

Robert Griffin

Side 1:

[1/1] He was born in Cleveland, Miss. When his father had a stroke, his mother took a course in interior design in New York, took over the drug store and turned it into an antique shop - supporting him, his brother, and his father. Her mother had done the same thing when her husband died and three children were left.

[1/17] In 1970 he went to Europe for his mother and bought antiques for the shop.

[1/26] He started a course in electrical engineering (Mississippi State University), switched to architecture in Auburn and, while visiting his brother in Buckeye Cove, fell in love with Asheville. He fixed up his brother's house for him and tried his hand at bussing at Buck's Drive In Restaurant. He lasted 10 days. He describes the place - now a drive-through. [Will Campbell, Andy Griffin]

[1/66] He worked on renovation of the Memorial Mission Hospital with Six Associates until laid off as last hired. [Tony Lord, Johnny Rogers, Jimmy Carter]

[1/84] He was living with his brother. In payment for "desk space" he painted Traver's office and worked on a house on Town Mountain Rd. [Larry Travers, Derril Umbries]

[1/94] In 1976 he worked with Wood and Cort. [John T. Wood Jr., John E. Cort]

While he continued with his architectural work (see enclosed) he became involved with the efforts to stop the cut through Beaucatcher Mountain (see enclosure Xerox of newspaper chronology). He donated his services, joining local lawyers and environmentalists. He and Betty became plaintiffs in suing the Department of Transportation for violating the act of 1961 - this involved damage to Zealandia, a house on the National Register for preservation. Local contractors had already picked out a site for dumping removed rock. This was taken to the Federal Court, and the ruling came back, "You're right but it's too late and you're in the wrong court." (Because of her efforts, Betty was given a scholarship to Duke to become a lawyer.) He discusses what a loss this has been for the city and compares the dome of the Baptist Church to its inspiration in Florence. In a dream, Wolfe imagines part of Beaucatcher removed. [Betty Lawrence, George Coggins, Pat Whalen, Ed Hay, Plu Bailey, Perry Alexander, Baxter Taylor, Douglas Ellington, Thomas Wolfe]

[1/154] He discusses the lessons learned by the preservation society - they became polarized, interest was high, and they all became well-organized. Be quick, be there, be legal, and obtain restrictive covenants.

[1/178] He describes the Preservation Society balls held to raise money and publicize their efforts. The first was held at the Manor and a Beaux Art ball for the preservation of the Grove Arcade held at the S&W Cafeteria. [Louise Lockwood, Ron Clemmer, Robert Fortune, Howard Hanger, Lee Cooper]

[1/221] There were three Robert Griffins in the city when he moved here - knew this was the place he was supposed to live and has been here 18 years.

[1/264] Reviews his work (see enclosure).

[1/270] The Sky Club, bought and converted into condominiums, was the first public project he did (see McGuire for Samsel). This was originally a residence and then a speakeasy during prohibition. [Pat Whalen, Jim Samsel]

[1/321] He was moon-lighting to turn Westgate, which had just lost its anchor store, into a mini-mall with Hughes but later worked on his own with his partner, Clemmer, working on signs George was so grateful that he bought a briefcase and lined it with \$1000 in dollar bills as surprise (see Coggins tape). [Carroll Hughes, George Coggins, Ron Clemmer]

[1/410] In Biltmore Village he convinced residents and owners to sign a petition to make the Village a Historic District (see enclosure).

[1/449] He worked with Montford to make this a Historic District also. [Barbara and Ed Siler]

[1/452] An option to buy the Manor was given to the Preservation Society. Tremendous effort on the part of all members went into this and Pam gave \$3000 a month for 6 months rent several times - the society, at the end of its financial rope and energy were about to give up until the Turners bought it. [Betty Lawrence, Mathew Elman, Jeanne Warner, Pam and Jim Turner]

[1/547] "The Last of the Mohicans" was filmed at the Manor - 2 minutes of film was used and probably 1/2 million spent by the movie company. The Manor was left with visual improvement and about \$90,000 worth of physical improvement. All of this was the result of exacting specifications and rules set by the Preservation Society. [Jeanne Warner]

Side 2:

[2/1] Details of negotiations regarding contract use of the Manor for "Last of the Mohicans" is elaborated on.

