



City of Alexandria
Office of Historic Alexandria
Alexandria Legacies
Oral History Program



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Title: *Interview with Vernon Cockrell*

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Transcriber: *Anne Horowitz*

Abstract: *Vernon Cockrell was born in Alexandria in 1920 near where Patrick Henry School is now. His grandfather, Charles Branner Cockrell, owned a farm in that area as well as a mill located near the intersection of Quaker Lane and Duke Street. The mill used water from Holmes Run and got shipments of corn via the railroad. Mr. Cockrell's father, Charles Norman Cockrell, worked at the mill and owned a feed store, which Mr. Cockrell converted to a hardware store. He built a new store on Duke Street that has now been replaced by another building. Mr. Cockrell talks about growing up in Alexandria and the many changes he has seen in the City. He was interviewed by one man (interviewer 1) and two women (interviewers 2 and 3).*

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Family History	
Interviewer 1:	When were you born?
Vernon Cockrell:	May 29, 1920.
Interviewer 1:	1920. And where were you born, specifically?
Vernon Cockrell:	Right over where [unclear, possibly Norman Hill] Apartments [are now], the family homes right in the middle of those.
Interviewer 1:	So you were born in the house.
Vernon Cockrell:	In the house, right.
Interviewer 1:	Did the doctor come to the house?
Vernon Cockrell:	Yep, Dr.—Dr. Delaney I guess. I guess it was Dr. Delaney back then. I'm not sure. [Later in the interview, Mr. Cockrell remembered that it was Dr. Pal.]
Interviewer 1:	Was that fairly common for the doctor to come to the house?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh, that was the only way.
Interviewer 1:	No one was going to the hospitals?
Vernon Cockrell:	Well, I guess the people with a lot of money could go to the hospitals, but anyway in the position.
Interviewer 1:	What were your parents' names?
Vernon Cockrell:	My father was Charles Norman and my mother was Alice Rose.
Interviewer 1:	And they were born—your family is from this area?
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah, yeah. My father was born up here on the Strawberry Hill, on the old—well, no, it won't be that either—it'd be up where the Patrick Henry School is. That's where the Cockrell family lived at first.
Interviewer 1:	Now I have a map here, I got out of the library. I saw a Cockrell on here. Right up in here, a C.B. Cockrell.
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah that's my grandfather, Charles Branner.
Interviewer 1:	Charles Branner?
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah, Branner.
Interviewer 1:	How do you spell that?
Vernon Cockrell:	B-R-A-N-N-E-R, I guess, Branner.
Interviewer 1:	And he was a farmer as well?

Vernon Cockrell:	Oh, he was all farmer, yeah.
Interviewer 1:	What kind of crops did he raise?
Vernon Cockrell:	Uh, mostly corn, corn maybe wheat. All I can remember is corn really. I don't remember if there was any wheat or not.
Interviewer 1:	And he was a farmer all of his life?
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah, other than he was a miller when he was running the mill down here.
Seminary Station	
Interviewer 1:	What mill was that, was that this [unclear, possibly Clouds] Mill?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh no, that's another one. Old Dominion Mill is Seminary Station.
Interviewer 1:	This is a Dominion Grist Mill.
Vernon Cockrell:	That's it.
Interviewer 1:	That's the one he helped operate?
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah, right, yep.
Interviewer 1:	So that's actually right around here then?
Vernon Cockrell:	Now wait a minute now, hold up now, that might be Roberts [Lane].
Interviewer 1:	This is Quaker Lane here and this is Little River Turnpike [now Duke Street].
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah, that's Little River Turnpike. So the mill was Seminary Station. They don't have no mill roads on here. Well, H.B. Watkins' estate—now the mill was owned by a Watkins family before he purchased it. He purchased it from the Watkins family. Now, I know exactly where that was. But I think this is—I'm sure this is Roberts Mill.
Interviewer 1:	It's not a very good map; it's a copy of a copy, so it's kind of tough to tell.
Vernon Cockrell:	And this is the old Roberts Lane...that's Roberts. Roberts Lane went off of Duke Street across the railroad track, and the Roberts family lived right over in here.
Interviewer 1:	Its looks like right after you cross the railroad track these all turn to dirt roads.
Vernon Cockrell:	That's a dirt road too?
Interviewer 1:	There was all dirt roads.
Vernon Cockrell:	I don't know why they don't have the old, the old mill on there.
Interviewer 1:	What year was the mill built? Do you know?
Vernon Cockrell:	1786.

Interviewer 1:	Okay, so it should of been there.
Vernon Cockrell:	It should have been there.
Interviewer 1:	Yeah 'cause this map is from the 1800s.
Vernon Cockrell:	Well, now wait a minute now, that's not, here's the Grist Mill, right here.
Interviewer 1:	Yes, yes.
Vernon Cockrell:	Okay, so that's it.
Interviewer 1:	The Dominion Grist Mill.
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah, Dominion, I don't know how they come up with Dominion.
Interviewer 1:	Okay, and your father bought that?
Vernon Cockrell:	It was Old Dominion Mills. No, my grandfather—
Interviewer 1:	Your grandfather bought that from the Watkins.
Vernon Cockrell:	From the Watkins family, yeah. Yep, now this is Roberts Lane, but they don't show the mills. There was another mill here that could be it right here, that little dot.
Interviewer 1:	That little dot, yeah, could be.
Vernon Cockrell:	Yep.
Interviewer 1:	So your family lived back up in here, and the farm—
Vernon Cockrell:	No, oh yeah, yeah.
Interviewer 1:	And the farmland was back up in there.
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh yeah, yeah. Right up here.
Interviewer 1:	How much property did they own?
Vernon Cockrell:	I don't know how much they had up in there. He owned most of that [Seminary Valley] though back there. And then he sold it to the Sanford family, and of course that's not on here. Part of it to the Sanford family and they truck-farmed it for years. In fact, one of his sons lives, well, let's see, I guess you call it a son or the son of the father of the father that lives up in there.
Interviewer 1:	What's his name?
Vernon Cockrell:	Charlie Sanford, it's almost across from the Patrick Henry School.
Interviewer 1:	Uh huh. Uh huh.
Vernon Cockrell:	It's a big two-story house right up on the hill, got a steep drive way going up to it.

Interviewer 1:	I know that house. My daughter is in daycare right across the street from that house.
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah, that's right. There is a daycare center over there. Yep, that's Charlie Sanford and his family bought it, bought most of it from my grandfather. And then when my grandfather, then he moved down to Strawberry Hill which would be—
Interviewer 1:	Strawberry Hill is on the far side of Duke Street?
Vernon Cockrell:	They've got a—years ago Strawberry Hill was on both sides of Duke Street.
Interviewer 1:	It was?
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah.
Interviewer 1:	Okay. It may not be marked on here.
Vernon Cockrell:	Why, this could be the old house right here. Yes, there is Watkins Estate.
Interviewer 1:	Watkins Estate.
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah, that's the big old house we had up there for years, that's it, yep.
Interviewer 1:	Now is that the house—that's not the house you were born in though?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh no.
Interviewer 1:	No. You were born down here.
Vernon Cockrell:	No, my father built this house down here.
Interviewer 1:	Yeah.
Vernon Cockrell:	After he left home.
Interviewer 1:	Are any of these other names familiar? Arthur Herbert?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh yeah, Arthur Herbert is Bert of Herbert Bank and Trust and Company.
Interviewer 1:	That's the same one.
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah.
Interviewer 1:	Now he did not appear to have a road going to his house.
Vernon Cockrell:	Well it was...a dirt road that went up right straight right up across from here. That's right, it was right straight across from here right up there. And we use to travel back and forth up and down there and that could of been back in those days I don't know whether, see it's another road [unclear, possibly St. Stephens Rd.] now goes on out to Seminary Road.
Interviewer 1:	Here is more Watkins. There is a George White up here.
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh yeah, I remember George White. He was a great big fellow who rode on a

	horse and buggy up and down Duke Street all the time.
Interviewer 1:	What did he do for a living?
Vernon Cockrell:	I don't even remember. I know he had a gravel pit up there and use to sell a lot of bank gravel—road gravel.
Farmers Market at City Hall	
Interviewer 1:	Now you mentioned truck farming before. What do you mean by that?
Vernon Cockrell:	Well, it raised a—spring onions were the big thing—and then they would have a plot for tomatoes and carrots and everything that grows, you know everything that is grown in a garden just about, and then they would take it to the market down City Hall.
Interviewer 1:	I see, that is what they use to call the Barter Square?
Vernon Cockrell:	Huh?
Interviewer 1:	Did they use to call it Barter Square down there?
Vernon Cockrell:	I—nah—I think we just called it the Farmers Market. Farmers Market is what I think we called it years ago.
Interviewer 1:	Down there where the courthouse is now?
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah, right.
Interviewer 1:	Yep.
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah. See, years ago it was a huge area of stalls in there. Chances [unclear, not sure of spelling] had the meat market in there, that was right in the City Hall—the meat—what's City Hall now, even had the sawdust on the floor.
Interviewer 1:	So he would haul all of his stuff down to the market on his truck.
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh no, horse and wagon—back then weren't any trucks. Then later on when his son took it over, then he started using a truck. And you know he continued raising those onions, just onions alone. Up until the [19]30s; he finally moved over here on what we call Middler Lane [unclear, not sure of spelling]—it's down Wheeler Avenue—built a little house over there.
Interviewer 1:	Just got good at growing onions I guess?
Vernon Cockrell:	Just got rid of spring onions, and every Saturday, every Friday, they go back to gather and bring them down here, wash, tie them up in bundles and take them down to the Market.
Family Roots	
Interviewer 1:	Now when did you family come to this area originally?

Vernon Cockrell:	Well, before this area they came to 'round Brent, Virginia
Interviewer 1:	Benton?
Vernon Cockrell:	Brent, located there in Oakville.
Interviewer 1:	Okay, okay.
Vernon Cockrell:	That's were they originally settled.
Interviewer 1:	About what year was that?
Vernon Cockrell:	I don't have any idea any more.
Interviewer 1:	Near the 1700s?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh.
Interviewer 1:	1800s?
Vernon Cockrell:	It was the 1800s I guess.
Interviewer 1:	And where did they come from? Did they immigrate from Europe?
Vernon Cockrell:	That's a good question. I—that's as far back as I ever think I've seen the history of our whole, you know, our immediate family—
Interviewer 1:	Do you have the history written down somewhere? Do you know?
Vernon Cockrell:	I have it but I sent it to some woman down in Texas who was interested, but she never did send it back to me. I think my uncle W.W. Cockrell, he was great for family history, but he is gone. His daughter is down in Harrisonburg [Virginia]. I guess she probably has some of that stuff down there. But he's spent, you know, just hours and hours tracing it back.
Interviewer 1:	Now do you have brothers and sisters?
Vernon Cockrell:	I got one brother, William D., and one sister, Doris.
Interviewer 1:	Did they stay in the area?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh yeah, my brother lives right over here. These three houses on Duke Street, right this side of the apartments, he's in the first one and my sister is in the third one and my mother and father used to live in the middle one.
Interviewer 1:	Didn't roam far.
Vernon Cockrell:	And then we built...[unclear, possibly Norman Hill Apartments] back in the—let's see—they're thirty years, forty years, they're getting close to forty years old I guess. So we had to stay close by then.
Interviewer 1:	Yep, does your family still own Norman Hill?
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah, my brother and sister and I.

The Mill	
Interviewer 1:	Can you tell me a little about the mill business that your grandfather ran and then your father, right?
Vernon Cockrell:	When I remember it, the only thing that we ground was corn, for corn meal. And we hauled it. I don't remember any local corn ever being—you know, years ago it was just local corn. But the only corn I can remember is we get a car-load of corn down here on the railroad side, Seminary railroad side. Then we'd haul it up there and they have a big chute out in front with the lid and then dump it down in there and go down into the corn bin and then we had—one, two, I believe it was two French, what you call French burrs—those big stone burrs that would grind it. And we had a twenty-eight foot oversize water wheel, bought the water from Holmes Run. Where is Holmes Run [on the map]?
Interviewer 1:	Maybe this one right here coming down? This is the Dominion Grist right here.
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh no, it was way up, those [unclear] on Foxchase, you know, that run, that run you cross over?
Interviewer 1:	Yep, yeah.
Vernon Cockrell:	Right there on Foxchase, that's Holmes Run. Well it was Holmes Run, I don't know what they are calling it now.
Interviewer 1:	And you brought that water all the way out here?
Vernon Cockrell:	Well to the mill race paralleling the railroad track on this side. We had an arch dam across Holmes Run that kept the dam up. Had a waste—a spillway—so it would, you know, after it got up so high it would run over top keep from washing the dam out. Then we would have a race, but the race I guess was close to a mile long. Came down behind 4600 Duke Street and probably little pieces of it still showing up there.
Interviewer 1:	What was it made of?
Vernon Cockrell:	It was just a big ditch.
Interviewer 1:	Uh huh, didn't have to reinforce it any way?
Vernon Cockrell:	Just the dirt had been piled up on each side and the water just, yeah the water was about I guess two or three feet deep all the time and it came all the way down, right behind. Right over here on South Early Street we had a waste gate, whenever a storm would come up we would have somebody have to run down there and open the waste gate keep the rain, you know, got the high waters from washing the dam out, washing the waste out. And it would come on down to the mill and went through a big pipe about this big around into the

	water box over top the wheel and inside had a crank that would open up and lift the waste gate up, let so much water up until it would go into the wheel buckets and start the wheel turning.
Interviewer 1:	Uh huh, and then you bag the flour after it was all ground?
Vernon Cockrell:	And then that would start the stones turning and it could reach down and pick up. I mean, the corn was the [unclear] when I was [unclear] and then there was a hole there you can reach in to check it. Well, no, first I would go upstairs and take the grain out and bag it up to paper bags and it was called Old Dominion Mills and most of it was taken over to Washington and sold.
Interviewer 1:	So when you checked it, you were checking it for the fineness?
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah, see whether it wasn't too coarse or too fine.
Interviewer 1:	Do you know where that corn was coming from that you got off the railroad? Do you know where it was grown?
Vernon Cockrell:	I don't remember where—back then I was only five or six years old.
Interviewer 1:	So you weren't working too hard anyway, were you?
Vernon Cockrell:	Well my father used to go down, sometime my father would go down there and grind all night and they had these huge windows this deep and the walls about that thick and I lay up in the window overlooking the wheel and sleep.
Interviewer 1:	How much of his business was produced by the mill and how much was farming?
Vernon Cockrell:	Uh, I don't have any idea. I couldn't tell. I wasn't interested in anything back in those days. Now today I could tell you right down to the penny. But—
Recreational Activities as a Child	
Interviewer 1:	What were you doing at that age and on into elementary school? What did you do for recreation around here?
Vernon Cockrell:	What we do around here?
Interviewer 1:	Yeah.
Vernon Cockrell:	I did a tremendous amount of hunting, actually.
Interviewer 1:	What were you hunting?
Vernon Cockrell:	Rabbits or squirrels, but I always like hunting rabbits.
Interviewer 1:	What did you hunt with?
Vernon Cockrell:	A shotgun.
Interviewer 1:	Shotgun.

Vernon Cockrell:	Rifle on the squirrels and, well, shucks, I go out my back door of our house, walk down to the fields, walk all the way up to Holmes Run. There was nothing—no houses—nothing but fields and then we could hunt all day, if you wanted to. But I had a cousin and he and I would, all hunting season, he and I would hunt. Then there all kinds of game, of course. We would miss more than we would kill anyway. Sometime there sounded like a little small army out there.
Interviewer 1:	Spend more on shells than rabbits you would bring back.
Vernon Cockrell:	He and I.
Interviewer 1:	That was an expensive dinner.
Vernon Cockrell:	Yes. Then over here on top of the hill, some warehouses are built there now, off of South Early Street and it was used to be quite a [unclear] over there facing the railroad. Heinz 57 had a huge concrete sign like, just like you lay sidewalk in the side of that hill, said Heinz and a huge 57. There was only two of them, two of those signs in the United States. And they used to pay—I don't know my father or somebody or my uncle—so much a year to whitewash them. Keep them showing. But—
Interviewer 1:	Who was looking at the sign? Was that for railroad travelers?
Vernon Cockrell:	For people, yeah, for railroad travelers. Yeah.
Interviewer 1:	So this Seminary Station was where people would get on and off?
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah, well, that's down there behind the City shops. Yeah, they show, yeah that's the Southern and [unclear] coming there and then that sign was, well, that sign was somewhere right along this hillside, yeah, right around in here. I mean it was huge. We used to go up there and roller skate on one of the letters it was so big. Especially the seven.
Interviewer 1:	How big do you figure it was?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh, it would cover half a city block I guess.
Interviewer 1:	Wow.
Vernon Cockrell:	It wasn't small.
Interviewer 1:	They were interested in selling some ketchup.
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah.
Interviewer 1:	Okay, so your father, did he open a store at the mill site or did he just keep it as a mill the whole time?
Father's Work at the Shipyard	

Vernon Cockrell:	Well my father was never a—he just worked there part-time. He worked at the shipyard for years.
Interviewer 1:	Oh did he? Doing what?
Vernon Cockrell:	Jones Point, Crane operator. Until they fell two or three decks down on the ship and that was the end of the shipyard work. But—
Interviewer 1:	What year was that?
Vernon Cockrell:	That was, that was, I guess it was about 1921, 'cause I was just a baby when it happened. And when showing you the distance he use to walk all the way from where we lived here on the hill down South Quaker Lane to the railroad tracks down the railroad tracks to Jones Point to work everyday back and forth. Can you imagine doing something like that today?
Interviewer 1:	Must have taken him a while.
Vernon Cockrell:	Well time, time didn't count back then. Didn't matter. Yeah took him a, probably half hour to walk it.
School and Neighbors	
Interviewer 1:	People spend longer than that driving to work now. Probably not going much further. So you went to school at Lee Jackson?
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah.
Interviewer 1:	Can you tell me a little about that school, the students that went there?
Vernon Cockrell:	That was seven grades and four years of high school, and it opened, I think, in 1927. I went there the first year it opened. Then I went there until the sixth grade and then it converted into a high school altogether, you know all high school. And for one year I went up to Bailey's Crossroads to the seventh grade and then I came back down there to high school.
Interviewer 1:	How did you get up to Bailey's Crossroads to go to school?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh, we had a bus.
Interviewer 1:	A bus came by?
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah, let's see, that was Big Donaldson that run that bus. I don't know whether you have come across Donaldson in any of your historical, he was a character too. He and my grandfather were, you know, quite politically inclined and they were always fussing and fighting about politics.
Interviewer 1:	Oh they were inclined in opposite directions.
Vernon Cockrell:	And then he had two, he had three buses, I think, and he got to [unclear] all the kids back in those days. [Unclear, possibly Model A Fords] they were, I

	believe. And then his—I remember or not whether his daughter or his sister—Agnes Donaldson, she was principal of the school down here for a number of years.
Interviewer 1:	Lee Jackson?
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah.
Interviewer 1:	Do you remember some of the political arguments they use to get into?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh, not really. I think—I don't know whether my granddaddy and he were both Democrats. But my grandfather was a Byrd, what we called a Byrd Democrat. And I guess Big Donaldson was a liberal Democrat back then. But they were always arguing. And then there was Cooper Dawson had to—he lived up there on top there, you know off of 70 off of Quaker Lane Road on top of the hill. And then back then we had the feed store it was right here in front of where Quaker Lane comes down the hill. Old Mill Road went off of Duke Street on an angle like that down to the mill, and in that corner my grandfather had a feed store. Nothing but feeds, feed and grain. I guess maybe hay and straw too. But he stand in the doorway and Cooper Dawson stand over here on this porch and holler back and forth about what they would do or when they going to meet for something. Well, grandfather was friends of the Horse Association, I guess it was called, but they would meet up at Strawberry Hill every month.
Interviewer 1:	What did the Horse Association do?
Vernon Cockrell:	People that owned the horses. Now I have no idea what they met about. But it was very—it was supposes to be the thing to be in—the Horse Association.
Interviewer 1:	Yeah, I see.
Vernon Cockrell:	So they'd meet up there every once a month. My grandmother she'd put out all this big meal for them, I can remember that part.
Interviewer 1:	Lot of folks belong to that?
Vernon Cockrell:	Huh?
Interviewer 1:	Did a lot of folks belong to that?
Vernon Cockrell:	People that owned horses, yeah, and most people owned horses. I don't know how many you had to own and I don't know whether he ever belong to the Dairy Association or not. I don't think he did. He wasn't much into dairy, had three or four family cows and that was about it.
Interviewer 1:	This was mostly for the family to use?
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah, used to make butter. Which I was never crazy about that country butter.
Interviewer 1:	What's the difference between country butter and—

Vernon Cockrell:	I always thought it had a peculiar taste to it. My wife says that my imagination, but.
Interviewer 1:	Cows may have been eating something funny too on your property?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh yeah, garlic, that would really tear you up. I'd have to run out to the yard to get a piece of garlic to chew on it to kill the taste of the butter. Yeah.
Downtown Alexandria and Duke Street	
Interviewer 1:	Did you get down into downtown Alexandria much when you were young?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh every Saturday night we would go down and park on King Street in front of the Woolworth store and watch people go up and down the street.
Interviewer 1:	Oh yeah, how old were you then?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh I guess seven or eight, nine or ten.
Interviewer 1:	So the whole family would go down there?
Vernon Cockrell:	My mother and father and sister—back then we would always have the streetcars come up King Street. Two of them together, that's when I used to like to see the streetcars. Two of them together going one way and two or three more coming up the other way and passing right there in front of us. But I used to love to watch those streetcars and ride on them.
Interviewer 1:	How far did they go?
Vernon Cockrell:	Well they had a line all the way to Mount Vernon and went into, of course, went into DC [District of Columbia] and then they came out of DC to Arlington into Fairfax, and right in front of Fairfax Courthouse used to be a dead-end track where you come around and park and wait for so long and load up and go back to DC again. Too bad we didn't keep them.
Interviewer 1:	Yeah.
Vernon Cockrell:	It really is. They really move some people on them, more so than the busses I think.
Interviewer 1:	What was Duke Street like going down toward Alexandria at that point?
Vernon Cockrell:	When I was a kid, Duke Street was just gravel road, and I was about five years old I guess and I don't know whether they were streets or whether the roads back then were [unclear], but I guess the counties had authority over them, but they hired Carson and [unclear, possibly Grumman] of Georgetown to pave it.
Interviewer 1:	When was that?
Vernon Cockrell:	Well, I was five years old, take five off of—I think that company is still over there.

Interviewer 1:	In Georgetown?
Vernon Cockrell:	Carson and Grumman, yeah. If they not, they still in the area. But they paved it and my father had the contract to put in all the culverts where there's any runs or creeks or overpasses, and I used to go out with him to watch that, to watch him work all day.
Interviewer 1:	What kind of equipment did he use to do the culverts?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh, everything was hand-worked.
Interviewer 1:	All hand-worked.
Vernon Cockrell:	Maybe a team of horses to scoop to...scoop the dirt out if you had to put in foundations. But the one in the bulldozers or drag lines or back hose or and, I guess it was right here at the bottom, this creek had run through here. I went out in the road and the foreman hit me with a Model T Ford and broke my left leg.
Interviewer 1:	Wow.
Vernon Cockrell:	Dr. Pal, that's who I was trying to think of, I think he was the doctor when I was born. Dr. Pal, I'm pretty sure it was.
Interviewer 1:	Same one that fixed your leg?
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah. He was the one to fix my leg, right.
Interviewer 1:	Came to the house.
Vernon Cockrell:	So he comes running up to the house, and we had these maple trees and evidently he couldn't stop fast enough and run into the maple tree. And that barked tree for years, I mean I was grown and you could still see that the bark mark on that maple tree where he hit it.
Interviewer 1:	Where there many houses or business going on?
Vernon Cockrell:	Weren't any.
Interviewer 1:	Nothing.
Vernon Cockrell:	Was our house; cross the street was a Watkins house then down almost to Quaker Lane was a Franks house and right across was that was a, we called it Bob Moore—he was an old colored fellow—it was just an old ramshackle shack right where they built the public, you know, the low-cost housing, right there and that was it. Then the next house was out on Strawberry Hill. Nothing on that side until you got up 'til the what's known as the Fannon home. Do you know the Fannon there? They had a big home up there. Which would be right back behind the Pier One just about; it's all gone. But every Sunday when my father was young they'd all congregate up there on Sundays—play

	and do this and do that. I'll go ahead and talk about that.
Interviewer 1:	And there was Cameron Station down the way?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh that wasn't built until World War II.
Interviewer 1:	So there was nothing there then?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh, let's see, yeah, there was an old tourist home in there.
Interviewer 1:	They had a tourist home?
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah. It was built for that purpose, but never ended up, never did amount to a whole lot. In fact the tourist home was right, right across from the right turn that goes round into Cameron Station. You know where the dog training lot is? Just about across from that. They had about a dozen of these old wooden cabins up near Duke Street they had the, I guess, maybe had a dining room in there. But it ended up being more—some family I think moved in there and started taking in homeless children.
Interviewer 1:	Do you recall who that was?
Vernon Cockrell:	Why lord no. I remember one of the girls used to go to school with me. Her name was Alice Ellington. She lived there and she was an orphan. And then after they left. Then there was a fellow name Fred Michaelback, opened up a chicken farm in there. Michaelback Furniture, you ever hear of that in Alexandria?
Interviewer 1:	Don't recall at all.
Vernon Cockrell:	He was the brother to the one who had the furniture. And he had a chicken farm for I guess ten years or more, maybe fifteen.
Interviewer 1:	What year was that?
Vernon Cockrell:	That was back about [19]30. Let's see, World War II started around 1940 didn't it?
Interviewer 1:	Uh huh.
Vernon Cockrell:	Well it was back, I think when I went to service he still had that chicken farm. I'm almost sure he did.
Interviewer 1:	Was it a big farm?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh yeah. He raised several thousands of chickens.
Interviewer 1:	Wow, and did he take those into Alexandria or where was his market for those?
Vernon Cockrell:	I don't really know to tell you the honest truth. I know we was selling feed. But I have no idea where he, you know, where he sold his chickens.

