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int. 5
tape 6

ORAL HISTORY

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DATE 12/7/83

W.B. Newcomb
(Signature - Interviewee)

38 Chestnut Drive
(Address)
Huntington, WV 25705

DATE 12/7/83

Robert Sawrey
(Signature - Witness)

Newcomb, William B.
11/7/83
int. 5 - tape 6

STONE & THOMAS COLLECTION

INTERVIEW 5

TAPE 6

AN INTERVIEW WITH: William B. Newcomb

CONDUCTED BY: Robert D. Sawrey

December 7, 1983

TRANSCRIBED BY: Patti LaMaster

TYPED BY: Donna Carver

BS: This is Bob Sawrey. Today we will be interviewing William B. Newcomb, uh, in my office in Smith Hall concerning the Anderson-Newcomb, Stone & Thomas history. Uh, today's date is December 7th, 1983. My notes...my notes indicate that I don't have a microphone. So that's for a start. I think I'm ready.

BN: (laugh)

BS: The notes I took last time, Billy, indicated that we wanted to start talking today about the high school girls that were working in the store.

BN: Well I think from the very beginning of the store that a great many young women were employed as of a...high school age. And it was, uh, from the stand point of a girls family it was...it was a fine thing, because it put them in, uh, a carefully managed atmosphere where they would be perfectly safe. And uh, it was good experience. In fact, when my daughter was in high school I had her in there working. And...and she looks back on that with considerable satisfaction because you...you learn a lot by meeting the public. And, uh, uh, a good many, uh, women who, uh, married quite well, uh, worked in the store. Uh, as, uh high school and college girls. And, uh, that was one thing that built it

BN: up, uh, was the fact these girls could come in during the summer and work all summer long and move around to different departments and get all that experience. And we...I don't know how it worked out (laugh) uh, for, uh, quite a period in the 30's, and 40's. Uh, we had a very handsome contingent of young women on the main floor. And those high school and college girls, uh, practically took over during the vacation periods in...in many departments and did very well.

BS: Could you indicate, Billy, if business was seasonal enough so that during the regular school year you could utilize these young ladies from three to closing time. But during say summertime, somehow or other you were able to expand your work force to have them work 40 hours a week? Did your business improve that (greatly)?

BN: No, it wasn't that we, but we had, uh, each employee had a two weeks vacation.

BS: Oh.

BN: So you needed to fill in for them.

BS: O.K.

BN: And now we didn't during during the, uh, year we didn't have too many coming in parttime except on Saturdays, uh, these high school kids.

BS: Oh, O.K.

BN: But, uh, except at Christmas time we would take them every hour we could get them. And it was the youngsters liked it because, uh, it was a pleasant atmosphere to work in they had, uh, uh. It was a pleasant place to work all together. A beautiful place really especially on the main floor. So, uh, we needed them though during the...during the summer to fill in f...for vacations.

BS: Were they, uh, always like at least 16 years old and paid minimum wage or...how did that part work?

BN: Of course, uh, I'm talking partly about a time before we had the minimum wage and before the minimum wage amounted to anything. Of course the first minimum wage was 50 cents an hour. Which we probably were paying already. And, uh, so when the minimum wage increased to where it became a factor then all this employment ceased because we could not afford to bring these inexperienced girls in there and train them and pay them the minimum wage. So that broke it up. Uh, and, uh, it was...it was no more. And I don't think it goes on to any extent now like it did, uh, back in the 20's and 30's.

BS: So there were in those days no real regulations either as how young these girls could be. I mean they weren't ten years old but they didn't have to be...

BN: I think we may have had some as young as fifteen. I...I mentioned a while ago in talking about this picnic picture in 1914 that Susie Bruce, uh, came to work. I'm sure when she was fifteen because she worked until she was 65 fulltime and was in charge for a good many years of the hosery department on the main floor. And very aggressive, uh, competent, uh, worker. She had no, I don't...I doubt whether she had any high school education. But she was a smart person and did very well.

BS: How about if we...we stick with the employees for a while today. And...and talk about, uh, benefits, compensation. Why they like staying with the company. How long they stayed. Those kinds of things. Uh, one of the first questions that the picture generates. And this is a picture that Billy brought in today of, uh, a 1914 picnic. Uh, were those annual events?

BN: Yes.

BS: As much as possible.

BN: Yes. I don't know when they started but, uh, probably...I

BN: know I can remember them a back as far as at least 1912.

And I think they may have been going on before that. I

just can't put it together in my mind. When...when I went to one...the first one. I know I was there in 1913. And I missed in 1914 because I was in a plaster cast and couldn't walk. But it was an annual thing for a good many years.

I...I can't remember when it was abandoned, uh, in favor of other things. But we generally went to Camden Park. And two streetcars would roll up in front of the store early in the afternoon. The store would be closed for the afternoon.

BS: That's Saturday?

BN: No. No. This would have been, uh, mid...midweek.

BS: Oh, O.K.

BN: And then the employees would all get aboard the streetcars, uh, which were already loaded with, uh, fried chicken and other picnic things provided, uh, by the women of the Methodist church. They were paid for doing that. And two big ice cream freezers which were a feature in those days. The ice packed in these big uh, uh, then with salt around the ice c...cream can. And then down...uh, uh, the children of employees were invited. And, uh, uh, a few, uh, wives would come along too of the male employees. I can't remember

BN: any, uh, husband's of the women coming. Although, I don't think it would have been, uh, prohibited. Uh, it was a rather open thing. And down at the park then Mr. Anderson and my father would have big rolls of tickets for the rides and any youngster who wanted tickets would just go over and they'd give us a long string of them and we could do anything we wanted to at the park. And then, uh, usually they...they posed, uh, the for...the employees posed for a picture. I don't remember whether I have another one, uh, taken at Camden Park or not. But, uh...this one at Blue Sulfur as I recall, was unusual. I don't remember whether they went there more than once. That was a little summer resort just above Barboursville on route 60. And flourished for quite a while in the early part of the century. And then finally closed down.

BS: These Camden Park outings were they basically the 20's?

BN: No, they would have been, I think, before the 20's. I can't remember we changed things a little bit in the 20's after the building was, uh, became a six-story building early in the... well, uh...that change was made in 1919. We had a roof garden on top of the building...and, uh...we ha...had our affairs up there during the summer instead of going to the park. We would, uh, serve meals, uh, uh, a picnic dinner up

BN: on the roof. Which was a right interesting thing. And have different programs. Uh, we also had, uh, meetings in the store during, uh, the winter months. I can remember the first ones of those. That they would, uh, just that wrapping paper and cover the counters in one of the isles on the main floor. And bring up chairs and stools. And, uh, again the Methodist ladies would provide the, uh, food. And, uh, we would have, uh, uh, this supper in the store. And then the executives would discuss various, uh, plans for the business. And...and uh,..uh, ask for suggestions from the employees. And it was just really a kind of a family, uh, event. And later we, uh, expanded that a little bit. I remember one time we...up on the third floor we used the annex building, uh, part of the third floor. And set it up almost like a restaurant with tables and, uh, uh, we had, uh, some of the black employees...uh, uh serving as waiters. And, uh, it was a very fine dinner. And we...we had those at least as I recall twice a year. And that continued after...uh, uh, when...up until almost well it continued until I retired in 1969. That we would have in the, uh, early part of the year we would have a...uh, uh...a dinner at the store. And we used the auditorium that's there now. And the kitchen facilities. And serve...uh...a dinner.

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BN: I think the Methodist women by that time had bowed out and the Highlawn Presbyterian Women took over. And...then we would have...uh...this would be the time when the, uh, annual profit sharing was announced...the amount of it. And that profit sharing went into effect, uh...in the...sometime in the 30's about the mid-30's that we set up this profit sharing plan which didn't produce anything for...uh...two or three years during the 30's. And we thought we were going to do it for the fiscal year of 1936 but the 1937 flood came in January which was the last month of the fiscal year. And uh...the cost of that flood in lost business and damage to the building...uh...eliminated profit sharing. But after, that, uh, for the next many years that profit sharing plan paid out, uh, over two million dollars in benefits to the employees. And it saved us during World War II because...uh...when...uh...wages were frozen we could not raise anybody's pay...but we could...uh...this profit sharing was...uh...wide open. And that's one reason we were able to hold our staff...uh...in competition with, uh, other opportunities that people had to get jobs.

BS: How...how precisely did that program work?

BN: I don't remember the actual mechanics of it. Larry Tippet could tell you, uh, all about that.

BS: Could you spell his name?

BN: Uh, L...Larry Tippett who was president of the business until he retired just a few years back.

BS: Oh, O.K.

BN: And, uh, his last name is spelled T-I-P-P-E-T-T. And, uh, he was the controller...uh, uh...before he was made president by Stone & Thomas.

(?): Robert.

