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Interview with Bill F. Rohner

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KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH BILL F. ROHNER

CONDUCTED AND EDITED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT

for COBB LANDMARKS & HISTORICAL SOCIETY and the

COBB COUNTY ORAL HISTORY SERIES, NO. 92

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Kennesaw State University Oral History Project
Cobb County Oral History Series, No. 92
Interview with Bill F. Rohner
Conducted, edited, and indexed by Thomas A. Scott
Tuesday, 17 June 2014
Location: Rohner residence, Marietta, Georgia

TS: This is June 17, 2014. I'm in the home of Bill Rohner and we're doing an interview for the Cobb County Oral History Series and for Cobb Landmarks and Historical Society. Let me just begin, Mr. Rohner, by asking you to say just a little bit about where you born and when you were born.

BR: I was born in Marietta in 1922. Dr. George Felton Hagood delivered me at home. Then I grew up in Marietta when it was still a country town when all the horses and wagons were around the Square all the time. We knew where the pavement stopped within a block or two from the Square out on most of the main streets. I went to high school at Marietta High School. I lived on Maple Avenue across from the old Marietta High School.

TS: Is that where you born?

BR: I was born off of Clay Street.

TS: Where?

BR: Right where, I can't think of the name of that street that runs off Roswell Street and runs right into Clay Street.

TS: Fairground?

BR: No, it was back this side [west of Fairground].

TS: Atlanta Street?

BR: No, if you went down Waterman Street, you run into this street and take a right.

TS: Alexander Street?

BR: Yes. My mother and father lived in a house right on the corner down there—corner of it and Clay Street.

TS: The corner of Alexander and Clay Street—there's an office building on the corner now where you can go down Alexander and turn onto South Marietta Parkway.

BR: We didn't stay there but two years. When I was two years old, my father bought

- a house on Maple Avenue. That's the house I was raised in—[it was] country. We were the last house on the left on Maple Avenue. It had woods all the way to Burnt Hickory Road.
- TS: I'm trying to visualize how far west Maple Avenue went before it stopped.
- BR: It went to what is now Cleburne Avenue. Maple Avenue stopped right there below our house, and there was a creek that ran down through there. Until World War II, Cleburne Avenue wasn't there. When I went off to World War II, they started building little houses in there because the Bell Bomber plant had come, and they developed all that on Cleburne Avenue and went all the way through to Whitlock Avenue.
- TS: Okay. So that was your playground, the woods west of there?
- BR: Oh, yes. There were probably five or six farmhouses from there all the way to Kennesaw Mountain. When we were growing up, we had access to those woods. The farmers were very friendly, and we could find minie balls around the mountain and arrowheads around the creek where the Indians had been down there years before, and just had a good time growing up down there.
- TS: I guess so. So who were some of the farmers down that way?
- BR: Oh Lordy, I wish you hadn't asked me. The lady who owned the house up on Kennesaw Avenue [Keeler]—her farm went all the way from there to Jimmy T. Anderson's. Keeler Woods—it went all the way. She had a farmhouse way out there on Stewart Avenue back on her property, and we had permits to go hunt on her property where Keeler Woods is developed now. Where the farm was that went all the way to Jimmy T. Anderson's.
- TS: Do you remember when the federal government began buying up all that land for Kennesaw Mountain [in the 1930s]?
- BR: We didn't have any property over there, and I don't know when they started buying it, but even after the government bought it, we still had free access going through there. We didn't go hunting on it, but it was nice to have, particularly for teenagers, to load up and take off.
- TS: I had heard before that you knew something about Judge James T. Manning, when he was a young lawyer, buying parkland.
- BR: Yes, and Mr. Brown was a lawyer.
- TS: Mr. Brown being the son of the governor?
- BR: Yes [Charles McDonald Brown Sr.]. He was an attorney, and he and Judge

Manning worked together on acquiring the [battlefield] property. I do know the girl I married—her father had inherited forty acres out there off the foot of Kennesaw Mountain. They were living in Miami, Florida at the time, and they were buying up this property. He got word from Judge Manning that he was going to pay him \$7.00 an acre, I think it was, for it. He said, “Now, we’re going to pay it, buy it, and close it out, but if you don’t, we’ll just take it.” So he got on the train and rode the train to Marietta, got his \$7.00 an acre for forty acres, and went up on Atlanta Street and bought an A-Model Ford. You could still buy a Ford then.

TS: Who was your father-in-law and how did he come to own land near Kennesaw Mountain?

BR: He was raised at the foot of the mountain. My wife’s father was a Kirk. Mr. Lee Kirk owned the east side of Kennesaw Mountain and [the property ran] all the way back to Kennesaw Avenue through there. He raised eight boys, and my wife’s father was the oldest of the eight boys. When he grew up, he had something to do with an optical company in Atlanta, specializing in reading glasses, when people really started buying reading glasses. They sent him down [to Miami] when my wife was three and a half years old. She had a little six-month-old sister. She and her mother and her little sister and her daddy took off to Miami, and she was raised in Miami. She was Jane Kirk. She was raised in Miami and went to high school down there. While her sister was starting high school, she had two years there. They lived close enough to the University of Miami that she could go and didn’t have to live on the campus and all. She went to college for two years. Then her daddy got evidence of where the Germans submarines were sinking ships off the coast, and he had to transport them back up here in 1943 to get them off the coast. So Jane’s sister graduated from Marietta High School in 1944.

TS: So that’s how they got back to Marietta?

BR: Yes. I met her after I had gone over and flown and come back and got out. I was going to school, and I ran into her in Marietta.

TS: Okay, Jane’s grandfather was named Lee [George Washington Lee Kirk]. What about her father, what was his name?

