## **Chapter One:** The House

The McCord-Eppes home, "The House"[1], is located near the Southern railroad crossing in Goodwater, Alabama (Central of Georgia, later Illinois Central). The circa 1870 depot was closed in 1978. The well-built and designed facility (except toilets) has been removed to a plot near the overhead railroad bridge. The local Lions Club plans a restoration in 1990.

It is usually assumed that my brother, John Stinson ("Buddy"), and sister Ann and I were born here. Not so: our birthplace still exists "across the tracks," hardly altered from the time we left it to remove to The House. The death of my grandfather, Z. D. McCord ("Poppy") in 1923 provided the relocation. My aunts, Mary and Velma, had resided there with him. My grandmother, Minerva, nee Vaughn, had died in 1917.

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[1] The designation "The House" was easily derived. Just as in provincial England one is directed to "The Manor" (the headquarters of a given location), this simple and unpretentious title has been used by our family for four generations, as well as our friends, neighbors, employers and business associates.

The youngest and only son, Jefferson Davis McCord ("Jeff," fortunately), after graduating from Auburn University with a degree in electrical engineering, entered the family business. He married Orlean Driskill in 1917 and removed to a home on Ashland Street, a wedding gift from his father. Aunt Orlean was to be tragically murdered there at the age of 75.

My mother, Annie Lou, along with her brother and sisters, had been born, reared and married from The House. She had come to our birthplace as a bride in 1906. My father had met and wooed her while she was employed by her father as head bookkeeper for the Z.D. McCord Company. Mother had held this position of great responsibility during her high school years and all vacation periods until she entered what is now Montavallo University in 1903.

Her beauty had been much admired. In spite of her long hours, perched on the high stool at the bookkeeping ledger shelf, she had many young admirers. Mother admitted that the persistence of my personable father, Talmadge deWitt Eppes of Springville (later incorporated by Birmingham) prevailed until she and her family accepted an engagement. They were married in a simple service held at the foot of the stairs in what is today the library, on December 24, 1906.

Mother had worked that day in the office until prodded by my father to get dressed for the ceremony. She had admonished him, "I am just to busy to get married!" – a portent of her liberated spirit she retained throughout her life. After the short service they left by train in a Pullman compartment to visit his family for their honeymoon. Can one imagine a more inept honeymoon situation for a nervous young bride? The seeds of an improbable marriage situation were laid.

Her magnificent wedding gown and veil and traveling ensemble are preserved and stored in the cedar chests in the attic.

In 1904 Mother and her younger sister, Mary, had entered the then-called Alabama Industrial School at Montavallo, founded in 1893. Mary was inordinately shy. Mother was encouraged to attend college as much as a companion for Mary as for academic reasons. Both were excellent students. Mary graduated May 21, 1907 cum laude, earned a diploma (no degrees were then granted) for her specialized work in a General Literature course and in the Technical Course in Cooking. It was signed by the current governor of Alabama, B.B. Comer, and the college president, J.L.A. Moore.

Mother attended only for her freshman year so that Mary might be conditioned to the environment. Her father had insisted that she return to her bookkeeping duties, which she held until her marriage.

The youngest sister, Velma, had attended Central College, a long established girls' school, housed in the former state capitol building in Tuscaloosa. (This magnificent neo-classic structure burned in 1923. The ruins and grounds are now a city park.) Velma did not earn a diploma. She returned to The House to supervise the housekeeping with the death of her mother in 1917.

Our maternal grandfather, Zachariah Davis McCord, had come to Goodwater from nearby Tallapoosa County, ________, Georgia, in 1853. His family had emigrated from North Carolina. The McCord family home, "Stately Oaks," in Jonesboro, Georgia, survived the burning of Atlanta at the end of the

Civil War in 1864.It was the modest prototype of "Twelve Oaks" in Gone with the Wind. Removed from its original site, it was restored by the Jonesboro Historical Society. My sister, brother and I have contributed several period McCord pieces, including our grandfather's Western saddle and Aunt Velma's (restored) English style sidesaddle.

The family's original immigration to America is a dramatic story. As chieftain to his clan, James MacKorda (later simplified to McCord) of Argyle, Isle of Skye, was killed in the decisive battle of Killiecrankie Pass in 1689. His death forced his sons – all five or seven of them – to commence a freedom odyssey that led them from Scotland through Ulster, Northern Ireland and eventually to the religious equality offered by William Penn in Lancaster Country, Pennsylvania. Here the family settled in 1780.

Pre-revolutionary Indian wards, the Revolution and Civil War took their toll on this still close-knit family. Several descendants, traveling together, followed the settlement of the Carolinas, Georgia and eventually backwoods Alabama.

The House was first a crudely construction cabin, later a "dog trot" house. This name refers to an architectural style of in which an open breezeway or gallery, usually through the center of the house – especially a farmhouse – allowing easy passage from the front to the rear.) Sympathetic families allowed favorite dogs to sleep here; it also provided cross ventilation with the adjoining rooms. The simple home was located in a tiny settlement called Atkins Gap. It was the site of the Potoushatchee Indian tribe. The name was eventually changed to Goodwater due to the water supply of nearby Hutchet Creek. The

dwelling was made of logs, with the only refinement being wide plank flooring. These materials have been incorporated into the present Georgian brick "wrap around" designed by Montgomery architect Carl Cooper in 1933. But for the ineptness of a Birmingham interior decorator, the 12-inch wide interior wall siding would have been exposed today in what is now the first floor guestroom. The 12-inch wide boards had been discovered during some interior renovations in the 1940s; I thought them magnificent. Alas, while I was away for a short trip, the walls were covered with plasterboards at the direction of the decorator. This abortion only added to my continued disaffection for interior decorators; they have, over the years, wrought havoc with The House.

