1983

Oral History Interview: William B. Newcomb

William B. Newcomb

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Interview

ORAL HISTORY

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Date November 2, 1983

WBNewcomb
(Signature - Interviewee)

38 Chestnut Drive
Address

Huntington, WV 25705

Date November 2, 1983

Robert Sawrey
(Signature - Witness)

Newcomb, William B.
11/2/83 Interview

AN INTERVIEW WITH: William B. Newcomb

CONDUCTED BY: Robert D. Sawrey

DATE: November 2, 1983

TRANSCRIBED BY: Pat LeMaster

STONE & THOMAS COLLECTION

Interview 2 Tape 3

BS: This is Robert Sawrey, we are continuing today our discussion with William B. Newcomb concerning the Anderson Newcomb Company. Ah, today is November 2, 1983. The interview is taking place in my office in Smith Hall. O.K. I guess we're all set to go Billy.

BN: Well now the first the thing that we were talking aboout when I left was this night opening when my father was working for R. A. Jack.

BS: O.K.

BN: And he was left in charge of the store night after night. Apparently there wasn't much business. So, ah, Mr. Jack would come and see that everything was alright. Then, he could go up the street and play cards with friends. And then come back and decide when the store should close. They had no definite closing time. Well, he didn't come back one night and my father sat there til after eleven o'clock. And just decided he'd better close the store, which he did. But the next morning Mr. Jack, ah, told him that he should have waited for him. Then some weeks later Mr. Jack went off to play cards and didn't come back at all. He went home and went to bed. Woke up three o'clock in the morning began to wonder what about the store, when he came downtown he found my father sitting there with oil lamps blazzing. (Laughs) After that there was somewhat of a gentlemens

agreement about closing the store. In fact, my father told me that when he was, ah, courting my mother, ah, he had a definite date on Wednesday evening if he could get there by 9 o'clock. Which gives you some idea of, ah, every night opening except Sunday.

BS: O.K. Why don't we use that for a take off Billy and go back and deal a little bit with your mother's side of the family.

BN: O.K. Ah, my mother's name was, ah, Margaret Barkla. That was spelled B-A-car B-A-R-K-L-A. Ah, her father was born in England. And his father died when he was about two years old. And there was some dispute over the estate that was left and my great grandmother gathered up her brood of children and came to America on a sailing ship in 1830. Been probably been about 1837 or 8. And settled in, ah, Philadelphia where she did all sorts of work to support her family, including dressmaking, I think. And my grandfather ah, grew up in Philadelphia and learned a machinist trade. And became a railway machinist. And, ah, at the time of my mother's birth in Renova, Pennsylvania, ah, he was with the railroad. And later they moved to Saxton. Which was spelled S-A-X-T-O-N, Pennsylvania. And he was mater mechanic of a railway shop there for oh a period. Ah, he lost his first wife and married my grandmother whose name was Caroline Potts. And her ancestry was English also. Her

father had come to Maryland and established a farm along the Potomac River. And then he went back to England and married his sweetheart and brought her to America. Which always has impressed me. He's one ancestor I'm very proud of that he would, ah, have that interest to go back and marry the woman he loved and bring her. Becaused there probably were plenty of women in Maryland. Ah, but he was drowned in the Potomac when their third child, ah, was just eight days old. And that family was divided out. And my grandmother, ah, was brought up by foster parents not related to her at all. And she, ah, apparently though the people she lived with were prosperous because she was taken to, ah, summer resorts. In fact, she told me about seeing President Buchanan at one of the summer resorts in Maryland. Ah, the family moved to, ah, Huntington in 1888, because, ah, my grandfather had been a temperance man and he wouldn't let any of his employees in the shops work if they were drinking. And, ah, there was a great deal of sentiment against him in the town because of that rule. My mother said that some of the men on the job actually drank the alcohol that they used to mix with shellac. In those days they used grain alcohol not denatured alcohol. And they would mix it on the job and, ah, when the management of the railway changed, ah, he, I guess, lost his job or had to

leave. They came to Huntington and during, ah, his period here he was the night foreman at the roundhouse at the C & O shops. Ah, both, two of his sons were, ah, railway machinists. Ah, a third son, ah, was killed in the Philippines during the insurrection. Ah, after the Spanish-American War, ah, he belonged to the West Virginia National Guard and was taken, taken over there. His death, however, was accidental. He had been through some battles but, ah, he was shot by a fellow, ah, soldier who was cleaning his rifle, ah, with a bullet in it. Ah, That's about the story of my mother's anc, background. Ah, she was a very intellegent woman and ah, sh had I, I assume from some of her papers that she may have had some high school education. How far she went I do not know.

