Remarks by L.G. Walker at the 2007 Family Reunion

Grove Hill, Alabama

I am L. G. Walker, Jr. I live in Charlotte, NC. My grandmother, Charlsea Mathews Walker, daughter of James Waldrum Mathews and Frances Isabella McLeod, was born in 1879, the fourth of ten children.

A family story tells of a fire that destroyed the Mathews home sometime in the early 1880s. What may not be generally known is that my grandmother, as a five or six year old child, was responsible. She cleaned ashes from the fireplace and put them in a cardboard box. A live coal ignited the box and before it could be extinguished the house burned one night leaving the struggling family homeless with the loss of all possessions except their mattresses. No life was lost, however.

When her mother, Frances Isabella, died in 1895, she was sixteen years old and she was pressed into service, assisting raising the younger children. Albert was fourteen, Mamie eleven, David nine, Mitford four, and Fannie two. The next year James W. married Christian McLeod in 1896, known as Cousin Kish, his first wife's first cousin. As a young woman, Charlsea taught in a country school near Jackson. There she met and was married in 1901 to Elias Hodge Walker, a farmer of modest means and demeanor and grandson of two early Clarke County settlers, George Washington Walker and Elias Hodge Dubose. The latter was one of the first to serve Clarke County in the State Legislature.

She and Elias Hodge Walker lived on a farm two miles west of Jackson. The home place remains, but it is now surrounded by a modern housing subdivision and is located just behind the Jackson Academy. They raised six children, three boys and three

girls. All three boys had children, none of the girls did. My father, L.G. Walker, was her oldest. He was a teacher, a principal and country school superintendent following the tradition of many in the family. The daughters were Wilma, Madeylene, and Mildred. The other two sons were E.H. Jr. and Mitford Mathews Walker. The latter was signed to a baseball contract by the NY Yankees with a signing bonus, I am told, of $400. He pitched one year for the Easton, MD Yankee farm club before an injury ended his career. My grandmother had her hands full raising Mit, the youngest, who as a growing boy would slip off for a day of fishing on the Tombigbee River not far from the Walker farm. Grandmother Walker always expected the worst and could visualize a thousand dangers lurking at the river. Upon his return, he could always expect to be locked up in the smoke house behind the house to loudly plead for mercy and hope for a speedy release.

After Mit returned from Easton, my grandmother, a very frugal woman, could be seen taking care of her chickens and cows wearing Mit's gray NY Yankee's warm up jacket passed down to the Easton farm team, which incidentally had the name of Lou Gehrig stitched inside it. Mit, the last of her children, died in Wallace, NC on June 22, 2006, age 88.

The Walker farm was only two miles from Jackson, but it was in those days distinctly rural – no electric power and no running water. I can fondly recall the glow of kerosene lamps, an open fireplace built of native limestone blocks where hot, crackling oak logs would over-heat your front side and chill your backside until the room heated up. Rainwater that collected from the tin roof ran into a cistern near the kitchen where my grandmother hand-pumped it up for use.

Grandmother Charlsea churned her own butter and milked her own cow at 4 a.m. every morning. I asked her once to take me along and by kerosene lantern the two of us went to the barn. I was totally ineffective as a milker and have since left the production and delivery of milk to the professionals.

On the farm there were pigs and cows and chickens. Around the house there were usually two or three melodious hounds and a family or more of cats. On one occasion when the Mitford Mathews family from Chicago was visiting, George, then a young boy, told my grandmother after hearing the noisy caterwauling of the felines near dinner time, "Aunt Charlsea, you had better feed the cats or they will run away from home." She was amused since she had never lost a cat for that reason.

In the summer of 1941 we took my grandmother on our family vacation to Washington, D.C. This was far and away the greatest distance she had ever been from home. We traveled along the spine of the Smokey and Blue Ridge Mountains on the recently completed Parkway, a Depression project of the CCC. Her two great fears were storms and heights. As we drove around the mountain curves at thirty-five miles an hour and peered off the magnificent overlooks, she suffered agony. One of the places that we visited in the Washington area was George Washington's Mount Vernon. There were chairs on the porch that faced the Potomac River. My grandmother sat in one and enjoyed the view. She entered into conversation with the lady traveler in the next chair and was overheard to ask her, "Do you know if there is any way to get back to Alabama without going over those mountains?"

