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An Interview with

MRS. GORDON L. HOUSE
(MRS. MARY SHELDON HOUSE)
May 17, 1977 and August 30, 1977

Interviewed by

Mary Louise Merideth
Clinton Bagley

Mississippi
Department of Archives and History
and the
Washington County Library System
Oral History Project:
Greenville and Vicinity

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Interviewee:

Mary Ellen House

Interviewer:

Clinton Bagley and Mary Louise Meredith

Title:

An interview with Mary Ellen House, May 17, 1977 and August 30, 1977 / interviewed by Clinton Bagley and Mary Louise Meredith

Collection Title:

Washington County Oral History Project

Scope Note:

The Washington County Library System, with assistance from the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, conducted oral history interviews with local citizens. The project interviews took place between 1976 and 1978. The interviewees included long-term residents of the Greenville-Washington County area in their late 50's and older.

This interview is being recorded at the William Alexander Percy Memorial Library in Greenville, Washington County, Mississippi. The date is May 17, 1977. The subject of this interview is Mrs. Gordon House of Metcalfe Community. This is Mary Louise Merideth an interviewer with the Washington County Oral History Project.

MERIDETH: Mrs. House, would you state your full name, please?

HOUSE: Mary Ellen Sheldon House.

MERIDETH: All right, Mrs. House. Where were you born?

HOUSE: I was born in Nehawka, Nebraska, and you spell Nehawka, N-e-h-a-w-k-a.

MERIDETH: Nehawka, that's an Indian word you say. All right, and what year was that?

HOUSE: I was born August 7, 1900.

MERIDETH: Mrs. House, could you tell us something about your family background, or whatever you'd like to say about the first Sheldons in this country and how they got to Nebraska in the first place?

HOUSE: The Sheldons were English and they came and settled in the New England area around 1829. I don't know very much about my early ancestry but my grandfather, Lawson Sheldon, with a friend, Isaac Pollard, came to California in search of gold in 1848, I think. Anyhow, whenever the Gold Rush was in

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California. Then they decided after they got back that they would go overland and they started overland to California in 1854, no I believe that was 1855, and when they got to the plains of Nebraska they thought they were beautiful. They crossed the Missouri River between Union and Plattsburg, and they decided that they would settle there, so they came to a little town that had been named Nehawka and the only settler was a Mr. Kilpatrick, and there was a small creek, the Weeping Water, which is the English translation for the word, Nehawka, and they built a sawmill and cut the black walnut and that was about the only timber that grew, however there were a few elm, along the river but the plains at that time had no trees except along the streams. They cut the walnut and they built a house that consisted of a hall, a bedroom, a large kitchen, and another - well, I guess the living room. Then upstairs there were three bedrooms and it was all built of black walnut and later as the family grew they added onto the house and built a kitchen at the back and some more bedrooms and a woodshed, because they had bad winters in Nebraska and it was the only way to heat with wood or coal that was shipped in and since they had to go 18 miles to Nebraska City to get any kind of fuel like that it was better to use wood, and behind the woodshed they had a wash room and behind that they had a carriage or wagon house. There was room for a wagon and for a carriage or buggy, and above that, above the carriage house was my grandfather's workroom, and over what was the washroom, they had built another bedroom, and

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also over the new kitchen they had also built another bedroom. Grandfather Sheldon married Julia Pollard, who was the sister of Isaac Pollard that he had gone to California with in the search of gold, and they found some. To Lawson and Julia Sheldon were born five children - Florence, Gertrude, Frank, George Lawson (who was my father) and Vilas.

MERIDETH: Now, Mrs. House, tell us something, a little bit about your father, George Lawson. We know that he had an unusual career in Nebraska. Tell us what you remember or recall about that.

HOUSE: My father was Governor of Nebraska from 1907 for two years. At that time they only had two-year terms. His father had been offered the Territorial Governorship of Nebraska but he didn't think he had enough education so he made up his mind that he would educate a child that would have enough education to be Governor, and this grandfather had a great deal of political influence in southeast Nebraska, so he managed and I guess my father served with a great deal of honor in both the Legislature and then in the State Senate, and while he was in Mississippi he was nominated, through the influence of his political friends in Nebraska, for Governor and he won the Governorship with a right good majority. Then again in 1908 he had come out for Taft, mainly I think because he had insisted on a 2¢ railroad, the railroads were out to get him and they fought him extremely hard.

MERIDETH: Mrs. House, let's back up a minute. You mentioned that when your father was in Mississippi he was nominated

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by the Republicans (is that right?), to be Governor of Nebraska to be their candidate. What was he doing in Mississippi at that time? Can you brief us on that background?

HOUSE: I'll have to backtrack quite a bit. He was a Captain of Company "A" in Nebraska and that Company was stationed during the Spanish-American War, they were bivouaced right next to the Mississippi Company and Company "A" was right next to the Company from Greenville. The only men that I can remember that daddy told about was Arthur Lyell and Henry Starling, and Lyne Starling and he said these Greenville men just said that Greenville and the Delta was the most wonderful place to live and they never stopped talking about it. He decided that when he came back to the states that he would come and see this territory for himself, so when he was discharged from the Army he came back by the Delta and Greenville and in 1902 he came down and bought Ashland Plantation which is about a mile and a half from Avon and about a mile and a half from Wayside, that was just about half way between us, and he was down there looking after some business. He didn't stay down here all the time. He had pretty good tenants and he'd come down in the spring and see that they got the crops in, then he'd come back to Nebraska, then he'd come back probably again in the summertime and then of course he had to come when they settled up in the fall.

