

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

REV. J. MURPHY SMITH

INTERVIEW 1008

This is Dr. Joseph Patterson representing the Memories of New Bern Committee. My number is 1000. I am interviewing the Rev. J. Murphy Smith at his home at 4902 Hillandale Road in New Bern. The number of the interview is 1008. The date is August 28, 1992.

Dr. Patterson: I just want to say I appreciate you letting me come and talk to you and the Memories program appreciates it too. One of things we are most interested in talking to you about for our history of New Bern is the way you think the church has fit in New Bern in your lifetime here. Before we get into that, let me just ask you a few questions about yourself. Where were you born, Murphy?

Rev. Smith: I was born in a little village called Linden, North Carolina. It's in Harnett County. We lived there about a year then moved to Robinson County to some land that was owned by my grandmother Shaw. My father was a farmer. They say I was about a year old when we moved there. I guess we lived in the house which we moved into for about three, maybe four years. Then we moved to another house that was owned by my grandmother about a mile from there. I think the first memory I have is in the summer when I must have been about three years old, walking with my mother I was barefooted and the sand was hot, and she was tired; and I wanted her to pick me up and carry me; and she wouldn't do it. That sticks in my memory. The next memory I have is during World War I. I must have been about four and a half years old. My father, mother, brother, and I, the whole family, were sick with the flu. It was in the winter, and our neighbor nearby brought us soup.

JP: That was the flu epidemic of 1918?

Rev. Smith: Yes. The next memory was the day the war ended. I remember all the saw mills and factories around blew their whistles all day long. Those were my first memories. So, we stayed there and I grew up on the farm. I went to Parkton School which was about three miles north of where we lived. We went to the Presbyterian church about three miles south of us in a little village called Rex.

JP: How did you get to the church? Did you walk?

Rev. Smith. No. In first years, it was horse and buggy. In fact, the first year I went to school was to Rex to a two room school house. My mother carried me in the morning with my brother, who was almost two years younger than I. She carried us in the buggy. Then the next year the school bus from Parkton came through our community, and I continued to go to school in Parkton the remainder of my grade school life. After I finished high school, I went to Davidson College with the intent of becoming a minister.

JP: What year was that, Murphy?

Rev. Smith: It was in the fall of 1931.

JP: I need to ask what year you were born.

Rev. Smith: February 26, 1913.

JP: And your full name is John Murphy Smith?

Rev. Smith: Yes.

JP: I just forgot to ask that. You go ahead.

Rev. Smith: It was hard to get through Davidson. I made good grades in high school, but it was an eleven grade school and many of

my classmates in college had been to a twelve grade school and were a little advanced than I. I soon found that the grades I made in high school were pretty soft-grades. So, I passed just enough to stay in college my first semester. I had to repeat Greek and Algebra my second year. After the second year, I began to make fair grades and had no more difficulty. I finished college in 1935, and in the fall of '35 I went to Union Seminary, and three years graduated.

JP: In Richmond?

Rev. Smith: Yes. I graduated in 1938. I took two churches in the east end of Richmond; Fulton and Montrose. I stayed there for three years when the Army called me to active duty.

JP: What year was that, Murphy?

Rev. Smith: That was in June of 1941. When I was in Davidson, I took ROTC, and afterwards was commissioned a Second Lieutenant, and assigned to the 321st North Carolina Infantry Reserve. So in January of 1941, I transferred to the Army Chaplains Corps, and in July was sent to Camp Stewart which is now Fort Stewart. I stayed there until the war broke out; and the day after the war broke out, World War II, our regiment started to Baltimore, Maryland.

JP: What regiment was that, Murphy? Was that an infantry regiment?

Rev. Smith: No. That was the 70th anti-aircraft regiment. We stayed in Baltimore for a month, and then was sent to the port embarkation in New York. We left on February 23, I think it was, for the South Pacific.

JP: Were you with a battalion in that regiment?

Rev. Smith: No, I was chaplain for the whole regiment. We had 2,100 men and officers. We went down the east coast and through the Panama Canal. Soon after we got into the Pacific, the Philippines fell. We went to Melbourne, Australia. The commander was fearful that we might have to fight our way into New Caledonia where we were heading. So, we put in at Melbourne, unloaded the ships and reloaded them tactically. When loading the ships in New York, much of the fighting gear was put in the hole of the ship, and other gear on top of it. Consequently, we were not in a position for any kind of battle until it was reloaded in Melbourne. Our regiment was sent by train about a hundred miles inland to Indigo, Australia, where we lived in the homes of the Australians for a week. When we got to Caledonia, we didn't have any trouble getting on the island. The regiment stayed there for about fourteen months, and then went to Guadalcanal. The search-light battalion stayed in New Caledonia. The first battalion and headquarters went to Guadalcanal. The second battalion went to Russell Island. I stayed two weeks in Guadalcanal, and then was ordered back to New Caledonia to be supervising chaplain for the island.

JP: Now Guadalcanal, the battle, had been fought and the island taken by that time?

Rev. Smith: The Japs, we were told, were back in the hills. For all intents and purposes, the island had been taken. There were lots of planes that came down to Guadalcanal. The second battalion was in Russell Island ninety miles north. They picked up the Jap planes

when they were going towards Guadalcanal and notified us so our planes were ready for them when they got to Guadalcanal, and many of them didn't get back. So, after I got to New Caledonia again, I stayed for a year. I came back to the states and had a three week vacation or furlough. After three years practice as a chaplain, they sent me to chaplain school at Harvard to teach me how. (laughter) Then I was assigned to an Army transport in the Atlantic. On the first trip, we went into Naples, Italy. After that, to Plymouth, England. In April of '45, we were caught on a shuttle service from Southhampton to Le Harve, France. We would load up troops during the day in Southhampton and dash across the channel at night, arriving in the harbor about sunrise the next morning. Then after the war in Europe was over, it was the reverse. The ship would carry about 2,500 people; that is, sleep that many, and piled 4,000 people aboard on the way back to England to a staging area. There wasn't much that the doctor and I could do, so we were detached. I served as post chaplain in Tidworth Barracks, England, the staging area, until the war was over. I came back to the states in early October. I was discharged, but I kept my commission.

JP: What was your rank then?

Rev. Smith: At that time I was Major. Right after the war, in December, I was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. I took three churches in Duplin County; Fason, Calypso and Stanford. I stayed with them for five and a half years; and then came to First Church in New Bern, stayed with it until October of 1979 when I retired.

JP: Now the year you came to New Bern was what?

Rev. Smith: June 1, 1951.

JP: To backtrack just a little, you and Margaret got married somewhere along the way.

Rev. Smith: Yes. I met Margaret in the summer after my second year in college. We lived only five miles apart. She lived in Lumber Bridge. I had known her or knew who she was, but never had met. So, we began a courtship that lasted for five years. The last year I was in the seminary, she taught school in Powellsville, North Carolina.

After I finished seminary, and she finished her first year of teaching we were married on the 27th of May, 1938. Our first child, Annette, was born in Richmond March 16, 1940. John Murphy, Jr. was born in Fayetteville, North Carolina on December 22, 1945. We lost him in a car accident right after he finished high school in 1964. It was a freak automobile accident. Our third child, James Shaw, was born November 5, 1951 in New Bern. There's a difference of twelve years between Annette and Jim, we call him. Jim is a professor of music at Peace College, and has been for fourteen years. Annette married a Presbyterian minister who is pastor of Second Presbyterian Church in Richmond. They've been there ten years.

JP: Murphy, let me ask this question. What prompted you to go into the ministry?

Rev. Smith: Well, I guess it goes back to very early days. I must have been about six years old when the family took a train trip to southern Georgia to visit my grandfather and grandmother Smith.

He had moved from Harnett County to Nahunta, Georgia, and had bought a turpentine plantation. He lived about four or five miles out from town. I recall that he was building a church on his property. He was a methodist, and he was building this church to have some kind of services, if nothing but a Sunday school. I came home with the idea I wanted to be a minister like my grandfather. Well, that stuck with me through most of school, or through the middle of high school at least. They used to call me "Preacher." Later in high school, I got a different nickname.

JP: What was the new nickname?

Rev. Smith: You would be surprised? (laughter) "Gallopig Goose." My best friend gave me that name. I think it was in the ninth grade. We didn't have an indoor basketball court. It was outdoors. I was trying to learn to play basketball. I didn't know how to dribble. I'd dribble two or three steps and then pick up the ball and run. (laughter) So, my friend called me "Gallopig Goose." It wasn't long before they left off the gallopig and just called me "Goose."

JP: You wanted to be a minister for many years from childhood then. What prompted you to come to New Bern?

Rev. Smith: I'd been in Faison for five and a half years. The churches did very well. In fact, the Stanford church had twelve members when I went there and when I left it had a hundred. It was a lot of work having meetings of elders and deacons and young people at regular times at three churches. I felt that coming to New Bern where I would be pastor of one church would relieve me of part of the load that I



was carrying. After seeing New Bern, I felt that it was a place for me to be.

JP: What about New Bern appealed to you so much that made you have that feeling?

Rev. Smith: I don't know. I thought that there was an opportunity for the church to grow. There had been some friction in the congregation about which I was a little concerned, but I was assured by the search committee that they didn't think this would hinder the work at all.

I guess I liked the idea of just having one church to look after; feeling that I could do a better job than spreading out over three churches.

JP: What memories do you have of New Bern as a town when you first visited here?

Rev. Smith: Downtown seemed to be thriving. I remember when Margaret and I came down for a look at the place the first time, we went to the New Bern Hotel for dinner. It was in the second block. I think they closed it about three years later.

JP: It was on Middle Street.

Rev. Smith: On Middle Street.

JP: That was the old Albert Hotel. My grandfather and great-grandfather built that hotel.

Rev. Smith: It's interesting that twenty-five years later we were going from Richmond to Massanetta Springs, Virginia. Ed Wallnau, who had grown up in New Bern, and had gone to New York and had become part of Picadilly Hotel and had now retired - had come back to New

Bern and joined the Presbyterian church - was with us. He knew the man who ran a motel in Waynesboro, Virginia; and he wanted us to spend the night there with him in that motel. The manager of the motel had been the manager at the New Bern Hotel here. I can't recall his name.

JP: Murphy, when you came to New Bern and became pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, what was the church like in those days?

Rev. Smith: The word I have often used was, it was very slow. It seemed to me that no one in the church wanted to do anything. My predecessor had organized the men of the church, but it hadn't met for my first three years here. A lot of the young people when they finished high school, left and went to college, and never came back to New Bern. We frequently invited some minister to come in and preach for three or four days. I remember Frank Hall from Wilmington came, I guess it was 1952 or '53. It must have been about 1954 or '55 that Mack McQueen, who was the minister of the church in Clinton, came.

He preached from Monday night through Friday. Mack was the kind who said, "If I'm going to preach for you, we're going to do some visiting."

So, each afternoon, we went out to see some people. A couple of nights, even after the service, we went out and talked to people. The last service was Friday night. On Sunday, he came to New Bern on his way to Havelock to organize the Trinity Presbyterian Church, and asked Margaret and me to go with him. We did, and when we got back about ten o'clock, an elder, Wallace Jones, called. He said "We've had a meeting of the session tonight." I said, "Why? You didn't let me know about it." He said, "We didn't want to let you know. We discussed

many matters, and we have decided we're going to do four things. One is, get a part-time secretary; second, get a DCE."

JP: That's a Director of Christian Education.

Rev. Smith: Yes. "Third, organize the men of the church; and fourth, help you with the young people." That changed the whole church. It just turned it around, and it's been different, more progressive ever since.

JP: As the years went by, did the church continue to develop?

Rev. Smith: Yes. It continued to grow. It had about three hundred members when I came to New Bern. The roll was not exact. It took me about a year to get it straight, but there were around three hundred members.

JP: So, when you came, you had no help at all? You had no secretarial help?

Rev. Smith: No. Nobody.

JP: No assistant minister, nothing?

Rev. Smith: No. We tried to put out a bulletin with old equipment; and I managed to get it out. It was not very long after that that we secured a DCE. She had finished St. Andrew's Presbyterian College. Her name was Elizabeth McIntosh. She stayed with us about two years and then decided to go to the Presbyterian School of Christian Education in Richmond for further study. Ann Gause became the part-time secretary and was a great help. We organized the men of the church and began having monthly meetings which continue until this day. There was a time, some fifteen years ago I guess, when a lot of the churches gave

up on the men's organization, but this one has continued from that day, and is very active today.

JP: Murphy, you were playing an active role in the church-life of New Bern, not just the Presbyterian church, for twenty-six years or thereabouts. You came in 1950?

Rev. Smith: 1951.

JP: And you retired in 1979? So you had almost thirty years.

Rev. Smith: Twenty-eight years.

JP: As you look back over the time of those years, can you speak to the role that the church, not our Presbyterian church alone, but just the church in general, the role that the church has played in the life of New Bern during those years you were here and active?

Rev. Smith: That's hard to sum up. My impression has been that New Bern was a very religious community. There was high regard for the churches. We had a very active ministerial association for a long time. In fact, in the early fifties, I'd say for about six or seven years, we had a good organization where the ministers met monthly.

There were about twenty members. Three of them I remember were black members. After 1954 I guess it was, two of those dropped out. C. C. White, who was pastor of Ebenezer Presbyterian Church, continued to be a member. What the organization did was to talk about things that were going on in the community. We tried to have joint services.

There was a Thanksgiving service that was always held at Centenary Methodist Church when I first came. The church was full each Thanksgiving. Then we started the Easter Sunrise Service.

JP: Where was that held?

Rev. Smith: It was usually held at Union Point. For the first two years we had the band at the high school to play for us. Then it became difficult to get up the band members. (laughter) The Salvation Army played for us for three or four years. Then they tried different methods of providing music for the service. After about 1960, the ministerial association membership decreased for various reasons. I don't know how effective it is today. It tries to provide some joint services, but they are not as well attended as they were in the 1950's.

JP: Was there generally a feeling of cooperation among the various churches in New Bern?

