One Ashland, Many Voices Oral History Project
Transcript of Interview with Dr. Hill Carter

Interviewee: Dr. Hill Carter; Mrs. Carter also in attendance
Interviewer: Emily Chilton; Danny Jones also in attendance
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Location: Ashland, VA
Transcribed By: Emily Chilton
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EC: Danny? ...Perfect

EC: Dr. Carter, How long have you been in Ashland

HC: um, on and off since 1946, um when I was born. My father uh was born and raised here over where the post office is right now and uh he would bring us down from Washington which is where I was born. I’m not a native Ashlander which, much to my discredit, um, but he would bring us down and visit grandma and grandpa who lived over where the post office is right now so I’ve known Ashland for um what is that 60 years, over sixty years (spoken softly: “and then”) in 1975 my wife and I moved here with uh 2 small children and started a medical practice um or went into a medical practice with Dr. Lee and so we’ve really been here for 34 years with our family

EC: You moved here from Washington D.C . . . . Okay. Um what community did your family first move uh moved to when you uh came here?

HC: Right here on College Avenue.

EC: Okay, and wha-what was Ashland like when you first got here and uh also through your childhood visiting your grandparents?
HC: Lots of difference because when I was here as a child it was back in the the early 1950s it was just a small little town uh much difference from Washington DC which is what I knew uh and grew up in and it was uh just coming back to uh dirt streets and you could ride the bike wherever you wanted to and steam engines going through town and just a lot of uh country excitement

EC: And, what makes Ashland so special for you and your family?

HC: Um I think because it’s a-uh- it is a town with and you’re living close to your neighbors but yet you feel like you’re not in a huge city and so it’s got a very country feel to it and I’m basically a country person.

EC: And what do you remember from your grandparents and the-their living here?

HC: Well they had uh-a big old roomy house over right across from the old post office uh on England and uh Maple Street and we’d come down and played with the chickens and the turkeys that they raised uh they were basically a little farm with in the middle of town. Uh when my father grew up they actually had crops and horses and cows uh on about an acre in right in the middle of of Ashland. When I came along it was a little more civilized they actually had electricity and running water um and my grandfather’s office which is out back right now we moved it over here um what right next door to the big house when he had his practice there for over 50 years so he was a country doctor in the middle of town and I just remember people coming by and visiting. Uh you’d sit on the porch and watch the traffic go by, listen to the trains uh and I guess the-I liked the freedom that was here uh. You could ride the bike anywhere you wanted to Grandma would just let us do whatever we wanted to do. You could ride from here to Gwashmy if you wanted to or up to vans crossing and watch the the trains um the post office was always great cause you had a key to actually go in a box and get your mail rather than have it delivered to your house. Uh there was a wonderful uh movie theater here uh that uh had great movies that only cost a very little amount, I remember maybe fifty cents or something like that. um it was just slow country living and then i-i- I guess that- I remember the summers cause we usually came for long times in the summer just having no air conditioning and things were just hot here no nobody had air conditioning and you guys probably aren’t here in the (Danny: No) summertime it gets hot in Ashland. So you really need air conditioning and of course grandma never had it never wanted it and they were never bothered by it but it got hot in Ashland

EC: And did your grandparents share any stories about their youth and um growing up in Ashland or living here?

HC: Uh yeah lots of ‘em I don’t remember any specific ones um I think they pretty much did what we did they had their own circle of friends um there was all kinds of activities here that uh kept them in Ashland but they went to Richmond uh they’d ride the train uh you cou-could ride the train down uh to broad street station be in the middle of Richmond within a half hour or or certainly within an hour they had a a bus that took them to Richmond so they weren’t cut off from uh culture and uh all the goings on in Richmond and and the big stores Millen Roads and Tahlheimers they could get down and do their
shopping down there if they wanted to uh but yet just like now days you can get away from the big city
get back into Ashland and just sort of settle in to a a little more slow time.

EC: What do you know about the CCC camp and building roads in Ashland?

HC: uh way before my time. Um but I know uh we also have a farm right outside of Ashland and there’s
an old CCC road that goes through Jamestown out to our farm and um we we could ride it in horses I’d
actually ride my bicycle uh down it and into town and I just remember hearing daddy talk about the ccc
road that was made during the 1930s I guess um and that’s my only contact with it um but all I know
about it.

EC: And what schools did your children attend?

HC: They went to Patrick Henry no scratch that they went to Henry clay kindergarten uh till the third
grade then Gandy for several years and then uh most of them went on into Richmond after that to saint
Christopher’s and Collegiate um oh and don’t forget uh oh uh the preschool Kiddy Kingdom. They all
went to kiddy kingdom.

EC: And how did teachers discipline students then?

HC: Didn’t need to they were good kids (laughs) they never never got in uh any trouble. I think kids back
then were a little more respectful of of their elders. And didn’t have quite the the freedom that they uh
my perception as an old person now uh the freedom to talk back to to older people and and act up I
think with our children if you told them to do something, they pretty much did it and if a teacher told
them to do something they straightened up.

EC: And what were the major differences between your education you-and your parents’ and your
children’s.

HC: I’m not sure there’s any difference between uh what we did. My father, who grew up here in town
commuted to Richmond to a private school uh called Maguire School in Richmond um and then he went
to the Univ. of Virginia. My mother went to a private school in Washington DC uh Holton Armes. Um she
was from Alabama but she uh boarded at Holton armes in Washington. Uh I grew up in Washington,
went to a private school Saint Autumn’s uh in Washington. Uh my wife attended um public schools in
North Carolina um and my kids started out in public school here in Ashland and then we made a choice
uh for them to private schools in Richmond so I think you know uh and then we all went to to college I
went to the Univ of VA uh one of my children went to UVA and then others went to Alabama and
Washington college and Sewanee so um you know we pretty much did what my parents did.

EC: And in what ways did having a college in town affect your life?

HC: Good or bad?

EC: Either.
HC: Um the good things um are and and were and still are that you get a sense of vibrancy, um in the community, the kids you hear ‘em talkin’ partyin’ playing um and that’s good to hear um even if it is one or two at at night. Nowadays the kids uh I think party a little more inside then they used to when we first moved here it was pretty wild when back in the seventies uh kids the the college kids roamed the territory and uh we we partied with them sometimes in our younger days and they uh would party up and down our street uh we lost many a bush for the to the uh k-uh to the KA’s for their um what old south weekend they dig up th-the deal was to go dig up uh um any kind of bush they could find and we had azaleas out front and they would dig those azaleas up and we could follow the trail of dirt through the through the street to their fraternity (laughs) and we’d let them have it and then we’d go get them um when the weekend was over and and sometimes we made them re plant it, and um it was fun it was a give and take proposition then we had cars sideswiped by uh drunken students um th-th-those are some of the bad things that happened. Um the college offers a lot of um uh entertainment and culture that we might not uh get if we didn’t go to Richmond and sometimes it’s a hassle to go to Richmond so the the concerts are good and the uh music that comes out here is good from the college. Um right now we are in the middle of a fight with the college uh with them sort of moving into the community and buying up houses that we as a community feel threatened by um the college uh if they get a house one it takes the house off of th-the tax base so taxes go up and two um it takes away the potential for having a family here with kids. And that detracts a little bit from the uh small town atmosphere here and we don’t want it to become too sterile we want children and families to be able to to come into town and if the college buys everything up which they look like their doing right now uh at least in our area um we lose that ability to do that. That would be a major disadvantage right now. But in the college’s behalf, uh in their defense they are trying to work with us and help us understand what they want to and so we’re, we’ve got a committee trying to work some of these things out.

EC: Did anyone in your family attend Randolph-Macon College?

HC: No.

