

**Oral Memoirs**  
**of**  
**Harold Haldeman**

An Interview Conducted by

Daniel Motta

July 11, 2012

Museum of Seminole County History

*Museum of Seminole County History*

Copyright 2012

This material is protected by US copyright. Permission to print, reproduce or distribute copyrighted material is subject to the terms and conditions of fair use as prescribed in the US copyright law. Transmission or reproduction of protected items beyond that allowed by fair use requires the written and explicit permission of the copyright owners.

## **Interview Histories**

Interviewers: Daniel Motta

Transcriber: Savannah Vickers

The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of the Museum of Seminole County History, Sanford, Florida.

## **Legal Status**

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Harold Haldeman is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on July 11, 2012.

## **Abstract**

Oral history of Harold Haldeman, conducted by Daniel Motta on July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2012. Haldeman was born on November 12<sup>th</sup>, 1924 in Tampa, Florida, but spent much of his life in Osceola. In the interview, he also discusses his childhood, migration to Osceola, the differences between Maitland and Osceola, the sawmill in Osceola, the lumber industry, race relations in Central Florida, the effect of the Great Depression and World War II on industry, the Geneva airfield, and education in Geneva during the Depression.

## Harold Haldeman

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Daniel Motta

July 11, 2012

Sanford, Florida

**Motta** This is Daniel Motta. I'm here at the Museum of Seminole County History. It is July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2012. I'm talking with Mr. [Harold] Haldeman. Mr. Haldeman, if you could peek in—could you just tell me where and when you were born?

**Haldeman** I was born in Tampa, Florida, November 12, 1924.

**Motta** All right. And what brought you to Central Florida?

**Haldeman** Well, we initially, when I was about six months old, we moved to Maitland, Florida, where I was baptized in the First Presbyterian Church of Maitland. And we were there until 1928, when my father got a job at the Osceola Cypress Company, which was in Osceola, Florida—not to be confused with Osceola County, you know, where Kissimmee is. Okay?

**Motta** Yeah.

**Haldeman** So we switched to Seminole County.

**Motta** So you were brought to Osceola because of your father, you said?

**Haldeman** That's right. And I was about four years old at the time.

**Motta** So some of your earlier memories were from the sawmill?

**Haldeman** Yes. In other words, generally speaking, you start remembering things when you're three and a half or four years old, so I have very good memories of, you know, of the actual move. You know, the physical move, and a little bit about some of the people at the time. But most of it would come, like with most people, five or six years old on up.

**Motta** Okay.

**Haldeman** I wasn't, naturally, [*laughs*] I wasn't out running around much when I was four years old, naturally.

**Motta** Yeah. Well, could you describe a little bit about when you actually arrived in Osceola—the memories as being a child? Could you describe just, like, the day-to-day life of the town?

**Haldeman** Well, of course. I think the first impression was it was different than Maitland, 'cause in the case of Maitland, even though the house was literally right on [U.S. Route] 17-92 – you know, going through the area – there were just houses around without any other infrastructure. Whereas in this case, as you came into town, you'd see some houses on the left-hand side, and the school, and then the boarding house and the post office. And then on the right-hand side, there might be a train of logs there, you know, fifteen cars long, you know, with a train engine, and then in the distance, a sawmill literally at the end of the street. So the infrastructure was naturally quite different than what I was used to.

**Motta** So Osceola actually seemed like more of a bustling town than Maitland, at the time?

**Haldeman** Yes, mainly because you were seeing the whole town kind of at one swoop.

**Motta** Yeah, kind of condensed.

**Haldeman** Whereas the case in Maitland, they had to either go into Winter Park, or inside[?] Maitland itself – as you probably know today [*laughs*] – still doesn't have much in the way of business. It's mostly Winter Park and Orlando.

**Motta** Could you describe the house you moved into, and like the street and neighborhood, a little?

**Haldeman** Well, the first five houses as you came in, on the left-hand side – and you always could remember that you were into the little town, because there was a cattle guard, because the area was fenced off. So from an early age, I remember going across the cattle guard, 'cause if you were asleep, as a little kid, you'd wake up going over the cattle guard, and you knew you were home. So the first five houses on the left-hand side, which kind of called it executive[?] row. That might be a misterm today. But the first house had the bookkeeper. The second house the general superintendent. The third house the person in charge of the mill – not the president, but the operational manager. And my father was the sales manager. He was the fourth house. The company doctor was in the fifth house. So the house itself was – for a company house – was a pretty nice, you know, relatively, to speak of, of course today, a pretty nice house. And of course they [*inaudible*] electricity during the [Great] Depression. They didn't – but, so the facilities were pretty good. The water, of course, the water was free, but it came strictly out of the St. Johns River, so [*laughs*], you naturally didn't drink it, but it was okay to take a bath in. So those were the things that I probably would have noticed that – because in Maitland, you know, you have the normal city water and all that sort of thing. But so the house was larger than the one in Maitland, so that was probably noticeable, you know, from a kid's standpoint.

**Motta** So where did the water that you drank and cooked with – where did that come from?

**Haldeman** The water we drank – that was – unfortunately for the area, if you put down a well, you got quite a bit of salt in the waters. So, had they known – had the company known they were gonna be there that long – they would have even gone deeper to get water, or they would have piped it from Geneva, which was five miles away, but they had good water there. So we used bottled water in some cases. We also supplemented it every time we went into Sanford. We'd always have a couple of five-gallon jugs. In those days, the space between the back seat and the front seat was big enough for five-gallon jugs. And we'd fill it in a filling station, so that was part of it. Now, some of the people, particularly coming from the black quarters, would walk down to the depot on [inaudible] railroad, and there was a pump down there – that the water was drinkable. It had a little strange taste. I mean, it wasn't, you know, natural spring water, but it was suitable, you know, for that type of thing. But you just had to get used to the taste of it.

**Motta** Well, you mentioned these utilities there. How self-sufficient, like in itself, was Osceola? Did you have to take frequent trips to Orlando or Sanford or anywhere else, to get things?

**Haldeman** Well, the company, they had a company town and they had their company store, which I worked in at a later date, which we'll cover later. But it was 18 miles into Sanford on the nine-foot road. And so, we generally went into Sanford on Saturdays. That was kind of the custom in those days, particularly people from out of town. And then we got relatively few items from the company store, because [inaudible] was small and didn't have a lot of buying power. Even though they were pretty honest, the prices were higher there than they would have been at a bigger store in Sanford. And, now, when you get into special holidays or Christmas, we were more apt to go to Orlando, where there was more retail establishments, [inaudible] otherwise. But that was generally the way we got things. Of course, [inaudible], with a catalog, that's where almost everybody that lived in the countryside got their clothes and a lot of things, 'cause that was generally cheaper than buying it in most any town.

**Motta** You mentioned that your father was the sales manager. What were his duties? Like how were they different from the other managers'?

**Haldeman** Well, he was sales manager, but he also handled all the administrative things. Like he was in charge of buying the insurance and making sure they had insurance coverage. He bought all the supplies for the mill, and things of that nature that you might call operational manager duties, from that standpoint, because there was relatively few key people, as you can see, you know, from the houses that I mentioned, 'cause the rest of them were either in the supervisory level or below that.

**Motta** Did...

**Haldeman** Actually, in the sales manager part, he didn't necessarily handle the salespeople in sales. It would be more like a marketing manager, because they sold through

their own representative in Florida to the retail lumber industry, and they sold through wholesale lumber companies in the Midwest and the Northeast. And of course, there wasn't any reason to go over towards Louisiana or other places in the South, because they already had cypress mills, you know, closer to them. So it was kind of a duke's mixture of a lot of duties, really.

**Motta** Okay. And there were two higher level managers, your father and the other. What did you say...

**Haldeman** Only one, actually, above him, what would be the president of the company. So you had a very, you know, limited chain of command.

**Motta** So the foreman was just—he had...

**Haldeman** The foreman would actually be under either the sawmill foreman or the planing mill foreman, or something of that nature. And they generally were lumber inspectors or someone that handled the crew. Or, in the case of the sawmill or the planing mill, you had an engineer around the steam engines, where you used the power plant and that sort of thing.

**Motta** Were there any—as you were a child, when you had first got there, do you remember any of the children having any roles in the sawmill business itself, like in any just odd jobs they would do here and there, or like chores they were expected to do by their parents? Was there anything...

**Haldeman** You mean for the mill itself, or for outside of the mill?

**Motta** Really anything, but were they involved in—really anything.

**Haldeman** No, but really not, because there weren't that many opportunities. There was—it's not like, you know, going down and working for McDonald's or something. They would have—including myself—would have loved to have had some opportunities, but there wasn't even a paper route, you know, to have. So that was very limited, so they generally did things for their folks and, you know, mowed the lawn and all that sort of thing. And in some cases, like in our yard—the yards were fairly large. The yard was a hundred by three hundred, which would be the size of a football field. So you had a lot of grass to cut, and then in the back part you had chickens and a little garden and so forth. So kids in general, like in the country or particularly farm area, have got plenty to do without working at McDonald's, if you know what I mean.

**Motta** You just mentioned chickens. Was there much livestock there, that the families took care of, or was it a...

**Haldeman** Well, it depends. It depends on the family. The general superintendent at the time, particularly prior to—well, most of the time—he had a cow, you know, that produced milk for the family. And I don't remember a garden in this case, but we had a garden in the back. It grew, you know, naturally not all of our needs,

but certainly it, you know, helped. And that type of thing. And [inaudible] chickens – I raised chickens not only for the family, but I sold them to the workers and so forth around the mill. I generally had about 75 hens, you know, for laying eggs, and then I had about 300 fryers. Fryers, rather than [inaudible] beyond that. In other words, fryer is good to sell when they're about six to eight weeks old. And you get about 25 cents a pound live weight. Remarkably, eggs and chickens were – adjusted for the dollar – were a lot more expensive back then than they are today.

