

Oral Memoirs

of

Bob Hattaway

An Interview Conducted by

Daniel Motta

June 14, 2012

Museum of Seminole County History

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Interview Histories

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The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of Adult Toy Storage, Altamonte Springs, Florida.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Bob Hattaway is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on June 14, 2012.

Abstract

Oral history of Bob Hattaway, conducted by Daniel Motta on June 14, 2012. Hattaway was born and raised in Altamonte Springs, Florida. In the interview, Hattaway discusses growing up in Altamonte Springs, working in the fern industry, his real estate and agricultural endeavors, his family's influence in Altamonte Springs and Casselberry, the greenhouse business, local politics, and the air travel industry.

Bob Hattaway

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Daniel Motta

June 14, 2012

Altamonte Springs, Florida

0:00:00

Introduction

Motta This is Daniel Motta. I am interviewing Mr. Bob Hattaway at his business, Adult Toy Storage, in Altamonte Springs. To start, Mr. Hattaway, could you tell me where you were born?

Hattaway I was born in the city of Altamonte Springs in 1936, which today, the location is on Lake Orienta, which at one time was called Orienta Ferneries, later in years. And the Hattaway family lived on that property for a number of years, probably 30 years, or something.

Motta So you were born on the property?

Hattaway I was born on the property, yeah. At that time, when I was born, 1936, a lot of people did not go to hospitals. They couldn't afford it. So I was born at home.

0:00:46

Altamonte Springs during Hattaway's childhood

Motta And could you tell me a little about the neighborhood, the house, property?

Hattaway The property, basically – it was 150 acres of property. Thirty acres of the property was into a fernery slat shed growing tropical foliage and plants, mostly *asparagus plumosus* fern, and then another fern called leatherleaf fern, which came on in a later date, which became very popular in the flower industry. But we were growing plants and flowers and a lot of different products back at that time, to sell. So it was a very rural area. Altamonte Springs had one road leading in and one road leading out, and it was Highway 436 [Florida State Road 436]. If you wanted to go shopping, you would get on 436 and travel [US Route] 17-92 to Downtown Orlando, because there were no stores in Altamonte Springs, or Casselberry. You had to go to Orlando to shop.

Motta And I imagine 436 looked a lot different then.

Hattaway Yeah, 436 was probably a two-lane road, and going through the middle of Altamonte Springs was a four-lane road divided in the middle by two very large rows of oak trees, from about where the Altamonte Mall is today, all the way to the railroad track in Altamonte Springs. That's going from west to the east.

Motta Were any of these paved roads?

Hattaway It was paved, yeah. Sometimes. But Maitland Avenue also was there, which was a two-lane road itself. But very rural. I mean, there was really nothing out here.

Motta And you said, on the property, only part of it was ferns?

Hattaway Yeah. Of the hundred acres, a lot of it, 30-something acres of it was slat shed fern itself, and the other was open fields, and we were growing *plumosus* or *podocarpus*, and were using that. We'd grow the podocarpus and cut that as cuttings and ship that to the northern market, to flower shops as well. So, and everything at that time, back when the fern business back in the [19]50s, and [19]60s, most of the freight was moved by rail, and not by truck. So there was a big depot in Altamonte Springs, and the depot itself, the major portion of it, was people like us – Hattaways, Casselberrys, Vaughns, etc. – shipping boxes and boxes and boxes of cut fern to the northern market, to flower shops.

Motta And that would all take place here, or would it go to Sanford first, and go from there?

Hattaway No.

Motta Just directly?

Hattaway There was a direct stop in Altamonte Springs and a direct stop in Casselberry, and also a direct stop in Longwood and Maitland. So they were little whistle stops, but most of the time they were stopping to pick up a product, like the fern product, and then some passengers. But there were no 7-Elevens, and there was absolutely nothing out here at that particular point in time. Not any tourists as well.

Motta About how many families lived in this area, you think?

Hattaway Well, you know, on the Orienta Fernery side, which was known as the Royal Ferneries at one time, there were probably – it was a housing development there, row houses for the migrant workers, or the workers, to live on the premise and work there, and [inaudible] 40-something houses with a church, [inaudible] on Hattaway Drive today, this long, long, long, then gone?. But they provided housing for people, and they were not great to live in and to be able to work.

0:04:26

Hattaway's father

Motta And did your father build the houses and the church?

Hattaway No, those were built back in the – golly. My father went in, they bought from Hibbard Casselberry, 1951. They bought what at that time they called the Royal Ferneries, and they bought that from Hibbard, and Hibbard bought it, I think, in 1946 – '45. And then my father worked for Mr. Casselberry, and my grandfather worked for Mr. Casselberry, and my two uncles, also, worked for Mr. Casselberry. All of them in stooped labor, cutting ferns by hand and taking it to

the packinghouses, and then being able to ship the product to the northern market. And there were no Kmart's, and there were no big Wal-Mart's, and those kind of things. Flower shops were flourishing. That was the mainstay of the fern business at that time, corsages and bouquets and things of that nature.

