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An Interview with

MR. GUY LELAND MATTINGLY

February 4, 1977

Interviewed by

Roberta Miller

Mississippi
Department of Archives and History
and the
Washington County Library System
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Interviewee: Guy Leland Mattingly
Interviewer: Roberta Miller

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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 is Roberta Miller an Oral History Interviewer with the Washington County Library System. I am interviewing Mr. G. L. Mattingly of 915-A Arnold Avenue, Greenville, Mississippi. This is February 4, 1977.

When did you come to Greenville, Mr. Mattingly?

MATTINGLY: In June 1919.

MILLER: 1919, right after World War I?

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am.

MILLER: What were you doing in World War I?

MATTINGLY: Horse buyer for the government.

MILLER: For the cavalry?

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am. They were for the cavalry.

MILLER: They were fine horses?

MATTINGLY: Well, we bought all kind of horses.

We shipped them to France. We bought horses all through the Pacific Northwest.

MILLER: Did you buy horses in Kentucky?

MATTINGLY: No, ma'am. The horses I bought were for the cavalry. They don't use gaited horses or fine horses in the Army. They want a horse with good conformation and ability.

MILLER: And endurance.

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am.

MILLER: So you came to Greenville in 1919. Why did

you happen to come to Greenville?

MATTINGLY: I came on a business trip. I came down as a traveling salesman after I got out of the Army, after the War was over. They sent me down to Mississippi. I came here, Goyer Company was our agent here. I stayed around a few days and took a liking to the town and people so I decided to settle down in some small town and call it home.

MILLER: So you came back to Greenville and you married Hazel Shanahan.

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am.

MILLER: What were you doing at that time, what business were you in?

MATTINGLY: I was working for Armour at that time. I had quit the Diamond Match Company and went to work for Armour so I would become established in this town. I had the audacity to eventually go into business for myself.

MILLER: Armour & Company was a big thing then, wasn't it?

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am.

MILLER: Were you a salesman for them?

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am.

MILLER: Did you travel?

MATTINGLY: No, just worked in the City of Greenville, seven years.

MILLER: Just worked in the City of Greenville. You quit in 1926.

MATTINGLY: In 1927.

MILLER: In 1927. Right before the flood or after the flood?

MATTINGLY: On January 1, 1927.

MILLER: And where did you go into business for yourself?

MATTINGLY: On North Street near Alexander, next door to the Coco Cola plant.

MILLER: And the name of your business?

MATTINGLY: Delta Cigar & Candy Company.

MILLER: You ran that business for how long?

MATTINGLY: Thirty-five years.

MILLER: Thirty-five years.

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am.

MILLER: Now, during that time from 1919 to 1927 what was going on in Greenville that was of the greatest importance at that time, do you think?

MATTINGLY: Nothing but the general routine, because nothing was going on of any importance any more than at any other time.

MILLER: You did start a business one time in Mr. Shanahan's back yard, didn't you, with your brother-in-law?

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am. That was while my building was under construction. It was back in the garage and then when my building was finished we moved into it.

MILLER: I see, and where did they live then?

MATTINGLY: On North Walnut Street.

MILLER: North Walnut Street, What block was that?

MATTINGLY: I think it was the three hundred --

MILLER: It was between -- ?

MATTINGLY: Alexander and Nelson.

MILLER: Between Alexander and Nelson and now that part of Walnut Street is in --

MATTINGLY: Is in the river.

MILLER: Is in the river because the levee was moved back.

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am.

MILLER: The levee was moved back right after the twenty-seven flood.

MATTINGLY: No, about 1930.

MILLER: Yes, it took some time to do it.

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am.

MILLER: While you were running your Cigar and Candy Store were you traveling or did you just stay in Greenville?

MATTINGLY: I was manager and did the buying and a couple of things. I was Office Manager with several salesmen working for me and we worked all of Washington, Bolivar and Sunflower counties.

MILLER: Who were your salesmen?

MATTINGLY: Dan Shanahan.

MILLER: Your brother-in-law.

MATTINGLY: Yes, and Pat O'Brian.

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MILLER: That was a relative too, was it not?

MATTINGLY: No.

MILLER: He was not a relative.

MATTINGLY: And we had several salesmen. Those kind of fellows kind of threw us, they would come work for us a few months and go on and we'd get somebody else.

MILLER: And they traveled around to the small towns in the counties?

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am.

MILLER: And you visited the corner grocery stores.

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am.

MILLER: This was a good business, wasn't it?

MATTINGLY: I thought it was pretty good. I liked it. There was only five wholesale tobacco houses in the state at that time and I was the only one in Greenville.

MILLER: Well, now, how about Mr. Frank Rosella?

MATTINGLY: He came here about six or seven years later.

MILLER: After you did.

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am.

MILLER: When did he start his business, in the twenties?

MATTINGLY: That was the twenties sometime, I don't remember just what the date was.

MILLER: And you started your business in 1927?

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am.

MILLER: And Mr. Rosella's business was Central Tobacco & Candy Company.

MATTINGLY: He started his business ten or twelve years later.

MILLER: And at that time there were only five tobacco and candy distributors in the state of Mississippi.

MATTINGLY: In the whole state of Mississippi.

MILLER: That seems unusual, doesn't it?

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am. Barton & Steele was in Clarksdale, I was here, and there were two in Jackson and one in Biloxi.

MILLER: Do you remember the names of those?

MATTINGLY: I know but I can't recall them.

MILLER: Now during this time that you had this business you were always interested in horses, weren't you?

MATTINGLY: All my life.

MILLER: Did you own some land up on North Broadway? That's where you kept your horses, wasn't it?

MATTINGLY: No, I owned land out on Highway 82. It's now Mattingly Subdivision.

MILLER: Yes.

MATTINGLY: I kept horses there and I had another place down near Hollandale, a farm where I kept my horses.

MILLER: Now, did you ride yourself or did you just --?

MATTINGLY: Not in recent years. When I was young, when I was big enough to walk they sat me on a horse. I was

born on a race horse farm near Bardstown, Kentucky.

MILLER: Yes, that's race horse country.

MATTINGLY: And they thought every child should learn to ride and I guess when I was five years old I was riding horses.

MILLER: And when you came down here did you just raise horses to sell or just for pleasure?

MATTINGLY: No, just for pleasure.

MILLER: And other people came and rode them?

MATTINGLY: Well, no, I would raise them and then when they got grown we would break them and develop them and sell them.

MILLER: Yes, I see. Did you make money out of that venture?

MATTINGLY: No, ma'am. It was a losing game.

MILLER: Yes, I've always heard that it is.

MATTINGLY: It was a sport of kinds, a gentleman's pastime. That's the way we feel about it in Kentucky.

MILLER: Yes. Well, now during the 1927 flood - what happened to you and your family during the 1927 flood?

MATTINGLY: I stayed here and my family went to Memphis and stayed with relatives up there until the water went down.

MILLER: Yes. And how did you manage your business at that time?

MATTINGLY: We closed down.

MILLER: You were working at Armour & Company at

that time:

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am.

MILLER: No, you had already started your own business. So, you just shut it up.

MATTINGLY: Just shut it up.

MILLER: And I believe you and the Shanahans all stayed together, didn't you?

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am.

MILLER: And that was over on North Walnut Street?

MATTINGLY: North Walnut.

MILLER: And the house was very high off the ground.

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am. The water didn't get in the house but it got within two or three inches.

MILLER: Did the water get into your business?

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am, about four feet deep on North Street.

MILLER: Did you suffer great losses? Was your stock ruined?

MATTINGLY: Our estimate from our inventory showed we lost \$27,000.00.

MILLER: That was a big loss.

MATTINGLY: It was.

MILLER: How did you go about starting over: Just got started over again?

MATTINGLY: I borrowed money from my people in Kentucky and got enough to start off again. I rocked along and

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paid them off.

MILLER: Then after you got started back in business in 1927, the stock market crashed. Did that affect you? In 1929 --

MATTINGLY: Yes, 1929. Yes, ma'am, that did.

MILLER: It affected everybody, I think, maybe not directly but indirectly. Your business suffered, didn't it?

MATTINGLY: To some extent but what hurt me most I had stock in several different organizations. Stock that I had paid a hundred dollars a share for was only worth about twenty-five or thirty-five dollars a share minimum.

MILLER: Do you still have those stock?

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am.

MILLER: And they never have gone back up?

MATTINGLY: They haven't gone back to what I paid for them.

MILLER: Right.

MATTINGLY: They are still paying dividends.

MILLER: You bought them at the peak?

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am.

MILLER: Then the depression came along pretty soon and how did that affect you?

MATTINGLY: That hurt me. People who owed me couldn't pay me. Stores were going broke and closing up and because they owed me money I took quite a loss, from their debts you might say.

MILLER: Yes. But you didn't have to close your business did you?

