

Benjamin R. Hunter, interviewed by Dr. Louis Silveri, July 8, 1977.

Dr. Silveri: When were you born?

Benjamin Hunter: August 17, 1886.

Silveri: Where?

Hunter: A little village known as MacNeill, South Carolina.

Incidentally, you possibly have heard of the famous Charleston earthquake which occurred in that year, and I never was quite certain as to whether I caused it or it caused me, but anyway, I preceded it by twelve days.

Silveri: Could you tell us whereabouts your birthplace is, in South Carolina?

Hunter: Well, it is on . . . it is located, generally speaking, in the Southern part of the state near the Savannah River, on the little railroad that ran on the South Carolina side from Augusta to Savannah. They both were Georgia points; not too far from Allendale, South Carolina. That's a bigger town.

Silveri: What do / <sup>you know</sup> about your ancestors? How far back can you trace your ancestors, in America?

Hunter: I have a genealogy of my maternal ancestors. They left Wurttemberg, Germany . . . there was three families, came together. . . they left there in 1751. They entered the port of Charleston in 1752. They were given grants of land up the Edisto River, about forty miles from the coast. There is an island just south of Charleston known as Edisto Island. It takes its name, of course, from the mouth of the river of that same name.

Silveri: What was your mother's maiden name?

Hunter: Rentz, R-e-n-t-z.

Silveri: Let's go back to the Civil War period. When you were growing up, did you have any relatives who fought in the Civil War?

Hunter: Yes, my father's brothers. He had, I think, three in the war. One was killed at Bull Run. The other fled West after the war and never was heard of since. I don't know whether he got into a friendly fight, or whether or not he was hung for cattle rustling, or what, I don't know, but anyway, he disappeared.

Silveri: Did your father then . . .

Hunter: Oh, no. My father was too young. My father was born in '52, so he was only nine years old when the war started.

Silveri: Did either of your grandfathers own slaves?

Hunter: Oh, yes. My maternal grandfather had thirty-five. And as a matter of fact, one of the interesting episodes: the family moved from where I was born to South Georgia when I was quite a youngster, but my mother always, without variance, would go back to visit her family in South Carolina every two years. And there were so many of us (you were talking about your family) my mother had eleven children. Two died in infancy, but nine of us grew up. Anyway, there were so many children that we had to take turns about who would go with her and who would stay home and keep the home fires burning. The trip that I was old enough to remember: my mother went to the cabin of her mammy. You know, it was the custom in those days for the colored woman to be the nurse and look after each child. She had an individual mammy. And

Hunter (Cont'd.): Mama's mammy, the one that served her when she was young; that was the first place she went to visit, and they greeted each other as if they were long lost sisters, and the affection that they showed was very delightful to see.

Silveri: What did your maternal grandfather raise?

Hunter: Oh, he grew cotton and rice. He had lands that extended down into the swamps of the Edisto River and he grew rice to feed his own slaves, and family, too. I'm a rice eater, myself.

Silveri: How about your paternal grandfather, did he hold slaves?

Hunter: Well, I don't know too much about that. My paternal grandfather was an only child, and his father

was not a plantation owner. He ran a . . . they called it a carriage factory, but actually what he did, I think he built rough country wagons, you know, farm wagons, and did blacksmithing, near Sunbury, North Carolina, right close to the Virginia line, just south of Suffolk, Virginia.

Silveri: You heard many stories about the Civil War?

Hunter: Well, I heard a great many, of course, but mostly what I read afterwards, because actually the fortunes of my maternal family were so drastically upset that the question was how to re-adjust to the new conditions that were existing at the time. No, I didn't hear, I couldn't go into detail, because after all I was born <sup>twenty-one</sup> ~~thirty-one~~ years after Appomattox. No, no, no. . . twenty-one years. Appomattox was '65 and I was born in '86. ★

Silveri: But your mother and father could remember the war?

Hunter: Not too much. Papa used to talk about the Yankees coming through southern Virginia and northern Carolina when they'd come, but Mama didn't. She was too young. She was born in '59. She was only two years old when the war started.

Silveri: What did your father's family do after the war?

Hunter: My father . . . I declare, I don't remember too much. I never knew too much of them. We never visited them when I was a boy growing up. They lived up in Virginia too far away. But I didn't see too much of them. I really do not know the intimate life of any of them. I only knew two of Papa's brothers who came South and worked for the railroad company, as he did.

Silveri: He worked for the railroad?

Hunter: Yes. As a matter of fact, I started out in life as a railroad agent and telegraph operator. This really might go into this picture: I left home, shoved off from home port, when I was fifteen years and three months old. I finally wound up, oh, about, that was and in November of nineteen and one, / in January of nineteen and three, which was about fifteen, sixteen months later, [here he speaks Spanish rapidly].

Silveri: Would you repeat that in English, please?

Hunter: [Again, in Spanish]. . . agent for a little railroad about a hundred and fifty miles southwest of Juarez.

Silveri: You couldn't speak Spanish, could you, when you went down there?

Hunter: Oh, I had not much to do, and I applied myself. I borrowed a textbook. Well, digressing for a moment, the only time I had a chance to test my fluency in the language was: Mrs. Guastavino, whose husband was one of the architects that built the famous Biltmore home and estate, you know, this thing you have to pay eight dollars to go through, now. When he died, he came out here to Black Mountain, and over here where there is a Christian assembly church, he bought about one hundred and sixty acres, or thereabouts, and built him a replica of the old Spanish hacienda, with an outhouse and a gate, and everybody had to pass muster before you could get in to see the . . . and he lived there until he died. The fact is, he's buried in the crypt of the St. Lawrence church in Asheville. His name was Guastavino.

Silveri: Is the house still there, that you describe. . . the Spanish hacienda?

Hunter: No, it's been . . . she's been dead now about thirty or thirty-five years. But I knew her, in her lifetime, because after he died she still lived out there, with a woman for a companion. Then in the wintertime she'd come down here and stay at the Monte Vista. . . the original,

Anyway, I got to know her once and she, herself, was  
. . . Mr. Guastavino's second wife and the  
daughter of a fellow architect from Madrid, España.

One cold, winter day, I remember when she was plodding along in this dress, black dress. (she never did mix too well) but she was just

Hunter (Cont'd.): plodding along this cold, bitter, wintry day, and I came up from behind her and I cried out: "Buenos dias, se<sup>ñ</sup>ora. ¿comos esta dias, no?" She turned around and galvanized into life. She later told me I spoke such good language. Which was true. The textbooks that I acquired to study from were of the Castiliano type of Spanish, spoken by the elite of Madrid.

Silveri: You mentioned that there were eleven children in your family.

Hunter: Born, but nine. . .two died in infancy.

Silveri: Which one were you, the first?

Hunter: Fourth.

Silveri: That was a very large family. What do you remember about growing up? Where did you grow up---North Carolina?

Hunter: No, no. I grew up in a little town called Alapaha, South Georgia. There are no finer people in the world than they were, either. Good Samaritans. Whenever anything happened they all rallied around, and as far as money was concerned, never mentioned at all. As a matter of fact, when I was a boy, oh, six or eight years old, our house burned down, and our nearest neighbor lived about a quarter of a mile away, was a big farmer, had everything on the map, we just bundled the whole family up. . . there were about eight or ten of us at that time. . . down to his place, and he took care of us until the house could be re-built. We'd been down there about three months, and as far as board, or cost, or anything. . . it was never mentioned in the world. That's what you did for your friends.

Silveri: What role did the church play with your family? How important was the church?

Hunter: My parents were very religious people. Very religious.

Silveri: What church did they belong to?

Hunter: They belonged to . . . my father and mother belonged to the Methodist church, and I was compelled to go worship. . . let's see, they had about five services a week that I had to attend. The fact is, I was Sexton at our little church when I was about ten or twelve years old. I'd ring the bell; trim the lamps, fill them with oil, and then go to sleep when the preacher preached too long.

Silveri: Do you remember the first school you went to?

Hunter: Yes. My father sent me to a little private school. There were about six . . . an elderly "fille soule". . . comprenez fille soule? French, that is: unmarried lady. . . taught that school, and we went to that before we were eligible to go to the public schools.

Silveri: So you went to school as long as you were home, up until fifteen years old?

Hunter: Oh, yes, yes.

Silveri: What grade did you finish?

Hunter: We didn't have grades; we went by readers. I think I was about the sixth reader, or something like that. . . seventh reader.

Silveri: We're talking about the 1890's now, right?

Hunter: No. That was nineteen and one.

Silveri: Nineteen and one. Okay.

Hunter: Well, I didn't go to school for about a year before I left. . . That was about 1899. . . when I went to school.

Silveri: Then you took off?

Hunter: I took off, because by that time . . . I matured early,

Hunter (Cont'd.): really I did, because I became aware of the problem that my father had in providing for so many children, and I thought I was capable of getting out. . . and indeed I did, for the next eight years. I plowed back into the coffers of my family my little tid bit. When I came back from Mexico, as an example, even though I had been away from home for about a year and a half. That was such a tremendous move going West, I was sufficiently under the influence of parental domination that I didn't think I could make such a move so drastic as that without getting my mother's consent.

This is an interesting interlude: when I went home to spend my sixteenth birthday, my youngest sister was just about seven days old, and I remember kneeling by my mother's bedside to plead my case for her permission to go West. And finally I was successful in getting it, on the condition that I wouldn't be gone more than a year. So, when I got to Mexico and the dan was [Spanish]. . . I'd save my money, and I'd made a friend who was a telegraph operator in the Western Union office in New Orleans, so when I got back to New Orleans I bought a present and gifts for everybody (not men, no) <sup>and</sup> but all of my sisters and my mother / the family, with the money I'd saved while I was in Mexico.

Silveri: How much money did you start out with?

Hunter: Me? Nothing.

Silveri: Just took off without anything?

Hunter: Sure.

Silveri: How did you get along? What did you do. . .start walking along the road when you left home, or what?



Hunter: Oh, no, no, no. You see, I took my apprenticeship in the little town where I grew up, Alapaha, which was eighteen miles east of where I had landed a job. Oh, yes, I knew exactly what I was going to do. I had arranged for a job. I don't go off half-cocked; never have.

Silveri: At that town you learned the art of the telegraph operator, right?

Hunter: Yes.

Silveri: Then why did you go to Mexico?

Hunter: Well, because when I got to New Orleans, that was where we got our first jobs. The Southern Pacific railroad does not go into New Orleans. The terminus is at Algiers, right across the river. Have you ever been over there? Well, anyway, on the west bank of the Mississippi River they do have, did have, (I don't know what the situation is now) but they do have a passenger station in New Orleans, but they used to ferry their trains across to that station, but as far as the track and all, it began at Algiers and went westward. Well, anyway, my friend with whom I was traveling, we got a job, each.

I was sent to a little town called Jennings, Louisiana, and he was sent to Opelousas, and when I stayed there about three minutes I said, "Gosh, I'm just half-way west." So I took off and finally wound up when I got to El Paso, which is directly across the river from Juarez. My money was running out, so I had to replenish it some way or another, and I tried with Southern Pacific; I tried with ET&NE: no soap. I tried with the Mexican Central; that's the government-owned railroad that reaches ultimately to Mexico City: no soap. Then I heard about this little mining railroad that took off South West: Sierra Madre Pacific

Hunter (Cont'd.): That's how I happened to be in Sabinal. \*

Silveri: You stayed there for about a year.

Hunter: No, not quite a year, because you see, the year included all the time I stayed in Jennings.

Silveri: After that you came back home, then what did you do?

Hunter: Well, after visiting my family and then going back to visit my tutor, you know, the man under whom I learned telegraphy, and what have you. . . this is a sort of a fate-like incident in my life: I knew the crews on the railroads. There wasn't any question about buying tickets, or anything like that, so when I got ready to leave Alapaha, the Dixie Flyer, <sup>which was</sup> the winter train from Chicago that came down and finally wound up in Tampa, Florida; the winter train. And then there was the local passenger train that began at Albany, Georgia, and went to Brunswick. The local passenger train left Tifton, eighteen miles west, ahead of the other train. But the other train being faster, whenever it ~~got~~ caught up they'd make it take a siding to let this through train go through, even though they were both passengers. But, anyway, I said to Mr. Harris, who was my tutor, ~~I said~~, "Now, Mr. Harris, I don't know where I'm going." ~~Answer~~, "If the local train comes first, I'm going to turn northward at Waycross (which was fifty-two miles east of us); if the Dixie Flyer comes, I'm going to go to Florida." And the Dixie Flyer came, and that's why I went to Florida, and I stayed there for some thirty years. That's fate, you see.

Silveri: In order, can you tell me the kind of jobs you had while you were in Florida, from the time you got there until the time you left?

Hunter: Well, the first thing I did. . . back in those days I was still telegraphing, that's what I was doing. I got a job with the Florida East Coast Railroad; night operator at a little town called DuPont, just a little south of St. Augustine. By that time I had become quite adept as a telegraph operator, even though I was only seventeen years old.

Then they sent me from there to Ft. Pierce, which is 'way down, about two hundred miles south, which was a junction point, and I was night operator there for three or four months, until the call boy down at the roundhouse. . . Do you know what a roundhouse is?

Silveri: Yes.

Hunter: . . . he persuaded me, beguiled me to go out one night and steal a chicken, and we cooked it in a pot down at the roundhouse. That led to trouble, so I ducked out of there and went back to Jacksonville and got a job in the East Coast freight office, no, first. . . in the Union Station, passenger station. But it was night, third trick, no, hell, second trick. . . there were only two tricks, the operators there each worked twelve-hour tricks. Dispatchers worked eight hours, but the ordinary, common run of telegraph operators, they had to work seven days a week, twelve hours each, seven in the morning, seven in the night, seven days a week. Well, anyway, I went to work in the Union

Hunter (Cont'd.): Station. This was an important position. I worked there until I finally found an opening down at freight office of the East Coast Railroad, which paid, I think, ten dollars a month more, and it was a daytime job. So I went down there on the bill desk, and I worked about three months and they made me chief bill clerk. I was working men on the desk two and a half times years as old as I was. Well, anyway, one of the young lads that passed through on the billing desk thought so highly of my capabilities that he proposed that we go into the clothing business there in Jacksonville.

I said, "Boy I haven't got any money." He said, "My brother has." His brother was county commissioner; had money. He said, "He'll put a set-up there." I said, "I don't like to wade out in stuff I don't know anything about. I don't want to risk his money." But it wasn't so long at that before I was getting sixty dollars a month there for that; he got me a job in a wholesale grocery firm for eighty dollars a month. And that's when I left railroading. Later on, that was when they thought well enough of me that when they decided to open a branch in Miami they sent me down as manager. So really, I began in it when I was eighteen, became chief bill clerk, I became, I would say I qualified as an executive for the balance of my life.

Silveri: How long did you stay working for that wholesale food firm?

Hunter: I went there in the fall of '12 and I left them in '25 or '26. Twenty-five, I guess. Just before the big crash came. About thirteen years. Meanwhile, I became second vice president of that million-dollar

Hunter (Cont'd.): company. Based on my operations there, we had extended, and had eight branches, beside the parent company in Jacksonville.

Silveri: Grocery stores or wholesale food distributors?

Hunter: Groceries. That was back in the days when the wholesale grocers distributed, I'd say, from eighty-five to ninety percent of all the food stuffs. I mean, the groceries, not greenstuffs nor meats, but in the general form of grocers, long before the days of supermarkets and all that kind of stuff.

Silveri: You didn't get into the first World War, did you?

Hunter: No, I didn't. I missed it. . . well, I did. I was manager, had been for eight or ten years, around there, finally, though, I had been enrolled in an officers' training camp, but the war was over before I got there.

Silveri: What did you do when you left that firm?

Hunter: First of all, I worked so hard, in other words, I took things very seriously: "Life is real, life is earnest." For instance, when I'd relieve a salesman on his vacation, or if there was any other problem that came up, I said, "If you can't run, step aside, let a man run that can run." In other words, things must go on, and I drove myself so hard that I began to develop all manner of symptoms. I went through several clinics; never could find out what my problem was until finally, here in Asheville I ran into a doctor through a dentist friend of mine who directed me to him. Finally, when he had completed his examination, he said, "All you've done is just to exhaust your

Hunter:(Cont'd.) nerve forces." He said, "If you had a battery and your generator was not producing as much as you're ~~throwing~~ <sup>BRAYVING</sup> out of it, after a while you couldn't start your car." He said, "Well, you're in just that shape."

So that's when I got out, and my friend who <sup>was</sup> ~~is~~ manager of the Pennsylvania Sugar Company's farming operations, which they got into as a result of World War I, when the U-boats (this is the first time U-boats played any part in warfare) they sank so many of the foreign ships bringing raw sugar to this country that the price of sugar shot way up. Where formerly it had retailed at twenty pounds for a dollar. . . Now mind you, twenty pounds for a dollar, that's five cents a pound, that was on special. Anyway, it got to be three pounds for a dollar during World War I.

The result of that: the sugar company. . . that was just about the time that the State of Florida had completed the first stage of their drainage program, draining the Everglades, and the president of the sugar company, who had a home in Miami, was there close enough, he thought so highly of that he had his company buy ten thousand acres of that newly-drained Everglades land to grow sugar cane to make ourselves free.

Things were going on nicely. <sup>1911</sup> He had twenty-five hundred acres growing in sugar cane when they had a heavy rainy season and flooded the 'Glades; drowned out all of his cane except about twenty-five acres. They never could get the State internal improvement board to take the necessary measures to prevent a recurrence of that flooding, that his engineers (the sugar company's engineers) thought

Hunter: (Cont'd.) was necessary, so ~~he~~ <sup>THEY</sup> dropped out, although ~~held~~ <sup>THEY</sup>

~~HAD~~ spent a million and a half dollars building a new refinery out there to test the saccharine content of the cane growing on that land. But, nonetheless, ~~he~~ <sup>THEY</sup> had the land.

~~he~~ <sup>THEY</sup> bought it outright, and so ~~he~~ <sup>THEY</sup> conceived the idea of using it as a demonstration farm, looking ultimately to sell it to truckers, people who would use it for agricultural purposes. <sup>GROWING GREEN VEG</sup> And so he took one thousand acres of it, surrounded it with a fifteen-foot dyke, built a system of canals and ditches inside, so that every five acres was surrounded by either a ditch or a canal. Then he built a big pumping station on the main canal ~~just~~ where it connected with the Miami Canal, which was one of the big drainage canals.

It was really an ideal set-up, because they could, in case of a drought they could pump water from the Miami Canal into these canals and ditches and radiation would give them the moisture that was needed. On the other hand, if they had news of an approaching cold wave they could pump water from the canal also, into the ditches and warmth of that. . . they had learned that the temperature of the water in the canal didn't vary more than about five degrees, winter and summer, so it was relatively warm if there was a cold wave. They would pump that warm water in there and radiation from that would raise the temperature in the field about ten degrees.

So we didn't have any more cold problem. Then they planted everything on demand.

Hunter (Cont'd.): My job was to sell that; I became the selling agent. And I was doing that very nicely; I had my second year on that and had come up here in the summer time. Left down there in July; cleared out the last of my potatoes. We grew, one year, six hundred carloads of winter Irish potatoes, and I cleaned out the last of them right after the Fourth of July and I came up here, and then when it came time, along about the first of September, to go back, my friend down there told me that the waters had raised in the 'Glades again and had delayed their planting, so just keep quiet and come on back when the time came.

But meanwhile, I got restless and somebody came along and proposed a hosiery mill, and I had some friends and we got together and organized it, even though I had been badly crippled financially. I still had a few shekels stashed away in the old sock.

Silveri: What year did you start this company, and what was the name of the company?

Hunter: Black Mountain Hosiery Mills, Incorporated, organized in the fall of '28.

Silveri: Were you part owner of it?

Hunter: Oh, I was only part owner, because I didn't have enough money to capitalize it, though I invested more than any other single . . . the man who joined me, we both started out with the idea of putting five thousand dollars in it. I knew where I could get mine, but he never did get together but three. But, meanwhile, to further my lot, the other man was a TB man. He was up here on a . . . I think



Hunter (Cont'd.): he owned a New York Life insurance policy that paid him benefits, you know, total and permanent disability, and he couldn't do anything. But he was the man that really got me interested in it. . . .

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(Beginning of Tape I, Side II)

Hunter (Cont'd.): . . .with the help of a friend to get out here and call on these people and persuade them to turn loose enough of their shekels to get us started.

Silveri: What year was this?

Hunter: That was in the fall of '28.

Silveri: Fall of '28. Was there already a vacant building where you could start this business?

Hunter: Yes, yes. The building that I started in was alongside the . . . . Do you know where the railroad crossing is down there?

Silveri: Yes.

Hunter: It's been now razed, demolished. There is a three-story brick building on the . . .just as you cross the railroad on the right side, right next to the railroad. It was a brick building, is still a brick building on the left side that was there then. I was able to rent that building: three stories.

Silveri: How about the machinery? Did you have to go out and buy the machinery?

Hunter: Oh, yes. We bought new machinery. We bought twenty-five knitting machines to start with. They cost about eight hundred dollars

Hunter (Cont'd.): a machine. Then we had to use some other equipment, too.

Silveri: Did your partners have experience in this business?

Hunter: No.

Silveri: Why did you. . .

Hunter: He had a nephew. . . a niece who married a man that was in the hosiery business at Lexington, North Carolina. The fact is: when he proposed it I laughed at him. I said, "No, I don't know anything about those mills." But he said, "Let's go down to Lexington, and this man who is married to my niece, he'll show us what he is doing." At that time. . .you see, that was in early 1928, mid-summer of '28, and that was before the Crash came, you know. Everything was on the up, up, up, up, you know, sort of a re-bounce from the surge we had following World War I. They were just reaping up the earth, looks like. Then he, having no knowledge or any experience in it; as far as directing help was concerned, I wasn't worried about that, because I could acquire whatever know-how was required. As far as planning, keeping people busy, and all that, I'd had too much experience to let that concern me. Anyway, these people said I didn't have any marketing experience; I didn't have any contacts, any identity in the trade.

These people agreed, "We'll buy these goods from you in what we call the greige,"(g-r-e-i-g-e, that's a French word, meaning the unfinished state, the raw state, not dyed)"nor do you have the problem of finding a market. We'll buy the goods just as you finish them from your knitting machines and loop them, and then let you feel your way

Hunter (Cont'd.) into the hosiery business!" Well, that was the only reason at all that I decided to go into an unknown country, so to speak. But then, the picture changed so drastically again. I'd been through that in Miami, but here, now, then, in the fall of '29, if you remember, the stock market crash came, and it was all of that bad here. These people suddenly owed me for three or four months of shipments, and they hadn't paid me. The people that were going to take the goods in the greige. And I said, "Huh, uh, this won't do, huh,uh, huh,uh. So I went down there and made a settlement with them. They gave me some money and then gave me a ninety day trade acceptance for the balance.

Then I looked around and found that I didn't have any dye plant. I looked around and found a finishing plant down there and I made a deal with them, and then I was in the hosiery business whether I wanted to be or not.

Silveri: What kind of hosiery did you make?

Hunter: I made socks like . . .

Silveri: Men's socks?

Hunter: Men's socks. They were fancy, though. The machinery that I bought; that was just when the fancy socks were on the way in, and that's the type of equipment that I bought, which made them as expensive as they were.

Silveri: Were they one hundred percent cotton socks?

Hunter: No, no. No, I used rayon, and I used acetate, which is

Hunter (Cont'd.) really another form of rayon yarn. But I did use a good deal of added trim, which is a top toe and heel. It was always mercerized yarn.

Silveri: What does mercerized mean?

Hunter: It means yarn that has been treated so that when dyed it will take a much finer finish. It adds to the cost of the yarn, and besides, it requires the fiber to be the length necessary to strength. It's really a quality product. That was the only way that I. . . I said, "I don't want to find out how to make the cheapest sock. I want to make the best sock." You can't build up a reputation for a product on something that's cheap.

Silveri: Did you have any trouble finding workers for your plant?

Hunter: No, no. No, no. Well, I did find some trouble finding trained people. Then I had the job of training people, myself. So I went down and spent about ten days in Charlotte when I got my dye plant all set up. Now it would cost me sixty-five dollars a week, at that time, to hire a finish dryer. I could hire one for twenty-five dollars a week if I could train him myself. So, in order to be able to train him, I went down and learned myself.

Silveri: So your workers in the plant came from right around here, right around Black Mountain?

Hunter: Ninety percent. . . ninety-five percent of them. The only people that I really got outside . . . It takes several years to train a mechanic well enough. . . you see, these machines would knit patterns and designs, and it wasn't simple plain knitting like this. . . that meant complicated equipment that it would take a man a long time to

Hunter (Cont'd.) acquire the know-how to produce it, keep them running, keep them turning, keep them turning out socks. I don't want anybody experimenting around, I want to keep those machines turning.

Silveri: Most of the people were unskilled people, in the plant?

Hunter: Most of the plant workers were unskilled when I first. . . I trained them myself.

Silveri: In that first year, about how many workers did you have? Do you recall?

Hunter: Oh, I think, somewhere around twenty, twenty-five.

Silveri: And what's the greatest number of workers you had at the plant while you were there?

Hunter: Ninety-eight.

Silveri: A pretty small operation.

Hunter: Oh, it was, and yet hosiery mills as a rule don't get too big. The only two really big ones, I think they still are, Adams Millis in High Point. . . My initial capital that I started with was \$29,700.00. But, of course after all, you know, when you think about dollars then, the dollar then was worth about five times what it is now. But anyway, that's what we started with, \$29,700.00, and when I got out it was something over three hundred thousand dollars. I built it up to that.

Silveri: Do you remember what the wages were, of the people?

Hunter: Oh, yes. Yes, indeed, I do. The common, ordinary, untrained girls that we could get, plenty of them, we worked fifty-five hour weeks, ten hours every day, and then five hours on Saturday. . . seven dollars and a half a week.

Silveri: Seven-and-a-half a week. This was when you started in 1928, '29?

Hunter: No, well, it was in '29. We got to making socks in January, '29.

Silveri: And this is the wage that the girls got in '29. '30. and . . .

Hunter: Oh, yes, down in the depths of the Depression. Well, as a matter of fact, to show you how I had to nurse that thing through the Depression: I was determined. . . it was a challenge to me and I was going to do what it took. Anyway, I analyzed my picture at the end of three years, and in each case, we had made a little operating profit, but, because of the experience I'd had in Miami, I was determined to create a reserve, and therefore I charged the maximum depreciation off that the law allowed, and so when I did that I showed "red" for three years. I called my directors together and I said, "My analysis of this picture is that what we need is more equipment. I can add twenty-five percent more equipment without increasing the overhead in this, that, and the other field. So, therefore, my net would step up accordingly." They agreed that seemed to be the thing to do. Well, I said, "Where will we find the money to buy that new equipment?" This would be about nineteen and thirty-three. Did you ever go to a Quaker meeting when nobody

Hunter (Cont'd.) moved 'em to speak? The Spirit didn't move 'em. Not a single soul. Nobody had anything to do. Well, back in Miami when I got out of the wholesale grocery business, we were also selling cigars and tobaccos, and one of the accounts that we had for the state was the general cigar companies: Robert Burns, Little Bobbies, White Owls, and all that line. The general sales manager thought so highly of my performance down there, he said, "You don't want to get out of this wholesale field, you have an identity here, and you shouldn't do it." I said, "Well I wouldn't have what?" I said, "I've got fifty thousand dollars just cached in the whole market. You can have it, and I'll give you the line." (In other words, the agency for the line) I said, "In the first place, I don't think, physically, I could be able to handle it now." I couldn't, and I turned it down.

Well, then, when we got along, about four years later, well, it's just been a little longer than that, about six years later, I turned to him and I said, "You wanted to back me before, what about now?" I was in New York. He said, "Ben, I'm so sorry, but I didn't have any more sense, than when you wouldn't take it, I went back into the market and then I lost my shirt."

Silveri: You were determined to make that . . . .

Hunter: I did, I finally, yes I did. . . I finally wangled. . . the banking situation clarified a little bit, and I finally made friends with, and sold myself to the president of the new bank that was organized.

Hunter (Cont'd.) They gave us a little loan that we made a down payment on . . . meanwhile, I'd established a very satisfactory credit rating with the machinery people, and we bought, I think, ten more knitting machines right off the bat. You see, that would be forty percent more, and we started off with twenty-five. The minute we got that new equipment in we never had any more red ink at all. We didn't use any more; proving the soundness of my analysis.

Silveri: When the Depression hit in '29, and then got worse in the next few years, didn't your orders decline? Was there a time when you couldn't sell your hosiery?

Hunter: I had that marketing problem, too. Yes. The only thing that I asked my man that got me interested in this thing, to do, was to go up to New York. . . In the meantime, I had been subject to some of this kike type of Jewish representation, that. . . well, they're just kike's, that's all. . . had no future, no basis upon which to try to build anything. . . I said to him, "We need a selling agent in New York."

Meanwhile, I had one placed in Chicago; one in Cincinnati, and one in New York. With these open accounts like that, they don't particularly feel any sense of responsibility. They say, "Well, I'm not doing much for him, but he's got other agents, they maybe are doing it." Anyway, I sent him to New York, and he came back and all he did was hook with some more, even worse kikes than I already knew about. So I had to go up there and finally establish a selling agent that



Hunter (Cont'd.) I had for the balance of my days. The fact is, he bought the business for his son when I got out after some thirty years.

Silveri: When the Depression hit, did you have to lay off workers?

Hunter: No, no, no, we didn't, because we were so small there, to run at all we needed all we had. The fact is, for the first six months we were working on unfinished stage, undyed, and we didn't have the marketing problem. They paid us for a few months, but then when they quit paying us, then's when I had to do those things that I told you about.

Silveri: So the average work week was fifty-five hours a week. You had to reduce that when the "New Deal" came along, right?

Hunter: It was a long time before we got into that. They had moved into that field of legislation slowly. For instance, I think their first minimum wage was twenty-five cents an hour. Now it's. . . I think they've got it up to two and a half, and now the unions want three dollars an hour.

Silveri: Did you have to start paying the minimum wage?

Hunter: Oh, when the minimum wage came, but meanwhile. . . Yes, but as I say, it was slow. That was not down in the depths of the Depression. We were beginning to come back a little bit more. As a matter of fact, for instance, now a certain type of construction that was selling to the jobbing trade at three dollars a dozen before the crash came, got down as low as a dollar and ten cents a dozen, and then some of the jobbers were complaining, saying that that's an odd price, "When we add our profit to

Hunter (Cont'd.) "If we bring it into a bracket that's just not normal. Now, if you could bring that down to a dollar a dozen, I could handle it." I said, "No, I can't do it. I just won't do it. To do that, I'd have to take so much out of it I wouldn't have anything at all. I won't do it. I won't lend myself to any such plan as that." And I didn't. That was where I made the stand, and I never went below the standard of quality that we were able to do at a dollar and ten cents.

Silveri: Were there any hazards in your factory for the workers? Health hazards?

Hunter: Health hazards? Not particularly; no. There's nothing. . . there's no great danger in the type of equipment that you used there.

Silveri: What about the dust from the looms getting into their lungs?

Hunter: No, no, no. There was no dust. You see, we only handled, for instance, now like you take the rayon: Have you ever seen rayon yarn? Have you been out to Enka?

Silveri: Yes.

Hunter: Well, then. They were my buddies out there. I'll tell you a little incident too, about that, when you get around. . . let me finish the thought. We were dealing in mercerized cotton, which would be the only yarn that had any fuzz at all to it. It's all, as I say, it had to be of high quality cotton, long length fiber, and there was no dust at all. But, later on, I remember about '37, that was when we began to see daylight, and there was a sort of resurgence of activity in the market. One time the supply of rayon was so limited, at that particular

Hunter(Cont'd.) time, that there was sometimes trouble getting it, finding what you needed, but I did have. . . there was a man named Johnson, who was Secretary and Treasurer of the Enka plant, that came down from Pittsburgh. He was associated with some big textile operation up there. But he was a nice chap. When the banks closed and I had trouble. . .I couldn't borrow a nickel any place. . .I stated out this: now the mercerized yarns and the rayon, the terms were thirty days, net, or two percent, ten days. Well, I went to Mr. Johnson and I said, "Mr. Johnson, you know the situation better than I, but I believe, if you'll do this for me I can see this thing through." I said, "If you'll let me, when that discount period of ten days expires, send you a sixty-day trade acceptance bearing six percent handling, I can do that. I'll take off two percent and it'll only cost me one percent to finance this for sixty days, so I've made one percent profit anyhow."

Anyway, during that period I had been so faithful in caring for my obligations, that when the time came for the shortage of rayon, he called me up on the telephone one day and he said, "It looks like this rayon situation is getting so tight a lot of people are going to have to go without, but I just want to tell you, you don't have to worry." So I thought that was a wonderful feeling to know, for the first time business was beginning to show any life at all, to know that I was assured a supply of rayon.

Silveri: Were there any attempts to unionize your plant?

Hunter: Not to my knowledge. That picture you saw there is proof: I cultivated a family spirit in the whole organization. To this day,

Hunter (Cont'd.) whenever I get with one of my gals, to see the friendly expression that they show for me to this day, I am very proud of it. You see those pictures there? I have a letter from my selling agent. At one time I put in effect a profit-sharing plan. That was inspired by my . . . I've been a Rotarian for more than fifty years, and that was one of the things that I figured out that back in those days you consider a secured debenture or an obligation you would be satisfied with a five percent yield. But I said, "Now this is not secured, this is a risk operation, so I think they're entitled to eight percent." So, when our books were closed at the end of the year and I saw what our operating results had been, that I would set aside eight percent to go into the reserve of the company, and then anything we made beyond that I'd divide fifty-fifty between the corporation and the employees. And I had a letter from my selling agent after I'd been with him about eight or ten years, when I was doing that. . . I'll show it to you sometime. It's quite a . . . He was a Jew, but he was amazed to see how I treated everybody alike.

Silveri: Most of your employees came from out of these mountains around here? Most of your employees were mountain people?

Hunter: Oh, yes; yes.

Silveri: Were they good workers?

Hunter: Yes. They are also, most of them are of Scotch-Irish origin, and they have, of course, a lot of forms of speech, their ideology, for instance, like: you've done something, you've thought of something kind and you've done it for them, they'd say, (it wasn't thoughtful) they'd say, "It's mighty thoughty of you." Then another one would be, if they wanted you to stay still, they'd say, "Stay stood." A lot of

Hunter (Cont'd.) little idioms of their manner of speech. Sometimes . . . they are very stoic in their whole outlook. They're not very enthusiastic, but when it comes to real, they're there. I told them, "I'm just as Scotch-Irish as you are, but you went to the mountains," and I said, "I'm a low-lander."

Silveri: Did many of them leave farms that they had to come work for you? Sell their farms and come to work?

Hunter: No. Well, there wasn't much, this was never a farming country. Not much of a farming country. I guess corn for their squeezin's was about their . . .

Silveri: Did you employ mostly women in the plant?

Hunter: Well, sir, that's an interesting thing, too. I had to learn how to do that. In the course of my wholesale grocery days we took over the grocery. . . wholesale grocery operation of the Consolidated Naval Stores company. Have you ever been in a country where Naval Stores figure? Well, it means the, it's a long-leaf yellow pine that exudes a tar juice from which they make turpentine, oil of pine, and what-have-you. Down in where I grew up it was big business. This outfit, the Consolidated Naval Stores is one of the biggest factors in that field in Florida, Jacksonville. To supply their operators, they had a wholesale grocery department, but they wanted to get out of it, and our company took it over. Inheriting the. . . I took care of everything except the manager: the salesmen, the office help, and everything else. They had a woman, and I'd never hired a woman, and I didn't know how to do it. I was never

Hunter(Cont'd.) interested in going into the women's hosiery business, because I always thought of women as too hard to please, to reason with. . . I didn't understand their language too well, so I didn't want to fool. . . so, in that case, she finally, I guess she sensed my attitude, and when she found a new job we were both happy. But down here it is a different story. I finally did learn how, and when I ended, I had about sixty percent women.

Silveri: I see. Did you employ any blacks in the factory?

Hunter: Oh, no, no, no, no, no.

Silveri: Were there any around? Were there any living in Black Mountain?

Hunter: Oh, yes, they had blacks. They had blacks then, and they have them now. No, I never did hire. . .well, the only thing, when I was in the wholesale grocery business I used to hire teamsters that were black, and porters that were black, but other than that, no.

Silveri: While on that subject, what are your feelings about the situation in the South? As a Southerner?

Hunter: Well, I don't know. Truly, I find it difficult. My experience with blacks has been very satisfactory, but, I have been selective in the ones that I'd deal with. For instance, neither of my wives were cooks. I had to hire a cook from the time I went to housekeeping. The last cook we had in Miami, our relationship was such that when she finally died she left her home to me, or to us, my wife and I. I had looked after her in many ways. The fact is, I saved it for her at one time when . . . Florida had an iniquitous

Hunter: (Cont'd.) law which, when things were sold on deferred payment plans, on the installment plan, that if the purchaser was in default over a certain length of time that the seller could step in and take possession and declare all previous payments to be liquidated damages. In other words, the man that had paid in gets nothing. In other words, if he falls down on his payments, six months, or whatever the length of time was. . . but it was, truly, it was not a just law at all, and of course that's since been annulled. But, at that time it was so, and they got behind and this Jew, from whom they'd bought the home, was going to take it. So I went to see my closest friend, who was a lawyer, and laid the situation before him. All he did was sit down and write a letter to the Jew, and the Jew came crawling in. . . scared the life out of him. We saved the house. I used that as an example.

Silveri: What is your attitude toward changing race relations in the South?

Hunter: I don't know what the answer should be. I, somehow or another, I have often wondered, I go to try as best I can in my reason, to go to primary sources. As I told you, I have been very much religious, and I tried to learn what I could about the Bible, what we are taught in the Bible, and as far as I know, we start from the premise that Noah had three sons, of whom Ham was one, and he, as I understand it, is the father of the Black race. Now, in all of the thousands of years of history, if the black people have ever contributed anything of great value to mankind, I have no knowledge

Hunter (Cont'd.) of it. I don't say they haven't, I just don't know anything about it. Now . . . and you take the present situation in Africa, I'm trying to deal with the question broadly. You know, for about three hundred years most of these African countries were ruled by these colonial governments, like Germany, well, I guess England and France were the principal ones, and Spanish, too. Germans not so much. But, anyway, now that they are all slowly taken over by the blacks of the area, look at the mess that's there.

Now let's come back and consider for the moment how it affects us here, locally, beginning with the Yankees that sold us these slaves to start with. That's we in the South. They couldn't use them up there so they found a good market and they sold them to us. That's true. Now, they're being educated. Of course, one of the things that complicates it is that through . . .

(End of Side II, Tape I)

(Beginning of Side I, Tape II)

Hunter (Cont'd.) . . . they've created a situation that . . . well, a lot of these people who are classified as blacks are about ninety percent not black: octoroons, maroons, and what have you. They complicate the situation. Frankly, with that statement, I now come back and ask you this question: Are we, who are so presumptuous as to take positions that apparently are contrary to what God created. . . all these different races, with each one: different instincts, mores, and what have you, and we say He didn't know what He was doing; we are going to make them all equal.



Hunter (Cont'd.) Somehow or another, I can't clarify all of that.

Have I made any sense to what I said?

Silveri: Yes. I understand what you are saying. Yes. Very much. And the South in particular in the last fifty years has undergone a tremendous change.

Hunter: So I've been reading. For instance, I was reading here just last night in this summary of a recent issue of the Geographic. "Trek Through America," I believe was the name of that. Do you take it? The Geographic?

Silveri: Yes.

Hunter: Anyway it was talking about the vast change that's taking place in Alabama and different places in the South, in their attitude about the darkies. I know that's going on, and I'm not for a moment trying to indicate what the course should be. I don't know. I'm giving you the factors that have registered with me, and invite you to weigh that in the light of: Aren't we a bit presumptuous when try to play God? He didn't know what he was doing when he made all these different races and endowed them with different instincts, different ideology, different reactions.

Silveri: Provided that's right; provided your assumption is right about that.

Hunter: Which assumption are you referring to?

Silveri: The distinction between the races.

Hunter: Well, all right, proof of that was to degree, I say is found

Hunter(Cont'd.) in the fact that, left to their own devices in the annals of history of the human race, what have they contributed?

Silveri: What do you think they have contributed once they have come to America? What have the blacks contributed to America?

Hunter: Nothing, that I know of. No more than they have in the thousands of years of African history. Nothing, that I know of. I mean, original. I'm not saying it hasn't, mind you, I readily admit that I'm not a know-it-all by any means. I don't claim that what I say is gospel. Huh-huh. I'm just saying what I know and what I don't know.

Silveri: Let's go back to the 1930's. What was your attitude toward Franklin Roosevelt? Did you ever vote for Roosevelt?

Hunter: Well, he's the man that caused me to leave the Democratic Party.

Silveri: Oh.

Hunter: Yes. When he ran for the third term I had read enough about history, French history, and various other races, to know when you endow people with too much power, and when I remembered how he, as our president, under our constitution, had complete domination over the Navy and the Army. . . now if you let him stay in there long enough he could build up an organization that he could make himself Emperor, King, Prince, whatever he wants. He's human. Now, I was so thoroughly convinced of that, I said that I had, being, of course,

Hunter (Cont'd.) Southern, that I had thought that I would live and die with an unblemished record for having voted the straight ticket all my life. But I said the man hasn't been born that I would support for the third term in the United States of America. Proof of the soundness of that reasoning, when the furor and the excitement of the election was over, forthwith they passed an amendment making it impossible. Showing the soundness of my reasoning.

Silveri: Yes.

Hunter: And then, another thing, as I grow older, all this liberalism that's. . . for instance, you take the Congress we've got right now: I'll bet you there isn't ten percent of them got sense enough to run a peanut stand and make a profit out of it. And yet, we turn them loose there and let them spend our money and every move they make is just fanning fuel to the fires of inflation, depreciating, demoralizing our whole financial system. All this welfare stuff. All right, I ask you this, now: if you study the life of animals, birds, they're all creatures of God, the same Being that I acknowledge as All Supreme. Whenever, for one reason or another, the food gets scarce, they die out, don't they? Whenever they fail to adjust themselves to the changed condition, they become extinct, don't they? Well, now, will you give me any good reason why the human race should be an exception of that? I mean, does it add up? Because we wear pants, are we exempt from

Hunter(Cont'd.) these same laws?

Silveri: Did you vote for Herbert Hoover in 1928?

Hunter: Yes.

Silveri: Why?

Hunter: Because I was a Democrat, and he was a Democrat.

Silveri: No, he was a Republican; Al Smith ran in 1928.

Hunter: Nineteen Twenty Eight was when Hoover was elected.

Silveri: Yes, but he ran against Al Smith. Al Smith was the Democrat.

Hunter: I see. Oh, no, I voted for Al Smith; I voted for the Democrat. Oh, yes. It was only when Roosevelt. . . you see, he was elected '32, '36. . .it was in '40, when he ran for the third time, that's when we parted ways.

Silveri: The fact that Al Smith was a Catholic didn't . . .

Hunter: Oh, no, no, no. I don't go. . . I'm not that extreme in my religious . . . No, not at all. As a matter of fact, I want to tell you, too, that I have come to have a very kindly feeling for the broadening of the attitude with which the Catholics have now expressed in many, many ways. After all, we do hope to go to the same place when we die. Just because they are Catholic, it is awfully sad to have to turn up your nose and not speak to him when you meet him.

Silveri: You voted for Roosevelt in 1932 and 1936, but you refused to vote for him for the third term, right?

Hunter: Because of the reason that I gave you.

Silveri: You weren't particularly upset with any of his domestic programs in the first eight years, were you?

Hunter: As a matter of fact, during the early part of his period I had sympathy for his NRA, as an example. I don't know if you remember that or not.

Silveri: Yes, I do.

Hunter: But, anyway, among other things, the one that affected me in my business was the processing tax that was placed on cotton. They imposed a tax of a certain poundage on cotton with which to raise money to give certain benefits to the farmers who grew cotton. But that looked like it had certain benefits, too. Of course, at that time I don't think I had thought the thing through as thoroughly as I have since, because, actually, I think the more nearly that it's

possible to avoid restrictive action, legal action, the more wholesome will our economy be. Safeguard it, yes, if you will, by skullduggery and people getting cocktails, you know, getting together in a group and organizing to take advantage of the situation. That should be prohibited, of course, but to the degree that you can, do not [bind] the operations of your economy with restrictive legislation, laws. I certainly agree with that theory, and by and large, now that I have gotten out of the Democratic field, I can see a lot of their weaknesses that I would make myself blind to before.

Silveri: Did your mill continue to operate during the second world war?

Hunter: Oh, yes, yes. As a matter of fact, I got to know Mr. Walters, who was the. . . I don't know what his title was, but anyway he was the Carolina Power & Light Company's big man for the whole Western part

Hunter (Cont'd.) of the state. His office was in Asheville. I knew him quite well. During World War II he was appointed, or given a position that was to organize industry as a whole in North Carolina; bring it into the war effort; make it effective in every possible way. At that time I was eager to get into it, in other words, doing this preparedness program. I made no effort to get any Government contracts at all. I had some experience with World War I that made that distasteful to me. For the most part, most of the people in the Quartermaster Corps, the new people that came in when we got in the war, were people out of civilian life. They came in with. . . people that were. . . you know, in textiles and what have you. They gave them a title, you know, Captain, or sometimes, a Major, and that just puffed up their heads, you know, all out of doors. So that was the kind of people I ran into and said, "You play with your own marbles, I won't bother."

But when we got into the war this time, and I was in the hosiery business, I wanted to have a hand in it, so I told my friend, Charli Walters. . . I was out in Bryson City attending the funeral of my wife's mother when word came, so I left the whole party there and hot-footed it up to Philadelphia to see what I could do about getting an Army contract, and when I finally found a man up there to talk to, he said, "No, you'd better go back to Washington." He said, "That's where the thing takes place." So I went back and I contacted my House of Representatives, and also my Senator, who, by the way, at that time was Bob Reynolds, who lived in Asheville. That was an interesting

Hunter (Cont'd.) experience. I had never met him before in my life. When I introduced myself and told him why I was up there, oh, he just . . . he was one of these "gushy" kind of politicians. . . he couldn't have been more enthusiastic. . . he slapped me on the back like I'd been his long-lost brother. But he said, "Yes, yes, yes, we'll fix that up, right now." So he called up the man over at the Quartermaster Department and made an appointment for me to go over there to see him. So I went over there and I found the man, who at that time was a Colonel, I guess, incidentally he was a man named Upjohn. He came from down near Union, South Carolina. So I wasn't afraid to talk to him; he was my native fellow citizen. Anyway, we got started then. He turned me over to a man to handle the details. As a result of that (that was the beginning) when the war ended I was sixty percent of production on both Navy and Army.

Silveri: Socks.

Hunter: Yes, I had a big part in it.

Silveri: What happened when the war ended? You had to go, now, the Government orders stopped.

Hunter: Of course, when the war ended the economy as a whole had a re-bound. I had no difficulty. By that time, too, I had established identity in the market. That makes a big difference.

Silveri: What was your label? What was the label on these?

Hunter: Well, I didn't have any private label. Most of the stuff, you pack it and ship it out under the distributor's label. I had a label, but I didn't use it very much: Black Mountain. I had a picture of a black mountain.

Silveri: When did you sell out the company?

Hunter: In '63.

Silveri: Nineteen sixty three. Were you the sole owner by then?

Hunter: I had about sixty five percent of the stock.

Silveri: I see.

Hunter: I had acquired it as people would buy it and borrow it, and what have you.

Silveri: Had your stock been giving you dividends over the years?

Hunter: Oh, yes, and I also had stock dividends four times.

Silveri: Splits, you mean?

Hunter: Four times as much stock. In addition to the dividends, I paid a test dividend every year, except for those first three, and then as the years went on we built up these huge reserves, instead of issuing additional shares of stock. There was four times as much issued. By the way, too, I used such a strategy in organizing that to attract investors, that my friend, the manager of the Pennsylvania Shirt Company, a few years later the shirt company got tired of this demonstration farm, and they wanted to sell and get out. He wanted to figure out how he could finance that deal, and he came up here and I gave him my plan, which I think he used.

I didn't sell any common stock at all. I sold only preferred stock, with a stated dividend. In this case, it was eight percent, and with each unit of three shares of preferred, I gave, without cost, to the original investor, two shares of common stock. "Now," I said, "the way this thing works is: that one share, I'm going to keep, because



Hunter (Cont'd.) none of this common stock will ever have any value unless I make it so, and if I do, I'm entitled to share in it." Preferred stock is like a mortgage, anyhow, on assets of the company. And it worked out. So eventually, when I got to the point I was declaring dividends . . . but I got way behind, because those dividends were in arrears for the first three years, totally and entirely, and I had to catch that all up and all before I could. . . but, finally, when I got so I could, that was one of the conditions of the issuance of this preferred stock, which was: that it could be callable, on any interest-paying period, by a premium of five dollars a share.

So, I didn't want that eight percent piling up against me each year, so I figured that out, and I figured out a deal where those people who wanted to convert from preferred to common on a basis which they could convert.

Silveri: I see. When you sold out, what was your volume sales?

Hunter: Oh, something like three quarters of a million dollars a year. And, incidentally, the best customer I had was S.S. Kresge and Company: this K-Mart here. I sold them all. I sold Ward; I sold Sears; I sold National; I sold Woolworth; I sold Newberry; I sold. . . I don't know; all those chains. But for clean-cut, honorable, methods of operation, they were kings. For instance, a lot of these big chains would book at the beginning of a season, we'll say, fifty thousand dozen. That meant that they would bind us to supply that much and then they would agree to give us details as the stores would send them in. But at the end of the season, if any of that fifty thousand dozen hadn't been detailed,

Hunter (Cont'd.) it was forgotten, I mean, they felt no sense of obligation at all. Not so with Kresge. When they said, "We'll take so and so," they meant it, and "if we don't take it this season we'll take it the next season." I just cite that. The result of it was, I got to know the buyers, well indeed, in fact, I used to entertain them in my home. I had very satisfactory relationships with them. I'm just thinking about all this stuff that . . .

Silveri: That's good. When you finally sold out, was the union in your shop at all?

Hunter: Have any union?

Silveri: Yes.

Hunter: No.

Silveri: Didn't have a union.

Hunter: You see, with a union, you know. . . then we had a Christmas party every year. We'd all get together and exchange gifts, and all that kind of stuff. We'd give gifts, and then they'd exchange individual gifts. In other words, it was just a very well-pronounced family spirit.

Silveri: Okay. So you sold out. Who did you sell out to in 1963?

Hunter: My selling agent.

Silveri: Oh. What's the story? He was from New York?

Hunter: Yes. Oh, yes. He was from New York, and he was buying. . . well, you see, after we'd been together about ten years. . . you see, he was with me. We were together over thirty years, and after we'd been together about ten years. . . I used to stay in his home when I'd. . . first he was living in Mamaroneck, and then later he moved over to, oh, on the river there. But, anyway, I would always stay in his home, and then when he came South he stayed in my home. These boys, he had two sons.

Hunter: (Cont'd.) The younger one, somehow or another, he became interested in the hosiery manufacturing business because of what he knew about me and our operations. That's why his father bought the business, and they operated it two years after I'd sold out, but apparently his father thought he didn't have what it took.

Silveri: Did he sell out to someone else?

Hunter: No. He just liquidated it. Sold off the machinery and sold out the merchandise. I don't know just how he operated it, but he sold it.

Silveri: What was the selling price when you sold out?

Hunter: What do you mean: selling price?

Silveri: How did you make the transfer in ownership?

Hunter: I just sold him so many shares of stock. I think we had four hundred and some odd (I don't remember just how many, now) shares.

Silveri: You just sold your shares?

Hunter: Just sold my shares. That's right. Yes, I sold, I just sold him my shares. After he'd bought enough to give him controlling interest, he caused the company to buy out the. . . that was the deal, because I was getting out entirely.

Silveri: So you just left the business in '63. You've been retired since 1963?

Hunter: Yes. That's right. Well, I was seventy-seven years old.

Silveri: Before, you mentioned about leaving the Democratic party. You've been voting Republican ever since? You've voted Republican ever since 1940?

Hunter: With one or two exceptions. For instance, now, like Everett Jordan, I don't know if you knew him or not.

Silveri: Yes.

Hunter: He's a very close personal friend of mine. In fact, he was in the yarn business, manufacturing yarn, himself. His father was a Methodist preacher. His mother's people were the Sellers of the Sellers Manufacturing Company of Saxapahaw, North Carolina, and they were big manufacturers of mercerized yarns and I got to the point where I really was buying practically all of my mercerized yarns from him. He had a home up at Montreat; he and his wife. The fact is: he got into politics through the fact that he was chairman of the state Democratic Executive Committee for a number of years, and then when the Senator died, while he was in the Senate, and had two or three years unexpired balance, the Legislature appointed him to fill the unexpired term. Then he ran once or twice afterwards and was re-elected.

When he first was inducted into the Senate, I had an invitation and I went to Washington to see him "swore in" . . . as he called it.

Silveri: Did you know any North Carolina governors?

Hunter: Yes, I did know the one that brought this state "san" here. I've forgotten his name, now. I didn't know him too intimately, but I did meet him on one of those occasions. But I can't say that I was intimately associated with him. I knew Sam Ervin that's just elected not to run. I knew him fairly well. The one that I continued to vote

Hunter: (Cont'd.) for, a Democrat, was the boy that didn't run. . .

Silveri: Roy Taylor.

Hunter: Roy Taylor, right. You see, I first knew Roy when he came out of Mars Hill, I think, and he boarded. . . no, he didn't board here, but his wife, when she was a Reeves, from Weaverville. He taught the . . . he was a sort of a director of the school out here. . . Roy was, his first job, he taught one class and then he looked after the athletic operation of the grammar school. Then later he went to this man's school, they can't do it now, he had a sort of a home-made manner of making lawyers. He taught a class over there in Asheville. He practiced law here for quite a while. But anyway, the reason I voted for Roy was: I followed his activities, and for the most part I was with him ninety percent on every position that he took. I think he worked as hard at trying to make a good representative as I've ever watched, or followed. I still think so, and I always voted for him. I'm pretty loyal in whatever I do, and when I vary I feel like I've got a good sound reason for it, not just pure emotional reaction. If the devil, himself, helped a widow lady, or somebody, I think I'd want to acknowledge it in some way.

Silveri: Did you ever know Lewis Weatherford, the founder of the Blue Ridge Assembly?

Hunter: Yes, yes, I did.

Silveri: How did you come to meet him?

Hunter: He was from Weatherford, Texas, by the way, originally. Yes, I got to know him fairly well. Well, I've been active. I was president

Hunter (Cont'd.) of the Chamber of Commerce here one year, and then I've been . . . they tried to get me to run for the Council, but I didn't want that. The fact is, I said, "Let some of you younger birds do that, anyhow."

But anyway, in Y.M.C.A. work, and all that kind of stuff, yes, I used to be quite active around there. I'm president of, I mean, I'm Warden Emeritus of our church. I don't know if that means anything to you. They gave me quite a swell party here on my ninetieth birthday.

Silveri: Do you have anything to do with the Presbyterians up at Montreat?

Hunter: Not too much, but one of my directors was the Business Manager up there when I was operating.

Silveri: I see.

Hunter: I knew Dr. . . . what's the man that married the Belk woman from Charlotte? Anderson. . . I knew him casually, but not too well.

Silveri: How about the Belk family? Did you know . . .

Hunter: No, I never knew them personally. I have a wonderful friend down in Charlotte that knows all those people well. He was with the Celanese Corporation, a salesman, when I first started. Then he later branched out in the yarn brokerage business. I think he was elected Man of the South here about four years ago. Some organization that has . . . Billy Graham was one year, and I think Bill was (Bill Barnhardt). Yes, Bill and I were buddies. If I were

Hunter (Cont'd.) upstairs I could show you a picture. We used to go down to Pinehurst every year and play golf. Our standing foursome was Bill and the manager of the Kernersville plant Adams-Millis Company, and the purchasing agent in High Point of the Adams-Millis Company. We played golf every year down at Pinehurst.

Silveri: I never did ask you about your marriage and your children.

Hunter: No children.

Silveri: No children.

Hunter: No children, but I say this: (you can delete this if it is improper . . . I don't think it is, though) I say, when that subject comes up, I am responsible for the birth of three children. Then, of course, people think I had some extramarital incident. Get that out of your mind. I say, I approach this thing purely from a mathematical point of view: it takes two people to constitute a family. Now, unless you have at least two. . .

[End of Side I, Tape II]

[Side II, Tape II]

Hunter (Cont'd.). . . you don't maintain the quota standard. So you must, you should feel responsible for. . .(if you're going to keep the human race alive) providing the third for contingencies, and making people who are sterile and can't, and what have you, so a minimum would be three children, and so when they stop off at two, so three, I get the third, see. But the last one, though, when I had finished my little spiel, she said, "Son how many children do you have?" "Well, now," I said, "you could have just overlooked that question. But, I'll tell you this,

Hunter (Cont'd.) you shouldn't really hold me responsible, because I did everything in the world I knew how."

Silveri: Thank you very much for your time. That was very good.

Hunter: Well, thank you. I don't . . . you got me started reminiscing. . . the only fun that I get out of it is that I recall events. . . revive memories of events, many of which I don't have anybody to talk with. It's just like, I had my sister up here from Florida. A lot of times we are talking about . . . she says, "The most pleasure I get out of you is talking about things that nobody in the world but you and I have any interest in."