

Morris & Leah Karpen

Side 1:

Morris was stationed in California in WWII, met and married Leah. They came to visit her parents. He realized he could never make a living in Asheville. In 1970's he bought property in Weaverville and built a little cabin (closer to the road). In 1977 he decided to retire and built present house. After 2 months he decided to start a factory doing what he had done in NY - building doors and door frames to be sold strictly to dealers, guaranteeing delivery within 10 working days (see enclosed). This developed to more than he wanted to handle and he brought in two of his children to take over. [Samuel Morrison, Esther Morrison, Rachael Karpen Smith, Joseph Karpen]

[36] He trains his workers, ran ads in trade publications and got the highway to his present building. He bought and rebuilt the [?]craft Co. (manufactured furniture.) There are a few other businesses in the area: Reliance Electric, Revco Scientific, Straus Co. Sonopress Inc. The Chamber of Commerce was not active in bringing in new businesses.

[72] His workers are willing and able, loyal and dependable. A-B Tech recently sent him one employee. He hires 20-25 people, gives a good salary, medical coverage and retirement. He never goes to the shop without white shirt and tie. [Harvey Haynes]

[91] After turning the factory over to his children he, with two employees, are using lasers to cut objects for other shops in the area.

[101] There were two things he needed when he came here - knowledge and money. You don't start from scratch without knowing what you are doing.

[107] The city of Asheville had tremendous problems but a lot going for it. During the last 17-18 years there has been cultural growth and things to do. Liquor by the drink stimulated better restaurants. He was President of the Reems Creek Community Organization for a year. Leah said the people think he is one of them.

[124] In NY the shop was unionized but there is nothing to unionize for here. He hires mostly local people. Asheville is not a community - it is too diverse. Reems Creek is a community - people work together. They use the library, restaurants, and Post Office in Weaverville and participate in the 4th of July programs. They go to Asheville for cultural events and meetings.

[158] Organizations are centered in Asheville whereas in Ox Creek activities such as Homemakers Extension is community centered. Summer people aren't involved in activities.

[169] He is on the Board of Trustees of Warren Wilson College, is on the Boy Scout Council, the UNCA Foundation, the Ethics Committee of the Memorial Mission Hospital and works with the Habitat for Humanity.

[182] The award (see enclosure) given by the Community Foundation for Western North Carolina was discussed. Leah said they do not donate for recognition but because they feel friendly towards Cecil and Smith. [John Q. Schell, Mimi Cecil, Pat Smith]

[190] Leah was born in 1920 on Broad Street and when she was two moved to 108 Forest Hill Drive. As the family grew, there were 6 children, the house was enlarged. There were woods and a creek nearby. She had a next door neighbor as well as siblings to play with. She went to Newton School, walking home for lunch because she was underweight. She was always ahead in spelling but got a C in sewing. She was moved ahead in grades and went to David Millard Jr. High. The teachers weren't "top notch" but she loved civics. After school she would walk to town, usually to her father's office at 75 Patton Ave. She found Asheville High (then Lee Edwards) more interesting. She remembers the Assistant Dean. She was not asked to join a sorority because she was too young and graduated at age 15. She then went to the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (known then as Women's College) for 2 years. Her father advised her to major in Chemistry, and she was accepted at the University at Chapel Hill. She mentions tea in Spencer Hall at 4 PM, stating that this wouldn't happen today. She had a succession of roommates, was active in a science club, earned Phi Beta Kappa award and graduated with a BS in science. She worked hard and enjoyed the field - mentioning an excellent chemistry teacher. She was recommended for a scholarship in the west but didn't get it. [Peggy Brown, Mr. Bingham, Mrs. Huffman, Alfred Russell]

[240] At that time she was not a feminist and didn't realize until years later that she didn't get certain jobs because she was a woman. Acusta Paper Corp. opened a factory in Pisgah Forest, she applied but was told to brush up in typing and shorthand. She went to Blanton's Business College and worked with Bob doing some testing. (see Blanton enclosure). [Bob Mathews]

[262] In 1943, the middle of the war, there wasn't enough work at Acusta so she applied to the Waves. Because of her eye sight she was not accepted but joined the Navy in Vallejo, California, where she took a job drafting. She met Morris and went with him to Seattle and then to Spokane where Morris was discharged. They lived briefly in Asheville and moved to NY.

[283] They had 4 children on Long Island. Morris designed two houses. When the children were grown the house was too big. [Daniel Karpen, Joseph and Seth (twins), Rachael]

[295] They bought more land on Ox Creek, Morris designed the present house and two carpenters built it. There is a small stream at the foot of the property which is forded [fun!]. They came in 1977.

[313] The biggest change in Asheville was the expressway which cut up neighborhoods. She had lived in Kenilworth and knew that area. Biltmore Forest was "forbidden." She didn't know the Grove Park area and didn't know anybody in West Asheville or Weaverville.

[326] When she was growing up she and a group of women formed a sorority (no longer existing) to have something to do. The only cultural activity was the community concerts (see George Coggins tapes), there was no symphony (see John Bridges tape) the Community Theatre had not been established. Her life revolved around her work at Acusta.

[336] Parties for the soldiers from Camp Craft in Spartanburg were held at the Jewish Community Center (now replaced with new building - see Jane Mathews and Katharine Shepard tapes).

[343] Most of her contemporaries left for Atlanta or NY for better jobs.

[348] When she came back she had had some experience teaching graduate courses on Long Island. She took her master's degree in management, taught at UNCA and part time at Warren Wilson. For College for Seniors she invented her own course - the "Agenda for the 21st Century" - she did this to fulfill a requirement to get a Masters in Liberal Arts. She started in 1989 and finished in 2.5 years. She was one of the first 2 people to get Masters of Liberal Arts from the University. She needed an outlet and wanted to interact with the excellent faculty. She has taught several courses on women's issues and "Progress Towards a Sustainable Society."

[389] She was Morris' secretary and bookkeeper when he started business here.

[395] The League of Women Voters was very low key when she came here compared with NY. The organization was going downhill and no one wanted to be President. She was elected in 1983, went to the National Convention and created the Florence Ryan Education Fund [this enabled the organization to accept non-profit tax exempt funds - see side 2]. She was voted Woman of the Year in 1985. She didn't want to accept, but her brother said "You've got to do it. After all, you're a Jewish woman. You have to let them know we do something." (see enclosure).

[409] Morris attends Saturday morning discussion group at the Temple Beth Ha-Tephila and was active in helping raise money for the elevator. (photo)

[423] She is co-chair of the local chapter of the World Federation Association and a member of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom which holds bi-monthly interracial dinners and seminars. The chapter (see Marie Colton tape) is growing. She took the Building Bridges Program (see O.T. Tomes tape) but already had friends in the Black Community. She wanted to know what was going on in Asheville so took the Leadership Asheville course (see Cissie Stevens tape). She was on the Board of the YWCA for 2 years and chaired a long range-planning and building committee (see Florence Ryan, Thelma Caldwell, Lynn Troutner and Kathleen Balogh tapes). [Dorothy Kirschbaum]

[466] The YWCA, founded by women of wealth in 1908, is operating at a deficit. The United Way contributes 15% of budget and are in the middle of a fund drive. There is a new director. [Janet Bowman]

[491] The Women's Center started several years ago and could be more successful with more funds. She was involved in its founding. The Y is the most integrated facility in the city.

[560] She and Hazel are interested in international affairs. She took a trip to the Soviet Union, her first time outside US and it changed her outlook on the world. She attended international meetings. Several years ago she was International Chair for the League of Women Voters, went

to a training session in Washington, and obtained a grant to put on programs. She is "conferenced out" at this time except for one day meetings. [Hazel Fobes]

[603] She spends her time exercising Monday and Friday, hiking on Saturday and Sunday, has someone clean her house so she can read, go to concerts and symphonies. She is a member of the Sierra Club and Audubon Society.

[625] She was an observer for the League of Women Voters for the bulletin which was printed in the GreenLine which doesn't exist anymore [now called Mountain Xpress - see Jeff Fobes tape].

Side 2:

In 1984 Leah went to a League of Women Voters National Convention where she learned about fund raising and got the idea for establishing the Florence Ryan Education Fund which is non-profit, tax exempt and approved by the IRS. She said this was what was needed to make sure the League would never go broke again the way it was when she took over.

[2/19] In 1979 she taught a management course to undergraduates. She is not one to analyze the University but feels it has come a long way with a new dorm and dining room. She spoke highly of a number of professors. Sabo was always well-prepared. Qualification requirements are being upgraded. Most professors have Doctorates, people with Masters don't last long. [William Highsmith, Allene Highsmith, Ileana Grams, William Sabo]

[2/45] Regarding Karpen Hall: Morris wanted to give money to the University and the way you get a building named is to give money. You can't give money for construction - that's state money. The third floor is still unfinished. There was a room downstairs that was to be a seminar room that was unfinished, Morris gave money to finish it and Carroll thought up the name Laurel Forum for it. It is not open to outside groups because of hard use but Western Carolina uses it for management courses. The building is one of the most modern. She thinks funds will become available to finish the building (see map). [Roy Carroll]

[2/73] Courses for the College for Seniors - as many as 32 in one term - are crowded. Classes are in Owens Hall. The NC Center for Creative Retirement is in Rhodes Hall. Students resent money being spent on seniors who are charged \$80 for spring and fall courses and \$40 for winter. She feels this is reasonable for what given and a person can take 2 or 3 courses for that. One or two professors are paid, the rest are volunteers. Cissie is an employee (see her tape). College for Seniors runs on its own. [Cissie Stevens]

[2/108] Morris calls the Center for Creative Retirement a melting pot. (see enclosure) [David Brown, Ron Manheimer, Phyllis Stiles, Alf Cannon, Beverly Modlin]

[2/111] Leadership Asheville was founded jointly with the Chamber of Commerce. It is self-supporting by fees paid by individuals and organizations. (League of Women Voters gives 1/2 scholarship. Banks pay for participants). The teaching varies - WNC history, politics, health care, leadership, management, etc.

[2/142] She gave several hour seminars teaching leadership styles and ways of delegating responsibility.

[2/162] There are many seminars on retirement. One of the first things people do when they move here is join the College for Seniors. There is a roster of people interested in volunteering. One group adopted a class of students.

[2/180] Morris said that when they moved here things were beginning to develop, such as restaurants now that liquor was sold by the drink. The College for Seniors made a big difference.

[2/188] Leah's father was an optometrist. He had migrated from Russia when he was 10 to join his father in Texas. He graduated from the University of Texas, worked in the oil fields but studied optometry so he could get married. His father had a jewelry store on Pack Square where the Biltmore Building now stands. Her father had an office on 78 Patton Ave. and gave free pre-school eye examinations. During the war soldiers sent money home and their families could get examinations and glasses. He made enough to feed and house 6 children. He moved to 78 Haywood Street. Her mother worked with him and he had a secretary. Children went to office a lot. [Dr. Samuel Robinson, Esther Robinson, Mildred Messer]

[2/224] He was a great influence on her life. He took up hiking and got his children hiking. He got involved in Boy Scouts. When he died they gave money to renovate a room at the Boy Scout Council.

[2/244] Through Morris' efforts, Robinson Hall was named for Leah's father. He was community minded, was on the Metropolitan Planning Commission and would have been unhappy to see what happened to the mountains. He was always writing letters to the editor. He told Morris "DOT made up their mind where it [cut or tunnel] was going to go, no matter what the city decided, it was going to go the way they want." (see map) [Dr. Samuel Robinson]

[2/267] Leah said that pollution was increased by opening the mountain up. Before it was contained in a hollow.

[2/284] A housing development off Martin Luther King Jr. is being built and there is a discussion about additional apartments in Haw Creek Area. (enclosure)

[2/300] They don't live in the city so they don't vote in the city. Morris ran for County Commissioner but was defeated in the primary, "I wasn't one of the old boys."

[2/311] Regarding the Opportunity Corporation, Morris said that is something the city has to solve for itself. "What they've been doing is just throwing money at something without really thinking about what it should be." "A lot of money is going for administration instead of really helping people." She talks to people but she doesn't live in the city. (Leni on council). History of Opportunity Corporation from clippings - started with Ken Michalove - see his tape. [Leni Sitnick]

[2/317] She was an observer for the Metropolitan Sewerage District for the LWV for a couple of years. They were opposed to building an incineration plant for the sludge. "We knew it wouldn't work, they didn't listen. They've got their problems. It's kind of frustrating working with the government. They had meetings, public meetings, experts, but they wouldn't listen." When you are an observer you're not involved in decision making.

[2/336] She wouldn't want to be an elected official at this point in her life.

[2/339] In 1981 she started work with the library in Weaverville and was asked to chair the Board for 3 years. A new building, as planned, would cost \$400,000. They bought the Baptist Church. They got a grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation for \$1,500 to do a feasibility study, hired an architect and applied for a loan from the Farmer's Home Administration. The total cost was a little over \$110,000. They had bake sales, recycled glass, got shelving from MAHEC, Friends of the Library did the carpeting, Morris painted the shelving. They fixed up meeting rooms and the library gets busier every year. She helped on the computer training in North Library, Weaverville and Pack. [Jan Weigman]

[2/383] She did all of her papers on a computer when she was getting her Masters in Liberal Arts.

[2/361] The Dry Ridge Museum in the basement of the library was fired up by volunteers. They are starting a new exhibit on art and had one on business in the area. [Josephine Weaver Osborne]

[2/429] Her parents moved from Kenilworth to Country Club Road. She names her siblings in order of birth. [Eva Serotta deceased, Leah Karpen, Emanuel Robinson deceased, Michael Robinson a rabbi, Faela deceased, David Robinson]

[2/467] Jewish Community Center on Charlotte Street has been videotaped. There is a preschool which is well thought of. The green house was a fire trap and the group was unable to find property in central Asheville and decided to build on same site. They raised the money from the Jewish Community. Jerry pledged 1/2 million dollars if the group could raise the rest. It was designed by Patty who went into business with Jane. Marline might give us a copy of the tape. (see enclosure - see Mathews tape) [Jonathan Pearlman, Hilda Hoffman, Jerry Sternberg, Patti Glazer, Jane Mathews, Marlene Joyce]

[2/533] They have 5 grandchildren, two on Long Island, two in Raleigh, and Rachel's son in Weaverville. [Adam Smith]

[2/552] When they can't make the hill anymore they will move into an apartment they have at 400 Charlotte Street which is furnished. Morris takes a lot of satisfaction in his business.