

Bascom Lamar Lunsford  
New Garden Meeting  
Levi Stephens  
Addison Stephens

Interview with George Myers Stephens, July 12, 1976

## **Tape I, Side 1**

Silveri: I'd like to start with the date and the place of your birth.

Stephens: I was born July 19, 1904, which is therefore 72 years, lacking one week.

Silveri: And where?

Stephens: On the south edge of Charlotte, North Carolina. It might be interesting just to have a little of my immediate background. I had a charming Chapel Hill professor who got up to open a course called... he called it Human Geography. He grasped the rostrum as though it were a pulpit and said, "I'll speak from a text, gentlemen. We're all what we are largely because we're where we are. On the other hand, each of us is an omnibus on which all of our ancestors ride." I have believed in the merging of both of those ideas, and for that reason, if you'd like, I'll can give you a little of the immediate ancestor framework, which might give you a little on a key of things.

The father came from a rural Quaker community, largely Quaker, where present-day Guilford College is. The Quakers had moved out of the Philadelphia area during the fighting in the American Revolutionary War. They wanted no part of the fighting. I suspect the British were raiding their barns and granaries, so they moved during the Revolutionary War to [New Garden Meeting], a community we know now as Guilford College or Summerfield, a few miles northwest of Greensboro, North Carolina.

There they lived for several generations. Parts of the record there are clear and part not, but at least this is clear: my grandfather Stephens was what might be known as a country businessman. He ran a tanyard, as they called it, which is a tannery. I've been back and looked at the pits in the old Stephens homestead. If you'll look right over there to the window, you'll see the front door lock to his house, which I was lucky enough to get.

Anyway, Levi Stephens, and many of the names, came directly out of the Bible. Levi was what, the high priest, Levi? Levi was a highly regarded man in the community and often served as guardian or trustee. He was completely wiped out by the holocaust of the Civil War. His son was named Addison. I believe that there was admiration for some of the early writers, like Joseph Addison, and that he was named for the essayist.

My father [later corrected to be grandfather] was a teenager when the Civil War broke out, and he enlisted, I have heard, at 16. He was a splendid horseman, and I think perhaps he was a courier attached to a headquarters brigade or something like that. But, the hardships of the Army life resulted in very poor health and his death as a young man. So, my father was probably reared only by his mother in this substantial rural community, with good family secure family background, out in the country there.

The other side of the family has an English name, Lambeth, which, as you may know, is still prominent in the London area. I can show you, perhaps before you go, a book which is an account of the Lambeth family part which settled in the coastal North Carolina area, and then moved up into the Piedmont where the health made perhaps more vigorous careers for people. That book, which was edited by my sister and in which I did have a

humble part -- the design of it -- has over 12,000 entries in the index which shows how those families multiplied by a geometrical factor.

Silveri: About what date did the original Lambeths come to this country?

Stephens: They probably settled like most of the early settlers in the late 1700's in the New Jersey area, I believe it was, and then moved to what we know as Coastal Plains, North Carolina, and much of it swampy. They got there rather late and got into an area where it was difficult to make a living. I believe it was called Flat Swamp. There were two Lambeth brothers, both of whom married sisters named Loftin, which is an old English name too. These families migrated to the almost exact middle of North Carolina, near the present day town of Salisbury, which is about the geographical and population center of the state. Evidently, they were reasonably energetic because there are furniture factories in that area with the Lambeth name attached to them. By and large, of those 12, 000 entries in the index, my sister says very few of them are really distinguished. Perhaps a scientist or two, and a professor or two. They've just gone along and have been good average people.

Silveri: Was the name Stephens always spelled S-t-e-p-h-e-n-s ?

Stephens: My information, and we don't have complete unbroken records, is that the name brought over was Apstephen from Wales, and that Ap meaning, of course, "the son of, out of," and Stephen simply the first name as they used it in the Middle Ages in most places. In a small community, they didn't need a surname, but then the Apstephen came over and then became "Stephens." I believe that was the origin of that part.

The Quaker records show at the New Garden Meeting which is the community where my family grew up, that George Stephens, about 1840, was waited on by a committee to ask him if he did not regret his thoughtless action by marrying out of unity. Now I'm not sure that this is an ancestor, but it could have been. This George Stephens replied that he was already married to one he considered a quite worthwhile young woman. He replied that he thought it was not a cause for regret at all, where upon the Meeting dismissed him. I believe, like many people in that area dismissed from Meeting for marrying out of unity, they joined the Methodist Church, and this Lambeth connection has even Bishops in it, I believe, which was their main following thereafter.

Silveri: When you say "married out of unity, " you mean married someone of another faith?

Stephens: Right. That was the Quaker term, as you probably know. We have highly respected the Quakers, however, to the extent of sending our children to a Quaker school in the Pennsylvania area which did them a great deal of good, and made them work hard the way the Yankees work. (Chuckle.) So, all in all, that was a happy connection.

The mother's family in my case has a fairly typical background. They were part of the tide of migration southward which came in through the port of Philadelphia, down the great back valley of Virginia because the threat of the Indian massacre after the defeat of General Braddock on the Pennsylvania frontier kept them from going on to Pittsburgh where they were headed. So, they turned south and finally ended up in the upcountry on the border of North and South Carolina, possibly just south of Charlotte near Lancaster. Along with the Scotch-Irish part... as you know, they are northern transplanted Scots who lived in Ireland, in Ulster, and they were called the Ulster Scots. Apparently they were of such troublesome nature that the King moved them over there out of the south of Scotland. They were probably the sheep stealers and raiders into the northern part of England, so he moved them over to Ulster which was a little farther away. Then they passed laws which prevented their wool business from thriving, the Parliament did, and so they had to migrate to make a living. They migrated through the port of Philadelphia where William Penn welcomed them. Then they went down this great valley and poured over out of the Roanoke area, poured over into what we call the Piedmont. We got the name from pied monte, from your folks. [pied: foot; monte: mountain] They had to work hard. They were probably very contentious people, very troublesome, but they worked hard and, of course, got thrown for a loss

by the faulty leadership in plunging us in the Civil War between the north and the south. So, they lost 100 years, but they are now getting underway, and you know some of their successes.

For instance, one family that come down with the Scotch-Irish was named Springsteen, came off of Long Island. The Springsteen dropped the part of "teen" so that it became "Springs. " They married into the Scotch-Irish, but the Springs were enterprising people, and they built a cotton mill which you know as a whole chain. The Springs Mills. Springmaid fabrics, you see advertised. I mention that not just altogether personal reasons, but for the pattern of life.

Then the part of that pattern was to take their early earnings from growing cotton in 1830's and 40's and to invest in railroads, small beginning industries. The Southern Railway now is part, for instance, out of the investments of the slave owners' profits.

Silveri: On that point of the Civil War, you mention slavery and so on, were any slaves owned by either side of your family?

Stephens: Well, I had an idea that the South Carolina border parts of the family did own considerable in slaves , and prospered and even some of them went into the Mexican War, you may remember, as volunteers, and were paid in land in Texas when the U. S. took over Texas. So they even prospered further from cotton lands and even moving some slaves, I believe, to Texas. Fortunately, my family stayed out of that, I believe it is fortunate, and they were largely farmers around Charlotte.

The other part of the mother's family was named Myers and came from what I consider still the oldest, unchanged part of the state, and it is near the geographical center, and is called Anson County. I don't think it has any town in it over 5,000 population. It apparently had some quite good stock; I've watched other Anson County people make good in professions. This Myers part moved to Charlotte and married the planter background, Springs part. So you have then on one side very modest upcountry Quaker and English Lambeth background, and on the other side a fairly typical cotton planting background, so they merged in the Charlotte community. Then my own father had an invitation by the newspaper to move up here, and I was trained for newspaper work and moved to Asheville in 1919.

At this point, I'll go back to my earliest recollection. This was perhaps just a picture that might be useful of not an untypical background of middle North Carolina.

Silveri: If we can hold off on that and go back again to some questions.

Stephens: All right.

Silveri: Roughly, chronological. You mentioned before about families investing in beginning industries and railroads and so forth through profits, raising cotton, I guess.

Stephens: Yes, that's right. There are those who say that there wasn't much money around. In other words, the people who owned slaves had their money, had their capital in slaves, and there wasn't very much capital around in the south to invest.

Well, fortunately, one member of our family connection went back and looked up the Springs papers, and I have a compilation by a daughter-in-law who married into the family who is quite systematic, citing the facts more or less on what I have stated to you. So they do have documentary foundation. I don't pose as a professional expert, by my sister who was a psychological research person and editor of the Lambeth book. Well, another turn aside from documentary and undisputed evidence, I believe that you ought to turn up leads through personal recollections and then verify with documentary and official records.

Silveri: Yes, that's right.

Stephens: I think you can turn up more when you do it that way. It's just like a good doctor who won't just look at the symptoms alone, he will talk, feel around and listen, and you turn up more that way. (Chuckle. ) Again, let's stay with the Civil War period. fight in that war. And incidentally, It was my grandfather, excuse me.

Oh, your grandfather, at 16 ?

Stephens: Yes.

Silveri: I think you said your father, when you.

Stephens: Did I ? I intended to. ..

Silveri: You mentioned your father did... It was your grandfather.

Stephens: Grandfather Addison Stephens. My father's name was George Stephens.

Silveri: Okay. And Addison died at a relatively young age?

Stephens: About 28 or something like that.

Silveri: When the war broke out, the Stephens family were living in Charlotte?

Stephens: When the war broke out, they were living in that Quaker community but they were Methodist and therefore, did not, as the Quakers did, refuse to fight.

Silveri: So they very much supported the southern cause during the war?

Stephens: There was no choice. I don't know whether you've heard the words of Zeb Vance up here that he was the Governor of North Carolina, but an early political leader. Have you run across Zeb Vance? He said, "My hand was raised in the meeting at Marshall, making an impassioned plea for the union of my fathers. When the telegram arrived saying that Lincoln had ordered out the troops to invade the south, my hand sadly fell by the side of the cessationist." That was the crucial point for a long time. And in practice, there was virtually no choice. It was either do that or leave for Canada. Some did.

Silveri: Well, at the outbreak of the war, what do you know of the circumstances of, I guess it would be your great-grandfather, Addison's father?

Stephens: Well, he was probably too old to fight in the Civil War, and he stayed home and watched his thriving local business go to ruin and, of course, there was rampant inflation which ruined the Confederate currency. Virtually, everything was drained off, and the family actually made a living by going back up in the foothills, which are not far from where they lived, and buying horses, work horses, from the mountain people, taking them down more or less what we know as the Cape Fear River Valley to the farming area around Fayetteville and selling them. Their local business was destroyed virtually, and that's how they made a living. They all became splendid horseman, I believe. Then, as you say, Addison at the age of 16 volunteered. Yes, as most young men did, I guess.

Silveri: Do you recall anything beyond what you have already said about his experience during the war itself?

Stephens: There is very little record. I believe the only records my sister was able to find were that on quite a few occasions he was hospitalized, if that's the word you can use when they almost had no hospitals, from dysentery troubles related to meager military sanitation. And that probably laid the foundation for his early death.

Silveri: All right. 1873.

Stephens: 1873?

Silveri: When was your father born?

Stephens: Yes. In that Quaker community in Summerfield in a Lambeth home, I believe.

Silveri: So, if your grandfather died around 28 years of age, then your father has very little recollection of him.

Stephens: Very little. My grandfather's widow lived past her 70's and at times would sit down and talk to my father about some of her early recollections of that period.

Silveri: Do you remember her?

Stephens: Quite vividly, yes. Her name was Lydia Lambeth Stephens, and perhaps I might relate one matter. I saw my folks talking about old times, and I asked what was going on. They sort of discouraged my sitting around. What they were saying was that the end of the Civil War again brought a great deal of havoc in their home community. There was a Confederate supplies depot at Greensboro, and after the surrender just east of there of General Johnstons troops I believe around Burlington, in that area, the local commander just told the people to come in and help themselves to the supplies because they were all in need. And they did come in, including my great-grandfather Lambeth, I guess, whose name I cannot remember, I could look it up but, in any event, he took a great many hams and other army food supplies. I suspect that before that the Federal troops had taken all their animals and slaughtered them so there was very little meat, so they took this food home. Apparently some other Confederate soldiers in the troops which had just surrendered and were on their way home to Texas or somewhere, stopped at the Lambeth house, and were there when still another group of soldiers rode up into the yard and said, "We want you to surrender that food you took from the Confederate Commissary." Whereupon these first soldiers who were there said, "Well, you'll have to come and get it," and when they did start in the house, they were shot down in the front yard by other Confederate troops, and it was known as the Lambeth tragedy and actually was tried in court, and my grandmother, who then was a girl of I should guess, 18, was a witness in the trial. Those were the kinds of things that happened to people in the days surrounding and following the Civil War.

Silveri: What kind of attitude did your grandmother have about those experiences?

Silveri: Well, she was just matter of fact about it. She was not a person of any long carried emotions, as I remember it. She was a very practical person. Loved the, basically, the farming life. I believe the only thing I remember hearing was that her husband, before he died, made her promise to give their son a good education. She was quite clever and capable of doing it, because off of that he went to a country academy run by some of their cousins which is still running, called Oak Ridge Academy, near western Greensboro. And, there he turned out to be a prodigious left-handed ball pitcher. So prodigious, that, even though they didn't have athletic scholarships in those days, the alumnae of Chapel Hill sent the President up there to watch him pitch. (Chuckle.) The story is that afterwards he said, "Young man, I would like for you to plan to come to Chapel Hill, but I have no way of offering you a scholarship. But, if you will, at your own expense, will go to Springfield, Massachusetts, to the school of Physical Education, we will employ you and you can earn your way through college, but you will have to pay for your education at Springfield somewhere else. So he borrowed the money - - maybe his widowed mother loaned him some of it -- and he went to Springfield and then went to Chapel Hill,

and never missed a chance to make an honest dollar or to make friends, and as a result he became an outstanding success in Chapel Hill. The young lady whom he had been courting inferred that most of her people had been bankers, so he thought the thing to do to increase his prospects was to start a bank which he did (chuckle) and moved to Charlotte. He started what is now the North Carolina National Bank which, I believe, is the largest in the southeast now with the consolidation. But it just shows what little spur and coincidence will make a person go a certain direction and what circumstances might make that possible to go on to that kind of success.

Silveri: That's fascinating. Your father was the only child in the family?

Stephens: He was the only child, yes.

Silveri: When he went to Springfield, how long did he spend there?

Stephens: My guess is less than a year, but he had a great capacity for making friends, and he made friends in the north even right then, who stood him in good stead later.

Silveri: Okay. And then he came to Chapel Hill, and we're talking about the 1890's when he was in Chapel Hill.

Stephens: Right. From '92 to '96 is my guess; he graduated in '96.

Silveri: Those happen to coincide with the national depression that was taking place in this country in the 90's.

Stephens: That's right.

Silveri: And there he was employed by the University.

Stephens: As physical education teacher, director. While he was getting his own degree.

Silveri: What did he major in?

Stephens: Well, I suspect it's what we would call the Liberal Arts now. It may have been about all that Chapel Hill offered, although there were some good scientists there. This President that I mentioned, was named Francis Preston Venable, and he was the discoverer of the process for making acetylene gas. Two of his students, John Motley Morehead and one other whose name is William Rand Keenan, I believe, both were great successes in business in the North, and then returned properly Dr. Venable's results in his efforts and of their own in the form of probably two of the largest educational foundations in the South (except for Duke): the Keenan Foundation and the Morehead Foundation are quite widely known I guess and have been very practical and useful.

Silveri: You have endowments, I guess, at Chapel Hill?

Stephens: Yes, and a very much coveted scholarship program called the Morehead Scholarship Program. There again, it's interesting to know the humble beginnings and circumstances in the hands of responsible, good people, have turned out to be a blessing to a wide number of people. There, again, I believe that the middle section of North Carolina, where that Quaker and in general the British Isles stock, and I'm not partial to it necessarily, but in that case, Carolina got a most valuable core of leadership which has turned out again and again. Some of it is north European, like the Moravian. The Fries family in Winston-Salem started Wachovia Bank and many industries, but the upper tier of middle North Carolina counties have the climate and enough opportunity to enable people to be a great blessing to the place they settle.

Silveri: I do want to talk to you about race relations, as we go along, and I'm wondering that within that context of post-Civil War America, what do you remember about what was told to you -- well, you weren't born until 1904 -- but what was told to you by relatives about race relations after the Civil War in the South?

Stephens: Well, I do have some carryover in that my major in college was history and government, and I was lucky enough to have an outstanding man who became later the Archivist of the United States, Robert Digges Wimberly Connor. And as a result of his forthright Irish way of saying things, why a good deal useful filtered in. For one thing, there was chaos in most of the middle Atlantic states on the race and politics question until around 1900. In the case of North Carolina, at that time a man came in who could fit together all of the needs of the state to the extent of saying, what we *really* need is education, and we can forget about the race part as a matter to fight over, and his name was Charles Brantley Aycock. He started the public school system, although it had begun earlier in a way. He really got it rolling. And from then on, as you may know, North Carolina's progress has been quite steady because they rightly thought of education as the foundation for progress.

Silveri: Yes. Later on I want to talk to you about how some money was raised when Terry Sanford was Governor.

Stephens: That's right. I was fairly close to him, and his activities in this part of the state. Race, as such, did not figure in a chaotic way in 20th Century North Carolina, and we were *very* fortunate in that, and other states have had real handicaps that they are now just now getting over -- say the states even north, but many south of us.

Silveri: Okay, now, you said when your father was going to Chapel Hill he was of a particular nature that he worked hard, was able to make friends, and so when he graduated, you say he married while he was at Chapel Hill?

Stephens: No, he was courting while he was there.

Silveri: What did he do when he graduated?

Stephens: He moved to Charlotte because his roommate -- circumstances always play a part in things -- had a family engaging in the insurance business. So there was a place for him. The insurance business is always flexible -- room for one more. So he quickly in Charlotte got in the insurance business, and he was a hard worker and made friends in an unbelievable way. He just loved people, and understood them, had the "inwit," as the Quakers call it, so that he knew what was going on.

Silveri: Charlotte was booming, I imagine, at that time.

Stephens: Well, Charlotte was a good practical Scotch-Irish community in which I have often laughed when I realize when we have this great blessed wealth of Jewish people here, and you see it in Georgia and South Carolina and notably in New Orleans, that Jews could not make a living among the Scotch-Irish in Charlotte. It has only been in the recent 30 or 40 years that they have come into Charlotte and made a go of it. So the Scotch-Irish were hard to live with. Anyway, he went into Charlotte, I guess with his banking idea in mind, and he found a wealthy man of northern background who was willing to join him in starting a bank called The Southern States Trust Company, and the result was that he'd got off as you suggest, Charlotte was at least growing in a promising way if not really booming. He quickly saw that they didn't know the banking business, so he got his boyfriend from up near where he grew up who was then working for Colonel Fries in the Wachovia Bank, Word H. Wood, to join him in the bank with a change of name, which then became the American Trust Company and which went on for, oh, 50 years, I guess, under that name and then began to merge and is now North Carolina National. But Word H. Wood was a genius as a banker, and as a result of that, my father did not have to sit with his feet under a desk, and it was not long until he went back to his real love which was the natural out-of-doors and preserving and using and improving land. He took his father-in-law's 1,000-acre cotton plantation and developed it into Myers Park which is perhaps one of the early successful

residence areas in the south. That is partly due to the friends he made in the north earlier, perhaps in the Springfield days, I don't know. But he brought in John Nolen, of Cambridge, Massachusetts, who was surely one of the outstanding city planners of the country. The result of that was that the whole plan of Myers Park has stood up so well since 1910, that it's just had no trouble. It has been an outstanding success.

Silveri: Myers Park is a residential community?

Stephens: It is a residential community, which is almost wholly the cotton farm of John Springs Myers, my grandfather. So there again, it is fortunate circumstances that help people.

Silveri: I know. Do you recall the date of the marriage of your mother and father?

Stephens: Yes, I believe it was perhaps 1902.

Silveri: 1902, thank you. When he did this with Myers Park was approximately when?

Stephens: About 1910, I believe.

Silveri: Okay. By that time, he was, as you said, able to move his feet from under the desk to the top of the desk.

Stephens: That's right. Now, he continued as president of the bank, I believe, until about the time we moved to Asheville. His partner Word Wood was a very generous, fine man. He didn't push to become president of the bank, and he just let things roll along, and ran the bank well. I think at that time my grandfather gave me 10 shares in that little bank, and I still have them. I believe they number now 3,500 shares. That doesn't mean they're worth that much more in money, but it's interesting how banks have grown.

Silveri: You mentioned that once the bank was on the way your father turned to other pursuits. How did he get interested in these other pursuits?

Stephens: My sister pointed out that he always loved the land and loved to preserve and make things better, and he, I believe, was early the organizer of what they call the Park and Tree Commission in Charlotte which was to preserve places for neighborhood children to be able to play and preserve trees in general. Perhaps you see that I have inherited some of that. That natural love carried out of what I consider a very decent rural background in the Quaker community, surely contributed to the direction his activities took. I don't think that the Myers Park venture greatly rewarded him. I have an idea that others have reaped where he sowed.

Silveri: Then you were born in 1904?

Stephens: Yes.

Silveri: And then the family moved to Asheville when?

Stephens: 1919.

Silveri: 1919. Well, before the move you attended school in Charlotte, right?

Stephens: Yes. Some public. Largely whatever private schools which, at that time, of course, had a real advantage in resources over public schools. I went to oh, I think there was a school department in a little college right near my neighborhood, and then later I went to a military school, one of the old-time military schools which was perhaps the most prosperous kind of private education in the south in the early 1900's. I went to



Homer Military School, which was then having a hard time, however. Then when I came to Asheville I went to what turned out to be a quite worthwhile school called Asheville School for Boys, which was founded by some Cleveland men, I believe, and is still going strong since 1900.

Silveri: Why did your family moved to Asheville?

Stephens: A businessman here named Charles A. Webb had an opportunity to buy the Asheville morning paper, The Citizen, and he wanted someone with some newspaper experience to go in with him. My father had been a part owner of Charlotte's paper, The Observer, which is a very large prosperous paper, and so the partnership of these two as co-publishers was a natural outcome of Mr. Webb's opportunity to buy the morning paper. So, as I grew up, from high school age on, I thought I would be going into the newspaper field and was educated in subjects that would be useful to me, including journalism at Chapel Hill.

Silveri: Let's go back again to your father's involvement with the Charlotte Observer. Was he part owner mainly as a business venture or was he just a newspaper man?

Stephens: I believe a business venture in that case. He had already the bank and a little later Myers Park, so it just had to be a business venture mainly.

Silveri: All right. But he did become acquainted with the publishing of a newspaper?

Stephens: Oh, yes. And his own civic interests which were very strong made it natural for him to support a good newspaper.

Silveri: Incidentally, how many children were eventually born to your father and mother?

Stephens: I was born in 1904 and my sister about 1913, I believe. I was virtually an only child for a long time.

Silveri: When the move came in 1919, was your mother happy about it? Or was she...

Stephens: To move to Asheville? I think so; I think she got along here about as well as anywhere.

Silveri: Okay. So your father moved here in 1919 as co-owner of the Asheville Citizen?

Stephens: Yes. They called it co-publisher for some reason, but it was co-owner.

Silveri: What kind of newspaper was the Asheville Citizen then? Was it a small circulation?

Stephens: Well, Asheville had not over 28,000 people. I doubt if its circulation was over 10,000. It served the immediate mountain region around it. So it was a modest sized paper, but it began a rapid growth then because there was a rapid development of Asheville which turned into a disastrous real estate boom and deflation.

Silveri: We'll get to that in a minute. I just see here that when you came to Asheville, it was after the first World War, and I was just wondering what effect the first World War had on your family, on your father?

Stephens: Well, the deflation in 1919 -- I believe the armistice was 1918 -- caused cotton prices to drop, and I believe in the South that dragged down other prices, so it was a time when real estate was having hard going. People didn't have the money to invest in homes, so probably it was a good time to seize a new opportunity which was offered here in Asheville, and fortunately it turned out well.

Silveri: Yes, yes. I see, so that the move did have some relationship to the war and the economy that resulted from the war.

Stephens: I should think he might not have moved, but then again it all fitted in together.

Silveri: He must have known Mr. Webb?

Stephens: I suspect that he did. The University at Chapel Hill was the meeting place for many of the promising men of the state, particularly those who were likely to be leaders, because that was the one place to get the outstanding education, and it continued so until the coming of Duke and other endowed universities later, and then of the improvement in the whole state public university system. So Chapel Hill was where you made your friends all over the state.

Silveri: So, it was a kind of network of relationships.

Stephens: Exactly. And particularly for one who liked people as much as my father did, it provided the network in his early banking success. He brought the new accounts into the American Trust Company while Mr. Wood ran a good bank inside. So all the way around, his love of people in this connection arising from Chapel Hill, stood him in good stead.

Silveri: If we can pause at 1919 and talk about your father's politics. What party did he belong to and how active was he in political life?

Stephens: Not very active. I guess his views and mine happen to be the same: that a moderate part in politics enables you to carry out your own worthy civic ambition. And that therefore you should have some part. You shouldn't stay out of them all together. In general, the men who became Governor were his good friends, largely through that Chapel Hill background. I think I have about 40 or 50 years of pictures of Governors who were his personal friends. During the 1900's I think the Democrats were virtually the only party.

Silveri: Was Holshouser the only Republican Governor since reconstruction?

Stephens: I believe they were virtually unchallenged during 50 years, at least. Even so, the Republicans don't always have the luck to always be able to stick together. Which they ought to know by now, if they read their lessons of history, is a first step to success. The Democrats have not *had* to because they were dominant in numbers.

Silveri: All right. Awhile back you said that it might be interesting for you to recollect some of your earliest memories about Asheville, and Charlotte.

## **Tape I Side 2**

Stephens: Yes, Charlotte was a hot place in summer, and people went away, oh, if they could, for weeks on end, and it happened that after my father began to do fairly well in business, he was able to help his mother take her savings and buy a country place which was part farm and part of the Flat Rock summer resort type, the westernmost part of the noted Flat Rock community of largely summer homes, but this one was actually used as a year-around home, and had been there quite awhile. She moved there before 1900. My recollections of it are very pleasant and some images stand out right now. Today's community knows it as the Kanuga area because it had an early successful summer resort right near her home. And it is now the Episcopal Conference Grounds. In any event, when I was a small boy, while the farm was in the family, I was allowed to go there, oh, I was told at the age of six weeks first, but by the time I was 2, 3 or 4 years old, I was just left up there with my grandmother. And I can remember the very pleasant waking up in the morning, the chickens cackling and clucking, under my

window in the yard, dogs and people happily going around below, and I guess one of the early recollections is of a nice pair of mountain women who lived in a house in the yard. One of them served as a sort of cook and part housekeeper. And Miss Nancy Shepherd would pay some attention to me; I remember hearing the thunder rolling across the sky as a youngster, and I said, "What is that?" She said, "Why the old folks say that's the corn wagon rolling across the sky, that tells you we're going to have good crops." I believe that's about the earliest recollection that I have. This farm was carried on on a hill top where there was no spring flowing, and therefore they had to keep their milk and butter cooled by digging a cellar and going down in the basement under the house where the temperature more nearly resembled the year-round average temperature, I guess it was 50 degrees down there. And I was allowed to go in and out as they took the milk and butter in and out of that. Then another recollection is that the side door had a hole in it about breast high or a little lower, that was an inch or more across, and I asked what was that, how did that come, and they said, "Why, the bushwackers did that, shot that." Apparently, the bushwackers were the renegades and deserters who wouldn't fight in either Army. There were a good many Federal union sympathizers who fought in the Union Army, and some in the Confederate, but some were just outlyers, as they were called, or bushwackers. They came around to rob the house. With the men gone off to war, they could frighten the women. And I'm not sure but what an older man was in the house so the story is that they knocked on this side door, and when he answered he stood not right in front of the door, but to one side. So when the bushwackers shot through it, they did not kill him. So that's the story I heard later. But the old mountain women just said, the bushwackers shot through that door. (Chuckle.) The farming life went on. They raised corn, and my grandmother loved to keep chickens. She had several hundred chickens, so I was allowed to go out and scatter corn for them, and go out in the vegetable garden and help gather strawberries or raspberries, just do the various farm chores. At some point I can stop and give you a piece of cornbread made just the way we ate it then, if you would like. I made some this morning early.

Silveri: I would like some, yes. I forgot to ask you what influence the church played in your family up to the time you came to Asheville. What church did your family belong to?

Stephens: The part involving my mother's family, I believe, had become Episcopalians perhaps in the 80's or 90's. The Episcopal Church as you may know, nearly died out a hundred years earlier because of its connection with England, and although there was a chapel at what we know now as Chapel Hill -- New Hope Chapel -- it fell into disrepair and was not, was just a ruined building when the university was started, I believe, but it was right at the crossroads of two major routes where the Carolina Inn stands now at Chapel Hill. But the Episcopal Church was just barely getting going again. I think it was fairly strong in the Tidewater, eastern part of North Carolina all along. But the upcountry, they were Scotch-Irish, Presbyterians and Methodists, and it seems to me I saw somewhere a note that my great-grandfather Myers had changed over from oh, perhaps the Methodist Church and helped to organize I guess the first Episcopal congregation in Charlotte, called St. Peters, which is the oldest and largest there now. As you may know, the Episcopalians are not necessarily the best because there are splendid Presbyterians, Methodists and Baptists in that region, and, of course, Moravians and others. But they very often attracted the more, well fixed financially, and often the better educated, although not by any means all of the educated.

Silveri: Why do you think that was the case?

Stephens: I don't know whether the nature of the church ritual or the tradition or just what. I see it here in our own community now. Of course there are great changes in churches. I have watched with interest and amazement changes in the Roman Catholic church in my time, and maybe it's all to the good. It's certainly realistic. Perhaps the un-changing that I've observed are the Presbyterians. They've hewed to the line of what their early founders in Scotland have said that we must rely on education in our clergy if we are to succeed, and I suspect that is the whole history of the Presbyterian church, and there are almost always good colleges wherever they settled, such as Davidson.

Silveri: What about your father's side? You've been talking about the Myers side haven't you?

Stephens: Yes, now the father's side were Methodist which was, that with the Baptist, was the religion of the great part of upcountry North Carolinians, and even some Tidewater. At that time there were scarcely many people in the mountains, and they tended to Baptist and Methodist.

Silveri: In 1919 when you came to Asheville, you were 15 years old. What did you see when you came to Asheville? Where did you first live in Asheville when you came in 1919?

Stephens: I lived a mile and a half south of Asheville, what was known then as the, and still is, the Manor Grounds. There was an inn there built by a Georgia family to which perhaps 20 houses around it were added. Some of them as sort of annexes for more guest rooms and some as permanent residences- dwellings, and we lived in one of those for about a year and then moved about a half a mile to another residential group which, there again is interesting, was built out of the earnings of a lumber man, and he knew how to build quite nice houses, comfortable, well-designed, decent houses. So we lived out two miles south of Asheville up until my marriage in which case I moved to this side. I married into a family with a Biltmore Village background, my wife's family, and it seemed quite natural to settle in this area.

Silveri: When you say two miles south of Asheville, that's pretty far out.

Stephens: Mid-city.

Silveri: Mid-city? In the city limits?

Stephens: Two miles south of mid-city. I reckon the way the highway department does is one point is the point of reference for distances, and in that case, Pack Square at Asheville.

Silveri: Okay, so when you're driving on the highway, 50 miles from here, and it says 50 miles from Asheville...

Stephens: That's to center city.

Silveri: That's to center city, not the city limits?

Stephens: That's right. That's the highway designation system, distance designation. It's the only way to avoid confusion. Being a map designer, I have to stick to a workable way.

Silveri: Okay, so when you came in 1919, you were 15 years old. So you were old enough to notice what was going on around you and what the city looked like. Do you remember what your impressions were when you first came here?

Stephens: Yes, the imprint of Asheville at that time was two or three elements. Immediately north of me was the small, but well done subdivision by the inventor of the Grove's Tasteless Chill Tonic, and this was called Grove Park. And it was, still is one of the better residential areas because it was designed well, with good, wise, protective restrictions in the deeds. And then another north of Asheville which was what we know as Montford Avenue and Cumberland Avenue, had the families who came in and prospered after the coming of the railroads in the 80's, and that was one of the genteel places to live for Asheville's first 50 years really. It still has some fine old homes in it, although they are rather crowded in. They didn't have the protective restrictions that Grove Park and Biltmore Forest.

Silveri: Did you ever have any Grove's Tasteless Chill Tonic?

Stephens: No. I roomed with the grandson of Dr. Grove; the "doctor" is the old country title for pharmacist, as you know.

Silveri: Yes.

Stephens: Many places it still persists. He started in middle Tennessee in a small town called Paris, and it was called the Paris Medicine Company. Then he moved to St. Louis, and much better manufacturing and distributing points. This partly comes out of John Seely... Seely being the builder of the Grove Park Inn -- John Seely's father [Fred Seely] -- who married Dr. Grove's only daughter. So Dr. Grove had made a tremendous amount of money, and he evidently found this son-in-law satisfactory and promising, and one thing he did was to back him in the building of the Grove Park Inn, which this former newspaper man, self-educated, designed and carried through on his own.

Silveri: Seely did this, on his own?

Stephens: Yes, that's right.

Silveri: Do you suspect that Mr. Grove's tonic was pretty much useless as a medicine?

Stephens: During the days of malaria, it was a specific for malaria, quinine is.

Silveri: Oh, is that what it was, quinine?

Stephens: Yes.

Silveri: Oh.

Stephens: And see, quinine was so unpleasant and bitter that the Tasteless Chill Tonic made a great success .

Silveri: Interesting. Do you happen to know how Grove got interested in Asheville? How he happened to come here in the first place?

Stephens: No, except that after the coming of the railroads, there was a surprising amount of publicity in magazines like Harpers, and Leslies, which are in our public library here and are worth your turning through sometime because there are numerous accounts of this quaint, unspoiled, mountain region, with its quaint, unspoiled people.

Silveri: Yes, as a matter of fact, I went through some copies of those articles and even some pictures in the U. S. Forest Service file. Someone there made copies of those.

Stephens: Yes. So, the North Carolina room of the public library here will be well worth your time when you can look through it.

Silveri: You mentioned that you went to Asheville Boys School.

Stephens: Asheville School for Boys, as it was called.

Silveri: Located where?

Stephens: About 5 miles west of Asheville. At that time, so far from good roads that the little west-bound Murphy train was the way you got there and back. Well, they were just beginning to have paved roads. You may know all of, or soon sense, that the quite successful highway system of North Carolina began with a good-roads governor in the 1920's and that before that the good roads were rare. And so North Carolina's emergence, and especially the mountain region, came with the coming of good roads.

Silveri: Was the Asheville School for Boys an elementary school only?

Stephens: It covered the 4 usual high school years, I believe, or 5, maybe.

Silveri: So you graduated from there, huh?

Stephens: I graduated from there, with a quite strict standard of work, and you could just coast on through after that. They gave us college entrance board examinations every day in the spring of our junior and senior year just for the exercise.

Silveri: Were they teaching Greek and Latin in those days?

Stephens: They were teaching Latin. Greek had been passed up by then. There was a man in Asheville, I might call your attention, who taught Tom Wolfe, Thomas Wolfe, the local author, not the contemporary Thomas Wolfe, with a Greek background, and he found Tom so bright that he just coached him I believe four years, he told me, in Greek before he went to Chapel Hill. He went there with four years of Greek already, so he could just gallop through the classics, and you could feel the rhythm of some of the classics in Tom Wolfe's writing.

Silveri: Was this the school Tom Wolfe himself attended?

Stephens: Well, this was called, I believe, something like the Asheville Fitting School, which was a modest, in-the-city school run by a man named, Roberts -- J. M. Roberts, whom I knew for a good many years here. [1915 Asheville City Directory: North State Fitting School, John and Margaret E. Roberts, 157 Church Street]

Silveri: You graduated from the school then in what year? From high school?

Stephens: That would be 1922.

Silveri: 1922.

Stephens: And straight on to Chapel Hill.

Silveri: Straight on that year?

Stephens: Yes.

Silveri: Before we get into that, what did you do? Did you work during the summertime or after school while you were going to high school? Did you have any experience with the newspaper?

Stephens: I was not given the work experience that I might well have, though I guess my family the same way took no chances on being well prepared. We call it running scared these days. I was coached and prepared for Asheville School, so I galloped through that, not any virtue for my ability, but I just was ready for it. And then Chapel Hill, the same way.

Silveri: Okay, there was no question that you were going to go to Chapel Hill to college?

Stephens: Hardly, with my father's very happy experience there.

Silveri: Did you know before you went to Chapel Hill what your major interest would be in college? What particular subject?

Stephens: Well, I suspect I was just headed for what they called a liberal education, but it turned out that I enjoyed especially the history courses that they had, and they were starting a number of good new departments, like -- it came a little later -- the Institute of Government, but they had a good department even already, good faculty and staff in the science of government as a part of history, and then later, a quite later famous man came there during my time -- maybe he got there just ahead of me -- anyway his name was Howard Washington Odum. He came from a Georgia community and started the Institute for Research in Social Science, which is one of the big successes in academics in the south, as you probably know, as you know many who are graduates probably.

Silveri: Yes, and I'd like to ask you later on some questions about Howard Odum, about what he did.

Stephens: Yes, in his later years, I was fortunate in getting to know him pretty well. Yes, I went to see him in the hospital, from which he never returned, but over the years ahead of that I saw him, and I may have a memento or two I can save for you.

Silveri: Fine. Okay, 1922. Chapel Hill must have looked quite different in '22 than it looks now.

Stephens: The building program was just beginning; in fact, they had just finished the first of four modern looking, but still Georgian type dormitories. They were sensible enough to stick largely to Georgian, which was proved by time to be well adapted to the south climate, so I lived in one of those newer buildings. And then, was lucky enough to move into the -- after it had been completely gutted and remodeled and made new inside -- into Old East, the earliest state university building in the country. And that was quite a nice experience.

Silveri: Do you remember what the tuition was in 1922?

Stephens: Well, tuitions were very low. It seems to me that for each of the three parts of the year, they had the quarter system, and I believe it was about \$120 which was surely not half of the cost.

Silveri: Yes.

Stephens: The University was just beginning to get substantial support. They brought a president from New York City, I believe, named Harry Woodburn Chase, who, though he wasn't gifted with a southern accent, he knew surely how to reach the legislators, and he got a number of these fine programs, like the Odum program started. They brought another man named Eugene Cunningham Branson, also from Georgia, who started the study of what they call rural social economics, which was what North Carolina needed to relate economics to its rural structure, and to its economy, and to its society. So, all of these very fortunate events took place in the time that I was able to remember and in some places to share them.

Silveri: Okay, you mentioned that you found the history courses particularly interesting. Was that due to any one particular professor?

Stephens: Well, just about everyone I listened to I thought was good. And maybe I was lucky. Even those who were considered a bit dry, if you already had some interest in history, why, it meant something to you. The man who did so much

later in collecting and started the Southern Historical Collection -- he got several years running start on any other university. Joseph Grégoire de Rouilhac Hamilton, was not a thrilling teacher, but knew what he was doing, and you could for, I believe, middle period, perhaps what we call reconstruction, was an outstanding man, and he along with Boyd [William Kenneth Boyd] over at Duke and Connor -- R. D. W. Connor, I mentioned -- wrote a Connor-Boyd-Hamilton History of North Carolina, which is one of the best. It had to be financed by the mug method of a whole big biographical section. But still, the historical text which these three men wrote was a real milestone. There have been others since then which are good.

Silveri: I was going to ask you about taking a course in North Carolina history. And whether they did.

Stephens: Connor taught that. Now, nothing mattered in those days but the Piedmont because there's where the progress was, but the control of the state was still firmly in the hands of the Tidewater, and the history, even through the Lefler History, spent most of their time on the Tidewater, but the *effect* of the Tidewater, as I see it, largely played out 100 years ago.

Silveri: Certainly the industries that got located on the Piedmont and those who ran that industry became prominent in state politics and economic life?

Stephens: Well, they were novices at controlling the legislative work, and only in the past immediate few years is control passing away from those gifted politicians of the east. They just knew how to do it, and they can still hold the gun to a western legislator's head and say, you want to do so and so or else my committees just won't find time to consider the legislation you want to introduce. They are extremely likable and extremely clever.

Silveri: Well, we'll talk about that more as we go along. I want to talk some more about some of these other professors you had at Chapel Hill. Did you have courses dealing with the history of the south?

Stephens: We didn't ride the south. We were looking ahead. We were taking a hindsight look ahead. No point in... well, there are lessons, but not so much for middle south because the middle south history is not the history of the deep south. Once you get into the large farming area, area of large farms, why, then that's a different history.

Silveri: So the history that you had was North Carolina history? National history?

Stephens: Ancient history. And general American history.

Silveri: Did you run into what, even in those days, may have been called radical teachers, iconoclasts, notorious individuals who may have been in trouble with the administration or Board of Trustees for their views?

Stephens: Not that I realized. That has come about only in the recent years where they were under a cross fire between the conservative, prosperous Piedmont businessmen and the conservative reactionary easterners.

Silveri: You don't mention the mountaineers, the mountain counties, in this matrix that you're talking about. About political life.

Stephens: Well, they counted, with a few exceptions, counted very little in the political leadership of the state. Of course, the exception, and you can find ways of getting it, although I could tell you a good deal, is Zebulon Vance.

Silveri: Yes, was it because so many mountaineers were Republicans, or was it because of the lack of economic base?

Stephens: Both.

Silveri: Well, your four years at Chapel Hill must have been very interesting ones because you had come in contact with a wide variety of... well, I don't know... it was a wide variety geographically, of people in North Carolina, but not necessarily coming in contact with people of limited means.



Stephens: More than you might believe. There were a great many who were working themselves through college by waiting on dining room tables. Not all, by any means, but a substantial number of worthwhile young men did come there in my time.

Silveri: All right, 1926 was the year that you graduated, and what happened then?

Stephens: Things were booming here, and my family probably had more spare money than they ever had, and so they let me take an on-your-own trip with a boyhood friend through southern and western Europe. Then the family went back later. Do those look familiar to you? I think it's the [?] or something like that.

Silveri: Yes.

Stephens: That's, of course, looking out a window in Florence.

Silveri: Is this you?

Stephens: No, that's the boyhood friend. So then that trip was followed by a family trip, largely Mediterranean. So, got some useful smattering of what had been going on in the world.

Silveri: It must have been exciting for you.

Stephens: Yes, I see a lot that I have not yet covered that I would like to. I've been back since then to learn more about map design and went to useful places like Austria and Switzerland... Germany.

Silveri: When did your father die?

Stephens: My recollection is 1945.

Silveri: I do want to ask you some questions about the newspaper. Did he remain in that capacity with the newspaper until his death?

Stephens: No, he remained until about 10 years, about 1930 as I recall, and this man who invited him to come and join in the purchase, the two of them, had a buy or sell agreement by which if either of them wanted to go ahead and buy it out, he could do so, and Mr. Webb, the man who had approached him in the first place, said he wanted to buy it out. His purpose was to join with the owner of the other paper and consolidate the two. I stayed on, I believe, 3 years after the consolidation. After spending some time in the mechanical department, I went into the advertising, what is known as display advertising, the big type display advertising. My typographical knowledge from the year in the mechanical part helped me there, and I stayed about 3 years as I say in that.

Silveri: Oh, maybe we should go back and fill in the years since 26. You took that trip, and then you came home.

Stephens: Yes, and then I had some desire to want to get into the woods and work, and they were just beginning then the purchase of land for the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and I had liked the out-of-doors always, so I was lucky enough to get a job as a tallyman, which is the humble part of the job in the timber cruising, which is the estimating function in land valuation. So, I started in... I was the only city fellow in the outfit. The party chief was a veteran of World War I, who went on the early G. I. bill to a 4-year education in forestry at the University of Georgia at Athens, and he had great misgivings about me, I think. He wasn't sure whether I would make it or not, but I had been raised in a fairly rigorous way and would always run scared, so to speak. I took no chances. I tried to do my work well. And before long, we became very fast friends, and later, when there was a vacancy for the big job called the timber estimator, he had watched and I would always walk

around the trees and look at every big, valuable tree and just took no chances; so he promoted me to be the first cruiser at the astronomical salary of \$150 a month, with your usual board. I worked about half of that year as a cruiser.

Silveri: What was that gentleman's name?

Stephens: His name is E. J. Rosser. He's sitting behind the surveyors transit in the middle of the group. He was a Tennessee/Kentucky mountaineer, and then you see the others. I'm down in the lower corner, perhaps left corner, is it? Pulling on an invisible thread which snapped the picture.

Silveri: Where, right here on the side?

Stephens: Yes.

Silveri: Well, you're very young looking there.

Stephens: I was about 23 or 24.

Silveri: 24, yes.

Stephens: So we had good luck on the picture,

Silveri: Well, you were only -- It looks as though pipes were in vogue in those days.

Stephens: Yes, that's right. Well, it's the only safe way in the woods.

Silveri: Yes.

Stephens: Cigarettes are dangerous.

Silveri: Yes, uh huh. How long, well, first of all, maybe I should ask you, your work was in estimating the timber there because the government was going to buy that property.

Stephens: Yes. The state had to buy it and turn it over to the Federal government to make a national park.

Silveri: All right. What about the people living there?

Stephens: Well, the law was a fairly humane one, they were allowed to live on the rest of their lives, the occupants were. Some of them took their money and moved out, especially if they had young children. I noticed the announcement of the death of one of them in one of those valleys in today's paper, Lush Caldwell, who was a young man at the time I was in there.

Silveri: How do you remember that? How did you happen to remember his name? You mean he worked with you?

Stephens: No, he was just in the community. I remember names. Well, I can't brag on that, but the way-back memory is good. Now, this was a maiden sister in the place where I boarded. I just brought 2 or 3 of those. That was Cataloochee Valley, it's called. Then farther up in the valley, there was a portrait painted or sort of a tinted portrait, I guess, of a man when he was young. His dearest possession was his rifle. You see it has a hammer on it, doesn't it? Hammer style?

Silveri: Yes.

Stephens: And that's Turkey George Palmer, I believe his name was. So I took that picture, and I have somewhere a picture of him at the time I was there in his 70's.

Silveri: How long were you working in that area?

Stephens: I worked about, in the Smokies in the purchase, about a year. But the whole purchase... cruising took, oh, 3 or 4 years.

Silveri: Okay, but in the Smokies about a year? Was it all throughout the Smokies, or in one particular area?

Stephens: Well, we could cruise out, that means systematically, tally the timber in one valley and then move to another, and we had as a director of the work a trained forester, whose family still lives here. The Forest Service had what they called a ten percent sampling system by which you followed the compass line from the valley base to the top of the mountain and set over and then came back, so that you covered 10% of the area, no matter what you went through, cliffs or anything, and we went through such scenes as *that* sometimes.

Silveri: What is this?

Stephens: It's a moonshine still.

Silveri: Oh! Laughter. Is that the moonshiner there too?

Stephens: No, that's one of our, one of my buddies. And the people in those valleys were basically honest, good people, and there was no way to get cash except to make liquor.

Silveri: Uh huh.

Stephens: It was like the Corn and the Whiskey Rebellion time. They trafficked then. And so they were, they were decent people, and I think there were something like thirty families. And I believe there were twenty-seven of them in one way or another connected with the whiskey business, either in making it or carrying it out or what not. Of which this Lush Caldwell that I mentioned was one. Then some of the, some of the going was fairly rough. It was so cold that waterfall was frozen. There's my talleyman down in the foreground after I had been promoted. And they... the big lumber companies were operating in there, and they were cutting timber as fast as they could before the North Carolina got the courts to stop them. Tennessee wasn't as rigorous about that. They cut out vast big acreage in the Tennessee side before they stopped them. They said it was under contract or something. But we stopped them in the courts. But there they are cutting great red spruce. Can you see it falling?

Silveri: Yes. Red spruce?

Stephens: See, that's the tree of the Northern woods, but there's a little island of it in this plateau here. Then there's Frasier's fir which is peculiar to this area. That's different from the Balsam fir in the North.

Silveri: You weren't the only crew doing cruising?

Stephens: There was one crew for the state of North Carolina. And one crew for the state of Tennessee. It took us two or three years to ... three or four years to get it done. They had to go to court and testify and get the evidence before a condemnation - forced purchase - could be carried through.

Silveri: Did you encounter any hostility from the people who lived there when you were coming through?

Stephens: No, not at all. I think they were probably wary and took no chances, but they soon knew what we were about. In a way I guess favored the prospect of getting enough money to sell out their farms and get in a place where they could educate their children better. In fact some of those families did do that very thing. They moved their children out during the school years where you could get good schooling.

Silveri: They must've wanted to be where they were if they *were* there.

Stephens: Well, the land, perhaps the better grade for farming, and nearer markets and schools was taken up when they moved in there in the early 1800's. That was the story of a good deal of the settlement in the USA. You took what you could find after the fellow who was ahead of you had already staked his out.

Silveri: Do you know if there are any families still living in the Smokies today?

Stephens: Well, they live *near* the Smokies. I could show you before you leave this Lush Caldwell's ... He was... I think... I'm not sure, but he was connected with the still operation. I remember him as a first class man. And he's left a big family. Many of them have gone to the midwestern industrial area. That's what they *had* to make a living.

Silveri: When you were cruising timber and came across a homestead in the mountains, what did you do? Did you have to make note of that?

Silveri: Yes. My first job, by the way, in this Cataloochie Valley... I was the first man employed in the field in cruising. My first job was to go into this Calaloochie Valley and find out the name of each landowner. And they were willing to give the information. As I say, most of them wanted to look into the possibility of getting paid a reasonable price and moving out. So I found people ready enough to give me the information I wanted, and I came out with a report of landowners. And then before long, this man Rosser had been employed - and he had been working for a very good lumber company out in an extreme western county, and among those who you should interview is a member of that family of that lumber company where Rosser had been working. Gennett. Andrew Gennett.

Silveri: What did you see when you went to find out who the landowners were? What kind of houses did they live in?

Stephens: Well, they lived in the second stage of house beyond the log house. Mostly. That is, they had...by then there had been saw mills in there. And in some instances the boards had been simply put over the central log structure and then additional rooms added as wings. And they were wood shingle houses. And I recall...I guess there was a shingle making point somewhere around there. I don't know whether you know how that works, but there's a slightly swiveling saw which will saw wood billets into wood shingles... tapered wood shingles. In the old days, of course, they split them. And some of the oldest houses there had hand-split shingles, which I could tell you where to find around here along the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Silveri: Split with a [?] and a wooden hammer.

Stephens: Right. They're not tapered you see, they're not as easy to use as the sawn wood.

Silveri: Did you find that these were large families you dealt with, they had a lot of children?

Stephens: Mostly large families, not always. This particular family where I boarded, the man had married late in life, and they had, I believe, one child. And did Miss Mariah have a baby in a basket? There was one

daughter to this perhaps forty year old couple. And then their son was born a little later, to become one of the leading business men in the Waynesville community. Just next, west of here. Linton Palmer, I believe his name is. And about three names covered virtually every family in that valley. They were English names like Palmer and Caldwell and Woody. Then there some are Scottish out there though, like Ferguson.

Silveri: This was the Cataloochie Valley you're talking about?

Stephens: Cataloochie Valley.

Silveri: And it's part of the Great Smokies today?

Stephens: Well, it's part of the Great Smokies. Well, it's the eastern end that you see the... full of ridges. Boundary up there, up to the left... well, the extreme eastern end of that is a landlocked valley called the Cataloochee.

Silveri: So lets move on...

Stephens: This little story will tell how I got there. This Verne Rhoades was highly educated... fine man who was chief of the land purchase. And then head forester... first head forester... there was no forester in this area, and later they got him to serve as purchase director. So he said, "I want you to go back in Cataloochee and find out the names of the landowners." And just about like the fellow who said, "You take the message to Garcia," in Cuba, that's about all the man said. So I got to Waynesville and got off the train right by a wholesale grocery house, and I went over to the wholesale grocery house and I said, "Isn't there a little store back in the Cataloochee Valley?" He said, "Sure is. Hub Caldwell owns the store there." I said, "I want to go back in there." He said, "You'd better run real quick, because that's Hub's truck all loaded up ready to go." And I ran over there right quick, and sure enough, he was just ready to start. And it was piled *high* with sugar sacks. Virtually... there were *some* other groceries, but it was mainly sugar sacks. (Silveri chuckles.) And he says, "Yeah, I'll take you." And I think he had a passenger or two in this little ole Ford truck's cab, so he let me ride up on the sugar sacks. And we rode up over a oh 4 to 500 ft. pass called Cole's Creek Gap and into there. I'd been told that Jarvis Palmer might be the... [some conversation is lost as tape is turned]

## **Tape II Side 1**

Stephens: He's a NC background man from down in the Cape Fear River Valley.

Silveri: Chancellor Highsmith?

Stephens: Yes, but he's been in the Southwest most of his life.

Silveri: Yes, down in the Jacksonville area. Florida.

Stephens: Well, he came here from there, but he was in Oklahoma and Baton Rouge. He's had a good... I see a good deal of him.

Silveri: I want to get back to the time when you were in the Cataloochie Valley. We were talking about 1926 and 1927?

Stephens: Well, I was there, actually, I guess, in '27 and '28, but conditions were going...back then there wasn't much money around. The real estate boom had already begun to sag, and by 1930 we had our bank demoralization and trouble here.

Silveri: I wanted to ask you, do remember how many property owners you counted in the Cataloochie Valley?

Stephens: I guess between 30 and 40.

Silveri: 30 or 40, in a valley that was how big? Can you give us some idea?

Stephens: Yes. The part that was in farms... the valley itself was, of course, much larger, but because of the forest slopes around it. But in farms, I guess one by four miles. And then there was an adjoining valley called Little Cataloochie, which was probably one by two miles.

Silveri: And they were largely small farms?

Stephens: Largely small farms, but what the mountaineers called "good livers." They had enough to eat, though not much more than money to meet their simple needs.

Silveri: No extensive livestock holders?

Stephens: Yes, it was rather interesting. They wintered their cattle in large barns, and there's a good example of this right near the eastern entrance to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. They wintered their cattle in these sheltered barns, for which they had made hay right in their farms, right down there, and there were sparse supplies of level land. And then as soon as the danger of freeze passed, they would drive them out onto the mile-high country where there were mountain-top pastures, which they knew as the balds. B-a-l-d-s. Cataloochie's favorite grazing place was called The Ledge, which, on the map shows as The Ledge Bald, which is the headwaters to the north and west of that valley.

Silveri: A bald is a natural development, that's not been cut over, is that right?

Stephens: Uh...they're not absolutely sure, but they believe that for some reason, freezing conditions have destroyed the trees, although they suspect at times that they were burned off by the Indians. But in any event the grass is the dominant feature, and then there's a surrounding border of rhododendron and laurel or kalmia, and a flame azalea, which is another heath plant.

Silveri: What's kalmia?

Stephens: Kalmia is mountain laurel. It's common all the way to New England, I believe. Kalmia Latifolia.

Silveri: What about the...was there a church in the Cataloochie Valley?

Stephens: I believe at least two churches, but they did not have regular preachers.

Silveri: Do you remember what denominations they were?

Stephens: Baptists and Methodists, I believe.

Silveri: How about school? Was there a school there?

Stephens: There was a small school which I believe, I should guess, maybe it had the first six years of grades.

Silveri: What about the school house?

Stephens: Well, maybe two teachers...I can't remember exactly, but very simple and primitive.

Silveri: When you boarded at this gentleman's house, did you have a room of your own, or did you...

Stephens: Well, I slept there in one of the rooms provided for visiting fishermen, so I slept in a good place, made for visitors. But there was another time where I did board with a family where we were considerably more crowded than that. I think there were 3 or 4 people slept in the room on Noland Creek, where Walt Jenkins had a home where a pair of cruisers and talleyman just boarded out there to cruise that particular valley. And it was very interesting to watch...one of the older sons would come in our room before daylight and build a fire. And then the family would be up by daylight to give us breakfast. And soon after daylight we'd be out on the trail going to work.

Silveri: What kind of meals did they serve?

Stephens: Well, cornbread. Let's see if I remember... what they called canned goods, which were put up in glass jars, which would be beets and apples and then pickled cabbage, which is sauerkraut really. Those I do remember...there must have been many others. I didn't suffer from a lack of variety. It just happened that I'd been reared with a background of that sort where it was relished by me... you have a little more cornbread and a little more something to drink when you want it. Then...so it was the "good livers," as they were called, that had a simple but ample life.

Silveri: Do you remember what it cost to board there?

Stephens: Well, I guess that the park purchasing agency paid it for us, but I'm guessing 30 or 40 dollars a month for the bed and the food. We slept in many places, and stayed in the upper, under-roof second floor, and one that I enjoyed very much was up Cooper's Creek, where... this was a real old timer, and he would come up with a lamp...they're very modest people... he'd say, "Roll out, boys, and come get your coffee." And he'd come up with a lamp, though actually we had a good breakfast, but he'd just say, "Get your coffee." And this fellow had this habit of getting up *way* before daylight, and I remember one of the mountain boys who was a talleyman or something, sat up in bed one morning and said, "You know, I'm going off somewhere where they'll let me stay all night!"

Silveri: You were expected to get up when they got up, is that it?

Stephens: Yea, and it was just barely light enough to walk the trail, when they got us going. Well, we needed a full day to do our estimating work.

Silveri: They went to bed at dusk, then?

Stephens: Yes, because they did have oil lamps, but it was not good light to read by. Of course broadcasting was almost unheard of. They had some amusements. One night they...down at the church down the valley there's a singing teacher who's got some new songbooks. Let's go down there and see what's going on. And they issued paperback books with a few new religious tunes, but mainly the old standby's. The publisher will get those republished and republished. I had a friend who did that for years.

Silveri: Shape note?

Stephens: Are you familiar with shape note? Well, it indicates the relative interval to the next note. It doesn't tell you the pitch, the reason being that the shape note printing will be on the staff at whatever level that the key required. So, it's an interval, and you think when you look at a triangle and then a square, or what have you, or a diamond, that you're going to jump a fourth interval or a third interval, or what not. That's the way the shape notes worked. But anyway, these people with the new songbooks went through once with the reader humming, and the second time through they sang the words and the tune, which may have been a new tune to them. Those

people were after a fashion, after their fashion, *unusual* musicians, as I see it. And they have still these old-time shape note singing conventions. I guess you know about them.

Silveri: You mentioned the homes where you stayed. Did you see any musical instruments there that were played?

Stephens: In those particular homes there was not. I took a guitar back into the mountains. So this man Rosser, our party chief, knew how to play a guitar and sing, so he brought out from memory all his old childhood tunes. And we'd sit around in the evening and listen to him, and I don't think I did much with the guitar. But it was quite interesting to me to hear them play, and many of them are based on the early British Isle tunes.

Silveri: Well, in the Cataloochie Valley you did not see a guitar or a banjo or a fiddle? Or a dulcimer?

Stephens: I don't remember seeing one at all, though there's been a comeback in musical instruments, largely thanks to Bascom Lamar Lunsford, a long-time friend of mine, who died two or three years ago. You've heard something about him, haven't you?

Silveri: I have met him.

Stephens: Oh, you did. Good. Well, he was something of a scholar, but an unusual showman. He knew how to get things going.

Silveri: Okay, you did mention that they had singing schools, that they were learning the shape note singing. Did you ever attend any of their... did you have need of preachers [inaudible]

Stephens: I did not go to a preaching at least in them, but I've heard them at times, and they supply the emotional needs of the people. Their life pattern is rather quiet... restrained. So they need that and they need it today. I drove by some place in the country last evening where there was a Holiness Meeting going on, and the man was shouting to be prepared. There was a real need for it.

Silveri: I think you said before that you thought the two churches were Methodist and Baptist.

Stephens: Yes, plus this Holiness, which is... I don't think it... it may be an organized sect now, based in Cleveland, Tennessee. But it's... I think it just came of these spontaneous small congregations not requiring standards in education, or even religious ritual, but meeting some kind of need of the people.

Silveri: You did mention, however, that you did ride in or ride out with a Presbyterian... who was trying to come in and proselytize?

Stephens: Well, I don't know whether that is the right word or not. They were just trying to do their duty by... well, I suspect that some of these churches are not strictly denominational. That where ever they could get a preacher, they would ask him to come.

Silveri: I see. I suppose I could go on for hours talking about those years up in the cove. It's a fascinating life to me. But your experience in those woods ended in 1929, did it?

Stephens: Yes, probably late '28. Then I went to work for the newspaper. Worked about four years for the newspaper.

Silveri: But from '26 to '28 you weren't just in the Smokies. You were doing other ...



Stephens: I was on two trips overseas that I mentioned. I guess some of that time I was not doing anything. Then after the Smokies work, then I went to work for the newspaper, starting down in the type makeup, in the composing room.

Silveri: What year was that?

Stephens: That was during 1928. So I worked there about four years, the last year in the advertising part. Next to the last year. I was out when the front doors of the banks were locked, I was out trying to sell newspaper advertising. So I'm much more cheerful than most people, because everything has gotten better since that time.

Silveri: You had a front-row seat in what happened in Asheville.

Stephens: It was mighty hard on some people. They just lost everything.

Silveri: How did your father weather that period?

Stephens: Well, I suspect so far as most of his investments go that he was washed out. The newspaper repurchase I mentioned took the form of Mr. Webb's taking the newspaper as a going business and my father taking the Haywood Street location, which is now Woolworth's store. They were just ready to move, and that's a well-run outfit, as I guess you know, and so they've done a little better every year since then. So it worked out reasonably well. He was quite careful and provident with his own family, even though he was in the real estate business, which gets you in trouble mighty easily. But he saw ahead with great care for his family.

Silveri: You say 1930 Webb bought out your father...

Stephens: About that, yes.

Silveri: And combined with the evening paper...

Stephens: The Times, yes.

Silveri: The Times. And so The Asheville Citizen-Times was created. Who was the owner then?

Stephens: Of The Times?

Silveri: Of The Times, yes.

Stephens: A man named Don Elias, who had a background from some of the counties to the west. He appealed to Mr. Webb, I guess, as a partner, because he had an active interest in politics and some business talent, so they seemed to get along all right together. Mr. Webb, the irony is, sold the Times ... when he bought the Citizen with my father, sold it for \$20,000, and I understand that when Mr. Webb took the Times in the merger of the two papers, he took it in at a million dollars. It was before the worst of the crash, so Mr. Elias got a pretty good arrangement with Mr. Webb. And he later, I believe, got possession of it and was head of it for a while. Then then some Greenville investors, a family named Peace, P-e-a-c-e, from Greenville, South Carolina, came in and bought virtually all of the stock.

Silveri: That was the beginning of the way it is now?

Stephens: That was the beginning of the present management, in which Bunnelle became publisher, and still is Chairman of the Board, I believe, of the corporation, and Winn who was a student at Asheville-Biltmore when I was in the printing business and has been a long-time friend, a first-class man, was made publisher when

Bunnelle withdrew active direction. Bunnelle lives down on the South Carolina coast, I believe, now. Winn has run things, but Bunnelle is still nominally, and for more in practically in authority. He's the final authority. [Robert E. Bunnelle, Richard B. Wynne]

Silveri: All right, let's get back to the Depression years. You were in Asheville. You saw... you know the real estate boom took place in the '20's. And then it busted.

Stephens: By the late '20's.

Silveri: Late 20's... '27, '28.

Stephens: I never missed a... Webb, while we were overseas, wrote my father that things were quick... rapidly... going bad in the real estate field. That is '27, I guess.

Silveri: And then the big, big bust in the country came in October, 1929. And the next few years were very desperate years for the city, because people lost a good deal of money.

Stephens: Well, yes, it had a very large bonded debt from over expansion of water line systems and public buildings, so that when the final bank crashes came locally... my dates are not exact on them. I believe the Wall Street crashes were in '28 or '29. And my recollection is within a year after that there were local bank closings. And it took us four or five years to work out with the bond holders agents a satisfactory plan, and perhaps you've read the section of the newspaper recently which quite carefully goes over the details of that.

Silveri: Yes, I did read also your letter that came later on.

Stephens: One or two matters were overlooked which were quite important. My immediate... or one of my superiors was the one who worked out the plan of going out on the market while the faith was so low in Asheville's ability to pay Asheville's bonds that they bought up at favorable prices a large part of Asheville's refunded public debt. As I understand it, they never failed on one cent of the principal value, although they did get concessions on interest rates that made a big difference. But there never was a default as I understand it ... technically, that is.

Silveri: OK. Well, when did you terminate your association with the newspaper? 1933?

## **Tape II, Side 2**

End:

Stephens: We are in just the beginning of the underlying limestone area which is much more favorable to grass. Once you cross the Unakas going to Tennessee the limestone base is much more pronounced and the grass much more prosperous, and therefore Tennessee is to the south one of the outstanding limestone areas. So we are going through a natural gap which strangely enough leads us into another river valley of the Pigeon River, which is another flowing North toward the Unakas cutting through a gorge, which Interstate 40 follows, by the way. But this gap we've passed through approaching the town of Canton makes us rise from the Asheville Plateau, rise perhaps two or three hundred feet into the Pigeon River Plateau, just right next to each other, but at a higher... the western Pigeon River Plateau, at a higher elevation. And some bright man had the idea of damming the Pigeon and turning it through the gap between the two plateaus and generating power, but the plan fell through, so my engineer father-in-law told me. But nevertheless the Pigeon has been a great resource in water, having in the upland region a dam for the storage of water to serve the giant...

Stephens: ... through a solid rock tunnel to the border of the state and there dropped, I believe, about 700 feet to get a very large powerline generating capacity.

Silveri: A private generating...?

Stephens: It was developed by the big electric holding company called Electric Bond and Shaft. And later marketed probably at no small profit to a regional company now known as Carolina Power and Light Co., headquarters in Raleigh.

End:

Cherokees holding staff jobs in the Indian Agency Offices

Stephens: They've had a very favorable situation. And out of their families have come many who are developing into good businessmen. When we started, for instance, the Cherokee Historical Association, to launch an outdoor drama, we had only a very few Cherokee who could take part in the project as board members. Each generation, each decade that passes, more and more are taking a useful part. I hope by the end of my lifetime the Cherokees will be in almost full control.

Silveri: How many... about how many Cherokee reside here?

Stephens: I believe the count is something like 66 hundred now - I may be wrong on that. But of that I would say the Cherokee blood is perhaps half or slightly less. White blood the other part. A little Negro blood. Now here ahead is an example: Lost Cove Campground is operated by a man named Arneach Newman, Arneach... who holds one of better paying staff jobs on the Indian Agency. And as you see he's used good sense in making a campground. And he has a name which was probably originally something like Aneichi, just a slight change. And the Cherokees build very well - they build brick houses. Probably because the home finance lending system..

Stephens: Beginning:

Built on good urban housing standards	federal pattern	build lasting investment	Wide variety in their
knowledge of caring for property	others slipshod.		

Just dedicated a new Cherokee Heritage Museum

Collection started by David S. Colburn

End:

D. Hiden Ramsey

Stephens: Three or four brothers, but he was the brilliant one. A man down at Old Fort said, "We saw he was so bright we got him into college."

Later he went into the afternoon newspaper

carried through with that

retiring a little earlier than he might have otherwise

Served on many public boards

and the Asheville

UNCA library named D. Hiden Ramsey

honorary doctorate from Chapel Hill

Glen Tucker recommended

citation for "Interpreting the Life of the Mountains and the People"

Twentieth year of the press

Conservation work

End:

### **Tape III, Side 1**

I was on the board of the Cherokee Historical Association.

### **Tape III, Side 2**

Sondley Collection

Civil War

I wanted to find out if you had

At that time I was engaged in the Citizens Committee for Better Schools.

Sanford's whole philosophy was built on the Scottish belief that education is where you start.

I did know Sanford quite well and was of some help to him

Appointment. I don't believe it's well to mention it.

Terry Sanford

such an outstanding record served the state far better than I could have in it.

Silveri:

Stephens: He drove through the legislation (quite unpopular really) necessary to pull the schools out of their precarious situation.

Frank Porter Graham

Weldon Weir

Did you know Jesse James Bailey?

Through the Bascom Lunsford connection.

He was as you've observed really....

Tape ends.