

SUMMARY OF ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

NARRATOR: Harold Burt

INTERVIEW DATE: 2/14/2011

WHERE CONDUCTED: Mr. Burt's home in Cary

INTERVIEWER: Peggy Van Scoyoc

PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW:

The purpose of this interview was to capture local history of North Carolina, with focus on the town of Cary by recording the knowledge, memories and impressions of the narrator.

SPECIFIC FOCUS OF THE INTERVIEW:

Harold was born in Raleigh and lived there until a few years ago. He began his teaching career at Cary High School on Academy Street in 1950 to start a high school band. From there, he taught part time at many schools throughout Wake and Johnston Counties, teaching wind and percussion instruments and starting and developing bands for the schools. He then bought out a music store in Cameron Village in Raleigh where he sold instruments and music, and gave private lessons. He later moved his store to Cary, on Kildare Farm Road. Due to economic downturn, Harold closed his store at the end of 2010, but he continues to teach his private students in his home. He maintained a newspaper delivery route for over 55 years, and has registered with the Guinness world records office as the longest paper delivery person known. He had a small band for many years that performed for weddings, dances, etc. He also has been choir director for many years for various churches. Harold is married and has three children.

NOTES ABOUT THE INTERVIEW TAPE:

The interview was recorded on a Zoom H2 digital recorder. The Interview Index lists subjects in the order they were given in each of the WAV files.

DIGITAL RECORDING

2/14/11

Peggy Van Scoyoc (PV): Today is Monday, February 14, 2011. This is Valentine's Day. This is Peggy Van Scoyoc, and I am in the home of Mr. Harold Burt. We're here today to talk to him about his illustrious career and life in Cary over the years. So, Mr. Burt, if we can start out, we'll start at the very beginning. Were you born in Cary, are you a native?

Harold Burt (HB): I'm a native of Raleigh. Actually I've only been in Cary three years now. I lived in Raleigh up until three years ago. I started in Cary. My first encounter with Cary was, I came over to teach industrial arts shop and drawing [at Cary High School.] As a sideline, I asked to the opportunity to organize and start a band. I found twelve students that had instruments, and only two that I feel they could actually play, the others maybe one song or something. Anyway, we started a band. We doubled the number in a few days and got started with twice that many. We made our first appearance at the first ballgame, as small as it was.

PV: So now, when did you start to teach at Cary High School?

HB: This would have been in 1950.

PV: Okay, so it would have been in the building at the head of Academy Street?

HB: Correct. I was in, I think it was the Page building, that building behind the main building. I think it was referred to as the Page building, I think but I'm not sure of that. That's the only place I taught in Cary. When they moved to... Well, I taught in the Swift Creek area in the Swift Creek School. That's the only one, I'd get over to Macadonia. It was the one at the fairgrounds that I taught at. I left Cary and went out organizing bands. I went to many other schools.

PV: So when did you leave Cary High School?

HB: I actually resigned in 1955 with the intentions of teaching part time at several schools. Cary was not able to get a replacement, so I taught part time at Cary for 1955-56, along with Apex, Millbrook, Knightdale High School which is now re-formed, I think. Then I went down to Johnston

County when I gave up Cary, and started a band at Four Oaks that lead to other schools in Johnston County, and eventually the south Johnston High School when it was built. I came back to Raleigh after I retired from Johnston County and bought the E.R. Pool Music Company in Cameron Village in Raleigh. Then after approximately six years there, I moved to Cary to Kildare Farm Road in Cary. I've been there until economic conditions required me to downsize, and I moved back into the back part of the building which is dominated with the School of Music, and moved the retail there. On December 31st, 2010, my lease expired and I decided it wasn't wise to re-issue a new lease. So now I am teaching private lessons in my home. Retirement is a word I never learned to pronounce.

PV: Apparently now. Wow, that's a lot of different schools, a lot of different bands. So did you actually move to Johnston County? So you were commuting down there all those years?

HB: No. Correct. I even went down in Harnett County and, well, I went down to Erwin in Harnett County. I went to several in Harnett County. Normally I had four, five and six schools at a time. I spent about two and a half days in each and even less in some.

PV: That's phenomenal. So how do you start a band in a school? Where do you start and what kind of instruments are you looking for to form a band? What does it take?

HB: Work. In most cases, it was a principal like Paul Cooper was in Cary that was very interested in having a band program. In some cases, in fact in Apex I was hired by the Band Booster Club. Sometimes there were just interested citizens that would start the program and I would go in and introduce it. Some were actually done on a fee basis. Each student would pay me a monthly fee. In some instances the PTA sponsored it and they collected the fees and paid me a salary. So there were just grass roots beginnings. Some of them reached, I thought, very good credits. Apex was selected one year when I was part time there to represent North Carolina in the Rotary Club in Chicago that paid expenses to represent the state of North Carolina Rotary.

PV: So where did they represent the state? Did they travel around and perform, or...?

HB: No, in the parade at the convention in Chicago.

PV: for the Rotary.

HB: The following year it was in Europe. I didn't make that one. I had already been there. I had been selected one time, they were selected twice.

PV: You pretty much started the Cary Band in Cary's Band Day. Is that right?

HB: Not Cary Band Day no, that started later.

PV: So before Cary Band Day got started, you were building and creating the band at Cary High School that eventually became famous, basically. So at what point, how far did you get them? How far did you lead Cary's band before you left Cary? Do you remember how big it was?

HB: Yes, 35-40 was maximum. My idea was Broughton High School's marching hundred. I thought if I could ever get there, but I fell short of that before I left. I'm sure they've reached that goal now.

PV: So the Broughton one-hundred, that was a real...

HB: That was the outstanding marching band of Wake County.

PV: Okay, so if you could compete against them, and actually win?

HB: No, I just aspired to get that number of people in my band, because they carried on their drum "Marching 100," which is nothing unusual now, but that was outstanding then. Fifty was probably considered a large band. You know the history of Cary Band, their trip to Europe and to the Rose Bowl and all the other fabulous things they've done, I wasn't a part of that. I was at the beginning.

PV: So you were at the beginning of that?

HB: I've got a write-up from Wilmington when we appeared at the Azalea Festival. This is supposed to be a big event, that we made a trip to the Azalea Festival, I've forgotten what year.

PV: This is 1956, a newspaper article and the Azalea Festival parade, the Cary High School band majorettes and flag-bearers scheduled to appear in Wilmington during the ninth annual Azalea Festival parade.

HB: That was a big deal. No comparison to the events that they have accomplished since.

PV: This is March of 1956. So you took them from two students who could sort-of play their instrument to winning a spot in this parade in six years. That's phenomenal, really really impressive. And it went from there.

HB: In Cary Band Day they announced that I was there until 1955, but we went to the Azalea Festival in '56, so that's proof I was there one more year.

PV: Okay, so they got that not quite right. So you have had a lot of students over the years. Do you teach all instruments? Have you taught all instruments? Everything, from brass to percussion to strings to, you name it.

HB: Not strings. This is all band instruments, wind instruments and percussion.

PV: That's phenomenal. And the music you were working with was typically parade-type music? Did you teach classical music?

HB: Yes. Actually we had concerts with overtures and music that, practically all types of music that we could do with a band as well as the marching.

PV: A little of everything. So, after your career of developing bands in schools all over North Carolina, pretty much, many counties, then you started teaching students individually as well?

HB: Not much, until recent years. In commission with the music store, I started teaching lessons. On one occasion, if you rented an instrument, you got free lessons during the summer to prepare you for the fall. That last, year before last that was one of my signatures. That's when I got deeper into teaching. Because of the economy of the store, I decided it was best to decline that and go into my true interest of teaching.

PV: So what did you sell in the store? All types of instruments, music?

HB: Everything musical. All types of sheet music, classical and all the way through country and jazz and rock, whatever. We had all instruments including piano and keyboards and so forth. There came a time when piano and keyboard were not doing very well, so I divided that area into small studios and started the school of music. From that school of music I have students coming here and taking lessons.

PV: Here in your home. Now did you have employees in the store who also were teachers, or were you the primary teacher?

HB: The teachers were self-employed. We rented them space. Of course, we approved them for quality of teacher, but if we selected them to teach, we rented them space and they were independent. A few of my teachers taught part-time and worked part-time, but mostly separate employees and teachers.

PV: That sounds like a good setup. So now, how many students do you currently have?

HB: I have about 25 students, some of them I've taken every day and up to full time and on up. I let some of them take a spot and hold it for them to alternate between, things like that.

PV: 25, that's quite a few. Is there one instrument that you like the best?

HB: Clarinet. That was my major, pick on as your life and I guess my choice one was winning the first superior rating in a solo contest, which they don't have now, in the first chair position in the all-state band. That is my probably most cherished accomplishments, personally. I cherish the accomplishments of my students more than I do mine and my children.

PV: So, the all-state band, tell me about that. What is that and where is it?

HB: Back when, there was one all-state band held in Greensboro. Music Festival, it actually was a course, and band. I don't believe there was a string involved. They had solo contests for both.

That was all one full week in Greensboro. It later divided into two districts, and now I don't know how

many. Cary since, now audition for the, I don't know if it is the central district or the all-district. And then if they achieve some rating in their own district, then they audition for the all-state. All honors band they call it now.

PV: So these are people from all over the state of North Carolina that come together to form one band?

HB: Then. Now they are divided into several districts. I know there is eastern and central and western, I'm not sure. I'm not into that now. But I do know students, I teach auditioning for the all-district.

PV: Okay. Then what do they do? They perform at various events?

HB: No, they just perform one weekend. They usually practice one day and perform the next.

PV: So you won a seat in that.

HB: I won first chair, which is the top clarinet player. It is an honor.

PV: That's fantastic. Congratulations on that.

HB: Strangely enough, the other honor was the most athletic in high school. In another field, but I cherish my music contest more. I've been in all areas. I had my own dance combo for many, many years and kept that and enjoyed that.

PV: So you would play at dances?

HB: Yes, play at dances, parties, weddings.

PV: That's great. So tell me something about some of your students. What students do you know of who have gone on to make a career of music, or done great things with music?

HB: You're checking my memory a little bit now. I took a music course at Wake Forest, and Jim Adcock of Cary was on scholarship at that time. I know several in Johnston County who have gone with a full music career. Don Holloway and Don Johnson, with, I think, the first name of Donald. But I cannot mention these names. I've had, I know several band directors that have come to Cary

Band Day that were former students of mine. I found them at Cary Band Day, and they had to remind me that they started in my band. It's always a pleasure. What I miss giving up the music store is the people that would come by and mention it. I get letters, I got one letter, well several letters from a young lady who was in, up in New York somewhere going to school, nursing school. I provided her private lessons here and I enjoyed that attention. Memories.

PV: Well, and how you have touched so many lives, and possibly influenced whole careers and life paths through music too. And just fostering a love of music for so many people.

HB: So many have come in and told me that, yes. I appreciate it.

PV: I'm sure you do. So now, you were not involved in creating Band Day for Cary, is that correct? Okay, so what can you tell me about it, even if you weren't actively here in Cary at the time, what can you tell me about Band Day?

HB: I participated in Band Day four, five six years. I marched in the parade and performed on the field with bands in Johnston County. It was after I left here.

PV: They came up to compete against Cary?

HB: No, Cary doesn't compete in Band Day. Cary's guest Band Day. They perform as guests but not in competition. The competition is for the others.

PV: Who come in. So they are just the host.

HB: They are the host, and they have bands come in, several bands come regularly from Virginia and I think I've seen South Carolina, as well as North Carolina, quite a few attend the Cary Band Day. It's a big event.

PV: So they're looking for one declared winner, the best band that year of all the visiting bands that come in, and they are competing? Is that the way it works?

HB: They have a lot of firsts. The number one drum major, and the drum corps, and they have all these different contestants. They used to give the rating on the parade, I believe. They had a, what

we call Jazz Band, what we call a stage band. They had that in the elementary building I was in after the high school was built. My stage band from Four Oaks won first place in that one year. It was an honor for the Four Oaks band.

PV: It has really grown, hasn't it?

HB: Oh yes. You only had to go to the town hall to see that Cary is recognized, the band is recognized here. You see the statuettes, band leaders in the yard up there.

PV: So you just moved to Cary three or four years ago from Raleigh. Why did you move here? Why did you leave Raleigh? To be closer to the store?

HB: In problems there, I was gone a lot. I had some break-ins. I thought I'd get closer to the store. And I have a daughter that lives in Cary. Cary means a lot to me, so why not move where you love.

PV: I'm all for that. That's great.

HB: I don't know about you, but so many people I see, I ask where they're from. We love Cary. They're here and they plan to stay. We are all proud of that. I think you told me you are originally from out of state.

PV: Yes, I'm not a native either, but I have been here seventeen years and love it. I plan to stay, that's right. Yes indeed. So, is there anything else that you can think of that we haven't touched on, as far as your career and music in general is concerned?

HB: Well, if you saw the book, there is one article about being a busy man, because I was teaching four and five and six schools, I was carrying a paper route for 55 years before I'd go teach school. And on weekends I'd play in the dance band. And on Sunday morning, I was minister of music for 38 years, so I directed church choirs on Sunday, and finally resigned from that profession. And now I'm just singing in the choir and occasionally playing a solo. I'm proud of my children. They all have a touch of music and enjoy it. I had the opportunity to play in the Bayley Baptist Church

performances and a couple of other places that my son was directing. I had opportunities to sit and play clarinet under his direction, even though that is not his profession. He's an insurance, with State Farm.

PV: So how many children do you have?

HB: Three.

PV: Are they all in this area?

HB: One is the associate provost of UNC-Wilmington. The other two, one's in Cary and one's in north Raleigh. My daughter's in Cary, my older son is in north Raleigh. That's why I was able to go out and play with him several years in his performances.

PV: So tell me a little bit more about all of your children, and their – whatever they do musically, or have done.

HB: Well, the three children, and all three have families. The families haven't participated greatly in music. Some have played in church, in high school, but not much beyond. But they are outstanding grandchildren. But all three of my children did perform.

PV: Played different instruments?

HB: My daughter was solo majorette at NC State for a number of years, and played in the band.

PV: What instrument?

HB: Flute. My older son played several instruments, a trombone major. My younger son in Wilmington played trumpet and French horn. So they all have been involved.

PV: Did you teach all of them their instruments?

HB: Not directly. I started them and, before they started in the school, I was never their high school band director, even though they played in my bands. When I was teaching in Cary, my older son came out with me and I handed him the baton and I sat down and played trumpet with the band at football games. He was a tot.

PV: He was just a little guy?

HB: Yes. And my daughter was a mascot majorette. She marched in a parade in Chicago with the mascot majorette. Like I said, memories.

PV: Before I turned the tape on, you were talking just a little bit about your 55 years of delivering papers and how you, even though they are not necessarily publicizing it, you are on the Guinness Book of World Records for that. Is that it? You submitted it?

HB: I don't know. I sent it to them. They didn't commit to anything.

PV: They didn't commit. But they did acknowledge that it was probably the longest paper carrier career that they knew of.

HB: I don't know how they select that, to tell you the truth. I'm sure it's tedious.

PV: What paper did you deliver all those years?

HB: I started with the Raleigh Times, but it merged with the News and Observer and I continued with the News and Observer. In fact, at one time, I took them both. Even though they didn't allow that, I did it. Then when they bought the Times, I was going along there anyway. Part of that time was afternoon paper, and most of it was 5:00 morning paper.

PV: You have been busy, working seven days a week, pretty much.

HB: I had 26 years at Longview Baptist's choir director, music director. And I had, went to Olive Chapel, I went to Mary Baptist, and Carolina Pines Baptist. All of those shorter terms. That's where the 38 years added up.

PV: So you were involved in all of their choirs and, as choir director or singing in the choir, or performing?

HB: Directing.

PV: What is your favorite type of music?

HB: Combination. I'd only say two, classical and jazz. And I'll add march music. I like lots of marches and overtures and things. That's probably classical, though. You can categorize it as classical as well as specific.

PV: Do you have a favorite composer?

HB: No, too many. That's almost like, what's your favorite child. You can't do it. Of course, John Phillips Sousa would hold a pretty top spot, since I like marches so much.

PV: Was there anything else that you can think of that we haven't really touched on?

HB: No, thank you. I can't think of anything.

PV: Well, thank you so much. This is fantastic. What an illustrious career you've had, and all of the lives that you have touched and enriched with your love of music, and instilled that same love in so many other people, I would think.

HB: Of course, I cannot close without mentioning one thing, and that's my 65 years of happy marriage with my wife. This year will be 65 years.

PV: That is phenomenal, that is really wonderful.

HB: She stays at the Carolina Beach. We have a place there. I go down Thursday and Friday, come back to teach on Saturday and go to church on Sunday, and tennis on Sunday.

PV: How long has she been living full-time at your beach house?

HB: Four or five more years, I don't know exactly. Since she retired, she retired from the News and Observer.

PV: What is her first name?

HB: Pearl.

PV: That's wonderful. And you have three children and a whole host of grandchildren.

HB: And two great-grandchildren. They are here with me. That's my grandson's truck out there. My grand-daughter is at work, he keeps his youngest child. His job was not paying as much as child care was, so he keeps the child, the smallest, and the other one is in Farmington Woods school.

PV: So they live here with you?

HB: Yes, they have the whole upstairs.

PV: So you are very actively involved with your grandchildren's lives as well.

HB: Yes, and my other vocation of most interest is tennis. I played three hours yesterday, and I play every Tuesday and Thursday morning if it's not raining or snowing.

PV: Wow, that's fantastic. Where do you play?

HB: Lake Wheeler, its Carolina Pines Park on Lake Wheeler Road. Before I moved to Cary, one reason I didn't move to Cary for so long was, I had a tennis court in my yard. I've had my own a tennis court and swimming pool, and I didn't want to leave them. That's one reason for the length of time it took before I moved to Cary.

PV: That's understandable. That's fantastic, so you're keeping in shape and keeping a hand in everything that you still love. ()

(Start Wav file #2) I'm back on-line here. So you were starting to tell me about your parents, and your father, well both your parents' careers. Could you tell me again for the tape?

HB: Well starting to back up, my dad was born in the area of Fuquay on a land grant granted by the queen of England, and still in the hands of my cousin's son who owns that property. My dad started teaching school. I'm not sure whether he taught around Fuquay or not, but he took a few courses at State and that was higher education at that time. He was principal of several schools. He taught in Cary at the boarding school. This was a building up there we called the teacherage when I taught there, but it was the dormitory for the students that lived there, I think, at that time. And then he moved on and taught, was principal of a school in Holly Springs and Leesville, then went back into farming. My

mother taught piano at the school where he was teaching. After he left the school, they were unable to have any courtship or even contact while they were in teaching. But they were married after they both left the teaching. Had a dairy out on what is now called Burt Road, over near the university...

PV: At NC State, there's a Burt Road?

HB: Yes, about two blocks long, ran from my old mailbox to the Gorman's house. There's the Gorman Street there now that is a big street. But Gorman Street was only an extension with two houses on it.

PV: So that's where you lived, that's where you house was?

HB: That's where I was born, in that house.

PV: Where you were born, and where you lived in that house. And that's where you lived...

HB: Doctors came to the home then. There was a doctor on route who had it to deliver babies now. But I was born in the home and I lived there until the house burned down. I was in the first grade, and had a two-mile walk to school. There was a Cary bus came by, but we went to Raleigh school. It was a two-mile walk for me, and I read in an article in the Old Raleigh Boys, my brother wrote in there that he and my other brother walked four miles to Wiley School in Raleigh. Kids now don't walk to the neighborhood school. It's a big change.

PV: Yes. So you went to a different school than your brothers did?

HB: That was an elementary school I did. Then I went to Hugh Morison High School. One brother went there. The other graduated before they built the school, I believe. No, I believe he went there too. They graduated from Hugh Morison. The school, the building is no longer there, you know. They built a new one called Broughton High School.

PV: So they closed Hugh Morison when they opened Broughton?

HB: Years ago. Years went by. My son went there. So it was that long before they closed it. It wasn't right away.

PV: So when your house burned down when you were in the first grade, did your folks just rebuild it?

HB: No. We moved, we were operating a service station, and we lived in it for three or four years, and then moved into town, into Raleigh. Then I went to Murphey School in downtown Raleigh.

PV: So the house that you were born in that burned down, was that on Burt Road?

NB: No, it was on Avent Ferry Road. Burt Road was at the end of our place, from the mailbox down to Gorman Street, just a little two-block stretch, still a two-block as I understand it. I haven't been there recently.

PV: So the property that you had in Raleigh until just a few years ago, that's completely separate from the home place where you grew up?

HB: Oh yes. That wasn't in Raleigh, that was in Wake County. It was, do you know where Pullen Park is? Okay, it was one mile from Pullen Park, but that was country, down a dirt road. The service station was across the highway from Pullen Park. It had a garage in it. The old stations used to have a garage and a little place to eat. And we just () and lived there three or four years.

PV: So you lived upstairs, or...?

HB: No, in the garage. There was no upstairs.

PV: Oh, it was just a one-story building.

HB: The old service stations, my job was to pump gas into the gas tank, so that when they wanted to let it out, they just let it go down. I'd come back up to let it out. It's quite a change. The old service stations had an operating place about the size of this kitchen. Then they had a little eating place back behind it, where you could fix sandwiches or something to eat. Then they had a garage. My mother fixed sandwiches and things in there. So we had kitchen things and then they just moved into the garage, and lived in the garage. Do what you have to.

PV: Yes you do. So then, after that, where did you move to? What did your folks do?

HB: We moved to one block off the capital, Jones Street, first Salisbury Street, then around the corner to Jones Street, then McDowell Street. So we lived down there, right downtown. I lived there when I went to State. You didn't live in the dormitory unless you had money. And I didn't make enough money off the paper route to live in the dormitory, didn't want to. I carried the paper all through, part of elementary school, all of junior high school and high school, and college, and on into. I was in Cameron Village running the music store when I gave up my paper route.

PV: What were your parents' names? What was your father's name?

HB: My father's name was Raymond A. Burt.

PV: And he taught at the Cary school for awhile? Do you know what he taught?

HB: Yes, everything. I don't know how many teachers they had but one teacher may have the first three grades, and the next teacher would have the next three grades, and that was it. It was few public schools, most of them were whatever. Abraham Lincoln, I think, never went to a public school, but he was educated, wasn't he? But times changed from there.

PV: What was your mother's name?

HB: Ella Stanfield was her maiden name, and Burt.

PV: Fantastic. I'm glad we got this part on tape as well. Your family goes all the way back to a land grant. So you've been here a long time.

HB: There's a Burt Road down there, in Fuquay. It's out from Fuquay. I can't think of the place now. It's out from there, but I don't think it's incorporated or anything like that.

PV: So your family's been around a long time. We're certainly glad that you came to Cary and contributed. Again, thank you very much.

HB: You're quite welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW