

PRESERVING OUR HISTORY: ROTARY CLUB OF GREENSBORO
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: CHARLES L. WEILL

INTERVIEWER: HERMANN TROJANOWSKI

DATE: November 26, 2007

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

HT: Well, my name is Hermann Trojanowski and today is November 26, 2007. I am at Robins and Weill, Inc., Greensboro, North Carolina to conduct an oral history interview with Charles L. Weill. Mr. Weill, thank you so much for meeting with me this afternoon. Could you give me your full name and we'll use that as a test to see how you sound.

CW: I'm Charles L. Weill, Jr., better known by most people in Greensboro as "Buddy."

[Recorder turned off, then back on]

HT: OK. Again, thank you Mr. Weill. Could you give me some biographical information about yourself, such as where you were born and when and where you grew up?

CW: Born in Greensboro, Fisher Park neighborhood, and lived there until I was fifteen years old after which my family moved to Irving Park where I continued to live until I was married at age thirty-eight.

HT: Could you tell me something about your family and home life; where you went to school and that sort of thing?

CW: I had a typical, and what I call normal, family life. My mother and father raised my sister and myself with good principles and strong ethical background for which both she and I are quite thankful at this day and time. I lived on Isabel Street about a block from Fisher Park itself that we now know as a city park. I attended Aycock School which then was an elementary facility, grades one through six.

HT: Mr. Weill, where did you go to high school?

CW: After finishing the curricula at Aycock, the next step was what was known in Greensboro at the time as Central Junior High School located on South Spring

Street where the Weaver Education Center is now positioned. After two years at Central, I went to what we called Greensboro Central High School, now known as Grimsley.

HT: Do you recall what your favorite subject or subjects were when you were in high school?

CW: Yes, I did well with the general area of mathematics and geometry, also enjoyed courses in the sciences. Did not particularly care for the language or like type courses, either the English or the foreign languages.

HT: After you graduated from high school, what did you do next?

CW: I went to University of Chapel Hill – University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill the following autumn after finishing high school in June of 1941.

HT: And did you finish all four years at Chapel Hill?

CW: I did, although it was interrupted as to the continuity and expedited because of the interruption. I went to Chapel Hill in September, 1941 and when – on my eighteenth birthday, which was the following summer, enlisted in the Army Reserves as was a common practice for many of us in school at Chapel Hill, hoping to – through that affiliation, to remain in college until we could graduate. In the winter of 1943, approximately six months later, the Army decided to activate those of us in the Reserves and we were called to active duty in March of 1943. Remained in the military until January, 1946, and returned to Chapel Hill immediately graduating in June of 1947.

HT: While you were in the Army, what type of work did you do?

CW: I was in an Infantry Division after spending some time in both basic training and army specialized training.

HT: What influence do you think having been in the military, for what, about three years, have on your life?

CW: I believe military service not only broadens your perspective with respect to other people because of the affiliations that are automatically established but it provided a major jump in the maturation process and I think it provided a level of confidence – self confidence perhaps, that didn't exist before. It was a natural outgrowth of the confrontations that Army – being in the Army provides; training, combat associations.

HT: Did you serve overseas at all?

CW: I did, for a year and a half. From early fall 1944 until the end of 1945.

HT: And were you in the European Theater?

CW: Europe.

HT: Europe. After you got out of the Army, what did you do next?

CW: I returned to the university, as I mentioned previously, and finished the curricula which had been adopted at the time of matriculation and graduated in 1947.

HT: And were you able to use the GI Bill to finish your schooling?

CW: I did.

HT: And after you graduated, what was your next endeavor?

CW: Perhaps one of the best decisions I've made, looking back over the span of life, having developed a keen friendship at the university, a friend and I decided to tour this continent before starting to work. Each of us was going to join our respective family businesses and we concluded that it would be a long time before we could justify the kind of time required to see this country, Canada, and Mexico, and employment simply wouldn't provide the opportunity for that kind of travel. So we spent four months touring a large part of the North American continent. It was a most enjoyable venture; a lot to be learned.

HT: And how did you get around, by car or train?

CW: By car.

HT: Car. And were you able to visit every state in the union?

CW: We visited all of the states except New England, and I had been to those with my parents earlier, so as a consequence of this trip I was able to see every state except Alaska and Hawaii which at that time, had not be admitted to the union.

HT: Sounds like a lot of fun.

CW: It was.

HT: What line of work did you finally go into when you returned to Greensboro?

CW: I joined the family business, this company, which had been planned, as far as I know, from the time I was born. It was my father's wish, desire and he provided the opportunity. I came to work in this company, October 1, 1947.

HT: Can you tell me something about the line of work that the company is in?

CW: The company has been in the real estate and insurance businesses, both businesses, for the entire time since its inception and I was assigned a role in our real estate operations and spent my entire career in marketing and managing real properties; particularly industrial plants and commercial properties; we did very little in the residential area.

HT: And you say your father founded the business?

CW: Yes.

HT: Do you recall when that was?

CW: December 1, 1911, is the founding date.

HT: How has the real estate insurance business changed in your eyes since you joined in 1947?

CW: Dramatically. [Laughs]

HT: Can you elaborate a little bit on that?

CW: The degree of sophistication, knowledge, application has been greatly enhanced in both fields; particularly the real estate field, much to the betterment for all concerned. It was a haphazard sort of business in the earliest day, even the days when I began working here, which was thirty-five years after the company was formed. The levels of discipline, ethics, knowledge, and practice for the benefit of both the customers and practitioners greatly improved.

HT: Do you recall any humorous events during your business career which really stand out?

CW: I've tried to think of some activities that would fall in the humorous category since you first invited me to consider this interview, and I can't identify any particular humorous event though there's been lots of fun with satisfying results. Perhaps more challenges and obstacles stand out than humorous events.

HT: What about significant events that happened during that course of time, that really signify something significant that you were perhaps involved in with other people here in town?

CW: Where as, Hermann, there are a number of events that I think back and enjoy recounting that provide a lot of personal satisfaction, perhaps the best answer to your inquiry is events that maybe helped our community grow or gain direction;

they're more significant in my way of thinking; such as the tremendous efforts that have been incorporated in planning our future, planning our traffic system, planning our land uses, guiding the direction of growth in the community. And having been a participant in some of those activities, I believe they are far more significant than any particular event that – where I might have had some, some great effect on a – on a single event but I think what we've done for the community as a whole is more significant. The planning of our street system, when compared to other towns, is absolutely excellent: the circumferential road system that we have in Greensboro and the connection of arterial streets; the ease of which we can get around.

HT: How did that come about?

CW: The – following the financial debacle in Greensboro during the Depression, and the need to have guidance from results of failed developments and other activities, the Planning Department was incorporated into city government; one of the first in the area, perhaps one of the first in the country. And through some dedicated staff people as well as volunteers, the need to plan for future traffic flow and plan for land use that is through control of how the land would be used, zoning particularly is the best method of doing that. The efforts – the combined efforts of the professional staff and volunteers addressed these needs which had long been set aside for lack of funds or ability within the city. It was a great opportunity because the city was beginning to grow and through these joint efforts, the plans – the obstacles were identified, the planning was recognized, professionals were hired – professional disciplines were hired when necessary, and through the joint effort of the professional staff, the city's staff and the volunteer commissions, these plans were incorporated and began to be implemented and I believe that planning was perhaps one of the most significant achievements that we've experienced in Greensboro.

HT: Did that happen in the 1950s?

CW: Yes.

HT: I know that at one time you were a member of the Greensboro Planning and Zoning Commission. Was that in the fifties?

CW: In the fifties. In the 1950s.

HT: And I imagine that is when Wendover Avenue was planned? Is that correct?

CW: Wendover Avenue actually existed as a short street from the late 1800s, extending through Latham Park to the main line of the Southern Railway, now Norfolk Southern at Church Street. It was destined to be called Memorial Boulevard, or Memorial Drive, because during the 1950s the land fronting Wendover at Elm to Virginia Street had been acquired for a site to build the World War II Memorial

Coliseum. It was as a consequence of that intended project and the need for a cross town street, that Wendover was envisioned, first to have been known as Memorial Drive. Later, when the Coliseum and Auditorium were located on the Fairground site at High Point Road, there was no need for the land which had been acquired on Wendover, but there was certainly a continuing need for an expressway, a cross town expressway, and Wendover seemed to be the route by which it could be developed and little by little additions were made to it east and west to what we now have as the main cross town parkway – expressway.

HT: You've been involved in a number of civic clubs and organizations and that sort of thing. Can you tell me something about your involvement with the various civic groups in town and how that has influenced Greensboro and yourself?

CW: I think the first civic involvement, using that term, the classic civic or service club, was the Greensboro Jaycees. It was quite common for younger persons in the city, younger males at the time, particularly those in the business environment to affiliate and it was an excellent program to not only undertake projects that required a lot of manpower and energy but a great leadership organization, developing – to develop leadership. That was the first and most active, at the time, most active organization with which I was involved.