**Motta** So you were doing this business with your chickens when you were still a child?

**Haldeman** Yeah. Yeah, from the time I was about ten years old 'til about 15 years old.

**Motta** Okay.

**Haldeman** So, really, 'til the time we moved away.

**Motta** Did you also say that you had a job in the store – the company store – eventually?

**Haldeman** Yeah, when I got out of high school – Seminole High School – in 1941. I was barely 16 when I got out of high school. So, I didn't have money to go to college, so I worked in the company store from, you know, May or early June of '41 until September of '42, when I went to the University of Florida one year before I went into the Navy. So that would have been 15 months, and I saved enough money to go to Florida. 'Cause my year at Florida – at University of Florida – in '42, '43, my total expenses, including bus fare to Gainesville, was \$490. So it was much cheaper to go [*laughs*] to college back then, because the tuition – if you want to call it tuition – they were on a semester system at the time. So the two semesters, and each one was \$64 a semester, which would be \$128 for the whole year, and that included your yearbook, your football tickets, and concerts, and, you know, soup to nuts. So, I wouldn't exactly call that tuition [*laughs*]. So the cost, most of the cost of going to school was room and board.

**Motta** So...

**Haldeman** Compared to today, it's quite a contrast.

**Motta** Yeah. Yes. So you said you went to college in 1942 and '43?

**Haldeman** Yeah. I went '42 to '43. Just the one year. And I was supposed to be called to go into the service. I had signed up for a certain thing, but you had to wait 'til you were called, but for some reason each county is a little different. You could be in one county and be called much earlier than other counties, or much later than other counties, see. And Seminole County just happened to be one that seemed to have not a surplus, but an adequate number. So you might not be called for a while. So actually, when I got out of college that year, I worked at – I went back to work for the company. I worked in the office in the afternoon, and then I ran



the light plant. They had their own light plant, and I ran the light plant at night, 'til 11 o'clock. We didn't have lights after 11 o'clock. So then I went in the Navy, about the same time that my folks moved down to Port Everglades, or Fort Lauderdale.

**Motta** And that was about – that was the time they moved down there because of the sawmill operation closedown?

**Haldeman** Oh, yeah. It was the closing down thing. My father was there the longest of anybody, because they liquidated the [inaudible] of the company. Actually, the company that continued was a different ownership, but some of the same people. Not all the same people, but some of them. And it became a wholesale lumber distribution of the West Coast lumber, rather than cypress. And, so, they took over the liquidation of the town, which most of it – where they just didn't – where it's nothing, you know. A steel rail that would have been junk, you know, scratch steel and so forth. But as the war progressed – World War II – those items that were junk. They started having value. So that was one thing that got them shortage. So my father was in charge of getting rid of the things. So the houses that normally would have just kind of deteriorated were actually moved to Sanford and other places, as full houses. And the things were too big, people would come out and tear them down piece by piece, take them back to other places in Seminole County and build another house, 'cause you couldn't get lumber any other way, because the government took all the production, you know, that was available. So you had to use something that was already there in order to build anything. And so some of the trains were – they generally were sold for scrap, but the steel rail was suitable to use in the mines and other places, either in the U.S. or South America. So they brought a lot more money than they would have as scrap – scrap metal. The rails – they were used in the logging woods, and so they were quite a few miles of rail, and they just had it stacked up, you know, ready to be sold as scrap or something. But most of that was sold as rail. Now, it's what you call "light rail." You couldn't use it on the main railroad. So there might be – a regular railroad has at least 100- to 150-pound rail, which is three feet is 150 pounds, where this might be a 60-pound rail or something like that. So it was limited use, but still had a lot of value, when you couldn't use it any other way.

**Motta** So, why exactly did the sawmill operation move to South Florida?

**Haldeman** Well, the mill didn't move. They just formed a different type of company. In other words, they no longer sold out of Florida, because they wouldn't have had enough market, because there's other people doing the same thing, [inaudible]. In other words, cypress was replaced with lumber from Oregon and Washington and British Columbia and places like that. And what you were shooting for wasn't [inaudible] in the East very much, because they didn't – perhaps in the Northwest – not the Northwest – but the Midwest, might have used some. But generally the freight part was too great to compete with things in the Eastern part of the U.S. So the complexion changed considerably, from manufacturing

completely to wholesale distribution. In other words, buying lumber on the West Coast of the country. And it either came by ship or by rail over to the Southeast, and then it was distributed all over Florida by truck. So you can see it's a different type.

See, the timber ran out. The last timber they had – well, the first timber when we moved in there – it came from an area between Osteen and New Smyrna, a little town called Maytown, which I guess is still there. And Maytown was kind of a distribution point on the [inaudible] Railroad that went down to Okeechobee. And now – prior to that, it came from the section from Holopaw down to Okeechobee, in the Kissimmee Valley and places like that. But then the latter part of the time, they logged back of Holly Hill and Ormond Beach and that area, which is Tomoka River section and so forth. But that ran out in 1938, so the sawmill shut down for good in '38, but they still ran the planing mill, and they brought in lumber from the [inaudible] mill. They had a little mill up in Otter Creek, which is west of Gainesville. And then they had their own little [inaudible] mill near Kissimmee. Actually, I guess it would be where [Walt] Disney [World] is now. There used to be some cypress in that area. And, so, but that was a limited amount, and they did that up until about 1943. And then they closed down the planing mill and everything by that time. So, 'cause even after 1938, they had 25 million [inaudible] of cypress. It was on the drying yard, 'cause cypress has to be air-dried, compared to chill-dried. So it takes a long time. It takes a year to the inch. If you got a one-inch board, then technically[?] it takes a year to dry it. If it's two inches, it takes two years. So if you get into bigger stuff, like a tank, it's four inches, so it can take four years, you know, to dry it. So you got a lot of stock there that takes a number of years to heat it up. In fact, the only thing that speeded it up was – in World War II – was to get into blossom, and the defense part started picking up after 1940. So, that had an effect to pick up the business, and they were able to move it out at a faster rate. That's the reason that otherwise it might have – the planing mill – might have run for another couple years, had it not been for World War II.

