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William Henry Chafe Oral History Collection

INTERVIEWEE: Mike Weaver

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WILLIAM CHAFE: —the construction business in Greensboro. Did you grow up in Greensboro?

MIKE WEAVER: Yes.

WC: So you've been here many years. How long have you been in the construction business?

MW: I've been in the construction and real estate business since I graduated from law school at the University of North Carolina [at Chapel Hill], which would be since 1962.

WC: So you went to the Greensboro public schools, did you?

MW: I was born in Greensboro, went through the entire Greensboro public school system, and then went to the University of North Carolina for its undergraduate and then to the law school.

WC: You graduated from Grimsley [High School]?

MW: Yes.

WC: In '54?

MW: [Nineteen] fifty-five.

WC: [Nineteen] fifty-five. So that you were coming out of high school just before the first black student went to Grimsley, I believe.

MW: Yes.

WC: Did you have any sense at that time—was this a big issue at that time? Do you remember hearing a lot about it or thinking a lot about it, the whole question of desegregation?

MW: Yes, I do. I think in high school I was very aware of it, and, of course, when I was in college, it became a very big issue. But it was becoming a big issue in the fifties, and I was very aware of it.

WC: Were your parents involved in the PTAs [Parent Teacher Association] and things like that?

MW: No.

WC: So you had been aware of it just from the *Brown [v. Board of Education]* decision and the whole—at least in high school, the whole discussion of whether or not desegregation was going to occur?

MW: Yes, I think would. I think probably more in context of President [John F.] Kennedy's campaign, the things that led up to his campaign, and also just my own personal experiences.

WC: And you were in law school—were you in David Dansby's class?

MW: I was a year ahead of David.

WC: Did you know him in law school at all?

MW: Yes, not well. In fact, I think I was two years ahead of him.

WC: Did you get any way involved in the kinds of things going on in Chapel Hill at that time?

MW: No.

WC: I guess that most of that came after you left.

MW: It did.

WC: You graduated from law school the same year I graduated from college. It was a good year.

MW: That was a good year.

WC: [laughs] So you came back to Greensboro in ’62. At what point did you become in any way publicly involved in the question of desegregation, not only of schools, but of any kind—nature—any kind of desegregation: housing, business, things like that?

MW: I guess about the area of 1966 to 1968. I was—in that period or leading up to that period, my only involvement was just to speak my mind, but not to be active in groups or anything like this. I was never really interested in being involved in groups or involved in protest or anything else. I was interested in doing what I could directly do with my resources or with my life that affected me. And the one thing that I could do, my family owned about five hundred units of apartments, and I persuaded my family to adopt a policy of open housing.

WC: Where were those apartments located?

MW: All around Greensboro.

WC: All around, so they were not in any one particular neighborhood?

MW: No. And we went to the other realtors, the major realtors that handled rental property, and said what we planned to do or wanted to do and suggested that everyone go along, and hoped that we could talk everyone into going along. That went on for a few months or a short period, and did not produce the result of everyone going along. I think it produced a good result in that it got people thinking and talking, and at the time I felt that was a good result, so I didn’t—I was not so result-oriented as to thinking that I could—you know, that we could influence everybody overnight. We did adopt a policy of open housing, and it was successful and has seen successful.

WC: Now, do you remember exactly when that was?

MW: No, I don’t. I’d have to go back and look in the newspaper files or something. But probably it was in ‘66, ‘67, or ’68. It was in one of those three years.

WC: What prompted you to do that?

MW: A feeling that that’s what I wanted to do, that I felt better about myself if I did it.

WC: Was there any connection to the church or to any individuals in the church?

MW: No, no.

WC: So it came really out of—did it come out of conversations you had with family members or close friends?

MW: Well, I had to persuade family members, but my feelings about it just were my feelings. They didn't come out of anything; they were my feelings. And that was the one area that I could something.

WC: And so you were able—

MW: And I could do it directly and put my own self on the line.

WC: Right. Did you find surprise from not necessarily your family, but other people were surprised that you were initiating this?

MW: Not too many. It was amazing; I would say that I received as many or more compliments. I believe I received more compliments than I did criticisms. Some people didn't like it. And from that point on, or even before that—because I had never gone out and pigeon-holed people and said, "Here's what I believe in. I think you ought to believe in that." But if—I never let anybody pigeon-hole me. So I was somewhat probably thought of as being somewhat liberal. I did not consider myself liberal, and do not now consider myself liberal. But I could tell at times people took a slightly different view because of it, but it was nothing that was any problem.

WC: So that—how many rental units approximately would there be in Greensboro of the kind of apartments that you are talking about?

MW: Oh, I don't know. Many thousands.

WC: Many thousands. So your five hundred or so would be a fairly small percentage overall?

MW: Well, it was probably two or three or four percent maybe, not more than five percent of the total. But it was—

WC: Significant, none the less.

MW: Yeah.

WC: Did the other people—did any other realtors go along with you, or is this something which you ended up doing primarily on your own?

MW: No, one other realtor, John R. Taylor, had really been doing this before. He had not made it a public announcement to my knowledge, but he really had been very concerned with open housing and had been, I think, following an open housing policy. So whereas we put a notice in the newspaper and were probably a little more out front in that regard, John Taylor was really far out front in being the forerunner. He really did a lot more than we did.

It wasn't too long that the law changed; the Supreme Court decision came out. And, of course, the law—it was known the law was going to change. So it wasn't too long till everybody was into open housing one way or the other. I think probably the greatest contribution that we made, as I look back on it, wasn't that we did it. It was that we did it without a big hassle.

WC: So that it happened and there was no furor over it?

MW: Right. We didn't have half the people moving out, and we didn't have crosses burning in our yard, or we didn't have people slashing our tires or anything like that. It was just an acceptable thing.

WC: You got no hate mail at all?

MW: Maybe two, three pieces, not much.

WC: How about people who had been active in the Patriots in Greensboro, the White Citizens Council? Any kind of backlash from—

MW: No. I don't know what the Patriots is or was, so I didn't.

WC: Okay, it was a respectable—respectable in the sense that people who comprised it were middle and upper middle class—anti-desegregation movement. Stark Dillard was active in it and people like that.

Did the newspaper make any—do you have any kind of commentary from the editorial page of the *[Greensboro] Daily News* or anything like that?

MW: I don't remember. We—I personally went to the newspaper and told them that I wanted to make an announcement or wanted them to carry it, and at the same time I said, "This might be a news event. And if you play it up, it could interfere with my ability to bring it off. And I know that you need to report the news, and you'll have to do what you're going to do, but if you could avoid any sensationalism." The paper went out of their way to avoid it. And I certainly knew that I couldn't—I happened to have one of the editors was

a friend of mine and someone that I could talk to real well, and I knew that he would do and the other editorial staff would do whatever they were going to do anyway. But I thought the paper handled it very well. They reported on it initially what we were doing. It seems like about a week later they carried something else on it, and then it sort of died. No big deal.

WC: Would you—did you have conversations with John Taylor in advance of this?

MW: Yes.

WC: About his experience?

MW: John has been, all my life, been a good friend. We had conversations about civil liberties and human rights for many years. And John—have you interviewed John yet?

WC: Yeah.

MW: He was way out front. He was so far out front it's unbelievable. He's the guy they ought to give a medal to. He's really—

WC: He was in the First Presbyterian Church, wasn't he?

MW: Yeah. Very active in the church.

WC: Were you in that church also?

MW: I'm a member of the First Presbyterian Church. I am not active.

WC: During this period, were you having any contact with people in the black community, either about this or about other kinds of questions?

MW: No.

WC: So you would not have talked about this decision or have enlisted the cooperation of the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] or—

MW: Oh, absolutely not. It was my decision.

WC: Sure.

MW: Do it or don't do it.

