CM: Okay, this is Chad Morgan. I’m here at the Kannapolis History Room at the Kannapolis City Library here with Clarence Horton. He’s a judge in town and also a local historian. And I guess I want to go ahead and start by asking you a little bit about um, your background (CH: Okay) um, especially as it relates to Kannapolis and it’s history and that sort of thing and also what you do so ah, go ahead.

CH: Okay, as Chad said I’m Clarence Horton. I’m presently an emergency special superior court judge. I’ve lived in Kannapolis all my life. I was born here in 1940 in a little house south of Kannapolis which burned when I was, in December of 1941 and we moved to Jackson Park which was then a new subdivision. We were on the far edge of Jackson Park in a little four room house. My mother’s parents ran a boarding house on North Main Street at 504 North Main Street in Kannapolis called Brigman Boarding House and my father came here during the depression with a construction company to work on the underpasses in Kannapolis and some of the, some of the road and street improvements. He stayed at the boarding house and met mama and been here every since. So we’re the only Horton’s in this part of the state that are from our line. Most of us are from Raleigh and Cary and in that area of the state. I attended Woodrow Wilson Elementary School which is just across the line in Rowan County and then went to the Kannapolis, the other Kannapolis City Schools, graduated from A. L. Brown in 1958. I attended ah, UNC at Chapel Hill from ’58 thru ’65 ah, a BA degrees and then got my law degree there also probably came back home to practice law with a local lawyer named Bedford Black and practiced for several years. I was appointed ah, to the local domestic relations and juvenile court which was just a county court at that time and served several years and then my practice became such I didn’t have time to do that. So I resigned. I was with a local firm and finally moved to Concord because it was so inconvenient to drive back and forth from Kannapolis to the courthouse all the time. Practice with folks there, serve as county attorney a short time. In 1981 we had a district court judge named ah, L. F. Mule Thaggard who was a Kannapolis resident. He was one of the last lay judges in the state. He had served as a police officer and a justice of the peace and he was a very poplar democrat and ran for office and won as judge. When he won it wasn’t required in the early ’70’s that you be a lawyer to be a judge. So Judge Thaggard served as judge and did ah, did a commendable job. He consulted lawyers and studied what he had to do and used very good common sense and a world of experience. Unfortunately, he died in 1981 of a heart attack in January of that year and I was appointed to succeed him ah, on the district court. I served on the district court from 1981, February of 1981 thru December 1997. My main—of course the district court handles smaller traffic cases
and other criminal cases but it handles all the domestic relations cases and juvenile cases and I started working in that area and became ah, very interested in equitable distribution. So I worked a lot in that. In December of 1997 Governor Hunt during his second ah, terms in office he actually had appointed me in 1981 to the district court appointed me to the court of appeals, North Carolina court of appeals and I served there for three or four years ‘til 2001. Lost ah, actually two elections, I had run four times as district court judge uncontested so I ran two times statewide. Unfortunately, during a period of time when the opposing party was gaining a lot of judges for many reasons in any event lost and returned home I was appointed as a special superior court judge and those are the judges who travel the state and can be assigned anywhere. And then resigned from that in December 2004 to become an emergency special judge which means you can be appointed and assigned to cases anywhere as needed but you’re also free to do some other things. So I do a great deal of mediation and arbitration work and I want to have room, I wanted to have time for my writing and I work on local videos on the, for the local TV channel. We do a series of local history videos and that gave me a lot more flexibility with my time. So now I do primarily exceptional cases which are kind of complicated, lengthy business cases. Emergency judges have more time to do that than regular judges. I married and have four children all of whom, my wife and I do all of whom live in the area and we have nine grandchildren all of whom are, are local and we’re blessed with that. Attend church here and actually attend Mt. Olive at Methodist Church. I was raised in the Baptist Church but began attending Mt. Olive in about 1980. They have a lengthy history. They were one of the oldest churches in the county founded in 1803 and I became interested in their history. I worked on the bi-centennial of the Methodist church in 1984 and that really got me started. Did the church history and branched out that led me into the county history and I’ve been working on that ever since and with the bi-centennials I was chair of the Cabarrus County Bi-centennial in 1992. Actually, we started in 1989 and worked for them until 1993. We were able to add a number of things to the county history. We began to collect records seriously and to try to fill in some gaps and transcribe our old ??06M 54-55SEC sessions records and tried to edit some of those. And one thing led to another, Concord had its bi-centennial in 1996 and they were gracious enough to allow me to chair that even though I was a Kannapolis citizen they made me an honorary Concord citizen. And so one thing led to another, my goal had always been to complete the county history up to 1905 and then begin working on the Kannapolis history which really begins with JW Cannon beginning to obtain options on land in 1905. And I even though I had lived here all my life we had done very little to organize or write down our history. We had like most local histories a lot of information but a good bit of it was not exactly consistent with ah, what actually happened (CM: Right). The best stories and unfortunately my favorite stories never happened and I’ve learned that over the years.

CM: So you’re in the process right now of writing a history of Kannapolis?

CH: Yes, I’ve been working on that for sometime and I was a little diverted because as part of the bi-centennial effort in Kannapolis the bi-centennial committee wanted to do a pictorial history of Kannapolis from 1906 thru 2006 and that had various problems
apparently and then the young lady who’s in charge of that now, Renee Goodnight at the City of Kannapolis asked me to help organize the material, work out a time line and figure out how to divide the material into reasonable chapters or some ??08M 38SEC and then write captions for the pictures and check the historical accuracy and I wound up ah, spending a lot of time trying to accumulate ah, some pictures in addition to what, there had been some initial work done on the early years of Kannapolis. Norris Dearmon had done a lot of work collecting pictures through roughly the 1950’s, early 1950’s but there was considerable gap of course he was working by himself. I don’t know how he did all that he did but there was a considerable gap from about say 1955 ‘til 2005 there was very little. Then he ended with some beautiful pictures of the old mill building that’s being taken down and new buildings constructed and, and that was nice but we’re trying to fill in the gap and added some old pictures. People are still bringing in images all the time. So were increasing our collection. The hard thing is to keep everything organized and be able to find what you, what you’d like to have. But I’ve spent most of my time trying to correct the old records. I transcribed the 1910 census for Kannapolis to be able to identify the more or less the pioneer families who were here then and then we had a several school census in the 1910’s. I remember one in 1917 and I transcribed that because I thought it would give us a good indication of the change during those seven years and we were able to trace a number of families. There was a lot of coming and going in the early years. A lot of families stayed but a number of families were, moved from job to job. An awful lot stayed in Kannapolis because the, the pay was at or above the industry standard at that time. The Cannon’s always almost always did that. They stayed a little above the curve and they had here you had much better living conditions. I’ve looked into the history of some of the other mill villages and the homes, the houses here well they’re still standing, they’re still solid as a rock. They were much better built and the mill wanted, Mr. Cannon wanted the town to look good so he took on the job of maintaining those houses and you couldn’t beat the price. It was just one of the perks for working. You might not be making ah, as much as folks in other manufacturing jobs but when you added up the house at that time I believe water was furnished and the rent was very cheap. It was only a few dollars a room. It was hard to beat that and the mill did things like pick up trash they did the jobs local government normally would have done, even some health care.

CM: Right, so I mean is it difficult is it is it more difficult I mean to do a local history in Kannapolis than it is elsewhere where you know I guess the town I mean has only existed as a town in ’82 or ’83 or something like that.

CH: It made a difference. In working with the Concord local history (CM: Right) and I did a little, a little book ah, on the history of Concord just to, to get that project started which was published years ago in connection with the Concord bi-centennial. There I had the old records unfortunately as happens often the first volume of the Concord City Records was, is actually gone from, Concord was act, began in 1796. Lots were sold and so on. In 1806, Concord was incorporated. So you would expect to have formal records after that but from 1806 to 1838 that book is lost so their records actually start with 1838 as I recall, 1837 or ’38 and for many years they thought that their history began then so (CM: Hmm) we had to begin but from there on you have much of the history contained in
the minutes and that plus the voting records, deeds and other things it, it was much easier to be exact about their history than it was the early days of Kannapolis although we’re much younger (CM: Right). But once you get to, once you get through that difficult early period of, of ah, let’s say the first twenty years or so, twenty five years it’s actually not any more difficult than anywhere else. There are lots of records. We have the Daily Independent (CM: Right) on microfilm from what about 1937 or ’38 and I’ve used that extensively they, then local news was pretty thoroughly covered and you had list of all the officers of the organizations, people who attended meetings, people had birthdays and deaths that there’s a wealth of information as in any local newspaper and we, we’ve had to rely a lot on the, on that. The Concord Tribune has some articles about Kannapolis but the really more important events and usually those that touch Concord also. The Cannons since they lived in Concord and this was more or less their town and but they usually covered any of the activities that, that related to the mill or, or big observances.

CM: So you’ve talked about how in the course of researching this project about the history of Kannapolis you’ve sort of debunked some of your favorite stories or…?

CH: Well, there’s always a lot of folktales about the beginnings of anything and who drove the first stakes and who dug the first foundations and things like that and actually I’ve learned to be a little more sensitive about some of those things. My being in my profession you usually like to get the truthful answer if you can and I’m pretty detailed oriented so I really like to have two or three sources corroborating whatever I say if I possibly can. But you also learn and doing church histories is the same I’ve done the histories of a large number of churches in the area. The early years of those histories are usually the recollections of some of the older members and sometimes the recollection is just not consistent with (CM: Right) when the deed was given, what the conference records show and that sort of thing but I’ve also learned that you people get tired of someone always telling them that’s not right and I think you need to have a little respect for the oral tradition and there usually is some truth to it (CM: Uh, huh). So I try to be fairly gentle about it but when I’m writing if I say the traditional account says then you know that means (CM: Right) I’m not really sure that that’s what happened but ah, and if I know absolutely for sure I write it correctly and just take a chance that folks will understand. So we’ve done some of that ah, we still run into it with some of the old images. They’re dated some of the dates are off ten years (CM: Uh, huh) and frequently, so I’ve tried work on a timeline for Kannapolis which I’m ??16M 01SEC behind in adding to my timeline. It’s on the computer but I try to get exact dates that you can pin down what happened enough that you can test the old stories. Same thing with the old images we know exactly when a number of buildings were taken down, when the dome on the First Baptist Church was changed to a steeple, when some houses along Main Street were taken down for a parking lot and you can construct a timeline and identify the images to within a year and of course the makes of cars help but I don’t trust those because a lot of people had old cars (CM: Sure).

CM: Sure, so I mean what are, what are some of the sort of distinctive features of Kannapolis history versus other towns you’ve done?
CH: Okay, one of course the first thing people come to when I was growing up I was, we were always ah, always told that Kannapolis was the largest unincorporated town in the world. That was the, that was one thing that was going around and we certainly were unincorporated which makes us a little different from almost everything else I’ve worked on but unfortunately it turned out we weren’t the largest unincorporated town in the world of course ??17M 13SEC the largest in North Carolina. I think Fort Bragg was the largest until it incorporated where all the soldiers were (CM: Right) but we were certainly a large unincorporated town and we were taught that we were unique and we certainly were unique. After all we were a town where one person one company let’s say, we always think of Mr. Cannon it’s actually the mill company actually owned things but of course he controlled them. One company owned the entire downtown area and I suppose still does now well except that it’s (CM: Right) Mr. Murdock’s company that was a little unique. We had such a huge mill town and I think everyone agrees that this was pretty well not only the largest but the best run and, and the nicest maintained of any of the any of the mill villages and I’ve, I’ve traveled to several. We had, because of being unincorporated we had the distinction that everything that was done generally was done by the mill. Even though we referred to the for example the Kannapolis police chief the Kannapolis police chief was actually a deputy sheriff of Cabarrus County because we weren’t incorporated but he was designated the chief and usually had several other deputies who worked for him. Ah, but they because of the expense of guarding the mill property and that sort of thing I believe that the mill always had a relationship where they donated extra money to assist with ah, with law enforcement. And we always had the volunteer fire departments, the volunteer firemen were employees of the mill but they were allowed to leave their jobs when the siren went off and to answer the call and we had the mill furnished some equipment and we have some pictures in the library of the first fire engines. And that was, that was a distinctive thing. We had a fire siren that would spilt your ears on the top of Montgomery Ward which was erected as an air raid siren in 1941, I’m sorry 1942 when they wanted to have blackout drills and so on. The mill whistle wasn’t quite loud enough to extend all the areas of town. So they installed this enormous siren on top of Montgomery Ward which was our skyscraper, our tallest building at what about four stories or five and the, after the war is was used as of course as a fire siren on occasion but you certainly could hear it almost everywhere in town at that time and the volunteer firemen would respond. So we didn’t really have any professional, we always had volunteer fire company and in fact in the very early days they were back in the old hose and reel days you probably have already run across or you will all the pictures of the Kannapolis hose and reel team winning state championships for speed. We had a number of outstanding athletes in those days and they consistently won awards in baseball and in running track and field type things, volleyball and that was another interesting thing I though about early Kannapolis that was different from other towns. I know the YMCA is probably important in every town here the YMCA and the churches were the center not only of religious life but actually of social and civic life. Clubs met at the Y you could have meals served there. So many of the clubs, Rotary Club for example for a time met at the Y and had meals as did a number of others but the Y had such a huge membership because Mr. Cannon always encouraged membership there and kept with his contributions kept the dues low enough that we had almost always had the largest membership under one roof in this, in the southeast and some would say
in the country but we’ve never run down those figures exactly. Certainly we had one of the largest, we had one of the first Y’s to have a women’s department and that was largely at the of Mrs. Cannon who that women and young, young girls ought to have an equal place to go and have recreation and so on. So when the old Y burned in the 1930’s, I think in 1937 the, the new Y, what we call the new Y, the one that I went to as a boy was built and opened in 1940. It was really an impressive and posing structure and had a had the old colonial type entrances at the front but in the back there was a separate entrance for women and young girls to because of the times that was it was not considered appropriate to mingle the two too much. But our athletic heritage I think was strong not having a local government or other things to center on most people went to church and they were proud of their churches and that was really a social outlet too. But we were extremely proud of the local schools and the, the winning football teams. There was always a fierce rivalry with Concord, still is and there were a number of other sports teams sponsored by the Y and by, and by the Cannons over the years. That was another difference. Healthcare, Mr. Cannon of course pioneered healthcare in the textile industry there in the plant and actually had I think a doctor and a nurse, certainly had a nurse I recall in the very early days of Cannon who could go out and could actually help with minor illnesses there with families because there wasn’t much there were a few doctors but we didn’t have a lot of medical facilities at that time. Charles Cannon and his mother, Mary Ellen Boss Cannon after the death of JW Cannon encouraged the building of our local hospital and they built it really between Kannapolis and Concord to serve the entire area. So in 1935, when it opened it was largely as a result of their influence. Mrs. Cannon donated the land. Mr. Cannon supported it tremendously financially all the rest of his life. Served on the chairman of the board for many years and that’s why we located his historical marker in front of the hospital. We thought that would be, he would like that. That’d be appropriate because although he supported education particularly the smaller universities and, and two year colleges and so on healthcare was another one of his passions just as for Mrs. Cannon. She was responsible for music in the public schools arts and music and history and the love of ah, and historic preservation were her, her big things and everyone is very proud of that that she worked on the, worked down at Manteo and she worked on the restoration there at and as you go through the state I’ve been surprised how many times I’ve seen either her name and or Mr. Cannon’s name or the Cannon Foundation on various historical things like the Museum of History in Raleigh. It’s amazing how broad their influence was and if you really want to see her influence you can go to Appalachian and go around Boone and all the, all the music program her and her daughter Mary Anne Cannon Hayes did a wonderful work and I’m sorry I got far away from your question (CM: No) so when I do just (CM: Ah) feel free to shepherd me back in the right direction.

CM: Okay, well no, this is, this is terrific stuff actually. I know you’re principal um, in this organization Kannapolis History Associates…

CH: Well, it used to be. I was the president for many years. I’m just a member now because frankly, I have so many other things going on I couldn’t continue as an officer until I finish a few of these projects. I didn’t think I could get a time. I’ve been trying to
help some on their local pro, on their latest project of getting a museum started (CM: Yeah) and so I’ve been able to help some. Getting folks to talk to each other and get together proposals and they’re doing ah, they’ve take, picked up the ball and they’re doing a wonderful job on that. I can’t claim credit for that ah, Estes White who’s father was a doctor here and he was the Clerk of Court for many years is extremely interested in, in ah, Kannapolis History Museum. It’s ah, Estes B. White, his nickname is Sonny and his father was also Estes White who was a much beloved general practitioner here for many years. In fact he was, he was our doctor on occasion back in the early days of my life when doctors made house calls he and Dr. Maldin would, would come by and give you a shot or do whatever needed to be done. Ah, that, they, obviously, obviously has passed but (CM: Sure) he’s a, he would be a wonderful person for back, for a different background um, on the history of Kannapolis and what he observed and saw and, and loved about it.

CM: And you, you, you spoke earlier about you’re doing some videos about the (CH: Yes) history of Kannapolis ah, I wondered what those are and what they, what they’re about?

CH: Okay, we started a series of historical videos three or four years ago to run on the local government channel which is channel 22. Frankly, when we started we intended to do some very brief historical vignettes and so we called it Historical Moments and I researched them which was very easy because I was writing the book on, on the county at the time and still am. So we wanted to acquaint people with some of the misunderstandings. For example, many people didn’t know that we actually are in our fourth courthouse now and the old courthouse, the historical courthouse beside it is the third. So we started off with something about the historical courthouses and how Cabarrus County was formed from Mecklenburg, why we’re named after a Frenchman who was never here and who lived down on the east coast and who Steven Cabarrus was and something about him. It turned out to be a little longer than just a vignette and so we’re getting into thirty or forty minutes and nobody’s gonna be interested in this. Well to my great surprise people were interested in it and a lot of people were interested who would not, who you would not normally think with our tendency to prejudge I guess, you would not normally think would have been interested history but there was some local interest and it wasn’t so much just that I was doing them. We found out people really wanted to know so we kept doing them and kind of traveled around and did the ones that I was interested in. Stonewall Jackson which is about to collapse but has a wonderful history is very important to the people here because we were the first ones to support the new concept of training school. James P. Cooke, a newspaper editor in Concord actually editorialized about it and spread the concept through the state it’s interesting the legislature then was reluctant to endorse the training school concept for the same reason they would be now. They didn’t want to be seen as being soft on crime. So the ladies, this the first, I think the first organized example of women’s groups and at that time women didn’t even have the vote coming together and supporting the idea of petitioning the legislature and then they hit on the brilliant idea of saying we’ll name this after General Stonewall Jackson who was one of the heroes of course of the Civil War from the southern viewpoint. Mrs. Jackson who was from Cabarrus County was a Morrison,
lived in Charlotte and they got her to come before the legislature. Well, most of those legislators were Confederate Veterans and they weren’t gonna vote against anything that, that honored Stonewall Jackson so they passed the legislation and because Mr. Cooke had been in the forefront of it he was able to persuade them along with a lot of business leaders here to locate it south of Concord on the huge campus it occupies. Well, those lovely building and it was gorgeous. We found some old film from the ‘30’s that were ??29M 49SEC that we were allowed to use which shows the young men and marching in military fashion but it shows the campus and the buildings were much like a small Ivy League campus. They were gorgeous. Now, if you look it it’s pitiful. The decay there really unsafe you shouldn’t even be inside them. And so we wanted to bring some attention to that in the hopes that ah, particularly as they neared their hundredth birthday so we did a video on them. Then to get to your question and I’m sorry for the rambling, we were interested because it was the Kannapolis bi-centennial. I want, what, what I wanted my contribution to the bi-centennial to be was a video history of Kannapolis. So did it in three parts started with the first part the background of textiles in the county and James W. Cannon emerging as a leader in that and being a cotton merchant and so on and the life story that’s always told about Mr. Cannon. But I wanted to get him to explain why his, I wanted to explain what his dream was and why he built Kannapolis to start with. How this, how this all came about. That was the first video. The second one I think I call that an Empire of Looms. The second one was a—he died in 1921 so it was taken from 1921 when his youngest son ah, Charles Albert Cannon and based on the looks probably the most unlikely son to be the head of a great empire. I mean he was a small man ah, soft spoken. He looked like a Presbyterian elder. He looked like a cherub but he was just tough as nails and I think he was the only one of the sons whose lifelong dream was to be a textile man. And his father who was a wonderful judge of character saw that and he, so he left Charles in, in charge which probably his best decision ever. So from 1921 until Charles Cannon died in 1971 it seemed to me to be although it was a lot of material seemed to me to be a pretty crucial part and a, and a separate segment. We did that second and because of the length of time it turned out to be about an hour long probably. And then from ’71, ’72 up to the present, I wanted to get at that time they were taking down the buildings and the towers, filling in the lake which of course I’ve grown up with and that had a big place in my heart, town lake it gave me an excuse to get some great film of that and also film of the new, of the beginnings of the new ah, of course we stopped when we stopped it would be simple enough to finish it now. But people the last four or five minutes is done ah, silently without music or, or speaking is just the images of the old things, the old era passing and the new buildings being built and frankly a lot of older people say they’re
just enormously moved for example when the towers come down and those things. Well they were such a part when you’re growing up here the lake has a rich history in itself. It was a center of recreation to start with. They actually fished in the town lake and that’s why it was built as, you could go on boat rides. Take you girl around the lake for a nickel and you had those wonderful, the towers we grew up those were what represented Kannapolis to us. The old neon sign, that was of course that was back in the ‘80’s when it was taken down but that was a real trademark. When you came into town on the highway or on the train and that’s the first thing you saw. In fact the account is that Mr. Cannon purposely built the sign high enough and bright enough that folks passing on the train would know that this is the center of textiles in the world. This is Kannapolis and, and it had originally boosted of being very truthfully the largest manufacturer of household textiles in the world until it’s competitors increased in size and forced them to change it to leading manufacturer and so on. So they went through a process too but we were extremely proud and the people that worked in the mill had a not only had a tremendous work ethic but they were enormously proud of the quality of the products they turned out because they were aware of the fact that around the world particularly in the ‘30’s, ‘40’s, ’50’s, ‘60’s through that, through the whole center of the century anything that had the Cannon brand on it you knew from, you knew without going any further it was going to be extremely high quality, long lasting, many of us still have the towels we took to college and so on. The old royal family sets. You couldn’t wear them out. They finally just got so thin that you gave them a, a decent retirement but we were very proud of that. So my point at the end of the videos was that the physical part of the town is changing but what really makes the town special the people and their spirit and, and their unwillingness, their, their desire to succeed and to see their children have a better life ah, we haven’t lost any of that. It’s still at a very special place and continues to be. We’ll have a little different business. There was some concern it’s so amazing, Chad because growing up something I heard all through my life my parents would say we don’t know what we’d ever do if the mill ever closed because everyone was so dependent on it. They originally worked there then my father went to business for himself but the business people would tell you when the mill’s slow we’re slow. I mean every, we were a, everything had a, is symbiotic relationship the right term? Everything was like that here and it was extremely unique. It was, there were people who couldn’t fathom the idea of ah, all the paternalism and, and we, there were occasionally articles which were I know very hurtful to the Cannon family in which they’d talk about the paternalistic nature of the Cannon empire and that Mr. Cannon ran everything in his town. I don’t actually think the people in his town were too upset about that. I think that it was a relationship in which both sides, both sides gained. We had we had the trappings of government, all the good things about government without really paying for it. I suppose indirectly a lot of people said well he could have paid higher salaries, sure he could have paid higher salaries and we could have paid those things. I’m not one the, one of the Cannon bashers. I respect their vision. If people say well they made a lot of money out of the mill well I supposed that’s what capitalism is all about. I don’t know that you’d go to that much trouble just to do it as a hobby (CM: Right). So that doesn’t bother me and probably doesn’t bother most of the older people. I grew up on stories of the mill staying open during the depression and apparently it did. The idea, I’ve talked to lots of people and the idea was that the at least one of course most people were living in
Cannon houses so the rent was not much problem but the idea was that at least one person out of each family, now at that time you had bigger families and more working in the mill including some of the younger people. The idea was at least one family member would be, would work and bring home enough money to keep the family going through these bad times. He just warehoused huge amounts of material and didn’t even have orders for ah, and of course some of that as it worked out some of that was rewarded when the second World War broke out and they had enormous government contracts but that part is true that the mill stay and not only that it was so well managed that Cannon is one and I always meant to check with other corporations but my understanding from the Cannon history is that they showed a small profit. They were always in the black during the depression. One of the few, certainly one of the few companies, one of the few giant corporations in the especially textile industry that could do that and that was despite having reduced orders and so on but they were such a magic name in retailing and the textile industry at that time that I think that is the best tribute to it. They kept on selling towels. They had the first nationwide advertising campaigns. They were the first people to advertise in the Better Homes and Gardens and Ladies Home Journal particularly.

Things directed toward women. Mr. Cannon was a, just an advertising, merchandising genius as his father was and I really think he inherited those genes. They were the first people were so proud of their cloth back in the 1890’s that he wanted his name on it. Mr. Cannon said I want when people they know it’s gonna be good quality. I want them to be able to come back and say I want more of that Cannon cloth. So they won a number of prizes with it but anyway let me let you start, start me again. That’s I got a little off.

CM: Okay, well I mean one of the things I notice coming in to Kannapolis is that there’s an unusually big initiative on the part of the local citizenry about keeping it’s keeping it’s history. You know you have the, you have the local history room here (CH: Right) and you, Norris Dearmon and I wondered if you had any thoughts on where that impulse comes from? Why is Kannapolis maybe more interested in it’s past (CH: I think) than my experience in other places?

CH: I think part of it is that people still regard it as a unique past because of what some of the things we’ve talked about and lots of other things. We since we didn’t have a town government to center around we really centered the civic clubs and organizations some of our leading men and women who guided those and they’re still very important in our town but I, I’m not sure. I know the folks in Concord are very interested in their, in their history also. We’re fairly, we’re a fairly new town compared to people I’ve worked with in Salisbury and in Concord and some of the older cities which are more than a century older than us also have the desire to preserve their, their antiquities and, and things but they’re just in a little different than we are. We’re fairly new but we want to believe that although things are changing that we’re going to have a good record of what happened here, an accurate record. And that we’re gonna honor those people who, who built the town because I don’t think people feel that we’re going anywhere. We ah, we certainly had a, had a major scare when the mill closed but I think we, we began to look at what things are really important and what, what do we treasure about living here other than, than just the jobs. So we want to have a good, a good record of that. The people have been extremely supportive of the bringing in images and having them scanned in, of
writing first person accounts. You wouldn’t believe how many people in this town have written down some recollections and most of them are from some of the older families. They wanted to have it right. They have pictures of their family. They’ve written accounts and I found that to be true when we check around for pictures and, and so on that almost everybody has a story and they want to tell you that story and they really like the idea of that being preserved because they see us, I mean they see the changes that are coming and they see the changes in the mill villages ah, as those houses are sold and, and made individual rather than, than being pretty much the same white frame houses that I grew up with. You worry that we’re losing something and we really want to hang onto to it and maybe we’re making a more dramatic change than any of the towns around us. It think that’s one reason people all of a sudden thought I need to get this down and to as, as my generation ages and we, we’re losing our World War II soldiers and we’re, we’re losing a lot of the things that were important when I was growing up and heard stories about. I feel ah, a strong urge to, to get them written down and get them right and even to write some of the antidotes and the recollections about growing up. Some of the expressions, unique expression that you hear around here that came out of people working in the textile mills and when they refer to things like the dope wagon people who are not from a textile town or from here ah, you immediately thing what in the world? We, we didn’t have any drugs around here then but Coca Cola’s were always called dopes from the beginning when they had the, were supposed to have a little bit of cocaine or coco leaves in them. Ah, and so when the YMCA as a fundraising thing people worked up in the mill and it was hot and dry and ah, Mr. Cannon allowed the YMCA they built big wagons will wheels on them that you could push almost like a peddler’s ah, a giant peddler’s cart and folks would come around at break times through the mill with the dope wagon and you could get a Coke or a pack of crackers or something off that and the profits went to support YMCA programs. But we have lots, there are lots of little things like that because even the names of ah, of the jobs the kids now have no idea what a, what a doffer or a slubber hand or any of those things are and there are a group of people who worked in the mill particularly like Mr. Dearmon, he’s very interested in this. He’s tried to accumulate all the old hand tools that you used the weaver’s hook and so on. He has lots of those and he has written descriptions of what different people do but we’d like to um, we’d like to have a good description it, it would be great to have a video description of the process of cotton coming in because cotton was actually brought here and it was opened up in the, in the opening room and went all the way through the process. And when it was shipped out it was shipped out as finished goods and ah, sent all over the world from the distribution center so that, that may, that may be lost unless we work really hard on preserving it and we’re, that’s one of the projects now I think particularly that, that Norris is interested in.

CM: Okay, well we talked to you to get some historical grounding in Kannapolis but one, you know one of the, the process we’re really interested in documenting because you guys have got it you know the past, you know ah, the textile past pretty well taken care of um, and we don’t want to duplicate that effort (CH: Okay) um, but one of the things we’re really interested in is you know um, Kannapolis’ transformation right now (CH: Right) and not ah, I, you know I don’t expect you, I, I know you want, you, you want to
talk mainly about the history but um, I just wondered if you could ah, give me a general impression of ah, what you feel about what’s happening to the town now ??46M 24SEC?

CH: Okay, well I, I can not with and by no means am I, do I feel as comfortable on this as I do on the older history (CM: Right) but for what it’s worth my general impression is that there was a, it, it was a really, a really difficult year the year the mill finally closed and people began to come to grips with what is it we’re going to do? I mean you had so many people affected (CM: Right), so many people out of work and that meant that many families affected. Here locally it affected local business um, there, there were plans that immediately stopped I understand. A number of businesses had plans to expand and build new things and they put those on hold, everything, everything went on hold for a time I’d say for a year or two. And even though there were rumors and concerns about can we get somebody in to use the old buildings? What will happen there was a real, real fear that wouldn’t happen. So it was I would say an enormous feeling of relief. There were a lot of questions but when Mr. Murdock made the announcement ah, began making announcements about what he intended to do and, and frankly the end project is even more than what I would have guessed from what he said. I think it has taken, it’s grown and taken on a personality of it’s own now but I think he, he really had a vision for that, for using the ah, space. He, he loves the town and I think he’s ah, I think it would be fair to say there were folks when he originally bought the mill and then left ah, shortly after a favorable union election you’ll find as you go through our history and talk to people that they felt he had not, they didn’t expect that. The impression we got during the campaign for the union vote was that I’m gonna be here with you. You know vote for me. Well in the past the union had always been defeated because of the personality of the Cannon’s. People trusted the Cannon’s more than anybody else because they had been here and they were gonna be here. Well, suddenly they were gone and then Mr. Murdock was gone because shortly after the favorable election he, of course he sold he mill, kept downtown and parking areas and other things but a lot of people felt that, that was not what they expected from him. They were disappointed. So when he came back and then bought the plants and made these announcements I would say there was a great relief among about half the folks who were just thrilled to death at the prospect and then there was ah, a little suspicion among some that you know well let’s wait and I’ll believe it when I see it. You know let’s see what he actually does. Now we’re at the point where we, you can’t escape seeing what he’s done and ah, it’s obvious that someone who’s building something that’s almost inconceivable that’s even going to dwarf the mill buildings and things over there in a way ah, that that’s someone who is sincere about what he means. That he means to make this the center of biotechnology and, and scientific advances and so on. I think that people are, are feeling more comfortable with that notion. There was, there is still a feeling of well, what does this really mean for us here? The initial feeling was and, and perhaps still is among many people that the jobs would go to people who are not from here. They’re going to bring in a lot of scientists and they’re the ones that are going to profit from this. We fortunately have had an effort particularly among the churches we expect a lot of people to move in but we also expect there to be jobs for local people. So we’ve had speakers from the local community colleges and other places who have tried to explain what’s going to happen, what’s going to be available and that you don’t have to be a PhD in Biology or Chemistry to, to get a
job there. They’re going to need a lot of support personnel but you’ve still got to be trained. So the local community college is doing I think a wonderful job and that’s pretty typical of the folks here. We are, we have survived lots of things. I don’t think anybody ever gave up on the, on Kannapolis that we would do something but they’ve been unsure but now I think you’re in a period where we accept that the campus is going to be here. That it’s going to bring a lot of attention to Kannapolis. That it’s going to bring new people to Kannapolis and there are always mixed feelings about that. We start hearing about a much diversified town and needing to be sensitive to other religions and other folks from other localities. We’re working hard through the churches to prepare for that and, and I think real well they’ve taken the lead in that as they always have through our history in, in different programs. But I think we’re more comfortable now. I think there was a lingering sadness over the old buildings going, the lake being filled in I mean that’s a pretty dramatic change. I don’t, can’t imagine anyone as giant as the mill campus was and just ah, snapping your fingers and that’s gone. When, when Mr. Cannon built Kannapolis ah, there was a lawyer from Concord named Morrison Caldwell who wrote about, about that in the Concord paper in about 1907 and he referred to JW Cannon as being an Aladdin who just ah, rubbed his lamp and created a city out of some played out cotton fields. Now I almost feel and it’s so well for us who write it’s a wonderfully extraordinary coincidence that a century later we’ve got another and I always call him a man of equal vision David Murdock who has, is literally, has literally snapped his fingers, the old has disappeared and is building a whole new foundation for our second century. You couldn’t write that. I couldn’t have made it up if I wanted to. And I think that’s why it took us a while for it to sink in. We’ve gotten used to some of the things going. There are still folks who believe that some of the old details of the mill or maybe the lake could have been preserved and that sort of thing that it could have been worked into the new plans. And there are others who thing well it’s right. He’s starting all over again so let’s start all over again. We’ve got a clean slate. Those days are, the hardest thing frankly for me and others of us who’ve lived here all our lives is to accept the fact those days are never going to be here again. We have, we had a I think unique and a marvelous century in history but we’re still here and I see my job as emphasizing the elements and things of Kannapolis, the institutions and the people that emphasize that they are still here and that that’s what makes us special and they’re going to, we’re going to, they’re going to remain whatever happens. We’re going to still be proud of our sports teams and our bands and our churches and all those things that have been important to us but we’re gonna have to learn to be, to be accept, a little more diverse and a little more accepting of things that we haven’t even thought about doing up to this point. That’s what’s going to be exciting. I’d really like to be here another sixty seven years just to get to see what is going to happen in this place.

CM: Yeah, well, very exciting. Was there anything else you wanted to add? Anything else you wanted emphasize about the history of Kannapolis (CH: Ah) or things you wanted to draw out?

CH: No, I don’t think right now. I’m afraid I’d just, I would just ramble on some. I have lots of, of material that I’ve accumulated over the years and, and not that my writing is particularly wonderful but I have lots of things I’ve written and speeches I’ve given.
As far as the historical background I know as you said the background of the mill has been done and, and what not. I’ll try to get the see if we can’t get those videos available to you and because I think it will give you some notion, I tried to get away from just names and dates and (CM: Uh, huh) actually show some footage and so what we could find. We do have a few old videos from the ‘30’s that are in the—we have copies here in the library now to be checked out so we can see what people looked like and how they worked and what they did. But I don’t know much else that I could emphasize. I mentioned one other thing I haven’t mentioned the political changes in the county and you may not even get into that but during the time that Mr. CA Cannon was in the ‘40’s and ‘50’s township four which is Kannapolis generally had a huge impact on voting in the county, on the election of officers and in fact our long time, one of our long time members of the House of Representative one of the longest serving in history Dwight Quinn was actually a Cannon employee and when you get into the preserving the uniqueness of the history Mr. Cannon had a, had a long battle with the lawyer that I first worked for, a man named Bedford Black who’s father was a Wesleyan Methodist Minister and that’s why he came to Kannapolis. Mr. Black served in the war and came back and have always understood that Mr. Cannon helped he worked in the mill for a time. Mr. Cannon helped him go to law school. When he came out he ran against Mr. Cannon’s one of Mr. Cannon’s relatives, one of the Bost, ET Bost who was a prominent lawyer from Concord who also was Mr. one of Mr. Cannon’s lawyers. He ran against him and one and that was just not good (CM: Right). So there are even articles in major national magazines about what they call the Black Out. I think I may have a few of those around. After that the newspaper which was kind of run by another relative in the Cannon family would not mention Mr. Black if we, if the three of us did something together they would mention you know Mr. Morgan and Mr. Horton and others did so and so but Mr. Cannon was so outdone he considered it a betrayal that Mr. Black would run against ah, his, his relative and his lawyer after I guess all he figured he had done for him. But that in itself there are a number of interesting little stories like that. The story and you’re not interested in the textile history but how the people regarded unions, why they rejected them and then the group who worked I guess pretty persistently from the 1950’s up to the present to try to get a union that in itself is a, an interesting story that, that we’ve never written and it probably is not appropriate for your thrust here but I think if you interview people today throughout the community from all walks I’ll be interested if you don’t get pretty much the same appraisal I have of all the different, all the different stages we’ve gone through in adjusting to this and being excited about it, being sad about it, we’ve just about gone through all the ah, emotions I think that run the gamete of emotions about it but overall we know realize how very blessed we are that, that this is happening and I think with a few, a few, a little sadness for the, for the things that have passed (CM: Right) but I think that’s gonna be the general feeling you’re going to find.

CM: Thank you so much for your time.

CH: Oh, you’re more than welcome.