Robert Eades Oral History Interview

Interview Conducted by
Gabriel Cumming
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Title: Robert Eades oral history interview, 2002 October 20

Description: Robert Eades discusses the history of the land in Catawba County and Long Island, North Carolina, along with how the area has changed in recent years. Mr. Eades talks about cotton mills, which had closed by the time of interview; cotton farming, new development in the area, camp meetings, and how his role as county attorney influences land use in Catawba County.

Biography: Robert Eades was a 41-year-old man at the time of the interview, which took place in his home in Long Island, North Carolina. He was born in Statesville, North Carolina in 1961. He was educated at Mitchell Community College, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Wake Forest, and was employed as a federal clerk and defense lawyer. At the time of the interview, he was the county attorney for Catawba County.

Keywords: Eades, Robert, 1961-; Land use, Rural; Mills and mill-work; Hunting; Fishing; Community development, Urban; Cotton growing; Ponds; Rivers; Camp meetings; County government; Zoning; Animals; North Carolina--Statesville; North Carolina--Long Island; North Carolina--Catawba County; North Carolina--East Mondo; North Carolina--Lake Norman (Lake); Interviews MiniSound recordings); Oral histories

Interview Date: 2002-10-20

Coverage: Catawba County, North Carolina circa 1740-2010.

Interview History:

Interviewer: Gabriel Cumming
Transcriber: Mike A. Drum

Setting Description: Home of Robert Eades in Long Island, North Carolina.

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Transcript Notes: GC : Gabriel Cumming
RE : Robert Eades
CE : Cynthia Eades

Robert Eades Oral History Interview Transcript

Minidisc 1 begins.

GC: (water running in background) Okay, I think it'll work.

RE: Okay.

GC: Fun with recording equipment--

RE: Uh-huh.

GC: --of various kinds.

RE: This looks pretty impressive.

GC: Yeah, actually I lost mine. I'm borrowing one; kind of upsetting.

RE: I'm sure it is.

GC: I don't know what happened to it. The thing is these darn things are too small; valuable but small so that's a bad combination for me. Actually, I don't know what happened to it. I hope it wasn't stolen.

RE: So, are the files that are being created, are those just like mp3s or something?

GC: Yeah. It's similar to that. So, it's a digital file so you can mess with it on the computer or you can copy it to a tape or a CD if you want.

RE: Right. The mp3 player that I have on my computer, it has several different ways of recording music. One of them's just with a mic in and I've recorded Warren and various(??) other people. I guess it's the same thing.

GC: Yep. Yeah, pretty similar. So, you can spell out your name for the transcriber, to start with.

RE: I'm Robert Oren Eades, R-o-b-e-r-t O-r-e-n E-a-d-e-s.

GC: And it is October 20th. And how old are you?

RE: Forty-one.

GC: It takes me a minute too.

RE: I just turned forty-one. I just had gotten accustomed to saying forty. My birthday is on 9-11, so I turned forty last year.

GC: Oh wow. Yeah. And tell me about your family. You have a wife and--

RE: I have a wife, Cynthia, and two children, Emily. My oldest is twelve, she's in the seventh grade at Mill Creek Middle School and Warren is nine. He's in the fourth grade at Sherrills Ford Elementary School.

GC: And, beyond that you have a sister.

RE: I have two sisters, yes.

GC: And one of them just got married.

RE: One of them was just married yesterday.

GC: Is that the twenty-four-year-old one?

RE: Yes. She's my baby sister. She's actually twenty-five. She just turned twenty-five. I was a teenager when she was born.

GC: Uh-huh.

RE: And my middle sister is fourteen months younger than I am. My parents were married when they were very young. My father was nineteen and my mother was eighteen. Straight out of high school and I was born nine months later and then fourteen months after that my sister Barbara came along. We kept them busy.

GC: For a while.

RE: Fifteen years, yes.

GC: And your parents are still living.

RE: Yes, here just a mile away.

GC: And your occupation?

RE: I'm a lawyer in Hickory.

GC: We'll talk more about that, but--

RE: Okay.

GC: --and describe, describe where we are, this place.

RE: Okay. We're on the back porch, a screen-in porch of my home. It's about five years old. It's located in the middle of the woods on, just right at forty acres of land in Long Island, North Carolina off of Monbo Road.

GC: And, so you built this house, or you had it built yourself?

RE: Yes. I had as a young boy, these were woods that I hunted squirrels in, fished in and went frog gigging in the ponds and I always said that this was where I need to build my house and so I did.

GC: Now, this isn't--so, so how far is the place you grew up from right here?

RE: Within walking distance. And as the crow flies, a quarter of a mile, maybe. It's not very far at all.

GC: Is that where your parents still live?

RE: Yes.

GC: So, there's a lot of continuity?

RE: Yes.

GC: Yeah. And, so how did you come to own this property and build here?

RE: Well, my grandfather owned the land, and my father and his brother inherited it when their mother died. And when the time came for me to build a house, as I said, this is where I always had wanted to build and so--

GC: And they knew that.

RE: Yes, and so my parents gave it to me.

GC: Uh-huh.

RE: As I expected that they'll give my sisters land and I'm sure that my uncle will give his children land.

GC: Uh-huh, uh-huh. So how many acres that you, your part of it? Or I guess the whole and then your part of it.

RE: Well, right here we have just right at forty acres, but my father and his brother own probably five and six hundred acres, not all here but close by. Yes.

GC: Near here. Uh-huh. And what made you decide to build this way? I mean, in other words, keeping it, keeping it in the woods and, and not, you know, far back from the road and stuff like that?

RE: Hello, I'm being recorded. (pause) I like--well, when I was a child, I grew up very near here, but we also lived in a remote area like this. There weren't houses around us. When I was a freshman in high school my parents built a new house and they built it deep in the woods--

GC: Oh yeah?

RE: --so I was accustomed to that.

GC: And that's where they are now?

RE: That's where they are now, except now they live in a field now because when Hugo [ed. note: Hurricane Hugo] came through it wiped out their woods. They still far off the road.

GC: Uh-huh.

RE: But I like quiet and I did not want to feel like there were people all around me and I wanted to be able to do what I wanted to do in my yard when I wanted to do it and so, (laughs) because I had the ability. The land was here, and I took advantage of it.

GC: Instead of squeezing yourselves up next to the road with all the land out back in back of you--

RE: Exactly, exactly

GC: --you decided to put yourself in the middle of it.

RE: Exactly. And Long Island is full of large tracts of land with houses on those tracts of land but the houses right next to the road. And there are lots of people who like to do that. My family is full of people who think that we are crazy for having lived down in the woods. They want to be up on the road where they can see what's going on, as they say.

GC: (laughs) That's true. You don't know what's going on in the community.

RE: Yeah, I know. When we hear an ambulance or a siren go down the road we can call around and find out if we're inclined. We don't get to actually see it go down the road.

GC: Don't get to see it. So, the front porch culture itself suffers a little bit.

RE: It does.

GC: Would you say that there is a real front porch culture in this community?

RE: That's a complicated question.

GC: (laughs) Huh-oh.

RE: When you said you had nothing to do, they would actually arrest you for that years ago.

GC: Go for it.

RE: This, we're talking in Long Island as I said, and that is a very, very unusual community because it, it started as a mill village. There were cotton mills on the Catawba River.

GC: Okay. Yeah, I was going to ask about that.

RE: And in 1959 when Lake Norman was built, the mills closed. There were three of them in this general area: Long Island Cotton Mill, the East Monbo Cotton Mill and the Monbo Cotton Mill. And as I mentioned earlier, we live on Monbo Road so we were sort of--we were right in I guess the mid-point between where those mills would have been. When the mill village was here, there certainly was front porch culture because those people had been classic Southern mill village and if you know what to look for when you ride around here you can see a lot of those mill houses are still here that were moved after the lake was built. The folks who owned the mill said you can have these houses if you want to move them. And so, they've been moved and there

still are a lot of them around here. So, there was that front porch culture that really sort of very suddenly was stopped. The folks who had lived outside of the mill, even though they were still in this very same area, they were like other rural people. They lived out in the country and even though they may lived on the road, there just weren't neighbors right around to sit out on the porch and talk to. So, there was an odd mixture of both here. But it's always been my experience since I was born after the mill village, that if you wanted to go visit your neighbors, it was a get in the car and go ride to see them. They weren't close enough. We could play with the neighborhood children. They were close by, close enough that we could all walk and get together, but it's never been let's walk up and down the sidewalks, which we don't have, and chat with people.

GC: But you're saying some people kind of brought that with them?

RE: Sure. And there are, there are places around here where people who lived close together in the mill ended up living close together after the mill and their houses are pretty close to one another and they were mill houses and I suppose those folks had a front porch culture but that was never part of what my family did so I don't know.

GC: But--so some people who did relocate from the mill village kept that--

RE: Yes.

GC: --kept the same format, or something close--

RE: Very close.

GC: --to what they had. And other I guess adopted the more rural--

RE: Uh-huh.

GC: --play out(??).

RE: They did, and my grandparents did not live in the mill village. They were doing other things. I had relatives that lived in the mill village, but the bulk of my family did not. So even though they had cousins and lots of friends and family that lived there, my immediate influences never lived there so I'm not sure what the transition was like for them. They lived, those folks in my family that think Cynthia and I are crazy for living off the road, they're the one who as children lived way off the road in a farmhouse and couldn't see anything. They had to walk a long way up the drive just to get ready to go somewhere. They did not have power until 1941

when they moved into the big house on the road which was their new place to live. So, they've been there and they don't like that and don't understand why I wanted to do it.

GC: So it's a generational thing in a way.

RE: Yes, it is.

GC: I mean, for them it was moving up in the world to move to the road and they're connected in the power grid, they're more toward the center of things.

RE: Yes, and as I was--

GC: More convenient

RE: Sure, when I was talking earlier I thought, I was trying to decide whether I could say that it was purely generational about whether folks--it was uniformly older people who said you're crazy for living down there and it's not, but that's almost a perfect way of explaining it. There are some exceptions to it.

GC: Uh-huh. Well sure. I mean plenty of people your age and my age still like to live that way but I wonder if they even--I mean I wonder--some people may have just been inheriting that way of living and assumed that that's the way it's done.

RE: Uh-huh. Lots of folks come here who aren't friends so much but I have lots of clients come here to do things because my practice is in Hickory and I have lots of people on this end of the county who want me to do things and just as a convenience to them I tell them to come here. And it's, it's probably I'd say two-thirds of the people who come say, "Hum. We'd really like to live here, away from people." And the other third don't like it. "It's too far out in the woods." "Aren't you afraid down here?" That sort of thing.

GC: Yeah part of it is, is some sort of sense of fear of isolation isn't it?

RE: Uh-huh.

GC: I mean what are people afraid of?

RE: I don't know, I don't know.

GC: I mean you don't see anything to be afraid of, do you?

RE: No. Snakes, is one of the things old women ask about. “Do you see lots of snakes?” And we say yes, actually we do. (laughs)

GC: I get that so much. It’s so funny. I interview older people around this region and so many of them--I’m surprised at how little they go out in the woods. And I’m like, “Why don’t you go out in the woods?” And they’re like, “Snakes!” (laughs) I mean, yeah you might occasionally see a snake but still your odds are probably pretty good.

RE: Uh-huh. We’re not a snake-fearing family.

GC: Yeah, snakes don’t bother people.

RE: We don’t--when we see them, they let us--we just let--we’ve one up here on the screen porch before. Cynthia was a little put out with that. (laughs) Once it was off the porch, she was okay with it.

