

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

INTERVIEWEE: James Townsend

INTERVIEWER: Eugene E. Pfaff Jr.

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EUGENE PFAFF: The interview today is with Brigadier General James R. Townsend, city manager of Greensboro from 1947 to 1961. A native of Greensboro, General Townsend served on the staff with the city engineer from 1914 to 1916, during which time he helped plan the development of Irving Park and Lake Brandt. He enlisted in the North Carolina National Guard in 1911 and upon graduation from North Carolina State University in 1916, entered service.

In 1920 he became a captain in the United States Army, serving in Hawaii, Panama, and in the United States. He was commanding general of Camp Davis in Wilmington, North Carolina, and Camp Han in California during the Second World War. General Townsend also commanded anti-aircraft defenses at Casino, Italy, during World War II, as well as serving in Rome, Northern Italy, Southern France, and the Pacific. Upon cessation of hostilities in Europe, he was transferred to the South Pacific, where he served on General Douglas MacArthur's staff to plan the invasion of Japan, concerning himself principally with problems of supply.

During his distinguished military career, General Townsend was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal, the Legion of Merit with Oak Leaf Cluster, the Croix de Guerre with Palm Leaf, and the Legion of Merit with Oak Leaf.

Retiring from the Army in 1946, General Townsend settled in Greensboro and was appointed city manager by the city council in August 1947. He served in this capacity until August 1, 1961, whereupon he resigned and became chairman of the North Carolina Board of Water Commissioners, of which he served as chairman since its inception in 1955. General Townsend is a past president of the North Carolina League of Municipalities and was named an honorary life member in 1961. He now resides in Durham, North Carolina, with his wife.

I'd like to welcome you to the Greensboro Public Library Oral History Program, General Townsend. And I'd like to begin with what, in many ways, is the most dramatic aspect of your years as city manager; that is, the sit-in demonstrations at Woolworth's in February 1960 by four A&T College [North Carolina A&T State University] students. I'd like to ask you, when did you first learn of the sit-in demonstrations at Woolworth's?

JAMES TOWNSEND: Now you're asking questions that I can't answer as to the exact time or date. At eighty-five years of age, things have kind of slipped as far as dates are concerned. Incidents are quite clear.

That thing was agonizing to the city administration, because we had always had good relations with the black people in Greensboro. And I wondered sometimes, if it hadn't been for that good relations, that they may have tried some other town to try the sit-in. But I thought many times that that was where it started. Now, of course, I had experience with black people in the army and I came to admire them. I had a good many black troops serve under me at different times and they did a good job.

This thing shows up and it makes a problem for a city manager and he has the one job--to keep order in the town. He had an able police department. And actually, he had good cooperation from the men that were sitting-in. I think that due credit should go to Mr. Ed Zane for having solved that problem, in that he worked with Jackson, I believe it was--

EP: Captain William Jackson, yes, sir.

JT: Jackson and others. And finally the day came where they sat down in Woolworth. And the press picked it up there and was all right.

EP: May I ask, what was the nature of race relations in Greensboro at this time? Did you anticipate a test of segregation?

JT: No, no. We hadn't seen anything like that on the horizon. We hadn't seen anything that disturbed the relations. I was close to the unit out there at the college and attended their formations and parades. And actually, they gave me a very nice plaque, which I've sent on to a grandson.

EP: Did you favor closing the stores when you heard that there were attempts at sit-ins and there might be potential violence?

JT: Well, no. No, I thought that thing could be worked out because basically, I couldn't see why, if a black person could buy a comb at a counter, they shouldn't be allowed to sit down at the lunch counter. They had to come in and get their stuff and go out.

EP: I understand that you and Mayor [George H.] Roach went over immediately to talk to Mr. C. L. Harris, the manager of Woolworth's.

JT: Yes.

EP: What was his reaction?

JT: His reaction was that it was going to hurt trade, and that he'd lose trade if the thing were started.

