

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

THE GREAT FIRE OF NEW BERN OF 1922

SPECIAL PROGRAM

This is Dr. Joseph Patterson for the Memories of New Bern Committee.

The date is October the 14th, 1992, the place is the New Bern Craven County Public Library at 400 Johnson Street in New Bern. My number is 1000. This is a special interview (and you might label it as such).

This is a recording of a program concerning the Great New Bern Fire of 1922. It is a program put on by the Memories of New Bern Committee.

This is the fourth and final presentation. It has played to full houses every night in the auditorium at the library, and the audience consist each time of 180 people. (Interruption) ....is gonna be Dr. Simeon Adams, who is the President of the New Bern Historical Society.

#### The Great Fire of New Bern of 1922

DR. ADAMS: Good evening. On behalf of the New Bern Historical Association I'd like to welcome each of you to this the fourth presentation of the Great Fire of New Bern of 1922. We're holding this meeting in this auditorium through the generosity of the New Bern Public Library. At this time I'd like to recognize Mr. Wayne Modlin who is the new director of the New Bern Library.

MR. MODLIN: On behalf of the library, we want to say a great big welcome and we're just so pleased to have so many of you all here tonight for this the last presentation of the Great Fire of New Bern.

DR. ADAMS: This presentation is made possible through Dr. Joe Patterson's committee on Memories of New Bern, and at this time I turn the program over to Dr. Patterson

DR. PATTERSON: Thank you Dr. Adams and Mr. Modlin. The New Bern Memories Committee is happy to welcome you here tonight. With that play-off baseball game going on, I know it took a lot of doings for some of you to get here, (laughter in audience), and for us too. But I'll bet that you'll remember this Program a lot longer than you'll remember that baseball game. The New Bern fire of 1922 was a tremendous thing in the history of our town, and those of us who were old enough to remember anything in those days, and I say it's around four or five years of age, remember it as a great event in our lives. We've been through hurricanes in New Bern, but I think that we would say the Great Fire of New Bern is the thing that we remember most. I was five years old at the time of the fire and I lived on New Street, almost on East Front Street, one house away. That was a long way from the fire which was on the other side of where Kafer - the fire was where Kafer Park and Cedar Grove extension, cemetery, are now, but I could see the glow of the fire in the sky and I remember that. My brother who is three years older than I am remembers that sparks and flaming debris were falling in our yard and around our house. Well, my father thought that we should leave home because our house was surely going to burn. He was a physician, and he came home and we loaded two things in the car with us. We loaded the silver service and some bottles of Ginger Ale, (laughter in audience), and left home. In those days behind the driver on the backseat of the car was a compartment with a lid on the top which would raise up the way you could put luggage and store things, and

I'm sure some of you remember that. We put the silver service in there. But before we had gone very far, I was so afraid that I took the silver service out and I got in there and I pulled the lid down over my head! (Laughter in audience) We didn't go far. My father realized that as a physician he was needed and so we went back home, and our house did not burn. We're proud of this Program. This is our fourth and final presentation. We just can't do it anymore. We don't have the time. It's been fun putting it on and the public has certainly responded, and we're happy that it has been such a welcome program in town. Mary Barden is the one who deserves the most credit for this. This is a part of our Memories of New Bern Program, but Mary has been in charge of this Program. She has researched the fire, made numerous visits to Greenville to look up things in the library over there; and Fred Latham has handled the photography and the slides, and many other people have been involved, but Mary deserves the credit and I want everybody to know this. I would call your attention to a display on the wall outside concerning the fire which Fred put together. Very, very good. Before starting the program, let me just tell you a little bit about the Memories of New Bern Program and what it is all about. Almost two and a half years ago, six of us, all New Bern people, realized that if we were ever going to preserve the history of this town as we knew it and the wonderful place that we grew up in, then we'd better get busy because we were losing folks all the time and their memories were gone. So we decided to start a program, audio taping the older people in town and recording their

memories on tape. We had trouble figuring out exactly how to do this, but with the help of experts who came down here and worked with us, we realized that what we wanted more than individual histories of people was a story of New Bern people speaking to the town and how the town lived through the years as far back as we can go; wars, Depression, hurricane, integration, whatever, how did New Bern handle all these things. We divided our approach into nine different areas; schools, downtown New Bern, local economy, the library, medicine, transportation, politics, civil rights, and a big area called townlife which took in everything else and just how it was to live in New Bern.

We appointed Task Forces; a task force in each area, composed of people really knowledgeable in that particular area about that aspect of New Bern story. This group would research that topic. They came up with the names of the people we should interview and formulated basic questions we should ask everybody in addition to personal questions. We were helped in this by the North Carolina Humanities Council in Greensboro. Now the Humanities Council is a state based branch of the National Endowment for the Humanities. This fine organization sent a staff person down here to work with us to develop our plans. We also had help from East Carolina University History Department, Mr. Don Lennon who worked with us. We had help from a humanity scholar at the University in Chapel Hill. All these experts worked with us to develop this concept, but the Humanities Council gave us financial support. They gave us a Planning Grant to plan the program and then a Major Funding Grant to run the program. Without

that help we couldn't have managed. The Humanities Council funds public programs in the humanities throughout the state. The Kellenberger Foundation came to our aid and gave us two grants; we bought fine equipment for recording, and this helped pay a lot of our other expenses. We had three training sessions in how to conduct interviews. There are about fifty people in New Bern involved in this Program now in some way or other, and a core group of us are doing most of the interviews. We have interviewed over seventy people, and that is a mammoth amount of work for an Oral History Program. We hope to do a hundred interviews and perhaps more. We're well on our way, and we're at our busiest right now. The interviews are being sent off to be typed, transcripts are being made. These come back to us, we take them to the interviewee who corrects them, we correct them, then we run them off again from computer disc, and finally print them on permanent paper. All of this material will be turned over to the library, this library, so that in the future there will be a wealth of material available for historians to work with or just for citizens to deal with and listen to. We hope to have an index system set up so that if someone wants to do a paper or do a story or a program on politics in New Bern in the era we're talking about, they can look that topic up in our files and be directed to the interviews where this topic was discussed, and people will speak to this from the tapes and the written word will be there in the transcripts. It's a busy program. We had no idea it was going to be this large. We're glad we did it. We hope that in the future

other groups will take this up periodically; maybe at ten year intervals or fifteen year intervals or whatever, but we hope this will be the start of something that will be continuous in this way.

I'd like to pay credit to Marea Kafer Foster, who is our Program Coordinator, for the great work she's done in coordinating all of this material and directing the use of the equipment. Without her dedication, it would have been most difficult to have succeeded. Ahead lies a program in April, our next public program. And April is the end of our data gathering. We will have a public forum, and the public of course will be invited to hear a review of what we've done, the significance of it will be discussed by outside historians, we will have some workshops. We are video taping the program tonight and last night. We hope to have a fine film out of this available to many different groups. We are talking about making a booklet out of this program. We have so much great material to use that it seems logical to make a booklet just about the Great Fire of New Bern. Every month, Sounds Magazine, which is put out by Digital Arts downtown, it's a free magazine, it's a fine magazine, runs a story of excerpts from one of the interviews we've done, and if you haven't noticed this, these magazines are available all over town. It's fun to read these. We think it very appropriate that in November and December the stories will come from the interview with Mr. O.T. Faison who was the administrator of Good Shepherd Hospital, which was a hospital for the black community. The Great Fire of New Bern showed how much the black community needed better medical care, and out of

that came Good Shepherd Hospital, and Mary will tell you more about that. Mr. Faison was the administrator and he has given us a wonderful story of how Good Shepherd Hospital evolved, and he carries it through until it's closure. So that will be the part that will be in the next two issues of Sounds. Our plan is, that after this particular phase of the program is over, and that will be April as I said, we will write a book about this whole Program. We will have a book about the history of New Bern, how New Bern handled itself during this time.

We do not intend for this to be a book written in narrative form like most history books, but we intend for the people of New Bern to speak to the topics to show how individuals lived through the times and how they visualize the progress of New Bern. I've said all I need to say, and Mary probably thinks I've said more than that. (Laughter) I'd like to introduce Mary Barden who will now present the program. (Applause)

MARY BARDEN: Short people needs stools. Thank you very much, and I'm so glad so many of you could come. While we have the lights on I'd like to introduce some folks that will be speaking tonight.

Last night you couldn't see them because we had already cut the lights out for our slides. As it turned out, all of us that have worked on this program were really involved with the Great Fire. Joe Pat's father was the doctor that was in charge of all the sanitation. Fred Latham's father was a doctor and he was in charge of the emergency hospital that was placed at St. Cyprian's. When the fire took place, he left home and his wife never heard from him for thirty-six hours.



Marea's grandfather was running a bakery, and that was very important because all these poor people had to be fed. And my father was the photographer that took the pictures, many of which you'll see tonight.

We have Mrs. Dorothy Bryan whose husband was - she's one of our committee, and Dorothy stand up. Her husband was in the very first - he was at the place where the fire started and you'll hear about him. Then we have Miss Dorcas E. Carter. She is a retired school teacher and she lived through the fire, and you'll be fascinated with her memory - Miss Dorcas. We have another fire member who - two more; Theresa Howard, and believe it or not this lady is ninety-one years old and she certainly doesn't look like it! (Applause), and we have Mrs. Frances Hatch Jones and here she is, and her memory will certainly interest you all. (Applause) So we thought we'd get right to work and show you these pictures, because this is the biggest fire that ever took place in North Carolina, and it was a honey! Fred. (If you'll cut the lights down - whoever.) These headlines were all over North Carolina and the newspapers were a wonderful source of what happened. Okay. Now this is a map that shows you the fire. (It might help if I turned around.) This is Johnson Street, and here you are at the library, right here. You see, this puts the train station - this is the train station, the fire burned up to it, and the only reason it didn't burn is people worked hard and put the roof fires out. It jumped all the way over and went to the Neuse River. This is North Craven Street now, it was called Griffin Street in those days. The fire started up here and then spread rapidly because

of the wind and took in all this area. Right here is where St. Peter's AME Zion Church is and it burned. And this is the cemetery. The flames just whipped up into the top of the trees and then flipped over here. So it was a big area. (Okay, Fred.) How's this for a hose wagon? Now we did have a truck. It was a 1914 LaFrance pumper.

We don't have a slide but there's a picture of it outside as you can see the real fire engine in our firemen's museum. Okay. This is the fire in progress. (Can you get the focus a little better? Thank you.) Okay. During the course of the fire, they had to dynamite some houses hoping to have a firebreak. I believe the next picture shows the fire. See up here, this is where they were dynamiting on Queen Street and Metcalf. Okay. Another one. This picture was taken from the top of the Elks Temple about four o'clock in the afternoon.

It's looking north, and of course you can identify the First Presbyterian Church. This is the old Pepsi Cola building I believe, and the fire was raging all behind here. They were very frightened that it would burn down into the middle of town. This is also from the top of the Elks Temple, and this is the old Kafer Hospital or the Jones House. It's looking more towards the west, but the flames were getting mighty close. Okay. These are the smoldering ruins.

Okay. It was just a sea of chimneys. As you can see, the devastation was almost total. This is called the old Stewart Sanitarium and it stood on George Street. This is St. Peter's AME Zion Church that's right up on the corner of Johnson and Queen and this church burned completely. Another view of it. It was the finest black church in

town and they also had a wonderful organ that they just bought for three thousand dollars. No other church in town had one like that.

And then when they had to rebuild it, the black folks literally built it brick by brick. I remember sometimes the vegetable women would say if they sold you vegetables, "Give me a quarter for my church."

They really worked hard, and it was finished and used I believe for the first time Easter 1940. Okay. Here's your train station. All this rubble in front is what were the houses on North - on Pasteur Street, not North Pasteur, just across. You see here, it was mighty lucky it didn't burn all the way down. Okay. Now this picture we found is of George Street. It was actually made by my father in 1912.

Now all these nice homes you see here were homes that were lived in by the black people most of whom owned their own homes. It was a tree-shaded street. Over here is the cemetery. Now see these great big trees? When you look down George Street today, most of the trees that were on this side of the cemetery, the cedar trees anyway, are gone. They were all burned. Okay. This is what it looked like after the fire. The same view today. We have the extension of the cemetery.

(Go ahead Fred.) On down is the Recreation Center, used to be, now I think it's the Senior Citizen Center. And this was built of the cleaned off bricks from all those chimneys. And the sidewalk here, if you walk down by the cemetery on this side it's actually still buckled, and the heat from that fire made that buckle and the city just hadn't gotten around to straightening it up. (Laughter in audience.) This is the same map. I thought maybe now that you've

seen all this destruction you'd like to see it again. It burned over forty blocks and left 3,200 people homeless. Okay.

Mary Barden telling of the Great New Bern Fire

It's hard to imagine the scope of the tragedy that befell the city of New Bern that day in 1922 when the town was ravaged by the worst fire ever to occur in North Carolina. Before the day was over, 3,200 people were homeless, a thousand buildings were destroyed and hundreds of jobs were lost and an area of forty blocks was totally destroyed. Losses were estimated at two and a half million dollars and about a third of this was covered by insurance. The town was just stunned by the magnitude of this disaster.

The morning of Friday, December 1, the day after Thanksgiving, dawned cold and overcast with the wind blowing a gale. At eight o'clock the fire department was called to the Rowland Lumber Company mill on the outskirts of town. Every piece of fire fighting equipment and every man was sent to fight the blaze which swept through the huge sawmill, the largest sawmill in North Carolina. With the wind gusting up to 45 miles an hour, and I've heard higher estimates, the firemen were assisted by scores of volunteers. They had a hard battle to control the flames that were sweeping through the piles of dry lumber. Over two million board feet were stored in the yard. This fire itself represented a huge loss for the town for it was New Bern's biggest industry with a weekly payroll of \$25,000. It employed five hundred men in the sawmill and another five hundred in the log woods.

At 10:45 a.m. an alarm was sent in for a fire that had begun

across town in the residence of Kilmarnock Street, which is now in the area of Craven Terrace. There was a delay of about forty-five minutes before they could send a fire truck or any men to fight this second blaze. But the fire truck when it did arrive, it didn't have the proper nozzles. They couldn't connect it to the fire hydrants. They had to send back to get that, so that caused further delay. By the time that this happened, there were three houses that were burning out of control. Now all the houses in this black neighborhood were crowded close together and had wooden shingle roofs. Whipped by the violent winds, sparks and burning debris showered down on the area and houses blocks away burst into flames. In no time at all a major disaster was at hand.

By midday the fire chief, James K. Bryan, realized that more help was needed. Frantic calls for help went out to the neighboring towns. Kinston dispatched a large fire truck and men which drove overland, if you please, by way of Pollocksville on it's own power.

It arrived two hours later at 3:15. Mr. Callie Newman remembered seeing that fire truck when it came rushing up Rhem Avenue. But Washington placed its fire truck on a flatbed rail car and it got here in fifty minutes. Men of the Cutter Pamlico, which was a Coast Guard cutter, under the command of Captain Fisher, had been assisting the New Bern Fire Department in the Rowland Lumber Mill fire and they continued to help all through the day. In fact, every able-bodied man in town came to help.

More young men and volunteer firemen of the town would have been

available, except, that over four hundred people had left at eight, well, before eight that morning, before the fire started, to go to Raleigh to cheer the New Bern High School football team which was playing for the Eastern State Championship. The fans heard about this fire when Raleigh newspaper came out with an "Extra" addition and distributed it around the stadium. Well, the coach was Mr. Graham Barden, who happens to be my father-in-law, and when he heard about the fire he sent someone out and bought every paper that was in the stadium so his team wouldn't hear about it. (Laughter in audience.)

