



**Warner Sprow -- 12/14/2007**

*By Tina Mathews, CRRL Intern, editor*

*Interviewed by Mary L. Preston*

Mr. Warner Sprow was born and raised in Fredericksburg. Seen as a gifted youngster, he was skipped along in classes until he entered high school at the age of eleven. It was at this time he was introduced to the art of barbering. As a long time resident, he has been known for his posture over the first chair in his barber shops.

Interviewer: Good Afternoon! I am Mary L. Preston. I am a member of the Research and Education Committee which is a part of Historic Fredericksburg Foundation. We have an oral history project in which we interview local citizens Fredericksburg and the buildings that are now standing or that about their lives here in have been torn down in the neighborhoods in which they grew up. I am talking with Warner Sprow at his home on May 26, 1998 at 2:45 P.M. We can get started by talking about where you were raised in the city, where you remember living first and what it was like when you were a youngster.

Mr. Sprow: I was born in what is the James Monroe Law Office which was a rental unit at that time--three little rental units. That's my earliest recollection.

Interviewer: Do you remember the other two families that lived there?

Mr. Sprow: One of them was Mrs. Nettle Thompson. I know you knew Charlie Johnson.

Interviewer: Oh, yes, I knew Nettie Thompson, and the other family?

Mr. Sprow: And the other one was a fellow by the name of Scott, but they called him "Lightning," but I don't remember his first name. They called him "Lightning" Scott.

Interviewer: And your birth date was?

Mr. Sprow: October 8, 1916.

Interviewer: Your mother, when she died, lived on Amelia Street. When did the family buy that home?

Mr. Sprow: 1949.

Interviewer: Is there a story to that?

Mr. Sprow: No, I lived there under rental circumstances and bought the home for her.

Interviewer: I see, I see. And much of that block is inhabited by blacks and, I guess, has been for some time--that block and the previous block.

Mr. Sprow: On the opposite side of the street. The Free Lance-Star and the building we previously mentioned are the only ones on that side of the street--on the south side. The opposite side is occupied, I think, entirely by blacks.

Interviewer: Do you remember the neighbors there before the Free Lance-Star tore down houses for their building?

Mr. Sprow: Yes, we were the only blacks on that side of the street.

Interviewer: And I can recall that there were quite a few houses running down Washington Avenue. Weren't there three, four or so houses?

Mr. Sprow: Yes, that's right.

Interviewer: So they were all bought up by the Free Lance Star?

Mr. Sprow: That's right.

Interviewer: Did you buy the property from a black person?

Mr. Sprow: No, I bought it from Mr. Garner, Julian J. Garner, wholesale grocer.

Interviewer: I see, okay. Were any other houses bought up at that time from him or anyone else? Were all the other citizens were already there?

Mr. Sprow: I don't know whether all the other houses were bought up or not, but going east on Amelia Street was residential but I couldn't say whether they were rental or what.

Interviewer: So then your childhood was spent on Charles Street-the 900 block.

Mr. Sprow: A part of my childhood was in the 900 block.

Interviewer: Your mother hailed from what family? What was her maiden name?

Mr. Sprow: I don't know whether I should be saying this or not as I mentioned before- illegitimacy--she never married.

Interviewer: We can leave that in or take that out.

Mr. Sprow: Well, it doesn't matter with me. But I just wanted to-if it is-it is-that's all, we can't change what was.

Interviewer: That's right. My father talked about a school in Douglas Sheet. Did you happen to attend that school or the elementary school down on Princess Anne Street?

Mr. Sprow: Princess Anne Street is where I went--where the firehouse is now.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about that. Many people have mentioned attending there but I haven't gotten anyone to talk about it to get a flavor of what the school was like?

Mr. Sprow: Well it was an old brick building there. They had classes from one through seven and a backyard that ran a pretty good distance from the school. Surface was cinders that came from the gas-house down there. I guess there is an awful lot of skin left down there now. It was scuffed off with those cinders.

Interviewer: Do you remember the principal at that time?

Mr. Sprow: Professor Whitely.

Interviewer: Do you recall if he was there the entire seven years you attended or did you have another principal?

Mr. Sprow: Well maybe I shouldn't say this. I hope it doesn't sound like bragging. I went into that school in the first grade and in a couple weeks I was sent into the fourth grade. And at the age of 11, I started into high school in Mayfield.

Interviewer: Tremendous! I don't think I'd heard all of this. I had heard a little bit about it, but that is a tremendous story.

Mr. Sprow: At that time, I had made some progress in learning the barber trade. And the money was needed at home, so I quit school as a freshman in high school. I could work full time and make a little money. Here is what I want to show you. I'm sorry. [technical difficulties] [He shows his General Equivalency Diploma.]

Interviewer: So you quit school at what age now?

Mr. Sprow: At 11.

Interviewer: Eleven and you were able to get this certificate of general studies.

Mr. Sprow: I took a test and got that in 1989.

Interviewer: So, you are a high school graduate no. That is the equivalent. How about your siblings? You wanted to tell me how many brothers and sisters you have.

Mr. Sprow: You want their names? Interviewer: Just how many...

Mr. Sprow: Four brothers and one sister.

Interviewer: I know Lloyd very well because I graduated- well I went through school with him.

Mr. Sprow: You know Tommy don't you?

Interviewer: Yes, yes. And Tommy--that is Grace's husband. He is not here anymore?

Mr. Sprow: Oh, yes, he's here.

Interviewer: How about genealogy. Have you done any work in that area? I haven't done much myself.

Mr. Sprow: No, due to that illegitimacy, that is not a very popular subject with me.

Interviewer: I see what you are saying. I am going to be tracing some Sprows since I was a Sprow, also.

Mr. Sprow: This may be interesting. In California in the service, they had a tremendous board with names listed alphabetically for payroll I found three Sprows on that. Only time I had seen that name other than our family. And I stood around and watched and they were little blond, blue-eyed Dutch boys from Pennsylvania.

Interviewer: Interesting!

Mr. Sprow: Which made me think that name was originally a Dutch name.

Interviewer: I hadn't thought of that. In my own mind, I always thought of it as being German. But I had no reason to know that. Do you have any ancestors buried in Shiloh Cemetery?

Mr. Sprow: My grandmother is buried there.

Interviewer: Give me a picture of early family life. Many times we compare notes on people born during the same era and the kinds of games they played, the activities the boys participated in and the activities girls participated in. It's enjoyable listening to someone talk about what he did as a child.

Mr. Sprow: Well, first, most of us were very poor, but we didn't realize it--and very, happy. And I guess we played games we devised ourselves.

Interviewer: Because there weren't a lot of real toys.

Mr. Sprow: Well, we were able to make a lot of our toys. And after I got older, I think those you make yourself are enjoyed more so than those that are given to you.

Interviewer: Can you name anything in particular?

Mr. Sprow: Well, one of my favorite things was to get a "y" shaped branch on a tree. Put a cross stick in the "y", tie a string across the top and make it the shape of a "u," Put it in the oven and bake it so that it

would stay like the shape of a "u." Then we would cut a couple of strips out of an automobile inner tube and the tongue out of an old shoe and make a sling shot. And nearly every boy you saw had one sticking out of his hip pocket. And we became amazingly accurate with them. Sometimes they got us in trouble, but we had a lot of fun with them.

Interviewer: I assume you played a lot of ball. Can you remember where any of the ball fields were?

Mr. Sprow: The main thing then was what was called Gouldman Park on Pitt Street between Prince Edward and Washington Avenue backed up to the Veeco Canal.

Interviewer: That was an open field?

Mr. Sprow: It was used as a baseball park and it was an open field.

Interviewer: Can you remember the canal being open? It was kind of a ditch coming all the way down Kenmore Avenue?

Mr. Sprow: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: I hear people mention it. My brother mentions something about jumping across it.

Mr. Sprow: In some places you could. In some places it was open all the way down where it ran into Hazel Run which in turn ran into the river.

Interviewer: I assume you went up to the Rappahannock to swim?

Mr. Sprow: Oh, yes, yes.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Sprow: Our main swimming place was back of the Old Site Church.

Interviewer: I haven't heard that mentioned before. That is interesting. So it was shallow enough to walk out in it along there?

Mr. Sprow: For a certain distance, then it hit a channel and it dropped off into a shelf.

Interviewer: So you learned to swim early on.

Mr. Sprow: Yes, that was just about natural in those days. All the boys learned to swim. The river was a playground.

Interviewer: Yes. So, when you discovered that you knew something about barbering, then were you put to work or did you have to wait a little while and apprentice?

Mr. Sprow: I went into the shop at the age of 10, shining shoes.

Interviewer: Where was this shop, then?

Mr. Sprow: The 400 block of William Street.

Interviewer: Whose shop was that?

Mr. Sprow: A fellow by the name of Willie--Willie Hall. And I liked it and got pushed out of the way by the barbers, because I was in their way watching them. And a very short while I had a soapbox set up in the backyard. Every kid in the neighborhood I was practicing on.

Interviewer: So you learned it by trial and error.

Mr. Sprow: Yes! That's right.

Interviewer: So I guess your fee was a little cheaper than the others--the regular barbers, I guess.

Mr. Sprow: No, at that time, if they had twelve cents, fifteen cents, whatever they had, I'd take it. If they didn't have anything, they'd get a haircut anyway.

Interviewer: Great! Great!

Mr. Sprow: Then when I went to work in the shop, I just got the regular fee.

Mr. Sprow: Did you become connected with the Baylor family or the barber in the Baylor family?

Mr. Sprow: I had been working at it for quite some time when I went with the Baylor family.

Interviewer: I see. Were you in your 20's?

Mr. Sprow: No, I went to work with them when I was 18, but I have been standing behind a barber chair since I was twelve.

Interviewer: So it comes real natural for you and it is real hard to give it up too, isn't it?

Mr. Sprow: I have no idea of giving it up. I still like it very much. I have made some very wonderful friends. I think I have learned a lot more in the barbershop than I ever learned in school.

Interviewer: Let us explore when your family lived in the James Monroe Law- Office. It was not reclaimed as a historic site at the time that you were living there?

Mr. Sprow: In 1927, a fellow came into town and bought the place. He was a great grandson of James Monroe--Lawrence G. Hoes.

Interviewer: All right. But that was...

Mr. Sprow: 1927. And as far as I know, he still owns the place--he or his family.

Interviewer: Now the great, great grandson that came here at one time was not the one who bought it? It was his father? Remember there was a Hoes here who conducted some of the tours and ran it until he passed away.

Mr. Sprow: I am not sure if the man I mentioned is his father or grandfather. It was one or the other.

Interviewer: How soon after your family moved out did it become a place to visit?

Mr. Sprow: Almost immediately, I think. That was his purpose of buying it.

Interviewer: Do you know anything about the house that was on the 500 block of Princess Anne Street. Some believed that James Monroe lived in that house. Had you heard that?

Mr. Sprow: I had heard of it. I guess I was too young to deal with the history, then and that didn't have that much meaning to me.



Interviewer: Someone was positive that some tours were taken through that house. So that was of interest to us.

Interviewer: Fredericksburg, like all other areas, was a segregated city to some degree, but however, we had quite a few businesses in various parts of the city. How did you view that? We have talked about the fact because of some of our living patterns; we have some black sections [interspersed] about the city. How did you view those things?

Mr. Sprow: I guess growing up under those conditions, it was just customary and accepted.

Interviewer: And so you sort of went along with it simply because that's the way it was.

Mr. Sprow: That was the way of life.

Interviewer: Being in a barber shop, can you recall any incidents. Well, of course, of interest to me is the fact you served white patrons. How was the tenor of things with people talking--being free to speak? Do you have any stories along that line?

Mr. Sprow: I think in most cases, the white people realized that certain things they might say would be unpleasant to the colored people and they respected each other enough to be a bit careful about what they said.

Interviewer: That's good to know. So, it wasn't a hot box by any stretch of the imagination.

Mr. Sprow: All the conditions were just accepted. It had been that way for so long and the change came gradually.

Interviewer: Do you remember the sit-ins at People's Drug Store and Woolworth's?

Mr. Sprow: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: Did it become more tense at that time?

Mr. Sprow: I suppose the tension was minimal as far as I knew anyway.

Interviewer: I see. We have interviewed Mrs. Todd who worked with the youth group through the NAACP and organized the sit-ins. That's why I was asking--and you were a businessman on that street.

Mr. Sprow: That's right.

Interviewer: So, from the 400 block of William Street, your business took you to what other site? Did you then move to Caroline Street?

Mr. Sprow: In the 400 block of William Street, I was a boy then. I started in the shop shining shoes and gradually learning the trade. When I went with the Baylor family, I had been working at it for several years. They were in the 200 block of William Street. And I was probably eighteen years old when I went to work with them.

Interviewer: Can you point out which building or what businesses are on those sites now?

Mr. Sprow: Exactly where the Baylor Shop was?

Interviewer: Yes.

Mr. Sprow: The Jewel Box --210 William St.

Interviewer: Mmm, hmm. Now they did move their barber shop to another site?

Mr. Sprow: To 1027 Caroline St. And this may be interesting to know that the Baylor's started their business in the spring after the battle of Fredericksburg--April 1863.

Interviewer: What generation were you working with?

Mr. Sprow: I went to work for the grandson of the original owner.

Interviewer: Did they talk about stories of those days that they had heard from the grandfather?

Mr. Sprow: Not a great deal.

Interviewer: I take it then there were two people working-- or was it just one?

Mr. Sprow: Three. Would you like their names?

Interviewer: Yes, that would be interesting to know.

Mr. Sprow: Chester who was the owner, Charley who died reasonably young and Willie who died reasonably young. And there were two sisters. One of whom you probably knew --Virginia Baylor Speaks.

Interviewer: Yes, I have heard that name a lot.

Mr. Sprow: She taught school and another sister who left early and lived in New York, Mary Baylor.

Interviewer: Are they forebears of--I think there was a younger girl coming up...

Mr. Sprow: Adelaide?

Interviewer: Yes, Adelaide, but I was thinking of-Virginia Dare. Now why do I think of Virginia Dare?

Mr. Sprow: Virginia Dare's father worked with us in the shop. Jones-- he was a Jones. But Adelaide's father was Willie Baylor, the younger one of the three brothers.

Interviewer: So Chester Baylor was the one who had a house down on the 200 block of Princess Anne Street?

Mr. Sprow: That's right. That was the family home. Chester remodeled it.

Interviewer: I see the family home. Where else did they live in the city? Do we have some Baylor's living up on Pitt Street?

Mr. Sprow: Willie Baylor lived in the 300 block of Wolfe Street. Charley never married. He lived right next to the old home place on Princess Anne.

Interviewer: Would that have been the house bought by Mr. Wright? Is that the house next door to Chester Baylor's?

Mr. Sprow: Chester's house was the second house. Their original home was on the corner and the Wright house was the third one in the block. Chester was between the two of them.

Interviewer: I see. That's a little bit about the makeup of that block and we have interviewed someone on that block. In fact, we will interview about three people down on that end of town. So, it progressed then and of course, you were 18 when you went with the Baylor's. You were the youngest one in the shop. So you had honed your trade rather well by that time. You had your own customers then? Can you think of some customers who are the longest running ones with you? Have you had someone who has come to you for 50 years?

Mr. Sprow: Dr. Ware for one.

Interviewer: Well, interesting, interesting. So, your business here-- is it curtailed somewhat here or is it just the same as it was downtown?

Mr. Sprow: I have about all I can do.

Interviewer: But you did move here from the 1000 block? I can remember growing up, and seeing a barber shop closer to the 500 block of Caroline Street. Did you move from there?

Mr. Sprow: I moved from the 1000 block where I worked for the Baylor family and opened my shop in the 500 block of Caroline. The city bought up that whole square all away round. At that time the Baylor's shop came up for sale and I went back up and bought the shop where I used to work and stayed there until I set up my shop out here.

Interviewer: The city, owns that whole block. I guess there are a few businesses on that street now that have moved back in? The welfare department used to be there. There used to be municipal facilities. Now there seem to be a few businesses in those places. Also, of interest, seems to be the unusual step of providing services for white only. Did some black patrons come into the shop at times? Were they welcomed in?

Mr. Sprow: Well in the early days, it was a very rare thing. I guess segregation was just accepted where it was known and the few blacks that came in because they did not realize the conditions here. And when they were informed, they just accepted it. And integration gradually took place. So they just come in--there is no difference

Interviewer: So you have an integrated patronage now?

Mr. Sprow: Oh, yes. Every one comes in now. Mighty glad that took place.

Interviewer: Good. That's excellent. Can you tell us about some of the people who have worked for you?

Mr. Sprow: When I first started my shop, I'm trying to think of his name, everybody called him "Junior Boy."

Interviewer: Scott, Scott.

Mr. Sprow: Yes, and another young man from Warrenton whose father I had previously worked with by the name of William Moore.

Interviewer: How long did he work with you?

Mr. Sprow: Several years.

Interviewer: And you have someone working with you now. He has been with you for a few years?

Mr. Sprow: Yes, he has been with me since 1956 off and on. Morris Walker --he is pastor of Piney Branch Church out in the county.

Interviewer: Since 1956--that's quite a lengthy relationship. Maybe we can interject the period when you married and list who your children are.

Mr. Sprow: I was married in 1936.

Interviewer: Do you remember the marriage date?

Mr. Sprow: June 7, 1936.

Interviewer: Your wife did pass away a few years ago.

Mr. Sprow: Yes, 1982.

Interviewer: You have two children.

Mr. Sprow: Yes, they are--we have no natural births. They are both adopted.

Interviewer: I can still see them as little toddlers when you adopted them. Of course, they are both here in Fredericksburg. We saw your

son at one of the restaurants working. And of course, your daughter lives here with you and gives piano lessons. She has done that for quite some time.

Mr. Sprow: She started with piano at the age of six. She took to it.

Interviewer: She is quite accomplished. I have heard her play at times.

Mr. Sprow: Yes, she took to music and she is still very interested in it, I think.

Interviewer: And has probably put quite a few students through her musical program.

Mr. Sprow: Yes.

Interviewer: What other businesses were in various places when you worked in the barber shops? Do you remember other businesses?

Mr. Sprow: This may be interesting. When I first started in the barber shop, there was a division in one store building. Ale had the barber shop on one side and Jerry Taylor's father had a cleaning and pressing shop on the other side.

Interviewer: On William Street?

Mr. Sprow: 400 block of William Street.

Interviewer: That cleaning business lasted there for the same time until you moved on to other facilities? I know the tailor shop, at some point, was a little farther down on Caroline Street.

Mr. Sprow: Right.

Interviewer: That is interesting. Now you were next door to Jones' Market? That was the grocery store that had been in that spot for over a hundred years.

Mr. Sprow: That was in the 200 block.

Interviewer: Oh, that's right. I'm sorry.

Mr. Sprow: And we were several doors down the hill from Jones Grocery.

Interviewer: What was next door to you?

Mr. Sprow: Lucas Supply... building supplies.

Interviewer: Okay. What had the building previously been--at the 500 or 600 block of Caroline Street--what shop had been there before you?

Mr. Sprow: When I was in elementary school where the fire house is now. There was a bakery there --Weiser's Bakery. They had the bakery in the building in the back of the lot. They lived upstairs and the salesroom was in the same place where I had the barber shop.

Interviewer: Was that a white or black proprietor?

Mr. Sprow: They were German people.

Interviewer: So when you moved in there, was that who you purchased from?

Mr. Sprow: No, I rented it from the McGee family who had previously had a plumbing shop there. I actually bought it from that family.

Interviewer: So when you sold, you sold to the city, though?

Mr. Sprow: That's right.

Interviewer: You were across the street from...?

Mr. Sprow: Elkins Flower Shop.

Interviewer: Straight across the street from Elkins Funeral Home and of course, Masters on the corner there. We have talked about "Chef Hazel." I am not sure that I have the right person because one person said, "Chef Hazelett" was a chef in a restaurant where Carley's used to be. I don't know whether that's was during your time. Do you remember any chefs running restaurants?

Mr. Sprow: Carley's, if I remember right, that's in the 200 block of William Street on the north side? That's a mistake. About, my earliest recollection about that was E. M. Curtis Clothing Store and that goes way, way back.

Interviewer: There was a cleaning and pressing shop around there and some of my forebears were supposed to have had a shop there.

Mr. Sprow: That was where the [First Virginia] bank is.

Interviewer: Oh, where the bank is now?

Mr. Sprow: And they were below the street level. Your grandfather had a cleaning and pressing shop in one side and Cordley Wright had a barber shop in the other side.

Interviewer: I've heard Cordley Wright's name mentioned a lot from my father.

Mr. Sprow: Grant and Welborn's father. Grant Wright and Welborn's father.

Interviewer: My father would say that he delivered clothes sometime when he was eleven years old. For the black businesses farther up William Street, do you recall the times when we had some flourishing businesses in that 600 block which Safeway bought up?

Mr. Sprow: There was a man by the name of Bacchus White. He was the grandfather of Claudia Lewis, Jean Baylor, Elaine. He had a restaurant on the corner. A gentleman by the name of William Ware had a business on the opposite side of the street.

Interviewer: Was there a drugstore?

Mr. Sprow: Yea. W. W. Lee moved there from the 300 block. Yes, Warren Lee. And there was another fellow had an auto repair business in the 400 block.

Interviewer: He had an auto repair, so he had a garage, I guess.

Mr. Sprow: Yes, A fellow by the name of Lattimore.

Interviewer: I guess going back earlier was the Bumbray - Coleman Grocery Store. Where was that actually?

Mr. Sprow: You know where the bakery was on William Street?

Interviewer: Is that the 400 block?

Mr. Sprow: Yes, they were on the south side of William Street-- Bumbray and Coleman.



Interviewer: While reading someone's interview, they mentioned the Sanitary Store which was the forerunner of the Safeway Store that was on the corner of William and Prince Edward Streets up from where you were born.

Mr. Sprow: That's right. Across the street from there was the A & P.

Interviewer: I remember the A & P, but the other one must have been before my time. What were your feelings about the 500 block? We have been talking to someone who was a proprietor in that block. You get a real interesting feeling of camaraderie and of going to work with people you knew and of course--you knew much about their businesses. Did you have any dealings with businesses in the 500 block?

Mr. Sprow: Well, Monroe Lucas had a barber shop--Reggie Lucas' father and I used to go down there and sit and talk with him. Sometimes it was a better show than it is on television there. Further down the block was a pool hall which was very entertaining and a couple of beer and sandwich places in the block. Not many dull moments in the 500 block in those days.

Interviewer: I have an interest in the brick building that is cater-corner facing the train station. Was that building there in the 30's and 40's?

Mr. Sprow: A little building on the right going south...

Interviewer: I would say yes.

Mr. Sprow: A little building?

Interviewer: Well, this one is not too tiny. There have been various businesses in it and I assumed some years ago, that it had been a filling station.

Mr. Sprow: Oh yes, that sets back off the street. Yes, that was Horton's Filling Station, but there was a little building right on the corner that was a hot-dog stand--very popular.

Interviewer: So out in front of that and dead on the corner. And of course, there were a series of houses on both sides.

Mr. Sprow: Up near the north end of that block was the Rappahannock Hotel which was very popular.

Interviewer: We hear of people who said they roomed there when they came to town.

Mr. Sprow: Yes, that was operated by Mildred Brown Queen's father--no, that was Mildred Brown's uncle and across the street was the funeral parlor which was operated by her father.

Interviewer: I have heard more about the fact that many of them were born down in that block in the house which was the forerunner of the building on the opposite side of the street.

Mr. Sprow: On that east side of the street, near the middle of the block, there was a little restaurant. I think they called that "New York Restaurant." Down on the corner there was a larger Restaurant. A Greek fellow by the name of Calamos ran that. And on the opposite side was the hot-dog stand I just mentioned.

Interviewer: So you remember the building at the site of the Paris Inn as being a restaurant run by the Calamos family?

Mr. Sprow: Mmm, hmm. And the poolroom was run by Thornton Grayson which was a very popular place.

Interviewer: We have had others mention Grayson Flats.

Mr. Sprow: Yes that was in the same building where Monroe Lucas had the barber shop on the ground floor and Grayson Flats was upstairs. Joe Robinson had a little confectionery store on the corner.

Interviewer: That building was eventually torn down because in my time, and I can only see Thornton's Filling Station. Do you have an estimate when that was changed over to a filling station?

Mr. Sprow: It would have to be a rough guess--perhaps in the 50's.

Interviewer: Until latter days, I thought there was a barbershop up Wolfe Street behind Thornton's Filling Station.

Mr. Sprow: Joe Whitfield had a cleaning and pressing shop there.

Interviewer: Is that what that was? We didn't have any black businesses through the 200 block of Wolfe Street going toward Caroline? There was New Site Church and the parsonage. Did we have any other black patrons living in that block?

Mr. Sprow: The Henderson family lived there.

Interviewer: On the side with the parsonage?

Mr. Sprow: No, no, no, on Princess Anne Street now. You're going down the side?

Interviewer: Yes, yes. I'm thinking of other areas of the city. Because that is a big help in knowing that Joe Whitfield had a cleaning and pressing shop up the street.

Mr. Sprow: Someone had a restaurant going from Princess Anne to Caroline--back of the church.

Interviewer: To your knowledge, Tate had a drugstore past the viaduct on the next corner. [On the corner of Princess Elizabeth and Princess Anne Streets] And I know in time "the Spot" was in a house on the left side of the street, but I imagine there weren't any other black businesses in that part of town?

Mr. Sprow: Not that I know of.

Interviewer: What is your view of historic preservation? Are you an individual who supports that?

Mr. Sprow: Yes, I think that historic preservation certainly should be interesting and most of us who grew up here should be interested in preserving it. I am afraid it is too late for some of it, but we should make an effort to preserve what is left.

Interviewer: We have let some things be destroyed. The history here in Fredericksburg is that --I imagine they organized in the 50's and I am not sure what was done before then. If the houses were well built and stood the test of time, they remained, but if they needed extraordinary measures to maintain them, we lost.

Mr. Sprow: Fredericksburg has always been proud of its history, in fact, many years ago, there was some contention between St. Augustine, Fl. as to which one was the most historical city in the U. S. Have you heard that before?

Interviewer: Yes. So what did you think about that?

Mr. Sprow: Well, I didn't know enough about it to have an opinion.

Interviewer: We talked about the fact that the business catered to whites and that over the years, you haven't viewed any adversity related to that. You didn't experience, say black patrons being vocal about it when you went to church or anything at all coming up about it.

Mr. Sprow: Very little and I think the change was so gradual, that kept it from being controversial.

Interviewer: How about the professional end of being a member of the business community in downtown Fredericksburg. Did you participate? I am not sure they have had a Downtown Business Association for years or what, but there was a chamber of commerce, however. Did you participate in those?

Mr. Sprow: No, I never did.

Interviewer: You never did? So at this point, you are not a member of the chamber of commerce? I was thinking of the social connotation to that and the professional aspect where you would belong to the association and participate with them.

Interviewer: How about the living patterns of blacks and whites in the city? We say that some came here years ago to work on the canal when that was being built. And we feel that the communities in the 1500 block of Charles emanated from that time and the ownership has spanned down into Pitt Street, Hawke Street and to the 1300 and 1400 blocks of Charles Street and Princess Anne Street.

Mr. Sprow: As far back as I can remember, there has always been some integration. There hasn't been such a distinct line. I think the integration was so gradual, that there was really no problem.

Interviewer: And much of the integration emanated first from the schools. A lot of work was done there to get the schools integrated. Were you a patron of Walker-Grant, in other words, you had your children who attended and you would have had your children of your siblings who attended. So you have been a patron of the school. Did they ever ask you to help by giving money for scholarships or ads in bulletins?

Mr. Sprow: I have always participated. Not to any great deal, but I have always responded to just about everything that was requested of me.

Interviewer: I know I have asked you to help with the debutante ball fund raising. How did you promote your business or was it such that you didn't need to?

Mr. Sprow: I never found it necessary. Interviewer: I see. So you had enough patronage so that you could keep busy? How has your family survived here? For instance, what are some things your family does together? Do you have picnics or Christmas dinners?

Mr. Sprow: Well, on a small scale. I have right much room here and very often have a group out here. Have a cookout or play ball back in the field, such things as that, just on a kind of small scale.

Interviewer: You do have a lot of room. So, when did you purchase this property?

Mr. Sprow: It must have been in the very early 50's. I don't remember the exact year.

Interviewer: So, not too long after you purchased the house on Amelia Street, this was acquired. It was purchased from whom?

Mr. Sprow: This location?

Interviewer: Yes this location.

Mr. Sprow: It was purchased from Marvin Robinson.

Interviewer: So you have some acreage then?

Mr. Sprow: Three and a quarter acres.

Interviewer: And to buy it that far back. Were the Taylors or the others that live on the curve out here then?

Mr. Sprow: I'm sure the Taylors were here.

Interviewer: This house was built in what year?

Mr. Sprow: I should be able to answer that right off, but I can't.

Interviewer: Well, it would go along with when you moved your business from the 1000 block of Caroline Street. Was the house already built when you moved that business over here?

Mr. Sprow: Right.

Interviewer: Where did you live in town before?

Mr. Sprow: Before Amelia Street?

Interviewer: So, you were living in the house on Amelia Street? Was your mother living with you?

Mr. Sprow: No

Interviewer: You would have to go back to the 50's. I was telling you about giving Alyce Sprow [my first cousin] piano lessons in that house and that was before she graduated from high school. So, this house was built then and your daughter, Joanne was a little toddler because I think you came in one day with her. She was about 3 years old. So, this goes back to the early sixties or late 50's. So, you had no adversity in buying the property?

Mr. Sprow: No. The Ennis", Owens [black families who lived in the area.]

Interviewer: That's right. Mary Virginia [Jackson] had built her house here.

Mr. Sprow: They bricked it up afterward, but the house was there for quite some time.

Interviewer: Mmm, hmm.

Mr. Sprow: The big house behind where they are now, that was the old original Ennis home.

Interviewer: And, of course, the Owen's family owned the property where we built. Charlie Minor bought that from them.

Mr. Sprow: At one time, the Ennis' owned all the way to the top of the hill.

Interviewer: You mean straight down here? And started to sell that off., I see. The other acreage there on which Morningside subdivision was built was supposed to have been 45 acres of land. So at some point, the family may have sold this land to the Robinsons from whom you bought yours? If we don't have any other questions at this point,

what we do is, type up the interview and let you see a copy of it and probably come back for answers to additional questions that may relate to something we have already asked or to go over another series of questions.

Mr. Sprow: I'm glad to do whatever I can.

(SECOND INTERVIEW on June 24, 1998 at 2 o'clock in the afternoon.)

Interviewer: I want to put more information in the interview on your siblings and what businesses or professions they were able to work in. We have Lloyd, who graduated with me... or went off to the service during our senior year. What has he worked in all these years?

Mr. Sprow: He--He's in Steelton, Pa. I should know exactly what he is working at. He is working for the state in some capacity.

Interviewer: Oh, that's fine. And you had a brother to pass away some years ago.

Mr. Sprow: James.

Interviewer: Let's see, was he working at FMC?

Mr. Sprow: No he worked with Horton's Filling Station.

Interviewer: And you had a sister who passed at an early age. Was that shortly after high school?

Mr. Sprow: No, she was around 27 when she passed.

Interviewer: She was married and had one daughter.

Mr. Sprow: Yes, Mmm hmm.

Interviewer: I only know your other brother by the name of Hickey.

Mr. Sprow: Yes, George.

Interviewer: George, I should have remembered George because he lived at the home.

Mr. Sprow: And never married.

Interviewer: And he did work at FMC? And we do have Tommy who lives in the city now.

Mr. Sprow: He is an automobile salesman.

Interviewer: Have we covered everyone?

Mr. Sprow: I think that's right.

Interviewer: We wanted to make this known for the record. Your business in downtown Fredericksburg was in the what hundred block? On the previous tape we had said the five hundred block.

Mr. Sprow: Well, I had two locations--the 500 block and the 1000 block.

Interviewer: I was curious about the home you had on Amelia Street and the fact that it is next door to the Free Lance-Star. I was positive; they probably tried to buy that land from you at some point.

Mr. Sprow: Yes, they have mentioned it several times, but they just didn't want to come up to my price.

Interviewer: When they [FLS] first moved there--when they first built, did they ask then?

Mr. Sprow: I don't remember the interval between the time they built and then asked. But it wasn't right away. Not right away.

Interviewer: That is somewhat prime property.

Mr. Sprow: I think so.

Interviewer: So in the future, if they were to meet your price, you would...?

Mr. Sprow: Anytime they are ready, I am.

Interviewer: They may need it someday for parking or for something.

Mr. Sprow: They do, they need it now. And they are going to pay the price.



Interviewer: ...We were talking and I had asked where did you move when you left Charles Street? You mentioned that the Hoes family came in and bought it to open as a historical site.

Mr. Sprow: We moved to Pitt Street--300 block of Pitt Street.

Interviewer: And the rest of your growing up years were spent there?

Mr. Sprow: No, we moved down in the 300 block of Charles Street. I stayed there until I married.

Interviewer: Okay, 300 block of Charles Street. This is one block before the train station or viaduct of the train station?

Mr. Sprow: That's right.

Interviewer: How old were you during that period?

Mr. Sprow: Probably, 16--17.

Interviewer: You had mentioned that you were a trustee at Old Site Church?

Mr. Sprow: Right.

Interviewer: What about your work with Old Site? You have been a lifelong member there?

Mr. Sprow: Right.

Interviewer: Have you participated in any of their organizations? Choirs?

Mr. Sprow: Choir.

Interviewer: Are you in the choir today?

Mr. Sprow: No.

Interviewer: Oh, I see, that was something you have done over the time period. Well I imagine you have seen quite a deal of growth there at your church.

Mr. Sprow: Oh, yes indeed.

Interviewer: So you were a trustee when they made the expansion and put in the elevator which I think is excellent.

Mr. Sprow: Mmm, hmm.

Interviewer: Are there any new ideas on the horizon for Old Site or anything?

Mr. Sprow: If there is, I am not aware of it. You always hear a lot of talk, but not much doing.

Interviewer: When you moved out here, had building in Braehead subdivision begun?

Mr. Sprow: No, it had not.

Interviewer: When were you first aware of the selling of lots and people moving in?

Mr. Sprow: I should know exactly when. I guess I have to do a little racking of the brain for that.

Interviewer: I imagine they started in the 60's somewhere I assume.

Mr. Sprow: More than likely, the 50's I would think. I am not sure of that, but in the late fifties or early 60's.

Interviewer: You want to mention that story you told about someone offering land to you there in Braehead?

Mr. Sprow: Yes, right after I moved out here, someone called and asked me how much I wanted for 600 dollars an acre.

Interviewer: And you decided not to invest.

Mr. Sprow: It sounded ridiculous. 600 dollars an acre. Land back there I didn't think anybody wanted--hill sides and gullies, back off the road.

Interviewer: It has lots of gullies.

Mr. Sprow: Had no idea of what developments would take place. Over there at Confederate Ridge, Mr. Gibson bought that whole place for 35 thousand. And the old fellow that previously owned it, offered it to me for 15 thousand--over seven acres.

Interviewer: Seven acres of land!

Mr. Sprow: Almost heartbreaking to think of it.

Interviewer: And people seem to very savvy now days. Everything is being bought up so quickly.

Mr. Sprow: Well there has been such development all around Fredericksburg for an area of several miles and it is almost obvious that anything that comes up, you almost have to grab it.

Interviewer: I think our city has been one of slow growth. So that we stayed within the confines of the downtown and just a few areas for so long until you couldn't fathom that the development would take place as rapidly as it has.

Mr. Sprow: Yes, that's right, yes.

Interviewer: Are there any charitable or community organizations that you have belonged to over the years?

Mr. Sprow: No, I say not. The "Twenty Gentlemen" we have now, we do some charitable work.

Interviewer: Were you one of the founding members of that?

Mr. Sprow: Yes.

Interviewer: Along with...

Mr. Sprow: Roland Gray.

Interviewer: And you stayed in it for about 20 years?

Mr. Sprow: Well, I am still with it.

Interviewer: So that's over 20 years that you have been a member of that. That's an interesting group because I thought it organized just to have a Christmas social and then it turned into a year-round organization.

Mr. Sprow: Well, we--for quite a number of years, the ladies, wives and girl friends and so forth, several times a year would have a feed and a little get together and would always invite us, so Roland Gray

and I and somebody else, I believe it was Wilbert Rowser decided we should reciprocate. That was what started the "Twenty Gentlemen."

Interviewer: Did you actually start with 20 members?

Mr. Sprow: No.

Interviewer: When did it take the name of "Twenty Gentlemen?"

Mr. Sprow: I don't remember just how or when or why. We just gradually grew and just got to that. I think we decided to stop when we got to twenty.

Interviewer: It is still thriving today and has a pretty active social program. What do you think of the preservation of Dr. Wyatt's dental office? Are you familiar with what happened there?

Mr. Sprow: I didn't know what happened, but I certainly agree with any type of preservation. Something that takes you back to the past. I hate to see our history destroyed.

Interviewer: So this was an excellent one in that the building was moved.

Mr. Sprow: That was a quite an accomplishment, too.

Interviewer: And now Dr. Wyatt's grandson is now the owner.

Mr. Sprow: To move an old brick building like that without breaking it up. That was remarkable.

Interviewer: Do you know of any properties you would recommend for preservation.

Mr. Sprow: That would call for some thought. I just can't think of it right off the bat like that.

Interviewer: You had mentioned that you only knew of one black lady who lived on Caroline Street. Can you tell me about that?

Mr. Sprow: There was an elderly lady by the name of Racks--Ameba Racks. She was in the 600 block on the east side of the street right across from the old Belman's Grocery. She was an elderly lady when I was a small boy going to school there.

Interviewer: She lived there?

Mr. Sprow: Mmm, hmm.

Interviewer: At that time, did they point out the house on the corner as the John Paul Jones house?

Mr. Sprow: I think so. I am almost sure they did.

Interviewer: I don't see a marker there now. I was just curious because there used to be [one there.]

Mr. Sprow: Have you noticed it lately? I think they have a metal plaque there.

Interviewer: Maybe that has been restored. So many houses in that block have the preservation plaques to indicate what year they were built. That would be important for that particular one to be saved. What would you like to be remembered for?

Mr. Sprow: That's hard to say.

Interviewer: After you think back over your career and the mark you have made in this community, how do you feel about that?

Mr. Sprow: Well, I have made an awful lot of nice friends for which I am thankful.

Interviewer: And you have practiced along time.

Mr. Sprow: Yes.

Interviewer: You have been faithful to that profession and it has rewarded you too.

Mr. Sprow: And I have always managed to make a good living.

Interviewer: Has it always been fairly prosperous endeavor.

Mr. Sprow: Well, if a person was willing to stay there and work, he could always make a good living.

Interviewer: And beat the tax-man away from the door. And you have used your wealth wisely, I think too. This is a lovely home and being

able to move out here with your business. That's ideal--you can get up and walk next door to your shop.

Mr. Sprow: Yes, that's taken for granted, but that's a real nice feature.

Interviewer: I was curious if you had to have an ordinance change of any sort to allow you to have that?

Mr. Sprow: I had to get at least three neighbors to sign a statement that they had no objection to it and they didn't think it would be detrimental to the neighborhood.

Interviewer: So, just simply that. You didn't have to go through a great deal. Well, I think we have covered much of what we wanted to cover. I have found this very delightful. I have been able to find out a lot to fit into patterns of missing memories for me and to elucidate some things for me. I really appreciate being able to sit down and talk with you and to do this interview.

Mr. Sprow: Well, I enjoyed it and am glad to be of help.