

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

CHARLES HAZEL KIMBRELL

INTERVIEW 421

This is Marea Kafer Foster representing the Memories of New Bern Committee. My number is 400. I am interviewing Charles H. Kimbrell, interview number 421. This interview is being conducted on Thursday the 28th of January 1993. We are in the den of Mr. Kimbrell's home at 1616 Queen Anne Lane in New Bern, North Carolina.

MAREA FOSTER: Charlie, this is really a great privilege and pleasure for me to be here because I've known you so long and then you were such a great friend of my daddy's. So, this is a double pleasure for me. I want you right now to give me your full name and your birthdate and your parent's names.

MR. KIMBRELL: Thank you, Marea. It's a real privilege to be participating in this effort and I hope that I will be able to contribute something worthwhile to the program, because I think it's a wonderful one and one that certainly needs to be done. My full name is Charles H. Kimbrell and I will note here that I grew up and finished high school under my middle name, which is Hazel. MAREA FOSTER: Hazel!

MR. KIMBRELL: That was not an unusual name for the male sex in the area where I was raised. That's the name that I graduated under and remained with me until I graduated and began school in Charlotte.

But in particular, after I had moved on up to my first assignment under the war department, where I picked up the nickname of "Chaz", and then from there, it later came to be Charlie and it's been Charlie ever since. I was born in Waxhaw, North Carolina on Sims Road, which is in Union County. My father's name was Richard Mack Kimbrell and my mother's name was Maggie L. Sims Kimbrell.

MAREA FOSTER: Now, when you say his name was Richard Mack,
M-A-C-K?

MR. KIMBRELL: Yes.

MAREA FOSTER: When is your birthdate, Charlie?

MR. KIMBRELL: July 8, 1923.

MAREA FOSTER: And you went to school in Waxhaw?

MR. KIMBRELL: In Waxhaw.

MAREA FOSTER: And graduated from the high school.

MR. KIMBRELL: New Bern High School.

MAREA FOSTER: You didn't graduate from New Bern High School!

(laughter)

MR. KIMBRELL: Excuse me, I've been here so long that it's home
to me now. Actually, it was fifty years this year. In September of
this year I will have been a New Bernian for fifty years.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, after you graduated from high school, when
and why did you come to New Bern?

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, of course, two years passed, really a little
over two years passed and a number of events occurred; a short term
in the military, and then, of course, going to engineering school.

But I came to New Bern, I had signed up for a two year period.
Fortunately, they honored that. Anyhow, I came to New Bern to visit
an older brother who was manager and owner of an independent shoe
department in the Coplon-Smith store. That was a shoe department.

It was run under a contract, under a national leasing agency, and
my brother Tom was the owner and manager of that department. I came

to visit him. When I entered the intersection of Broad and Middle Street, going to a service station that used to sit diagonally in the northeast corner of that intersection, I had to hesitate a minute for traffic and I could of course see the Neuse River ahead of me, and sitting right in the middle of Middle Street I could see down Middle Street and see water in the Trent River to my right. There was still foliage on the trees and it was a very pretty Fall year, and I said, "Boy, this is for me!" Anyhow, I visited a week or two with my brother, who also roomed with Mrs. Annie Rhem, Dr. Rhem's wife. Then I returned home and visited a while, and then I made up my mind that I wanted to come to New Bern and live and returned.

MAREA FOSTER: And you've been here every since.

MR. KIMBRELL: Mrs. Annie Rhem almost treated me like a son, and here I am.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, Charlie, where was Mrs. Annie Rhem's home?

MR. KIMBRELL: Mrs. Rhem lived in the 400 block of Broad Street. Actually the house number was 410, which was really next door to the Clark Building at the time. There was nothing between Clark's Drug Store and Dr. Rhem's house.

MAREA FOSTER: Was that building Clark's Drug Store at that time?

MR. KIMBRELL: It was at that time. Mr. and Mrs. Clark had come to New Bern sometime prior to my arrival and they rented Dr. Rhem's office which was attached to the Rhem house. They rented Dr. Rhem's office and that's where their first son was born, Gordon. Yes, it was named then Clark's Drug Store. And the name of Clark Building,

of course, it's stuck with it since.

MAREA FOSTER: Now, what was your first job in New Bern?

MR. KIMBRELL: My first job, and of course, I was obligated to the war department in exchange for my education. I had to remain in defense work until the end of hostilities, and possibly longer. As a matter of fact, up to 10 years, cumulative. Of course, Barbour Boat Works was in the ship building business at the time under Navy contract.

MAREA FOSTER: Before you go any further, please tell us exactly where Barbour Boat Works is.

MR. KIMBRELL: Barbour Boat Works is located on what was known then as South Front Street, at the intersection. South Front Street between Metcalf and Hancock, is their location. Of course, they remained there and operate today.

MAREA FOSTER: What was your job for Mr. Barbour?

MR. KIMBRELL: I was employed immediately upon stating my business to Rembert Rivenbark who was the manager. Mr. Barbour was, of course, the owner. Rembert Rivenbark was his son-in-law. I met him on the yard and asked him about a job. He wanted to know what I could do and I said, "I can do anything you've got, I believe." He said, "Well, what have you done previously?" I said, "The only thing I've done is gone to school and pulled a hitch at the Martin Aircraft Plant in Baltimore under the War Service Administration. And I studied mechanical engineering and aeronautical engineering", all of which was what you would call crash courses to get people qualified to do defense work in ship building or aircraft. He said, "Well, you go

to work", and he directed me to a little further down the yard to a gentleman by the name of Bubba Richardson who was engineer for the yard, and he said, "He can put you to work. As a matter of fact, anything that you can do, and Bubba wants you to do it, you just work under him." So I did some engineering detail for him and also did some work in the machine shop, of which I later became foreman of.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, how did you get into this type work rather than being drafted?

MR. KIMBRELL: That's a real story. That was the purpose of volunteering ahead of us getting into hostilities.

MAREA FOSTER: Oh, I see, you volunteered early.

MR. KIMBRELL: That's correct. Right after I finished high school.

MAREA FOSTER: Okay.

MR. KIMBRELL: Now, how I got into that was, actually, my mother picked up on this program and she brought it to my attention and we went to talk to the people at the school there in Charlotte. The South Eastern School of Engineering is where I initially started in mechanical engineering. If you were accepted, you had to take an aptitude test to see what field you would best fit in, and if you could fit into any. Well, I passed. Passed, in the field of engineering, and that really frightened me, because I didn't think I was good enough in arithmetic to be in engineering. I will never forget Professor Latta who was Professor Emeritus of mechanical engineering at N. C. State University. He took me in his office and sat me down and gave me a little fatherly talk and he said, "You don't have to worry about

whether you can do it or not, you leave that to us, and you'll be all right." Anyhow, that gave me a deferment for two years, and further if my services were needed in defense work. I then, of course, progressed out of mechanical engineering. They decided, well, they got orders that they really needed more people in aircraft manufacturing and especially the field of engineering, in aeronautical engineering. So they transferred me from mechanical engineering into aeronautical engineering, in which I was then sent to Santa Monica, California and went through a three month conversion. Well, it really wasn't much of a conversion because mechanical engineering and aeronautical are very compatible really. But anyhow, I went out there.

I was there, had finished this conversion course and was to go then to Martin Aircraft Company in Baltimore when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. On Christmas Eve day 1941, I went to Pearl Harbor, Christmas Eve day.

MAREA FOSTER: You went to Pearl Harbor?

MR. KIMBRELL: After we were attacked. We were sent over there, a number of us were sent over there, to help do survey work, survey aircraft damage for salvage purposes. In fact to see if some of them, and of course we did, all of them did not receive damage but hundreds were totally destroyed. Anyway, we finished that assignment and then I was sent to Baltimore, Maryland.

MAREA FOSTER: Charlie, this is interesting to talk to someone who was actually over at Pearl Harbor. Maybe not that day, but the day after, so you can give a first hand account of what it was like.

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, of course, the attack came December 7th and I went over on December 24th, Christmas Eve day. That's when I arrived there. I don't guess the scene had changed much from the time of the attack until the time that we arrived there. However, we didn't have any liberty time there whatever. We were restricted to Hickam Field and we were, of course, busy, very busy. We knew no such things as coffee breaks or rest periods.

MAREA FOSTER: In other words, you worked from sunup to sundown.

MR. KIMBRELL: And sometimes longer than that.

MAREA FOSTER: How long did you stay there?

MR. KIMBRELL: We were there about five weeks.

MAREA FOSTER: Then you went to Baltimore.

MR. KIMBRELL: Baltimore. Now while I was there, I received my "Greetings", which of course came as quite a surprise. But I really at that point in time had gotten hyped up like everybody else had, wanting to do their part. I felt like I could fight the whole world anyhow, so it didn't bother me. But the people there of course were concerned about it. I said, "Well, you know there's nothing... I have to go. I don't have any choice." Well, I went to...gosh, the hospital there in Baltimore...

MAREA FOSTER: Johns Hopkins.

MR. KIMBRELL: Johns Hopkins Hospital and took a preliminary physical. They had me do that. Said, "Well, there's no need to send you all the way to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and then, you know, you may be rejected physically." So they gave me a physical at Johns

Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore and I passed that. Then I subsequently left by bus and went to Fort Jackson, South Carolina and was inducted into immediate service that day.

MAREA FOSTER: Into the Army?

MR. KIMBRELL: Into the Army

MAREA FOSTER: In the infantry?

MR. KIMBRELL: In the infantry that day. Even given assignment that day, still in my civilian clothes. All of us still in our civilian clothes. It was quite an experience. Well, I finished boot camp and was waiting along with lots of other guys for the order to where we were supposed to go. I got called into the administration building one day. You know, I was just right out of high school so to speak.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, you weren't but nineteen years old.

MR. KIMBRELL: A little 'ole country hick boy, I just wasn't ready for that kind of public involvement I don't think. But anyhow, I went in to this certain office and I learned there that they had already received word that I was not supposed to be there.

MAREA FOSTER: So were you discharged?

MR. KIMBRELL: They said I was needed worse in Baltimore than in the Army, and I was mustered out and sent back to Baltimore.

MAREA FOSTER: Weren't you lucky!

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, yeah, in a way I guess, but I enjoyed the training. I really felt like I had been sort of cheated out of something that I had come to look forward to, because the camaraderie with all the young men that I was with, we just almost all immediately become

a family so to speak. I got over it, I did, but initially I felt like I'd been sort of cheated out of something I wanted to do. But by the same token, I had a very important job at the aircraft plant. I don't know why, I didn't have any trouble with my arithmetic, but Professor Latta took care of that. I couldn't believe myself how well I really got into it after, you might say, some provocation from experts in the field of education into my mind. A lot of things had gone in there that I just hadn't put together and they put them together for me.

But I was very capable at my work assignment, which was primarily engine mounts, because they were developing larger and larger horse-powered engines. Well, the aircraft industry was in its infancy.

MAREA FOSTER: Yes, it was.

MR. KIMBRELL: Building fighter planes and bombers and seaplanes, all new.

MAREA FOSTER: Talking about this you have in the biographical sketch that you gave to me that you helped with mounting, or developing mounting machine guns on jeeps. Where did this take place?

MR. KIMBRELL: That took place at South Eastern School of Engineering in Charlotte. I hadn't been there but just a month or two and they sent this ordinance crew there from Fort Jackson. They had an idea about mounting machine guns in jeeps and they wanted some technical assistance and we had been recommended. This school, of course, was operated under the War Services Administration, so it was actually a department of the War Department. I keep calling it the War Department because that's what it was.

MAREA FOSTER: That's what it was, and you're right, it was.

MR. KIMBRELL: Of course, they had teachers there that were some of the finest instructors in engineering in the country. Professor Latta was, gosh, I don't know, he had taught at N.C. State I don't know how many years, but half his life. But, I said, "Yeah, yeah, I think we can." Professor Latta was telling me this later, cause I asked him, "how did I get involved in this?!", and he said, "Well, I just think you would be better. Everything just seems to come to you naturally, and this is something new and I just thought you'd be able to handle it." But anyhow, they assigned me to these ordinance people from Fort Jackson and we did it. We did it.

MAREA FOSTER: Isn't that wonderful.

MR. KIMBRELL: I went down to Fort Jackson. That was my first visit. That was before I had to go there to boot camp. But I went down to do some test firing. I didn't do the test firing, but I was right there with them in other jeeps. Riding along in jeeps and watching them fire and seeing if, you know, what adjustments we might make, whether the pedestal was high enough or too high or not steady enough, or whatever, because it was a new animal that we created and if it accomplished what they wanted to do. Well, it turned out, Marea, that we didn't do anything. We didn't make any change. Now we worked on that, I know for three days that I didn't leave the school, nor did they. What sleep we got was off and on over a three day period

MAREA FOSTER: How about that.

MR. KIMBRELL: We ate right there in the engineering department

in the shop part where we fabricated the machinist and put it together.

It worked. Then I suppose they took that to some supplier or manufacturer and patterned those components to get them manufactured.

It was so interesting, just a year or two ago they were having a car show here down at Union Point down on the Bicentennial Park, and Eula and I were walking around looking at the different vehicles and I looked over there and saw a jeep just exactly like the jeeps of that year, 1940, '42. No, that was in 1941. I worked in the latter part of '41.

I told her, I said, "There's a jeep just like I put that machine gun mount on." We walked on over to it and it turned out it was Kennedy Ward's jeep and he had it on display down there. We were all looking at it and Kennedy came up. But, it's a small world.

MAREA FOSTER: It certainly is, and that's a wonderful thing Charlie. You have a claim to fame.

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, it wasn't my idea.

MAREA FOSTER: I know, but you did have a hand in it, and so that went toward your war effort. Now, let's get you back to Barbour Boat Works. How long were you with Barbour Boat Works?

MR. KIMBRELL: I'm not sure just how long it was. It was better than a year. Somewhere in the neighborhood of a year and a half. When I went down there, they had three vessels, I believe, that had not been completed. One of them, though, was overboard and I believe they had done some test trials on that. That was a mine sweeper.

MAREA FOSTER: Excuse me, Charlie, were they building these mine sweepers for the United States Navy or for the British Navy? Didn't

Barbour Boat Works build some ships for England during World War II?

MR. KIMBRELL: Yes, they did. But I believe these mine sweepers were ours. The net tender was for Great Britain.

MAREA FOSTER: What is a net tender?

MR. KIMBRELL: They had steel nets out to entrap submarines.

MAREA FOSTER: Oh, I see.

MR. KIMBRELL: They would become entangled in them. They were anchored to the bottom, and they were of course heavy steel netting. They'd put a submarine out of commission.

MAREA FOSTER: I don't think I'd ever heard of a net tender before.

MR. KIMBRELL: They're a right large vessel. Well, they're not large considering today's vessels. I believe they're about 190 feet long, a rather sturdy, heavy ship. Of course, all of these were wood hulls.

MAREA FOSTER: Excuse me, were they not using steel plate hulls at that time?

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, they had some steel plates on them, but these were all wooden hulls, solid wooden hulls.

MAREA FOSTER: Were all the ships in World War II wooden hulls?

MR. KIMBRELL: No, no. The majority of them were steel hull. Very fragile steel hull, because a lot of them broke up in heavy seas. This thing (net tender) had a twin boom steel super structure that extended out beyond the bow of the ship and there was windlass and gear mounted out there. Of course, the steel wire nets were backed to board, of course on the deck, and they were laid out into place

and retrieved over these large drums and winches that were mounted in this super structure in a heavy boom at the forward end of the ship.

These ships used an awful lot of electricity, with all this mechanical gear on board. By being that they needed so much electrical power, these ships were powered by electrical motors. The big diesel engines were all diesel, but they drove generators. The generators, of course, generated power to propel the ship and to operate all the gears. It was loaded with electrical driven mechanical gear.

MAREA FOSTER: Do you happen to know how many ships Barbour Boat Works built during the war?

MR. KIMBRELL: I don't. I've heard, but I don't recall.

MAREA FOSTER: But you stayed with them how long did you tell me?

MR. KIMBRELL: I'd say approximately a year and a half. Then, of course, I had to continue in defense work. So I just went on down to Cherry Point and just walked right on in there. I stayed down there until 1953 I believe it was.

MAREA FOSTER: And that's when you left to start your own business, wasn't it?

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, no. I liked the work at Barbour Boat Works so well that I resigned down there to get back into private work and into different work.

MAREA FOSTER: That's right. So, you went back to Barbour's and it was at Barbour's that you decided you wanted to be in business for yourself.

MR. KIMBRELL: Went into business for myself, yeah.

MAREA FOSTER: And you were into boat racing - for how many years?

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, I blame Steve Fowler.

MAREA FOSTER: Did he get you involved in it?

MR. KIMBRELL: Steve got me involved in it. I got to know Steve, of course, through his aunt, Annie Rhem. He'd visit there and I got to know him. We were about the same age and we became good friends.

His dad was known by everybody as "Party." He had an inboard run-a-bout boat and kept it in the boathouse down on the waterfront down there behind Nelson Seafood, which was adjacent to the old Trent River bridge on the upstream side. I beg your pardon. His boathouse was on the downstream side pretty close to Barbour Boat Works. As a matter of fact, it might have been at the foot of Metcalf Street. I believe it was. Steve had acquired a little racing hull. We went down there one day and he wanted to run it. Of course, we had talked about outboard motors and boats, cause I had gotten just a little sample of it at home before I got all involved in the war effort. Well, we went down there one day, Steve wanted to run his little racing hull and said, "Charlie, come on down, come on down, help me. You might like this."

So I went down and we put the little boat in the water and we put the outboard motor on it. He got it cranked up and he went off out there in the Trent River and buzzed around a little bit and came on back in. It looked simple enough to me. I was sort of amazed that he said, "Want to try?" I said, "Well, yeah. Yeah, I'll try ." You had to be very careful in getting in and out of those things because

you'd sink them. They have a very shallow freeboard and you have to keep the weight distributed or they will sink. Well, he got me in the boat okay. And of course you have to turn around in a very small cockpit that you have to operate the boat from, and you have to turn around and face the motor, of course to start the motor. You have what they call a deadman's throttle. You have to open this throttle wide open and lock it into position, lock it into wide open position, to start the engine. Then when the engine starts, you have to turn around in the cockpit, of course down on your knees, take the steering wheel in one hand and the deadman's throttle in the other. Of course the first thing you do is squeeze the throttle a little bit and that unlocks it and then you have control over the throttle. Well, it got started and I got out of that boathouse of Mr. Fowler's so quick, it scared me. I forgot about how to unlock the throttle, how to slow the thing down, and I had an awful hairy ride out there in the river bouncing around until I accidentally squeezed the throttle a little harder. When I did, it unlocked and I suddenly realized that I had control of the speed in my hand. (laughter) I headed back to shore just as fast as I could then. Of course I shut it off. When you turn the throttle loose, the engine just dies. I was just heading toward the shore, and I don't know, it must have been a hundred yards from shore, I thought I was gonna run ashore up in that boathouse, so I just dropped the throttle out of my hand. It just settled down and stopped and almost sank then, the water rushed right over the stern. I had to paddle that thing by hand all that distance into the boathouse.

Well, right then, I didn't want anymore of it. But then I got to thinking about it later, "Boy, that would be great. I bet that's a lot of fun." Of course at that time, Mutt Barwick had come back to New Bern after service, and some how I learned that he had one he wanted to sell. He was opening his business up over there on the river, Trent River side. Well, I went looking at Mutt's boat, and it was like Steve's and that was fine. His engine was all disassembled and in a box, but he assured me it was good. Anyhow, I purchased it. My education and my getting into actually doing hands-on machine work myself, proved to be real beneficial to me in that hobby, because actually in no time at all I was building my own engine, which you had to do. They were, of course, modified engines, stripped down.

MAREA FOSTER: Charlie, who else raced besides you and Mutt and Steve?

MR. KIMBRELL: Oh gosh. Mutt didn't ever race.

MAREA FOSTER: Oh, I thought he did.

MR. KIMBRELL: He must have been contemplating it, but I don't recall Mutt ever racing. Unless he did it before the war, and that's possible because there was some boat racing prior to the war because Shoot Hall was boat racing prior to World War II. But Steve did a little bit, Guy Hamilton, and later Ed Meadows, Jimmy Humphrey, E. E. Lane, Tull Benton, Jarvis Arthur, Buddy Arthur. With the passing of the years, new motors being built, the economy picking up, more people buying, until it got to the place that we had almost enough people right here in New Bern to put on a right big boat race. Of

course, I don't know whether you would remember or not, but we had some mighty big racing events here.

MAREA FOSTER: I remember that.

MR. KIMBRELL: You would have been very young.

MAREA FOSTER: But I do remember the boat racing. I certainly do. And you raced on the Trent River, didn't you?

MR. KIMBRELL: Yeah, at the Trent Pines Club. Initially, at the Trent Pines Club, and then for several years thereafter, and then the club was sold. Then we moved, oh, just across the river and downstream a little ways over to the Williams farm. Then, we had races over there for several years, oh, right on up into the seventies, because that's where we held the races during the bicentennial celebration.

MAREA FOSTER: Now, after a while, racing sort of lost its appeal, didn't it, because it has not been a continuous thing?

MR. KIMBRELL: I was surprised to learn that Guy Hamilton's son, Guy III, and his son, I don't know whether he's a fourth or not, have continued to race some. Noel Paul, his father, Adolph Paul, raced. Then Noel got into it and I think Noel still has a racing rig, and a number of other young fellows here.

MAREA FOSTER: Recently, they have started racing again. But didn't we go through a period...

MR. KIMBRELL: Oh yeah, we sure did.

MAREA FOSTER: That's what I thought.

MR. KIMBRELL: An awful lot of amateurs. They could go to the store, so to speak, and buy a racing boat and motor and put it in the

water and they're in business, but they were not experienced drivers.

They were beginning to experience an awful lot of bad collisions and serious injuries and even deaths and that began to kill the interest somewhat.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, I knew that there was great interest in it when I was in high school and college and then it had sort of faded out. Now, after this racing, when did you decide to enter New Bern politics?

MR. KIMBRELL: Let me add this to a bit of information concerning the racing.

MAREA FOSTER: Oh, okay.

MR. KIMBRELL: We used to have these water festivals, generally a three or four day affair. We would have what has been started in recent years at Christmas, water parades. We had those back then in the forties and the fifties. We would have fireworks out off of a barge in the Neuse River. I towed a barge out there many times from Barbour Boat Works.

MAREA FOSTER: In the Neuse or the Trent?

MR. KIMBRELL: In the Neuse along East Front Street, prior to the construction of the new bridge, of the existing John Lawson bridge. We had what was estimated by a national television network people, we had up to 40,000 out at Trent Pines Club. You couldn't believe the people that would come out there. By the same token, people would come in here for these fireworks and water parade at nighttime. The yachts would all light up with colored lights. Real pretty. People

just as thick as hair on a dog's back so to speak. All along the waterfront down at East Front Street just like they were back during the bicentennial in 1974 when we celebrated the 200th anniversary of the convening of the first Provincial Congress. It's unreal. That went on for several years. We had sailboat races and power boats. Actually, I have seen the time down off of Union Point and along East Front Street where I believe you could almost walk across Neuse River just stepping from sailboat to sailboat. Unbelievable.

MAREA FOSTER: And people were beginning to water ski at this time too.

MR. KIMBRELL: We had the world's champion water-skiers to come in here from Cypress Garden, Florida, Bruce Parker and his aquamaids. They put on ski shows out at Trent Pines Club. Big event.

MAREA FOSTER: Big event, yes it was. I had almost forgotten it until I read your sketch. I'm so glad you mentioned it.

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, I couldn't begin to note it all down.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, I know it, but thank goodness you noted that.

MR. KIMBRELL: But then you asked me about politics. Let me touch another subject though just briefly. As noted in this outline, I was injured in a boating accident.

MAREA FOSTER: Oh yes.

MR. KIMBRELL: It happened out at the Trent Pines Club.

MAREA FOSTER: I didn't know if you wanted to talk about it or not, that's why I didn't mention it.

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, yeah, yeah. I was very fortunate. I did,

of course, get some injuries and loss of fingers and some other cuts and injuries, but none of them fatal thank goodness. Dr. Bill Willis who was a general practitioner did the operation. He was our race surgeon, which we were required to have. We had to have one at every race. This was on the weekend of course. Dr. Charlie Ashford was about the only surgeon here at the time and he was down at the beach.

But anyhow, I laid up at Kafer Hospital before dark when I was injured until about eight or nine o'clock. I just kept wondering, well, why doesn't somebody do something? Then Dr. Willis came in and told me why the delay. He said it was a creed among doctors that where there was permanent disability that they would not operate without consulting with another doctor and they'd been trying to get up with Dr. Ashford and to no avail. Anyhow, I assured him, I said, "Look, I'm not worried about you doing this right", and I told him what I didn't want him to do and do the rest of it just like he knew how and they put me on the operating table and operated. But this happened in late 1954.

I was an officer in my lodge, St. John's Lodge, and if I was fortunate I would be elected to hopefully serve as master for the ensuing year.

Here I was with my right hand severely injured and nowhere near healed up. I went through a period there of wondering if I was gonna be eligible to proceed. Fortunately, they decided that I was and I was able to go on and was elected master and served during the year 1955. This is interesting too, and I feel very fortunate, and at the same time I feel a little nervous about it, I am the oldest living master of St. John's Lodge.

MAREA FOSTER: Really?!

MR. KIMBRELL: And I was master thirty-eight years ago. I've held that position, now, this is the third year. I don't like being at the top of the list!

MAREA FOSTER: (laughter) That's all right, Charlie, just stay there as long as you can.

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, I'm gonna try to.

MAREA FOSTER: Heavens yes. St. John's Lodge is a wonderful lodge and very beautiful.

MR. KIMBRELL: I have a lot of memories there and all good. Well, we go on down and we were getting into the sixties and you asked about...

MAREA FOSTER: Why you went into politics and when.

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, as I had mentioned earlier in this outline, I rented a room from Mrs. Annie Rhem. She rented rooms on the second floor of her big house there on Broad Street, and a nice bunch of boys if I may say so, being one of them myself, roomed there. She also rented out the doctor's office on the first floor, but all of us single boys were on the second floor. I don't know why, but I thank her for it, Mrs. Rhem seemed to develop a little partiality for me. Incidentally, did you ever know Mrs. Rhem, Mrs. Annie Rhem, and her sister, Mrs. Lillian "Sis" Foy, who was then Mrs. Claude Foy?

MAREA FOSTER: Uh huh.

MR. KIMBRELL: Mrs. Claude (Lillian-"Sis") Foy's daughter was...

MAREA FOSTER: Mrs. Laurence ("Little Sis") Stith. Right. Because Sis and Laurence lived with Mr. and Mrs. Foy.

MR. KIMBRELL: Yeah. Well, Mrs. Rhem knew everything and everybody in New Bern. If you wanted to do anything or be anything you just about had to get clearance with, get Annie Rhem's endorsement or approval. She was a great person. She really was. She just sort of became a second mother to me during my adult life. Being in her company, we went out and dined together frequently in the evening on the weekends, we visited friends and relatives around town together. She just helped me get to know the people in New Bern.

MAREA FOSTER: Charlie, describe Mrs. Rhem for us.

MR. KIMBRELL: Mrs. Rhem was a very dainty lady, and if I might say so, she was a little bit sissy. She wore hats all the time.

MAREA FOSTER: What type of hat?

MR. KIMBRELL: Oh, they were real sophisticated looking hats. Generally, it was a hat that had a narrow brim right straight out and a little shaped crown in it and they always had a pretty bow on them or cluster of flowers. Then she had some colorful hats, multi-colored, that were rather discylintrical and straight side, but very, very pretty hats. She was a real dresser and a strict person on etiquette. Well, as I mentioned in my outline, she just simply became my mentor and she just meant so much to me. Particularly, in a town where I was by myself, because, subsequently, my older brother left New Bern and went to Raleigh and opened up a store there in the downtown area similar to what he had here. And subsequently, well, as a matter of fact, he eventually moved to North Hills in Raleigh and then from there he took a store down in Florida. Then my younger

brother Jack attended his freshman and sophomore years at Wingate Junior College and then came to East Carolina and graduated over there.

He had to have a job. He was a school teacher, wanted to be a school teacher.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, Charlie, talking about Mrs. Rhem, was she the one who first suggested that you go into politics?

MR. KIMBRELL: No, not really. Of course by then, and you know we're talking about in the mid-sixties, I had of course through her and through my lodge work, through civic clubs and organizations and civic projects, I had just come to know an awful lot of people, including your father who was a little bit of a politician himself.

MAREA FOSTER: Yes, he was.

MR. KIMBRELL: The city had retired the chief of police. Chief Belangia had been retired and also his assistant. They hired, I believe Mayor Millns during his tenure as mayor, hired a new chief of police who happened to be a retired colonel from the Marine Corps to bring us into the twentieth century so to speak. He did a tremendous job.

MAREA FOSTER: This chief of police?

MR. KIMBRELL: This chief of police.

MAREA FOSTER: What was his name?

MR. KIMBRELL: His last name was Pearsall.

MAREA FOSTER: Jim Pearsall.

MR. KIMBRELL: Jim Pearsall. He's sort of like myself, he didn't have much of an out-going personality, but he knew his business and he just did an outstanding job. I had come to know him because he

liked to fish, and by doing a little fishing he owned a little small outboard motor. Every year when he would go on vacation he'd bring that little motor down to our store and have it checked out before he went off with it fishing. He would come to the store and tell us what he would like to have done. We accommodated him because it was just a few minute's thing anyhow, and he would just back up completely out of the way and one of the servicemen would go ahead and take care of his engine and he'd pay us for it and go. Of course, it got some dissatisfaction started among the existing officers to bring a newcomer in here and they didn't get to be chief of police at that time. Word got out that a new board had been elected and that they were gonna appoint someone in his place. Well, that concerned me greatly, because I had noticed the great change in law enforcement in the city during his tenure and it really bothered me to see if they in fact did do that. Well, I was concerned. I mean they said they would. As a matter of fact, one of the aldermen, my alderman as a matter of fact in the second ward, told me himself down at my store one day that he'd (the new chief) be looking for a job come next July, and I made my feelings known to him right then, and he was a good customer of mine.

MAREA FOSTER: Do you mind telling us who the alderman was, and if you prefer not to, that's perfectly all right.

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, it's a personal friend of mine and that's behind us now. We're now close friends. It was one of your neighbors.

MAREA FOSTER: That's okay. I know who it is.

MR. KIMBRELL: There's no animosity or anything, we're close

friends. But then I began to talk to his friends, his very closest friends.

MAREA FOSTER: To Chief Pearsall's friends? No, the alderman's friends.

MR. KIMBRELL: No, the alderman that was really heading this thing up. I began then to meet some of these same people that I talked to later and they began to tell me that, "Charlie, no, they're not gonna do that. He told me he wasn't gonna do it." I said, "Well, good. Maybe my work has paid off." So I stopped. They went in office, they appointed another man in his place, and he's sitting there in the court room at City Hall where the aldermen meet, you know, expecting to be re-appointed. He was not re-appointed and instead they appointed somebody in his place. That is what triggered me into getting interested in serving in city government. I ran at the subsequent election and was elected.

MAREA FOSTER: What was your platform?

MR. KIMBRELL: I got into a number of areas. First of all, I love the water and was in the boating business, and other people were getting in it and we had no access to the water. The general public had no access to the water. People who were not interested in boating but interested in sightseeing and being able to get to the water and just enjoy the scenery, we had no such place. Union Point had not been developed at all. So one of my strongest campaign projects was to clean up the waterfront, pull pilings and get rid of debris, build some access areas for the boating public, picnicking areas for the

general public. That was one thing. Another thing was privilege license was enforced selectively. I ran a small business compared to most of the businesses in town and I was paying more for a privilege license than the largest business in town, in a retail business, and I was running a retail business. There was just a great disparity in the way it was administered, in the way the fees were set up. This one person ran his campaign to get rid of the new chief of police, because it was his responsibility to enforce and collect the privilege licenses. He did, and that man happened to be one who had not paid for a privilege license in twenty-some years and he was forced to pay them. Anyhow, that was one of my other campaign platforms. Also, to restore integrity and productivity in the police department. And lots of other things but they were the personal ones.

MAREA FOSTER: You were elected, and who served on the board with you?

MR. KIMBRELL: Mayor Lupton was the mayor, a grand old gentleman. You never wanted to under-rate that man. He was extremely sharp and good. Durwood Hancock, Paul Cox, Tommy Davis, and Ben Hurst.

MAREA FOSTER: Now, were you able to carry out your campaign projects, so to speak?

MR. KIMBRELL: We were very successful in getting something going toward a public park on the water, Union Point for instance, which was dedicated in less than two years time as you see it today. Glenburnie Park, much as you see it today.

MAREA FOSTER: Now, Glenburnie Park is off past the Riverside

area, off Oaks Road, isn't that right?

MR. KIMBRELL: Yeah, that's at the foot of Glenburnie Drive down by the city's waste treatment plant. A beautiful piece of real estate if there's ever been one. Unlike Union Point, but unique within itself. It's on the highest land around and certainly in the city of New Bern. Beautiful views from the bluffs over onto the water.

MAREA FOSTER: And this is the Neuse River.

MR. KIMBRELL: This is the Neuse River. The person that had been appointed chief of police was a long time employee, he was a veteran in the police department, we attempted to have him request retirement, but he just felt committed to his supporters and we of course had to initiate action to retire. Then we hired a professional chief of police. Now he also began his career in the military but he had been a civilian chief of police for a good many years.

MAREA FOSTER: But, Charlie, this chief that you are now hiring, was he the first professional policeman, or police chief, that New Bern had ever had?

MR. KIMBRELL: I would say so. He just worked magic, except with these three or four old politicized members of the police department. But with all the younger guys, and there were a lot of young men going in the police department, he just worked magic.

MAREA FOSTER: Who was this chief?

MR. KIMBRELL: His name was Franks.

MAREA FOSTER: That was his last name?

MR. KIMBRELL: That was his last name. Harold Franks. I saw him just recently, him and his wife, out at Clancy O'Hara's Restaurant in New Bern.

MAREA FOSTER: Charlie, what were some of the changes made in the police department?

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, first, Chief Pearsall had it organized and had established a set of general orders similar to military. They spelled out everything. That had been abolished under the person that succeeded him and an awful lot of disorder among the policemen themselves. He updated those orders. But he was a professional and he did a lot of training himself of his officers. He set up good new records up there. He set up a good record keeping system, modern day, modern for that time. They needed equipment. He was able to get equipment. You could tell that the men were on a high under that man because they were proud of their uniform, spit and shine of the day. They kept their vehicles clean. We had traffic officers on motorcycles back then. Well, like Pete Bland for instance. Pete was on the police department. You should have seen him in his spit and shine and his leggins. His leather leggins and that motorcycle and all the ribbons and the bows - sharp! It made a beautiful image. They spent a lot of time around the drive-ins coming up during those years, and they just had tremendous camaraderie with the young people. I'm gonna tell you a story. They were having a parade one day. I was riding with one member of the board that went along with the discharge of this first new chief, Chief Pearsall. This motorcycle

patrol was just ahead of our car. We had left Kafer Park. Very popular name around New Bern.

MAREA FOSTER: Yes, it is. (laughter)

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, we'd just left Kafer Park and were going up George Street toward Broad. We got to Broad and of course the crowds were out along the streets and these two motorcycle patrolmen were just ahead of us. Pete Deichmann was driving one of them, I don't know whether we were in a Buick or Oldsmobile or Cadillac but it was a brand new car, and Pete, who was a very young high school boy, was chauffeuring this alderman and myself. As we were making a left turn off of George onto Broad Street, those two motorcycle officers were just like the Blue Angels, if you've ever seen them fly, they were just like they were attached together around that corner. They were so impressive that that kid said to us, "You know, you all ought to be very proud of your police department. You have some of the best looking and nicest police officers I've ever known." That made me just swell up, and my cohort sitting there, and he just sort of grinned, "Uh huh, yeah they are." But anyhow, we had an excellent police department. That man, in the short time that he was here, which was a little less than two years, obtained designation for the city of New Bern as having reduced crime in the city of New Bern by the largest percentage per capita of any city in the United States by the National Police Chief Association.

MAREA FOSTER: And this was Chief Franks?

MR. KIMBRELL: This was Chief Harold Franks.

MAREA FOSTER: That's wonderful. Now, Charlie, someone else had told us in an interview, and I believe it was Alfred Ward, that until you had the first chief, and that was Chief Pearsall, that the policemen were not issued guns, they had to furnish their own, there was no uniform gun. Is this true?

MR. KIMBRELL: That's right. That changed with Chief Pearsall, not with Chief Franks.

MAREA FOSTER: Okay. So the city had to appropriate money to buy guns.

MR. KIMBRELL: Absolutely, and they were responsible to the city of New Bern for all their equipment; their uniforms, their guns, their badges, the whole ball of wax.

MAREA FOSTER: So, the city provides everything a policeman needs?

MR. KIMBRELL: Yeah, and from then on to this day. Even the cleaning of their uniforms.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, I think we have a very nice... And that's a wonderful story about Chief Franks.

MR. KIMBRELL: It really was. If you didn't know him, you would think he was an old sourpuss. But he had a very unique personality and he just communicated with people who were interested in law enforcement, and that was a great asset.

MAREA FOSTER: Now, when you were on the board this first time, the privilege license fee, did you all establish a set schedule for every business?

MR. KIMBRELL: We did, and it has not been updated since.

MAREA FOSTER: (laughter) Aren't they lucky? Now, are these fees collected, as you mentioned earlier by the police department, or do people now go to City Hall and pay?

MR. KIMBRELL: They're collected now by the tax department.

MAREA FOSTER: By the tax department, okay. And then at this particular time we were not talking about a garbage fee. That comes in another election doesn't it?

MR. KIMBRELL: No, it came during my first two year tenure.

MAREA FOSTER: Oh, okay. Now I know up until this time the city, from the resident's taxes, provided garbage collection. The garbage cans would be in the backyard and the trash personnel would go in the backyard and empty the can and beat it up! (laughter)

MR. KIMBRELL: That's right.

MAREA FOSTER: Why did the Board of Aldermen feel a need to establish a refuse collection fee?

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, you might say we were beginning to "come of age", the city of New Bern was. Our population was growing. Our population was becoming diverse. People were beginning to want more services, more of certain services, new services, and the only way you can provide them is to have revenue. We felt that there was a disparity in the refuse collection in as much as particular businesses and in particular the wide spread of social levels of our population. There was a lot of disparity in who was paying for what. To this day, forty-nine percent of the population of the city of New Bern, lives in a rental housing. They don't pay the \$36 a year tax assessment

that the county has put on them and they don't collect property taxes.

They don't pay property taxes on that property. So there was a large segment of our people that were not sharing in that obligation, and the only way we could do it would be to assess a monthly fee. Obviously, you know you got inequity in almost anything you do and there was inequity in that, but it was a token amount so to speak. We felt that helps offset the fact that so many rental property residents were not paying anything and this would help bring that in balance. We needed additional revenue. People wanted more recreation, wanted more police protection, wanted and needed more fire protection. We were beginning to grow and it just took additional money. Of course, everybody always talks about, you know, our taxes are increased. So, we felt that would be a fair way to go about it. We enacted it by a split vote. There was opposition to it. Those who opposed it vehemently never let up.

They just kept right on until the next election. We had been tagged as the "Garbage Three"; myself, Paul Cox, and Durwood Hancock, and we got beat! We got beat.

MAREA FOSTER: (laughter) Now tell the rest of the story.

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, first there was another issue. We were pretty much of a split board; 2-3, 2-3. Durwood and Paul and myself, we wanted to reach out and get going, and the other two were politicians and they didn't want to make anybody mad. They knew that if we wanted to do it we were gonna do it, and they just sat back there and looked good and we looked bad. That's the way it had to be. We didn't intend to let that deter us. Just like on the purchase of the property for

the library.

MAREA FOSTER: Don't get into the library yet. I want you to finish the "Garbage Three" story, when the new board was sworn in.

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, when the new board was sworn in; and of course, I guess the garbage fee had defeated us, we recognized that and we had no regrets, but we thought in all fairness that we would leave the need of a garbage fee with the incoming board. So at our last meeting, before adjourning Sine Die, for the new board to be sworn in, we decided that we would rescind the garbage fee since everybody disliked it so much. Our cohorts on the board disliked it, maybe they had something better in mind. So we thought that we would relieve them of the problem of having to deal with that, so the three of us who enacted it rescinded it and what a hue and cry went up! But we held our ground. They apparently had nothing better in mind, because at the same meeting after they had been sworn in they were of course compelled to adopt a budget to get business going again. Of course the budget was developed with a certain amount of revenue coming from the garbage fee. They had no better answer in mind, so they were compelled to vote for a garbage fee.

MAREA FOSTER: (laughter) I just love that!

MR. KIMBRELL: So, we thought it was a pretty neat trick. I guess maybe it was a little bit mischievous, but it all worked out all right and everybody had a little fun over it and there was a little moral to the story too.

MAREA FOSTER: (laughter) Well, we do have to pay if we want

services. And I had not realized until you stated just a little earlier that forty-nine percent of the residents do not pay property taxes, they live in the rental property.

MR. KIMBRELL: As of this day, forty-nine percent of the residents of New Bern live in rental property.

MAREA FOSTER: So it meant that everyone else, fifty-one percent, was supporting them as far as garbage... And you're right, that's not fair.

MR. KIMBRELL: And there is a disparity there. We felt this would help to bring a little more in balance.

MAREA FOSTER: Now tell me about the New Bern Public Library.

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, you probably know the story. New Bern did not have what you would call a public owned and operated library. What we had was operated in the John Wright Stanly House, which was located on New Street directly behind what was then, up until this year, the New Bern Post Office, Custom House and Federal Courthouse, all in one building. As a matter of fact, the Stanly House once sat right where that building was erected and it was moved around the corner in order to construct that building there. Well, there were a number of ladies, "Friends of the Library" that ran and managed that and they got some appropriations from the city to help them with the operation. But that had ceased to be totally adequate. We were growing. The population was increasing and this was not adequate for our needs. The ladies of the library decided that it was time to make a change. They advised us of what they had in mind and that they wished

to give the house to the Tryon Palace Commission, and they had been so advised and the Palace Commission had said, "We love it!", and here we are then in a position to get to work and build a library. And of course you gotta have a site. Well, we went to work on finding a site. Several sites were looked at, including the Stewart property, the Jane Stewart property across the street. The house fronted on Pollock Street. On the corner of Pollock and Craven Streets. We first looked at that and we decided that the city needed that worse for a parking lot, unfortunately. It was a beautiful stately mansion really.

But anyhow, we had purchased that and were gonna build a parking lot on it, and did. Then the two members split the board. For some reason or other they got hung up on the Duffy property, which was next door.

No, it wasn't the Duffy property. The Duffy property was the next house. I forget the property.

MAREA FOSTER: Was it Parkhill Jarvis?

MR. KIMBRELL: No. But anyhow, it was a large stately building where the Sun Journal is now constructed. They wanted to buy that property and put the library there. They pretty well zeroed on in on that and just wouldn't yield. In the meantime, we wanted to get and needed to be, we felt, in a more reclined, quiet neighborhood area and we felt that it needed to be near the central part of the town.

There was an old abandoned service station on the corner down there on Johnson and Middle Streets that wasn't in service and had not been for sometime. We finally zeroed in on that. It became kind of a hassle which site to buy, but we finally had to do something. We went ahead

and voted, split vote again. But we purchased that property from one of the local oil companies, I believe the Blandford's.

MAREA FOSTER: That was Pure Oil, wasn't it?

MR. KIMBRELL: That was Pure Oil.

MAREA FOSTER: Blandford with Carolina Oil Company I think. That's the Pure Oil Station.

MR. KIMBRELL: And then we bought, I believe it was the Browns...

MAREA FOSTER: The Street house.

MR. KIMBRELL: No.

MAREA FOSTER: I believe it was.

MR. KIMBRELL: I know this man was blind and he was Justice of the Peace that lived in the house. Rented a house along there someplace. And the Albert Brinson's, I believe, lived along there somewhere too.

MAREA FOSTER: Oh yes, along Middle.

MR. KIMBRELL: On Middle.

MAREA FOSTER: I was thinking on Johnson Street. That was the Street house.

MR. KIMBRELL: Yeah. Anyhow, we made the vote and got right into it. We had no choice, we had to proceed. In the meantime, of course, we had joined forces with the county and we agreed that we would go fifty/fifty, and did, and ultimately wrote the contract and constructed the library.

MAREA FOSTER: So until this time, the ladies association, or Friends of the Library, supported the New Bern Library.

MR. KIMBRELL: Oh yes.

MAREA FOSTER: And then when they moved, the city, more or less, became owners of the library, because the city and county supported it?

MR. KIMBRELL: That's correct.

MAREA FOSTER: And you bought the land for the new library?

MR. KIMBRELL: Yes.

MAREA FOSTER: Did you get any federal funds for this?

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, we did get some grant money. As you probably know, Marea, we had two sort of quasi-public private libraries.

MAREA FOSTER: I want to get into that one.

MR. KIMBRELL: The one over on West Street.

MAREA FOSTER: Right. We'll talk about that one later. Charlie, we were talking about the public library. So, the county and the city did it with some federal money, you got some grants.

MR. KIMBRELL: Yeah. In the meantime, of course, the question came up from the black community, actually a group of people who operated that library. It was something we had to deal with realistically and they understood. The time had come that you could not have separate but equal facilities.

MAREA FOSTER: The library for the blacks was over on West Street.

MR. KIMBRELL: On West Street in what is referred to as the Rhone building.

MAREA FOSTER: Did the city support that library?

MR. KIMBRELL: Yes we did.

MAREA FOSTER: Did you pay the librarian?

MR. KIMBRELL: I'm pretty positive that we did.

MAREA FOSTER: If you supported it, then the county was not involved.

MR. KIMBRELL: That's correct. We met with them and told them that, "We have federal funds involved here. As long as it was our money, nobody questioned it. We were willing to honor your wishes. But now we've got federal money involved, we have no choice. This has got to be a library for all people irrespective of race, creed, color, or whatever, and we would not be able to support a racially segregated black library." I think it was handled real well.

MAREA FOSTER: It's worked out well.

MR. KIMBRELL: It's been fun. I've had an extremely good relation with those folks, though, over there for many, well, going back into the sixties. I'd say that the Bibles were used somewhat as an advertising tool. They were beautiful Bibles, big family Bibles, that were quite expensive. I got into this program with this fund and I placed one of these Bibles in that library for public use. I placed two at New Bern Craven County Library, and they're both there to this day. One of them out in the reading area. The other remains in the librarian's office. I've seen them recently. As a matter of fact, Elinor saw me looking over there at the window in her office some time ago and said, "You keep looking at that Bible over there!" I said, "Yes, I do." She said, "Well, I know why, but I can tell you, you can't have it." But I was just pleased to see that one of them is kept there in the office though, where it's not subject to abuse.

The one in the reading area gets some abuse, but it's still in there to read. And of course I placed them in high schools and churches and institutions around town.. I've just enjoyed a good relation with those people.

MAREA FOSTER: Now, moving of the John Wright Stanly House, what did this involve? Before I go any further, the ladies of the library owned the John Wright Stanly House, is this right?

MR. KIMBRELL: Yes.

MAREA FOSTER: The city did not own that property.

MR. KIMBRELL: They did not.

MAREA FOSTER: So did they go to you and ask cooperation from the board to move the house?

MR. KIMBRELL: The Palace, well, Miss Gertrude and other members of the commission, yes. They actually moved the house, but obviously it had to be done with the assistance of the city. It's a large house as you well know.

MAREA FOSTER: Yes, it is.

MR. KIMBRELL: It was quite a major undertaking, but it went off without a hitch. We had everybody in town without power for a right good long while. But it really went off quite well and everybody was pleased.

MAREA FOSTER: It was a big event.

MR. KIMBRELL: Oh, it was a big event, it really was.

MAREA FOSTER: Then once the house was put where it is now on George Street and it was restored and it was dedicated, were you on

the board at that time? Were you still an alderman at that time or were you mayor when it was dedicated?

MR. KIMBRELL: That's one of those periods when I was...

MAREA FOSTER: When you were on the outs.

MR. KIMBRELL: I was on the outs. I had run for mayor I believe back in '71.

MAREA FOSTER: Yes, and you were defeated by 42 votes.

MR. KIMBRELL: Yeah. Let me tell you a little bit about that. Obviously, a little hanky panky was involved. Wards 1, 3, 4, and 5 had come in and were counted by, I believe, before eight o'clock that evening. I'm sure of it, because you know they were all hand ballots.

MAREA FOSTER: They were paper ballots.

MR. KIMBRELL: Paper ballots. But four of the wards was in and I was ahead comfortably. The second ward, the smallest ward in the city...

MAREA FOSTER: Now, where is the second ward, Charlie.

MR. KIMBRELL: The second ward was this area.

MAREA FOSTER: This area that we're in?

MR. KIMBRELL: Just where we're sitting right now.

MAREA FOSTER: Green Park.

MR. KIMBRELL: Green Park.

MAREA FOSTER: Which is north of Neuse Blvd.

MR. KIMBRELL: DeGraffenreid.

MAREA FOSTER: And it was Ghent too.

MR. KIMBRELL: Yeah, it included Ghent. It went sort of north and took in the Duffyfield, Washington Park area.

MAREA FOSTER: So, we're talking from Park Avenue, Spencer Avenue, Rhem Avenue, Trent Boulevard, and Tryon Road, Lucerne Way, Neuse Boulevard and over through Duffyfield. Okay. That's the ward we're in now, isn't that right?

MR. KIMBRELL: That's correct. And at that time it had the lowest number of voters, registered voters. What should have, because the poles all closed, as you well know, at the same time...

MAREA FOSTER: Yes, they do.

MR. KIMBRELL: And should have recorded among the first. But not only were they not first, they were hours and hours, til after eleven o'clock that night before the count from the second ward came in.

MAREA FOSTER: This is your home ward.

MR. KIMBRELL: And I was defeated in the second ward. About three hours, at least three hours after all the other four wards, the bigger wards had all come in.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, I would question that.

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, I just didn't.

MAREA FOSTER: In my mind I would question it.

MR. KIMBRELL: I didn't make any challenges or rhu barb about it. I just advised the winner, "You be ready two years from now."

MAREA FOSTER: And I know who that winner was. (laughter)

MR. KIMBRELL: But he elected not to run. He elected not to run.

MAREA FOSTER: (laughter) You're right. Well, getting back to the Stanly House and its dedication. Do you remember that, the dedication?

MR. KIMBRELL: Very well.

MAREA FOSTER: Please tell us about it. You're the only one that is going to be giving us this information.

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, Marea, I just feel like I've grown to be a part of New Bern and its history and I really take it back to Mrs. Rhem in becoming of a resident here. When we were first married in 1945...

MAREA FOSTER: Tell me right now your wife's name.

MR. KIMBRELL: Eula.

MAREA FOSTER: Eula, her full name.

MR. KIMBRELL: Eula Bunting Kimbrell.

MAREA FOSTER: And she's from Tarboro.

MR. KIMBRELL: Tarboro.

MAREA FOSTER: And you have two children.

MR. KIMBRELL: That's correct, two daughters.

MAREA FOSTER: Their names.

MR. KIMBRELL: Linda Kimbrell, and her married name is Snow. The other daughter is Ellen Kimbrell, and her married name is Stokes. She married a New Bern boy.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, how nice.

MR. KIMBRELL: Robert Stokes, Natt and Ida Stokes' son. They used to live on the corner right over there.

MAREA FOSTER: But get back to the dedication and your feeling of New Bern history.

MR. KIMBRELL: I had rented an apartment down on 206 Change Street, an upstairs apartment over Mitchell and Molly Roundtree. Certainly a very historical home. Unfortunately it wasn't in very good condition, but one of the finer homes in town now. We lived there I guess about two years. Then by that time I had gotten to know Mrs. Jessie Claypoole.

I don't recall just how that came about; but anyhow, I did. She ran a guest home, tourist home, down on East Front Street. Her relatives from Wilmington owned the house next door to her between her home and the Sudan Temple. I believe it was the Broadfoot family that owned that home. It was 407 East Front Street, which is next door to the Sudan Temple, which then was a very stately old home sitting on the corner there where the new temple is.

MAREA FOSTER: Right.

MR. KIMBRELL: This old home also had a little cottage in the back of it which was servants' quarters in earlier years. This particular home, we resided there five or six years or seven years.

Our first child was born while we resided there. That home is known as the Governor Tryon House, because history says that he resided there until they finished the construction of the Palace. Well, living in a historic district, getting to know all the people and all the buildings in the historic district, I guess maybe that had a lot to do with my interest in the town's history. And of course, I'm a member of one the oldest lodges in North Carolina. One of the oldest in

America. The oldest operating theater in America. It was a part of the social and cultural fabric of the town and I've been privileged to become a part of it. Anyhow, I was all gung ho for assisting with the movement of the John Wright Stanly House to the Tryon Palace commission. Anxiously, I awaited this completion and this dedication.

Unfortunately, while my wife was able to attend, business obligations prevented me from attending the actual ceremony. Now, I got to see Mrs. Pat Nixon, the first lady of our country, a gracious lady, at the dedication, but I did not get to attend the whole dedication. But it was a big event, certainly well attended to say the least. There must have been 1,500 - 2,000 people. I don't recall, but it was an estimate given on the crowd that time. It was a huge crowd.

MAREA FOSTER: Charlie, who invited Mrs. Nixon to New Bern to cut the ribbon so to speak? Was it Mr. and Mrs. Kellenberger or did the city do it? You didn't mention any of the people involved with the dedication.

MR. KIMBRELL: I think it was Miss Gertrude.

MAREA FOSTER: Miss Gertrude and the Kellenbergers probably.

MR. KIMBRELL: I think it was initiated by Miss Gertrude. As a matter of fact, I remember her mentioning it in my presence. Of course you know the invitation was extended to the President and Mrs. Nixon, he could not come, but she did. And as a matter of fact, I later had an acceptance, tentative acceptance, for President Nixon to attend our Bicentennial Celebration in 1974.. I talked to a young girl, her name was Pam Powell, who was the daughter of the movie star

Jane Powell. I communicated with her about getting him to attend down here. This went on over a several month period. But then as you know, Watergate, when it came alive, he was unable to attend.

MAREA FOSTER: I'm glad she was able to come. And this has not been mentioned before in any interview, that the First Lady of the United States of America, Mrs. Patricia Nixon, did attend the dedication of the John Wright Stanly House.

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, she certainly did.

MAREA FOSTER: A lovely, gracious lady.

MR. KIMBRELL: She was always, in every appearance that she made, on TV, that I witnessed or heard on TV, and here, I know everybody just talked about she's so down to earth.

MAREA FOSTER: Everybody admired her.

MR. KIMBRELL: So friendly.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, now, I want to ask you about the controversy over elected officials, alderman or mayor. Any of them you'd like to talk about.

MR. KIMBRELL: That was thought provoking to list those people that I did. Frankly, I was probably the most controversial one. Probably as controversial as all of them combined.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, what happened during your term as mayor that caused you to be so controversial?

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, you know, I'd have to admit that I was an activist mayor and I make no apology for it. We had to come out of our past and get into the future. We had to protect and preserve and

honor our past, but we couldn't live there. The world was passing by us and there were things that had to be done. I'm not a politician.

I called the shots as I saw them. Obviously, you can't be a politician and do that. You got to play their music and that takes time. If you got a job to do, you set your mind to do it and go about doing it. That's just simply the way I operated and everyone knew it, but of course people, they challenged and they wanted to fuss about it.

MAREA FOSTER: What did you do that people did not like?

MR. KIMBRELL: The biggest two hassles I think, without any doubt, was we got almost a two million dollar federal grant which almost just fell in our lap. I had to do a little politicking among the board.

I admit that I'm not a conservative in the sense that is nationally accepted, but I like to think of myself as being responsible in the management of public resources. I wanted that money to be spent primarily for the reason that it was enacted by Congress, which was for the lower and moderate income people and their neighborhoods, and that's exactly what we did - eight or nine hundred thousand dollars.

Somewhere in the neighborhood of \$115,000 we appropriated to the Academy Commission.

MAREA FOSTER: The New Bern Academy.

MR. KIMBRELL: The New Bern Academy Commission, because the cupolar, I don't believe the cupola was there, anyhow, they had had a fire in the building and it had burned. It was a rather serious fire, but we were fortunate, we had a good fire department and they got it out. But it remained that way for some time and was getting

damaged. They didn't have any money. But to promote tourism, tourism creates jobs and dollars, was a permitted use of those funds. They had occasion to put in a museum over there. It was going to be an educational museum initially. It was the first public school in the state of North Carolina.

MAREA FOSTER: That's right.

MR. KIMBRELL: New Bern was a leader in education. They also had the first school for black children. So, I thought, hey, that sounds great, and if nothing else it will be a tourist attraction as one of the original schools. Second oldest in the nation I believe.

MAREA FOSTER: I wouldn't be surprised.

MR. KIMBRELL: We gave somewhere between fifty and sixty thousand dollars to the Chamber of Commerce to equip a tourist center. They got their office down there at the old Frank Efird property on Broad Street, the little annex that's connected by the breezeway. They had no heating or air in it and they had no audio visual equipment, none of that. They needed money to put some semblance of a tourist center.

We did that. Other than that, we spent that money, most of it, we made an appropriation to the construction of the Towers project down on New South Front. I had a terrible time getting that site approved.

I won't get into many details on that, but at the time that I was trying to get that site approved, we had purchased all that property and was clearing it, the bridge was being constructed at the time and I couldn't get this turkey from HUD to listen to me. Now, it's in a low income, blighted neighborhood, we cannot, we will not approve

it. You have to get it out in the better part of the town. Well, I didn't give up. He came back again. At that time the bridge had been constructed about halfway over the Trent River. For some reason or other they were not working. I don't recall why they wouldn't have been working on the bridge, but they were not. I put that sucker in my car and I drove him out on that bridge, up to the very end of it, I turned around, and I said, "Now, I want you to look, look over there at that site and I want you to visualize that multi-story building sitting over there for these elderly and handicapped people, and if you don't say that that's one of the prettiest views anybody in New Bern and anybody along the coastal area of this country would have, you're crazy and I'm not interested in talking to you anymore about it!" "Well, now, just where is the building going to be?" I said, "All right, just get out here and I'll point you right straight at it", and I did. He kind of hemmed and hawwed around there for a little while and then, "Well, yeah, I see your point. Well, let's finish our tour and I'll let you go." But anyhow, I believe, yes he did, yes he did, he came back. He came back way ahead of his next scheduled inspection of how we were spending the money and brought me a lot of papers to sign and it was constructed.

MAREA FOSTER: So, New Bern Tower is constructed on a prime piece of waterfront property.

MR. KIMBRELL: Undoubtedly. Above the flood plane.

MAREA FOSTER: Yes.

MR. KIMBRELL: Fantastic view, because, you know, they can look

down the Neuse River also.

MAREA FOSTER: I know it. I know it. I don't know how HUD could complain against that.

MR. KIMBRELL: We cleared that entire waterfront area over there because there was no sewage system because it was all on the downgrade side and they were still using outdoor privies. It was indeed a slum area. We purchased all that property, relocated all those people. We built new streets over there. We put in new water systems, fire hydrants, curbs and gutters, did a lot of rehab housing. We did some street work over on West Street, some rehab of housing over there, some drainage system work.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, you just cleaned up the area.

MR. KIMBRELL: We tried to save the East-South Front Street area on the north side of New South Front Street to be an upgrade, desirable place to live, and I think we were pretty successful. But everybody had their own ideas where that money ought to be spent. Of course we had to concentrate on specific areas. We could have spent ten million dollars. If our work had been fragmented here and yonder, you couldn't see any evidence of what had been accomplished.

MAREA FOSTER: Right.

MR. KIMBRELL: We had to concentrate, and of course, that was required under the regulations. But we got all kinds of flack. That was to be expected. Then the police department, of course, all resigned in 1978 I believe it was.

MAREA FOSTER: And this was while you were mayor.

MR. KIMBRELL: No, that's when I was alderman and I was mayor pro tem. The mayor was taking the policeman's position and I and the other board members were on the opposite side. Of course, one night they met and they just came forward and laid their guns and badges on the table, including the Chief of Police, and we accepted their resignation. I knew that two very close friends of mine who were policemen were out of town at a school somewhere and they didn't know about this til they got back. They did not resign. I think there was another one or two that didn't resign. The secretarial staff did not resign and we appointed the chief's secretary Chief of Police and we just got along beautifully.

MAREA FOSTER: Now, who was the chief's secretary?

MR. KIMBRELL: Ruth Hoyle.

MAREA FOSTER: H O Y L E?

MR. KIMBRELL: H O Y L E. Did a remarkable job of managing all the law enforcement people from everywhere. People from everywhere just flocked in here. We had the best police protection we had had in a long time during that period of time.

MAREA FOSTER: How long did this walk out continue, for two or three days?

MR. KIMBRELL: No, it was several weeks. Oh, we had national TV media down here and they hounded me continuously. I couldn't go outside, couldn't go downtown. They were everywhere with cameras following me up and down the sidewalk.

MAREA FOSTER: What did the police want that the city was not

prepared to give to them?

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, Marea, at this particular time, you know from the early seventies to 1980, we had two so-called fuel shortages - pure hoax - both of them. Electricity rates just went sky high. Everybody screaming and moaning about electric rates, and boy, the power company was just pumping it to us! We had no choice. We had to pay our electric bill. We accepted their resignation. As far as I was concerned, they had resigned.

MAREA FOSTER: But they resigned because they wanted more pay.

MR. KIMBRELL: They wanted more pay and they wanted other benefits. You know, we were caught there between the public crying and hollering and screaming at us about electric rates going up. Fuel, you know, gasoline went up to a dollar and a half, dollar sixty cent a gallon. We were just caught between a rock and a hard spot. And you know we couldn't generate revenue, like just snap your fingers and generate revenue. We got over one and here comes another one. All in the seventies. Then in the late seventies, you know, supposedly a propane gas shortage, or fuel shortage. An interesting thing, you know, I was just reading a short; no, it was last night's paper, where Hatteras Yachts is firing 100 or 200 new people. There was a bill put before Congress in 1980, in January I believe, to ban weekend boating. To ban it outright. To make it illegal to put a boat in the water and operate it on the weekend, because of the so-called fuel shortage. Well, it was just (snap-snap) like that for my business, because if people couldn't use their boats on the weekends, they didn't need a

boat. Well, there are thousands of us throughout the country. But it also hit Hatteras Yachts and other yacht manufacturers. They had over 1,200 people out there at that time. They laid off somewhere between six and seven hundred people almost instantly. There were people who had deposits, and of course, when they start building a million, two million, or several hundred thousand dollar boat they're gonna buy, Hatteras had huge deposits on hand to guarantee delivery.

You know, there were a large number of people who forfeited their deposits out there rather than be obligated to take that boat. Well, fortunately, the threat hit more people like myself, small boat dealers and mariners. Larger numbers, and of course it's numbers that count, well, we went together nationwide and Congress backed off. But Hatteras Yachts still lost 600 employees and they never got back to 1200, never to this day. Well, it also got me to thinking, because at the time my son-in-law Robert Stokes was my sidekick down there in the business and had announced to me that he wanted to go back to school. His dad had wanted him to get a college degree and he had not. He had gone to East Carolina for two years. You know that generation, didn't like school and he dropped out. He wanted to get into the military. Liked to never have got in the military until I found out what was going on. I went to see the recruiting officer and shortly thereafter he was in the military. Well, he happened to be going with our younger daughter, Ellen, and they were married and first thing you know they had him shipped out to Germany. Ellen, later flew over there by herself and had a grand time. But, he announced to me one day in early June

of 1980, at a time my business was just recovering from being almost completely put out of business for three years due to construction of the by-pass because they had Pembroke Road torn up and closed off down there and people couldn't get to me. Well, anyway, I was doing right good. Business was up. But then this, Robert said that his daddy wanted him to get a college degree and he hadn't and he wanted to go back to school. I said, "I think that's great. You want to plan to get enrolled next year?" He said, "Um uh. This year." I said, "Robert, this is June, there is no way you can get enrolled this late for the first semester by the fall." "Um huh. I've been talking to Uncle Jack." Jack is my brother, younger brother, and he was on the staff there at State for many years until he retired last year at the same time I did.

MAREA FOSTER: And he had gotten him in?

MR. KIMBRELL: He had gotten him in. He was already cleared to go. I said, "Well, I tell you what, Robert, I think that's great. The city is advertising the position of Director of Public Works. It's vacant. The man got fired. It's vacant, I'm gonna apply for it. If I get it, I'm just gonna close it down, close it out." Well, I applied, I was hired. Robert went to school. As a matter of fact, I had to leave before he did. He closed the business out and went on to school and I went to work for the city in 1980.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, Charlie, as Director of Public Works, what did you have to do? What were some of your jobs?

MR. KIMBRELL: My responsibilities, and I'll try to think of all

of them - of course there was street construction and maintenance; operation of the cemeteries, maintenance and the operation of them; all the parks, maintenance of all the parks; building inspection; and, enforcement of all the planning and zoning codes; operation of the city garage. Then during the time that I'm in that position and handling those operations, in which I had no difficulty, because of my education background and my work experience, I just seemed to fall right into it; but during that time and then in 1986, I was Interim City Manager at that time. Of course, in 1980, late 1980, the existing city manager was coerced to resign, Mr. Outlaw, by the board. They subsequently hired Tony Hooper. But around the first of July of 1986, he resigned and took a new job in Fredricksburg, Virginia. Well, I was appointed Interim City Manager at that time and served until about the middle of January of '87 and they hired the present city manager, and I went back into public works. Well, when he came, he did some reorganizing immediately and moved zoning and subdivision enforcement and building inspection to planning. Then, gave me water production, treatment and the water distribution system. The waste treatment collection and treatment operation exchange came at a time when the waste treatment plant was not and could not meet the treatment requirements. It was terrible, terrible. Neither could hardly pump enough water to meet the city's demands. The people in charge of that didn't know what the problem was. They knew what some minor problems were, but they were not aware of the fundamental problems. There is a thirty inch diameter waterline from Cove City, thirty inch. That's a lot of well

water coming from wells in Cove City. But, all the water that we were getting in the city was coming through an eight inch pipe. It had been reduced down to that size and the thirty inch discharge taken out of service because of a condition called "hammer" that existed within the system that was destroying the thirty inch pipe. Rather than correcting that problem, the city's consulting engineers just throttled the flow of water, which kept a heavier head of water in the 30" pipe all the time and that eliminated the "hammer". The water comes to New Bern from Cove City by gravity, not pumped in. It just flows downhill all the way. But then the demand for water increased as we grew. There were times that the elevated storage tanks would run out. Well, of course they hired outside engineers and they wanted to steal us blind and I said, "No way. No way. I can handle it", and I did. Now, back to the waste treatment plant, I hired Brooks Whitehurst who was a professional engineer in chemistry, because I have no knowledge in chemistry whatever. He was a personal friend of mine and I knew he was top of the line and he lived here. I had him to join with me in some chemical treatments that we could do out there and help bring that process down. Of course, the mechanical parts of the system were deteriorated and falling apart and we had to get those back working. We had the plant back meeting the limits just like it did the first day when it went in operation. So, I had everything that falls within the category public works. Then in 1988, the Director of Electrical Utilities retired, who of course happened to be J. C. Outlaw, who had been reemployed as Director of Electrical Utilities.

His wife was sick and dying with cancer and he retired. I was asked to take over the position. I declined initially, then later on I wanted to kick myself. But I made the decision and I had to live with it.

But I enjoyed doing what I was doing very much so. I was about to get over it and then I was called in and asked again to consider it.

Well, I had to be a little coy about it, I said, "Well, I don't know. Let me think about it and talk to the wife over the weekend." So I did. I went back in and I said, "We had best talk a little bit before I tell you what my answer is. I'm willing if..." He, the City Manager, said, "Well, all right. What do you need to know?" I told him and we worked it out. I then left public works and went over and took over that operation which was in just as bad a shape as the other two departments were when I took them over. They needed equipment, they needed discipline, they needed organization, they needed education, they needed training in safety. It was in shambles. Of course I had hoped to stay there, well, I really had no specific date of retirement, but I'd hope to stay around until I'm seventy. Then I found that I have cancer in my lung you know.

MAREA FOSTER: And you retired.

MR. KIMBRELL: And I retired. Well, I didn't right away. Of course, they didn't have anybody to put in my place. I stayed on about a year until they had hired someone and then several months longer to help him get familiarized with the operation and with the system. See, New Bern has a big system.

MAREA FOSTER: I'm not surprised.

MR. KIMBRELL: It's a very large system.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, Charlie, let me ask you about women in politics. Who were some of the women you worked with in politics?

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, politically, of course, Ella Bengel, who subsequently was elected mayor for two terms. It certainly introduced a different aspect of the way the two sexes look at things differently, and they were good. It was good. Things that we might sort of sluff over, so to speak, a woman can bring the proper emphasis to it and the why and so forth. We didn't always agree. She's a very strong-willed person herself and awfully opinionated. We had some rough go rounds. But there was one thing about it, we might have those confrontations, but when they were over, they were over. The only one that went right on through overnight and into the next morning, which I didn't know until the next morning, but I learned then, it dealt with the election of the mayor pro-tem. It had always been custom, we found out, historically, the person that got the second highest number of votes; no, the alderman that got the highest number of votes in the general election was elected mayor pro-tem by the board. Well, Ben Hurst had come out top vote getter in the election. Ella was forced into a runoff in the election. Then in the runoff election, she got a higher number of votes. You know, one of those elections.

MAREA FOSTER: Yeah.

MR. KIMBRELL: She felt like that vote entitled her to be top vote getter. There'd be no fairness in that because this other person, he didn't participate in that election. The top vote getter when

everybody was running.

MAREA FOSTER: Right. That's the fair way to do it.

MR. KIMBRELL: It's fair. If that's the way you're gonna do it, then that's the fair way. I had to break the tie. I was known as a tie breaking mayor. We had one board member who knew these situations were coming up, who would never show up. He would always have business out of town and he knew that the mayor would have to break the tie. Well, I broke the tie, and I broke it in favor of Mr. Hurst because that was the right way, the only way. And wow!!

MAREA FOSTER: I bet she didn't let you forget that.

MR. KIMBRELL: Boy, she came in that office the next morning and man I thought a Mack truck had driven in the building! I was of course interested in following the tenure of Kathleen Orringer. I thought she represented herself real well up there. And then of course other women in political office. More in appointed positions than elective positions. Well, in fact Patric Dorsey, I think Patric has done an outstanding job as Secretary of Cultural Resources these past eight years, I believe.

MAREA FOSTER: Yeah, it has been eight years.

MR. KIMBRELL: Nothing that I know of that would reflect negative at all upon the opposite sex in politics. It seemed like I became a new person when I got out of Waxhaw and found out how large the world was. Oh, you have to be a part of it when you get out there. There was a transition in my life, even toward the blacks, which happened out in Riverside in New York City. A friend of mine, we had some leave

time and we wanted to go to New York. We'd never been there. We went to New York and we were touring by subway, got way off course. It was all right, though, because we met two nice young ladies and had the pleasure of visiting them a time or two after that. But me and a black person collided. We were crossing the street in opposite directions and the streetcar was coming. I was looking at the streetcar and he was looking at the streetcar. Neither of us saw each other. He was a big burly guy and he just splattered me right there in the street.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, you couldn't help that!

MR. KIMBRELL: No, no. That man grabbed me just like I was a little 'ol doll and got me out of the way and carried me right on over to the sidewalk out of that street and was so apologetic trying to get me brushed off.

MAREA FOSTER: Oh, he was apologizing.

MR. KIMBRELL: Yeah.

MAREA FOSTER: Oh, I see. I misunderstood it. He grabbed you out of the way.

MR. KIMBRELL: He grabbed me out of the way and took me over to the sidewalk.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, this was a new experience for you.

MR. KIMBRELL: That changed my life. It changed my life right then and there.

MAREA FOSTER: This is a nice time for me to ask you about how the blacks and whites worked together on the Board of Aldermen?

MR. KIMBRELL: We had some, I and Morgan, had some very heated differences of opinion. And I make no apology for it. There were, as far as I know, there were only two. One of them was over the fact that he had gone to Las Vegas to a meeting of the National League of Cities, and we're not a member of the National League of Cities and have no affiliation with them. So we had no business with them. Unbeknowing to us; we didn't find it out until he came back. It's just unprecedented. You don't do that.

MAREA FOSTER: When he went, the city paid his way.

MR. KIMBRELL: Oh yeah, sure did. Then later, there was a political rally in Washington, D.C., purely political, partisan, that he attended at city expense. It had absolutely nothing to do with the government of the City of New Bern. And again, at city expense. The only way I found out about it, was "Under the Dome" in the News and Observer.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, Charlie, were you able to get the mayor to reimburse the city?

MR. KIMBRELL: No.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, that's an abuse of power, or a privilege of office. It's an abuse of your privilege of office. That's not nice.

MR. KIMBRELL: I feel like I'm a public servant and I hold a public trust very, very sacred. I do. And irrespective, I mean, whether he had been black or white, it made no difference. It had absolutely nothing to do with it. Here is a member of the governing board who is travelling to political functions, travelling to attend

organizations that we had no affiliation with, without the board's knowledge, but at city expense. That's unethical to me.

MAREA FOSTER: It's things like that that give politics a bad name.

MR. KIMBRELL: And then like I say, I make no apology for it because I did challenge it. That's the way it stood. But, no, there was no reimbursement. But, nevertheless, we did a lot of positive things.

