

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

GENEVIEVE TOLSON DUNN

INTERVIEW 1013

This is Dr. Joseph Patterson representing the Memories of New Bern Committee. My number is 1000. I am interviewing Mrs. Genevieve Dunn (Mrs. Mark S. Dunn) at her home at 1609 Lucerne Way in New Bern. The number of the interview is 1013. The date is October 5, 1992.

Dr. Patterson: Genevieve, what I'd like to do is just chat with you and have you tell me what you can remember about a number of things.

You've done so many great things in your life time in New Bern that's it's really hard to just imagine them all. The only way I can see to do this is just take them one by one and talk about them and then go on to another one. Tell me your full name.

Mrs. Dunn: Genevieve Tolson Dunn.

JP: You were born where?

Mrs. Dunn: In New Bern on July 24, 1917.

JP: We're both 75 years old.

Mrs. Dunn: Yes we are. (laughter)

JP: Did you have a doctor in attendance at your house?

Mrs. Dunn: Oh yes, and mother didn't have any more children for twelve and a half years because she was in labor with me for three days. (laughter)

JP: Who was the doctor?

Mrs. Dunn: Was there a Dr. Rhem?

JP: I'm not sure.

Mrs. Dunn: I can't remember his name right now.

JP: You had one brother, Hubert, Jr.

Mrs. Dunn: Yes.

JP: Where was your father from?

Mrs. Dunn: I'm going to say somewhere around Newport. He was born in a farmhouse, and then his father and Grandmother Tolson moved her children to Swansboro and they lived at various places around there. There's an island not far from Swansboro they lived on at one time. She had thirteen children, and only seven of the thirteen lived.

JP: What was your father's full name?

Mrs. Dunn: Hubert Glenn Tolson. I have a son named Hubert Glenn Tolson Dunn. That got in there because when he was approximately five years old or six and he was asked his name, he told them that his name was Hubert Glenn Dunn. I had left the Tolson out because I thought we could call him Glenn. He came in and wanted to know why he wasn't named for granddad and I said, "you are." He said the name is not Tolson. I said, "that's all right, you are." I marched to the telephone and I called Theresa Shipp down at the Register of Deeds office and I asked her how much does it cost to have a child's name changed, and she said, "fifty cents." So, I had his name changed, and now, he's stuck with it. H. Glenn T. Dunn. (laughter)

JP: That's great. What was your mother's name?

Mrs. Dunn: Florabelle Day Tolson.

JP: Where was she born?

Mrs. Dunn: She was accidentally born on a visit. My grandmother, who was her mother, had gone to deliver presents to some sisters and relatives in Vandemere. They lived on Metcalf Street in the double gallery porch house that Miss Katie Whitford tore down. Mother decided

to come a little early, and so mother was born in Vandemere. But she really was living in New Bern.

JP: When your father came to New Bern, what did he do?

Mrs. Dunn: As far as I know, he came to New Bern on a horse and he moved in a boarding house where the lady always said, "I cooked just enough biscuits and they were all dying for another biscuit." (laughter) I don't know who she was or where she lived. Daddy and mother met in the choir of the Methodist church. They were married in New York City. My grandfather was a sea captain. He had beautiful ships. I have pictures of his two ships in my dining room.

JP: Where did he live when he was a sea captain?

Mrs. Dunn: He was a sea captain when he was married. He sold that house because his wife died. Mother was only about six or seven or eight, or somewhere along there and her little brother was two or three years younger, and there were just the two children. They stayed with relatives until mother was twelve and Uncle Robert Day was nine or ten. Granddaddy put mother in a young ladies seminary up in Virginia and put poor Uncle Robert in the house of the president of the school, and he went to school with all these girls. (laughter) He never married and I know why, he had enough girls right then and there! After mother finished that school, she went to school in a school further up state that has been torn down. Littleton was the name of the town or the name of the school or both, I'm not sure. From there, she went to Greensboro College which you went to in those days. So, she attended four schools counting New Bern schools.

JP: Your father had quite a career in New Bern. Let's just talk about him for a minute. He had a fine furniture store. Do you recall the beginning of that store and would you tell me something about it?

Mrs. Dunn: All I can tell you is what I remember of daddy's involvement in it. He didn't start the store. The store's been there over a hundred years. Mr. Turner, Charlie Turner's father, started the store back in the 1800's. When daddy came up, he saw something in daddy that he wanted because his son really was marvelous at bookkeeping and that sort of thing, but he wasn't so good at knowing woods and selling. So, daddy immediately got a job with him and built the store on up 'till now Hubie, Hubert III, has taken over. When daddy died, he left half the store to me and half to Hubert. I sold my half to Hubert when my son got out. I was saving it for Glenn. Glenn had graduated from the University of Florida in design and architecture. But after a few years of working out there, he said mother, "I just want to go to law school." So he did.

JP: I remember your store. Turner Tolson was the name I always remember.

Mrs. Dunn: It still is. Daddy decided not to change the name and so did Hubert and so did Hubie.

JP: I remember it being in one location, I think, the whole time. Part of it opened on to Middle Street and then part on to Broad Street and sort of went behind Williams Cafe.

Mrs. Dunn: That's about the fourth location.

JP: Where were the other locations?

Mrs. Dunn: The one that I can barely remember was where the Jewel Box was later on that alley on Middle Street across from the Baptist church. Another one was around across from the Episcopal church in what became a pool room.

JP: It still is perhaps.

Mrs. Dunn: It could be or it could be a restaurant. I sort of get my architecture mixed up a little there. Then he moved to the location you were speaking of. Incidentally, those two stores belonged to two different men. He had to knock out walls. He had an upstairs and a basement and had lots more room. Then when Hubert, my brother, was very involved in the store, they decided to move it out on the edge of town.

JP: To it's present location?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes.

JP: On Clarendon?

Mrs. Dunn: It's on the road to Pollocksville and Wilmington or Wilmington highway. I don't remember the name of it.

JP: It's a very huge attractive place.

Mrs. Dunn: It's twice as big now. Have you noticed what Hubie has put in the back end of there?

JP: Yes.

Mrs. Dunn: It's tremendous.

JP: Another thing your dad was well known for, he was mayor for a while.

Mrs. Dunn: He was mayor for two terms, as long as he could be.

He was on the Board of Alderman for, I'd say, thirty years. He was chairman of the Health Department. For many years, he was on the school board.

JP: So, you inherit these tendencies genetically?

Mrs. Dunn: (laughter) I must.

JP: One of his great accomplishments was fixing the river shore.

Mrs. Dunn: Right.

JP: There's a plaque down there commemorating that.

Mrs. Dunn: He also let the women have the dump pile at the confluence of the two rivers. My mother was in charge of a pool. Do you remember a great big beautiful pool down there?

JP: Swimming pool?

Mrs. Dunn: No. It was a pool of beauty. It had beautiful fish and plants.

JP: At Union Point?

Mrs. Dunn: Yeah. They filled it in because it was hard to keep up and also I think they were scared some child was going to drown in there someday and the city might get blamed for it. Daddy was mayor then. They planted a tree in his memory down there.

JP: At that time, had the point been filled in? Was it Union Point then?

Mrs. Dunn: The city filled it in with trash. A highway from Bridgeton going north was being torn up and they just dragged in all that torn up highway for a building. If you remember, the sides of that building have all those pebbles in it. They built the building

from that highway and had dirt and so forth brought in.

JP: The garbage and all the trash had formed the basis for this. That had already been done?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. You know now when a boat comes by, how close they come to that point because there was a lot of space in there and they gradually filled it in with trash.

JP: Getting back to you. You were born on Metcalf Street and you went to school on the school grounds on school green.

Mrs. Dunn: Same school you did. (laughter) I went to school and graduated.

JP: Do you remember your early years? What were they like at school? Do you remember your teachers, your friends?

Mrs. Dunn: I don't remember too much about it. I'm gonna be honest with you, Joe Pat. I remember being in Miss Molly Heath's room which was very desirable. I remember Miss Louise Bell. She was grand. I had Miss Ruth Berry who was my next door neighbor. She taught us in the third grade. Miss Bell was fourth grade. I had Miss Curry, I think, in the fifth grade. You're helping my memory. You're making me come up with things. (laughter)

JP: You're doing fine.