Rev. Smith: Not particularly. I don't feel that there was competition between the churches, but there wasn't this feeling of cooperation that exists today. I think the organization of the RCS, Religious Community Service, which is one of the best things that has happened to New Bern in a long time, has gone a long way toward a closer cooperation among the churches.

JP: Was there a feeling of cooperation between the black churches and the white churches?

Rev. Smith: No, there wasn't. There were attempts to form a joint ministerial association with black and white. So many of the black ministers had outside work they had to do during the week, the only time they could meet, they said, was on Saturday. The white ministers felt that they were too busy on Saturday to meet. There

was one time, it must have been around 1974, that another attempt was made to have a joint ministerial association or at least some meetings.

We had those on a Saturday. I think there were four meetings in which we discussed problems in New Bern and the problem of cooperating among the churches, but it fell through. I guess the reason that it didn't succeed was that the black members felt that we politically ought to take some action in the life of New Bern, try to get things for the black community particularly. The white ministers did not want to get into any particular political action, and after the fourth meeting the idea just disintegrated, was given up.

JP: Murphy, during your years here, when you look back, there are certain bad times for New Bern; disasters, times of stress. The ones that I think of are the hurricanes in the 1950's, the three hurricanes that came through. There were perhaps other times that I don't recall. I wasn't here all of these years. Can you speak to the role that the church played in responding to the disasters situations or a disaster situation in New Bern?

Rev. Smith: I felt that they responded very well.

JP: This was in the hurricane time?

Rev. Smith: Yes, in the hurricane time. 1955 was the worst I suppose. There was a bad hurricane in 1954. The city was without power for about three days. There was not so much water damage as there was wind damage. In 1955, there were three hurricanes, one after another. I remember the name of but one. It was Ione.

JP: Connie.

Rev. Smith: Connie was one.

JP: Hazel.

Rev. Smith: Hazel was '54.

JP: Right.

Rev. Smith. I've forgotten the other name. But Ione was the worst. The water came up Johnson Street to within a half a block of Middle. The newspaper said that the water on East Front Street at the foot of the Neuse River bridge was nine feet deep. We had seven feet of water in our basement at the manse. The churches offered places for people to come for refuge. Some of them offered food. I don't know what else they were able to do.

JP: But you felt that it was an adequate response on the part of the churches as a group?

Rev. Smith: Yes.

JP: Do you think that over the years that you were here the churches in New Bern played much role in social issues, politics, or environmental affairs, or did they sort of lay away from these things?

Rev. Smith: No, I think they had a kind of a laid back attitude. I don't know why. Not many of the ministers took part in any civic affairs. I was disappointed in the role that the churches took in the race issue.

JP: Would you speak to that?

Rev. Smith: Well, I think the first thing that hit me was, there was an organization of United Church Women in New Bern when I came. They met once a quarter. I don't remember how many churches were

involved in it but all the white churches downtown were.

JP: Is this the sixties now that you're talking about?

Rev. Smith: No, this was in the fifties.

JP: What were the problems then?

Rev. Smith: I think it was after the 1954 Supreme Court decision on race, there began discussions of what to do in New Bern. It must have been about 1957, my guess, that we had a world day of prayer at First Presbyterian Church. This organization, United Church Women, observed this every year. We held it in the Fellowship Hall of our church and half of the attendance were black people. I thought they had a very good service. I heard no comment after the service about black people being present. But as far as I know the organization of United Church Women, never met again. No reason was ever given. I tried to start it about ten years later and got no response. No reason given. Then when the marches began, when things got serious...

JP: Was this in the sixties?

Rev. Smith: In the sixties. There were some black people who tested some white churches. Some went to Centenary Methodist; and we all heard that they were turned away. Some went to Tabernacle Baptist. They were turned away. I heard that some came to the Presbyterian church one Sunday. They were parked in a bus outside at the end of the service. We were having services early at that time due to the heat. We didn't have air conditioning. So, the service was over. We never had a group to come back to test us again.

JP: Were they admitted to the service?



Rev. Smith: Well, service was over and people were going out. We frequently discussed it in session meeting and we came up with the idea that if any came, we would seat them down front in some of the best seats. We would not cause a scene. I recall that one elder said, "If I knew that they were coming to test us, I would tell them to leave; but if I thought they were coming to worship, I would invite them to sit with me in my pew. Since we will not know the motive if some come, I suggest that we seat them." One idea was to seat them upstairs, but then the session by majority vote voted to seat them downstairs. Two or three came afterwards and they were given seats in the center section about three pews from the front, and we never had any trouble. There was another occasion when we played host to the Glee Club of St. Andrew's Presbyterian College. They came on a Saturday afternoon, late, and were to take part in the worship service on Sunday. There were two black boys in the choir. My wife and I decided we would keep them at our house overnight. There were several people who said to me, "we'll be glad to take them," which was encouraging for I felt that this somewhat broke the ice in admitting black people to worship in the church.

JP: Murphy, in the sixties when the Civil Rights Act was passed, there was trouble in New Bern that I did not experience since I wasn't here and I don't know a lot about it. Can you recall the way the churches in New Bern responded to this turmoil of the sixties?

Rev. Smith: No, I don't know what they did really. I know it caused some trouble internally in some of the churches in their

discussion. For example, Broad Street Christian congregation split because of it. Some were in favor of entertaining the blacks and accepting them into their fellowship. Others were opposed and they went out and organized Highland Park Christian Church which still exists. I don't think they ever had any problems in the Episcopal church. I always had the feeling that they had a more progressive or positive attitude toward admitting black people into their worship services.

JP: Murphy, as the years have gone by and you look back, can you remember any particular, and this is in regard to the church or the church life in New Bern; can you remember any particular memorable incidence or memorable people that stand out above others?

Rev. Smith: Well, in other churches, Ed Sharp stands out in my mind as a great pastor. He was always cooperative within the ministerial association. He visited in the hospital very regularly, frequently visiting some of the members of First Presbyterian Church.

None of us resented that because we knew his concern for other people and for many people in the Presbyterian church that he knew.

JP: Can you think of any particular individuals who are lay people who played a leading role in the religious life of New Bern during your years?

Rev. Smith: I think of Dr. Dale Millns who was mayor one time. I felt that he was a leader in the Episcopal church. In our church, the Presbyterian church, there were two or three people that I think were outstanding people. One was Dr. E. F. Menius. He died around

1960. He was an elder and a quiet man. He had such good ideas in session meetings. When he made a motion, you just as well go ahead and put it to a vote right then, because it was going to carry. (laughter) He didn't have much to say, but he thought things through.

There are some others that I remember who were outstanding leaders. Catherine Latta was a great choir director, and had a supreme voice, just a great voice, until she became ill. Charles Francis was an organist and a bass singer in the choir. He often filled in when we didn't have an organist. Laura Bryan was the organist when we came to New Bern. She had a feel for the hymns. While she played a little slow to suit some people, she still was a good church organist. I miss people like Ed Howard and Frank Almon and Joe Patterson who were outstanding deacons in the church. I think a lot of things were accomplished under your leadership, Joe. There's lots of people in the church that have just been good, honest people. It's been a good congregation. I remember when we put in the pews that are in the church now. This was around 1960. The pews that were in at the time needed repair badly. We didn't have air conditioning and somebody had put varnish on the pews; and when one got hot, (laughter) he took along some stains on his clothes. They had to be refinished. Well, the deacons decided it would be cheaper in the long run to get new pews.

Some of the people wanted to get the original pews that had been given to the Pollocksville church in 1895. They wanted to get them back, but the Pollocksville church was not ready to give them up. We had two congregational meetings to solve the problem. The first one took

an hour and a half. We adjourned to meet the next Sunday, and that took an hour and fifteen minutes. We voted, and the vote was 95 to 45 to get the new pews. I was very impressed with the way the discussion went, pro and con. I felt that people were very careful in what they said, and how they said it, to prevent a split in the congregation.

While many didn't like the final action, we did not have a split in the congregation. It's just a good group of people.

JP: I remember that. Bill Bell played a leading role in that.

Rev. Smith: Yes.

JP: Murphy, talking about the church has been fun and it's been great. I would like to switch a little bit now, although, we'll speak to some things we've already spoken to. I'd like to talk to you a little more about race relations in New Bern and the civil rights movement of the sixties. I have been told that there was a commission established in New Bern to deal with race relations even before the Civil Rights Act came along and that you were a part of this. Could you tell me about that?

Rev. Smith: Not very much. I guess because we failed to accomplish much. I can't even remember all the members of the commission. I remember that Mr. Rivers of Rivers Funeral Home was on the commission. There were four others. We were appointed by the mayor at the time. I can't recall who it was.

JP: Was Genevieve Dunn a member?

Rev. Smith: I think she was.

JP: How about Ed Sharp?

Rev. Smith: Yes, he was. I don't remember the other two. I think there were six of us.

JP: About what year was that?

Rev. Smith: I think it was around 1953 or '54.

JP: What was your charge?

Rev. Smith: The only thing that we were told was just try to better our race relations in the community.

JP: Who was the mayor then that appointed you?

Rev. Smith: It was either Dale Millns or Robert Lee Stallings. I don't remember which. We talked about how to talk to each other, what kind of programs we could put forth or hold that would bring blacks and whites together. It was very hard to get a consensus in the commission, especially between the blacks and the whites. There was a feeling on the part of some of us that whereas we might agree on something in our meetings, afterwards we just didn't carry out what we had planned. After about a year, we just gave up on it. We didn't feel we were accomplishing anything.

JP: So, this group just met for a year?

Rev. Smith: I don't believe it met for more than two years at the most. We first started meeting monthly and then we got to meeting quarterly. I had a sense of failure in that we just didn't accomplish anything. If we had been in existence in the sixties when the situation got so bad, I think we could have helped a good deal but the commission had been abolished a good while before then.

JP: You speak of the situation getting so bad. What was it like?

Rev. Smith: It centered around the public school. They were having difficulty within the school. I don't know what the difficulties were. I think there were some fights between and white and blacks. They closed for at least one week.

JP: Which school was this? The high school?

Rev. Smith: The high school. In hopes that things would cool off. There were some marches, particularly of black people, down Broad Street. I can't recall that they came in conflict with any white people in those marches, but it was considered very serious at the time. I don't remember just how they cooled things down but after the high school started again, I think there were some alderman and maybe some other individuals who met with the student body to discuss things, what could be done, and what would happen if they didn't to do something to try to get along.

JP: The school was integrated at that time?

Rev. Smith: Yes.

JP: Do you recall the night of Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination?

Rev. Smith: No, I don't, except there were some marches. But as to whether or not they caused trouble, I don't recall. You may have heard and know more about that than I do.

JP: Well, I've just heard things. I've heard that some of the downtown businesses would not serve blacks at the counter. Do you remember that being an issue?

Rev. Smith: Yes.

JP: Any particular ones that you recall?

Rev. Smith: No.

JP: Do you remember any particular individuals who stand out as helping solve these problems at that time?

Rev. Smith: No, I don't, Joe.

JP: Do you think, Murphy, that there has been improvement in race relations since then? Are things getting better?

Rev. Smith: Yes, I think they are. We hear a good bit today over TV and in the news media about race relations getting worse. I haven't seen that in New Bern. I think probably they're getting better here. Have you heard anything to the contrary?

JP: No, I haven't. I would go along with what you said. I believe you're saying that integration has led to a better situation in the life of New Bern.

Rev. Smith: I think so.

JP: Has there been any particular harm done to the community because of all this unrest in the sixties, because of integration? Things seem better. Are there any bad effects that you can speak to?

Rev. Smith: No, not from direct observation. There are a few people in town, white people, maybe there's some blacks, who think the same thing but I haven't heard it expressed - that race relations has lowered the standards in the school. Whether that's the reason for it, I don't know. I think in the early days of integration, perhaps our teachers were not as demanding on students as they ordinarily had

been because of fear of trouble arising. But that's from hearsay. I didn't see any of that, not being involved in the school system itself.

JP: Let me shift gears again and ask you a medical question. When you came to New Bern, what was the hospital situation like?

Rev. Smith: There were three hospitals. One was St. Luke's on George Street. It was Catholic owned and run, and I think a very good hospital. Then there was Good Shepherd that was located near Five Points. I think it was owned by the Episcopal church.

JP: It was a black church owned.

Rev. Smith: A black church owned by the Episcopal church. I think they did a very good job. Then there was Kafer Memorial Hospital located at the corner of Hancock and Broad. It later was bought by the Baptist Association and run for about three years as I recall. They gave it up. I don't think it served as a hospital thereafter, did it?

JP: I don't think so.

Rev. Smith: Finally, it was torn down. I don't know who bought it, but Barker apartments was built where that hospital was.

JP: I'm not quite sure of that. The apartments might have been there before and a filling station parking lot might be where Kafer Hospital was.

Rev. Smith: That could be.

JP: Did you visit people in all those hospitals?

Rev. Smith: Yes.



JP: What do you think about the new hospital? Is that an improvement?

Rev. Smith: Yes, I think so. At the time the new hospital opened, they had twenty-one practicing doctors taking part in the hospital, or permitted to practice in the hospital. That's about all the doctors there were in town. Now there are well over a hundred.

JP: Murphy, you have been a part of people's lives so much since you've been here that you have shared very sensitive thoughts with them. How would you compare the relationship between patients and doctors in your early days here with the present?

Rev. Smith: I think about the same. People have had faith in their doctors. I really can't see much difference in the relationship now than back then. It may be that people today ask more detailed questions of the doctors than they did when I first came, because most of us know more about nutrition, cancer, and disease, and all this, than we did back at that time. Also, the medical profession has progressed so rapidly with new techniques and new things, and the knowledge of new drugs, until there is just more help available to a sick person, and more questions that the sick person can raise. I feel that the doctors are a little more open, a little franker in dealing with a patient than they were perhaps in the 1950's.

JP: In telling them about their condition?

Rev. Smith: Yes. I think they're very up front in telling you what's wrong.

JP: Murphy, when you came to New Bern in '51, had the bridge

been built at the foot of Broad Street?

Rev. Smith: No. It was in the process of being built and it was dedicated in the summer of '52 or '53. I'm not sure which it was.

The highway 17, north and south, came down Neuse Blvd., turned down Queen Street onto Johnson Street; and there was a wooden bridge at the end of Johnson Street across the Neuse River. In those days there was a lot-of-out of state traffic following that route from the middle of November until the end of January. It went right down Johnson Street.

Parking was permitted on both sides of the street, so it became quite congested at times! (laughter) There was a filling station on the corner of Middle Street and Johnson where the library now exists that stayed open twenty-four hours a day. Of course, we lived in the Manse not very far from it. In the summer, the windows had to be opened.

We didn't have air conditioning. We could hear them beating on tire rims and so forth at four o'clock in the morning. (laughter)

JP: What was Broad Street like in those days?

Rev. Smith: It was a beautiful street, two lane street, with trees on both sides. I think it was a very bad decision to put the Neuse River bridge where it is. I understand that the state transportation department wanted to put it up around where Hatteras boats is now, put it across the river, and bypass New Bern. A lot of the business people in town felt that that would just cut them out of a lot of business, so it was put where it is located. There were a few stores on Broad Street at that time. In two years time they were all closed. Broad Street, since it became Highway 17 and there

was more traffic, was broadened. It lost all beautiful trees along the street. One lady who had a business in the second hundred block of Broad Street, about five six or years later told me that she was trying to sell her business and couldn't get very much for it. She said, "I fought like everything to get that bridge located where it is." She said, "I made a bad mistake."

JP: Do you think that when the bridge is moved that Broad Street will come back?

Rev. Smith: I doubt that it will, like it was. It could. I don't think there would be enough traffic on it to necessitate a four lane street. I think it will take a long time, if ever, if it comes back.

JP: Murphy, you saw the town when it was a fairly small town and fairly quiet. It was even quieter when I was a boy here. What changes have you noted in New Bern since your early days here compared to now?

Rev. Smith: There's been a lot of new building, more people have moved in. Especially in the last fifteen to twenty years, more people have come. Many of them from northern states. Fairfield Harbour has been a location for some of them, and River Bend for a good many more.

Fairfield Harbour was begun about 1970 by two men, Dale Dillahunt and his brother-in-law Joe Gwaltney. They worked for two years. They bought a lot of the land from Pop Beasley. They then sold out to Treasure Cove, and Treasure Cove put on a high powered marketing system trying to sell lots which lasted for two to three years. Then a vice-president,

we were told, left with three million dollars; and the effort to sell lots subsided considerably for about two to three years. Then Fairfield Harbour company took it over and began to develop it. The land at River Bend was bought by Frank Efird and Guion Lee, I think it was.

They pushed development of that. I don't remember what year probably about fifteen years ago, somebody else took over most of that. Then Greenbrier, out near Craven Community College, began to develop five or six years ago. They have a beautiful golf course there. I think they're still building. Craven Community College started as a technical school. I think it's first school was in the Harvey house.

I remember my wife teaching about a year in it. Then they built some buildings out where they are now, and it's been growing every since.

Also, that area around the college has grown tremendously rapidly.

You have the Berne Retirement Center. Not far away there are at least four doctors offices. There's a out-patient clinic out there. There was one time when our Presbytery recommended that the West New Bern church buy some property out there and move, but the church didn't see fit to do so. Now, I doubt that's there any property available.

JP: Murphy, do you think New Bern is as friendly a place as it used to be?

Rev. Smith: Yes, I believe it is. There's a little difference sometimes between the natives of New Bern and the new comers. So many of the new comers have become involved in organizations such as; the historical society, the churches, community concerts, and other organizations. They've put in volunteer time and have contributed

money to different projects. There are just more activities going on. For instance, in the early days when we were here, about the only thing of entertainment in New Bern was the movies. But now, there's a civic theater; there's a children's theater; there's a Bank of the Arts; there are programs at the city library; there are programs put on by Tryon Palace, programs sponsored by the Historical Society, there are boat races. It's interesting about the boat races. When we came to New Bern, they were having boat races on the Trent river. You could hear the boats warming up on Friday afternoon and all day Saturday, and then they'd have the races on Sunday. That lasted for about five years my guess. I don't know why they were discontinued, but they were. It was interesting that everybody and his brother tried to get a small boat on the river. Many a one, including our children, learned to water ski. I never could get up on skis myself. Now, there's not as much motor boat activity on the rivers, but there are lots of sailboats. People have gone in for sailing in a big way. There are sail races once or twice a year. There have been a couple of new hotels built; Ramada Inn, the Sheraton, and the Days Inn which was originally the Ramada Inn. There's just a new spirit, I think, in town.

JP: A new good spirit, would you say?

Rev. Smith: I think so.

JP: Murphy, can you tell me about the early days of Tryon Palace?