BR: George Maxwell Kirk.

TS: How much land did George Washington Lee Kirk have?

BR: Lee had about 200 acres or so. He had part of the east side of Kennesaw Mountain and a little bit going up the mountain, and he had about 200 or 300 acres around there all the way back to Kennesaw Avenue.

TS: There were a lot of Kirks in that area that had a lot of the land around the mountain.

BR: Oh, yes. The east side and the west side and even on further out in the country.

TS: Right, okay, so you grow up just running wild if you wanted to, I guess, out in the woods, hunting and fishing and all those kinds of things?

BR: Oh, yes. I could step out of my bedroom, get out and walk down in the Brown's Woods down there with a rifle and shoot the squirrels out of the trees. I did that, and I trapped rabbits through there and had a good time growing up.

TS: So you learned how to hunt very early then?

BR: Oh, yes.

TS: What was your father's name?

BR: Ernest.

TS: What did he do?

BR: He and his brother had a plumbing company, Rohner Brothers Plumbing Company. At the time of the Depression things were tough, and they were having to work hard. We lived over on Maple Avenue, and the plumbing shop was over on Waterman Street over at Uncle Fred's, right across from Waterman Street School. Uncle Fred lived there, and they had the shop in his backyard across from the school.

TS: Is that where Clay Homes would go in later on?

BR: Yes. They've torn that project out and are building another development there.

TS: Behind there what was that called—Holland Town?

BR: I think it was Holland Town.

TS: Do you remember that at all?

BR: I don't. All I remember is that the plumbing shop was in Uncle Fred's back yard, and my daddy didn't drive, so they would send the truck over to pick him up on Maple Avenue, and then they'd go out and do the plumbing work. Or Uncle Fred would come and get him.

TS: What elementary school did you go to?

BR: It was on Haynes Street.

TS: Haynes Street School?

BR: Right off Lemon Street.

TS: Which became Keith Elementary School later on.

BR: Then I had to go to sixth and seventh [grade] at Waterman Street. I had to get up every morning and walk from Maple Avenue all the way through town and over to Waterman Street. I went for two years and never was late or tardy or absent.

TS: Well, that's probably about a mile I guess?

BR: I think it was about a mile.

TS: Good exercise.

BR: I can remember when I was in one of those grades. One morning we had to walk on the porch to leave, and it was still dark at 7:30. My mother said, "You can't go now. You're going to have to wait a few minutes." That was the morning that the tornado hit Gainesville [April 6, 1936]—came over Kennesaw Mountain and then turned and went that way. That was the only time I was late, but they didn't charge me for being absent.

TS: Was your uncle's and your father's plumbing business gone by the time you were walking to Waterman Street School or were they still there?

BR: They were still there. I don't know how he got over there or how he got to work that morning, but all I know is my mother stopped me out on the porch and said, "You can't go until it clears up a little bit." Then it got light, and she let me go, and I went on my way. They accepted me and didn't charge me for being late.

TS: Any memories of teachers or experiences from going through school? Do you think you got a good education?

BR: Oh, I think so. I wasn't the smartest one in the class; I'll tell you that. It was a struggle, but I got through.

TS: Do you remember any of the teachers or classmates or anything?

BR: Oh, yes, I remember lots of classmates, grew up with them, and went off to service with some of them.

TS: You started to Marietta High School in the ninth grade?

BR: Eighth grade.

TS: And then you graduated at the end of the eleventh grade?

BR: That's right.

TS: There wasn't a twelfth grade back then.

BR: Right.

TS: Did you play any sports while you were there?

BR: No, I was always too skinny and bony. I tried basketball my senior year in high school, but I didn't do too well.

TS: Do you remember when they built Northcutt Stadium?

BR: Yes, I do.

TS: You would have been living almost across the street from there.

BR: Well, just one block over through the woods. Yes, I can remember the WPA built a wall around there and put it in. I believe shortly after that thing was built, I [went] overseas.

TS: [It was dedicated in October 1940, the last major project funded in part by a 1938 Marietta bond issue]. You would have graduated from high school about '39 maybe?

BR: In 1940.

TS: So it was finished several months after you graduated. The Brumby Recreation Center should have been completed by the time you graduated. [It was dedicated on June 16, 1939].

BR: Yes, they had moved the basketball courts out of the old Marietta High. My older brother [Clarence]—two years older—I believe he played basketball there.

TS: Any memories of high school teachers or anything?

BR: I remember Shuler Antley was the superintendent [from 1942 to 1959].

TS: He would have been a principal, I guess, while you were in school. [Principal of Marietta High School, 1928 to 1942].

BR: Yes, a principal, and a fellow named [Claude A.] Keith was the superintendent.

TS: What do you remember about Schuler Antley?

BR: I think he was a great fellow. He was a good sportsman, and I liked him. He was tough, but he did a good job. He had his hands full with a bunch of wild Indians like me running around.

TS: I did an interview with him back in 1978.

BR: He was a nice fellow.

TS: He had a very distinguished career.

BR: He wound up on the other [west] side of the mountain. He built a house over there and bought some acreage, and he was just a good guy. The football coach was Hollis, I think was his name. But I didn't play football.

TS: If you were too little for football or basketball, you should have run track or something while you were [in high school].

BR: I ran track all right, but I ran paper routes and things like that trying to make a dime and trying to help keeping things going.

TS: What kind of jobs did you have growing up?

BR: Well, I was [part of] the first bunch that started delivering *The Marietta Journal* when it went from weekly to daily.

TS: I think that was in '35.

BR: Yes, and I had the route down Atlanta Street all the way on the right and went all the way to the cemetery. Goss Street went through there and hit Powder Springs Street [just north of the Confederate Cemetery].

TS: So you went out Atlanta Street and then took Goss Street over to Powder Springs and then out Powder Springs?

BR: No, not out Powder Springs, back down. There wasn't too much out on Powder Springs back then. There were woods through there—the cemetery and woods, and the Marietta Country Club was up there, but not too many people went there.

TS: Did you have to collect as well as deliver the papers?

BR: Yes, took a dime. Let me tell you, the [Marietta] police chief Ernest Sanders and his brother [Cobb County sheriff] Kermit Sanders owned the Texaco service station right there on Atlanta Street. When I'd pull in there on Friday to deliver a

paper and say I want to collect, they would say, “We’ll, we don’t have any money, but you can get a coca-cola and a candy bar”—Baby Ruth, and that was the way I collected.

TS: Oh, no. Now, their Texaco Station was on Atlanta Street about across from the Sears store?

BR: Yes. I had all that down the right hand side going south, and somebody else had the other side where the Methodist Church and all was. But it was fun driving through there and delivering those papers. I did that for a couple of years.

TS: So the paper was a dime for a week. How much of that did you get to keep?

BR: I’ve forgotten now, but I didn’t get to keep much of it.

TS: I remember by the time I came along, I lived in Knoxville, but my brother and I carried the morning newspaper in the 1950s, and the paper by then was forty cents, and we got to keep fourteen cents, but we had to go out and collect it, and that was sometimes a challenge. We learned a lot about human nature.

BR: Yes. Talk about a challenge. By the time I was fourteen I had already learned to drive an A-model. My father would work all week, and he’d come home on Saturday and clean up. He didn’t drive, so I’d put him in the car, and I’d drive him down Church Street and up Cherokee Street and Kennesaw [Avenue] and places like that where he had done plumbing work and went around get fifty cents or a dollar. I mean, during the Depression it was hard to pick it up and collect it. We collected enough money and kept half of it and gave the other half to my uncle and then went to the grocery store.

TS: It was hard to collect.

BR: There was four of us in that A-model, my older brother and my younger brother and a sister. The time she went into the Rogers store up on the corner of Depot Street and Church Street, filled it up with groceries for about four or five dollars, so then there wasn’t enough room for my brother and me to sit back there with my brother and sister in the car. So we’d have to stand on the running board, and mother would drive home. I mean four dollars, you know, you bought everything in big bundles and big bagfuls. I can remember all that.

TS: Do you remember when the Strand opened up?

BR: I do because I was a Boy Scout. You have to be eleven years old. You have to be past ten, anyway. I had been going for a dime, and then I went one Friday night after the Boy Scouts. I went with some fellows, and one of the guys recognized me with that suit. He said, “You’re twelve years old. You have to start paying fifteen cents. So I had to start paying fifteen cents when I went with the Boy

Scouts to the Strand Theater. But it was a lot of fun to go to the Strand Theater, especially if you get up in the balcony.

TS: Oh, you sat in the balcony?

BR: Sometimes.

TS: My impression was that that was in the days of segregation and that the Blacks sat in the balcony.

BR: The back of the regular balcony.

TS: The back of the balcony, okay.

BR: They had a big balcony, and then the Blacks sat in the back. They went in off of Cherokee Street where we went in up through the front that way. There was a drugstore in the lobby of the Strand Theater, and you had an entrance on Cherokee Street and an entrance off the Square. A fellow named Jones and he lived right up here on Northcutt Street.

TS: Did he really? Jones. Do you remember his first name?

BR: I don't remember.

TS: But he had a pharmacy at any rate?

BR: Yes.

TS: The Dunaways hadn't come yet, but you had Hodges [on the north side of the Square on the corner of Root Street]. Do you remember going in there?

BR: I've got a list that I found on my desk the other day of every store on the north Square, east Square, down Atlanta Street, then down Powder Springs Street on the west side naming all those occupants in there.

TS: That's great. That definitely needs to go somewhere where people can see it.

BR: Going down Atlanta Street, you mentioned Sears and Roebuck a while ago, when I was talking about the service station that was across from it.

TS: Did you ever go in the Sears store?

BR: Oh, yes.

TS: That's a nice old building that dates back to when the Methodists were there.

BR: Well, the Methodists, the church and then the manse for the preacher and then a commercial building where Don Straits' daddy was a chiropractor and had an office there—and then Office Sales and Service was down in the other block had moved in there in the old building, then there's a Shell service station there, and then the Miller's had a store there and a car dealer, Butler.

TS: Yes, Butler, the one that got shot.

BR: Yes, he got shot. He's the one that Jane's father came up and got the Ford from back in there when he came in and [sold] his property on the Mountain.

TS: Is that right?

BR: Then you go on down there, and there was a Chrysler dealer on the end and then a service station and the Latimer Apartments, the big apartment building. I've got all that written down.

TS: And then the side you were collecting on you've got city hall.

BR: Yes. I started at the police station down on the corner, police station and barbershop.

TS: Oh, I didn't know there was a police station.

BR: Oh, yes.

TS: The police station was where Sherwin Williams is now?

BR: No, the police station was where People's Financial Corporation was down there on Atlanta Street, and there was a drugstore on the corner, and an alley went down through there. Then there was a building there, and the police station was on the corner, and there was a barbershop, and then something else, and then a restaurant, and then a road through there, and then the post office, and then city hall, down where the filling stations all started.

TS: Why don't you talk about your memories of growing up in Marietta and maybe what you did for recreation when you were a teenager or anything that you can recall?

BR: I was just lucky to be able to finish high school. I wanted to go to college, and I had made arrangements with my aunt. I was going to go up to a college up above Canton, a two-year school.

TS: Reinhardt?

BR: Reinhardt.

