

Robert and Barbara Buchanan

Side 1:

[6] Barbara said that her mother was the first woman to run a service station, pumped gas and had men working for her (see photo Xerox). This was at the corner of Biltmore and Short Coxe. [Eloise Elizabeth Patterson Monteath]

[20] Bob was born in Asheville, went to David Millard and Lee Edwards and, in order to get technical training, went to Burlington, NC. He started work at the Three Mountaineers running wood lathes and worked for Fishburn Equipment Company which made tobacco presses and shipped all over the world.

[54] In working with cars, Bob said that cars are now run by computers - little sensors with their "own brains" and cars "almost drive themselves." Mechanics have to go to school (A-B Tech) two weeks twice a year. If you don't, you fall behind and in two years will be "out of the ball park." There is little a person can do on their own. If battery is improperly replaced an airbag could come out and cost a great deal of damage.

[119] Barbara's father used to have school kids working around the shop. There was one man hired for filling cars with gas, one for cleaning windows, one vacuuming and a car could get the "once over in 4-5 minutes." A car, with 6 men washing it, cost \$1.25 and over a hundred cars were manually washed in a busy day. Her father took water from the river to wash cars. [Robert Graham Monteath Jr.]

[141] Bob said that, when he started work there were probably 5 stations in Asheville that gave full service. The difference in gas price between full and self-service is 8 to 10 cents a gallon. Cars will average 15-22 miles on a gallon. There are still some old cars around that are well cared for. In the early 70's there was a "gas crunch" and it was rationed - the number of gallons and hours for pumping was limited.

[170] She said that competition has come from retail stores. Grocery and drug stores sell some auto lines, and sometimes the items are cheaper.

[181] Many of the stations have had to close, not only because of competition in merchandise but because of EPA ruling about ground contamination. Every 25th year tanks have to come out and be replaced. Some were found to have holes and it costs thousands of dollars to clean up the area. The tanks are 15-20 feet underground. New tanks are made of fiber glass or are put above ground.

[210] He is able to make a profit because his people specialized. He considers this a challenge and said that one must enjoy the job. Gas was never a money maker, just a calling card.

[234] Cars got better care when the stations offered full service because everything was checked - oil, fluid, air filters. That's why there are so many old cars around today.

[241] Monteath's had steady customers and kept in touch by reminding them when it was time to have an oil change. If cars run low on oil the engine freezes. He has 3 cars in the shop today for this reason. Young kids, working at Winn-Dixie or Burger King know what a car costs, have studied the manual and take time to check the oil and water. Older drivers either don't know, having relied on the service station in the past, or don't bother to take the trouble to check their car.

[310] At one time Monteath's had 4 stations. In July 1986 Gulf was sold to British Petroleum. They went to Texaco for the first time.

[340] A line is chosen because of its product line - not just gas - but oil, batteries, etc.

[350] She has done a little of everything in the station and kept the books when she was off from college. Her mother kept the books until they had a full-time bookkeeper. In the early 60's they bought a service station on Tunnel Road (see enclosed) and also had a truck rental.

[375] He said people have been trading with Monteath's for over 30 years. The company has earned the trust of the customers who bring their cars in for a brake job. Their car is tested for 15 miles before being turned back to them. Ladies who have lost their husbands just say, "Bobby, handle it, take care of it."

[403] Once in a while young men come in as trainees and kids come by and ask questions but the garage needs highly trained technicians. They make good money.

[450] She said that if they owned a service station today with fiberglass tanks in the ground they would still have to carry a half-million dollar policy against pollution.

[480] Car dealers can do the same kind of work Monteath's does but because of overhead it would cost more.

[485] They have a big library with the schematic diagrams for many makes and models. He has owned a motorcycle in the past but doesn't do anything with them in the shop. Doesn't have the parts.

[619] He occasionally works with racing cars. He explains how cars can be tested for problems.

Side 2:

Barbara lived down the street from St. Genevieve's and went to first grade there (for the school see Mother Potts and Sister Winters tapes). She attended Newton from 2nd to 4th (see enclosed). For her 5th and 6th grades she went to Plonk School (enclosed), to Biltmore for 7th and 8th, then back to Plonk where she graduated. She graduated from Sacred Heart near Belmont, NC and Charlotte, NC and then went to Blanton College (see Karpen tape for Blanton) [Mother Mann (nun)]

[2/24] She compares the city school experience with Plonk. In Biltmore she had Home Economics. The philosophy at Plonk was ahead of its time. The training for mind and body was very strict and teachers were dedicated. One teacher wrote a book about the Vance Monument. She, as have many other interviewees, mentions Mrs. Snowden from Newton. [Laura and Lillian Plonk, Dr. Cordelia Camp, Mable Snowden]

[2/54] Plonk school was non-denominational but the Bible was studied and at chapel every Monday and Friday ministers and missionaries would come to talk. Graham's daughter went there. Seven students graduated with her in the class of 1963 - two of them from Asheville. Boarders stayed with the Plonks. Her brother, who is younger, stayed there after she left. She thinks the school closed in 1965. She sees one person who was from the school (picture in clipping 12/10/61). [Billy Graham, Mahala Ernest]

[2/78] Asheville Community Theatre (ACT) developed out of the school. Hamilton taught in the college. (It was a liberal arts 4-year co-educational college. There is a church in the building now.) Every year a three-day production of the Christmas Carol, with costumes from New York and demand attendance of the parents. The school was financed by Plonk family funds (she thinks). A niece lives in King's Mountain, NC (she doesn't know married name). [Jim Hamilton, Nancy Plonk]

[2/107] She then graduated from Sacred Heart College and Blanton's Junior College where she learned and used bookkeeping.

[2/115] Her father had a Gulf station on College Street. This was her first job. The station closed in 1966 or 1967 because the Radisson Hotel was being constructed.

[2/121] Urban development did not affect the family business but, when the Interstate went through many blacks were forced to relocate (see Booker T. Sherrill tape). Her grandmother, who lived at the base of Sunset Mountain in a house her father built, had to move when the cut went through the mountain.

[2/144] Monteath's business was seriously affected by the cut - 50% loss in sales as 30,000 people a day went through. However, after people had tried it, customers came back and go on Tunnel Road for shopping.

[2/164] Before the cut, cars were bumper to bumper and Monteath's was just beyond on the left (see Xerox) from 1973-86 (Rigatoni's now).

[2/181] They were on Patton Ave when Westgate went in around 1969. It was the place to go. The family shopped there and in town. She doesn't think that Westgate hurt Asheville financially but the concept of shopping any place other than town led to other changes (see George Coggins tape). The Asheville Mall did hurt the center of the city.

[2/190] They still had the location at Patton and Ashland that her father built but now it is just a garage (see photo). The First Citizens Bank took down the Gulf part for their building. The property belongs to her sister and her husband but is run by their son, her nephew. For 5 or 6

years her sister and her husband had a Gulf station in West Asheville but he didn't like it and went back to the railroad until retiring. [Richard and Ann Hyatt, Robert Hyatt]

[2/211] His father and grandfather worked on the railroad. His grandfather carried water for the men laying track in the 1900's. His father believed that all one ever did was eat, sleep and work. He was with the Southern Railroad 52 years. [William Monroe Buchanan (wife Mildred)]

[2/228] Norfolk Southern "bought jobs out" to get people to take early retirement. Interstate ran the trains and planes out. The trains are now only used for hauling goods. (see Lucius "Craggy" Ingle tape)

[2/241] Her father started Bob out selling tractor trailer tires. He was on the road, even into Kentucky, until the 1970's. He ran into so many different people. Truckers live in a different world. She was with him in a wrecker, they were bringing a tractor into a city and bringing another one back, when they realized they were lost. A police car came to help them, was then called to chase a drunk driver, had to drop them off and come back to get them and help them find their way. She was pregnant with their son. [Robert Buchanan]

[2/270] Before the Interstate, all traffic had to come through Asheville. Now cars and trucks can bypass the city.

[2/295] The tunnel was built in 1929. Mrs. Cathy's father helped build the tunnel and so did Barbara's great grandfather who specialized in tunnels and built one in Old Fort. He died before she was born. Someone was killed during the construction of the tunnel. There is a plaque on the city side. Controversy regarding the open cut went on for years. (see Bob and Dorothy Hussey tape)

[2/325] She is still doing bookwork for the business and taking care of her 10-month old grandson "Robbie." There are 6 Roberts - her grandfather, father, husband, nephew, brother, son, and grandson (she said 5, then 6, I count 7!) Their son married to Elizabeth. They live in Haw Creek, he is working full time at Thomas and Howard (Ingles warehouse) and going part time UNCA studying journalism. [Robert Lee Buchanan, Robert Charles Buchanan, Elizabeth Buchanan]

[2/361] They have been married since 1967 and the next year they went into business on their own. She has always helped out with the bookwork.

[2/368] The computer has taken over and makes work much easier. She learned to run it on her own and is getting a computer that will not only produce bills in detail but be able to show the problem with the car, time it takes to fix, parts needed, time to replace and costs. This will eliminate all the books. Once it is established it will not only eliminate trouble but it will save money.

[2/404] More and more people are using computers like theirs. They can afford to hire another person to work. One computer can service 12 mechanics. This is why it is necessary to hire people with specialized training.

[2/425] In the past they had full and self service and paid minimum wage plus a commission. They had 3-5 men out front.

[2/454] It would be awfully hard living on minimum wage. Her father said, "It's not so much what you make as how you save it." It seems as though Asheville has always had people on minimum wages and it stays the same. The jobs brought in by tourists are in the minimum wage category.

[2/490] It would not have been feasible to stay on Patton Ave as a full service station. Gulf knew what it was doing when that part of the property was sold. They are in a different field now. They started as a service station but now are a garage.

[2/523] They went with the Monteath name because people always knew when anything went wrong to call Monteath's. Buchanan was new to them. In 1984 they incorporated as "Monteath Gulf Inc." He has been on his own since 1968 and now has his own reputation. She is proud of him.