

## History United: Memory Initiative

**Interview with Landon Wyatt (LW)**

**Interviewer: Evelyn Riley (ER)**

**Friday, October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2013 at 1:00PM at the Danville Regional Foundation Offices,  
Danville, VA**

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**ER:** We just have some questions that we normally ask but if you ever want to jump in and tell me anything, it's kind of a loose interview.

**LW:** I picked up a few things out of my papers that might come up...

**ER:** Good, great! [Pause in transcription during audio check.] Ok, so first I'd like to ask you just your name and birth date.

**LW:** Landon R. Wyatt, Jr., October 8<sup>th</sup>, 1925

**ER:** And what would you consider your occupation to have been?

**LW:** I was a Buick-Pontiac dealer...that was my day job. *-laughs-*

**ER:** How long have you lived in the area?

**LW:** All my life.

**ER:** And what other organizations have you been a part of, or what other jobs have you held?

**LW:** Well, I managed some mineral properties in Southwest Virginia, gas and coal...and I was vice-chairman of Piedmont Broadcasting, director of Smith Seed and Feed, and...managed some farms and I guess that's about it in...might have been business, I've been involved in community [unintelligible] assets and [unintelligible] all my life. Most of the time I was chairman of the hospital board for 24 years and I've done the Chamber of Commerce for the past [unintelligible]...retail merchants of this local and the state. And the United Way...all the things most of us do around here.

**ER:** Yeah *-laughs-* Are you enjoying them?

**LW:** Oh, yes, very much.

**ER:** How did you get into your line of work at the dealership?

**LW:** -laughs- I was...my father owned it before...went into business in 24 and had all of the Buick lines and it seemed interesting to me because I finished at UVA in 49 and that fall I was [unintelligible] him and his managers of the business at a GM meeting and instead of saying, "What are you going to do when you finish college," Tom Carter, his manager, said, "When you finish and start working, do you want to start in sales or service?" -laughs- It was just a given, as if I had no option. Which was fine with me because I grew up in it. I started, I became manager in 56 and became a [unintelligible] dealer in 65 and I managed...had it until General Motors bought me out in 08...09, I'm sorry.

**ER:** You said you went to UVA, where did you go to school locally?

**LW:** GW

**ER:** GW?

**LW:** Mhmm.

**ER:** Do you remember anything about your time there in particular?

**LW:** Oh yeah! I can remember it all! When we started the first and second grades were on Broad...on Holbrook Avenue in what was later the GW building, but the first and second grades were called Rising Parks School even though it was in the same, within in the same walls of George Washington High School. So, I went to first and second grades there. Third, fourth, fifth, sixth grades at Berkley on Grove Street. And then seventh through twelfth at GW, except I left in the eleventh grade to go into service in World War II. But we all knew, growing up, that we weren't going to college when we finished high school so we never even considered what colleges you wanted to go to and I knew I wouldn't finish...be able to take my last year because I would be 18 in the fall of the last year. So I...as well as a lot of others went to summer school that year, took an extra subject every semester, so actually I finished in 11 years. Then went into the Air Corps.

[Timestamp – 5:21] **ER:** In the Air Corp...

**LW:** I got my diploma with the class of 44 but I left in October, 43. And then I remember getting out of the service and father said, "Do you want to go to college?" and I never gave it any thought you know because war ended and all of a sudden we go home... really had never given it any thought. "UVA I guess..." Never thought about it.

**ER:** Yeah...did the GI Bill help with that?

**LW:** Yes, it was...it's real interesting to compare because he called up UVA in Charlottesville and said, "When do classes start, and register," and all that and they were still on a stepped up schedule so they said, "Classes start in February for the first semester." And this was in December...they said, "You can come up and register anytime you want to." And no application...I just went up. We walked into the rotunda, registered with whoever was there, and they said, "Come find yourself a room, classes start so-and-so,"...so February to June was one semester, June to September was the second semester, then we got back on the regular nine months semester.

[Timestamp – 6:41] **ER:** And what did you study there?