BS: Go ahead.

BN: She, ah, she and my father were married in 1895. And I have two sisters still living. They're older than I am. My mother was a compulsive housekeeper. (Laughs) She (laughs), ah, and a wonderful cook, and, ah, and a wonderful mother too. Now would you like me to, ah, ah, go into some other incidences in reference to the early store?

BS Yes let's (inaudible) one question though before we, we go , leave your mother. Did she ever have any active role in the store dresmaking? Anything?

BN: No. No she did, no she did not. I have a, ah, she was issued a, ah, share of stock when the company was formed. And, ah, I have her cancels here. Of course, that was turn in _____(inaudible)_____ and changed into Anderson-Newcomb stock after, ah, the name changed.

BS: O.K. Let me, just for the record, indicate what I am looking at here.

BN: O.K.

BS: This is, ah, one share of stock in the Valentine-Newcomb Company dated September 10, 1895. It indicates that the, the company was capitalized at a hundred thousand dollars. That this, ah, was share number 15. Ah, and this stock had ah, a par value of a hundred dollars.

BN: I think so, yes.

BS: So that they must have had a thousand shares.

BN: I would assume so, yes.

BS: O.K. O.K.

BN: There was another interesting incident. Of course, women in the early 1900's, well late ninties let's say and then early 1900's, laced themselves in with corsets. Then my father told me about one of the employees at the R. A. Jack Company who laced herself in very tightly. And, ah, on a warm day she would faint and the other women employees would just, ah, open up her clothes, and with scissors cut the laces on her

corset. And, ah, she would go "pop" and (laughs) would be revived immediatly (laughs). And then there was another incident on the 9th Street store that sort of illustrates my father's interest in, in being active physically. Ah, there was a heavy snow and when John Valentine went to lunch my father took one or two other men who were working there up on the roof and they decided that the roof wouldn't hold all of that snow. So they were up there shoveling the snow off the roof. This building was, ah, on the corner of the alley. Ah, three and a half alley on 9th street. So I guess that they were putting some of the snow, ah, into the alley. But, ah, my father spied John Valentine returning to work with an umbrella over, ah, carrying an umbrella. And so he playfully dumped a shovel full of snow on the umbrella and smashed it. So after he came down off the roof he apologized to John, "I'm sorry that I smashed, ah, your umbrella." And he said, "Oh, well. That's alright Will, it happen I borrowed your umbrella."

BS: (Laughs.)

BN: Ah, but my father could be found, ah, what you might say on the firing line. He liked to be active physically and that was evident all the way through his career. I can remember him on a busy day, ah, bringing additional merchandise down to the floor. He just loved to handle it. And, ah, ah, he, he liked physical contact with the merchandise.

BS: Now when they, let's see, if we can make it clear Billy when they moved to the new store or built the new store . . .

BN: Yes.

BS: The time and the size of the store, ah, that type of thing.

BN: Well I don't know the exact volume they were doing when they moved but they must have been doing extremely well or they couldn't have financed this venture. The, ah, property they bought on 3rd Avenue, ah, cost them $13,000. And then the building itself cost 25,000. And, ah, when you concider that in 1895 their first year together, ah, or at least their first full year, which probably was the year 1896. They did $56,000. Which in those days you compair that with ah, mmm, modern dollars, that was a pretty good j...job. And it was growing rapidly. Ah, so they decided to build this store on 3rd Avenue. And, ah, they em, employed a man named James Stewart. That Stewart is spelled S-T-E-W-A-R-T. And he, he's the archetect who a few years later designed the Fredrick Hotel Building. And also designed the First Presbyterian Church. I'm not sure of other buildings. He built a very handsome home on 5th Avenue. On the site of the Bank Building, the First Huntington National Bank Building. Ah, and then the, ah, building contractor was, ah, Abraham Lincoln Shockey. That's spelled S-H-O-C-K-E-Y. The building was, of course, a brick structure with very heavy walls and

it was built with the idea it was a three story building. It was built with the idea that the walls and foundations would carry five stories. Which is pretty ambitious in 1901. Ah, When the, they, they moved into the building in 1902. The problem, well, in the beginning was of course, ah, ah, fitting it up with fixtures. They didn't have the money to equip it properly and my, my father told me that on the main floor, ah, when they opened up they had nothing, ah in the rear of the store. It was, ah, just open, ah, maple floor. And some young people came in on opening day and askied if they could go back there and dance in that space. Ah, they, they had the ready-to-wear on the second floor. And as I recall their fixtures must have been according to my father the fixtures must have been pretty scanty up there. They did not have any merchandise on the third floor at that time except they used it as a stockroom. Ah, the building had two elevators. One passenger elevator with which was water power a hydrolic. The, ah, freight elevator was a hydrolic elevator. I can not remember the, ah, passenger elevator seeing it operate because they replaced that with, ah, an electric, ah, power in I believe 1911. But I do remember the freight elevator which was used until the building was, ah, added to in na 1919. And it had a big cylinder on the floor, across the floor in the basement.

