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William Henry Chafe Oral History Collection

INTERVIEWEE: Mrs. Charles Bowles

INTERVIEWER: William Chafe

DATE: September 24, 1974

Note: This transcript is an edited version of an original transcript for which no audio recording was available. Therefore, CRG cannot guarantee that this transcript is an exact representation of the interview.

WILLIAM CHAFE: When did you come to Greensboro?

MRS. CHARLES BOWLES: Well, I am a native of Greensboro

WC: You are?

CB: Yes. I don't know whether you know Mrs. Ethel Arnett, who is a historian.

WC: I've read the book [*Greensboro, North Carolina: The County Seat of Guilford*].

CB: She lives just up the street. I was visiting her one day and she found out I was a native of Greensboro. And she said, "Congratulations. There are not many of you around." However, I lived here until we were first married, and then our first assignment was the Bessemer community, out from Greensboro, so I just moved across town, lived in the western section. And I moved to the eastern section, and we were there three more years—me, making my husband five—in that community. And then we were gone for about twenty years and then returned.

WC: I see. Where did you go to?

CB: Well, immediately from here we went to Belmont, which is just beyond Charlotte. From there we went to Wadesboro, and then to Statesville, and then to Charlotte, and then back here.

WC: So you had a series of moves there which were—

CB: In the Methodist [unclear], the moves are dictated by need and the bishop.

WC: Yeah. I was a student at Union Theological Seminary for a year, and I served as an assistant minister in a Methodist church on Long Island, so I had some familiarity with the Methodist [unclear]—the district superintendent?

CB: Well, the district superintendent was just one portion of the bishop's cabinet over which he presides. And each area is a district, and there are ten of them in the western part of North Carolina, and they together decide where the various people are needed, the ministers, and assigns them. Of course, seniority has something to do with it and various other aspects.

WC: So you came back. When did you come back to Greensboro?

CB: In '55.

WC: So you came really back into the middle of—

CB: In the middle of it.

WC: Because of the Supreme Court decision [*Brown v. Board of Education*] had been made.

CB: In '54, wasn't it?

WC: Fifty-four, yeah.

CB: I was in town on the streets in Charlotte and saw the headlines and went back and told my husband about it. But he was very much involved in all aspects of that. And he had a very keen insight into the future, and has an article—he was vitally interested in this periodical, the *Pulpit*. It's a national magazine, and I think it's still in existence. Anyway, their comment was the sermon that my husband preached was most very unusual for one from a Southern pulpit at the time. But he believed that the justification for the integration was there and that we must accept it and do what we can to foster the element of all people. And he encouraged the attendance of minorities in our congregation, and he also stood with the school officials. He was very interested.

In fact, when we had the school meeting in Greensboro—I was trying to think what they did. I believe it was the first time that they integrated the schools at all, which

of course came. There were very few pupils to begin with. He—well, Mr. Ben Smith—Dr. Ben Smith was the superintendent at that time, and Charles had learned that there would be a very ugly appearance at that meeting, so he went up and there were very ugly things being said and done. So he went up behind Dr. Smith and put his hands on his shoulders to sustain him. He was very forward in his thinking and relied on him a lot. And the—

I knew that Charles had had some very ugly letters. Of course, I did not see his correspondence. He kept that at the church and his staff. My children got a hold of the files and destroyed it. They didn't want me to see it, but the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigations] was aware of all the letters that he had received. They had a very interesting meeting, so far as we were concerned, on the steps of the court house, which is across the street from our church. And it was—I believe it was a [Ku Klux] Klan meeting, and there was a comment made that we relayed to him later by some of the law officials that one of these men said, "Well, if it wasn't for that so-and-so in that church across the street—."

WC: I take it that there was a close relationship between your husband and Dr. Smith?

CB: Dr. Smith was a member of our church, and he had known him otherwise before that time. And I'm not real sure where, but I know he knew him. Charles was very greatly involved in education. If I could point a direct finger at any aspect of the ministry that interested him most, it was in education. And he was on both the Duke [unclear]. And for the number of years that he served the West Market [Street United Methodist] Church, he was chaplain at Greensboro College. At the time they did not have a chaplain, and he was the last one to serve there, but automatically the senior minister at West Market was the chaplain. As such he performed some duties that are no longer required of the minister there.

