

Thomas Gilcrease

“Every man must leave a track and it might as well be a good one.” – Thomas Gilcrease

Chapter 01 - Introduction

Announcer: Born in 1890, Thomas Gilcrease was the oldest of fourteen children and learned the value of hard work early in his youth. As a boy, he loved to read—a hobby that correlated with his inquisitive mind. His early education took place in a one-room schoolhouse in Indian Territory. Then, for a short time, he attended Bacone Indian University in Muskogee, Oklahoma, and later enrolled in a teachers college in Emporia, Kansas.

Thomas Gilcrease was of Creek heritage and in 1899 he was entered into the tribal rolls of the Creek Nation. When land allotments were dispersed by the federal government, Thomas received 160 acres. His portion of land was located south of Tulsa, and in 1905, oil was discovered in that region which became known as Glenpool. At age fifteen he began receiving royalties from oil sales which opened up a world of opportunity. He would soon take his first steps on a course that ultimately led him to found The Thomas Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

The grandson of Thomas Gilcrease, Gene Gilcrease, along with his family, share their remembrances of a man they call granddad and great granddad on the oral history website VoicesofOklahoma.com.

Chapter 02 - 4:45 Gilcrease Family

John Erling: My name is John Erling, and today’s date is July 11, 2017. Gene, would you state your full name, please?

Gene Gilcrease: Eugene Folsom Gilcrease.

JE: And your date of birth?

GG: 2-19-42.

JE: So that would be February 19, 1942, and your present age is?

GG: Seventy-five.

JE: Where are we recording this interview today?

GG: In Nacogdoches, Texas, at my home.

JE: And in the room, are family members. And, Steve, who are you?

Steve Gilcrease: Youngest son, Steven Charles Gilcrease.

JE: And?

Thomas Gilcrease: The oldest son, Thomas Gene Gilcrease.

JE: In the room, making us comfortable and so forth, is Darlene, Gene's wife. Darlene, thank you for everything you've done to help in this interview, as a matter of fact.

Darlene Gilcrease: You're welcome.

JE: Where were you born, Gene?

GG: San Antonio, Texas.

JE: Your mother's name?

GG: Grace Folsom.

JE: And where was she from?

GG: Newkirk, Oklahoma.

JE: She grew up in that area?

GG: In Newkirk, and Hominy area. Her father worked for Texaco for thirty-five years. She more or less followed around that area.

JE: Your father's name?

GG: Thomas Gilcrease Jr.

JE: Where did he grow up?

GG: He was born in Tulsa. He spent his childhood in Tulsa and in Long Beach, California.

JE: Describe your mother, what was her personality like?

GG: Greatest mother in the world. She'd do anything for anybody.

JE: How old was she when she died?

GG: She was eighty.

JE: And she died here in Nacogdoches, Texas?

GG: Yes.

JE: Your father, what was his personality like? What kind of a person was he?

GG: Easy going but a hard worker. He was gone a lot on the oil fields, making sure that everything ran smooth.

JE: He died at an early age, didn't he?

GG: Fifty-seven.

JE: Fifty-seven, here at Nacogdoches, Texas. Why are we all here in Nacogdoches, Texas?

GG: I left San Antonio in 1962 to come to the university up here, Steve and I also. I liked the area and Dad and I had planned to go into ranching when he retired. Well, I was looking for property up here while he was looking at property in south Texas.

He and Mother came up in early '64. We looked at two properties I'd found here. He and Mother decided this was the place.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative). Your grandmother, what was her name?

GG: Belle Harlow.

JE: And she came out of Oklahoma?

GG: Yes, she was Osage.

JE: She was Osage. And then who was your grandfather?

GG: Thomas Gilcrease Sr.

JE: What was his full name?

GG: All I have ever found for sure was Thomas Gilcrease. Now a lot of folks say William Thomas.

JE: Yes.

GG: But he never signed or said that he was William Thomas Gilcrease; it was always Indian Tom or Tom Gilcrease.

JE: Let's go back. His parents then, his father was William Lee Gilcrease.

GG: Correct.

JE: And his mother was Mary Elizabeth Vowel Gilcrease.

GG: That's correct.

JE: And she was Creek.

GG: That's correct. They were over at Vowels Mill in Louisiana. It's where they apparently met there and were married. Then when the allotment for the Nations in Oklahoma came up they moved up to Oklahoma to establish their residence. And both of them got their allotment.

JE: That would have been in Indian Territory then when the family came here?

GG: It, it was.

JE: Thomas Gilcrease, your grandfather, born February 8, 1890, where was he born?

GG: He was born in Rumley in Louisiana.

JE: Let's go through the family in the family tree here now. Let me make it clear. Tom Sr. married Belle Harlow in 1908, and divorced in 1926. They had two sons, Tom Jr., and Eugene Barton. Tom Jr. had one son, that's you, Eugene Folsom, and Barton had two daughters, Barta and Jenna.

Tom Sr. then married Norma Smallwood in 1928, and divorced in 1939. They had one daughter, Dacine, and Dacine had three children: Tom and Pete and Desi Denny.

GG: That's correct.

JE: And who was Norma Smallwood?

GG: She was a Miss America of 1926.

JE: And of course, Norma was Miss Tulsa, she was Cherokee, and was the first Native American to become Miss America.

GG: Yes.

JE: When Tom Sr. died he had three children and six grandchildren, and after death, several great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren.

GG: That's correct.

JE: And I have here the oldest five grandchildren are the trustees of the Thomas Gilcrease Foundation: Eugene Gilcrease, Tom Denny, Pete Denny, Barta Busby, and Janet Gilcrease. They are the trustees.

Chapter 03 - 4:06

1905 - Oil

John Erling: Your grandfather, what is your earliest recollection of him?

Gene Gilcrease: I was six or seven years old, there was a family gathering in Taos, New Mexico. To the best of my recollection, we all went out there for the powwow. While we were there, Granddad carried my dad and my uncle. Of course, I had to tag along with Dad. And he carried us around and introduced the families to several of the Taos artists.

I can't remember the name of the old Indian that we met with but he either took a liking to me or Granddad bought a drum and a rattle. The drum was made out of an old powder keg and the rattle, a tortoiseshell rattle. I've treasured those all my life.

JE: Well, the drum is here.

GG: The drum and the rattle are both here.

JE: In this house.

GG: In this house, and they will remain here.

JE: Heh-heh-heh (sort of laughing), yes, yes they will.

Now Steve and Gene, you jump in here on any of this. Your grandfather's education took place in a one-room schoolhouse in Indian Territory?

GG: That's correct. And later went into Bacone, did a semester there.

JE: He was influenced by Alexander Posey, who taught him about the Trail of Tears and Indian leaders such as Sequoyah and Sitting Bull and those kind of people. And, yes, he attended Bacone. Then he met somebody on a train ride to Bacone one day.

GG: Yeah.

JE: And who was that?

