

ABSTRACT

SCRC Series: Lewis Clarke Oral Histories Project – MC 00191

Field Notes: Donald E. Basile (compiled October 20, 2011)

Interviewee: DONALD E. (“DON”) BASILE

Interviewer: Yona R. Owens

Interview Date: Thursday, July 14, 2011

Location: Douglassville, Pennsylvania

Length: Approximately 130 minutes

The interview took place at a large dining table in Basile’s home. He was asked about his years in design school at North Carolina State University, his work on Palmetto Dunes and other projects while employed as a landscape architect at Lewis Clarke Associates (LCA) in the late 1960s, and his decision, as a landscape architect in the early ‘70s, to start a development company with his brothers. He discussed Lewis Clarke’s “book of common knowledge,” the regulatory challenges his company has faced and overcome, and the projects he is most proud of.

Tape Log

00:00:00	Where from and how got involved in landscape architecture.
00:00:15	Cutting grass and working with plants in teens, accepted at Cornell, transferred to NCSU
00:02:30	First class was with George Bireline, struggled with grades then adjusted attitude
00:04:15	Program of destroying old thinking started to make sense, description of courses
00:05:00	[Dog barked – pause in recording]
00:07:45	80 % washout rate, names of faculty and classmates, starting to understand how to get projects done, using trash to give depth to project
00:12:34	Working for LCA and difference between “real world dollars and cents” and school’s mental process, process of how to solve problems
00:14:45	Clarke’s “book of common knowledge,” being well-read, expanding horizons, coming up with answers on your own
00:16:45	First project at LCA, how to design, and how to treat client
00:19:10	[Dog bark] Running up on an expert brick mason when novice designer
00:21:15	[Squeaky toy noise – pause in recording]
00:22:20	What did you take away from School of Design?
00:25:00	Names of projects, Palmetto Dunes, Tysons Corners and plant material with Fred Stresau’s help
00:26:44	Salary story about Schauman and others asking for raise
00:27:10	[Dog bark]
00:28:00	Back to Tysons Corners and misting system
00:34:20	Developer and public’s lack of sensitivity to landscape architecture design
00:35:40	[Interruption – pause in recording]
00:36:00	Design considerations for Palmetto Dunes
00:40:50	Designing own projects to look into open space and create living environments
00:46:00	Example of project with influence of Richard Moore and Clarke on dune protection a decade ahead of the trend

- 00:48:30 Possible to design well and turn a buck for the developer
- 00:50:30 Wetland considerations and applying rules to the project design
- 00:55:20 Why make retention basins look like blocks?
- 00:58:30 Not every plan gets built, need to educate students about making land value go up because of the way plan is designed
- 01:01:38 Do regulations stifle good design? Example of trails across people's backyards, change perspective on sidewalks
- 01:09:00 Storm water retention in enclosed caisson design and battle with township engineers
- 01:11:30 Township small thinking
- 01:13:05 When landscape architecture comes up with an innovative design solution, what about educating the public?
- 01:15:10 Difference between being an engineer and a landscape architect, design goes to engineer from landscape architect, never the other way
- 01:16:40 What kind of boss was Clarke?
- 01:19:00 Ken Sangster as designer, Ferd Hobbs' early computer for lotting, cutting edge in LCA
- 01:25:00 Tom [Martin], Roy Pender, and experience of LCA as a group, Sally [Schauman], Fred [Stresau], LaMarr [Bunn], Charlie Burkhead
- 01:28:30 Working for clients versus working for self as developer, designing beyond conscious perceptions and showing developer how to make money from nuances
- 01:33:10 Which projects most proud of?
- 01:36:30 Township zoning conflicts forces competition between townships, interpreting the rules
- 01:44:20 Heading for retirement? Working on book about elderly housing design needs
- 01:49:00 Getting into the client's design mind
- 01:50:30 One important thing to know about Don Basile?
- 01:53:15 "Green" people have to realize that people have to have places to live
- 01:55:01 Is regulatory situation going to change? Examples of regulations that are out of line
- 02:01:05 Will landscape architects rewrite regulations?
- 02:02:30 Names of faculty who helped him get to where he is today, tools he picked up, happy working for self, a bit cloistered, but thinking trained by SOD
- 02:04:18 Recently visited Palmetto Dunes, still works
- 02:06:00 Clarke set the rules, they designed to the rules, translated what learned at LCA to business with his two brothers (one an architect, other is builder), had unique success for nearly fifty years
- 02:10:14 End of interview