

An Interview with

Ross Barnett

July 14, 1976

Interviewed by

Elbert R. Hilliard

H. T. Holmes

Mississippi Department of Archives and History
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Interviewee: Ross Barnett
Interviewers: Elbert R. Hilliard
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HILLIARD: Governor Barnett, this is Hank Holmes, who is a historian on our staff. Hank is responsible for our Oral History Program. We're fortunate in getting interviews with some of our political leaders and various individuals.

BARNETT: ...excuse me.

HILLIARD: All right, go ahead.

BARNETT: Mississippi Southern University sent me a copy of a statement that I made last year. It took them two or three days you know. Off and on. Do you know where it is? It has a blank back on it. It's about forty pages or more.

HILLIARD: First of all, one thing we're very much interested in, as indicated in the letter, are your papers as governor or any of your personal papers and memorabilia we could preserve in the Department of Archives and History for future generations to research and enjoy and appreciate. I would note, for example, that some of the past governors had extensive holdings. We have some of your official papers during the administration catalogued in the department. But we hope you will keep the Archives Department in mind as being the official repository for all papers for our governmental leaders for the State of Mississippi. So any papers of memorabilia that you have we're interested in preserving them for the State of Mississippi.

BARNETT: Well I don't know. You know I've been awfully busy trying law suits.

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HILLIARD: Right.

BARNETT: Since I got out of the Governor's office, we've added four new lawyers to our firm. Three in the last year. And I just haven't kept up with...

HILLIARD: Well, Miss Pearl may be able to help you round up some papers. But any-thing that you have...

BARNETT: We have about one thousand pictures out back at the house about a lot of things that took place during the administration. Now, there's a speech I made to the joint session to the Mississippi Legislature. I think I have a copy of that. But what you want is certificates.

HILLIARD: We want anything related to your administration, or to your life, or your career. Correspondence, photographs, official actions as governor, or anything that may not have been turned over from the Governor's office to the Department of Archives and History.

BARNETT: Well, we got all kinds of pictures of the Mansion, inside the Mansion, family, the Colonels such as that you know. I was looking at one the other day. About fifteen of them down the stair way. Good pictures really. And...

HILLIARD: We'll talk with Miss Pearl about that.

BARNETT: I sure will.

HILLIARD: And keep that in mind...

BARNETT: I delivered a whole bushel of things out at Virginia's house.

HILLIARD: This is your daughter?

BARNETT: Yes. She lives out on Pear Orchard.

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HILLIARD: And this is Virginia. Her name now is...

BARNETT: Virginia Branum.

HILLIARD: Branum, right.

BARNETT: She's our youngest daughter. And whole, she got a bushel of things. I had them up here, but carried them out there for her to keep. Pearl knows where a lot of stuff is around the house. You can go out there any time and pick-up what you want. We do have a lot of pictures at Virginia's and at the house. Write ups and all, she has them. I made forty-seven speeches at 47 universities and colleges while I was in office. Such as Princeton, Harvard, Syracuse University...

HILLIARD: In some respects, you preceeded George Wallace in going out and making contacts throughout the various...

BARNETT: I laid the foundation for him.

HILLIARD: ...you laid the foundation for him.

BARNETT: I did. Actually. He knows that. Oh, I don't claim the credit for that. Anyway I made a lot of speeches.

HILLIARD: What sort of reception did you...

BARNETT: I got good reception. Most of the time. Now you take at Princeton University, I got a pretty decent reception, except getting into the building. There were a lot of - I guess, look like wild men trying to turn the police car over carrying me and my wife into the auditorium. Trying to push the car over. Turn it over. I finally got in. When I got in I spoke about forty minutes, and I got a pretty good reception. And then when it was over with I started out with seventeen police officers.

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There was a group on each side of the sidewalk. Hollering "Boo, Boo," such as that. So I didn't pay any attention to it till I got out of the police car, turned around, waved to them. I told them, I said now, "If you gentlemen would come to Mississippi we'll show you that ole spirit of hospitality. And that ole spirit of true friendliness you've always heard about the South." And they just stood there all bent over like a bunch of bird dogs. And that was the end of that. Now I spoke at Harvard. That was one of the first invitations - I got to speak at Harvard University, well, in Massachussets, of course. They had, I'll say 3,000 in the auditorium. And they had a professor sitting on the stage who was going to answer me. Now they thought I was going to talk about blacks. Segregation. I didn't mention it. He said, "Well, I don't have any thing to say." Said, "I thought I was going to answer him on integration."

HOLMES: You fooled him.

BARNETT: I fooled him.

HOLMES: What did you speak on?

BARNETT: I spoke on constitutional government. Constitution, local self-government, rights of the state to control and direct their own activities. And I got a good reception really from 90 percent of the audience. And you take the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, there were 2,500 to 3,000 people there and I got a decent reception there. But there was about 100 over to my right grouped over there together. Long whiskers, long hair. They just looked like a bunch of varmints. Make you sick to look at them

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almost. They looked like a bunch of communists. They were hollering and carrying on all time I was speaking. Didn't have no courtesy to wait till I finished, you know. But I had a loudspeaker and they didn't... Oh, I was bragging about Mississippi. I said: "You ought to come to Jackson, Mississippi, and see the brand new football stadium we just completed recently. Seats 46,000 people. You ought to come see the new beautiful Standard Oil Refinery, the largest initial oil refinery in the world of its tpe in Pascagoula, Mississippi. You ought to come see the beautiful coliseum that will seat 10,000 people." I named, oh a good many other things, and I said, "We have an insane hospital that could take every 100 of these boys over here to my right." They stood and cheered me. Police had started to come towards me you know.

HILLIARD: Did you go out and ask for these invitations?

BARNETT: Goodness, no. I never did ask for one anyway.

HILLIARD: Or did the colleges - the colleges came to you?

BARNETT: They'd write me a letter and ask me to come. Oh, I never did ask for a single one. I wouldn't have done that for anything. I made five different speeches in Michigan. I made one at Kalamazoo, Michigan, Western University, now I met some opposition there. There's a professor, I don't recall his name. He asked me... He opened his mouth; it popped like an ole Yazoo River turtle snapping at you, you know. He said, "Governor why do you oppose integration in the public schools of Mississippi." Well, I said: "Professor one reason, I don't believe in inte-

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marriages." "Can you name any inter-marriages that have taken place in this...?" I said, "Yes, one in Georgia not long ago." And I said, "It's left some families mighty, mighty sad." Then he said, "Well, do you believe in segregation in the cemeteries?" I said, "Well, I never thought of that." But I said, "My grandfather, and my father, and a slave by the name of Josh witnessed the siege of Vicksburg. And after the siege of Vicksburg, the Yankees took ole Josh with them. Captured him there in Vicksburg and carried him to Mobile, Alabama, and he slipped away from them in Mobile, walked back to Leake County where my father had a plantation. He got back there and he said, 'I want to live here the rest of my life.' That was after the siege of Vicksburg. And he said, 'I know you won't bury me in your cemetery, but put me up next to the fence.' My grandfather agreed to do that and he put him right up next to the fence. And now the cemetery's been enlarged and ole Josh the slave is right in the middle of it." And I said, "I don't guess I object to integration in the cemetery." I said, "The reason I object to intergration in the school is it means inter-marriages. I don't presume it could be any inter-marriages in the cemetery." But I got a good reception. They elected me "Man of the Year" at Princeton. Shortly, sent me a bulletin where I was elected Man of the Year.

HILLIARD: How long has your family been in Mississippi, Governor?

BARNETT: My grandfather was reared in Alabama.

HILLIARD: What was his name?

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BARNETT: John Henry. And he came to Leake County about ten miles south of Carthage. And he bought seventeen thousand acres of land. Two dollars an acre.

HILLIARD: What year was this?

BARNETT: About 1850, 1851. He bought what is known as the old Weeks Place. Beautiful, bottom fields, swamps and what a bargain he did get. He had about eight slaves. And he was a cotton farmer. Selling cotton at eight and ten cents a pound. And he sent three of his sons to medical school and they all three graduated at Tulane University. And how a farmer back in those days could make enough money raising cotton to send three sons to Tulane University - I think it was for a three year course then. And two of them practiced there at Standing Pine for many, many years.

HILLIARD: Did they go to Tulane before the war or after the war?

BARNETT: That was... I don't know. Must have been...

(Interuption)

That's my trouble it's just one after the other here all day-- but anyway Joe Barnett lives on the old place. Course he sold off a lot of the land. Beautiful old setup.

HILLIARD: Is the old family home still standing there?

BARNETT: Yes, he remodelled it.

HILLIARD: Is it your grandfather's home?

BARNETT: Yes, he's remodelled it. And beautiful oak trees are all around it.

HILLIARD: This is in the Standing Pine Community?

BARNETT: Five miles and one-half out from Standing Pines.

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HOLMES: This is where you grew up in Standing Pine?

BARNETT: Yes. Well, I was reared, I would say about a mile and a half from Standing Pine. On the road that leads from Carthage to Union. That's highway... Oh, I've forgotten the name of that highway now. It's a blacktop highway. But, I'm the youngest of ten children. My oldest brother was a veterinarian. He practiced veterinarian surgery in Yazoo County about forty years. James Flue Barnett. And I went over there in about 1930 I think, so I could go fishing on the 4th of July. He had an office - Gill Strickland, the livery stable. Strickland was mayor at that time. Said, they ran the city just like they wanted to. We drove up. They were both sitting out in front of the big livery stable, you know. Pretty horses and mules there. I said, "Flue let's go fishing." "No," he said, "I have to work." I said, "On the 4th of July?" and he said, "Oh goodness yes." He said, "Ross, let me ask you this. You haven't got a whole lot of practice right now." I said "I haven't been practicing but about three or four years." He said, "Let me tell you one thing, if you haven't got much practice, you better stay there 4th of July and every other day. Work up one. And when you work up one you better stay there every day to hold it, or somebody else will get it." And that's what he had done over there. He had really worked. Veterinarians would come stay two or three months then leave.

HILLIARD: I imagine you followed his advice...

BARNETT: Absolutely have. I've never forgotten it. He was a very

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successful veterinarian.

HILLIARD: How do you spell his middle name?

BARNETT: Flue. F-L-U-E. James Flue Barnett. He's a graduate of Kansas City Veterinary College.

HILLIARD: Who were your parents? The names of your parents?

BARNETT: John William Barnett and Virginia Chadwick-Barnett.

HILLIARD: Where was her home?

BARNETT: At old Walnut Grove.

HILLIARD: Walnut Grove. That's also in Leake County.

BARNETT: That's in Leake County, she was reared there in old Walnut Grove. She had two brothers and one sister, about the only ones I even knew of. One of the brother's John Chadwick...

HILLIARD: ...This is the type of thing we're interested in as well. 1905 right.

BARNETT: He was a merchant at old Walnut Grove, and his brother Jeff Chadwick, I had his picture and we've lost it. He had a wonderful looking family.

HILLIARD: See we'll get them all in the Archives and catalog them so that in a moment's notice you can come up and look them up and have copies made and circulated.

BARNETT: Uncle John Chadwick, had a store on one side of the street. And Jeff Chadwick on the other side. Two pretty good size stores. And they both were successful. It was an "old Negro" there, name Mose Fortune. Said one day, "Now that Mr. John Chadwick, he knows how, but Mr. Jeff, he knows when."

HILLIARD: Tell us, Governor, about your schooling? High school and college

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work, that sort.

BARNETT: Well, I went to public school in the Leake County. I went part of the time to Standing Pine, most of the time to Rosebud School. At one time they called it the Hamil School. Cause a man name Hamil had taught there.

HILLIARD: How do you spell that name?

BARNETT: H-A-M-I-L.

HILLIARD: H-A-M-I-L.

BARNETT: And at one time they called it the Rushing school. 'Cause a man name Rushing taught there a long time. And I went to school with my brother. Went to prep school there, two years. My sister, who taught there two or three years, we'd all walk together to school. And we had a good basketball team there. We played some team every Saturday. We'd play two on Friday afternoon in Neshoba County. Tuckawa was one of the teams, and the other was Dixie. We won both games. We were trying to build up a big winning column. Horace Chadwick Barnett was next to James Flue. He was a lawyer; he graduate at Cumberland University. But he didn't practice a whole lot. He taught school nearly all of his life. Last school he taught was Edinburg. That's between Carthage and Philadelphia. That was the last school I think he taught.

