

**Transcript of an oral history interview in the collection of the
BREVARD COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION
308 Forrest Ave., Cocoa, FL 32922**

Nancy Yasecko: Interview with Laura Hiott. August 28, 1992 at 2940 Hessey Ave, NE Palm Bay Florida. Nancy Yasecko, Nancy Yasecko, cameraman Robert Gilbert. Camera, Sony BVP 50 Beta SP recorder, Sony BVW35. Audio on channels 2 & 4. Copyright Brevard County Historical Commission 1992. Laura Hiott, tape 1.

Tell us when you were born and where it was.

Laura Hiott: Well, it was creek called Mullet Creek. Mullet is a fish, you know, that jumps a lot. My father built a house near the Indian River and I was the first child. That's where I was born. I always say Mullet Creek because it was just a few feet from the creek.
[00:01:00]

Nancy Yasecko: What year was that?

Laura Hiott: October 15, 1900.

Nancy Yasecko: When did your family first come to Florida?

Laura Hiott: My father and his oldest brother were from southwest Georgia. They had been farmers. They knew how to farm because they were raised on a farm. My father was 21 and his brother was about 5 years older. They decided they'd start out in a wagon and come to Florida. They heard there was some government land, they could homestead some land perhaps and start anew. Find some good land.

Nancy Yasecko: When was this?

Laura Hiott: This was in 1885. They started out and traveled. There were no roads, just wagon trails. When they got as far south in Florida as Titusville, they went all the way across. They were from southwest Georgia. They got to Titusville, our county seat. The people there said, "You're at the end of the trail, and we suggest you sell your horse and wagon and buy yourself a sailboat and sail down the river, if you want to go any farther south."
[00:02:00]

That's what they did. They settled land at Melbourne Beach. In those days, there were acres and acres of pineapples growing, so they got a job working in the pineapple fields. It was pretty rough, handling those stickers, thorns. They had to wear gauntlets on their arms and leggings on their legs to protect them.

But on weekends, they were sailing around to see what they could find that was maybe suitable for a place to settle. They sailed down the river opposite Grant, went up Mullet Creek. All those mangrove trees that over hang the creek. They got out of the boat, climbed through the limbs of the mangrove trees, went into the wilderness. Dug down and found out the soil was black, and said, "This is it. We're going to stop right here." That's what they did.
[00:03:00]

They built a cabin out of, what I call cabbage palmettos, because the people used

to cook the heart of the sable palm. That's what it really is, our state tree now. Cabbage palm, they call them, the old timers. They set them up just like they grow, for the sides of the cabin. They used the palm fronds for the roof to keep from leaking, water coming in. They fixed it real good.

They cooked outdoors so the cabin was cooler for sleeping. I guess they didn't probably have any windows much. So that's what they did.

Nancy Yasecko: That's the house where you were born?

[00:04:00]

Laura Hiott: No, No. My father married my mother. After he came down, he didn't marry yet for awhile, he was 35 and he came when he was 21. My mother came with her father and her two brothers and half-sister. A real estate man. They settled finally in Grant and my father met her there.

She worked for nine different families before she married him. Dollar and a half a week and her board. Keeping house, cooking, whatever. When she told these people, their name was Barden, they came to Melbourne every winter for a number of years, that she was going to get married to Bob Smith, they'd say, "Well, he's so much older than you. You shouldn't marry him." He was 14 years older than my mother.

[00:05:00]

But she married him. She said, "I don't care what you say, I'm going to marry him." They wanted her to go north and meet a wealthy man. She said, "I don't want any wealthy man. I love him and I'm going to marry him." So she did.

They raised enough string beans they grew about this high ...

Nancy Yasecko: I think we're going to have to stop for a second here because of the train.

Laura Hiott: Seems like beans were regular to raise in order to have them get to market in good shape. You know no wilted or anything. They took care of them, to pick them at nice sizes. My father was very particular. He didn't want us to pick any small ones. We went to school in the summertime and helped him pick his beans in the winter. It was hard to get help. Usually, our school would begin the day after 4th of July. We'd get out about Christmas-time. That's the way we went to school.

Nancy Yasecko: So you grew one or two crops of beans in a year?

Laura Hiott:

[00:06:00]

Two. Usually the first crop would be planted earlier, about the middle of October; and another one in January. Because if you planted them too early, he said the worms would eat them up. The weather was warm and just too many worms, cut worms, chop them down.

Well anyhow, my mother and my father raised enough beans the first year they were married, they were married in 1898, to build a house and it still stands. 1899

is when they built the house, the year before I was born. The big house. Quite a bit of the lumber in that house came from the ocean beach, driftwood off of ships. They had no way to get it back. Maybe a heavy storm, wind would blow it off. People that lived in the area would just pick it up because they didn't come get it, no one else.

[00:07:00]

So that's what they made the house out of, part of the lumber. It's quite a house. It's two stories high. We had a celebration when Papa had been there 100 years a few years ago. I have a son, John, that lives over there and his wife and three sons. They run Honest John Fish Camp, they call it. They sell bait, they rent boats for people to go out and catch fish.

Nancy Yasecko:

You were saying there was something unusual about the porch on that house.

Laura Hiott:

Well, the house faced the creek, the south side. A lot of the wind is from the south or southeast in the summer. That creek out there came around like that into the main part of the river and went on down below there a ways. The breeze seemed to blow real good a lot of the time on the south porch. But sometimes we'd have west winds, so they'd get on the west side. There's a porch all the way around except the east side.

[00:08:00]

He didn't have it finished on the east side because he planned to have a fireplace and have a chimney up there, but he never got that built. In fact, I guess we didn't really need it here in Florida. But that was what he thought he'd do.

Nancy Yasecko:

How were the mosquitoes?

Laura Hiott:

Terrible. We had to live in the house in the summertime. We couldn't stand it outdoors. We had to fight them. You'd take an old pail and put a lot of sand in it, build up a smudge pot. Have them around the house. Then I've seen my father take the dry palmettos, light them in the house, they'd be 3-4 feet above the ground, so he could burn millions of them under the house where it was dark, with that fan. He's twist it around in a hurry so it'd never catch anything on fire.

[00:09:00]

In the nighttime, my mother made mosquito bars with nets. It took about 20 yards of the finest cheesecloth she could buy for the sides, and overhead it was made like a canopy. The top was made of unbleached muslin and it has strings to the ceiling to hold it up. It went all the way to the floor. First, before we'd get under that at night to keep the mosquitoes from biting us, we had something called Persian Insect Powder. It was brown-looking. We'd put it in a pan and set fire. It didn't blaze, it just smoked.

Closed the windows and the doors, then you went to the door and listened didn't hear the mosquitoes singing, then you knew they were all dead, or you thought they were. Then you could go in and get under the mosquito net and go to bed. You had to fight them. They'd kill you. They would, but thank the Lord they were not malaria mosquitoes. I don't think anyone had malaria around here then, not

that I know of.

Nancy Yasecko: I've heard of mosquito brushes. What were those?

[00:10:00]

Laura Hiott: I have one in the house, I should have brought it out. When the palmetto, these cabbage palmetto trees are growing, before they get full big palm frond, cut it off, strip it up and let it dry. They made hats and caps and fans and different things out of them. People used what was available, what they had at hand.

My father felt sorry for the bear and other animals, so he said "I'm going to dig a bear well." So he dug a bear well out behind our house a ways. He sloped it down so the animals, bear or any animals could go down and drink water and back out. That was always known as a bear well to we children.

Nancy Yasecko: A cistern for the bears.

Laura Hiott: He never had any meat markets. He always went into the woods and killed deer, bear. Over to the beach, sea turtle or whatever. There was, I think, a law but they never enforced it years ago.

Nancy Yasecko: Did you ever see a bear run in the woods?

Laura Hiott: Oh yes, we were on the beach looking for turtles one time and there was a bear. The man behind us, he had a gun. I don't know whether he killed it or not. Yes, there were bear. My brother killed some. My brother John was a good hunter. We had lots of wild ducks in the fall of the year, the Mallard ducks would fly from up north. After they stayed here awhile and they'd fish, it made them taste fishy. So mother cooked them, and I think she cooked with baking soda in the water. Par-boiled them before she baked them.

Nancy Yasecko: We're going to close the door here.

Laura Hiott: Well I'm glad, this will make it cooler. Maybe it probably won't last too long.

Nancy Yasecko: Transportation in Brevard. How long it took to get ...

[00:12:00]

Laura Hiott: Pretty slow. Sailboat, but my father loved that kind of transportation. He said it was the most peaceful, quiet. If the wind died out, you had a pole, and it wasn't as much fun. He'd pick beans until 4:00-5:00 in the afternoon and get them ready to be shipped by express that night. He's take them over to Grant. It was about a mile and a quarter, mile and a half in a sailboat; and ship them to northern markets by express that night.

Nancy Yasecko: In the railroad.

Laura Hiott: Yes, by train. They'd set a lantern out at the depot there and the express train would stop. They'd know they had something. Other people probably had something to ship too, but my father's slogan on his letterhead was "RT Smith, In Beans I Trust." That's where he made his living for years.

[00:13:00]

Nancy Yasecko: Did you learn how to sail a boat yourself?

Laura Hiott: No, but I remember when I learned how to row a boat.

Nancy Yasecko: You were that young?

Laura Hiott: Yeah. I remember my brother Charner, the one aged next to me, was about two years younger than I, would take my mother sometimes, and my brother John, the one that's still over the river. They'd go down about a mile in the rowboat to see the Lathams, Mrs. Latham. You've heard of Oak Lodge? That's where she was.

[00:14:00] We'd been watching Halley's Comet one night, and everything had all brightened up. We didn't know, we thought maybe the tail of that thing caught on fire or something. It was her hotel. She'd set it on fire and burned it up. Then she left town and went back to Utica NY where she came from. She was quite a woman. They used to go out, my father and other people, she was one of them. She's the only woman we ever say dressed like a man. Women didn't dress overalls like they do now then.

They'd pick these saw palmetto berries, the low kind. It was a good place for rattlesnakes. You had to watch under in those thickets. They picked them and made trays about this wide, maybe this long. They had slats, narrow slats of wood and a space between where the air could get to them. They put the berries in there and hung them up from the ceiling out on the porches to dry. They'd ship them to Detroit MI. There was a pharmaceutical company that made tonic medicine out of them. That's one of the things they had to make a little money coming in. That was it.

Nancy Yasecko: You talked about using sailboats to get around. What about the first roads around here. How were they made?

[00:15:00]

Laura Hiott: We didn't come to Grant very much, very often. There was just a dirt road, then they put crushed oyster shells. The people who lived here years ago must have lived on oysters almost because there's just loads of them. They hauled them out by train loads. The cars like they used to haul old rock in to make roads. And then they used them, crushed, for the chickens. They sold them.

It was just loads and loads of oyster shells. I remember how hard it was to pick beans down on those rough places where you had to kneel or stoop to pick them. You always had your knees went down to pick some beans for someone. String

[00:16:00] beans that lived down there years ago. It was a hard life but you know it was what we were accustomed to. We didn't mind it. It was just part of our living and we didn't know any better. Just part of it.

Nancy Yasecko: The railroads and whether you ever took a train ride.

Laura Hiott: Well, mother had eight children and she heard they were going to have a little rodeo or parade or something, a fish fry or something, in Melbourne. She took her eight children, and had to get on 30. That was the number train going up between 11:00-12:00 and we'd come back on 29 between 5:00-6:00. The conductor said, "Well, mother, where are you going with your brood?" She said, "I thought I'd take my children out for a little outing up to Melbourne." He said, "I'm not going to charge you anything for them, just 0.25 cents from Melbourne to Grant." It was 0.25 cents.

[00:17:00] So we went to the fish fry. She thought she'd be real nice to her children, and they had an old theatre there. She had no idea what it was going to be, the picture. It turned out to be Lon Chaney and the Hunchback of Notre Dame. "Oh," she said, "That's terrible to take her children to see such a terrible looking old man." But that's what we saw.

We stayed and we met some people from Sebastian, that's south of Grant. They said they were going to come back that night. They asked my mother would she like to stay with the children and come back on a boat. They had a big boat with a cabin, and we knew them. So we came back that way and saw the fireworks. That was an outing.

Nancy Yasecko: Sounds like a wonderful time.

Laura Hiott: My aunt, my mother's sister, lived in Malabar. Their name was Bolton. Charlie Bolton used to carry the mail in the sailboat from Titusville to Jupiter Inlet. That was before the railroads came. I never remember that. That was before I was born. That was quite a thing he did.

[00:18:00]

One time, my aunt, my mother's sister said she was going to be nice to my mother's children and her children, and they were going to go out and pick huckleberries. There were loads of huckleberries west of Tillman. This was Tillman. We could pick a quart in a little while, there were just loads of them. We'd go out in the wagon with her children and she always said, "Watch out for snakes. There might be snakes in there now. Be careful." So we had more huckleberry pies and everything was delicious. You don't see them anymore. The freeze is cold or something's happened to them.

Nancy Yasecko: Sounds like you had a pretty good diet.

Laura Hiott: We had a wonderful diet. We never had anything but a cold until we started to school. We went barefoot until we started to school, then they bought us some

[00:19:00] shoes to wear. We were healthy kids. For Christmas, my father would go out and cut a wax myrtle tree and we made all the decorations for it, popcorn and paper chains, and mother knew how to weave some little paper baskets. And if we got a package of ZuZu Ginger Snaps or a 0.10 package of lemon snaps when my father would go to town to carry the beans over, he'd stop by the grocery store; we thought we had something. We enjoyed any little thing we'd get, we appreciated it. We didn't get much.

Nancy Yasecko: What kind of toys did you have?

Laura Hiott: Every Christmas there was usually a baby in the family. My father and mother, he had a nice little red wagon, and we'd pull the baby. I was the oldest and my brother pushed the wagon and take the baby. Sometimes we'd tip him over in the yard, but he'd get up, we'd brush him off, he'd be all right. That was the kind of things we had. We didn't have much and we didn't expect much.

[00:20:00]

We had a Victrola, wind up for music. My father, he played violin but he never would let any of the children touch it. He never knew a note. There were five brothers, and they never knew a note, just whatever they could hear, get it in their ear, and he'd play it. He was the life of the party. He'd play awhile, then he'd get out and jig a little bit and sing a little bit. Would you like for me to sing a little song for you? One that he liked.

Nancy Yasecko: I'd love it.

Laura Hiott: He was from Georgia, and this is called Savannah Home.

[00:21:00] "Where the balmy air is sighing and the roses catch the dew, and the mockingbirds are singing in the trees. There's a charming, lovely city, and I'll ever hold it true. I was brought up among its butterflies and bees. And the pastures and the fields, I lived the whole day long. But from all of them I've been obliged to roam. But when I think of the happy times, a merry dance and song, I long to see my dear Savannah Home. Oh, I long to see you once again, and feel the scented breeze. And through those sunny streets I long to roam. Oh I long to hear the mockingbird singing in the trees that grow around my dear Savannah Home."

That's what he loved, because he was from Georgia, you know.

[00:22:00] You know I've tried to find the music. I didn't know if I'd ever find it. I wrote to Columbia SC. I wrote to Atlanta GA, and no one ever heard of it. But I went to a show in Washington DC, a one-man show. He picked 4-5 banjos. After the show was over, I said to one of the ladies who was helping him, "When he gets dressed," he exercised, danced and working with his instruments until he was just real sweaty from exercise, "When he gets cleaned up, tell him I would like to speak to him."

Because he was a musician I thought maybe he had heard of this Savannah Home.

[00:23:00] He said no, he had heard someone say something, but he didn't know about it. He told me of a man at the Library of Congress who was up on folk music and stuff and said he might be able to help ya, and he did. They sent it to me. It's kind of a Negro minstrel thing, but I think it's pretty.

Nancy Yasecko: It's beautiful tune.

Laura Hiott: He like to play that, my brother did.

Nancy Yasecko: Were there any songs that anyone wrote about this area?

Laura Hiott: I have one at home over there. It's about the Indian River. My son's 4th grade teacher, she passed away a year or so ago, she wrote it. She lived in an apartment that overlooks the river, up on the bluff, we call it, in Melbourne. She lived there, I think, it was 43 years. She looked at the river every day and she wrote this poem, it's kind of pretty.

I think probably other stories or poems have been written maybe, but I knew about that one, I have that one.

Nancy Yasecko: Okay. What are the early business that you recall in this area?

[00:24:00]

Laura Hiott: Well there were only two stores in Grant. There was just one until my father and another man went into business together. It was 1904 ... I think that's a mosquito after me or something after me.

Nancy Yasecko: Let's get rid of that bug. Tell me about the different business that were there.

Laura Hiott: These people had a store, next door. There was just a road, a street between us. My father put up the store. He thought, well, since we had a big family we'd save some money to put up a store and have groceries you could buy wholesale. My mother and we children could run it while he run the farm. He said he couldn't make a living on the west side of the river, it's all white sand. Over there, he had black, good soil. He just loved that place. He could make a living and he was always bringing over things. He'd come and go, and some days we'd go over and stay with him all day, and cook dinner for him, and pick beans for him.

[00:25:00] Anyhow, this man was Danish. They were from Denmark, the older people. They didn't want anybody else to get into anything business like they were in, and they were very mad when my father bought this piece of land and throwed up the store, and later made it a living quarters where we could be there and run the place. The other person, he wanted to go back to North Florida, where he came from. That's where it was.

But the town didn't grow, they wouldn't sell land to anybody much. They just wanted the Danish people in there. Now they're all dead and gone, nearly, the

[00:26:00] town is growing some. He got murdered. There was a murder. He used to sell groceries and go out on Saturday mornings with a mule and wagon, delivering a wagon load of groceries. Sometimes he had a 100 pound sack of chicken feed or something laying up on the seat or somewhere around him.

This day he started out, he'd go out on Saturday morning. We saw him leaving the store and going west. The highway was west of the railroad track in those days, the Dixie Highway. This man waylaid him. He was strange. He was a strange man and he had been crawling in the grass. They found some green grass between the barrels of the gun or something.

[00:27:00] Anyhow, the section crew came along. We had crews that kept up the railroad tracks. Now they don't have to do that, they have rocks that hold the rails and cross ties better than just the dirt and sand. They saw this mule standing there with a wagon stopped. The railroad track was near where the highway was, the old Dixie. They went over and there was a man laying down by the road, dead. He'd shot him. The mule had sense enough to stand still and stayed right there. They went, some of them stayed with the mule and wagon, until they went on to Grant and told people, notified them about what they found.

That was a big, very big trial. It went to the United States Supreme Court. We had a governor, Governor Sydney Catts, that pardoned him. My father helped arrest him. We were scared to death. There were four of them: my father, the High Sheriff Joe Brown from Titusville. He was the sheriff for about 20 years. No one dared run against him because they would lose. The Deputy Sheriff of Melbourne, and the Chief of Police of Cocoa, Mr. Jabbert.

[00:28:00] Two of them went first. My father said it would be better not all four of us go to his house and not first. My father and one of the men, one of them, I don't know, it must have been Joe Brown the sheriff, I don't know, the deputy I guess. He came to the door and my father knew him. He'd been to our house, he'd been to the store and bought things, and he'd eat supper with us sometimes.

We thought he acted strange. He'd sit at the table and he'd just look all around and act a little bit different, but we never knew he was this kind of a person. Anyhow, they entertained him, talked to him for awhile. Then the sheriff came in, and the other man, and my father introduced him to Sheriff Brown, and Mr. Brown told him, "I have to get you on a train. It'll be soon. You get ready, we're going to take you to Titusville and we'll explain more later." So they took him and put him in jail.

He was from a wonderful family in Virginia.

[00:29:00]
Nancy Yasecko: What year was this? When did this happen?

Laura Hiott: 1914 I believe it was. We hadn't been living in Grant too long, but it was such an exciting time. We were so afraid my father going to the house where he was, what

might happen. He might shoot some of them or something.

One of his shoes was run over in the heel somewhere, and they tracked it, and they found grass sticking in the barrel of the gun, somewhere he'd been crawling along to waylay this old fellow. It was my father, and just about everybody in Grant went to the trial in Titusville. It went to the United States Supreme Court and all around. But he pardoned him, but later we heard they got him for good some other time, another place. That was one of the terrible things that happened down there.

[00:30:00]

Nancy Yasecko: Interview with Laura Hiott. August 28, 1992 at 2940 Hessey Ave, NE Palm Bay Florida. Nancy Yasecko, Nancy Yasecko, cameraman Robert Gilbert. Camera, Sony BVP 50 Beta SP recorder, Sony BVW35. Audio on channels 2 & 4. Copyright Brevard County Historical Commission 1992. Laura Hiott, tape 2.

School, and then later.

Laura Hiott:

We couldn't get to school, only by sailboat. My mother took it upon herself to go to the school and get some books so that she could teach her children. She painted three blackboards for the three older ones. Charner, John and I. Every evening after we ate supper, we called it supper, we had to go in that living room and learn our lesson, ABC's 123's.

[00:31:00]

Well my brothers were not a bit interested in books. They wanted to be in that river fishing, crabbing, or whatever. So they didn't learn very much, I guess at that time. But I studied, I loved it. My daughter loved it when I was teaching her when she was young. When I got into the school, I was in my 10th year. I passed through the 1st grade, I passed 2nd grade to the 3rd grade because mother had taught me.

She knew the need of an education. She lived in Missouri and they had to walk 2.5 miles to school, 2.5 miles back home, cross two streams of water with stepping stones when it was dry weather, but when it rained or snow melted, father would come in the wagon and the horses would have to swim across the water flow to take them home.

[00:32:00]

So I just loved school. I had a first teacher, she was from Malabar, her name was Ada Comstock. She was from Florida. I always remember her. Then the next teacher we had came from Malabar, and she came on horseback or had a buggy when it was raining, and had a horse. Sometimes try to get him up to the front porch of the old school house but she couldn't get him up there.

The next one I had was Miss Norwood. She came from Titusville. Usually they board in the community with some of the children's parents. After that I had one teacher for three years, when I was in the 6th -7th -8th grades. She walked to the school. That little house down there in Grant, that historical house was she and her husband's house. Some of the old clothes that she made, things in there, she loved to do handwork. She mad it. She was a very nice teacher.

[00:33:00]

Nancy Yasecko: What was a school day like? What would you do in school?

Laura Hiott: The teacher always read from the Bible. We had prayer in the mornings. Sometimes we'd sing a little song. My Country Tis of Thee, something about America or something. Introduction to school, starting the day. Then we'd get started on our lessons. There were not too many of us, but everyone had a number of subjects they were studying. At one time, I had about 8-10 when I got farther up in 7-8th grades. Every night we took lots of books home to study, arithmetic and things we had to learn for the next day.

[00:34:00]

I loved spelling. The teacher said if you write your words on the blackboard or somewhere, we had slates or scratch paper, it wasn't good ink paper but pencil paper. Write it 10 times and you know it. That was one of my favorite subjects. I learned to like spelling.

It came time for me to go to the 9th grade, and there was no way to get there in Melbourne. They didn't have any school buses then. That was in 1918. So, Mr. and Mrs. Haisten, Oliver's parents, came down to see my father and mother. They said, "Let Laura come up and live with us. We'd just love to have her." So they let me go, and that was the best school year I ever had because I didn't have to help Mama with the children or the store. I could study a lot.

[00:35:00]

Mr. Haisten was taking care of 2-3 big houses down by the river from where they lived in Cocoa. They had big cisterns of rain water, so Saturday morning I'd take my clothes and go down and wash them, hang them on the hedge or whatever it was place, then later go down and take them in. Iron them and get ready for school the next week. But they were very nice to me and I never will forget them. They didn't charge my parents very much, and we got along just fine. That was my first experience being away from home, going to school.

[00:36:00]

The next year, they got a Deputy Sheriff, his name was Bayber Rhodes, from Melbourne. Had a Model T Ford, and they picked me up first. I was the only one ready to go into the 10th grade. I passed the 9th grade up there in Cocoa. I worked hard to study, but I couldn't finish my algebra. I had to take that over in my 10th grade, but they passed me to 10th grade.

So I worked, I studied, and that was the only 9-months term I ever had. That was the year the war ended, World War I. We went to school in this Model T, it picked me up and then go up the road three miles on the old Dixie Highway, picked up Eliza Sudekis [00:36:35], her father was the one of the officers of the school board.

[00:37:00]

Then we'd go to Malabar, three more miles up the road, and he had a little homemade trailer he hitched onto the back of the Model T, and picked up maybe half a dozen, not very many, children. Never had a door to the back of it until one day a hitchhiker jumped in with them. They all hollered. Bayber Rhodes went back and got him out. It took us an hour to go 12 miles. The roads were pretty bad, and

if you got off the crushed oyster shell part of the road, get in the sand, you'd have to push to get out of the sand. It isn't like it is today.

[00:38:00] But I loved school. When I went to school in Cocoa, I'd just come home on the train. They had a little measles and they closed the school for a couple of weeks. That was one time I was up there. But anyhow, they had a male teacher. He was from Wilcox, Florida. His name was Raymond J. Lindsay. He said to me, "I wonder if you could teach for me a couple of weeks? The boys hit my knee with a ball or bat or something, and I'm on crutches. I'd just like you to teach."

I was 16 and I didn't know anything about teaching. I said, "Listen, just make out a schedule. Have the classes come every day." There was just one or two in our class, not very many of us. "I'll try." So I got along with him all right. I was 17 but I don't know. I think I wasn't cut out to be a school teacher.

I liked children. I kept the nursery over at the First Baptist Church, the little ones, for 14 years. I helped them in Bible School. I think anything that will help children be better children and learn is a wonderful profession. I think it's good.

Nancy Yasecko: Were you ever part of any dramatic productions or different plays?

[00:39:00]

Laura Hiott: I used to dance some when my father would play for dances and other people. We had dances sometimes up at the old schoolhouse. Not the schoolhouse where I went, but the one that's now is their civic building down in Grant. I met a boy there that was a good dancer. He taught me how to waltz, and that was a dance I liked. We just had a Victrola [inaudible 00:39:25] it was a hotel up from the hill of the school there.

I only ever heard it, My Isle of Golden Dreams. We used to dance to that. "Out of the missed lips I have kissed so tenderly ..." It goes along. I wrote to him for years. He left here. He was an archeologist. He went to Paris first, and he went down to Africa after he married. He was from Wisconsin.

[00:40:00] Just now I'm writing to one of his daughters. I have been for awhile. She's been in Africa. She's never married. She's a minister. They're lovely people. They had a little tent tavern there in Grant. There were two brothers, Lonny and Eddie Pond was their names. The father dressed up like the mother one Halloween night. He dressed up like her and they won a prize, they were just excellent dancers.

We had a lot of fun. We just made our own entertainment. People get together and sometimes if some people didn't dance then, well they'd play cards awhile. Someone would make a cake or some punch or something. Just nice.

[00:41:00]

Nancy Yasecko: Do you remember any tent shows or anything like that coming through?

Laura Hiott: Well here in Palm Bay there used to be a man who was a magician. He died since we came here, but he was very good. Then there was another one that worked with him. He was a juggler. They worked a lot together around the Catholic Church, they did big things in the fall of the year, you know.

You knew everybody, everybody knew you. It's just a different world today. You don't know your neighbors sometimes. It was just like a big family, almost, the way it used to be. Everybody seemed to enjoy the others' company and parties and things.

Nancy Yasecko: You mentioned, you were talking about World War I being over. Do you remember there was rationing during World War I?

[00:42:00]

Laura Hiott: Yes, we had sugar rationed, some of the things. Then sometimes I knitted some washcloths. I'm not a very good knitter, I've never learned to make a sweater, but we did everything to help in the effort. Johnny, my son, joined the Boy Scouts after. I thought it would be good for him to join the Boy Scouts after we moved to Palm Bay. I used to take my little two-wheeled cart and collect newspapers for them. They collected automobile tires and different things for the war effort, to make some money.

Nancy Yasecko: In World War II?

Laura Hiott: Yes. It was later, too.

Nancy Yasecko: Do you recall the plane spotters and all of that sort of thing?

Laura Hiott: Oh, we sat up in a tree and every time we'd see a plane fly over. Ground observers. Yeah, we had a band on our shoulders. And my mother, it was 24 hours, you know, up there and they had a ladder up from the cabbage tree by the river at Grant

Nancy Yasecko: You climbed up the tree.

[00:43:00]

Laura Hiott: Well, we went up the steps and then there was a place where there was a telephone. We'd call Tampa. Any kind of flying object, any plane or anything you had to report what you saw. My husband would work 8 hours a day in the carpentry business until we moved here, and I don't know whether you've ever seen these lookout towers over on the ocean side, he stood up there and it was four hours at night. If someone didn't come to relieve him longer than that, and then come home. They were Coast Guard Auxiliary. He had a uniform and everything. Everybody tried to do their part, and did.

Nancy Yasecko: What were they worried was going to happen?

Laura Hiott: Well you know there was submarines off the coast here. People were told not to

[00:44:00] burn any lights shining out toward the ocean. There was a family of Germans down in Grant that did. They got after them. People should do what they're supposed to do. If it was the enemy, they see lights there, they might come and do something dangerous. You never know.

The first seaplanes landed, I think it was about 1912. There were three of them. They had pontoons on them. Down at Mr. Catch's place there. Mr. Catch was a mechanic, he was an inventor. He invented the turbine pumps to pump water out of the Everglades and places. He just loved Sebastian Inlet. He's the one who helped started to open it up. They dredged in there. They worked hard, first with shovels, and then it filled right up. That's a dangerous inlet, there's lots of rocks in there.

[00:45:00] And one man, Mr. Arnold, Ed Arnold, I think was his name, his first name. There were some people came down from Kansas, Topeka I think it was. There were about 25 of them. They wanted to go out. It was on Sunday, out in the ocean. He had a nice ocean-going boat with a cabin. But there were so many of them, he didn't want to take them, really.

He got on the bow, they went out and it was fine. It was pretty choppy and he told them it was pretty choppy. He didn't really want to go. But 14 of them drowned when they turned, the boat turned over. You know people should listen to the captain of a boat or anything and do what they say, because that would have saved them from being drowned. He didn't want to go.

Nancy Yasecko: We talk a little bit about when the stock market crashed and the Depression here. I guess there wasn't much cash around.

[00:46:00]
Laura Hiott: We were in South Carolina in the early 1930's. My husband had worked for Ford Motor Company in Jacksonville. He was on the assembly line, the body and trim department. He had to wear a little black tie and he didn't like that. He was a farmer, you know.

Anyhow they kept promising him to start up again. They closed down, the Depression was coming on. At first it was everything in Florida was selling, real estate, everything went wild. Then the whole thing fell out the bottom. We got on the farm, he said, "Laura, let's go up to my home state in South Carolina. I know how to farm. I was raised on a farm. They won't starve us. We'll make something deep."

[00:47:00] So we got along pretty good, but we worked very hard. We had a pig, and he'd kill it when it grew up to be a hog. Then we bought a cow, and she was a Holstein, black and white. She didn't give anything but blue milk so we fattened her up and sold her for beef. Then we got one that was a good black and tan Jersey. She gave six quarts twice a day of milk with nice thick cream. I'd never milked a cow, I learned how to milk. After we brought her home, it was late in the day, we'd been

picking peanuts. Picking peanuts growing in the ground, and we'd been over to my husband's cousin's house picking peanuts off. She said she would sell us the old cow.

I was glad we bought her, but she hated my daughter. She'd put her head down and shake it. We had to keep her in the lot or she'd kill her. She was frightened to death of that old Lucy. I'd milk her. First, that morning after we got home, it was late and we went to bed that night. Doc said, "I guess I'll go out and see if I can milk old Lucy while you cook breakfast." Cooking on a wood stove, you know. I said, "All right."

[00:48:00] Pretty soon here, he came back. I said, "What's the matter?" He said, "I can't make old Lucy stand still. She just goes around and around." I said, "Let me go out there, I bet I can do something with her. Maybe I can." So I fed her the first thing in the trough, some feed, get busy eating. She didn't bother me. She had very short tits, kind of hard to milk. But good milk. I never did like any other cow's milk as well as hers. She was good.

Nancy Yasecko: So you came back here after?

Laura Hiott: Yeah, after that. My husband went to fishing. He had a brother who was doing commercial fishing. Fishing used to be good. Sometimes they wouldn't make but \$5 a night, and again they might make \$50. Fishing was much better than it is today, and the fish tasted so much better.

The water, you never heard the word pollution in the Indian River you know. There just wasn't such a thing. When people come and throw all kinds of things in the water, it makes it polluted. You know that.

[00:49:00]
Nancy Yasecko: How did they fish?

Laura Hiott: He had a gill net. You seen them on wrecks, haven't you? Out by on the fish houses. Corks come to the top of the net, and the leads weight it down toward the bottom. They'd fish all night. They'd put a light on their net. They'd come in in the mornings. Usually they'd clean some mullet fish, that was our favorite, just common fish to eat. Clean them and have them for breakfast when they got ashore home.

[00:50:00] Then they'd go to bed and rest awhile because they were up most of the night. After they ate lunch or dinner or whatever, they would go down and mend their nets because there were big fish that would get in the net and tear up the webbing. Now they have filament or something, they call it, but it used to be linen twine. My husband knew how to mend. He learned how to mend the nets. They had to mend them or the fish would go right through the holes.

It was quite a bit of work, but they seemed enjoy it. I worked in the crab factory. They had a factory there where they had blue crabs and they'd cook them, steam

them. They only gave me 0.08 a pound for picking the meat. The claw meat, the dark meat, sold for 0.25 cents a pound, and the body meat, 0.30 cents a pound. This was back in the late 1930's when Lindbergh went to Paris, and the baby was kidnapped. That was the time, in the 1930's.

Nancy Yasecko: There were citrus groves going in all around here when you were growing up, I guess you saw them.

[00:51:00]

Laura Hiott: When my father got to rating so many beans, he was stooping a lot and he got lumbago in his back. He said, "I'm going to have to get into something else, something that's easier to gather." He asked the old-timers, the people who'd been living here what kind of seed to plant to get a citrus grove. They told him grapefruit seed. Then you could learn the bud, he said.

So that's what he did. He had little rows of grapefruit seedlings coming up. He'd bud those. He learned to bud and he was in demand from other people to have him come and bud things for them. When he died in 1948, he was 84-1/2 years old, he had practically, or just around that much, 20 acres of bearing citrus of various kinds that he grew from grapefruit seeds. He was very proud of his grove.

[00:52:00]

Nancy Yasecko: Was that over on the barrier [island 00:52:02]

Laura Hiott: It was on the old place where he homesteaded.

Nancy Yasecko: I guess there aren't any of those trees left.

Laura Hiott: Oh there dead, My brother John lived there, he didn't care. He just let them die. I guess they would have died from old age maybe by now anyway.

He never came over to see us every day or every night, but when he'd come he always had a watermelon in the [ruck?] sack on his back. He had some vegetables or something else he'd raised to bring home for Mama to cook. She was a good cook. We'd cook things, she would, for him to take over there, but he could cook. He could make hoe cake. You know what hoe cake is?

Nancy Yasecko: Is it like a pancake?

Laura Hiott: You make it like a biscuit, only a little stiffer, the dough, and fry it in a frying pan. They used to turn it with a hoe years ago, that's where they say they got the name hoe cake. My husband was very fond of that, I used to make it. Didn't want the fire too hot under the old iron frying pan. You didn't cook it in a thin frying pan. Seemed like everything tasted better that was cooked on that stove or in an iron pot. I don't know it was just different.

Nancy Yasecko: Let's cut, we're at the end of this roll.

Interview with Laura Hiott. August 28, 1992 at 2940 Hessey Ave, NE Palm Bay Florida. Nancy Yasecko, Nancy Yasecko, cameraman Robert Gilbert. Camera, Sony BVP 50 Beta SP recorder, Sony BVW35. Audio on channels 2 & 4. Copyright Brevard County Historical Commission 1992. Laura Hiott, tape 3.

[00:54:00]

Please tell us about this 4th grade teacher.

Laura Hiott:

Written by Bessie Reeves. The Indian River was the story, poem.

"It was looked out the windows upon this river for 43 years. It is like an old friend, Indian River. Bessie Reeves was a very active teacher, right to the end of her living on earth. She loved people and was concerned about their learning, about what was most rewarding. I was fond of her and her sincerity, and all she did for others without expecting any reward.

"Her appreciation of what others did was proven by a shelf of our booklets, one each, from way back, and one on her table in the living room after she left us on earth. The good teachers like Bessie Reeves helped instill the knowledge of the benefits of good that has been done in our area by those now grown."

[00:55:00]

This was written by her friend, Alberta Leisure, who made one of these little booklets each year for years. I found this in Bessie Reeves thing and gave it too her, Johnny my son.

The Indian River. The Indian River lies languid along the Florida coast. For miles, her brackish waters, to many a fish, are host. Her tropical shores reach far apart. Her bed is deep and wide, and the silent crane and heron stand watching by her side. Ever up and down her channel fly yacht, dredge, tug and boat while in her quiet backwash, contented Mallards float. Daily the native sunshine makes glassy this lagoon. By night she is often silvered by a mellow Southern moon. Man's harried hustle, she little but notes. Nor does she heed young laughter but holds within her voiceless deep the now, before and after.

[00:56:00]

She wanted something about me and she picked ... You can have that if you want it.

Nancy Yasecko:

All right. Let's go on to some more things about Grant, Palm Bay area. What was the early postal system like down there?

Laura Hiott:

We had a little post office in the store next to our store. They had a little bit of everything. They just about run the town. They had the only telephone in town hanging on the wall, one of those old-fashioned kinds. They had the telegraph office. The lady that was running the store most of the time, there were several sisters. Their name was Jorgensen, they were Danish people. She learned that from a man they sent to teach her how to dot-dash, that kind of calligraphy she learned. They had the only telephone, the only telegraph office, the only express office, the only post office. For a long time, the only store. They about run the town. That was

[00:57:00]

amazing.

We got mail on two trains, twice a day. We really got better service than you get today because I've put a letter in my mailbox the other day, three days they didn't pick it up. I had to flag them. I guess they just didn't see it. But that isn't right, they should've pick it up.

[00:58:00]

The train that went north was number 30, and it came in between 11:00-12:00 every day and took the mail. They hung it up on a crane and they grabbed it with a big arm, iron arm. Sometimes it'd fall down and go under the train. Very rarely, but once in awhile.

The post offices were small, and the post mistress was always nice. You could get your mail whenever you wanted to go and get it twice a day. The train that came down in the evening came down between 5:00-6:00, number 29. It carried passengers, it carried express, it carried baggage and mail.

My father used to have a friend who was in the mail car, and when he'd see a letter addressed to my father, mother said before they were married, he'd show here where his friend would write a little note or say, "Hello dog," or something. People were just like a big family. You knew everybody and everybody knew you. It was just different. I think it was a nice way to live.

[00:59:00]

Nancy Yasecko: Tell us about Ms. Latham and the manatee.

Laura Hiott:

Mrs. Latham lived about a mile south of where I was born, on the east side of Indian River, Mullet Creek. She lived farther down, about a mile. Her place, she called it Oak Lodge. There were a lot of oak trees. Her daughter's name was Queenie. My mother's youngest brother married Queenie. Queenie was a lovely young lady, but her mother was just not so refined. She was just different.

[01:00:00]

My mother said she and Aunt Queenie, she was later my aunt, were going over to cook for the men and women. I guess Ms. Latham was the only woman out with a bunch of men picking saw palmetto berries. When they all came in for lunch, my mother said they had a nice chicken dinner, everything. Ms. Latham says, "You got some hot water? Some boiling water?" "What do you want with some boiling water?" "Oh, I'm going to make some hasty pudding." She took some corn meal and stirred it up in boiling water, and not a one of them would eat any of it. They had some lovely lunch or dinner which my mother and later her sister-in-law cooked. That was the way that was.

It was quite a place she had. She made guava jelly. There were plenty of guavas back in the early days. Different things, sea grape jelly and different things you don't get every day. She had a lot of Northern people, some wealthy people. Some very intelligent people came to her place. Sometimes they would go out in the woods between the ocean and her house and the river, and kill some animal. There

[01:01:00] was a taxidermist, he'd mount the head or something.

It was quite an interesting place. We liked to go down there when we were children and see them and see the place. But one time, I don't know who helped her, but she caught a sea cow, we used to call them, manatees really what they are, call them. Of course, it was against the law now to have one, but she got it and had it tied up to a dock or near their wharf, she called it. She had some man put it in a tank and ship it to the Smithsonian. I don't know what they did with it.

Years ago, there were a lot of Indian mounds. There was an Indian mound on my father's place, and one time a man came and dug in this Indian mound and got a nice vase. It got two handles and looked like it was pretty big. He sent my father a picture of it after he got it.

[01:02:00] I love the Smithsonian. I've been there and different things they have in Washington DC. It's very interesting. But this old lady decided she'd burn her house down. It was the night that ... Halley's Comet was the brightest along about 1908-1910, along through there, those years. We were awakened by this bright light shining in our windows on the south side of our house. Her house was south of ours. We thought maybe the comet caught on fire. We'd just been watching it that evening. But it was her house and she left town after that. They said there were no valuables there. She had them all packed away. She was just a wicked old woman.

[01:03:00] The nice thing was her daughter. Her daughter was just the opposite to what she was. She was just different. When her daughter died, she left five little girls. My mother's youngest brother married her daughter. Wells was their last name. She had typhoid and she had a very young baby, just a few weeks old, and they had to let someone adopt it out for [Uncle Lon 01:03:05] my mother's brother had to let someone out of the family adopt the baby. The rest of them, he wouldn't let anyone adopt any of them. They were all girls, five little girls.

