GREENSBORO VOICES/GREENSBORO PUBLIC LIBRARY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: Carson Bain

INTERVIEWER: Eugene E. Pfaff, Jr.

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EUGENE PFAFF: Today's guest is Carson Bain, former city councilman, mayor, and current president of the Bain Oil Company. Mr. Bain was born in Lexington, North Carolina, in 1917, has been a resident of Greensboro since 1932, has been a member of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners, of which body he was president in 1954, city councilman from 1966 to '69, and mayor of Greensboro from 1967 to '69. Mr. Bain was a life member of the Greensboro Jaycees the year it was voted the most outstanding Jaycee club in the world. Mr. Bain and his wife, the former Susie Winston, have three children and reside in Greensboro.

I'd like to welcome you to our oral history program, Mr. Bain. And I'd like to begin by asking you, when did your family move to Greensboro?

CARSON BAIN: We moved to Greensboro from High Point in 1932. I attended Grimsley High School here, which was--at that point was the only high school in Greensboro other than Dudley. And we had separate school systems at the time, so it was known as Senior High School, because it was the senior high school for Greensboro.

EP: And what was your father's occupation?

CB: My father was in the insurance business.

EP: What memories do you have of Greensboro during the Depression?

CB: Well, I think very fondly I remember a lot of things that we look back on. I tell my children about this and other people that are your age that fail to comprehend or even believe the history of this.

But one of my earliest recollections were the old streetcars that used to go from downtown Greensboro out to what we called the Pomona area and turn around out there. This was the old track streetcars, before we had the trackless trolleys in the Duke Power days. Also I remember the ice wagons that were pulled around with a horse. And the kids

used to run on the back of them in our neighborhood and get chips of ice in hot summertime, such as July and August where the ice--long before the days of complete refrigeration, the electronic age, which we're in now.

Also, I remember the Guilford County issued scrip so that we could go to the store. And Guilford County government was in its doldrums at that time. And they issued scrip, paper scrip, twenty-five, fifty cent, up to five, ten dollar pieces of scrip, which I have some of today that actually was--they paid their employees with scrip, which was recognized and accepted among our corporate communities, among our retail merchants. One of the things that is tragic, and I don't think would happen in our government of today, because we have safeguards against this--but the saddest thing I guess I saw was people coming on Monday mornings, literally going through your garbage looking for food. This was one of the saddest things we used to see. And I tell my kids this, and they don't believe it, but it actually happened. I've seen people actually literally going through your garbage. We'd have people come to your back door and want to do some kind of work for food. These things actually happened. They're not just fiction of anybody's imagination.

EP: What was the mood of the people? And, and you would have come to Greensboro at the height of the Depression. Did you notice a change and, perhaps through the effect of New Deal programs--

CB: I noticed an immediate change. For example, I used to work in an A&P store down on Spring Garden Street. And the average--when the Roosevelt administration took over, and immediately the NRA [National Recovery Administration] took effect, the minimum wage that anyone could be paid was twelve dollars and a half a week. Now that sounds like a small amount. But when you raise a working man's salary from nine dollars a week to twelve and a half, like a 25 percent increase in pay, I saw immediate effect of, of a look for people having a little more faith in the future. And this came about in that era, in the '32 to '34 section. And I saw immediately a, a difference in people. I saw people with a glint in their eye where there was a "hang-down" sadness. And I saw this, this change. And it was almost overnight.

EP: Are there any parts of Greensboro that were materially affected by WPA and other New Deal programs? I know, for instance, several buildings were built--campus of what was then Woman's College.

CB: Yes. We got some governmental structures that way. I think one of the biggest areas that, that was noticeable to me as a young person was recreational areas, such as the High Point Lake and City Park, which is adjacent to us, which was used, perhaps, by as many Greensboro citizens as it was by people in High Point. This was completely a WPA

project. At that time, Greensboro didn't have any kind of a swimming facility of this nature. And I enjoyed this perhaps as much as any citizen of High Point. And this was completely a WPA project. And it's still in existence today, and it's still widely heralded and widely used.

EP: I'd like to turn now, if I may, about to your career as a businessman here in Greensboro. What was your first position in business here in Greensboro?

CB: Well, I don't know whether you'd call my, my first venture into business a position or not. I used to work in the A&P stores on Saturday when I first got out of high school. And I'd go out on a bicycle and solicit oil business. This was in the days when people used to heat with little tiny stoves, or they'd have one heater in the middle of the room, and everybody would huddle around it before the days of the masses of people had central systems, and a great number of people used to cook with an old kerosene cook stove. So what I used to do was go from door to door--we called it the Home Kero Service--and solicit people's cooking oil business. In other words, they'd have a five-gallon can, and you'd sell it a quart to five gallons. Five gallons was a big sale in those days. And actually, there were literally whole sections of Greensboro--I would say three-fourths of the sections of Greensboro--this was before our oil/electric age--that would either cook and heat with these old cook stoves in the kitchen.

