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T. M. SHACKLEFORD, JR.: A Lifetime of Quiet Achievement (1884-1973)

It has been said that to write the biography of a man, you need to know his origins, where he came from and how he grew, something in the early years that marked his spirit, somehow, and set him apart.

With those guideposts foremost in mind, this, then, is the story of T.M. Shackleford, Jr. It

begins June 26, 1884. (His full name was Thomas Mitchell Shackleford, Jr., but he commonly preferred use of his initials).

The only child of Thomas M. and Nannie Rhea Shackleford, he was born in the rustic setting of tiny Brooksville, at that time a backcountry community—the seat of undeveloped Hernando County, Florida. Census records reflect that the entire county was peopled with only 2,476 souls in 1890.

Brooksville is said to have been named for Congressman Preston Brooks of South Carolina. On May 20, 1856, during the debate on the Kansas-Nebraska bill, Sen. Charles Sumner of Massachusetts denounced Sen. A. P. Butler of South Carolina, who was then absent from the chamber and who was an uncle of Preston Brooks. The latter, hearing of the verbal attack on his relative, found Sumner in the Senate chamber after adjournment that day, broke a gutta percha cane over his head and left him insensible on the floor. Sumner reportedly never recovered fully from the assault. A move to expel Brooks from the House of Representatives failed, but he resigned and was promptly reelected by his constituents. He was the recipient of a number of gold-headed canes and gold-handled whips. Congressman Anson Burlingame of Massachusetts, on the other hand, publicly denounced Brooks as a coward. Brooks challenged Burlingame to a duel; the latter accepted, and named the Canadian side of Niagara Falls as the place. Brooks said he could not make his way with safety through the northern states to this site, and refused to go. He died about a year later. (Reprinted from *Florida Place Names* by Allen Morris, with permission of the publisher, Pineapple Press of Sarasota).

The senior Shackleford (usually referred to as T. M. in this narrative) was a native of Fayetteville in south-central Tennessee, just a few miles south of Lynchburg. Oddly



enough, the latter was the hometown of Judge L. L. Parks of Tampa. Parks, until his appointment to the Circuit bench in 1923, was a law partner of T. M. Jr. and a close friend.

After his marriage T. M. did what many from the Volunteer State did before and after him; he moved to Florida, settling initially in Lake Weir where he engaged in citrus farming. In addition he tried his hand at writing fiction, and wrote his first novel with Lake Weir as the locus. About 1883, T. M. and his retinue moved west to Brooksville and remained there for about a decade, practicing some law and fine-tuning his writing by turning out another novel during that period. T.M. Jr's mother died when he was three years of age and the following year his father married Lena A. (Jane) Wooten of Russelville, Kentucky, with whom he would have three children. One of these was R. W. (Bob) Shackleford who also became a trial lawyer in Tampa, first with his father, and later with J. Rex Farrior and others.

1884 was a banner year, not only for the Shacklefords in Brooksville, but also a special time for a family in Lamar, Missouri; for it was in May of that year that Mr. & Mrs. John Anderson Truman had a son. His name was Harry S. Truman. The lives of both the future president of the United States and a Tampa lawyer who served as a federal judge of the bankruptcy court provided a rich taste of a better past, to borrow a thought expressed by John Kenneth Galbraith in his assessment of a Truman history.

Meanwhile, after relocating in Tampa, T. M. quickly became prominent in Tampa, both professionally and politically. He forged a partnership with Hugh C. Macfarlane, a native Scot who began the practice in Tampa the year of T. M. Jr's birth, and who was already a force in the legal and business community of Tampa. T. M.

served for two years as City Attorney in Tampa before realizing his long-time ambition to gain a seat on the Florida Supreme Court. In 1902 he was appointed by his good friend and fellow Democrat, Governor William Jennings, and served with distinction and acclaim for several terms between 1902 and 1915, some of which as designated Chief Justice.