Grandmother Walker was, tall and thin, wore glasses, and was always neatly dressed. She was always busy and was industrious, extremely frugal, and possessed a quick wit, all Mathews' family traits. One of her comments about an acquaintance in a letter is telling. She wrote, "It seems that people who are over flowing with money, have to study up some way to spend it." However, when we left her to go home after a visit she would always press a fifty cent piece in our hands, my brother Bill and me, from her butter and egg money.

Like two of her brothers, Mitford and David, she lived to become a nonagenarian. She died at 93 and they both died at 94.

James Waldrum Mathews, their father, was an old man in his eighties in my earliest recollections. My father, in visits to Jackson from east Alabama, where we lived, would pick "Granddad Mathews" up in the family car at Aunt Mamie's in Grove Hill and take him with us to visit my grandmother in Jackson. He would always refuse to sit in the front seat saying," I don't want to separate a man from his wife." When there, he would kindly accept a toddy that my grandmother would fix for him since some of the family households where he visited were distinctly dry.

He loved to read and talk about American history. Francis Marion, the Swamp Fox, was one of his favorites. I have with me two of his books that my father enjoyed having and thus preserved. They are *The Annals of Newberry* (South Carolina) and Halbert and Ball's *The Creek War of 1813 and 1814*, a first edition. More about Ball's book later. Both books are well worn and both bear his name in the front covers.

He died at 84, probably of pneumonia, in the winter of 1936, January 17th. Although I was only four and a half, I remember seeing his body in an open casket in a room just off the side porch of Aunt Mamie's house in Grove Hill. It made a great impression on me to see my father standing there looking at the body and shedding tears. This was the first time I had ever seen my father cry. From there we went to his burial at the Old Union Church where his wives and three of his children were buried. Of course, I didn't know this at the time or even the name of the cemetery.

As a further source of early Mathews' family stories I will rely on a master story teller's letters selecting parts of some twenty-seven of them, sent to family members by Mitford McLeod Mathews, Uncle Mit, from 1938 until 1981, his ninetieth year. His remarkable memory and sense of history depicts the family and neighbors with love and affection and with what must have been a twinkle in his eye. His letters from Chicago reached the Alabama relatives like manna from heaven and couldn't have been more appreciated or wider circulated had they been from Saint Paul himself.

Uncle Mit recalled colorful accounts of his days as a boy in rural Clarke County. He was not above embellishing and exaggerating some of these tales in the manner of the old southwest humorists, popular in the nineteenth century, but as Mark Twain once said about some of his own writings, they are mostly true. The following excerpts are not in chronological order.

To my father he wrote:

> Josiah Mathews married Lucy Martin and by her had 16 children, as the record shows. Josiah and his family came to Clarke County about

1820, and settled near Uncle Monroe Halford's – you may never have been there – near Grove Hill. Right across the hollow lived the father of "Doc" McVay, our neighbor there at home. Josiah had a poor heart, and one day returning from McVay's, he felt an attack coming on and lay down in the trail, adjusted his old wool hat under his head, with the aid of a root for a pillow and so passed off from the scene.

His widow continued to live there until she became quite old and then went to Texas – everybody was going to Texas in those days, and no doubt some of her folks were doing so. And out there she died.

(MMM to LGW 10/10/1973)

In another letter to my father he wrote:

I must send special thanks for the two pictures, one of Grandma and as you thought, Dave Mathews, her husband. But the man in the picture was her brother James Waldrum . . . Both these pictures hung in our old south room, on the west wall. Grandma visited us only seldom. At the breakup of her family [home] from about four miles a little southwest of Grove Hill, she gave her part to her son Marion, and Henry's part [David Henry Mathews 1861-1920 feeble-minded] to Uncle Marion. Her brother James (Waldrum) in the picture must have died early. He was a noted overseer and was left stranded at the close of the war. I doubt if any of my father's family ever saw him. I am not sure where he lived. I doubt if there is a picture anywhere of my father's father. [David 1826-1867]. He was not a

