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1229 Bellevue DR. Gadsden

on the date(s) of MARCH 9th 1996 11:00 AM.

for the oral history collection being compiled by Dr. Marshall.

Ronald Schwartz Date: March 9th 1996
Interviewee's Signature

Address 1229 Bellevue Dr.
Gadsden, Alabama

Phone 205-543-3086

Melissa Schwartz Date 3-9-96
Interviewer's Signature

Address 381 N.W. Quill Ave #69

Jacksonville AL 36265

Phone 205-435-4005

INTERVIEWEE BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Name: RONALD S Schwartz (M/F: _____)

Address: 1229 Bellevue DR Gadsden, AL 35904

Phone number(s): 205-543-3086

Approximate age or date of birth: 60 25 of March 1996

Mothers name: Nellie Mae Smith Schwartz

Father's name: FRANK Schwartz

Places lived and when: Gadsden, ALABAMA -
Born Here and lived here

Education: Highschool - 2 yrs UOFAAL Extension Center

Religion: Sou Baptist

Business, political and social memberships (past and present): Gadsden Museum of ART Board member,

Present occupation: Retired

Former occupations: Steel Worker and Restorer ART

Special Skills: ART

Major Accomplishments: OWN Home, Favorable Life Style Now

National Events in which interviewee has participated: NONE

Local Events in which interviewee has participated: Help with Campaign

National born U.S. citizen? Yes/No Naturalized Citizen: Yes/No

Country from which he/she emigrated: _____

Documents, photographs, and artifacts which are in the possession of the interviewee:
Fathers metal from WWI. Photographs

Individuals recommended by the interviewee who might be candidates for an oral history interview: JACK Schwartz

Additional information: _____

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Ronald Schwartz on the
effects of the "Great Depression"

By Melissa Schwartz

04-09-96

202 American History

Dr. S. Marshall

By far the most extraordinary economical disaster in the history of the United States of America was the Great Depression during the period between 1929-1941. The unemployment rate rose from 3 to about 25 percent. It left most Americans struggling daily just to eat and survive. My father, Ronald Schwartz, is one of these people. He was born on April 22, 1936, so he did not live through the entire period of the depression. He experienced the later half and the after effects of the depression. Mr. Schwartz allowed me to interview him to try and give us an idea and examples of what it was like to grow up during the Great Depression.

It is hard to say exactly when and why the Great Depression began. Most people believe that the economy slowly began to decline sometime in the 1920's after republican president Warren G. Harding took office. Mr. Schwartz believes that "it was because of the leaders of the country at the time and because people's money was no good since the stock market crashed in 1929 and monetary forces hit rock bottom. People lost everything. The nation was in a panic and people were committing suicide because they were afraid of what was going to happen to them".1

During the roaring 20's the American economy was soaring but by the end of the decade the economy drastically declined. In 1929 the republican president, Herbert Hoover, wanted the Americans to have a new era of prosperity. He believed that people like big corporations would volunteer to help relieve the struggle of the people, and also that people should have faith in self-reliance and help themselves.

Hoover believed in the trickle down theory and that the federal government should not be involved in businesses and public interest. During his term in office more than 15 million people were unemployed, thousands of banks failed, and around 2 billion dollars in bank deposits vanished.

Since Mr. Schwartz was not born until the middle of the depression, he has a lot of memories of what his parents told him. His father Frank Schwartz was a German descendant and was born in 1898. His mother Nellie Schwartz was born in 1901 and they were married in 1918. They lived in the city of Gadsden, Al. for several years and then moved to the outer skirts of the city where my father was born. He remembers his older brothers and sisters telling him about the life in the city compared to the country. "There was freedom in the country, but no luxuries. There were no phones, no electricity, or running water like they had it in the city."² As for the families income Frank Schwartz worked some with Singer Co. repairing sewing machines. He worked odd jobs with electrical things and he was also a gun smith. "Money was scarce so he traded his work for food like eggs and vegetables."³ His father was also a very well known man, he had a great personality, and most of all he was honest. In 1924 Frank Schwartz invented "an automatic fire alarm system that not only turns itself on, but informs the fire department of the location of the blaze." Frank Schwartz did apply for a patent but for some reason he never got it. The fire chief, L.B. Rainey, of Gadsden stated that "little attention is sometimes paid to these great inventions. The people do not appreciate what their benefactors are doing for them but concentrate upon movies, football, baseball, Andy Gump. politics and divorce."⁴

At a young age Mr. Schwartz remembers that out of eleven children that his parents had to raise, seven of them were during the depression. "We had a three room house so all of the children had to sleep in shifts on bunks."⁵ His father had a hard time getting every thing that they needed. His mother would make clothes for the girls and sometimes "made shirts out of feed sacks for the boys to wear".⁶ If they did get blue jeans or shoes they had to last a long time. His mother had to boil there clothes in a big pot and wash them by hand on a scrub board.. When they ran out of fire wood which was their only source of heat they would "have to buy coal from a coal company and it would have to be rationed so it would last".⁷ Mr. Schwartz said "we made the best of being poor, we survived. There was no conveniences, it was very hard on us, but it must have been just terrible in the early 30's".⁸