WC: Yeah, I just didn't know whether there might have been some basis, some previous record of conversations between. Were you part of the Greensboro Community Fellowship? That was a group started in ‘64, I think, which Warren Ashby was associated with and the Taylors and some other people.

MW: After the—a year or so after we adopted open housing policy, I had been active in the [Greensboro] Chamber of Commerce. And the other civil rights activities and civil liberties activities I had were run through the chamber of promoting an openness in the community and a spirit of cooperation and to avoid the idea it’s on both sides. The changes were obviously here, and how does a community accommodate the changes? I was asked to be on the Greensboro Human Relations Committee, and I accepted that appointment for a two-year period, and I did not accept reappointment. And I did my job on that.

WC: Was that on the housing committee primarily or would there have been—

MW: I was chairman of the housing committee for one year. But I did not enjoy it.

WC: Would you say why, or—

MW: I do not enjoy working with committees and being involved with large groups of people and talking about things forever and ever and ever. I'm just not built that way. I like to do what I'm going to do and not hassle the rest of it.

WC: Do you think that was an effective body, the Human Relations Commission?

MW: I do. I do, yes.

WC: Who was chairing that when you—could those have been the years when [Cecil] Bishop was the head of it or—

MW: I don't think Cecil was. I'm not sure. We had several chairmen. One was an insurance man. Let me go get—I think I can find—

WC: Sure, okay. Great.

[Recording paused]

WC: I have the record somewhere, but I just—

MW: Cecil was maybe the chairman when I came on the commission, and he immediately got—he was appointed to the school board or he was appointed to something. I don't remember.

WC: So that on the Human Relations Commission, would that be about half black, half white, the membership of that?

MW: It would be.

WC: Did you find that there was a fairly good consensus of what that commission should do?

MW: No, no.

WC: Where would the conflict be?

MW: Well, I think the conflict would be in many areas. I felt that at the time that this was a big issue: what should the commission do? But we were in an area that was very new and changing very fast, and was a very subjective area dealing with people's emotions and opinions and prejudices. And I felt that it was really healthy that the commission was made up of a large group of people that had very divergent viewpoints. And, of course, that kept the commission from ever being a little tighter and either resisting civil liberties or maybe prosecuting any advance in civil liberties. It was sort of an in-between, a go-between. And I felt that it did a good job, and that that was the job. But there were a lot of different ideas about how aggressive to be or how passive and how to handle different situations. I think if it had been very, very passive and conservative, the black community would have been totally turned off. I think if it had been extremely aggressive, much of the business in the white community would have been turned off, and it would have lost the ability to communicate.

WC: There was a—wasn't there an open housing ordinance before the [Greensboro] City Council? It never passed, I don't believe. Do you recall that?

MW: I recall it. And I think that it was a resolution, because the city council did not have the authority to pass that type of ordinance. But it was a resolution before the city council to favor it, and I believe the Human Relations Commission passed it and sent it to the council. And whether it passed or not, I don't know.

WC: I think the realtors were against it. I recall reading that the realtors took a public stand against it—the board or whatever, the association of realtors—on the grounds that it would I guess be coercive or try to legislate a situation which should be voluntary.

Now, were you on the Human Relations Council during the disruptions at Dudley [High School] and [North Carolina A&T [State University] in the spring of ’69? That would have been when people like Nelson Johnson and Vincent McCullough were active.

MW: I think I had gotten off of it at that time. I don’t—I remember the disruptions at A&T, and I remember sort of being informed because I was the director of the chamber of commerce, but I believe I was off of it. I'm just not sure, though. I might have been. I don’t know.

WC: Were you active in the citizen—in the Community Unity [Council]? I can never say that. [laughs]

MW: Well, yes, I was involved with that. I was quasi-active.

WC: At what point do you remember—I guess you probably would have gotten fairly well involved with Hal Sieber.

MW: I was very involved with Hal, yes.

WC: What was—how did you perceive his role from when he first came to the chamber to when he left, if you don't mind talking about that?

MW: No, I don't. I don't know when Hal first came. I don't have a recollection of when he first came. I know that probably the last four or five years he was with the chamber I was very aware of his role. I thought that he just was a fantastic talent that got put in Greensboro at a key time. Hal did so much to—he did so much behind the scenes and so much out front to promote race relations. He talked to so many people and he had a lot of people’s ear. He had people’s confidence. He was so—he was gutsy, but he was gutsy in a really neat way, so that people didn’t view him—I think a lot of people didn’t view him as gutsy. Didn’t really—would have never known quite how gutsy he really was. He was very gutsy. And he could get people to do things. He would get people like Allen Wannamaker, Al Lineberry, and others—he would get their ear, people that then could get to other people. It appeared to me—now, you know, maybe Allen Wannamaker and Al Lineberry were able to really effectively use Hal Sieber, but I felt that Hal really had a way of getting across varying viewpoints and getting other people then to champion that cause.

WC: Did you see that happening as it was happening, or is that something which you saw retrospectively more?

MW: No, I saw it as it was happening.

WC: As it was happening?

MW: Oh, yeah. Every time I was with Hal I felt like I was a violin that he was playing.

WC: [laughs] I've been with him in situations which—I agree with you 100%, but I think that one—

MW: And I loved it. If the tune got too loud, I felt very comfortable to say, “Hal, let's back up.”

WC: But do you think other people saw the extent to which he was in effect manipulating them?

MW: I would think most of them did. Some maybe not, but I would think most did.

WC: Because the whole emphasis on the total community was really his instrument for dealing pretty forthrightly with the question of desegregation.

MW: Oh, right on. It was. And I think he had so much support, probably from Bill Little and from other people, that that really helped Hal in doing it, because there was a sort of reservoir of support.

WC: Yeah. Did you see much opposition, at least—I realize opposition became greater at the end, but was there opposition, say, when you first began getting in touch with him?

MW: Yes.

WC: Would that have been on the board or—

MW: On the board and membership throughout the community, because there was a great debate: what should a chamber of commerce be? Should it just bring in new business till its running out of our ears, or should it be something else? There were a lot of people who felt that the chamber way exceeded its rights and authority, and those people, many of them, of course, could pinpoint—Hal Sieber was the whipping boy.

WC: Sure. Do you remember particular episodes where that opposition would have become great?

MW: No. No, I don’t.

WC: Do you remember when the chamber gave George Simkins a—its annual award one year? Would that—do you recall whether that was a matter of controversy?

MW: I don't know.

WC: I just would have thought it would have been.

MW: I'm sure it was. I would think it was. But just a simple award to the president of Guilford could sometimes be a controversy. But I'm sure that probably was. But I didn’t—I wasn't involved in it. But you know the board meetings at the chamber were really feisty, many of them. What would happen, you would go to a board meeting and it would be a very mundane thing, so it wouldn't be feisty, and maybe two in a row would be like that. And then the third one would really be something that happened or something that was going to happen, all of a sudden—and there were strong people. Of course, there were—at that time, by the time I came on the board, there were blacks and women and other people that had joined the chamber, or some that maybe weren't even members that were on the board, so you had a wider viewpoint. But I felt that Bill Little and Hal Sieber and John Paramore[?], whoever was responsible, tried to keep a balance on the chamber board. I felt that was one of the successes, that they did keep a balance.

WC: So that everyone would have some representation.

MW: Yes.

WC: Would you mind saying who some of the people were who were opposed? And I wouldn't cite you on this, but I might be able to support it somewhere else. Who were some of the people who would be most against what Sieber and Lineberry and yourself might be for?

MW: I just don't know. Probably—I don't know. I can't think of who it would be. There were so many members on the board. There were about—seems like there were about twenty-five or thirty and it changed. It rotated every couple of years, [like they do now?]

WC: But there wouldn't be one particular person or two or three who would be leading a campaign against Sieber or against the departure of the chamber from traditional—

MW: No, I don't remember any one person that would stand out in that area. It was basically people like myself that would speak their mind, but yet were going to go with the majority vote. It was a [unclear] majority vote principle.

WC: So that when you talk about these feisty meetings, the factions wouldn't necessarily be so congealed that you would immediately know who they were?

MW: No. You might know who they were. Certainly you could take an issue and you could say because you would have someone on the floor, it stands to reason that this group of people won't like this, but there wasn't any—no, it was not congealed and there were not that many issues that it could really become, in my opinion, fractionalized. I didn't feel that way.

WC: Were you involved in discussions about the beginning of these cell groups?

MW: I don't—No, I don't think I was. I think that I had just got involved in the chamber when—right after the cell period of community involvement got started.

WC: In addition to renting these units of housing that you had, was there a program of building new interracial housing or housing which would located in places which would make it susceptible to being interracial for yourself or people you worked with?

MW: No. No, there wasn't. Housing is just too complex for that. And I think there is a great divergence of opinion on that right now. How do you integrate housing by location? So, no, there was no emphasis on that.

WC: From what I understand, you've been able to maintain fairly well-integrated housing. Is that not true? I mean you don't have—your housing units have not reached the tipping point where they have either gone all-white or all-black.

MW: That's right.

WC: How has that happened?

MW: Well, a couple—we have—we manage housing outside of Greensboro. And two projects have tipped. Maybe they would have been all one race anyway. Several projects are outstanding in that they have a significant amount of white and significant amount of black. Other projects might have just five or ten percent black, so that it's integrated but it's not significant.

Basically, we don't worry about it too much anymore. At the time we worried a lot about it. We worried—first we had the business concern. If we can rent to whites and blacks, we have 100% of the market, and so we have a better chance to achieve full occupancy. So there's a really good business reason to be integrated. If we tip and go all one way or the other, then we have lost a significant share of the market. So there is a real business reason not to tip.

Beyond that, there was a real reason not to, in that we had not gotten into busing or anything. The school systems, the neighborhoods, we could have an impact. By being poor managers, we could have an impact on many people that were very innocent, and because we happened to own a large piece of property, we affected their lives greatly. And that was something that we would like to have avoided, and were able to avoid. A lot of ways we did it, we would—quite frankly, if we got too many whites, we would go out and try to get blacks. If we got too many blacks, we wouldn't take any more until we got whites. And if within a complex if we had a building with eight apartments, we would make sure that six of those didn't get black first. Because first we were going from white to black; we didn't want segregation within the project. For about a year we had a policy internally that if—this was when we were building up—that when a black family moved out of an apartment, we'd put a white family in it. When a white family moved out, we'd try to put a black family in. The theory there was that we didn't want any area thought of as being white or black. We wanted to totally mix it and keep it mixed. I think that one thing probably helped us more than anything else.

But the big thing that people still don't realize and particularly didn't realize then: a black is not going to rush over to an all-white area to live. Nobody wants to be segregated against. Nobody wants to be an outcast. There are strong ties to the church and to the friends and what have you for all of us, and we're going to try to live in that locality. It's been thought if you don't build any more housing in predominately black areas that you'll get segregation. Well, eventually you might, because the poor blacks just don't have any place to live. Their family just doesn't have a choice. But many people, if they had their choice, would still take the segregated situation.

WC: Yeah. Did you have particular ways of finding, of recruiting, families? Were there—

MW: No, we just ran an ad in the newspaper.

WC: Would you run ads in the *[Carolina] Peacemaker* as well as the *Daily News*, or just the *Daily News*?

MW: No, we didn't—we might have run ads in the *Peacemaker* for a while, but not for long. What we generally run in the *Daily News* is an ad. We have one ad, a very small ad. And we have a year's rate, and we just change the copy. Maybe if we get a few two bedroom

apartments, we'd put two bedroom apartments, or we would—one week we would feature one area and the next week we would feature another area. But it's just sort of—the need for housing was so great at the time that you really didn't have to go out. But the people knew.

WC: Now, the kind of housing you're talking about I assume would be middle-class housing?

MW: Right, yes.

WC: So you were speaking—or you were dealing with professional or business clientele in terms of the class of people you would be renting to?

MW: No, we were dealing with that clientele as well as the blue collar worker that made up—at that time probably made six, seven, eight thousand dollars a year. Now we make ten to twelve. So it was moderate middle and upper middle.

WC: Did your housing units have tenants associations or things like that in which they would—

MW: No.

WC: So there would not be the occasion for the integrated clientele to come together in any kind of collective community group?

MW: Right.

WC: I see. There was one—correct me if I am wrong. I remember reading somewhere, I think, that you and Hal Sieber were attending a meeting or were going to attend a meeting—it may have been at St. James Presbyterian Church, maybe it was somewhere else—and it involved, I think, a tenant strike, and you were asked to leave. Do you recall that?

MW: Yeah. Oh, yes.

WC: Can you tell me what the circumstances about that were?

MW: I know what church it was. It was Reverend [Frank] Williams' church out on, I believe, Hope's Chapel Road.

WC: Mt. Zion Baptist?

MW: Yeah. And it seems like it was GAPP [Greensboro Association of Poor People] who was having the meeting. And it was something—I don't remember what the issue was, but it was an issue that the Human Relations Commission and the chamber, but particularly the Human Relations Commission, should be involved in. And I was chairman of the housing committee. And so there were notices about the meeting, and Hal and myself went and we were asked to leave the meeting, or I was. And Hal left, and I think some other people left as a result.

WC: You were asked to leave. Was that because you were white or because you were identified with downtown or what?

MW: I think I was white and I was identified with—I was just a honky. I was just white. That was it. I was not part of the radical movement.

WC: Was that the only time that kind of thing happened, or was there a series of things like that?

MW: Well, there were one or two of them. That was the most—that was probably the toughest situation. It wasn't comfortable. Hal Sieber was in those situations all the time. The man has got some guts.

I went to another tenants' strike out in east Greensboro behind the WFMY-TV station and got the landlord to go. I don't remember if I got him to go or if he was going anyway, but he and his son went. And we were able to resolve it very well. It was a difficult situation. He had—the housing had been mill housing that Cone Mills had sold him. He had bought the housing for the land. He bought it at a time that Greensboro—it was built at a time when we didn't have any building codes or very lenient building codes. He bought it at a time that there were no particularly strong code enforcement, if the codes were even on the books. So he was holding it for the land. The people had been there many, many years and they were paying—as I remember, they were paying forty-five dollars a month or something.

It was very sub-standard housing. And he wanted to go up five dollars a month on the rent. The tenants wanted—didn't want him to go up. That's really what they didn't want. The city was sitting in a position of maybe coming in and condemning the houses unless he made a great deal of repairs. He would never make the repairs. He would just give the people eviction notices and tear it down. Most of these people were very old. They had lived there and they had worked for Cone Mills. Some of them had lived there thirty years or longer, and they would have been dislocated. And so it got settled by—he agreed not to put in any rent increase, and he been following a policy of when a family moved out, he would not re-rent that structure, he would demolish it. I thought it was a

very—I thought it was well done on both sides. It was very, very rewarding to be in on that one.

And it was a point that—probably one thing that I didn't enjoy about being involved with things like the Human Relations Commission and the chamber: the public, the press, and general consensus of opinion was if this is sub-standard housing, then it ought to be brought up to standard or it ought to be done away with. And these poor people would have suffered greatly. I mean, you know, there was no one day or quick solution to a problem that had been building up in that community for thirty of forty years, and our way of life had changed so fast that these people hadn't exactly changed. It was such a common sense thing for me to see that, and yet very few people saw it.

WC: Was GAPP involved in that?

MW: Yeah, GAPP was involved.

WC: So you had some negotiations or contact with the people from GAPP?

MW: Yeah. Not much, but a little.

WC: What was your perception of those people like Tom Bailey, Nelson Johnson?

MW: Well, I felt—I wondered many times if I were black, would I have been a member of GAPP and a leader of it. I probably would have. So I could understand to a great degree their frustration. I thought Nelson Johnson was a masterful leader. I really—I don't know what he does now—but I really wished at the time that he had had a little less bitterness and a little more trust and could have had a little bit longer perspective. And, of course, probably he wished the opposite about me. But I respected his leadership ability, and even though I thought he—I did not agree with what he was trying to do or the principles of GAPP, I did think he was a pretty square person and straight-shooter. I did not like Tom Bailey. I felt that he was probably looking after himself, and that was a big deal and a lot of ego involved, and I didn't think much of him.

WC: Johnson—did you get the impression that Johnson was a separatist, black separatist, or did he want to unite, as much as possible, black and white people together?

MW: I guess I had—I had more—I didn't have either one of his views. I wasn't sure. I felt that he probably felt that the black community could not really achieve any improvement unless they just tore the system totally apart. That was the way I perceived his view. I didn't perceive it ultimately of being separate or integrated. I perceived it of helping the

black community in that the only way to help it was that you could not change from within so you just had to totally tear it apart.

WC: I think he was a masterful leader.

MW: What does he do now, do you know?

WC: I'm not sure. I haven't talked to him yet. I want to.

MW: I'm sure that will be interesting. He one's of the—he would be a fantastic trial lawyer. He was good on his feet. He was good in front of an audience.

WC: A very good writer, too. I mean some of things he's written are powerful and persuasive, basically. The reason I asked the question about separatism was because there are some things that GAPP put out which were not signed, and most of the things I think he wrote were signed by himself. But some things that came out were very clearly separatist, but not his things. I just wondered whether they may have been written by other people, and I thought you might have—

MW: I didn't have that view of him. There were a number of good black leaders at the time that held different viewpoints. I'm trying to think of—my daughter was in school with his son and daughter. What's his name? They have asked me about him.

WC: Walter Johnson?

MW: No, I think Walter's a very smart, excellent. I have a lot of respect for Walter. Walter's—I think Walter and Henry Frye both are very pragmatic and have done—have used their skills in the very best way.

WC: [John Marshall] Stevenson [now Kilimanjaro]?

MW: No. I see him every now and then. Maybe I'll think of it.

WC: Yeah. Were you children involved in the—I guess they probably were—in the busing when it came about? What was your perception of how that issue was handled and when you saw Hal Sieber operate during that period, as well as the chamber and the school board?

MW: I think the school board and the chamber and Hal did a great job. I think they did a fantastic job. I never—as an individual, I never could decide whether busing was the best

way to achieve integration or not. I still don't. I probably think not. I probably thought not at the time. It was one thing that I never had a clear-cut opinion on. At times I thought I had a clear-cut opinion, but within a year or six months afterwards I would maybe have a different opinion or I would always have good arguments both ways.

[End of Tape 1, Side A—Begin Tape 1, Side B]

WC: My impression of the school board in the middle sixties is that it was dragging its feet and there was a strong lack of leadership there. And then when Lineberry became chairman and really, with the chamber, got behind this thing, that there was leadership there. Does that correspond to your perception as you were—during these years from ‘64-‘69—

MW: That does. I don't have such a clear perception of pre-‘69 because I was so—I wasn't interested. Or if I was interested, I wasn't paying attention to what the school board was doing and what was happening with the school situation. I didn't have children in school. I was busy working as hard as I could and involved in a lot of other things. And the school issue was just one that I didn't really give a great deal of thought. So I don't have an opinion. But I did have the opinion that once we got into the busing and Al Lineberry got on the board—I believe Henry and then Walter or maybe Cecil Bishop—that they really did a masterful job, and they did a masterful job, I think, with the white community. Probably I can judge what they did for the white community better than with the black.

But I think that was sort of a carryover, because I think the real thrust, as I saw the thrust, of civil liberties and race relations really started when Allen Wannamaker was president of the chamber of commerce. And he was very good. He was a man that was just well known and well respected and could go anywhere in the city, and he just put it right out on the line. And Al Lineberry comes right behind him and does the same thing. They were such a one-two shot that—and it was difficult for anyone—they were—it wasn't that they were so persuasive, it’s just that they were so sincere and had so much patience and so much conviction that you could not come away—no matter who you were, you could not come away without respecting them and respecting their right to their position. I think that swayed a lot of people. I think for the first time, a lot of people, a little piece of their mind moved over and said, “Maybe as a Southerner, or maybe as an American, and maybe as just a person, I can accept some integration. Maybe it’s socially acceptable to accept some integration.” I think that’s—I think they unlocked a lot of that.

WC: So those two in tandem, as opposed to—I'm not trying to put Marion Folger[?] in a different category, but I guess he probably would have been compared to—I think he was the immediate person before Wannamaker, I think.

MW: Okay, now Marion probably was just as effective. You see, I wasn't aware. I wasn't involved and aware. Allen was the first time that I was involved and aware, so probably Marion did as much. This just goes back. Because he certainly did a lot from every time I've known it, he's done very, very much.

WC: Just one or two more questions. Is it—has it been your perception that, either in the chamber or through the community as a whole, that places like Burlington [Industries] or Cone have offered leadership in this area, or have they pretty much been—gone with whatever the community sentiment was?

MW: I think—[pause] I think they've offered leadership. I think that different employees would become involved with the chamber or with other groups and they would really not be speaking for the corporation but for themselves. For instance, Jack Elam has been—and I'm sure you have run into his name—has been quite in front of the whole business. Cone probably was the biggest financial contributor to the chamber—I'm not sure—during that period. I think they might have been. Yet I also have the impression that some of the officials of Cone felt that the chamber went too far. So that you get one side of that company saying, "I disagree with what we're doing." You get other people in the company who are the absolute leaders.

I think the same thing in Burlington. I think the same thing in Jefferson [Standard Life Insurance Company], because Allen Wannamaker—the company he works for is controlled and owned by Jefferson Standard, and you have some very conservative voices there. You did at that time. Yet they didn't to my knowledge ever quit supporting the chamber. That's why I go back to the thing that some of the meetings were really feisty, but people just weren't saying, "Okay, I'm going to take my marbles and leave." They were staying with it even though it went against them.

WC: Have you had much to do with Jimmie Barber or Vance Chavis?

MW: Yes. Not much, but I know both of them. I think Vance was on the Human Relations Commission—

WC: Yeah, I think he was.

MW: —when I went on. I have high regard for both of them.

WC: One of the problems I think with the school board is that for a while, there was a sense that the black members of the school board, or the black member, Dr. [George] Evans,

was not really speaking out very much. I didn't know if the same thing had—whether you would see the same thing as being true of the city council members or even of Evans.

WC: I don't know Evans. That was always involved in it, because Vance Chavis and Jimmie Barber certainly appealed to—the black community is just as fragment as the white, and that was another problem at that time. Whites—probably it was a problem on both sides. Whites said, well, like all blacks thought exactly the same thing. And I'm sure, like when I got invited to leave the meeting, that, you know, I was white so I thought we all thought exactly the same thing and could not be trusted. I think that was—Jimmie Barber was able to lead a segment—or is able to lead a segment of the black community. He doesn't speak to the whole community. Walter Johnson and Henry Frye probably come closer because of the respect that they demand. Nelson Johnson—in the white and the black side you had an awful lot of leaders, and each one of them had their own constituency so to speak, but yet through different channels they were communicating. I think Jimmie Barber has been a very effective leader. He's a very nice person. He's a low-key type, but I think he has been very effective.

[End of Interview]
[Redacted notes by Chafe on off the record comments made by Weaver.]