

Robert & Louise Branson

Side 1:

[9] Louise said that at first it was scary being married to a policeman but it got easier with time. She went to Claxton School, David Millard and Lee Edwards.

[21] She worked at Bon Marché and moved with them when they went to Asheville Mall. Meyers/Arnold bought the store, changed it and then it was bought by Uptons (see enclosure). She said the store was beautiful and carried good merchandise. She was cashier for 18 years and then went on the floor to sell.

[41] She didn't want to discuss it but indicated the working conditions were bad.

[45] Today the companies are pushing merchandise, however some stores still give personal service. He knows Red Hoyle and said his son is running the stationery store now (see Hoyle tape). He knows Webb Ellis and Charles Dermid swore him in (see write-up following Dermid's death). [Red Hoyle, Webb Ellis, Charles Dermid]

[58] He was born in 1925. His father sold insurance and moved to various areas in the city. He had to go to the schools in his district so attended 11 in all. He graduated from Lee Edwards along with Justice who was famous but never weighed more than 160 lbs. (UNCA gym named for him - see Ted Carter and Bob Terrell tapes) [Charlie "ChooChoo" Justice]

[77] He graduated from High School in '43 and went into the Army. Charlie went into Navy a little earlier, but he wanted his "little piece of paper" (for graduating).

[85] He found all the schools he attended pretty much the same. They all were divided into A and B sections.

[98] Always liked to draw and said his 4th grade teacher liked him to do class projects for her and kept him back 1/2 grade to keep him doing it for her. He "just quit." "If you're good at something, a lot of times it's a fault." He was called on to do diagrams in the police force.

[103] He was sworn in in South Carolina. He was 5'5" weighing 111 lb. and went to South Pacific in the only division with a name rather than a number. "America I" - one of the first outfits to land in Japan after the A-bomb. The whole division came home in 1945.

[151] He had no idea of what he wanted to do when he got out.

[153] Louise didn't meet him until 1948. She didn't know much about the war or the Depression. They had enough to eat and a place to live.

[171] He was 18 when he went into service but "grew up real fast." He remembers the Depression. There were no jobs. He took his little red wagon and went to the commodity distribution center which was in the basement of the old jail (building no longer there) on

Marjorie Street. People didn't have money for insurance. The city was still in the Depression when the war broke out.

[196] When he returned after the war the girl he had been writing to was killed and all the girls he had known were married. Then he met Louise.

[205] She didn't date until she was 16 and met Robert at a party.

[211] He remembers floats being built on Valley Street (now South Charlotte where the Wolcott building is) for the Rhododendron parades. The last parade was a carnival. There were parades every day. He remembers the goat pulling Harmon's brother's cart (see Harmon Lee tape). His father was working at the Citizen-Times, "and their float, as far as I've been told, was a fellow standing next to an outhouse and on the side of the float was a sign saying, 'why use corn cobs, take the Citizen-Times.'" He was in a couple of parades. [Harmon Lee]

[236] His father had part of the city for delivery. He did some himself and the children threw from the running board. The pay was 20 cents a week for delivery and if the paper wasn't placed just right it was sent by Western Union for \$1.

[250] In high school he had enough credits so he could get out at 1 o'clock and work at the Plaza Theater (this was under a program called Diversified Occupation. He knew Roy Gibbs - see his tape). Louise worked in the box office. [Roy Gibbs]

[260] He worked at the Plaza until 1 am, got a sandwich at the cafe on the corner of Ashland and Patton, ran home to sleep, got up to deliver papers, freshen up and go to school. [Lee Stalling, Carl R. Bamford]

[270] Dress clothes were required for school. The last grade was the 11th and he feels that the 12th would have been a wonderful time. By finishing younger one could go to college younger.

[299] A Bible class, for which one got a credit, was taught by the wife of the Kenilworth pastor. (Rev. Paul Gresham) Always thought that without some kind of religion we would be living in a jungle. His grandfather, born in Madison County, was a postmaster, school teacher, and a Baptist preacher. His father said, "Everybody's trying to go to heaven, they just go about it in a different way." When he was transferred in the insurance company they went to whatever church was the closest, though they were Baptists. [Cora Gresham (Mrs. Paul)]

[312] One never jumped in the car to go anyplace. There was a corner grocery store and the pharmacy was close. There was a street car for going into town. He was born in West Asheville.

[325] West Asheville was an incorporated town. It got into trouble over a bond issue to improve the sewer system and asked to be annexed by the city of Asheville. Kenilworth was a town of its own (see Chiles tape). The city limits ended at the tunnel and Wolsey Dip. They had extended north but not south or east (Oakley or anything east of the tunnel) but north and part of the south was in. Shortly before his time the city ended at Victoria Road and Biltmore Ave.

[345] Bob was raised in Cullowhee and writes about old times in Asheville. [Bob Terrell]

[350] As a child his mother would fix a lunch and he would walk from Highland Street to the top of the mountains - nobody would bother them. Today a mother wouldn't let her child do that.

[365] They were engaged two years and he was going to Blanton's Business College and working part time at Sears (see enclosure). A friend talked him into making an application to the police. He told Louise that if they called him they could set a date - they did and they were married March 23, 1952.

[386] For the first 6 months he worked shifts, and knowing he didn't drink, he was put with every drinking officer they had. This was the only training he had. Real training didn't come in until 1972 (see Best tape). [Capt. Brownley, Capt. John Best]

[407] Chief Enloe had been killed in a car accident in Nov. 1951 and they didn't have a chief. Dermid was Director of Public Safety and swore him in in Weir's office. Weir put his hand on his shoulder and said, "Now, son, you're a first class SOB." [Chief Harold C. Enloe, Charles Dermid, Weldon Weir]

[416] Uniforms were hand-me-downs and officers bought leather goods and weapons (all this is finished now). The merchants were good to the police giving discounts, theatre passes. The S&W let them have diners and there was no bus charge. There were 7 officers on the street. There were no shopping centers at that time. They got paid \$207 a month (paid twice a month).

[445] Both he and Louise knew the people - he on the street and she in the store with her own clientele.

[457] A merchant, seeing him in loafers on a cold day took him to the back of the store and gave him boots (Emporium - 54 N. Lexington). [Isadore Goldstein]

[472] There were many deductions from his salary - state tax, income tax, hospitalization and pension. No social security at that time.

[477] They had a union in 1952 and he was secretary/ treasurer for two years. The city manager (Weir) didn't want a union. They went to Raleigh and police departments cannot have a union in NC (see Laura Gordon tape). They had a nice club house on Avery Creek and had to disband the union so organized the Fraternal Order of Police and the lodge was transferred to the F.O.P. which is like any other civic club. [Weldon Weir, Laura Gordon]

[506] The Fraternal Orders could not arbitrate. They were #1 in N.C. and there are about 79 in N.C. now (see enclosure). They help children and function as a civic club. When the law was passed outlawing police unionization no other union came to their defense. The fire department does have a union and the letter carriers have an association. The Oath of the Police Officers says they will not strike.

[580] During the first 6 months in the service, while in training, he went with another officer to a house where a bullet had gone through a window. His captain asked him for a report - he said he was still in training and assumed his superiors had put in the report. He was told, "Don't you know that man can't write?" He decided that if you are going to do something you had better do it from the inside - so he stayed. The improvement in the department today is in better personnel. After one year and 3 months he was asked if he wanted to go on the traffic squad and he stayed on traffic for 20 years to the day. [Chief Claude Waddell Jr.]

Side 2:

He was on traffic for 20 years. The first of June 1973 he was promoted to Lieutenant and in 1974 made Captain.

[2/7] He was on the interview committee when the first female was hired. She was good and is still there. [Beverly Lee]

[2/14] He remembers one male applicant who, when asked why he applied, said that his wife told him to get out and get a job - he is still there.

[2/24] When he first went on there was a 3x5 form for 25 citations with an original and a copy. It was 2 months before he was told how to fill it out. When he was training with another officer it was so quiet that after midnight he had his own paper route, delivered milk and had a taxi service. There were no convenience stores, beer time was 11 pm and there wasn't anything going on.

[2/34] The cars had numbers and areas to cover #2 downtown, # 3 north, #5 south, # 4 west end.

[2/44] He was made captain in 1974, had a postal job and was always in a vehicle. In his group - 28 total - there was one lieutenant at the desk, a 1st sergeant for relief and the rest were patrolmen. He arranged days off and vacations by seniority. He always had 18 or 19 men with him every night, today they do well to have 10. Three shifts (7-3, 3-11, 11-7) which rotated monthly. There were 3 squads - he was in charge of one.

[2/71] Steak and Ale robbed, Rector the dispatcher, got the call and while information was being given he sent officers after 2 suspects. They hit a dip, the hood flew up but they pursued on foot and got both of them. [Charlie Rector]

[2/93] There was training at the Police Club at the airport and classes at A-B Tech (see Harvey Haynes). He was like "one of the guys" and likes the word "supervisor" not "boss".

[2/111] Louise called Branson and the two on crime prevention with him, "the Three Musketeers." They said, "The captain (Branson) never loses his cool." She shows photos (plaque on the wall by Louise). [Walt Masters, Woodie Allen]

[2/128] When Hall retired he wanted a chief chosen from the inside group - others, because they felt they had gone as far as they could, wanted someone from the outside. Tucker, knowing he

didn't like the idea of an outsider, wouldn't interview him for the position (which he wanted). Now the chiefs are chosen from the ranks. [Chief Joseph Candey Hall (always referred to as J.C. Hall) Chief Melvin Tucker]

[2/150] In his job he was responsible for the record room personnel, the property room, crime prevention, animal control, parking tickets and communication. Each group went on shifts except for personnel and property.

[2/168] Crossing guards are hired under contract with a security company.

[2/173] There are three trucks with cages for Animal Control, which is responsible for any animal except wild life.

[2/192] Before traffic engineers were hired, he drew up diagrams for the city and named some alleys.

[2/206] He and Burton, who supplied draperies for the Langren Hotel from the Bon Marché, were talking at Eckerd's (the "Liars Club" at the lunch counter) today. They thought it was a pretty hotel which was taken down to build a garage for the Northwestern Bank (now BB&T) (see Gibbs and Booker T. Sherrill tapes). It was so well built explosives had to be used to demolish it. [W. C. Burton]

[2/221] He loved old Pack Square and names the shops that were on the side now occupied by the Biltmore Building: Drug store [1938 Asheville City Directory: Moneyham's Drug Store, 2 Pack Square N. ; 1947 Asheville City Directory: Barefoot's Drug Store, 2 Pack Square N. ; 1955 Asheville City Directory: Barefoot and Tatum Drugs, Inc.], Gordon Jewelry store [1947 Asheville City Directory: Gordon's Jewelers, 4 Pack Square N.], Hancock restaurant [1955 Asheville City Directory, 8 Pack Square N.], Peterson's restaurant [1947 Asheville City Directory: Peterson's Grill, 10 Pack Square N.], Asheville Fish Co. [1938 Asheville City Directory: Asheville Fish Co., 14 Pack Square N.], a candy store [1938 Asheville City Directory: The Nut Shop(?), 8 Pack Square N.], Hanser's Drug store [22 Pack Square N.: Johnson Drug Co. (ACD 1945), Pack Radford Drug Co. (ACD 1951) Pack Square Pharmacy (ACD 1955)] and Quality Bakery [1938 Asheville City Directory: Quality Bakery, 12 Pack Square N.]. There were shops underneath on the College Street side. [George Cecil]

[2/239] He often went with his father on Saturday morning to his office on Church and Patton to go over books. Then they would go to his uncle's shop - he was the mechanic for all the slot machines in Western NC. He knew, when told to "go in the back and play" that the two men (who never drank in front of the kids) were going to have a little drink. Slot machines were "under cover" but the "numbers" were openly sold. There isn't much money in "numbers" now. Alcohol came from Madison and especially Yancey County.

[2/265] Johnson learned to drive selling liquor. He owned Holly Farms (in Yancey County) at one time (see enclosure). [Junior Johnson]

[2/267] Bailey was first cousin of his grandfather who was a Democrat from Marshall. The Baileys were Republicans. When the Republicans took over Madison County his grandfather had to leave. (for Bailey see Sluder and Sorrells). [Jesse James Bailey]

[2/275] One half of Madison County was Union during the Civil War.

[2/282] His family members were wanderers. Most are educators, many have gone west.

[2/296] The police department, as the city was redeveloped, reassigned patrols. The blacks moved into Flint Street and the Montford area. There weren't any housing projects when he joined the force. Hill Street (see Sherrill) was a pretty little street. A hill has been leveled to create Hillcrest. Pisgah View was built before this, then Lee Walker Heights (see Minnie Jones and Dorothy Jackson) and then Erskine, off Livingston. The town has changed.

[2/328] The police force now has new cars, new weapons, and a communication system - a hand-held radio used as a phone. One driver per car with one or two backups. He had two for a car.

[2/351] The department has grown as the city has grown - it should be 1 for every 500 but they never get there. Under him all officers were in cars. Now there are 3 walking and one on horseback. Two officers handle dogs. There is a larger juvenile and identification department. Detectives only work one shift now.

[2/383] There were drugs in his time (mostly yellow jackets kept in match boxes), but there is more problem today with speed and ice (derived from cocaine). Alcohol was, and still is the big problem - especially in domestic arguments. In the 50's returning service men, who became alcoholics, were real mean. Bill could undress two officers when he was drunk and it took four to get him to jail. He hung around N. Lexington. [Bill Parker]

[2/419] Until 1970 they had their own police jail and court in the police department. The Sheriff is a good friend of his and he will probably visit the new jail (see enclosure).

[2/430] They both worked on the election for the new sheriff who was first a patrolman and then a detective. He is well experienced in all aspects. [Bobby Medford]

[2/448] Long, being in Highway Patrol didn't know anything about investigations. They get good training but the police have to have background in everything, even juvenile. [Charlie Long]

[2/464] Police officers have the authority to go one mile beyond the city limits but if they are in "hot pursuit" and have the car in view, can go across the US.

[2/473] Training for police and sheriff departments are different. Sheriff Deputies don't handle accident, Highway Patrol does. The Sheriff is in charge of the jail, courts and serving civil papers. The city is reimbursed for costs incurred on the part of the county - i.e., court costs, patrolling. [Thomas Morrissey]

[2/491] Prisoners are kept on the 15th and 16th floor of the Court House. Before 1970 city and county prisoners were separate. The police had its own court and judge (who was blind). When the new jail opens, all prisoners will be sent there and held for 30-90 days, at which time they will go to Craggy or Raleigh (clarified by phone).

[2/527] Two officers brought Davis into the breathalyzer room for drunk driving. They didn't know he was wanted for highway robbery. He grabbed a gun, shot and killed both of them. May found the bodies. He became an alcoholic and had to be fired. Davis was caught the next day. [Davis, Sgt. Orleage, Patrolman Knipe, Highway Patrolman May]

Re: worry

[2/583] Louise said that after several years "you put it on the back burner."

[2/598] He always laughed about a lot of things. "If you don't laugh, you cry."