> strong fellow as was James Waldrum, by his picture. My father's father may not have been so robust, for he was almost blind. Dad was his reader. One of his favorite authors was Parson Weems whose life of Francis Marion, I hope you have. In those days no close examination was given those entering the Confederate Army. The only requirement was that he have teeth with which he could bite off one end of the pasteboard cartridges they could ram down the old muskets they used, and Grandpa Mathews could do that. He was captured at the Battle of Lookout Mountain. He was imprisoned most of the time at Rock Island in the upper Mississippi River. It took him a long time to make it back home, where he failed utterly to begin getting rich raising cotton selling for fifty cents a pound. The army worm ate up his cotton crop and contributed to the old soldiers' death within a year or so.
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> (MMM to LGW 5/4/1981)

In another letter to my father he wrote:

> I have been casting around for some books to add to that reading one (*Teaching to Read*) I want to send you. David gave me a copy of Halbert and Ball's *Creek War*. This new one brought out at the University of Alabama Press is, as you probably know, a fine thing. If you would like to have the original edition, I can return yours. You remember you gave me Dad's copy of the original edition. Let me know and I will send both books at one lick. In the meantime I will continue looking around for

others you might like to have. If you ever convert your goat house into a library, I want to be well represented in it.

(MMM to LGW 8/8/70)

There the matter lay. Eleven years later, after considerable intervening correspondence Uncle Mit wrote my father:

I should have sent you this book (Ball's *Creek War*) long ago, but did not have an envelope of the right size. I finally found this one which I will make do.

The way my father got this book may interest you. It was during cotton-ginning time, and he was hauling cotton to the gin when he met up with Mr. Ball in a horse and buggy peddling his two books, his Clarke County, and this one. The *Creek War* was $2.00 and the *Clarke County and its Surrounding* was $3.00. Both for $5.00 as you see.

Dad seldom had that much money, but he did happen to have $2.00. So he and Ball traded, and Mamie, who could write well, wrote his name in his new book[1]. Dad had hoped to get the larger book too, but found out that Mrs. Booth who lived near us, being a niece of Miss Creighton, whom Ball had married, got a copy free. So we borrowed hers, and actually returned it, a rare event. Mrs. Booth was a sister of Hiram Cabiness, who lived a few miles north of us, you may have known him.

Mrs. Booth's husband, Posey Booth, had a saw mill and was murdered by one of his workmen, Lum Miles, who was sent to the pen –

> for life. Uncle Arch McLeod was the prosecuting attorney. Dad arrested Lum, whom he knew. The children of Mrs. Booth were: Johnny, Charlie, Minnie, and Gordy. I am sure they are all gone now. Johnny got killed working for that dummy line you knew."
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> (MMM to LGW 6/26/1981)

The family connections so effortlessly and accurately recalled in the previous letter and repeated in so many others was a special interest to Mathews' family members. They took an uncommon delight in discussing and recalling each and every member of large families, some of whom even had tenuous connections to their own family.

As an example consider the letter from Uncle Mit to my father regarding an illness in the family.

> It was pleasant that she had a nurse who came so near being a member of the family. Her mother, however, Vivian Parker, was the daughter of Forrest Parker, not Blount's.
>
> When I was a boy I often saw old man Seth Parker, the father of those four boys. He lived there where Bob Bell did in your time. Bell married his daughter, Amelia, and lived on at the old place. The boys were Forrest, Blunt, Morgan, and Lee. Forrest married Blake McVay's sister, Mary, and their children were Vivian, Carlos, Alta, Blanche, and F.N. I taught all of them in 1908-9 there at Parkertown, my first and last country school.

Vivian married a man, Strong, much older than she was, and lived at the Locks near Salipta. He did not live a great while and it was not too long until Vivian likewise died.

Blount married Eva Porter, a niece of my stepmother's. Cousin Kish had a sister, "Vi" – I suppose her name was "Violet" – who did not live long. She had two children, Scot (sic) and Eva, both of whom Cousin Kish largely raised. Blount's children were Irma, Searcy, and Wilda. I stayed at Blount's when I taught at Parkertown. Blount was timbering in the forks of the river and needed a "Man," as I thought I was then, to stay around the house while he was gone. I stayed there from Monday to Friday for five dollars a month, and never lived better."