TS: Were you Methodist?

BR: Yes. My mother was Methodist, and my father was Episcopalian. I went with him until I was seven or eight years old because it was nearer to walk. We had to walk, but she was in the Methodist [church], and by that time we'd gotten a car and she was driving, so I started going to the Methodist.

TS: So you planned to attend Reinhardt.

BR: Right. I had made arrangements to work at the dairy, but I had to have some money, and my daddy didn't have any. He had an old maid sister that was working for Georgia Power in Atlanta, and she had volunteered to let me borrow some money. I told him that, and he said, "No, you're not going to do that. You're going to go to work to help me bring some money in to pay the back bills and get me out of debt so your younger sister and younger brother can finish high school." My older brother had graduated in '38, and he couldn't find a job. When I graduated in '40 my brother didn't even have a job. He picked around and had a little job here and there, but he never could find a permanent job. Then the War came along, the Japanese hit Hawaii on December 7 of '41, and by April of '42 he and Ross Reeves had joined the Air Force and took off.

TS: Ross?

BR: Ross Reeves of Reeves Seed Store. We called him Seed Reeves—that was his nickname.

TS: What's your brother's name?

BR: Clarence. He was the manager of the Coca-Cola Bottling Company for 52 years. They join the Air Force and took off, and then I was working for Coca-Cola. I had a job when I graduated from high school in '40. In May Coca-Cola Bottling Company had finished their Coca-Cola plant on Roswell Street close to Groover Hardware. I had worked two summers for fifty cents a day loading bottles off of trucks and all for them, so they said that when they built that new plant over there if they had room they were going to give me a job. Sure enough, they found a job for me in there, and I went to work for them.

I can remember working in there five and a half days a week and getting off on Saturday at noon and going into the office of Mr. Smith, the manager, opened an envelope, and there would be a ten dollar bill, a one dollar bill and eighty-eight cents because they had taken out twelve cents for social security. So I started paying social security back in '40.

TS: So you're making twelve dollars a week and twelve cents goes to Social Security, which would be one percent.

BR: Yes. I did that, and so I went on, and after my brother went in the service, I messed around about six months, and that was getting close to '42, and I was already getting up to being nineteen, almost twenty years old. I heard that the draft board was fixing to draft the class of '40, which was when I graduated. So me and my buddy—we went down there and said, “We ain’t going to go in the [army]. We might wind up in the jungle fighting those Japanese”—because we were fighting the Japanese by that time. So he and I went down and took exams for Army Air Force and Navy Air Force, and three weeks later, they called me to come down for a physical for the Air Force. I did and I was accepted.

TS: The Army Air Force or the Navy Air Force?

BR: Army Air Force. The Air Force at that time was controlled by the army.

TS: Do you remember when you went in? Did you go through basic in the hot weather or cold weather?

BR: I can tell you when I went in. The date of induction was April 8, 1943.

TS: So you’ve been working for Coca-Cola for two or three years then?

BR: Yes. See if that isn’t right.

TS: We’re reading the enlisted record and report of separation honorable discharge for Bill F. Rohner. The date of separation was 23 September 1945 and date of birth 24 December 1922—408 Maple Avenue.

BR: Go on down a little further.

TS: Yes, here it is, date of induction, 8 April 1943; date of entry into active service, 15 April 1943. It says place of entry was Ft. McPherson.

BR: I wound up going to pre-flight. I went up to a college up in North Carolina, I can’t remember which town it was, for pre-flight, and then did fine in that and got down and started to doing the flight stuff. I messed up, so then I just stayed in.

TS: So you thought you were going to go in to to be a pilot?

BR: Yes. That’s what all of us wanted to be.

TS: And you ended up a tech sergeant, airplane and engine mechanic gunner. So they trained you in airplane mechanics once you got in?

BR: Yes. Then I went to gunnery school. I graduated from gunnery school and was put in a pool, and when my name was drawn on a list assigned to a crew. We

were trained together, and then we went overseas and flew 35 combat missions.

TS: Thirty-five, wow. I see on here Distinguished Unit Badge, 1 May 1944, and Eamet medal with three bronze stars and an air medal, 19 October 1944; first oak leaf cluster, 3rd Bomber Division, 19 November 1944. And you've got all your medals here.

BR: Yes. I've got all those old medals.

TS: Wow, that's great, that's wonderful. So it says Ardennes campaign, Rhineland campaign in northern France.

BR: We flew out of England. The campaign at that time, I didn't have any idea. The 8th Air Force was all I knew.

TS: So you were part of the Eighth Air Force?

BR: Yes.

TS: Have you ever been down to the museum near Savannah?

BR: Yes, me and my main navigator spent a lot of time down there helping. You go down there, and you'll see our crewmen's picture in the lobby.

TS: That's wonderful. Your reason for separation was for the "convenience of the government."

BR: That's right.

TS: The War was over.

BR: That's right.

TS: So what was it like going over to England? You hadn't ever been out of the country before that time had you?

BR: No, I never had been out of Georgia. I was telling somebody I hadn't been any further north than Chattanooga or any further south than probably maybe Valdosta until I got in the service.

TS: What was it like being in the military with people from all over the country and going over to England?

BR: You know, at my young age in my early 20s we just did what we were asked to do, and we got close. I mean, being in that crew, we were just like brothers. We looked after each other and hoped to get through. Out of those ten men, two got

injured so badly that they never could fly any more.

TS: Injured in the War?

BR: In flying in combat. So many aircraft and fighter planes...

TS: So you're basically flying over Germany?

BR: Over Germany, yes.

TS: Then running into guns from the ground?

BR: Yes, from the ground, anti-aircraft aircraft. The first probably fifteen missions we had to contend with German fighter planes. Our P-51s got so good, and we got enough of them over there that they kind of went all the way to target with us. On the first missions we flew, they'd get us across the Channel, and then they'd have to leave, and we were on our own. But we flew those 35 combat missions, and as I said, two injured so bad—no one was killed, but two injured so bad that they had to quit flying. In fact, one of them just about lost his arm. The lucky part for me is the pilot and I flew those 35 combat missions, and we didn't get a scratch. We didn't even have to have a Band Aid. All the rest of them had injuries of some kind. Some was real serious, and some weren't too serious.

TS: What were you actually doing on a flight?

BR: Standing between the pilots. We'd get on the plane and start down the runway. My job was to sit in the swing seat between the pilot and the co-pilot and call out air speeds so both of them could watch the planes on either side. Once they got off, then I would step back and had some other little things to do, some switches to turn, oxygen to turn on, and that kind of thing. Then when we got up in the air and got across and the fighters came in, I stepped back into the turret, one step back, got up in there, and my job was to protect the pilot and co-pilot from fighter planes.

TS: You're firing a gun to protect them?

BR: Yes. The top turret has two fifty-caliber machine guns. You'll see one over there when you go out. You might get shot by the one that's over the refrigerator that somebody made for me. But there are two fifty-calibers, and I would stand in that turret, and I could swing that turret all the way around to the back and all the way around to the front. My job was to protect the pilot and co-pilot because if something happened to them...

TS: You're in trouble.

BR: Yes, we're in trouble; none of the rest of us could fly.

TS: Wow.

BR: Well, also the navigator, he got through primary and basic flight training, and he messed up, and he got washed out of that, but we don't know what he could have done. He says he could have flown a little bit.

TS: You didn't want to find out.

BR: We didn't want to find out.

TS: So 35 missions—was that like about one a month or one every two weeks?

BR: Well, the weather was a factor over there. I've got a list of every one of them. On September 20, 1944, we were briefed for the first mission. Then the mission was scrubbed; we didn't get to fly. September 21 we flew the first mission actually to Ludwidshafyn, somewhere over there.

TS: So basically you flew missions for about six months until May when the War in Europe was over.

BR: Well, I finished my last mission on March 3, 1945.

TS: So five months, 35 missions, about two a week. That's a lot.

BR: Let me tell you about going to Hamburg.

TS: You were flying over Hamburg?

BR: Yes. My grandfather was born in Hamburg. His mother died when he was fourteen years old. He had a sister that was two years older, and they got along. Then his father remarried when my grandfather was fifteen, going on sixteen, and I believe it was at sixteen that the Kaiser would automatically pull them into service. He was subject to being called into service. His father had gotten married six months after his mother died, and they didn't like the stepmother, so he got his sister to bring him over here. He raised three boys and three girls. Those three boys all had to go back over to Germany and fight [in World War I], and then me and my cousin went back over there in World War II and fought them. I told the bombardier, I said, "If you see any Rohners down there, drop a bomb on them. We don't want them coming back over here. Just wipe them out and get rid of them."

TS: What was your grandfather's name?

BR: Frederick Rohner.

TS: When the War ends, do you come back to Marietta?

BR: I came back and went back to Coca-Cola and got my job back and starting going to Georgia State at night. It took two years, and then Jane and I got married, and then I kept my job and worked.

TS: Okay, you come back from War, you get married, and you're working at Coca-Cola, and then what happened?

BR: Now, wait a minute, I wasn't working at Coca-Cola when I got married. I got married on April 16, 1947. On March 15, 1947, I left Coca-Cola and went to work for People's Financial Corporation.

TS: Your separation was September 23, 1945, at Maxwell Field in Alabama, Maxwell Air Base. So you come home in September of '45 and get married in April of '47?

BR: Yes. When I went back to Coca-Cola, I started going to night school. Georgia State was a branch of the University [of Georgia], but it was in Atlanta. It wasn't too far from the bus station at that time, and I could ride the bus down there. Then a month before Jane and I got married, on March 15 I went to work with People's Financial Corporation because Mr. Fowler told me, if I'd come to work for him, he'd let me drive a company car to go to night school, and I wouldn't have to fool with the bus.

TS: That would be nice.

BR: So Jane and I got married. I went to work for him on the 15th and then Jane and I got married on April 16, a month later and that was in '47. We were married in First Presbyterian Church by Dr. Harry Holland. We were the first couple he married after coming to Marietta.

TS: What is Mr. Fowler's first name?

BR: Bob Fowler. Mr. John Fowler founded People's Financial Corporation. Mr. John Fowler was the president of Citizen's Bank on the Square, and he built that big old brick home up yonder next to the hospital—the one with the columns—back in '24 or '25. He had a son named Bob. Back in those days—and you're not going to believe this—but people would come in the bank to borrow money on a car to get it financed, and the federal law wouldn't let the bank lend money on cars. They would lend on a horse and buggy and a wagon and all. So Mr. John Fowler got his directors [together]—Rip Blair and some of those—and he said, "Can we form a company called People's Automobile Loan and Finance Corporation and have it ready by March of '27? My son Robert is graduating from college at [the University of] Georgia." So they started in 1926, the People's Financial Corporation. Mr. Bob had gotten out of school, so he put a

partition in the bank. They were right there across from McLellan's [Department Store on the south side of the Square]. An alley [Winters Street] went up through there.

TS: They were on the other side of the alley?

BR: Yes, and then there's a window out of the building. So they took the window out and put in a door and put the People's Financial in the back. Somebody came in [the bank] wanting to borrow money, and he said, "Well, I can't let you have it on a car as collateral, but if you'll go out and go down the alley and go through that door, my son's back there, and he can lend you money." That's how People's Financial got started.

TS: How does Bob Fowler relate to the Bob Fowler who was the editor of the *Marietta Daily Journal* in the 1960s?

BR: They're cousins.

TS: Okay, Bob Fowler offers you a job at People's Financial in 1947, and that begins a lifelong career.

BR: Yes. And I'm still working two days a week.

TS: So 67 years ago you started working for them, and you are still working with them two days a week. Wow.

BR: They put up with me. In fact, Bob Fowler III is the president of the company now, and he's got a son named Robert IV. I spent yesterday going over to our Mableton branch and doing some business over there. I spent the whole day working with him yesterday.

TS: Okay, so they start out on Winters Street on the alley. How long did People's Finance stay there?

BR: You know, I can't remember the exact time because later the People's Loan & Finance on Atlanta Street was next to Cox's Printing Office. There was some kind of a bank in there, and it went under. Then that building became available, and they moved down there. I don't remember what time they moved down there.

TS: How long did they stay next to Cox's Printing?

BR: Oh, a long time—it sure was a long time. [A number of years ago], Mr. John Fowler was living in the big house, and he moved. He and his son, Bob, bought a house right over here—Rosser Little's house. [Little] was president of the Cobb Exchange Bank. They bought his house, and when they bought that, I don't know how long they lived there. But Mr. John passed away, and then they moved the

business up on Atlanta Street up into his house and converted it into the home office. At that time we had 27 branches.

TS: Wow. When you go to work nowadays where do you go?

BR: I go up there to the building next to the hospital; they have an office up there. I've been a corporate officer for twenty-something years.

TS: When you were pointing to Rosser Little's house you were pointing...

BR: Right straight over here, Whitlock Heights on the left. There's a circle right in there where they're working now. The first turn you go around that circle, it's up on top of the hill.

TS: How did you meet Jane?

BR: I got home from overseas, hadn't been home about five or six days, and I was uptown around Atherton's Drugstore. That's where we hung out as teenagers. And here comes Ted Bogle. Do you remember Ted?

TS: Oh, absolutely, I knew Ted very well through Cobb Landmarks.

BR: Here comes Ted Bogle. He had just finished officer's training, and he said, "I'm glad you got to see me today because I ain't got but two days before I ship overseas." He said, "I've got my orders right here in my pocket." He said, "What you doing tonight?" I said, "I've got a date with Jo McMillan. Her father was the county commissioner.

TS: Oh, yes.

BR: George McMillan. He said, "I've got a date with a new girl in town." He said, "My father's car caused me some trouble, and I wanted to take her to Atlanta, so we could go dancing, but I'm afraid to drive down there." I said, "Well, I'm sorry; can I help you in any way?" He said, "Well, we can double date." I said, "Yeah, but I'm an enlisted man, and you're an officer. You don't want to be roaming around with me." He said, "Look I've been an enlisted man for a couple of years before I got to go to Officer Candidate School. So don't worry about that. We've known each other since the first grade." That's a picture of him. That's a picture of Ted, and that's my wife, Jane. He had a date with Jane. He said, "I've got a date with a new girl in town," and said, "I want to take her to down there where we can dance." I've forgotten the name of the hotel it was. It was close to the Fox Theater, somewhere down there. We could eat cheap, go into where you could dance and get a little food.

I said, "Okay, we'll double date if you don't mind, if I can be of any help to you." So we picked up my date and picked up Ted and of course, Ted and Jo knew each

other—my date—we'd all dated each other back in the days when we were teenagers. I took Ted out and picked up Jane, and when he got in the car, he said, "Now, this is a new girl in town, and her name is Jane Kirk, and I just want y'all to meet her." Jane pops up and says, "I ain't no new girl in town. I was born in Marietta." Before we got to Fair Oaks, I already knew that she was a Kirk, that she was born out at the foot of the mountain, and that her daddy was the oldest of the Kirk eight boys. She says, "I will tell you this. When I was about four years old I did have to move to Miami and lived down there and grew up in Miami. We haven't been living here for long. We moved back here."

TS: When did he meet [his future wife] Estelle?

BR: Oh, I don't know how that all happened. All I know is that I met Jane that night, and we came back, and he took off to the South Pacific, and he was gone for a year and a half or so, I think. I was through with my combat missions, and I was just piddling around. I had been transferred over to Alabama right across the line to some little field over there, and then it wasn't but about another month or two after that when Hitler committed suicide [on April 30, 1945] and the War got over in Europe.

TS: So this picture is 1945 then when you're still in uniform. This is before you get out?

BR: Yes. I forgot now what month it was that Hitler, when the War in Europe was over.

TS: V-E day is May 8, 1945. Oh, I see that the photo is dated April 18, 1945.

BR: He and I went out and took our dates to Atlanta.

TS: So that's when you met Jane was April 18, 1945. You say you'd been in school with Ted all the way through?

BR: Yes, Ted and I started the first grade together.

TS: How about that?

BR: We got through high school, and his daddy had arranged for him to college for two years. But like I told you, I couldn't go to college because my daddy said I had to work to help him make some money.

TS: Well, Jane is very pretty [in the photograph].

BR: Thank you. We were married for sixty-five years before she passed away.

TS: That's fabulous. You got married in '47, so by the time Ted got back, you're

already married.

BR: Yes, I think he'd been back a little while before we got married. He never begrudged me marrying her. I can't remember when he and Estelle got married, but sometime after we did.

TS: You had two or three daughters?

BR: I have two daughters. Georgeann is married to a fellow named Bill Watson, and he's from Marietta. They've got two grandchildren for me, Max [Maxwell] and Abbie. Their pictures are in there. Both of them graduated from [the University of] Georgia. Max is 28 years old, and he's got a job with some big computer company in Atlanta with an office in Buckhead. Abbie graduated from Georgia, and she's got a job. She's twenty-five years old and not married, so maybe one of these days I'll have...

TS: More grandchildren?

BR: Yes, or great-grandchildren. But Lee came along, and there's seven years between Georgeann and Lee. My youngest daughter got married, but she's never had any children. She still lives in Marietta over there in the house that I moved out of, and nobody's ever lived in that house but Rohners.

TS: On Maple?

BR: Yes—owned by the Rohner family.

TS: This is L-e-e?

BR: Yes, Barbara Lee. She married a boy named Philip Chesney. My mother was 94 or 95 years old when she went in a nursing home. When she went in the nursing home, Lee and Philip got married. So we got them to live in the house. My daddy had already been dead a little while, so they lived in the house to look after the house while Mother was up there. Then Mother died when she was in the nursing home, so we just sold it to Lee and Philip, and they fixed it up and added on to it and have a pretty nice looking place.

TS: What year did you say you moved over here on Maxwell Avenue?

BR: The first house I built was over on Northcutt Street, and we lived in it seven years. Then we built this house and moved in it [in 1957], and Lee was born the May after we moved in it.

TS: Was this area just beginning to develop when you moved onto Maxwell Avenue in the 1950s?

BR: Yes, this was part of the Little estate. Do you remember Wilder Little? This was part of his estate, and he sold me this lot. There was a house across the street, and next door—John McCollum who used to be with Johnny Walker's clothing store up on the Square.

TS: What's the story on the house on the corner? I guess you call it an International style house?

BR: I call it the Florida house, Ross Reeves' old house. It looks just like a Florida house that you would see in Miami down in Florida, the design of it and all.

TS: It's very different.

BR: Yes. He raised two kids in that house. He had a daughter and a son, and he raised them there.

TS: Did you say you built this house yourself?

BR: I had it built.

TS: Who did the building?

BR: Ward Watkins.

TS: You said that this area was just beginning to develop, so all the houses were built about the same time?

BR: There wasn't a house down there at all [pointing south toward Woodland Drive, the next street behind the house]. There wasn't anything down there back then. The house on the corner wasn't there, and Ross' house wasn't there. Ross built his house after we built this one.

TS: I thought it was probably a different time. But most of the houses on this street were 1950s houses?

BR: Yes. When I bought this lot, the property line started at Whitlock Avenue and ran all the way down and around to the creek [Ward Creek].

TS: When you bought it your property went all the way to Whitlock Avenue?

BR: No, the estate that owned it, the Little Estate.

TS: Oh, I see.

BR: They had seven or eight acres.

TS: It went from Whitlock Avenue to the creek?

BR: Yes, well, not quite to the creek, but almost.

TS: Is this what you call Whitlock Heights?

BR: Yes, part of Whitlock Heights. This is what we call the poor man's Whitlock Heights because the wealthier part is across the creek. Ross and I named this the poor man's Whitlock Heights.

TS: What was it like living here as a young married person?

BR: It was fine.

TS: I would think it would be a good place to raise a family.

BR: Yes. Of course, there wasn't any traffic on this street like it is now. When I built this house, they had just opened it up all the way down to Durham Street, but the road [originally] stopped right out here because there was a fence down through there. Mr. Little had a fence down through there, and they had a horse barn right out here, and his daughter had horses. I don't remember the date when he died, but when Mr. Little and his wife both died both the same year, the kids took it over, inherited it, and cut it up in lots and sold them.

TS: Do you remember when they paved Whitlock Avenue?

BR: When I was growing up, Whitlock Avenue was paved from the Square out to, what is it across from the church out there on the right?

TS: Oh, Lindley Avenue? You're talking about Pleasant Grove Missionary Baptist Church, the old Hedges property.

BR: Yes. What is the street where Whitlock Heights dumps into it?

TS: Kirkpatrick Drive?

BR: Yes.

TS: So that's where the paving went to?

BR: Yes, when I was growing up, and from there on out it was dairy farms. The Mannings had a dairy farm on the left, and somebody else had one on the right.

TS: Is this related to Judge Manning?

BR: Yes, some of the family. I can remember during World War II when they paved

- Whitlock Avenue further out from Kirkpatrick Drive toward Dallas. This part of Whitlock Heights right here where we are now, this lot before the Littles got it belonged to Mr. John Elder. He sold the crown cork and seal that you put on the Coca-Cola bottles.
- TS: He did what?
- BR: The little cap that you put on Coca-Cola bottles—he was a salesman for the Crown Cork & Seal Company. He had a house up there—that big old house that is still sitting up there that has been worked over. It faces the road, and I think it’s seven or eight acres. It went all the way back down—Whitlock Drive was on one property line, and this big old poplar tree right over here was on the other one. Right in here was a barn, and they had horses. Mr. Elder and Mr. Little swapped places. The Littles lived in a brick house where the street comes down from the high school.
- TS: Winn Street?
- BR: Winn Street. There’s a brick house on your left, a two-story brick house. Mr. Elder had remarried, and he had some younger children, and Mr. Little’s kids were grown and growing—teenagers—and they agreed to swap. The Littles built a tennis court up there and horse farms and all that.
- TS: I understand there are some stories that you remember about how James T. Anderson got his property next to Kennesaw Mountain in the early 1940s, wasn’t it?
- BR: Oh, the story I heard—I think it’s authentic—the bank had foreclosed on that piece of property out there.
- TS: I think that’s true.
- BR: The farmer was a colored man, I believe. Maybe it was a colored man that lived on the farm. Anyway, they had foreclosed on it, and back in that time the First National Bank didn’t want the Federal Bank to know that—didn’t want it to show up as a debt—so they put it up for sale. It sat there, and I understand they told [Mr. Anderson], “If you’ll buy it and sign a note for it, then we won’t even charge you interest on the note for the first year.”
- TS: Wow, that’s a good deal.
- BR: Yes. And that’s the story I had always heard. So he got that property out there.
- TS: Yes, I forget what it cost.
- BR: Twelve dollars an acre. He got that, and he didn’t do anything with it for a few

months. Then he got married, and Jimmy T. had a little age on him when he got married to Jennie. Then they went out there and built that nice home.

TS: I don't think you could get any property for twelve dollars an acre any more.

BR: Oh goodness, just think what he got for that stuff that he sold off the backside.

TS: Tell me a little bit about People's and its history. Of course, you were doing automobile loans to begin with back in the 1920s, 30s and 40s.

BR: When I went to work for him, it was primarily automobiles. Used car dealers back in those days would come in and borrow money and then go up to Detroit or somewhere and take a tow bar and buy used cars and bring them back down here. They'd set up little lots around, so People's Financial Corporation financed the lots for them and loaned them money to buy the lots and set up business. Then the person who went up to get the cars and come back...

TS: Up to the Ford plant?

BR: Yes. Different places up north, and that's how a lot of those used car lots got started. General Motors was the only manufacturer of cars that had their own financing. They could finance a car for you there. Then People's was financing cars for Ford dealers. I know we had Ford dealers in Douglasville and places like that where we owned the buildings, rented them the buildings, did the financing for them and that kind of thing. It was what was called foreplanning where you get a shipment of cars and they come in and we've give them a check, lend them money on those cars, and they would use that money to pay the manufacturer.

TS: Wow, sounds like a pretty good business.

BR: Yes, it turned out to be. When I went to work for them we had 27 branches.

TS: They already had 27?

BR: No, we didn't quite have 27 then, but we wound up just a few years later. Seven were in Florida and the rest were local—had one in Cartersville, Dallas, all the way up to Dalton and Rome, Gainesville, and places like that.

TS: What were you doing for them?

BR: I started out in the finance business, and Mr. Fowler and a buddy he had grown up with formed an insurance agency. He wanted me to help him put together that insurance agency. I knew what fire and theft insurance was on automobiles and what a fire insurance policy on a house was. I didn't know all this stuff about workmen's compensation and dealers' automobile liability and all that kind of stuff they had to have, so I had to get in there and go to work and learn how to [do

it]. He had a woman that was running it for him, and her grandfather got sick. He lived up North, and she had to go up there to check on him. He was so sick she had to call Mr. Fowler and tell him she had to stay. So he and I ran that thing. I worked with him on that thing, and he worked with me, and I ran that for him for nine years.

TS: So you learned the insurance business?

BR: Yes.

TS: Who are you selling the policies to?

BR: Well, individuals, but primarily to the dealers on the buildings they have bought and all that stuff.

TS: So everybody that People's did business with—you were selling insurance to.

BR: Yes, and then trying to sell some on the individuals too. We had built up a pretty good business there. All we had in Marietta was Earl G. Medford Insurance Agency, and then A.D. Little Insurance Agency, and one or two others, but I had a good time doing that. Then they came along one day, and a man talked to me. I'm not going to tell you who he was, but he said, "I just sold a piece of property, and I've got \$20,000. I need to invest it in something." He said, "Don't y'all borrow money there to lend out?" He said, "I know you all borrow money from banks." People's Financial Corporation did have credit lines for people to borrow money. He said, "I've got this money, and I need to get some interest on it. The bank will pay a little, but not much. I want it from somebody else." I went back and told Mr. Fowler about it, and he said, "Well we'll figure out something." And that's how we started our demand note part. We started taking money [that people invested], and we had demand notes. That was our operating expenses. When we had those 27 branches, it took a lot of money to get them going, so we got that going.

Another thing we did that developed from that—the company decided to make second mortgages and lend money on mobile homes lots. That got turned over to me, and I got involved in that. So that turned out to be a pretty good thing. We got to the point when we started taking in money and all and trailer park lots and small mortgages—I was telling one of the finance companies, Marietta Federal Savings [and Loan Association], and some of those guys, "We're going to spend a little bit of money to make some second mortgages on some houses. If you've got a customer in there that's having trouble and needs a second mortgage, and Federal Savings can't make it and Cobb Federal Savings and Marietta Federal [couldn't], if you send them to me, I'll see if I can help them out."

So that's how we got our second mortgage division going. I started doing that. I can remember, one of those guys when I went in to tell him, I said, "You're

probably not going to be too happy.” He said, “I’m as happy as [I can be]. You’d be surprised how many I’ll be sending over to you. We’ve got a lot of them that have a little bit of a problem, and we can’t make seconds, and we don’t want them to have to foreclose, and we don’t want to lose them. So we’d like to see them keep going. If you can help keep them going, that’ll help us too.” That’s what I finally wound up heading up.

TS: So that’s basically what you spent much of your career doing?

BR: Yes.

TS: You’re still working two days a week, so what are you doing now for your two days?

BR: Right now I’m a corporate officer, and I just do a lot of work just signing off papers. I still go do some appraising. I went to an appraisal school to learn more about appraising and so forth, so it’s all turned out and been pretty good. It’s been good for me.

TS: Well, Marietta has changed quite a bit since your childhood. What do you think about the changes that have taken place over the years?

BR: Well, just like everything else, some of it has turned out to be beneficial, and some of it’s turned out to be not too good. I wouldn’t know, but I think it’s a good place to live. I wouldn’t want to live anywhere else.

TS: Well, I think I’m about out of questions. Thank you very much.

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