**Motta** Now, I know the company was called the Osceola Cypress Company, but did you deal with any other kinds of woods, or was it just cypress exclusively? Or did you...

**Haldeman** It was just cypress, cypress exclusively, 'cause it's pretty hard, in the first place, with yellow pine, which is all over the state, particularly the northern part of the state, at the time, it can be a fairly large mill, or it can be a small mill. And actually, today, a pine mill, you've seen the trucks running around with the logs on them. They look like telephone poles, you know, whereas cypress was a much bigger log. It took them a much bigger mill, much like California redwood requires.

**Motta** Yeah.

**Haldeman** Well, so in cypress – the difference is you cut for quality, not for quantity. Now, most mills cut for quantity, and not for quality, because the logger doesn't want a

sawyer looking at it ten different times and treating it all kinds of ways to get it the best cut. They just shoot it through and it's done with a computer. They do it in such a manner, they get the most [inaudible] rather than the most quality, because the quality's gonna be pretty general anyhow, pretty much on the low end of the spectrum.

**Motta** So did most sawmills in the Florida area – did they deal with cypress, or was it like a mixed bag?

**Haldeman** No, no, most of them were yellow pine, but the reason there weren't many cypress was because firstly, there wasn't that much cypress, but also, you had to have a big mill. Everything about it is big. Then the logging part is very expensive, 'cause you're going down in swamps. You build a railroad every mile, and then you have big skinners pulling the log as much as a half-mile in each direction. So that takes a lot of equipment. But on the other hand, the lumber that comes out of it brings a much bigger price. Otherwise, you couldn't afford anything, 'cause cypress is not a commercial tree. You can grow a good – pretty good – yellow pine for lumber in 30 years, particularly in Mississippi, where they get a lot of rain. Whereas I don't think you can even classify cypress, 'cause usually most of those logs were six or eight hundred years old. Most, to begin with. So 60 years – you get a fencepost, you know. Also, cypress – when you look at cypress around Florida, most of that is what they call “pond cypress,” and it never gets very big. It's really used for a fencepost and that sort of thing. And for log cabins or something. And it has a lot of sap in it. It has very little heart, so it'll rot away pretty fast, whereas the bigger logs were heavier heart. Only the last outer inch was sap. So, there's a big, big difference between the two. Cypress in general was the epitome of the finest in what you call softwoods. Now, and there weren't too many hardwoods to cut in Florida. They might cut some. I'm sure they would cut some gum and a few things like that, but they did it mainly for their own use, for doing trams[?] going out through the drying yards and that sort of thing. They never did sell it or anything. So 99 percent of the cut was cypress.

**Motta** In the pictures you sent us, I noticed that most everything in the town is made out of wood. Was the building material cypress for the homes, or was that...

**Haldeman** Yeah. Yeah. And the original mill – I'm not sure what the tree was, but the first mill burned down at some point, and evidently the ownership – the deal was different or more money was poured in – I'm not sure what – but the things that were built after about 1921 seemed to be built much better than the ones prior to that time. And you can tell this by – if you look at the one – the company store, that was a sufficient building, but it was a fairly crude building. And some of the early houses weren't that great. But then, after that, they were built in a much better way. For example, the boarding house, which was the only two-story building you'll see in the pictures there, the vertical beams on that – when they tore it down, nobody could believe that they were so far apart [*laughs*]. In other words, that in fact – the guys that tore it down – they finally had to push it over,

'cause they were scared to go up on top and take the roofing off, because it's amazing it stays under that long.

But of course, when you build something for a temporary basis, you never expect it could be there that long. In fact, one interesting thing between the white people that came out and tore things down – and that had to be white people in this case – they didn't do nearly as good as the blacks did. The blacks would come out with 15 or 20 of their cousins, you know, and they would do it piece by piece, and they could retrieve much more of the house than the white people that did it, because they weren't quite in as much a rush, and they had the personnel to be more meticulous on tearing it down. And of course, two stories, in all fairness, was a little different 'cause of the mere fact it was two stories. And the white group that did that did a very stupid thing. They took all the siding off the bottom before they started taking the roof off. Well, once you take the siding off, you've lost all the strength of the building. Then nobody would go up on the top to take the roofing part off. And by "roofing," I don't mean the shingles. I'm talking about the boards, 'cause the roof is – what you put over the roof – the roof is the boards themselves. But at any rate, that's kind of an interesting sidelight of the differences in the people, you know.

**Motta** I read that many of the workers at the sawmill were black. Was Osceola pretty much as segregated as any other town in the South at that time, or...

