

TRANSCRIPT

SCRC Series: Lewis Clarke Oral Histories Project – MC 00191

Field Notes: William P. Pinna (compiled December 8, 2008)

Interviewee: WILLIAM P. (“BILL”) PINNA

Interviewer: Yona R. Owens

Interview Date: Thursday, December 4, 2008

Location: Raleigh, North Carolina

Length: Approximately 28 minutes

This interview for the Lewis Clarke Oral Histories Project was conducted at the law offices of Pinna, Johnston & Burwell, P.A. Born in Chicago, Bill Pinna came to North Carolina to attend law school at Duke University. After graduation (and at intervals throughout his career), he taught at Duke, and North Carolina State University. In 1970, he opened his law practice in Raleigh and met Lewis Clarke shortly thereafter. Over the last 40 years, Pinna has been Clarke’s personal and professional attorney as well as an occasional client of Lewis Clarke Associates (LCA).

YO: This is an oral history with Bill Pinna on December the fourth, 2008 at his office in Raleigh, N.C., and I’d like to start off with our standard first question. Tell me a little bit about where you’re from?

BP: I was born in Chicago in 1943, and was raised in Chicago, and came to law school down at Duke in ’65, and then remained in the South after I graduated from law school in ’68.

YO: So you’ve been in North Carolina ever since?

BP: Yeah, forty-three years.

YO: You taught at Duke at one time, right?

BP: I taught at Duke from 1978 to 1987.

YO: And were you starting your practice at the same time?

BP: No, I started actually my practice right after I finished law school. I came to Raleigh and I worked for Ann Pullen doing some accounting work while I was teaching at State. I was teaching at State from 1968 to 1981 and then I interviewed and took a job with a law firm in Durham. I lived in Raleigh and I would commute every day. And then in 1971 early in the year I opened up the Raleigh office for that law firm. And that was just about the time I met Lewis Clarke.

YO: And how did you meet him?

BP: Lewis came to me through First Citizens Bank. He had a relationship with the trust department there and I had done some work for the trust department and he was in need of a will, an incorporation, and a retirement plan. They had recommended that Lewis see me. I saw Lewis and met him probably in the latter part of the year. As I recall, it was like a September-October time frame.

YO: Could you tell he was a different kind of a client at that time than maybe your average client?

BP: I think I knew Lewis was different. Period. He was very bright and very enjoyable to be around and intelligent enough to understand all the various nuances of the things that he needed. The will, the incorporation, and the retirement plan.

YO: And so you struck up a relationship on that, but there were other things that you started doing for him, wasn't there?

BP: Oh, yeah. Well, the truth of the matter is that I think to get those three things accomplished—oh, I think it was probably eleven years. It only took me eleven years to get those accomplished with Lewis and the reason I say that is because Lewis is very particular about things. So my envisioning a will was—ok, have a will that provides for your family and provides in case certain things happen. Lewis had a more elaborate arrangement that he wanted to explore. The corporation was something I didn't think would take a long time, but we didn't incorporate until probably mid-seventies and then the retirement plan we didn't end up finishing until 1982. So, the answer is it took a little longer than expected.

YO: Well, people have told me he's a bit eccentric. How did you find him?

BP: Lewis is somewhat eccentric, but you know he's a very bright person and when you're that bright you have so many different ideas and thoughts on things that it's often hard to communicate that and sometimes you don't communicate that. And Lewis would ask and suggest things, but once you would get into the details, you would see that he would really have a number of other thoughts that you had to consider and talk about so that was part of it.

The other things I used to do is during that period of time I traveled with Lewis a lot to do a little work contracting with not only some of the people that he would hire but also some of the people that he would perform services for. I think at that stage Lewis had developed a wonderful reputation and was widely sought after for some of the larger projects and one of the concerns he always had is you commit those resources and get in those arrangements and you best have some writing that defines the scope of the work, and the payment schedule and what was expected on everyone's part, and what if something does happen? So that was a lot of the work that I did for Lewis too, basically just contracts and would go with him when he would you know negotiate some of these different arrangements with different developers.

YO: Do you remember one project in particular?

BP: Oh, there were a lot of them. One that—one of the earlier ones that he did is he did a project down at the coast with a gentleman named Wayne Harold who you know passed away much

earlier than he should have. But I think he died in his early to mid-forties. And Lewis was brought in to do a project down on the Neuse River. It was Whitaker Creek Marina, and it was also Pierce Creek. And I was involved with that. I was involved with some work that he did for Bill Arnold down at Southport Marina. You know he did work down in Palmetto Dunes, he did work for the zoo, he did work on Fripp Island, and those were all different projects that we would help and converse and talk about different arrangements.