HT: You've also been involved with the Board of Realtors and the United Way of Greensboro and the American Red Cross and that sort of thing. Can you tell me a little bit about your involvement in some of those other groups?

CW: My involvement with those organizations that you have just mentioned was a member of the boards or the – and/or the various committees that each organization necessarily had to explore and conduct its work. I found it quite satisfying to participate in each of those organizations.

HT: Since you lived in Greensboro all of your life, have you ever been involved in the political arena of Greensboro?

CW: Only peripherally; keenly interested in the political results; like to know what is taking place; attempt to help those who are willing to take on political assignments, but had no interest in being involved personally as a political nominee or office holder.

HT: What prominent people in Greensboro have you known and how did you get to know them?

CW: I like to think, and it probably is an exaggeration, that I've had a chance to know during my active period – period of active participation in the Greensboro community; I would like to think that I knew or have known most all of the leading and prominent citizens, the people who caused things to happen. The manner – so that sounds like a reasonable explanation, knowing them through

either my father's connection; or through my long history in Greensboro, having lived here all my life; through organizations such as the Rotary Club which attempts to – attempted – has always attempted to recruit the leading business people – the leading citizens in the community, be they business or other activities; Greensboro Country Club, where a whole lot of them maintain membership; participation in the various civic organizations where prominent people make themselves available. I hesitate to name any one because that would single out who appeared to be prominent and who does not but as I think about your question; it's hard for me to identify any I didn't know along the way. That's not as true today because I am now older and am aging out of the – the daily and current activity, but over the past years, I think I knew most everybody.

HT: Well, I ran across an article concerning you and Joe Koury and Four Seasons Mall. Can you tell me a little about how Four Seasons came to be, the story behind that?

CW: Yes. Joe and I are about the same age. He was a year younger. Joe is now dead. Shortly after Joe began his rather fabulous career of developing Greensboro, he and I became acquainted basically through real estate transactions and this is in the 1950s, we were both much younger of course and as part of our real estate activity in commercial real properties – market and commercial properties, it became my good fortune to have assignments for aiding investors in building neighborhood shopping centers around the city.

Joe was a visionary and saw the opportunity to locate a significant shopping center in the southwest part of the city. He asked that – if I would be willing to affiliate with him primarily to market the properties, find tenants for the project, and help him plan it. We began that affiliation – we began that consideration for the Four Seasons project in 1958. Joe asked if I would help him assemble the land where the center – where the mall and hotel are located. The principal piece of that land was owned by someone that Joe had difficulty in communicating with and asked if I could assist him. I was lucky enough to be able to acquire that for Joe, and as the – as time went along, Joe continued to enhance his vision for what that project would be.

It took fifteen years before we actually opened the first store in the project, but in the meantime, the project grew phenomenally in his mind and in his planning. And Joe, together with an associate he engaged, Fred Williams, and I became the trio, or the triumvirate, as some people referred to us, to build that project. We were successful in achieving the goals over many, many obstacles. Joe and I had a long lasting friendship up to his death.

HT: Now what was on the property prior to Mr. Koury obtaining the land?

CW: There were two principal activities. The land consisted of approximately one hundred acres. About forty acres were a residential – suburban residential

complex. The major residents, recreational lake and open pasture land. Another forty or fifty acres were used as an equestrian center open to the public for horse training, boarding, riding instruction and the accompanying open space to complement that activity. The remainder of the land around the periphery was occupied by single family residences

HT: Now was interstate already in existence in the late fifties?

CW: The Interstate was being built – Interstate 40 was being built at that time which was one of the reasons that site was identified as an easily accessible one and was a deciding factor in locating the project there.

HT: That's High Point Road.

CW: High Point Road had existed for many, many years. It was one of the original arterial streets into the center of Greensboro that we referred to earlier when we were talking about the traffic development – traffic patterns. It existed as Highway 29 – Federal Highway 2970. It was a connecting Road from Washington D.C. to Montgomery, Alabama.

HT: You were also involved in the planning of New Irving Park. Is that correct?

CW: Yes.

HT: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

CW: The land that we now call New Irving Park was owned by Cone Mills Corporation; part of its extensive land holding which were acquired – were acquired in part for watershed resources to their lakes needed for manufacturing and in part to provide land for housing – employee housing as needed. New Irving Park had never been developed for housing but was protecting a primary source of water for one of its mills. As the – as town grew in population and dispersion after World War II, there came a time to redevelop what had been housing for employees of the various mills. And Cone Mills asked that that land be made more suitable for other uses; specifically the area east of Elm Street to the main line of the Southern Railway, Norfolk Southern.

After a successful redevelopment of that former housing site into light industrial and office area, along what we now know as Church Street, it was decided to continue the development of unused – of land that Cone did not need for its production or its housing activities. So with the favorable results of early development, it was decided to plan and begin the development of New Irving Park. Elm Street was extended as part of the project, across Buffalo Lake, a water resource for Cone's manufacturing operations and made land available to upper income or more affluent housing development since the land was now serviced with utilities, or at least it was available to be serviced, and the town had grown

westward through the Starmount Company developments to a rather extended distance and land in New Irving Park appeared to be ready in the market for an extension of existing Irving Park developments due to its proximity and accessibility. So that the development – after planning the entire area, construction began with the extension of Elm Street and the building of roads for housing and lot development in the Irving Park area.

HT: Did you have any kind of – or did your firm have any kind of involvement in the Friendly Shopping Center?

CW: No. Only an occasional marketing of some of their space, but not an active participant in that development.

HT: How about Summit Shopping Center?

CW: We did Northeast Center which is across Bessemer Avenue from Summit. Did that project, did O'Henry Shopping Center. Did some others. And that's – the favorable results obtained in those small projects were the genesis in Joe Koury's interest in helping with Four Seasons; of course as a much, much larger project.

HT: Were you involved at all in the Carolina Circle Mall?

CW: Interesting question that you've asked. After completing the work for Four Seasons and having immediate successful results at that project, developers of Carolina Circle asked if I would assist them in the same way. We spent an evening together and it just appeared that someone else might just be better suited for that project because I was so closely identified with Four Seasons and I questioned the longtime viability of Carolina Circle. Appears that question was justified. But I did not participate in the project.

HT: In your opinion, what was the cause of the eventual decline of Carolina Circle Mall?

CW: At the time the developers were getting it completed, I remember saying to them that it was a wonderful location for retailing but in the longer term future--not at that time because the neighborhood that the project was expected to service--or the neighborhoods, let's put it in the plural, were distinctively different. The area immediately surrounding the project – the Carolina Circle Project, was largely modest to lower income earners – wage earners, and the Irving Park area which they had hoped to capture had a distinctively different merchandise desire. It was going to be difficult to stock the retail stores with either goods or services that were suitable to both groups.

As time passed, that condition became exacerbated because within the nearby areas to Carolina Circle, there was an infusion of ethnic groups that had entirely different mercantile desires and a retailer couldn't stock to suit any one

group. The – in the last days it was noticeable that there were different types of stores to suit each of the retail interests and no one store could service all and so each was attempting to live on only a fraction of the usual patronage that would surround one of these centers. We had Latinos who were interested in mercantile and services for which they were accustomed, we had modest income patrons who were looking for price points, and you had the higher income who were looking for quality merchandise and no way that any one merchant could service them all or if you divided the stores there was no single focus to attract patrons.

[End Tape 1, Side A--Begin Tape 1, Side B]

HT: Before we flipped the tape we were talking about Carolina Circle Mall. Have you been involved in any other larger commercial endeavors in town that you would like to talk – tell me about this afternoon?

CW: It's fun to recall some of the projects that occurred over time. The compliments indicated by properties that major owners engaged us to market. I'm thinking of facilities such as Wachovia's branch bank in the Central Business District which we sold to the county as part of the assemblage to establish what we now know as the Governmental Center. It's fun to recall the sale of the Burlington Industries headquarter properties on Eugene Street, originally intended to be their long term headquarters but later moved to Friendly Avenue; the Federal Home Loan Bank Building on North Elm Street now part of Blue Bell's Wrangler division; some of the old industrial mills that were converted to other uses.

HT: Since you've lived in Greensboro all of your life except for being away in the Army during the Second World War, what events in your mind, really stand out during the last say fifty, sixty years, that happened in Greensboro.

CW: Singling out specific events is hard. I believe that Hurricane Hazel occurred 1954. It was a classic severe hurricane hitting first the southeast coast of North Carolina and continuing through to Greensboro which alleviated a then water shortage, but as a consequence of overloading the dam of our principal water reservoir, Lake Brandt, and broke the dam. It made us acutely aware of our need for protecting water resources. Out of which, perhaps it was needed anyway, but out of which grew the keen interest in the protection of water and Lake Townsend was built, instigated as much by then City Manager General Townsend. A major event in my way of thinking and of course from that, we've now built the Randleman Reservoir. Had we not have been so severely impacted by that hurricane, I'm not sure it would have been that easy to develop the water that we need.

I believe that the development of the city thoroughfare plan in the middle fifties, the wonderfully efficient circular traffic system with the four circumferential routes around the city, the last being the now under construction outer loop, Painter Boulevard. That was actually planned in middle 1950s. We're now getting it built in pieces fifty years later; but without that planning it would

not have been as easy to construct that facility. It was done as a response to the citizens' objections to earlier circumferential routes where a great deal of disruption took place with widening existing streets or connecting them in such a way that vehicular traffic could move uninterrupted. To me, that is a major event.

I believe a concerted effort that took place over many years and a lot of groups working diligently to develop a manageable downtown area out of which grew the Governmental Center as we know it, concentrated at the corner of Green and Market Street. Those facilities were scattered throughout the town beforehand. As a consequence of those planning efforts, Freeman Mill Parkway was built--was designed and built. The strong financial sector concentrated around Elm at Market and Friendly was a consequence of those efforts. I think that those activities, though they were a bit and piece at a time, but they provided a blueprint for future development. The Transportation Center at the -- now at the Galyon Depot as its called, was actually envisioned as part of those early studies in 1960, 1961, and 1962.

And clearly the social and, hard as it is for me to reference this, racial conflict, because I don't like that term, but the conflicts between the haves and have nots in the community that became palpable as a consequence of the various civil rights movements were significant activities within our city -- within our society.

And I believe the expansion and enhancements of our schools of higher education, particularly the state universities, are quite significant in our community.

HT: I was just going to ask you, do you have any connections to the local colleges and universities?

CW: I do.

HT: Could you expound on that a little bit?

CW: I've been involved with UNCG [University of North Carolina Greensboro] through its Excellence Foundation on two separate occasions; first in its early beginnings when the goal was to raise a million dollars for faculty and student support. Sounds meager today, but that was the goal when it was first established.

HT: Do you recall when that was?

CW: I'll have to look at my notes. I became involved maybe a year after the initial founding and remained a participant for a long time and now reengaged with that group serving as a Director of the Foundation. I've long tried to assist Greensboro College in its land considerations and its efforts to meet its needs and now I serve as a trustee of Greensboro College [telephone rings, tape restarted].

HT: How has Greensboro changed since you've lived here?

CW: [Laughs] That's a big question. Greensboro, as I remember it, in my earliest days of recollection, probably age five or six, was a small, localized neighborhood community dominated by the textile industry and my later review tells me that 90 percent of the employment in Greensboro in those earliest days, was either textile or textile related businesses. When I say textile related I'm speaking of sewing plants -- cutters, suppliers like Loom Reed Manufacturers, and mill supplies. But the entire community was dependent on the success of the textile business. Yes, there were some other businesses, but not large enough to influence the community.

And I well remember the consequence of the -- what we refer to as the Great Depression, the great financial debacle of the early 1930s when -- every commercial bank in the city failed. There was no money in circulation, no legal tender, other than what the individual citizens may have had in their pockets when the banks were ordered closed in March of 1933. And rather than have some method of conducting business, the county issued script, which was legal tender, printed locally, I suppose locally, but issued and circulated within the community in order for the citizens to simply conduct their affairs. The city did not have a commercial bank in the period of March 1933 to the end of August of that year. The only banking institution was a savings bank which did not do commercial retail business. As a consequence we later learned that the city was unable to pay the interest of its bonds, never defaulted, but did defer the payment. So the financial condition in the city was bleak at best.

As kids, we hardly knew the difference because we all were suffering the same plight. We played together in the street with old tin cans and left over tires but there was nothing new. The schools were conducted reduced time, only eleven years; the whole elementary -- the whole local school system. People got by the best they could, but it was an entirely different environment from what we see today where everything is readily available at your fingertips. To those of us as kids, we all had the same experience, so it made little difference, but I can well remember that we just made do with what we had. Everything got fixed, nothing got thrown away. The old adage of, "You either ate it up or wore it out," was certainly true.

HT: So how did your parents buy things?

CW: I really don't know. I do remember that we had a -- a housekeeper at the time, as most families did. Awful lot of people working in that trade, and when my family had to reduce its budget, they said they simply could not continue the services of the housekeeper. When it was--I was later told that when she was notified that we simply couldn't pay for the services, she asked if she could remain and stay at the

house. We had an extra bedroom, and her pay was a dollar a week and the dollar was used by the housekeeper for transportation on her two afternoons off, Thursday and Sunday, to pay for bus or streetcar fare to visit her relatives who lived in another part of town. But that way, she at least had food and a place to work and to be not on the streets. I suppose other people suffered the same plight, if you call it suffering. How the services were paid for, I'm not quite sure, but my father was fortunate. You know, he and his partner suffered financial consequences of the Depression. He was skilled in a particular line of insurance business, cotton insurance, stored cotton, and was invited to participate in a bidding competition for insuring the Department of Agriculture which was making loans under the Federal Agricultural Program. They were insuring the cotton in storage under what was called a Parity Program, Federal Parity Program that was an advancement of funds for farmers to continue their production. As a consequence of that insurance contract that he was able to obtain, it provided a financial resource for my family out of which this company, he and this company, were able to recover from the Depression – the consequences of the Depression. Not everybody was able to do that. We were indeed fortunate.

HT: What was Greensboro like in the fifties and sixties when you started out in the family business? Because I'm assuming that the War had changed Greensboro like it changed so many places.

CW: The War did change Greensboro because in the thirties we were experiencing short time, employment time, in the mills. The indebtedness of the city was substantial. There were no extra funds from any source, government or private, to undertake any of the typical growth projects. Greensboro had been greatly overbuilt in the 1920s which was the primary root cause of the problem; too many roads, too many residential subdivisions, too many major building projects. More than the city could absorb and they drained the city of its financial resources. That, as I mentioned early, continued through the thirties and then as a consequence of World War II, not only were the needs of our military had to be met, which prompted increased production in the mills but there was established in Greensboro an Army base, within the city limits; a very unique and unusual facility. It brought to the city approximately thirty thousand military personnel in training and their wages were available for expenditure within the city and its environs. And they gave new life to the financial conditions within the city.

Following the end of hostilities, World War II, many of those who had been at the Army's installation, the Army and Air Force installation, remained here. The land was made available to the city for development. The infrastructure was provided by the U. S. Government who abandoned the camp and allowed a phenomenal growth and that was a consequence of the good road system that existed and was being upgraded in and around Greensboro. And that facilitated distribution which allowed the city to once again to gain its financial health-- to regain its financial health and attract distribution industries; be they service or product industries.

HT: Earlier we talked about the changes you witnessed here in Greensboro. Have these changes been for the better or for the worse?

CW: Both. From a convenience perspective, from a financial health consideration, it's certainly been for the betterment of the community; goods and services are readily available, access to other places and facilities are greatly enhanced, the educational opportunities are much expanded. Those are all very favorable. Entertainment is much more – much more readily available and attractive. But our social fabric is probably negatively impacted. We've had conflict. We've not been able to dispel all of that conflict. We've certainly enhanced it somewhat, but it continues to exist. Greensboro does not have today, in my opinion, the sharp focus on its future. That's unfortunate. We have great services, we can provide for people's needs now and I believe the current developments will lead, once again, to improved distribution activities but they don't exist at the level today I think they might. One illustration of that is banking has now been concentrated in Charlotte. Government which is greatly enhanced, greatly enlarged, is concentrated in the Raleigh area. Some of those activities used to be in the Greensboro environs.

The – whereas in the past, we could compete effectively with anywhere in the southeast for attractive, exciting new industries, that's hard for us to do today. The Research Triangle Park at Raleigh, between Raleigh and Durham, now I want to praise that to the highest degree that you can describe it, but it is attraction for them not for us and consequently I think we have a difficult time appealing to those decision makers who find it more satisfactory to be in that environs instead of ours.

HT: Do you think the conflict between the three major cities in this area, Greensboro, High Point, and Winston-Salem, has been at the root of some of these problems?

CW: I think that it has been a retardant of sorts but it will take care of itself and I think that we are already beginning to see that. If nothing else, a matter of necessity to combine our efforts in competition with the strong focus that other communities present. Atlanta has a magnificent transportation system. Charlotte seems to have the same and more modern spaces but I believe we are positioned in Greensboro in a very favorable location to make attractive insularly activities such as the mountains and the coast, but just far enough away to know that you've left Greensboro when you visit those places and not too far – not too difficult to access them. That's a real plus for Greensboro as a site, but we lack strong, identified, and perpetuating leadership. We have for many years and I believe the consequences of what we see in our competing cities, like Charlotte and Raleigh, is illustrative of that. It's unfortunate. We've found ourselves competing with one another internally.

I mentioned the social environment, I think could be better. I think we do find ourselves competing on group settings, be they racial, be they ethnic, somewhat religious, but we're in conflict with ourselves. We needn't – we shouldn't have that or we'd be better off if we didn't. When I look at other places, they seem to have overcome those feelings of – that still exist in Greensboro. I don't want to say they're underlining animosities, that's too strong a term, but I don't think we have assimilated all of our interests as well as we could have. I wish we had done better.

HT: Do you foresee the coming of Federal Express to Greensboro, because Greensboro has always been known as a distribution center, will that be a plus or minus for us do you think?

CW: Very definitely a plus. I'm a strong supporter of that project because it is not so much what Federal Express itself will do, but the insularly benefits of other organization identifying and selecting this area for their investments. I think we're beginning to see examples of it with organizations like Dell and some of the other timely distribution operations.

HT: As you see it, what are some of the biggest problems, or problem, facing Greensboro and how do you think that they or it can be solved?

CW: I think we've identified two of the problems. One is long term availability of water resources; clearly a problem. For the moment we are pretty well taken care of with the Randleman Reservoir but forty-five years ago we were taken care of when we built Lake Townsend. But we'll outgrow those resources because we are at the top of a watershed. Whether that means recycling our own water or finding other water sources like artesian wells, deep water wells, or what ever means, but we must find some way for long term independence for water needs and I don't think we've found that yet. That's an item. It happens to be amplified at the moment because we're in a drought. But we were in a drought five years ago; we were in a drought in the 1950s when Hurricane Hazel – Hurricane Hazel saved us. This is not anything new. It's a long term problem.

The other problem that I see is--I say problem, the other area that I believe we could greatly enhance is our social interrelationships. We've mentioned that twice before. When I say social I am speaking generically including racial, ethnic, religious, every means by which groups can identify and separate themselves. Those could be – those conditions could be greatly improved.

HT: Do you have any thoughts on how they might be improved?

CW: I wish I knew the answer.

HT: [Laughs] What do you see in the future for Greensboro; ten, fifteen, twenty, thirty years from now?

- CW: Greensboro's future, from what I can see today, is based on--is likely based on our very favorable transportation – very favorable site or sites, if you please, a general location, in the growing southeast and the magnificent transportation system that exists to service Greensboro. These are invaluable elements of our infrastructure.
- HT: How about the education infrastructure that we have here?
- CW: When we speak of that, I think that we have to divide it into two groups. One is the research activity that is beginning to be enhanced at UNCG [The University of North Carolina at Greensboro] should be very attractive to some of the brightest minds that are available. That will be a strong element in our future--for our future growth and should be an impetus for other institutions. The other four schools of higher learning; however, A&T State University [North Carolina A&T University], Greensboro College, Bennett [Bennett College], and Guilford [Guilford College], will probably do well to continue as modest enterprises. They're very valuable for our community. I certainly would not want to be without any of them but I do not see any of these schools as leaders in advancing higher education.
- HT: You know UNCG, in conjunction with A&T, has started the Gateway Research Park on Lee Street, the former A&T farm out that way.
- CW: That's good.
- HT: Do you have any thoughts on that?
- CW: I hope it's successful. When I think about it, I believe it's going to experience some limitations in its growth because of the social fabric that exists in the community. I'd like to be wrong. I hope these outlying campuses, such as Millennium Campus, the old School of the Deaf, and the Gateway Center will all be very successful, but being the conservative that I am, and I am conservative by nature, I think they're going to experience some – some limitations.
- HT: There will not be another research park like there is now in the Triangle.
- CW: I would love it to be, but I don't see that happening.
- HT: Mr. Weill, you belong to a number of organizations in Greensboro and of course part of this oral history deals with the Rotary Club. Can you tell me something about your involvement with the Rotary Club of Greensboro?
- CW: In 1961, I was invited to join. It was one of the most exciting moments and invitations that I have ever received. At that time, Rotary was premised on the leading activists, or participants, in the principal institutions and businesses of the

community. That was a cardinal principal of Rotary organization. To be invited to join such a distinguished group was not only a compliment, but a magnificent opportunity to participate with other very keen, bright, interesting people. I don't know how to express my enthusiasm for that invitation.

Rotary has grown in numbers and its representation and its dispersion and whereas many of the community's leading personalities are affiliated, that's no longer the single – the method of how membership is limited. I believe Rotary, and I suppose this would be true for other civic clubs, attracts people who want to improve the environment in which they live; the physical environment, the social environment, the – and make the community a better place for current and future members of our society. I like that. I've enjoyed my years in Rotary. I admire the organization for projects that it undertakes and for the achievements it's accomplished; be they local or broader in their fields, such as the national and international programs. I think they're all very good. Is Rotary the dominant civic organization I saw it to be forty-something years ago? In my opinion, no. The Rotary movement – first of all, civic club movements seems to have declined in our society and it's natural. We travel more. We have more activities in which we – each of us needs to be involved. It's understandable why the organizations can't function as they used to when most of our activities are localized. But I don't see these organizations representing the community's leadership that they once did. I'm speaking not only of Rotary, but other notable civic clubs as well.

HT: Mr. Weill, we've covered a number of areas this afternoon. Is there anything we haven't covered that you'd like to add to the interview?

CW: When we speak of Greensboro and my involvement in it, two areas of activity and specific institutional organizations come to mind. One is the health system in Greensboro. We now know it as the Moses Cone system. It grew from a single hospital which this community is so very fortunate to have had made available by a most generous endowment from members of the Cone family, particularly Bertha Cone, Mrs. Moses Cone. That facility had provided health care, and does now, at a level that is equivalent to most medical centers and its been done with the benefit of that endowment, previously made available, and good management. Today, the Cone Hospital has expanded to include other hospitals and is now known as the Health System. I believe we're most fortunate in Greensboro than most anybody is willing to – than most anybody knows or – tape stops]

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

CW: – this is to our citizens. Having participated in that organization, particularly in its growth over recent years, I believe it to be one of our real attractions and solid – [recorder turned off, then back on]

HT: OK. We were talking about Cone Hospital when the tape stopped on us.

CW: I think we've fairly well covered the significance of Cone Health System and that in itself prompts me to think about another institution we don't hear a great deal about but I think is significant and that's the Gateway Education Center, I believe it's called, for retarded children. Retarded is right; those who are afflicted with whatever their disease is, in the eastern part of town. The name escapes me right now.

HT: Is that the one on West Wendover?

CW: East Wendover.

HT: East Wendover. OK.

CW: Which has grown to be prominent in its services and has attracted people to actually relocate to Greensboro for the treatment that their children can receive. The other major thing that comes to my mind because I have been active with the organization, is the advancement in care of the elderly, and I'm speaking now of the Well Spring Retirement Community. At least that's the one where I had involvement, but that organization has turned out to be a magnificent haven for people in later years who would otherwise be living in their original environments, perhaps growing lonely as some have told me; not well cared for. And it provided a home and an environment in which people in later life can be rejuvenated. That's the description I've heard from residents who've spoken to me. Having been involved in it from the beginning, that its early efforts to become a reality in place and a service organization that sets standards for others. I see it as an inspiration to other homes for the aged in and around our area because it's set a standard by which others can guide and I see it as a very favorable institution for the sector – segment of our population which is getting older, yet wants to remain active. And I believe that it is one of the truly successful ventures of that small segment of our population.

HT: Now is Well Spring locally owned?

CW: Yes.

HT: OK.

CW: Well Spring was an endeavor, very much like a community hospital, in which the ownership is really in the hands of the public, but the administration is in the hands of its governers. It, like Cone Health System, is a self perpetuating governing board, but the ownership, in fact, is the community. Whatever the community is. We're not speaking of Greensboro's boundary; we're speaking of all the people who might avail of their services. There are no other owners in the sense of for-profit corporations or profit-making individuals who've invested. These are very attractive features for those two institutions.

HT: You know one thing that we haven't discussed is your wife and I know that she's a graduate of what is now UNCG. Can you tell me how you met her and a little bit more about your family?

CW: With respect to my family, my initial family is my mother and father, as I mentioned, and I have one sister who is a graduate of UNCG, now ninety-two years old and in poor health, but continues to live here in Greensboro as she has all her life. She has no children. She was married to Dr. Maurice LeBauer, one of the two original LeBauers in that health practice. He died about twelve or thirteen years ago. My wife, actually was born in Virginia, moved here when she was very young; grown up in Greensboro. We met as young adults, married in 1962. We have no children.

HT: And is she involved with UNCG at all? Your wife, is she involved?

CW: No, she is in poor health as well and where she was active on a limited basis in her earlier years, she is not able to do that now.

HT: OK. Well I thank you very much for your time. I've heard some very interesting stories about Greensboro from you. That's wonderful.

CW: Don't know that we've covered all of Greensboro but if you have further query about anything specific and you think I may have answers, I'd be delighted to try to help.

HT: OK. Well, thank you again so much.

CW: Yes sir.

[End of Interview]

[End Tape 1, Side B]

*The foregoing transcript of the oral history interview of Mr. Charles L. Weill, taken on November 26, 2007, was reviewed and revised by Mr. Weill. The original recording and transcript are housed at the University Archives and Manuscripts Department, Walter Clinton Jackson Library, The University of North Carolina Greensboro.