Courtship	
Interviewer 1:	So you met your wife out here in high school?
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah.
Interviewer 1:	Did you guys date then?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh sure.
Interviewer 1:	What you do on dates?
Vernon Cockrell:	Go to the movies or go to—we used to go over to—what’s the boat landing up here on Georgetown? We used to go up there sometimes—go by and rent canoes quite often, canoe up and down the river. And I often think the days that the river—it scares me—I tell you the honest truth. How I think about it ‘cause my cousin and I, we always double-dated and we would always take chasers to begin with, so. Yes sir.
Interviewer 1:	You would rent your own canoes, though?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh yeah. It was somebody’s boat landing. Can’t think of the name of it.
Interviewer 1:	Is it the one that is still there?
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah.
Interviewer 1:	I know the one you’re talking about.
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah, its still there.
Interviewer 1:	I don’t recall the name of it.
Vernon Cockrell:	I can’t either. But you’re younger; you would remember.
The Railroad	
Interviewer 1:	Did the railroad employ many people in this area?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh yeah. The railroad was big, especially when the Potomac Yard was working. The Railroad and Fruit Growers Express, which is all gone now, oh, they employed hundreds of people.
Interviewer 1:	I think I have [them] on one of these [maps].
Vernon Cockrell:	Well that won’t be on this map anyway.
Interviewer 1:	No not on that one. But here we go, this is 1956. There is the Fruit Growers there.
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah that’s it, that’s it.
Interviewer 1:	Down there by Stonewall Jackson School.
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah. It used to be E. Jackson when I went there.

Interviewer 1:	What was the Fruit Growers?
Vernon Cockrell:	They rebuilt refrigerator cars for the railroad, you know, they strip them down, they were all made of fir wood and I suppose they used fir back then because it didn't deteriorate or wouldn't rot like most of the other woods. And they strip them down and completely rebuild them right from the wheels up. They build thousands of cars there. In fact, half of the [unclear] houses out there were put together with Fruit Grower lumber.
Interviewer 1:	Oh really.
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh yeah. Every afternoon when they get off from work you'd see them going up Duke Street with half a dozen boards on their shoulders, never failed. Yeah. You talk to some of the old people that live down there they can tell you about it. Yeah.
Interviewer 1:	That's interesting. What other kind of rail traffic came through.
Vernon Cockrell:	Well we had the north and south traffic. It was over on RF&P [Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad].
Interviewer 1:	So it was passengers and freight?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh, passengers and freight, yeah, and B&O—Baltimore and Ohio—C&R, I think is Baltimore, C&O, that's [unclear] Ohio they used the southern tracks to go south on. Yeah, railroads. In fact, my father...I don't know if it was before he went to shipyard or after he got out of shipyard, he thought he liked the railroad so he goes on a run, I guess to Monroe probably, and he had to start out as a fireman and by the time he got back he was so black and dirty with soot, he never went back again.
Early Work in the Feed Store, World War II Service, and Marriage	
Interviewer 1:	So what was your first job?
Vernon Cockrell:	My first job?
Interviewer 1:	Uh huh.
Vernon Cockrell:	I never had but one job, and that was working with the—after we closed the mill—then we had a feed store on Duke Street where I had the hardware store, feed and grain, hay, and straw.
Interviewer 1:	What year did you close the mill?
Vernon Cockrell:	[19]28 or [19]29 I believe it was.
Interviewer 1:	So you were working in the feed store when you were growing up?
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah I was working in the feed store.

Interviewer 1:	What were your duties?
Vernon Cockrell:	Delivering feed. Picking up, I would drive go up to West Virginia, Baltimore, pick up a truckload of stuff—feed—to bring back. Hay and straw was really not delivered then. ‘Cause we didn’t have a truck large enough for that. Everything was farming until World War II around here. You know—not big farming but small farming.
Interviewer 1:	And when did you get married?
Vernon Cockrell:	While I was in the service, I don’t know, 1942/1943, something like that.
Interviewer 1:	So, were you drafted?
Vernon Cockrell:	I was drafted number thirteen from Fairfax County; we were in Fairfax County then. I was number thirteen. I said, “Boy! Either this number will be lucky or real unlucky.”
Interviewer 1:	What year were you drafted?
Vernon Cockrell:	1940 I guess it was. I was in the service four and a half years until the war was over.
Interviewer 1:	What branch?
Vernon Cockrell:	Coastal Artillery. Well, I spent two years in the States on the Detach Harbor Defense, Fort Hancock, New Jersey; Sabine Pass, Texas; Pascagoula, Mississippi. Then from Pascagoula they shipped us to the Aleutian Islands. Hot climate to the cold climate.
Interviewer 1:	How long were you up there?
Vernon Cockrell:	Two and a half years. That’s like being in jail. That was really miserable.
Interviewer 1:	So at what point did you get married?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh, let’s see, when I was in Texas, Sabine Pass, Texas, yeah we had a hurricane down there and washed everything away so I said I go home while they cleaning up, so I came home. Well we had already planned on getting married anyway. I thought it was going to, I thought I wasn’t going to get back home, so when I came home we were married on Washington Street Methodist Church.
Interviewer 1:	That’s where I was married.
Vernon Cockrell:	Were you?
Interviewer 1:	Yes sir.
Vernon Cockrell:	Who was the minister? Of course I don’t know the ministers anymore.
Interviewer 1:	Actually I don’t recall the minister’s name at this point either; there is a

	different guy now.
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh yeah, they change it every two years.
Alexandria After World War II	
Interviewer 1:	So after the war you came back to Alexandria?
Vernon Cockrell:	Came back to the feed store.
Interviewer 1:	And where were you living when you got out?
Vernon Cockrell:	I lived at home with my parents and then I start building this house and...they lived in the big pillar house across the street. So whenever he go, he and his wife go back to New Orleans, they want us to live in the house, so it would be somebody there. So we would live in that house and I could walk across the street and work on this, go back.
Interviewer 2:	You built this house?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh yeah, like I was telling you, I had the brickwork done and I had to let my...father-in-law do the masonry, with all the framing, all the center block work I did. I could do center block work but I wasn't much for brick laying, and I did all the framing, put all the roof on. My wife did up all the rock—they call it rock layer—that you plaster over top of it, she did most of that up.
Interviewer 2:	That's great.
Vernon Cockrell:	Then I laid all the hardwood, I laid all this oak hardwood floor. We got it covered up with carpet. That's the oak I could get. That's the best oak I could get.
Interviewer 1:	You didn't get it off the railroad did you?
Vernon Cockrell:	No.
Interviewer 1:	So there was a lot more people living here after the war then before the war?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh yeah.
Interviewer 1:	I've seen the population double in about six years during the war.
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh yeah, the Shirley Duke apartments were built and another number of single family, and this [unclear] over here in Strawberry Hill. All of these houses were built.
Interviewer 1:	Now these little houses down here with the flat roofs. I've heard those were made of metal.
Vernon Cockrell:	That is [unclear] made those houses. They brought them in here in trailers—you know, in sections—and bolted them together and they are still there. They—one of the first experience with radiant heat and the concrete, 'cause

