

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

DR. CHARLES THOMAS BARKER

INTERVIEW 415

This is Marea Kafer Foster representing the Memories of New Bern Committee. My number is 400. I am interviewing Charles Thomas Barker, Doctor of Dental Surgery, interview number 415. This interview is being conducted on the 23rd of June, 1992. We are at 4503 Tenella Road in New Bern in Dr. Barker's home. Now, Dr. Barker, if you will tell me some personal history; your full name, birth date, parent's names.

Dr. Barker: My name is Charles Thomas Barker. I was born in New Bern, North Carolina at 121 Broad Street which is now 711 Broad Street. My mother was Ruth Jane Henderson from Onslow County. My father was Christopher Sylvanus Barker. He was from Trenton in Jones County. My brother was Christopher Sylvanus Barker, Jr., and he was a Rear Admiral in the United States Navy.

MF: He attended the Naval Academy, didn't he?

Dr. Barker: That is right. He went to the Naval Academy of Annapolis, Maryland.

MF: I met his son, Chris the Third, last week at the Academy Building here in New Bern.

Dr. Barker: Yes, he's visiting. As a matter of fact, he is here today. He went north and then came back.

MF: Well, how nice, I had a nice visit with him and with Anne. Now, we're going to skip over your childhood memories because I want to get right into Dentistry if it's okay with you. What made you decide to be a Dentist?

Dr. Barker: That's a mighty good question! I was originally

planning to be a Physician. My father was a Physician, and he seemed to be busy twenty-four hours a day. I wondered what could you do just as well as being a Physician twenty-four hours a day that you could do in twelve hours a day, and it actually turned out to be about eighteen hours a day and that was the practice of Dentistry. I figured that you would work in the day time and wouldn't have to deliver babies at night. When I first started practicing Dentistry I worked six days a week, and I worked from about seven thirty in the morning til about eight o'clock at night. There was a shortage of Dentist in New Bern when I first came. There were five Dentists practicing here. That was; Dr. W. L. Hand, Dr. W. L. Hammond, Dr. Harvey Civils, Dr. D. L. Hand, Jr., and Dr. R. A. Millns, Jr.

MF: What about Charlie Johnson, was he not practicing?

Dr. Barker: Yes he was, there was six Dentists. Charlie Johnson was here, you're right. I'm glad you reminded me of that.

MF: Well, he had been my Dentist until you came to town. I mean really and truly, he was a nice man, but I just hated that drill. I remember your office in the Barker Apartments.

Dr. Barker: That's correct. That's where I started practicing Dentistry.

MF: I really enjoyed going to you. You made it painless, you really did.

Dr. Barker: Well thank you, I tried.

MF: Where did you get your education?

Dr. Barker: I went to the Medical college in Virginia in Richmond.

I went first to the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. I graduated from the University in Chapel Hill and that's an interesting story. I supposed to have been a Pre-Med student, as I was telling you, and World War II came along. When World War II came along I had had my requirements for either Medical school or Dental school. World War II came along and they wanted people to report Battle Action, so I transferred to the School of Journalism and I graduated from the Chapel Hill with a degree in Journalism. I went to the Naval Office of Procurement and told them that I was ready to go to report Battle Action and they asked me if I wore glass and I said "yes." They said, "Well, you can't do that." So, I decided since I couldn't do it I would go ahead and do what I wanted to do, and so I went to Dental school.

MF: At the Medical College in Richmond, Virginia? No Dental School in North Carolina at that time?

Dr. Barker: No Dental school in North Carolina at all. The closest to New Bern was Richmond, Virginia.

MF: Were their other New Bern students there?

Dr. Barker: Yes there were; Dr. Roy Miller who is now practicing in New Bern was there, Dr. Billy Hand who is now practicing in New Bern was there, and Dr. W. L. Hammond had just recently graduated and Dr. Joe Anderson was there.

MF: It was like old home week.

Dr. Barker: We had more people in Dental school at one time from New Bern than there were from Richmond at the Richmond school.

MF: Charlie, did you always want to come back to New Bern?

Dr. Barker: Well, my father wanted me to come back. I had originally thought about going up into the mountains of Virginia, up around Winchester to practice, but my father wanted me to come to New Bern. There was a need for Dentists in New Bern, so I came back to New Bern. The only trouble is that when you come back to practice in your own hometown, you're always a child, you never grow up so to speak.

MF: That's true. In fact, I was going to ask you how it felt to come back.

Dr. Barker: That's right. Actually, it's a good idea to go to another town rather than the one that you were born in.

MF: Well, I'm glad you came back. I really am. And your first office was?

Dr. Barker: My first office was at Barker Apartments, 514 Broad Street, and I stayed there until they widened the street and parking became a problem. It was not only parking, but traffic kept people from coming in. So, along with Lewis Bratton who is a Dentist in New Bern now, we started a Medical Dental Center which was across the street from where the Dairy Queen is now, it's out on Highway 17. We started that and I built an office there. The first office was built there by Dr. Fred Miller who came here from up-state; then I built the second office there; then Dr. Bratton built an office there, and there are several Dental offices in that area now. I practiced there and then I took in a partner, Dr. Sam Jackson. We got along very well but I

felt that I wanted to practice again by myself, so I went out to River Bend and opened an office there.