Mrs. Dunn: I don't remember who I had in the sixth grade. In the seventh grade was when my brother was born and I remember I was in the class of the lady who married Charles Turner. I can't think of her name right now. She married Charlie Turner who was in with daddy. I'll just say Mrs. Charles Turner was my teacher there. From

there, I went into having different teachers for different subjects.

JP: You finished high school. Were high school years happy years?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes, they were fine.

JP: What were some of the things that made school fun for you in those years?

Mrs. Dunn: I don't know. The schools were a little different of course than they are now. For instance, they put on a lot of plays and we would all be in them and sing and dance. We had a music teacher who would put them on. I remember I worked and worked and worked my freshman year on learning a speech to give and I won the prize for speaking publicly. Then, I was on the debating team and I won the first prize for that. I still have my gold medal that I got. It's on a bracelet, but I lost the gold medal that I received for public speaking. That's what I did mostly in high school.

JP: Who were some of your good friends during high school years?

Mrs. Dunn: We had a group: Mary Brent Holland and Theresa Ship and Elizabeth Jones and Rosalie Richardson and Mary Anderson.

JP: Frances Roberts.

Mrs. Dunn: Frances Roberts. Some of these are dead now.

JP: Don't forget the boys.

Mrs. Dunn: (laughter) Joe Pat, Billy Dawson, Ben Hurst, Stanley Claypoole.

JP: Tom Bass.

Mrs. Dunn: Tom Bass, yes. He married Elizabeth Jones and she was killed not long after they were married. They had one child.

Very sad.

JP: That was a pretty closely knit crowd.

Mrs. Dunn: Yes.

JP: There were different crowds in those days. People had there own social groups. Do you remember it that way?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. I certainly do.

JP: You went on and graduated in New Bern High School and then where did you go to college?

Mrs. Dunn: Duke University where I only stayed two years. Mother and daddy figured I had spent most of that two years over at Chapel Hill with Mark. (laughter) Mark being my husband today. I made terrible grades, and so they jerked me out of Duke and sent me to school to a business college in Washington. Frances Roberts had gone to the same school. When I went up, she had just finished. It was the Washington School for Secretaries in the National Press building downtown Washington. Washington has changed so much now. I had a hard time finding anything up there.

JP: How long were you there?

Mrs. Dunn: Two years.

JP: Then did you come back to New Bern?

Mrs. Dunn: I worked up there for three or four months. Hap Barden our Congressman, he and daddy and mother and his wife were very good friends. In fact, they summered together a lot. We'd would often go to a clubhouse that daddy and the Congressman belonged to. He said, "don't worry Hubert, I'll get her a job in the government." I was

so stupid that I said, "I will get my own job!", and of course, I didn't get a job that paid half of what I would have made in the government. (laughter) To make ends meet, I taught school in the Washington School for Secretaries at night. I got off work in one building at 5:00 and my first class was due in the other building at 5:00 and there were about three or four blocks apart and I'd tear over. I didn't last but about four months, when they told me, I just stood up and screamed the roof off the building one day at work! Mother and Mark drove up to Richmond. I took the train to Richmond. I thought I was just coming home for a little while. I came home and Mark had finished school then and was practicing law here in New Bern. So, I decided to stay in New Bern. I got a job here. How many clothes and suit cases and trunks and everything I left up there, I'll never know.

JP: You never got them?

Mrs. Dunn: I hope to heavens I didn't save any letters I shouldn't have. (laughter) Every now and then I think about that and it haunts me. (laughter)

JP: When did you get married?

Mrs. Dunn: The end of 1941. The 28th of December. I have to think real hard. We were married fifty years.

JP: Your fiftieth anniversary was, of course, last year. Your family moved from Metcalf Street to New Street?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes.

JP: You were living there when you and Mark were married, is that correct?

Mrs. Dunn: Oh no. We lived on Metcalf Street in the house mother and daddy moved out of. When we first moved over here, war had been declared and houses were getting difficult to find to rent over here.

So, Mark's daddy bought a little house over on Rhem Avenue and we lived there until Glenn was born, my second son. Mark, Jr. was born about a month or two before we came over here. We came to New Bern to spend the Fourth of July and Mark's father said, "Why is all of your mail coming here?" We discovered he had been transferred but the government hadn't told him. We had to go back with this baby who was born late May. I smoked then. I don't anymore. Every time I put down a pack of cigarettes, a pack of chewing gum or anything, they'd wrap it, and I got scared they were going to wrap my baby. I took my baby upstairs to Mrs. Leslie Boney with whom we had an apartment. We moved to New Bern and didn't have a place to live.

JP: I'm not quite clear where you moved from to New Bern.

Mrs. Dunn: Wilmington.

JP: You were in Wilmington at that time?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. Mark was in Raleigh when we were married. He had been there about a month and a boy he had roomed with at Carolina put his name down to get a job for some reason and Mark decided to take it after we went over. So, we didn't stay in Raleigh more than a month. Then we went from Raleigh to New Bern. I mean, from Greensboro to Raleigh and Wilmington and then back to Greensboro while Mark trained. We ended up first in Wilmington.

JP: Was Mark in the service then?

Mrs. Dunn: No, he tried to get in four times. He wanted very much to be in the Navy. His eyes just would not pass. Then he tried to get in the Army. The second time he was examined he went up in a whole big old truck full of boys from Pamlico County and Craven County and Mark was one of the last ones that the doctor saw. So, he said, "Mark, do you have any children?" Mark said, "Yes sir. I have two sons." I don't know whether Julie was on the way or not. She wasn't then I don't believe. He said, "We don't need you", and he stamped cancel on him.

JP: How many children do you have, Genevieve?

Mrs. Dunn: Four.

JP: And their names.

Mrs. Dunn: Mark, Jr., Hubert Glenn Tolson Dunn, Julie, and Nancy. Nancy was born eight years after the others. I thought I was through.
(laughter)

JP: I remember. Genevieve, we'll get back to your involvement in New Bern in a more relaxed way a little bit later, but let's start now with some of these great things that you have done in New Bern.

One of the things that keeps cropping up as I talk to people is the RCS, the Religious Community Services. Every time that is mentioned, your name is involved. You are obviously a very integral part of that.

How about telling me about the Religious Community Services; what it is, how it came about, and your involvement with it.

Mrs. Dunn: It was started by a Presbyterian minister, Dr. Boyd. Dr. Boyd had been involved in an effort somewhat the same in I believe

Mississippi. I'm not sure where he came here from. He brought it up at a meeting of all the ministers here in town and they voted to try to do it.

JP: What was it supposed to do?

Mrs. Dunn: One church had a clothing closet, another one had a food closet, another one had a little of each. There was no money to give somebody who needed groceries. We needed to work together, so Dr. Boyd got this group together and they decided try to see if they could get a minister and two non-minister people from as many churches as possible. We started with eleven churches and now we have almost thirty I think.

JP: All in New Bern?

Mrs. Dunn: The county.

JP: It's a county wide program. About what year was this?

Mrs. Dunn: It's been ten or eleven years. I think it's ten years.

JP: How did you get involved in this? Were you one of the two people in your church?

Mrs. Dunn: I was buying and kept a closet with food at our church, at the Episcopal church. The girls at the welfare department would call me and say, "I've got a family of five. Can you give me enough food for a week when he'll get a check?" I would meet them down at the church and we'd give them enough food to carry the family. It takes an amazing amount of food to feed five people for a week or two weeks. Somehow or other when Dr. Boyd suggested this, I was already doing it, so I just fell into it that way. We were able to get a building

for free down from Barbour Boat Works down on Tryon Palace Drive. When we started out, we did not have the soup kitchen. We started out just with food for them to take home, and clothing. In some areas we had money. We had money for transportation. I guess, perhaps, there were three or four churches who gave most of the money, but any church could join that would give us ten or twenty dollars. That would be a part of it. Some of them couldn't afford to do any more than that and we were glad to have them. We stayed down there until they decided they were going to use that building for something else. The board of directors decided at that time that we needed a soup kitchen, that there were a lot of people who needed a soup kitchen and a place to get one decent meal a day. They found out that Sister Angela Mary wanted to stop teaching and was thrilled to death. She had worked for one summer at a soup kitchen up in Baltimore, so she sort of knew how to go about it and get it started. So, that's how we got the building built up here.

JP: Where is that building located?

Mrs. Dunn: I think it's on Guion Street. It's the same street the bus station is on now. It's right across the street from the bus station.

JP: Is it just beyond Kafer Park, in that area?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. It's beyond the old Rec building. The lot backs up to the McKnight's.

JP: Were you the first chairperson of this group?

Mrs. Dunn: Of the services to the people, but I didn't have

anything to do with the soup kitchen. (laughter) That was Sister Angela Mary's.

JP: Your job as chairperson was just to coordinate it all?

Mrs. Dunn: After we moved down there, it grew to the place that we had four, what we called, managers. They would take one week of the month. We worked it that way.

JP: Were you over the four managers? You sort of coordinated that?

Mrs. Dunn: Yeah.

JP: How long did you maintain that position of responsibility?

Mrs. Dunn: Almost ten years. I have a silver cup in there they gave me. It's lovely. They decided to hire a paid lady. So they did, and naturally she took over my job because she's in charge of everything.

JP: Do you have any connection with this effort now?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. A funny one. Whenever the police gets someone in the middle of the night that needs a room, they call me. (laughter)

I got permission after it happened one time. I went to this lady who is in charge of the whole thing and I told her that I was getting phone calls, and she said, "Well that's fine. I don't want to be awakened at two o'clock in the morning." I said, "Well, I don't either if I've got to go up there." But I can generally handle it by telephone.

I also can put them in a motel, usually the Palace Motel, and I can give them enough money for gas or they can charge it with a slip I can give them, and food; like they'll have breakfast the next morning.

Usually they're people who are leaving town when they call at two o'clock in the morning.

JP: Now this effort that you helped start has blossomed all through the years to the point that now it has a brand new home. A house has been moved out.

Mrs. Dunn: Yes, and the brand new home has been added on to. It's twice as much space as it had.

JP: This is a house that was moved from the corner of Pollock and Hancock Street?

Mrs. Dunn: Oh, you're talking about that house. I don't know what they're planning to do with that house.

JP: It's out there next to all of this now.

Mrs. Dunn: I'm trying to think where it is. No. It's over on Pasteur Street where Whitty Milling used to be. That's where it is.

JP: That's to be the RCS house though, isn't it?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes, it's going to be an RCS house, but I don't know exactly what plans they have drawn up to go in there. They could move the department I was head of over there and use that whole new building for meals which would be the simplest thing to do. Or they could make more space to have people for overnight. Sometimes in cold weather, that overnight business gets sort of rough.

JP: This has been a great thing for New Bern. I have been told by people who really know, that this is perhaps the greatest thing that the religious unified effort has produced in New Bern, and you are largely responsible for that and so that's good.

Mrs. Dunn: No. Rich was responsible for that. (laughter)

JP: You played a leading role. Well, Genevieve, do you have anything else you want to say about the RCS before we move on to another major area?

Mrs. Dunn: No.

JP: One of the things in New Bern that has your name stamped all over it, of course, is the Academy Museum. This museum is in the old Academy building on the school green. It was renovated for a New Bern type museum, is that correct?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes.

JP: Now you tell me how this came about.

Mrs. Dunn: As integration progressed, and it went through two or three stages, finally they just decided to close down all the school buildings on that campus. There were four buildings. The night we made that decision, I was at a school board meeting and I said, "Good gracious, you can't let that Academy building be torn down or made into anything in the world. It's got to be preserved." So, they decided that since I had brought it, I got stuck with being chairman of that.

The way school law works, you cannot just sell a building or give a building to anybody. If you're going to sell it, you have to stand out there and hold an auction, either that or we had to go through the state legislature. So, we went through the state legislature and the building was given at first to New Bern and New Bern refused it and Craven County accepted it. They appointed a board of directors and I was made chairman of that board. It hadn't been very long when

I was awakened by my husband saying, "Genevieve, the school building's on fire! Your building's on fire!" I threw on some clothes Saturday morning and ran down there. The fire had started, we think, because it was sort of a time that a person would have gone in there to smoke a cigarette, and it started on some steps that went up to the third floor; such as the third floor was. There was a very small amount of flooring put in up there. But we were fortunate. All the fire was on one side of that building and the two sides were identical.

So, we had to restore it. To make a long story shorter, it took half a million dollars to restore that building, \$500,000.

JP: When the fire occurred, had you started the museum?

Mrs. Dunn: No, we hadn't. We were getting money to start and they were working on drawings of the building. The building was so important to the whole state not just to Craven County.

JP: Why was it important?

Mrs. Dunn: Because the school was started in the 1700's. This building was built around 1805 or 1806. We've never been able to completely identify the date. A school had been there on that ground for many years, since the 1700's when we were a colony rather than a state. Everybody knew it had to be preserved. After the firemen got it out, we collected what insurance we had on the building and got it back well enough that it didn't rain in. But I'm telling you, Joe Pat, every item that went in there is the same size of the one on the other side. If it was a foot wide and a foot long beam up in the attic, it was the same. We had to get our beams and boards and

things from someplace in Georgia. We couldn't even buy them in North Carolina.

JP: Where did you get a half a million dollars to restore this?

Mrs. Dunn: It took us ten years. (laughter) Mrs. Kellenberger was very generous. She gave us five thousand dollars at one time and a thousand or two another time, and then when she died, she left us a goodly amount. A number of people in New Bern gave fair amounts of money. We put on sales of all kinds in the building. Then the city after turning us down and wouldn't take it, the county took it, the city gave us almost one hundred thousand dollars. (laughter) They had this money left over that had to be used for something like our project, and so they gave it to us.

JP: The building still belongs to the county?

Mrs. Dunn: I don't know who it belongs to; whether it belongs to the county or belongs to the board of directors. I guess it belongs to the county. We want very much for the Palace to buy the building. We'll sell it to them for a dollar. That's what they pay me a year for rent. They give me a dollar bill and I give it back to them as a gift. (laughter) It doesn't cost them a penny.

JP: Are you still chairperson of this?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. I've been the chairperson since the beginning.

JP: At what point, Genevieve, was the decision made to make this a museum? Your vision was to restore the building to it's original status, then it became a museum. How did that happen?

Mrs. Dunn: Tryon Palace made the decision. We did not feel that

we could let them have the building and not say anything much. I said a little bit, but I didn't say much. I wasn't quite as happy as I should be for what they were doing because I had envisioned something that school children would like and that's a result of my doing tours with school children for twenty some odd years. I knew they would love it. I had always envisioned something that children would really love, and they have not done that exactly.

JP: Did Tryon Palace, then, do the museum planning?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes.

JP: That was not under your jurisdiction?

Mrs. Dunn: No, but we told them not to move one permanent thing or close one permanent window or anything like that. I haven't checked on them in a year or so. I think it's about time I go down there and see what they're doing.

JP: Does the Palace run the museum?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. We don't have a thing to do with it.

JP: The museum is more directly connected with the history of New Bern than the Palace. I have been told by people that that's the place to really go to find out about New Bern. It's a wonderful place.

Mrs. Dunn: Yes it is. They've done a good job. It's just not exactly what we thought they were gonna to do.

JP: Your involvement was getting the money to restore that building and getting it restored.

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. It had to be restored mint perfectly! The people who made that decision were the Raleigh people. I made presentations

to Raleigh asking for money, and that was one thing that they always said, "We want it done exactly as it was."

JP: Genevieve, some buildings were torn down on the school green.

Mrs. Dunn: The primary building which was next to this was torn down.

JP: That was west of this building. That's where we went first through fourth grade.

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. First through fourth. We did. We went through fifth and sixth in the Academy building. A second building was built by the Academy. Did you know that?

JP: The Bell building?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes.

JP: No.

Mrs. Dunn: It was the second building for the Academy, for high school children. It's a well built, wonderful building. Bob Stallings bought that and he's now living in it.

JP: Yes. He made some beautiful apartments there.

Mrs. Dunn: They're perfectly lovely.

JP: Then the high school, the last building...

Mrs. Dunn: Yeah, that was torn down too, and the Ben Jones house I call it was moved there. I don't know the correct name for that. I haven't done any tours in a long time.

JP: Why did they tear that down?

Mrs. Dunn: I don't know, unless that there was a dire need for a place to put buildings and houses that were being moved. They decided

that the building wasn't that old or that good. It had been changed a lot. Do you remember they had put a front on it and it had four rooms in it?

JP: I think so. Well, the school green as we used to know it was a lot of fun. Recess was fun.

Mrs. Dunn: Yeah. We used to climb those poles. (laughter)

JP: Yes, and before school and after school was fun.

Mrs. Dunn: I could leave home when the second bell rang and be there by the time the third bell rang. I was just around the corner. (laughter) It was wonderful.

JP: Let's look at another area where you have been important to New Bern, the school board. How long were you on the school board?

Mrs. Dunn: It was almost twenty years.

JP: Do you recall the years involved, when you started and when you stopped?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes, to a degree. MacDonald was head of the school system then. He wasn't there too much longer when Will Pittman took his place. So, I served under two of them. I tried to resign a couple of times. I'd get mad about something and I tried to resign, and they wouldn't pay any attention to me. (laughter) They'd let me stay home for a little while and then they'd call me back to a meeting and I'd go back again. So, I served much longer than I really should have I guess.

JP: Were you chairperson?

Mrs. Dunn: I was then.

JP: How many years did you chair?

Mrs. Dunn: I think that's one time I quit, to tell you the truth, because the chairman resigned and I was vice-chairman for ever and ever, Amen, so I should have stepped in his place. I got a phone call from a man who said, "we just think that with all the trouble, integration, that's going to come up and so forth, we need a man chairman." So, I did not go in then. But then after this man served a few years, he had a stroke and so then I became chairman. They didn't hold it off any longer. I think they found out the day I went out to the high school, the high school went crazy, that I could hold my own.

JP: Was this school board the county board or the city school system?

Mrs. Dunn: The city board.

JP: I was just about to ask you about some of the notable things that happened during your term on the school board, and you brought up a very important one just a moment ago. You spoke of a day when there was a lot of trouble. What was this about?

Mrs. Dunn: It was a heartbreaking day. It really was. We knew from the day before, things that had happened and things we had found out, that we were going to have trouble that day.

JP: What was the setting? Was this the Martin Luther King episode?

Mrs. Dunn: No, it wasn't. It was after that. I don't even connect the two in my mind, so I know there was no connection. I may be wrong.

I got dressed and I went out there and I met every bus that came into

the high school. I'd say, "Good morning. I'm on the School Board, and I'm here to say good morning to you." They all got off peacefully, black and white. Then by the time school started, whoever was chairman of the board at that time and two or three black men from the board, (we were partly black and partly white) had come in. We had so many principals, I can't remember what his name was and maybe it's good I don't, he went all to pieces. He just was no good that day. Every time they'd buzz for a class to change, a black man and I would walk the halls of the school. All day long! We walked on every class change, and you'd see a group of whites here and group of blacks here. They'd see us coming, a black man and a white woman, and they'd break up real fast!

JP:(interruption) Genevieve, you had just driven over to the parking lot.

Mrs. Dunn: And I drove my car up between the high school building and the gymnasium. You know how they're separate?

JP: Yes.

Mrs. Dunn: Lo and behold there was a group of white kids in two or three automobiles on one side of my car and a group of blacks on the other, and they were getting ready to go to it. I jumped out of the car and I said, "I'm from the School Board. Don't you all do anything wrong", and I said very quietly to one of the boys, "Go get some men fast." I held them apart until the men came and separated them. We did have a white boy who was injured and had to have some stitches. We had some troubles that day. We really did. So, that night we

held a meeting and the principal resigned. Mr. Fields, a black man who had been principal over at the black high school and was still principal, was made principal of New Bern High School that night. And he was just wonderful. The next morning, he called all the girls into the auditorium. This was the day after all that mess had happened.

He said, "You all look the same color to me, so I want you all to behave yourselves", and he gave them a little talking to. He got rid of the girls and had all the boys in, and he said, "Ya'll look alike to me." (laughter) He said the same thing to both of them. We still had a little trouble after that but nothing great.

JP: What had led up to this Genevieve? Do you remember? Was it the Civil Rights Act?

Mrs. Dunn: I cannot remember to save my soul what brought that on.

JP: Was that the worse time with racial problems that you remember?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes.

JP: What are some other important issues you had to face?

Mrs. Dunn: Joe Pat, I told you I didn't have any memory.

JP: Well, this is certainly an important one.

Mrs. Dunn: We had meeting after meeting when blacks would come to the meeting and want more than they had and deserved more than they had really. As I say, our integration was done piece by piece. First they sent a few black children who lived real near Central School to Central School, and a few that lived near the Ghent School were sent

to Ghent School, but there was really no bussing or anything like that done at first. Then the next step was to try to divide them up as equally as possible and that has made a lot of bussing. I'm not sure that it's working til this day, Pat. I really am not. My youngest daughter, Nancy, went her last two years to school in Virginia because she thought she was getting along so beautifully with the blacks and a black girl gave her such a hard time that she just begged with tears in her eyes to be sent off to school.

JP: During those times, were you having many problems with the white parents?

Mrs. Dunn: Oh yes. We had problems with both. People moved actually. I know one family, I shall not name, moved three times. Every time that she'd put a child in school, it would get integrated and she would move to another school. We had a lot of complaints. More over the telephone or personally than at a meeting of course. The blacks had complaints too, and their complaints were just as realistic as the whites and probably more so. My father was ill for many, many months before he died, and he just lay in the hospital like a one minute old baby. They had nurses around the clock. His daytime nurse from seven until three was a Panamanian. She and her husband and a group of blacks came up to one of our school board meetings and they gave us up and down the country. I was not chairman then I don't believe. I can't remember whether I was or not. We couldn't do what they wanted us to do. It wasn't practical and it just wasn't doable. So when the meeting was over, they blocked the door and weren't going

to let us out. I stayed and talked for a few minutes to this black lady. She was a good friend of mine. I said, "well, I'll see." I got ready to go and I started out the door and this white man said, "I'll see you through these people." She whipped around and she said, "Mrs. Dunn does not need to be seen out! She can go anytime she wants to!" That made me feel good. I don't know that integration is working as well as they want it to. They thought by now that everything would be better, and they still have difficulties.

JP: You're not on the school board now?

Mrs. Dunn: No. After I had been on the school board for about twenty years, I don't know how they worked it, but somebody had it put through that we had to integrate the two systems. So now, it's just one system for the city and county.

JP: Genevieve, do you recall some of the other members of the school board during that troublesome time? You said there were blacks and whites.

Mrs. Dunn: I can't remember the names.

JP: Let's just shift a little bit from that. During those trouble years when civil rights became a focal issue, I think you were involved with a civil rights commission of some kind in New Bern. I don't know that I have the name right. Could you tell me about that?

Mrs. Dunn: I don't know what the name of it was to tell you the truth. There were two ministers who were the first chairmen. We always had two chairmen for some reason. Ed Sharp and the Methodist minister were the first presidents or leaders or whatever. Then I and the black

man, James Gavin, were the second heads of the organization. It was during that time, I'd forgotten about this, the school up on West Street burned to the ground. We knew pretty well who burned it, but we didn't dare accuse anybody because there wasn't a soul to be seen anywhere near there except Mr. Sparrow and his family. Mr. Sparrow the brick mason and his family lived there. I don't know who is there now. They watched the fire and watched it burn. There were some young men from out of town who were running some sort of organization here that was trying to get everything, as they said, civilized. The building was in terrible condition. Buckshot Nixon, that was his name. He came to the school board and raised cain about the condition of the school. Well, I hadn't been up to the school and I took the superintendent's word for it that he was fussing about nothing. They appointed me to go and do an examination of the school. So, I went up to the school and I was appalled at what I saw! It was simply dreadful! You walked in and you dodged a big hole in the floor where once there had been an attempt to heat the building. One room was not used at all because about over a third of the wall was gone and there were wires all through it. I threw a switch and the wires were not dead. The bathrooms were an added feature. They weren't in the building when it was first built. They were added on. It was as cold as could be and every window was wide open! It was simply dreadful and he was just talking terribly about it. I kept saying, "I didn't know about this. I did not know it was this bad, and something will be done." He wouldn't take anything for an answer. He just ranted

and raved. So finally, I got away. One of the mothers took me aside and said, "Don't pay any attention to him. You see what it is, don't you?" I said, "Yes I see and I'm going to do something about it!"

We had a school board meeting that night and I reported what I had seen and I thought that something should be done immediately. We got Livingston Stallings on it. I think this was Thursday night. I went to his office with him. I didn't go alone. There was somebody with us. He promised that he would get trailers in there for the children and get them out of this disreputable building, and the next night, it burned to the ground.

JP: Solved that problem, didn't it?

Mrs. Dunn: It sure did. We collected insurance. We couldn't have collected it insurance if we had torn it down.

JP: Getting back to this civil rights group. How long was this commission in action?

Mrs. Dunn: I belonged to it about four or five years. Then we just reached a point where I didn't think we were doing any good anymore and I stopped. We started out with some people that I could name that you would know, but I'm not gonna name them, that dropped off.

JP: What was the purpose of the group?

Mrs. Dunn: Race relations.

JP: To better race relations in this city?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. There was a lady for instance from Vanceboro who came in and, poor dear, the night or two before, they had burned a cross in her yard. She and her husband had worked so hard and earned

enough money to build a little brick house out at Vanceboro, and the people out there couldn't take it and they burned a cross in her yard and shot into their bedroom. She got under the bed with her two children and was not killed. It was just unbelievable how things were. It really was.

JP: Do you think, looking back, that this was an effective group?

Mrs. Dunn: I think so to a degree, yes. For instance, the night that Martin Luther King was killed, we were called to a meeting at five o'clock that afternoon. On my way there I met a newspaper man who is now dead, and he said, "Have you been to the post office?" I said, "no." I was walking. He said, "Well, the flags are at half mast for that great Martin Luther King", and he made a lot of bad cracks about him. I didn't tell him where I was going because I knew I would be in trouble right then. (laughter) So, I went on to the courthouse and practically every member of that commission was there. Finally, James Gavin stood up and with tears streaming down his face said, "Don't make the blacks stay in tonight!" That was what the whites wanted, and he said, "no. Put police cars, sheriff's cars, anything you can get from one street to another street and just block off that part of town and let them roam and sing and cry and do anything they want," and he was crying when he said it. So, that's what we recommended, and I'll always think the mayor was very brave to try it, but it worked.

JP: Who was the mayor?

Mrs. Dunn: I can't remember.

JP: The groups of blacks and white on this commission had

evidently worked out a trust between them. Is that correct? Did that help the situation?

Mrs. Dunn: I think so. I think that we did the right thing by letting them roam and stay out as much as they wanted to.

JP: How did it go that night?

Mrs. Dunn: They never tried to break out or get downtown and break any windows. That's what would have happened. Now whether they broke a few up in the section that the black people live in or not, I don't remember, but nothing really serious happened. They had the privilege of roaming and going where they wanted to.

JP: That commission is not in existence now?

Mrs. Dunn: I don't think it is.

JP: Do you have any other memories, Genevieve, of integration or problems in those days?

Mrs. Dunn: No. The schools, and I had children in school at that time, were the main things. I'm sure there's a lot somebody else can tell you that I've forgotten about. I'm not such a good one for you to interview. (laughter)

JP: You've told me some very important things. Let's shift to another area. Another place where your name has been prominent is the library. Tell me about your involvement with the, is it the New Bern Library or the New Bern Craven County Library?

Mrs. Dunn: It was New Bern Craven County I think. We were in the John Wright Stanly home which was around on New Street across from the Presbyterian church when I was asked to be on the Board. One of

the first things that happened was terrible. We lost our librarian, but at the same time a man who was married to a librarian decided to move back to his home out here. So, we had a marvelous librarian who has just resigned her position.

JP: Was that Fannie Howerton?

Mrs. Dunn: No. Elinor Hawkins walked in and she was hired immediately and it was a wonderful, wonderful day the day we got her!

JP: This was still when the library was in the John Wright Stanly house.

Mrs. Dunn: We kept begging and begging for a new building and they wouldn't give it to us.

JP: This building had been turned around from facing on Middle Street to facing on New Street, and upstairs was an apartment. Is that correct?

Mrs. Dunn: Two apartments. One on each side. So, this library was just really bound in there. They couldn't grow at all. We tried to do something about the building and the city would turn us down.

Finally, we just gave the building to Tryon Palace and then they had to build one. So, that was the way that happened. Then Elinor has just retired two or three weeks ago.

JP: Where was the next location of the library after moving from that building? The corner of Johnson and Middle?

Mrs. Dunn: I can't remember whether we had a place that we met in between then or not. Isn't that strange? I hadn't thought about that. I don't remember. I do remember the day they moved the building.

(laughter) Mark and I got up about five or six o'clock and it was cold. We put on warm clothes and we walked down to the library. They had been working getting it on this thing they were going to move it with and it was pulled by something that was used to pull World War I huge cannons. That's what it was. Mrs. Kellenberger was there with her chauffeur. We got in the car, and Mark went and bought us donuts and hot coffee and we watched until they moved it.

JP: You were in the car with Mrs. Kellenberger?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. We watched until they moved it, and then I had to go to Greenville to see a doctor about something. So, I went to Greenville and came back just in time to watch the man turn that building around in its new location across from Tryon Palace. How he ever did it, I'll never know. He was a big strong young man. He had sleeves that didn't come down very far, so you could see the muscles in his arm. He was pulling it and he had the front end, so he had to jockey it all around to get it. It was fascinating to watch, and they've done a beautiful job with that house around there. Then they had to build us a library because we didn't have one.

JP: How many years were you on the library board?

Mrs. Dunn: I don't remember Joe Pat.

JP: You're not on it now?

Mrs. Dunn: No.

JP: Has it been some time since you've been on it?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes.

JP: But you still are involved there?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. I still am on the book selection committee which hasn't met since Elinor resigned. (laughter) I don't know whether we're still going to exist or not. There were Margaret Stallings and a group of us who met and we each had different resource materials. I used a book list that had everything in the world in it. Then if I would see something in another magazine that wasn't on the approved list, I would take it and they would have to try to find it and they would look for a place that did approve the book.

JP: Mrs. Emmet Whitehurst was on this board for a long time, wasn't she?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. She was chairman.

JP: You worked with her?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. I may have been vice-chairman. I don't remember.

JP: You were chairman for a while though, weren't you?

Mrs. Dunn: No.

JP: But you were on the board all these years. Well, you must be very satisfied to see that new library sitting there and to know that you played a big role in that.

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. It's beautiful.

JP: Another thing that you have done is you were president of the Community Concert series for ten years. What is the history of that, Genevieve? How did that start in New Bern?

Mrs. Dunn: Frances Johnson found out about Community Concerts. I don't know how she found out. She must have found it out from another town cause they were in Kinston and different towns. We started that

in New Bern and our first president was Mrs. John Guion because she was an older lady and her name was well known. She was only president to help us go through the first year and then I was president from then on. Frances was the real worker of the group but she never was chairman of it that I can remember. I don't know why. Somehow or other she felt that Mrs. Guion's name and my name knew more people. I don't know what it was. But we had some wonderful artists here. We really did. After we had been going for a number of years, we were having so much trouble selling the memberships. You had to sell them before you could select your artist. We would try to get one really well known artist each year to sell the product. I don't know what happened. We passed out these questionnaires to everybody who came to a concert. I think one bad thing at the time that I was president of the thing was that we did not have the New Bern High School auditorium.

JP: Where were you meeting?

Mrs. Dunn: We had some of them at the auditorium over here at Ghent School and whenever they had a fire, the fire whistle would blow the artist out of the building. (laughter) So, that wasn't very satisfactory. We had most of them at the building that's now used for lunches. The recreation building out on George Street. We passed out these sheets of paper and asked everybody if they thought we should continue and they all voted no, so we just dropped it. Then later on, it was picked up by another group.

JP: I was going to say it's still going, but there was a gap

of some years in there?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes.

JP: During the ten years, you had some good concerts.

Mrs. Dunn: Oh yes. We had some wonderful concerts. I'm not going to try and name any of them. I can remember one lady was so funny. She was quite a famous harpist and she had the most beautiful harps you've ever seen. She had lots of small ones and all these different size ones. We didn't touch the stage at the Rec building because a play had been given there and they had a living room scene which was lovely. They had painted and put up wallpaper with nothing behind it. So, she played for a little while and all of a sudden she went over and put her fist right through the wallpaper. (laughter) She said, "It's hot in here. I'm burning up!"

JP: She did this deliberately?

Mrs. Dunn: Yeah! She did it on purpose. She was so funny. She taught Harpo Marx how to play. She had some very prominent harpists. I just happened to remember him.

JP: And the New Bern people voted to discontinue it?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. Then a few years later another group took it up.

JP: And it's flourishing.

Mrs. Dunn: I guess it is. I hope so.

JP: Genevieve, you mentioned the clubhouse at Union Point. This was the Woman's Clubhouse for many years. You were a very instrumental person in getting a teenage group involved in that in some way, weren't

you?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. We decided that the teenagers didn't have any place to go at night and that it would be a darn good idea. That place was empty. It was in bad condition. The flooring was sinking and it was not used at all. The Women's Club was not using it, so it had reverted to the city. I made an appearance before the Board of Alderman, and I believe Bob Stallings was mayor then, and I told them that we would like to use the building if they would fix it up. We didn't have any money. (laughter) We just had the idea. Some how or other I sold them on it. They had an architect to work on it and give them plans and they fixed it. Not too well I'm sorry to say. One thing I did was I would call one lady and ask her to donate a chair. I'd say now, you call five ladies and get five folded chairs. Then I'd call another lady and I'd say now, you get five ladies. We were given some recreation things like machines for the kids to play with. It was for high school children. We kept that thing going. I was chairman of it for about five or six years. To be perfectly honest with you, I think that the integration of schools made it fall apart. Because at the time we started it, no blacks ever came.

JP: Was this forbidden?

Mrs. Dunn: I don't know. They just never came. It was before integration apparently. Nancy is my only child that went through integration. She's in her thirties now. My other three children are in their forties. (laughter) I can't believe it but they are. We had a good time down there. We really did. We had all kinds of games.

Then we started opening in the afternoons some to give the kids a place to go.

JP: Was it originally opened in the evenings?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes.

JP: And the teenage high school children would come.

Mrs. Dunn: I tried to get two sets of parents for chaperoning. I started having trouble getting chaperons and the Recreation Department decided that they could pay a lady to be a chaperon down there. She had to get somebody to help her as well as go down there.

JP: How did the integration movement cause trouble down there?

Mrs. Dunn: It never caused any troubles. It puzzles me. Mark, Jr. was maybe in school for one year that I had it open and then a year passed and Glenn graduated and so he went down there some and then another year passed and Julie was out there. We didn't have anybody who tried to come down there except some Marines. We had to tell them they were a little too old. They probably weren't. We never had a black try to come down there that I remember.

JP: What happened to make it fold? Did people just stop coming?

Mrs. Dunn: I think integration. I hate to say these things but I've got to be honest with you, Joe Pat. The department that ran the Recreation Department had been gathering money for years to build a swimming pool and they had it in a special account. They gave that money to us. I remember things we bought with the money they gave us. Because they knew if they built a pool at that time, that before long they were going to have trouble. They'd have blacks and white.

I hate to say this because I have many black friends and I've had many black friends. But to be honest, the Recreation Department did not want to build a pool and I know that was the reason. So, they gave it to us and we spent it on a pool table and all kinds of nice things.

JP: But this was a growing concern for several years and then it gradually phased out?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. The phasing out was coincidental with the integration of schools. That's the only thing I can say about it. I hate to say it.

JP: But it was a good thing for a while.

Mrs. Dunn: Yes, it was.

JP: You have been very active in PTA work, Parent-Teacher Association, and I know you have a long history of involvement there. Would you like to speak to that a little?

Mrs. Dunn: It's funny. I was trying to find some material to give you and I found a letter from Mr. Gooding. Do you remember Mr. Gooding?

JP: Nat Gooding. Yes.

Mrs. Dunn: He wrote a letter to the paper about the PTA council of which I was president. The head of each PTA would meet up in the superintendent's office. He wrote a letter to the paper that he read that we had given our approval to put chlorine in the water. I'm not sure if that was it. He called me by name because we had approved it. (laughter) It had been in the paper that we had approved it and

were going along with the idea. I did not meet with him or anything but I wrote him a letter back in the newspaper and answered his letter and told him that if he wanted to meet with me personally he was welcome to, but we had been told it was a good thing and therefore we voted for it.

JP: Were you in a leading role in the Parent-Teacher Association during these years?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. There were a small group of us at Central School who did everything. That's one thing Frances Johnson used to jump on me about, "You all are just too together down there. It's the same people doing everything!" Well, we were the only people who would do!

JP: Who were some of these other people?

Mrs. Dunn: Louise Whitty and the girl who lives across the street from the school now. I can't think of the name.

JP: What sort of things did the PTA get involved in?

Mrs. Dunn: We put on something every year to make money. I remember when Nancy was born, I was told if I had that child on Friday they were going to shoot me, and I had her on Friday. (laughter) She was born in February and they were getting ready to have George Washington's or somebody's birthday. We usually had it out at the rec building, money making things.

JP: This money was turned over to the schools?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes.

JP: So that went on for twenty years!

Mrs. Dunn: Yes it did. It went on for more than twenty years.

JP: What was your role, Genevieve, in cancer education in New Bern?

Mrs. Dunn: That was the first thing I ever did. A lady from Kinston was in charge of the cancer program for a large area of eastern North Carolina. I can remember talking to her with Julie in my lap.

It really was the first thing I got involved in. First I'd forgotten about it. I was chairman of a Junior Woman's Club, and then I went into the cancer education. They would call me to come out to some little town outside of town to a PTA meeting and I would go to the health department and borrow a projector. I couldn't even lift the thing. I'd have to get somebody to put it in my car. It was so old fashioned. I'd go out and I'd give programs and I would talk about things and you could see them punching each other when I'd mention some parts of the body. But I did it for a while. Then I got very involved in the concerts, and the PTA, the teenage club, and then I was selected Woman of the Year one year.

JP: Do you remember the year?

Mrs. Dunn: No. It's on a silver vase in there.

JP: You had been in line for that honor for some time when it finally caught up with you. I know that.

Mrs. Dunn: Yes, but I didn't think so. It didn't bother me one way or the other.

JP: Genevieve, this cancer education was a series of talks that you would give in various parts of the county?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. That's all I did.

JP: You toured around also, as I recall, as a New Bern tour guide.

Mrs. Dunn: Boy did I tour! (laughter) I did that for over twenty years. I'll never forget the first time. I had taken Gertrude Carraway's course that she gave for a while. They were digging for the foundations of the old Palace and she gave this course in the Stevenson house which they had purchased by then. Then at the end of it, she gave an exam. I can remember the day before I took the exam I went to Raleigh on a school bus with one of my children who was in the fifth grade or somewhere along there. I studied all the way up there and all the way back. As long as I could see, I studied that material. and I passed the test with flying colors. She asked me didn't I want to be a guide at the Palace and I said, "no, I've got to many other things I'm involved in." I never have been a hostess around there. When they started wanting more than the Palace, a lady from the Chamber of Commerce called Gertrude or somebody and asked them who in the world knows about the houses and things in town, and I was the only one not working at the Palace so she named me. (laughter)

I refused the first two or three times, and then finally about the fourth or fifth time she called me, I said, "I will try it." I had a grand time and I loved it. I took some very nice people. I took the man who was the head of the Shriners over the whole country and some interesting people and many thousands of school children!

JP: Was this a Chamber of Commerce project?

Mrs. Dunn: They could get me through the Chamber of Commerce

or through the written word from the Palace.

JP: This was part of the Palace endeavor?

Mrs. Dunn: It was both. It was written up in the brochure that they sent to all the schools. If you would like a tour of New Bern, contact Mrs. Mark Dunn.

JP: This was a walking tour?

Mrs. Dunn: No. This was a riding tour most of the time. I did a few walking tours. I trained Muriel Latham who is Fred's wife. She's my half aunt. I trained her because some days I'd have four buses at one time. I trained Nettie Cox and I trained Teensy Tolson's sister, Emma Katie Guion. That was before she started working at the Palace. So on the days I'd have a whole bunch of them, I'd could bring them in and they could help me.

JP: How long did you do that?

Mrs. Dunn: Over twenty years.

JP: My goodness. Can you still do it?

Mrs. Dunn: Well, they've changed the names of the houses a great deal. I could still do a tour, yes. They have gotten a little more information on who built a house or that sort of thing, so I don't know that I would be very good. I thoroughly enjoyed it while I did. I really did.

JP: Genevieve, you're a great Episcopalian. I used to be an Episcopalian and I remember those days.

Mrs. Dunn: I know it. (laughter)

JP: Tell me about you role in the Episcopal Church.

Mrs. Dunn: I married the Episcopal church. I was married in the Methodist church, but I married the Episcopal church. I started taking confirmation lessons down in Wilmington. I hadn't been there but a month or two, so I didn't get much lessons. They weren't as strict then on confirmation lessons as they are now because he, the Bishop, confirmed me. I was confirmed at St. James Church down in Wilmington. Then we moved to New Bern and I started singing in the choir. I sang in the choir for thirty years I guess. I ran the little place that gave out the food that I talked about. I was chairman of a chapter. I taught Sunday school. I was anything you could be in the church except on the vestry. When I came along, women weren't on the vestry. (laughter) Now, they have them.

JP: You have been the senior warden.

Mrs. Dunn: (laughter) No. Sometimes it works out that the senior warden's a lot younger than the junior warden. (laughter) But I enjoyed my work at the church and I enjoyed Mr. Williams. I only have known two ministers. Mr. Williams and Ed Sharp are the only two ministers I have known. The new minister has come in, but Mark just doesn't get going early enough in the morning for me to get down there, and I don't either to tell you the truth.

JP: Genevieve, do you remember the Green Door Tea Room?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes, I certainly do.

JP: What was the involvement of the Episcopal Church in the Green Door Tea Room?

Mrs. Dunn: None that I know of. Mrs. Waldrop ran that.

JP: Yes. The church was not involved?

Mrs. Dunn: No.

JP: What do you remember about the Green Door?

Mrs. Dunn: I remember that for fifty cents a person you could have a party. If you wanted to add a dime to it or so, you got dessert too. You got her wonderful chicken a la king in a homemade patty shell and a frozen fruit salad and hot cheese biscuits all for fifty cents.

JP: Where was this located?

Mrs. Dunn: On the corner of Broad and Middle. Right across the street from Williams, which is not Williams anymore.

JP: It's on the corner that's now an empty lot where Belk's and Penney's used to be. Right on the corner.

Mrs. Dunn: Yeah.

JP: Then did it move to another location? Do you remember? Across from the Athens Theater?

Mrs. Dunn: If it did, I don't remember it, Joe Pat.

JP: Genevieve, we've covered the main things you were involved in in New Bern? Let's talk about your growing up in New Bern and how you remember New Bern. How do you remember New Bern when we grew up?

Mrs. Dunn: Well, I was going through the telephone book and I realized I didn't know a third of the people in New Bern. (laughter)

I knew them all in those days. It's amazing how this town has grown when you consider the outer parts. My first real memory is of the fire in 1922 or 23. We had been out of town that day. When we were coming back into town, my father was driving and he saw all these men

going toward a fertilizer plant or something over there in James City.

He stopped and asked them what they were doing and they told him New Bern was burning up, and it was! They were going for dynamite to dynamite the houses on our street, but they only dynamited two or three up at the corner there. It didn't come down as far as the house Theresa Shipp lived in or Frances Roberts. It didn't come down that far, but it almost did.

JP: Was New Bern a fun town to be a youngster in?

Mrs. Dunn: It was wonderful! I'm so glad I was young then and not now. (laughter) My mother would tell this story, "I saw this little girl riding her bicycle on East Front Street and the ladies I was riding with said, 'What little foolish child is that?! She went right in front of the car!', and it was you, Genevieve Dunn!" (laughter) Genevieve Tolson, I was then. I can remember going down and playing on the river shore a lot. We messed around down there a lot.

JP: How do you remember the river shore?

Mrs. Dunn: I remember it before and after. Daddy put the walkway and so forth down there, but I remember before hand too.

JP: What was it like before the walkway was put in?

Mrs. Dunn: Well, it just was there. It didn't have the walkway and it didn't have the lights which they've given up on completely I think, haven't they?

JP: I think they had a shell rock break water as I remember.

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. Mr. Blades used to keep his house boat down there after the cutter left, I think.

JP: At the end of Broad Street?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. Cause Frances Roberts and I would get on it and walk all around the outside. We couldn't get in it, but we would walk around the outside and look at it.

JP: Do you remember Broad Street as it was before the bridge came in?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes, I remember it. I don't have any particular memories about it except that it was a prettier street than it is now. It was lovely.

JP: Was New Bern a quiet town then?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. It was very quiet.

JP: Small?

Mrs. Dunn: A small quiet town and it was gradually going down hill because we lost the tobacco market. We had these huge warehouses and there they sat very empty. Some men from out of town, from towns that had tobacco markets, bought all the tobacco market buildings over here and then shut them down.

JP: Where were those warehouses located?

Mrs. Dunn: The ones I remember were out at the end where George Street goes into National Avenue. I remember one there and one across the street there. There was a third one it seems to me over on Pasteur Street. I think there was one on North Pasteur Street. I don't remember exactly, but we lost it completely and that was a great blow to our town.

JP: Did folks in town mostly know each other in those days?

Mrs. Dunn: Yeah.

JP: What happened when you walked down the streets?

Mrs. Dunn: You spoke to everybody. (laughter) You knew most people. You really did. We used to love to park downtown on Saturdays and watch the people who came to town. (laughter) It's a terrible thing to do, but we did it.

JP: Was downtown pretty busy?

Mrs. Dunn: Oh yes, particularly on the weekend because they didn't just zip into town like they do now.

JP: Were there a lot of dances in those days?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. That was one thing that we had a lot of. They charged very little to go to them. Usually boys would put them on. I had a dance one time and had the worst orchestra I've ever heard in my life. (laughter) We didn't have very good bands, did we? But usually the boys would get up a dance and you'd pay fifty cents or a dollar.

JP: Do you remember where they were held?

Mrs. Dunn: They were held down at the Woman's Club and some of them were at the Country Club and Stanly Hall. Stanly Hall is where our senior dance was. I went to Duke the next year and Les Brown had an orchestra at Duke and he said, "I know you. You're Genevieve Tolson. I saw you at the dance." I said, "Where in the world did you see me?" He said, "I saw you at your senior dance." He was playing in the orchestra. He didn't have his own band then. Les was three years ahead of me at Duke, but we were good friends.

JP: He became very famous. Were the dances held in the local tobacco warehouses in those day?

Mrs. Dunn: Some of them were, but usually they were so big. In the summer time a lot of the dances were held in the main building down at the beach. The beach was a completely different situation.

JP: This is Atlantic Beach?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes! You know in those days, they didn't have a Dune's Club or anything like that and everybody went to the main part of the beach and we had a good time. They had an orchestra down there every year. In fact, my son Glenn is practicing law with Jimmy Poyner who headed up one of the orchestra's down there. JP: Big name orchestra's came?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. As guest, they would come for one night. Paul Whiteman came. I can't remember some of the others, but they would have at least one or two big name orchestra's down there.

JP: What about the Atlantic Hotel?

Mrs. Dunn: I loved it. I went to my first dance there when I was thirteen or fourteen years old. Mother was in the balcony watching every move I made. (laughter)

JP: Was Cab Calloway playing?

Mrs. Dunn: Cab Calloway was the occasion of my first visit.

JP: I was there. I was at that dance.

Mrs. Dunn: Frances Claypoole and I both had on white organdy evening dresses. The man that she later married, Vermont Royster, and a boy that later became something at Chapel Hill; he died about

a year ago, came down here with him. He called me Frances all night and he called her Genevieve all night. He got us so mixed up. That was at that Cab Calloway dance that I met him at first. Then when I went to school up in Washington, the school I attended was in the National Press building and he was with the Wall Street Journal.

JP: He became editor.

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. But at this time he was just starting out and he was stationed in Washington. I can remember going with him and helping him pick out Christmas presents for Frances. I knew they were going to be married.

JP: Genevieve, did you do much sailing in those days?

Mrs. Dunn: We did some, yes. Two or three people had boats. I think my husband did more than I did, but I went along two or three times and like a nut, jumped off the wrong side of the sailboat one time and they had to go way down and make a circle and come back to get me. Mark jumped overboard and came and held me up til they came and got me. (laughter) I tried to kill myself I think. I didn't know that much about sailing. I jumped off the wrong side and they couldn't just turn and pick me up. They had to make a big turn.

JP: Were some of the sails at night time?

Mrs. Dunn: Yep.

JP: How late would you stay out?

Mrs. Dunn: Oh, eleven o'clock or so. We had a good time.

JP: Where did you go swimming when you were young?

Mrs. Dunn: I can remember when I was very young going across the river to Shady Beach.

JP: As you go across the river was it to the left or to the right?

Mrs. Dunn: To the left. I never went in around town on account of the sewers emptied into the river. They don't anymore, but they did then. We went to the Country Club and swam a lot out there. In fact, I can remember out there swimming with Mark and I almost drowned again. I swam too far down stream. I didn't think I was going to make it back.

JP: What was the Country Club like in your younger days?

Mrs. Dunn: The building really appealed to me. I wish that when they built the new one, they had built it like the old one as much as possible. It was gray shingles and they weathered so beautifully. They had a big fireplace. Remember that huge fireplace in the ballroom? They had a porch that went all the way across the front and down the side and across the back where you could sit and look at the river. We had lots of dances out there.

JP: Did you play golf?

Mrs. Dunn: No. I tried it once or twice and that's all.

JP: Do you remember the tennis courts out there?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. I didn't play tennis much then, but about ten years ago, I pick up tennis and started playing. We had a good time. We were the worst players at the club, but we had a good time. I played with the real bad players. (laughter)

JP: Genevieve, you were in New Bern during the war years, World

II. What was New Bern like then?

Mrs. Dunn: It was full of women trying to find a place that they could sleep with their husbands. (laughter) I got to the point I decided I could let one couple have one room. Then this couple came by and begged and begged and begged so hard, I let them have a second room.

I didn't have but four or five bedrooms and here I was, renting two of them out. You just felt so sorry for them. I know one girl here in town, she's a lady now, she's older than I am, who lives in a house at the corner of Pollock and Metcalf, Nettie Cox. They knocked on her door all the time cause that house with all those columns and everything will fool you. She didn't have but two and a half bedrooms.

She built a bedroom on her first floor and a bath so she could rent it out and do her part. Then when the war was over and there was no need for her to use that, her father moved into it.

JP: The town was pretty full of people then.

Mrs. Dunn: It was jammed because they couldn't build buildings fast enough down there. When the war started, they built these two Marine bases. Incidentally, we lived with a man who was an architect for building the base down at Jacksonville, when we were living in Wilmington. I can't remember his name but he married a Hussey. I'll tell you that. You remember Fred Hussey?

JP: Yes.

Mrs. Dunn: He married his aunt I believe. His name was Leslie Boney.

JP: What do you remember about the Depression years in New Bern?

Mrs. Dunn: I don't remember too much about it, do you?

JP: No. I remember very little about it. I think you and I were fortunate. But so many of our friends had tough times.

Mrs. Dunn: I know they did and I heard a lot of talk about it. There were some things that I couldn't have. Daddy always promised me when I was sixteen I'd get a car. Well, when I was sixteen, daddy bought a new car for the whole family, but it was not mine. I can remember that I had lovely clothes to go off to school with. In fact, I think they were much too fancy. I didn't even need them. But my mother was probably doing without and I didn't know it.

JP: Genevieve, a topic that most everybody we've talked to likes to talk about is hurricanes in New Bern. What do you remember about hurricanes in New Bern?

Mrs. Dunn: Well, I can remember that the first year I went to Duke we had had a hurricane. It was in the paper that New Bern was destroyed. There was \$15,000 damage or some ridiculous thing like that. (laughter)

JP: That was the hurricane of '33 I guess.

Mrs. Dunn: Yeah. I graduated in '34, so I went off to school in '34. Most of the people at Duke had never heard of New Bern; although, there were about six of us. There was Mary Brent Holland, Elizabeth Jones, Eleanor Stevenson, Nettie Cox, and I. That's five. I think there was another one. But there were five or six of us from New Bern at Duke at the same time. I got teased a lot about that \$15,000 damage that they had in the paper. (laughter)

"New Bern was destroyed! \$15,000 damage!"

JP: Do you remember that hurricane?

Mrs. Dunn: In a way. It's confused in my mind with other hurricanes. I remember the one where Mark's mother had water three feet deep in her house.

JP: On East Front Street?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes.

JP: That must of been '54 or '55; Ione or Diane.

Mrs. Dunn: I think so. But she and Pop didn't stay out of that house but one night. They could get in the back door some how or other and they got in the back and slept in their beds. Her furniture was wrecked! Just everything was a wreck. It was a terrible, terrible time. I believe that was the time the little boy drowned, wasn't it?

JP: I think so. It was at the corner of New and Short Street, Honey Barron's house. Tell me about your memories of Short Street.

Mrs. Dunn: My memories of Short Street are strange memories. (laughter) You and I used to throw rocks and stones and coal at the kids over there. (laughter) When mother died, Mark and I had a lot out on Trent River and we were ready to build. We'd had the lot about ten years. I went down to spend the night with daddy that night and I shoed him upstairs first and then I checked to see that everything was locked downstairs. When I went upstairs, he was going around pointing at bedrooms. I said, "Daddy, what are you doing?" He said, "Well, you and Mark have that room and Julie has that room and Nancy has that room and I have that room and bath and the boys have the third

floor." He had my family placed. I said, "Daddy, we've got a lot and I'm planning a small two-story house with just a couple of bedrooms and a living room and dining room and then I'm gonna have a wing with an every day room and bedroom and bath downstairs and all we got to do is put a little wing on the other side for you." "If I could move this house to the Episcopal Church lot, that's exactly where it would be!", he says. So, my husband was wonderful. He agreed, and we worked on the house and had it painted and papered. We took daddy, one chair, one lamp, and a television and put them in the back living room where he could sit, and everything else in the house was torn up! 'Cause I said, "if I'm gonna move in that house, I'm gonna have a new kitchen not an old one." So, we moved in.

JP: This brings up another reference to race relations. How do you remember the relations between blacks and whites when you were younger in New Bern?

Mrs. Dunn: We paid them terrible salaries! We did. I don't care how many servants you had, you didn't pay them much. I don't know how they existed. I really don't. Things have improved. I know that, but there's still improvement to be done in my opinion.

JP: Do you think the blacks and the whites got along well together when we were younger?

Mrs. Dunn: I think the blacks had to get along with us white people cause we could fire them and hire somebody else with the greatest of ease. I don't know how to put this, Joe Pat. I really would not like for one of my children to marry a black because I think it puts

them in a terrible position, but there are plenty of blacks that I think the world of.

JP: A lot of people tell us the relations were good and that the blacks and whites loved each other when they were in the same household.

Mrs. Dunn: I don't know. I'm not gonna say yes to that. I don't think there was a lot of that. I think the blacks knew if they wanted to keep a job they had to behave a certain way.

JP: Did what they had to do.

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. Now, I had some mighty good friends when I was in high school and along there, but they came to mother's and daddy's house to work and I became friendly with them that way. They've all died now.

JP: What do you think of New Bern the way it is today?

Mrs. Dunn: I don't know what to say. As one lady who moved here about ten or fifteen years ago said to me, "I wish they'd shut the doors and not let anymore in." (laughter) She thinks too many people have come down here. Of course, she was one of the first and lives downtown and is very friendly with a lot of New Bernians and so forth.

I think that so far as jobs are concerned and that sort of thing, the town is better off, and I'm gonna give Cherry Point a lot of credit for that. Every time they've been in danger of losing it, the people have risen up because they know what that means to this town. I wish that we could kind of close it down now. Isn't that terrible? (laughter) Has anybody else said that?

JP: Yes. Are you glad you grew up when you did?

Mrs. Dunn: Yes. We had fun. We had a grand time.

JP: Genevieve, maybe this is a good point to stop. You have other things that you would like to speak to that we haven't spoken to?

Mrs. Dunn: No.

JP: It's been a great interview. You had so many things to talk about and so many things you've done. You described them and this is going to be of great value to what we're trying to do. I thank you for letting us come.

Mrs. Dunn: I'm glad to do it.

JP: It's just a pleasure to talk to the vice-chairman of the whole Memories project. So, it's been fun, Genevieve, and thanks a lot.

END OF INTERVIEW