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Interviewee: Cates Bertha

Last First Middle

Date of Interview: 6-13-79

Total Number of Tapes:

Place: Burlington

Cassette: C-45 4 C-60 C-90

Interviewer: Murphy

Reel: 5" 7"

Context of the Interview (e.g., study of a special topic, the interviewer's particular interests, focus of the questions, anything significant about the setting or circumstances):
See attached sheet

List topics discussed in the order they occur on the tape.

Tape # 1 1 father came to Burlington with first wife, four children, then married her mother
Side 1

had 6 children

after 1st wife died; never allowed to say half-brother, etc. went into business around

1895, not sure; contractor, sold coffins, lumber, started lumber yard on Webb Ave.;

Bertha started working with him when got out of high school, rest of children went to

college; had been sick and didn't start; oldest sister was working with father, then got

married; ~~father~~ died in 1918, took over the business; brother in-law, John Vernon co-executor,

all brothers in some other business, several months after father's death, incorporated,

she was sec. treas., John Vernon pres., she ran it for fifty years; when she took over

was selling mostly lumber, shingles and sewer pipe, and coal; moved business across highway

continued to sell shingles, flagstone and sewer pipe; sold mostly coal, little wood;

bought shingles from western states, believes it was Washington; father hurt in wreck,

1914, meeting with the governor for Good Roads, Mr. Kernodle driving; when she started

in coal business; first woman in south to go into the coal business; 1930 organized

the N.C. Retail Coal Assoc.; (pause while get glass of water; look at pictures of car

wreck and deacons of First Baptist Church; father instrumental in organizing Church;

1st Baptist

1887, 13 charter members, mother joined the church that day; elected treasurer at organiza-

tional meeting of Coal Assoc., only woman there; stayed on board as long as organiza-

tion in existence; last yr. made 40th perfect attendance at coal meeting; Retail

Assoc. gone, but several kept going; enjoyed it so much, always traveling;

year or two after she started men would start bringing wives, Mrs. Clegg in Greensboro,

husband died, so she and Miss Cates would go together; 4 or 5 women who went together;

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Tape #1
Side 1

objects to ERA because has always dealt with men , were "pleasant and generous " haven't had a bit of trouble dealing with men; delivered coal, first started out with horse and wagon, then trucks, had bag coal, especially in cold weather, little coal for fireplaces; remembers one big snow, had to shovel and pile up so much stuff that still had a snow pile in May; occasionally sold coal to mills, doesn't seem to be regular customers; not many bought coal for mill villages, Glen Raven did, came and asked her to take over their allotment when they didn't want to do it anymore; sold coal as far out as Ossippee, Altamahaw, even Hillsborough, Mebane; had one to five Negroes working on the yard, had one or two trucks running, maybe three; blacks drive trucks, occasionally white man, had someone in office; in her early thirties when took over business, school in Burlington, Burlington Academy, studied voice at Elon and Greensboro; sang in choir, at weddings, wasn't much of a soloist; greatest joy was directing weddings; must have directed 150-200 weddings; looked after church flowers, father used to raise flowers to take to church, took over when he died; raised roses mostly; before had florist would go to people's houses ask them for flowers, knew what kind everybody raised; always said "I had just as good a life as anyone ever had."; member of Chamber of Commerce, Merchants' Assoc.; 2 other women in town in business, merchants in ladies wear; Business and Professional Women, one of charter women; never joined the service League; remembers it was very active , but not what it did; just a day student at Elon and Greensboro, while she was working; take the train to Greensboro, have to wait, go around stores; most exciting thing was Coal Assoc; did a little bit of everything; can't remember all the clubs she's been in; mother died July, father in Jan.; she started buying coal when father hurt; doesn't remember him building Erwin Mill village, does remember building houses at Wilmington; wouldn't go down and stay, sent a foreman, would go down to check; built individual houses in Burlington; first sold coffins, bought them from Coffin Co. in town; after undertakers went into business, stopped selling them; mostly people from the country wanting to take coffin back; didn't have anything to do with Geo. Anthony coal company; two or three other coal companies in town.

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Tape #1

Side 1 stayed friends with competitors; Depression, lost money at the bank; First National Bank closed, had gotten check for \$3-400, cashed it and put in box at another bank; company let her write draft and get coal until got straightened out; had trouble getting coal during coal strikes; extended credit to lots of people in Depression, tried for 2-3 yrs to collect, finally closed books, said "If they can live with it, I can live without it." (see Mildred Edmonds interview for same statement in different context);

Tape 1 Side 2

went up to coal country during one of strikes, didn't try to see miners just coal company people; had business course last year of high school; Miss Stackhouse enters conversation, not sure father built Erwin mill village; has letters of father, most written to brother; some papers at ^{Alamance} Historical museum, some at Wake Forest; father interested in some lumber company in Florida; kept diaries galore; can't read them any more, eyes got bad last few years; lot of parties when younger, house center of activities; mother took neice in; something going all the time, were dances, but they were not dancers; went to all county fairs, father very interested, has some badger treasurer of Alamance County Fair; receptions for brides; mother from Virginia, came to N.C., met father after 1st wife died; had two sisters; grandmother lived with them (on father's side); younger brother at home until after father died as well; father head of Sunday School, chairman of the board at church, whole family very active; baptized when was 14, with 4 or 5 girls; Dr. Martin Burke stayed 20 yrs.; Dr. Prickett 20 yrs.; members of Mt. Zion Assoc.; never had split in their church; first people joined church: 4 ladies, father; only man in business, one man worked for him, a carpenter; had lot of mill workers then; knew Preacher Swinney, thinks probably preached at their church at some time; thinks her sickness taken away some of her memory; had revivals, several tent revivals; remembers one where storm came and tent fell; lot of people converted; haven't heard of any recently; never had any connection with the "type" that would heal; church organized in their house;

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Tape # 1
Side 2

mother was as active in church as could be, with all those children; had a cook to help out; probably most had at home at one time was 6; kids did cleaning had someone come in once, twice yr. to clean whole house; always had doctors for births mother 8 yrs. younger than father; had all childhood diseases, but doesn't remember much; Miss Cates had flu bad in 1918, brother-in-law, John Vernon died; so many friends who passed away; had typhoid fever when 14; lot of it then, old well on Front St., thought that was source; one of reasons didn't go to college, had to make up high school work; always glad she didn't, glad went with father; sister one of first coeds at Oak Ridge; father all for women's education; with schoolboard till death; donated to Meredith College; all sisters went there; mother didn't go to college; oldest sister had worked with father in office; father said women were going to be in business and wanted all to know how; "believed in women in business"; didn't know of any other fathers that so encouraged their daughters; used to say "Papa would send us to places that women didn't go as a rule." barber shops etc., she never did, but sisters were sent out to collect; people used to come to see house, has stained glass windows upstairs, walk on roof, get out and see the town; father: sec. and treas. of chamber of Commerce when hurt; ^{Miss Cates} one of 2 ladies who took original stock in Spencer Love's mill, still has her 3 shares; one of few original stockholders left; seems like invested \$300. took stock in Alamance Hotel, lost money there.