And the being of the economic plight that most of our nation was in at this time, you'd huddle around the same place you cooked with for your warmth and also your baths, primarily in the poor sections of the city. So this was my first venture and, perhaps, I might say my life's venture, because I continued to stay in this type of business which I'm in today.

EP: As a businessman in Greensboro, what--how have you seen business grow and develop and the business community expand in Greensboro?

CB: Well, I think I've seen it grow completely, and I think we've almost tripled our population since I moved here. In fact, I know we have.
We were in the early, in the early thirties we were somewhere in the neighborhood of forty-eight thousand people. Today we're approaching sixty to seventy thousand--a hundred and sixty to a hundred and seventy thousand people--which has almost tripled our population.

I've seen them working actively on the board and in the Chamber of Commerce and in the Junior Chamber of Commerce. I've seen industrial development through government, through planned orderly growth, through housing, through many facets of local government, as well as through our civic endeavors. I've seen industrial parks come

and develop and are still here. I've seen regional shopping centers come and develop and are still here and are still growing.

I've seen our banking community expand from one branch to several branches so that service could be rendered to people throughout the financial community, rather than have everybody come to the downtown area. I've seen the downtown completely almost exhaust itself of its retail merchants. And they go into regional shopping centers. And I've seen the downtown go from a regional shopping center, or to an area shopping center, to a planned area primarily of offices and apartments and high-rise for the elderly.

All of these things have come about within the last twenty years in our Greensboro area. And I, I don't look at it with alarm at all. I think it's good growth. I think it's been planned growth, and I think it will continue to grow.

EP: You were elected to the [Greensboro] City Council in 1966 and then elected mayor 1967. What were the major issues that occurred during your tenure on the council and as mayor?

CB: In the--in the soaring sixties, as we liked to call them, one of the biggest things I think we had was a, a revolution of our races. Greensboro, for example, was, perhaps, the motivation that started the nation and, in particular, the South, thinking about our brothers of the brown or black skin.

We saw this coming. We knew that the tension was at its height. We knew that through our universities that we--this is our university students that we have at five colleges and universities, that we house in our city limits of Greensboro, or our adjacent city limits--that we knew tension was foremost in this area. We knew that things had to be done. We didn't resist them. We did our best to try to cope with them and to meet the situation head on.

And the way we defined this--we had all of our city employees attend sensitivity sessions, letting them know that all people bled when they were cut, and that all people were human beings. And that we tried to teach them, in our work, that we worked with people and we don't draw lines of this nature. I think this helped greatly.

And I think this reflected in our corporate community as well, because I think government, perhaps, should set the example and not abuse it. So I think one of the highlights that we had was to try to solve a racial problem.

This was during the era of Martin Luther King's highlights. And this was during my tenure as mayor, Martin Luther King was slain. And we had some tension in Greensboro that was perhaps uncontrollable, and I could understand it. So we had to call a curfew, for the first time in our city, for three days. And this was a dramatic period in our history.

And the reason we did, we thought there needed to be a cooling-off period for the races to sit back and think, where, where do we go from here? And why take it out on our

people here for something that happened in Tennessee that we didn't have anything to do with, weren't a part of, nor did we condone it.

EP: Who were some of the people, particularly in the black community, you worked with?

CB: I worked with the Reverend Cecil Bishop, who was a minister here of Mount Zion Church, who is no longer here. I worked with Otis Hairston, who serves with me very diligently on our city school board at this time in history. I worked with Dr. George Simkins, who headed up the NAACP. I worked with Dr. Lewis Dowdy, who was president of, and still president, of the [North Carolina] A&T State University.

I worked with many people that are in the cloth in the black communities as well as the white communities. We had our ministerial association that I addressed. I talked with every president of every college here and addressed the student body of the five universities here and told them the direction that Greensboro and the city planned to take and asked them to join with me. I talked to militant blacks at A&T in private sessions, as well as public sessions, through city clubs.

And I felt, as head of our city, this was all with the concurrence of our city council. They had vested me with the authority some months previously during emergencies, at my own discretion and within the wisdom that I had, to call a curfew when I felt it necessary, because we, we could see this coming. So it wasn't just an accident, but we planned it. We had a chain of command. And the city council worked very diligently with me at that time in carrying out all of these things. We came through it, I think. I was sorry that it had to happen. But we came through it.

This was the days when high school—not high school, but colleges--wanted to march. And they did march. And they carried on to represent their viewpoints to the community. And this was an historic period in the time of Greensboro. We came through it, I think, unscathed. And I think the results of it is, Greensboro became a better community. It became a more understanding community. And I think we set some good examples for the nation.

EP: Were there much incidence of violence, or was it kept to a minimum?

CB: Well, we had some pretty good instance of violence. We had actually people shooting, and actually did shoot police officers. None were killed, thank God. We had window lights broken in the downtown area during some of the marches. And this is the reason I called the curfew, because we wouldn't tolerate it.

Although I think I'm trying to be understanding--I tried to be understanding during this time--I, I couldn't accept violence. I couldn't accept disobedience to laws and to order. And that's just the reason we had a curfew, which I considered a real good time.

We closed the state university here and sent the students home early for Easter. By the time we got back, minds did prevail over violence--cooler minds. And we had no incident after that.

EP: I'd like to pursue some other areas of your administration, such as the redevelopment program.

CB: Well, the redevelopment program started, actually, before my administration. But I certainly--this was through federal grants, where we would go into areas and try to clean up unsightly, as well as unlivable, housing areas of Greensboro.

And I'm proud to say that, as of this sitting, Greensboro doesn't have the shotgun type of filth and housing that we had in those areas. And thanks to the leadership in this community, as well as the financial assistance through the federal government, we have open housing, I think, in Greensboro to a degree. It's still controlled a lot more by finances than it is by philosophy. And I think anyone can buy a home in any area of Greensboro today that they choose to, regardless of race or color. And I think it depends primarily on financing.

We've cleaned out, and did clean out, a lot of streams and ditches. And at this time, to show you the real working togetherness of our Chamber of Commerce, our Junior Chamber of Commerce and our civic programs, we started a City Beautiful program in this time. It initiated through the Chamber of Commerce and is now a part, an integral part, of city government in Greensboro that encourages homeowners as well as businesses to clean up and fix up and, and make Greensboro the beautiful city that it's represented to people who visit us.

And I think through the housing area we're getting better living conditions to our citizens, and we gave motivation for those who own homes to keep them that way. And the results of it is, when I have visitors come to our city today--and this just happened recently--that they say how clean, how beautiful this city is and how clean it is. Well, it wasn't a happenstance. It was planned by many civic organizations in this community, as well as government.

EP: You mentioned several city visitors. Who were some of the more outstanding people who visited?

CB: Well, we had Mickey Spillane at, at the height of some of his writings visit with me. I had met him earlier in the summer, and he visited with our police department when the word "mace" was first introduced in the police program and was predominant on some of your fiction writers and the--and the TV news. We had Mrs. Edward R. Murrow visit with us. And she helped dedicate Murrow Boulevard, which is so-named today, on the

corner of Friendly and Murrow, along with Joe Hunt, who was at that time chairman of our Highway Commission or speaker of the House of Representatives in Raleigh.

We had members from--that were on A&T staff--that were students at A&T from Ghana visit us. We had members from all, oh, so many that I can't, can't recall all of them. Those two are two of the most interesting people that I met during--we had the, the mayor and his wife from Montbeliard, France, which was our sister city. And we gave them--we had Lord and Lady Guilford from, from England come, after which Guilford County was named during our sesquicentennial highlights. They visited with us, and we gave them a tour, sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce of Greensboro, throughout Greensboro and Guilford County. Those are among a few of the people that, that were--during my tenure as mayor--who visited with us.

EP: Now, Greensboro's been very successful, perhaps unusually so, with growth through successful bond programs. And I'd like to mention, or discuss, and ask you questions about several of these bond programs that resulted in growth. And one would be the bond resulting in the governmental complex.

CB: All right. We had some opposition to the bonds program that developed--that proved to be very successful. We needed very badly a, a new governmental center.

We were housed in an old--what was the old *Record* building on Greene Street. This was a building that had been purchased, and it was renovated. And the old City Hall building, which was built for an era back in the twenties, that no longer served its purpose.

We had more employees than could get in and out of this. We had people scattered all over this community. And it was most difficult to try to control sixteen or seventeen hundred people from about ten different locations to see who worked and who didn't, to see that you got the most efficiency out of the people who were paid to work.

And this became increasingly bad. So we had to actually literally sell this program to the citizens of our community, because it met quite a bit of resistance. Any time you talk about spending seventeen million dollars in a community, you're going to meet resistance, and you should. And unless you can justify it, perhaps it shouldn't pass.

So we formed a bond task force headed by people like Mack Arnold, Sr., and our present mayor, Jim Melvin, Joe Ruzicka, and people of this nature, Arnold Schiffman, who still maintains a place downtown Greensboro and believes it in very vitally. And we, and we formed this task force with a fellow named Joe Gossart[?], who at that time was working with Pilot Life Insurance Company and who was an expert in housing.

These people formed a bond task force committee and a governmental advisory committee to the mayor. And they answered to me and met with me periodically to help us build and sell these bonds. And, and actually after the bonds were sold, they acted as

an advisory committee to us to meet with our architect to see that we had the best possible building for the money that we were spending.

And we met resistance from the black community on this. And they voted overwhelmingly against it, because I think there was a misunderstanding in this. But later on, we became—we, we had discussions and solved our problems.

But we, we were able to be successful in passing this bond issue overwhelmingly. The results of it, you have a beautiful city/county building today and a new courthouse where we have it in downtown Greensboro.

EP: And construction began on what--in what year?

CB: Well, actually, construction--it all depends on whether you're talking about pouring the first mortar or drawing the first plan. The construction of the plan by a fellow named Catalano, who was the architect for the job, actually started drawing it. But I don't think construction actually started till the latter part of my tenure as mayor, somewhere in the later part of '69.

EP: And was completed during what year?