MF: How long were you at River Bend?

Dr. Barker: I was at River Bend exactly six months and I had a stroke and had to quit practicing Dentistry.

MF: You would never know it to talk to you or look at you.

Dr. Barker: I appreciate it. I'm not nearly as sharp as I used to be, at least I don't think I am. Maybe I wasn't sharp then. (Laughter)

MF: You've always been sharp and you're still sharp. Tell me about the changes in Dentistry. What was your office like when you first opened it?

Dr. Barker: When I first opened my office, all Dentists stood up to work. They stood on one foot and used the other foot to balance when they were hanging upside down in the patient's mouth and that always seemed odd to me. Even back in Dental school, I wanted to sit down and look in the patient's mouth like you ought to, but they said anybody who sits down is a lazy person and we don't want them in Dentistry. The day that I graduated from Dental school and started practicing Dentistry I got me a stool and I sat on that stool, and I found that looking in the patient's mouth from the front rather than looking in it upside down was the right way. Then, we started reclining the patient in a regular dental chair which resembled a barber chair.

We started reclining the patient and that was sort of taboo because they felt that the patient would drown because if you lay the patient back he wasn't able to expectorate and so a Dentist never did that.

Then too, they thought it was dangerous because a patient would swallow the filling or ever what you were using, gulping they were back in a supine position. Actually, it was a whole lot safer that way because when the patient is lying down his mouth is closed off, at least the back of his throat is closed off and he is less likely to swallow a foreign object. So then, when we got the evacuators and the pumps that we used to suction, as most people call it, that eliminated the need for the cuspidor, and so we could put a patient all the way back and work with the patient's head in the Dentist lap. That is the way that it should of been done from the very beginning, and we did that. We got a patent on a design for a dental chair.

MF: Excuse me Charlie, when you say "we" got a patten, "you" got a patten.

Dr. Barker: That's right, I got a patten. Well actually, I'm glad you mentioned that. I had an Upholsterer working with me, Thomas Grey and he and I designed the chair together. I told him what I wanted and he built it, but I felt that since he didn't charge me too much that he should share in any of the profit that we got from the thing.

So, we got the patent in my name and Tom Grey's name. Thomas Grey was from High Point and he later went back there. A lot of people say, well, didn't you patent the chair? Well, the chair itself was not patentable because the Romans used lounge chairs and lounge chairs were in a lot of people's houses. So, you can't patent the lounge chair, it's been in existence 2,000 years. You could patent the design of a lounge chair just like you can't patten the bottle but you can patten

a Coco-Cola bottle and you can patten a Pepsi-Cola bottle. You can patten the design of a bottle, and so I patented the design of the chair. Now all somebody else had to do to make one was just change it just a little bit like the Pepsi-Cola bottle is changed from a Coco-Cola bottle and anybody could make one, and that's what happens.

A lot people think that I got rich off of the chair, but I didn't. As a matter of fact, the patent lawyer made more out of the chair than I did!

MF: I'm not surprised about that. Well, what about the little tray or table where your instruments were kept?

Dr. Barker: The dental unit, or where all the instruments were, was designed for stand-up dentistry. When you are having sit-down supine dentistry, those instruments are way out of reach, they are practically useless. We had to use them because that's what we had, but it was hard to use them. By putting the instruments behind the patient's head at head level, we found that that was the way to do it, and so we eliminated the stand up dental unit and made a console unit that went back of the patient, across the back of the chair. When looking in a dental office, one would see a T-shaped configuration, the chair with a console behind the patient's head.

MF: When you say "we", you're talking about you and Mr. Grey?

Dr. Barker: No, Mr. Grey had nothing to do with that. This was me. I guess I use the editorial "we" because I went to Journalism school, and in Journalism school everything is "we". You never say "I" killed the bear, "we" killed him. That's the inference of the

"we". (Laughter)

MF: Did you patent this?

Dr. Barker: Yes, I patented this. This was a utility patten rather than a design patten because nobody had ever done this before. This was like inventing the bottle. I got a patten on it and got a company in Charlotte, North Carolina, the Pelton and Crane Company. Anyway, this Charlotte company manufactured the dental console and they paid me a royalty on it, but the royalty wasn't too much. That too didn't make me rich because there are not too many Dentists. Now if there had been a lot of Dentists like there are people it would of made me quite wealthy if we sold all in proportion. What it did, it made me a little more comfortable than I would of been but it didn't give me enough to retire on.

MF: Dentist today, here in 1992, still use your designs?

Dr. Barker: Yes. It was originally called the Pelton and Crane Executive. Today it's called the Pelton and Crane Spirit but the same patens that I got covered the Executive and the Spirit.

MF: This is used by Dentist?

Dr. Barker: It's used by Dentist all over the world! I have given clinics in Germany, in France, and everywhere. As a matter of fact, Dentists in Europe knew more about what I did than Dentists in the United States. There was a friend over there by the name of Karlheinz Kimmel, a German Dentist, who included it in German textbooks. It hasn't been in the American textbooks but it's in German textbooks. So my name is more familiar among the Dental profession

in Germany than it is in the Dental profession in the United States.

Karlheinz Kimmel was quite a prolific writer of textbooks, and he is considered to be the authority over there; therefore, I have more European notoriety than I do American.

