Gazette Project

Interview with

Farris Wood,
Little Rock, Arkansas,
12 April 2001

Interviewer: Ernest Dumas

Ernest Dumas: Okay, this is April 12, 2001, and this is Ernest Dumas, and I am at the home of Farris W. Wood, who worked for the *Arkansas Gazette* on three occasions through the years, and now lives here in Little Rock at 4323 South Lookout, Little Rock, 72205. It says on this paper that you realize and consent to this material being used and put on public record up at the University of Arkansas, Oral History division and you know that it will be available for scholars to look at and write about or whatever. You do not have a problem with that?

Farris Wood: No.

ED: Good. Okay, let's just start off with a little bio of where and when you were born and who your daddy and mama were and about your early life.

FW: I am a native Arkansan, born in Searcy in 1923. My dad was a plumber and a sheet metal man. He had a business in Searcy.

ED: What was his name?

FW: Steven E. Wood, Sr. He and my mother separated. He passed away in 1964, and she died twenty years later to the day in 1984.

ED: So you grew up there in Searcy?

FW: Yes. My sister was eighteen years old when I was born. She married in 1934. In 1935 [she] went to work for the Bank of Kensett and stayed there forty-five years. The Mills family — Wilbur, his brother and his father — were the predominant stockholders of the bank. For many years it was the smallest bank in the state. I don't know about now. I worked at the trade at the *Gazette* Publishing Company from 1940 until my service in the war — World War II. I returned in 1947 and stayed another ten years and went from there to a commercial printing house. I returned to the *Gazette* in 1968 and stayed one year, got on their computer program. Things weren't going my way, so I left and went to work for IBS, which is a subsidiary of American Express and sold securities and insurance.

ED: So you worked for the *Gazette* on three separate occasions?

FW: Yes.

ED: Let's go back before you ever started the first time. You kind of grew up there in Searcy?

FW: Yes.

ED: Did you go to school all your life there in Searcy?

FW: Yes, that's right.

ED: How did you get started in the printing business?

FW: My mother had a heart attack, and she had a friend — the family had a friend at the *Gazette*. He put me wise to of an opening.

ED: How old would you have been at that time?

FW: That's a mystery! I remember lying about my age because I was under age, and that was at the time I was filling out an application. It was about six months before I actually got a job. So that had to be 1939 and 1940.

ED: So you would have been about fifteen or sixteen years old, and you wanted them to think you were eighteen or something.

FW: I certainly did not want them to think I was sixteen.

ED: Yes.

FW: They wouldn't have accepted me.

ED: Yes. You had to be a – what was it, the union ?

FW: Yes.

ED: Yes. It was a union requirement?

FW: Right.

ED: Not so much the *Gazette*'s, but the union's requirement. To get into the trade union and begin that apprentice process, you needed to be at least eighteen.

FW: Yes.

ED: Had you finished high school?

FW: Oh, I . . .

ED: Obviously, you had not.

FW: I was in my senior year. I went back the following summer and finished in summer school.

ED: So you came down and applied and fudged a little on your age and . . .

FW: Yes, in the meantime my mother was recovering, so . . .

ED: So you needed to get the money to support the family.

FW: Right. Then I went to . . .

ED: Do you have older and younger brothers and sisters, or are you the youngest?

FW: No, I have two older brothers and a sister.

ED: So you say this was about 1939 when you think you went to work.

FW: When I filled the application out, certainly.

ED: When there was an opening and you went down and went to work. What were you doing? Was this called a "printer's devil"?

FW: Yes. Right.

ED: That was a term applied for, I guess, all the beginning printers.

FW: Right. Starting with Benjamin Franklin. I was handling the new type, putting proper heads over them, proofing them, getting them to the news room — just running my butt off. That's what a "printer's devil" does.

ED: He does, I guess, the shit work.

FW: Yes. Right.

ED: And "If you don't like it, there's the door." [Laughs]

FW: Yes.

ED: So how long did you work there at that stage? I think it was in 1939, so this was before the war.

FW: Well, once again, I was born in December of 1923, so effectively that's 1924.

ED: Yes.

FW: I worked there until my mother got enough on her feet and could rearrange some

financing, and that was a pretty big item in those days.

ED: She was still living in Searcy, right?

FW: At that time.

ED: Yes.

FW: Then she came down here with me. Seems to me like I was there about a year, and I went back to Searcy and finished my public school education. Then I went to Denton, Texas, to the Grand North Texas State Teacher's College. It's North Texas State University now. I got in there a couple of weeks late at North Texas. They sent for my transcript from Searcy High School, and whoever handled it sent them the original transcript, so for years [laughs] after I referred job applications and everything to Searcy High School, and they had no record of me being there! Now I have a diploma from there [laughs], but the original transcript is at North Texas State University. And if it was important, I would have retrieved the thing, but I don't think it was, really.

ED: Somebody just stuck that whole transcript and all . . .?

FW: The whole damn thing. "It's Friday afternoon, and I am ready to go home." I could just see that.

ED: Yes. Probably was. Some new clerk or something.

FW: Yes. Then I came back at the end of that college year, and my draft number was looming, so I didn't have anything to do from the end of that school year until when I was obviously going through that draft, so I went back to the *Gazette*. They accepted me, and I went back to work there.

ED: This would have been in 1942.

FW: 1942. I was in Denton when they bombed Pearl Harbor.

ED: So how long did you work there before you . . . ?

FW: It was a matter of months. They had my payroll records and everything, so I felt reasonably secure that I could come back — if, in fact, I came back — after the end of the war and go to work again, you know. The Fed [federal government] was pretty adamant about you returning to your job if it all possible.

ED: Yes.

FW: And the VA [Veterans Administration] in those days packed a power house. It had to, you know. There was a lot scandal around it and everything today. People are disgusted with it [now], but it was a different ball game [then].

ED: So you worked there a few months and then your draft number came up.

FW: I went into the service. I beat the draft. I went down and volunteered about a month before I was to be drafted — something like that.

ED: Yes. I did the same many years later, but it was peace time when I volunteered.

FW: But that at least gave me a choice.

ED: Yes. So tell me a little bit about what you did in the service.

FW: I trained as a radio operator and then later on [went] into radar. It was a violation of regulations to use the term. You could not go into a bar and talk about data. You could be arrested for that. I wound up servicing airborne radar — at that time, I guess the only airborne radar that existed. Radar was banned, at least to us — the British had it going a year or two before then, but on B-29s. I went

overseas with the Ninth Bomb Group, Twentieth Air Force and wound up on Tinian. I was there when they flew the atomic bomb. That was not my outfit, but it was another outfit on . . .

ED: How do you spell Tinian?

FW: T-I-N . . .

ED: . . . I-A-N.

FW: The Marianas.

ED: Mariana Islands?

FW: Right. South central Pacific.

ED: How long were you in the service?

FW: Three years.

ED: So you would have gotten out in 1946, after the war was over?

FW: I got out January of 1946. Here again, I just completed the year.

ED: Any other kind of war experiences that are particularly compelling that you'd like to mention?

FW: No. Looking back on it, it was not all that dangerous. It was awfully nervous. For example, the atomic bomb — the crews were instructed that if they could not bomb visually, they were to bring the damn thing back to Texas! [Laughs] That didn't inspire us with enthusiasm, but . . .

ED: But you knew what was coming up?

FW: No, I found it out when everybody else did. I was very uneasy about it. At the tender age of twenty-one, I knew this world was not — the neighborhood wasn't

ready for that. And, sure enough, it's still not ready for it. We haven't solved our neighborhood bully problems yet, have we? [Laughs]

ED: No. And perhaps never will.

FW: Yes.

ED: Okay. So in early January — you said 1946 — you got out of the service, and what was up next? What did you do then?

FW: Okay. Ten days before I went overseas, Beverly and I were married.

ED: What was Beverly's maiden name?

FW: Priest.

ED: P-R-I-E-S-T. Was she from Little Rock?

FW: Yes. I'm going to wander on you a minute here — she and Orville Henry were classmates. Orville, in those days, was about three feet tall, and he remained that way until the early 1950s, and some doctor found the right button and pushed it. The ones I think of — Beverly and Orville — and they both worked on the *Tiger*, incidentally . . .

ED: At Central High School.

FW: It's Central now, Little Rock [High School] then.

ED: Little Rock High School then. *Tiger* was the name of the newspaper.

FW: Betty and Bill Fowler were also classmates to both of them. Orville went to work for the *Gazette*. He worked as copy boy, you know, and general flunky around there as a kid before and at the outbreak of the war. The sports editor was a man named Ben Epstein, later of *The New York Times*, an excellent guy. I was

particularly impressed with Ben's wife. She was one of the most gorgeous women [laughs] I've ever seen in my life!

ED: And he left during the war, I guess, didn't he?

FW: I don't know.

ED: Orville was a copy boy, and the next thing he was a sports editor.

FW: Well, that is what I said. I am sure that they would not take Orville in the service because of his size. I never talked to him about it. We used to be neighbors out in Meadowcliff on the butte. I saw him this morning as he left the restaurant. I didn't see him in there, or I would have spoken to him. He walked very slowly to his car and got in the passenger's side, and his wife was driving, so that didn't look good.

ED: Well, it's kind of amazing. He's had pancreatic cancer now for about two years. It seems like it's been maybe two years ago since it was discovered. It was advanced, and he was given not long to live, and it is amazing that he has done as well as he has.

FW: Yes, that is unreal. I had a friend who had pancreatic cancer. It took him in two months.

ED: Well, we've all fought that. When they diagnosed it, I went to the hospital. Ann was distraught and all the family thought that he would not live over a few months.

FW: That just didn't look like him this morning.

ED: He has had some problems with the treatments— the chemotherapy, radiation,

and so forth.

FW: Yes, I think everybody does.

ED: Yes, so he may be going through another round of that right now.

FW: Yes.

ED: He has done quite well and has continued to work.

FW: Is that right?

ED: Yes, he has continued to write several columns a week and he lives in Malvern. [Note: Orville Henry passed away in 2002.]

FW: I had a partner in the big band a few years ago, the Swing Shift, that we've kept going through the years. His name was Jess [Huey?]. He died about a month ago, the same kind, but he lasted two months. He called me and said, "Farris, I've got a problem." He got tangled up in all that bad weather around Christmas and couldn't get back to the hospital, and the physicians couldn't get back. I'm not sure that played a part, but it might have sped up his demise.

ED: Yes. This is something we haven't covered. You said you had a band?

FW: Yes, I had a — well, we're getting on up into the 1970s now . . .

ED: Well, we can skip over it, and you can go back.

