

**Bill Moore Interview**  
February 20, 1993  
Dorothy Joynes, Interviewer

Dorothy: This is October 20th, 1993, Dorothy Joynes talking with Bill Moore in his office at 188 College Street. It is a special privilege to be able to find you because I have known about you since I came from Santa Barbara and went to the Unitarian Church and looked at the rockwork and the wonderful light in the Unitarian Church building, and wondered who did it, and now here I am.

Tell me, first of all, how did you come to Asheville. How did you decide to come here, and what did you find when you came?

Bill: Well, I grew up in a small town, 600 people, almost a village, east of Statesville, and it took me about ten years after that to get out of Raleigh because I studied architecture there and commuted to Chapel Hill and studied city planning, and I went into service and worked to earn money for school, but since childhood I had remembered that my dad could point out the Brushy Mountains to the west, 60 miles away. Across a great wheat field I could see those mountains on a clear day, so for me the mountains -- as a child the mountains were a place of escape, a place of mystery, perhaps even romance. There I was living in this little town and there was a sign on the highway that said "Asheville, 144 miles", and then, of course, in later years I did visit Asheville. I had no good reason to leave the state. I have ties of various kinds, family and scholastic and professional, and for me Asheville seemed like a good choice because it is a beautiful natural setting.

Dorothy: When did you come here?

Bill: 1963. And for the prior decade growth here had been about zero, and there are those who would say that's a blessing, but if you're trying to make a living on something that depends on building or construction, zero growth is not a very happy situation, but I took a calculated risk and came anyway.

Dorothy: Did you know there was going to be a lot of development?

Bill: There wasn't a lot for another decade like there is now. And even today we don't have the growth that Charlotte or Raleigh have.

Dorothy: I was thinking in terms of the real need to do something about the community, such as model city plan and the 20-10. Were you involved in those in any way?

Bill: Yes, I was. We planned housing and cooperated with the city planners in the model cities program. I was president of the local AIA chapter when Forward 76 came along, and we formed a task force to do a plan for downtown. The one big mistake we made was that we did it for free, for no charge, therefore they didn't think it was of any value. So it never got very far. It was not implemented. Funding was not there at that time, but later -- it probably served a purpose because later there was additional planning and hundreds of thousands, and even millions finally went into downtown development.

Dorothy: Were the projects part of your planning?

Bill: Projects?

Dorothy: The projects for the -- well, I was thinking particularly, because it looked a little like your style, in Kenilworth. When the people were moved out of the center of the city they were placed in various projects all over the community.

Bill: Right, we do have public housing of mixed quality. John Wiegman was the architect for the project in Kenilworth that you're talking about. We did housing for low and moderate income, but not within the city. Well, I have to correct that. Yes, we did. Mountainside Apartments.

Dorothy: You also worked on the Blue Ridge Parkway for the park development. Did you do some work for them?

Bill: We did a small project up at Sliding Rock. Actually it's a bathhouse and toilet facilities and picnic areas in the vicinity of Sliding Rock. I don't know if you're familiar with that, but kids and teenagers slide down a long, long slick rock and plunge into a deep pool. It's a very popular recreation area.

Dorothy: So when you first came here there wasn't a great deal of talk about developing the city. That was later. But you probably anticipated that it would come because at that time there was a lot of substandard buildings throughout the community.

Bill: Well, I knew two of the planning directors, Bob Barber and Dean Mathews, and they both had rather progressive, forward looking plans. Things were in the formative stage and Dean Mathews especially was instrumental in bringing about the model cities program to Asheville, so things were growing.

Dorothy: You could see that even though you might feel there was a log jam at the time, there was something that was going to be coming as far as the upgrading of the city was concerned.

Bill: Oh, yes, it was inevitable. Asheville had its own little depression before the national depression, and it was deep in debt, and roughly from 1930 to 1960 growth was zero, but we, of course, gradually pulled out of that. Air conditioning was a factor. After World War II there were not as many families that came to the mountains and stayed for a week or a month to escape the heat of the larger cities.

Dorothy: So air conditioning meant that there were fewer people coming here to get away from the southern heat.

Bill: Yes.

Dorothy: And yet I think there has been a climate change since the 60's.

Bill: Yes, there has. There was almost an axis between here and Charleston, the South Carolina low country, that came up as far as the railroad came, and that stopped at Saluda, and Saluda is a small resort in itself, but then others took the stagecoach on to Hendersonville and Asheville and other places. That went back even prior to the Civil War. The secretary of the treasury of the Confederacy had a summer home in Hendersonville, and many other prominent South Carolinians.

Dorothy: Do you still get people here from Florida for the summer months?

Bill: Oh, yes.

Dorothy: And would then own their houses here, as well as in Florida.

Bill: Many of them do.

Dorothy: You do that kind of building?

Bill: Yes, we design houses.

Dorothy: What is your favorite kind of building? Do you like to do the individual or do you like to do the corporate projects?

Bill: What I enjoy is being able to practice architecture as an art, and that's not limited to any building type. I would rather work in any building type if I had a client who is interested in the art of architecture, and they're so rare that my opportunities are rare.

Dorothy: It takes a lot of time to train them too, doesn't it? To get the ideas together so

that you're expressing them and they understand what you're doing.

Bill: Well, there are some out there who actually appreciate the art of architecture, and sometimes I learn from a client. Quite often I learn things from a client.

Dorothy: But it's much more complicated to work on an individual house, isn't it, when you are dealing with somebody with ideas that they particularly have cherished but can't particularly put down on paper.

Bill: Well, certainly you're dealing with an individual or a couple or a family who have very distinct ideas. They have perhaps been dreaming of this project for several years, as opposed to working on a school, church or other institution where a consensus finally builds, and that, of course, in itself might be hard to achieve, a consensus, but the architect there is seeking some common ground rather than trying to satisfy the individual needs of one person or family.

Dorothy: Do you have a particular style that you lean towards?

Bill: Well, broadly speaking I would consider myself part of the organic architecture movement of Frank Lloyd Wright. I'm not even sure it should be called a style because there are a lot of variations within it, and we could spend several hours talking about that, but I'll try to just briefly say something about it. I don't know if you know the name Louis Kahn, but Louis Kahn is no longer living, but a few years back he was considered one of the very best architects in this country, and Louis Kahn said that he was greatly influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright, that he owed a great debt to Wright than any other architect, and yet his buildings didn't look like Wright's buildings. He was an original. And I think that a healthy influence that came from Wright produced that kind of work. Not designers trying to mimic his work or repeat elements or -- all of that's obviously plagiaristic work.

Dorothy: But his philosophy.

Bill: I think the healthy influence was an appreciation of his philosophy and his examples. He was one of those first modernists who saw that architecture and architects should have a social responsibility, a social consciousness. Prior to that time there was still this grand conception of designing majestic palaces for royalty and grand government palaces, but by the turn of the century, there were a few people looking into the new century and seeing that everybody out there ought to have access to good buildings and good design.

Dorothy: And looking at the site, looking at the use, and looking at the material.

Bill: Right. He's the leading example of user friendly buildings, buildings that are friendly toward the earth, in harmony with nature, that hug the ground or that in some way always relate to the landscape, the context, to the natural environment.

Dorothy: Do you have any favorites that you've done here?

Bill: Favorites of my own buildings? Well, certainly the Unitarian Church is my favorite project. We designed several residences that I think are successful. The clients are quite happy with them. We won several awards.

Dorothy: What are they?

Bill: We won an award, a regional environmental award, on my own house on North Griffing Boulevard. We won an award for the rest area building at the Biltmore Estate, which is really nothing more than a glorified restroom, but it did win a North Carolina AIA honor award. I've been involved in several other awards, but in a collaborative way in some other office, a couple houses.

Dorothy: Have you always been with another office, or were you on your own?

Bill: I came here in '63 with Charlie Sopenfield. I was working for him. He later went on the Ball State and became the dean there. Then I was with Bert King for several years. In late 65 I opened my own office. And it has changed and evolved a little over the years. We've never been a big office, but we have had partners and associates that have come and gone.

Dorothy: Have you always been at this location?

Bill: No, we've only been here a couple years.

Dorothy: I was interested with what they're doing with Pritchard Park, whether they're going to have the buses continue to make this their headquarters for picking up people. Has that affected you, the buses being around Pritchard Park. Has that affected your business at all?

Bill: No, not at all. We get very little walk-in trade. I do like to see activity downtown. It doesn't bother me that there is a tendency for lower income people to ride the buses. They're the people who need it, and therefore they should be seen and near the bus station.

Dorothy: I was listening to a tape that Tony Lord did about the trees in Pritchard Park, and I had frankly never noticed the trees until today, so there has been a lot going on in developing the esthetic area of the downtown. Have you had anything to do with the involvement of decision making on the friendly -- how is you phrased that -- architecture should be people friendly. . .

Bill: User friendly.

Dorothy: User friendly. I've heard about this bank that was set back, the National Bank was set back by a number of feet, and how pleased people were to have that green space between the sidewalk. Do you have any feelings about what is being done in town or the changes that have been taking place to make the buildings more user friendly?

Bill: I am aware of the fact that Tony Lord is a young man who is inspired by all the tree lined avenues in Paris, and I think that we have, not only Tony, but the City of Paris perhaps, to thank for that. I have studied city planning and urban design, and went to Europe and studied Italian public spaces, Italian Renaissance spaces, and certainly where I've had an opportunity I have always been interested in that, and I think almost any architect would like to have the opportunity to create nice public spaces in a lively downtown. I haven't had much opportunity and can't take much credit for . . .

Dorothy: What do you think about what's happening right now with Pack Place being developed and the effort to bring people back into the center of the city? Do you have any thoughts about that?

Bill: Well, certainly that's a big plus. When I was chairman of this task force I can remember making public addresses and pleading for an improved downtown. If you recall, I think it was Napoleon who called Piazza San Marco in Venice the finest drawing room in Europe, and I tried to make the point, although it's not nearly as grand, that Pack Square is the living room of the city, it's the primary public place. I think it's a disgrace for any city to not have some nice public space.

Dorothy: You say task force. Can you talk about that?

Bill: It was a group of architects who volunteered their time and cooperated with the city planning department, and we evolved a plan that was intended to serve as a guideline. Of course there was some limit as to how much volunteer time could be put into that, but there was a team of perhaps a dozen young architects who did volunteer quite a bit of their time.

Dorothy: What brought this about? How did it begin?

Bill: Well, there were a number of us who simply were interested in urban design, and could see that there was a vacuum there. There hadn't been any vision in recent years.

Dorothy: Was this under parks and recreation. Was there an overall head for this?

Bill: We cooperated with the city planning office.

Dorothy: Was this the '76 program?

Bill: Actually I think it was prior to that. I think we started about 1974.

Dorothy: What was that called?

Bill: We just called it a task force for downtown planning. Then later I think Forward '76 adopted us, gave us support.

Dorothy: And who were they?

Bill: You mean names, or describe the organization?

Dorothy: Yes, how it went together.

Bill: Well, it was a city sponsored organization. I think there was some federal funds and local funds that went into that. Their main objective was simply to improve the quality of life in downtown Asheville, and even try to reach beyond downtown in promoting parks, trees, public spaces, generally giving some attention to aesthetic values of the various public facilities across this town.

Dorothy: Was this following HUD and the redevelopment of the downtown around the YMCA and the church, and the downtown demolition of the old buildings? Was this following that program?

Bill: Well, there had been several programs and, as you would guess, they sort of overlapped. Some were concurrent. The Civic Center was part of a downtown urban renewal project, and it's an asset to the downtown.

Dorothy: Were you involved in that? The decision making on that?

Bill: No.

Dorothy: That was a difficult decision.

Bill: Right. The location of it was criticized at the time because many people felt that parking was inadequate and too expensive to build, but in order to get the federal funding for the building it had to be in an urban renewal area, so this turned out to be the best location.

Dorothy: Have you felt the impact of the malls in the city, the malls taking so much traffic out of the city?

Bill: Oh, no question about it. For the last twenty years you can walk the streets and see the stores emptying.

Dorothy: What do you predict will happen?

Bill: There is a certain inevitability about downtown. It is the heart of the city. For those who still work here the public spaces are the living room of the city. All the major financial institutions that we can see around us here are very much committed to downtown, as they are in all downtowns. They're here to stay. And along with them, a lot of professional people, a lot of commercial offices, and there will always be small shops and lunchrooms and cafes, restaurants, that are going to serve those people. I, in a short time, wouldn't attempt to make any long range forecasts, but generally I think downtown is going to survive as an interesting place where there is some contribution to the quality of life. Maybe we just have to stop thinking that bigger is better, and accept downtown for what it is and give up on the idea of it ever being a major retail center again. That's not to say that the Grove Arcade Building can't make a comeback. I would certainly like to see that happen. I would hope that it could be a successful venture.

Dorothy: Talk about that. Have you been involved in the planning for that?

Bill: Well, I have been in several meetings, but I haven't been directly involved in that. I can't give you any inside information or take much credit for that.

Dorothy: I wondered how they felt they were going to take care of the parking that would be necessary.

Bill: If there's demand, parking appears. If the city can justify it financially they build parking garages. They have been doing that. They've built several.

Dorothy: Have you been involved in any of the parking garages?



Bill: No, we haven't. There have only been -- I think there are three major parking garages.

Dorothy: Any plan for the future?

Bill: I'm sorry, I can't answer that. I think that if downtown thrives it's inevitable. Probably the new federal building will have some provision for their own parking, but I haven't seen plans for that. But the Grove Arcade, you know, was originally planned as a retail shopping center.

Dorothy: Wasn't that to be several stories higher?

Bill: Yes.

Dorothy: Is there any possibility of putting parking on the roof?

Bill: I don't think so, from what I know of the building.

Dorothy: Not structurally strong enough?

Bill: It's the layout of the building. It would be too costly. You'd sacrifice too much quality space inside.

Dorothy: I mean put it on top, on the roof.

Bill: To get there, just the access, you'd either have to sacrifice too much of the quality space within the building or go out on the public right-of-way. Anything's possible, but I doubt that it would be feasible. It's just that there are other ways, better ways, to do it.

Dorothy: Do you think that Pack Place will be able to draw enough people to pay for itself?

Bill: I think the planners may have gone a little beyond -- maybe they were a little bit too ambitious in planning for that. Certainly I'm a 100% supporter of the arts and certainly I'm glad to see as much money as can be raised go into that, but I think it's a little bit like church. No matter how much you're dedicated to it, still you have to live within your means, and everybody has some limit. So I think Pack Place will still go through some upheaval if the city puts enough into it.

Dorothy: So this is mostly financed by city bonds.

Bill: Well, it's complicated. There's some private -- in that whole complex there's private property, public property, local funding, I think there's county funding, and federal funding. It's a pretty complex project.

Dorothy: Is this anticipated over a period of time. Is there a specified time they hope to be able to raise the money to pay it back or is it just open ended?

Bill: Well, a lot of money was, the private money, of course, was donated up front. The city, of course, does look at improvements downtown with the idea that there will be some payback, that if property values can be kept up, with tax bases improved, over the long haul money does come back.

Dorothy: Have you worked with Roger McGuire?

Bill: Not very closely. I met Roger soon after he came here and saw him quite a bit at the Unitarian Church, and we have a good acquaintance, but haven't worked directly with him very much.

Dorothy: I went on a hard hat tour before they opened and I was very much impressed with him as a person. He had real vision and a very strong personality.

Bill: Oh, yes, a very capable person.

Dorothy: And the Haywood Park Hotel, that renovation over the last eight years. Can you talk about that?

Bill: Yes. John Rogers was the architect for that. I don't know his client but he must have had a good client who was interested in good building. I do think that architecturally it's successful. I really don't know how successful it is commercially as a hotel. The atrium is quite an asset, which is adjacent to the hotel.

Dorothy: It's a little like the inside Venice, isn't it. People do go there and have lunch and that type of thing. The lobby is very pleasant.

Bill: I guess I would compare it to the Galleria in Milan, as an enclosed mall. Something similar to that movement that started maybe 1890, 1880, in Europe.

Dorothy: There are these real efforts to develop the downtown and it's interesting to see how they go along. Of course I'd like to see -- I'm looking out at S & W. You hated to see that closed, didn't you?

Bill: I did. Not only because the building has no life anymore, but I miss the food too. Of course you probably realize that that was designed by Douglas Ellington, and there's quite a story there. I don't think we have time this morning for me to go into that, but Douglas certainly made a contribution to the city.

Dorothy: I'd like to hear some of it anyway. Can you tell me?

Bill: Well, his own house is a marvelous creation. He started with a log cabin and it grew into an English cottage, so to speak. It's built with a lot of salvaged material from city hall. If you go in the house, the living room has a high ceiling and you can still see the wood grain on the boards and perhaps some concrete from those boards being used as formwork in city hall. Just a lot of little curiosities. He embedded coal, black coal into the walls, and he embedded little pieces of glass, rather unique and innovative.

Dorothy: But he has also thrown in some art deco in that house too, so that you have the three different styles.

Bill: Well, generally all of his work reflects to some extent the art deco style.

Dorothy: The S&W has almost a history of its own. Did you use it a great deal?

Bill: I did, and we even did plans for renovating it. It was a young man who had grown up in that cafeteria, so to speak. He was a relative of Mr. Sherril, who was the S of S&W, and he would like to describe how when he walks in that building he hears voices. And he sees visions, and the 30's come back to him. He wanted to renovate it into a 30's type -- almost a galleria. His concept was a little shopping center of cafes and restaurants, and bars and retail.

Dorothy: Wouldn't that work? Wouldn't that be a possibility?

Bill: I think something like that might happen in the Grove Arcade. Yes, I think that -- and the atrium is to some extent an example. But Asheville is no great metropolis, and there is some limit to how much of that type of commercial operation can be successful. Businesses do fail. You don't automatically succeed with a good idea. There has to be an economic base.

Dorothy: Someone said to me that if they had had parking here, and they had discussed that, that they would have been able to accommodate the people coming in, and I talked to Red Hoyle of the Hoyle Stationery store, and he was telling me about all of the organizations that got born there. It's really a long history of the people who would meet there week after week, and all the committees that would be formed, particularly after the

war, and it's just such a shame. It meant a lot to my husband, and when we came back here -- I was here 20 years ago -- and I remember vividly how marvelous the food was, and the idea of a cafeteria where you could just get what you wanted and that was all. And we were shocked and surprised and very sad when we found that it was closed. So if there's any possibility of its being revived, I think that's most interesting. Is there a group behind this in any way?

Bill: This was several years ago, more like ten years ago, and it's changed hands a couple of times and several false starts have been made, and I know of nothing positive.

Dorothy: Who owns it?

Bill: I'm sorry, I used to know.

Dorothy: Still privately owned?

Bill: Since it has changed hands I haven't kept up with each successive owner.

Dorothy: But it's quite a loss having it vacant like this.

Bill: Oh, it is.

Dorothy: Are there any other buildings around here -- you said there were long stories with Ellington, but I would like to hear some more stories on Ellington. I think his house is incredible. Are there other things -- the courthouse, of course, and the church that he is so well known for.

Bill: Asheville High School. And there's some interesting renderings around that were never realized.

Dorothy: What kind of renderings?

Bill: I'm trying to remember now one that I saw about twenty or twenty-five years ago, a building that would have been sort of Asheville's miniature crystal palace, with a glass roof. I think maybe that was going to be an automotive showroom. I'm not sure about that. Most architects have a few buildings in the file that don't get realized. Frank Lloyd Wright designed a thousand houses and only five hundred of them got built. That tells you something about going through a depression, but it wasn't only back then. Even today plans change, people change their objectives.

Dorothy: What changes do you see in Asheville, have you seen since you've been here?

You have a good long scope of time in this community, and lots of change while you were here.

Bill: One positive thing is that I think there is a pretty strong and widespread interest in the quality of life. Many people come here looking for that, and they're willing to work toward that goal. Now, I suppose to some extent people everywhere are interested in a quality of life and seeing their town improve, but we have a strong preservation society here. They don't get all the credit for the old buildings you see that are still preserved. Tony Lord made the point years ago that the depression was probably the greatest factor in the preservation of the old buildings with real character because what happened is that Asheville just became frozen, it was overbuilt. It had twice as much space as it needed and, therefore, the old buildings just kept being reused and recycled, and therefore we have more that survived than the average town of this size.

Dorothy: That's why Monterey has the adobes, because everyone left for the gold rush and they didn't bother to knock them down, and so when they started seeing what they had they developed them and made almost national shrines of them.

Bill: Oh, that's interesting.

Dorothy: And it was because of the fact that the people just walked off to go to the gold mines. The Montford area is one that must interest you also. What's being done there with the preservation society and the saving of these houses.

Bill: The preservation society has certainly worked hard to save a number of old buildings, but another strong and important influence there is the residents -- a community action group -- what's it called? Simply an organization of residents in Montford.

Dorothy: How is that formed. I've heard about it. Have you ever gone to any of their meetings?

Bill: I've been on the fringes of that, informal groups and committees.

Dorothy: Richard Mathews is working with that. I know he was instrumental in moving Richmond Hill. Did you know anything about that project -- Richmond Hill being moved off the property, the Baptist Retirement Home?

Bill: I'm pretty much familiar with that, but most of my information comes through newspaper reports and photographs from years past.

Dorothy: They have a nice little video of that being moved, and I didn't realize so much

had gone into it until I saw what they had done with the house, and then Montford area -- I was very impressed with the houses there. They are tremendous. And I talked to Mary Parker yesterday, and she was talking -- she lives at 95 Chestnut Street. She was born in that house. Her grandfather built it, and it was considered in the country. We were talking about Montford, and she said, "oh yes, Montford was the elegant, stylish place to be".

Bill: Oh, yes. Still a lot of those houses are there and well preserved.

Dorothy: They are really beautiful. Are there any plans -- you said there was an organization, and I know very little about it -- to redevelop the area? Are the residents themselves concerned? Is that an internal concern so that they are trying to upgrade it?

Bill: Yes, there are several things going on there simultaneously. There is the preservation society, there is the organization of residents. There is a projected urban renewal area, and that is somewhat controversial because there are those who would like to see Montford remain entirely residential, and yet there are others who say, if we're going to live here we need a grocery store, and we need a laundry and we need shops, and we need services. So that's an ongoing controversy. It's my impression that what's happening over there is pretty spontaneous and it's pretty much due to the effort of individuals. The people who live there are obviously the ones most concerned about what's going to happen to their neighborhood, but even they might disagree among themselves about the pros and cons of a grocery store coming to the neighborhood. At least the democratic process is at work and hopefully Montford will remain a pleasant place.

Dorothy: You said urban renewal. Would that be with federal funds, city funds, state funds?

Bill: Right: Larry Hold is instrumental in the project over there. The only thing that's happened for several years is acquisition of land, and at this point nobody knows for sure what will happen because it will depend on private developers buying that land or portions of that land and what they do with it to some extent depends on their objectives, and if they're private profit motivated, then they obviously have to bring in profitable businesses for it to survive.

Dorothy: I was interested in the recreation center that they have there, the gym and the playgrounds, tennis courts and so forth. I had heard that you had done that so I went up there. . .

Bill: Oh, you did. Yes we did, we designed the building, the recreation center.

Dorothy: I went up and looked around and took some pictures, and I thought, this is just great because I'm going to be talking to you on Saturday.

Bill: Well, of course with that type of building the funding is usually limited, and a gymnasium is a pretty big elephant and hard to hide, but we did make our best effort to try to scale the perimeter of the building down and put it into a residential context.

Dorothy: One thing I've always been impressed with with architecture is the way you can take cement, which used to be cement blocks, used to be just slabs of cement, you could just tell it was a cement building, now it's treated in such a way that it has tremendous texture and makes lights and shadows on it, so that even though it's an inexpensive and very durable building material, it is made extremely artistic.

Bill: It's a very important element in modern architecture. Unity Temple, if you recall, was one of the first concrete buildings in the country, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, Oak Park, outside Chicago. A pioneering building. It was a Universalist Church.

Dorothy: So that even though you're using the least expensive material, you can make it the most elegant.

Bill: That was always an objective of Wright, and many other modern architects set that as a goal. The optimum, how to achieve the most with the least means.

Dorothy: When I think of your work, I always think of the stone and the brown and the lightness. Is this one of your trademarks? Is this something you feel particularly close to?

Bill: I used to have ambitions of writing a book, or editing or collaborating on a book, that would have been called something like, traces of the regional style. There is no regional style, but there are elements, certain elements, rudimentary beginnings and stops and starts. The native fieldstone does cost less here, relatively it costs much less to do stonework here than in Charlotte or Raleigh, and therefore it's more common here and contributes to some extent to what could be a regional style. Now if you go to Italy and you see these little hill towns and every building in the village is built of the same material  
...

Dorothy: Comes right out of the earth.

Bill: Yes, and all the roofs in town are red clay. Tremendous harmony and unity about the place.

Dorothy: All through England you get the same thing. You can tell that what the stone is underneath you.

Bill: And yet there are those who would say, oh, it's awful . . .

Dorothy: This is side 2. On the other side we were talking about the integrity of a community which is largely a part of the material that they have on hand, and we talked about something to do with the bricks. Is there a theme in Asheville as far as the colors or the mode, or the impression that the city is giving to people who are just coming into visit it?

Bill: I think there are a number of buildings downtown that probably were built in the 20's or maybe before that, and built of brick that came from the same source because it was local and economical, so almost by accident there is a unity there. We were speaking of the Italian hill towns where all the buildings in town are built of one material. We tried to apply that principle at the Givens Estate. Of course, it's modest. I don't mean to compare that to Florence or Vienna, but in a modest way we did try to apply that principle and give this complex a sense of unity, village-like. Sometimes a client, an owner can't buy that. He won't go along with the principle. He's grown up thinking variety and things in terms of let's paint this one green and let's paint that one pink. Of course it's possible to work with color ranges. Analogous colors are easy to work with. By and large I think what you are identifying is eclecticism that lifted from many styles and mixed a lot of materials without any unity of purpose, but there are other examples where native fieldstone has the beginnings of contributing to a regional style.

Dorothy: I was interested in the colors that they chose for Pack Place. Evidently they were reflecting the buildings just opposite -- what do they call it, the restaurant on the green, or in the park. There was a color scheme across the street they were reflecting when they were putting the finishing colors on Pack Place. Is there a basic color scheme that the community is working with. Is there something that they are trying to incorporate in an overall feel or overall color coordination?

Bill: The city is building sidewalks of bluestone and red brick so you get the combination of concrete, new and old, and a dull red brick and bluestone, which I think are compatible. I think you can tolerate that much variety if it's in some orderly pattern, and they are making an effort in that direction. I know of no example where any public building is, or group of public buildings, is well coordinated in material and color.

Dorothy: Is there someone in charge of this, some advisory committee or zoning or . . .

Bill: There is a downtown committee that reviews plans, but it's advisory. It has no



authority. It can make suggestions and have some influence.

Dorothy: What is their offices, how do they work?

Bill: They are appointed by the city council.

Dorothy: Under what?

Bill: Well, they're simply called -- I'm not even sure of the name -- the downtown design review committee.

Dorothy: And zoning? Would that be under zoning?

Bill: Well, this committee has no authority. Zoning is a factor. It controls to some extent what can be built.

Dorothy: Is this following the 20-10 plan?

Bill: The committee that I'm speaking of preceded that plan, and would overlap. I'm sure that there is some effort to try to conform to that plan, but it preceded it and may exist after the 20-10 plan is no longer relevant.

Dorothy: Do you know anything about their meetings or what comes to them and how they make their decisions?

Bill: In the past I used to be better informed. I served on the planning and zoning for three years, and I ran for city council, and participated in zoning and planning, but I don't have much current information. I'm not up to date on how they're operating.

Dorothy: How does zoning and planning affect what you're doing?

Bill: Unfortunately when I served on planning and zoning, there wasn't much planning, or wasn't much interest in planning on the commission. There was a planning staff and they did some planning, but they were severely limited. It was my impression that what they did was mostly trouble shooting, administrative work, and didn't really have the staff or the budget for planning, and if any planning was to be done it had to be subbed out to an out of town consultant, out of town expert.

Dorothy: I've asked a lot of questions but I'm sure that as an architect you have many areas that I haven't even touched on as far as your relationship with the city is concerned. Before we get on to the church I wanted to ask you whether there's anything I haven't

asked or whether there is an area you'd like to explore.

Bill: Well, there are some fine examples of architecture. For example, the Grove Park Inn is a tremendous asset, not only to it's neighborhood -- now I'm talking about the old part. I won't get into a critique of the new because that's too complicated. The Grove Park neighborhood, even though it came under the influence of all the eclectics and the eclectic styles, still there is some character to the place. You see threads of some unity here and there. Seeley's Castle on Town Mountain Road is a product of eclecticism. An owner tried to lift an English castle from the continent of Europe, not literally, but that, of course, inspired Seeley's Castle. Zealandia, a very handsome building by, I think it was built by our ambassador to New Zealand. I'm not sure if I have that right. But it's a piece of architecture worth looking at. All over town if you seek them out, there are some gems and some semi-precious stones, and some in the rough, and then some awful examples of buildings to look at.

Dorothy: I really appreciate your comments on that, and I wondered if there is anything more to do with the past, present and future of architecture in the city.

Bill: In my mind the regional style is still an open question. Philosophically I lean toward that. I would like to think time and place and economy and the socio-economic context can still all somehow achieve a unity, and achieve some man made environment that's worthy of the 20th and the 21st century.

Dorothy: How would you describe that in a group of houses?

Bill: How to describe . . .

Dorothy: Well, what you would like to see giving the time and the place and the material. What would you like to see in a group of houses, say in an area that was going to be developed.

Bill: A group of houses is not likely to be built on flat land in Buncombe County because all of the flat land was developed years ago, or it's in the flood plain, so it's likely to be on a hillside, and that would suggest to me terraces, landscaping, stone retaining walls that become integrated with the integrating building and landform. Certainly preserving trees is something that everybody likes to see. It's easy to agree on it, but then if you have to grade the site sometimes it's just impossible to save a lot of trees. So that points to the need to quickly come in and re-landscape where a lot of grading has taken place, and I think we should budget more money for that. Nature works fairly economically. A little bit of landscaping goes a long way at a relatively low cost, and yet we often neglect that. I think most people prefer small scale development. There is an American ideal of the

single family house, but everybody can't afford a single family house, and some people don't want to. We have a lot of condos here, and that way we're part of a national trend. There is the economy, the efficiency, land conservation. There's several forces and factors that are pointing us toward multifamily housing. A planner, when he's planning for other people, likes multifamily housing because it's compact, it's easier, more economical to serve the so called infrastructure, water, sewer, paved roads, etc. There's a lot of logic in it. But if this planner is very successful and wealthy, he probably wants to live in a single family house in the suburbs. So that's a controversial issue that's almost universal, that goes on and on. Everybody likes as much low density -- not everybody, but low density is popular, and yet there's a good argument to be made for higher density to develop intensely here and preserve a hundred acre park over there for all to enjoy and stroll in. I'm still not quite answering your question. I would see a successful residential development as more compact than in the past for all the necessities and reasons that are becoming more and more important, all the economies and efficiencies need to be applied, perhaps cluster housing as an alternative to single family housing where you've got two or four jointed together in a tight cluster, so that 10 or 20 acres surrounding it could be preserved as a green belt. Insofar as practical, I have tended toward native materials, wood and stone and even cement plaster, which is a rather modest material, but it's neutral and can be blended with stone and wood if you don't have the budget for all the quality materials. Certainly residential developments could be planned with more harmony, more integrated with nature, in harmony with nature. But it's not just the developer that's the villain, or the mediocre architect. The client has to demand it. That's where it comes from. The principle of supply and demand works, it really works in every marketplace. If you want it bad enough and if you've got the money and you can afford it, you'll get it.

Dorothy: And there's compromise all the way along the line.

Bill: Right.

Dorothy: Could you tell me about your relationship with Unitarianism. Were you born a Unitarian?

Bill, No, I wasn't. I grew up in a Methodist family, and moved to Raleigh and drifted a little bit, and attended a Baptist church, where a very prominent minister spoke on Sundays, and then gradually drifted away from that, and was sort of a dropout for a couple of years until I discovered that Frank Lloyd Wright and Thomas Jefferson, two of my favorite Americans and my two favorite heroes, I guess you would say . . . When I discovered they were Unitarian that was compelling to me. I had to know more about it. As I grew to learn more about Wright and Jefferson I learned of so many compatibilities, similarities, both egalitarian, both fierce defenders of religious freedom and democracy, and both interested in the arts and good government, and on and on and on. So there was

so much there for me to explore and admire and learn from that it led me to the Unitarian Church. When I moved here in June of '63, the first Sunday I went to the Unitarian Church, and shortly thereafter became a member and have been ever since.

Dorothy: They were on Vermont Avenue at the time.

Bill: That's right. We were in a large old house over there.

Dorothy: A lot of talk about building their own place, right?

Bill: That's right. I think we had attendance of something like 30 or 35 adults when I first started attending, and then it grew to 40 and 50 adults, and then we formed a long range planning committee. I served as chairman of that committee for several years. Maybe I shouldn't have been even a member of that committee. I raised that subject. Sometimes a client and an architect get into an adversary relationship, and the client should be free to take issue with any problem or subject in the design process, but nevertheless I was on the committee and we spent many hours trying to project a program. You might say, we'd sit around the table and take turns giving a pep talk, to use a popular common term. We tried to make population projections, we tried to guess what percentage of population growth would get to be Unitarian, but what we really felt was underlying the whole potential of the church was a lot of Unitarians, a lot out there who were already Unitarian in belief and practice who didn't know it, who didn't even know there was such a thing as the Unitarian Church. But gradually we had people moving here from the north, the northeast, the midwest, who had been exposed to Unitarianism and many of them came here as members. Gradually the community became more and more aware of Unitarianism, and probably our church has grown at a higher rate than any other church in the community. We came from nowhere in 1950, not one that I know of in the 17 western counties, there was not one. We started at ground zero and today we have roughly 450 members, I believe, and one thriving congregation in Hendersonville is sort of an offshoot of this one, and there is a fellowship at Black Mountain, so there is tremendous growth here. Back then our long range planning committee liked to believe that all that was going to happen, that all these wonderful Unitarian-Universalists were out there, and if we could find them or only they could find us, that we'd have a lot of support and could build this church that we dreamed of. We struggled on, and as late as something like 1968 we still didn't really have much money and didn't see much potential for getting the budget we needed. One common problem that churches have, that seems to be unique with churches, and that is how can a small group, small cluster of 30 or 40 people, build a church for 100 or 200 people. You know that once you get it all built and paid for those people are going to come and they're going to enjoy it and support it. Anyway we had some generous contributions along the way. We started out thinking that our building program had to be limited to a \$90,000 budget. We thought that all we could

afford would be a simple multipurpose space where everything would happen, church dinners, service. But one generous contribution was a piece of land with some houses on it, and we were able to use those houses to phase and phase out with one house serving as classrooms for R.E. I think by the time we started building about 1970, our first phase was completed in '71. Going into that I think we had adult attendance of something like 100-125. When we moved into the new building it just instantly jumped to something like 175 and shortly thereafter up to 200, so that the building was very instrumental in contributing to growth, although we had some members that felt like we shouldn't build a new building, that it would cost too much, that we should be more modest. It was a luxury that was not proper for us to indulge in. Among Unitarians you hear a wide, wide range of opinions.

Dorothy: We were fortunate in location and in your spectacular building, which is used by so many people, so it's constantly advertising. Tell me some of the experiences you had in planning the building and working with the people there.

Bill: Generally I think it's one of the best groups I've ever worked with. Now there's another controversial subject. Some would argue that a congregation should never hire one of their own members as architect because the potential for an adversarial relationship can come about and can even get to the point where a contract needs to be terminated or where an architect submits a design that's simply not acceptable. That's a controversy. There are several sides to that.

Dorothy: Did you feel threatened by that?

Bill: That argument. No, I didn't. I sort of grew into this role. I never proposed to anybody that I be the architect, but in this long range planning committee and then when a building committee was formed, and throughout the congregation every Sunday for five or six years, people would say to me, well, Bill, when are we going to start doing the design for the church, and it just seemed to be implied. Our congregation was so glad to have an architect in their midst so that never became a controversial issue. I didn't seek it and they never considered any other alternative.

Dorothy: That was my question, too, when I heard that it was built by a member of the congregation. I thought how difficult that could be.

Bill: Well, to some extent it was and still is. For ten years you're there every Sunday and anybody in the congregation can give you their opinion or tell you about some little problem or some failing, however I've been fortunate. I think we've gotten more praise than we have complaints from the process. We don't mind that.

Dorothy: It's been good advertising for you as an architect too.

Bill: Well, I suppose so. However we haven't had much opportunity to do other Unitarian churches.

Dorothy: The building was done in stages and, as I told you, I heard there was a spiral staircase that had been planned so the children could come up into the place where people congregated after church. Can you talk about that?

Bill: There were some people who simply felt that the social hour should be an adult activity, that noisy children running through the place and making it a playground was not a proper function, and if you look at other churches I think you will find some separation between the sanctuary, narthex, social hall, R.E. Those functions are zoned to some extent. I personally didn't feel very strongly about that issue either way. I didn't take a strong position. It wasn't that I didn't care. I just thought it could work either way, depending on what the consensus of the congregation was. The majority of the congregation thought that there ought to be a little more separation, that parents should go to R.E. fifteen minutes after coffee hour and be responsible for their own kids. That's not my position. There was a consensus. There was another controversy too that I might tell you about. It didn't really turn into a full blown controversy but when we were planning there was one elderly member of our congregation, a very fine and wealthy man, who was influential and gave generously to the church, but he had a preconceived idea of a church. He had been on a committee in New Jersey many many years before, and he had a preconceived idea that we had to build a church like that church he helped build in New Jersey in 1930 or '35 or whenever it was. He was on the building committee, but he was not chairman. Even though he was not chairman he called a special meeting, and the meeting was to be at his house, and we all sat around his dining room and listened to his values and his arguments. He had seen our proposed design and he had seen a model, he'd seen the drawings, and he felt that it was unattractive. He felt that the tower on top was an unsightly sawtoothed cupula. Somebody else called it a light scoop, but they meant it in a complimentary way. But essentially there was no one on the committee and no one in the congregation that agreed with this person. In fact I almost had sympathy for him because I didn't really fight him hard, I didn't resist. Since he stood along he was simply overwhelmed. But he was influential. He made a lot of people aware of the fact. He made it look like there was some major controversy. But the support for him just never formed, so it didn't get to be a strong . . .

Dorothy: Was the church he had in mind a traditional one, a gothic type?

Bill: He never showed us a picture. He just always described so, I'm sorry, I don't know what it was like, but I think we could guess that if it was built in 1930 in New Jersey it was

one of the traditional styles.

Dorothy: I've often wondered about this because it seems to me as I've looked at churches being built in the last 20-30 years, the most modern different, some of them very way out looking -- look like they're going to take off in a heavy gale -- buildings have been churches, which is traditionally the most conservative group. Is there a reason for that?

Bill: There are so many types, so many different types of churches and so many variations of the modern style that it's hard for me to generalize. I can remember speaking to the Unitarian congregation in Columbia, South Carolina, on the subject of a new church. They had a building program at the time and asked me to come and speak. I made the point that I was committed to a modern architecture, but that didn't mean that the church should look like a rocket going to the moon. I think there's been a lot of experimentation, and I think that some of it has failed. I think that some architects don't listen to their hearts or their instinct. I've mellowed up a little bit in my older years. When I was a young man I thought I was a missionary and that I had to convert everybody, and I've come to accept consensus. And context is also an important value.

Dorothy: It just seemed to me to be unusual that a conservative group would be in some cases so extreme, and perhaps it happened to be in places where I was looking and being aware of this, which was in California, where you probably see more of it. But some were so extreme that you wondered how they could be functional inside, and wondered whether this was a statement that went along with some of the attempts that churches have had to draw more people to their services, saying up front that we are forward thinking. I didn't know if there was a message behind that. Did you ever have any feeling that that could be.

Bill: That is hard to generalize, because that impulse might come from the congregation, it might come from a few individuals who are influential, or it might come from the architect who imposed some inappropriate form on a congregation. Many lay people can't visualize from a drawing, and quite often a client will not even be sure of what a certain space is going to look like until he sees it going up, and sometimes he's not very happy with what he sees going up. Of course a designer should make every effort to make his client fully aware of the design.

Dorothy: You indicated that this example that we have in the photograph of the Unitarian Church is a smaller addition of one that you had before.

Bill: The model.

Dorothy: So you had a large model that you showed to the congregation, is that it?

Bill: This is a portion of the original, but it was four times as big and it had all the building and landscaping, and it was in good condition 22 years ago.

Dorothy: And this is what you showed to the congregation?

Bill: Yes. We used it as the presentation.

Dorothy: Because people do have difficulty . . .

Bill: Right. We made a presentation to the building committee and then, of course, to the full congregation. Several presentations of drawings and the model.

Dorothy: Do you really gave everybody a chance to not only hear but to see exactly what it was going to look like.

Bill: Oh, surely.

Dorothy: When I was talking to the Macphersons the other day they were telling me about having the dedication in the smaller recreation area because the minister's office and library was in there, so that was another development that you added on. How many developments have there been since you built the original sanctuary?

Bill: Basically just two because the original building was composed of the sanctuary, the narthex, and half the fellowship hall. We anticipated that we would need double the space in the fellowship hall, so it was so designed that we could add on in such a way that you're not even aware of it now. We spanned the long way initially with the laminated wood beams, which made it look irrational, but later it turned out to be the short span when we doubled the size of it.

Dorothy: I'm glad I asked because I didn't know that. That kind of thinking had to be built into the beginning, didn't it?

Bill: Yes. It was really what I like to describe as a design in space and time. We had an old, what we called the Drummond House. There had been a tearoom there, and I think maybe a boarding house. We needed income from it, but then we needed parking so we had to phase it out. We moved one house away from the site, and later discovered that two houses had been buried in its basement, so it was expensive to remove all that debris. We converted the Hatch house on Edwin place to classrooms and made a connector into the fellowship hall, which even then we called Sandburg Hall. Later the Hatch house was torn down and doubled the size of the fellowship hall and wrapped classrooms and other



spaces around it on three sides. Later we bought Jefferson house. Then we added the playground and the Memorial garden. So it has evolved, but there were basically two big building programs, the original sanctuary and fellowship hall and then the later addition.

Dorothy: And all of this was part of the original plan.

Bill: Yes, but it was not -- we did quite a bit of planning. I've had an orientation in that way since I studied city planning, and we like to do master plans. We like to look as far into the future as we can see, but sometimes you can't quite see far enough or well enough. In the original master plan we didn't know what kind of program we were designing for, we didn't know how much money would be available, so it did evolve. It got updated and revised.

Dorothy: But you didn't have to start over and redo.

Bill: No, there was a master plan, and generally we followed the concept although not in detail.

Dorothy: I understand that it was advised that the church should not build on land that was that small and limited for space for parking, that Boston was making comments at that time that it should be on larger property.

Bill: There are differences of opinion about that. Our real estate professionals tell us how important location, location, location is, and I think that has proven to be a good location. We like extending into the community, reaching out to the community and bringing the community in, sharing our space, sharing our meetings, sharing our values, so in that sense it has been successful. We do have an agreement with the property owner across the street to use a parking lot over there. Many people don't even know it, but it's there and its available.

Dorothy: It can be used now? No, I don't think people do know.

Bill: It has been available for twenty years, twenty-two years. Initially we did use it, but now most people prefer to park on the street.

Dorothy: Are you familiar with the talk that was given about a month ago by, I think his name is Charles Gains from Boston, saying that we were at a point now where we had a lot of visitors coming into the church and we should for larger membership, either having two Sunday services or starting another church in the city. Have you heard about that?

Bill: Yes, I did hear that talk. It was very interesting to me because as chairman of the

long range planning committee and attending many meetings of the board of trustees and other committee meetings over the years, I heard all the controversy. I heard all the differences of opinion on that subject and whether they were right or not, I sometimes remind some of our members that the board did adopt a policy way back -- we face this difficulty of how can a small group of people design for what we think might be a potential of three or four hundred members, and we did the best we could, but we knew that there was some limit. We could not design for indefinite growth into the indefinite future, so we did build in expansion where the minister's office was, where the closet, the board room the library, that was deliberately built in as expansion space, and then later we replaced that space with the new addition, doubled the size of the fellowship hall. Our classroom space was more or less adequate for something like fifteen years. We did follow closely developments around us, we did buy additional property at the right time, we did phase out Hatch house, we did get the Jefferson house at about the right time, but nevertheless the board did adopt a policy that if we ever needed to expand our sanctuary beyond its present size, well that we would not do that. We would accommodate an expanded membership by having two services, or we also anticipated that other congregations might split off, and one opinion that I heard was that we should even promote that. That we should help, nurture other churches, not only here in Asheville but in other communities. Over the period of twenty years I've known people who commuted in fifty miles or more from Cullowhee, 40 miles from Marion, 50 miles from Seelo. We had a strong group, a strong contingency who came from Hendersonville, 25 miles away, and 35 miles away, and we felt that ultimately some of those clusters and communities out there would start there own. I certainly agree with the idea of nurturing other churches.

Dorothy: I'm glad you have this on tape because this is a very important factor coming up with the church right now, and I think it will be important to have this historically. Can you tell me anything about the color schemes. Was there any controversy on that. I had an interview with Helen Reed and she said that somebody had suggested a purple carpet. Were you involved in the color coordinating?

Bill: Yes, very much so. Of course, as you know, the basic materials, exterior and interior, are natural or neutral, and finally we came to the important decision about pew color and carpet. Those were the two big decisions. We heard a lot of opinions. The building committee, I think, blended into the furnishings committee, or there may have been a subcommittee. As I recall, I suggested a muted blue carpet or even one with -- purple would not be my description, but one with some red in it. I could easily see two analagous colors in there as an alternative to what we have. Not a burgundy, but a claret perhaps in the pews, and some tone of -- not magenta -- I can't come up with the right color, but some mixture of red and blue on the floor, two analogous colors, somewhat muted but not dull and not pastel, so that's where that controversy came from. Somebody said Bill wants a purple carpet. I can remember looking a samples. At one

time we thought we had to choose the cheapest fabric of the options being offered, and I didn't like any of them. Nobody else liked them very much, but somebody asked my opinion so I said, well, if we have to select this and we have to do it now, I would point to that one, and it was sort of a burgancy, and then somebody threw up their hands and said, yeah, we knew it. Bill wants a purple carpet. So that's what that was all about. I think we could have done a little better job on those two choices, but color is so subjective that I was glad that it turned out as well as it did. We had some people who would bring in floral patterns, white dogwood flowers and green and pink background, awful stuff. So I was very happy that it turned out to be sort of a rusty color.

Dorothy: Thank you, Bill, for doing this for the church and for the university. It was good being with you, and thank you for all you have told us.