

Harmon M. Lee

Side 1:

Introduction:

He was born in Asheville as was his father (a former Mayor 1941-1947). His mother moved here from Kentucky as an infant. He was the great grandson of Col. Stephen Lee who operated a boarding school in Chunn's Cove following the end of the civil war. (see enclosure) His great grandfather on his mother's side came here because of his son's health and started selling men's clothes door to door: taking orders to be made up in a factory. [L. Lyons Lee, Virginia Griffith Miller Lee, Col. Stephen Lee]

[26] In 1890 the Carolina Coal and Ice Company was founded. It became Carolina Fuel Company and, after building an ice plant on Lyman Street the company joined with another group on Riverside Drive (the ice house was sold and used for other purposes). He came in as a majority owner (when Lyons Lee died he was Vice-President of the Carolina Fuel Co. and Chairman of the Board of Asheville Ice and Storage Co.)

[38] Coal wagons were drawn by mules. When there was ice on the road the animals were shod with rough shoes so they could get up Clingman Avenue with their heavy loads.

[49] In the summer his house was fueled for the winter with 6-8 wagons, one after the other, shoveling coal into the basement of his house on Montford Ave.

[57] In New York, when coal was not delivered directly into the houses, it was piled on the street.

[60] The ice company used horses. His grandfather had ice shipped in from Knoxville. [James Hardy Lee]

[68] Housewives placed a cardboard square in the window which showed 25, 50, 75, 100 and directed the iceman to deliver the amount shown on the top. In his house there was an outside entrance to the chest which held 300 lbs. It was double insulated with a door opening into the kitchen. After depositing the ice, the iceman collected coupons in pay.

[79] When he came home for lunch from school he could ride back on one of the ice wagons. The house (on Montford below Chestnut) burned. It had 3 livable stories, a full basement and an attic. It was used as a school dorm.

[108] Asheville had street cars and in the afternoons his nurse would take him to town, get a transfer and go to West Asheville to Malvern Hills and the golf course. His mother, who drove before his father did, took him to Sulfur Springs.

[125] He graduated from Asheville High. The principal died working in the garden on the day his class was to graduate. He was laid in state in the rotunda and services were in the auditorium.

Because of the Depression, the term was short. Edwards was fair but tough - beloved by the students (see enclosure). He rode his bike from Montford to school. [Lee Edwards]

[152] He remembers going to Weaverville with his aunt and said that there is a bridge in the middle of Beaver Lake - it is narrow and concrete. There was a change house at the pool - long and divided for boys and girls. At one time there was a life guard. The association could not afford to keep it up and after a man was drowned and water seeped in from the lake, it was closed.

[200] There were two gangs in Montford when he was going up - the Broadway group vs. the Cumberland group. Klondyke [housing] project took its name from the old Coxe home which was bought by Wall and sold to the city. At one time the streetcar went as far as the Coxe property and then cut down to the river. The original route was changed for the Coxes. [Robert Wall]

[222] His mother told him about Riverside Park which had rowboats, a dance area and movies. This was destroyed with the 1916 flood.

[241] The Riverside Cemetery was developed by a stock company and when the Depression wiped out money invested for perpetual care, the city took it over when his father was mayor. It is now run by the Parks and Recreation Department. [L. Lyons Lee]

[260] He said "all my sons were daughters" - two not married. The oldest lives in Kentucky and as a lawyer does research for other lawyers. The second has a masters in psychology, Caroline went to Clemson, has two children, and lives in Orlando, FL. [Mary Latta Lee, Cecelia Johnston Lee, Caroline Elizabeth Lee]

[283] He went to the same school his mother had attended and had some of the same teachers. The old school was torn down and the new William Randolph school erected.

[297] Blacks attended the Hill Street School in Stumptown, a run-down area in Montford. The David Millard Jr. High was on Oak Street. The hill was leveled and there are now business buildings in its place.

[310] He went to high school during the Depression until it was closed because of lack of funds. He went back to Hall Fletcher Jr. High in West Asheville and then back to Asheville High School (Lee Edwards High School) when it reopened.

[317] He was not deeply affected by the Depression and went to Camp Rockmount near Black Mountain (enclosed). The family also went to Lake Eden, an area developed by Grove. His grandfather bought a couple of ponies. [Edwin W. Grove]

[333] When the coal trucks were motorized the mules were sold. There was a tannery up the river which is now closed. [Hams Reese]

[344] The family was able to retain servants who were paid \$2-3 a week. Vegetables were grown in the old mule lot and what wasn't eaten or canned was given to the needy. A cow, tethered by the river, got into an onion bed and his mother smothered the churned ice cream with chocolate sauce.

[415] He has many friends living in Crowfields now - Rawls' father had been a mayor and his wife is an artist (now showing at Museum - see tape with them). He worked with men in the city. His brother was business manager for the city schools and managed the contract for fuel. [Charles Rawls, Eleanor Rawls, George Hackney, Pat Burdette, Weldon Weir, Walter Hatch Lee]

[439] He studied math with Reynolds (see tapes John and Thomas Reynolds) and attended Biltmore College. [A. C. Reynolds]

[459] He won an appointment to West Point but flunked the physical despite the fact that he went to Washington and then to Atlanta to appeal his case. He studied business and accounting in Philadelphia and for a short time was a teller in the First National Bank. When his father had a heart attack (see enclosure) he went into the coal business. His younger brothers were in the ice business. [Zebulon Weaver, Bob Reynolds, James Lee, Walter Hatch Lee]

[504] He was on the board of Eliada Home and President of the Hospital Board at the time it moved from Woodfin and merged (not with St. Joseph or Aston Park, now a nursing home) (see Barbara Keleher tape for details).

[532] At one time there were plans to build in Chunn's Cove on property owned by the Seely's. The Seely land had been prepared for construction, when Norburn's [1947 Asheville City Directory: Norburn Hospital, 509 Biltmore Ave.; Norburn Hospital Nurses Home, 37 Watauga] said they would give up their land. All hospitals were mortgaged, despite two campaigns and money through the Hill-Burton Act (which made the new hospital a regional rather than a solely local hospital). But the building commenced. The Board of Trustees signed for the difference - a trying time for him with a baby on the way. [Mrs. Evelyn Seely, Charlie Owens, George Cecil]

[583] Duke University offered the Highland Hospital land to the group after the fire but stipulated that it must maintain a psychiatric division. The board passed this up and built on Biltmore Ave.

[607] The hospital owned the property where the Doctors Building is now but, feeling there would never be a need for it, sold it only to buy it back later.

Side 2:

St. Joseph's, originally a T. B. hospital built by Catholics, was turned into a general hospital and rebuilt when medication for the disease was discovered. Mission Memorial and St. Joseph's hospitals divide areas of emphasis - i.e. ob-gyn patients, because of religious inhibitions, go to

Mission. Doctors are usually on staff of both hospitals. Hospital employment surpasses Enka and Champion.

[2/36] There was an ice house on Meadow Road. Empty cars were iced and sent to South Carolina where they were re-iced and filled with peaches. The cars are refrigerated now.

[2/61] During the Depression peddlers took 50-100 lbs sacks of coal up through the colored section.

[2/69] His younger brother was given a goat which he attached to a wagon and with it peddled coal. It was kept in a coal yard and used also in parades. [Walter Hatch Lee]

[2/89] The Grove Park and Battery Park Hotels had stoves requiring hard coal. They had to be especially ordered and kept under cover.

[2/102] The smoke ordinance against the use of soft coal (see George Coggins) applied to industries only. When it was not possible to convert to gas, instructions were given on how to shake down the fire and they only burned at night or early morning. The hospital stack on McDowell St. still burns soft coal. (enclosure)

[2/118] The Artmore Furniture Store (see Wade Huff) sold room furnaces - this did not cut into the coal business. The Grace Coal Co. in Newbridge sells coal brought in by rail. Some houses still burn coal.

[2/132] His grandfather invested in brickettes to be used in fireplaces and cook stoves. Cement held the coal together and it did not cook well. He lost money on this.

[2/143] Chimneys were cleaned by dropping heavy sacks down to loosen the soot.

[2/161] When coal cars on their way to Knoxville had to slow down, men riding on top of the gondolas would throw coal down, jump off, and pick it up. Some cars were so picked over they didn't weigh what they were supposed to. The coal company only paid for what it received and the railroad had to make an adjustment. Jesse James Bailey was sheriff of both Madison and Buncombe County. [Jesse James Bailey]

[2/191] He never saw a still. Once he was sent to Black Mountain and given an address where he could buy whiskey. He was met at the door by the Chief of Police who directed him to a place where he could get it. While horseback riding in the Smokies, he thought he ran across a still but it was a saw mill.

[205] He, with his younger brother and cousins used to take horses into the back country with a trailer and air stream. He kept horses in Biltmore. Jane is an English rider. He saw one race on the track of the old McCormick Field. He has never visited the Amboy track for cars. [Jane Raoul Bingham]

[235] He has had no relationship with West Asheville after his trolley trips with his great aunt, his mother, and his nurse.

[245] His family bought groceries on the bottom end of Lexington - this was an outdoor market place, replacing the one at the back end of the fire department.

[281] McGough was instrumental in getting the Farmer's Market started on Brevard Road. It is a big operation and brings in money. He does not shop there, however. [Morris "Mack" McGough]

[308] He describes Pack Square. Many of the exterior walks are still there but inside gutted out. A restaurant operates in the Rexall building which was at one time an army outlet store.

[325] When the BB&T building (then Nations Bank) was being built it swayed in the wind and workers refused to go up until floors were put in to stabilize it. His father was mayor and the WPA, during his second term, returned the drawings for the building saying funds were not available. The government overlooked the fact that the building was already constructed and being used.

[358] A theatre on Patton Ave. and College St. had double entrances. Animals for the dog and pony shows were hauled up to the second floor on the College St. side.

[369] He does not recall any problem with integration. His customers were both black and white. The cars were "Jim Crow." He had blacks care for him as a child.

[386] He remembers the old Post Office and describes the way the carriers trucks drove in to pick up and deliver mail. When it was taken down to relocate on Otis Street, copper from the roof was made into post boxes.

[426] Drag pans with mules were used to level the hill for the new Battery Park Hotel. Pilings were driven into the land making a tremendous banging.

[450] He lunched at the S&W every day. During the Depression people would get hot water, which was free, and shake ketchup in it - making tomato soup.

The S&W started in Charlotte by a friend of his wife. There were several branches. Twice the local building was revived and is now being used for large dinner parties or catering. He thinks it may be a tax write-off. [Sara Lee, Frank Sherrill]

[518] He feels he has had a wonderful life. His first wife died with polio after the first child was born. His mother-in-law came from Charlotte to help and brought her daughter Sara with her. He later married Sara, whose grandfather had been Chief Justice of the State. [Mary Johnston Clarke Lee]

[563] He has had many interests in Asheville - the Hospital, Eliada Home (\$150,000 raised for a cottage by the Lions). Red Hoyle worked with the Lions later (see his tape). He was president of

the YMCA for many years but because of a heart attack did not attend the dedication of the new building. [James "Red" Hoyle]