

OH
80-5
Daisy Balsay
Dr. Robert Fullilove

04
80-5

YAZOO COUNTY SCHOLAR IN RESIDENCE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: Dr. Daisy Balsley
INTERVIEWER: Barbara Allen
SUBJECT: Dr. Robert Fullilove
DATE: 1980

DB: The only daughter of Dr. Robert Elliot Fullilove. I've been living in Chicago for the past thirty years and now teach at Roosevelt University here in Chicago. I consider it a very great privilege to be able to talk about my father, for one reason because I take a great deal of pride in the thought that some small record of what he was like and the kind of physician he was, and surgeon, at the Afro-American Hospital, has some small chance of being preserved for posterity.

My father was born on July 5, 1882. He was the second son of Taylor and Laura Fullilove. His parents were ex-slaves, and because his grandparents were -- particularly his grandmother -- was such a strong influence in his life, I would like to say just a word about them.

First of all, his father took the name "Fullilove" -- or rather, his grandfather -- took the name "Fullilove" because it was that of the widow Fullilove who owned him. The fact that she was called the Widow Fullilove certainly does imply that there was a husband in the picture but some how or other he does not figure in the story of the Fullilove family. My conjecture is that he was perhaps -- that he perhaps died early and that my great-grandfather just simply did not have very much dealings with him, or didn't remember very much about him.

When he was a boy, he was taught the blacksmith's trade and apparently became very adept at it. The Widow would hire him out to various farmers in the neighborhood and it appears that he was very much in demand. After he married he conceived a plan by which he could buy his freedom. He would hire himself out -- he arranged with the Widow to hire himself out and to give the Widow regular monthly installments that would eventually cover the price, or his price, as a slave. And he was given permission to pocket the remainder if there was any.

OH
80-5 Daisy Balsay
Dr. Robert Fullilove

OH
80-5 Daisy Balsay
Dr. Robert Fullilove

Through skillful maneuvering and being a person of very great enterprise, he did succeed in buying himself. He was in the process of buying his wife's freedom when the Civil War broke out. He had married a very beautiful, as the report goes, mulatto woman by the name of Adeline Oldnutz. I'm not at all sure that that was the correct pronunciation of the name but as far as I can determine, it was spelled -- just determined phonetically, now -- it was spelled O-l-d-n-u-t-z. Adeline lived on a plantation of which the master, who was Swedish, was also her father.

In spite of the fact that both of them, both my great-grandfather and my great-grandmother, seem to have been treated very well by their owners, they were not taught to read or write. They were absolutely illiterate. Taylor -- they had, however, one son. I don't want to get ahead of the story. Yes, they had one son, whose name was Taylor, and that was my grandfather. That was my father's father.

Before the Civil War, he had married a woman whose background was quite similar to Adeline's. Her mother had lived on a plantation of which the master, a Scotchman, was also her father. I don't know the name of my -- I don't know the family name of my grandmother.

After the War, Taylor, my grandfather, started a family and had three children in rapid succession. They were William, Robert, who was my father, and a girl by the name of Lulu. Taylor began to see very early in his career that there was not much future there in Demopolis, Alabama -- oh, I forgot to say that the family lived in Demopolis, Alabama. Well, he had begun to see that there was not very much future for the family in Demopolis and he decided to set out to try to find greener pastures. He actually walked from Demopolis, Alabama, to the farm in Holmes County, Mississippi, on which he eventually settled and worked for the rest of his life as a sharecropper.

He had to stay there some time before he could accumulate enough money to send for his family. It wasn't very long, and he was able to send for his wife, his parents, and their three children, who were very small at the time. Now it was this farm that my father knew and loved as home. It was called "Honey Island", and was beautiful delta land. My father said that very early in his life he had made a vow to himself that one day he would own that plantation himself, and I must add that he did do just that. He not only bought that plantation but several surrounding it and so the Fullilove holdings for quite a long time were quite extensive.

Taylor, my grandfather, was a very hard worker, and his family began to grow by leaps and bounds, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say by sons and daughters, until there were twelve children in all.

When my great-grandfather was forced to move out of the house to a nearby small home -- the family always stayed close together, I might add -- my father went to live with his grandparents. By that time he was a young impressionable boy who was extremely fond of his grandmother Adeline. She was equally fond of him and he told the story of how she -- he would often tell us the story -- of how she was the one who inspired him to become a physician. He said that often in the evenings, or late afternoon after the evening meal, and while the family was gathered on the front porch, she would suddenly jump up and peer down the road as if she were actually seeing something, and would exclaim in some such terms as these, "What is all that dust that I see down there? Why, there's somebody coming! Certainly must be somebody important from the looks of those horses and that fine buggy. I wonder who it could be?" And she would stand there shading her eyes with her hand and kind of rocking to and fro, apparently trying to get a better look at the approaching apparition.

And finally, when it did loom into view, she would stand back and say, "Oh, bless my soul, that's Dr. Robert Elliot Fullilove! Why, he must be out on his rounds. What a handsome figure of a man he is!" And then she would wave, "Hello, there, Doctor!" And then my father said that he would -- all the time he was sitting there entranced at this narrative, and that he would jump up and run to her and she would hug him and they would rock back and forth in a sort of mutual understanding of the whole situation.

And he said that this went on and on, and he never for once doubted the truth of her clairvoyance. When he became school age, he attended the one-room school house in the vicinity. I have seen the -- well, the spot -- the building had long since gone by the time I was old enough to know anything about it. But I've seen the spot and my father has told of how he went to school there, and then learned that there was a school in Yazoo City run by a Mr. Oakes. Since these schools were not graded and the grades were not comparable to what we know them today, I would say -- I would have to guess -- that that school went to about the tenth grade. But at that time, admission to college was not nearly as strict as it is today and it was possible for my father to enter Rust College in Holly Springs, Mississippi, from that school in Yazoo City.

I want to say a word about Rust College, because it also played a very important part in my father's career. It was founded by the American Missionary Association, that was established -- I don't know much about the real beginning of it -- but it had its base in the New England states, and I believe it was Boston. The teachers who I'm sure were not very highly paid were really doing missionary work when they came down south, were, however, dedicated to the ideal of giving the blacks, the newly emancipated

blacks in that area, a really sound classical education. They themselves were the products of the British curriculum, British type curriculum, which included courses in Latin and Greek and mythology and logic and mathematics and aesthetics, etc. And my father proved to be very, very agile, very, very capable as a student, and assimilated all of this very easily. He especially liked Latin. He took, oh, enough of it to be quite fluent in the reading of it, because I remember when my brother and I graduated from the high school that we attended, we did not have enough Latin credits to qualify us for entrance into the colleges that we wished to attend. He was going to Howard University in Washington, D. C., and I was going to attend Fisk. And he taught us, taught us the Latin. I remember his teaching us during the summer enough Latin -- in his spare time, now -- enough Latin to permit us to pass qualifying tests in Latin.