Although this story fits in with most of the Americans through out the United States during the depression, Mr. Schwartz said that "locally most families were economically equal, but we had an advantage because my father could do so many things that others could not do".⁹ There were some families that were even worse off than the Schwartz family. The children did not have to work at a young age to help support the family except for two of the older brothers, but it was not necessary, it was just for extra money. They did not raise a farm or vegetables, they basically depended on their father for every thing. Since the family was poor, there was not much entertainment. "We did have an old radio and got some funny programs. We also started getting the newspaper around 1940."¹⁰ The highlight was once in a while they would get to go to the movies which only cost about ten cents each. There was not much that they could afford to do but

they had fun anyway.

With the economy being so bad, to me it seems like there would have been an increase in crime because people did not have enough money for most things. I would have assumed that some people would have turned to stealing and robbing. Mr. Schwartz said that "I don't remember any crime, I only remember the threats of war and I had a bad feeling about war. I was very upset."¹¹ Maybe the thoughts of war was weighing so heavy on their minds that they did not have time to even think about crime. They just wanted to survive.

During the first part of the depression life was extremely difficult for most people. Mr. Schwartz remembers his mother telling him something that happened just before he was born. "My mother said it was just terrible. One day all she had in the kitchen to eat was an onion so she cut it up, added water to it to make soup, and fed the family."¹² Life was very hard. There was ^{no} no jobs and if they did get a job they made only about three or four dollars a week which was practically nothing. My father said "I knew we were poor but I would not have traded it because the love of my family was like gold and silver".¹³

During the 1932 presidential election Americans were now very concerned about the economy. The democrats nominated Franklin D. Roosevelt as their candidate for president. "In his first hundred days in office, Roosevelt initiated 15 pieces of legislation, aimed at recovery and relief for the people with no jobs and no food. New Dealers launched a massive program of federal spending on direct relief and on public works projects designed to provide temporary jobs for the unemployed. Although these measures looked decisive,

even revolutionary, many of the programs became mired in red tape and thus failed to reach those most in need of their services."14 Roosevelt envisioned an active role for the federal government and hinted that he would support the creation of a welfare state."15 With the New Deal people decided to take the chance and try letting the government get more involved in public interest since President Hoover had not seemed to be beneficial for the nation, so what could they lose. If Roosevelt failed then they would not be any worse off than they already were. The new powers that came with Roosevelt's presidency was almost like a dictatorship. "These new powers extended not only to the fiscal functions of the government, but to budgetary economy, control of gold, control of banking, and to possible inflation. They extended as well to agriculture, to every branch of industry, to public works, to the railroads, to mortgaged homes and farms, to unemployment and to the relief of destitution."16 "The Great Depression gradually ended"16 said Mr. Schwartz " and we were happy but still, after all we went through, happiness is what you make of it. I Still believe that if it had not been for President Roosevelt our country would still be going backwards because he did so much like for example: He started the W.P.A.(Workmans Progress Association) which was federal jobs that helped put men to work that could not find any work."17 With these new jobs the men built new roads, bridges, and dams. They also built stadiums out of stone. All of these jobs were mostly related to public works. My grandfather, Frank Schwartz got a job with the W.P.A. as a supervisor in charge of transportation with the Mason cement trucks. This program seemed to help a lot of Americans. The New Deal changed the minds of Americans about letting the government intervene with the

economy and public affairs. Even though President Roosevelt's New Deal did help some people, I believe that the government has left too much room for crooked people who do not want to work but only wants to take advantage of the welfare programs which was designed to be short term help for the needy but the government has let it become a long term aid program. I feel that this New Deal did help the depression but I also feel that World War II played a great part in helping the American economy. The war started in 1939 but the united States of America was not involved until the end of 1941 when they declared war on Japan. Roosevelt wanted to come to the aid of Great Britain and France so "he pledged to convert the United States into an "arsenal of democracy"¹⁸ When World War II began our country had a great demand for weapons and millions of people were needed because "manufacturing plants that had run at half-capacity during the depression were now needed to operate overtime to assemble war material".¹⁹ This greatly helped the economy by the enormous increase of jobs, and it helped the transition of money from the government to fall into the hands of the American people because during the depression the people might have been poor but the government was not. There was no way for the people to get their hands on the governments money because Hoover felt that the government should stay out of the public interest and that the people should be more self-reliance. This is why I believe that World War II had the most impact on helping the United States recover from the Great Depression. So after World War II most people believed the Great Depression to be over.