Motta So what year did you say your father procured the property?

Hattaway He bought the property from Hibbard in 1951.

Motta Okay. So, when you were born, he was working in the industry? He just didn't...

Hattaway He was working with Mr. Casselberry. Yeah.

0:05:36 **Childhood memories working in the fields**

Motta Okay. And what were your experiences like as a child? Did you also have any contact with—did you work in fields at all?

Hattaway Yes, yes. Oh, yeah *[laughs]*. Those were wonderful moments. *[laughs]*

Motta Could you tell me a little about them?

Hattaway Out there with stooped labor, working in the—I would work in the summer months when I was out of school, high school and grammar school. I would pull weeds in the fernery. And they would hire a lot of young people like myself at that time—ten, twelve years old. And our job was—the fernery was full of weeds of various kinds, and so we'd line up ten, fifteen, or twenty of us in rows. We'd go down through and pull the weeds out of each row. That was a terrible job. I knew when that was happening I didn't want to stay in the nursery business, or fern business. I darn sure didn't want to be a stooped laborer in the field. But that's where my family came from. I mean, they worked for every Casselberry. And Hibbard brought my grandfather and my father both out of the fernery, out of the field, and put my grandfather in charge of the fernery over[?]*—* which was the Royal Fernery at that time, Casselberry Ferneries as well—and put my grandfather in charge of that side of the fernery, and then my father went over to the main plant over in the middle of Casselberry, and he became the main foreman over there, in an office, working for Mr. Casselberry. And so Mr. Casselberry brought him out of the field, very little education, and put him in charge of a number of people. At that time, you know, back in the '40s and '50s, the fern business, it was a big business, and they were employing probably two, three hundred people. So it was a lot of people depending on the Casselberrys and the Foleys[?] in the fern business at that time as well.

Motta So when you were in the fields doing that work that you loved so much, were you paid for that, or was that just something expected of you?

Hattaway Oh, yeah. Yeah, we got paid for it.

Motta Do you remember...

Hattaway Twenty-five cent an hour. And I was, you know – I've always loved to work. That's been my mainstay, and I've got great work habits. And I think most people back then did. I'm not sure what they have today. I know it's not as good as it was back then. But Mr. Casselberry provided a lot of employment for young people when school was out, that they could work during the summer. And pulling those weeds was part of what you did. And I would get out, and we'd help with the repair of the slat sheds, repairing the irrigation systems, just to keep the fernery back in good repair, so we could grow the fern itself. But it's hard work.

Motta I'd imagine.

Hattaway But, you know, I did that every summer. When I got out of school, the following week I'd be working in the field.

0:08:27

Education

Motta Could you tell me a little about where you went to school? Did you – high school, or did you go to college after?

Hattaway Sure. I went to Lyman High School, grades one through twelve. I went to Winter Park High School the 10th grade to the 11th grade, and then came back to Lyman for the 12th grade itself. So I was actually grade one through ten at Lyman High School, the old school.

Motta It wasn't called Lyman High School then?

Hattaway It was called Lyman High School, yeah.

Motta But it was one through twelve?

Hattaway One through twelve, yeah. There were, when I graduated, in 1954 – '55 there were twelve boys and one girl in my class. Thirteen class. And the class behind us, I think, had 25. So it was a very small school back then, and grade one was, you know – all the way through. And I think they stopped that just before – no, it was still going on in 1955. It was still grade one through twelve, I think, at that time. But Lyman today is probably graduating one thousand kids at one whack. And you got Oviedo, and etc., etc. Great changes, but, you know, we had small classes. Probably the max in a class was 20, 25. Teachers were very personal. Teachers knew us all, and it turned out, had a good education. When I graduated from Lyman, I think there was only two people in our class went to college, and the rest of us went into the work field. And I immediately, when I graduated, I started buying real estate, starting my own fernery.

0:09:58

Life after high school

Motta Graduated from high school?

Hattaway Yeah, high school. I didn't go to college. Didn't go to college. And I was working—I got a job in Winter Garden with Continental Can Company, and they were making small cans to put orange juice into, frozen orange juice, and that was a—you'd put three cups of water with it...

Motta The concentrate?

Hattaway Concentrate, and do all those. I worked there at night, the night shift from 3:30 'til 12:00 or something of that nature. And then during the day, I bought a piece of property in Oviedo on Chapman Avenue[sic], and built my first nursery under oak trees. And I started my own business back in 1956—I guess '57, '58, something like that.

Motta Where did you say the canning company was?

Hattaway Continental Can Company.

Motta Where was that?

Hattaway In Winter Garden.

Motta Oh, okay. So those...

Hattaway It was a big canning company.

Motta Pretty far from each other, the two?

Hattaway I'm sorry?

Motta The two jobs you had were pretty far from each other.

Hattaway Yeah. Yeah. One was working in the can company, the other was working in the field, in a nursery. And started my own place. I bought an oak tree hammock. And we'd found by that time, in the nursery business, in the fern business, that slat sheds were very expensive, and you couldn't keep them up because of cost, wood rot, and it became—they were falling down. So, we started...

Motta How often do you have to replace those?

Hattaway Oh, you were constantly working on the building, on the fields themselves, and you're talking about 30 acres of slat shed. Just slats are, you know, four inches wide. And sometimes they would kind of fall down. If you're tall like I am, you'd run into a slat and hit your head and etc. So we went from the slat sheds into buying oak tree hammocks, and putting fern under the oak tree hammocks. And we also started planting in the ferneries—the old ferneries, oak trees inside

of the fernery itself – to grow up through the slat sheds for shade. You were looking for a certain amount of shade. And so we started that, and that’s where the slat sheds kind of disappeared, and everybody, especially Mr. Casselberry, his whole side was nothing but oak trees.

Motta Oh, really?

Hattaway The side we had, and my father and grandfather had, over on Orienta Fernery side, they planted orange trees, which was a really, really smart move, because they always had orange trees – they also had the product of fern under that. The problem was, when they planted the orange trees, they budded the orange tree to Valencia, navels, or whatever it’s going to be. When they sprayed the orange tree spray on the fern, to kill worms, etc., it killed the buds on all the orange trees. Ended up with 25 acres of sour orange trees, and there’s not a lot of market for sour orange trees. So it was just a good concept, but it didn’t work.

Motta So, by that time, there was pretty much the natural solution of replacing the slats with the trees? Like, is that what all the fern owners pretty much moved to?

Hattaway Yeah. Yeah. Everybody was doing that. Everybody was doing that.

Motta Okay.

Hattaway Fern business was big not only here in Central Florida, in the Orlando area, Altamonte Springs, Casselberry, Fern Park, but it was big up in Crescent City and Pierson, which it still is today.

Motta Yeah.

Hattaway It’s the mainstay up there as well.

0:13:16 Rivalry between Seminole County and Volusia County

Motta Was there any kind of rivalry between, like, here and Volusia County?

Hattaway Oh, yeah. Oh my god. Yeah. Yeah. They would – and I’ve heard my father talk about the stories that the price of the ferns had become very cheap – and so the industry got together and met someplace up in DeLand or something, some little community, with the main growers all meeting at one concept.

Woman Excuse me, do you need anything before I go to lunch?

Hattaway No, I’m good.

Woman Okay.

Hattaway I’m good. They all went back to discuss the pricing, and I guess they were trying to do what you’d call the price fixing. But the typical agriculture business, they all got together, they all decided, shook hands, and this is what we’re gonna

charge to the fern. All of them couldn't wait to run back to the phone and call their customers in Chicago[, Illinois] or New York or where it is, and say, "Hattaway's going up on the price of his fern by three cent. I'm gonna stay the same price" or "I'm gonna drop the price." It never worked. And so they cut their throat time and time again. But there was great rivalry, especially, that I'm familiar with, between the Barnetts, the Casselberrys, the Vaughns. And there was a rivalry there because Mr. Casselberry started the tax-free town of Casselberry, and the Barnetts were a big, very wealthy family, had a lot of ferneries in the Fern Park, Casselberry area, and they didn't like Mr. Casselberry, because he was so aggressive, and he was a new guy in town. And they got into a hell of a rivalry. So it was always a shootout.

Motta And the Vaughns, you said?

Hattaway Vaughns.

Motta They were also in Seminole County already.

Hattaway That's right. Yeah. They were up in Casselberry – which you would never say "Casselberry," you would say "Fern Park" – which today is the location of the Home Depot.

Motta Near Lake Concord?

Hattaway On 17-92 and Concord. That area. So yeah, there was a real rivalry going on between the small families with the Casselberrys. And those three, those were the three players. So.

Motta And this was like the '50s, early '60s?

Hattaway Yeah, '40s and '50s.

0:15:24 **Decline of the fern industry**

Motta So when did the fern industry kind of start slowing down, in the area?

Hattaway Oh, god. My father – I read this this morning – and it had so many ups and downs that I wasn't even aware of – when I read his notes. And the, you know, just the price of fuel became so high, and labor became so expensive, that we really saw it when my father bought the place in 1951 from Hibbard, like 130 acres, Orienta Ferneries. He, within five years, was subdividing the fernery. And he became involved in real estate, which was a really smart move.

Motta And these, the plots, were they designed for the houses and also, like, partially for ferns? Like, if somebody wanted to grow, like, a little on the side...

Hattaway No. That was way before that ever happened.

Motta Oh, okay.

Hattaway That was a lot of little nurseries that were back in the '20s and '30s.

Motta So this was purely real estate?

Hattaway Yeah. purely real estate. Yeah. He started taking the fernery, which had a hundred and some odd acres, and started selling the land off itself to people that wanted to move. By this time, Altamonte Springs and Casselberry and the community started growing, and so people were starting to migrate, if you want to say that, from Orlando out into the country. And we were selling real estate lots on Lake Orienta – that was a fernery – and we took some of the slat sheds down and were selling real estate lots 100 feet wide, anywhere from 250 to 300 feet deep, for \$2,000, for a lot, on paved road.