A century-old case involving T. M. is *Laflin v. Shackelford*, 98 F. 372, decided by the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals Dec. 5, 1899. It illustrates how economics has changed. The law firm of Shackelford & Pettingill made a federal case out of it when it sued for unpaid legal services amounting to \$2700. Judgment was plaintiff, affirmed on appeal. In the 21st century, those plaintiffs would have had a struggle getting into a state small claims court, much less a federal district court. There is a 1929 composite photograph of members of the Bar of Florida. Mr. N.B.K. Pettingill may be seen. Not shown is T. M. Shackelford for he died in 1927.

There was a lot going on in the Shackelford family as the 19th century was winding down. Number one son, T. M. Jr. was prepping for high school, and graduated from Tampa's Hillsborough High School in the first year of the 20th century. Interviewed in 1959 by a reporter from *The Tampa Times*, he reminisced: "When he graduated from Hillsborough High, there were 11 girls and 5 boys in the graduating class. We had sand streets and wooden sidewalks then, and Tibbett's Corner at Franklin and Lafayette (Kennedy) streets was the gathering place for couples after a dance. Cocktail lounges were unknown, and an ice cream soda was a real treat. Tampa had perhaps 15,000 people then." The primary thrust of the *Times* story was that the 4th of July in

1900 was not recognized with the hoopla and festiveness common today. T. M. Jr. ventured that the Fourth was viewed somewhat suspiciously as a Yankee holiday, a remnant of the feelings engendered in the aftermath of the Civil War.

After high school, it was time to get intellectually prepared for a career in law, following the example set by his father, so T.M. Jr. attended the following secondary schools: John B. Stetson University, 1901-02; University of Florida, 1905 BA degree; University of Virginia, 1907 LLB degree. Phi Beta Kappa and Blue Key. The University of Florida, incidentally, bestowed an honorary LLD degree upon his father, Justice Shackleford, in 1910.

After receiving his law degree from UVA, it was back to Tampa for the 23 year old new lawyer. Tampa was growing apace during the first quarter of the last century. So, indeed, was Shackleford's reputation for intellect, diligence and professionalism. Man's mortality has erased the availability of human testimony. But there are records, notably old directories, which chronicle T. M. Jr's associations and progress.

In 1910 he became the junior partner in Caraballo & Shackleford, located in the old American National Bank Bldg (the bank failed during the Great Depression). Martin Caraballo and later his son were respected names in Tampa's legal community. In 1912, while living at the YMCA, Shackleford had an office in Exchange National Bank Building. The following year he took space with C. C. Whitaker in Citizens Building. The year 1915 saw his appointment as Referee in Bankruptcy, a judicial responsibility which gives him eligibility for this biographical series. He and his brother, R.W. (Bob) Shackleford, a splendid trial lawyer, and his father (who had just concluded his

noteworthy tenure on the Supreme Court of Florida) teamed up for a time in the location last mentioned.

He was honored in 1917 by his election as President of the Hillsborough County Bar Association, and a few years later was chosen to chair the Florida State Bar Association. From 1923 until 1929, he was attorney for the County of Hillsborough.

One of the longest of his early associations was with Marcus F. Brown (Shackleford & Brown) with some noted associates including: Morris E. White, J. Rex Farrow and George T. (Pat) Shannon, in what was the embryo of the fabled firm which for many years featured T. M. Jr. as its head. His dearest friend was Fred Thompson, after whom his second son was named, but he was also close to L. L. Parks, with whom he practiced as Shackleford & Parks commencing in 1919 and lasting until Parks appointment to Circuit Court in 1923. About 31 years later, Bar President O.D. Howell, Jr. appointed a committee to draft a resolution recognizing Judge Parks 30 years as Circuit Judge. It consisted of Judges O.K. Reaves and T. M. Shackleford, Jr. and this humble scrivener.

One of Tampa's most historic landmarks built in 1925 is the Tampa Theatre (Building). The theater opened in 1926 and records show that Shackleford & Brown became tenants there in 1927. Shackleford & Brown was succeeded by Shackleford, Ivy, Farrow & Shannon. Prior to its fairly recent merger with an Orlando law firm, there were periodic changes to reflect new named partners in S-F, to-wit: Corbin Glos, Norman Stallings, and Thomas P. Evans. The subject firm is now Gray, Harris, Robinson, Shackleford, Farrow.

After moving from the Tampa Theatre Building, S-F went into the Marine Bank Building where T. M.'s last years were focused. According to Martindale-Hubbell, usually a reliable source reflecting the structure of law firms, Mr. T.W. (as he was affectionately known to members and staff alike at the firm) was until the 1969 edition listed as the first named partner in Shackleford Farrow. He is shown as "Of Counsel" in that and later editions until his death on January 10, 1973.

He is warmly remembered by his colleagues. T. Paine Kelly, Jr., son of a prominent Tampa lawyer whose name he bears and who served as an Assistant Attorney General in Florida, is retired from trial work, but for many years was a preeminent trial lawyer in Florida. Says Kelly: "He (T.M. Jr.) was one of the most courtly gentlemen I have ever known." That is a high compliment, indeed, when one recalls Emerson's definition: "The flowering of civilization is the finished man of sense of grace, of accomplishment, or social power—the gentleman."

Some observations by lawyers who knew him well:

A. Obie Stewart of Palm Beach

It all began in 1948. I had just graduated from law school at the University of Virginia. I had taken and passed the Virginia Bar examination and was awaiting the results of the Mississippi Bar exam (my home state). I was in Tampa with my parents from Coahoma County, Miss. I went to visit an old friend, Corbin Glos (now deceased), also a graduate of the University of Virginia Law School, who was a lawyer with Shackleford, Farrow, Shannon & Stallings in Tampa.

Corbin inquired of my plans for the future and I told him that I was going to return to Washington, D.C. where I was stationed in the Army at the end of World War II. Corbin told me that Mr. T.M. Shackleford (also a graduate of the University of Florida Law School) was looking for a young lawyer to work with him on a very large and complicated estate. So, I go to see Mr. T.M. Shackleford. Mr. Shackleford stated that he wanted a young lawyer to work with him and Mr. Foy, as co-executors of the Fred Warner estate. It appeared that Fred Warner was the son of one of the principals in GMC.

Fred Warner, he stated, had left a very large estate, having just recently shot his wife at their ranch in Colorado and then committed suicide, leaving two young children. He stated that I would not be working for the law firm (S-F) but would be working under the estate under the supervision of Mr. Foy and him as co-executors. The Fred Warner estate owned, among other things, one of the largest L.P. gas companies in Florida headquartered in Miami, the Theater of the Sea in Marathon, real property in the Bahamas, and various other real estate in Florida

That really changed my life in Tampa. "Mr. T.M." arranged a blind date for me with Lucy Ann Forgy. After over a year of courtship, we married and will be celebrating our fiftieth wedding anniversary in May, 2003.

After a two year relationship with Mr. T.M., I relocated in Tallahassee where, with the assistance of Rex Farrior, Sr. I became a judicial clerk with Justice Glenn Terrell of the Supreme Court of Florida. I ended up my legal career with my firm—Cunster, Yoakley & Stewart now consisting of some 150 lawyers stretching from Miami to Vero Beach.

Thomas C. MacDonald, Jr. of Tampa

I recall Mr. T.M.'s well known frugality. In 1959 he took me to Miami in connection with a case in which he represented the owners of a Miami Beach waterfront hotel. We nevertheless stayed in the very old ramshackle downtown Urmey Hotel, complete with pull chain commodes. When we met them at their hotel, our clients were taken aback at this, but Mr. T.M. commented that he wasn't comfortable staying in a high priced place. Fortunately, the litigation shifted to Punta Gorda.

Norman Stallings, former firm partner, of Tampa

Tom Shackelford was a great conversationalist. He had a story, usually based in Florida's past to illustrate any subject that came up. It was almost always interesting and very much on point. With his father II. Justice of the Florida Supreme Court and with his many personal experiences in his various positions, he had access to much material concerning the growing State of Florida.

In later years when he was still coming to the office but spending less time on the law, he enjoyed making small bets on athletic events, particularly baseball games. With his legal background he had carefully researched the odds and one would be well advised to decline his offer or at least keep the amount of the bet on the low side. He enjoyed betting with the manager of the cold drink stand at the entrance of the Tampa Theater Building where the firm's office was located for many years. The manager was a worthy opponent but even so Mr. Shackelford prevailed a majority of the time. Mr. & Mrs. Shackelford had a large brick home with white columns in the Golf View area and enjoyed entertaining their friends frequently.

One of Mr. T.M.'s proudest achievements, cited by his daughter Mary Shackelford Brown Wolfe, was his mentorship of former S-F partners and associates who moved on to become Judges at one level or other, including: L. L. Parks, George T. Shannon, Joseph P. Lieb, Henry C. Tillman, James E. Lehan, Vernon W. Evans, Jr., Peter J.T. Taylor, O. D. Howell, Jr., E.O. Palermo and W. Marion Hendry.

Experience has proved that hardly anyone, even family, has as much insight into the nature and character of a man as a personal secretary who spends many hours working closely with him. Here are some extended remarks from Frances C. Vaughn

sharing her feelings about her former boss:

In 1948 I was 20 years old, working at a small bank in Tampa and bored to tears when an acquaintance just happened to tell me that she knew that the Shackleford firm was looking for a secretary. I applied for the job. I had taken shorthand and typing at the University of Tampa; the shorthand was no problem but I was a terrible typist. When Mr. T. M. interviewed me he asked about my shorthand skills, but when he didn't inquire about my typing I thought it was best to not bring up the subject! One of my first assignments .was typing a will for a well known Tampa doctor. Wills had to be mistake-free—no erasures. They also had to be typed with at least two carbon copies. There is no way to calculate the paper I wasted or the time it took to complete that will. Fortunately it was only eight or ten pages long and not like the complicated documents of today. But he waited, somewhat impatiently, until I finally finished.

Mr. Shackleford and the next five years had a profound influence on my life. He was a stickler for perfection and I'm sure I was a trial for him, coming to be his secretary with absolutely no experience at all! When I left him to be married some five years later he wrote a beautiful letter of recommendation for me which I still cherish. Mr. Shackleford was a man who cared deeply about his friends.

He kept in touch with friends who were sick and told me the worse thing about aging is losing so many friends to death. He made frequent and regular visits to hospitals and to the homes of sick friends. He also kept in touch with an elderly widowed aunt who lived in another state and assisted her financially. He corresponded with attorneys who had been associates or law school classmates and with men who were active in Florida Blue Key, politics or church work. He was a close friend of Senator Spessard Holland and other influential politicians. He was always available for consultation on cases which required his expertise. Practicing law was a very serious matter to him and he was able to clearly see a problem add analyze solutions. His knowledge of the laws was very highly respected by other attorneys. Much of his consultations was kept in strictest confidence—not only from me but seemingly from everyone. He had great compassion for the many failings of people.

When Mrs. Shackleford died (1966), he asked that “Miss Curry’s husband” be a pallbearer and left the same instructions for his own funeral. Bob and I considered this the highest form of compliment and I mention it because it shows what kind of man he was.

He married Mary Baird of Gainesville on June 23, 1915. Of their four children, namely Mary Shackleford Browne Wolf, Thomas M. Shackleford, III, Nan Rhea Shackleford Owen, and Frederick Shackleford, only Mrs. Wolfe survives. The couple have nine grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

Judge Shackleford was active in a host of activities and organizations almost beyond count: Former President, Tampa Board of Trade; attorney for State Road Department; founder of Tampa Federal Savings & Loan Association; Past president,

University of Florida Foundation and University of Florida Alumni Association. Last surviving charter member of Palma Ceia Golf & Country Club. He enjoyed golf and fortunately, his career in law was unaffected by the gloomy caveat of the cynic, H.L. Mencken—“Any man guilty of golf should be ineligible to hold any office of trust under the United States.”

Judge Shackleford lived life to the fullest. Never really retiring, he continued to drive his old Chevrolet to the office until disabled, giving credence to the Shakespearean adage: “How use doth breed a habit in a man.” (from *Two gentlemen from Verona*)

Morison Buck

AFTERWORD: Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men. Proverbs 22:29