And every time that elevator went up that cylinder filled with water. And then when it came down it the water going out acted as a break too. But the water went down the sewer. I enquired from the water company a good many years ago. I was curious about how much water might have been used and whether, ah, the water company was, ah, at a disadvantage in the deal because at that time there were no water meters. Ah, people were charged, ah, per tap. And whether that was one tap I don't know. But that thing really had to use a lot of water. Ah, I, I had, I don't whether I still have them or not. I did at one time, ah, the Warner Elevator Company, ah, sent me their, ah, a copy of their blueprints for that instalation of that elevator. Ah, the, ah, building also had telephones on each floor. It had electric lights. My father said that on Saturday nights when they had all their lights on that these big knife switches or the main switch, ah, would glow red. Why the place didn't burn down I don't know. Ah, the ah, ah, building also, ah, had some interesting ah, fire protection features. They had a, they built intentionally built what we call fire walls. In other words, the exterior walls of the building were made, ah, built with the idea that they would resist a fire. And we found out when the building burned next, burned next to us in 1953 that that wall certainly was fire resistant. The, ah, building had

ah, heavy shutters over the windows that were closed every night. Metal shutters that were rolled or not they were rolling shutters that clo, and ah, one of the last things every evening when they closed up was to close those things down.

BS: Those were interior?

BN: Exterior. They, they were, they were, they came down over the outside but they were operated from the insided.

BS: Oh, O.K.

BN: And, ah, that was for the second. I don't remember whether they had them on the third floor. I know they had them for the second and the first floor. And that was the windows along the side, ah, of the building. On both

BS: What was the purpose of those Billy?

BN: In case of fire.

BS: Just in case of fire?

BN: Next door, those shutters would protect the building.

BS: O.K.

BN: Then they also had a fire hose on the roof. Ah, and I remember that being in use one Sunday. Must have been about 1911 that a, ah, 5 and 10 cent store one building away caught on fir on a Sunday. And I remember going down there in the afternoon and going up on the roof. And, ah, my father and other men were up there with this fire hose

keeping the roof damp, ah, to prevent cinders from setting the building on fire.

BS: Were most of the other buildings in the area frame?

BN: No. They were brick. But in many cases the buildings along there had party walls. Ah, in other words, they would hang another building on to an existing building, which was dangerous. It was just, if the one building didn't have, ah, substantial walls and you hung on to it then you had a fire you could be burned out that way. The, ah, this, ah building, as I recall, that burned out was not completly ruined. It was gutted but they rebuilt inside of it. But I can remember being down there and seeing the flames come out the roof. Then they also had another interesting feature in the building, ah, which was, ah, a hedge against, ah, a flood. There was, ah, there was and still is an eighty foot well beneath the basement floor. And ah, all the elevator pits are connected to that well. The, ah, they had a choice of connecting to two sewers in the alley and they chose one about 5 feet off the floor. There was another deeper sewer which they did not connect with and that proved to be very wise in 1913 & 1937, because in 1913 when we had, when we had, ah, the flood, ah, my father got a lot of satisfaction out of the fact that they were able to hold the water out of that basement, ah, until it was up

around on the street out front. Ah, we could pump, ah, with an auxilliary pump. You could pump water out of that ah, dry well as it seeped into the building. And then, ah, when they were all ready to, to, ah, give up and let the water come in, ah, they opened up, ah, this sewer valve and let the water come in through from by way of the sewer. We did the same thing in 1937. I happened to be called the flood president because I was the only officer of the company on the job in Huntington, ah, when that flood hit. And, ah, we kept the water out of that basement until it was already washing over the sidewalk out front. And, ah, ah, my father got alot of satisfaction out of the fact that he was able to hold the Ohio River at bay long enough to get, to get things out. And neither flood did we lose any merchandise.

BS: Those were devistating floods too, weren't they?