Motta Around what year was this?

Hattaway In the '50s – '58, somewhere along there, '57, '58. That area where Hattaway Drive is today, that drive that was all Orienta Ferneries, all the property that my father bought from Mr. Casselberry. But he went in like Hibbard. Hibbard went into the real estate business big time. He had a lot of land. And he saw the handwriting on the wall itself. The fern business was just not thriving. There was – and, a lot of artificial stuff coming down the line. People were using *podocarpus*. People were using [?], using a lot of fillers instead of using the fern. It was cheaper to buy a filler and put inside, in that corsage, for the price.

Motta Oh. I was about to ask what were some of the reasons it kind of went down. That was pretty much just the artificial – were other parts of the country...

Hattaway It wasn't artificial, then. It was just shrubs and things they were cutting that they could stick into a bouquet of flowers. Bouquet of flowers won't last, you know, a week, four or five days. So they could take *sphagnum* moss, or they could take a *ligustrum*, or something that's leafy and green, and put it in a corsage at a cheaper rate than they could a sprig of fern, or a sprig of leatherleaf fern.

Motta But if people did want those kind of ferns, were they still dependent on this area, or were there other parts of the country, do you know of?

Hattaway Not from what I remember. It was mainly this area, plus the Pierson-Crescent City area, that was the mainstays. Later on, it became, everybody started to go off – not everybody. Several of the nurserymen started going off to Costa Rica and islands, and growing fern down there. In fact, one of the largest growers, probably still today, moved from Zellwood. Name was John Marcell. He moved to Costa Rica, and the last I heard, and I haven't seen John in a long time, he had over 1,000 acres of saran shade cloth, growing leatherleaf fern, and ferns shipping all over the world. Actually, I've been told he controls the fern market in Costa Rica. This[?] big. *[laughs]*

0:19:20

Fern industry in Zellwood and shift to the tropical plant business

Motta Was Zellwood into the fern industry, or were they in other agriculture?

Hattaway And actually Zellwood was – it was a small little town, still today. Marcell was the main grower at that time of leatherleaf fern. Went over to Lockhart, there was another grower over there, name of Joe Wofford, and he had a small fernery, probably ten or fifteen acres. He was growing leatherleaf fern. And Apopka itself had started transitioning over from the fern business – the Ustlers, Mahaffey's – golly, some other families there. But they were more into the tropical foliage business, and growing – building – greenhouses, taking slat sheds and growing tropical plants, which were now becoming very popular. So they shifted from the fern business over to the tropical plant business. And I shifted, also. I saw the handwriting on the wall. The one I built over in Oviedo, myself, it was only small as ten acres. But I sold that to another fernery guy out of Crescent City, took the money of that and started buying property in Altamonte Springs, off Hattaway Drive, and built my first greenhouses. And I went in the greenhouse business. So I shifted from the fern business over to the tropical foliage business.

Motta More broad[sic].

Hattaway Yeah. broader opportunity of selling to a greater amount of people. And my first greenhouse I built was out of used lumber, and I took a saw mill myself, and cut the two-by-fours and four-by-fours out of used lumber, and built my first building, which was 30 feet wide and a hundred feet long, which I have pictures of it there. And, gosh, over the years, became a pretty good size. *[laughs]*

Motta And where did you say this first one was?

Hattaway It was over just off of Hattaway Drive there in Altamonte Springs. Small place.

Motta Okay. So how long were you – your property in Chapman, you said it was on Chapman Road?

Hattaway Yeah. I was over there – I was in Chapman, probably, I had that nursery probably ten years. A good while, long enough that I'd made enough money working at night. At the Continental Can Company, they were paying me union wages, and I never joined the union. But I was making big bucks, and I was able to buy the land and do the things I'd need to do to get a business going. And it was pretty successful, but when I had the opportunity of selling that property to another person, then take that money and come back over into Altamonte, and go into a different business – although I was still in the agriculture business, it was a good shift. I ended up – well, the fernery there had 20 acres there on Hattaway Drive, and greenhouses – had probably ten acres of greenhouses there. And grew there for a number of years. To build the buildings, [?], build the buildings, I was – to get the lumber for that place – I was going, also to get the used lumber, I was going up and down the railroad tracks. They were taking down power poles and telephone poles, and I would cut the telephone poles and

take the arms. At that time, they had arms going out with wires on them, and those were like three-by-fours, and they were like eight feet long, and I would use those for posts, as I gathered used stuff to build my whole nursery.

Motta Were they just, like, the ones that they left there?

Hattaway Yeah.

Motta Was it okay that you took those? *[laughs]*

Hattaway Yeah. definitely. They knew I was doing it. They were taking them down.

Motta And, so, you pretty much built all those house, the original houses, yourself? It sounds like you're a jack of all trades.

Hattaway I am. *[laughs]*

0:23:24 **Interest in agriculture**

Motta Did you enjoy the growing aspect? Like, did you have a green thumb, or was it like...