BS: Excuse me a second.

BN: Well he didn't set it up but, uh, he...he administered it...uh, over a good many years. And he would know the formula that was followed in determining...uh...it depended...what you got depended to some extent on your length of service with the store. And of course it was based on your salary. And, uh, it was...then there was a special part of it for department managers to, ah, reward them for, uh, their results and so on. And I...I was not...I never... I knew in general the plan but I couldn't tell you off-hand just exactly how it worked.

BS: But you did receive some?

BN: I sure did.

BS: Yeah.

BN: Even after I retired, uh, I got a check for, I think it was for something like \$1,200, uh, representing the first five months of, uh, the year of my retirement. I retired in...in...no it was the first four months. I...I retired in May...May first. And uh. Well if you take the fiscal year it was just the three months of that year that I got that check for that after I retired.

BS: Was this profit sharing program, uh, part of, uh, a broad and conscious strategy of keeping the people happy or was it more...I hate to use the word generous...but was it not part of a strategy but just part of these are our folks?

BN: That was more it. The...the trend again very early in the business because my father, uh, used to say that he was so proud of the many different things that the store was the first in ~~in~~ Huntington. Uh, one was that, uh, they had the first elevator...uh, passenger elevator. Uh, they had the first delivering service. And they had the first, uh, paid vacations for employees and other, uh, benefits for employees, uh, which other stores did not undertake, uh, locally.

BN: And there was always I...I would say almost a paternalistic attitude toward the employees. They were interested in, uh, their, uh, welfare, uh, in so far as the business could afford it. And uh, when...by the time this profit sharing was instituted, after my father was out of the business, by Mr. Anderson and Mr. Long. And uh...this...they...they also at about the same time, uh, instituted a pension plan. Which they had to modify when Social Security came in because they couldn't carry the total load. And uh...so, uh, the pension system is still in the business. Uh, the profit sharing was eliminated by Stone & Thomas. Now what their compensation method is I do not know. Uh, they...but they felt it. And we felt that toward the end that it was, uh, uh, probably, uh, not as effective as it could have been...some other plan of compensation employees. Because you were rewarded on the basis of your pay...regular salary...rather than on your individual efforts. And we were struggling, uh, in the late 60's for some new formula to make this thing more of an incentive. But on the other hand, it did, uh, result in a great...uh, uh, in a loyalty to the business, and a feeling that the people, uh, the employees felt they were getting a fair shake out of things. And for that reason we never had any, uh, problems of uh,

BN: for instance, uh, organized employees, uh, union or anything like that was never a...a possibility in that business. Uh, because, uh, we had too many people who were sold on the management of the business. And, uh, uh, would of downed it immediately.

BS: When you mentioned the paid vacation, can you remember how fa...far back that started?

BN: I would think it would be in the early 1900's. I...I think it was either...I think it was done during the Valentine-Newcomb years which ended in 1907. And, uh, that was a two week...the two weeks summer vacation for any...any employee who...who had been on the job for a year or more. And then of course, uh, with the institution of the pension plan and the profit sharing, uh, we began, uh, having winter vacations in addition to summer vacations. After ten years of service, uh, you get a weeks winter vacation, after fifteen years you get ten days, and after twenty years you would get two weeks winter vacation in addition to summer vacation. And that...that is still in effect there. I don't know what Stone & Thomas is doing about its other stores.

BS: So after twenty years really it amounted to five weeks paid vacation?

BN: No, four weeks...two weeks summer...two weeks winter.

BS: O.K....O.K.

BN: That was, uh, really a wonderful thing because, uh, the... the...the department store business is a very confining thing and you've got to be on the job six days a week. And...and, uh, with night openings you're caught in them, too. And to be able to get loose in the winter as well as the summer was a real benefit.

BS: Now you just said six days a week, was that the salaried personnel worked six days a week, but the people on wages worked by the hour and worked a forty hour week?

BN: Everybody, uh, unless you were a parttime employee you worked everyday. And if you were a salaried employee, uh, you worked at night if we were open. When I was there on Monday nights. We worked on Monday nights. Uh, and no foolin' we were there. Uh, the uh, s..., uh, weekly pay pay people the sales people and so on, uh, would come in their...their hours were staggered on Monday. Some came early and left at s...5:00. Others came in at noon and worked until 8:45. And, uh, we had to arrange it that way. And then, uh, we began giving each person a day off, uh,

BN: each week. Uh, that was a later development. And that resulted in still more staggering of, uh, hours for everybody. So that we could overcome that drop-out of one person out of a department each week.

BS: That was when you had got to a situation of over 40 hours a week was a time and a half?

BN: Yes. But...but that...it wasn't...it wasn't that so much as it was a desire to give people a day off. Uh to, uh, allow them to have, uh, a day of freedom each week. And that was supposed to extend to department managers but that was pretty hard to manage. I think I finally began getting an afternoon off but, uh, too much could happen (laugh) on that day when you were away. And, uh, so it was a little tough for the ma...department managers to, uh, get that day off.

BS: Was that a development of the 40's?

BN: That was a development, I'd say, in the 50's as I remember it.

BS: O.K. Uh...did department managers make an...a commission on department sales?

BN: No.

BS: Just straight salary (inaudible).

BN: Straight salary...there was a, uh, rather indefinable, uh, compensation for, uh, results...meaning net results...profit. Uh, but uh it was never spelled out. And uh finally the, uh, the adjustments were made through salary and uh that automatically, uh, ripped the profit sharing, uh, that you would get. So that, uh, I...I...I would consider that one, uh, bad point in the...the strategy. Uh, I never felt that uh, I understood what I could do to make more money. In other words, uh, if it had been spelled out if you meet certain objectives, uh, it'll be thus and so. It was never that way. I was rewarded but I never...I always felt that there was, uh, an element of in...uncertainty in there. That I didn't, uh...I didn't like, frankly.

BS: So that profit sharing program reflected more the total store's profit rather than individual departments?

BN: Oh, yes...yes.

BS: So that in some senses you could have been carrying other departments and they were sharing your wealth.

BN: Well that's right. And, uh, of course that was one of the fundamental things about the department store, uh, the main

BN: floor always made more money than any other, uh, section of the store. Because they got all the traffic that came into the store came to the...the first floor naturally. And, uh, the departments down there were, uh, planned to take advantage of that traffic. So they had a better opportunity to make money. The ready-to-wear divisions, uh, were subject to all sorts of hazards of, uh, weather and uh, uh fashion changes and so on. And, uh, horrible mark downs which could, uh, uh, ruin results. And, uh, it was a rather interesting thing, my father objected, uh, to this idea of making...he... he...the way he put it making every tub sit on its own bottom. He...he realized that to have a department store you were always going to have certain parts that would be unprofitable but the whole thing would be profitable. And that way, uh, you could...you could offer a complete service to the customers and still...and make money in...in total. Were as this operation...that operation you could not prove was, uh, worth having. Uh, Mr. Anderson, uh, in his latter years, uh, came to the same conclusion because he...he told me one day, he said, "We have things in this store that are not paying, we might be better off without them. But the store is so popular with customers and we're making enough money out of the business as a total that I'm not worrying about, uh, results in some of these marginal operations. Of course,

BN: we always tried to improve them. But, uh, we felt that the attractiveness of the store was enhanced by having some departments that, uh, couldn't make it. So in a sense, even though, uh, somebody up on the sixth floor might not be, uh, making as big of contribution to total profit. They were part of the whole enterprise.

BS: That sounds like kind of a nice strategy but is that the way departments stores function today?

BN: No!

BS: I mean every square foot has to make it's bucks or they put something else there, don't they?

BN: That's right. And if...if a...if a certain item or line of merchandise, uh, becomes marginal, they cut it out. With a result, that you can't walk into a department store and expect to find a lot of things that you could find, uh, in former years. And to me it's a disservice to the customer. And it's a, uh, it's a black mark against department stores because they're concentrating on fast turnover items. They're concentrating on, uh, things that can, uh, produce, uh, quick profits. And they're neglecting these other things that made the department store such a charming place, uh, earlier in the century. And that goes for any, practically

BN: any store you go into. You can go across the United States and shop in these, uh, uh, malls, where the department stores are represented. And you see the same merchandise, you see the same lack of interest in the customer, uh, everywhere. And the...the other...uh...uh...while you say well that was, uh, altruistic, uh, uh, on the other hand, it made for, uh, good business at one time,

BS: We talked a couple of weeks ago or more, uh, about the impact that people like Wanamaker had especially concerning one price. Do you recall anyone making a similar impact kind of impact in terms of employee re...relations?

BN: No, I can't...uh...I can't recall that it was, uh, that way, uh, it...uh, the...ma...ma...my impressions from, uh, observing a lot of the big stores, uh, was that there was a tremendous amount of back-biting and politicing going on. Uh...I...when i...i spent one semester in...in New York University's School of Retailing. And as part of that I managed to have a job at Gimbles...uh...for some weeks. And, uh...they shifted me all over the place...just wherever they needed somebody they'd send me out to work there. So I worked out on the sales floor. And I worked, uh, back in, uh, uh, behind the scenes. And, uh, one time I was clear down in the, I think the third basement in their, uh,

BN: delivery department credit authorization section. And, uh, everywhere I went I found this, uh, back-biting going on. And, uh, a feeling of disloyalty to the company. Uh, when...I encountered buyers in the market, uh, uh, during my years as a buyer, uh, who, uh, uh, seemed to have no feeling of loyalty to their stores. In fact, they were always looking for a better job with some other store. They worked for one place for a while and then if they could get a chance to hop to another one they would go. And I remember, uh, talking with, uh, a woman in, uh, in one department store who would....(end of side one).

(side two)

...whether she was a buyer or uh just a floor manager for this ready-to-wear section. And I was commenting about another department that, uh...well this was typical in New York to have a popular price section and then a better section, and then, uh, another, uh, fancier place. And, uh, uh, she just let me know that, uh, the competition within that business was such that they just, uh, uh, literally hated the guts of the people in those other departments. And, uh, there was no feeling like we had in our store of, uh, team work. And, uh, uh, an effort to, uh, uh, work together rather than be fighting each other all the time.

BN: So, uh, I feel that we had something unusual in...in the Anderson-Newcomb Company. And I could...I could extend that further because for a good many years we had an organization called the Interstate Drygoods Syndicate, which was a research group composed of stores in West Virginia and Ohio of comparable size. Uh, they were, uh, most of them were not as large as Anderson-Newcomb but they approached it. And they were all independent stores, uh, locally owned and so on. And we would have annual conferences, or no semi-annual conferences. Uh, usually at the homestead at Hot Springs, Virginia...sometimes at the Greenbriar...once or twice over in Pennsylvania in the Poconos and so on. And uh, we had a...we employed a...a research, uh, outfit in New York City to, uh, arrange our statistics, uh, in parallel. So we could study the operation of every department in comparison with other stores. And they would come, uh, usually with two or three people and meet with us in this, uh, in...in these conferences. And we would, uh, have a program covering various departments in this...individual stores would be assigned, uh, topics and departments to discuss. And then, we would also visit these stores, uh, uh, for, uh, uh, meetings of the buyers of these departments. As for instance, the ready-to-wear buyers would get together in a store, uh, two or three...well no...not...

BN: not two or three times...maybe once a year, the ready-to-wear and some other department or another. We met around in the other stores and observed what was going on. And I must say that our store was unique in its whole approach to the business. It was, uh, run with a great deal more precision. It was, uh, uh, the, uh, we could gather from listening that our...our relations with our employees were better than theirs, in most cases. And, uh, we uh...the...the general tone of the business was different. And I...I can't account for it except that it started early and was a...a top policy all the way to have this kind of a store, rather than just an ordinary store. And... and profit was, uh, really, uh, I would say, a little bit damaged by it. Because, uh, there were things that we wouldn't do.

BS: As a small store, reasonably small, uh, one of the problems that, I would assume entered into the picture occasionally, was not very much room to be promoted...

BN: That's right.

BS: There is somebody in your way...

BN: That's right.

BS: And he's going to be there 30 years.

BN: Uh huh.

BS: Uh, how did the company get around that?

BN: Well we didn't. Uh, you see, I was too close to Mr. Anderson and Mr. Long. I was five years younger. And they just frankly told me that, uh, uh, I could go so far because, uh, they were not going to get out of my way. And, uh, uh, I know one man in Huntington who, uh, was a very successful, uh, real estate man. And he was uh...he told me that, uh, he was considered one time to be brought into the business. And uh, he just frankly asked a question uh, what would my future be? And uh, wh...when they told he would be an employee. And was...there was no prospect as...as they could see it that the business would grow to the point where he could be a partner and uh, uh, participate in, uh, general management and so on, and, uh, salary also. So he...he...he wouldn't...he wouldn't go. He just gave it up. And I think we...we lost other people who could see no future. And of course, uh, in my case, uh, the depression was so bad. And I was in there. And then, uh, as time went on I had a vested interest in profit sharing and, uh, pension and so on. Uh, it just wasn't practical

BN: for me to pull out. Otherwise, I might have.

BS: But if some was in your position only say was...was not a Newcomb. And did not own part of the business even...no matter how small, were they a...appeased by increments in salary. Uh, was there some way to show them that they really care, we just don't have room for ya.

BN: Well they were...they were paid but of course the business could only stand so much. Uh, in other words, the size of the business controlled, uh, what salaries were available. And, uh, the business actually, uh, had very slow growth after, uh, the first 25 years. Uh, when we hit the depression we lost a lot of business. And, uh, went way down. And lost a tremendous amount of money. And then when we hit World War II, uh, and inflation our depreciation that we took on, uh, fixtures and other equipment, uh, was not sufficient to, uh, refurbish the store after World War II. We had to go our and borrow money which we would not have borrowed if it hadn't been for inflation. And, uh, so the business was I would say almost continually, uh, needing cash. Uh, it was, uh, uh, when a...when a business grows rapidly your needs are great. And then of course having lost a great deal during World Wa...during the depression. Uh, we weren't able during World War II to build up too much

BN: because it went out in taxes and it went out in profit sharing. And so, uh, everytime the business for instance we wanted to, uh, do over, uh, a floor, the money had to be found somewhere. It was not in the business. So you had those problems, of, uh, of financing the business. And the city of Huntington was not growing all that fast. So we...we had not, uh, prospect of, uh, increasing the business greatly.

BS: Would we or would you have had the same kind of problem with the people you supervised that...surely there was a finite limit to the amount of hourly compensation...

BN: Uh huh.

BS: ...and people were going to run smack into that at some point in their career. And from then on they financially speaking stagnate.

BN: That's right. And the...the problem was that as time past people who had ambition and, uh, so on, could do much better, uh, working for industry or being a doctor's, uh, receptionist or something like that could pay a lot better than we...we could afford to pay. And then the other problem was, is, the, uh, minimum wage crept up. It was very hard for us, we...everytime the minimum wage went up we had to

BN: increase everybody above. And that made it so hard to bring in people and train them because we couldn't afford them. We...we...there was just a limit on how much we could pay to train somebody. So we were...we were unable to attract, uh, people like we had been in the earlier years. But of course the whole employment picture changed, uh, opportunities for women to work, uh, back before 1940 were pretty limited. And a job at Anderson-Newcomb was, uh, considered a real good job because, uh, the pay wasn't all that bad and the, uh, working conditions were good. So they were...they were anxious to get the job. But as time past and opportunities for women opened up then it's been harder to get, uh, competent people. And keep them.

BS: Go one step above the floor walkers, the man...the department managers...were they promoted from within? Did you come up to Marshall and...and...and try to recruit people that were in business administration or...retailing or whatever? Or did you have any relationships with any colleges or anything like that?

BN: It wasn't that frequent that we wanted somebody. And uh...now Larry Tippett was a Marshall graduate. And Harry Wolfe knew about him and su...suggested that, uh, he would be a good one to bring in. And, uh, so he was employed

BN: the Print School. Uh, over, I think it was in Boston, somewhere in New England. Which was set up to train personnel directors for department stores. When she came on sometime in the 30's, as I recall as our personnel director. Up to that time we had had a system of everything. But it had never been quite spelled out. And with her training and her brains, uh, everything was revised, even the sales tickets and, uh, the...all of our procedures were, uh, standardized. Uh, personnel policies were developed. And uh, printed out in a book that was handed to an employee when they came on the job, spelling out everything that was done. And then she, uh, was very efficient in training new employees. She was with us for a few years and then left us to take a job with Lord & Taylor for two or three years. And then came back and stayed with us until she was married. I don't know what her total service was. But I regarded her as one of the great influences in the business. And she had a great deal to do with, uh, uh, working out personnel policies. That made the business, uh, work better. As...the efforts to keep the employee satisfied and happy. As well as, uh, this, uh, efficient way of doing things. Of having a standardized way throughout the business for everything. I might say right here that there were many people in that business who had a lot more

BN: talent for the business than I ever did. And my wife before she died, uh, was certain that I never should have gone into the Anderson-Newcomb Company. That I had...

BS: Where did you belong in her mind?

BN: Well I don't know. Uh, I, uh, I never felt that my abilities were used to the fullest extent. And, uh, uh, while I was treated well and, uh, reasonably successful and happy. Uh, other pursuits, uh, might have been better for me. I like to, uh, write. I might have been, uh, uh...some people said I could have been a college professor. But that never appealed to me.

BS: (Snickers)

BN: Uh, I, uh, uh, I could have, I think, uh, done well in, uh, sales promotion rather than, uh, buying and, uh, the...the paper work of a buyer's desk, uh, was always a burden to me. The, uh, promotional efforts thought I could handle. Uh, I could have been the advertising man. Uh, because in, m...many cases I wrote the adds...the advertising for my own departments when I felt that the advertising department could not interpret, uh, the merchandise. They were very happy for me just to take over. And I would write the copy. They would make the lay-out

BN: so that it would...and then I would write copy to fit.

And some of my ads, uh, pulled very well. And I did a lot of other things of that sort. Which really appealed to me more than, uh, the buying transactions. Although, uh, I did, uh, get satisfaction out of that because, uh, the trips to the market were interesting and, uh, the, uh, uh, knowledge I gained of merchandise by moving all over the store in different departments, uh, uh, I cherish now that I know s...I know a lot of things that I wouldn't know otherwise. I've been into so many different industries as a buyer. That I know I have a broad knowledge that I wouldn't have had otherwise. An appreciation, too, of things.

BS: You may want to quarrel with what I think I'm hearing...but let me tell you what I think I'm hearing. Uh, and I'm hearing a man who is very proud of what he did for his life's work. But at the same time seems to have chafed a little bit under the direction of other people running what may have seemed to be a family heritage. And maybe you could make a little more clear to me who was really running Anderson-Newcomb from the 30's to the time it was sold out. Who really made the decisions?

BN: Well it was, uh, primarily Mr. William B. Anderson, who was the president of the company, and John W. Long, who was the

BN: right after he, uh, finished Marshall. And...he...he did well. He ended up as president of the company. Uh, Harry Wolfe graduated from Marshall. He had worked for a clothing store which was the predecessor...well I guess it was the...yes it was the predecessor to Amsburys. And then he was employeed after he had worked there. Harry Apple, I think, was a Marshall graduate. And, uh, he had worked for Bradshaw Deal. And then came to our store after some years there. And he did very well. He became...ended up as a ready-to-wear buyer. But we had no organized recruiting because we didn't need all that many people. Now the, perhaps one of the most talented buyers we ever had in the whole store was Shirley Schultz, who came to the store during her high school years and worked as a stenographer, and an assistant for Mr. Anderson. Just a filing clerk and so on. (cough) And as time went on she was given some of the departments on the main floor. And of all the people I think we ever had, she was outstanding in her ability as a buyer. And made a lot of money for the company, and did well herself. Uh, she, uh, was well, she just had a high school education but she was smart and capable, very energetic. We had another woman in the business who I think had a great influence on it. Her name was Mirvine Garrett. M-I-R-V-I-N-E. She was a graduate of

BN: vice-president and treasurer. They controlled the business because, uh, when Mr. C.N. Anderson died in 1926...by the terms of his will they had the voting power of the ma...majority interest in the business. His widow received the, uh, dividends from the business for the stock he had owned. But they had...they...they ran the business. And, uh, my father then became president of the store. And stayed for a few years. And then, uh, we were hitting hard time, uh, beginning in the...with 1929. And they made a proposition to my father that, uh, uh, they would reduce his salary and he would no longer be the president of the company. He would remain as a buyer because he had great talents as a buyer. And he couldn't accept it. He just couldn't do it. So in the end he sold his interest to them on a...well it was stretched out...what he got was stretched out over I think out ten years that they paid...actually when you say they bought it. The business bought it, they just, uh, paid him, uh...well he became chairman of the board and they paid him so much a year for several years. And so he retired from the business in 1931. I believe it was then for a few years he...he was drawn in to be manager of the Bradshaw-Deal Department Store, which was in financial difficulties and that ended, lasted for 3...about 3 years, I think. Well, of course in that I did have, uh, a bad

BN: feeling, uh, when my father left the business because I had looked forward to working with him and that was gone. And then, uh, of course it was a tough stretch there in the 30's. The business kept going down. Things began...we were having to take salary cuts time after time. And there was a certain amount of fumbling because these were young men who were running the business and didn't have the background. And actually, I think, in some cases they needed my father. And he...he was still consulted, uh, frequently. But, uh, he was out of the business. And I went through a crisis, uh, physically because I, in 19-, uh, fall of 1931 I had to have an operation on my hip that knocked me out for, uh, well I went...was operated on early in November, and went back to work on crutches in...on the last day of February to give you an idea. And it was a great financial blow, too, because, uh, that was the year, 1931 was the year one of my boys was born. And then I had this...

(telephone buzz)

BN: uh.

BS: Excuse me.

BN: So I had, uh, I really went in a nose dive financially, uh,

BN: that year. And when I got back to work I think I had...I took two or three more salary cuts in the 30's. And by the end of, uh...by the time World War I came on I mean World War II I was not making as much money as I had been making in the...in the 1920's and had a family of three children. So you can understand that there was, uh, a struggle there. And meanwhile the business had gone way down from a million and a quarter dollars a year to 700 thousand dollars. We had lost three something...over 3 hundred thousand dollars during the depression. So the business wasn't able to do what could have been done. Uh, by 1943, I had taken over the, uh, fifth floor in addition to the fourth floor. I was operating the two floors, doing all the buying for both of those floors. And my salary wasn't as much as it had been in the 1920's, but as time moved on the profit sharing helped out on that. And then when we were free again to change pay I got a substantial increase in my salary. Which of course helped me a great deal because by that time my children were facing college. And I never would have made it through if I hadn't, uh, had that help. So that's the one side of it that I did chafe some because I could see things that I felt should be done. Uh, there was a...a cautiousness on the part of Mr. Anderson and Mr. Long uh, particularly as long as Mrs. C.N. Anderson lived.

BN: Uh, they were always vulnerable because if they had mis-
managed the business and lost money. Uh, after the depres-
sion was over, uh, she might have taken some action.
Because she was very hostile about the whole thing. She
believed when Mr. C.N. Anderson died that she was going
to control that stock. And she was going to run the store.
And so you can understand her revulsion of feeling when this
thing happened. Uh, I wasn't the only employee though, who
suffered from the change of management between Mr. C.N. An-
derson and my father and these two younger men. Uh, there
was...there were people who, uh, just never got over it. Uh,
the change and...and everything. And I wouldn't say that
the changes were all bad. But they were just hard to accept
at...at...at first. As time went on, uh, I felt a great loyalty
to both of those men, and liked them and got along with them.
But again uh going back uh over the whole thing. It's not
necessarily a good idea to, uh, stay in a family business.
Uh you...you aren't challenged quite the same way you are
when you kick loose and...and uh go out and work for some-
body else.

BS: Did Mr. Long and Mr. Anderson continue to run the company
say into the 60's?

BN: Well, Mr. Long died in 1956.

BS: And he was active till then?

BN: Yes.

BS: O.K.

BN: And he died very suddenly. He went to work one day and died during the night of a heart attack. Uh, it's interesting he died within just a month after my father died. And, uh, he was comparatively young. He was, let's see...98...he was 58 years old when he died. He was a brilliant man. He was educated at the University of Chicago. And, uh, I think in engineering. When he came to the store he had an analytical mind. He quickly grasped retail accounting. And over the years he was a big man in the National Retail Drygoods Association, uh, their controllers division and helped develop accounting methods to make, uh, results comparable. And many of the things that took place, uh, in that development period, when all those methods of accounting were being worked out...uh were a part of his thinking. Uh, in the store he took over, also the building, uh, maintenance of the building. And, uh, he was very competent at that. He understood machinery. He, uh, was a hard worker. In the office he installed, uh, what they called this tabulating equipment which is the predecessor to computers. Uh, for, uh much of our accounting was being done on machines, including uh printing out the

BN: statements for the customers, uh, automatically from punch cards. He was a pioneer in that, too. He, uh, hadn't practically no talent for merchandising. Wasn't really, wasn't interested. His one attempt at that was to take care of the uh, uh, applicance department for several years, uh as part of his duties. And uh, we sold refrigerators and stoves and so on. But I don't think he had any feeling for it. Mr. Anderson on the other hand was just a born merchant. He could he...he was an excellent buyer. And dep...and whatever department he took over prospered. He, uh, also was a very uh, you might say level headed man. Who uh...very thoughtful about the business. Very uh, consistant in his... everything he did. Uh, meticolus in getting his work turned out. I think he actually was carrying too big a load. Because he was president of the company which gave him oversight of personnel, all the merchandising and, uh, you might say general management. Where as Mr. Long had the credit department, the accounting offices, and the building. And when Mr. Long was in town Mr. Anderson never spoke, gave any instructions to anybody working under Mr. Long's direction. And vice-versa. When uh, Mr. Anderson was out of town in later years, uh, some of the general management functions turned...were given to me. In other words if, uh, there were some problem that was not in Mr. Longs jurisdiction, it would come to me.