BN: Yes. It was 43 inches deep on the main floor in, in, ah, 1913 and seven feet in 1937. Ah, another feature of the, ah, store was that the windows in the front of the building, ah, were fitted with prism glass that, ah, brought the north light, ah, into the building and lighted it up. And now that's all been pretty well blanked out now, entirely blanked out. Ah, but, ah, back in 1902 that was a, ah, big idea because, ah, they practically need no artificial light during the day. Ah, and, ah, that glass is still in there. Ah, the exterior of the building, the front is quite interesting. It's made of what

they call Roman brick which is a, ah, slimmer brick. It was double fired to give it a glazed finish and, ah, the building has never, ah, looked shabby as a result. And they had ter, It was brick as you go, as you look at the front of the building. It has terra cotta trim. Ah, across at each floor level. And when the building was (inaudible) when we, ah, when the building was made into a six story building, they took sample bricks out, and, ah, sample terra cotta and sent it off and had new brick made to match. And if you look at that building now you can scarcely discern, you'd have to look very carefully to see any difference in that brick. We matched it again when we built an annex building next door. So we've, we've had two firings of brick since the building was put up originally. Ah, the maple floor on all the floors were, were maple. And the, ah, of course, the, in thw 1913 flood the, ah, basement floor just heaved up. It was layed on I, I don't know whether it was concrete under it or not. But it just, it had to be completely replaced. But the, the, ah, first floor went through that flood with no problems. Ah, and in 1937 after the flood we had a carpenter on his knees for six months trying to keep that floor nailed down because it, it had, had too much. And it was then torn up. And underneath were these heavy, ah, ah, fur, ah. subfloor boards, ah, rough sawed two inches thick.

And they're still under there, the original boards under that floor. And, ah, then this, ah, ca, ca, composition floor was layed on top of that. And it's always been quite stable. Ah, the ah, then I believe, did I describe, ah, the other time the building that was built , the annex building, built next . . .

BS: No. No, go ahead and do that Billy.

BN: Well, in 1913 the business had expanded and they needed more main floor space. So, ah, they made arrangements with Julius Brough who owned the bu, the property next, and there was no building on the rear of that property, so a 3-story building was erected there in 1913. And the, ah, ah, first floor was used as, ah, I believe at, at that time the, ah, some of the yard goods was moved over there. Yard goods of course was a big deal in, ah, in the store for, for a good many years. And on the second floor they set up a beautiful millinery department, which was quite beautifully equipped. And on the third floor was this, ah, custom dress making department. And on that floor they layed a, ah, parquet oak floor very beautifully done. Ah, the architect designed, ah, a, ah, fireplace that had no fire in it but to make it look, ah, homey. A little more than homey. It was an enormous thing. And he personally came when the tiles were delivered. He came and layed those, arranged those tiles in a, a beautiful

pattern. It's a source of regret to me that I don't have a color photograph of that thing. Of course it's been long gone. Ah, Mrs., ah, Tucker was the, ah, in charge of this dress making department. And she had, ah, ah, this, this one room that was all fixed up beautifully of course was the, ah, reception room where she greeted her customers. And then she had rooms where she could take them in for a fitting and measuring. And most of her customers, ah, had their own dress form there made to their dimensions. So she could make pin fittings without the customer having to come in. Ah, that had been in operation on the, ah, front end of the third floor of the building for some time before the annex was built. And as I recall it didn't last too long after 1913. Apparently it became unprofitable when the, ah, when ready-to-wear became, ah, better, you might say wha, the dress that were made in the early nine, early part of the 20th century just weren't adaptable to ready-to-wear. So the, ah, ah, ah, women who wanted to be well dressed had their things made to order. But after the, ah, ready-to-wear business came on stronger that was no longer the case.

BS: Was there very much, ah, seasonal difference in clothes at that time? Or did men and women wear basically the same blends of material year round?

BN: Oh no, no. The women, of course had summer dresses, and, ah, ah, there was a great deal of, ah, difference. I would,

would recall. I remember the women in the summer, ah, of course wore beautiful cotton prints. And, ah, they wore, ah, many of them wore white dresses. And of course many of them wore skirts with, ah, white blouses or we, they callet them shirt waists in those days. And, ah, it's when I think back the variety of white goods, ah, was, ah, remarkable, ah, in, in the, when we had the fabrics down on the main floor. Ah, one woman had nothing but white goods to sell, and when I was in the yard goods market many years later of course in the 1950's and '60's. I t was still, ah, quite a thing. We had a wh, white goods section. We didn't need, ah, one person to be in charge of it all the time but, ah, we had quite a white goods section. And of course a lot of it went into undergarments. Ah, which, ah, to a large extent were, were homemade, not entirely so, ah, the silk underwear and things like that of course were sold over the counter. And then in the winter women wore warm underwear. And that was a big business. In fact, the big operator in that was Munsing Wear. And the Anderson-Newcomb account with Munsing Wear was the 6th account that they opened. Their first, their first sale was made to a store in Marietta. And, ah, our store was number six on their list of accounts. Ah, but that was a big business, the warm underwear business. Because, after all, people were much more exposed than they are now in the winter time, ah, you had to go out for

