

JACKSONVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY

700 PELHAM ROAD N.

JACKSONVILLE, ALABAMA 36265-9982

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

TELEPHONE (205) 782-5632

**Gift and Release Agreement:**

We Mrs. Lydie Abernethy and Carlos Mina  
(Interviewee) (Interviewer)

Do hereby grant permission to Jacksonville State University to copy the tape of the interview conducted at \_\_\_\_\_ on the date(s) of \_\_\_\_\_ for the oral history collection being compiled at Jacksonville State University.

This collection will be maintained by Jacksonville State University for research into the history of Northeast Alabama and the South. We further grant researchers permission to quote from the interview on this tape.

Louise Leal's Abernethy  
(Interviewee's signature)

Date Nov. 10, 1995

504 S. East Ave.  
(Address)

Talladega, Alabama  
362-2189  
(Telephone)

Carlos Mina  
(Interviewer's signature)

Date Nov. 10, 1995

400 Pignoka Ave.  
(Address)

Talladega, Alabama  
362-8508  
(Telephone)

Interviewee Background Information

Name: Louise W Abernethy  
Address: 504 S. East Ave.  
Phone Number(s): 362-2189  
Approximate age or date of birth: 9/23/1909  
Mother's name: Flora Gretns  
Father's name: Joseph Vannikellis  
Places lived and when: Houston Texas (1932-37)

Education: Wesleyan College / Bryn Mawr  
Southern College - Education degrees and  
Religion: Presbyterian Certificates.  
Business, political and social memberships (past and present):  
"Who is Who in America"

Present occupation: Retired  
Former occupation(s): Farmer; Conducted Tours  
Real state owner  
Special skills: Art skills, violon player tennis player  
Major Accomplishments: Knowing world's people.  
Many times she went around the world.

Local events in which you have participated: Open House For  
the History of Talladega and Pilgrimage.

State and/or regional events in which you have participated:  
Representing Alabama as a Republican delegate  
from Talladega (Woman's committee.)

National events in which you have participated:  
The Republican National Committee Woman from Alabama  
(20 years)

International events in which you have participated:  
Cruises around the world

Natural born U.S. citizen? Yes/No  
Naturalized Citizen: Yes/No Date:  
Country from which you emigrated:  
Documents, photographs, and artifacts which are in your possession:

Individuals you recommend who might be candidates for an oral  
history interview: Mrs. King  
503 East Street south - Talladega.

Additional information:

Mrs. Louise Wallis Abernethy, an oral history

Carlos Mina

HY 444 01

November 21, 1995.

Mrs. Louise Wallis Abernethy. an oral history

A woman stands almost like a symbol among streets and buildings at the old Talladega town. It is the story of a good citizen who, standing for a town pride, never gave up her own beliefs. The principles she has taken were not popular, she said, and moreover, the active community life she carried out was truly incomparable. This honorable resident of the town, Mrs. Louis Wallis Abernethy, represents the kind of spirit every town has. An indubitable story to new generations, Mrs. Abernethy tells what it happened, what is today, and for the future, what she sees from her experience in order to happen. Her passionate interest, traveling around the world, gave also Mrs. Abernethy opportunity to perceive other cultures. Her husband Tom, who died years ago, was a preminent figure in Talladega. As a matter of fact, he was a politician, moderate speaker at national conventions, writer, poet, and owner editor of The Daily Home, the newspaper of Talladega. Together, Mrs. and Mr. Abernethy will spend many treasured momennts at home and abroad.

Mrs. Abernethy's family came originally from Chester, South Carolina; although, her great-grand mother, Jane Barclay, came from New Castle, England. The Wallis established in the lower part

of Talladega County soon after the Indians were moved out of Alabama. Mrs. Abernethy brings memories from her grand-mother Wallis sometimes. Her grandma went to a Methodist College at Tuskegee; location where now is Booker Washington's School. "...She had a strong personality, though physically rather delicate she was very outspoken..." Mrs. Willie Wallis Moore wrote.(1) The Wallis met right after the war. They married January 8, 1867. during Recostruction Period. Some Mrs. Abernethy's great-grandmother relatives came directly from Aberdeen, Scotland, to Talladega. The moved there before the Civil War. Mrs. Abernethy's parents were Mrs. Flora Greene and Mr. Joseph Vann Wallis. A brother. Kennon Wallis. and a sister. Mrs. Nell Caldwell. live in Talladega today.(1) "...Our grandfather (Charner Wallis) was in the lumber business and built Talladega's first school, Northside." she said. Mrs. Abernethy's " aunt Ida "\* was one of the first teachers at that school.

