

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

JOHN WHITTY MITCHELL

INTERVIEW 1031

This is Dr. Joseph Patterson representing the Memories of New Bern Committee. My number is 1000. I am interviewing John W. Mitchell at his residence at 511 New Street in New Bern. The number of the interview is 1031. The date is January 11, 1993.

DR. PATTERSON: Johnny, I want to tell you I'm very happy to be here in your home talking to you. I'm looking forward to hearing your memories about New Bern and the way things used to be with you in New Bern. Let's start out by my just asking you some things about yourself.

What is your full name?

MR. MITCHELL: John Whitty Mitchell.

DR. PATTERSON: Where were you born?

MR. MITCHELL: 34 South Front Street, New Bern, North Carolina.

DR. PATTERSON: What year?

MR. MITCHELL: 1919.

DR. PATTERSON: When is your birthdate?

MR. MITCHELL: November 17.

DR. PATTERSON: You said 34 South Front Street?

MR. MITCHELL: 34 South Front Street.

DR. PATTERSON: Which house is that Johnny?

MR. MITCHELL: Well, now, let's see. It's still standing. There're not but three of them standing on that side; the bungalow, 34 South Front the was one next to it, where John Peterson's office is now, and the next door was Mr. Wade and Miss Ella Meadows.

DR. PATTERSON: So your home is where John Peterson's office is now.

MR. MITCHELL: That's right.

DR. PATTERSON: Who were your parents?

MR. MITCHELL: My mother was Mary Whitty. She married Mr. Thomas J. Mitchell.

DR. PATTERSON: Are they both from New Bern?

MR. MITCHELL: They were both from New Bern, yes.

DR. PATTERSON: What did your dad do?

MR. MITCHELL: My daddy was a salesman for Armour Fertilizer Company until my grandfather died. My grandfather you know, ran Mitchell's Hardware and all and Thomas J. Mitchell and Sons. Then after he died, then my daddy and Uncle Biddy went in and ran the hardware store. My daddy stayed there until in the fifties and then he retired, and he died in 1963.

DR. PATTERSON: We'll get back to Mitchell's Hardware. That's a very important story in downtown New Bern's history. So we'll come back to that for more. Your grandparents on the Whitty side, what was their name?

MR. MITCHELL: My grandfather was Mr. John C. (Christopher) Whitty, and of course my grandmother was Mary Whitty, Mary Hines Whitty. She was originally from Raleigh I think. She married Mr. John C. Whitty.

DR. PATTERSON: Now, Fred Whitty was your first cousin?

MR. MITCHELL: That's right. In other words, Fred and John (whitty) were my first cousins. His parents were Uncle Fred and Aunt Neta.

DR. PATTERSON: If you go back far enough, we get to a man whose portrait is hanging over there, Thomas Jerkins. You're a direct descendent of Thomas Jerkins.

MR. MITCHELL: That's true. My grandfather was named Thomas Jerkins Mitchell. And of course, what was the Mitchell girl, Grizzell, married...

DR. PATTERSON: Grizzell.

MR. MITCHELL: Something like that. She married Thomas Jerkins and then the line started from there.

DR. PATTERSON: Except for a missing link way back there, you and I are kin.

MR. MITCHELL: (laughter) Yeah, I understand we are. Johnny Pat said we were.

DR. PATTERSON: There's just a little gap there that we can't quite fill in, but we are probably kin back to the Jerkins line.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, what Julia says is that everybody in New Bern is kin to somebody. (laughter)

DR. PATTERSON: Well, the name Thomas Jerkins has certainly stuck with your family coming down the line.

MR. MITCHELL: This is true, but it's the end of it now because Tommy is the fifth and he has no sons.

DR. PATTERSON: This is your son you're talking about.

MR. MITCHELL: Yeah my son Tommy. See, he's Thomas Jerkins Mitchell V, but he has no sons. He has two girls.

DR. PATTERSON: Johnny, what about brothers and sisters?

MR. MITCHELL: I had two sisters and a brother. My two sisters were Mary who married James Dawson and Sara who married Henry Henderson. James was a newspaper person, a journalist, a writer and so forth. Mary graduated from Woman's College in Greensboro and majored in Latin and Library Science. She came back to New Bern and taught school over across the street over there. Then she and James married. Well, before they got married, she got a job with the veterans hospital in Oteen, North Carolina. Then from there she got transferred out to Texas. But back during the war or right about the war, they got married, James and Mary. Now my brother, his name was Thomas but everybody called him "Buzz."

DR. PATTERSON: He was Thomas Jerkins wasn't he?

MR. MITCHELL: Thomas Jerkins.

DR. PATTERSON: They called him Buzz.

MR. MITCHELL: Yeah because John Whitty always said he just buzzed all the time, so they called him Buzz. He was my brother. Of course, he worked there at the hardware store from the early 1930's until he died in '85. So he was right there the whole time. My other sister was named Sara. She went by the name of "Tootsie." She lives in Atlanta, Georgia now. She's married to Henry Henderson who was a native New Bernian.

DR. PATTERSON: Used to call him "Junior."

MR. MITCHELL: That's right. They live in Atlanta. Tootsie hasn't been real well right lately. She had a bad operation back in November, but she's doing pretty good now. Henry's getting along just fine.

And then of course me. I'm married to Julia Guion. We have three children; Susan, Johnny Jr., and Tommy V.

DR. PATTERSON: Are they all living in New Bern?

MR. MITCHELL: No. Susan lives in Roanoke Rapids.

DR. PATTERSON: But your two boys are here.

MR. MITCHELL: Two boys are here.

DR. PATTERSON: What do they do?

MR. MITCHELL: Johnny is vice-president at New East Bank and Tommy is a realtor with Tyson and Hooks.

DR. PATTERSON: Johnny, you spent your childhood down at 34 South Front Street, is that right? You grew up there?

MR. MITCHELL: I grew up there.

DR. PATTERSON: With the South Front Street gang.

MR. MITCHELL: Union Point gang we used to call it.

DR. PATTERSON: Sorry, Union Point gang. Tell me about those young years down there. What was it like to live on South Front Street?

MR. MITCHELL: I feel sorry for people that didn't have the opportunity to do it. In the first place, the Meadows Company was one of the biggest organizations and one of the biggest businesses in New Bern at the time. They had a girl and two boys. The two boys were our age. The two Mr. Meadows, Mr. Wade and Mr. Ed, they were gracious. They would turn over things to us and we could do whatever we wanted. The old shipyard was right across from mama's. There would be a skiff down there we'd want to go use, they'd let us use it. They even built a tennis court there where we could play tennis. As you

know, they gave Crabby an old warehouse. He started Union Point club down there. Called it Crabby's. Built docks, went swimming, had a pool table, had radio. It was just great. Ask what did we do? It's so different, Joe Pat, then than it is now. As you know, the trash pile was there on Union Point. We were all very athletic. At least, we thought we were, let's put it that way. (laughter) Andy Fuller was one of us. Billy Braddy lived on Metcalf St. but he came down and played a lot with us, and the two Meadows' boys. It's hard to believe, but we would get up wanting to have a football team, so we needed a sweatshirt, five or six of us, and shoulder pads. We would go over to the trash pile and pull out cast iron, put it on a wagon, take it over there to Craven Foundry and sell it for fifteen cent a hundred pound until we got enough money to go to Leon Cohen and buy some sweatshirts and shoulder pads. (laughter) In other words, that was just part of it. Of course after the trash pile got gone, they put the park in there and the Woman's Club and everything. It was the best ball field other than Kafer Park there was around here. We played baseball there from March right on into November. So we were active. We were active on the water. We were active doing things and it was just great. I mean, we had something going on all the time.

I told Julia many a time, Joe Pat, I never remember going to my mother and saying, "I don't have anything to do." We had something going on all the time. I don't want to hurt your feelings, but as you know, Dr. Hand had a gang also, and they challenged us to a baseball game.

We played it there in Dr. Hand's backyard. There was Bucky and Ecky

(Meadows) and myself and Andy (Fuller) and I don't remember who all. We didn't have nine on each side I know. But anyway, we had to quit at the end of the second inning because it was dark and the score was 62 to 3! It made the Washington Post because your granddaddy, Senator Simmons, had a grandson (who would've thought that thing) that hit three home runs. (laughter)

DR. PATTERSON: I know that and I've seen that article from the Washington Post. I think it was on the front page of the Washington Post.

MR. MITCHELL: I don't know where it was. I heard it made the Washington Post. Anyway, that was the whole thing of it. As I say, we kids had a great time growing up because we were busy. We were doing something all the time Joe Pat.

DR. PATTERSON: I think I was on the other team that day. I remember, if I'm correct, you and Andy pitched. I think we played you more than once, and we always hated it when you and Andy pitched cause you threw the ball so hard.

MR. MITCHELL: (laughter) Well, Andy turned out to be a real great pitcher. There's no question about that. He got his college education with it, being able to pitch.

DR. PATTERSON: Johnny, what was Union Point like before it was fixed up with the clubhouse and all?

MR. MITCHELL: It was nothing but a trash pile. It was the city dump. Of course, City Hall was where New Bern Auto Supply is now. The street people, Mr. Robert Tooker, lived on East Front Street.



He was head superintendent of the street department. They kept their horses and the wagons in buildings there behind New Bern Auto Supply now. I remember that they would go early in the morning and hook up those horses and those wagons. Of course, the streets were brick at the time and you could hear them going down the streets scraping, getting the trash up, and so forth. They took it to Union Point and that's where they dumped it, and that was it.

DR. PATTERSON: Did they put garbage out there?

MR. MITCHELL: They put everything in there.

DR. PATTERSON: Old cars?

MR. MITCHELL: Old cars, tires, anything there was, went in that trash pile. In fact, that's what we called it, was the trash pile, and that's what it was.

DR. PATTERSON: Alice and I walked down beside the new Comfort Inn that's going up. I guess it's the Minette Duffy Park where they're gonna put the new boat ramps. I saw an old tire sticking up out of the ground.

MR. MITCHELL: Not surprised at that either. (laughter) Not surprised at that.

DR. PATTERSON: Where did you go to school?

MR. MITCHELL: I first went to Citadel.

DR. PATTERSON: Before that.

MR. MITCHELL: I went to New Bern City Schools. Started right over there in the first grade and went through all those grades right across the street over there.

DR. PATTERSON: You remember your teachers?

MR. MITCHELL: I had Mrs. Armstrong in the first grade. I had Miss Hollister in the second. I had Miss Fannie Howerton in the third. Let's see, in the fourth grade I had Miss Bertha Lane. The fifth grade I had Miss Curry. The sixth grade I had Mrs. C. Green. In the seventh grade we had four. I had Miss Carter, she's now Mrs. Willis; Miss Winslow and Miss Anderson and Miss Andrews. Then in the ninth grade, I had Mrs. H. B. Smith and Miss Masie Bookhart and maybe Mr. Raper. I don't remember all of them Joe Pat. I do know that somewhere in the tenth or eleventh grade I had Miss Blanch Rowe for English and I had Miss Blackwelder for Geometry and so forth, but the rest of it, I can't remember exactly who tried to teach me what.

DR. PATTERSON: Well, that's remarkable to be able to remember that. I'm gonna backtrack a minute, and this is a mistake on my part.

I just want to make sure you understand that I belonged to Crabby's too. I finally was taken in.

MR. MITCHELL: (laughter) It got so successful, Joe Pat, that an awful lot of people who lived away from South Front Street wanted to go down to Crabby's. There's no question about that.

DR. PATTERSON: Did I tell you that I took care of Crabby in later years? I think I did.

MR. MITCHELL: Yeah, because I went over there to the hospital the night you operated on him. Andy and myself, we were very concerned with that situation. Crabby was a great fellow. Like, Joe McDaniel wrote in his newspaper The Mirror back years ago, he said, "Crabby

could do more with a few hundred dollars than a recreation department could do with several thousand."

DR. PATTERSON: Describe Crabby, Johnny. I have unclear memories of him.

MR. MITCHELL: Crabby was a fairly short man that I never saw wear anything but coveralls. He ran the machine shop. He had lathes and drill presses and things like that. He lived right there. And there on the corner, what was part of the old Meadows' office on the corner of East Front and South Front, he had a room in there where he lived. During the day, a lot of times I've seen him take a tub and put on, he had an oil drum stove with a cast iron top to it, build the fire in there and put the water on top of that, and he'd take off his clothes and stand over there and take a bath and dry himself off and then go up to Nick's, old Central Cafe when it was on Middle Street, and eat his supper. He took care of outboard motors. He took care of the machinery at the grist mill. He took care of the machinery over at the shipyard. He was just a great fellow. He was such a great influence, Joe Pat, on us boys that were down there because there was one or two up in that neighborhood that unfortunately were not born as fortunate as we were, physically or mentally. Crabby had gotten two of his fingers cut off in a lathe. He'd come and he'd get in front of us, Joe Pat, and shake those fingers right in our face and say, "Let me tell you something. You just be thankful you were born healthy!" I've never forgotten that. Never have I forgotten that.

DR. PATTERSON: A kind man was he?

MR. MITCHELL: Very kind. Of course he never had any money, but he would do anything he could to help you. Great fellow. Great fellow.

DR. PATTERSON: What was the Meadows Shipyard like?

MR. MITCHELL: Well, speaking as a boy, it was absolutely fascinating. Of course, the Meadows lived right next door and if we needed something we could go down there. We'd go down there, and of course Mr. Herbert Barbour was the foreman. Mr. Julian Hardesty was one of the superintendents. We would go down there and watch them start a skiff, old wooden skiff from scratch, and watch them until they had finished the thing. It may take them four or five days, it may take them a week. That was a good experience for us. The shipyard, also, the big Menhaden boats, would come up and they were the only ones that had railways big enough to pull these boats up on. They would come, and it was quite a sight to see them pull these big boats up. They'd crank up the old steam engine and the chains and the crank and everything and they pulled these boats out. Well, that was something to see. That was really something to see. The shipyard also had a kind of a foundry there where they would heat up their iron and flatten them out to make skids and this type of thing to go on the boats. It was very extensive.

DR. PATTERSON: It was a big operation?

MR. MITCHELL: Oh my! Joe Pat, that Meadows' company was some operation in this world. What happened to them other than the fact they just couldn't make it, now why, I don't know. I would have said that back there then they were perhaps the largest operation in this

part. Really. I know some of the lumber yards were mighty big outfits, but Meadows Company, they ran from the corner of East Front and South Front, about half of that block on South Front up toward Craven. Then they owned the fertilizer factory across the river over there where Dixie Chemical is now that Mr. Tom Williams ran for them. Amy and Betsy's daddy ran that for them. So it was a tremendous operation.

But as I say, boys, we didn't know what was going on. We were 10, 12, or 13 years old. That type of thing. We weren't s'pose to know.

But I remember when they went into building race boats. Shoot Hall, you know, was the world champion. You know that?

DR. PATTERSON: Yes.

MR. MITCHELL: They'd go out there and they'd build these boats and get on out there in the river and crank those motors and there they'd go. Crabby kept up those motors for them. In fact, Shoots told me many a time that he had fixed that motor of his so fine, there was very little friction there, that the Evinrude, it was Elto then, but Evinrude people engineers came down and wanted to know how he did it, and he wouldn't tell them. (laughter) Shoot may have told you this.

DR. PATTERSON: I didn't know that story. Johnny, were there railroad tracks at the corner of South Front Street and East Front Street?

MR. MITCHELL: Yes sir. They went to the veneer plant. They came right to the end of South Front and East Front Street there. In other words, they came right around the old, well, the street there

at the end of South Front Street and then there was the railroad tracks across that and then that went on down to the water. But the tracks stopped right there at the end of South Front Street.

DR. PATTERSON: Where was the veneer plant?

MR. MITCHELL: Looking toward the river from the end of South Front Street it was off to the left. It ran from the corner of East Front Street and South Front over three or four hundred feet. Something like that. Where they're building this new thing and all that going on. Of course, there was some warehouses along in there. Mr. Tom Mariner had a wholesale grocery warehouse in there. It burned one night. I remember that and the veneer plant. I remember one thing about the veneer plant Joe Pat. When the Depression hit and everything, Wall Street blew up, whatever Wall Street was back there then, I don't know, but the people that worked at the veneer plant, they all got laid off of course. I can see them right now, Joe Pat, sitting on the curbing all the way from East Front Street right on up by mama's, right on up the other side of Maxwell, just sitting on the curbing and just say, "I don't know what to do." I've never forgotten it.

DR. PATTERSON: Where did the railroad tracks run to get to that corner? What did they hook up to?

MR. MITCHELL: They came from up there, Queen Street.

DR. PATTERSON: They came from Queen Street. Not on East Front Street?

MR. MITCHELL: No it didn't come down East Front. They came back and down, Barbour Boat Work came down Hancock Street, over by between

where Barbour Boat Works is and where Maxwell Company was and Mack Lupton's place and Baugh & Sons and those warehouses and the shipyard and the Meadows Company, and it made the switch right there at East Front and South Front, along in there.

DR. PATTERSON: Okay. Let's get you back to the school green over here. You went all the way through eleven grades of school.

MR. MITCHELL: That's right. I started in the first and finished it all right there.

DR. PATTERSON: What were those years like? Were they good?

MR. MITCHELL: Like anything, Joe Pat, some were good and some weren't so good. (laughter)

DR. PATTERSON: You have any particular memories about those years?

MR. MITCHELL: Oh yes, very definitely. I remember Miss Fannie Howerton in particular. She was also the (public) librarian. In the third grade we were s'pose to be learning the multiplication tables.

Math was a very poor subject of mine and I could not get it all done in a day during the class time. So Miss Fannie would take me with her to the library every afternoon at four o'clock. That's when it was there on Middle Street beside Christian Science Church. She put me back there in the reading room and I sat there until six o'clock then she'd let me go home and eat my supper. (laughter) I went many an afternoon there with that. I remember that Miss Hollister, I think 1927, wasn't that when Lindbergh flew across the ocean, she told us the whole story about the flight of the Spirit of St. Louis. I remember

that. Now, whether I want to put this is there, you can cull this out.

DR. PATTERSON: No, I can't cull the tape very well. This tape is going to be for public use, so I just want to tell you that.

MR. MITCHELL: Okay. Miss Curry in the fifth grade was a no nonsense type of teacher. In other words, she gave it to you straight and you were gonna toe the line and learn and I did very well in the fifth grade. I went in the sixth grade and I had Mrs. C. Green.

DR. PATTERSON: Mr. or Mrs.?

MR. MITCHELL: Mrs. C. Green. I reckon I was overmatched Joe Pat, in that, that was a very smart class. There was your Tom Guion, and your Grayson Waldrop, your Marion Terwilliger, Elicia Caroon, Ruth Chadwick, Eddie Russell. They were smart people. I didn't cut it that year and so I repeated the sixth grade. One of the best things that ever happened to me. From then on I had no more problems with school. No more problems. When I was in the school business out there at Oaks Road, as a Principal out there, Joe Pat, those parents would come in there getting so upset that so and so wasn't doing well and everything, looked like he was gonna repeat, and I would tell them my experience. I'd say it's the best thing ever happened to me. In the first place, back there then, depended on when your birthday fell and everything when you started to school. I started to school when I was five years old in the first grade. If I could have waited that year I probably would have done better in those first grades. But no need to worry about that, that's history, pure and simple.



DR. PATTERSON: What memories do you have beyond that through high school?

MR. MITCHELL: I thought high school was very enjoyable. Of course I played all three sports. Fortunately, I was fairly successful at it and I enjoyed it. I felt that high school gave you an opportunity to do more for yourself and think for yourself than what the grammar grades have done for you. I know it's controversial about him, but Mr. Harold Whitehurst, he was a smart man. Very smart I thought. (laughter) Well, things were so different then Joe Pat. Henry Whitehurst wanted to go to Annapolis and made the cut. We had had two years of Algebra but he needed that third year of Algebra. So, Mr. Shields (our principal) got Mr. Whitehurst to teach a third year Algebra. You talking about a mixed up class! Henry was in it, Joe Zaytoun was in it, I was in it, Sam Bledsoe was in it, and then the rest of them were people that probably hadn't even had first year Algebra. He was just filling up spaces. But anyway, he taught it just about like on a college level, "There's the assignment. You do it. You go to the board and you do this and you do that." When I got to college, I really appreciated Mr. Whitehurst for what he had done. Of course, as I say, he was a very controversial type of teacher. But I thought he was great.

DR. PATTERSON: You mentioned Mrs. C. Green and I mentioned Mr. C. Green.

MR. MITCHELL: Yeah, he was scout master.

DR. PATTERSON: Mr. C. Green became the Scout Master of Troop

11.

MR. MITCHELL: That's right.

DR. PATTERSON: Now, what did Mr. C. Green do in town?

MR. MITCHELL: He was with the newspaper best I remember.

DR. PATTERSON: With the Sun Journal?

MR. MITCHELL: New Bernian, whatever it was at the time. I think that's what Mr. C. Green did.

DR. PATTERSON: So you had a pretty good time in high school?

MR. MITCHELL: I enjoyed high school.

DR. PATTERSON: And after high school you say you went to The Citadel.

MR. MITCHELL: I went to Citadel for two years. Then I got an appointment to West Point at the third offering. I went to West Point and I was there seven months, Joe Pat, and I could not cut solid Geometry, so I was found deficient. I left school and I came home.

Mr. Frank Alston had been my high school coach in all three sports.

So I went to Mr. Alston and I told him what my problems were and so forth and I had had a great foundation at The Citadel and I learned a lot at West Point and I felt like I could continue if I could get a break, cause I had no money. Mr. Alston took me the following Saturday to Elon College and we went in and talked to a man by the name of Mr. George Copely who was kind of the man who decided whether you were going to or not going to. Mr. Alston talked him into giving me an athletic scholarship to Elon. So that's how I managed to get into Elon, and I graduated from Elon

in a year and a half.

DR. PATTERSON: Was this a football scholarship?

MR. MITCHELL: It was a baseball scholarship.

DR. PATTERSON: Did you play baseball there?

MR. MITCHELL: Yes I played baseball there. But then when the papers came out, Joe Pat, to where you had to sign your eligibility and I read that thing closely, I had already played ball in the Southern Conference for Citadel, so I went to Coach Hendrickson and I told him that I could not sign it because I would be ineligible and he hit the ceiling. Well, of course, I lost my scholarship but then I got a lot of jobs. I was waiting tables, I was sweeping the Science building, I was working downtown Burlington on Saturdays, I was running the soda shop for the man late in the afternoons and so forth, and I was able to be able to pay my way on through the rest of the way.

DR. PATTERSON: What happened after The Citadel?

MR. MITCHELL: I went to West Point.

DR. PATTERSON: I'm sorry, what happened after West Point?

MR. MITCHELL: I went to Elon.

DR. PATTERSON: Johnny, I'm mixed up. I apologize. What happened after Elon is what I'm really trying to say.

MR. MITCHELL: After I graduated from Elon, I went to work for the engineers at Cherry Point; Olson, Dietrich, Carr, and J.D. Greiner.

I was one of the few people down there that knew the area, so I was in the engineers office there. I would have to go into Beaufort and draw plats of this piece of land and that piece of land, and where

they were gonna put this or where they were gonna put that and so forth.

But I was there only two or three months I'd say and then along came the threat of the war and this and that and so forth. I got notice to report to Fort Bragg, or Pope Air Force Base. I was going in the Air Corp (so called at that time). So I had to quit my job at Cherry Point and went in the Air Corp and fortunately went on and was able to get a commission and was a bombardier on a B-17 during the World War II.

DR. PATTERSON: How long were you in service?

MR. MITCHELL: Four years.

DR. PATTERSON: You were at Cherry Point in the very early days weren't you?

MR. MITCHELL: I was there when they were cutting the trees out.

DR. PATTERSON: Tell me about those years. What was it like down there then?

MR. MITCHELL: I've never forgotten how they cut those trees, of course it was ninety percent woods in there at the time, they cut those trees with those crosscut saws, Joe Pat, and those people that were handling those things, you talking about perfect rhythm, they had it. When they cut them down one time for two or three weeks, I was the topper. When the tree would fall I would get the ax and I'd go cut the limbs out and cut the top out and then they would come with the oxen and the carts and pull the trees out. I didn't stay at that too long, and then as I say, I went with the engineers down there.

But, no, it was a period of beginning to clean the area out so they

could start what is now Cherry Point Naval Air Base, Marine Air Base.

There wasn't anything down there at the time. Frank Russell's grocery store and filling station was right there at the fork of the road and so forth. In fact, that's where we used to go and get a Pepsi and a Coca-cola and a cinnamon bun for lunch or something like that. I mean, that's all there was there at the time.

DR. PATTERSON: After the war, did you come back to New Bern?

MR. MITCHELL: Oh yeah. I was married.

DR. PATTERSON: You were married?

MR. MITCHELL: I was married. We got married in West Palm Beach Florida. I was on my way overseas. I came back home and went to work with my father in Mitchell's Hardware.

DR. PATTERSON: Now this was on South Front Street.

MR. MITCHELL: That was on South Front Street. Yep. I came home in '45 and I stayed in the hardware business until '67 I think it was, '68 Joe Pat. Then I went in the school business for ten years.

DR. PATTERSON: Did you have to undergo anymore training to go into teaching?

MR. MITCHELL: I had a teacher's certificate from Elon when I graduated from Elon. I had to go get that renewed by going to East Carolina and taking some refresher courses. Then to become a principal I had to go get in graduate school and I went over and took courses until I got my Master's degree to become an administrator.

DR. PATTERSON: You first started out classroom teaching.

MR. MITCHELL: I started classroom teaching in the eighth grade

right over there.

DR. PATTERSON: In Central School?

MR. MITCHELL: Yeah. I reckon that's what it was at the time.

DR. PATTERSON: How many years did that last?

MR. MITCHELL: I was in the classroom just three years and then I got the Principal's job out at Oaks Road School. I was out there eight, nine years, something like that.

DR. PATTERSON: Johnny, what years are we talking about? When did you begin teaching and when did you stop this administrative job?

MR. MITCHELL: I started teaching in '67 I think it was Joe Pat. I taught until '76. Then Tommy wanted to come back to New Bern and open up a business over there, Coastal Plastics he opened up, and I told him I would go help him. So I resigned from the school business and went out there and helped Tommy get started. Of course, I had enough age and time and so forth then that I could retire. So I just retired and we got the place down there at Gloucester and we were spending a lot of time. I did an awful lot of work on that house down there.

DR. PATTERSON: Did you enjoy your years as a teacher and administrator?

MR. MITCHELL: Yes I did. Yes I did.

DR. PATTERSON: Johnny, was integration a going thing during your years of teaching and administration?

MR. MITCHELL: Yes it was.

DR. PATTERSON: Tell me what that was like.

MR. MITCHELL: I had no problem over in the eighth grade type of thing. I mean, it wasn't too prevalent. My busiest time I had with that was when they had the flare up out at the high school when Mr. Honeycutt was principal out there. There was more or less an uprising and it disrupted the school to a fare-thee-well, so they took Mr. Grover Fields who was at J. T. Barber as principal at the time and moved him over to the high school. They took me from Oak Roads School and put me out to J. T. Barber. Of course, I was the first white administrator that had ever been in J. T. Barber, and some accepted me and some didn't. So I had somewhat of a problem at times adjusting to their ways and my ways.

DR. PATTERSON: Was it pretty much black then or was it entirely black when you were out there?

MR. MITCHELL: Oh, it was integrated (all ninth grade).

DR. PATTERSON: It was?

MR. MITCHELL: It was integrated, oh yes. We had whites and black both out there.

DR. PATTERSON: Did things work out for you all right from the standpoint of race relations out there?

MR. MITCHELL: Yeah, I got along all right.

DR. PATTERSON: You mentioned the flare up at the high school. Do you remember any details about that?

MR. MITCHELL: No I don't Joe Pat. I was at Oak Roads School as Principal out there and everything was quiet and everything was nice. I understand that they had arguments out there in the school

yard or something and the first thing you know the whole thing erupted and Mr. Honeycutt resigned and went somewhere and Mr Fields was taken and put over there.

DR. PATTERSON: We've talked to a number of people about that. I haven't listened to all of the tapes, but we do have information about those times. What was New Bern itself like during the period of the civil rights adjustment, the Martin Luther King episode? Was there much trouble in town?

MR. MITCHELL: No, I don't think so. If there was, I was not aware of it. I don't think so.

DR. PATTERSON: While we're on this topic, let me ask you to look back to your younger days and talk if you will about how things were between the races when we were young.

MR. MITCHELL: I think they were better then than they are now. We had some wonderful black people that were a part of our lives. We had a cook, we had a laundry woman, we had yard people. They were just as helpful, nice. Would help you do anything in the world and you wanted to help them. That's just the way the whole atmosphere was at the time, down in that part of town. Now how it was elsewhere, I could not tell you. But as far as we were concerned, we had no problem. We thought they were just as fine as anybody else.

DR. PATTERSON: I think that was probably true all through New Bern from what I've heard and what I remember.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, that's just the way I remember it. Just the way I remember. Good people.



DR. PATTERSON: Johnny, we've gotten you back where you're sitting in this chair now, retired and relaxed. You have been a part of downtown New Bern really all your life and your parents, your father...

MR. MITCHELL: Grandfather. Both grandfathers.

DR. PATTERSON: And your grandparents. I'd like to get you to tell me about downtown New Bern the way it used to be and tell it in your own way. You may think of talking about Mitchell's Hardware a little more at the beginning, but let me just say, tell it like you want to.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, Joe Pat, I reckon I'm in an unusual situation in that my Grandfather Mitchell and my Grandfather Whitty both ran farm implement stores, J. C. Whitty Company and Thomas J. Mitchell and Sons, which later became Mitchell's Hardware, so I grew up with it. What downtown was, there was Whitty's. Whitty was the oldest International Harvester dealership in the South when they closed up. Mitchell's Hardware had been there since the late 1890's. I remember the first part of Mitchell's Hardware was on South Front Street. My granddaddy had kind of a stable and everything across the street over there by where the whiskey store is now...

DR. PATTERSON: The what store?

MR. MITCHELL: The ABC Store. He had some stables in the back with some horses and mules. He had wagons. I've never forgotten, Joe Pat, he had of course a building that ran from the sidewalk on back, half the lot maybe, and in there he had his horse collars, his harnesses, his reins, his this and that. It was all one hundred percent

leather. It was Thomas J. Mitchell and Son across the street at the time. It was the best smelling place there's ever been. I remember another thing. I was probably four or five years old Joe Pat. I was playing on one of those wagons back there. I say I was four years old, something like that, and a bumblebee stung me. I mean, that was something going on right then. I've never forgotten that. Then sometime after, I'll say 1925 or something like that, Joe Pat, is when the Fuller Music House and Mr. J. R. Chadwick used to be on South Front Street where you remember Mitchell's Hardware. Then they moved around the corner to where Fuller Music House is now. That's when Grandpapa moved across the street and when he more or less went in the hardware business. But he still had the good smelling leather harnesses and horse collars and in the back we still had some wagons and cartwheels and rims and spokes and hubs and things like that. But after my granddaddy died, my daddy and Uncle Biddy took it over, and they went more or less into the hardware.

DR. PATTERSON: As I remember the store, and we're talking about the same place I know, it was on the south side in the second block of South Front Street.

MR. MITCHELL: That's right.

DR. PATTERSON: Part of the Gaston Hotel complex sort of.

MR. MITCHELL: No.

DR. PATTERSON: Well, it was underneath.

MR. MITCHELL: No. The Gaston Hotel, and the entrance to the Gaston Hotel was another little building there that was a barber shop

and may have been part of the hotel at one time.

DR. PATTERSON: Now is it the east or west you're talking from the Gaston Hotel?

MR. MITCHELL: The Gaston Hotel, it would be east. It's towards Mitchell's Hardware. It was a little store in there. I remember that barber shop, cause you could get a hair cut for a quarter. Then there was a wall between that and Mitchell's Hardware and that's one thing that helped save Mitchell's Hardware in the big fire when it happened, when the hotel burned. No, the hardware store stayed there. The hotel was severely damaged and all as you know. That was the hardware store. It ran from there. It ran from South Front Street back about two thirds ways back down the Gaston Hotel.

DR. PATTERSON: Now you and Buzz both worked there all through those years. And after your father died, did you continue?

MR. MITCHELL: Buzz and myself ran it and then I bought Buzz out and I owned it for something like nine years I think, Joe Pat, and then I sold it to Buzz when I wanted to get out is what it amounts to.

DR. PATTERSON: When did it move from that location to Craven Street?

MR. MITCHELL: That happened when the Bicentennial Park started getting all that land to put into Bicentennial Park. We never owned that property. My cousin Mary Steele Brinson owned the property. I tried to buy it from her for years and never could. So, anyway, after the hotel burned and all this went on and everything there, she

did sell it. I think she sold it to Louis Howard and that's when Louis started selling all that stuff to the Bicentennial Park down there and that's when Buzz moved across the street over there.

DR. PATTERSON: And Buzz ran that store until his death.

MR. MITCHELL: He ran it until his death, that's right.

DR. PATTERSON: That was five years ago?

MR. MITCHELL: He died in '85. That was six, seven years ago.

DR. PATTERSON: And then Mr. Harold Talton...

MR. MITCHELL: Harold Talton owns it now. Genevieve sold it to Mr. Talton.

DR. PATTERSON: He moved it across the street.

MR. MITCHELL: He moved it across the street in the old S. B. Parker Company building over there.

DR. PATTERSON: Well, I can remember very well going down there and buying things from you and Buzz.

MR. MITCHELL: A lot of people do Joe Pat. An awful lot of people do.

DR. PATTERSON: What do you remember, Johnny, about downtown as a whole as it used to be?

MR. MITCHELL: Joe Pat, I've thought about it and I know that you have talked to a lot of people and you have got a lot of information about who was there and who was not there. Of course, I think Craven Foundry was a very integral part of downtown at the time. It was a foundry and it was also a machine shop and it was also an auto supply house.

DR. PATTERSON: On Craven Street.

MR. MITCHELL: That was on Craven Street, and that was very instrumental. The S. B. Parker across the street, they were "the people" at the time. They were the sheet metal people, they were the Lennox furnace people and so forth. And that's what everybody had about the time. The only other sheet metal man that I remember was Mr. R. E. Bengel who had a little shop down there at the end of, about halfway between Craven Street and South Front Street. Of course, there was New Bern Building and Supply, a great organization. Mr. E. K. Bishop and his warehouses and grocery business.

DR. PATTERSON: Excuse me, let me interrupt you about the New Bern Building and Supply. Where was that located?

MR. MITCHELL: That was down at the foot of Craven Street.

DR. PATTERSON: On the water?

MR. MITCHELL: It didn't go to the water. It stopped at the railroad tracks. The railroad track went on around it and over there to Meadows shipyard and the grist mill.

DR. PATTERSON: You were talking about Mr. Bishop.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Bishop's warehouses were there on the part of that property that would be to the north of the railroad tracks. On the south of the railroad tracks were a bunch of warehouses that burned. There were a lot of groceries. Mr. Harry Kahn, you remember him, he had a big warehouse down there and it burned. His boat, the Mary Buckley, burned. That's when the, what was the boy's name that died in the fire? They named a fire truck after him. Elliott. The

Elliott boy died in that fire. Of course, right across the railroad tracks on the water was Baugh & Son, Mr. Allen Ives. Across the street going on up Craven Street from that, of course, was Hollister & Cox coal yard. And, of course, the cotton exchange used to be down there, too, Joe Pat.

DR. PATTERSON: Where was that?

MR. MITCHELL: You remember where Hollister & Cox was?

DR. PATTERSON: Not very well.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, anyway, it was in that area right there where the Hollister & Cox coal yard was. It was kind of down at the end of Craven Street was the cotton exchange. Mr. Ball ran it at the time.

It depends on the time frame in there Joe Pat. So much of it was wholesale grocery houses. Lucas & Lewis, Armstrong Groceries, S. G. Roberts & Sons, Maxwell Company, they were all wholesale grocers and they were all pretty big wholesale grocers. Of course, beside Lucas & Lewis on Middle Street was Gip Lucas' Star Grocery. Now you've got to remember Star Grocery Company. Then, of course, on down the street was the Coca-cola bottling company and the Maxwell Company down at the foot of the street, Mack Lupton's stuff across the street. It was something going on down there. Sam Lipman used to be on the corner of South Front and Middle. Then after Mr. Cutler closed up his hardware store and moved to Goldsboro, then that's when Sam Lipman moved from there, where you remember him more or less there on Middle Street.

The A&P, they had a little store there on Middle Street next to Howard's Clothing Store. That's when they went on the corner, A&P. Of course,

on South Front there was Braddy's Laundry.

DR. PATTERSON: No, it wasn't on the corner. It was next to the corner.

MR. MITCHELL: Braddy's Laundry, about half way. On the west side of the hotel. Across the street wasn't anything of any consequence, garages and that type of thing. I remember Mr. Lee Taylor. He bottled "Nu Grape" and "Orange Crush" on the corner of Craven and South Front Street.

DR. PATTERSON: Going up north on Middle Street, further north, you remember the stores along there?

MR. MITCHELL: Duffy's Drug Store was on the corner of South Front and Middle Street. Then next to that was Howard's Clothing Store, Louis and Ellis and Mr. Phillip Howard. Next to that, at the time, was the A&P Store.

DR. PATTERSON: Is that where the vacant lots are now?

MR. MITCHELL: No, I think that's about where Singer Sewing Machine is now Joe Pat. Then, where the vacant lots are now is where Sam Lipman was. Then, of course, there's Fuller's (music) still there and the Jones Furniture Store and the old hotel and Mr. Charlie Boyd, C.O.H. Boyd's Furniture Store was along there where Mike's Jeweler's is now and that type of thing. But the stores that were there then, I mean, are nothing but a memory. There's not anybody even related to it anywhere around that I know of except Fuller's Music and Jones Furniture. There where Bynum's Drug Store is, was Eaton's Jewelry Store. You remember Tom Eaton.

DR. PATTERSON: I remember Mr. Eaton. I remember Sam.

MR. MITCHELL: That's right. And Mr. Ziegler, he was the one who ran it and was the watch maker and that type of thing. Of course, Mrs. Ziegler is still living. So all of that has changed dramatically.

Now there's something you have in some of this stuff that Julia and myself talked about. You say McSorley's used to be where Gaskins was.

I never remember that. McSorley was there on Middle Street across from Sam Lipman. Julia has talked about it many a time. Of course, I think Mr. Caprio had a shoe repair shop on the corner, and then more or less next to that was McSorley's. I remember he had taffy and used to cut it with a hatchet. Julia's talked many a time how her Uncle Raynor would come get her from her grandmothers over there and take her down to McSorley's there on Middle Street and buy her a lemon phosphate. (laughter) Now, I'm not questioning what you got in there, but I do not remember McSorley's anywhere except where it was on Middle Street. Now as far as on the other side of Middle Street, as I say, I think Mr. Caprio had a shoe shop, shoe repair place. Along in there, Mr. Charles Ellis ran a clothing store.

DR. PATTERSON: I think he called it the Army and Navy Store.

MR. MITCHELL: Right next door, that was the Rachide's who ran that. You remember Mr. Jim Whitcomb had a butcher shop along in there too. (laughter) Carolina Rubber Supply used to be on Middle Street Joe Pat. Mr. George Roberts and Mr. Bill Bryan, they were on Middle Street for a while before Mr. Roberts got the Sinclair franchise. Time frame is hard to understand. Now I remember the Carolina Rubber



on Middle Street. And so that must have been in the late twenties, early thirties or something because then Mr. Roberts got the Sinclair place. Because I remember on cold mornings I used to watch until he came out of his driveway so I could get a ride to school because it was cold walking in the morning. (laughter) So that changed things around quite a bit. Now Carolina Rubber Supply and along in there, I do not remember Scott's stables or anything there. Where Jenkins is now, I believe is where Scott's was. I do not remember anything in there. I do remember Coplon's. Where the vacant lot is now where that park is, that was Coplon's when we were kids growing up. Now, across the street later became Montgomery Wards. Then Belk's took over the old Coplon's Store and then they moved across the street. Down on the corner where McLellan's is now, Mr. D. L. Latta ran a hardware store.

DR. PATTERSON: I remember that. And Leon Cohen...

MR. MITCHELL: Leon Cohen was there on Middle the other side of Howard's and A&P store, along in there.

DR. PATTERSON: He ran a pawn shop.

MR. MITCHELL: He ran a pawn shop.

DR. PATTERSON: He sold Jew's harps.

MR. MITCHELL: And ammunition. He sold about anything you could sell. Leon was quite a fellow.

DR. PATTERSON: What do you remember about the southeast corner of Middle and Pollock Street where Mr. Bradham had his drug store? Do you remember that store?

MR. MITCHELL: Not when Mr. Bradham had it. I remember when Mr. Shaw was there. He was the first one I remember there. Then of course after Mr. Shaw left it, then Harry Jacobs went in there.

DR. PATTERSON: It was called Shaw's Soda Shop.

MR. MITCHELL: (laughter) That used to be a mouth full I remember. But I do not remember Mr. Bradham there. I do not.

DR. PATTERSON: As you continue north on Middle Street past the Episcopal church, what was between the Episcopal churchyard and Broad Street on the east side?

MR. MITCHELL: Well, at one time, Mr. Cannon, Lemuel and Jack's father, Helen and all of them's father, ran a sheet metal place there. Next to that, Joe Pat, was a Chinese laundry.

DR. PATTERSON: I remember it.

MR. MITCHELL: And then next to that, or along in there, was Miss Minnie Oxley's studio. Then Mr. Caprio, I think it was, ran a shoe repair place there. Then on the corner ended up the Green Door.

DR. PATTERSON: The Tea Room.

MR. MITCHELL: That's right. Mrs. Waldrop ran that.

DR. PATTERSON: It seems to me there was a house there too, very close to the Episcopal churchyard.

MR. MITCHELL: All right. Where Dave and Tom Henry lived.

DR. PATTERSON: Dave and Tom Henry lived there.

MR. MITCHELL: And his father was what, he was a railroad engineer or something. I think one of those boys is dead and one of them lives in Chapel Hill or Durham. I remember them.

DR. PATTERSON: As you cross the corner from the Green Door Tea Room to where Williams Cafe was, now called The Chelsea, what was that building then, the Williams Cafe building?

MR. MITCHELL: As best I remember that is where Nick and Jimmy, Jimmy Williams and Nick Contose, or Conkus or something, started a cafe, which ended up as Williams Cafe. Now next door to that, at one time along in there, Mr. Tom Davis who lived across the street from mama there on South Front, he ran a hardware store along in there somewhere. Of course then that all went over, and then Shriver's Florist Shop was in there. Of course, everybody remembers that. Kafer's Bakery was on that side of the street. Meritt Shoe Store was on that side of the street. Maybe Boody Hawk was there at the time. I don't remember.

DR. PATTERSON: I think that came later.

MR. MITCHELL: It could have been. But Boody was along there somewhere, Meritt Shoe Store, and of course Kress. That was a big deal.

DR. PATTERSON: A&P Store?

MR. MITCHELL: There was an A&P in there, and then of course, Gus Davis ran a sandwich shop in there too. Nathan Frank ran a sandwich shop. Where Baxter's Sporting Goods is now was a cafe which Pete Chagaris ran for quite a while. Charles' Store used to be there where this Knits Galore is now. And of course the Kress building.

DR. PATTERSON: What was under the first floor of the Elk's Temple building? Gaskins Drug Store was there. Before Gaskins, you remember

what was there?

MR. MITCHELL: No. Gaskins was there ever since I can remember.

DR. PATTERSON: Ever since we've been around.

MR. MITCHELL: Ever since I can remember, they were there, yes.

DR. PATTERSON: Johnny, let's get you situated on the Elk's Temple corner now looking east on Pollock Street. Suppose you just start walking down that street toward the river and tell me what's on your right.

MR. MITCHELL: Back there then, the best I remember, Mr. Jarvis ran a notion store there, thread, fabric, what ladies sewed with. Of course, my mother would send me around there to buy a spool of thread and this type of thing. Parkhill Jarvis' father along in there. Then, of course, either Dowdy or Turner Tolson's Furniture Store was along in there.

DR. PATTERSON: Dowdy I think.

MR. MITCHELL: And, of course, Baxters has been there for 200 years. It's one of the oldest there is around. Of course, the Metropolitan Club was there.

DR. PATTERSON: Who?

MR. MITCHELL: The Metropolitan Club.

DR. PATTERSON: That's a pool billiards (pool hall).

MR. MITCHELL: That's right. Bill Smith ran that, and the Pugh fellow, Mike Pugh. They ran that. There where Branch's is now, used to be what, Tolson? Could have been a furniture store.

DR. PATTERSON: Not Tolson. I'm thinking of Jack Tolson's father,

Mr. J. J. Tolson.

MR. MITCHELL: That was up the street a little bit. That was an electric supply and heat. I forgot what the name of that was.

DR. PATTERSON: That was on that side though.

MR. MITCHELL: New Bern Electric Company or something like that is what Jack Tolson's father ran. And the Metropolitan Club. The bank was along there, National Bank. They were operating there until it went broke. When did the ABC's stores open Joe Pat?

DR. PATTERSON: I don't remember.

MR. MITCHELL: I don't remember either, but best I remember, the first one of those was there about where Branch's is now. And of course next to that was the Sun Journal.

DR. PATTERSON: Was there a movie theater along in there somewhere?

MR. MITCHELL: They say there was. I don't remember.

DR. PATTERSON: I'm not sure I remember that either it.

MR. MITCHELL: They say there was. I don't remember it. But I remember the Sun Journal being along in there.

DR. PATTERSON: Where Branch's is now.

MR. MITCHELL: Along in there from there to the corner. Of course, Mike Shapou had a sandwich shop along in there too. I don't even remember, there's been a lot of people on that corner. Who was there at what particular time, I can't remember.

DR. PATTERSON: Well, getting back to the Elk's Temple corner, look west and go down the street to Hancock Street. What was along in there?

MR. MITCHELL: I've always heard, I do not remember it, but there was a cafe in there where Abie Henderson used to work before he went to work for Floyd Gaskins, and of course the Athens Theater. That was the thing on that side of the street. Then Blades Auto Sale, Dan Roberts, his daddy, and everything, that was there. Then where the cleaning plant is now is where the Cutler house was. Mr. Lycureus Cutler, and Mrs. Dan Roberts was a Cutler, they lived there on the corner in that big old house that used to be on the corner of Hancock.

DR. PATTERSON: What was across the street from that Cutler house? Was it an apartment house?

MR. MITCHELL: There was kind of Sultan's apartments. And next to that was where Mr. Tom Daniels used to live. Mr. Tom Daniels was World War I, Spanish-American War, hero or something, and he was very active in the American Legion and so forth. Then next to that was where the Tea Room started. The Green Door started there and then went up on the corner of Broad and Middle and Dr. Latham had his office up over that.

DR. PATTERSON: Is that where Miss Ina Bright lived?

MR. MITCHELL: She lived along in there, yeah.

DR. PATTERSON: Downstairs.

MR. MITCHELL: That's right. About where Alfred Ward's law offices and all, that's where those houses were. Then on the corner was Mr. Latta's hardware store.

DR. PATTERSON: Johnny, we've talked a lot and I know we're both getting a little tired. But before we stop, I wonder if you would

look back at South Front Street for a moment where you lived and tell me about the houses across the street from you. What was there? They're gone now.

MR. MITCHELL: I'll be glad to. Right across from where we lived was Mr. Sam Dill and Miss Bessie. They lived there. Then the house next to them was a very low house that sat low. Next door to them was Mr. Tom Davis who had a son named Tom who was cohort of Shoot Hall.

They had three girls I think; Lillian and ( ) and so forth. And next to that was Mr. John Davis. Now what Mr. John Davis did, I do not know. He had one daughter named Charlotte who married a man you may have heard of, a Dr. Broaddus Massey in Richmond. Next door to that was Mr. Charlie Hall and Miss Mamie, where Shoot Hall lived. Next door to that is what they now call the Harvey Mansion (Harvey House). That was always apartments where different people lived. Sometimes, you know, Bobby Sparrow lived there for a while. Different people lived there. Of course back during the war, Mr. Ray Henderson got it and Olin Wright lived there and then after the war Ben and Mary Lib (Walker) lived there and Ray and Frances (Henderson). A lot of people lived in that. Next door to that...

DR. PATTERSON: Excuse me, Johnny, let me get this straight. Charles Manor was this big building?

MR. MITCHELL: That's the great big house. It's a cafe, restaurant.

DR. PATTERSON: Yes. Anyhow, I thought the Charles Manor was a house on the same side of the street with you where that vacant lot

is now.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, it was at a time when Mrs. Simons owned it. She ran, it wasn't a cafe, it was just a dining room there. She lived there and ran a dining room. But isn't that what they call the Charles Manor now? It's the Harvey House.

DR. PATTERSON: And that was the Charles Manor?

MR. MITCHELL: No, that is where I was confused. The Harvey House is where people always lived. There was not any restaurant or anything like that. And of course, as you go way, way back, it was s'pose to have been some kind of school back there in the early 1800's. But who all lived there, as I say, Bobby Sparrow, Garland Bell. Some of these people I remember as a child growing up with. Now next door to that, Joe Pat, there were two houses. Snooky Gillikin and his mother and father and brother lived in the one right next to the Harvey Mansion, Harvey House. Then there was a little driveway and there was another house there where Mr. Gillikin lived. Ben Gillikin's mother, I do not remember the father, I remember the mother and Mr. Fred Gillikin, they lived in those houses. Then of course next to that was the J. C. Whitty building which was on the corner which was part on South Front. He had an entrance on South Front and John, Fred and Uncle Fred and Aunt Neta, they lived up over the store.

DR. PATTERSON: In those days then, the first block of South Front Street was lined with houses on both sides.

MR. MITCHELL: That's right.

DR. PATTERSON: Johnny, an important topic in New Bern's history



is hurricanes. Everybody has something to say about hurricanes. What do you have to say about them?

MR. MITCHELL: The first one, of course, I remember, Joe Pat, is the '33 hurricane. I was there home with my mama and the phone rang. My daddy called and said for mama to send me to the store because half the roof had blown off. So I took off and went down to the store and we got out tarpaulins up on the second floor and put it over and tried to save what merchandise we could. That was the first one I remember. I remember walking home from that and there about where the McSorley's used to live there on South Front Street, a crepe myrtle tree blew down right before I got there. About as far as from here to that front door, it blew down right here in front of me. That was the first one I remember and then all the rest of them, put them to this and to that. I remember sitting on mama's front porch and watching people. The water would be up on South Front Street this high and that high. People tried to go down there in the cars and get to the corner of South Front and East Front and it's a little lower there, they'd stall out ninety percent of the time. I never forgot that.

I remember that. And of course I remember the devastation of the trees, the debris. As far as actual damage, we had none at our house.

DR. PATTERSON: What hurricane is this now?

MR. MITCHELL: All of them.

DR. PATTERSON: You're talking of the fifties?

MR. MITCHELL: Yeah. The one with the most water that I ever remember, Joe Pat, was Ione. Of course, Connie had stayed off the

coast of Wilmington for a few days and pumped a lot of rain. But when Ione got here, it was the most water I ever remember seeing in New Bern. It was the only time that I remember that water came into Mitchell's Hardware to where we had to move things off that first floor.

Of course, boats were running up and down South Front Street.

DR. PATTERSON: How far did the water go up Middle Street and Craven Street?

MR. MITCHELL: Middle Street I couldn't tell you. I do know on that particular hurricane I had the truck and I was going down to the hardware store to get in and do whatever I could do and on Craven Street I had to stop there where S. B. Parker was, about where Gussman Cleaners is now. That was as far down Craven Street as I felt like I could go safely at the time. I remember that, and I remember I had on my hip boots and walked across the street in my hip boots.. Of course the hotel was still operating at the time. I remember going to the back of the hotel and standing there watching all these shingles blowing off of Mack Lupton's fish house back there. Well, the wind was up over a hundred mile an hour Joe Pat. It was quite a storm. No question about that.

DR. PATTERSON: Well, we've talked a lot and before we stop, let me just ask you if you have any special memories that you'd like to speak to that we haven't gotten to.

MR. MITCHELL: I think we've covered about everything I can remember.

DR. PATTERSON: Well, Johnny, thank you very much for letting

us do this.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, I'm happy to help if I can.

DR. PATTERSON: This has been an important interview for this story.

MR. MITCHELL: I don't know about that. (laughter)

DR. PATTERSON: Well, you've told us things that we haven't heard from other people about a number of things, downtown New Bern, Mitchell's Hardware. It's been a good interview and I want to thank you for the Memories program, but I'd also like to say I've enjoyed sitting here talking to you too.

MR. MITCHELL: It's been my pleasure.

DR. PATTERSON: So thanks a lot.

MR. MITCHELL: It's been my pleasure.

END OF INTERVIEW