Hattaway Oh, yeah.

Motta Did you enjoy the business?

Hattaway I enjoyed the business, and I definitely did not have a green thumb. But I enjoyed the business, and I didn't know anything else. What else could a guy do? There was no — there was nothing out here. You either worked for the Hattaways, you worked for the Vaughns, you worked for the Casselberrys, or you worked for the Bradshaws in the grove business. This was agriculture community. There was nothing to do. Or, work at the dog track, something like that. So it was, you know — happy as a pig in slop. *[laughs]* What else can you do? This is what it is.

0:24:11 **Influence of the Hattaway family on Altamonte Springs and Casselberry**

Motta This might be going back a little bit, but did your family have any influence on early Altamonte Springs, like developing and like with the government?

Hattaway No, my father did. He was elected a constable. He worked for Hibbard. And when Hibbard incorporated the City of Casselberry — I've heard my mother and father talk about that the night that they did the incorporation, they had a town hall meeting before it was ever incorporated in Mr. Casselberry's office. There was a — had to have a certain amount of people in the meeting to have a quorum and to be able to appeal to the legislature for incorporation.

Motta And this — as a town?

Hattaway As a town. As a town. And they didn't have four[?] people...

Motta This was around 1940?

Hattaway In the room, so my father left the meeting, went home – we lived on Concord Drive – and brought my mother to the meeting, and she voted, and that’s how, that was part of the process of incorporating the City of Casselberry. My father was elected in 1941 as the first constable of the City of Casselberry. And it was a, I guess, kind of a window-dressing job, but he was constable for eleven years in the City of Casselberry.

Motta And that’s kind of like the police chief of the town?

Hattaway That’s right. Yeah. He was the police chief. *[laughs]* I don’t think he even had a badge. *[laughs]* But that’s old time there.

0:25:51 **The Casselberry family**

Hattaway Yeah. But you know, again, you know, this was small town, U.S.A. Hibbard would have – and I can remember this so well – he would, at Christmas time, he would have a big Christmas party on the front lawn of the offices, and for all the employees that worked for Mr. Casselberry, his entire operation. And he would get every kid a gift at Christmas time. And this was black, white, whatever it was be. He would always throw this big Christmas party. Big deal. You’d either get a knife or get a yo-yo or something like that. *[laughs]* But, and he was quite a – he was a good man. A lot of people, you know, just – vision, had great vision. And smart, wasn’t hard to talk to. He was a young man at that time. He was just good to us. He was very good for the community. Barnetts won’t tell you that. And the Vaughns won’t tell you that. But the Hattaways damn sure will tell you that real quick.

Motta Did you know Mr. Casselberry personally, as a young man?

Hattaway Mm-hm. Yeah. I knew him. He, and especially Leonard [Casselberry]. I don’t know if you’ve interviewed Leonard, Jane [Casselberry]?

Motta Yeah. about a week or two ago.

Hattaway Leonard used to come to my mother and father’s house, and Leonard would love to read comic books. *[laughs]* He – he wasn’t too energetic. *[laughs]* But he would come in and read the comic books, and Jane – they lived over off of the old race track road [Dog Track Road], at the horse track. He probably told you that’s what they built there, as well.

Motta Yeah. Was knowing the founder and, I guess, owner at that time of Casselberry, was that like a – in this year, that seems kind of, like, strange, or maybe not strange, but – was it, did it seem like a big deal, or was he just like any normal citizen?

Hattaway No. It was – to the normal person, it was probably a big deal. But because my father worked for him, and with him, I would go into my father’s office, and Mr. Casselberry’s office was right there. And he had a big picture window that he could look out into my father’s office, and then be able to look out into the grading there. They graded fern – longs, shorts, mediums, whatever you were looking for in the size of fern to ship. And, you know, he was just there all the time. He had a – I can remember so well – he had a big, big tarpon fish mounted in his office in back there. He would go to – my father, in fact, I’ve seen some pictures of him – he would go to the flower shows in Chicago or New York, where they might be, and Martha [Casselberry], his wife at that time – he married three times – Martha would wear, he would wear white riding pants – horses, cows?

Motta Mm-hm.

Hattaway And boots, real knee boots up there. With a big coat on. All in white. And a fern spray on this thing. Promoter.

Motta Yeah. representing his...

Hattaway Yeah. He was a promoter, as well. Promoted, and he had a knack about doing that, much better than the Vaughns and the Barnetts, as well. But, yeah, he was a good man. I can’t tell you that enough times.

0:29:14 **Greenhouse business**

Motta So you started getting into the nursery, would it be considered nursery business or the greenhouse...

Hattaway Greenhouses. Yeah.

Motta How long were you involved with that before you looked more towards retail?

Hattaway I started in the fern business when I got out of high school, 1954-55. I was in the fern business by 1960, with the fernery over in Chapman Avenue in Oviedo. And then started the first greenhouses and then grew that business. And I went out of the business in 1988, of the foliage business. So I graduated, basically, from the fern business over to the foliage, from the foliage into the foliage business itself. Ended up with this place, which is 500,000 square feet of what was greenhouses. But I built steel structure buildings, I told you. And today it’s now the steel structure buildings that are storing boats, cars, and recreational vehicles. 1974-75, I bought a farm in Puerto Rico, and I started out with thirty, three thousand, building 3,000 square feet – 300 – yeah, 3,000, 30-foot wide and 100-foot long. And I bought a farm in Puerto Rico that was 80 hectares of greenhouses. And I was shipping fern or foliage plants from Puerto Rico, by sea freight, to Europe. So I moved from 33,000 square feet, to a farm here, and a farm in Puerto Rico. And I farmed in Puerto Rico, foliage plants, for twenty years, twenty-two years.

Motta Did you sell that land, or still...

Hattaway Yeah, I did. I sold it. I sold it. I wanted to go out of the nursery business. My brother, and then, by then graduated from University of Florida, had a degree in horticulture, and he wanted the nursery in Puerto Rico, so I sold the nursery to him in Puerto Rico. And he farmed in Puerto Rico for, I don't know, another eight,-nine years. And we had three major hurricanes hitting back to back. First time we had insurance. We rebuilt. Second time, had insurance. Insurance company went belly up, and we rebuilt. And the third time, we said, "That's it." And we sold it. And then I was here all the time, and I just started converting all the buildings over to what you see today.

Motta So about what time did you decide you wanted to get out of that business?

Hattaway 1988.

Motta Okay.

Hattaway Yeah. I already had another vision, what you see today.

Motta Works out for you.

Hattaway Yeah, it worked out. Yes. Yeah. It really – what was my whole plan at that time, was – I had roughly 30 acres here – was to add on a trailer park in front of me, which today is a public shopping center. And I was trying to buy their property, and I wanted to build a big industrial park, 40-45-acre industrial park. And I couldn't buy that trailer park, and made them some ridiculous offers. I'm glad they didn't take it, 'cause the market went to hell in a handbag. I ended up, you know, basically looking at what they were doing, and I said, "If they will pay \$35.00 a month to park a boat outside in an open field, with grass and grasshoppers, what will they pay to put it inside the building?" And from there, you know, it grew from there. So, in 1988, I was in the foliage business. In 2012, I'm now in the storage business. And the place is doing fairly well.

Motta That sounds like a pretty brilliant idea, just converting the fields to this. Do you know if any other growers have took that...

Hattaway No, no. They can't. They all built buildings that were not convertible. They couldn't do what I did. In fact, I saw Earl Vaughn two weeks ago. Had a funeral up in Apopka, and went over and we were talking – and I know Earl. Great guy. I like Earl. I don't know if you've met him or not.

Motta No.

Hattaway You need to meet him. You need to meet Earl Vaughn.

Motta I would love to.

Hattaway Vaughn Greenhouses. They're in the book. He's no longer in the foliage business, but he has a farm, a foliage place up on [Florida State Road] Highway 46 up in Sanford. And saw him, and I said something, and he said, "Hattaway, what you did is brilliant." He said, "I've been trying to do the same thing, except I can't get my zoning. I'm in the Wekiva [River] Protection Area." And so, he can do nothing other than what he's doing. So, you know, fortunately, when I started building the buildings, I then started working politically to change the zoning on this place. And so I did it back early. If I tried to do it today, I'd probably never get it done.

0:34:25 **Local politics and involvement in the air travel industry**

Motta Are you still involved in local politics?

Hattaway I just write checks. *[laughs]*

Motta *[laughs]* Well...

Hattaway No, I'm still involved. I have a lot of friends in the political scene. I help them. You know, I served eight years in the [Florida] Legislature. Loved it, and had fun with it. Eight years at Orlando International Airport. That's a full-time, non-paid political job, and did that for eight years.

Motta And what was your – for the airport, what was your...

Hattaway I was the – actually, I was chairman for four years, and vice chairman for two years, and on the board for eight. And the governor appointed me. Lawton Chiles appointed me. And so, I served there, and when I went on the board, there was \$10 million worth of construction going at the Orlando International Airport. When I left, eight years later – yeah, eight years later it was – it was \$500 million worth of construction going. And they had another \$500 million committed to build the south terminal, and the new board decided that they didn't want to do that, and so the new board today is trying to figure out how they can get the money to build the south terminal for international rivals. And, you know, that was a group of Democrats – John Rich, Bill Miller, Howard McNelty, myself – four really strong Democrats. We got in and got aggressive, said, "This place is gonna grow." And we went from 22 million passengers – eight years later, it was like 31 million passengers. That's growth. And all we did, we went out and started marketing the Orlando International Airport, as a board, as a group of people, with the mayor of Orlando, Linda Hood, and the county chairman, Linda Chapin. And we were a hell of a team, and we moved around this country, all around this world, basically. And brought airlines in, British Airlines[sic], Southwest [Airlines], Virgin [Atlantic]. Those were all new carriers that came in that eight-year period of time.

Motta Were you involved in the [Orlando-] Sanford [International] Airport or the...

Hattaway That was my first venture. Back when we did that one, Kay Shoemaker was the chairman, and John – what was the name – Steve, he was the executive director. I can't think of his last name now. But he came to me, I was a new board member, and he said, "You know, we need to go after international passengers for the Sanford airport." So we went to Kay Shoemaker and talked Kay into letting us fly, I think it was, Toronto, Canada. And the concept that Steve had – and I was just the baggage, went along with him – that we need to go to Holiday Travel, and talk to them about direct flights from Toronto to Sanford, and not from Toronto to Orlando. And we met with the Holiday Travel, they thought it was a good idea, and he was very much in favor of it, but the issue was that the travel time coming from the Sanford Airport to [Walt] Disney [World], you didn't have the 414, I think it is, or 4...

Motta Oh, [State Road] 408, [State Road] 417?

Hattaway 417, yeah, coming across the lake. You didn't have that segment built, and, so, that was a stopping point. When that segment was built, Holiday Travel and a lot of those guys started flying into Sanford, and bypassing Orlando. Well, in the meantime, I moved from the Sanford Airport board, over to the Orlando Airport. *[laughs]* So, it was quite a conflict there for a while. *[laughs]* And Larry Dale – and I don't know if you know Larry – but Larry Dale and I had some real knockdowns and drag-outs about the airports. He's the executive director of the Sanford Airport.

Motta Oh, yeah?

Hattaway Yeah. Yeah.

Motta I'm curious how you, how did you even get involved with the airport, like the industry?

Hattaway The governor.

Motta Okay.

Hattaway The governor. Yeah, I – when Lawton was elected – Lawton Chiles – I'd been in the Legislature. I knew him very well, and I worked with him for his election. And he was elected. He appointed me to the lottery commission. I didn't believe in the lottery. I didn't like the lottery. When it was approved, I was in the Legislature. I voted against it. And was opposed against it then, and Lawton told me, said, "I want you to be on that board. You're the first Democrat to be appointed, and I want to get rid of the executive director." I forget her name. She was really good, too. But he wanted to get rid of her and he wanted to change the entire board. He wanted to make changes. And so, I did that for a couple of years. And I was tired of it, and finally we just got enough Democrats on the board that I went to the governor, said, "I'm out of here. I don't want to do this anymore." In the meantime, when that happened, the [Greater Orlando] Aviation Authority thing came up available in Orlando, and I was supporting a

Republican, Sue [inaudible] was her name, and Sue wanted to be appointed to the board. And I went to the governor to appoint her from Seminole County, and the governor says, "No, I'm not going to appoint a Republican. But I will appoint you if you want to take the job." So I said, "Well, okay. I'll do it."

Motta Did you have an interest in air travel?

Hattaway Yeah, I did, because of Sanford. And I knew that it was a very, very important job. The Orlando International Airport is the economic engine that really runs this community today. And the things they've accomplished, and the size of the airport. This is number one around the state of Florida, certainly, that I enjoyed that. But I did, I was able to go into that segment having eight years in Tallahassee being a legislator, that I knew a little bit about politics, and I knew that a lot of my newfound friends that I found in Tallahassee, of eight years, when I was no longer elected, they didn't know my first name or my last name. And when I was appointed to the Aviation Authority in Orlando, I told my wife, Charlotte, I said, "This is altogether different. We're going to have a lot of brand new friends, and they're going to love us for eight years. And when we're gone, they won't know our name. So we're gonna do this different. We're gonna do what the hell we want to do, and we're gonna do the things that we think are right, and eight years from now, we'll be good." And that's how we prefaced that. So it was fun. It was, like I said, it was a full-time – as a chairman – non-paid, political job. But would I do that again? Probably not. It was the right time. You know, I've been very fortunate that I've lived at the right time, when things were just starting to peak or things were really going smoothly, and everybody was getting along.

Motta It seems like you've always been able to do what makes you happy.

Hattaway I've been lucky. You'll never sit across the table from a more blessed, lucky guy than me. Life has been good. With high school education, I've competed with all of them.

Motta Work ethic. Whistling[?] away[?].

Hattaway It's worked out, worked out fine. *[laughs]* So, and I laugh about. In fact, I've brought my report cards in today for some reason, and I looked at those report cards, looking through stuff, and I said, "Man, I was a straight-F student." *[laughs]* So, but, it's been fun. Life's been good, been good.

Motta I wanted to ask you, for the Sanford Airport, when did that start becoming – when was it under construction?

Hattaway It was, you know, it was a naval base [Naval Air Station Sanford], and then they converted over into a commercial airport, and I don't remember the years. But I was on that board – phew. It wasn't in the – must have been in the late '70s when they started converting it over. Yeah, I can't remember the dates on that one.

0:42:30

Evolution of the fern industry

Motta So, did – it might have been the fern industry – I mean, it might have been kind of already low at that time, but was there any kind of transition? ‘Cause you said the railroads, in the early days, that was like the artery. Was there, like, did the airports start to be more of a central thing with transportation?

Hattaway With ferns, no. No. With the fern business, it became trucks.

Motta Okay.

Hattaway Everybody moved from the – we did some air freight, not a lot. Most of it was done by – the whole industry changed from trains and rail over to the trucking industry. So there was a – trucking lines were moving strictly either foliage plants or ferns by truck itself to the destination. The fern business itself – the labor, cost of labor, the cost of materials, the cost of land – all those things just became cost-prohibited to be able to do anything with it. You asked a question earlier about, you know, do I miss it? I loved the plant business. I really enjoyed it, and still today would like to be in the business, except I know I can’t make any money at it. And I’m not gonna fool around with something I can’t make money at as well. But, you know, the guys in Apopka and the guys that been in the fern business, and growing something, you know, a plant or product, I think they all will tell you, you know, it’s just a great place to – it’s a fun thing to do. And it’s really rewarding to put a little plant on a stem into a piece of *sphagnum* moss, and grow it to a finished product, and ship it. If I had a nickel for every plant that I’ve grown, I’d be a very wealthy man. Rick [Hattaway] enjoyed it. My brother enjoyed it very much. And I kept telling him, “You don’t want to go into the greenhouse business. You want to stay out of it.” My mother told me that as well. But, you know, he followed the family trade and did that as well. But, it’s a good life. It’s a good opportunity.

Motta That whole watching something grow, that seems almost kind of like a good metaphor for your, all your business [inaudible].

Hattaway [laughs] Yeah. Yeah. I read an article today, an old one, gosh, about when I developed that orange grove over there, and it was – Phil [inaudible] was the city manager. It was quoting him about what I was doing over there, and how I environmentally was taking care of Lake Lotus, and all the things I did back then. But, you know, to see the growth, or where we were back in the ‘40s and ‘50s, and where we are today, people have opportunities. There were no opportunities when I was growing up. Either you worked in a fernery or you worked in an orange grove. There wasn’t high school education. People weren’t going to college.

Motta You had to find your own...

Hattaway You had to find your own, you had to make your own way at that particular point in time.

0:45:28

How Altamonte Springs has changed over time

- Motta** Since you brought that up, I'm curious what you think about how this area—I probably can't imagine what it was like when you were a kid. What do you think? How do you think it's progressed? Are you...
- Hattaway** I'm for growth. I'm growth. Opportunities. I mean, I had a farm, sold it a couple years ago up in Alabama, little town called Opp, Alabama. And it was heavy agriculture, farming area. And today—Opp, Alabama—you can take a shotgun down the main street and not hit a soul. There's just nothing to do there. And that's the way it was here. The growth has been really, really, to me, healthy. It's been giving good opportunities to people having good jobs. Our way of life—there are no poor people in this community today. You see some not as well off as others, but everybody either has a television, or everybody has food on the table. Everybody has an opportunity to make something of themselves, you see, if they want to take that opportunity. And back then, there was no opportunities. You had to make it yourself. And today there's many doors open for employment, and it's not all agriculture. At that time, it was. But am I in favor of growth? Absolutely. Has it been good for this community? Absolutely. Has it been good for this state? Absolutely.
- Motta** Is there anything that you see in this community, that you don't find good about—like, obviously, there's a lot of good growth brings, but is there anything you lament that has changed, or any nostalgia?
- Hattaway** I think the one problem that we have in our community is that we have not been able to keep up with the road—the growth with our road network—and mainly because of the lack of proper leadership from the Legislature. We've never had the political voting power to be able to build a road network they have on the south coast, South Florida—they have on the west coast. And our group has been splintered—Democrat, Republican—and many times have not worked together to have the power base in Tallahassee to get the state dollars to build—FDOT [Florida Department of Transportation]—to build our community. So we've not done a good job on our roads. And you have one major road going through this entire community, from Daytona Beach into Tampa, and that's I-4. Other than that, you have very limited roads. If it wasn't for the East-West Expressway [SR 408], the [Central Florida] Expressway Authority, we wouldn't have any roads. So that's been a blessing to us, but I think that's our biggest problem. Our growth has been handled with zoning—comprehensive land plan—where the commercial's going to be built, where the residential's going to be built—all those things, I think, have been handled very well. We have a great water system, sewer system in Central Florida. We have all the things conducive to solid development, except the roads. And you get on these roads, and you know what it's like.
- Motta** Yeah.
- Hattaway** Gridlock.

Motta But I'm kind of surprised to hear that – weren't a lot of the old, like '70s, '80s, '90s, Florida Republicans, weren't they kind of pro-growth and infrastructure? Wouldn't they...

Hattaway Well, when I was in the Legislature back in the '70s, the [Florida] House [of Representatives] and the [Florida] Senate was controlled by the Democrats, and the Republicans were along for the ride. And then, when power shifted chains, we didn't see a lot of growth coming here. I mean, we've had – I don't want you to write this.

Motta What's that?

Hattaway *[laughs]* I don't want you to write this. This is off the record on this one. Yeah.

End of Interview