GC: Yeah, like I say, growing up in South Carolina we had a, we had a really old house and there was a crack above the mantle between the woodwork and the--well once and a while a snake would come out of that and that was a surprise. (laughs)

RE: Uh-huh. I’m sure that would be.

GC: We were, we were alright with it. We just kind of encouraged them on out. What kinds do you see out here?

RE: Black snakes.

GC: Yeah.

RE: More than anything else. Ever seen--

GC: Ever seen copperheads?

RE: No, I’ve never see--no, that’s not true. I did see a copperhead one time a couple summers ago, but I remember seeing little green garter snakes.

GC: Uh-huh. (pause)

RE: And I’ll have to call in and ask. I can’t remember if we saw a king snake or if that was just something we were just talking about one day. But we’ve seen lots of black snakes.

GC: Yeah, I'm sure.

RE: Lots of them.

GC: Nothing else poisonous though, it doesn't sound like. Yeah. Well that's interesting about Long Island, I mean, that--this community has really transformed at the time of the creation of the lake.

RE: Uh-huh.

GC: It's a landscape change that created, that caused a community change.

RE: Yes, it did and we're very--definitely is a difference in feeling among the folks who were, what I would call, lake people. People who arrived post Lake Norman and people who were here before.

GC: And among the people who were here before there are two categories, right?

RE: Uh-huh.

GC: There's mill people and country people, as they were.

RE: That's right. It was--I don't think. Well, I wasn't here so maybe I'm speaking out of turn(??). Maybe I should send you to older people who can talk about this, but within Long Island, I don't think that people who lived--if I had lived here I would have been a mile away from the cotton mill. My perception if that people who lived in Long Island that close to the cotton mill, whether they lived in the mill village or not, were so intertwined with those folks that they did not look down upon them the way that other rural people looked down upon mill ( ) folks. But, if you went as relatively nearby as Sherrills Ford, those people look down on people from Long Hill(??) who were Long Island, who worked in the mill.

GC: Hum. That's interesting.

RE: Because we were rough. Which is what you hear about all mill people. That we drank and all that stuff.

GC: That's interesting. But you're saying around here, I mean, you could hardly, you couldn't distance yourself from them because you, you're interdependent in some way.

RE: Well, you had cousins, brothers, sisters that worked there and even my family, my great-grandfather ran the cotton gin at the mill. He didn't work in the mill, but he ran the cotton gin. He farmed. That was his primary source of, well, cash money from the cotton gin but he raised his family on the farm. And at the Monbo Mill he had, he had worked there as a young man in the mill. I don't, I don't guess there were any families here who totally escaped working in the mill. Someone in that family was doing that to get money. Now my, my grandfather, he was in the timber business. He cut timber and sawed lumber and built houses and did all sorts of things. He did not do that. But his wife looped socks. See these are looped socks that I have on now. Do you know the difference between?

GC: I can't say that I do. Maybe I do but I don't know that I do. They have a line across there but I don't--

RE: ( ) did they come from land here?

GC: I don't know where they came from.

RE: We're ( ). I don't know, there's a new way of sewing seams that make them very flat but there's no thread. These are just ( ) together so they lock perfectly flat and that's the way all socks used to be done but now it's hard to find looped socks. Most socks have a seam across the toe. These are from Lands' End, you can order them new. And there's a woman that owns a hosiery mill in Hickory and she specializes in looped socks. They're hard to find now.

GC: Huh.

RE: When I was little--my grandmother died when I was four, my father's mother, and she had a house out next to her house that was the looper house and in the looper house there were three or four loopers and she and some of her sisters looped socks there.

GC: So, they just did the looping part of it.

RE: Uh-huh. The man would bring socks waiting to be--the toes finished, and he'd come back and pick them up.

GC: ( ).

RE: Yeah. It was exactly that.

GC: That's interesting. So, your family's been involved in all different aspects of the life of the community. So, the mill had its own cotton gin?

RE: Uh-huh.

GC: Okay, I didn't realize that. So, people--so the mill was basically getting all its stuff locally?

RE: I don't know if it was getting all of its cotton locally, but cotton was grown nearby and people ( ). (pause) I don't know. I should know the answer to that question. How much they brought in, I don't know. After we're done talking, if you want me to, I'll show you some pictures of the cotton mill.

GC: Yeah, that'd be nice. Yeah, Ray Von Caldwell, I was talking to him and, he was talking about how much cotton was in this area if you--well even in his childhood--

RE: Uh-huh.

GC: --until '50, '51, the year of the boll weevil.

RE: I think the field--(??), on my road, that was a cotton field. ( ), that was my grandfather's.

GC: Your grandfather or your great-grandfather?

RE: My grandfather grew cotton. It's my great-grandfather that ran the cotton gin. My grandfather was killed in 1955 in an automobile accident so he, past '55, he didn't do anything.

GC: Right, that was your grandfather?

RE: Uh-huh.

GC: So, Long Island the community, original community is under water then, I mean what used to be Long Island?

RE: Essentially, where the mill was and where the dam was, is underwater. Where the houses were, most of them--most of that land is above water, all of it, I guess. And you can still see foundations and steps and things to where the houses were. But people are building new houses there now. It's just a brand-new development going up around there.

GC: So why did they relocate 'em if they were still above water?

RE: Well, I don't know if when Duke Power was doing the original surveying and that sort of thing that they were uncertain as to how high it would rise. I know that they were certain that the

mill itself was going to have to be demolished. And Duke Power actually owned the mill by the end. And sense they were going to demolish the mills, I guess they just saw no need for the houses, but I don't know why they wanted them moved but that was they, that was the deal.

GC: Wonder if they were foresighted enough to realize they could make, they could put much larger houses on those, that property much later down the line? I doubt it, I doubt it.

RE: I don't think so. I mean if they had been thinking about that, they could have also saved the mill, some of the mill buildings and you know they--you can think of that big old brick industrial buildings transformed into condos and things like that. They would have been phenomenal places on the lake. And they didn't think about that.

GC: Right. That's true. That would have been interesting.

RE: And the mill at Monbo, the first one, it washed away in 1960 during a flood [ed. Note: The old Monbo Mill was destroyed in a flood in 1916]. So that mill was not operating in '59 but the one at East Monbo just across the river was.

GC: Oh, okay.

RE: And there were people who lived here on the Catawba County side who pawed back and forth across the river to go to work.

GC: So, when was the lake, when did they start filling the reservoir?

RE: They closed the mill in '59 and--

GC: Shortly thereafter.

RE: Yeah. I was born in '61 and it was full by then. They have, my great-uncle has slides he took as the lake was filling up and you can see it working its way up.

GC: Interesting. My dad remembers before, he remembers the river but. And we had land under there.

RE: Uh-huh.

GC: But I wasn't sure exactly when that had happened. So you, as far as you're concerned, there was always lake.

RE: Always lake. I was just telling my son the other day that I remember very well when I was six, seven years old, his age, going to the place where we went swimming a lot. There was a road that ran right through the middle of the mill village and it just ran right into the lake, the river and stopped and then came out on the other side of the cove. And so, you could drive your car right down to the water and my great-aunt and uncle had a VW Bug and they'd actually pull it out into the lake and wash it out in the lake. And we would take baths down there too. (laughs) We'd go and get in the water and take our bath. I remember a great-uncle of mine. He had--always used Ivory soap because it floated and he'd be out there and just--that literally we weren't just playing, we were going and taking out bath that day. That's what we would do.

GC: I mean, so sometimes you didn't take a bath in the lake?

RE: No, no, we didn't have to.

GC: It wouldn't be the primary bathing location.

RE: No, it was just fun, and it was something to do. And the lake was so new. See it wasn't new to me and I guess as a child I didn't--but I can just imagine for all of those people what a novel thing it was to have the lake.

GC: Well where they used to have their town, now they had a lake.

RE: Uh-huh. And there was a beach in Long Island where the river, on the weekends they'd turn the water flow off at Lookout and the river would go down and it would expose a great big sandy wide-space just right up the river here. And people would drive their cars out on the sand and spread towels and it was a beach for them. It was just lots and lots of people there. And my father still laments ( ).

GC: What happened to that?

RE: It's flooded. Once the lake backed up it all--

GC: Oh, I see. That was old, ( ) right?

RE: Uh-huh.

GC: So, you get the impression--? I mean what was it like for the community to just have a completely new landscape to get used to in the middle of their lives? I mean honestly speaking, were people, were people okay with that, or was it kind of a traumatic experience?

RE: It was traumatic for some of them. My, one of my great-uncles, Sloan Alexander, was the Second Shift Supervisor at the Long Island Cotton Mill. And one of his brothers-in-law was the supervisor, first-shift supervisor for East Monbo and Calli(??), the one at East Monbo, shut the mill down here. That was what he was charged with doing and by the time he finished working for the mill, remember he was supervisor, when he finished, he was essentially the night watchman. He was the only one left and his job was to keep watch over the plant and the machinery until it was taken out. And my uncle Sloan who had, not only worked here as a supervisor, but his parents had lived in a cotton mill village, so he was a second-generation mill guy. And the folks that owned this mill owned mills in Belmont and they wanted him to move to Belmont and become a supervisor down there.

GC: What company was that?

RE: It was Superior Yarn Mill. See, that's off a barrel of something from the mill. But again, it was tied up with Duke Power and I don't know all of the ways that that was done but his oldest daughter was my father's age and Daddy graduated from high school in '59. So, she would have been right at his senior. And she stayed here and lived with some of her aunts and uncles to finish out high school and Sloan and his wife and the rest of the family went to Belmont and lived. So, I'm sure that was traumatic and there were other families who did that too. They either stayed in textiles and moved to Belmont or Mount Holly or somewhere like that or they got new jobs. And I've heard, and I think this is true, I've heard some of them say that there were people who did new things and got better jobs and ultimately bettered their families that never would have done that had the mill not closed because it was such just an isolated community. It was easy to be born here and live here and die here and on and on and on.

GC: So, it kind of forced some change?

RE: Uh-huh. And I think overall it was good.

GC: And what about the people who resettled right around here? What did they do?

RE: Went to Statesville to work or moved.

GC: Not really anybody moving into farming, who wasn't already in it?

RE: No, no. I don't know of anyone right around in this area who ever made a living as a full-time farmer. I think they all had cash-money jobs somewhere.

GC: Well, was anybody making a living as a farmer at that point? Even the people who had been out in the country longer?

RE: You talking about in ’59?

GC: Yeah, yeah, I mean, what’s your impression of when full-time farming, how that’s kind of tapered off, when that kind of tapered off?

RE: Well, these cotton mills have been here since the 1800s, so I don’t know. You’re asking questions about things that happened generations and generations ago.

GC: Well, but even while they were the mills, there were still people farming cotton and so forth.

RE: There were. (pause) In Sherrills Ford and Balls Creek, sort of to the north and the south of here farming went on in a larger scale and for a much larger time than it ever did right in here. The mills were all here and that was such a draw for people. I just--

GC: So that was really the economic driver?

RE: Yeah, it was. But even the folks in my family that worked in the mills, (pause) I guess there were two camps. There were folks here that worked in mills and did nothing else. And then, as I say, there were people like my great-grandfather that would have worked in the mills and farmed also. But I don’t think he could have made it farming--I don’t think he could have made it farming. I don’t think he could have done all that he did without some cash money.

GC: So basically, this hasn’t been a totally agricultural economy?

RE: Not exclusively. For a long--

GC: For two hundred years; something like that. A hundred and fifty years.

RE: Uh-huh.

GC: So, you’re making a distinction there between Sherrills Ford, Long Island, and Balls Creek?

RE: Oh yeah!

GC: ‘Cause you think that’s a distinction that everyone from around here would recognize?

RE: Uh-huh. When I said about people being rough, or thinking that we were rough here, you know distances have collapsed now because it’s so easy to get in your car and go somewhere.

But there was a man in Sherrills Ford, Ray Von Beatty--you know there are lots of Beattys in Sherrills Ford--there was a friend of mine, even though he's much much older than me is dead now, but I had an uncle Arnold Eades, a great-uncle, who married Alberta and she had a twin sister, Roberta, and Ray Von Beatty grew up living next door to Alberta and Roberta. I don't remember their names, but his mother really loved those girls. They were like daughters to her. And when Alberta married my great-uncle Arnold, he told me that his mother sat in their house and cried because she was moving to Long Island, a long ways away, and she was marrying into Long Island people who were rough. So, his mother worried about that.

GC: So, it's simultaneously an economic and a class distinction?

RE: Sure.

GC: Is it also, does it also reflect about the landscape? I mean Balls Creek is going along, there's Balls Creek kind of, all the land that drains to that and then geographically are you sort of over the hump from that in Long Island?

RE: Well Balls Creek comes in right up here.

GC: Okay, so it's still part of the watershed.

RE: Uh-huh. Yep.

GC: So, it's a social, it's a social boundary?

RE: I think the mills really go a long way for explaining it. And there were lots of things we had in common. I mean there were still families who were going to the campground, for example, as mine was.

GC: So, in a larger sense, there's a larger sort of regional identity that included Long Island but if you break it down smaller, it separates out?

RE: Yes. Yes.

GC: What would you call the larger region? Anything?

RE: East of Newton.

GC: East of Newton?

RE: Uh-huh. That's where all the Republicans were, that's where the English people within the larger county were clustered there. Before Catawba County was formed and was part of Lincoln County, the English were the majority and the Germans were the minority. But then when Lincoln County was sort of cut in half, east of Newton down toward Sherrills Ford, there was a pocket of English-speaking people who suddenly went from being part of a majority political, economic, governing majority; they suddenly were in the new county where they were a minority and I think that helped ( ) some cohesiveness. We have just the Saturday before the election we'll be having the Balls Creek fish fry, which is a long standing political tradition and those are the precincts in eastern Catawba County that have been hosting that for a long time. The Republican fish fry. And this is ( ) precincts and it has never been carried by a Democrat presidential candidate. And that's, that was in contrast to what the rest of the county was like.

GC: It was the Germans; democratic.

RE: Uh-huh.

GC: Interesting. So east of Newton is a term for that?

RE: Oh yeah! People will know. You say east of Newton. People in Hickory think Newton is eastern Catawba County and they will say that, but it's not.

GC: It's not. You know it's not. It stops--so you would group Newton, Hickory and everything else--?

RE: No, I would--I would count Newton as separate.

GC: Oh, okay.

RE: I'd say there's everything to Newton, then Newton, Conover. That's where--and then everything west of that.

GC: What's Newton? I mean what are they, just an anomaly?

RE: Yeah. They are. And you know Gary Freeze would say that too. He would say that Newton is still a southern antebellum type town and Hickory is modern, progressive, industrial town and that happened very soon after the Civil War.

GC: And then east of Newton is just--?

RE: Yeah. It's very different because east of Newton you have Balls Creek and then you ride on down and you're into, back into Long Island and Sherrills Ford and Terrell. Those are all distinct areas from ( ).

GC: Right. Much more rural--

RE: Uh-huh.

GC: --to this point. Do you feel like, I mean there's been a big new influx of people in this area because of the lake?

RE: Yes.

GC: People who know nothing of this whole local geography, right?

RE: No, they don't. Their focus tends to be towards Charlotte. Lots of them work there and shop there.

GC: Really?

RE: Uh-huh.

GC: Wow, it's a long drive still to Charlotte from out here.

RE: But it's not undoable. When I finished law school and moved back here, I was clerking for a federal judge in Charlotte and I drove down every day. It's--

GC: It's doable.

RE: Uh-huh.

GC: Yeah, and I guess they identify with Charlotte because they're identifying with the lake community which goes down to Charlotte.

RE: Charlotte and Mooresville I should say. Especially as Mooresville grows, there is not much you can't do in Mooresville. I mean you can go grocery shopping and go out to eat and all of that.

GC: Go to Walmart at three o'clock in the morning.

RE: My son plays soccer in an Optimist league in Sherrills Ford and most of the parents down there don't know anything about how to go anywhere in Catawba County if it's not in Sherrills Ford, if it's not in the immediate area of where they live. They have to be given directions to go to the other soccer teams to play.

GC: So, you kind of got these different orbits, like areas of familiarity and some people have an orbit that's centered over on the other side of the lake and they only cut in so far to Catawba County.

RE: I hadn't said this, but Hickory is full of people who have never even heard of Long Island. They really and truly do not know Long Island as part of Catawba County.

GC: Well that's another orbit entirely over there. I mean, so do you find that there are people who are oriented more toward Charlotte and Mooresville and people who are more oriented in Hickory in this area? Could it go either way? (pause) Well, I know of course being the third group, the group that's just oriented to here because here's where they're from.

RE: Well, yeah. (pause) Yeah, they, people here who I'd say are oriented toward Hickory probably are people who work in furniture factories up that way. Those are the ones who'd be most familiar with that, I think. For a long time, before Mooresville grew as much as it did, before it sort of passed Statesville, people around here would go to Statesville to go shopping and out to eat and that sort of thing. And it is interesting to me that if you are in Sherrills Ford and Terrell down there, people when they die very, very often go to Mooresville to the funeral home. And that's a long standard thing. You know that's not just lake people that do that. Whereas people here go to Statesville. Very few people who die here go to Newton to the funeral home, they go to Statesville.

GC: So, it is a relationship, a closeness to Iredell County in one node or another in Iredell. Which probably predates the lake too, right?

RE: Yeah, it's just a distance. I mean you can get to Statesville quickly from here.

GC: Right, right.

RE: I was born in Statesville for example, because my hospital was closer by and my mother grew up in Statesville ( ).

GC: Uh-huh.

RE: Don't tell that to many people. I try not to let ( ) know that I wasn't born in Catawba County. (laughs)

GC: But according to what you're saying, people wouldn't mind.

RE: Oh no. They don't mind. I'm--

GC: Maybe people in Hickory might mind.

RE: My father was born in Statesville.

GC: There's no shame in it.

RE: I had to be near my mother.

GC: Yep. That's so interesting. Well, getting back to this land and your family's land, what are the uses, changes in use that his land has gone through? I mean you've mentioned cotton farming.

RE: Well as I said, my grandfather was in the timber business so in those days when people sold their timber, they generally sold their land too. He bought lots of land and cut the timber off of it and sold lots of land and what we have now is what he was working on when he was killed. And then when my grandmother settled up in ( ) state she sold a lot of land too ( ). That sort of pattern goes on ( ). They aren't many people that ended up with the amount of land that we had.

GC: Because of the business that he was in.

RE: Right. And I really did not realize how unusual that was until I was older and started looking about who owns the property in Catawba County. When I was in college, there was some non-profit that was interested in land ownership in North Carolina and they did an exhaustive survey, county by county, and identified the top ten or twenty landowners and I can remember just being astounded when we showed up on that list. 'Cause I didn't think what we had was even come close to that. But there really aren't many people in an urban, a county as urban as Catawba County is who owns much land.

GC: Right.

RE: And I think had he lived, he probably would've ended up like lots of other people. I think because he was constantly turning the stuff over that it would have been different but--

GC: He probably wouldn't have kept a lot of it if he knew that he was, he was getting old and he would have probably converted it to money.

RE: I know. There's just no telling what he what he would have done. But his pattern was, buy it to cut the timber and very often he would make pasture out of what he had been cutting over so he had cattle that he grew. He had barns all around here that he built. And he'd grow crops. And so, he had lots of different things, as I say: the timber and building houses and farming and he was just sort of a typical rural--

GC: Jack of all trades.

RE: --entrepreneur. He did a lot of things. And so he died, as I say '55. My daddy was about thirteen and his brother was nine. They were very young. And when Daddy and Momma got married after he'd been married for a very short while, he started--he went into the sawmill business and was hauling across the river and cutting timber and doing all that himself using family land for the bulk of it, not always but for a lot of it. And then when he was in his early twenties he, he went up for a flight in a plane for the first time ever and he liked it. And sold his sawmill. He was going broke in a hurry in the sawmill business. We were very, very poor. I'm, as I said earlier, forty-one and I don't meet many forty-one-year-old men who can say that they lived in a house with an outhouse. As children that had really pretty much passed by, by then. We had one, just down the road here.

GC: That was before you built the new house?

RE: Yes.

GC: That was the house that you were--young childhood.

RE: That was the house I lived in while my grandmother was alive and when she died, when I was four, we moved into her house and lived there until I was a freshman in high school. But he ultimately, he sold the sawmill, he started working in a cotton mill, some sort(??) at night and got his license to fly during the day and became a pilot for Piedmont [ed. note: Piedmont Airlines] ultimately.

GC: Oh wow. Okay.

RE: But kept the lumber stuff going because he, you know he was only flying a few days a week, so he needed something else to do. Pilots just can't fly and fly and fly, they have to take mandatory time off between flights. So, he continued to do that and then returned--

GC: But I thought you said he sold--?

RE: He sold his sawmill but he kept--he bought--he and his brother were doing things like logging and hauling ( ) wood and stuff and then he eventually got back into buying a sawmill. And he has now, they have a lumberyard in Sherrills Ford that they dry lumber and kilns and they plain it and do all sorts of different stuff to get it ready for folks to make pallets out of or furniture frames. And he hasn't flown, he retired, he took an early retirement from what was by then US Air ten years ago and he was about fifty then. But I told you that so I could tell you about the land, so in all of that time the land was either being used to--like this land back here. He and his brother, the ones who had cut these trees, they planted them back out. They've got another big place over here where they harvested that they let grow up naturally in hardwoods. They had cows. All of this was pasture--

GC: You mean to say that, that part's grown up in hardwoods since they cut it?

RE: It's growing up. It's going to be a long time before it's ready to go but it's, it's growing up.

GC: Yeah, right.

RE: And so, even though his primary source of income was flying planes, we were still doing things that were related to the land. And it's really not been until I guess about twenty years ago that we stopped doing anything with the land other than just having it.

GC: Uh-huh.

RE: We haven't had any cattle in a long long time. They haven't cut any timber off of their land in a long long long time. So right now, it's all just sort of sitting there. Now--

GC: Well and growing and ( ) and stuff.

RE: Growing. Ten years ago, we had two hundred acres rezoned from just a standard basic rural zoning to an industrial, that's over close to CommScope. (coughs) Excuse me. Because he thought then that might where wanted to build a new lumberyard. He ultimately built the lumberyard somewhere else in Sherrills Ford. And that land's still there and it either has trees still growing on it or there's about a ten-acre field that somebody farms and grows grains. We don't but we rent it out. And I get to go dove hunting there. That's my dove field, which is a rare commodity. But that--if we were to do anything, developing land or using the land for anything other than what it is would, would happen(??) there I suspect.

GC: Yeah. It's right next to CommScope.

RE: It's close by. But we don't--it's never been on the market; we've never tried to sell it to anyone. We've had some people call and ask about it before. We've always said we're not interested.

