

Transcription for Edie Burnette
Interviewer: Jordan Baker
Interviewee: Eddie Burnette
Interview date: 11/7/2016
Location: Pisgah High School Library

Start of Interview

Jordan Baker: So you grew up in Haywood County?

Edie Burnette: I did.

JB: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

EB: I have one brother.

JB: Ok. Is it ok if I ask you a few questions about your early life?

EB: Sure

JB: What is your name?

EB: Edie Hutchins Burnette.

JB: Do you have any siblings?

EB: One brother John

JB: Did he grow up in Haywood County?

EB: He did. I want to add one thing, our father was superintendent of the Canton City school system before the schools were consolidated.

JB: I seen where your father was one of the men who physically helped build the town? Did he ever tell you stories about the Canton Mill? His name was A.J. Hutchins correct?

EB: He didn't tell me too many stories about the mill because he didn't work there, but he was personal friends with Rueben B. Roberson who was over the mill. He did several projects that the people at the mill asked him to participate in, and one of those was to plant trees on the Canton water shed.

JB: What impact did the Canton mill have on the town while you were growing up?

EB: You know it's hard in my mind to separate Canton and the mill because they are so intertwined, and I suppose you know that the paper mill had a Company Store ... and they had a YMCA and they had Camp Hope and even though my father didn't work there I could go to the company store with friends ... I spent half my life at the YMCA, we had square-dance teams, dances, sock hops, whatever you want to call them ... Most of the teenagers spent most of their time there.

JB: I was in Camp Hope when I was little. I used to do that, we have that in our town. I've seen in an article written by Dave Neal that you said waterdogs were the worst part about growing up in Haywood County?

EB: I wouldn't call that the worst thing of all the aquatic creatures in that river, that's the ugliest thing you've ever seen. It looks prehistoric.

JB: What are waterdogs? I've never heard of it.

EB: A salamander.

JB: So they are not harmful?

EB: Nah, we thought they were gonna eat us and they are in decline because of water quality and

I don't mean below the mill you know with the mills affluence I'm talking about higher in the mountains.

JB: Were you ever concerned about what was in the air?

EB: I suppose I was too young to be really concerned, but I could see the black soot on the window sills. I could see what fell on the clothes that were hanging outside to dry, and people if you go to the mill right now you will see a lot of brand new fancy trucks but back during my youth you drove a clunker to work at the mill, because they always said that it contributed to rust, deterioration.

JB: Over your lifetime have you noticed any progress that has been made to the mill?

EB: Oh heavens yes, the air is so clean now. The odor was very strong back in the day, below the mill the water was brown of course that doesn't really bother me that much because that is tannin part of it at least. And if you go down east all of the rivers are brown because of the tannin and the trees so really that water didn't look that different other than there was foam on it.

JB: You went to Wake Forest, is that correct?

EB: I did

JB: Can you tell me a little about your book? I'm interested to hear about it.

EB: I formerly before I taught school I was employed full time by the Asheville Citizens Times, and then over the years I left because the time was not good for my daughter. I needed to be home more so I very reluctantly gave up that job, and came to teach school, but I never completely lost touch with the Asheville paper. Over the years I've been described as a stringer, a correspondent, a columnist, you know whatever, and the last and most meaningful thing I did there for more than 5 years I wrote a column that was called Mountain Echo's, and when I was asked to do that I was asked to focus on the history of Haywood County, and I was just given free reign whatever tweaked my

mind to write about. I would research it. It was so fun driving all over this county and talking to whomever and I learned so very much.

JB: What was your favorite historical moment that you learned?

EB: I had several favorites. There was a man named Garret Smathers whose professional life had involved working for the National Park Service in Hawaii, just all over the country, but he was

Canton native, and when he retired and came here, he was so good to just sit down and explain to me whatever questions I asked, like the Smokies are so diversified in trees and plants and flora, fauna you know, and he explained all that to me with the glaciers that would flow into this area and carry with them all sorts of wildlife, plants, flowers, whatever they would recede, but they left what they brought with them, and to me that was just fascinating, and he worked with me on a number of columns, and that was very special. But another man his name was George, I'll think of his last name, but he had worked at a logging camp above Sunburst which was the better known of the logging camps, but he called and asked me to come talk to him. He said, I don't want people to forget about Spruce which was another smaller logging camp further up the mountain from Sunburst. And he really meant that he wanted that area, and the things that happened there to be remembered, and it was gratifying to be able to do that for him and he was a very nice person.

JB: Well when I was driving up here I had never seen the Canton Mill, and I couldn't believe how big it was.

EB: Oh yes.

JB: I don't know what I was expecting but it's huge, I was so shocked.

EB: Well it is. It has increased in size over the years when they first started operating according to what I had been told one of their primary products was oil that was derived from the Chestnut trees, and if you are familiar at all with the blight that affected the Chestnut trees basically they are gone, but in the beginning it was one of their big products. And it was used to tan leather, and it was shipped overseas, was used here and I have wrote a story about it. But then the trees died and construction on the mill was continuing, and it just grew and grew until it was producing primarily paper.

JB: Did anyone in your family work in the mill?

EB: I had uncles and aunts who worked there.

JB: Did they ever tell you about it? The working conditions?

EB: No. they were very fortunate to have those jobs, good paying jobs and benefits.

JB: So the mill was good paying jobs for the town?

EB: Always and continues to be. I use to envy my friends in high school because their parents made a lot more money than mine did. He was a state employee, therefore my friends had more material possessions that I did, and they had access to that wonderful company store.

JB: What was the company store again?

EB: It was a store that stocked groceries, they even had coal, ice, it was all inclusive – tools anything that the mill employees wanted needed.

JB: So only the mill employees could shop there?

EB: Yes.

JB: Is it still here?

EB: No. They tore it down to build a paper machine, but the employees could even buy their gas there, and they used what they called doogaloo, and it wasn't a cash operation.

JB: Did you teach in the library, is that correct?

EB: No.

JB: History?

EB: At Canton High school I taught English and History, and when we moved to Pisgah I made a big switch. I went into a vocational program, and I taught graphics or offset printing.

JB: While teaching English and History did you ever teach about this area?

EB: Not much about this area because I was assigned a certain period of time, and that didn't include local history, and that was a shame because kids need to know more about their local

History in addition to what went before.

JB: Yeah, I was so excited about this project because it was so close to where I go to school, and

I was excited because you know I've never, I didn't really know about the Canton Mill. I knew it was a thing, but I didn't know anything about it, so when I was doing research I found all this information on how it has changed over time, and it's just right outside my backdoor and I knew nothing about it.

EB: Well I'm surprised.

JB: So what else is your book about?

EB: It's just about this entire mountainous area and I talked about building I40. I talked about the old way of living, people making lye soap, and gristmills, communities, how they got their names just anything and everything.

JB: Did Canton get their name from the mill, is that correct?

EB: Oh yes that's an interesting story.

JB: Ok.

EB: There was a metal bridge, and those bridges were called truss, t-r-u-s-s, truss bridges and at the top there was a metal plaque, and it said that the bridge was manufactured in Canton, Ohio. In the beginning this was called Forks of Pigeon because the Pigeon River has two forks the east fork, and the west fork, and before the river reaches Canton those two forks converge, and there were places where the river could be forded, and Canton was one of them. So it's called Forks of Pigeon, and then as the mill grew the town grew, and they decided they needed to change the name from Forks of Pigeon. At one point it was called Buford, EB: u-f-o-r-d, and then during a town alderman meeting they were arguing over the name, and one fellow went outside and he happened to look up at that plaque on the bridge that said made in Canton, Ohio, and he came back in and he said we should call it Canton, and so it's been ever since.

JB: Has the town grew over your lifetime?

EB: It has grown then it has declined. When I was say a teenager every store in town was full. We had shoe stores, clothing stores, shoe repair stores, we could go to town and buy anything we needed. And then they built I40 which is another thing I wrote about in the book, and when I40 was completed it bypassed Canton, and we lost all of that traffic that we had enjoyed. So the stores because of the lack of customers, and foot traffic the stores one by one closed, and it's just been sad, but in recent years thanks to the current town board, and the current town manager they realized that Canton would never be what it was because so many attempts had been made to rejuvenate it, but this town board understood that what was in the past could not continue to be. That we had to look to the future, and we had to change. Many people were opposed to any sort of changing they wanted to be what it once was, but that was not going to happen so I'm not basing the improvements over the sale of beer and liquor, but whether we like it or not that contributes to growth so a former mayor owned what use to be a very known hotel, and it was called The Imperial, and he refurbished it and put a restaurant, and it started the upswing because now then we no longer had the YMCA to go to. All of our gathering places were gone other than the schools, but the Imperial gave us a place to be, and to meet our friends. And since then it's slow but new businesses are coming in including a brewery, another new restaurant is coming, a new florist, a new bakery, little by little it's coming back.

JB: Did Canton not use to sell alcohol?

EB: Heavens no. Now in the beginning I've been told there was a beer joint that's what they call it. There was a beer joint on every comer and a pool hall, and I guess

appealing to the male workers, but then of course all that was replaced by hardware stores, the Carolina Power building and that sort of thing.

JB: I seen where you were a part of volkmont?

EB: Folkmoot?

JB: Yeah that's it.

EB: Oh, when Folkmoot was introduced I was there even before the festival was before it became to be. I was asked to do a newspaper story and I was to do it on Folkmoot and I said what on earth is Folkmoot? And the editor said go talk to Dr. Clinton Border, and he will tell you what it is. I ended up working with Folkmoot for about 35 years, and it an international folk festival that brings groups from their native countries to the headquarters in Waynesville, and they stay here almost two weeks. And they perform. They mingle with people. At one point Champion Papers then, would entertain them at a picnic, at Lake Logan to give them an opportunity to get out in the mountains and see the beauty, the natural beauty here.

JB: What award did your book win?

EB: It's called Historical Book Award, and it was given to me by the North Carolina society of

Historians and the meeting was this past weekend, and that group has been in existence for 75 years. And over time they have expanded so they give awards for anything and everything that pertains to the History of North Carolina to computer blogs to full on books.

JB: When you were writing your book did you base it off of interviews, research or?

EB: Yes, I talked to innumerable people. And they all seem eager to share what they remembered. My dad was, well he was a history buff, but on Sunday drives he would, we would pass places and he would talk about them. One was called the Friendly House, and I remembered these little bits and pieces, and one of the first things I did was do some research find someone to interview and learn what on earth was the Friendly House.

JB: What's the Friendly House?

EB: It was a group of Universalist. A religion that it not usually found in this area but they came down here to establish a place where the mountain people could come and get limited medical attention, education. They had a very expensive library, and the women who the pastor was originally a man, but they sent this woman and she just came involved in everything now this was in the Bethel area it wasn't in Canton. It was for the people who lived way back in the woods who really didn't have much and needed any kind of help.

JB: Has the education system always remained the same here?

EB: The what?

JB: Education system.

EB: Oh, basically of course the Friendly House, and that Universalist religion did not last here because this community has Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterians, and they did not really like the Universalist religion. But they did like the benefits they derived. When my father came here there wasn't much of a schools system, but over time it grew and grew. They built, well they had some Elementary Schools, but they had no cafeterias, no libraries, so all of that under his leadership improved. Then he built a new high school, and over time another that sits across the river that's Canton Middle School now.

JB: I seen it when I was pulling up. So how long was your father superintendent?

EB: Gosh 30 something years.

JB: Oh man. Umm is there any other stories you would like to add?

EB: I would like to say that the time period during which I grew up even though it was following the depression of course the economic system improved drastically after World War II. But it was an ideal time, everything every place was safe. We were free to wander all over this town even ride our bicycles up towards the Bethel rural area. Everyone was our friend in town, the doctors we knew everyone they knew us and if they thought we were going to do something we shouldn't be they took care of it or told our parents so in that aspect we had a lot of care takers if you will. And it was safe and then the paper mill when they came here they brought a lot of people from Ohio to run the mill and these people were well educated, and they had children who were more sophisticated than we, and all of that combined just had a tremendous effect on us. I mean most of my graduating class went to college. Well I knew that I would go to college that was a given.

JB: But that's saying a lot

EB: Yes, and my classmates went to Wake Forest, they went to Duke, Carolina, you name it they went to Western, but it was a good school and of course you know how it's grown.

JB: Definitely growing.

EB: Oh yes, boy getting very good reviews.

JB: Ok. Do you know this has been recorded?

EB: Yes I do, that's fine with me you have my permission.

JB: Ok. Thank you.

End of Interview