



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



Project Name: *Chamber of Commerce Oral History Project*

Title: *Interview with Harvey Boltwood*

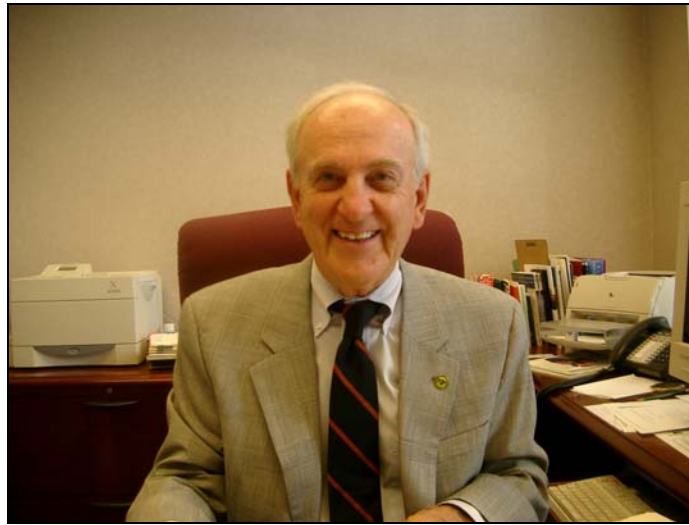
Date of Interview: *September 14, 2005*

Location of Interview: *Alexandria, Virginia*

Interviewer: *Margie Bates*

Transcriber: *Jennifer Hembree*

Abstract: *Born and raised in Alexandria, Harvey Boltwood has been an active Alexandria community member since the 1960s. Involved in the former Retail Merchant's Association at that time, he joined the Chamber of Commerce soon after the two organizations merged in 1968. He has been involved in community service work such as tutoring and volunteering for the Red Cross as well. He was chairman of the Chamber of Commerce in 1988. Mr. Boltwood currently works for Burke & Herbert Bank & Trust.*



Harvey Boltwood, 2005

Margie Bates:	My name is Margie Bates and I am a volunteer with the Lyceum Museum Alexandria Oral History Project. This interview is being conducted for the purpose of capturing historic information about the Chamber of Commerce in preparation for its centennial celebration in 2006. Today I am interviewing Mr. Harvey Boltwood, former chair of the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce. This interview is being conducted at Mr. Boltwood's office, building located at 1775 Jamieson Street in Alexandria, Virginia. Mr. Boltwood, do I have your permission to conduct this interview?
Harvey Boltwood:	Yes, you do.
MB:	Thank you. Could you tell me when and where you were born.
Harvey Boltwood:	Born in Alexandria, Virginia, at the corner of Howell and Mt. Vernon Avenue in 1931.
MB:	What years were chairman of the Chamber?
Harvey Boltwood:	1988. 17 years ago. My year of chairman, I dubbed that the "Year of the Small Business."
MB:	Why was that?
Harvey Boltwood:	Well, 80% of the Chamber members at that point in time and probably still today are small businessmen. And I just felt as though we had to emphasize small businesses and develop a five-point program to try to help the area's small businesses.

MB:	Is that five-point program still in existence?
Harvey Boltwood:	Each year the Chamber chairs have the opportunity to redevelop or refocus...everybody has an agenda it seems like. Some of the programs are still in effect. One of the more significant programs was that in addressing the concerns of the small businesses, we developed an idea relative to having a small business incubator for Alexandria and from that infancy, we have evolved into a small business development center. Bill Reagan who is full-time employer to that was a committee member of that incubator process and sort of took hold of it and he evolved as the head of that particular division of the Chamber.
MB:	That sort of leads me to the next question, which is partially answered. What were the most significant initiatives and activities of the Chamber while you were chair?
Harvey Boltwood:	Let's see. What was most important. We were concerned at that point in time in trying to establish communications with the local and state governments. We wanted to carry that over to the civic and citizen associations. It always seemed like businesses and the word profit among some of the citizenry didn't chime too well. We wanted to build some bridges there to help get the point across [to] the Chamber [that] it's not only good for business, but it's good for the community. That was one of the main focuses.
MB:	Are there any others you'd like to discuss?
Harvey Boltwood:	Relative to the five-point program, we were trying to, I guess, from the educational standpoint, trying to get businesses to adopt schools. And in doing so, and that by the way, that program is still going on...we have people from the professional [world] or from businesses go in and tutor those children that seem to have a little bit more difficult problem learning, maybe just a little behind their grade-level. And I think what prompted this in my own personal opinion was—what prompted that—is that for a number of years it seemed like the school system had what they call social promotion, whether you made the passing grade or not, you just got promoted. I was a volunteer teacher—a tutor I should say—not teacher—for three years and I guess they were a full—the three children I had—were a full three grades behind where they were in school. Ten, eleven years old and were probably at 6 th or 7 th grade and at a 6-or-7-year-old's reading [level]. That's still going on, by the way.
MB:	Do you recall the name of that program?

