Oral History Interview with Bill Goodman
By Ginnie Munford

This is Ginnie Munford talking to Bill Goodman.

GM: Bill, tell us about your wife, Edwina, and her involvement in Galloway.

BG: I’m very prejudiced that she is now ill, so I’m sad about that. But it just a fact that she had a wonderful talent. She started out taking piano lessons all of her young life and won all of the piano contests in north Mississippi. She always loved every part of music. She played in the high school band as well as being the majorette. But about the time she was a junior in high school her family began to realize that she could sing. The last year or two of high school she was in every musical thing in the small town of Aberdeen and, as I said, she came to Belhaven because of Mrs. Caldwell who was the voice teacher. Edwina was blessed with a gorgeous voice and Mrs. Caldwell, as was her practice, between her junior and senior year took three of her students to New York to spend the summer and to study with Estelle Lebling who was the coach for many of the stars of the met.

GM: That is what I was remembering. She had an operatic trained voice.

BG: She really did! But she also was good singing popular music. Mrs. Caldwell told me that at the end of the summer Mrs. Lebling said to Edwina, “When you graduate from college if you will come back up here and study with me you will sing at the met.” I’m glad she didn’t. (laugh)

GM: Her life would have been different.

BG: The choir at Galloway was very important to her. The people like Magnolia Coullet—she was the grand dame of Jackson music and taught at Millsaps but also the Galloway choir was also blessed with her and they fostered a great friendship. I remember Anna Dennery recently telling me about the first time she sang in that choir she was standing between the two of them ...

GM: Oh! My goodness! That must have been intimidating.

BG: Well, I don’t know. Anyway, we had a...

GM: Magnolia wasn’t the director of the choir...she was just a member of the choir and a very well trained musician.

BG: Yes. Absolutely.

GM: Do you remember who the choir leaders were. Was it still Dr. Thompson?

BG: It was a different Thompson. In the 1950’s and 60’s, it was Maurice Thompson, who was an entirely different person from the one from years before. Maurice Thompson was active in the
city radio and musical world. He was a great musician and he directed the choir at Galloway and it was something special in those days.

GM: And was it a large choir?

BG: It was reasonably large, but they not only did what choirs do, they commonly put on very ...Brahms or Beethoven special musical program.

GM: Special classical program for the whole community.

BG: They would be in the church, and then later Maurice organized a group of popular singers, called the Maurice Thompson singers that were about eight or ten of them and they would travel all over the state performing and several member of the Galloway choir, including Edwina were members of the Maurice Thompson singers. As a matter of fact, Ginnie, the first year or two that I was practicing law in Jackson, Edwina sang on TV to make a little money. We didn’t have but two or three TV stations and she sang often at the Christian Science Church and the Jewish Synagogue because they would pay you. I’ve forgotten whether it was $25 or $35 to come sing at their services. She used to tell me that we didn’t have any money and she had to wear her wedding dress. I don’t remember that.

(laugh)

BG: She had a great voice and it was a great part of her life. She was very active in the local opera. She sang...

GM: And she actually performed in the local opera, isn’t that correct?

BG: When she was at Belhaven she had a part in, I think it was, the second or third opera that Jackson Opera Company, now the Mississippi Opera Company, had ever done. After we ended up living permanently in Jackson, I know she sang the lead in La Boheme. She sang the lead in Puccini one-act opera about the nuns. Of course, her big claim to fame was when what was the new city auditorium opened in Jackson, the first thing the opera company decided to do there was Aida and they got Richard Tucker, who was then the lead tenor from New York and Edwina sang the role of Aida with him.

GM: With Richard Tucker!

BG: in 1969. So she had a wonderful time. And later she had a big part, in fact was the chair of putting on what we called then Mississippi Art...

GM: The Arts Festival

BG: Yes. You remember that?

GM: Yes, I do. That was a huge statewide production
BG: Then we would get people here from Bob Hope and Jack Benny, national opera singers, the whole works.

GM: She was the chair of that?

BG: She was. To give her due credit, after she quit being a star singer she worked just as hard being part of the organizations themselves. It was just an important part of her life. I can’t tell you how many times I’d come home from work and there would be some opera group meeting in the house with the latest emergency...

GM: So she wasn’t just a diva?

BG: That’s right.

GM: Tell me about your children’s involvement in Galloway. All three of your children, I know, were involved in the Youth Choir in a very strong way.

BG: That’s fair to say. Of course, they grew up there and went to everything that happened. Will’s got a good voice. Pat has a good voice. Meg has a good voice. Meg also plays the piano extremely well. So the music at Galloway was important to them.

GM: All three of your children also went to Millsaps. Isn’t that correct?

BG: Will went to Ole Miss as a freshman but decided then to attend Millsaps the last three years. Pat went all of her years to Millsaps. Meg went to UVA her freshman year just to prove to me that she could, but she ended up graduating from Millsaps.

GM: Can you tell us just briefly just the relationship between Galloway and Millsaps in your lifetime?

BG: I don’t know exactly what word to put on it, but I always thought of Galloway Church as THE leading cathedral church, or whatever word you want to use, of Methodism in Mississippi and I thought Millsaps was not the only, but the principal institution of higher learning that was fostered by the Methodist Church. It was just normal that there was this strong connection. It was even stronger when I was young because I believe at that time the majority of the faculty at Millsaps was part of Galloway. I think the church involvement in the school was probably more prevalent then, though fortunately it still continues today.

GM: You had mentioned earlier as Clovis Chappell and Dr. Selah as being ministers that you remember well. Tell us about Marion Smith. He served briefly as a substitute minister at Galloway after Dr. Selah’s registration, but his job was the president of Millsaps. I believe that you knew him.

BG: When I attended Millsaps, Dr. Smith was the president of the college. He was a minister by education and training. As a matter of fact, at that time every president of Millsaps had been a minister. That later changed, but Dr. Smith was one of the kindest, sweetest, nicest man I ever
met. He talked to me briefly one time about had I considered the ministry. I told him I had just been raised to be a lawyer. That’s what I thought I was going to do, and he smiled and said, “We need good people there, too.” He was a sweet man.

GM: Did you ever consider being anything except a lawyer?

BG: Not really. It’s a good think I liked it. Grandpa just raised me that way. I might mention an example of Dr. Smith: My last year at Millsaps, I was the number one of the Kappa Alpha chapter and a card game developed in the fraternity house that after a day or so turned into a game that was attracting people in town other than ... a major event. Dr. Smith sent for me. I had an idea what he wanted. I was very nervous. My number two, the vice president, Duke Williams—I just adored Duke – He had been in World War II and he was several years older than I was and certainly wiser in the ways of the world and I asked him to go with me to meet with the president of the college. He said ok and we went into Dr. Smith’s office and that kind gentlemen looked at the two of us and said, “Gentlemen, I understand there is gambling in the Kappa Alpha house.” I didn’t say anything. Duke looked at him and said, “Dr. Smith, it hurts me for you to say that.” We got up and left and went and broke up the game. (laughs) And that was the end of it.

GM: Is there anything else you want to say to younger members of Galloway who may not be aware of all this history that you wish people would know, remember about Galloway.

BG: I’d like to first mention Warren Hamby who was the minister there for a brief time from Alabama after Dr. Selah left and we had some problems. My mother thought, and I agree with her, that he was a very special person for a very short period of time. We needed somebody like that.

GM: And that was the period after Dr. Selah’s resignation when there was a lot of controversy and he was a strong leader.

BG: He was just a good preacher. We had had some fair preachers after Dr. Selah. We were spoiled with Dr. Selah. Warren Hamby kind of got us back on the strong track. I still have copies of some of his sermons which were printed and made available.

GM: I didn’t ask you, but can you tell me briefly some of the leadership positions that you have taken at Galloway.

BG: Ginnie, I wish I could say that I did anything approaching what my grandparents and my mother and my wife did. But it wouldn’t be true. You couldn’t go there all your life and not hold some positions so I’ve probably been on everything at one time or another. I was on the Administrative Board, Board of Stewards first—then later they changed the name to Administrative Board—at a relatively early age. I remember when they changed the structure and started a Church Council, which I doubted the necessity for. I think I was the first or second chairman of the Church Council. And I taught Sunday School a little bit, off and on. I was on the trustees for a term, but after I’d done that, I went through my middle years thinking
I’d done that and that’s for young people and I’m so busy working that I always went to the church, but I didn’t really do my share of that kind of thing.

GM: But in recent years you’ve taken up leadership again.BG: I ended up on the Staff Parish Committee with you which is an interesting job. And I’m still on there. But my time is going to run out soon because I’ve served a couple of consecutive terms, but I think that is only because Joey and Connie thought there ought to be one old person on there. But, by the way, I was very glad I did that. And a few years back I did lead the fund raising one year. Not too long ago.

GM: In the last five or six years?

BG: Probably a little bit further back than that. The stewardship campaign. We had the man who later became the District Superintendent as our preacher then.

GM: Willis Britt?

GM: Willis Britt. He was the minister during that period. My daughter Pat said something to me about some people wanted me to do that. And I said that I’m not going to do that. One day after church the best looking young lady you ever saw came up to came up to me, just smiling like she had known me always and gushing at me and telling me that they needed me to do that and Pat said all I did was say yes —(laughing) —she knew exactly how to trap me.

GM: Thank you very much. We appreciate this.

BG: Thank you.