First things first. (Laughter) New Bern won that football game 6-0 when Nicky Simpson caught a long pass from the team captain, Redmond Dill. Those who had driven automobiles to Raleigh left immediately for home. Now I wondered why all these people went on the train. The roads weren't paved between here and Raleigh so they went by train; and also, our New Bern paper listed the name of everyone of the four hundred people that attended. (Laughter in audience.) So you can go look it up to see if your folks were on the train. George Scott remembers that trip home and the nightmare. It began to rain and the unpaved roads were slippity quagmire of red clay. But the folks who rode that train had a long and agonizing trip because they didn't find out until they got to New Bern that the town hadn't burned to the ground.

Meanwhile, the scene here was one of total confusion. Just imagine, there were trucks, handcarts, horse-drawn wagons filled with furniture and possessions. Screaming people were trying to escape

the danger. The fire spread rapidly down to George Street. Now it had started up at Craven Terrace and it swept right down with this big wind to George Street. Many of these people were running ahead of the fire and took all their things into Cedar Grove thinking they'd find refuge, but it didn't work that way. The flames caught in the tops of the trees and made a spectacular leap across the cemetery towards the Union Railroad Station. Dense choking smoke, blowing sparks, and heat so intense that even the railroad tracks were warped, added to the fear that the whole town would be destroyed. Dr. Roy Miller's father was working for Steve Fowler's filling station and he had the dangerous job of supplying the fire trucks with gasoline.

Fire Chief James Bryan decided to use dynamite to level the houses in the path of the inferno and to create a firebreak. Many people had no time to save their furniture or belongings before their houses were blown apart. They could only stand by helplessly and watch. The newspapers reported some freakish occurrences as a result of the explosions. One gentleman was so startled by the noise that he bit his false teeth hard enough to break the plate and swallowed his teeth.

(Laughter in audience.) When one house on George Street was blown up, a white goat was shot twenty-five feet straight up in the air.

(Laughter in audience.) It had landed on its feet and took off!  
(Laughter in audience.)

An officer of the Cutter Pamlico named William Montague barely escaped with his life as he rescued a woman from a house being

dynamited. "I had a woman in my arms, carrying her outside, when I saw three men placing dynamite in the building. I tried to call and tell them I was inside and to wait but they did not hear me. I heard the explosion and that's the last thing I remember for several hours." Both Mr. Montague and the woman were blown outside of the building but neither was seriously hurt, although Mr. Montague was unconscious for several hours.

In addition to the nearly one hundred homes that were dynamited, six houses along Queen Street were pulled down by a large cable that was attached to a Norfolk and Southern steam engine.

Panic and fear gripped the whole town as the day wore on. The streets were filled with automobiles carrying household goods to safety. Just around the corner from where we are right now on Middle Street, Mrs. Claude Foy packed her daughter Agnes' trousseau and placed it in the hall so that it could be moved in a moments notice. Agnes had gone to the football game with her fiance, Graham Barden. People as far away from the fire as East Front Street, seeing sparks and burning branches falling down in their yards, packed their valuables and prepared to move out. Mrs. Laura Hardison remembers that she was living in Bridgeton and sparks were even blown across the river by that wind, all the way to Bridgeton. Dr. Charles Barker recalls that day as his earliest memory. From his front porch on Broad Street he could see houses burning a block away on New Street. His uncle in Trenton sent a truck to move their furniture. A sofa was left in his father's office and little Charlie crawled under it. He was



three years old.

A half a block away the Tabernacle Baptist Church and St. Luke's Hospital were threatened. As a safeguard, patients were moved from St. Luke's and from the New Bern General Hospital, which is just a block up here at the intersection of Middle and Craven, and were moved down to the Episcopal Church Parish house. The St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church became the emergency ward for the black people. It was feared that the business district would be destroyed as the flames approached the best residential district. St. Peter's AME Zion Church, the finest black church in eastern Carolina, caught fire and preparations were made to dynamite houses on Metcalf Street.

All the houses on Pasteur Street facing the train station caught fire. Only heroic efforts saved the station when it began to burn.

Nettie Pinnix Cox was a little girl, and she and her grandmother, Mrs. Watson, hurried up to her father's drug store to rescue the awning that was in place. The Nassef Manufacturing Company was a big overall factory and that was across the street from the train station. It employed a large number of women, and it burned completely as did the Ebenezer Presbyterian Church and Rue Chapel AME Church further down Pasteur Street. The fire leaped over the station and burned a two and a half block area as it raced to the Neuse River. The Norfolk and Southern Railway loading docks were destroyed, but by a miracle nearby oil tanks did not explode. Mr. Sam Dill's tobacco warehouse, a brick building, was burned completely; and his residence, which was at the end of Queen Street near the Neuse River, was gone within

fifteen minutes.

Finally, shortly before dusk, the wind shifted and died down and the fire was brought under control. That's all that saved this town. The fire continued to burn through the night painting the sky with red glow that could be seen for miles around, but the worst was over. When dawn came and the extent of the catastrophe could be seen, the town was stunned. People milling around the ashes, trying to find a few belongings, seemed to be in a state of shock. Newspapers compared the devastation to that of war-torn Verdun. All that was left was a sea of chimneys and a few twisted stoves and bedsteads poking up through the ashes. It was simply beyond comprehension.

With all the danger, the fire was responsible for only one death - that of an aged black woman who was too lame to escape her house.

Mrs. E. W. Brinkley had a narrow escape when she spent the night with her three week old twins in a boxcar on the siding near the burned out mill. She was found Saturday morning cold but safe. Many of the black people spent the night in the cemeteries, Cedar Grove and Evergreen, camped out among the tombstones with whatever they'd been able to save of their possessions. One newsman reported seeing seven pianos carefully wrapped up as protection against the weather.

Ninety percent of the 3,200 people left homeless were black, but about twenty white families also lost their homes. A large number of people saved only the clothes they were wearing. The homeless represented one-fourth of New Bern's population.

Now this town lost no time in trying to help the situation.

By ten o'clock the next morning a brief mass meeting was held at the courthouse, organized by Harry Jacobs the head of the Chamber of Commerce. Fifteen thousand dollars was quickly pledged for the relief of the homeless by the businessmen of the town and more was promised.

A suggestion was made that the town forego giving Christmas presents and give that money to the homeless. Everyone wanted to help. Mr. T. G. Hyman organized a fleet of trucks to help move the furniture and belongings that was scattered everywhere under shelter. By eleven o'clock on Saturday all were safely stored, and this was fortunate because then the rains came to add to the misery. Turner-Tolson Furniture Store was open for the homeless as was the Episcopal Parish house and the Christian Science Church. Meadows Warehouse on South Front Street and West Street School, which by some miracle had escaped the flames, were opened for the black people of town. Mayor pro-tem, John S. Holland, was put in charge of purchasing the food and supplies and Mrs. John D. Whitford was in charge of assigning volunteers to the various committees.

Mrs. Wade Meadows was appointed to oversee the preparation of the food at West Street School. And this was a big job. I mean we had thousands of people to feed two or three meals a day. The Methodist Church provided meals for the white victims and volunteers. And all the various church and civic groups for women pitched in to assist.

Kafer's Bakery made seven hundred loaves of bread by noon and a thousand more by Saturday night. Mrs. R. J. Disosway of the Home Bakery was one of the unsung heroes of the day of the fire. But she

had kept her bakery going in full production without the assistance of her son Willie who was busy fighting the flames. Both bakeries also baked bushels of sweet potatoes in addition to the bread. Swift and Armour Company shipped in a large quantity of ham to be used for sandwiches and the Sterling Mills of Stateville sent a whole carload of flour.

But shelter was the first priority. General Bowley of Fort Bragg responded to a call for help by promptly sending eight freight cars loaded with tents, cots, mattresses, and other needed equipment. No hesitations there. Two officers and fourteen men came to oversee the erection of the tents. The Navy base at Norfolk sent one thousand cots and blankets and hundreds of sweaters. The nearby towns immediately began collecting used clothing and money to help the homeless. Little Cove City got together a whole boxcar full of supplies, and Kinston sent three tons of clothes.

The newly organized local unit of the North Carolina National Guard, Battery D, 113th Field Artillery, consisting of sixty men under the command of Capt. Albert Willis, was called out to prevent looting and to preserve order. Governor of the state, Cameron Morrison, requested that these men serve as civilian guards as the charter of the State Guard restricted its use to putting down riots and insurrections. The Coast Guardsmen of the Cutter Pamlico also helped patrol the town.

Mayor Edward Clark returned to the city and he issued an order that no drunkenness would be tolerated. (Laughter in audience.)

Any man, black or white, found drunk was to be arrested - put in jail.

Bootlegging must have been a very profitable business in this town for the remains of seven stills were found in the rubble, (laughter!) plus, a large amount of whiskey which was stored in an underground hole, and that was exposed when its cover was burned. The Red Cross moved in and was placed in full charge of the relief effort.

Mr. Carter Taylor came from the Atlanta office bringing two assistants and a nurse. He estimated that fifty white families and five hundred black families needed complete furnishings for a minimum of two rooms.

Dr. Joseph Latham was put in charge of an emergency hospital set up at St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church. And Dr. R. S. Primrose and Dr. J. F. Patterson headed the local Sanitary Corps and won the praise of the State for their speed in which they began operations. Warnings had to be issued about boiling drinking water. It was almost a week before it was declared safe. The water had been contaminated because they had to use the water mains for the river water to fight the fire.

On Sunday, after the fire on Friday, over ten thousand sightseers came to view the ruins. They created a tremendous traffic jam and ate every morsel of food in all the restaurants. But, they also pitched in. Many of them pitched in to help and many brought food and clothing and contributions for the fire victims.

As word of the enormity of the need spread, the town was just overcome with offers of help. Neighboring towns organized committees to see to their relief efforts. Tons of used clothing shipped in.

The Pugh Grocery Store next to the Gaston Hotel became the clothing

distribution center.

Every cash contribution, large or small, was recorded in our paper The New Bernian. The Wilmington Klu Klux Klan sent us \$25.00 (laughter in audience) plus a note of sympathy for the town. Surprisingly enough, the largest single contribution made through the Raleigh Relief Fund for the New Bern fire victims was \$800.00, which was sent by the Robeson County Klu Klux Klan. Mr. Ottis Chamberlaine, a member of the 23rd Massachusetts Regiment, which had been stationed here during the war (Civil War), sent us a note of sympathy and a poem. (Laughter in audience.) The paper noted that every town and city in the state sent telegrams or letters of condolence and most sent other help as well. The Varsity Football Team of Shelby was to be given monogrammed sweaters by the Kiwanis Club. They voted to send that hundred dollars to New Bern to help. The response was both heartwarming and overwhelming. Even President Harding sent a message of sympathy for the town to Mayor Clark.

Finally, on December the 17th, the mayor requested no more help. But fire or no fire, life must go on. New Bern was no exception. Two babies were born the night following the fire to parents who had lost their homes. Archie Watson Edwards, son of Mr. and Mrs. Archie Edwards, arrived at 1:30 a.m. on December the 2nd, and I think he was delivered in a boxcar on the siding. His family's home on Pasteur Street was destroyed by fire the day before. Little Herbert Gaskins, Jr. arrived at 8:00 a.m. His family lost their home on George Street to dynamite. Now our fire baby was here at our first

presentation but he was out of town tonight. The first black baby to be born following the fire arrived at St. Cyprian's Emergency Hospital and was promptly named by Dr. Joe Latham, St. Cyprian's Emergency Dillihunt. (Laughter in audience.) He was called "Cyp" for short. (Laughter)

The fire wasn't allowed to stop a planned wedding either. Vera Wayne, a seventeen year old bride-to-be, not only lost her home but her recently purchased trousseau. In tears she appealed to the welfare superintendent. The relief committee hurriedly went through the pile of clothing gathered for the fire victims and was able to replace her lost garments. The wedding went on as scheduled. Now we were supposed to have Mr. Albert Willis but he couldn't be here tonight, so we have some memories that

Dr. Patterson will read. (Applause)

DR. PATTERSON: Albert Willis is a very valued member of our group. He's one of the original six who started this Program. He can't be with us tonight. He has done a great job with publicity throughout our whole Program and we rely on him a great deal. I'll fill in for Albert. When the times come for him to speak, I will speak as Albert Willis. And sometimes Albert is speaking for somebody else. So what it amounts to is somebody speaking for somebody who's speaking for somebody. (Laughter in audience.) First, talk about Dr. Samuel Bryan. Dr. Bryan is the husband of Dorothy Bryan who is with us tonight, and Dr. Bryan has been with us most every program. He's a retired dentist in New Bern and a very fine gentleman. He

was in the house where the fire started when he was a little boy, and this is the story of Samuel Bryan.

Dr. Samuel Bryan's Memory of the Great New Bern Fire

He was a young child visiting his grandparents, Henry and Hester Bryan, when the fire started. He recalls being seated at the table eating when someone called from the street that the chimney was on fire, which of course meant nothing to him. Family members began immediately removing the furniture from the house while he simply continued his meal. In the excitement of moving the furniture it was discovered that he was still inside the house eating. A Mr. Chapman came in and literally took him from the table. The next thing he remembers is being back at his home on Cedar Street. Now this house that he was in, of course burned. Flames caught in the gable of his own house, but men saved the house by beating out the flames. While houses burned all around, his house remained standing and served as a haven to several families among which were the Cobb and Whitney households. One room served as storage for the furniture his grandparents had salvaged. His home still stands. His grandparents lived in Tent City for a while but eventually rebuilt on the same spot where they had lived before the fire on Kilmarnock Street. They remained at that location until after their death. The property was later taken over by the federal government to make way for the Craven Terrace Housing Project. Dr. Bryan later recalled that he and neighborhood boys collected roasted pecans for months after the fire.

(Laughter in audience.)



DR. PATTERSON: Joe Gaskill McDaniel was a man we all knew. He was a newspaper man. He was a poet. He wrote well. He wrote stories for The News and Observer. He put on a Christmas pageant called The Yuletide Review with local talent for many years here in New Bern. He was well recognized and highly thought of. Forty years ago he wrote this story. This is J. Gaskill McDaniel speaking.

Joe Gaskill McDaniel's Memory of the Great New Bern Fire

I was twelve years old at the time. A fire alarm had come in from Kilmarnock Street a short distance from where I lived. When I ran there with a friend, Frank Shriner, a small blaze was burning around the chimney on Henrietta Bryan's house. A man had climbed up on the roof of the small dwelling and was throwing buckets of water fetched by neighbors. It wasn't much of a fire - not then. A gale was blowing and the blaze started racing across the roof's wooden shingles with lightening rapidity. The man on the roof scrambled down - just in time.

Frank and I were standing in a patch of collards growing in a vacant lot across the street. Wind caught the flames on the roof and carried them across the street. We fled from their path and you could hear the collards crackling as the fire consumed.

In a matter of minutes a hose truck driven by A. L. Deal arrived. There had been one or more false alarms sent in by cranks while the lumber mill fire was at its height, and it was considered impractical in this instance to send a pumper to Kilmarnock Street or anywhere else without investigation.

As soon as the hose truck arrived, at which time several dwellings were already ablaze, a second alarm was sent in. Unfortunately there was no nozzle on the hose truck to connect to the hose, a fact that no one denies, and this occasioned further delay. It has been said, and vigorously denied, that firemen had to send for a wrench to turn on the hydrant, even after a nozzle was obtained. If a wrench did have to be sent for, I was not aware of it.

This much we can be said, Dame Nature and not negligence on the part of the city's volunteer firemen, was responsible for the size of the catastrophe. No fire-fighting apparatus, small town or big city, could have halted the inferno. It was helplessly out of control in a matter of a few minutes.

Flaming shingles, careening on the breast of the gale, flew through the air for blocks and set widely scattered conflagrations. It was an awesome sight - completely unbelievable.

Pitiful humans screamed everywhere, like trapped animals fleeing from a flaming forest. The fire spread so rapidly that few of the residents around Kilmarnock Street even attempted to save their belongings. Those who lived further away tried to save their possessions but to no avail. Furniture moved into the streets burned on the spot. There were no vehicles to haul it away, and besides, everyone had his own troubles and could not lend a helping hand. Miss Dorcas Carter will tell of her experiences.

DORCAS E. CARTER: This picture survived the fire. I'd like to say regarding the picture here that I'm wearing a blue serge midi

suit that was fashioned and designed by my mother. Her picture was taken at eighty-eight. Tonight is quite momentous for me as I come again to bring to you the memory of what we called then "The Big Fire of New Bern."

Dorcas Carter's Memory of the Great New Bern Fire

I just might recall everything I know about "The Big Fire of December 1, 1922." I am eight years of age then. On the morning of the fire before it became widespread a fire had broken out to Roper's mill in a nearby location from where we lived. A second alarm sounded.

Then, in our household, we always knew the fire was getting out of control. It was the day after Thanksgiving and my three brothers; Caswell, Robert, Sylvester and I were at home for the Thanksgiving holidays doing the Friday chores while our youngest brother Rudolph was either in his high chair or crawling around the floor. He was one years old. My Aunt Rachel, who lived in Johnson Street next to the Ike Smith residence, came to our home since the alarm sounded was near us. In dismay she told mama that she needed to stop cleaning that no one knew how far spread that fire might could be, but mama felt that the wind was blowing in an opposition direction and it wouldn't come to us.

After she returned home, the fire alarm began blowing in the black neighborhoods. Then another alarm. This was getting upsetting, because you could look out and see clouds of smoke. Then you knew that fire was getting out of control. When the third alarm sounded, the fire wagon was dispatched to the scene on Kilmarnock Street to

the fire where already three houses had been consumed by flames. With the 70 mile hour wind blowing, you can imagine as to the speed it was traveling. I had heard the people say in the neighborhood in conversation that, "God will not destroy this world again by water.

The next time it will be destroyed by fire on Judgement Day." From my viewpoint, I was frightened because I really thought it was Judgement Day with all that fire around us. (Laughter in audience.)

Only eight years of old now, just thinking. The fire kept spreading rapidly because it was out of control. And all the houses in New Bern at that time had wooden shingle tops and you could see sparks flying everywhere. By this time she looked up, my mother looked up and saw that a house had caught on George Street. This was getting very close to us. Someone came along and said Mr. Louis Ward's waterhouse was on fire. He was a family friend and trustee at Rue Chapel AME Church around the corner from us. Then mama said, "We have to start packing our belongings so we can take refuge somewhere."

By this time, my father had built me a two-room playhouse, doll house, so I ran into my doll house and started collecting my doll clothes and furniture so I could have them for safety. Remember, I'm eight years old.

My oldest brother, Caswell, worked on weekends shining shoes at Sam Coplon's and Son Store. He was coming home for dinner when he saw the fire raging into our direction by the way of Pasteur Street.

So Mama, Caswell, Robert, and Sylvester started packing our possessions while my father had gone to get a truck to move what he

could salvage. She told me to take my little brother and go on George Street and sit on Mrs. Jemma Whitley's steps about three blocks from where we lived off of George Street into the vicinity of what now is Ives Oil Company. She told me to just sit and hold him. This was between eleven and twelve, going without eating since breakfast.

I sat there holding him - just sitting, watching people come up George Street pulling trunks and other household possessions to find a place called Dunn's Field for safety, or wherever they could secure for safety.

I kept hearing the fire whistle blow so distressingly from different alarms kept sounding. Then Rue Chapel AME Church bell started tolling, which was as close almost as I am now. Then St. Peter's AME Zion Church bell started tolling. I began to cry now because I knew danger was in sight. No one had time for me it seems.

They just kept going scampering up George Street. I just sat there holding Rudolph my brother wondering when the rest of the family might come to us. By four-thirty or five, I guess it was, just about then when the sun was about to set on a December day, I saw Mama and my three brothers; Caswell, Robert, and Sylvester coming up George Street bringing two ironing boards. Ironing boards at that time would have to be placed on two chairs. Not modern like they are now. And looking again, the fire seemed to be getting near them and me. So in excitement, Mama told them to put the ironing boards down! Then I yelled out, "Mama, we need the ironing boards because you can't iron our clothes!"

I don't guess we even had any clothes at that time except those that

we were wearing.

But anyway, we kept walking until we reached Dunn's Field. Later daddy joined us. After it became night, and his being a home site builder, he took our living room chairs and made it look like a room.

Placed then the living room rug on top so we could have a place on the mattress to sleep that night. Before we could crawl in, a resident from upper George Street offered Mama and Pops refuge for the night.

She said she had a basement and we were welcome to come and spend the night. Mama felt that seven of us were too many to accept the offer so we did not go; however, I do remember that she brought a flour sack as we call it, full of biscuits. She brought a flour sack full of biscuits, but I don't remember what else or eating any of them. Remember, I haven't had anything since breakfast. I was very saddened that my mama said, "Sylvester, has our house burned down?"

He said, "All standing is the chimney." Here we have no house and no home, only ashes and cinders on a December 1 night.

Finally our grandmother Dorcas and Aunt Lucinda's husband, with his truck found us in Dunn's Field. They packed our possessions and daddy hired Mr. Bud Reed, who also was a fire victim, the taxi driver, to take us to our grandparent's home. Grandmama Dorcas lived on the corner of what is now Fleet and South Front Street. She had already taken in a Fonville family, because their baby John Fonville, who was a resident, recently passed at Pembroke area - was only eight days old. So she had no shelter for her two daughters; Rachel and my mama, Olivia. However, Lucinda lived in lower Bern Street. She

had one room unoccupied upstairs, so that's where the seven of us stayed for nine months with two high-back beds and one window. Caswell, Robert were at the head, Sylvester and I had the foot. Mama, daddy, and Rudolph occupied the second bed. But at least we did have a shelter and love.

The American Red Cross came to the aid of the fire victims and provided tents in what was called then Smithtown. The property was owned mostly by Ike Smith Realtor, locating Bern Street on both sides.

My grandmother did not want my mother, due to frailty, to live in Tent City because it was the winter season and she felt she might develop pneumonia. Incidentally, my father had drunk some city water and he became very ill on December 2, and the doctor had to pump that water out of him. This was exciting again because I didn't want him to die. I really wanted to live in Tent City. (Laughter in audience.)

I really did, because my childhood friends were there; Martha Chapman, Adelaide Resper Spinner, and Simonetta Picket. They even had a tent for a church, and the more family, the more tents. That Tent City was exciting to me because that's where I used to go and play.

Our church, St. Peter's AME Zion Church was completely destroyed by fire as we hosted the fifty-nine sessions of the North Carolina Conference. The Bishop, Ministers, delegates, parishioners, had to flee for their safety. In as much as we had a large congregation, the city of New Bern personnel allowed us to use West Street School auditorium for our worship services. The Bishop appointed my grandfather, the Rev. William Martin, to be the shepherd of the flock.

In the meantime, the sites were being cleared and the present basement was being laid. In 1923 we were able to go back on Queen Street.

Oh yes! The town has changed, because three thousand people were left homeless, and out of this they became quite dishearted. No jobs, property condemned from where the armory, which is now the police department, up to Nunn Street. They did not allow the blacks to rebuild on their home site - George Street, on both sides. This was upsetting, because of the fire, not returning to your birthplace.

And daddy had promised us a piano for Christmas! This gave us another setback, because no piano came.

Remember too, I'm recalling now a nearby neighbor who was a Mr. Richard Sawyer, a prominent tailor, who lived in Cypress Street, attempted to rebuild. His homesite was on the condemned section leading up to Nunn Street. Each time he would get his frames up the city would make him tear it down. Finally he built up to the second story ready for a roof - this, he was ordered to tear down. I remember this very distinctly because I was all in that area around Tent City.

Disheartened, he and his wife and two children went to live with his father, the Rev. William Sawyer, who was also a tailor, who lived on Cypress Street near the corner of Bern Street, and there they remained until each deceased.

The American Red Cross was a great functional agency to New Bern. It helped people secure homesites for rebuilding and provided nominal sums of money.

As another childhood friend, Loretta Bryant Smith says, "What



a time!" It was really a time, as an eight year older was trying to make readjustments away from neighborhood, away from my friends, and it seems as if I were away from everybody except my family.

The big fire of December 1, 1922, caused me and my family to become scattered from our homes and my birthplace, church site, and make new adjustments for another mode of life, because we had to find familiar paths to travel and unfamiliar people to become our friends.

To me it seems as if I have been scattered from everyone ever since.

But thanks be unto to God who gave to us the victory; for these seventy years and days, months, and years, He has been faithful. However, He granted unto the fire children an enriched life to accomplish all our dreams in this great wide beautiful wonderful world. After the homecoming of our mother in 1935 and our father in 1942, so we picked up the heritage they left. Thankful life and His accomplishments simply because we strove to make a prideful tradition for ourselves.

Before I conclude, I would like to say that I lost my brother Robert January 10, 1992 and my brother Caswell June 20, 1990.  
(Applause)

MRS. MAREA FOSTER: This is Rose Brooke Carraway's memory of the fire. The Carraway home is located at the lower end of Broad Street near East Front St.

Rose Brooke Caraway's Memory of the Great New Bern Fire

Most everybody had gone to the ball game in Raleigh. I never cared about football so I didn't go. I walked up to the fire to see what was happening, and of course people were moving everything out

of their houses they could. It began to look really bad and the flames began skipping. It would go over one house that had a wooden roof, but it'd skip over another one. It looked so bad that I thought I'd better get home and get ready. I had a big trunk up in the attic and it was empty. So somehow, I don't know how I did it but I did, I brought it down and put all the silver in it. MRS. MAREA FOSTER: Helen Cannon Mewborn's memory.

Helen Cannon Mewborn's Memory of the Great New Bern Fire

Papa and my two older sisters had planned to join the crowd on the train to Raleigh to see the championship game. However, mama woke that morning with an unexplainable feeling of dread. "Please, Lemuel, don't leave today. I feel something dreadful is going to happen and I just don't want you to go." So Papa respected mama's wishes and he stayed home.

MRS. MAREA FOSTER: Caroline Hunter Davis.

Caroline Hunter Davis' Memory of the Great New Bern Fire

I tell you we were all playing down on Broad Street that day. We were playing at the Gaskins house which was right next to the Sudan Temple and we were on top of the roof on the garage. We could see the smoke and the fire, and we all got off that garage and went over into my yard. For some reason that's where we all stopped. Somebody said, "Let's pray", and I thought they said, "Let's play!" (Laughter in audience.) We went into the house to get our clothes out. We were really frightened, but we did pray.

MRS. MAREA FOSTER: Caroline Ashford.

Caroline Ashford's Memory of the Great New Bern Fire.

I was ten years old and staying down on the Neuse River. We could see the smoke and flames and were wild to know what was happening. Finally my father came home and told us that the town was on fire. He said they were dynamiting homes to try to save the school. I was just horrified and said, "Oh! Daddy, they must'nt blow up people's homes just to save the school! Let the old school burn down!" (Laughter in audience.)

MRS. MAREA KAFER FOSTER: Mary Bray Mullineaux's memory.

Mary Bray Mullineaux's Memory of the Great New Bern Fire

My husband, small baby and I had an apartment in the Hurst Green house on the lower end of Broad Street. I rolled my baby in his carriage as far up Broad as Craven Street. That was as far as I thought I ought to go. The smoke was terrific and seemed to cover the sky. The wind was blowing terribly.

Every available man in New Bern was called. My brother, Walter Bray, and my brother-in-law, Ed Mullineaux, were among the fire fighters. My brother, in helping to put out a fire on Metcalf Street, fell through the second floor to the first floor. He was not injured too badly however, but they would not allow him to continue to fight the fire. And my brother-in-law was brought to my house. They had to bring him in bodily. He was smutty and dirty and almost unconscious.

They laid him on a cot in the living room, and I can't remember how he was administered to, but he lay there until he became conscious.

(Applause)

MRS. DORCAS CARTER: Continuing the memories of the fire, Mrs. Malissa Vailes, her memories in absentia. She was a fire victim.

Malissa Vailes' Memory of the Great New Bern Fire

My name is Malissa Vailes and I was about ten years old at the time of the fire. My family lived on the corner of Good and Willis Streets, on the end of George Street near National Avenue and near where Ives Oil Company is now located. My mother was crippled and made a small living by taking in washing.

On the day of the big fire my sister and I went up to the fire on Kilmarnock Street. It began to spread very rapidly, and my mother, who was on crutches, came to get us to come home. We were afraid we would get a whipping for going to see the fire. Instead she told us to hurry and take our clothes down from the wall and put them in wash tubs. We just hung our clothes on pegs because we did not have closets. Mr. Ernest Johnson was going through the neighborhood shouting for people to take their belongings that they had and go to the railroad tracks. He had a big horse drawn wagon and people put their pianos and big heavy furniture on the wagon and he took them to the railroad tracks and put them on the flat- cars. All the people in our area ran and got on the flatcars, no roof, just an open flatcar. The engine then pulled the cars way out to the end of the tracks, out by Oaks Road. It was the day after Thanksgiving, and mama said to us to pack all the food that we had left so we could put it in a wash tub in order that we would have something to eat.

We spent the night on the open car and tried to cover up with the

clothes we had saved.

The next day the train pulled us back to town and we went to see what was left. Our house was gone. Mama had left some clothes in the yard in an iron pot that she had been washing when we had to leave. The clothes belonged to Mrs. Martha Mengel and these were gone too. I guess they were stolen. We had a large family; grandmama, aunts, uncles, and cousins, that lived near us and we all lost our homes. We were able to stay with relatives in Pavie Town, so we did not live in Tent City, but we had a hard time.

MRS. DORCAS CARTER: Melissa lived across the street from me. Continuing the memory of the Great Fire, Martha T. Chapman in absentia.

Martha T. Chapman's Memory of the Great New Bern Fire

I am a retired school teacher and I had always lived on Bern Street. I was about eight years old in 1922. I remember hearing the fire bell ring that morning. My mother and I went up to Kilmarnock Street to see the fire. The wind was very strong and blowing sparks everywhere. When we came back home, it seemed that a sheet of smoke separated the two sections of Bern Street. By the time we reached Smith Street we could see that our house was on fire along with the others. My parents attempted to get our furniture out of the house.

A cousin took me and my younger brother to Duffyfield where we stayed with an aunt on Barclay Street for two nights. That night I remember seeing the sky illuminated by flames.

On Saturday the National Guard came around and counted the number

of people in each house. Some houses had a family in each room of the house. Everyone was trying to help the fire victims. But if there were too many people in a house, the National Guard made some move over to West Street School where shelter was provided.

On Sunday church services were held in West Street School and meals were also served there. Oh, the cars! The cars! So many visitors came that day to see the destruction. They were everywhere. Many of them brought clothing and things for the people who were homeless. My father was a tailor at Sam Lipman's store, but we lost everything but one trunk.

When the Tent City was built we lived there for about two months. Each family was provided with two tents, set up so that the doors faced each other. One tent was used for cooking and one for sleeping. There was a stove set up in the corner of each for heat. The Red Cross provided utensils, cots, and other items. We could get our meals at the school for a while at first. My church, Rue Chapel, was given a tent for services. A health department was set up and everybody had to get immunized for typhoid fever. The banks would replace any burned coins that people could find if they could be shined up enough to identify. I remember that the area smoldered for a long time. When the Rowland Lumber Company closed, many people were left unemployed. As a result many moved North.

All the houses on Bern Street were destroyed except three located near Queen Street. The houses along George Street were burned and the city took over that property to extend Cedar Grove Cemetery and

to build a park. This caused a great deal of distress for the property owners and the issue was taken to court with a Mr. Kennedy acting as spokesman for the property owners. Mr. Kafer, a member of the city government at that time, pushed for the undertaking and when the park was finished it was named for him.

MRS. DORCAS CARTER: Continuing, final memory of the fire, Theresa Howard. She was not a victim, an onlooker.

Theresa Howard's Memory of the  
Great New Bern Fire

My name is Theresa Howard and I am 91 years old. I was twenty-one years old and had been married for two years at that time. I lived on Carrol Street, two blocks west of Kilmarnock Street where the fire began. The wind took the fire away from my home, but my parents and other of my relatives who lived on Cedar Street lost their home in the fire. I had a nursing baby, Melba, and a friend kept her for me while I went to look for my parents. It took me a long time to find them and I had to keep coming back home to feed my baby. Later that day I found my parents in a field in the Duffytown section of town. I had been crying all day and when one of my church members, Nita Sutton, came by and yelled to my sister-in-law, "My God! St. Peter's Church is on fire!!", then I really did cry!. (She's a member of St. Peter's.)

My parents lived in Tent City until they could rebuild on Cedar Street. My husband, Guy Howard, remained employed at Kafer's Bakery.

(Applause)

MRS. MAREA KAFER FOSTER: Frances Hatch Jones.

Frances Hatch Jones' Memory of the Great New Bern Fire

My name is Frances Hatch Jones and I was six years old in 1922. My Aunt Fanny, my father's sister, had carried me to New York. We were coming home on the train. New Bern was still burning when we got to town. The fire was burning the fence down around the train station so that the train had to back up all the way to Goldsboro and wait until the firemen beat it out. I saw it 'cause I was peeping out the window. But anyway, when we did get through to the station I got off, and we'd been on that train it seemed like two days!

Aunt Fanny said, "Where are we? Things look very different", and I said, "We on the right street, Aunt Fanny. Listen, I'll run ahead and when I see West Street School I'll know where I am." People were making beds in the cemetery, spreading beds wherever they could. We didn't see too many people in the streets. But anyway, I kept running up ahead, and I'd run out in the middle of the street and I'd look back. When I got to West Street and I saw West Street School, I said, "Aunt Fanny, here it is!" She was a coming with the bags. We had two suitcases. And we got to Elm Street - that went straight down to our house. It was a two-story house and it was still standing. Later they tore it down for Craven Terrace.

MRS. MAREA KAFER FOSTER: Eleanor Lee Sutton Heath.

Eleanor Lee Sutton Heath's Memory of the Great New Bern Fire

Eleanor Lee Sutton Heath's grandmother was visiting in Clinton when she heard about the fire and she left immediately for home.



When she stopped in Kinston for gas, the station attendant said, "Lady, I wouldn't go to New Bern if I were you - it's all burned up!" They could see the smoke from Kinston. The Sutton family lived on National Avenue near the railroad tracks and the Banner Warehouse, which is now the S. B. Parker Company. As the fire spread in that direction, there was talk of dynamiting the warehouse. The Suttons and many of their neighbors moved their furniture to the new house that the Suttons were building at the far end of National Avenue. Carved on a rafter in the attic can still be seen, "This beam was put in place the day of the Great Fire, December 1, 1922."

MRS. MAREA KAUFER FOSTER: Evelyn Shupp.

Evelyn Shupp's Memory of the Great New Bern Fire

Evelyn Shupp, another resident of National Avenue, was unable to return home from her job in the courthouse either by George Street or Griffin Street, which is now North Craven Street. She had to come by a round about way on the old brick road to avoid the flames. That evening she and her husband walked up to the railroad tracks to see the fire. "It was awful! The black people had spread their beds and mattresses and furniture everywhere. Then suddenly, out of all the confusion, we heard music. Two little boys were playing their victrola and were sprawled on their mattresses enjoying the music."

MRS. MAREA KAUFER FOSTER: Eleanor Jones Carr. Eleanor was twelve years old at the time of the fire and she lived on, and still does live on Metcalf Street.

Eleanor Jones Carr's Memory of the Great New Bern Fire

You could see the flames and smoke and my mother went up into that area to watch the fire. Everybody on this street had moved out except us, and my daddy was out of town. I was here, walking back and forth on the street, worried you know, when my mother finally got home. My uncle came, Uncle Johnny, and got us. It's right funny the things we saved. My daddy was out of town so Uncle Johnny opened a lock drawer and got a pint of whiskey and took a pistol, and I took my bicycle and my doll, and mother took silver, and that's all we took. And we locked the door and we walked out. Well, we had no damage except some window panes broken out by the blast, because to keep the fire from spreading they dynamited houses across the street.

Houses on my side of the street were made of pine wood and the sap just oozed out in great chunks. And across the street they dynamited the Dixon's house. Mrs. Dixon lived over there with her two sons and her two daughters. On that side of the street Mr. Franklin's home is still there and the Shipp's home is still there - directly across from me. Well, Louie and Nelson (Angel) and I walked up there the next day and dead cats were everywhere. It was sad, you know. It was really pitiful.

MRS. MAREA KAUFER FOSTER: Theresa Shipp. Theresa lived right across the street from Eleanor Carr on Metcalf Street.

#### Theresa Shipp's Memory of the Great New Bern Fire

I was five years old at the time of the fire. Mama and I heard the fire alarm and decided to go up to Kilmarnock Street to see what all the excitement was about. And mama got so busy talking that she

forgot all about me and I got lost in the crowd. I was really frightened until I found her again. Then, like we always did on Friday, we left there and went to my grandmother's house on Broad Street for lunch.

I was in the back yard when I saw the steeple on St. Peter's Church on fire. We went straight home and found men preparing to dynamite houses on our side of the block. Mama started right in packing, getting our furniture moved out, and she sent me to sit in the yard across the street. They dynamited other houses near us but they did not have to destroy ours. But I did see the men put sticks of dynamite under our house. (Applause)

DR. PATTERSON: John G. Dunn, Jr. is an esteemed former banker in New Bern and many of us here know him, known as Johnny Dunn. He now lives on the lower end of New Street, now East Front Street, but at the time of the fire he lived at the corner of East Front Street and what used to be Short Street, now Linden Street. He mentions Caleb Bradham in his story. This is the son of the Caleb Bradham who started Pepsi Cola, and many of here knew this Caleb and knew him pretty well, and our parents knew his parents. Mr. Dunn has this to say.

Mr. John G. Dunn, Jr.'s Memory of the Great New Bern Fire

Caleb Bradham and I were Freshmen at Carolina at that time and home for Thanksgiving holiday. We fought the fire together. The outstanding thing I remember was that the Shipp family lived on Metcalf Street and they thought that they were going to dynamite all those houses on Metcalf. Mrs. Shipp had moved all her furniture out of

the house. She asked Caleb and me to, "Go get my light fixtures! They are brand new!" (Laughter in audience.) We went in and snatched them down - just like that. She might have been better off to have left them where they were because her house was never dynamited. (Laughter in audience.)

DR. PATTERSON: John Dill is an old-time friend from childhood days. He lived, when I knew him, up at the northern end of East Front Street. This is what John has to say in a telephone interview.

John Dill's Memory of the Great New Bern Fire

I was living at the end of Queen Street near the Neuse River where the Salvation Army building is now located. My father had gone to Raleigh on the train to see the championship ball game and my mother was in Baltimore. My brother Marcus and I were left in charge of our maid Sarah and my grandfather who lived nearby. When the fire came closer to our house and sparks were leaping over Cedar Grove Cemetery and setting nearby houses on fire, our Sara became very excited. She ran upstairs and began gathering up all the household linens. These she threw down the steps, knocking the telephone off the wall! We thought that was really exciting! (Laughter in audience.)

My grandfather came and took me and Marcus by the hand and walked towards his house, which he had heard was on fire. I remember watching it burn and seeing tears run down my grandfather's cheeks. There was a great deal of confusion and many people rushed by our house with bundles of clothing trying to get to the safety of the river.

Then my aunt and uncle came and took me and Marcus and grandfather

to their house on South Front Street.

When my father returned the next day, he took me and Marcus to see what had happened to the property that he owned in the burned out section. We saw many people camped in the cemetery and we saw where the houses were dynamited. I was just a little boy and thought all this was wonderfully exciting!

DR. PATTERSON: This is a telephone interview with Ray Hathaway of Hobucken.

Ray Hathaway's Memory of the Great New Bern Fire

Like many of the boys living in New Bern at that time, I kept a list of the fire alarm numbers in my cap. When the alarm went in for the Rowland Lumber Company that morning, I went up to see about it, for my father worked at the mill. There was a scene of total confusion. I saw the metal roof collapse. It just buckled in the middle and fell down.

I lived on Hancock Street, about where the Firemen's Museum is now. We were much concerned and interested in the second fire that day as it came within a few blocks of us. My most vivid memory of that fire was going with my father to see the damage when the fire was over. The walls of the cemetery were just lined with furniture that had been saved. The ruins smoldered for several days, and I remember that the remaining chimneys were dynamited to clear the property. I found a cat with burned paws and brought it home to be my pet. I named him "Spark Plug" (laughter in audience) for the cat in the Barney Google comic strip. I kept that cat for a long time.

DR. PATTERSON: Albert Willis says, in personal comments in conclusion of his remarks, "Please allow me a personal comment in closing. The National Guard captain in charge of Battery D, 113th Field Artillery, was my father, Albert T. Willis. I later became a member of this unit in 1936. My grandfather was Joe K. Willis, a stone mason who started a funeral home in New Bern about the turn of the century." (And his funeral home was located on Craven and Broad Streets where the Craven County government complex is located now.) "Many of the stones in Cedar Grove Cemetery where people sought sanctuary from the fire were carved and chiseled by him. As far as the funeral home is concerned, my grandfather was known for about a year after - as the only undertaker in the state who had to postpone funerals because the cemetery was too hot! (Laughter in audience.)

Among the donations received was one from the Burlington Coffin Company in Burlington, North Carolina. When I left in 1964 to seek a career in teaching, the funeral home was still doing business with Burlington." (Applause)

MARY BARDEN: We'll show you some more pictures of Tent City and the fire. If any of you have memories of the fire, I would love for you to get in touch with me. (Tape turned over. Mrs. Barden's conversation picks up here.) ....full page ad telling people about this fire and how to help. (pause) I think we had better tents put up than the ones in Florida. Ours had wooden floors and wooden sides and they only put one family in a tent. This is what our tent city looked like. These pictures were originally on a great big, what

we call a circuit picture, and we had to make it in sections so you could see it. They were taken by my father. One of the fire victims, Miss Martha Chapman, had a picture that she let us copy. (Get the focus a little better, Fred?)

QUESTION FROM AUDIENCE: How many tents were there, Mary? Do you remember?

MARY BARDEN: I think about two or three hundred. This is the Baptist Church that's over near Evergreen Cemetery, and here it is today. Okay. (pause) There was a real attempt made to find jobs for these people. The little columns box had all the tidbits and a little bit of humor that goes with this talk. But they were very glad that the mill rebuilt. Everybody wanted to cash in on the fire - (laughter) - S. B. Parker Company. Now we have a brief overview of what happened at the end of all this that Mr. Julius Parham, one of our Alderman, is going to give you, and then we're all through. (Applause)

MR. JULIUS PARHAM: I've gone through the history with them, so now I'll do the summary and probably take a test after we're through all this. (Laughter in audience.)

#### Great Fire Aftermath

Within a few days, the Rowland Lumber Company announced plans to rebuild its mill. It promised to reemploy all those whose jobs were lost as a result of the fire. Other lumber companies in the area went on a 24 hour production schedule to provide jobs for the unemployed and to fill the demand for more lumber. The Nassef Overall

Company started rebuilding immediately.

Senator Simmons and a committee from the town called on the State Highway Commissioner, Frank Page, and urged that he proceed at once with the building of roads in this part of the state to create more jobs. A bureau was set up to find employment for as many people as possible.

Construction of the Tent City proceeded rapidly and by December 12th fifty tents were ready for occupancy. Some prominent black leaders asked to move in, hoping to reassure their people that the tents with the wooden walls and floors would be safe and comfortable.

The city aldermen lost no time in passing an ordinance forbidding the use of wooden shingles in new construction within the fire district of the town. Old shingle roofs would not be allowed to be repaired with wooden shingles. They sent letters of thanks to the Kinston and Washington fire departments for their assistance and voted to replace 450 feet of hose lost by Washington in the effort. They also replaced 3,400 feet of hose lost by New Bern fire department.

The city of Greenville apparently felt a bit apologetic for not sending aid. The fire chief wrote a letter to The New Bernian listing three reasons why he did not respond. (Laughter in audience.) (1)

He was not officially asked to come by the New Bern fire chief. (Laughter in audience.) Greenville received a frantic call for a truck and more hose but it wasn't from the chief or anyone in authority.

When sometime later the Greenville chief put in a call to New Bern, he found that the fire was under control. Second reason; the Greenville



chief did not want to send his only truck and all those hose he had out of town with a high wind blowing. And his third reason; it was impossible to send a truck over the unpaved country roads for it might break down the bridges and not be able to get back. He did not have a railroad flatcar at his disposal to bring the truck by rail at that time.

Both the pastor of St. Peter's AME Zion Church and the Colored Relief Committee wrote letters of appreciation to the newspaper thanking the citizens of New Bern for help rendered to the black people of the town.

The Board of Aldermen raised a ruckus when on the 19th of December the Red Cross transferred over \$60,000 from the local bank to the bank in Atlanta used by Red Cross Headquarters. Mr. Tom Hyman insisted that the funds had been raised for the relief of New Bern fire victims and should be kept in the town for that purpose. The Red Cross promised that as the funds were used up here they would send additional cash as this was their usual way of handling funds. That did not satisfy the city government. Finally, the Red Cross agreed that their usual method of handling funds might be changed in this instance.

The post office ran into difficulty when they were unable to deliver a flood of mail sent to the people in the burned out area.

A suboffice was established in West Street School, placed in charge of a postman who knew the people in the area and the mail was delivered.

Christmas was fast approaching and the children who lost their homes were very concerned that Santa Claus might not be able to find them.

Here again, the Red Cross and others stepped in and tried to see that every child was remembered in some way.

In a meeting on December 21st, the city government voted to tackle its most controversial project. It was decided to condemn about twenty acres of the burned area to widen and straighten the streets, to extend Cedar Grove Cemetery and to create a city park. This brought forth a storm of protest because most of the houses that had stood in the condemned area were owned by the black people who lived in them. Many of the members of St. Peter's AME Zion Church who liked living in close proximity to their place of worship were very angry. Today we have Kafer Park, the cemetery extension, and the George Street Senior Center building on this property.

One positive good that came from the fire was the building of Good Shepherd Hospital. The Rev. R. I. Johnson of St. Cyprian realized the need for a hospital for black people. Through his efforts the Episcopal dioceses built Good Shepherd Hospital which served the people until better medical care became available to them. Now it is used as a nursing home.

The people of New Bern seventy years ago lived through a frightening and difficult time. They pulled together to help each other in their direst need and many bonds of friendship were forged between the races. As we read of the massive effort made to help the victims of the fire, we can be proud to call ourselves "New Bernians." (Applause)

MARY BARDEN: Thank you for coming. (Applause)

END OF PROGRAM