CB: I don't think it was completed till '71. It took about two years to complete this building.

EP: Turning to another bond issue, the expansion of the Coliseum. Was there much resistance to that?

CB: Oh, yes. There's some people that will resist any kind of recreational things. And they didn't think it was necessary to have an expansion program for the [Greensboro] Coliseum. We had a coliseum that was limited in its seating. It was limited in its facilities. We needed an exhibition hall, so that corporate citizens could display their wares, so that it would attract the conventions here. So we asked and joined with the Chamber of Commerce, the Junior Chamber of Commerce and our other civic leaders. And we made talks all over the community. I say "we"—that's the total leadership in the community made talks and tried to tell people what this was all about. This passed overwhelmingly.

The result of it is we have the best coliseum between New York and Miami. We have an exhibition hall that corporate citizens can go out and have trade shows and develop these. And it encourages industrial expansion for our community. It gives an insight to people who live here and who live in the region to come to Greensboro. We've had public recognition nationally because of our coliseum.

This is the place, you remember, where "Tricky Dick" hurt his knee. He was then president of the United States; he came to campaign here. We've had, we've had a lot of national things here that we would have never had.

For example, ice hockey was introduced to the South at this coliseum. We've had--you remember when the UCLA/North Carolina State University played basketball. And this was one of the greatest things that ever happened to Greensboro, when, when North Carolina State University became champions of the nation when they beat UCLA here--standing room only.

We had our basketball--the Big Four [Tournament]. We had the Atlantic Coast Conference. We could have never had without the expansion of this coliseum. And I hope the people who voted for it can recognize this and note that this, and this alone, made it possible for Greensboro to grow in this area.

EP: Now, under its original construction, there were several sites that were considered downtown. And one was over on Lindsay Street, another was where the Sears and Roebuck retail store was for many years.

CB: Yes, that's right.

EP: Do you think that that kind of complex would have been possible if it had been built in the downtown area, and would that have perhaps prevented the decline of the downtown area?

CB: Absolutely not. Because I base this on what I've seen. You know, I've visited Detroit, and I've seen their governmental complex and their coliseum that far surpassed ours in cost. The, the, the real thing--for example, we had a site over close to the *Daily News*, old *Daily News* building on Forbis Street that was presented to us. I worked with Mr. W. H. Sullivan Sr. at the time. And one of the, one of the citizens who never did get recognition for the real start of this coliseum was Mr. George Perring.

He saw the [unclear] and raised the first million dollars that--out of voluntary and corporate money--and almost did it single-handedly. And I don't think anybody ever recognized him for it. But he did it, and I happen to know it, single-handedly.

And then Mr. Perring and W. H. Sullivan headed up the treasury for this community. And we tried to sell this bond issue to people all over the community. It took us about ten years to find a location. And people didn't think it would ever come about.

But actually, this delay really was, perhaps, one of the greatest things historically to happen, because we couldn't have built the coliseum in a better place than it now is. And perhaps it was wise--and we didn't know it at the time--that it wasn't passed.

EP: The third bond issue that I wanted to mention was the one concerning the county schools, and specifically, the buildings and the development of career education. What was your input into that?

CB: Well, I was chairman of the bond committee that--for Guilford County, as well as Greensboro, to try to sell a three-hundred-million-dollar bond issue that the state of North Carolina was presenting to the people of the state, of which Greensboro and Guilford County was a great part when it comes to elections and voting--as well as Mecklenburg in Charlotte. We had a bond task force started.

A young fellow by the name of George Seay, who headed up community relations for the city of Greensboro at one time, and, and then was, at that time, was an assistant county manager for Guilford County, he and I got together and formed a task force for this. And we incorporated people throughout High Point, Greensboro, and rural Guilford. And we overwhelmingly sold a bond issue to these people, and it passed.

And the results of it is, we have, we are in the process today--this is 1977--of building a career education center that will cost some five million dollars on eleven acres of land in downtown Greensboro that will give a high school student the opportunity to, to have a career education if he wants to pursue it beyond the high school level. We're teaching the arts such as music and drama, et cetera, and have an art center incorporated within this. We're teaching horticulture, which will have a greenhouse.

We also have a place for that student who is a high school dropout, called the "Optional School," where he or she may go and pursue her education further. We also have within this career education center an occupational staff that teaches a trade to that student who does not plan to pursue his education beyond the high school level.
To me, this will be the greatest thing that ever happened in our city and county. I, I told many people in making talks throughout our county--and Guilford County and Greensboro has always overwhelmingly supported at this city bond issues for education. And I honestly have never seen a city or a county go broke over educating its people.

EP: What--concerning pursuing public education in Greensboro--what positive or maybe, perhaps, even negative things have you seen about the progress and the movement of education in Greensboro?

CB: Well, we've had some great changes. And I think historically, perhaps, in the South, Greensboro led the way in when we--when busing was an issue, Greensboro became a court-ordered school district, which said to this, you must integrate your schools.

Since our housing pattern at that time had not developed to the point that we had scattered site housing or we had black people living in white neighborhoods and vice versa, then most of our schools were predominantly white or predominantly black. In

order to achieve racial integration, the courts compelled the city school board to bus students from one neighborhood to another in order to achieve racial integration.

We discovered this, and I primarily, being on the school board, discovered it faster than a lot of our citizenry did, that although we said we had separate but equal schools, we did not have equal schools. We had separate schools.

We found out that we had two school systems run within one school system, that we had a black school system and a white school system. We weren't teaching the same subjects. They weren't offered the same curriculum. They weren't offered the same physical facilities, believe it or not.

Today we're giving--we're, we're striving under a five-year plan that every student in every school in Greensboro will have the same educational opportunity, and, hopefully, the same physical facilities. This did not exist prior to cross-busing. This is one of the assets of it.

One of the negative things of it is that a generation of students will get less education, and are getting less education because a teacher has the most frustrating problem in the world when she has different intellectual levels in the same room, trying to reach a common denominator to motivate the superlative and activate the inferior intellectual student. And I'm not talking about race now. I'm talking about education. So it, it's a difficult problem. This is one of the hardest problems to solve.

Of course, neighborhood schools are, by far, the easiest to handle. We can educate the quickest and, perhaps, give a better education. But your people as a whole have suffered, and until such time as we have scattered housing or open housing to a point, we can't begin to go back to a neighborhood school.

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EP: I'd like to turn now to several areas that you were involved in, not necessarily in connection with the city council, but before turning to the city council, I would like to ask you, who are some of the council members with which you served during these years?

CB: Well, during my tenure I served with Forrest Campbell, who was our mayor pro tem. I served with Mary Seymour, who is now a representative in Raleigh. She was one of the second women to be elected to the, to the [Greensboro] City Council. I served with Bill Folk, who was a Jaycee friend of mine. Jack Elam, who later became, who was a city attorney at one time and who later followed me, became mayor. Bill Trotter, who, who was a past mayor and had served several--a couple of terms as mayor, and also served many times on the city council. I served with Mack Arnold, Jr.; I served with Roger Matthews. I hope I'm not leaving out anybody. I'm thinking ten years back. But all these people served diligently--and Walter Cockerham, who served with us during this tenure

of office. I think, I think that gets most of the people that we served with during this tenure of office.

EP: I see. Well, at this point I'd like to ask you about one service that was created in July of 1967, and that would be the gripe centers for the poor or economically underprivileged in, in Greensboro. And I'm thinking specifically of the individual you mentioned earlier, Mr. Cecil Bishop. Could you describe how this occurred?

CB: Well, Sarge Shriver was appointed by President Kennedy to head up the program of, of poverty and aid to people. He visited our city. He was one of our dignitaries that visited with us, I forgot to mention.

He came down, and we spent a weekend together. I met him at the airport, and we came down, and we visited some of the housing projects that we had. We went through these housing projects. And he, he applauded us on, on the upkeep of some of these.

And we tried to establish centers. And we actually tried to communicate more than we did establish, and know where people hurt, and to find out what we could do. And we would have--we had a two-hundred-people session from Morningside Homes, for example, with Sarge Shriver there, to ask them what we could do.

For example, we found out they were hurting in areas of public health, for example. They couldn't get bus transportation to go to the health center. We made efforts to try to move areas of the health center to the people rather than have the people go to them. So we had roving dental clinics established and things of this nature, which we were already doing in the schools--a TB [tuberculosis] clinic, for example, so we could identify early tuberculosis and try to eradicate it, and things of this nature.

Pockets of poverty exist today in Greensboro. And the majority of us, when we live in our own little field, didn't realize that, even though we were doing pretty well, that they existed elsewhere, see. So what we tried to do, we established neighborhood meetings of the city council to go out, and they are still being conducted by mayor [Jim] Melvin today, to go out into the community and find out where people hurt and what we could do in this respect.

Cecil Bishop aided greatly. And he later became a member of the Housing Authority, which is an appointment of the mayor, to identify things of this nature and to try to fill out these pockets and try to do something about it.

EP: Do you think that this aided materially in presenting the needs of the poor and facilitating these needs being met in Greensboro?

CB: Not right away, because this is a slow process. You see, finally you find out why people are poor. You find out some of them are poor because they don't have the education or the talent to do a better job.

So we had a federal grant. And we, we started a job program, where for six or eight weeks these poor people could be paid to go to school to learn how to do a trade. We formed an advisory committee with the industrial community, with personnel directors throughout our industry, such as Cone, Burlington, Blue Bell, people that hired the most people.

We tried to find and identify where they needed help the most. We tried to educate these poor people in these areas. We even had people to go on the street as street people to try to identify the guys that hang around the corners and so forth, to try to identify and try to solicit these people to come to this school to learn a trade of some kind.

We had at one time about two hundred people going to, to school at different hours. We paid them to go. And it was right next to the YMCA down here in Greensboro. And we paid these people through a federal grant. And we tried to do this. And it helped some, but not greatly, because it's a full-time job and it's an all-time job. And you'll have it tomorrow and the next day, but it, it, it at least identified some of the pockets of poverty we had and tried to identify some of the problems.

