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(Interviewee's signature)

Address P.O. Box 366 Pelham, Ala.

Date 3-15-96

Phone 620-4409

Ashley Fuqua  
(Interviewer's signature)

Address 90 Teals Trail #2

Date 3-15-96

Piedmont, Ala. 36272

Phone 782-0036

**Interviewee Background Information**

Name: Robert Harrison Fuqua  
Address: P.O. Box 366 Pelham, Ala.  
Phone Number(s): 620-4409  
Approximate age or date of birth: May 12, 1922  
Mother's name: Gussie Irene Harbin  
Father's name: Robert Harrison Fuqua  
Places lived and when: West End, Ga; Georgia; Pennsylvania; Florida; Pelham, Ala.

Education: West End high school

Religion: Baptist  
Business, political and social memberships (past and present):  
belonged to a labor union (136) IBEW

Present occupation: Retired  
Former occupation(s): Electrician, Flowers shop keeper

Special skills: naval electronics, arrangement of flowers  
Major Accomplishments: Finished advanced electronics school, 1st class electrician Full chief in Navy. His sub made Ripley's Believe it or not.

Local events in which you have participated: Fought in Golden Globe Boxing Camp. in B'ham finished second.

State and/or regional events in which you have participated: Golden Globe state Finals - finished second.

National events in which you have participated: WWII

International events in which you have participated: WWII

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: —

Additional information: —

## HISTORICAL CHRONOLOGY

(1922-1929) It was the Roaring Twenties, a time of booming economy and plenty of jobs. Governor Kilby was preparing to leave his last term as governor of Alabama in 1922 and William Brandon was preparing to take over. Warren G. Harding was President of the United States till 1924 where Calvin Coolidge picked up. As the state and country were unknowingly headed for disaster, Bibb Graves took over as governor of Alabama.

(1929-1939) Herbert Hoover became President at unfortunate time, 1928. The stock market crashed on October 29, 1929 and resulted in the Great Depression. Benjamin Miller becomes governor of Alabama in 1931 and Franklin D. Roosevelt becomes President in 1932. As Roosevelt is putting his New Deal into motion, Bibb Graves wins his second term as governor of Alabama in 1935 and FDR wins his second term in 1936.

(1939-1945) World War II had been going on in Europe since 1939 and Frank Dixon had become governor of Alabama in that same year. Roosevelt became President again in 1940 and on December 7, 1941 the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and the United States joined the war the next day. Chauncey Sparks became governor of Alabama in 1943 and President Roosevelt won his fourth term in 1944. Roosevelt died April 12, 1945 and Vice President Truman took over. The Germans surrendered in May and after dropping the atomic bomb, Japan surrendered on August 15, 1945. The war was over.

(1947) James Folsom becomes governor of Alabama

(1948) President Truman wins the Presidential election

(1951) Gordon Persons becomes governor

## INDIVIDUAL CHRONOLOGY

- (1922) Robert Harrison Fuqua was born in West End, Alabama.
- (1929) Robert was seven years old when the Great Depression hit. His family began moving around trying to find work for the father to do.
- (1941) Graduated from West End high school and went to work for the union.
- (1942) Joined the Navy to fight in WWII.
- (1945) Early part of the year he left the service then he married Elizabeth Dryden. He found another job through the union.
- (1947) Robert's and Elizabeth's first son was born.
- (1950) Their second son was born.
- (1953) The family moved to Pennsylvania.
- (1960) The family moved to Florida.
- (1961) Their third son was born.
- (1962) The family moved back to West End.
- (1963) The fourth child, a girl, was born.
- (1965) The family moved to Pelham to get away from coloreds.
- (1987) Robert retired from the union.
- (1988) Robert and Elizabeth moved to Heflin to run Elizabeth's father's flower shop.
- (1994) They moved back to Pelham for Elizabeth's treatment of Alzheimer's disease.

## GUIDE FOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) What was your family like as a child?
- 2) Did you and your family attend church?
- 3) What was your education like?
- 4) Did you work as a child?
- 5) How did the Great Depression effect your family's lives?
- 6) What do you remember most about it?
- 7) Do you think the New Deal was effective?
- 8) When and why did you decide to join the Navy?
- 9) What did you think about the cause of the war?
- 10) Where were you stationed?
- 11) Why did you choose the sub and what was it like?
- 12) What was the longest period of time you spent out at sea?
- 13) Were you ever in battle?
- 14) How did your sub make *Ripley's Believe It or Not?*
- 15) What stands out most in you mind when you think of the war?
- 16) What did you think about the Japanese-American internment program?
- 17) What did you think when they were finally compensated?
- 18) Were you able to get over hard feelings towards Germany and Japan?
- 19) How did the war effect Alabama?
- 20) Do you think Roosevelt and Truman handled the war well?
- 21) Did you meet Elizabeth before or after the war?
- 22) When were you married?
- 23) What did the Civil Rights movement mean to you?
- 24) Living in Birmingham, how effected by it were you?
- 25) What did you think about integration?
- 26) Were you a supporter of George Wallace?
- 27) What did you think about Martin Luther King, JR.?
- 28) What about the assassination of JFK?
- 29) What were some of the high points in your life?

