

R O B E R T G. F O R T U N E, J R.

Interviewed October 12, 1979

By Dr. Bruce S. Greenawalt

S O U T H E R N H I G H L A N D S R E S E A R C H C E N T E R

University of North Carolina at Asheville

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Robert G. Fortune, Jr., interviewed by Bruce S. Greenawalt, October 12, 1979, on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Asheville.

Bruce S. Greenawalt: Mr. Fortune, no one appears on the scene all by themselves; we all have families, and they may mean more or less to us. I think a good place to start here might be just asking some questions about your family. Perhaps we could start with your grandparents' generation, both your paternal and maternal grandparents, and raise the question about who they were and where they were born and lived, and so forth, and maybe we can start there.

Robert G. Fortune, Jr.: My grandparents on my father's side, that's the Fortune family, lived up across the river from what is now Warren Wilson College. My grandfather was in the Civil War, and was sent with a troop of men over to what is now Spruce Pine, North Carolina.

That town wasn't in existence then, but that's where my grandmother lived. The people who were slackers from both the Federal and Confederate armies congregated in the mountains over there and were robbing the people and so the Confederate government sent my grandfather with about nineteen men, (he was classified as a Junior Second Lieutenant) over there to see if they couldn't do something to stop the robbing of the people. This was the only way these people could live, of course. In that way he met my grandmother, who was a Wiseman. All of the family. . . there were quite a few Wisemans, and there still are, over in the Spruce Pine, Avery County area. After the war was over; several years after the war was over my grandfather married my grandmother and brought her back to Buncombe County. They first lived in a little cabin up where North

Fortune: (Cont'd.) Fork Dam is, now, which is close to where my great-grandparents lived; in other words, my grandfather's parents.

Greenawalt: Do you remember your grandparents?

Fortune: I remember them, both, yes; my grandfather and my grandmother. I remember my grandmother very well. I don't remember my grandfather very well; he died rather early, when I was small.

Greenawalt: You're talking about your Grandfather Fortune?

Fortune: Fortune; always about the Fortune grandparents.

Greenawalt: What was his name, his first name?

Fortune: Benjamin Fletcher Fortune, and my grandmother was Adelaide Lucinda Wiseman. They are both buried in the Berea Church Cemetery yard up on Riceville Road. My great-grandparents. . . he was Fletcher Fortune, and my great-grandmother was Jane Fortune, and I think her name was Alexander before they were married, Jane Alexander. They are both buried in the Methodist Church off of. . . I'm sorry, I can't remember the name of the road now, but up close to Black Mountain, just up above the Highland Farms center; it's a Methodist Church there. . . Craigmont Road. . . I did think of it, finally. That's as far back as I can go, now, because I've been to my great-great-grandfather's grave with my father, but I haven't been able to remember where it is or find anybody else that can tell me. But my father knew, and we went there one time.

My father, as a young man, came to town and worked in Asheville just a little bit, and his name was Robert Greer Fortune. . . g-r-double-e-r, he always spelled it, although he was named after Dr. Greer, who was the president of the college at Due West, South Carolina. I don't remember

Fortune: (Cont'd.) the name, but that's where my grandfather hauled all of the things that he sold, like onions and potatoes, and things like that, and he sold them all to Dr. Greer, and he thought a lot of Dr. Greer, and therefore he named my father Greer; and he named him Robert because of Robert E. Lee, because he thought a lot of General Lee.

Greenawalt: I've lost something here.

Fortune: Now, wait a minute, I want to come back to my mother, that's what you want, isn't it?

Greenawalt: Yes.

Fortune: I'll come back to that in a minute. My father came to town as a young fellow and worked, and after he had worked around here for quite a little while. . . first, he delivered pianos for Falk's Music House, which was on what is now Broadway, then called North Main Street, and then finally he went to work in several of the stores where they sold dry goods and things like that, and he got very much interested in that. After he saved up some money he went down to Greensboro and found a partner and went into business in Greensboro. He and his partner ran a store there called "The Bee Hive." It was on Elm Street in Greensboro. That's the old time main street, not too far from the Southern Depot. Just across the street from that, a man who later would be my uncle, or would be my uncle when I was born, ran a candy store. My grandparents and my uncles on my mother's side were all candy makers. My mother came from New York State, from Port Jervis, New York, and her name was Nellie Boyst. If she had a middle name, I do not know.

Greenawalt: B-o-y-s-t?

Fortune: (Cont'd.) B-o-y-s-t. . . my uncle in Greensboro was Mr. Charles Boyst. He was the oldest member of my mother's family and she was next to the youngest. She had a younger brother. She came down. . . actually, Mr. Boyst, my uncle was in business in Sedalia, Missouri, where he met a lady and married her. She was originally from Greensboro and her name was Monroe. They came back to Greensboro, and that's how my uncle got there. My mother had come down to work in my uncle's candy store. He not only had a retail store, but he also sold candy wholesale and manufactured candy. So my father met my mother because that store was just across the street from his store. Also, my father was boarding at Mrs. Boyst's, my aunt's sister's home. She ran a big boarding house in Greensboro. She was never married, the one that ran the boarding house. Later on they were married. In other words, they were married in April, 1903. I was born in May, 1904, in Greensboro.

My father had become somewhat dissatisfied with the way things were going with his partner. My dad was a fellow that paid strict attention to business when business was at hand, and his partner was not too much that way, so I understand. I don't know. So I was born in May, 1904; May 7, 1904, in Greensboro, on the corner of Eugene and Washington Streets in a house that was there; it is now gone. Then my father decided to do something about this dissatisfaction with his partner, so he told the partner he would either buy him out or sell out to him, and the partner

Fortune: (Cont'd.) took him up on it and my Dad sold out to him and came back to Asheville before Christmas of 1904. So, of course, I was still a baby in arms and know nothing about ever having lived in Greensboro.

Greenawalt: You're almost a native of Asheville.

Fortune: I'm almost a native is right, and should be. I usually tell everybody the only reason why I was born in Greensboro was because my mother was down there at the time. We first lived in a rented house on Oak Street and then my Dad built the house on Spruce Street. The number of that house on Spruce Street was 23 Spruce. It was on the opposite side of the street and up closer to College Street than the house that Tom Wolfe lived in, for instance. It was right across the street from where Will Russell's dress shop is now. At that time there was a big boarding house just across the street from us operated by Mrs. C.H. Miller. Mr. Miller, her husband, is the man who started the Langren Hotel.

I never did know my Grandfather Boyst; he died before I was born, but when I was just one or two days old we started, my mother and I, going to Port Jervis, N.Y., every summer to see my grandmother. The last time I went was in 1916. That's the reason why I wasn't here for the 1916 flood. We came back from New York and got in Greensboro on the Sunday morning after the flood occurred here, having intended to come home in the next day or two from Greensboro after we went to see my uncles and aunts on both sides down there, but since they had the

Fortune: (Cont'd.) flood, we had to stay in Greensboro some two or three weeks, and finally had to go down to Spartanburg, South Carolina, and come home from there on the train. There were no roads of any consequence to ride on, and no automobiles, either.

Greenawalt: I suppose some of those bridges east, across the Swannanoa, had been wiped out by the flood?

Fortune: The railroads suffered severely, not only here, but on all of the mountains, a lot of their big fills were washed completely away. They had culverts in those fills, of course, that would carry two or three times the amount of water that they had ever known about going down that particular valley. But the flood was so severe, and the rain was so heavy that it washed a lot of debris down and stopped up a great many of those culverts. Pretty soon the water ran over the top of the fill and washed it away. I have pictures of men standing on the railroad track fifteen, twenty or thirty feet up in the air, where the ground had been washed out from under it.

The railroad all down in the Catawba area suffered severe damage. . . down around Mobile, Alabama, as well. That's a side issue from what we are talking about.

I knew my Grandmother Boyst real well, but I don't remember her name before she was married.

Greenawalt: After your grandfather died, she went back to Port Jervis?

Fortune: No; she lived in Port Jervis all the time. He died there. My Grandfather Boyst lived there all the time. He was a candy maker. He had been in the Northern army, too, and I understand contracted some

Fortune: (Cont'd.) trouble there, I don't know just what, but he never got over army days. . . . My mother had several sisters that lived in Port Jervis, and one in Schenectady, and two brothers that lived in Port Jervis, that I can remember.

Greenawalt: Let's return, just for a minute here. Your grandfather, Benjamin Fletcher Fortune, you said he was farming?

Fortune: Yes; he farmed.

Greenawalt: In the . . .

Fortune: He farmed in the Swannanoa River valley.

Greenawalt: What confused me was how he would be selling to President Greer in Due West, South Carolina? That's a long way . . .

Fortune: There was no other place but Asheville to sell it in. You see, Asheville was, even back in say, 1870, or around that date, was just a town of a few hundred people. Even in 1890 the official population was, in round figures, twelve thousand. Nothing happened much in Asheville until after the railroad came . . . to make Asheville much of a town, and so he hauled his produce to Due West, South Carolina, to sell it to Dr. Greer. The same family, by the way, that Greer, South Carolina is named for.

Greenawalt: What was he growing, do you know?

Fortune: I had a postal card, which I have now given to my cousin in Greensboro. He is Dr. Benjamin Fletcher Fortune, and was named after his grandfather. He has children and I don't, so I gave him all of the things that were handed down in my family from my grandmother to me. But this card said: "Be sure when you come to bring onions and potatoes."

Fortune: (Cont'd.) So other than that, I don't know what he raised. Of course, they raised practically everything they ate, in the line of corn and wheat and things like that. Even when my uncle farmed the farm and my grandfather was dead. . . my uncle had a farm next to my grandfather's farm and he farmed that for my grandmother, and I used to work on it in the summertime. My uncle raised wheat and corn, and we used to have it ground at the old Bee Tree Mill on Bee Tree Creek, just down below the Riceville Road. I think the old mill is gone now. He also . . . always kept quite a few purebred cows, mostly Jerseys, and he had quite a lot of milk and butter and poultry that he sold in Asheville, to a Mrs. Webb, who ran a hotel down near the Depot.

Greenawalt: That still seems like a long way to haul something to market, doesn't it?

Fortune: Yes.

Greenawalt: Farmers today, with pickup trucks, will complain if they have to drive for two hours, sometimes, along a smooth highway.

Fortune: And there weren't any paved roads, of course. Even when my Dad came to town, he'd work, back in the. . . I don't know just exactly when it was, but it would be some time along in the 1890's, he worked for Mr. Falk. He had a piano to deliver for Mr. Falk to Brevard one time. They had sold a piano to some woman in Brevard and they loaded it on a two-horse wagon, and my Dad set out for Brevard in the rain. The wagon mired up in the mud. I've heard my father tell this story a thousand times. He got out and walked from first one farmhouse

Fortune: (Cont'd.) and then another until he found a man that had a team of oxen, and he came over and pulled him out of the mud. He finally got to Brevard and then back again. It took him four days to make the trip over there and back in a two-horse wagon, delivering that piano.

Greenawalt: I hope the piano didn't get too much rain on it.

Fortune: I don't know about that.

Greenawalt: What did your father do when he came up from Greensboro?

Fortune: My uncle. . . my aunt, really, his sister, had started a millinery store in Asheville some years before my father went to Greensboro and went in business. She had a ladies' store where they sold millinery and ladies' underwear, and things like that. Not too much ready-to-wear or drygoods, or anything. Later on she met my uncle, who was Morris Meyers (M-e-y-e-r-s) and they were married. He was traveling. He traveled for wholesale concerns and sold some of this merchandise wholesale. My aunt had done right well in the business. Even before they were married she owned five houses in Asheville that she rented.

Greenawalt: Maybe she and Mrs. Wolfe were in competition, buying up property?

Fortune: I don't think there was much competition. What she did: She bought property and built houses on it, and most of the houses, by the way, she built, she bought the material from Mr. Westall, who was Mrs. Wolfe's brother, W.H. Westall. I have just lots and lots of receipts where she paid him back ten, fifteen and twenty dollars at a time, and every now and then a note from him saying that it would be

Fortune: (Cont'd.) perfectly all right if she couldn't pay the twenty dollars due such and such a time, to wait until some other time and pay him. She'd contacted him and said she didn't have quite enough money, or something. But all of these houses were down on the lower end of Haywood Street, Jefferson Drive area, Park Avenue, which was in the early days a nice neighborhood and had some real fine, big houses.

Greenawalt: When you were growing up on Spruce Street, and you were four years younger than Tom Wolfe, just down the street. . .

Fortune: . . . up the street. . .

Greenawalt: . . . did you see much of him?

Fortune: Very little of Tom. I remember seeing him go up and down the street. He was a big, tall, gangling young man when I was a sub-teen-ager, you might say, eleven, twelve, thirteen years old, and I can remember seeing him. But Tom didn't take any time with the kids on the street, as I remember. But his brother Fred, the brother that stuttered, did; he used to always stop and talk to us, tease us a little, or play with us, or something. He was a very nice guy; he's still living. He's the only one of the family still living. I went over to the house a time or two when he said he was going to be there, in the last few years, but every time he didn't get to make the trip.

The other day, when they had the open house, they did say Fred was going to be there, but he couldn't come because of his health. He is up in his eighties, I think. I also knew Mrs. Wheaton very well.

That's Tom's sister, she used to trade in my Dad's store, ran an account in the store. Her husband sold the National Cash Register.

Fortune: (Cont'd.) His place of business was on College Street between . . . now, it would be between Spruce Street and the Courthouse, along in there.

Greenawalt: Maybe you can describe where you went to school?

Fortune: Yes. I first started to school at the old Hillside Convent, which was on a hill where the "Pickle Barrel" is on Broadway. All of that property from Walnut Street down to Woodfin Street has been graded off. That would be the property between the "Pickle Barrel" and the Masonic Temple. Up near Walnut Street it was up, to my recollection, ten or fifteen feet above the street; maybe not quite that high, maybe ten feet would be the maximum.

Where the "Pickle Barrel" is there was a large, white house that had a well in the yard on the Walnut Street side, I can remember, and the Catholic sisters came there and opened a school. I started kindergarten there along about the time that I was just, maybe barely five years old, in the fall after May 7, when my fifth birthday would have been.

Greenawalt: Did your parents send you there because it was close?

Fortune: That's right. They let me walk. Of course, there were no automobiles on the street, or anything like that, and after I'd been there a time or two I went by myself most of the time. I can still say some of the French that I learned in kindergarten, not much, but. . . . I went there through the first, second and third grades, and then these Catholic sisters bought the old Oakland Heights Hotel out on Victoria Road; originally, I think, called Victoria Hotel at one time, and

Fortune: (Cont'd.) changed the name of the school to St. Genevieve's. Since that was quite a long way from home, I didn't go there any more, but mainly because there was another school in the Woodfin house, which later became part of the Y.M.C.A. property. Down on the corner of Woodfin and Broadway a man and his wife, a Mrs. Ford, had started a school they called the Asheville School for Girls. They didn't do too much good just having girls, so they started taking in boys. So I went there for the fourth and fifth grades. There were just four boys and six girls in my class.

Greenawalt: Tony Lord wasn't there at the time, was he?

Fortune: No. He could have been there, but he wasn't in my class. Bill Cocke, Fuller Brown, Frank Weaver and myself were the four boys. I can only remember two of the girls. One of them was Elizabeth Kent and the other was Pauline Biggs.

Then I went to Orange Street School to the Sixth Grade. The only Seventh Grade in Asheville was over on Montford Avenue in Montford Avenue School, so I went to the Montford Avenue School to the Seventh Grade. By the way, they didn't "bus" me there, either; I rode my bicycle over there when the weather was nice, and rode the street car when it wasn't.

Then I went back to the old Woodfin house for the Eighth Grade, which was the first year in high school back in the old days, because they had the eighth, ninth, tenth and eleventh grades for high school. The twelfth grade was added later.

Fortune: (Cont'd.) They had demolished the old Asheville Female College building in 1914 and started a new school building there and the war came along and the contractor went broke; so we had no high school building. They took over the Ford school and built an addition on the back of it (the City did) and I went there to the eighth and ninth grades.

In 1919, in the Fall, what later became David Millard, but then was called Asheville High School, was completed, so I went my junior year and senior year over on Oak Street and graduated in 1921.

The next fall I went down to State.

Greenawalt: When you went to State, did you know what you wanted to study?

Fortune: Yes. My Dad was very positive about that. He said, "You can go to any school you want to, and take any course you want to, but I'm not paying for any foolishness." He was that kind of a man, and I knew what he said he meant; he always kept his word on things like that.

I got along fine. I was fairly good in mathematics in school, and so I took an electrical engineering course, and that's principally mathematics, particularly in the last two years, and I had no trouble in that. I graduated at State in 1925. Six hundred and some-odd freshmen started out and about a hundred and fifty-five of us graduated.

Greenawalt: Well, I've brought you to the verge of full-time employment. Where did you go then?

Fortune: When I studied electrical engineering at State, I was debating in my mind whether I was ever going to practice it or not, because

Fortune: (Cont'd.) my Dad had a department store in Asheville that was doing real well.

Greenawalt: What was the name of the store, again?

Fortune: Palais Royal, P-a-l-a-i-s R-o-y-a-l, commonly called Palay Royal, and of course it is a French name.

Greenawalt: Which was located?

Fortune: On five and seven Biltmore Avenue. When my Dad came back to Asheville from Greensboro, my uncle, Morris Meyers, that I told you about, had gone to college to study to be an attorney, and my aunt actually owned the store that they had. My Dad had the money that he had sold out the store in Greensboro. He bought out my aunt's store and enlarged it into a general ready-to-wear and drygoods, and so forth.

My aunt and uncle actually never did quit the business; they stayed in there with him, and eventually they bought the building next door, the three of them together; put the two buildings together and continued to run the store. Although my Dad was the owner of the store a great many people in Asheville thought it was my uncle. My Dad was a retiring sort of a person and my uncle was a true extrovert and was very gracious and did a lot of wonderful things for me. He and my aunt never had any children, but for all of the nieces and nephews they did a lot.

When I got out of college my Dad said, "You do what you want to, but I'd like for you to come back to go in the business." I debated it

Fortune: (Cont'd.) quite a little bit, and decided that I would go in the business. At the same time, William Hand Brown, Dr. William Hand Brown, who was head of electrical engineering at State College, wanted me to come back and take a teaching fellowship, and I still have the telegrams from him, plus a letter or two, trying to encourage me to do that, at State. He said if I would come down there and get my Master's that he would help me get a fellowship at M.I.T., where I could get my Doctorate.

I liked him a lot; he was a fine man, and very smart, and he and I got along real well together, but I decided not to do it.

Greenawalt: One thing: you may not have been associated with the electric company in those years when you were working with your father, but I know you must have been riding trolley cars through Asheville.

Fortune: Oh, yes.

Greenawalt: At least for a while, they were owned by one of the electric companies.

Fortune: Actually, of course, the electric company started out as a facility to furnish electricity for the trolley cars. Originally, you see, there were no incandescent lights, as we know them now; there were only arc lights. In fact, one of the fellows that I worked with in the power company in the beginning, Mr. Adolph Marquardt, had been with the power company since he was seventeen years old and his original job was going around in the few stores in Asheville that had arc lights in them, doing what they called trim arc lights. The carbons in those old arc lights had to be replaced, because the electricity burned them

Fortune: (Cont'd.) into dust, and they had to go around and pour that dust out of the bowl and wipe the bowl out and put in a new carbon. They called that trimming arc lights.

As soon as Edison invented the incandescent bulb and a few people got them, then many more people / ^{wanted} them and they called on the power company for more and more electricity, which they were not in a position to furnish, because power plants were built primarily (in Asheville) to operate street cars in other places: a cotton mill or a saw mill.

Over at Sylva, North Carolina, they started up an operation of a saw mill. The saw mill ran in the day time. Generators were a much earlier invention in the electrical industry than the electric lights, so somebody said, "Well we don't run the saw mill at night. We've got lots of saw dust and slabs here, we'll just burn those at night." So they put in a generator and lights in the mill houses.

Greenawalt: Do you recall why Asheville decided to abandon the trolleys in 1934?

Fortune: Well, economics was the reason. In the first place, the street cars ran down the middle of the street, and therefore the power company had to maintain the street in the middle of the street car tracks all the time, and for about eighteen inches on each side. This was a constant source of expense, because the old cross ties under the tracks would decay and make potholes in the street. The street cars were a hazard to the people that rode them, because when they stopped, if the fellow coming down the street on the right hand side didn't happen to stop his car and you stepped off the street car, you got hit by an

Fortune: (Cont'd.) automobile. Also, they congested traffic

down the middle of the street. At that day and time, of course, all of the things for buses were probably a good deal cheaper. It was cheaper to replace a bus than it was a street car. It was always, too, a constant thing to maintain trolleys on a street car line. The trolleys were made out of copper wire and the wheel that ran over it constantly would wear down that wire, and when it wore down sufficiently it would break. So that was the main reason why they were replaced.

Greenawalt: The reason I asked: I know that some towns, the trolley lines, or the transportation company, were bought by a company essentially owned by General Motors and some other vehicle manufacturers, and they would take over the company, sell the trolleys or abandon the trolleys and buy buses, and having done that would then sell the company and take the money to another town and repeat the process, thus get America on rubber wheels instead of tracks, that way.

Fortune: That was another thing about it; the buses rode a lot better than the street cars, really. There must have been a lot of maintenance on the tracks. Of course, another thing: the tracks were wearing out all the time on the curves, particularly in Asheville. They wore out everywhere, but the curves were severe.

Greenawalt: What led you back into the work you were trained for?

Fortune: What happened, of course, was that all of the banks, not all of them, but a great many of the banks in Asheville closed in, I think it was 1929, and since my Dad's store did a large credit business (in those days all the stores carried their own customers on credit) It was

Fortune: (Cont'd.) not like it is now, with Master Charge, or other credit cards. Since a great many of the people that owed him money couldn't possibly pay him; it wasn't a question of whether they wanted to, they just couldn't.

Actually, we had been on a boom and we had been doing a booming business, and we had a great deal more money owing to us than we would have had four or five years before.

This left him pretty much in the middle. He owed for goods that we'd bought, and he couldn't get the money out of his customers to pay for it, and he didn't have sufficient ready capital to pay for it. Under normal circumstances he might have had enough money, but the bottom also dropped out of the price of all of the property here in Asheville.

Property that would have normally been worth around a hundred thousand dollars in Asheville was worth about twenty. In fact, you could buy what had been a fifteen or sixteen thousand dollar house for thirty-five hundred dollars. . . . one that I particularly happen to know about. So he hung on for quite a few years, but finally had to ask for a receiver, and that wiped out what you might say, all of his working capital.

So I decided, back in 1934, or 1933, really, that I would get out of the business just as quick^{ly} as I could, because at that time I wasn't making much of a living anyhow, just barely getting by, so I had a chance to get a job with one of the veterinarians in town. He ran an animal hospital and also a pet shop, and he needed someone to keep his books and run his business for him so he could attend to the doctoring of animals, and I went to work for him, I believe, in January, 1934, and

Fortune: (Cont'd.) worked for him for two years until February, 1936, and at that time I had an opportunity to get a job with the power company.

Greenawalt: Which raises an interesting question here. Clearly the Depression hurt a lot of businesses in Asheville.

Fortune: Oh, it broke a great many.

Greenawalt: What impact did it have on Carolina Power and Light? Here they were at least hiring some people.

Fortune: No; the worst part of the Depression was over for them at that time, but they didn't pay any dividends on stock. Of course, most of the common stock at that time was owned by National Power and Light. All but two shares of Carolina Power and Light common was owned by National Power and Light, which was a subsidiary of Electric Bond & Share, but they had quite a few shares of preferred stock out all over the Carolinas, as well as other places in the United States, and they didn't pay any dividends on that for several years. They had to go back to catch up those dividends. One of the things with preferred stock is that they had to catch up the dividends. I don't know too much about that, because they had, what you might say, recovered in a small way, by the time I went to work for them in 1936. I went to work for them as a collector and cut-off man.

Greenawalt: What is a collector and cut-off man?

Fortune: Well, every day they made up a list of the people that hadn't paid their bills, in a certain area, and were about to be billed for a second month, and I would go around and see all these people. Some of

Fortune: (Cont'd.) these people that were chronically on the list, my boss would mark them that I could use my own discretion about whether or not to cut them off. Others, probably this list would amount to somewhere around fifty people every day, and some portion of that, eight, ten, or maybe twelve people, he would mark it, "If you don't collect, cut off." These were the people that the company would always have a hard time collecting from. Now, if I should see that something there would create a real hardship, find out that somebody was ill in the house, or some other real good reason, I would not cut them off.

One place that I remember in particular, I knew that a white woman was making her living washing clothes because her husband was out of work. She had an electric washing machine, and if you cut her off it would put her out of business. Even though that account was marked, "Collect or cut off," I actually didn't cut her off. I'd wait a day or two. Sometimes she'd be able to raise the money.

I worked at that for one year, because they knew I had an engineering education, but they didn't have an engineering job open. They didn't have anything for an engineer to do. Then in the old engineering department, or in the old line and maintenance department, the man that had charge of that had gone to State College at the same time I had, and he had an opening to come up there. / I got out of the collecting and cut-off business after about one year, and went to work repairing transformers. It was a very dirty job, but I got

Fortune: (Cont'd.) a twenty dollar raise. Believe it or not, I started working for the power company for ninety dollars a month back in 1936, approximately one year later they raised me to a hundred and ten dollars a month, and I repaired transformers for about a year.

Then the company started building rural lines, somewhat on a smaller scale. It wasn't that they would not like to have built a whole lot more, but it was the fact that even though a lot of people think the power company has a whole lot of money, they actually didn't have the money to invest in . . .

Greenawalt: Let's pause here for a minute. We're up to about 1938. Was Carolina Power and Light at this point serving principally industries in the town of Asheville, with the countryside un-electrified?

Fortune: Correct; there were a few lines way out. Now, for instance, Dr. Grove had, some time before I went to work for the company, opened the Grove Stone and Sand Company up on the Swannanoa River, above Swannanoa. He had built the line-- helped pay for the line--that the power company had built, all the way from down at what we used to call the old Avery Street sub-station, which was just down below the West Asheville bridge on the French Broad River. (That's the low bridge that crosses off the end of Clingman Avenue over into Haywood Road.) It went up the road all the way to Grove Stone and Sand Company.

The only line that I know of that was off that at the time, when I first went to work for the power company, was the line that went over to Warren Wilson College. Warren Wilson College wanted to get electricity over on the campus, and the power company told them that they would have

Fortune: (Cont'd.) to have enough money for them to pay for all of the material, and then they would put the line up. So Warren Wilson went to see my grandfather and Mr. Charlie Alexander, who were the only other two places that possibly could take electricity along that line. There were no other people there. So they came up with the idea that they would do a great deal of the work and my grandfather would furnish the poles. Somebody finally worked out a deal that Warren Wilson College bought the cross-arms, and the insulators and the wire, and my grandfather let them cut all the poles, which were chestnut poles, on his farm, and Mr. Charlie Alexander cut them and hauled them and dug the holes and set the poles in the holes. Then the power company came along and put the cross-arms and the insulators and the wire up, and the three of them. . . .

Greenawalt: That served the College, the Fortunes, and the Alexanders, then?

Fortune: That's right. It served the Alexanders first. Mr. Alexander's farm now belongs to Warren Wilson College.

Greenawalt: I recall the house; it used to sit up on the hill.

Fortune: That's right; that's correct. My grandfather's house was, what you might say, off down to the back of that hill. It was further down the river. . . .

[END OF Side A]

[BEGINNING OF Side B]

Greenawalt: It's hard to imagine the Swannanoa Valley with so little

Greenawalt: (Cont'd.) electricity in the late 1930's. . .

Fortune: . . . or any other place around here. Really, we started building the rural lines, and then the second World War came along, and of course most of our engineers and a great many of the other personnel with the power company went off to the war.

. . . I forget now how many fellows we had. . .

I was the division engineer, and John Hunter, who is an Ashevilleian also, was my assistant, and I had about three or four other fellows working in engineering. All of those got into the army, except John and myself.

Greenawalt: Before we leave the '30's altogether, let me ask you: Were you married by that time?

Fortune: Yes.

Greenawalt: Your wife was an Asheville. . . ?

Fortune: My wife . . . I met her at First Baptist Church in Asheville. Actually, she was from Reidsville, North Carolina, and had lived in Greensboro quite a little bit. Her father had moved up here and was in business; had a sewing machine shop here. At one time he had worked for the Singer Sewing Machine Company, but now he had a shop of his own.

Greenawalt: What was your wife's name?

Fortune: Mildred Patterson; Mildred Kathleen Patterson.

Greenawalt: You got married in which year?

Fortune: Nineteen twenty-eight. When we first got married, we lived on Ramoth Road, ^{Norwood Park.} I believe it was twenty-three Ramoth Road. Believe it or not, that was outside the city limits

Fortune: (Cont'd.) of Asheville. The city limits of Asheville were at Coleman Avenue.

Greenawalt: So you had her to come back and tell the stories to about being a cut-off man, and the heart-rending appeals you must have gotten. One thing more about the Depression: I know one response of Carolina Power and Light was to "Sell, sell, sell." Sell people on the need to have power. At least in the Raleigh area, the company introduced the policy of the more you used the less you paid. Did any of that go on in this area?

Fortune: Yes; it went on over the whole company system. Mr. Sutton, who was the president of the company, was of the idea that the way to make money was to sell your product as cheap as you could, and sell a lot of it. He and his wife, personally, put on cooking schools, and things like that, to get people to buy electric ranges.

Greenawalt: I gather that was not being really done up in the Asheville area, because . . .

Fortune: Yes, sir.

Greenawalt: It was.

Fortune: Oh, yes; it was done here.

Greenawalt: In the town?

Fortune: Yes.

Greenawalt: But the people in the countryside. . .

Fortune: Well, it was the same way it was done down East, too. The rural program went on over the state all at the same time, both for Duke Power Company and Carolina Power and Light Company too.

Greenawalt: So at least for the people within the range of electrical service, there was a strong push in the '30's to get them to convert

Greenawalt: (Cont'd.) to electricity.

Fortune: That's right. Not so much in the rural areas now because the main problem in the rural areas was that, for instance, we would take a ride out a road.

The engineers didn't do this. The company had people working in what we called the sales department. The engineering department had nothing to do with it. They would ride out this road and stop at every house and ask these people if we built a rural line out that road, would they take electricity.

I'm sorry that I can't remember the amount now, but we had a minimum charge, and we always told them that there would be at least this amount of bill every month.

Greenawalt: Were meters being used?

Fortune: Oh, yes. What I'm saying is that if they didn't use that much electricity they'd have to pay that much anyhow, the minimum charge; at one time, back in the old days, when the minimum charge was a dollar, for instance.

Now, we built a line up to Hickory Nut Gap, to . . . Mr. McClure's house. They got a few customers along that line, but he had to pay the principal charges, and he had a minimum of something like twenty-five or thirty dollars at the beginning.

But every time we got a customer along the line, that would reduce his minimum. Likewise, when we went out to

Fortune: (Cont'd.) develop a new rural line somewhere, we went along and got all these people to sign up, then the man would ask them about what they thought they would use, and then he would make an estimate of about how much he thought their bill might be, based on the company's experience with people who had had that sort of thing at that time in somewhat the same circumstances. Then we would decide whether or not we could get enough money out of those customers to make a return on the amount of investment that the line would cost. Quite frequently we would estimate what a line would cost, the engineering department would, the department that I was in, we would make an estimate of what the line would cost and we couldn't get enough customers on it to pay us to build it. So we would just hold that/^{until later.} Sometimes things would change.

I have known that a man would go out and he would sign up maybe only sixty percent of the people, or half of the people along the line, who had said they would take electricity if we built the line. I always contended with the management of the company that as soon as you got the line built, at least half of the others would take it anyhow, because Mrs. Jones would say to Mrs. Smith, "Oh, you ought to have electricity in your house. It does this, that, and the other." I've been told by farmers they didn't care anything about the lights, that all they were interested in was to get something so their wife wouldn't have to carry water from the spring house, and so they wouldn't have to have the radio operated with batteries.

Greenawalt: I was going to ask whether the farmers were putting this to agricultural use: milking machines. . .

Fortune: Not so much that, as pumping water. A lot of these people, for instance, had wells, or springs; it was a pretty good job pumping water by hand or a gasoline engine for livestock.

Greenawalt: Earlier, you began talking about the impact of World War II.

Fortune: What happened then was that no material was available. You had to prove that any line that you built had something to do with the defense effort, the war effort. For instance, we built a line or two over in the Spruce Pine area, all with second-hand material. We just used most anything we could scrape up in the insulator line, and the wire line: old second-hand wire. Second-hand insulators: some of them looked pretty bad, from the standpoint that they had big old transmission line insulators. But you had to prove that anything you built had something to do with the war, so that ceased all of the rural line-building effort; brought that to a screeching halt, so to speak.

As soon as the war was over, then we got back into that in a big way.

Greenawalt: Did the war create any special demands for electricity in this area?

Fortune: The only thing that I can tell you that happened was: TVA had been in existence for some time and had posed a great threat to the power company, our power company in particular, and they got in a situation over in Tennessee where they looked like they were going to have to black out Knoxville and some other places at night. In other words, cut down most all of the street lights and stop all of the show window lighting and everything else.

Greenawalt: Before TVA, didn't Carolina Power and Light sell its power to Knoxville?

Fortune: Yes; that's right. Before TVA we used to sell the East Tennessee Power Company somewhere around nine hundred thousand to a million dollars worth of power out of the Walters plant, which at that time was the largest water power plant in this part of the world.

That was mainly because we couldn't use it in North Carolina; we just had no place to use it. TVA, of course, took all that over and we ceased to sell that, but gradually, that was one of Mr. Sutton's ideas, "We've got the power, let's sell it; get what money we can out of it." That was the idea that you were talking about the cheap power, a moment ago. And also, the bigger plants you can build, the cheaper you can operate. I'm talking about back in those days, now. In other words, let's say, you could build a two hundred thousand kilowatt plant and operate it with almost the same number of men that it would take to operate a hundred thousand, because you had all of the same functions, only on a larger scale. One man could sit down at a ^{control} board and / ^{tell as much about} what was going on in a big plant as he could in a little plant. After the war was over we got back into this in a big way.

To get back to the Knoxville business again: during the war, when they were talking about that, the TVA didn't want to look bad, so they came along with an edict that we were going to have to black out Asheville, too. They had a meeting about it in Washington, and the company's vice president in charge of generation,

he
Fortune: (Cont'd.) actually/was my big boss, finally got up in the meeting and said, "You tell us how much power it will take to keep the lights on in Knoxville so we can keep the lights on in Asheville and we'll put it on the line for you as long as the line will carry it." So we bought power from Champion Fibre Company. (They had their own power plant at that time. We were hooked in with them, but they ran their own plant.) At night time we'd buy all the power they could make. The American Enka Company had their own plant, although we were tied in with them; we furnished them some power. When they weren't using their own power, they ran their power plant at full blast and we bought all of that.

Greenawalt: Did American Enka and Champion build their own power plants because there was not. . .

Fortune: In the beginning that was the cheapest thing for them to do, but as time went on it became less and less profitable for them to do it, and they took more and more power from us all the time. But at that time we paid them a profit, plus their cost, something that was agreed on. I wasn't familiar with the agreement.

We also ran the old Elk Mountain steam plant. It had been built back in the '20's. It took about two and a half pounds of coal to make a kilowatt hour of electricity, whereas a new plant at that time would take somewhere between a pound and three quarters of a pound of coal to make a kilowatt hour. Nevertheless, we ran it wide open day and night, and got power from every place we could think of, and managed to fulfill the vice-president's promise to

Fortune: (Cont'd.) TVA, so they never did black out Knoxville or Asheville.

Greenawalt: Was it after the war that the plant was built south of town?

Fortune: Yes. That was built in the '40's sometime.

Greenawalt: How about the work of the meter-men. Were they put under any special obligation or hardship during the war?

Fortune: We had women doing that. One of the ladies. . . her name was Glass, I believe. That's the only one I can remember, but we had several women doing that. Of course, when I first went to work for the power company, three men read all the meters every month. That was in 1936.

Greenawalt: I know that during the war the Raleigh people put their meter men on bicycles.

Fortune: Yes; we did the same thing.

Greenawalt: The two situations were not equal; it's harder to cycle around Asheville than Raleigh.

Fortune: That's right; of course they got off and rolled the bicycle, sometimes. It didn't work out too good here, but there were some bicycles furnished here. I forget whether it was then, but I believe it was, we went on a situation of only reading the meters every other month and estimating the bill. This also saved a lot of money, because meter reading takes personnel. There doesn't seem to be much of an economical way to do it any other way. It wouldn't make a bit of difference if you only read it once a year, really.

Greenawalt: You mentioned that during the war the company began employing women as meter readers. Were they brought in in other ways, during the war?

Fortune: Yes. I had always, for my secretarial work, I had always shared, for any letters I wanted to write, with someone else in the company, a secretary. The war was on, and my draftsmen were all in the war. The company let the draft, or however it turned out, to take all of the men in barber shop style. In other words, if they had called me first, although I was too old, but if they had called me first, I would have been the first one to have gone. Somebody else would have had the engineering office. But they left John Hunter and myself, as it so happened. Well, we didn't have anybody that could draft, or draw. There was a girl who went to work there delivering mail for the company; taking the mail around to the various offices and places when it came. Doing other things, too: delivering stationery, and things like that, when they'd call up to the stationery room. She'd ^{and} mail all the bills; /run them through the stamping machine.

I found out that she could draw. She was a real good free-hand artist; made some nice pictures. So I asked her if she thought she might be interested in learning drafting. She said, well, she'd try it. So we sent her down to Raleigh, where the company still had the four or five men in the drafting department, and they gave her a two-weeks' rush course in drafting. They had a lot of fun; she was a real hard worker. So when she got ready to come home, they even had a "graduation party," as they called it, for her. Some of the boys drew

Fortune: (Cont'd.) up a little diploma freehanded. But anyhow, she came back and worked in our drafting department.

Greenawalt: When the war was over, was she reassigned to something else?

Fortune: Well, she stayed with us then as long as she wanted to, and when she got married she quit; now lives in Charlotte. At that same time there wasn't too much for John Hunter and myself to do, either. Also, we were required to keep certain maps. I understand they are not required to do it now. But the Commission required us to keep certain maps, and so this young lady and myself rode to every pole that you could drive to up in the Swannanoa Valley and out in the Enka section, and made maps. We took a map that the TVA had made, showing all the roads, streams and houses, and so forth, and enlarged it. It was on a scale of one inch/two thousand feet. We enlarged it to one inch/six hundred feet, and we put every pole, transformer and house service, size of the wire, and various other things, on that map.

Greenawalt: What was your position during this period?

Fortune: I was the division engineer.

Greenawalt: Were there other women brought into the company during the war, perhaps in new positions where they hadn't been employed before?

Fortune: Well, just practically everything, except, well now, in the warehouse, for instance. In the old days men kept the books and other paper work, but during the war the women got in on that, too. Then

Fortune: (Cont'd.) we had a system set up somewhere along in there after I came with the company, of relieving the engineers and the line foremen and everybody else that we could, of all of the paper work; having all of it done by someone in the office that did nothing else but the paper work. So the foreman would just come in every day and turn in his report of how many men he had on his crew, and how many hours each one of them had worked, and, roughly speaking, what kind of work each one of them had done that day, as it would refer to an account number set up by the Government. Because, you know, the Government controlled the power company's bookkeeping.

The man that did the paper work, or, later on, the lady, would take that and transfer all of that to the sheet that would just be a rough pencil-kept copy of the foreman's report, and he, or she, would transfer that to the master sheet, so to speak, on which the payroll was made out and the charges made to the bookkeeping system board, whether or not this cross-arm had been replaced on capital account, or whatever it should be charged to. If there was any question about it, they caught it, and usually corrected any errors that the foreman might have made: the total number of hours, or anything else.

Greenawalt: Did the company begin hiring blacks, during the war?

Fortune: I, offhand, can't think of any, but the main problem, always, with our company, was that very few blacks ever applied for a job. Most blacks wouldn't take a job on the line crew, for instance. They do now, but back in the old days they wouldn't.

Greenawalt: Why was that, I wonder?

Fortune: I don't know, but maybe just afraid of electricity, so to speak; now the company had one or two black linemen around at different places, but not in Asheville.

Most of the people that were hired in the line department used to come down to see my first boss. When I first went into the engineering department he had charge of the line crews, too. If they were hired, they would come to see him, and I don't ever remember a black coming to see him.

Greenawalt: After the war, you continued with the company until your retirement?

Fortune: Yes.

Greenawalt: And you retired in. . .?

Fortune: Nineteen sixty-nine; June 1, 1969.

Greenawalt: Was it after the war that the countryside was essentially electrified?

Fortune: Yes; in the '40's.

Greenawalt: The '40's; the late '40's.

Fortune: Either the REA; we sold them their power wholesale at various places, and they built the lines, or we built them. We built all the lines we had the money to build, or that we could get to, reasonably. That's when the big push came through for us.

Greenawalt: You must have kept the line people awfully busy.

Fortune: We employed all the contractors we could find, just about, to build them. We had some crews of our own that built them,

Fortune: (Cont'd.) but mainly we employed contractors to build them. Those contractors all worked for me at that time.

Greenawalt: Do you know if there were ever any instances of industries failing to locate in this area because of a lack of power?

Fortune: No.

Greenawalt: The company was always able to handle that.

Fortune: That's right. There might have been some applications that would have been undesirable to the Chamber of Commerce, or something like that. I can't think of what they were now, but there were some industries that might have been a detriment to a power company because they bounced the voltage up and down pretty bad, but I can't think of what they would be, right now. I don't believe we ever turned down any industry that wanted to locate in this area, and I don't think we would now.

Greenawalt: When the plant south of town was built in the late '40's . . . Is there a name to that plant? I've forgotten it. . . just the Skyland plant?

Fortune: The Skyland plant, Carolina Power and Light Company.

Greenawalt: Was it at that point that the Elk Mountain plant was done, or turned out to pasture?

Fortune: No; we never operated the Elk Mountain plant, only in a case of emergency, in the latter years, except as I told you about during the war. We quit operating it because it was too expensive to operate; it took too much coal to make a kilowatt-hour of electricity.

Greenawalt: And then, with the completion of the Skyland plant, the company was then relying on the Walters plant?

Fortune: Waterville.

Greenawalt: It's Waterville, but it's named after someone named Walters, wasn't it?

Fortune: Charlie Walters; he was the Vice President of the company and lived in Asheville. He was what you might say, my big boss here.

Greenawalt: So those two plants essentially provided the power for Western Carolina and parts of Tennessee?

Fortune: That's right, and of course, they are tied in with every power company all around. We've had a big line that went down to Greenville, South Carolina, and we furnished power down there, too, as well as took power from Duke.

Greenawalt: Some years ago, Carolina Power and Light was thinking of building a, I think, an atomic plant, in the Sandy Mush area?

Fortune: They always think about it.

Greenawalt: Would that plant be needed to supply the local capacity, or is it simply . . . ?

Fortune: Yes; it would be needed, not only that, but, of course, you understand that all of these plants are wearing out all of the time. As they get older and older, they become more expensive to operate. So a new one is always essential.

Greenawalt: What is the life span on a plant like the plant at Skyland? Is there an estimate on that?

Fortune: I never was in the generating part of the company, but I

Fortune: (Cont'd.) would say, you'd think about thirty or forty years.

Greenawalt: So it's nearing the end of its life, then.

Fortune: I wouldn't say that in that way, but I would say that, of course, there have been additions and changes, and all of that might have changed since I worked with the company. I am sure that it has, because when I talk about the life span, I don't necessarily mean so much that everything is worn out, except for the fact that it costs more to operate than a new one would, which I am sure has changed since I left. But I never was involved in the generation part of it; the only thing I had to do with/was when the Marshall plant was operating, since we had no one else in the Asheville area in the generation business, so to speak. I had a little bit to do with the personnel that was at the Marshall plant. When they had to hire someone down there, or if they fired someone, or something like that, I was always called in on it before they did, to talk about it, and I was involved in that.

Greenawalt: Do you recall any serious power interruptions that this area suffered, say, in the period of your employment?

Fortune: We had an explosion at the Avery Street Sub-station, as we call it. As I told you a moment ago, down on French Broad river, just up the river from the West Asheville bridge, that's the low bridge that you take going from Clingman Avenue over to Haywood Road. In the days, in 1916, the old Asheville Power and Light Company had a steam generating plant there; a small plant. That had all been done away with later on, and that became what was known as the Avery

Fortune: (Cont'd.) Street Sub-station, because the street that went by it was called Avery Street. We had an explosion there. The power company used to own the gas company also, and the gas facility was between Avery Street and the river, and the power company's facilities were between the railroad and the street.

When they had sold the old gas plant to the North Carolina Public Service Company, which operates gas plants all over North Carolina, and the power company got out of the gas business, they had to give the gas plant a right of way across that piece of property that we had between the railroad and the street, because they made gas down there with coal.

Greenawalt: I saw a picture of it.

Fortune: Well, anyhow, it came along that the gas company could buy a railroad car of liquefied gas cheaper than they could generate it out of coal then. So they started buying this gas. On that right of way that they had across our property they put in a pipe line. They took it from the railroad tank car which sat on the side track where they would normally unload their coal, over into their gas tank. Of course, when they turned the liquid loose in their gas tank it expanded back into a gas. That pipe, being laid in the ground that had been where there had been an old steam electric generating plant, a great deal of it was in cinders, and those cinders ate that pipe that they put in the ground and caused it to have a hole in it. That pipe crossed over two small tunnels that we had. They were about two or three feet square. They carried the cables from the inside of our

Fortune: (Cont'd.) building to the transformer yard on the outside, and this old building that had the steam plant in it down there had a basement in it, and since it was down on the level of the river it frequently got water in the basement, so they had what they called the sump in the basement, which was nothing in the world but a much lower place in the basement for all of this water to drain down in. We had a pump down there that pumped that water out. We only kept one operator down there day and night. They had three shifts working, of course, but one of the things that each operator did was to pump out that sump. That was one of his duties, to start that pump and pump it out. The fellow, his name was Knapp and everybody called him Knapp. . . he went down there apparently, during the night to pump out that, and since this liquefied gas, when it escaped it was heavier than air, it sunk down into the basement.

He smoked a pipe all the time, Knapp did. Either when he went to light his pipe in the basement, or when he pulled the switch, and it arced, to stop the sump pump. It blew up and of course killed him instantly. That building was one of these old brick buildings, and had about an eighteen to twenty-four inch wall, and it blew the west wall of that building out into Avery Street and blew the roof straight up. The roof came back down, then, right on top of the plant. That created an outage all over Asheville for quite a little while. They called me at the house at two-thirty. I slept with the phone right beside my bed.

Greenawalt: Do you recall what year that was?

Fortune: No; but I have the date and pictures of it.

They called me about two-thirty and said Avery Street Sub-station had blown up, "That's the reason you don't have any lights." I said, "What do you mean, blown up?" He said, "I don't know; it just blew up." He said, "We need you to come right away." So I went.

We didn't have any lights. We didn't even have enough lights to answer the telephone. They were using flashlights, which were fast giving out. That was something like three to three-thirty in the morning, and I couldn't think of any place to get any candles at that time of ^{night} / except that I'd worked at the Sunday School Department over at the First Baptist Church for years and I had a bunch of candles over there, big long ones. So I went over and found a window open at the church and climbed in the window. It was dark as pitch in there. There wasn't a street light or a house light, or anything on anywhere. You can't imagine how dark it is until that occurs. I climbed in the window and got those candles and took them back down to the switchboard so the people could answer the telephone, because most of the people in Asheville didn't know what caused their lights to be out and they were calling in.

They sent quite a few men up here from Raleigh, as well as some transformers, and everything. We got the street lights back on, I think, the second night. It took quite a little while, but we had most of the other lights on the next day, sometime. But all of my men worked. One fellow that was on a pole down there at Avery Street where we were stringing ^{wire} / . . . what we did: we just took the wire straight from the

Fortune: (Cont'd.) transformers in the transformer yard and didn't go through an oil switch or anything. Luckily, nothing hit any of the poles in Asheville, or kicked out any of the lines. If it had, it would have kicked the transmission lines out all the way over to Canton. But that didn't happen; so we got by, and then the next day we got some new oil switches, or some second-hand, really they were, oil switches from Raleigh that they had on hand down there and put them in out in the yard. But one fellow, one of the linemen that worked on the pole, was always a kind of comical sort of fellow anyhow, and had something funny to say, said, "If I'd known I was going to be on this pole this long, I'd have taken some straw up here with me and built me a nest."

Greenawalt: People never realize how much their lives depend on electricity in their routines until they lose it.

Fortune: That's right. We've had others; we've had one or two big ice storms. One of them occurred right at Christmas time, that I can remember, when the ice storm went through the area all out around Enka. I can remember coming through the woods out there close to Enka Lake and every tree was glistening. The sun was out, then, but it was still whizzing cold, but every tree was glistening just like diamonds. It was really beautiful, but it was sure destructive on the lines. We had so many outages then, and also, it put out most of the telephone lines, and in fact, what I was doing out there was riding along with another man, and we were just riding along asking people if they had electricity, because we didn't know who was out and who wasn't.

Fortune: (Cont'd.) They couldn't call us. We were trying to get the lines back on. Although the wires to their house might have looked all right, we didn't know whether further on somewhere it wasn't connected. I can't think of any other major outages.

Greenawalt: Mr. Fortune, I have certainly enjoyed this. I have exhausted the questions I had in mind. Is there something you'd like to add to this subject?

Fortune: I enjoyed my work for the power company. I can say that, because I felt like building all these rural lines, these people really got a helping hand, a great many of them. Like the old fellow told me: his wife didn't have to carry water any more, which was quite a chore back in the old days.

Greenawalt: Is it your impression that the rural areas around Asheville went without electricity longer than some of the rural areas to the East?

Fortune: When we were building lines, the same thing occurred all over the company system, as well as the Duke Power Company system, almost all at the same time. Now, in some of these Southern areas, it might have been more so that they went without electricity than, say, up in New York State. Also, it was a question that a great many things that we take for granted now, such as an electric washing machine, even an electric iron, when I first went to work for the company we put on a campaign to sell electric irons. In fact, they gave prizes to the employees who would sell the most electric irons. I won one of them one time. A lot of things were not available to use electricity.

Greenawalt: They were paying a light bill?

Fortune: That's right; they were paying a light bill and paying about fifty percent; fifteen cents a kilowatt hour for it, but they burned very little of that. The bills weren't great big, in the real sense of the word.

Greenawalt: Was Carolina Power and Light making its own irons?

Fortune: Oh, no; we never manufactured anything, that I know of.

Greenawalt: But you were marketing?

Fortune: We marketed for a great many years, and then we realized that. . . in other words, everything that the power company does is so closely scrutinized. The power company is one of the most regulated industries in the world. You have to get a franchise to operate on the city streets, and you have some sort of a permit to operate on county roads and do certain things, particularly on any roads controlled by the State of North Carolina, you can't set poles close to the pavement, and such things as that.

Your can't sell stock without Securities and Exchange permission. You can't raise or lower your rates without the Commission in Raleigh agreeing to it. If we owe money to the bondholders, they send around people all the time to see if we are keeping up our lines; see if the sub-stations are in good order; see if the power plants are in good order. Because they want to be sure their mortgage money is safe. You see, that's really what a bond is: it's a first mortgage on the company. You keep books, you do everything by what I used to call "the Blue Book," which is now quite a sizable item. Today it's

Fortune: (Cont'd.) two or three volumes, but when I was in the business it was only one pretty thick volume, but it told you how you did anything that you did. If you put a new light in the headlight of your automobile, you had to charge it to a certain account that the Federal Government specifies. So, just everything like that was the real. . .

Greenawalt: We're a little bit familiar with that here; we've got the same thing with the State, in a way. Well, again, I want to thank you very much for your time and participation in this, Mr.

Fortune.

Fortune: If you think of anything else, some time, that you want me to do, I will be glad to come.

Greenawalt: Thank you very much.

[End of interview]

Since all of the above is primarily about my Carolina Power & Light Co., employment, I would like to add a few words of appreciation for the opportunity I had to work for C. P. & L. Co. From laborer to top management, or from top to bottom, they were a great group. As I advanced from collector, to Junior engineer, Senior engineer, Division engineer, Division Superintendent, and Manager of division operations, for Western North Carolina, all were helpful. Management was tolerant of my mistakes, gave me every opportunity to learn, and provided sound advice. My fellow employees in most every case gave me their cooperation and good work.

Looking back now, I feel it was most fortunate that I had the privilege to work for Carolina Power and Light Co.

R. G. Fortune, Jr.

July 9, 1980.