MF: That's wonderful. Do you still correspond with him?

Dr. Barker: No, I haven't heard from Karlheinz in a long time. When I had my stroke, which was ten years ago, I sort of dropped out of Dentistry. I try to keep up with it. I keep my license current, and I read the Dental Journals but so far as trying to do something in Dentistry myself, I don't.

MF: That is so interesting. I know you've got a lot more to tell me. I want to ask you if you had any unusual, difficult cases that you wouldn't mind talking about?

Dr. Barker: Yes. I don't remember the man's name, but Dr. Charles Ashford who did a lot of surgery back in the old days, called me one day and told me to come to the hospital that they needed me there.

I did quite a bit of oral surgery and reconstructive surgery between the time that I came to New Bern and the time an the Oral Surgeon came.

This patient had a wreck in his Pontiac automobile which had a horn button that was in the shape of a "V", and his head had gone forward and his face was in the shape of an inverted V where that horn button had hit him. I said what we have got to do is send this man to Durham, there is nothing we can do for him. Dr. Ashford said, "If you send him to Durham that's a death warrant, you're going to kill him. You better go to work on him right now." So I did, and we had a magnificent

result. He had a floating maxilla, he had a crushed-in nose, and we fixed him up and he lived.

MF: When you say he had a "floating maxilla", what is that?

Dr. Barker: The maxilla is the upper jaw, and it was knocked loose from his skull. It just floated around.

MF: Did you wire it back?

Dr. Barker: Yes, I wired it back and put a pin (a Kirachener pin) through his cheeks and maxilla and held it with wire. That was my most difficult case.

MF: You were called out for emergencies?

Dr. Barker: Oh yes. I had a lot of fractured mandibles. That was the only fractured maxilla that I worked on.

MF: The mandible is the lower jaw?

Dr. Barker: Right.

MF: I remembered that from Biology, I'm surprised I could remember that! Anything else about your practice you would like to tell us?

Dr. Barker: Yes, there is. More people seem to be interested in the physical things that I did in Dentistry, but I'm prouder of the preventive things that I've done in Dentistry. I was appointed by Governor Bob Scott to the North Carolina State Board of Health.

At that time we instituted an education program in the public schools through the Dental Hygienists that we hired and started giving tooth brush instructions on how to brush your teeth. We started using fluoride, and we started a program to put fluoride in the water in every school in the State of North Carolina. A program of fluoride

topically applied, fluoride in the water supply, and Dental Hygienist in the school has reduced dental decay among school children in North Carolina by between forty and fifty percent. I am prouder of that than anything else I did in dentistry.

MF: That's fantastic, Charlie. I didn't know you had done that. That's a wonderful, wonderful thing you did for all the school children.

Dr. Barker: Dr. Alec Pearson was the Director of the School Health Department at that time, and as a result of this program that I instituted he won the first award ever given by the American Dental Association in preventive dentistry.

MF: Wonderful! You have a lot of claims to fame.

Dr. Barker: This was done back during the time that these tapes are supposed to cover.

MF: Right. Now, when did you first have a Dental Hygienist?

Dr. Barker: I had the first Dental Hygienist in New Bern. One of the Marines came down to Cherry Point and his wife was a Dental Hygienist, and she was from Pennsylvania. This was so long ago I've even forgotten her name, but later on in years she came back by to visit me and I should have written down the name so that I could of remembered it. She practiced for me for maybe six months before, maybe not that long, but this was forty years ago.

MF: It sure was. It was in the late Forties and early Fifties.

Dr. Barker: Right. After that, we went for a long time without a Hygienist. Then, I went to Chapel Hill and got a young lady who

practiced with me for a long time by the name of Nan Southerland from Durham. She was a wonderful Hygienist. She is now living St. Louis, Missouri, and she comes to see me occasionally when she comes to North Carolina.

MF: How nice. There were schools then for Dental Hygienist?

Dr. Barker: Yes, the University of North Carolina had started the Dental Hygiene school. The University of North Carolina started the Dental Hygiene school almost as soon as they did the Dental school, and the Dental school was started about five years after I started practicing Dentistry.

MF: What does the Hygienist do?

Dr. Barker: Hygienist, when they first started did nothing but polish teeth, but later on they did more. They started scaling teeth to get off tartar and plaque. They applied topical fluorides in the office, and they in general practiced the hygiene, cleaning of the mouth, which is a very difficult thing.

MF: I would think it would be. Before that, was the cleaning of the teeth done by the Dentist.

Dr. Barker: Yes. When I first started, there were no Hygienist and I had to do all the tooth cleaning that was done.

MF: That keeps you from filling somebody's tooth that might need it but that had to be done. Were there any disappointments in Dentistry?

Dr. Barker: No, I don't think so. I felt that it was a rewarding thing. I enjoyed Dentistry, and I enjoyed practicing Dentistry, and particularly the prosthetic dentistry in which you replace missing

teeth. This is done with crowns and bridges and implants. I did some of the first implants that were done here in this area, and I had outstanding success with my implants. I did a sub-periosteal implant rather than an osseous of bone implant, I didn't do any bone implants. Mine were between the tissue and the bone and it worked out quite well.

MF: So, for you there were no frustrations or very few frustrations?

Dr. Barker: Oh, Dentistry is a frustrating profession. It's a very difficult profession. Yet I think that Dentist have done more in solving the problems of their profession than most any profession that I know of. For instance, replacing a tooth that is missing and so forth. They have done a remarkable job.

MF: I could tell early on in the interview that it was frustrating to you to have to stand up. As you say you would be upside down. So you solved that one right away. I mean common sense tells you it's better to sit down.

Dr. Barker: That's exactly right, but there were about three or four thousand Dentist practicing that didn't feel that way, they hadn't done it. There was a Dentist in Canada by the name of Cox who was feeling the same way that I was and he introduced a dental unit at the same time I did that was almost the same idea. I was accused by one of the Dental salesman of copying Dr. Cox's work, and I told him that I had never heard of Dr. Cox. So one of the salesmen from Pelton and Crane went to see Dr. Cox and asked him, "You know where

New Bern, North Carolina is?", and he said, "No, I don't know where New Bern, North Carolina is", and he said well Dr. Barker doesn't know where Hamilton, Ontario is. It so happened that I did know where Hamilton, Ontario was. (Laughter)

MF: Well, you're glad you went into Dentistry?

Dr. Barker: Oh, very much so. I'm also glad that I'm not in it at the present moment with OSHA and AIDS and all the problems that have developed in the meantime since I was in practice.

MF: Right. When I went a few weeks ago to get my teeth cleaned, the Hygienist was gowned, the first time they have been gowned. They've worn the gloves for quite awhile, but it was the first time I had seen them in a gown.

Dr. Barker: And the Dentists will all be wearing gown. They have a mask now that fits over the Dentist's face, a face shield.

MF: Yes. Karen, the girl who was cleaning my teeth, had one on with her green gown and her gloves.

Dr. Barker: Was it transparent or was it just a mask?

MF: It was like a plastic piece over her face, but it was not transparent.

Dr. Barker: They have two types. They have one that's a shield, it looks like a welder.

MF: No, it wasn't that.

Dr. Barker: Then they have one which just fits over the Operator's face, the nose and mouth.

MF: She was wearing one, and then I think that Fred had on a

green gown too. I do know six months ago he did not have the gown.

Dr. Barker: That's right, and all this is adding tremendously to the cost of Dentistry. The Government is telling them to do it yet they are not telling them how they can pay for it, and so the patients are going to have to pay for it, and it is going to be horrible.

MF: You're right about that because my bill was more this time than it was when I had gone last December.

Dr. Barker: And they have to change gowns between patients.

MF: Yes, they do.

Dr. Barker: So you have launder every gown for every patient. They change gloves also.

MF: They sure do. At least I hope they do! I'm sure they do. Let me ask you, would you be a Dentist again if you were starting out?

Dr. Barker: I don't think so.

MF: Why?

Dr. Barker: Because of the trials and tribulations of "Big Brother" looking over your shoulder. Now I believe very firmly and always have in preventing the transmission from patient to patient of dental disease and any other type of disease, but some of the things that are being recommended today are being recommended by people that just haven't ever done it and don't know and are "Mickey Mouse". You understand what I'm saying?

MF: Yes I do. You need to be there before you start.

Dr. Barker: Actually, except in one case, there has never been

any transmission of AIDS in a Dental office, and that one case was in one Dental office and he transferred it to four patients, and the other day I read in the paper that he did it intentionally.

MF: That was in Florida.

Dr. Barker: In Florida.

MF: We want it on the tape that this did not happen in New Bern, North Carolina. It happened in Florida.

Dr. Baker: It happened in Florida and this was an intentional thing and it was done by the Dentist to call attention to AIDS. It just ruined people's confidence in Dentistry, and that is a crime.

MF: With all of this taking place now, as far as regulations go, would you encourage, because your children are grown, would you encourage your grandchildren to practice Dentistry?

Dr. Barker: I would not. I think it's a noble profession, I think it's a wonderful profession, but i think it is being "bumped into" too much.

MF: Charlie, I have a feeling that you've studied the history of Dentistry, and you mentioned that the Romans had a lounge chair. Did they by any chance practice Dentistry back then?

Dr. Barker: No, but the first reference that I have ever seen of sit down Dentistry was a Dentist, believe it or not, in New Bern, North Carolina. A Dr. E. R. Hubbard used a stool in New Bern.

MF: Do you remember how long ago that was?

Dr. Barker: Yes, it was in 1835.

MF: Well, New Bern is famous for a number of things.

Dr. Barker: Not only Pepsi-Cola but a lot of things.

MF: Not only Pepsi-Cola, but Dr. Hubbard, and then you with your patients!

Dr. Barker: That's right. He believed in sit-down dentistry.

MF: Do you feel by sitting down to practice dentistry that you could continue your profession longer than you could by standing?

Dr. Barker: Oh by far, that you could. When you sit down you automatically put the patient in a supine position even if he is in a stand-up dental chair, you put the back back as far as it will go.

So this Dentist in New Bern had sort of a lounge chair arrangement, but he was primarily not practicing lounge chair dentistry but sit-down dentistry, and so sit-down dentistry is what I would say he would be more famous for rather than supine dentistry.

MF: I want to ask you about Dr. Whitehead because his niece Margaret Whitehead Wall had given me the advertisement and the article about him from the Times, the newspaper in 1942.

Dr. Barker: Dr. Whitehead was in New Bern before I came to New Bern to practice and he was gone before I got here. Dr. Whitehead was, I believe, in Rocky Mount practicing Dentistry. We needed Dentists in New Bern during World War II, and the Dental Association asked Dr. Whitehead to come to New Bern to practice. So, what he did was he came to New Bern to help alleviate the shortage of Dentist in this area, and he worked here during the period of the war, and he stayed just about that long.

MF: He stayed with your parents didn't he?

Dr. Barker: Yes, he stayed at my mother and father's house, and I knew him. He was a nice old gentleman. Well, I say nice old gentleman, he is probably a whole lot younger than I am now but I thought of him as being an old gentleman.

MF: We all do when we are so much younger. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about Dentistry?

Dr. Barker: Well, as I told you, I'm glad that I practiced Dentistry. I don't regret it a bit. It was a fulfilling professional. It was a profession that gave me a great deal of satisfaction; but as I say, if I was starting over under the conditions of today, I think I would have perhaps done something else.

MF: You would of gone maybe into medicine, into a specialty?

Dr. Barker: Gone into medicine, right, into a specialty.

MF: And with lots of partners to share the night and weekend work!

Dr. Barker: Right! They don't work like they did when my father came along. My father worked twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and I saw that he was killing himself, and I didn't want to put myself in that position.

MF: During the war there were not many doctors in New Bern.

Dr. Barker: No, there weren't. There was just a few: Dr. Patterson; Dr. Jones; Dr. Latham, my father, Dr. Wadsworth, Dr. Primrose, and Dr. Duffy.

MF: Which Duffy was that?

Dr. Barker: Dr. Richard Duffy.

MF: I think Charles Duffy was here.

Dr. Barker: Now Charles Duffy was here then. but Charles Duffy is a whole lot younger than the doctors I was talking about.

MF: Well he is 87.

Dr. Barker: That's right, but he was still young back then. I remember when Charles Duffy started practicing medicine in New Bern.

MF: That's was in the Thirties. I think my uncle Oscar, Dr. Kafer, was here at that time during the war.

Dr. Barker: Yes. Where did Dr. Kafer come to New Bern from?

MF: Edwards. And Dr. Ashford. But you're right the population was growing. Well, I think have covered Dentistry to the best of my ability. I've probably have not asked you all the things that I should have.

Dr. Barker: I think we've talked enough about Dentistry.

MF: Okay. Would you like to give me some childhood memories, because you are full of them I know.

Dr. Barker: Well, as I told some of the people the other day, Mary Barden gave a talk on the New Bern fire. The New Bern fire is the first thing that I think that I remember. I remember it quite well. I remember looking out of my front porch over across the street at houses burning over on the next street, and it was frightening for a little fella at that time. So, I hid under a sofa because I was so scared, and they tell me that they found me there later.

MF: That would have scared me. That was a terrifying time.

Dr. Barker: It was. I remember when my father had an office in the Elks Temple, and I use to go up to see him, and I remember his adding an office onto the side of a house.

MF: Now that's the one that I remember.

Dr. Barker: Yes. Then he moved there from the Elks Temple. I remember going up on the elevator in the Elks Temple, that was quite an experience in those days.

MF: Is that the same elevator they have today.

Dr. Barker: No, they have changed the elevator two or three times since then. The elevator today is quite modern compared with the one they had which looked like a squirrel cage. It was a cage-type elevator now it's an enclosed-type elevator.

MF: I just remembered when they closed this wire gate and it seemed to me a rickety thing, but it got me up there. Even though I didn't want to go up to Dr. Johnson at that time!

Dr. Barker: One of my earliest memories of New Bern was the street cars. They used to come down Spencer Avenue into Queen Street and from Queen Street they went down Pollock Street to Middle Street, but at Metcalf there was a spur-off to the left that went over toward the school. Did you know that?

MF: No, I didn't.

Dr. Barker: But anyway, it went down Middle Street to South Front Street which is now Tryon Palace Drive. It went down Tryon Palace Drive to down Craven Street then it went all the way back down to the Depot to Queen Street. It went down Metcalf Street and turned the

corner and went down New Street and ended up at Riverside.

MF: You rode the trolley then?

Dr. Barker: Oh yes, I rode the trolley and Captain Bill Davis, who lived across the street from me, drove the street car.

MF: How interesting! What did it cost you to ride it then?

Dr. Barker: Oh Lord, I don't know, I didn't even know what money was back in those days. I remember the greatest entertainment that we had back in those days was when the ice wagon would come by and it was drawn by a horse, and it had a foot rest in the back and we would jump up on the footrest and beg them for a little piece of ice.

They would chop off a little piece of ice, and I enjoyed eating that piece ice, and I enjoy eating ice to this day.

MF: I enjoy eating ice. Your mother had an icebox then?

Dr. Barker: Yes she had an icebox, and the ice man would come around and put about a forty or fifty pound block of ice in it every day, and the milkman used to come and deliver milk and cream right regularly.

MF: The milk came in glass bottles, I do remember that, with paper stoppers. I know you remember your mother ordering her groceries.

Dr. Barker: Oh Lord yes! She wouldn't go to the grocery store. She would call up and they would deliver the groceries on a bicycle. She dealt with Freeman Smith who had a grocery store on Queen Street, and that grocery store was just torn down within the last year or so.

It was a little tiny, teeny, brick store, and I used to go by and look at it in amazement thinking of supermarkets today, about this

little teeny-weeny building that had all the groceries in it that my mother used to order.

MF: Dr. Barker, who were your childhood playmates?

Dr. Barker: I used to play with Jack Taylor who lived next door. Actually, his house was built on an empty lot that was next door to my house. I was very little at the time, and they built a house there and I was told that there would be a young fella there who would make a good playmate and he did. He was younger than I was. Jack died just not too long ago. We played with a little boy across the street by the name of Edmund Nelson who was Ben Nelson's son, and Edmund also died several months ago. He died within the same two weeks that Jack died. I'm the one left out of the three, so I hope it doesn't foretell, what happens twice happens three times.

MF: No, it doesn't mean a thing. But they were your playmates?

Dr. Barker: They were my playmates, and also I played a lot with a little boy who was up the street, Charles Turner. He was a very good playmate.

MF: What kind of games did you play?

Dr. Barker: Well, we were very active. As a matter of fact, we would dig caves in the back yard.

MF: I know your mother loved that!

Dr. Barker: We had all sorts of holes back there. It was the most remarkable thing you've ever seen. We had engineering feats, it's a wonder it didn't kill us all with cave-ins and everything else. It's amazing we're alive.

MF: Your right. Well, that's okay, your daddy was a doctor, he could take care of you.

Dr. Barker: My back yard was adjacent to St. Joseph's School, and there were a lot of little black children who went to school over there and they used to throw bricks at us.

MF: Why would they do that?

Dr. Barker: Oh, they did it all the time. They would throw bricks at us. They got rid of their frustrations, but we would egg them on.

MF: Well, I should of known that you all would egg them on. And you attended the public school in New Bern?

Dr. Barker: Yes. I went to school at Central School and the street car went by right down to the corner. I went to school in the primary building, in the Academy Building. That's one of the things I've never been able to understand, if a school building is twenty-five years old now they have to build a new one. I went to school in a school building that was 200 years old and I felt that it was completely adequate.

MF: I went there too. That building was used as a school from 1809 to 1971. That's when that building was erected, the brick building. Before that, they had a wooden one but it burned. So from 1809 to 1971, but I agree with you on that. It was fine.

Dr. Barker: I went to school there and I don't think that I lack an education as a result of having gone there.

MF: Well, I know you don't. Did you graduate from New Bern High School:

Dr. Barker: Yes, I graduated from New Bern High School in 1937, in June of 1937.

MF: How many were in your class, do you remember? Did you have a big class?

Dr. Barker: I imagine there were fifty or sixty.

MF: Was that at that time eight months of school or nine months of school?

Dr. Barker: Well, it was both. We sometimes went eight months and sometimes nine months depending on how much money the County had.

MF: This was still bad times with the Depression.

Dr. Barker: It was bad times! Some of the greatest times that ever were was during the Depression. I saw some terrible things of people begging and people hungry, and today kids and people just wouldn't realize the misery that was throughout everywhere during the Depression. Yet, some of the best times were during the Depression.

We didn't have anything, we didn't have any money. Now, my daddy was practicing medicine at the time, and people didn't have money to pay the doctor so they would bring him collards and chickens, and he'd put on the book "by collards" or "by chickens". That's the way he was paid.

MF: The old barter system.

Dr. Barker: The old barter system, and it worked. We always had something really good to eat but we didn't have any money in our pockets.

MF: Well, no one else did either.

Dr. Barker: That's right. Everybody was in the same boat and people seemed to look after each other more then under those circumstances than they do today.

MF: Did the churches get together and have a soup kitchen.

Dr. Barker: No. The churches were the primary sources of welfare then. They didn't have the highly structured welfare departments that they have today.

MF: Getting back to the schools, were there eleven or twelve grades when you graduated?

Dr. Barker: There were eleven grades. Now my wife, she went to school in Hamlet and she was in the same class I was, but she graduated a year later because they had twelve grades in Hamlet.

MF: You mentioned your wife, and her full name is?

Dr. Barker: Vivien Lee Jeffreys and she was born in Hamlet, North Carolina. She went to Meredith College and she majored in chemistry. After she went to Meredith College, she went first to graduate school at North Carolina State University and was one of the few girls there at that time; then, she went to work for the Southern Cotton Oil Mill in Savannah, Georgia; then, she was offered a job by DuPont in Richmond, Virginia in their Rayon plant up there. I met her in Richmond while she was working for DuPont. I was a junior in Dental school when I met her.

MF: When did ya'll marry?

Dr. Barker: We married not too long after I met her, this was back during the war, and I think it was eleven months after I met her

we got married. I then graduated from Dental school after having been married. In other words, I got married before I finished school. She continued working at DuPont and she helped me stay in school. When I graduated from Dental school, I was offered a job with the Richmond City Schools system as an intern in children's dentistry.

So, I worked on school children. We had portable dental equipment that we carried from school to school. In order to indoctrinate me into working on children's teeth, I was sent to an all Black school in Richmond and there was a Dentist there, a black Dentist, who took me under his wing, and I practiced with him for a period of time to learn what he could teach me. I got a real different look at the Black situation back then because in this school there were black school teachers and black principals and an entirely different facet of Blacks than I had been used to. They were professionals, and it changed my opinion from a white supremacist southerner, I decided that segregation was the wrong thing, and this was a completely segregated school.

MF: So, you learned that a long time ago?

Dr. Barker: I learned that a long time ago. Then after having gone there, I went out into this City school system on my own and practiced children's dentistry in the City school system of Richmond until my office was completed in New Bern, the apartments where you were talking about. Then, when all that was completed and I had my equipment installed, I moved with my wife to New Bern and started practicing in New Bern.

MF: I want to pick up on something you mentioned earlier. When

you said children's dentistry, were there in Dentist in New Bern just for children?

Dr. Barker: Oh Lord no! I don't even know if there was such a thing then as a pediatric dentist, I don't think there was such a thing.

MF: Well, they have them now.

Dr. Barker: Oh yes.

MF: All of the equipment and everything is scaled for a child?

Dr. Barker: Yes, a Pedologist. We have a Pedodontist in New Bern now.

MF: Oh, we do? Who is that, do you remember?

Dr. Barker: The Pedodontist is Jim Congleton.

MF: When I lived in California in the Sixties, my children when to a Pedodontist, and it was just the cutest office, everything for a child.

Dr. Barker: When we were talking earlier about the North Carolina State Board of Health in reducing dental decay, I received the award from the American Society of Dentistry for children for being the most outstanding Dentist in North Carolina. This was in 1969.

MF: Wonderful! That's wonderful! Now, at what age would the parent bring his or her child to you?

Dr. Barker: Actually, when they first get their second molars, about twenty-four months old or something like that.

MF: Are babies sometimes born with dental problems?

Dr. Barker: Very seldom but occasionally babies are born with

teeth, but that's not usual. Sometimes they have their little central incisors, and sometimes they have to be removed so that they can suck.

MF: You pull them out?

Dr. Barker: Yes.

MF: I know you pulled some from me, but anyway mine would be terrible to pull out compared to a babies. When you were practicing, you had children as patients as well as adults?

Dr. Barker: I had them from babies to geriatric-type patients.

MF: So, you practiced on all kinds of patients? But now everything is specialized?

Dr. Barker: That's right.

MF: Now, we'll get back to your personal history. You and Jeff have three children.

Dr. Barker: Three daughters. Their names are Ruth Henderson, Nancy Jeffreys and Martha Elizabeth. Martha Elizabeth is "Betty" Barker, and Nancy is now Nancy Hill, she married King Hill of Baltimore, Maryland, and Ruthie is now Ruthie Cushman, and she lives in Kingsport, Tennessee.

MF: Betty is the only one that lives here?

Dr. Barker: Betty lives in New Bern and she married Lou Cannon who is a CPA.

MF: It's nice that you got one of them here.

Dr. Barker: That's right. She looks after us like a mother hen.

MF: Well, that's what we are supposed to do, and I think that's wonderful! Charlie, what about downtown New Bern. What do you remember

about downtown New Bern that you would like to share with us.

Dr. Barker: When I was in high school I always had a job and I worked in downtown New Bern. I worked at Merit Shoe Store, I worked at J. C. Penney's, and I worked at Belks, but most of my work was at Hill's, I worked at the men's clothing store. It seems to me as if I always had a job, I never was without one. I worked in the downtown area. The downtown area then was where everything was going on and it was a vital type of area, there were a lot of people there, parking was a problem. The malls and the strip shopping centers have absolutely ruined downtown New Bern, but downtown New Bern was as they used to say, "That's where it was at!"

MF: Your right, it was. I loved it, I liked all the individuality of all the stores. Every time you went downtown, you saw lots of people you knew, never went there that you didn't see someone you knew.

Dr. Barker: That's right. It was a social thing as well as a business. The A & P store was down there and at the same time that's when David Brinkley used to work in New Bern.

MF: I didn't know he worked in New Bern.

Dr. Barker: Oh he worked for A & P store.

MF: Were you working for the newspaper at that time?

Dr. Barker: No, I never did work for the newspaper in New Bern, I was a volunteer, and I wrote a column called "Barker Barks" for THE TIMES. THE TIMES was published by Harlow Waldrop, and Harlow who made TIME magazine one time, he said, "In New Bern since we've had so many hurricanes, we don't sell coffee anymore by the acre, we

sell it by the quart." (Laughter)

MF: That's sounds like him! I like that! Did you ever have a paper route?

Dr. Barker: No, I was a substitute paper carrier, but I never had a regular route. I did carry papers for different people that wanted to get off and I did do that.

MF: Well now, what was your column about?

Dr. Barker: Just general things. One thing was we advocated painting a line down the middle of the street. That was before they had lines down the middle of the street. We said that would be a good way to tell which side was which and later on they painted the line down the middle of the street.

MF: Thank goodness or I'd drive right down the middle, I really would! Did you ever go down to the river?

Dr. Barker: Yes, I went to the river. Now, I belonged to "Crabbys" club which was what is now the foot of the Trent River Bridge, the old Trent River Bridge at Union Point. It was away about a block from Union Point and we used to swim in the river there, and there was no bridge there of course. Down at the foot of the bridge down on Johnson Street was where the Hand gang was and I occasionally went down there to go swimming. They had a big sewer that dumped right there and you would swim through the sewer.

