

George Coggins

Tape I, Side 1:

[1] Born at Bee Tree (18 miles away). His father was star pitcher at Wake Forest College, had 1,000 acres of land and known as the "Mayor." He was second of 9 children. Went to Swannanoa High School and graduated in 1929 from Chapel Hill where he majored in journalism, banking and commerce. He was married to a "lady with Coxe children" (not his present wife). [Anita R. Coxe, widow of Tench F. [?] Coxe, children Mary Coxe and Francis Coxe]

[35] While possum hunting he discovered vermiculite and later built a plant to process the material. [Henry Irven Gaines, Lockwood Perry]

[45] Hand-made bricks from the Coggins-Orr Brick Company were found in a house being dismantled. He built his fireplace and one wall from this (photo). [Coggins-Orr Brick yard]

[62] His (great grandfather?) grandfather (through mother, a Burton) owned half of Asheville, John Craig the other half. (See side one of tape 2 for clarification) [John Burton, John Coggins, John Craig]

[90] Grandfather came to this area, following the treaty of Paris which made NC titles secure, because land was cheap. [Forster A. Sondley]

[107] He tells tales of drovers and inns for their needs. Log roads and then trains changed the method of getting animals (especially turkeys - there are turkey tracks in his bricks) through the area. [James McClure Clarke]

[146] He, at the age of 8, drove his car to the Riverside Park where his father played baseball. His uncle was the police chief and stopped him because of his age. When he learned he had driven from Bee Tree he laughed and said to keep on going. There were no age restrictions on driving. [Henry Bartlett]

[168] He drove across the first concrete road in the city when it was still wet. He didn't know why it felt so mushy. He describes the route of the seven trolley lines. One went beyond Weaverville to the Dula Springs Inn (see tapes by Honeycutt, Sluder, and McMillen) and went behind his present house to Craggy Gardens. The power plants were on the river. [Reed, Rex Howland, Stanley Howland]

[213] Landing fields in Asheville are discussed first on French Broad near Biltmore Estate, then near Warren Wilson College. Westall built a strip on Amboy Road. Airport built on Sweeten Creek Road. [William Davidson, Richmond Bartlett, Henry Westall, Dr. Owens]

[269] He and his father ("Mayor" of Bee Tree) were invited to fly in Ford Tri-motor to tour over area. His first flight. [Henry Allen Coggins]

[291] His father started the first Asheville baseball team. When the city municipal golf course was being dedicated he was invited to play. He used his ball and bat and went farther than Cathey. [Sam Cathey]

[321] His father was chairman of the draft board W.W. I, on the Tax Board, was in timber business, live stock, farming and saw mills.

[331] He came to Asheville because of the Depression. Got a job on a construction crew, was taunted as a college boy by the foreman, struck him on the chin and knocking him into wet concrete, was fired. He went by bus to the city and cleaned up in the Moore clothing store. Ended up selling clothes to son of Langren Hotel owner, was hired and worked there on and off 10 years. [Charley Owens, M.V. Moore, Lulu Lang]

[436] He roomed with his uncle, the "famous moonshine sheriff." [Sam Coggins]

[457] Describes the city before, during and after the real estate boom.

[485] Describes Grove Arcade. He had an office in the building and considered buying it. Jackson owned it - developed the Arcade and Kimberly section. [L. B. Jackson]

[547] Tourism was the biggest "industry" in the city. He became president of "Welcome to Asheville" and describes motorcades to Florida with the mayor, city commissioner, fire chief and sheriff.

Tape I, Side 2:

[2/2] Young business men were called together to plan to develop tourist trade. He was still working at Moore's [M. V. Moore & Co.]. He set up an office in the Arcade and, by advertising developed a membership of 1,000 (Hotels, boarding houses, service groups, restaurants). [Philip Wolcott, Cecil Pless, Harry Mathews]

[2/52] The Chamber of Commerce, which had been fearful that tourist trade would take away from business being attracted, had a membership of only 50. His group was asked to merge. [Nathaniel (Nat) W. Gennett]

[2/68] He felt that a training school should be started to teach hotel management and the first school of this sort in the state was started. It developed into A-B Tech. A-B Tech is state-funded. This is to keep it out of local political control. [Governor Bob Scott]

[2/127] Asheville Civic Music Association became well established when a representative of the NBC radio station in Chicago helped the local music enthusiasts organize and build an audience. He was secretary and the group was incorporated. The following year the group doubled and was too large for any facility. He asked the city to build an auditorium. [Bill Zimmerman, Bob Cochran, Grace Potter Carroll, Mrs. Tench Coxe, Mrs. Junius Adams, Mrs. Arthur Ambler, Mrs. Herbert Pinckney, Thomas Edison, Mrs. Sherman, Eugene Ormandy]

[2/211] He was told by the city administration that a convention hall was needed and that a Federal loan had been applied for. He found that the application did not go to the proper department and went to Washington to see Reynolds. Reynolds called the President and was told that he could have 4-5 times what had been asked for (see Xerox of newspaper write-up). Plans for the building were changed and a basketball court was put on the first floor - this necessitated having a flat floor and removable chairs. Later it was redesigned. [Senator Robert R. Reynolds, Franklin Roosevelt, Douglas Ellington, Mrs. Gudger]

[2/291] The auditorium, after many delays, was redesigned so that it is acoustically correct. [Harold Burris-Meyer, Walter McCrary, David Morgan, Lee Ellis, Charlie Wallace]

[2/338] There was conflict between the people who wanted the space for sports and those who wanted music. The merchants wanted everything down town. [J. Y. Jordan, Gudger, Ellington]

[2/364] The parking deck helped but there is too much going on in the area at the same time. [Weldon Weir]

[2/400] The downtown is so crowded that it started to collapse.

[2/411] He built the first shopping center in the South with a department store - Westgate. He had been given a ticket for parking some years before and told the officer that in 5 years he wouldn't need a parking space - that he had the land.

[2/443] He was in the mining business and the Pentagon used his vermiculite one foot thick on the roof as a protection against possible firebombs.

[2/458] The Civic Music Association is well-managed and very successful. Board members are prominent citizens. The money is raised before programs planned and artists charge from \$1,500 to \$20,000 or \$30,000. Individuals give extra concerts. The Coggins have given two. The National Concert Association, which took the place of NBC which went out of the business, buys artists in a group. [Yehudi Menuhin, Helen Jepson, Coe Glade, Lily Ponds, John Charles Thomas, Giovanni Martinelli]

Tape II, Side 1:

(Re Tape 1 - and enclosure - John Burton had a sister Sara Burton who married John Craig. John Craig had a daughter Jane. Jane Craig was Coggins' grandmother.)

[II/1/20] Cotton mills were at the edge of the French Broad River. He bought the land which he later developed into Westgate. [Caesar Cove]

[II/1/38] There is tremendous water power on the river and 7-8 power plants were built there. A pleasure boat ran up the river but went out of business with the flood. He bought land where it docked, near Smith's Bridge. [Smith, Craig, Burton]

[II/1/66] He elaborates on the development of Westgate from tape #1. He had retired from mining (sold to Chrysler and then to Grace Co.) and from selling his hair preparation Ban Dan (Banish Dandruff) for he could no longer get glycerin. He agreed to set a concrete and plaster plant for Englishman. He leased land for 50 years with 50 year renewal in his own name. The Lord died and the city would not cancel the lease. He traveled to see other malls and, with the advice of Lipinsky, he worked out a floor plan and sent out letters. He had leases before anything built. He got financing and had no competition for 10 years. He was the first merchant to run a tabloid. The mall was a tremendous success for all the stores. [Dr. Pinkney Herbert, Lord Braithwest, Louis Lipinsky, Richard L. ("Pokey") Coleman, Perry Alexander]

[II/1/338] The Asheville Mall developer was advised to have two department stores. He couldn't get Sears in Westgate because there wasn't enough land. [Richard L. Coleman]

[II/1/373] He got out when Biltmore Mall was opening. [George Cecil]

[II/1/382] Grace - off Merrimon - is a strip mall.

[II/1/414] The Mafia got A&P stock in a gambling game.

[II/1/420] West Asheville was not part of the city at the time he was developing Westgate. Because of city taxes the residents and store owners were against annexation.

[II/1/461] The city council stopped busses into West Asheville. The people protested and service was resumed.

[II/1/480] His secret of success is to contact the people who can help and advise. After his success with the music group he is "Mr. It" for getting things done.