**LW:** Commerce.

**ER:** Ok. If you wanted to talk a little bit more about the history of the Buick dealership itself?

[Timestamp - 6:55] **LW:** Well, I had dealer license number, number four in the state of Virginia. I'm assuming there were a whole great number of dealers who were licensed when the license procedure came out and we happened to have number four and we maintained that till I sold it. I ran it...my son-in-law and then my daughter were with me. My daughter was with me when it closed, my son-in-law passed away before that. GM wanted to get all their makes under one roof and they said, "Why don't you buy out the Chevrolet dealer, or let him buy you out?" And I, said, "Ok, fine." And forgot all about it. Because we had [*unintelligible*] 30 some odd people who spent their life working for us, you know. From the time they started work all the way through and I didn't want to put them out. So I just said, "I'll stay. You know, I'm old enough." And then that Christmas of 07, my service manager...whom I had hired as a teenager out of DCC and began to work for me as a teenager and married my bookkeeper whom I'd hired as a teenager...He told me, "You know we've been here, we've enjoyed it, we won't leave you, but another year or two is about all we would like to work." So I thought, well, "Maybe I better listen to this man." And he walked in in February [*unintelligible*] saying this is how much we'll give you to resign the franchise, I said, "Give me the check!" and for all...agreed to take all my people who wanted jobs, offered them jobs. So I said, well it's taking care of them, taking care of myself, so it's time. It just happened that was about three months before everything went down so, it couldn't have been timed any better. I don't take any credit for that. *-laughs-*

**ER:** Just how it works out sometimes. Just out of curiosity do you have a favorite car that you sold?

**LW:** No, no, no. I drive a Lucerne, but it depends on the use.

**ER:** Right.

**LW:** I, you know I grew up in the business. We had a dealership on Main Street and we took overnight parking from the hotels so we were open 24 hours of the day, seven days a week. I was there in the summertime, and weekends, and Saturdays, and...so I grew up in the business. I remember going to the announcement meeting of the 1941 Buick in August of 1940. Goes back that far. Because, you know, at that time you could get a permit when you were 14. Cost 25 cents. But I had been driving for a couple years before that. Everybody drove, there weren't that many cars.

**ER:** Has it always been located at that location?

**LW:** No, we were from 24 to 34 we were over on Craghead, part of which is now a...later became Lincoln-Watson Hardware. From 34 to 67, we were on Main Street next to the Hotel Leeland. In 67 I built the facility over on Riverside Drive, which we still own. So, three. During that time we also operated Lynchburg and Martinsville Buick dealerships.

**ER:** So how far was your service area?

**LW:** Well, according to the General Motors contract I served this area was Danville and Pittsylvania County. But we had Martinsville as a dealership so we had Henry and we owned the Lynchburg dealership so we had Campbell. So the three dealerships covered those three areas.

**ER:** Are there any historical events that you think impacted the dealership?

**LW:** I remember when World War II came, started. We had to...all cars were frozen as of December 31<sup>st</sup>. And we had to put the vehicles up on stands, get the tires off the floor. There were war...the war production Board of Vehicles issued permits to physicians who made house calls at that time. They issued permits...I remember the city bought a Buick for the fire chief. That was that type of person who could get a permit to buy a car. And so, they were the only cars we sold and back in the 30s, 20s and 30s, automobile dealership accounting would leave you to believe we made a lot of money selling new cars and used cars. Then you lost 90 percent of it in the service department. That's just the way the accounting system was set up. So everybody assumed that when we couldn't sell new cars everybody would go broke. And I'll tell you the story, you can delete it if you think it's not appropriate, but the persons are all dead so, I think it's interesting. Willie Gardner was the Dodge dealer, Dodge-Plymouth at that time, built a house that Fred Leggett lived in and Wes Hudson [?] moved in, I don't know the number in Forest Hills. And across the street was a house that Fred Leggett seen or lived in. The man who's got Leggett's you know. Well, Willie Garner thought that he was probably going to go broke so he couldn't afford it so they exchanged houses. And of course, Willie Gardner made more money

during the war than he ever did before. Turns out he could've kept the house but he didn't and Fred Leggett moved from this little house to the big one and of course he owned Belk-Leggett and his son Fred, Jr. [unintelligible] as well as his daughter...Sue. So I don't know if they know this story or not, but I think it's interesting.

**ER:** And what part of town did you live in, or did you grown up?

**LW:** I've only...I've lived next door to Mount Vernon Church from 1925 to 34. We lived on Main Street across from First Baptist Church from 34 until we sold the house in 77 when my mother died. I was married in 52, lived on Marshall Terrace 101 from 52 to 55, 55 to 70 I believe 501 Linden Place and 70 to present I live in a house I built on Magnolia Drive.

**ER:** What do you think about the region? How have you seen it change and grow?

[Timestamp - 15:00] **LW:** I just that that its marvelous what has been accomplished by this city. And I'm on the Industrial Government Authority so I see it first hand, and I marvel at the number of industries, businesses being brought to this area. And there are so many of them I can't even remember them! And most of them have acronyms which are not like Dan River or Dibrell Brothers, like this business was, but I think its...it bodes so well for the future and every space on this street is occupied. Every market rate apartment, loft, in this whole area is occupied. I just see so much and so many things happening.