MERIDETH: Mrs. House, during your father's tenure as the Republican Governor of Nebraska in 1907 and 1908, who was President of the United States during that time?

HOUSE: Theodore Roosevelt.

MERIDETH: Do you recall what kind of a relationship your father had with Mr. Roosevelt?

HOUSE: They had a very close relationship. Daddy visited the White House and was a guest there on several occasions. I know that I used to beg him to take me and he'd say, "Well, what would I do with you?" But, during my father's tenure as Governor, Mr. Roosevelt - they called him Teddy - President Roosevelt came down the Mississippi River. My father and mother and my oldest brother met Mr. Roosevelt in St. Louis. They stopped in Greenville on the way to New Orleans and Mr. Harley Metcalfe, who is the father of Harley, Jr. and Jane Metcalfe Weathers, organized, with Holt Collier as a guide, a bear hunt and Mr. Roosevelt got the bear. The Metcalfes have the gun that the President used to kill the bear.

MERIDETH: This has become a very famous story in Delta history. It was an important occasion for the President of the United States to come into the state and your father was a member of that famous hunting party when President Roosevelt came down the river.

Mrs. House, when did you first see the state of Mississippi?

HOUSE: In the early Spring of 1909. My family moved here then.

MERIDETH: Why did your father decide in 1909 to move his entire family to his Mississippi plantation?

HOUSE: Well, he spent more than his income because they only paid \$2,500 a year for Governor and mother and father entertained quite lavishly and in order to pay up his debts there he sold his property in Nebraska and just decided to come on down to Mississippi, with his family.

MERIDETH: Did your father have any farming interests in Nebraska?

HOUSE: He owned some land and then he had inherited a right good estate from his father, who died in 1905.

MERIDETH: But, he loved the land, did he not? And as he turned toward Mississippi in 1909 he decided that he would become a farmer. In that correct?

HOUSE: Yes, that's correct. He decided that it would be a good place to raise pigs and cattle and at one time he had quite a few and sold - he had to take them clear to St. Louis to market them and in taking them to St. Louis they would lose a good bit of weight because it took a long time to go on a freight train.

MERIDETH: Mrs. House, how many acres was your father's Ashland Plantation?

HOUSE: It was 1700 acres in Ashland but it all wasn't cleared. There was about 600 or 700 acres in timber. In 1911 he bought a place that joined us by the name of Loudon. Loudon is spelled, L-o-u-d-o-n. He bought it from the Aldridge family in Natchez, who were descendents of the Buckner family. They had married into the Worthingtons that had come in the very early

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days and owned the plantation of -- One Worthington family owned Belmont and the other owned Wayside.

MERIDETH: Mrs. House, were these people your neighbors at that time or were any of the Worthingtons, Aldridges or Buckners still living at Belmont and Wayside?

HOUSE: On the Wayside plantation, no. There was a family by the name of Clouston that lived there but on the Belmont Plantation a Mr. Edward Worthington was most gracious to daddy and asked him often to come and have meals with him and sometimes he spent the night. None of the houses were screened and at dinner time they always had someone that stood at either end or either side of the table with peacock feathers to keep the flies away.

MERIDETH: What is your recollection of those first years when you came as a young girl to a Mississippi plantation, raising pigs and cattle and timber after having been the daughter of the Governor of Nebraska and living in the Governor's Mansion? Can you give us some memories of those years?

HOUSE: Well, we came down here in 1909 and we had a governess because there weren't any schools out in the country much and she fell and broke her leg after about 6 weeks. She was a Christian Scientist and daddy insisted that she go to a doctor and have it set, so just as soon as she was able to travel she was furious because she had suffered so and she said that if we had called a Healer in Boston she wouldn't have suffered, and so she left us. Then they sent us to a little school down at Avon

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that stood upon stilts and there was just a plank walkway over to the school building and it was just a one-room school and the teacher taught everything, and at Avon at that time, it was quite cosmopolitan, because there was a Chinese that had a store, an Italian by the name of Brocato, and some of the Brocatos are still living in and around Greenville, and Tony had a horsedrawn covered wagon or van that was filled with groceries and he would go out two or three times a week and cover the plantations and I think that he probably sold quite a bit because he had candy and coffee and tobacco and things that the tenants on the place would like to have. Then there was a - I don't remember what the Jewish man's name was, but he had a store there.

MERIDETH: So your plantation was located between the two settlements of Wayside and Avon. Is that correct? Was there a post office at Avon at that time?

HOUSE: Yes, there was a post office, and I can't remember which one of the stores that it was in but I believe that it was in the Jewish store and you had the Avon post office, you had the Pettit, excuse me, the station was Avon and the post office was Pettit so your mail came to Pettit, Mississippi and you got off the train at Avon. Then, at Wayside there was a post office and it was in a store run by Mr. Lewis.

MERIDETH: Mrs. House, when you came to the plantation was there a dwelling already existing or did your father have to build a house to move his family into?

HOUSE: No, the house that we lived in was one that

had been built by some people that had been cutting timber back down -- I expect they had been cutting it on Ashland but in other -- he had a sawmill around -- It was a comfortable house, the ceilings were high -- On the back of Ashland the old quarters still stood, and that house, surprisingly the plaster was still good on it and I don't know why we did not go back there and live except that it was almost a mile and a half from the road. You had to go across two bayous and in the winter time the road got pretty bad out where these bayous were. The old quarters, the overseer lived at one end, with your cabins between that and the Master's house and at the time that we lived on - in 1909 - there was a log cabin, the original one, still standing and clear down at the furthest end was the gin.

MERIDETH: Mrs. House, you spoke of the quarters. Surely, you must mean these were the old slave quarters on the place. Was anybody living in these dwellings at the time?

HOUSE: In one, or maybe two, of the log cabins some tenants lived and then in what was the overseer's house there was a family living. Daddy built the two houses about halfway between the quarters and the railroad track, and then on the railroad track he built two other houses because it got to the place where the tenants wanted to be able to get out as well as the white people.

MERIDETH: Now when you speak of tenants on your father's place, were these sharecroppers and were they white or black?

HOUSE: I am not right sure but I expect that they were

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sharecroppers because I think at that time everything was done on sharecropping. The person that owned the place usually furnished the mules and the implements and they brought them back to the barn every evening and in the morning they'd come and get their mules and go out to work, and all of the implements were owned by the person that owned the place. These tenants were black. I don't think that there were any white tenants in here until along after World War I, along in the 1920s.

MERIDETH: As a child of say about 9 years old, a newcomer to the delta land, can you recall what life was like on the plantation? What were some of your social customs, your religion, your travel?

HOUSE: Well, there were no other white people living down on the plantation except the Branton family that lived 3 miles east of Avon and, of course, you had to go to Avon and so that was about 5 miles from where we lived. They had two children but to make a 10 mile trip, which would be a round trip, we didn't make it very often. I know that sometimes we went on horseback to see the Brantons and they came that way to see us. There were no churches down there and to go to church we would come to Greenville. We were Episcopalians and we worshiped at St. James Church which was on the corner of Broadway and Washington Avenue, and Mr. Phillip Davidson was the Rector. He was the Rector, I believe, for fifty years and had come to Greenville around 1906. Since there were no neighbors, we had to entertain

ourselves. Fortunately, there were four children and I expect we scrapped and fussed like all the other children but we did have a good time. There were few restrictions. We could do most anything we wanted to do within reason, without killing each other.

MERIDETH: You remember some of the games that you and your brothers and sisters played? You had no neighbors so I'm sure you had to stick together for playtime.

HOUSE: Well, you know oddly enough, I don't remember too many of our games. We rode horseback. We probably played hopscotch, hiding-go-seek, and there weren't enough of us to play ring-around-the-rosy, you know, where one person would get in the center and then they would - the one that was it had to make a forfeit. I learned to cook to keep busy. They put me in the kitchen and it didn't make any difference how many dishes I dirtied or what I did because there was always a maid to clean them up for me.

MERIDETH: At that time were little girls in the Mississippi Delta instructed in the ways of domesticity - cooking and sewing and what was the role of a young girl and woman during that time?

HOUSE: Well, I'm afraid I can't tell you, because I think I learned to cook and was instructed just to keep me out of my mother's and father's hair.

MERIDETH: It sounds like you might have been a mischievous little girl.

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You spoke of going all the way to Greenville to church. How did your family make that trip to Greenville, which must have been a pretty good trip during those days?

HOUSE: Well, fortunately, the train ran to Greenville or went to Memphis in the morning and came back in the afternoon, and we'd catch the train at 10:30 - I think that it was 10:30 - and it would take about thirty minutes to go to Greenville. We were always a little bit late to church, because it didn't always get there always quite at 11 o'clock, and then the station is where the Trailway Bus Station is now and you had about three blocks to walk up to St. James..

MERIDETH: As a small girl when you traveled that thirty minute train ride to Greenville, can you give us some of your impressions of what Greenville was like at that time?

HOUSE: One reason it took us so long we stopped at Swiftwater and because the train was the only means of transportation there were always passengers going and coming to Greenville, because you could come in the morning and go back at three in the afternoon, and when you got off at Greenville across from the station was Goyer Company and then there was Washington Hotel right across the street that is still there and used as a boarding house but I can't think of the name of it, and then on the other side of Goyer Company there was a vacant lot and then you had the Court House and where the C. & G. Railroad track was there wasn't anything on the east side in 1909 either on Main or on Washington. I may be wrong about there not

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being any homes out on Washington Avenue and Main but I don't remember them. On Walnut and Poplar, they were the residential area at that time, and on Walnut Street - well, you see, Locust and Cherry went into the river and in 1912 when they had the high water they tore down houses and things to build a dike around a bubble that was right there at the end of Washington Avenue, if that is what you call them, and they built it around and siphoned the water over it to relieve the pressure and that really saved Greenville in 1912. Up on Walnut Street a man by the name of Captain Reilly came in and had a school, only I don't think he established that until about 1914, just for boys, and Mrs. Edmund Taylor organized a school about on the corner of Central and Shelby, or Hinds. She had a private school but I can't remember the name of the person that ran that school. The girls went there and the boys went to Captain Reilly. While Greenville had good public education due to Mr. E. E. Bass, the county lacked a -- I can't remember of any black schools in the county - and just an occasional white school, so my father felt that we weren't getting a good education and he moved mother and we four children back to Nehawka. Julia and Anson were ready to go to school and we stayed there a year, then in 1911 we came back to Mississippi but Daddy had bought Loudon at that time and we moved into the Loudon house. The original Loudon house had burnt just after daddy purchased the place. When we came back there was a family by the name of Giddens, and Sarah D. Giddens was our teacher and we sort of had a private school. They lived out

behind -- well, it was about a mile and a half from Wayside on the old Lilly Plantation and Miss Lilly Worthington had a son that was a doctor and so they had built a house for an office to the north of the main house and we used the office for a school room. It wasn't very easy to heat so when it got cold why Miss Giddens just moved us into her bedroom. Well, there wasn't anybody that went to the school but the three Sheldon children, because the oldest brother at this time was with Captain Reilly, and the Gidden children, so I guess it was all right.