I believe that because of what all that my father, Ronald Schwartz, experienced while growing up during the hard times of the

depression is what has made him the loving, most unselfish, and honest person that he is. I am thankful that at least the Great Depression had some good effects in the out come of people's lives like my father. My father said to me, "I don't know how we made it but I believe we got through it because my mother and father were strong, brave, loving and most of all we worked together. That is what it took to get through the hard times."20

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ALABAMIAN INVENTS FIRE-ALARM SYSTEM

Gadsden, Ala., October 25.—(Special.)—An automatic fire alarm system that not only turns itself on, but informs the fire department of the lo-



FRANK SCHWARTZ.

cation of the blaze, by means of a switchboard, is the novel invention claimed by Frank Schwartz, a young Gadsden veteran of the world war.

By means of his apparatus, he contends that a step has been taken toward elimination of much of the loss of life and damage by fire. It is operated by means of electricity, a short circuit caused by the burning of the installation giving the alarm.

Mr. Schwartz, 26, has applied for two patents in connection with his invention and has models of his apparatus in the United States patent office.

Has Two Systems.

One patent comprises the invention of a house fire alarm system, not akin to the water pipe or sprinkler method. His building invention consists of insulated wires attached to a battery, especially through sections most liable to fire, such as flues, along electric light wiring, about furnaces and in kitchens. The wiring is provided with a test switch and at any time the switch determines if the system is in perfect working order.

It is equipped with alarm bells arranged in the building and with the fire station, through cable in similar fashion as telephones are connected to a central office.

At the fire department, under this system, the cable carries wires from every residence and building with the system installed, to a switchboard, which comprises his second patent.

"In case of fire, the heat would strike one of the little wires and burn the installation, the alarm sounding in the house and at "central" in fire headquarters.

L. B. Rainey, of Gadsden, in whose office the system is on view, declares the invention has been thoroughly demonstrated and has proven a success.

"Little attention is sometimes paid to these great inventions," he declares.

MAYOR APPROVES NEW ENGINE HOUSE FOR NINTH WARD

Mayor Walter A. Sims Saturday approved papers recently passed by city council, in concurrence with the Aldermanic board, approving proposed erection of a new fire engine house in the ninth ward and awarding the contract for its construction to the Paul Wesley Construction company.

The mayor gave his approval to all matters submitted by council, except the bill prohibiting parking of any cars, other than those belonging to the city, in the rear court of the city hall. His reason for not approving this measure was that many employees of the city rode in their own automobiles and should be allowed to park them in the space, although the machines are not city-owned.

Mayor Sims also declined to approve a bill providing for payment of back salaries to Detectives Portwood and Acree.

"The people do not appreciate what their benefactors are doing for them, but concentrate upon the movies, football, baseball, Andy Gump, politics and divorce and silently pass up these wizards who by torchlight cipher out their protection and safety."

Mr. Schwartz was born in Trenton, N. J. of French parentage. He has a wife and three children.

NORMAL INSTITUTE NEEDS ONLY \$1,500

The campaign for \$3,500 to pay off pressing indebtedness of the Atlanta Normal and Industrial Institute for Negroes is going forward with satisfactory progress, according to R. D. Stinson, principal.

Leading white citizens are contributing, he said, the latest being Frank Hawkins, of the Citizens and Southern bank, who has offered to give the last \$250 required to complete the total.

Chairman Ed H. James of the police committee of city council, promised \$500 several days ago. Other prominent Atlantians are contributing the amount needed, according to Principal Stinson.

The institute is one of the south's best-known institutions for negro youths, and has a large enrollment each year made up of young negroes who are being trained in manual arts along with regular literary studies.

Less than \$1,500 is required to complete the total, the school head states, and that amount is expected to be forthcoming during the coming week.

Automobiles produced in the present calendar year will exceed the value of any other single American industry.

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- Mavis Face Powder..... 3
- Azurea Face Powder..... 7

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Family Group Sheet**Husband: Frank Schwartz**

Born: January 17, 1898 in: Sarregueimenes, France
Married: June 16, 1918 in: Gadsden courthouse (Mr. Loveman)
Died: April 1980 in: Gadsden, Alabama
Father: Nicholas Schwartz
Mother: Regina

Wife: Nellie May Smith

Born: December 25, 1901 in: Gadsden, Alabama
Father: McDonald Smith
Mother: Lucy Richardson

CHILDREN

1 M	Name: Frank Schwartz, Jr. Born: March 5, 1920	
2 F	Name: Gloria Ellen Schwartz Born: May 24, 1922	
3 F	Name: Susan Schwartz Born: April 16, 1924	
4 M	Name: Louie James Schwartz Born: July 21, 1925	
5 M	Name: Jack Schwartz Born: July 28, 1928	
6 F	Name: Rosemary Schwartz Born: September 15, 1930	
7 M	Name: Howard Smith Schwartz Born: April 5, 1934	
8 M	Name: Ronald Sherman Schwartz Born: April 22, 1936 Married: February 24, 1957 Spouse: Rebecca Ruth Brock	in: Gadsden, Alabama in: Trenton, Georgia
9 M	Name: Don Greenville Smith Born: January 29, 1938	
10 F	Name: Julia Elinor Schwartz Born: September 14, 1939	
11 F	Name: Margaret Lynn Schwartz Born: September 15, 1941	

Prepared By: