One Ashland, Many Voices Oral History Project
Transcript of Interview with Pat Ewald

Interviewee: Pat Ewald
Interviewer: Amanda Bass
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AB: Tell me why you came to Ashland?

PE: We came to Ashland because we had relatives in Virginia and we were moving from upstate New York where it’s very cold all year round and we wanted to move to a warmer climate and we had in-laws and cousins here you know that were friends for the children and so we just came to Virginia for the family and for the weather.

AB: Do you have any interesting stories from your relatives about Ashland?

PE: Well, (ha, ha), actually uh, probably the most interesting story is that when we decided to move here and bought a house here the man who sold us house uh, said uh, the one thing that Ashland needs is a bookstore (laughter), and so I was looking for a place to start a bookstore thought that was something that I really wanted to do at that stage of my life and so we found a nice little place that he you know, knew was available for rent and we started a bookstore. Uh Ingram book company has what they call a Rosie which is a, a opening store inventory we ordered all those books and our kids all got on the computer with us and said oh mom this a good one, that’s a good one, and so we got our inventory, our first inventory and we started our bookstore. But that was actually an anniversary because it was 25 years ago.
AB: Within the bookstore have you meet any interesting characters or any interesting people?

PE: Oh yeah, we really have and I always said that it was a good way to move to a new town because you meet all the nicest people in a bookstore, and uh a lot of the friends from the bookstore are no longer with us actually some of the very best, Booty Tucker used to stop in almost everyday and he was really Mr. Ashland and he knew all the history he would tell me about it, uh, at the same time that we opened the bookstore they published the old homes book and uh, lots of people who were interested in the history of the old houses came to our store to pick up the book uh, Lois Winfield would sit and talk with us for hours about the history and I found it very interesting because I’m, you know history is one of my favorite subjects. And uh, just incredible people that would come in, there was one young fella who was named um, Roger, who lived at the home, uh, you know uh, for dependent children and he used to have a different outfit for everyday, he would be a fireman one day, he would be a policeman another day, he would be a cowboy, and he would come down to town and everybody just loved to see him, see what he was gonna be that day and uh, the people of the town were so good they just accepted all the kids that lived at the home and uh watched over them made sure they got home safe and sound and uh, just he was one of the special characters.

AB: And what would you say that the other businesses around the bookstore how would you say that they have fit into the community?

PE: Well, they, they all try to fit in beautifully and of course Crosses has been here forever and that’s an incredible service to the town of Ashland and surrounds for people because its one of the few stores that delivers groceries and uh everyone who has come has uh done their best to make a really fine store that would offer things people want not all of them have been successful but uh, they have all you know, really had in mind the welfare of the people of Ashland. How it worked out you know for good or ill is another thing some have come some have gone, quite a few have come and gone actually in the 25 years we’ve been in business here. But they’re all just tremendous you know good folks.

AB: And you said you’ve been here for 25 years just to touch on that, how would you say that the community has changed and grown or what do you think of that?

PE: Well, uh, I’m not truly in favor of expansion in such a degree as we have seen. Ashland of course has expanded it parameters and can only be developed so much, but um, if you go outside the parameters of Ashland into Hanover there’s just some ruinous development going on as far as I’m concerned, and I think we would have been better off to stay a little more exclusive.

AB: And you said that you weren’t in favor of the expansion, what can you tell me about the fight over the Wal-Mart?

PE: Well uh the fight over the Wal-Mart really was ya know, a non-entity the people who were fighting against it didn’t really have the funds to get, to get, an attorney to stop it to ask for environmental checks on what was going to happen and Wal-Mart was coming weather we liked it or not. The fact of the matter is I now go to Wal-Mart because there are some organic things which we use in our household that are only available at Wal-Mart. I try whenever possible to go online and find something
that’s made in the U.S.A. I don’t buy toys there that are made in China, you know, and I try always to find an American made product before I buy anything at Wal-Mart. But they’ve got the organic uh, sugar, they’ve got organic peanut butter, organic green beans I got the other day, and the laundry detergent that I use is free and clear and it’s the only place I can get it so I’m a customer at Wal-Mart and you know I’m kinda glad their here. I just wish that everybody would try first to buy American made if it’s available. Uh, you know the fight was, ended up to be nothing because they’re here and what they do they’re doing, and they do it pretty well.

**B:** How do you feel about having a railroad straight through the center of town?

**PE:** Oh I feel great about it, yea it’s a wonderful part of the character of the town, has been for many many years. I don’t know if you’ve ever heard doctor Carter speak about being a little boy, I mean he was holding his daddy’s hand and they’d come down and watch what they called the great prude special go through and um its fine. I love it, and of course it goes clear back to the War Between the States so it’s got a long long history. You know the R, F, & P and now the CSX move things for people it’s great.

