

ERNEST Mc KISSICK

and

MAGNOLIA THOMPSON Mc KISSICK

Interviewed by:

Louis D. Silveri

August 2, 1977

SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS RESEARCH CENTER

The University of North Carolina at Asheville

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INTERVIEW WITH

Mr. and Mrs. Ernest McKissick
(Magnolia Thompson McKissick)

August 2, 1977, Asheville, North Carolina

Interviewed by: Dr. Louis D. Silveri

Dr. Silveri: I think, in our conversation on the phone, you said you were born in Asheville in 1900?

Mr. McKissick: I came here along in 1901, maybe 1902. I'm not positive. When I came to Asheville I was a small boy.

Dr. Silveri: So, you weren't born here?

Mr. McKissick: I wasn't born here.

Dr. Silveri: Where were you born?

Mr. McKissick: In Kelton, South Carolina.

Dr. Silveri: Kelton?

Mr. McKissick: When I came here my parents were already here, and brother and sister. They left me down in the country to nurse my sister's baby while my sisters worked in the field. Then I came to Asheville. They put a tag on me and put me on the train that brought me to Asheville; so you know I must have been about seven or eight years old. I've been here ever since.

Dr. Silveri: Why did you come to Asheville?

Mr. McKissick: Oh, we came here to make it our home and to stay here permanently.

Dr. Silveri: Why did your parents come to Asheville? What attracted them here?

Mr. McKissick: Well, they came because the conditions down there weren't as good as they thought they were; they thought it would be better somewhere else. So they came here to make a living. It was better than being down there in the country.

Dr. Silveri: Did your father have a job or anything up here?

Mr. McKissick: Well, my father, fortunately, was a Missionary Baptist minister, and it seems somehow or other he, I think he left home and didn't come back. My mother said he left her within twenty-four and a half hours after my birth. We went to Spartanburg, then we left Spartanburg and came on to Asheville.

Dr. Silveri: I see. So your first recollections were as a boy of about seven years old?

Mr. McKissick: That's right.

Dr. Silveri: Where did you take up residence?

Mr. McKissick: Well, when we came to Asheville, we lived on Turner Street; that's in west end.

Dr. Silveri: West end?

Mr. McKissick: With Mrs. Vance's family; old family in Asheville. The Vances. V-a-n-c-e.

Dr. Silveri: In those years Asheville was very small. I think the population was probably fifteen thousand or around that.

Mr. McKissick: Yes, around that, at that time.

Dr. Silveri: Very small city.

Mr. McKissick: That was the old days of the horse and wagon, and the buggy. That's when they drove wagons from the country with oxen. The farmers would come to Valley Street to drive behind the distillery and

get all of the sour mash and take it back to the farm and feed it to their hogs.

Dr. Silveri: Oh!

Mr. McKissick: Yeah, you could smell that! That was on Valley Street where I lived, Black's Distillery.

Dr. Silveri: Interesting. Where did you go to school?

Mr. McKissick: Well, when I first came to Asheville, I went to old Hill Street School, in the first grade. We lived in west end, and we moved two or three places down there on Hill Street. Then back over on Davidson Street, Valley Street, and Eagle Street. We lived several places, and during that time I went up to Catholic Hill School to the second grade, second B. That's as far as I went here in Asheville.

Fortunately, I was associated with some good Christian people, people that really thought, I guess they saw something in me and they wanted to take me in. Dr. J.W. Walker, I worked and stayed with him, and Professor Trent, Dr. Jones, and other influential Christian men and women who were in the city. But my mainstay and my idol was Dr. Walker, because he put me on my feet and started me out. I worked for him driving a horse and buggy. He would go and make visits; I would stay out and hold the horse. My horse's name was George; a pretty buggy and black horse.

Dr. Walker said, "Well, Ernest, I'll tell you." I said, "What?" He said, "I want you to work in the drugstore, the Y.M.I. drugstore; that would be better for you." So he got me a job in the drugstore. I stayed there for years, but I worked from one place to the other: the hotels, bellhopping, then back to the Y.M.I., Young Men's Institute.

They had about four, three dormitory rooms. I lived up there for a while. Then I stayed with Mrs. Hill on Eagle Street for a while. My people were then over in Tennessee, but they came back. I stayed with different people while they were away. Fortunately for me, Dr. Walker told me: "The Club of India of Hopkins Chapel AMEZ Church is having a contest to raise money. Several people are running in it. The one who raises the highest amount of money will receive a gold watch. You might get that watch." Well, my friends helped me. I remember Miss Willie Cline was running, but she turned the money over to me. I raised about, I think, fifty dollars. Mr. McCoy raised over fifty. He had a little more than I did; he won the prize. He got the watch. This was held in the YMI building for the AMEZ Church which I belonged to.

Hopkins Chapel had burned down. During that time we were having services in the YMI. The Rev. S.G.W. Spurgeon was our pastor. Dr. Walker and some others had a caucus; went back in the office somewhere and came back. He said: "Since you didn't win it, tell you what we are going to do. We have decided to give you, each one of us, ten dollars apiece. We are going to raise some more money for you. You work this summer and save all you can, and we are going to send you to Livingstone College. That's what we want to do." I told him, "All right."

Well, I did exactly what they asked me to do and got ready to go to school in the fall of 1913. Yes, '13, and I went to Livingstone College. I had given my sponsors all my money, and they had already sent it down there. It was there waiting for me to get a receipt and get my room. I went to Livingstone College and finished grammar. Then the War

broke out, the first World War. That's my picture up there. I went to the service in the second draft in May, in April, I think, the 29th, 1918.

Dr. Silveri: Did you volunteer?

Mr. McKissick: No, we had the draft during that time. Everybody was drafted. Eighteen to what? Thirty or forty, and from that on. Further on they would get me. They got me in that eighteen to twenty-odd line. I went to Camp Jackson first, then north. From there to Camp Dix, to Camp Merritt, then overseas. I was put in the 349th Field Artillery, Battery F, 92nd Division.

Now there's one thing about this that people didn't know we were doing. This battery of artillery is the first in the history of the United States that Negroes manned. Three hundred forty ninth, 350th was Field Artillery, French seventy five millimeter guns, and they had the hundred and fifty-five howitzer. That's the big artillery shell about that large. We used that. That was our heavy artillery. That's 351st. We served in that and we went on to the front. We stayed on the front until about six, let me see exactly now, October. We were there in October and got situated. We stayed on the front, I think, six months over there. Then we'd go from Issoudun for rest camp (Camp Issoudun) then back to the front, and rest camp, then back to the front. I was very fortunate I didn't get hurt, but I escaped. Oh, I guess God or Providence saved me about four or five times.

One incident I want to tell you about. Now this is not a lie. This is the truth! We were going to the front. They said: 'McKissick, (I came to the rest camp) get ready to go up to the front; [you've]

got to relieve those boys up there." I was in the specialists. That is semaphore wig wags, telephone, fine data, and all that stuff. My group did all that work. The officer over us said, "I want you all to load the caisson with ammunition and go up with it and give relief so the boys can come back here to rest." Well, that did it! That night along about evening when we got up there we were taking the ammunition out and putting it in place for the boys to fire, when the Germans commenced shooting at us. BOOM! That was one! So somebody said, "Man, that ole boy's going to raise sand tonight!" And later on, BOOM! That was another shell. The Germans are very funny, peculiar. (Boom! Another shell.) You shoot one shell at him, and he's going to shoot fifty back at you! Now that's a fact!

That's what they did. That went on. Finally we got to Xon (pronounced zon). That's in French, X-o-n. That's the hill. That's right on top of the mountain. There were trenches all up there. Infantry, 366, 368, and 6 and 7 were all around, all stationed over there near Metz. We finally got up to the front. We made it; put the lines in for the boys to shoot. Some of the infantrymen said, "Man, don't shoot! Please for God's sake! If you do, if you shoot one shell, they are going to shoot a hundred and fifty at us tonight!" Well, we did it anyway. We hated to do it.

That night coming down from Xon, coming down the hill, that's when I thought, oh, I thought they were going to kill five of us: the lieutenant and four or five other men that were with us. As we were coming down they were shooting shells at us but missed us! The shrapnel was falling all around us, but fortunately we weren't hit. Just the matter

that Providence, the Good Lord, wasn't ready for us! They came so near hitting us. I told the Good Lord, I just stopped and prayed on my knees, "Lord if You let me get home safe, I'll live and work for You as long as I live! And He saved us! Then I ran down the hill!

The Germans had shot up all our lines. Next morning we had to go back to repair them. I was going along the side of the camouflage fence and a plane came over. I mistook it and thought it was our plane by the noise. You see, we could distinguish the planes by the way they sounded: American planes or German planes or French planes. But I mistook ours, and man, the shells came a zipping! ZIP! ZIP! ZIP! ZIP! ZIP! ZIP! I fell on the ground and rolled under the camouflage. That was two times right in succession that I was in the jaws of death! I recuperated and went back. Told the lieutenant and sergeant about it. They said: "All right, we'll have to let the line go. We can't repair it. Boys will just have to do without it until we can get up there!"

We got down, finally, to a culvert under the road, and we stayed there until morning. Morning came and we went out and found food in the kitchen, got something to eat. After we got our food we went back to the front. Well, what we'll do, let's see what we can do around here with the other fellows after we see if we can help any of them out. They had been gassed and shot up, and killed. One shell hit in front of a dugout and killed four men, and we thought how fortunate we were. One of them was an old friend of mine that I met in camp, and another friend of mine was gassed.

We went back to rest camp and stayed there until time for us to come back to the United States. We had to march twenty-five miles

from Pont-à-Mousson to Mousson to get a freight train to come home to America. When we came back, we landed in New York and stayed there and had our pictures made and everything: got a welcome back home. Then we were sent to Camp (What's the camp in Virginia?) Camp Lee. It must have been Camp Lee.

Dr. Silveri: You must have taken pictures while you were there?

Mr. McKissick: No, sorry. Then I was mustered out at Camp Lee and came back home. I had already asked my wife, before I left, if she would marry me when I came back. She said, "Yes!" We had met at Livingstone College in Salisbury, North Carolina.

Dr. Silveri: Were you married before you went in the--

Mr. McKissick: No, no, we weren't married. I asked her if she would marry me when I got back, and she said yes. So I came back and took the college course. We have four children: Floyd Bixler McKissick (He's the one that's building Soul City; I'll tell you all about that,); Geraldine McKissick; Frances McKissick, and Jean McKissick. (That's our baby; she has a brand-new home that she just built down the street. She's been teaching in Washington for several years.) We bought a home and a little car and, thank God, we are doing just fine to live at our age. The Good Master has been good to us. We appreciate life and all that has been happening to us.

Dr. Silveri: Let me ask you some questions.

Mr. McKissick: Yes, sir. Go right on.

Dr. Silveri: That experience in World War I, that unit you were in, 349th?

Mr. McKissick: Three Hundred and Forty Ninth Field Artillery.

Dr. Silveri: I see, you said it was a black--

Mr. McKissick: A black outfit. Yes, sir.

Dr. Silveri: Completely? Or did they have white officers?

Mr. McKissick: We had white officers.

Dr. Silveri: That was the general case, probably.

Mr. McKissick: Yes, Company may have had one or two officers, but all of them were white officers.

Dr. Silveri: Did you feel any resentment about that?

Mr. McKissick: No, because at that time, it was just prejudice typical of the South. We knew where we were, and that was the way of life. They knew that was prejudice, and of course some were meaner than others. Lord help me, when I went to camp! They were examining us to find out our IQ and one sergeant said, "How far did you go in school?" I told him, "I went to first year normal." And he got furious. I said, "That's all right; I have. I went to first year normal."

They used an examination, and the poor fellow was sorry. They asked me who wrote The Scarlet Letter. I told them, and answered other questions and put the blocks and things together. That's the reason I was put in artillery; because of the training that I'd had. I had been to school. Otherwise, you couldn't make it in artillery because you really have to know your stuff.

Dr. Silveri: Were there many, when you went, when you were drafted from Asheville, were there many other blacks that went with you at that time?

Mr. McKissick: Yes, about--when we left here. How many coaches were there of them, Honey, that left here that day? You were at the station.

Was it about six coaches, or seven?

Mrs. McKissick: I don't remember exactly, but they were brought up from North Carolina.

Mr. McKissick: All 'round here in the western--

Dr. Silveri: What did you feel about going? What did you feel about Woodrow Wilson, for instance? Did you tell him you wanted to make the world safer?

Mr. McKissick: Safe for democracy. That was it. That was our slogan. That was what we used and what we said, and that's what they told us.

Dr. Silveri: That's what you believed? You believed that?

Mr. McKissick: Well, we tried to make it safe for democracy. We found that we didn't, because democracy wasn't working at all at home 'cause they hadn't done anything for us. We had Jim Crow and all. They tried to put us down in every way: Street cars and buses and everything else, Jim Crow! Jim Crow!

Dr. Silveri: You realized that when you were going over there, going over there to make the world safe for democracy, even back in America, there wasn't democracy?

Mr. McKissick: No. But we went and fought for America right on, regardless of that, and we said, "That's home!" Even at that, after we saw the poor conditions over there, that those people were in, eating and sleeping and begging for food and supplies, and all the things they needed, I said, "My God, I'd rather live at home, regardless of this prejudice and all!"

Dr. Silveri: Yes.

Mr. McKissick: Those were bad conditions, bad shape!

Dr. Silveri: Right!

Mr. McKissick: Yes.

Dr. Silveri: So you spent about a year in the Army?

Mr. McKissick: Yes, just about a year. Lacked about one or two days, but it was close to a year.

Dr. Silveri: You know a lot of World War I veterans said that when they came back from the war they found that Americans didn't really appreciate what they had done. They found it hard to get jobs, and so on, like that. Did you feel that?

Mr. McKissick: Well, that was really true! That was really true! But I didn't hold it, you know, against anybody. I knew the conditions. I took it as it was, and went on. And finally I made it. Had I stopped and tried to fight it by myself I don't know where I'd be today. But, thank God, I went and got through it safe, and here I am.

Dr. Silveri: Another thing is that--you remember that old song, "How You Goin' to Keep 'Em Down on the Farm?"

Mr. McKissick: After they've seen Paris?

Dr. Silveri: Did you think of not coming back to Asheville after the war?

Mr. McKissick: No, I did not! I wanted to come back home to Asheville. Yes, I wanted to come home and talk to the people. During those days I could sing. I was really a singer. What a soloist! My wife can tell you that. I wanted to come back home to be with my people and see them and see what I could do. And I wanted to try to help young people, young boys, and all. A lot of them I've helped!

Dr. Silveri: O.K. Hold there a minute and go back again. What

influence did the church have on you as a person?

Mr. McKissick: Well, the church had a great influence on me. Because they helped me, and they guided me, and they directed me, and they took me up as a boy and put me in the choir to sing. They put me in front of the choir to sit on the side of the older ones because I sang tenor. They used my voice and kept me in there, and I've been singing in the choir since then 'til now.

Dr. Silveri: Are you talking about A.M.E. Zion Church?

Mr. McKissick: A.M.E. Zion Church. Hopkins Chapel. AME Zion Church.

Dr. Silveri: When did you join that?

Mr. McKissick: Well, I joined that church about 1907.

Dr. Silveri: Been with it ever since then?

Mr. McKissick: Yes, sir. Must have been about 1907, because we were having services in the YMI then. Our church had burned, and it was re-built in 1910. So, it took them from about 1907 to 1910, three years, to complete it. We had services in the YMI until we could get the church completed. We had services in the basement until the main auditorium was completed.

Dr. Silveri: O.K. Were you married shortly after you came back from the war?

Mr. McKissick: We got married October 8, 1919. That's been about 58 years with this lovely wife here of mine, who has stuck by my side and made me what I am today. If it hadn't been for her I couldn't have made it. You see, we had four children and we educated all of them. The one down here has her Master's in English and is teaching at Owen High School. She has two children. One's teaching in Philadelphia,

and she has three children. Floyd has four, and Frances has two. All of them finished college, and made good. So you see, God has blessed us. We have no regrets.

Dr. Silveri: And one has a national reputation, too.

Mr. McKissick: My son you know about. You've heard of him. I'll tell you about him a little later.

Dr. Silveri: What did you work at when you came back from the war?

Mr. McKissick: Well, when I came back from the war I went to work in Hendersonville at the Carolina Hotel.

Dr. Silveri: That's an old hotel. Not up any more.

Mr. McKissick: No, I think they tore it down and built something else up there [or] it burned down.

Dr. Silveri: Did you live there then?

Mr. McKissick: Well, I had a sister over there. I was living over there and coming back and forth, coming back and forth from Hendersonville to Asheville.

Dr. Silveri: How long were you there at that hotel?

Mr. McKissick: I just worked that summer over there. Got married in the fall, and then that winter I left my wife at home and went to work in Florida. I had to go to Florida in winter, come back and go to the hotel here in summer, and then go back to Florida. [They laugh]

Dr. Silveri: This was in 1920 when the big Florida boom was taking place?

Mr. McKissick: Yes, that's right, when the boom was taking place.

Dr. Silveri: So you kept your home here?

Mr. McKissick: Oh, yes.

Dr. Silveri: But you went off periodically to earn money in Florida?

Mr. McKissick: That's right, in the winters, see, money here in summer is plentiful, lot of work in hotels. That's what I did, bellhop, go down there and work in the winter in hotels, with some of my friends down there. Sam Wynn was head bellman down there. I worked at Don Cesar hotel in St. Petersburg, Florida, and Brown's Hotel in St. Petersburg.

Dr. Silveri: So it was really difficult to get work in the winter here?

Mr. McKissick: Yes, it was.

Dr. Silveri: So, how many years did you do this?

Mr. McKissick: Well, I worked in hotels, you know, I'm telling you the truth, practically all my life. I worked in hotels until I resigned from the George Vanderbilt in '43 and I started working for the government in '43; working for the government in Postal Accounts. Decentralization had come to Asheville. They had all the accounts of the United States at Postal Accounts. I started as a Junior Laborer. I ended up as a CPC-3, which may have been a big thing then, a chief messenger for the entire organization. I had worked up to that. My supervisor called me to the office and said, "Listen, McKissick, we've been watching your work, and what you have done and are doing. You've been training these fellows." I learned all about accounting, the cards of the machinery, punch cards, and so forth. They said, "I want you to train these fellows, tell them what to do and how to do it." So I showed them. Later my supervisor said, "I'm going to have a little talk with you. What we want to do is promote you to a paid and issued exam."

That's where the paid money orders and issued money orders had to be processed. I knew what to do, and they promoted me and put me in that job. I stayed there until 1953. I had been with them ten years. Counting my service in the Army I had five more years to make, when decentralization came. They said, "We'll send you to Oteen VA Hospital so you can make your other five years and you can retire at 15-62 service years." So that's what I did. I retired in '57, the last day of December in '57.

Dr. Silveri: Wow! You've been retired since '57? I'm sure you haven't just sat around in the chair.

Mr. McKissick: No, I've been around working. I've always liked civic work: American Legion, church work, and other civic things.

Dr. Silveri: What happened when the big bust came in Florida, when the Depression hit? And it hit up here, too.

Mr. McKissick: It hit here, too. I was working up here and down there, too. Anyhow, we made it. Yes, I had a hard time here at home during the bust, when it busted. I mean, it was terrible. People lost their homes and businesses and committed suicide here in Asheville. In fact, I lost my government insurance. I couldn't keep it up. I was buying a home on Magnolia Avenue, and I got so far behind I couldn't make it. I couldn't make ends meet. I've seen the time I'd go to the man, and pay the man two, three, four, five, six, or eight dollars, like that, and he would accept it. But I had established a reputation. Mr. Westall held my mortgage. He had a big lumber company. I will never forget him as long as I live. He had two sons. His sons told me later on, "You know what, Mr. McKissick?" I said, "What?" "My Daddy told us you

would be here at that door at a certain time with money whether you had all of it or not. We noticed it, and you were right here. Daddy said anything you want you can get it, no matter what it is!" So, I could call my order any time, and they would send it that day. That's the kind of credit we tried to establish. We tried to have a good reputation of living and doing here in Asheville, setting examples that our children could see, and realize that we were leaving something for them to shoot at. They have done that. They have succeeded.

Dr. Silveri: Do you remember when the Supreme Court decision came down in 1954, desegregation of schools?

Mr. McKissick: Yes.

Dr. Silveri: I was just talking with Lucy Herring this morning. She told me a lot about what happened here in Asheville about that. Were your children in school at that time?

Mrs. McKissick: Oh, no, no. No, my grandchildren were in school in Durham. My son had two children admitted to the high school in Durham.

Dr. Silveri: He was living in Durham at that time?

Mrs. McKissick: He was living in Durham at that time. He had a law practice there.

Dr. Silveri: Where did Floyd go to law school?

Mr. McKissick: University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and also North Carolina Central. Back then they called it North Carolina College. He finished there and also went to the University of North Carolina. He broke the color line there, going there to law school.

Dr. Silveri: He was the first one?

Mr. McKissick: Yes.

Dr. Silveri: What year was that? Do you remember what years he was there?

Mr. McKissick: Fifty-two? No, he finished in '52, passed the bar in '52.

Dr. Silveri: Let me see now, O.K., '52? Now, I'm interested in what you can remember about that decision and what happened in the schools here. Do you remember much about that?

Mr. McKissick: Now Mrs. Herring could tell you more about that, exactly what happened, because that was her field. She can tell you exactly what happened, repercussions, and so forth. As far as we were concerned, we were glad that it happened, because my son was battling then, fighting in the Civil Rights cause. I don't know how many cases they had, but most of the school cases they won.

Dr. Silveri: You had a close association with the YMI, right?

Mr. McKissick: Yes, sir. I've been associated with it for years and years. From, I'd say, 1907 or '08 up until now. From the YMI into the Y.M.C.A.

Dr. Silveri: O.K., the old George Vanderbilt started that, is that right?

Mr. McKissick: Mr. George Vanderbilt, in 1892, built that building down there. The people said he blew up the foundation that was practically solid rock. Now, he didn't give that building to the Negroes of Asheville. He sold it to them. They had a meeting. A corporation formed before it was bought. They were renting from him at first. Fifty members belonged to the YMI. Thirty two of them got together and formed the corporation. Vanderbilt said he'd sell it to them for \$12,000. Mr. Swope was Mr. Vanderbilt's representative. The Negroes told them: "We're

not able to pay that kind of money, because we're domestic servants and we don't make that kind of money. There are not many Negroes in Asheville! But we will give you \$10,000 for it, and pay on installment." Well, we paid on installments, oh, for years. All we did was keep up the interest. Oh, we paid enough interest on it, to be frank, it's no lie, because I helped pay. All we had to pay off was \$10,000. But finally we paid it off in '51, I believe, and there's a picture of the burning of the mortgage. There's Doctor Evans, and Reuben Dailey, and the Reverend Edington. That's where we burned the mortgage.

Dr. Silveri: I think it's somewhat more than incredible that this man who owned, Mr. Vanderbilt, who owned, well, he wasn't around then, I suppose, but his heirs were around. You were paying off his heirs, right?

Mr. McKissick: Oh, yes. We paid it to them. Let's see, he died, and that left his wife and daughter. I knew them. They used to come to the old Battery Park Hotel. I saw Mr. Vanderbilt once. He had on riding breeches then; tall and a moustache, I think. Mrs. Vanderbilt was tall, and their daughter was tall. She would come there during WWI for the Red Cross, and help the Red Cross make bandages to send overseas. See, I know that. I saw them. I waited on them, bellhopping in the old Battery Park. I don't mean the "new" one, I mean the "o-l-d" Battery Park. Have you ever seen it?

Dr. Silveri: The one before they took the hill away? I've seen pictures of it.

Mr. McKissick: Yes. I was going to say I have a newspaper, the 80th Edition of it, with all the pictures around here of Asheville, in the

newspaper. Have you ever seen those pictures?

Dr. Silveri: Yes. Did you ever work at the Grove Park Inn?

Mr. McKissick: No, I never worked at the Grove Park; that was 1913.

I was working at the new Battery Park at that time.

Dr. Silveri: Did you ever know any of the Wolfe family?

Mr. McKissick: I knew Mr. Wolfe. I knew two of them. You see, Mr. Wolfe's brother used to deliver papers all around Eagle Street, in Dixon town. I remember when Mr. Wolfe came home, the last time he was here, before he died. I saw him. Said, "Hello, Mr. Wolfe!" He said, "Hey there, boy! How have you been getting along?" I told him, "Just fine!" I said, "I'm glad to see you!" He said, "I'm glad to see you!" I said, "You come a long way, and we're glad to see you!" He was at the hotel then, at the Langren Hotel.

Dr. Silveri: Did you know his father or mother at all?

Mr. McKissick: I'd see them. I didn't know them, you know, to be intimate with them, but I'd see them. I used to pass the house all the time. I knew them to live on Woodfin Street and Spruce Street.

Dr. Silveri: As you mentioned, you met him just before he died, when he came home. Of course, you know all about his book and what effect it had on the City of Asheville?

Mr. McKissick: Oh, yes it did! They wondered whether he could come back home; the people got mad. They were sitting and talking about him. They were scared he was calling names, you know, around here. But he was telling the truth. I said, "He's telling the truth!" That was why they were scared and mad at him. But finally, when his work was recognized, you know, they got over it.

Dr. Silveri: Did you know any of the people he wrote about in the book?

Mr. McKissick: Yes! He wrote about Henry Pearson. [He laughs loudly.] I knew Him! He was quite a character! He had a restaurant on Eagle Street. I can't think of the other ones now, but he mentioned Henry Pearson. I can't think of the others, though.

Dr. Silveri: How about some other interesting people you met when you were working in the hotels. Can you remember any off-hand?

Mr. McKissick: Well, let me see. I have met some very distinguished people, but I can't think of them now. In the hotels, I made many good friends.

Dr. Silveri: Have you ever met any important people?

Mr. McKissick: No, I don't think so. I was trying to think. I might have, and can't think. I don't think I did. But I'll tell you one thing: I met one man that I never will forget. You see, some of the distinguished people came in those days, and they do now. I remember the clerk rang the bell and I went to answer. He said, "Ernest, take Mr. So and So (he called him by his number) and show him these rooms. That was Mr. Floyd S. Bixler from eastern Pennsylvania. He and his sister were aged people. They had been around the world three times. They came to Asheville to see these mountains. I took them upstairs and showed three rooms. He had a talk with me. He said that he knew several boys that he had helped. He told me if I'd write him, he'd help me. When he left he gave me a dime, twenty cents, rather, and he said, "Be sure and write me!" And I told him I would. He said, "That's not much, but I will think about you later." Well, now that's the way of Mr. Bixler.