

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

PAUL MONCIER COX

INTERVIEW 1010

This Dr. Joseph Patterson representing the Memories of New Bern Committee. My number is 1000. I am interviewing Paul M. Cox at his home at 516 Pollock Street in New Bern. The number of the interview is 1010. The date is September 1, 1992.

Dr. Patterson: Paul, let me say that the Memories of New Bern program really appreciate your letting us interview you, and I'm personally delighted to be here with you. To start with Paul, what is your full name?

Mr. Cox: Paul Moncier Cox.

JP: Where were you born Paul?

Mr. Cox: Newport News, Virginia.

JP: What year?

Mr. Cox: 1914. I'm a war baby.

JP: A lot of us are. What were your parents names?

Mr. Cox: My father was named Cortez Moncier and my mother was Katherine Bell West.

JP: Do you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Cox: No. There was one brother who was three years older than I but he died the same day he was born.

JP: Paul, did you grow up in Newport News?

Mr. Cox: Yes, through high school.

JP: Where did you go after high school?

Mr. Cox: I went one year to Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, Virginia, and then four years at North Carolina State. Of course back then, it was a different name.

JP: What was it called then? State College, wasn't it?

Mr. Cox: North Carolina State College of Agriculture and Engineering.

JP: You graduated there, and then what happened?

Mr. Cox: I finished there one day and came down here the next.

JP: To New Bern?

Mr. Cox: Yes.

JP: What made you come to New Bern?

Mr. Cox: I was an assistant county agent with the Agriculture Extension Service. I believe today it's called the Cooperative Extension Service.

JP: What were your duties?

Mr. Cox: In those days, we did everything. You didn't have specialist like we do now. I worked with farmers, but I spent most of my time in 4H Club work.

JP: What year did you come here Paul?

Mr. Cox: 1936.

JP: You continued in this job for some time?

Mr. Cox: For twenty-two years. Then I went with the North Carolina Farm Bureau Insurance Company in Craven County for ten years. Then for seven years, I was, Civil Preparedness Coordinator for Craven and Jones Counties and the city of New Bern.

JP: In that capacity, you drew up emergency disaster plans for these various areas?

Mr. Cox: That's correct.

JP: Did you continue in that until retirement?

Mr. Cox: That's right. For seven years.

JP: And then you retired when?

Mr. Cox: It was 1974.

JP: What have you been doing since then?

Mr. Cox: Whatever I wanted to and whenever I wanted to. I guess I spent most of my time down at the Civic Theater after they bought the old Athens Theater. You know in an old building, there's always a lot of work to do, so C. B. Edwards and myself spent a lot of time down there doing a lot of things.

JP: That's been your main interest then for some time?

Mr. Cox: I guess so. Of course, I did a lot of community work also.

JP: Who did you marry?

Mr. Cox: Nettie Pinnix.

JP: When were you married?

Mr. Cox: 1938.

JP: You had been here two years.

Mr. Cox: Right.

JP: Children?

Mr. Cox: Bill and Ruth.

JP: Where's Bill?

Mr. Cox: Bill lives close to Richmond. He and his wife run a computer learning center. Ruth has been through several colleges. The year before last, she got a doctorate from Florida State University

in Marriage and Family Therapy. She's now an assistant professor, I believe is her title, in the School of Nursing at the University of Alabama in Birmingham.

JP: She's probably one of the most qualified nurses anywhere around. Both of your children have done very well.

Mr. Cox: Yes.

JP: Paul, in looking over your career, I know that being mayor of New Bern has been a highlight for you. When were you mayor of New Bern?

Mr. Cox: I was mayor from 1981 to 1985. It's right interesting the first time I ran. I had an opponent, and I've forgotten why it was, but he said he didn't have enough time. He lost. So, he went to the state board of elections and they said, "That's right. You didn't have enough time." That was when we had the elections in November. So, here we go in December. Well, a former mayor decided he would run also.

JP: In the second go around?

Mr. Cox: That's right. So that meant that I had to defeat both of them. I lacked sixty-nine votes. The ex-mayor was third, so he dropped out. So, here we go again in January, and I won the election.

I guess I'm the only mayor that had to run three times. JP:

Do you remember the name of your opponent?

Mr. Cox: One was Don McDowell and the other was Etheridge Ricks.

JP: Which was Mr. Ricks?

Mr. Cox: The former mayor.

JP: Would you like to just look back and reminisce about your career as mayor; things that happened, issues that you addressed, opposition or encouragement, or whatever happened?

Mr. Cox: Of course I had right much experience before then because I'd been on and off the board for ten years.

JP: The Board of Alderman?

Mr. Cox: Yes. So, it wasn't completely new to me. I always, and I still do, look at the office of mayor as a public relations office for the city of New Bern because we do not have a public relations person on the staff. You go to all of these functions. Some of them maybe you don't want to go, but you know you're representing the city, so you go; like the ribbon cuttings and so forth. That takes up a lot of time and people just don't realize it. I should have looked up the number of functions that I went to in a years time. It's around 250. That takes a lot of time. Of course it's different now. Before I was mayor, the mayor did not have a vote. We only had five members on the board, so he only voted in case of a tie. They decided to change that so the mayor would have a vote. The law says that the mayor can be given the right to vote. I believe it had to go through legislature; but anyway, the board said, "he will vote." So, that's why today, the mayor votes. Today when there are six members of the board, his vote doesn't mean a thing, but still he has to vote.

JP: He could be the deciding vote.

Mr. Cox: If one was absent.

JP: Well, if you have six members of the board and they are split,

then the mayor's vote would be the deciding vote.

Mr. Cox: Right. But only if there's a tie vote. It's the same way. I told them several times they ought to get it changed, but the board would probably not do that because they want to put him on the spot also. It'd be good politics if he could get out from under it and then he wouldn't have to vote. You can be a silent mayor, or you can really be up front leading the charge. I didn't choose to do that because I didn't think that really it was necessary. I got along pretty well with the board.

JP: Who was on your board?

Mr. Cox: I forgot.

JP: Were there any major issues that came up to confront you during those four years?

Mr. Cox: We didn't have any big issues really.

JP: The library on Johnson Street?

Mr. Cox: That was in progress. The expansion is still in progress.

JP: So, that was all settled. Was there much opposition to that?

Mr. Cox: No, not when I was mayor.

JP: Now your alderman career goes back to about 1971?

Mr. Cox: It started in the sixties. I've been on and off. I've been defeated and won and so forth. I forget which year this was, but anyway, this is funny. Charles Kimbrell and Durwood Hancock and myself were on the board. We shouldn't have done this because it was just before election. We decided that it was time that the city charged to pick up garbage. I forget who made the motion, but anyway, we did

and the other two voted against it. This is just at the end of the fiscal year, so the city manager put it in the budget. As I remember it was about \$64,000 it would bring in. Well, of course, we were immediately known as "The Garbage Three"; therefore, we were thrown out at the next election. We decided that at the last meeting before we went out we would vote to repeal this charge. Well, we didn't tell the city manager anything about what we were going to do. One of us made the motion and the other two voted against it. The other two, of course, raised sand. I said, "Well, you voted against it to start with and evidently the people don't want it because they threw us out.

Now you're saying that you want it?" Well, of course, the city manager was jumping up and down because he had \$64,000 in his budget and here it was being taken away. It was voted out. So, we told him not to worry; that the new board at their first meeting, if he'd put it on the agenda, would put it back on. And sure enough, that's what happened.

(laughter)

JP: I think that was a pretty slick move.

Mr. Cox: The next morning on the street, everybody was laughing.

JP: Do you remember any other controversial issues when you were an alderman throughout all of these years?

Mr. Cox: Nothing that was real outstanding. When I was mayor in 1985, for our 275th birthday, about eighty of us went to Berne. Anybody could go that wanted to. We were over there a week to ten days. A hurricane came along, so we had to wait a day and that sort of messed up what they had planned over there. Of course, we have

always had a good relationship with Berne, our mother city. They rolled out the red carpet as I guess they did for the group that went last fall to Berne and to other places. Incidentally, it upsets me when people call it our sister city. Most sister cities in the United States have nothing in common. They just have a sister city. Here we are settled by a person from Berne, and I made it quite clear when I was over there, they were our mother city. In fact, there's a parchment on the wall in the mayor's office that came along when we accepted the colors of Berne and the bear. They referred to us as their "daughter city across the sea." While I was mayor, Helmuth DeGraffenreid, who is the historian of the DeGraffenreid family, came here. That was his first trip, and from then on, he really developed an association with New Bern. He's been here three times or more. He was just here this year. This was the second year that the DeGraffenreid Association in the United States has met in New Bern. I went of course.

JP: Now, you have a very close personal relationship with the Berne officials through the years.

Mr. Cox: With Helmut and by letter mostly with the mayor; which reminds me of something else that happened. When we were trying to get the trip lined up, I had occasion to call the Swiss Embassy. You know on the phone sometimes you say, "Wait a minute." The secretary up there said, "Wait quickly one." (laughter) I used it several times while I was mayor and people would wait, and I'd come back on the phone and they'd say, "What did you say?" It means the same thing as our "wait a minute."

JP: Paul, looking back in the political area still, even before you became an alderman, I'm sure you were pretty conversant with what was going on in New Bern. The bridge at the foot of Broad Street and the widening of Broad Street, does that stir up your memory?

Mr. Cox: Oh yeah. The main thing was the trees. I don't know that it was all the people, but quite a few of those that lived on East Front Street on the north side of Broad, raised sand because it was going to cut off their view down the river. Most of the town was upset about cutting down the trees on Broad Street, but there was really nowhere else for it to go if they were going to move it off the foot of Johnson Street.

JP: As I recall, the bridge was placed in it's present location in the early fifties.

Mr. Cox: I believe that's right.

JP: Then traffic continued down Broad Street as Broad Street was until it was obvious that the street had to be widened and this after sometime later. Were there a lot of trees cut down then?

Mr. Cox: Oh yeah. You remember.

JP: I remember, yes. I talked to Robert Stallings who was mayor then and he said that many of the trees had already been taken out by hurricanes before this happened and there weren't as many trees cut down as people seem to remember.

Mr. Cox: It was enough to upset them.

JP: But people objected to that?

Mr. Cox: Oh yeah.

JP: I suppose there wasn't any alternative?

Mr. Cox: That's right.

JP: The town was in a fix by that time.

Mr. Cox: It's just like today. When they built the Sheraton on the Trent, the people objected because they couldn't see the river. They're building the other one over on the Neuse there where you can't see the river.

JP: Were you involved in this or do you remember any particulars about the renaming of the streets in the city?

Mr. Cox: Not too much.

JP: Do you remember Short Street being renamed Linden Street?

Mr. Cox: Yeah.

JP: Was there a particular reason for that?

Mr. Cox: Not as I know of.

JP: Were there any other elections you remember that were controversial; not that your's was in that instance you told us about, but do any other elections stand out in your mind?

Mr. Cox: No, I don't believe so.

JP: What about the city manager form of government? When did that come into play here?

Mr. Cox: I believe the JC's were responsible for that. I'm not sure, but I think they were. I forget when it was. I think the job was getting too big for I guess you would call him a part-time mayor to run the city on a day to day basis. I think that was the reason for the change to city manager form of government.

JP: I think that came to being in the forties. I'm not sure. Do you remember many of the city managers?

Mr. Cox: Craig Barnhardt. I guess I remember him because he was a State College graduate. J. C. Outlaw. He's still here. He went into another business, but now he's retired here. Who else?

JP: Clifford Pace?

Mr. Cox: Yes. I remember him.

JP: Claude Helms?

Mr. Cox: Not too much.

JP: I think maybe they were before your time. Tony Hooper?

Mr. Cox: Yeah. I remember him. I remember him because of the way he pronounced his last name. I guess he's still in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

JP: Who was the city manager during your term of mayor?

Mr. Cox: Tony.

JP: Was the city manager form of government pretty well accepted during your time here?

Mr. Cox: Yes.

JP: There's been no real controversy about that issue?

Mr. Cox: No.

JP: What about annexation of property by the city? What do you remember about that in your career? Any difficulties with it or particular incidence?

Mr. Cox: Only the weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth! Nobody wants an extra tax. You know it's a bad thing that people

don't realize that they go before a governing body with a problem and they cannot see why they cannot get what they want. But the governing body has to look at the city as a whole and whether or not what they want done is good for the city as a whole. It effects the rest of the city. That's in a way why people do not want to be annexed. Of course, there's a hue and a cry to change the law so that you have to do it by vote. If that is ever changed, it will kill the growth of every city in North Carolina. While it may not seem to be right, it's the only way. A city cannot die on the vine. If it does not grow, if it does not get a new tax base or added tax base, it just can't do things.

JP: Were there any particular problems with any special area of annexation that you recall? All were perhaps somewhat troublesome.

Mr. Cox: No, I don't believe so. Except as I said, they didn't want to be annexed.

JP: What about the position of police chief? Has that been a pretty stable situation all through the years or have there been any problems there?

Mr. Cox: I can't recall the names of the chiefs, but there have been one or two that people really got upset about, so they resigned.

I don't believe any of them were actually fired, but they could see the handwriting on the wall.

JP: Do you recall any individuals in the mayor's position who were controversial in that capacity through the years? Let me just name a few and see if there are any association with this. Ray

Henderson, C. H. Boyd, Fred Hussey, Dick Bratcher, Charlie Kimbrell and others.

Mr. Cox: No, I don't believe there were any real controversies.

JP: Are there any other recollections, Paul, that you have about the political situation in New Bern when you were on the board or when you were mayor or just New Bern in general? Political parties?

Mr. Cox: No, since it's not non-partisan, not democratic or republican. There's never been any real controversy I don't believe.

There have been times when the meeting room was filled. And, of course, they always said, "you can get them at the next election." Like they got the Garbage Three. I never will forget one night, and I forget what it was about, but the place was packed. They were standing around the wall. It was while I was in the extension services or maybe it was after. One of the farmers I worked with was there for some reason.

I expressed myself during the meeting, and after the meeting, he said, "Paul, that's the best speech I've ever heard you make, even if you were wrong." (laughter) You always had one or maybe two people who appeared before the board that are always anti, and they still have them today. But you have to let them talk. People cannot understand why the board wants to limit the time a person can talk. But if they didn't, they would be there all night. Then people want to scream about "you're taking away my right to speak." But it has to be done.

JP: Paul, has New Bern been primarily a democratic town or evenly split with the republicans?

Mr. Cox: Oh yeah, mostly democratic. However, that's changing

with the advent of retirees. I think that's also effecting the whole of North Carolina. People can't understand why the republicans in the last several years have taken state offices. I think that's the biggest reason. Because a lot of them come from republican areas and they're still voting republican.

JP: That's an interesting insight. I hadn't thought about that. Suppose we leave the political area and talk about something else. I failed to ask you about your military career. That's a big item with most folks our age. You were in World War II?

Mr. Cox: Yeah. I was a reserve officer from my commission at North Carolina State. I had not been in a unit or active, so I got recalled in January of '42. In fact, I brought my wife and baby home on a Friday from the hospital and left on Monday.

JP: In the Army? They were in the hospital here.

Mr. Cox: Yeah. I started off down in Macon, Georgia and I moved twice from there. Every time I moved, I got closer home. I moved from there to Fort Jackson, from Fort Jackson to Fort Bragg. I got to come home right much when I was at Bragg; in fact, most every weekend.

So, I went from Macon to Fort Jackson to the 77th Division, and then when the 100th Division was activated, they moved me over there. This is the 100th Infantry Division. I stayed with them through the war.

We went to Europe in '44 and through the end of the war. Then I came back in '46. Mainly I was a Captain and I was the S-3 Operations Officer for the 2nd Battalion of the 399th Infantry.

JP: Were you involved in combat?

Mr. Cox: Oh yes. We went in through after the invasion of southern France. We went in through Marseilles. We started off in Baccarat, France where they make the beautiful crystal. We worked our way up through France, then Germany, and ended up in Stuttgart, Germany. I got out in May of '46. I got home in January, but I didn't get out until May. I stayed in the reserves. In the Korean mess, I got recalled.

There were several more here who got recalled and they got out. So, at the urging of my wife, I called up Congressman Barden's office; and I knew his administrative officer (Tom McGhee) very well because back then they stayed here in the summer time because Congress didn't meet in the summer. He said, "well, I'll check on that and see." In about two hours he called me back and he was laughing. I said, "What are you laughing about?" He said, "Well, I called over there and they've checked and said that you were just the kind of officer they needed!" (laughter) So, that ended that. I never dreamed that I'd go back to the same place I left from in Germany. The day I got to Jackson, by this time I was a Major, there were one hundred Majors who reported. There were two divisions there already. So, what do you do with one hundred Majors? I ended up in an office that inspected everything; broken stuff, burglaries, etc. I remember I inspected once a broken lock on a warehouse. When I got aboard the boat going to Europe, I was looking at my orders and I had a different MOS they called it, which described what your duty was, other than an infantry officer. There was another officer on there and he said, "Well, I know what that is. That's an inspection MOS." I said, "uh huh, they

pushed the button." I found out when I got to Germany, right back to Stuttgart where I left in 1945, that was what they were looking for - an Inspector General. The General said, "Major, how much IG duty have you had?" I said, "Sir, I've never been inside an IG's office."

He turned to the Adjutant and said, "You call Heidelberg and get us an IG officer and find something for this Major to do." (laughter)

He said, "By the way, have you unpacked?" I said, "Well, I'm in the process." He said, "Well, the reason I asked is I've had officers come over and stay two weeks and went back home." So, I stayed there and I had my family there in the summer. We had to live, as they said, on the economy. Not in a barracks or something like that. But it was nice. The children were young and they knew I was coming back.

I only had a twenty-two month deal, so I had to come back.

JP: You didn't go to Korea?

Mr. Cox: No. There were four Majors in my office. Three of us had combat experience, and the other one stayed at Fort Benning the entire time leading classes around from one class to the other.

So, who did they send to Korea? They sent him. (laughter)

JP: Paul, I know you played a big role in Little Theater in New Bern. How about telling me about that.

Mr. Cox: We had what then we called the New Bern Little Theater.

JP: What year are we talking about?

Mr. Cox: We're talking about the late thirties. I forget when the Civic Theater was formed. I'm not sure if we did anything after

the war as the Little Theater or not. We did our thing in the old recreation building on George Street across from the cemetery. It was a very small stage. Of course we didn't have a lot of money and we didn't care really as long as we got enough to pay for the show.

One of the people that was in it was Gerald Colvin. I never will forget he played the man in "The Man Who Came to Dinner." That's the one where as soon as he got on the stage, he never got off the whole production.

JP: He was a good one for that.

Mr. Cox: Yeah. Jimmy Williams. He's dead now. Annie Rose Daugherty, Bill Pierce, Sybil Jenkins, Albert Willis, Sr. George Nelson, Kay Turner and others. We had a good time.

JP: What was your role in all of this?

Mr. Cox: I did some on stage stuff. Of course, all of us helped with scenery and you have to do a little of all of it.

JP: Were you the one behind this? Did you get this going?

Mr. Cox: It's been so long. I think I helped get it going. Another one that helped was Kenneth Jones wife, Helen H. Jones. She was quite involved. Also, she was involved with drama in Centenary Methodist Church. Way back, we did a couple of plays. I remember one play we did relating to the Palace. It was written by Helen Dorstch Harrison who lived in Chapel Hill and who was a friend of Raymond Pollock's sister, Emily Pollock Crawford. It was called "The Loved Home." It was about the Palace. As far as I know, that's the only time it's been presented. The next time they have an anniversary of

the Palace, it should be done again.

JP: This was all before the war in the thirties?

Mr. Cox: Yeah.

JP: Did this Little Theater movement continue up until the time you left for the war?

Mr. Cox: Yeah.

JP: What other places did you use for your shows?

Mr. Cox: That's all.

JP: You mentioned the Athens Theater.

Mr. Cox: That's the Civic Theater. When they formed the Civic Theater.

JP: That's a different thing. In those days the Athens Theater was of course a theater. But you put on most of your performances at the recreation center?

Mr. Cox: Yeah, on George Street.

JP: When you came back, did you pick it up again?

Mr. Cox: Eventually, the Civic Theater had already been formed because they had done several plays. Before they got the Athens, they did them over at the high school. You have to call it the old high school now.

JP: Which is now the middle school?

Mr. Cox: That's right.

JP: Did you get involved pretty actively in that?

Mr. Cox: Oh yeah.

JP: As an actor?

Mr. Cox: Oh yes. I "trod the boards" as they say, out there several times.

JP: What were some of the plays you were in?

Mr. Cox: "Brigadoone" is one of them and some musicals.

JP: Did you sing?

Mr. Cox: I did some. I was the tin man. (laughter) I was in most all of them out there in some form or other. Now, speaking of that, this is along the same line, in the 250th anniversary of the birthday of New Bern, Kermit Hunter wrote a drama called "The Third Frontier." That was done at the high school for two weeks every night.

We had a two week celebration. I was on the board at that time I believe. I think Robert Stallings was mayor and somehow I got to be general chairman. We hired a full time director for the whole thing, and then we hired a director for the show. I don't know whether he was head of the drama department at ECU, but most of our outside actors, the speaking parts came from East Carolina. Of course there was a whole lot of other local people in the chorus and so forth. I remember there was a controversy about whether or not to hold it out on the football field. But we figured with just two weeks we better not bother with rain, so that's why we went inside.

JP: Now, all through the years, have you stayed connected to the Civic Theater?

Mr. Cox: Yes.

JP: The principal place now is the old Athens Theater and has been for some time now, has it?

Mr. Cox: Oh yes. The last time it closed as a movie theater, we received a grant from the Kellenberger Foundation to help pay for it.

JP: We were talking about the seats being removed from the old Athens Theater. The people who owned the theater took them with them and you had to get new seats. Where did you get them?

Mr. Cox: In a warehouse somewhere in Wilson. They looked like they probably came out of a high school somewhere.

JP: What has been the story of the Athens Theater since then? Has it been improved?