	they wanted the concrete slabs, and they run that copper tube back and forth through the concrete floor, but over the years oxidation started leaking. 'Cause you know if you don't use the right [unclear] copper not as, doesn't have the longevity as you think it would have under some conditions.
Interviewer 1:	I understand those are pretty cold houses now.
Vernon Cockrell:	Any time you've got a slab they're cold. Unless you got some new type of radiant heat. Yes sir.
Interviewer 1:	What kind of families are moving into those places and all around here?
Vernon Cockrell:	Uh, tell you the honest truth I don't know.
Interviewer 1:	Is there government workers?
Vernon Cockrell:	I suppose that some of them are, yeah. I'm sure they are a number or Orientals and Salvadoran what have you, moved into them.
Interviewer 1:	Right away.
Vernon Cockrell:	'Cause it's something they can afford.
Interviewer 1:	Right away they moved into them.
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh you mean where they were built. Oh my God. I don't have any idea who moved into them back then.
Interviewer 1:	I would be shocked if it were Salvadorans.
Vernon Cockrell:	No I don't have any idea who, what they did or who they were. Nope, can't help you on that.
Cockrell's Hardware Store	
Interviewer 1:	So at that point you were still in the feed business?
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah, and after a year on, I got to thinking the feed business was not going too be too good too long. So I thought I would switch over and get into the hardware business. So I had an architect come in and we designed the old building for hardware store. I did all that work. You know I have a picture of it up there.
Interviewers 2 and 3:	Oh.
Interviewer 1:	Now, was your father still in the business at this point?
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah, he was still part-time. We'll move that light if you want me to?
Interviewer 2:	I'm fine. I'm fine. No, sit. I'm fine; I'll do it.
Vernon Cockrell:	My brother and sister gave me that one Christmas; they had that done from a [unclear] glass.

Interviewer 2:	Oh that's nice.
Vernon Cockrell:	Not enough light for you, isn't it?
Interviewer 2:	I'm just going to really, really gently move it, just a couple of inches. Is that all right?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh sure.
Interviewer 1:	I think she found a copy of a picture of it. Now this is later I imagine? Got the McDonalds behind it.
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah, that's after. No, I built all of that, put all that on it. It was just an A-shaped, squared, rectangular building. Yeah.
Interviewer 1:	What kind of stock did you have in the hardware store?
Vernon Cockrell:	Well anything pertaining to hardware.
Interviewer 1:	Yeah, and what about your customers from the immediate area?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh yeah, yeah. I developed a reputation. Cause if Cockrell's didn't have it you couldn't get it. But I got out of it at the right time too, when Home Depot came in.
Interviewer 1:	Now when did the Hechinger's come in?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh they were my best growing card, Hechinger's.
Interviewer 1:	Really, how so?
Vernon Cockrell:	And Sears up here at Landmark. Well, people get so aggravated, go in there and couldn't get services and their prices weren't any better. The only time they had better prices is when they have an item that they buy at a discount and put in on sale. Same with Home Depot, you could not get any good bargains at Home Depot, only the stuff that they have on special. And once you buy it and if you go back there a month later they don't even have it anymore. Yep—retail business is quite an experience. Quite an experience. And I had three beauty shops going on along with that.
Interviewer 1:	You did? Where were they?
Vernon Cockrell:	One was at Springfield Plaza, one of them still up there at [unclear] Garden, King Street, and the other one is over in Arlington on Glebe Road.
Interviewer 1:	So you managed those and the hardware store?
Vernon Cockrell:	I didn't manage, you know I had managers run them.
Interviewer 1:	You had people run them.
Vernon Cockrell:	My wife she did the bookkeeping. But how I got into that, the hardware

	<p>salesman from [unclear] called on me every Friday. His wife worked at the one in Springfield. He told me one Friday when he came in that the girl that owned it wanted to sell it and I should buy it. I had no idea of running the beauty shop...my daughter had one of these video cameras, what are these computer cameras? Well I swear she takes pictures, goes back home, and puts the pictures on the computer and they come out. I mean it's amazing how well they come out. Absolutely amazing.</p>
<p>Social Life in the 1950s</p>	
Interviewer 1:	<p>Could you talk a little about the community here in the [19]50s—the social life? What you guys did?</p>
Vernon Cockrell:	<p>In the [19]50s?</p>
Interviewer 1:	<p>Yeah.</p>
Vernon Cockrell:	<p>I guess we went down there to George Mason Hotel to a dance every now and then. Went to movies, went to the beach. Well, we used to go to Beverly Beach.</p>
Interviewer 1:	<p>Where is Beverly Beach?</p>
Vernon Cockrell:	<p>That up on the Chesapeake Bay. Well it's still over there but it's not a beach anymore. North Beach, they were a number of beaches on the bay.</p>
Interviewer 1:	<p>Lot of folks in this area go over to the Chesapeake, to the beaches?</p>
Vernon Cockrell:	<p>Yeah, I suppose yeah. Yep, [19]50s. I have to stop and think about when the [19]50s were.</p>
<p>DAUGHTER'S EDUCATION</p>	
Interviewer 1:	<p>Now you have one daughter?</p>
Vernon Cockrell:	<p>Yeah, uh huh that's all.</p>
Interviewer 1:	<p>And where did she go to school?</p>
Vernon Cockrell:	<p>Well she started at Lee Jackson, no she didn't, no, no, no what am I talking about? She went to St. Agnes and then she went to high school at T.C. Williams. She decided she would want to be in the class where there were some boys.</p>
Interviewer 1:	<p>I can't imagine you let her. What year was she born in?</p>
Vernon Cockrell:	<p>Well she is forty-two. I think she is forty-two, yeah, I'm pretty sure she is forty-two. Then she went to the University of North Carolina. Got a degree in I guess market research, then she went to George Washington got her master's then when she went out to Indianapolis. I forget the university—she went up there and got some more, some more education.</p>

Interviewer 1:	First Cockrell to leave Alexandria in many generations.
Vernon Cockrell:	She used to go with me to up to Chicago to the hardware shows every year, so she said, you know, after she got out of college, out of George Washington, she thought she'd go up there and maybe make some kind of contact. And right away the National Retail Hardware Association, they wanted her to come to work the next day. So she went out there with the National Retail Hardware Association. Then after she worked for them for several years then she went with Walker Research, which is a major research company, marketing company. And then they started having troubles so she said she would go on her own, so she and I guess another employee had their own business and they worked out of their homes.
Interviewer 1:	Stepping back to when she was in school, what was the school system like here from your perspective as a parent?
Vernon Cockrell:	Well, St. Agnes was pretty hard to beat. Yeah, I think she really got a good basic education at St. Agnes and at T.C. Williams. As far as I can see it was first class, back then. In fact I think T.C. Williams is pretty well run school today even.
Local Politics	
Interviewer 1:	Did you ever get involved much in politics local or?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh yeah I was Chief Judge in Alexandria for I guess twenty years.
Interviewer 1:	Oh really.
Vernon Cockrell:	For Patrick Henry Precinct. And when I was in Fairfax County I was a registrar. Oh yeah, I been in ever since I could know what the word meant I guess. And usually we used to vote at the store.
Interviewer 1:	Oh really.
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah we would open up a window up front. People come up to the window, then back inside in the office where they are [unclear] and the judges and the clerk were all sitting in the office over there and people come up to the window and vote.
Interviewer 1:	Now how did they vote?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh we had paper ballots, yeah, and a box to put them in and sometimes you had to have two boxes—you had Republicans and Democrats you had to have two boxes. Or if you were having a congressional and a senatorial race you would have to have two boxes to keep them separated.
Interviewer 1:	Did you tally the vote there at the store?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh yeah. We put them out, straighten them all out, line them all out, then

	somebody would check them off as you read the, you know, the vote off. Yeah did that for years. And even did that at Patrick Henry at first, until we got the voting machines.
Interviewer 1:	When did they come in?
Vernon Cockrell:	I don't have any idea, tell you the honest truth. But I guess we went through about three different styles of voting machines before I finally quit. But I thought they were all very efficient compared to this thing we've got now. That's the most ridiculous thing I think I have ever seen.
Business in Alexandria	
Interviewer 1:	From your perspective as a businessman—local business—can you talk a little bit about being a businessman in Alexandria?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh, yeah, in what respect?
Interviewer 1:	Well, were there particular times when business was down or there was problems?
Vernon Cockrell:	Alexandria never had any great love for business. That has always been my feeling.
Interviewer 1:	How so?
Vernon Cockrell:	Well, they never encourage it or never attempted to help [unclear] downtown for years. Well, I was on the Planning Commission for twenty-three years, incidentally. And I was pushing for years to get some parking structures built downtown for someplace for people to park. 'Cause if you don't have parking you might as well almost write off a business, but they never do it. And they just never really gave me the feeling that they were interested in helping business.
Interviewer 1:	What were their priorities, do you think?
Vernon Cockrell:	Alexandria's Old Town.
Interviewer 1:	Yeah.
Vernon Cockrell:	For years people didn't realize this was part of Alexandria. We were incorporated, I think, in—what—[19]36 or [19]38, probably [19]38 into the City, but no one realized it. 'Til later years they started spending a little money out here. They built a monstrosity up here they called it a library.
Interviewer 1:	Yep. With all this they have going on down the Carlyle Development, just down the road.
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah, you know when I was a kid that was all the City dump.
Interviewer 1:	Oh yeah?

Vernon Cockrell:	I often want to tell my brother-in-law—he and I grew up in Alexandria. He’s 80, well he’s 84. He’s sick, getting senile. I still don’t think he understands, but he can go back and talk...he can’t remember anything five minutes after he hears it or says it now, but he and I can talk for hours about years ago. About what’s going to happen one of these days when all of that stuff under those, of course the building have solid foundations under those, but all that surrounding area as all that stuff decays, it’s bound to settle. Street will go down, well I mean it was a huge dump. You can’t believe it unless you can see it. It must cover the entire area. In fact, in one time a dump was right up to King Street—right up Hooff’s Run, where right now...a Metro station is, right this side of the Metro station in that area, they were some dumping going on in there when I was a kid.
Interviewer 1:	You see anything here [looking at a map]? Here is the Masonic [George Washington Masonic Memorial] and this is Duke Street heading out.
Vernon Cockrell:	And then on North Washington Street where there used to be what’s known as the Hot Shoppe—it’s not there anymore—that was all built on dump area. Dump went from Washington Street all the way to the river, just about. We use to go there and shoot rats when I was a kid.
Interviewer 1:	Run out of rabbits and squirrels?
Vernon Cockrell:	I don’t know why, I guess.
Interviewer 1:	Do you remember when the Masonic was built?
Vernon Cockrell:	Well nobody believes me but I remember them laying the corner stone when it was built. But my family thinks I—but I remember my uncle holding me in his arms while we all stood around to watch it. And I was probably a couple years old, maybe a year or two old. But they swear—but I can picture it just as well, but they say no. Yeah I remember that.
Interviewer 1:	Were any of your family Masons?
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah, my grandfather.
Interviewer 1:	Your grandfather was?
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah, my grandfather, grandfather Rose on my mother’s side, yeah he was a high Mason. He never did put—I don’t think he ever mentioned it to me, I don’t know why he didn’t. I guess he gave up. Thought it wasn’t important trying even.
Interviewer 1:	Well, did you guys want to ask any questions to Mr. Cockrell?
Interviewer 2:	Do you have any?
Interviewer 3:	Not really, I think he did a real thorough job I mean I can’t—nothing.

Vernon Cockrell:	You going to write a book?
Interviewer 1:	Mostly this is just for the record. This is for people who are going to be researching Alexandria and, basically, putting together people's memories of it. Tells a little more than the City Council minutes do.
Interviewer 3:	Well we are sort of affiliated with the Lyceum and a project called Archaeology. Believe it or not, but oral history is a part of that, so, just to have a written transcription of people's thoughts of the City and stuff.
Vernon Cockrell:	Well, you know, talking about how cold it used to be, years ago when my father—I've heard him more than once talking about driving a horse and wagonload of corn meal up the Potomac River on the ice. And I can remember cutting ice and putting it in the ice house down here at [unclear, possibly Chansey's]. My uncle married into the Chansey family and they had an ice house down there on Longview and the old Chansey home was up on that hill. Longview and Duke, now....cut ice put in there and cover up with sawdust.
Interviewer 2:	What year did you sell your hardware store? Do you recall?
Vernon Cockrell:	I guess—this is, what, 2000—I think probably between [19]86 and [19]88.
Interviewer 2:	And does the building still exist? That building?
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh no. I tore the building down and I built the efficient living. I got a [unclear, possibly nine]-year lease on that. In fact, I tried to put an office building on it...yeah. We wanted to put a five-story medical building on it. Really wanted to. See, the only guy in the hospital, I think, was behind the fight that planned on putting doctors' offices in it. And I've been on the hospital board for thirteen years before that and I knew a lot of the people and some more or less told me that the hospital was really behind it. And I'm glad they were because I was going to sell the grounds then instead of developing it myself. Yeah, I'm glad I did. And now I would like to sell real estate, if I can't help.
Interviewer 3:	How did Cockrell Avenue gets its name? Was it because it was obviously or discretely after you? But did you own the land?
Vernon Cockrell:	We developed this subdivision years ago, and we called the street Alnor Heights—a-l was the first two letters from my mother's name and n-o-r was my father's first name. And the City annexed, and one night City Council just arbitrarily changed it.
Interviewer 3:	Oh really, so it wasn't something?
Vernon Cockrell:	And we didn't even [unclear]...the paper next day.
Interviewer 3:	And you developed this in, what? Was it late [19]40s or—
Vernon Cockrell:	Some of it was before that, yeah.

Interviewer 3:	Oh, okay, after the war.
Vernon Cockrell:	We built these first three or four houses back before World War II. Yeah, and they may have, might have done it just to make us feel good 'cause we fought them tooth and toenail on the annexation on this area.
Interviewer 3:	Oh.
Vernon Cockrell:	You know that Cooper Dawson I was telling you about?
Interviewer 3:	Uh huh.
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah. We spent quite a bit of money fighting it. We wanted to stay in Fairfax County.
Interviewer 3:	Oh, I see.
Interviewer 1:	Why is that?
Vernon Cockrell:	I don't know, tell you the honest truth.
Interviewer 3:	A good fight.
Vernon Cockrell:	As far as I am concerned we were better off in the City 'cause we got, you know, better fire protection, better police protection, and I think Alexandria City government overall has done a real good job. And, well, I don't think you can fault them one bit. Other than they allowed too many townhouses. I'm afraid they're going to come back to haunt us.
Interviewer 2:	Oh you mean these other developments out this way?
Vernon Cockrell:	Cameron Station up here—I think that's—my wife and I ride through there about once a month just to see what's going on. And I've never seen such dense development in my life.
Interviewer 3:	There are issues for the City because you don't collect the same kinds of revenues that you do.
Vernon Cockrell:	Well, that's right.
Interviewer 3:	But people use the same services that single-family homeowners do.
Vernon Cockrell:	It cost ten thousand, probably now it cause twelve thousand dollars to educate a child in the city of Alexandria. And they maybe pay thousands, maybe a thousand, I don't know, whether they pay a thousand dollars here on real estate taxes on a townhouse.
Interviewer 1:	Well now I got to tell you we look down there and those townhouses cost more than my house over here on Early.
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh, yeah. They're going around two fifty, two seventy-five.

Interviewer 1:	It's not like some of these on the outer Beltway that are going for ninety thousand, hundred thousand. They don't cover their service charges with their taxes.
Vernon Cockrell:	But then again I was reading at the [unclear, possibly register] just the other day there is only two children in every one hundred townhouses in Alexandria.
Interviewer 3:	That could be, yeah.
Vernon Cockrell:	Now that's really, that's possible. So if it is then they're breaking even anyway.
Flood on Duke Street	
Interviewer 3:	Changing subject, but you talked about how heavy the snow was in [19]36, which must have contributed to—wasn't [19]36 a flood, a major flood, that year? Am I right or am I wrong?
Vernon Cockrell:	I don't know.
Interviewer 3:	You don't recall?
Vernon Cockrell:	I remember a flood, but I don't—
Interviewer 3:	Maybe I got the wrong year, but anyway do you remember the flood?
Vernon Cockrell:	We had a flood later.
Interviewer 1:	Yeah it was [19]36.
Vernon Cockrell:	We had a flood much later than that, when it flooded Cameron Station you mean?
Interviewer 3:	I just remember reading about it, a major flood. I guess I can't recall what year I read, but—
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah, it must of been in the late [19]40s we had a bad flood and Cameron Station—the entire Duke Street—had a foot of water over top of it up there.
Interviewer 2:	But that had nothing to do with the mill and washing out the mill.
Vernon Cockrell:	Oh no.
Interviewer 2:	You just closed the mill. Yeah, somebody along the line had mentioned that maybe the flood had washed out your mill. So that wasn't the issue?
Vernon Cockrell:	The dam used to wash holes in it anyway. And I could remember a number times my father going up there in the middle of the night. We had this black fellow that works for us named Jim Wheeler. He and Jim Wheeler go up there with a wheelbarrow and cement and just mixed the cement with dry dirt and dump it in to where it was washed out till they finally got it stopped. Yeah,

	you couldn't dam it today. Well, what happened that really caused that flood—the dam up at Barcroft let go. I don't know whether you're familiar with the Barcroft Dam or not. That's up on Columbia Pike. But that let go—it didn't let go, they opened the gates to keep the dam from washing, going out itself and that, well, it flood that entire area.
Interviewer 2:	So everybody on down.
Interviewer 3:	Wow.
Vernon Cockrell:	Yeah. You couldn't even get up and down Duke Street the water was so deep.
Interviewer 3:	Wow. Did you have a number of floods like that or—
Vernon Cockrell:	That was the only one that was that bad.
Interviewer 3:	But that was their biggest one.
Vernon Cockrell:	Well. hey, we've had a number of them out here in Arlandria, in that area. But since they've done the flood control we haven't had any problems either here or there. None at all. Yep.
More on Business in Alexandria	
Interviewer 3:	Did Alexandria City government—did they fight a lot of the development out this way or—because it sounds like to me what you're saying they were a little bit anti-business-development, but there certainly a lot has been built this way. So did they fight that along the way or—
Vernon Cockrell:	Well, yeah, well only in the late years.
Interviewer 3:	Oh.
Vernon Cockrell:	Back years ago when we had businessmen on the Council, you didn't have that trouble with development, well you didn't have a lot of [unclear] even back then. Because they realize that you've got to have business to pick up the majority of your tax base. You can't get it from—even single family homes don't carry the weight.
Interviewer 2:	Oh, and its just in recent years that you've notice it change in perspective?
Vernon Cockrell:	Well, you know, the thing, you know, what was [unclear] business. I can't understand why Landmark doesn't do any better than it does. I mean it's sitting right in the center of a huge population of homes completely surrounded.
Interviewer 3:	Do you have any ideas, since you're a businessman? What you think maybe it's doing wrong?
Vernon Cockrell:	Well, it's hard to understand really. I don't whether they've got exorbitant rents. Of course they don't have an anchor in there right now.

Interviewer 3:	Yeah. They've lost their anchor.
Vernon Cockrell:	And if you don't have an anchor you've got problems. And—
Interviewer 2:	What did they lose? Don't they have Sears and Hecht's?
Vernon Cockrell:	Huh?
Interviewer 2:	Hecht's and Sears are there?
Vernon Cockrell:	Hecht's and Sears.
Interviewer 2:	Yeah, but they had another anchor?
Vernon Cockrell:	And they've got a Lord and Taylor, I think is supposed to come in. But you go up there, and every time I go up—I check about once every two or three weeks to see how many vacancies come up.
Interviewer 3:	Yeah. It is odd, it is very odd in there.
Vernon Cockrell:	And it's a nice location.
Interviewer 3:	Easy to get to.
Vernon Cockrell:	And all the parking you want. But for some reason they just don't seem to cut it. I don't know whether it because of Springfield Mall and Crystal—not Crystal City but—
Interviewer 1:	Pentagon City.
Vernon Cockrell:	Pentagon City. I was over there—my wife and I was over there yesterday. One vacancy . Then somebody moved. Victoria's Secrets moved a subsidiary into that. That's a fantastic operation. I mean the mall, not Victoria. But, yeah, well, it's right on the Metro line and it's got the all the Washington, D.C., area and completely surrounded.
Interviewer 3:	Uh huh, well that's all I had too.
Interviewer 2:	Very very important. I learned a lot. Thank you.
Interviewer 3:	Yeah great, thank you. [End]