The above-mentioned members of the household, along with my brother and sister, completed the "persona dramatis" of The House. We, along with some of the unforgettable people who were involved with my family over the decades, will be presented. Many of these creative and staunch characters were involved both personally and in business relationships with the family and even today remain in spirited and lively memory. Our appreciation and gratitude to them, if in some awe, is limitless.

[Here are family charts]

## **Chapter Two:** "Uncle Hamp"

Uncle Hamp is the first person outside I immediate family I can recall at The House.

The appellatives "Uncle" and "Auntie" had been used as a form of family affection or more broadly applied as a term of polite address to elderly and venerated Negroes. They had been used in the South since slavery days, but the epithets are now considered servile, and rightly so! On being so addressed, the late Negro American Educator, Mary McLeod Bethune (1875-1955), once exclaimed, "I am NOT your aunt. You may address me as Mrs. Bethune!"

Hamp was a proud and handsome man of Creek Indian, white and Negro extraction who defied age determination. One of my proudest possessions today is a double signed lithograph by the late artist Thomas Hart Benton (1889-1975) titled "Aaron," the model for which was a famous Kansas City Negro. The similarity of my visual recollection of Hamp to "Aaron" is striking; here is a

reembodiment of Uncle Hamp in bone structure and proud spirit. The work conveys an aura of simple dignity, which Hamp personified. An oil portrait of him hangs in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. ("Aaron" was loaned to the Birmingham Museum of Art, Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, **Comer? Handwriting on bottom of page, chapter II, page 1]** Arts Center, **[Sylacauga?],** Huntsville Museum of Art from 1980-1990.)

Hamp had become a family employee as a young man, probably to work as a laborer in one of my grandfather's businesses and eventually became attached to the household because of his bearing and versatility. Amongst his duties were attending Poppa Cord. Although Grandfather lived a rough and ready life dressed in solid working clothes, Poppa Cord was an extremely busy man. His requirements were simple, but attention to his needs involved the consideration of the entire household. His vivid personality and strong-willed judgment created tensions within the family that lasted until the McCord Company was phased out in 1945; there is no wonder his continually besieged wife predeceased him.

Uncle Hamp's background was recalled on the first visit Ann, Mother and I made together to visit the present National Park site of the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, fought during the War of 1812 near Dadeville, Alabama. Here one relives the slaughter of the lordly and mighty Creek Indian tribe by Andrew Jackson and his forces. In the diorama we could identify his prototypes many times. His ancestor and a small band of other natives had miraculously escaped from the carnal scene, swimming from the bloody peninsula where they were trapped

across the Tallapoosa River to the densely timbered shore land. Refugeed here from the battle area, he and other survivors were befriended by backwoodsmen and somehow managed to survive. Most fugitives intermarried amongst the Negro and white settlers.

My first memory of Hamp was his silent fulfilling of one of the many functions within the busy household. He attended all the fireplaces and the cook stove, as well as the outside fireplaces required to boil water for the laundering. He also managed to keep the enormous woodpile stocked. Fuel was supplied from the residue of the log and plank block from the McCord sawmills, buggy factory and later the planning mills. Cuttings from the farm timberlands also provided another source, especially of hardwoods.

It was usually "only on Sunday" or a very special occasion in the spring or simmer that Uncle Hamp set up the hand-cranked ice cream freezer on the back porch. This was one of his activities that we children could never forget. His creative involvement in the freezer operation required a strong arm and much patience to produce the gourmet delights from the big two-gallon can. I have yet to taste anywhere in the world anything approaching the quality of that fresh, rich, heavy cream (of course unpasturized) and mixed along with the seasonal fruits and nuts.

Singularly, his nobility of presence would not allow him to follow the pattern of the other help in appearing Christmas morning with the chant of "Christmas giff" (gift). His presents were carefully separated and placed in his quarters on Christmas Eve.

The House compound began to expand over the years to almost the exact equivalent of what we Anglophiles and historic house buffs know as "The Manor House."[2] It became very nearly a self-containing unit, comprising some 90 acres, 12 of which were devoted to domestic use, with some 78 acres of pasture and woodlands attached.

There was eventually a two-acre vegetable garden nearby, as well as fruit and nut trees and grapevines. There were annuals such as strawberries and blackberries. The enormous red barn housed the mild cows, and a stable took care of all the rest of the livestock. There was an especially designed poultry house and yard. Ducks and geese, and of course Rhode Island Red chickens, ran here. Ann and I grew to despise the silly, noisy, stupid chickens.

The dependencies, besides those already mentioned, included an active blacksmith shop, spring house, smoke house (existing to day as a laundry and freezer room), corn crib, storage sheds, pig house, wash house, playhouse, and, later, garages. I'm afraid these dependencies, often jerry-built and unplanned, unfortunately portrayed little of the scaled beauty one admires on visiting the existing "model" of an 18-19th century plantation and manor house one visits today.

After the death of Poppa Cord and the demise of personal duties, Hamp took over other responsibilities connected with the household. These ranged from drawing water for the needs of The House to acting as courier, delivering personal and business notes about town.

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"A mansion, habitation; a country residence; the principal house of an estate…a landed possession…a unit of English territorial organization, originally of the nature of a feudal lordship."

There was no central heating in The House until the Cooper renovations of 1930. At that time a coke-burning furnace was installed for operation on the first floor, but only for two upstairs rooms. Furnace and storage space was, at that time, excavated by hand and removed by wheelbarrow. The space provided facilities for holding one entire railroad flatcar of coke, which was sent out from Birmingham for use once a year. This had to be loaded by hand from the nearby spur of the railroad. Stoking the furnace was performed manually. An oil burning until was installed and other radiators added in the 1950s.[3]

May I now proclaim that there was little romantic coziness about any of this procedure. It was often freezing cold, untidy and uncomfortable.