EP: Another major issue of controversy in Greensboro was the ward system. What was your opinion of the ward system?

CB: My opinion of the ward system then, as it is now, that any time you divide a people, you don't grow in the most orderly and in the best manner. I said then, and I'll say it now--that wards divide rich from poor, black from white, neighborhood from neighborhood. I think the best way for a city to grow is to grow together, not separately.

We had three straight election issues on the ward system, of which Greensboro overwhelmingly defended the at-large system, which we now have. And we rejected ward systems every time they've been presented.
I still maintain--and as long as I have a breath in my body I'll maintain--and I'll fight ward systems every time they bounce back. I don't think it's behind us by any means. We--it's like licking a dead horse, I guess. We've beat this issue three times, and I hope we'll continue to have an at-large system in Greensboro.

EP: What sort of things were you involved in that defeated the ward system?

CB: I think the best thing in order to, to, to, to show people what's good or bad is to give it exposure. So we, we had people talk all over the city and let them ask questions on the pluses and the minuses.

I know, the first one we had, I didn't have any help at all. The Chamber of Commerce was for a ward system. It looked like the press and the majority of people were saying, this is the way to go. And I didn't think it was, and I tried my best to turn it

around, and did turn it around. We defeated it. Now on my second and third go-round, after giving a little bit of exposure to what wards do in other cities, I think we got the Chamber of Commerce supported an at-large system in the last election that we had. And we defeated it again.

EP: Well, now, I know, of course, the ward system is very common in the larger urban areas in the North and Northeastern part of the country. Is it very prevalent in the South and Southeast?

CB: Well, in North Carolina we have many; High Point, for example, and Winston-Salem have had wards for years and years and years. And I use them as a shining example of why we don't need to have wards.

I think primarily the reason a lot of people here, especially in the black community, always supported wards, they thought that was the only way you could get a black man elected to the city council. Well, we proved it wrong, because we've had many blacks elected to the--under an at-large system--and you'll continue to have blacks elected under an at–large system when you present candidates that are capable and willing and sincerely want to do a job, I think the citizens of any community will elect them. And we, we've elected them here.

Wards have no real value except they give--I don't think a person really is any better because of where they live. And that's what wards say. You must live in a neighborhood in order to serve.

I don't want to serve a neighborhood. I want to serve my community. And this is the plus of, of not having a ward, that if a councilman is elected today, he serves the entire community. The entire community votes for him or rejects him. Under a ward system, only your neighbor votes for you, or your neighborhood. Then when you serve, you serve your neighborhood, because your, your debt of allegiance is to that neighborhood and not to the total city.

So when you slice a pie, you try to divide the money. And I think money should be spent where it's needed, not where an allegiance is. And I think this makes the best kind of government, and I hope we'll continue to have it in our city.

EP: Turning to another area of dealing with the unemployed or low income individuals, in January of 1968, the OIC [Opportunities Industrialization Centers] and Manpower Development Center turned their attention to these individuals. Could you describe these activities?

CB: Yes. Bobby Sullivan came down, and he was one of my guests. And we had many talks here. He originated--he was the origin of the OIC. He later became public relations with

General Motors. And he had many OIC centers throughout the nation. We wanted to know more about it, so we started one here.

And this was exactly what we were saying while ago. This Manpower Development Act was a federal act--the federal government, where you could show initiative and wanted to place money in a given community, would assist you financially in developing this manpower. And this is the way we tried to go about it. So we applied for it, and then used it over a period of two years until the money ran out.

EP: In other areas, you've been very active as private citizen and as a city councilman and mayor in a number of areas. And one of these is establishing a boarding home for children. What issues were involved here, and how successful was that?

CB: Well, nursing homes or boarding homes or anything else--through the Junior League and through the Junior Woman's Club. We've--nursing homes have been perhaps one of the greatest helps to poor people of anything, because the majority of working mothers who had small children found it difficult to, to have a job and leave their children unattended. So I think perhaps the United Community Services, more than any other area, have been instrumental in forming the Metropolitan Day Nursery, which was one of the first nurseries for poor people, which was a United Community Services effort. So that a working mother could leave her child or children there, and they would be attended and fed while she did her menial job, whatever it may be, to bring income home. Now this helped perhaps more than anything else.

Now, since then, many profession people have seen the good in this. The results of it is you have many all over our city that aren't sponsored by any civic group or anything, but it's a money-making project. And they have up to even three grades of school in some of them, where they, where they keep the children for working mothers so that they can receive an education. This is before you even had kindergartens in our school system.

EP: So it was ultimately successful. And you think that this has benefited —

CB: I think it continues to be. But don't give me any credit for it. I think the United Community Services deserves all the credit for it. It was an origin of this. I just kept it going. I served as president of the United Community Services. Now, I think I speak with knowledge in the fact that United Community Services is still doing a great job in this effort.

EP: Well, another issue which, with which you've been associated is the rural fire protection. What's involved in this area?

CB: Oh, well, rural fire protection actually has nothing to do with the city, other than the fact that city government and through our fire department--which I think is second to none in the nation--assists rural areas in establishing voluntary fire departments. This is county government primarily who, who gives them seed money to establish a rural fire department or a volunteer fire department. And these people work without pay. They serve diligently and, and help in preventing fires in rural areas of our county adjacent to our city.

Our city expertise in our city fire department go, go out and they give lectures and assist in any, in every way possible in the prevention of fire, as well as putting out fires. This is a great thing, I think. It shows city/county cooperation.

EP: Well, we've touched on, briefly, on the development of business and industry in Greensboro. I understand that you, as a member of the Jaycees, were connected with the development or the national, nationwide attention that was given to Blue Bell. Could you describe how this occurred?

CB: Oh, yeah. One of the most interesting things that we ever did in the Jaycees, I guess, we, we formed a convention committee. And we'd go to a national convention, whether it was in Miami or Chicago or San Francisco or wherever the case may be. And we tried to give the best exposure we could, not only to the North Carolina Jaycees but to the Greensboro Jaycees.

One of my earliest recollections was going to Mr. Ed Morris--at that time was, was president of Blue Bell--and telling him that we wanted to go to a national convention. If he had any trinkets or anything, we might give Greensboro some good exposure. So Mr. Morris had made for me a great big plywood board showing playsuits made of denim, work clothes made of denim, some of the novelties that, that Blue Bell was first coming out with.

I was able to come back and report to him that the women literally pulled these suits off the board, they were so fascinated with them--I mean, in areas like Colorado and, and Wyoming and places like that--it was in Chicago. In fact, this--we also went to Cone Mills, and Mr. Herman Cone Sr., who was living at the time, gave us a lot of these little denim bags for bobby pins and things that we gave out compliments of Greensboro City and Greensboro Jaycees. And we, we had such a good time. I remember one year in the Sherman Hotel, which was the national headquarters, Gene, for, for the Jaycees that year, that the next morning the Chicago paper had as its headline, "South marches through Sherman." [laughter] We thought this was a most interesting incident.

But I would say that the Jaycees have, more than any organization in the history of Greensboro, have done as much if not more to promote Greensboro, within the city as well as without, than any other one organization I know. Because they literally take hundreds--I know, at this sitting right now, Jaycees are, several of them, twenty or more,

are in Seattle, Washington right now at a Jaycee convention, doing their best to tell the people of this nation what a great place Greensboro is. And twice we've been honored as being the greatest Jaycee organization in the world. And I think we ought to, many, many of the young people--and it's formed, I guess, the leadership of this community, most of whom have served at one time or another in some capacity. And I could literally name fifty or more who have served as presidents of the Jaycees or in some capacity in the Jaycee movement who have developed the leadership that gives Greensboro its guidance that it now has.

EP: Many of the projects in which the Jaycees were involved also resulted in Greensboro being named an All-American City.

CB: Absolutely, absolutely. For example, the Jaycee Park that's being developed today, the swimming pools you have around your community, many of your community centers, all were spearheaded by movements to do it. This library, for example, that we're sitting in, I think is the results of it. Forrest Campbell, who was the mayor pro tem at the time, resulted in Mr. Benjamin, who was one of our great citizens, giving the site for our branch Benjamin Library out on one of our boulevards here. The library that we have, I think, I think it's due to cooperation and leadership from the Jaycees that many of these things developed.

EP: How have you seen Greensboro grow and change, positively or negatively, over the years? And what changes do you see in the future?

CB: Well, I've seen Greensboro grow tremendously, as many of the people who have lived close to us have seen it grow. I think all of it's been positively.

I've seen our school system change, and I see it with a temporary setback, but I see it for the better in the future. I've seen our universities here develop beyond all reason. We're searching for land today.

I've seen Greensboro recognize the need of its poor by having a high-rise for the elderly. I've seen Greensboro recognize its poor by having housing projects that house those people who are unfortunate enough to not be able to care for themselves.

I've seen it grow industrially in very good planning. I've seen it take care of its water so that we have water into the '90s, to the year 2000. I see citizens still searching for better input in this. I see city and county cooperation. I, I see all this as good.

I've seen the downtown change completely and drastically, because people search for better areas of shopping. I've seen it change. And we're in the midst of a revolution of downtown today, which will be perhaps an office complex and a high rise of apartments and something, rather than having a retail shopping center in the downtown area. And I don't consider this bad. I consider it good.

I've seen Greensboro go from these many things. But most of all, I visualize--if we work with city and county government closely--I can see us, knowing that we've gone to the moon, I can see us, and I don't think it's an impossible task at all to see Greensboro and Guilford County becoming one government, so that we can give better services to our people at less cost.

The biggest--I think the biggest block that we have toward growth today is not overtaxing our people to, to, to give them too much service. This is one of the things government, not only in Greensboro and Guilford County, but the nation, needs to realize. Because I think we're getting to the saturation point of allowing government to cost us too much.

I can see Greensboro, for example, developing a cooperation with its library services. Why not give library services through the schools to our citizenry rather than close them up, or through our gymnasiums? Why close them up in the summer? Why not utilize them?

I can see this developing, because Greensboro has already built jointly with the school system swimming pools and recreation facilities. These are the kind of things that I visualize for the future. And with the good leadership that we've had in the past, there's no reason to think that those who follow us, with good guidance, won't continue to develop and build this. So I see a Triad Council of Governments developing a great governmental complex that can make a better life for all of us at less cost.

EP: Do you ever see the merging of Greensboro, High Point, Winston, this area in between, in some huge continuous urban area?

CB: Not as one complex, because our needs are different. Our manufacturing is different. Our growth has been different. I can see High Point, Greensboro, and rural Guilford develop into a complex far sooner than I can the Winston-Salem area. Not that I have any fault with Winston-Salem, but, I, I think they move in a direction that's contrary to our growth. But I, I can see us developing many things, such as the airport.

A tremendous amount of credit should go to Stanley Frank, Caesar Cone, Mr. Martin, those people who developed the airport through the County Commissioners and the City Council of High Point and Greensboro. I think we got a regional airport there that's second to none in, in North Carolina simply because many volunteer people who worked tirelessly to develop this, this kind of project. And this is in cooperation with Winston-Salem. There have been many areas of cooperation, but I, I don't see our governments merging within our lifetime. It may eventually.

EP: Well, Greensboro's had kind of a fluctuating growth, generally continuously upward. But we've brought in many new industries--for instance, Gilbarco--and of course, we've--many years of the development of Burlington Mills and Cone Mills Incorporated,

Western Electric. However, recently there have been some moving of industry out of there. Do you think we'll continue to bring in new industry, and, if so, in what directions will we move?

CB: I give the Chamber of Commerce and John Parimore credit for all of this, because it's been one of the most wholesome growths we've had. The Chamber of Commerce continuously has sought out needs in our community, such as a type of industry here that we don't have, rather than the complex, to see what the labor market is.

And I, I've seen--I think, primarily Gilbarco, Western Electric--many of these people who have come in here over the past and then small industries that we don't even know about that don't--get little or no recognition--have come in here through the planning of the Chamber of Commerce. And every credit should go to them for this planning, because I can see it continually.

Now naturally, you know, products come on the market and go off. I'll give you an example of the difference between weaving and double-knit. You know you have flare-ups, and all of a sudden people want double-knit, and all of a sudden they want woven clothes. So sometimes you're going to have transitions in, in the knowing the styles of people, so you'll have industry that will that will go by the wayside and you'll have industry that'll develop. But usually every time one drops out, two more crop up of a better nature. So let's hope that it's for the best and hope it's positive. But all in all, I think Greensboro will continue to have good growth.

EP: I'd like to ask you, by way of summing up, what are some of the difficulties, some of the benefits, the general nature of being a mayor on city council---a mayor in the city the size of Greensboro at a time of growth and social change, such as occurred during your tenure.

CB: I think perhaps, if I could call the shots, I'd say that the biggest problems we have is seeking out and, and assuring ourself that we have the best leadership possible at our governmental levels, such as city and county. We should encourage people to seek these offices that have the potential and the capabilities of getting the leadership that this great community deserves. This can only be obtained through press and good press relations and through good civic cooperation and through knowledge of people knowing the ability of people to serve. I, I think the leadership is the key to the growth of any community.

The Chamber of Commerce, for example, and the Junior Chamber of Commerce continually doing the work that they do in giving our city the needs and the exposures that we have, I think, are continually good. But I think keeping local government with good leadership--you've heard this said many times, and I'll continue to say it. If leadership keeps its head in any crisis, everything will be all right. And I think this is one of the safeguards that we have to good growth.

I don't really foresee--I think that water is going to be one of our biggest problems and the disposal of our human waste is another. And lately this is--I, I see this as one of the most potential dangers that we have, because we can't develop industry if we don't have the potential of water and sewage disposal to give to this, because the environmentalists and the people who live here know that we have to keep it right through our health and through our growth. So I, I think our biggest problem is learning to work with our neighbors.

There's a controversy developing, I can see, in this county right now--and city--over water and whose water it is. But realizing that we all have to live together and work together is most important. But the biggest complex to our growth--if we don't solve our water and sewage problem, we won't have to worry about growth, because industry won't come here and can't come here.

EP: Well, I want to thank you, Mr. Bain, for participating in our oral history program. And I think we've learned a lot of valuable insights in your observations of Greensboro.

CB: I want to congratulate you and this public library for, for such a thing, because to me, history is not philosophical, it's factual. And I think what you're doing is perhaps going to give the future generations factual history about things that have happened in our city. And I certainly want to thank you for allowing me to participate in some small way in this history, and thank you for the job you're doing because it's, it's a real great job, I think.

EP: Thank you, sir. This has been a segment of the Greensboro Public Library Oral History project. It was filmed on June 30, 1977, at the Greensboro Public Library.

[End of Interview]