GG: That was Belle Harlow. That was my grandmother.

JE: So he met her on that train. She was an Osage student and they were married.

GG: Yeah.

JE: I believe she was fifteen years old.

GG: Granddad was eighteen.

JE: And then in the early 1900s the federal government dissolved the Indian Nation's land by distributing parcels and private ownership.

So he was then how old? Only like nine years old when he got his—

GG: Allotment.

JE: Yeah.

GG: Very young, yes.

JE: A hundred and sixty acres, which was about twenty miles southwest of Tulsa. And of course, his father acted on his behalf at that time.

So then the 1905 drillers struck oil in the area, that's when he was about fifteen years old. So it made him a multimillionaire by the time he was twenty years old.

GG: Correct.

JE: How much does luck play into all of this, anyway, huh?

Steve Gilcrease: A lot.

Thomas Gilcrease: Back in them days with oil it was a lot of luck and—

GG: You know, he was not an oil man. He was an oilman. He didn't go out there and prospect for it. He knew enough people that he knew whether you were going to have a good oil field, and he would get with you. He had five or six partners on Gilcrease Oil that started out. They moved into California first and then into the Maidwater area, of course, the great save, the Glenpool, you know, that's where he started, where he got his money.

JE: He had thirty-two producing oil wells by 1917, that's when he was financially secure and could begin to collect art.

GG: Yes.

JE: But have you guys ever thought about this? It came to a man who was very smart in the beginning. He could have gone into anything, I suppose, and been an outstanding person. But the luck in the oil, I mean, he could have frittered the whole thing away. We've heard of stories about people struck oil and they were poorer within a year or two.

TG: He was decades ahead in his thinking and in his writings. You know, he talked about so many things it was hard to believe in that day and time.

JE: Well, I was reading where he had to go to the oil well site and he had to be there.

TG: He wanted to be at every one when they came in.

Thomas Gilcrease: We've got some old black and white video of one coming in. We called it then a gusher.

JE: Yeah.

TG: All flowing out, he's there on the scene with them.

JE: Or a blow, I think they called it.

TG: Yeah.

SG: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GG: I was at the last legal gusher in Kansas. I was about eight years old. Mom and Dad said I was running along with a shovel trying to dam the oil up. (everyone laughing)

SG: Save money, huh?

Chapter 04 - 3:08

Preserving History

John Erling: It's kind of interesting as to why he would pursue collecting art. Have you wondered about that? He could have collected cars, he could have collected a lot of things.

Thomas Gilcrease: I think the reason he did that was because it was preserving the history of Native American Indians in the western culture, and that's what he liked. He liked that western culture. He grew up in an era when some of that was still going on. So he's going to try to preserve what he sees in his mind needs to be preserved for this country.

JE: So it was preserving history—

TG: Yes.

JE: ...is what drove it and the way you do that—

TG: Preserving history.

JE: ...is through art.

Gene Gilcrease: Through art.

TG: He traveled around the world several times, through the love of art, all kinds of art. But he settled on Native American art because of his background and where he lived and where he grew up. And I believe he just had a love for it more than anything.

GG: His first collection was "Rural Courtship."

JE: And who painted that?

TG: Daniel Ridgway Knight.

JE: A beautiful piece. Just think about Thomas, he was a rancher, he was a farmer.

GG: He was.

JE: Cowboy.

GG: Yes.

SG: Got some pictures of him cowboying.

JE: Oh really?

GG: Yes.

TG: Got some good black and whites of him. That's what I do, so it runs in the family.

JE: Banker and, obviously, an oilman. He was a store keeper—what was that about, a store keeper?

GG: Huh (expression of thinking), William Lee was shot at his store, he had a store there.

JE: That's Thomas's father?

GG: Yes. I'm assuming that after his father was killed he went and ran the store for his mother.

JE: So your granddad, Thomas Sr., was how much Indian?

GG: He was quarter because of his mother's birthright as a Creek Indian.

TG: Creek Indian.

JE: Obviously, then, that drew him into the life of Native Americans and wanting to preserve that history. His company brought in many wells in Oklahoma, Texas, and Kansas. And he obtained interest in the Fourth National Bank of Tulsa, the Bank of Bixby, the state banks of Coweta and Wagner and a large bank in Stillwater. Maybe you know of other banks elsewhere too, I don't know.

GG: I believe he had a controlling interest in a bank in Long Beach.

TG: The story we've always been told growing up was the federal government was changing some regulations in the banking business and he didn't like it. He just sold his interest out and just got out of the banking business, because he didn't like the regulations the government were putting on them.

JE: Where did he start the oil company? The headquarters?

GG: In San Antonio, 1949.

TG: The first museum that displayed any art was there in San Antonio.

JE: He opened that in San Antonio, and why didn't he stay there with that museum?

Steve Gilcrease: He couldn't get enough interest from the people coming to see the museum. He wanted the art work to be seen.

TG: And he really liked them hills up there in Osage County. He just felt more at home there.

GG: When he went back to Oklahoma, the oil company stayed in San Antonio.

JE: And he moved to Oklahoma?

GG: Yes. The building that he bought down there was the old Casino Club. I think there's five floors of it. The oil company occupied one floor and then had the museum in another floor. People just didn't come to see it. Out on the river in a beautiful location but people just didn't come.

Chapter 05 - 3:38**Jackson Hole**

John Erling: What do you know about when Thomas and Belle were married and they would travel the country exploring museums and galleries?

Gene Gilcrease: They had a nice home out in Long Beach. Granddad was a great hunter and they made several trips to Alaska hunting. Matter of fact, I have Grandmother's doll sheep she killed in 1926.

JE: They also spent time near Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

GG: Oh yes.

JE: Let's talk about that.

GG: I don't remember the exact year. They were headed for Yellowstone and they stopped at Rock Springs for directions and told them where they were heading and they told Granddad that he couldn't drive that car up there. He had to go way back around and come in from the east. He asked them, "Does a wagon get through?"

"Well, yeah."

"Wagon can go through, this car will go through." Now he drove a Packard all his life.

JE: That's the only brand he drove?

GG: That's the only brand he would drive. Now Grandmother said that one river had to be pulled across by mule, but they still got the car up to Jackson, Wyoming. They camped out at a camping area for several days and then just fell in love with the country. And he ended up buying both pieces that had a cabin on it.

Later on he moved one cabin down to the other one where they had both cabins for the family. From earliest I can remember until I was about sixteen or seventeen, come summertime the whole family would move up there to Jackson until time for school, then we all moved back.

Of course, Dad and Barton would have to go and come and Granddad would have to go and come. As a matter of fact, I can remember him flying in on his small plane in Beech Bonanza. Dad and Barton had to go up and block the highway so he could land on the highway above the cabins. He was there four or five days and then they blocked the highway so he could take off. And he flew out to Gillette. The family drove out there on an antelope hunt. It—a great experience to watch that plane come down and land on that highway.

He had two planes; he had a DC-3 and a Beechcraft Bonanza. I guess he needed those planes to save time in his travels.

JE: Yeah. Where did he keep them?

GG: Started out in San Antonio and then moved them up to Tulsa. Had two pilots that were on retainer: Ford Wellworth, and I can't remember Dee's last name. Ford was one of the members of the Black Sheep Squadron during World War II. He told some interesting stories.

I think, really, that's why Granddad hired him.

JE: Steve, the ranch in Wyoming, he bought it for how much?

Thomas Gilcrease: Great-Granddad gave twenty-five cents an acre. And he could have bought more but he always said it'd never be worth more than—

GG: Fifty cents.

TG: ...fifty cents an acre.

Steve Gilcrease: That was his mistake in calculating what something was worth over the years—

GG: Yeah, if—

SG: ...was that land right there.

GG: ...it had been art he probably would have said, "Oh yes!"

TG: So when he bought 350 acres and 25 cents an acre, that's \$87.50. And you can't buy a square foot in Jackson Hole for that.

JE: Wow, right.

JE: Well, maybe that was his only miscalculation.

TG: Yeah.

JE: Whatever happened to that ranch?

TG: The foundation still owns it, the Gilcrease family foundation.

SG: The majority of it, some of it's been sold off to the Forest Service.

JE: The existing ranch then, how is that used?

SG: Really, it's not used a lot because of the regulations put on the family members. In a 501C3 foundation you can't just go use that property.

TG: It's leased out.

SG: It's part of the ruling. It gets leased out.

GG: It gets leased out to the Boy Scouts and the—

TG: Kayak Club.

GG: ...Kayak Club and such.

JE: Okay, so that's a lasting legacy then of Thomas.

GG: Yeah.

TG: Um-hmm (affirmative).

Chapter 06 - 3:32**Thomas Personality**

John Erling: Granddad, as you call him, did he have a sense of humor?

Gene Gilcrease: Yes he had a great sense of humor, but it was sort of a dry sense of humor.

He didn't smoke, he didn't drink, he didn't curse, and you very, very rarely saw him without a tie on. Outside, I don't think I ever saw him without a hat on.

JE: Well, then it showed some pictures that we saw, he was out fishing.

Thomas Gilcrease: I've seen pictures of him fly-fishing, still wearing his tie.

GG: He was very proper.

JE: Did he go to church?

GG: The only thing I can remember about that is that when I was very young we all went to the Methodist church there in San Antonio. Now, as far as spiritual, I know that the family always gathered at his house when we were in San Antonio for Thanksgiving and for Christmas. The whole family would gather like that.

And then a couple of times, family went to Tulsa. I know he believed in the Lord because he was fairly spiritual that way.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GG: But I'm not sure what church he went to once he went back up.

JE: Did he take a real strong interest in family and children and grandchildren?

GG: Yes and no. He took a great interest in us but he traveled so much, you know, there's big gaps where we weren't able to talk and see him. I have a letter there that I'm going to give to you that he wrote me for my birthday.

JE: Well, I know you're not giving me this letter, but you just handed it to me here. And let me just quickly read what Thomas Gilcrease wrote to you: "Dear Folsom." So did you grow up using Folsom or Gene?

Thomas Gilcrease: He grew up going by Fo-Fo.

TG: That was a nickname.

JE: You were Fo-Fo?

GG: That was the nickname.

JE: But he uses, "Dear Folsom," and this is typewritten. "17 February 1958," on Thomas Gilcrease Foundation letterhead, "Wednesday you will be sixteen. Before you know it, you will be twenty-one and can vote for a man of your choice. I hope that by this time you will also be a real, honest-to-goodness man with a lot of intelligence, honesty, and reason."

You turned out that way, didn't you?

GG: I hope so.

JE: Then he goes on: “On my last visit I noticed that you were slender and looking the part of a well-balanced young fellow. Now just get right down to real study and make yourself a distinguished man among men. You have a good mind but you must use it to good advantage every day.” And he says, “Always happy to hear from you and drop me a note from time to time and let me know what you are thinking and doing. Many more happy birthdays. Love, Grandpa.”

GG: That was Granddad.

JE: Yeah.

GG: Now one thing he never forgot was my birthday. He never forgot Christmas. All the grandchildren always got a present for Christmas. Usually it was a painting that he thought would fit what we would like. It was a great deal.

JE: Where are they, those paintings that you—

GG: I’ve got several of them here. Some of them were so large that once we moved up here I didn’t have the wall space for them so I sold a couple of them to Paul Rossi.

JE: Who was a curator.

GG: Who would have been a curator at the museum.

JE: At Gilcrease Museum.

GG: Um-hmm (affirmative).

Steve Gilcrease: Sold a few of them myself.

JE: So you had access to them too?

SG: Yeah, I had some that were given to me as well. I sold a few of them through Paul Rossi as well.

JE: Steve, did you get any?

SG: Yes, I’ve still got some paintings, some Tommy Lewis paintings and some Willard Stone works.

JE: And they were given to you by?

SG: My grandmother.

Chapter 07 - 4:20

Gilcrease Artists

John Erling: Thomas’s interest in art, obviously affected all of you so that you became interested in art. Talk to me about that.

Steve Gilcrease: Anything to do with western art from the time period he was collecting from, from the 1800s on up, that’s my interest. The Indian artifacts, it goes along with it, because it was all from the same time period. And it doesn’t matter whether it’s artifacts

such as arrowheads or any other Indian type things that they would find, or the paintings, it just all goes together.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

SG: You know, we grew up taking several trips to Tulsa a year wearing matching western outfits and going to functions at the museum. Paul Rossi and the curators, they pretty much let us run around and do what we wanted to in the museum, you know, except, "Don't touch the art."

JE: How old would you guys have been at that time?

SG: Anywhere from five to ten. We've seen every piece of art in that museum. And, you know, there are some people that have worked there twenty years and never seen every piece of art.

Thomas Gilcrease: There's art in that museum that's never been displayed, it's just unreal.

JE: And that's what we're trying to do is to build now so that more of that material can be seen on a regular basis.

TG: And I would love to see more of that art come out and not so much of this modern art that's there now.

JE: Did he have an interest in politics at all? Did he talk about presidents and that type of thing?

Gene Gilcrease: He didn't talk politics to me. Now he and Dad and Barton discussed several presidents and governors that they either liked or didn't like.

JE: That would be Barton, he's your uncle, and your father then were the children of Thomas Gilcrease. Where did they go to school?

GG: Dad was there at Norman.

JE: At the University of Oklahoma?

GG: At—yeah. And I believe Barton went to Norman also.

JE: Okay, and what was their area of study?

GG: Dad was a petroleum engineer; Barton was also but his minor was in finance, business.

JE: Did they go to work for the Gilcrease Oil Company?

GG: Yes, both of them did. Each one of them boys ran a part of the company for Granddad.

JE: Is that where they spent their whole career?

GG: Their whole career. They were tired out, both of them, in 1964. In '64 is when they sold out to Corwin Denny and retired. That's when Corwin took over and changed the name of Gilcrease Oil to Venus Oil.

JE: As a result of Thomas Gilcrease, you came in contact with artists that were real important to him and became real important to your families. Let's talk about some of them and your remembrances.

Acee Blue Eagle would be one of them.

GG: I had a chance to meet Blue Eagle, Woody Crumbo.

JE: Charles Banks Wilson was a close friend, I believe we can call him that.

GG: Yes.

JE: Of Thomas. That major signature portrait—

GG: Yes.

JE: ...“The One” was painted by Charles Banks Wilson.

GG: Yeah. One of the people that I didn’t get to meet but I know Granddad talked a lot about him, had a lot of correspondence with him, is J. Frank Dobie. They were great friends.

SG: That’s right.

GG: They wrote back and forth a lot.

SG: As a matter of fact, Joseph Sharp spent a lot of time at the cabin at Jackson Hole.

TG: Yeah.

SG: He would go there and paint. And I believe him and Great-Granddad would spend time together there fishing and just visiting.

JE: Woody Crumbo, who worked right there on the grounds of Gilcrease Museum, I believe had his own house there, didn’t he?

GG: Yes. There’s a house that’s since been torn down that was used for the artist in residence.

JE: And they traveled together, Woody Crumbo.

GG: Yes.

SG: There were some other artists that he was friends with that didn’t really come to stay there or do their art there. He was pretty good friends with some of those Taos artists. That’s one of the reasons why they would go to Taos, New Mexico, because he collected a lot of their art.

TG: But you know, the three main most known artists that were artists in residence with Great-Granddad were Acee Blue Eagle, Willard Stone, and Woody Crumbo.

SG: Woody Crumbo.

JE: So it was the same as for Woody? I mean, I think he worked for Thomas for about three years and then, of course, everything he did belonged to Thomas.

Darlene Gilcrease: Absolutely.

TG: Correct.

SG: Willard Stone had a contract with him for three years and every piece that he made he bought. Any of his etchings or any of his pencil drawings, any of his wood carvings, that was under a three-year contract that Great-Granddad had with him. So that’s why he had so much of his art to begin with.

Chapter 08 - 5:30**The Big Buy**

John Erling: It was in 1947 that he purchased the entire collection of the late Philip Gillette Cole, the New York collector. Can you boys—I call you boys because we’ve never established your ages.

Thomas Gilcrease: I’m younger than you at fifty now so you can still call me a boy, I guess.

JE: And, Steve, you’re a boy, how old are you?

Steve Gilcrease: I’m forty-nine.

JE: All right. Can you talk about that collection? They had twenty-seven bronzes, forty-six paintings by Charles Marion Russell; seventeen bronzes, twelve paintings by Frederic Remington.

SG: Remington, yes.

JE: Photographs by Edward Curtis; documents and correspondence of well-known figures in the American West.

SG: You know—

JE: So is that the big purchase that gave him—

TG: For the western art, that’s what gave him the boost. That was his biggest collection at any one time that he bought like that. Then he branched off, he bought other artists from that era then.

GG: Um-hmm (affirmative), bought the Lee out.

TG: William Lee, several others.

SG: But in my opinion, the Cole collection, that was the best collection.

TG: Yeah, by far.

JE: He bought the collection, as I understand it, on installments.

GG: Yes. Had to wait for the oil checks to come in.

JE: Okay. Even Thomas Gilcrease bought things on installments the way some of us do.

GG: Oh yes, he did.

JE: Yeah.

GG: And at times he overextended.

JE: He made the final installment while he was living in Tulsa.

GG: Yes.

JE: And there are those who thought that if he had been living in San Antonio that collection might have been in San Antonio, and that would have been where the Gilcrease Museum would have really flourished.

GG: I—

JE: Any thought on that? That's just a speculation.

GG: I don't think it would have flourished as well in San Antonio as it has in Tulsa. Tulsa—

SG: Tulsa is such a magnet for art. And it's just a world renowned city, you know, with Gilcrease and Philbrook and the love of art in that part of the country.

TG: Especially if you get into the Native American Indian culture because you've got all the Nations up there. That's where it's going to be.

JE: Yeah. And then I understand he kept the collection quiet for a couple of years.

GG: Yes.

JE: So when it opened?

GG: He wanted to have all the collection together. Now, on some artists, he would take possession of the paintings and pay out in installments. Some of them, he made the installments and then got the painting. He wanted to have what we refer to as the core, at the museum before he let it out that he had it and had the museum.

JE: And it opened in what year?

GG: 'Forty-nine.

JE: In 1949. And, of course, he had many Thomas Morans.

SG: Yes.

GG: Oh yes.

TG: Quite a few.

JE: Over a thousand, I think was the number?

TG: Yes.

SG: Yes.

JE: Thomas Morans that he had.

SG: Seltzers, ah, I can't remember right now how many old Al Seltzers he had but it's a lot.

TG: A lot.

JE: In '49 you were eight years old?

GG: Yes.

JE: Were you up there for the opening?

GG: I was not. I did get to go up there when nobody was there and wander through it and look at things. You know, an eight-year-old child is not interested in art so much—

JE: No.

GG: ...as he is the western horses like the Remingtons and the Russells. The one that I really remember, he had a painting there, and I don't know if it's still in the museum or not, of Red Cloud.

JE: Who was Red Cloud?

GG: Red Cloud was, I guess you'd call him the head chief of the Sioux Nation, led the group out of the greasy grass after Custer was wiped out.

JE: Darlene has just handed me a letter here. This comes from Thomas Gilcrease: "Dear Mr. Stone: Thank you for your letter of January 27th. Due to the pressure of events my reply has been delayed." He says, "I think that the little standing figure would interest me and enclosed please find check for twenty dollars. In connection with this figure I would like to voice a little constructive criticism. One, you seem to sacrifice form for stylization, by which I mean that an excessive amount of overall design is present at the expense of detail. The arms of the figure look inflated. The anatomy of the arm and shoulder should be suggested through the cloth. No extreme detail, of course, but enough to show the form."

Isn't that interesting how—

GG: Yes.

JE: ...this oilman got to that point where he had developed taste—

Darlene Gilcrease: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: ...and understood what—

TG: The one he liked didn't have the arch and look.

SG: I think he could have been, had he chosen to, an estimator for Christie's.

JE: Heh (form of laugh) yeah, he probably could be. He says, "And then point number two," this is to Willard Stone from Thomas Gilcrease, "your choice of wood texture is good but be careful around grain patterns on flat surfaces as on the back and the seat they flatten those planes unnecessarily. Remington solved those problems to perfection. I can send you some photographs of some of my bronzes if you wish, for study purposes. The two flat reliefs I am returning to you as they do not quite fit in with my things. Very cordially yours, Thomas Gilcrease."

TG: He must of took his criticism to heart—

SG: To heart.

TG: ...because he perfected that wood carving.

JE: Oh, is that right?

GG: Yes.

TG: He did. And he collected many, many pieces over the years from him.

JE: That is great. Thank you, Darlene.

DT: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: Curator of the Gilcrease home here in Texas.

GG: Right.

Chapter 09 - 2:52**Gilcrease House**

Gene Gilcrease: Something I just thought of—

John Erling: Yeah?

GG: ...about the museum and Dwayne King, when they started the idea of redoing the old home.

JE: The old home where Thomas Gilcrease lived.

GG: Yes. Wayne got me to walk through and try to show him where things were, how it was. First thing I noticed, they cut a big hole through the wall from the living room to Granddad's bedroom. I was not real pleased with that idea, but he said that would be very quickly taken care of when they started construction.

One other thing I noticed was that Granddad's bird feeder was gone. He sat there in the breakfast nook every morning, watched his birds come in. But it had been torn down, it wasn't there.

So I have since made a feeder to match it. The next time I go to Tulsa I'm going to carry it up there and give it to Dwayne or whoever—

JE: Aaah (understanding sound).

GG: ...and show them exactly where it was.

JE: What's your recollection of the Thomas Gilcrease house there? Were you in it a lot?

GG: Yes I was.

JE: Tell us about the rooms that you liked and the bedrooms.

GG: I guess my favorite room was upstairs, it was an upstairs bedroom where you looked out over the city of Tulsa.

Thomas Gilcrease: The one with the balcony up there?

GG: Yep, the one with the balcony.

JE: And that's where the gardens were out in front of the house?

GG: Not like they have them today but there were some. Like I said, the University has done an excellent job, I mean, they have just done wonders.

Now Joe Sherlocky and Oligget, the two Indians that took care of the ground, they only did what Granddad told them to do. They didn't put new flowerbeds in. Granddad said, "They wanted it, they did it." But they saw to it there wasn't a blade of grass in any of the flowerbeds. It was kept mowed like a golf course.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GG: Those two gentlemen were out of this world for Granddad.

Cephas Stout was his right hand man. Cephas drug me around that place showing me things, telling me stories about Granddad.

TG: Pretty much, he's the one that taught you how to drive on that tractor.

GG: Yeah. I have a bulldozer, a little Poppin Johnny bulldozer, and a Farmall Cub that were Granddad's. Now as far as I know, that bulldozer was the first mechanized equipment used to clear overburden off Indian mounds.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

GG: It was the first time any mechanization was used. I've got it now and my boys, one of these days, will refurbish it. Then there was a Farmall Cub that he used on a place up there. They used that Cub with a trailer to haul blocks of sandstone up from the quarry to build the museum. I didn't get to be there for that but I guess I was fourteen when Cephas started teaching me how to drive.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

Chapter 10 - 3:49

Death of Thomas Gilcrease

John Erling: Let's talk about the personal secretary to Thomas Gilcrease. What was her name?

Gene Gilcrease: Eudotia Tinger.

JE: Eudotia is E-u-d-o-t-i-a.

Darlene Gilcrease: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GG: Everyone just called her Tinger.

JE: That was her last name?

GG: Yes. It was easier for people to say.

Steve Gilcrease: Yeah.

JE: What did she mean to the legacy of Thomas Gilcrease?

Thomas Gilcrease: She took care of everything.

GG: She ran the chief's hall for him, she ran the foundation for him. He'd come in and tell her what he needed done and she'd see to it. She kept every scrap of paper that he received from artists. She documented the whole history of Granddad.

TG: She probably knew more about the museum and the oil company than anybody. She was his secretary for forty-plus years.

DG: Sixty.

TG: And probably knew more about Great-Granddad than any of the family.

SG: I guarantee that.

TG: If anybody would have ever known what anything cost that he bought, she would have been the person to know it, because she would have been the person that went through that process with him.

SG: You know, she was with him every day, through every transaction through the museum.

JE: Did she live in a house down near Thomas Gilcrease's house?

SG: Yes she did. She lived in a house there on the museum grounds.

JE: So she was kind of also the protector of Thomas Gilcrease?

SG: Yeah, that's a good way to put it, very good way.

TG: Very good.

JE: Collected, I suppose, every snippet of newspaper articles and magazines and all that?

SG: Everything.

JE: Darlene is pointing out here from the book that she was born in Claremore, the third day of July 1910.

GG: Tinger always called Granddad, Mr. Gilcrease. That was the way she addressed him the whole time.

JE: Did he have a certain way about him that would almost demand that kind of...?

GG: He always stood erect, sat erect. And as I said earlier, he always wore a tie. As the old saying goes, "Very prim and proper."

JE: Yeah. Didn't Thomas Gilcrease whistle a lot?

GG: Yes.

TG: When Tinger would walk up from her house to Great-Granddad's they always had a bobwhite whistle. She would whistle and he'd whistle back, you know. He always kept the windows open and she'd whistle so he knew that she was coming and he'd answer her.

The day that he passed away, she'd walked up there and she whistled and he didn't answer back. She walked in the house and found him on the floor. The story is in the book that David Milstein wrote.

JE: So he died of a heart attack?

TG: Yes.

JE: Did Thomas have health problems?

GG: Yes he did, he had heart problems, macular degeneration of his eyes, but he kept that very much to himself. He didn't let the family know that much about it.

JE: Do you remember when it was you heard your granddad died? And how old were you? About twenty years old?

GG: I was about twenty years old.

JE: And let me quickly say, he was seventy-two when he died, May 6, 1962.

GG: That date, Tinger called the family and let them know that he'd died. Tinger called Dad and Barton to know that he passed.

Of course, the family went up there very quickly to start making burial. His funeral was rather impressive.

JE: Obviously you were there.

GG: Yes.

JE: What is your recollection of that?

GG: Every public official that you could think of from the surrounding area was there. Chief Wolf Robe Hunt shot the four arrows into the air, to the east, the west, the north, and the south for the spirit to go. Now that impressed me that Wolf Robe was doing that for Granddad, in sending him off to the spirit world.

JE: Yeah, the whole service was in an Indian style.

GG: Yes it was.

JE: Shows you how close he was to the Native Americans.

GG: And it took place on the front lawn of the old house.

JE: Cornmeal was sprinkled at the site to provide food for the spirit's journey. And then, of course, Thomas Gilcrease is buried in a mausoleum on the grounds of the home and the museum there.

Chapter 11 - 4:20

Tulsa Bond Issue

John Erling: Let's talk about the declining oil prices in the 1950s. That caused financial difficulties for him.

Gene Gilcrease: Yes it did. He had already made arrangements to buy several collections and artifacts and he, all of a sudden, didn't have the money. Also he owed some back taxes that he just didn't have the money to come forward with because the oil prices had dropped so low. That's when he went and talked to the city because he did not want the collection to leave Tulsa. But he was going to be forced to sell it out to cover his debts—if they didn't pass the bond issue.

So the mayor at that time and the city council pushed forward the bond issue. And as you said earlier, I think it passed three to one.

JE: It was three to one, the 2.25 million dollar bond issue, which paid his outstanding debts.

GG: He pledged oil royalties to pay the bond issue off.

JE: He committed his oil property to Tulsa for the museum maintenance until the bond was fully repaid.

GG: That's correct, in 1981.

JE: You know, that's interesting, some things are just meant to be, aren't they?

GG: Yes.

JE: Have you ever wondered if he did not have to go to the city and say, "Hey, you have to take this over," if he would have kept it until his death, you certainly have wondered about what would have happened to it?

GG: I believe that had he still been alive after the debt was paid off, that when he died, all of the museum property would have gone into the foundation.

JE: Okay. And there still is a foundation to this day.

GG: It is.

JE: So then you think the foundation would have operated the museum?

GG: I do. Of course, Dad died early. I think it would have probably fallen to the five grandchildren to carry it forward. We're operating the foundation at this time, trying to keep everything going. Learn pretty quick.

JE: That foundation exists today, whatever it's worth. What is that money used for today?

GG: It's for grants, 503C grants. It's other foundations, churches, schools. One of the grants that I made was a scholarship to SFA up here for Native Americans. It's named after my father.

JE: Thomas Gilcrease Jr. I was also reading where he admired Charles Page of Sand Springs.

GG: Yeah.

JE: You have Charles Page Home for Children and for mothers, single mothers. They sheltered, educated, and cared for hundreds of boys and girls, and he wanted to repeat what Charles Page had done. He provided funding to many students at Bacone College.

GG: Yes he did.

JE: Speaking of money, a lot of people would think as wealthy as Thomas Gilcrease was that all this money would then come down to heirs and down to you and you guys would be— [all laughing] and you guys would be living in the lap of luxury.

Steve Gilcrease: No.

GG: Not. Granddad in his will, said that throughout his lifetime he had provided very well for his family. He was leaving everything to the foundation and a couple of other small charities. I think he left a dollar to each, Uncle Barton and Dad.

JE: They each got a dollar? Everything went to the foundation?

GG: Yes. He knew that Dad and Barton would go ahead and continue on with the foundation, that's why he put everything in there.

JE: But nothing came to them?

GG: No.

JE: In the foundation?

GG: Nope, not a penny. It all went to the foundation.

JE: How do you feel about that?

Thomas Gilcrease: That was his choice.

GG: That's his wish, yeah, his will.

SG: Yeah.

JE: Right.

GG: That's what he wanted.

TG: Not every family legacy has a rich person that leaves money to carry it on, I mean, other people just do things different ways and that was the way he wanted it set up.

JE: Yeah.

TG: It gave a way for the money to continue on and do good for other people, rather than just be split between family members and Malone, you know?

JE: Yeah.

SG: Now the city of Tulsa and the whole world benefited from Thomas Gilcrease.

TG: Yeah.

SG: I mean, it's the best treasure in the world.

JE: There's no question about that.

SG: No question.

JE: It's just that that's the way he handled it. But a lot of wealthy people have done that very same thing.

SG: Yeah.

JE: Give a dollar, a dollar, dollar, dollar, and it all goes into that end, so it's up to your father then, to make his own way.

TG: Like Great-Granddad said, "Every man must make a track and it might as well be a good one."

GG: A good one.

SG: Yeah, you go.

Chapter 12 - 10:12

Family Interest In Art

John Erling: And let's say here, your profession, Gene, was?

Gene Gilcrease: Law enforcement.

JE: And your profession, Gene?

Thomas Gilcrease: Law enforcement.

JE: And your profession, Steve?

Steve Gilcrease: Retired law enforcement.

TG: We've all done other various things in between, I mean, raised cattle, worked for people. I worked cattle for a living, I'm a cowboy, it's what I do even though I'm retired law enforcement. I do custom leatherwork as well. You know, I make art in leather.

JE: Well, your mother said earlier today that you're quite an artist in that area.

GG: Yeah—

TG: I've displayed—

GG: ...there was a holster laying on this table, yeah, there it is—

TG: I've displayed during Rendezvous at the museum there at Tulsa.

JE: Oh, have you?

TG: Yes.

GG: That's the holster that he made for me.

JE: That's beautiful. When you come to the museum, and people realize that you're the direct descendents of Thomas Gilcrease, you must get some special attention.

Darlene Gilcrease: Nope.

Steve Gilcrease: Not really.

TG: Uh-uh (negative).

JE: Not really?

GG: Not really.

TG: The last time I went I didn't tell anybody who I was, I just dropped a donation in the box like anybody else and walked through the museum.

JE: Where do you like to go? What do you like to see in the museum?

TG: I like the western galleries where Remington, Russell, Lee, Sharp, where all their western art is, that's my favorite gallery there.

JE: Steve, how about you?

SG: Everything in storage.

TG: Yeah, I—I would have to say that because we've both been down there and in storage and seen what's there.

SG: Yeah, that's one thing, we get to go look at stuff in storage that the public doesn't get to see. That's where the real treasures are.

TG: It's just unbelievable the amount of art that was collected, not just paintings or statues but books, documents.

DG: Documents.

TG: Indian artifacts that are housed in the basement of that museum.

GG: There's some pieces that has had to be restored over the years but from the early years to now there's so much technology to take care of art now. That Granddad had no knowledge of back then. The lights, you know, you have to have special lights that won't harm the papers.

GG: That's why Helmerich Center has been such a blessing.

TG: You can go in that one hall where they have documents like one of copies of the Declaration of Independence, things like that, you have to have it that way or the ink just fades right off the paper; paper degrades. They didn't have that kind of technology back then.

SG: Well, you know, like I said, without people like Dwayne King and his partnership with the University of Tulsa it wouldn't be what it is today.

JE: You know, you talked about Belle Harlow, Tom and Belle divorced. But they remained friends, didn't they?

GG: All their lives. When Granddad moved from Tulsa to San Antonio, Dad and Barton had a house on Westwood and Drive. There was one house in between them and a vacant lot that Dad owned.

About six blocks over, Granddad bought a house for Grandmother. And she lived there until she died. He divorced her and married Norma.

JE: And that didn't last very long.

GG: No, it was rather a bitter divorce.

JE: And, of course, made headlines.

GG: Oh yes, all—

JE: And made headlines all across the country because she had been Miss America.

GG: Yes.

JE: He wasn't the kind who would seek attention, was he?

GG: No. No, all he wanted to do was visit with his family when he could and take care of his collection. Now, I don't know if you realize that after he gave the museum to the city, he changed his outlook on his collecting. He started going back digging the Indian mounds that were available to dig.

What started, he met a man, Greg Perino, and he and Greg would go and take these mounds. And Greg would sit there and document everything on that mound where he could put that mound back together from his drawings, his photographs. He's the one that got Granddad to buy this little Poppin Johnny bulldozer. Greg would go out there and probe the mound completely with a probe rod to find out how deep the first burial was or the first whatever. And then they could use the dozer to push the overburden off and made it much faster.

Somewhere I've got a photograph of Granddad and Greg in an extremely large mound. Where they dug a ditch right through the middle of it because as they probed they didn't find anything in that. So they could profile the mound. And you could see every piece of that mound where the different dirt was brought in. The size of that mound and the carrying capacity of the people at that time would be a basket maybe

a half yard, at the best. That mound was, I'm going to say, sixty feet tall by about ninety to a hundred feet long.

JE: Where was that?

GG: That was up in Illinois, overlooking the Illinois River.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

GG: There was several burials in that one. But they had one tomb in there that, best I can remember, there was a man and a woman—it had been a log tomb with the dirt put over it. Both of them is seven feet, which is extremely large, extremely large for back in that time. They must have been, as the saying goes, “high class,” because they had a lot of jewelry with them.

I remember there was a headstone about that big around above them. It was sent to University of Chicago and I never did hear what they decided it was. Matter of fact, all of the bones that were dug, all went to University of Chicago and then back to the museum. They catalogued them up there, did carbon-14 tests on them.

Granddad had one tomb built in diorama in the museum that show these.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GG: To show how they were buried. Never did get around to it. One of the directors of the museum, I'd talked to him about it and he was all for it but couldn't get the money.

JE: Your father and your uncle Bart, because of their father, were they art collectors? Did they get interested in wanting to collect anything?

GG: Not really. They liked art and both of them had bought a little bit, but they were not collectors.

TG: I deal with Indian artifacts some with a lot of friends of mine around the nation, arrowheads and different things like that. Grick Reno was the most well-known person that authenticated anything from that era from when he was with Great-Granddad up until he died. Even to say his name at one of these artifact shows and they're like, “Yeah? Got something from him?”

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

TG: “Yeah.”

JE: Yeah.

TG: And they want it 'cause they know it's going to be the real deal. You know, it's authenticated through him.

GG: You know what a flint napper is?

JE: No.

GG: Greg was an expert flint napper. He could sit downn with a nail and a piece of flint and make an arrowhead in just a few minutes. You couldn't hardly tell the difference. But he always put something in there that would be different from what it was supposed to be so that it wouldn't be used as authentic.

- JE:** Well, both you, Steve, and Gene are interested in art and the art world because of Thomas Gilcrease, there's no question about that. Talk to us about the effects of having a great-grandfather such as Thomas Gilcrease has had on your life.
- SG:** It's just been amazing that one man could collect what he's collected. And it's on display in one place for the world to see. It couldn't be done today. There's no way.
- JE:** No.
- TG:** The price for having to collect what he did if you tried to do it now is immeasurable. I mean, you couldn't afford it.
- GG:** Uh-um (negative), no.
- TG:** Nobody would let go of it and if they did you couldn't afford to buy it to collect it.
- DG:** He's already got it all.
- TG:** Well, no, he didn't get it all.
- GG:** Huh-uh (negative).
- TG:** He didn't buy everything Philip Cole had either. Because I know where there's some of that at.
- SG:** Yeah.
- JE:** You say you know where there's more of the Cole collection?
- TG:** Yeah.
- JE:** What do you mean?
- TG:** There were quite a few pieces of it that he didn't sell at that time to Great-Granddad and he donated and sold others to other museums over the years. There's several other museums that have pieces from Cole. From his collection.
- JE:** I understand that Cole allowed that sale to happen because Thomas and Cole were alike. It wasn't just about money.
- TG:** Kind of a kinship.
- JE:** Yeah.
- TG:** About what they liked and how they went about collecting. What their perception of art was, what they wanted the world to see.
- JE:** And Cole was careful not to sell it to somebody who didn't have the same appreciation he had.
- TG:** Right, he really didn't want it going into a lot of just private hands that were going to keep it in their house. He wanted it to be seen by everybody. So he kind of had the same thought process about art that Great-Granddad had.
- JE:** You know, we do a lot of what-ifs?
- GG:** Yes.
- JE:** If those two personalities hadn't of clicked who knows where this whole thing would have been today.

TG: Yeah.

SG: And you know, in Great-Granddad's later years, when he started digging in mounds, more into the artifacts, I kind of think of him as the original Indiana Jones.

JE: Yes.

TG: He just wasn't swinging through vines and popping a whip.

JE: Right. Right. Now you two boys, like I'm calling you now, you're certainly passing on this legacy to your children. And they must know much about—it would be Great-Great-Grandfather, I guess. Is that true?

TG: I've got two sons and one of them is a little more interested in it than the other. Fact, I was just in Indiana about a month ago to see my youngest son graduate from high school. And we went to a museum there in Indianapolis, the Eiteljorg Museum, they also have some of the Cole collection there as well. They know Gilcrease. It's a museum along the same lines as Gilcrease but it doesn't have any of the ultra modern art in it. It just all caters to Native American and Western art.

JE: Another point in this whole story is that when Thomas Gilcrease needed help financially, maybe that was the best thing. I don't know.

GG: In the long run, it probably was.

TG: It certainly kept the collection intact, from being sold off to individuals where it might not ever been seen again. So, yeah, I think it was probably better that way. He kept it all intact and in a public viewing area where people can come and see it. Rather than some old collector with a bunch of money having it in his house somewhere.

JE: Right.

GG: I just wish that the university had taken over management of the museum way before they did. The museum would be so much further ahead today.

Chapter 13 - 7:55

How To Be Remembered

John Erling: And then we go back further. Your grandfather, great-grandfather, gets this allotment. He happens to be of Creek descent so he gets this allotment. Where is it? Right there.

Gene Gilcrease: Right there.

JE: So there's all these things that we see in our lives. We look back, "That happened, that had to happen."

DG: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: We didn't understand at the moment why it did but that had to happen. And so that's this story.

GG: Yep.

JE: That we're telling here today. And the luck of the draw in Glenpool, but then the kind of mind that wanted to learn business, wanted to learn art, wanted to learn ranching, he had that inquisitive brain that brought this all together. And there are those who could have gone and said, "Well, I'm a playboy."

GG: Yep.

JE: "I'm just flying around to Paris and I'm going to go to all these places." And he didn't do that. When he went to Paris, he went there to learn about art.

SG: You know, he didn't do it for himself, he did it for the world.

TG: So he got to be a fly-around playboy in a different sense.

JE: Yes, right. With purpose.

TG: With purpose.

GG: Yes, yes.

SG: You know, he wanted to put this together for people to come to Tulsa to see it because he loved Tulsa, and you know, that's the great thing about it. The location. Gilcrease wouldn't be Gilcrease anywhere else.

TG: Uh-uh (negative).

GG: No.

TG: That's him at fifteen, right there at the top.

JE: We have pictures in our slide show that will include this, Thomas Gilcrease at age fifteen. I hadn't heard that, you said, "He loved Tulsa."

SG: Yeah.

JE: Would you all agree?

GG: Yes.

TG: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: He really liked it there?

TG: You can read a lot about him. It was those hills right there, those Osage hills.

GG: Black Dog township.

TG: Yes, that's exactly right. That's where he wanted to be. That was this view, his vision, where he wanted everything to be because that's where he felt comfortable at.

JE: There are two great views from up there, and in the museum as you look west that great, great view of hills and trees. It's just beautiful.

GG: Yeah.

JE: And then from his own house he looks down on some hills, but there he sees the skyline of Tulsa.

TG: The city of Tulsa, yeah.

JE: So he had the best of both worlds where he was.

TG: Yep.

JE: So maybe we've already said—that's the way he should be remembered.

GG: Yes. You know, he has to be remembered as a benefactor to the city of Tulsa and to the world.

TG: He was somebody that really cherished his past and Native American and Western art and wanted it to continue on for everybody else to understand and enjoy. And that's what he did, he collected and set it up where it can still be viewed and enjoyed by others.

JE: Yeah.

TG: For years and years.

JE: Steve?

SG: Like I said, it's the greatest place in the world. And the one thing about Gilcrease, as far as history goes, compared to, say, history of the Civil War where you're seeing all the Civil War statues being taken down. It's not that way with Western art. It tells a story of how America evolved. And I hope it's there forever for people to see.

TG: Those artists that traveled around through the west actually painting what they saw—

JE: I'm thinking of Thomas Moran right now.

TG: Moran.

JE: Of how he came out to the West.

DG: Catlin.

TG: Catlin, Lay, all those, they traveled and actually painted what they saw, not just an image in their mind that they thought it might have looked like. They actually saw that and painted it—

DG: And went out and—

TG: ...and there it is on canvas and oil for everybody to see.

JE: And then they went back East and showed, "This is what's out there, folks."

TG: Yep.

SG: And it tells a story.

DG: Amazing that they went out to the reservations and painted the Indians and everything just as it was there—

TG: In life, in real life—

DG: ...and especially...

JE: Yeah.

TG: ...not just an image in your head but the real thing.

JE: So then Thomas comes along and says, "Here, we're going to protect that history."

DG: Yes.

JE: So, guys, thank you so much. We were talking so freely last night about stories. I'm hoping that we brought these stories out today. I don't know if we did or not.

DG: Yeah.

GG: Not all, I'll give you another one right now.

JE: Okay.

GG: We were discussing Willard Stone. How Granddad decided to give me this beam, I don't know, but this is a beam out of Ft. Sill. It's made out of cherrywood. And how long is that beam down there?

TG: Four, five feet long.

GG: Four or five foot. And it'd be about eight by eight.

JE: All right, you say a beam, for those who don't understand, it would be in the ceiling of a building?

GG: Yeah.

TG: The floor joist.

JE: The floor joist, okay.

TG: Yeah.

GG: Willard identified it as being cherrywood and we're maintaining it. One of these days maybe there'll be a woodcarver in our family.

TG: Still got a spike in it.

GG: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: And now they say that maybe the ghost that wanders the halls of the museum is the ghost of Thomas Gilcrease.

SG: I don't know about ghost or anything like that, but if he never went anywhere but Tulsa that's probably where he'd be right there, wandering around looking at it. You know?

GG: One of his favorite spots was out in front of the museum. There's a huge oak tree there. He liked to go out there in the evenings and watch the sunset.

SG: Right there where Charles Banks Wilson did the portrait of him at, by that big tree right in front.

GG: Yep.

TG: I don't have it here, it's at the house, I've got some taxidermy work, of two cedar waxwing birds.

GG: Um-hmm (affirmative).

TG: Great-Granddad fed the birds. And these two cedar waxwings kept hogging the bird feed. So we shot them with a BB gun and had them mounted under glass. And it looks like a picture. It's bubbled out with these two cedar waxwings birds in it.

GG: Yep.

TG: And he loved the birds so much he wanted to preserve them but he had to kill them because they wouldn't let the other birds eat.

JE: Yeah.

TG: And it's hanging in my house.

GG: And he killed more than one squirrel at that feeder because they would get in there and run the birds off.

JE: So he'd sit there with a BB gun?

GG: Aah (pausing sound), when I was there he had a .22 to keep the squirrels away.

Uh (hesitation sound), were you aware that he had an office in Paris, France? He opened an office in Paris, France, to get investors in the oil company from Europe in order to build the company and make the money for the collecting.

One of the reasons I didn't see Granddad a lot in my younger years, because when the war ended he spent a lot of time in Europe gathering art.

JE: After World War II was over?

GG: Yes. He gathered a lot of art over there earlier, but when the war ended he went over there and tried to save the art that he'd found over there.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

TG: Some of that is still housed in the basement of the museum and some of it was resold to buy the art he wanted here.

GG: You know, we were talking about the statues being torn down, the Confederate?

JE: Yes.

GG: You know, I find it rather stupid. What they doing is doing away with history. Those statues represent a time in our history that, depending on how you look at it, may or may not have been a good time. There is a picture of Lee, a painting of Lee down in the stacks. And it has never been displayed.

JE: A picture of Robert E. Lee in the stacks of the Gilcrease Museum that's never been displayed?

GG: Never been displayed. There is several paintings in the stacks that have never been displayed. Because of this latest bond issue and the construction they're going to do, I'm quite sure that a lot of them that haven't been displayed will be put on display.

JE: Right. Well, guys, have we done it?

GG: I think we're pretty close to being wore out on it.

JE: Have I talked you out? Have you given me everything?

SG: That's a wrap.

TG: Is that how you're going to say it?

JE: Well, I want to thank you for talking to me.

GG: You're more than welcome.

JE: And—and to the world because this is the World Wide Web. Over twenty countries come in and listen to our VoicesofOklahoma.com. So to you, Steve, and to Gene, and to the elder Gene, and to Darlene, thank you, all of you. We had a great time last evening looking at pictures, which I'm going to display. So thank you. This was an enormous, wonderful experience for me. I appreciate it.

DG: Thanks very much.

SG: You're very welcome.

TG: Thanks a lot, John.

GG: We—we enjoyed it, John. Thank you.

JE: Thank you.

Chapter 14 - 0:33

Conclusion

Announcer: This oral history presentation is made possible through the support of our generous foundation-funders. We encourage you to join them by making your donation, which will allow us to record future stories. Students, teachers, and librarians are using this website for research and the general public is listening every day to these great Oklahomans share their life experience. Thank you for your support as we preserve Oklahoma's legacy one voice at a time, on VoicesofOklahoma.com.