MATTINGLY: No.

MILLER: Your buyers were cut down, weren't they? The people probably didn't buy cigars and candy as often because that was a luxury.

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am.

MILLER: Then, of course, I know World War II came along next and I know your son was in World War II. Were you affected by World War II in any way?

MATTINGLY: No, it didn't hurt me so much. It sort of helped at times. The greatest trouble was getting competent help.

MILLER: Yes. Salesmen?

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'sm, and truck drivers and porters.

MILLER: But you could get your stock?

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am.

MILLER: You had no trouble buying candy and tobacco?

MATTINGLY: No. We couldn't buy as much as usual. The had us cut down.

MILLER: Yes.

MATTINGLY: They cut off about forty percent of what we'd been getting but still we got enough to keep us going and make expenses.

MILLER: I would have thought that would have been a good business during World War II. It was except for the --

MATTINGLY: Shortages of merchandise.

MILLER: Shortages of merchandise and the inability to get help.

MATTINGLY: Competent held and merchandise.

MILLER: Then it picked up in the fifties, didn't it?

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am.

MILLER: In the fifties and sixties. When did you close your business, Mr. Mattingly?

MATTINGLY: About fifteen years ago.

MILLER: About fifteen years ago. What have you been doing those fifteen years?

MATTINGLY: I have a plantation where I amuse myself fooling around with it.

MILLER: Where is your plantation?

MATTINGLY: It's down near Arcola.

MILLER: And you attend to it yourself?

MATTINGLY: No, I rent it. I rent it out for cash rent but I take quite an interest in it. I go down there and finding time I drive up underneath the shade of a tree and I sit there in my car and watch the plow. I've got the whole day to pass away.

MILLER: Is this a cotton plantation?

MATTINGLY: Cotton and beans.

MILLER: Cotton and beans. Going back to the year that you came here in 1919, do you remember at any time that you were in Greenville that anybody was hanged publicly at the

Court House?

MATTINGLY: None since I've been here.

MILLER: None since you've been here. I think that there might have been some since then and I didn't know whether you remembered any of them or not. You ever remember any lynchings in Greenville?

MATTINGLY: I had heard of them before I came here but if there has been a lynching since I've been here I didn't know about it.

MILLER: Yes. I don't think there has been any since you've been here.

The main entertainment in Greenville in the 1920,s was at the old Grand Theatre, wasn't it?

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am.

MILLER: Who was running that theatre, do you remember?

MATTINGLY: I don't remember who it was.

MILLER: And then they had the band concerts, didn't they at the Court House?

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am.

MILLER: And then they had the horse races, didn't they? Do you remember the horse races with Doctor Norton and Mr. Chipman?

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am. I remember that. They were called stallion blood horses, they were trotting horses.

MILLER: Yes.

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MATTINGLY: A thoroughbred is a race horse. One is for riding and racing like the Kentucky Derby. The stallion horse you drive him to a sulky. I remember Doctor Norton and _____?

MILLER: Who also raced with them? Mr. Chipman.

MATTINGLY: Mr. Chipman.

MILLER: Mr. Reynolds.

MATTINGLY: Charlie Severs, you remember, the one who used to have the bakery here?

MILLER: Yes. Did he have a horse?

MATTINGLY: Yes, he had the best horse.

MILLER: He did? He was one of the winners.

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am. He had the best horses and he could handle them better than the most of them.

MILLER: And they all drove sulkies?

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am.

MILLER: How often did they have the races? Did they just have them in the spring?

MATTINGLY: They had them every Saturday afternoon.

MILLER: Every Saturday afternoon. Did people bet on them?

MATTINGLY: I guess they might just bet among themselves, but they had no betting except their own, never had a betting book.

MILLER: Were the races popular? Did a lot of people go?

MATTINGLY: Yes, there would be a pretty good size crowd out there. They used to have a street car running out there and the people would ride the street car and go out and watch the races, didn't have a grandstand to sit in but you would stand up around the fence and watch them.

MILLER: Just like you do in Kentucky.

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am.

MILLER: Did they have a concession stand and sell popcorn?

MATTINGLY: No, nothing like that.

MILLER: Then the other thing that was entertainment at that time was the Island Queen and the President. They used to come down the river, didn't they?

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am.

MILLER: Did you ever go on those?

MATTINGLY: No.

MILLER: You never did. Then the circuses. We used to have some good circuses in Greenville.

MATTINGLY: Yes. I used to go to all of the circuses.

MILLER: What was the best circus?

MATTINGLY: It's been so long, I expect it was Ringland Brothers and Barnum and Bailey.

MILLER: Yes, I remember some good circuses too, and they used to have parades down town, didn't they?

MATTINGLY: Yes.

MILLER: Why did they stop having parades down town?

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MATTINGLY: I don't know. I've never been able to find out why they did that.

MILLER: I heard that the elephants were so heavy, that they were scared that they were going to break the streets in.

MATTINGLY: It might have been.

MILLER: I don't know whether that was true or not.

MATTINGLY: I remember Tom Mix was here with one of the circuses, riding his famous horse.

MILLER: Yes, and where did they have that circus?

MATTINGLY: I think down on Theobald Street.

MILLER: At the end of South Theobald. That's right. And Tom Mix appeared at the Grand Theatre that night too, didn't he?

MATTINGLY: I think he did.

MILLER: At a personal appearance at the Grand Theatre.

MATTINGLY: Yes.

MILLER: You weren't here when Ben Hur played at the Grand Theatre and they had the horses on the stage? I'm not real sure when that was.

MATTINGLY: It was before my time.

MILLER: Did you go to school in Bardstown?

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am.

MILLER: What kind of schools did they have in Bardstown then, public schools?

MATTINGLY: They had public schools and private

schools.

MILLER: And you went to the public schools?

MATTINGLY: No, I went to a private school.

MILLER: You did?

MATTINGLY: Bethlehem Academy.

MILLER: Called what?

MATTINGLY: Bethlehem Academy.

MILLER: Bethlehem Academy.

MATTINGLY: In Bardstown. While we lived in Bardstown, we had a winter home in Louisville. In September when school would start, I went to public school in Louisville. We would spend the winter in Louisville and then in the spring we would go back to the farm in Bardstown and stay all summer.

MILLER: Yes, those farms around Bardstown are beautiful. It's beautiful country.

Did you go to business school? Is that the reason you like business?

MATTINGLY: Yes, I went to business school in Louisville.

MILLER: What was the name of that school?

MATTINGLY: Brian and Stratton Business College.

MILLER: And then right after that did you go into the Army?

MATTINGLY: No. I worked for the American Tobacco Company as a traveling salesman.

MILLER: I see.

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MATTINGLY: I traveled over the United States for them. Later on when the war started I went with the government buying horses.

MILLER: And went all over the country. Where did you get the best horses?

MATTINGLY: Out of Kentucky.

MILLER: I mean for the Army?

MATTINGLY: Oh, they got horses -- they finally used horses for pulling wagons and cannons and things like that. They got them out of Colorado, Wyoming, North and South Dakota, Minnesota, Montana and back in that territory.

MILLER: During the depression years when the government was doing all that work on the levee, we had pretty good payrolls in Greenville then. Do you think that was one of the reasons we got through the depression as well as we did?

MATTINGLY: I expect it helped a whole lot.

MILLER: It put a whole lot of people to work and we had a good little bit of money that was spent at the corner groceries and various places. Was your business affected by Goyer Company and Harbison Company or Itzig Company?

MATTINGLY: No, ma'am.

MILLER: Those three businesses didn't affect your business at all.

MATTINGLY: No.

MILLER: What's the biggest change you've seen in Greenville since you've lived here, Mr. Mattingly?

MATTINGLY: Well, the growth of the town. Greenville was less than ten thousand when I came here. It's big growth is the most amazing thing to me.

MILLER: It's quite a change, isn't it?

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am.

MILLER: It used to be we all stayed in sort of one little area and now the downtown is changing very much. Around where people used to live, people have given up their old homes up on the north end.

MATTINGLY: Yes.

MILLER: Were you affected by the Civil Rights Movement in any way or you or your employees?

MATTINGLY: No, ma'am.

MILLER: It didn't affect you at all, did it?

MATTINGLY: We had to have colored and white both. We had porters and some drivers and people like that.

MILLER: But you'd already been doing that all the time, hadn't you?

MATTINGLY: Yes, ma'am.

MILLER: Why do you think you liked Greenville so much when you first came here?

MATTINGLY: The nice people around here.

MILLER: You know, I've heard that before from people who had moved to Greenville, that one of the things they liked about Greenville was the people and I think that speaks well for Greenville.

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MILLER: Okay. Well, thank you very much.
Mr. Mattingly, I appreciate that.

(End of Interview)

(Transcribed by Vivian Broom)

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