

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
Chattanooga - Hamilton County Public Library
Chattanooga, Tennessee

An Interview With
JAMES JOHNSTON GRIFFISS

By

Norman Bradley
January 25, 1985

PREFACE

This manuscript is a transcript of an interview conducted for the Oral History Project of the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Public Library. The purpose of the project is to capture the first-hand accounts of the social history of the Chattanooga area in the twentieth century.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that the transcript reflects the patterns of the spoken, rather than the written, word. The information is presented as it was recalled by the interviewee at the occasion of the interview and has been edited only for clarity.

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Two indexes have been prepared for locating specific information from either the transcript or the tape. The page index to the transcript is located at the end of this volume. A meter count number has been given in the left margin of the text for locating a section on the tape. It should be noted that this number will vary depending on the equipment used.

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CHATTANOOGA - HAMILTON COUNTY BICENTENNIAL LIBRARY

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

PERSONAL DATA SHEET

Date January 25, 1985

1. Full name (include maiden name and married name, where applies):

James Johnston Griffiss

2. Current address and phone number:

106 Scenic Highway
Lookout Mountain, TN 37350

3. Date and Place of Birth:

June 17, 1904 Chattanooga, TN

4. Mother's maiden name:

Sarah H. (Sallie) Johnston

Place of Birth:

5. Father's name:

John Carroll Griffiss, Jr.

Place of Birth:

6. Spouse's name:

Virginia Keating Griffiss

7. Children's names and addresses (if possible). Indicate daughters married names:

James J. Griffiss, Jr., Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Mary Keating Griffiss, Lookout Mountain, Tennessee

John McLeod Griffiss, M. D., San Francisco, California

INTRODUCTION

James J. Griffiss, attorney, businessman, property owner, and developer, is a third-generation Chattanooga who has watched the city grow all of his life. He attended its public schools and the Chattanooga College of Law. His observations, based upon his childhood days on High Street and Lookout Street, and later a resident of Lookout Mountain, are those of a happy and productive boyhood, and a busy and active civic life.

The interview with him was recorded on January 25, 1985, at the Chattanooga - Hamilton County Bicentennial Library by Norman Bradley for the library's Oral History Project.

Bradley: Mr. Griffiss, this is an interview for the public library's
019 Oral History Project. Let's just start at the beginning.
You are a native of Chattanooga?

Griffiss: Native of Chattanooga, born on [419] High Street.

Bradley: Was your family -- had they lived here before?

Griffiss: My father [John C., Jr.] was born here. My mother was raised
023 in Loudoun, Tennessee.

Bradley: At Loudoun?

Griffiss: Yes, she was Sallie Johnston and lived in Loudoun.

Bradley: The name Johnston brings -- are you related to Summerfield K.?

Griffiss: Yes, we had a common great-grandfather, great-great-grand-
father, I guess it was. Yes, we are -- not "kissing cousins,"
but we're cousins anyhow. *

Bradley: And then your grandfather, I understand, was a veteran of the
028 Confederate Army.

Griffiss: Right. He ran away from school when he was sixteen years old.
He was in a military school, and he and another boy ran away
and were coming down to join some of the raiders, and I've
forgotten which one it was, but I think they ended up in For-
rest's cavalry. And then he was wounded in the knee and was
033 invalidated to Chattanooga. Then he went to work for the ex-
press company here. **

Bradley: What was his name, James?

Griffiss: John C. Griffiss.

Bradley: Now, he was a native of Baltimore.

Griffiss: Native of Baltimore, [Maryland] yes.

Bradley: What campaign was he wounded, where was he? Do you remember?

* Summerfield K. Johnston and John Griffiss' common an-
cestor was Joseph Johnston, their great-great-grandfather who
lived during the Revolutionary War period.

** John Griffiss worked for Southern Express Company and
later Adam's Southern Express Company.

Griffiss: I think it was Shiloh, but I'm not positive; I've got that somewhere, but I don't know.

Bradley: It was not a battle here in Chattanooga?

Griffiss: No, it wasn't a local battle.

Bradley: But he was sent here as an invalid and remained here.

Griffiss: Remained here, and married Nellie Hooke of the McCallie Hookes.
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Bradley: Oh, yes. Well, that makes you a relative of some very prominent families.

Griffiss: Well, (laughter) I don't know. I don't think most of them claim kin. (laughter) I kid young Tom [Dr. Thomas Hooke McCallie, III], I call him "Cousin Tom."

Bradley: You were born in what, 1904, was it?

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Griffiss: 1904, yes.

Bradley: And grew up on High Street?

Griffiss: Yes, mostly.

Bradley: Where was your home, Jim?

Griffiss: Well, we -- I say High Street; it was on Georgia Avenue part of the time. I grew up, really, as a youngster on High Street, I mean, on [412] Georgia Avenue, and then we moved up on [408 E.] Second Street where [Cyrus] Griffin Martin's house is now.

Bradley: Oh, yes, on the river.

Griffiss: On the river, yes, and we lived up there for a while. But I always think of High Street because after I married I lived up there for five years before I moved to the mountain.
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Bradley: Tell me about the neighborhood. Was that a well-populated -- I mean were there houses all around, or were the houses rather isolated?

Griffiss: No, they were -- of course, the [Mertland M.] Hedges on the corner of Third and High Street, they had a good big lot. And then the [Scott L.] Probascos were next door to that, and they had a good big lot. The others were just ordinary lots. Mr. F. A. Gentry lived on the corner of Second and High, Mr. [William E.] B. Norvell on the corner of Third and High, and then
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(Griffiss): Mr. [R. H.] Williams, Scott Probasco's father-in-law, lived on the corner of Third and High. It was a well-populated neighborhood up there.

Bradley: Had the city begun to expand toward [Missionary] Ridge much at that point?

Griffiss: Well, it had to the ridge, but not beyond the ridge, no. Beyond the ridge was farmland. I used to fish in the ponds out there at Mr. Cooke's farm just beyond -- we'd catch the Missionary Ridge streetcar and then walk down to his farm. It was all farmland out there. Henry Hampton had a big farm.

Bradley: What is now Brainerd.

Griffiss: What is now Brainerd, all farmland, yes.

Bradley: As a boy, were there many youngsters around of your age? Did you have a bunch to play with?

Griffiss: Yes, we had a nice bunch up there on Georgia Avenue and High Street, we all played together. And then when we got a little bit older, we had the neighborhood dances at different ones' homes. We got around that way, and that was the beginning of our, you might say, our social [life], if any. The Llewellyn girls, Henry Trotter's wife [is] one of them, Charlotte and Sarah, they were among them; Elizabeth Potter; Emily Head Norvell; a bunch of those girls, mostly on High Street, but the Chapman boys were about the only boys up there. Most of them were girls. But we had a good time.

Bradley: Where did you go to school in the elementary level?

Griffiss: First District.

Bradley: Where was that?

Griffiss: That was between Oak and McCallie on Baldwin, I guess, about where the university is now.

Bradley: About where the university is. The university was -- it had been founded there at that point?

Griffiss: Yes, it was the Grant University, of course, before it was -- but at that time it was University of Chattanooga.*

* Grant University became the University of Chattanooga July 11, 1907.

(Griffiss): But it was, [of] course, nothing like as big as it is now, much smaller.

Bradley: What sort of games were played in the neighborhood at that time? What did you do?

Griffiss: We played "I Spy" and "Cops and Robbers" on our roller skates, and "Running Through" and football and baseball some. We had a lot there which -- well, [there's] an apartment on it I believe now -- it was next to where the [United] Daughters of Confederacy has -- belonged to a lawyer here. I can't think of his name now, I know it well, but he let us use it. And that was our playground, and we had many games there.

096 I remember one time that a bunch of us were playing out there, and some ladies from the Daughters of the Confederacy just corralled a whole crowd of us, says, "You-all are going to be in a play." "Fifi and the Toy Shop," I believe it was. Helen Phillips had the lead, she was singing at that time. Helen led and all us kids were in it. Dan Latimore was a pig (laughter), I was a jumping jack, there were several of them. I said I was the lead jumping jack because I was the only one that had my costume on backwards (laughter), which I did. I was told afterwards that I had my -- but they just corralled the whole crowd of us there, and we were all in "Fifi and the Toy Shop," that's what it was, and Helen had the lead on it. So that went for a play. They made us rehearse, we worked hard on that play. (laughter)

Bradley: Where did you present it?

107 Griffiss: It was presented, I believe, at the old Lyric, [or] either at the Bijou -- I don't know, maybe it was the Bijou. I believe it was the Bijou was where it was.

Bradley: But it was a big production.

Griffiss: Oh, it was a big production, yes, it was a big -- it was at the Bijou was where it was. And, of course, you had then the Lyric [Theater, 536 Market] and the Bijou [Theater, 6th and Walnut] both.

Bradley: Yes.

112 Griffiss: It was a nice neighborhood, as I say, Philip [A.] Rubin who was later with the bank [American Bank & Trust Co.] here was one of the crowd. We all played together. He lived down in the Virginia Apartments. I don't recall any other that was local --

Bradley: Virginia Apartments, is that the present building or --

Griffiss: Yes, it's the present building, it was built when I was a kid. I remember when it was a vacant lot there, and it was built
117 [1913]. That's the corner of Fourth and Georgia Avenue. It will probably be partially torn down if they widen the streets like they're talking about doing. The Wright Apartment [509 Georgia Avenue], I remember when it was built up there [1912]. In fact, I remember when most of the buildings here were built. (laughter)

Bradley: What about transportation? You-all didn't have to worry about transportation to school, of course, it was close enough to walk.

Griffiss: I rode a bicycle.

Bradley: Were there streetcar lines up around that neighborhood?

Griffiss: Yes, one went up Georgia Avenue, up the hill by the fire hall there for years, and then it was taken up. I don't know why. And then there was one out Fourth Street. And of course, when I first came along the fire engines were all pulled by horses. Ambulances and -- everything was horse-drawn, as a matter of fact. I remember seeing the old steam engine go out with the sparks flying as it went. They built a fire in it, had a quick-built fire in it. It'd be dropping coals as it went along. Beautiful horses, big Percherons or Clydesdales. Of course, we were near Number 3 Fire Hall [515 Georgia Avenue] and knew all the firemen; loved to watch the fire engines go out in those days. The minute that bell would ring or clang those horses would charge out of there, they were trained. The harness dropped down on them. It was very interesting to watch it.

Bradley: How effective were they? I mean, were they able to get to a fire with any speed?
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Griffiss: In a hurry, yes. I expect almost as fast as they do now. (laughter) They told one story up there about coming down Sixth Street hill with the -- I believe it was the steamer pump, but it might have been the hook and ladder, and the lines broke.

Bradley: Now, that would be coming down toward Market.

Griffiss: Yes, coming down toward Market, and the lines broke, and the driver had no control over his horses. But they turned there at Market Street and stopped where they were supposed to stop. Those horses -- they said they didn't have to guide them, they

(Griffiss): knew when it -- of course, the thing clanged out and told them where to go.

Bradley: Yes.

Griffiss: The firemen could read it and so could the horses.

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Bradley: Is that right?

Griffiss: Yes. Now, that's what the firemen claimed, I don't know. (laughter) Good story, anyhow.

Bradley: This was at the very beginning of the automobile era. Did most families have carriages or buggies?

Griffiss: They had buggies, most of them. The people up on High Street, you'd see there was a boy from the livery stable bringing their buggy up to them. And some of them had their own barns or something. Now, Mrs. Hedges had a great big barn right back of their house.

Bradley: Where was the Hedges home?

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Griffiss: That was at Third and High Street. It went on down to Spring Street, the lot. There were houses down below them there, but they had a great big place, barn, there, that they later used for a garage. But I remember as a kid seeing them bringing the buggies up. I think Mr. Hedges had, I guess, the first automobile I ever rode in. It was a Cadillac limousine, and, oh, it was a great thing then. They kept it there for many, many years in the garage. It'd be worth a million dollars now. (laughter)

Bradley: At least, at least.

Griffiss: I remember seeing it there many years after that. He didn't trade it in.

Bradley: What Hedges -- what was his name?

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Griffiss: Mertland McClain Hedges, M. M. Hedges. He's the grandfather of all these Hedges that you see here now. See, that was -- well it was later -- what was it? It was out on Broad Street, I can't think of the name of the darn firm now, but anyhow he was in the --

Bradley: It wasn't the boiler company.

Griffiss: Yes, it [Casey-Hedges Manufacturing] went in with Walsh and Weidner later, but it was -- it was a huge, big place. I worked there when I was a kid in the summertime.

Bradley: A foundry, too, I mean, wasn't it?

Griffiss: Yes.

Bradley: One of the heavy industries.

Griffiss: Yes, heavy industry.

Bradley: Jim, how long did it take for automobiles to displace the
171 horse and buggy?

Griffiss: It was slow, really it was rather slow. I remember seeing
the first -- I think old Dr. [Cooper] Holtzclaw, I believe it
was that -- Bitsy McCall's grandfather had one of the first
ones. As I recall, it was an old steamer that you could hear
coming three miles away, and it had buggy wheels on it. They
just gradually increased. But I can remember going to the
farm when I was a kid; oh, I guess I was ten or eleven years
old, maybe older, maybe a little younger. But when we'd see
179 a cloud of dust, which was rare when we were out on the farm,
we'd run to the gate to see the automobile go by. Now they
were that rare. And that was, of course, a good while after
automobiles came in. And all us country kids would run to
the (laughter) gate to see it.

Bradley: You said when you were at the farm. Are you speaking of the
place near Loudoun?

Griffiss: Loudoun, yes. [Annondale Plantation]

Bradley: That was your grandmother.

Griffiss: My mother's grandfather's, yes. Well, I'm the fifth genera-
tion to own it.

Bradley: Oh, you still own it.

Griffiss: I still own it.

Bradley: It is still an operating farm?

Griffiss: Still an operating farm. So I'm a hog farmer and cattle farm-
188 er and small grain farmer. (laughter) I'm an asphalt farmer.

Bradley: Do you visit often now?

Griffiss: Not as much as we used to. We have a house up there that's
furnished, and we can go in any time and spend the night or
whatever we want to do. But it's a little bit of a trip for
me now to go up there and back in one day, and I don't like

- (Griffiss): 192 to stay up there by myself. I used to take the dog up with me and spend the night or a weekend, whenever I wanted to, if the family didn't want to go. And years ago we used to spend several weeks at a time up there, but we don't anymore. Usually I wait till my daughter [Keating Griffiss] has a Saturday off here, and then she drives up. I'll drive up and she'll drive back, or sometimes she'll drive both ways. So I don't -- but I have a man there that operates it.
- Bradley: What about the management of a household in the era in which you were growing up? Did you have servants?
- Griffiss: Oh, yes, yes, there was no problem, no problem.
- Bradley: Were they live-in or did they come to work every day?
- Griffiss: 202 Both. A great many of them were live-in. Now, when I first moved to the mountain we had live-in servants. But the last one we had quit us and went to work in a lunatic asylum, and I think she had good training for it. (laughter) That was the beginning of World War II. Sarah was one of the best we ever had, but she got off and went to New York or somewhere to work in an asylum. I always said, "Sarah used good judgment because she had good training." (laughter)
- Bradley: Well now, the women who were servants, were they usually cooks and housekeepers?
- Griffiss: Well, yes, they did the cooking and the cleaning and everything. Now, of course, [when] you get in the sweller societies, they had butlers and they'd have two or three servants. But most people just had one servant, and they, say on the mountain, they lived on the place. Ours always did. We never did have but one at a time, one servant, but a lot of people did have.
- Bradley: The tendency was -- or the usual thing was for a servant to work for a family for a good many years.
- Griffiss: 220 Right on through, yes, stayed with them, and some of them still have them, and they hate to think of them not having them, because some of these women never did learn to cook. They'd always had servants, and when it came to the place -- you can't get them now of course, they just -- it takes an arm and a leg if you find one, but you don't find them that can cook, and if they cook that's all they want to do, they don't want to --
- Bradley: If there were children in the home, as there were in most homes, of course, what was the relationship of the servant

(Bradley): to the children? Were they nursemaids and friends and confidants?

Griffiss: Oh, yes.

Bradley: And everything.

Griffiss: Usually, they cook and housekeep or looked after the kids, too, and if you wanted to go out at night -- you didn't go out a lot -- but if you wanted, she was there on the place; she came upstairs and stayed with the children while you went out at night. Now, you've got to buy one to sit with your children. (laughter)

Bradley: You sure have. You went to First District School at the elementary level; what about high school? Where did you go, Jim?

Griffiss: I was in the local --

Bradley: Public school?

Griffiss: Public schools, yes.

Bradley: Your father was a businessman, wasn't he?

Griffiss: He was in the real estate business.

Bradley: Your grandfather was a --

Griffiss: My grandfather [John C. Griffiss] was licensed to practice law. He read law, I think, in Mr. J. A. Caldwell's office [623 Market Street], and he was -- I have his license, it's about that big, hand-written, and signed by the judges. It's a hand-written license to practice, but he never did actively practice. As a matter of fact, he retired at forty; he was in the grain business [Kennedy & Griffiss] when they shipped grain down the river; had a place down at Fourth and Market, I believe it was, through to Broad. The flood washed him out, cleaned him out, I think, twice. I believe he was, as I recall, he was completely washed out twice. But he had sense enough to invest in downtown property. His wife had died. He had five children -- had six really, one of them died. So he apparently didn't see any use in making any more money; he had enough to live comfortably on. He had a home downtown [704 Georgia Avenue] and one on Walden's Ridge, and he owned a lot of property up there, a good deal of which I still own. And he just quit when he was forty, looked after his property. He was a director in the old First National Bank, not when it broke, but before that time. (laughter) Well, he grew up with Chattanooga we'll say. Of course I did, too, but not to

(Griffiss): the extent he did. Now, when I was little, growing up, all our streets were chert; we didn't have any paved streets. And if you fell down, you took the hide off of your knee and it hurt. (laughter)

Bradley: What was his name?

Griffiss: John C.

Bradley: John C.

Griffiss: Yes, Dad was John C., Jr.

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Bradley: Did he recall much of the talk about the war?

Griffiss: Not a great deal. In his old age he took a tour of it. They drove up through Virginia and all through the old battle-grounds, and that's about all I ever heard about it. He went to the places where he had served and fought, and seemed to enjoy it very much. But he wasn't a young man then. He was active in the Confederate veterans here, I think head of it one year. But he never talked about it much. He never shaved because he had a saber cut across his chin that left a scar, and he let his beard grow so it'd cover up that scar. (laughter) See, he was just a kid when he was in, 16 when he went in, ran away from home.

Bradley: Other than the cut on his face he was not -- I believe he was wounded in his leg or knee.

Griffiss: Yes, in the knee, yes.

Bradley: But that didn't hamper him in any way.

Griffiss: No, no, it wasn't -- I don't think it ever bothered him. The minie ball was still in his knee I think; it never was taken out.

Bradley: Well, after your high school education where did you go to school? You are a licensed attorney?

Griffiss: Yes, I went to Chattanooga College of Law; I graduated at the top of my class. But I was an old man when I went there (laughter); I mean, I wasn't like some of the younger boys. As a matter of fact, my oldest son [James Johnston Griffiss, Jr.] was born when I was a junior at law school, but I've been practicing ever since, nearly fifty years. In fact, I graduated in '36 from Chattanooga College of Law.

Bradley: Well, most of your professional activity has been in -- not

(Bradley): in an active practice of law, has it? Or has it been in management or --

Griffiss: Well, it's been an active practice, but I've never been a
294 trial lawyer, I've never gotten into trial. I've done a few trials because I had to, but most of mine was wills and estates and taxes, real estate law, more office law. I was rarely in the courtrooms. Most all of mine was chancery work, and I served as a chancellor for a couple of times, once for six weeks.

Bradley: A special --

Griffiss: Special chancellor, yes, yes. [Morris B.] Finkelstein went
300 off on a two-week vacation and I took his place, and he got sick while he was gone, so I had to take it for a month. And [Joseph Clifford] Cliff Curry was in an automobile accident, in the hospital, so I was the only chancellor (laughter); I had my hands full there for a while.

Bradley: Well, tell me about the development as you have seen it over the years, as one who has practiced law in that field, as a property owner, the development of the downtown area. What has been the principal changes that you have seen over the years?

Griffiss: Not as much as there should have been, I don't think. Of course, this out here in a great big change. But --

Bradley: You're speaking right now of the TVA --

Griffiss: The TVA, yes, and of course [T. A., Jr.] Tommy Lupton's
314 buildings there*, there's a great thing. But beyond that there's been very little change in Market Street or Broad Street. They've torn down a lot of buildings, but when the First Federal [Savings and Loan], of course, put their building down there [601 Market] I sold them one of the lots that they built on. But Chattanooga downtown has not grown like it should, and in my opinion the city fathers have done their damndest to keep it from growing. By narrowing down Market Street, taking the parking off, it's darn near ruined a lot of the merchants down there. They'll tell you that, that

* Refers to the TVA/South Central Business District Project which borders 11th and 12th Streets between Market and Carter Streets and includes the TVA office complex, hotel, convention and trade center, and parking garage. Lupton's Tallan and Krystal Buildings border on the 10th Street side of the library.

- (Griffiss): when they took parking off of Market Street they ruined us. Well, to my mind, there was no sense in taking two lanes of traffic off of Market Street. We were blessed with a wide main street; Knoxville has been choked to death with a narrow one.
- 327
- Bradley: Gay Street.
- Griffiss: Gay Street, yes. Knoxville would have given anything for a Market Street, or Gay Street as wide as that.
- Bradley: And Broad too.
- Griffiss: It was wonderful, but they come along and -- what good are those wider sidewalks that about once or twice a year people come down and sell a bunch of junk on them. (laughter) That's one of my pet peeves, really, the fact that they've -- and they're doing it on out now to the [Chattanooga] Choo-Choo. I think it's a horrible mistake, and I predicted then in ten or fifteen years they'd have jack hammers tearing up that sidewalk and moving the street back where it belonged. Maybe I'm wrong, but I'm not wrong as far as the merchants are concerned because it has hurt them, and they'll all tell you that. Oh, there's been some improvements, but I don't see any great improvements downtown that they have made.
- 338
- Bradley: We were talking about the fire engines a minute ago. Now I meant to ask you at the time -- the courthouse burned --
- Griffiss: I watched it.
- Bradley: 1912 wasn't it? '13 maybe.
- Griffiss: No, it was around 1909 I believe.
- Bradley: '09?
- Griffiss: Yes, I think it was 1909*. I stood on the Robinson Apartment [620 Georgia Avenue] steps and watched it burn. See, my grandfather lived on the corner of Oak and Georgia, and they called us and told us the courthouse was on fire. I remember I was so small that I was afraid that the courthouse was going to fall over on us. (laughter) My mother kept assuring me that it wasn't going to.
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- Bradley: What type of building was it at that point?

* The courthouse burned during the night of May 7, 1910.

- Griffiss: 354 As I remember, it was a red brick building. But I remember down in the pit after the fire I saw the great big old iron safe down there that had gone through the fire. But, see, if it was 1909 I was just five years old, but I remember it very well. Those things stick in your memory when they make an impression.
- Bradley: It must have been a time of high excitement. What time of year was it, do you recall?
- Griffiss: 360 No, I don't. Must have been in the warmer part of the year, because it was struck by lightning, and it burned right on up. It just -- it was a huge fire. And then they built a new one there, of course. But I stood there and watched it for I don't know how long, for quite some time.
- Bradley: What about the records, Jim? You mentioned the safe.
- Griffiss: Those were all right, as I recall. Some records were burned, of course.
- Bradley: What happens in a case like that? Can those records ever be reconstructed?
- Griffiss: 373 No, it'd take -- if it happened now, I think the Title Guaranty and Trust Company has duplicate records of most of that stuff so they didn't have to go to the courthouse to look them up. They have a duplicate, I suppose still do, used to have that. But it plays havoc because I remember back years ago when some woman went haywire in the Clerk & Master's office and the records were all screwed up. They had a time with that, trying to get it -- some people paid their taxes and there was no record of it and so forth. I don't know whether you remember that or not.
- Bradley: No.
- Griffiss: When did you come here?
- Bradley: In '42.
- Griffiss: 385 That was probably prior to that. Sam Erwin was Clerk & Master.
- Bradley: I know the name of Sam Erwin, of course, but I don't believe he was still Clerk & Master at that point.*

* Sam Erwin served as Hamilton County Clerk & Master from 1901 until his death in 1948.

Griffiss: Some woman -- I've forgotten whether she stole the money or
390 what happened, but something went haywire with the records and
they had a hard time getting them straightened out.

Bradley: And up until fairly recently, certainly, they were all in long-
hand.

Griffiss: Yes, that's right, oh, yes.

Bradley: There were no copies. The advent of microfilm, I suppose, has
changed the whole --

Griffiss: Whole thing, yes. Yes, I was on the Equalization Board* when
402 we got them to put in some of the machines there, the dupli-
cating machines and so forth. I've forgotten now who was the
County Judge then. That's been a good many years ago; I was
on the Equalization Board there for two, three or four years,
I've forgotten how long I was on. There's certainly been
changes, and everything now is in a boil on account of this
new proposition that you don't have to think for yourself; you
just put it in a machine and (laughter) let it think for you.
The computers are just changing the whole shape of the world,
face of the world.

Bradley: Yes. You said they called you when the courthouse caught on
fire. When did telephones really come into widespread use?

Griffiss: Well, I don't know. I remember my grandfather's number was
410 879, so there must not have been a whole lot of telephones;
Main 879, (laughter) and ours was 4668. We had a telephone
ever since I can remember; but, now, on [Walden's] Ridge we
had one of those that was on the wall, and you cranked it
and got the operator and then gave her your number. Of course,
all the numbers were given to the operator, nothing was auto-
matic in those days. But telephones were common when I came
along, and most people had them.

Bradley: What about lights? Were there electric lights or gas, or do
422 you recall?

Griffiss: I remember living in one house when I was quite young [where]
we had gas. I can remember my mother when she put a new fila-
ment on and had to burn it, you know, some way, I don't know.
She tended to those things. I guess I wasn't over three or
four years old. From then on it was electricity.

* Board of five private citizens who met each May for
twenty-five days to hear appeals of tax assessments. Members
were appointed for 2-year terms by the County Judge.

Bradley: I guess there was a local generating company.

Griffiss: Well, my grandfather was the president of the first electric
light company here, and Web Brown's grandfather, I believe,
435 was secretary of it -- no, I think he was president of that,
then he was president of the first insurance company here.
That's the one that old man, that Web's grandfather --

Bradley: You're talking about your grandfather --

Griffiss: My grandfather and Web's -- Web Brown's grandfather was, I
believe, secretary of that insurance company. I don't think
it -- we've got a report on it -- it didn't have any losses
at all the first year. I think they folded their tents and
left (laughter) after that.

Bradley: Did they quit when they were ahead?

Griffiss: Quit when they were ahead, I never saw anything else on it.
But I've got the first statement of it showing that they had
some assets and no losses.* Of course, Chattanooga's made
great headway in the years, but not what it should have. I'm
446 glad, I don't like a big city. Lookout Mountain's gotten too
big for me. (laughter) I liked it better-- if they caught
you driving drunk, [James L.] Jimmy Broadwater on his motor-
cycle would make you move over and take you home. (laughter)

Bradley: That's another story in itself, the growth changes in Look-
out Mountain.

Griffiss: Yes, yes.

Bradley: When did you move up there?

Griffiss: I moved up there, let me see, my boy's forty-nine, forty-
455 eight years ago I guess. I'd just been admitted to the bar;
I guess it was '36.

Bradley: '37.

Griffiss: '36 or '37, yes.

* A copy of this statement shows John C. Griffiss as president of the Mountain City Fire and Marine Insurance Company with W. J. Colburn, Web Brown's grandfather, as secretary. Mr. Griffiss is also listed as president of the Electric Light Company, on this document.

- Bradley: Your present home is right at the top of Scenic Highway [106 Scenic Highway].
- Griffiss: Yes.
- Bradley: Was that the site of your first home?
- Griffiss: Yes, we tore the house down.
- Bradley: Right across the street from Mrs. [Margaret W.] Bright's home [211 Lookout Mountain Scenic Highway].
- Griffiss: Mrs. Bright was raised there, that belonged to her father.
- Bradley: Yes.
- Griffiss: 468 And we bought it and raised the family there, and then we tore it down and built the present house. But when we moved up there I bought my coal from Jimmy Broadwater who was the policeman then, rode a motorcycle, as I say, bought it for \$3 a ton. We had a stoker and you could get stoker coal that was raised on the mountain, dug on back there on the mountain in those mines.
- Bradley: Mountain coal.
- Griffiss: Yes, back -- I don't know whether those mines are still in operation or not, but it was good coal and worked fine in the stoker, \$3 a ton. You don't buy any for that now. (laughter)
- Bradley: Three dollars a ton delivered.
- Griffiss: Yes, delivered, put in your basement.
- Bradley: 480 How many residents of the mountain, permanent residents of the mountain were there then? Do you have any idea?
- Griffiss: I have no idea, no. There weren't many in those days of summertime residents; most everybody that lived up there then were year-round.
- Bradley: Year-round residents. It had changed from a summer community to a permanent.
- Griffiss: 488 That's right. I remember the [Robert] R. J. Maclellans had a summer place up there [109 E. Brow Road], and they were downtown in the wintertime [28 Bluff View]. My grandfather had one on Walden's Ridge, but he was downtown in the wintertime. But of course those things have changed now so much. You don't see any summer residents on the mountain, and there

- (Griffiss): were darn few of them -- I don't remember any when I moved up there. I remember a lot of them when I was a kid.
- Bradley: When you were a child, or in your growing-up years, you-all never did live up there as summer residents?
- Griffiss: No, no, we moved up there permanently. I bought that house and we moved right in there. It was an old summer house that had been fixed up. There was no furnace in it when I bought it; I put a furnace in.
- 501
- Bradley: I understand it was called a "Dinky" line, wasn't it?
- Griffiss: Yes, the "Dinky." Now, I don't think that was the Dinky line; the Dinky line, I think, went out to East Chattanooga.*
- Bradley: Oh, is that right?
- Griffiss: Yes. But they had a line up there; they had both a streetcar and the Incline. You could take your choice and wish you'd taken the other one. (laughter)
- Bradley: They did have the streetcar line on top of the mountain that made sort of a loop on the mountain itself.
- 510
- Griffiss: Yes.
- Bradley: And so a person who lived away from the top of the Incline, say, could have transportation pretty well to his home.
- Griffiss: Of course, there was a big hotel up there at the top, as you know, and then there was one next door to me there in the Pound property [Lookout Mountain House]; there was a big hotel there. And the streetcar line went right under the Pound property, came across the road down below me, and I don't know where it went from there. (laughter)
- Bradley: Well, of course, the Scenic Highway had been -- was a well-constructed road then, of course.
- 521
- Griffiss: Yes, yes.
- Bradley: Well, what did most people do, most business people for instance? Or you, did you go up and down by car or by --

* The narrow gauge railroad which ran from Point Hotel to the Natural Bridge was known as the "Dinky line." The East Chattanooga line of the Belt Railroad was called the "Dummy line."

- Griffiss: 527 I went by car every day. Now there were some days you didn't because it was much worse. In other words, they didn't salt the highways back in those days. And that curve right below my house there, I've seen dozens of them stall there and gone down there and tried to help them up, and you'd slip and fall down, you couldn't keep your feet. It was just a sheet of ice; the water from what's now the [Gordon L.] Davenport property there on their place [101 E. Brow Road] -- "The upholsterer" Davenport, as I call him (laughter) -- the water from that lot went down on the highway and froze, and, oh, it was awful, but there was no salting or sanding of the highways in those days. If it got real bad, you stayed home.
- Bradley: What happened to the big hotel down toward the Point? I think you mentioned that a moment ago.
- Griffiss: Yes. It burned, I think.
- Bradley: It burned?
- Griffiss: Yes.
- Bradley: Do you remember the year?
- Griffiss: 545 No, it was before my day, long before my day. All of them -- I think the one where Pounds were, I think that was a school at one time, too, but those things all happened long before my day.
- Bradley: I see. Well, you were talking about the chief of police or the -- I guess he was probably the only police.
- Griffiss: He was the only police, he was it. (laughter)
- Bradley: There was, of course, a town council -- mayor of Lookout Mountain.
- Griffiss: 554 Yes, mayor and a board of aldermen or something, or commissioners.
- Bradley: Commissioners.
- Griffiss: Yes.
- Bradley: The policeman didn't have much to do.
- Griffiss: He didn't have anything much to do, he rode around on his motorcycle, knew everybody and friends of everybody; everybody liked him. And then it gradually got on to where they came in cars and then had more policemen.

Bradley: Did they have any fire protection that early?
562

Griffiss: Yes, we had a fire engine; I don't know whether it would work or not. (laughter) We had one.

Bradley: Well, talking about the subject of transportation gets around to the formation here not too many years ago of the Chattanooga Area Transportation --

Griffiss: Association.

Bradley: Authority.

Griffiss: Authority, yes.

Bradley: Which is CARTA*, of course. You were a member of the first board and still are a member of the board.

Griffiss: Still on the board. I was secretary of the first board, and
576 I am now vice-chairman of the board.

Bradley: Tell me about how that -- what led up to the formation of the transportation authority?

Griffiss: Well, as far as I can see -- of course, Jo [Conn, Jr.] Guild had the old transportation [Southern Coach Lines, Inc.] and it was not making a go of it. The city was subsidizing it for around \$800,000 or something a year. They just sold out, the government helped us buy it; in other words, it was bought mostly with government money. As you know, it is subsidized by the state and also by the city, and the county gives a little bit. Lookout Mountain, both Georgia and Tennessee [sides], and Soddy -- whatever township it goes into -- contribute some to its upkeep. At that time they had a bunch of small bus lines running around through the county; we bought all of those out, and so that all the transportation --

Bradley: Hale's, was that one of them?

Griffiss: I think, as I recall, Hale's [Hale Bus Line] was one of them,
601 yes. We bought all of those, bought their buses and their franchises and so forth. So as far as the county is concerned and North Georgia, we're it. We used to run to Fort Oglethorpe and then they didn't want to contribute. Rossville has never contributed, we never could get them to. So we used to shut the gates, shut the doors at Rossville and go through and then

* Chattanooga Area Regional Transportation Authority.

(Griffiss): go on out to Oglethorpe. (laughter) Then Oglethorpe dropped out, so that the only Georgia community we serve now is Fairyland.

Bradley: On the mountain, on Lookout Mountain.

Griffiss: Yes, but we do go over there and pick those up. And we
614 bought all new buses when we went in; of course, that was subsidized by the government. Looks like they ain't going to do it no more (laughter), they're cutting down on us.

Bradley: Would seem to be the trend.

Griffiss: But each of the communities has one member of the board, and the city of Chattanooga, I believe, has eight because they're the principal contributor, yes.* And I represent Lookout Mountain, Tennessee, and E. Y. Chapin IV represents Fairyland, so the two of us represent the mountain.

Bradley: Is it on pretty sound footing?

Griffiss: Yes, it's on a sound footing. We've been able to make out
637 all right; we've got some new buses ordered, eight new buses. I don't think they're ordered yet, don't think we've ever picked them out, but they've been authorized, and I think the money put up for them, promised. But those buses, when we bought them, cost us around \$43,000 as I remember, roughly \$40,000 a bus. Now, that same bus would cost around \$150,000.

Bradley: Almost four times.

Griffiss: Almost four times.

Bradley: Over ten, fifteen years ago?

Griffiss: Ten or twelve years, yes, I think I've been on there about twelve or thirteen years. But I remember signing the checks to General Motors for the buses, and they ran around \$40,000, little bit more than \$40,000 apiece. Now you can't even get that kind of buses.

End Tape 1, Side 1
Begin Tape 1, Side 2

Bradley: We were talking, Jim, about the CARTA, the bus transportation
006

* The CARTA board consists of one representative from each participating municipality, and an equal number of representatives plus one from the city of Chattanooga.

- (Bradley): system. I was about to ask you a question. As I understand it, size of a bus isn't the principal determining factor of the expense, the expense is more the driver and the upkeep and whatnot.
- Griffiss: Upkeep, yes.
- Bradley: So that there isn't a question of putting a smaller bus on a
012 less well-used line with the hope of saving money, is that true?
- Griffiss: They say it doesn't save any. I know I fussed a lot when we put on those mistakes that we bought, foreign-made buses that made so much noise you didn't need a horn on them. I said, "Put a smaller bus on some of these lines." Well, they told me -- and they never did convince me, but they did a whole lot of work on it -- that it was just as expensive to operate that small bus as it was the big bus, that where you saved in one place, it cost you more in the other. We finally did away with the small buses; they were not -- well, they weren't satisfactory in the first place. But all of our buses are the same size, big buses.
- Bradley: What do they call them, sixty-passenger?
- Griffiss: Forty-five, I think they are, yes. Of course I think we've got heavier engines in those that go up and down the mountain, which they'd have to have. But, of course, you've got, for instance, Lookout Mountain -- you take a big load up and bring back practically nothing.
- Bradley: Is the "park and ride" plan program working out all right on
026 CARTA?
- Griffiss: Yes, I think it's working out very well in various places. Of course, they're different, some of the grocery stores and some of the churches let us use their lots. We use it on Lookout Mountain and people park; in both churches they have a right to park. And I know some that ride the bus; I come down on "park and ride." But we never have gotten the women to take over. The working people use it, and a lot of people have to be to work at eight o'clock that catch that early bus down, and on the quarter after five bus back. But in the morning I catch sometimes a nine-thirty if I'm going out to CARTA, or the quarter to nine when I'm coming down; it rarely has any passengers to amount to anything, but it comes up loaded with maids. And then they take them back down in the afternoon, at which time they don't bring up much of a load. So it's a one-way proposition with the mountain.

Bradley: The Incline is still a part of the system.

Griffiss: Yes, it's the only money-making part we have. We do make
040 money on that, the rest of them are all subsidized.

Bradley: I imagine it's because of the tourists.

Griffiss: Tourists, yes.

Bradley: And it is not the big method for the servants or --

Griffiss: No, no, they don't use it.

Bradley: They don't use it now.

Griffiss: No, they don't use it much as they did. We do have some of
046 the residents using it; now whether they are servants or not,
I don't know, but I doubt if many servants use it. And of
course it's so high now that the tourists -- they pay it, I
don't know why. I made them mad when they wanted to go up
on the pay, I said, "Who wants to pay that kind of price to
ride up on an elevator?" They didn't like it when I called
them an elevator. I said, "Well, look at it, it's an Otis
elevator." (laughter) But, anyhow, it's expensive to ride.
Of course the locals get a cut; they can buy a book of tick-
ets that doesn't cost them like it does on the tourists. But
now the state's come along and added a tax onto that, you
know, saying that it's -- the regulars don't have to pay the
tax, but the tourists do, that -- what is it? seven and a
quarter percent or something?

Bradley: Yes.

Griffiss: We're arguing with them on that; I don't know whether we're
going to win or not, but we're trying to get out of paying
that. And I notice a lot of other things are going to ruin
them about sticking that tax on there. But the politicians
have got to have their gravy. (laughter)

Bradley: It would appear so. One other point that I want to ask you
060 about -- the 1917 flood, and you mentioned the fact that your
grandfather was washed out a couple of times.

Griffiss: Well, now, those were the earlier floods, the one where the
Read House was --

Bradley: Do you remember the '17 flood?

Griffiss: Oh, Lord, yes! I was in it, right -- working as a kid.

Bradley: What led up to it, what do you remember about it?

Griffiss: I just remember that you could swim a horse on McCallie Avenue
065 because I saw them do it. They had there -- in the dip just at Warner Park there when you come over the viaduct, the water was standing there, and they had taken cross ties and built a walkway across so you could ride the streetcar that far and then pick it up on the other side. Some fellow came along on a horse, and he swam his horse across there, so that shows you how high the water -- because Warner Park was covered. Main Street, as I recall, there was water out there. It was a terrific flood now.

Bradley: Do you remember what they did, how they handled the refugees, the people who were really --

Griffiss: They put them in the Billy Sunday Tabernacle.

Bradley: And where was -- locate that for me.

Griffiss: Let me see if I can (laughter). It was down there about the
075 City Hall somewhere down on -- it was a great huge wooden building that they put up just for Billy Sunday and they left it. But I be darned if I can tell you exactly where it was now [corner of E. 10th and Lindsay]; I was in it many times because I ran the cook stove while there were kids there. They had the ROTC out guarding the schools and so forth, and we had a great big portable army kitchen there. Why I ever got elected cook, I don't know, but I was cooking twenty-four hours a day there for a while.

Bradley: What time of year was it? March, maybe?

Griffiss: I don't remember whether it was fall or spring; it wasn't warm, anyhow [March]. But I kept that old stove going, that great, great big old army thing there. And the auditorium was full of people, just refugees from various places. Now, I think the -- I don't know, but it seems to me like they used the schoolhouses, too, to put some of them in. Of course, schools were closed, and the whole ROTC crowd was trying to keep down looting and things like that. They sent them. The boys, I think, they had a ball doing it. But that was a rip-roaring thing. What's Maclellan Island now was covered with water, just a few trees sticking up there. I've also seen that river frozen over. Of course, I was right up over it.

093 And you'd see -- during the floods you'd see stuff coming down. Ever now and then you'd see a bunch of stuff with pigs on it, animals -- a great big piece had washed away. We had one flood there; it was in the fall and they picked

(Griffiss): up raft loads of pumpkins floating down the river. Below the bridge there, one of those boat people ran rafts out there, and they had raft loads, they gave them away. Just millions of pumpkins came down there because it was all in the fields. They hadn't had a chance to get them in. I called it the "pumpkin flood"; I don't remember which one it was, because we had high water frequently before TVA built the dam there.

And then -- I don't guess you recall it, but the TVA wanted to put levees around the city of Chattanooga. Well, I was in the thick of that fight.

Bradley: Tell me, what year was this, Jim? Do you recall?

Griffiss: I'll be derved if I know what year it was, it was a good many years ago, and I don't remember how I got into the fight. But [William G.] "Grape-nuts" Foster was editor of the [Chattanooga] Free Press then, and he was for the levees, and I was against them. I know I debated one time with Mr. John [Storrs] Fletcher. I had a whole lot better man ahead of me, but I won anyhow (laughter). He and I debated on the question; he was for it and I was against it, of course. But there was no question in my mind with the investigating I did, which was rather extensive, that they never would have worked. You see, Chattanooga is underlaid with caves.

Bradley: Porous.

Griffiss: Very porous soil, caves all under here, limestone caves. Well, if you're going to stop those things up, then that water's going to come right in inside of your levees, and you're worse off than you would be otherwise. But anyhow, we got it stopped.

Bradley: Was that a pretty bitter sort of fight?

Griffiss: It was rather bitter.

Bradley: I take it that the business interests, primarily, were against it for the reason that you've cited.

Griffiss: Yes, and it would, I don't know, -- [to] fence the city in there with those walls of dirt was not too good. I remember the headlines one day. On the editorial page they had "Griffiss Out on a Limb," and "Grape-nuts" thought he had me. I took him the proof that I was right. The next headline the next day was "Griffiss Not Out on a Limb." (laughter)

Bradley: They got what is known as vindication.

Griffiss: Yes, vindication, yes. But of course the TVA was doing every-
thing they could to get it because they didn't have to regu-
late the water then, you see. If they had the levees they
could go on and hold their water as long as they wanted to in
those lakes. Now they have to let it down, you see, to take
care of the spring floods. And that was their idea was to re-
131 lieve them of a lot of responsibility there. But it was fun
while it lasted. (laughter)

Bradley: How long did the argument go on? Do you recall?

Griffiss: Oh, it was weeks. I was in the headlines there for -- again
I don't know why I was. Web Brown was always getting me into
something like that. I don't know how I got in to head the
thing up, but I did. They had flood commissioners then, I
believe, and there was a new election, and we put up our board
candidates, five of them; we thought there was just five com-
missioners. Well, actually there were six. So we elected our
five, and the sixth one was a big labor leader here who was as
radical as he could be. But he didn't have a chance; there
were five men against him.

Bradley: This was the flood commissioners?

Griffiss: Yes, flood control commissioners. I've forgotten what they
144 called them, but, anyhow, it was a commission.

Bradley: That was their purpose.

Griffiss: It was a public election, and we just had -- we didn't have
any time at all hardly; we just had to get out -- mostly I
think it was a bunch of real estate men that were on the com-
mission.* Of course, they just let the dern thing die is
what they did, that's what they were elected for. But it was
a fight.

Bradley: It was planned, roughly, to put the levees on the city side
of the river, southern or western bank, I think.

Griffiss: That's my recollection; I don't think it went on the other
side, because the other side wasn't built up as much as it is
now. As I recall --

Bradley: There was nothing on [Moccasin] Bend at that point.

* The commission elected in 1946 consisted of five real-
tors, F. L. Gates, John F. Crabtree, John Witherspoon, Web C.
Brown, Lee C. Head, and local labor union representative, Jack
B. Henderson.

Griffiss: Nothing down there then. I don't guess Baylor School was even
154 over there, I'm not sure whether they were over there then or
not, I don't know when they went over there.

Bradley: They went out there about in the late thirties, I guess.

Griffiss: I remember when they were out on Vine Street. GPS [Girls'
Preparatory School] was on --

Bradley: Didn't GPS take over their -- when they moved, at one time
160 didn't GPS take over their building?

Griffiss: GPS was there on -- what is that street? I can't think of
anything anymore -- anyhow, GPS was out there, but I think
GPS was there when Baylor was there, as I recall. Baylor was
on the corner and GPS was down the hill from them. I remem-
ber when GPS was on Oak Street; now that's going way back.
They were on Oak, corner Oak and Lindsay where the church has
it now, the property. Oak and Lindsay, there's a big frame
house there and that's where GPS was. And you'd see the girls
out walking then. They'd always take them for a walk at re-
cess time -- in uniform, like they still are. Of course, I
think McCallie School started up on that corner from where
that church is. I think they were at the corner of Lindsay
and McCallie where it started, where McCallie School started.
But that was before my day, but I do remember GPS was out
there.*

I also remember when none of our streets were paved, as
I'd said earlier, I believe.

Bradley: Yes, you said they were chert.

Griffiss: Chert, or Vine Street was cobblestone.

Bradley: How far out had they laid the cobblestone? Do you remember?

Griffiss: It went on out, I think, to East End Avenue, which was East
177 End then and now Central.

Bradley: Now Central.

Griffiss: Yes, I think it was a cobblestone all over, as I recall.

* In 1899, Baylor School moved from the corner of Mc-
Callie and Lindsay to Vine and Palmetto. The Girls' Prepara-
tory School purchased the site on Palmetto in 1915, when Bay-
lor moved to its present site on a bluff east of Williams
Island.

Bradley: That was pretty much the edge of the city.

Griffiss: That was the edge of town, yes. Of course, Highland Park --
181 a world of people lived in Highland Park; it was a popular place. I mean, it wasn't like it is now; it was a high class subdivision. But a lot of people lived out there, and then, as I said, a good many people on Missionary Ridge. But beyond that -- Missionary Ridge was the line, really, yes. Now, Market Street, as I recall, was wooden blocks, and if we had a real lot of rain they'd swell up and just come up.

Bradley: They'd just sort of float up. Were there brick streets, too?

Griffiss: Brick sidewalks; I don't remember any brick streets, but brick
192 sidewalks. And that's why I can't understand the city putting these bricks down on Market Street, because I remember when I was a kid if you had a cold day, those bricks would -- moisture would come up on them and they'd freeze, and you'd break your dern neck on them.

Bradley: Bricks tend to flake, I think.

Griffiss: Yes, yes, and you notice them on Market Street, they are popping up; every now and then there will be a brick out, and that's dangerous. They look very nice, I reckon, but the others looked just as well, wouldn't cost as much.

Bradley: Was Mr. C. E. James still active? Do you recall him as an active person?

Griffiss: Oh, yes, yes. I don't remember the building of the James Building [1907]. That is about the only building I don't remember. I remember Hamilton National Bank [1911], and I guess that was the first one after the James Building that was a big building. I remember when he developed Signal Mountain, put his streetcars up there and so forth, because the streetcars use to sit there on Broad Street and wait for the Baylor boys. They took them out to the school. And you'd go on great big old streetcars that went up the mountain then. They don't have that anymore. But I remember his building the hotel up there [Signal Mountain Inn]. My dad said he used to hunt deer and turkey where the hotel was, but (laughter) that was before my day.

Bradley: Did they call it Signal Mountain then or did they call it
209 Walden's Ridge?

Griffiss: It was Walden's Ridge. He named it Signal Mountain; when he developed it, he made it Signal Mountain, but it was always just a part of Walden's Ridge.

Bradley: Signal Point was a point during the war.

Griffiss: It was known as -- yes, it was used as a signalling point during the [Civil] War, over to Lookout Mountain, as I recall.
214

Bradley: What are your recollections of the World War I period? You were thirteen, fourteen, fifteen.

Griffiss: I remember it very vividly.

Bradley: What did the city -- what was its place in that era? I mean the activities.

Griffiss: Of course, it meant a lot to the city of Chattanooga, a lot of business and so forth, because they were building buildings, houses, cantonments out there, I remember.
221

Bradley: At [Fort] Oglethorpe.

Griffiss: At Oglethorpe. Every carpenter in the country was there building cantonments. And then they built the road out there, concrete road; I remember it was an awful thing, you couldn't get out there because the road was torn up. And that was the horrible freezing winter we had; it's the worst, I think, we ever have had. Roads were just a sheet of ice out there. It was a tremendous thing, and meant a lot to Chattanooga because groceries and stuff were bought here and hauled out there. Now I don't know how many thousand men they had there, but it was a tremendous big thing. And, of course, [in] the second World War there were a lot of them out there, too, but I think there were more in the first one. I used to be out there a good deal during that war and saw the "goings-on." But it's all gone now.
233

Bradley: Jim, it's been a wonderful pleasure talking with you.

Griffiss: Well, I hope I haven't talked too much or given out any secrets (laughter).

Bradley: I doubt if you have. Are there any other recollections you have of your youth, or of the town and its people over the past fifty years?

Griffiss: Well, I recall a lot of our older citizens, who have long since gone, who played a big part in Chattanooga.
242

Bradley: What list would you make of that category?

Griffiss: Well, I'd put Dr. [Thomas Spencer] Tom McCallie, maybe not at the top, but close to him [Ed. it]; I thought he was a very,

(Griffiss): very fine gentleman. Dr. [Jonathan] Bachman, Dr. [Henry] Berlin and Dr. [William T.] Hope, those were some of our leading citizens when I was a child. We had a good many lawyers who were leading citizens then. I remember many of the lawyers that were at the bar when I came that were [prominent]. It seemed to me back in those days that the lawyers were more the leading citizens than they are now. Most of the lawyers now are not interested in civic propositions; they are interested in making as much money as they can. Those men were usually interested in politics and in the city. They were big men; maybe they seemed bigger because I was younger.

262 But I was speaking of cousin Tom McCallie; I'll tell you a story on me. I don't know whether it's apropos or not, but it shows the type of man he was; he was, I think, a student of human nature and a very fine one. For some reason, I don't think I had ever been christened; I don't know, I didn't have any record of it anyhow. And so I was going into the Mountain City Club one day and cousin Tom was coming out or going in, and I stopped him. I said, "Cousin Tom, I want you to christen me some time." Well, I was going to his church because my future wife [Virginia Keating Griffiss] belonged to it, and I'd go with --

Bradley: First Presbyterian.

Griffiss: No, the one out on McCallie Avenue.

Bradley: Oh, Central --

269 Griffiss: Central Presbyterian. And my wife and her mother [Mary Ida Wells Keating] and sister [Jeanne Keating Smith] went there, and I'd go with them to church. I said, "I want you to christen me sometimes." "All right, John, I'll do that." I said, "Well, don't christen me 'John' I'm Jimmy." He always called me John. He said, "All right." He said, "I'll just take you into the church at the same time." And I said, "No, I don't want to join your church." I said, "My grandfather was always a deacon or an elder or something in the First Presbyterian, and we've always been members of the First Presbyterian." I had never joined the church. "Well," he said, "I think you're right, you ought to go in that church." Well, that let it drop. Well, two or three Sundays later it so happened that I was leaving Chattanooga, moving to Greenville, South Carolina, the next day. How he found it out, or if he found it out, I don't know.

But, anyhow, I was sitting there with my future wife and future mother-in-law and sister-in-law, and Dr. Tom's wife was sitting in the same pew with us, and somebody else.

(Griffiss): He came over and leaned over them and said, "John, how about christening you this morning?" I said, "Okay, but don't -- if you promise not to kiss me," -- he always kissed the babies (laughter) -- "and don't christen me 'John.'" He said, "All right, I'll just take you into the church at the same time," and yonder he went, didn't give me a chance to say "Yea or nay." Well, you're supposed to go before the vestry or something, I don't know what it is, and be questioned, you know, and so forth. He stood me up in front of the congregation, he just had them vote me in right there. (laughter) He said, "This young man has the same blood in his veins that I do." Said, "I'm just going to put him up before you. Do you want him in?" or something, and that was it. I never was snowballed into an organization, but he was that type of man. He knew if he didn't do it in a hurry, he wouldn't get me in. And, as I say, I left town the next day.

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About that time, either before or after that, my aunt wanted him to preach my grandfather's funeral up at Loudoun, my grandfather [James Harrison] Johnston. So she asked me to bring cousin Tom up to preach the funeral, which I did. It was about a four-hour drive up there then; we didn't have any freeways and so forth. And I dreaded it; I said, "Lord, I've got to spend four hours with 'Preacher,'" and I said, "I'll have one awful time of it." I never had as much fun in my life. (laughter) He came out with one tale after another. I said, "Cousin Tom, if you weren't a preacher, I'd say you were the biggest liar I ever saw." (laughter) He'd swear it was the truth. But we had a lot, as I say, we had a lot of big men that had the effect. Dr. Bachman had a great effect on this community, I think, and then Tom McCallie did, too. I recall a lot of the older lawyers who were -- well, they were practicing, as I say, when I was young. Old man Wilkerson* was one of them, and I can't recall the names -- I can see their faces now, but I can't remember their names. They were all -- Mr. [James] J. B. Milligan, now he taught me about all I know about wills. He was there when I went in the office [Milligan & Milligan]; he and Con [Carnot G. Milligan] had the office together, and I went in with them and have been there ever since.

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Now, I've never been a member of the firm, never wanted to because I've practiced just as my own sole practice, but I have shared offices with them and shared a secretary, library, and so forth. But these older lawyers were always good to the

* Leonard F. and William E. Wilkerson had a law practice at 206-207 Temple Court.

(Griffiss): young lawyers. If you had a question that -- I know if I had anything on corporations, I'd go to Mr. Wilkerson and he'd straighten me out. But by the same token, if he had something on taxes, which was newer to him, he'd come to me and get my advice on it. Old man [C. W. Kirby] Meacham was another one that was practicing back in those days. There were a lot of excellent lawyers that I knew and enjoyed working with.

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Bradley: I wanted to ask you, too, do you recall -- someone told me at one time there were nine or eleven distilleries, active distilleries here in Chattanooga at one time. Of course, it was before prohibition. Do you remember any part of that -- of their activity? Did people pay any attention to them or --

Griffiss: I've got a part in the activities; I've got a quart of whiskey that was made by old man Morg Price in his distillery.

Bradley: Is that right? What was his distillery, do you remember?

Griffiss: I don't know. There was a Mountain Springs [brand] here, and I don't remember the other names of them. That name sticks in my mind. But old man S. S. Price had one [Chattanooga Distilling Co.], and then his brother [James S.] had a distillery here, and there were a number of distilleries here. Then, of course, you had the beer place down there, Reif's --

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Bradley: Which was a brewery?

Griffiss: A brewery, yes, that made beer down close to the river, Reif's, I believe they called it. * But I do have this [bottle of] Old Tennessee Club, I believe this whiskey is. I've still got it. It's dropped down about that far with the distillate and with the evaporation, and, of course, the cork's gotten rotten in it. I had one of those old 100 proofs that was before prohibition; I can't get anybody to drink it, they say it's so strong you can't drink it. (laughter)

Bradley: It must be about 120.

Griffiss: I imagine it is, yes.

Bradley: Do you think it was because of the transportation -- grain could be brought in here and --

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Griffiss: Yes, it could be brought in.

* George and Charles Reif owned and operated Chattanooga Brewing Company which brewed lager beer.

Bradley: And, of course, it was shipped a great deal out, I'm sure, by train.

Griffiss: Yes. But grain could be brought in here on rafts and was, and on barges; it was barged down the river. I don't remember where the distilleries were, any of them, but I remember those two brothers had distilleries here, and that this whiskey I've got was made by Mr. S. S. Price. There were some fortunes made then in the whiskey business here. And then, of course, you had your saloons up and down the street.

Bradley: Tennessee went dry before --

Griffiss: Before national -- yes, it went dry, I think, in 1908, as I recall, something like that.* And, of course, you had your free lunches, and they tell me they were wonderful; I don't know (laughter), that was before my day, too, when you could go in and get a nickel stein of beer and eat all you wanted to.

Bradley: Well, I surely appreciate your talking to me.

Griffiss: All right, sir. I hope I've added something to your -- whatever you call it.

Bradley: It's a collection, I think, of reminiscences and we like to think of it as sort of filling in the background. We do appreciate it.

Griffiss: Well, I'm glad I could be here.

* Tennessee ratified the Prohibition Amendment in 1913. However, distilleries continued to operate in Chattanooga until nationwide Prohibition began in 1919.

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