

Interviewee: Walter Claytor
Interviewer: Carla Lewis
Transcriber: Andrew Sterling

CL: My name is Carla Lewis and I'm the Gainsboro Branch Manager. Today is December 16, 2006. I am going to interview Dr. Walter Claytor. Dr. Claytor, when and where were you born?

WC: I was born in Roanoke, Virginia, 406 N Jefferson Street in Roanoke, Virginia.

CL: Can you tell me something about your parents? We'll start with your parents and then go through your brothers and sisters, where they lived and occupation.

WC: My dad was 1 of 13 children from Floyd County, Virginia. Its down the road from where you're living now at the present time. There were 10 boys in the family and 3 girls. At the time, more or less, one step in front of slavery. His father was a slave as well as mother. They came from over near Ferrum, Virginia, Calloway, in that section. They lived there. All of 'em had taught school at that time. He went into medicine and 3 others went into medicine and they were farmers and school teachers and _____. My mother was from Knoxville, Tennessee.

CL: Can you give me her name?

WC: Roberta Morris Woodfin. Most of her life she was in Tennessee. My dad and they were married in Bristol, Tennessee. My mother's father was a Presbyterian minister and they were friends to the Downings here in Roanoke at the Presbyterian Church. My mother came up to visit the Downings and whatever happened – My dad went to the train station with a horse and buggy to pick her up. And, of course, he was immediately struck by her. And, of course, he took the long way home to get there. You got all that history early enough but that's the way they met and, of course, one thing led to another. They married in Bristol, Tennessee, and then she came to live in Roanoke with him. Their first home was on the corner of Gilmer Avenue and Henry Street. I don't know if you were here at the time the Dew Drop Inn was there and what not. That was a very prominent place at one time before they started urban renewal and what not. So they were there until they built a home on Jefferson Street and it was built around 1922, '21 or '22. Very unique situation at that time. It was in the Jim Crow era, time. The house was too large for a black man to own. You couldn't find contractors that would build it. So my mother's father came to Roanoke and built it for her and, of course, they brought workmen out of Tennessee to come up here to do the job. That house ended up being one of the largest homes in Southwest Virginia, one of the finest including even the whites in Roanoke. They never wanted to own up to it but it was very much there and it had 22 rooms in it. It was quite a large place in that day. With the hardwood floors and central heat and things of this nature. In those days, blacks just didn't have homes like that, I'll put it that way. It served all of us and that's what I meant when I said my mother kept us busy. The home was on an acre of land and, of course, between cutting the grass and the upkeep and washing walls and whatever it took. Cutting grass kept us all busy so she knew what to do to keep us going. There's no doubt about that. So there was 8 of us that were born. The early ones were born in the home. Later one, they were birthed at Burrell Hospital at the time that was formed, you know, whatever. Anything specific with my mother or dad that you wanted to know?

CL: Your brothers and your sisters, can you name them or can you tell us a little bit about their occupations?

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WC: As I said, there were 8 of us, 2 boys, 2 girls, 2 boys, 2 girls. The 2 older boys finished Medicine at Meharry Medical College. That would be Frank W. Claytor and John B. Claytor. Frank was in Internal Medicine and John B. was in Obstetrics GYN. Bernice, a girl, married a Lewis Bodie and she was a Medical Technologist. Roberta got her training because _____ as teacher, she had her Doctorate or what not in Mathematics and she taught in schools in Washington, DC, whatever. She finished Chicago University, one of the youngest to do it. Her first teaching experience was at Christiansburg

Institute and I think she finished around '21 or '22 _____ at the time. Brother Ralph went to Hampton and all of the boys had been previously in the military service. And, of course, I was the 4th. My mother was determined to keep me out of it. Of course, I wanted to go. I guess the uniform, looking at the girls in those days, it was something you wanted to do. I wasn't looking at the seriousness of it, I was looking at the other end of it. (laughing) So that's the way that went. But anyway, all of 'em except Ralph had gone to Knoxville College in Knoxville, Tennessee. Its a small Presbyterian college there and our connection with Tennessee with _____ my grandparents. That's where they had gone to school also and what not. Ralph went to the school where my father went to which was Hampton Institute. I don't know if that was university or institute or where they was in those days, you know, whatever. My dad had taken his medical training at Shaw. I believe it was in North Carolina I believe at the time. Ralph had finished – I called him a mechanic but they called it Automotive Engineering. It was a fancy term, you know, for this type of thing. Of course, when he came back home, he operated a service station that was on the property at the time. I went to Knoxville also. I only took 2 years though and then I went to Nashville for summer courses at Tennessee AMI (??) and then 4 years at Meharry Medical College for my Dentistry. Finished also at the age of 21. I worked for the Burrell Clinic when I first came home, for indigent children. That's before we got the clinic built and before I started to practices. It was an experience but it was a little donation, you know, for the kids of Roanoke. You know, they had nowhere – well, they had somewhere to go too but money and things of that nature, things was awful tight, whatever that you do that. Then, I was there 2 years and then I also had to go to service and spent 2 years in service, 18 months in Alaska, Alaska Air Command. That's where I met the wife and had enough sense to bring her to Roanoke and worked it out. And the first year after I finished which was in '48, the clinic was built and we moved into that January of '49. So I was there 2 years before when I took military service and came back. And then practiced there for 45 years before I retired, whatever. That brings you up to '93 I guess it is if you work it out.

CL: OK, thank you. Did you have extended family living nearby, aunts, uncles, cousins?

WC: That house, during the time, between relatives and I guess the ministers and the doctors that came through town and during that day and time, blacks couldn't just stay just anywhere that you wanted to stay. You couldn't go to the hotels and, of course, the Holiday Inns and those things were just beginning to come in in later years. So usually, you had to know some people and you stayed with them or you stayed at the church lot. Many a night, we slept in the car all night. You'd drive and you had nowhere to stay and you spent the night on the road. So, rather than do that, you'd go to a community and then you'd find a black section of town and you'd sleep in the church lot in the car or whatever 'til the next morning and then you'd drive. You also had to pick certain filling stations that you could go to because all of 'em wouldn't, particularly in the South, they wouldn't serve blacks or whatever in those days when you had the Klu Klux Klan and this kind of thing going on. So, had a hard life in some ways but it was interesting at the same time. It prepared you for other experiences and other things that were going on, you know, with -

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CL: Can you describe your home life? You started describing your home at one time. For instance, did you gather around the radio in the afternoons and can you remember when you had your first telephone, refrigerator.

WC: The telephone was there all my life. I guess the patients would call my dad and we had the drug store down on the corner there which was the – It was Gainsboro Pharmacy but that's not the first one, there was a – don't remember that – Dr. Skinner who lived up on Patton Avenue, 216 was the first pharmacist that was there. We ended up with Dr. F.A. Robinson, that's Foreman Robinson was the pharmacist at that time. Most of our time with a large family which I started to mention about the physicians and ministers or whatever that came. There has never been a time that I can remember that you didn't have 8 or 10 people sitting down at a meal whether it was breakfast, lunch or dinner or

whatever. In reading the question I remember one year, the fondest time I think would be when all the children were home and its something we've always done all our life with the parents is to come home. Its not like kids today that don't speak to each other. They don't know each other. But our family was a unit and it was there. My dad being a physician, he got up early in the morning. He went to the hospital and did his surgery or whatever. He had office hours in the evening as well as the night. And his time of rest or whatever was at 4 o'clock and no matter where you were or what you were doing, you knew that he was coming home to dinner at 4 o'clock and you were to be there. My mother didn't run a cafeteria. It wasn't these things that each one eats at different times. You come in and you sit down at that table and you do not touch anything 'til my dad said the blessing. You know? Everybody ate together and this is where you talked or you whatever goes on for the day or whatever you'd have to do at that time. Thanksgiving and Christmas, my grandfather being in manual training and builder and what not, we'd put the leaves in the table and stretched it out and that was not square but oblong. The dining room was a – I mean the breakfast room was a round table with leaves in it and he made a little section to go through it. And you'd have 27 or 28 people sitting down at a meal. You'd put a turkey on one end and a ham on the other (Clap and laughing) and it disappeared. And, of course, the kids, we all had to help set the table or you washed the dishes or you cleaned up after and this type of thing but it would be my grandparents, my mother's father and mother came when I was a youngster, my grandfather's people stayed there also upstairs. You didn't have nursing homes and this thing. We all had to do this at home and we were all taught that very young. You know, this sort of thing. The cousins that you mentioned, there were several of 'em. They came down from Florida or Christiansburg or whatever and stayed with us also. Of course, they helped out around the house or whatever work they could do. This is where they went to school to give 'em a little training in high school or whatever and they attended Addison whatever. Most of us went to the Gainsboro School and then we came up to Harrison here for 1 year which is a junior high I guess you'd call it. Only a year or two years. I think it was one year and then went over to the old Addison not the new one. That's where that was for the rest of our time here spending in that regard. You've got to point me a little bit. I'm rattling off but I think this is what you asked. Its what you wanted. (laughing)

CL: What kind of activities did you participate in?

WC: You mean besides working? (laughing)

CL: Yeah.

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WC: During the late '30s, my parents had bought a farm out at Kingstown. It was about 18 ½ acres and my mother fixed up – we had a swimming pool on it. And she fixed up a thing that church groups would come out and have picnics and this type of thing. And, of course, we worked out there with that. As the older kids left – My younger life was in Tennessee with my grandparents and then as the older brothers and sisters left home to go to college then the younger ones like my sister Ruth and Ralph and we came from the grandparents into Roanoke. So, we had to pick up where they left off to do the work. My days of high school, I think about feeding the hogs and milking cows and chickens. I didn't have the chance to rip and run around town like a lot of kids did, this type of thing. We had chores to do and this type of thing. I didn't try basketball but I did try football at the time. You know, whatever. And other than that, I didn't have much time for anything else except working. When you talk about milking cows, that's a morning and night. That's everyday. You don't put it off. You've got to do it everyday.

CL: Did you sit on the front porch and did your parents sit on the front porch in the afternoons when the chores were done?

WC: I would say sometimes that that happened like that. You know the house and you're familiar with it. The porch went around the whole front and part of the side and yes, there were times that we would be out there particularly if the weather was nice. You know, what not. Of course, First Baptist Church

was across the street from there and, of course, we'd sit and talk with the neighbors and people visited more in those days than they do today. Didn't have television but you did have radio. If he didn't know them, they knew him. This was just something that – the yard was full or church let out. It was just something that you did. Now, First Baptist was his church. My mother's church was Presbyterian. That's where most of us were. But Reverend James, as I remember, was the minister there and you could go over there to the first church in the morning to go to bible study or Sunday School. Anyway, that service started at 11:00 or whatever. But see my church, we're out by 12:30/1:00. But you never get out of Baptist church 'til 2:00 or later. (laughing) So then a funeral would come up. You'd never know when the church service was over and the funeral had started because he never stopped preaching and he'd tell the undertaker, "Just bring 'em on". And he'd come on into there and bring the casket on in and he keeps talking and its been many-a-day that they were over there until 5:00/5:30 before that church ever let out. (laughing) Sometimes two funerals and you'd just never know. That's what I grew up with. You know, this type of thing. But many days, the people were there, the family and you're waiting for church to let out. They lined up waiting to come in the church and he had never finished the sermon. And ____ came in and he finally just told 'em, "Bring 'em on in" and they'd stay all day. But in our day – Let me be honest about this. I am honest but I mean I'm trying to fill in – By not having the different social places and the different things to go to in the black community, church was one of our central things to do. As a result, if it wasn't in there, they made visits to the sick at the hospital and things of that nature. But that was not only part of entertainment but it was social but it tied the black community together that we knew and they knew us. And that meant an awful lot. I know one of the questions that you were asking about urban renewal which ____ on in but that is a difference between white Roanoke and black Roanoke. There were two Roanokes. People don't know this. They don't want to recognize it. Blacks had their own things compared to the white side. We never had sewers, disposal or water things (??). That's not what I'm referring to. Hospitals yes. Banks building and loan, eating places, things of that nature that we had. That's one of the things that I – I always feel bad about it in Roanoke because they tore up one of the best black communities in the South and that is no joke. You had more going for you in Roanoke than any community in the South, bar none. I'm not talking about Atlanta now. No, no. I'm talking about our size. Atlanta is straight for blacks all over, everybody knows that. Charlotte, Atlanta. For our size, Roanoke, there's nothing to touch it but that was destroyed beginning in the '50s and its still going on today because they still can't get Henry Street straight and what's going on. It wasn't that we tore it up, the whites tore it up by not understanding what they were doing. And that is still going on. Millions and millions of dollars been spent and the town has been hurt by it, particularly the black community anyway. Its the whites too because you've got, what, a third or a fourth of people that are against the city. That's bad. To my mind.

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CL: Did your family have stories that they passed down from generation to generation that you all still pass down today?

WC: That depends on what kind of stories you're referring to Carla. (laughing)

CL: Every family would say, "Well, your granddaddy was such and such" and maybe they passed it down and then when you got it, you passed it down to your children. They would tell a story about the grandfather or -

WC: It gets down to whether you're referring to the truth or the what exactly you put on somebody as to how it works. (laughing) All families have some kind of stories of some kind but I was at the experiences. I don't necessarily say they're stories because we had some wonderful experiences and different things that have happened and _____. _____ a few wrecks in your life and going back and forth to school when you have all these different events. You know, different things happen. I don't mean that they were bad, you know, type of thing but its just average life or whatever that you're

doing but you always remember somebody did something and pulled a boo boo (??). You laugh and joke about it even today. You know, those type of things but its more family things. Its not a thing about talking about other people its just things that happened within the family.

CL: Let me narrow it down a bit. Maybe the Civil War would ring a bell or slavery.

WC: Civil War. Before my day honey. (laughing)

CL: Civil War stories that were passed down or slavery. You know, sometimes they had a story they would tell during slavery how a certain person did certain things.

WC: Not too much in slavery in my deal. What I'm going to refer you to here now as you know, its in your library. You have a book "Virginia Kaleidoscope". It should be.

CL: I have it.

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WC: Gainsboro and there's one here at the Harrison Heritage I know. There are others in town that will give you all the history of the Claytors and a lot of other things. Even more than I can tell you now. I can remember – As I said, my father's sisters, that would be my aunts. It was 3 girls and the 10 boys. They never dwelt with that type of thing. Its something that's not taught to us. We were taught to respect people. You do your thing and if you do it properly, you don't have to worry about the rest of it. We rode the Gainsboro bus. It was all black anyway. _____ hospital to make the circuit. We rode the front of the train. We rode the back of the bus. This type of thing. When I cam along, the library was not where it is at this time. It was across the street at the Artfelder's (??) building on the corner. Miss Virginia Lee at the time was the librarian and then her name was Beatrice Mitchell and we know her as "Sugar" Mitchell was there for years. Where you are at the present time was a foundry. That land is owned by the Catholic Church and leased to Roanoke City as long as they have a library there. The man that ran that foundry was named Shanks and his kids would come down the hill on the weekends when they put the fire out and they dropped the grate out of it and all these hot ashes and melted in the fire, whatever, and they would empty this until next Monday 'til they built the fire again. We saw all the sparks flying, all of this going on, whatever. Fascinating to the children and this is where we'd all end up when they shut it down for the weekend. First thing I can remember in learning to ride a bicycle was one of my first jobs. When I got out of school, my job was to deliver the medicine to people over the city that had ordered prescriptions or what not. You delivered in those days. You didn't have to necessarily have to go to the drug store to get it. But that's one of the first things that I did was learn the city at that time. And if I stopped, I played marbles or played something in the street or whatever, but if anything happened, you better believe that "Dr. and Mrs. Claytor, your son" – they knew. Yes, there was a phone. It didn't have to be the ringing kind. But whatever it is, the word got back home. (laughing) I remember that very well. That's the type of thing – That's just the life but colleges, everything was segregated, yes. But its something to not let that bother you or stop you from doing. You don't go to places that do not welcome you through the front door. We don't go to the movies in the back alley and climb steps and this type of thing. If nobody wants you around then you don't force yourself on 'em. You don't spend your money for people that don't respect you. That's just a training. You just don't do this. There's other places to buy or to do or whatever you had to do. That don't mean everyday somebody beating you in the head, this, that and the other. Its just some things that you grew up with that you knew. Then, in the medical profession in my life or whatever, its always been a situation that someone needs your service or your help. I can remember my dad telling me when I finished medical school. He wanted to know where I was going to practice. And, of course, at that age, at 21, you've been scuffling all your life. The first thing you've been studying, you haven't had a chance to get out and party and do the things that other people do and this kind of thing. Its a matter of money. I received this lecture about its not about money, that you went into a service field and that's what you are expected. I ended up in Roanoke. Its where you're needed. (laughing) So that's the way that works. I'm kinda filling up a little bit thinking about things. Its carrying me back a

ways. But there were good times, this type of thing. And it was true what he told me. It was something that – It wasn't the money. Your pleasure will come from being well-respected. You will live a comfortable life and its kinda an honor or whatever. And that meant more to you than all the money they could give you. And that's what happened.

CL: That is exactly true.

WC: It turned out to be the truth.

CL: The honor. I know what you're talking about, the honor.

WC: I'll never forget it. I haven't thought about it for years. (laughing)

CL: Thank you for sharing it with us. What is your fondest memory during childhood?

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WC: Well, I think I pretty much expressed it already about when the family comes in and all the kids come back, my brothers and sisters, grandparents were there. You think 27/28 people sitting down together – I mean its just like a picnic or something. And everybody in the house and people coming and going and that's just good times. Its not like I had to go out to look for it or this type of thing and then, not only that, all the kids up and down the street, maybe they were invited. "Come on in". You know, you'd eat with 'em and everything there together. You'd play in the yard, playing football, this kind of stuff in the yard and - But it all kinda dove-tailed into it and I hadn't really thought about it. Its just something that you did. But they were full days or whatever.

CL: How long have you lived in the Gainsboro area?

WC: All my life. Other than school time, you know, service.

CL: And you lived on -

WC: 406 Jefferson Street.

CL: Jefferson Street.

WC: And then 802 Grayson.

CL: Grayson. Has the Gainsboro area changed much over the years.

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WC: Oh, tremendously. Tremendously. Let me see if I can separate Gainsboro from other parts. There's a situation of sections of town. I'm talking about black Roanoke now. You had Northeast Roanoke. You had Northwest Roanoke and you had West-end Roanoke. They were black. Henry Street was the middle of all of it which was the center of the black section of town. Henry Street, one street, but that also was two streets. And a lot of our people don't understand this. On Henry Street, you had movie theaters, doctor's offices, beauty shops, barber shops, hotel, eating places, ice cream parlors, club, daytime activities. Now at nighttime, the sun goes down, 10/10:30/11:00, there's another street. That's where all the boozing goes on. Ladies of the night if that's what you want to call 'em or whatever. But, the street jumped. Its a different type life. Women could go dressed daytime, you know, whatever, and nobody ever bothered you. Nobody – You've probably talked about this. If anything happened and you go across the bridge to white Roanoke, that's the railroad track divided you. They used to put up a little thing across there to block you off from going over to see if that was going to stop you. If blacks wanted to go over to white Roanoke, that wasn't going to stop you. You know, as far as the thing. The only thing was that at 10 or 10:30, the police would leave. They wouldn't stay up there late at night. So, Henry Street was on its own. Two streets. A lot of people – Even the blacks don't follow this completely, they don't understand it but you had not just one doctor's office, you had several doctor's offices was on Henry Street. You had 2 drug stores, black drug stores up there.

_____ what are they Greeks or Lebanese or whatever. I don't know what they are, Moses or -

CL: Syrian.

WC: Syrian. All the grocery stores in the neighborhood but they were all here too but we got along.

We played together and all this business. I didn't never pay any attention to what they were, they were just there. One of these things. Excuse me, but all this took place on Henry Street. I can't say that any

of it would be the Taj Mahal. They didn't make that kind of money. But what they did, and in many cases all of this section here was part – Gainsboro stopped at 5th Street as far as urban renewal part went – But you had certain sections of town that the people took pride in their properties. Not only their home but the yards were kept up. They were fixed up nice. You could go Gilmer Avenue and it's just as nice as any street you'd want to see in Roanoke, white or black, whatever. Same thing as far as Harrison or up around the Burrell Hospital section, nice homes. This type of thing. Northeast was probably the first section of Roanoke when Roanoke first came into being in 1887 I guess it is and they used to call it row houses down where the Gregory School was. You don't know about that do ya? Something new for you. OK. Those were the first homes for the railroad workers, Norfolk & Western. And as they moved out, and then the blacks moved into that area where the 581 comes down through by the graveyard that you've seen here in the paper just recently. Whites were buried on that side of it. The First Baptist Church owns the rest of that where blacks are buried. They moved it but that's where the First Presbyterian Church was located. That's in the history I gave you some time ago on the Presbyterian Church. They put that church up on ox carts and moved it over on Roanoke Street and that was _____. They had a new brick church built at one time. It was Second Presbyterian, whatever, it's got his name. I don't remember what that is. But the black congregation on – Reverend Honey's (??) church. What is that? Up in West-end Roanoke.

CL: Roanoke Memorial.

WC: Gosh, as well as I know that. Is that Loudon or that -?

CL: Loudon's on 8th Street.

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WC: No, wait a minute. It'll come to me. But anyway, they bought that church that was the Sunday School for the First Presbyterian Church and that's where they started their first church until they built it, the other one. That's where that came in. So that building was moved on ox carts twice up to that place now. OK, get back to Northeast. See, that's the older part of Roanoke. As the whites moved out, and the blacks moved into it. So that was the older section down around the gas company. This type of thing. The first urban renewal was in that part where the Civic Center is at the present. Now the city promised when that was to be done that that would be rebuilt as a black neighborhood rather than the businesses that are down there. So, once they got the land, then they reneged on it. As a matter of fact, the church, Mount Zion – No, that's not right, Gregory Mount Zion and built where the Civic Center is today because they thought they were going to be rebuilt. Then they had another urban renewal and since because the city, they didn't want to give 'em the money that they had paid to build the church. So they argued and fussed about it so the city finally gave 'em extra money because they tore down a brand new church. They took that land for the Civic Center and then 581 came through so that wiped out the whole black neighborhood again. So that was one lie. The second one Kimball Avenue, they gave the people \$4,000 more to help them with the transition of moving because those in the lower section really got ripped off something awful. They had to go in debt. They lost everything they had pretty much. Kimball, they gave 'em \$4,000 more to help 'em with the move. And Gainsboro, which was the last one, they promised 'em \$15,000. Some of 'em got it and some of 'em didn't. But the point that I was leaning towards is that the pride of ownership has been destroyed. You had the – I want you to look up and down the street. They don't take care of 'em. They don't paint 'em. They don't keep the yards. The promise was that they were going to fix up the place. They're going to buy you out. Well, why fix it up if you're going to buy it. They had 2 houses adjoining. One lady had put a new roof on it and had fixed her place up and painted it. The house next door to it, identically the same thing, same sized lot, small lot, 40 or 50 feet is all they had. She got as much for her place that this other lady that put \$8,000 to \$10,000 in it to fix it up. It doesn't take long for the word to go around. "Well what am I going to fix it for. You're not going to give me no more money." And that feeling is still today of what's going on. Now, they don't take the blame for it. They said, "We didn't do it.". But that's the

way it goes. Its something we didn't do. But that's what happens. And this is hurting Roanoke people today. And something else that is not recognized. They don't want to recognize. They funneled us all up to Northwest quarter whether or not you moved wherever you want to go. You can't borrow but so much money. That's the way that they restrict you and hold you down and this type of thing. They don't want to go anywhere. They like to stay together. That's the word that they give you. Its this type of thing. Block busting. Our people didn't go up and bother the whites that live up there in Rugby and all further west. They sent you up there and they paid our people to go into those places to break up the lot 'cause once the blacks moved in, they know the whites are going to move out. Now where the city made their mistake, which I've always said – They know it now. They didn't know it at the time. They did not go buy the homes for the white folks in the city. Now, when they ran 'em out of the city, they took the money with 'em. Now the city is scrambling, need money and now they're trying to fix the places up downtown to get these people back in here. But you've run 'em all out in the county, _____ park and all over town and up in Salem and all this business. They carried the money with 'em. They kept the blacks. They kept the welfare but the money left. Let's face it. You won't see that in the paper. They won't put that out for ya. But you understand what I'm saying. Now, we didn't bother those white people. That wasn't the problem. If they'd have fixed up what they promised to do, we were perfectly happy. All they had to do was to do what they promised. When the Civic Center, before it was built, the citizens had turned down the old American Legion Auditorium on 2 occasions. They didn't want it. So what did they do? They burned it. I shouldn't word it that way. It conveniently caught fire and burnt down. I think that's a better way of putting this. I can't say they because I don't know who did it. But anyway, it caught fire and burnt. They turned it down so then they took that and moved it from – that's right down where the Hotel Roanoke is – You know where that is? - That's where it used to be. Its a parking lot now. And they built the Civic Center. Now they got a big thing going on now, they can't get their mind together. Roanoke is land-locked. You're either going down or you're going up. You add all this thing on the back of the Civic Center, you've got no parking. How can you have affairs if you can't park to get to it? They cleared the land across on Orange Avenue back on the other side of the graveyard. So if you had put Victory Stadium or whatever over there, where are these people gonna park? Whatcha gonna do? You keep building it but you got nowhere to park. And if you can't get 'em in there by bus or train or something, what are you gonna do? No, they're gonna go somewhere else. But Roanoke is _____. I don't know whether they fall over their feet doing something but they're not thinking far enough ahead. All of our people – Let's put it this way, when you move places and all of our neighborhoods, this is neighborhood businesses. Alright, you've got zoning to contend with. Now if you had a grocery store in Northeast or somewhere, and they buy you out and that's the only business you've ever done all your life then where do you go? If they move you up to Northwest or somewhere else, what land is available that's zoned that you can have your grocery store. And that's not a supermarket where people come from all over town to your place. That's neighborhood business. So if you take away the neighborhood, you've lost your business. My work, dentistry, same boat. I lost my business. Even though I'm a doctor. I lost and everybody else lost their business. And Burrell Hospital at one time, you had 8 or 10 active physicians active staff, 6 or 7 dentists, black I'm talking about. Where are they today? Not only did the new ones come in and left Roanoke then it was to the old ones to die or a couple of us retired. The rest of 'em gone. Nobody here. Those are the people that you have a question there “Who did you look up to? Who were your role models?”. Maybe in a sense, I'm a role model for some people but they were also my role models because this was our community and this is what we had. At one time, you either became a doctor, you became a lawyer or you were a school teacher and that was the top 3 professions for blacks. But now its open to a lot of things. Our best jobs in the years would be Norfolk & Western. You had the silk mill. I think that was on your sheet. And those jobs offered you some type of retirement or something going on but nowhere else. Like if you did day work, taking care of people's children and their homes

and this type of thing but you had nothing else to live on. You worked all your life and did the best you could for as long as you could. That's the way it worked. So once you destroyed this, you took the business away, all children, my friends and what not, they had little jobs like carrying groceries to people or whatever you did or the families of those businesses. Like in my case, there were several businesses within our block but there were other businesses. This is where the children got the training to do things, to have a business of your own. You didn't have central heat in a lot of places. You had coal stoves and wood but you had some job to do to come in to get that fire going and ashes out and got it ready for the next morning, you know, this type of thing. But kids had more to do at home than they do today. You didn't set the thermostat and go about your business. You had things to do. The homes around this area, all of 'em when I was a kid, you didn't have sewer. All up Patton Avenue, outhouses. You had to go outdoors. At the park, over at Washington Park its called, there was – I thought it was an artesian well. I didn't know any different. But that pipe that that water ran all the kids around from where we live here over to Addison had wagons and you had these 5 gallon cans that you carried that you hauled water to your home. That's every day you had to carry that water. And of course, the interesting part of the story is to talk about, if you want to get into some of that. You see, that's where the bootleggers ran too. (laughing) But those cans – They'd stop 'em, even the kids, but all the kids hauling liquor. You see you open the top on one end and that was water but when you turn the can over, there was liquor. We don't need to go into all that. (laughing) That's interesting. I'll tell you all about things you didn't know. (laughing) Those were the things that took place in those days. Its in my time that I can remember when sewer lines and things were put in and people had bathrooms put into the homes on the back porches or whatever. But those were outhouses. The house that my parents built, had 3 bathrooms in it with tile floors and all this and that. Oh honey, that was luxury. You're living. You know, its one of those things. But that was Roanoke when I was born. That's not only blacks. I mean, a lot of that was in town. That's pretty much all over. This type of thing.

CL: And did most of the families own their own homes?

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WC: A good many. A good many very definitely. They might not have been the finest thing. Alright, take all the homes and go up and down here, most of 'em on _____. It depends on your level or where you were. You might've had a mortgage for 20 or 30 years but in time but you owned it. And that's the way it went. But the point I was trying to make, in case you missed it, there were groups that took pride in what they were doing. It may not have been much but they owned it and they took as best they could with it. A lot of 'em knew more about carpentry work or doing roof or painting. Kids today don't know how to do anything. They haven't been taught. They don't know anything. They've got to hire somebody or they don't know what you talking – They can't even fix a bicycle. But that's something we all did. We fixed our own things. You made scooters or skates. I don't know if you remember this thing you took a roller skate after you wore the skates out. You took the wheels and put 'em on a board and you put the board up and you had your little scooter. You remember those things? You see, we made 'em. But that's what we had as kids. You might've had an iron ring with a little wire on it and that's what your toy was but you played, this kinda – You didn't have no computers and all that stuff like you got this stuff going on nowadays. You didn't have it but nobody told you were poor but you enjoyed what you had. You worked it out.

CL: You said you remember the silk mill.

WC: Oh, yes.

CL: OK. How did that affect Roanoke Valley especially our community when it closed?

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WC: I would say the silk mill hurt Roanoke Valley period, white and black. You had both people working at the silk mill. They broke that off into 4 or 5 or 6 different businesses that's out there. People on that side of town that worked at the silk mill or if you had a job at Norfolk & Western

Railway, you were the hoipaloi (??). You were top of the line as far as salaries. You had better salaries and you had retirements or whatever they were. You had pensions I'm thinking about. You had health care and this type of thing and that was your better class of worker in that day. So when the silk mill closed, it hurt Roanoke. Most of the people in Southeast worked at the silk mill. And I was fortunate enough in my day as a practicing dentist that 16% of my patients were whites and a lot of 'em came from Southeast. So for me, in my work, at our level, it never bothered me black and white. If nothing else, one of the first things we learned in med school is the only difference was the pigment of your skin and this type of thing and then when you go into anatomy, I've seen that all, we'll skip all of that. (laughing) There's no problem. I've been all of it let me believe _____. Just the idea of what's the skin color, this type of thing, but that's the first thing they knock out of all doctors, that quick. There's no such thing as the top of the line. People are people and you treat 'em as such. Very seldom are you going to see a doctor that's going to pick up a, this type of thing like that. They're people. We were talking in my case were teeth but that's connected to the body and you've got to realize what that means to the rest of it and those type things. They knew that in general, most blacks came to school. That segregation and all that stuff was ingrained in 'em from the time they were kids. That somebody has always told 'em that white's better, that you're not as good and this type of thing. So that's one of the first things when you go in to be a doctor that _____. Get you straight to start with. There is no difference other than that color or absence of color and the fact that you've got melanin in your skin. And then they tell you why its so much better – I don't mean to low-rate you now or put you down – You don't have as many skin eruptions. You don't have the problems with our skin that your people do. If you're red-haired, if you're blond and all this stuff and you're out in that sun, you better get you some sunscreen quick 'cause you in trouble. You can stay out there all day and no problem. Well, you still have to be careful. I don't mean that type of thing but its just difference in people. I'm not saying that to down anybody, I'm just being factual about it.

CL: Dr. Claytor, what other kind of jobs did the blacks have? You were talking about doctors and some worked in the silk mills and such.

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WC: You worked with the city. You dug the streets for the water company, gas company, this type of thing. I remember we had that little farm out there. We'd go down on the market and pick up what we called day-workers. There were a lot of people that weren't interested in doing steady work all the time. They only wanted to work 3 or 4 days a week and then, he'd do what he wanted to do. Get drunk on the weekends, come back Monday and work some more and this type of thing. We'd go down and pick up workers and you know, things like that. All the farmers brought the produce into Roanoke and a lot of that, the city priced 'em out of it in many cases but the downtown farm section, it used to be a very bustling type of thing when I was a kid. A lot of the offices and _____ were down there but now, except for novelty shops and – You've got a few people come down sell flowers and 2 or 3 farmers but you've lost all of that around Roanoke now. All the farmers have either stopped farming or they sell their lands to development and things of this nature. Its not only Roanoke but this is hurting our country and our politicians haven't awakened to it. I just heard the other day that we don't even supply enough food for our country. That we import it. I didn't realize that. But as we build out and you don't zone the land and you're giving up farmland, you're depending on other countries for your food. You are running into trouble in 50 – I don't know how many years but down the road, you'll be just like you are with the oil people. They control us. They act like its not but that's the war's all about is controlling that oil. They don't care nothing about Iraq. They want that oil honey. No question. That's money. Black gold. (chuckling)

CL: What are some of your memories of the Gainsboro library and Virginia Y. Lee?

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WC: Well, being across the street from it, let's face it, I'm in it. And, of course, this business of Miss

Lee was like a second mother to a certain extent. Not only to me but all of the children. She was just that type of person, type of thing to do. You know that building burnt and then of course you've got a building or two in there at the moment. I remember Dr. Paxton and Dr. Fears and different offices were up above there, whatever. At that time, the library was a little larger than this room but it was just a one room affair, you know, type of thing. But Miss Lee was very diligent about keeping a lot of different things particularly to the black race or about the effects that took place and things of that nature, you know. It was very good for me in a sense as I got older and I started practicing and a lot of times after you become a doctor and families begin to trust you or they ask you for advice and, you know, things of this nature and a lot of times the parents would talk to the children but they would ask the doctor about different affairs whether it was personal hygiene or whatever, you know, type of thing. I consider myself lucky in a sense. Rather than get involved in it. I got involved to a certain extent but if it got too much, it'd been worked out with Miss Lee and Mitchell that I could send the girls up to the library and let them get a little bit more rather than give 'em my version. (laughing) Its _____ for me to get send them to someone else get involved in _____. But they were very good at that. They worked it out. And I had 2 or 3 to come back later and thank me because it kinda put 'em on the right track and not get in trouble and the boys were pushing them at the time, you know and that type of thing and rather than to go too much into what to do and what not to do. I just let the older women take care of it and they accepted it and worked it better which took the load off of me which I was thankful. (laughing) And you work it out. And, of course, being young at that age, all the parents wouldn't necessarily appreciate me talking to a high school girl doing this type of thing. I mean, I'm 21/22 years old and, let's face it, and I sent them to somebody a little older and let them handle that. I wasn't married at the time see. But even so, at that age, that's just wasn't the thing to do. At least I didn't think it was.

CL: Who were some of the role models that you had when you were coming up?

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WC: You see, that's what I mentioned about all the physicians, the dentists and you belong to those society – Well, it wasn't a society but my dad belonged to all of 'em and my mother. Of course, in those days, I guess you had more home games. My dad was a great bridge player – mother. And they'd get together on occasion and people would come to the house and they had these little card sessions or bridge or whatever. They'd go to Dr. Roberts or Downing. You know, they'd just visit around, whatever type of thing doing and just different things. In my day when I came along, it was Canasta and Penuchle. You know, more so than bridge, at the time or whatever. But it was more house parties, more church affairs. As I said, you didn't have TV, this type of thing. We were busy but you had more home chores and things to do. You didn't have the time to do a lot of this. Everyday, "Oh, I ain't got nothing to do. I'm bored.". I've never been bored in my life. I don't know what you're talking about. Never had the time to do the things I had to do. Its a lot of entertaining yourself. I think its hard for somebody who don't know what to do with as much reading and things to do. You've got to sit up and don't know what to do. I don't know what you're talking about. I've seen it. I've heard people talk about it but even retired – I wonder when I had time to work. (laughing) 'Cause its "Honey do this and honey do that". Its one of these things. Its something to do all the time. I guess its the farm work. I wasn't a farmer but my dad came off the farm and my mother and we used to go to Floyd and had a big garden up there. She'd pile us all in that car and we'd go up that mountain and you'd weed that garden and you'd do whatever you'd do and _____ working out. But there's always something to do from morning 'til night. I just don't understand. What do you mean you don't have nothing to do. (laughing) Its never been in my vocabulary. I'll put it that way.

CL: Dr. Claytor, is there anything you'd like to tell us that we haven't asked or did we leave out anything that you would like to say to us?

WC: You got many more hours to stay here to do this? (laughing heartily) I think you've got about as

much as you can digest. The only thing that I will say to you that if you would share the book, "Virginia Kaleidoscope". There's much more in there than I can possibly tell you. The only thing that's not in it that has come up since then would be when we went into blood studies, DNA. We know from the family that its 69% European. We know that we're 29% from the Mende tribe which is Sierra Leone in Africa and the other 2 or 3 % is Cherokee Indian and that's not in the book. But that's a continual thing we've been doing for 20 or 30 years is trying to get our history as to whatever. But we've traced it back to the 17th century and this is where the different marriages of the different nationalities of Europe until the Tors and the Clays when they came here to this country and they combined the name is where we got Claytor. And they settled around the Bedford area. And then they branched out from there and my father's father would be, his father would be Harvey Claytor owned a farm over here in Calloway. That's the slave farm I'm talking about. That's where we all came from. And grandmother was a Gurrant (??). They didn't know it at the time but he was – When I did this history on the church, Presbyterian, he belonged to that Presbyterian church over there. So its been _____. Its been quite interesting. I've led a full, interesting life. Still trying to make it. Doing the best I can with my sore hips. (laughing) And bad whatever.

CL: Thank you Dr. Claytor. We do have a copy of the Kaleidoscope at the Gainsboro Branch Library and it can be checked out and we thank you all for donating that. I think you donated one and I think we bought one but thank you for that. And we do have that copy. I really appreciate your time.

WC: There's a whole lot more in there. I can't tell ya. Its hard to fathom. Its different things. Its children as they came along, you know and whatever. You work it out. But that book is in the library in Washington. Its been listed through the library system as one of the best genealogy books in the country so that makes us feel pretty good.

CL: Thank you.