FW: Okay. [Laughs]

ED: I just don't want to forget the band.

FW: Right. [Laughs] I played in a band when I was in high school. This was the Swing era, you know. We had a swing band in Searcy, much to my mother's disdain. When the war started, I hung my horn up and never did think anymore

about it.

ED: What did you play?

FW: The trumpet.

ED: The trumpet.

FW: And I had a customer, Earl Smith [Inman?]. He was the personnel director to the staff. He said, "I want to get a group together just to blow — just a rehearsal band." And I said, "Let me know when you do that because I want to be a part of it." I am well into my fifties now, and everybody who met in those days just about had the same thing. We got up in the attic — "Where the hell is that horn?" [Laughs]

ED: Yes.

FW: We had a lot of fun. Joe's next door neighbor was a man named Kosty Bookalis and so . . .

ED: How do you spell that, roughly?

FW: I knew until you asked me, B-O-O-K-A-L-I-S.

ED: And the first name was Kosty?

FW: Kosty, K-O-S-T-Y.

ED: I have never heard either of those two names.

FW: He's Greek, and they're all crazy, you know [laughs], but we had the Style Masters going on for thirteen years.

ED: That was the name of the band, the Style Masters?

FW: Style Masters, right.

ED: Did you all play at reunions and . . .?

FW: Gosh, yes. We almost had a standing thing going at the Arlington, and everybody was working . You don't make any money at this! [Laughs] Yes, we've played the Arlington. We've played here quite a bit. I'm trying to think of some of the things. The last year I was with that group we had thirty-five gigs, which makes, what, about one every . . .

ED: Two or three a month.

FW: Two or three a month. And we're talking about eighteen pieces and two vocalists, now. It was the Swing era. We used the term. We used the charts. Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey, and so on — Artie Shaw.

ED: You started this in the 1970s?

FW: Yes.

ED: And into the 1980s?

FW: Yes. After thirteen years, Jess and I dropped out and formed our own band, the Swing Shift. He got a job with Royal Cruise Lines, and every time we'd set up a gig, he'd be out of the country. I called him over here one day, and I said, "Jess, I didn't take a young partner because I wanted to bill this band to work, you know. I am not having fun." He was active in the Pulaski Heights Methodist Church, and Dr. [James] Argue was a very big swing fan. On his last day, one of his assistants led him down the hall — wouldn't let him go to work — opened the door to the gymnasium, and I cut down on Woody Herman's "Woodchopper's Ball." His eyes got about that big around. The place was full of people. That

was very satisfying. That was one that Jess missed. And I played the Scotsman down at the Consistory. Doug Styles got an old hotel book. If you recall, when you were a child, every hotel as a part of its cabway had an orchestra. They usually ran seven or eight pieces each. They liked to get the introductions and the endings of a song — they liked these little Mickey-Mouse endings that weren't always the same. They couldn't always do that, but that was part of that era. Well, we got a couple of books to the group. By books, I mean books with eight parts to them, and we'd sit around and play these tunes. We did that for years. I was president of the jazz club and did biographies of the older players in the jazz club. That was weird! I would set up an interview like we are having here, and I would go back and say, "Now, if you can think of anything in the next two weeks because it was going to be that long before I write it, call me and let me know." A surprising number of them, within three weeks or so, would die. It was spooky.

ED: Yes.

FW: Oh. We had a gig in the First Methodist Church in North Little Rock two or three weeks ago with the North Little Rock Community Concert Band. I played in it about twenty years. I think that is one of my favorite gigs.

ED: You're still playing?

FW: Oh, yes. UALR [University of Arkansas, Little Rock] has a symphony, which is a community affair, kind of like the community band in North Little Rock, and I'm playing in that.

ED: You play the trumpet in the UALR Community Orchestra?

FW: Yes.

ED: Is that the name of it, the UALR Community Orchestra?

FW: Yes. It's a symphony — we've got strings and what not, violins.

ED: Well, I am glad we detoured into that [laughs].

FW: That doesn't have much to do with anything.

ED: Well, it does. I am glad you tossed that out, or we might have missed that altogether. Well, so to go back now to where we were. After the war when you got out, did you go back to the *Gazette* then?

FW: Bev and I went to the country. We worked for a year in Harrison. We worked for J. D. Dunlap.

ED: At the *Harrison Times*?

FW: No, he did not have that then. It was the *Boone County Headlight*, and about maybe six or eight years later he got the *Harrison Times*.

ED: The *Boone County Headlight* — that was a weekly, I gather?

FW: Right, right. They sell all sorts of monuments at the back door and things like that. [Laughs]

ED: Kind of a general printing house deal?

FW: Yes, right. And then I came back to the *Gazette*. Beverly worked for the *Gazette* with Inez McDuff during 1945. I think it was 1950 or 1951 that she freelanced, and they did some work for the *Arkansas Farmer* and stuff, two or three publications. Then she went to work for Clem [Brossier?] in the Associated Press.

ED: And from 1945 to 1951, she wrote in society news — what was it?

FW: No, she was assistant state editor.

ED: She was assistant state editor?

FW: Yes. Did you know Inez McDuff?

ED: No, I did not know her. I knew of her, but . . .

FW: Yes. There are a lot of amusing stories about people like that. She was very astute. She was a good editor. Good newspaper woman.

ED: I've heard her to be. She's one of the legends.

FW: Yes.

ED: You came back in 1947, probably, to Little Rock?

FW: Yes.

ED: You went to work at the . . .

FW: Back at the *Gazette*.

ED: Back at the *Gazette,* and she did, too.

FW: No, Bev freelanced.

ED: She was freelancing?

FW: Yes, she did a lot of assignments for Mr. Heiskell. There are two that I remember. He was a scholarly old gentleman, you know. He said, "Beverly," — I think she had two weeks to get this together — "there is a marked parallel between the life of Julius Caesar and the life of Franklin Roosevelt. I want you to do a story on that." It was beautiful. It was just goddamned beautiful! She did it. The Cuban Missile Crisis came along. He called her in one day, and he said

"Beverly, I think this has happened three times in our history. I would like you to get after that." [Laughs] And he was right! Just shear stupidity, all three of them. There is no way to explain it, American stupidity. They would pull into the wrong harbor. Back in the 1800s somewhere, they had their muskets stacked — that they [ ] a compass, and they went around this bay, and up here the damned Spanish guns came down on them. [Laughs] Sank everything in sight. And I remember she asked him that — part of that eccentricity. She said, "Mr. Heiskell, did you ever think about doing a story on the Brooks Baxter war?" And he just looked really tired. He said, "Beverly, more has been written about the Brooks Baxter war than there has been about the Bowie knife." He said, "We had a fellow who was in that conflict write a story, and it appeared in the *Gazette*." And she said, "When was that, Mr. Heiskell?" [Laughs] He said, "I think it was 1916 or 19 — no, it was 1916." [Laughs] She just loved it. [Laughs] There's stuff like that! [Laughs]

ED: What a phenomenal man! Okay, so in the late 1940s you were working at the *Gazette*. How long did you work there during that spell?

FW: Seems to me I left there in 1957 or 1958, somewhere in there.

ED: So, roughly, ten or eleven years at that spell there.

FW: Yes.

ED: What did you do? Were you a printer? Did you run the Linotype machines?

FW: Yes.

ED: Those big, old hot metal Linotype machines.

FW: Yes. And somewhere in there they plugged me in to a machinist. I worked under Dwight Schaer for a number of years.

ED: Schaer. S-C-H-A-E-R.

FW: Yes, his son has the blueprint company, Farrell and Schaer. Anyway, I became a machinist, too. When I left there, I went to work for the only typesetting house in the state at that particular time, and I got into another very interesting job.

ED: Where was that?

FW: Democrat Printing and Lithographing was kind of a . . .

ED: D. P. and L., I assume? Democrat Printing and Lithographing.

FW: Yes. The name of the thing was a subsidiary. The name of it was Publications Typographers, Incorporated. We were still running Linotypes and teletype setter-equipped Linotypes and so forth.

ED: Armitage Harper, I guess, was there and running D. P. and L. at that time.

FW: Yes. There are two things that I remember from that. He had a contract with Thomas Publishers in Springfield, Illinois. Those were the years that they literally pumped millions of dollars into a search. A Linotype operator would have a conference with the editor about this textbook, and he would get his style and everything down pat, and he would learn the idiosyncracies of the editor. And for that reason they would want this one man, this one operator, to stay with this manuscript until it was completed. There was a big horrible rule about homosexuality in those days. They had decided — someone had decided — someone with a lot of <u>money</u> — had decided that wherever you found

homosexuality you would find capital crime. And the search people were obviously after that, and they weren't really interested in much else. They wrote many, many textbooks on it, and I set the type on the damn things. Another thing that took place there, and I've always found this amusing: When John Fitzgerald Kennedy was elected, Erwin McDonald — I am sure you're acquainted with Erwin?

ED: Reverend Erwin McDonald, who was the editor of the *Arkansas Baptist News* magazine for quite a number of years.

FW: Right. He had decided that the battle of Armageddon was at hand and that it was only a matter of a few weeks before the Pope came to Washington and took over the United States of America, and he wrote editorials about it. I still have some copies of the damn things. They are out in the store room somewhere. [Laughs] Meantime — back to the homosexual thing — this took place right after I left there, but I was interested in it. They had a convention in the Waldorf Hotel — a psychiatric convention in the Waldorf in New York. These learned men with their scientific minds were in a debate about whether homosexual activity was normal or whether it was abnormal. That was the argument. They took a vote on it, which still blows my mind [laughter]! It wasn't proving anything or disproving anything! They took a vote, and it was pretty close! They voted fifty-one to forty-nine percent. Fifty-one said that "Homosexuality is a normal function, and we will treat it as such." Well, that was the beginning of the promotion of respectability to homosexual people, and it has rolled a long way

from those days, but I still find that very interesting [laughs].

ED: Well, let's talk a little bit about your long spell at the *Gazette* during that period after the war. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about what it was like in the composing room. Of course, now it's nothing like it [used to be]. You don't have hot type in newspapers now. It's all done by computer, and it's quiet. But was it was different in those days.

FW: A whole lot of staff people then. Here we got changes taking place. [Showing photographs] Here is A.R. Nelson.

ED: And there is Clarence Mansure.

FW: Yes. It looks like that page had been backed and they'd rolled a mat on it because it is clean.

ED: This is a great picture of A.R. Nelson.

FW: Isn't that something?

ED: He would have been, at this time, probably in his thirties, wouldn't he?

FW: Yes, I would say late thirties — not necessarily, middle-to-late thirties.

ED: I remember Nelson as an old man when he hired me.

