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Interviewee James B. Butler
Interviewer H. T. Holmes

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NARRATOR: Dr. James B. Butler
INTERVIEWER: H. T. Holmes, Mississippi Department of Archives and History
DATE: February 10, 1976
PLACE: Dr. Butler's Home, 2303 Robinson Street, Jackson, Mississippi
SUBJECT: Edwards Hotel, Jackson, Mississippi

Butler: ...Either ten or twelve years in the old hotel.

Holmes: In the old one?

Butler: Yes, I was a boy going to school here in Jackson, and Mr. Ware, who was the manager, gave me a job.

Holmes: Mr. Ware gave you a job?

Butler: Yes, and I'll tell you how I got it. Dr. H. M. King was the minister of the Second Baptist Church here in Jackson, which was located on Capitol and Lemon Street; and after my father passed away in 1917, I was in school, and Dr. King was one of those fellows that looked after his parishoners. So, one day at Sunday School, he asked me, he said, "Do you want a job after school?" And I said, "Yes, I'd like to have one." So he said, "I can get you a job working at the Edwards Hotel."

Holmes: My goodness!

Butler: So I said, "That will be fine, Doctor, because..." The Edwards Hotel in that day and time, you know, was the meeting place for Mississippi.

Holmes: How old were you?

Butler: Thirteen.

Holmes: Thirteen.

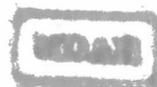
Butler: Yes, I'm seventy-one now. So I went there and worked after school. I usually got down there about two or two-thirty and worked until about eight.

Holmes: What did you do?

Butler: Well, we had what we called mail clerks and baggage clerks, laundry clerks. The desk there was at the end of the lobby; and adjacent here was the office of the hotel, and here was what we called the mail room and up front was the cigar stand. My job was to do everything they told me to do! So, I was what they called key clerk, mail clerk, laundry clerk, baggage clerk. I tried to keep up the

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stock such as stationery and the linens that went with the hotel; and also we had a supply room back there for the cigar stand which sold all items, and I worked in all of those departments of supply except the restaurant. I did not work in the restaurant. Now one of the interestings, perhaps, for you is that one of the clerks we had there was a man named S. J. Hawkins. He was a brother of city commissioner Hawkins, one of the finest gentlemen I ever met. Then we had a man there named John E. Quinn, who was the night clerk when I went there. In the summer time, I would work the regular schedule hours which one day was five o'clock in the morning until noon and then come back at six and work until eleven. The next day you would go on at twelve and get off at six - long and short days. They didn't have this split hour deal like they have now in most hotels. The premier clerk worked from seven to three, and then you had three to eleven and eleven to seven.

Holmes: I see.

Butler: Now, Mr. Holmes, I cannot remember exactly the date that hotel closed, but I can give you a rather vivid incident because I remember it quite well. The old Edwards Hotel, I believe, closed in '33? Do you have those dates? The old three-story building, now?

Holmes: 1923. They tore it down then.

Butler: 1923. All right. On December 31st of that preceding year, what would that be? '23 or '22?

Holmes: 1922. They built it in '23.

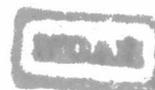
Butler: They began tearing it down in 1923. All right, December 31, 1922, at midnight I was on duty. We had lost some clerks to the war and I was on duty, and a man named A. L. Morris was our house officer; and a boy named George Barber was then the mail clerk working with me - I was pretty young to be a clerk, but nevertheless, I had to fill in because they couldn't get anyone on account of the war, you know! We closed it up at midnight, December 31, 1922. I locked the door at midnight.

Holmes: My goodness!

Butler: So, during the year of 1923, the hotel office maintained offices over in the Morrison Building. Are you familiar with that on Pearl Street?

Holmes: No, sir.

Butler: All right, that's over there one block off of Gallatin. It's still over there - called the Morrison Building. Orgill Brothers have



a warehouse in there now, I believe. It's right across from the old Armour Packing Company building.

Holmes: I see.

Butler: It's on Pearl Street. We went over there, and that's where the office staff composed of Mr. Ware, the manager; Miss Ella Smith, the auditor. Helen Smith, her sister, was the bookkeeper, we called her. That's where they maintained the office, and for about six months I was over there because I used to go get the mail, take care of the mail, open up the office and answer all the questions for the travelling public who wanted to know what had happened to the old Edwards! Another interesting factor was that when they built this new hotel, the first man to register was a Mr. Edwards, who was a descendant of a postmaster here in Jackson and one of the original incorporators of the Edwards House when they built it shortly after the War between the States.

Holmes: Is that right!

Butler: He was the first man to register.

Holmes: Well, that's really something!

Butler: I was on duty when they opened the hotel. I was back in my capacity of handyman! Fact is, I had so much to do and the hotel was not fully completed, but we had opened it anyway because it was scheduled for a certain date; and Mr. Ware was the manager and all of the old staff was back there.

Holmes: What kind of opening festivities did the hotel have?

