

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

BILL BAXTER

INTERVIEW 601.2

This is Dr. Joseph Patterson. I'm with Bill Baxter who was interviewed earlier by Nat Dixon. The number of that interview is number 601.

This will be an addition to that interview No. 601.2. The date is April 27, 1993 and the interview is taking place at the McDaniel Rest Home in New Bern. My number is 1000.

DR. PATTERSON: Well, Bill, it's a pleasure to be here talking to you this morning. I just want to go into a couple of things that you and Nat didn't really get into too deeply. The first thing I want to ask you about is the great New Bern fire of 1922. Now as I recall, you said you were at the Rowland Lumber Company that morning. I wonder if you'd tell me about the Rowland Lumber Company fire and what you remember about the big fire.

BILL BAXTER: The fire at Rowland Lumber Company, I just went up on my bicycle to see that fire and while I was up there another alarm went in. I had my bicycle and I thought I'd ride out to see the other fire. I got there and they sent just one wagon up there. I was up there when the fire just started. It was a colored lady washing clothes. The wind was blowing fairly brisk. The wind picked up and the fire started and it just spread right on to the river.

DR. PATTERSON: Now when you were at the Rowland Lumber Company, getting back to that for a minute, what was that fire like? Was it a big fire?

BILL BAXTER: It was a big fire, of course, the lumber company. We thought it was a big fire.

DR. PATTERSON: Did you stay there long to see that?

BILL BAXTER: No.

DR. PATTERSON: But when you were there it was really pretty well burning.

BILL BAXTER: Yeah.

DR. PATTERSON: How long did you stay out at the other fire?

BILL BAXTER: Not very long because the fire was spreading very fast.

DR. PATTERSON: So what did you do?

BILL BAXTER: I came on back.

DR. PATTERSON: Back home to New Street on your bicycle.

BILL BAXTER: Yes.

DR. PATTERSON: Did you have any worries then about your own home burning?

BILL BAXTER: Not until that afternoon. I believe the time was in the afternoon the wind changed and started coming right on. You could see the flames going right on up. That's when they dynamited the houses.

DR. PATTERSON: Did you see any of those houses they dynamited?

BILL BAXTER: No.

DR. PATTERSON: Did your family leave your home?

BILL BAXTER: No.

DR. PATTERSON: Did anybody on New Street get so alarmed that they left?

BILL BAXTER: Not that I know of. It went to the school and there it stopped.

DR. PATTERSON: Some folks say they wish it had burned them up. Did you go back out to that site of the fire after that?

BILL BAXTER: Yes, afterwards. It was just smoking. You know they dynamited a block there to stop it.

DR. PATTERSON: Some people remember the chimneys standing where the houses use to be. Did you see those?

BILL BAXTER: Yes.

DR. PATTERSON: Was Tent City placed right in that area that was burned? They had to clear it out first thought, didn't they?

BILL BAXTER: Yes, there were places they could put the tents.

DR. PATTERSON: What was Tent City like?

BILL BAXTER: I really couldn't describe it. I wasn't interested in Tent City. (laughter)

DR. PATTERSON: Bill, something else I want to ask you about, and I know you have a lot of memories of this, about hurricanes in New Bern. What do you remember about the hurricane of 1933?

BILL BAXTER: I'd been to Atlantic with a truck and I came back through it. I got home just as the water was coming up to my steps.

DR. PATTERSON: You came back from Atlantic across which bridge?

BILL BAXTER: The bridge fom Morehead.

DR. PATTERSON: The Trent River bridge.

BILL BAXTER: Yeah.

DR. PATTERSON: That was high above the waters. That bridge was not damaged in that storm. You got home and the water was almost in your house.

BILL BAXTER: No, it was coming down the street.

DR. PATTERSON: What happened after that?

BILL BAXTER: The wind kept blowing, the water kept coming.

DR. PATTERSON: Was there much damage in your area?

BILL BAXTER: No, not in our area. Well, if houses had basements they filled up with water.

DR. PATTERSON: But your house was not very badly damaged?

BILL BAXTER: No.

DR. PATTERSON: What about other hurricanes in New Bern? In the fifties, you remember those hurricanes?

BILL BAXTER: Yes. One right after another.

DR. PATTERSON: Um huh. New Street was a pretty tough place in some of those storms as I recall.

BILL BAXTER: Yes. It came up fourteen inches in our house.

DR. PATTERSON: I remember that boats were used up and down New Street to get people back and forth.

BILL BAXTER: My brother had a skiff and he went up to Craven Street and picked your mother up and carried her down to her home.

DR. PATTERSON: Did you see that?

BILL BAXTER: No I didn't see it. (laughter)

DR. PATTERSON: I did. I remember that. She sat in the back seat and George Dick just pulled her right on down. What do you remember about Short Street? Who were the people you remember on Short Street?

