

PERSON BEING INTERVIEWED: MR. ANTHONY RYAN

INTERVIEWERS: Donna Thomas

A Miss Thomas has asked me to speak about Savannah and I'd like to cover the period from 1932 to 1973 and that part of the economy that the Savannah River has played. In the year 1932, the world was in the midst of a depression. Mr. Roosevelt became President of the United States and with him came many of the reforms and changes that have affected the lives of people, not only of that day but to the present day. As far as Savannah's "activities" went, it was the largest cotton port in the world. In the year 1910 3 million bales of cotton, not compressed cotton, was shipped through the port of Savannah. In the shipping trade there is an instrument known as the Savannah Charter Party, which is used to charter a ship to carry cotton such was the extent in the sizes of the cargoes of cotton moving out of the port of Savannah, that entire ships were chartered to move them to all parts of the world. When Mr. Roosevelt came into office, the world was in the midst of a depression. The world cotton market was 7¢ a pound for cotton but there was no demand for cotton, as the cotton mills in the North, the cotton mills in Europe and England, were not running and they had cotton in their warehouses; and, the exploitation of cotton came to a halt. Mr. Roosevelt appointed Henry Wallace, Secretary of Agriculture. Mr. Wallace came into the office of Secretary of Agriculture with a scheme to pay the farmers 12¢ a pound for cotton on reduced acreage, for which the government would pay them the higher price to raise less cotton. This priced the American cotton 5¢ above the world market. As the world slowly came out of the depression and the war clouds that WWII gathered, there was a demand for cotton slowly increasing in the early year. The cotton buyers, brokers and factories in the United States began looking to other areas of the world to supply cotton. The cotton industry moved to Mexico, South America and India, and gradually the production of cotton in those countries replaced the historic market that was out of the United States. The same as Roosevelt with some of his projects paid man to build mess for birds that birds have built from time immortal, thus with his hair-brain scheme, we lost the world cotton market. We have some of the finest sections of the country to grow cotton and yet, unless it is a program whereby some Federal funds, or government aid or some restriction, where aid is given to a foreign country and the money must be spent in the United States, cotton is now imported to Savannah from other parts of the world. It is like bringing coals to Newcastle. With the cotton market destroyed and the economy in poor shape, Dr. Herty developed the pine tree as a source for making paper and this was the economy from which Savannah rebuilt its export market; and today, with the basic cargo from the paper products; wood pulp, lighter board, to give the base cargo to ships to call on Savannah and thereby able to afford a regular schedule, Savannah has again returned to one of the largest ports in the United States. Its commerce exceeds that of the ports of Charleston and Jacksonville, combined. It is the 10th largest port in the United States, and this year exceeded Norfolk. Savannah has a bright future because many industries have now located here, to give us a diversified economy. The paper mill industry is quite large; but another segment of industry is coming, and that is the tourist industry. Savannah is very fortunate to have many tourist attractions that are unique and unusual. We have museums and forts, recreational facilities; and adjacent to us, Hilton Head and other things. The Savannah River front is being developed into a tourist attraction. When River Street is revitalized, paved, sheet pile put along the River, new sidewalks, lighting, curbing and gutters, the areas underneath Factors Walk paved and lighted, Savannah will have a tourist attraction that will exceed, as far as interest goes, by far, that of Underground Atlanta.

- A The buildings there are very unique. They are 4 and 5 stories tall. They were built in the early 1800's for cotton warehouses. The 3 lower levels were used to store cotton and the main street or Bay Street level was the office and the level above it, was used as the hotel for the planters to come and stay when they came to do their business. The buildings are very unique and they are 5 stories high. They are accessible by 4 levels at ground level. These buildings are made of brick and stone, walls being of 2 and 3 inches thick and the timbers are hand-hewn, 3 X 12 and 3 X 16's, 12" on the center. Tourism for the year 1980 would exceed that of the industrial dollar payroll in our economy in Savannah.
- I I know that you own one building down on River Street. What are you doing down there to help tourism?
- A Well, there are many buildings along River Street that are being converted into shops, specialty shops, restaurants, art museums. At the present there are about 40 different shops and restaurants along the River Front that are already open, and perhaps by this time next year, it will be close to 70. The shops are very unique, in as much as, they are individually operated shops; not part of any chain whereby if you see the same shop in Atlanta or Chattanooga, or Jacksonville or Savannah, it would be the same. These shops are left up to the personality and ingenuity of the individual shop owners. In the last 2 years since this revitalization has started, no shops have closed, gone out of business or changed hands, which I think speaks well for the time and the place.
- I What made you become so interested in River Street?
- A Well, I had worked in that area for a number of years and then when I retired I decided to start to rehabilitate my building, and being that it is on River Street, it was just naturally of interest to me.
- I Have you lived in Savannah all of your life?
- A Yes; I knew of people who were here since 1800.
- I How did you get started in the business in Savannah?
- A You mean the present job or the job I retired from?
- I Well, let's take both of them; let's take the one you retired from first.
- A Well, that was a ship supply business. Then, when I came out of the service, I was like many other young people at the time, restless and I had worked for a hardware company, and I was afforded the opportunity that presented itself for me to go into business for myself, and this is the type of business that I went into. The business that I have now is Verdery's Lamp Shop. I was retired about 6 months and I didn't do anything and the wife said she couldn't find a lamp shade, but I really think she wanted to get me out of the house, so my daughter, my son and I, we run the lamp shop now. In our building there are presently 9 shops.
- I Do you think it is fairly easy for people to go into business for themselves in Savannah?
- A Well, I think for anyone to go into business, they must realize certain things. First, they must be willing to give it the time and attention that it requires. People in business for themselves, can figure that certainly in initial years, on putting in long hours. Second, I think that if anyone is thinking about going

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- A into business, they should realize that if they wait for the right time to go into business, it is never the right time, either to go into business or get married, so if you wait for the right time, it is never the right time. I think that it affords a person a great sense of satisfaction as well as a livelihood to be able to put together a business, especially one that is of his creation and see it grow.
- I Have you ever considered leaving Savannah for any business reasons?
- A No.
- I Any special reason why?
- A Yes; when I came back to Savannah in 1945 I was single, and all I was really in need of, I guess, was a job and I could of got a job in any number of places, but Savannah was a place that I would rather live than anywhere else that I had seen; in other words, I'm pretty satisfied with Savannah.
- I What do you think Savannah offers that other cities don't?
- A Savannah offers the opportunity to work hard. You have to work hard here to get ahead, because unfortunately at the present time, there just isn't as much opportunity as it might be in a bigger city; but by the same token, if somewhat relative, your potential number of people seeking the jobs are not as great either. Opportunity is what you make of it, really.
- I As to you personally, what effect did the depression have on you?
- A You realize that when you saw people eat regularly, you could brag on them but it would also make you realize that when the economy is destroyed, then there are no jobs; that it isn't enough to be willing to work, because many people were willing to work during the depression but there just weren't any job opportunities, and there probably is nothing worse than a depression. It's sort of, to give you a small idea of what a depression on a scale is, if you lose your job, that is a depression to you, but you multiply it by the number of others; if someone else loses their job, that is a recession. But, when there are just more people willing to work and absolutely no work, that's a bad situation.
- I Well in Savannah, I know you said that because of the cotton industry leading as a result of some of FDR's measures, would you say that because of this, his popularity was decreased around Savannah or did he ever have any popularity around Savannah?
- A Oh, I think he had popularity. He had popularity all over. He was a spell binder; he even got Cotton Ed Smith, the Senator from South Carolina, to give away the Southern section of the country's birthright. When the south failed to have an effective voice in the Democratic party was the year 1936 when Cotton Ed Smith, the Senator from South Carolina, made the proposal to change the rule in the Democratic party to where it took a 2/3 majority to a simple majority; the South then became the tail of the dog and not the dog.
- I With Roosevelt's New Deal, how did this affect the people in Savannah directly, as far as economics was concerned?
- A The New Deal. It came into the program called the WPA, which provided work for people. The government paved streets; it built bridal paths; it divided jobs;

A It paid artists to draw; it paid writers to write; it set up a program called the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) that provided employment for young men. It started a national recovery act, which established the minimum wage and reduced the number of hours that people could work a week, so as to make more work available for people. The government started spending large sums of money, for the times, on public projects that, historically, had not been done by the Federal government. This program was the beginning of the Federal government doing things that, historically, had been the responsibility of the local governments.

I How has Ft. Pulaski been turned into a tourist attraction?