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Robert Harrison Fuqua, Jr. was born May 12, 1922 in West End, Alabama. He was born the son of a construction worker Robert Harrison Fuqua, Sr. and his wife Gussie Irene. He entered the world when Kilby was governor of Alabama and Warren G. Harding was President of the United States. It was a time of booming economy, Ford automobiles, Flappers, and Jazz music, or more commonly known as the Roaring Twenties. Robert, my Grandfather, was born into happy times, but starting shortly he would live throughout intense, turbulent and very difficult times.

During this time the Democratic Party had no serious opposition in Alabama. From 1876 to 1960 not a single Republican carried the state. The state did not have a Republican governor until 1986. President Harding dies in 1923 and Calvin Coolidge takes over, remaining President until 1928. Alabama was in a progressive era, carrying out plans of former governor Kilby and Bibb Graves, who becomes governor in 1927. Together they accomplished child-labor laws, abolishment of the convict-lease program, better educational systems and a longer school year.

Prohibition brought some violence to Alabama, at this time, through increased smuggling, racketeering, and bootlegging. Although, consumption sharply declined at first, enforcement efforts were unable to stop the illegal methods going on.

The general economy of Alabama was booming largely in part due to Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company(TCI). There was a

1 large population increase in Birmingham because of the people  
2 coming to work for TCI. Textile mills were still going strong and  
3 many other businesses were opening up in Alabama. By 1925 Alabama  
4 ranked fourth in the South in the number of manufacturing jobs.

5 Alabamians, including Robert and his family, were taking full  
6 advantage of the Roaring Twenties and enjoying the era of apparent  
7 business prosperity and what seemed to be a rising standard of  
8 living. It was short lived, though, as critical agricultural,  
9 industrial, and financial problems led to the Stock Market Crash of  
10 1929 and the Great Depression, thus ending the prosperity and  
11 carefree recklessness of the Roaring Twenties.

12 Robert was seven years old when the Great Depression hit. It  
13 affected his family greatly. His father became one of the millions  
14 of unemployed. They lost their house and two cars because they  
15 could not afford the payments. They began moving around looking  
16 for work and renting places to stay. For now, the good times were  
17 over.

18 Herbert Hoover was unfortunate in being elected President when  
19 he was. He came into office just before the stock market crash and  
20 inevitably was blamed for the country's misery. In 1932 Franklin  
21 D. Roosevelt was elected President; he promised help.

22 The Great Depression was the most traumatic experience  
23 suffered by the people of the United States since the Civil War.  
24 More than fifteen million were unemployed at the height of the  
25 depression. Thousands of homes and farms were foreclosed for  
26 failure to pay mortgages. National income declined and thousands  
27 of banks went bankrupt. The city of Birmingham was one of the

1 worse hit by the depression. The city's iron and steel based  
2 economy was controlled by the Pittsburgh rulers. When U.S. Steel  
3 shut the mills down, it meant disaster for the Birmingham area.  
4 The area turned poor, hungry, violent and dismal almost overnight.  
5 A study in 1935 showed that of the cities in America within  
6 Birmingham's population class, Birmingham had the highest  
7 illiteracy rate, highest venereal disease rate, and the lowest  
8 income per capita of any city in America.

9 The insecurity, fear, and humiliation felt by Americans  
10 increased as the deepening depression continued. In 1933 President  
11 Roosevelt set into motion the New Deal. The New Deal was a set of  
12 programs intended to offer relief and stimulate economic recovery  
13 from the Great Depression. Particularly important to Alabama was  
14 the creation of the Tennessee Valley Authority(TVA). The TVA  
15 brought electricity to rural areas of the Tennessee Valley area,  
16 which includes Alabama. It set up dams and power plants, which  
17 provided not only the much needed electricity but also jobs.

18 During this time, Benjamin Miller had been elected governor of  
19 Alabama in 1931 and with him came complete economic collapse for  
20 the state. It was not until 1935 when Bibb Graves was elected to  
21 his second term as governor and coupled with the New Deal, that  
22 Alabama started showing signs of recovery.

23 There was some opposition to the New Deal in Alabama.  
24 Businessmen and industrialists opposed it calling the program  
25 socialistic and the rural churches along with conservatives thought  
26 it called for too much government involvement.

27 As the nation's economy started to improve under Roosevelt's

1 New Deal, U.S. Steel decided to spend twenty-nine million dollars  
2 in the Birmingham area. This provided a measure of recovery to the  
3 city.

4 Despite efforts of the New Deal it was World War II that  
5 finally brought full recovery and ended the Great Depression.

6 During the last years of the Depression, Robert had been  
7 attending West End high school. With hard times hitting home not  
8 once did his dad ask him to go out and get a job. Just the  
9 opposite, actually. Neither of his parents had finished high  
10 school, so it was very important to them for Robert to concentrate  
11 on his grades. Robert graduated in 1941 and soon after his dad  
12 gave him a union ticket. At that time the unions were the best way  
13 to get good wages. He began making around thirty-five dollars a  
14 week, which was a lot more than most other young men. Robert  
15 believes that because of the organization and wages that for many  
16 people it was the "Union that brought us out of the Depression." (1)

17 World War II had started in 1939, while Franklin D. Roosevelt  
18 was still President and Frank Dixon had just been elected governor  
19 of Alabama.

20 " Complete economic recovery came to the Birmingham area with  
21 the beginning of World War II in Europe, when America again became  
22 the arsenal for democracy." (2) December 7, 1941 the Japanese  
23 brutally attacked America's Pearl Harbor. The next day America  
24 joined World War II. Robert was nineteen years old when he heard  
25 stories that "the Japanese were cutting our men's heads off and  
26 raping our nurses." (3) Angered by this, he soon signed up for the  
27 Navy. He began by going to San Diego for his basic training where

1 he scored high on a electrical test. He was sent to Minnesota  
2 where he attended a electrical school and finished in the top ten.  
3 Next, they sent him to Advanced Electronics School. After  
4 finishing with high grades again, he was given his choice of any  
5 assignment the navy had to offer. He surprised people by choosing  
6 the submarines. Submarines were not a popular choice. They were  
7 crowded and extremely hot. About sixty men lived in the cramped  
8 subs. They walked around in inch thick sweat and grime that had  
9 accumulated on the floor and slept in bunks over torpedoes. The  
10 air got so bad sometimes that you couldn't strike a match.

11 They rotated in periods of thirty days. The first thirty days  
12 were spent out at sea, the next set was spent on liberty leave and  
13 the last thirty were spent repairing the subs to go back out again.  
14 Every time you left for your liberty leave they would give you a  
15 complete health check, including a mental check. When you returned  
16 they went through the same procedure. Robert got to see several  
17 interesting places by visiting ports. He spent most of his time in  
18 the South Pacific. Sometimes the subs would have to dock at  
19 islands for the thirty days liberty leave. Here, the sailors would  
20 have nothing to do but play basketball and softball, watch movies,  
21 and drink beer. The sailors preferred docking at the large cities  
22 so that there would be plenty to see, including women.

23 Out at sea, the sub would surface every night to recharge its  
24 battery, while running on diesel fuel. It was one of these times  
25 that Robert had taken the high look-out position. Enemy planes  
26 started firing down at the sub. As everyone was scrambling inside  
27 Robert was struck in the arm by a stray piece of metal off part of

1 | the ship that had been hit. Although, he bled a lot, it was not a  
2 | very serious wound, but he still carries the scar today.

3 |       The sub that Robert stayed on, the *Flounder*, made *Ripley's*  
4 | *Believe It or Not* twice. The first time was because they sunk a  
5 | german sub and it was the first time a sub had sunk another. The  
6 | second time was for colliding with another sub, which the odds for  
7 | that were almost nil. They raked across each other and thankfully,  
8 | nobody was killed. Both subs had to go back in for repairs,  
9 | though.

10 |       Back in Alabama everybody was busy. TCI was by far the  
11 | largest steel company for defense. Birmingham was producing great  
12 | amounts of artillery. Women were working in place of the men who  
13 | left for war. Blacks also had been given more job opportunities  
14 | due to the war. Because of Alabama's military tradition and good  
15 | climate, the state became a important training center. It also  
16 | became a major location for prisoner of war camps. This was one  
17 | reason that Alabama's population increased throughout the war. In  
18 | all, about 250,000 Alabamians served in the war and about 6,000  
19 | gave their lives.

20 |       The attack on Pearl Harbor and Japanese advances in the  
21 | Pacific led to a paranoia of sabotage on the west coast. In  
22 | February 1942 the Japanese-American Internment program started.  
23 | Federal officials forcibly relocated over one-hundred thousand  
24 | Japanese-Americans, including U.S. citizens. Their property was  
25 | seized while they were sent to camps. The camps were closed by  
26 | 1945 but it was not until 1988 that the survivors were compensated  
27 | twenty thousand dollars each. Robert did not really agree with

1 | this program because these were people who considered themselves  
2 | Americans. We were fighting for freedom, yet we were locking up  
3 | some of our own people who had done nothing wrong.

4 | Germany surrendered on May 8, 1945 after the invasion of  
5 | Normandy, Battle of the Bulge and finally, Hitler's suicide.

6 | President Truman, who had succeeded to the Presidency upon  
7 | Roosevelt's death April 12, 1945, ordered atomic bombs to be dropped  
8 | on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 and on Nagasaki three days later.  
9 | Japan surrendered on V-J Day, August 15, 1945 and World War II  
10 | ended. Robert was totally in favor of dropping the atomic bombs.  
11 | Actually, he thought they should have been dropped sooner, so as to  
12 | save more American lives.

13 | Animosity towards the Germans and Japanese was intense long  
14 | after the war. So many senseless deaths were engraved in the minds  
15 | of the onlookers and especially of those who served in the war.  
16 | Robert lost his best friend and he still is not completely over his  
17 | hard feelings. He has been trying to forgive for years because he  
18 | believes "forgiveness is what makes the world go around." (4)

19 | After the war, Robert married Elizabeth, his sweetheart that  
20 | he had met before the war. Jobs were plentiful and the economy was  
21 | again booming. There became a demand for houses because, like  
22 | Robert, servicemen were marrying and ready to start families.  
23 | Robert secured another job through the union wiring new houses. He  
24 | and Elizabeth were living with his parents due to the shortage of  
25 | homes. It was several years before domestic life got back to  
26 | normal.

27 | One very important legislation that was passed was the G.I.

1 Bill of Rights, a series of programs designed to help veterans and  
2 was first passed in 1944 during World War II. Besides providing  
3 money for education, the law also included hospitalization.  
4 pensions, and other benefits as well as a provision for government  
5 guaranteed loans for the purchase of homes, farms, and businesses.  
6 This bill greatly helped World War II veterans.

7 "Americans emerged from World War II into a world that  
8 Franklin D. Roosevelt had assured them must be and could be based  
9 upon 'four essential human freedoms' - freedom of speech, freedom  
10 of religion, freedom from want and freedom from fear of aggression  
11 anywhere." (5)

12 In 1947 Robert's first son was born and named Robert Larry  
13 Fuqua. This was one of the high points in Robert's life and  
14 certainly one of the most memorable. In 1950 Robert's and  
15 Elizabeth's second son, Tommy, was born.

16 In 1951 Gordon Persons was elected governor of Alabama and in  
17 1952 General Eisenhower was elected President. In 1953 Robert,  
18 Elizabeth and their two sons moved to Pennsylvania so that Robert  
19 could help build a steel mill. He was not too fond of the north  
20 because of the cold weather, but his wife became active in the  
21 community and thoroughly enjoyed their stay of seven and a half  
22 years in Pennsylvania. They often fixed good 'ole southern fried  
23 chicken and corn bread for their northern neighbors. In 1969 they  
24 moved to Florida where their third son, Mickey, was born. Robert  
25 had been contracted to work on a plant to be used in the making of  
26 missiles. Then, in 1962 the family moved back to West End, in the  
27 middle of one of the most turbulent times and areas. Her, their

1 | fourth child, a girl named Susie, was born.

2 |         In 1955 James Folsom became governor of a very race concerned  
3 | Alabama and President Eisenhower was elected to his second term in  
4 | 1956. It was in 1954, though, when the Supreme Court case *Brown v.*  
5 | *Board of Education of Topeka* shook white supremacists to their  
6 | inner core. This case declared the "separate but equal" doctrine  
7 | concerning schools unconstitutional. Eisenhower, who at first was  
8 | reluctant to deal with the civil rights issue, enforced the Brown  
9 | decision by sending troops to Little Rock, Arkansas, to back the  
10 | desegregation of a school there. The racial issue was evident  
11 | throughout the nation, but deep in the south, Alabama burned with  
12 | unrest.

13 |         During the sixties Alabama was known for its poverty, poor  
14 | schools, lack of leadership political chaos and racial violence.  
15 | All of these factors led to a very low opinion of Alabama  
16 | nationwide.

17 |         For years there had been an unofficial race between Birmingham  
18 | and Atlanta to become the major city of the south. For awhile, it  
19 | looked as if Birmingham had a good chance, but by the sixties it  
20 | was clear Atlanta had won. The racial problems were just too bad.  
21 | Birmingham's population had actually declined where as Atlanta's  
22 | had almost doubled. Birmingham was preoccupied with hating and  
23 | Atlanta claimed they were "the city too busy to hate". Atlanta's  
24 | businesses and culture expanded. In 1965, Robert himself was  
25 | growing disgusted with the civil rights movement and especially  
26 | integration. He had been brought up to hate blacks; it was the  
27 | normal thing to do then. "We would go to the nigger section

1 looking for them and beat them with bats." (6) He's not proud of  
2 that, now, but then it was his way of life. He tried to invoke his  
3 hatred of blacks into his two older sons. He used to get on to  
4 them because they were letting blacks walk on the same sidewalk.  
5 Robert said this about when he was younger: "We wouldn't let a  
6 colored person walk on the sidewalk. If you met one, they would  
7 get off and walk around." (7) When, in 1965, a colored family moved  
8 in down the street, Robert packed up his family and moved to  
9 Pelham.

10 The Brown decision along with the strong movements of Martin  
11 Luther King Jr., the NAACP and the Freedom Riders provoked intense  
12 feelings within the whites of Alabama. These intense feelings were  
13 converted to violence. Martin Luther King Jr.'s marches were  
14 constantly threatened or attacked. He was continually harassed  
15 after helping start a bus boycott in Montgomery after Rosa Parks  
16 was arrested for not giving up her seat on a bus. Martin Luther  
17 King Jr. was assassinated in 1968. Although, King himself  
18 practiced non-violence, angry whites didn't hesitate to do just the  
19 opposite. The Freedom Riders was a group of black and white  
20 college students, ministers and others who rode interstate buses to  
21 test enforcement of a desegregation law that had been passed. The  
22 riders were supposed to have protection throughout Alabama but  
23 Eugene Conner, head of police and an extreme racist, denied them  
24 protection. The riders were brutally attacked in Anniston when  
25 their bus was set on fire.

26 Integration of schools was a bitter topic for whites. In 1963  
27 Governor Wallace, who Robert strongly supported, stood in the

1 doorway leading in to the University of Alabama, blocking the way  
2 of two black students. It was his way of protesting integration  
3 and it was also on national television, adding to the bad public  
4 image. The tension was mounting along with fierce hatred. On a  
5 Sunday morning in September, a church on sixteenth street was  
6 bombed, killing four young black girls. Later that day, two white  
7 teenagers shot and killed a thirteen year old black boy riding a  
8 bike. It was this type of insane hatred producing violence that  
9 gave Alabama such a terrible public image.

10 "The Brown decision, Martin Luther King, Jr., Little Rock,  
11 John F. Kennedy, Birmingham, the march on Washington, Lyndon B.  
12 Johnson, the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965, Medgar Evers, and  
13 Bobby Kennedy are all prominent names and events linked to the  
14 Civil Rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's." (8)

15 The Civil Rights movement was the main event during the 50's  
16 and 60's alongside the assassination of John F. Kennedy and Neil  
17 Armstrong landing on the moon. Robert believes, now, that the  
18 Civil Rights movement was a good thing and "there are some good  
19 people and bad people...on both sides." (9)

20 Robert Harrison Fuqua has seen a great deal during his  
21 lifetime. He has seen the face of poverty, savagery and death.  
22 Yet, he has also experienced the good life has to offer. He has  
23 led a full and happy life with his wife as they watched their  
24 children grow up. He has lived through several of the historical  
25 events that make this country and state what they are today.

Notes cited

- (1) Robert H. Fuqua in interview by Ashley Fuqua on February 28, 1996.
- (2) Mcmillan, Malcom C. *Yesterday's Birmingham*. Florida: 1975.
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- (4) Robert H. Fuqua in interview by Ashley Fuqua on February 28, 1996.
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- (7) Robert H. Fuqua in interview by Ashley Fuqua on February 28, 1996.
- (8) Colburn, David R. "The American Civil Rights Movement." *The Forum Series: America in Depression and War*. St. Louis: Forum Press, 1979.
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