

Roy Gibbs

Side 1:

[1] He was born in Asheville 12/7/14 and lived on Hillside until he married in 1937. He has lived on Dorchester since then.

[14] The Depression was very hard on his family and, there being no law regarding age, he started working at the old Princess Theatre when he was 14 for 18 cents an hour. His salary was steadily raised as he became an usher, then a door man, an assistant manager, a manager and then promoted to city manager of all theatres with his office in the Plaza. He stayed there for 47 years until he retired.

[37] He describes the Plaza and its various changes - stage shows, kiddie shows, the development of concession stands from coke machines and candy bars to soft drinks and popcorn. Concessions doubled the income.

[73] Housekeeping became a problem. At first ushers picked up the boxes but with popcorn, janitors with blowing machines cleaned at night in preparation for the next day.

- mail man at door-

[86] Children did not tear the place apart until the late 60's and 70's. With racial problems the theatre problems started.

[108] Colored people didn't have much money so they devised a way for one person to buy a ticket and open the exit door for their buddies.

[110] Before integration blacks had a separate entrance on Eagle Street which led to the balcony.

[122] Attitudes changed with integration. The children still sat apart but seats were cut up with pocket knives.

[140] Ushers were eliminated in the late 50's. He said people preferred finding their own seats. Money was saved as was the constant problem of maintaining the uniforms during the hot summer months (no air conditioning). Minico [Cleaners], a land mark in the city, was their cleaner (see tape by Margaret Calloway).

[116] He supervised the theatres across town. He had good managers and assistant managers who would consult with him in his office - or he would ride out to see them.

[191] Labor laws affected his operation. The employment security commission contacted him about his nephew who was under age but needed a job. Minimum wage law came in at the same time which greatly affected salaries. If costs got out of hand he had to reduce staff.

[225] The big snow of 1936 stranded players from a stage show in the Langren Hotel for 3 days. He sent his employees home before the blizzard got too bad - he stayed on and lived on candy bars.

[235] He describes Pack Square. Hot dogs cost 5 cents and a slice of pie 10 cents at Tingles. He always went there after the theatre closed.

[273] A former manager who was a friend came to see him - to say goodbye as he is 80. [Jim Frazer]

[282] He describes the Langren Hotel as being very nice - not elaborate - no ballroom but clean and well constructed. It was frequented by businessmen and business meetings were held there. The Battery Park and Vanderbilt Hotels put it out of business.

[373] He had contact with managers from other cities through meetings. Irvin from Biltmore Forest and Fuller from Columbia formed the Irvin-Fuller Co. [Sam Irvin, Jack Fuller]

[401] Motion picture projectionists unionized around 1950. [He did not want to talk about this]

Side 2:

He discusses the various theatres: the Isis was in West Asheville (see enclosure), the Plaza on Pack Square (enclosure), the Terrace was not one of his (in the Innsbruck Mall - enclosure), the Majestic or Paramount (enclosure) and the Strand [not one of his - it started at the tail end of Vaudeville, then showed foreign and classic films, then art in the day and X at night. Slowly it became a porn house On Pack Square, next to Finkelstein's was a porn theatre called "Mr. G" - this info from Debra Austin of the Asheville Community Theatre. Robert Bunn of Bunn Antiques - see his tape - told me of the Princess Theatre located where the BB&T building is now. Gibbs first job was here].

[2/30] West Asheville has grown. It used to be called "Worst" Asheville - nothing was there. Haywood Road is now thriving.

[2/42] He, with his wife and daughter (age 2), moved into his present home in 1946 when he returned from 2 years in the Navy. They lived for a short time with her parents who had the Bob Lewis Funeral Home. His neighbor was Stroup of the sheet metal business (company still in phone book). [Violet Lewis Gibbs, Bob Lewis, H. B. Stroup]

[2/68] His daughter (age 53) has 2 boys and 2 girls, lives with her husband, a French Canadian in Hendersonville. She designs or redesigns kitchens and bathrooms and he builds them. [Agnes Gibbs Jacques, Danny Jacques]

[2/86] The Westgate shopping mall did not catch on for a long time [he lowers his voice and indicates it is because of the blacks]. The ground started settling and for a time there was concern that some of the buildings might go into the river. It is thriving now and a new radio station has just leased space - WSKY. [George Coggins]

[2/109] He hasn't gone up town for years and only goes for business. All stores have moved to the malls and the fine stores have moved out. His wife was a cashier at John Carroll's.

[2/127] People, especially the elderly, are upset about this for they used to be able to get on a bus and do shopping up town. Even Woolworth's is gone with its 50' long candy counter [!].

[2/147] He discusses the changes in theatres. The Plaza was upgraded, the Paramount was a little family theatre with 300 seats showing "solid" movies. The Isis was a neighborhood theatre. The Imperial was the class A, owned by Publix-Bamford Theatres Inc. (Carl Bamford was his wife's uncle) [Publix according to Billy Wolcott is the name of a corporation out of New York which owned a chain of theatres. Sam Irvin bought all but the Plaza (because of the anti monopoly law) and Gibbs worked as manager under different ownerships. Wolcott's family had, at one time, owned the Imperial, State and Paramount...from phone conversation 5/9/94]. The Imperial was "plush" before the Plaza renovated. It had a tremendous lobby, no concessions, and catered to the high class. Prices were high. (8/23/94 - see Grace Kouns tape - sister of Wolcott - lived with Bamford)

[212] He had lunch every day at the S&W. He was there the day it opened and the day it closed. Next to the Grove Park it was the best in town. He mentions people who ate there [I, in error, referred to the waitress I had interviewed as Glenda McDowell - it was Marjorie Maxwell - see her tape]. Martin was an artist who did work for the theatre. [Frank Lavar, Tony Ptnacik, Jessie James Bailey, Dick Martin, George Coggins]

[255] The first "talkie" was known as "Vitaphone" which had speakers behind the perforated screen. Then came the wide screen, stereophonic sounds and acoustical design of the theatre. Cartoons and full-length Disney features were a terrific success. Shirley Temple was "out of this world." "Gone with the Wind" was one of the greatest productions of all times. He thought it was going to play forever. [Walt Disney, Shirley Temple Black]

[338] If a film is making money you could keep it indefinitely. First-run theatres played on a % basis - 25%-50% of the take.

[364] The types of films went "from bad to worse." The Hays office was against violence - with the exception of Westerns - which were always violent but had a good ending. The office also interfered - sex was implicit. Ratings were started - X and R. He was responsible regardless of the rating.

[401] In 1977 he retired. The company gave a party for him at the Biltmore Country Club and the dignitaries attended. He went back to the theatre to pick up a few belongings and say goodbye to employees. As he left he said to himself, "I will never set foot in another theatre the longest day I live, and I never have." [Sam Irvin, Jack Fuller]

- and with that the tape ended!

[by phone. The Twin theatres on Merrimon were built while he was manager - He said it was about 72 or 75 - see enclosed of movies in 1994]