EP: Given the fact that the council-manager form of government depends upon, theoretically, the council forming policy and the manager carrying it out, why did you and Mayor Roach not consult with the council prior to going over there?

JT: Well, that's a question that I can't answer, because the mayor and I were so close together. He was such a splendid mayor that we could talk things over and handle it that way.

Now if you had a council meeting on the thing, why that's just news, and what's going to take place, and all that kind of stuff. No, some things can be talked over without going to the full council as to what should be done. It'd have been a bit of a weakness on the mayor's part and my part to call the council meeting and ask the council what should be done.

EP: What were your instructions to the [Greensboro] Police Department as to how best to handle the situation?

JT: Keep order. Keep order.

EP: Did you advise them to try to avoid arrest if possible?

JT: Yes, yes. Yes, we didn't want to go that far or anything.

EP: Were there ever any incidents of violence that you can recall?

JT: No, I can't. I don't think that there was any fisticuffs. There was a tough character, and I don't remember his name, that was determined to make trouble, a white man. And we kept a pretty close eye on him to be sure that he didn't get loose and cause any trouble. There may have been an incident or two, but I don't recall it.

EP: What was the response of the black community? It's my understanding that you and Mayor Roach spoke to black leaders of the community, particularly Dr. Warmoth Gibbs, a president of A&T College, and Dean [William H.] Gamble, dean of students. What was their reaction?

JT: They would have to give you their reaction, but it was friendly. Our conferences with them were friendly and on a good level.

EP: What suggestions, if any, did you make to them as to what they could do to--

JT: No, no, we didn't--

EP: Help the situation.

JT: --tell them anything about, "Well, now, keep the people back at the college and don't let them go downtown." We didn't tell them anything like that.

EP: Well, the manner in which this incident was handled appears to be unique, almost, in that other cities were arresting the demonstrators for trespass, there was an absence of communication between the black community and the leaders of the white community and the city government. Was your reaction/response to the situation unique for southern municipal leaders?

JT: I suspect it was. I suspect it was because we were determined that we wouldn't get Greensboro in the headlines by having had a damn riot where somebody was injured or something of that sort.

EP: Can you think of specific policy decisions that you and the mayor discussed about the possible alternatives in handling the situation?

JT: No. No, the police department was doing very well we thought. And we didn't give them any particular instructions in that, other than to maintain order.

EP: Did you and the mayor--what possible alternatives that you did not take did you and the mayor discuss?

JT: None.

EP: In other words, curfew or arrests for trespassing-- [both speaking simultaneously].

JT: No, no, we didn't say anything about the students couldn't come downtown or anything of that sort.

EP: Why do you think this particular time was chosen? What influenced the students and the black community to act at this time, and why Greens[boro], why Woolworth's?

JT: I think that the reason they picked Greensboro, as I said a while ago, was due to the fact that race relations and our relations with the college students out there had always been good.

EP: What were your suggestions to the store managers? Did you urge them to integrate?

JT: No, no, no. I didn't take part in any of that. Mr. Ed Zane did the job on that. He talked to them and some way or other, and this was kind of out of my bailiwick, he talked to them, and it was arranged that the time came that they'd come in and sit at the counter.

EP: How was Mr. Zane's committee formed? Did he come to you and the mayor with the suggestion of the committee, or did you ask him?

JT: No, no. I actually didn't know that he was working. I didn't have any knowledge of that. But Mr. Zane is a man of great common sense and judgment, and I think he did that on his own. And he deserves any credit for having brought that thing to a head.

EP: Were you ever threatened by any individuals because of the policy decisions of the city administration?

JT: Well, I got an anonymous letter one time. I've got a copy of it somewhere.

EP: What was the context of the letter?

JT: Well, I'll speak bluntly. "Get the niggers out of those stores, or you will be blown to hell with a stick of dynamite." That came in the mail.

EP: Was this the only threat against your life?

JT: It's the only threat that came.