[2/63] Richmond Hill was bought from the Baptist Home, salvaged and saved. (There is a short film about their moving in their lounge - see Matthews tapes). [Richmond Pearson, Jim Samsel]

[2/86] The building he is in now was moved from across the street (now Hardees - see snapshots). This had been the office of the first woman doctor in NC. The house next door was also moved. It had belonged to a basketball hero. [Dr. Ethel Bronsburger, Charles "Choo Choo" Justice, Ramona Jay]

[2/93] He found that the Biltmore Village was not listed as local historic property to protect it from private funds.

[2/103] By working together a unified Historic District can be created and structures can be saved. [Grace Pless, Mimi Cecil]

[2/115] The mentality in the city is "what's your is yours and what's our [is ours] and don't tell us [what to do]." There is a lot of resistance and zoning is seen as obstruction. People can't see that they are preserving their own property rights. It is tough to sell politicians.

[2/128] Published guidelines are given property owners after consultants have been hired to write up decisions and the owners opinions sought.

[2/140] He considers model city and 2010 plans the most effective tools today to legislate aesthetics. NC is the first state to set a precedent about standards of this sort: i.e., fences around junkyards.

[2/159] It is better to redo what we have than tear down and rebuild because replacement won't be as good. Owners can't command square footage in rent to justify tearing down and rebuilding.

[2/170] Talbots came to the Village because of its image. There is no protection downtown, no guarantee that the building put up beside it won't devalue it. There is no Historic District in town. It takes years to come back - it took years to go down.

[2/176] Biltmore Village is discussed. Tree planting is detailed. The houses will be moved from the center of their lot to the sidewalk with parking in back.

[2/200] He was a consultant to a plan for redevelopment to go to city council soon.

[2/212] The grandson of Smith, who designed most of the houses in Biltmore Village and some in Montford, came to the city just as the Biltmore Village Historical Museum was about to open. A parade, led by bag pipes, opened the museum. Bissette, who had been mayor, was ordained Mayor for the day. [R.S. Smith, Lou Bissette, Dick Smith]

[2/238] He has just purchased the old Clarence Barker Hospital and will move his architectural practice and interior design there.

[2/245] He is not anxious to go back to the original plan of the village. The little cottages on 1/8 acre of land sell for \$250,000 (40% increase since historic district was established).

[2/322] Traffic, widening 25A, proposes bypass around the village, "safe havens" and cross-walks with lights are discussed.

[2/387] Our lives are geared around the car and we are losing the quality of life. It is difficult for small businesses to offer service when competing with conglomerates.

[2/429] "Cultural Tourism" is the buzz word now - not just the preservation of the building but the little old lady who has owned the shop for years. [John Reed]

[2/435] Lexington Park has developed into a little community. In 1976 the city was ready to tear down the area and allow a large corporation to put in a mall complex (see Boland tape). A lobby formed to keep this from happening.

[2/447] He was a "hippie" in the 70's and believes that his generation is coming of age and has the energy to carry out convictions.

[2/477] The reconstruction of the Manor is about complete and is nearly fully occupied. He has a sense of accomplishment.

[2/490] CEBO (in favor of sign construction) has misdirected its energy in the past. The "get rich quick" mentality is detrimental in the long run. There is an amortization clause of 7 years on signs in Biltmore Village. Colors for the exterior of buildings in the Village are suggested (see enclosures regarding plans). A speaker at the Preservation Society meeting last year said: "We are selling our grandmother's 3 karat diamonds for a 7 karat cubic zirconium."

Tape II, Side 1:

[II/1/3] He met Betty at a fundraiser to save Beaucatcher Mountain from the cut (see #94, side 1, tape I). This was held at Zealandia, a Tudor style home on the mountain. Even though the fight was lost the people became energized and the Preservation Society developed strength which was used later. He describes the fundraiser and the house. [Betty Lawrence]

[II/1/47] The Akzona building on Pack Square came to pass in a similar fashion as the cut - it was sprung on the public. He feels that Pei was the only person who could have gotten away with such "brutalism" which says, "your square is no longer public, it is a private corporate square." There was no historic district or guidelines - it was a private enterprise and there was no way to stop it. [Claude Ramsey, I. M. Pei]

[II/1/71] The Preservation Society mobilized and threatened to organize a protest. Cut a deal that they would not protest the north side if they would leave the south side alone. Pack Place and Pack Plaza are possible because of this (see McGuire). [Claude Ramsey, Larry Tice]

[II/1/107] He is ambivalent about the demolition of the Theatre. He discusses the Public Works Building (161 Charlotte St.) (by the same designer as Pack Plaza) and says this late post-modern style much like the comment made regarding Mozart in the movie Amadeus, "Too many notes!" (see enclosure).

[II/1/148] City Hall was not popular when it was built.

[II/1/166] He discusses Pei's pyramid in front of Louvre and the Pompidu building (Paris) which has not stood the test of time (can't be cleaned) and said that, "God had the good sense to put skin on humans!" [I. M. Pei, Bruce Goff]

[II/1/215] He was commissioned to adapt offices in the I. M. Pei building and flew to England to get images of Victorian Gothic so he could mix Pei with Hunt without attempting to blend style. [Bill Cecil, Richard Morris Hunt]

[II/1/235] The 5th and 6th levels are used by Biltmore Estate headquarters (he tosses in that the BB&T building should be covered with kudzu).

[II/1/247] For several years the Biltmore Museum, started by Mary, a volunteer, was housed on the top floor of the Fireside Antique shop. She had been gathering artifacts pertaining to the area for festivals but they had to be returned and there was no permanent show place. Because of the disability act the public could not be invited. [Mary Hyde, Ron Clemmer, Bill Dodge]

{II/1/330} Ground floor office space was offered rent free (now there is a phone and overhead charges) and items, loaned and donated, were collected. The county matches \$3000 a year to keep it going. It is manned by volunteers (see Hyde tape). [John Cram]

[II/1/344] Note - the State Department of Archives and History funded a series of taped interviews regarding the Village.

[II/1/355] The relationship between the Biltmore House and the Village Museum overlap and parallel. The estate is interested in tapes with employees and families who have worked on the property - the social structure as well as the real estate venture (see Mary Hyde tape). [Susan Ward, Rick King, Mary Hyde]

[II/1/403] When Mrs. Vanderbilt was denied membership in the Asheville Country Club she started one of her own (see Jane Bingham tape). [Thomas Raoul, Jane Raoul Bingham]

Tape II, Side 2:

[II/2/3] Development of the French Broad River has been an uphill battle in trying to reverse the industrial trend (see Webb tape).

[II/2/29] He was really sad to see the redevelopment of Wall Street. He felt it had been the "real thing" - "tatty but real." Now it is synthetic and the history has been evicted. A lot of money spent by over-zealous builders changed the atmosphere. It will take years to build the quality tenant base it had before. [Jean Wall Penland]

[II/2/75] It took an organization to stop the building of a mall on Lexington which was not designed to relate to the city. [Jim Daniels, John Rogers]

[II/2/100] He does not feel passionately about the development of the Arcade into a farmers' market. Feels we already have a farmers' market, and this would not be upscale enough (see Nancy Marlowe and Roger McGuire tapes).

[II/2/128] His practice has grown 100% in the last 3 years in a period most people consider a recession. Small dreams come through. He has a lot of energy to do more. There are enough people in Asheville to share the individual dreams.

[II/2/143] It was a tragedy to have lost Discovery. Quality Forward is doing a fine job. [Julian Price, Susan Roderick]