

Interview

with

SAM D. FAUCETTE

June 13, 1995

by Jeff Cowie

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The Southern Oral History Program
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START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

SAM D. FAUCETTE
JUNE 13, 1995

JEFF COWIE: This is an interview with Sam D. Faucette at his home in Mebane on the 13th of June, 1995 about White Furniture Factory.

Mr. Faucette, if you could just begin a little bit with your own family background, where you born, what your father did?

SAM D. FAUCETTE: Well I born on 3rd Street in Mebane in 1917. And at that time my father was working at and had been working at White Furniture Company since about 1906. My family has been in the county since before the Revolution, the Faucettes' and my mother was a Trollinger whose family had been in the county before the Revolution, too. They were from Haw River, and my father was from the southern part of Alamance. I don't know whether you needed to know that, but you ask me what you need to know.

JC: All these sorts of things are very interesting, actually, so all details that you want to offer we're interested in listening to.

SF: Well, as far as my background, I have a brother who is very much into genealogy, and that's why I could tell you that. Same way with the Trollingers', and by the way, I think Washington Duke's mother was either a Trollinger or akin to the Trollingers'. She is buried over at Haw River which was settled by my family and is observing its 250th Anniversary this year. The little town of Haw River. That's all that I was going to say.

JC: Okay.

SF: And I am known to talk too much so if I'm doing that just tell me. [laughter]

JC: [laughter] Okay.

SF: You can use whatever you want of this.

JC: Great. So your dad had been working at White's since 1906.

SF: He had, uh, huh.

JC: What do you remember about growing up around-- In fact, you're only a few blocks from--

SF: About four blocks from the factory. Well, I remember taking his lunch sometime. Mamma would fix it. They would have an hour for lunch and by the way, when I was going up in the early school they worked from seven to twelve and then from one till six. And sometimes on Saturday. So they had long week works, work weeks, but it was a small town and about everyone knew everyone else. The Whites' lived over on 5th Street. And the old fellow, Will White, who was the daddy of the White Furniture Company, you know what I mean, the one that established it, he and his brother, lived on Main Street right across from the factory. But the old fellow himself had a little two-room building at the end of, well, the last business building between town and the factory. He lived in that and that was Will White. I faintly remember, but I can't tell you whether this-- but you will find this out or probably already have, that the factory burned down on Christmas Eve in 1923, I think it was 1923. I remember seeing the smoke. I had been sick and they wouldn't let me go down and see it. I wasn't but about six. The other kids were going down and watching it burn, but I didn't get to do that. I just could see the smoke from where I lived down on--

The other thing and I'm just telling you little incidents. As you get older they will isolate their self and every once in a while something will bring up a little incident. I remember when they came home from White's before that had paid good bonuses to the employees at Christmas. They didn't give any paid vacation or nothing like that that I know of unless it was for the executive, but to the workers they didn't. But on Christmas Eve, 1929, what they gave for Christmas was a twenty percent pay cut, I mean, that's what they came home with.

JC: On Christmas?

SF: Christmas when they closed down. I don't blame them particular, but it was one of the things that--you know, you asked what I remember, incidents--

JC: Do you remember when that was? Was that when The Depression came along?

SF: 1929, Christmas Eve. I think it closed down on Christmas Eve, before Christmas, and I do remember that a lot of times during The Depression-- Now later on I worked there and Mr. Sam White who was president at the time I worked there from about 1939 to 1947, he said what had happened to them is that they had put all their eggs in one basket. Had a sales agent who was taking their full production and they hadn't scattered it out and so when business quit with him they just about shut down. I've known them to go for a month or more without hitting a lick of work, but that was during The Depression time.

Then about 1934 they started working full time again, you know, forty hours at that time. I recall The Depression because you know you recall hard times. The whole time Mebane suffered not because of White's, but we had about three industries there and the other one was what is now Kingsdown, bedding company. I think it may have been Royal at one time, but it's always been the bedding factory as far as we're concerned.

Then there was a yarn mill. There had been hosiery mills, but they shut down when The Depression hit real hard. But this was and I don't know that what the name of the yarn mill was then but it was-- Rock Fish may have been later. It's there now.

JC: So as a young man in Mebane when you first started to look for work what did you--? Where did you go and what did you find?

SF: To Burlington.

JC: Burlington.

SF: Well, that's where I started looking for it. I eventually wound up, and this was-- I got out of school in 1934, but I went to work in 1933 after I got out of school in May. They had eight months school and eleven years at that time. I worked at Mebane Hosiery Mill. It may have a hosiery mill and learned how to operate knitting machines. The first week and this was in 1933 before the NRA come in. The NRA was the National

Recovery Act, and I expect being a historian you will know that. I worked all night except--. Actually from six till six and got a half hour off at midnight and I made four dollars. [laughter] It sounds ridiculous, don't it? When you go out and a lot of places pay four dollars for a hamburger.

JC: What was the impact of the NRA? Why do you remember the coming of the NRA?

SF: Well, this was the National Recovery Act under President Roosevelt. All of the mills had been operating two shifts the ones that got started back and they were beginning to start up. The machinery, some of it had rusted, and things like that and a knitting machine you can't have rust and have a knitting machine or I imagine looms, but I didn't know that much about looms. I don't know a lot about them now.

Why I remember it is because of the hours that we working and the National Recovery Act put you on eight hours a shift. They set the minimum wage for a learner which I was still considered a learner because it takes a little while to get enough skill at that time in making a--. That would be including industrial revolution instead of maybe with White's, but at that time they had a two hundred and twenty or two hundred forty needle machine. You put a sock top--when they made the sock tops--and they had a little transfer line you called it, but anyway, you put them on a round bunch of--a circle--of two hundred and twenty or forty--according to the size of the machine--and transfer that from the machine, I mean, from the transfer you ravel it down to where there is just one little thread around each point and they were kind of hollowed out and you sit that on top of the machine. It had to all fit and then you pull that--leave stuff in the machine--and pull that top down and then started the machine. They wouldn't think about doing that now. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

SF: Things have got so automated, but this is some of the incidents that I remember. But mainly because of cutting down of hours and increasing pay. By the end

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of summer I had become a knitter and I could earn the twelve dollars and did get twelve dollars a week, but I worked a little while after-- I would work on the second shift. I'd go to school, walk over to the hosiery mill that was running at that time which was eight or ten blocks and work till twelve o'clock. I didn't hold up under that. I mean, I was young, but I had two miles to walk home by myself and in the dark. But anyway I worked a month and quit and went ahead and finished school.

But now jobs were still hard to get after school. That's when I-- I didn't get on at Mebane right off after school was out so I went to Burlington and went to work in a hosiery mill there. Then later I did work back at the same hosiery mill in Mebane.

But, what I saying about this you just didn't-- They didn't have a job for everybody that come along then. If they could-- I mean, if some experienced man came by they, you know, would take your application and put you on a list and then when they could use you they'd call you. But the same thing, you know, applied to most of the work and for the factory, too, for that matter, and of course there had been lots of changes in the way they--or there was from the time I can remember about my father working there and when I went down there they had put in an upholstery department and I was fortunate enough to go to work in one from the beginning. Now they very seldom transferred anybody from the lumber part to the upholstering because the upholsters made more money than the others. But, of course, it must have been kind of hard or a lot to learn. A lot of young people would come in over in the upholstery department in the late 30s, long before the world war started. They wouldn't stay long. They wanted to make good money right from the beginning, what was good money to us.

But White's had a good line upholstery, but in 1937, they closed it out, not 1937, but 1947. After the war they--

JC: Now, did your father help you get that job since he was already in there?

SF: No, he didn't. Like most fathers, they want better for their children if they can get it, and he never did encourage me to go to work at White's. Later on-- Now he had

been a veneer cutter which was pretty much a skilled job, and during the war he was a foreman in the veneer department. But the foreman had went into the Army, and then when the war was over he came back. So papa was kind of put down there in his older years or later years to running a dryer which was about the worst job in there. You had terrible heat to put up with. So one of my brother's who was working at Haw River got him a job up there as an oiler and that was a job that they give the older men up there and he could do this job and make time, where at White's you just worked all the time. And, of course, in the upper department we were on piece work.

JC: Let's see, you started in 1939, you said, down there?

SF: I started in '39, yeah.

JC: How many people were working at the plant then, do you remember?

SF: I think it was three hundred. That was an approximation. It varied a little. They also had a plant in Hillsborough. You've probably heard of that. I never did know exactly how many that worked there, but this was the main plant and that was, I don't know, a satellite, I reckon.

JC: So you had been in the plant before you first went to work there?

SF: Oh, yes, I've been in there and at lunch time they would--. They generated their own electricity, but at lunch time, at twelve o'clock, it would switch over to Duke Power just to have lights in the plant. But they had a boiler room, and I expect up until they closed it out they probably--.

JC: I didn't know that.

SF: But they did. Of course, they utilized the scraps and sawdust and stuff like that. They didn't have a sawdust pile or nothing. It went through the blower system at White's. Now that's when I was down there that they had the boiler that made the electricity ever since they built a new one anyway.

It was a pretty fair place to work. They never paid--unless it was maybe later and I didn't know anything about it--.

JC: They never paid--?

SF: Top wages.

JC: Top wages, I see.

SF: They paid pretty good, but they always encouraged you--. Old man Sam's main topic in the Christmas speech he would always make was to buy yourself a little piece of land and a cow. In other words they encouraged you to have the garden--. It wasn't a bad place to work. I mean, they wasn't slave drivers or anything like that.

JC: And you so you started in the upholstery and stayed in upholstery?

SF: I stayed in upholstery. I started in learning--. They did it in parts. What I learned when I first went in was to put the outsides on and trim. You know, where they have wooden rails you would glue gimp over the tack line, you know, right up to the rail. Gimp was a little braid. Or you would put gimp down and then drive brass head nails. They used a lot of them, and they had a lot of sofas and chairs that were trimmed in wood.

They didn't make these frames. Now later on at Hillsborough they made the frames for that plant, but they didn't make the ones for the Mebane plant. I think the rails are still on the backside, but I don't know whether they cross the highway or not. But the freight would come in on there and then on the backside of the plant the railroad would come right up to where they could just unload and, you know, put a metal piece down. But the frames would come--. You know how they used to ship automobiles and freight cars?

JC: No, I don't.

SF: Well, there would be about six or eight and the way you see them hiked up on trailers now they would have them blocked up, I mean, they were made, they were fast, but the frames would come and it would be a boxcar load of upholstery frames come from Halperin & Company in Philadelphia. They were suppose to make good--. They had some Victorian stuff. They had really a top line of upholstery and later on as I got out of there and seen--. I started upholstering on my own, but I was, you know, be around in the

plants in High Point and I found out that they-- I was glad that I learned to do this at White's because of the quality there was above most of the plants in High Point.

JC: Do you know why they got out of upholstery at that time?

SF: Well, in 1947, the demand, the supply kind of caught up with the demand. Upholsterers in general at that time were drifters. Now that don't mean everybody. I wasn't. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

SF: I stayed in Mebane. Steve Millender was vice-president, one of the vice-presidents at that time. I've been told this that he drank beer up at a beer joint where one of the upholsterers was and he was kind of high. We were on short time, the first short time we'd had, and he was telling him he had to have more time. You know, as you grow older you find out-- Of course, I wasn't involved in that part. That was one of the things, he sounded off to him and he just decided to close it out, he and the board did, rather than fool with it. But also I've heard this and check with other people.

JC: Okay.

SF: I don't know that it was the reason. I just know we got a letter saying that such and such a date that it would be closed out.

I organized a union down there in the upholstering department. Although we were making better, we thought it would be a help to the others. I don't recall ever trying to organize anybody from the other side, but I did join the union. Practically all the upholstering department joined it. And so I think from the management we probably got credit for it being there. Now this was back a while when we were still at war.

What happened, they didn't want to negotiate. I wasn't on the negotiating committee, but the president told us at the meeting that they just wouldn't negotiate and, you know, in good faith, you might say, and the War Labor Board come some where in between what we were asking and what they were demanding and told both sides to sign it.

For a while that did help things considerably. Not for the company, at least, they never were satisfied with it and later on when they didn't have to they didn't negotiate and the union-- I don't know whether it was voted out or whether it just faded away. But they thought getting rid of--I was told--the upholstery department would help their cause in that respect.

JC: Do you remember whether that union was AFL or CIO.

SF: Well, it was AFL-CIO, but it was Furniture Workers of America.

JC: Furniture Workers of America.

SF: United, I think, Furniture Workers of America.

JC: Yeah, at that time the AFL and the CIO were separate. I was just wondering whether they joined in the 50s.

SF: Oh, it was CIO.

JC: It was CIO.

SF: I think sometime along about that time was when they became affiliated but I know we started out as CIO.

JC: Interesting. Did you know how the whole union ball got rolling? Were the folks from outside or was the movement from inside the plant?

SF: Well, actually, I'm sure that folks from outside must have contacted, but Charlie Williams was the first union president, and he was representative in the negotiations. But, now he was from the machine room or the cabinet room, I'm not positive which, on the other side. It didn't start in the upholstering department, but we felt that it would be a help to them. I know that's why we joined. We didn't--. There was some things--. We were on piece work, for instance, and it only affected a few, but when they'd go to take inventory or something like that in the cloth room somebody that was on piece work and could make good money if they had some hour work for them they would pay them minimum wage. We brought that up to where they'd get an average of what they made. I say we, by having the union done it. It was the shop stewards, but--.

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I was trying to think of other officers in it. I know Charlie Williams was-- We had a man from the international that was down there and helped organize it. But I don't know whether somebody called him to come in or he contacted somebody in the factory. But the company was very anti-union as far as that was concerned.

Now, is this the kind of stuff you want?

JC: This is exactly what I'm looking for. This is right on the money.

SF: Well, you just go ahead and ask, and I'll keep talking.

JC: Well, you said we were making-- Earlier on you said, "We were making better." Did you mean the upholsterers were making better money than the folks in the rest of the plant or--?

SF: The upholsterers made better money. Not because they wanted paid better money, but because to get upholstery--back even before the war started--they had to pay a better price to get experienced upholsterers to come in.

JC: Because other plants were hiring away upholsterers?

SF: Well, upholsterers, I suppose if you go to High Point you'll find that even today upholsterers make above the people, I mean, make more money than the people that make the frames, make the case goods as we call it.

JC: It's a little higher skilled work?

SF: I think that's it, it's a skill. It takes longer to learn it. Well, you can go in a machine room and if they put you to tailing--what they call tailing a machine--on the end where you take it off and put in on trucks and the other end is feeding. And, of course, there will be a few that sets the machine up for whatever operation they are doing, but the man on the back end will make the list and the man on the front end will--.

JC: Okay, so the upholstery shop was still sort of the center of union activity is the impression I'm getting.

SF: It wasn't the center. I was just the strongest.

JC: Yes, that's what I mean, the strongest within the plant.

SF: We were the-- I mean, about everybody in the upholstery belonged to the union, I mean, went ahead and joined it.

JC: As opposed to the folks over at case goods?

SF: The others were more, well, they were more divided is what I mean.

JC: Now I understand.

SF: Now there were some other there that were stronger, really, than we were, but others that-- I know one fellow that came to the union hall--came to the meeting--and actually he joined. Then after they got the union going and got the contract he became a foreman over in the machine room.

JC: [laughter]

SF: He was a spy or a mole that was put in there to see what we were doing. Of course, there was no law against that that I know of, but he was kind of coming in under false--like he was interested. But I imagine you have that in all of them. I don't know about that. These are little incidents though that I can recall from then.

JC: So you actually did get a signed contract when the War Labor Board--?

SF: During the war and as far as I know they never got another one. I don't remember how long this was for. It was more than a year, but it did improve working conditions. For instance, when my father worked down in the--this was at the time I was working there, too--there would be, say, three men here on the bench doing the same thing. It was at the foreman's discretion and I'm sure he had to clear it with other people. Some of them would be making forty, some sixty and some eighty. I mean three men doing the same thing. They would pay them whatever they decided to pay them. I reckon it was [inaudible]. We got job ratings. I mean, that was one of the things we got in the contract.

JC: I see. Classification?

SF: I say, we and them, but I don't have any bitterness towards White's because really I got-- You'd have to know something about the times to realize what I'm--and you

probably do being a historian--to break out of the mold of just working in there--to give me a chance to learn a trade, and then I was able to take advantage. Of course, now when I went to work there I already had, I was the father of three children so I was hungry.
[laughter]

JC: [laughter]

SF: Not really hungry, you understand, but I was hungry for some of the better things in life. And so after they closed down I built this building. Built the building myself and started an upholstery shop.

JC: This one right here behind us?

SF: No, this one over here. When I say built it actually the carpentry work.
[laughter] But you done things like that back then to get ahead. Like I say, I'm not bitter at them and as far as I know there wasn't--. There was one man I didn't like. He was superintendent, but I like his son. He's dead and gone now so we won't go into that.

JC: Okay.

SF: That was Phonse Bean. He was superintendent. They said that Steve Millender was a hard man, but you could believe Steve Millender, I mean, he might have been a hard man, but he was a truthful man.

Steve White, now I had the feeling that he would come around and grin and pat you on the back, but I always had the feeling that he might have a knife.

JC: [laughter]

SF: I don't know whether you understand what I mean now, but I don't have any thing to prove that. Well, I do have one thing, too, but it doesn't prove that. It makes me more sure.

But while I was building this place for the first time in my life I drew twenty dollars a week for about eight or nine weeks.

JC: Drew, I'm sorry, unemployment?

SF: Unemployment while I was building this building out here. I didn't have enough work to keep me busy to begin with so I went to work in Graham whenever they needed me at a upholstery place, and one day a deputy sheriff came in and served a warrant on me. It was for drawing-- See, I had already quit. I went to work and it just happened, I think, that what saved me was when I worked up there some and drew that money I reported it the next week when you had to go in and sign for a check every time then. And they would deduct that from-- I would deduct some from what you drew. But, anyway, I was supposed to have been drawing unemployment money while I was working. They had come by and seen me working on the building, and I'm sure that either Steve White or Mr. Bean one was the one that turned it in. But then when I went for a hearing before a magistrate--I wasn't put in jail or anything like that I was just, you know, had to recognize that the warrant was served on me.

JC: But you were working for your own--?

SF: I was working for another upholsterer. A little--small--guy that was running a re-upholstery shop in Graham.

JC: I see, so it wasn't work on your own shop other there.

SF: That was when I was working building the shop that this happened. And that was what-- They said that I was building a shop, but when I went before the magistrate Steve White was there and he was, you know, like I say, he was friendly. He just come to-- And I knew that they was the one's that were behind it, but I believe he just had to come-- He said he came to confirm-- I was talking with him out-- In fact, he came and sat down beside me when I was waiting for the hearing. There was a man from the labor board there. But when the magistrate heard it he asked him he said, "What about farmers here that is not working on the job is building a barn?" They said, "Oh, that's different." He said, "I don't see the difference." And he marked it, Not Guilty, on the warrant, I mean, just wrote that on it and War Labor Board man tried to argue with him. He said,

"I'm judge. I passed judgment on it." So he didn't get no where with it, but you remember these little things.

You know people are inhuman to each other. I mean, they'll do little things to get back at you for something. You think maybe, you know, that you think maybe they done to you or something. I just thought that was uncalled for.

JC: What was his motivation? He didn't want to see you opening up another shop?

SF: No, it wasn't that. It wouldn't have been any competition with him because it was to re-upholster furniture at that time.

JC: Oh.

SF: Because I didn't have any money. I couldn't have possibly. I was drawing twenty dollars a week unemployment and that was the only unemployment I ever drew. I think it was for nine weeks. This had been several months before that. I had got through out here, and I had started an upholstering shop, but I still had to go to work a day or two here and there to live.

JC: I guess I still don't understand why he would do that.

SF: You can't understand, I mean, I don't know the motive. I don't remember ever--. Of course, I was a union member, and I think Mr. Bean must have held grudges and wanted to be the cheese, but I won't say that positive. This is what I think.

JC: Okay, that's fine.

SF: And Steve White thought he would cause me a little trouble because I didn't kowtow to him either. That was one of the incidences that I remember about this.

JC: You suggested that there were a couple possible reasons why the upholstery shop at White's shut down. One was for economic reasons and the other was the union.

SF: Well, one was economic, yes. Now, I think them would be the two. You know you can't, I can't go into your mind and find out what you are thinking and, of

course, I'm going to tell you mainly what I'm thinking, but right on the other hand there might be something that I don't want to mention.

JC: Sure.

SF: But I try to be-- I mean, it's not anything that means a thing to me now. But now Bernie Bean works at Craftique, and that's Phonse's son. He later was Phonse's assistant down there, but he was just a boy when I was down there. His father come over in that department. He's the one that would hide in the sofa. I reckon his daddy didn't want him, you know, just hanging around there. What I mean, hide in the sofa, he'd get in one without a back and so you couldn't see him. But I think Bernie is a right good fellow.

JC: So there was never-- I'm continuing with the theme of the union. There were never any strikes or walkouts, I take it.

SF: Not that I know of.

JC: What do you think prevented, you know, everyone from getting behind the union? Why do you think--?

SF: Well, they worked so hard against it.

JC: The company.

SF: And I've been told that Steve White would pay off the international representatives. I don't know that that's true either, just hearsay, but I do know that they didn't work as much openly as they did undercover. All the time it was in they were strongly against it.

JC: Right, but from the perspective of the workers over in the case goods production, I'm just wondering how might have seen --.

SF: They were divided. There was a majority of them for the union, but I know later on after I was out of here it was quite a few years the union tried to get another contract and there were about seventy-five percent that voted for the union at that time which was more than to begin with, but they never got the contract. I've heard that it was because Steve White paid off the International. In other words, unless the International

backs this no little place the union is strong enough to strike. You know, you don't make that much money that you can do it and out last the company, but with an International backing you which is what they are supposed to do, but you find crooked people in all walks of life.

JC: You sure do. Do you know when that second attempt to bring the union in might have been?

SF: I would think the late 60s or early 70s. I'm not positive now the date of that because it was something that, you know, just people that I knew from down there would tell me. Now, I had a dealing down there, not with Steve White. Steve Millender was also sales manager and later on after a while I got-- Well after several years of upholstering we started selling furniture and it's hard to get a line of good furniture in a new store. And White's say it's hard because all the established dealers don't want no new dealers. But that's industry talk there, what I mean, it's not just one company. A fellow that thinks he's just going to go--starting a furniture business--anywhere and get any lines can't do it.

One of the salesmen who was Steve Millender's brother-in-law came by here one day. I had asked about it and kind of got a negative, you know, like maybe they didn't-- I was crazy enough to just go down there instead and go up in Steve Millender's office and ask him about it. But he just kind of beat around the bush that time, but later on his brother-in-law stopped in--Paul Jones--and he said he thought we ought to have that. Well, at that time we had already got Craftique, Craftique and Kingsdown--two local companies--if I hadn't of been able to get them I would never got going without any money to start up. We sell a lot of Craftique when it was at its-- Well, before it was sold out and sold to Pulaski.

Sometimes we would buy what they would call two truck loads at a time. They delivered in their own truck which was a big truck. We were one of the best dealers around. Of course, we always got fair treatment from them and from Kingsdown, too.

JC: Did you ever get any White Furniture then?

SF: Yes, we did, but never did do to good with it because-- If I got it to start I think I could because everybody is in the habit, but we done well enough with the ones that we did get. We got the Bob Timberlake-- Of course, we were getting Lexington Furniture all the time, I mean, for a long time. And I don't know whether you know or have other interests, but Bob Timberlake is an artist in North Carolina and he went to Thomasville and designed some reproduction furniture and Lexington has fourteen plants and it run three of them for two years on that one little line. I mean, Lexington is a big furniture producer. Well, they are still running one plant, I think, full-time.

JC: What was--?

SF: I don't mean to get a way from White's. You'll have to steer me.

JC: That's fine. I'll steer you back as need be.

As a furniture dealer what is the reputation of White's products?

SF: White's had a good, very good reputation. I've always felt that they started going backwards when Mr. Bean came in as superintendent. The had a-- I'm trying to think of the man's name who was superintendent when I worked down there. I was down there when he left and Mr. Bean come in.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

SAM D. FAUCETTE
JUNE 13, 1995

SF: was his name, and he is the man that really put the factory back to going after The Depression. He was there at the last of the world war, but now I think what had happened they sold a big hunk of White's stock to some other person and Mr. Gaines, him and his manager, and superintendent kind of under their guidance, but then when they were able to buy that back--as White's--anyway the leather heads added different people after that on it. I didn't know all about your business. I'm not trying to tell you this is fact, but anyway when they came back he got Mr.--. Where the others--. White's had always been quality furniture up until that time. Mr. Bean was from Lexington and had worked in a factory up there, and he would cut some corners. He believed in production more than quality.

JC: In what year was that more or less or what era?

SF: It would have been about 1945.

JC: Right after the war.

SF: Now that's just a guess when he came in. It might not have been that date particular, but you can probably find this out from some other people you're going to interview. Do you know any of them that you're going to interview?

JC: Well, we've interviewed a lot of the workers there now, or that were there in the last few years when it closed down.

SF: Well, the only trouble with that--.

JC: We're just beginning to reach back into the historical part of this whole project. So any names you have we can maybe go over a little bit later.

SF: Well, I don't really know who was working there. Most of the ones that were working--. Well, like the upholsterers they scattered. They didn't stay in Mebane, anyway. You know the towns where they did have two or three job selections, I mean,

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they say you could quit in the morning at one place in High Point and go to work after lunch at another place.

JC: [laughter]

SF: That's in good times.

JC: Right, right.

SF: They all scattered and so many of the people that was over in the case goods when I was there are dead. There may be some living, but there have got to be some living. See that was--. A lot of them--. They were highly skilled craftsmen. Since then they gotten more to having experts set machines. They've got machinery that experts set up, I mean, that's in the industry as a whole. I imagine that happened down there, too.

JC: What happened with your shop? Did you set it up in the late--? You went out there and built it in the late 40s.

SF: It was successful. I mean, I made a good living. I worked hard, but I found that I could sell a whole lot more than I could make. I mean, I could re-upholster. So about--I think it was 1970--I had been selling some on the side. I tried putting it in the front and selling it, but I was selling for cash and didn't have any way--. I don't know why but I didn't succeed in that. I was still operating as a upholstery shop, but also selling on the side. But then after that people would come in and say, "I hear you can get furniture. How about getting me a so and so?" So we started our business on a ten percent commission.

But in 19--. In November of [hesitation]. Let's see, it could have been November of '69, I was working--. We done the kitchen for my wife and put in new cabinet and stuff in at that time. I had been working on the house--. But to make a long story short I got on a hot wire and got knocked out of a chair. I was standing in a chair connecting the hot wires and one of the got contrary and I shook it a little bit, you know, to get it working again, and my pliers hit the--. I had insulated pliers. I had a little bit of sense but not much.

JC: [laughter]

SF: Insulated pliers and then a screw driver and it hit the switch box and I seen a ball of fire fly. The next thing you know I was on the floor. I got knocked from standing in a chair to the floor. It cracked a vertebrae in my back so I was in bed for a little while. I had to get fitted with a brace. It was about two or three weeks and, of course, and I wasn't able to upholstery for longer than that. We had enough special order business going. I was in the bed in the back room in yonder. A customer would come and she didn't know anything at that time about the books and selling and they'd come in and go through the books and tell me what they wanted. Picked swatches if it was a new sofa or chair. We would order. Anyway, I didn't get behind with any bills or anything at the time.

So after that I decided I was going to get out of upholstering altogether, but in the meantime, I put this in and sold it out because it was taking up my time, and I wasn't making any money.

After that we kind of went on and gradually I got backlogged and I had over a year's backlog of upholstery so it wasn't on the count of work, but I finally worked it all out and then concentrated on filling the upper shop with furniture, and it wasn't many years till I had to build a warehouse down there. We had some show rooms down there. And I built a little building in between which now I have for a play house. I've got woodworking machinery in it. I don't make anything to sell, I just, when I feel like working some I go down there and make a bunch of gadgets or crafts or something like that. I love to do woodworking and if you've worked all your life you're not going to just sit down and--. Of course, I've gotten bad about sitting now and stuff. I lost my wife about five years ago, and it will soon be six.

My kids are running the store, but when quitting time comes they go home and I'm here by myself and so television--. I've kind of grown to depend on it a lot. I hate that, too, because I don't want to be a slave to television.

JC: It has a way of creeping in though.

SF: Yeah, it does. After supper I sit here and nibble goodies and look at television.

JC: [laughter] So when did you stop doing upholstery all together or have you?

SF: Oh, well, I was going to tell you about that. There was place down where--. I've had two strokes and my mind don't bring up the names, places, or--. Electronics, it's not Westinghouse.

JC: GE?

SF: GE. That plant started as Piedmont Tubing. I had a friend that became manager of that, and he offered me a job as shipping supervisor. I thought that I would try it. I didn't know anything about steel and that's what they made, steel tubing. But I went down there and worked a month. [laughter] I near 'bout run out of that place. You can try to learn too much at one time. I had to learn the gauges of steel. They called it the oil polish and different things like that. And the shapes of it and the size. I was just trying to learn too much too fast. So I decided then I was going to stick to furniture. I came back and concentrated on turning this into a store and finishing up the backlog I had at that time. Now this was directly after I was shocked. So it's run as a furniture store. I operated it until about the year I was sixty-five, I believe. I never thought about retiring, but my wife--. We went to Florida. My family does things together, and my children were all grown then. I think all of them but one was to be there at the same time as we were. My wife had a heart attack in Florida, and she was an invalid for about seven years. She could get around some. We made some trips after that, but I always had to take, you know, one of my sister-in-law's or maybe two of them along on these trips, which was fine, but what I mean is I couldn't take off. It was about five years that she was improving and got along pretty good, but she had diabetes, too, and she couldn't go out for the last eighteen months she lived.

My kids run it now. It's still mine, but--.

JC: And so this whole life long business basically grew out of your early experiences at White's, it sounds like.

SF: Yes. Now I was about twenty-nine--. Well, let's see, I was born in 1917, and it was 1939, so I was about thirty-two wasn't I. Well, thirty-one or two, anyway, when I went to work at White's. My work before had been--. I had worked in hosiery mills and cotton mills, several different jobs.

JC: Now back when you started working there at White's were there a lot of blacks working down there?

SF: There wasn't a lot. There were several and there were some like in the glue room. There was more than the average and some of them had production jobs which at that time in most of the mills they didn't have production jobs, they would have service jobs or something of that kind.

JC: Doing more cleaning up and such you mean?

SF: Cleaners and things of that--. Firing the boiler. Of course, now there was usually a white man in the boiler room as supervising, kept gauges, I mean, watched the boiler and things like that, but they had to haul in coal from a pile in a wheelbarrow and that's the kind some of them had, but like I say, some of them was production workers. You know, ran machines.

JC: Right.

SF: Or tailed machines in the machine room. There were several black men there at the time. But now during the war there hired white and black women. I suspect from the war on there were more blacks.

JC: Women as well? Were there more women after the war?

SF: Uh, huh. I think White's directly after it they let most of them go and got white men, but then gradually you would see them come out and there would be quite a few scattered in there.

JC: Do you now how race relations were at the time within the plant?

SF: Well, all the time I was at White's and all my life up until the Supreme Court ruling, I reckon, I've never known race relations to be bad in Mebane. Back at that time you wouldn't think of inter marrying or anything of that kind, but in other words they lived on the outer edges but there was no trouble.

JC: Okay.

SF: I never heard no-- Now, in Greensboro, you know, they had a lot of trouble which is not far here, but I never knowed of White's or Mebane-- There was a-- It was about the same way over at the bedding factory which was the other big employer at that time, I mean, the second biggest employer. I don't know about the yarn mill. I never worked there, and I wasn't around it much. I never worked at the bedding factory, but like from the time--a year or two after I got started out here as an upholsterer--I would buy cotton for upholstering at the bedding factory and I was in and out of there a lot. Then when I started selling that was the first thing that I sold--.

From my point of view the bedding factories opened up the world some what. I say that-- I can't remember what year it was, but it's been twenty-five or more years ago, they gave incentive trips if you sold so many-- Well, certain items of the bed, in other words, certain qualities. You know there is several qualities in [inaudible]. You would get so many points towards trips and then you could-- They would charter a plane. They were really deluxe trips, I mean, they looked after you. They had travel agents. The first trip that I took out of the country--the first time I went anywhere with them--I don't know if they had ever been out of the country before--was to Myrtle Beach. Well, we had to drive down there, but the Thunderbird Motel out on the beach was one of those big ones and we checked in there and had fine accommodations. We ate in the dining room. When we got ready to leave we just signed it.

JC: [laughter] This is all from selling--?

SF: That was for my wife and me, and of course, we had taken friends from Elon down. The next year they went to the Virgin Islands and then the next year Rome. I've been to England, Switzerland, and Hawaiian Islands.

JC: All of this just as a product of selling--.

SF: Kingsdown mattresses.

JC: Kingsdown mattresses, wow!

SF: But it got me started and I found out I could, you know, you learn a little bit about places and so I've had--not only my family--I know all of the children but one. I had one son that don't like to fly. He does if it's necessary, but he don't like to. He hadn't been on trip. I took his wife, you know, with us as a family. I've had as many as nine go along. I had sold that much bedding during the year. Anyway, it opened up horizons.

JC: Great.

SF: I don't know about you, but I always like to see what was over the mountains and around the bend.

JC: Definitely. To sell so much--so many goods--what was the market you drawing on? I mean, where were people coming from to shop at this--?

SF: Chapel Hill or Cary.

JC: Oh, so you were getting them from a very large area.

SF: Well, you had to have something to get started. I didn't have the money to advertise and put in big stocks and things like that so I sold at a very low margin and one told another one. Some of it I can trace where it mushrooms. For instance, there's a man named Ed Stewart who runs Stewart's Physical Therapy over in Burlington, well, the first time I knew him he lived in Chapel Hill, and he was still studying physical therapy but his wife wanted some Sanford furniture, a bedroom suite. It was expensive furniture at the time. She came here to see if I could get it. I told her I didn't know, but I would order it and see. I ordered it, and it come in so I had a customer. That was in Chapel Hill, but

he was raised around Broadway and Mammoth which is seventy-five miles or so. Do you where Lillington is?

JC: Yeah.

SF: Down in that section between Sanford and Lillington. His family was from down there. He had nieces growing up and went to school and became teachers and got married. The mother had come first and bought furniture. And it was a big enough discount that they could afford to come and do this. Not only them but right in that section if I could go out and look them up. They won't all come to mind, I know, but we probably got fifty customers. Well, you'd think they were coming to buy right much furniture now and they ain't never going to need anymore. It's not like that. They'll sometime want to change it and from this--. Now the girls taught school, and they had a principal. I don't remember exactly where it was. It was down there close, but their principal was a Mr. Gray. And so he started buying furniture, and his wife still buys it. He's dead now, but his wife was up here within the last six months. We've got customers in Roxboro. We've got a whole lot.

JC: Yeah, they really come a long way.

SF: I think it's the fact that we sell good furniture and sell it cheap. Most people, you know, if they got a Cadillac, they are going to hold up to Cadillac prices. In other words you'll get a discount on a Chevrolet quicker than you would a Cadillac, I mean, if you go to buy.

I'm sorry. I get wound up on this stuff that is not relevant.

JC: No, no. What about the relationship between the town and White's? I mean, it seems--.

SF: Well, years ago you would think White's owned the town. I mean, they had their way about everything. But the big guy--you may have heard this before and I'll just tell you this--the Hupmans' owned the telephone company and they began to get

prominent in politics and so there seemed to be some rival to that and some differences of opinion.

The White influence, it diminished. Other influences have gone, whether it's good or bad I don't know. White's was--. Although they were looking after their self mainly, they were still--. They were good for the town.

Mebane--. Now, I've been here all my life and there were several census years, you know, which is every tenth year. We would only grow one or two and sometimes we didn't grow any.

JC: [laughter]

SF: But, I know Mr. Best who owned Craftique said that--he just had one daughter--and the year that she was born was a census here and maybe they grew one that year. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

SF: He always told her she was the one. But for the last ten years Mebane has taken off and it's doing better. Now, I have been told and this was something more or less that I heard when I was a kid from my father that there were several industries that would have come to Mebane but White's kept them out. They owned a lot of the land, and they pretty much had their way about it.

JC: What was their motivation from keeping other industry out? Maintaining their labor?

SF: Well, they had a--. If you lived in Mebane and wanted to live in Mebane and worked at White's they didn't want you to go somewhere else to work. There was a silk mill that came here one time and took a lot of the young employees away, and they done all they could to get rid of it. They finally--. Of course, The Depression is what got rid of it. I say silk, but it was--. They called it a silk mill, but it was mostly rayons of different kinds.

JC: Do you remember first hearing that the plant was going to shut down?

SF: White's was going to shut down. I don't recall just when that--. I wasn't too long. Maybe it was in the paper.

JC: Yeah, I'm just wondering.

SF: Six or eight months before they did finally close, I mean, they worked it up until then.

JC: Did that--?

SF: Of course, it wasn't White's anymore then. It was Hickory.

JC: Right, it was Hickory.

SF: But the reputation of White's Furniture has dropped considerably since Hickory got it, I mean, it's not--. I know a lot of the dealers don't even consider it White's Furniture anymore if they buy Hickory Furniture. I don't know why they bought it out unless it was to close it down. I've been told that they wouldn't sell that as a going concern.

JC: That's White's wouldn't sell it?

SF: No, that Hickory wouldn't sell it. I think White's family, the White's family would have liked to have seen it go on. I know the old man, the two old men that started it, well, like you say, they would have turned over in their pine boxes. They would have turned over in their graves if they knew what had happened to White's furniture.

But back, I think, at the time in the early years of White's the older men at White's--. I wouldn't say it was Mr. Sam. It was one of the later--. He is the brother of the men who started it, but he was the younger brother, and they had already got going and he was, you know, got educated and things of that nature. I think the older men were closer to the employees. And there was a time back--this was when I was a kid before I went to work and this was before then went on with that cut--when White's would pay the employees a ten percent bonus at Christmas. I mean, I've heard of them paying as high as ten percent, and they would always give them a ham at Christmas.

These were things they didn't have to do, they weren't forced to do. I have had one paid vacation in my life. Now that was for working in the mills and it was down there. Of course, that was right after we got the union and that was--.

JC: Yeah, you got some paid vacation when they union was there.

SF: Before that vacation was a week's rest, I mean, you didn't get paid for it. That was in the hosiery mills, cotton mills, and all. Later on when Western Electric came into Burlington they had retirement and paid vacations, paid holidays and things like that. And gradually some of the other mills do give it now and have to pay--not on the paid vacation--but the retirement plan. I reckon it kind of rubs off.

JC: [laughter]

SF: To keep the employees cool. There was a time during the war when you could get a job anywhere. And really right now it is not easy to get--. I'm a little bit stubborn--. I don't want to be told who I can hire and who I can't hire because just anybody that comes and applies for a job is not going to qualify for what I need, but I could use another hand down here now. You know, vacation time is coming on. I've got a sister-in-law that works out there and she has two broken arms. It happened at one time. She was helping her husband take the cover off of the swimming pool and she stepped in a hole and broke this wrist and this shoulder. That's the same brother--. He was waiting on--. This happened about three weeks ago and last week he had a stroke which was, you know, pretty massive the doctor told me this morning. I had to go to the--. Well, I didn't to, but I go for a check up every month and I was down there this morning. We have the same doctor.

JC: You'd like to hire some more help?

SF: Well, I would like to have one more, but he's got to have certain qualifications, I mean, somebody that can meet the public. I hired a boy one time. It's a boy that went to church where I do and told me if I had a job that summer he'd like to have it. Well, right then I didn't have a job, but I think it was the next summer I was

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going to need somebody, but I needed somebody that could help sell, too. Well, a lot of times you go into the price list and you have the number of the piece that they want--. There's a lot of special order work, but then you have to put down the piece and all for inventory purposes even if you sell it out of the stock.

JC: I guess I am trying to figure out what your problem is in hiring people and is that that the nature of the workers around here has changed over time or--?

SF: Well, it has. I would need somebody that I think is presentable and can--. Well, I've got somebody out there now. Now I've got my brother's grandson, but he's been at State for four years and several salesmen has come in out there and he can walk up and say, "I'm Andy Faucette." You know what I mean?

JC: Yeah.

SF: And still he can go down yonder and pick out, you know, if there is a certain piece that we've sold from those in the warehouse, and he can go down there by the number on that and pick that piece out and load it on a truck or whatever, trailer or whatever. It's just qualifications. You've got to be presentable and able to talk to people as a salesperson. And also know enough about it to know and be willing to do that.

JC: You raised an interesting idea earlier that White's reputation in the industry went down after Hickory bought out and became Hickory-White. In what way could you tell or in what way were people talking about that change in your industry?

SF: Well, I think maybe it came a little from the workers and the employees, but it was just in general, in the general conversation and the people that worked for me and Hickory incorporated into theirs, but it will soon be just Hickory Furniture.

JC: But you could look at a piece and tell the wood wasn't up to par or the workmanship?

SF: The finish was a big part of it and then the smooth workmanship and White's--. One of the things you can look at and tell--. Now this don't make it good or bad, but still it's an indication of whether they took time to make it good furniture. White's and

Craftique's drawers fitted inside. A lot of people's drawers that fit they are just in there. They don't fit tight, but they got a band around so you don't see it. But now it takes a while to get that and the cabinet man does, I mean, their job description is they are case fitter when they do that.

One time White's made a--a few years back--and I could get this at that time--it was a little chest of drawers called a bachelor's chest. They made it and it had a curved front. It had three drawers that fit in, but you could turn that drawer upside down and push it in there and it would fit. Now, that's unusual. Now, people used to take time to do that, but--.

JC: So now the similar case would have a border around it that kept it from going in.

SF: Now that don't make a--. That don't mean that everything is made that way. Usually you can do that and what the core is. White's was always veneered, but it was a high quality of veneer, and they usually had a solid popular core. Well, now the places and I think White's finally went to that when down here, it may have been. I don't remember whether it was before or after Hickory, chip board, and chip board will crumble, I mean, the part that's less exposed. They make cabinet tops now--. You know the mold, the chip board, and put Formica on it and you have a little row of fronts and things like that, under the bottom where it sticks out over the cabinet where the sink is you'll finally see little saw dust down below that.

JC: But Hickory-White actually went to veneering chip board at one point?

SF: If I'm not mistaken we've seen some--. We've got some White's that went to chip board. But that just--. It's not one thing. It's a whole group of things. Mainly it's in the workmanship. Well, the workmanship, of course, you've got to have something to work with, but White's was a quality furniture manufacturer for a long time. I think as long as White's owned it. You've got to come down a little, I think, when Mr. Bean come down as production manager.

JC: Was there a sense of the end of an era when that factory closed down or was it something that was somewhat expected? I'm just wondering how you felt about it.

SF: I don't think it was expected particularly. I think people in Mebane were disappointed. It was kind of an institution and it was something that you expected to be there forever. Well now like, for instance, they used to take great pride in it, you've heard of--maybe you've been there, stayed there--Grove Park Inn in Asheville. When they built that, that was back maybe in 1925, White's made all of the furniture for that. My father had a postcard picture of a train load of White Furniture. It had banners on the side, "From White's Furniture Company in Mebane."

JC: That was actually a postcard?

SF: Yeah, there was a picture postcard of it, and I don't know who know where it is now, but my father used to keep a lot of pictures and postcards and little souvenirs and things of that kind. Where if he would go somewhere and things that he valued and wanted to keep in his trunk. Once in a while he would go in there and we'd see pictures and things like that. But I remember that postcard. He had pride in it, too, because he worked at White's.

JC: Did he continue to work at White's till he retired?

SF: No, not till he retired. After they put him on this drier, one of my brother--.

JC: Oh, that's right. I'm sorry. You told me he went up and became a machine--.

SF: But he loved furniture. I had bought--. I didn't know anything, you know, when I was growing up really about the quality of furniture and I couldn't afford White's when I got married and I bought a suite of furniture that was made at Bassett. I've had it a good while and one day and I was in there looking at it and I said, "You know your pulls weren't lined up?" I got to looking. You've seen this was veneered and it would be slanting and it would come right to a point in the middle and it would have been very easy to line the holes that they bored and put them little rosettes with pulls in. And one of

them was about a half inch high. It's noticeable on a drawer. After I noticed it I've seen it, but something like that I don't think it would have been out of White's.

Of course, all furniture manufactures in times when they can sell it good they let down--. Like automobile manufacturers, I think both Ford and General Motors lost their pride for a while, but I think they both kind of worked it back up now to where they make better products.

JC: Let's go back a little bit to when you first started there. I was wondering just exactly how you got your job. You mentioned your dad didn't necessarily get it for you and you were over in the upholstery shop.

SF: Well, I had a second cousin--my father's first cousin--that went to work at White's in the upholstery room. He had become a cutter and he told me they were looking for an outsider and if I wanted a job down there, why, he believed I would like it and it paid right good. So I'm sure he spoke a good word to the foreman. The foreman hired. You didn't go through a personnel office at that time. The foreman in that department hired you and that was true in the others, too, and true in hosiery mills and cotton mills.

He had undoubtedly had spoken a good word for me. Now, I was so ignorant about upholstering furniture until I went down there and the foreman said, "Do you have tools for outsiders"? Well, I told him I had carpentry tools. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

SF: That was the only tools I had, but it does take special tools.

JC: What kind of tools did they expect you to have as an outside upholsterer?

SF: A hammer which is magnetic on one side. That's what they expected then.

JC: Yeah, that's what I'm interested in.

SF: And a pair of heavy shoes and a screwdriver. A screwdriver, it wasn't to drive screws with, it was to knock the tacks out of it, you know, you needed to knock it out, backing them up a little you might say. You had to have, we called them crooked

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needles, they were curved needles. You know, you done a lot of hand stitching then, and you had to have a big needle to--. You made your own edge. Now you buy it in roles, but back then you'd sewed a piece of burlap on to your--. Well, the burlap covered the springs and you sewed a piece of burlap then on to that and filled it up with moss. That's what we used. Occasionally we used hair for filling. Now, that's another difference that went in cheap upholstery furniture. You would have wood wool and wood wool is nothing in the world except excelsior. Get them bales and that's the filling you used, but they had basically moss which was stuff harvested off of--Spanish moss--harvested off trees down in South Carolina and on down in where there is the hanging moss. Well, they would take that out and dry it just like they did the hay and bale it and sell it. Now, we didn't buy it, naturally out of factory business and later on when I was out here. We bought it from a supplier, but there were people that made their living gathering it and curing it. The bales would be just like a bale of hay, but it makes good--. Now the change now is that they had have rubberized pads that goes over the insulation springs and then layers of cotton over that. You don't have to mess with that, but at that time we would tear that out of the bale, pull it apart, and build it the shape you wanted it on a sofa back, a lot of camel backs, Chippendale and Hepplewhite. They had the--. Some of the older furniture designer styles that they made--. Now I forgot what the question was.

JC: It started out when you were hired and what tools you were required to have and such, which you answered.

SF: Well, the hammer, scissors, a screwdriver for knocking, and several different needles.

JC: Then how did you get trained?

SF: They put me in the factory with another man that was doing the out siding. I'd watch him and help him along till they thought I could join a piece myself. It didn't take too long to do that, but it took a long time to pick up the speed the way, because it was all piece work. You were just paid by the hour until you, of course, they had the

Wage Hour Law well in by that time, and you were paid that way until you could make more on production and when you done that they gave you a section of the bench with, we called them bucks, but they were like saw horses except padded on top to protect the wood part of it.

JC: Right. You keep using this term, outsider or outside, I don't understand exactly what that means.

SF: That was putting the outside on sofas.

JC: Oh, I see.

SF: The outside arms, the back, maybe the wings, and then any trim work we would have to do like brass head nails and, you know, the panels we put them on and a dust bottom on the bottom. But now, I worked that for a year or more and got to where he thought I could upholster. I just went over from the outsider, and they hired somebody else to outside. They would come in to train for these things a lot and they wouldn't stay until where they could do it well enough to make money.

JC: How many folks were in the upholstery section when you were down there?

SF: Well, I believe about nine upholsterers.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

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START OF TAPE 2, SIDE A

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SF: of course, you can have anything on it. Put webbing on the bottom of it and springs, set them up, fasten them in and tied them. You know what I mean, you tie them down and all that was done by hand at that time.

JC: No.

SF: There was a foreman and in the cutting room there was five or six. I would say in the whole department including a couple of men that just crated them, maybe thirty.

JC: So when they cut out the upholstery part in the late 40s it didn't cut down the number of workers dramatically?

SF: Not to amount to a lot. Anyway, they were--. I don't know any of them that--. One man had a heart attack, and he stayed on and made slip seats. Now slip seats is a--. Well, that's a slip seat over in that rocker there. That's something I put in there myself. It came with the back, but I like that chair better than--. You get used to a chair and it kind of fits you.

JC: Yep.

SF: And they bought me--my kids bought me--a oak rocker which was nicer, more dressier rocker, but it don't have the comfort yet. So I put it in yonder and use that one. But anyway, this was for dining room chairs. (). Now this is a pullover, they call it. This seat is actually made on a frame and then it is installed. But

they do have them that come down over the whole frame that's a pullover. He stayed on and done that for the dining room.

JC: I see. Now what was going on in Hillsborough plant?

SF: Hillsborough plant closed down for some reason. I never did--. They made-- . I don't know what kind of case goods they made, but they made a cheaper line of upholstered furniture.

JC: Did you think about going over there when you lost your job?

SF: No.

JC: There weren't any openings or you just didn't want to do it anymore?

SF: Well, I'm not even sure they were still operating.

JC: Oh, I see.

SF: I don't much--. I think they probably closed that out before--. The didn't close the whole plant out, but--. I knew a guy that was later on one of the postmaster's in Mebane was an upholsterer at Hillsborough. But by having a cheaper line of furniture they didn't make quite as much money as the upholsterers in Mebane did. [pause] I'm sorry I mentioned to you--.

JC: How did your father feel about you going to work down there? You said originally he wanted you to do--.

SF: Well, I told him that they had told me--. Now this manager was--. Just a while before we got into the Second World War I told him that they told me if I learned the job good I could make twenty-five dollars a week. "You'll never see the day you'll make twenty-five dollars a week at White's." [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

SF: That's what he said. Of course, before I left there I was on piece working and was making well over a hundred. Of course, things--. I mean, at piece work, not well over but some over a hundred if I worked, you know, a whole week. But we would work--. When I went to White's they were working fifty-five hours a week. No, they was working forty-five. It seemed like nine hours a day and then on Saturdays. It would be fifty, wouldn't it? I know they was working overtime, but I think I made by the hour about eighteen dollars for that length of time and that would include some overtime. But later on when they cut back a little bit on the hours of the upholstering department chose to work nine hours four days and four hours on Friday. So we got paid about eleven o'clock Friday and was off the rest of the week. If felt pretty good.

JC: [laughter]

SF: You know, it was better than I had been doing up to that. Everything is relative when you get down to it.

JC: Indeed.

SF: I don't even try to figure out the relativity of a dollar then and a dollar now. After it got to where it was worth ten times, I mean, after it got to where a dollar was worth ten times as much then as it is now, I quit figuring, I didn't want to know.

JC: Well, I don't know as I have any more questions about White's. Are there any other stories specifically about White's or the town?

SF: Not that I know of any incidences. You know this was the ones in my life that I knew of and that's the only way I could tell you because they're just things that I

was involved in or had a first-hand knowledge of. I'm sure there are a lot of little incidences along.

JC: Well, you're the first to give us a solid understanding of the union down there. So that's invaluable.

SF: One little incident, I don't know whether it's even tellable or not, but this was when this Mr. Gaines I was telling you about was plant manager. He would go through the plant, but there was a boy come in, a country boy come in and he come on in the factory and he had come to ask for a job. But they said he was standing and looking around at things and Mr. Gaines come through the plant and come by and said he watched him a while and said, "What's your name?" "Simmons." "Well, Mr. Simmons, you're fired." [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

SF: He hadn't worked. I think it is a true story because the boy, and I knew the one that told, and I think it was true. But that was kind of the-- He thought he was loafing on the job.

JC: Right.

SF: They expect you to give a day's work, but I think the people that worked there expected it.

Cotton mills and hosiery mills and I expect from what I've seen in furniture factories people don't go down at it just every minute like they used to.

JC: There wasn't a lot of time in between tasks or--?

SF: Well, you have a little, what you might say, rest and if you're on a service job like moving something or in the cotton mill and putting up ()--that's in the

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spinning room--or you have little ropes of cotton that's cut down to that size and the spinning frame twisting the thread, I mean, it's, you know, spins it out and makes it certain sizes. But they have people that do that, but the people that run the machines then really had to work, but it wasn't quite as hard. Of course, the pay was, you know, it wasn't as much for the job that didn't work as hard as it was for the others so I reckon a little difference then--.

Back in--. At that time you didn't get a raise every year. That's something that is very definitely post war, I mean, of course, inflation is going on all the time, too, so you have to get them.

JC: Before those cost of living raises and before the union would management alone set the wages? Was there any way to put any kind of pressure on them?

SF: Well, you didn't have--. Down there, for instance--. But when my father was--. When I was in high school, I mean, the year I was a senior, he made a quarter cents an hour, that's sixteen dollars a week, which wasn't the best but a lot of the people were working for twelve. Of course, there was a lot that was making twenty and twenty-five on the high skill jobs. The first industry in Alamance County that came in that paid better was Full Fashion Knitting. Of course, later, you know, it came and had its niche and then it went on. They improved on ways of making it to where you could make it with less skill and more machinery and less skill.

I think White's had a very definite influence on the town and the people. You know, it's furnishing employment. I never did think that they were the worst place in the world to work, but my--. () as far as that concern and he took pride in what they made and things like that which most of the people that worked there did. But

I think that's the thing that's gone, at least, management don't--. I feel like this way, I believed in the unions and their rights, I mean, they should had had a--. If the union and management could have really got together and management would have listened to the labor they could have put out a better product, they'd done better, they'd had more pride in it. They could have made--. I mean, in other words, they could have paid them a little better if they worked together, but working for somebody that you felt like was your enemy and having somebody work for you that you felt like was your enemy that don't--. Well, you know, that's the way the politicians keep the country divided now, and they could step in and make a decision.

And back then I thought I was liberal. I'm just talking now, not necessarily for--. I thought I was liberal. Now I am so much conservative. But things have happened in this country since I grew up that was never dreamed of years ago.

JC: Yeah.

SF: And it's all nibbling at our freedoms. I don't know whether a lot of people realize that or not, but I certainly think so.

JC: What sorts of freedoms are you concerned about?

SF: I'm concerned about all kinds of freedoms in making decisions. Things that bug me which is just little things. Seat belts bug me because I'm not convinced that on the average they would save a lot of lives. They might. They could just as easily cause you to be held in an automobile and killed, but I think we know that they might be a safety factor and if we want to wear them, well and good. I don't even object to them having to put them in the automobiles, but I do object to them making you wear it.

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You know, I objected to Hillary's health program. I don't think you ought to be told who your doctor can be and all of these things. In other words, they just creep little by little. There's a law that you can't do this and a law you can't do that.

Like the case in Alamance County now, the schools consolidating, it didn't make a whole lot of difference whether they consolidated them or not really but they way they are going about this pushing. Now they won't allow--. Two of the commission are firmly against allowing any vote. They want to push it through whether they people want it or not. I think we ought to get the vote. We might make some bad decisions or the wrong decisions, but we still ought to get to have a say in that.

JC: Right.

SF: Well, mainly I don't believe in--.

INTERVIEW STOPS ABRUPTLY