[II/1/522] The American Kennel Club asked him for help. He became President, developed by-laws and incorporated. He is asked by everyone to straighten them out.

[II/1/556] The Asheville Community Theater (ACT) ran a deficit every year. He set up a membership that pays in advance and conducted their first campaign.

[II/1/589] He had been professionally trained by the Vice President of NBC to run campaigns and has used the same technique in all campaigns. (see tape 1) [Betty Posey]

Tape II, Side 2:

[II/2/1] Techniques learned in money raising, setting up an organization, getting public support, obtaining quarters and influencing the state are discussed. [Lily Pons]

[II/2/20] He was asked by the governor to coordinate the Arts program of the WPA. [Reverend Charles Johnson]

[II/2/34] For the NC Symphony orchestra he set up a special train to Greensboro which would be the headquarters. He worked with high school ballet groups, painting and graphic artists. [Thar Johnson, Cones, Lamar Stringfield, Joseph Denardo]

[II/2/75] With WWII there was no further possibility to travel and the projects ended.

[II/2/82] He was involved early in the Museum of Art. A wing of the City Hall was used for display. Margo was second president of the Auxiliary (called the Muses at the time) [Margo Coggins]

[II/2/104] In the 40's he had wanted the city to get WPA funds and develop Pack Place. In time it will be an asset to the community. [Roger McGuire]

[II/2/121] He discusses the Civic Center vs. Coliseum concept. Said the bonds were raised for one purpose and used for another. It was taken to court but lost.

[II/2/134] The newspaper supported him (Citizen and Times which merged). [Webb family, George Stephens]

[II/2/151] He was appointed by the City Council to be chairman of the Smoke Abatement Commission. As secretary of Civitan he asked a St. Louis smoke engineer to address the group. The big, established coal dealers, after hearing this talk, agreed not to order any more bituminous coal (Pres. of Owens Blanket, American Enka and CPL). [Jack Woodcock]

[II/2/188] A black doctor talked to his Civitan group and the city manager ordered that all black and white signs in public facilities be quietly taken down. This was around 1947 before the integration law - there were no incidents.

[II/2/224] He believes that the cocaine traffic is controlled by the police department and sheriff department. "If you have crime in a community, go to the source - the police department and sheriff's department."

[II/2/237] He tells about a woman who owned the Sky Club and was serving liquor when the state was dry. She was arrested and threatened to divulge the crookedness of the police and sheriff departments and tell how much she paid for protection. She was released.

[II/2/250] A man who was running a betting operation threatened to name the people he paid off. He was released.

[II/2/279] Regarding a newspaper photo (enclosed 10/26/41), he said he was not accepted as a leader but asked to organize the High School Football League and make it pay. He did.

[II/2/292] The "good old boys" group is not as strong as it used to be. Green and Elias who owned the paper for a while covered up for the Champion Paper Company which was creating smog. ["Deacon" Green, Don S. Elias, John Shuford, Charles A. Webb]

[II/2/315] When he was chairman of the Smoke Abatement Commission he had the Surgeon General of the US talk to the Civitan Club and tell about the causes of smog and the health hazard. Parkinson disease has been linked to this, and the residue after the pulp has been boiled is dumped in the French Broad. He traces the route of the river which collects poisons as it goes to the sea. Smoke from the lime kiln contains 7 deadly poisons - it is a sulphite mill. The trees and little animals are being killed. Champion is the biggest depositor in the First Union and Wachovia banks. The banks had to get into politics. Ramsey tried to stop it. Green had the insurance for Champion. They formed a real city "ring" - and Champion is still polluting. They threatened to leave and city cooperated (or lose 2,000 jobs) He was told that the polluters organized the "Clean Air Society" to trick people to expose opposition. [Sam Bingham, Dan Torf, George McCleary, Don S. Elias, D. Hiden Ramsey, "Deacon" Gay Green]

[II/2/554] Enka was a problem up to a point. Vanderhaven worked with Coggins. Westall had been president of civic music but "hid the material" and Coggins got him to resign and put in Vanderhaven. [Stan Vanderhaven, Jack Westall]

(The pleasure boat on the French Broad was called the Mountain Lily. It sank... from Mitzi Tessier at a luncheon called "the Colonial Club" founded @1920.).