**ER:** Did the closing of the mills and things like that affect your business.

**LW:** Oh yes, it affected everybody! Closing the mills and the tobacco industry going down, you would have thought that Danville would have just rolled up our sidewalks and gone home when those two went away. I operated two tobacco farms and until the allotment system went away and after that the owner of the farm who owned the allotment could...had no way to participate. What we used to call a sharecropper. Are you familiar with that?

**ER:** Yeah, I was going to get you to describe the allotment system that you were talking about. I guess it's kind of the same, the sharecropping the allotment system are they the same thing?

**LW:** No, the share...the allotment system...each farm, and I cant tell you when this started...it started before 71, which is when my father died and I started farming for us. Each farm was allotted an allotment that they could sell so many acres of tobacco or pounds--really both--and you could plant up to it or you could sell those pounds to which you were allotted. If you wanted somebody or other a farmer had all these pounds and wasn't going to farm he could lease them to someone else, so I always leased a lot of pounds into me [?], and then we sold them. The sharecropping system was, I'd say, I owned the farm, I owned the allotment—100,000 pound

allotment. A person who didn't have any assets, generally, would be the sharecropper. He would work, provide the labor. He would provide  $\frac{3}{4}$ , he'd pay  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the fertilizer, I'd pay  $\frac{3}{4}$ . [Note: He probably means he would pay  $\frac{1}{4}$ ]. He would furnish the labor and the machinery. I would furnish the barns. And then selling tobacco he would get  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the proceeds and I would get a  $\frac{1}{4}$ . And that's where the sharecropping system works. When the allotment system went away there was no place for me, the landowner, to benefit, so we sold the properties and the people who used to be sharecroppers could then plant without having to pay us the landowner and they've done very well. And the tobacco business has done very well.

**ER:** And what year did you sell?

**LW:** I don't remember for certain...right in 2000, 2002 I guess in that neighborhood.

**ER:** And how did your family get into the tobacco business as well as the car dealership?

**LW:** Well my father was born on a farm, I suppose, so he had a love of it. So he bought the farms and ran them on the side along with the dealership, he ran those and managed the farms. The share...the only person who owned the allotment...and you know I go out once a week or as needed basis keep books for them, that type of thing but it didn't have to be every day. And the person who lived on it, was usually, you usually furnished it the house to the person who lived and worked your farm so he enjoyed doing that. And I did...when he died I took over that. And real interesting, we had a sharecropper who couldn't read or write and when he'd get a letter from the government he would bring it into town for me to read, he didn't trust his wife.

**ER:** *-laughs-* I wonder why that was?

**LW:** And he rented the farm until he died, he couldn't read or write. But it was a marvel to me, he could drive a car, get a permit, he could run the farm...buy and sell, I mean sell tobacco and go out and buy fertilizer whatnot but couldn't read or write. Couldn't read a lick. [unintelligible]

**ER:** Did he do his own account books?

**LW:** No heavens no, he couldn't write! I kept the books for him.

**ER:** I just have heard some stories of people being good with numbers, but just not, you know with words.

**LW:** I think I've heard that but no he didn't keep...

**ER:** Wow. So how did he, how did your father get in the car dealership in the 20s?

**LW:** It's really interesting to me there were about nine in his family and everyone of the boys either sold automobiles or groceries. And the one girl married a grocer and another girl married a farmer that produced groceries. But we had one Buick in Danville, there was a Wyatt Chevrolet in Danville which was my uncle. There was a Wyatt Chevrolet in South Boston which was also my uncle. And I had cousins, one of them in Virginia Beach ran a Studebaker dealership. I don't know. They all sold cars or groceries. I had a grocer...two brothers [?] with a grocery in Danville, one in Roanoke...how that occurred, I don't know.

**ER:** So how have you seen the industry change since you took over?

**LW:** The automobile industry?

**ER:** Mhmm

**LW:** Oh it's changed, I've been out five years now, I keep in touch, talking to them enough to know it's changed. See the internet was not a factor at all when we were selling the cars. It was just barely beginning, people have the website and all that type of thing. It was not a factor with us. And of course it's a big portion of it now. It's so foreign to me that I just marvel at how it changed. But I saw changes too. I've seen...one thing, I don't--and I'll take as much time as you like because I love talking about it—one thing that just, hate to say it blows my mind, but it really does blow my mind. Everybody fusses about the price of gasoline. They buy a car because it gets high mileage. They go to another station because it's two cents less...I read the paper about people driving to Martinsville over here to buy cheap gasoline...and my service manager and I sat down when we retired five years ago and we figured out, we used these parameters. Gasoline, we went back 10 years from 08 to 98. We put gasoline back at a dollar a gallon. We put mileage at 10 miles a gallon. We figured out how long the brakes would last, how long the exhaust would last, how long the transmission would last, how often you tuned a car. Then we moved up to 08 and we figured 20 miles per gallon we could do \$4.00 for gasoline, we figured 20 miles a gallon. Transmissions, when we were on Main Street, that was as late as 67, we'd have three, two or three, automatic transmission down there everyday in the shop. And now you go a lifetime without changing the transmission. We've changed tires that have lasted 10-15,000 miles now they are 40 or 50,000 miles. Used to tune a car every 5,000 miles and now you might do it once in a lifetime. So we calculated, based on 100,000 miles driving with all those givens, it cost about two cents a mile more to drive a car now than it did 10 years ago per mile, over 100,000 miles. So gas, the price of gasoline, is the least important consideration in buying an automobile, but everybody puts it right at the top...just because they see it on the pump, people talk about, the news talks about it. It's just...I mean I've spent a lifetime in it and I just...I'm obsessed by it, that's the facts.

**ER:** So do you think cars have improved?

**LW:** Oh, Heavens!

**ER:** Some people, you know, they think cars were way better back in the day, more comfortable and everything, no?

[Timestamp - 25:18] **LW:** Oh, Heavens no! No! No! Tires would last 10,000 miles. We were in the leasing business and we leased Dibrrell right here 56 cars a year at the time. And we did all the maintenance. We paid for the tires, the oil...so we know what it cost the customer. That's the information we were using. Because it's just so much nicer. AC and heater wasn't even standard equipment until 1951! Turn signals came out in 39. Automatic transmission...there was one in 41, but of course the war stopped it, so really 48 was about time the automatic transmission came out. Air conditioning in 53, so you know. Steel top didn't come out to 36. Back then they were soft tops. Oh it's just, oh it's no comparison because it's just so much...They last longer. I remember my father said 50 years ago. When people said, "Well when should I trade?" and he said well, "I'd say trade either when you reach three years old or 50,000 miles." And I have a car now with 49,000 on it and I think it's brand new, and it runs like, looks like brand new. The car I took when I closed. That's the one I am referring. Oh, the cars are just so much better.

**ER:** Yeah, 50,000 miles is not very much anymore.

**LW:** I traded my grandson's vehicle, truck [*unintelligible*] about...this year. And it had 96,000 miles on it and I couldn't believe it. We used to junk cars if they traded in at 96,000 miles and they gave him a big allowance on it. I was dumbfounded.

**ER:** *-laughs-* So how do you think the culture around cars has changed. For example people would go cruising, go to the drive-in, that kind of thing, but now I don't think that's necessarily as prevalent. The drive-ins are closed now, that kind of thing. So do you think the role...

**LW:** Drive-ins! I'm old. I'm used. About every time I see a Sonic. We used to have drive-ins, they all went away, now they come back. And I ride by that place a lot because I was president, still am president, of Community Enterprises which owned half of that land up there where the shopping center went. So I have a vital interest in it...from a history standpoint too. So I ride, when I go in that area, I look over there and see a bunch of cars at the drive-in. and I see other places it seems like. So things go away, but they come back.

**ER:** Yeah, like the drive-in movie theaters and everything.

**LW:** Yeah and you know Danville had three or four movie theaters but couldn't keep up with them, now we got one with what, 10 or 12 [*unintelligible*] rooms or whatever you call it and it seems to be doing a lot.

**ER:** I think that the outdoor theaters, the drive-ins like that, were a different experience.

**LW:** Oh, it was.

**ER:** There's only a couple left now.

**LW:** I know it. They haven't come back yet.

**ER:** I think they might though.

[Timestamp - 29:11] **LW:** Well, you know, we're spoiled to air conditioning sometimes. We didn't have air conditioning until 53 in automobiles. Of course we didn't have television in Danville until 49. First TV set in Danville.

**ER:** Who owned the TV set?

**LW:** Hmm?

**ER:** Who owned, whose TV was it?

**LW:** Well a cousin of mine who was a Chevrolet dealer had a TV set, and my wife's grandmother had a TV set. I mean I could almost name the people who had them in 49. I was at UVA and we went to Princeton to play football, I mean I wasn't on the team, I was in the pep band, and I remember this was in 46 or 7, I remember seeing the television set outside. But the first one I saw was in 39 at the New York World's Fair. I remember going up to the World Fair and they had one, a television.

**ER:** What do you remember about the World's Fair?

**LW:** What do I know about it?

**ER:** Yeah, did you say you went to it?

**LW:** We went to it.

**ER:** What was that like?

**LW:** Oh it was...hate to say it like EPCOT, but...I don't know, I was really young, I went twice actually. Danville had the drumming bugle corps, which marched in our parades and I was in that and we went to the Drumming Bugle Corps in 1938, I believe it was...and marched in there and

in 39 my family went to New York and went to the World Fair and it just...I don't remember much. I remember this TV. And I remember marching with the Drumming Bugle Corps. But I guess the states had exhibits. I don't remember rides, as is in a carnival type fair.

**ER:** Did you see when you were working in the dealership an increase in women driving and that kind of thing?

**LW:** Increase in what?

**ER:** Women...like driving from throughout the 40s, 50s up to present day.

**LW:** No, women always drove. Back as far as I can remember. In fact my sister was talking about over the weekend about me teaching her to drive. Let me job back as far as I can recall...fact I was in a wreck, got a scar right here when my mother was driving. I don't remember how it happened. That was in the day before safety products you know. That must have been 1930 something like that. But she was driving then.

**ER:** You were born in the 20s correct?

**LW:** 25

**ER:** Do you remember anything about, this is kind of off topic, but do you remember anything about Prohibition or anything during the time?

**LW:** Uh...no. Prohibition ended around what...30, 31?

**ER:** 33

**LW:** I was like five or six, no I don't...

**ER:** I just thought, during the time I might want to ask.

**LW:** No that was before my time.

**ER:** Would you mind talking a little bit more about your...you said you joined the Air Corps?

**LW:** Mhmm.

**ER:** Do you want to talk a little bit more about your experience there?

[Timestamp - 32:51] **LW:** Well, sure. It...recruiters came into the schools and gave tests. You could join the Navy at 17. At age 18 you had to register for the draft. But at age 17 you could enlist into the Army and choose your branch, or enlist in the Marines and choose your branch. I wanted to fly. In fact, I went to up to the airport here an got my solo and was flying when I took the test. So I decided I wanted to be in the air force. The Army Air Corps, what's now called the Arm Air Force, was then Army Air Corps and it was a part of the Army. Just like the infantry and the artillery and all those divisions. They gave a test in GW and lot of us took them and passed it. I remember going, had to go all the way to Abingdon for the physical I don't know why that was true but it was. Then they said, "Ok, just, you passed and we'll call you." And I remember, around the first of October I called them and I said look, "I'm going to be 18 in eight days, I need to be sworn in," so they said, "Well come to Roanoke." So I drove to Roanoke and was sworn in on October the 6<sup>th</sup>, two days before my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. So then I came home and they called me and so I was in as of October the 6<sup>th</sup> I stayed only a few weeks, I've forgotten, and they called me into active duty and I went to Fort Meade, Maryland then to Miami, Florida; Alva, Oklahoma; San Antonio, Texas; Frederick, Oklahoma; Amarillo then Hancock [?], Texas. I was about halfway through pilot training when the UB-29 model came out. They said, "We think we have enough pilots, you got a choice, you can either...we're going to stop the pilot program. So you can just, be...we'll decide where you go or you can sign up to be a B-29 plane engineer." So I did. And that's when...when I finished that, the war ended, and I like to say when I finished and got my wings the Japs surrendered!

**ER:** They were too scared -*laughs*-

**LW:** They saw me coming! But that...it just happened to be that time. So then they just said, "Well...we're going to discharge you and you'll be subject to recall." I said, "Well, what other choice do I have?" They said, "Well you can sign up for 10 years." I said, "Well that's not a very good choice." So I took my chances and then when Korea came along they called back everyone who had less than two years and I had 26 months. So, I missed that one.

**ER:** It worked out. Do you know if the Civil Rights Movement and that kind of thing had any impact-

**LW:** If it what?

**ER:** If it had any impact on your clientele, who you were selling cars to?

**LW:** No, no. I remember it very well because we were right on the main street and we were standing on the sidewalk and the TV cameras...and they were marching up and down the street or whichever way it went...I've forgotten...up I think. We were standing right there with them. and then you watch the news that night you would have thought we were in a warzone! You

know how the news is gunna focus in on something and so...to hear the news, see the news you'd think we were in a war zone. But to watch it, just standing there, it wasn't any big deal. We knew they went over to High Street, but nobody went over there. And they were our customers, we bought, we dealt with them...no, it wasn't anything like what you really think it might have been. And then why they shot the hoses on them...of course I didn't witness it, all I know is what I saw in the news and pictures.

**ER:** Did you hear about Martin Luther King coming?

**LW:** What?

**ER:** Did you hear about Martin Luther King visiting Danville?

**LW:** Oh yeah, yeah. Oh sure! It wasn't anything to which I would have gone so...didn't make an impact.

**ER:** If you could describe working in the dealership in three words, what would those words be?

**LW:** Just serving, serving our customers. Number one. We did relatively little advertising and most of our customers were repeat customers. And being Buick we were not...we were dealing with high income people I suppose and we knew lots of families...the grandfather, the son, and the grandchildren would all be our customers. And Buick was [*unintelligible*]...in 1950 we sold 10 percent of the whole US market. So it was a good size. We concentrate on service. On the service end.

**ER:** Wow. Do you think your family will stay in the area?

**LW:** I have three children. My oldest is a girl whose husband was a pilot and of course, they were living in Richmond. He developed juvenile type...onset diabetes and of course was grounded. This is too detailed just say so.

**ER:** No, go right ahead.

**LW:** My son had just finished Darden School and decided he wanted to go into commercial real estate in Charlotte. So I told my son-in-law, I said "Don't worry about it John. You could always come down here and work for me," and he said, "I was hoping you'd say," because he was from Chatham. So he came back to work for me until he died in 02. And I told my daughter come on and take his salary...just do what she needed to do. She was raising two children, keeping up a house, and she was working full time, and that's one reason I wanted to get her out. So she lives here. My youngest, my youngest child's a girl who was married to a physician in Charlotte. Have

a granddaughter who's married in Richmond, still in law school, but married in Richmond. And another...two other grandsons, one working in the Outer Banks, one works in Washington. All the rest are in high school or lower. Or college or lower.

**ER:** And where do you see the future of the region going?

**LW:** I see it turning exactly opposite from what it was. We relied on tobacco and textiles and now we're relying on a plethora of types of industries. There's China connection, you know about that.

**ER:** Right.

**LW:** And these industrial parks. A lot of times on Saturday afternoon's I'll just ride around the whole night just looking at them. And [unintelligible] and knowing the history [unintelligible] you know...I just, I see it doing well. I really do.

**ER:** Are there any other memories you would like to share either about living here, working here, anything really that I didn't ask?

**LW:** Well, I...I spend more time volunteering as chairman of the hospital board for 24 years. I don't know if you want to go into that?

**ER:** Sure, we have time!

**LW:** Hospital board chairman has historically lasted for a long time. Bill Jefferson became chairman in 1975. Lewis R [?] retired after many years and Bill took over in the spring but by August he was in inpatient hospital with cancer and died in December. He asked me to be chairman, vice-chairman, and I thought well, "It'll be another 20 years before I have to worry about that." But I was thrown into it [unintelligible] and when you...When I do something I rather do something whole hog or not at all, so I really was...bunch of fine business men running, you know, on the board. Then when things were going well you didn't want to retire and when they're going bad you can't retire so you just end up staying until they start talking about wanting to sell the hospital. To back up, in 1990 we had to fire the administrator because they just...well I won't go into that. He just wasn't fit and we said the quicker we change the better so it was my job to go in and say, "I'm sorry but you're relieved as of this moment." And then we had, we didn't have anybody in administration that had the...temperament, training, and all to be the CEO. So I said, "Ok, I'll do it as a volunteer." So I went up almost every day and I told them I'd be in the cafeteria for a while if anybody wanted to see me and I said, "I'll deal with the doctors and y'all...the ones in the offices, y'all deal with the laws and the personnel thing [unintelligible] and I'll deal with the doctors and staff. And so I did that for nine months

and it starts getting under your skin and it really feel close to it. So when in 03 some of the board members said they wanted to sell, wanted to consider selling the hospital, I just... I couldn't, I just couldn't be a part of it. I said, "Well, you know, I know the reasons." I could see the arguments both ways but you know it's just too close [*unintelligible*] to it. I was born 50 yards from the hospital on West Main Street and so I said, "Well, I'll retire." So I retired at the end of 03. And then they stayed for about a year and in 04 or 05 they sold it. I could see both sides. The 200 million dollars that runs this organization has done a world of good for this area. So I can see that. And I can appreciate it. And I've talked to Karl about it. And I've told him what a marvelous job I think he's doing and like that building on South Main Street, tearing down the Downtowner that y'all gave us money to do, the IDA. So... I have to be perfectly honest I think it's... it was good. I just don't like it, I just can't do it because the chairman... going to have to lie and I'm not going to do that, so I thought, "Well 24 years is long enough anyway." But and they've got a good hospital and Eric Deaton is the best CEO I ever knew in my time as a hospital connection. But when you've got people like Eric and Karl doing things for the city, you're going to see it. Now I don't have any fear at all. I actually have rental properties here, interest in the business. I don't have any fears for the area. I really don't.

[Timestamp - 47:35] **ER:** I think that it's definitely on the up.

**LW:** Yeah, I think, I pulled out a few things, one thing in particular about the Pinnacle I didn't know if that was something you were going to get into or not.

**ER:** No, but we can!

**LW:** Do you know what, to which I'm referring?

**ER:** Could you explain it for the record.

**LW:** Yeah, ok. In... and I don't have a date on this I don't think, but the city during the early 30s was producing electricity by burning coal right here by the fire station. That was called Bridge Street Fire, Bridge Street Plant. They burned coal and developed electricity. In the mid-30s, mid-to-late, I'd say 37 to 38, they devised a idea of building dams in, up in the Pinnacles, south of [*unintelligible*] that area. And I, I copied this and brought it to you, this is a picture of Harry Wooding who was our mayor for 46 years. [Pause in transcript to collect dropped document.] This is Harry Wooding who was the mayor of Danville for 46 years [*unintelligible*] this is the statue in front of the municipal building. This is Clayton Bradley [?] who was head of Bradley Steam Plant [?] [*unintelligible*] this is the day the water... flowed over the Talbott dam... Talbott and Townes were dams, the two dams [*unintelligible*]. This is a picture I took walking on top of the dam. This is my father, who was on city council at the time, he subsequently went to the state

legislature and stayed there 44 to 68. [*unintelligible*] and Addison actually he was in my father's Sunday school class and that's why he took them. This is on top of the Talbott Dam.

**ER:** And what year is this?

**LW:** It's in the mid-30s. 36-38 [*unintelligible*]

**ER:** these clips from the Daily News Record?

**LW:** Danville Register.

**ER:** Ok. And all of these are from the same time period you say

**LW:** That's the day, well this is all taken the day, it was in the paper, the day the water flowed over the dam and started producing electricity. [Pause in transcription for unrelated conversation.] That was the day the water flowed over the dam and started producing electricity. Into Danville and they started...adding to the power that the coal plant was producing. That power plant, this coal plant later on was demolished, ceased operating, and then into the 70s im guessing there was a big hoorah about whether to build another dam or to buy power from Appalachian. In the end result the city decided to buy power from Appalachian because the city [*unintelligible*] was becoming part of our industrial development. Now the newspaper was opposed to it but the city went ahead and did that. Anyway. I think it's proven its worth.

**ER:** And the other image you have there...

[Timestamp - 52:23] **LW:** This is the B-17 bomber car, the city of Danville, that's interesting to me, David Hutcherson at BTM became interested as a pilot [*unintelligible*] everybody knew there was a B-17 in the city of Danville. This was in the Danville paper six months or so ago. A city...if they raised x number of dollars for war bonds in World War II they would have a plane named for them so one was named for the city of Danville. The pilot was Terry Powell, whose mothers was my father's first cousin and he was...Hutch was looking for some Powells and he told me, and I found Terry, who's dead but he has a son, his son lives in Richmond so I put them together. They said Danville raised more money per capita than any city in the country. [*Pause in transcription for duplicate information.*]

**ER:** Is Terry Powell in this picture, do you know?

**LW:** You know I'm thinking Terry was injured and was not in this picture, way I recall it.

**ER:** Now are these for me to keep?

**LW:** Yeah, they're just copies. I just knew they were in my scrapbook and copied them to bring to you because you know, I love this place and I spent my life here. All 88 years of it. So, I feel like...[*unintelligible*] the museum somehow or another because when we were growing up it was a city library. Yeah I could talk all day about the city I guess.

**ER:** Well let me see what time it is, see how much time we have left for you to talk. We have about 15 more minutes if you want to tell me some of your favorite memories, places, growing up.

**LW:** Well, I remember the old Robertson bridge you went right down Park Avenue, right across the river on Robertson Bridge. It think it had metal frames on top. But it came right into riverside driveway where [*unintelligible*] is. Then in 1940 they built the other one and a friend of ours who was back here for his mother's funeral six months ago hadn't been back in...just happened to come up that he hadn't been here for maybe a year. And he lived on 58 west. I said, "Then you haven't seen new Robertson bridge, you've got to go see that," because Danville, and this an industrial republic, is better fixed with bridges than any place I know of. Every one of them. I consider new, Union Street's been redone and Central Boulevard was built in 1960, they started in 66 because we owned the land on Riverside Drive on which we wanted to build a dealership. But at the time you couldn't, can't conceive of it, but at the time the thought was that Broad Street would stand right across the river into Piney Forest Road. That would go right across my land, so we didn't want to do that. And in 66 when they finally settled on a location just a 100 yards upstream, glad we built when we did, because Main Street's brand new, got rid of [*unintelligible*], 95 [*unintelligible*]. Just I think we...the city administration have been remarkably clean all my life.

**ER:** Do you remember how long the, I know they used to have trolley's on Main Street.

**LW:** Yeah I took a picture of a street car, that was about 37 or 38, I was living on Main Street at the time. And the barn was the...well, new drugstores in South Main, CVS, Walgreen's I forget which one it is, that's where the tobacco, street car bond was. And it went...it stopped up about Mount Vernon at that time, avenue. I remember very well.

**ER:** How do you think that public transport impacted your business at all or did it not?

**LW:** I don't see it having any impact, no. People bought cars or rode buses depending on their economic status. And we'll never be like Washington or New York if you've been on a subway or mass transportation to that extent. Because I can remember when North Danville was called Neapolis and...in fact grade school...junior high and all, I guess they didn't have a junior high in North Danville. They came to GW in the seventh grade. And I...I was at Berkley when they built Forest Hills School and then it was so crowded they had one shift in the morning, one in the

afternoon. Until Forest Hill opened. Of course I grew up in that area and they have the church First Baptist Church to which everybody belonged [unintelligible]. I remember, I'm just reminiscing now we were at the Rialto Theater on December the 7<sup>th</sup> at the picture show, that's what it's called now, when they stopped it and announced that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. So, we were carrying papers at the time, so children went up to the paper office and stood in line. I went up to the daddy's dealership, got a used car, and we loaded it with extras, drove over to what was then Eden, I mean what was [unintelligible], it's now called Eden and the Greensboro people beat us to it. I don't think we sold a paper. To my recollection. -laughs- But [unintelligible] father was a business masters I said [unintelligible] he was one of the three of us that did that. But we sold extras. We got a [unintelligible] of extras. If we sold any I don't remember. Course I wasn't here when the war ended so I don't know what they did then. I do remember when the stock market crashed. I remember I was up with my uncle in the country, he was a country doctor. I don't know why it impressed me, but it did. And the property we had in southwest Virginia was in charge [?] of that because the bank here failed and my father and another man bought the assets of the failed bank. If this is too personal, just say so. Among the assets was a note by Mr. John [unintelligible] for whom right [unintelligible] is name after beside Stratford House. He couldn't pay it so they called out the [unintelligible] to see what [unintelligible] stock was worth and he said nothing and it had been sold for not paying mineral taxes. So my father and [unintelligible] Mr. Penn, over in Reidsville, [unintelligible], Plantation Penn...went out there and bought it at auction. Mr. Penn died in 1940, he didn't have any children so it ended up in Harrison's [unintelligible]. I've managed it since 71. But I know another thing maybe. I was chair of hospital board, in fact I was treasurer of Stratford when they closed, and this all ties in. And everybody said, "Well why don't you let Averett have Stratford," well Averett couldn't borrow a nickel they were so deep in debt they couldn't borrow a nickel from anybody. We had two or three colleges that wanted to come here but none of them had any money. The hospital was the only viable buyer of the Stratford property and they bought it for what we, what we said it would take to run the college for the rest of the year which was 20,000 dollars. No, 22,000 including the mortgage which was 15,000...mortgage [unintelligible] but the new fine arts...[unintelligible] we borrowed money from Hood [?] so they bought it and we had \$22,000 to feed the students, house them [unintelligible] hospital took it over. Hood started calling for their payments and we said, "We don't have any money." So for about 10 years they would write us, send the payment [unintelligible] forget, subsequently write it off. The hospital bought everything except the fine arts center and by then I had switched over to being on the hospital board so we just let the fine arts just sit there till Hood gave up and then the hospital took it and then tried decide what to do with it. We had one lady, Emily Grossbeck, for whom the music center at Averett is names, moved, decided to move to a retirement home in Winston. Look, Danville's money is going elsewhere to a nice retirement home, we need to keep those people in Danville, so the hospital built Stratford House. While I was president. But if we didn't make any money, if we could keep Danville's better citizens here, the community [unintelligible]. Emily Grossbeck was the [unintelligible] instigator behind that.

**ER:** You mentioned that North Danville used to be called Neapolis?

**LW:** Neapolis.

**ER:** I know that the name legally changed in like the 1890s when it got incorporated.

**LW:** But you know how people are, they keep calling it the same name

**ER:** Right, and I was going to ask you why do you think that that changed, most people today don't call it Neapolis anymore.

**LW:** I'd say World War II.

**ER:** What do you remember about Schoolfield Village?

**LW:** Well, the mill was there and people lived on all those streets and they had their own school, own fire department. We didn't think it as anything different, we just...we called it Schoolfield, but we thought if it as just like Schoolfield, Forest Hills, [*unintelligible*] Park but we didn't think of it as a different entity. Never gave it a thought.

**ER:** Yeah, because they had a movie theater and everything there too. Well I mean if you have any other memories, we have a little bit of time, but otherwise I think...

**LW:** I think we've covered pretty much. I did think of those things on the dam on the Pinnacles, but other than that it was just picture of all kinds.

**ER:** No, they're great. And who did you say was with Mayor Wooding in the picture?

**LW:** Down at the end [*unintelligible*] is Brantley Steam plant and that's Clinton Brantley.

**ER:** Ok, well then I think we're good to go.

**LW:** Alright.

**ER:** Thank you so much!

*[End of transcription]*