(MMM to LGW 7/12/1964)

Another boyhood story that Uncle Mit recalled was about some of their neighbors in the following letter to my father in reply to one about some items found in an old trunk.

The things that Douglas (McVay) showed you were of special interest to me . . . It was of course natural for Douglas to have those things from his Mother's trunk. You may recall that she was a sister of Arvin Payne's, and her mother was Mary Cox, daughter of Matthew Cox. John Payne, - you may recall him too – and Mary had: Rhett, Arvin, Cora, Glover, Effie, and Tellie. And I think they lost a baby or two. My father was a great admirer of Mary Payne, and for her father Matthew Cox. John,

he did not admire especially, especially after he reputedly became a Republican after he got to associating with those Zimmerman timber people, - most all of them Yankees.

When I was quite young I knew Matthew Cox. He had lost a leg in the (Civil) war, and his wooden leg impressed me. I don't know how much you know about that region immediately west of my old home. But if you stayed in the big road for about 4 or 500 yards beyond where I was raised you came to the Crossroads. If you turned west there and followed the "Salt Works Road," we called it, for a mile or more you would pass over a billion square miles of sandbeds and reach the Matthew Cox place. A hundred yards or more before getting there you would pass down a considerable hill, called the "Cox Hill."

He may have settled that place; it was an especially good farm. When Dave, four or five years ahead of me, first attended Arlington school, a hundred yards beyond the Cox place, Matthew's wife, Effie was living there, and I take it Matthew was also there. But Mrs. Cox favored Dave with cakes from time to time, and endeared herself to him for good and all. By the time I came along there to my first school to Andrew Stanley, Daniel Stanley and his family lived there. They may have been caretakers of the old folks, for Stanley had married Lena Cox. Daniel and Lena by 1896 had two children, Wincy and Lexie, that went to school with me. Daniel was an unusually good farmer, and intelligent citizen – I'm

sure you remember him. He kept a gin in a hollow near his place there and usually ginned about 150 or more bales a year.

Matthew Cox passed on in 1897 as you show in your communication which came today. I was at his funeral. In those days country schools always turned out when a member of the neighborhood died. This was to show respect for the bereaved family and the corpse and maybe helped us younger fellows to bear in mind we would die too, and we had better behave ourselves as well as we could. I was six years old, going on seven, when I attended the old veteran's funeral, and I still remember a fragment of one of the songs they sang at his graveside. He was famous for his sterling character and strict religion, and one of the songs they sang had in it this fragment:

I saw him in the evening
His strength was almost gone,
Yet he shouted as he journeyed,
Deliverance will come – then
Songs of victory . . .

The hymn that Uncle Mit remembers is called "Deliverance Will Come." It is said to have been printed often in pre-Civil war songbooks and hymnals, and was attributed to a Methodist circuit-riding preacher, John B. Matthias (1767-1848). The tune has had a varied history having been used in the 1880's politically by the "People Party" for a song called "Pans of Biscuits," a plea for better treatment of the farmers and by Bob Dylan in

his more recent song “Paths of Victory.” As a hymn it was recorded as “Wayworn Traveler” in the 1920’s by Uncle Dave Macon, a banjo player for the Grand Old Opry and by the famous Carter Family country folk singers in the 1930’s. I heard a rendition of this same song called “Palms of Victory” on Palm Sunday of this year on a Public Radio station in North Carolina done by a group called the Coon Creek Girls.

It is remarkable that the six-year-old Mitford Mathews could recall such a hymn almost eighty years later. He altered location of some of the verses, but maintained enough to make it easily identifiable to us one hundred ten years after the funeral. One line he altered is totally understandable. In the refrain the song goes “The palms of victory,” not “songs of victory,” a mistake easy enough for a six year old Alabama farm boy who had no knowledge of palm trees and thought, no doubt, that what was sung was “songs of victory,” not “palms.”

Continuing his letter about the McVay family, he wrote:

> I was surprised to know that “Doc” (his real name was Everett) McVay kept such a ledger as you mention. He was a fine man, and I am sorry Dad did not appreciate him as much as he should have. Dad knew Doc’s parents. They were all Hardshell Baptists, and that did not sit well with Dad. But he though all the McVay’s were “curious.” Dad’s world was pretty well populated with curious folks. Doc was industrious and enterprising.
>
> When the Zimmerman log works started around our place, he bought him a few yoke of oxen and went into the logging business. He did

not make a fortune at it, but he did not expect a fortune. Later when Daniel Stanley put up that store at the crossroads beyond our house, Doc was in business with him for a time. Then Daniel moved to Jackson, - Doc I suppose bought him out. And that was a bad play for him. He was such a good fellow that he gave credit to everybody.

But he got the post office after a few years and that helped a little, and got "McVay," the name of the place, on the map. But one day Doc's creditors in Mobile came down on him, and he had to ride all over the community to see if he could collect some of his debts due him. He met Dad at the end of his day's canvassing, and told him he had collected not one cent. He had, for example, credited Ed Reeves up to $400, and Ed never in his life saw more than ten or fifteen dollars, I am sure. And I am sure he never paid Doc a cent. So Doc bundled what goods he had on hand and turned them over to his creditors and went out of business. He was honest but not wise enough. And much later, to the surprise of everybody dropped dead in his own chip yard, heart failure. His entire household is now gone. And of Dad's household, only Dave and I are left.

Several years ago my visit down there (Clarke County) came to be such sorrowful experiences that I balked at going back. Too many of the old-timers were gone; the very face of the earth, places I knew so well, all gone. I suppose you have to get old to appreciate how a fellow feels.

(MMM to LGW 12/18/1976)

Next as an example of childhood stories of the family, Uncle Mit wrote a lyrical piece to my grandmother, Charlsea, in March 1959:

> You mentioned the likelihood that the plums were killed in the cold when you wrote. I sure hope they escaped, for I can remember so well how much they used to mean to us.
>
> They were about the first edible things we had after the long hard winter, for you remember we used to eat them as soon as a few of the wormy ones began to turn red. And Dad let them grown all over the place – always spared a plum sprout, and that lower "thicket" as we called it was something to behold when they were all ripe. Many's the time I have slid in there like a rabbit and eaten my fill. I used to love to sit in there and listen to the ripe ones dropping all over the ticket – used to see if I could eat one as often as one dropped, and found I could not keep up. One year we gathered a cotton basket of the nicest ones and took them to Jackson and sold them for a dime a gallon or so. Nothing prettier than plums in bloom except peach trees. They are about the prettiest things the Lord ever made.
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> (MMM to CMW 3/15/1959)

In the same letter Uncle Mit recalled a story from his youth after mentioning a member of the family being ill.

> Folks are a lot more curious now than they used to be. I don't remember such ailments among the folks when I was younger. A fellow occasionally

> got sick, but unless a doctor got to him, he got well and went back to work. Now, all sorts of things get wrong with them. Zack Long introduced this new-fangled ailment into the community one year at cotton chopping time when his eyesight went bad on him and he could not tell a stalk of cotton from a coffee weed. He could see well enough to fork himself over his little brown mule and ride all over the community to singings and preachings and such like – it was only when he confronted cotton and weeds that he went blind. All of us boys wanted to catch his disease, but we felt sure that Dr. J.W. Mathews with the aid of a sprout would give us treatment that would place us permanently among the sharpshooters of our time, so we never dared take up with Zack's trouble and Zack recovered about laying-by time that year.
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> (MMM to CMW 3/15/1959)

For those unacquainted with the term "laying-by," it is the time between when a crop is actively worked and when it is harvested.

Another James Waldrum Mathews story is a tall tale told by Uncle Mit to my grandmother.

> You have forgot all about it I know, but I left Jackson in some dignified state when I graduated (high school). Dad came down in a wagon for me. He might have come in a buggy, but he probably thought as big a man as I had become should be hauled in nothing less than a wagon. And he had a fine team at that time, Old Pete, not, as you remember, a

smallish sized mule, and a little blind mare. The wagon was not in first-class condition, but those parts most likely to give way were wrapped more or less securely with haywire, and we were provided with an ax, so that if the worst came to the worst and the wagon did decide to quite on us we could make another one as good without too much bother. Well, anyhow, he set out from your place with me and the team and the wagon early the morning following graduation, where I had walked off with all the honors a school could give.

I should mention that we had one other passenger on this return trip. Dad had managed to carry on some sort of bargaining with Hodge (Walker, my grandfather) and had secured from him a choice young bull, about three-quarters grown, and plum full of bellow and wiggle – that is he was when he left your place. He was to sing a different bellow before the day was out, but at that time he didn't know it. In order to expedite matters, Dad planned to go on foot in company with the bull, and take a short cut and meet me and the wagon over there just below where Razz Taylor used to live. I drove around by town (Jackson), the road not being what it should have been for such a choice vehicle as I was driving through that shorter way. A finer morning could not have been looked for such an expedition and Dad had no trouble at all with the bull. When I passed the old ocher mine (Iron Oxide in clay used as a paint pigment). I

saw him and his bull reposing in the shade of a tree beside the road, and in due time I pulled up beside them.

Dad was so highly pleased with his bull and so confident that he was a beast of unusual intelligence that he felt sure all he had to do was to hitch him on behind and get up in the wagon with me, and enjoy a little social visit with a well educated man, the only one in the family, or in the entire neighborhood at the time. So said, so done, and we drove off in due course. Mr. Bull being carefully anchored to the rear axle of the wagon, we immediately, - that is Dad and I, not the bull, fell into a regular old-timey Mathews conversation and in a few short seconds had as completely forgot about that bull as if he had never existed. I was doing the driving, and all of a sudden I noticed that my well matched team was struggling along like they were pulling a ton. Their eyes were sticking out on stems, and the sweat running down their faces to a fare-ye-well. I called Dad's attention to the struggle they were having to pull an empty wagon up the big road, and he treated the matter with little concern. Said I had been immersed in books so long that I had forgot that mules were not as strong as folks, and besides I should remember that this wagon he had brought out to escort me home in was a sizeable sort of vehicle and that it took a good team to handle it with ease, and so we went on back to our conversation. I guess we would have talked all the way home if I had not got suspicious and looked back, when what to my wondering eye should

appear but our entirely forgotten bull, down broadside in the road, and dragging with his legs stuck out as stiff as pokers and his eyes walled back in his head as though he was dead and laid out. I shut off my power at once, and we both hastened back to look into the matter at first hand.

It turned out that the bull, without saying a word to us about it, had taken about the worst fit of sulks that ever attacked any one animal. He had probably objected to being led and must have pitched and tossed and bellowed at a great rate, but we could not hear it thunder above the rattling of the wagon, and busy as we were talking anyhow. And then the bull had got down with the sulks and just swore and be blasted if he would go another step. We turned him over and found that one side of him was worn a lot thinner than the other and that if we had not discovered his plight in time he would have been entirely useless for family purposes for the rest of his natural life, as the emoluments of his high station in life had just about worn off, and that in a manner not contemplated by our Creator at the time he was fashioning such beast, just outside the garden of Eden on the morning of January 1, of the year 1.

Well, that bull was young and had lots to learn. His education had been neglected badly. He had probably been associating with Hodge (my grandfather) and Vester McMullen (a neighbor) and hadn't done as much reading as he should. Anyhow, he picked out the wrong man to sulk on when he picked out Dad. Dad tried gentle means at first, tried to reason

with the beast. Kicked him in the slats and told him to get up and act the man like a bull should. But no sir. That bull had no intention of ever getting up. His feelings were hurt too bad. And Dad saw that severer measures were necessary he moved up his treatment. Finally, after everything else had failed, Dad took off his wool hat and put it snuggly over that bull's nose, and thus shut off his air. It is not a good way to treat a hat, - and I don't believe a bull would recommend it. Anyhow, in a matter of seconds that bull began to swell. I want some smart man who has looked into such matters to explain to me sometime why a bull will swell up under such circumstances; it looks to me like he would collapse and shrink up. But I am telling it as it happened right before my eyes. That bull began to swell till he was as big as an ox, and he kept on swelling till he was just about the size of a pregnant elephant, and at that point he decided to give up. He had been convinced that Dad "meant business" as Enoch Furr said the night he proposed to Mamie. That Bull bounced up, slung Dad over the nearest Brier patch and gulped down enough air to do him and his descendants the rest of their natural lives. And we had no more trouble with him from then on. He led fine, and by the time we got home we had settled most of the matters we had to talk about, and I am sure Dad soon forgot the incident. But it has remained with me.

(MMM to CMW 12/19/1948)

A final story, in 1980, we were in Chicago for a meeting and paid a visit to the Mathews at 1359 East 57th Street, one afternoon, Dianne, our five year old son and I. We had a delightful time reviewing family news with Uncle Mit and Aunt Georgia. While talking, Uncle Mit said something about a consortium of schools in some context at which Aunt Georgia challenged and rebuked him sharply and immediately.

"Why Mit," she said, "you know the word is pronounced 'consorshium.'"

We were aghast, horrified, speechless at an eminent world-famous lexicographer and scholar being corrected by his wife on the pronunciation of a word.

Knowing full well that he was on solid ground, the 89 year old stooped and feeble doctor of lexicography sprang to his feet with a twinkle in his eye and a smile on his face and replied very kindly, "Well, I stand corrected."

Shortly thereafter, he excused himself and left the room to return shortly with a small cardboard box from which he took something wrapped in some oily cloths and to our amazement produced a pistol, a 1910 32 caliber Smith and Wesson six-chambered revolver with bullets wrapped separately.

He said, "I want you to take this home with you."

He told about how he had acquired the pistol and how he did not want to have to pay for a pistol registration in Chicago and yearly fees and that if I would take it home, he would be much relieved. Having reached Chicago by air, there was no way I could, on short notice, safely get it back home without violating federal law. He said he had been told that he might disassemble it and throw it in the Chicago River, but he preferred not

to destroy this beautiful old revolver. I prevailed upon him to hold it until we could return by automobile and retrieve it to which he agreed.

The story of the gun was that it had been bought in 1910 at Andrews Hardware in Jackson by my great-grandmother Walker for her beloved son, my grandfather Walker, for his self protection after there had been a mob lynching of a black man in the community who was said to have killed a white deputy named Wainwright. The officer had burst open the black man's door without knocking following a gambling altercation. Fortunately no racial warfare broke out and the gun went unused. It belonged to my grandfather Walker until his death in 1957. My grandmother, fearing for her own brother's safety, gave it to Uncle Mit, sometime thereafter for his protection in Chicago. He paid her what the pistol cost in 1910 in return. He said later in a letter that he never cared for a pistol and that he "went in for 22s and shotguns" in earlier times.

In a letter to my father and mother telling them about our visit and the gun, Uncle Mit wrote:

> Ever since we had that fine visit with Dr. LG and his wife I thought I would resume writing as in days long ago. Our trips down there and our writing too dies out, (they) have fallen off, because so many vacancies confronted us, and the whole landscape – the fields where I used to work, the woods where I used to go hunting – the entire country side as I knew it long ago entirely gone – not a McVay – our neighbors – is living. All the Flemings gone, and the Cabinesses, and all the homes going toward

> Jackson, all gone. The visits down there became such pilgrimages of sorrow I gave them up. And writing too.
>
> (MMM to LGW&MBW 9/30/80)

We did retrieve the gun. I took my parents to Chicago the next year for what was our final visit. The Mathews and my father were soon gone.

On a personal note, I can recall having spent many hours on the porch of my grandmother's house listening to the adults talk about Clarke County families with biblical thoroughness. Never did the discourse sink to common gossip. It remained on a much higher plane. They told not only who begat whom but what happened to them, each and everyone, down to the last generation.

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[1] There are two signatures of James W. Mathews in the book, the first dated October 15, 1896. This confirms Mitford M. Mathews statement that the book was bought in cotton-ginning season and is a tribute to his remarkably retentive memory at a time when he was only five years old.