Mrs. Abernethy and her husband graduated from Talladega High School the same year. 1926. She went to Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia, where she studied art and violin, and was elected president of the freshman class. Being in love with Tom, she transferred to Birmingham - Southern College where, of course, he was a student there. After many plans. they married in 1932.

\* Mrs. Ida Wallis Elliott. a prominent benefactor of Talladega. She was the first organizer to the Pilgrimage Tours in Talladega, travel agency director. teacher. and promotor on the movement for Beautification of Talladega.(2)

By that time. Depression was causing so many struggles every where. People in great despair. were looking for any forward hope that helps them to get out.this situation. It was a hard time for many.

The story of Tom Abernethy starts early when he began as a city editor for The Sylacauga News. Another was arising for him later on. The Dothan Eagle offered Tom same position. He accepted it at once. After the couple has been living in Houston. Texas. for five years. they decided to return to Talladega. The year was 1937 when he entered to relation work for Bemmis Bag Company. Time ran upon the death of Tom Williams. owner of The Daily Home of Talladega. There was the greatest opportunity for Tom to a ful ownership of a newspaper. After buying a half interest of that editorial, Mr. Abernethy, along with Mrs. Abernethy's brother, Joe Wallis, assumed that desired opportunity. Tom Abernethy's writings and editorial style attracted many. The same was true on the weekly Our Mountain Home columns. People's appeal was very concerned to that type of writing. One Man's Opinion columns caught also the attention of hundreds. Because of his high quality writings, Mr. Abernethy was soon recognized. He became the recipient of an " Associated Press Nieman Fellowship in Journalism." As a result, he spent several months in Europe, primarily in London. England. Soon. Tom studied and critiqued foreign newspapers. He worked in company of prestigious editors and publishers there, and after all, London became the place of good memories for the Abernethys.

By the time Tom accepted the job as a city editor for The Dothan Eagle, Louise has been already enrolled at Troy State University. Right after that, she earned a teaching certificate. As soon as she started teaching, her career was shortened. She was confined to the Talladega County areas of Munford, Idalia and Lincoln; however, she has been attracted to that area because his brother lived there. Close friends from newspapers called her " Iron Ludy " because of her strong nature and rugged determination. Indeed, she appreciated that name as a reflection of her attitude. The stands that she has taken were not always universally popular.(3) After he has been employed as a political writer for The Houston (Texas) Press, Tom was increasing his political activities. He was a member of the Alabama Democratic State Executive Committee from 1948 until 1952. He became presidential elector in 1950. Disenchanted with the Democratic Party, Tom turned to the late Gessner Mc Corvey of Mobile in the formation of the State Rights Party. He worked as its chairman. By the year of 1952, Louis and Tom became ardent supporters of Eisenhower. From 1953 to 1966, Tom was a member of the Alabama State Republican Executive Committee, Republican elector in 1964 and a delegate to the 1956 and 1960 Republican National conventions. Meanwhile, " Iron Ludy " became the Republican National Committee Woman from Alabama. She remembered she must have attended at least four or five national conventions. She also remembered that General "Ike" was nominated at her convention. She met Eisenhower and his wife, Mamie, " the most

gracious first lady. " she said. After Mr. Abernethy died in 1968, the Alabama State Republican Convention meeting in Mobile was dedicated to him as " an editor, poet, political leader and great American."(5)

Today, Mrs. Abernethy is 85 years old. Practically she has spent her entire life in the community. She was continuously involved in its social, church and cultural enrichment endeavors. As a reference on how Louise's principles stand, one that explains her attitude, occurred in 1983-84.(6) An issue started when the Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind decided to seek additional property owned by Mrs. Abernethy. The AIDB, a prestigious institution along the South, and in the nation, also envolved same issues with other land owners adjacent to the Institute. As a leader, " Iron Lady " did not give up her committment to the land owners' group. The battle that followed was prolonged several months over. Eventually, after all discussions, the dispute was resolved. Owners had to sell the Institute portion of the property it sought. Because they have been good neighbors, Mrs. Abernethy decided to get over this problem. She will remark that she regreted this problem arose. She sold her land section because the Institute needed, she said.

Another valuable stands for her were in Who's Who in America, Who's Who in the Southwest, as well as Who's Who in American Women.(7)

Mrs. Abernethy a fervent Presbyterian always willing to help, served as a Sunday School Teacher at her church, First Presbyterian at Talladega. Indeed, she was very known for growing and arranging



all the flowers used in the church; a job that lasted through many years.

Capetown. Buenos Aires, Cartagena and Bombay are some of the places "Ludy", thus being called since her early school years, became familiar with. She has been travelling around the world eleven times. A person who accompanied Ludy in almost all the trips was Mrs. Ida Wallis Elliott: a sister to Mrs. Abernethy's father. Mrs. Elliott, or "Aunt Ida" was "the most-travelled and highly-regarded citizen in Talladega," Ludy said. They went everywhere, discovered many things and enjoyed each other's company. Mrs. Elliott was the first organizer of Talladega's Pilgrimage; a distinctive tour in the town. Before Ludy began her around-the globe trips, Tom, herself and "Aunt Ida" went to Mexico sixteen times. The company she used the most was the S.S. Rotterdam of the Holland American lines; nevertheless, Ludy remembers that by the time they went to Mexico, the P. & O. (Peninsular and Occidental) was her line. Among the special places or points of interest, Ludy talks of an island called Tristan de Cuna. A spot situated halfway between Buenos Aires and Capetown. Located 10,000 miles apart, this island offered a distinctive environment where high winds controlled the landscape. In Bombay, India, she got really scared because of the way taxi drivers ran over the streets of the city. Holyland was the place Louise loved to visit over and over. In 1986, from the deck of their ship in South Pacific waters, Mrs. Abernethy saw Haley's Comet: a brief and tiny spectacle. Among her favorite

people. Mrs. Abernethy referred to the Indonesians as courteous and kind. She was delighted looking at their immaculate dresses and manners. Indeed, London was another city Mrs. Abernethy always wanted to come back. For Tom and Louis, London was a place of happy moments. Mr. Abernethy's favorite spot was the famous Foiles Book Store. There, he spent hours checking the good publications.

Over the years, Mrs. Abernethy has been gathering books like "The Right and Dominion of the Sea;" a compilation at the date of February 2, 1662. According to the Library of Congress, these volumes, printed by John Seldom.(8) bear explicit authenticity. Amazingly, she found that a half dozen of the books were believed to be in existence. As said before, Mr. Abernethy gained also credentials as a poet. A proof of that matter is shown on two books of poetry, "Wood Smoke" and "Wood Smoke II." Written by her husband, they were published in 1967, the first, and in 1975, by Mrs. Abernethy after his death, the later. Another good literary work is "EastStreet South:"(9) a well known poetry read by many in Talladega. The book contains also pen and ink drawings by Talladega's Wilmary Elliott. The finest and most historic buildings of the town are depicted as long the poems appear.

The Abernethy residence at 504 East street South was built in 1908 and occupied by her parents until their deaths. They lived downstairs after the Abernethys married. Filled with

memories of the Abernethy and Wallis travels and the family's antiques, Louise's home has evidence and portrait of wonderful days. Reminiscences with Tom are still alive. Art objects from across the world. the famed "Thieves Markets" and other well-known places in Paris. Mexico City, London, Buenos Aires. perfectly occupy her living room. Almost from everywhere she went, an object will describe an amazing story. Many paintings. some done by Mrs. Abernethy herself, embellish all the walls at every hall in the house. She produced a silver chest emblazoned with her name and containing 29 silver coins, one from each of the ports of call taken on "Holland American's historic silver jubilee world cruise, January 8 to April 1, 1983" which was presented to her at a high seas ceremony.

By the 1950s. Ludy along with Billie Bliss, Sarah Whitson(10) and Wilmary Elliott. went around Talladega County searching for places to portray. People referred to them as "The Barnyard Girls" and they could be found on the side of the roads, in the woods. just everywhere. Tom's best description for them was "The Magnolia Girls." and after all. the ' trio' had so much fun together that she never forgot this time. Friends from travels around the world are still in touch with her. They keep this fellowship alive through calls and correspondence. They met each other between the trips. and the bond. it seems, lasts forever.

Between her courtship days and those wonderful times spent with Tom. Mrs. Abernethy keeps her vivid memories today. Nobody could take away from her this fascinating life of adventure and

passion. For certain. the trips around the world gave her the blessings of knowing other people's cultures, as well as a well-formed idea how our world is made of. Indeed, a good citizen's story and a town pride essence are some of the qualities for Mrs. Abernethy; consequently. her name contributes to the spirit of the old Talladega as a reminiscent thought that goes by the time.

References.

- 1) Moore. Willie Wallis. "Louise Wallis Abernethy, Family Facts."  
Christmas 1934. pp. 1; 2; 5.
- 2) Russell, Stephen. Talladega Town. Southern Press. 1973. pp. 67.
- 3) Abernethy, Louise Wallis. Personal interview. 21 Oct...1995.
- 4) Abernethy. Louise Wallis. Personal interview. 10 Nov., 1995.
- 5) Jacob. Leslie.T. " 'Tween Us." Home staff writer. Daily Home.  
Sept. 4. 1968. p 4b.
- 6) Edwards. Bill. " Edwards at-Large." Daily Home. 3 July, 1983  
p. 3b
- 7) " Who's Who in America " vol. 32 - 1962-1963. " Who's Who in  
the South and Southwest " vol. 2. 1962-1965. " Who's  
Who in American Women." vol. 3. 1962-1963.
- 8) Seldom. John. The Right and Dominion of the Sea. Edinburgh,  
Scotland.( from Mrs. Abernethy's private home library)
- 9) Abernethy, Tom. Wood Smoke. Brannon Printings. Talladega.  
1967. Wood Smoke .II. 1975. East Street South.

Ed. Louise W. Abernethy. Brannon Printings. Talladega, 1972.

10)Whitson. Sarah. Personal interview. 13 Nov. 1995.

Questions for Mrs. Abernethy.

- Where did your parents come from ? Ancestors in the Civil War?  
Do you have information about your grand-parents?
  
- Where did you graduate from? College? Majors?  
Year of graduation(s)? Certificates? When did you meet  
Mr. Abernethy? Where?
  
- Tom had an exciting career. How was he as a writer? What  
editorials was he involved in? Opportunities for him abroad?
  
- Could you please talk about your career as a teacher, or  
political member of the Republican Party?  
Tom's commitment in the party? Could you mention some of  
his achievements? Committees?
  
- The issues with the AIDB were not regular ones. Could you  
explain some of your views on it?
  
- Where the name of " Iron Ludy " came from?
  
- What church affiliation do you have?
  
- Do you have any anecdotal story with friends in Talladega?

- About trips around the world. How many times did you travel around the world?

Which trip was the most enjoyable? Memories? Did you have the chance to talk with different people? Which were the most characteristic individuals ? Souvenirs? Special places? Events? Memories?



Chronology of Mrs. Abernethy's life.

1867- The Wallis, Mrs. Abernethy's parents, get married right after the Civil War.

1908- Abernethy's house is built.

1926- Graduation for Mr. and Mrs. Abernethy at Talladega High School.

1932- The Abernethys get married.

1932-1937. The couple was living in Houston, Texas.

1937- Tom worked at Bemmis Bar Company.

1948-1952. Mr. Abernethy was a member of the Alabama Democratic State Executive Committee.

1950- Tom Abernethy. Presidential elector. Then, after being disenchanted with the Democratic Party, he turned to the States Rights Party. He was its chairman.

1952- The Abernethys as supporters of "Ike" Eisenhower.

1953-1966. Tom became a member of the Alabama State Republican Executive Committee. He was nominated as delegate to the 1956 and 1960 Republican National conventions.

1967- "Wood Smoke" is published.

1969- After Mr. Abernethy's death (1968), Mrs. Abernethy became the Republican National Committee Woman from Alabama.

1975- "Wood Smoke II" is published by Mrs. Abernethy.

1983-1984. AIDB land discussions.

1983- Mrs. Abernethy is awarded with "Holland American's historic silver jubilee cruise."

1987- One of the last trips around the world.

State and National events.

- 1906- Alabama Power Company built its first dam.
- 1914- World War I started.
- 1915- Booker Washington's last public appearance.
- 1920- World War I ended.
- 1930- The Great Depression began.
- 1940- U.S. entered W W II.
- 1941- Pearl Harbor, in Hawaii. is attacked.
- 1945- World War II ended.
- 1950- Korean War began.
- 1953- Korean War ended.
- 1954- Mr. Brown's case. Segregated schools ruled unconstitutional.
- 1955- Rosa Parks is arrested on Montgomery bus.
- 1956- U.S. Supreme Court ended Montgomery's bus segregation policy.
- 1957- Dr. Martin L. King elected as president of the SCLC.
- 1960- Vietnam War started.
- 1961- Freedom Riders came to Alabama from other states.
- 1963- Governor Wallace against " integration " at the University of Alabama.
- 1964- Civil Rights Act. Segregation in public places ended.
- 1965- Selma to Montgomery march to pass the Voting Rights Act.
- 1970- First man on the moon.
- 1973- U.S. Troops left Vietnam.