

## **Ralph D. Morris Jr.**

### **Side 1:**

Sound in background is hum from machinery and tapping from jewelry making.

He was born in 1927 in Rock Hill, SC. His father was with Efirds [Department Store] and then Ivey's. When Ivey's opened in Asheville in 1936 the family moved.

[15] He entered Newton School in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Since the schools, due to the Depression, had 11 grades the work was accelerated. He attended summer school to catch up. He went to David Millard Jr. High and Lee Edwards High School.

[28] He joined the Army Air Force in 1944 and, when Germany surrendered, he joined the Navy. After graduating from the University of North Carolina he joined his father in the Stewart Nye jewelry manufacturing business. The building where we met was erected 1948, the year before he became a partner with his father.

[54] The first craft fair was in Gatlinburg in 1948. The Southern Highland Handicraft Guild, goes back before 1933 when Nye started working. His firm has been a member as long as any concern.

[82] Nye was a New Englander, gassed during WWI and sent to Oteen for his lungs. While he was hospitalized he learned how to carve wood. After running a popcorn stand, he married the hospital librarian and designed the dogwood flower out of sheet metal. This flower is still the best seller although new designs have been added - humming bird, cat, angel, etc. (see file).

[100] Almost every area has its own handicraft guild. Nye is well entrenched here. There is no sales force but a fine catalogue is sent on request. It is expensive to go to shows (hotel, meals, salary, truck expense) but he goes to the July and October craft fairs where he gets some wholesale contacts.

[150] He knows what works and how much volume he can handle. With eight craft people working - at one time there were 4 employees in their 80's working part time that could be called on when there was a rush of orders. Sibyl worked for the company on and off since she was 17 and is now in her 80's. She babysat for the Nye children, married and moved to Texas and came back. She does the hammering (see photo). [Sibyl Vess]

[188] The "color season" is busy as is spring because of the gift shops on the drives through the area.

[198] He has 7-8 outlets in Asheville (Biltmore, Folk Art Center, Grove Park Inn, the shop next door, etc.) His concern is more like a family than a factory and all work is guaranteed.

[213] He joined Rotary Club in 1952 and was the youngest past president (1959-1960).

[240] He is not fully retired but is working less and less. His son is working with him. He is never in competition with his customers. He built and leases the building next door to the Southern Highland Guild.

[267] A computer helps spot trends and shows what sells well. He looks after customers better than the "big folks," and takes back stock that isn't selling. His son enjoys the work but "his patience is limited." [Joseph Morris]

[313] John is a microbiologist in Chapel Hill working on cancer research. [John Morris]

[322] Ralph is running a men's furnishing store in Greensboro. [Ralph Morris III]

[330] The Stuart Nye Company used to sell to department stores but now, because of the large scale of buying, they can't fill the orders requested. He would rather deal with mom and pop stores and be service oriented.

[351] Regarding the trend of stores moving from the center of the city to the malls, he feels they committed suicide. The first thing they did was open a branch in the mall and send the best merchandise and help out. When business went to hell downtown the shops closed. Property values had to fall to become more attractive. He feels the center of the city is coming back (see enclosed comment 8/11/94).

[403] After he had been president of Rotary and Vice President of the Chamber of Commerce, he realized that with his free time he could start another business or become involved in the community. His father had been on the city council.

[428] The first time he ran he was beaten - then after being elected he served 5 terms (10 years). He wanted to get off after 6 years but was not comfortable with the slate. He felt that if you could not count 7 qualified people running you had to stay on. After 10 years it looked like a good slate and he didn't seek re-election.

[444] The Water Authority was established at that time. Although he didn't vote for it at the time, he wanted to see if they could make it work.

[469] The Sullivan Law (enacted before his time) resulted in water being sold out of corporate limits at a loss. It was obvious the supply would not last and a treatment plant was needed. The city council had said to the county, "The time has come and you folks are going to have to go into the water business and we suggest you put a dam on the French Broad River and start your own water treatment plant." At first the county said, "You get it established and we'll co-operate." Then the city offered to build the plant but wanted to get out from under the Sullivan law. The county couldn't see that.

[512] Asheville is the only major city in the state that has less than half the voters in the county. At one point the city was denied the right to annex! He wrote a poem (May 1981, enclosed) when some of the folks in the legislature were going to make an exception of Asheville and not let them annex. [Norma Price]

[567] Most cities made a little profit on the water and the counties over-taxed the people in the city for their services. [the net result being that city residents weren't double-taxed and over-taxed]. Very complicated.

## **Side 2:**

Review of above

[2/30] The Water Authority worked fairly well. Smaller units (Black Mountain, Weaverville, Woodfin, etc) were offered a chance to join. They had their own systems and didn't want to. (However ultimately they would have to join, and there would be a countywide system.) Consultants said the water treatment plant should be on the French Broad River. Bond issue for plant failed - easy to instill fear - there is better water there than any place. Water is now being taken upstream on the French Broad River where the Mills River joins.

[2/76] A lot of fear tactics, misinformation and out and outlying went on. He has a real problem with folks that are employed by others to be against plans.

[2/90] Fanny (see enclosure - even a picture) was against fluorides. He considers this the same mentality as anti-abortionists shooting doctors. [Fanny McCoy]

[2/156] "Government folks cause more problems than they cure." i.e. Dam safety - what if you had 36 inches of rain in 24 hours - you wouldn't have a dam; you would have a flood!

[2/192] He served for 9 years on the Water Authority. There is now a limit on the term. He is impressed with the way it is running now and hopes an agreement can be worked out with Henderson County.

[2/211] The Pink Beds - south of Mills River - have been discussed as the best source but the idea was discarded because of the distance.

[2/232] There is nothing in the French Broad River that they can't get out. However, someone always comes along and discredits it as a source.

[2/230] The newspaper took a strong position in favor of the bond issue, but columnists had nothing good to say about it. The Green Line troubled him in its lack of integrity. (see enclosure and Jeff Fobes tape)

[2/250] Maas says French Broad River is high quality but wants a "what if" guarantee. No engineering firm he worked with had any trouble with the French Broad River. Millions have been lost in wages from industries unable to come here. [Dr. Richard Maas]

[2/299] The bond issue for the Civic Center (called "the rock pile at the end of Haywood Street") went over but water purity is a health issue and people are easily frightened. He was responsible for Wood's election as mayor (see tape). Coggins wanted the Civic Center built on his property (see tape). [George Coggins, Richard Wood]

[2/329] There was a lot of publicity about the water bond (see enclosure). At one point the airlines wouldn't take our water - this was before filtration and caused by leaf mold and animals up stream. This had nothing to do with the French Broad River.

[2/353] A number of groups sprang up to stop the water bond. The Clean Water Fund was one. [Monroe Gilmore]

[2/363] Timbering on the water shed was disputed. Since mature trees use more water, it was advised to cut some down (see enclosure). If you harvest 10% on a rotating basis, the forester said, these would be a 2-year expansion in the supply of water. [Elwood Denim]

[2/390] Water pipes are renewed when necessary. There are breaks because of their age (see tape). There are pressure differentials because of the mountains. Pressure reducers are used for the valleys. [P. Greer Johnson]

[2/414] The water department is not tied in with the sewage disposal plant. The Metropolitan Sewerage district is a creation of the state - not the city or county. The city still owns the property for the water.

[2/433] The taxes in the city are almost twice as much as those charged in the county. He feels the city and county shouldn't be in the same business. Expenses for the library, airport, parks and recreation and law enforcement were merged so that the county shares their portion.

[2/470] The Hilton Inn fought annexation until drinks by the glass came in.

[2/489] He has served on the council 10 years, the water board for nearly 10 and the transit authority before that.

[2/496] He feels that honesty should be described as the intent not to mislead. There has been a change in attitude in the country - and Chicken Little is right - the sky is falling in. He feels great anxiety about the news out of Washington. It is more important to be a Democrat or Republican than an American. He doesn't know where it will end. Maybe like urban renewal, it will have to get worse before it gets better (see Larry Holt tape).

P.S. He phoned to say that any inequality in water bills was unintentional and probably due to careless reading or estimates by staff to avoid digging meters from under silt.