HILLIARD: How would you describe school teachers of that era - that time?

BARNETT: They were really devoted and not in there to make money, but to uplift humanity. Now my sister, Nelly Barnett, she married a man named Brown in Meridian. She died in about February, this

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last February. She taught school 61 years. Died at the age of 86. She taught at Carthage High. She taught at Rosebud School that I was telling you about. And at Plymouth two or three years each. And then she taught at Meridian nearly thirty-five or forty years. She was a primary teacher. I'll... show you how she was devoted. About ten days before school would open, just like at Carthage or Plymouth or Edinburg or Rosebud she'd get in an old high-top buggy with a red horse and visit every home. For about ten days before school would open. She said, you had no idea how it helped her, to find out what the children were up against. Said, it gave her a good idea about how to teach and to look after them. She was really a natural born school teacher. She really was. Dr. Brown with the Deaf and Dumb institute went to school with her.

ILLIARD: Dr. Robert Brown?

BARNETT: Yes. She taught at his old home and boarded at his home. That's at Lauderdale. Lauderdale Station about eighteen miles from Meridian. She taught there two or three years before she went to Meridian then she taught at Poplar Springs School. And I had two brothers who were school teachers; two sisters who were school teachers. And all would come home for Christmas and it was a joyous occasion. You know it seemed like an orange had more juice in it in those days. I don't know - shoot a gun it would sound better. Our eyes were brighter, and candy was a lot sweeter. First piece of property I ever owned was a banjo. I bought it from a cousin of mine, paid him \$3.00 for it. My sister loaned

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me \$3.00 - the teacher, in Carthage, Nelly Barnett-Brown. And, I gave a Negro, whose name is Henry Hudson \$5.00 to teach me how to pick a banjo. Oh, he could pick a banjo and dance with it and sing. You don't see Negroes like that these days. I don't. He was just an old cotton-picker, a ditcher you know. Hard worker. I know he use to sing an ole song - talking about old Grady and all his women... "When old Grady was on his feet, he didn't allow women to walk the streets. But now poor Grady's he's dead and gone, women walk the streets all night long." And he said, "When old Grady died he went down looking so curious. He said, 'hello, Mr. Devil. I'm from East St. Louis.' The Devil spoke up in this way 'I've been looking for you for many a day.'" Oh, those kind of songs you know, that Negroes loved to sing.

HILLIARD: What courses of study were you particularly interested in during your school days?

BARNETT: Well psychology and history more than any others. Of course, law, when I went to law school. I went four years over to Mississippi College. Well, I went to Lena. Leake County Agricultural High School in Lena, two years. My brother, Bert Barnett was one of the teachers over there. Bert Barnett, was, oh, about fourteen years older than I was. Daddy, he and my uncle owned a cotton field, and he just got cut nearly all to pieces in that gin. He was trying to put a belt on a fly wheel and his sleeve got caught in a set screw and it just cut him, tore him every which way. Terrible injury he got. My uncle, Arden Barnett, who was a doctor, James Arden Barnett's grandfather, and Dr. Kelly waited

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on him about six or eight months. But then he was a school teacher and then he was elected as Chancery Clerk for Leake County. Then he was re-elected Chancery Clerk. Served for eight years; then he ran for the State Senate, Leake-Neshoba. And he beat two men in the first primary over 1,000 votes in those two counties. And then he ran for State Auditor and was defeated by 8,000 votes. Then he got the auditing machine with him for the next time, got elected. He served for State Auditor 1943 through 1947. I wish I had a picture to show you. He was a keen fellow. My people were nearly all in politics in Leake County for many years.

HILLIARD: When did you first get interested in politics?

BARNETT: When I was ten years old.

HILLIARD: Who was governor then?

BARNETT: I believe Vardaman.

HILLIARD: Did you ever see Governor Vardaman - campaign?

BARNETT: Oh yes, Governor Vardaman. I went to a picnic where he was, Woodmen of the World Picnic at Esther's Mill. And the Esther's Mill boys had a little brass band, eight or ten pieces and I got in the band a couple of years. Two or three years. Played D flat alto horn. We had a fourteen piece band. We'd play each year at the Leake County Fair, then the Neshoba County Fair, then the Scott County Fair. We'd get \$10 a piece for playing a week, for one solid week and we'd save all but about two dollars of it. People knew how to save money in those days. Then I went to school four years at Mississippi College.

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Pennyside operated a barber shop in the basement of the science hall. I operated a barber shop in Lena in the agricultural high school there at a dormitory. And...

HOLMES: How did you learn to barber?

BARNETT: Well, I just had an ambition to learn and I learned cutting people's hair under the cedar tree. Under the chinaberry trees in an old chair. And I finally got to where I charged ten cents. I went to Lena at Leake County Agricultural High School. I bought an old barber chair from Lacy Martin. He became a dentist at Aberdeen, Mississippi. I paid him ten dollars for an old barber chair and his equipment. Scissors, comb, brush. Such as that and I operated a shop there - well it was on the porch. I was in my room part of the time, and on the porch part of the time. And I made pretty good money in Lena. Cutting hair at fifteen cents a head. After I had gone to school two years I got a little better educated, I went up to a quarter. Went to Mississippi College I charge twenty-five cents, thirty-five cents then that was all about any barber was charging. So I operated a barber shop at Mississippi College. Dr. David Provine was president of the college. And he gave me space in the basement of a science hall to operate a barber shop. And I operated the shop four years there.

HOLMES: You cut the students' hair?

BARNETT: How's that?

HOLMES: Did you cut the students' hair?

BARNETT: I had a good patronage among the students. Had between three

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hundred and four hundred young men there then. Other times, such as Saturday nights, I'd be in there until one o'clock cutting hair.

HILLIARD: Hank, you probably didn't have to work when you went to college. But I worked in the cafeteria at Delta State...

BARNETT: Yes, you went to Mississippi State?

HILLIARD: Delta State?

BARNETT: Oh, Delta State. Oh, yes.

HILLIARD: I did my undergraduate work there. Let me ask you this. How would you, speaking of Governor Vardaman, how would you compare Governor Vardaman and Governor Bilbo? You have recollections...

BARNETT: Well, I remember about both of them they were great leaders in segregation of the races in the schools and in the churches. And they... Bilbo especially advocated sending all the negroes back to Africa. If you'd advocate that now, they would shoot you..

HILLIARD: He was reviving the American Colonization Society. In other words.

HOLMES: 1830s and forties.

HILLIARD: Thirties and forties.

BARNETT: Yes. He wanted to appropriate enough money.

HOLMES: You said, you were ten years old when you decided that you wanted to get into politics. What was it that made you reach that decision?

BARNETT: Well, my brother Bert Barnett, he was a pretty good speaker. He was elected Chancery Clerk when he was pretty young. And I admired him greatly. And I remember a superintendent of education came to our school. He was well-dressed. Had a short

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talk. And I said then, "I'm gonna be a politician." I liked the way he handled himself. His name was Hollis. Anyway, my uncle - you remember Judge O. H. Barnett? He was Circuit Judge. He didn't run for re-election, sixteen years, now he's been re-appointed. Appointed by Governor Finch, too, several months ago. His daddy was supervisor in the Standing Pine area for a good long time. Oscar Barnett. Then his son, Leslie, succeeded him. I was in politics a good deal, my brother Chancery Clerk, State Senator. And Tom Barnett was my uncle's oldest son. He was County Attorney twelve years. I listened to him speak. And he was District Attorney twice, in that five county area. Neshoba, Leake, Scott, Newton and Rankin. And I admired Tom. Thomas Jefferson Barnett. Been dead I reckon now for 10, 12 years. Fifteen years I guess. And, I remember Les running for supervisor. He'd been to high school at Lena, didn't finish. Anyway he's running for supervisor, and his opponent was bragging about being a college graduate. And I remember Les would just laugh about it. He'd say, "college graduates don't know anything about building roads. Now he says he's a college graduate - 'bout all I remember about my education was, I was still in third grade when I had to start shaving," he'd say.

(Interruption)

BARNETT: A. and I. Board sent that to me, said we want to remind you of how hard you worked. I made thirty-five different trips,

HILLIARD: That's remarkable.

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BARNETT: Thirty-five.

HILLIARD: Governor we'll break up here little bit before lunch. And I think it will be beneficial to us if we from time to time, could maybe schedule an hour every so often...

BARNETT: All right.

HILLIARD: ...Just keep coming back rather than trying to take up all your time at one time. When did you meet Miss Pearl for the first time?

BARNETT: Well, I met her when I first came to Jackson. I met her in the Calvary Baptist Church one Sunday night.

HILLIARD: What was her maiden name?

BARNETT: Pearl. Mary Pearl Crawford.

HILLIARD: Crawford. Crawford.

BARNETT: C-R-A-W-F-O-R-D. And, I walked in with another girl, I sat right behind her. She had her hair balled up around her ears.

HILLIARD: Was it love at first sight? With Miss Pearl.

BARNETT: I guess so.

HILLIARD: One question here and we'll rap it up, because you're busy.

BARNETT: Oh, I can talk a little... more.

HILLIARD: ...We'll re-schedule some other time with you. Ross Jr., is in New York, is he not?

BARNETT: Yes, he's on a platform committee. A delegate too.

HILLIARD: What is your opinion of Governor Carter?

BARNETT: I don't know much about him.

HILLIARD: Don't know much about him.

BARNETT: But, I'm gonna try to find out all I can about him. I just

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don't know. Now, I did hear him speak for Wallace at Red Level, Alabama, in 1972. They were having an all day Wallace Rally there. Red Level, Alabama. And I was invited to make a talk there. And when I got there Carter was speaking for Wallace. Making a good speech for him. And I spoke after he finished. And that's about the only contact I'd had with him. I eat peanuts all the time. Nearly everyday. He sells peanuts down there.

HILLIARD: Peanut farmer.

BARNETT: I'll tell you what I honestly believe - he'll beat the socks off Ford.

HILLIARD: The polls seems to indicate that he's well in front.

BARNETT: He's gonna be hard to beat. He's a vote getting dude. And there is something about him I don't understand. How he goes to Ohio where they're never heard of him before and he carries the state.

HOLMES: Governor Barnett, this is thirteen or fourteen years after you were governor. When you were governor, would you have imagined that this soon in time we would have a candidate for president from the south?

BARNETT: Yes, I thought we would. I thought we would in 1972. If Wallace had not been shot down. Because he was a million votes ahead of any other Democratic candidate when he got shot down.

HILLIARD: Popular votes he had received in the primary.

BARNETT: Oh, he carried Michigan, Tennessee, ten to one. Florida by

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the biggest kind of the votes. And he carried Maryland you know. He ran second in Pennsylvania. He ran second in New Mexico. And he was in the swim, really. But when he got shot down I think people thereafter decided he wasn't physically able to discharge the duties and responsibilities in-trusted to a president. I believe they got that out of him. Sure do. I expect Carter will be hard to beat. Yet, I hear a lot pepople say they are not going to vote for him.

HOLMES: Oh, really.

BARNETT: How's that.

HOLMES: Is that true?

BARNETT: Yes, I hear a few say that. I heard a lawyer at Brandon say this morning he didn't believe he'd vote for Carter. I said, "What about Ford." He said, "I'm not for him." He was working for Reagan seem like. I mean he was advocating Reagan. You think... Who you think he'll pick for vice-president?

HOLMES: I just don't know.

HILLIARD: He's to make that announcement tomorrow. He's holding it off right to the very last minute to get as much suspense...

BARNETT: I'll tell you who I'd pick if I were in his shoes. I'd pick the Governor of New York. Did you hear him the other night?

HILLIARD: No sir, I missed that.

BARNETT: Oh, he made a rip-roaring good speech.

HOLMES: Is that Governor Harriman?

BARNETT: Harriman is that his name?

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HOLMES: Averill Harriman.

BARNETT: No, he was governor a good while ago.

HILLIARD: Carey is the governor. Carey...

BARNETT: Carey. He made a good speech. Sensible. If he could swing New York, it would mean a whole lot you know.

HOLMES: I think it's interesting that Carter has been campaigning on an anti-Washington platform.

BARNETT: That's right.

HOLMES: And the people he's considering for vice-president are all members of Congress.

BARNETT: Well, I think he'll make a mistake. If he picks anybody from Washington. I really think so.

HILLIARD: I was just reading before we came in an editorial in U.S. News and World Report, reflecting the fact that people have really lost faith in the Congress because of some of the actions of...

BARNETT: If he selects Muskie, he's gonna get beat. I think. I don't know about Mondale. Where is Mondale from?

HOLMES: Minnesota.

HILLIARD: Senator Mondale is from Minnesota.

BARNETT: I guess he stands pretty well in his own state.

HILLIARD: What's your assessment of the impact of Charles Evers now on Mississippi politics? He's a delegate also is he not? At the Democratic Convention.

BARNETT: Yes, he's a delegate. He'll swing most of the black votes I guess.

HILLIARD: Most of the blacks listen to Evers?

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BARNETT: I imagine they will. Yes.

HILLIARD: You have... Governor, do you still have any feeling about the way our voting laws operate - you have any...?

BARNETT: Well our voting rights have been taken away from the states you know. That's practically in Washington you know. I think that's one of the things the states have lost that ought to be restored to the states. Let each state control and direct its own thinking, its own activities about such events. I tell you, I honestly believe that if the Federal Government continues to "whittle" away - year-by-year - the rights of the state. The states will finally get into the same status as provinces are in now in foreign countries. No authority to amount to anything. I don't believe you can indefinitely maintain a successful national government without strong state government.

HILLIARD: This is the concept of the federal government. I think most people do not understand the concept of the federal government, which consists of a central government and then state governments, each of which have their own duties and responsibilities.

BARNETT: Well, our tenth amendment says plainly, that the powers not delegated by the Constitution to the federal government, and not prohibited by the constitutions of the state belong to the state of the people thereof. Now where is it in the constitution about giving the federal government power to operate the schools, buses. Not a word in there about it. So you know George Washington said that, "If this nation ever

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falls it will be because of the misuse of power." And that is what we are doing. We are misusing the power that has been invested in the federal government.

HILLIARD: Power tends to corrupt.

BARNETT: Absolutely, and it tends to increase. Power wants to increase and increase and increase.

HILLIARD: One weakness I think that we have now with our voting law is that you can be virtually illiterate today and cast a vote.

BARNETT: Yes.

HILLIARD: And...

BARNETT: I believe a man ought to be able to read and write...

HILLIARD: Ought to be literate.

BARNETT: ...to be eligible to vote. They drive them to the polls like a bunch of sheep. And they vote like they say when they can't read and write. The government cannot rise any higher than the level of the constituency.

HOLMES: Governor Barnett, change the subject here a little bit. I'm curious about when you were ten and becoming interested into going into politics. Having decided someday that you did want to go into politics, who became your political heroes?

BARNETT: Well, if I had one I guess I would say it was brother Bert. Bert Barnett. I thought a lot of him.

HOLMES: Were there governors or Senators that you would keep up with and...?

BARNETT: Well, I kept up with them generally but none of them were my heroes that I remember about.

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HOLMES: How would you get the news back home about the political activities of the state? Would you read about it in the newspapers?

BARNETT: Well, my daddy took the Atlanta Constitution. And, the Baptist Records. My mother took the Christian Advocate. She was Methodist, daddy was Baptist. And I'd read those papers some. And the county paper - it had a good deal of news - The Carthaginian. I'd look at the ads. Lawyers ads - wish my name to be in there. Like David L. Collier of Kosciusko - have his ad in there every week. Lawyers would practice in all courts in this state.

HILLIARD: You know Governor, I live out at Madison and before I came to work with the Department of Archives and History I taught school at Madison-Ridgeland. And I remember some of the people talking to me out there. And they always appreciated the service that you had provided, and I never knew all the details about a particular situation which I suppose bordered on the verge of organized crime about to get into the Ridgeland area and some of the citizens more or less took it upon themselves to form a vigilante committee to drive the criminal element out and then it ended up with the... according to the information I have, it ended up with the criminal element bringing legal charges against these citizens and these citizens hired you as their lawyer. You won the case for them. Do you have any memories about that situation?

BARNETT: Was that case in Canton? Pending in Canton? Or...

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HILLIARD: I don't know if it was Canton or Yazoo City that it came up or not but there were... as I understand there were gamblers, bootleggers and everything that had come into the night clubs and were getting into the Ridgeland area. And I don't know whether this vigilante group took care of them or not. But it ended up with the law abiding citizens being harrassed by the criminal element and somehow you came to the defense of the citizens there.

BARNETT: I believe that's correct. It's been a good while ago.

HILLIARD: This must have been back in the...

BARNETT: Thirties.

HILLIARD: No, forties. Late forties or early fifties. Late forties probably...

BARNETT: I sold some land to that Ridgeland - Madison-Ridgeland.

HILLIARD: Madison-Ridgeland Academy. I was on the school board when you made a good offer on that land. Made it fortunate to get that for us. And all that property has now developed all around. All the way back in there.

BARNETT: I sold some for a thousand dollars an acre. And I got two-thousand five hundred dollars for all the balance from Bailey & Bailey. Two thousand five hundred an acre. I started buying land over there in 1933. Cousin of mine, Dr. A. J. Barnett, Veterans Administration here - they had their headquarters out off Clinton Boulevard then - came by my house one Sunday afternoon. And he said, "Ross, if you want to buy eighty acres of land over at Madison call Dr. Carlton

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Kelly." Jones Barnett. A. J., he was a doctor over at Veterans Administration, he was first cousin of mine and he said, Dr. Kelly was his brother-in-law and wanted to sell the land. And I went over there with him and looked at it. Wanted sixty dollars an acre for it. I asked how much Kelly paid - he said he thought it was about thirty or forty. So I bought it. Everytime I'd win a good law suit or two I'd buy thirty or forty acres more you know. Few years later I bought 95 acres from Alton Batterman. He lives right across the road there. On the hill.

HILLIARD: He lives on the hill.

BARNETT: Well, I bought forty acres from Sam Andrews - he was about to go to Lubbock, Texas. I think I got his about seventy-five dollars an acre. And Dr. Clay Lyle, I bought 175 acres from Dr. Clay Lyle. I paid about one-hundred forty dollars an acre for that. And that's all any of its worth then, you know. Then I bought one hundred fifty acres from E. B. Gullege - they call him Bowser Gullege - for one hundred fifty dollars an acre. I've been buying land over there all along. And I've sold every foot of land I've been talking about.

HILLIARD: Do you have any of that land left? Do you still own any land in Madison County now?

BARNETT: Yes, I have some east of the Old Canton Road. Joins the airport property. It's up and down the Natchez Trace.

HILLIARD: Right. In between the airport and the Natchez Trace Parkway.

BARNETT: That's right.

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HILLIARD: There's an old negro who lives on that...

BARNETT: Louis Thompson?

HILLIARD: What's the story of him?

BARNETT: Oh, he's been there a long time.

HILLIARD: He just lives there, is that... does he do any work for you or he just lives there?

BARNETT: No. He pays ten dollars a month rent. Got a pretty yard. Flowers all around. He's a good negro really. I asked him one day last year, "Is there any quail out here?" Boy he said, "There's a sloch of them. They bothers me," he says. "They keep coming around my house and they just cuts up like everything." I said, "How many covies are there?" He said, "About thirty." I think he's talking about sealarks and black birds. I went over there and couldn't find...

HILLIARD: Well, it's about lunch time. And we appreciate your taking time with us. And what we'd like to do would be to, have it where, say Hank could call you and you all could get together an hour or so ever now and then and tape some more. Would that be agreeable with you?

BARNETT: That's entirely agreeable.

HILLIARD: And if its also agreeable I'll call Miss Pearl and talk with her about the pictures and papers and things. And maybe we can get together and get a collection...

BARNETT: Virginia has a lot of them, too.

HILLIARD: All right, I'll call her. Mrs. Robert Branum.

BARNETT: Mrs. Virginia Bobby Branum. B-R-A-N-U-M. Telephone number is

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TY-SEVEN - BARNETT

956-1318. My wife's number 362-0349.

D: Did Mr. Branum have a heart attack a year or so ago? Did he...

: Branum. Yes, he had two heart attacks. He gets around pretty well though. Not able to do much I don't think. Doctors won't permit him to go back to the National Guard.

ARD: Well we have really enjoyed it.

TT: Well I appreciate...

(End of Interview)

(Transcribed by Kathleen Smith)

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