Mr. Cox: Yes and no. Of course they hope to someday restore it I guess, but I understand there is some controversy whether to restore it as it was. There's a phrase that you don't restore it "exactly as it was" and you cannot because of present day building codes. For instance in this theater, I don't know whether present day building codes would let them put the boxes back or not. There were boxes down front on each side. It will cost a heck of a lot of money. As you know, they took the front off. Everybody was screaming, "Why don't you take it off!" So, we took it off, and we ran into a big problem. There was a contractor for about six thousand dollars.

It was stucco, so he knocked off a piece of it and sent it off, and lo and behold it had asbestos. Then the price went to about sixteen thousand. It took them longer to encase the whole front than it did to take the stucco off. That's where the cost was. He had to carry the stuff to Indiana, if you can imagine that. We all fussed about

the asbestos. Now they say, "when are you going to do something to the front?" Of course it's the same answer, after we get money. I'm not sure and I don't even know whether it's been discussed, but probably they might paint the front just to make it look a little better until they get enough money to do something about it if they are going to restore it.

JP: What are some of the other groups in New Bern that put on dramatic performances.

Mr. Cox: There use to be the Footlight Theater, but they're out of business. There is a black organization, and I believe they call themselves the Shooting Star Performers. I don't know whether they call themselves professionals or semi-professionals that do shows at the Harvey Mansion, Cherry Point, Camp LeJeune, and also, across the river at Fairfield Harbor. I don't know where their real base is.

I forget their name. They have a name too. I think they classify themselves as professionals.

JP: Is the Civic Theater the only group now in town that puts on major performances?

Mr. Cox: Well, the professional people, but they don't have a home so far as I know.

JP: Who are some of the other people beside yourself who have been very active in this?

Mr. Cox: I'm not involved really. Of course, it's the board of directors that runs the outfit. I'm not involved in that at all.

C. B. Edwards has been in it from the very beginning. As I said,

he and I are I guess the resident repairers. There are two doors leading to the alley way. They have to at some point have a fire curtain, so that cuts off the exit from the stage into the alley. So, we reopened one of the original doors. He's right good at woodworking. He does all this fancy stuff. Billie Taylor, Peggy Scharding, Ann Wade, Leon Wade (husband and wife), Emma Anderson. I'm talking about some of the old ones now. I don't know about the new members on the board.

The present president is David Bauer who works with Craven Community College. A lot of the old ones have dropped out. You see a lot of the retirees on boards and committees because the older New Bernians are burned out, so they just quit.

JP: So, retirees are playing a very active role in this now, is that right?

Mr. Cox: I don't know who is on the board. There are names on the board that I just do not recognize. Whether they are retirees or not, I do not know. Incidentally, there is one interesting thing.

I don't know whether he is a member of the board or not and I forget his name, but he is starting a Shakespeare group. I won't call it "theater", but he's forming a group of anybody who wants to read and eventually produce a Shakespeare play in the Civic Theater.

JP: I have been reading about that. Paul, you've been involved in so many things in New Bern. You've been here a long time and you have lots of memories about this town other than the things we've talked about. Why don't I just ask you to look back over New Bern as you remember it and speak to some of the things that have been of interest

to you.

Mr. Cox: I was pretty active. I was in on the beginning of the North Carolina Symphony Society, the group down here, the Easter Seals and a lot of other things. There are several things I want to talk about. Some of these you know about, and you may have already gotten them from other people.

JP: That's all right. We want to hear from many people.

Mr. Cox: Stanly Hall. You probably remember it when they played basketball up there.

JP: Could you describe it's location?

Mr. Cox: It's on the corner of Pollock and Craven right across from City Hall, the upstairs, which is now something else.

JP: Who all played basketball there? Did the high school play?

Mr. Cox: Oh yes. Way back. My wife said they had dances there. I'm just gonna jump about. Since I've been here there have been seven locations of the Chamber of Commerce. When I first came, it was at the old city hall on Craven Street; then it moved to Hancock Street between Pollock and Broad; then it moved to the brick building on Broad Street that is now the office of Tabernacle Baptist Church; then of course it was at the foot of Middle Street.

JP: That was in the Clyde Eby house that was moved. Maxwell house.

Mr. Cox: Maxwell house. That's right. Then it was on the corner of George and Broad right across from the old hospital. Of course now, it moved up a block from Middle Street in the O Marks building.

So, it moved six times. The blocks on Tryon Palace Drive from the railroad over to Craven Street and on out to the Trent River used to be a lot of business until they tore it all down in the urban renewal.

Some of those at the foot of Craven Street were, I think, Baugh & Son two fertilizer warehouses and the Whitty Farm Machinery on the corner of Craven. Back then, it was South Front. Of course, the famous Gaston Hotel in the block between Middle and Craven. There was Kafer's Bakery. I think on the corner of Middle and South Front was the A&P store. I think next to the hotel was the laundry.

JP: Braddy's.

Mr. Cox: That's right.

JP: Mitchell's Hardware?

Mr. Cox: No. That was on Craven right where it is now as far as I know.

JP: It was originally on South Front. It burned.

Mr. Cox: Right. Then on the other side about where the Ramada Inn is now, Mack Lupton, who was mayor at one time and also in the seafood business, started a canning plant.

JP: That's on the other side of the river?

Mr. Cox: That's right. He didn't do too well because the farmers would sign up to furnish him fresh produce of snap beans or tomatoes, but if the fresh market was higher, then they'd sell it to them. Of course, he had to know what he was going to get and when he didn't know, why, he just closed it up. Then in the late thirties, the government was buying up cattle because of a drought I believe. So,

the old Abattoir down on 17 South, back of where the boat plant was and the building that was the bus station on George Street, which is now a woodworking place, was a canning plant. I remember Mr. Baugh came down from the land of the sky, a canning plant up in the mountains, to get this one going. They canned there for a while. I forget why they closed up; but anyway, they did. I remember that Raymond Watson ran the Abattoir that slaughtered the cattle. Of course, I know that somebody has mentioned to you Kafer Hospital.

JP: What do you remember about Kafer Hospital?

Mr. Cox: It was right next to the B&P station on the corner of Broad and Hancock about where Barker Apartment's are now. It was a large home with large white columns that belonged originally to Kenneth Jones. His daughter, Hayden Jones, is still here and she works at the library. It was started by Dr. Oscar Kafer and Helen, his wife. I'm not sure how long it ran.

JP: Were you ever a patient there?

Mr. Cox: No. I don't know whether it closed after he died or exactly what.

JP: It went on for some years after that.

Mr. Cox: Right.

JP: It was a beautiful home.

Mr. Cox: Yes. That's about all I know about the Kafer Hospital. Jane and Sarah Stewart, do you remember them?

JP: I remember them.

Mr. Cox: They lived where the parking lot is across from City

Hall in a beautiful old home. Jane was an interior decorator. I will never forget that she had a chauffeur. But she laid it on the line.

I remember she came here once. Nettie just wanted to see what she would say. If I'm not mistaken, she said, "throw it all out" or something like that. That's the way she was. She wasn't gentle with you. (laughter) They say she was right good at it. I doubt she ever had any professional training. I don't know.

JP: What was her house like?

Mr. Cox: I never went in it.

JP: What did it look like from the outside?

Mr. Cox: As I remember, it had a porch around it and it had vines growing up on it that sort of covered it. I think it had steps on the Pollock Street side. It was two-story I believe. It was a typical old home for those times.

JP: Why was it torn down?

Mr. Cox: To make the parking lot as far as I know.

JP: Do you remember what year that was?

Mr. Cox: No.

JP: You weren't the mayor then?

Mr. Cox: No.

JP: You didn't do it?

Mr. Cox: It was before then. No, I didn't do it. (laughter) But she was quite a character. I don't know whether anybody's mentioned to you Joe McDaniel.

JP: No. Nobody's talked about Joe. This is a good time to talk

about Joe.

Mr. Cox: He published The Mirror, a weekly newspaper. Some think Joe was quite controversial. You might talk to his wife about Joe.

JP: Did The Mirror stay in existence a long time?

Mr. Cox: Quite long. But he was more famous I guess for his "Yuletide Review" at Christmas time.

JP: What was that?

Mr. Cox: It had everything; dancing, piano, singing, ballet, whatever.

JP: Citizens of New Bern participated?

Mr. Cox: Yeah. It was done in the old Masonic Theater. He raised the money for charity for several years.

JP: That was quite a successful venture.

Mr. Cox: Oh yeah. In The Mirror he wrote a column on the front page and he wrote a lot about local people. Way back, there was a strictly black school, West Street school. They had a football team and they played in Kafer Park. I think there were three Pollock brothers. They weighed in the neighborhood of three hundred pounds each. I forget the coach, but he played them in the line most of the time. But sometimes when he got down on the goal line, he would put two of them in the backfield and there was no way that anybody could get to the ball carrier, and so they scored every time. This was if he was on the three yard line or something like that. But they were huge! I mean they were huge. You know about the nativity scene at Centenary Methodist Church.

JP: Tell about that. I know about it, but other people won't.

Mr. Cox: I should know how long it's been going, but I don't. It's been a long time. It was started when Jimmy Smith and his wife Jane, who used to teach at the high school, saw it down at Wilmington. Our Sunday school class at that time was the young adults. So, you know how far back it was. We got it together with costumes. We got some throw-off costumes from the Shrine, the Scottish Rite, and we made a lot of them. The class was responsible for it, but a lot of people worked on it.

JP: Now, where is that presented Paul?

Mr. Cox: It's on the Middle Street side of Centenary Methodist Church.

JP: During the Christmas season of course?

Mr. Cox: Oh yes. It's the three nights before Christmas; Christmas Eve and two nights before that.

JP: It's a living scene of a nativity?

Mr. Cox: That's right. It has the manger scene and, as I call them, the upstairs angels. There are some sheep and shepherds and so forth. Last couple of years, they haven't had a donkey. When we first started, we had one for a long time. There's one story about that. I was in charge of the animals. I got them from everywhere that I had to; as far down as beyond Maysville. I finally found a donkey down on the Morehead City highway that belonged to a Mr. and Mrs. Boyd. He was by himself all the time. They staked him out to graze. When he'd see you coming, he was so happy to see somebody,

he just started hollering. You had to watch him because he would nip at you, but he wasn't mean. I have a story I did on the nativity scene from the standpoint of the animals. It's real good. Especially when they talk about the Christmas that Elvis didn't show up because he is dead. His name was Elvis. He said, "Well, you should have told them he had died." It's been going probably forty years. Very seldom has it been rained out. It takes over a hundred people, so you have a different cast each night. It's not hard to put together and the community seems to enjoy it, so we keep on doing it. Sheila Darden, you probably know her as Scrappy Bell's wife. She and I, in the ballroom of the Gaston Hotel, did the first radio broadcast in New Bern. It was a remote from Kinston.

JP: What year was that?

Mr. Cox: I think it was in the late thirties. If you'd really like to know, if you call Sheila, she may know when it was. But that was the first radio broadcast in New Bern.

JP: What was it about, Paul?

Mr. Cox: Music.

JP: Broadcast music from the ballroom.

Mr. Cox: She played and I sang.

JP: Was this just a one time thing?

Mr. Cox: Oh no. I believe it was once a week.

JP: For some time?

Mr. Cox: Yeah.

JP: She played the piano?

Mr. Cox: Right.

JP: I don't remember the ballroom in that hotel. Was it quite a sizeable place?

Mr. Cox: It was fairly large but so elaborate with mirrors and all the old time furniture.

JP: Dances were held there?

Mr. Cox: I believe so. It was a shame that it burned. Incidentally, the night they had the fire, the Tryon Palace Commission was meeting here and several of them were staying there. I think one of them was Mrs. Kellenberger. I believe she lost her rings. That's the story. She had taken them off and put them on the table.

JP: But she lost a lot of other things I imagine.

Mr. Cox: Yes. Power boat races. I forget what the years were but Guy Hamilton or Charlie Kimbrell can tell you because Charlie lost some fingers.

JP: There were a lot of power boat races here?

Mr. Cox: Yeah.

JP: They were on the Trent River? Do you remember them?

Mr. Cox: Oh yeah.

JP: Did you participate?

Mr. Cox: Oh no. When they had them here last year or the year before, Guy's grandson, I guess, dodged a boat. I said, "Guy, you wouldn't want to be out there now, would you?" He said, "I certainly would." (laughter) In 1986 or '87 was the Pepsi celebration. We'd been trying for years to get somebody from Pepsi or Pepsi-Co, which

is the parent company of Pepsi Cola, down here to do some kind of celebration. So the canners; you know they are not bottles anymore, from North and South Carolina decided that they would come and put on a two day show. I was still mayor. I mean they put on a show. They had a parade. It cost them about \$250,000 to put on this show. They had a big thing over at the Shrine and several other things. It was really something. They had the president of Pepsi-Cola and the president of Pepsi-Co down here. I never will forget, by a slip of the tongue, I forget what I was saying to the president of Pepsi-Co and I said Coca-Cola instead of Pepsi-Cola. I told him it was a slip of the tongue and not of the heart.

JP: You told me earlier about a semi-pro football team.

Mr. Cox: I believe Nettie says it was in 1937. I don't know why it started really, and I don't remember the names of anybody else that played. But we had a team. We furnished our own uniforms. As I remember it, we were all dressed differently. (laughter) We were coached by Fred Shipp. He played ball at Duke and then played some pro ball, Theresa's brother. You knew Fred.

JP: Yes. I knew Fred. Now, you were on that team?

Mr. Cox: Yeah.

JP: Did you play other towns in the vicinity?

Mr. Cox: Well, there weren't that many. I think we played maybe four games a year. We didn't get paid anything. In fact, there wasn't that many people that came to see the game.

JP: How did this last?

Mr. Cox: As I remember, it only lasted one year.

JP: Was Fred Hussey a member of the team?

Mr. Cox: I don't think so. We played at Kafer Park. I guess I'm the only one left that remembers that. Then after a couple of years, we had a "womanless" concert I guess you call it. Somebody would sing; somebody would do a speech, but we were all dressed like women. (laughter)

JP: This was at the Athens Theater?

Mr. Cox: We did it at the high school. I've forgotten who did it, but somebody did it for some community fund of some kind. It was a lot of fun. Another thing about Cherry Point. I was still here when it started. I was in the Extension Service. Whoever was in charge, I don't know what he was in charge of, but one of his duties was to grass seed Cherry Point. He came to us and told us how much area he had to seed and he wanted us to figure up how much seed it would take.

This was all the areas; the shoulders of the road, the shoulders of the runways. You can imagine how much seed there was. We figured it up and we translated it into something people would understand.

We figured it would take eleven box cars loaded with one hundred pound bags of seed to seed Cherry Point.

JP: That's a statistic nobody else has spoken to.

Mr. Cox: I imagine not. I'm the only that remembers it. But we did it. I don't remember too much about the USO except, I don't know if it was anywhere else, but one location was on the next corner at the Dill House.

JP: That's the corner of Hancock and Pollock.

Mr. Cox: Yeah. I wasn't here then, so I don't know too much about that. Anybody talk to you way back about making whiskey?

JP: No. We're hoping somebody would.

Mr. Cox: Well, as you know, way back, New Bern had several large saw mills. As I got the story, they didn't do to much conservation.

They just cut out and got out. When they cut out and got out, there was nothing left for people who were working for them to do. Down in the Harlowe section which I think always has been a section of black people, they just left those people with nothing to do, so they started making whiskey. There was one or maybe two that had fairly large farms and they furnished the money to buy the sugar and whatever else was needed to make the whiskey. You weren't afraid of getting killed by the whiskey because they were copper stills. In other words, they didn't run them through a radiator like they do now days. I don't know how many stills were down there, but it kept the revenue people, alcohol and tax unit or whatever you want to call them, very busy.

But they would find them and they would bring them down here to federal court, Judge Meekins. He gave all of them the same sentence; a year and a day in Chillicothe, Ohio. They'd come back, and some of the revenue people told me that they'd go right back and set up a still in the same place where they got caught before, cause they'd catch them again. It was a wholesale place here in town, and I guess he knew what they were going to do. He sold them a lot of sugar. It was all right as long as he kept the door opened. Of course the revenue

people knew this and they'd set up outside and see who was buying the sugar until one day he closed the door, and then they got him, the man that owned the place. I won't name any names. He had a real loud voice. You could hear him a block I guess. I found out the day that his case would come up. I just wanted to see what he would do. So, I went up to the federal court and of course he couldn't say anything up there. Man, he squirmed in his seat. As I remember it, they fined him five hundred dollars. They didn't give a sentence. I guess from then on, he kept his door open. So, that's my story about making whiskey. They said if you knew where to go down there that nothing in an ABC Store could touch it.

JP: Was this moonshine sold in New Bern? Where did you buy it?

Mr. Cox: I really don't know. I think you'd probably have to go down there on the sly and be sure you didn't get caught. (laughter)

For ten years I took the football film for the high school. That was interesting. The things that stands out most in my mind is the night we went down to Wilmington. It was cold. A fellow went with me to help me change the film and so forth. In those days, it was rather primitive. They had a platform where you had to climb up a ladder and it had no back on it. Just some planks laid across it.

The spotter for the home team was up there too. Right behind you was a big electric line. It was horrible. This boy forgot to bring his coat. I thought he would freeze to death! In fact, he said, "I can't stay up here. I gotta go down", and he left. That sort of stands out in my mind. I see that they're going back next year to play in

Elizabeth City. The trip to Elizabeth City was 125 miles. The game didn't end til ten, ten thirty. That was a long ways to drive back at night. Especially, if it rained, it was terrible. But I enjoyed it.

JP: Paul, these are good stories. Let me ask you about Mr. Pinnix Drug Store.

Mr. Cox: He came in the early 1900's. I'm not exactly sure when he opened his store, but I do know that he finished his schooling and he was too young to be licensed to be a pharmacist. He worked for Dr. Duffy in that drug store, and then he opened his own across from where it is today at the old train station on Queen and Hancock. He ran that for over fifty years. He was the only pharmacist. There were times he'd hire others, but he was the only one there.

JP: He sold that to John McDaniel and W.A. Crumpler who is there now?

Mr. Cox: Yes.

JP: Pinnix Drug Store from the very beginning then was in this same location? It's always been there.

Mr. Cox: That's correct. The original building was owned by Bynum Smith, and Mr. Pinnix never bought it.

JP: Paul, you lived through in New Bern the Civil Rights Act of the sixties and you have watched race relations change through the years. Could you speak to what all what was going on in that time?

Mr. Cox: Up until the time that Martin Luther King was killed, of course, there was separation of the races. There was quite an

upheaval when he was killed. I remember some business owners stayed at their businesses twenty-four hours a day. Some of them on the roof with rifles. It was a little rough. Of course, we didn't have a lot of break-ins and things like that, but there had to be some control and there was. Etheridge Ricks was mayor then I believe. They blocked off streets. As I remember, there were smaller groups of the black rolling around and making a lot of noise, but they never caused any trouble.

JP: Were there any marches by blacks downtown during that time?

Mr. Cox: Not as I remember it. But there have more since then.

JP: Were you associated, Paul, with this civil rights commission?

This was a group set up to handle this type thing.

Mr. Cox: No. I was not associated with that at all.

JP: What do you think about segregation in New Bern following the Civil Rights Act; in schools or other ways? Do you think things worked out pretty well? Has it helped?

Mr. Cox: Yes. It went pretty smooth. I remember one Sunday, I don't know if it was a black organization or what; but anyway, there were blacks who attempted to go into Sunday church service in white churches. Some, they were not allowed to go in. I remember in Centenary, we let them in and we seated them down front. It caused no problem. They haven't been back since. I don't know what they were trying to find out; but anyway, that did happen.

JP: Your children went to school in the integrated school, didn't they?

Mr. Cox: No. Because when the school was on the school green, they were not integrated.

JP: That was before integration. So, they didn't experience that. What changes have you noted in downtown New Bern; the buildings, the general feeling of the downtown?

Mr. Cox: As far as buildings, it hasn't changed really. The only ones I know that's been torn down are on lower Middle Street.

JP: What were those building? I can't remember.

Mr. Cox: I can't either. I don't know what was there.

JP: What changed, though, were the businesses in the buildings.

Mr. Cox: Several times.

JP: Do you remember some of the old businesses that disappeared?

Mr. Cox: They'd come and go. Really no, I don't. Edna Earl Parsons ran a Ladies Ready to Wear Shop. There was Coplon-Smith Department Store. The Jewel Box was one, but there was another one before then. There was of course Kress's and Charles Store on the corner. The A&P that moved up to between Pollock and Broad. I remember John Blanchard was the manager. The ABC Store was on the corner of Hancock and Broad. It was a huge store. Right next to it was a restaurant.

JP: On which Street?

Mr. Cox: Broad Street. I remember the owner's wife made the pies. Of course, Wooten-Moulton Studio on Middle.

JP: Where was that, Paul, on Middle Street?

Mr. Cox: If I remember, it was right next door to what is now

the Chelsea.

JP: Turner-Tolson had a furniture store there too.

Mr. Cox: That's right. That was the next store, where the flea market is. Then there was Hawks Radio. I believe at one time a bakery was there. Of course Turner-Tolson also spread around on Broad Street in the back back there. I remember Edna Earl Parsons' place was right next door to the old First Citizens Bank that is now the Arts Council building. That's about what I remember. But there have been no changing in buildings really, except that one that was torn down. I forget what was there.

JP: Paul, what do you remember about hurricanes in this town?

Mr. Cox: Way back in the fifties, sixties, we had lots of them. We might not be in the middle, but we'd be on the edge. I don't know how many we've had. Of course the real one was in 1955. Within a month, we had three; Connie, Diane, and Ione. In September of '55 when this happened, Ione was the biggest one we had. It doesn't sound like much but remember this was when a dollar was a dollar back in the fifties, and when you're talking about fourteen million dollars worth of damage, that's a real dollar. We had a lot of high water and high wind. I think the winds gusted probably over a hundred miles an hour. Probably more than that down at Cherry Point. I remember I was helping some at the Red Cross and I guess it was about twelve o'clock at night when the phone rang; the wind was blowing and you couldn't see across the street for the rain, I could tell it was an elderly lady. She said, "Are you busy?" I said, "No mam, not right

now." She said, "Well, I just got to talk to somebody! If you can't talk to me, I'll hang up and call somebody else." So, we talked about five minutes and talked about the hurricanes and how long it was going to last and how much damage was it going to do. She just wanted to talk. She said, "Now I feel better. Thank you very much", and hung up. (laughter)

JP: Were you the emergency director then?

Mr.Cox: No. I was just helping the Red Cross.

JP: What was the damage like, Paul, in that Ione storm?

Mr. Cox: There were many trees blown down and a lot of shingles off the roof. Incidentally, we were in the eye. I don't believe we've ever been in the eye before. Of course it gets completely dead, no leaves moving or nothing. But yet all around on the outside, it's horrible. The people said it must be over, so they'd get out and drive around. The people that were trying to get things repaired, they'd get in their way. Of course, they let them out for a little while.

Nobody knew how long it would last. Whether it would be for an half hour or hour or what. But because nothing was happening, everybody thought it was over. Well, as they say, the front end pulls the shingles off on this side of the house, and after the eye passes, the back end pulls them off on the other side of the house. There were not a lot of homes destroyed, but there were a lot of roofs damaged. It was right funny that the insurance said that the water had to come in through an opening or they would not cover it. So laughingly, I used to tell people, "You know it's coming, so go around and punch some holes in

your house and it'll come in through an opening." (laughter) But that was right, if it came in around your windows and so forth, there was no pay from insurance at that time. I don't know what it is now. Of course, we were without electricity for a while and the water rose.

The highest point was at Jack Smith's Creek out on Oaks Road just beyond the National Cemetery. I think the water was ten feet above sea level which is pretty high because that's a fairly low place. The water came probably half way up Middle Street. I know it was halfway up the parking meters on Tryon Palace Drive. You could row a boat up Middle Street for a ways. Here where I live, on the corner of Pollock and Metcalf, Metcalf slants down toward the Trent River. At the lower end of Metcalf, I could just see the top of a car. Some of the worst damage was on East Front Street between Broad Street and north of there because the hurricane pulled logs from the saw mill in Bridgeton across the river and beat the foundations of the houses.

JP: My mother's was one of them.

Mr. Cox: That's right. Where your grandfather used to live. So, it beat the foundations terrible.

JP: When you were in charge of emergency management, did you have any disasters or situations arise?

Mr. Cox: The only thing, and I'm not sure of this, but I think it was in '70 with the first big snow we had. Maybe it was '73. We had fourteen inches of snow, and of course that stopped everything.

That was the biggest thing. I never will forget, my office was in the basement of the social service building in old St. Luke's and I

was down there. About two o'clock the phone rang, and it was people from Bosch.

JP: The tool company.

Mr. Cox: Right. They said, "Our shift that's here, cannot get home." I said, "I guess not." They said, "Have you got any blankets and cots?" and I said, "Yes." They said, "Well, we want some and we're sending a four wheel vehicle down to get it." I said, "Well, I hope it gets here." And sure enough, they did. The windows were down at ground level and he backed it up and we loaded him up and he took off.

JP: The town was really at a stand still for a day or so?

Mr. Cox: Oh yes, until they could scrape the snow.

JP: I know, Paul, that you're conversant with the trolley situation. Aren't you the one who got the trolley's exposed in front of the old Athens Theater? Was that your doings?

Mr. Cox: No. I think most of that was Charlie Kimbrell when he was director of public works.

JP: Do you remember the trolley's?

Mr. Cox: No. That was before my day.

JP: What was the social life like in New Bern as you came along? Was this a pretty active place socially?

Mr. Cox: Yes. Of course, that was back in the days of the big bands. Not the present day noise. (laughter) But anyway, this is their generation. We had dances.

JP: Where did you hold these dances?

Mr. Cox: There was one club I believe. Of course, we had some

at the Country Club. Aside from that, I don't remember any other places.

JP: Do you remember a warehouse in New Bern where dances were held?

Mr. Cox: No. A tobacco warehouse?

JP: Yes.

Mr. Cox: That was before my time. There was no tobacco warehouses when I came. Incidentally, let me mention the 101 Ranch. Have you heard of that?

JP: Tell me about it.

Mr. Cox: It was on the Country Club Road just on this side of Old Towne. Of course that was just a field. It was way back off the road. It had a u-shaped road you drove in and you turned and you could drive on out the other side. It was not a nice place, so I can't tell you much about it. I guess that was the first night club in New Bern. I don't know. But that's what it was called, the 101 Ranch.

JP: They sold liquor?

Mr. Cox: It was said they did.

JP: But you never went there?

Mr. Cox: No.

JP: I remember the name.

Mr. Cox: One thing that we haven't talked about is Tryon Palace. What do you remember about the beginnings of Tryon Palace and what was your role in all of this? I know as mayor, you were on the commission.

JP: Of course, that was after it was built. I remember all the

digging and the archeological digs that they had to do. There were a lot of people that didn't like it because they were going to cut off that end of George Street. Some people thought it was a waste of money. I guess most of those were those who would not get anything from it personally. The people that would come here would be spending money mainly eating, buying gas, and staying in a motel. So, they would not be getting anything directly from it.

But most people thought that it was a good thing and would mean a lot for the town. Have you talked to Miss Gertrude yet?

JP: We're not going to be able to interview Miss Gertrude. We've talked to other people though. Paul, you remember George Street going through where the palace is now?

Mr. Cox: Oh yeah.

JP: George Street in that area where the Palace is located was lined by houses on both sides.

Mr. Cox: That's correct.

JP: Do you recall any other views of that area?

Mr. Cox: Guy Hamilton had a restaurant right on the river.

JP: By the bridge?

Mr. Cox: Right. There was General Wholesale. They're the only two I remember on each side of George Street.

JP: The bridge went right straight across the river?

Mr. Cox: Yeah. I've forgotten now where it landed on the other side.

JP: They tore that bridge down of course when they built the

new Trent River bridge. Was that a popular location for the new Trent River bridge, where it's located now?

Mr. Cox? I don't think there was much controversy about that as I remember.

JP: Was there much controversy about locating the Neuse River bridge where it is now?

Mr. Cox: Oh yeah!

JP: We talked about the people in town and the streets and the trees. But the location itself, was that a big issue in New Bern?

Mr. Cox: There was no other place for it to go the way I saw it. I don't know what the people in Bridgeton felt. People just thought it was bad because of the trees. That's the main thing.

JP: Who wanted that bridge put there?

Mr. Cox: The state.

JP: The bridge at Johnson Street just wasn't adequate to handle the traffic and so a new bridge had to be put here. Paul, do you have any other things that you'd like to talk about?

Mr. Cox: There are a couple of people. I forget what year this was, but back when we used to have June is Dairy Month, I sort of ran that program for Maola. One year, we had the state dairy princess, Connie Hobby. Her daddy ran a shoe shop where the parking lot is next to the Episcopal church. He ran a shoe repair shop there. Her mother still lives here. I remember, I think his name was Bud. Do you remember Nicky Simpson?

JP: Yes.

Mr. Cox: He had a son that was in a wheelchair.

JP: Bud.

Mr. Cox: Bud. Nicky would put him down beside him and he would talk to everybody that walked by and waved to people. He was always happy. I forgot to say that the city put a lot of money into the 250th anniversary celebration. As I said, we had two weeks of it. I remember we had to air condition the high school auditorium. We awarded the contract and then he came back and said, "My man made a big mistake! I can't let you have it for this amount." So, we just added a little to so we could keep it.

JP: You did air condition it?

Mr. Cox: Yes. And it's still there. It made a lot of noise but we couldn't have done "The Third Frontier" otherwise. There was no way to do it. I thought maybe some time somebody might catch hold of "The Third Frontier" and do it like "The Lost Colony" cause it could be done outdoors very well. At that time, there were places around New Bern that you could have done it. I don't know whether there's any place around now or not.

JP: Was this written just for New Bern?

Mr. Cox: That's all. By Kermit Hunter. You know he wrote "Until These Hills" and "Horn in the West."

JP: But it's not in production anywhere?

Mr. Cox: Oh no. Never was. They made a movie of it and spent an awful lot of money. I don't know whether it was the Tryon Palace Commission or the Kellenberger Foundation; but anyway, it didn't turn

out too good. Some company out of Atlanta I believe. They just had to redo it. I don't know what they did. They made it a little better.

I think the Palace has the film now. They should show it some time and just invite the public to come see it. It didn't turn out as good as it should have. It should be redone some day. Perhaps the Civic Theater should either do that one or the "Loved Home" the next time the Palace celebrates a birthday of some kind. I guess I had the only copy of "Loved Home", and I gave the Palace a copy of that and of "The Third Frontier". So, they have both of them. I suppose Kermit Hunter would still want some little return if it was ever done again. I've forgotten how much we paid him. Has anybody mentioned to you about Dr. Hand and what he did for the boys?

JP: I'd like to hear more about that.

Mr. Cox: I'm not the one to talk to really because there's several here who he worked with.

JP: This is Dr. William Hand, the dentist, you're talking about?

Mr. Cox: Yeah.

JP: What did he do for the boys?

Mr. Cox: I don't know whether he ever had a Boy Scout Troop.

JP: He had this place over at the Neuse River down there by the side of the old bridge. He had a club and it did involve into a Boy Scout Troop. We've interviewed Billy and he's talked to us about it. But you think he did he did a great thing for the boys?

Mr. Cox: Oh yes. You know the one you wrote a poem about, Buddy?

JP: Do you remember Buddy?

Mr. Cox: Oh yes.

JP: What are your memories of Buddy? This is not Bud Simpson. This is another Buddy.

Mr. Cox: Like you said in your poem, he was always happy too and he'd always turn around.

JP: He was a black man.

Mr. Cox: That's right. He liked to talk to you. I was trying to think of the name of the barber shop that was a part of Clark's.

JP: The City Barber Shop.

Mr. Cox: Yeah. The black man in there that shined shoes.

JP: They called him "Shine."

Mr. Cox: I remember he was a great, I think, Yankee fan. He loved baseball. So, we all got together and took up some money to send him up to see a pro game. Oh, he had the time of his life!

JP: Shine was lame. He had a bad leg and he limped. Later on when I was in the medical school at Chapel Hill, Shine came up there as a patient and he died up there. I didn't take care of him myself, but I certainly went to see him very frequently and we had a renewal of our relationship.

Mr. Cox: Everybody liked him. Now, from a personal standpoint. I've been a member of the Lion's Club since 1937. That's a long time. It was formed in '37, but when the war came, everybody left and got busy and they turned in their charter. Then it was re-chartered in 1945, but they gave us credit for the war years. When I came back in '46, I joined again. So, I've had a continuous membership since

1937. That's fifty-five years. This doesn't mean anything really, but I figure that in those fifty-five years, counting holidays and times I wasn't there, that I had listened to over 2,000 programs. There are three kinds; somebody talks, somebody talks and shows slides, or in the modern day they talk and show a video tape. That's the three kinds. So, I decided I'd put together a program for any kind of club, not necessarily a civic club, church groups or what have you. Down through the years I've cut out poems and some jokes and stories and sayings. I wish there was another word for that. The best part I've done, I have some charts that I flip through with what I call some philosophy, some of mine and some I cut out through the years. That's the best part, when I just shut up and just do that. Just flip through it. I've done it twice and I'll do it again next week. Of course my problem is, pretty soon I'll be talking to the same people. (laughter) I try to keep track of the places I've been and when I think somebody might be there that was somewhere else, I do something else.

JP: Paul, there's one final thing I want to ask you. You've been so much a part of the New Bern story for so many years. You've seen the changes that have occurred with new people coming in and new businesses. What do you think is going to be the future of New Bern?

Mr. Cox: It's hard to say. Somebody projected what it would be like in 1990, what the population would be, and that didn't come about. It's not as high as they said it was going to be. We only have certain directions to grow because of the rivers. It's beyond

comprehension really to think that eventually there will be businesses all the way down 17 to Havelock. It could be. And also, I'm sure I'm ahead of my time, but it's happened in other places, it could be that New Bern could annex the entire county. In Newport News, Virginia, Newport News annexed Warrick County and in Suffolk, Virginia, Suffolk annexed that whole county. Suffolk is one the largest towns area wise in the United States. If you go up 13 to Newport News to Norfolk that way, you hit the Suffolk town limits way out there because they have the whole town. So, I don't think it's beyond reason that some day that might happen here. Industry wise, that's hard to say. We need more industry, of course, for jobs. Not just to locate here, but for jobs. And of course, we can only grow north or west or south. If we don't get industry for jobs for young people who are not going off to college, then those young people are going to leave. We're going to continue, I think, to get retirees. I don't know how you can control it really, but we will be an area of older people and not young people if we don't get enough industry to keep the young people here. Regardless of that, we still need to keep our tourism going. At this time, I'll not get on my tourism soapbox. There may be things going on that I don't know about because I'm not as much involved as I used to be, but our tourism right now is fractured. You have many people that are interested in it but there's no one who is responsible or one group who is responsible or one person or one group in charge of day to day. The new plan that they have for tourism is fine, but it should not even be attempted until it is decided who is in charge or

who is responsible. Now, who decides who is responsible? I don't know. But until we do that, we're going to have trouble with tourism.

People will always come here to see what we have, but if we don't treat them right and treat them nice, they'll go away and say, "Yeah, there's a lot to see, but..." We need a driving route. We need a walking route. Because everybody doesn't go to the visitor center.

They just do it on their own and you need some signs up there saying this is the way you go on the walking route. There are those that don't agree with me. I hope someone is solving this problem because we'll always have tourism if we don't have anything else with all the school children that come in the spring time. We will have them as long as we have the Palace, and that will be there forever I guess.

Incidentally, talking about the Palace, I talk to a lot of tourist that come by the house here because we're so close to Tryon Palace.

I make it a point to ask them if they have been to the Academy Museum because you have two histories. The Palace is the history of the government or of the world so to speak, where the Academy Museum is the history of New Bern. It's just as important for them to see that as it for them to see the Palace. I tell them, "if you just have two or three hours, then, you go over there because it takes a couple of hours to take in the Palace." I'll get off of my tourism soapbox.

But that has to be done, what I just said, if we're going to treat tourist like we should treat them. I know because my wife and I started travelling way back before there was somebody every day going to Europe.

We've traveled quite a bit, and I think I know what tourist want or

what they like. I think we're going to see more and more retirees.

And if we don't watch out, we may get into (and maybe this is not bad) too many older people who probably could not care about whether the town grew or not because they came here because they like it like it is and they may not want it to grow. That's it.

JP: Paul, I think this has been a great interview. Let me thank you for the Memories of New Bern and myself. It's been a real pleasure just sitting here talking to you and listening to you and seeing your home and seeing Nettie. So, thanks a lot.

Mr. Cox: You're welcome and I enjoyed it.

END OF INTERVIEW