

A Guide to the Harrisonburg Court Square Oral Histories, 1990 SdArch 0002

Harrisonburg Court Square oral histories

1990



Title Statement

A Guide to the Harrisonburg Court Square Oral Histories, 1990 SdArch 0002

Author: JMU Libraries cataloging staff

Publication Statement

Publisher: James Madison University Libraries Special Collections

820 Madison Drive
MSC 1706
Harrisonburg, Virginia 22807
Telephone: (540) 568-3612
library-special@jmu.edu
URL: <https://www.lib.jmu.edu/special/>



1998

Profile Description

Creation: This finding aid was produced using ArchivesSpace on 2025-10-17 07:02:05 -0400.

Language Usage: Description is written in: English, Latin script.

Descriptive Rules: Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

SdArch 0002

Unit ID

/repositories/4/resources/590

Unit Date

1990

Language

English

Abstract

The Harrisonburg Court Square Oral Histories, 1990, is comprised of audio recordings, interview transcripts, and background papers, documenting the impact of the construction of the Valley Mall in 1978 on downtown Harrisonburg.

source

Accles, Amy

Extent

0.2 cubic feet 4 folders, 6 audiocassettes, 3 cds

Repository

James Madison University Libraries Special Collections

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Access to the Oral Histories is governed by agreements with the narrators. Researchers must register and agree to copyright and privacy laws before using this collection. Please contact Research Services staff before visiting the James Madison University Special Collections Library to use this collection.

Use Restrictions

The copyright interests in this collection have been transferred to the James Madison University Special Collections Library. For more information, contact the Special Collections Library Reference Desk (library-special@jmu.edu).

Acquisition Information

Collection was donated on April 25, 1990 by Amy Accles.

Processing Information

Collection was cataloged by JMU Cataloging at the item level in 1998; the descriptive metadata was compiled into a Finding Aid format in 2019. Cassette tapes were transferred to MAMA-R 700MB gold cd-r using Tascam cc-222 mkII; 618mb. Audio recordings were digitized by Kirsten Mlodynia, Digital Project Specialist at JMU Libraries in July 2018.

Preferred Citation

[identification of item], [[box #, folder #], Harrisonburg Court Square Oral Histories, 1990, SdArch 0002, Special Collections, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Va.

Bio/Historical Note

Oral histories were created by Amy Accles, an undergraduate at JMU, who completed the project as an intern in Special Collections in 1990.

Scope and Content

The Harrisonburg Court Square Oral History Collection, 1990, is comprised of audio interviews, transcripts, and background papers, documenting the impact of the construction of the Valley Mall in 1978 on downtown Harrisonburg. This oral history series shows how the Valley Mall changed the face and atmosphere of downtown Harrisonburg by comparing and contrasting the present Court Square area with the same area prior to the completion of the Mall. Interviews were conducted with three Harrisonburg citizens who reflected varying viewpoints on this subject. They were: Ronn Short, former owner of a local business; Terri Denton, manager of a family-owned local business, Denton's Furniture; and Bob Sullivan, Harrisonburg City Planner.

Keywords

Accles, Amy

Description of Subordinate Components

Court Square, Harrisonburg, Virginia Background Paper

Unit ID 2-1

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/18199

Mixed Materials [1000898332] 1 (box)

Container 1 (folder)

Scope and Contents

This monograph gives a brief chronological history of the downtown Court Square area of Harrisonburg, Virginia, beginning with its founding in 1780 by Thomas Harrison and ending with an assessment of the area's status in 1990, twelve years following the completion of the regional Valley Mall in 1978. Traces the Square's development and later demise as a shopping district, and various attempts at revitalization. Describes the Court Square area, the spring/creek and courthouse, and other surrounding buildings and their uses over the years. Shows how the downtown area became a gathering place for social, economic/business and legal activities during the 19th and 20th centuries. Describes the court days of the early 1800's through the 1930's, and records the development of local downtown businesses including banks (ex. Virginia National, Rockingham National Bank), and family-owned/other shopping business (ex. Joseph Ney's, J.C. Penny's, Leggett's, McCrory's, Woolworth's, and the A&N store). Traces the building of the Valley Mall with consequent competition for downtown businesses, resulting in the relocation and/or closing of some. Describes concurrent/consequent attempts at revitalization by the Harrisonburg Downtown Development Corporation, and actions by the Rockingham Board of Supervisors. Compares/contrasts Harrisonburg situation with that of Staunton.

Ron Short interviewed by Amy Accles

Unit ID 2-2

Unit ID /repositories/4/archival_objects/18200

Unit Date February 6, 1990

Mixed Materials SA0002-SET-001 (network storage)

Creator Short, Ron

Creator Accles, Amy

Access Restrictions

Oral history is open for research.

Use Restrictions

The copyright interests were transferred to Carrier Library.

Scope and Contents

This interview records the reflections and viewpoints of Mr. Ronn Short, former owner of Colonial Touch Bake Shop/Cafe (now out of business), on the atmosphere and condition of Court Square, Harrisonburg, Va. before and after the completion of the Valley Mall in 1978. His opinions reflect those of a long-time resident and shopper of the area; also as a former businessman. Reminisces about the small-town atmosphere of a busy centrally-locally downtown area ten to twenty years ago (ex. the feeling of community/comaraderie which existed). Describes the area as being the location for shopping (department, five-and-dimes such as McCrory's, clothing, other small retail stores) and professional offices (attorneys, accountants, doctors, etc.). Mentions customer relations and the use of traditional merchandising techniques (compared and contrasted to today's advertising methods); Christmas shopping. Compares and contrasts regional shopping areas; notes impact of highway systems on shopping developments and shoppers' habits. Believes downtown has changed from a retail/shopping center, drawing people from all over the region (incl. W. Va.), to a professional office-type area. Opinions that the Mall was responsible for the demise of downtown shopping, with the relocation of the two main department stores (Penney's and Leggett's) to the Mall. Believes strongly that parking and access/convenience to businesses are the main reasons why people do not frequent the Square today. Mentions traffic patterns; revitalization attempts; shopping patterns of today; relations between the town and James Madison University; and proposed new County jail. Regrets the sense of loss of community in the downtown area. Refers to the following stores: McCrory's, Leggett's, Penney's, Alfred and Joseph Neys', Woolworth's, Bride's House, A&N, Image Boutique, Cato's, Valley Books, Jewelry Box, Colonial Optical, Whitesel Music, Schewel Furniture. Mentions sandwich shops/restaurants such as: Jess' Quick Lunch, The Palmer House Restaurants, Calhoun's, Joshua Wilton House; entertainment spots such as the Elbow Room, and movie theaters such as the Virginia and State Theaters. Refers to the big fire which destroyed a city block [1968]. Mentions the following banks: Virginia National Bank, Black Diamond; also Harrison Plaza (professional complex). Recorded at the home of Amy Accles, Harrisonburg, Va. on Feb. 6, 1990.

Transcript and supporting documents**Unit ID** /repositories/4/archival_objects/18201**Unit Date** February 6, 1990**Mixed Materials [1000898332]** 1 (box)**Container** 2 (folder)**Bob Sullivan interviewed by Amy Accles****Unit ID** 2-3**Unit ID** /repositories/4/archival_objects/18205**Unit Date** February 9, 1990**Mixed Materials** SA0002-SET-001 (network storage)**Creator** Sullivan, Robert James, Jr., 1937-2013**Creator** Accles, Amy**Access Restrictions**

Oral history is open to research.

Use Restrictions

The copyright interests were transferred to Carrier Library.