EP: My understanding that Mayor Roach and yourself decided to not allow a Klan meeting in the [Greensboro] Country Park, and that, as a result of this decision, you felt it necessary to assign policemen to watch the mayor's residence. Was this the only time that anything like this was necessary?

JT: I didn't know that had taken place. [laughs] I never had any police watch my residence.

EP: Why do you think the store managers were so intransigent and inflexible in allowing integration to take place at the lunch counters?

JT: Money, money, money, money. They could see the white people quitting them if the black people sat at the counter. I enjoy going back there now and seeing the black people drink coffee just the same as anybody else.

EP: Did your personal sympathies tend to increase with the student demands as the store managers continued to remain intransigent?

JT: My sympathy was with the students.

EP: During the seven-weeks truce which came about--that is, from the third week in February until the last week of March--what efforts did you, by yourself or in concert with the mayor and other city officials, attempt to work out a compromise? Did you take any action?

JT: No.

EP: Or did you leave this entirely to the Zane committee?

JT: No, we never tried to work anything out of that sort.

EP: What other pressures were you under from the white community to maintain segregation?

JT: Very little, I'd say.

EP: Were there individuals--for instance, Mayor Roach has spoken that in walking from his place of business to the city hall, he was frequently accosted by members of the community, saying that "You shall not allow integration to take place at these stores." Did you ever experience a similar incident?

JT: No, no.

EP: How do you think the council operated during this crisis?

JT: Rather routinely, I think. I couldn't tell you that.

EP: Was it regularly brought up at council meetings?

JT: No.

EP: Did Mr. Zane meet regularly with you and the mayor?

JT: No, no. Mr. Zane worked on his own.

EP: What was your reaction, then, to the concept of nonviolent protests, such as sit-ins and boycotts, as opposed to the previous pattern of court litigation by the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People]? Did this seem like a radical change in race relations?

JT: You're getting too deep for me now. I can't answer that. [laughs]

EP: What advice or action did you receive from outside sources such as the Southern Regional Council, Governor [Luther] Hodges, the news media, or any other source as to how to handle the situation?

JT: No, no. We figured on handling it ourselves. And as long as we kept it smooth, reasonably smooth, we didn't ask for any troops to be sent in or any such damn thing as that.

EP: What was your opinion of the students that you met on a personal basis during these meetings, [pause] as to their seriousness, their purpose, how they conducted themselves as individuals?

JT: My impression of the students was that they handled themselves very well. There was one afternoon where there was close to trouble, I felt. And the students withdrew quietly. And I appreciated that.

EP: There was the incident where it seems that the two sides were going to come to blows in Woolworth's and there was a bomb threat phoned in. Were there regular bomb threats or was this the only incident?

JT: No. No, no, the bomb threats were not regular by any means.

EP: Do you have any idea or personal opinion as to who may have phoned in the bomb threat?

JT: No. No.

EP: How did you first learn of the settlement that was reached in July?

JT: I don't know. Eighty-five years old and that's been many years ago. And I can't say what day or what month or anything of the sort.

EP: What was your reaction when you heard the situation had been settled?

JT: Happy. Happy.

EP: Did the rest of the city business go on as usual?

JT: Yes, yes. I spent right much time down there with the police department. But the city business went right along.

EP: Was your subsequent career in business, or any other political ventures you may have had, damaged by your association with facilitating integration in Greensboro?

JT: No. No.

EP: In your opinion, how was the issue resolved? Was it a just and honorable resolution to the problem?

JT: Yes.

EP: What do you believe were the ultimate results? Do you think that Greensboro benefited by being one of the first cities to voluntarily integrate?

JT: I'm sure, yes. I'm sure that that answer should be yes.

EP: Did you ever have the feeling that this protest was starting a national civil rights movement and a new era in race relations?

JT: No.

EP: It just seemed to be an individual, local incident?

JT: Yes. I didn't think that these chaps had any particular backing from--but I wouldn't have known about that, of course. But--

EP: Did you and the mayor have any communication with other city officials?



JT: No.

EP: Such as Charlotte, or Durham, or Raleigh?

JT: No.

EP: Did you communicate with the national presidents of these stores involved?

JT: No. No, because it was up to the local store manager, and we didn't go to that extreme on a thing like this. No.

EP: Do you think that this was an important contributing factor to the demise of retail sales in downtown Greensboro?

JT: No, no. [laughs] No, no indeed. Downtown Durham is pretty well gone. Downtown Greensboro is pretty well gone.

EP: I'd like to turn to other aspects of your career as city manager, and ask you what were the most important problems that you faced as city manager?

JT: As city manager, I think that the problem of water was the thing that I became most interested in as city manager; the proposition of seeing ahead. I was a civil engineer by profession, and I knew that water that was then available to Greensboro was insufficient, that something would have to be done. So we started planning and it took a long time on that lake that they honored me by naming it Townsend--the planning, that's something--that's the advantage of having a city manager stay more than three or four years or something like that, because if he can get a plan and then push it, eventually it will come into being.

EP: Did you find much resistance to this plan, or was there cooperation?

JT: No, no. This trouble that they're having now about putting lakes here, there, or anywhere else didn't exist. It was a proposition of getting the lake built, paying the people that owned the land that would be inundated. And most of them cooperated. They hesitated to give up their land, which is what I would have done if I had been in their shoes. [laughs]

EP: Yes, sir. What would you consider your greatest achievements in the years, the fourteen, fifteen years that you were city manager?

JT: I think as far as any achievement was, is this: that we had splendid councils. We had a council of seven persons. A council of seven persons is better than a council of thirteen or fourteen. They all worked as a team. And I guess due to my age then--I was older than some of the councilmen even then--and the proposition of bringing in the council as a team to support projects, after the city manager had shown the need of it, was probably an achievement, if you want to put it that way.

EP: What policies or pieces of individual legislation would you like to have seen enacted that were not?

JT: Greensboro had done a lot of things back long before I became city manager. For instance, I had a full-time lawyer--not one that lived in a building somewhere away, but one that was right in there--and that had been placed in effect, and that was a great help to me.

Greensboro could do things on street paving that most cities couldn't do. Greensboro had a setup that every person that worked for the city, except the city council, was under the city manager.

Some towns had a council appointing the chief of police and that sort of damn foolishness, if you'll pardon the expression. But the Greensboro city manager--everybody that worked for the city was under him. Now that makes a king out of the city manager. And if he doesn't handle his job right, it can prove [to be] a trap for him.

Another delightful thing about this job of mine, there, was that I had a very close relationship with the press. The press cooperated very fully in projects that were sound. And they gave backing to good projects. The *Daily [News]* reporter was wise and got his story right. And I cooperated by giving them the information so they could get that story right. And I made many friends among the editors there.

EP: What do you see as the appropriate role for the city manager? You've mentioned that it's possible for him to be virtually a dictator. What do you see as the appropriate role, providing he does do, as in your words, an appropriate job?

JT: A leader. A leader. A leader. He's got to show interest in the people that work for the city, just the same as I showed interest in the soldiers that were in my command.

EP: What sort of frustrations accompany the job of city manager?

JT: I'm trying to think where I was frustrated, and I can't remember being particularly frustrated.

EP: Do you think the manager has a more powerful position than the mayor or council by having access to sources of information unavailable to the council--financial, other types of information?

JT: That's a very--

EP: Does it make him stronger?

JT: That's a very good question. That's a very good question. Now, anywhere that I was in the army, there was always somebody over me. Actually, I didn't serve on MacArthur's staff. I served on the staff that was in Manila that was planning to supply his army. A chap named Starr was the lieutenant general at the head of that. So that thing works out very well.

EP: You employed many various studies, using many commissions in working out these studies of various municipal problems. Do you find this as an effective way of confronting problems?

JT: I think the stronger the city manager is, the less need there is for a commission. Now an exception to that would be a planning and zoning commission. There's too much work even at that time for the council to go into all details. And they do need help. So commissions can be invaluable to you.

EP: You have mentioned annexation and water and sewer facilities as two primary concerns that you had as city manager. Can you specifically think of what problems of annexation confronted you?

JT: Well, Greensboro had to grow. And it was smart to get the land surrounding Greensboro annexed, no question about that.

EP: Were there people who didn't want Greensboro to grow?

JT: I can recall one instance where we were making an annexation. And what we did, we asked the people to come to a conference that we were proposing to annex. Ronald Scott was planner then. And Ronald made the address and a councilman chaired the meeting. And Ronald, who doesn't get excited about things, was constantly booed. But after the chairman had said, "Now, please let's not have any booing, let him talk," why Ronald went ahead and talked in a smooth sort of way. If he had shown any temper on that game, why it wouldn't have been very good. But, no, he just quietly stood there, and the chairman said, "Please be polite now." And after--

EP: Did you have much input into the decision of what came to be known as the Babcock Plan, the planning of thoroughfares in Greensboro?

JT: Yes.

EP: Could you describe how this plan came in to being?

JT: Well, I recall that we got Bill Babcock [North Carolina Director of Highways] and brought him in and put him out there at a motel. And he worked for an air-conditioned room. [laughs] And he worked quite a while.

And that, of course, had been a plan all the time--added to, added to, added to. But we never had much money in those days to help implement the plan. Now they're getting more money. And the state came into the thing, thanks to realtor Jimmy [James A.] Doggett, who squared off and got some money for us.

And it was chaos back in the early days about who would be responsible for roads in a town and that sort of thing. Now the state has taken over a lot of that stuff that they didn't touch.

EP: Can you think of any specific recommendations associated with the Babcock Plan? For instance, Winston[-Salem] has I[nterstate]-40 going directly through it, which confronts problems of traffic. Greensboro, on the other hand, I-40 and I-85 go around it. And yet there are major north/south access routes to the city and the highways. Was this a specific concept of the plan?

JT: Yes. Now getting back to Winston, I said to John Gold, who was manager at that time, "I know what you're doing. You're getting a downtown street. What are you going to do about--"

"Well," he said, "The highway will go south of Winston." Now is it going south? You wouldn't know. But what he had planned was to get a city street and then put the highway where the traffic would, naturally, it wouldn't come into Winston. It'd go by. And that's what Winston should do if they haven't done it yet.

EP: You mentioned that you didn't have the money to implement the plan. What were some of the financial problems confronting Greensboro?

JT: To do what you wanted to do. [laughs]

EP: Did you think it had too low a tax base?

JT: The jobs that needed to be done would not be supported by ad valorem tax. I knew that.

EP: You felt there had to be an increase in the ad valorem tax?

JT: No. The council was pretty thrifty. Now this Proposition Thirteen that I read about, the city council of Greensboro handled it this way. They would say, "Jim, we're not going to increase the tax rate and work your budget out." And we worked the budget out. Now we had a Proposition Thirteen in that sort of a deal. [laughs]

EP: In other words, they anticipated what the taxpayers would stand for and what they wouldn't stand for.

JT: That's right.

EP: Did you argue or urge for certain programs or plans that you felt were important to the council, or did you just merely try to implement the policies the council had already established?

JT: As far as the highway plan was concerned, Bill Babcock worked the plan up, and then we presented it to the council. That's what my job was, to get the plan and present it to the council. And that plan was presented to the council. And the council could study it very carefully, as they did.

And then comes the great question about city government--priorities, priorities. Which one are you going to build first? You don't have money enough to build them all. So that is where the real brain power has to be used and worked out, so that you can say to this fellow that, "Here's when we'll get to you, year after next, and it's written down here. We're doing this now." And they're satisfied when you do that, the citizens are.

EP: Did Greensboro have a problem with its bond indebtedness at this time?

JT: No. That had been taken over. You know, they defaulted on their bonds back in the early days.

EP: Back in the 1920s, I believe.

JT: Yeah. And they sold some bonds to pay off those bonds that had been defaulted. And it hurt our credit for quite a long time. But we got on a sound financial basis. It was a sound--

EP: You mentioned that Mayor Roach was a very fine mayor. Who would be the outstanding mayors that come to your mind that you had a good working relationship with, and that contributed to Greensboro effectively?

JT: Well, George Roach stands out pretty high. Ben Cone was a good mayor. They were all good mayors. They were all people [who were] interested in the city and wanted to do the right thing. And that worked out very well.

EP: Did the public have any real involvement in the issues that were brought before the city council?

JT: It was kind of hard to get the public to show interest in things. And that meant one thing-- that the public generally had confidence in the councils that they had.

EP: Can you think of any particular issue that did bring out the public to the council meetings or letters to the councilmen or any public outcry?

JT: No. Strangely, no.

EP: What was the procedure for evaluation and selection of policy alternatives within the council?

JT: Will you repeat that question?

EP: By what manner did you evaluate and select policies to be implemented in the council? You mentioned priorities. On what basis did you establish priorities?

JT: By deep study. And then present it to the council.

EP: How well do you think the city government represented its constituents?

JT: That is a difficult question. Some people figure that you should have a woman on the council because you've got to represent the women. Some people would say that you must have a black on the council because the blacks must be represented. I think that a council of seven can't be carried over to the point where they'll have to have a Vietnamese on it. We very early had one of the finest councilmen, Dr. Hampton.

EP: This would be Dr. William Hampton?

JT: Dr. William Hampton. Dr. Hampton was a splendid person. And he came and he said, "Now, I don't know much about the organization or anything of the sort. I'll take Thursday afternoon off. I want to learn."

And he came down to the city hall on Thursday afternoon. He went to every department. He went to every sewage disposal plant. He went to every water plant. And when he had finished, he had a better background than any other councilman because he had devoted his time to it. And there was no question that he made a splendid councilman. And I figured that when he died that I lost a beloved friend, I'll tell you that.

EP: Did you ever feel the council intruded into your authority as city manager?

JT: No, not particularly, not particularly. There was a time or two there one time when some of the "bad boys" kind of announced that they were going to clean out the city hall, staff at the city hall.

EP: Who would these "bad boys" be?

JT: Well, *The Greensboro Daily News* wrote an article that said, councilman so-and-so and councilman so-and-so--"the man in the street", "the man in the street"--that's what, quoting what the newspaper said. "The man in the street" says that councilman so-and-so and councilman so-and-so are planning to clean out the city hall. They named--I guess, named, probably named me, I guess, I'm not sure.

And I read that thing one morning and I thought, well, the *Greensboro [Daily] News* can be sued because they called names when an election was coming up. And the two guys that were going to clean the city hall out didn't get elected, you see, on account of what? The press. The press took the step there to protect the city hall. See the relationship with the newspapers? You must have--

EP: In other words, they, the press in its editorials came out in favor of the city council.

JT: Yes. Came out and said, and, the article read, it looked to me like it might be damaging. And I went over and thanked the editors for having published the thing. And I said, "I hope you won't get sued."

He said, "We hope we do get sued, because if these fellows ever get on a witness stand, we're going to burn them up. Our lawyers have gone into it."

There's a case of where a city manager that was unpopular with the press, they would never have published that. But a city manager that they called Honest Jim--

EP: To what do you attribute your close relationship with the press and the news media?

JT: I'll tell you what, now. You're putting me where I have to brag. The press felt that under my work there at the city hall that everything was honest. And they were willing to back an honest situation.

And--well, here's a story. [*Daily News* editor Henry W.] "Slim" Kendall, he was gone before you arrived. Slim called me up one day and he had my private telephone number. And here's the way this thing was stated, "Jim, I have this before me and I'll read it to you. Is that correct?"

"Well," I said, "Slim, you have caught city hall with its pants down. And the statement is correct. Please be kind to me when you write up the incident."

"Well," he said, "tell the city manager go and get back on the--city hall to go and get back on the job and go ahead with your work and I'll treat you all right." Now, that's how close our relationship was.

EP: When you felt that the city council wasn't acting, wasn't active enough on a certain issue, what steps would you take to influence it?

JT: Take the blame on myself--my fault, my fault. If the council wasn't doing what I thought was right, the blame was mine that I hadn't explained to the council. And the council having made a decision which was adverse to me, I backed it up just as much as if it had been my own.

EP: What were some of the tough decisions you had to make as city manager?

JT: Some of the what?

EP: The very difficult decisions that you had to make as city manager. Does any one, or a few, stand out in your mind?

JT: No, I don't think so. Probably the most difficult decision that I had to make was when I decided to retire. Somebody said, "Well, you're getting along all right. Why are you retiring?"

I said, "I've played poker too many times in my life, and if you can get ahead and quit in a poker game, why, you better quit." So that was that.

EP: Upon your retirement, you then became chairman of the League of Municipalities, or served as president of the League of Municipalities.

JT: At one time I was president of the North Carolina League of Municipalities.

EP: What were some of the problems the League had to face?



JT: Money, [laughs], money, money. The League is a different thing at the present time. They are outstanding, they are outstanding, the people that operate in that league now, Lee Wilson and others.

EP: Do the various municipalities cooperate in a number of instances, or does each city function independently and as a rival of the others?

JT: We kind of ran out of water. And the situation was so bad that the water that we had in our lake would last until December and then there wouldn't be any water. The lake would be dry.

The mayor, George Covington, of High Point came in to see us and said, "We'll let you have some water." We ran a pipeline from up at the head of Reedy Fork Creek over the hill, hooked into his lake and started pumping water. Now that's a case of splendid cooperation, and I've always had a love for High Point ever since.

The day that we started pumping water, Hurricane Hazel dropped six inches of water on our watershed, and our lake filled in about fifteen minutes. [laughs]

EP: What sort of things did you attempt to do to ensure that Greensboro had an adequate water and sewage disposal facilities?

JT: Made long-range plans.

EP: And these plans were what, specifically?

JT: Plans for the--

EP: Building a dam at Reedy Fork Creek, I believe, was one.

JT: Yeah. Building the impoundment that's now called Lake Townsend was one.

EP: As a way of summing up in our final question, General Townsend, what would you say was your philosophy of government?

JT: That's a hard question, saying a philosophy--saying this, I think that local government, that local government should learn to work as a team. Teamwork always. Teamwork always. And I don't mean by that that the councilmen can't disagree about a project. But I mean that after the project is explained, that the group as a whole give it backing.

EP: Do you think that the council-manager form of government is the best form of government for a local municipality?

JT: There's no question about it in my mind, no question about it. I think that it's the best form of government that there is for a local government, because the city manager is the guy that they can look to to get the job done.

Now we had, when I was with the city earlier as a civil engineer, we had three commissioners: commissioners of public works and water and sewer; commissioner of safety handled police and fire department; and the mayor was just top man. But there's no question about it that with a city manager, even in a small town, it's better.

EP: Well, I want to thank you very much for contributing to the Greensboro Public Library Oral History Program, General Townsend, and in relating and sharing with us your memories and impression of your years as city manager.

JT: I regret that I didn't have more detail on some of the questions that you asked me, but as I say again, eighty-five is pretty old. [laughs] And you can see here that I managed to get to your library. I used to spend right much of my time in the library because all this stuff is family history that's back in here behind you--all these books and everything. And this sort of a thing is stuff that I've collected over the years, clippings for the grandsons and so on, when I'm gone.

EP: Yes sir. This has been a segment of the Greensboro Public Library Oral History Program. It was filmed at General Townsend's residence at 18 Oak Drive in Durham, North Carolina, on November 22, 1978.

JT: The day before Thanksgiving.

[End of Interview]