

**GREENSBORO VOICES/GREENSBORO PUBLIC LIBRARY ORAL HISTORY
PROJECT**

INTERVIEWEE: Boyd Morris

INTERVIEWER: Eugene E. Pfaff

DATE: N.D.

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

EUGENE PFAFF: --Greensboro Public Library Oral History Program. I'm speaking today to Mr. Boyd Morris, who was the former mayor of Greensboro, former manager and owner of the Mayfair Cafeteria, and is currently the resident manager of the Piedmont--Pilot Life Insurance Company Country Club Restaurant. Welcome, Mr. Morris. And I'd like to begin by asking you if you could give me some brief biographical background about yourself.

BOYD MORRIS: I might sound egotistical to go into, in depth of what I have done in Greensboro. I was a council member for nine years, mayor pro tem four years, and mayor two years. I bought a farm outside of the city of Greensboro. And by the law of the land, you cannot hold a governmental position unless you live in the corporate limits of the area in which you govern. So I resigned as mayor about three months before my term was out and was succeeded by a former mayor, Neil Vanstory. He became a council member. And Archie Cannon, the mayor pro tem, moved up to mayor of Greensboro upon my resignation.

I formed--helped form the North Carolina Restaurant Association, which is an ongoing association. I read in the morning paper that over ten thousand attended the convention food show that they had in Charlotte this, this week, ended last night.

I've been a national director of the National Restaurant Association, now an honorary life member of that board. I have been a director of the Chamber of Commerce of Greensboro for about nine years. I was president of the Greensboro Merchants Association. I was president of the Piedmont Sales Executives. I was vice president of the Greensboro Country Club. I'm an elder of the First Presbyterian Church. And would that be for starters?

EP: Are you a native of Greensboro?

BM: I was actually born in Haw River and moved to Greensboro at age of--two and a half months of age. And Kerr Scott, former governor of North Carolina, was a native of Haw River. And, and I jokingly would say to him, "Hi, neighbor." [both laugh] We--but I've lived in Greensboro all my life, all my life since, since two and a half months of Haw River residency.

EP: What businesses were you in prior to the opening of the Mayfair Cafeteria?

BM: Well, I was a student at Davidson College and, and was out to be a cotton buyer. I was--my uncle was a cotton buyer and cotton merchant. And, and I wanted to follow in his footsteps. And I was working at Cannon Mills when--and going to Davidson College. And my father bought an interest in the Mayfair Cafeteria here in Greensboro, and asked me if I would like to join the company. And I did. And I have been--at my father's death, I became the sole owner of the Mayfair Cafeteria. And I operated it for, I'll say thirty-eight years, and--

EP: When did you first join the Mayfair Corporation?

BM: Well, 1937, I believe, 1937. And--I'm sorry, it was 1935. So that's forty-five years, right, that I've been in the food business. I had a touch of food in New York City in the summer. Smith Richardson--I had a scholarship from Smith Richardson to play football, basketball, and baseball at Davidson College. And that scholarship enabled me to go to Davidson, because they were the, the years of want, the Depression years. The bank failures and all was the time that I was a student. And so I worked at Liggett Drugstore. Mr. Richardson gave me a job at Liggett Drugs, which Vick Chemical--Richardson Merrill now own. And they gave me a job there in the summertime. So that was my first brush with food.

EP: So you graduated from Davidson in what year?

BM: I didn't graduate. I was class of '34. I did not graduate, but I would have been class of '34.

EP: So you joined the Mayfair Corporation. Is it fair to characterize it by that name or--

BM: Right, Mayfair Cafeteria.

EP: During the Depression, that must have been a pretty difficult time to run a, a cafeteria. What were the circumstances involved there?

BM: Well, we did have difficulty. In fact, you might say business is difficult even in times of plenty. You have different problems as the business goes, goes forward. You have, you accumulate myriad problems. Food cost was hard to--well, the price of food that we could charge, five cents for a cup of coffee, ten cents for a salad, and fifteen, twenty cents for an order of roast beef, a full meal for forty cents. We--and no tipping. And so this was the way all cafeterias and food establishments were operating at that time.

EP: Was there a significant drop in, in business during the Depression? Did people stop going to places like cafeterias?

BM: Well, no, on the contrary. I have said it's tough to be the oldest man on the block. But that's where you get to. And the alternative is--being the oldest man is better than the alternative of not being there at all, if you understand.

EP: Really.

BM: But we--what I was going to say is that I feel that, that I was a pioneer in the eating habits of Greensboro and the state of North Carolina, because Greensboro--the old slogan, the "Pivot of the Piedmont"--we got people into Greensboro from all over America and, certainly, all over the state of North Carolina. And we had what was known as an institution. We really had a marvelous staff of people. We--I was very fortunate, and maybe I was a good boss, maybe I wasn't. But we had thirty-seven people who worked for the cafeteria, for me, for over nineteen years. And about fifteen of those worked for the cafeteria for thirty-seven or thirty-eight years. And I have two now that are still with me from the Mayfair days.

EP: So there wasn't much turnover of personnel?

BM: No, we--well, my staff at one point was a hundred and ten people. And about thirty-eight of those were original employees and continued with me.

EP: During the--was the advent of the war and the establishment of ORD [Overseas Replacement Depot] a boom period for you?

BM: Yes, it was. We, we became a feeder for the armed services, in that the troops were transported mostly by train. And as they stopped at the railroad crossing on South Elm Street, they would march the troops to the cafeteria and commandeer the cafeteria. And we would feed them, and they would go back to the train and on to Europe.

EP: I know that during Huger King's tenure as mayor was the relaxing of the blue laws to provide entertainment for the troops on Sunday, open up the theatres. Was the cafeteria already open on Sundays, or was this part of a new trend for you, also?

BM: Well, we were open. We were open seven days a week. And Sunday became the biggest day, food-wise, of the week. But during the war period we, we became busy at--we opened at eleven o'clock for lunch. We served breakfast, lunch, and dinner, seven days a week. And, well, from the time we opened the door to the time we closed the door, we had a backup line of people to be served. And the business did boom during, during the war years. No question about that.