Harvey Boltwood:	I just think it was “Adopt-a-School” program, but I would have to go back and check on that. I don’t know if it had an official program. I know today Burke & Herbert’s involved in that program. When I was at the Bank of Alexandria, we were involved. I even had some of my directors, back then, volunteering to help the kindergarten—Maury School, Lyles-Crouch are two of the schools that come to mind.
MB:	It was primarily elementary schools it focused on.
Harvey Boltwood:	Yes.
MB:	So that’s while you were chair in 1988. What were significant initiatives while you’ve been a member—since you still are a member?
Harvey Boltwood:	I think—and this may—I don’t know if anyone else will comment on this, or not. Back when I was working for a small business here in town before I started my banking career, there was the Chamber of Commerce and then there was an organization called the, “Retail Merchant’s Association,” which were two different groups with the same goals, for the most part. The Retail Merchant’s Association was primarily concerned with promoting just those members that were retailers, whereas the Chamber was trying to promote business in general. In 1968 Art Brunof was chairman of the Chamber at the time- I think it was 1968—and he had the idea that they ought to bring those two groups together. I was active in the Retail Merchant’s Association ’cause I was working for a job in the retail fuel concerns, that was back when they were still selling coal—see how long ago that’s been! Through his leadership, the two groups...they both had the same goals in mind—evolved into the Chamber of Commerce. The Retail Merchant’s Association owned some valuable real estate and we used to have what was known as Park & Shop. I don’t know if you’ve heard anybody has mentioned that or not, but if you visited one of the merchant’s that was a member, they would validate an hour of free parking if you were to visit their establishment. I think as that broke up, the parcels were sold off and those that were part of the Retail Merchant’s had some return on their initial investment. That really got me launched into my Chamber activities...[unintelligible] Committee. In between working for and volunteering of the Red Cross which I didn’t mention earlier, I served as chairman of that for two years, got me interested in the Chamber and I’ve been interested and involved in the Chamber since 1968 to the present day. That’s a long time, as

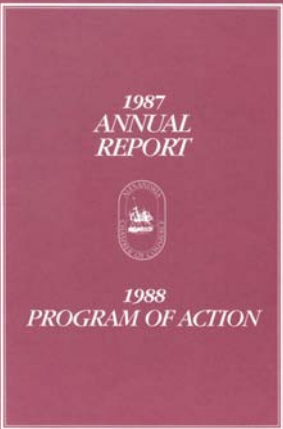
	my age will indicate, I've been around the horn a few times!
MB:	What significant events or activities happened in the City while you were a member?
Harvey Boltwood:	Probably, one of the most significant things was urban renewal. I remember when I was president of the Jaycees—which was the Junior Chamber of Commerce—my theme or platform was to get Gatsby's going. Urban renewal was a process that you are probably familiar with, the Supreme Court decision was that they could go in through eminent domain take property. That happened in the 500 block of King Street and that's where I had mentioned earlier where Jack [??] was digging in an old privy while they had excavated and torn down the whole 500 block of King Street to put up the new courthouse. That was called urban renewal. Across the street, did the same—the 500 block, 400 block, 300 block. So a lot of old businesses sort of faded away and some of them came back into the new buildings that were erected that I think probably—I know that was probably one of the most significant things that happened in Alexandria. The other probably was when we went to the bus system—Alexandria's bus system. They call it DASH. Now the joke, "What did DASH stand for?" "Doesn't Always Stop Here!" [both laugh] So that was sort of the joke. But it worked out well. What is happening now on the waterfront—trying to make that develop. I remember when I was a kid, how polluted the Potomac was...[unintelligible] it just looked like a cesspool. That goes back 50, 60 years.
MB:	How was the Chamber involved in any of those events?
Harvey Boltwood:	At that juncture, I'm not sure who was leading the Chamber at that point in time. I do know that it may have been Jack [Voegel?]. They were trying to encourage businesses to create some [parking?] districts. Mostly small businesses couldn't afford to do that. So I think the City in conjunction with [unintelligible] developed some public parking garages at that time. I'm not sure exactly how the changes [unintelligible]...That was pretty more political [unintelligible], although the Chamber and then the Jaycees were involved as I said earlier [unintelligible] of course they had private property, but nothing was happening. City activist, by the name of [unintelligible] and he used to joke that the ghost of Old Town pulled down all the parking meters and stuff [unintelligible]!
MB:	Anything else you want to address regarding significant Alexandria events? Even social...

Harvey Boltwood:	<p>I grew up when schools were segregated, and I think desegregation didn't start 'til the [19]60s or well after I was out of school. But I thought the City handled the desegregation situation extremely well and I think the City came closer together. Back then there was only one public highschool -that was George Washington, for the whites and Parker-Gray was for the black [community] and they had their own agendas -the schools— G.W. had theirs. There was no cross-rivalry [unintelligible], but I would think that going back to the tutoring program that has been one of the best things that I think has happened in the City to bring about that diversity. I think Al Hare[??] [unintelligible] was the City Manager and Russell Halls[??] was the Chief of Police and I don't remember any incidents. The other problem—significant problem—was when we had a rain storm, Four-Mile Run used to flood in Arlandria, which was part of Alexandria—the Presidential Gardens[??] District[??] and I think Jim Thompson who was the Attorney here in town and who was also a member of Virginia House of Delegates helped put through some measures. The Corps of Engineers—redid Four-Mile Run to prevent it from flooding because under Potomac Yards which was then fairly crowded railroad terminal [unintelligible]. And speaking of Potomac Yards, I remember when I was a kid and we used to go over when refrigerator trucks, cars would come through Alexandria, they'd stop at the Mutual Ice Company and we'd see all these people icing, putting blocks of ice down into the cars because that's how they transported perishable goods from the South to the East and up North and [unintelligible]. As time evolved and rail became less [unintelligible], Mutual Ice Company shut down. In fact, Mutual Ice Company not only did that for the railroad, but they delivered ice for all of us that had iceboxes, which are known as refrigerators now! And I used to jump on the back of an ice truck and when the fellow would chisel off a piece of ice to bring into the house, there'd be little flakes and we would eat those! That was fun. That was pretty significant, seeing the demise of Potomac Yards as one of the major rail centers on the east coast.</p>
MB:	When was that? [unintelligible]
Harvey Boltwood:	I don't have the exact date, to be honest with you. Things just sort of evolved. They just go with [unintelligible] naturally.
MB:	You touched on this a little bit, but what was the Chamber's relationship with other groups in the City—City Council, social services and civic associations?

<p>Harvey Boltwood:</p>	<p>I think now it's probably communications have probably been better in the last few years than it's ever been that I can remember. [unintelligible] The chairman-elect is [??] Rich. Rich is an attorney here in town and served as a City Council member. And got involved with the Chamber and was a councilman and realized business was good for the City and helped the Chamber build a repaire with the rest of the City Council. As far as the civic associations, Old Town Civic Association gave the impression—was perceived that they were against any expansion of business for the development—they wanted to keep things I guess status-quo. Of course with business thriving, beginning to thrive, parking encroached into the residential areas and I was a member of the Traffic and Parking Board for a number of years and my play was that the streets are to move traffic, not to park cars, but it's hard to convince people of that. I've been on all facets of the situation and can appreciate how the community feels, but can also feel how the businesses feel. Right now I think there's a good mesh—a good understanding—of those two groups. It's taken some time but, [unintelligible], I think it's working.</p>
<p>MB:</p>	<p>Who were some of the other Chamber chairman before or after you?</p>
<p>Harvey Boltwood:</p>	<p>I mentioned before Art Brunof[??], a CPA, who was really active in the business community. Brought the two groups together—Retail Merchants and the Chamber—together. There was Randy Viseback[??] who was an architect. One of my peers that was extremely persuasive and influential was Norman [??], was a stockbroker, was also very active and helped focus. Roger Machanic. He's more recent and was extremely influential in keeping the Chamber focused on communications and keeping channels when the City was trying to redistrict or re-zone some of the areas that would have a financial impact on some of the business owners, he was very instrumental in keeping everybody focused on it. There have so many good previous. [Phone rings; tape paused]</p>
<p>Harvey Boltwood:</p>	<p>...Scott, Randy, Roger. After, I think, which was one of the questions, I think a young fellow named Shaun McLaughlin did a great job. Elizabeth Lewis, in fact, she was Chairman of the Year—when she came on...[unintelligible] became president or chairman. Randy [??], [??] Linker[??] was a great chair. We've had so many. It's almost unfair to single out a few because all of them have been very, very good.</p>
<p>MB:</p>	<p>I was wondering if I could I get contact information for some of the</p>

	people you think who've played significant roles? Either as chair or as members who might be valuable.
Harvey Boltwood:	Sure. I'll give you. Art has died. Scott is [unintelligible]. I'll give you his phone number. Randy has moved to Colorado. Roger Machanic is still around. Shawn is still around. Betsy Lewis is still around. Andrew Blair is still around. I'll get you the phone numbers—directory.
MB:	Thank you. I did ask this, but I'll ask it again on tape. Do you have any memorabilia—photos of Chamber activities you want to share.
Harvey Boltwood:	I don't personally because I relied on Chamber staff. They would have all of that. They should anyway. I'll put it that way. We've had some great Chamber Execs over the years. I remember we had one Chamber Exec who was an excellent chef and when the Chamber had their own building down on South Washington Street, for the Board meetings, which was at lunch time, he would cook lunch for all of us. He was great. His name was Bob [??].
MB:	I bet he was really popular.
Harvey Boltwood:	He was. And of course, Art Middleton was Chamber Exec the year I was president, chairman. He moved to Georgia and subsequently passed away, I think. Ken Moore, who is the present Chamber Exec is as good as some. So we've been very blessed to have full-time Execs take hold of the situation. Strange note in fact when I was chair, we had a membership drive and we brought in \$30,000 which was the best we'd ever done to that point in time and I look back at that and this last one was a \$155 [thousand] I think...\$135 [thousand] [unintelligible], so it goes to show what happens over a span of 17 or 18 years.
Harvey Boltwood:	We've gone to some alternative areas to raise funds, as opposed to just taking on new members for dues and things. So much business can absorb relative to dues, so we have luncheons and seminars and stuff that you pay an extra a couple bucks that all goes to a service corporation of ours, and of course, you've got dues and the big events that we have, we have corporate sponsors, businesses [unintelligible] a couple extra bucks to have their name displayed in the sponsorship of that particular event [unintelligible].
MB:	[unintelligible]
Harvey Boltwood:	I would think the annual golf [tournament] that has grown so [unintelligible] so that everybody could play, [they] had a morning

	group and an afternoon group. Up until then we just had one [unintelligible] and a lot of people didn't get to play. That's very successful. We had really one fund-raiser, but we made money on it because we had all three gubernatorial candidates speak to us at lunch last year. We should have made some money on that. We had Valor Awards. I think when I was chairman, that was the second year we had the gala where we honor outstanding fire, sheriff and police department and we have sometimes 3[00], 500 guests and that is a fundraiser too, of course because we ask a couple businesses if they want to be a corporate sponsor. If we have corporate sponsor [unintelligible] so that helps us.
MB:	Was it Valor Awards?
Harvey Boltwood:	Valor Awards. That was instituted, I think. It was the second year that I was chairman. [unintelligible]
MB:	What are some of your favorite memories that you haven't already mentioned about the Chamber?
Harvey Boltwood:	I think probably what I will remember the most are the people that I have met. The fellowship, the camaraderie that has evolved, that may not have happened hadn't been active in the Chamber. I think that would be one of my fondest memories. It's just so difficult...like trying to say past and present people who I would single out. It's difficult to do that without getting into trouble! [laughs] If I'm not already in trouble as it is!
MB:	How did you get involved in the Chamber?
Harvey Boltwood:	I think when I was active in the Retail Merchant's Association which was a group that had the same goals that the Chamber had, but they were two different organizations. And when they put those two together I just sort of became involved. I thought too, as a businessman that you need to give something back to the business world that you're a member [of]. I always think...one of the questions, Number 10, "What would you say to someone who was considering getting involved?" Well, I look at the Chamber as an investment, not as an expense. And that's what I used to tell my bosses when I was in charge of the marketing and public relations...first thing that got chopped was advertising and public relations, but I still firmly believe this, that you've got to look at your membership in the Chamber as an investment...[unintelligible]
MB:	Why is the Chamber such an important organization in Alexandria?

Harvey Boltwood:	I think that it is a vehicle that builds bridges between the local and state governments and builds bridges between civic and financial organizations. I don't know that there's any other group that tries to do that or has been as successful as that than Alexandria, Virginia...[unintelligible]
MB:	Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about the Chamber that we haven't covered?
	<p>1987 Annual Report – 1988 Program of Action (at left) <i>(courtesy Harvey Boltwood)</i></p> <p>“...the Chamber is the voice of the business community within the City, the County, the State...” <i>-HB, 2005</i></p>
Harvey Boltwood:	No, other than I think the Chamber is the voice of the business community within the City, the County, the State [unintelligible]. Mostly that will continue on. No reason to think that it won't. [unintelligible] I'm sure I've left out a number of things that are more important than what I've mentioned to you, but if I think of something that just sort of jumps right at me, I'll let you know. And I need to give you names and numbers of possible contacts, if that is what you would like.
MB:	Yes, I would. We would certainly like to include them in the centennial in any way, where there is deserving...
Harvey Boltwood:	I know Norman is a native Alexandrian. I know Scott Humphrey is a native Alexandrian and I think Andrew Blair is a native Alexandrian and Jeff. It's always good to get somebody's perspective who's grown up here, other than what mine is...[unintelligible] Also served on the City Council [unintelligible] Judge Kemp [unintelligible] so he brought a lot of business expertise to the Council that they didn't have...[unintelligible] I never got involved in politics. The closest thing I ever got was [unintelligible]. But I was too conservative, so they asked me, “Would I please relinquish my seat.” [both laugh] [unintelligible] The only time I really got a bad rap, when I was in

	<p>Traffic and Parking Board, I was chairman of the Safety Committee, and legislation was enacted changing the speed limit in school zones from 15 miles per hour to 25 miles per hour. I got more harassment. There really wasn't anything we could do. It was enacted at the State, we just never blessed it. People thought we had done a horrible thing, changing the speed limit in school zones from 15 to 25 miles per hour. [chuckles] That's the only time that I got some nasty phone calls, thinking it was my fault.</p>
MB:	<p>Thank you so much for your time.</p>
Harvey Boltwood:	<p>It's been fun. I hope I haven't taken up too much time.</p>
MB:	<p>Not at all. We've got at least 20 more minutes of tape there!</p>
Harvey Boltwood:	<p>Let me get you...that's what I looked like when I was six foot tall. That's when I was chairman.</p>
MB:	<p>Would like to have that picture. That's perfect then. Is that something I can take with me?</p>
Harvey Boltwood:	<p>Let's see. This is the [19]87 report, [19]88 program [unintelligible]. This will tell you what I planned to do [unintelligible]. Yes, you may have that. [End]</p>