

MEMORIE OF NEW BERN

TIM CONNER

INTERVIEW 1701

This is John Phaup representing the Memories of New Bern Committee.

My number is 1700. I am interviewing Tim Conner, Curator of the New Bern Fireman's Museum. The interview number is 1701. This interview is being conducted on Thursday, September 24, 1992. We are at the New Bern Fireman's Museum on Hancock Street in downtown New Bern. Tim is also the guide at the museum as well as the curator. Tim has told me that he's very proud of his service to the New Bern Fire Department.

Mr. Phaup: Tell me when you joined the force, Tim, and how many years service do you have as of September 1992?

Mr. Conner: I've got fifty-one years in the New Bern Steam Fire Engine Company #1 known as the Button Company of the New Bern Fire Department.

Mr. Phaup: Then you joined the department in 1941. I'm very pleased to be here. I love museums. Standing here looking at the old fire trucks, I imagine that we have enough equipment to film a Mac Sennet comedy. I hope in the course of our conversation, Tim, that we can get to talk about yourself. Your memories will be what we're trying to preserve. I'd like to tell you that I'm brimming with questions, especially, since reading the stand-up file at the New Bern Public Library so graciously provided by Emily Miles. I also talked to other people and asked them what questions they would like to ask you and I'll try to work them in during the course of our chat. I know that you have been interviewed many times before; in fact, you're a rather famous guy, not only by the Sun Journal but by the Raleigh

News and Observer. I'd like to talk to you first of all about the museum, then I'd like you to tell me about growing up in New Bern.

I have some questions about fire fighting and the fire department in general in the New Bern area, and I think many listeners will be interested in your memories of famous fires here and other stories about fire fighting. I have permission to go back beyond your personal memory, if you have something on very good authority. I would also like to stop at 1970, since beyond that is considered current events.

That's a lot of ground. Let me tell you that Earl Applegate, the architect for the museum expansion in the early eighties, sends his regards. He remembers you quite well. Tell me how long you've been curator. You told me you've been in the fire department since 1941, how long have you been curator and guide for the museum?

Mr. Conner: Since 1959.

Mr. Phaup: I understand that you still answer calls. Now, how do you do that and still manage the museum during the day?

Mr. Conner: I don't answer the alarm during the day time hours.

Mr. Phaup: I see. But you go on calls during the hours when the museum is closed.

Mr. Conner: Right. Some alarms.

Mr. Phaup: Do you ever feel a little nostalgic for fire fighters that you know in the past or ever have a flood of memories when you open up the museum in the morning?

Mr. Conner: Sometimes, yes.

Mr. Phaup: Can you tell me what one of those memories is?

Mr. Conner: Oh, just looking at old equipment.

Mr. Phaup: Do many towns the size of New Bern have a fireman's museum?

Mr. Conner: There's only a few fire museums in the whole nation in addition to ours. Very few more, but not many.

Mr. Phaup: When I was young, they called men who put out fires firemen. We now have the term "fire fighters." Can you explain this change?

Mr. Conner: Basically, because there are women. A lot of the departments now a days has women in the department. In other words, the fire fighters, that was the purpose of that.

Mr. Phaup: It takes the gender out of the term firemen. Do you have many visiting fire fighters go through the museum, and what is the farthest someone has come to call at the museum?

Mr. Conner: I would say France.

Mr. Phaup: Are many of the visitors fire fighters?

Mr. Conner: Quite a few.

Mr. Phaup: Do you conduct tours for school children?

Mr. Conner: Yes I do.

Mr. Phaup: A booklet that I saw in the stand-up file published by the museum in the early sixties had letters from Mrs. Rose's class. This is taking you back to the early days here. Some of these letters were written by now prominent New Bernians; JoAnne Gwaltney and Frank Crayton. Do you remember that particular tour?

Mr. Conner: Yes I do.

Mr. Phaup: Was Mrs. Rose's classes a frequent visitor here?

Mr. Conner: Yes, quite a few times.

Mr. Phaup: Do you ever have other museums, especially in larger cities, try to buy the pieces that New Bern's collected here?

Mr. Conner: No, not really.

Mr. Phaup: You're not really interested in selling or they never approach you about buying it?

Mr. Conner: Well, I'm not interested in selling it, but they've never approached me about buying it either. I wouldn't sell if they did.

Mr. Phaup: One thing that's always intrigued me about the fire department is the names of the former mayors on the fire trucks. How long has this been a practice and how did it get started?

Mr. Conner: Years ago. The mayor's name is on one of our horse drawn steam engines, Elijah Ellis. He was mayor when that steamer was bought in 1879.

Mr. Phaup: That's going back over a hundred years.

Mr. Conner: It's still one of our traditions right on.

Mr. Phaup: Tell me about this stuffed horse's head in the glass case behind us here.

Mr. Conner: That's old Fred. That's Fred's real head stuffed. Fred fell dead in the line of duty answering a false alarm.

Mr. Phaup: How long has he been stuffed?

Mr. Conner: Since 1925.

Mr. Phaup: Do they often give horses men's names like Fred. Is that an unusual name?

Mr. Conner: Fred was named after his owner. The city bought him from a fellow right here in New Bern by the name of Fred Richardson. So, they named the horse Fred. But Fred originally came from Gastonia, North Carolina. The city bought him from Gastonia. Mr. Richardson bought him and then the city bought him from Mr. Richardson and then they named the horse Fred.

Mr. Phaup: Is he a popular piece here, especially with the children?

Mr. Conner: Very much so. Yes sir.

Mr. Phaup: I've seen a lot of stuffed deer's head in New Bern, but this is the only stuffed horse that I've seen. Speaking of animals, it's been suggested that I ask you about the dead mule in Mitchell's Hardware. Apparently, a mule wandered in to Mitchell's Hardware when it was still located in the old city hall and dropped dead in the corridors of the store. Firemen, I think, had to come and retrieve the mule. Do you remember anything about that story?

Mr. Conner: That's been many, many years ago, but I've heard of the story.

Mr. Phaup: You heard the story?

Mr. Conner: Yeah, but it's been many, many years ago.

Mr. Phaup: I'd like you to give me some information about your family now, Tim. What is your birth date?

Mr. Conner: February 25, 1923 and that makes me sixty-nine years

old on the date that this tape was recorded.

Mr. Phaup: What were your parents names?

Mr. Conner: My father was Tim Conner and my mother's named Lilly Conner.

Mr. Phaup: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

Mr. Conner: No sir.

Mr. Phaup: You say you lived in the same part of town your entire life. Which part was that?

Mr. Conner: I was born on Pollock Street between Bern and Fleet streets. I've never lived over a block from where I was born.

Mr. Phaup: And you still live a block from that area right there.

Mr. Conner: Right.

Mr. Phaup: You were born in 1923. The great fire of New Bern was in 1922. Do you have any memories growing up as a young boy of the surviving devastation? I understand you that you would of been five years of before you remembered much of anything, but what was that area like in 1928?

Mr. Conner: The area on George Street, Kafer Park was there then of course in 1928. The rest on George Street from Kafer Park on down to beyond Cypress Street was just vacant lots in 1928. But one of the marks of the fire for years later was the sidewalk. The heat from the fire cracked the sidewalks and they remained that way for several years after the fire.

Mr. Phaup: Did you hear much talk about the fire growing up in New Bern?

Mr. Conner: Oh yes.

Mr. Phaup: It's been rumored that sparks from the Rowland Fire Company and the high winds of that fire travelled a mile to the Five Points area and ignited the Bryan house. Do you think that's realistic?

Mr. Conner: It's always been told that the fire started from a wash pot. A woman was doing her week's wash in her back yard in her house on Kilmarnock Street and a spark from the wash pot is what caught her house. It's always been said that's what started the fire.

Mr. Phaup: Was you father in the fire department?

Mr. Conner: No he wasn't.

Mr. Phaup: Have any other relatives?

Mr. Conner: No sir.

Mr. Phaup: Tell me about your school carer.

Mr. Conner: Well, it's limited. I'll just let it go at that.

Mr. Phaup: You went to school in New Bern?

Mr. Conner: Right in New Bern.

Mr. Phaup: The schools at that time were on the Academy grounds, is that right?

Mr. Conner: Yes.

Mr. Phaup: Did you have a job before you joined the fire department in 1941? Did you have any other jobs?

Mr. Conner: No, I really didn't.

Mr. Phaup: In '41, you were eighteen years old. Was there any formal training given you before you joined the department?

Mr. Conner: You mean fire training?



Mr. Phaup: Fire training.

Mr. Conner: No. We don't have to have that.

Mr. Phaup: What was your first fire that you remember?

Mr. Conner: My first alarm?

Mr. Phaup: First alarm.

Mr. Conner: There was a very small fire on Ash Street. That was my first alarm.

Mr. Phaup: Where is Ash Street?

Mr. Conner: Ash Street is in Duffyfield.

Mr. Phaup: During the 1940's, what would you call the worst fire in New Bern?

Mr. Conner: In the 1940's would be hard to say. We had several large fires in the 1940's.

Mr. Phaup: Can you tell me the ones you remember?

Mr. Conner: The Bates Lumber Company burned in the 1940's. That was a pretty hot fire. That was a saw mill on North Craven Street.

Mr. Phaup: Was the Bates Lumber Company what used to be the Rowland Lumber Company?

Mr. Conner: No.

Mr. Phaup: This was a different lumber company?

Mr. Conner: Right.

Mr. Phaup: During World War II, I understand New Bern had black-outs as they were called to prepare for a possible air raid attack, and during a black-out, everyone was required to turn their

lights off in their house and the city turned the street lights out.

Did you ever fight a fire in a black-out?

Mr. Conner: Not an actual fire. We firemen used to have fire drills in black-outs very frequently during the war years.

Mr. Phaup: Did you have to go to a fire with your headlights off?

Mr. Conner: Yes sir.

Mr. Phaup: Were there any rumors or actual incidence of fires caused by sabotage during World War II?

Mr. Conner: No sir, not in our department.

Mr. Phaup: Farmers in eastern North Carolina had draft exemption from military service. Was that ever given to firemen?

Mr. Conner: Not really. No sir.

Mr. Phaup: I understand there was quite a celebration in New Bern on V-J Day. For young listeners, that's Victory in Japan Day in August 1945. Can you tell me about the way it affected the fire department?

Mr. Conner: Yes. It was in August 1945. I've never seen as many people on Middle Street before or since as was on it that day.

We rode all over the city with our big ladder truck celebrating, blowing the siren and ringing the bell. We couldn't hardly go down Middle Street for people. We had to go slow to get by the people.

They were standing in the streets hollering and laughing. We had eighteen false alarms that night after we got through celebrating.

Somebody pulled eighteen false alarms in. Our old steam fire whistle,

which used to be on top of the old power plant, when the President made an announcement, we had arranged ahead of time that the whistle would start blowing one solid blast for ten minutes, and that's what happened. Then as I say, we rode all over the city with our ladder fire truck. Just the time we got back to the station, we started having false alarms, and we had eighteen of them. Between nine o'clock and two o'clock in the morning, we had eighteen false alarms. Somebody's pulling for celebration for the end of the war.

Mr. Phaup: Did you stay up all night that night?

Mr. Conner: We all did. Yes sir. It was on a Tuesday night.

Mr. Phaup: Tell me, have you ever saved a human life?

Mr. Conner: No, not really. When the Governor Tryon Hotel burned, when we arrived, Mrs. Joe Patterson was standing on the ledge and we helped her down the ladder. She was out in the open but she was standing on the ledge of the hotel, and we helped her down the ladder to safety.

Mr. Phaup: Firemen have been known to rescue cats from trees. Do you still do that?

Mr. Conner: Not much now. We have many times though.

Mr. Phaup: Has arson ever been proven in a major fire in New Bern prior to 1970?

Mr. Conner: A few cases. Yes sir.

Mr. Phaup: Can you tell me about one of these?

Mr. Conner: Not right off hand. No sir. There were several. Not a whole lot, but several, prior to that.

Mr. Phaup: Do you know anything about fire fighting in the days

of racial segregation? I understand there were two Black companies; the Axe, Rough and Ready Company and The Independent Colored Fire Department. How long did they last? Do you know anything about that period?

Mr. Conner: They lasted for a few years. One black company was on the corner of George and Cypress Street. It lasted for several years.

Mr. Phaup: George and Cypress would be down where the Senior Citizens is now.

Mr. Conner: In that building on George Street, yes sir. That's Cypress Street.

Mr. Phaup: Were fires fought on a segregated neighborhood basis?

Mr. Conner: In those days you mean?

Mr. Phaup: Yes.

Mr. Conner: No sir. Our two companies plus the black company answered the alarms.

Mr. Phaup: Have any New Bern firemen ever died in the line of service?

Mr. Conner: Yes, we had one directly.

Mr. Phaup: Which fire was that?

Mr. Conner: The sugar warehouse fire at the foot of Craven Street. The warehouse rode the river and it caught fire early one morning between midnight and day. Edgar Elliott drowned at the fire.

Mr. Phaup: He was a fireman?

Mr. Conner: Yes. We expect that it got too hot for him and he

had to jump overboard. He was wearing his protective clothing of course, and we figured that prevented him from swimming. He wasn't missing until the next morning during the hustle and bustle, you know.

We got to looking for him and he was found in the Trent River with his arm around a piling. He had drowned.

Mr. Phaup: What year was this?

Mr. Conner: In June 1931.

Mr. Phaup: My son is a little young lad named Satterfield and he's age eleven. He wants to know how much pressure comes out of the hose.

Mr. Conner: It varies of course, depending on how fast our pump is running. It can go up to 250 pounds out of one line.

Mr. Phaup: Two hundred and fifty pounds is a lot of force. How far would that shoot?

Mr. Conner: That depends on the nozzle tip.

Mr. Phaup: If you wanted to shoot the water as far as you could shoot it, how far could you shoot it?

Mr. Conner: A stream of water as far as shoot with a one mile hose could go close to a hundred feet I'd say. Approximately now. I'm talking about straight up now.

Mr. Phaup: That's a different tale.

Mr. Conner: It would be further than that just a little flat. Maybe 250 or 300 feet on the ground.

Mr. Phaup: In a trajectories level. A hundred feet straight up is about ten stories.

Mr. Conner: Just one line with a lot of pressure on it could go close to a hundred feet. Maybe not quite, but close to it.

Mr. Phaup: How long have fire hydrants been in New Bern?

Mr. Conner: Since 1894.

Mr. Phaup: I understand there was a system of wells prior to piped in water used by the fire hydrants.

Mr. Conner: Yes.

Mr. Phaup: How close were these? Did it depend on the position in the town?

Mr. Conner: There were quite a few wells. They were on the street corners. We had several. When World War II broke out, we didn't know what was going to happen for a while. We tried out some of those wells and we got right much water out of some of them. They're still there.

Mr. Phaup: How interesting.

Mr. Conner: But we've had hydrants since 1894.

Mr. Phaup: You say the wells are still there. Are they boarded over and covered up?

Mr. Conner: They're covered up, yes sir.

Mr. Phaup: Now a days you dial 911, I believe, if you want to call the rescue squad or the fire department. Is that correct?

Mr. Conner: Yes.

Mr. Phaup: What were the earlier alarm systems?

Mr. Conner: We've had an electric fire alarm system here in New Bern since 1899. We used to have the old red box on the corners. We removed all those not too long ago because we had so many false

alarms. But when we had them, if anyone had a fire, they'd run to the box on the corner and pull the box. That would send in the alarm over the bell indicated at the fire station. Then we had a fire whistle and fire bell. I mentioned earlier, the old steam whistle was at the power plant. There was a man on duty twenty-four hours a day at the light plant. He had a bell inside the plant and when anyone would pull a box, that bell would ring the box number, and then he'd pull the whistle right with the bell and that would give us the location.

Mr. Phaup: He would blow the whistle by the bell.

Mr. Conner: By the box number. Yes sir.

Mr. Phaup: Did he have a certain number of whistles he would give you to tell you which box number it was?

Mr. Conner: Oh yes. If, for instance, it was 27, he'd blow the whistle 2, a pause, and then 7. That would tell us that Box 27 was coming in. We didn't have but two digits to our numbers then in the old steam whistle days. Later, we had three digits. But then, we didn't have but two digits when we had the old steam whistle.

Mr. Phaup: How many locations were there?

Mr. Conner: Boxes you mean?

Mr. Phaup: Yeah.

Mr. Conner: We had originally about forty-nine boxes. Now, we had a big fire bell in the steeple of city hall also that would ring automatically after we got our electric alarm system. That bell is still in the steeple of the city hall, but of course we don't use it no more.

Mr. Phaup: You say it rang automatically?

Mr. Conner: By electricity. When anybody would pull a box on a corner, it would ring at the fire station, ring at the light plant, and ring the big bell at city hall. He'd blow the whistle by hand.

Mr. Phaup: Was the bell ever operated manually by hand?

Mr. Conner: No sir, not that bell.

Mr. Phaup: It's always electric?

Mr. Conner: Yes sir.

Mr. Phaup: You've got me intrigued about the bells. New Bern's been called the City of Bells because of the several church bells, the town bells, and the fire bells. Were there any stories about these bells ever being confused, a church bell being confused for a fire bell?

Mr. Conner: No sir, not so far as we firemen were concerned. Cause our old fire bell had a very distinctive tone, so no way we'd get it mixed up with any other bell.

Mr. Phaup: You mentioned the corner fire boxes. Was it possible to call in a fire on the telephone at this time?

Mr. Conner: Oh yeah. You could call in a fire. We had a master box at the station and when someone would call to report a fire by phone instead of pulling the box, have to send the closest box with the fire in from the station over at, we call it the sender. It's a wheel with digits. What ever the box number was it would; I'll say 27 again, it was 2T's, a pause then 7T's, put it in the slot and pull the lever down and that would break an alarm, the circuit, and that



would cause the bell to ring; 2 and then 7.

Mr. Phaup: I've got a trivia question here. William Ward's house on Craven Street has a plaque reading "Eagle Number 2" with an emblem of an eagle on it. Can you tell me what the meaning of that was?

Mr. Conner: Is it an insurance plaque?

Mr. Phaup: That's what it looks like.

Mr. Conner: You know years ago you had to fire insurance if you wanted to have fire protection cause the insurance companies financed the departments. That plaque had to be on your front door. If that plaque wasn't on your front door, no fire protection. Of course, that's been years ago now. Waaaaaay back in the bucket brigade days.

Mr. Phaup: So if you didn't pay your insurance, you didn't get fire service?

Mr. Conner: If you didn't pay your insurance, you wouldn't get any fire services. Right.

Mr. Phaup: So at that time, the fire companies were not supported by tax money, they were supported by revenues from the insurance company.

Mr. Conner: Yes sir. We never did have that system here, but a lot of places did.

Mr. Phaup: So, you think Mr. Ward's plaque is just a souvenir he picked up somewhere?

Mr. Conner: Yes sir. I won't be dogmatic about that, but I think that's correct.

Mr. Phaup: We've talked about the famous fires of the forties

and the great fire of 1922 a little bit. What was the worst fire that you remember from the 1950's?

Mr. Conner: From 1950 on you mean?

Mr. Phaup: No, in the decade of the 1950's.

Mr. Conner: I would say perhaps that about the hottest fire we had in the fifties was there again the Bates Lumber Company caught fire again. That was about the hottest fire.

Mr. Phaup: So it burned in the forties and in the fifties, is that right?

Mr. Conner: Yes it did. Also another 1950 fire was the old Montgomery Ward warehouse at the foot of Craven Street. That was a pretty hot fire and a big job. We put several hours on that fire.

