

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

HAMILTON EDWARD RUSSELL SR.

INTERVIEW 409

This is Marea K. Foster representing the Memories of New Bern Committee.

My number is 400. I am being assisted in this interview by Charles Kimbrell and his number is 1200. We are interviewing Hamilton Edward Russell, Sr. (interview number 409). This interview is being conducted on Tuesday the twelfth of May 1992. We are in Mr. Russell's home at 1305 Heritage Drive, Forest Hills, New Bern.

MF: Now, Mr. Russell, if you will give me your personal history, when you were born, where, full name, and parent's name. You just go ahead and talk.

Mr. Russell: My full name is Hamilton Edward Russell. I was born in Pamlico County, North Carolina on October 14, 1919 on a farm, the White Farm, which is now part of the town of Oriental. My brother, W. K. Russell, Jr. was also born there on April 7, 1918. Our father was William Kitchin Russell of Craven County and our mother was Roella Mae Pegg Russell of Guilford County. We children were generally referred to as Eddie and Billy, although we called each other Bill and Ed. I was named after two of my relatives. My father insisted that we put Hamilton first so the three initials would spell a name - HER- her, because he said that would make me rich and famous. I've always been glad he did that! Actually, I hated to be named Hamilton.

No boy wants to be called Hamilton. (Later, in the Army, they called me Hank. I mean the boys did. Officially I was still Hamilton.) We moved to New Bern about 1921 and moved to 32 George Street which was later renumbered as 231 George Street, but it was in the block now occupied by Tryon Palace and the house has been removed. If you

go on Eden Street and stand in front of the Falls house and look straight ahead, you would have looked into our back yard.

Mr. Bloomgardt lived upstairs in the Falls house back then.

MF: Who were your playmates when you were growing up?

Mr. Russell: Bob Mohn, David Lawrence, Grayson Waldrop, Joe Jackson, Tommy Cannon, Elbert Lipman, Eugene McSorley, (and later, members of the Hand Gang).

Charles Kimbrell: They lived on the corner at that time?

Mr. Russell: They lived in that immediate area. Some lived on Eden Street back behind us, almost behind us. We played a lot of games that boys always played. We didn't have any girl playmates! Most of the games involved running. We all liked to run, especially me.

One or two could run faster than I could but I could run farther and longer than they did. So we played kick-the-can, make-a-round circle, tag, and something we called "wehawkee", all games that involved running. We also played sandlot football on a small lot at the corner of Pollock and Metcalf where the Confederate Museum is now. David Lawrence lived in the house right next to that, on Pollock Street.

MF: Is that house still standing?

Mr. Russell: Yes.

CK: Would this David Lawrence be someone who went on to be in the North Carolina Institute of Government?

Mr. Russell: No.

CK: That was a different one.

Mr. Russell: Yeah, I knew that David Lawrence too.

CK: Yeah, I did too, but I just wondered if it might be the same one that was raised here in New Bern.

Mr. Russell: No. Later I worked with David and his father but I don't really want to get into that yet.

MF: Well that's all right, if you want to talk about it now, go right ahead.

Mr. Russell: Well, I don't want to at this time.

MF: Okay, all right. We have a picture back here with you and your brother Billy and you're wearing "knickers" and I just think that's so nice. Were they usually made of corduroy and was this what you wore everyday to school, to play in and to Sunday School?

Mr. Russell: Well, I'm not sure about what we wore, but that picture would have been me in my Sunday clothes. (Laughter)

MF: I guess maybe I didn't say that right. When you were growing up, did young boys wear long trousers?

Mr. Russell: I really don't remember. I know I wore shorts mostly all summer, but I just don't remember when we wore long trousers.

MF: I've always been interested in clothes and the different styles.

Mr. Russell: Well, boys weren't too interested in clothes.

MF: No, you were too interested in playing and having a good time! Well, tell me about school. Where did you go to school?

Mr. Russell: I went to Central. We walked there and we sort of had to hurry to make it.

MF: Who were the teachers?

Mr. Russell: Well, all the old teachers that local people talk about; Molly Heath and Ruth Berry and I don't really remember most of their names now. I went to school in all of the old buildings that are still there and some no longer there.

MF: That includes the New Bern Academy? You had classes in that building?

Mr. Russell: Yes, I did. I think I took the fifth grade in there. I forget the teacher's name, Miss Folks I believe, but I'm not certain.

MF: What time did you have to be at school, Mr. Russell?

Mr. Russell: I assume it was somewhere around 8:00, but I just don't remember that.

MF: Do you remember if you went eight or nine months during the year?

Mr. Russell: I know we went nine later but I don't know if it was nine the whole time or not.

MF: When you were in school, did they have twelve grades or just eleven?

Mr. Russell: Eleven.

MF: Anything special about high school that you would like to tell us? Special memories, sports, events?

Mr. Russell: I don't know. David Lawrence was full of devilment and he got me into a little trouble every now and then. We pulled a lot of pranks, but I don't really know if you want to get into those things or not.

MF: Well sure, because if you pulled pranks in school you were

probably sent to the Principal's office. (Laughter) Do you remember who the principal was and what your punishment might of been?

Mr. Russell: Well, I don't remember getting into any trouble at school.

CK: You didn't get caught!

MF: Oh, he was smart, he didn't get caught!

Mr. Russell: The Principal was Mr. H. B. Smith or maybe he was Superintendent, I don't remember which he was.

MF: Well, he was Superintendent when I went, but he probably started out as Principal. Well when you finished high school what did you do next?

Mr. Russell: Well, I stayed in New Bern. My brother was at college and we both couldn't go at the same time so I stayed in New Bern for a year and went back to school and took commercial courses; bookkeeping, shorthand, typing and maybe one or two other subjects for one year.

MF: You could go back to high school and take a business course?

Mr. Russell: I had already graduated, but you could go back. You see I had taken no business courses in regular school curriculum. It came in handy, I've used shorthand all my life ever since, typing too. Then I went to Mars Hills College up in the mountains which was a Junior College then, for two years, completing business administration.

MF: After Mars Hill, did you continue your education?

Mr. Russell: Not then. Later I earned a certificate in municipal administration at the Institute of Government at Chapel Hill. After

Mars Hill I went to work with David Lawrence and his father, H.C. Lawrence, who was a contractor. At that time he was an excavator contractor and his work was in the low country of South Carolina. Our office was at Walterboro and I ran it. We worked on the plantations of millionaires from the North such as Hutton and Guggenheim, and they would spend all kinds of money to get the ducks to come in and they would shoot the ducks. It was said each duck might have cost them ten thousand dollars - I really don't know what it cost! (Laughter).

Mr. Lawrence made a good living building dikes and levies and so forth, so they were basically big shots! (Laughter) We met several of them and my impression is that they were not happy people. They always thought everybody was out to get their money and actually in many cases it was true. (Laughter) Incidentally, one house, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, was built with no right angles - and this was 50 years ago.

MF: Before we started the interview, you mentioned the service. Did you serve in World War II?

Mr. Russell: Yes. While I was working with Mr. Lawrence I was drafted in 1943. When I was being examined for military service there was some question as to whether I would pass because my eyesight wasn't good, but when they found out I was an office worker, they passed me in a hurry! When I reported for duty, they kept me there. Three years I stayed at Fort Bragg, at the Armed Forces Induction Center.

MF: You never got overseas?

Mr. Russell: No.

MF: Weren't you lucky?

Mr. Russell: Well, I tried to go. I tried my best to get out of that place. Of course I'm glad now I didn't because I might have been killed. It was a miserable three years!

MF: I'm sure it was and I know you wanted to be over with the rest of your friends, but still what you did was very important. Somebody has to take care of the administrative work; it had to be done and that is very necessary.

Mr. Russell: They put us where they wanted us and my roommate and I were good. We got promotions all the way from Private to Tech Sergeant, which is five stripes, in a very short time. I could have been Master Sergeant but there was only one and he stayed.

MF: And he stayed! If he had retired or left you could have been promoted! (Laughter)

Mr. Russell: After the war they offered, if I'd stay, to make me Master Sergeant, but I wanted to come home. But ever since I got out I have been proud of that three years of service,

MF: How did the Depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Russell: Well, I remember the Depression days. I remember something that happened when I was eight or nine years old. I get emotional just thinking about it.

MF: If it bothers you, we just won't talk about it. Okay?

Mr. Russell: There's really no reason to do that.

CK: You have got a tender heart. I know the feeling.

MF: That was a very sad time for a lot of people.

Mr. Russell: Maybe later I can tell you about it.

CK: I was old enough that I remember the Depression and I remember that we had "hoover carts." Do you remember "hoover carts," did they have "hoover carts" in this area?

Mr. Russell: I don't remember that.

CK: Of course they couldn't afford to buy gasoline, tires and operate a vehicle, so they took the wheels off and made "hoover carts." They were pulled by one mule or one horse. Do you remember seeing anything like that?

Mr. Russell: No, I don't, not in town.

CK: I've seen some old pictures in New Bern where there was a "hoover cart." That was when Hoover was elected President.

Mr. Russell: I know that when you lived on a dirt street which was all the time in the early days, it was not paved and every now and then you would see them come by and spread oyster shells on it.

I don't know what the purpose was, maybe to keep down the dust. I also remember the ice-man would come by and he was horse-drawn and then later drove a truck. The housewife would put a poster in the window and turn the card to show how much ice she wanted, if she wanted a 25-cent piece or a 15-cent piece or whatever. He'd see it in the window and he would chip a piece off a great big block and bring it in a canvas bag and put it in her icebox. Of course there were no refrigerators or electric appliances. We boys would gather around because sometimes when he would chip that piece off of a block it would make slivers that could be twelve to fifteen inches long and we'd

sword-fight with them and eat them and just have a great time with those slivers on hot summer days.

MF: Do you remember when George Street was paved or the streets of New Bern were paved?

Mr. Russell: No. I was living there, but I don't remember it. I don't remember whether I was off in school or just when.

MF: Well, I want to go to your marriage at this time and would like for you to tell me when you were married and your wife's name and your children's names.

Mr. Russell: I met my wife while I was in the Army on a blind date. My roommate was so innocent when he took me home with him that time! Her name was Lady Bird Satterwhite.

CK: Satterwhite Point?

Mr. Russell: Uh huh. Well, there were a lot of Satterwhites in Vance County.

CK: But it's the same name?

Mr. Russell: Same name. You mean Satterwhite Point up near Henderson?

CK: Yeah, sure.

Mr. Russell: Her father was a Satterwhite of course, but he was part owner of Henderson Furniture Company. There was a Satterwhite Furniture Company but that wasn't him. We were married in Henderson later, on September 20, 1948 and then we came back to New Bern.

MF: Now we'll start your political career.

Mr. Russell: I was hired in November of '48 by Mr. Barnhardt.

He was the second city manager of New Bern. He came here from Raleigh, I think he had been city engineer in Raleigh and New Bern was his first city manager job. He told me later that I was the first person that he ever hired as a city manager.

MF: His daughter and I were very good friends and I used to date his son who was killed in an airplane. Craig's plane crashed. Very, very sad, he was a nice young man.

Mr. Russell: I remember that.

MF: What was your position, what did he hire you to be?

Mr. Russell: That's a long story! The City Treasurer, Evelyn Shupp, had been sick for several months. I believe she was in Florida and they didn't know whether she was going to come back to work or not. They wanted someone to be ready to take her place and so I was hired, not with any assurance that I would have her job, but just to be learning it. I remember they wanted to pay me \$135 a month and I held out for \$150, and got it.

MF: That was a lot of money then!

Mr. Russell: I was also under the GI Bill and that helped out some. At that time, while the Treasurer was away, the city records had got way behind and they wanted me to catch them up. I started on them and I worked during the day and would go back at night and worked on Saturdays and put in hundreds of hours of overtime. No pay for the overtime! (Laughter) We had an old Burroughs bookkeeping machine there and you had to punch every figure in, push a key down for every number or letter you wanted to enter, then pull a lever to

make it record and it was all complicated. Do you remember those?

MF: I do because daddy had one of those in his bakery.

Mr. Russell: Probably did. I had worked for a short time with Mr. N. E. Mohn and he had one and that's where I learned how to operate it. So when I went to City Hall I knew how to do that and I worked that thing many an hour. After several months I got it all caught up and about that time the Treasurer came back and claimed her job, which she had every right to do, and they had to find somewhere else for me to go. About that time the Clerk of the City Court quit, he was Wilbur Smith, well I'm not real sure of his name, but anyway he resigned from his job. They put me upstairs as Clerk of the City Court where I worked for two to three years I believe. Lawrence Stith was the Judge and Henry Grady was the Solicitor or prosecutor. (Chuckle) I had an amusing incident happen while I was there. I was the Clerk and I sat near the witness box, next to the witness who was testifying so that I could hear everything, give oaths, collect money, etc. One time they were having a case and Henry Grady was interrogating a witness and it had something to do with a gun that was under a car seat and Henry had it in his mind that the gun was under one seat and it was clear to me that the gun was under the other seat, and Henry was trying to figure out how the man had got to the gun. Right in the middle of everything I got impatient and hollered out to the witness "Well, which seat was the gun under?". Everything got real quiet and then everybody started laughing. I didn't have any business saying anything! (Laughter) The witness had answered right away and told

me which seat it was under and cleared everything up. Henry would joke with me several times after that and ask me whose turn it was to interrogate the witnesses - mine or his - that day. (Laughter!!)

Then, Miss Shupp's health still wasn't good so she applied for retirement which eventually worked through the process and was granted and she left. Meanwhile Mr. Hellinger the City Clerk had died or he died soon afterward. So I went down and did both jobs, City Clerk and Treasurer.

MF: That was a lot!

Mr. Russell: It was too much! There was never a time when my work was all caught up. I held that position for about thirty years after that, thirty-three years altogether with the City, about thirty of it as the City Clerk and Treasurer.

MF: Do you remember Mr. Hellinger's first name?

Mr. Russell: They called him "Jack" but his name was Charles T. Hellinger. He was a wonderful person.

MF: They lived somewhere close to Ray and Gertrude Henderson Jane Stewart lived on the corner.

Mr. Russell: Mr. Hellinger was cute. Oftentimes people would come by there looking for the marriage license department (Register of Deeds) and they would be in the wrong place. That was actually down at the courthouse and we were at City Hall. The couple would ask if this was the marriage license department and he would say, "The what?", and they would say the marriage license department, and he'd say, "You want to get married?" They'd say, "We certainly

do," and he would shake his head and say, "Oh, you don't want to do that," and he would spend several minutes trying to talk them out of it, and they didn't know what to think. Finally they would catch on to him and he would laugh and send them on their way.

MF: I want to ask you about city elections. You mentioned to me that you were in charge or head of city elections and that my father was Chairman of County Board of Elections and you said, daddy did county and you did city. Could you tell us about that?

Mr. Russell: Yes. I dreaded to see city elections come because that meant a lot of extra work. I really considered conducting elections as just another add-on job. In those days, let's see, the Mayor, Aldermen and the Judge of the Recorder's Court ran. They were elected for a two-year period. Everybody ran at the same time in uneven years. they filed with me. The elections were held the second Tuesday in May and those who were elected took office the first day of the following July. In those days the city didn't have any election equipment. Of course everybody used voting booths and ballot boxes back then. I had to go over to the county and borrow them from Shorty Kafer, (A. A. Kafer, Jr.) and he was so nice about it.

MF: You had to get people to hold the polls, is that what they do, are they poll holders?

Mr. Russell: Yes. I had to line those up ahead of time and be sure they would serve and then give their names to the aldermen to appoint as a registrar and two judges in each of the five wards. Then I would deliver the registration equipment to the registrars and try

to see that they knew the current laws for registering people, which I had to learn myself first. When they would get me in a jam, I would call on Shorty and he would help me out with the answer. So he not only furnished the equipment but he gave me a lot of good advice. After a while, the city bought equipment and I didn't have to borrow it from him, but I still called him up on the phone for advice every now and then.

MF: How did you choose the registrars and judges?

Mr. Russell: Well, usually it was somebody that had done it for years before and was familiar with it and they wanted to continue and you would just let them, because they knew something about it. If they dropped out or wouldn't take it, you had to get somebody else.

You would find out by word of mouth or sometimes people would come in when there was an opening and say they would like to serve. You usually tried to get the more responsible of the three as the registrar because that was the most important job, as the registrar had to register new people to vote, whereas poll holders or judges only served on election day.

MF: Were they paid to do this, and if so how much?

Mr. Russell: Yes. I don't remember how much, but nobody was paid much in those days.

MF: I know what you mean. Daddy used to pay my sister and me a penny a hundred. We would have to count out the paper ballots and he would pay us for every hundred ballots we counted out a penny.
(Laughter)

Mr. Russell: I remember those paper ballots. I had to have our printed and be sure they were in the right order and that the names were rotated, and follow all the rules and laws. Everything was governed by state law and you had to follow it.

MF: Were there many Republicans, people registered as Republicans at that time?

Mr. Russell: I'm just trying to think. Most of the time I was there the city elections were non-partisan and people did not register as Republican or Democrat. They didn't have to, it didn't matter. Now it may be in the early days they were separated, but I don't remember whether they were or not.

MF: Did blacks vote at this time?

Mr. Russell: They voted, but I recall requirements to vote were pretty strict and I expect most of them did not pass the requirements. I think that was true throughout the South. Perhaps in the North too.

CK: The topic that was assigned to me for interviewing for posterity reasons was town politics. I can't imagine why they would assign me that particular topic! Just to help you think and reflect back, motivate you to maybe recall some elected officials for the City Aldermen, Mayor and the City Judges who were elected back then too, but is there some particular issue, controversy, involving some one of those elected officials that you might want to recall with some humor and feel comfortable in reciting.

Mr. Russell: You say "with humor?"

MF: Evidently, there was no humor!

CK: I recall that there was some humor to some of those I have known that I experienced.

Mr. Russell: "Controversial elections" ----- (Laughter!!) I'm going to try and equate that with humor. I see you listed down here as controversial too, Charlie! (Laughter) I made it a point to get along with the aldermen and mayors; I didn't criticize them then, and I don't think I will now. It is well known that Charlie Kimbrell and Robert Lee Stallings saw things through opposite views, and as far as I know very seldom agreed on anything. Would you say that's about right?

CK: Yeah, I hadn't thought about it, but you're about right.

Mr. Russell: And I see Dick Bratcher's name is down here and, as I recall you and he often differed.

CK: We were of a different philosophy.

Mr. Russell: I won't get into any particular problem; in fact, I don't remember any. There was one instance that I could mention, involving Alderman Durwood Hancock, but it also deals with the garbage fee business which was an issue, and I don't know whether you want to get into issues now or not.

CK: You can move right on into that category - controversial issues. I well recall, at least I think, what you are going to tell us.

Mr. Russell: The city always furnished free garbage collection to businesses and residences for as far back as I can remember. Time

came that money got tight and other towns throughout the state began charging a fee for garbage collection, refuse collection. So the topic came up for New Bern to start charging. Not to pay the full cost but to pay something, maybe two or three dollars a month toward the cost of garbage collections. There were three aldermen who were in favor of doing that and two were not. There was a lot of talk and opposition throughout the city to it because most people didn't want to start paying for something that they hadn't been paying extra for. The three aldermen prevailed and they made a motion to adopt an ordinance establishing refuse collection fees, and it was carried by a three-to-two vote. City people then were charged refuse collection fees.

The next time the election came around there were a lot of people who were upset and decided that they would turn the rascals out who had put on that refuse collection fee. They called them the "Garbage Three;" and they did. Those three were voted out and replaced.

MF: You don't want to name those three, do you?

Mr. Russell: I don't see any need in naming them. Charlie can name them if he wants to.

CK: I'll be happy to name them. There was myself, Durwood Hancock and Paul Cox. We were the "Garbage Three." The two that opposed and won re-election were Tommy Davis and Ben B. Hurst.

Mr. Russell: In those days after the election when the new people took office, I believe on the first of July, the old board went out and the new board came in, and it was done on the same night. The old board would meet and do a little bit of final business and then

adjourn, sine die for the last time, and leave. The new board would be sworn in and take over all on the same night. Also, that was the time when they had to adopt a budget ordinance for next year, so keep that in mind. The budget ordinance had already been prepared for the following year. It included in it money that would come from the refuse collection fee, and it was a substantial amount. When the old board met and conducted their business, the last thing they did was Alderman Hancock made a motion to rescind the refuse collection fee. I'm telling you there was a time there for a while. The two who won re-election were some kind of upset! They said, "Here we got a new budget to adopt and we counted on this money and you're taking it away from us." The "Garbage Three" said, "We put it in and we're taking it out and if you want a garbage fee, you put one in." (Laughter!!) I don't remember whether I was in favor of the refuse collection fee or not, but I thought that was a neat maneuver, because the new board had no alternative and so they re-enacted the refuse collection fees they despised, and there was no break in the charges. I thought that was a neat political trick!

CK: Reflecting back on that occasion, Mr. Hancock made the motion to rescind that. Apparently the people in New Bern were not in favor of it as evidenced by the fact that we were not re-elected on that issue and he felt that the proper thing to do would be to do away with it, then if the new Board didn't like it they could not put it into effect and find revenue from some other source. Mr. Davis comment was, immediately following the motion, (Mayor Lupton was presiding

Mayor at that time) and Mr. Davis said, "Mr. Mayor, Mr. Mayor, Mr. Hancock is out of order. Here we got a budget here put together and it's funded by this revenue and now they are rescinding it and they dug a hole and left us in it." Mr. Hancock's response to us was, "Mr. Davis, if you don't like the garbage fee you don't have to deal with it, we've gotten rid of it for you and you don't have to vote for it."

Well, that all transpired and Mr. Hancock was waiting for me to second that motion. Well of course quite a bit of time passed from the hubbub that erupted upon his motion. Mr. Hancock was getting worried if I was even going to follow through with the second, but I finally did and then we all voted 3-2, two dissented. We went on about our other business. It was a pretty neat trick! Mr. Russell, in that category, we had other issues that I personally recall. I just wondered if you had any thoughts about any of those. One of them was of course the widening of Broad Street.

Mr. Russell: I remember the widening of Broad Street. There was a lot of opposition to cutting down the trees. There were beautiful trees lining the street and it was a shame to cut them down, but progress said cut them and so they were cut.

CK: Obviously, you being an employee of the city, you did not participate, and wisely so, in political issues. I don't recall you ever even coming close to hinting of getting involved in such a thing, but these are issues and I thought maybe since they weren't political issues because they were decided by the elected officials, that you might have some comment on them as you did on the Broad Street and

removal of the trees. Do you remember the issue of "Chlorination of the City Water Supply"?

Mr. Russell: Yes, I remember there was opposition from people who said that chlorine was poisonous to your health, and several people came before the Board some even on religious grounds. I believe they brought that in, that it was medicine. Several people were opposed to it. One of them was Gooding. Nate Gooding was one of the leading opponents. He made several impassioned speeches against it, but again, it was done.

CK: It has proven to be good.

Mr. Russell: Yes, I'm sure it has been proven, not only in New Bern but throughout the country and the world.

CK: Do you recall the renaming of city streets?

Mr. Russell: Yes, I remember the need to rename many of them because there were same names on several streets, duplications. Some people didn't want the name of their street changed, but I don't remember it as a big issue, do you?

CK: Well it's like you said, some people that lived on these streets where they were changing the name, didn't like it. I don't recall what Park Avenue was named at that time, but I do know that there was a lot of controversy about the changing the name of that street. Also, I recall changing the name of Short Street from Short Street to Linden Street. That one was highly controversial, and I don't think anyone has really come up with a real satisfactory reason why they chose Linden. There are a few Linden trees in town.

MF: I never could understand it because it was a short street, so why not leave it as "Short"?

CK: It's just like alleys. People wanted to change some of our alleys, and alleyways are some of the most famous streets in the world.

They were not changed though. Going back to the controversy which surrounded the implementation and then the ultimate rescinding of the garbage fee; I remember that Cletus, better known as "Red" Derda, subsequently ran for Alderman during the garbage fee controversy. Red developed a slogan that he would recite to almost any and everyone that he saw out soliciting vote, he would say "Vote for me - the Garbage Three - and Me!" (Laughter) Needless to say, Cletus didn't get elected either.

CK: Can you say something about the airport? It was such a favorite of Mack Lupton.

Mr. Russell: Yes, Mack surely loved the airport and he worked hard for it. My main recollection of the airport is I served as Treasurer of the Airport Committee for fifteen years, and that was another job I didn't need! (Laughter) For a while they didn't have a fixed base operator and I had to do all the paperwork for that, which was collecting on credit cards and filing sales taxes and the whole accounting works, in addition to my regular work. Lord, that was a mess!

CK: As you already noted, Mayor Lupton was an immensely devoted person to the Simmons-Knott Airport and we can be very grateful for some of the things that he brought about over there. Particularly

the FAA control station. You remember how we came about having to finance and construct that building which was then in turn leased to the FAA?

Mr. Russell: No, I don't.

CK: This was a very unusual thing. There just wasn't any money, but it just simply had to be done in order to have a fixed base operation over there to communicate weather conditions and transmitter from the FAA to the aircraft and traffic. The city, it is said, out of the norm of things, effected a loan from First Citizen Bank and the funds, and of course the FAA agreed to lease the building and put its facility in there and they did. They still pay Simmons-Knott, of course it's now Craven Regional Airport, on a monthly basis for lease and use of that building. Subsequently, it did of course pay off the loan. We were talking earlier about a David Lawrence at the Institute of Government at Chapel Hill. This was done contrary to his thinking that it wasn't exactly kosher for the city to go out and borrow money from a bank, but Mr. Lupton was bound to find a way and it was agreed that the bank agreed to loan the money and we had a written lease from the FAA to repay it, and so it was done. Everything worked out fine.

Elections - anything about any particular elections that you recall that would be interesting for posterity?

Mr. Russell: No, I don't know of anything unusual about any particular election, but on the subject of elections I want to say something about the people who ran for Mayor and Alderman. I never could understand why anybody would run. Especially the second time!

First time they could do it there because they really didn't know what they were getting into, but I was surprised they would run the second and third time. No doubt it was because many of them were civic-minded people and they were just trying to help their city. It was a thankless job. They were bothered all the time and called all hours of the night about barking dogs and holes in the streets and everything else. People would come to Board meetings, but they wouldn't come unless they were mad about something or wanting something. I just have a great admiration for those people who would take those jobs. Somebody had to do it and I was glad they did.

MF: Were the Alderman paid at that time?

Mr. Russell: Yes, they were paid but it wasn't much. They made \$50 a month. As time changed they did increase it some but it never did reach what the County Commissioners were paid, and maybe it shouldn't, but anyway commissioners were better paid. Of course they had more territory to cover.

CK: Do you have anything that you recall that is worthy, or that you would feel comfortable in sharing with us concerning the employment and dismissal of the City Manager whom you worked for?

Mr. Russell: Well, technically I didn't work for the City Manager because I was appointed by the Board, but I was close to each of them and I don't have anything on that. I filled in for the manager when he was away, and at one time was offered that position.

CK: Can you say anything about the employment and dismissal of the Chief of Police, one way or the other?

Mr. Russell: Is this in reference to the walk-out of the Police Department, or was that later?

CK: No, not necessarily. Chief Belangia had been Chief, of course you would know more about that than I, I don't know how long he served as Chief of Police. Then a new age of Aldermen and Mayor were elected and they wanted some later model people in best positions in city government and one of them being Chief of Police. That of course was when Chief Pearsall was hired.

Mr. Russell: No, I don't have any comment on that, but since I mentioned the police walk-out, I want to say a word or two about that. I won't get into most of it though, I just want to make a point.

The police had a dispute with the city about wages and at a Board meeting the entire police force came and laid their badges and guns on the table. That was a precarious time for the city. The Governor called in the Highway Patrol and we got help from surrounding towns and off duty policemen. We survived, but it was several tense weeks.

During that time there were talks going on between the Board of Aldermen and police officers. The chief alderman in opposition to the police raise was Charles Kimbrell. On several occasions I saw him walk out alone in the midst of those angry policemen and he showed great physical courage in doing that. At my age I can get choked up talking about such things.

MF: I know, that was a very emotional time. What year was that?

Mr. Russell: I don't know.

CK: That would have been 1977 I believe.

Mr. Russell: Let me say something else about that. I well remember one night when the Alderman were going to meet in City Hall courtroom, and the police officers were gathered up there. They sent word down to Charlie that if he came up there he would be thrown out the window!

Charlie sent word back that if he went out the window, somebody would go with him! (Laughter) We all went upstairs and nobody bothered him. I thought that took a lot of courage! I just wanted to mention that.

CK: This would add a little humor even to that. The policemen, after they had resigned, went out on the streets soliciting signatures of any and everybody that came along supporting them in getting their jobs back even to extent of getting into the middle of Broad Street out at the stop lights and getting people going north and south from Florida going north, from Maine going south to sign petitions; and they submitted petitions that night, a stack about as thick as a Sears Roebuck catalog, each and everyone of them. Sometime later on before day, we did leave City Hall and of course the story that Eddie just told, some of the law enforcement people thought might materialize, so when I left City Hall I had a couple of escorts. We had just started up the sidewalk, (I had found a parking place up on Middle Street somewhere), I mean City Hall was full that night, hanging from the rafters. I started to my car and had these two escorts and I got I'd say just about approaching the wrought-iron fence around the Episcopal churchyard, and I heard this person walking along behind me, and I knew this person well enough that I knew his walk; so, I knew who it

was. I just kept walking, I didn't pay it any mind. Of course these other two guys, these law enforcement people were in civilian clothes, I think they were civilian policeman on their regular assigned job, and I just stopped all of a sudden and turned and slapped one of my feet down on the sidewalk when I hurled around and I said to that gentleman, "You got anything you want to say to me, or something you want to try to do?", and it just scared him so bad that he was speechless and turned around and went back the other way. That was Rev. "Buckshot" Nixon. That was the end of that. In that regard, the only person in town in the police department that didn't resign was Mrs. Hoyle.

She was secretary to the Chief. Mrs. Hoyle served as Chief of Police during that period of time. Actually she just did the coordinating with all the different law enforcement agencies. She did a wonderful job. We had all the law enforcement that we needed and everything was just smooth and no problems during that period of time.

MF: Why didn't you keep her as Police Chief? She could have been the first woman Police Chief in New Bern!

CK: She would have been too if I'd of had my way!

MF: What was her first name?

Mr. Russell: Betty. She retired just a few years ago. She wasn't a police person, she was the secretary, personnel.

CK: But she knew the operation because she had been there so long.

Mr. Russell: It would have been much more difficult without her, no doubt about that.

CK: Oh yeah, she did a marvelous job. Do you recall any particular interesting events about annexation, or any subject or issue that you might recall? They were all controversial except in recent times.

Mr. Russell: The city didn't do a whole lot of annexing. The city wasn't interested because taxes brought very little income in and there wasn't much point in annexing anybody. The city made its money from the electric system. Looks like "them days is gone forever," though! (Laughter!)

CK: It took a lot of money to get these services out, but the amount of money that they owe with the arrangement they are in now, I think you are right! You recall the move to hire a full time city manager?

Mr. Russell: No, that was the year before I came here. I came in 1948. They voted it in effective August 5, 1947 and they hired Claude Helms. As I recall he stayed about a year. Then, the second man was Barnhardt, because he hired me and I was there the next year, 1948. Barnhardt came from Raleigh and as far as I was concerned he made a pretty good city manager. I remember he got us into the State retirement system. Before we got into it, he asked me to go down to Wilmington and check out the Wilmington system, they had a system all their own. Some people wanted New Bern to go alone and have its own retirement system. I went to Wilmington and investigated it and came back and advised him that we certainly did not want to do it on our own, that we just couldn't make it fiscally. He got other information too and then recommended that we go with the State retirement system,

and we are all delighted that he did.

MF: That was wonderful that he did that.

CK: In that regard I did look up some information on changes that were made in city government. The first referendum on city manager's form of government was April 6, 1943 which was defeated by an overwhelming majority. It was put back on the ballot in March of 1947 and it was voted in by an almost 2-1 vote. That's the statistics on the city manager's form of government. I think the J. C.'s and some civic groups were a little more familiar with city management form of government at that time and they did a lot of solicitation and promotions for it.

Mr. Russell, do you have some other issue that you would like to talk about; the Waste Treatment Plant, the construction of the Waste Treatment Plant, the acquiring of new wells out at Cove City and constructing a new water supply line along which had to be voted on?

Mr. Russell: No, my association with all of these things was of a practical nature. Every time we got a new project like this I had to create a new set of books and a separate bank account. I well remember there were times when I was dealing with twelve bank accounts to keep up with it! Each government project and each bond issue called for a separate set of books and separate accounts and separate handling of the money. That's the reason I sort of dreaded them. No, I really didn't. They all represented progress and we all were in favor of progress.

CK: I'm going to involve him in this because this took political

action to bring it about. The "Garbage Three" had a lot of tenacity! (Laughter) Mr. Russell thought the banks in town were just scamming the city, they wouldn't pay us any interest. He put a bug in my ear and he'd put a bug in the other Aldermen's ear and we finally decided that it was time to break away from this. At least some of us didn't feel like we owed our soul to the bank on the corner so we voted to put the city's money up for bids. Anybody who wanted the city's account was going to have to bid and tell us how much interest they were going to pay. Mr. Russell now, he put us up to it, he wouldn't come up front with that, but it was a worthwhile suggestion and the Lord only knows at that point in time now that would mean millions of dollars!

Mr. Russell: Let me pick up on that a little. Even after we did as you said and asked for bids, the banks were not competitive, their bids were pitifully low, and they were all the same, as I recall.

I would go to one banker and ask him could he pay more and he'd say, "I'll meet the competition." I would go to the next one and he'd say, "I'll meet the competition." Well, there wasn't any competition.

There was no Wachovia Bank in New Bern at the time but there was one in Vanceboro. So one Saturday I drove over there and talked to the bank manager, I believe he was Whitley, and I asked him if he would bid on the city's money, handling the money, you know, paying interest on it. He said yes he would be glad to. I said well now even if you are the high bidder and offer the most money to handle our money and invest it for us, I can't guarantee you that you will get it because I can't give it to you unless the city authorizes your bank as a

depository, and I'm not at all sure they will put New Bern's money in Vanceboro. In fact, I didn't have any idea that they would and I don't think he did either; but anyway, he said that he would bid.

So then I got word to the New Bern banks that there was going to be outside competition, and immediately we got competitive bids!

CK: Mr. Whitley appeared before the Board of Alderman several times. A Swashbuckaneer from Vanceboro, he made it very clear that he was going to pay out a reasonable amount of interest, and he did in fact mean it. I didn't know Mr. Whitley at the time but of course I got to know him and we remain to be the closest of friends. His first name is Alpha, I think, A.H. or A. F. Whitley. Maybe it's Alton, something like that. He is still living.

Mr. Russell: That investment program became a big thing and I spent a lot of time on it. I would have to determine how much money we'd need and when, and invest it for the right period of time. I invested some for a month and two months and three months and even some for a year. This was money that came in that we didn't need to spend yet. For years we hadn't been getting anything for it, but after we worked a system out, sometimes there were two or three million dollars there. It was temporary. Part of it was the water and light deposits people would put up and so on. (We later had to start paying interest on that deposit money too.) Anyway, it was a substantial amount and the interest it earned became a substantial amount. As I recall after it got going good, it was our third main source of revenue. First was the electric system income and then taxes and then

I believe was interest on this money. I'm sure we got more from that than we did from the refuse collection fee for several years. Since I left, I don't know what's happened to it. I was proud of that. We had some management information experts who came and checked out New Bern and they gave us high marks on our investment program.

MF: That's all thanks to you, so we are all very grateful. If you hadn't of thought of it, it might of not been done.

CK: It had to come sooner or later and you got it sooner. I think you suspected the "Garbage Three" probably had already given up hope on getting re-elected anyhow. They would probably go along with that, and we did without any hesitation too because it was a good thing. It goes right back to Eddie Russell. What about controversial projects? We mentioned Waste Water and electric revenue. The old steam generator plant wasn't up to meeting the demand, so we built a new additional generator facility. Do you recall anything about that?

Mr. Russell: I remember selling the old engines I believe to Stark, Florida. Several of the aldermen went down to make arrangements for it. And we did then add on to our generational facility.

CK: It was a short lived project. It didn't take a real smart mathematician to figure out that at the price we could buy electricity for at that time, that it was costing us much more to generate than we could buy it for. Very shortly, I believe in 1953, we began purchasing our power from Carolina Power and Light Company. When "Friends of the Library" gave the John Wright Stanly House to the Tryon

Palace Commission, we were then confronted with the construction of a library. First of all, we had to come up with the money to build a library. As it remains to this day, it's supposedly a 50/50 thing - city/county. Is there anything you recall about that?

Mr. Russell: As I recall, I was the Treasurer of the project, and I had to set up accounting records for it. I'm not sure whether the County Auditor was Wilbur Williamson or Ben Jones, whoever at the time, I don't know if he was co-treasurer or not. I don't recall any particular problems at that time.

CK: I think it was Ben Jones at that time who was Auditor and Clerk of the Board, and Wilbur was also there.

Mr. Russell: It was a good example of city/county cooperation as far as I was concerned, and everything went well. We now have a beautiful building which has recently been enlarged and improved.

CK: I will just recite these particular things: 1) picking a location for the library and it very quickly boiled down to two locations. One of course is where it's at. As I recall that property belonged to Blandford Oil Company, and the other was where the "Sun Journal" is located now. That was another situation where a 3-2 Board had to make a decision. Mr. Hurst was very adamant about putting it right across the street from City Hall over there where the "Sun Journal" is today. The ultimate decision was made to locate it where it is at. Another thing that occurred there, of political significance and interest, of course was the fact that we had some federal funds and state funds - grant money. Money of some sort that came from federal

and state. Of course with integration, there was no way the city of New Bern could afford to support two libraries; in particular, a black and a white library which had been in the past. The "Friends of the Library" back of the post office was all white and then the Black library over on West Street and which the city funded, was no longer permissible. We had to transition the Black library out of existence and incorporate it into the new improved county library. The Black community regretted that and of course would of preferred that it didn't happen, but they understood and as far as I know there was never any controversy or problems associated with it. They of course still operate in a private organization in what I believe they call the Rhone Building named for Miss Charlotte Rhone. Being I was on the Board at that time, I don't recall 1965-66, somewhere along in there, but that is as Eddie mentioned and I think, an acceptable location.

Unfortunately, there was considerable controversy and delay about increasing the size of it at its present location. It's a grand facility as far as I am concerned. Anything controversial but humorous about the Urban Renewal project?

Mr. Russell: Is this down there where the Sheraton is?

CK: I don't hesitate to bring my name up because as you know it appears that they wanted to let the land just sit down there and grow grass and I was opposed to that.

Mr. Russell: I don't recall anything unusual.

CK: Then how about the proposal to construct a courthouse and jail on part of that land that evolved from the Urban Renewal project?

Mr. Russell: Well, I just know that there was a lot of opposition to it. People expressed much opposition to having a penthouse for the "jailbirds." They didn't want them to be able to look out of the window at that beautiful view! That didn't get very far.

CK: Of course the county had purchased the property for that purpose but that proposal fell through so the city purchased the property back, as I recall at the same price that they had paid for it. It was suppose to have already been developed before now, but it remains undeveloped. The city doesn't own it anymore, the Sheraton Hotel people own it.

Mr. Russell: Everyday I read about some new deal down there.

CK: I had another category down here - disasters to strike the city and I failed to list the September 16, 1933 hurricane. I guess you would remember about the Dr. Joe Patterson. I wasn't here then.

Mr. Russell: Is that when it destroyed the bridge?

CK: Yes. There was 9.7 feet of tide here which would of been getting pretty close to you over on George Street.

Mr. Russell: I don't recall being worried about the water coming up. One or two of these others I remember water coming up almost to City Hall steps from south Front Street and Pollock Street..

CK: Yes absolutely, particularly the Ione hurricane. Do you remember tornadoes or fires, and obviously I'm not talking about the 1923 fire?

Mr. Russell: Well, I know you're not talking about it, but I was here for the great fire December 1922, when apparently I was three

years old. I don't remember it, but my mother told me that when the fire was burning, she missed my brother and me and went looking and we were in the next block headed to the fire. I was three years old and he was four and a half, I guess. So she went and got us and carried us back. I also remember when the Tabernacle church burned. Our house was a block and a half from it. That was a real big fire.

CK: How about the Governor Tryon Hotel?

Mr. Russell: Yes, I remember it burning. That was a terrible fire. I don't know of anything special to talk about or information about it.

CK: Anything more about you as a city employee that you care to mention?

Mr. Russell: Let me mention the third manager. After Mr. Barnhardt left I believe he went to Hickory they hired Clifford Pace. Clifford was a product of the Institute of Government, a very well educated person. I believe he had been manager of a smaller place, maybe Dunn.

He had poor health and I just got the feeling that he never really did get started. I visited him one day in the hospital, and as I was leaving I said, "Well Cliff hurry up and get well, we miss you at City Hall and want you to come back," and he said, "I wish I never had to go to that City Hall again."

That impressed me. It was not long after that, that he killed himself.

The next time I went to the Institute of Government, one of the staff members who had been acquainted with him asked me what happened to Cliff, why would he do such a thing? I said I think the job just got

the best of him and that he couldn't handle it. He was indignant and said, "Our boys can handle anything; they can handle city manager."

I said, "Well, this one couldn't handle it in New Bern," But he was a pleasant man and had a nice family.

CK: What are your personal thoughts for the city's future?

Mr. Russell: I haven't given it a lot of thought especially since I have been retired now for eleven years, but I think the city's outlook is good. I know as long as we've got civic-minded people and several good organizations working for the betterment of New Bern, then we should be doing well. The Community College is growing and expanding, and I'm just very optimistic about the future of the city.

MF: Is there anything else that you would like to tell us as an employee of the city, as the money man of the city I should say, as that's what you were.

Mr. Russell: I was the money man so far as the Treasurer was concerned as I was the chief finance officer and it took about 70% of my time, but as far as the Clerk was concerned I was another kind of man. For instance, I had to attend all of the Board meetings and take down the minutes and record them, (and I was Secretary of the Police Civil Service Board).

CK: That's was in shorthand, and transcribe them and type them.

Mr. Russell: Yes. Sometimes there were meetings of the governing body three, four, five times a month. Sometimes till two o'clock in the morning. For years I was there at work at eight o'clock the next morning. Later on when I couldn't take it, I would come in a little

late. I also want to mention when I first came to the city how well-received I was by the old-timers who were there; Ed Belangia, Bill Bartling, Johnny Rhodes, Jack Hellinger, and Fred Scott and others. They didn't resent me, instead they were just as nice as they could be.

MF: They were nice, nice men. I remember all of them and have nice memories of them. They were gentlemen and they were certainly glad to welcome another gentleman to their group.

Mr. Russell: Thank you, that was kind of you. I also would like to say it was a privilege to be able to work with so many other fine people. There were too many to list including elected officials, aldermen, and department heads. But I must mention at least two who were not in the "big shot" category. Lucille Mallard and Annette West worked closely with me, in my office, for many years. They were dedicated workers, fine people, who were and are my friends.

MF: Thank you so much for this wonderful interview, Mr. Russell. We certainly do appreciate it.

END OF INTERVIEW