John Morgan, Register of Deeds for Beaufort County

By Rebecca Luton and Betty Moore

Journalism students Betty Moore, Rebecca Luton (left), and Cheryl Grubbs with John Morgan, Register of Deeds for Beaufort County

Introduction

By Rebecca Luton

In an effort to record state and local history, my journalism group found a man who could paint us a mental picture of local life in the Great Depression as well as amuse us with
tales of sports events during the 1950's and '60's. John Morgan, Register of Deeds for Beaufort County, has a vivid memory and was pleased to share his life with us when we visited him in mid-December. Mr. Morgan entertained Dr. Roy Armstrong, Betty Moore, and myself in the courthouse in Washington and astounded us with his recollections of times past. Coming away from this interview, we were all enriched with the history and wisdom of this gentle man.

Life: Please tell us where you were born and raised.

Mr. Morgan: I was born and raised right here in Washington, North Carolina, on Fourth Street. Dr. E.M. Brown brought me into the world. My mother, Katherine Stowe, was a native of Hatteras. She came from Hatteras to Washington to the old Washington Collegiate Institute, called then a finishing school. The Methodist Church sponsored the old Washington Collegiate Institute. All of the towns here on the Coast had finishing schools, because the Outer Banks then only went through grade school. If they wanted to finish school, they had to come to New Bern, Washington, or Elizabeth City, one of the towns along the Coast, to a finishing school.

That's how my mother met my father, who was working here at that time. He was a native of Washington. They were married, and in 1923, I came along. I have one brother, Richard, who is 18 months younger than I am. He lives in Pocomoke City, Maryland. So I was born and raised here in Washington. I went to the Washington City Schools, graduated from Washington High School in May, 1941, and matriculated at the University of North Carolina, thanks to the urging of some of my friends who said you could go up there and work your way through. We didn't have a pot or a window to throw it out of!

I came along during the Depression. My mother and father separated when I was nine years old and then divorced. She worked for the WPA [Work Projects Administration] office here. I worked in a grocery store after school and Saturdays. My brother carried a newspaper route. So between the three of us, we kinda made both ends meet. We got along all right.

Life: Was the Depression as bad as we hear about?

Mr. Morgan: Not in this section. In northern industrial sections, you had the soup lines and unemployment. But down in this predominately agrarian section, people could usually get something to eat. They didn't go hungry. People would look out for people. You had stronger family ties, stronger community ties, I think, in this area of the country than in other areas. So actually, during the Great Depression, people were not as hard hit here as in other areas of the country. So we made do.

I was recollecting the other day that my brother and I had an old wagon we had fixed up from some old boards we found and four wheels we had gotten from some other vehicles, two from an old tricycle and maybe two from another wagon. Anyway, we fashioned our own little wagon. Mr. Charlie Cowell ran a potato grader on what we called the "Pea Dock." It was right next to the Pamlico Chemical Company, which was located at the foot of Gladden Street, just across from where the train depot is now. Right next to that was a dock that extended out over the water right along where the beginning of Stewart Parkway is at the present time. During June the potato harvest started at Aurora and other sections of Beaufort County. Of course, Aurora was the big potato capital of Eastern North Carolina at that time. The potatoes were graded on the Pea Dock next to the Pamlico Chemical Company. There were lots of culls and "B" grades that were rejected. They couldn't sell them. Anybody who wanted those potatoes could pick them up. My brother and I would take our
old wagon and go down to the Pea Dock and load it with potatoes and take it back to our home on Third Street, just across from the rear end of Rumley Motor Supply's building.

We would spread them out under the house where they could be cool in a place of shade. We would eat potatoes all summer long—fried potatoes, mashed potatoes, potatoes lyonnaise, potato salad—any kind of a way you could prepare a potato, we ate them that way. And working in the grocery store after school and Saturdays, of course, gave me access to old fruits and vegetables that were beginning to overripen. We always had something good to eat on the table and made out all right. I think my mother made $15 a week working for WPA.

The WPA—or Works Progress Administration—was one of Roosevelt's recovery programs. WPA was an umbrella for many work programs. The Agriculture building here was built in 1937 under one of the WPA programs. In 1932 when Roosevelt went into office, he initiated a series of recovery programs to bring us out of the Depression. Really, what brought us finally out of the Depression was World War II. When World War II came along, it created jobs. That's when we saw a great influx of women going into the work market. Because men were going into the service, women were taking defense jobs in shipyards and other defense plants. And women really worked themselves into the work force. You saw more women getting away from the role of being a housewife and mother to the role of being a working housewife and mother.

*Life*: Did you work for Frank Porter Graham, the president of Carolina at that time?

*Mr. Morgan*: Yes, in the fall of 1941. I worked in Tayloe Drug Store with Joe Tunstall the summer before I went up there. Joe had graduated from pharmacy school a couple of years prior to that. He was from Belhaven, and he had worked his way through school. He told me that if I wanted to go to school, I could get a job. And so in July in 1941, I went to Chapel Hill and I met Mr. Ed Lanier who was the Director of Self-Help. Mr. Roy Armstrong's office was right across the hall from Mr. Ed's in the South Building. He took me over to meet Mr. Armstrong, who was the Director of Admissions. Between Mr. Ed and Mr. Roy, they got me entered into the university. Mr. Ed took me over to the Book Ex [Book Exchange]. He said, "I want to take you over here and meet Mr. Ray Richie." Mr. Richie was the manager of the Book Exchange. At the time, that was considered one of the prime, choice jobs on the campus. It paid 30 cents an hour, and you could always get you a Coca-Cola or milkshake on the side if you worked it right, if you were not under the watchful eye of Mr. Ray Richie who stayed up there in that balcony kinda looking things over all of the time.

I got a job at the Book Ex, starting in September. Mr. Richie said to be up there a week early. He said, "We are going to indoctrinate you to the way of the Book Exchange." You are supposed to go up for freshman week for freshman orientation. Well, I got "orientated" by working in the Book Exchange. A couple of the older boys at the Book Ex got me a room with a Mrs. Frank Thrall on Gimghoul Road. Her husband was a professor of English. He had died a couple years earlier.

*Life*: Did you work for Frank Porter Graham, the president of Carolina at that time?
Everybody would come rushing in there between 7:30 and 9:00 o’clock to get them something to eat on their way to class. Those 8:00 o’clock classes! Everybody hated an 8:00 o’clock class. But you had to have an 8:00 o’clock class back then, especially if you were a lower classman. Francis Nordan and I were the ones who had to get up early and go over there in the mornings.

I remember I had a little Jewish roommate from New Haven, Connecticut, named Dick Wallach, and he was a freshman and I was a sophomore that year. I said, “Now, young man, your job is to get me up at 4:30 every morning.” At 4:30, he would be over there shaking me saying, “Hey, hey, time to get up. Time to get up.”

But it was a great experience living with those people, working with those people. In the summer of 1943 I moved to a house next to the president’s mansion on Franklin Street. In the fall of 1943, I went over and talked with Miss Mirian Graham, Dr. Frank’s wife. Dr. Frank was serving on the War Labor Board during the war.

I was a 4-F; that’s why I wasn’t in service. I was up there when Pearl Harbor was bombed on December 7th, 1941. I had been to the movie and was walking back across the campus when I heard the radios giving out the news about Pearl Harbor. So the next day, everyone started enlisting or making their plans for getting into service. My draft board had put me in a 4-F classification. I tried to enlist in the regular Navy over at Raleigh; they wouldn’t have me. They rejected me. Ironically, after the War was over, I was reclassified into 1-A. In 1946, I went over to Raleigh and enlisted in the regular Navy with a fellow named George McKee. He has his own insurance agency nowadays. George McKee had one leg a little shorter than the other. He walked with a little limp, kinda hippety-hop. They took George and he went on to boot camp. They detained me at the Receiving Center at Great Lakes and surveyed me out. They said I was too big a risk for the Navy to take. I had broken my leg and neck in an automobile accident in 1938. I had a dislocated first and second vertebrae. In 1974 I went to Duke Hospital and spent six weeks. They put me in a halo device and pulled the bones back into position. They gave me a new lease on life at the age of 50.

*Life:* You said you were classified 4-F, but then you got into the Navy later?

*Mr. Morgan:* I enlisted in the Navy in 1946. At the Enlistment Center in Raleigh, they were glad to get any new enlistees. Everybody was getting out of service at that time. They sent me to the Great Lakes Receiving Center. That is where I was rejected when I went through the medical examining line. I was in and out in just 30 days.

*Life:* Did you find that in late 1941 after Pearl Harbor, in contrast to more recent times, men were much more eager to go into service? These people were leaving school and enlisting?

*Mr. Morgan:* Yes, it was a time of national emergency and a time of high patriotism. Of course, Great Britain had already been in the war for two years. They went into the war in 1939; they declared war on Germany. They had been trying to draw the United States into it for a couple of years. Then, of course, Pearl Harbor did it. I vividly remember December 8th. We had the radio going full blast in the Book Ex. I was behind the soda fountain. President Roosevelt made his speech to the joint session of Congress declaring war on the Axis — Germany, Italy, and Japan.

*Life:* Would you say that that was the most exciting historical event of your life — Pearl Harbor Day?
Mr. Morgan: It was one of them, yes. As Roosevelt said, that was a day that will go down in infamy. It was a time of turmoil, a time of high patriotism, a time of feelings running high. The expressions you heard as you went across the campus were “Goodbye, old buddy,” or “Come on and let’s go join the Navy together.” A lot of the boys got into the V-6 and V-12 programs, which were Navy programs. Carolina had a Navy ROTC program already going. This became the Navy V-12 Program.

Life: What exactly did V-12 mean? Was that an officer training program?

Mr. Morgan: Yes, that was an officer training program. You could keep going to school until you completed a course of instructions. Then they had what they called “90-day wonders.” Three months and you were commissioned an officer. They were running them through—and running them through. A lot of the fellows went ahead and got their commissions, went into the service, and then came back later in 1946 and 1947 and finished their schooling.

I remember we had a lot of great football players that came up from Alabama and Ole Miss. We had the Poole brothers from Ole Miss — Ray and Barney and Oliver Poole. Doc Blanchard was there for a year before he went up to West Point. He was Jim Tatum’s cousin down in Conway, South Carolina. I knew Coach Tatum when he was there in 1942. Then he went in the Navy. When he came out of the Navy, I had left there.

Life: What about President Graham? Did you work with him? Did you stay at his house?

Mr. Morgan: Yes. He had two rooms on the back of the president’s mansion. He would take four self-help students in—that’s what we called ourselves, self-help students. That’s when you worked your way through. I roomed with a boy from Hurdle Mills. That’s near Roxboro in Person County. His name was Cy Whitfield. Cy was a premedical student. In the other room were two other boys. Dr. Frank had a nephew from Charlotte named Willingham, along with another fellow named Moore. It was my job to go down to the Purchasing Department and get the key to the car, a 1939 Ford Sedan. You know they quit making cars during World War II because all of the effort had to go into making tanks and armored stuff for the war effort. So this was a 1939 model sedan, and I would drive over to Raleigh and pick up Dr. Frank from the Pullman that would bring him in there during the night. I would meet him about 7:00 o’clock in the morning. We would come back over to Chapel Hill. Miss Marian would have breakfast ready for us, and we would all sit down and eat breakfast together. On these occasions of driving with Dr. Frank, I got to know him very intimately. He had a great mind. He was one of the most humble persons that you would ever want to meet, but with a great, brilliant mind. It was always said that Dr. Frank Graham was 20 years ahead of his time.

Before he was defeated by Willis Smith for the Senate, Dr. Frank was appointed by Governor Kerr Scott to fill out an unexpired term in the United States Senate. Dr. Frank filled out this unexpired term and then ran against Willis Smith. That was a bloody, knock-down, drag-out primary fight in which Dr. Frank was painted as a “pinky” and “commie” and everything else. This shows you how cruel politics can be and how it can attempt to destroy the character of a great person. Willis Smith won the nomination and went on to be United States Senator. Dr. Frank then became a consultant for the United Nations. He worked overseas and worked with this United Nations Commission which he headed up. Just a great man.

Some years later, after I was married, we were driving down to Hatteras to visit with my grandparents. On the way back
"Having known Dr. Frank Graham was a highlight of my life."

up from Hatteras, we were driving back through Nags Head and Kill Devil Hills. Back then you had to come back around by Elizabeth City. I saw this person walking along the side of the road with his head buried in a newspaper. And I told Geneva, "There's Dr. Frank Graham." I recognized his stature. He was real short in stature. I stopped and rolled the window down. He looked up from the newspaper he was reading and said, "John Morgan." Well, I hadn't seen him in eight or ten years at least. Just like that, "John Morgan." I introduced him to my wife. He said that he and Miss Marian were down there spending a two-week vacation. They always went down on the Outer Banks at Nags Head where they rented a cottage for two weeks each summer.

I would say that having known Dr. Frank Graham and the experience of living with and knowing such a great person was another highlight of my life.
Life: Frank Graham was, I believe, generally credited, rightfully, with having Carolina move into the forefront of national research universities. Is that right?

Mr. Morgan: Yes.

Life: By bringing in a lot of faculty from all over the country and the world.

Mr. Morgan: Yes. In the late '40's, Gordon Gray, I believe, succeeded him. Gray was there for a short time, about two or three years. Gordon Gray later went into politics. Then you had the revamping of the university system where each branch of the university had a chancellor at its head and Dean House became chancellor. I think he was the first chancellor. He was a mighty interesting character, Dean Robert Burton House.

Bob House could play the harmonica. We had a lot of square dances down at the Y [YMCA] Court, and Dean House would go down there and play the harmonica and Fish Worley and Bill Cochrane, who works for the United States Senate as a consultant, would call the square dancing sets. In those days it was odds move on and evens stand still: you had to count off the odd and even couples. They’d count you off, and you had to remember if you were odd or even. And the odds would move on and the evens stand still and join four hands and around circle left, around circle right, swing your opposite, swing your own, right hand across and circle left, left hand across and circle right. They called all these sets. And then you joined hands all together and you’d weave a basket, and then north meets south and kiss her hand, east meets west and kiss her again. We’d just have a terrific amount of fun! And, occasionally, we’d have a live string band to help out, but most of the time, especially during the early years of the war, you had to use recorded music, with a loudspeaker system, to have the square dance sets. But we had a terrific amount of
fun out there doing that.

I never owned a topcoat in my life up until then. Dr. Cecil Johnson was the freshman advisor. Dr. Johnson saw me across the psych [psychology] building one day in my shirt sleeves. He said, “Young man, don’t you have a coat?”

I said, “No, sir. I’ve never had much use for a coat. I’ve got a sweater, but no further than it is from the Book Ex over to here…”

Next day, Dr. Johnson came in to get his daily cup of coffee from the Book Ex, and he says, “Young man, when you get off of work today, I want you to go down to Bierman’s Department Store. They’ve got a package down there for you.” I said, “Thank you, sir.” After I got off of work, I went down to Bierman’s and there was the first topcoat that I ever owned in my life. Dr. Cecil Johnson was my benefactor.

**Life:** He was a nice fellow.

**Mr. Morgan:** He was.

I worked with a couple of boys who were in Chapel Hill High School. One was named Freddie Bowman, who’s dad was a lobbyist, worked with the beer and wine lobby, I think, and there was another young fellow who later became famous as an Associated Press correspondent, Sam Summerlin. Those fellows used to come down and work at the Book Ex, and there was a boy from Kinston named Pete Pulley. His folks ran Pulley’s Bar-B-Q in Kinston. Pete was a workaholic, and if I worked with Pete, I was too. I had to be a workaholic to keep up with Pete. We worked together at the Book Ex, and we had dance concessions for the Grail dances, the University Club dances, the Germans [official university dances]. They were held at Woollen Gym. We’d go down to Kenan Stadium and get a big drink trough to ice down drinks. I don’t think they use them any more. They have more modern methods nowadays, but we had these great long drink troughs, as long as a table, and load it on the back of a pick-up truck that we got from the Purchasing Department. That was another vehicle that I had access to. And we had to clear everything through Mr. Rogerson, University Finance Officer. He was crusty; he was rough. Bill Carmichael was the comptroller, the business manager for the university at that time; and Billy Carmichael and Pete Pulley were very close friends, and we worked with Billy Carmichael. Fact is, Pete designed and made the plans and everything, and opened up and managed the Skuttlebutt [a drink and sandwich shop for V-12 students]. We made that for the Navy V-12 students that were there. And it was strictly for them; no civilians were allowed. That’s where you got chocolate candy, cigarettes, and things that the civilian population did not have access to. But it was strictly for the Navy personnel, and the pre-flight school was there also. Otto Graham, Ted Williams [famous athletes in the pre-flight program]… I saw Williams knock a home run over Lenoir Dining Hall. Johnny Pesky, Ted Williams, Enos Slaughter, and that baseball coach Bunn Hearn were there. The Navy pre-flight school had some outstanding people from all around the nation to go there and go through the Navy pre-flight training program. I think it lasted three, maybe six months. And then they’d bring another class in, and they kept coming and coming and coming. The pre-flight school had a football team, and they would play Greensboro O.R.D. and Bainbridge Navy with Charlie Justice. The other service teams around the area would also play against the Carolina pre-flight school. They had some outstanding football players to come there [Carolina], and some came back later to finish school there.

**Life:** You graduated in 1946?

**Mr. Morgan:** Roy, I never graduated. I quit-uated. Dudley DeWitt Carrol, Dean Carrol, called me in 1945, and said,
"Morgan, I've been checking up on you. You're working full time and going to school on the side. It's supposed to be the other way around. You're supposed to be going to school full time and doing a little work on the side." So he advised me to come home, get a job, and then go back. He said, "I'm sure that our faculty committee will look favorably upon your reapplication to the School of Commerce." I said, "All right, sir." And I came home and got a job with the radio station here, WRRF. That was the first job I had after I got out of school. I worked for a year and saved my money up, and that's when I went back in 1946 and was readmitted to school in the fall quarter of 1946. And that's when I got reclassified 1-A. I went back again, but they [the Army] rejected me again at Fort Bragg. So that was all behind me. I came back to the draft board, and I said, "All right, so now what do you want to do with me?" So I went back to work with the radio station with intentions to save enough money so I could go on back and finish school. I never did go back.

Some years later, I went up there with Nelson Jeanette and Henry Barnes to talk with Spike Saunders [long time director of the Carolina Alumni Association] about getting an alumni program for Beaufort County alumni. While I was there, I went over to the Central Records Office to check up on my standing when I left the university. And they checked my records and said, "Mr. Morgan, I'm sorry to inform you that you never have officially withdrawn from the university." And this was 1960 and Terry Sanford was running for Governor that year and we ran into him on campus.

"You will have to officially withdraw from the University," she [official in Central Records] said. She directed me to the Business Administration Office to withdraw. She said that I lacked nine courses from graduating. I was married, my wife, a nurse who worked for some pediatricians, and the lady in the office said, "You could go to work with your journalistic experience for the University Press. Your wife could work at Memorial Hospital, you could put your children in the day school, and you all would have it made. In one year's time you could go ahead and knock those nine courses out and get your degree." I came back home and said, "Well, I'm working for the newspaper; what in the world do I need a degree for? It ain't going to do me any good—working for the newspaper." I was in the School of Commerce; I wasn't in the School of Journalism.

*Life*: So you had left the radio station and were now with the newspaper?

*Mr. Morgan*: Yes, I went to work with the newspaper in 1951—*Washington Daily News*.

*Life*: You were the sports writer for them?

*Mr. Morgan*: Yes.

*Life*: How did you enjoy that?

*Mr. Morgan*: Loved it! Loved every minute of it.

*Life*: What do you think were some of the more memorable sports events and personalities that you remember here?

*Mr. Morgan*: I've been asked that many times. I worked with WHED, the new radio station that started in 1948. I signed it on the air. We could broadcast at night. Then, WRRF was having to sign off at darkness; it was a daytime station. I went to work with WHED to broadcast basketball and football games. I'd ride to the games with the team and come back with them on the bus.

*Life*: That was Washington High School?
Mr. Morgan: Yes. I covered all of the other sports: the old Beaufort County League and baseball. That was my introduction to doing sports, first in broadcasting. I wrote a lot of copy, commercials and things like that, when I worked for the radio stations. I learned how to type when I was 13 years old. I didn’t make great grades in English, but I managed to form and type the words. I went to the newspaper in 1951 with Ashley Futrell, who came in 1949. I stayed there until 1964 when I came into the Register of Deeds Office. My primary job was sports editor for the Washington Daily News and as such I covered all of the schools in the local counties. Primarily, I covered Washington High School. P.S. Jones’s manager would call me with the information. The score keeper or one of the coaches with the county schools would call in with their information, and I would take down the information and rewrite it real quick for the 10:30 deadline. If you got it back there at 10:45, they were ready to fight you in the composing room, for they had their deadline to meet too. Back then, of course, you had hot lead, Linotypes and molds. You had to cast these forms to go on the press, and everything had to go. Often I was the holdup. So they would vent their wrath on me, but I could take it. I was covering five county schools and the two schools in town. Then, P.S. Jones was the black school, and Washington High School the white school. So I had two varsity schools to cover right here in town.

As far as the highlights were concerned, in 1952, the Greensboro Daily News used to pick an All-State team that was generally recognized as the authentic All-State team. Smith Barrier was the sports editor for the Greensboro Daily News. Dick Cherry made the All-State football team. Dick was selected that year as quarterback. Later, he matriculated at East Carolina and became a little All-American. He was just an uncanny quarterback. He’d run to his right and throw to his left, which was very difficult to accomplish. He was a great passer. He played under Jack Boone at East Carolina. Dick was an all-around good athlete. Dick Cherry played that same year on the basketball team that went all the way to the state finals at Duke Indoor Stadium. We defeated the best team in the tournament, Reidsville, and the next night we played Hendersonville for the State Championship and lost to them 44 to 40.

Edgar Woolard, who is now CEO of DuPont Company, was a member of that team. Bobby Hackler, whose father was an x-ray doctor here, was another. Bobby Smith was the only sophomore on the team. He’s a lawyer in Raleigh now. And John Keias Hoyt is with Wachovia Bank in Kinston. We had four seniors and one sophomore who made up this championship basketball team, and they were great!

Life: Do you think that that was the most memorable event?

Mr. Morgan: That was one of many memorable events. Another was in 1955, when Chophy Wagner’s Washington Pam Pack won two games, lost seven games, and tied one. It was the worse, most dismal season they ever had. That will always live in my memory. But in 1956, this same bunch of kids, who were young and green in 1955, had matured and developed by 1956, and went to the State Championship against Canton. Ward Marslender was the quarterback that year, and they had a great bunch of kids.

In 1955, we went up to Churchland, Virginia, to play a great team, and I remember it just as if it were last week. A foul was called against the Washington team and a 15-yard penalty. Chophy yelled, “That’s a bad call. That’s a bad call.” The official put the “T” on him and stepped off 15 more yards. Chophy continued to protest, and the official picked the ball up and stepped off 15 more yards. That was 45 yards in penalties. A free-for-all broke out. Dave Milligan, who teaches fourth grade at Chocowinity School, was working at
the newspaper then and had gone up to help cover the game with me. He said, “Come on, let’s get into the fight.”

I said, “You go on and get in the fight. I’ve had my neck broken once, and I don’t want to go through all that again.” So Dave was running out to get in the fight, but by that time, the officials had pulled everybody apart and had restored order. The game went ahead and we finished the game. Churchland beat Washington bad, thanks to the “homers,” the officials that were calling the game.

Upon leaving, the last words I heard Wagner say to Shotgun Brown [the opposing coach] was, “Shotgun, you folks got to come down to our place next year, and we’ll be there waiting for you.” Next year they came, and it was the only time in my life I saw Wagner run up a score against an opponent. Churchland came down here, with a good team, the next year to play at Washington. It was a home-and-home series. Washington beat them 52 to nothing. Wagner poured it on that night. That ended the series, to say the least.

There have been many memorable players down through the years. I can’t recollect all their names. I wish I could remember them. I really do. I’ve often said that when I retired, I’d like to go back over to the Washington Daily News and go through the microfilm files and pick out some of the outstanding events and some of the outstanding players that I knew and maybe write something about it one day. I’m in the process right now of writing down some of my memoirs, and some of the things I’m telling you right here will be included. My memoirs mostly have to do with my happy days as a child spent with my grandparents at Hatteras on the Outer Banks. Those were happy times. And I’ve always tried to be a happy person, even though I came along during the Depression. Nothing there to keep you from being happy. Happiness is a state of mind. That’s the way I see it anyhow. I never had sense enough to be anything but happy.

Life: Was Hatteras very sparsely developed compared to what it is now?

Mr. Morgan: Yes, you didn’t have the tourist traffic that you have now. Ocracoke was really what you call more of a spa. People from up this way had boats running down to Ocracoke. They’d run down to Ocracoke to spend the weekend. A lot of folks used to say, “I understand you’ve been down to Ocracoke.”

I’d say, “No, I’ve been to Hatteras. Ocracoke is further south than Hatteras.” I’d say, “I’m a Hatter-asser.”

Life: Going to Ocracoke in the early ’50’s, I don’t believe they even had roads into there. We flew into there.

Mr. Morgan: Yes, you’d land on the beach.

Life: People who lived there weren’t too happy to see us.

Mr. Morgan: Yes, that’s right. You were foreigners, strangers.

Life: I couldn’t understand the way they talked.

Mr. Morgan: You had to listen carefully. They talked with a sort of clipped off speech. The Ocracokers even had a different dialect from the Hatter-asser. A Hatter-asser was hard enough to understand. And then if you came from Avon, you had a little different dialect. They were called Kinnakeeters.

Here’s an interesting thing: Rodanthé was known as Chicamacomaco. The natives along the Outer Banks couldn’t put all those syllables in there: Chic-a-ma-com-a-co. So they shortened it to Chicamacomic. They called it Chicamacomic. Waves was known as Middlewoods. Salvo was known as Washwoods. Avon was known as Kinnakeet. Buxton was
known as Cape. Frisco was known as Trent. Some of the old timers still call it Trent. "Going up to Trent?" "Let's go to Trent." And Hatteras, of course, was known as Hatteras. Each one of the villages, except for Hatteras, had another name. If you were going up to Buxton, you'd go to Cape.

*Life:* Why would they change the names?

**Mr. Morgan:** Well, Kinnakeet came from the two Coast Guard stations. They had Big Kinnakeet and Little Kinnakeet Coast Guard stations there. So they called it Kinnakeet. And another thing that is interesting is that if you went up to Kinnakeet, people there loved to brew and drink yaupon tea. I don't know if you ever wrote anything on yaupon tea and the way it was made, but you take the yaupon leaf and cure it just like you would any other tea leaf and brew yaupon tea. It was peculiar to the village of Avon—Kinnakeet. And if you would go up there and yell out, "Kinnakeeters, yaupon eaters!" then you had a fight on your hands. Kinnakeeters were sensitive about such things as that. I had a couple of cousins—I had an aunt who married a Kinnakeeter, name of Scarborough. She had three children. I used to go up there when we were children and say, "Hey, Kinnakeeters, yaupon eaters." They didn't cotton too well to that expression. But we got along delightfully with each other.

But those villages were given those names; they were known as that, even though they had the name like Rodanthe. They had a Coast Guard station there known as Chicamacomico Station, so they called it Chicamacomic instead of Rodanthe. I mean, the natives, the old timers did. Of course, nowadays everybody calls it Rodanthe. The Chicamacomico Coast Guard Station is a national historical site, I think. Some efforts have been made to restore it and keep it, as well as some of the old Coast Guard stations down along the Outer Banks. Hatteras Inlet Station used to be on the northern tip of Ocracoke Island. But a new inlet cut through there, and there's nothing left where the old Coast Guard station was. They rebuilt it on the southern tip of Hatteras Island, where you get on the ferry to go over to Ocracoke Island from Hatteras.

So happy times and great times of summers when I was a young fellow were spent with my grandparents at Hatteras. My grandfather was a captain on a freight boat that ran between Hatteras and Elizabeth City, the old "Ethel." He would carry a load of fish up, as would the boats that came from Hatteras to Washington. Two boats came from Hatteras to Washington each week. Two boats came from Hatteras to Elizabeth City each week. That was the way they brought supplies in and carried fish out. The dealers there had connections with dealers in Elizabeth City. The Globe Fish Company, I remember that one especially, from out of Philadelphia, had the dealers in Elizabeth City and in Washington. S. P. Willis and Company had a boat that ran between Washington and Elizabeth City, the old "Mary Fletcher." Then there was another one called the "Flossie Muir." She was a two-master, great masts.

One of my stories that I recollect in my memoirs was that we were going down to Hatteras on a two-master. We got down to the mouth of the river one day with the "Old Flossie Muir" under auxiliary power. Herbert Oden was the first mate, and Mr. Johnny Neal was captain. Herbert decided he would take a little nap. The jib was furled around the jib sprit on the bow of the boat. It was a nice comfortable canvas bed. He got into the jib sheet and fell asleep. He went to turn over and fell out of the jib sheet. Mr. Johnny saw him as he rolled out of it and very quickly ran down into the cabin and cut the engine off, knowing that he was going to be keel hauled. His leg hit the propeller as it was stopping, I'm sure, because if it was still turning it would have chewed him up. It cut a big gash in his leg. He bled profusely. Mr. Johnny lowered the yawl and went and got Herbert back aboard the boat, bound his leg up with some old rags soaked in kerosene. Well, that didn't stop
infection from setting in. We got him back home, back to Hatteras. Old Doc Kenfield sewed his leg up and fixed it up and treated it for infection. They didn’t have the wonder drugs then that they have now, so they had to treat it with what they had. They didn’t have any sulfa drugs or wonder drugs as we know today to knock out infection. So he came mighty near to losing that leg. But that was an experience right there.

*Life:* How did you ever get into your present position?

**Mr. Morgan:** When I was working for the Washington *Daily News*, Mr. C. C. Duke was the Register of Deeds, had been since 1930. There have only been three Registers of Deeds in this century. Mr. Gilbert Rumley, I think, went in in 1898 and served until his death in 1930. Mr. Duke was appointed to fill out Mr. Gilbert Rumley’s unexpired term. Then he ran for the office successfully in 1932 and continued in the office continuously until his death on the first day of the year of 1964. Mr. Duke’s wife, Mrs. Lida Duke, was appointed by the Board of Commissioners to fill out the remaining one year on his term, which expired in December 1964. Many of my friends had prevailed upon me to run for the office. They said, “John, you ought to run for that office. Your Old Man used to work in there, and you know you’re familiar with that office and everything.” There were a couple of surveyor friends of mine around here that especially wanted to see me run. They offered to pay my campaign expenses and everything if I would file for the office.

I said, “Well, I want to find out what Mrs. Duke is going to do.” And I came over and talked to Mrs. Duke, and she said she had no plans to run for the office, that she had retired on December 31, and that she planned to retire when she filled out Mr. Duke’s unexpired term. And so I decided that I would file for the office. And so in February, I filed for the office. I came over and paid my filing fee at the Board of Elections office. Nobody else filed. I was unopposed in the primary, and I was unopposed in the general election. I have run unopposed ever since.

Now, there’s an interesting story. An old timer from Belhaven told me one time, he said, “John, the reason you ain’t never had no opposition for the office is ‘cause it don’t pay enough to attract any top-notch people.” There may be a whole lot to that. Notwithstanding, I’ve always enjoyed it, and I’ve always been a public person. I’ve always worked with the public ever since I was a little boy nine years old selling Washington *Daily News* for three cents a copy on the streets of Washington.

That’s how I got in the grocery store. I had an uncle who worked in the grocery store, Uncle George. He always gave me a nickel for my three-cents paper. I would turn in two cents and keep a penny for myself. That was my profit, one cent for each paper that I sold. I would make 75 or 80 or 90 cents a week selling newspapers. But my Uncle George always gave me a nickel. Sometimes, when he was feeling real generous, he would give me a dime. Uncle George asked me one day, “Why don’t you come to work down here. Mr. Peele said he would pay you a dollar and a quarter a week working after school and Saturdays sweeping up, stocking shelves, and delivering groceries.” So that’s how I got my job in the grocery store. I was eleven years old then, so that would have been 1934, and I worked there all through high school. I graduated in 1941. It was quite an experience. I met some great people.

*Life:* What have you seen over the years from your youth to the present as being the most significant changes in our society?

**Mr. Morgan:** Well, as I said earlier, one of the most significant changes was during World War II when women entered the
work force. And I think probably during the '60’s, the hippies, or yuppies, movement and the ERA, the Equal Rights movement, in the workplace. And I think the computer age has brought on some revolutionary changes. Television, of course, brought on some great revolutionary changes in our lives.

_Life_: Do you think they are positive or not positive?

_Mr. Morgan_: Positive. Yes, I think the positive outweighs the negative aspects of television and computers in that it has opened wider vistas to assimilate and disseminate information. And that is what we are talking about anyway in a learning process is disseminating information and educating ourselves in positive and negative ways. It has both aspects. The computer age, I’m just getting into that myself. It’s fantastic.

_Life_: We saw you at a computer when we came in.

_Mr. Morgan_: Yes, I was sitting at a computer. I was working on my memoirs. I’ve got a disk I’m working on. I’m Clerk to the Board of County Commissioners, and, as such, I keep the minutes. We have a Mindex Program, a program for minute indexing. You know, the heart and soul of the operation in my office is indexing. We’ve got records that date back to 1696. And if you didn’t have them indexed, it would be complete calamity. So indexing is the heart and soul of the operation in the Register of Deeds Office.

_Life_: You wonder how you ever functioned without computers?

_Mr. Morgan_: Yes, you did it with pen and pencil. That’s like a copier. A copier is one of the most revolutionary changes that has come along, especially in record keeping. I think that the copier machine has been another one of the revolutionary
Mr. Morgan shows students copies of old records.

or technical changes as far as our operation in the Register of Deeds Office is concerned, along with the computer age.

Microfiche is another revolutionary change. A lot of the offices ran out of room, so to speak. So that was another one of the revolutionary changes, to go from hard copy to microfilm. And now you are going from microfilming to computerization and computerized records.

Life: As Register of Deeds, you spoke about those old, old records. What are some of the highlights from the old records that come to mind that you have had to be involved with?

Mr. Morgan: Our records begin in 1696, which was the founding of Bath County. Albemarle County was founded in 1693, and old Bath County in 1696. So our records go back to 1696. Some of the old records have to do with the transferring of property by the Lords Proprietors to ship captains who were bringing people in here from the Virginia Colony to settle the North Carolina Colony. There are some
old deeds indicating that “Ye surveyor go lay out so many acres, say 225 acres, to ye Captain So-and-So for ye listed people brought here to settle this area.” It was settled in the early times by the French Huguenots, I believe. Maule was a French Huguenot name. Maule’s Point is named for Patrick Maule, who was one of the earliest settlers. Some interesting records have to do with depositions of ships’ captains. Washington was a port. Portsmouth and Washington were points of entry. As such, some ship captains would file depositions here, which are in our records, having to do with acts of piracy, having to do with storms destroying their ships and their cargoes. They would file a deposition explaining what the storm or the pirates had to do with losing the cargo. These are real interesting records.

One spicy record has to do with a deposition filed by one Thomas Unday, who was accused of having begotten upon the body of a young maiden an illegitimate child. He had filed these depositions proving that he was in Core Sound at the time of the alleged conception of the illegitimate child. A captain friend of his had filed a deposition saying, yes, we were down at Core Sound at that time. One deposition had to do with a man going to bed in between two women, and one of the women says to the man, “Mr. Unday, why do you come into bed with your breeches on only?” They went into bed and had some rum together. This was a deposition leading up to why this girl got pregnant and everything. But then other depositions had to say that he was in Core Sound at the time of the alleged conception. So all things like that were going on in the 1720’s and ‘30’s that we read about and hear about today. So what’s new under the sun? Nothing is new under the sun; it’s all been here before.

Mr. Morgan: Yes. We call those “vague descriptions.” We have some very vague, bad descriptions of land in Beaufort County. Beaufort County has never been mapped, and we hope in the not too distant future to have Beaufort County mapped. That would set out each parcel by metes and bounds. But a lot of our old deeds have descriptions that read, “from a pine stump down the run of a branch to a gum, containing five acres, be the same more or less.” Well, it could be ten or it could be two and not five. And many people who go to have their property surveyed will find out that they may have more or they may have less than what their deed calls for. The only sure way to find out is to have it surveyed, and more and more lending institutions are requiring a survey of property before they will lend you money on it because they have to know exactly whether it’s ten acres or whether it’s two acres.

[Having no survey can cause] boundary disputes. People have to get together on it. And if they can’t get together, then the court has to make these decisions for them. This is done too. But it is a lot cheaper and a lot more amenable if you can get together with your neighbor and come to an agreement over the boundary line. These disputes do come up.

Life: It sounds like there are a lot of records there that could make for a lot of interesting books. Have you ever had researchers come in to research for books?

Mr. Morgan: Yes, we have researchers come in to research the old books — Inglis Fletcher, who wrote a lot about the Albemarle. One of her kin, John Fletcher, is an attorney in Hyde County. She did a lot of research here and up in Edenton about the Albemarle—you know, she wrote about the Albemarle. We have a lot of genealogical research, too, because our records do go back so far.
Conclusion

By Betty Moore

Through only this brief visit with Mr. Morgan, his personal inner strengths and resiliency were clearly evident. In spite of many personal crises and tests of these strengths, he has, like the mighty oak, bent and flexed and continued to grow. His belief that we are each responsible for our own happiness can also be heard in the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson:

*The high prize of life, the crowning fortune of a man, is to be born with a bias to some pursuit, which finds him in employment and happiness.*

*Mr. Morgan with his staff: (left to right) Nelda Cooper, Asst. Register of Deeds; Gloria Howard, Deputy Register of Deeds; Betty Woolard, Deputy Register of Deeds*