By having taken that initial grant, if we had not accepted that grant, we would not have been eligible for subsequent grants. We had that initial grant because the government financed Urban Renewal Project, which I'm not sure that we're so delighted today because there were a lot of buildings down there that people would give their arm and leg for today. But that's all over with. Then the city began to apply for additional grants. Soon after I had gone to work for the city, they began to apply for annual grants to continue assisting people in the old and lower income group. The city was not paying any grants.

I told the city manager one day, I said, "If you let me write your grant application, I'll get you some grant money. Now, this is the third year and you haven't gotten any grant money. I've seen your applications and they're just a bunch of gobbly gook. You have to cut into it and get to the nitty gritty of it and work that needs to be done and here is where people consistently complained, and legitimately complained about." He wasn't so hot on that idea, but he eventually acquiesced and I developed a drainage system for the Duffyfield area which down through generations everyone said it

couldn't be done. Well, it could be. Not the best! - But it worked.

We did two drainage systems. One of them over there on the west side of Jack Smith Creek and the canal meanders right on up to over behind the Palace Motel and on over to the west side of Simmons Street. Then we did this one, you might say, at Cedar Street right on back in there to the railway. The railway street, a low pocket in there down between the housing projects of Cedar Street and the development area down there around Pavie Avenue. There's a low in there. It's like a dish.

I had had this engineer, he's a local engineer, who thought maybe we could put a pump station down there and pump it out. Well, in preparing plans for that we had to have a topography of the area. We developed a plan and we got some estimates, and we didn't have that kind of money. Well, I was discouraged. But then one day I said, "Wait a minute. Let me get that "topo" map back out here", and I did.

I began to look and I said, "Now, wait a minute. That area is not as low as the area over here at the foot of F Street. If we can get a pipe from Cedar St. down to F Street, we can drain water out of there by gravity." I studied it some more and I went back to him and I said, "Hey, man, I believe I can come up with something here." He looked at it and studied it some and came back with me and said, "Charlie, you can. You'll have a problem on high tide if we have any." Our tides are strictly wind controlled. "If we have a strong northeastern sustained and concurrently with rain, the system will fill up and then it will into the area that it eventually drains to now. But it will go. But if you don't have a concurrent high water, this will work.

We'll just store it down there in the basin and within the system itself." That's all below ground except from North Street all the way down to the foot of F Street. Over half of the pipe is exposed. It's laying right on the ground.

MAREA FOSTER: But it works.

MR. KIMBRELL: But it works. It's going downhill. Then we had one over here on Hazel Avenue. God, I feel so sorry for those people. The hospital keeps expanding, expanding, expanding. Every time they add on some asphalt, a roof over there, the water runs into those people's yard and every time it comes a real rain - a foot deep in some of those houses. Terrible! It'll break your heart to sit there and watch it and you can't do anything. Well, that's a bad situation over there too, that elevation. We just don't have any gradient around here to work with. Well, I had the same the engineering firm send his people over there and get the "topo" of that area. I fooled around with that a while and the existing system over there. We came up with a plan. Then after I had shifted jobs, and that one got to be top priority before we did these others, because of the physical damage that the water was doing over there. But, there wasn't enough social mix at that time. It is now. But that changed and they then got that place corrected.

MAREA FOSTER: Took care of it.

MR. KIMBRELL: Took care of it. You know, I had so many people telling me for years and years and years, "It can't be done. It can't be done. And you come around here and you do it. Why come?" I said,

"Well, I don't know why come. If it's a legitimate problem, I don't stop until I'm convinced that it can or cannot be corrected."

MAREA FOSTER: You try to find a solution.

MR. KIMBRELL: I try to find the solution. If there is a solution, I'll try to find it. I remember right up here on Broad Street, a big church there just on the other side of I believe First Avenue, right down beside it. Then there was a little loop street that goes in and out in the Five Point section. It flooded for years. I cut through that loop street one day for some reason or other and stopped and was talking to someone I knew about Broad Street. This fellow came up to me, a black man, and said, "I want to talk to you. The street there right in front of that church, just a short distance off Broad Street, has flood problems." He talked, oh gosh, going way back, to Cedric Boyd's early days with the city. Who said it just won't go. Just won't go. Well, while he was there, I just called my superintendent on the radio and said, "Bring your level over here. I want to shoot some elevations", and he did. We set up, shot some elevations and there wasn't much, there wasn't much gradient, but there was enough gradient there. We took care of the problem. While we were doing that work, I don't know whether he was mayor at that time or not, but Leander Morgan at River's Funeral Home had a little building there on that same street right across the street from the church where they stored some hearses, and they flooded too. He came by and saw that we were doing some drainage work there and he asked the man about, wanted to know if he could get some done. "Well, yeah, but, you know,

that's private. There would be cost involved." So, they came to me and asked me about it and I said, "If you've got any elevation there, if you can take it across the street, and he's willing to pay, get what material up and let's see what it will cost." So we did. We put it in for him and he paid us.

MAREA FOSTER: It works fine.

MR. KIMBRELL: It works fine. People had to put up with those problems for years. But you know, the general public or neighborhood wasn't aware of those things.

MAREA FOSTER: Right.

MR. KIMBRELL: But then too, you know, anybody in public office, if you do anything at all, you're gonna make some happy and you're gonna make some unhappy. I don't care how good you are or how much resources you got to throw out there, you're still gonna have people unhappy about something.

MAREA FOSTER: You sure are. Well, Charlie, we're just about out of tape. Unless there's something else you want to talk about...

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, the only thing, and I don't know as it's important, I mentioned in that outline about my political involvement.

As a registered Independent, the fact that I was campaign chairman, county chairman of three major candidates...

MAREA FOSTER: Right. Yes, I'm glad you're putting this in.

MR. KIMBRELL: Back in '71, Mr. Hugh Morton had announced his candidacy for Governor and I felt privileged to be asked to be his county chairman because, I mean, he is one of the most prominent people

in North Carolina as far as I'm concerned and has done a tremendous amount of work to boost the economy of the state. So I accepted and before the primary, I had all grades of campaign literature. These little miniature salt shakers of Morton Salt, you remember those?

MAREA FOSTER: Yes, I do.

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, I don't know, he must have sent me 15 or 20 cases of those and they were used for name identification in the campaign. We had done a considerable amount of work, but after a month or two he just didn't feel like the momentum had been generated that it would take to win and he withdrew. Then Senator Jordan was up for re-election. Of course, Mr. Morton knew Senator Jordan and I think he probably had something to do with Senator Jordan asking me to be his campaign manager. So, I said, "Yeah, okay." But he was defeated in the primary by Nick Galifnakis. I couldn't support him in the general elections. Well, in the meantime, Jesse Helms had won the republican primary for U S Senator quite easily, unopposed. Of course, I had known of Jesse all my life from high school days. He didn't go to my school. He was in Monroe and I was in Waxhaw, but we were opposing in school sports. Well, I served as his campaign chairman for his first two elections in '72 and '78.

MAREA FOSTER: That's wonderful.

MR. KIMBRELL: And I'm a registered Independent. They never bothered to ask me what my political affiliation was.

MAREA FOSTER: That's all right. They just knew you'd do a good job.

MR. KIMBRELL: I've just had a wide experience in municipal government and state government.

MAREA FOSTER: And they respected your expertise.

MR. KIMBRELL: A number of times Livingston Stallings and I went to the Jackson-Jefferson Day Rally in Raleigh. I often wondered, you know, why would he, with all of his political associates, want me. You know, that's the biggest Democratic rally in the state.

MAREA FOSTER: I know it is.

MR. KIMBRELL: I know at least twice, maybe three times down through the years, that I attended the Jackson-Jefferson Rally in Raleigh with him. Just he and I drive up together.

MAREA FOSTER: And just have a good time.

MR. KIMBRELL: Have a good time. Like Congressman Hap Barden, every time he'd come home from Washington, he'd stop by my store over there on the Pembroke Road. If I didn't see him drive up, he'd have his maintenance man to meet him over at the airport to pick him up and carry him home. He'd stop there at the store, cause he and I did a lot of fishing together. He'd come to the door and he had an old felt hat, an old, raggily, dirty, felt hat that he wore when he'd come home (on the outside). He'd throw that hat in the door. The first time he did it, it scared me because I didn't realize anybody was around.

I saw that big object come sailing in the store down there one day and I wondered "What in the world is that?! Who is that?! What is it?!" About that time I heard him and he came walking in. Charlie Ashford was a good friend of mine. He was also a physician and a good

friend of the Barbour's. He wanted a boat that I sold, but he felt his loyalty was strongest down at the shipyard, because he'd been their physician from the time they, I reckon, went into operation. But he said, "Charlie, I want your boat, but I want to buy my trailer and my motor from Barbour. You have any problem with it?" I said, "Absolutely not." If you can't have the whole pie, better to take a piece. I got his boat and he told me, he said, "Now, Charlie, when you get the boat, you go down there and get my trailer and my motor, bring it out here and we'll put the boat on the trailer and the motor.

I want to come out there and I want to help put this thing together, and I don't want anybody to know that it's me!" I said, "Doc, I don't know how you're gonna manage that." He said, "Well, you leave that up to me." Well, Marea, Dr. Ashford came out there with bib overalls on, blue denim shirt on, an old floppy hat, and honest to goodness, I didn't recognize him myself. But he worked down there in that showroom for the better part of a week putting his boat together, people coming and going all the time, and never the first one recognized it was Dr. Ashford.

MAREA FOSTER: (laughter) Oh, that's a nice story. And it's a place where we'll have to stop, Charlie, cause I'm really at the end of the tape. I do want to thank you so very much on behalf of Memories and for me for this wonderful interview. It was very good and thank you very much for participating in this program.

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, I appreciate you doing the interview, because as you mentioned earlier, I felt like your dad and I were almost brothers

in the real sense as well as in the fraternal. And I don't forget Miss Penney either.

MAREA FOSTER: Oh, I know.

MR. KIMBRELL: She was a doll.

MAREA FOSTER: Thank you very much.

MR. KIMBRELL: We were awfully close, and I was real pleased that I was able to get your dad nominated for, what was it, what did they call that thing, in The News and Observer?

MAREA FOSTER: "Tar Heel of the Week." Daddy was "Tar Heel of the Week." Well, thank you, Charlie, for that.

MR. KIMBRELL: He was "Tar Heel of the Week."

MAREA FOSTER: He certainly was.

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, one of the editors up there and I were good friends. He wanted someone from this area too, you know, for balance of the area that their circulation was in. I said, "Well, go no further. I know." And, of course, your dad drove to Raleigh and went to the News and Observer and they interviewed him there.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, Charlie, thank you so much for doing that.

MR. KIMBRELL: You didn't know that?

MAREA FOSTER: I didn't know you'd done it. I really do appreciate it.

MR. KIMBRELL: Well, it was a pleasure. It was a pleasure.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

