do these things to raise money to pay the preacher with.

CW: And the preachers, it sounds like they rotated in and out of the church.

PR: It wasn't – Until more recent years, back when I was young Sardis was on a what they call a charge. We shared a preacher with Sandy Springs United Methodist Church. He would preach at Sardis one Sunday and Sandy Springs the next Sunday. Then in the summertime, Sandy Springs had an arbor, outside arbor at their church and each summer we would have camp meeting in that arbor. We didn't go to camp, it was close enough to drive but we would all drive up there every night for services and I guess that was about

it. But the whole family and all of the social life was centered around activities like that in the church.

CW: Who were some of the other families at the time that attended Sardis that you remember?

PR: Well I remember J.W. McGehee family, they lived up Roswell Road. Their daughter is one of them my age that is still going to church there and the Robertson family and God it has been so long ago I'm trying to remember some of them. The more recent years I remember we had Dr. Carl Avin, chest surgeon and his wife came there and Dr. Willis Hurst, he's been there for years. He and I and Ray Moore, the television personality and Dr. Henry McGee a science professor at Tech, we shared teaching of an adult Sunday School class for 25 years.

CW: Tell me a little bit about it because I imagine that over time the church changed a good bit. It's a beautiful piece of property and legend has it that it's one of the oldest churches certainly in the Atlanta area.

PR: Right and probably in Georgia.

CW: And probably in Georgia but from your memory of going to church how have you seen the church change physically as far as new buildings, expansions?

PR: What happens, the existing structure at Powers Ferry and Roswell Road is to my understanding the third structure. First there was a wooden building that was destroyed by fire and a second building destroyed by a tornado.

CW: And when was the tornado roughly?

PR: It was back before 1924.

CW: Okay so before your birth.

PR: Yes. And then it was replaced by this brick structure that is there now and that building was built by my Uncle George Spruill who was married to my father's sister, Cora. He was the contractor on it and at one time back in those days; before that building came about when they had the two-story deal the Sardis Lodge No. 107, Free & Accepted Masons occupied the second story of it and what happened was we had gotten up into the 1940s and the membership of the church picked up. We had a wonderful pastor by the name of Ed Padgett and he brought members in and he was great and we outgrew that church and we tried to expand it. There wasn't enough land so the church conference had closed the St. John's Church downtown and had the money from it left and they gave us that money together with what we raised and we bought the property on Mt. Paran Road and built the existing building. In that cemetery – well what happened when we moved a

few of the people wanted to stay in that building so we changed our name to St. John's in recognition of the money we got from them and a new congregation was formed in the name of Sardis for the people who stayed down there and did not go with us. Now the bones of most of these ancestors are buried in that church cemetery at Powers Ferry and Roswell Road including W.J. Rolader, the first one; W.W. and Lorenzo Dow and I don't know how many others.

CW: There are a few I think in the Paces Ferry Cemetery Methodist Church.

PR: Yes.

CW: And there are some Roladers buried in that cemetery as well.

PR: Yes.

CW: And so why the split? Why did some go to that church and some stay at Sardis?

PR: Some lived over toward that area and married into families in that church but the bulk of them stayed at Sardis.

CW: And as far as the stained glass that was in Sardis that was in 1941 I think the stained glass that's in the church – did the Roladers buy any stained glass windows for the church?

PR: There are three big windows in the front of that church inside; the first one on the right is the Rolader family. That was a miracle in the making. We almost lost the church to having the mortgage foreclosed in the depression days but this minister came along, N.O.L. Powell with the idea of selling those memorial windows and it worked and we paid off the mortgage and saved it.

CW: How about that! Do you remember the family talking about what was going to be included in the Rolader window?

PR: It was done in the name of the W.W. Rolader family.

CW: Okay. Oh Erica is writing down some notes. She is saying that Uncle George Spruill also built the Buckhead Theater that Charlie Loudermilk recently renovated.

PR: That's right. Do you know Charlie?

CW: We do know Charlie, we sure do.

PR: He was a rip. Charlie and my brother, Ike, Dr. Ike, they went off to Chapel Hill to play football. They were big stars at North Fulton football and they got up there and found

that they were pigmies compared to the size of those boys so they didn't make the team but Charlie and my brother were the closest of friends, about as close as my brother and I. So I've known Charlie all my life and in fact I was his lawyer when he formed Aaron Rents.

CW: Is that right?

PR: And my mother, this was right after my father died, my mother had always worked for my father in his businesses and she and Charlie were good friends because he stayed at my house half the time and so Charlie talked mother into coming with him so she was the first employee Charlie had.

CW: Is that right?

PR: Yeah.

CW: How about that! That is remarkable. What year did your father die?

PR: You know I can't remember but it was along the 1940s. It was after '49; it may have been the early 50s because he was still living when I graduated from Emory Law School and passed the Georgia Bar and I remember him going with me to argue my first case before the Supreme Court.¹⁰

CW: That's a nice memory to have. Tell us a little bit; you mentioned also the multiple businesses that the family had. We talked about Rolader Spring Water, we talked about the pottery, now there was also a general store and a gas station at one point wasn't there?

PR: That was the headquarters for Northwest Atlanta.

CW: Where was that located?

PR: At the intersection of Moore's Mill Road and Northside Drive where the water tower is now, it was in that corner.

CW: And what was the name of it, what was it referred to?

PR: Just Rolader's Store, General Store.

CW: What all happened there?

PR: Everything happened there.

¹⁰ He died in 1954.

CW: Tell me about it.

PR: I was raised in a soapbox on the counter of that store. That store had was first of all gasoline and oil, repair garage, dry goods, feeds and seed, anything you could buy in a general store they had it and then in addition to the automobile repair garage was a blacksmith shop. They shoed horses and mules back there and the trade was – that's just about a block off from the millionaire estates on West Paces Ferry and Northside Drive so we gassed up all their cars and charged them dearly for it. One of my fondest memories of those days was that Harrison Jones was the owner and president of Fulton National Bank and his son, Gordon was about mine and my brother's age and Gordon was the only guy on this side of Atlanta that owned a Shetland pony and it was the prettiest brown and white Shetland pony you ever saw. Gordon would ride that thing up to the store and let my brother and I ride it. We always looked for him coming. Last time I saw him Gordon himself was president of the Fulton National Bank downtown where I banked.

CW: A lot of activity out front, would neighbors come and hang out on the general store porch or?

PR: We sold Coca-Colas like crazy. We had a long ice box for the soft drinks to go in and watermelons and Atlantic Ice & Cold would come and put in like a 200 pound block of – 200 pound blocks of ice and that thing would keep them cold and it was outside and I spent half my life popping Cokes for a nickel a bottle.

CW: Tell us a little bit about – kind of focusing in on your life a little bit. We've got a great background on the family.

PR: I left off – my dad had so many businesses. We also got into it big when he decided we would have a dairy so we had a dairy right behind the house where I born on Moore's Mill Road.

CW: How many head of cattle were back there?

PR: I was trying to think, about 15-20 and they called it Red Ridge Dairy.

CW: Who were some of your clients?

PR: I don't know. We had a route, we delivered the dairy products by truck and I can remember sitting and making butter out of a pottery churn, another thing from the pottery was churns, you would churn and make buttermilk and he had a – it was a regular route down the Northside of Atlanta toward town and that's where he would sell the milk

instead of people coming after it and it was Grade A raw then. They didn't know what pasteurizing was.

CW: Sure.

PR: I've washed not only water bottles but the milk bottles.

CW: When did the dairy close down? When did that operation close down?

PR: Oh many, many years ago. I'd say probably during the 40s.

CW: How about the spring water company? When did that?

PR: It kept on until Uncle Homer died about the end of the 40s.¹¹

CW: Who was the last person to turn a pot on the Moore's Mill?

PR: I guess this old man, we called him Dolph. His name was [Ulysses Adolphus] Brown and he not only could turn a pot but he could play a fiddle like Charlie Daniels.¹²

CW: Is that right?

PR: He would make pots all day and play the fiddle all night.

CW: Was he part of the Brown family that was also heavily involved in the pottery in Buckhead?

PR: Yes.

CW: So he was a descendant from the Brown family.

PR: Yes.

CW: What year do you think that might have been?

PR: That was in the late 30s and 40s.¹³

¹¹ Homer died in 1966, but the spring water operation ended in the late 1940s.

¹² Ulysses Adolphus Brown was born in 1858. He was the grandson of Bowling Brown. He died in 1933 and the shop closed permanently at that time.

¹³ It was probably 1933.

CW: Let's talk about you. Let's get you on Moore's Mill, some of the childhood memories. I mean it sounds like a pretty ideal existence. You could milk cows, wash bottles; you could hang out at the general store and drink cokes, that's a pretty good childhood. Tell us a little bit about just your general life and your reflection of Buckhead at the time, the feel of it, some of the favorite things you did as children, places you went to, things you did, just give us a – paint a picture for us.

PR: I will do a panorama as quickly as I can because a lot happened. In the first place, the only school over in that area, grammar school was called Rosserville down close to between Moore's Mill and Howell Mill. A man and his wife were the only two teachers. You have heard of one room schoolhouses, this was a two room schoolhouse and my father, he didn't have much education but he was a wise man. You see what all he did with his businesses and things and he raised an Orthodontist and a lawyer. Where he started out he went to the County Commissioner back then and told them he wanted his children to go to a real school and we were compelled to go there but he got permission for my brother and I and my Uncle Clark's kids to go to E River School so we went to E Rivers Grammar School and from there to North Fulton High School and both of us went onto Emory University and I went to law school and my brother to dental school and then Stanley, he wound up being a professor over there in Orthodontics. Of course we were great fans of the Bulldog athletic teams at North Fulton and I was in ROTC. We wore uniforms four days out of the week and one of the big things I can remember is when Gone With the Wind premiered in Atlanta all of us ROTC boys in uniform were put on Tractor's Trolleys that ran from Buckhead to town then. We were put on Tractor's Trolleys and we were taken to town to guard the sidewalks and keep the people out so Clark Gable and Scarlett O'Hara could get to the theater. So that was a thing to remember. And I remember the Buckhead Theater, we used to go on dates; we would put 50 cents in our pocket and go out for the evening. It would cost a dime to go to the Buckhead Theater to see feature movies, a Flash Gordon serial and Movie Tone News all for a dime.

CW: How would you get up there? Would you drive?

PR: Well in the daytime on Saturdays we had off, my brother and I we would ride our bicycles up there. Then we had a bowling alley in Buckhead.

CW: Where was that?

PR: It was on West Paces Ferry; just about a block off Peachtree and that old Red Durham had a pool room up there and going to North Fulton I found a city girl for a wife, found her over at the corner of Peachtree Avenue and Grandview Avenue.

CW: When you say found her, how did you find her?

PR: Well she lived across the street from -- Uncle Clark and his wife had moved up there. That's how I found her and I started going with her when she was barely 16 when her mother let her out of the house and we used to go up to Peachtree Road and Buckhead and the big day another 50 cents in your pocket and we would buy – go to E- Scott & Simmons, a drug store and Winder & Roberts, they were both going then and get a cherry coke and a sandwich and go to the Buckhead show. We would put on a whole night for 50 cents. Then on big days we would go to the Varsity and get waited on by Flossie if you ever heard of Flossie.

CW: Oh yeah, Flossie Mae.

PR: Flossie Mae.

CW: Yeah, he wore the crazy hats, right?

PR: Yeah and he would sing the menu to you and then we would go from the Varsity to the Fox Theater and that was a big deal. Then they had another place down at Peachtree Battle called the Spinning Wheel. They sold milkshakes. Those were the biggest and best in Atlanta.

CW: So that would have been behind the fruit stand? There was some fruit stand, I think on Peachtree Battle, was it nearby that or was it across?

PR: Do you know where the Peachtree Battle Shopping Center is? It was down in there. And that was another big pastime. Then back then of course we went to the North Fulton football games and other athletic events and I ought not tell this one but her mother and daddy are dead but after the show we would go into the drug store. There is a little road off of West Paces Ferry down there called Thelma Drive, no houses on it, just a road. And everybody went from the show down to Thelma Drive and parked and smooched.

CW: Lover's Lane.

PR: Lover's Lane.

CW: That was Buckhead's Lover's Lane.

PR: That's right.

CW: All right.

PR: So that was about the size of the social life in Atlanta. It got me married.

CW: That's a good thing. It got you three kids too, right?

PR: That's for sure.

CW: Okay, three children. You went to law school at Emory.

PR: I lived at home on Moore's Mill Road.

CW: And real quick, tell me about that house. You had Granny's cabin across the street and what was your house when it was built?

PR: My house was just across the street and my father, that was his lot from one of the cousins, his brothers and sisters and my father never got married until he was 36 years old. He was in World War I in the 82nd Division, Europe. He came back and he started a grading business I think before I was ever born and built this house and had it paid for before he got married. He said [unintelligible].

CW: Entrepreneurial.

PR: I don't know who he stole the money from but it was paid for. But it was a humongous thing; four rooms and a porch with no electricity, no running water, no inside plumbing and a well on the back porch you drew your water out this way.

CW: And was it wood or brick?

PR: The house was wood.

CW: A wood house.

PR: And it was still living until they built that subdivision over there, we sold it off and the dairy was behind that house over there too. So that was the house I was brought up in and after I got married, when my son came along, my wife and I were living in that house. The electricity and heat we had it going.

CW: So you brought it up to modern standards.

PR: Yeah, brought it up to date because that Buckhead wife wouldn't stay in a damn barn.

CW: How many acres was that do you think?

PR: It was probably – maybe an acre. My dad bought his brother's lot next door and we had two of them and lived on one, built another little house and had a garden on the other. That's where I grew up.

CW: And you lived in it as you went to undergrad and graduate school at Emory.

PR: Yes. And I drove all the way from there to Emory back everyday to class.

CW: What was that route, down Lindberg?

PR: Yes. Peachtree Road to Lindberg, in that way.

CW: And when you got out of law school you obviously tried some cases in front of the Supreme Court. Tell us about your law practice and what kind of cases you took on, any good stories about Buckhead that filtered through your law practice?

PR: Well back in those days the kind of practice you had depending on who walked in your office that needed a lawyer. You would do anything you could do to make money enough to go to Kroger and get your groceries on Saturday. And, I got an office with an old lawyer who was about gone and I think the first year I practiced law I made \$1,000.00; lived on it and doubled it every year since for sixty years. But then I went there – I must have done pretty well. This Jewish lawyer, Joseph J. Vine who lived on Chatham Road here in Buckhead, he took me into his firm as a partner and I practiced with him for a long time in the Hurt Building downtown. We represented who was in the biggest land owner in Atlanta that was Ben Massell and Southern Federal Savings & Loan, that type of practice. I was in general practice, civil practice. Then things begin to change in Buckhead and the legal profession and I was one of those pioneers who moved out of downtown Atlanta and came to Buckhead. I had an office there on – I forgot whether it was Peachtree or Roswell Road for a while and then a friend of mine, Bob Dailey who is dead now built a building on West Wieuca Road and I moved out there and brought two or three other lawyers with me from Atlanta and practiced there for a while and then Howard Chatham whom I represented. Chatham built homes, Northside Realty, that crowd and they built Northside Tower and I moved up there.

What kind of practice I had, I turned out to be a dirt lawyer. That is real estate, moving dirt from one hand to another. I reckon as far as success in the practice I took care of cancerous wife 15-20 years and raised and educated three children and never – they never missed a meal I never knowingly overcharged anybody nor did I ever let a client walk out of my office because he couldn't afford my services. I made the fat fry the lean. I think three cases hit me as probably the most memorable of my practice. One was a lady here on the lake, I won't call any names but she was here and is still here. Had two high school age children, her husband was a big wheel at Scientific Atlanta and he came down with Parkinson's Disease, the [unintelligible] kind and Scientific Atlanta fired him. Cut him off with nothing and we were good friends. I knew his physical condition and I said they can't do that. I took her case and convinced Scientific Atlanta that it was not husband but his physical condition; I got him reinstated, full salary, all perks and

benefits, retirement and everything. She is still living in that big house over here. Both kids have gone through college. I never charged her a dime. That was my biggest case.

And another one I had an old Fulton County employee redneck over here in Roswell who had a house with no road frontage on it. He drove through Judge Hilliard's land to get from his house to the road and Maurice Hilliard sold his property and this developer bought it to put in a warehouse and office facility and they came in there and threatened to cut my man's access off to the public road. I got into that thing and sued them to prevent them from stopping his easement. I lost it in the trial court in Fulton County; took it on to the Supreme Court and reversed them and the Supreme Court put in an opinion in that case that says this developer could not have done away with this man's access to the road or even change it if they paved it with gold. That's right in the books. This old man was just a redneck county public works worker, had an old house sitting back there and I got through with that case I had that developer on his knees. He and his silk stocking lawyers said what can we do and I said drop back 20 yards and punt. So they paid me a handsome fee, they gave my client access to the new public road that they had cut through and had his property rezoned to commercial and he sold that property for a million dollars and moved to South Georgia and bought a farm. I thought that was a pretty good.

The last one and I'll quit on this. This old lady up in Dahlonega on social security and living in a shack on the side of the highway up there, this Dahlonega lawyer called me and said that he had something he wanted me to look at and that he knew I was a dirt lawyer. So he did and I got into the thing and found out this lady had a half interest in the tract of land the Fulton County Board of Education wanted to put schools on. Well I had contacts there and I got them and got it cranked up and this woman's sister-in-law was living on the property; farmed it and had a house there. She didn't want to do anything. Well I worked on that thing with a point that I got the county interested in buying the property and this old lady had got her lawyers convinced that they had no alternative but to sell and I wound up selling that property to the Board of Education and I took this old lady to closing with her two sons, pulled into my coat pocket and handed her a check for \$2 million.

CW: Whoa, what year was that?

PR: That has been in recent history, within the last 20 years and she – I never will forget, I took them to a restaurant to pay them off, thank them and everything and she took that check, looked at it and says I can't believe it, I can't believe it. Those are three good things that happened practicing law. I'm not going to tell you about those I lost. Old Judge Hope, he is dead now, he was a Fulton County Superior Court judge, he wouldn't go to the bathroom without asking me what to do and he said one day, he said Pete why do you try most of your cases out in the hall? I said well judge I ain't never lost one in the hall. That's about the end of my law stories.

CW: Well I got one question. Your dad went to your first case in front of the Georgia Supreme Court, did you win it?

PR: I think I did.

CW: That's good, that's good. Well tell us, we're wrapping up and I think Ellen has got a glass of water for you if you want a sip of water there.

PR: I don't need it.

CW: Are you sure?

PR: It makes me have to go to the bathroom.

CW: Okay. I mean for us your family has such an amazing history for Buckhead, so much diversity in it all the way back to Sardis to coming back in the late 1800s, you know just to have that first hand account and even first generation oral history coming from your dad, from W.J., just a fantastic resource and I appreciate you spending time with us this afternoon.

PR: I've enjoyed it as you can see.

CW: I do have one question. We have been trying to unravel a mystery of Harmony Grove, the church at the corner of Chatham and Paces Ferry. Harmony Grove Cemetery is there which we have restored in the past three or four years. No one can seem to remember where the actual church might have been located in relationship to the cemetery and didn't know if in your childhood when you were 8 or 9 years old rolling down Paces Ferry if you might have remembered some sort of foundation or something associated with the cemetery.

PR: The only thing I can remember about Harmony Grove was the cemetery. It was gone before I was old enough to know what it was. So that will take you back to the early 1930s anyhow. The only thing I ever remembered was the cemetery. Did you say it has been moved now?

CW: The cemetery is still there. We restored it. It had been overgrown so the past two or three years we have raised a good bit of money and completely – we have done an archaeological survey, we were doing renovation plans with landscaping and trying to get a sustaining effort to keep it from getting overgrown again.

PR: Well since I have retired and moved up here to Berkley Lake I haven't – I don't go up and down West Paces Ferry like I used to. I used to ride a mule up and down West Paces Ferry and Northside Drive.

CW: It's almost hard to believe and I guess obviously with your uncle shooting the shotgun to announce Christmas, did you do some hunting in the area as well?

PR: Oh yes. You want to hear one more wild story?

CW: Let's hear it.

PR: Over behind Granny Rolader's house, between there and West Paces Ferry Road there was nothing but woods, forest and my Uncle Homer run the water company, bottling and stuff, he had no children and he played with us and his nephews all the time and I still have in there by my bed the 410 gauge shotgun my father gave me when I was 12 years old and two things – we had a farm, now where my daddy stole all this money I don't know [laughter], but we had a farm at Dallas, about New Oak, a hundred and some odd acres and then we had about sixty acres on the Chattahoochee over here at the Jones Bridge Road and my father was a big rabbit hunter and squirrel hunter. He never was much of a bird hunter but we kept hound dogs and we would go rabbit hunting behind the house and these two farms and squirrel hunting and the first time I killed a squirrel, I never will forget, I went over behind Grandmother's house, just me and that 410 shotgun and all of a sudden I saw a squirrel and I shot and I killed it. About that time I didn't know that Uncle Homer was over there with his gun and he didn't know I was there and shot the gun and he said hey or something and I picked up the squirrel and the gun and I ran home. I thought it was the game warden. He came panting in after a while and said I never saw a boy run so fast in my life. So we did a good bit of hunting.

CW: So how long was Granny Rolader the matriarch? When did she pass away?

PR: Oh she lived a long time. I'm trying to put things together. She lived up into the – I believe the early 40s.¹⁴

CW: Did she?

PR: Yeah.

CW: And she – so who took over the house at that point because I know the cabin eventually was enveloped by a ranch style house, correct?

¹⁴ She died in September of 1940.

PR: Well that – after my grandmother died my father bought that property from the estate and he and my mother started expanding it and they moved in it.

CW: Okay. So he lived across the street from you then when you moved – after Emory into the house with your wife?

PR: Yeah.

CW: Okay.

PR: Then my brother, father and I built Ivanhoe Drive and developed it. I think I built three houses down there.

CW: When did the water company take over the piece of property at Northside and Moore's Mill?

PR: That was a part of the original purchase by W.W. and Lorenzo Dow from the Howard estate. It ran all the way from Northside Drive down past Ivanhoe Drive, both sides of the road.

CW: And the water company was it imminent? Did they declare imminent domain when they built the water tower there?

PR: Yes.

CW: They did. Okay. How did the family take that when the city moved in?

PR: With a grain of salt.

CW: Did you try to fight it?

PR: No.

CW: You didn't, okay.

PR: By that time the general store was gone and Lorenzo Dow's son-in-law was given the lease on it and he was almost retired. He just sat around a few years until the city took it over and nobody wanted to fight it. It was just there anyhow.

CW: When do you think that was? Was that in the 50s?

PR: Yes, I think it was.

CW: And another question too, I assume the high school was probably on your family property too.

PR: No we were across the street from Miriam School.

CW: Okay. So that you all never controlled that piece of property then.

PR: No. What happened over in there, you had Northside Drive including the house that was on the high school property; Northside Drive all the way down to about Argon Drive was blacks and then Moore's Mill down below us toward Northside Parkway was black. This was where the servants of the millionaires of Northside Drive and West Paces Ferry, where they lived.

CW: Would they shop at the general store?

PR: Oh yeah.

CW: Did they have accounts there?

PR: Yes. My father would not let anybody go hungry. Another tradition of our family was that nobody went hungry. My mother and the black help she had prepared a large dinner, they called it then in the middle of the day and the doors were open to anybody that wanted to come eat costing nothing and so it was an entirely different world back then.

CW: As far as the changing of that area, was Moore's Mill probably a dirt road when you were a child.

PR: No it was paved.

CW: Paved. Even in the 30s it was paved?

PR: Yeah.

CW: So it was a pretty big thoroughfare I assume to Bolton and in that area.

PR: It was the main, then was the main thoroughfare between Buckhead and Bolt. I forgot what they called it, it was Indian Trail.

CW: There was standing Peachtree.

PR: Yeah, it was down at Bolton by the river. I was trying to think of anything else. I know I hadn't told you – I think I about told it all.

CW: Any other funny stories in the area or people, places, things, even how you feel about how Buckhead has changed from your childhood to now. How does that make you feel?

PR: Well it makes me feel lonesome for the good old days. When I was a child and a teenager, we used to ride our bicycles Moore's Mill Road to Buckhead and go down the sidewalks and every merchant you saw knew you by your first name and you would see everybody that you knew. Now, you are almost afraid to go to Buckhead. Charlie Loudermilk screwed the thing up but that's the difference. It's an entirely different community from what it was then and I've worked – the first public job I ever had before I went into service was working at the Fulton National Bank, Peachtree Road office at the corner of Peachtree Road and Buckhead Avenue. It was owned by Mr. and Mrs. J Slide Thompson and back then we had no computers, we had an old Burrows bookkeeping machine, an adding machine and that's all. The time I went to work there the service had taken all the old male employees and we would go in there and work, open up the bank at 8:30 a.m. and run a teller's cage until 10 till 2 and then go up to Hitchcock & Simmons and get a sandwich and cherry coke and come back and post to – do all the bookkeeping. And there was two machines and at the end of the day we would have adding machine tape as long as from here to that door over there and we would have – we would be out of balance we would have to compare those tapes and make it balance before we could go home. I've seen the sun come up in Buckhead lots of mornings.

I remember one morning, back then \$1,000.00 was a bunch of money and I remember one day we got through posting those books and we were several thousand dollars out of shape. With old lady Thompson in particular, she would squeeze a buffalo till it howled, we had to find that money before we went home. Graph Harmon and I tore up that bank, finally towards along sun up we found a check for that amount over behind the steam radiator and got balanced and got to go home eat breakfast and we came back to work.

CW: Golly.

PR: In those days we angle parked on Peachtree Road and Hitchcock Simmons and Wendon Roberts had carhops that came out and brought your stuff to the car and you don't get that kind of service up there anymore.

CW: No, no, not at all.

PR: Old Governor Slaton who lived on the other side of Peachtree Road and owned most of it, now you go to Buckhead they don't know who you are. They think you're a foreigner.

CW: Yeah, yeah. So most everybody knew everybody at least in the Buckhead area.

PR: Oh yes. We had one famous musician in Buckhead, his father owned that big fruit stand there down toward Pharr Road and this boy was a country western singer and his name was Boots Woodall.

CW: Would he put on shows? Do you remember when he got his start anyway?

PR: He just played around – I think he put on one or two at the Buckhead Theater. Every once in a while we would have a live show up there and everybody would go. Back then the Buckhead Theater had a front entrance and it had a back entrance upstairs. White people sat downstairs and came in the front door; blacks had to go up the stairs and sit in the balcony. So I've seen lots of changes in 85 years.

CW: Yeah. There has been mention that there was a Buckhead Symphony at one point. We interviewed a woman that played in the Buckhead Symphony. Do you remember that at all?

PR: Gosh I don't remember that.

CW: I'm trying to think if there is anything else we haven't covered. You have given us a great overview. You have got such a rich history with the family we could probably do this for a week and still not really tap into it all.

PR: I probably said enough to run you out of tape anyhow.

CW: Well thank you so much. It has been a wonderful interview, it has been a pleasure to meet you and a real treasure too so thank you sir.

PR: It's good to meet you too and I appreciate you coming out here because I can't get to the mountain. What is your outfit? Buckhead Heritage Society?

CW: Yes sir.

PR: Where did it come from? I never heard of it before.

CW: We started about 2006. My cousin, Wright Mitchell, you may know his father Wade Mitchell, he went to North Fulton.

PR: Oh yeah, Wade played football.

CW: Yeah, he went onto Tech and played football as well and worked at Trust Company for his career. Wright started it in 2006 for some of the reasons that you mentioned. We felt that there was a lot of the history in Buckhead was about to be forgotten and wanted to go and record those and protect and preserve and have it as a resource for others who ever

want to come back and have an idea of how things used to be. So that's who we are in a nutshell and Erica is our second Executive Director and she is doing a wonderful job.

PR: Well are you connected with the Atlanta History Center at all?

CW: We are – we have some synergies that go along with it but we're much more focused on Buckhead, on the Buckhead side. We've got the world history project that we're working on, we worked on the Harmony Grove cemetery restoration, we sponsor some lecture series of the Battle of Peachtree Creek, some of the Civil War events, the architecture in Buckhead.

E: Working on National Register nomination for Sardis United Methodist Church currently. We have a lot of different things that we're working on.

PR: Well I was just curious because I have a vested interest in Atlanta History Center.

CW: Sure, sure.

PR: They took my brother and I to ride for that thing.

CW: You've got the cabin there now and I know some of the pottery in their folk life section.

PR: That's right. I forgot to tell you, it's the only thing – I went from North Fulton to one year at Emory and then I got into the war, World War II with the 9th Air Force in England, France and Germany; spent two years over there.

CW: Yeah I wanted to talk to you about that. I mean we mentioned ROTC, I knew that would probably place you right around that time. I was going to ask if you served or your relatives served. So you did serve?

PR: Yes. I was in the 9th Air Force in England, France and Germany.

CW: Did you fly?

PR: I didn't fly. I was partially color blind. I qualified for pilot school and they caught me with the color blind situation and busted me out so I wound up in the headquarter squadron helping run the air war from there. I was sitting on the banks of the Cliffs of Dover when the big invasion took place. That's the biggest air show I ever saw.

CW: Wow. So you watched all the planes fly overhead.

PR: Yes and heard them. It was – the planes was probably 7 stories high and everything from bombers to our fighter planes to gliders to paratroopers. It was something else. Later

after they cleared the path out I wanted to show everyone those boats where it would let the end down and you would walk in the water and hold the gun up like this.

CW: Did you have a lot of planning before the invasion that you were a part of us as far as the air support that you were aware of?

PR: Yes. I was in the headquarters of the 9th Air Force, we were the fighter group, P38s, P47s, P51s and we were used from the time of the invasion on as fighter bombers flying in close support of the ground troops. I was just 18 years old then. So I didn't get to be a four star general.

CW: Thankfully. I think that woman that got \$2 million check from you is glad you didn't.

PR: I guess so.

CW: How was your return from World War II coming back to Buckhead? Did they have a parade or anything in Buckhead?

PR: No.

CW: Just kind of came home.

PR: One of my professors at Emory, his son, he was a lieutenant and I was staff sergeant, we were in charge of the shipment coming back from Europe, we got over here and was coming across the ocean and we looked at the papers, had us going to Ft. Bragg for discharge. We changed those Orders, we came down through Brookwood Station and he and I bailed out and let them go on. The next morning we went down to the Fort and they said what are you guys doing here? We said we don't know it's what the orders said. They said oh well since you're here we'll discharge you anyhow.

CW: Smart thinking.

PR: That's right.

CW: Smart thinking.

PR: I won't tell you anymore of my stories today. You have more bubblegum than you can chew.

CW: No, I appreciate it. We can cut the camera off here.

PR: Has it been on through all of this?

CW: Oh yeah.

PR: Edit this thing.

CW: Here we go.

* All footnote clarifications and explanatory notes have been provided by Dan Vickers. The Buckhead Heritage Society sincerely thanks Dan for taking the time to review this transcript.