MERIDETH: So you and your brother and sisters attended this little private academy on the Lilly Plantation, run by the Giddens' family and how many years did you attend this school?

HOUSE: Just one. Then mother, I think the Giddens moved away. I believe they were just managing this property. I may be wrong on that, because it had originally been the Worthington-Plantation, and then they sent us to --

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They sent us to St. Rose of Lima Academy, which was right next to St. Joseph Church here in Greenville. It was run by the Sisters of Mercy. I think at the time that Julia and I were there, there were eleven boarders. It was a dormitory type but the Sisters were so good to us. We were there just a year, and the next year I was sent to All Saints College and they had --

MERIDETH: That was All Saints College at Vicksburg, Mississippi?

HOUSE: It was All Saints College at Vicksburg, and

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they had -- the Keys had moved down, the Mr. H. H. Key and family, moved to manage the Wayside Plantation. They had children that were the same age as we were. Mary was my brother Lawson's age, Kate was my age, John was Julia's age. When I say they were our age, they were within nine or ten months. Then, there was Frank and Hub, but they were a good bit younger, and later Harry Key was born but not until a good many years later.

MERIDETH: Did you ever attend any public school in Greenville, Mrs. House?

HOUSE: Yes. After I left All Saints College, the next year, Julia and I came -- Julia was ready for high school and so she entered high school as a freshman and I entered high school as a junior. We stayed with a Mrs. Shaw on Alexander Street. The high school was modern. I expect it was one of the very best high schools in the state. It had an excellent library. The old building is still standing. It was made part of Bass Junior High, or Bass Junior High was built on it, and then when they built the new high school out on Robertshaw Street, they took the old high school for a part of Junior High School, but at the time that I went there when you entered at the front the Principal's office was on the right, and then you turned the corner and went down the hall and we had, as I said, a beautiful library. You went first into where the Librarian was and on one side was a big reading room and on the other was the - we called it the general library. We had a card reference and we were taught how to go and use that card reference and find a book so

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that when I went to college I found that our library was run, only on a smaller scale, just exactly like the library at the University of Nebraska was, and I knew how to go and find my books and I knew what the numbers on the card meant and how to find them. Mr. Bass was quite farsighted. He had up on the second floor, he had an extremely well-equipped chemistry and science room. I also found when I went to the University of Nebraska the chemistry department wasn't any better equipped than ours except that it was much larger and I expect that was the same about the physics. Then in the basement part - it was really on the ground floor but you went down -- well, they may have excavated a little bit they couldn't have excavated very much - they had a -- on the right hand side they had a Home Economics Department and they had a cooking room and a sewing room and then a class room; you went down the hall a little farther and they had a gymnasium and it had a beautiful floor, but above the gymnasium was the auditorium. It had enormous pillars to hold up the auditorium and for that reason it made it quite difficult to play basketball or any of your other indoor games. Then across from the gym was a swimming pool and we'll back up -- and when you would first come down the steps you would turn to the left and you went into a girl's dressing room and we had to dress out for gym and each girl was assigned a locker, and, of course, when you went swimming - sometimes we swam in our gym classes - and the boys went down from the south end and they had their locker room there so they could use the swimming pool in classes.

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They had a girl's gym class and a boy's gym class, and then the football boys were at the south end.

MERIDETH: Can you describe -- This is interesting about the girls dressing out for gym and going swimming. Can you describe for us your gym uniform and what your swimming attire looked like?

HOUSE: Well, I'm afraid that they were far more -- they covered us more than they do now-a-days. The swimming suits were sort of like boomers, I guess. They went almost to your knees and they covered you, it was a one-piece affair and, of course, your arms were out and you didn't have too low a neck. They were made of wool. Now, our gym outfit was very much like that only the legs were bloomers. As I remember they were blue but I may be mistaken on that.

MERIDETH: And the school furnished these uniforms for the girls and boys?

HOUSE: They may have furnished them but you had to pay for them and they were yours when the year was over.

MERIDETH: You speak of the outstanding Library and the Science Department and other facilities at Greenville High School, to what do you attribute this, Mrs. House?

HOUSE: I attribute it to the farsightedness of Mr. E. E. Bass, who came to Greenville in the early days and, as I understand it, he had a good high school over at Archer High School and he was instrumental in building this new high school and equippint it. He had a national reputation. I believe

that Greenville High School was the first -- I won't say the first High School, but one of the very best and it ranked first in the state.

MERIDETH: We know that Mr. Bass was an outstanding Educator. Did you know him personally, Mrs. House?

HOUSE: Yes. I did visit his home a number of times because of Elizabeth, his niece. He had taken in several nieces and nephews and educated them and Elizabeth and her sister, Irene, were living --- Well, I believe she was in college, but Elizabeth was in high school with me and then there was another cousin of Elizabeth's by the name of Avery that was living with Mr. Bass. I was in and out of their home a good many times.

MERIDETH: Then you have very warm, personal memories of Mr. Bass?

HOUSE: Yes, I should say so. I was married in 1924. He was most gracious and gave us a half a dozen sterling silver spoons.

MERIDETH: Do you have any insight into Mr. Bass's character and personality that might be original with you that you could share with us on this tape?

HOUSE: Well, he always spoke to us in Assembly and I can remember one time that he'd been to some sort of an educational meeting down in the southeastern part of the United States and he came back and talked to us on manners. He told us how we ought to eat soup, where we should put our knives and our forks but I expect the funniest recollection that I have of him

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is the year that I graduated from high school in 1918 and he had gone down to get our diplomas. Mr. Henry Starling was president of the School Board and had to sign them along with the rest of the members of the School Board and as he was crossing Main Street, between where the First National Bank is now and the Grand Theatre was then, there was a street car track in the middle of the street too. Well, somebody stopped to talk to him and so he put the diplomas down in the street and then just walked off. Somebody came along and looked in the box and decided, well, they ought to be out at High School so they brought them out to High School and he didn't remember until late in the evening where he had left those diplomas but they were duly given out that evening.

MERIDETH: And that was 1918 that you received your diploma from Greenville High School by the hand of Mr. E. E. Bass. How proud you must have been.

Can you tell us what were your aspirations for higher education?

HOUSE: Well, my mother and my father were both graduates of the University of Nebraska and my grandmother, on my mother's side, graduated from Knox College in the early 1860s and so there wasn't any question but what I should go on to higher education, and because of my love for Nebraska, although I loved Mississippi dearly, I wanted to go to the University of Nebraska. My family was willing for me to go that far away because daddy had a sister and two brothers still living there, and I spent a good

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many weekends down in the little town of Nehawka where I was born.

MERIDETH: So how many years did you attend the University of Nebraska?

HOUSE: Four. I finished in 1922 and received an A.B. degree.

MERIDETH: And what was your major subject? What field of study were you in there?

HOUSE: I majored in Math and Chemistry. My senior year I had come back to Nebraska and had taken every course that the University offered in Bacteriology because Dr. Underhill of the State Department had offered me a job in his laboratory, and I fully intended to go and accept that.

MERIDETH: Was that in Mississippi or in Nebraska or Dr. Underhill in Mississippi?

HOUSE: Dr. Underhill head of the State Department in Mississippi. But, going back in my senior year each student had to have their registration signed by their adviser and I received Mr. Stuff as my adviser - his daughter was a very close friend of mine and he said that there wasn't anything fit for a young lady to go into but teaching and he wouldn't sign my registration slip until he signed me up for education courses. At that time the University of Nebraska only required 12 hours of education to get the best certificate that Nebraska gave for first grade studies, and I went ahead and took it, took the courses because I had already worked off all of my required things and these

were just elective so in order to get through registration I did what my adviser told me to do.

MERIDETH: So you're saying that teaching would not have been your chosen field except for the fact that this adviser instructed you that that was the only field that was permissible or desirable for a lady at that time. How did you feel about that, Mrs. House?

HOUSE: Well, I expect I accepted it because I loved his daughter, Grace, so much and at the time that I was in school we rushed during registration, sororities, and it was a hectic week to try to rush and register and I expect that I got tired of arguing with him and just accepted it to go on with the other things that had to be done, but during my senior year the University of Nebraska offered a -- they had a Placement Bureau in their Education Department and the different teachers or superintendents from all over the states would come down and interview the students that were in the Education Department and the superintendent from Norfolk came down and talked to me and I told him that I wasn't interested in teaching, although I had this certificate. He told me that teaching --- that if I really wanted to do something to help the world that it was the most altruistic thing that a person could do because you were forming the lives of young teachers. He sold me on the idea.

MERIDETH: So you have no regret since you've spent a great part of your life in the teaching profession?

HOUSE: No, I think that it was quite rewarding, and

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the first year that I was out I taught Mathematics down at a town of Geneva, Nebraska. I taught all the math because it was a high school of 250 and they only had one math teacher, and the next year I came home to teach. I was going to be married in the spring and I never dreamed when my father called me and told me that he had a place in Greenville for me that it wasn't in the high school teaching math. In the late summer I was at a party and some dear lady said, "Oh, you're going to have my child this fall." I said, "Oh, no, I'm teaching in the high school." Well, anyhow, the next day I went to see Mr. Bass and he said, "Well, if you can teach high school you can teach fourth grade," and that is what I ended up teaching, fourth grade, and I loved it. Well, I was married in the spring. Mr. Bass had the substitute bring the whole class down to my wedding.

MERIDETH: What year was that?

HOUSE: That was in 1924.

MERIDETH: In what elementary school did you begin your teaching in Greenville?

HOUSE: In the, what they call the "Little White House" now but it was Starling School at that time, and Miss Em Boyd was my principal. We had just six grades. Well, she was a principal and a teacher because she taught the sixth grade.

MERIDETH: How long was your teaching career?

HOUSE: Well, I taught 27 years, but when I started in 1924 here in Greenville, 1923-1924, I stopped and had a family and it wasn't until 1934 that I went back, and at that time I taught in the same building that I'd taught in 1924

but we certainly had outgrown it and the next year they built Carrie Stern and I moved over there and taught the rest of the time in Carrie Stern, and Miss Parks was my principal - Mr. O'Bannon was first and then Miss Annie Grace Parks was the principal.

MERIDETH: What occupation was your husband?

HOUSE: Well, he farmed, then we farmed down on Loudon, and we had two bad years and then later we moved up and managed Locust for two years. We had the flood during that time. The old Locust house sat almost 8 feet, maybe not that much, but it was fully 7 feet. You could walk under there, under the house, without hitting your head except that you had to duck under the timbers which were cypress and they must have been 8 X 8 hewed logs.

MERIDETH: Where was Locust Plantation located?

HOUSE: Locust Plantation is on Bayou Road and it is the Land Grant property to the Montgomery family and had been in the Montgomery family, was owned by the Montgomery family up until Miss Inez Montgomery lost it, but Dr. Montgomery owns a piece of property to the north of it, and that was part of the original place.

MERIDETH: How long were you at Locust Plantation?

HOUSE: Well, we were there 2 years, then Mr. Will Crump and Brodie Crump talked Gordon into coming up and raising alfalfa on a piece of property that they had that's north of town. Well, it's right there at the intersection of Broadway

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and Number One and it lays on the east side. Mr. Crump has sold most of that as a subdivision in there.

MERIDETH: So, during the 10 year time that you were being a farmer's wife and a mother, how many children did you have, Mrs. House? How big was your family?

HOUSE: We had four children: Gordon, who was named for his father, Julia Anne, who was named for my sister and Gordon's mother, William Crump, who was named for Mr. Will Crump, and George Sheldon, that was named for my father. When George was about 2 years old he had osteomalitis and we lost him.

MERIDETH: This was a very eventful 10 years - 1924 to 1934 - for a family living in the Mississippi Delta. In 1927 there was what we call the Great Flood. What are some of your experiences and memories of that occasion?

HOUSE: Well, Miss Inez Montgomery said we wouldn't have to worry because there had never been water in the house and she was right. There was only 2 feet of water there on Locust. The Montgomerys had built, in the early days, the levee that is in front of the old Locust house and it's still there. It runs along Bayou Road and the family built that to protect -- at one time it went clear around the place, but as the years have come and gone they have torn it down and sold the dirt and one thing and another but if you ride down Bayou Road you can see pieces of it. We only had 2 feet of water under the house and they took the barn and the hay barn and divided it up, using cotton picking sacks to divide it, and made rooms, and moved all the

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tenants in there. They had a central place that they cooked and all the children, men, women -- of course, the women did the cooking and the men had to keep wood for the fire, and I don't know where they got the wood because everything was -- well, we had 2 feet of water. Maybe they went to town and got coal. Of course, some of the tenants were eligible for food from the Red Cross and they would go to town in boats and get it. Now my mother and father were so sure, they lived on the Keystone property, they lived in a bend and they said that there had never been water on Keystone, and so they came up and got out oldest boy and took him down there to stay with them. Well, they had more water than we did and after two weeks, my husband, myself and somebody else, went down there in a boat with an outboard motor and got this child because I felt that he was too much for mother and father to look after. They had to move upstairs and when they would let him go out doors they didn't want him to fall in so they put a leash on him and would tie him to the banister to keep him from falling in, but we went down the top of the railroad track and when they had to put gas in the outboard motor somebody would steady the boat by holding on to a telephone pole.

MERIDETH: I'm sure there were many inconveniences to a family and especially to a housewife during the flood, can you think of some of the main inconveniences that were a nuisance to you as you brought up your children during this year?

HOUSE: Well, all the water had to be boiled. No one

could drink any water or you didn't cook with any that wasn't boiled, and you'd boil great big kettles and they said to boil them for 20 minutes to be sure that they were well sterilized.

MERIDETH: How long did this sort of thing last? How long did you have to put up with these conditions in the high water and as the waters receded?

HOUSE: Well, the levee broke in April and it covered the whole Delta, from just south of Clarksdale to the Yazoo River in -- just above Vicksburg, and the water was beginning to recede and there on Locust they planted cotton. The June rise that came, which they said we wouldn't get but we did, and it killed the cotton so there -- well, there may have been a few fields that were a little higher than the others where cotton lasted, but no one made a crop that year.

MERIDETH: Practically on the heels of this disastrous flood came the great depression. Was your family hard hit during this catastrophe?

HOUSE: Well, farming didn't pay off; Miss Inez lost her property, because when you lose the income for a year and most of the property at that time was mortgaged, you had to pay the interest some way, and the Insurance Company -- almost all the property was mortgaged through an Insurance Company. They just came in and foreclosed and I think by 19__ - well, I don't know. Anyhow, most of it was mortgaged to the Insurance Company. In the early days you couldn't go to the bank and get

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a loan, you had to go to a cotton factor, then as the cotton factors began to fade out in the 1920s then your Insurance Companies came in and under-wrote, and I'm not quite sure how that was financed, but they would hold mortgages on the different plantations. I think that the depression was pretty hard on the Delta but, you know, the Delta has always come through. They came through beautifully during the depression. Because of the depression was one reason I went to teaching school. We had two droughts - in 1930 when Gordon was raising alfalfa with the Crumps and they didn't get but two cuttings. Well, when you only get two cuttings of alfalfa, well, that's pretty bad. We had an opportunity to buy a piece of property, 50 acres, and it had an adequate house on it, only I had driven by it a number of times and said it was the ugliest house in the county, but it looked like a good buy and so Gordon and I bought it and it was something that we could pay for. My father had a fit because he said it wouldn't grow anything. Well, anyhow, we managed to get it planted in alfalfa and Gordon had taken a job with the post office as a Rural Letter Carrier and he could do the alfalfa in the evenings after he got off.

MERIDETH: Was alfalfa a major crop in the delta?

HOUSE: No. Mr. Alf Stone had been quite successful with it and I think that's the reason that Brodie Crump and Mr. Will Crump had planted it up there on their piece of property. Because my husband had been reared in Wyoming and knew a lot about alfalfa, because that was what they raised out there, was

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one reason that he went ahead and planted alfalfa on the place that we had bought.

MERIDETH: Your husband was a farmer raising alfalfa and a Rural Mail Carrier. Was he -- did he share your family's love of politics at all?

HOUSE: Well, I think he did but being a Federal employee, there was a Hatch Act and Federal employees and their families could not participate. Even though I inherited my love of politics from my father I wasn't able to participate much. I could go to the precinct, county meetings and the state convention but to be real active, you couldn't, but then they didn't have too much of a Republican party in Mississippi in 1934.

MERIDETH: Did your father retain his interest in politics?

HOUSE: Yes. He attended all the National Conventions and during President Hoover's administration, President Hoover never made an appointment here in Mississippi without conferring with daddy. He also served in the Mississippi Legislature from 1918-1922. In 1918 Washington County had a meeting of all the citizens. There were about 500 present and Mr. LeRoy Percy, after they had discussed the problems of the roads, where they needed paving, and where they were going to pave them, and how much money they were going to spend, he said, "Well, we'll never get as many intelligent people together again to elect our officials to the Legislature" and he said, "These are trying times, so let's nominate --

(End of Tape One)

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This is Clinton Bagley, August 30, 1977, continuing interview with Mrs. Gordon House. We are at 520 East Starling Street in Greenville.

BAGLEY: Mrs. House, when we left off on this last tape we were talking about a road that was to be built. Is that correct?

HOUSE: That's right.

BAGLEY: This meeting was for a road being built, but where?

HOUSE: It was a meeting to discuss the paving of the road from Greenville to Glen Allen, from Greenville to Winterville, Greenville to Priscilla, one to Leland and down to Trail Lake; another one down to Hollandale. Oh, and I believe that they went from Leland to the county line north.

BAGLEY: That's at Elizabeth?

HOUSE: Yes, just a little above Elizabeth up to about the Bogue.

BAGLEY: Were they going to have to issue bonds for this?

HOUSE: I'm sorry, I don't know, but I think they did. I think the fuss was that they didn't think that they'd ever get them paid off, but I think that they've been paid off so many years ago that people have forgotten about it.

BAGLEY: What type articles have been written about

your father?

HOUSE: Well, the most recent probably was the one written by J. A. Simpson when he was doing his thesis for history at Mississippi State University.

What else do you want me to say?

BAGLEY: What was it?

HOUSE: It was a history of building the Republican party in Mississippi, and he based it upon what my father, George L. Sheldon did. It was also a sort of a biography of him.

BAGLEY: Where did Mr. Simpson get most of his material?

HOUSE: I gathered what I could of my father's papers. A great many of them had burned down when the house burned down in 1932, or maybe the house burnt in 1930, but most of the papers but the ones he had left, I used part of them, and then my brother has the remainder, the remaining papers. The papers, after Mr. Simpson got through with them, they were given to State and so they are in the Archives of the University at Starkville.

BAGLEY: They are over at Mississippi State University.

What about this other article that appeared in Nebraska History in the Fall of 1972?

HOUSE: Beth was getting her Master's degree at the University of Chevron, Nebraska, and she chose the political life of my father for his career from 1907 to 1909. She came down and talked to my brother and myself and then I think she went over to State and looked through some of those papers. Most of the material was gathered, I think, from newspaper articles in

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Nebraska.

BAGLEY: How did your father get along with the Democrats from Washington County and, say, with Senator Percy?

HOUSE: They were extremely good friends. I think he got along with all of them because they elected him to the Legislature and he had no one to run against him, but he didn't want to run for re-election because of financial conditions and said he was needed on the place and while he was in the Legislature he had neglected his farming.

BAGLEY: Were he and Senator Percy good friends?

HOUSE: Very good friends.

BAGLEY: In spite of political differences?

HOUSE: In spite of political differences.

BAGLEY: Do you recall them getting together at any particular, or certain time?

HOUSE: No, I don't, but I know that daddy hardly came into -- we lived 12 miles from Greenville at Wayside - he never came into Greenville that he didn't go up to the office and see Mr. Percy, and then in the fall when the quail season was on he usually came down and hunted there on the place.

In Mississippi he was in Internal Revenue and I believe that was Mr. Hoover appointed him to that in 1928, I think, and he was in for four years and then when Mr. Roosevelt went in, defeated President Hoover, why President Roosevelt appointed a new Internal Revenue Collector. Now daddy was Justice of the Peace down at Avon but that wasn't a Federal appointment.

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They elected their own Justice of the Peace in their own community.

BAGLEY: This still had to be approved by the Senate, did it not - the Internal Revenue job?

HOUSE: Yes. I think it did.

BAGLEY: I wonder if he had to go before any committee in Washington?

HOUSE: Now that I do not remember. I don't think so. You know they may now, but I don't believe at that time, I think Hoover's nominations were pretty much because the Senate and the Congress were Republican that first year that he was in - I mean the first term, the first two years.

BAGLEY: Well, you remember your father campaigning any for the Legislature?

HOUSE: No. They didn't campaign. They were nominated at this road meeting but no one came out in opposition against - any of them, and so when their names went on the ballot they were automatically elected, there was no one opposed to them. If they only got four votes they would have been elected. I think you have to have more than that but --

BAGLEY: Can you tell us some more about how say certain positions in the state were filled, Federal positions such as Post Masters?

HOUSE: Well, since the Republican party wasn't very strong there usually was one Republican - at least the man said that he was a Republican - that was responsible for the nomination of the different post masters because at that time all of your

Class A post offices were under Federal appointment and so were all your smaller ones for that matter, and there are a lot of other Federal positions that were appointed every time the presidency changed. Now they are under Civil Service and they have changed the laws in some respects but there were a great many offices up for grabs so they would appoint one person to be -- to recommend them, that would go to the community and find out who was agreeable, and if they had integrity, honesty, etc. before he would recommend them to the President.

BAGLEY: Wasn't there someone who had this position?

HOUSE: There was a -- in the Hoover Administration, he appointed a Mr. Rowland down at Picayune. I believe he lived at Picayune, to be his representative in Mississippi, and anyone that wanted a Federal job at that time would go and consult with Mr. Rowland. There was also a Mr. Crosby down there that was real active in the Republican party, and they gave very liberally and I expect that he and Mr. Rowland did a great deal to establish the Republican party here in the state of Mississippi.

BAGLEY: But who was the person that you paid, although this was illegal, for a certain position - like the big post office at Columbus went for \$100.00, a small one like Bardette or Wayside at maybe \$50.00?

HOUSE: Well, I think that probably was your -- I don't know how the Democrats set up their ---

BAGLEY: This was with the Republicans.

HOUSE: Well, with the Republicans you had a state

chairman or a committee and they would get the money. The time, before Lamont Rowland came in and was appointed, it had been controlled by the Redmonds that live in Mound Bayou and Perry Howard and they just passed out the patronage to whoever paid them the most.

BAGLEY: Who was Perry Howard?

HOUSE: Perry Howard was a mulatto. I expect he was more than that, that came from Mound Bayou, the National Chairman for Mississippi in the Republican party for a great many years, before him one of the Redmonds and then Perry Howard took over, and I expect that he was there for 20 years.

BAGLEY: He lived at Mound Bayou.

HOUSE: When he was in the state, he had a home in Washington, D. C. I don't think he lived there in Mound Bayou but he lived up in that area.

BAGLEY: Your father was in the Legislature from about 1918 until --

HOUSE: 1922.

BAGLEY: 1922. And you think he was the only Republican?

HOUSE: He was the only Republican in the Legislature at that time and when he went over, although he had been elected by the Democrats in Washington county, he told them that he would register as a Republican and that was agreeable with them, and he registered as a Republican, and he was the only one in the Legislature that four years, or those four years.

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BAGLEY: Can you recall any Bills that he proposed?

HOUSE: I'm sorry, I was away at school but I do know that he was extremely interested in education and that he visited Ole Miss and stayed, and he was dumfounded at the delapidated conditions the dormitories and the buildings were in and felt that if the state could not do better they ought to close the schools up. He worked hard and he got money appropriated for repairing the buildings and some new buildings in both schools. He also introduced a Bill for Homestead Exemption but it was defeated. Well, he introduced a lot of Bills but a good many of them were defeated and he had to work extremely hard to get this educational Bill through, to get any money up there for those two schools.

BAGLEY: Did he meet with any opposition in the Legislature by being a Republican that you know of?

HOUSE: No. I don't think so. My father had been a very personable man and he was a good thinker and people were willing to listen to him even though they disagreed with him. I'm sure that he had opposition but he also gained friends enough to get his -- Well, he had to have some supporters or he couldn't have gotten these bills through. He and Mr. Walter Sillers were extremely good friends. Mr. Sillers was the Speaker of the House. That helped my father in getting the bills and things that he was interested in introduced, and Mr. Sillers had a good mind. When my father passed away he wrote a very beautiful tribute to him.

BAGLEY: Where did your father stay when the Legislature

was in session?

HOUSE: Well, they stayed at the Edwards Hotel to start with. At that time that was the - well, I guess the only really good hotel in Jackson and a great many Legislators stayed there. Then the last two years they bought a house out on West Capitol and lived there the next two years.

BAGLEY: Did they ever live in Clinton?

HOUSE: Mother sold the house in 1926 in Jackson and in selling the house in Jackson she got a house in Clinton as a trade-in, it was a part of a payment, and after my brother was married in 1935, there wasn't but one house on the plantation and so they decided that they would go to Clinton and live in the house that they had over there in Clinton and that's the way he got over to Clinton, and they never came back except for visits, they'd come back and spend a couple or three months, in the winter time either with myself or my brother, divide the time between us, until he passed away, and, as I said just a few minutes ago, they would come over here to visit, but after mother died, daddy lived down there but he spent more time with either my brother or myself than he did before. I expect he got lonesome. He made friends with the professors at the school there at Clinton and he said that they had a marvelous group of professors out there.

BAGLEY: Are you talking about Mississippi College?

HOUSE: Mississippi Vollege. He said he thought few colleges had as many professors that had doctorates, none of them were narrow minded, as sometimes professors are. They both of