Rev. Smith: Before the Palace was developed, to get across the Trent river, one went down George Street, through the Palace grounds, and across a wooden bridge to the other side. There was a seafood

restaurant on the north side just before you crossed the bridge. Then when they began the restoration of the Palace, they re-routed the street around the Palace grounds and down to South Front Street and around the end of the Palace grounds to East Front Street, and a bridge was constructed to cross the river at that place. I remember they dug up practically every inch of the land in the Palace complex before building anything. I think the first Tryon Palace Commission was appointed about 1945. Dr. Gertrude Carraway was the first administrator, or director, of the Palace. Mr. and Mrs. J. A. Kellenberger were very active in it. He was treasurer of the commission. The first money to develop the Palace was given by Mrs. Kellenberger's mother, Maude Latham. Kellenberger did an excellent job in investment in the use of the money to begin it. There were some people in New Bern that felt it was money thrown away, but it's been a blessing to New Bern.

JP: There were a number of people displaced from their homes when this happened and it created some difficulties as I recall.

Rev. Smith: Yeah, a few were. Yes. They bought Mrs. Mark Stevenson's old home which I believe is the office now.

JP: I think the office is across the street in the Mohn home.

Rev. Smith: That's right. Then they bought the Speight house that was on New Street across from the Presbyterian church?

JP: That was the Stanly house.

Rev. Smith: The Stanly house. When we came to New Bern, the downstairs was the library for New Bern.

JP: It was on New Street then.

Rev. Smith: On New Street. Mrs. Firstbrooke had a beautiful apartment up on the second floor, the house was moved around to become a part of the Palace complex.

JP: Murphy, we'll wind this down now because I've made you talk a very long time. I have one question I want to ask you, the final question, but before I do, let me just ask you if you have other memories of New Bern that you would like to speak to that I'm not going to ask about?

Rev. Smith: No, I don't think so except that I have wonderful memories of many people in New Bern. Most of them in the Presbyterian church, but not all. I remember very pleasant relationships with lots of people in other churches, and some outside of churches. I feel that New Bern has given me opportunities to participate in the life of the community beyond the church. For example, you mentioned the race commission on which I served. Also, I served on a committee in the county health department on mental health. Dr. Brown was the director of the department of health at that time. I was on a committee that worked with him. He was the final mental health authority in the county at the time. Before this time, two of us had organized an alcohol information center to try to help alcoholics and to provide information to anyone who would receive it. Finally, we combined the alcohol information center with a mental health center called the Neuse Mental Health Center. I had an opportunity to work in that and to serve on the board three different times. I have worked in the mental

health association as president for a few years. I was campaign manager and president, each for two years, in United Way. I was also president of the community concerts for a while. So, I feel that I was very fortunate that the City of New Bern gave me an opportunity to participate in the life of the community beyond the church.

JP: Murphy, there is no doubt that you have paid New Bern back many times. Let me ask if you are glad you came to New Bern?

Rev. Smith: Yes, I am. I didn't think I would stay when I came because in the Presbyterian church, ministers don't stay beyond about ten years on the average. And here, I've stayed twenty-eight and retired. I've served as interim in six churches since then and am still visiting some elderly people in the Presbyterian church. I don't know that I could have gone to a better place. I had the opportunities to go to two or three other places. I was very interested in two of them especially. But for various reasons I felt that I should stay here, and I'm glad I did.

JP: I can tell you the Presbyterians and the New Bern are very glad you did too. Now, where do you go from here, Murphy?

Rev. Smith: Well, we've committed ourselves to go to Cary, North Carolina probably in September of 1993 to enter a Presbyterian Retirement Center which is being built. It will be completed some time next spring. We both hate to leave New Bern. As I've told Margaret, we both will cry on our way to Cary. But as we have reached this age of eighty years old, we know that it can't be too much longer. If the Berne Retirement Center had an intensive care center, that's where



we would want to go. But as it is, if we should reach the place that we couldn't drive the car, we would have trouble getting to stores and hospital and that kind of thing. We feel that we get better care in a retirement center in Cary, and we would also be closer to our son who lives in Raleigh. As far as any kind of work is concerned, I plan to give up visiting for our church at the end of this year.

I've done enough. I plan to write maybe some of my memoirs, and I have thought of writing some of the changes that I've seen in New Bern.

I don't know whether I'll get around to that or not. After this, there's not much point in writing because you will have a better collection of materials dealing with the changes that have taken place in New Bern. You will have the history of it. I was thinking of the replacement of buildings and new buildings and things like that, but I doubt that I'll get around to it. I can't type as fast as I use to.

JP: Murphy, I certainly wish you God Speed on this next venture.

Let me thank you for the Memories of New Bern program for all of this information. We really appreciate it. It's been a great interview, and it's just been wonderful to talk to you again.

Rev. Smith: My memory is not as keen as it used to be, and I probably have missed some important things.

JP: You've done just fine. It's been a great interview, and I thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW.