

John Bridges

Side 1:

[1] John said he "grew up in the Pack Memorial Library" and for 29 years was a Librarian. He describes the Alexandrian frieze, the multi-purpose room, programs for children, concerts, meetings and lectures. The library is heavily used and in last part of his career he urged obtaining additional space. [Bertel Thorwaldsen (Danish neoclassic sculptor)]

[44] He attended Asheville-Biltmore Junior College (working during that time as a page at Pack Library) and graduated from UNC at Chapel Hill. He obtained a masters in Theater and went to New York. He has had all experiences in the arts and sang professionally. In 1956 he came back to Asheville and joined the staff in the Pack Library where he developed programs for children, obtained important films, gave programs on art and for years has given pre-concert programs called "Tea and Symphony" - which he started and still continues. He correlated his program "see a film, read a book" (for K-2 students) with the public schools and traveled all over Buncombe County giving each school six programs in a school year (see enclosure). [Dr. William Highsmith]

[135] The Junior League started a project, using copies of masterpieces chosen by him, which it purchased for use in the schools and for loan from the library on a three-week basis. He gave orientation lecture to the volunteers.

[166] In the Juvenile Evaluation Center - for adolescents in trouble with the law - he gave a 6-7 week series of slide shows. The students were encouraged to tell what they "saw" - not what they "should see." This was a refreshing experience and one youth told him that he had planned to escape but didn't want to miss the sessions!

[197] When the PBS dramatizations of book classics came out he was gratified to see that there was a run on the books that would augment the subject. He feels that tapes and video belong in a library.

[214] The Friends of the Library, started under the auspices of the AAUW, has supplemented the library budget for over 40 years.

[247] There was a division of opinion as to where the new library should be located. It is located where there is heavy foot traffic and was the first institution to go to the end of Haywood Street - and encouraged the growth of several book stores in that area. The Library was paid for before the first spade of dirt turned - through revenue sharing. The book budget is higher and parking accessible.

[314] After he went to N.Y. he felt Asheville to be quaint and charming on his visits to his mother. He remembers horse troughs, street cars (children could clang the bell) that went through the Highland Hospital area to the French Broad River, Confederate Veterans who would parade and the Dew Drop Inn. [Mitzi Tessier]

[394] The freeway cut off part of the city and the 30 or 40 street cars came to an end. Busses don't travel the same areas.

[413] He has read about the flat-bottomed pleasure boat ["Before my time," he says] on the French Broad which ran, for a short time, to Brevard.

[434] He marched in the parades in a Rhododendron Festival [early 1040's] and describes the Royal Brigade of Guards, the big ball and the debutant party. There was a pageant in the old McCormick field. The war killed this and times changed.

[460] Many of the boarding houses of the tuberculosis area are now doctor's offices.

[491] He met Wolfe's mother and sister and his mother and Mabel were in the same circle of the First Presbyterian Church. The minister thought highly of Wolfe. All fiction writers use material they know about. [Mabel Wolfe Wheaton, Fred Wolfe, Sherwood Anderson]

Side 2:

[2/11] He reviews the history of early theater in the city - first a room in the court house for a one-man show, a building for opera and other stage presentations on Patton Ave, a succession of auditoria on the site of the Civic Center. At the age of two, his mother took him to a matinee as she couldn't find anyone to stay with him. He remembers the lights and hall and was "marked for life." The Civic Auditorium was built by WPA in 1939 and concerts, ice shows, basketball and symphonies were held here. A new floor had to be built (see George Coggins tape). The Asheville Community concerts no longer need advertising. [John Bridges correction, 2002: "This is no longer the case."] He sold student tickets while attending school - now it is oversold (see Coggins). [John Bridges correction, 2002: "This is no longer the case."] [Mrs. O. C. Hamilton, John Charles Thomas]

[2/78] Asheville Community Theatre has spawned many little theaters and is so popular that it is now possible to sell individual tickets as many subscriptions are sold (see enclosure).

[2/104] Chamber music, administered by volunteers, performed by world-class professionals, has performed in many places - now the Unitarian Church. [Joseph W. Vandewart]

[2/120] The Asheville Symphony goes back to the 20's. After the Depression it had to start again (see enclosure). [Helen Sorton, Robert Hart Baker]

[2/138] The Art Museum has grown slowly because, until it moved to Pack Place, it had no real home. Its success is a matter of the personalities and numbers of people involved (see other tapes on subject). [Gay Green]

[2/170] Because of the increasing age of the population, due to influx of retirees, the stage door is no longer stormed by autograph seekers following performances. This is not an isolated problem. Due to our technical inventions the concert as we knew it is over. There is a broadened demand for entertainment but this is being supplied by transistors, VCRs and TV.

[John Bridges addition, 2002: "And CD's"] With little or no training a performer can make three times the money singing into a mike. The commercial aspect is of more concern than "art." People are more alienated - they don't dance together. [Glen Gould]

[2/264] During the Depression people amused and entertained themselves. They could not rush off to college - they stayed here and organizations grew. The effect of the Depression was more devastating in financial loss per capita in Asheville than any other part of the country. The mindset continues. People in power didn't go to college.

[2/306] He hopes to see more programs similar to College for Seniors. The retirees are a good resource for the city.

[2/342] He feels that the studies (2010 and Model City) are forward thinking. UNCA is a great "shot in the arm" and he is very optimistic about the future.