Scope and Contents

This interview records the reflections and viewpoints of Mr. Bob Sullivan, City Planning Director [1965-Feb. 1992], on the atmosphere and condition of Court Square, Harrisonburg, Va. before and after the completion of the Valley Mall in 1978. His opinions reflect those of a long-time resident and Harrisonburg city official. Reviews the history of and city's position on the following issues: advantages and disadvantages of not having businesses centered in downtown Harrisonburg; city zoning regulations; city annexation of the Rockingham County area, later to include the Valley Mall; use of the downtown Court Square lawn for public events; city's continued "pro-Mall" stance; downtown revitalization efforts (sidewalk beautification, ordinances to encourage a mix of types of business, housing); special events such as the bicycle race; expanding city government space, building of the new County Jail. Describes results of a recent survey of downtown building space by square footage, from highest to lowest use. Mentions a study done on the number/adequacy of metered parking spaces. Philosophizes about changes that have/are occurring in American downtowns, primarily as a result of the development of shopping centers; sees grocery stores as the focal points of shopping centers. Believes Harrisonburg's decentralization began with the move of civic clubs from the downtown area. Expresses personal views about downtown Harrisonburg. Reminisces about the small-town atmosphere of a busy centrally-locally downtown area, especially during the 1950's and 1960's: Describes various businesses (ex. department, clothing stores, congregation points such as Glen's Fair Price Store, grocery stores such as Mick-or-Mack; hotels; antique shops; movie theaters); festivals/parades/events (ex. Friends of the Feathers), etc. and the general feeling of community/comaraderie which existed. Mentions family/personal shopping patterns downtown. Refers to the following stores: Leggett's, Penney's, Alfred and Joseph Neys', Woolworth's, McCrory's, Grant's, Dollar General Store, Rose's, A&N, Glen's Fair Price. Mentions grocery stores such as: Mick-or-Mack, Red Front, Safeway; hotels such as the Warren, National, Kavanaugh, Wise Tourist Home, Motel Marvilla; also Belle Meade. Mentions the Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church; downtown Presbyterian, Episcopal Churches. Recalls movie theaters such as the Virginia, Strand and State Theaters. Mentions the Post Office; Virginia National Bank; Rockingham Public Library; the Salvation Army, various civic groups (Rotary, Kiwanis); and the Farmer's Market. Recorded at the City Planning Office building, 345 South Main Street, Harrisonburg, Va., on Feb. 9, 1990.

Transcript and supporting documents**Unit ID** /repositories/4/archival_objects/18206**Unit Date** February 9, 1990**Mixed Materials [1000898332]** 1 (box)**Container** 3 (folder)

Terri Denton interviewed by Amy Accles**Unit ID** 2-4**Unit ID** /repositories/4/archival_objects/18210**Unit Date** February 7, 1990**Mixed Materials** SA0002-SET-001 (network storage)**Creator** Denton, Terri Lynn**Creator** Accles, Amy**Access Restrictions**

Oral history is open for research.

Use Restrictions

The copyright interests were transferred to Carrier Library.

Scope and Contents

This interview records the reflections and viewpoints of Ms. Terri Denton, manager of a locally-run family-owned business, Denton's Furniture, on the atmosphere and condition of Court Square, Harrisonburg, Va. before and after the completion of the Valley Mall in 1978. [Note: Denton's Furniture went out of business in 1991]. Her opinions reflect those of a long-time resident and merchant of the area. Reviews a brief history of the family business, first begun in 1878, with mention of various family members and discussion of buildings owned over the years. Reminisces about the small-town atmosphere of a busy centrally-locally downtown area twenty years ago (ex. a feeling of community between merchants; the typical shopper; Friday nights on the town, and the general sense of comraderie that existed). Discusses the effect of the Mall on the Court Square and concerns over the relocation of the two major department stores (Penney's and Leggett's) and failure of J. Neys. Compares and contrasts regional shopping areas; notes impact of highway systems on shopping developments and shoppers' habits. Believes downtown has changed from a retail hub to a banking/lawyer/financial district. Sees impact of Mall in vacant buildings, less traffic flow and net income. Discusses various retail merchant's associations, including the Downtown Harrisonburg Merchant's Association and its support of community events (Christmas parade, Farmer's Market) and lessening influence. Sees general growth of Harrisonburg and increased competition (ex. chains such as Wal-mart and Rose's) as being the biggest challenge to a family-owned furniture business. Discusses shoppers habits; downtown revitalization efforts (ex. beautification, controversial ban on public events on the court lawn). Regrets the sense of loss of community in the downtown area, yet expresses a positive view of its future (ex. new small entrepreneur businesses; building of a new County Jail, proposed new parking deck; and relations with James Madison University. Refers to the following stores: Leggett's, Penney's Alfred and Joseph Neys', Woolworth's, Grand Piano, Schewel Furniture; Hostetter Drugstore, Hughes' Pharmacy, People's Drugstore; Wilson Jewelers; Studio Art Shop; Gitchell's, Harrison's Antiques. Mentions sandwich shops/restaurants such as: Jess' Quick Lunch, the Famous Restaurant, Spanky's Delicatessen, Belzona Cafe, Calhoun's. Refers to the public library; historic Morrison House. Recorded at the Denton's Furniture Store, 61 Court Square, Harrisonburg, Va. on Feb. 7, 1990.

Transcript and supporting documents**Unit ID** /repositories/4/archival_objects/18211**Unit Date** February 7, 1990**Mixed Materials [1000898332]** 1 (box)**Container** 4 (folder)