**Haldeman** Oh, yeah. The only thing that was probably more democratic, we had two or three black people. In fact, one that – he was kind of a mentor to me, 'cause I was kind of a little kid following him around. And he – I was always amazed at what he could do with his education and so forth. I will always wonder where he got it from, you know. His wife was a midwife across the river from Sanford, in Enterprise, and she used to bring him out every Monday morning and then pick him up Friday night. And, but he kept up the electrical system, which was the city lights, a 2500-volt system – [inaudible] lighting system – and the light – the engine itself and the generator was in the sawmill and earlier in the planing mill. And they would run only at certain times, because there was no need to run them 24 hours a day.

And then there was another black fellow, I think they worked down in the shop, because they built the lumber cars. They kept up the steam engines and all that sort of thing. It was all in-house help. And so, there really – religion or race didn't seem to have too much to do with it. But now, by nature of the beast, some of the blacks didn't have opportunity at an earlier age, and that's understandable. But they had several that had fairly good jobs.

And, as far as religion – you didn't know who was Jewish and who wasn't Jewish, you know. Not many paid much attention. So that was pretty much, you know – I'd say a full democratic system, except for the housing. Housing was separate, and that was the one part that probably could have been better, but of course, the turnover was a little greater than in the [inaudible]. But most of the blacks were in there, if they were fairly long-term, they would tend to fix things

up, and of course the company would furnish lumber for them and so forth. And so a lot of things were done in that way, even in the case of my folks' house. My father did a lot to it to improve it, and of course the company furnished the lumber part, so there wasn't a great expense to, you know, to make improvements. Like I built all the chicken houses and all that sort of thing, and there was no shortage of lumber, particularly in the depths of the Depression [*laughs*].

**Motta** Since you mentioned the Depression, was there any kind of significant impact on the town at the time? Like in the '30s?

**Haldeman** Oh, yeah, because the sawmill – the sawmill shut down in 1932 and didn't start back up until 1936. 1936 was the first start to pull out of the Depression. Unfortunately, by 1937, it was kind of [*laughs*], like some of our [*inaudible*] right now, things kind of went backwards for a while in '37. So it wasn't until '39 or '40 that it started picking back up again. So, but they managed to get through 1937 okay, because some parts of the country were still doing all right. But Florida – Florida really didn't pick up until, well, really the first part of World War II. The first preparations were done early starting in 1940, but particularly in '41, when [Franklin D.] Roosevelt figured we were gonna see this thing, you know, whether we like it or not. So, whereas some parts of the country held up better – 'cause, as I said, they sold through the wholesalers in the Northeast and the Midwest. But it was affected 'cause naturally all the sawmill workers, I don't know where they went [?]. Of course, some of them were from Georgia. They went back to their folks' farm or whatever, you know. Fortunately, in the Depression, so many people went back to the farms, where their parents were or relatives were, and today we don't have those farms to go back to. It was a little different. But, and then of course, the logging camp naturally shut down, because there was nobody to, you know, get the logs. So there was[sic] four years – and that was probably the worst – also the worst part of Seminole County or anywhere near there, as far as the Depression was concerned, because the banks closed. The [*inaudible*] Bank closed there for a while, and not too many banks survived it – the Depression – 'cause you didn't have the FDIC [Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation] guarantee any deposits or anything. So, so that was a rough period. So I'm sure Sanford, you know, was affected by it just as much as any other part. I think the only – I must say that Orlando, and perhaps Lakeland, and Miami Beach, probably did the best during the Depression. Orlando seemed to go along. They weren't booming, but they kept building a few houses during the Depression.

**Motta** When people started leaving the town, to your knowledge – do you know if anybody stayed or stuck around, or didn't pretty much...

**Haldeman** Well, some of the blacks stayed in Sanford. I know the black that kept the boiler room going, and that was probably one of the more important jobs, 'cause he was the night boiler man, and so they had to keep it up, keep the steam up – you had to keep the steam up not only to be ready the next day, but also in case of

fire. You had to have steam for the steam pumps, for water and so forth. And so you kept it up just enough to keep steam, but not enough, you know, to waste the fuel with excess steam that would blow off if it got to be more than needed. Now, he had quite a family, and a lot of those were either from Sanford or from the back end of Sanford. And as you probably well know, the Sanford[?] district was out east in Sanford, on either Celery Avenue, particularly Geneva Avenue. And then of course the black shopping district was on Sanford Avenue, which was where Gatlin Grocery Store was. In fact, I have an ad in that, 1940 ad of one of their sales in their weekly newspaper thing, kind of interesting to see the price of different things [*laughs*].

**Motta** Yeah, I'd imagine.

**Haldeman** So, at any rate, the economic growth—I would suspect that Seminole County was hurt a lot more than Orange County—but maybe not as much as some of the counties in the northern part of Florida. But Jacksonville probably did a little better than some of the others, because that was quite a distribution point for a lot of things, like more so, at that time, relatively speaking, than it is today.

**Motta** So you don't know of anybody that actually stayed around in Osceola after everybody left?

**Haldeman** No, there wasn't any place to stay, really, 'cause the company owned all the houses and they sold them all. But...

**Motta** And they owned the land as well?

**Haldeman** And they owned the land. And in fact, we had to, the land stayed with the [inaudible] company at Port Everglades until 1982. And it was leased out for years to Cameron[?] for cattle. In fact, they had their own cattle for a while, which was never very profitable. Then they sold it to—no, beg your pardon—they leased it to Cameron, which was a cattleman there. In fact, I think there's a Cameron Boulevard off of around State Route 436, somewhere along in there. But anyway, that's the Cameron family. And the thousand acres, about 400 of that was prairie off of Lake Harney, so that used to flood every year, almost every year. In recent years, I don't think it has. But [inaudible], 'cause when the water went down, of course you had tremendous grazing[?] for cows[?]. The rest of it was kind of a scrub pine area. Ironically, there were no cypress trees in the Oviedo area. They were all pine trees, but none of any size, 'cause a lot of the land had been cleared for the lumber piles around, and so forth. And the only people that lived beyond that, if you go west, then you get to the end of paved road, there's a dirt road that goes west and then it trails north. And about five miles north of the St. Johns, there was a place called Days[?]Camp, and that was a man and a woman that lived there—gosh, I don't know how long they'd been there. But they were there even before the mill came there, and then he died and she married the caretaker. They must have been there—well, they were there through, you know, '44, '45. I don't know what ever happened to them. And then

later on, a Southern belle out of Orlando had a little camp on the St. Johns, just beyond where the sawmill was.

But for the most part, that area, north until you get to Lemon Bluff, which was near a road going from Orlando – Celery Avenue – and going to Osteen, that part of the river literally was never, never developed, partly because it was low. As you probably know, very little of the St. Johns, from – well, from Palatka to anywhere – almost all of it was low land. Even Sanford would flood when Osceola wouldn't. They built a sawmill there 'cause it was one of the few places where they had fairly high land.

**Motta** I understand in the area where the current Seminole County landfill is, there was an airfield around World War II?

**Haldeman** That's right, 'cause that was actually some of the company's property. It really was more than a thousand acres, maybe 1,200 acres. And that was a satellite deal to the naval air station in Jacksonville, because – I mean, in Sanford. See, every field that had a naval setup, those planes were almost all carrier-type planes, you know, for landing in an aircraft carrier. So it took a lot of trading[?] of land[?] and taking off on short distance. They'd mark off the field as if it were an aircraft carrier. And so, so you had, there was one satellite field over at New Smyrna, which was part of the one at Daytona. So almost every one had at least one satellite field. And, in fact, the one in Fort Lauderdale – the big airport we have here was a naval air station, and it had three satellite fields, and they had the bomber planes that were on the aircraft carriers which trained in this area and up there. So, at any rate, that sat there for years, and people would fly in, and they finally had to put sand dunes on it because the drug people were flying in, 'cause, you know, you could cut in discreetly, come in there without anybody knowing.

**Motta** Yeah.

**Haldeman** Now, we had some real trouble with Seminole County, and they were gonna put a full, just plain old dump out there. And I guess they thought we wouldn't know anything about it. And I was involved with that, because by that time I was the manager. And so we had to, our lawyer had to fight with City Hall – not City Hall – but their County Hall. And at any rate, we won out on it, so they put a full-fledged, you know, bona fide dump that has all the environmental stuff and so forth. We keep [inaudible] on it because then – in order to take the garbage trucks out there – because that's where most of the garbage for Sanford goes. They redid the road to a 16-foot road, so we [inaudible] the road.

**Motta** And when was that?

**Haldeman** That would have been about 1970.

**Motta** Okay.

**Haldeman** And, 'cause, by that time, the company down here had been sold to a division of [inaudible] Corporation, and they didn't want the non-operational assets, and so the land up there was something they had no desire to own. So that was spun off as a separate thing, and for years it was on the market. But 18 miles east of Sanford was no-man's land, you know, at the time. Nobody in particular wanted it. The only value in it was the part that was high land on the St. Johns. And so anyway, at any rate, we finally sold it in 1982, and they broke it up into five-acre plots. The reason for that is to make a lot no smaller than five acres, you can put a septic tank on it. Otherwise, you gotta build a plant. So at any rate, they sold several of the lots right on the St. Johns, and there's a couple houses down there now – two or three. You can't see them now, because the trees have grown up so much. And then, I thought they would build some of the land where the lumber even sat, 'cause that was all cleared and drained pretty well, but they never did, to my knowledge. But they built some right along the, it'd be just east of the [inaudible] right-of-way, 'cause the railroad's not there, but the right-of-way's there. And you can see some along in there, 'cause the trees have grown up and you can't[?] see it. But I guess they built them there, because if you look east, and look over 400 acres of prairie toward Lake Harney, and if you went very far east you'd be down in lower land, and I don't think they would have let you build there because it's subject to flooding.

**Motta** The flood plain.

**Haldeman** So it never was developed as much as I think they thought, but I think the guy that bought it did okay, because he got a pretty good price for the stuff on the water and probably got most of his money back on that, and then hoped that the rest would sell at some point. But since that time, there's been some houses and things between Osceola and Geneva that you can see along the highway there.

**Motta** I meant to ask you about Geneva, actually. You said at that time Osceola was about five miles away from the central part of Geneva?

**Haldeman** Well, in fact, I think it almost connected five miles to what they call [inaudible] corner. It used to be – and then you'd turn south to go to the end of – until you went about a mile and a half. But those were all Chase & Company orange groves around that whole corner. Later on they built a shortcut that went straight from the Geneva Bridge straight into Geneva. In fact, actually south of Geneva, which is now [State Road] 46. Before 46 used to come toward Osceola and then turn south to get into Geneva. So it was actually about seven and a half miles into where the school was in Geneva. Geneva never was very large. It was strictly a citrus county. It had a lot of orange groves, and they had one packinghouse, and they had, at one time, a little mill to make the orange crates. Almost every packinghouse had some kind of a mill to make the orange crates, 'cause the orange crates were all wood at that time, but the ones used in the – to bring in the fruit, and also the ones for shipping. And of course, the orange crates used for bringing in fruit were more permanent, and naturally the others were



strictly temporary. But it was, as you may well know, even today it's a very scattered area.

**Motta** Yes.

**Haldeman** But if you drive through, you'll think there's 50 people living there. But if you go back off the road, there's quite a bit of houses, you know, here and there. But it never has grown like they – I would have thought it would have grown a lot more, because it has, you know, quite a bit going. It's good high ground. It's 75 feet higher than Osceola was. And it's nice. That's the reason the orange trees were there, 'cause it was nice sandy soil, whereas Osceola was more of a wet soil.

**Motta** You mentioned earlier that between 1932 and '36, the production at the sawmill stopped?

**Haldeman** Yeah, it was shut down completely. Yeah.

**Motta** What happened to the residents? Did they, did people move away?

**Haldeman** Well, and some probably went back to Georgia. The population there was at least 80 percent black, and so some went to Sanford now[?]. They were beginning to – the celery industry was [inaudible] to get them to move down to Okeechobee, so maybe some of them went down there. You know, it's amazing, they never really seemed to survive. They just survived very well.

**Motta** Yeah.

**Haldeman** But there were, you know, we didn't have Social Security. We didn't have this, that, and the other then, but people seemed to make out one way or the other. A lot of them went back to their folks or their relatives and so forth. You know, you had a lot more people doing things for each other than you would have today. If we had the same kind of depression that we had in the '30s, [laughs] I'm not sure that the country would hold together. Probably blow up 'cause people just aren't used to taking care of themselves one way or the other. I don't mean it's quite that bad, but you know what I mean.

**Motta** Yeah. It would be interesting to see.

**Haldeman** Although it's interesting what people will do if push comes to shove.

**Motta** Yeah. I'd like to switch to a little more personal topic, if I could. Do you have a, like a favorite memory that you can share with us, of the town or your time there? Something that most people that didn't live in the town wouldn't know of, or...

**Haldeman** Well, I think the informality of it. I guess the fact the first four years of school, it was only half a block to the school, so [laughs] you didn't have very far to walk, you know, to go to school. And then the teacher, you know – as I mentioned one

time, I think – when I talked to you, from 1930 to '32, it was a four – no, I guess it was not until '34 – at any rate, it was a two-room school with two teachers and four grades. And then, as the Depression set in, the school board cut it back to one room, but six grades instead of four. So one teacher taught six grades. So that was an interesting period because you were going to school – I guess people would think that's a real handicap today, but in the first place, you had top-flight teachers in those days. I mean, you know, really dedicated teachers. Secondly, with only thirteen students, and then they kind of taught each other the [inaudible]. So it's amazing the education was that good, considering. And then of course the discipline was tight, so I guess what I'm trying to say is – even with that kind of limitation, the education was probably better than it is today, because now, not only is the school class so big, in general the teachers aren't quite as competent. At least, a lot of people claim they're not. I don't mean there's not hundreds of exceptions. And then they had discipline in those days that they don't have today.

So [laughs], a little off-story on this thing, when I was on a cruise recently on the Columbia River. There was a couple from Georgia. He'd been a schoolteacher and a principal and later in school administration, and then in his later years, he worked for the prison department. And the first day he was shown around the prison, the warden said to him, "Don't you feel a little uneasy here, in this prison?" He said, "Oh, no. This is a lot better than being in a high school with a change[?] of classes[?]." [laughs]

**Motta** [laughs] Uh-oh.

**Haldeman** Yeah, so it kind of reminded me of the differences in the time, you know.

**Motta** Yeah.

**Haldeman** But anyway, I think of the school system, and then of course, education in Geneva. That was a three-room school, so I went there for the seventh and eighth grade. And actually Geneva was much worse off in the Depression than Osceola, at least those of us that were still in Osceola, and by the time I went there, the sawmill had cranked back up. But Geneva was pretty well-hit right on through. And to make matters worse, of course, as you know, later on, you didn't need a packinghouse every ten miles away. They consolidated that as trucks came in and so forth, so Geneva was hit quite hard during that period, 'cause I can remember that not too many kids had shoes, you know.

**Motta** Oh yeah?

**Haldeman** I've got a picture of the school there, and I was just looking at it the other day. I was amazed how many ones there were barefoot, you know.

**Motta** Yeah.

**Haldeman** So, whereas at least, in Osceola, they had some kind of income. Also, they stopped collecting rent. Of course, electricity, water was free, so even though the salaries and so forth were cut, you didn't have a lot of extra other expenses that you might have had somewhere else.

**Motta** Did you enjoy growing up in that area? Like the geography of the area, more than the town itself, I mean? Like, do you have any memories of going down to the river or Lake Harney?

**Haldeman** Oh, yeah, because, and not only, you know, having my own chickens and own things of that nature, because I made little money. I never, you know, got rich on the thing, because—even though I didn't have too much overhead. And, but I—I built a small boat first, then got one larger. The black person that I mentioned that was kind of a mentor to me, he and I built a really nice boat, and I had a big Johnson motor on it and so forth. I tell you we built it. He was 99 percent and I was one percent, and one of the houses was [inaudible], and we worked at night. He kind of took me as a son, so to speak, because he didn't have any children, and I mentioned his wife went back to Enterprise during the week, so he didn't have anything to do at night. So, but I used to follow him around, and I learned a lot from him, not only practical things, but plain old wisdom type of things. But then, later on, you know, I'd think nothing of going down there, getting in the boat, going up to Lemon Bluff or wherever—even Geneva Bridge—without thinking anything about it. If I'd ever broken down, I'd probably still be there, you know, 'cause [laughs] there were no phones, there were no CB [citizens band] radios, there was no sheriff patrol, you know. There was nothing, you know. In fact, most of the time, nobody even knew I left, you know. They wouldn't even know where I was. So...

**Motta** That sounds a lot different from today.

**Haldeman** That's right. That's right. Far different, yeah.

**Motta** Yeah. Well, we...

**Haldeman** Growing up in any country area has a lot of advantages, and a lot of disadvantages, but a lot of advantages.

**Motta** We have a little bit of time left. Do you have anything you could share that you think I missed that you think is interesting?

**Haldeman** Well, I may have mentioned this either to you or Kim [Nelson], but the, some of the economics is interesting. The houses were—I guess you'd call it executive[?] row—a little unfair to use that term, but that's about what it amounted to—were \$23 a month, and then if you went down to where then you had the schoolhouse and the post office. The post office had the doctor's office and a little library—at the post office. And that postmistress, of course—that was—I don't think it was a contract job. I don't know how it was in those days, but she sold candy and newspapers and other things, because there was only, at the most, 200 people in

the town, and half of those didn't get any mail, so you can see [laughs] it wasn't that big a post office.

Then you had the boardinghouse and then the company store, and then the office, or between the boardinghouse and the company store, one of the pictures I showed you there, it's called Pine Street. And that was an extension of the white quarters, and on the left side the houses rented for \$15 a month. On the right side they were a little smaller and they were \$10 dollars a month. And then the ones down at the end crosswise were \$6 dollars a month. Now, even those were – had a little two-bedroom houses. I mean, I don't know, but maybe eight hundred, nine hundred feet, so they weren't baby. And then the black quarters was west of that, and they varied all over the place, and usually they could be – they weren't, you know, anything to write home about, but I can say a lot of times people added onto it or fixed it up or this, that, and the other with it. So I was never down there too much. I could go down there as a kid. In fact, that was the only place you could get a Coca-Cola at night – was to go down there, 'cause they had their own little juke joint down there, you know. And there's no place wilder than a black section on Saturday night [laughs].

**Motta** Did you play a lot with the black children? Was that – did you guys mingle?

**Haldeman** No, no. That was – I guess it was strictly because of the location. I don't think it had too much to do with race. Young kids, no matter how far back you go, never pay much attention to race. Only older people pay attention to race.

**Motta** Yeah.

**Haldeman** But I think this had to do with location. But as far as the workers, you know – in fact, the company had some kind of agreement with the sheriff's department, because they didn't have any kind of police force at all, but I guess they did have something [inaudible] whatever kind of sheriff department he had. I'm sure it wasn't that big a deal in Seminole County back then. But they had some kind of agreement with the sheriff at the jail in Sanford. They always kept on the payroll about two people that were on probation and everything had been in jail or whatever. And I remember one that used to – when I didn't mow the yard – he sometimes would help mowing the yard. And he killed his wife or something or other. They were all, you know, most of the black things[?] in those days had to do with domestic squabbles or something, you know. You know, [laughs] I didn't think about the fact that he murdered somebody. In those days, you just didn't give it a second thought.

So those were some of the differences. So there was a little more camaraderie among the adult part than there was the kids' part. Personally, you know, you rarely saw the kids, to be honest with you, because they pretty well did their own thing. They had their own school. The only thing they didn't have is a high school, but of course, not every white person went to high school in those days either, for that matter. So. They had the opportunity. I think they – if they went to high school, they stayed with somebody in Sanford or something. I don't

remember. And I really don't remember that we had hardly any people of that age that I can remember. They were always younger than that. I don't know what happened to them when they grew up. They probably went to work somewhere else, I guess.

**Motta** Well, Mr. Haldeman. Thank you very much for talking with me today.

**Haldeman** Okay, and if there's anything that we missed or there's, you know, something to expand on or some other part of an outline that got missed, you know, call me anytime. Now, if I don't answer when you call from the museum, it shows up here as unavailable. Sometimes we don't catch that right off. If we ever answered unavailable, call...

*End of Interview*