By the time we had removed as a family to The House, Uncle Hamp was quite feeble. Apparently, even in the early 1920s, no attempt ws made to replace Uncle Hamp.

Logs were less frequently used and a new woodhouse was built to house the wood blocks left over from the cuttings of the fast-growing planing mill of the McCord Lumber Company. The woodhouse, an unsightly, abortive structure, was thrown up in less than a day under my Aunt Mary's direction. This horror stood until the renovation of the 1930s and the laying out of the formal gardens.

At this time in the twenties, a truckload of wood blocks (leftover flooring ends) was hauled anywhere in the town and delivered for 50cents. (Most deliveries were never paid as I recall from family reports.) The McCord Company

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As defined by the Oxford English Dictionary.
[3] Visitors to the Franklin D. Roosevelt Mansion at Hyde Park will note the rusty railway spur at the bottom of the hill in back, which was installed for fuel delivers as well as use of a private railway

had begun to plane the flooring and siding for the Illinois Central Railroad boxcars. The quality of the wood was quite acceptable as firewood, so that the heating element was high as long as it was contained and kept replenished in a full grate. The woodhouse and fireplace attention detail became our childhood daily duty. It was a chore we all thoroughly resented!

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car siding. Its redbrick Georgian style is only a façade; the rear of the house was left in upright Victorian flamboyance and built entirely of wood.

## **Chapter Three:** Our Home across the Tracks

This house, then and today, has all the charm and character of a tornado-struck barn. I suppose my father, in desperation of wooing my mother, had proposed that she would reside nearby, thus the marriage could be more easily consummated. It was purchased and, along with improvements made over the years, became our only Eppes home together as a family. It was an uncomfortable structure with drafty halls, high ceilings, too close to the railway tracks, and located on an unpaved, dirty street. It was dark and dreary, even during the summer.

My father had left Goodwater after my birth in 1918 to live and work in Birmingham. The bank that he and his brother had established in Goodwater had not been a success. "Uncle Buddy"[4] had come to Goodwater originally as the principal of the local school. It was on a visit to him that my father had first come

[4] Marvin McCoy 1878-1954)

to the community and met the McCords and my mother. He must have faced all sorts of personal and business problems in trying to face up to the more affluent McCord clan. He strove to provide a comfortable and dignified way of life for us.

The master bedroom was enormous. It was probably not as large as I scaled it as a child, but it did contain three full-sized double beds. (These were the tall, brass-spooled beds, a style that is such a delight to the collector today. They were sold to Loveman, Joseph and Loeb on a trade-in with the House decoration department in 1933 for $1.00 each.) Here, all three of us children were born. It was the only pleasant, light, sun-filled room in the entire house. There were two or three large windows overlooking the vegetable garden. This house, as far as I know, has no central heating to this day. Mother sold the house in the 1940s after years of disastrous operation as a rental unit.

Would research bear out a cold cycle in the twenties? It seems we were forever haunted with the cold, inside or out. I was constantly abed with cold and flu viruses. All my creative life and spirit today revolves around the spring and summer months, forever recalling those sick and uncomfortable days and years of my childhood.

My first memory of this house where I was born is a scene as graphic and forbidding as one of those highly pictorial 19th century family paintings. We were awaiting the night arrival of my father from the City and were seated around out enormous bedroom fireplace in great anticipation. I don't believe there was a sofa; we were probably all seated in rocking chairs of various sizes and shapes. A heavy woolen rug with long fringe was laid before the hearth.

For the rest of his life, my father's homecoming was always a special event for all of us. I must confess that my first recollection of him was an awesome one. He was a handsome man: intense, formal in demeanor. Economic problems had prevented him from attending college, but he played the violin and other stringed instruments with skill and sensitivity. He had a large collection of personal instruments and a fine music library. He had, no doubt, been influenced by his father's (John Henry) gift and love of music. He was a fastidious dresser and a tall man: in all, the prototype of an Edwardian gentleman. He was little given to outward shows of affection with us, except towards my sister Ann. They had a close and endearing affection for one another all through his brief life.

On his arrival home this particular bitter winter evening, after formal greetings all around, he immediately asked about my then-current affliction. (I suffered chronic bad health.) I was flipped up, pants pulled down, and my groin exposed for his inspection. I was then suffering from a severe case of exema[5] in these parts. The prescribed, foul-smelling ointment filled the air in the overheated area. Mother liberally applied more of the same. I was redressed with bandages and stuffed inside the heavy clothes again. My case was discussed and commented upon, with all the latest tabulations from the doctor on this and my other ailments. I loathed the exposure and attention my ailments caused. The remedies were those that had been used and prescribed to my mother in Victorian days. Believe me, there were no miracle drugs in the 1920s

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[5] Today exema is recognized as an inherited dermatological problem transferred through the paternal life.

or 30s, at least not in Alabama. Sir Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin in 1928. Its late discovery caused the death of my father in 1929, along with many others, including Irving Thalberg, the MGM producer, even later in 1937. As to the correlation between psychic and physical illness, Freud and his theories were unknown in our Alabama world.

I was more interested in things outside of the house. There was a garden with calla lilies around the circular brick front steps. There were set within brick borders, upturned on their corners, just as they are around the pool at Monticello, a design established by Mr. Jefferson.

The vegetable garden, which was quite large, fascinated me. Asparagus, I believe, was not that popular in the South at this time. I loved the tall, fern-like leaves, and Mother had very early introduced us to asparagus on toast. She served it with a delicious white sauce. It would be given to us as a special treat, sometimes for Sunday at breakfast or when we were ill. I also remember the corn, and string beans with cross poles for the vines to climb. There were probably all the other popular Southern vegetables, but I don't seem to recall the ones that grew close to the ground. I enjoyed and remember playing among the higher plants.

Mother must have incited a particular early memory of the corn. She had probably read us a story involving a picnic. I was allowed to go on one of my own. The corn suggested to me a likely spot to picnic under. Mother was interested but seemed to have nothing on hand for sandwiches. She gave me

several spoonfuls of beans in a round, decorated biscuit tin that I admired and a big silver spoon, and I was off on my own little party.

The dependencies were fewer than at The House. The largest was a big two-car garage near the garden. Mother had a chicken house addition placed at the garage rear alongside a privy. It was an ugly, shoddy, makeshift structure. An early Kodak snapshot of me, taken by my photographer mother, feeding chickens from a pan and laughing like a daft clown.

Covering what seemed like the entire backyard was an elderly and gigantic pecan tree, whose umbrage reached out all over the yard and the back of the house. It was one reason the house was so dark inside.

The house plan was a simple L-shape, of wooden construction upon a brick foundation. It had a steeped roof and porches in front, back and on the garden side. Louvered green shutters covered the high windows. Unless properly hooked, their flappings in a storm during southern winds and rains were a nuisance. Long after the house was sold, someone found them under the house and sold them as antiques.

The structure was high enough off the ground to provide a rather primitive bath and toilet space, access to which was reached by descending steep steps from the back porch.

Daddy was a competent handyman. Perhaps some of my "do it myself" early interests were sparked by his efforts. He had provided the simple plumbing and other facilities in his spare time. The shower room was unheated, and even in the summer it was always cool and joyfully refreshing from the simmering

August heat. Outside of this area, the remaining basement space was not used, except for open storage.

My favorite location in our home was the front porch. There was some rather interesting "carpenter designed" grillwork between the columns. The area was furnished with the then-common rustic (and cheap) hickory outdoor pieces. Now, of course, they are collector's items. The seats were all hand-woven by local itinerant artisans. Some of these pieces lasted for many years, and we later used them on one of the terraces at The House. On the garden side, a metal swing hung. This was to be one of our great play and reading areas and the summer, and my sister and I vied for its use, producing squabbles between us. The fact is, we had other swings up front and on the rear porch, but we all seemed to gravitate toward and prefer this one, perhaps for the garden view, morning sun and afternoon coolness. One of these metal swings, over 70 years old now, hangs on the grounds of Creekwood, my brother's Lake Martin home. Mother and I sat in it together on my last visit with her before her death. There was not one comment concerning this swing. We both knew and without speaking concluded "we remember it well."

We had several 9x12 studio-posed gravure photographs of Mother, my sister, brother and I posed on the circular front steps of this house, especially requested, I believe, by my father. He had them displayed in his office and took them with him on his travels. It's a real Gatsby scene. Mother is wearing one of the big stylish, ornate hats of the period. I have on short pants in a little sailor suit, and my brother is dressed in a suit with knickers, even though he was in his

late teens. Ann probably has one of the lovely dressed Daddy enjoyed bringing her from the city. These gifts caused many arguments, as Mother thought they were too fancy and ornate for her age. Buddy and I always wore clothes selected for us at Blachs' boys department in Birmingham.

The interior of the house was equally uninviting. In renovating, Mother had the foyer opened up to provide the then-popular large living room area. The 15-foot walls were finished in tongue and groove boards laid in horizontal patters. The color note of the paint was a pale, characterless ivory, a popular shade of the period. There was a fireplace, which to save me I can never recall being lit. The room was cold, dark and as unstylish as a boxcar interior. The only bright object in the room was an art nouveau-style, Tiffany-influenced table lamp that had a stylish design of yellow tulips. My father had brought it home, whereupon he was promptly denounced for such extravagance. It was a delight, and to this day we enjoy it in The House.

The player piano was the one piece of furniture in both households that delighted all of us children. No doubt all three of us have very well developed legs, gained from pumping its foot pedals. When we moved to The House, our piano was loaned to the Jeff McCords. It was later donated to a local church, minus the player equipment. Its leaving was as if we had lost one of the family. Between the town households, we had a large collection of music rolls, consisting mostly of semi-classical and popular selections of the day, including a number of Victor Herbert selections. One, "Wedding of the Winds," was a real thriller and took some powerful foot action to keep up with its pace. When we

combined the collections, we became the envy of the neighborhood. Favorite rolls were borrowed and loaned among family. Later, when my sister and I began to take piano lessons, we used the player less. This was encouraged by our teacher, Mrs. Arnold, and Mother, who both hoped we would practice more. Some years later, after the arrival of a Knabe grand piano at The House, the rolls were stored in the garage and later given to a local black woman who had a player piano. Along with the brass beds, rocks, oak furniture and such, these rolls and the player piano are now collector's items and are being reproduced to meet the demand of eager consumers.

Opening off from the living room through the French doors was the dining room. It was even darker, with a lone upper window shadowed by the back porch. The one piece of furniture in the dining room I vividly recall was a curved, bow front china cabinet, again so popular with collectors today. It had claw feet and displayed family china and crystal. My Aunt Mary too sold it to Loveman in the '30s for $3.00.

I cannot recall a single cake ever being served from any of the several ornate cake plates displayed in the china cabinet or on the plate rail that ran around the wall some three-quarters of the way up from the floor. Tea was never served from the china tea sets. The only time the cups from the chocolate sets were used was when we were allowed to pick a cup to take one of the many "witches brews" (medications) we were constantly plied with. The fouler it tasted, according the theory, the better it was for you.

It was the heyday of patent medicines, all enthusiastically endorsed by garden and kitchen help, as well as visitors, neighbors and acquaintances. The drugstore was happy to supply or order any brand they possibly did not stock. All of this, of course, was done under the observation and care of the M.D. who "happened" to own the drugstore. The content of most of it was pure alcohol and narcotics, but somehow we managed to survive it all.

Many of the better pieces that graced the dining room, including period objets d'art, have been lost or stolen. Often I recall a piece and ask my sister to check on it. We recount it in detail and search to no avail. There is no way to account for these light-fingered losses. Collecting friends of mine speak of the same problem with their objets d'art. We might at least have had the joy of using them to remember, except for the Calvinistic mores of our family.

Furniture? Sparse. Daddy had purchased for $200.00 a wedding gift bedroom suite, 17$^{th}$ century, Chippendale-inspired with claw and ball feet, a superb contemporary reproduction in rich mahogany veneer. This was the sort of Grand Rapids period piece that was well executed during this pre-World War I period. One of the big problems of housekeeping was to properly protect the protruding claws on the ball feet from the vicissitudes of mops and brooms wielded by uncaring servants during cleaning. This furniture survived the Loveman sale and was completely refinished, including the replacement of the missing claws, by their furniture shops for $25.00. The suite is now in the main floor guest room of The House.

I often wonder what happened to the remains of that Loveman load. Mother had begun to be interested in antiques in the twenties. She had begun to collect a few pieces, including a beautiful spool bed. I had refinished it myself, but it went to Loveman for $10.00, along with the rest of the lot. Fortunately a few pieces were forgotten by my aunt at the time, and we have them refinished and in use today in The House.

As a teenage birthday gift, Daddy gave my brother a $125.00 bedroom suite. It happened to represent the worst sort of example of overpriced Grand Rapids furniture of the twenties. It has been refinished and toned down and somehow comes off today in its use at Creekwood. Buddy had attached some sentiment to it because of my father's memory and generosity. At this time he had been given his own bedroom next to the guest room and opening into the kitchen.

A large wood-burning stove dominated the kitchen, not half so large as the one in The House. Daddy had provided running water and a sink. I am reminded that running water in Goodwater at this time was extremely rare as a convenience. I doubt that more than two or three other families had these conveniences at this time.

The other important item was the golden oak icebox. We waged a constant battle to keep the tray underneath it emptied so that the melted ice water might not run out onto the floor. Ice was available form the icehouse near the railroad crossing and was usually purchased on Sunday morning. This allowed for ice cream making and the leftover for the box. Most cities provided

door-to-door ice delivery, but I don't recall delivered ice in Goodwater. Ice was not usually kept the year round, only during the warm months. We were occasionally given a glass of weak ice tea as a treat. (My aunts felt that tea was harmful to children.) Neither family served ice tea during the week unless guests were invited; it would have been considered overindulgence.

When ice was not stocked, food leftovers were kept in the "safe." Today this is another collector's item. It was simply a country-made cabinet, usually upright, with the panels left open to allow air passage. The panels could be filled in with either filigreed, punched-in design on tin or, as were ours, wire widow screening. If insects were a problem, I recall seeing such cabinets with their four legs immersed in an upturned Mason jar top, kerosene inside providing a moat to keep the insects from traveling up the legs into the cabinet. In it were stored the leftovers and condiments such as butter and milk. Many families who did not have a springhouse or ice storage lowered their dairy products by basket or bucket into their well for a cooler atmosphere.

A "good well of water" was a must for any household and the first consideration for a moving family. We, fortunately, had an excellent water supply, both here and at The House. For a well to dry up was a calamity for any family, especially in a rural area where there were cattle to be watered. There seemed to be no concern about the possible pollution of the water during this time. Open toilets were common all over the town, usually flowing into small streams. I don't recall a water test until possibly the '40s, long after Goodwater had a city water system. The well and spring at The House was found to be

contaminated. Is it possible that we had built up immunities? In her autobiography, the late Pearl S. Buck stated that when a child, she would dash out of the servants' entrance from their compound in Shanghai to shop for goodies with the servant children. She never remembered being ill from the food or drink, while the other compound children, less adventuresome, were continually having problems. At this period (1930s), the common drinking gourd or dipper was still in public use in the country and, of course, segregated.
A small closet stored tools and household equipment. Until later renovations, closets in both houses were inadequate and sparse. Wardrobes or armoires were still considered proper storage facilities in both town and country. This was quite accepted by that generation. President Roosevelt, even in 1932 when building his "little White House" in Warm Springs, Georgia, made no provisions in his plans for closets. In both houses, our closets were stuffed to the ceiling; to open the door took stamina. This overload gave us little incentive to "pick up and put away" or things.

As mentioned, the family room, as we would call it today, was Mother's big bedroom. The fireplace was the center of our life. We were bathed, dressed, often fed, did our schoolwork and recreational reading in front of it, sometimes seated on the comfortable rug.

There are two unforgettable family legends concerning this fireplace. When my brother and sister were small children, Mother was dressing for an important social event when her long, full, beribboned gown caught fire. With the great presence of mind she demonstrated throughout her life, she collapsed to

the floor in a "stage fall" she had learned in her elocution classes and wrapped herself in the heavy rug. The flame was quickly smothered and she suffered no burns except for a few scorched strands of her long hair. She got up, changed into another gown, and went ahead to the event. Mother – the "Pearl Mesta of the Cotton Patches" as I called her – wouldn't allow some small interference like that to keep her from a party!

As if this were not enough to record, there is a sad, more graphic report. In one of my numerous bouts of respiratory problems, it was suggested that I take Vick's vaporizing treatments. There was no such thing as a vaporizer at that time; the preparation had to be melted over boiling water while the patient was placed under blankets in a tent-like structure. To comfort me, my sister was ordered to participate. The boiling liquid was somehow spilled on her, and she is still marked today after a long and painful recovery. Little was known at the time about third degree burns, and a keyloid condition developed. Poor dear Ann, to have had to suffer such anguish, and for a palliative remedy, to say nothing of the psychic fear she was left with.

We were expected to perform certain duties at our birthplace and later at The House. Ann particularly was put-upon by my aunts; we boys were much favored by our family peers. It was a blatant inequality. Ann suffered it magnificently, bless her. We were not, however, instructed with much patience by our peers. I must in all fairness and thankfulness now recall the kind, gentle instruction we gained from the black servants at The House and employees of the McCord Company over the years. Bless them all!

I have no personal memory of other servants in the house where I was born, so perhaps my recollections of Aunt Dilly were told to me. When mother once asked her to give me a bath, I became concerned. She was apparently very dark-skinned and I was afraid some of her color would rub off on me.

This modest house must have been quite a chore for Mother to manage. She had been more adapted to office routine; I suspect housekeeping was an ordeal for her. Aside from all the care of the house and children, a housewife of her day had to live up to the standards of the day in cooking, sewing, needlecrafts, gardening, home canning – not only of farm bought produce but homegrown – and baking, all of which had to be combined with a certain amount of mandatory social life, as well as civic and church commitments. "Help" was considered a sign of personal weakness and family ineptitude, particularly by my aunts. There was a strong feeling about the exposure of our family unit to outsiders. Much of this was probably ingrained insecurity and paranoia. Today a family is still forced economically to perform most of its own chores, but it was an entirely different matter with most of the affluent Southern families of my pre-World War II world. Help was cheap, but the quality of performance often left much to be desired by the housewife, just as in plantation days.

As a child, even with my bashfulness and timidity, I was always interested in how things worked. I also had a deep respect for the artisan and craftsman in any field. My curiosity drew me to these people. Most individuals I approached were kind, and even pleased to be willing to take the time to explain their particular tools and crafts to me. I do wish I might have been encouraged more.

My parents were afraid I would be in the way or might get hurt. They, often not being piqued themselves, did not understand my interest and curiosity.

Today, in this do-it-yourself age, I am so thankful that this same childhood inquisitiveness has given me some skills for home and garden maintenance. I feel sorry for the many friends of mine who have to dig out of texts information I have gained simply and creatively by learning by doing as a child.

Affluence and probable false pride denied so many wealthy friends this privilege. I was made particularly aware of this in friendships with Jewish contemporaries. They seemed to be removed from even the frying-your-own-egg knowledge, easily assumed by children in homes of lesser means. It is certainly good to know today that basic crafts and arts are being revived and practiced – certainly nowhere more than in Israel. Many of my friends have had to return there to realize what they have been missing all their lives in elementary creativity, especially gardening. This revival can be exactly documented with the tremendous success and interest shown in the best-selling Foxfire books or other "How to" publications.

I have no memories of our removal from this "house across the tracks." It was probably done in stages. My brother and sister, I believe, have more vivid and, I hope, more pleasant memories of their years spent there, where they had neighborhood children of their own ages to play with and visit. Certainly we knew an informality about that house that we were never to know again. This was, after all, our <u>own</u> house. We were never allowed the freedom we knew here after

we removed to The House, which was really our aunts' home for as long as they lived – never really an "Eppes" house.

## **Chapter Four:** Life with Father

As I've said before, my father was a formal man, with a procedure for every possible meeting or circumstance. Later, when I lived and traveled in England, I came to understand his code in a deeper way, but the apprenticeship put hardships on active little boys, whether in Mayfair, London or in Goodwater, Alabama. I suspect it was even more difficult for Stinson, Ann and me since few other parents we knew were as strict with their children. We all suffered during the "training" periods. For example, young ladies over 15 were to be addressed simply as Miss, while in the South it was customary to add the Christian name. For young, old, unmarried and married ladies alike, Miss was a term of affection and respect, and it was all pretty complicated to a six-year-old. Yet I was a fairly apt pupil. Daddy had taught me to address men over 20 as Mister or Sir. And with all the social upheavals of our day, I still manage to fall into the practice

quite easily in England. I try to maintain it especially in New York City, where casual relationships can be strained and abrasive.

One afternoon, not long after we had settled in The House, and quite off his usual scheduled, Daddy decided to take a nap upstairs. I seemed to be alone with him in The House that afternoon, and he commissioned me to answer the doors and telephone.

A knock came at the side service entrance. On answering it I found a fine-looking, extremely courteous gentleman who asked for my father. I recognized him as a hunting companion and guide for my father. As taught, I asked him to step inside and take a seat. He came inside but did not sit down, remaining on the threshold with his hat in his hand. He gave me his name and I went upstairs to wake Daddy, who dressed quickly and came downstairs. They went outside to the porch to discuss their plans. When Daddy came back inside I knew I had displeased him. It was impossible for his face to conceal his emotions, negative or otherwise. We had learned this all too well. But he tried to control his voice as he proceeded to give me another lecture. I had performed all the greeting procedures fairly well, but didn't I know that the formalities did not apply in the same way to Negroes?

As Oscar Hammerstein II says in the lyrics of a song from South Pacific, "You Have to be Carefully Taught" (segregation). That became my first lesson in "official" segregation. I did not understand the duplistic system and said so. It makes no more sense to me now than it did then.

I have many times been asked how and when I became "liberated" concerning civil rights and Negroes. I have often thought I would have this episode photocopied to hand out whenever I am asked this meaningless question. All Southerners are suspect as to our sincerity, especially to "professional," card-carrying, "liberated" Yankees.

## **Chapter Five:** Railway and Hobo Lore

Our birthplace was intermeshed with the life and rhythms of the then-nearby Central of Georgia Railroad. Its frenetic activity encircled our lives in a personal, business and family way for many years. Its intensity was felt more intimately from our birthplace than when we removed to The House, which, fortunately, was somewhat further from the main tracks.

In a concise essay my mother wrote in 1901 on the History of Goodwater and published posthumously in the publication of the Coosa County Historical Society in 1974, she reminded us that Goodwater was founded in 1875 as a rail terminus. It was created because of the excellent supply of water and became a water and coaling stop between Birmingham and Savannah. We were very dependent on the railroad, both for personal transportation and for the family's lumber industry.

The Central of Georgia was at its zenith during the 1920s. Entire families of neighbors were "railroad people", which granted them a certain status. It was a way of life that represented a certain flair denied more mundane families such as ours. They had family travel passes, allowing them to travel up and down the road at their convenience. By request they could also ride on other lines with the same privileges, except by Pullman car.

The railroads held tremendous power in those days as the primary means of transportation for interstate business. My Aunt Mary waged a constant game of skill and perseverance to corral enough box and freight cars to keep the flow of her ordered shipments of timber to Detroit and Chicago. If stymied locally, she never hesitated to use her influence to call the administrative office of the Central of Georgia in Savannah. She had influence there and usually obtained her requests. Other nearby industries also put considerable pressure on the local railroad management for the same reasons. The fact that my aunt was a "lady" made absolutely no difference on the local business battle scene. It was a tough game. As if all these obstacles were not trying enough for the family, no acceptable toilet facilities (especially for women or children) were available, so both houses were continually besieged by uncomfortable women and children looking for "necessaries." This accommodation involved the usual household cleaning problems. No one was ever refused. We, of course, provided the usual linen (no paper towels yet), soap and other toilet items, including, in some cases, cloth diapers for unprepared parents!

The fume- and smoke-belching engines of picturesque folklore were pollution monsters, with not only smoke and cinder fallout but noise. Nearby spur rails "switching" went on night and day to bring in empty cars and roll them out loaded for their destinations. The fallout around our birthplace was unbelievable. It was almost as bad at The House, where local factories added open toilet sewage to the same pollutants in our lovely pasture stream.

Naturally we children found some features of railroading very enjoyable. My sister, who was more outgoing, had engineer friends that she waved to and had kisses blown to her from the engine cab or caboose. This caboose, usually at the rear of the train, intrigued us. We longed to be able to sit up above the car tops and travel over the entire country. We counted boxcars from the porch swing for fun and high figures. We created tiny scissors by crossing dress pins on vacant tracks to be run over and pressed flat by the engines.

Then there were the hobos. At that time these men (and, once in awhile, a few women) were bohemian-like figures. Roles were defined for both hobo and railroad man and a code established between the two strictly kept alive by conviction and tradition. As long as there were no flagrant attempts at car break-ins or gang force, the train crew was apt to look aside.

An amazingly accurate communication system operated among railroad people and hobos. With no means other than word of mouth up and down the railroad, news spread about "hot spots," towns and stations to avoid, even certain individual railroad personnel. It seemed to operate fast and efficiently.

Well known and thoroughly staked out hobo campsites flourished up and down the line. Some hobos had regular schedules and followed the seasons like birds. As children we were allowed to view them from afar, usually from the high railroad embankments. We children though them delightful, with all the lure of gypsy life we had read about in storybooks. Brewing coffee and roasting meet on their open fires seemed to have a gourmet appeal unmatched by our family kitchen. Many of the hobos had colorful and highly individualistic ways of dress, and some had real flair. Given their limited and primitive toilet facilities, a few managed even to be quite presentable. Whenever we came into contact with them, they were courteous, especially with children and women. We began to recognize some commuting regulars and seasonal traveling hobos.

It was a family policy at both houses that anyone, Negro or white, who came to the back or kitchen door asking for food was given a generous plate of whatever we might have provided for ourselves that day. My grandmother McCord had established this custom. It was adhered to and maintained all of our lives up to and through the Great Depression of the 1930s. More about this era and the nonprofessional hobo later.

Another family story concerns Bully, a beloved monster dog – a mutt, no doubt – whose size and exploits have been molded, I suspect, more by fiction than by fact. Many photographs still exist of this historic character surrounded by children, with several hanging onto his ample shanks.

Apparently Bully had been trained by Daddy in his banking days to fetch and carry articles between the Bank, the McCord offices, The House and our

home. The last station required crossing the railroad tracks. He was even entrusted with small bogs of groceries for kitchen delivery from Main Street. His skills were only questioned once. There was, it seems, a problem with a roast (a rare treat) from the butcher on its way to Mother's kitchen; the butcher had not properly wrapped the package for such a long trip. The steam engines of the railroad were switching over the many various sidetracks as Bully came to the crossing. His saliva loosened the package wrapping and the roast landed on one of the sidetracks. Rather than having to pick up the exposed raw meat, he stood guard over his charge. The railroad engineers all knew and recognized him, and since he refused to move, they carefully maneuvered their engines and loaded cars on the other siding lines around Bully. He was finally rescued by someone in the family, and the roast was safely delivered. Bully made dog lovers of Mother, Ann and me for the rest of our lives.

Our closest relationship with one of the neighborhood railroad families came about with a simple and beautiful act of charity. Mrs. John Davis, a new neighbor who urged us to address her as "Daity", sent me the most bountiful, beautiful tray of delectable food I have ever seen. It was delivered by her maid, Jessie May, whom I came to know well in the coming years. It was a touch of 18$^{th}$ century flamboyance, all served tastefully on exquisite china. This generous bounty, enough for the whole family, made a tremendous impression on all of us. Today I still have a small, three-footed opalescent bowl with a grape design that Mrs. Davis presented to me when she left her Goodwater home. She had come to Goodwater to live in one of the railroad houses with her husband, who was

Superintendent of the local coal chute. At that time the chute was the highest structure in Goodwater and, along with its steel water tank, an impressive feature of the skyline.

Mrs. Davis was a "born" lady. She had come from a good family and had, I believe, a private girls' school education. She was an omnivorous reader. But while she professed an interest in "good" literature, her heart was really with the pulps. If there had been radio or TV in those days, she would have been the first of the soap opera fans. Addicted to periodical serials, she sent Jessie May to the post office on the very day all the popular women's magazines were known to arrive so that she would not miss the latest episode. I don't know how she kept up with the plots since she read so many magazines had and to follow several story lines. Somehow it must have worked out well, for it gave her the opportunity to subscribe to all the popular publications of the day; Ranch Romances, I recall, was a special favorite of hers.

On my very first "thank you" visit when I recovered, I knew I had found a friend. I learned that Mrs. Davis had "married beneath her" and had lost a son at an early age. Mr. Davis was a kind but rather gruff man. She did all the bookkeeping for his loading statistics. With his staff of Negro workmen and his wife's abilities, he had very little to do but appear at his plant office. We did have one big interest in common: he adored dogs, and one or more were always with him at the railroad.

Mr. Davis began his first year I Goodwater in what became an annual event. He and Mrs. Davis hosted an outdoor barbecue for his staff, railroad and

neighborhood friends. It was unforgettable, even by Texas standards. She was a superb cook and oversaw the slaughter of the animals and the roasting. A secret sauce was used, all served with her outstanding coleslaw and roasted corn on the cob and homemade lemonade, capped off with an array of pies and cakes to startle a Viennese pastry chef. I might ad that "liquid refreshment" was provided for those interested on arrival in Mr. Davis's office. Mr. Davis "drank" and had his "bad days," but his wife and a close-mouthed staff of kindly Negroes kept the coal rolling and the water flowing into the engines.

Their small but tidy railroad house fascinated me. The front parlor was always darkened. I never recall it being used or enjoyed, except when I was allowed to listen to Mrs. Davis's Victrola. This was the upright, "puffed" machine with Nipper, the RCA dog trademark, stenciled inside the open lid, so popular during that period. It was from this tinny, little acoustical midget that my love of classical music began. I recall all the opera and concert favorites of the time: Alma Gluck, Schuman-Heink, Galli-Curchi, Caruso, Joseph Hoffman, and Chaliapin. There I also heard for the first time that classic comedy, "The Laughing Record" of Cohen and Kelly. All were recorded on the big, thick platters that RCA produced in Camden, NJ, and all were probably scrapped when Mrs. Davis moved in the 1940s.

Along with the records, I began to identify the personalities from the often hefty and beefy colored sketches of opera stars that appeared in full-page RCA advertisements in Mentor Magazine. This was also the beginning of my learning to read. Soon I learned to recognize letters and words associated with the

pictures. It was also the beginning of my interest in autobiographies and biographies.

Mrs. Davis and I established a very special relationship. She is the first person, I believe, who accepted me, not simply as a child but as an individual. We began to discuss intimate thoughts and ideas together, knowing they would be well kept. Hers, like mine, was a lonely life. She made no attempt whatever that I can recall to indulge in any form of the usual neighborhood social life. Always friendly and outgoing to her neighbors, she never visited or indulged in back fence gossip. I somehow came to know of her deep grief over the loss of her little son and, though she did not bring it up, her sensitivity to her husband's social caste and habits. She was the first person who ever noted and commented to me on the loneliness of her life. She did not demean me or make suggestions; it was only a concerned comment. She had an amazing wealth of household, gardening, first aid and culinary knowledge. While being carefully reared, she, as I, had been able to garner much information from servants and reading. I was a willing listener and garnered much from my friendship with her. From the first, I had a sense of timing and the importance of her household and railroad chores, so I tried not to interfere or overstay my visits.

Sadly, as the childhood years passed, I realized that her reading interests and mine had long divided. By this time I had met Miss Kelly McLeod, who was a more scholarly reader as well as a trained artist. I began to spend more time with her. I was saddened by this turn.

Mr. Davis died in the 1940s. After all the relationships with his hunting and drinking friends, not one man accompanied Mrs. Davis to his funeral in South Alabama. Mother was furious and named individuals who had partaken of their generous hospitality for years. Mother left her bed during one of her many illnesses to attend the funeral along with a few of the neighborhood ladies. Mother was bitter, as was I, about this cruel oversight.

Some time later, Mrs. Davis made plans to move away with her relative who, now that she was a widow, apparently welcomed her back. I was home on a short visit and telephoned to ask if I might please purchase just one of her many objets d'art as it was reported that she was disposing of some of her effects. None of her really fine cut glass or silver, just something "bright" that I had remembered and loved as a child. Bless her heart, an older but still bright-eyed Jessie May arrived at The House with the little pressed glass bowl. I was deeply touched. It is with me today among other sentimental objects holding many memories and the spirits of their former owners.