



The University of Florida and  
the College of Liberal Arts and  
Sciences presents the Honorary  
Doctor of Public Service Degree to

*Dr. Samuel Proctor*

---

Thursday, July 22, 2004

4:00 pm

Keene Faculty Center, Dauer Hall

University of Florida



## Neil Sullivan

Good afternoon! I am Neil Sullivan, dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and I would like to welcome everyone here today for this very special occasion as we honor a very distinguished individual, Dr. Samuel Proctor. We are thrilled that so many of you could join us. Many members of Sam's family are here, including his wife Bessie and his sons Mark and Alan and their families, as well as colleagues, former students, and faculty and staff from around the university, and many of you who have known Sam for a long time. Sam and Bessie are two of the truest Gators who

have worked so hard to support the University of Florida and make it into what it is today, one of the best.

We have asked several individuals who have known Sam as a colleague, mentor, friend, and historian to speak about him today. One of Sam's greatest accomplishments was creating the Oral History Program at UF in 1967. The program has been renamed in his honor, and at this time, I would like to ask Julian Pleasants, director of the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program to come and say a few words. Julian....

## Julian Pleasants

I am delighted to be present at the awarding of this much-deserved and long-awaited honorary degree.

All of us are thrilled to see Sam in good health, and sassy again, after such a long period of ill health.

I am here to extol Proctor's contributions to the university, in particular, his founding the Oral History Program. Sam began the program when oral history was in its infancy. He had very little money, a staff of three, and was teaching full-time and editing *The Florida Historical Quarterly*. He managed to get some key grants and then develop the program to one of the best in the country.

Today the Oral History Program has 4,000 interviews and 100,000 transcribed pages, making it one of the largest and best in the country. We are currently in the process of digitizing the entire collection, making it instantly available for researchers. We are currently publishing books based on the collection and plan to continue that process. This vast array of valuable interviews with native Floridians would not have

been possible without the vision and hard work of Sam Proctor.

We were able, appropriately, to have the program named for Sam. Immediately after this was accomplished, I answered the phone and said, "Oral History Program." A voice said, "What?" I replied, "Proctor Oral History Program." They called again and said, "What?" more insistently. By this time I had recognized Sam's voice. So I said, "Samuel Proctor Oral History Program." Sam said, "That is correct. Good Morning."

Since he had so much to do with the Oral History Program, I thought it would be appropriate to read from his own oral history.

Sam, thanks for all you have done.

Now, Roberta Peacock, the office manager of the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program will come and read a poem she has written. Roberta...

## Roberta Peacock

---

Dr. Samuel Proctor  
Mr. Florida History  
Congratulations on your  
Honorary Doctor of Public Service Degree

A richly deserved Recognition  
For such a "Landmark" person!  
You've been at UF since you  
Were a child—  
41' a BA, 42' MA, and then in 58' a PhD!

Lecturer, consultant, expert witness,  
Interviewer, director, professor and, of course,  
Always a Great Gator!

Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus,  
One of Florida's Famous Fifty...  
Colleague, mentor,  
Sweet, kind and wonderful Friend!

A beautiful wife,  
A special asset indeed.  
2 "boys" with wives and granddaughters  
You've watch them grow up,  
Spoiled them a little...  
And love them all so much!

You are not the only lucky one  
For the many lives you've touched  
Throughout the years  
You've made each of us  
Richer, fuller, and robust.

Thanks so much, Dr. Proctor,  
For all you've done...  
So many accomplishments  
So much more to do...  
We love you very much!

## Neil Sullivan

---

Thank you Roberta.

Now, Ralph Lowenstein, dean emeritus of the College of  
Journalism and Communications and a friend of Sam's for  
almost 30 years will offer a few remarks. Ralph...

Sam Proctor, whom we honor this afternoon, is a contradiction to all the advice that we give to graduate students. "Don't get your graduate degrees at the same place where you received your undergraduate degree," we tell our students.

Sam is the exception that proves the rule. He not only earned three degrees at the University of Florida, but today he becomes the only person with three degrees to receive a fourth in the form of an honorary degree. He spent 55 years as a student or faculty member on this campus.

He was parochial to a fault. He wrote his doctoral dissertation on the history of the University of Florida, he became an expert on Florida history, he was the editor of the Florida Historical Quarterly for 30 years, and knew so much about the University of Florida that he was named "university historian."

I have figured out that even including his four years in the military and the cruises that Sam and Bessie took so often in their years just before and after retirement, Sam has spent 94 percent of his entire life no farther than 80 miles from his birthplace in Jacksonville, Florida.

He worked with eight of the ten presidents of the University of Florida. He became the embodiment of the University of Florida for generations of students now spread throughout this state and the other 49.

At the turn of the century four years ago, a major Florida newspaper compiled a roster of the 50 most important Floridians of the Twentieth Century. Sam Proctor was the only professor in the state who made the list.

Sam is probably the only professor in any state who single-handedly added 53 years to the age of his alma mater, shoving back the history from 1906 to 1853. Of course, indirectly, he also added 54 years to the age of FSU. I

don't see anyone here from FSU here today to thank him. Nor would they be welcome by the Proctor family, which has counted at least one Proctor enrolled at UF continuously since 1929. It's not that the Proctors are slow learners—there are just a lot of them.

I have always referred to Sam, much to his displeasure, as an adjunct professor of journalism, since hundreds of our students over the years have awakened him in the middle of the night to ask him questions about campus and Gainesville history. Professional reporters throughout Florida do the same when they need historical information about the university and the state itself. They Proctorize rather than Google-ize.

There is only one bit of history that Sam has never been able to answer, to my knowledge. For whom was Lake Alice named? Was it an early explorer who named a hidden pond for his aging mother? Was it a love-sick student almost a hundred years ago who pined for a sweetheart in Tallahassee? Sam has a lot of good years left, and I hope he will find the answer to that important question.

I once spoke for 20 minutes at a dinner in Sam's honor, and could not enumerate completely in that time all the things he has *done* for the University of Florida. But in just a few minutes this afternoon I can tell you what Sam Proctor has *meant* for the University of Florida. Stand at any spot on this campus, and you will see a building that he has helped preserve. Anderson, Flint, Leigh, Floyd, Peabody, Walker, Buckman, Thomas, Women's Gym, Rolfs—all of these would not grace our lovely campus today were it not for Sam, Blair Reeves, Roy Hunt—and the administrators who heard their plea to save these wonderful old buildings from the wrecking ball. Read the brass plaques scattered throughout the campus that recount the history of these and other buildings. All but one was written by Sam.

In the best of times, Sam was not a tall man. But we all

## Ralph Lowenstein, continued

---

stand in his shadow today, and for generations to come students who make their academic homes on this campus will enjoy the benefits of the institutions that he either founded or played a significant part in building—the oral history project, Hillel, the Center for Jewish Studies, the

Library of Judaica, the archive of Floridians that packs the shelves in Special Collections at the Library.

Who was Alice? Nobody knows. Who is Sam Proctor? Everybody knows.

## Neil Sullivan

---

Thank you, Ralph.

At this time, I'd like to call upon Bob Bryan, UF's former provost and president, to say a few words. Bob came to UF in 1957 and has known Sam since that time. Bob....

## Bob Bryan

---

Sam is the only faculty member in the long history of the University of Florida to hold simultaneously five offices in five different locations across this campus. When University College was abolished in 1978, he clung to his office in Little Hall; he maintained through thick and thin his office in Peabody Hall where the Department of History was located; he appropriated an office in Library East where Florida history materials are located; he was given two rooms in Dickinson Hall so that he would have a headquarters for his splendid Oral History project and for the editorship of the Florida Historical Quarterly; and I am told that IFAS gave him an office in one of its many buildings in the south part of the campus because he said he needed a hideaway office where he could work without interruption.

When I was vice president for academic affairs I used to try to call him when I needed advice on a particularly difficult problem, but I could never contact him; he was always on his way to another office. Eventually word would reach him that I needed help, and he would call

me and give me excellent advice, but he would never tell me which office he was calling from.

But, seriously, his far-flung real estate holdings on the campus are but a metaphor of what Sam has meant to this University. His influence is everywhere to be seen: the shape and scope of the Library; the truly impressive holdings of Florida's historical documents; the voluminous files containing the oral interviews of literally hundreds of Florida citizens, from elected officials through scores of university figures to virtually every important businessman, rancher, and developer in the State; the biannual Alumni Professorship awarded by the University's Foundation—he was responsible for that; the depth and strength of the History Department; and the thousands of students, now alumni living and working in every part of the world, who remember him as the best professor or one of the best professors they ever had at the University. His record of achievement is magnificent.

It is not hyperbole to assert that Sam Proctor has given

## Bob Bryan, continued

---

his life to the University of Florida; in a sense he is the University. He was graduated from here with a baccalaureate degree, later earned a master's and a doctorate from here and became one of its best known and best loved professors. He has helped raise literally millions of dollars for the University Foundation. True, he was a professor and scholar for the University, but he was also a fund-raiser, and an unofficial lobbyist who advanced the University's cause not only to state representatives and state senators but also to governors like Collins, Askew, and Graham. Indeed, he is to this day Senator Graham's favorite University of Florida professor. In his travels around the world—is there a place on this globe that Sam has not visited?—he has spread word about the University in a convincing and engaging manner.

I remember, for instance, the time Kay and I traveled with Bessie and him on an alumni-sponsored cruise up the Danube from Budapest to Regensburg. When the cruise began, two people, Kay and I, knew Sam and Bessie. By the end of the cruise, all the passengers on that ship not only knew and loved Sam and Bessie, but their knowledge of and appreciation for the University of Florida had been expanded and deepened by his lectures, his mealtime stories, his fascinating recollections, and unforgettable anecdotes. In short, he brought the University along with him on that cruise, and when it ended, all the Gators on that ship were twice as committed to the University as they had been when they boarded.

I can think of no person more deserving of an honorary doctorate from his alma mater than Sam Proctor.

**Neil Sullivan**

---

Thank you Bob.

Another name at UF that is synonymous with Florida history is Michael Gannon, a distinguished service professor emeritus of history. Mike has known Sam since he came to UF in the early 1960s, and the two have worked together on numerous projects. Mike...

## Mike Gannon

---

Good afternoon, Sam, Bessie, Mark, Alan and other members of your family, Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen. Samuel Proctor's name should be spoken in the same breath with the names of other distinguished scholars who advanced the craft and expanded the field of Florida history during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. George Rainsport Fairbanks, Thomas Buckingham Smith, Woodbury Lowry, Philip Keyes Young and his son Julian C. Young, James Alexander Robertson and Rembert W. Patrick. Just as deserving of a place on that roster is today's honoree: author, classroom teacher, dissertation director, conference organizer, lecturer, facsimile series editor, oral history pioneer and editor in chief from 1963–1993 of the *Florida Historical Quarterly*.

Like his intellectual forbears, Sam elevated the position of Florida historical research and writing to a new level of scholarly respectability, where it confounded those more precious of his colleagues who were who given to denigrating state and regional studies as a lesser form of history.

One of his greatest impacts on the field has been as patron and inspirational leader. "Igniter," as he likes to say. Who among us who raised pens or touched keyboards in service to history has not known his guidance, his encouragement, his persuasion, perhaps even his goading? For this, he has been thanked in innumerable book acknowledgements and in the 20-odd dissertations and theses that he directed. Not to mention in the voluminous correspondence he has received from scores of authors he brought to print in the *Quarterly* over a 30-year span. How many of us were saved from an error of fact, a typo, or an infelicitous expression by his judicial pencil? Ave, Proctor, we who were about to err, salute you.

Sam wrote a seminal, book-length study of former governor Napoleon Bonaparte Brown which has recently been reprinted and a now-classic pictorial history of his alma mater, for which, as has been pointed out, he serves as official historian. His book reviews and introductions to 25 facsimile book editions form an impressive body of work. And no listing of his accomplishments should omit his classroom teaching, beginning in 1949. First, the teaching of Florida history, and then beginning in 1971, the teaching of the history of the South.

Along with Professor Terry McCoy, director of the Center for Latin American Studies, I was privileged to serve with Sam in the founding and direction of the Spain-Florida Alliance, which from 1979–1992 made possible each year both the exchange of faculty members and graduate students with major universities in Spain and academic conferences that alternated between Gainesville and cities in Spain. With his sterling intellect, his boundless energy and his irrepressible good humor, Sam made an impression in Spain that an official ambassador would envy.

It is not only his professional accomplishments, but also his fine personal qualities that make Sam a valued friend to one and all. For his gentlemanly manner, his generous spirit, his concern for others, his kindly wit, and his wisdom and, may I say, his luck in winning the hand of Bessie as his spouse, we pay him honor and heartfelt thanks.

There are not words enough to describe adequately Bessie's faithfulness, courage and graciousness. Truthfully, Bessie has been Sam's rock and his staff. Sam, this honorary degree is for you, the next one is for Bessie.



Thank you Mike. At this time, I'd like to ask Provost and Professor of History David Colburn to offer a few remarks. David has known Sam since he came to UF in 1972. David...

---

David Colburn

I go back a long ways with Sam Proctor, not as long as some, but a pretty good distance.

Sam was a senior member of the faculty in the Department of Social Sciences when I joined it in the fall of 1972. I recall walking into the departmental office on my first morning and meeting Sam. "I'm Sam Proctor," he said with a smile on his face. "You must be David Colburn." I felt at home.

For much of my early career and for those careers of my junior colleagues, Sam was a senior mentor. He would always want to know, "what was I working on and would I write something for the Florida Historical Quarterly." But more than that, Sam simply by the way he conducted himself was a mentor. He was incredibly hardworking, incredibly considerate of students, fully engaged in the department and very active in our profession. Albert Schweitzer said: "Example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing." Schweitzer must have known Sam because Sam was precisely what a junior faculty member needed to see in a senior colleague.

Sam was and is also an incredibly warm and caring friend. Sam pushed me to be a candidate for chairman of the History Department. When I became chair, he did not ask for any favors. In fact, he could be a tough friend, reminding me about some failings of the department and wanting to know what I was doing about these matters. But he was also incredibly supportive as we sought to move the department among the best in the nation.

Along the way, we had many good experiences. I would raze him about his five offices, which he assured me he needed

and used. He would remind me that I was not consulting him enough and thus making some unwise decisions. And we would chuckle together about what to do with the treasure of the Spanish galleon Atocha, including coins, silver and gold bars that were given to us by an alumnus.

My major problem as an administrator in dealing with Sam was that he remembered everything. That can really create havoc for an administrator—because we always speak with authority and truth. I am sure you can imagine how unnerving it is to have someone correct your version of the truth.

But this is not a retirement party for Sam. I think we had four of those, didn't we?

It is Sam Proctor as a scholar, editor, mentor of graduate students and dean of Florida history for which we recognize him with this honorary degree today. Helen Keller remarked that "Knowledge is power. Rather, knowledge is happiness. To have knowledge, deep broad knowledge, is to know truth from false and lofty things from low. To know the thoughts and deeds that have marked men's progress, is to feel the heartthrob of humanity through the centuries; and if one does not feel these pulsations, one must indeed be deaf to the harmonies of life." Sam has never been deaf to such pulsations or to the harmonies of life. Moreover, he has encouraged us—colleagues, students and friends—by his example to join him in embracing the good life of ideas and knowledge.

So Dr. Dr. Proctor, your alma mater, your friends, students and colleagues are pleased to recognize the magnitude of your contributions and say well done indeed.

## Neil Sullivan

---

Thank you David, and thank all of you again for sharing your insightful, touching and humorous stories about Sam.

One of Sam's former students, U.S. Senator Bob Graham, could not be here today, but he sends his best wishes to Sam and the Proctor family. Senator Graham has sent a video message about his recollections of Sam that we will play now.

Senator Graham was a student at UF in the late 1950s and earned his bachelor's degree in political science in 1959.

This brings us to the moment we have been waiting for in our ceremony. Other than the earned doctorate, the greatest recognition this university can give to any individual is an honorary degree. Such degrees are not given lightly, and relatively few are awarded. Upon the recommendation of the

Committee on Honorary Degrees and with the approval of the University Faculty Senate, University President J. Bernard Machen, and the UF Board of Trustees, this university will confer an honorary degree upon a truly distinguished individual: Samuel Proctor.

I would like to ask UF President Bernie Machen to come forward for the presentation of the honorary degree.

President Machen, as you have heard today, Samuel Proctor is a legend at the University of Florida and throughout the state. We are indebted to him for his numerous contributions to so many organizations during his past 67 years on campus. There are few others who have dedicated themselves to preserving the history of this university and promoting its excellence to others.

## Bernie Machen

---

Samuel Proctor—historian, researcher, educator—your leadership has provided sustained achievements of lasting significance and value at the state, national, and international levels. You have enhanced the quality of life for many groups of people here at the University of Florida and around the world.

Sam, you are a fine example of the very best a person could possibly offer as a UF alumnus, professor, mentor and colleague. In recognition of your distinguished service, dedication and success, and in acknowledgment of the honor and

support you have brought to the University of Florida—your alma mater—we are pleased to present this honorary degree to you. We commend you for your dedication, achievements and leadership and take great pride in recognizing you for your influence and accomplishments.

By the authority vested in me by University of Florida Board of Trustees, I hereby confer upon you the degree, Doctor of Public Service, honoris causa, together with all the rights, privileges and emoluments thereto appertaining.

## Neil Sullivan

Congratulations Dr. Proctor! We are pleased to have you on campus today and to recognize your numerous accomplishments. I would also like to recognize members of Dr. Proctor's family who are here today, especially his wife Bessie who has been one of the most dedicated faculty wives in the history of this university.

In addition to keeping Sam in line for the past 56 years of their marriage, she has been involved with numerous organizations on campus and in the community, including working for more than 50 years with the Alpha Epsilon Phi sorority on campus and serving as a dedicated member of the University Women's Club. She has welcomed alumni and friends of the university into her home on numerous occa-

sions and supported the UF and Gainesville communities in countless ways.

So Bessie, for all your dedication through the years, we would like to present you with this token of our appreciation because we know you mean so much to Sam and all of us here today.

Other members of the Proctor family who are here today include Sam Proctor's brother Sol, and his family, and Sam's sons, Mark and Alan, and their wives, Mary Frances and Susan and their two granddaughters, Madison and Rebecca. At this time, Mark and Alan would each like to thank everyone on behalf of the family. Alan, Mark...

## Alan Proctor

I am honored to be speaking today as my father receives such an esteemed designation as honorary doctor of public service. He truly has served the public as an educator, historian, and fundraiser for the university.

As an educator, he has influenced many students at the University of Florida by not only teaching them but acting as a mentor in assisting them in making important life choices. He has helped many students get into specialty schools of their choice, including TEP fraternity brothers, where he has served as an advisor since 1949. He has also helped colleagues pursue their careers by helping them get jobs. His enthusiasm for history and life, in general, has been contagious and inspired many that he has taught. His knowledge has benefited others by way of his writings as well as speeches.

As a historian, he has served the state of Florida and the country as a pioneer in the field of oral history. He has interviewed or coordinated the interviews of thousands of people whose important stories would have been lost but are now preserved. He has helped save many historical buildings

and landmarks that might have been torn down or left unnoticed. My dad has also helped to revive many historical books and documents through the Facsimile Series of which he was the editor. He has promoted the writing of books and articles through his dedicated efforts when he was editor of the Florida Historical Quarterly. He has also been called upon by government officials and business and legal professionals for his advice and wisdom on many occasions.

As a fundraiser, my father has succeeded in personally working with the Foundation, alumni, as well as other influential people in the state to help bring millions of dollars that have benefited the university. Sam Proctor is a hard person to say "no" to! He was also influential in helping to raise the money to start the Center for Jewish Studies.

Not only has my father served the public, he is also an outstanding husband, father and grandfather. My brother and I know that our parents have always given us valuable advice. Our parents are always there to encourage and be optimistic about life and all of its challenges. They have given us the

## Alan Proctor, continued

---

desire to live life to its fullest and see as much of the world as we can.

Literally everywhere I have traveled in the United States, particularly the Southeast, I have met people who know and respect my father. Typically when people find out that I am "the son f Sam," a smile appears on their face with a twinkle in their eyes. They can relate stories about how my dad made a difference to them.

The secret to my father's success is very simple. He loves his life and learning. He loves his family and his friends. He loves his work at the University of Florida. He loves people. In return, he is very much loved and respected and appreciates that he has gotten back more than he has given.

I thank all of you very much on behalf of my father. Dad, we are all very proud of you.

My brother Alan and I come from a wonderfully close family, and we owe much of our success and happiness to our parents, Sam and Bessie. They have taught us the difference between right and wrong, the importance of family and community, a love for and an appreciation of learning and education, and an understanding that using one's talents and resources to make a difference in life is important. Both of us have attempted to apply their wisdom in our own lives as we have built our families, made our friends, and advanced our careers.

My parents have taught Alan and me that reaching out to people and endeavoring to help and make a difference in people's lives is noble and important. As I look around this room, I see individuals whose lives have been forever touched by Mom and Dad. I see family members and close friends who have become, over the years, part of our expanded family. We have many things in common, but one important common denominator is that all of our lives have been touched and molded in some way by Sam and Bessie Proctor.

The life of the Proctor family has been intertwined with the University of Florida for over 60 years. Since Dad arrived at the University as a student in 1937, he has been continuously involved in the affairs of this University as a professor, university historian, fundraiser, and active participant in the oral history program until he became ill last year. In addition, at most times since 1937, a Proctor has been a student at some college on this great campus. In truth, you simply cannot think about the Proctor family without recognizing

its ties and kinship to the University of Florida. We are proud Gators, and we carry the heritage of this great institution wherever we go.

I want to thank all of you for today. To President Machen, President Bryan, Dr. Colburn, and Dean Sullivan, on behalf of my entire family, we thank you and the University of Florida for this great honor. To Dr. Colburn, a special thank you. This day would not have been possible without you. To Dr. Lowenstein, Dr. Gannon, and Dr. Pleasants, you are dear friends and colleagues, and I want to thank you for participating in this ceremony today and for your kind words. To Senator Graham, thank you for your friendship, for your support, and for participating in the longest running oral history interview in the history of the oral history program. To Roberta Peacock, Dad's trusted assistant for the last 20 years, we thank you for everything: your love, dedication, and expertise.

To all of you, our family and our friends, on behalf of Mom and Dad, thank you for everything. Thank you for your friendship, thank you for your support in both wonderful and difficult times; and thank you for your prayers and well wishes during the last year of Dad's illness. I want you to know how much you mean to us and how proud we are of all of you.

This is a great occasion. This is a great University. Let us pledge to be together on other happy occasions.

Thank you very much.

## Neil Sullivan

---

Thank you both for being here today and speaking. Your father means a lot to this campus, and we're so glad you and your families could share this special event with all of us.

And we're pleased so many of Sam's friends and colleagues could join us today. It has been an extraordinary event for everyone involved. We often do not have the time to share with others what they have meant to us over the years, and

there are very few individuals like Sam Proctor out there, so it has been my pleasure to be involved with this honorary degree presentation.

At this time, we'd like to invite all of you to join us for a reception and share your congratulations with the Proctor family. Thank you for attending.



UF President Bernie Machen presents Samuel Proctor with an honorary degree of public service diploma.



PO Box 117300  
Gainesville FL 32611-7300