Butler: It was very elaborate. That was back in the days when your friends would send you flowers, and they had several floral arrangements, magnificent basket bouquets; and then they had pictures; many, many pictures were taken. Let me see, what was the name of that outfit out of New Orleans? They made post cards. You may be familiar with that. They came up here and took post card pictures of that; because I think one of the reasons why they did it, the architect on this new building was a fellow named William T. Nolan from New Orleans. John W. Billingsley was the consulting engineer. The furnishings of the hotel were by Carson, Pirie, Scott Company of Chicago. That's where they bought all of the bedding and all of the material that was used in the furnishing of the hotel, such as sheets, towels, pillow cases, and so forth, and beds and dressers - we called them then; but it was quite elaborate.

Holmes: Did Marshall Field Company have anything to do with the interior design?



- Butler: Yes, quite a bit. They had all of the lobby furnishings and, let me see, I believe the dining room. Yes, the dining room. You see, they had a coffee shop up front in this new building, but the dining room back there was furnished by Marshall Field, and all of the mezzanine furniture. Now, the second floor of that building, you no doubt have heard, has been thoroughly renovated, not the original plan at all. It used to be a big opening there in the center, and we didn't have any escalator.
- Holmes: We've got a copy of some of the blueprints at the Archives.
- Butler: That's interesting!
- Holmes: I looked at that; and then several months ago I went down to see the building as it is now and there's quite a difference!
- Butler: Oh, yes, Mr. Milner did a lot of work in there when he took it over. He made several banquet rooms. We had a banquet room up there, and a ballroom, and all of the service clubs met there in the new building, but we didn't have but six rooms as I remember, in the new building, for guests. Now, Miss Bonslagel had a beauty parlor there on the second floor.
- Holmes: Bonslagel?
- Butler: Yes.
- Holmes: How do you spell that, please, sir?
- Butler: B-O-N-S-L-A-G-E-L. She lived out here on West Capitol and O'Ferrall Street. She was a middle-aged person then, and I don't think she's living now. But she had a very fine beauty parlor there, one of the first, I think, in Jackson - and was a very gracious lady with it! All the service clubs met there: Rotary, Kiwanis, Exchange, Lions - all that were in existence in Jackson met at the Edwards Hotel. Later they began to lose them, but in the new building. You knew at one time that the West Jackson Post Office was in the rear of the old building, didn't you?
- Holmes: No, sir, I didn't.
- Butler: All right. West Jackson Post Office used to be directly behind McIntyre Drug Store. Now, they moved it over on North Mill Street in the Noble Hotel Building.
- Holmes: When did they move it, do you remember?
- Butler: Let's see, I would say they moved it four or five years before I went there, because it was sample rooms when I was there. That was back in the days when the travelling salesmen carried many

trunks - not suitcases - and all of the sample rooms, as we called them, were there on the ground floor. Another thing that would be of interest to you, perhaps, in your research is that Mr. George Sturm, who is with the Jackson Hilton, is a former clerk there, even before my time.

Holmes: Oh, really!

Butler: Yes. He left there and went with Armour and Company. He was a salesman for Armour and Company. George is a fine man.

Holmes: I talked to Mr. McPhail, who was a barber back then.

Butler: Oh, yes, he was in Reed's Barber Shop.

Holmes: Yes, I have an interview with him on tape. You mentioned Mr. Morris, the house detective. I'm going to talk with his widow this week, too.

Butler: Yes.

Holmes: She called me in response to that article.

Butler: Well, I tell you what, that's his second wife.

Holmes: Oh, it is?

Butler: Yes. She doesn't know too much about it. I remember when they married.

Holmes: Did they get married at the Edwards?

Butler: No, let me see how that happened, now. Her name was Franklin, I remember that, but I don't remember her first name, but she was a very fine woman. I don't think that they married there in the Edwards Hotel; however, we had some ceremonies there. I remember an old steward named Breitkopf got married there; and then we had two or three travelling men to get married there. One of the fellows in particular that got married there was a man named Womack. He was a lawyer up at Belzoni, Mississippi. He was married there. We had quite a number of ceremonies down there. At that particular time, Mr. Holmes, the old Edwards was one of the places that we would say was projected ahead of its time. I think as a piece of architecture it was somewhat of a monster because every time they found a vacant space they'd add on to it. The first and second floors went around in a curve. The third floor didn't. It stopped before it began that curve. You had elevators, and your stairs went up there. Now on the first floor where the elevator stopped was room 133, the second floor was 233, and the third floor was 301.

Holmes: My goodness!

Butler: So that shows you the numbers on that were most unusual.

Holmes: I've got some old pictures here I'd like to show you.

Butler: Good, I'd like to see them. I just went through Dr. McCain's story of Jackson, and I was trying to find some of those things.

Holmes: Let me see. This was the original Edwards House that was built right after the war.

Butler: That's right, about 1870.

Holmes: Now, Major Edwards had built in 1861 a hotel called the Confederate House. Then it was burned May 15, 1863 when Sherman was in Jackson.

Butler: Yes, the old general - he did a good job!

Holmes: Pretty thorough!

Butler: Yes, sir!

Holmes: Then he built this one. I don't understand what that structure is at the rear. Do you have any idea of that?

Butler: No, not unless it was one of those enormous dwellings. Right behind the Edwards Hotel when I went there was Hannah Distributing Company, a wholesale grocery. It was on what we called Pearl Street.

Holmes: Yes. Now, did that building metamorphis into this building?

Butler: Well, you see, here is where the post office was I was telling you about, back here. Now, McIntyre's Drug Company was on the corner. Chambers Office Supply Company was next. McGee-Hawkins Men's Furnishing was next. Then your entrance to the Edwards Hotel. Over on this side was the private dining rooms where the service clubs met. Now, that was all on the ground floor.

Holmes: Now, let me see. This continues in that picture there, doesn't it?

Butler: That's right. Yes.

Holmes: So where would be the entranceway?

Butler: Right there.

Holmes: Right here. And this would be the private dining rooms on the left?

Butler: Yes, sir, that's right. You, of course, know that they had a well back here that all the people used to come drink the water, because you could put a match to it and it'd burn - it had gas in it. The people used to drink it for health reasons.

Holmes: My goodness!

Butler: I don't think it did any good. Now, this was not a street but an alley-way, because this building here, which was the Harland's Pool Hall, and upstairs was the railroad house.

Holmes: What was that?

Butler: That's where most of the switchmen and railway men stayed there overnight. Conductors, flagmen, and so forth, that was on a monthly basis, not on a nightly basis. R. E. Harland owned that pool hall.

Holmes: Okay, now, do you think that this building is the same building just added on to?

Butler: Yes, sir, you could tell after you got inside there what they had done.

Holmes: Yes, I see.

Butler: They just made an addition. They opened up any walls, because that was kind of a split-level job there, because when you got out of the elevator on the first floor you only walked about four or five feet to the west. You went down three flights of stairs! You turned to your left and went down two more. You turned back to your right you didn't go down any! It was a terribly built building.

Holmes: Now, the elevator was in this?

Butler: Back here in the back.

Holmes: Okay.

Butler: Right in here. Now, you see, this was a tin roof here. These were windows. Now, here's where you'd follow here.

Holmes: So that this entrance way cover was a tin roof.

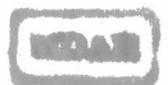
Butler: Yes, sir. One time in here, out here was a rather large porch all the way across, and they put these large rocking chairs out there.

Holmes: On the sidewalk?

Butler: No, back here.

Holmes: It was recessed?

Butler: Yes, a sort of veranda, you know.



Holmes: Did you step up to the veranda?

Butler: Yes, sir, you stepped up about six inches. Then the street here, of course, out here was where all the taxis stood. They were parked out there in front.

Holmes: When you walked to enter the Edwards, you would step up on the veranda, and then you would enter the front doors, and what would you see? Can you describe how it looked?

Butler: Yes, it was a very large lobby, and long.

Holmes: One story in height?

Butler: One story in height, right. On the left side was the - after you got down about half-way, I would say about fifty feet, you would come to the cigar stand. Then continuing on down there would be the mail section and the room desk section. You turned around there, and you'd go back to what we called the writing room. Had a lot of little tables, and that's where we had a lot of stationery back there for the people to go in there and sit down to write their letters. Then off to the right of it as you entered into this enclosure we called the writing room, was the rest room. Directly south of the room desk was a very large room which we called the cafe, and it was quite a cafe, too!

Holmes: It was!

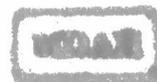
Butler: I remember they had some of the finest food in the country there and some good stewards. Mr. Ware, before he became manager, was a steward. He was a steward of the hotel.

Holmes: The Edwards has a long-standing reputation for fine food.

Butler: Oh, excellent food. Had to because, you know, the Edwards Hotel - or the Edwards House, as we called it - was to Mississippi what the Peabody in Memphis was to the Delta planter. You hadn't lived until you had come and spent the night at the Edwards, so they said! It was quite a fabulous place.

Holmes: When you walked into the lobby, were there rocking chairs in the lobby?

Butler: Yes, lined up on two rows. One of them went from the front entrance back to the entrance where you entered the elevator to the right. I would say that was a hundred feet. Then over against the wall on the left side was a stationary chair. There must have been twenty-five of them, these massive chairs, even larger than this. I presume that they still call them - then, we called them captain's chairs. But there was some fine furniture there.



- Holmes: I was asking you because I was talking to Mrs. Walter Sillers about it.
- Butler: Oh, yes, yes!
- Holmes: And she said that when the ladies would arrive they only went down one row of rocking chairs and the men would take care of the business by going down the other. Do you know what she was referring to?
- Butler: Yes. The ladies would come in on the left. They would go down to a certain place and then the men would go down on the right. Now, oftentimes, what they would do, the men would go down the center and the ladies would go down the right and turn at the elevator because they had a little sitting room over there in front of the elevator. But that became objectionable because some of the boys would stand too long in front of this little sitting room looking at the ladies! So then they changed over on the left and went down there and just before they got to the cigar stand they usually sat there. Now, that section was reserved for the ladies.
- Holmes: So at first, the ladies would sit in the waiting room to avoid sitting in the public lobby?
- Butler: That's right. Mrs. Sillers, Walter Sillers - I remember them well.
- Holmes: Well, they were almost as much an institution as the Edwards!
- Butler: Oh, I should say they were. You know, every time they came to the Mississippi legislature they stayed during the entire session. Then, of course, he'd come down several times a year. They were a very devoted couple. Everywhere Walter Sillers went, Mrs. Sillers went, too!
- Holmes: That's what I understand.
- Butler: Yes, sir, they were wonderful people. I remember Mrs. Sillers' father, Mr. Roberts.
- Holmes: He stayed at the Edwards.
- Butler: Yes, sir. Then she had a brother Roberts who was in the Navy. He was a commander. W. B. Roberts was a senator, and you know, Mr. Sillers was in the House. He was a representative. Fine people. I knew them well.
- Holmes: How were these two buildings connected inside? Just wherever they felt like making a door?

Butler: Well, a little larger. That archway, they were connected that way.

Holmes: How many archways would there be?

Butler: There would be one.

Holmes: Just one?

Butler: Yes. You see, that's when they took this section and joined it up with this section.

Holmes: Could you get to the second and third floors of this old section from its first floor?

Butler: Yes, sir. They had built a stairway there. They went back to the end of this - right in front of the elevator, when they started putting up this new building and built a three-floor stairway, a wide one, all floors.

Holmes: And it connected with this old building, too?

Butler: Now, this porch here, you know, that is correct. It was an old wooden porch. When you got to the thing, right here was a door, I would say just beyond this octagon-shaped part here, right there was a door. We never did encourage anyone to get out there. Now, this door here was locked.

Holmes: It was?

Butler: Because the fire escape was there.

Holmes: Why wouldn't you encourage people to get out there?

Butler: Afraid they would fall through the thing.

Holmes: Was it wooden?

Butler: Yes, and in very poor condition. Yes, sir, we never would encourage them to do that. Fact is, we discouraged them!

Holmes: Here is another shot.

Butler: Those are some excellent pictures.

Holmes: This one shows the entrance-way here, through the annexes, but I don't see the veranda.

Butler: King Drug Store, I remember that.

Holmes: That was right across the street from it.

Butler: Yes. Now, let me see. Wait just a minute, now.

Holmes: Here's a closer close-up of it, and the roof, the covering was tin, so people could not get out on top of that.

Butler: Let me see, now, there's your roof. Now, right in here, see, there were three doors here, and later they partitioned off McGee-Hawkins and put J. A. Reed barbershop in there.

Holmes: I see.

Butler: Now, that came a little later. That must be about 1900 or something?

Holmes: It must be a little bit later because of the automobiles.

Butler: Yes, there are some cars there. This must be a little earlier, because I remember them old hacks. I remember Cain Drug Store later became the Ford Drug Store. Later it became Williams Drug Store. These are some excellent pictures. Did you get these from Mrs. Cunningham, Mr. Hiatt's daughter?

Holmes: No, sir, I didn't. I've just picked them up from various sources. I think these came from the City, the transportation department.

Butler: Oh, yes.

Holmes: Now, this one is shown with....

Butler: That's the old car tracks.

Holmes: The old car tracks, and there you can barely see the front of the Edwards.

Butler: That's right. I remember that just went down Mill Street. It used to jump the track every Saturday night and that's what the boys went to town to see!

Holmes: Oh, really! This is before the train tracks were elevated.

Butler: Yes, yes.

Holmes: And this is the first train on the elevated tracks in 1925. This was after the new hotel was built.

Butler: Yes. I remember that all the porters in the hotels used to go over there and stand on the corner, you know, and all the hacks and cabs would park out there in front.



Holmes: Now, this is a picture of the old Edwards and the old depot.

Butler: Yes, I remember that with that shed on it. Yes, I remember it very well. This is really fascinating history.

Holmes: Then they tore that down. Here's a picture of when they were tearing it down. They had torn down the oldest building here, and then they were tearing that down. This is the archway that you were talking about where they were joined.

Butler: That's right. You know, this new building is one of the best built buildings, I think, in the south. I don't know how many pilings they put in that thing.

Holmes: About fourteen hundred, I believe.

Butler: Fourteen hundred; but you know how long they were and one thing and another. Yes, sir, the Edwards was a fine thing.

Holmes: Now, the annexes to the Edwards House were four stories?

Butler: No, the annex of it was two stories, back here in the back. This was the front part.

Holmes: Okay, the front part was four stories, then, is that right?

Butler: Yes, including the ground floor, you're talking about, yes.

Holmes: Right, and then the...was three stories.

Butler: The other one was what would be three stories there, with the ground floor. That went on back, you know, around this way, kind of a curve. See, it started back there at room number 201, and you worked on up to 231. Then you went to, well, 101, too - because we numbered them not on the ground floor, but what we would call the second floor - 101, 201, they came around in the curve. Now, this was the old building. You came up to 231, 232, and the manager, Mr. Ware, took two of those old rooms over there...together was supposed to have been the office, made him a bedroom and called it 233!

Holmes: I see!

Butler: Another unusual thing about that old hotel, it didn't have but one suite in it, and it was 145; and Dr. and Mrs. George E. Atkins - Dr. Atkins was associated with Jackson Infirmary here - he and Mrs. Atkins occupied that suite for years!

Holmes: Of course, after they tore it down they built this building.

Butler: Yes.



Holmes: And it had a coffee shop in it, and that was the first coffee shop in Jackson, I understand.

Butler: I think you're right, sir. Let me see, an old boy named J. D. Gandy ran the coffee shop.

Holmes: Here's an interior shot of the coffee shop.

Butler: Yes.

Holmes: That must be looking out in that alley-way, isn't it?

Butler: Well, yes. You know, that alley-way out there, I would say, is about as wide as this hall.

Holmes: About twenty feet.

Butler: About twenty feet. I think this is nineteen. Yes, because that's the way you would go back there to the back, you know, in the new building. See, we had a laundry back there and we had the power station back there; and they enclosed the old well back there because they tried to keep people from drinking that bad water, because I think it killed more than it helped!

Holmes: Now, that water was still accessible to the public, wasn't it?

Butler: Oh, yes, they gave it to them. In fact, to tell you the truth the only thing they asked was for them to bring their own containers. A lot of people would drink it, claiming it helped them.

Holmes: Well, now, those are all the pictures I've been able to come up with.

Butler: I think that - well, let me see, now....

Holmes: And what I am particularly interested are in interior photographs of the Edwards House and of the Edwards Hotel.

Butler: That's a good question. Have you contacted Mrs. I. C. Enochs, Jr.?

Holmes: Yes, sir, I've talked to her and they don't have a single photograph. She told me that she and her husband moved to Texas right after the new hotel opened.

Butler: Well, that's true, that's true.

Holmes: And that she wasn't familiar with it. And when they sold the property, most of the records were gotten rid of.

Butler: Well, now, how about Mrs. J. D. Buchanan?



Holmes: No, sir, I haven't talked to her.

Butler: Well, now, her husband, you know, was the chairman of the stockholders that took it over when they foreclosed this building. See, the way that thing happened, as I understand it, Enochs and Flowers put up \$800,000 of this money and they sold \$900,000 of stock. The hotel, unfortunately, never did pay off. It was always about sixty percent filled. It was too much hotel for Jackson.

Holmes: Yes.

Butler: Your Heidelberg had come in here and got all the business. They were full every night. We got the overflow of the Heidelberg.

Holmes: Why was that?

Butler: Well, their rates were about three dollars less than ours; and another thing was that building that new building was about \$500,000 in excess of the amount that had been earmarked to build it, the cost of material and labor.

Holmes: What was the total cost, do you remember?

Butler: Around \$1,850,000.

Holmes: The reason I asked is because in newspaper accounts at the time it was opened, they called it "Jackson's million dollar hotel."

Butler: Oh, well, that was because the boys couldn't count any higher!

Holmes: I didn't know whether it was a secret and they didn't want people to know, or what!

Butler: No, you see, they had put out \$1,700,000 with that \$900,000 bond issue, and the Enochs and the Flowers - Mr. E. G. Flowers was I. C. Enochs, senior's, son-in-law - and they had put up \$800,000. That's where they made their mistake.

Holmes: Putting up their own money?

Butler: No, putting up only \$800,000.

Holmes: Oh.

Butler: They lost their controlling interest. Now, if Mr. I. C. Enochs, Sr., if he'd been living, it wouldn't have happened!

Holmes: He wouldn't have lost control.

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Butler

- Butler: He would have put up all the money himself. He was a very fine businessman. Another interesting thing you may be interested in - this was before your time, I'm sure - but sheep were raised on the White House lawn during World War I, and the wool was sold. Mr. I. C. Enochs, Sr., paid a thousand dollars for some wool from the sheep on the White House lawn, and we put it in a large glass canister and put it there on the cigar stand!
- Holmes: My word!
- Butler: But he was a public-spirited citizen. He was a very fine man!
- Holmes: That reminds me of something. Somebody called this week in response to my article, and wanted to know if I had ever heard of a painting of a champion bull, Point Comfort III, that hung in the Edwards.
- Butler: Oh, yes, yes, sir.
- Holmes: The person that called was Mrs. John Gaddis.
- Butler: Oh, yes.
- Holmes: It was her husband's grandfather that owned the bull.
- Butler: Yes.
- Holmes: What can you tell me about that? I told her I would ask you.
- Butler: Well, the last time that I remember seeing that picture was, I believe they were doing some painting down there in the lobby and Mr. Davis loaned the Laverned Stock Farm - now that's out here at the old airport - they called that the Laverned Stock Farm, and that's where Point Comfort was housed. And as I recall it, Mr. Davis was the president of the Capitol National Bank. It was located where the First National Bank is located now on West Capitol Street. And that picture was given to him as I recall it now.
- Holmes: Do you remember approximately what time?
- Butler: Oh, I don't know. I remember Point Comfort there was, let's see...I would say it was about the beginning of World War I.
- Holmes: Is this when it was given?
- Butler: Yes, I would say it was that, because I remember old Point Comfort XIV.
- Holmes: Fourteen?

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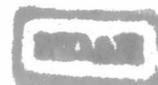


Butler

- Butler: Yes. Out there; Mr. Davis had a - I don't know what it is, maybe you can call it an obsession - anyway, he named all of his bulls "Point Comfort" - numerically, you know. I remember old Point Comfort XIV. They used to bring him down to the State Fair.
- Holmes: Championship bulls?
- Butler: Oh, yes, yes! Mr. Davis was a very fine man. He was another good businessman.
- Holmes: How did a painting of Point Comfort III come to hang in the Edwards?
- Butler: Well, now, let me see if I can answer that question. Mr. Davis was a very public-spirited citizen, and so was Major R. O. Edwards, you know. And I believe that that, perhaps, came about because they owned the streetcar line here - The Edwards House Railroad Company, they called it.
- Holmes: Mr. Davis was one of the owners?
- Butler: He was one of the men who served as an incorporator of the Edwards House Railroad Company. He was president of the Capitol National Bank. He had a son named Vernon Davis, Vernon T. Davis, who really took more of an interest in the stock farm than he did in the bank or anything else. Well, I would say that that's the way it was; but you know, it could have been the fact that the catering department of the old Edwards specialized in meats. That was back in the days there, you know, that - well, you could go in there and order roast duck and you could get it. Or you could go in there and order a goose. I don't think they knew what a pheasant was at that time, but if they did, you could get that, too! Because they had some very fine chefs there. They had some good men! They had some good men who were stewards, knew their business. And a tremendous patronage! You open the door there at seven o'clock - we closed it at nine o'clock at night - it was always filled. Excellent food!
- Holmes: You're making me hungry just talking about it!
- Butler: Well, that was back in the days when you enjoyed your food! You'd go sit in there maybe an hour or two and enjoy your meal! You don't do that any more - you don't have time.
- Holmes: Do you know when the painting was first hung in the Edwards?
- Butler: No, I don't remember. The fact is, I don't remember seeing a painting of that particular animal there, and the only reason why it brings it to mind was that later on the hotel used to buy a lot of meat from the Chicago stockyard - Swift - and the manager

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of Swift and Company lived there at the Edwards for a while, and he brought this very large painting over there and put it in the lobby. Then that's when one of the old porters there who worked down at the Edwards for fifty-five years - I never will forget - a Negro named Sam Davis. Sam was one of those fellows that kind of cleaned up the lobby and dusted out the chairs - no specific job - but I used to talk to Sam quite a bit, and he was telling about some of the old methods that they had employed, some of the old things that were in there, and he showed me a clock that wasn't functioning any more, but he showed me a clock that had been in his suite of rooms and it was a French clock, first one I ever saw - but it was a magnificent thing! Had a pendulum on a ball, very unusual clock! Perhaps another interesting thing that you may be interested in, see, the Enochs family also were located in McComb, Mississippi. Now, part of the Enochs family owned the Fernwood, Columbia and Gulf Railroad, FC&G they called it, running out of Fernwood just below McComb, around over there to Tylertown, supposed to go to the Gulf but it never did get there. There was an old Negro that used to come up to the hotel about twice a month, by the name of Howard Divinity.

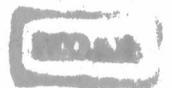
Holmes: Divinity.

Butler: Yes, Divinity. I don't think he was divine by any means, but he claimed to be a slave. And the thing that always attracted me was the fact that he wore a Confederate uniform. He used to tell us that Mr. I. C. Enochs's father, who was in the War Between the States, he was his body servant and he went with him all through the war; and when they came back, Howard went to work for the Enochs interests down there at Fernwood. He got so old that he couldn't walk and they just took care of him. He used to come up, and he'd come in the lobby and he'd get down about half-way to the desk and he would just absolutely bellow, "Where is Mr. Ware?" Everybody knew what he wanted. He wanted to see Mr. Ware, the manager, and soon as he saw him, he'd say, "Well, go see if Howard has a bed, a place to sleep back there in the sample rooms." Our sample rooms were well-fixed, just like a room, had all the facilities. And they'd go back there and fix Howard up a room. He'd stay two or three days. They would feed him back there in the employees' dining room, and I think Mr. Ware used to give him some spending money. And when he got his visit out he'd go back to Fernwood. Then, in about two weeks, you'd see him again. And he always wore this Confederate uniform!

Holmes: When did you quit working at the Edwards?

Butler: Let's see. The new hotel was opened in '23?

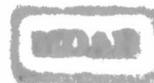
Holmes: Yes, sir, December 31, 1923.



Butler

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- Butler: All right, let me see if I can put it together. In '27 I finished college. It must have been, I would say, about midway of '26, because I did not work down there the last year I was in college because I went to college at the University of South Carolina. Yes, about '26.
- Holmes: In the old hotel, was that even then a center for legislative activity?
- Butler: Yes, sir! More bills were passed than lobbying up in those rooms than they did on the floor of the New Capitol.
- Holmes: That's what I'd always heard.
- Butler: Yes, sir, you're absolutely correct. I used to tell people that and they wouldn't believe me, and I said, "All right, I can tell you some things that will, perhaps, shock you!" I said, "I can tell you about the Bilbo-Dulaney scandal." You, perhaps, have heard about that. Are you a native Mississippian?
- Holmes: Yes, sir!
- Butler: Where is your home?
- Holmes: Winona.
- Butler: Winona! Why, I had some good friends up there. Do you remember Mr. Harry Watts?
- Holmes: No, sir, I don't believe so.
- Butler: Don't remember him. Do you remember John Aldridge?
- Holmes: Yes, sir.
- Butler: Do you remember John's father?
- Holmes: No, sir.
- Butler: Well, John and I are members of Sons of Confederate Veterans. John's a nice fellow. I knew his daddy. There was a Presbyterian preacher up there named Lowe.
- Holmes: Right, I remember him.
- Butler: You remember him.
- Holmes: When you were at the Edwards, prohibition was in effect in Mississippi, wasn't it?



- Butler: Oh, yes, but that didn't make any difference.
- Holmes: It didn't have any effect.
- Butler: No!
- Holmes: It wasn't in effect at the Edwards?
- Butler: No, sir. One of our old porters down there, a Negro named Gales Foster, never will forget him, who, much to my surprise was above the average! He neither drank, smoked, nor would he steal, had the key to the whiskey room. They let him keep it. He was the night porter.
- Holmes: Where was the whiskey room?
- Butler: Go to the west end of the ground floor, turn to your left - that was where the sample rooms were - and it was, I would say, about midway. It was what we called the stock room. And the stock room - let's see, we had twenty sample rooms - and about half-way down that side door that you were talking about, that's where they used to bring the liquor in before they put it over there in the stockroom. And Gales had the key at night. Let me see, who had the key in the daytime? I think another Negro, well-known here in Jackson for years and years, named Hayden had the key in the daytime. Any time anybody wanted a bottle of liquor, he could get what he wanted - didn't make any difference.
- Holmes: The hotel bought the liquor?
- Butler: No, the way I get it, the individual men bought it. Now who they were, I don't know. I never could find out. Of course, I've always suspected the manager was in on it but I never could find out anything. That's one room they never would let me in! They would let me in the cigar room and the stockroom up there where the sheets and pillowcases and the stationery and all of that - I was supposed to keep charge of it and see that our stock was always plentiful, but they never would let me get in the whiskey room. I guess I was a little too young.
- Holmes: Where would the whiskey be drunk, in the rooms? They wouldn't take it into the restaurant, would they?
- Butler: No, no. You had to drink it in your room. Now, they did this a little later on. They would - men would buy, say, a pint of liquor and ask for a cup if they went in the dining room, and they would pour them a drink in a cup. They wouldn't let them pour it in a glass, because, you know, after awhile they got so open with it - everybody knew what was going on, there was some objection.



Holmes: But there wasn't any trouble from the government about it?

Butler: No, sir, none whatsoever.

Holmes: Where was it kept in the new hotel?

Butler: Well, I think the new hotel really and truly was not handled inside the building but was handled in cars parked on what they called Esau Street. You know, that's South Mill, of course, but we called it Esau Street. Because there were always four or five cabs out there, and they all belonged to the same man. As far as I know, there was no liquor kept for sale in the new hotel - plenty of it was drunk, plenty of it.

Holmes: I'm sure! Mr. Sillers was quoted by a newspaper one time as saying that during prohibition liquor would be stacked forty cases high in the lobby of the Edwards House.

Butler: It wouldn't be in the lobby, but it would be stacked forty cases high, yes, sir, you're right about that.

Holmes: In the whiskey room.

Butler: Yes, sir. I've seen them bring it in there by the truck loads. Of course, I think that was just a figure of speech on his part, about it being stacked in the lobby, but it was pretty easy to get to from the lobby, now, there wasn't any doubt about that.

Holmes: Was it that easily accessible elsewhere in town?

Butler: Yes. Take, for instance, Pythian Castle, Knights of Pythiaa, Elks; then there was a racehorse bookie around on the corner of Roach and Pearl, then up there on the corner of North Mill and Amite, a man sold beer. But he sold everything else, too, and he made a world of money up there. He's got some relatives living now, but I don't think they approved of his activities. We had one fellow here that drove a cab, was crippled, and he had the largest car, I believe, in town. He wouldn't pick up any passengers, he loaded it up with whiskey and parked outside of the hotel.

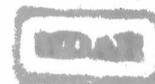
Holmes: What was his name?

Butler: Ballew.

Holmes: Ballew.

Butler: Ballew, Johnny Ballew.

Holmes: Is he the one that owned the five cabs? Who was the man that had the five cabs that would park out on Esau Street?



Butler: No, Johnny just drove one. Let me see if I can remember his name. I can't remember his name, for sure; I know he had five cabs.

Holmes: With all of the travelling salesmen and when the legislature was in town, was there much problem with call girls?

Butler: Yes, because I'll tell you why. You know, Mr. Enochs was an outstanding Methodist layman, and he was one of the trustees of Millsaps College. And J. L. Enochs, his brother, and I. C. Enochs built the Capitol Street Methodist Church. That is the one thing that they impressed upon us. "We don't care whether you register unattached women or not, because they may not be desirable." And if you didn't know them, we'd be very careful about it. Later on, in this new hotel, they put on two house men, one at day and one at night. Mr. Morris, A. L. Morris, the one I was telling you about, he was promoted to day house man, and they had a night house man. Yes, they were very strict about it.

Holmes: After the Enochs family lost control of it, it seems I've heard stories about the Edwards as perhaps being a pretty brisk business for the call girls - in later years.

Butler: Well, now, you're asking me something that I couldn't really and truly give you an intelligent answer. I've heard the same thing, naturally.

Holmes: But at the time that you were working there, the Enochs maintained a....

Butler: Yes, sir, it was certainly on the up and up. That's the way they wanted it, and that's the way they got it! They were fine people.

Holmes: We're just about out of tape. I'd like to - since you gave me some information about Mrs. Morris, let me give you these other names, and perhaps you can give me some information that will help me ask them questions. One of them is your neighbor, Mr. Hamilton. Do you know him? Mr. Thompson, excuse me, Thompson.

Butler: Oh, Frank Thompson, yes, he lives right back here.

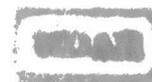
Holmes: He called me right after I talked to you.

Butler: Well, Frank was bricklayer. He layed brick on it, he never did work in the hotel, but Frank was one of the bricklayers.

Holmes: He told me that he helped build it.

Butler: Yes, he did. Nice fellow.

Holmes: So maybe he can tell me something about the construction of it.



Butler: Yes, he can. He's a good man, a good contractor. You have the name of the contractor there, Sumner Sollitt?

Holmes: No, sir, I don't.

Butler: Of Chicago? Oh, yes, Sumner Sollitt Company.

Holmes: S-O-L-E-T?

Butler: S-O-L-L-I-T-T, Sumner. By the way, Sumner Sollitt, Jr., while he was down here, got married.

Holmes: Oh, really!

Butler: Yes, he married Senator Marshall's daughter, from up around Sunflower.

Holmes: I see.

Butler: Up in your neck of the woods, too.

Holmes: Yes, that's just down the hill, so to speak.

Butler: Yes. Old Senator Marshall, I never will forget him. Beautiful woman, whew!

Holmes: And then I've got an appointment with Mrs. Ethen McNair. She was there after your time. She went to the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music and taught music here in Jackson for twenty years; and then decided she wanted to be a housekeeper at the Edwards.

Butler: Oh, yes.

Holmes: So she did that for about three years, when Hood Vest, or Mr. Vest, excuse me, not Hood Vest, was manager. But that was in the '40s, which would be....

Butler: Well, J. Hood Vest, you know, when I was down there, why, he wasn't even working there. He later came in to be a bookkeeper for Enochs-Flowers. Nice fellow, lived up here a couple of blocks. You know, he's got a daughter, Becky, I think, she's quite a tennis star. Hood Vest was a fine man. I liked him very much. You don't have Miss Luella Varnado do you?

Holmes: No, sir, I don't.

Butler: Well, she was a teacher. She was there when I was there in the old building.

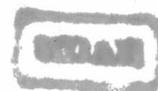
Holmes: She lives here in Jackson?

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- Butler: Yes. Have you made any contacts with members of the Pioneer Club?
- Holmes: No, sir, I haven't. I'll have to keep that in mind. I really hadn't thought of that as a source.
- Butler: Oh, that's a wonderful source, because I want to tell you. William E. Pleasants, who came to Jackson in 1905, was a former president of the Pioneer Club. I'm a member of the Pioneer Club. You have to be a resident of Jackson fifty years, you know, to qualify. So he brought down a large assortment of pictures, the small camera, you know, what we'd call the old "Brownie," and passed them out at the meeting one time; and during the course there, he said to me, he said, "You remember these things, don't you?" And I said, "Yes, you bet I do! You were ticket agent over there and I was working over there!" And he said, "Well, that's what I'm talking about." I said, "Well, yes!" His daughter, Mary Pleasants Smith, do you know her? I think she lives out on Euclid. Is Harriet Heidelberg still up at the Archives? Harriet will know her, because Harriet is also a member of the Pioneer Club.
- Holmes: He had pictures of the Edwards?
- Butler: Yes. A lot of small pictures.
- Holmes: I'll have to get in touch.
- Butler: Miss Varnado is a retired teacher from the public school system. She just worked there during the summer. But you ask old George Sturm up at Jackson Hilton. George worked there. He'll give you some information.
- Holmes: I've tried to talk to him, but he was in the hospital the last time I tried to get in touch with him.
- Butler: Well, maybe he'll be promoted to manager since Bill Green's going down to the old Downtowner, you know.
- Holmes: Bill Green worked at the Edwards, too.
- Butler: Oh, yes, he was manager there late.
- Holmes: Well, we've certainly enjoyed it. Hate to leave.
- Butler: Yes, sir! I'll be delighted to see if I can refresh my memory on some of the things that happened.
- Holmes: And if you should happen to remember somebody that has some pictures, please give me a call.
- Butler: Well, now, this Mrs. Cunningham over here on Arbor Vista.



Holmes: Would she let me look at them?

Butler: I think so.

Holmes: Have you seen them?

Butler: Do you see that large picture back there of yours truly? Let me tell you a little history about that thing, the reason why I say I'd think she'd let you have them. Hiatt did that job. He took the photo and enlarged it and she - what they called - electroplated it.

Holmes: My goodness.

Butler: Now, this thing's in my robe, you know.

Holmes: Yes.

Butler: But you can see....

(End of Tape)

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