The Raleigh *News & Observer*, 1945-1995, Oral History Series

Transcript: Claude Sitton Interview

Interviewee:	**Mr. Claude Sitton**
Date:	**Thursday, July 12, 2007**
Location:	**His home, Oxford, GA**
Interviewer:	**Joseph Mosnier**
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Transcribed by/date:	**Emily Baran, August 2007, Chapel Hill, NC**
Edited by/date:	**Dana Di Maio, December 2008, Chapel Hill, NC**

JM: This is the twelfth of July, Thursday, 2007. My name is Joe Mosnier. I am in Oxford, Georgia at the home of Mr. Claude Sitton, and we are here to do an oral history interview for the series on the Raleigh *News and Observer* that Mr. Frank Daniels Jr. has helped to set in motion.

CS: Joe, would you make that *The News and Observer* of Raleigh?

JM: *The News and Observer* of Raleigh, indeed, thank you.

CS: That's the correct title, *The News and Observer*. Now I'll tell you this, Frank Daniels III changed the name of the newspaper after I left and he changed it from *The News and Observer* to *The News & Observer*. I had a hard time getting over that because I think the last thing you touch on a newspaper is the title, but that's okay; it's neither here nor there.

JM: From that careful remark, I'm already anticipating that this is going to be a good and detailed and careful interview, so that's wonderful, thank you, Claude. You've graciously allowed me to call you Claude.

CS: Please do. As I said, Jonathan Daniels once told me shortly after I came to Raleigh, "Claude, never let anybody call you mister." That's Jonathan through and through.

JM: One further note before we get started. I am the associate director of the Southern Oral History Program at UNC-Chapel Hill and we are doing these interviews in that institutional context. Claude, thanks very much for agreeing to sit down and for hosting me here at your home. It's a pleasure to be with you and an honor to be with you.

CS: Pleasure.

JM: I appreciate the opportunity. I thought we'd talk today or open today, rather, with maybe having you reflect a little bit about the first earliest sense as you began working as a professional journalist--the first sense you would have had of *The News and Observer* from some distance, because of course your career started elsewhere and you would come to the paper later.

CS: Well, I covered civil rights demonstrations in Raleigh right in back of *The News and Observer* and I think it was Woolworth's and the person representing *The News and Observer* there as a reporter was Gene Roberts, who later became--well he later succeeded me as national editor of the *New York Times* and then left the *Times* and went to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, which won eighteen Pulitzer Prizes while he was there and then later he came back to the *Times* and worked for awhile as managing editor of the *Times*. He now teaches journalism at the University of Maryland.

JM: As you first sort of began to form an opinion about the nature and perspectives of the paper in that era, how would you have framed an answer to the question: "Tell me about that paper and what it's trying to do"?

CS: Okay, well *The News and Observer* was one of the few papers in the South whose news and editorial policies I agreed with. The others were the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, for example, and I had talked to them before making the decision to come to Raleigh; also the *Arkansas Gazette* under Mr. Heiskell, and Harry Ashmore at that time was the executive editor

there and Hugh Patterson was publisher. Then the *Delta Democrat-Times* in Greenville, Mississippi. I briefly knew Hodding Carter III [William Hodding Carter III, who reported for and worked at the *Delta Democrat-Times*, which was founded by his father, William Hodding Carter, Jr.]--well, I know Hodding Carter III, but I also knew his father, Hodding Carter Jr., not well, but briefly--and I'm just trying to think of who else. That was really about--well, certainly the *Atlanta Constitution* when Ralph McGill was the editor. As a matter of fact, when I worked for the *New York Times* out of Atlanta, my office was in the *Constitution* on the same floor with McGill's office and I'd come back from Mississippi and McGill would come around and say, "Hey Claude, what's going on in Mississippi?" And I quickly found out that unless I was very careful, that what I told McGill was in his column the next morning and this was material that I had intended to use for my piece in the *New York Times*'s *Week in Review* on Sunday; so I had to be rather careful there. But McGill was a wonderful, wonderful editor and took a lot of risk personally and otherwise to make his point of view known.

JM: I think it's implied, but do you want to just say a little bit about why *The News and Observer* was a paper with which you sort of agreed in perspective and point of view.

CS: Well, one, while I was still a college student at Emory University, I had read Jonathan [Daniels]'s first book, *A Southerner Discovers the South*, and I think that sort of set me off on the right path because I liked what he had written about the South and I liked his attitude on the South. And then, two, I knew he was one of the moderate southern editors who had sort of led the way to compliance with the Supreme Court's *Brown* ruling in 1954, and all of these things impressed me.

JM: If you would, take some time and describe how it came to pass in the late 60s that *The News and Observer* offered you the position that you ultimately accepted. How did that conversation unfold?

CS: Well, based on what I know about it, I had decided to leave the *New York Times*. I was the national editor. That was not a happy day on the *New York Times*. There was trouble between [Turner] Catledge, then the managing editor, and Scotty Reston [James Barrett "Scotty" Reston], the chief of the Washington Bureau, and other things; there were differences there at the *Times*. My desk had to handle the Washington copy, and yet I had no influence whatsoever when it came to handing out raises, hiring and firing in the Washington Bureau; at that time, the chief of the bureau there was Tom Wicker, a North Carolinian, great guy, great newspaper man, and a wonderful columnist; but Tom, I don't think, was quite happy as bureau chief, and handling the administrative affairs that went with the bureau. That's my opinion; I don't know that. But at any rate, there was blood on the floor every day and some of it was mine and finally I decided to leave.

I think Derick Daniels, who was a member of the board of *The News and Observer* and Frank's first cousin and son of Dr. Worth Daniels, who also was on the board of *The News and Observer*--I think Derick had heard that I was looking, and he knew that Frank and Jonathan had decided they wanted to make a change at *The News and Observer*. Jonathan, of course for practical purposes, moved to Hilton Head. I think they had decided that Tom Inman, Jonathan's son-in-law, would not be replacing Jonathan and so they were searching for someone who would. They invited me to come down to Raleigh after they heard of the fact that I was looking from Derick, I think. And I came down and had lunch with Frank--that's the senior Frank

Daniels--and Jonathan, and we agreed that I would come as editorial director of the publishing company and of the two newspapers, and that was the title that I had when I first came.

Two years later, and this had been understood, I was made editor of *The News and Observer* and vice-president of The News and Observer Publishing Company, and I retained my duties as editorial director, which meant I handled the news and administration of the both *The News and Observer* and *The Raleigh Times*, as well as the editorial policy and certainly the news policies of *The News and Observer* and the *Times*, but I had nothing to do with the editorial policies of *The Raleigh Times*.

JM: You mentioned that you had also talked with folks up in Louisville.

CS: That's correct. Yes, I talked to Barry Bingham. My brother had been a friend of the Bingham family, and especially of Barry Jr., and so they came to New York and I went over to the St. Regis Hotel, I think it was, for an interview with Barry. He brought Norm Isaacs, then the executive editor of the *Courier-Journal*, along with him. I let Barry know that I would be happy to come to Louisville as managing editor as long as it was understood that I would succeed Isaacs when Isaacs retired. Barry called me back--apparently, Isaacs was not ready to retire, and Barry called me back and said, "Well, Norm's decided he's not ready to go, and so that's it." I said, "Fine. I'm sorry, Barry. I can't come." I think four or five years later, Norm Isaacs moved out and went to a paper, I think over in Delaware.

JM: Tell me a little bit about your impressions of the paper in all respects when you arrived. Sort of frame up what you discovered on reaching the paper professionally.

CS: Well, it needed some work. Jonathan had been in and out by virtue of his interest in Hilton Head, I think, and also his own writing, because Jonathan was an author as well as a newspaper editor. One of the oddest things I found was one fellow who had been fired three

times and was still working, still on the payroll--and the payroll in those days was, I think, three sheets of paper on a legal pad. So the time for change had come. The news operation was good, but there were some problems there. I know Woody [Woodrow] Price was the managing editor--nice guy, a lot of background on North Carolina, and had been a very good reporter himself, but Woody--at that time, we had a feature on the front page called "Under the Dome." Well, Woody had been known to remark that, "Well, Jonathan's got his editorial page, but I've got the 'Under the Dome,'" and Woody used that "Under the Dome" sort of as an editorial page editor would. So we had to get a little more professional and eliminate that kind of business of mixing news and editorial opinion in the same place; you can't do that. And that's one thing I had to handle as well as getting some of the administrative work cleared up.

JM: You mentioned that Jonathan Daniels by this point was really transitioning down to Hilton Head. How about your sense, with him moving in that direction, Frank Daniels stepping into some new roles as he's moving up to sort of become publisher and chairman--if you could talk a little bit about the roles being played at that time of your arrival and how you managed your relationships vis-à-vis the family.

CS: Well, the senior Frank Daniels was in charge of the business side of the paper. Jonathan had always been in charge of the news and editorial side and the twain didn't mix. There was some resentment between the two families, and this continued and it reached the point under Frank Jr. when the Jonathan Daniels side of the family really wanted out and wanted its money, and that created some strains. When the paper was sold, I called Frank and asked him why he did it and he said, "Well, it had gotten to the point where it wasn't fun anymore," and I could see why. But Frank did his best through all those years, Frank Jr., to hold it together, and

succeeded in many respects and turned it into a much more valuable corporation and a much better newspaper than it had been before.

JM: Did you have wind of any of these kinds of intrafamily tensions before you accepted the position?

CS: No, they were subtle. They were not things that were spoken. It was just actions that were taken by people. I'm sure the situation with Tom Inman and Lucy Daniels and their later divorce and everything--I think that maybe added to the problems.

JM: You mentioned that on arrival, there were some adjustments that you began setting in motion. Tell me a little bit more about specifically what steps you had to take to begin reframing the operations as you preferred to see them arranged.

CS: Well, separating news and editorial was number one. Then giving some clear direction, both in terms of news policies that were being followed and also the editorial policy of *The News and Observer*, which tended to skip around a good deal. And to bring some new emphasis there to things like environmental preservation and some of the new things that were then coming along, that were important, I felt, to North Carolina. And of course, education. My goodness, education was, I thought--I'd always thought as a southerner that if the South were ever going to succeed, it would be through education, and education certainly was one of my number one editorial and news priorities the whole time I was there, as I think you'll find if you go back and look at the paper.

JM: You've just mentioned environment, education. Were there other key thematic questions that you had at the front of your mind as well?

[break in conversation]

CS: Oh yeah, things like planning. I don't think *The News and Observer* had given much attention to that.

JM: Planning in the sense of--?

CS: Planning in the sense of planning for new infrastructure, new growth, and all the problems that always come with growth; university reorganization--and that was an objective, too, of [Gov.] Bob Scott, which he succeeded in bringing about. Let's see. Trying to do something, and I never succeeded at this, about the overemphasis on college sports. I tried, but it didn't work because no one really wanted it except good folks, wonderful people like Bill Friday; he's still trying. I had a call from Bill just the other day and he was decrying the fact that some person he had a lot of confidence in had taken over at the NCAA and still had not done anything about the overemphasis on sports. Conservation, as I said, parks, flowers, clean air, clean water, all of those things.

JM: Was economic development per se something that you were attentive to?

CS: Yeah, and that went hand in glove with improving education and public school reform as well as reorganizing of the university system.

JM: We'll turn to all of those in time and take those in turn. Let me ask you about the transition in 1970 to editor.

CS: That was really no difference, just an addition of the title really is all it amounted to.

JM: So you were already well into that from the date of arrival?

CS: Yes, because Jonathan, as I say, had moved to Hilton Head. I think Jonathan came back and spent a couple of days at one point, but it was just seeing people around town. As far as I know, he didn't do anything for the paper. He kept his office for a year, I think, or a year and a half before I moved in. He said, "Well, you might as well move into the office." I had a smaller

office out--actually they'd built an office for me in the hallway out there, and then Jonathan said, "Ah, well, I don't need to keep this office anymore." I think I'd already moved into that office before I got the title of editor, but I was in fact the editor; I was editing the paper, no question about that.

JM: Before we went on the tape this afternoon, you mentioned that your work prior to joining the paper brought you into contact with key political elites in North Carolina, including several prior governors.

CS: That's right. Luther Hodges, who along with Archie Davis, a banker from Winston-Salem, was responsible for the creation of the Research Triangle Park and the Research Triangle Foundation, which became North Carolina's economic gem, jewel, really a great addition to the state. Also Terry Sanford, who was governor and had worked with Hodges in this respect.

JM: You mentioned that Hugh Morton got you all folks together.

CS: Hugh Morton, a great public relations man [known for his work to protect and promote Grandfather Mountain and to encourage North Carolina tourism], would invite the southern correspondents for national publications like *The New York Times*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and so forth to come up to Grandfather Mountain and he'd have Governor Hodges and Terry Sanford come over and we'd all sit around and drink whiskey and tell lies for two or three days. It was very interesting and sort of helped me to get to know North Carolina and what its hopes were.

JM: Would those events convened by Hugh Morton--was there any dimension of them that was more formally directed at, say, exposing the correspondents to reports or policy analysis, or was this purely social?

CS: Not really, purely social for the most part.

JM: So it was done over cocktails and spending time together.

CS: Oh right, right.

JM: Let me ask you about the state's political leadership at the time of your arrival. Of course, we're going to transition in '72 to Jim Holshouser and a big change, but first let me keep you at—

CS: Well, no. When I arrived, Dan Moore was governor.

JM: Exactly, exactly. So tell me a little bit about Moore, Scott, Holshouser.

CS: Moore was conservative, but a principled guy, principled, highly principled fellow. Then I got to know him better through a group called the Watauga Club. Present and past governors and heads of the university system, both the president, Bill Friday, most of the time while I was there, and then later Dick Spangler--I'm not sure Dick Spangler was a member of the Watauga Club, but I know Friday was; and of course chancellors--John Caldwell was very active; and other people. Then other people, the chancellor at Chapel Hill at the time, and I cannot remember his name right now, a wonderful fellow; and then folks like Ivy Clayton, for example, who'd been active in the Moore administration.

It met once a month at the Carolina Country Club and it was interesting. I remember, for example, that there was a long discussion at one meeting [with] Bob Scott and Bill Friday and others, John Caldwell, on the need for university reorganization, and sort of how it was going to come about. That was one of the meetings where it was worked out before it went to the legislature [Sitton refers to the consolidation in 1971 of all sixteen public institutions in North Carolina that granted bachelor's degrees]. Scott succeeded in doing that, and also in starting kindergartens in North Carolina--two of his main accomplishments.

JM: Would you say that the Watauga Club functioned as the most important vehicle for that sort of information exchange and collaboration among--?

CS: I don't know whether it was the most important, but certainly one of the most important, if not the most important.

JM: Were there others that you were aware of?

CS: No, no.

JM: Did the Watauga Club's meetings--you mentioned they were monthly and typically over lunch?

CS: Dinner.

JM: Would they typically include a formal presentation by one or more speakers?

CS: Yes, usually there was a speaker. Now this one session I was referring to there was no speaker; there was just discussion.

JM: And I think I recall someone telling me that it almost took the form of a question being presented and then each person around the table (**28:40**).

CS: Correct, correct. That's right.

JM: How wide a range of opinion would typically prevail? I guess there isn't a typical; it would depend on the question at hand.

CS: That's right.

JM: But how relatively widely distributed—

CS: Well, for example, as I recall, the one on university reorganization, there were some differences, but the discussion knocked off the rough edges and they sort of almost reached a consensus there.

JM: And that would be sort of a typical way for that group to do its work?

CS: Yeah.

JM: Tell me a little bit more about—

CS: Let me take this off and—

JM: Sure, we'll take a little quick break and we'll fire back up.

[break in conversation]

JM: Okay, we're back on after a short break to get a drink of water. Claude, we were talking about the Watauga Club and exploring in that way the much broader question of the ways in which political elites and institutional leaders across North Carolina interacted with professional journalists and exchanged information and perspective and all. How about your sense of Governor Moore and Governor Scott and how they interacted both formally and informally with *The News and Observer*?

CS: I don't know about Moore, but Scott--other than the Watauga Club setting, most of the interaction took place in brief conversation, maybe at a social reception of some kind and that type of thing. Other than with the reporters for the paper now. With the reporters, from time to time, a reporter would get in to see the governors, sit down and have a long interview--not frequently, but these things happened. But then the news conferences, where they would call in maybe the five or six reporters for the North Carolina press who were covering the governor--they'd bring them in to talk with the governor about some particular issue.

JM: Were there ever parts of your coverage that caused Scott to be at odds with the paper and try to bark at you a little bit?

CS: Well, Scott's problem with the paper was when the paper either editorially or in reporting noted his tendency to be something of a bully in trying to get things done; Scott could do that and be that way. And then after Scott left the governorship, I know there was one

instance where Jim Hunt had helped him get a job as head of the Appalachian Regional Commission, I think it was, and then for some reason Scott didn't like something Jim Hunt had done and so he starts making speeches going after Jim Hunt. This was right before Hunt was planning to run for a second term, I think the first governor who could do so because they'd just changed the situation that held all the other governors to one term. And it looked like Scott was going to go after Hunt politically and run against him in the Democratic primary, but it didn't happen, thank goodness.

JM: Staying here kind of late 60s into the early 70s, as your work is really measured against the long tenure you would have there, really taking off, tell me about the folks who were your chief operational lieutenants and leading reporters at the paper in those years.

CS: Well, of course, Bob Brooks. Bob Brooks, when I came to the paper, was city editor. Woody Price was the managing editor, and Woody just came to me one day and he says, "I know what you're trying to do here and I know what you're going to have to do to succeed and I just don't want to be a part of it." So Woody retired early through Frank Daniels' generosity. Then Brooks, I promoted Brooks to managing editor and Brooks did an excellent job in making the shift from the type of editing that had been the rule of thumb under the previous administration and the type that I thought we needed and he thought we needed. We were in general agreement on most things, ninety percent of the time, ninety-five.

JM: Tell me about other folks. I'll just run down a list of some prominent persons: how about Roy Parker?

CS: Roy Parker did a very good job for *The News and Observer* both in Raleigh and in Washington. Roy was good. He always had North Carolina's best interest up top primary with

him and he did a very good job with us in both Raleigh and Washington, and did an excellent job as editor of the *Fayetteville Observer* too.

JM: How about David Jones?

CS: Now you're talking about Dave Jones, the general manager—

JM: Yep.

CS: Of *The News and Observer*?

JM: Right.

CS: Great person, really did a fine job for Frank Daniels and for the paper and sort of led the paper's transition from a largely Raleigh, Eastern North Carolina paper to a Triangle paper. He made all the changes that needed to be made to make that shift and Dave was an honest, highly-principled guy. He and Mel Finch too--Mel Finch, of course, was the chief financial officer of the corporation and the controller. The three of us, Finch, Jones and I, all sort worked as a team. That was the day when there was a switch in the newspaper industry and editors were urged, along with other departments, to break down the walls among the various departments and to have good cooperation, and it was a healthy trend.

JM: How about your team of key reporters? Let me ask about folks like Ferrel Guillory.

CS: Oh, Ferrel was number one. Ferrel was not just a reporter. Ferrel was a student of government and politics and really spent a lot of time and effort in understanding what actually was going on. He had a lot of respect from other reporters, from people he covered, and also from--well, I remember [reporter] Judy Woodruff would come to Raleigh, and Johnny Apple [R. W. Apple Jr.] of *The New York Times*--Judy Woodruff was then with the *Washington Post,* as I recall--to check with Ferrel to see what was going on from a political standpoint. He had a lot of respect in the industry. Then there was Al May, who was not the student Ferrel was, but Al was a

damn energetic, digging reporter, very valuable to the paper. There were others, some of the younger reporters; a good columnist, Dennis Rogers, who has just retired. Now I shouldn't leave out, of all people, Pat Stith. Pat Stith sort of brought us into the high-tech age. He sort of, I guess you could say he got himself a graduate degree in I.T. [information technology] and had the patience and the determination to get to the bottom of whatever difficult story he was assigned to and give it to the paper in readable form.

JM: Was there any substantial build-up in your reporting staff under your management early years?

CS: Not as substantial as I would have liked. There was quite a substantial build-up after I left. I got a little help in that respect, but I never felt that I had enough, and I had several other editors tell me, "I don't see how you do it with that staff."

JM: Was that a constant question that ran between you and folks like Frank Daniels as to allocating more resources for more journalistic staff?

CS: Well, it was not a big problem, no, but every time budget time came up, yes, we had some discussion about it, yeah. But Frank, you know--I'll say this: I enjoyed working with Frank and I always sympathized with the problems that Frank had to handle, the complaints about things that the paper had done that I was responsible for and that some people in Raleigh didn't like at all. And yet I never, never had any problem with Frank except one time, when Jyles Coggins was running for reelection as mayor and Frank wanted to support Coggins for reelection. I didn't and I couldn't, and I told Frank, "I can't do that." I've always said that the publisher--in the final analysis, it was the publisher's call as to whom the paper would support, and that if the editor couldn't go along with the call, the editor could walk out the door. I told Frank, "This is one I just can't, I just think it's wrong in principle and I can't do it," and so Frank

said well, he wanted to express his opinion. I said, "Well, alright, have space on the front page," and it had "publisher's opinion" above it and this was Franks' endorsement of Jyles Coggins, who got defeated. (laughs)

Not long after I went there, Raleigh-Durham Airport just had a little bandbox of a terminal there and a five-thousand-foot runway that they'd inherited from the government from World War II. Frank was on the Raleigh-Durham Airport Authority, and the Authority was going to expand the airport and they were going to build a new runway. One of our reporters found out one day that they were out surveying through William Umstead Park for the runway. Well the park had been given to the state with a clear codicil that said this could be used only for park purposes. So we covered that one fairly well and had plenty to say about it editorially--never heard a word from Frank, never heard a word. So then they were going to reorient the runway and have 727's coming right down over all those Petri dishes out there at the Research Triangle Park. Well, you know, the people at the Research Triangle Park Foundation went up in smoke on that one, so they gave that one up. Then they did what they should have done all along and they had public hearings and they took input and one thing or another and then they built that ten-thousand-foot runway and gee, when I left, you had, what, three terminals and it was an international airport. Is it today?

JM: Well, I think they still fly to London.

CS: Still fly to London?

JM: Yep.

CS: Oh, great. Well, it was London and Paris as I recall.

JM: I think they dropped the Paris flight some years ago. You mentioned that nice anecdote about the Coggins campaign and your discussions with Frank about that. It would be

interesting, I think, if you reflected a little bit in some detail about the entire process that the paper, both internally and in relation to candidates, would set in motion when endorsement time came around.

CS: Of course, I would discuss it with the staff of the editorial page—Steve Ford was the associate editor at that time and Tom Inman before him—and then have some conversation with Frank, and I guess the first year or two with Mr. Daniels, the senior Mr. Daniels.

JM: Frank Sr.

CS: Yeah, yeah, whom I had a lot of respect for. He was straight as a die and I remember hearing about—I wasn't there at the time, of course—back in the Depression, things reached the point that he was not going to be able to meet the payroll and so he went around town and collected advertisement revenue in advance from his advertisers so that he could meet the payroll. Then I've heard both Jonathan and Frank joke about going to New York on due bills. They'd get due bills from advertisers, you know, for the railroad or what-have-you, and they'd go to New York and have a great time on nothing but due bills. But the old man was really great and had done a wonderful job holding the paper together. See Jonathan, you know, was the last press secretary of Franklin Roosevelt, so he was away for a time. And then Josephus Daniels was in and out; he was, of course, Wilson's secretary of the Navy and later ambassador to Mexico for Franklin Roosevelt. But Frank was there the whole time. We used to talk about the role of editor now and then, not frequently, but now and then. Frank had a friend named Brody Griffin who was a publisher in Macon, Georgia, and Frank said Body told him one time that an editor was any son of a bitch he could agree with fifty-one percent of the time. (laughs)

JM: How did you interact with candidates in anticipation of the paper's endorsements?

CS: Well, if I were doing it today, you know, we'd have a so-called editorial board meeting; that term was not used then. We'd invite the candidate to come in and we'd hear all the candidates out, I think knowing full well which one we were going to endorse because of the candidates' records. But not then; we didn't go out and talk to the candidates.

Before I forget it, I want to mention, talking about the family, that both Worth Daniels and Elizabeth Squire, who was Jonathan's daughter by his first wife, were great supporters of the news and editorial side when it came to budget. They wanted to see that *The News and Observer* did a good job, as good a job as it could do given somewhat limited resources; and any newspaper's resources are limited, certainly today. But they were great supporters of the news and editorial side in meetings of the board and in their private conversations about things.

JM: You mentioned in our email communication before I came down that there were aspects of the board's operations that would be worth--.

CS: That was one of them, that was one of them. The board really left it to Frank Jr. and Derick [Daniels]. Derick was probably the most influential member of the board in that respect, in conversations with Frank Jr. about the direction of the paper. We really--the whole time I was there, we needed a new press. They finally got one after I left, and it made all the difference in the world in the appearance of the paper, but God. In fact I think there was one time when there was a vote on the board about a new press, and I know Derick and Frank voted no and I voted yes. (laughs) But you know, that was an investment that--certainly it was the owner's call; I knew that, I knew that.

JM: Let's spend some time talking about some of the major issues you tackled both on the news side and editorial side during your tenure. Let me start broadly with the question of race and race relations and how it played out through the schools and in politics and all, and have you

share your broad perspective on that question and how you and your team of reporters thought about the many implications of race and how you would address that.

CS: Well, I think we took a moderate to liberal approach on racial issues. We generally were in tune with the thinking of middle-class blacks, at least as they expressed it at that time--and I'm not sure that what they said publicly actually represented their private feeling about the issue. I know there was a strong feeling, and perhaps we could have been more helpful in this respect, that black universities or colleges or whatever their status at that time were not getting the support from the state that they should have gotten and deserved.

JM: You think you might have done well to have been more assertive on that point?

CS: Yes, yes. Actually you know, one of the problems with the university system is it's always sort of broke down on the question of either race or section. I remember that there was a fellow named English Jones down at Pembroke, and he came to Bill Friday and he wanted Pembroke's status raised, I think, from that of a college to a university. Bill said, "Them PhDs are going to become as common as assholes one of these days, and Pembroke State University's got to have a few." (laughs)

So that was the kind of thing that was going on at the time, and I'm not sure that many North Carolinians had ever accepted [The University of North Carolina at] Chapel Hill and North Carolina State University as their universities. I know a lot of people at East Carolina [University] had not. They had to have a medical school over there, and Lord knows we didn't need another medical school. We had not only the medical school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, we had Duke and we had Wake Forest. But there you go, and there was waste in all that. There was money that could have been better spent in the public schools, but was not. Perhaps we did not emphasize that point as strongly as we might have. But race--we

didn't support [North Carolina Civil Rights activist] Golden Frinks and some of the tactics he used in demonstrations. We did not support the--aw gee, what's his name? The guy from Durham who was head of the Congress of Racial Equality at one point.

JM: McKissick.

CS: Floyd McKissick. We did not support McKissick and [former National Program Director for the Congress of Racial Equality] Gordon Carey in their drive to set up an all-black town [known as Soul City, the planned community was intended to be open to all races] up north of Raleigh. I just didn't think that was right. I mean, I was an integrationist and so we couldn't go along with that, but we did support busing when the issue arose along with after the Charlotte case.

JM: When you say the Charlotte case, you mean the Wilmington Ten?

CS: On busing.

JM: Oh, the busing case, I'm sorry.

CS: Wilmington Ten, I can't recall exactly what we did. I don't think it was much, but we had some problems with [Civil Rights activist Benjamin] Chavis's earlier actions up in north of Greensboro where we think he was responsible for a riot and for some burning up there, and of course, he was—

JM: Pre-Wilmington?

CS: Yeah, that was pre-Wilmington.

JM: You mean up in Oxford [North Carolina, Chavis's birthplace], I bet.

CS: Oxford, yeah, I think it was, yeah. So I guess you could say we were moderate on some issues, what would be considered moderate in that context, and liberal on others.

JM: Before coming down here to visit with you, I went back and I read an interview that you gave in 1973 to Jack Bass and Walter De Vries for their book [*The Transformation of Southern Politics: Social Change and Political Consequence Since 1945*, published 1976], and of course, that interview turned much on the question of race. And at that point--of course, that was thirty-four years ago--I think my summary would be that you were relatively optimistic that the South was getting beyond race and would get beyond race. I mean, you were not Pollyannaish [naively optimistic], certainly, but one way you explained how you thought it might manifest is that you anticipated that the political style of a Jesse Helms wouldn't play out so well, and that the old Eisenhower style of Republicanism, with greater attention to fiscal questions, would be more dominant in the Republican Party. And you thought that the whole South's politics would shape up with increasing attention not to cultural issues, but to basic economic ones, and that's why you thought that the Democratic Party's forecast—

CS: I was wrong.

JM: And you were wrong. Isn't that interesting? That's the point, right.

CS: I was wrong.

JM: Yeah, it's fascinating, isn't it?

CS: Yeah, that's the way I felt at the time. I remember reading that, and I also remember reading--they interviewed Ferrel Guillory, too, and I read that part of it, not recently, but a long time ago. But yeah, I think that the reason the South is so Republican today is still the reaction on race and the reaction against--well, Lyndon Johnson said when he signed, I think, his 1957 Civil Rights Act, told Hubert Humphrey, "I think I've just surrendered the South," or something to that effect, and I think he's right. Too bad.

JM: It's also interesting that--or I want to draw you out a little bit more on your comment that you were essentially an integrationist.

CS: Yeah.

JM: I guess you had a faith that that project would succeed.

CS: Yes, true.

JM: Fair to say that that was broadly the perspective held by the family as well, Frank Daniels Jr. for example--that that was the sensibility that prevailed?

CS: Frank was a little bit more conservative on that score than I was, but his father was--for all intents and purposes, he was a segregationist. He didn't talk about it a lot, but that was where his heart was, yeah.

JM: How about inside the newspaper looking down at your cadre of reporters? Was there any generational question in play there? Were younger reporters wanting to be more assertive at times? Were there any of those tensions inside your staff?

CS: Didn't come to my attention, no. On race, well, it's funny. I remember now efforts to desegregate the staff, and it was hard to get blacks to come who were qualified, who could handle the language of idiomatic English well enough to work on *The News and Observer*. I remember I got one guy, I can't remember his name now, but he came in as an intern. I believe Hunter George was then handling most of the interns as City Editor. And Hunter had done everything he could for him, and when this guy left, he told me, shouted across the newsroom, "You need to get more blacks on your staff." And I said, "You're leaving. Why are you going to St. Pete? Why don't you stay here?" We tried, but it was tough. It was hard to get them to come to Raleigh because they didn't like Raleigh. There were no middle-class blacks of their age to socialize with.

JM: How about we turn to the question of environmental concerns broadly--conservation, air, water, all of the challenges that you saw North Carolina facing, I imagine especially because of a pattern of unfolding economic development that involved a lot of growth and industry and so forth, and other things--?

CS: Well, actually, the growth pressures had not really become evident at that point.

JM: Okay, so it was more just existing industry?

CS: More existing industry and the purposes for which the state's resources were being spent for.

JM: Help me understand that.

CS: Even today, you're still short of funds in North Carolina, and we were short of funds in that day. There was not a lot of money to be spent for parks and forest and that type of thing, not state money at any rate. There was concern about water, or there was--I know, hell, we were concerned about that creek out there at Crabtree, Crabtree Creek was a problem; the development along the Neuse River. It's hard for me after all these years to remember in detail exactly what the issues were. Education was by far the number one issue.

JM: Before we move there, one last question about environment--I appreciate the difficulty of recalling these things at a distance--was, especially since the N&O would win a Pulitzer for the "Boss Hog" series much much later, were there water concerns down east in your era because of industrialized agriculture?

CS: Not that I recall.

JM: That hadn't really begun, okay, that hadn't scaled up yet.

CS: No, and I think that was a great series that they did, yeah.

JM: Talk to me about your vision of education and how you hoped the paper could cover the issue, illuminate the issue.

CS: I thought by preventing what I felt was a totally unnecessary tax-cutting, and this whole attitude of "government is bad, government can't do any good," the whole Republican effort, especially under Jim Martin. That was our big problem with Martin--not what he did, but what he didn't do. He was a do-little, do-nothing governor in effect, always trying to cut--. Well, he would cut taxes or set something up that took money away from education to spend on highways when they already had the gasoline tax--which to his credit, Jim Hunt and other Democrats had increased, several times I think. That was just getting the money in the right place. Also I might have been considered sort of conservative from a standpoint of curriculum. I really believed in the basics, and so did Jim Hunt. Jim Hunt and I pretty well agreed on what should be done in education, and Bill Clinton at the time. I remember I was on a panel in Raleigh with Jim Hunt and Bill Clinton on education, on that very subject. The money was always short; that was the big problem.

JM: You mentioned how Ferrel Guillory was a student of the deep politics that really motivated these things. How would you explain the deeper politics prevailing in the 70s, the 80s in North Carolina on these basic questions of fiscal policy and financial resource allocation around things like education and so forth? Why didn't North Carolina do better?

CS: Well, one, because it didn't have the money. I mean, there was a shortage of available funds, no question. Another factor was race. Some people were sending their children to private schools. Some people were disaffected by busing, including, toward the end of my stay up there, some of the blacks who didn't like busing. And this was a surprise to me, because I've

always felt and still do that if you don't have a pretty good black representation in a school, it's not going to get the resources it needs.

JM: You mean a white component to get the resources it needs?

CS: Well, yeah, you've got to have both.

JM: Exactly.

CS: You've got to have both. If you're going to have equality among the various schools in the system, you need both in each school. Those were two factors. You look at North Carolina wages in that day, they were pretty low. Somebody said at that time that we were going from an industry marked by mills to one marked by malls. Well, the service industry, look at its wages.

JM: You mean shopping malls when you say that.

CS: Shopping malls, yeah. Then at the same time, there was this increased support for the Republican Party and the first cry always went up: "Cut taxes, cut taxes. For God's sake, don't raise them." So given all those factors, we never could get the money for the schools.

JM: What was your sense of the efficiency, responsiveness, character of North Carolina politics and government in your tenure? How well do you think that the General Assembly and the governors actually did the work that ought to have been done representing their constituents? The question of influence in Raleigh I guess is what I'm asking.

CS: Well, I once said that Jim Hunt was about as good a governor as North Carolina would tolerate. That pretty well sums it up, yeah. Efficiency--he did his best with what he had to work with with the legislature, which--my God, he had to deal with Jimmy Green [speaker of the NC state House and then lieutenant governor during Hunt's first term as governor] there for awhile, and folks like that. Then there was the rising opposition to property taxes, local property taxes, which was one source of school money. Who was Craig Phillips's [NC superintendent of

public instruction from 1969-89] successor? Bob Etheridge. I thought Bob Etheridge did a good job as superintendent of public instruction and based on what I read, is doing a pretty good job in Congress and Price is still in the Congress too.

JM: He is, yeah.

CS: Two very good congressmen. Price is an old Terry Sanford guy; yeah, I like him.

JM: Let me have you say a little bit more about the university reorganization question.

CS: Well, as I said earlier, there's always been that division based on racial lines and sectional lines and God knows college sports. It reached the point where [NC State University basketball coach and athletic director Jim] Valvano even said—this was when he was athletic director—that he no longer worked for the university; he worked for the NC State Sports Association, or something like that.

JM: The Wolfpack Club maybe, something like that.

CS: Yeah, yeah. I mean, outrageous, outrageous, and Bill Friday is still fighting that battle and losing. And it's not just North Carolina; I mean, this is the country as a whole.

JM: Tell me what you would have liked to have seen North Carolina do on that front.

CS: Well, finally I think I even wrote a column (**74:08**) one time that they should go to club teams, bring people in, give them a uniform, let them represent North Carolina State. If they wanted to take a course or two, that was fine, but let's don't have this fraud of student athletes. Not only that, it was the exploitation of the players themselves who all thought they were going to wind up in the NBA or the NFL or what have you, when only one percent--I don't know what the percentage is today, but back then it was one percent of them made it. The coaches, the big coaches like Valvano with not just salaries, which were a small part of the picture, but with their shoe sales, their endorsements--

JM: TV shows.

CS: Their TV programs and everything, were making more in one year than a schoolteacher might make in her entire career and that's a scandal--was then, is now.

JM: How about we break for lunch? Does that sound good?

CS: Sure, fine.

[break in conversation for lunch]

JM: Okay, we are picking back up after a break for a lovely lunch and Claude, you had mentioned just as we were coming back here that you had a fun story to tell or an interesting story to tell.

CS: Well, my wife and I owned a small piece of property on a lake and a cabin out on Creedmoor Road [in Raleigh]. So we rented the cabin to this young couple, and one day I got a call that there was trouble out at the cabin. I rushed out, and here were all these State Bureau of Investigation people who had come rolling down this little dirt road and gone in and searched the cabin and pulled down about two or three dozen bricks of Acapulco Gold [a variety of marijuana] from the attic that this couple had stored up there. So I went back to the paper and found the senior Mr. Daniels and I said--

JM: That's Frank Sr.

CS: Frank Sr., yeah. He didn't like "Frank Sr.," by the way. You never called him Frank Sr., the Senior Mr. Daniels, or whatever. But at any rate, I told him about what had happened. He said, "Are you going to put a story in the paper?" I said, "Well, gee, I just owned the place. I had nothing to do with it, no charges against me." He said, "Live by the sword, die by the sword," so we carried a story on it. Well, a couple of years later, he got pulled [over while driving] for, I think he was crossing the yellow line, maybe weaved over a bit. So he came in with his ticket

and he came upstairs to my office, and he walked in and I think he gave me his first direct order. He said, "Put this in the paper." (laughs) Which I did. But a great man, an honest man, and just highly principled.

Now you asked me about the governors.

JM: Yeah.

CS: I thought, as I said earlier, Hunt was as good as a governor as North Carolina was likely to tolerate. I thought Scott did two wonderful things for North Carolina: one, getting the kindergarten program adopted, and secondly of course, setting up the new organization for the Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina--two great contributions to the state. As far as Holshouser was concerned, he did the best he could as a Republican governor with a Democratic legislature, and actually a Democratic lieutenant governor, because Jim Hunt was his lieutenant governor. But he did the best he could. He fought off attempts to cut taxes, unusual for a Republican in even those days, and tried to do what he could for the schools. I thought he was about as good a governor as he could have been under the circumstances.

JM: Can I ask you one more thing about that?

CS: Sure.

JM: Did you have any kind of a personal relationship with Holshouser? Did you know him at all?

CS: Yeah, Holshouser was in the Watauga Club, and as I recall was a participant in that discussion of what to do about the University of North Carolina Board of Governors, and made a good contribution. But he was a very decent guy and he was an old mountain Republican. He was not one of the Democrats who had turned coat because of the race issue and become Republican. He was not a Jesse Helms, by any means, by any means at all. I thought Helms was

just terrible from the standpoint of state--. I'll say one thing about him. As far as I know, he was not venal, he was not a thief, he did not line his own pocket dishonestly. But as far as politics were concerned and his attitude toward blacks--even though he hired the black who desegregated Ole Miss--

JM: James Meredith.

CS: James Meredith, but that was after Meredith had become sort of queer in his beliefs. At any rate--.

JM: Say a bit more about Helms, if you would, and how you thought about reporting about Helms and editorializing on Helms over the years.

CS: Well, I think we found out in the end, well, not in the end, but after awhile, after writing anti-Helms editorials or editorials that took a negative view of what he was doing and what he said he was going to do, that it was a wasted cause, and that perhaps the best treatment of Helms was that which Jonathan had adopted, and that was never [to] mention him in the paper. Well, I don't think you can do that. After all, he's your United States senator. You've got to cover him, but to cover him and let it go at that. But Helms and Tom Ellis, his political advisor, both were great admirers of the apartheid system of South Africa, to say nothing of what they thought of blacks--and Helms's contribution to racism by his performance as a commentator on WRAL television [based in Raleigh].

JM: You mentioned Tom Ellis. Did you know Ellis at all?

CS: Yeah. I used to see Ellis up in the--a lot of the politicians and actually people in government went to lunch at [department store] Hudson Belk's cafeteria. I used to see Tom up there. He was always very polite and cordial and I tried to be the same. Helms, on the other hand, he had a coarse streak in him. I remember Bob Brooks and I believe it was--well I'm not sure

who the other person was, somebody from the paper--we were sitting there at a table in Hudson Belk one day and Helms comes down the line and comes over and bows and said, "Hello, Mr. Sitton. How is your hammer hanging today?" I thought that was pretty awful.

JM: Did you know Carter Wrenn, the lieutenant to Ellis?

CS: I met Carter Wrenn once, I think, yeah.

JM: Given all that you've said about Helms and all, was there any extent to which Helms through Ellis or otherwise tried to cultivate you, the paper, to try to soften or in some way influence—

CS: No, I think he'd given up as we had, that it was just a lost cause. Did you see this?

JM: I did. Claude's pointing to a plaque on the wall over his desk. It has a little photo of Jesse Helms on it and I think it's going to probably be some ironic or humorous thing, I'm betting.

CS: It says, quote, "The most intellectually irresponsible editor I've ever known is Claude Sitton of the *Raleigh News and Observer*." He got the [newspaper's] name wrong. Excuse me, that was an interjection. This is [Helms's words on] Sitton again: "He doesn't make a stab at being fair to Ronald Reagan or to anybody who is conservative. If that's the kind of tocsin he's going to sound, he's going to continue to poison the atmosphere." This is from a story in *The News and Observer* in which Helms criticized the news media for coverage of his United States senatorial campaign. Well, actually, I recall having gotten a letter from Helms saying, "Your coverage of my campaign has been fair," and I think it was. I'm talking about the news coverage. I'm not talking about the editorial content, which Helms certainly would not consider to be fair. You could say I keep this on my wall as a reminder, "Sitton, there were some folks who did not like you and let you know it."

JM: Did you have any relationship at all with the young rising Republican in state politics who never quite made it, Jim—oh heavens. I can see his face as clear as day. Hardees franchiser, ultimately.

CS: Oh, Jim Gardner.

JM: Exactly, yeah.

CS: I talked to him several times, but nothing I remember. He had changed. Actually, in his latter days, he was a smoother article of what he had been to begin with. He was pretty rough, but I think in his last campaign he was, you know, okay; conservative, but otherwise fine.

JM: Tell me a little bit more about sort of how you came to know, observe, have a view of Jim Hunt, who would play such a significant role across those four terms as governor, but two during your tenure.

CS: Well, I guess the way I got to know him best was the Watauga Club because it was all off the record and everyone was expressing his opinion—and I say "his" because there were no women in the Watauga Club at that time. I don't know what the situation is today. But everyone was expressing his opinion on various subjects. Hunt was quite outspoken there on his thoughts and his hopes for the state and so forth, so I got to know him, I think, pretty well there. It was a more or less public meeting even though it was off the record. There were, I guess, at least a dozen at every meeting or more.

JM: What candid answer would Jim Hunt give to the question of his perspective on *The News and Observer* and how he attempted, to the extent that he did, to sort of manage that relationship and that coverage?

CS: That there, he'd probably be talking about dealing with reporters rather than with me because, other than when I asked him for an explanation of some position he'd taken or

whatever, he never tried to influence me to my knowledge. Actually, generally speaking, I think he and I agreed on most things. I understood that education was his number one do-good-in-this-field subject, and I certainly agreed with that.

JM: How about Jim Martin, same question: what would Martin say about *The News and Observer* and how he tried to (**89:38**)?

CS: Martin obviously did not like us at all and from his viewpoint, with good reason. I thought Martin was a do-nothing governor. I was surprised that he got reelected. I was even more surprised when he walked into my office one Saturday, or first sent his trooper in to say that the governor is here and would like to talk to you. I said, "Send him in," and in walked Jim Martin [who] rather looked a bit disheveled, no tie, which was unusual in that day.

JM: This was on a Saturday, you said?

CS: Yeah, looked tired, and said he wanted to resign. I said, "Well, if you want to resign, why are you here in my office?" "Well, I want to resign to you." And he handed me a letter of resignation, he said. I said, "Governor, would you mind talking to one of our reporters?" And he said, "No," and so I called Rob Christensen, who happened to be in the office at that time, and Rob escorted the governor to Rob's desk and interviewed him and we ran the letter. What he was resigning from was politics, he said; he was not resigning as governor. I think I had met Martin once or twice before, but that was the only time I had any face-to-face relationship with him. This is all duly reported in the Sunday morning *News and Observer* on the front page.

JM: Are there any legislative leaders or other state-level policy leaders who stand out in your memory as persons about whom you should perhaps reflect or comment?

CS: Well, I've commented on Bob Etheridge. I think Etheridge did an excellent job as superintendent of public instruction. I think Craig Phillips in that post did a pretty good job given

the resources with which he had to work. Gee, at this distance it's hard for me to call up names, but there were others. I thought, generally speaking, North Carolina had a pretty good group of public servants or public officials. The head of Central Prison, although he didn't have the resources he needed to clean up the place and straighten it out, I thought did a pretty good job with what he had to work with. Bill Friday--excellent job; no one could have done more for the university system than Bill Friday. Even people out of government, bankers--[former chairman of Wachovia Bank] Archie Davis, look what he did with working to set up that Research Triangle Park along with [Gov.] Luther Hodges, who then went to Washington with Kennedy as Secretary of Commerce. Terry Sanford, who brought a whole group of younger, very promising people into state government with him, and then later at Duke University--Joel Fleischman, for example--excellent, excellent in what he's done for Duke and earlier for North Carolina.

Another one who was not in government, but perhaps should have been--[vocal Raleigh Baptist pastor and reformer] Bill Finlator. Let me tell you about my first day in Raleigh. I flew in on Saturday night and I got up on Sunday morning. Now this was before I'd even been to *The News and Observer* office, and I had somewhere heard it said, maybe from either Jonathan or Frank Daniels the senior, that North Carolina had more Baptists than people. And I said, "Sitton, here you are in North Carolina, a place that has more Baptists than people. Well, why don't you get out this morning and see what the Baptists are saying?" So I walked up the street from the Velvet Cloak [Inn, a Raleigh hotel] where they'd put me up for the night and walked into Pullen Memorial Baptist Church and Bill Finlator stood up to preach, and I sat there and I listened and I said, "My God." I said, "North Carolina has some of the most liberal Baptists in the United States, and isn't this great." (laughter)

JM: Yep, you would have heard that from Finlator, wouldn't you?

CS: That's the truth.

JM: That's right.

CS: In fact, I've got the Finlator Civil Liberties Award, W.W. Finlator Civil--, by the Raleigh chapter of the ACLU. Oh, Frank and I, by the way, had ACLU cards, card-carrying members.

JM: That's Frank Jr.

CS: Yeah.

JM: Yeah, that's right.

CS: I'd better embargo that one. [laughs]

JM: Tell me about anybody else from the legislature who stands out. You've mentioned Jimmy Green as a negative example.

CS: Yeah.

JM: Liston Ramsey?

CS: Ramsey was an interesting type from over in the mountains, generally--as I recall now--generally positive, generally, generally. And then how about Jim Graham, the commissioner of agriculture?

JM: Yeah, what was your perspective about Graham?

CS: [laughs] Funniest guy in the world, funniest guy in the world. Then the state treasurer--oh gee, the old guy, I picked up a lot of North Carolina history from him; I cannot remember.

JM: Treasurer?

CS: State Treasurer.

JM: You don't mean Thad Eure, because he's—

CS: No, not Thad Eure, no.

JM: Because he was secretary of state.

CS: He was the secretary of state, yeah. Thad Eure, another born comic and clown.

JM: Well, tell the story. We'll get the name later. [Harlan E. Boyles]

CS: Yeah. Well, as I say, I just picked up a lot of history. He sort of saw me as an opportunity for education and proceeded to give me one, sometimes at greater length than I thought necessary.

JM: Let me turn the conversation in a new direction. Beginning in the early 70s, Frank Jr. and the publishing company began to acquire smaller papers in South Carolina, etcetera.

CS: Wasn't the first the *Waynesville Mountaineer*?

JM: Yeah, right up in the mountains as well.

CS: Well, no, it wasn't. Really the first was Jonathan's paper, the Hilton Head *Island Packet*, which had started out just as a gossip sheet that was put out by a group of women in Hilton Head. Jonathan, I think, sort of took it over and gave them a hand and turned it into what today is a very valuable property.

[break in conversation]

JM: Okay, we're going back on now just after a minute's break. You're talking about the *Packet.*

CS: Yeah, the *Island Packet* and wasn't the *Waynesville Mountaineer* next?

JM: Yep.

CS: And I think that that acquisition had to do with Bobby Joe Key, who was the husband of Jonathan's daughter [Adelaide Worth Daniels]. I'm just not sure.

JM: Actually the sequence, I'm referring to a list that I have, is Hilton Head in '71. Between '73 and '75, they bought Beaufort, Smithfield, Wendell, Cary, and *Business North Carolina* magazine; Mt. Olive and Waynesville in '79.

CS: '79, huh?

JM: Yeah. '82 Gold Leaf and Zebulon, and then in '85, the three papers in York County, South Carolina. So it kind of spanned from '71 to '85, every couple of years an acquisition or two. I guess my question is--obviously that was a process that took some time to move forward, but did you have a sense of--well, I want to ask a couple things: motives and implications.

CS: I think the motive was to increase the cash flow generally of the corporation to satisfy some of the desires of, for the most part, the Jonathan Daniels family for more income.

JM: How about implications?

CS: Well, I think the philosophy at that time was in the newspaper business, you grow or you die, and that this was a factor that affected everyone's thinking in the business, in the business.

JM: So you saw this as a natural and understandable pattern—

CS: Yeah, yeah.

JM: That was playing out, yeah.

CS: Yeah, yeah.

JM: Did it change your professional obligations and responsibilities in any way?

CS: No, no. No, other than my function as a member of the board just to listen and hear what was going on and so forth.

JM: I'd be interested in your perspective on--and we've touched this very lightly earlier on--the process by which the paper's geographic focus in terms of circulation shifted away from

the original, much greater, emphasis on eastern North Carolina, and now was turning more to the Triangle generally.

CS: My impression was that this was driven by Dave Jones. I'm not saying--don't misunderstand me, I'm not saying that Frank was opposed to it, no. I think Frank saw some advantages here, and what I'm trying to recall is whether his father was still alive at that time or not.

JM: His father died in 1986.

CS: Okay, and when did this change take place?

JM: I don't have the exact date, I'm sorry.

CS: My impression is I don't think he necessarily would have been in favor of that. I mean, you know, he'd grown up with "This is a Raleigh and eastern North Carolina newspaper," and this changed it, changed it greatly. Now I will say this. I just want to get it on the record. When I look back, I think my greatest mistake, in a sense, was sort of tied to this, and that is my failure as editor of *The News and Observer* to make sure that we had a top-notch investigative reporter on the "Little Rascals" case in Edenton. We let our regional person cover it and he was adequate as a regional correspondent, a full-time staffer, but he covered eastern North Carolina. But he was not the person to see what was wrong with this case and to do the necessary digging to root it out. That prosecutor had gone wild, eaten up by ambition, I suppose, to hang these people, these people who operated the Little Rascals Daycare Center, no matter how.

JM: And the accusation was alleged sexual abuse of these children?

CS: Yeah, alleged sexual abuse, crazy stuff like all the kids talked about being borne through the air this way and that way and flying all over and it was crazy stuff. And as it turned out, they were pardoned, but it wrecked their lives forever. And I still feel sorry about that, still

feel sorry about it. I think had we sent someone like Pat Stith down there, that would have been it. But see, at that time, Edenton already was a pretty far reach for *The News and Observer*. Actually that was *Virginian Pilot* territory. That pulling out of eastern North Carolina might have affected my thinking to some extent.

JM: Got it, in terms of how you assigned journalistic coverage.

CS: Yeah, whether we were really responsible for doing something about that miscarriage of justice.

JM: Right, right. We're going to take a little break here.

CS: Yeah.

[break in conversation]

CS: After I drink this coffee, I may be flying.

JM: We're back on after a little break and I think we're doing fine in terms of moving through some of the subjects I want to cover. So anticipating one more session tomorrow morning where we'll have a good hour and a half, I think we're good. I did want to ask, maybe to close out today, a couple more things. One was earlier we had visited about certain thematic concerns, areas of—

CS: Let me ask you to go back on another thing.

JM: Yeah.

CS: An interruption, sorry.

JM: That's okay.

CS: You're talking to Dave Jones?

JM: Yeah, we will.

CS: And you're going to talk to Fred Crisp?

JM: I believe we will, yeah.

CS: So that'll cover the business side, well, I mean, that aspect of the change in focus of circulation, but it also will cover those advertising--. I remember Crisp telling me one thing, that advertisers were not reading the paper, which upset me. That was either right before I left or later when I came back to Raleigh on a visit that he was concerned about it, that they weren't reading the paper--not because they disliked the paper; they just weren't reading.

JM: Was that a more general symptom of the wider trend that has happened—

CS: Yeah, yes.

JM: Of less paper readership?

CS: I don't think it was necessarily tied to I.T. [Sitton seems to refer to information technology--the way electronic news media has superseded newspapers]; they just weren't interested, weren't interested.

JM: We'd earlier talked about—

CS: Excuse me.

JM: Sure.

CS: And I remember reading at the time and I forget, it was not in *Editor & Publisher*, which never went into very great depth in anything, but there was a decline in newspaper readership among college graduates, which upset me too. It goes along with what we were talking about earlier this morning.

JM: North Carolina banks and Charlotte would really continue to boom past the time you left.

CS: Yeah.

JM: NCNB [North Carolina National Bank, based in Charlotte, NC] would become NationsBank, would become Bank of America through further acquisitions and evolution. But say through your tenure, how emphatically felt, if at all, was the influence of the Charlotte banking community on your work and range of considerations?

CS: Oddly enough, I think Winston [-Salem] had a more prominent presence around Raleigh. BB&T, for example--we have BB&T right here, you know. In fact, our local bank sold out to BB&T just recently, about a year ago.

JM: But you felt Wachovia more than you felt NCNB, is that what you're saying?

CS: Yes, Wachovia and—

JM: John Medlin [President and CEO of Winston-Salem-based banking corporation Wachovia].

CS: Yeah, Jack Medlin, yeah. He was a hell of a guy. I had a--what was it? I had a problem. We had a Wachovia account in Atlanta for some reason after we moved here. Although we did business with a local bank, we also had a Wachovia account and we had a real problem with them, something they'd done. I got so mad I finally called Medlin. I called him in the morning. He called me that afternoon. He'd just gotten back to town, unbelievable. So you can see where my loyalty lay.

JM: How much attention did you have to pay, broadly speaking, to bankers and their range of concerns and considerations?

CS: Not a lot, not a lot.

JM: How about real estate development and developers?

CS: Oh yes, oh yes. That's something that I remember the senior Daniels told me. He said, "We've always got to have two strong ones. Then they'll compete with each other. If we have only one, he's going to dominate Raleigh."

JM: You mean developers?

CS: Yes, developers--C. B. Jones on one end and Ed Richards on the other. He said, "Let them fight each other." He was right, he was right. One of the most promising politicians I ever knew in North Carolina was Tommy Bradshaw, who was mayor of Raleigh for a time. And Tommy Bradshaw worked for Ed Richards, but I'm not pointing a finger at Bradshaw to say that he did anything that was not in Raleigh's best interests as a result of his employment. I don't know one way or the other, but I thought Bradshaw did a good job for Raleigh. I don't know what ever happened to him either; I can't recall.

JM: I don't know.

CS: You don't recognize the name, yeah. And of course, the lawyers we had, as long as you're doing this, you really ought to talk to Roger and Wade Smith; Wade Smith, he's a good friend of Frank's. I think he and Frank have lunch together fairly frequently.

JM: Yeah, we are going to talk to Wade Smith.

CS: You're going to talk to him?

JM: Yeah.

CS: Yeah, Wade once represented us. It was a Freedom of Information thing. I think at that time, I'm not sure whether it was Stevens—Hugh Stevens, another great guy—or Bill, ah crap, the company's lawyer; I'll think of it. But at any rate, I got a little bit sore at Smith because I thought we could have gotten more than we actually got from the judge and he said, "Cool it.

This is it. This is all we can expect." (laughs) But I'll tell you another good lawyer there that I liked: Bill Joslin, great guy.

JM: We've talked about bankers and real estate developers as important economic forces in North Carolina. We could talk about other industrial players, tobacco, textiles, over the years and I'd like to leave that for tomorrow. Just on this last point, was there anybody, any group of economic players that you had to be careful about or wary about or take care not to alienate? Was that ever a part of your range of--

CS: Yeah, but what was fortunate, we had enough--. Well, Carl Hudson [of the Hudson Belk company]--decent guy, I don't think Carl Hudson ever, or the people with whom he worked, ever made an untoward request of us. Smaller, nothing guys would. They'd call up and say, "I advertise in your paper." I said, "Fine, and why do you advertise? Because we bring them in your front door, right, friend?" And that was it. Now as long as you got enough advertisers, you don't have to worry about any one, although if that one had been Carl Hudson, we'd have had a problem. But Hudson was just a decent guy, and he was a good friend of Daniels Sr. and I think of Frank, too. I was trying to think of Hudson's assistant, but I can't think of his name now. He was nice too.

JM: I think maybe to wrap up for today--I think over lunch we talked a little bit about Hugh McColl, the former CEO of NationsBank and Bank of America ultimately, and you mentioned that there were times when he would gather journalists in Charlotte, I guess.

CS: One time, I recall.

JM: One time, okay, one time.

CS: One time, I recall, yeah. It was a sort of, well, I gathered he expected us to come. I got that from Frank. I got that from Frank. So we went and it was okay, but not especially

helpful. But I met McColl and met McColl down in Frank Sr.'s office one day and a very smart guy, very smart guy, South Carolinian.

JM: I think that's a good spot to pause today and we can pick up tomorrow morning.

CS: You sure?

JM: Yeah.

CS: You don't want to go on?

JM: I feel pretty comfortable, do you?

CS: Yeah, I can go for awhile longer.

JM: Okay, alright, well, then let's keep going.

CS: I've got this coffee.

JM: Okay, good enough, good enough. Let me ask about when you look back and you think about the broad impact of the paper, can you think about examples that would be good illustrations of the N&O having its most salutary effect, from your perspective, or effects? It could obviously—

CS: Well, I think when it came to issues that were generally popular with the people, as opposed to the people in the legislature--that on issues like education and so forth, we were very influential, if not from the standpoint of initiating greater action in that area, [then] from the standpoint of preventing any undercutting of the best interests of the public schools. While I would say the people weren't with us on North Carolina State University basketball, so we didn't have much influence there. But you know looking back on it, and I've said this: Valvano just participated or initiated academic rape as far as basketball players were concerned at NC State, but I have said, and wrong from the other standpoint, that Valvano only came down and did what

Poulton wanted him to do, and that was win ball games no matter how, no matter how. But you know what I've got?

JM: Claude's just pulled out a copy of the Valvano autobiography endorsed on the inside cover: "Congratulations on a great career. Enjoy your retirement. I hope you enjoy my book too. Best wishes, Jim Valvano to Claude." (laughs)

CS: Always a promoter.

JM: That's right. I need to take a brief pause here for a minute.

[break in conversation]

JM: Okay, we're back on after a very brief break.

CS: Okay, a couple things. Are you interviewing Hugh Stevens?

JM: Yes.

CS: Okay, good. Now you might ask him about this. As I recall, most of the work that Hugh did for us after he took over from Bill Lassiter, whose name I couldn't remember awhile ago, was on access as opposed to libel or anything of that kind, any problems with suits against the paper; we didn't have that many, almost none. But access--Frank spent a lot of the corporation's dollar on gaining access to matters that should be of public interest and that was something that we really pushed hard on as far as the editorial page was concerned.

JM: State records and such?

CS: Yes, yes.

JM: You wanted to make sure that access remained?

CS: Right, right, right. And I failed to mention—you asked me about state officials. My Lord, Susie Sharp, Susie Sharp, who really set the stage for prison reform when she said, "Prisons today are nothing but schools of crime," and she was right, she was right. And as I

recall, there was no dissent from Lee Bounds, who was head of Central Prison, head of the Department of Correction, I think it was. But [Chief Justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court] Susie Sharp and her buddy, [preceding Chief Justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court William] Bobbitt are great folks. Eva was going to invite the two of them to dinner one night with some other folks and she called Justice Sharp and said, "And we're going to invite Justice Bobbitt too" and Susie says, "Well just a minute, he's right here." (laughs) Great, great person, great person. Oh yeah, another thing Susie said, and this is a great quote: "We cannot fight crime by breeding it," and she said, "That's what the prisons are doing."

I remember it because I think it's so pertinent today, I remember a column I had written back in '89 in which I said the United States is still playing policeman to the world. The United States has yet to learn the lessons of Vietnam. And that is so pertinent today.

Okay, what's next?

JM: Another question? Okay.

CS: Sure.

JM: You mentioned Eva, Claude's spouse, issuing a social invitation to Supreme Court Justice Susie Sharp and Justice Bobbitt and such. Did you have to give any--well, I'm sure you did to some degree. To what extent and what would be examples of ways in which you felt obliged, if in fact you did, to attend to structuring your social calendar and your pattern of interaction to be most advantageous to you professionally?

CS: Well, we didn't have a big social calendar, and the people we invited to our home were people we liked. We also--you know, it's like you're setting up a dinner party. You want to get a group of people together who like each other, and that would dictate, to some extent, who we invite. No, I left it up to Frank to handle that, yeah.

JM: That was my next question. Can you reflect a little bit on his obligations in that regard as you observed them?

CS: Yeah, Frank and Julia did a great job and Julia was a wonderful hostess, wonderful, yeah.

JM: What would illustrate for me what a typical--

CS: I know the senior Mr. Daniels wanted it that way. He wanted the publisher and the owner to lead the way in social affairs, which suited me fine. Frank never said anything about it to me; do what you want to, you know Frank. But Mr. Daniels did do that.

JM: I think maybe if you're willing, let's stop here today and we can finish up tomorrow morning, if that sounds good.

CS: Okay.

JM: Thank you so much for such a great day.

CS: Oh, glad to do it.

END OF INTERVIEW