Another thing, another influence that his Latin training had was on his own prose style. My father was a beautiful writer, that is, his style was simply beautiful. I have been impressed, very much impressed in later years, at the very simple and uncluttered character of his prose writing. It was, as I said, simple, but with sufficient structural sophistication to enable him to express the most complex ideas with the utmost clarity. I remember one summer, it must have been about two summers ago, when I was visiting in Mississippi, I went by the home of Dr. Boyd, Dr. J. D. Boyd, at Alcorn, Mississippi, who was at one time president of Alcorn, and after he had recognized me -- it took him a little time to do that! It had been many years since I had seen him -- but after he recognized me, one of the first things he said was, "Why, Daisy, I'm so glad to see you because I have just been keeping something that I had hoped I would be able to share with you." And he brought out a letter that my father had written to him when he was elected president of Alcorn. It was a long letter, relatively long, and when I read it I was just simply amazed at the beauty and dignity of the style.

My father was given to letter writing. I often wondered how he found the time, with his busy schedule, but he loved to write and he wrote easily, so I guess that was one of the reasons why he wrote so much. But he would write letters of that kind to -- of that nature -- to his relatives on the occasions of their having accomplished something or when they were extremely depressed -- depressed and fighting feelings of defeat. I remember also that he had a brother-in-law, Dr. Joseph Shaw, who practiced in Magee, Arkansas for a very long time but his family wanted to move out -- well, his daughter had already gone out to Los Angeles and the family wanted to move out there, and so, much to his -- much against, really, what he wanted to do, over his objection, much against his better judgment -- he also decided to pull up roots there as a physician -- in Arkansas, as a physician -- and

move out to Los Angeles. Well, things didn't go well for him, trying to get adjusted and having trouble with passing the state medical board out there. He went into a sort of depression and was extremely despondent. And so his wife wrote to my father and described the situation to him, and my father wrote him a letter. I didn't know anything about this during the time it was happening, but I was also in Los Angeles not too long ago and after my aunt died, my cousin had gathered all the memorabilia from the home and included among the letters that she ran across was one that my father had written to my uncle, Uncle Joe, Dr. Shaw, during the time that he was going through this extremely difficult period, and she also shared it with me. And again, I had to just sit back and wonder at the beauty of the composition and the style. Not only was he an excellent writer in that respect, but his handwriting was beautiful. And I might say about it, that it did not deteriorate up until the time he died, or up until the time that he stopped really writing letters, which was perhaps a year, six to nine months, before he died. His handwriting was beautiful and steady. It was the kind of Spencerian style, without the flourishes, that was taught in the schools in those early days.

Well, my father always kept a very close relationship with his brothers and sisters. He would encourage them to go on to school. He wasn't able, as soon as he finished Rust, to go to Meharry, which was the medical college that he attended, and so after Rust, he spent a year or so teaching, and among his students were his own brothers and sisters, the younger ones, and even the older ones. As I said, he kept in very close touch with them; they called him affectionately "Bud", his brothers and sisters. He sent one of his younger brothers to Meharry, and he became a dentist. He was generous with them to a fault, and also forgiving to a fault, if there's any such thing as that.

He had a strong attachment to his youngest brother, George Dewey, perhaps because he was a kind of black sheep in the family. He would forgive George anything and George came as near to breaking him financially as you can possibly imagine. He had a younger sister who required custodial care. She was an invalid and slightly mentally defective, and he built a house on the plantation and arranged with Uncle George to run the farm and to make a home for my Aunt Mina. Well, I remember Uncle George as an extremely likeable man, very nice-looking, with a keen sense of humor, who had charisma, and when he was under the influence of alcohol, this charisma was increased, actually. And so I -- I remember that when he would come to town to report to my father about the conditions on the farm and ask for more money and to say that a tractor had been stolen or was out of repair or something like that, he was always a little inebriated,

and my father pretended never to notice this, and he always gave him what he wanted and never questioned him. He would scold him a bit. I think he knew, just didn't want to let on, but he would scold him a bit. But it ended it up with my father's never receiving one bit of profit from that farm, all the time. But he was forever forgiving Uncle George and defending him and loving him, in spite of everything.

His own brothers and sisters also had large families. I'll say this -- I'll go on with this before -- his relationship with his family, before I talk about his education and practice.

They called him -- my cousins -- all called him "Uncle Bud", and he was something like the fairy godfather to them. He bought them things that -- there were scores of them, too -- he bought them things that their parents could not afford, such as eye-glasses when they needed them, and various other things. I remember once one of my cousins said to my father, during -- I didn't know whether he was joking or not when he said it or whether he had actually had it in mind for some time -- but he said to him that he was going to have his PhD by the time he was 25, and my father laid down his pencil -- he had been writing a prescription for him and he laid down his pencil -- and he said, "Well, now, look here. If you do that, then I promise you that I'll help you every step of the way!" And sure enough, in spite of the fact now that my father never made a whole lot of money, he helped this cousin through school and he did have his PhD in philosophy from Harvard when he was -- before he was 25. His own father never learned to read or write. I don't know whether my father ever sought to teach him or not, but my grandfather was a very bright man and very, very proud of Bud, my father, and his children. And his children. My early recollection of him -- and this is just a spotty recollection, because I must have been extremely young -- but it has to do with a birthday party that my father -- yes, it was a party -- that my father had planned for my grandfather.

My father discovered that he was not going to be able to attend the party and so he sent us with Mother. He had written my grandfather a long, beautiful letter -- one of those letters again! -- in tribute to his birthday. It was just beautiful, saying how much he loved him and what a devoted father he'd been to all of us -- all of them -- and just expressing a general kind of love and admiration for his father. And he conceived the idea of having my little -- my brother, Bob, who was just a little fellow now -- had to be, he couldn't have been -- you know, as I think I told you, I have not ever been good with dates -- but he probably was not more than five years old, or something like that. But he had planned to have Bob read the letter. And I remember very well walking up the steps of that house, and I remember going

in and my grandfather's greeting us, and I remember my brother's reading the letter. He did it beautifully. And when he finished my grandfather sat there with the tears just streaming down his face and the pride that he took in it! When I thought of this afterwards, I often wondered if it possibly was not a little embarrassing to him, but the more I recall that scene and -- the fact that he couldn't read -- but the more I recall the scene, I know that that was not the reaction that my grandfather had, it was just pride. He kept the letter, he showed it around, he told of the incident over and over and over again.

Well, my father kept in very close contact with his own family all through the years. I thought I'd just better finish that part of the narrative before I get on with my father's training and his practice of medicine in Yazoo City. He was their -- for his family, their family physician. He treated them all free of charge. He never, never once acted impatiently with them. I have never heard him say or permit anybody to say in his presence anything disparaging about any of them. He would sometimes simply laugh at some of their foibles, and they had many, they were perfectly human -- they were human beings -- they were human. But they also maintained a profound respect and love for him during his life.

When he graduated from Rust, he went up to Meharry, Meharry Medical College at Nashville, Tennessee. The College was one of two that I know anything about that trained blacks at that time. The other one was Howard in Washington, D. C. Now, in that period, the doctors had no specialty, so I think that -- although my father most have been exposed to surgery, as was perhaps true of everybody who was studying medicine at that time -- it was not really considered a specialty in any sense that you would think of that today.