GC: So, the lumberyard--he's not using, obviously, timber from your own land anymore?

RE: No, it's--the lumber comes in from West Virginia, Virginia, South Carolina; all sorts of different places.

GC: Oh okay. I was talking to the Bumgardners a few days ago who also have a lumberyard.

RE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Well they have a sawmill.

GC: Yeah, they got the whole process. But lumberyard too.

RE: Yeah, yeah you can go and buy lumber. And he--I think that Mr. Bumgardner sends stuff down to Daddy from time to time to have it dried if he's trying to do something particular.

GC: Well does your dad treat it?

RE: No.

GC: Okay, he sends it off for treatment.

RE: Right, he doesn't--the lumber that he does, he doesn't have to treat it but he's got a dry kiln where he runs the lumber through and gets it ready to be made into furniture.

GC: Oh, okay. Right, okay. So, he's dealing with hardwood, stuff that you can make furniture out of?

RE: Uh-huh. Yeah, he doesn't do any soft wood.

GC: Right. Yeah, I mean the Bumgardners do mostly pine. It's almost all pine.

RE: Uh-huh.

GC: But in the old days he was dealing with pine, right?

RE: Yeah.

GC: ‘Cause he was dealing with stuff that was around here ( ).

RE: He did. He did both. He had a sawmill, oh gosh, all the time when I was in elementary school and high school, ‘cause I started working there when I was twelve years old. Every summer I worked with him. He had either a pulpwood yard where people brought pulpwood in and we put it on ( ) cars and shipped it off or a sawmill in conjunction with that and I did that every summer. And when he was sawing (pause) he sawed, he sawed pine and hardwoods. It seems like it was mostly hardwoods that I can remember. And I’m visualizing in my mind standing at the end of the sawmill catching the lumber and stacking it. It was oaks, maples and things like that.

GC: But he was replanting in time?

RE: Uh-huh. With the one exception.

GC: Right. And did your granddad do replanting or not? He was doing mostly the Pasteur?

RE: Yeah.

GC: So, a lot of the land that you guys still have, is been replanted by your dad at some point? That right?

RE: Uh-huh. But it’s surprising; it really is not that long for a hardwood forest to grow back up. Land that my grandfather had that he cut down, you can walk through now and it’s like a forest, like what we walked through. And the only sign that he ever had cut it are occasional stumps but barbed wire fences that are in the trees, you’ll find little bits of it and Daddy will say, yeah this was a pasture, but over time it’s grown back up and it’s got trees that big around.

GC: Yeah, yeah it is interesting. So that’s hardwood forest essentially?

RE: Yeah.

GC: So, what was the land like that you--when you grew up as a kid--I mean as a kid when you were roaming around outdoors, what were you roaming over?

RE: Land a lot like we walked through. In the house where I grew up there was a field in front of it that we had as a pasture, that had been a cotton field before. And behind us was a ( ) of a stretch of woods that went probably a mile, straight back to another road and there was this land that I could walk to and at that time, instead of being forty acres, was about seventy acres. So,

there was a lot of it. And then we had down below where pasture was, there was another big stretch of bottom land that had big trees and a big nice creek and I roamed all--I could get all of those places just by walking and I did all of that.

GC: And do you still ever go to those same places?

RE: Yeah. Now that big unbroken stretch is no longer unbroken. There's a house--two houses that have been built there that have--one of those guys has cut a lot of that for pasture. Horses, he raises horses. And then the bottom lands, they're still there but ( ) them now is one of the real high-end lake developments that's there, that's just been put in so that's changed the character of that a lot. But no, I take great delight in being going--tramping over the same places with my family that I did when I was young and finding trees in the woods with my initials that I carved in when I was a kid.

GC: And what were your favorite places? (pause)

RE: Well, I'm pretty close to one of them. This really was a nice place I liked a lot because of the big poplar trees there that were here. I liked that and I like the ponds before they dried up when the drought was here. I spent a lot of time here. I went squirrel hunting here, I went fishing in the ponds, I went frog gigging in the ponds. It was a great place for a boy who liked nature to be able to explore and it was all fenced in then so there were cattle there too.

GC: In the woods?

RE: Yeah but remember that was a big field and that's a big field. And as I grew older, I had a lot of responsibility for keeping the cattle, hay's spread, and making sure the barn had feed in it and all of that. So, I was here a lot doing different things. And my, my parents would make me drive before I had a license. I would drive a truck and go around, and I had a motorcycle. I'd ride from place to place to do things. The population was so much smaller in Catawba County then. We've really had tremendous population growth in the last twenty-some years. It had a different feel to it then, it was much more country. I wouldn't let my child now drive down the road at thirteen, which is what--

GC: You were doing.

RE: Yeah.

GC: So that's neat. So, you were in this place a lot and picked it out as a place you'd like to live then were able to do that?

RE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

GC: Even though the woods has changed some but, but it's--

RE: But not really.

GC: It's very recognizable.

RE: Yeah.

GC: Now frog gigging

RE: Giggin', giggin'

GC: Giggin'

RE: Giggin', G-I-G-G-I-N.

GC: Okay, explain that to me.

RE: Well, (pause) they make things that are gigs. They are metal spearheads with tines on the end of them. Three or four or five depending on what kind you buy. And you mount those to a handle, and you go around a pond edge at night in a boat or in waders or something and you shine the lights. And this is in the days before bullfrogs became almost non-existent, so when you see the bullfrogs, the great big you gig them and then you cut their legs and you're getting frog legs is what you're doing. You know that's frog giggin', classic frog giggin' and I did that. But when I got older, I figured out that you could also go around with a .22 rifle and shine the lights on them and shoot the frogs and that was a whole lot easier and plus it had the advantage of killing the frogs automatically rather than ( ).

GC: But could you still get the legs though?

RE: Yeah!

GC: Oh, okay. So, you didn't just blow it to oblivion.

RE: Oh no. No, a .22 is a very small little bullet.

GC: Right. And so, you could still locate it and stuff?

RE: Sure.

GC: Wow.

RE: As a matter of fact, the first, one of the first dates that my wife and I had in Chapel Hill--you know where 54 is coming into Chapel Hill?

GC: Yeah!

RE: And just as you get to Carrboro on old 54, there's a big pond over on the left, going in--it's a park. I don't remember the name of it. It was new in '85 and Cynthia and I met. And we went out there one day and there were frogs everywhere, huge bullfrogs! I just could not get over how many bullfrogs there were. And they had signs that said no fishing, but I told Cynthia, "It didn't say anything about no frog giggin'." (laughs) So we went back that night and I--or sometime after. I can't imagine I had a frog giggin' in my, a frog gigger in my apartment in Chapel Hill but I got it all together. But we went back, and gigged frogs and I had folks in our grad program that came over and ate with us, frog legs, that was one of our first dates. She stuck with me.

GC: Wow. Yeah, I was going to say the relationship survived that early process so that's good. (laughs) Where's Cynthia from?

RE: Cynthia is the daughter of a career marine, so she is--

GC: So, she moved around.

RE: Cynthia explain where you're from.

CE: I'm from everywhere.

RE: You probably can't hear?

GC: We were ju--he was just recalling an early frog giggin' experience that he took you on.

CE: He did frog gig with me. He gigged and I watched.

GC: (laughs) In Carrboro huh?

CE: Yes, in the city pond I guess it was. But it wasn't a gun and there was no sign that said no frog gigging.

GC: Right, that's what he was going--

CE: We did that and then we actually, we ate the legs. He cooked the legs for us. And some friends from grad school who had never had the opportunity to have frog legs ate them. So--

GC: You'd never had 'em?

CE: No, no.

GC: How were they? I've never had them.

CE: They were plain, kind of like chicken. White meat you know. It's what everybody says, how snake is kind of like chicken; how rabbit is sort of like chicken.

GC: Right, right.

CE: But I still wouldn't order it in a restaurant because frog legs is not something I think I would want to eat, although it's probably not much different than any other sort of meat I guess.

GC: Right.

CE: See, the thing that surprised me, and a friend had noticed, was after he cleaned them and had them in the bowl. He soaked them in salt water and something in the salt reacts with the muscles so even though it's just laying there it'll still jerk like that. And you'd think it was alive and I remember that surprising me that it still moved around like that.

GC: (laughs)

CE: Even though it wasn't attached, how it still jerked when you put it in that salt water.

GC: Yeah, I've had rat. I don't--

RE: Rat?

GC: --think it tastes like chicken. We were talking about how it tastes like chicken.

CE: You've had rat?

GC: Uh-huh.

CE: Why?

GC: I was in Thailand.

CE: Well.

GC: Rat, you know sometimes they eat rat. It didn't taste like chicken though, it tasted pretty bad(??).

CE: I haven't eaten any meat that I thought was real--but I have--frog has probably been the oddest thing. I mean I've had rabbit.

GC: Uh-huh.

CE: I don't know if I've had squirrel. Remember--?

GC: Do you squirrel hunt?

RE: I don't know, but I used to.

GC: But you did.

RE: Oh, I did a lot.

GC: Yeah.

RE: We had squirrel pie.

CE: His mom, his great-great-grandmother, his great-grandmother made squirrel pie. Did you tell that story about the sister, her husband, he was a football coach and sort of a big fella' and liked to eat a lot and he was over at his house and it looked like chicken pie on the counter and he was really into eating it and he said, "Boy maw, this is good chicken pie!" and she told him it was squirrel.

GC: (laughs)

CE: He wouldn't have been able to enjoy without eating much(??) ( ) squirrel pie but I never have, had that.

GC: Wow, squirrel pie. So that's usually what you do with it?

RE: That's what they always did. My maw would make squirrel pie and my great-aunt Una May she'd fry squirrel and that was good too but she could fry anything. She was a good cook.

GC: Uh-huh.

CE: ( ). But we don't--I don't cook and clean. I never grew up knowing how to do that and that's not something I--I'd much rather go to Harris Teeter and buy it in saran wrap and cook it and it seems unkind to kill something--

GC: And just leave it?

CE: --and not do anything with it, that's exactly right.

RE: This is like, those ( ).

CE: ( ) yeah, they do summer and fall, they do quail and pheasant(??). And one of them was better than the other. I forget which one.

RE: You like the pheasant best.

CE: But I was surprised, they were really good. The kids really liked pheasant which was surprising. Okay, I'm going to run get Emily.

RE: Okay. We'll see you in a little while. (pause)

GC: So, you've hunted squirrel, rabbit. Did you hunt rabbit?

RE: No. One or two times I did. I had a great-uncle, I had a great-uncle that lived right down the road here who was a very very well-known beagle breeder.

GC: Oh wow.

RE: And he had a twenty-some acre enclosure, chicken-wire enclosure that he trained his dogs in. And he used to pay me a dollar a rabbit if I'd catch them in rabbit traps for him and I would do that. And they now, this isn't a side, but the Beagle Club in Maiden is now paid ten dollars a rabbit, which is a tremendous amount to me. But, he, he lent a cousin of mine, a dog or dogs one time to see if we'd like rabbit hunting and there just weren't enough rabbits around for us to--

GC: Not enough to do.

RE: --for us to do anything. I've never even fired at a rabbit in my life.

GC: A trap but not--?

RE: Uh-huh. That's a reflection of how land use is changed though. If you're looking for different ways of measuring the impact of changing land use, it would be the small game population; what species have gone up; what things have gone down.

GC: Well what do you think of that?

RE: Oh, quail are almost gone, and I think that's almost entirely a function of the ways in which land use has changed. And also, as people have moved into country and brought their cats with them. Cats are really bad towards small game populations. And the availability of food for things like raccoon populations to grow and they're bad for quail and rabbits and anything small ( ) ground. But, well when this field up here was worked and that one was worked and there were small field that joined the woods and they had hedge rows and things, that's prime quail ( )--what am I trying to say, habitat.

GC: Uh-huh.

RE: And there were enormous quail cubbies over there, just huge. And they're gone. You hear just one or two calling very infrequently. Plus, there were a lot of people here who hunted quail and they probably hunted more heavy than they should.

GC: But doves, there apparently still are?

RE: Yeah, still lots of those. They're a migratory bird and the sorts of farming that people are doing now, lots of small grain farming with big fields, that's perfect for dove.

GC: So basically, you're seeing a rise in species that (pause) thrive in this newer kind of habitat and a decline in one that depended on an older ( ).

RE: Yeah, there were--if there were deer here when I was young, I don't know about it. I never saw deer tracks. I never saw deer. I never heard of anybody seeing--you never saw any dead on the side of the road. The deer, that's an entirely new coming.

GC: Interesting.

RE: I don't know, I don't know what prompted that, where they came from, why they're so plentiful now.

GC: Yeah, it's interesting isn't it? I mean, it's all over the east coast and really suburban areas you get--there's this huge deer population boom.

RE: Uh-huh. And then people say that they're just being squeezed so that they're more obvious now.

GC: But you're saying they weren't there.

RE: No. I mean you couldn't spend as much time in the woods as I did and not see deer tracks if there were deer around and they weren't.

GC: That's interesting. So, I mean it's not really a switch from more natural to less natural, it's just a switch from different kinds of uses by people?

RE: Uh-huh.

GC: Which leads to different kinds of animals making a home there.

RE: Right.

GC: You say there aren't many bullfrogs anymore?

RE: No.

GC: Wonder why that is? Too much giggin'?

RE: No, I don't think so. You know worldwide, there's a problem with frogs and amphibians in general.

GC: That's true.

RE: I don't know. In the ( ) there's a bullfrog but he's a little one. And (pause) very very rarely in the ponds down there we'll hear one but very rare.

GC: So that might be a global impact, might be something larger than this region.

RE: Uh-huh.

GC: Wonder what that is? I don't understand that.

RE: I don't know. It's shocking though to remember how I used to go around and get a lot. You're hear them calling all over the pond and they're just not there now.

GC: So, you've seen a lot of environmental change?

RE: Uh-huh.

GC: Though there's been a lot of continental continuity too. I mean would you say it's more the same or more different than it was when you were a kid, around, you know, the part that you know best?

RE: It's, it's--there are certainly lots of fields that I go by now that are full of houses that were farm fields when I was young. And there are (pause) three that I can think of right now that I have hunted in before where there were, are houses--four that are houses now. So that, that part of it is a radical change but--and the development on the lake is new. There's a lot more of that. Crescent has really opened a lot of land to be developed that they had not before. But if you, if you're not talking about right on the lake and just the sort of proliferation of housing developments, it still looks a good bit like it did. I walk through the woods around here. They're still a lot like they were then.

GC: Uh-huh. There's a sort of natural landscape is still quite similar even though there are more houses around. Well, I'm not done but I need to pee.

RE: Okay.

GC: So, I need to give you--oh yeah I switched the plugs.

RE: ( ).

GC: Yeah.

RE: They all look like Catawba County.

GC: Oh! (laughs) So they do. Well I'll be.

RE: Yeah.

GC: That's a good collection of Catawba County shaped rocks. Should be in the Genus Book of World Records for largest collection ( ).

RE: I know. That's not even all of them. It's amazing how once you find--you start looking for something like that they just sort of start leaping out at you.

GC: Sure. I guess that's king of a--a shape that rocks come fairly often.

RE: Not only--they have to look like the county, and they have to be able to stand up.

GC: Right.

RE: My two best ones are not out here. One's in my office and one's in there on the bookshelf. They're just remarkable.

GC: Really close resemblance huh?

RE: Um-hum.

GC: Well let's see. What else do I need to add?

RE: I just feel like I've been wondering all over the place talking.

GC: Well I've been wondering with you. That's the way we're supposed to do it. What we were talking about some favorite places. I think that's a good thing to talk a little more about. I mean talk like here, around--now that you've made your home here, what are some of your favorite spots. Like places we went out and looked at today or whatever. (Cynthia Eades enters in background)

RE: The rope swing, that hole where the steep banks are, and the azaleas are and the ferns. I like that a lot.

GC: Describe that place a little bit.

RE: Okay. Well you, you leave my house and walk out through the woods, down through a holler and then you get up on a ridge line; you follow the ridge line down and as you go down that line, to your left, there is a spring and it gets very very steep there on the left in a holler. And there are large white oak and red oak trees around there, mature maples, poplars. Then the understory is saspas trees(??) and wild azaleas, some sourwoods and it's just--it's attractive, I think. There's some large old hollies in there. It's pretty and then at the bottom two different

hollies get together and there's a small, what was a pond all of my life, and then last summer in the drought it dried up; springs dried, went dry for the first time that I've ever known about. And now the only time it has water in it is when you've had a lot of rain and the rain sort of catches--that's one of my favorite places. If you want me to keep talking about that, I'll tell you more favorite places.

GC: Yeah, do.

RE: I will. Just, just a short distance from here is the old house. It is the house my father's mother grew up in. That's the Brown family home place and it's fallen in now, largely because of me. I've torn it down bit by bit over the years. I have all of the bricks from the chimney, I've done things with. I've got wood out of it. I've incorporated into different places. Rocks from the rock walls around the house I've hauled up here and done things with. But it's--I like to go down there. The house if falling down, the granary and the barns and the other outbuilding have fallen down or are falling in and--but there are some great big trees there and I really like to sit there. That's been in the family a long long long time, since the 1700s. And I like to think about who all's lived there and what they've done. Then back behind that house is a Terrapin Creek and there's a huge sheet of granite or some other very hard rock all just below the surface there and Terrapin Creek is running across that. It's just skinned across the surface; big wide expanse of it. And that's a really pretty place. I like to go there. And my other favorite natural place is just on the other side of Terrapin Creek, a place that we call the "Fed Sherrill" place because the Sherrill Family lived there, or Fed Sherrills and his house is there. It's--I don't know when it was last lived in, a long long time ago. And I've done the same thing there. Some of the blue boards that are in the bathroom, where you just were there, those blue boards came out of that house. Cynthia and I hauled them out a long way through the woods, a board at a time. And that land, that's a large track of land. There's four hundred and some acres there. And it has really nice creeks in it and big rock outcropping. It's just a nice place to go and hike. And those parcels of land are essentially exactly the way they were when I was a child, so they really have not changed much. The old home place, I can tell what was a field when I was young, I can remember it essentially been filled--it pretty much has grown up in volunteer pines now. But that's been such a gradual process and so much of it happened when I was off in school and things that it's really hard for me unless I try to remember that it was once something other than that. But those are nice places.

GC: And those were all--that's all family land?

RE: The Fed Sherrill place yes, is immediate family. The old Brown home place is owned by my--a great-aunt. My grandfather was buying it and he was killed in a car wreck. And when he was killed, one of his brothers-in-law just to help everyone, stepped up and bought that. That's seventy acres that he bought, and his children own it now.

GC: So, it's--you said your grandparents--no your--who lived there originally?

RE: It's been in the Brown family since the 1700s. And we have the genealogy in the house. I could go get it out, but a Joseph Brown built the house, the first house there. And that would have been 1780, somewhere around there. And they lived there unbroken. His name was Joseph who he had a son, William, who had a son, Joseph, who had a son, William; just like that on and on until my great-grandfather who arrived who was Joseph William Brown. And he lived there and grew up there with his parents, a Simeon and Margaret Brown. Simeon is the man who built our tent at the campground where you'd been.

GC: Oh, okay.

RE: And when Simeon died, Joseph the--his mother moved in with him and he took care of her so when she died, he ended up with that property and that's where he raised his children. One of them was my grandmother. That one, that's her. It's Thelma.

GC: Thelma. Wow, so that's--is that the earliest--I imagine it is the earliest record of your people in this area.

RE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. The Eades' are relatively recent arrivals. They probably weren't here, that I know about, until the 19th century. But the Browns were here long ( ).

GC: And they were English immigrants?

RE: Yea--Joseph's--Joseph William, my great-grandfather, his (pause) his mother's a direct descendant from Adam Sherrill, who was the first guy over in 1747 in Catawba County.

GC: Sherrill as in Sherrills Ford? Named for him?

RE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. And so, they were English, Scotch and if you've ever seen Paul Beatty's family genealogy book through the years of Jamie and John Robinson, I don't know if you have or not.

GC: I haven't.

RE: But if you have, remember that line of demarcation they talk about "lake people" and "non-lake people." Almost all of the non-lake people are in that book because the families were so big and were so interconnected, we're all in it. If you were here in 1959, you're in that book, almost. If you're not, you're not.

GC: That's interesting. That's a pretty clear demarcation right there.

RE: Uh-huh. Yeah, it is. (laughs)

GC: And is almost everybody interconnected in some way?

RE: Uh-huh.

GC: Everybody who's in that book, is that it?

RE: Oh yeah. I mean if they're in the book, they're related by definition. It's through one line of Robinson family line.

GC: Oh okay, just one big family.

RE: Yeah, and the Robinsons and the Sherrills, there were some sort of parallel lines there. It's, it's very interesting ( ).

GC: Yeah, I should look at that.

RE: He and his two aunts spent about twenty-seven years working on that book. It took a long time.

GC: Paul is(??) ( ).

RE: Yes, he is. He really, really is.

GC: Let's see. (pause) Now, you talk about your appreciation of the land and relationship with it, do you feel like other people continue to have, or in the area continue to have strong relationships to the land and the place and get out and do stuff around or has that changed over, over your experience time, over your experience. I mean in terms of what people intend to do outdoors and stuff like that.

RE: Uh-huh, yeah. I think people in general spend less time outdoors than they did when I was younger. I know my children certainly don't. Oren, as I said earlier tonight when we're walking through the woods, he is now at the age where he is out walking with the dog in the woods exploring, doing things. But that's relatively recent for him and I don't--I hope he likes that and will continue to do that, but there are so many other things to occupy your attention. Now I don't know if he will ever be as immersed in that as I was. Now my sister Barbara, the one who's

closest in age to me, she was never like that. She was a girl and maybe that's a girl-boy thing. I don't know. But I can't imagine my daughter Emily spending a lot of times in the woods. When she has friends over sometimes, they'll go out and explore and do things but they don't--that's not something they come home and see, think of as the first in line of choices they have or how they'd entertain themselves for the afternoon, which it was for me.

GC: Right. So, it's really society as a whole being more inward oriented and more, more inward entertainments to do.

RE: Uh-huh, yeah. If I had had PlayStation and those sorts of things I don't know what I would have thought.

GC: Right. What about air conditioning?

RE: It's a blessing.

GC: Right, I'm sure it is, but how does it affect that kind of--I mean, like if rather than being out on the porch you're going to be in the air conditioning right?

RE: Well, ( ) will say and sometimes I'll come home ( ) go outside and play or on a Saturday I'll say, "Go outside. It's a beautiful day." And they'll say, "It's hot." We didn't have air conditioning when I was little and maybe, so it didn't matter to me whether I was inside or out. I remember when we got it for the first time and even then, it was a window unit

GC: When was that?

RE: that sort of kept the middle of the house freezing and the rest of the house not so much. It was before I was in the eighth grade sometime, but not long before.

GC: So, it was kind of a gradual transition to--?

RE: Yeah. We didn't have central air until that year when I was a freshman in high school and Momma and Daddy built the new house. That was the first time we had it.

GC: Yeah, I grew up without air conditioning. It was not much good either in or out. (laughs)

RE: No. I remember very well trying to go to bed at night and being so hot you just could not stand it and Momma would put washcloths on our foreheads.

GC: Yeah, I've talked to folks that really why they got the air conditioning was so they could go to sleep.

RE: And I really, really like to sleep in cool rooms so.

GC: Rather than hot.

RE: Yeah. If I had it, one of the things I'd do if I were changing this house earlier is I would get a separate air conditioner just for the part of the house that's our bedroom and bathroom because I turn the air down so low at night and we're really cooling the big house just to have the bedroom cold.

GC: Yeah.

RE: But I didn't think about that then.

GC: Yeah. I guess I mean by in large older houses were better engineered for the, for air circulation and stuff. I don't know if that, you found that.

RE: Well the house that my grandmother lived in was a house that had been built in about 1930 something. And it didn't have real high windows, or it was, it was a new sort of modern style house.

GC: Yeah, but not so much.

RE: But I've noticed in Hickory in the Harper House that maybe we've talked about before that was built in 1887, had high ceiling and windows and all. It stays very cool, even--

GC: Hot.

RE: It's hot upstairs but downstairs it's, it's comfortable.

GC: Yeah, that's I mean, our old house was like that. I mean it was old enough--the heat would rise off of you to some extent. So, tell me, let's talk a little bit about how you became a lawyer, went away and got your education, coming from here, deciding to go away and came back; that whole process.

RE: Well--

GC: I mean have your, have members of your family done something similar before?

RE: No, I was the first one. And I was an indifferent student all through high school. I didn't particularly care much about academics. I guess I was one of those kids that would drive their parents crazy. If I liked it and interested in it, I'd get an A. If I didn't like it, I didn't care, I didn't care what I got. And my parents had not been to college. No one in the family had and I don't really think that any of knew what you're supposed to do to get ready to go to college but whatever it was I didn't do it. And so, you know I got to be a senior in high school and really hadn't thought anything about that. I know there's a Haywood Technical College--

Minidisc 1 ends; Minidisc 2 begins.

RE: --up in Haywood County, they have a sawmill program and I thought that's I want to go do. Boy am I glad I decided not to do that. But I ended up just sort of, for lack of anything else to do, I went to Mitchell Community College in Statesville. And again, just sort of followed that same pattern of doing okay in what I wanted to do and not so well in anything I wasn't interested in. But what I did do there was start to meet other people who were--and some of my friends had went away to four-year colleges--Paul for example had--and I started meeting people through a variety of different things that were away at schools and somewhere along the line I figured out that I needed to get an education so I went from there to Chapel Hill and when I finished getting my undergraduate degree I went to grad school there and then I came out and I worked for Governor Martin for a couple of years in Raleigh. He had just been elected and I was already by then interested in politics and that was, that actually was one of the ways I met lots of young bright people who were going to Duke and Wake Forest and Carolina and places that I really had never even thought, that had any interest.

GC: What were you doing for him?

RE: Well, I was an advance(??) man. I traveled all around with him. I would go places before he went to make sure everything was ready and plan the trips out and that sort of thing. And then I'd go with him, travel. It was a great thing for someone like me who's interested in politics and the state and the people and the different areas because I've been in almost all of the hundred counties.

GC: Yeah, you really got to know North Carolina.

RE: I did! And it was a lot, a lot of fun. And while I was working with him, I decided that no matter what we did almost everything eventually ended up going through or being influenced by lawyers. And that's what led me to decide I wanted to go to law school. Thank you very much sweetheart. And so I talked it over with Cynthia--I was married by then--and decided that I--

GC: You met her in undergrad?

RE: I met her in grad school. She had gone to Wake Forest undergrad and then came to Chapel Hill where I was then, and we went to our masters of public administration together. And, so I decided I would apply to Wake Forest and to Carolina and see what happened. And I really did not want to go to Carolina because I'd been there, and I'd already gotten two degrees from there and I thought I'd like to do something else. And the long and short of it is, I applied to Wake and before I got around to applying to Carolina, I was accepted at Wake so I ended up never even applying to Carolina and went to Wake. And then I got that first tuition bill and I thought, "Boy, that was the stupidest thing you ever did." (laughs) Even that worked out because after my first semester I got a scholarship to Wake and that helped a whole lot. But (pause) by then I was twenty-seven and I was old enough and mature enough to find myself and so I did and I did very well in law school, which sort of paved the way for everything else that. Law school is very competitive and there are so many lawyers now that unless you do well in law school, you really don't have nearly as many opportunities as you might expect. And I finished in the top ten of my class and--

GC: Wow.

RE: --which pretty much meant I could have done whatever I wanted in terms of the legal job. And did my clerkship, which is a--you have to had done very well to get a federal clerkship and I did that.

GC: In Charlotte.

RE: In Charlotte with Judge Potter. The things, you know Jim Baker, judge and all that.

GC: Okay.

RE: And Patrick, Carpenter and Dixon where I practice now in Hickory was the three senior partners. Patrick had gone to Columbia Law School and Harper and Dixon had gone to Harvard.

GC: Oh wow.

RE: There are fourteen--there are thirteen lawyers now. There were fourteen up until a couple of months ago and out of that fourteen four of them were Morehead Scholars. It's a very good firm.

GC: High powered.

RE: And when I discovered that they were there, and they were doing the sort of work I wanted to do I thought this really could not be more perfect. It's in Catawba County, it does what I want to do and if they all hire me, I'm going there. And they hired me so.

GC: So, what do they do?

RE: There are about three of them that do almost exclusively litigation of various sorts. We represent a whole lot of insurance companies. We're what are called defense lawyers. All of those billboards and yellow page adds you see where they lawyers say hurt in an accident, free consultation; we're the lawyers on the other side.

GC: You're the opposite side of the fence.

RE: They're plaintiff lawyers and we're defense lawyers. And then there are several folks who do a whole lot of estate planning work and the rest of us are just sort of general business estate work and I personally do a whole lot of local government since I'm the county attorney. That takes up a lot of my time. I've been doing that since 1994.

GC: Being the county attorney?

RE: Uh-huh. Which was something I always wanted to be able to do, but the guy that was county attorney then is my father's age. They grew up together. And I had thought that he'd be doing it forever. That was my expectation but I thought that maybe, maybe by the time I was fifty or so he would have aged out and they'd be ready for somebody else but nothing was ever certain and it ended up that when I was thirty-three I was able to do it; so a lot sooner than I thought but that's been fine and rewarding to do that. Because that lets me do a lot about land use in Catawba County and think about those things and try to, try to really, really think about what the role of government is and what we ought to be doing to try to control land use and how to balance the rights of people and the needs of people. My, my expec--my experiences being that when it comes to doing what people want to do on their land, everyone's a libertarian, but when it comes to stopping a neighbor from doing things, they're authoritarian. That really and truly is how it works, and you have to try and balance that, which is hard.

GC: Yeah, it's not in my back yard unless it's really in my backyard.

RE: (laughs) That's right, that's right. And Catawba County is such an interesting place too because there is this--we're a big county; Long Island, Sherrills Ford; Terrell really are nothing like Mountain View and Vale way out there. They are completely different places. And you have all these people down here, all of the lake people that have one set of concerns. And to them one of the chief attributes of the county may be my field, my dove field. They get to ride by that

every day and think this is a nice rural area. Now if I want to put houses there, they don't like that. Without--I think many times they never ever stop to think that the field they live in was somebody else's dove field. It's just like a disconnect. And I think I told you at camp meeting that I had sat at tables and talked with nice, reasonable, good, hearty people who would never ever think of coming up to me and saying, "Robert, you have $400,000 in the bank and we want to take 200,000 of it for the community benefit." But they don't think at all, well saying we have 400 acres of land and we want to pass a rule that cuts its value in half, for the community to benefit. They don't see that as being the same thing and it really is.

GC: Right. Oh yeah. (pause) So, yeah, so you deal with that--a lot of different people's situations that that work. And that's, that's part of why you wanted to, to do that, to take on that responsibility.

RE: Uh-huh.

GC: Well, that's interesting. And you just--did you move back after you finished law school, move back to Catawba County?

RE: Uh-huh. I always knew I was going to do that. I never ever thought I was not. Cynthia says she can remember from the first day she met me in grad school thinking whatever girl ends up with him is going to have a hard time 'cause they're going to have to go to this place called Catawba County--

GC: (laughs)

RE: --and love it.

GC: That's funny.

RE: She did.

GC: So apparently you weren't shy about letting people know that that was your plan.

RE: No! I thought Catawba County was the greatest place on Earth. I still do. It is a remarkable place. Everyone I'm sure has a pride of birthplace and their own bias about where they grew up and the home. I think even discounting that objectively, there's a lot going on here that makes this a good place to live.

GC: Like what do you mean? I mean you've talked about it a lot.

RE: Camp meet! You can't find camp meeting everywhere. Camp meeting is a wonderful thing! The people are good people, they are industrious, they work hard, they're civic minded (pause) there's--we're close enough to Charlotte that we can go and do urban things if we want to but we're far enough away that we are still in a rural area relatively, Lake Norman's a good asset to have, the mountains are close by, there is a high degree of sophistication in Catawba County in some quarters than I think people would expect to find. Part of that is because Lenoir-Rhyne's here I think. And that's another unusual thing. I mean not every small town has a coll--

CE: ( ).

RE: Okay. We'll be right in. Plus, one of the things that makes camp meeting really great and living here great and going to church where I go, to be as good as it is, and this is something that's not related all to the place, but I have a really, really good family and I recognize that. All my aunts and uncles and all those folks are good people and they've treated me very well and get along and we don't have family feuds or anything like that. And that could have happened as easily as in Pender County as it did here but that's--

GC: Well I'm sure it did actually have something to do with the place though 'cause this is where it happened. So, I mean this is where they made their living and made their life and raised each other.

RE: They're waving at us to come in and eat.

GC: Yeah, we better stop. I'm sorry I just--

Pause in Recording.

GC: Oh, I'm fine.

CE: Oh, I was going to say if you were cold, I could offer you some coffee.

GC: Oh, I'm good. Thanks.

RE: Are you going to have coffee?

CE: Yes.

RE: Could I have hot chocolate?

CE: Yes.

RE: It's cool. Are you sure you don't--?

GC: It's cool. Shall we go inside?

RE: Sure if it's not too much to--

Pause in Recording.

RE: It's pretty quiet in here.

GC: (laughs) Yeah, it is quiet. Well, (pause) (telephone rings) Do you need to get that?

RE: No, Cynthia will grab that.

GC: So, we were talking a little bit about the relationship between your work and your appreciation of place and land. So do you feel like that is working, working in that capacity has changed or broadened your perspective on land and land use or has it confirmed things that you already felt from your own personal experience or tended to add new, new ways of seeing it; just from dealing with all these different peoples' situations.

RE: Yes, it's changed the way I've thought about it I think. Prior to actually having responsibility for trying to formulate rules that balance the needs people have, that I was--would have more readily come down always on the side of private property. (pause) Now though, I recognize that it can be difficult to try and, and balance private property rights, which I still think are very very important, against what really are community assets. And there's--what makes that difficult is that, that analogy I used before about the four-hundred-acre field, it really does create community assets in a way that is unlike the $400,000 in the bank.

GC: Right. They aren't getting anything from that.

RE: ( ). You cannot get away from that. And in some instances, people have recognized that and by private contract agreement taken that into account. For example, all the communities in the mountains that have view easements where you can't block someone's view. And the shorthand answer to that sort of balance is, yes that four hundred acres creates open space and pretty view and all of that and it is an important community asset and if the community values it, the community should pay for it.

GC: Right, right.

RE: And that I wish happened more often. I wish Catawba County and other counties in North Carolina, local governments, had the resources to go out and do exactly that. We'd all be better off. Of course, we've got a tax rate of X number of cents on the dollar. If we wanted to set a tax rate high enough, we'd have the resources to go do that. The fact that our commissioners don't reflects that people tell them they want taxes to be low, which translates into I guess that they don't want those sorts of things enough to go out and pay for them.

GC: Right. I mean that's the direct consequence of that.

RE: I don't know if they would though if they thought that were the only way of having those assets protected. If they think they can pass a zoning rule that keeps my hypothetical guy from doing anything to his four hundred acres, they've gotten the same thing without it costing them any money.

GC: That's true, that's true. And I guess it also just has to do with what kind of place people, people think it is. I mean they'll take it for granted if they think it's a place that's just going to have open space and stuff like that, right?

RE: Uh-huh.

GC: I mean that gets to what you were saying over at camp meeting when you said that Catawba County's an urban county but people, a lot of people still think they're living in a rural county.

RE: That's absolutely true.

GC: I mean explain that a little bit.

RE: When you look at our population densities and the rate of population growth, which as fast-growing counties in North Carolina grow--go, is not that high but it's still high enough that people notice. And in pockets(??) of the county it's very high. When you look at all those things; out roads, the proximity of urban areas within the county to each other, Hickory, Conover, Newton, all sort of flow together. We really are an urban county. Especially, that's especially obvious if you ride Catawba County up through Alexander County; very quickly you recognize there's a difference, that one is more rural than the other. But a lot of what has made us an urban county has happened in particular parts of the county; Mountain View, outside Hickory, Highway 16 North, outside Conover, Lake Norman, Lake Hickory. So, you have areas where there's quick, fast-passed growth, lots of people moving and sort of scattered among those places that really have not changed that much. And since overall, it sort of looks like the country, I think people think we're still living in a rural area. But I think the reason they think that is because they don't see other places, they don't have anything to compare this to. If they spent

more time on a motorcycle riding through the boonies the way I do, they'd see we really have changed a lot.

GC: I mean in a way, Catawba County compared to some other counties that might have been principally agricultural or something, I mean for a long time there's been a lot that wasn't really rural about Catawba County, right, because there've been a lot of industry of one kind or another even if it's small.

RE: That's right. A mill hill is not a rural area. Now what made the Long Island Mill Village different from say one in Mount Holly or Belmont or Monroe is that it was in a rural area. There weren't any other urban areas anywhere around.

GC: So the region was rural but there was these--

RE: Sure.

GC: --high density uses.

RE: Uh-huh. I just today heard somebody say, talking about the wedding, my sister's wedding yesterday, as they were riding down to the wedding, they drove past a sign on a church marquee that said pinto bean supper and gave a date. And said you know when you're in the country when the churches are having pinto bean suppers, which is what I'm saying. People still think we're out in the country and you know we're twenty minutes at most from Mooresville, fifteen minutes from Statesville. I work in Hickory; I'm thirty-five minutes from there; on a bad day, an hour away from Charlotte. It's hard to reconcile all that with being a rural area.

GC: Right. I mean people do come here thinking that's what they're coming to, to some extent, right?

RE: Yes, absolutely.

GC: Which is where you get your conflict

RE: Exactly.

GC: Because people came here because they wanted to move to the country and then if it's not going to be the country, they're going to be pissed off.

RE: It's the age-old thing of I'm here, I don't want to go anywhere else.

GC: Shut the door. (laughs)

RE: Yep. And we have that a lot in Sherrills Ford when the county sponsored the Sherrills Ford Small Area Plan and had the committee there of community people to try and come up with a vision of what they want their county to look like. What we found--that process, process has not ended yet, it's almost at the end--but what we found in Sherrills Ford, Balls Creek, Mountain View, Oxford; those are the small areas of the county that are furthest along in developing their plan. And what we've found is that all of those communities valued the rural nature and they are making land use, zoning, control recommendations designed to keep the appearance of a rural area. I don't think people had anticipated that, at how many of those folks came and said we want low growth, big lots--

GC: Uh-huh.

RE: --low density. So that is what's valued. And another way of telling that is every one of those small area plan reports that has been put together thus far has a cover sheet on it. And all of the pictures have been about the same, they've been of rural scenes.

GC: Right.

RE: When they're in Sherrills Ford they don't take a picture of the lake, they take a picture of a cow pasture. And that's the same all over the county and it really, if you just looked at that, you'd think we were a radically different county than we are.

GC: I mean it's interesting that, I mean basically they're going to preserve, that kind of regulation will preserve the, as you say, the appearance of a rural landscape but not necessarily the function of a rural landscape right because

RE: Right.

GC: I mean it'll basically be residential for people working elsewhere?

RE: Uh-huh. When people say they want two-acre lots, that's supposed to create green space and openness and all that but in Orange County right now they're going through some of these same studies and ways of thinking about something and they've had similar regulations for a while. And one of the county commissioners down there was quoted in the news and Observer the other day saying, "Two-acre lots really that's not meaningful open space."

GC: No.

RE: Yeah, on every lot you maybe have one and three-quarters of an acre open space, but if it's a lot, the people aren't--it's not community.

GC: Right.

RE: And what we're trying to think about is, are there ways of saying to someone who owns fifty acres and wants to develop it, you can build X number of houses. Whether that's twenty-five or that's forty-five, but we want you to cluster that and put it together in such a way so there is true open space.

GC: Right.

RE: I've been county attorney for eight years now and even before when I was in public administration in school, I've learned now that planning and zoning, all of those things I think have fads. Right now, we're in the smart growth fad. I don't know what it's going to be in four or five years from now, but it seems like about every five years the next big thing comes along that's supposed to solve our problems and Davidson's been struggling with a lot of stuff lately and I don't--as long as people are willing to move to an area and there are people there who are willing to sell land to them, growth is going to occur unless you just say no. And you just can't say now.

GC: Right. I mean so it's a question of managing it?

RE: Uh-huh.

GC: I mean it's still going to happen right?

RE: The whole underlying philosophy being is can a room full of people on a committee manage it better than the market manage it?

GC: Uh-huh.

RE: And I don't know.

GC: Yeah.

RE: Catawba County is not, not an extremely wealthy county. We have lots of people who cannot afford--if it's something like twenty-four percent of Catawba County cannot afford what is defined as a "starter home." So, everything we do that has the effect of pricing homes higher

up on the scale; two-acre lots, more extensive landscaping, all that sort of stuff; you're increasing that percentage of people who can't afford to live here. And is that good or is that bad?

GC: Right. Right, I mean a two-acre lot, I mean that is effectively--it's not shutting the door but it's closing it half-way because a lot of people won't be able to move into an area if it's--

RE: That's what's in place now in Catawba County effectively, is because we have a school capacity tie-in, and--

GC: Sort of ( ), ABFO kind of thing.

RE: We don't have that, ( ),

GC: Not per se.

RE: --we don't, but what we have said is that--and this was meant to be an interim measure, which is supposed to be winding down now but we said, if there's school capacity you can do X, Y and Z, which involves smaller lots. If the school is full, you can do two-acre lots unless you have some public infrastructure and you can reduce it down a little bit more. And since there's not public water and sewer in many places in the county that really means for most of the county, two-acre lots. And it has reduced the rate of growth, no doubt about that.

GC: Yeah, I'm sure. Interesting. So, you're dealing with this stuff all the time?

RE: Every day.

GC: And you wanted to?

RE: I did.

GC: And you enjoy it?

RE: I do.

GC: I mean do you, (pause) do you have to be in the public eye as a part of the job, to a certain extent?

RE: Uh-huh. Yeah, I do. The commissioners meet twice a month.

GC: And you go?

RE: And I go to those and folks call me a lot and ask me questions. Reports call me. In general people have the idea that I'm the county attorney. I man Catawba County's not such a big place that people who pay attention don't know who people are.

GC: They know you.

RE: Now that's detrimental sometimes. Lots of folks think I work for the county so that I can do their wills and things like that if I were to want to.

GC: What is the nature of it? I mean in other words, obviously you still work for the law firm.

RE: Uh-huh. They county is a client.

GC: The county's a--so it's basically they assigned you to do the county load? I mean, except you chose to do it.

RE: Well, actually the way it worked is the chairman of the commissioners called and said would I do it.

GC: Uh-huh.

RE: And I was still an associate then, I wasn't a partner. That was '94 and I didn't start at Patrick, Parker and Dixon until '92 so I hadn't been there very long and I said I sure would like to but let me make certain that the partners think that's okay. Of course, I knew they would and they did and so here it is, eight years later and I'm still doing it.

GC: (pause) Why did they call you to do it? They knew you would--?

RE: Well the commissioners appoint county attorneys. There's a general statute that requires every county to have a county attorney and he is actually the attorney for the commissioners. My true clients are the commissioners. In practice what that means is that I represent all sorts of folks; the county at large. Catawba County has in addition to me, I'm the appointed county attorney, there are four staff attorneys that work full time for the county. Two of those people work in social services and I, I never see them, I never deal with them or talk to them about anything. And the other two work in the county manager's office and one of them works--well I work closely with one or both of them depending on what we're working on. But one of them is assigned to planning and I work a lot with her about things. Why they picked me, it's a political appointment. The commissioners are always going to appoint someone who's of the same party

as they are. Catawba County is a republican county and I'm a republican. And I knew all the commissioners and had worked with them a long time. And I don't know, they didn't say--

GC: Yeah.

RE: --why we want you but that's--

GC: Well, you knew you knew the area and cared about it I suppose.

RE: That's right. I think, I think they want somebody who's a county native and I'm reappointed or not, the first Monday of every December, so I may be about to end my service as county attorney. I don't think so, no one's told me that yet but when this new term starts in December, there won't be any commissioners who were on the commission when I started.

GC: Oh wow. But there's plenty of continuity.

RE: Yeah, there's continuity although the continuity--the guy who was chairman when I was appointed had been, had served already by then fifteen or sixteen years. He finished with a total of twenty. We don't have anyone now who's even--the longest serving people now, I think, have been on there for ten years, so we've gone through a lot of change relatively recently.

GC: Well--

RE: I'm sorry but let me say that, that is--I think people probably do not understand the degree to which county commissioners drive local land use plan and city council folks in the cities. Peoples' thinking about land use planning, zoning rules, controls, what the county ought to do; that is a personal thing and I mean that not in sense that it's private but that it's very much a matter of your own perspective, your experiences and what you think generally about such things. And given that, who those five people are in Catawba County, that makes a difference. There have been several elections where people have run saying the county is to deponing(??) in zoning or they're building requirements are too strict.

GC: ( ).

RE: Had some of those folks won, we'd, we'd be in a different place than we are right now. (coughs) Excuse me. And I just think most people don't even think about that when they're thinking about who they're going to vote for. Even though it's interesting to me and I enjoy it and you obviously enjoy it, most people don't sit around at home at night, on a Sunday night thinking about zoning. And they get mad when it's applied to them. This small area plan tomorrow night the county commissioners will adopt the first of those small area plans and if it's

adopted, the plan precedes the zoning, you have to have a plan and then you zone and the zoning will take a long time to do. Are you about to--?

GC: No, I was just checking it 'cause I thought I might.

RE: But there probably won't be very many people there tomorrow night. (coughs)

GC: What small area is it?

RE: Mountain View. There probably won't be many people there tomorrow night because we've already had one public hearing about it, and this is the second one and we've made some changes to the plan as it was presented to the commissioners. But if the plan is adopted, if it's going to involve large scale re-zonings and I bet when we actually start doing those, we'll have hundreds of people because the rubber will have hit the road.

GC: Yeah, then comes trouble. Absolutely. Yeah, I mean I've seen that plenty of times in Davidson.

RE: Uh-huh.

GC: I mean some processes kind of mulling along for a while and then finally when the outcome's about to come out, then everybody suddenly shows.

RE: And you know, they say over and over and over again no matter what we've done, those people show up at that meeting saying, "I didn't know anything about this."

GC: Right. You didn't tell us.

RE: And that's frustrating.

GC: It is frustrating. I mean if you put it in the paper, you have public hearings, meeting times.

RE: You have community meetings.

GC: Charettes, whatever.

RE: Yeah, we've had some of those. We didn't call them charettes--

Pause in Recording.

GC: Well let's just talk a little bit about camp meeting.

RE: Okay. One of my favorite subjects.

GC: Yeah, talk about camp meeting. How long has your family been going to camp meeting?

RE: Since it started in 1853.

GC: And you're Baptist right?

RE: I am a Baptist, that's right. But--

GC: Was your family always? I mean I'm just curious.

RE: No, no. The Browns were Methodist and they're the ones who built--it's the Brown tent--they're the ones who started us heading out that way. But their family home is closer to the Baptist church than to the Methodist church and (pause) my great-grandfather Joseph William Brown married a Baptist and they actually went to separate churches. She went to the church I go to and he continued to go to the Methodist church.

GC: What's the name of your church?

RE: Olivet Baptist.

GC: Olivet Baptist, right.

RE: It was started in 1833. It's older than the county. And Simeon, the man that started the tent, he sold the land--I used to think he donated it and then I found out later reading the deeds and things that he actually sold it to the Baptist to build their church on. I think it was $25. But as the children grew older, more and more of them opted to stop off at the Baptist church with their mother so they wouldn't have to walk on up the road another mile, or close to it, to get to Concord, the Methodist church. And so my grandmother Brown had started going to the Baptist church as a child and the Eades' were Baptist already so that's where she met my, well I don't know where she met him, but it was a small place but they both went to that church and so we've, we were all Baptist now; as are most all of the Browns. Although Joseph ( ), they're all buried at the Methodist church. All of the Eades' are buried at the Olivet Church. So that's how we started that, we ended up, almost by accident of location, being Baptist.

GC: But then you guys inherited the tent anyway from--

RE: Well it still belongs to Una May.

GC: Oh, okay.

RE: And the way that it worked in my family, the way the tent ownership is kept track of at the campground is there is a list maintained by the secretary of the trustees or the treasurer. And unless the person whose name is on that list presents the keeper of the list a written document directing that the name on the list be changed, it's not changed. So, my great-great-grandfather Simeon built the ten. He died and his widow, my great-great-grandmother moved in with her oldest son who was my great-grandfather and he took care of her. When she died, she left the tent to him. When he and his wife, my great-grandparents, when they died and their children, there were nine of them, they were dividing their estate, their two youngest children, Una May and Eileen asked for the tent and they inherited the tent. Eileen and--

GC: As opposed to inheriting something else.

RE: Other stuff. And Eileen is dead now and Una May is the one who's name is on the list now. And so it owns--it belongs to her but as I said, in other context, she is like a surrogate grandmother to me and so to me, it is exactly as if it was owned by my grandmother and I was going there with my parents and my grandparents.

GC: And your parents--

RE: Oh yes!

GC: --still go? So, and so you've gone your whole life?

RE: Yes.

GC: Every year?

RE: Yes.

GC: And--

RE: I've never missed a year. I've--and since I've moved back to Catawba County until my children started school, I never missed a day. We went every time it was there; we'd go. That's where I was engaged to my wife. I asked her to marry me there in our tent.

GC: Oh wow.

RE: And I think it's--I'm resisting the urge to say the greatest institution in the world, so I'll just say it's the greatest thing in North Carolina I've ever been.

GC: Well why?

RE: Oh 'cause--

GC: What in particular do you like?

RE: You've been there so you know that the tents are there. They're close together, side-by-side. You are forced in that circumstance to sit close to people. There aren't any distractions there. If you are there, what you are there to do is visit with people, whether that's visiting in the worship service and after or whether it's skipping the worship service and just visiting. If you're young, you're there. There are boys and girls by the dozens that chase and meet and talk and flirt with. If you're a child, there's The Shack to go buy toys and ice cream and there is also a freedom that you probably don't have anywhere else because the campground is a self-contained place. You'd have to try very hard to lose your way on the way around. And so that's the first place where lots of children have a degree of independence. I know I let mine at a very early age go off on their own and you wonder whether that's the safe thing to do but I feel comfortable doing that.

GC: Well they're under a watchful eye all the way around the circle, right?

RE: They are, and most, most kids who are there going around can't make it many tents without knowing who they are and seeing that they're walking around and would know if something were amiss. So, from a very early age, most people really like it. And I just, I enjoy talking which is obvious from the amount of time you've had to put here. But I get to see people that I see only at camp meeting. It's like a family reunion, a class reunion all in one and it happens every year. And just the whole concept for someone who enjoys history and is interested in history, being there it's such a long-standing tradition and has changed relatively little. It's like I brought a friend from law school and his family there and it was like going to Williamsburg but getting to be in it instead of just hearing people talking about it.

GC: So, it's kind of a living tradition in the best sense.

RE: Yes, it is.

GC: And it's an annual sort of reaffirmation of the community that you were talking about, right?

RE: Uh-huh. And there's so many things there that, that you ( ), that you--I bet for a lot of people that's the place where they had their first kiss or their first girlfriend or boyfriend. And all of that just, I think at least for me, makes more memories.

GC: It's like a distilled like center for human experience, I mean all the different aspects of the experience of growing up and living in the area and stuff.

RE: Uh-huh. Sure. Uh-huh.

GC: I mean it struck me that in a way it's kind of like--

Pause in Recording.

GC: --they'll be later ramifications.

RE: People are going to be looking at those for a long time. Plans are never static, and they'll be changing so the next go around of folks may very well be interested in that. I really, I think probably the most important thing you can do is to do a good job on putting it together and--

GC: That's accessible.

RE: That's accessible and then making certain that the base information is also preserved and is in a place where people can get to it.

GC: Right. I would like to have at least one kind of presentation though. Partly because that's the mandate of my Community's Council Grant. They say, got to do a public airing of it, the material. And I, and that can be in any kind of forum that people in this area are comfortable with. I don't know, is there a community center, community meetings, maybe at a church. I don't know.

RE: Well, the hist--

GC: School again.

RE: The historical association has periodic meetings on Sunday afternoons where you maybe could--

GC: Is that in Hickory or--?

RE: That's in Newton.

GC: Oh, it's in Newton. Yeah. (pause)

RE: I could, if you were going to do it in sort of a community institution, the school would be the place to do it.

GC: I mean but so adults could come too, like after hours.

RE: At night, at night would be the way you would go about doing that. There really aren't

GC: Any other spaces.

RE: Yeah, this is enough of a rural place that there aren't rotary clubs and things like that that are meeting at night.

GC: I should certain--speaking of spaces I should certainly bring copies of whatever it is around at meeting time.

RE: Oh yeah, yeah. People would be tickled.

GC: 'Cause a lot of those people will be there anyways.

RE: There will be.

GC: Yeah, a school's probably the best place for that kind of thing.

RE: And Mill Creek would be a good place to do it.

GC: Yeah, especially if I got to know Beth, and work with her.

RE: Oh yeah! So, you're meeting with her tomorrow?

GC: Uh-huh.

RE: Are you going to be here tomorrow night?

GC: No, I have to go back to Chapel Hill tomorrow. Why?

RE: Well, because Mountain View would not be particularly the good one to do but both Sherrills Ford and Balls Creek, their small area planning committees--

GC: Are meeting?

RE: --are going, not tomorrow night, but will be in the next couple months making their presentations to the commissioners and having a public hearing. I think that'd be an interesting night for you because--

GC: ( ).

RE: --those committees have spent a year or more thinking about the very sorts of things you're talking about.

GC: Yeah, yeah. We should know about each other. Yeah, definitely. That would be good to learn about.

RE: Sherr--the county library is probably a place that would want to have these things.

GC: Yeah, and there's a Sherrills Ford Branch Library. I think I met someone from that.

RE: Yeah.

GC: They don't have a community space, do they?

RE: They do. It's not very large but Cynthia and I were just down there a couple months ago. They had--you know Carolina has the visiting professors' program. They send people out and they had the chairman of the Folklore Department at Chapel Hill was here. What's his name?

GC: Glenn Hinson. Guy with a little ponytail.

RE: Yeah, yeah.

GC: That's the one who.

RE: He was here to talk about folk art. Since Cynthia and I like folk art obviously--

GC: Yeah.

RE: --we went down to hear him.

GC: At the branch library?

RE: Uh-huh. He talked down there. There were fifteen or twenty people there.

GC: Well, so maybe I could do something like that.

RE: Yeah! Yeah, they'd be tickled for you to. It's just not a very big space but you probably aren't going to draw out a--

GC: Huge number of people.

RE: --much folks.

GC: I wonder if--how was that publicized? I mean how did you know to go? (pause) I mean 'cause in order to make it public I would have to publicize it.

RE: Well let me ask Cynthia about it. She'd know. I can't remember if it was in the paper or we just heard about it. Sweetie, was that guy, the professor from Chapel Hill came to the library about folk art, how did we learn about that?

CE: ( ). (too far from microphone to hear)

RE: Okay. Did you hear any of that?

GC: Not clearly.

RE: No. Cynthia is on the Board of Directors for the Library of Catawba County. And so she's not certain whether she received the information because of that, but she--we received a couple of notices from the library about it and she thinks that it's possible that what they did is send a notice to everyone who has a library card from Sherrills Ford Library, which would be about a large number of people.

GC: That would be a thing to do. Yeah. Okay, well maybe we'll think about something like that down the road.

RE: And, I don't know whether this would be helpful to you or not but you know they have aerial photographs of North Carolina and there were some that were done in Catawba County in the 50s, and I've got my book around here somewhere, but we have new sets of aerial photographs, of some that were done not,

GC: So, like a comparison.

RE: not too long ago and some new ones, some really really knew ones. And the folks in the GIS office in Newton are just so tickled with what all they can do I'm sure that they would be very helpful to give you anything like they you wanted.

GC: Yeah.

RE: Their maps are tremendous.

GC: Yeah. Yeah, that would be--I like to engage with GIS technology too 'cause it's, it's a fun supplement.

RE: I have, I have a map in my office, it's just rolled up but it's, it was at that time the current land use of every parcel in the county. And they had done it so that every parcel in the county was not contiguous to any other color, the same color so that every parcel shows up. It's pretty, it's an amazing map. It's just like you know those things you used to look at and the design would come out, that's almost what it looks like.

GC: Oh yeah. The magic eye.

RE: Yeah! That's about what it looks like.

GC: Yeah, that's funny. Okay, that's good. Let's call it.

End of Interview.