

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

CAROLINA DUNN ASHFORD

INTERVIEW 505

This is Francis King dictating an interview with Mrs. Caroline Dunn Ashford at her home on East Front Street, January 7, 1993. Mrs. Ashford was born on August 16, 1912 here in New Bern on Craven Street. She lived on Craven Street in the 200 block, and then moved down to the Hughes Apartments, the 600 block of Craven Street, and then later on the Neuse River.

FRANCIS KING: Where did you attend school?

MRS. ASHFORD: The school green. Everything was right down there on Johnson Street.

FK: That's where the Academy building and the Bell building is now.

MRS. ASHFORD: Uh huh. I was in three rooms in the Academy building.

FK: Now, was the high school building built then?

MRS. ASHFORD: Yes.

FK: You went to high school there?

MRS. ASHFORD: Right.

FK: Did you go to college?

MRS. ASHFORD: I went to St. Mary's two years. That's the end of my education.

FK: Well, it's not the end, but formal education. You remember anything unusual about your school or your classmates that's interesting?

MRS. ASHFORD: We learned more than they learn now, I can tell you that.

FK: What way?

MRS. ASHFORD: Miss Ruth Berry kept you right there til you learned that multiplication table. I stayed til four o'clock one afternoon.

FK: What time were you suppose to get out?

MRS. ASHFORD: Three. Rubbed a hole in the paper.

FK: What grade was that?

MRS. ASHFORD: Third grade. Miss Ruth Berry. And when you got through with those teachers you knew what you were suppose to do. The three "R's" at least. We didn't have any trips to Tryon Palace and these cultural things. We didn't have any of that.

FK: How about later on in high school? Did you have any activities there?

MRS. ASHFORD: The usual ones. Girl's basketball. That's about all girl's had, was basketball.

FK: Did you play on the basketball team?

MRS. ASHFORD: I tried, but I wasn't very good. Just for the fun of it, I went out.

FK: Were your contemporaries on there you recall?

MRS. ASHFORD: Helen Kafer was one. She's dead. My other good friend is dead.

FK: Eleanor Stevenson Breitweiser was a little behind.

MRS. ASHFORD: She's younger, yes. Most everybody is, Francis.

FK: What church did you go to?

MRS. ASHFORD: Christ Church.

FK: Episcopal?

MRS. ASHFORD: Um huh.

FK: Do you have any fond memories of that?

MRS. ASHFORD: Oh yes.

FK: Can you tell me about any?

MRS. ASHFORD: Our Sunday School teacher finally got married. She taught us a long time. They said we were so bad they couldn't get anybody else to come back and teach us.

FK: Who was that? Who was your teacher then?

MRS. ASHFORD: She was Mrs. Mattie Griffin Ives. She married Mr. Charlie Ives, Laura's father. We thought she was ancient then. She wasn't really that old. Then we'd gather for Sunday School and put our offerings together and go buy funny papers and sit up in the Sunday School room and read funny papers. (laughter)

FK: What happened to the offering?

MRS. ASHFORD: We had some left over to put in.

FK: Where'd you get the funny papers?

MRS. ASHFORD: The drug store on the corner across the street where Dixons is now.

FK: Who owned it then?

MRS. ASHFORD: I honestly don't know. I don't know when Mr. Gaskins finally bought it.

FK: Nobody perceived what you were doing then?

MRS. ASHFORD: They didn't care.

FK: How did you get by with it?

MRS. ASHFORD: We had our little services in Sunday School instead

of going into the church. Then we divided into the age groups for Sunday School for special classes. We were upstairs out of sight, so nobody saw us. That's the last I remember. I may have stopped Sunday School then probably. I don't know.

FK: But you continued on with the church through the years?

MRS. ASHFORD: Yes. I stayed there all this time.

FK: Who was your minister then? Do you remember him as a child?

MRS. ASHFORD: Dr. McKinnon was the one when I was a child. Then we had...Mr. Madara, I can't believe I've forgotten that name.

FK: Not Charlie Williams?

MRS. ASHFORD: He came a little later. He came after I was married. So he came in about '35 or '36.

FK: So you were married here in New Bern?

MRS. ASHFORD: In New Bern.

FK: How long have you and your husband been sweethearts?

MRS. ASHFORD: About a year. He was ten years older than I was, so I didn't know him in my younger days.

FK: I see. But he was a native New Bernian also.

MRS. ASHFORD: Um huh. Right.

FK: Where did you live then?

MRS. ASHFORD: When we got married?

FK: Uh huh.

MRS. ASHFORD: Two months on Broad Street, and then moved up on Pollock Street.

FK: Where on Pollock Street?

MRS. ASHFORD: The 600 block. The Bryan House they it now.

FK: Oh, you lived there then?

MRS. ASHFORD: Uh huh.

FK: I thought that you and your husband had bought that.

MRS. ASHFORD: We did. You mean where was I living when I got married?

FK: Yeah.

MRS. ASHFORD: Oh, my mother was in Hughes Apartments then. My grandmother was living out of town, so we were living there. Bad times along there.

FK: When did you buy the Bryan house now?

MRS. ASHFORD: January 1st, 1934. I think that's when. We had looked at it. We had an option on it, but Jane Stewart had an option ahead of us for it. When her's expired, we got one, so then we got it.

FK: You were married when now?

MRS. ASHFORD: October 1933.

FK: And Jane was here in the decorating business then?

MRS. ASHFORD: Oh yeah.

FK: Had the same sort of personality as when I knew her?

MRS. ASHFORD: Um huh. Somebody should have written a book about her.

FK: Twenty years later.

MRS. ASHFORD: Oh gracious. It's awful nobody wrote about her.

FK: Tell me more about her then.

MRS. ASHFORD: Well, I need my mother. I don't know that much, you know, really. But she's one of the most interesting characters we had in New Bern. She was good at what she did and she didn't have any formal training at all.

FK: She was a decorator.

MRS. ASHFORD: Um huh. But she knew how to do these houses in New Bern very well I thought. She was just an interesting person. Did you treat her? Were you her doctor?

FK: No. She helped us with the house and that's how I knew her.

MRS. ASHFORD: Oh, is that how you knew her then? I wondered how a doctor's experience would be with this. Charlie, when he came to practice...

FK: Charlie's your husband?

MRS. ASHFORD: Uh huh. When he came to practice, he rented a place in the Elk's building. His mother got Jane to fix some curtains and cover an old chair, and he thought he had been robbed completely. He said, "She'll never enter this house!" He put me in that house and I didn't know what to do with it. So he got very benign later.

FK: How long?

MRS. ASHFORD: Not too long. He was nice about it.

FK: Now, this was the house you bought.

MRS. ASHFORD: The old house on Pollock Street.

FK: The Bryan house.

MRS. ASHFORD: So finally he relented and let me...

FK: Have Jane?

MRS. ASHFORD: Yeah.

FK: She was the only one of that ability here in New Bern then.

MRS. ASHFORD: Yeah. Some people could make curtains and things like that, but not somebody over all.

FK: What did she do for the house?

MRS. ASHFORD: Everything was ever done practically, and it was nothing when we got it but a shell.

FK: Tell me about that, because that's certainly an interesting house and an historic house. How was it when you arrived there?

MRS. ASHFORD: Terrible.

FK: In what way?

MRS. ASHFORD: It had been vacant two or three years, and before that it had been rented out as a rooming house for girl's working at the sewing room. Francis, there wasn't a floor plug in the house. There was not a thing but a light from the ceiling. No heat of course. I don't think it had been painted in fifty years. FK: Had no type central heat.

MRS. ASHFORD: Oh no.

FK: Only heat came from the fireplaces.

MRS. ASHFORD: The bathroom was something stuck out over a roof of the second floor that you could see daylight through the boards. (laughter)

FK: Did it work?

MRS. ASHFORD: Never tried it. The first thing I said, "I would not use that." We moved it into a hall room very quickly, before I

got in there.

FK: You mean, the end of the hall there on the second floor?

MRS. ASHFORD: Yeah. Right. One look at that and I was gonna have it moved.

FK: How was it heated?

MRS. ASHFORD: Fireplaces.

FK: Was it gas or just open fireplaces?

MRS. ASHFORD: Open fireplaces. All they had there I suppose.

FK: They didn't have any gas heaters or anything in the fireplace?

MRS. ASHFORD: Um uh.

FK: This was January 1, 1934. So you had to have it rewired, I mean, wired. (laughter)

MRS. ASHFORD: Yeah, for floor plugs. The ceiling light stayed there.

FK: You put in heat then?

MRS. ASHFORD: Uh uh. Had to make some money first.

FK: Oh, I see. Ya'll just had the fireplaces then.

MRS. ASHFORD: Yeah. We put in a circulating heater and a laundry stove in the room we used for a kitchen. You know what a laundry heater is, laundry stove?

FK: I know what a circulating stove is. Let me go into that a little bit. That was hooked up to the fireplace.

MRS. ASHFORD: You used kerosene or something in it.

FK: Oh, it was using kerosene. But you still had it hooked up to a flue though didn't you?

MRS. ASHFORD: Yeah. Just used it like any stove.

FK: And it was out in the rooms, so to speak. It didn't have a fan or anything in it.

MRS. ASHFORD: I think it did. I think they did. They used to call them circulating heaters, so I think they had fan. It's something I didn't have to stoke. You ever try to keep a fire going and keep warm?

FK: Yes.

MRS. ASHFORD: It's hard work, I can tell you.

FK: Yes. Did you sleep upstairs in the house?

MRS. ASHFORD: Uh huh, with a tin heater. You know what a tin heater is? That'll jump with a newspaper. Did that way for I know two winters. We went through two winters that way.

FK: What did you put in then?

MRS. ASHFORD: A furnace.

FK: A coal furnace?

MRS. ASHFORD: Uh huh.

FK: In the basement or what?

MRS. ASHFORD: Basement.

FK: With radiators or what then?

MRS. ASHFORD: No, hot air, warm air.

FK: You had warm air. And that was a little more comfortable I guess.

MRS. ASHFORD: Shew. Yes!

FK: How about in the summer time?

MRS. ASHFORD: The summer time, as with nobody had any air conditioning, it was nice. Those old people had corresponding windows and doors, so you could get a draft through. So as long as nobody knew any better, our house was just as good as anybody else's.

FK: And if the ceilings were high, that helped.

MRS. ASHFORD: That helps. And brick helps. The only trouble is we were too close. We didn't have enough trees for shade.

FK: The trees weren't grown in there.

MRS. ASHFORD: Charlie quick planted a quick growing tree in the backyard to shade his office some cause his office would get hot and he had to close doors, you know. An electric fan in each little room, that's all they could do. But you know, we weren't spoiled then, we were used to it. It wasn't bad. I don't run my air conditioning now if I can help it. I really do not. I'd rather have nature there. Now what else can I tell you?

FK: That was interesting about your house. Did you later put in air conditioner or not?

MRS. ASHFORD: No, Charlie died. See, we used to go across the river every summer, and I wasn't going over there by myself, so I put in a couple of window units until I moved out.

FK: Tell me about your house on the other side of the river.

MRS. ASHFORD: That was our summer vacation. We couldn't go back and forth to the beach like other people.

FK: Was that even before the new bridge was built? You built that house when?

MRS. ASHFORD: He started working on it in '36. I reckon we got in about '37, the property.

FK: On the bridge beside but down toward Sandy Point down 50 South I guess.

MRS. ASHFORD: That was a bathing beach at one time, Wyatt's Beach.

FK: You bought the property over there I guess.

MRS. ASHFORD: Uh huh. Wyatt's Beach is what they used to call it.

FK: In the summer that caught the prevailing wind. It was much cooler over there I guess.

MRS. ASHFORD: Oh yeah. Delightful.

FK: Did you use the beach much?

MRS. ASHFORD: All the time. Little children, I spent my life sitting on that beach.

FK: Did you have any boats then?

MRS. ASHFORD: Yeah, we always had something tied up there. One summer I woke up to no boats and I was delighted. We'd get storms and the phone would ring, "Have you tied up all the boats?" Then you'd have to go bail them out.

FK: That was your husband that called up.

MRS. ASHFORD: I was happy to have one summer with no boats down there. (laughter)

FK: Were there any motor boats or were there sailboats or what?

MRS. ASHFORD: He had a sailboat at the time. A homemade one.

FK: How large was it?

MRS. ASHFORD: I've forgotten.

FK: How many people would it hold?

MRS. ASHFORD: Four or six. Is sixteen feet too small for a little sailboat?

FK: No, I don't think so.

MRS. ASHFORD: He built it in his mother's basement.

FK: Who?

MRS. ASHFORD: Charlie did.

FK: Your husband.

MRS. ASHFORD: And he had to tear some of the wall down to get it out when he got ready to get the boat out. (laughter)

FK: His mother lived down on Broad Street?

MRS. ASHFORD: Yes. Rodman Guion gave us an old boat. An uncle built Charlie, my son, a little tiny skiff.

FK: Who was this?

MRS. ASHFORD: Mr. Charlie Hall. I doubt if you ever knew him. Charlie was named for him. Then later on they got the little boats for skiing.

FK: Now, Charlie Hall was Shoot Hall's...

MRS. ASHFORD: First cousin.

FK: First cousin. That family.

MRS. ASHFORD: Um huh.

FK: So your summers were active over there. Now the bridge came up over Johnson Street and so you rode down there. I guess you were pretty isolated down there at that time. Were there any other houses

down that way?

MRS. ASHFORD: The Fuller's already lived over there. Then there was a bootlegging man that lived on the other side of us. (laughter) That's it. There weren't many people there.

FK: But it wasn't hard to get to ordinarily unless the bridge was opened, and it didn't open very often I don't guess then.

MRS. ASHFORD: Well, in '33 just before we were married, the bridge washed away in a hurricane. We had a big hurricane in '33. Charlie called one day and said he had to go see a patient in Bridgeton and said, "Come on, I'll take the sailboat. Get a friend to sit with you and we'll go over there." So we did, but the wind gave out. I thought he wasn't going to speak to me again, so we were laughing and being silly just sitting in the river cause we couldn't sail. (laughter)

FK: Well, let me go into that in a minute, but let me go back to your husband a minute. Ya'll were married in 1933. He was a native New Bernian?

MRS. ASHFORD: Um huh. Right.

FK: His family had been here a number of years also I guess then.

MRS. ASHFORD: Some, yes. I think so. His father came actually from Kinston through Clinton. Most of his family in the way of the Clinton area, the Ashford side.

FK: Clinton?

MRS. ASHFORD: Clinton, North Carolina. But I think he was born in Kinston.

FK: And his name was Charles Hall Ashford. I didn't realize

he was that much older than you.

MRS. ASHFORD: Uh huh. Ten years.

FK: Ten years. So he would of been ninety years old.

MRS. ASHFORD: Ninety last April.

FK: He went to school here in New Bern?

MRS. ASHFORD: Uh huh.

FK: Where did he go to college?

MRS. ASHFORD: Chapel Hill, UNC.

FK: How about medical school?

MRS. ASHFORD: The two years of medicine at Chapel Hill and the two at Hopkins.

FK: And then he had some more training as I recall.

MRS. ASHFORD: Two residencies. Two years at Hopkins and two years at New York Hospital.

FK: Well, it was unusual for them to have that much training at that time as I recall.

MRS. ASHFORD: If he had continued his Residency for one more year he would have automatically been accepted in American College of Surgeons, but times were hard in New Bern, his father was having problems so he felt he should come home and try to help out. Later after WWII he saw "the handwriting on the wall" and realized it was important for him to be a Fellow of American College of Surgeons.

FK: Let me go back a minute. He was two years at New York. What hospital?

MRS. ASHFORD: It was called New York Hospital. It later merged

with Cornell. He always just called it New York Hospital.

FK: Now, did he ever get in the American College of Surgeons?

MRS. ASHFORD: Um huh.

FK: So, that was not a deterrent. Well, why one more year?

MRS. ASHFORD: He said that he would have met the requirements for some reason. I don't know.

FK: But he did meet the requirements.

MRS. ASHFORD: Later, but we had write up all this stuff. He had to work hard to get into it. But times do change.

FK: Yes. When did he come to New Bern to open his practice?

MRS. ASHFORD: 1931 I think.

FK: And ya'll got married right after that.

MRS. ASHFORD: About two years after I think, cause I was at St. Mary's when he came. I think it was my last year. I think he opened his practice in December of 1931 or something like that.

FK: And that's when you got to know him, when he came back.

MRS. ASHFORD: Um huh.

FK: Did he sweep you off your feet?

MRS. ASHFORD: No, he's not that kind. (laughter) You're scared of him. As one of his old girlfriends said, "He changes with every moon, so don't worry." Scared you to death you know.

FK: In what way?

MRS. ASHFORD: He had a lot of girlfriends around, so you couldn't get serious for a while.

FK: Oh, I see. Well, how'd you win out then?

MRS. ASHFORD: Don't ask me. He wanted a good slave I reckon. He got one anyway. (laughter)

FK: But I assume he got interested in the house also.

MRS. ASHFORD: What house?

FK: That you moved into, the Bryan house.

MRS. ASHFORD: He's the one that found it. And you want funny days, he came up, we had a date one night and he said, "You know, they're two places..."

FK: With you?

MRS. ASHFORD: Yeah. We were looking for somewhere, cause I didn't have a car, we had to live downtown. He says, "There's a frame house on Broad Street and a brick house on Pollock Street." Well, you know, twenty-one years old, I didn't anymore know. I said, "I like the brick house better. It had an office with it you see. He said, "Well, Broad Street is a better business street." I laughed. Two years later there was Charles Duffy and Oscar Kafer and Charlie Ashford all in one block. And he said all the business would go to Broad Street, which it didn't.

FK: Well, who was on Broad Street among the doctors?

MRS. ASHFORD: I don't know. Dr. Wadsworth was then. Dr. Barker was up the street. I honestly don't know of any. No, he was perfectly happy to take the Pollock Street house.

FK: Well, he was near St. Luke's Hospital at that time.

MRS. ASHFORD: And it saved us so much having that office there.

FK: It was part of your house.

MRS. ASHFORD: Yeah, because we could make payments...

FK: On that too.

MRS. ASHFORD: They were rough days, Francis. They really were.

FK: In what way?

MRS. ASHFORD: No money. His sister had to persuade him to stay. After he had been here six months, he said, "I can't stay. I can't make a living." I don't know how many babies he delivered. He said, "I haven't collected enough to pay for the chloroform I used." It was awful.

FK: He delivered them at home.

MRS. ASHFORD: Oh yeah. Thirty-five dollars for nine months of care and six weeks check up.

FK: And these were deliveries at home where you had to wait for him.

MRS. ASHFORD: Oh yeah.

FK: That occupied a lot of time. Did he refuse anybody cause they couldn't pay?

MRS. ASHFORD: Uh uh, not usually. He started on them early to try to persuade them that they had time to collect some money. But you do you know. Especially when you're new.

FK: Was there much competition among the other physicians?

MRS. ASHFORD: (Interruption with tape. Interview picks up with another topic) Which is why I'm living down here now, cause he bought this property to build his own hospital.

FK: When was that?

MRS. ASHFORD: My son was about twelve. We took mother to the

mountains. Went up to get Charlie Bryan to see if he'd sell his property to us. That would be not too long after the war, '44, '46. Thank God we didn't have to build it.

FK: Now, did the property include the house?

MRS. ASHFORD: Uh uh. No.

FK: That was the Justice.

MRS. ASHFORD: Yeah.

FK: Sally Justice I guess.

MRS. ASHFORD: Whether they had owned all of this, I don't know, but Charlie Bryan owned part of it. We did end up buying a little piece.

FK: From Charlie Bryan's brother.

MRS. ASHFORD: No, he was a distant cousin of my grandmother. I don't know how to tell you. He was from New Bern originally but wasn't living here then. It made practice hard to have two people own a hospital.

FK: Well, the other hospitals were there.

MRS. ASHFORD: New Bern General was not practicing, was not here when he came.

FK: So, that was the only hospital.

MRS. ASHFORD: Um huh. That was the only hospital.

FK: How about when the war came and things got so busy, was it any easier for him?

MRS. ASHFORD: Well, he and Dr. Patterson worked together, it better have been. They treated everybody. All the injured workers

at Cherry Point and LeJeune.

FK: And Dr. Jones had retired by that time.

MRS. ASHFORD: He had retired. He didn't last long after we got here.

FK: Well, how about Dr. Kafer? When did he come?

MRS. ASHFORD: Maybe four or five years later.

FK: But that was before the war.

MRS. ASHFORD: I ought to be able to tell you exactly. Those children had already been born. He came about '37 or '38, somewhere like that. When did they fix Kafer Hospital? I'm trying to get a date on that. I can't get it.

FK: It was about 1949 I think, or '50.

MRS. ASHFORD: I was trying to trace when Mrs. Jones died, Leah's mother. I can't place it. That was Leah's home.

FK: I came in '52 and it was before that, but not long.

MRS. ASHFORD: It was already here when you came?

FK: Yes, so it was about 1949 I think.

MRS. ASHFORD: I was trying to think the other day when you had come.

FK: '52.

MRS. ASHFORD: Cause you're like one of the old boys now. (laughter) I saw a list of the doctors not long ago. I don't think there are ten names on there I even know or heard of it. Never seen as many in my life.

FK: Well, did he get to practice at Kafer Hospital also?

MRS. ASHFORD: Later on, not at first. But I think Oscar must have realized that he was cutting his throat, you know, not to let them in.

FK: I gather there's a little bit of rivalry between him and Oscar Kafer. To go back to your husband, he was trained in surgery, which he worked into I guess.

MRS. ASHFORD: About the time you came, didn't he? Wasn't he working into it then? Or was he into it then?

FK: Uh huh. Then.

MRS. ASHFORD: No. He did everything when he came. He told me once, he said, "I'll do anything but a brain tumor and a mastoid. Of course he tried most anything, but there wasn't a lot you could do then.

FK: Um uh. Well, he did a lot of surgery though by the time I came.

MRS. ASHFORD: He delivered babies. The first thing he dropped was infants under two. He couldn't wait to get rid of them. He hated treating little babies. He dropped those and then he dropped obstetrics. Then he found out he could make a living with surgery.

FK: That's largely what he did. I guess during the war, then, if they treated all those injuries, they were real, real busy then.

MRS. ASHFORD: They were busy.

FK: That was a busy time then.

MRS. ASHFORD: Very busy. Oh my Lord, yes! It was awful.

FK: Well, did the service, when they were injured on the job,

they paid?

MRS. ASHFORD: Yeah.

FK: You got some remuneration from the government then.

MRS. ASHFORD: No, I think it was private contractors. You know, like Nello Teer and these people each had their groups down there. I think workman's compensation was that. But there was a lot of it because a lot of them had never been a carpenter, had never done any of this work before. It was a job. But it was a busy time.

FK: By the time I came in 1952, he was real, real busy then. He was busy all the time I guess.

MRS. ASHFORD: From the time the war came, I figured that was it. Life didn't seem so complex before, but then, it was just terrible. The population was growing so in New Bern you see and no more doctors. I was lucky he didn't have to go in service cause there was so few here.

FK: Was he eligible to go in the service?

MRS. ASHFORD: He was the age or anything, yeah. But he had never done any ROTC or anything like that. Sonny Davis is the only one they took from New Bern. He had only been here about a year I think.

FK: Yeah, but that was after the war.

MRS. ASHFORD: Was that after the war?

FK: Uh huh. Frank Grady, did he go in the service or not?

MRS. ASHFORD: From here?

FK: Uh huh. Or did he come back here after the war?

MRS. ASHFORD: I think he must have come back.

FK: Do you remember anything interesting or unusual about his practice? Did people pound on your door at the night to get to be seen?

MRS. ASHFORD: How would you like one? (laughter) She had dental problems. She said the dentist doesn't like to work at night. I said the doctors don't either, you know. No, he wasn't at home. This was my answer to her. One Easter, one of them knocked on the door. We were getting ready to go to church. He didn't often make it, but we were gonna make it that time. He had had a pain in his stomach for six months and he came Easter morning to be seen. So Charlie just said, "I think you can keep it one more day if you've had it that long."

FK: Did the man come back?

MRS. ASHFORD: I don't even know. I didn't ask him. I heard this at this at the door. (laughter) As you know, Francis, you came here when there was plenty of funny things going on here. Human beings are funny.

FK: Now who did you have in mind?

MRS. ASHFORD: What, human beings?

FK: Yeah, that are funny.

MRS. ASHFORD: Oh, you know they're all funny. Doctors work with them as much as anybody in the world really.

FK: Yes. Have any other instances about that?

Mrs. ASHFORD: The brain doesn't work just well, does it?

FK: Charles Duffy was right next to you was fairly active at that time.

MRS. ASHFORD: He came about two years later after we moved there. He and Charlie would get together. Everybody that had never paid Charlie for anything was so glad Charles Duffy came cause they moved on over to another one. The people couldn't help it, some of them, Francis. They just didn't have it.

FK: New Bern was fairly destitute during and after the Depression.

MRS. ASHFORD: Oh, it was awful. Charlie delivered a baby for this family, and he came in one night. He stopped by to see how she was doing everyday, you know. He says that man goes home and puts on a pot of beans every single night. That's all they had to eat.

FK: Was he working at that time?

MRS. ASHFORD: The man?

FK: Uh huh.

MRS. ASHFORD: Trying to. But he had too many children probably. It really was sad. But people in New Bern took it pretty well. Somebody said they were the happiest people on a dime than anywhere they'd ever seen. The didn't have anything, but everybody was pleasant and did the best they could.

FK: You think one of the reasons was that everybody was in a similar fix then?

MRS. ASHFORD: I think so. There were mighty few that had any money. Mighty few.

FK: Even the people who had been fairly well off before, lost.

MRS. ASHFORD: A lot of them did. A lot of. Yeah.

FK: I guess when the war came people were able to get to work.

Many people built rooms onto their houses or turned them into apartments.

MRS. ASHFORD: Really, nearly every house in New Bern. You had to. Helen Eaton, did you ever know her?

FK: Yes.

MRS. ASHFORD: She was in charge of the Chamber of Commerce. She called, the people wanted to rent the cottage across the river. I said, "It has no heat in it Helen. It's nothing but a summer cottage." She called and she called, and we finally put a furnace in the thing to rent to these people because I reckon they just were desperate to house all the people that were coming in. The one that rented our cottage, it ended up he was stationed at LeJeune in Jacksonville. But, of course, Jacksonville was worse than New Bern. They had nothing down there. A little tiny crossroads is all it was.

FK: These were the family of those in service?

MRS. ASHFORD: Um huh. They, of course, had no hospitals.

FK: That was built after the war.

MRS. ASHFORD: Charlie did a lot of delivering of babies from down there.

FK: Where?

MRS. ASHFORD: Cherry Point.

FK: Did he go down there?

MRS. ASHFORD: No. They'd come up here to the hospital. Cause they were slow getting a hospital going down there to take care of them, but all these families were coming in. It was interesting,

though, some of the names of prominent people you know. Some of the generals were living right over at Sara Abernathy's. I couldn't believe it. Had fancy generals. The war came too quickly. They weren't ready for it.

FK: Wasn't the addition to St. Luke's added during the war?

MRS. ASHFORD: I think so.

FK: And Dr. Patterson had to give that up then. Didn't he sell it to the Sisters?

MRS. ASHFORD: He sold it later to the Sisters. The Sisters were there in '44 before the war was over I know, cause Tay was born out in that extension as I remember, and she was born in '44. So it must of been added to help, because that hospital was not big.

FK: No. Then I guess he was pretty well filled up. Your husband had a lot of patients by then I guess, didn't he?

MRS. ASHFORD: Oh yeah.

FK: How did he get along with the Sisters?

MRS. ASHFORD: Pretty good. He enjoyed them, mostly.

FK: Sometimes they ran a tight ship, didn't they? (laughter)

MRS. ASHFORD: She was fussing about him getting there in time to deliver a baby once, not getting his gown on. He said, "Sister, look at yours sweeping all over the floor and that dirty gown you're wearing!" (laughter) He figured he was just as clean as she was to be in that room. But they took it very nicely. They seemed to like him. Every now and then they'd say, "I'm praying for you." He'd say, "Good. I need every bit of it, so you keep right on." But they ran

a pretty good hospital I thought. Were they running it when you came?

FK: Oh yes. For ten years after I came. They left in 1962.

MRS. ASHFORD: I remember. What had happened, Charlie was interested in the Bank of New Bern. He found out that morning the one in charge was embezzling at the bank, then Sister said, "We're gonna close the hospital", and there was one other thing. The other night I thought, what is the third thing that happened that day? Oh, he was fit to be tied that night! He said, "I can't make a living." I can't think of the other tragedy. Maybe it was just a personal one.

FK: But the hospital never closed.

MRS. ASHFORD: It ended up they got Lonnie Moore to come over. But his word was, that they were going to close the hospital.

FK: Kafer Hospital had already been closed.

MRS. ASHFORD: It was already closed. Good Shepherd, they've already written about that. You were here when you had to go to three staff meetings?

FK: Yes mam.

MRS. ASHFORD: That about finished him off, having to go to three different staff meetings. I'm thinking if I can remember anything else. It's been a long time.

FK: Of course when I came, it didn't take long for me to get real busy. Charlie and I, your husband and I, would usually be up at night making rounds. He always worked by himself. He never had any associate did he?

MRS. ASHFORD: No. It's just as well. He would demand too much of them I think. He was sort of a perfectionist and it wouldn't have worked.

FK: He was a perfectionist, but I must say, he was a very good perfectionist.

MRS. ASHFORD: Well, it was probably quite necessary.

FK: Yeah, I was amazed.

MRS. ASHFORD: But the office was too little. I know when they began to build that professional building, Reece Little began talking to him to go out there. He said, "No. I've been this long, I can go a little longer." I thought it was just as well, cause by then he'd learned he couldn't do but so much.

FK: He was busy right up to his last illness.

MRS. ASHFORD: Oh yes.

FK: He had his episode, subarachnoid hemorrhage initially, but he went back to work some after that.

MRS. ASHFORD: Oh yeah. He was there for three years.

FK: One thing we didn't go into is the hurricane in 1933. Where were you living then?

MRS. ASHFORD: In my grandmother's apartments up on Hughes Apartments. We didn't know anything about hurricanes, you know really, except that they come. Because we had no warning. I don't know where I had been that afternoon. I'd been to a Woman's Club meeting on Johnson Street. Libby and Leah Ward were living in a little house that Meredith Nelson lives in now. The bricks were falling down in

the fireplace. We knew there was a strong wind. I don't know who else was in the car. Lucy McCotter said, "Well, let's ride across the river and look at it." So we ride over the Neuse River. Got over to Bridgeton and the water was already high. The car got swamped out over there, and I came back.

FK: Did you drive the car back?

MRS. ASHFORD: Charles McCotter had to come get us.

FK: Who were you with then?

MRS. ASHFORD: I was with Lucy McCotter and I've forgotten who else. We'd been to a club meeting. Charlie calls and says, "I've got to do something about my boat. The water is very high." His little homemade sailboat was tied up down at the Woman's Club. I put on some old clothes and went down there with him, and sure enough, we were wading in water. And still we hadn't thought anything about a hurricane. Later on that night, a friend of Aunt Carol's was the only Red Cross person in New Bern at the time, and she let us know that a hurricane was on the way. It was a mighty big one. All I know is that it took down trees this big in my grandmother's yard.

FK: Where was that?

MRS. ASHFORD: Up on Craven Street, Hughes Apartments. She had great big, what were those trees?

FK: Pecan? Oak?

MRS. ASHFORD: Pecans went down too, but these were those little things that grew quick. I've forgotten, but they all went down in the yard that night-Huckleberry trees..

FK: So the trees were about a yard in diameter, the trunk, or more?

MRS. ASHFORD: Um huh. They went down all over New Bern. That was the beginning of us having no trees. Of course you don't know anything about a hurricane, and if they come at night, mostly you can't see anything. Except wake up the next morning and find boats tied up along Craven Street is sort of an odd sight to see. I never got out in but one and that was in '55.

FK: It didn't get all the way to your house, to where you were staying at your grandmother's house.

MRS. ASHFORD: Well, it went up in the backyard there. Yeah.

FK: Was it higher then than it was in 1955?

MRS. ASHFORD: No, it's never been any higher than that up to now. Charlie asked all the old folks he could find around in '55 and none of them had ever seen the water. We were just saturated when it came. You were here weren't you?

FK: In '55?

MRS. ASHFORD: Yeah.

FK: Yes.

MRS. ASHFORD: You were here. You know that we had the water like nobody had ever seen with three hurricanes. You know how high that house is next door?

FK: Who?

MRS. ASHFORD: This Gull Harbor house.

FK: Yeah. Uh huh.

MRS. ASHFORD: Miss Sally was in the hospital at the time. Charlie gave me a key and said go down there and see if the water got in. That back door is higher than this house. You could see where a little sand had run in under that back. It's just hard to believe that it can get that high, isn't it? I just never can take care of it.

FK: Did any people die during the hurricane you recall?

MRS. ASHFORD: No.

FK: But a lot of damage I guess.

MRS. ASHFORD: In the '33 one, some little colored kids did I think up on New Street.

FK: I think that was in '55.

MRS. ASHFORD: Was that one in '55? I don't know. But it went in all those houses. That Guion Dunn house, you know the one I'm talking about over on the corner?

FK: Which one is that?

MRS. ASHFORD: Where Mark's family used to live. It's the first house past Short Street, Linden Street, going right on the corner there. It got every hurt. I remember in '55, Neta McCotter who lived across the street, said she could see the furniture washing back and forth in the house.

FK: They weren't in there at the time I don't guess.

MRS. ASHFORD: No, they had been taken out. I don't know of anything of interest that hasn't been written up about hurricanes.

FK: Another interesting person was your grandmother I think.

MRS. ASHFORD: I don't know whether she'd be interesting to anybody

that didn't know her, Francis. I thought about that. She wasn't a modern woman. She seemed like old timey, and progressive a little bit in some other ways.

FK: My perception was that she was interested in people.

MRS. ASHFORD: Tried to do good. She was a do-gooder.

FK: She arranged for wet nurses I understand.

MRS. ASHFORD: She made some of them get married. Poor John Haywood has been a witness, a godfather.

FK: John Haywood was your uncle?

MRS. ASHFORD: Poor thing, he was so good to DearMa and he took care of all her business. He helped her whenever he could with what she was doing. She taught kindergarten at the little chapel that the historical society has now. She was always interested in trying to help those people. Then she started a kindergarten.

FK: Was that a free kindergarten she taught?

MRS. ASHFORD: Just church kindergarten at first. She taught Sunday School up there first with those folks. Then I believe the church had been deconsecrated, or whatever you call it. Sometime in my busy years, I don't know too much about it, she started like a day care kindergarten. Of course she had Aunt Carol to help her. Aunt Carol went all around to all these stores to get them fruit juice and stuff like that.

FK: I guess she did it as a volunteer. There was no charge for what she did.

MRS. ASHFORD: Yeah.

FK: And this was a rather low economic...

MRS. ASHFORD: Yeah. In that long wharf section. She'd always been interested in trying to help those people because there were a lot of nice people up there. See, that was a white section. What your historical, preservation group were going into, was originally a white section all through there. A lot of them went to that All Saints Church. I did not know too much about this later thing, because I know Aunt Carol was working hard to help her. But she really was trying to help them.

FK: You mean the day school.

MRS. ASHFORD: Uh huh. Trying to help those folks with those children. As a girl, every Christmas, she took baskets around to all these people. I remember when I got my drivers license, it was up to me to take her around. She had her pets that she wanted to give a turkey and so forth to. She did her Christian duty is the way I always felt about it.

FK: Can you tell me more about your husband and his practice? I guess he worked real hard all through the years.

MRS. ASHFORD: Alone and hard. Tried to get two weeks off a year for vacations.

FK: Did he get away then?

MRS. ASHFORD: Yeah, we went away usually. Francis, I don't know what to say, except that he was a country doctor. When you practice by yourself, you're at everybody's beck and call. Until after '63 after he'd had that, whatever you call it, he never turned anybody

down really. Then it got to where nurses would call him at the hospital and then he'd say, "I can't do anymore tonight." It's the only time he ever learned - I've done all I can do today, and that would be ten, eleven o'clock at night. But he loved what he was doing mostly.

FK: I think that was obvious.

MRS. ASHFORD: I said something about retirement. I knew he wasn't going to ever retire. When I first knew him, he said he was gonna retire at fifty, then he went to fifty-five. He died at age sixty-four.

No young doctor would even know what we were talking about with his kind of practice. They can't visualize being on call twenty-four hours a day. You can, but these young ones can't.

FK: How did you get up with him when he was away? He did used to do some woodworking didn't he? Wasn't that kind of a hobby?

MRS. ASHFORD: It was suppose to have been. He had a nice basement full of tools, but they never got used.

FK: He never got to use them.

MRS. ASHFORD: He made one desk for us, a knee hole desk, and he made kiddie coop when the first child was born. A nice kiddie coop, great big one.

FK: That was a crib.

MRS. ASHFORD: Well, you know the kind, a crib with wire, you lock them up in.

FK: For your children.

MRS. ASHFORD: And that was the end of the basement really, except a few little repair jobs. He didn't get to it.

FK: Does your son use those now?

MRS. ASHFORD: He's got them. He's got a workshop over there. He's good with his hands too. But Charlie was good with his hands, but just no time. He told me once, I said, "How you gonna do this operation you haven't done?" He was reading something there, he said, "You know, really, surgery is glorified plumbing, if you know where the pipes ought to go." So I thought, well, I had more respect for you then knowing you're a glorified plumber. (laughter)

FK: I think there's a little difference there. You had to know a lot more. You had to know what was around those pipes too.

MRS. ASHFORD: Well, probably so. (laughter) His practice, I'm trying to think. When Roosevelt came in, one of his projects to help people, the welfare or somebody could refer them to get a slip and you could go to the office and the doctor got fifty cents. I was standing there one day with him, "I don't want to have to get a slip!" I thought, well, he doesn't want to treat you for fifty cents either really. But that's how bad the situation was really. The welfare department was Mrs. Whitford. Was she still there when you came?

FK: Yes.

MRS. ASHFORD: Oh, he'd get on the phone and practically cry with her to put somebody in the hospital, that they needed an operation you know. It really was quite bad.

FK: Did the welfare have funds to put people in the hospital?

MRS. ASHFORD: Mighty little, and they wanted to take your farm or your home or whatever you had. Mighty little. I suppose she had

to be careful like that. But he would just really plead with her sometimes that this really did need to be done.

FK: Of course there was no remuneration for him in this I don't guess.

MRS. ASHFORD: Oh no. He had me bookkeeping for him in two years. One year he told me to add up what we'd taken in to get ready for the tax man. Francis, he had taken in \$5,000 that year. We said, "We're rich. We were on easy street." Now look how far would it go? Hardly pay your office expenses now, would it?

FK: Obviously it would not. But that was just the gross pay, is that right.

MRS. ASHFORD: That's his gross, yeah.

FK: Did he have a nurse then?

MRS. ASHFORD: Oh yeah.

FK: He had to pay her.

MRS. ASHFORD: He always had one, and then later on a secretary.

FK: You don't remember what year that was that you got \$5,000? Probably the thirties.

MRS. ASHFORD: Late thirties. Gosh, we thought we were on easy street then. We had it made. (laughter)

FK: Were you able to keep on with that collection? I guess you did better when the war came though.

MRS. ASHFORD: Oh yeah. He got hysterical. He would tell the man doing his books every year, said, "You don't need to estimate as high. I'll never do as much again", and each year we'd go up a little

more cause he worked harder.

FK: He did work hard.

MRS. ASHFORD: But we didn't take in enough. I couldn't have lived like I have lived all these years, except for his outside investments. No way! Of course we did the houses down here which took a little hunk.

FK: Now, when did you move this house?

MRS. ASHFORD: '58 is written in the floor. I saw it the other day. 1958 is down in the concrete floor.

FK: Now, this was moved from...

MRS. ASHFORD: Pollock and, what is that? Western Auto is there.

FK: It's not Jones Street.

MRS. ASHFORD: Jones Street I think. I think it's Pollock and Jones. (Recorder had been turned off.).

FK: I sure wonder how long I've had it off.

MRS. ASHFORD: It's all right. You haven't missed anything. Nothing earth shaking has gone on.

FK: Well, it's relevant.

END OF INTERVIEW

Note: (This is Marea Kafer Foster. Today is January 9, 1993. Dr. Francis King, interview number 500, interviewed Mrs. Caroline Dunn Ashford, interview number 505, on the 7th of January 1993. The interview took place in Mrs. Ashford's home at 512 East Front Street

in New Bern, North Carolina.)

END OF TAPE