WC: Do you recall—either you were part of conversations, or your husband was a part of conversations, of a private nature with Dr. Smith or other people at that time—

CB: I was never privy to the conversations that they had regarding that. Naturally, the church, as large as West Market, which was about 3,700 people, most of the business activities were carried on at the church itself, and purposely trying to separate a little bit of your work so when you get home, you would feel a little bit freer of pent-up emotions that at that time pervaded the whole community.

WC: How did you—of course, you were a native of Greensboro and—but how did you see what was happening? What were your feelings about what was happening? Did you think that Greensboro was going to—wanted to move ahead steadily in this area?

CB: Well, there were potent factions, naturally, and—but there were—and, of course, I had close relationships with both sides, and I could see the—that there were the two sides. I could also see that neither side could move too rapidly for fear of undoing any good that had been done before. I really think that Greensboro is a fairly—I started to say [unclear] isn't the term either. I think Greensboro wants to do what is right. I think they have that desire, but sometimes I think people hold back for fear of being placed in a position of saying, "Well, they are too farsighted or too liberal," you know. Some people fear to be stigmatized by either rightist or leftist leanings.

WC: Now, of course, at this time the school board was ready to move ahead and—with this initial desegregation—and you and your husband were supportive of them at that time. Had this become a problem, the fact that you were supportive of Dr. Smith and of the school board?

CB: It was not for me, and if it was for Charles, he did not bring that home. Of course, I know he encountered difficulties. He had some members who would call him at home, and I would hear that end of the conversation. But he was always trying to be conciliatory, not backing down in his feelings, but trying to—I remember quite well his saying to one man, "Well, we can be friends, even though you don't believe in all that I stand for." And that was the sort of—his general thinking that he could be friends with both sides, even though they were not always thinking as he did.

WC: This sermon that was quoted in the *Pulpit* magazine, was that preached at the time of the desegregation decision, or was that later on?

CB: That was in Charlotte before we came to Greensboro.

WC: I see.

CB: I do not remember the title of it. I just don't remember. But it was saying that we had to accept things and to be Christian about it.

WC: Did your husband often preach about things like that in church?

CB: He was absolutely fearless, if that's what you're driving at.

WC: So that a sermon on a social issue or an issue of controversy was not unusual?

CB: Oh, no. We had one interesting experience in Charlotte. He was preaching on the Reformation. He did not preach on the fact that there was a division between the Catholic and Protestant religions, but he said it was not something for us to reform against, but it was to reform ourselves jointly. And I answered the telephone one evening—well, it was late afternoon, shortly before he had come home. And a voice, evidently trying to keep from being identified, whether I would have known the voice, said—when they found out Charles was not at home said, “Well, you tell him to read an article on such-and-such page of such-and such-magazine.” I don’t recall what it was.

And I said, “We don’t take that magazine.”

“Well, tell him to read it.” And so a couple of days later, just out of curiosity, he bought the magazine on the newsstand and brought it home. And the title of the article on that page was “Why Don’t You Get Out of Town.” [laughter] But the article had nothing at all to do with anything. It was just the headlines that they wanted him to see.

WC: Well, you had a church then that was obviously very large and had a very many important people in it, and your ministry was not passive, at least, and quite active.

CB: It was. I would have to say that his was much more socially active than any of the other larger churches in town. I know he [unclear] some of them for being somewhat lax. In the [Greensboro] Ministerial Association, the general interdenominational meeting, I recall his frustration at not being supported by the other large ministers, to the extent that he felt they should support him and maybe he was expecting too much, but I know he did not feel that they gave him the full support.

WC: I have heard that the First Presbyterian Church, in particular, was not exactly forthcoming?

CB: Well, you said that. [laughter]

WC: But I take it then that it’s your feeling [that] had the churches been more dynamic along the same lines as West Market Street was attempting to be, that this kind of moral leadership would have made a difference?

