

Jim and Virginia Hamilton

Side 1:

[1/1] Jim and Virginia live in a condo with views of the courts and the mountains. They came to Asheville in 1949 with one child.

[1/30] Jim was stage-struck ever since he felt audience response when he was in the second grade. He studied acting in the 1930's in California and hoped to make his career as an actor as his brother was doing. He visited an aunt in Asheville and felt that he could get a good background by volunteering as Fonda had done before him. Heston was here for a year as director and actor. [Henry Fonda, Charlton Heston]

[1/60] The Hamiltons moved here so he could get experience and they concluded they had moved to "paradise." He got a job on the radio as a disk jockey and, as there were few men auditioning for roles, was cast in at least three of the five or six shows a year.

[1/71] Virginia was hired as head dietician in the old Mission Hospital. She had studied at Penn State, Harpers in Detroit, and had served a year in the army.

[1/84] Community theatre attracted many actors. Some had worked in New York and moved here. [Barbara Freeman, Dot Adams]

[1/101] The response of volunteers has varied over the years. At times it was difficult getting enough men, but back stage and props helpers were pretty steady.

[1/120] Some people met through the theatre (see Chiles tape), and couples worked together. He worked with the MacPhersons (see their tape). [Anne and John Chiles, Ann and Bob MacPherson]

[1/140] Jim was cast as Jason in *Medea* when he first came and got a lot of leads until he became director in 1967. He volunteered for 17 years as actor, board member, stage manager and chairman of workshops. When he became director he did a role occasionally as needed.

[1/169] He didn't feel uncomfortable switching from actor to director and back to actor for, as Jane said, he never became involved in politics. He worked with her in the Tanglewood performance of "You Can't Take it With You." Her husband, who has recently changed his name, worked on the sound and lights at ACT. [Jane Fishburne (now Jane VanLaurel), Earl Harger (now Forrest McGregor)]

[1/196] He was determined to give the best possible performance and cast roles according to actors' ability, not as rewards for their volunteer activities. He feels that directors were disposable as pieces of Kleenex and attributes his 14 years of success to his unwillingness to play politics.

[1/265] Both the Hamiltons were students in the Plonk School of Creative Arts [1 Sunset Parkway], graduating with a degree in creative arts. [This was made possible through the G. I. Bill, I later learned.] [Dr. Laura Plonk, Dr. Lillian Plonk]

[1/325] Virginia stopped working at the hospital because of stress. The employees, paid minimum wages, were inadequately trained or motivated and, when one pulled a knife on her after being fired, she decided to leave.

[1/378] After his Plonk School experience, Jim was hired at the Country Day School where he remained 9 years teaching eighth grade homeroom, upper school boys and girls athletics, three history courses, drama, debating, speech and poetry, and he started a tennis team.

Virginia, reading from An Uncommon School by McCabe (see Eileen McCabe tape). His thespian group won 17 distinguished awards - regionally and in Chapel Hill, NC. [Eileen McCabe]

[1/466] Recognition of Jim's work with the Country Day students led to his being asked to become director of ACT by its president Dot Hammel. [Dot Adams (former wife of Judge Joel B. Adams, now Dot Hammel)]

[1/468] Jim first appeared on stage in a school production (2nd or 3rd grade) portraying a fat woman. He, under an umbrella, nearly fell off the stage. The audience loved it.

Side 2:

[2/1] Virginia acted in a number of shows, did choreography for many musicals and kept notes for Jim. Her claim to fame was having danced with Gene Kelly. She worked in the box office, with costumes, as stage manager, with make-up and while there was a costume mistress, she helped with changes. She worked in all capacities as a volunteer (see enclosure). [Gene Kelly]

[2/24] She was hired at the Country Day School, then on Merrimon Ave, in 1958 and retired in 1989 (see notes).

[2/42] Jim taught tennis at Country Day and played in tournaments in the summer. When he retired he could play all the time (see enclosed).

[2/47] He was director of ACT when the new Spruce Street building was constructed. Adams was president of the board at the time the performances were in the warehouse - a fire trap - she got Cecil to come and take pictures of scenes of productions (see enclosure). Cecil became mover in raising money for the theatre. First he got enough members to become committed financially and then went to industry for contributions. Almost all the members of the building committee but Cecil and Ponder have died. One was Pickett, whose wife was office manager. They got money for seats by selling them - a plate was attached to the back giving the donor's name. The last payment on the mortgage was made the year after he left. [Dot Adams, Bill Cecil, Herschel Ponder, John Pickett, Jane Fishburne]

[2/94] There were two opening nights because not everyone could be accommodated in one night.

[2/96] He was interviewed by Bridges (see John Bridges tape) and a member of the board in anticipation of the 50th anniversary which is this year. [John Bridges]

[2/105] He admires Redpath, who had previously been at Flat Rock [NC] and feels he may beat his longevity as director (see enclosure). [Ralph Redpath]

[2/113] He has not done work with the Montford Players, which was started by Hazel Robinson who had been a technical director at ACT. This group does Shakespearian plays outside in the summer and each year the Christmas Carol in Pack Square and the Asheville High School. [Hazel Robinson]

[2/137] He was on a play reading committee for SART (Southern Appalachian Repertory Theatre) after he retired. This is a professional repertory company.

[2/150] Tanglewood was taken over by UNCA. Flat Rock is completely professional and identified as North Carolina State Theatre, funded by the state, and was in operation before he came to Asheville.

[2/167] He is impressed with the work done at UNCA.

[2/174] They often eat at the restaurant Hathaway's and overheard some tourists talk of their amazement at the development and activity in downtown in the last 5 years.

[2/187] Asheville has one of the larger tennis clubs in the country. Brown is a member of the family that made shoes but his money was made in real estate. His parents built the club for him and a picture of him and his father used to be in the club house lobby. He is an excellent tennis player, as are his daughter and granddaughter, Jane McNeil and Bridgett McNeil. [Buster Brown]

[2/212] At the club there are 5 Laykold courts, 15 Hartru (soft surface courts outside and 9 hard courts inside. There are Racquet courts and an Olympic pool (see enclosures).

[2/226] They are charter members of the club but moved in from Kenilworth 3 1/2 years ago. Virginia doesn't play.

[2/230] They have 4 children, all living in town! Lisa is in the English department at AB-Tech, Gene is a teacher and coach at Asheville High School, Lee is an electrician and Heather works for WLOS as a salesperson - they also use her voice for commercials. [Lisa, Gene, Lee and Heather]

[2/248] As a disk jockey at the radio station he played standards of the day, giving a brief introduction about the artist and composer. In time the station played the top 40 with no

comments. He was never pressured to push particular recordings as is done on larger stations.
[Frank Sinatra, Doris Day]

[2/298] We discuss changes in music. Virginia likes the Beatles, loved to dance and went to the Big Band dances at Penn State. Romantic music is passé. There is anger expressed in the music today. [the Beatles]

[2/328] Covington, a local man, is called "Mr. Tennis." He is trying to get the courts at Aston Park renewed. He has won many awards (see enclosed photos of Aston Park). [Dick Covington]

[2/345] In July there was a tournament in Aston Park which drew from a number of states.

[2/368] Tournaments are divided according to age. Men's Open is age 17-29 and then they are divided by 5-year periods, i.e., 30-35. Sometimes, if there is no one in his age group, he will play with the 75 year olds - one can play down but not up. He is 80 and can't compete with men 85.

[2/383] Tournaments are held in different areas. The North Carolina Senior Division Championship is held in Winston Salem every year. He won the singles and doubles. The results go to Greensboro, NC, and the ranking comes out in the Tennis Magazine (see enclosure). Ranking goes from 1-25. The southern Tennis Association covers the south, with the exception of Florida which has its own. He hasn't traveled outside the south.

[2/480] Brown sold the club [we later discussed that his painting of him with his father has been removed - it was opposite the plaques in enclosed photo] but still owns the property. [Buster Brown]

[2/495] Their son Gene won the state title five times. He was the world ranking champion at one time and #1 player at UNC Chapel Hill. Jim and Gene won the father and son tournament three times [Gene Hamilton]

[2/524] Lisa, who met her husband while acting in *Fiddler on the Roof* is working on a doctorate in rhetoric and linguistics. Lee did backstage lighting at ACT, wired their old Kenilworth house and is now an electrician. Gene teaches and coaches tennis. Heather works in sales at WLOS. All four children have been in ACT productions and done backstage work. [Lisa Hamilton, Lee Hamilton, Gene Hamilton, Heather Hamilton]

I was then given a tour (see enclosed).