EP: What was the effect of the competition of other cafeterias and restaurants downtown, principally the S&W [Cafeteria]? I know there was the Lotus Restaurant, Chinese restaurant. Did that affect your business at, at all?

BM: Actually--well, certainly the S&W did affect us more than any other place. We ran--Peter Young was a dear friend of mine, who was the owner of the Lotus Restaurant. And Manuel's, and many other restaurants. Bliss' Restaurant were here. And they all, like the Mayfair, did, did an outstanding business. At one time, there was a Jefferson roof restaurant--seventeenth floor of the Jefferson Standard building. And it, too, did a land-office business. But later years, they phased out and moved out of the city. We, we did feel the hurt of the competition of S&W Cafeteria, yes. We sustained. We closed the cafeteria about eighteen years after S&W came in.

EP: When was that?

BM: We closed--my memory's not too good--about thirteen years ago. And the, the S&W was the finest cafeteria in the nation. It was a showplace. Frank Sherrill, who was a good friend of mine--not good enough to stay out of Greensboro [laughs], but was still a good friend, and--but he did put the finest cafeteria in America here in Greensboro. It was a Rube Goldberg drawing if you're old enough to know what Rube Goldberg drawings are.

It was a masterpiece of electronic equipment, subveyors converging on subveyors and the cal--what do you say? Where the one subveyor would mesh with the other subveyor and go off, and you'd think that the dishes were going on the floor. But someway or the other the subveyor came in, picked those dishes up, and off they went to the dishwashing department. And the clean dishes were returned to the counters by way of, of subveyors, conveyors, also. So it was really a showplace.

EP: When did you become involved in local politics?

BM: Well, during the, the war period, Mack Arnold was the council member. And Mack accepted an assignment by the United States government to go to Germany. And he asked me, and the council concurred, that I replace him on the council. And that was my, by appointment, was my first.

I had run for the city council and came in eighth. I lost the election by a hundred and eleven votes. I was eighth in the, in the poll. And I presume they went to that eighth spot to pick me to go on to the council. And then Eck Falkener, who was a member of the council, took an assignment by Southern Railroad to go to Florida, to do some governmental work down there for the United States government. And Mack Arnold returned from Germany, took his seat back on the council. Eck Falkener went to Florida and asked me to replace him on the council. So for about a year, I was on by appointment. And then I ran for, for the office for the succeeding--I think I was on four--I ran four times. I ran five, defeated once, successful four times.

EP: And these would have been from what year to what year?

BM: Well, my first--I don't know the exact dates. I was mayor in '35. And so, go back from there eight years, and that's it.

EP: Excuse me, you said 35 years, 1955?

BM: Nineteen thirty--nineteen, 1955. I'm sorry. I said that in error. I got married in 1935. [laughs] Nineteen fifty-five I was mayor, elected mayor of Greensboro, 1955. And then I'd been on eight years. So I'd been on seven years. So that was a little fuzzy there. But understand, that's twenty-five years ago. [laughs]

EP: What outstanding issues were involved, not only during your term as mayor, but during the whole, your whole term as city council member, all your terms as city council member?

BM: I don't recall any bombastic issues. I had--I have said this publicly, that I had the finest council that's ever been in the city of Greensboro. Outstanding men were on the council with me.

EP: Could you name them?

BM: Bill Burke, Bill Folk, George Roach, Dick Higgins, Robert King. We had the finest city manager, General [James] Townsend. And not to say that Tom Osborne's not a fine man, but Tom Osborne is a disciple of, of General Townsend. And Tom Osborne is a fine city manager. And he's a disciple of mine, too. [laughs] I had a small part in trying to get him

back into Greensboro. He went to Reidsville as city manager and, and at General Townsend's retirement, we got him back. And he's been a fine addition to the city government in Greensboro.

EP: Well, now, there--I understand there were several, quite controversial issues when you were mayor pro tem and mayor. Could you characterize those?

BM: The [Greensboro] Coliseum probably was one of the thorns in our side. We were given a parcel of land by John Voring[?] in memory of his son who was killed in the service. And that's what was known as the, later years, the Sears Roebuck property, now the Blue Bell property. But we were going to establish the coliseum on that location. And we certainly planned to buy additional property in the adjoining area for parking and all of that. But McDaniel Lewis sort of spearheaded the opposition and--

EP: Do you know why he opposed it?

BM: Well, I presume, thinking mainly that the area was too small. And he could have been right. But we would have built a, a very nice establishment there. And if we could have followed through with our original plans to get the land--I've been a downtown advocate all my years. I think the heart of a city is the downtown area. And I think if you can keep it viable, and good, and progressive, you've got a good community. You've got a good base of business.

EP: Isn't this, though, right at the same time when the shopping centers first started to challenge the downtown business district?

BM: Correct, correct. Well, the, what is known as strip shopping centers--Lawndale Plaza, Irving Park, that type of shopping center, the ones on High Point Road, the ones that have grown into the neighborhood communities. Then came Four Seasons [Towne Center], Friendly Shopping Center, and then the Guilford College Shopping Center, or Quaker Village. And each certainly has pulled away from the downtown area. The--

EP: I'm sorry. I deviated from the coliseum controversy.

BM: That's all right. We can touch back on it. But, yes, the downtown deteriorated rapidly after the major shopping centers came in. It's a, a nickel parking downtown. And although I was very much in favor, the Greensboro Merchants Association, of which I was president, did put in the parking meters. And, and I thought, and still think, at the time--the Bible says, everything in its season. Well, the season was to share parking. That's the whole concept of parking meters, is to share the parking. And you take it, I

take it, and then my neighbor takes it. And we have good, good business because of the parking meters. Somebody doesn't come in and usurp the parking all day.

EP: What's your reaction to the supposed quote attributed to Lewis Mumford, the urban historian? He called Greensboro the "parking lot city" at one point in the fifties, I think.

BM: You're correct. We--and I was a member of the Merchants Association. I might have been president, I don't know. But we were the first city in the South that got enabling legislation to use parking meter funds to build parking lots, the parking garages. We were the first city in, in I think the South that got enabling legislation to use that money to further parking lots, parking garages.

EP: So you think parking lots enhanced rather than acted as a detrimental factor on downtown shopping?

BM: The charge was the thing. The fact that they're there is marvelous. The fact that you were going to charge them, where they can go to Four Seasons or Friendly and get a free parking spot, you bring out the Scotch in people. [laughs] And they, they would rather go where it's free. And that's why they'll ride around the block four times to find a parking place rather than pay a nickel to buy a parking place, you understand.

EP: Surely. What were the various site locations suggested for the coliseum, and what was the controversy surrounding each site?

BM: Well, McDaniel Lewis was the foe, you might say. Again, he's a, was a warm personal friend of mine, and a patron of my cafeteria for lo, many years. And this is the way lawyers do. They cut each other's throat in the courtroom and walk out arm in arm, embraced--you might say, friends. Well, this is the way public life is, too. You do what you think best and, and let the chips fall.

And this is what I tried to do. I did what was best in my heart for the city of Greensboro, and the entire city of Greensboro, because I'm an advocate of the present system of government. I think it's outstandingly good. There's never been any smudge of controversy of, of favoritism or anything like that. I think we've got the grandest system, if I might say that. You can give equal time to anybody else. Well, doing what you think is best, trying, in my mind, to get the coliseum downtown, to bolster the downtown area. You can see downtown going out with, like a car going downhill with no brakes.

EP: Did you conceive at that time of a complex the size of the current coliseum?

BM: No. No. As a matter of fact, we didn't--we, we have enlarged the present coliseum to that top tier of seats, you know. They have enlarged it. So again, we missed the spot there. And then we probably missed it again because now the, the tournaments are going to coliseums of twenty to twenty-five thousand seating capacity. So it's hard to, to be--look in the crystal glass and see what's going to happen twenty-five years ago. But we did it on water. We did it on streets. We did it--we tried to project what we would need twenty years. And I think that's about all you and I can do is to, is to project what's going to happen twenty years from now.

But back to the issue of the sites, Voringer, I think the first site was the Voringer site on Friendly Avenue at Eugene and--

EP: Is that the same place that is often referred to as the Van Noppen property?

BM: The Van Noppen property, that's exactly right. That's the Van Noppen property. And so Voringer dedicated it, donated it free and clear to the city of Greensboro. All right. Then we--I believe we bought the property which is now the Gate City Motor Company property, and the lot across the street from it, which they use as a, as a car lot. But McDaniel Lewis, again, took us to court, blocked the use of that for a coliseum.

EP: When you say take you to court, did he get, did he get a restraining order or--

BM: I feel certain that he did. I--my mind doesn't get to the minute detail of how it was stopped. Either that or by public opinion. He--McDaniel Lewis was a very feisty person. [laughs] And he could be very persuasive in his conversation.

EP: Was he the sole opposition, or were there--

BM: Well, of course he had others, yes. He had others. But he was the spokesman, and he was--it wouldn't have happened. I'll say this, and I say it I think knowing what I say. I don't think that the others would have ever gone the lengths that he did. But he took it as a personal challenge and he--the same way he did with the arts museum in Raleigh in the recent years of his life. Of course, he's gone now.

EP: There was one charge he made that a lawyer from Atlanta came down, or came up to Greensboro when there were bids on the property. And I think he was referring to Van Noppen property. And he--his allegation was that this lawyer was acting secretly for the Sears Roebuck Company. And that he--I'm not exactly sure of the details--but he manipulated the price of the property. Do you have any knowledge of that story? Is this one that ever came to your attention?

BM: None, none whatsoever. I, I don't know. I was probably too involved in the--trying to get it cemented, to, really, to the building of it. And it was frustrating to me, wanting it as badly as I did. I wanted it as badly as McDaniel Lewis didn't want it. And, and I told him so. And we--

EP: Where did he want it?

BM: He didn't know where he wanted it, but he knew where he didn't want it. [laughs] But then we went to, to the Wendover site, where is now Cone Hospital. It was--I believe they called it Cone, Cone ballpark out there. And where the Moses Cone Hospital is now located, that area was available. And we got an option on it. And likewise, they didn't want it there, so they fought that.

EP: Again, was there any indication why they didn't want it there?

BM: Well, that could have been too far out.

EP: So it was too far in, then it was too far out.

BM: Yeah. And then the site came about at the, the Fair Association lot, where the coliseum is now located. It's the Greensboro Agricultural Fair site. And the fairground site is, I think it's referred to as the Greensboro Fairground Site. But that is now the coliseum. The Greensboro Coliseum is there now. That is the, the next place that we selected.

And I did, in my way of thinking, I did a lot of behind-the-scenes work to get it worked out, to get the bond issue. The last thing that I did as mayor of Greensboro was to solidify the council. I took Bob King to New York City to meet with the bond attorneys for the City of Greensboro, and to be sure that in the minds of a lot of people--and McDaniel Lewis put this idea into the minds of a lot of people--that the city council was personally, financially responsible for any monies they spent. If they did it illegally or without benefit of the legal profession, if they did it in any way wrong, that they would be held financially accountable.

EP: Now, there was an account in the paper where the state Supreme Court declared the War Memorial Coliseum Commission was acting illegal, illegally, or unconstitutional to its charter, or whatever, because of changes made in it by the council. Could you characterize this controversy?

BM: Not in depth. I don't recall.

EP: I think that was 1954.

BM: I think perhaps this was true. And I don't know the seriousness of it. I don't think--now the bond attorneys in New York told us that what--and they researched the whole thing and said, "what you have done is perfectly legal." And generally, the bond attorneys in New York are--they're--that's gospel. If you--if they say it, then that's the way it is. And I don't recall in my time of political endeavor that, that the bond attorneys were ever found wrong. And so this I base mine on now. They, they did, and McDaniel Lewis, again, was involved in the sale of the land to--was it Sears that bought it?--to where that money should go, whether it should go on to build the Coliseum, or whether it go into city funds. I think that was part of the controversy. But I'm--again, I'm not--don't hold me to that thought.

EP: So, you had mentioned this trip up to New York to consult with the bond attorneys.

BM: Right.

EP: And what subsequently happened?

BM: They said we were perfectly legal and gave us a letter to that. We came back. And I met with the council and told them, gave them the letter from the bond attorneys. And we--from that point on, it looked like we were home free with the coliseum site as now exists.

EP: What was the relationship between the War Memorial Coliseum Commission and the city council? Were they one and the same? Did they work together?

BM: Hand in glove.

EP: Hand in glove.

BM: Hand in glove.

EP: Were there members of one that were members of the other, or not?

BM: I've forgotten at this time. There could have been ex officio councilmen. I don't think--I don't really believe that there were any council members on the commission, except perhaps the mayor could have been ex officio. And I resigned as mayor when the bond issue, the bond issue came up the next week after my resignation. And, in fact, I was going to hold the seat until after the bond issue, because I was afraid somebody was going to stab it again. [laughs] And I'd been through all these sites as, as a councilman.

And I was tired of the fight, and I wanted to get on with the building, and get on with the memorial, and stop the conversation.

EP: Sounds like this controversy went on for over ten years.

BM: It did.

EP: Is that right?

BM: It did.

EP: Are you familiar with the ongoing controversy of other sites, such as the Forbis Street site, and what was involved in that?

BM: Again, in, in my opinion, too, that, that was not large enough. But it was--you know, a lot of people don't want business to go on in to the community. Now we thought that--part of our thinking was that that Forbis Street site would be a buffer zone between the residential area and to the business area. And it would be close enough, in walking distance of the hotels. People could check in the hotels and walk downtown.

EP: This is, I assume, before the explosive advent of the automobile that completely changed the pattern of living.

BM: Right, right. And we were thinking in terms of walking. Of course, the Van Noppen property, you certainly could have walked there from the hotels that existed. We didn't have the myriad of, of motels that we know now. We did not have those at that time.

EP: This is a period of tremendous growth for Greensboro. We've touched upon the coliseum. But I understand there were also a great deal of land annexation, which extended the city limits of course, the extension of streets, water and sewer to these areas-

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BM: Right, right.

EP: --of future development. Could you characterize that, and what was the thinking of the council as to which way the city should expand and that kind of thing?

BM: Well, we were--we tried to be forward-thinking. And back, again, to what I said a minute ago, of a twenty-year forward picture. In the water sources of Greensboro, we expanded Lake Brandt. And we built Lake Townsend. Not--Lake Townsend wasn't in my time. But

the, the impetus was started in my--like streets, like Wendover. Wendover Avenue I started. I call Wendover my street because I started the--but it was just finally completed in the last five years.

EP: Was it originally conceived of as a multilane thoroughfare?

BM: Right.

EP: I guess it is the east/west thoroughfare through Greensboro.

BM: Right. That was my thought. And to route the, the traffic around the--I like to get traffic downtown. And this is--I had discussions with the planning committee and the public works department on not making everything a speedway to get through town. If you're going to go to the speedway, then go on the outside of the--

EP: Like the loop around Raleigh.

BM: The loop, yeah. And certainly, you don't want to pull people that are going to the beach to go through the heart of Raleigh. You don't want that. And neither did I want it here in Greensboro. But put the loops around town, and then make the streets accessible to downtown. I, I started Wendover, and it takes land acquisition, and condemnations, and all of this. It takes a long time to get it done.

And the same way with the coliseum. I, I felt a very integral part of the planning and the motivation of getting it done. And then it was completed in someone else's term. And I think jokes you tell on yourself are the, are the best jokes in the world. And I might say with all of the, the feeling that I thought that I was doing to get the coliseum built, I was not invited to the dedication. [laughs]

EP: For heaven's sake.

BM: So the Bible says, again, that if you think upon yourself as something, you're nothing. [laughs] But I, I've laughed a lot about that.

EP: So you don't think that--so essentially, the idea for Wendover was to get the traffic that was going on through Greensboro away from the downtown area. But you don't think that pulled away potential consumer traffic away from the downtown area?

BM: Well, no question that, that it does. Whatever you do, it'll make it easier to go somewhere else. You've given them an alternative. They can go either way. They can come downtown, or they can go there. And if they can go there faster and free parking, then

that's where they're going. And if they can park at the front door, then that's where they're going to park. And they're not going to park two blocks and walk two blocks to get to a photo shop. But if they can park at the front door--and three or four cars at the front door--then that's where they're going to shop. Don't you think?

EP: Well, yes. And in connection--before we leave this part of the interview, I wanted to ask about the effect of the--what has been called the semi-mall downtown. Do--what do you think was the effect there?

BM: Well, I think that the mall is beautiful. I've jokingly said that whoever sold boxes was a good box salesman, because that's what you see. I think--well, I, I have a friend of mine that always says, "Well, I would have done it this way." And if I--I'm for wide streets.

EP: Yes.

BM: I'm for westly/eastly. I'm for Wendover and Bessemer. I like to see them wide. Not so wide that then they got to come and put islands in there to bring them down to safe conduct through the intersection. But that's what you do when you get too wide a street. You do have to bring them down to the intersection to, to get safe conduct there.

EP: What this seemed to do was narrow the already existing streets--

BM: Right.

EP: --and squeeze that much more traffic. Do you think this had an ultimately detrimental effect on the businesses that remained downtown?

BM: No question. No question about it. I think--well, I think they widened the sidewalks too much and narrowed the street too much. I think they could have done a little bit each way and had a nice sidewalk.

EP: How about the concept such as, as currently in Raleigh, where they've completely closed off the downtown to traffic and it is a, an outdoor mall, in effect, from the Capitol to the Memorial Auditorium. Do you think that's a positive thing and maybe the route that Greensboro should have gone?

BM: The aesthetics of it is beautiful. And--but I'm--and I know they do it in Europe a lot in the, in the older cities over there. They have the great esplanades of beautiful scenery, plants and shrubs and all this. And it's, it's beautiful. And I think--well, a friend of mine, Bob Frazier, former mayor, was--he envisioned from the Guilford County Courthouse to

the Internal Revenue an esplanade through there, of glorifying that area, beautifying it as an esplanade through there, which is good. And I think that certainly was in the thoughts of the people who built the downtown mall here. I think they wanted something beautiful. And I would have to admit that it is pretty. It is pretty.

One of the, as you well know, that one of the big problems of downtown--one thing that I tried to get the merchants to do at one point in my career was to build a cover all the way down every building. To build out a twelve-foot cover, whatever the length. You might say twelve feet or fourteen feet, whatever, to shield the people, to keep the snow off, and keep people so they could walk the same as they do in a covered mall.

But you've got people who own the property down there who are mostly estates, and they are quite a, quite a few of them are out-of-city residents. And they perhaps are aged, and they want income and not expenditures. And to spend a hundred thousand dollars on their property if they're my age, sixty or more, they, they would--it would not be a good investment for them. So they are not going to spend. And they would not, even twenty-five years ago, they wouldn't do it. But I thought it was a good idea to cover the walkways both sides of Elm Street. And I think it could have been architecturally done and, and--but, again, to get everybody to do it was impossible.

EP: I'd like to turn now to an area of controversy and-- which directly affected you as the owner of the Mayfair-- and that involves the CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] picketing of the Mayfair. When did that begin?

BM: What--a lot of things I've tried to forget. What was it, '63?

EP: That was when, certainly, where it reached what you might call a fever pitch, with thousands of people involved. And I was wondering if--

[End Tape 1, Side B--Being Tape 2, Side A]

BM: The, the time was short, you might say, in the time that, that they tried really forcefully to, to integrate. The law of the land was that businesses operate segregated. We had--we were the guinea pigs of America here in Greensboro. We had no knowledge of good or bad, evil or good, whatever. All we knew is what we were doing. And the law being segregated operation, we had, by law, had to have restrooms for black, white, male, female. So that was the law, so that's what we knew. And if we didn't know any better, then, that's all we did know, so--

EP: Were you contacted by--I know there was a Human Relations Commission in effect at that time under Mr. Bland Worley. Were you contacted by them about your position on desegregating?

BM: Yes. I've never said this publicly before, but I did meet with them. And I told the one sitting at the table, as I told the business leaders in the city of Greensboro when they wanted me to integrate the Mayfair Cafeteria, I was the sole owner of the Mayfair Cafeteria. And I told them, and I stand by it, I said, "Gentlemen, if each of you will integrate your places of business, if you will put ten percent black personnel into your operation, the Mayfair Cafeteria will be integrated tomorrow morning. All you've got to do is tell me at this point that you'll do it. I'll take your word for it, and I'll integrate tomorrow morning."

EP: You're talking about sales personnel and, and--

BM: Secretarial. The minister was there. I told the ministers if you'll integrate your churches, I'll do my business tomorrow morning.

EP: And this is when you appeared before them and--

BM: Before the Human Relations Committee, right.

EP: What was their response?

BM: They were, well, they were not talking about that. They were talking about integrating the Mayfair. I said, "Well, I'm talking about the overall," as we quite often say, "the big picture, the city of Greensboro. You want me to be the fall guy. I will--I'll integrate tomorrow morning. I have the finest staff of people. I have no feelings toward them of hostility, none whatsoever. Contrary, I have love and not--"

EP: Did you have an integrated working staff?

BM: Oh, yes, yes. And I was--more, more black than white. But--and I expect food businesses generally are more that way. But I, honestly, I had no feeling about black or white. The, the commission turned my offer around. They just tabled it. They wouldn't go into it. So I, in my heart--and I've got to live with my God--I did what I thought was the right thing. I offered, and was rejected.

EP: Did you--you say you did not hire an attorney--

BM: I did not.

EP: --such as Mr. Bentz did at the S&W.

BM: No. I was my own attorney. I was--I didn't see any need to. I, I was not going to do anything illegal. I told the commission, when the law of the land was changed, that you could bet your money that I would be a law-abiding citizen and operator. And I did. When we--the day that the Supreme Court ruled, we started--I knew they were going to rule. I started serving that, that evening meal.

EP: What year would that have been?

BM: I--

EP: Sometime in '64?

BM: It, it--I think so. I'm not sure. I've--as I say, my dates get confused. I'm not, I'm not positive of the exact date.

EP: Mr. [Armistead] Sapp, as representing the S&W, said at a news conference that, "Gentlemen, it's simply a matter of economics. If we integrate, we'll lose our white patrons, we'll go out of business." Was this your point of view?

BM: Well, that certainly was. Again, we didn't know. And I think, certainly, with the volatileness of both white and black, we--you would certainly have lost and you would certainly have been, as I was--obscene phone calls and this sort of thing--

EP: Is this what happened to other businessmen who, who integrated in Greensboro? I was thinking of John Taylor and the Holiday Inn, and Woolworth's and Kress's in '60. Did they receive this kind of reaction?

BM: They did. And--they did. The people were volatile on both sides. And there's no way to win an argument in a climate like that. You're going to do what you think is best and, and you've just got to let the chips fall. And that's what I did.

EP: Were you--go ahead.

BM: I staked myself out publicly with the people who were trying to bring this to a conclusion.

EP: Were you repeatedly contacted by the commission, or was this kind of a one-time meeting?

BM: No. I, I felt that I turned them off. [laughs] I don't take any praise for whatever I did or didn't do. I tried to do what I thought was the best thing, or, or the right thing. I, I made the offer publicly in all seriousness, and they hardly even let it get over the table till they changed the subject. So I, I did what I thought was right. And that's what I--I've got to live with me.

EP: Did--it's my understanding the first time black students came in [and] sat in at the Mayfair was the evening of May twelfth, I believe. They were picketing the McDonald's on Summit Avenue and marched downtown, I believe. The paper said four or more students came in and sat down at, at the Mayfair. Was this the first--did this take you by surprise? Was this the first inkling that, that they were going to have this kind of campaign against you?

BM: Right. We did--we were surprised that they came in. And then we had a lot of that sort of thing. Again my, my dates are not--

EP: But they had been picketing before?

BM: They--well, I believe this came first, before they actually started picketing. They, they tried to integrate. And we politely asked them to, to leave, that we were not going to serve them. And most of the time, in those first one, two, or three times, they, they went ahead and left. And then, as it grew more militant, then they--we had to bring the police in and have them taken out, and--

EP: Did the police consult with you beforehand as to what your policy would be?

BM: Yes, yes. Captain [William] Jackson deserves an awful lot of credit for a cool head. He, he handled--he handled the situation, I thought, with extreme judgment.

EP: Were you present every evening when, when the students would come down to march and demonstrate?

BM: Yes, I was. Yes, I was.

EP: Did, did you always have advance knowledge that they were coming?

BM: No. I was on two or three when Jesse Jackson and, and Ralph Abernathy were leading the marches, and they had the sit-down in the street.

EP: Oh, that's when they sat on the square.

BM: Yeah. And they were from the O. Henry Hotel to Kress's, and Market Street from King Cotton Hotel to county courthouse. They were--there were reputedly two thousand of them. But I was warned that they were coming that time. And so I stood at the door and, and talked to Jesse. [laughs]

EP: The newspaper coverage is rather extensive on that conversation. Do you remember the gist of it?

BM: I told him I would not serve demonstrators.

EP: Had you been given any legal advice exactly how to phrase your denial of entrance or--

BM: Not, not the first time.

EP: Do you mind my asking if, subsequently, you sought legal advice as to just what terminology you should use?

BM: Never did, never did.

EP: So, so just totally on your own--

BM: Right, right. I used the expression, "I will not serve demonstrators."

EP: Did--was there ever any violence exerted toward you? Did you ever feel in threat of your life or safety?

BM: The--I was told that they were going to throw acid on me. And they were suggesting I wear the largest glasses I could find, which I did on two nights.

EP: Who, who told you this?

BM: A source considered to be reliable.

EP: Oh, I see. But it was a private source, it wasn't either police or students?

BM: A source considered to be reliable. [laughs]

EP: Okay. But did, did any violence ever--

BM: No.

EP: --be visited on you or your staff?

BM: No. They--I told--my confrontation was with Jesse. Jesse was the speaker. And--but he put his nose up against mine. He says, "I'm coming in." And I says, "You're not."
[laughs] And I look back, it seems sort of childish and funny now, but it certainly wasn't then.

EP: The way the paper has it, it says after the exchange about not serving demonstrators, you say, "Well, I like you, boy." And he [Jesse Jackson] says, "Well, I like you, too." And [Boyd Morris] says, "But violence is not the way to get someone to change their mind."

BM: Did I say that?

EP: Well that's what the paper--

BM: Well, I, I did say that. I do. I said this is not--

EP: Did they leave out any of the conversation?

BM: Well, this--no, the police thought there was going to be a confrontation.

EP: Between you and Jesse?

BM: Yes, but, because he put his nose against my nose and was breathing in my face. And I felt that he was trying to, to--

EP: Intimidate you?

BM: --intimidate me. And, but I, I was, I was never really afraid. And I, and I've told this before. And here, I, as a businessman, I disliked no one. I didn't then. I don't now. And I've served every facet of this community to the best of my ability, and knowledge, and time, and money. I've given of myself freely. I did then. I do now.

And here you, you're there--I was there, standing there nose to nose, wondering in my own little mind, Why is this happening to me? Here they wreck my business. They bankrupt me. I didn't go bankrupt. They made me insolvent, where you have a fat bank account and in five years you have nothing. You owe the government withholding taxes and all of this, which is public record, too.

But how does it happen when you, when you've been a friend of the black people, when you've born their babies, you bought their cars, you've helped them with their houses. You, you've done everything in your own heart right.

EP: Is this something you personally have done for various black residents?

BM: Yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah. And, of course--well, they say, "Well, that's selfish. I mean, you got something in return." Certainly. No deal is a good deal unless it's good for both parties.

And certainly that--and I have letters--I don't know whether I can put my hand on them now--but I've received hundreds of letters from A&T [North Carolina A&T State University] students who have thanked me for giving them the opportunity to make a living while they attended A&T College. The same way with Greensboro College and Woman's College [now UNCG]. We've gotten letters from white girls.

And I bought the 4-H baby beef from this young Cobb lady out here. She's a lady now. She was a young girl at that time. And she said that by the purchase of her animals--she happened to have the champion four straight years, and I think I paid her over four thousand dollars--she said it paid her way through the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

And so what I'm saying is you do everything in your heart is right. And then for this to come along and just, boom. Where we have a five-hundred-dollar a night take on, on the evening meal. And after the demonstrations, we fell off to twenty-five dollars, thirty-five dollars a night. And never in the next five, six years, were never able to get our business over a hundred and thirty-five dollars.

And you're sitting there. You're losing money day after day. You can't get out of your lease. And you're losing money just hand over fist, and there's nothing you can do about it. You can't let your staff go. You got to carry on. But--go ahead.

EP: I was just going to say, the reason why I was asking about any possible intimidation by the crowds is because Mrs. Bentz told me that her husband came home and said that he had been shouted at. I think she said spat upon, feet stepped on. Any of that happen to you?

BM: No. No, it didn't. Not to say that I didn't get phone calls, and not to say that, that when they were parading up and down, or demonstrating in front of the place--now, they never spat. They never--they--I had a great rapport with, with black people. I had--I don't mean to be egotistical. I don't mean that in one bit. Because there's no brag, there's no egotism left. I, I just do what I can day after day after day. But I think that, that in the heart of a lot of the blacks, that they wanted me to go ahead and capitulate and integrate and, and

get it over with. But what you said a minute ago, yes, I would have lost face with the white. It was a two-edged sword. Whichever way you, you get cut.

EP: You mentioned phone calls. Were these threats? Were these anonymous? Or were these people you knew who were trying to give you advice one way or the other?

BM: Well, the, the ones that are good you probably forget. The ones that are bad you probably remember. The ones that you remember are the ones that, that call you dirty names and hang up, that never identify themselves. That's—

EP: Were you able to tell whether they were white or black?

BM: Both, both. Because we had, as you well know, you could call in--I could give you names of people to call in to tape who would say Boyd Morris was absolutely wrong in everything he did--white people. And then I had the Ministerial Association to come in and say, We won't eat here anymore unless you integrate. And I told them the same thing that I told--I said, "You integrate your church and I'll integrate tomorrow. I have no fight with anybody."

EP: Again, did they respond to that or not?

BM: [They were] not talking about that.

EP: So they wouldn't address themselves to the question either?

BM: They wouldn't address themselves to it. And so--

EP: Was this during, while the negotiating, I mean, the demonstrations were--

BM: This was during the whole, the whole period of, of the intense integration thing. But I said this to everybody who wanted to chastise me for any--the ones that didn't praise me were chastising me. You understand what I'm saying? So I would just tell them simply, I said, "Well, what do you do about integration?" And then this would stump them, because they jolly well knew that they weren't doing anything but wanting you to do it. And--

EP: Did you ever consult with Mr. Bentz, or Mr. Frank Sherrill, Jr., at the S&W, Neil McGill of the Carolina Theatre, and Mr. [James] Bellows of the Center [Theatre], who were the other principal targets besides you?

BM: Yes. We, we certainly did talk, yes.

EP: Did--could you characterize these conversations?

BM: Well, nothing of violence. It's just more frustration of, of what are we going to do, knowing full well that the government was going to capitulate, change the law. We--in my heart, I felt that that's what they were going to do. It was just a matter of time. But whether you wanted to, to carry on the way you were doing or, or go ahead and--we didn't know--I didn't know what the timetable was for--

EP: Did, did all of you meet frequently? Was it in person or by telephone?

BM: Never any sit-down, have-lunch-together meeting. It was just more or less, well, telephone. If, if--Mr. Bentz seemed to know more about the oncoming things of a march, maybe because he was over on East Market, or maybe because he had the lawyer who was earning his fee. Whatever, I don't know. I don't mean to put anybody down. I mean, everybody, I think, did what was in their heart to do at the time, not having the knowledge of what to do.

EP: You had mentioned that you knew full well the government one day was going to act. Did you receive any overt or undercover pressure from the government?

BM: I felt that my phone was tapped. I tried to find out through the FBI, but they said that--their answer to me was, "We don't know whether it is or isn't. It could be."

EP: And that's all they would say.

BM: That's all they'd say, and--

EP: What led you to think your phone was tapped?

BM: I could hear the, the clicking in, clicking out.

EP: How about from the state government, Terry Sanford's office, say?

BM: No, no, never, never.

EP: Did you ever consult with the mayor and city council?

BM: Well, they--David Schenck was mayor about that time. And, and we had some meetings of restaurant operators, and David was there. And he tried to get us--there was a man with Western Electric [W. O. Conrad] who, who was very vocal. I think he might have been on the mayor's committee. But they were rather vocal. But at this point I think the tempers was a little bit more frayed than--more, more feeling into everything that was--

EP: You mean vocal against you?

BM: No. Vocal--everybody was more at a fever pitch of what to do and how to do it. And the downtown was, you might--under siege is not the right word. But it, the--

EP: It might be a good word.

BM: People were scared to come downtown. And business continued to drop off. And people just weren't coming downtown to shop.

EP: Were you--there was--you've mentioned that the one meeting you had with the Human Relations Commission under, under Mr. Worley--and then there was a second commission formed. Did any of these individuals contact you?

BM: Not really, not really. They, they--I don't know whether I was a real stubborn guy or what. But they never bothered me.

EP: You never entered into negotiations?

BM: The only thing is, I told them, and I think--I felt in my heart that, that I stood them off because I said, "You integrate and I'll integrate." I put the monkey back on their shoulder. And, and I did it in all seriousness. I didn't do it in any frivolous way. I, I would have integrated the next day, so help me God, if, if they would have done what they were espousing.

EP: You mention this one confrontation with Jesse Jackson. Were there ever any other confrontations at which you stood at the door?

BM: Only at my front door. Only at my front door, the only time.

EP: Okay. Did they stop by your place on a nightly basis?

BM: They did for many nights. I don't remember whether it was three, four, nine, or what. But they did. They marched for several nights, and--

EP: Did you lock the door, or did you always stand at the door?

BM: I stood at the door. When I felt--the second night they were there, I felt that they might push on through. I did lock the door. But, but there was nobody--there wasn't a customer in sight. In fact, I sent the help home. I locked it up and went home. Did it three, I did it three nights. I just--because I didn't want any confrontation. I didn't want any of my staff hurt, if, in fact, they were coming through the window. If they're going to knock the window out and come in, or push the door down, or trample me, or through the door, or whatever. I didn't want anybody hurt. So three, three nights I sent my help home.

EP: I know at the S&W there was a situation where they would lock the door. And then when a white patron would come, they would unlock it, and let them in, and then lock it again. Was this a practice you followed also?

BM: Didn't have the experience. Because there was only one night that--the fellow's dead now, but he came through the door and--

EP: Was this that first night I mentioned, or was this another night?

BM: It could have been the first night. I--I'm not positive on it.

EP: But there was never any violence.

BM: No, never, never.

EP: Did you ever talk with any of the black leaders of the community?

BM: Yes. I talked to several of them. But I told them that when the law was changed, I would, I would abide by the law.

EP: Do you happen to recall who these individuals were?

BM: Mostly ministers.

EP: Otis Hairston or--

BM: No. They were ministers. And I can't recall--Wyoming Wells was one of them. Wyoming called me about three times. And I had always had marvelous--Douglas, Reverend [Julian] Douglas. I had preached in his pulpit on layman's day. Dr. [William] Hampton

was a very close friend of mine, served on the council with him. But, my--I was never antagonistic toward any black that I talked to. We had almost a friend-to-friend feeling with all of them. Even Wyoming Wells. I don't know whether you were old--you're not old enough to know him.

EP: By name only.

BM: Oh yeah, yeah.

EP: Well, it would be understandable if it did. Did these--was there a strain or tension in these relationships during this period?

BM: There was none. I didn't--they were wanting what they wanted. I was wanting what I was doing. And so I didn't--I didn't feel any animosity really. I, I felt that they liked me, didn't approve of me, maybe, but they liked me as a man.

EP: So Boyd Morris the man and Boyd Morris the businessman were two different--

BM: Right.

EP: Did you ever testify in court against--

BM: Yes. I had some removed from the premise, and I had to appear as a witness against them, yes.

EP: I see. Well, the reason I ask that is, I do remember several times when, when you said that they shouted right in your ear, that they were right in your face.

BM: Right. That was Jesse Jackson.

EP: Was that the gist of it?

BM: That was Jesse Jackson, not, not anybody except Jesse Jackson.

EP: Oh, I see. So you were speaking of him.

BM: Yeah. Right.

EP: Were you directly testifying against him at that time?

BM: No, no, no. I didn't bring any charge against him. It was just the ones that came into the business and sat, and wouldn't leave. And we also did whites that way that were with the blacks.

EP: Were there many white demonstrators?

BM: There were some Guilford College professors. There was a white woman that--at A&T or Bennett--she was a teacher, I think [Elizabeth Laizner?].

EP: Did you ever have any conversation with--

BM: She wouldn't talk.

EP: I see.

BM: I just said, "Why are you doing this? Why are you here?" She says, "I'm with them." I said, "Well, I'm not going to serve them, and I would like for you to leave with them." She says, "I'm not going to leave." End of conversation, so the police took them out.

EP: There were two meetings after--we mentioned the sit-down in the square, and then Mayor David Schenck called in restaurant, and hotel, and motel, theatre owners. And apparently there were two meetings on June thirteenth and fourteenth. And the paper made a special mention of the fact that Boyd Morris was not invited. Do you know why you weren't invited?

BM: Well, because I was very outspoken the first time. I told them that--well, I told David Schenck. And he said, "Well, how much longer do you think we ought to protect you?" I said, "As long as you are mayor of Greensboro."

EP: So this was in a personal conversation?

BM: No. This was in a meeting, this open meeting. I said, "As long as you're mayor of Greensboro."

EP: May I ask which meeting this was, and did you often meet, or--

BM: No, no. This is--at his invitation we met.

EP: I see. But this was not--so this was at a different time than these two meetings that I have mentioned.

BM: That confrontation was--with the mayor was at the first meeting of the restaurant operators, hotel operators.

EP: Do you happen to remember the date?

BM: Whatever you said, June the thirteenth and fourteenth. This happened on the thirteenth. But I, I told him in no uncertain terms that I'd sat in the same seat. And I said, "As long as you are mayor of Greensboro, it's beholden on you to protect the city and use the police. If we are wrong, then put us in jail."

EP: Did you ever attend subsequent meetings, or was this the only one?

BM: No. As they say, I wasn't invited. [laughs] I think they thought maybe I was the leader of the group and, and they wanted to deal around me. I presume that's what they did.

EP: Were you--you mentioned you were national director of the American Restaurant Association.

BM: It was the National Restaurant Association.

EP: National Restaurant.

BM: National Restaurant Association.

EP: And also of the North Carolina--

BM: Restaurant Association.

EP: --Restaurant Association. Were you--did you hold these offices at that time?

BM: No. Well--I did hold them in ex officio, in North Carolina, as past president. As a national director of the association, I was--I'm a lifetime director. I was an active director at that time.

EP: Did, did this have any influence, do you think, on the other restaurant owners? I mean, this sounds to me like a position of influence and power.

BM: Well, being the oldest operator and the biggest operator in the city of Greensboro, I think they looked to me for leadership. The fact that I had been involved in every civic

endeavor in the city, practically--then I think they had faith in me and--what do you say--they, they looked up to me.

EP: Did you have any official or unofficial meeting with other association members concerning this controversy?

BM: No, no.

EP: Did you attend the meeting in Mr. Sapp's office of--I think it was June ninth, in which a lot of restaurant owners, theatre owners, hotel owners, met. And the gist of it was, tell us what we can do. And the paper said they allowed a reporter to sit in there as long as he didn't mention people's names. And it was a pretty free-wheeling discussion, back and forth. Did you attend that meeting?

BM: I don't recall. I don't recall being there. Not to say I wasn't there, but I don't recall. I don't recall it.

EP: The last demonstration mentioned in the paper was June seventh. Were there ever any subsequent, small-scale demonstrations or picketing against your establishment after that?

BM: No, no.

EP: When the S&W did desegregate, did you consider desegregating at that time?

BM: I considered it from the beginning. [laughs]

EP: I see.

BM: But, as I've mentioned, it's a two-edged sword. Whatever I did would have been wrong with some people. But if, if I could have perceived that the ministers, the business leaders would've done what I asked them to do, it would have been over and done with long before. They were talking to me and they weren't talking about themselves. This is the contrariness of the thing--the whole situation. They want you to spend your money. They want you to be a dead hero. But--and I'm not--please don't misunderstand me. I'm not downing anybody. I'm just stating the facts of the situation as it occurred at the time.

EP: I see. So, would it be fair to characterize--

[tape paused]

EP: Why do you think that the large cafeterias like Mayfair Cafeteria--Mayfair and S&W Cafeteria--have gone out of business? And that now the cafeteria business seems to be the small shopping center variety type?

BM: I don't think that integration has anything to do with it, other than the fact that in Greensboro, integration ruined the downtown. Now, we were--we were failing in our business at the Mayfair. It's a matter of history. We were not--we were not doing well, because downtown Greensboro was not doing well. And S&W was not doing well downtown, because nobody else was doing well downtown. And you've got to have people.

EP: So it's just this, more or less, flight of the consumer out to the shopping center and the general--

BM: Right, right.

EP: --decay of the downtown throughout the country.

BM: I think it's--that's the perfect explanation right there, see. It's the decay of downtown across America. Because this--you'll find this same situation in Raleigh and Charlotte. And, and the, the day of cafeterias the size of S&W and the size of mine--I had seven hundred and fifty seats. I had seven private dining rooms and two cafeteria lines. And two hundred twenty-five seats downstairs and two hundred on the second floor, and then the private dining room. And it's a mammoth operation. And you've got people. And you can't, you can't get people motivated today as you could back then, even.

And of course the minimum wage today is such that, that--it's not the price of the tomato that makes the salad expensive. It's the cost of the tomato and the great cost of labor and overhead. And you got a service call twenty-five years ago, [it] would be five dollars. Today they don't even come out. It's a twenty-five dollar minimum charge plus whatever they do, today. So all that in--goes into the price of the meal you put on the table.

EP: Well, I want to thank you, Mr. Morris, for participating in our program. I think it's been a very enlightening discussion of the entire, of your business and political career.

BM: Well, I wish I--I had an appointment at twelve o'clock and--

[End of Interview]