EC: Um and what do you remember about events that took place at Randolph-Macon aside from the azaleas and the car sideswiping uh through your I guess younger years of living here

HC: Well now uh when I went to the university of Virginia we’d come down here to party with the Randolph-Macon guys and girls well with the guys there weren’t girls back then. Um and that was always fun, I mean there were great parties down here back in the sixties um and what I remember of them were very much fun and we had camp town races uh which I don’t know if you guys celebrate that at all do you all do you have camp town race weekend or camp town weekend?

DJ: No.

EC: I’ve never heard of it

HC: Okay that’s a thing of the past then that was a great bacchanalian uh um event where they had horse races just outside of town and a lot of people including us a kids and young adults were having a good time so that was always fun
EC: Are you referring to the race track on Ashcake Road.

HC: Wait a minute am I what?

EC: Uh there was once a race track on ashcake road. Is that where the it took place?

HC: Um no it was uh the one I’m talking about the Camptown races were out uh the originally uh at the Chainridge Farm up in Caroline county which is where the uh uh state fair is going now I can’t think of the name of the the uh at the meadows where the uh Hill Prince, Prince Hill and Cicada and uh it was a Triple Crown winner more recently I can’t think of his name all came from but that’s where the camp town races started and then it moved to Hanover county oh back in the 60s I guess mid early sixties I guess um and it was out by uh towards where Bear Island is now about half way between here and Hanover court house. Race track on ashcake road I don’t know about there was a race there’s race course street which is down um the rail road and they think the race course a race course was there at one time and that’s near ashcake but not on ashcake.

EC: Did your family attend church?

HC: Y-yea.

EC: Where did you attend and who made up the congregation?

HC: Now you’re talking about my immediate family wife, kids that kind of thing?

EC: Yes sir

HC: Um yeah we uh all go to uh Fort Episcopal Church which is uh just outside of Ashland up on uh Old Ridge Road

EC: Have you attended other churches in the area?

HC: St. James we went to for a little while which is Episcopal church on Beverly Road.

EC: And what made you switch congregations?

HC: Um I think I said at the beginning I was more of a country person and I just like going out in the country on a Sunday morning and coming back on a Sunday afternoon.

EC: Um what was your church’s and the minister’s role in civil affairs among the community?

HC: I’m not sure that’s applicable. Uh I you know we did the usual outreach uh things and we combined with St. James here in town to do some outreach things uh but country churches are more self sufficient and tend to do things themselves and within themselves and I like that.

EC: What are some of your earliest childhood memories in Ashland?
HC: Um well we’ve talked about some of them. I just remember visiting grandparents um I loved trains from the very beginning I always have I collect electric trains now uh and the trains were a big part of my uh childhood here in town and grandma would take me up on the railroad track and we’d watch uh the steam engines I remember some of the last steam engines coming through town back in the early fifties. Um scared to death, I remember peeing in my pants when they’d come by because it was so loud and she’d let me stand right beside the uh station and um it was exciting um and then she would, we had an old swing on the porch at grandma’s house and we went up to Doswell and she got a piece of wood and that was the step the stool that you’d get up on the train with we’d pretended and the swing on the porch was the train and she would be a passenger and I would be the conductor and I would help her up the stool and sit on the swing and then we’d swing on the swing and that would be the train going and moving and we’d go higher and higher and then I’d slow it down and then we’d stop and get off and she would do that for hours with us she was a wonderful grandmother who would uh just play with you endlessly. I remember the post office being a central place where everybody went and you saw everybody in the morning when the mail was put out and I think they’d put out the mail again in the afternoon. Um you’d have two postings and so you’d go back and check again and the same people would be back there and you’d converse and talk about what they had done during the day. I wouldn’t cause I was little but I’d listen to my grandparents talk. I remember grandpa being a country doctor and everybody coming from all over um...you listening?

Mrs. Carter: Yeah

HC: Uh everybody coming from town or out in the county to see him in in his office. Um I remember big old cars from the fifties that were uh pretty slow back then it would seem like, dirt dirt streets, a lot of dust, one stop light in town out on number 1 in fact that might have been the only stop light in the whole county for a while now we’ve got um uh probably got ten within town so that’s been a huge change. Um my families’ uh my family had another farm right outside of town which is where 95 interstate 95 is now. And I remember that being a a dairy farm and relatives worked on that and now that’s all motels and truck stops and fast food places that’s been a huge change

Mrs. Carter: McDonald’s

HC: And McDonald’s...what’s the name of that horse the the triple crown winner?

Mrs. Carter: Secretariat

HC: Secretariat yeah Secretariat, Hanover claims Secretariat but really he was born in Caroline county not Hanover but Hanover forgets that.

EC: Who was your childhood role model?

HC: Uh I guess my father. I just wanted to be a a doctor like him

EC: What kind of doctor are you?
HC: Family Practice

EC: And your father was the same?

HC: He was a cardiologist but uh he was a specialist but he did basically a country practice in Washington D.C. he was a a supped up country doctor but that’s what he did he was a very people person

Mrs. Carter: He took care of the rich and famous. He did.

HC: Yeah that’s why you really need to have interviewed him unfortunately he’s not here anymore but uh he had wonderful stories about all of his uh

Mrs. Carter: He was a society doctor he took care of everybody the rich and the upper crest but a but a country guy at heart.

HC: That’s why they liked him up there

EC: How were you expected to behave in front of adults?

HC: How am i?

EC: How were you as a growing

HC: Oh (laughs) I thought I was an adult. Um I don't think you know yeah there wasn’t uh no body sat down and said this is the way you behave. We just um we interacted with them. Uh and grandma was one of us you know she was uh just a great grandmother who played down and in the dirt with us um and um I don’t remember ever being disciplined about anything we just had fun with with adults.

EC: And I know you’re from a medical family obviously um but what kinds of medical care um options were available in Ashland?

HC: Well when I was a child there was really very little insurance you just um grandpa’s patients would come they’d pay him, we’ve got some old uh receipt receipts from him they’d pay fifty cents or a dollar for a visit a really expensive visit was about 10 dollars where he’d do some minor surgery. Um I think people paid in cash or in kind. I I know he got lots of hams and chickens and they’d bring him fish and um that type of thing. My daddy in Washington was uh they were more sophisticated up there and I guess there was some type of insurance but again most people just paid cash.

EC: Where were your children born?

HC: You may have to help me

Mrs. Carter: Charlottesville Va.
HC: I can let me try. My oldest was born in Charlottesville VA uh the next was born in New Port News Virginia and then the last two were born in Richmond at uh St. Mary’s Hospital.

EC: Were were they born with doctors assisting the delivery or a midwife?

HC: (laughs) no that’s a legitimate question.

Mrs. Carter: This is the midwife right here.

HC: (laughs) No, they were all doctor assisted

EC: And who made the decisions about housekeeping and the budget and other

HC: In our present house, wife. Laughs we have a budget uh I’ve it on a piece of paper we’re going to frame it one day we never

Mrs. Carter: When we were first married.

HC: When we were fist married it’s a joke we never went by it, always exceeded it.

EC: And how were decisions um or other decisions such as schooling and moving and occupation and the approval of marriage dec-made?

HC: Approval of marriage?

EC: If that if that was a if that was a situation, I don’t know.

HC: I’m not sure about that one let me answer the others, um maybe ask it again.

EC: How were decisions like schooling and occupation um and approval of marriage I don’t know if you had to have your if your parents had an influence on your marriage or if your children if you app- had to approve of their marriages or any other situations like that.

HC: Well we’ve approved of all of their marriages. (Laughs) I presume my parents approved of our marriage um we were pretty traditional um you know I asked Diana’s hand in marriage of her father. Um all of my sons in laws, sons in law have asked me uh

Here, the recorder stopped because the memory card was full. END