YO: Whenever you think of a landscape architect firm you don't usually think about needing legal assistance.

BP: I would tell you that that's maybe the conception that the public would have. I would tell you that in reality I think the more successful organizations realize that it's very, very, very important to make sure you create a document that pretty much addresses the expectations of the parties. Because usually what happens in any type of contractual arrangement, one party has an expectation, another party has an expectation. That was the same thing when Lewis came to see me. I mean, he had an expectation. He had an expectation of a will, an incorporation, and a retirement plan. We certainly didn't sit down and draft anything and talk about the scope of it. I had the same concept of those documents, but my concept was totally different than his. And therefore, how do you have a meeting of the minds or whether people come together, and the answer is we had a very good relationship so we would work through it and talk about it and discuss it over a period of time.

When you've got a developer who has a project that wants them to have it online in two years or three years you better just really develop and define that scope of work and how the payments will be received, and what the total payments are, and define the arrangements and the relationship otherwise you'll have disappointment. And with disappointment usually comes breaches of contract and law suits. So, I think Lewis was very wise. I would say he was ahead of his time in the sense that he understood that part of the relationship and therefore wanted to make sure that a lawyer would put some documentation down in terms of what was going to be delivered, when was it going to be delivered, how it was going to be paid for, etc., etc.

YO: So, a lot of contracts were involved in the landscape—

BP: Yeah, there were contracts, both with employees, both with people that he would do business with and both people that sought his professional services.

YO: There was an airplane involved in this corporation.

BP: Yes, actually he had two, but there was one that we used primarily, which was a Cessna 401 that we would—it was a twin engine and we would fly when we had distances to cover and those distances may be South Carolina, parts of North Carolina, etc.

YO: Was it unusual for one of your clients to have an airplane?

BP: I didn't have many with airplanes, but I did have a couple of other clients with airplanes, and they generally were contractors, some general contractors, some electrical contractors that would

do jobs in Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. So, generally you would see an airplane with somebody that was servicing people in say at least two states if not three states or more.

I had a fellow that had a plane that, he was again a contractor, he installed safety systems and we would fly up to Pennsylvania and Kentucky and Tennessee and places like that. So, typically it was contractors. You didn't have anyone else that had one. If so, it was probably just pure pleasure.

YO: And the reason for that was because air flights in and out of Raleigh were slim to none at the time, right?

BP: Well, there were less air flights to the smaller areas. I mean, if you wanted to fly to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, which is one place I did fly with this other contractor, I mean it would have taken you a better part of a day. You would have probably had to spend the night. Where you could fly up there early in the morning, you could have your meetings, do whatever you needed to do from a business standpoint, and be back before dark. And it was the same thing with Lewis. You could fly to Columbia, South Carolina, you could fly to Fripp Island, you could fly to Hilton Head, and you could be back late in the afternoon.

So, it made good sense and, and I think Lewis used his airplane very effectively. I mean he clearly had to have a justification for it and I think he did. He had a reputation that really took him up and down the coast, and if you needed to get somewhere and be able to get back for some meetings, the plane was perfect. We actually flew to Beaufort, you know we talked about a little earlier that he has a place in Beaufort. We actually flew down to Beaufort. We had a contractor here that wanted us to look at some properties down there and we flew down and had lunch, looked around, looked at the various properties and we were back by two o'clock in the afternoon, which made it very convenient. You could have driven it, but you would have pretty much consumed a day.

YO: It's always a mystery of how they took care of so many different projects in such diverse geographic areas and the airplane is the key to understanding that.

BP: Well, I think the airplane allowed Lewis to efficiently and effectively reach out to these various projects where his reputation had pretty much preceded him and still be able to effectively manage an office and an operation because as you know, he had a number of people working for him. And if you would be gone for two or three days, I think an office suffers with an absence of that kind of leadership.

YO: Well, talking about the office, when it moved to Koger Center that was where it had the most people, right?

BP: Yes, yes. Oh, he had a—it would vary. I think you understand architecture and landscape architecture. There was a great deal of expansion and contraction depending on the work. So, there would be times when you know he would have thirty, forty people working and then there were other times when they're maybe you know down to ten.

YO: Do you remember some of the people who worked for him?

BP: I do. You know Leland Kew worked for him. Wayne McBride, Dick Paton, LaMarr Bunn, among many others. And they were all you know—he had some of the best talent as far as I was concerned around town.

YO: What made their designs different from other people's designs?

BP: That's a good question, Yona, and I really wouldn't feel that I was qualified to make that evaluation. I mean I think that's something that another person that would be in that field and would be able to appreciate Lewis' design.

Lewis was a person that you know before the term became well familiar and, and, and well coined was, he was a person that always thought outside the box. I would hear him talk with the people that worked with him and he would challenge people to think outside the box, to look at this a little differently. You know he had a unique ability—and I'm sure that this comes from years of experience—but he had a unique ability to look at property and look at projects and come up with solutions that were a better utilization and a consistent utilization of the land, where I think a lot of landscape architects and engineers may have done more of the cookie cutter type projects. And again this is my limited, limited, limited perspective because you know Lewis obviously was there every day. I would be there only at various times and I would listen to some of the discussions, and I would see some of the drawings, and I would see some of the interaction between the various staff. And I think that's what made Lewis so unique and I think that's what made his office so unique.

YO: Well, from a layman's stand point you could tell that there was something different there.

BP: Oh, yeah, absolutely. There was an energy there. Lewis was so dynamic and he did have that gift. You know, I remember we'd be out on a site and he would just be talking and telling people to look at the natural contours of the land and don't fight the land. I mean—and that's so true. You'll see so many projects where some installation of some facility be put in a place because somebody wanted it there, but that wasn't the natural place where it should be and as a result you always have all those associated tenant problems to putting something where it doesn't belong from a landscape standpoint. Lewis would say, don't fight the land. You know you've got some high land there. You've got some low land. You don't want to do something to re-route water or try to overcome this obstacle, this barrier because you're fighting something that's Mother Nature. And he's ended up always being correct about that from my limited perspective.

YO: Did you go with him when he'd do presentations?

BP: Yes, yes, yes, many presentations. He had the ability to mesmerize people. He truly did. I would just marvel and enjoy that part of the time I spent with Lewis because his presentations were fabulous. They were dynamic. His explanation, his discussion of questions, his understanding of the project, and the variables, his understanding of how you could approach the project in different ways—it just, it was just outstanding. I thoroughly enjoyed it. I watched him make a presentation to a state agency one time and they were just spellbound and I was just sitting over there just, just remarking to myself, how somebody can present something and just everybody just thinks it was absolutely outstanding and went along with it and just first blush, that was it.

YO: What were some projects that you remember going with him on?

BP: Well, we did one—and again these were concept drawings— we did the one Whitaker Creek Marina with this gentleman, Wayne Harold that was down on the Neuse River. He made some presentations on the Zoo, North Carolina Zoo that he worked on. We also did this one down in Southport—the Southport Marina that Lewis had developed some concepts on. You know all of them were just—they were all different, but all fascinating in dealing with the different problems that you run into.

YO: Did you go with him on any of the Palmetto Dunes presentations?

BP: I did not. You know he was doing Palmetto Dunes at that time. He also did Fripp. I went on one trip with him on to Fripp Island. Also, Carolina Trace—we were on that project a number of times which was kind of was local so we would typically drive that. That was down in Sanford. And again, each project presented its own challenges and its own obstacles and its own opportunities. And Lewis and I would drive down there on a regular basis just to deal with the person that developed it originally, Bill Arnold, and then a subsequent person that took it over, Truby Proctor. You know and Lewis developed close relationships with both those people.

YO: Tell me just a little bit about Truby Proctor.

BP: I met Truby later on in life. Truby had made most of his money through Lee Oil Company and the Pantry and I think he then became very much involved with Carolina Trace because that was really in his own backyard. I think he kind of took a liking to it. There were other people in the community that were involved and he knew them quite well. He then moved on to another project called The Governors Inn and I think Truby thoroughly enjoyed those challenges. They were so different than what he originally was in. He was an interesting guy. I did not know him when he was overweight. He lost a lot of weight. He had some serious heart issues that eventually I think took his life, but he made a remarkable adjustment. He watched his weight. He was very particular in his diet. We would have lunches brought in and you know we might have a certain meal served and Truby would be eating something that would be as heart healthy as you could get at that time and this is probably in the late seventies, eighties, and maybe to the late eighties.

YO: He was one of our local developers and that's why I wanted you to expand a little bit on him.

BP: Yeah, he was and Governors Inn was a nice development he got into. I think it was a rather difficult development. There were a lot of obstacles from a geographic standpoint or a lot of rock and a lot of barriers to developing that property. You know I wasn't there in the end, but I know that he had put an awful lot of money into that project and it was difficult because you ran into different cycles just like the cycle we're in now. I heard the other day that that big development in the northern part of the county called Hasen Tree, H-A-S-E-N Tree, which had a wonderful eighteen hole golf course, and all that, that basically the bank had taken it over. You know with the economy and the credit markets the way they are, there's no money for these home sites to be sold and developed. So I think Truby did run into a similar situation. The first part of the

Governors Club was relatively successful, and then the further development became more problematic and, and troubling for him because you have so much—you have so many dollars in infrastructure and roads and golf courses and utilities, and if you don't have the sales to match up it's very difficult. So, I think in the end it was a situation that became burdensome for him.

YO: Did Lewis Clarke affect your practice?

BP: In one sense, yes in terms of Lewis being very dynamic and I obviously sharing so many different opportunities. In the other sense, Lewis was a person that he would refer people to me and there are a number of clients he did refer and they became you know clients who were important. He referred a gentleman named Bill Arnold who started Carolina Trace. So, in that respect, yes, the real dynamic that Lewis brought is—you always enjoyed working with Lewis because Lewis challenged everybody. It didn't matter whether it was landscape architecture or anyone else. He was always very challenging and that was the part I think that impacted on the practice the most in the sense that he would challenge you to think outside the box, to look at it, to figure more creative ways.

I would think over the years that that probably influenced a lot of the things that I do. I look at things many different ways not, maybe not, in a traditional sort of way or the notion that well you can't really do that. There's always a way to figure to a solution and Lewis kind of instilled that so, from that standpoint, yes. But it wasn't the type where a lot of times you'll have somebody that you'll associate with at a bank and the bank will refer a lot of clients. Lewis certainly referred clients, and was always very complementary, but it was more the dynamic that he brought to the thought process and the analysis. Because I mean Lewis, whenever we get together it's always a thought of well, let's figure a better mouse trap, and let's approach it differently, and let's look at this and let's look at that. So, he's very creative and he's creative in all aspects of his life.

YO: What's the one important thing to know about Lewis Clarke?

BP: Oh, I don't think there's just one thing. There's many things. I think the one thing I would tell people is that you cannot even begin to understand the depth and breadth of his knowledge base, and his creativity, and his thinking skills. And certainly—I'm sure that people that don't know Lewis that well but—you'd never underestimate whatever he can do.

I remember when he retired. He decided to get into the stock market, which he really had never done prior to that time because he was so consumed and wrapped up and working everyday in the field of landscape architecture. And he would come in with twenty one column accounting paper—this was before the computer and, obviously before he could track everything online—and he would track all these stocks, and I was just absolutely amazed. Here is a person that never had an interest. He got into it and he had developed his own system for tracking and following stocks and buying and selling. And needless to say did quite well.

So, I think that the thing is just you can never underestimate what Lewis is capable of doing. I think he's capable of anything. He's just one of those very unique people that comes along just once in a lifetime.

I'll also tell you the story, I came down to see him one time in Beaufort and I walked in the backyard and he is standing up on some type of platform with a tire, a wheel that's been welded and he is driving a pipe into the ground. He's doing his own well. He's developing his

own well. He's figured out that you know we're only three feet or five feet or eight feet above sea level and he's going to tap into some water source that he can use in his garden. Lewis wouldn't think of calling anybody to bring in and build a well. He said he could build a well and there he was building a well. Now, unfortunately he hurt his hand during that process, but you know that would be Lewis. So, I really think there's very little Lewis can't do.

YO: What's the one thing to know about Bill Pinna?

BP: Oh, I think it's the thing that compliments Lewis' relationship with me that I'm well grounded and very practical, very down to earth, and very persistent.

YO: Those are all the questions I have for today. Would you like to add anything?

BP: No, other than the fact it's just been an absolute pleasure to know Lewis, and work with Lewis, and work for Lewis during the close to forty years we've been together and I'm just so happy that all this is being done—that somebody is taking the time to recognize Lewis, his contribution to landscape architecture, his contribution to the community and, and his contribution to mankind. I think it's unfortunate sometimes you'll see a lot of people who have done an awful lot in their lives and their recognition often goes unnoticed. And it's great that this is happening so I'm pleased that you're doing this, and I'm pleased that the university certainly wants to be involved.

YO: Well, thank you very much.

BP: Thank you.

Transcriber: Jennifer Curasi
Date: August 7, 2009