BILL BAXTER: Cousin Ola Ferebee.

DR. PATTERSON: She was a music teacher.

BILL BAXTER: Yeah. And the house was right on the ground almost and it came up in her house of course.

DR. PATTERSON: Bill, there were some black families living in that area in those days. Do you recall who they were?

BILL BAXTER: Yes. I believe a colored man lived in the shack over there.

DR. PATTERSON: Next to you?

BILL BAXTER: No, across the street.

DR. PATTERSON: Across the street from you on Short Street?

BILL BAXTER: He was right at the corner of Short Street.

DR. PATTERSON: Of Short Street and New.

BILL BAXTER: Uh huh.

DR. PATTERSON: His name was Baron?

BILL BAXTER: I really don't know.

DR. PATTERSON: That was right next to where Ola Ferebee lived?

BILL BAXTER: Yes.

DR. PATTERSON: She was on the other side of that house.

BILL BAXTER: It was Uncle Sammy. I better call him Uncle.

DR. PATTERSON: Was there another black family on the other side of Miss Ola's house?

BILL BAXTER: Yes, there was a family living in that house. There wasn't but one colored lady.

DR. PATTERSON: Then there was another colored family that lived where Johnny Dunn's house now stands.

BILL BAXTER: Yes.

DR. PATTERSON: That was one house down from you.

BILL BAXTER: That was Aunt Lucy.

DR. PATTERSON: And her son was name Harvey?

BILL BAXTER: Yeah. Harvey and I were very good friends.

DR. PATTERSON: Did you go in their house ever?

BILL BAXTER: No, I don't believe I did.

DR. PATTERSON; What was Harvey like?

BILL BAXTER: Harvey was just a good 'ol colored boy.

DR. PATTERSON: What did he do?

BILL BAXTER: I couldn't tell you, but I know this much, he was a little older than I was and my mother would trust me with him. Anywhere I ever wanted to go, if Harvey could go with me, it was all right.

DR. PATTERSON: Do you remember the Hollowell family who lived on Short Street; Mitchell Hollowell, Ernest Hollowell, Callie Hollowell?

BILL BAXTER: The names are familiar but I do not place them.

DR. PATTERSON: Do you remember anybody else on Short Street in those days?

BILL BAXTER: No.

DR. PATTERSON: Bill, one thing I remember about your house when I was boy, we used to go sit on your back steps or on your back porch and shoot rats that would run across the fence in the back.

BILL BAXTER: (laughter) You gonna get us arrested.

DR. PATTERSON: Do you remember that?

BILL BAXTER: Yes.

DR. PATTERSON: Was there a fence in your backyard that the rats would run across? That's the way I remember it.

BILL BAXTER: Not that I remember. But nearly every lot had a fence around it. Lumber, you could buy cypress lumber for nothing. Now the lumber is very valuable for inside.

DR. PATTERSON: Yes, that's right. Your brother George Dick was a nice fellow.

BILL BAXTER: Thank you.

DR. PATTERSON: He and I were pretty good friends. He was a little younger. What did George do before he moved out of town?

BILL BAXTER: Let's see, he worked with Scott.

DR. PATTERSON: With Leon Scott?

BILL BAXTER: Yeah. He worked with the Ford people but he couldn't stand it. You know when he came out of the war, he was shell shocked.

DR. PATTERSON: I didn't know that.

BILL BAXTER: The worst kind.

DR. PATTERSON: When he left town and moved down the county, I think you said something to Nat Dixon about his starting a museum.

BILL BAXTER: He did. A real nice museum.

DR. PATTERSON: Where was that located?

BILL BAXTER: In a building down there that was owned by the county. Right in that area by the jail.

DR. PATTERSON: Was this down near Grantsboro or in that area?

BILL BAXTER: You know where the courthouse, right there. Right back of the courthouse.

DR. PATTERSON: What did the museum contain? What was its purpose?

BILL BAXTER: Just a little bit of everything.

DR. PATTERSON: Things he found on the rivershores.

BILL BAXTER: Yes, partly. He had some old bottles. He had a nice collection of old bottles.

DR. PATTERSON: Um huh. And that's down in Pamlico County this museum, is that right?

BILL BAXTER: Yes. Right there at the courthouse.

DR. PATTERSON: All right. Now is it still standing, you know?

BILL BAXTER: I don't know.

DR. PATTERSON: Bill, are there any other things that you remember about New Bern that you didn't tell Nat?

BILL BAXTER: I don't know.

DR. PATTERSON: Hard to remember what you told him, isn't it? Well, these are the things I wanted to ask you about and I thank you for talking to me about them. So I'll just cut this off now and be on my way.

END OF INTERVIEW