**AB:** Have you heard any stories I guess family stories as to the railroad for your relatives who have lived here?

**PE:** Not from my relatives but there have been a couple really sad occurrences uh with the railroad. The train was stopped out front one day and a young fella needed get to the other side and tried to sneak under the train with very unfortunate results he lost his legs. And I think there was a young lady from Randolph Macon who put her hand out, thought she was gonna touch a moving train and was very seriously injured. Uh, you know, there are lots of good stories from friends and customers about people who sat on the porch and waved to the train you know, in the old days when it was the RF&P who always knew the schedule and knew, the a lot of the people who lived and worked in town worked for the railroad or were related to people who did. And um, there was one lovely lady who wrote a biography of Patrick Henry which is just incredible and Noreen Campbell was her name. Her sons and daughter are in Ashland or have just recently been deceased. She’s been gone for 15 or 20 years I guess but uh she would get on the train because she had a pass her dad had worked on the railroad for years, and she would get on the R, F, &P and go down into Richmond and stop at all the places where there were prosperous people and ask them for money to restore Scotchtown. Was Patrick Henry’s home and she almost single handedly got the money to save Scotchtown; uh so that we have it you know, for historic remembrance. And um at the time she did that it was nearly falling down there was a man I think keeping goats inside of the house and Noreen Campbell did that on the R, F, & P on the train.

**AB:** And would you say that the train is probably what brings the most people through Ashland?

**PE:** Um, I’m not so sure about that. I think most people who come, come by car. People that use the train are Ashland residents, mostly who use it to go to Washington and points north and south. But I
don’t think a whole lot of people get off the train to come here. We get a lot of nice shoppers from other places but they mostly come in their cars. At least as far as I know. I know people stop at the train station up there and get information and talk with folks but I don’t know that they come on the train. Do you think a lot of the students use the train to get to school?

AB: Probably to get more home and then back. I think it more depends on like where they’re from. I do know a lot of them do take it instead of trying to drive.

PE: Yeah, especially now. Big money.

AB: Right. Speaking of the college, how do you feel about having Randolph-Macon in the center of town?

PE: Oh it’s just fine. You know it’s really nice to have the young folks in town and around and uh, good atmosphere, and uh their parents are some of our best customers. While the kids are up at school the parents come and buy books. I think the kids are a little too busy sometimes to do any extra reading. But we think its fine, just fine.

AB: And while you’ve been here, have you seen any events around the campus or been to any events on the campus that you thought were significant or that you’ve really enjoyed?

PE: Uh, we’ve gone up to the theater to see some of the productions of the drama department and we loved them. Thought they were just magnificent for the facilities that they have and the time that they had to prepare. They do a wonderful job, and you know we’ve been up there for concerts and things but they weren’t given by the students. They were mostly you know, by the symphony but the plays were wonderful and I’m looking forward to more.

AB: I’m sure we’ll definitely have some. Um, what would you say is probably, in the way of the businesses for the newer businesses like such as Ashland Coffee and Tea and Suzanne’s and Iron horse how would you say they have blended in with some of the older businesses that were already here when they came through?

PE: Well the truth of the matter is Suzanne’s opened the same year that we did. She’s actually one of the older businesses now, you know excluding Crosses which has been here as we understand forever. Suzanne’s has been here for a good long while and she was successful from the very first day she opened. Iron horse you know is lovely for people to come, we can recommend a good diner there for folks that are looking. And um, Ashland Coffee and Tea is a little bit newer but I think that many folks have spoken highly of it we don’t get a chance to go there very often but I think it’s tremendous. And a lot of good stuff for the students has gone on there I think they’ve had the music on the weekends and things haven’t they?

AB: Yes.

PE: Which is great we need something for the kids to do in town so that they are happy here.
AB: How would you describe being in a small town such as Ashland and of course with being in the bookstore, how would you say that you describe that?

PE: As far as the size of the town it suits me. You know I have a new daughter in law who really loves the city. She comes from Germany and her hometown Nuremberg but uh, she loves New York she loves Chicago; she loves all the big cities and what goes on there. But for me Ashland’s just about perfect it’s a town very similar to the one I grew up in. And uh, in fact so many similarities that it’s almost like a twin to the city that I grew up in. And it just suits me fine, like I say I don’t care if it ever gets any bigger. You know the few empty lots could have houses but other than that its fine the way it is. Status quo.

AB: And I know that, I’ve heard that Ashland they will sometimes put on festivals such as the Strawberry Fair in the summer and stuff like that. What can you tell me about some of the festivals and things that they put on?

PE: Well the strawberry fair of course is the main one and it brings a lot of people to Ashland and it’s a very good thing because people get to display their wears, it’s not really for the merchants but it’s for people who really don’t have a store front or a home base here. And still have a chance to sell things and to greet the public and it’s a wonderful time of year. All of the strawberries are great and people are always just have a marvelous time. They’re starting to have some of the music festivals with the food across the way, and they’re in the evening and I think they appeal to the younger folks and we think its fine. And we’re very disappointed that O’Sullivans went out of business because we thought a pub was great in the town too. But the kids like the music and I think they have good food and um it’s great for them. We don’t partake in it too much but uh, they have the railroad which is great. Uh, on the 4th of July they have a wonderful celebration in town. You know and homemade apple pies and contests and music and a teeny tinny parade but its all Ashland its great.

AB: And Ashland being such a small town and being so close knit I guess in the way of community how would you say that has helped like I guess the people get to know each other?

PE: Well uh, it’s easy to be drawn in because the people are friendly and they’re very accepting of new comers and they wanna make them feel at home. They will you know, welcome wagon you into everything. The churches are wonderful that way and uh, the arts and activities center is wonderful that way offers so many possibilities for people. It’s probably a cut above most towns because they really work at it, they don’t want anyone to feel left out and so they do a tremendous job, and of course they’re lucky because they get good people.

AB: You mentioned the churches, how many are there in the town and do you have one that you would say is or favorite or?

PE: Well they don’t happen to have a church of our denomination in town, uh we’re Lutheran. So we have to go into Richmond to go into town. But golly I don’t know how many there are there must be ten. One, two, three, four, five, there’s probably ten churches, but we go to Richmond to a Lutheran Church.
**AB:** With the fact that Ashland is so small um, we’ve heard people talk about the government and the town government what could you tell me about that?

**PE:** hmm, well I think it’s like any government, they think they’re the best that they can do for the town. It’s not always possible to do what the people think they want, you know, and uh people who attend the meetings are vocal about their desires. But by and large I think they do what they think is convenient for the town. They’re not very responsive to the businesses. For instance we have no place that we can have our trash picked up, the sidewalks are not always clean, uh, you know there are other services that we would like to have from the town of Ashland. But by and large we take care of them ourselves its nothing major. And um, I think that you know its like government everywhere it’s got some strengths and it’s got some weaknesses.

**AB:** Did you have any family members who were involved in politics or I guess close to the government of the town or ever helped out of it?

**PE:** No, no we really haven’t. Not interested too much in that aspect of life. We’re busy we have horses we have the store. My husband has you know golf as a hobby, and I have ten acres that I take care of myself. So you know we just, we find out what’s going on but unless it’s something that affects us mightily we just sort of let it go.

**AB:** And you just mentioned that you had you know; ten acres that you take care of um, how would you describe like the land and the houses around Ashland?

**PE:** Well because it is a town, which is rather unusual in Virginia by the way, a lot of places that you live here in the country and you have a crossroad where there might be a little grocery store and a post office and an auto parts. But there aren’t a lot of towns that are like Ashland so it’s unique in that way and very special it’s really one of the reasons why we chose it because it is a town and offers a town’s amenities. And um, the lots are lovely you know and people keep them in pristine condition they get their leaves gathered up and things. So um, just beautiful homes lovely homes and the folks take very good care of them. It’s special that way.

**AB:** And have you ever heard of any stories from anyone weather it be relatives or just family friends about um, some of the older businesses in Ashland such as you mentioned Cross Brothers has been here or even such as um the Henry Clay Inn?

**PE:** Oh yeah, the Henry Clay Inn was a wonderful spot you know a recreation spot and uh, there were people living in the Henry Clay Inn who had giving up larger homes out in the country. An older folk who had come in and actually resided there and when it burned down it was a horrible, horrible disappointment to the town. No one was killed in the fire but a lot of people lost their home. It was in the same place right across from the college and everyone was glad when they rebuilt that much, much later. It’s not an exact replica of the old Henry Clay Inn but um, just you know the people loved it and it was a tremendous place and uh, they liked to have a new replacement. But the old one was quite unusual. A place where people met you know to socialize and uh I think they had dances there uh, many long years ago and it was just wonderful.
AB: And you mentioned that a little earlier about some of the places that like the college kids and members of the community like to hang out. And we’ve heard stories about the movie theater, how do you feel that the Ashland movie theater here in town served I guess when it was still open or still fairly popular with the town?

PE: Well it was a wonderful thing for the kids and I’m talking lets go back 40-50 years when it was right across you know where the O’Sullivans just closed but it was in that building. And the young people were like young people everywhere. You know weekends was the movies, and of course it was Roy Rogers and Dale Evans but it was the movies and they loved it. And when the movie theater moved up on England Street they had some wonderful movies and the families went because there were always things that were suitable for families and they loved it. But evidently it didn’t prosper, uh, I don’t know if it was because the movies cost so much to maintain or obtain or what the reason was but it’s too bad that we don’t still have it because I think that it was a really fine thing. And as I say years and years ago all the old timers would talk to me including Booty Tucker would talk to me about how fun it was to go to the movies in Ashland. And uh, I think Meden Company moved into that building after the movie theater moved out and they were there for many long years. But um, its something that we should have and I don’t know if they’d be able to get first run movies or not. Somebody would have to actually I guess be responsible for it and the gentleman who owns the building I don’t think is interested at this point in doing that. But old timers had a great, great time with the movie theater and they really used it, and you can imagine in Ashland because they didn’t have cars to run into Richmond or you know it was, it was the entertainment.

AB: okay, um, and you mentioned that you weren’t sure that the guy who owned the theater was really interested in getting it back into, do you feel as though such as the movie theater up at Virginia Center do you feel as though some of the upscale theaters like around Ashland probably put a damper on the business that it could have done had they not moved in here?

PE: Well I have to tell you a little secret, um the last movie that I saw was in 1957 (he, he) so you’re talking to the wrong old lady about movies. I’m sure I mean I think the movie theater down there at Virginia Center has more than one uh showing of films doesn’t it isn’t it divided? And I think people flock to that place because there’s lots of good eating places there you know and shopping and all kinds of exciting. And I assume that that would put a damper on the Ashland showing. But if they had good films you’d think the students at Macon instead of running down there and the people here would use it. I would go maybe.

AB: Um, you mentioned that you had relatives here, did you ever hear any stories from any your relatives or did they ever have anyone who fought in the civil war in your family while they were here?

PE: Well as far as stories my brother-in-law does a lot of metal detecting and of course has found a lot of history in the ground, beautiful things and before we moved to Ashland we rented a house in Goochland. Where he went over the land with a metal detector and we found a horse brass that had
the lone star on it and some bullets from the war between the states. My own family lived in Virginia at the time of the war between the states, and my relatives were abolitionists, so the family sort of split up. The one brother who was a preacher went North, and the other brother who was not a preacher volunteered in the Southern forces. So the family went two separate ways, so until I came back to Virginia the family hadn’t been in Virginia for about a hundred and twenty years. But people tell incredible stories I’m trying to think, Louis Wickem had a picture of a relative that was slashed by a union Calvary men you know with a sword. They went into the churches with their horses and broke pews and you know destroyed the bibles. There’s one farm out at Hanover Courthouse where they actually took the family pet dog when they left. So you know they gathered up the horses and took all the food that they could find and took the family dog. So when people from the North speak about the war they come at it from a totally different angle from the people who lived with it. And whose relatives experienced these things. Uh, at Hickory Hill uh, Robert E. Lee’s son you know was wounded and came here there to recover. And uh, there were quite a few skirmishes in Ashland, and uh there were troops that were uh, stationed here up around race course avenue. I read a book about a lady and I knew her relatives because they still lived in the confines of Hanover, but she was in Washington when the war started. And she knew that all the southern sympathizers were gonna have to come south and nearly all of them came to Ashland. She lived in that second little house that’s over on Virginia Street and she rented the whole house. And she actually brought her piano down with her from Washington and so many people came that she decided that she could do with the first floor of the house and she would let somebody have the second floor of the house. And then so many more people came that they finally ended up each family had one room in the house. And Ashland was just overflowing with people. Who had come from D.C. and points north you know who had to get back. So Ashland was really a stopping place for a lot a lot of refugees.

AB: Did your family have any stories from the reconstruction era of the Civil War or did you ever hear about any?

PE: Well basically the only one I ever really remember hearing was from Pettis Miller who’s a long time Ashland resident. And uh, her great grandfather was a union officer and when the War Between the States was ended he loved Virginia so much that he came down here and established his home and made a fortune in timber and that was during reconstruction. And of course she’s considered now soul of the south you know. But her great grandfather was a Yankee and came down, and this happened in a lot of cases but that’s the only one I know of you know actually that’s a story from a resident. It was tough times in reconstruction uh, and a lot of people didn’t have enough money to you know pay the taxes on their property. We had uh, some estates of books that we got that had a lot of things tucked into the bible uh, you know, the can’t think of exactly what I want to call it now but each soldier had to have a piece of paper signed saying that he was loyal once again to the United States. And uh we had one of those from a family that was left in the bible from a man from Ashland. Who had served you know with the confederate forces and a pearl, they called it a pearl. When he came back he got his pearl signed so that he could live. If you didn’t get your pearl signed, there was nothing you could do you could not have any way to make money or to pay your bills or even get food to do anything. So he got his pearl and was able to go back into farming again although it was very difficult. All the fences
were down at all the properties around here. They had all been used for firewood or broken down. People out at Hanover Court houses I know had no salt whatsoever, so they went to the smoke houses and actually got salt that had been accumulated for years and years and years on the floor of the smokehouses, and used that salt because they were so desperate for salt they had none. So and that continued into reconstruction as well I mean it was a time for people to be resourceful and they were, you know they dug in and made due and got back on their feet but it was a very tough time.

**AB:** And of course you mentioned that even back then you know everyone pitched in and helped out with such things. Do you feel as though even now that like the community will come together during a hard time that maybe someone is having, or just in the community in general do you feel as though they come together?

**PE:** I’m sure that they do uh one of the reasons is because most of the people are long time residents and um, you know friends that they have we’ll go into a room and they’ll have gone to high school with you know three quarters of the people that are there. They’re old friends their long time friends and whenever there’s trouble they’re always there to help. Um, Hayden Hopkins had a heart transplant, I think maybe you kids heard about that and uh, when he came home the whole town was full of red ribbons. And lots and lots of things were done to make him sure that everyone was so glad that he was alright and that he’d gotten a new heart that wished him well for many many years to come. Yeah, the town is very good that way, and it might not be the same section that helps but it will be the neighbors and the friends and they people who work with them and go to school with them. They’re very good that way, and I think that’s true all over our country. American people are like that they’re hopeful and helpful and you know they’re really just by and large good people. In fact we’re the most generous people in the world and so it translates to Ashland same as everywhere.

**AB:** And just going back to something that you said earlier in the interview, you said that when you moved here that you had your kids with you, did they attend schools here?

**PE:** They were in college, they actually our daughter was in law school at the time and our son had been graduated from Rinsileer up in Troy New York. And was actually getting his first job in Riley North Carolina. But the kids were grown and uh, so they never went to school here.

**AB:** Have they come back to the town or have any um, I guess memories or opinions about the town?

**PE:** um, I’m not sure, our daughter lives here in Ashland, and uh, she works mostly in Richmond she’s a criminal defense attorney so she has a lot of work to do. But they don’t pay much attention actually I mean they think the bookstores neat and uh, they like the whole atmosphere of it, but they don’t have a whole lot of connection with the town, you know how kids are. And our son once he was gone he visits but that about all, he’s been all over the world and uh, he’s a global marketing manager and he lived in Germany for three years and he’s been everywhere, been to the Middle East and farther. That’s probably what you kids will do to from Randolph-Macon you know you’ll go from here and cover the world. Uh, it’s a whole different really now for young people because they cross the ocean like it was nothing. They go to London for a long weekend; it’s a different world it truly is. Uh, I don’t know if
anything will happen to change that but I do expect that you young folks will probably travel the world a lot more than any generation has ever done.

**AB:** Did you have any family members or friends that attended Randolph-Macon?

**PE:** Oh lordy. Same thing, everybody in town really has attended Randolph-Macon. Yeah good stories about basketball players you know and people who came back to be professors. And uh, Kathy Bock who’s in charge of the library right across the way, you know there’s just tons and tons of Randolph-Macon people. Belong to the Ashland Woman’s Club and there’s really a close association with Randolph-Macon with members there. Nearly all either work there Barclay Dupriest is a member you know and uh, uh, who else I trying to think, Doctor Gilman is a member and they just intertwined totally yeah there’s a ton of them. Oh you know the other thing is interesting is during the war the had some uh, service men who came here to Randolph-Macon and I think it was probably just after their induction into the army and they came here for training, And uh, quite a few of the ladies in town married those fellas and they’re still here you know. I know Sarah Wright married Louie and he had you know he had come into Ashland to Randolph-Macon as a service man. And Liz Styles, uh, Joe Styles was one of those and he has done uh, an incredible uh, one of those histories for that project that they’re doing for the World War II veterans and uh, talks so beautifully about his service in the war. But he’s still here and of course they own Luck Chevrolet and they talk about the house that was over just off of Route 1 and 54, where there was a, what do you call it. A mineral spring and there were tons of mineral springs in Ashland and its fun to hear people talk about those too about the different places that they went to drink from the mineral springs. But uh, I was wondering if that one is still there, that’s something that you kids oughta try to find out because now it’s, it’s that bank that’s on the corner of 54 and number 1 highway and then probably the next building too would be on part of the land that had encompassed the farm. But down in back of the house which is there that has been moved here to the railroad avenue. You knew that, that house was moved. Anyway behind that house when it was there was a mineral spring, and I just wonder what happened to it, if it’s still there or if you could find it.

**AB:** We’ll have to look into that.

**PE:** Yeah it would be neat to find it and see what it tasted like.

**AB:** Um, in the way of like some of the houses I know that like the college will sometimes buy some of the houses around for certain aspects of it, um, what do you think about the fact that they have bought these houses?

**PE:** Well I think they’ve bought enough. But I think that the ones that they bought they have kept in tremendous condition. Some of them they have you know refurbished that were in need of it. Folks who had the houses thought they were too big and too hard to keep and were thrilled at the chance to uh, sell them to someone who would maintain them. I think it’s great, I think its fine. But I don’t think you know that the sprawl should go too much farther but I do think it’s great. And I’ll tell you somebody who knows all about the people who lived in those houses and some wonderful stories about those houses is Roseanne Shelf. Don’t know if she’s on your list or not but she definitely could be because she knows
the history of every house on Railroad Avenue and uh, tell you about the house that has all the daffodils. You maybe have noticed, I don’t think they’ve taken them out but the one that’s just surrounded by daffodils. Had a very special old time resident and there were some famous actors and actresses who came here whose grandparents lived in those houses and uh it’s a great story. I’m not in touch with all of that because a lot of it you know took place before we came here. But uh, there wonderful history stories to tell and really if you call her she would love to tell you because she wrote the Ashland, Ashland book. So she has her finger on a lot of history.

AB: And you mentioned of course that a lot of the houses around Ashland are Victorian style, do you feel as though they that the houses themselves contribute to how everyone looks at Ashland?

PE: Sure I do. In fact there’s one railroad engineer who came through here who was famous for saying that in most towns you go through the worst part of town with the railroad but in Ashland you go through the best part of town. And my daddy and mother used to come down on the train from uh, you know on the auto train to go to Florida and my daddy said people always used to comment on the train about how beautiful Ashland was, and how clean and nice and the houses so pretty. Yeah we put our best face toward the railroad I think.

AB: Um, did you have any relatives who um, were around Ashland during the depression?

PE: No I really didn’t. Uh, that’s a period of time that you know we didn’t have much association with Ashland very, very little connection. I just, I had one cookbook that came in a batch from an old, old house out in the country and the woman had uh, several pages of recipes for things that they could afford to make. You know that had eggs in them but no butter, and just you know some evidence that they really, really had to be careful and of course that was true everywhere. But Ashland no specifically I don’t have much connection with that time period here. I think it was probably universal although they may have fared better than a lot of places, because most of the old time residents had found themselves a niche that was prosperous, something that was needed that they provided to the community. And uh, I think that maybe they did a little bit better than people in the cities and of course out in the mid west, in the dustbowl and on the farms. Speculation.

AB: How would you say that the incorporation of um, the areas surrounding Ashland such as you know Hanover and some of the other areas have affected Ashland?

PE: Well probably for the better financially. I don’t know that they’ve benefited that much but I think Ashland of course has, you by the income the tax base. Other than that the same thing, it falls into the political arena, which isn’t of whole lot of interest to me. Um, I think that sometimes a smaller area can govern itself better and knows better the needs and wants of the citizens than a larger area. I think we have some corporation on some projects actually with Richmond but I’m not familiar with them. It’s something that I just, it’s ho-hum to me.

AB: How would you say, um, I guess the differences between a small town such as Ashland and the inner city such as Richmond, I don’t know how, if you’ve been through Richmond much but how would you describe it?
PE: I’m holding my head. The problems with the city of Richmond are enormous and I think that those people who are responsible for the way things are run are trying very hard to make a difference and to improve them. But I tell you something it’s an uphill battle in Richmond there’s no comparison none whatsoever. And uh, Ashland and Hanover actually are experiencing uh, some changes in the way things are done because of you know the development here that uh, approximates what you would find in a city as far as the uh, the spacing of houses and facilities and things that are offered. There’s really no comparison, Richmond is a city in agony a city that needs a great deal of care and a great deal of uh, thoughtful work and consideration. But Richmond is difficult very difficult and I hope that Ashland won’t become like Richmond because the problems are almost insurmountable.

AB: Do you have any stories from I guess older friends or even relatives, you know you said you had relatives who have been here for a while. Uh, we heard in class how Randolph-Macon when it was first built I guess they didn’t have some of the facilities that they do now, such as the commons area and that um, did the town of Ashland did they ever have like people who helped out with the college or in the way of like with the students?

PE: I think they did, a lot of the students boarded with people in the town. Uh, and there’s a lot of good stories about that, but same thing I think Roseanne would be the one to ask because she really has the details down pact. But oh they did yeah, and I know that in Wash-Frank Hall they used to have debates you know and they had wonderful oratorical groups and uh, everything about the time was gentler. And you know I know that they had dances and things and of course the girls were delighted to go up and associate with the boys from Randolph-Macon. And I think it’s always, in fact it might have been even a gentler more supportive relationship in those days than it is now. I don’t think the kids need the town as much as they did at that time. But I know that the associations were very close and a lot of the professors opened their homes to students who came and the students would board with the professors. Maintain a life-long relationship that you know it was really an affair of great friendship. I can’t remember any specifics except for just hearing people talk about oh, so and so, when we were newly weds you know we boarded we lived on the second floor of one of these houses here on the railroad avenue and when we finally bought a house you know, and it just a lot a lot of history that I’m not that conversant with. Somebody will be able to give you a wonderful fill in on that I’m sure. You know there’s somebody else you should, you should talk to Liz Styles should call her and ask her if she has time for an interview. Same thing I mean she just has tremendous history to talk about and I think she would do it, I think she would like to do it. Do you know, it would be Mrs. Joseph Styles, she lives out guess you’d consider that Gwathney out there.

AB: What would you say makes Ashland so special?

PE: Oh with out a doubt it’s the people, it’s the people everywhere. That’s the key to everything. People and their attitude, that’s it.

AB: Do you feel as though, Ashland being such a small, you know a small town do you feel as though that has helped to shape the, the views of the people and how they feel about you know inviting other people within the community and making them feel so welcome?
PE: Hmm, it’s like the chicken and the egg, people probably came here because it was a small town, if they were already here the fact that it is a small town, you know I’m sure uh, affected the way they think about everything, including newcomers. Um, and the character of course is changing you know, this is a world where people move and I think a lot of the folks who come in are from other places now, in fact they call them “come here’s” if you weren’t born here you’re a come here. And one lady that I know moved here when her family was six weeks old and she’s still considered a come here (ha, ha, ha). So uh, you know and there are times when you could say to yourself well you know everybody comes from somewhere. And uh, there’s a lot of small towns in the United States and so you transfer that, that feeling to a place you know, we picked Ashland because it was a small town. My husband was raised in a small town; I was raised in a small town so here we come to another small town. And so you’re attitude is you know the same across the board really. I think it definitely does, Ashland being a small town affects the way you accept things and people. Also makes you sometimes a little bit stogy, you want, like I am you know I’d like things to stay the way they are.

AB: And you mentioned that you know earlier that you weren’t all that big on change; do you feel as though the town as a whole I guess would prefer that Ashland stay small and not branch out?

PE: The people that I speak with feel that way, I don’t know, you know if the majority feel that way or not. Uh, when the whole business came up about the Wal-Mart it seemed as though I knew almost everyone who was seriously objecting to it. But there were a lot of people who never showed up, who never spoke up, who never indicated that they had any concern about it one way or another. So uh, I don’t know what the answer is to that. What do you think?

AB: Oh, I don’t know, umm, I think it could be almost anything, I mean it is a small knit community and I think that once you get used to it you don’t want it to change.

PE: Yeah, and some of the people who uh, who have been here for a long, long time, who’s family have owned businesses think that it’s grand you know. They think that some of the newcomers who think Ashland shouldn’t change are very wrong. That uh, that we should always be open to change, and I don’t know I think that it could be done in a more sensible manner. For instance instead of trying to place something at the corner of number 1 highway and old Ashcake road why not go back behind Wal-Mart which is always basically ruined as far as real estate is concerned and, and go over there instead of trying to plant yourself in the middle of a part of town that needs some elbow room, and if I were the boss that what I’d make them do. But, but you know not everybody is concerned about it uh; some people just want the growth to be sensible and controlled. And there’s no way to stop it this is how its going to be like it or not, and sometimes its going to be a very bitter pill especially if it comes next door to your place. It’s this, the idea of not in my backyard. But when they allow this development they always say people are allowed to do whatever they want with their own property, but they fail to take into consider is that they’re also doing it to your property and they’re not paying you for it. They’re just making you know what they want come into flussion but don’t care about the surroundings so much. If we could just be sensible growth would be fine I guess.
AB: And Ashland has actually been tagged with the term Center of the Universe how do you feel about the term or how do you have any stories or I guess insights as to how that term came to be?

PE: Richard Gillus who was mayor of Ashland for quite a long time, and the library’s named after him, uh started that term and you know it’s just in good fun, just in good fun. I mean every place you live is the center of the universe right. We carry the center of the universe inside of us so wherever we go that’s it. But Dick Gillus is the one that started that. And he was a well loved figure in town he was a great big guy and went around wearing a cowboy hat and cowboy boots you know, and as you can imagine you know he was quite a character, well loved and uh, very much into politics. Life long democrat and uh, just a great guy. But he thought that Ashland was the center of the universe and everybody was quick to pick it up.

AB: And you mentioned that um like Cross Brothers has been here for quite a while, um do you know of any other I guess older um, older businesses that maybe were here that that aren’t here now or have you heard of any?

PE: Yup, for sure Loving Ford was a very prosperous and wonderful business uh, and a beautiful gentleman whose daughters still live in town, uh started that business, uh when Ford was brand new. You know, I think they actually have a Model A and a Model T still from the time when they had the Ford motor company. And it was on the corner of uh, Robinson actually and England Street. The dance studio’s in one of their buildings now and Dresser Drawer’s in one of their buildings. And uh that business was actually sold and that business was eventually sold and of course it has moved out to number 1 highway which is motor mile now actually in Ashland. It’s just about all you see out there new cars and junk cars and cars of all kinds, but Ashland Ford was one of the places and I think it started about the same time that Luck Chevrolet started so this was one of those things where one of the old time residents found something that was prosperous and took a gamble and did well with it. When we bought this little building we had the wall cleaned there’s a brick wall behind this uh, shelf of books here, and there’s uh, uh advertisement on there for flour so we know that the building next door was probably was a grocery store at one time but we, we don’t have any record of it. And this was an alley way actually and a little old man who wanted to make a shoemaker shop put a roof on and a door on the front and the back and turned it into a building and that’s probably sixty years ago.

AB: And I know that being such a small town did you ever hear of any mysteries or things that maybe Ashland is famous for?

PE: Yeah, and you know I can’t remember the name of the man but I there was a I think it was a deputy that was murdered behind Crosses you have to look into that. I think Roseanne Shelf actually found out who did it but she’s sworn to secrecy, I mean they never would tell. Uh, his granddaughter worked at the library and I can not remember his name but he was, he was killed and they never did convict anybody of his murder. I think that happened late at night I think it was the back of Crosses I wish I could remember his name but you’ll have to look into that. Other than that not a lot of things, I think a
lot of things that go on now, that are of note happen because of Route 95 going through Ashland. And the police have quite a job to really as a small town police force to be involved with some of the traffic that goes up and down 95 guns and drugs and stuff like that, that really something that in the past I don’t think they faced. I don’t know of any other mysteries wish I did, wish I did.

AB: And you mentioned uh that Ashland’s police force can be busy at times with 95 being right out there. Do you feel as though having 95 um, Ashland gets I guess a lot of tourists or just a lot of visitors throughout that will come and have you ever had any come through?

PE: Yeah oh sure, we get people off, that have come off 95 actually once in a while we get a truck driver who will stop and want something to take home to his children you know buy kids books or something sure uh, and 95 has actually outgrown itself. But uh, the number one highway was the way to Florida in years gone buy. In fact we actually took the number 1 highway to Florida when my children were like this you know we had a brand new Buick station wagon and we decided to take a trip. Uh, yeah 95 uh, is incredible you know for the businesses I'm sure and the gas stations and Cracker-barrel and all the different places. And the hotels and motels seem to really prosper I mean they keep building more so they must be doing alright. Yeah its, it’s an amazing thing.

AB: I guess one thing that we haven’t really touched on, is what would you say you like best about um, about the bookstore and about being around in Ashland?

PE: Well uh, the best thing I like about the bookstore is the people that I’ve meet, the customers who have become good friends. And some of them have been customers since the first day we opened the door. So twenty five years is a long time and of course you go beyond just selling books to somebody, you get to really love folks and appreciate them, learn about them. Uh, I have customers who brought their grandbabies in you know the carryalls and they’ve been graduated from college now. So uh, that, that’s actually the people that we’ve gotten to know I’m back to that. I think it’s all the people, and I love the books of course and it’s uh, for my husband now who’s retired it’s a nice place for him to come, it’s a good place you know to keep busy. Which is something that’s really important make sure you do that for yourself when you get older (ha, ha, ha) look at her.

AB: Would you say that Ashland is becoming more I guess young in the way of community or do you still feel as though the community still has some of its older history and I guess older residents that have been here for a while. Do you feel as though it’s being taken away?

PE: Well not so much taken away but its in fluc of course you know the, a lot of the people uh, who were prominent in Ashland were products of World War II and that era and we’re starting to lose some of them. And uh, the young folks who are coming in are just every bit as vital and important to the town as the old folks were. It’s a mix now but I think that you have to yield always you know to the younger generation. And I think its fine, uh, there’s some wonderful young folks who will take over the job of running the town and do fine with it. But uh, I notice quite a few of the folks that I knew when I first came have left us now, it happens.
AB: And what can you tell me about Ashland now as opposed to when you first came how has it changed or how has like the community itself changed?

PE: Hmm, well, same thing it’s a never ending story, uh, how has it changed? Not so much, I haven’t noticed so much change. Different faces maybe uh, still you know grandpas walk along the sidewalk holding the hands of their grandbabies and it’s a wonderful site to see. But uh, not so much change, different, little bit different stores one will go and one will come you know but basically its, its not noticeable because there’s a continuity, I think in my mind.

AB: And do you feel as though having so many stores you know together in Ashland, do you feel as though having them all within walking distance of the colleges and even some of the um, even some of the houses within Ashland do you feel as though that gives the town more of that um, close knit feel?

PE: Yeah, there’s a definite flavor to it and it’s, it’s a real benefit to some people. A lot of people really, really want a house within walking distance of down town. Uh, yeah undoubtedly it’s a benefit I think for anyone who’s close enough to take advantage of it. Yeah its, its great. And uh, you know even the ice cream shop is great for folks with little ones to walk down on the weekend and have an ice cream cone. The kids will remember that all their lives when they’re old folks, they’ll say remember when we used to go remember when we got ice cream down the street? You know, yeah its, its great, and it does affect the town and the, the flavor of it, I’m sure of it.

AB: And in the way of I guess some of the older history, did you ever hear of any stories of how Ashland was with the Civil War like when it, like when they were divided up um, about any segregation or anything such as that?

PE: Hmm, not really, uh, not really because most I think slavery was certainly an evil to the people who were caught up in it, both sides. But in Ashland the type of work was not the cotton fields not Mississippi and the Deep South. There were a great, great many of free slaves or free black people in Ashland and in Richmond. Uh, huge number probably more than were considered servants which are what they called them. But People here were very concerned about them. And uh, when the war was over, most of the places that were still considered plantations gave those black people land of their own and a house of their own so that they could stay. Took care of them until the day they died and they were family and they were well loved. And this is what I hear, now I haven’t had a whole lot of conversation with the people on the side of you know the black folks, but as far as I know the relationships were unusually good if any could be considered that way. But you know that’s all I know, that they made sure that these people were taken care of all of their lives. Didn’t you know, didn’t abandon them in old age or when they were disabled and took care of them. And they uh, they were the salt of the earth those people many of them are still raising their great grandchildren, great, great grandchildren. They really were the salt of the earth. I always say that you will have to get behind them in line when the great day comes.

AB: I guess one question, um; you know you mentioned that, about the Victorian styles houses and that a lot of people will keep them up and keep them pretty. Do you feel as though having, you know,
you mentioned that you have ten acres, do you feel as though having that land, um and everything is one thing that keeps Ashland, that makes Ashland unique that it has all the land and such things?

**PE:** Well you’ve touched on a very sore spot because its, its disappearing. There was a hundred and fifty acre plot that was next to my land, and uh real estate developer has come in there, and of the hundred and fifty acres the only place he could find to put twenty four houses was right on my property line. So to me uh, you know nothing will be sacred anymore in the way of land or acreage in Ashland or Hanover. Its, it’s a bygone day and uh, where money’s involved you really don’t have any say so. The planning commission and the board of supervisors really don’t care. Once you own a piece of property you’re you know expo-facto the next guy coming along is the one who’s going to be given the consideration. Not a reason in this world why they should have allowed it, because there are plenty of programs where you can deed your uh, land to the Virginia Outdoor Foundation and keep it wild forever. It was wetlands and they had to go through a lot of trouble to get permission to develop it and put in sewer and chase out all the deer and the antelope you know. And um, so that, you know that is something that we have lost, it’s not in the town of Ashland actually just outside the town more I guess you would say Hanover County, but our address is Ashland and our hearts are broken, because of the development.

**AB:** Would you say that there are any differences between I guess some of the older houses or maybe some of the newer style houses on either end of the college, would you say that there are differences?

**PE:** Well there are some differences that are obvious because houses were built in a certain era. Uh, by and large I think you know most of the newer houses tried to keep their development in line with what was already there. There’s only one or two really what I call ranch burgers on the Railroad Avenue. Uh you know pretty much pleasant, and there’s a lot of other streets in Ashland that are all newer homes that are lovely and you know have developed in the same way as a cohesive unit because the houses are of the same era and are very much alike, but still comfortable and lovely and well kept. But to me the old houses have a lot more appeal, and I think it just depends on what you like. But by and large I can not think of, well I guess there’s two or three down at the end of the Railroad Avenue and there’s one brick ranch burger. But other than that really most of them went up at the same time or nearly the same time. You can find a lot of good history about them in the Old Homes Book too, if you have a chance I’m sure they have that at the library up there at school.