CENTER FOR FLORIDA HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **JOHN LAND**

INTERVIEWER: **DR. JAMES M. DENHAM**

PLACE: **APOPKA, FLORIDA**

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D= **DR. JAMES M. DENHAM**
L= **JOHN LAND**

D: It is August 22, 2008 and I am here with Mayor John Land in Apopka, Florida. We are here to talk about some of the reminiscences of John Land and begin our oral history with Mr. John Land.

L: I am glad to have you here today and I appreciate you bringing Jennie Gordon Scully, a long time citizen of Apopka. Good to have you.

D: Mr. Land, what year were you born and where did you go to school?

L: I was born in Plant City, Florida on November 5, 1920. We moved to Apopka when I was one year old and I went to school here in Apopka. Actually, this is the same campus where I went to school. City Hall is now located where the school was located for grades one through twelve. We are in what was the gymnasium when I went to school. I graduated in this same building and met my wife here at a school function during World War Two.

area. When I grew up in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, we had anywhere from three hundred to six hundred people working there which was a big workforce. The six hundred was about wartime when we had war contracts and had to go twenty-four hours a day, three shifts a day. But, back in the twenties, I would expect maybe one-

count up the score. That was always a big thing for inside. We had other card games and things like that, tiddlywinks, you name it; we had all kinds of inside games for during a hurricane. Most of the time if it wasn't something like that or in the evening, we would be outside playing, boys and girls alike.

When we got a little bit older, Albert Martin and I would get into some things. He'd been over to Daytona and seen one of those mini-golf courses so he came back and we decided we would build one in the Martin's grove. So that was one summer we were working to build that and we got in competition with my older brother and some of his friends. They were going to build one

you got a little older you could get a boat and go down to Wekiwa. In high school, Jack Grossenbacher and me, the Grossenbacher family was a big family here in Apopka, spent a lot of weekends on the Wekiwa with hardly anybody else on the river. Sometimes two boats of us,

Rocks. But, in 1930, daddy took us over for an excursion to the beach which he liked because he was born up there.

D: Did you know what you wanted to do?

L: I always thought it would be something like Agriculture.

D: What about engineering or . . . ?

L: I didn't think too much about that at the time. I thought about it later when I got in the Army. I was an S-2 and you had to be a survey officer and all that. So I got a lot of it in the army and took some survey courses. I got into forestry and you had to survey, so after the war I should have gone into that, but I was mostly thinking of agriculture. I ended up in forestry because I was thinking about more of an outside type of thing. My grandfather was a doctor so

another one later and put it up out there at camp cozy when we had our camp in the state park at the Sportsmen's Club. When I was home for Christmas vacation in 1940 I had to work one of the shifts there because of the government contract to ship boxes to England or somewhere for Lend Lease or something. I did work before the war there like that; it was day labor at eleven dollars a week. Then I went work there after the war until we sold it.

D: Walk us through your first days at University of Florida. What were your experiences there your first year or so?

L: I was a country boy from a small town and I got up there with four thousand people. Henry

gallons of water, and mix it all together and the yeast to make it ferment and the sugar; bottle it and wait about ten days I bet it was. That was a long wait to open that homemade root beer. When I got to college they had you put a nickel in to get a nice cold coca-cola and, man, I went crazy for cokes. The chemistry building and all the buildings had those coke machines; you'd

L: Well, I'd have to do a lot of recollecting. Our battery, a field artillery battery, wrote a little history from the time we went in to my fighting unit. I've got some history that was written up. Not a whole lot about me personally but about the Charlie Battery of the 656th Field Artillery, which is Corps Artillery. I was in a training organization in June of '42. I went into Fort Bragg at the Field Artillery Training Center. General Coveson was the general there. It was a big operation there at Fort Bragg. Of course, the main base was separate from that; this was a training area. We took in new recruits and trained them. Colonel Marcus A. L. Ming was the Regimental Commander. Colonel Emerson James Bush was our Battalion Commander. General Coveson was the head of the Training Center. I thought I was pretty good at training people. I kind of liked that; bringing in the new recruits and give me twelve or thirteen weeks. They finally sped us up and we had to do it in six weeks. They wanted them out faster. So we had to train them and then take them on troop trains to their base. Then they sent me to Fort Seagull for training out there, which is all field artillery. I was out there for about three months and then went back to Fort Bragg. traTp 259.9512 -0.2 (e2 (nde)ge)0.2 (-e)0.2 (f)9.9512 543.36 cm BT 50 0 0 Tm

L: Never did. My grandfather did call me *Janess* for John, things like that. I figured it out later

was in college I thought about owning some land and planting an orange grove. When we left for the war property was about five dollars an acre and when I came back it was about fifty dollars an acre. It changed that much. You might find some less desirable land for about forty dollars an acre. I suspect everything else had probably gone up equally because property usually seeks a level of where the economy is. A lot of people were buying up property at that time to put into orange groves. Some of the people that didn't go to war benefited from that; some that were maybe a little older and didn't have to go to war and were able to stay and invest in some of the citrus and agricultural type things. When I say agriculture, a lot of the economy then was saw milling, naval stores, and things to do with forest products like the crate mill.

D: So the company was really booming then at that time? Did you go back to work for the company.

L: Yeah, I went back to work for the company, but all of us boys went into the service and left the mill in the hands of someone else to manage it. Of course, my mother was the owner of it having inherited it from my father. We each owned a little bit because he left us a percentage as children. Anyway, we were off in the service and during that time the unions took over our crate mill and put us at a disadvantage with other competitors in the state that weren't unionized. So that had changed and it was kind of a . . . I guess we felt bad about it because most the people that worked there were our friends.

D: Why did the union come in there and not other places and how did that happen?

L: There was an organizer there in Apopka and there were all these stories whether he had direct contact with the people in Moscow. He was kind of noted for being a socialist I guess, but some even claimed he was more than that. It was during that era and I don't know all the details because I was off in the service. Henry had come back sooner because they let him come back because of the country needing production of products like that. He got to the *Rhein* and he got a leave to come back to the States and, while he was in the States, the War ended over there. He got back a little sooner because of some of the disruption at the crate mill with the union. The guy locally organized it with a Mr. Conner; he was sort of a promotion guy and sort of a likeable guy in his early days. As Mayor he wanted to make friends with Unions.

D: Was he a local guy that you knew before?

L: Yeah. I knew him during that time. Anyway, we worked with the union until we finally closed up. We organized the mill out at Mississippi that was not union which supplied crates here and we moved all the operations to that one. It was in Waynesboro, Mississippi and they had a deal there to balance agriculture with industry and the county . . . had a glove factory come out of the north and put it there (of)-01d they

D:

D: I tell my students the Old South ended on the border between Orange and Marion County.

L: Well, that's about right. But, Mr. Martin . . .

D: I guess it would be Lake County and Marion County.

L: Yeah. When I came down and hitch hiked back through Marion County, it was always picturesque to me. It still had those old home farms with the mules and the hog pens and everything and I always thought that was great. That's all changed, but that was in the late thirties.

D: Those are all horse farms now aren't they?

L: Yeah, they are all horse farms. Mr. Martin always had a close relation in his life to those old plantation days up there in Marion County. Of course, then he moved to Jacksonville and John Martin was elected, I think he was Mayor of Jacksonville or something, but, anyway, he was big in Jacksonville politics and got elected. In the meantime, in1919, Mr. Martin moved and, I think he liked these rolling hills because he owned Martin's pond down there where . . . the cowboy is and he told us about coming in and, down that hill where our house was, he saw a little stream going into the lake and he had to have it. He started a dairy there, but he sold paper to citrus plants. Anyway, his brother would visit maybe once a year and he would come down as governor and he would come over and see daddy's bird dogs and they would talk bird dog hunting and stuff like that. That made a big impression on me as far as politics. Then, in '32, he ran against Dave Sholtz and we were gung-

all your buddies and all the townspeople, watching the dipping baths you know. That's what you did before T.V. Things like that, people speaking when they are campaigning, dipping baths, anything to entertain you, you would go take advantage of it. I guess you learn something along the way about life. Running our own entertainment with scrub baseball, or scrub football or