They used to go to the beach and gather shells. There was some kind of white shells that resembled angel wings. She added those and covered Aunt Queenie's grave with those. When her mother died, this is what Papa said before I was born, before Mama and Papa were married, I think her mother was living over there with her. She often told her daughter, "Don't ever bury me out here in these woods. I don't want to be buried here. I'm buying a lot up in Georgiana on Merritt Island and I'm going to be buried there."

[01:04:00] Well poor soul died, and Papa said there were boats there and people that wanted to take her body, but she says, "No, I'm going to put her there on the trail to ocean beach, right along by the trail." I remember seeing the grave out in the woods. She hired a man to take a stone and put it up in the Georgiana cemetery so people would think she was buried there. She was wicked. She was awful.

Nancy Yasecko: That was Ms. Latham's mother.

Laura Hiott: It was her mother. That was when Papa first came, before Mama and Papa were married, but he used to tell us about it. I don't think Mama was living. Papa played for a dance in Grant one time. I was young, I must have been about 2-4 years old and my brother Charner next to me in age, he was about 2. There was about 2-3 years difference in our ages. We got the measles. Papa took them, then he got over them, but they were bad for him. They didn't know to shade the windows to keep the light. It affected his eyes later.

[01:05:00] Mama said Mrs. Latham's daughter, Queenie was her name, brought the nicest scalloped oysters. They scalloped them, I think they baked them with milk and butter and whatever. But they couldn't either one touch it. Papa couldn't eat butter and milk anyway. He's just a person that didn't like it. Mama said, "We'll never have a cow because he doesn't like the smell of milk around." So we just used the canned milk or dry milk. So that's what we had.

But it was always amazing to go down to her place. She had so many interesting things. We'd meet nice people, but I was small and I don't remember all the things they told us. But it was quite a place.

Nancy Yasecko: There were some other hotels around here.

Laura Hiott: There was one in Grant called Richland House. It was up, there was a little ridge, a little bit higher land than just ordinary down by the Winn-Dixie road there. They had people coming every winter. There was a man and his wife from Providence, RI. Their name was Weeks. They wanted to take Sarah, the oldest one of Aunt Queenie and Uncle Lon's daughters, wanted to adopt her and send her to school, educate her. Uncle Lon said, "No. I said I won't let anyone adopt any of my girls except the baby. That one I would have to have someone take her."

[01:07:00] They said, well that's all right. We'll take her and send her to school and educate her," which they did. It happened that she went to Brown University and graduated. She studied Greek and art. She was well-educated, and that's the school where Linda, my granddaughter went. In fact, she's a graduate of Brown University.

Nancy Yasecko: I guess Northerners would come down just to see.

Laura Hiott: Yes, and they had what they called chamber maids to take care of the rooms and clean up. They didn't have bathrooms like they have nowadays, the modern. They had good cooks. It was the regular ones would come often in the wintertime to get out of cold weather, just to enjoy it.

Nancy Yasecko: Do you recall the Indian River regattas, where they used to run the boat races?

Laura Hiott: No, that was before my time. I heard about them. They said it was mostly sailboat racing and like that. But they did have steamboats that had a store, a trade store or something. My mother said the first grits she ever ate came off one of those boats.
[01:08:00] They'd bought it. The boats had to have a lot of water, so they couldn't come in

close to the shore, but people would row out to the boats and buy things. Food to eat, I don't know what all they had, but grits was one thing mother said they'd bought off ... They called them the trade boats.

But everything seemed to be, most of the travel was by water. They didn't have very good roads, and of course we didn't have any airplanes.

Nancy Yasecko: Did you ever see any of the steamboats, or were they gone?

Laura Hiott: They were gone. I have some pictures of them, read something about them.

Nancy Yasecko: Did you ever go to the beach to go swimming?

Laura Hiott: No, we weren't allowed to go swimming in the river. It was so muddy there in Mullet Creek where we lived. Mother wouldn't let us go in. I learned how to float after we moved to Grant. We used to go up to Malabar to my cousin, Victoria Molar was there. The boys learned how to swim. They just got out anyways and learned.

[01:09:00] I went out them one fall, the fall of the year. It was roe mullet time. When they have roe mullet, they're heavier. Bigger fish and it's just once a year in the fall-early winter. They caught 623 pounds of fish in one setting of net. That's how thick the fish were, how numerous they were. There was good fishing times. You don't have it anymore like that.

Nancy Yasecko: Did you ever go down to the ocean beach?

Laura Hiott: Yes, sometimes. Wade along the shore. We thought it was fun. Those little [coquina 01:09:38] clams, you'd stand in the sand, move your feet, and they'd come up out of the sand. The little tiny clams, you've probably seen them. They made good soup, to make oyster stew.

Nancy Yasecko: I guess they had a county fair.

[01:10:00] Laura Hiott: In Eau Gallie. The last year I was in school, 1918, I worked on books, I mean from school. I was in Melbourne School in the 10th grade, and all the pupils in my class were boys, and they wrote left-handed. You couldn't hardly read their writing. So the teacher said would I copy some of their work? I don't know, I learned to read their writing because I guess I just kind of grew into it.

I took a course one time on letter-writing. I thought I wanted to work in the Post Office sometime. I never did. Anyway, they sent those books to the fair to be examined. My father had some kumquat trees, a couple of kumquat trees and she made kumquat jelly, and she got a blue ribbon on her kumquat jelly that year. I have a lovely kumquat tree. It bears real good.

Nancy Yasecko: The fairs had different agricultural exhibits?

[01:11:00]

Laura Hiott: Yes. Different things. Different towns, but they had it in Eau Gallie. That's Melbourne, now, but to me it's still Eau Gallie.

Nancy Yasecko: Do you recall if they had baseball teams?

Laura Hiott: Yes. My brothers, they had a little team in Grant. I made, put the letters on the t-shirt. I remember Elmer, my youngest brother, Grant were on there. Had a lot of fun. We girls would go around and take one of the boys' caps or hats pass it around for a collection. They never charged for the game and just take up the money they'd give us to buy bats and balls or whatever. They played Fellsmere, they played Sebastian, played Malabar. The little towns.

[01:12:00]

I don't know if they ever played Melbourne or not, but they had a little ballpark down there, a sandlot. One time we went to Fellsmere, I think, and played. My boyfriend was a pitcher, so of course I had to go see him pitch. Two or three of my brothers played, Charner, John and Elmer.

I had a brother in the [Wake 01:12:07] Island in the war. He used to work for Catch Manufacturing. He was my youngest brother. He saved his money, he didn't make a lot of money there, but he said he wanted to amount to something. After he got some money together, he went to electrical school. I think it was in Cleveland OH. While there, he met a boy from New York City, and he told him, he said "Smitty," our last name was Smith, he called him Smitty. "Come go with me to New York, Smitty, and I'll get you a job." So he did, and they were building the Lincoln Tunnel under the Hudson River.

[01:13:00]

He was what they called a sand hog, down under with the hard top hats. When they completed that job, the superintendent said, "Who wants to go West? We're going to Idaho to dredge for gold. It won't be a big job." When they finished that job, he said, "Who wants to go to Wake Island?" Of course, Elmer wanted to see the world, and a lot of others, 1100 of them went over there. They had the airstrip almost completed. They attacked Wake Island the day after Pearl Harbor.

My youngest sister, she was very close to my youngest brother. They were the two youngest children in the family. She was working in a large restaurant in Morristown NJ and living with my sister, Ida, and her family up there. She heard the news and she said, "I've just gotta get in there. I've just gotta go." So she joined the WACS, they were taking the WACS starting in. She went to Des Moines IA for basic training. From there to Spokane WA.

[01:14:00]

They sent her home for two weeks to get her clothing ready for overseas, or wherever they were sending her, London. A submarine chased the boat going over. They had those buzz bombs coming across from France, the English Channel to England. She said it was very scary but she came through all right. She met this

man, this flyer. He was one of the pilots on a plane. A wonderful husband. They were married in a church over there. They were in Germany twice, she got to be a Captain while she was in the WACS. She has a lot of memories.

[01:15:00] It happened that Elmer, my brother, had some friends that were three brothers. They never separated those three brothers all the way through the war. Their name was Zivic. They were from Des Moines IA. There was a picture of them being reunited with their sister somewhere in Ohio. We have relatives in Ohio and she sent me the pictures and said, "Maybe Laurie might write to one of them and find out something about her brother, about Elmer."

Well it was about six weeks before I heard from him. He said, "We've been all over the West Coast of the United States. We've been on the radio and everything, being interviewed. I'm sorry I haven't written sooner." He said, "Elmer was one of my best friends there. I came upon him one night. I was delivering ammunition and he was stationed there with a machine gun just like a Marine. He said to me, 'Come and have something to eat. We're getting pretty hungry out here. We haven't had anything for hours.' He said he told me he'd do the best he could and go on his way."

[01:16:00] He said before they went to Japan, he and his brothers never were separated, the three of them. They never separated them. He said "Before we leave, I'm going to give you my best girlfriend's name and address." Elmer gave him his. He said whoever got back first could write. He said, "I prefer you write to her." She was in New York, he'd met her there. I guess

He wrote us a nice letter, the last letter we had from my brother. It was written on Thanksgiving before the attack in December. He said, "We've had the nicest Thanksgiving dinner. Everything from soup to nuts. We have a wonderful chef. I presume we'll have about the same for Christmas. The big shot from Japan on his way to Washington to talk peace is on the clipper ship. I gotta get the letter out there before they leave so they'll get this letter." That was the last time they let him write a letter.

[01:17:00] Later we heard they took out, they kept prisoners for three years. Starved them, maybe. They don't know what all they did to them. Took them out, tied their hands and feet and shot them in the back. They have a monument there on the island. My son's found out. War is so terrible.

Nancy Yasecko: Around here after the war was really when the space program started. All those rockets over here.

Laura Hiott: Oh yes. That was really exciting when they started that.

Nancy Yasecko: How did that change the south county area?

Laura Hiott: Well, I don't know too much about that. I know more people came in and they had

to have homes. Some people like my husband built these two apartments where they'd have a place to live. They didn't have any housing up there too much at the time. It was different, it was a different life I guess than we were used to.

Nancy Yasecko: Okay, let's cut.

[01:18:00]

Laura Hiott: This is my father, Robert Toombs Smith was his name. He was fighting in the Civil War. When they finished fighting at Olustee, which is near Jacksonville, south of Jacksonville. He walked all the way back to Southwest Georgia because my father had been born and he heard about a new baby at home. He wanted to get home and see the baby.

He was ragged and dirty and needed to be shaved and everything. He knew his wife wouldn't know him. He knocked on his door at home. She opened the door and said, "Lady, I've been on the road for several days. I know I'm ragged and dirty and all. Would you mind trying to give me a little something to eat? I'm hungry." She started getting him something to eat before he turned around and said, "Honey, I'm your husband."

Nancy Yasecko: That was your grandfather?

Laura Hiott: Yes, Papa's father. He liked his commanding officer so much, I think it was a colonel or something in the service in the Civil War, that he said, "I'm going to name him for myself, Robert, and I'm going to give him my commanding officer, whom I liked so much, Toombs, be his middle name." Everybody wondered where he got the last name of Smith.

[01:19:00]

Nancy Yasecko: Where is your father standing here?

Laura Hiott: It's near the creek. Did you want me to leave it there? You see through there the water. It's up not far west from the house. Mother made his shirt, he had very fair skin like I have. Mother made long-sleeved shirts for him and put mitts over the backs of his hands because he's blister. He had very fair skin. He made shirts and he always wore a mustache, as long as I can remember. He loved that old place. I'm built like him, kind of.

Nancy Yasecko: Who's this?

[01:20:00]

Laura Hiott: My father was quite an entertainer, and he had these friends who came, some of them from [Deland 01:20:01]. There's Mr. Hasser next to him, on his right, and my mother over here. He liked music so he was playing them a tune on the banjo, but he often played on the fiddle, he called it. He was the life of the party. He'd just jig a little bit and dance a bit around, and sing a little bit. Everybody got a kick out of him because he was like a clown sometimes almost.

That's typical Florida. This is a banana tree and this is a cabbage palm, as I call them.

Nancy Yasecko: Was that near your home place?

Laura Hiott: Yes, it's on the place, over there near the woods.

Nancy Yasecko: Everyone's dressed up in ties.

Laura Hiott: Well I guess they had a little party. Sometimes they'd come over and have a dance over there. He'd play for them, you know. I have a poem to read you before we go
[01:21:00] about him. When he was 61 one of his friends wrote a birthday poem for him.

Nancy Yasecko: Okay. And cut.

Laura Hiott: On the left, sitting on the bench, is my sister, Ida Smith. Next to her on her left is John Smith, my brother. Then Bill Smith, another brother. Me, standing up, and then my oldest brother, Charner Smith, on the very end of the bench on the right. The man standing up behind us, with the hat on and the coat, he's a first cousin,
[01:22:00] and this is his nephew, his sister's son. John Summerford, from Georgia.

Because we were so many of us, we didn't have chairs for the table. It took up too much room, I guess. So my father made a long bench for us to sit on at the table. There were only five of us. We had three more after that. 8 in all.

Nancy Yasecko: I notice I don't see many shoes in that picture.

Laura Hiott: No. I said we went barefoot. I probably had shoes on, but you can't see my feet. He was nice to us, this cousin of ours that came down. His sister went over the river and cooked for Papa one winter. She felt sorry for him, living over there, and cooking for himself and everything. This is her son, her husband had died with typhoid when she was first married. But he married a woman up there and they moved to [Apopka 01:22:55] for years. He took care of some of the groves up there. Their daughter lives in Melbourne Beach. Her husband used to have a men's store there at the shopping center in Melbourne. She's a nice girl.
[01:23:00]

Nancy Yasecko: Okay.

Laura Hiott: It's first the creek running into the Indian River there. They call it Palm Bay. The town of Palm Bay, there's a bay there, where two waters come together. The Turkey Creek that runs into Indian River is freshwater. I've seen lots of water hyacinths floating down with their beautiful blossoms. They're a nuisance, they clog up small streams sometimes, but they're pretty to look at. These are cabbage palmettos, I call them, these taller trees. Our state tree is really the sabal palm. The state garden club people ...