

**VOICES OF THE CAPE FEAR  
INTERVIEW WITH EVERETT HUGGINS**

**JUNE 7, 1995**

**INTRODUCTION**

**This is Sam Bissette on the morning of June 7, 1995. It's a beautiful day outside after a very rainy spell from a hurricane. I am with Everett Huggins in his lifetime home at 412 Market Street here in Wilmington. I'm going to be talking with Everett this morning as part of a series of talks with other people in Wilmington that might give some background on Wilmington that might otherwise not have been noted or recorded as time goes on.**

INTERVIEWER: So Everett, I want to ask you to start out just to tell me a little about this house and your being born here and your early beginnings.

HUGGINS: Well, this house was built in 1870 by \_\_\_\_\_ Martin a merchant here in Wilmington. My grandfather bought this house in 1889 and the Huggins' have lived here ever since. I was born in this house on April 20, 1906. That's a long time ago.

INTERVIEWER: It is.

HUGGINS: I went to school here in Wilmington, went to private school run by Miss Annie Harts.

INTERVIEWER: That's a familiar name. I've heard that name before.

HUGGINS: Yeah. The school was located in the back of what is now St. John's Art Gallery. It was a two-story wooden building. It had about, as I recall, about four classrooms. I went there for, go back a little... I started school in Union School which was at 6th and Ann Street.

INTERVIEWER: That was public school.

HUGGINS: Public school. I went there for a year and a half and then went to Miss Annie Harts for I suppose it was about four years. Then I went to Hemingway School which was public school. I entered the 6th grade there.

INTERVIEWER: Are you talking about 1912 or 1914 along in there I guess.

HUGGINS: Yeah. I started school in the fall of 1912 because that's when I would be 6 years old.

INTERVIEWER: What did we have here then in the way of a high school?

HUGGINS: Well, I was getting to that.

INTERVIEWER: Oh yeah, I didn't mean to...

HUGGINS: I went to Hemingway for the 6th, 7th and 8th grades and then went to high school.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

HUGGINS: At that time, Tileston what is now Tileston School was Wilmington High School.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

HUGGINS: I went there for two years and then New Hanover High School was built there on Market Street and I graduated from there in 1923.

INTERVIEWER: That's the present building?

HUGGINS: The present building of course it's been added on to.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, sure. Tell me now, after you left high school what happened to you?

HUGGINS: Well, I went to NC State which is now North Carolina State University now I believe.

INTERVIEWER: It had a name like Agriculture and Mining or something.

HUGGINS: Yeah. It was originally A&M.

INTERVIEWER: Agriculture and Mining?

HUGGINS: Agriculture and Mechanical.

INTERVIEWER: Mechanical.

HUGGINS: Yeah. My father graduated from there in 1900. I went to State and got a degree in Electrical Engineering and graduated in 1927.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

HUGGINS: I never followed Electrical Engineering.

INTERVIEWER: Well after you, in 1927 when you came out, what happened next?

HUGGINS: I entered the jewelry business with my father.

INTERVIEWER: I see. That's an interesting story. You told me a little the other day. Tell me about when that was started and your father.

HUGGINS: Well, my grandfather started the business. Before the Civil War, he worked for the firm of Brown and Anderson which was a jewelry firm started in Wilmington in I think, 1824 and he worked for them as a watchmaker before the Civil War and then he went in the Civil War in 1861 and stayed in the Army until the surrender. Then he went back to work for Brown and Anderson and left them in 1870 and started business for himself and eventually bought out Brown and Anderson and that was at 105 Market Street.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

HUGGINS: And then my father entered the business in the early 1900s, I don't know the exact date.

INTERVIEWER: Was that, tell me about the building on Market Street. Wasn't it built sometime early on?

HUGGINS: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: The one that's got George Huggins on it.

HUGGINS: It's got George W. Huggins at the top of it and that was put up there when he remodeled it in 1912 and the dates he's got 1870 when he entered it and 1912 when he remodeled.

INTERVIEWER: That was Wilmington's real heyday right along in there.

HUGGINS: Yeah that was ...

INTERVIEWER: Largest city in North Carolina.

HUGGINS: At that time, yeah it was.

INTERVIEWER: Well then you stayed in the jewelry business then for a lifetime career until you retired didn't you?

HUGGINS: That's right. I went to work in the store in 1927 and I closed the business out in 1973.

INTERVIEWER: Well I knew you in business when you were over on Princess Street as I recall, were you not?

HUGGINS: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: In the old Southern Bell Telephone Company Building.

HUGGINS: Yeah in 1924 my father bought out the firm of...Shuster\_\_\_\_\_, I don't recall, went by the name of Shuster which was at 117 North Front Street, and he bought the building as well as the business and sold the building in 1941 and moved to Princess Street where you referred to just now. And then, let's see, that was in 1941. In 1953, I moved to what was then the Murchison Building.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

HUGGINS: Had a store there and closed the business there in 1973.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, before we get away from those early years, you would have been around, just beginning to get to be a teenager about the time of World War I.

HUGGINS: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any experiences you remember about Wilmington at that time? That you can recall? Of course then, the only way to get across the river was on the Ferry and various other things.

HUGGINS: Yeah, that's true. It was a flat that held about three autos and was pushed by a small motor launch along side of it. And that was still in use until the early 20's when they got a conventional ferry boat.

INTERVIEWER: Then later built the bridge. (laughter)

HUGGINS: Then later built the bridge. That's right. In 1928 or '29 I think it was that we finally got the bridge.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do for entertainment when you were a boy in the period of time between 10, 11 and 12 and so forth? What did children, young people, do in that time for entertainment?

HUGGINS: Well Sam, we had picture shows then. They were just the silent ones and you could go to the Bijou which was on Front between Chestnut and Grace for ten cents. I remember that it had a wooden facade on Front Street and behind that was a tent with a sawdust floor and the wharf rats used to come ...

INTERVIEWER: Well, I had wanted to ask you about the rats because I heard a rumor about that. Didn't one of the owners of that live across the street from you here at one time? It seems like to me Howard?

HUGGINS: Howard Wells owned it. No, I don't recall that. The \_\_\_\_\_ and the Berrys' lived across the street there.

INTERVIEWER: I see. What did any of you do so far as the beach is concerned. Was that something that was part of entertainment in the summertime?

HUGGINS: Yeah, of course the only way to get there was on a street car. It took about 45 minutes and there was the Lumina Pavilion which had bathhouses underneath and you could rent a bath suit for fifty cents I imagine, twenty-five to fifty cents. And of course about the bathhouse was a dance floor that was a very popular place.

INTERVIEWER: I asked another person that I had talked with sometime back what kind of mischief they got in to in that period of time and I found out he said he was expelled from school twice, so I've been reticent to ask that except that you could control what you told me. What did kids do when they got into mischief in that period of time? What did they do? I know I did some in Rocky Mount when I was growing up.

HUGGINS: I don't know. (laughter)

INTERVIEWER: Besides to try to pull the electrical connection on the trolley on the back.

HUGGINS: Oh yeah, that was done. When, this happened in Raleigh when I was in school up there, we were still riding the street cars at that time and about a half dozen boys would get on the back and start going up and down, up and down and (laughs) they would raise the front trucks off the trolley and they would bump off.

INTERVIEWER: I never had heard that one before.

HUGGINS: There you are.

INTERVIEWER: That's a street car story from your time.

HUGGINS: The motorman would stop the car and come back there and raise sand with us.

INTERVIEWER: Uh huh, yeah. Do you remember anything specifically relating to World War I here in Wilmington?

HUGGINS: Uhh.

INTERVIEWER: You started to say something about Dr. Harper a minute ago and I was mentioning some doctors that drowned on the river.

HUGGINS: The river, they, I don't remember too much about it. I remember Dr. Harper was one of them, but there were a couple of German ships docked just across the river there and these doctors had gone over there to play cards or drink Schnapps or whatever it is they drink and of course we had Prohibition here at that time. North Carolina went dry, I believe it was in 1908 I believe or '09.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

HUGGINS: There were plenty of bootleggers around, you could always get good corn whiskey.

INTERVIEWER: (laughs) Do you recall later Black Friday in the late '20s.

HUGGINS: Oh yes very well because I was working at that time and I remember there was a, I can't remember what his name was, but he was a stockbroker, and I remember seeing him walking there in front of the Post Office and he would take a few steps and somebody would stop him and start talking to him. He would take a few more steps and somebody else would start talking to him. (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: (laughs) Probably very unhappy with what happened in that stockbroker crash.

HUGGINS: They apparently were aggravated, yeah. And it was pretty bad after that when the depression actually hit here.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember the old Post Office?

HUGGINS: Oh yeah. It was a brownstone building that was two-story and the weather bureau was up on the second floor.

INTERVIEWER: Um hmm. Well that was before the new building came along, I forget when, but sometime later. It's a beautiful building now.

HUGGINS: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Let's talk about what life was like during the times when you were in business after you got out of school, those years up to the depression and including the depression. What were things like downtown? What did people do? What did people eat? What sort of life was there and what sort of transition, were there still horses and wagons on the streets up until a certain point? Can you recall any of that.

HUGGINS: Oh yeah. There was horses and wagons up until I would say after World War I. Most of the goods was moved around town on what was called drays which was a one horse, one mule, two wheel flat vehicle. I don't know exactly how to describe it, but there were quite a few of those around here. They were the main means of moving around town.

INTERVIEWER: Um hmm. What went on down on the harbor side? Was there a lot of shipping back during that time? I know back around the turn of the century there were a lot of sailing ships there.

HUGGINS: Well there were sailing ships still coming in that I remember. Not too many, but quite a few. I remember a sailing ship come in here loaded with fruit from, I suppose, Central America. My father

took me down there and we bought a bunch of bananas. (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: (laughs) That had to get, that had to be from some other country.

HUGGINS: Yeah. I don't recall what other fruits were on there, but I do remember him buying this bunch of bananas.

INTERVIEWER: Was the old City Market thriving in those days?

HUGGINS: Yeah, it was, it was going full blast down there.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you buy your groceries back then?

HUGGINS: At the Wilmington Grocery which was located down here on Market Street between 2nd and 3rd right where the cooperative garden is now.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

HUGGINS: That was run by Mr. Al Hall. He was a member of the Hall family that had a pharmacy at that time.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah we had Hall's Drug Store.

HUGGINS: Now that was a different Hall.

INTERVIEWER: The Hall name was pretty well entrenched in Wilmington.

HUGGINS: Yeah. They were not kin though.

INTERVIEWER: Of what church have you been a member?

HUGGINS: I've been a member of the First Presbyterian Church for a long time.

INTERVIEWER: Um hmm. When was that church built about do you know?

HUGGINS: Yeah, built in I think it was only 1928, '27 or '28. The church that was there before was a brick church and it burned while I was in college, but it was on, I think it was New Year's eve of 1925, I believe or '26 that it burned. I recall I was getting ready to go to a dance and I was putting on a tuxedo and happened to look out the back window here and saw the flames of the church going up the steeple and of course I went around there to the fire in my tuxedo.

INTERVIEWER: (laughs) You were really dressed for the occasion.

HUGGINS: I was dressed for the occasion.

INTERVIEWER: Wilmington has been unfortunate to lose some of its downtown churches to fire. I remember across the street at First Baptist which has been over there, part of it, since before the Civil War. I've always been worried about the possibility of a building like that being destroyed by fire.

HUGGINS: The Presbyterian Church was the same style church as the Baptist church.

INTERVIEWER: I see. Let me ask you this, you've been in the Civitan Club for a right long length of time haven't you?

HUGGINS: Yeah, I'm a charter member of that. It was organized in 1939 I believe it was ...

INTERVIEWER: It's a nice club. I have friends among the members of that club.

HUGGINS: Yeah it was organized as a young club. We had a rule when we organized that no one over 35 could join. Of course that was soon done away with because some of us got to be over 35. (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: Who were some of your neighbors back in that time?

HUGGINS: You mean in this neighborhood?

INTERVIEWER: Um hmm. In this neighborhood, up and down the street, around the corner.

HUGGINS: Well, \_\_\_\_\_ George \_\_\_\_\_ lived around the corner.

INTERVIEWER: Oh really, I didn't know that. I know him, but I didn't know that.

HUGGINS: Yeah, he lived, I think it was the third house from the corner counting from the Synagogue.

INTERVIEWER: Um hmm. Next door?

HUGGINS: Next door here was, well when I was young, the Mills' lived there. Mr. Tom Mills who was City Clerk for many years lived there and then, his daughter married Gene Berry, inherited the house and then the Berry's daughter Jane Woodbury lived there. Mrs. Louis Woodbury, they lived there when they were first married.

INTERVIEWER: This a fine neighborhood up in here. It's had some beautiful houses. Unfortunately, some of them are gone. I'd have liked to have seen some of them saved that didn't make it.

HUGGINS: Well, it used to be residences all the way down to the blocks between 2nd and 3rd on Market. There were stores and two or three houses on the north side of the street. It was always businesses on the south side of that block. And then of course, there were residences between 3rd and 4th on the north side.

INTERVIEWER: Um hmm. Well, we get up on into the last several decades and of course Wilmington has changed. I don't believe it has ever grown as much as it's grown within the last five or ten years with what's going on in the way building in this down now, but there was, it's interesting to note that many of the buildings downtown on the top of the building just like George W. Huggins, there's a memorial marker. Many of the buildings there have the names of the people who built them and have dates and most of these dates are 1910, '12 and '14 along in there.

HUGGINS: Um hmm. Well, apparently about that time there was a building boom in the downtown area. Of course there probably were some fires down there that burned out some of the buildings and they had to be rebuilt.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, yeah. Everett, what recollections do you have in the way of experiences during your business life as a jeweler? If I were asking myself that question I could remember several instances. Some of which I couldn't tell about, but several of which I could because human nature being what it is,

when deal with people in business you find out the side of a person sometimes that nobody else knows.

HUGGINS: Yeah, there are a few things I can remember. I remember a lady coming in the store and asking for a lemon fork in a certain pattern of silver. I looked it up and unfortunately I didn't have it. I said, "I'm sorry I don't have that lemon fork, but I've got the tea set up here in that pattern." She ended up on buying the tea set. (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: (laughs)

HUGGINS: Coming in for a lemon fork. (laughter)

INTERVIEWER: Pretty good sales man.

HUGGINS: (laughter) That surprised me.

INTERVIEWER: Were there some experiences in dealing with the newlyweds, the ones to be newlyweds and stuff like that? Did you get a lot of that?

HUGGINS: Yeah. We used to supply a lot of the couples with their silver and crystal and china for the weddings. Another instance that I recall was this young \_\_\_\_\_ man brought a watch in to be repaired and engraved on the back was \_\_\_\_\_ whatever that battle was, \_\_\_\_\_, I believe it was, but anyhow, it was a couple of World War I battles. This fellow was too young to have been in World War I and we used to, when we would repair watches, we'd always scratch a number in the back and keep a record of it so that somebody would come in and saw well I had this watch repaired by you two months ago and it's stopped. Well we could look up the record and find out it was a year and two months ago that they had it repaired.

INTERVIEWER: (laughs)

HUGGINS: Anyhow, this particular watch had a couple of our scratched numbers in it and I looked 'em up and realized that that watch belonged to a fellow that I knew, so I reported it to the police and asked them to find out if it was a stolen watch and as it turned out, it was a stolen watch and it was finally returned to its rightful owner.

INTERVIEWER: Well that's interesting, that's interesting. What do you recall were some of the benchmark happenings in Wilmington during your life that you were here? Events that were particularly important or of that kind. Anything that you can recall?

HUGGINS: Well, I reckon building the bridges across the Cape Fear River was one of the important things. You could access Brunswick County much easier.

INTERVIEWER: What was on the other side of the river over there?

HUGGINS: Umm.

INTERVIEWER: I see a lot of old pilings and stuff over there now. Nothing but a battleship really.

HUGGINS: There were some old houses over there. I don't recall much of what was over there. \_\_\_\_\_ Shipyard was over there which was the repair yard they had where they could pull boats out of the water and work on the hulls.

INTERVIEWER: Let's just change things for a minute to say that I envy the fact that you are out on the golf course at age 89 and playing on a regular basis, but you said you aren't hitting it quite as far as you

used to hit' em, but you're still out there.

HUGGINS: No, I can't hit the ball as far as I used to. (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: How long have you been a member of the Cape Fear Country Club?

HUGGINS: Uhh.

INTERVIEWER: Way back there isn't it?

HUGGINS: Yeah, I joined it in 1928. I've been a member ever since. I suspect I'm one of the oldest members out there.

INTERVIEWER: I would certainly think so. I would certainly think so. Having been here in this house, you say you were born here?

HUGGINS: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: This house has seen a lot going on up and down Market Street in your lifetime. Did you ever know any of our ministers at the church across the way?

HUGGINS: Yeah, Dr...

INTERVIEWER: Dr. Foster would have been one.

HUGGINS: Dr. Foster. Dr. Hurt, he was, in fact, Dr. Hurt would talk very loud and I could sit on the front porch here and hear his voice. I couldn't make out what he was saying, but I could hear his voice because at that time, there was no air-conditioning and the windows were open.

INTERVIEWER: All the windows were wide open (laughs).

HUGGINS: Yeah and there was not much traffic going on in front of the house here.

INTERVIEWER: That's right. That's right.

HUGGINS: You could hear his voice. I remember him and of course Dr. Blanton well. I don't know, there have been quite a few over there.

INTERVIEWER: Well there were a lot of good people that have been around that have passed on, but there are not many people that are as active as you are. The only other one that has got you beat is Emsley Laney Wito is 91. He drives out to Porters Neck everyday in all the heavy traffic to see his wife.

HUGGINS: Yeah. He's got me by a couple of years.

INTERVIEWER: He's a remarkable individual. Do you want to add anything that you might can think of to what we have added. We have pieced together some interesting things as we've been talking, that you can think of. The Fire Station right around the corner, I can remember as a child, I was living in this area at 511 Dock Street, that's where I used to skate.

HUGGINS: Um hmm.

INTERVIEWER: And there was an old fire tower that we had around there and I climbed it many a time. My mother would have been horrified if she knew where I was.

HUGGINS: (laughs) Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And the Schnibbens lived around on the corner.

HUGGINS: They lived on the corner.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. I remember that because it seemed like it was the whole Schnibben family that has been connected with the Fire Department as long as I could remember.

HUGGINS: Yeah, the chief and one or two of his sons were firemen.

INTERVIEWER: There are some other houses in this area that people have been in there for a lifetime and expect that Leslie Boney and the Boney house is probably one that has been there for a long time, it's a block or two away.

HUGGINS: Yeah, of course the Boney's haven't lived there all that time.

INTERVIEWER: I didn't know, I thought that they had.

HUGGINS: Huh uh, no. The present Leslie's father built a house down on 3rd Street as 3rd and Church I think, a brick house, and they were living there when I first knew 'em.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

HUGGINS: The McMillans were livin' in that house before the Boneys.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Well, I'm glad to clear that up because I had thought all that time that that had been their family home.

HUGGINS: No, no, the Boney's are relatively new, new people in that house. (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: (laughs) Well we got, that's a little bit of history we got straightened out.

HUGGINS: Oh, I don't recall when the Boneys moved there, but my guess would be around 1950.

INTERVIEWER: Um hmm.

HUGGINS: Maybe a little before then, I don't know.

INTERVIEWER: What was over across the street over there where the Raney Chevrolet Company was.

HUGGINS: There were two residences there. The corner house, Mr. W.L. Berry lived there. He was a conductor on the Seaboard Railroad and next door was Mr. Herbert McClammy an attorney. He was a prominent attorney here for many years. There were two houses there and they were torn down when Raney Chevrolet bought'em and put a used car lot there.

INTERVIEWER: Was Dr. Thomas on the corner over there when you were here?

HUGGINS: That's right, Dr. Thomas lived on the corner and had his office in a little building that near the sidewalk.

INTERVIEWER: I got interested in that when we built the People's Savings Building over there and did all the excavations, we turned up a lot of stuff in the way of artifacts that were from the people who had lived there and the house next to the YMCA. I forget who?

HUGGINS: That was Dr. Milton lived there. He was a rector at the St. James Church.

INTERVIEWER: I see, I see.

HUGGINS: I don't know whether the church owned that building or whether they rented it.

INTERVIEWER: The YMCA has been there, had been there for a long time hadn't it?

HUGGINS: Yeah. Yeah all when I was growing up, why it was there. It was, I don't know...

INTERVIEWER: What was the building next to the Y used for? Later on it became an apartment building or something.

HUGGINS: It was the Colonial Inn.

INTERVIEWER: Colonial Inn?

HUGGINS: I think originally it was a hotel and then they changed it into apartments.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

HUGGINS: It was owned by the Pearsall family.

INTERVIEWER: Owned by the Pearsalls. How about the history of the Carolina Apartments over here next to you? How far does that go back?

HUGGINS: That was built in 1906, same year I was born.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I see.

HUGGINS: I have no trouble remembering that.

INTERVIEWER: No trouble remembering that do you?

HUGGINS: (laughs) Yeah it was a...

INTERVIEWER: Who built and owned that? Do you recall?

HUGGINS: I think Mr. Tom Wright. He and it was somebody else. I don't recall now who else, but I know my grandfather sold him about six feet of land there that, so that they could get the apartment on there then. I think it was six feet, maybe twelve feet. It was a strip of land.

INTERVIEWER: It certainly has quite a history in there. We were talking earlier just before we started recording this, I remember eating in the dining room when it was operating as an Inn down there for a

long time back with Claude Howell and his mother and a number of other people. A large house that it is around the corner that backs up to the Carolina Apartments, I've never known anything about it. Do you? Do you know anything about that?

HUGGINS: Yeah, that was the Williams' house. I really don't remember too much about them.

INTERVIEWER: Is there any connection between that and Jean Fountain who lives in it now.

HUGGINS: No, no. Jean's father bought that house about 1950 I reckon and she inherited from her father. The Williams' family, there was quite a few of them around her, but I think they've all died out now.

INTERVIEWER: We've got two or three more minutes. Anything more that you want to add that you can think of to fill in some interesting information about things that you've told us or things that I've said. The idea behind some of these is that some of these things that you've been putting on this tape are things that maybe you are the only one that can remember and now we have made'em a matter of record.

HUGGINS: Well, there is one thing that I can add. This block was burned. The whole block burned except the house around there on the corner of 5th and Dock and so all these houses in this block were built after the fire which...

INTERVIEWER: That must have been back in the 1800s then?

HUGGINS: Well, that was in the late 1860s because all these houses date from that, from around 1870s.

INTERVIEWER: Um hmm. I see, I have never know that and yet, I lived in this block at one time right through the block.

HUGGINS: Yeah, well Miss Mary Meares who lived next door told me that. There is one thing in connection with this house that might be of interest. Captain Massey, the Confederate Sea Captain married a daughter of the builder of this house, Mr. Martin. I believe her name was Emma Martin and he lived in this house for some years.

INTERVIEWER: Did this Martin have any connection with the Martin that was a ship owner that lost a daughter at sea and a son at sea?

HUGGINS: I don't know. I never heard if there was any relation.

INTERVIEWER: Well Everett, I appreciate the opportunity to visit with you and to record this. The Public Library when we get through would like to have these as sort of an electronic book to go in the North Carolina Room and I appreciate the opportunity of putting your interview along with a group of some of your other contemporary citizens in Wilmington. Some of whom are younger than you are, one or two older, but I think its remarkable what you've told us and I'm impressed by the fact that you can get out on the golf course. For another week on account of medical problems, I can't. On this pretty day, I think we'll sign off with that and thanks for letting me do this.

HUGGINS: Thank you for having me.