He graduated from Meharry in 1907. And I can remember very well he had a graduation picture that he hung in his office, and we just loved it because it showed my father standing in the front row, slim -- he put on weight in later years and we just always liked this beautiful picture of him -- slim, and the thing we liked so much was his absolutely handsome handlebar moustache. This was just an elegant moustache! We liked it, the moustache, but after a while he grew tired of it and he cut it off, and my brother has told me recently that one of the big disappointments of his life was when my father visited him when he had set up practice in New Orleans, after he had graduated from medical school, and when my father came to visit him, when he opened the door and saw this man standing there without that luxurious moustache, he said it was one of the big jolts of his life.

My father had married my mother shortly -- well, yes, shortly after he finished Meharry, because she graduated from Rust College also, in Holly Springs, in 1907, the same year he finished medicine. She -- I'll say a word about her, say more about her later -- but I might say this: she would require a whole story in herself, just in her own right. I will say more about her if the tape permits.

When he graduated from Rust, he opened an office in a small Mississippi town near Memphis called Tupelo. It was a very, very small kind of hole-in-the-wall unpretentious place, but that wasn't what finally decided him against Tupelo. It was the fact that he was something of a curiosity there. He was actually stopping traffic. People would stop to look at him and point him out as that nigger doctor, that new nigger doctor in town. The blacks were suspicious of him, too. It was a little hard for them to even conceive of a black doctor, and then really to conceive of the idea of a black at that time becoming a physician and then to have one actually there in the flesh was just a little bit more than they could swallow. They would, however, sometimes come to his office -- a few -- but he learned later that they would take the prescriptions that he had written for them to white doctors to see if they were real. And my father often laughed about that.

He had heard of Dr. Miller in Yazoo City. Dr. Miller had by that time become a real -- quite famous, I would say. He was a real go-getter, a very attractive, very affable man, and so in about 1911, he went to Yazoo City to join him. He became his assistant but not in what you would call a paid, formal relationship. It wasn't that at all. My father, I guess, was a kind of apprentice to him. He was older, Dr. Miller was older than my father, and welcomed him and just really took him to his bosom, so to speak.

Dr. Miller -- I remember him very well, very well, indeed, and my memories of him are very pleasant. I liked him very, very much. He was -- as I said, a good -- he dressed well, I guess that's what I'd better say. Now the nickname "Daisy" actually was another term for a dandy in that time, so he got that name because of the way he dressed, his dapper appearance at all times.

Now, the Afro Hospital, when my father first went there, had not come into existence, but Dr. Miller had a sanatorium which was really a kind of extension of his office, down on -- oh, where was it? On Mound? Well, I can't remember -- I would rather be accurate about this so I'll leave it off; I can supply that a little later, except that you, perhaps, know this already, where the sanatorium was, so I won't bother about that. He did operations there and my father, you see, could also take his patients to this hospital. I'm not giving any details on the hospital

because I'm sure you can get all ~~on~~ you have this from other sources since you've also done interviews with Dr. Miller's relatives.

But I do want to talk about my father's activities there and his relationship with Dr. Miller. They operated there, and the hospital must have had the minimal equipment. I don't know just to what extent it had to meet any state regulative standards, but I'm sure there were some and I'm sure they met them because as far as I can remember it had a good reputation. It was the only thing around, for one thing. But my father took his patients there and they probably split the small fee that they collected from the patients, between them.

Their relationship remained cordial during the complete -- during both of their careers. My father was glad actually to have the opportunity to work with Dr. Miller. He was a young fledgling surgeon and had much to learn and he learned it. Dr. Miller, I remember, called him affectionately "Fully". It was all he ever called him, but my father never called him anything but Dr. Miller.

I don't think my father would ever have even thought of being jealous of Dr. Miller. Dr. Miller had a nice home, by those standards, and was making money -- was actually making money. But I don't think my father even knew the term, jealousy. As a matter of fact, he wouldn't even want me to use that term in connection with their relationship, so perhaps I'd better strike that from the record!

When the hospital was built, in the '30's I believe but again I'm sure you can check that date for accuracy, my father became -- Dr. Miller was the head surgeon and my father was his assistant and remained in that capacity, served in that capacity, until Dr. Miller died in 1947, when my father became the head surgeon and stayed on in that capacity until his death in 1965.

Since the hospital was owned by a fraternal order, my father did receive a salary from the hospital. I have no idea as to what it was, a small salary I am sure. But he also had a private practice, a large private practice, as a matter of fact. He would put in many hours at the hospital, the morning hours, as I recall, from about 7:00 until around noon, or maybe earlier. Sometimes they scheduled operations earlier than that, but I would say from around 7:00 to 12:00 just about did it. He would then go to his office, which by that time would be overflowing with patients.

He had a large private practice, as I said. But I want to tell you what kind of private physician he was. His patients loved him. He was, to them, a kind of father figure, a confessor, a

lecturer. He didn't hesitate to lecture them on any subject whatsoever, even without their soliciting his advice but they never seemed to resent it. But they did come to him for advice. I would say that he was practicing psychosomatic medicine even before the term had been coined. He never treated the patients with any kind of condescension; no matter how small the problem that they brought he always entertained it and treated them with dignity. He didn't just limit his relations with them to that of a physician. I don't know just exactly how -- well, it was still in the capacity of physician, but I remember very well that he used to tuck a book of poetry under his arm when he left the house on Sunday afternoon to make his rounds at the hospital. And he would read the poems to them.

I often, later, when I used to tease him about it, I'd say, "Now, Father, are you sure -- " (I always called him "Father".) I said, "Father, are you sure that these people -- that they don't regard this as a nuisance? How do you know which ones are going to be receptive?" And he would just smile that kind of knowing smile, and he'd say, "Oh, you can tell! I don't -- see, I have a choice here, and I don't impose anything on them that I think they can't stand."

And as a matter of fact, he did have a choice, because his selections ran from -- I'd say Wordsworth and Tennyson through Edgar Guest. I don't have the slightest doubt that some of the poems were completely over the heads of his patients but my father had a lovely voice, a lovely speaking voice, and was something of an elocutionist himself. I believe they enjoyed it. I never heard anything to the contrary, from the nurses or any of his former patients. I think they actually looked forward to it. As a matter of fact, I can remember also -- and this is just in connection with the poetry reading and his relationship to us -- when my mother died, he never married again, but he would devise little ways of spending time with us privately and one of the ways of spending time with us was to have a poetry reading session with us on Sunday afternoon. He wouldn't let us have candy but once a week and that was on Sunday, and he made a kind of ritual of dividing out the candy after dinner, and then he would sit and he would read the poetry, and this was very pleasant.

There was a family who lived across the street from us with which we were very, very close. They were the Sharkeys. And I can remember very well that when he'd get ready to read the poetry, we'd say, "No, wait! Not yet! Let's go and get the Sharkeys." There were children in that family, so we'd run over and get them, and all the two families, the children, would sit there spellbound as he read the poetry. So I can remember that even on us he had that kind of effect.

Another thing that we did as a family -- and I know this is digressing but you will edit it anyway -- he -- we went to the cemetery -- my mother died -- after my mother died, he never married again. We went to the cemetery every Sunday afternoon. It never occurred to me that people ever thought that this was bizarre, but I was visiting just last summer in Detroit. The woman that I was visiting was a woman who had grown up in Yazoo City, I had known her all my life. I had not seen her for many years. And, during the time that I was there, she finally said to me, "Daisy, there is something I must ask you because we used to hear so many rumors about what went on at that cemetery when you and Dr. Fullilove and the children went out there." Said rumor had it that she would talk to you, your mother, and say, "Now, Maggie, how do you think the children look today? Do you approve of the way --" (he called me Jack incidentally) "Jack is dressed?" Of course that just sent me into hysterics because nothing like that went on. As a matter of fact, I don't -- sometimes we never even called her name. But he had made the cemetery lot into a very beautiful spot. He put a bench there, and he was very good at roses, and he planted roses and there was a beautiful rose arbor, and it was just a nice spot to spend a Sunday afternoon.

And I'll tell you what we did, though. We did a sort of Canterbury Tales type of thing. We told stories. We'd tell stories on the way and then he'd -- we'd talk about them there and tell them on the way back. We had an excellent children's library, I must say that, another influence, I'm sure, of the -- of both my brother and father's training. I can remember Myths Every Child Should Know, the Harvard Classics, the encyclopedias, not only the Brittanica but a series that I don't think is in existence any longer but which was called Every Child Should Know series and we had them. And I remember very well that we had favorite books. We were avid readers. We read everything. I can remember that my brother's favorite book was Child's History of England, and mine was Heidi. I could recite that from beginning to end even before I went to school.

And then, of course, when we exhausted our own supply of books, we'd look to the shelves for the adult books, and two -- three, actually -- stand out in my memory. I read Ramona when I was seven years old. And another one was called He Fell in Love with His Wife, and it was written by a man called E. P. Rowe. Isn't it funny how you can remember all these things. I was six or seven when I read all this. And the other was called Sorrows of Satan. I don't know who the author of that was but that was fascinating, but we could read all of that.

My father always encouraged the reading, there's no question about that, and those jaunts to the cemetery were never looked upon by

us as morbid things at all. They were just times when he could spend time with us alone and when he got the chance to really see that we were developing, the sides of us -- I think you understand that -- were developing.

Well, to go back now to the hospital. My father did indeed perform a great deal of surgery at the hospital. The two of them operated in the mornings. Sometimes my father did operations on his own patients alone, but for the most part, the two of them operated. It was my father however who would be called back to the hospital in the night to sew up gunshot wounds and knife wounds. It seems that people there had a thing for double-barrelled shotguns, because they were constantly being exploded in the abdomens of people who would come to the hospital, then, with their intestines riddled with bullets, and all of this had to be taken care of.

As a matter of fact, those two men performed some incredible surgery. They did everything. I guess I should perhaps exclude brain surgery and heart surgery, but it wouldn't surprise me one bit to learn that they even attempted some of these! And just didn't publicize it. I don't know, I won't go any further with that.

Now their methods may have been crude by today's standards, but they had spectacular successes. The people had great confidence in them. Well, as a matter of fact, they knew anatomy very, very well, and they used common sense, and they gambled a bit, and they performed magic. That's just about the way it was.

I remember very well that my brother, who was very close to my father and visited just as often as he could, and when he couldn't visit -- and I feel very ashamed to admit that I didn't do this -- he wrote to him once at a week, had a special day on which he wrote, and they kept up a beautiful relationship. Well, I was about to say that I remember when my brother on some of his visits, my brother and father would get into these discussions about surgical practices, particularly those in the field of neurology. My brother was a specialist in neurology. He was a sophisticated surgeon, a board man in neurology, a fellow in the American College of Surgeons, etc., and they would discuss cases. And I remember very well they were talking about -- one night -- they were talking about an operation that my father had performed, and my brother was following along the details and nodding in assent, and when my father got to a certain stage in the recital, my brother jumped up and said, "Oh, Dad! No, Dad, you didn't! You couldn't have. By all the rules in medicine, if you did that, that man ought to be dead." And my father just leaned back and said, "Oh, but he isn't! He isn't, and as a matter of fact, I had planned to take you to see him tomorrow." And they'd just go on and on with that kind of thing.

They -- as I said, their surgery, my father's and Dr. Miller's surgery, just about covered the gamut. They did a lot of abdominal surgery because, as I said, there were a lot of accidents, gunshot wounds and that sort of thing, but they did -- they removed tumors and did appendectomies. Knife wounds I can remember were -- oh, there were many of them. Of course, they were the Saturday night casualties, those extreme knife wounds on every part of the body, including the face -- all had to be sewed up and taken care of. They would treat broken limbs there. They did mastectomies, appendectomies, that class of surgery, and they delivered babies there at the hospital.

I remember one case that was my father's case, that he was particularly proud of. It was the case of a young boy who drank lye and this closed up his throat. My father disconnected the esophagus, brought it out to the side, I would imagine in the area of the neck somewhere in there, and this boy was fed through a funnel inserted in that opening. When I first knew about this, I thought to myself, "Oh, how sad that this child has to be deprived of the pleasure of the taste of food." My father said, "Oh, no." He said the child chewed the food, there was nothing wrong with his salivary glands and also he could masticate it, and it was just removed and then fed into his stomach through the funnel. The child lived into adulthood and I'm pretty sure that if he's dead now, and I imagine he is, he didn't die as a result of that accident.

My father didn't dispense his own medicine, of course. There were very well-equipped drugstores in the area, and he had an excellent relation with the dentist there. I can remember very well that one of his idols and close friends was Mr. Carr, who owned a drugstore there for many, many years. And others. When he was ill, I can remember going down and as soon as the druggists knew that I was in town, they'd call and say to me, "Now, Daisy, if there is anything Dr. Fullilove needs, any medicine, just let us know and we will just be happy to take care of everything." And they did that. And they sent icecream to the hospital in such copious amounts that we -- I think they had to share it with other institutions there in the city, there was so much of it.

He did have a lot of very, very -- I'd say useful samples, that the various pharmaceutical houses would send him. I can remember they just covered the back seat of the car lots of time. But he would say he wasn't going to throw them away, and he would talk about how very often he was able to dispense them to very grateful patients in the country who would otherwise have had to wait for trips to town to get prescriptions filled.

Now at that time the hospital was strictly for surgical patients. All the other ailments were treated in the office, or at home if the patient was not ambulatory. Now, there was a wide variety of ailments that my father treated. Malaria was endemic. I can recall childhood bouts with it. Oh! Those times when I would be racked with chills, just shaking with chills one minute and the next minute burning up with fever. It is a small wonder that we didn't suffer some serious debilitation from those bouts with malaria, but apparently not. We don't seem to have suffered any ill effects.

But my father treated a lot of it because it was endemic. Typhoid fever was also one of the ailments that he treated. Respiratory ailments, asthma, I remember that, and pneumonia, influenza, and what was known as -- it was tuberculosis but it was commonly called consumption at that time. None of the lung disorders were ever diagnosed as lung cancer as I can remember, but I feel pretty sure that some of what passed for consumption or tuberculosis was actually lung cancer, particularly those that did not succumb to treatment for tuberculosis. Some diphtheria, and something that was called acute indigestion, but since we now know that people just simply don't die from indigestion, the ailment was no doubt cardiac. Diabetes and associated complications were also a part of his repertory of diseases that he treated, or disorders.

One of the reasons that diabetes was a real problem in that area was -- one of the reasons was that the people who had it worked in the fields and they were not as careful as they should have been with injuries. They'd stick something in their feet or they'd get scratches on their hand and just simply not attend to them, and by the time my father saw them, gangrene would have set in and they would have to have the limbs removed, or sometimes the gangrene was too far along and they simply died of it.

There were various infections also being treated, again for the reason that he had a large plantation practice and many of the patients were field hands and wouldn't take care of injuries and would get infections.

Diarrhea was also one of the diseases. And there was a disorder called pellagra that you don't hear anything about now. It is a dietary disorder, and it has just about disappeared. It was caused, I believe, by a deficiency of nicotinic acid, I suspect, and it was chronic, characterized by gastro-intestinal disturbances and skin eruptions and sometimes mental disorders. My father had numbers of cases of those -- well, numbers of cases of pellagra.

I don't recall sickle cell anemia, by that name, though a cousin of mine, who lives here in Chicago, lived here until she died two years ago, said that my father diagnosed her son's ailment as sickle cell years before it was confirmed by doctors here in Chicago. So there must have been some of that. I have not checked with my brother, who would know more about it than I on this situation.

High blood pressure was a disorder that he treated. Hepatitis. All the childhood diseases, and that was, you see, before there was any immunization to any large extent and all children just had to have these diseases and had them, and there were complications sometimes from it. But those childhood diseases were a large part of the diseases -- comprised a large part of the roster.

Rheumatism was also -- this was arthritis by that term -- was also high on the list.

As to the hours that my father worked, why, he worked all hours. He was completely dedicated to his profession. He did not have a specific -- he didn't have just specific office hours. His day, however, did have -- in order for him to get everything done, it did have to have a measure of order to it. Speaking about strict office hours, when he went down to visit my brother, very proud of the fact that my brother had opened a well-equipped, very nice looking office there in New Orleans, and he looked at the plaque that showed his office hours, and my father turned to my brother and said, "Office hours? Aren't you just about here all the time?" And my brother laughingly said that he assured him that he was not quite the dedicated man that my father was.

Well, he would go to the hospital in the mornings, of course, to perform the three to five operations which they usually performed, and then he would make the urgent house calls on his way to the office. Now, when he got to the office, he would find hoards of patients waiting for him, some of whom had been there waiting patiently all day. You see, he did a large plantation practice and those who could bring their patients in from the farms did so, and so many of them would be there. He would have his lunch -- well, he ate his dinner in the middle of the day -- no, I guess I'm not right about that, because I recall that he always came home to dinner in the evening -- so he would have lunch, but it would be sent in from one of the local cafes, and then he would begin to wait on his patients. After he had finished with them, he would make more house calls on his way home to dinner. He very seldom got a chance to eat his dinner uninterrupted because he was constantly getting calls during the dinner hour and would work until late in the evenings.

He would often go back to the office in the evenings. The way that happened was that the office girl would have gone home but somebody would notice that there were some patients sitting there in the office, or sitting outside -- not in the office but sitting outside, and they would call and say that there were patients there. Or somebody would -- some member of the family of the patients would get to a telephone and call my father and say there was somebody at the office and he would then get up and go down and take care of them.

He did a large plantation practice. Now those who could not get to the office, who were not able to get to the office, had to be treated at home, and so this -- and of course there were emergencies, too -- and this meant that my father would make his plantation calls often late in the evening, late at night.

When my brother, the one who became a physician, was old enough to go with him, he would accompany him on these excursions. Well, to tell the truth, these night calls, in the middle of the country, were not always the safest things. They were fraught with quite a few dangers. You see, that was an area where people shot first and investigated afterwards. My brother says that he recalls that he very often remembered the mounting excitement that he would feel when he'd climb -- well, he actually says he remembers hitching up the horse and buggy, but I don't believe that, I can't believe that he remembers back quite that far, but he declares he does. But he does remember climbing into the seat of the Model T Ford in the middle of the night to accompany my father on some of his calls.

One night, he said, they were going to an area called Wolf Lake. It's about ten miles from our house, and it was in the late spring. Now, that area was one that constantly came under the ravages of floods; high water or floods every spring would wash out most of the bridges. They were frail to begin with, just man-made little constructions that would span a ditch or a gulch in many instances, but some -- they had to be sturdy enough to support the cars and the farm vehicles, so for the most part they served the purpose pretty well, unless they were subjected to long periods of onslaught by this water.

So one night my father and my brother were feeling their way along when they came to a spot where the bridge had been washed out. There was no way to proceed except to cross a farmer's field, and they saw other cars ahead of them, taking this detour, so my father thought that there was nothing wrong with his going along in their wake. So he got about middle way across the field when a man popped up from nowhere and my brother said that for the first time in his life, he was looking down the barrel of a shotgun. Well, the man with the gun was the irate owner

of the land, who had just grown tired of all that traffic across his land. He just didn't want to put up with these trespassers any more, so he shouted to my father to turn the car around and get the blankety-blank out of there or he was going to blast him to smithereens, and my brother started crying. My father just -- according to my brother -- looked the man straight in the eye and said, "I'm Dr. Fullilove. I'm on my way to see a very sick patient, and the only way I can get there is across your plantation and I simply can't turn back. Besides, I saw other cars ahead of me taking this route and I'd appreciate it very much if you'd just let me go on." My brother said the man stared at him for a while and then he just sort of dropped the gun and waved my father on and said something like, "All right, doc. Go on."

My brother said that after that he began to rely on that phrase, "I'm Dr. Fullilove," to get them out of all kinds of trouble, and it usually did. It was just a magic that he said they could learn to depend on. So the next time he experienced that shotgun episode, he just waited for those magic words and they always had that magic effect.

There was another occasion that he tells, though, that's slightly humorous. They^{was} making a call in the middle of the night on a very lonely country road and they began to have some trouble with the headlights, they were blinking on and off, but there was nothing they could do about it and they just kept going on. A car pulled up beside them and pretty soon they were looking down the barrel of a shotgun again, and this time it was the sheriff. He accused my father of being a bootlegger, and told him to get out while he searched the car. You see, he had actually thought that the blinking lights were some sort of signals between two bootleggers who were making some sort of trade, or a bootlegger who was -- a sale of some sort. Again, my brother said, my father just calmly told him who he was, and the sheriff ended up apologizing and left with a slight warning that he should not travel with his lights in that condition and advised him to get them repaired.

Of course, there were other problems, too, that were the result -- well, that they encountered by having to make these rounds in the country in the middle of the night. Often the car would get stuck and they would have to walk the six or seven miles to the house of the patient, my father would wait on the patient, and then they would have to help the farmer -- or they did help the farmer hitch up the mules and wagon and go back with him to the spot where the car was stuck in the mud and wait until the car was pulled out. They just simply never knew what to expect, even after they got to the patient's house.

My brother says that many a time my father has had to operate on a patient on the kitchen table while he, still a very small boy, you know, gave the ether and held the lamp for my father. You can imagine what an experience that was! Sometimes my father would be so exhausted -- and this -- often when my brother, Bob, was not with him -- he'd be so exhausted that he wouldn't even attempt to go home that night. He'd just spend the night on a pallet at the home and go home the next day.

During the very terrible epidemic of the flu that claimed my mother's life, my father spent three days and nights going from one plantation to another, without going home at all. He would finish at one house where all the members were down with the flu, and there would be somebody waiting there to take him to another house where all the members were sick. And, surprisingly enough, although we had it, she died of it, he never contracted at all.

Now my mother's death was a grave shock to him, but he had to carry on. There was just nothing else in him to do. I can remember very well how grief-stricken he was. I remember the day she died. I can't remember my mother in any sort of continuous fashion, but I remember episodes. I remember events. And I do remember the day she died. Now she was a very talented woman in her own right. Her parents were also ex-slaves, but her father had acquired enough education to become a minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church. My father actually heard her singing in the church, in her father's church choir, and he did tell us many times after that, that he knew, the moment he saw her, that she was going to be his wife.

After they married, she did not work outside the home, but she did operate a sort of private -- kindergarten, I guess you would call it -- where she taught us and a few children of very close friends. When we went to school, I was in the fourth grade at seven. I can remember that very well. She could play the piano and had a marvelous voice, actually of operatic stature. Her teachers at Rust -- I think I told you she attended Rust -- had sort of discovered her in a similar fashion to the way the woman in Laurel discovered Leontyne Price. And she had a voice quite similar to that. They had even hoped to launch her on an operatic career and actually our introduction to opera was from the recordings, the arias, which she had there in the house, the complete stories of the Operas, and records -- at that time there was a record put out by Victor, I guess it was, that was very thick and unbreakable, and it had -- well, she had all the arias. I remember one particularly that my father liked very well was a duet from Norma.

But anyway, as children, we listened to those operas. We loved them. But then, after we listened to them, we played with them. We would sail them across the room, or roll them -- they were heavy records -- and so we devised all sorts of games by which we could also roll them across the room. And they must have been extremely durable because we could still listen to them after they had had that kind of treatment.

She didn't work, as I said, outside the home but she was very busy. She sang in the church choir, this is St. Stephen's Church right there, and she wrote a lot. Now, how she found time to write with three children, I don't know, but she did. Her only novel was called -- that was published -- was called Who Was Responsible. By today's standards I guess it would be judged quite moralistic and didactic, to say the least. It was the story of a man whose life and that of his family was ruined by his addiction to alcohol, the Demon Rum it was even called in this story. Now in spite of the fact that there was this moralistic thing to it, it was beautifully written, very simple, direct -- she was a good story-teller, there's no question about that.

I think her skills, though, lay mostly in the area of the short story. She was a short story writer and published quite a few stories in newspapers, or had them accepted in newspapers, and in a magazine that was called "The Half Century", and as I recall, it was published here in Chicago. I have tried my best to get my hands on some of the stories. Unfortunately, there was the flood, after my mother died, in Yazoo City, at which time the levee broke and most of the houses were just simply submerged and ours was among them. When I came back from college one year, I could just simply see the chimney on our house. My father wasn't able to rescue anything and so he lost his admirable library and all of her work, and the letters and the sort of thing that they had kept and treasured. So I just simply remember the stories and remember the plots of one or two. I remember the titles quite well. There were such titles as "Sweet Peas Between You", and it was a realistic story about two families, the family next door to us -- based on fact, as a matter of fact -- the family next door to us and our family, about their having an argument. The woman in the family, which was my mother, having an argument over some sweet peas that had been planted for her on the dividing line between the two houses.

That was one title, and another title was "Navy Blue Velvet". I don't remember anything about that one, but "Pass It On" was another title. And "The Making of Leon Toney", and another title, "Sermons In Stones". She was also extremely good in the kitchen. She always contributed -- she put her canned goods on display at the local fairs and that sort of thing.

After my mother's death, my father devoted more and more time to his career, to the practice of medicine, and, as I said, when Dr. Miller died, he became the chief surgeon. Now, when his duties at the hospital became more demanding, he took a room in the hospital and stayed in the hospital overnight many a night and gradually spent less and less time at home. The hospital staff became a surrogate family and he loved it, he loved it. He had said that he never wanted to retire, and when an ulcer on his leg broke down, he wouldn't give up. He made his hospital rounds in a wheelchair, and he died in the hospital in 1965 in the midst of his family.

He stayed in very good health up until that time and very active. He did, however, have a hearing loss. He refused to do anything about it. He loved baseball, he was an avid baseball fan, and I think that he did miss the fact that he began not to be able to hear the major league games the way he wanted to hear them. Our first clue that he was losing his hearing was because he would have the radio up so -- the radio would be so loud when he was listening to the games and we realized that he was having this problem. Now my brother spent a fortune on hearing aids for him but he would never wear them, and after he died we just found the whole collection. Any time my brother thought that a hearing aid would be useful to him, he would buy it, but after he died, we just found the collection there that he'd never used.

There was one rather pathetic little incident connected with his hearing loss that I want to tell you about. He had decided -- he made very few trips away from home -- but he had decided to go Meharry to a reunion of his class. My brother called me and asked what I thought about our dedicating a volume of medical books to the library in his honor, which would be called the Fullilove collection. And I, of course, thought it was just marvelous, and we decided then to do that. Now it turned out, however, that neither of us was able to go, but my brother wrote, and my brother, incidentally, was a good writer -- is, is a good writer himself -- but he wrote a beautiful tribute to my father and he sent it to Meharry and they promised that they would read the tribute in honor of my father at a public meeting, at the commencement exercise, as a matter of fact.

All right. My father went, and he told us later -- well, I'd better tell it this way. We, though we hadn't done it, of course, to receive praise, we were a little surprised, to say the least, that after the commencement exercise and my father came home and told about what a beautiful time he had had, he never once mentioned this gesture on our part. So this puzzled us a bit, a great deal, and I don't remember exactly what prompted my brother to

finally ask him point-blank about the contribution to the library in his name, but when my father found it out, he was just crushed and he told us that during the commencement exercise he was having a lot of problems just hearing what was going on on the stage, sitting in the audience as he was, but that he did remember that the master of ceremonies got up and read something and afterwards there was tremendous applause and somebody sitting next to him nudged him and said, "Fullilove, they want you to stand up," and my father said he stood there and bowed and acknowledged the applause but he said that all the time he thought that perhaps they were honoring the two or three of them that were still alive who had come back to the commencement, and he never knew what we had done. He didn't hear it.

Well, that always touched me a bit, but I got over it, and I was just simply glad that we were able to do it.

Now, I was not living -- did not live at home for any extended period of time after I started going off to school. But I would visit. I would come back in the summers, but I didn't know the hospital very well. I have a lot of pleasant memories in connection with the hospital.

I'd like to tell you really what it -- what the hospital really meant to the community. It served actually quite a unique place in the black community. First of all, it was a great source of pride because of its appearance. It was a brick building with very simple but good design. Considering the fact that it was right in the midst of architecture that was far from elegant -- as a matter of fact, the houses surrounding it were what we had learned to call "shotgun" houses, and which, if you know anything about this architecture, just simply meant little frame houses with one room right after the other, so you'd have to go through every room to get to the back, and with no imagination, no innovations or imagination, just straight little rows of one room after the other houses. So in the midst of that kind of architecture, here was this lovely low, sort of spread out brick building, and it was a real pride to the community.

The furnishings, as I recall them, were minimal but adequate. The rooms were equipped with typical hospital furniture. I can recall that it was very strong on physical cleanliness, and I'm sure, on professional cleanliness also. The floors, as I remember, were covered with congo-leum that was kept in repair, and was always kept well washed and waxed. The lab was minimal, I suspect, but adequate. I can remember particularly the kitchen, which was very clean. The food was copious and tasty, not at all like some of the insipid hospital food that I have tasted

since that time. I doubt very seriously that in those early days the woman who prepared the food was a trained dietician. I'm pretty sure that was not true, not at first. But it was certainly not difficult to find an experienced cook in that neighborhood since one of the few occupations for women, and most of the black women worked, you may rest assured, was domestic work, which included cooking, and they were excellent cooks.

The group of nurses that I remember were excellent recommendations for the hospital. I don't know how many they could accept at any one time because, you see, the hospital was a training ground for nurses. But I'm pretty sure that they kept their quota because these young women who selected nurse training were smart young black girls from all over the state, from cities like Meridian and Laurel and Natchez, who simply didn't want to teach -- who found that nursing was just much more to their liking. They simply welcomed an alternative to teaching. And so they came to Yazoo City to be trained.

I don't know -- I'm sure you can find these figures out also -- but I'm not sure just what proportion were able to pass the state board. I don't know actually what degrees or certificates or whatnot that they earned, but I'm sure there is somebody there who could give you that information. But as just professional people on the staff there, they departed themselves in an excellent professional manner. I knew some of them very well. I remember such names as Eunice Nelson. She is -- she was Eunice Nelson then -- she is the mother of the Dr. Nelson who has recently come to Yazoo City and opened an office as a dentist there. There was an Amanda Flowers, and she was from Laurel. She lives here in Chicago. Then there was Leola Nicholson, who is now Leola Galloway, and she's also there in Yazoo City. She is at now. And a Mrs. Walker, who is also in Yazoo City. She is at the nursing home now, though, and I have seen her. As a matter of fact, I visit both of them every time I'm in Yazoo City.

I would say then in general the nursing service was good, and certainly for that time, was as good as you might expect. As you could expect.

The other staff members in the early days I believe included an administrator. This was a man who was connected with the Afro-American order, named by and selected by the Afro-American order. He perhaps was also the business manager as I don't recall his having an associate, who would have performed that function. There was a receptionist, I'm sure. I don't remember if there were other staff members at all. Of course, there was the janitorial crew.

There was also a nursing home next to the hospital where the nurses lived, and I suspect there was a matron who had charge of the nurses, but I'm afraid that's just about all the staff that I remember.

The hospital did have an excellent reputation in the city. I think it's important to realize that it served another purpose other than a professional purpose. I would say it was a social purpose. It may be difficult to imagine today that people would regard going to the hospital on Sunday afternoon as something of an event, but it was! It was a place to go on Sunday. I don't want to give the impression, though, that there was any sort of circus atmosphere, or that there was rowdiness and disorder. This was not true at all about the people who went. They were quiet and the people who gathered there on Sunday included a large portion of people from the country, who couldn't get in to see their relatives except on Sunday, and they had to bring the family. So the whole family would come and park out some- where near the grounds, but there always a kind of solemnity about them, though they were dressed in their Sunday best; they seemed to have respected the function and to have regarded it with a sort of sacred attitude and they never abused the privilege that they enjoyed of being able to come on Sunday after- noon and stay for the afternoon and visit.

Of course, one did not have to have relatives to visit the hospi- tal. One could go to the hospital to see who was there. And so a lot of people did just that. There were occasionally quite famous patients there, and I say famous, because sometimes they were from out of town and they were, people who had done some- thing that had made their name, if not famous, well known in the black community, but then there were others who were local people but for one reason or another had achieved a kind of fame.

And I remember one particularly. This was a young woman by the name of Zanzzy Hill. She was the daughter of a local postman. She was a brilliant woman who had received training in law in some school in Nebraska. To this day I don't know what her medical problem was, but I do know that she stayed at the hos- pital for years. She just became a sort of celebrity because whatever the disease was which kept her bedridden, and I remem- ber that very well, it did not affect her mentality. She was a very articulate girl -- young woman -- and kept up with things. She was an avid reader. Her father was a very intelligent man, also, and she had a sister who was a physician, and a brother who was a professional man, I don't remember just what he did, but they kept her supplied -- and so did my father -- with the books and newspapers and things, and she was just simply a kind of oracle, I'd say, because people would go and talk over things with her, and she was always well prepared to express her views.

I'm sure this sounds fantastic but that woman stayed in that hospital for years. I can't imagine what was wrong with her. She did waste away. I was not around when she finally died, so I don't know any of the circumstances, and I never asked, so I think this might be interesting to find out. I don't know what circumstances attended her later years. I don't know whether she finally became irrational, and whether she ever lost that kind -- that mental alertness that made her so popular when I was in college and in the years after that.

This was the only medical care facility for blacks in Yazoo City or, as I recall, nearby. Yes, I feel pretty sure that that is true. I think that there were wings that -- this was a segregated situation -- but I believe that the hospitals in Vicksburg and Jackson had wings that were open to blacks, and quite a few people went there.

Now, other than members of the Afro-American Sons & Daughters did use the hospital. However, because the services to the members of the order -- of the fraternal order -- the larger portion of the clientele were members of the Afro-American Sons & Daughters order. But many others went, many others.

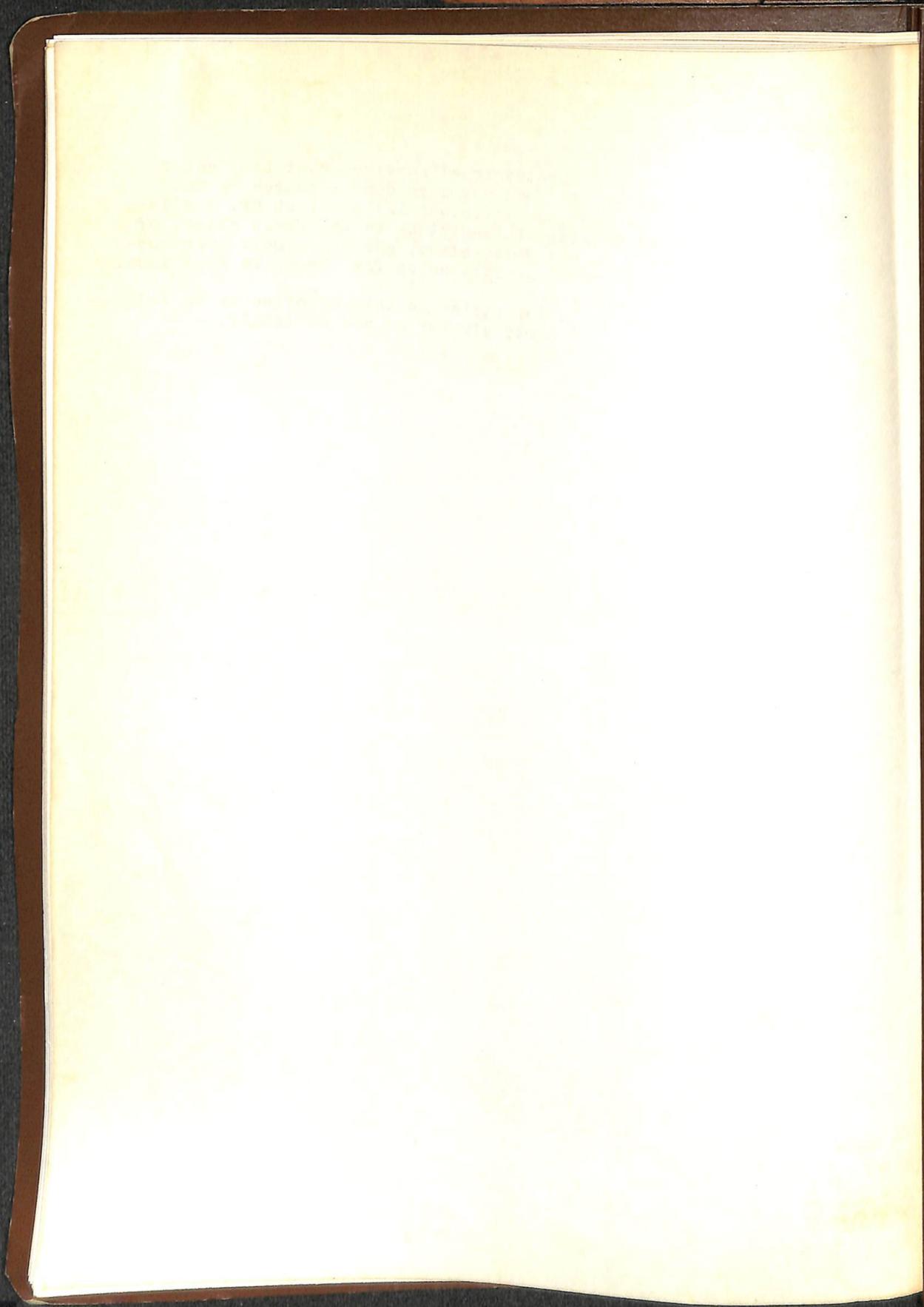
About the decline of the hospital and the reason for its -- about the decline and the reasons, I can only conjecture. I would say that it began its downward move in the '50's, about '57, perhaps. The reason -- well, the times caught up with it. The people themselves had become much more sophisticated in their own lives. Education had taken care of that. And they had begun to think more in terms of specialists. Of course, that meant that they would have to go to one of the other hospitals if they were to see specialists. That sophistication, you see, did have its effect. Dr. Walwyn had joined the staff by that time, he perhaps came around that time, a very able, a very well prepared man, and he was able to carry on even after my father died, but by that time the order declined, perhaps accentuated by a parallel decline in the membership of the Afro.

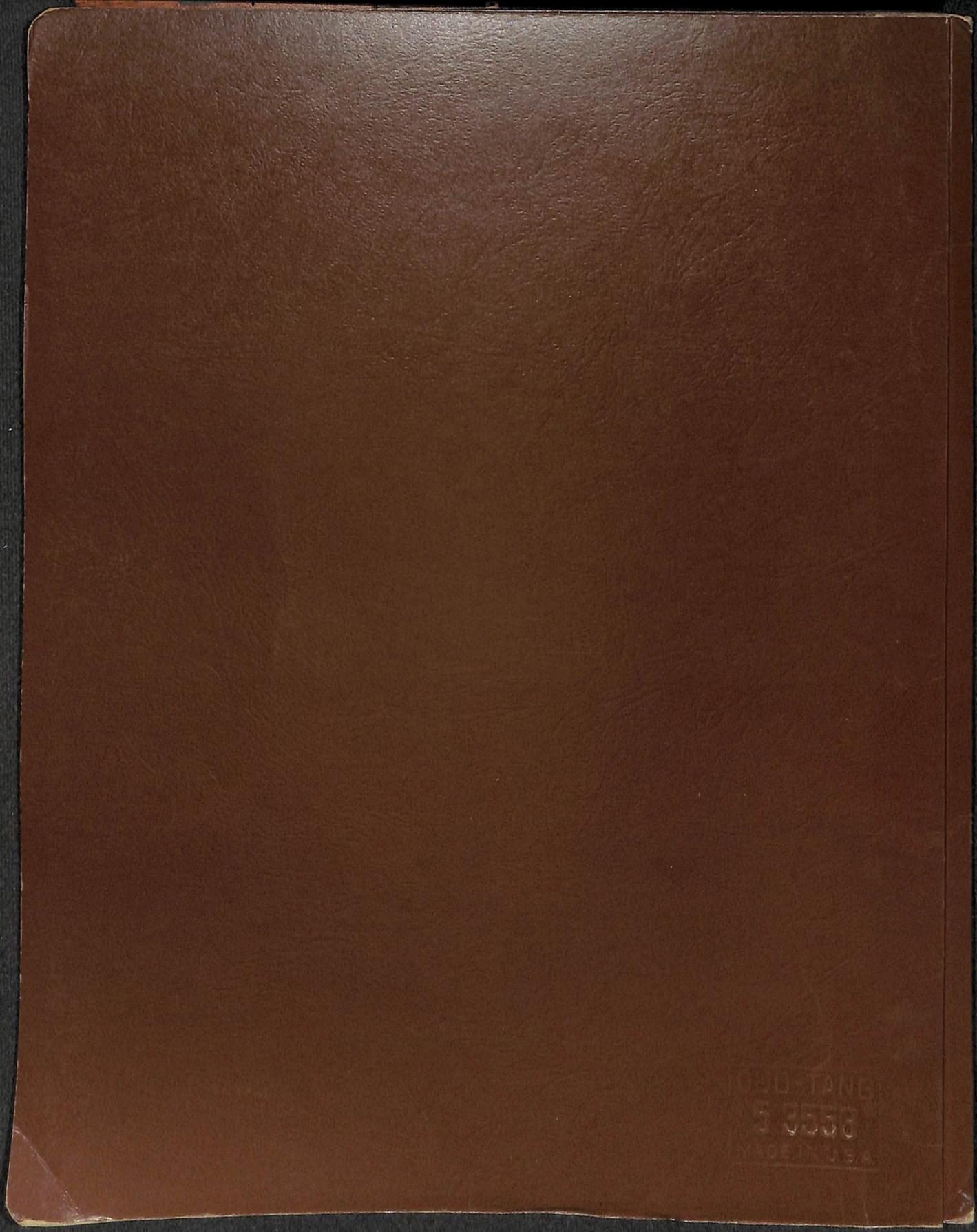
And so I don't think there was any way that the hospital could have been maintained on the same level and from the same perspective because the times just had simply caught up with it. It was a victim of progress, I would say.

In conclusion, I would like to say of it that I think it's an admirable thing to do a story on the Afro-American Hospital. It was an institution that meant an almost inconceivable -- it meant something almost inconceivable to the blacks in that area. It provided highly professional service at a time when -- for blacks -- at a time when blacks had very few opportunities to

be accorded the kind of professional services that they could get there. It was -- I'm sure you have done research on the Huddleston family and on the marvelous insight that Mr. Huddleston must have had to start the hospital in the first place, or the fraternal order in the first place, and his simply spectacular success in getting all of this going for blacks in that area.

I want to thank you again for giving me this opportunity to talk about a source of pride, certainly for me and my family.





UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
LIBRARY
8000