A Well, Ft. Pulaski was built after the War of 1812. It is one of the coastal defenses. In the War of 1812 with the British, it was found that many of our cities did not have proper defenses, so the Federal government started a program of building a series of forts to protect coastal cities. Savannah was to be defended by Ft. Pulaski, Ft. Jackson and Ft. Wayne; and about Ft. Wayne, where East Broad and River Street would normally be, there is a battery of guns to be put there by the old Harbor light. If you go by there today, you can still see 3 or 4 gun ports that were there. After Ft. Pulaski was built it was considered an engineering achievement of magnitude, when one considers the many million brick that were hauled to Ft. Pulaski by barge to build it by water. Ft. Pulaski was one of the first assignments that General Robert E. Lee, then a Lieutenant out of West Point, U. S. Army, had. The masonry work on Ft. Pulaski is considered artistic in that it is so perfect. Ft. Pulaski was considered impregnable and when the war came between the states, it was taken over by Colonel Ulmsterd, and he garrisoned the fort. Union troops came across from South Carolina and established a battery on Tybee Island. This was not of major concern to the Confederate forces in the fort as it was then thought that any cannon shots from Tybee would be ineffective. But, the shots that were fired from Tybee on Ft. Pulaski revolutionized warfare. It was the first time that the rifle cannon was used, increasing the range that Federal forces were able to zero their guns in on the fort and were able to come close to hitting the powder magazines. Then, after about a 24-hour siege, Col. Ulmsterd surrendered the fort. Ft. Pulaski fell into a state of disrepair and disuse for many years. In the 30's the National Park Service was declared by then a national park site and Ft. Pulaski was restored, and it is now been outfitted in many sections as it was formerly outfitted. The moat around the fort has been replaced. There is a park and picnic area there, as well as, the Fort itself. They have guides to take you personally on tour; and anyone interested in military items, would find a tour of Ft. Pulaski most interesting.

I Who began to restore Ft. Pulaski?

A The United States government in the 1930's.

I Many houses in downtown Savannah are being restored.

A Yes, and the restoration in downtown Savannah, I think, affords a very uniqueness. If one goes to Williamsburg and looks at Williamsburg and you see the restoration there, you realize that although it is very beautiful, still it is artificial in as much as it is not a living, working community. The restoration in the Savannah area has not been done by any foundation nor government grant but done by private capital. The restored area is a living, working area where restored homes adjacent to the Savannah River front will offer the tourist a prime attraction.

- I How has downtown Savannah changed from the time when you first started, maybe, working or living down there?
- A Well, some of the major changes are really happening now. Of course, the street cars went; but, I think some of the interesting changes are those that are taking place around Johnson Square, which is one block south of the City Hall. Savannah Bank and Trust Co. is building a 10-story addition and Liberty Bank has torn down an old building and is building a new building there. Their plans when that building is finished is to take down the building by the corner of Broughton and Bull and build additional buildings there, with parking. Across the street, the old Savannah Manger Hotel is being restored. There is just a tremendous amount of restoration in the business section of the downtown area. The Broughton Street Revitalization Program has now been approved and the engineering started. The parking for the Civic Center would extend from Montgomery to West Broad, from Broughton to Oglethorpe. It will be a parking facility place there for shoppers. Also, the Chatham County Courthouse is proposed to be relocated in that complex and that will tie in with the Civic Center, and all of this will add to the life and activity of the downtown area.
- I You mentioned a 10-story building, I thought there was a law about buildings not having more than 3 stories.
- A No, I think that what you have to have, is that the building has to be compactible with the adjacent buildings. The area in the downtown area has been declared a historic zone area, and for any structural change on the outside of the building, in addition to getting a permit, a person has to have their changes or plans approved by the historic review board; and, this is to assure that buildings that are put there will be compactible with buildings that are presently there. It is not limited particularly to the height.
- I Then in other words aren't we trying to keep some atmosphere in Savannah, instead of having skyscrapers?
- A Well, that's true, but you see, the building that will be built; a 10-story addition to the Savannah Bank, will be 5 stories shorter than the present bank building; and, they feel that as the present bank building is 15 stories, that a 10-story addition will not be incompatible with the present building.
- I You mentioned the Civic Center; the auditorium that was used before the Civic Center, when was it built?
- A It was built about 1916; it was a monstrosity. The acoustics were poor.
- I How has Savannahians changed in their voting party over the years, or have they stuck with one party, from your personal observation?
- A No. They have changed considerably; Even at the time when it wasn't considered respectable to be a Republican. So Savannah has changed in their voting habits in that respect on a national level, although many people figure Savannah has been a Democratic party stronghold within our present Democratic system or the Democratic party, Savannah always had several factions and under the procedure before, when two candidates ran in the Democratic primary, the winner of that primary then ran in the general election, and the Democratic primary was really the primary that decided who would get the office they ran for, because when the general election came, either the Republican party failed to put up candidates or if they did put up a candidate, he didn't get popular support, so the winner of the Democratic primary would be the successful candidate for the office. But then, with Mr. Eisenhower, when he went in as a Republican in 1952, because of his popularity with people in

A the service and persons that had been in the service and gone to defend sections of the country, communications being what they were, people began to think not particularly as Democrats but perhaps as individuals and more or less gave birth to a 2-party system in Savannah.

I Have you ever known any bosses or machines to be present in the Savannah politics?

A Well, in the years past when your total vote would have been better than 4000, there were political parties and I guess, as all political parties, they had political bosses. I guess that there are political parties today and I'm sure that political factions have people that are in charge.

I Were the people in Savannah informed as to what was going on in politics?

A Well, I think that they were informed, in as much as, the politics were on a very much more personal basis because there were so very few registered voters, and the community was smaller but you knew the people intimately who were running for public office; so as far as being informed, I think they were probably better informed then than they are today.

I When did the Savannah Evening Press and News start?

A I think the Savannah Morning News started in 1896. Savannah Press was an independent paper and ran as an independent paper for many years and then it was purchased by the Savannah Morning News and combined into one newspaper function. It was purchased by the Savannah Morning News, I believe, in the early 30's.

I Has the paper been worse?

A Well, there again, I think the paper is perhaps a little bit less personal that it was before. I certainly think that their type today is worse.

I Their type?

A Yes, it is harder to read; they have more mistakes; their printing is worse than it was before they went to the present type of production of producing the paper.

I How about Savannah, as opposed to inland cities; in relation to economy, and I know there would be an outstanding difference between economies, but their voting habits and the overall opinion of the populus, from your personal experience, "Is Savannah sort of set apart from inland cities?"

A Well, it is set apart geographically in as much as we are on the coast and the land mass is to the west of us and then, of course, to the east of us is the Atlantic Ocean. The economy should not basically be set aside, because really, from a regional standpoint, the economy of Savannah ties in with that of the rest of the area of the Southeast. From the standpoint of Georgia, Savannah should be looked at as part of the marketing system for the state of Georgia. It offers an outlet to our farmer to sell his products, whether it is a pulpwood producer, the same who is raising tobacco, corn, soybeans. All these things would find themselves into foreign trade which are exported through the port of Savannah. The farmer receives into the port of Savannah, fertilizers, fuel, tractors and many of the items he uses, field fencing. For a long period of time people have thought that the interest of the interior of the state and the interest of the people of Savannah were different, but really, it all ties with in and Savannah needs to be looked at as part of the marketing outlet for the state of Georgia, the same as in the years past. The idea

A was developed to build a set of roads which are referred to as "The Farmer's Road to Market." The state of Georgia needs to look at the port of Savannah as part of the marketing system of Georgia, so that it can serve the economy of the entire state. Many products come into Savannah and then transhipped to other sections of the state, as well as, exported out of the state of Georgia. So economically, our interests are the same. Politically, on a state level, we should have the same interest because if it helps Savannah, it helps the rest of the state. So, I would think that our interests would be the same.

I How would the base Hunter, have influenced Savannah?

A Well, personally, I think that the sooner that we can get rid of the Federal government's involvement in Hunter Field and turn it over to the community to develop, the better off it would be. I think it is a shame that such a prime part of our community is not being utilized to a higher-made purpose than what it has been or is being used now.

I How would the military people, what kind of influence have they had on Savannah?

A They have had an influence and have made a valuable contribution to our community but unfortunately, so many of the ones that we have had in the course of their service with the US government, of necessity, leave our community; and I believe that from a community standpoint, that our best interests could be served with the utilization of the land now embracing Hunter Field for industrial and community developments. I believe that it would be a far healthier and more stable economy than one that would have to depend on the whims of the Armed Forces.

I How has the military influenced our economy?

A The military has influenced our economy by making payrolls: the military has contributed in that respect. They have also given us some outstanding citizens.

I Do you think it has hurt our economy by their leaving?

A It has, but I think that as they have left, that the other segments of our economy have increased to offset the loss, and that is why I feel, at this time, it would be to the local community's advantage to take Hunter Field and make a huge industrial development out of it. The runways are very strong; they are very deep. Many, many types of industry could build their plants on the present runways without having to go to the expense of driving piling. It has many natural facilities, that have natural assets of location. It goes to the Forest River which could provide barge traffic to the area. It has rail road sidings. It has facilities that the Army has built that would be an asset to industrialization. It has land that could be used for recreational purposes. It would also afford the county the opportunity to open up through roads through there to relieve their traffic congestion; and the lasting benefits to our community, I believe, would be far greater if it were used by private industry rather than by the military.

I What other things does Savannah offer that would be favorable for industry?

A Well, it offers a good climate, it offers a reliable and cooperative labor market. It offers a good transportation system, such as fine rail and truck

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A line facilities that serve the area. It is located on a deep water port which is of prime importance to most industries of any size. It has good schools, churches, banking facilities and financial facilities. It has all of the elements that would make for a fine place to locate a plant and a good place for the people to live.

I What would Savannah offer individuals, not industry, but individuals that would be thinking of coming to Savannah?

A Well, it would depend on what, would you say, that individual would be looking for.