

Marie & Henry Colton

Side 1:

Clock ticking in background.

John Toms told me about her family history here. He is a friend of their daughter Sarah. [John Toms]

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[10] Her grandparents moved here from Charlotte, NC (see picture of her with grandmother). "Plantation memories" was written by a great aunt who grew up in Wilmington, NC. [John S. Watters, Kate Lord Watters, Miss Roberta Lord]

[16] She and her brother, the only grandchildren, came to Asheville to visit. There were always excursions in the car to the top of Beaucatcher Mountain. The tires always had punctures. She learned to swim at Recreation (Rec.) Park and enjoyed the zoo. [Jack Watters]

[25] She loved seeing Beaver Lake with the boats and people swimming. It was a wonderful approach to the city when the family drove in their model A or Model T car with isinglass windows, running boards and one or two spare tires.

[50] Henry tells about patching tires. Most roads were muddy and rutty. Concrete roads went through in the 20's.

[61] Marie went to town on street cars. Her grandparents built a house on Cumberland Ave. across from the park which had a large circular wading pool and swings. The women didn't drive. Her grandfather wore a tweed suit and hat. Every one wore a hat or cap. Her other grandmother was in mourning all of the time.

[81] Marie describes mourning customs. Her grandmother gave her some black jewelry, only to be worn when in mourning. Her maternal grandmother in Charlotte, NC wore full black the first year after her grandfather's death. In the summer she wore gray and lavender with a matching hat and veil. [Kate Lord Watters]

[89] Henry said some women dressed in mourning 30-40 years. Men wore a black band on the left sleeve of their coat for a short time.

[102] When her grandfather died her mother went in complete mourning for a year - stockings and shoes too. She was 5 at the time and did not go to the funeral. A wreath was attached to the front door.

[120] Henry said that in business a white wreath is still put on the door.

[124] Marie said the customs were carefully delineated. The households were subdued, the grieving did not go out socially, nor were they invited. As a child she wore a bonnet and in college at St. Mary, stockings, heels, hats and gloves were required.

[139] Marie describes the Grove Arcade during the Rhododendron Festival. The cars drove up the ramp to the top. he was too young to go to parties but in her teens, when she was visiting friends at Lake Lure she went to the auditorium (civic center) to hear a big band. The Royal Pines was an "in place" to go. (Enclosure - map) Social life revolved around her relatives or friends houses, playing bridge and checkers.

[166] He grew up in Nashville, TN. He heard about the land boom and thought Asheville the best-known small city. In 1943 he and Marie drove up to see her grandparents on Cumberland Ave. It was in November and, next to Nashville, it was the dirtiest city he had ever seen because of soot from the burning of soft coal (see George Coggins re coal and soot) In 1953, he being an independent insurance agent, [New England Mutual Life] and wanting to live in a larger city than Morganton, they moved to Asheville. They drove up Broadway which was dirty, nasty and full of old cars. Decision to widen Broadway and opposition to DOT plans has been going on for 40 years. (See enclosed and Mary Lloyd Frank, Betty Lawrence, Norma Price tapes) [Norma Price]

[212] Henry's great uncle wrote [Mountain Scenery](#) in 1859 (see enclosure, p.29). This is a travel book about WNC with chapters on Asheville and Hickory Nut Gap and Sherrill's Inn (see Elspeth and James Clarke tape). He became editor of the [Asheville Spectator](#) and wrote about the controversy regarding whether or not Mitchell went up the correct mountain. Clingman had a dome named for him. His uncle went on to Knoxville, Colton's Cliff is named for him. [Henry Colton, James Clarke, Dr. Elisha Mitchell, Thomas L. Clingman.]

[267] He said that the best way to get the story of the Sherrill's Inn was by reading [The Lord's Acre](#) by John Ager (see Clarke tape with Xerox of material). [Mitzi Tessier, John Parris, Katharine Shepard, Elspeth and James Clarke, Margaret Kimberly Carter]

[280] Their house was built by Thomas Kimberly (Marguerite Carter's uncle, see her tape), belonged to Dumont Clarke (Jamie Clarke's father), and was lived in for a long time by Chapman. They bought from Clarke (First name not in 1950 Directory. Listed as Dumont Clarke who was owner.) The lot was laid out in the original subdivision of the Kimberly farm. It is the Charlotte Street extension. In the 1890's this was the only house in the area. (Their Christmas card of the house in the snow is enclosed.) The boxwood was planted by Elspeth Clarke from Sherrill's Inn. For years she and "Uncle Koon" would drive in and dump chicken manure to fertilize them (see enclosed picture). They bought a piano from Elspeth (see photo with daughter Sarah Villeminot and granddaughter Florence Villeminot). [Dumont Clarke, Thomas Manly Kimberly, Chapman, Elspeth McClure Clarke, Sarah Villeminot, Florence Villeminot]

[325] Henry tells about Weir who was a political dictator until 1958. He was in control of everything, put good people in office who were above reproach but did just as he said (see Lou Harshaw - and many others tapes). For some reason he went away from Asheville - he left a vacuum and 32 candidates (15 Rep, 17 Dem) ran for office. [Weldon Weir]

[368] Henry didn't tell anyone except his family that he was running. He was known in the city through his business. He had 4 children in school, and had been active in civic and church groups. He was the least Party Democrat of the group. The others were more identified with the old party (see Barbara Keleher and Luke Atkinson tapes). There was much work to be done - Civic Center, airport, expressway - but the spade work had been done by the former councils. However he doesn't like dictatorship, even benevolent dictatorship. [Wayne Montgomery, Barbara Keleher, Robert Anderson, Bob Crouch, Ruben Daily, Weldon Weir]

[434] Big law suit held the center up for a while (see Coggins, Wood, and Michalove tapes). [George Coggins]

[439] Blomberg was one of the people who ran in the same election - he was a Democrat. He was not elected. He made the space available for the parking garage for the Civic Center. He didn't want to sell. He was an outstanding citizen and, had he not been Jewish, he would have been elected to council. [Harry Blomberg]

[461] Marie spent six summers in Kanuga Conference Center (see enclosure) in Hendersonville, NC. Her father died when she was 10 and her mother was publicity director at the Episcopal center. She came into Biltmore Village often - women were working at crafts. People bought basket material and yarn. Everybody knitted (see Phillip Merrell and Richard and Anne Parham tapes). Wonderful home-spun material was sold by the skein. (See Jesse Ray tape: he wore a suit dated 1956 for his interview, and after his death Mary Hyde borrowed it for the Biltmore museum: see Mary Hyde tape) [John Piper Watters, Sarah Thomas Watters]

[500] Marie remembers going to a tailor on All Souls Crescent. The trades people lived and worked in the houses just as the Schandler's on old Oak Street (before urban renewal) had a Deli on the first floor while living above. (Pickle Barrel, 52 Broadway) [Aaron M. Schandler, Lee Schandler]

[526] Henry said that Urban Renewal had already taken place when he went on City Council. The area around South French Broad and McDowell up to what is now South Charlotte was all slums. Nasty Branch had to be cleaned up (privies were emptying directly into it), but they went through the "tortures of the damned" getting it done. (See Marjorie Maxwell tape)

[560] People were relocated to Montford, East Asheville and Kenilworth. The most vicious thing they got mixed up in was the plan to put public housing in the St. Dunston area. The doctors, social and economic friends of council members "came with blood in their eyes." In today's paper there is an article about the people on Martin Luther King Blvd protesting the building of housing in their area. (see John Cort re: Planning and Zoning and Xeroxes - they are being built - 4/15/1995) Nothing has changed - "Not in my back yard." [Barbara Keleher]

Side 2:

Marie's decision to run for public office did not come in a "blinding flash." She was active in PTA work and had been on the state-wide Board. The Secretary of State told the people at a meeting in Raleigh how important the State legislature was and she, having finished high school

in Chapel Hill and graduated from the University, knew many people in politics and was very interested. She worked on Henry's campaigns and when he decided not to run she ran for the state legislature. [Thad Eure]

[2/24] She announced in 1975 that she would run and when she didn't get nominated she went to Mars Hill for another degree, this one in piano. She talked it over with her son before she decided to run again who said, "There are tone-deaf politicians and apolitical musicians and I think you could bridge the gap and I think you should run.". She did and won "handily" eight different times. [Walter Colton]

[2/41] She had learned some tricks to get elected. She had support groups and advice (see Clarke tape). She had to cover Transylvania County and all Buncombe. She had to decide whether to walk through East Asheville or drive an hour to Brevard. They stood outside of plants with cards, asked people to put on parties and did mailings. Henry masterminded the campaign. She used radio on a low budget but no TV except with the whole slate. [Gordon Greenwood, Jamie Clarke]

[2/81] She would never accept a large check and when the limit was reached she sent checks back. It was not worth it to buy a seat. She believed in "playing as smart as you can while on a low budget.". She did not have a lot of major commitments, rather there were rallies at homes and addresses to larger groups. Every Saturday people came to address mailings and she served chicken soup. They sent out thousands of brochures. She always tried to get someone to set up meetings with clubs and groups such as Highland Farms.

[2/110] Henry said she was using a lot of techniques, i.e. knock on a few doors, drive half a mile away and knock on a few more (like planting grass - a clump here and there and hope they grow together) leaving a card and a personal note. She asked people to have parties for her.

[2/130] When Henry first ran, the 18-year-olds had just gotten the vote. He went to the University and talked. The students asked lots of good questions but when voting time came they went on a picnic. Old people vote - it's a big event for them.

[2/138] There are handbooks on techniques. She had a campaign manager the first time she ran. [Nona McDonold]

[2/148] Henry said you can get precinct lists to see how people voted. They didn't have enough money to mail to all who voted Democratic but chose the "hard-core" voter - those who voted in the bond election, not the Presidential election (everyone votes in Presidential).

[2/155] Marie wrote personalized letters with follow-up phone calls to all precinct committees (56 precincts in Buncombe, also Transylvania and, with redistricting, part of Henderson County)

[2/164] She never liked fund raising but had to do it. Henry composed the letter and kept good records.

[2/175] Maggie had an elaborate campaign (see enclosed: she didn't win) which was detailed with arrivals and departures. She represented Maggie once. [Maggie Lauterer]

[2/185] There was a large, statewide Pack (unnamed) that tried to give her \$3,000 which she refused, saying that there was a maximum she could accept. They came back with her limit but tried the same thing the next election. She had to take her chances as it wasn't worth it.

[2/207] She wanted a "bottle bill" (a deposit on bottles, so people won't litter - 10 states have such a bill but distributors don't want to bother with handling), and a man who opposed her offered a contribution. She said she could only take it if he understood where she stood and she would continue to stand on the issue. He did and she accepted the money.

[2/237] She got the first award for government service from Common Cause last summer.

[2/247] She doesn't get money from the billboard people because she has fought them so hard.

[2/254] Henry doesn't think the money induces people to change minds as such, but, when they have no strong feelings they can be persuaded. She has seen people change in a few instances. "People change and not always because of money, but money is a very pernicious influence in government."

[2/286] She has been very outspoken and taken on some "big, heavy opponents.". Cline said that the sodomy bill (see enclosure) was not government business. Some people said she hurt herself with this, but she feels somebody had to take it on because people are so homophobic (see Cline tape). [Billy Cline]

[2/317] Henry was involved with race riots in 1969. The race relations were very tense. This was in the city and the sheriff had nothing to do with it. (see Morrissey tape) [H. P. Clay: Sheriff 1964-70, Tom Morrissey: Sheriff 1971-86]

[2/328] Marie told when Jesse Ray Jr. led a group into City Hall and got the blue blazers with seal of city on them and tried to flush them down the toilet. This was when Lee Edwards (white) and Stephens Lee (black) merged and though the name was changed to Asheville High School, all the trophies and awards were there - like having the blacks come to the whites. This was just one year after King had been killed, the Watts riots and riots in NY (Sherrill and Jones not there then). This in 1969. [Jesse Ray, Jr., Wayne Montgomery, Barbara Keleher, O. L.. Sherrill, Don Jones, Martin Luther King, Jr.]

[2/357] There had been a year of preparation for the merger. Blacks and whites were on the football team and practiced after the turmoil. [Walter Colton]

[2/387] A Brazilian boy was living with them as an exchange student at the time and said that the girls behaved worse than boys especially black girls in the lunch room - goading the boys to fight. The school was closed once or twice during the year.

[2/390] It was about this time that the University became part of the North Carolina system. The new campus was started and trying to get accredited. Up to this time there was the University (meaning Chapel Hill, NC), North Carolina State in Raleigh, NC and Women's College at Greensboro, NC. The Universities of Charlotte, Wilmington, and Asheville had to come up to standards to be admitted.

[2/418] Henry worked with Delany, who was an advocate for the black movement. This was the first time they had a peer relationship with blacks. Their son had a black teacher. Her previous maid now calls her by her first name. She said, "A lot of my friends have never had that yet, they never have and they never will because they are too old. And they have never been in the kind of environment where they could have, and I rejoice that I have had it. It has made a huge difference in our lives." [Logan Delany, Lonnie Burton.]

[2/464] She loves going to black churches and went during a campaign. She gave a political speech in the middle of the service and the minister told the congregation to vote for her. [Mary Thompson, O. T. Tomes]

[2/482] Henry said that their 4 children went to public schools - he has had 45 student years and they were all different. The oldest is in journalism and wrote about the Iran Contra. The next went to Women's College in Greensboro, NC and is in real estate in Charleston, SC. Sarah graduated from Chapel Hill, worked for Roy Taylor in Washington, went to France and married Pierre Villeminot. Walter graduated from Chapel Hill, lived in Brazil 5 years and works for the N.C. Port Authority in Wilmington, NC. [Elizabeth Colton, Marie Pelzer, Sarah Villeminot, Walter Colton]

[2/520] Marie minored in French in Chapel Hill and was a Spanish translator. She went to France for UNESCO.

[2/527] The children were encouraged to travel and be a positive influence in the world. They have 7 grandchildren.

[2/556] They have seen changes in their neighborhood, the Grove Park Inn has trebled in size, there have been startling changes in the social system. Their children went to totally white schools.

[2/573] Henry said that, when they first came here, downtown was jammed. There were 5 theatres and two drugstores between his house and what is now the expressway. Marie has gone from street cars and the Model T to no street cars and no public transportation. The older girls went to school by train. It is hard getting in and out of the city now.