transportation you could go catch a streetcar or you could walk. And people need warm clothes. And, ah, now with men's clotehes I can remember too much difference in the looks of the clothes my father wore in the summer. I think he wore probably, ah, thinner woolen fabrics, ah, than he did in the winter and, ah, his clothes were tailor made. They were, there were merchant tailors in Huntington. And, ah, up until . . .

BS: O.K. Go ahead about your father.

BN: My father, ah, bought a ready made suit some time in the 1920's and that was the first time since, I guess he, since he began, ah, dressing well that he hadn't had a tailor made suit. And he put it on to wear it to church. And our garage was not more than 30 feet from the back door. He came out the back door. Walked to the garage to get in the car. Turned right around and went back in the house. Took that suit off and he never wore it. Ah, and he went on having his suits tailor made some time after that. He finally, of course tailor made suits finally bec, I mean ready made suits became well done but in the beginning they were rather questionable in their tailoring. They just weren't, they didn't fit like a tailor made suit. Ah.

BS: Let me interupt you here and ask a couple questions that went through my mind while I was listening.

BN: Yes.

BS: Ah, when did you start selling patterns?

BN: I would think that the patterns were sold from the beginning of the store.

BS. O.K.

BN: Because, ah, patterns were available long before that. There were patterns, I've, I've researched that thing a little bit and I think patterns may have been available even before the sewing machine was available.

BS: Same basic companies as today?

BN: Ah, some of the names were familiar. Ah, I don't, I don't know that there is any. Butterick was one of the old names. And then there was a Pictorial, ah, patterns, which went out of business. And of course Vogue and, ah, McCalls and, ah, have been around awhile. But I don't think they would go back, ah, too far. When I say too far I'm think, I think now, I'm thinking in terms of 50 years and 75 years. And, ah, I think there was another line called the Delineator. I'm not positive about those names. And, ah, ah, but I've, there's some I, I can't prove it out, but I, I, there's some oral tradition that I'm aware of that I believe my father or mother told me. Probably my father. That in Guyandotte a few women had patterns. And, ah, others were permitted to make patterns off of them with newspaper. And, ah, those would be passed around within the,

ah, community as women, ah wanted to make dresses. They had these more or less basic patterns and then I would assume that a woman could, ah, adapt it to change the style a little bit; a clever seamstress could do a lot with a pattern, still can. Ah, but patterns were a feature I can't remember the store without patterns.

BS: O.K. How about heating and cooling of the building?

BN: They had a big, ah, gas furnace in the basement. And it was steam heat. The, ah, ah, and they still have it. Of course it's been renewed several times. Then another interesting thing was that the store was quite early in having a huh fire sprinkler system. That was put in 1912. And was a source of a great deal of problems, ah, for my father. The thing would, ah, go off, ah, accidentally when there was no fire. And, ah, it might be 3 o'clock in the morning. The fire department would come up and take their axes to the back door and then go inside and use the telephone to call my father and said they were in there. There's no fire would he come down now and look after the store after they left and so that back door, ah, it was beaten down so many times that (laughs) finally had to be replaced. Ah, they learned after a while I guess how, a way to break it open without destroying it. Ah, but that went on for sometime. And there was 3,000 and a 4,000 gallon tank on the roof of the 3 story building, ah, to, ah,

back that thing up in case there was a water failure, ah, from the city pressure. And that tank was moved up to the roof of the six story building. And that's when my father ah, ate at least one cigar. Ah, he was standing where he could see they had the building all framed up, ah, but they had to raise that tank before they could, ah, fill in the floors. They had space to take it. And, ah, it was quite, ah, a thing. They had some kind of a derrick to lift it and then they had to swing it out quite a distance to get it past obstructions and then back to the position where it would be. And when the thing was about six inches down to were it was going to rest the hook broke and dropped it that distance. And we've often speculated on what would have happened if that hook had broken when it was swung out over the other building. It would have gone right down through it. That tank is still up there and, ah, supports the system, ah, in case, ah, ah, the city water pressure would of course, it's, it's what drains off first. When the sprinkler goes off. And that sprinkler system has saved the store at least two or three times that I can recall.

BS: Was that put in, you think, at the insurance companies request? Or was this something that your father had heard about and thought was a great idea?

BN: Well I think it was, ah, one of the, ah, things in, ah, being

progressive. It makes the building much safer so far as customers are concerned. And of course it is, it does have ah, a bearing on insurance. But it's the sort of thing that ah, in these modern times big buildings are put up still put up without that kind of protection. And it's interesting to me that, ah, ah, 71 years ago, ah, they were alert enough to ah, modern methods of doing things to protect their building with, ah, a sprinkler.

BS: You hinted here at a, at a direction maybe we should go for a few minutes on progressive ideas or whatever. I've got what I call here business practices or that type of thing. Ah, I'm particularly interested in for example, ah, when in the extent of advertising, ah, pricing policies, ah, mark up ranges, determination of profit, ah

BN: Mr., ah,

BS: those kinds of things.

BN: Mr. Valentine, ah, was (laughs) interested in using comparative prices. He used them when he was a salesman over the counter. He would quote a higher price and then lean over and whisper to the customer that he would let her have it at a lower price. Which irritated my father because, ah, he, ah, had been influenced a great deal by John Wannamaker's methods. And, ah, as I get it, ah, John Wannamaker had a one price store. The prices were advertised. They were plainly marked

and the customer was at no disadvantage. There was no trading, ah, over the price of something. No haggling, which, ah, my father just couldn't abide. So, ah, ah, he, ah, when Valentine was gone the, ah, and the Andersons came, they were very agreeable to that policy. In fact, finally, ah, the policies adopted that no comparitive prices would be shown in any of the advertising unless it was some, ah, price that was more or less controlled by the manufacturer. Ah, as an example, ah, in the towel business, ah, periodically for the white, ah, January white sales and the August white sales, towel manufactures would reduce their prices considerably, ah, at wholesale to promote the business. And, ah, we would, of course, immediately reflect that in our prices. But when we showed that comparison in our advertising we would always have an asterisk and a little footnote saying that this price is a manufacturer's price price, ah, temporarily reduced. And, ah, we were very, very careful about that thing. In fact, ah, we ran a series of ads one time, ah, saying, ah, don't, ah, don't buy until the caboose comes by because, ah, many of the ready-to-wear shops in the town at that time, ah, had a set up that a saleswoman would quote one price, and the customer would object. And finally the proprietor would be called in to settle the sale. And he would let the customer have it at a lower price. And it

was just a come-on deal. And, ah, ah, my father in particular was much opposed to any kind of a premium, any kind of what he called hurrah advertising. Ah, he wanted, what he wanted was the feeling that a customer could come in the store any day have fair prices, and, ah, fair treatment, and, ah, no, ah, haggling over prices. They offered no discount to anybody except employees and stockholders. And we gave discounts only to employees, ah, some stores would give, ah, discounts to clergymen, and other merchants and so on. But, ah, they would never do that. They, they wanted to emphasize the fact that our prices were stable and, and dependable.

BS: What, what was the way that they determined mark up?

BN: Well you, you determine mark up, ah, to a large extent on your expenses. And, ah, a m, mark up is always, ah, from a retailers standpoint, is always a percentage of the selling price. Ah, (inaudible). It amuses me for somebody to say, well if you pay a dollar for something and sell it for a dollar and a half, that's a 50% mark up. That is a 50% mark up on the cost. But in, but in the trade we call it a 33 1/3% mark up. Because that's on the selling price. If our expenses were 32% then we only, it, we, that, ah, ah, 33 1/3% margine was not profit. It was largely to cover expenses. And, ah, as time went on of course, ah, the customary mark up when I was still at the store, ah, depending

on merchandise, ah, and competition and so on, ah, we, we aim generally at a 40% mark up. Ah, I understand, ah, that now in many cases it's higher that that because expenses, ah, have gone up. The, ah, ah, and of course over the country the, ah, prices would be more or less the same. Ah, the manufacturers would manufacture merchandise for certain retail price levels understanding that the merchants were going to get a certain percentage. Of course, now if you take something like, ah, china and glass where you have a breakage problem and a storage problem, you had to have a higher percentage. And merchandise that weighed alot and cost alot to ship had to have a higher mark up, ah, to cover those things. Ah, but it's interesting that people seem to think that a merchant never sells anything, ah, for less than he paid ofr it. But when you get into the end of a season and you've got to clear that merchandise out, you forget about what it costs you. The whole thing is to get it out of there. Ah, an insurance man scolded me one day. He said that his wife had looked at a suit that was marked a hundred and fifty dollars and she didn't buy it. And she waited and, ah, it was reduced down to a hundred dollars. And then later she bought it for sixty some dollars. He said now if they could have sold that profitably at $69 why didn't they do that in the beginning and get a. . . I said, "Do you realize that

they were selling that for a lot less than that costs?" "Well, no. Nobody would sell something for less that it cost him." They don't understand. And so, ah, ah, Mr. Charles Anderson, I heard him say one time, ah, to a meeting of buyers (laughs) he said, ah, "We want all the mark up that the traffic will stand." And one of the buyers spoke up and said, "Mr. Anderson, you wouldn't want to be quoted publicly." And he said, "Yes I would because they traffic won't stand too much." You can't have your prices out of line. Ah, we, we, I've had people carry an ad from New York in and complain because my price was five cents higher. And, ah, so you, you can't get too far out of line on your prices if you're dealing with the average customer. Now of course, ah, in some speciality shops and places in New York that have a high very, ah, wealthy clientel, ah, they can do all sorts of things pricewise and it doesn't make any difference. People are proud to, ah, say that they buy there and know they pay more. But it doesn't work in Huntington. Never did.

BS: How, ah, much advertising did the company do?

BN: Well, . . .

BS: And what types?

BN: At one time we were the, ah, we used more space than any other advertiser in Huntington. And, ah, we often had a

full page when, ah, when that was unusual. I should say I don't know whether you've got time for it or not. That we had a man named Oscar Ryan who had a tremendous influence on the whole store. He was our, ah, window display man and advertising man. And he had a great deal of ability. Ah, ah, a lot of artistic talent. And he had a lot to do with, ah, making our advertising look good. Ah, he made most of the stores at the time just turned the thing over to the paper and let them figure it out, but not Oscar. He made his own layouts. He indicated exactly what space was to be used. He indicated the type to be used. And then in the end he actually had his own font of type at the newspaper so that our ads were printed in a type nobody elses could use. So that you didn't (inaudible), didn't need a name on it because, ah, it was, ah, ah, so distinctive in its, ah, layout and, ah, type faces and

BS: Did he almost, then, in a sense, create a logo for the company?

BN: Well he had a logo for the signature.

BS: Yeah.

BN: But he, what he did he just got catalogs from type founders and chose, ah, type faces that he liked. And then bought the type and left it at the newspaper. And they used our type, ah, only for our ads. Even for the small copy, small print.

BS: About what were the dates of his connection with the firm?

BN: He came along some time before 1920 probably along about 1915 or 16. And he was with the company until he wa, until he died. Oh, I guess it was in the, I can remember, ah, but he had a lot a, he had a great influence on the whole store. Our window displays were unusually fine. And, ah, he bought the finest of mannequin to display. And, ah, his, ah, trimming on the, ah, at Christmas time and other seasons he would trim that, ah, main floor magnificantly. So much so that women would come in and actually shed tears over the beauty of the thing. And, ah, he, ah, he, he just added a touch to that store that, that made it stand out. In fact, he also designed, ah, figures that were made up into some kind of plaster for a company in Chicago. And, ah, those people, ah, used his designs for their line. And I have seen things that he had in Huntington one year. Would be in New Y, in the windows in New York City the next year. They would not sell it until they let him have one shot at it.

BS: What was his kind of training or background?

BN: He, he had no college training. He'd gone off somewhere to a, a display mens training thing. I don't think it lasted more than a year. His father, ah, was very mechanical and had been, ah, I think in charge of the, ah, signal installations on the C & O Railway. He had his own private caboose

and whenever there was a breakdown in the s, in the signal system. He would be rushed to it to, ah, get things straightened out. And, ah, ah, Oscar was a very intelligent man. And, ah, ah, mostly it was, it was just something he'd worked out through his basic talents. But we have to give him credit for, ah, giving that store a quality image that, ah, it wouldn't have had otherwise.

BS: Am I right in assuming that he then had no sales function at all?

BN: Oh no, he was, he was sales promotion. That is, he had charge of the advertising.

BS: No but I mean meeting the, meeting the customers?

BN: Oh no, no no. He was, he was busy with this, ah, thing.

BS: Was that pretty unusual then? I mean it's, it's . . .

BN: I don't know of a store of our size anywhere in the world that had a, had anybody to compare with Oscar Ryan. His ability to write copy for ads was remarkable. And he, he, he just had a high school education. But he could write excellent copy. And his, his, his, ah, ah, advertising layouts were beautifully done. And, ah, he even invented ah, a board with a special ruler to be used. And he sold that all over the United States to people to, ah, ah, make layouts. You see the bigger stores in the big cities, ah, would make their ads and set them up in type and just turn

them over to the paper to print. Ah, well he couldn't do, we weren't big enough for that so this is his way out of it was to make his own layout. Then, ah, ah, carefully measure the space, ah, that, ah, ah, you, you would set your typewriter for so many characters. And, ah, type this little paragraph to fit.

BS: O.K.

BN: I've done a lot of that myself. I sometimes, ah, where I knew more about the merchandise and I could convey to the advertising department I would write my own copy. And I always made it had to make it fit their layout.

BS: When we're talking about, ah, business practices, ah, how long was the store open in the period around World War I?

BN: Well they were open, ah, as I recall from about 8:30 in the morning til 5:30 in the evening. And, ah, in 1913, Mr. Charles Anderson made a trip to, ah, Europe. And my father was on his own for several weeks. And some very hot weather one Saturday night the business didn't, didn't even pay for the lights. So, ah, he decided to close the store. And he didn't, they, the store was closed on Saturday nights, ah, the rest of the summer. And then the fall they resumed night openings. And then in 1914 they cut them out entirely. And the store was not opened at night until, ah, recent times when we went to a Monday night opening. Ah, my father

said that he lived long enough to get the closed, the town closed down on Saturday nights. And then saw it open up on Monday nights. Ah, he was not in favor of night openings.

BS: Ah, In those years around World War I were there attempts made to determine which parts of the business were more profitable than others and give them greater floor space or any of that kind of decision making?

BN: Ah, not at that period that came later, ah, later, ah, we could have the, the figures weren't available. But later (inaudible) we had you could get figures that, ah, a department that was going to do so much business, ah could be expected to do it on so mu, so many square feet. So much business per square foot. And we came in time to allocate space for all departments on that basis. But in the earlier period it was only haphazard. And if it didn't work then they would change things around. My father was everlastingly ah, changing the arrangement of things on the main floor. He would, ah, get up and eat his breakfast and think about some change that could be made, call the man who, ah, had a gang of carpenters. And they would, might come in that very day and begin moving things, ah, to fit circumstances. I remember my mother commenting when he, when my father came home at noon one day and said he was moving things. She said, "Well I hope you won't move the pattern department again

because I haven't been able to find it (laughs) half the time." But that sort of thing went on, ah, to adjust to actual circumstances.

BS: And throughout this period up to World War I the store remained, ah, heavily a woman's world for clientel?

BN: That's right, ah, we did have one there was one for short period there was one interesting thing. On the third floor they opened up, ah, a photography, ah, place. Ah, sold, ah, Eastman Kodak, ah, products. Cameras and so on. And a man ah, became quite knowledgeable, ah, on those things. And I guess we had, ah, the principle, ah, Kodak supply place in Huntington. And, ah, that lasted for several years. Then I guess it, it went then, it went, became sort of a drug store business. And they got out of it.

BS: And that part you're talking about there didn't include any processing. That was back in the days when Kodak loaded the film right in the camera? (inaudible)

BN: No, ah, they, they, they had all of the equipment for my, my mother took up photography, I think, about 1909. And she developed her own film. She could buy the chemicals and everything at the store. Ah, she, ah, had, ah, a well, well she only made contact prints from her film. She had a Kodak that made, ah, a postcard size picture. And she could put that film in a and the paper in a frame. And, ah, if she used used her darkroom, ah, she could get a, a white, black

and white print. If she put it out in the sunlight she got a brown and white print. And she did a whole lot of that. And that was the way they were working at that time.

BS: Were there any other attempts made to veer off diversify in to different kinds of departments?

BN: Well for, for several years we were, we had Steinway pianos.

BS: What were the dates probably on that?

BN: That would have been, ah, oh, ah, sometime in the late '20's I think, ah, into the, i believe it was into the '50's.

BS: But nothing in the period around World War I yet. Where you

BN: No, no not then.

BS: O.K.

BN: Ah, they made various attempts to sell different products but, ah, ah, they were more or less limited. The, the one thing that limited them was capital. They were always, ah, cash hungry. Because, ah, the business, a growing business takes more money all the time and they were reluctant to, ah, ah, go in debt. ah, so they, ah, they made an attempt to, ah, ah, finance the thing out of their profits. In facts, that's one thing that was hard on my father because, ah, ah, they ehld down the dividends in order to plow the money back in the business. And, ah, that was, ah, the only way it could grow.

BS: O.K. I thin we are just about out of time here. Why don't we stop for today?

BN: O.K.