FW: Yes.

ED: I went to school with Clarence Mansure down at Henderson State Teachers College. [Laughter]

FW: This was about 1951. Here's Clarence Thornbrough, Faubus's hatchet man.

ED: That is right. Clarence R. Thornbrough. This is a picture of him in the composing room. He was a printer. When Orval Faubus became governor, he

made, first, Clarence was his commissioner of labor. And then later, I guess, in his last two or three terms, he was Faubus's executive secretary.

FW: Yes.

ED: But when he was appointed, he was a printer at the *Gazette* and then at the ITU [International Typographers Union].

FW: Yes, he had been a president of the union.

ED: Yes. Okay.

FW: Can I jump back to ITU for just a minute?

ED: Yes, we want to talk about the ITU, the International Typographical Union.

FW: It does not exist anymore. I said that my trainers were unusual people. We had a proliferation of lawyers, businessmen, and two bankers. All of these people had come back to the trade in order to feed their families.

ED: Tell me about that. This was in the early 1940s, I guess?

FW: This was a result of the depression.

ED: The people who had been printers and had got some training had gone off and . . .

FW: Well, they were journeyman printers.

ED: Yes. And then they had gone off and had successful business . . .

FW: . . . careers in other areas . . .

ED: . . . but then the depression came and . . .

FW: Wiped them out.

ED: . . . wiped them out, and they came back to the *Gazette* and started their printing careers again.

[Telephone Rings]

[Tape Stopped]

FW: . . . but I ought to finish about this union thing.

ED: Okay, we're going back. We're resuming our discussion here with Farris Wood. Tell me about the International Typographical Union.

FW: Okay. When I went into the organization, the hue and cry was, "Why would anybody ever want to sign a contract with ITU? A damn good reason — they hired the personnel and that relieves you of a lot of financial responsibility and personnel within the company."

ED: So, ITU — really, what makes it kind of unique is that it is almost a subsidiary.

FW: Yes. Effectively, it is!

ED: It is almost an independent operation at the paper.

FW: Right.

ED: Since the union did the training and the hiring and then, of course, negotiated with the *Gazette* for . . .

FW: Now, the idea of negotiations has gone by the board. Before ITU approached the management of the *Gazette* for a raise, for example, they sat down and pondered and went over and over and over ways to improve production to get rid of as many of their own people as they could. In those days, we had an overage of printers, so overtime was pretty well nil. You'd just hire another man for the night. Not anymore. Not tomorrow. The emphasis was on training and the ability of these printers. Now, about the time that Thornbrough joined Faubus,

we had a groundswell of union growth in this country, and we had a different political climate then. They discovered that they could get one man, one representative in the legislature, and do more good for their cause at that time than they ever could by honest negotiations. [Laughs] They could make more gains in one year in the Arkansas legislature than they could in ten years sitting across the table from Allsopp. Did you know about Allsopp?

ED: This was Fred Allsopp, who was the business manager, I guess, of the *Gazette*.

FW: Right. Forty/sixty ownership of the *Gazette*.

ED: Yes.

FW: In my opinion, that is when the union started its decline. There's a long, gentle decline down the toilet into the sewer. The same thing when computers came along. If they had had the old-timers running that union, we would have had people ready and capable and just ready to take over the computer production. But they didn't do that. They weren't interested in training. They were lining their own pockets and interested in all the people to do with politics.

ED: But this change took place in the 1950s, when this kind of . . .

FW: Right.

ED: When it stopped operating as it had in the past and began to depend upon lobbying and influence and political connections, and so forth.

FW: Right. The *Gazette* newsroom comes into play here. You had a lot of women helping to replace men during World War II, but you also had some very loyal employees of the *Gazette* who stayed there by the hardest. You couldn't get tires

for your car. You couldn't get gasoline for your car. When you came to work, you'd leave an hour early so you could ride the damn streetcar to work. You come along to the late 1940s — and I think this is a predominant Allsopp influence, and I can't fault them — "We're talking about an orientation to a depression economy here. How do we keep this business going? How do we meet a payroll? How do we . . .?" You know, it goes on and on. But the newsroom people said, "We are going on 1939 wages, and we are ready for our raise." In the vernacular of the printer, they said, "Fuck you."

ED: And that's when they had the strike.

FW: That brought about the strike. It took two or three years for it to come about. But I am suggesting that the strike was justified. The strikers made two serious mistakes: One, they just knew that printers would not cross the picket line. All they had to do was just pick up the telephone and call [Collin Roberts's?] friends and talk to them a while, and they would find out whether that would happen or would not happen. That was their first mistake.

ED: They just made that assumption.

FW: They just made that assumption. Yes.

ED: That decision would have been made in Colorado at national headquarters?

FW: Yes, we would vote and tell Colorado it's our vote. Now, an official could say, "We don't care what your vote is because — ." But he would have to explain, "But this is what we are going to do and this is why." They got Colorado's attention too late, and they were out on the picket line, and they told us, "This is

not your quarrel regardless of how you feel about it. You are under contract with the *Gazette*. Go back in there and go to work." That was the first mistake they made. The second mistake they made was about six months later. Now, this was the American Newspaper Guild. About six months later, they embraced the circulation workers and the Teamsters Union. Now, Heiskell and the Allsopps had parted company by now. Yes.

ED: Allsopp was head of the operation.

FW: I think. Yes. One night they got every edition of the *Gazette* that they could possibly get on two or three trucks. They took them over to the middle of the Broadway bridge and they threw them in the river. Well, I know where the next edict came from, and it wasn't Hugh Patterson. [Laughs] It was Hugh Patterson's father-in-law! He said, "That did it. That union is not going back to work for this company. I don't give a damn if it costs every nickel I've got. Get anybody out there twenty-four hours to go back to work. Otherwise they're cooked. And to <u>hell</u> with those people who destroyed our property!" And, really, in all honesty, I don't see how anybody could blame him for doing it. Nobody has ever said so, but I'm certain it came from Heiskell because if you backed him into corner, he could make a decision! [Laughs]

ED: Yes.

FW: But there went the strike. And it might still be going on if they hadn't embraced the circulation workers and the Teamsters Union. That was ill advised. But those were the two mistakes they made. They were inexperienced in these things. In

those days because of telephone circuitry, I could call your home, and you could hang up and I wouldn't hang up, and I could keep this line open. Anyone who tried to call you from then on would get a busy signal. And, of course, they had those damn phones jammed morning, noon and night! [Laughs]

ED: So nobody could get through.

FW: Right. All kinds of dirty tricks, you know? Yes, if you can use any of these [referring to photos on the table] — I think this fellow . . .

ED: This is Sam Harris you're talking about here.

FW: Yes.

ED: Sam G. Harris. Here's a picture of him looking at a Linotype machine.

FW: He's showing it to visitors, apparently.

ED: Yes. Sam had two careers at the *Gazette*. He was there early on as a state capitol reporter and as a city editor, and then he left the *Gazette* and went with Witt Stephens for a while and became, I think, an executive assistant to Witt Stephens. Then sometime, probably in the 1960s or early 1970s, he came back to the *Gazette*.

FW: As an assistant to Hugh Patterson. When he left the *Gazette*, he went to work for Faubus, too. He jumped on that bandwagon.

ED: He was a big fan of Orval Faubus.

FW: Yes. Sam was a political reporter for AP for a long time, a very capable man. He didn't have to do all that. I saw him not long ago. Have you seen him lately?

ED: Not lately. I was thinking he went to a nursing home not too long ago in

Pensacola, Florida. [Harris died in 2001.]

FW: Yes. They sold their home and they have an apartment over on . . .

ED: Yes, they live over there past Monroe Street.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

ED: Okay, this is side two, again, with Farris Wood. Tell me some about the conditions in the composing room of the *Gazette*, particularly. How many Linotype machines did you have in the composing room at the *Gazette*?

FW: Okay. We had twenty-three. We had a battery of twenty-three Linotype machines, plus strip-casting machines, plus displaying machines. All of them were hot metal. Now, the Linotype machines themselves use a monomelt system. They would dump pied type into the top pot — melt it down, and it would feed the next pot.

ED: Let me interrupt here for a minute. Pied type. P-I-E-D.

FW: Right.

ED: It's type that's been thrown away. For example, if the proofreader makes a correction and that correction is made in hot type, the old line would be replaced, and it's just laying on the floor.

FW: Right.

ED: So, eventually, it's all scooped up and thrown back in there and heated up again.

FW: It's picked up with a shovel and put back into the top pot. Okay.

ED: This is hot lead.

FW: Right. Lead, tin, and antimony. Please don't ask me what antimony is.

ED: A-N-T-I-M-O-N-Y. I don't know what it is, either.

FW: Yes. But the mix is important. Men would come around once a month to take samples. After the metal is used over and over and over, it begins to lose its body, and you can't have that. On the other hand, you need it soft enough to cut and place where you want it. But back to those pots, they ran from five-hundred to five-hundred-and-fifteen degrees each, and that — twenty-three times two, times the strip casters and the display — in one room, it gets pretty hot!

ED: In August in Arkansas — so it might . . .

FW: Temperatures would run one-hundred-and-ten or one-hundred-and-twelve degrees at midnight, and it was beginning to cool off a little bit then.

ED: About working conditions — of course, the union had a big role in the working conditions. They contracted with the *Gazette* on salaries and such.

FW: We would look the other way for an awful lot of infractions, as any function in the union will do. The *Gazette* management realized, "We can't go too far here or we'll be called up on the carpet." There was not really any abusiveness. The union took a bad rap because they were never around in your conversation to hear about it, so if anything goes wrong, we can blame it on the union.

ED: Yes.

FW: They won't know the difference. Yes. They're a bunch of bastards, anyway! [Laughs]

ED: Everybody knows that!

FW: Everybody knows that! Yes! [Laughter]

ED: I don't know whether this was covered, whether we've missed this portion when the tape ran out a minute ago, but I want to come back to it.

FW: Yes.

ED: You had mentioned earlier about the large number of hearing-impaired people who worked at the *Gazette*.

FW: Okay.

ED: It may already be on tape, but just in case.

FW: It's an excellent trade for the hearing impaired because, for one thing, they're not bothered by the noise. Their concentration is better. Now, they're a little bit harder to train because you're speaking another language. I was always going to learn to sign, and I never did quite get around to it, which meant if we were going to get technical about any problem, I had to have an interpreter. Either that, or I had to write it down.

ED: Now, I remember at the *Gazette*, if you went back into the composing room, sign language was really in evidence. You saw nearly all of the people talking in sign language because of the large number of deaf people.

FW: We had a deaf man with a Ph.D. back there. His name is Drake, and I think he's retired from the deaf school.

ED: Did the union or the *Gazette* make a decision to seek these people out? Or did it just come to happen that way and people who were deaf would realize, "This is a place where I'd have an opportunity," and they would apply?

FW: Right. I think it just happened that way. There is always a rogue element who called them "dummies" and so forth. Most of us said, "Welcome. If there is anything I can do to help you, I want to."

ED: And you had some other — not just hearing impaired, but there were some other people with disabilities in the composing room. I've forgotten them now. There were so many people here. One young man who was disabled. I've forgotten what his name is.

FW: Oh, yes.

ED: He worked there for many years.

FW: Yes. He has a lawnmower shop over in North Little Rock now.

ED: He is severely disabled, as I remember, then. I've forgotten his name.

FW: He was a polio victim, wasn't he?

ED: I think he was. He was severely disabled. A lot of companies and a lot of unions, also, would be reluctant to hire people like that, thinking that they were a greater risk to occupational hazards because of their disabilities.

FW: Yes. The *Gazette* wouldn't have a choice there. This was our man.

ED: The union did it. The union had a remarkable safety record, did it not?

FW: Yes. And there is another element in this union business. One thing with this union business: One of the causes for dismissal is incompetence. There is only one judge of incompetence in that composing room, and that's the man who works for the front office, who also has a union card, incidentally. But anytime he says, "You're incompetent. Turn your light out." Or "You're incompetent for

drinking," or anything else — that's it! So I'm suggesting that this company man determined whether you're competent or whether you were not competent. Now, you get into some fights on that because here's this guy — he's been competent. He's worked for you for ten years, and he's been competent every night he's done it, and you tell me that he's suddenly not competent? Something is wrong here! If he's sober, something is wrong. So they watched their P's and Q's in there. But a new man comes in and the boss doesn't like his work, that's it! And he doesn't have to prove anything. He determines the competency or the lack of it. The ITU took an awful lot of bad raps from a lot of people. Hell, it was just an easy place to pass the buck. [Laughs]

ED: Sure. But, still, it was kind of remarkable that an operation with so much equipment had such a good safety record.

FW: Yes.

ED: To me, anyway, there was frighteningly risky equipment with all this hot metal that could do some permanent damage very easily. Boiling lead all over the place, these extremely complicated machines, people with hearing impairments who had trouble communicating. You had people with disabilities — yet, they had a remarkable safety record.

FW: You might have had another element in there, Ernie. People were not just looking for an excuse to go into court and sue somebody. We have that orientation today, but that wasn't around in those days.

ED: Not in those days.

FW: With deaf people as machinists — the deaf people would call me over and take my hand and put it on the machine. And I thought, "What the hell do you want from me?" Well, he felt something in the rhythm of that machine that wasn't right. I can't figure it. I don't know what you call it. Then he'd write me a note, "It's going to break within the next ten minutes." "Let it break!" And he would! [Laughs] Talking about disabilities, part of the territory in the newspaper business — I don't know how it is now, but I suspect it's the same. Whether you're a printer, a pressman, a news reporter, or an editor, is alcoholism. As a matter of fact, I'm an alcoholic. But that just goes with the trade. I had a feeling about this. I've never seen a study on it or anything, but you've got a high-tension job. You're meeting, if you're a printer, sometimes dozens of deadlines a day. You go home at the end of the day, and you're really tied in knots. Basically, reporters are the same way. The old sign says, "Why is there never time to do it right, but always time to do it over?" That kind of fits the reporters. But you go home and you'd hit yourself with about three or four drinks, and you're relaxed in less than ten minutes. Well, a year from then, it takes a little more than three or four. You're after the after-effects more than that. I think that's what happens to them.

ED: Yes.

FW: And it gets to be habit. It's a repetitive behavior pattern that just goes on and on.

ED: The ITU. What was the number of the Little Rock?

FW: Ninety-two.

ED: Does that mean it was the ninety-second union?

FW: Ninety-second local.

ED: Local in the country.

FW: I wrote this up years ago because I was afraid I would forget the details. If you're interested in this, the way it came about — somewhere around the time the *Gazette* came into existence, around the 1820s or 1830s, somewhere in there, the average life expectancy of a printer was twenty-eight years. Now, if he had a six-year apprenticeship, he served as a journeyman for that length of time and he dies, usually with tuberculosis, and usually with very impaired vision. So the men who knew best got together and said, "This is not necessary. We can help this TB thing by having a little better ventilation, and we can help the eyesight thing with a little better light." Some of them were actually working by candlelight in the daytime in cellars. I don't know why they always relegated print shops to the dark side of the building [laughs], but they wouldn't . . .

ED: Yes.

FW: So they started having meetings, and the way that they'd avoid management interference was they'd tell them they were having a printer meeting. Thus, the term, "chapel." The *Gazette* chapel was part of Local 92. The *Democrat* chapel was a part of Local 92. It was before the turn of the century that ITU established the first research hospital in tuberculosis. There wasn't any other TB research going on. Since it took the biggest toll on their lives, they addressed the problem. They had research positions, and they were working at it full time. That's a

management point of view. Our whole society has changed since ITU was founded. There will probably never be another union, trade or otherwise, that will meet the same criteria that ITU did, as far as negotiations, fair play, the whole nine yards. The idea that I had to prove to you how I'm going to improve production before you'll give me a raise really puts me in a spot here. You'll not ever hear of that today.

ED: Was the ITU the first union in Arkansas?

FW: I don't know. They've been a long time.

ED: It seems that it was among the very first because it came into being in . . .

FW: Well, you mentioned C. E. Palmer a while ago. He got a real hard-on for the union.

ED: Yes, he hated unions. C. E. Palmer was a publisher — the owner of what is now the Hussman newspapers in south Arkansas.

FW: Yes.

ED: Palmer was Walter Hussman's grandfather.

FW: Yes. He promoted teletype set. This was a kind of mechanical monster that you put on top of another mechanical monster to set type. They were looking for automation here, but they were going about it [laughs] a hell of a bad way, I think.

ED: Yes.

FW: Well, he set up this teletype, and he put a lot of money into the research at Teletypesetter Corporation. It had been around since, oh, I think, right after World War I. As a matter of fact, the people who put it together and invented it

tried to market it, but they couldn't get anybody to listen to them and, really, for some pretty good reasons! [Laughs] Talk about Fibber McGee's closet, now! [Laughs] They had them at the *Gazette*. This little crippled guy we were looking at was nursing a teletypesetter sitting on top of a Linotype keyboard.

ED: He used a perforated tape, didn't he?

FW: Right. Right.

ED: He tried to put everything into a perforated tape, and it would run into the typesetting machines and set it so that if you're standing beside it — rather than an operator sitting there typing on this machine — you'd see the keys move on their own, kind of like a player piano.

FW: Yes. The purpose — and John Wells bought into it, too, where the purpose is defeated — you've still got this guy . . .

[Telephone Rings]

FW: . . . for every key stroke, you've still got it on that damn teletype setter.

[Tape Stopped]

ED: Okay, so the teletype setter . . .

FW: To me it's ridiculous. It always was and still is. I got so I would nurse the thing along and make it run. Once again, it's a need to, or it's a desire to, establish automation. So they say, "We are replacing a Linotype operator." Well, hell, you're substituting another operator for it! Here the man sits perforating tape. So they've just about got that being beat nowadays with the computer because they make the newsroom employee . . .

ED: Do it all.

FW: . . . do it all. I saw a paper, I think it was the *Washington Post*, last week talking about the hot-metal system. They pointed out that it was one of the jobs of printers to correct copy for the news people. No, it wasn't! It was a kindness. [Laughs] It wasn't part of the contract. You sat there. You belonged to the *Gazette*, and "Ernie let a boo-boo go by. I don't want the *Gazette* or Ernie to look bad," so I'd correct it.

ED: Yes.

FW: Until some idiot would go too far with it.

ED: Let's talk about a couple of other things — back in the 1930s . . .

FW: Now, I'm looking over my shoulder here. You see, I'm getting this information from the people who trained me . . .

ED: Yes. Okay.

FW: . . . who also were exceptional. There has never been another crew like them, I guess, anywhere — after the depression days were over.

ED: Well, earlier you were talking about the 1930s. You said that things got out of hand at the union. They had one long party. Tell me about that.

FW: Drinking got so bad that they couldn't control it. One reason it was bad [laughs] at the *Gazette*, according to the stories that I'd hear and I have no reason to doubt, was Fred Heiskell. He liked to imbibe, too.

ED: Yes, that's his reputation.

FW: He and . . .

ED: And Fred was the kind of — he was the editor in charge of the news operation at the *Gazette* and was a part owner with J. N. Heiskell — J. N. Heiskell's brother.

FW: So Fred ultimately committed suicide. I can control my imagination a little bit. I can see a man suffering from clinical depression and medicating himself with booze. Somewhere you're at the end of the line, and he'd reached that. So as soon as he was out of the picture, the printers kept going. Mr. Heiskell, once again, in his own quiet way, was quite capable of making decisions. He went back there and looked the printers over. Ernest Dodd, E. D. Dodd, was the third sub on that board. So he said, "Come in here."

ED: What do you mean, third sub?

FW: Okay. You've got this many jobs. We have men who want and need work and, as managers, we're trying to avoid overtime. So there's a first sub, second sub, third sub.

ED: I see.

FW: Okay. You need help tonight? The first help you need comes from the first sub. The second help you need comes from the second sub, and the third from the third. You could make a living as a third sub, considering inflation and . . .

ED: The first sub would almost be a full-time job.

FW: Right.

ED: He's going to get so much work.

FW: Right. The only thing he can't control is his days off. But J. N. called Ernest Dodd in, and he said, "I've got a tough job, and I've had you investigated. I think

you can handle it. I want that mess back there cleaned up, and I will back your plan. I don't care what it is. You let me know if you need money, whatever. But I want that composing room straightened out." And Ernest went back there with a Bible in one hand and a ball bat in the other, and he straightened it out. He threw a lot of nasty assholes out of there, too.

ED: Did he put Ernest Dodd in charge?

FW: Yes. He was the foreman.

ED: He made him the foreman.

FW: Right.

ED: He plucked him way out — he was way down . . .

FW: From third sub.

ED: He wasn't even a full-time employee.

FW: No.

ED: He was a third-ranking sub, and he plucked him out and made him foreman of the composing room.

FW: Yes. He had him a real Bible thumper there, and that's what he was looking for.

ED: Now, Ernest had a — he was a foreman for many, many years. I mean, he was a foreman back in the 1960s and, I guess, the early 1970s. I don't remember when Ernest died or retired.

FW: He died about a year ago.

ED: Oh, did he?

FW: Yes.

ED: And then he had a brother named A. T. Dodd.

FW: A. T. He was . . .

ED: He worked back there, too. Well, what did you think of Ernest Dodd?

FW: [Laughs] He's just exactly what J. N. wanted him to be. He was a Bible thumper in those days — as I said, a Bible in one hand . . .

ED: He didn't drink?

FW: No. That was his . . .

ED: He was a teetotaler.

FW: That's right. He became quite a womanizer, and his taste was terrible, but be that as it may, Ernest . . .

ED: He was seen with women, but did not drink.

FW: Right. Ernest really threw his weight around there, and he would cross departmental lines. He would come out there and interfere with your business — go downstairs — anything else. We could never understand why that was until just a few years ago. There were two employees who were protected when the Allsopps sold out. They made negotiations to sell their common stock in this company. Bill Allsopp said, "There are two conditions for this: One is that Ernest Dodd has a job here as long as he wants it. The other is that the Kellogg — I don't know if little Kellogg was still alive. Kellogg worked in want ads downstairs. Kelly . . .

ED: You don't remember his first name, do you?

FW: No. We called him Kelly. He was a little fart. His dentures and his glasses never

fit. His glasses would slide down here, and he was always adjusting his dentures. Kellogg came down here from Chicago in the early 1930s, and he was going to play [baseball] with the Arkansas Travelers. He got out there, and they liked him, but they didn't have any money to hire him. So he spent one summer out there. He started dropping by the *Gazette* two or three times a week and got acquainted with the people at the *Gazette*. Once again, the Travelers didn't have any more money than anybody else, you know. We were in depression times. So Allsopp said, "Kelly, I'm about to run an ad for somebody to work in want ads. Would you be interested in that job?" And he said, "I sure would." Now, this was 1932 or 1933 — something like that. Kelly went to work for the *Gazette*. He didn't have any family. He lived in an old rooming house nearby. The only life Kelly had was that newspaper and those damned want ads. He would spend twelve and fourteen hours a day working for that paper because he <u>wanted</u> to! I mean, sometimes the job required it, but they didn't force him to work that way. He <u>wanted</u> to work that way. And Bill Allsopp really got acquainted with him through the years. And those were the two.

ED: They had lifetime protection.

FW: Lifetime protection. Now, it took a number of years, but Ernest Dodd found that out. <u>Somebody</u> told him. And that's when he really started throwing his weight around. And I tell you, there were times up there that if I'd worked for that newsroom, I would've kicked his ass downstairs!

ED: Yes. Well, I know that Ernest Dodd was not popular in the newsroom. Of

course, I was a reporter. I didn't know how people like Bob Douglas and [A. R.] Nelson and the others related to him.

FW: Oh, yes. Do you know how they handled it? I don't know why they didn't do this years before. They hired a mechanical superintendent. They hired a foreman, and they took the mechanical superintendent's desk out of his office and moved it over in a corner of the composing room. Then the foreman started running the show back there, and they didn't give Ernest anything to do. They didn't give Ernest anything to do. That was smart management, and they should've done that twenty years before they did.

ED: Yes.

FW: That's the way they get around that damned contract, too! They didn't fire him. He sweated it out for months and then, finally — of course, I'm long gone. [Wayne] Bolick was telling me about this [laughs].

ED: And, of course, that's the traditional way now. In situations like that when you can't fire somebody, you just move them over. They did that in the newsroom in some other ways, too.

FW: Yes. Would you be interested in me rattling off a few names here from the past?

ED: Yes, I would — if you could mention some names and what they did and what they meant to you.

FW: Okay. I don't know any of these people that I do not have a profound respect for, and I'm sincere about that. I grew out of my childhood with that respect for them. The first one — I mentioned him a while ago — was Ben Epstein. We're back in

the late-1930s and 1940s. He was in charge of the sports. I talked about Orville Henry being Beverly's classmate. There was a man who worked for Orville named Adrian Cooper. Did you know or ever hear of Adrian Cooper?

ED: I've heard of Adrian Cooper.

FW: He went to the Commerce Department in Washington. I don't know why.

ED: Was he a sportswriter?

FW: Yes. And Clyde Dew.

ED: He was the managing editor . . .

FW: Right.

ED: . . . until, I don't know, the late-1940s or early 1950s, somewhere along in there. D-E-W.

FW: Yes. And he must have started soon after the turn [of the century] — at least by World War I. Now, Clyde had a habit. When he was into a unit count, writing headlines, he'd count on his fingers. You know, a fourteen-point head had so many units. A twenty-four-point had so many units. So he had that part memorized, but he would count on his fingers. So, naturally . . .

ED: They had to make an accommodation because a capital M and a capital W would count two.

FW: That's right.

ED: And an I, L, T and F count one-half. They are skinny letters.

FW: Right. But here he goes, you know, with that damned corn-cob pipe, which he smoked Bull Durham in, and he'd count on his fingers. Well, naturally, he

became “Count Dew.” Or, they referred to him as “The Count.” Now, all the new printers called him “The Count” and some of the newsroom — I don’t know about that. Okay. “Count Dew.” This took place during the war. He would be concentrating on some copy, and he’d think that corn-cob pipe was out of fire — he really did smoke Bull Durham in it. He’d shake it over here in a wastebasket and start a fire every night. And the women really didn’t want to hurt the old man’s feelings. One of them would come over and ask him something while the other would take the wastebasket over to put the fire out! [Laughs] That happened almost every night.

ED: Okay, then. Heinie Leach. L-E-S-C-H. Is that how you pronounce it?

FW: L-O-E-S-C-H.

ED: L-O-E-S-C-H.

FW: He was the make-up editor.

ED: He was the make-up editor. H-E-I-N-I-E. Now, Heinie worked there approximately — what would it be?

FW: Through the 1930s and — he was there when I came back from the war, and somewhere up in the late-1940s or early-1950s, he had a stroke.

ED: He was a legend.

FW: Yes. He stayed away from there a year-and-a-half or two years and tried to come back one night. I could, to this day, go over and cry, thinking about him trying to gut his way through that night. He didn’t have it. He was so broken physically, and he was shaking all over.

ED: And he'd had a stroke, right?

FW: Yes, sometime before. Everybody tried to help him. Harry Ashmore was really, in spots, a genius. The man was a very accurate intellectual. I had to admire him for his thinking process. Now, he was an insufferable snob. He refused to even speak to Arkansas newspaper people. Now, they would speak to him, and he'd just stare at them. We wondered, "Who the hell does he think he is?" [Laughs] But that was Harry Ashmore. He is, in my mind, like Douglas MacArthur. MacArthur, when you get past all that bullshit, really was a genius.

ED: Yes.

FW: He really did know he was doing, but it was hard for you to see that with all his facade.

ED: I came there right after Harry Ashmore left — I guess six months after he left. Now, I later got to know Harry pretty well. He often came back. But I've heard a lot of stories. He wrote so fast. He'd come out into the news room, size up the situation out at Central High School and go back in, and then in twenty or twenty-five minutes, he had written a beautiful editorial.

FW: Yes.

ED: A crisp editorial analyzing the various events.

FW: Now, this is my opinion. You don't have to agree with me. [Laughs] I think any honest intellectual pursuit of politics inevitably leads to a liberal posture. In my opinion it does. And that's who Harry Ashmore was. Now, I would rather see him be a little nicer to himself and other people. He did some foolish things. I

remember when he shut down the market page.

ED: Tell me about that.

FW: You know, he knew what was right. He knew what ought to be done, and he'd say, "We're wasting time and space on this damned market page here! Who the hell cares about the stock market? Take that out of the paper."

ED: He took the New York Stock Exchange listing out of the paper?

FW: He took the whole damned thing out of the *Arkansas Gazette*!

ED: And how long did that last?

FW: Months.

ED: Oh, really?

FW: Yes. And businessmen really came down on everybody. They started at J. N. Heiskell.

ED: Yes.

FW: And they prevailed upon Harry to put it back in! [Laughter]

ED: When would that have been? That would've been before 1957. It must've been in the early 1950s or something.

FW: I think so.

ED: He came to work here in 1947 or 1948.

FW: Yes.

ED: Okay.

FW: Another name is John Fletcher, John Gould Fletcher's cousin.

ED: John L. Fletcher, who was the business writer and finance writer at the *Gazette*.

FW: Yes.

ED: I think he'd been a Capitol reporter, maybe, at one time, but at the later stages he was a business writer.

FW: In terms of intellect, you had another giant, in my view, in my opinion. Gene Fretz came along some time later.

ED: F-R-E-T-Z?

FW: Right.

ED: Gene was a copy editor and make-up editor.

FW: Yes. Sam Harris, as I said, I view as kind of tragic. He had so much ability, and he didn't use it properly, in my view. And we've spoken of A. R. Nelson.

ED: Did you know Matilda Tuohey?

FW: Yes. She had a big mouth on her. Like a lot of women, she would've been all right if she'd shut up. But she was so proud of this. I heard a story a day or two ago related to that. I want to remember that and share it with you. Oh! This man was on a desert island with Cindy Crawford [the model/actress]. They were washed up on the island. They took each other into their confidence and got to know each other pretty well. Their emotions turned to sex, finally, and they were having a pretty good time then. One day, a steamer trunk washed up on the shore and the man went down there and opened it. It was full of men's clothes. So he called Cindy over. He said, "Would you do something for me?" And she thought he was half crazy, anyway. "Sure! What do you want me to do?" He said, "I want you to take your clothes off and put those men's clothes on." She said, "All

right." She got the clothes on. She said, "How about the hat?" He said, "Yes, put the hat on, too." He said, "You look really good. Cindy, do you mind if I call you Bob just for a few minutes?" She said, "Well, no. Go ahead." He put his hand on her shoulder and said, "Bob, you really couldn't imagine who I'm shacked up with!" [Laughter] So that's half the victory there to be able to share the knowledge. And that's what Matilda Tuohey did. She shared too much of it. And Spider Rowland.

ED: Yes.

FW: A few years ago I got to know his son, Ray Rowland, who is now deceased. As near as I can piece the thing together, Spider's columns are just spread all over the state. I don't know. Ray said he sent some of them to Bob Douglas. I think he sent them back or something. I don't know what all took place. Spider wrote after the fashion of Damon Runyan. He had his own language. Women were quail, and young women were San Quentin quail, and the legislature was made up of county congressmen, and on and on and on. Spider lived on the edge of the criminal community. In fact, he'd been physically shot with a gun several times. When World War II came along, he tried his best to join all three services, and they wouldn't take him for physical reasons. So Spider joined the maritime service and requested tanker duty. He went all over this damned world. As I understand it, he had one or two tankers shot out from under him. He went back, put dry clothes on and got on another tanker. Well, a couple of times a week he would write columns. When he'd come into the port city, he'd mail them all, put

them all in a bundle and mail them back to the *Gazette*. So the *Gazette*, pretty much during the war years, had Spider Rowland's column going for them. But that's the way it was done. Clarence Thornbrough — we know about him. He truly was a hatchet man for Orval Faubus. Carrick Heiskell — there was a tragedy. J. N. had a son who was the heir-apparent. Carrick was killed flying the hump for the air transport command. It went down over the Himalayas. His wife was working on the *Gazette* crew. Everybody was so fond of her. She was a tall brunette. She stayed there a year or two after Carrick was killed. I don't remember her first name. She left. I don't know what happened to her. Carrick Patterson, I think, was named for his mother's sister, and that was a tragedy, too. The Heiskell family, unfortunately, had the idea that they had to have a male heir in the family running that paper, and that's too bad. From where I'm sitting, Carrick did not have any talent or desire or anything else to be there. But I think he was doing his duty and was really screwing up everything in the process. Okay. We had women. We had Beverly Wood there in 1945. She earned $35 a week as assistant state editor, and that year, J. N. decided to give everybody a Christmas present, and he gave them ten percent of one week's salary. So Beverly got $3.50. Some of the people didn't — said, "Fuck you! I don't have to do this!" [Laughs] Frances Shiras and Edith Shiras from the *Baxter County Bulletin*

ED: S-H-I-R-A-S.

FW: Yes. Their brother owned and operated it.

ED: Ginger, the daughter, I guess, later was a reporter — Ginger was a reporter for the *Gazette*.

FW: Right. I'd forgotten that. Yes. But they worked there during the war years.

ED: What did they do?

FW: I don't know.

ED: They were in the newsroom.

FW: They were in the newsroom.

ED: They were reporters or editors or something.

FW: Yes.

ED: Then they went up to Mountain Home and . . .

FW: Yes, that's where they live.

ED: . . . they're with the *Baxter Bulletin*, the weekly newspaper and now a daily.

FW: Yes. That's where they came from. Frances married a man named McClellan who's dead. I don't know what happened to Edith. She married a fellow named Mayfield. Ruth Jacquemine — "Babe" Jacquemine . . .

ED: How do you spell her last name? Do you remember?

FW: J-A-C-Q-U-E-M-I-N-E.

[Telephone Rings]

[Tape Stopped]

ED: Jacquemine.

FW: Jacquemine.

ED: What was she?

FW: She was a reporter.

ED: Was this during World War II?

FW: Yes.

ED: This was when they hired a bunch of women.

FW: She worked for them before then, and she stayed with them after the war. Now, Count Dew told these women when they came in, "You are replacing a man in this newsroom, and he gets his job back when he comes back from the war. I want you to understand that." Mary Young was one of them. Beverly said it didn't bother him a bit when he came out and said, "Sorry, ladies. They're back!" [Laughs] Nell Cotnam was an old-timer.

ED: Nell, who was the society editor.

FW: Yes.

ED: C-O-T-N-A-M.

FW: Inez "Lu" McDuff. The story about Lu was that she was married — we called her "Lu," much to her disdain. In the early 1930s, when she was a young woman, she had a lovelorn column, and she signed it, "Lovingly, Lu." So the printers would never let that one go. They continued to call her that.

ED: So she wrote a kind of Ann Landers column?

FW: Yes. She got married and a daughter was born. A year or two after she was married, she decided she had married beneath herself and she didn't need the son of a bitch anymore, and she kicked him out. The poor old boy was heartbroken. He worked for the railroad or something. I don't know what he did, but it wasn't

up to her standards. So he went out to Oklahoma and bought somebody off their job out there [laughs] and bought a hundred or so acres of land, and within five years, he had struck oil on that land. She'd been bitter about that ever since. Lu died three or four years ago. She was working for the *Democrat*. And Millie Woods.

ED: Millie Woods was the food editor of the *Gazette*.

FW: Yes. I remember a critique she did on a ballet performance in Little Rock, and somebody wrote in, "Who the hell are you? I'd just like to know what your qualifications are." Well, Millie had been through some of the best finishing schools in Paris. I remember the headline, "Sixty-Four Reasons Why I Know What I'm Talking About," or some words to that effect. [Laughs] Charlotte McWhorter was an absolutely gorgeous woman who didn't really have to do anything but just let you look at her.

ED: Was she in the newsroom as well?

FW: Yes. She was in the society department in the middle 1950s. She was just a knockout. The only story she ever wrote, I still remember. She was talking about her husband going deer hunting. Have we got enough tape for this? [Laughs]

ED: Go ahead. We'll stop it if we don't.

FW: It talked about all his preparations and everything. He'd go out, and he'd shoot a deer out in the woods, put the damned carcass up over the hood of his car . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[Beginning of Tape 2, Side 1]

FW: . . . and the next day, he gets up and dresses the deer out, and then they start preparing the deer to eat. There's all this conversation about the wild taste. And Charlotte said, "You know what that wild taste is? That meat is rotting!" [Laughs] But I remember that one story that she wrote. Grace Marjorie Wood — did you know her?

ED: No. Grace Marjorie Wood. Who was she?

FW: She was connected with the society department.

ED: She wasn't related to Millie?

FW: No. Millie was Woods.

ED: Okay.

FW: Betsy Hamlin was J. N.'s [Heiskell] daughter. She was just some kind of a jewel. She was an attractive women and did everything in good taste. She did not just hob-nob with the employees for the sake of it, she was one of us and made that fact known. She left there, I don't know, in the early 1950s. She married somebody who owned New York, I think [laughs]. The evolution of the paper I find interesting. I call it the "celebration of snobbery," a column they had, "Among Ourselves." Another one that they had . . .

ED: This "Among Ourselves," it ran every Sunday, didn't it? Or do you remember?

FW: Yes. It ran every Sunday.

ED: And it was what the high-brow people were doing.

FW: That's right. That's right.

ED: Little tidbits about the . . .

FW: Yes. Another one — we enjoyed Harry Ashmore's mistakes. We didn't help him make them, but we thoroughly enjoyed them! He came into the *Gazette* with his liberal viewpoint and everything, which is fine, you know, but for two or three years after he was there, he ran a column every damned day that was entitled, "Deaths of Negroes." It wasn't part of the obituary page. I said, "One part of the population — " and all this has to do with context — "We had a very large functionally illiterate group of people in Arkansas at that time." Then I said, "We have the same amount today, but now they're wearing clean clothes." [Laughs] You could detect these people because they smelled bad, you know?

ED: Yes.

FW: They really were functionally illiterate.

ED: Let me bring up a couple of other things that I really wanted to cover.

FW: Okay.

ED: One is that you have some knowledge about the original printing press of the *Gazette*. Tell me about that.

FW: Okay. It was, for years, in that warehouse area. Peanuts sandblasted it, refurbished it, and brought it — I think he even put a form on it.

ED: You're thinking — this was down in the bowels of the *Gazette* . . .

FW: Right. It was cast iron, and it weighs somewhere between one thousand and two thousand pounds. I can't look at cast iron and tell you how much it weighs.

ED: But you're convinced that was the original?

FW: I'm convinced that's it.

ED: That was the original press that William A. Woodruff used when he came over and started the *Gazette* in 1819 and so forth?

FW: I am convinced of that. Now, there's more to this story. Peanuts got this in his younger days from some old-timer who was long gone.

ED: Now, who was Peanuts, again?

FW: He's the Linotype machinist that I worked for back there. He said Woodruff — and this is his understanding of the story — William A. Woodruff bought that George Washington hand press — I believe that's what it's called — in St. Louis. He took it apart and it comes apart into three pieces. He put it on a raft. Now, we're back, where? 1830 or before?

ED: Or 1819, probably.

FW: Yes. Okay. He put those pieces on a raft. I'm sure he had some help with it, but according to the story, it took him two years to get that press to Memphis on a raft. He was on the Mississippi River, now. And you think about it. It's kind of a wonder that he did it in two years. He would tie that raft, I hear, and before he untied it, he'd have another line to a tree over here. Then he'd [pull the raft along], and that sucker would go the length of that rope. Then he'd do it again. Undoubtedly, he'd come to a place where it was easier for him to be on the other side of the river, and so forth. But that was quite remarkable. He got to Memphis and took the three pieces and put them on a mule train and brought it to Arkansas Post, where he set it up and printed the *Gazette* on it for quite some time, however long it was at Arkansas Post. Yes, I believe that's the original press.

ED: Because the old Territorial Restoration had a press over there that was purported to be — well, I guess, a replica of the original.

FW: A wooden replica.

ED: Yes. But this was the genuine McCoy.

FW: Right. And the subsequent years after Beverly and I saw that in the late 1940s or 1950s, somehow, we lost the word "replica" and it became an actual press that people were told printed the *Gazette*. Now, Margaret Ross doesn't know that, and I don't want to interfere with Margaret Ross. Bless her heart, she doesn't need anybody disputing her, but I'm convinced she's wrong there. Probably somebody told her this, and she took it for the truth.

ED: So Hugh Patterson, at some point, had these pieces down in the basement of the *Gazette* cleaned up and brought out and . . .

FW: They were on display.

ED: . . . on display there in the lobby of the *Gazette*.

FW: At the end of the hallway.

ED: At the end of the hallway.

FW: Right. Now, we had another thing here, and I'm more in pursuit of this diplomacy. I mean, I'm out of it. We had pictures — some of them large pictures in the old composing room. They were hot-metal setup. We had pictures four and five feet all the way around that enormous room. Those pictures went back to <u>before</u> the turn of the century. These are prints. Basically, Clarence Thornbrough was responsible for their being there. He put the word out, and everybody started

bringing him old pictures, people who lived in Arkansas and Little Rock. Those pictures disappeared when they brought the computerized setup in. I was concerned about this. You've got a pictorial history of our state here. That makes it important to me! This is the ticklish part. This is not just my idea. One or two employees of [Walter] Hussman told me that he was still bitter about some of their struggles with the *Gazette*. The only thing, to my knowledge, that corroborates that is that Hussman, by his own testimony, lost money for seventeen years so that he could fight the *Gazette*, or so he could stay alive in the same town as the *Gazette*. That does not describe a very well-rounded human being to me. He was subsidizing this from his other entities, television in Texas, and so forth. I was afraid and said to this employee, "He might destroy those pictures, although it's a part of the history." The employee said, "You got that straight. Yes, he's vindictive as hell!" So then my thoughts turn to that press. It just kind of depends on whether he has quit being a little boy or whether he'd really rather lose that press. I don't know. But if I was trying to get the thing out of there for the state History Commission or anybody else, that would certainly be a consideration, and I would probably send some shills when I try to find out. Have you heard this about him?

ED: That he's vindictive?

FW: Yes.

ED: Oh, yes. Yes, he is.

FW: So the *Gazette*'s dead, but he'd still like to . . .

ED: Yes. I think part of it goes back to his daddy . . .

FW: Yes.

ED: His daddy thought the *Gazette* looked down on them, looked down on him.

FW: Yes.

ED: And the Heiskells and the Pattersons later . . .

FW: Yes.

ED: They considered Hussman sort of beneath them.

FW: Somewhere back there we were talking about the teletypesetter. [Palmer and Hussman] put a lot of money in that corporation and set up a strike-breaking organization. He really had the scum of the earth working for him, heroin addicts and stuff like that. They could go into a strike-bound plant — it might be in Washington state or Oregon — they'd go in there and stay until the strike was over. He'd subsidize them to stay in touch with them. That, here again, is not a description of a well-rounded human being. The strike is none of his business, and a business is not his business. But he was — yes, vindictiveness is a . . .

ED: Yes, C. E. Palmer and then his son-in-law, Walter Hussman, Sr.

FW: Was there much substance to Walter Hussman, Sr.?

ED: I don't know. I didn't know him very well. C. E. Palmer died some time in the 1950s. My thinking is around 1955 or 1956, when I had just started to work. I was in high school and had started working at the *El Dorado Daily News* as a reporter. Then Hussman became the publisher of all those papers in south Arkansas. I didn't really have any dealings with him.

FW: Yes. I know Bob [Surrey?] had an attitude about him when Beverly was with the Associated Press. Well, I'll sum it up. Basically, there were two people whom he really kind of handled with kid gloves, and a massive ego was involved with both of them. One of them was Harry Ashmore and the other was the Palmer Chain. He said, "I don't tell them nothing unless they ask. I don't want to get tangled up in that."

ED: Okay. The other thing that we had mentioned briefly, you were talking about an underground tunnel over there.

FW: Yes.

ED: Tell me about it.

FW: I call it a warehouse.

ED: The *Gazette* building as at the corner of Third and Louisiana Streets.

FW: Right.

ED: Now, across Louisiana Street was a . . .

FW: There's a new structure there now.

ED: It was Oklahoma Tire and Supply Company, and later it was Western Auto or something.

FW: Something like that. Yes.

ED: An auto store of some kind there.

FW: Okay. You go into the old *Gazette* press room, and you go down under the press room. Now, it's kind of like the tip of the iceberg. A good part of that newspaper rotary press — that's a massive piece of machinery — is under that first floor.

But it seems to me like that's where they threaded paper. They had big rolls.

ED: But you couldn't see the paper from the . . .

FW: Right. You could see the web, I think.

ED: You could see the web, but not the press.

FW: Okay. You get under that mechanism and the first floor, the ground level, is quite a bit above you. That warehouse goes due west. It goes under Louisiana Street and under that Oklahoma Tire and Supply store and went back to that old flop house — that bachelor hotel that was back there.

ED: Where was the flop house?

FW: I think it was west of the Oklahoma Tire and Supply.

ED: So it was back of the old auto store?

FW: Yes, down Third Street.

ED: Up toward Center Street.

FW: Right.

ED: There's an alley there, midway, so the flop house would've been on the alley.

FW: Yes. Something like that. It's been a long time. I don't really remember — there's possibly even more under there that I didn't know about.

ED: Was that part of the *Gazette*?

FW: Yes.

ED: Well, the part that crossed street wouldn't have belonged to the *Gazette*, would it?

FW: Well, it does now! [Laughs] Yes. Now, there's no danger in that at all. I'm telling you, the engineer who put that together knew what he was doing. There

are massive steel girders and everything holding that tunnel in place — that warehouse in place.

ED: And that would have all been built when the *Gazette* was first built. That building was built in, what, 1908?

FW: Yes. It could very easily have been. It could've been built when there weren't any restrictions in the city whatsoever. But it's deep enough that it bypasses any water pipes, sewer, and anything else in that street. So, yes, there's a goodie under there. [Laughs] It was a storage place for — probably for those massive rollers, you know?

ED: Yes.

FW: I'm sure Hussman knows how far back it goes! [Laughs]

ED: I'll bet he does! I'll bet he hasn't been in there, but he knows about it.

FW: Yes. Right.

ED: What else do we need to talk about?

FW: Well, the only thing I know of is . . .

ED: Let me mention one thing that you mentioned to me earlier, and that is — we were talking about J. N. Heiskell and his geological reports.

FW: Yes.

ED: He'd had all these geological reports prepared. Tell me about when he'd run those and what they were.

FW: Well, it would be the kind of political controversy that he ought to do something about. He ought to voice an opinion, but he was reluctant to do that, and I'm sure

for some very good reasons. I'm not questioning his motives here, but he would just disappear. He's not available to . . .

ED: To be writing editorials.

FW: To be writing editorials, yes! [Laughs] He would just leave instructions on a piece of paper. They were numbered — one, two, three, four, five — "I'd like you to get Monday night — let's run seventeen. Then thirteen on Tuesday," and so on.

ED: And they were run in the editorial columns.

FW: Right.

ED: And these were just, what?

FW: Geological surveys.

ED: They were written by whom?

FW: By an archeologist on the faculty of Hendrix [College].

ED: And he had written a bunch of these things.

FW: Yes.

ED: And so J. N. just had them in type.

FW: Yes. He just had them ready.

ED: And so . . .

FW: It was the type of thing — you know, if you've done a VIP who's had serious health problems and you write his obit up in advance and hold it, that's the way it's handled.

ED: Yes. So this was when you need to take a powder . . .?

FW: Yes.

ED: You could avoid controversy.

FW: Who can argue with an geological survey? But he's gone. He went from that extreme to Harry Ashmore.

ED: Well, we didn't get into it. When Harry Ashmore came, that made the difference, I guess.

FW: Yes.

ED: Ashmore didn't want to duck any issue.

FW: No. Ashmore was making a speech to a graduating class, as I understand it, at the University of North Carolina, and J. N. heard it. I might have my geography a little mixed here, but that's my understanding of it. After the speech, J. N. ran up and shook his hand and said, "I want to hire you. No ifs, ands, buts, no money squabbles, nothing. Just come on." [Laughs]

ED: I think Harry might have been at the *Charlotte Observer* or something at that time.

FW: Yes.

ED: A newspaper editor.

FW: I think you pretty well know the integration story and everything. As I understand it, do you want to hear this?

ED: Yes. Let me have your observations.

FW: Okay. As I understand it and as I remember it, the people of Little Rock were given clear-cut choices in the school board election. The people running said,

"We are for peaceful integration of public schools," or "We are not for integration under any circumstances." And they were quite honest about that. People went to the polls, and they voted with this narrow margin for the peaceful integration of the school. Enter Orval Faubus. Also, here comes the White Citizens Council, which is just a front for their Mississippi buddies, the Ku Klux Klan. They moved into Little Rock en masse, so Orval had all this proof that all this violence was going to take place if he didn't call out the National Guard and stop the integration. Beverly belonged to the Women's Emergency Committee, as did several of our friends. We talked about it before she joined it, and I said, "I guarantee you, we're going to be under observation for weeks and weeks to come." Sure enough, we had the State Police go into the grocery store with us and everything. Right on the heels of World War II. I mean, goddammit, the guns had not cooled off hardly! It was scary. It really was. We had a virtual police state in Arkansas. The *Gazette* became the focal point of it. The *Gazette*, to my knowledge, never one time said they wanted to integrate anything. We said, "We are a nation of laws." But that's not the brush they painted them with.

ED: Yes. You look back on the editorials now, and they seem pretty conservative.

FW: Yes! By the following year, 1958, and, once again, I've seen Bob Starr's pictures of this. This is unbelievable! Flint, Michigan looked like a damned war zone! Clint had at least two dozen pictures of the city. It looked like it had been bombed — big pillars of black smoke coming out. I don't understand how an intellectually honest editor would make Little Rock the villain of all its evil and

just fail to tell us about Flint, Michigan. I said, "Are you sure the newspapers got this?" And he said, "You're damn right, I'm sure! The reason I knew [is that] I sent them out!" He was in Flint for a while there.

ED: You worked at the *Gazette* at that time and, of course, Beverly was on the Women's Emergency Committee. You mentioned that the State Police would sometimes follow you.

FW: Yes. We were under surveillance for weeks and weeks.

ED: Yes. And the State Police were following a lot of people — L. C. Bates and his wife, Daisy Bates and people who attended meetings.

FW: Yes. Right. They took the roster from the Emergency Committee.

ED: Did you get any nasty threats or phone calls?

FW: No. Not to my memory.

ED: Okay. I don't know whether we've covered this exactly, but your third exit at the *Gazette* was about — in the 1970s?

FW: 1968 to 1969.

ED: 1968 to 1969.

FW: I went up there and got on the computer program.

ED: But then you got dismayed and . . .

FW: Well, there's a story there. You see, I don't care about all this now because the principals are dead. I'm not hurting them or anything. IBM [International Business Machines] gave a test to anyone who wanted to take it. The axis is right in the middle of the page. You can make "plus" scores or you can make "minus"

scores. I went in there with about thirteen or fourteen people, something like that, printers taking those tests. I was third from the top on those tests. Now, the very first prize was Ernest Dodd's girlfriend. He had given her the answers to what they'd test. The second on that was her boyfriend that he didn't know she had! [Laughs] Now, the way this came to light was the IBM rep came back up to the *Gazette* composing room and said, "There's something awfully wrong here." And Ernest said, "What's wrong?" He said, "This first woman and this second man are making scores that are not humanly possible. We put those in there to purposely [laughs] catch people like that!" So, Ernie, as far as I'm concerned, I aced that one! [Laughter] That's an amusing little twist of that thing. That was when I decided, "Hell, I might as well go. I'm wasting my time. I've got better things to do with my God-given life than fool around in the *Gazette* composing room." I'm not really sure that was a wise decision, but it was my decision [laughs] at that time.

ED: Well, let's see. Look at your list. Is there anything else we need to cover there?

FW: I think we've just about got it all. Let me run it down here. Beverly — we had an unfortunate adoption back there that took up about five years of our lives. Did you ever know Ken Johnson? He was a stringer for the *Commercial Appeal*.

ED: Yes, I knew Ken Johnson. He was with the Little Rock bureau of the *Commercial Appeal* before Richard Allin. Then I think he went to the [University of Arkansas] Medical Center, didn't he? Did he go over to the Medical Center as the public relations director?

FW: Yes. Right. Well, he was working for Storm Whaley. He called Beverly up one day and said, "Beverly, I sure need some help out here for a couple of weeks." She said, "All right." He said, "Can you give me two whole weeks?" She said, "Yes." Well, to make a long story short, she went out there and stayed eighteen years.

ED: Yes.

FW: He had a manuscript piled over in the corner. The title of it was "The Impact on [Palms?]." It was about the medical center and its five colleges. Whaley was always kind of a hero to me. Here this disc jockey comes down into a political quagmire, you know? And he got bit everywhere he went. He was in trouble out there because he was not a physician.

ED: Yes.

FW: He sat on the information, and Beverly sat on the information. They split that damned thing wide open! [Laughs] Just dirty political stuff, you know?

ED: Yes.

FW: The faculty would just <u>love</u> to get their hands on it!

ED: Yes. The politics in higher education and medical centers is about as ruthless as it gets.

FW: Yes. It really is.

ED: All right.

FW: Well, I'll tell you what — do you want to talk about these pictures? Do you want to take them with you, or what do you . . .?

ED: Yes. I think so. We don't have any identification on the back. I don't know if there are any that we could — can we say what these are, do you reckon? Do you know anything about what these are?

FW: Oh, here's Guy Billheimer. Now, here's a seventy-odd-year-old who was the foreman during World War II.

ED: I wonder whether we might put a little number on the back of these and then you can just kind of tell me some about each one of them.

FW: Okay.

ED: Let me start here. This is number one, Guy Billheimer. He is the foreman in World War II.

FW: Let me get you a brush pen so it won't leak through.

ED: All right.

[Tape Stopped]

FW: I think on take-off down in Florida with Jerry Jones's people on board. There is Eddie Collins, who was flying the airplane. That Lear jet ran off the runway about a month ago or six weeks ago.

ED: Okay. This is photo number two. What is this? This is a bunch of people — what is this?

FW: Sam Harris showing visitors through the production plant.

ED: Okay. This would've been probably in the late 1960s or early 1970s, somewhere in there. Yes.

FW: Yes. Same here. 1960s or 1970s. These conversion pictures really don't show

anything worthwhile.

ED: Let's see. Now, the third picture now is a picture in the composing room. This must be when they're moving things out.

FW: Yes. They were converting.

ED: They were converting from this hot type to cold type.

FW: Right.

ED: There is a picture of these machines here.

FW: And here are some more of the same.

ED: There's Wayne Jordan, who was the state desk reporter for the *Gazette* striding by the machines.

FW: I would like to have these back when you're through with them.

ED: Now, picture number four — that's, again, during the conversion to cold type?

FW: Yes. Right. This goes with that other picture of Sam. I think that's the same print.

ED: This is number five. This is Sam Harris again showing visitors how the composing room works.

FW: Did you ever hear of Charles Overholt?

ED: No, I don't know him.

FW: Am I reaching back too far?

ED: Charles Overholt?

FW: Yes.

ED: No.

FW: He went to Nashville and got into the Airline Pilots Union and . . .

ED: That's photo number six, Charles Overholt . . .

FW: Yes. And he's giving . . .

ED: He's the skinny guy on the right shaking hands with this old fellow.

FW: And the old fellow's name is Brosius, and he was retiring.

ED: That's B-R-O-S-I-U-S?

FW: Yes.

ED: And Charles Overholt, who was he?

FW: He was just a printer down there.

ED: Okay.

FW: The chapel chairman.

ED: Okay. This would've been . . .

FW: He took up some money and was giving it to the old man.

ED: This would've been probably sometime in the 1950s, do you think?

FW: Early 1950s. Yes.

ED: Early 1950s. There's no date on it. This is number six. Here is number seven, which is, again, just a picture of some Linotype machines.

FW: Yes. We're involved in the conversion there.

ED: Well, here, this Linotype is showing it. You were talking about the teletype setter.

FW: Yes. Right.

ED: He's operating this teletypesetter with this little ticker tape in there that's

supposed to . . .

FW: Yes. That's the clip thing, and here you've got some tank galleys.

ED: Right. But this is the machine that's supposed to replace an operator, but here you've got two people operating it!

FW: Right! [Laughs]

ED: All right, that was seven. This is number eight. It's a shot of people running . . .

FW: Yes. Ralph Mayes about a year ago.

ED: This is him in the foreground. Ralph Mayes, and he was a cold type operator.

FW: Linotype.

ED: Linotype operator. And I've forgotten the name of that guy behind him. I know he had a terrible wheeze. Emphysema or something.

FW: He was some rehab from the penitentiary, I think.

ED: If that's the one I'm thinking about, he wheezed so badly we thought he was about to go over.

FW: Yes.

ED: Okay. That's number eight.

FW: That's the deaf/mute running the head-lettering machine.

ED: This is number nine. This is a head-lettering machine?

FW: Yes. It's just a Linotype that set heads. I call your attention to the keyboard. It's different. See, it's sloped.

ED: Yes.

FW: Lower case over here. Punctuation and numbers here, and caps on the right.

ED: Caps on the right?

FW: Yes.

ED: And the piece of paper is a headline that somebody has written.

FW: Yes. Right.

ED: That's a news story that somebody — they've got the headline . . .

FW: Yes.

ED: In those days, you'd write the stories, and then a copy editor would write the headline at the top.

FW: Right.

ED: The news editor would assign a headline type. For example, it would say, "This is going to be a two-column, twenty-four point, erbar head, three lines." It would say, "2-24erbar-3."

FW: Right.

ED: It would all be up at the top and then it would go back to . . .

FW: He'd give it to the head-letter man. He was going to set those three lines and put that on the dump over there and put the copy on a hook.

ED: Somebody else would set the actual story in it later. The headline and the story would be put together in the galley. All right. That's number nine.

FW: You know, most of these people are dead now.

ED: This is number ten.

FW: That's about 1950 or 1951. This same group, they're retiring.

ED: This is a group that's retiring?

FW: No, that's Mr. Brosius.

ED: Mr. Brosius retiring.

FW: Early 1950s.

ED: Early 1950s, and these are the people in the composing room gathered around him as he's being given something on his retirement.

FW: Yes.

ED: That's number ten. This number eleven is the same, right?

FW: Same thing.

ED: It's all happening at the same time. This is Mr. Brosius retiring and Linotype operators.

FW: And there's A. R.

ED: This is number twelve. This is A. R. Nelson, who later was the managing editor of the *Gazette*. He hired me. He retired as managing editor of the *Gazette* in about 1971 or 1972, I guess.

FW: Yes.

ED: But this time he's sitting on a page of type.

FW: Right. And the page is marked up in a chaise, and it's sitting on a turtle.

ED: A table is called a turtle, right?

FW: Right. It's got big wheels on it.

ED: Big, heavy things. A table would probably weigh five hundred pounds, wouldn't it?

FW: Right. It's locked up in a chaise.

ED: One person couldn't pick up this table. It looks light here, but it weighs . . .

FW: I'm not sure you could. Maybe you could. I don't know. I never tried to pick up one.

ED: Yes.

FW: That page weighs like hell. It's going to take all your strength. They lock it up, and they just lifted them up and looked it over to see if anything's moving on it.

ED: Make sure no type is going to fall out of it.

FW: And this is heavy. It's a hundred pounds or so.

ED: At least.

FW: At least. Yes.

ED: Nelson looks like a kid here.

FW: Oh, yes!

ED: I didn't know Nelson was ever that young!

FW: He went to the navy. They called him "the Admiral."

ED: Yes.

FW: These two are those changes we were talking about.

ED: All right. This is thirteen and fourteen. Thirteen is a picture a Linotype operator, and this one happens to be of Clarence Mansure, M-A-N-S-U-R-E, and Willie Jones.

FW: Yes! [Laughs]

ED: And he's setting type here with a Linotype machine. Number fourteen is when we were converting to cold type. All right. This is great. I'll see if they can

make copies of these and get these back to you. These are all good pictures.

FW: I'm so glad I could help here. As I've said, it's one of my favorite subjects. I think it's time for me to say — here's opinion again — I've tried to differentiate. I think the so-called newspaper war was just a lot of PR bullshit. I don't know how you'd define a war. John Robert Starr wanted to make some headlines, and he did. Certainly, the *Gazette* was not defeated by the *Democrat*. The *Gazette* self destructed, and it did it through incompetent management, in my opinion. They were not there on the day that sharp [snaps fingers] decisions were needed. I was walking down the street with Gene Herrington years ago . . .

ED: Gene, by the way, for the purpose of the tape, was a former managing editor of the *Democrat*.

FW: Gene played bari sax [baritone saxophone] in my band. [Laughs] We were talking to John Robert. We encountered him walking out on the street. He was rubbing his hands together and just dying laughing. He said, and I quote, "I've got those stupid people on the run over there. They've got the best newspaper in the state, and they don't even have sense enough to <u>know it</u>!" He said, "Every move I made just scares them to death. They run and change something!"

ED: Well, I think they . . .

FW: He said, "All they had to do was just to leave it alone."

ED: I think that was true after Gannett bought the paper. These guys that Gannett sent in — Walker Lundy, the editor — they read the *Democrat* and thought that was the gospel! They'd read John Robert Starr's column and think, "This is the way

things are. We've got to do something." And Lundy reacted to everything Starr did.

FW: Yes! [Laughs]

ED: I guess the other side of it is that before Gannett, they had ignored everything. In times when they should not have ignored the *Democrat*, they did.

FW: It's easy to criticize when you're outside looking in — Carrick Patterson should never have been up there in the first place. There was a time when the *Gazette* had so many fine — very professional people. All they had to do was just sit back and count their money. Leave them alone. But they couldn't do that. They had to stir the mix. Carrick is an opera singer, you know?

ED: Well, that was his first love.

FW: He belonged with his first love. [Laughs]

ED: Well, all right!

FW: After seventy-seven years, I get to say these things! [Laughs]

ED: Sure you can! Sure you can! You can say anything you want after seventy-seven years! All right. Well, thanks very much. We'll shut this off, and then if there's anything else later, we may come back and add something if we think about it. Thanks again.

[End of Interview]

Appendix

Fig. 4 *Gazette* office during conversion to cold type.	
Fig. 5 Sam Harris showing visitors how the composing room works.	

Fig. 9 Linotype head lettering machine.	
Fig. 14 During the conversion to cold type.