Mr. Phaup: In that same neighborhood was the Governor Tryon Hotel and that burned after being restored. The fire was November 2, 1965. You mentioned that fire briefly a minute ago. You were serving that night. Tell me about the fire and what your duties were.

Mr. Conner: You mean after we answered the alarm?

Mr. Phaup: Yes.

Mr. Conner: Well, we arrived, and of course like I told you, we rescued Mrs. Patterson.

Mr. Phaup: She was the daughter of Senator Furnifold Simmons.

Mr. Conner: Yes, she was. Then after that, we tried to wake all the guest up and be sure they were out. We went around from room

to room knocking on the doors waking everybody up trying to make sure everybody was out.

Mr. Phaup: So when you got there, the fire wasn't so bad that you couldn't go in?

Mr. Conner: No it wasn't. We could see very little fire when we first arrived, very little bit of smoke. So, we got all the guest awake and then we started fighting the fire. The fire got in the elevator shaft all of a sudden, and of course that was just like a match box. It just engulfed the whole building. All we could do then was just surround it with two and a half inch lines of fire hose. And of course, that's what we did.

Mr. Phaup: How long did it take to put the fire out?

Mr. Conner: Oh my gosh! We had to go back several times. That old floor kept rekindling, so we made several trips back to the hotel during that week.

Mr. Phaup: This was a wooden structure I take it.

Mr. Conner: Yes sir. It was 110 years old when it burned, and it was full of antique furniture. So, no resistance.

Mr. Phaup: Probably heart pine too. I understand that Mrs. Kellenberger, benefactress of Tryon Palace, was in the Governor Tryon that night. Did you also rescue her?

Mr. Conner: We didn't see her, no sir.

Mr. Phaup: Were there any personal valuables lost in the Governor Tryon fire?

Mr. Conner: There was some, yes sir. I don't know to the exact

extent, but there was some personal loss.

Mr. Phaup: Do you know how long the Governor Tryon had been restored before it burned?

Mr. Conner: Not exactly I don't. It was several years before it burned that it had been restored.

Mr. Phaup: Does the New Bern Fire Department ever travel to out of town fires?

Mr. Conner: We have if we're called.

Mr. Phaup: What's the farthest you've gone?

Mr. Conner: Morehead City.

Mr. Phaup: I remember seeing pictures of a famous pavilion or large pavilion, I don't know how famous it was, in Glenburnnie Park. Do you remember anyone telling you about the fire that destroyed this pavilion?

Mr. Conner: I've heard about it. That's been a long time ago.

Mr. Phaup: I think it was a nineteenth century Victorian kind of structure. That was before your time then?

Mr. Conner: Oh, it was way back many years ago.

Mr. Phaup: Tim, are you ever fascinated by the flames when you go to a fire?

Mr. Conner: The main thing that we have on our mind is getting water and getting the fire extinguished.

Mr. Phaup: I certainly appreciate your time Tim. Tell me again, as of September 1992, how many years service you've had with the fire department here in New Bern?

Mr. Conner: New Bern consist of two volunteer fire companies; the New Bern Steam Fire Engine Company Number 1 of the New Bern Fire Department and the Atlantic Fire Company of the New Bern Fire Department. I belong to the Button Company of the New Bern Fire Department. I've got fifty-one years in the Button Company of the New Bern Fire Department, and I'm still a fireman. I'm sixty-nine years old when this tape is recorded.

Mr. Phaup: Tell me how the name Button came to be applied to the fire company.

Mr. Conner: Because the company that made the steamer was named the Button Equipment Company. So, we got the name of Button from the steamer.

Mr. Phaup: I'm looking at one of the steamers behind me and it's a large tank on very large wheels essentially. Was the water in the tank pumped out to fight the fire? How did that system work?

Mr. Conner: The steamer didn't carry no water to fight the fire. It carried just enough water to generate the steam to run the pump. The water came from the wells that I spoke about before we had hydrants. After we got hydrants in 1894, these steamers pumped on hydrants just like our trucks do today.

Mr. Phaup: So, the steamers were still used even after the days of hydrants?

Mr. Conner: Yes.

Mr. Phaup: We're looking at one that's a little larger than another one. It's a steam-type pumper with a large bell and a large

globe-shape on the front with an eagle on top of what looks like a large light bulb. What function did that serve, Tim?

Mr. Conner: The large ball there?

Mr. Phaup: Yes.

Mr. Conner: It's called an equalizer. It kept the pressure from surging as it came out of the nozzle. Both of these steamers would pump five hundred gallons of water a minute. That's two lines of hose.

Mr. Phaup: Tell me what it is like to go to a fire. Are you nervous, afraid?

Mr. Conner: No sir.

Mr. Phaup: You anxious about what you're going to find?

Mr. Conner: My main thing is getting the fire out. That's the first thing. First thing, be sure no human life is involved, and then the next thing is getting water on the fire.

Mr. Phaup: If someone has to go into a burning building, how do you select who will do it?

Mr. Conner: We don't select. It's all done on spur of the moment. It just depends.

Mr. Phaup: The first one there, goes in?

Mr. Conner: Yes sir.

Mr. Phaup: You mentioned fire brigades. I read a little bit about this in my research that these were a lot of men that passed the bucket of water down a line from a well I assume, and then the last man on the end, threw it on the fire. On a hot fire, could the fire brigade actually fight the fire? Could they get close enough

to get water on it?

Mr. Conner: It was just better than nothing. Mainly, it would stop the spread of the fire. In those days, it was a city ordinance that each home had to have at least one bucket in case of fire.

Mr. Phaup: What days are we talking about?

Mr. Conner: Way back in the 1700's or early 1800's.

Mr. Phaup: You ever come and wish you were living in a different period when men actually pulled the wagons out to the fire?

Mr. Conner: No. (laughter)

Mr. Phaup: Give me the high tech, right? Tim, I skipped a few questions that I wanted to ask you about the organization in the fire department. I understand the New Bern Fire Department is made up of volunteers except for drivers and a few others, probably the paid officers. If men are working other jobs, how do you know that you will have enough people show up to fight a fire?

Mr. Conner: Most of the time, we always have enough help. There's enough there to do the job.

Mr. Phaup: Tell me about becoming a volunteer fireman. Is it like a standard civil service position? How does it differ from going to work just for the city in general?

Mr. Conner: Anyone who wants to join our companies apply by application and then we vote on the applicant.

Mr. Phaup: "We" being the membership of the companies.

Mr. Conner: Yes sir.

Mr. Phaup: Was there ever an attempt to do away with the volunteer

system and go with strictly a professional system the way some cities have?

Mr. Conner: The attempt never was successful at all.

Mr. Phaup: There was an attempt made back in the sixties?

Mr. Conner: Yes, but thank goodness it didn't amount to anything at all.

Mr. Phaup: Are there ladies auxiliaries in the New Bern Fire Department?

Mr. Conner: No, we don't have any ladies auxiliary.

Mr. Phaup: Do the volunteers ever get together and have a social function and what sort?

Mr. Conner: Oh yes. We have an annual banquet.

Mr. Phaup: Do you honor some of your more outstanding members?

Mr. Conner: Yes, for certain occasions.

Mr. Phaup: Tim, I know you're very proud of your service to the fire department. Tell me again the name of your company and the number of years of service that you've given to New Bern Fire Department.

Mr. Conner: I belong to the Button Fire Company of the New Bern Fire Department. I've got fifty-one years in the Button Fire Company of the New Bern Fire Department, and I'm sixty-nine years old when this tape was recorded.

Mr. Phaup: Thank you very much Tim Conner. I've certainly enjoyed it. I feel like I've gotten to know you a little better and I certainly do appreciate the New Bern Fireman's Museum much more than I did. I intend to bring my children over here. I think one has already gone



through in a school class. Thanks again.

(Tim has asked me to add a footnote to this interview. That is about the mule dying in Mitchell's Hardware. The scene was not in the old city hall which is on Craven Street, but in the former location of Mitchell's Hardware which was on Tryon Palace Drive then known as South Front Street.

END OF INTERVIEW