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Interview with Emily A. Malecki

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Malecki, Emily Akins (M), interviewed by Esther Mallard (E), March 16, 1992

E: Your maiden name was Akins?

M: Yes.

E: Were you born in Bulloch County?

M: Right, in Statesboro on South Main Street.

E: What is the first recollection that you have of the property that Georgia Southern University has recently purchased? Did you play there as a child or did you live there as a child at all?

M: No, but my father talked about it and my grandmother talked about the land. It is a portion of the whole section of land that my father later bought. The land purchased by the college is one hundred and eight acres that joined the existing college property and it was known between 1910 and 1915 as the Cage Groover Place. Mr. Groover married David Akins' daughter and he became the owner of the property.

E: Had that been in the Akins family before Mr. Groover bought it?

M: Yes. My Grandfather Akins was named Solomon Akins and he had a brother named David Akins who owned this portion of the land. David Akins fought in the War Between the States as did my grandfather. David Akins was married to Caroline Kirby and they had three little girls and he went off to the war and never returned. They did have a notice of the date of his death but they never found his body. Then Caroline Kirby Akins married again. She married a Dasher and she had some children by this Mr. Dasher. Adaline Akins, daughter of David and Caroline Akins, married Cage Groover and that is how he came to own the property. Then in 1914 my father bought this portion of one hundred and eight acres from Cage Groover and it has been in the family since then. My father gave it to my brother Edward and when Ed died in 1977 he left it to me and my husband and our daughter. The whole portion of the land out there was made into a partnership and we named it the J. Edward Akins Farms. For several years the college has been interested I buying it. After this bypass road cut through the farm, one hundred and eight acres was cut off from the other part. So we thought it was a good idea to negotiate with GSU and they made us a good offer so we are glad to see it go to them rather than go to commercial properties.

E: Let me go back a little bit to when it was owned by Cage Groover. Did he live there and farm the land?

M: Yes, there was a very nice house there and recently we tried to sell the house or the lumber out of it. It burned just before the end of December.

E: In 1991?

M: Yes, there was some good lumber in the house.

E: Were there people living in it at the time it burned?

M: No, the last tornado that was through here blew the roof off the top of the building and we never could get it fixed right or fixed back so that it was comfortable. So we just let it stand there. But it is just about gone now.

E: Did your father farm the land or did he lease the land to someone else?

M: He had tenant farmers on the land and that was one of the best places in the county for growing Sea Island cotton. The Sea Island Bank was named for Sea Island cotton. Then the boll weevil came and they stopped growing Sea Island cotton. But this portion of the land is real interesting because my grandmother's mother, my Grandmother Akins' mother, was Elizabeth Brannen. Her brother was Peter Brannen and he owned the land where the college is now located. This portion of the land was Elizabeth Brannen's. She sold it to old Lewis Akins who was my great-grandfather and he gave the land to my grandfather and several of his sons and David Akins was one of them and Solomon Akins.

E: Solomon was your grandfather?

M: Yes and on down the Old Register Road off to the right is where my grandfather and grandmother lived and that house and that farm had been put on the National Register of Historic Homes.

E: Does someone in the family still occupy that area?

M: No, it is not occupied.

E: Earlier I asked about your father and you said that he had tenant farmers. After the Sea Island cotton growing ended, what were the major crops grown there?

M: Peanuts and soybeans, tobacco and corn, and they still grew cotton, but not the Sea Island variety.

E: Did your brother farm it after your father's death?

M: No he didn't. I had two brothers, Harry and Ed, and they went to the University of Georgia. They weren't interested in farming and they both pursued what they wanted to do. Ed went to New York and worked on the Stock Exchange and Harry studied law. He was a young lawyer here and he died when he was thirty five. He had a real promising future. Then my brother Ed served in the Army during the Second World War. After he came back he went out to this Sol Akins place and lived. He really did enjoy it. He died in 1977.

E: Did he lease the land out during the time he was living there?

M: Well, at first he farmed it himself and then he leased it.

E: Since it has belonged to you and your daughter, has it continued to be farmed?

M: Yes, we rent it. This portion the college just bought was one of the best fields we had and wouldn't you know it would be that way. It is so level is one reason that makes it so desirable for farming.

E: Do you have personal memories associated with the farm? Did you go out to visit and chew sugar cane, watch syrup being made, and that sort of thing?

M: Yes, we used to go out there and pick up pecans and play with the children that were there. It was always real interesting to me to go out there with my father. He had a horse and buggy and he used to take me in the buggy and we would go out there when I was a little girl.

E: Is there anything else about the land that you can remember?

M: Well, I was going to show you this chart that indicates who Elizabeth Brannen was. This property came through her and then she sold it to the Akins. Her daughter married the Akins who was the son of the one who bought the property. Elizabeth Brannen was the daughter of Rebecca Donaldson and Joseph Olliff. Elizabeth married Matthew Olliff and she was born in 1824 and she died when she was forty years old. My Grandmother Akins' oldest daughter, Mary Lavenia, was married in 1864 to Sol Akins. They had a log-rolling and built a little log cabin. Then he went back to the War Between the States, or the Civil War, as they called it. But that is another portion of this same tract of land.

E: Was the log cabin the home that is standing there or did they start out in a log cabin and then enlarge it?

M: Right, they added to it. That is why it is significant for being on the National Register is that the front part of it was a log cabin. Then in 1880 they built around it and they added the back part, a long back porch and a dining room, kitchen, and bedroom.

E: Is there anything else about the land that you would like to add? Is there anything significant about the land that you can recall?

M: Nothing other than that it joined the Peter Brannen place which is where the college now stands. I think it is very interesting that the whole original tract of land was from Lotts Creek, you know, where that Primitive Baptist Lotts Creek Church is, all the way down to and including the present site of the college, was owned by this William Brannen. It was a land grant that was given for service in the Revolutionary War and he had all of these children and he gave them different portions of it. My father said he used to go over to the college to play and I would say, "Well, Daddy, where was the house?" He said it was right where the Administration Building is. Peter Brannen's house was right there. There was a hill up to it. See, it was a natural location. He said that all the boys in the community used to go over there and play. Mike Bland bought a back portion of this. That is where the little Dan Bland house is now, you know. He and his brothers were my father's playmates. I thought that was really interesting that he would call him "Uncle Peter Brannen." There was quite a bit of timber between the two tracts of land that has been cut down. During the time that Dr. Pittman was president of the college he bought the tract of land joining this one from the Sam Johnson estate. He had the foresight to add to the college even in those days.

E: That would have been in the 1930s or early '40s?

M: Yes, the '40s. In those days, and I don't know whether you know it or not, but the college had a farm. They had a farm and they had their own dairy and they grew their own vegetables and had farmhands and all of that grew out of the A&M land grant college because it was that to start with. When Dr. Wells came here as College President, he brought several people from Dahlonga, North Georgia College. Emit Scott's father and mother came and their boys came and worked on the farm. Then during the Second World War years they did away with the farm and Mr. and Mrs. Scott moved out on our place. They lived out there a long time and farmed the land.

(End of interview)