

An Oral History of West Durham, North Carolina

**Submitted to the Durham Bicentennial Committee
December 1975
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Mr. Zeb Stone is currently an executive in the accounting department of Burlington Industries' Durham plant. A former employee of the Erwin Cotton Mill and a longtime resident of West Durham, Stone was able to tell me much about the village and how it has changed over its sixty-four year history.

The personnel manager of the Durham plant arranged the meeting with Zeb Stone. "Old Zeb would be a great person to talk with," the manager remarked.

Stone sat relaxed at a desk in a crowded office. Before him were stacks of paper, account books, and payroll lists. We talked for over an hour, our interview interrupted only by an occasional telephone call and a break for coffee. He seemed enthusiastic about the subject and presented in considerable detail a personal history of West Durham and the Erwin Mill.

(Intro.)

(1)

R.F.: I was wondering if you could begin, Mr. Stone, by telling me when you started working in the mill.

Z.S.: August 1933 I started with Erwin Mills.

R.F.: Did you live close to the mill?

Z.S.: I lived in a company tenement house over on Erwin Road where this off-campus housing is. The mill was operating just two shifts and I went on the first shift. That was right after Roosevelt came in and they started the forty hour week. Of course that was something new for the textile industry. The hours before that had been fifty-five hours, that was eight hours a day and five hours on Saturday. (Note: I think he meant ten hours a day and five on Sat.) At that time the minimum wage was eight dollars a week, I believe. They could work you at that rate for four or five weeks and then they had to raise you to thirty cents an hour.

R.F.: What job did you have in the mill?

Z.S.: It was in the spinning room and that pay was nothing. And I worked there just a very short time. Of course I was still in school. Well I asked the second-hand, or the assistant overseer you might call him, what I was getting paid after I had been up there a couple of days. I was learning dolph- that's a spinning room job. And he said when you get to keep up half a box, why you get about half pay which at that time would probably be about six dollars a week, because dolphing paid a bit more than just the ordinary minimum wage. And I asked how long that would be and of course he said probably about six weeks. And my answer was "to hell with that, I'm going back to school. By the time you've worked me six weeks, I won't have anything."

(2)

R.F.: Dolphing. Can you explain what that is.

Z.S.: Well, you have two types of dolphing. You have a spinning frame in the spinning room, you see, and it has a certain number of spinners on each side, the same number on each side. You need the spindles to make wool which revolve one way or filling (?) which goes the other way. They're both on bobbins. Course you want bobbins heavier and larger and a dolpher's job, both wool and filling dolpher, is to go like milking the cow. You see, you got an end that runs up and you don't want to tear that down cause you want that to pick up on your new bobbin when it's spinning. So you go along putting on an empty and taking off a full.

R.F.: Do they still have dolphing in the mill?

Z.S.: Right, right.

R.F.: Did you move to another job after dolphing?

Z.S.: I moved into the supply room where they keep all the parts for all the machinery and the miscellaneous items it takes to run the mill.

R.F.: You mentioned that dolphing paid a bit more than the minimum wage. Was their a strict gradation as to what were the good and bad jobs.

Z.S.: Your job like sweeping was a minimum paying job, you see. All sweeping then was by broom and your scrubbing also since they had no scrubbing machines back then. I guess how good a job was depended on how much skill you needed to do it, just like the present time. I suppose the best job around the mill here in Durham would have been a card grinder. You had to be

very skilled, I mean he sharpened the cards in the card room. Next would have been a loom fixer. And probably next would be a weaver.

R.F.: And what job you got depended on how much experience you had?

Z.S.: The way a person got to be a loom fixer was to be a weaver first, you see, and then graduate.

R.F.: How long would that take?

Z.S.: Well, I mean back in those days it took a long time because people weren't moving around as much as they are today. The labor turnover was practically nothing.

R.F.: Right.

Z.S.: We had no employment office or anything like that. People came to the gate and told the watchman that they'd like to see the overseer or the supervisor and he'd go out to talk to them. And it was up to him if he hired him or not.

R.F.: I see. Did Mr. Erwin live right close by the mill?

Z.S.: They just recently tore down Mr. Erwin's home over by Swift Avenue and Main.

R.F.: You mentioned that you lived in a company house. Did Mr. Erwin own these houses?

Z.S.: Yea. Mr. Erwin kept his houses up good. I mean, they're painted at least every two years or something like that, both inside and out. And he had a painting crew. The same men were housed here in Durham, Hogan, and he would handle the house painting at the other villages also. A room was twenty-five cents a week. I mean you paid your house rent based on the number of rooms you had in the house. And up until they started having a

lot of electric stoves and electric hot water heaters the electric current was free.

R.F.: Really!

Z.S.: I mean, you didn't have no meter at your house. Then they went on the basis of allowing you a certain number of killowatts per room. They had a man to read the meter and you paid for any excess you used. And it was billed at a rate the company paid 'cause at that time it was all hooked in with the mill operation and you got a very low rate.

R.F.: You mentioned that Mr. Erwin was pretty good about keeping up his houses. Were there other mill owners who weren't that good about it?

Z.S.: Well, when we bought Stonewall, Mississippi, that was our plant number eight, in 1948, I went down there and I looked at the mill village down there. That was really going back to the dark ages. I mean, they used to have that place fenced off. I mean, the town was actually fenced in, you see. The houses for the most part were two room houses. That is, they had a small front porch, a front room, a back room, and a small back porch. And plumbing was all outside. Most of them did have running water in the house. But when you go in the front door, it would be this peeling wooden ceiling all along the four walls. But when you went in the back the outside weather board was the inside wall, and I mean the studs were showing and of course they had to use the back part for the kitchen.

R.F.: Jesus!

Z.S.: So they had the front room for the parlor, I guess, or bedroom and everything else. There were a lot of mill villages like

that. There were mill villages that were better than this. (The one in Durham owned by Erwin)

R.F.: Here in Durham, where did you do your shopping?

Z.S.: Well, there again, most mill villages would have a company store.

R.F.: Right.

Z.S.: This one in Mississippi sold coffins in the company store.

R.F.: So they'd even get you when you're going.

Z.S.: Right. They took your church dues out of the payroll.

Well you could just live without ever leaving town not having the cash, really. What they'd do is just deduct everything. But as far back as I could remember we had no company store here (in Durham), except originally there was one. But, now, the mill owned the store after that. And they rented it to someone they wanted to have it but they had nothing to do with taking your grocery bill out of the payroll. And the store is now that "Nearly New" place over on Erwin Road.

R.F.: About how many people did that one store serve?

Z.S.: I'd say probably around twelve hundred or so.

R.F.: Did this store sell just groceries?

Z.S.: Yea, it was a complete store. They'd have very few wives work (in the mills around 1930's). They would have a man who went out in the morning and they called it "taking orders." He'd go to all the houses and the woman of the house would tell him what she wanted and he'd bring it back in time to be cooked and served up for what they called dinner, which is of course lunch. And he'd do the same thing in the afternoon and have it back in time for a good supper.

R.F.: On weekends, were there activities which a lot of the mill

families did together, like at the church, or...

Z.S.: Now, you're talking about the same time period as before?

R.F.: Right- during the thirties.

Z.S.: Well, everybody lived close in. Just about everybody that worked in the mill lived in the village, almost without exception. Well, there was a community building right up here, built in 1920. This company paid an annual bonus to the employees and of course you have the same thing now but its a different form. Mr. Erwin took one of the bonuses, or almost all of it, and instead of distributing it, he built this building which was called the "Erwin Auditorium." And it had movies, an athletic program, and all that stuff. You could remove the seats to have the movies, originally on Tuesday and Saturday nights and then they changed it. They had it Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday. It cost a child a dime to go to the show, that was tax included, and twenty cents for grown people, and eventually it was cut back to ten cents and fifteen cents, or something. But that was the center of community life in West Durham and the church was on Sunday.

R.F.: How often did the employees see Mr. Erwin?

Z.S.: They could see him every day. And they probably would.

R.F.: Did he know many of the worker's personally?

Z.S.: Just about all of them.

R.F.: Really!

Z.S.: Back then you would have textile plants which were highly inefficient. They had a cost system of sorts. For example, my brother who still works here, he'll have to retire this year, used to work in the summertime for a dime an hour. I mean the card room or spinning room man would have a certain amount of

money based on what they thought was needed to run that department and if he stayed within that amount of money, fine, and if he went below it, better still. So, while my brother would normally be getting a quarter an hour, during the summertime, he would often get just a dime. So that'd make the overseer look real good, see, and brought his cost down. So that was the kind of cost system they had at the time. Course they had no federal minimum wage.

R.F.: That really impresses me that Mr. Erwin knew most of his workers personally.

Z.S.: Well, that's certainly changed now, I'm sure. Well, now what they would do... well say a man was a floater, that changed jobs a lot. Well he comes in and the first thing he wants is a company tenement house with a job. And then he'd want a job for his whole family and if he brought grandfather and grandmother along, and they wanted to work, why, they'd put them to work, see. And consequently, you had a lot of people who worked who were old. Some of them were doing make-do work and everything else. But that's kind of the way they hired. They'd hire the whole family. And so he (Mr. Erwin) watched them all in the community very closely.

R.F.: How did Mr. Erwin keep an eye on the workers?

Z.S.: They don't do it too much anymore but they used to have the court docket in the newspaper every morning, see. So, Monday, anybody who'd been drunk over the weekend, if they had to appear in court, and that came out in the paper, they just might as well come up here and get paid off. If you had any daughter who got into trouble, why, you couldn't live in the company house anymore. You might save your job, but you'd have to move out-

side the community.

R.F.: Did Mr. Erwin go to the same church as some of the workers?

Z.S.: He was an Episcopalian. For all practical purposes, he built this church ^{out here} built out of granite blocks.

Yea, that was his church. But, around all of the communities, I mean, we'd do such things as furnish the paint for painting the churches. He (Mr. Erwin) encouraged the people to go to some church. He didn't necessarily care if it was Episcopalian. And the Baptist church which I belonged to was set over by the service station, a big wooden building. And Mr. Erwin bought that property, personally, I think.

R.F.: Were you given any time off in the summer?

Z.S.: No, that came along later. You had holidays, but no paid holidays.

R.F.: And, at this time the turnover rate was very low?

Z.S.: We had no influx of new people 'til the Roosevelt Administration, when they started this two shift business, see. We'd run two shifts, or something like that when we were still on the fifty-five hour week. I worked a little of that, but the late shift would be all night long. Nine o'clock in the morning you'd get off, or something like that.

R.F.: Were people reluctant to work that night shift?

Z.S.: No, not really. That was a sign of good times. Back in those days, I mean, you got wage raises, but you also got wage cuts. The last time they cut wages here, was the only losing year Erwin Mills ever had, in 1938. But they couldn't cut me. I was only making thirty cents an hour, see, and the minimum was

thirty cents an hour. They had to cut some of those higher paid people, and they did make some adjustments there. And then in '39 the rumblings of the war started and all that.

R.F.: When the war did start, did Mr. Erwin make any pitches for increased war production? [NOTE: After asking this question I learned that Mr. Erwin passed away before W.W. II began]

Z.S.: That's when they gotta full third shift. The third shift only worked six and a half hours because they got no lunch hour.

R.F.: When Mr. Erwin had to cut back on wages, did this meet with any reaction on the part of the workers?

Z.S.: Yea, I think they were reasonably understanding. He (Mr. Erwin) could convince people. He was a convincing man. I remember this vacant place over here was a park and we had a bear, an eagle, goldfish, and squirrels. (a small zoo) But I heard quite a few times Mr. Erwin, during the war, the first world war, get up in the park here and make speeches, July the fourth, of course, was always a big day with games and prizes, and such as that. But he would tell the people, "now -I want you to have as many slices of bread as you ever had but cut them thinner." So that was his way to get them to ration bread.

R.F.: How often did Mr. Erwin make speeches to the workers?

Z.S.: Just about every opportunity.

R.F.: When a worker finished up for the day....

Z.S.: You know, there were a lot of company houses which didn't have baths. There was a garage right up here by the "Blue-Light" and right there was a long narrow building full of showers. There were a few houses up here, but very few, that didn't have running water and if not, you had a pump out in the center of the street. But if you had to live there your rent was a little

bit cheaper than twenty-five cents a room.

R.F.: How was it decided who got the better houses,-the ones with the running water?

Z.S.: Well, you only graduated to a better house by asking for it.

R.F.: Were people moving around to different houses often?

Z.S.: No, there wasn't too much turnover.

R.F.: Before, you said you lived in West Durham and not Durham.

Z.S.: You see, Mr. Erwin bought it (West Durham) because he didn't want to see it taken into the city limits. I think this was 1925, I believe. The city limits were up here at the women's college. Well, as you go by that dormitory, I think they still call it Southgate,...

R.F.: Right, right.

Z.S.: ...you go down a slight hill and down at the bottom, that was the city limits.

R.F.: Why did Mr. Erwin want to keep West Durham separate from Durham?

Z.S.: Well, he was the king.

R.F.: The what?

Z.S.: The king. He was it. Now the sheriff had some authority in here, but see the city police had none. Well it was just an advantage. We were a little community apart.

R.F.: Back then, if you just happened to meet a friend you hadn't seen in awhile, and he asked where you were living, would you have said Durham, or West Durham?

Z.S.: I would say West Durham back then.

R.F.: Did you...

Z.S.: Now, back then we didn't necessarily have to have city water

but he (Erwin) did use it. The streetcar tracks came right here and turned the corner down to Wachovia Bank and then went over to where the athletic field is over on East Campus and turned left, went all the way up Broad Street to Club Boulevard and the end of the line was up at the reservoir up there. We had our transportation that way and anybody that wanted to go to town on Saturday afternoon, after they got off work, at twelve o'clock, we had what we called jitney drivers. That would be people who worked in the mill and saved enough money to buy a car. And they would get these, what they call passenger Buicks with the lift up seats for a community car. People from West Durham would come to the post office if they would rather ride that than wait for the streetcar, because he'd have his seven or eight, or however many he could cram in there, and take off for town and leave them at five points. And if they caught him coming back he would deliver them to their door, cause they would have packages then.

R.F.: Why'd they call them jitney drivers?

Z.S.: I don't know that. That's what I always heard.

R.F.: Did most everyone go into town once a week or was it more of a special occasion?

Z.S.: I'd say once a week. You know, I didn't mention before that Mr. Erwin had carpenter crews going around repairing at the tenement houses. If you had a leak, you got it fixed. Of course, you didn't have to go to Mr. Erwin to do that. The houses were divided. These houses over here were for the people in the sewing room. And those over there were for the bleachers. And so you went to the superintendent over there if you worked there.

R.F.: And so they separated the houses by occupation.

Z.S.: Yea, and so that somebody (the superintendant) would be in charge of them.

R.F.: I see.

Z.S.: It worked out pretty well. See, what broke that, I mean at one time there were enough houses for one shift, and when you got the two, there wasn't enough and when you got the three it was even worse. About 1945, they sold off just about all the houses they had north of the railroad here which goes all the way back towards Watts Hospital. And they didn't sell anything south of the railroad.

R.F.: And why was that?

Z.S.: Gosh, I really don't know.

R.F.: Just one other question. What schools did the kids in West Durham go to?

Z.S.: The majority went to this school on the foot of Duke property over on Erwin Road, that was Southside school. And if you lived on the other side of Hillsborough Road, you went to what they called Northside, later changed its name to E.K. Powe. There was nobody working in the mill who had there kids go anywhere except to those two schools.

R.F.: Thanks an awful lot Mr. Stone. I can't tell you how much I appreciate talking with you.

West Durham is a community whose past is remembered fondly and vividly by many of its longtime residents. Mr. John C. Dailey, Mr. O. A. Eubanks, and Mr. I. L. Dean are three area merchants. I interviewed them in the upstairs office of Mr. Dean's textile remnants store on Ninth Street in West Durham. The topic of the conversation was to be the formation of the Ninth Street Business Association, but in the nearly thirty pages of transcript, they discussed many other aspects of the West Durham community.

Both Eubanks and Dailey are lifetime residents of West Durham and are in their late sixties. Eubanks had been employed in the retail food business nearly all his life, while Dailey was the owner of a local hardware store. Dean came to West Durham in the late thirties and is in his early fifties.

In a back issue of The Durham Morning Herald there appeared a short article which dealt with the formation of a merchants' association in West Durham. Eubanks, Dailey, and Dean were mentioned in the article as having been officers of the Ninth Street Merchants' Association. I contacted all three by telephone, and we arranged to meet at Dean's store.

The three men enjoyed the chance to reminisce about the community. Both Eubanks and Dailey gave some interesting details of their family histories, and all three helped to trace the important changes which occurred in the West Durham community.

Mr. Eubanks: Well I assume John, actually going back to your father and our Association, that your father was one of the oldest merchants, I guess, on this street. Wasn't he?

Mr. Dailey: Well, of course there was L.I. Carter that had a business here and...

Mr. Eubanks: But your father was in business at the same time.

Mr. Dailey: Well to me, going back to early history, this community here was a community by itself. The limits were halfway between here and downtown over by the campus. So it was a section started by Mr. Bill Erwin. It was a mill and then it had these interests here which developed in relation to the mill. At that time, of course, you didn't have cars. The people who worked there lived within walking distance, went to school there, and went to town Saturday, I guess. So this section was made up of just what folks needed day-to-day, where they could walk from there homes to get a loaf of bread, get a haircut, or things like that. There were no streetlights except what was furnished by the company- Erwin Mills. And they would inspect their own streetlights, I guess. I remember the mud. I started school a few years back and I remember trying to get across Martin Avenue which was then Eighth Street. I got my foot in a mud hole and when it came out it didn't have a shoe on it. It was right in the middle of the street. Of course we had a post office here, and later a bank.

R.F.: Where was the post office?

Mr. Dailey: The post office was up on the corner where the Burling-

ton Industry sign is.

Mr. Eubanks: The corner of Ninth and Main.

Mr. Dean: That was the street car stop too.

Mr. Dailey: Well, I was going to mention the fact that transportation was furnished by streetcars. Later on we would have a jitney which would meet the folks up here at the post office and take them downtown for a dime, or something like that. You could go on a streetcar for a nickel, but some people paid a dime for a special service. Of course the mail came to the post office by train and if they didn't have a stop, why they had a gadget up there that would pick up the mail as the train went by. If there was a passenger who wanted to get on the train they'd flag it down. They'd ride to town or to other cities..

The activities were furnished by the Erwin Mills- recreation and that type of thing. First they had a library at the corner of Hillsborough Road and Ninth Street. I remember during W.W. I it was the center of other activities- quilting by the housewives, and other activities of that nature. There was always playgrounds there. At one time it was across from this original library and later when Erwin Auditorium was built it became part of that and was moved over beside the railroad. We had big occasions like the Fourth of July with a picnic and a band. Erwin Mills had its own band with Mr. Curley as the director. There were movies. Of course the school was also the center of a lot of activity.

R.F.: Which school was that?

Mr. Dailey: There was a West Durham school which became Southside. It was first through eleventh grade back then. They had athletics

and a lot of functions.

Mr. Dean: Well all the recreation and everything was furnished by Erwin Mills. They furnished the basketball courts, tennis courts, baseball fields, softball fields- everything was furnished by the mill.

Mr. Dailey: They also had a bowling ^{alley} right there in the park. Those are some of the things I remembered and tried to bring out.

R.F.: I understand that that "Nearly New Shop" over on Erwin Road was sort of a community store for awhile. When did the Ninth Street stores come into the picture?

Mr. Dean: Ninth Street was here then whenever they had that store.

Mr. Dailey: Yes, Ninth Street started from what I refer to as the post office building. Of course, at one time that was a company store run by the Erwin Mills. My father came down here from Burlington (N.C.) to form a partnership as an independent store there. That was at the turn of the century.

R.F.: So, the Ninth Street stores date earlier than this company store?

Mr. Dailey: No, I would think the company store was the original.

Mr. Dean: Well, the company store was never over there on Erwin Road.

Mr. Dailey: No, that was the old post office.

R.F.: That was the old post office?

Mr. Dean: The old post office was over here at the corner of Ninth Street and Main Street up there where you see the big Burlington sign.

Mr. Eubanks: I would say, though, that Ninth Street was the oldest shopping center that Durham first had.

Mr. Dailey: Other than downtown.

Mr. Eubanks: Well, yes of course shopping centers are...

Mr. Dailey: Well, I guess at the same time you did have an Edgemont down by the mill there.

Mr. Eubanks: But that was scattered and this was all in one area. I had a lot of people tell me that they felt as if this was the first real shopping center that Durham had before it was all together. (West Durham and Durham became one city)

R.F.: By the time you gentlemen started your businesses on Ninth Street, had the area started to attract customers from outside of West Durham?

Mr. Dailey: It was primarily a community center. Our customers were confined to a small area, I'd say from Buchanan Blvd. west. It was just when people started shopping by car that we started serving a larger area.

R.F.: Did the streetcar go down Ninth Street?

Mr. Dailey: No, it came down to Ninth Street and then went down to Broad. It came down Main, to Ninth, to Perry, to Broad, to Club Blvd., to the Hillandale Country Club- the reservoir. The first time it only went to Watts Hospital and turned around up there and came back. Then they put a track down Club Blvd. out to Hillandale and finally came down to Hillsborough Road up through Ninth Street here.

Mr. Dean: I don't remember the streetcar doing that but the bus did. I know it turned right here, then it went up First Street and then to Broad and then down to Club Blvd. But the streetcar never ran on Ninth Street.

Mr. Dailey: Except for one part- Main to Perry.

Mr. Dean: Right.

R.F.: What year did the streetcars disappear.

Mr. Dean: I came here June the 6'th, 1933 and we had buses then. See, when I was here before they had streetcars. That was 1928, 1929, 1930 or something like that.

Mr. Dailey: Of course, Trinity College athletic field was right here across the street. That also entered into activities. There were boarding houses behind it, Trinity Park School- that became a part of the activities. In fact that church up there, I understand its first meeting place was that grandstand there, before they gotta building.

Mr. Dean: When you got off of Erwin Road, Erwin Mills had those houses and the rest of that was just woods and fields. When it was still Trinity, all the athletic fields were right there.

Mr. Dailey: We talked about the streets here, there wasn't any roads except old number ten which became seventy and came down Hillsborough Road, Ninth Street, Main, and right through the middle of town.

R.F.: For what period of time were these jitney drivers around?

Mr. Dailey: That was a relatively short thing, I guess.

Mr. Dean: I'd say Ed Duke and Charlie Duke and those boys went out sometime between thirty and thirty-five.

R.F.: For them, was it a full-time job or was it something they just did on Saturdays to pick up some extra cash?

Mr. Dailey: No, they were full-time and were there if you needed the service. They did other things like picking up people a certain day of the week. There were no taxis at the time.

R.F.: I'm going to sort of skip around as far as dates go. In

1947 you three gentlemen were among the original organizers of the West Durham Business Association. What I wanted to ask you was what was the goal of the organization and how did it come about to be organized?

Mr. Dailey: Don't let me do all the talking.

Mr. Dean: Well, you and Othar know. I'm just bringing up the rear!

Mr. Dailey: We had said a lot of times that it would be nice to get together and do some things. Then something would come up like why don't we get the alley in better shape, or why don't we have some better streetlights.

Mr. Eubanks: Then we felt united together and we could get these things accomplished, which we did do.

Mr. Dailey: When the mill gave up the baseball field which had lights on it, that's where the A&P and the post office was- on Broad and Main, they offered the city another location which is now Erwin Road. That is, they would move the lights and grade it. This same group of men was interested in that type of thing and helped push it ^{through} to get it approved. There was some opposition to the cost of it all. Can you think of other activities?

Mr. Dean: Well, also the Erwin Auditorium, when they decided to go out of the athletic business and let the city accept the responsibility for all of it. The city had never done anything up here.

Mr. Dailey: See, this part was not incorporated.

Mr. Dean: So they gave the land where the Erwin field is now and part of the Erwin Auditorium, they never deeded all of it to them,

and also the land where the Y.M.C.A. is now. They done all that about the same time. They gave it to the city and to the "Y." All the recreation in this end of town before then was furnished by Erwin Mills. The city didn't have anything back then.

Mr. Eubanks: The Erwin Mills had there own fire-fighting equipment also.

R.F.: They did?

Mr. Dean: Everything up here, just about, was run or controlled by the Company.

Mr. Dailey: Yea, and the whistle was the thing went by a lot. It woke them up, told them when to go home, and if there was a fire at two o'clock in the morning, that whistle would start beep-beepin' and people got up to see what was going on.

Mr. Eubanks: They had little firehouses built around the mill with hose connections and so forth.

R.F.: How large was the fire-fighting force?

Mr. Eubanks: They were volunteers.

Mr. Dean: They were employees of the mill.

R.F.: So, as I understand it, it was a lot of issues which culminated in your forming of the West Durham Business Association.

Mr. Dailey: There was a transition period when the community was not in the city limits and later when it was. The city wouldn't just come out here and start doing things because Erwin Mills was already doing it. When the mill gave it up, someone had to push these things through, and get these things taken over by the city. They didn't want to especially, It was expensive.

Mr. Dean: Well, I would say one of the first projects of the

Association was getting the street widened.

Mr. Eubanks: That's right.

R.F.: How big a job was that?

Mr. Dean: Well, it was Ninth Street. It was a very narrow street.

Mr. Dailey: Very narrow. Still, it was a state highway.

Mr. Dean: And we got in behind it and got the city to widen it. Then I'd say the next project we went after was getting _____ (?) up here. Then Erwin Mills decided to go out of the recreation business. They sold the lot, the baseball field, and then we had to get into it and that was the biggest fight we ever had. It involved a lot of money. It took a lot of time and effort to work it out. I'd say the next project was getting the streetlights that we've got now. We had a few lights but it wasn't lit up like it is now.

Mr. Eubanks: Well, in the law enforcement end of it, that was always carried out by Erwin Cotton Mills also. They paid the salaries of the officers and for motorcycles and things at this end. At that particular time they were, I guess, just deputies or something to that effect.

R.F.: There was no city police authority in West Durham?

Mr. Eubanks: That's right. No city at all. And that's another thing the Ninth Street Business Association did. One of the projects was to get law enforcement in this end. And they finally ended up putting a patrolman on the street actually walking a beat. And another, as you mentioned before, was getting lights on these streets. And another was of course the sanitation department. Remember how we used to put our garbage cans out on the street to pick up, when they had alleys back here that they

weren't keeping up? The Association was responsible for getting the alley straightened up and got the garbage collections from the back instead of the front because there were a lot of obnoxious odors coming from these things in front of your place of business. That was one of the projects the Ninth Street Association was responsible for, you might say.

R.F.: You called yourselves the Ninth Street Association?

Mr. Dean: That's right. Well, it was the West Durham Business Association, of course it was run...

Mr. Eubanks: At one time it was more or less incorporated, you might say, as Ninth Street.

Mr. Dailey: It started that way and then broadened out. The last purely Ninth Street project we did was getting the parking lot on the other side of the street from the stores. And that was worked out by the mill leasing it to the city, the city having improvements made, and the merchants signing an agreement to pay for it over a period of time. We started with a balloon payment at first and so much a year over a number of years, which we're still paying.

R.F.: How were these projects financed?

Mr. Dailey: Well, different ways. We had a Christmas scene right here where the post office is now that we bought and paid for and had put up every year and taken down every year and stored.

R.F.: That was down by the members of the Association only?

Mr. Dean: That was the Ninth Street part of the Association.

R.F.: What about something like streetlights?

Mr. Dailey: They were city financed, of course.

R.F.: But you had to sort of prod them on.

Mr. Dean: That's right.

Mr. Dailey: We had to let them see the need for it

R.F.: Was that a tough job, getting them to see the need for it?

Mr. Dean: Sometimes.

Mr. Dailey: Pretty tough wasn't it ____ (?)?

Mr. Dean: It got tough at times.

R.F.: How did the organization dissolve? Did it happen when West Durham became part of Durham?

Mr. Dailey: We elected officers every year and one year the officers we elected never got together.

Mr. Dean: Well I would say this...

Mr. Eubanks: It got to be more or less a social type...

Mr. Dailey: Lack of projects.

Mr. Eubanks: That's right, for one.

Mr. Dean: And two, the people who really were behind it when it started, they got old, aged up some and went out of business like Mr. Eubanks, Mr. Dailey, some of them died of course, and things like that. To put it all in a nutshell, the people who pushed it just faded out of the picture.

R.F.: I'm kind of curious about Mr. Erwin, because from what you have said he had quite a lot of influence upon the community.

Mr. Dailey: Well, it was his community.

Mr. Eubanks: He called the people here "my people" when he would get up before a group of people to talk. He said "your my people."

Mr. Dean: I started to say one thing but I won't say it. It won't

get nothing but a laugh, that's all.

Mr. Eubanks: But he was a very generous person, and a Christian type of person.

R.F.: Did he encourage people to go to church?

Mr. Eubanks: Yes sir, and...

R.F.: And how did he do that?

Mr. Dailey: He built his own church.

Mr. Eubanks: ...when you had any drunks around they lost ^{their} job and were shipped out.

R.F.: Well, how did he find out about them?

Mr. Dean: They published that docket and if your name was in that paper you needn't go back. That was it.

Mr. Eubanks: It was just automatic. He just didn't go for that kind of living at all. It was a good, clean, moral community.

R.F.: I've heard that Mr. Erwin had the ability to remember just about everyone's name, that he used to know all the workers in his factory by name. Is that true or is that an exaggeration?

Mr. Eubanks: Very much so. He called me by my first name.

Mr. Dailey: Well there was another side to all this moral stuff. There wasn't a bunch of angels who lived here. In fact, at one time, there were pool halls and bootleggers and things like that. It was a pretty rough place to be sometimes, like eleven o'clock Saturday night or something.

Mr. Eubanks: Well, the ____ (?) I was referring to was the employees of the Erwin factory.

Mr. Dailey: Well, that's true.

Mr. Eubanks: That's where, if you were in the court docket, and an employee of Erwin Cotton Mills, you just figured you were

automatically discharged.

R.F.: Tell me more about what kind of community West Durham was at eleven o'clock Saturday night.

Mr. Dailey: Well, we had some pool rooms and things and we had some fellas who were not working in the mill, who came to Ninth Street just like folks went to town. And they had a good time and it was better not to hang around as a boy. Don't you agree?

Mr. Eubanks: It was off limits with our family, with us boys, there were six of us boys.

R.F.: Did downtown Durham have its areas like this too?

Mr. Dailey: Oh yes. Down near the warehouses, I guess it was.

Mr. Dean: Well, Edgemont, East Durham, North Durham, every area had its own rough spots.

Mr. Dailey: Well, we've talked a lot about old, old times. I don't know anything more we can say about the present times. It's dead at five o'clock, stays dead til the next morning ...

Mr. Eubanks: John Calvin, lets go back to your father when he was a merchant on the street. Did he have the building built that he operated in or was it built by someone else prior to him going in business?

Mr. Dailey: Othar, I don't think he ever built the building.

Mr. Eubanks: Do you have any idea who did?

Mr. Dailey: I don't want to get into just my family history but I mentioned that he came to Durham to enter a partnership which he resigned from and opened a business where the Blackwell Memorial Presbyterian Church is right on the corner.

R.F.: What year was this?

Mr. Dailey: 1902. They hadn't finished Erwin prior to that

time. And it was a little one-room building that just happened to be there. Later he moved down on Perry Street where the bank is, right across from it. Andrews Furniture Store was there and Andrews got burned out. He was next door. His building didn't burn but he carried a lot of stuff out that was very expensive and he dumped a pile of ---- (?) on the sidewalk and half of it got carried off. I don't know if it happened right then, I think it did, but he moved out in the middle of the block right where the towel shop is now. In 1910 he was burned out by a fire there and the reason I know it was because I was born three weeks before. So then he moved into the building he was in when he died which is a brick building which still stands and he was there all of my life, that I can remember. Then he died and I took over there and built next door to him.

R.F.: How about you Mr. Dean? When did your business get started?

Mr. Dean: We started on Perry Street right around the corner in 1946 and I've been up here ever since.

R.F.: When did you move to your present location on Ninth Street?

Mr. Dean: We moved to Ninth Street in 1949 in the building next door. Then I went down the street next to MacDonalds Drugstore and stayed there probably ten years and then came up here in 1964. Mr. Eubanks used to run a grocery store in this building.

R.F.: And when did you move to this building here, Mr. Eubanks?

Mr. Eubanks: Well, when I came to work in the grocery business here I was with the A&P Tea Company. It must have been around 1928 when I started on this street. Our first location was next door to Mr. Dean's place here where the barber shop and beauty shop is now. That's a little bit smaller of a building

and it didn't have any back ventilation so the company decided to move next door which is this particular location we're now, which had a basement to it and the ventilation in the back. So I stayed with them in this location until 1942. They were going to close this store up and transfer me to another town and another larger store which was a self-service supermarket. So my children were graduating Durham High School that particular year so I declined to accept a transfer to another town. I asked them to sell me the equipment in the store that I might stay here. They graciously did and at a very reasonable price. They practically gave it to me 'cause I was with them seventeen years as manager of the store. Of course after staying here I renamed the operation "Serve-All Food Stores." The last location I was on Ninth Street is where that Towel Shop is. Of course it was a much larger building than this one, which fitted my purpose to go into a self-service type of operation which I did. In all, from the time I left the A&P til the time I went out of business about ten years ago, I was operating for about twenty-five years on this avenue. So I've been operating on Ninth Street, I'd say forty-two years. Of course I'm still working on Ninth Street part-time.

R.F.: How about the rest of the stores on Ninth Street? Was there always a big demand for the space?

Mr. Dean: It's been real big.

R.F.: When the Second World War came and the textile industry was pretty much out of the Depression, how did this affect your businesses?

Mr. Dailey: Until the war you could make money because your expenses were small, salaries were very low, and things were sold

at inexpensive prices compared to what we have now. I would say it was a good place to be in business.

Mr. Dean: Well, I think that's what really made the street move during that period.

Mr. Dailey: See, all this was prior to big-business coming in. You had no supermarkets, no discount operations. You had a lot of independent type of operations that were part of the community in a lot of ways besides this being a business. You were competing not with other shopping centers but with downtown or individual merchants or something like that.

Mr. Dean: See, that's about the same time the Mill started moving away from what you would call a mill village.

Mr. Eubanks: It became part of the city.

Mr. Dean: That's right. It became part of the city and you got water, sewers and everything else, transportation. Well things just began to move all together. It got away from what you might say was just a local six-seven block operation to what probably covered two or three miles each way.

Mr. Dailey: Before that they wouldn't work here unless they could walk to work.

R.F.: At what point did you start thinking of yourselves as Durham and not West Durham?

Mr. Dailey: We were fairly young then, teenagers or something like that, so we just adjusted to it.

R.F.: Was this after the War?

Mr. Dailey: No, before.

Mr. Dean: It really started to spring up and show that it was on the go after the War. They filled in all these gaps on Ninth

Street. That's when you built your building, the one next door....

Mr. Dailey: Well, that was a result of having satisfactory business after those lean years and the depths of the Depression, when folks could get there hands on a few dozen dollars and make a down-payment on something. And that was between '34 and '41 that a lot of that took place.

Mr. Dean: But the real up-swing in this West Durham area really started when the Company started to sell the houses to the people.

R.F.: And that was when?

Mr. Dean: Somewheres around '43 or '44. There may have been a few of them sold in '42 but I think it finished up some time in about '44. They began to sell out the property and people began to make improvements in the houses. That was really the turning point in what I would say was the making of West Durham. It would be a shopping center and everything else. She began to really move off then. Then the West Durham Business Association began to make a few moves towards improvement. It caught fire and that's when the stuff began to build up- Hillsborough Road,, Broad Street, and stuff like that. It began to really move, I'd say right after the War, when they began to break it up. They started to give up the control of it.

R.F.: Why did the Mill give up control of the community? Was it because Mr. Erwin had passed on?

Mr. Eubanks: He was dead...

Mr. Dailey: It was changing...

Mr. Dean: It was a changing time and it was a trend, I think,^{that} was probably going on all over the country. These people began to break up these communities like that. I think West Durham

was really blessed with Erwin Mills because they provided things for us that the city couldn't provide. We were the best-dressed ball team there was in town, had the best basketball courts, the best ball fields, and everything else. We were the envy of the whole city. When we walked out there, buddy, there weren't no slack about us and...

Mr. Eubanks: And we won a few games too!

Mr. Dean: ...we could beat you playing baseball or we could tear you up the other way if you wanted to go. It made no difference to us which way you wanted to go.

Mr. Eubanks: Speaking about the Ninth Street Association, I'd like to put this in also, that we really had the full support of our local bank, the ~~Phi Delta~~ Bank ^{Fidelity} at that particular time. They were members of the Ninth Street Association.

Mr. Dean: You also had the support of the Erwin Cotton Mill too.

Mr. Eubanks: That's right.

Mr. Dean: Full support.

R.F.: Was that when Mr. Ruffin...

Mr. Dean: Mr. Ruffin- if it hadn't been for Mr. Ruffin...

Mr. Eubanks: Oh yes.

Mr. Dean: ...there wouldn't have been no Erwin Field over where it is now and the auditorium wouldn't have been donated to the city and the Y wouldn't have the land to build on. It was all donated by the Erwin Mills and he was the leader.

Mr. Eubanks: Well, I daresay I imagine that most of our meetings of the Association were in the bank building. Of course we did hold them in various places of business like John Calvin's, then in my location here, and Mr. Dean's, but the bank wanted us to

feel welcome that we could have our meetings out there any time we wished, and we did use it quite a bit.

Mr. Dean: Well, with the West Durham Business Association, Erwin Mills- that's what made it go.

Mr. Eubanks: I'm proud to say that I was a member of the Association.

R.F.: Did you gentlemen have to attend meetings downtown, like City Council meetings?

Mr. Dailey: Oh, we were there.

Mr. Dean: We were there when we had a purpose.

Mr. Eubanks: We also had a good man with us- Mr. Strawbridge, who's not with us any more.

Mr. Dailey: Oh yes, Jim Strawbridge.

Mr. Eubanks: Jim Strawbridge. He went to bat for us quite a bit.

R.F.: He lived in downtown Durham?

Mr. Eubanks: No, he lived here but he was on the City Council and a member of our Association too.

Mr. Dailey: And others too. We've had some mighty good friends scattered throughout the city.

R.F.: When Kemp Lewis succeeded Mr. Erwin as president of Erwin Mills what was the switchover like?

Mr. Dean: I would say this, so far as I can see, that it ~~more~~ or less stayed about the same way.

Mr. Eubanks: Same routine.

Mr. Dean: Same routine until Mr. Ruffin became president. I mean, that was when the changes began to take place.

R.F.: Did people look upon Mr. Lewis as a real community leader as they had done when Mr. Erwin was alive? Or was this something that went out with Mr. Erwin?

Mr. Eubanks: I wouldn't say he was...

Mr. Dean: Now Mr. Lewis, he was quiet but he wasn't the type of...

Mr. Eubanks: He wasn't the daddy like Mr. Erwin was.

Mr. Dailey: Well, nobody was.

R.F.: Did you have any personal contact with Mr. Erwin?

Mr. Eubanks: Oh yes, I went to Sunday school with him.

R.F.: And what did you think of him as a person?

Mr. Eubanks: Oh, wonderful.

Mr. Dean: He was dead when I got here.

Mr. Dailey: He never knew me either. I was just a youngster.

Mr. Dean: He died in 1931 or 1932.

R.F.: Now, you say when Mr. Ruffin took over things really started to change.

Mr. Dean: Well, that's true because the economy started to change.

R.F.: Did Mr. Lewis retire?

Mr. Dean: He died.

R.F.: How old a man was he?

Mr. Dean: He was an elderly gentleman.

Mr. Dailey: Well, he wasn't that old. He seemed like it then.

Mr. Dean: He had a right smart age on him. See, they didn't have any retirement age when he was there.

Mr. Dailey: Well, the only contact I had with him was at the bank when we had these meetings there. He knew what was going on. He was pretty sharp.

Mr. Eubanks: Of course, speaking of Mr. Ruffin, my family was very fond of Mr. Ruffin because when he first came here to go into the textile end of it my father had associations with him in the mill there. We have always admired him as a very outstanding man.

Mr. Dean: He's a man who's never been recognized in Durham for what he's done for it.

Mr. Eubanks: That's right.

Mr. Dean: He's done a lot.

Mr. Eubanks: He didn't get on top of the roof and shout it out though.

R.F.: He supported your Association.

Mr. Dean: A hundred per cent.

Mr. Eubanks: I know on one occasion I was on a committee to go into his office about getting a place the Knights of Pythias wanted for a meeting place. When we went into Mr. Ruffin's office he said, "I don't see any reason why you shouldn't be able to get the location that you're asking for." He said: "That's what we need--anything to come into this community that can improve it." Of course what the Knights of Pythias stand for I still love and believe.

R.F.: Just sort of skipping around, let me ask you this. Mr. Lewis left a lot of his letters to the Duke Manuscript Collection. One of these letters dealt with the general textile strike of 1934.

Mr. Dailey: I was here!

R.F.: Well, Mr. Lewis said in this letter that he took this strike kind of personally- that he was very hurt by the whole situation. Did people in West Durham take that strike as a very serious event in the history of the community?

Mr. Dailey: That strike was something that, to us right here, was a very serious thing. We never experienced anything like it before. It looked like it was going on and on. One of the incidents that I remember was that some of my customers came to me

and I had a vacant building. The old Holloway Building I had bought, planning someday to build on. It was vacant and some of my customers came to me and wanted the use of it to give the union members assistance. They didn't have much. That was the idea. So, I agreed for them to use it. I met Mr. ____ (?) on the street one day and he wanted to know why I did it, and I told him. I thought if it would be of any help to the people in the community the least I could do was to let them use the facility I had. I guess he thought I was on the side... Of course I wanted to sell food and general merchandise. I didn't want to get involved in anything.

Mr. Eubanks: It was real touchy for the people...

Mr. Dailey: Yes, it was.

Mr. Eubanks: ...after all the influence the Mill had had.

Mr. Dailey: You and I as merchants were trying not to get involved

Mr. Eubanks: And my company specifically said not to get involved--the A&P Tea Company.

Mr. Dailey: And I know I had some of my customers come in and say, "You stick with me and I'll stick with you." So I stuck with them and they stuck me! So, it was a right expensive thing but there were some others who, just as soon as they got that money, they paid me. I won't forget that.

R.F.: What was the atmosphere of the community during the strike?

Mr. Dean: It got real tough.

Mr. Dailey: It was tough because a man didn't know when he was going to get some food for his children.

Mr. Dean: It was real tough. It was all right there for a couple of weeks but then that thing began to turn and there was some people who went hungry. That was the first experience, I imagine, anybody

in this part of the country, especially here, had ^{with} this type of thing. They didn't know what to expect and they were listening to outside people.

R.F.: There were outsiders coming into the community?

Mr. Dean: Oh yea, well there were outsiders coming in promoting it. They soon found out in about three to four weeks that it wasn't no picnic. The merchants weren't in a position to carry on but so long and the food lines began to get longer. And the union didn't have any money. I'd say that 98 or 99% of them was glad to go back to work. They were glad it was over. Of course, the one in 1946 was longer than that one.

Mr. Eubanks: But, it had more financial backing at that time.

Mr. Dean: Yea, it had more financial backing but that strike was six months.

Mr. Eubanks: Well, a lot of people went to work at other places. It just slowly dwindled away.

Mr. Dean: I don't think the hardship was there that was in the first one. But the strike was longer.

Mr. Eubanks: As far as food distribution is concerned, I was in on that because I wasn't with the A&P then and I was operating my own food business.

R.F.: This was the second strike.

Mr. Eubanks: Yes, the second strike. The union hall is up in this area.

Mr. Dean: Well, it's there.

Mr. Eubanks: Of course, they were buying food weekly from people who would co-operate in business with them. Mr. Clayton down here was running the store that, I believe, you were in at the time. He was a member of the grocery association also. Mr.

Scarborough was also in on this. The three of us combined our purchasing power. Each week they would give us a list of how much merchandise to buy and what kind of price we could give them on it. Of course, we were getting the cooperation at the same time from the wholesaler. They were going along with us also. So it worked much better this time than the time before. I believe, Mr. Scarborough, we let him be the banker. I did the purchasing of the food through my setup here. Mr. Clayton did delivery, or something to that effect. And of course at the end of every week the union would give us a check and we deposited it in the bank. We split what little profit there was three ways. It was very little money compared to what we had to go through with. Of course, there never was a holdup on the check. We got the check just like that.

R.F.: Mr. Dailey said before that in 1934 you had to walk a fine line. You were personal friends with the president of the mill and....

Mr. Eubanks: Well, we didn't want to take sides.

R.F.: And it was the same type of thing in 1948?

Mr. Eubanks: It was a little bit different.

Mr. Dailey: Well, you still didn't campaign for anything. We let our customers do the talking.

R.F.: Did Mr. Ruffin contact you after the strike had broke out?

Mr. Dailey: No, he didn't contact us. He had his hands full trying to work it out.

R.F.: Just one other question. Going back to the Depression how did you gentlemen manage to pull out of those "lean years?"

Mr. Dailey: Well, I was in school.

Mr. Eubanks: I was with A&P right then.

Mr. Dailey: Well, I was here but I wasn't in business...

Mr. Eubanks: That's when we sold fat ~~back~~^{pork} meat, we called it, for five cents a pound. The ~~purchase~~^{purchase} for a person with three to four in the ~~family~~^{family} was \$2.50 to \$3.00 a week. But the people bought more staple merchandise. They didn't go out for a lot of variety- different cuts of steak and things like that. They bought a lot of dry beans, pinto beans, fatback, and coffee, and flour and stuff of that nature, that they could live on.

Mr. Dailey: My father did get down to where he wouldn't have no money. We had no bank up here. The one he had an interest in was one of the first to close, so we didn't have enough backing. He hadn't been in business long enough. He didn't have much merchandise. He put on a big sale there trying to get a few dollars. He sold shoes for half price. He was then selling feed and all kinds of things a general store would sell. He didn't have any money and his customers didn't have any money and so he put on this sale. I dropped out of school for one semester to work in the store. Everything he thought he could depend on was not worth anything. So that was my situation.

Mr. Eubanks: I have heard it quoted that the average salary a person who worked in the Mill made during the Depression in 1929 was \$9.00 a week.

Mr. Dean: I'd say '32 to '33 and on in to '34, daytime work, the lowest paid, was \$9.50. And the work at night was \$10.50.

Mr. Dailey: Were you with me when we went over to Raleigh to try to keep them from putting a sales tax on food, way back?

Mr. Eubanks: Well, I wasn't in the group over there. Part of my argument against a sales tax on food was a tape on payroll checks I had cashed. And it was somewhere between \$9.00 and \$10.00

Mr. Dailey: A good while after that one of the second-hands, well I cashed his check every week and he always cautioned me, "Don't you let anyone else see what I make," 'cause he was making \$35.00 a week and if the folks who worked under him knew about it they would have told everybody. He didn't want it to get out that he was getting \$35.00 a week.

R.F.: So, people didn't have the money to spend on movies and things of that nature. Did they improvise?

Mr. Dailey: You could ride a streetcar for a nickel and go out to Lakewood Park, which was the big park in Durham.

Mr. Eubanks: Or you could ride the roller coaster for a nickel if you wanted to over there, and go swimming probably for five cents.

Mr. Dailey: So, it didn't take much.

Mr. Dean: The people in West Durham didn't have to look for recreation. The Company furnished recreation. They had their own movie over there- talking movie- and like I say they had their own tennis court, basketball court, baseball field. The only trouble was you didn't use none of this stuff on Sunday. The auditorium was closed down. During the week it was open from 8:30 in the morning 'til ten o'clock at night.

Mr. Dailey: And on the Fourth of July they had these big all day things with...

Mr. Dean: You didn't have to look for nothing. It was already here.

Mr. Dailey: ...a band, games- climbing the greased pole...

Mr. Eubanks: And prizes and awards for different things.

Mr. Dailey: ...and sack races.

Mr. Eubanks: The first sound speaking picture I saw was at Erwin

Auditorium.

Mr. Dean: They had shows on Tuesday night, Friday and Saturday. But they had a full rounded out program- for kids and adults too.

Mr. Eubanks: They had calisthenics, you played basketball...

Mr. Dailey: A full-time library.

Mr. Dean: Home economic classes, sewing classes, everything. It was a rounded out program. There wasn't anything like it. Like I said, nobody else had it. We had it. Nobody.

R.F.: I can see how something like that could really pull a community together.

Mr. Dean: Well it did. The community life was built right around the Auditorium and the churches. And every Christmas all the churches went together and had what we called a Christmas program.

Mr. Dailey: See, the best thing they had downtown was just the Y.M.C.A.

Mr. Dean: Like I said, when we walked out on that ball field we were the best-dressed people in town. There wasn't no arguing about it. Best equipment- everything. And the best ballplayers. But, we didn't have to go anywhere to look for anything. Out of town trips they paid for. Like I said, that building over there had a library, a snack bar downstairs, a swimming pool, a gymnasium, a bowling alley.

R.F.: And this operated all throughout the Depression?

Mr. Dean: Yes sir, through the Company. They'd break it up in the forties. It was real good.

Mr. Eubanks: Actually, the city wanted to incorporate West Durham before we were ever incorporated but Mr. Erwin kept this end of the town...

Mr. Dean: Kept the town his own.

Mr. Eubanks: Oh yea. Like I say, he fought it down to the last line. He didn't feel it needed to be incorporated.

Mr. Dailey: The city facilities weren't that good.

R.F.: So, all they'd be doing by incorporating West Durham would be taxing the place.

Mr. Dean: That's exactly right. It went years and years and years with the city operating and they didn't put nothing up here until the West Durham Business Association got on their butt. And tell them I said so! They all know it anyway! We didn't have a want for anything. It was all here for us. Like I said, it was controlled and they didn't allow ^{us} ~~us~~ to use it (the auditorium) on Sunday.

R.F.: After Mr. Erwin passed on was there still this community spirit?

Mr. Dean: In the forties, yea.

R.F.: When they decided to incorporate West Durham, was there a big controversy?

Mr. Dean: Well, that happened in the thirties.

Mr. Dailey: Well, it was a thing that a lot of people were against but the city voted us in.

Mr. Dean: It wasn't just left up to the West Durham people to vote on. It was city-wide. They decided for us.

R.F.: They decided for you?!

Mr. Eubanks: See, we didn't have enough votes in this end of town. I think to begin with Mr. Erwin's influence kept it out of the city.

Mr. Dean: Oh, yea.

R.F.: Do you think that if the issue had just been decided by West

Durham residents that it would have stayed a separate community?

Mr. Eubanks: I guess it would have.

Mr. Dean: I wouldn't doubt it.

Mr. Dailey: Sooner or later it would have...

Mr. Dean: After the city took it over it went ten or twelve years without them doing anything for it. It was already here.

Mr. Dailey: About the only thing I find better now than back then was the library. They didn't have any of the facilities that Erwin Mills had.

R.F.: So, they were the ones who benefited when your community was incorporated.

Mr. Dean: Right, the city benefited by taking it in.

R.F.: Did you get people coming from downtown Durham ~~coming~~ to West Durham for their entertainment?

Mr. Dean: They could come to the movie or come to participate in the activities.

Mr. Eubanks: I remember one time we organized in the recreation department a minstrel show with forty or fifty characters in that thing. We even carried it up to two or three little towns. We carried it up to Erwin, ---- (?) over here, We even got a few eggs over at ---- (?).

R.F.: Just one other quick question. You mentioned before that Mr. Erwin had a part in the Fourth of July activities. Did he make speeches?

Mr. Eubanks: Yes sir. That's when he'd make that speech addressing, "My people."

R.F.: And there were big crowds?

Mr. Dean: Oh yes. They'd have a picnic and everything.

Mr. Dailey: Well, you didn't have the competition with the people.

There was nothing going on anywhere else.

R.F.: And Mr. Erwin financed the whole thing?

Mr. Dean: Yea. They had dinners for the employees right over there.

R.F.: That was once a year?

Mr. Dean: Once a year. All the merchants on the street were part of it.

Mr. Dailey: It was a big thing.

R.F.: What time of the year was it?

Mr. Dailey: May, I guess.

Mr. Dean: Always in the Spring.

R.F.: Well, I've got a tremendous amount of stuff here and I'm going to try to put it all together. I appreciate your time.

.....

Mr. Dean: But all in all Mr. Erwin and Erwin Mills have been real good to this community. And I'd say the Erwin Mills has had some good leaders in Mr. Erwin, Mr. Lewis and Mr. Ruffin. They have been real good to us, including Burlington.

Mr. Eubanks: And I'd say that when West Durham became incorporated it was an asset to Durham.

William Ruffin was the fourth and final president of the Erwin Cotton Mill. He succeeded Kemp P. Lewis in 1948, after a twenty-seven year apprenticeship under the personal guidance of William Erwin.

The interview which follows took place on Ruffin's back porch in the Forest Hills section of Durham. The topic of the conversation was the relationship of the Mill to the West Durham community.

Ruffin's name had been mentioned repeatedly in earlier interviews. I located him through the telephone directory, and we arranged to meet at his house.

Ruffin provides an interesting perspective from which to view the history of West Durham. Many of the great changes to occur in the area were instituted during his reign as mill president. He describes West Durham as a community slowly emerging out of the paternalistic past.

Mr. Ruffin: There are some mighty fine people in West Durham, both in our mill and the business community.

R.F.: Mr. Erwin seems to have played a really important role in the community when he was living. Can you tell me what you remember about him?

Mr. Ruffin: Well, let me first go into some of the history of the mill. In 1892 Mrs. B.N. and J.B. Duke decided to build a cotton mill in West Durham, and they were joined by Mr. George Watts in putting up the money for this mill. And Mr. James Southgate, an insurance man, recommended that they get Mr. William A. Erwin, who was working ^{with} ~~for~~ his Holt family kin in Graham, to come down here and build the mill and run it. So they did contact Mr. Erwin, got him to move to Durham, and the report was that they told Mr. Erwin that "We're going to name this Erwin Cotton Mills for you. If it's a success it will be attributed to you, and if it's a failure it will be in your name." So that's the way we got the name of the company. The mill, which is now called number one mill there in West Durham at its present site, first made tobacco bag cloth for the tobacco industry here in Durham; the Duke's, of course, were prominent figures in the industry. Later they began to make indigo blue denim, which, incidently, is one of the most popular cloths in the country. They can't make enough of it. The mill was doubled in size some years later and then later, in 1909 I think it was, the company expanded and built another denim mill down at Erwin, North Carolina. What was then called Duke, North Carolina

was changed to Erwin, North Carolina to avoid conflicts with mail, and so forth, when Trinity College was renamed Duke University. Mr. Erwin was truly an outstanding, very fine man. He was highly religious and taught Sunday school, built the Episcopal Church here in West Durham, now called St. Josephs. He was a real leader of the community and of the people there in West Durham. He took great personal interest in his employees, and they highly respected and liked him.

R.F.: When did you first meet Mr. Erwin?

Mr. Ruffin: I first met him in 1919 when I was at Chapel Hill trying to get a B.S. Commerce degree which I did get in 1921. He and my father were good friends through the diocese council of the Episcopal Church of North Carolina. Mr. Erwin told my father that he'd be glad to have me come to work with Erwin Mills, and I was happy to have the opportunity. So I finished college and moved to Durham in 1921 and started working in the mill there in West Durham. First weaving , I then worked my way through the mills and then rose to the high position of assistant overseer in the number four mill's spinning room. We had about 500 men and women and 18-19 year old boys and girls working in there. It was a real experience which I enjoyed very much.

R.F.: And after that?

Mr. Ruffin: After that the opportunity came in the executive office of the company as a general assistant to Mr. Erwin and Mr. Kemp P. Lewis, who succeeded Mr. Erwin as president and treasurer of the company. Mr. Erwin served for many, many years as secretary and treasurer of the company, which was the usual term given to the active head of a textile manufacturing company

in those days. Mr. B.N. Duke was president of the company, inactive in his management, and Mr. George W. Watts was vice-president. Both of them were simply stockholders and not active in the day-by-day operations of the company. Mr. Erwin was (later) made president of the company, and Mr. Kemp P. Lewis was made secretary and treasurer. And later on I was made assistant secretary-treasurer. Mr. Kemp Lewis later became president of the company upon Mr. Erwin's death and later I became secretary and treasurer of the company. In due course, as Mr. Lewis neared retirement, he became chairman of the board of directors and I became president of the company. Mr. Kemp Plummer Lewis, named for his grandfather, Dr. Kemp Plummer Battle, president of the University of North Carolina, was also a most outstanding leader, highly respected and very capable. And, incidently, he was also one of the finest men I had the privilege to know. He and Mr. Erwin both saw that I got every opportunity to progress in the company and to be of help to them, which was greatly appreciated.

R.F.: As I understand it the community really started changing when the mill started selling off the houses.

Mr. Ruffin: Yes...West Durham by then had been incorporated into the City of Durham, and it was felt by the management of the company that our people would get much satisfaction out of owning their own homes, looking after them, and changing them in what ever way they wanted to. So the company did sell its houses to its employees, at very reasonable prices. The people were most happy to buy them and to pay for them over an extended time. And it all turned out to be a very good solution to the housing problem for the West Durham community. Of course

happy and satisfied employees mean a great deal to the operation of any business.

R.F.: Had the mill started to hire people outside of the community by the time the mill houses were sold to the employees? [around W.W.II]

Mr. Ruffin: Oh, yes.. I guess it was 1932 or 1933 when the textile industry went to two-shift operation. That's when the forty hour week came into operation, and you could no longer operate fifty-six hour like we were doing at the time. So we set up two forty hour shifts, which meant the employment of a great deal more people. And a great many of them did come from all over Durham and surrounding rural communities. It about doubled the number employed at the mill. Later the third shift was added which again increased the employment very much.

R.F.: Were the people still using the Erwin Auditorium and the other recreational facilities the mill provided?

Mr. Ruffin: Oh, yes. Mr. Erwin had that built in the belief that it would mean a great deal to the people. And he and Mr. Lewis both gave great thought and concern to the satisfaction and the health and the welfare of the company employees. And the Erwin Auditorium, with all its good facilities, did become sort of a center of the community. I think it was greatly enjoyed and appreciated by the people. And it was open to the community in general and not to just the employees. Later it seemed more appropriate for the city to operate those facilities, so the company deeded control of the auditorium to the city and later donated the remaining ownership to the city of Durham.

R.F.: Mr. Ruffin, is it conceivable that West Durham could

have remained a separate community had only West Durham residents voted on whether or not to become part of the City of Durham?

Mr. Ruffin: I suppose actually it was inevitable that the two communities^{would join}. I suppose that if it had been left up to the people of West Durham, it would not have been voted in. Lots of West Durham^{people} did complain that, for quite awhile, it did not get commensurate returns for the taxes it had to pay. I think it eventually worked out all right, and I believe within a few years there wasn't any feeling about it. You see, the company and its employees didn't use city water, and it used the electric facilities afforded by Duke Power Company and so forth... Let me dwell a moment on Mr. Erwin and Mr. Lewis as heads of the Erwin Mills. I felt proud to succeed them as the third active head of the company. Both were unusually fine men, outstanding public citizens, and known and respected very highly throughout the textile industry- throughout the country as textile leaders. I couldn't over-exaggerate the fine characters of these two outstanding textile leaders.

R.F.: When you were head of the mill were you a member of the National Association of Manufacturers?

Mr. Ruffin: Yes, I became president of the N.A.M. as it was called.

R.F.: And you were the first president of the association from the South?

Mr. Ruffin: I believe I was considered the first Southerner to really head the N.A.M.

R.F.: When you became president that must have really increased your responsibilities.

Mr. Ruffin: Well it did a great deal. I had to practically take a leave from the company. I suppose I travelled 100,000 mile a year, and largely by rail.

R.F.: What years was that?

Mr. Ruffin: '50 and '51. Carl R. Harris, executive vice president, took charge of the company, and with the help of our board of directors ran it well when I had to be away.

R.F.: And you had to make speeches while you toured the country?

Mr. Ruffin: I suppose I had to make three or four speeches a week, plus radio, and some T.V. which had just begun to come in then. I was supposed to become president of the American Textile Manufacturing Institute the same year. At first I declined the nomination to the N.A.M. presidency, but the American Textile Manufacturers said they would release me, and I should take this nationwide responsibility. I did later take the presidency of the American Textile Manufacturers in 1962, and Mr. Lewis served in that capacity also. It was then called the American Cotton Manufacturers Association, which later merged with the Cotton Textile Institute.

But we were all very proud of West Durham and proud of the people--our employees and the business community. And we think there was a fine relationship between our company and the community.

R.F.: Did the personal atmosphere which Mr. Erwin created contribute to it significantly?

Mr. Ruffin: I think it did very much so. His personal leadership and participation in the community was very important. Of course that meant a great deal to our company and to the community I think. It is often said that a company is no

better than its management. Certainly back in those days my predecessors did give good management. And I felt very proud to succeed them.

R.F.: Mr. Othar Eubanks, a West Durham citizen, told me that you might recall the time when his father was working in the mill.

Mr. Ruffin: He and I were good friends. I admired him a great deal, and he was the overseer of the number four mill spinning room and brought me up to be his assistant. I was very, very fond of him. He used to have a lot of great expressions. When someone would break a piece of machinery or something, he would get put out about it and he used to say, "I'll tell you Mr. Ruffin. You just can't teach a bulldog to set birds." Sometimes he would say, when we were having trouble as we were bound to have occasionally, "I'll tell you Mr. Ruffin. It's a great big world and you need all sorts of people to fill it." He was a great philosopher.

R.F.: When a new person was hired, what job was he assigned?

Mr. Ruffin: Well they would come in and learn to run the card room machinery or the spinning machinery or the spinning weaving machinery or learn to be loom fixers. I learned to run all those pieces of machinery, working at the mill. But the greatest experience for me, and Mr. Erwin told me it would be, was learning to work with the people. You had to earn their respect and good will and so forth.

R.F.: Did Mr. Lewis...

Mr. Ruffin: He didn't work in the mill. He came from college at Chapel Hill and went to work in the office. One of his early responsibilities was supply purchasing, and so forth. He very

soon became Mr. Erwin's right hand man.

R.F.: Under Mr. Erwin what was the turnover rate in the mill?

Mr. Ruffin: It was relatively small then.

R.F.: And when the company sold the houses and people from other communities began working in the mill...

Mr. Ruffin: The turnover increased then. The people who lived in West Durham worked on the first shift- the one shift that we had- and naturally they felt more at home there. They felt permanently located. As we added the second and third shift the turnover rate did increase. And during W.W.II, for instance, it was really very hard to get enough employees.

R.F.: After the war did the mill still stay closed on Sundays?

Mr. Ruffin: Oh, yes. When we went to the forty hour week, that meant no work on Saturdays, and it meant overtime if you worked Saturdays. The Erwin Mills in those days never really ran on Sundays, except in maybe some dire emergency. Maybe one department would operate no more than necessary to facilitate the operation of the shifts generally. We used to run on Saturdays until about noon.

R.F.: Did Erwin Mills continue to have a company picnic after Mr. Erwin's death?

Mr. Ruffin: Yes, we did. During the late '50's and early 60's we would organize a great picnic with brunswick stew.

R.F.: And that was always well attended?

Mr. Ruffin: Oh, yes. It was well attended and thoroughly enjoyed by our people.

R.F.: When was it held?

Mr. Ruffin: That was in the Spring, and we'd set it up in all our mill communities. We built big pits for cooking food. One

of the features of it was that the management personnel would do the cooking and the serving, and waited on the people.

R.F.: Do you recall the nationwide textile strike of 1934?

Mr. Ruffin: That was the strike with the "flying squadrons." Employees from other mill communities would get into automobiles and come into our community and try to disrupt our operations.

R.F.: And they weren't arrested?

Mr. Ruffin: I think some court injunctions were finally invoked.

R.F.: It sounds like pretty violent stuff.

Mr. Ruffin: It was pretty violent- yes.

R.F.: How did the 1948 strike compare to the one in '34?

Mr. Ruffin: Well, it was really much more serious and lasted, I believe, for six months. And Erwin Mills didn't turn a wheel that six months, which was very hard on the company and especially hard on the employees.

R.F.: That must have been a real economic setback to the community.

Mr. Ruffin: It was, and it was accompanied by some violence.

R.F.: Anything real serious?

Mr. Ruffin: I don't believe there were any deaths or particularly bad injuries, but there was a good deal of violence. One or two attempts were made to dynamite portions of the mill. One corner of our number four mill there in West Durham was dynamited. So it was a very serious and costly situation.

R.F.: Were the persons responsible for that ever found?

Mr. Ruffin: No, I don't believe they ever did. I don't think there were any indictments. They couldn't determine who did it

I guess.

R.F.: The whole tone of the strike was different from the one in '34 then.

Mr. Ruffin: Yes. '34 was made up of so much of what they call "flying squadrons." It wasn't so much a community thing or a company thing as it was in the 1948 strike, which was really a Erwin Mills strike, you might say. I think it was more of a misunderstanding between union leadership and Erwin Mills.

(in 1948) Wages were really quite high by then, relatively, for the textile industry, and management felt that the company and the employees would benefit greatly by scientific work rule studies by which the employees could and did earn a great deal more weekly pay. Scientific studies showed that more looms could be run and more pay could be earned at the same time. The employee would not be overloaded in his work. One of the worst things you could do would be to overload an employee. He couldn't run the machinery efficiently if he was overloaded. Of course there was some objection on the part of employees who didn't understand it at first. The union saw that as an opportunity to get dissatisfied employees to join unions, which they did do. I think that, without a doubt, most of the employees saw that these scientific studies--work load studies--were to their benefit as well as the company's. I used to say to union leaders that I didn't think you could go into our mills and persuade our employees to go back to the old workload system.

R.F.: Was there a division between the workers and the union in later years? Weren't there a lot of disillusioned union members in the West Durham mill?

R.F.: Was there ever a strong union in West Durham?

Mr. Ruffin: Well yes, I'd say there was a strong union. Of course I personally felt they were on the wrong foot, and I think later our employees felt so too. The union still existed after that (1948) and still exists today.

R.F.: But it never had the widespread support of the workers.

Is that right?

Mr. Ruffin: It certainly did not receive unanimous support from our employees, and I wouldn't attempt to say what percentage of our employees disagreed with the union policies. Of course quite a percentage did disagree, and that made for division among the employees.

R.F.: As I understand it some of the union leaders were not that honest, like Mr. Beck in 1934.

Mr. Ruffin: Well I wouldn't comment on that because I don't think it's becoming of me to criticize a union leader. They had their own policies. They had a certain amount of employee support. I don't believe I should comment on that.

R.F.: Right. Right.

Mr. Ruffin: Now things are peaceful and harmonious, and I wouldn't want to do anything to disturb it, you see.

R.F.: I see. One final question Mr. Ruffin. What was the transition like when Erwin Mills became Burlington Industries?

Mr. Ruffin: The Duke interests, who had a very high percentage of the stock in the company, as they got up in years, found they had a very big inheritance tax problem. And they disposed of a number of their stock holdings, not only in our company, to get more liquid and to prepare to pay inheritance taxes. So they sold the stock to Abdany Mills

of Greenwood, South Carolina. Later they ran into the same personal family problems so they then sold controlling interest in Erwin Mills to Burlington Industries. Our board of Directors and I decided that Burlington Industries' offer was the best, so that's the way that merger came about in 1962.

R.F.: What was the community reaction to this switch?

Mr. Ruffin: I suppose at first the community questioned and hoped that everything would turn out all right, and I think it later turned out to be--that Burlington Industries very well managed and was able to finance new machinery, pension systems, and all sorts of modern day operations.

R.F.: Was work interrupted when the switchover was made to Burlington Industries?

Mr. Ruffin: No, the transition was very smooth.

R.F.: And you were working pretty closely with the new mill leaders?

Mr. Ruffin: I was approaching retirement age then, but I stayed active in the management of Erwin Mills for Burlington for several years past the retirement age.

R.F.: Mr. Ruffin, I really want to thank you. I think I have some ~~real~~ good information here.

Mr. Ruffin: It's a pleasure. I just hope it hasn't sounded all too personal.

This interview was conducted in McDonald's Drugstore on Ninth Street with three long-time residents of West Durham. Mr. Samuel Dennis, seventy-two years old, had occasion to meet Mr. Erwin when he delivered milk to the mill-owner's house in 1908 and 1909. Mr. John Cameron McDonald, owner of the store, is a lifetime resident of West Durham and is fifty-five years old. Called "Mr. Brown" in the interview, the third participant wished to remain anonymous. He is in his early seventies and was for many years a house builder in the West Durham community.

The participants were relaxed and talkative. Mr. Dennis, especially, seemed to enjoy the chance to reminisce about the history of the community.

The drugstore is a meeting place for many of West Durham's old-timers. Mr. McDonald explained that it had always been just that, and he pointed to an area of the room which used to be occupied by a pot belly stove, around which people would often meet after work in the Mill.

R.F.: Mr. Dennis, do you remember meeting Mr. Erwin?

Mr. Dennis: Bill Erwin? In business transactions, no, but I knew him personally. I delivered milk to his house in about '08 or '09. He had a park over here, just on the other side of the track here, and he financed it and used it for entertainment for the employees of the mill, and he was there speaking at various occasions and events. I've been on picnics with him. Back in those days we went on trains to Lock-Lilly, which is up at Roxboro, to Quail Roost, which is out on the Roxboro Road. He was always the speaker and he financed those trains. He was the head of the community, in reality.

R.F.: Mr. Dennis, when did your family come to West Durham?

Mr. Dennis: My father came here from Charleston somewhere in the area of 1894. And he built a house adjoining this building right here. (McDonald's Drugstore).

R.F.: Do you remember him telling you what West Durham was like back in 1894?

Mr. Dennis: Back in my time there wasn't any town up here. Where the girls dormitory is, that was where the circus grounds was. Main Street did not exist up to Broad.

R.F.: So the area was much smaller than what we now call West Durham.

Mr. Dennis: Oh the town was... our telephone number was 527. Back in my time those mill houses were built. Those houses cost \$375. to build.

R.F.: Do you remember who did the construction?

Mr. Dennis: I don't know who did the construction. I think they cut a lot of the timber in the area.

R.F.: How far back does that go?

Mr. Dennis: All those mill houses there were built in 1909.

R.F.: When the mill eventually sold the houses in the 1940's, how much did they go for?

Mr. Dennis: They got about \$2,000. for those houses. Some of them now are selling for as high as \$20,000. apiece.

R.F.: Were the people given a chance to make payments over a period of time?

Mr. McDonald: I think you had to get your own finances. Of course at that price a lot of people had that much saved up.

R.F.: When in 1938, as West Durham began to emerge out of the Depression...

Mr. McDonald: In 1939 I worked in the mill for 25¢ an hour. \$11.88, I believe, was my forty hour pay. I worked long enough there to get my first year at Carolina.

R.F.: How about the time when Mr. Erwin passed on and Mr. Kemp Lewis took over the leadership of the mill?

Mr. Dennis: There was no change in activities over there that I know of.

R.F.: I've heard it said that Fourth of Julys in West Durham were something special.

Mr. Dennis: Well, most of the time on the Fourth of July is when we had our excursions. And all denominations would join in. It was really a trainload when they went.

R.F.: And this was all sponsored by the mill?

Mr. Dennis: Well, most of it was. Erwin generally... when he got ready to go on one of those trains, he didn't go down to the

depot. He walked out of his house out to the tracks and take his handkerchief and wave it and the train stopped for him.

R.F.: It seems to me that to a great extent the history of the West Durham area has been overlooked. Would you agree?

Mr. McDonald: It was self-sufficient. West Durham has always been basically independent or less dependent upon the city than other areas, basically due to the influence of the mill up here.

R.F.: I'm kind of interested in the incorporation of the West Durham area.

Mr. Dennis: The city limits have been extended about four times. The original city limits was down by the girl's dormitory.

R.F.: What year did that first extension take place?

Mr. Dennis: That must have been, now I'm guessing, around 1923 or 1924. The next one, after you pass the city water plant on Hillsborough Road and just about a block above it, was the second expansion.

R.F.: Why was this street called Ninth Street?

Mr. Dennis: Well, Buchanan Street is really First Street, the next one is Second, Third, Broad Street down here was Seventh Street, and Ninth has always retained its original number. The streets going the opposite direction, starting with Markham Ave., were A Street, B, and C.

R.F.: Was Mr. Erwin a religious man?

Mr. McDonald: I've been told that Mr. ^{Erwin} built or furnished

the funds church up here on Ninth Street.

Mr. Dennis: You mean the Episcopal Church?

Mr. McDonald: Yes.

Mr. Dennis: My father worked in Mr. Erwin's mill at the turn of the century. He started working at six in the morning and knocked off at six at night, six days a week. They gave him an hour off for dinner, so that's eleven hours a day.

R.F.: Do you remember how much he got paid?

Mr. Dennis: He was a loom-fixer and he had about forty looms, and I think he got \$3.75 a week.

R.F.: Gee!

Mr. Dennis: And most of them in that category would have a family of ten or twelve children living on \$3.75 a week.

R.F.: Mr. McDonald, when you were working in the mill for that short period of time, what kind of job did you have?

Mr. McDonald: I went in first as a carpenter's assistant or just a helper, and after a few months I moved into the tieing-in room.

R.F.: What year was that?

Mr. McDonald: '39, '40. Out in the weave room you had to put your hand out and scream to catch attention. Those looms would shuttle back and forth and they were pretty noisy. It was interesting. I thoroughly enjoyed the fourteen months.

Mr. Dennis: How much did you make over there?

Mr. McDonald: 25¢ an hour. And if you didn't want to work, there was a man waiting outside for your job at that price.

Mr. Dennis: What was the age limit for working there at that time?

Mr. McDonald: Well, I presume it was eighteen.

Mr. Dennis: There was some twelve years of age and ten years of age working there. Somebody said that they went working up there and they were not fourteen. And the limit was fourteen. So he put the number fourteen on a piece of paper and put it in his shoe and put the foot on top of it and said, "I'm standing over fourteen."

R.F.: Were there a lot of young children working in the mill?

Mr. Dennis: Oh, yes.

Mr. McDonald: Well, now I don't recall, frankly. I can recall when I got out of high school I went down to American Tobacco Company, you used to have to go down there early in the morning and stand out there and wait, and maybe the man would come out, and he'd look around, and there was no help wanted today, and he turned and went back, and everyone went back to their area. I went down there for at least two weeks hunting, and I finally gave up, and the boy who went with me went one or two days after I gave up, and he was put to work. So I came back to West Durham, and I was lucky enough to find a job up here

McDonald's Drugstore- Interview # 2

R.F.: Mr. Brown, do you remember Mr. William Erwin?

Mr. Brown: I sure do. I used to do repair work for him.

R.F.: What kind of man was he?

Mr. Brown: An outstanding citizen. I'd say he was a good man. He loved West Durham just as a man loves his kids. I used to go over and work on his house. Mr. E^s Powe married his sister across the street. I used to do contracting work, and I worked over there at Mr. Erwin's house, and he got me to go over to his brother-in-law's, Mr. Powe. Harper Erwin, he was a cousin, ~~and~~ he got me to go down to his house.

R.F.: What else do you remember about Mr. Erwin?

Mr. Brown: As I said he loved... He'd get in that car in the back seat, and he'd take a ride around that mill village every Saturday evening. He'd go around and speak with these people and holler at them

R.F.: Do you think he knew just about everyone in the community?

Mr. Brown: I wouldn't doubt it. When I went over there he learned my name and never did forget it. He was a great old man.

R.F.: What do you remember about Mr. Kemp Lewis?

Mr. Brown: K.P. Lewis? He took Mr. Erwin's place, you see.

He was a straightforward man. I did some work for him. He never gave me a bit of trouble. He always thanked me for what I done.

Dr. Frank T. DeVyver, a retired Duke University professor, talked about his experiences as vice-president for personnel and industrial relations of the Erwin Cotton Mill Company in the forties and fifties. I talked with deVyver for several hours at his office on the Duke University campus.

In 1928 deVyver visited textile mills throughout the South. In the interview he draws upon these and other experiences in recounting the history of relations between the Erwin Company and its employees.

Before deVyver joined the Mill in 1943, he attended the meetings of the local West Durham union and got to know its leaders. His appointment as vice-president of personnel and industrial relations symbolized a move by the Company out of the paternalistic past; the creation of his job represented a new and progressive attitude towards the union. In the interview deVyver draws a picture of mutual respect between the Mill and the union. Their's was a working relationship.

DeVyver served at a ^{critical} ~~crucial~~ time in the history of West Durham, and his recollections are extremely valuable and insightful.

R.F.: Dr. deVyver, could you tell me about the history of your association with the Erwin Cotton Mills?

Dr. deVyver: I think it was in 1943. I was teaching at Duke, and I kept on teaching at Duke. This was the beginning of the wartime period, and all of us were being called upon to stretch ourselves out, and also, it was possible for me to go on half-time at Duke because we didn't have that many students in those days. I was approached by Carl Harris. Carl Harris was Vice-president of Erwin Mills at the time, as was Mr. Ruffin when I went with the Company. He approached me and asked if I would come over and work with them, to handle their labor relations and set up a personnel department.

R.F.: Were you Vice-president of Industrial Relation when you first started?

Dr. deVyver: Well that came maybe six or eight months later. See I went in without any title and then became Vice-president for Personnel and Industrial Relations. Now the main reason I think they asked me to do it is because they wanted someone who could get along with the unions, and I had been getting along with the unions ever since I had been around here. I knew most of the people in the union movement already, and they had a union over there which had been voted in under the Wagner Act, and they wanted someone to negotiate and handle the grievances and then set up a personnel department, because they didn't have any personnel department at the time. They just had "employment at the gate" or some sort of thing. So I went and started the personnel department, got somebody to handle the employment,

we had a safety director. This came gradually; it didn't all come at once. You couldn't do all these things at once because a group of management people who had been doing all these for themselves take a very dim view of having a staff person come in and take over. But gradually we built up a personnel department over there with employment, training, safety, all the things you would expect in a personnel department. Meanwhile I was doing the handling of the final step of the grievance procedure and doing all the negotiating for the new contracts with the union. I should know, but I can't count how many negotiations I had. My first one was shortly after I went to work there. I was rather new at this business, as everyone was. There were no unions around. No one knew how to negotiate contracts. We negotiated a contract, got it settled, and I handled the final step of the grievance procedure, not only for Durham, but for the plants in Cooleemee, which is down in Davis County, and Erwin, which is down in Harnett County. But right at the beginning I had contracts for all three of those unions. They were practically the same contract, but they had to be kept as three different sets. And then I was the final step in the grievance procedure, and if we didn't get them settled there and the union wanted to arbitrate the grievance, I was the one who represented the Company in the arbitration procedures. And also I was the one who represented the Company before the War Labor Board. It was a group of organized mills, including Dan River Mills and Cone Mills in Greensboro and Fieldcrest Mills.

R.F.: What were your responsibilities when you served on the

War Labor Board?

Dr. deVyver: Well this was working with the other mills to prepare the cases. They would always lump us together for the main debates, when the union would come in and ask for a 7¢ wage increase or a nickel across the board or something like that. Each side had to prepare its case, and it had to appear before a panel of the War Labor Board and then before the regional board and then, if necessary, before the national board in Washington. Now this was for the main cases, where all the mills were lumped together.

R.F.: Was Mr. Kemp Lewis the president of the Erwin Cotton Mills at the time?

Dr. deVyver: Yes, Mr. Kemp Lewis was president.

R.F.: There's an interesting remark in Wilbur Cash's book, The Mind of the South. Cash made the statement that Lewis was one of the South's progressive mill leaders, for he saw unionization as inevitable. Did Lewis ever make any comments on the subject to you?

Dr. deVyver: No, but one of the things about Mr. Lewis was that he was a realist. When the time came Mr. Lewis knew that the union was there. He said, "O.K., let's get someone who can negotiate and deal with the union." Some of my friends in the industry acted as though they believed in Santa Claus--the union would never come and that sort of thing. And Mr. Lewis was a realist. When it was there, O.K., he accepted it. The story was that the union, in organizing, would say "Mr. Lewis wants you to join the union." This was just a story. I don't know if it's true or not.

R.F.: Can you give me some further description of Mr. Lewis?

Dr. deVyver: Of course by the time I got to know him reasonably well, his health was beginning to fail. He had I think it was Parkinson's disease, and he was not as alert as he had been. He was a very patient person and a person just as kind and would never raise his voice with people. He was a real, what they used to call around here, a Southern gentleman. And with everyone. It wasn't the fatherly type of approach but as far as people were concerned, he was a gentleman. There were a number of blacks, and one of them worked at the Mill and in Mr. Lewis' later years looked after him as sort of a male nurse for him. It was a real friend relationship as well as just a master-servant relationship.

R.F.: Mr. Erwin passed away before you came to Durham, but do you remember hearing any stories about the man?

Dr. deVyver: One of the stories they used to tell about Mr. Erwin was that after a board meeting, when you'd have a meeting of the board of directors, not the board of directors but the stockholder's meeting, he would pass out the annual report. But before the stockholders could leave he collected all those reports. The one I knew better was his sister, Mrs. E.K. Powe. We rented from Mrs. Powe's daughter and her husband, and lived there five years in that nest of Erwins, you might say. I think Mrs. Erwin was still living in the house which is now the Hillcrest Home. So we got to know that group pretty well, but not old Mrs. Erwin. And there was another fellow over there by the name of Parks. He was the manager of the plant when I got over there.

R.F.: Did you notice any significant changes when Mr. Ruffin took over the leadership of the Mill?

Dr. deVyver: No, I don't think so. The textile industry has its ups and downs. If you'd study it you'd know. We were tied up with the sales office in New York. There were no changes that I could see.

R.F.: How did the establishment of the personnel office affect the operation of the Mill?

Dr. deVyver: Yes, it took awhile to get used to it. We would always say that the supervisor, who was called an overseer, had the final selection of people. All our employment office did was screen them. It went over all right, and the training they liked. They held back a little at first, but then they found out that by working with the foreman, and of course we were in a period when employment was a very difficult thing. We used to say, "If they'd walk up those steps and felt warm, we'd employ them," during that wartime period. It was easier to get in because we had to go look for workers.

R.F.: Were greater numbers of applicants coming from different portions of Durham at this time?

Dr. deVyver: I would say that most of them were still coming in from West Durham. Sometimes the skilled workers would be brought in from elsewhere or would drift through from elsewhere. Loom-fixers and sometimes a fixer in the spinning room. But mostly these were built up, and we had training programs to advance them too. And there was a real long-standing work force over there. We had a 25 year club that I got started at all of these mills. And we had meetings each year at which we welcomed

the new people, and we had several who had been there fifty years because when they started to work the child labor laws weren't what they are now. They had no wage and hour law. Some of these people had been working there fifty years.

R.F.: Had an important change occurred when the Mill began selling off its houses?

Dr. deVyver: The thing that I saw happening, I visited textile mills all over the South in 1928, I was working for the University of Virginia, and I must have visited a hundred textile mills all throughout Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee, and the thing that I noticed was as the wages had increased, these people who had formerly been known as lintheads, well you couldn't tell the difference, if you go downtown, between a Duke co-ed and one of these girls. The thing that happened there was that as the number of hours they had to work was decreased and they went on eight-hour shifts and the wages kept going up, they became more like regular factory workers, rather than cotton mill workers. You couldn't spot them again as cotton mill workers. They were really a fine bunch of people. I still meet them in ~~them~~ in the bank once-in-a-while and got to know them fairly well. Knew the union. Even before I went into the Erwin Mills I'd go to the union meetings once-in-a-while.

R.F.: Was there any sort of a mill village atmosphere or remnants of that atmosphere in West Durham when you became active in the Mill?

Dr. deVyver: Not in Durham. You get down to Cooleemee and that

was more of a mill village type of situation. When I arrived here the only vestiges of the mill village was the Erwin Auditorium where we did have a social worker, Miss Lawrence, who had women's clubs and that sort of thing. But there was no Durham recreation department in those days. If you were going to have any recreation, that's where it had to be. It was built as a community house. That sort of thing got out of style.

R.F.: Would you guess as to whether or not there were any of the mill village characteristics in West Durham under Mr. Erwin's leadership?

Dr. deVyver: He was of the vintage, you might say, when this was quite common. And even Mr. K.P. Lewis had a little of that but not too much. By the time Mr. Ruffin would come in, the Mill would plan to sell off the houses.

R.F.: Soon after the end of W.W.II, in 1945 I believe, there was a strike in West Durham. Can you tell me something about the strike and how it was handled by the Mill?

Dr. deVyver: It was a long strike, and people had already bought their homes. (the homes the Mill offered for sale). They stood a chance of losing because they were on strike and not earning anything. We talked to the union about it and told them what we were going to do, but the Company arranged to guarantee these loans during the time that the people were on strike 'cause they didn't want them to lose their homes. Nobody was mad at each other at that time. It was just that we reached an impasse on a couple of things, and neither the Union or the Company wanted to give in. There was no violence. Nothing like

that. The company even strung a wire from the inside of the gate to the outside of the gate 'cause they wanted to have picket tents there and they needed light, and so the Company furnished the light for it. And the Company delivered coal. In those days they used to sell coal to the employees at wholesale prices, and all during the strike the Company delivered coal and charged it up against the workers. I don't think we lost more than ten or fifteen workers in the whole thing.

R.F.: Why was there such a conciliatory approach taken to the whole matter?

Dr. deVyver: Well when you go on a strike it's not like getting a divorce. When a couple gets a divorce they go their own ways. But when a company and a union get involved in a strike situation, unless the company goes out of business, they got to learn to live together. They've got to live together again.

R.F.: But the reaction to a strike situation on the part of other firms was hostility and retaliation. Was there anything in the history of the relationship between the Company and the Union which determined the tone of the strike?

Dr. deVyver: Well I think that's part of it. The Union was convinced that the Erwin Mills wasn't in there trying to knife them. That was why I was brought in, and I think I was successful in getting that point over. They knew that we weren't trying to get rid of the Union. You find that sort of thing in the general labor history too. But there was reasonably good feeling there. As an illustration of how this built up, we once ~~discharged~~ the president of the local union. He had gone in another department and had gotten into a fight with somebody. You stay in your

own department, that was one rule, and the other rule was you don't get into a fight. It's dangerous in a plant. So we fired him. Well now if that had happened at J.P. Stevens, there would have been a real N.L.R.B. case. They didn't even arbitrate it. It went through the grievance procedure as a matter of course, but they didn't arbitrate it. And two or three months later we hired the guy back. He was a good worker. He just lost his temper over something that went on at home, I guess. So you see it's that type of thing which creates a friendly relationship. Both the union and the company were trying to do that. A lot of the arbitration was handled in the Erwin Auditorium. On the other hand, down at our Cooleemee plant we didn't have any place like that, so all the arbitrations were held in the union hall. Now you had to have a good rapport not to worry where the location is going to be.

R.F.: During this post-W.W.II strike what percentage of the strikers were union members and what percentage were sympathizers?

Dr. deVyver: It was always over 50% were union members. We had a check-off over there, and you knew who was paying dues. I'd say about 60% were union members. But we decided that we wouldn't try to operate; we'd close the plant down. We figured that time the union members were the majority. Now we had a strike later which only lasted two weeks. The 1945 strike lasted three months. But this later strike, where we continued to operate, there was a split even among the union people. It was a silly thing to strike over.

R.F.: What year was that?

Dr. deVyver: '53 or '54 somewhere along there. This was called a legal strike, legal from our contract point of view. We had reached the end of our contract, and we were negotiating a new one. We had most of it settled, and then we went into this real hassle, and they went out on strike, and they decided to keep operating. This wasn't just my decision. It was the Company's decision too. And I thought it was a right decision. My feeling on the subject was that it was the national union forcing this crowd to strike. The union was out all over, and that's a national union. These people weren't mad about anything. It was the national that forced them out. Of course there was some discontents, but, gosh, we met with them all the time and had no problems. Except then the picket lines arrived, and they wouldn't let people in, and then there was some violence. Your talking about West Durham. There was some violence over there. Women tearing at the clothes of other women who were trying to get by the picket lines, and a car was overturned, and it was really kind of a tough situation, and the Company went into the state courts and got an injunction, or what preceded an injunction, to regulate this picketing. You don't stop picketing, but you can regulate it. And they came out and measured and put a line up and down outside the plant gate, a hundred feet, I guess it was. And the police came out and drew a line there, and there were some real battles there when people came and left, because they had a type of picketing which I hadn't seen before, but I saw it this time. It was lock-step circle picketing. I'd say about thirty people went around so as to get in the gate you had to break. Now nobody stopped you

from breaking. Then you were inside the circle, and then you had to break out of it to get in the gate, and this took a lot of courage. Now when you get down to it, no one was really hurt many time, but it was that type of thing.

R.F.: Was their any violence directed at the Mill?

Dr. deVyver: No we didn't have any violence aimed at the Mill. Now that was finally settled over in the governor's office. The governor got into the act, and we all went over there, and we settled our strike over there.

R.F.: Were there black workers in the Mill at the time?

Dr. deVyver: No. There were some very interesting stories about the black workers coming in. Before I left the Company needed some workers to do what was called cloth doffing.

R.F.: Around what time was this?

Dr. deVyver: 1955? They needed cloth doffers. A cloth doffer's job was a very back-breaking job. The Company was having a heck of a time getting any white workers to do it, so the Company hired some black workers. Now the workers in the weave room, and they didn't consult me ahead of time about it, the workers in the weave room just went on strike. It wasn't that black men were taking their jobs. It was that black men were mingling around with their wives and daughters. Actually, we had to find other jobs for the blacks. We had to give up on that one.

Well I got after them for that, and said, "For gosh sakes. When you're going to do something like that, let's talk about it ahead of time." So a few weeks later they needed to do the same thing in another department, and we got the union in, and we got the workers involved in, and we explained the thing to them.

This was of course before the equal opportunity laws. But we explained what was going to happen. And it happened, and everything went smoothly.

R.F.: How did the situation change after you left the Mill?

Dr. deVyver: I think two things made us change. One is the law. That's the most important. But the other is the shortage of workers. I'm not sure which in West Durham is the most important. I haven't been in the Mill in years, but I guess it's pretty well integrated now.

R.F.: Did the percentage of women in the Mill change over the period of time you were there?

Dr. deVyver: As I've studied the statistics, the average wage of women in the textile industry is somewhat less than the average wage for men. But even during the War we never had a woman loom fixer. The jobs that were the highest paid jobs, the mechanics' jobs, were all men. But in a weave room, if you were a weaver, it didn't matter whether you were a male or a female. You got the same pay. And the same thing for spinning. They had men spinners and women spinners. There was no discrimination for pay in any one job. There was discrimination, as they would call it today, against women in mechanical jobs. We always had some women on the union shop committee.

The following interview is with a lifetime West Durham resident, now seventy-seven years old. Mrs. Reynolds (not her real name) was a school teacher for many years in West Durham.

I had been checking with several of the area's nursing homes for possible sources of information on West Durham's past. Mrs. Reynolds was a part-time, volunteer receptionist at the Methodist Retirement Home on Erwin Road. When I asked if she knew of any people I might interview, she suggested herself. We arranged to meet at the Home in two weeks.

There is a nostalgic ring to Mrs. Reynolds recollections. At seventy-seven years old she has many fond memories, and she reminisced about her past with undisguised pride. We talked for about an hour. Here is the transcript of that conversation:

R.F.: Mrs. Reynolds, do you remember Mr. William Erwin?

Mrs. Reynolds: Through his daughter. Of course I knew him, and his daughter and I were in school together. My father was postmaster and naturally they were friends for many reasons. My grandfather was a friend of his. I can remember very distinctly my grandfather had a store- just a general store- and I remember very well when I was ten years old- I was born in 1898- my grandfather, who was a very sentimental man, gave me a little cut-glass pitcher. And I still have the pitcher. That was a great place along there. A lot of activities were going on, and of course we had no paved streets. But I remember Mr. K.P. Lewis. I remember Mr. Erwin. I remember very distinctly my father being postmaster. He would send me down to East Durham on the streetcar. We had streetcars then. And there was a Mr. Abernathy who was postmaster in East Durham, and they always had to exchange different things. So I was taught early to do the things that had to be done. I'd even take bags of money. You know, we lived in a time then when it was practically all right for a little girl my age to go from East Durham to West Durham.

R.F.: How long a trip was that?

Mrs. Reynolds: Oh, it was several miles. It would take maybe an hour. I've forgotten that, 'cause time meant nothing to me at that time. As I grew a little older and he was still there, I was allowed to give the general delivery then. As time went along and I grew, I can remember the Christmas parties that Mr. Erwin gave to the employees of the Mill..

And he was a very respected man. And that was the only thing that ever bothered me: the fact that I was not invited to the Christmas parties. I felt even then that I was being discriminated against, and it was because none of those in my family worked in the Mill. But we had a very good rapport with the people there.

As I grew the street grew. There were many stores that came along. We had a little dry-cleaning plant.

R.F.: Were there arrangements between the Mill and your grandfather who owned the store for serving the mill population?

Mrs. Reynolds: Well, of course that's how his store thrived

R.F.: Do you think Mr. Erwin might have consulted with your grandfather?

Mrs. Reynolds: I don't know about that. I do know that one time I remember hearing my grandfather say he couldn't get to the bank, or something happened, and he needed some extra money. It was for the payroll. I remember that.

R.F.: This was Mr. Erwin asking your grandfather for money?

Mrs. Reynolds: Yes, it was just a loan because he couldn't get to the bank or something like that. But the Mill was the source of income for most of the people. And we lived within the wall that we have now.

R.F.: The Women's College wall?

Mrs. Reynolds: Yes. I went to the West Durham school. We only had ten grades in those days. And then when I started to college, I could walk through and go to college. The first two buildings were the ones I had my classes in, and we could also walk down from the college to the Southern Conservatory

of Music. My sister and I happened to be talented, and there was nothing for little girls to do in the summertime but take music. And two summers I studied Latin with Mrs. B.N. Mann just to kill time. I needed something to do. And my father always believed in children having something to do, and he knew that there was only two things a girl could do and that was teach music or teach school. And we had to study music in the summertime.

R.F.: Was it fun studying music?

Mrs. Reynolds: Sure it was. I still sing, and I'm 77 years old.. But it was a great life when I think about the many, many fun things that we did. And we were not afraid. There was no one to bother you.

R.F.: You said you lived within what are now the walls of the College. Were there a number of houses here?

Mrs. Reynolds: Oh, yes.

R.F.: Were these especially nice houses?

Mrs. Reynolds: We thought they were. They were six-room houses. I remember that my grandfather had a large home, and that we lived not too far from him.. And we had this dear old uncle, Wash, who worked for both families. And we were so close (the houses) that he could walk between the two and keep the coal and the wood in both places. That was wonderful.

R.F.: Do you remember any of your neighbors?

Mrs. Reynolds: Oh yes. I remember the Warners, and I remember the McDonalds, and I remember the Langstons lived there. There were three big boarding houses immediately behind the row of houses we lived on, and they were the ones who looked after

the boys in Trinity Park School. And Professor F.S. Aldridge was the principal, or headmaster, I guess you'd call him. My brothers went to school there.

R.F.: What did you do after your schooling, Mrs. Reynolds?

Mrs. Reynolds: I became a teacher.

R.F.: At what school?

Mrs. Reynolds: At E.K..., well it wasn't E.K. Powe, (E.K.), it was just the West Durham School. It was across the railroad, below Mr. Erwin's home. That was where I went to school, and that's where I first taught school. And then I eventually came over to E.K. Powe School. It was named for Mr. E.K. Powe, and he was also affiliated with the Mill. They were related, the Erwin's and the Powe's. And they were across-the-street neighbors.. Then there was Jesse Harper Erwin- J. Harper Erwin. He was also in the Mill.

R.F.: In one of our earlier conversations, you mentioned that Mr. Dailey was a member of the Roney family.

Mrs. Reynolds: Yes, Mrs. Dailey, John Calvin's mother, was a Roney. And she was related to Mr. Ben Duke. And Mr. Duke, real often, would come over to see Mrs. Dailey. And Mrs. Dailey's daughter, Ruth, and I ...I thought I was her mama almost. I felt responsible for Ruth. We played together. She was my little doll, so to speak, because I was about ten or twelve years older than she. I would oftentimes be over there when Mr. Duke would come.

R.F.: What do you remember of Mr. Duke?

Mrs. Reynolds: He was a very gentle, kindhe looked exactly like his picture which I've seen so many, many times.

R.F.: What kind of clothes did he wear?

Mrs. Reynolds: He wore simple clothes but nice clothes, and he would always talk to us a little bit. He was a gentleman. There's no doubt about that. And Mrs. Dailey was always pleased when he came, and I thought it was so sweet. Of course I don't know what their conversations were, because we were out playing.

R.F.: Mrs. Reynolds, could you tell me something about medical care in West Durham? When people got sick did they seek advice at the local drugstore or...

Mrs. Reynolds: There was not a physician in West Durham for a good while. Dr. B.U. Brooks was the first pediatrician we had, and he was a very fine doctor. He and his wife never had any children, but all the children in the neighborhood belonged to him. And then, of course, we did have a little hospital down at the corner right there where McPherson's hospital is. That was the little tiny hospital at that time. And Dr. R.L. Phelps was one of the older doctors.

R.F.: Do you remember when Watts Hospital was built?

Mrs. Reynolds: Oh yes. That was 1905, I believe. I remember everything about it, because, you see, they had to pass our house to do everything that was done, to carry and in the meantime we got a streetcar started running by there. And I remember the day the hospital was opened.

R.F.: What happened that day?

Mrs. Reynolds: Oh, there was so many people going there. They were all so delighted that we were having a hospital there, that everyone wanted to see it. And it was a great, great day. And

I also remember the day that Theodore Roosevelt came to town. I remember very distinctly going up and seeing him. My father was a Republican, and he was a Republican, and he was kind enough to send my father his picture. I don't think he set aside my father to do that for. You see, when you were a postmaster, you had to be a Republican if there was a Republican in. You lost your job when the Democrats came. So that was the year that Roosevelt came, and my father saw him and talked with him. And I know my father heard from him on different occasions. But I have watched this town grow.

R.F.: Your father was a Republican, but most everyone else was a Democrat?

Mrs. Reynolds: That's right. So we kept a low-key. That's one thing we never argued about or fussed about.

R.F.: Did Mr. Erwin have any political leaning?

Mrs. Reynolds: Well, he was very political, and I think many people, at that time, could be, as they are today, expedient-if it was expedient to do something. But, it was a great day.

R.F.: Going back to Mr. Erwin, he impresses me as the type of man who kept in very close touch with his people.

Mrs. Reynolds: He did. He really did. He knew what was going on. He was an Episcopalian, and he had one son, William, and three daughters, and the youngest one, Sarah, and I became very good friends.

R.F.: Did you go to her house often?

Mrs. Reynolds: Oh yes. I went to her home many times, and she would come by with her little pony and little carriage. And we would go to ride. We would study together, and I ate

Some very delicious refreshments many times, and Mrs. Erwin...

R.F.: They lived in a beautiful house, didn't they?

Mrs. Reynolds: Oh yes. Did you get to see any part of it?

R.F.: I've seen photographs of it.

Mrs. Reynolds: It was a beautiful place--a beautiful place and, Sarah and I would go upstairs and sit on that long porch. There was a long porch upstairs. I walked to school by her house, and many mornings I would stop, and Sarah and I would go the rest of the way together.

R.F.: Could you give me a physical description of Mr. Erwin, from what you remember?

Mrs. Reynolds: Mr. Erwin was a big man. He looked like he knew where he was going and what he was going to do when he got there. He was very sure of himself.

R.F.: Was he a good talker?

Mrs. Reynolds: A very good talker and a very nice man. A really handsome man, I'd say.

R.F.: Did he talk with you?

Mrs. Reynolds: Well, he talked some but not very much because I was a little girl. He talked mostly to my father. And there was another old gentleman who really meant a great deal to many of us, especially the younger people, and that was Sheriff Blacknall. He was quite a character. He was a very small man. He never married, and his two nieces lived with him. The nieces taught school, and they taught a long, long time.

R.F.: Why was the Sheriff so memorable?

Mrs. Reynolds: Because he was so full of fun. He had a little place out in the country, it was on the Eno River, and we

(Mrs. Reynolds and her school chums) would go out for the weekend. And he'd go along because it was his place. He just enjoyed being with young people. We'd always take a chaperone, of course. We never were allowed to go unchaperoned. So the boys and the girls and the Sheriff and the chaperone would strike out many weekends. We had fun, in a nice, wonderful way. And then we'd come home Sunday afternoon in time for the league.

R.F.: What was the league?

Mrs. Reynolds: Our church would have our league, and we would have to go to that. I am a Methodist.

R.F.: Where was the church at that time?

Mrs. Reynolds: It was right across from the Erwin Mills,...

R.F.: And it was called...?

Mrs. Reynolds: It was the West Durham Methodist Church.

R.F.: Would you care to guess how large your congregation was at that time?

Mrs. Reynolds: Oh, you know when you're a child things just seem so big. I'd say we had a couple of hundred.

R.F.: Were there many mill workers who went to the Methodist Church?

Mrs. Reynolds: Oh yes. Episcopal Church too. And we had a little Presbyterian Church. That was back of the Mill. The Presbyterian Church was really a little mill church because that was way over back of the Mill.

R.F.: Do you remember ever seeing Mr. Erwin riding around the West Durham community, on a Saturday night perhaps?

Mrs. Reynolds: No, simply because I was home. We didn't run

around like the boys and girls of today, at night.

R.F.: No, I meant by word of mouth, or ...

Mrs. Reynolds: No, I never heard it. Of course that's another thing. My father and mother were very protective, and I did not know, or I did not hear, and they were wonderful people.

R.F.: Do you recall any major changes that came to the West Durham community, like when it became a part of the city of Durham, or when W.W.II came?

Mrs. Reynolds: I remember W.W.II. I remember the great epidemic. I was teaching at the time, and we were told that if we had anyone in our home with this flu epidemic that we would be allowed to look after our own people. If we had no one we had to come to the school. They had the school just filled with patients. It was 1918 or '19. I remember sitting with many people. One person I was with when she passed, and I was a young girl. Of course, it was my first year of teaching. It was very hard on the teachers. We were told that's what our duty was. We were not teaching, but we were getting our pay, and we were supposed to help those who needed help, because they didn't have enough nurses.

R.F.: Do you remember who West Durham's law enforcement people were?

Mrs. Reynolds: I couldn't tell you to save my life. I never did know any of the law men.

R.F.: I didn't mean....

Mrs. Reynolds: I know you didn't, but Sheriff Blacknall had been, and the name just stuck.

R.F.: Did you have the opportunity to participate in any of the

activities at the Erwin Auditorium?

Mrs. Reynolds: It was just for those who worked in the Mill. I did all my recreational doin's over at the College. I did play tennis over there. I played with the boys. I played ball. We just all had a good time. None of us felt that we had to be the boys over here and the girls over there.

R.F.: I guess most of the mill employees really used the Erwin Auditorium.

Mrs. Reynolds: They did. And I'll tell you, at Christmas time Mr. Erwin really put the big pot in the little one, so to speak. He really made a grand event. It seems to me that he not only had a party for the young folks, but I think, often-times, I remember him giving each family a turkey or something like that. He was very considerate and generous.

R.F.: Do you remember Mr. K.P. Lewis.

Mrs. Reynolds: He was a gentleman of the first order, I would say. I respected him a great deal, and he was not the type of person to make little talk. And he had a family and several daughters, four daughters, if I remember correctly.

.....

Mrs. Reynolds: And I remember one day we were sitting on the porch, we had a big rocking chair, and we were sitting in the same rocker so you know we [Mrs. Reynolds and her sister] were about six and eight, and these two ladies rode by. You see, they had their horse and buggies in those days. We were singing. Sister was the alto and I was the soprano. I remember very distinctly the fact that they stopped and listened

to us. And when we finished they said, "Oh, sing another one." And they sat there in their little buggy stopped right in front of our house. But that was the mode of going places and doing things. I just remember very distinctly that I felt very honored to think that Sister and I could entertain two women and not know who they were, and yet we were good enough for them to ask us to sing again. And those were the things that made life worthwhile. We were always going places and singing, and we still do.

R.F.: Can you tell me something about your teaching experiences in West Durham?

Mrs. Reynolds: Mr. Holin(?) Holton was my last principal. The year before I stopped teaching, he gave me 13 boys. They were not mentally alert. He said, "Miss Louise, you do what you see best for these boys. I'm going to leave them in your care." And two or three times I would go to the door and Mr. Holton would be standing there listening, seeing what I would be teaching those boys. I really felt that I was on the carpet. But, I'll tell you, he would let me do a few innovative things, such as taking them out under the trees to have a nature study. And I taught them a lot about the kind of leaves, and we just talked about nature, and they were much more impressed with that than they were with their abc's. But I remember my teaching days as some of the most rewarding days of my life because I loved to teach.

At work in the Erwin Cotton Mill at age twelve and a mail carrier in West Durham for thirty-seven years, Mr. O. C. Crabtree, now in his early eighties, provided a series of personal glimpses of life in the Mill community. His recollections are peppered with revealing anecdotes. Crabtree's working years were active and varied, and today he recalls his past with a sharp memory and with considerable pride.

The site where the proud Erwin home once stood, on Pettigrew Street, is now occupied by the Hillcrest Convalescent Center. I had inquired at the Center about any possible sources of information for my project with the Durham Bicentennial. Mr. Crabtree was introduced to me, and the two of us arranged to meet at the Home for an interview.

The Interview took place in the Commons Room of the Hillcrest Convalescent Center. Crabtree and I talked for about an hour, with few interruptions. Throughout the interview he was eager and enormously friendly, and afterwards he conducted me on a personal tour of the Home.

R.F.: When did you come to the West Durham community, Mr. Crabtree?

Mr. Crabtree: 1896. First we moved to Hickstown. Then we moved down to what they call Monkey Bottom. They had nicknames for all the little areas. It's been forgotten, I reckon, now. The city limits at that time came up to Buchanan. In fact, I went to school right out here on this...

R.F.: Which school was that?

Mr. Crabtree: Well the first school I went to was a three-room school. Three teachers. They didn't have no grades then. The next year I went to a graded school on the other side of this place out here. To the best of my recollection, it was said to be the first graded school in Durham County. That was outside the City. I wasn't inside the City, and I expect the Erwin Mills had something to do with getting the school up there.

R.F.: Did you have occasion to see Mr. William Erwin much?

Mr. Crabtree: Oh yes, I seen him. His brother. His sister.

R.F.: What do you remember about him?

Mr. Crabtree: Well, I worked in the cotton mills for awhile, when I was twelve years old. There was no child-labor laws then.

R.F.: Where'd you work in the Mill?

Mr. Crabtree: Well, I first started to work in there taking up cloth behind an inspector. They were making blue-denim then. He was looking for bad places. This was in the cloth room. They built a little section, separate from the Mill. They

threwed the cloth on the belt, and it went out underground and came out in the cloth room.

R.F.: Mr. Crabtree, do you remember how many hours you worked each week, at that age?

Mr. Crabtree: 66 hours a week. And I made the big sum of \$1.80. And my father made \$4.50.

R.F.: Were there a lot of young people working in the Mill then?

Mr. Crabtree: Oh yes, there was a lot of child labor.

R.F.: But you must have been about the youngest then.

Mr. Crabtree: Some of them might have told a falsehood and went to work at ten and eleven. They could. But it wasn't against the law.

R.F.: Tell me more about Mr. Erwin. How would you describe him?

Mr. Crabtree: Well, he was a good guy. I used to go to his Sunday School. He had an Episcopal Sunday school up on the post office, and he would charter a train and take us to Raleigh or to _____ (?) park down at Raleigh. He chartered a train and he paid for it.

R.F.: How often did he do that?

Mr. Crabtree: Well, he did it about once a year. And he had a big scuppernong vine in his yard, and he'd take us out there and let us eat all the grapes we wanted. I would call him a pretty good fellow, wouldn't you?

R.F.: I sure would. He actually taught the Sunday school class at the Episcopal Church?

Mr. Crabtree: He had some teachers besides him that taught the classes. He built that church out there, that granite church. He said he built that for what he would have spent for liquor,

cigars, and cigarettes, and soft drinks. Now that's what he said. I don't know. And he'd come in the Mill, He'd show you how polite he was, and women who worked in there, he'd tip his hat to. The street that Mr. Erwin lived on was supposed to be the best street outside of town, I reckon.

R.F.: After the time you worked in the Mill, did you go back to school?

Mr. Crabtree: Well, I went back to school and went to work in the grocery store.

R.F.: Whose grocery store was that?

Mr. Crabtree: J.C. Dailey. There's a store still by that name in West Durham. We still call it West Durham.

R.F.: How long did you work there?

Mr. Crabtree: Well, I quit the Mill when I was in the third or fourth grade, and I went to school and to work together, and I worked for Dailey morning and evening.

R.F.: Let me backtrack a little. 66 hours seems an awful lot of time for a full-grown man. How were you able to handle it as a 12-year-old child?

Mr. Crabtree: They didn't rush you too hard. They had some jobs where you could go out and play, and whenever they wanted them to come back on the job, their boss-man would come to the door and whistle, and they'd all hurry back into the Mill. But you better stay away from there while they was out.

R.F.: How often did you get these recesses where you could go out and play?

Mr. Crabtree: Well now I was unlucky. I didn't get that. I was working in the cloth room, and we were still working about

66 hours. But I didn't work hard. The first work I did there was an inspector that inspected the cloth, and he had two rolls up there in a place as wide as a cloth and good light so that he could see a bad place. And it would roll off of that roller, that round bolt of cloth, and it would go down, and I'd take that up and lay it over here, and the guy would stitch that until he got a big roll, and they'd run them through a dresser. And the old man, he was kind of rough.

R.F.: This is your overseer your talking about?

Mr. Crabtree: No, the man who was operating the machine. No, I didn't have too much trouble with the overseer. He didn't seem to bother me. The man would get behind on the stitching, and he come at me. He got so far behind it fell over on him, and he rolled that thing out there to get me. We had a little scuffle. But the boss-man, he was always on my side. No, that fellow was always behind, and I didn't make him get behind. He was just lazy.

R.F.: Do you remember any talk about the unions in the Mill in those early days?

Mr. Crabtree: Not at that time. Not until after I got to be a grown man.

Mr. Crabtree: And I know the first sheriff they had out here in Durham County- Blacknall.

R.F.: What can you tell me about Sheriff Blacknall?

Mr. Crabtree: He was a little guy. He lived a pretty good while after he was defeated.

R.F.: So the sheriff job was a political position. Was Black-

nall a Democrat or a Republican?

Mr. Crabtree: Well I can't remember about that, and I don't know what Mr. Erwin's politics were. They voted for the man that had the money.

R.F.: Do you recall what happened on the Fourth of July in West Durham?

Mr. Crabtree: We had a whole day of different amusements- catching the greasy pig, who could eat the most pie...

R.F.: Who sponsored the Fourth of July celebration?

Mr. Crabtree: The Mill company. They furnished the refreshments and all that stuff. They used to call him "Pa Erwin." I don't know where he got that nickname. He liked to have his way.

I reckon he was as good an employer to his help as there was.

R.F.: When did you start carrying mail in West Durham, Mr. Crabtree?

Mr. Crabtree: 1920.

R.F.: And, for how long were you a mail carrier?

Mr. Crabtree: 37 1/2 years. Out in any weather. Rain, snow, and sleet, we had to go 'til we couldn't go.

R.F.: How early did you start your route each day?

Mr. Crabtree: Well the first time I had to wait for a train that come up from Durham. I used horses then.

R.F.: Could you guess about how many miles you covered each day?

Mr. Crabtree: Oh yes. We got paid by the mile. 27 when I first started, with a horse and buggy.

R.F.: The postmaster's job was a political position at that time?

Mr. Crabtree: It was a political job, and mine was partly political.

I had to be on the right side.

R.F.: Mr. Crabtree, what was medical care like in West Durham?

Mr. Crabtree: Well, the Mill always got a doctor to live up here, for a long time. There's one old doctor in Durham, he lives in East Durham, he had a record. He delivered more babies than any other doctor in Durham.

R.F.: Going back to your experiences in the Mill, you had Saturday afternoons off, right?

Mr. Crabtree: 4 o'clock.

R.F.: What types of things were there to do in West Durham on a Saturday evening? Were there activities sponsored by the Mill?

Mr. Crabtree: There wasn't much going on. I don't know. Whenever I was a child, folks come around peddling stuff and show you the price of things. A man used to come to a little old storehouse down below where my folks lived there, and he brought butter and eggs and milk and chicken. He came in on Friday. The first thing I'd do was see the old man come and go down and see what kind of chickens (he had). I was crazy about chickens. If I found one like I wanted, I'd go back to the house and get me a dime and go back and buy that chicken, a prime-sized chicken for a dime, three dozen eggs for a quarter. And you'd buy a pound of candy for a nickel.

R.F.: At other times when the peddler wasn't around, where did people do their shopping?

Mr. Crabtree: They had several stores, and they delivered the groceries back then.

R.F.: Were any of the grocery stores associated with the Mill?

Mr. Crabtree: No, they did have, before my time, you'd get your groceries from the company store. You've heard the song about the company store. But that was not in existence as far back as I can remember. But I've heard my mother talking about it. She worked in the Mill when she was up there at _____ (?) River. They had a whole lot of little cotton mills up and down that river. But they had a company store up in West Durham. He had his Sunday school up over the company store. And they had a post office down in the company store and the store too.

R.F.: Tell me more about schooling in West Durham.

Mr. Crabtree: Well, we had a pretty good school after we got through grade school. We had good teachers.

R.F.: Did the teachers live in West Durham?

Mr. Crabtree: Some of them lived in West Durham, but most of them lived in and around West Durham.

R.F.: What happened in West Durham at Christmastime? Was there a party?

Mr. Crabtree: No, they give us one day, Christmas day. Then they got to where they give us maybe two days.

R.F.: Before you referred to the area as West Durham. I understand that West Durham was separate from Durham throughout much of its history.

Mr. Crabtree: Mr. Erwin got real hot whenever they... they promised him that they never would incorporate it.

R.F.: Why didn't he want it incorporated?

Mr. Crabtree: He didn't want a double tax. He was paying

county tax, and now he'd be paying county and city. I imagine that was it. The old man, he had a farm out in the country, Mr. Erwin did. He asked me over once-in-a-while after I got to be a rural carrier, how the crops were around. I used to be a crop reporter when I first started carrying the mail. I had to make a report, I don't know if it was every week or every month, how the crops were progressing.

R.F.: Were there any religious revival programs that came to West Durham?

Mr. Crabtree: Yes, we used to have a whole lot of tents come in here.