CB: Well, probably. I think anytime you have people socially involved, it has to have its stamp on the community, and I think the leadership of the churches determines largely the climate of any community. And there is another example, back in 1939, when the unification of Methodism took place in the North/South churches, some areas were so much better prepared for it than others. We at that time were in Belmont, just beyond Charlotte, and we had a good many—that is close to the South Carolina line—we had a good many friends who were in the churches in South Carolina, and they were not

prepared. They just did not approve, you know. You take a lot of steps, it seems, before you can get people to change their way of doing. And these people in South Carolina rebelled against even the unification of their own denomination, and so you can see how something as traumatic as the problem of integration would come when churches do not lead the people in preparing them for this advance.

WC: I guess if you refuse to speak, then pretty soon it becomes unspeakable and then it becomes much more difficult to.

CB: Unthinkable, too.

WC: Unthinkable, yeah. Of course, things got more heated in Greensboro [after] that initial desegregation of the schools. What are your recollections about the events around the Woolworth's sit-in?

CB: About the what—sit-in?

WC: Woolworth's.

CB: Oh, the Woolworth's sit-in.

WC: The five and dime sit-ins.

CB: We were not here at the time that took place, but of course we read after it very vividly. I saw some demonstrating after we came back to Greensboro. Do you mean—in what way did you mean?

WC: In terms of involvement in—well, getting support for desegregating the lunch counters and things like that. Was it that kind of thing going on in the churches?

CB: I can't say from actual experience because not being here. My children were fairly small at the time. Well, I had one in high school and two in grammar school, and I guess one was in junior high, but I was pretty well involved in my own community in Charlotte at the time and would only read of things, so I can't say first hand.

WC: When you came back to Greensboro in '55?

CB: Yes.

WC: And—

CB: I think these sit-ins took place in the very early fifties, didn't they?

WC: No. Actually, they came later in '60 and '63. And I was wondering at what point—

CB: Now, wait a minute. I'm getting things turned around. We were here. We left here in '63, and the bishop assigned Charles as superintendent of the Charlotte district. And he was there only about fifteen months when he needed him to go to this [unclear] church in Winston[-Salem]. I don't know whether you are familiar with that or not. In that period of time, we were transferred in a period of a year and a half. We were at three different locations, which also is a little disconcerting to community interests.

WC: I've heard—I know. Was Mr. [Harold] Hipps here as your husband's assistant?

CB: Yeah.

WC: Was he here for many years, or was that very brief?

CB: Yes, he was here for a good many years. He had already been here five or six years when we came, and we were here eight years. And he remained, I believe it was less than a year, and then he accepted a national job, in Nashville, Tennessee. I think he was here about thirteen years.

CB: And what would—his responsibilities would have been primarily with the young people?

CB: Yes. He was the minister of education.

WC: I see. I take it from what I've heard that he and your husband agreed very much on most of these questions.

CB: Yes. They worked very closely together.

WC: Was there a point at which opposition to their stance together—that is, your husband's and Mr. Hipps'—became more forthright than it had been within the church?

CB: Well, probably. There are bound to be peaks and valleys in that sort of thing. I don't remember any time when there was a real open split of any kind. You don't mean between the two of them?

WC: No, no.

CB: Between the church.

WC: Factions within the church.

CB: Well, yes, there was a small time when you would hear people opposing the liberalism, probably, you would call it, but it was never, to my knowledge, never a very large voice.

WC: I guess I've heard—and this can be off the record if you like—McDaniel Lewis, he is a stock broker, I take it. Wasn't he involved in the Patriots or something like that?

CB: Yes, and he was not a member of our church.

WC: He was not?

CB: No.

WC: I had thought he was.

CB: But Eugene Hood was.

WC: I see.

CB: He lives right down the street here. He was secretary to the White Citizens' Council, and I think that was based at Chapel Hill, if I'm not mistaken. And he was very much opposed and would write extreme letters, but then the next time you would see him, you would think that you were long lost friends. It was that sort of rather disgusting approach.

WC: So he would be acting himself to mobilize support against you and your husband, but at the same time he would be very friendly in his—

CB: Overly so. I don't—I'll have to say I did not feel it for myself because I was not that actively participating in this, in the community activities. But it was definitely for Charles, and naturally anything that affected him, affected me.

WC: So McDaniel Lewis was outside the church? I think maybe he is Presbyterian.

CB: I can't recall. He recently has married a second time, a member of West Market who continues to be a member of our church. And I know McDaniel Lewis casually. I've not,

you know, that intimate contact with him. I don't seek it. Not that I try to avoid it, but we just haven't been thrown together.

WC: Was there a faction of the church which was supporting Eugene Hood, or would you say that he was unrepresentative of the church generally?

CB: I don't think he was representative of the church generally. Any person has some following, you know, and sometimes people pretend. I think that they are more followers than they really are, when you get right down to basics. But in a church of 3,700 people, which is a small town in itself, you had to expect all kinds of reactions to any social issue. And there were definitely all kinds of reactions to it, and you will find that even today that there are differing reactions to these social issues.

WC: Has the church maintained its tradition of having a minister who is outspoken on these questions?

CB: Well, yes. Each minister is one unto himself, in that regard. The man who immediately succeeded Charles was very fine in that leadership. The next man who came I think was, too. But they were all so very different in their approaches it's hard to say, you know. And I think our current minister is just as interested in furthering relations. We began, during the time that Charles was minister, sending a bus to pick up students. And there were a number of black students who were at UNCG [The University of North Carolina at Greensboro] who came to church with regularity. We had one at least—I don't remember if we had any more—a professor from [North Carolina] A&T [State University] who came regularly, and at that particular time he sat in one place in the [sanctuary?] mainly, and Eugene Hood sat in the balcony just above him. And we laughingly had said several times, "You know, that it's a strange thing that the hymn book hasn't fallen." [laughter]

WC: Do you remember who that was, that professor?

CB: No, I can't recall his name. I really don't remember. I can see him very well, but I don't remember his name. Do you know Dr. Bethea at Duke [University]?

WC: I don't think I do.

CB: I think he is in charge of [the Office of] Black [Church] Studies, Dr. Joseph Bethea.

WC: Oh, yes.

CB: I'm not sure whether he is in the university—well, if he's in the divinity school, I think. But whether or not his black studies incorporate more than the graduate school, I don't know. But he would attend on occasions when he had an opportunity. He was the minister of a black church here.

WC: So that there was a fair amount of black presence in the church when you were here in the fifties.

CB: Any who wanted to come were welcome.

WC: And there was no—did that cause any kind of open commotion?

CB: No. They were seated wherever they wanted to be seated.

WC: Because there is a Methodist church over there by the university which I gather would not accept black parishioners.

CB: I really can't say, because I'm afraid I'm too loyal to my own church. That's one of the problems. You don't get to actually know other churches unless you do go into them. I know they have the—the center for students at the college, but I would think they would tend to be a little more [unclear] in their thinking. I have—the only aunt I have living, who is ninety-two, is a member over there, and I can't imagine that she would be extremely liberal. She came up in a different age, and she is an extremely interesting person, but I don't believe she would accept integration as well as our church would.

WC: I've often been intrigued by the extent to which the women in the community have seemed to be the path breakers in this area. I wonder if you have noticed that or—

CB: Yes. And I tell you, I seem to be tooting the horn about our church, but it—because I know it better than any other. We—and I don't mean I, but I mean the church as a whole started the program of—I started to say—well, it is a kindergarten at Union Memorial Church—[United] Methodist Church, out on East Lee Street—well, it's kind of back of Bennett College, right at the Warner[sville] housing community. And it still is under some sponsorship of our church. And then we have a tutoring program in—out in White Oak. It serves the underprivileged blacks out there. And many times we were told that the milk program in the city schools was so greatly underwritten by our church. And these are women's projects primarily. Now, the tutoring is less a woman's project, but it is sponsored a great deal by that. And Mrs. [Kay] Troxler is very actively involved in all of this. Now, Kay is a very good friend. Her husband is, I suppose, our leading orthopedist here. But now she would be so far to the left that she is not one that the general group

follows, if you know what I mean. She is extremely liberal, and that does not mean a condemnation of her. I think it is a commendation, but she participates in many more activities than any of the others of us that I know. And we have a great many programs that are just not publicized, you know. They just go on without public knowledge. We participate a great deal in this program Meals on Wheels, if you are familiar with that.

WC: No, I'm not.

CB: Well, for instance, there are many elderly people who live at home who are just not able to prepare hot meals for themselves, so once a day a hot meal is taken. Now, this is a project under the sponsorship of the United Church [Methodist?] Women, not just our church. We participate in that a great deal. And it's a matter of delivering, and you go into some very destitute homes. You go into others—those who can pay, do; those who can't are not denied their food. And, of course, our church sponsors—has its program: financial aid to the Children's Home—the Methodist Children's Home and the Methodist Home for the Aging in Charlotte. Both of those my husband was on the board. He had so many boards and agencies that he was a member of that. He was too involved, really.

WC: Did you—just pursuing this a little bit further—has this always been true, this kind of involvement by United Church Women and the social concerns committee of the Methodist church?

CB: Yes. Methodism is generally a church of concern. And the national program, we used to call it MCOR. It's now, I guess, UMCOR [United Methodist Committee on Relief] since the unification with [Evangelical] United Brethren [Church]. That program, as long as I can remember, and certainly since unification, has been a very great program. Now, for instance, when the earthquakes in—was it Ecuador, Peru? Peru. They were right on the spot at the time, now that a program over the general church, and of course the local churches participated to make that possible. That's just one part of the social concerns.

WC: Now do you recall this group which was concerned with tutoring, did that grow out of your church?

CB: Yes.

WC: Was that through Mrs. Troxler and some others?

CB: Yes, I think she is the one who probably got it started. And they met over in the White Oak community, and they would pick up students at UNCG and Greensboro College to help with that tutoring. And anyone who was able to do so would volunteer services.

WC: Now, was this—I've heard people talk about an integrated, biracial group of women who started to meet together, I guess in the late-fifties/early-sixties, concerned with providing—or with making it easier for and facilitating through the process of integration. Is that something which the church—came out of the church? Do you recall or—

CB: As you have described it, I'm not familiar with it.

WC: It was sort of—eventually it evolved into the Greensboro Community Fellowship, I think.

CB: Well, you mean the [Inner City Ministry]? Is that what you are referring to?

WC: I'm not sure whether that was a part of it or not. There was—it initially started off with a group of women who were anxious to avoid the problems that had happened in Little Rock [Arkansas] and were concerned with getting a—with tutoring children, and also with getting more black children into desegregated schools. And it later became something which men were apart of as well, and it became the Greensboro Community Fellowship, and I'm not sure whether an inner-city ministry was part of it or not.

CB: It could well be, because again, as large as the church is, there were many factors that I did not have an opportunity to know about. Another person who has been very vitally interested in things that have gone on in the churches is the immediate past-chairman of the local school board, who is Mrs. R. Kennedy Harris. I don't know whether you know Margaret Harris or not.

WC: No, I don't. I know of her.

CB: Well, she is very vitally involved with Duke also—the first chairman of the Duke Alumni Association, you know, after its unification, men and women—first woman, I mean. And she served very ably as the assistant chairman, and then as the chairman. And she certainly could give you some helpful information concerning our church, as well.

WC: That's interesting. I didn't know she was a member of West Market Street.

CB: Oh, yes. She is very definitely. She will be our next president of our women's organization. Are you Methodist?

WC: Actually, I grew up in a Baptist church.

CB: So did my son-in-law. I was getting ready to throw a Methodist term, and that was the reason I asked you—the UMW sounds horrible to say—

WC: United Methodist Women.

CB: —but its United Methodist Women. And I was just getting ready to say that Margaret was going to be the next president of the UMW, and I thought, “He won’t know what that UMW is.”

WC: Well, the one year I spent in the Methodist church gave me some familiarity with some of the organizations. I may well have met her because I was at an alumni luncheon last year where most of the people were coming back.

CB: She and her husband are a team of lawyers [unclear].

WC: I guess one of the things that I’ve gotten a vague feeling for is that your husband perhaps became disenchanted a little bit with the reaction of some of the people in Greensboro to his ministry, and felt a little bit, perhaps, disillusioned. I wonder if that is accurate.

CB: No. I don’t think he ever became disillusioned because I think he always felt that there was always the goodness there and you had to bring it out. I don’t think he was disillusioned. I think he felt often times that he was batting his head against a stone wall at the moment, but I don’t think he ever felt that it was an impossible situation.

WC: So that as the tenure here at Greensboro came to an end, there wasn’t any difference in his overall approach to what it had been in the beginning?

CB: No, not any that I could detect.

WC: I guess as reaction set in, in the early sixties, I guess some people felt that the fact that both your husband and Mr. Hipps left for other areas within the ministry, this might have had a connection to the amount of opposition which came up in the community.

CB: When a minister leaves, it most of the time falls that those under him will also leave, so that that isn’t anything that unusual. But Harold Hipps had antagonized a few people, and some of those had pressured Charles to have Harold transferred, and his loyalty to Harold prevented his doing that. Now that may be what you have run into, but as far as I know it was on a small basis. Now, I may not be fully aware of all that went on, but as most husbands do, they tend to try to leave their worries back where they originated and come

home and just be relaxed. But I was into the group enough that I knew some of it was going on, but there again, in that many people, there would have to be differences of opinions.

WC: Yes, sounds like a terribly large church. I was wondering whether you recall any feelings of dissatisfaction with the pace of the change, particularly after Dr. Smith died—or resigned and then died—from the school board, whether there was any feelings that things were not going as well as one had hoped they would.

CB: Well, there again, the transition period has almost inevitably [come in?] to focus. I believe Phil Weaver succeeded him, did he not?

WC: Yes.

CB: I mean he was the immediate successor, I think.

WC: Yes.

CB: And they were entirely different personalities, but he too was a friend, and he too was a member of church, and it was—I really don't know how. I just don't recall how he fit into the picture. I couldn't venture an educated guess there.

WC: Is—I guess McNeill and Louise Smith are both members of West Market Street.

CB: Yes. Now wait a minute. Louise is not.

WC: Oh, she's not.

CB: But she is a working non-member. Somewhere back in her family there is a traditional church membership that she maintains in, I believe, it is the Episcopal church.

WC: And the Troxlers. Who would be some of the other people who might have been active, in the sense of being very supportive of the ministry of your husband?

CB: It would be—are you familiar with the name Boren[?] in this community?

WC: No.

CB: Well, my husband was a member of this large Boren clan and they—many generations back, local people—

[End of Tape 1, Side A—Begin Tape 1, Side B]

CB: —his cousin, [unclear] Boren, was one of the big supporters. He is a member of the church, and Mose Kiser. You know, when you get right down to people, right off hand, it's hard to remember. Of course, the Harris', the Norman Coopers—but Norman since has died, but Mildred is extremely active—well, the community itself is just full of supporters. I don't mean that everybody is, but I suppose easier to pick out those that were not supporters, at least that's the way I remember it. And I think that's a good way to have left the community. And, of course, if I had felt some antagonism, it would not have been in my plans to return to Greensboro, even though I was native.

WC: Wasn't Charles Myers—isn't Charles Myers West Market Street?

CB: No, his father was a minister of First Presbyterian Church for about thirty-five years. I don't believe he would be with West Market Street.

WC: I guess I have a note saying he was an elder at First Presbyterian.

CB: Now, Ike English—

WC: I knew there was someone at Burlington [Industries].

CB: They are some of our very choice friends and very supportive. Newell Sapp—if I had a list of the people, I could go right down and point to most of them—also the president of Jefferson Standard [Life Insurance Co.], Roger [unclear]. I don't know whether you know him or not.

WC: Howard Holderness was president, wasn't he?

CB: Yes, he was president. I thought you were going to ask me if he was West Market. He was not. I don't remember whether he was Presbyterian or Episcopal. I'm inclined to think Episcopal.

WC: Was Spencer Love ever active in the church?

CB: I think he was Presbyterian. [unclear]

WC: One gets the sense that Jefferson Standard and Burlington are fairly important in the community. I guess the people who are most important in those organizations go to different churches.

CB: Well, not necessarily. I think in all organizations as large as they are you would have a diversity of religious affiliation. We have right many Burlington Industry people in some official capacity. Charles and Ike were very close together. He and [unclear] are supposed to come home today from a business trip from Ireland and Germany.

WC: Who is this?

CB: Ike English.

WC: He's home. I talked to him, as a matter of fact, earlier today. Do you have copies of his sermons and things like that?

CB: Yes.

WC: Would it ever be possible for me to look at those?

CB: Yes. They are in a storage area downstairs and they are easily accessible, but they are in cardboard boxes which have not been—they were—my son, who is in Charlotte, wanted the files, the steel files, so I just put the sermons in—or he did—just put them in boxes, and they are not cataloged as such. This is just a very small collection of sermons. [unclear] You can have that if you feel that it's any value to you.

WC: I'm sure it would be.

CB: Of course, those are edited. And, naturally, to get them—within the scope of the pages there some deletions and so forth, but I read them before I would allow them to be published. This was never published—I mean put in the regular book stores for sale. It was sold through the churches and all of the money went to Duke.

WC: I'd like very much to look at them.

CB: I have other copies so if you would—

WC: Oh, that's wonderful. I'll be sure to return it to you.

CB: Those are just a very few. There is not a controversial sermon in there, so you would not find your social issues. That's the reason I said if it is any value to you. But if you would like to come at some time and go through those sermons, I'd be very happy for you to. But it would be a chore because they are in manila folders. He was asked many times why he did not publish, and he said, "I just don't have time to edit." And, of course, you know any quotes and so forth—

WC: Sure.

CB: There is a lot involved in editing. [unclear] He said, "To preach a sermon is quite different from writing one for publication, and you wouldn't want to write it for speaking [unclear]."

WC: A very, very different kind of thing. Did things like correspondence files or a journal—was there anything like that?

CB: He had no journal. He had, of course, a large—but I did not save too much. I do have a book of letters that my son—I started to say complied—he gathered them together and put them in a scrapbook. Most of those letters are thank-you letters for things that were done. And it was interesting to me—well, occasionally I still have some younger minister come up to me and say, "You don't know what all your husband did for me," and so forth. And many people have spoken to me of the fact that he was the most brotherly of the ministers—meaning those who had attained some prominence—who took time to help or be friendly and helpful to the younger man. But I suppose that's the mark of anyone who is dedicated. You just don't know all that goes on. But his social issues were very clearly defined. If anything, he was more ahead of his day, and he was definitely committed to the Methodist tradition. And he felt that he belonged to the Methodist [church] and if they supported a certain issue, as long as it was a moral issue that he could subscribe to, then he subscribed to the issue.

WC: Did he have people in the black community with whom he was particularly friendly or close?

CB: Yes, what was that man's name, in particular, who was the Wesleyan salvation representative on the A&T campus, and he was jailed, and I remember that during some of the—

WC: Shaw?

CB: Wasn't Larry Brown. He was so friendly with him that after that, every time he would see him, he would holler, "Hi, jail bird." You know, that sort of rapport, which could be very dangerous unless you have a very good one, and I can see that little fellow now. But I don't remember. I know he called Charles one day to tell him that there was going to be some uprising. His daughter was in Raleigh at some meeting and had told him about it, and he wanted Charles to be aware that things were coming up. So that kind of rapport went on with him. The president of Bennett College at that time was—it's strange that names have completely—

WC: Dr. [Willa] Player?

CB: Yes. Player and he had a good relationship. And Dr.[Isaac H.] Miller has come since we left here. I have met him, but I'm not intimately acquainted with the Millers. But there were others too, but I just don't know.

WC: Someone like Rev. [Otis] Hairston, did he talk much about?

CB: I don't think he ever had any—he may have in the general ministerial association, but he did not talk about him, so I doubt that he had much—nor with the Cecil.

WC: Bishop?

CB: Bishop. I think they have—at least Bishop has come into prominence since the day when Charles was preaching.

WC: How about Julius Douglas?

CB: Now, that name is not familiar to me.

WC: I guess it was Professor [Edwin] Edmonds, a man who was head of the NAACP, and then George Simkins. They were probably less likely to have affiliation because of not being in the ministerial—

CB: I know that there was an Episcopal minister that he was very fond of, a black. I think probably if they had an elite Episcopal church, he was the minister of that one—of some of the things he said. I just don't recall who might have been. I'm sure he had a lot of them because he spoke at colleges frequently. I just don't recall.

WC: Would you have a lot of contact with the Greensboro College people since he was chaplain there?

CB: Yes. I was on campus a good bit, and my daughter graduated from Greensboro College.

WC: Did she?

CB: Yes.

WC: When was that?

CB: [Nineteen] sixty-four.

WC: Had Gordon Blackwell [chancellor of Woman's College (now UNCG)] left by that time?

CB: Yes.

WC: He had?

CB: Yes. Let's see who succeeded him. Blackwell was not here very long.

WC: He's now down in Furman [University].

CB: Seems to me like he was here maybe two years. I don't think he was here much more than that. I know Charles said that he thought perhaps if they called—rather than calling them “chancellors,” if they called them “presidents,” that it might—that Blackwell might have stayed. But now Dr. [James Sharbrough] Ferguson and Charles were very close friends. I don't know whether you know Dr. Ferguson.

WC: I've heard of him.

CB: He's chancellor at UNCG. He is a good West Market member, too.

WC: I think I have met him. [unclear] I guess I was initially connecting him with Greensboro College rather than UNCG.

CB: I don't much believe he would appreciate that a whole lot, since he was head of the university. [laughter]

WC: We were talking about Gordon Blackwell, and I was making that kind of connection, I guess.

CB: I knew Mrs. Blackwell, and I thought she was very fine woman. Yes, I was on the Greensboro College campus very much. And Harold Hutson was the president at that time, and he left here to be provost at American University in Washington [D.C.] And I've lost track of Virginia and Harold, and I don't know whether he is still up there or not. But he was here at least four years, and I believe longer than that at Greensboro College. And Howard Wilkinson, who is president now, is a very good friend.

WC: He came from Duke?

CB: Yes. I've know Howard and Juanita since I guess before they were married. I did not know her before, but I knew him.

WC: I recall that there were some Greensboro College women who took part in sit-ins, and that caused something of an uproar when it first started.

CB: Well, Kay Troxler and Mary Taft Smith, Mrs. Raymond Smith, are two of those who picketed the downtown post office for years during the Vietnam War. They were there every [unclear]. I don't know whether you know the Raymond Smiths or not.

WC: Well, I've met her.

CB: He was a professor.

WC: [unclear] She seems to be still very active.

CB: Yes. She had had—I understand she has had a slight stroke but is out and around. And they just had their fiftieth wedding anniversary celebration. Their children had it for them over at Greensboro College. I think it was the latter part of August. And they were both very chipper that day, so I think their health is probably a little bit better than it was. I don't much think that she is very able. She would not be able to picket and march, anything of that kind.

WC: Well, hopefully we won't have an occasion.

CB: Now I could not participate in that kind of activity. I'm just not geared to that, so I did not help them out in anything of that sort.

WC: Well, the United Church Women, of course, seems to have been a—and the Woman's Missionary Society. Now, what's the connection between the Woman's Missionary Society?

CB: Now it's no longer the Woman's Missionary Society. It's called the United Methodist Women.

WC: I see, okay.

CB: That missionary title to it went out many years ago. And I'm not sure it's a good thing, but it is no longer there. What connection do they have, did you ask?

WC: Yes.

CB: The local group of United Methodist Women is a member of the United Church Women. And financially we support it, but otherwise I don't think we do as much as we could.

WC: I see.

CB: But we have so many of our own local programs going, and you know who participates in all the programs are the same ones, and you can stretch yourself just so far.

WC: Does the United Church Women have an office of their own?

CB: Yes, we do, and it's a quarterly meeting body rather than monthly.

WC: So they would have a Guilford County or a Greensboro association office of United Church Women.

CB: Yes. But they are not—it's all [unclear] here. It's not—they don't have as such an office in a building or anything, but they have officers functioning.

WC: I think probably I have exhausted my immediate series questions, but I would very much like to have a chance to come back some day and talk again.

[End of Interview]