MF: Oh my gracious, and people would be up in arms about it today!

Dr. Barker: Well, it inoculated us against everything, we never got sick. (Laughter)

MF: I don't think you did! When you say "Crabbys", who was this?

Dr. Barker: Albert Crabtree. Albert Crabtree was a machinist who worked down in that area and he ran a boy's club, and it was a fabulous boy's club. He had a warehouse that went out over the water that he fixed for card tables and fixed it for the places where you could change into a bathing suit and he had diving boards and he had sliding boards. He did all this himself. Today, they would be out collecting fees from everybody. There was none of that because nobody had any fees to pay him, so he had to do it himself. There should be a monument in New Bern to Albert Crabtree.

MF: That is so nice, such a nice thing to do!

Dr. Barker: That was before we had a recreation department. He ran the recreation department and he had a lot of boys that used to come down there, and girls too.

MF: Oh girls could go also?

Dr. Barker: Oh yes.

MF: Well, did you all do any sailing on the river?

Dr. Barker: I did very little sailing. You did very little things on the river. I didn't do any boating. We didn't have boats. Today, boats are a common thing but back then boats weren't plentiful like they are now.

MF: What about dances?

Dr. Barker: We used to have dances at the Woman's Club at Union Point. The Woman's Club is still there. Jack Holland, and Ben Smith, and Ed Smallwood used to collect quarters and they would have a band

sometimes and they would play records and we just had a great time in the Woman's Club on weekends. One of the nice things about Union Point, we didn't have any local radio stations back then but cars were just beginning to have radios and you could park out on the end of Union Point and pick up New York City and other stations like that where having big bands back in those days.

MF: That's great. When you talk about radio stations, it brings to mind our radio station here and also the Community College, and you were very involved with the Community College.

Dr. Barker: Yes, I was involved with that. I was involved with WHIT when it came on the air. I won the contest to name it. Originally we had two slogans; one of them was "Where Hospitality is Traditional", WHIT, and the other one was "We Help Industry Thrive". They kept WHIT until they changed the call letters to WNOS and now a station, I believe it's in Madison, Wisconsin, has WHIT. So, we no longer have WHIT.

MF: What about the Community College?

Dr. Barker: Back in 1977 when I was Chairman of the Board of the Community College, we had no public radio in Eastern North Carolina.

There was a Community College in Hutchinson, Kansas that had started a radio station, and I said, "Phoo, we ought to do the same thing."

So, we started a drive for a public radio station. It was about five or six years after that that we finally went on the air with WTEB.

MF: When did the Community College open here in New Bern?

Dr. Barker: Twenty-six years ago now. (1966)

MF: 1966. How long were you Chairman of the Board?

Dr. Barker: I was Chairman of the Board twice. I was the only person that has ever been Chairman of the Board of Craven Community College two times.

MF: You did an outstanding job! You saw it grow.

Dr. Barker: I have a love for the Community College and I'm delighted to see that it has grown.

MF: Well, tell me, why was the Community College started?

Dr. Barker: The State of North Carolina started a system of community colleges and they were started to primarily get people who did not have the financial means to go off to school to be able to get a couple of years of college at home at a very low tuition rate, and it has been very successful, not just ordinarily successful, but tremendously successful.

MF: Yes, and this one has grown tremendously and it grew a lot under you.

Dr. Barker: Oh, very much so. The present campus came about during my Administration.

MF: Are they turning students away now?

Dr. Barker: Yes. We don't have facilities enough to offer the courses that we like to. I say "we" again, I just recently retired from the Board of the Community College so I'm no longer on it. I'm on the Board of the radio station over there though.

MF: But your still interested I know.

Dr. Barker: Oh, extremely so! Always will be but I figured now

that I've been on it long enough. I've been on the Board longer than anybody else. My term was coming up for renewal and I decided that it was time for somebody else.

MF: It's been a wonderful thing for Craven County, for New Bern. So, many people after two years have gone on to college.

Dr. Barker: That's right, a tremendous amount of people. Now, one of the things that I wanted to mention was that the Community College started at the Harvey Mansion as you probably know. That was our first campus in New Bern.

MF: That's very interesting. You outgrew that and then bought land that was considered practically in the country, that is no longer in the country.

Dr. Barker: In the country. I was on the committee that bought that land. It was the highest land that was around anywhere, and it was at an interchange on a super highway where people could get to it.

MF: I think they are eventually going to outgrow that spot.

Dr. Barker: Well, we already have a campus in Havelock, and they are going to build some buildings in Havelock for the people in that area of the County.

MF: That will alleviate the situation here some. Is there anything else that you would like to discuss.

Dr. Barker: I think I'm about talked out.

MF: Okay. Well, one thing, if you told me then it went right out of my mind, your birth date?

Dr. Barker: September 5, 1919.

MF: That's my father's birth date, September 5. I want to thank you Dr. Barker so very much for this wonderful, wonderful interview and on behalf of "Memories of New Bern", thank you for participating in the Oral History Program.

Dr. Barker: Well, I really thank you for interviewing me, and it's been a pleasure.

MF: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW