City of Alexandria

Office of Historic Alexandria

Alexandria Legacies

Oral History Program

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Location of Interview: *Black History Museum, Alexandria, VA*

Interviewer: *Mitch Weinschenk*

Transcriber: *Unknown*

Abstract: *Charles Sampson was born in Alexandria and lived here all his life. He was a member of the fire department from 1937 until his retirement in 1975. As a result, he knew the streets, businesses, and landmarks of Alexandria like the back of his hand. He carefully kept a collection of photos and mementos from his career which he has donated to the Alexandria Library and is now available in its* Special Collections

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Introduction	
Mitch Weinschenk:	Today is (February) 26, 1999 and this interview is going to be with Charles Sampson and the interview will be conducted at Black History Museum in Alexandria, Virginia. My name is Mitch Weinschenk and I'm an intern at the Lyceum in Old Town.
Family Background	
M.W.:	Can you state for the record your full name?
Charles Sampson:	Charles L. Sampson.
M.W.:	And your place of birth?
Charles Sampson:	Alexandria, Virginia, 1011 Duke St.
M.W.:	And the date of birth?
Charles Sampson:	May 6, 1915.
M.W.:	And your parents' birth names?
Charles Sampson:	George Taylor Sampson was my father and Florence Valentine Robinson, and then married George Taylor Sampson.
M.W.:	And were they from this area, or did they move to this area? Do you have any information on their childhoods or backgrounds that you would like to get into?
Charles Sampson:	I don't believe I remember any of it clear enough to really say that I do know.
M.W.:	Did you have any brothers or sisters?
Charles Sampson:	Had one brother and one sister, both deceased.
M.W.:	And their names were?
Charles Sampson:	George Llewellyn Sampson. He was born June 20, 1912 and Sarah Frances Sampson, and she was born February 22, 1910. Both are older than me.
M.W.:	And they lived here in Alexandria?
Charles Sampson:	Yes, until later years. Then my brother moved down the Boulevard, Wellington. My sister moved to Mt. Ranier, Maryland.
M.W.:	And that's where they lived their lives?
Charles Sampson:	Well, my sister came back here after her husband died. But the brother still continued to live down to Wellington until he died.
M.W.:	Did you have any children, or are your children ...
Charles Sampson:	No, no children. Wife died September 24, 1995.
M.W.:	Fairly recently.
Charles Sampson:	Fifty-eight and a half years we were married. I went to work in the Fire Department on February 1, 1937. I'd joined as a volunteer in '34, became a paid man in '37, and we were married April the eighth of 1937.
M.W.:	So that was a good year for you then?
Charles Sampson:	And I completed thirty-eight and a half years in the Fire

	Department and retired June 1, 1975.
M.W.:	I understand you have lived in the city your whole life. That's 83 years or so?
Charles Sampson:	83.
M.W.:	And you've lived at different locations in the city?
Charles Sampson:	Lived 1011 Duke St. where I was born and raised. From there, when we were married, moved to 108 S. St. Asaph, which is courthouse now, across from Portner's. And moved in 1958 when they were going to tear that property down, to 803 Church St. So, three places in 83 years.
M.W.:	In 1958 when they were going to tear that property down, they bought that property from you, or...?
Charles Sampson:	No, they bought it from Sidney Weil. It was an apartment house, Jack Lane Apartments. Sidney Weil was the owner. He originally lived next door. They bought the property from him. Park and Shop bought it from him and then sold it to the city for the urban development.
M.W.:	And did they give the tenants enough notice for you to be able to make other plans, or was this like a...?
Charles Sampson:	The other three tenants had moved. We were the last ones to get out. I had to live in the city as an employee of the Fire Department. It was a little more problem for me to locate, find a place, than it was for the other three tenants. So we were the last to leave there.
M.W.:	Was your wife influential in finding another place while you were working or was she working at the time as well?
Charles Sampson:	We both ... James M. Duncan, who had formerly been the Fire Chief and resigned in 1947, had gone into real estate and we had bought the property through him. And he tried to discourage us by telling us about the beltway that was to be built through there. That was the best we could find at the salary that I was getting.
M.W.:	How did it turn out with the beltway coming through there?
Charles Sampson:	Paid no attention once you were there. Same as the planes for the airport. All of those come right up the river.
M.W.:	So it's like you just learned to live with it?
Charles Sampson:	You accustomed to it. Don't even know it's taking place.
Earliest Memories, Recreational Activities	
M.W.:	Now that you're a long time resident, I want to press your memory a little bit and I want to start with some of the earliest memories that you have of your childhood living in the city, what things were like. Just general, anything that comes to your mind.
Charles Sampson:	In the neighborhood where I lived, I guess it was called a middle class neighborhood, Fannon's Coal Yard was on the corner at Henry St., and the railroad, Southern Railroad, yard was across

	from the 1100 block of Duke, and we kids entertained ourselves there on a vacant spot of the railroad property. That was our ball diamond area, recreation area. They had a big wooden platform, which was used to unload cars and get down to the ground level. At the western edge of that section was a cattle pen. Anytime that the stock cars were to come in there, the federal regulations, so many hours and they have to stop and let the stock, whether it be cows, or sheep, hogs, whatever, they had to have a certain period of time to more or less get out of the car and into a little larger space, such as a stock pen.
M.W.:	Like a rest stop.
Charles Sampson:	Right. So we, anytime we knew that there was going to be any stock unloaded in the cattle pen, we all had to gather there and check them over. And just to the west of that was an abandoned area, a depression in the ground that a turntable had been at one time. This was the RF&P Railroad that had come down Fayette St. and the cars would be turned over there. The one for the Southern Railway at that time, early time, was at Henry and Wolfe St., a part of the ball diamond, as we called it. And later they expanded and moved out Holland Lane, and that's where the turntable, roundhouse as they called it, was at that time, before they finished up here. The railroad, as I say, the cars quite frequent (sic) would go Henry St. because of a lot of industry on Henry St. from Duke St. on up to the north end, almost to Monroe Ave. at this time. A lot of the business places used railroad shipments of stuff to come in or to go out. Armour's meat packing place was at Cameron and Henry St. at one time. I think it's a warehouse now. The National Fruit Products, which we called the vinegar factory, was out 700 block. That burned 1927, or '25. There were other business places located along Henry St. At one time, back Civil War times, there was a railroad terminal, I'd guess you'd call it, at Fayette and Cameron St., at the west end of that 1100 block, where Hopkins warehouse had been.
M.W.:	I know you played baseball during the summertime, was (sic) there any winter activities that you did to occupy yourselves, as far as ice skating, or anything like that?
Charles Sampson:	Baseball - there were maybe four ball diamonds. There was one where John Roberts Homes were built later, which is at West St. and Braddock Rd. There's industry in there now, but John Roberts Homes at one time was in there. This was called the RF&P diamond. The employees of RF&P had a ball club and they played on their field there. Jefferson School, which was in the 200 block of N. West St., had a playground area in the back, football field. Where Hunting Towers is, was the Sandy Banks ball diamond.

	And that was a rough surface, because it was almost a gravel bed, really rough, worse than the one at Jefferson School.
M.W.:	You didn't want to slide into home base [inaudible].
Charles Sampson:	You felt it. You bore the marks for a little while. Baggett Stadium, which was privately owned, once in a while he may be able to become more liberal and let you use the diamond to play, or something of that type, but, as a rule, the Alexander High School played their games there because of the surface of the field behind them wasn't as desirable. That would have taken care of baseball and football, as far as those areas. And as far as ice hockey, back in some years, my childhood, the Episcopal High School had an area there that they used for a skating pond, right there, which would be on Quaker Lane today, and I guess it's still there. But that was the only place that I know of that was recognized to be anything for skating. We used to go out along the river shore, and as the ice would form there because of the weather, we might skate up and down on that, but just in our shoes, not with regular skates.
M.W.:	And this was only out a certain ways, right? Into the river. I heard the river hasn't froze (sic) over that often but I'm sure back in the ...
Charles Sampson:	Oh, they say back in, I guess in the 1800's, that you could drive a horse and buggy across the river on the ice. Not in my time. No, never been that severe.
M.W.:	You never saw it that severe then?
Charles Sampson:	Not that severe, no. Ice on it, yes. But nothing of that type. I wouldn't even risk a person, much less a team of horses, or wagon, or whatever.
Education	
M.W.:	Where did you go to school? What schools did you attend?
Charles Sampson:	I started out at Washington School, in the 400 block S. Washington Street. From there, first and second grade, the third and fourth, the Lee School, which was the 1000 block of Queen St., Prince Street. The Jefferson School was the fifth, sixth, and seventh grades. And then, the first year, 19..., February 1929, I had failed the year before and did not graduate in my class. My brother had scarlet fever and we were quarantined. I was not in school enough to qualify. When I graduated in February of '29, I went to West End School, right there where the boiler room of the Masonic Temple is now. That was outside the city and the city had annexed that area. That then became a part of the city and the school building that was there, we used that. There were two rooms upstairs and two down. And we used two of the rooms, one up and one down. The Alexander High School, after the first semester of West End, then Alexander High School on Cameron

	St. Streetcars, we could somewhat judge as far as the time schedule as to when the periods would end, because we learned the schedule of the streetcars, what time they were due. And they stopped running in 1932.
M.W.:	They didn't have the bells that went off in school to tell you...
Charles Sampson:	Right.
M.W.:	...but you could look out the window and see these streetcars...?
Charles Sampson:	We could judge that the room ... If the class was supposed to change at 10:30, there may be a schedule of a streetcar for twenty after. So we had an idea the shortness that was still there as far as class.
M.W.:	And when did you graduate high school, or did you finish high school?
Charles Sampson:	Well, you won't believe this. I did not go back to school in the fall of 1955, 45, whenever it was. I didn't go back to school. My father worked at the RF&P railroad. That was still the end of the depression years. He was pulled on his job and had to go on the extra list, which was seldom that anybody took off. And I decided that I'd go to work. So I went to work at Ale's Gasoline Station, which was at Wilkes and Washington St. And I was there about maybe eighteen months. Went as a stock clerk to Hullfish Hardware, 300-block King, and was there as stock clerk for about six months and then made shipping clerk, because they did a wholesale business also in southern Maryland and northern Virginia. Had a salesman on the road all the time. I worked there until February the first of '37, then went to work for the city at the Fire Department.
M.W.:	As far as the ...
Charles Sampson:	Let me complete that.
M.W.:	Sure. Sure.
Charles Sampson:	I went back to school. I was going... In 1957, I was going to take the GED course. And my wife had a serious automobile accident, got all crippled up. I did not go back to complete any of the papers, whatever on that. In 1970, '69, '70, the word had gotten out that Chief Padgett was going to retire as chief of the Fire Department. And the men insisted that I had to make application, which was against my judgment. But anyway, I went to the school board office, Dr. [inaudible] and questioned him as to what I would do to complete and get them the half credit that I lacked to graduate.
M.W.:	Half-credit.
Charles Sampson:	I had fifteen and a half. Sixteen was required. He, at that time, could not find my record anywhere. They looked everywhere. They could not find it. As I told him, it had been available in '56 and '57 because they had completed practically all of it before my

	wife had the accident and I gave up the idea. And there was a young lady worked in the office there, her married name I couldn't remember, but her name was Armstead, last name. She had two brothers that went public schools too. She was working in the office there and heard our conversation. And she told Dr. [inaudible] that she had the Allekko, the yearbook of the graduating class and she would bring it. And my picture was in there in the senior class. So she brought that and with my picture and whatever in there, then the conversation and whatever records he could find, he accepted the fact, and he gave me an examination, and I did qualify. So from 1945 to 1970, 1969, 1970, I did not attend school. However, I attended Purdue University and have a certificate. I attended University of Maryland - have a certificate. And William and Mary College I attended and have a certificate there. In fact, I was one of the instructors. So it's a little hard to convince somebody that I attended three universities before I graduated from high school, [inaudible] fire service. [inaudible]
M.W.:	You just did it in a different way, that's all.
Charles Sampson:	Right. Chemical warfare school at Purdue University, and the fire instructors' class at the University of Maryland each year. And then the teaching at Williamsburg in 1965.
Family Life	
M.W.:	Going back again to your family life when you were a child, were there certain chores that you were responsible for doing? Daily chores around the house?
Charles Sampson:	I was the youngest of the family and all of the dirty work left to me. Grocery stores, ashes from the furnace in the basement to carry up and dump this fill in our back alley to make a surface decent out there, and any miscellaneous thing that had to be done, I was elected to it. I volunteered by my arm being twisted.
M.W.:	How did you feel about that?
Charles Sampson:	Had no objection. My father worked nights at the railroad, so he slept during the day. And as I say, the ashes to be carried from the basement upstairs and all, to try and relieve him of some of that responsibility and all, I did it after school.
M.W.:	So you took on responsibility early on then? You were used to being responsible for household and...?
Charles Sampson:	Certain chores they were assigned to me. Brother and sister a little bit older and they had more preference than I did.
M.W.:	But they carried their own weight though, did they?
Charles Sampson:	Right. Whatever was necessary that I couldn't do, yes, they took care.
M.W.:	Do you recall your father, mother, or even yourself spending much

	time, like maybe on weekends, listening to the radio? Was the radio a big factor in your household? Newspapers, or ... ?
Charles Sampson:	Radio hadn't really come into existence at that time. The only thing available was a crystal set, if you're familiar with that.
M.W.:	Yes, I've heard of it.
Charles Sampson:	And we had to share the earphones. There were three of us to share those. The main thing that we wanted to listen to was the Grand Ole Opry from Nashville on Saturday night.
M.W.:	Did they broadcast that directly from Nashville and you were able to pick it up?
Charles Sampson:	On the crystal set. We had an aerial for the radio from our house three doors down. Daddy had gone across the roofs and had got permission to string the wire across these other houses. And apparently with that lengthy aerial and with the crystal set, maybe there were different types as far as the sounds and receptions and whatever. But it was a problem to try and use that little needle type thing and pick the spot on the crystal. [inaudible]
M.W.:	So if you found it, you would just leave it there? If you picked out a good reception, you wouldn't move it? I wonder if the other households used that common antenna for their crystal set, I wonder. Is that possible?
Charles Sampson:	That's right. I don't think too many people had them, and then finally the, I guess maybe at first it was an electrical, maybe first was a battery type. But it came out with the cabinets and then it came out as a combination thing, combination radio and television, record player. Lot of progressive steps there on the electronic part of it.
M.W.:	As far as newspapers, did you read the Washington Post, or ...?
Charles Sampson:	*Washington Post, Daily News, Evening Star.* In the morning was *Washington Times Herald*, which was the *Washington Times*. And in the mornings it was the *Herald*, and on Sunday it was a *Times Herald*, combination name. But the *Washington Times* put out three different papers: *Herald, Times, and Times Herald* on Sunday. And the *Evening Star* finally folded up in about 1960's, I guess, and the *Daily News*, maybe just ahead of that. *The Journal* came later.
M.W.:	Let me ask you this. This is actually a personal question I have. It has nothing to do with what we're talking about. Were the Sunday papers in those days -- were those a larger newspaper too, generally, than the weekly papers?
Charles Sampson:	Such as today.
M.W.:	They were the same? I'm just curious about that.
Charles Sampson:	Yes. In other words, I used to help my cousin on his paper route.

	He delivered for the *Times Herald*. And the morning paper was very small and very few as far as customers. The afternoon paper was much more acceptable. And then on Sunday you would have almost as many. We had 100, 100 and some in the afternoon to deliver. Thirty something in the morning. A hundred and some in the afternoon. And maybe on Sundays it would be like eighty some. So actually, the afternoon paper was the preference of people.
M.W.:	Why was that? Why would the afternoon be the preference?
Charles Sampson:	I don't know. It could have been cost as far as for the size of the paper and the quality of it. I don't know.
Community Life	
M.W.:	I'd like to talk a little about the community life in those early days. Did you know most of the people that were on the street that you lived on?
Charles Sampson:	You knew everyone practically in the city at that time. Back at the time that I went to work in the Fire Department, I think the population was only around 37,000. So you stayed more or less in your neighborhood as far as the kids were concerned. Each area would have what they called a gang and a person from another neighborhood wasn't entirely welcome. You had the 'Wolferettes' down along the riverfront. 'Tunneltown' down by the tunnel. You had 'West End,' which was Duke Street. 'Stonebridge' was right there at Duke and Peyton Street. 'Queen Street Gang.' So you more or less had ...
M.W.:	Were you a member of any of those?
Charles Sampson:	No, I was too young at the time they had them. But I knew better than to go into those territories because if they asked where you lived, didn't recognize you and asked where you lived, you weren't welcome. They run you away.
M.W.:	But generally speaking, with all these gangs around, I mean the streets were pretty safe to walk on?
Charles Sampson:	Oh yes, yes. No problem of any kind. Any hour of the day or night a woman alone could walk the street. My mother used to go to Washington to Bingos and she'd go up King St., from the 1000 block of Duke up to King Street and catch a bus and go to Washington. When the Bingos were over, which would be somewhere around 11:00, 11:30 at night coming home, no problem of any kind. Get off the bus up King Street and walk back to the house. No problem.
M.W.:	No problem.
Charles Sampson:	Women didn't give a thought to any hazards because there were none.
M.W.:	With these communities being close knit and smaller, did you feel

	that there was a pride within the local community?
Charles Sampson:	Yes, I would say that each area they tried to more or less keep up with other areas as far as cleanliness, as far as maintenance on buildings, houses, whatever. And almost every Saturday morning, I say a lot, most households, you would notice they would have a white marble top step going into the house. And if they had hired help, they would be scrubbing that for the weekend, Sunday. If they didn't have hired help, you'd see some member of the household out there cleaning it up. They took pride in it, right.
M.W.:	How much time was spent outside the city as far as like going into Washington, D.C. for entertainment, or to the museums, or anything like that?
Charles Sampson:	Yes, if you wanted entertainment, that's where you had to go. You rode streetcars, as I say, until 1932. The bus lines started around '25 and gradually the streetcar line petered out. Then there were two sets of tracks that came from out what (is) Commonwealth Ave. and King Street now, that came down and one track, let's say the south side of the middle of the street, continued straight on down to Royal Street, and Royal to Prince. At Prince Street it branched off; it either returned to come back up to Washington or it went to Mount Vernon. One line went to Mount Vernon from Prince and Royal Street like an hourly schedule and the other local schedule may have been like half hour, quarter hour, something like that. More frequent (sic) than what Mount Vernon would be. But the ones that turned at Royal Street, at Prince, went up to Fairfax, Fairfax to King, and back up King to Columbus. Then the streetcar track went north one block to Cameron and then out Cameron Street. And that's how it happened to go by the high school and all until it got past Peyton Street which was Baggett Place, and it cut through there back to King Street. And then it was a double track again from King and Baggett Place or Harvard Street, and on back to D.C. The entertainment anytime, movies or whatever, you had some movies in Alexandria but the majority, and especially the theaters over there that have a stage show, live talent on the stage, that was a big attraction.
M.W.:	Do you recall ever seeing anybody that became, that was (sic) big stars or anything that would come to D.C.? Any famous people, I've heard that ...
Charles Sampson:	Oh yes. Benny Goodman, his orchestra. Dorsey Brothers. Oh, I don't know.
M.W.:	Any of the comedians, any of the comedians like ...
Charles Sampson:	I would say yes, yes.
M.W.:	... Three Stooges, or the Marx Brothers, or anybody like that?
Charles Sampson:	I'm not sure about those. They may have been a little bit too big

	for Alexandria.
M.W.:	I'm talking about D.C. now.
Charles Sampson:	Yes, well Alexandria area. Maybe there was some attraction for them. Maybe they were down to ...
M.W.:	But you never personally ...
Charles Sampson:	No, I didn't go over there too often. In fact, the Gayety, which was a burlesque theater - all my life it was there and I never did go there. Never felt an attraction to it. A lot of fellows spent all their time over there when new talent was available.
M.W.:	And a lot of money too!
Landmarks and Businesses	
M.W.:	I'm going to briefly describe some of the landmarks of the area and see if you could give me some idea of your memories of them. Jones Point Lighthouse?
Charles Sampson:	Right. Recall the shipyard at the extreme south end of the city, southeast corner of the city. And yes, there was a family that lived in there. Jefferson, I believe, was their name in my time and they made sure that the light was lit and usable every night. Took care of the building.
M.W.:	Do you recall what color it was actually painted?
Charles Sampson:	The building? I think it was white.
M.W.:	Just a plain white?
Charles Sampson:	Yes, as I can remember.
M.W.:	How about the first Alexandria Hospital? I have that at the corner of Fairfax and Duke Sts. Is that correct? First Alexandria Hospital?
Charles Sampson:	There was one there at one time. There was one called the Infirmary at Wolfe and Pitt St. at one time. And then it went to the 700 block of Duke St., and from there to Seminary Rd.
M.W.:	And I have a landmark here - the City Jail which is on St. Asaph's, 403 to 405 St.Asaphs's, corner of Prince St., Princess.
Charles Sampson:	St. Asaph's and Princess. Called the White House - painted white.
M.W.:	White House. Going down the King St. area, we're going to take a little memory tour down King St. area. The Ramsey House, I'm sure you're familiar with.
Charles Sampson:	Fairfax and King.
M.W.:	Yes, the oldest house in Alexandria. My research indicates that at one time it turned into the Hershey's Restaurant and Grill. Do you recall that?
Charles Sampson:	Hershey's?
M.W.:	Yes.
Charles Sampson:	It was a tobacco place at one time.
M.W.:	Yes, I have that here too. Cigar factory from 1888 to 1889.
Charles Sampson:	It was Hirschmann's.

M.W.:	Hirchsmann's. OK.
Charles Sampson:	H-E-R-S-H-M-A-N, I think it was.
M.W.:	OK. I have it spelled incorrectly here then.
Charles Sampson:	Now you better verify that.
M.W.:	Yes. I have it with a H-U-R-S-H-Y-S.
Charles Sampson:	No, it was Hershman's.
M.W.:	Did you ever eat there at the restaurant?
Charles Sampson:	Well I worked part-time after school and weekends with Benny Moore the sign painter and he was in the 300 block King next to the Western Union Office. And he and I would take a break during the course of the day or night and go over to Hershman's and drink coffee.
M.W.:	Get a cup of coffee.
Charles Sampson:	Right.
M.W.:	How about the 300 block of King Street, W.E. Bain Hardware?
Charles Sampson:	At the corner of King and Royal Streets, which now is a CVS. After Bain was in there, Luckett took over. And after Lucketts, the First National Bank, Alexandria National Bank moved over to there. And now it is a CVS drugstore.
M.W.:	You do recall that being there, the Bain Hardware store?
Charles Sampson:	Right. When I was working at Hullfish they were there.
M.W.:	Yes, that was one of the other locations I had.
Charles Sampson:	313 King.
M.W.:	313 and 315. So it was a fairly big building.
Charles Sampson:	Well they had about six warehouses behind it and one across the street on the south side of King Street where the plows, heavy farmers' plows - that's where they were kept. And the plowshares, the parts of the plow, would be in the basement of the main building at 313 King. And then there was (sic) warehouses on up to Market Alley. The last one was Zimmermann's Beer Parlor I guess they would call it at that time. And what they called tin heaters, made in Baltimore. Wood stove. That's where they were stored.
M.W.:	You're talking about the heavy farm equipment that was sold and stored there. Did they send a lot of that out to like Loudon County?
Charles Sampson:	Right. I would say they had a salesman on the road all the time and these transfer trucks would come down in the alley and load these merchandise orders and deliver them.
M.W.:	Ship it out. Route 7, or whatever.
Charles Sampson:	Down to Maryland or western Virginia.
M.W.:	Is there a Crichton's Drugstore?
Charles Sampson:	Creighton?
M.W.:	Creighton's?

Charles Sampson:	King and Royal.
M.W.:	Corner of Royal ... yes.
Charles Sampson:	Yes.
M.W.:	Were they in business for a long time?
Charles Sampson:	Oh yes, yes. And then after Doc Creighton gave it up, his son-in-law, Willcoxon, operated the store.
M.W.:	And they were reputable?
Charles Sampson:	Oh definitely, yes. They were there. Warfield was at King and Roy, King and Pitt Street. Timmerman's was at King and Washington Streets.
M.W.:	They're still there actually.
Charles Sampson:	And Gibson was at Alfred and King. Moore was in the 1100 block. And (I've forgotten the doctor's name, druggist) in the middle of the 600 block, where Murphy's later went in. I've forgotten the name of the druggist that had the one at Reed Theater. But yes, they were all over the place. Oh, Ashton, I forgot that one, at King and Henry Street, Dr. Ashton.
M.W.:	When I was doing my research to get some of the other areas that we've gone over already, I came up with a strange one. King Street, 805 King Street, there was a Monticello Hotel?
Charles Sampson:	Mon-ti-sel-la.
M.W.:	Montisello Hotel?
Charles Sampson:	Yes.
M.W.:	And at the intersection of Columbus and, Columbus Street intersection, there was a Schaeffer Florist. Do you remember that? Do you recall that at all?
Charles Sampson:	Columbus Street?
M.W.:	Yes, it says ...
Charles Sampson:	There's one at King and Patrick, I think, now.
M.W.:	The thing that struck me as being odd about it was that it was right in the middle of the row, and it was just like a tiny, little building. Very small, little ... I mean not even as big as this room. You know what I'm saying? Schaeffer, it's called Schaeffer Florist, and it was located near this, near the Columbus Street intersection. You don't recall...?
Charles Sampson:	Yes, yes. There's one there but boy, Paul Smith, used to be on the police force, his family had the florist there, and the one I'm speaking of was on the south side of King Street along where Hopkins later, in fact until recently, Hopkins Furniture was in there. Manny Miller was on the corner. And then there was a place in between. And then, what was their name? They were in there. They operated a store in there and then moved to King and Colum, King and Columbus Streets. I can't remember the name. But, yes,

	there was one, but it was on the even side of King Street. So it wouldn't have been 805.
M.W.:	OK, that's where the hotel was located then, 805.
Charles Sampson:	Yes. Mon-ti-sel-la Hotel.
M.W.:	Yes, yes.
Charles Sampson:	Four people died in a fire there one time.
M.W.:	Is that right? What year was that, do you know?
Charles Sampson:	Maybe in the '40's.
M.W.:	They were guests of the hotel or employees?
Charles Sampson:	Yes, yes. They had, well, let's say they had overnight guests and they also had weekly and monthly. George Mason Hotel, the same thing at one time.
M.W.:	Do you remember Cohen's Clothing Store at 1104 King Street?
Charles Sampson:	Cohen? Cohen Brothers?
M.W.:	Yes.
Charles Sampson:	Right.
M.W.:	They apparently were there for a long time from what I researched?
Charles Sampson:	Sylvian and his younger brother that I went to school with, Benny. And, I can't remember but I think there was another brother in there with them. And that was on the south side, 1100 block King.
M.W.:	1104, yes, right.
Charles Sampson:	1104 would have been a good address, yes.
M.W.:	And they were in business for a long time?
Charles Sampson:	Oh, yes.
M.W.:	And the sons took over the business after he passed away?
Charles Sampson:	They finally sold out. And I don't know whether any of them are still living or not. Sylvian was really the brains of the outfit. I think he was the older brother.
M.W.:	The older brother.
Charles Sampson:	And then Benny. Yes, Benny Cohen I think was his name. There was a cousin of theirs that had a jewelry store. Cohen's Jewelry Store was on the odd side of King, 1100 block of King. Levin's Clothing was in the 400 block, 426 King. That was an old established place. They finally moved up in the 800 block of King St. when the urban development took over his place.
M.W.:	Going over to Queen Street, I know that you know Priest store, since you gave that photograph to the Lloyd House. Can you give me some background on what that actually was, the business was?
Charles Sampson:	DePriest? Poultry products: eggs, turkeys, chickens, farm products of that type. That was mainly what they were selling.
M.W.:	So they were a little bit more limited than a grocery would normally be?

Charles Sampson:	Yes, yes, yes. They had groceries and all in there too, but not to any extent. Most of theirs was the poultry type.
M.W.:	More of a specialty type store, then? More leaning towards like a butcher shop or something?
Charles Sampson:	And there were two brothers that worked in there with their parents. I can't think of their name now. Kleinman. Izzy was the younger one. I can't remember the older one's name now. But Kleinman.
M.W.:	Do you remember the Arrow Chevrolet Building?
Charles Sampson:	King and Henry St. Yes.
M.W.:	Right. And what was that business there?
Charles Sampson:	Chevrolet products. Automobile products.
M.W.:	Complete line of vehicles?
Charles Sampson:	Yes, and they gradually expanded and enlarged and took almost the remainder of that 100 block on N. Henry Street. And, with the exception of Marion Landingham's place up on the corner, they practically took over the 1100 block of Cameron on south side and back down Fayette Street, 100 block.
M.W.:	And then we have on N. Washington Street, the Hot Shoppes, 905 N. Washington Street? Did you ever have a chance to drink coffee there?
Charles Sampson:	Quite frequent (sic). My wife used to work at Hayman's before she had that automobile accident in '57, and when the store would close at night on Saturday night, they would go there. And we would accompany them and they would have more or less a snack, coffee, drink, some kind.
M.W.:	You're very familiar with just about every one of these...
Charles Sampson:	Yes. And they also had what was called "curb service." Hot Shoppes.
M.W.:	Right. I want to move into ...
Charles Sampson:	Didn't have to get out of your car. Just order from the car and waitress bring it out to you.
The Depression	
M.W.:	I want to move into the period of time in the 1920's, as far as the late 1920's and the Depression, and how that affected your family.
Charles Sampson:	Well, it didn't affect them until in the '30's as I was saying. Or I say it didn't affect them, but it did affect them to the extent that things were a little bit tighter but not any real problems of any kinds until the depression really hit there back in the early '30's. My daddy lost his job at the railroad. But we had an automobile. I think it was about a 1915 Ford, Model T Ford. And, I think, a '22 Ford. And then, and this as I say was during the depression years, '28 Studebaker, 1928 Studebaker. Boyd Carlin at Prince and Alfred

	Streets had the agency for that. And then '41 had another Studebaker car.
M.W.:	That's probably the last vehicle you had before the war then, because I believe they stopped making vehicles about '41.
Charles Sampson:	Yes.
World War II	
M.W.:	That moves us conveniently into the World War II period, which I was just going to touch on next. Now you never served (in the) military?
Charles Sampson:	No, I was deferred because of being in essential work. Also for married. And Padgett, Bernie Padgett, he and I worked the shift together at Number 4. And he became chief air raid warden, moved from the fire station to City Hall. I was in charge of all the civil defense organization materials and whatever. And, well, I trained auxiliary firemen. I trained new, volunteer firemen. I put the seals on the, shields on the front of the helmets for the auxiliary firemen. I taught American standard and advanced first-aid, American Red Cross first-aid, to air raid wardens, and at that time there was concern about these incendiary fires, use of [inaudible] pumps and whatever. And I sent a newspaper, newsletter, to about a hundred of the fellows from the fire department and friends, people that I knew around town. But I sent this letter, newsletter, every month, about six pages, to them overseas. Try to keep them informed on local news and also the possibility that someone that they knew was stationed close to them and gave a current address as I got any changes and whatever. So I tried to do a lot of extra stuff, war effort. There was the control center, air raid control center, which was in the basement of the Masonic Temple. And the students of Episcopal High School Theological Seminary operated that around the clock. And we firemen, if we were off duty, we had to call in to them and leave word where we were going to be if we were going out anywhere. And other than that, you had to be close to home, or one of the fire stations, or whatever to assist because it was a strict limitation on manpower. Hardly anyone left as far as the fire service.
M.W.:	So there was definitely a coordinated effort ...
Charles Sampson:	Oh, definitely, yes.
M.W.:	...between the war effort, I mean, as far as safety of the city then is concerned?
Charles Sampson:	They'd have these tests, air raid tests, and the company was split up. One piece would to the garage there in the 100 block N. Washington St.reet; the other one would go shipyard. And they dispersed the apparatus in the event that there was (sic) any bombs

	dropped, it wouldn't wipe out two pieces at one time.
M.W.:	So there was definitely a coordinated effort there?
Charles Sampson:	And then, around town, there were these anti-aircraft guns
M.W.:	Where were some of those located?
Charles Sampson:	Henry and Oronoco Streets was one. It was a big, wooden trestle type thing with a big platform at the top of it and the anti-aircraft gun was mounted on the top. And there was a barracks on the ground below there, and, on ground level. And this was where the men were stationed. And I was helping Benny Moore at that time lettering trucks, where trucks had to have the empty and gross weight, and I was spraying the numbers on them. The people would come and get the truck weighed at the Alexandria Hay and Grain there. And then just half a block down to where I was on my days off for the fire department and was spraying the weights on the trucks. And I could see the soldiers over there and the routine that they had as far as daily drills and whatever. They had one at the shipyard. Was one on the north end of town; I've forgotten where that one was. There was one or two right in the western section of the city. There was about, maybe close to six of them around.
M.W.:	And what about the activity at ... ... [active]ities at the Torpedo Factory were?
Charles Sampson:	Yes, it was very strict down there as far as the patrols that they had set up and a lot of the older men that had some knowledge of machine work whatever, from years before, the were given jobs down there and were able to do a lot of the work that was necessary to be done. And [a] terrific number of women were hired to work there.
M.W.:	Did you ever have any occasion to be called there for any accidents that ever occurred?
Charles Sampson:	No.
M.W.:	Or, would that be part of your jurisdiction anyway?
Charles Sampson:	Well, that would have been part of the rescue squad, but I can't remember that there was any that of a nature where it would be noticed.
M.W.:	So were pretty safe?
Charles Sampson:	Yes.
M.W.:	Good. Did you have any, personally, have any friends or family that was (sic) actually served overseas during the war?
Charles Sampson:	Cousin. That was about it.
M.W.:	And what was the impact as far as the City of Alexandria, as far as rationing and shortages, and things like that? I mean ...
Charles Sampson:	We had the ration books for various types of food. And they had

	gasoline rationing. If you could qualify and your car was used to go to fires when you were off, you might qualify for a 'B Book,' or maybe even a 'C Book.' I had a 'C Book' because if my wife wasn't available to take volunteer firemen to fires when it occurred, then the Reverend Roberts, Norman Roberts, had keys to my car and he would use the car and take some of the firemen to fires. So for the actual use and mileage, I was qualified for one of the 'C Books,' which gave you additional gasoline.
M.W.:	And, do you recall, was the 'C Book' that gave you the greatest amount of gas, or was there even one beyond that?
Charles Sampson:	No, I think if you got more than what a 'C Book' would have given you, you would have gotten two books, or a portion of another.
M.W.:	Okay. So a 'C Book' was a pretty good thing to have?
Charles Sampson:	Yes. And then they had 'D' and 'E,' which was farm equipment, which gasoline was used but not on the streets.
M.W.:	I don't really want to get into politics or anything that much, but this goes along with this World War II-era, period of time we're talking about. As far as President Roosevelt was concerned, do you think he kept in touch with America and the City of Alexandria about the war effort, what was actually going on?
Charles Sampson:	I'm sure that he did but, in other words, you got the scraps from the table. What they wanted you to have, you got. Other than that, you didn't know any more than anybody else. And I think that's what any administration or ...
M.W.:	Did you feel that at the time though? I mean ...
Charles Sampson:	No, I think that you had complete trust and faith in them that you were being kept advised and whatever.
M.W.:	Through the newspapers and radio broad[casts]. His "Fireside Chats," I know, were pretty famous.
Charles Sampson:	Look forward to any inkling of news of any kind; you always hungered for it. Hoping that the war would end soon. It finally did.
After World War II and the 1950's	
M.W.:	After the war, I know in 1949, (we have the 250th anniversary of Alexandria coming up in 1999), but in 1949 they had the bicentennial. Do you recall any of the activities that they had going on at that time, 1949, for the bicentennial of Alexandria?
Charles Sampson:	I don't recall anything, no.
M.W.:	Nothing special that you recall. Looking at the city, moving into the 1950's in Alexandria, do you feel that the population as a whole was in better shape than before the war, or do you think the years before the war were better?
Charles Sampson:	I don't know. The growth in the population... I don't know. The

	expansion and all, in my opinion, it seemed to make it worse. When it was a small town, yes, there were accomplishments and you looked forward to things, and whatever. But, well, I think maybe the saturation of crime and all was beginning back at that time.
M.W.:	In the '50's? So the real turning point, would you say, the real turning point would be during World War II when there was a lot of influx of people helping during the war effort, or closer to the '50's?
Charles Sampson:	No, I don't think at that time it was, because I think with the military police and all, that they were around to help to supplement the Alexandria police. And they had auxiliary policemen. I think everything was under control. I think it all developed later than that - up into the '50's and all.
M.W.:	And do you have any feelings of why that occurred? I mean why, why it took it down?
Charles Sampson:	Other than a lot of strangers moved in.
M.W.:	It became... Did it become a place that people would work in and leave, or was it people still working and living in the city? Was it becoming more of a transient area, in other words?
Charles Sampson:	Well, I think there were a lot of transients here, but at the same time, it was possibly people who worked here or in D.C. but moved to the outskirts more. In other words, the movement to the outside instead of living in the city proper. Expansion started there and people started going toward the outside.
M.W.:	Did that create a lack of community then, are you saying? Breakdown of community pride?
Charles Sampson:	The closeness of people sort of died out at that time because you were separating yourself from others.
M.W.:	Transportation was getting better, I assume, as far as... Did more people have their private vehicles in the '50's?
Charles Sampson:	It was ... the expansion was beginning to show yes, yes. And I think a lot of it, it was done so rapidly that maybe this was the reason why it wasn't too appreciative.
M.W.:	Maybe that brings us into something that we could talk about as far as urban renewal. Do you think that had a big impact on this whole situation? A lot of people coming in trying to make money, really didn't care about the city for what it was?
Charles Sampson:	Well, a lot of the historic part of the city, I think, was demolished. And I don't think that they realized it until later. For example, across from me at 1011 Duke St., there was a building over there at 1028 Duke St. And until they had a fire over there one time, I hadn't realized that building was over one hundred years old. And I think a lot of this went on. [inaudible] fires that at one time, 116

	S. St. Asaph Street, Number 4 Firehouse, and they had moved there from the Cameron St., or rather the Washington Street-area of Christ Church yard and they moved to 116 S. St. Asaph Street into the firehouse that they built there. And then in 1983 they moved over to the other side of the street into a larger building and all. And urban development, the court house and whatever, demolished the 116 ...
M.W.:	Oh, that was that site there?
Charles Sampson:	That was the old, original firehouse of 1855 and they built it as a garage for that house on the corner that they had taken part of the land. Westminster Building was on the corner there, which was a part of the Second Presbyterian Church on the opposite corner. So, I mean, they sort of worked haphazard (sic), it seemed, on some things, and then all at once they realized that they were demolishing historic buildings and they cut it off. A lot of them went by the wayside.
M.W.:	Unfortunately, it's a loss forever, as far as I'm concerned.
Charles Sampson:	Well, the building where I had lived in the apartment, as I say, across from the firehouse at 108 S. St. Asaph, that was put together with wood pegs, in the attic part of it. But that building went along with the rest of it. They were just so anxious to complete that urban development project that they didn't take into consideration a lot of the buildings that had been demolished.
M.W.:	I mean, we could look at that as a lack, maybe, on City Council too. Were they doing their job, do you think, or were they sitting back and letting this development go on haphazardly?
Charles Sampson:	I think they were too anxious to go for the urban development and could care less about the remains.
M.W.:	There wasn't (sic) enough people that cared about history on the board there?
Charles Sampson:	No. Right now, who cares about the fire department? And it's got the history going all the way back to 1700's. Nobody cares.
M.W.:	There's no ...
Charles Sampson:	All this information. I got two loose leaf binders that would stand this tall, and they are filled with loose leaf sheets, both sides, history of the fire department.
M.W.:	And nobody wants to do any work with it? Did you talk to Mike Miller?
Charles Sampson:	I doubt if you...Well, Mike would probably know about it. You have to ask him.
M.W.:	Does he want to do any work with it?
Charles Sampson:	I don't know. I don't know. But the pictures and [inaudible] stuff that I had and was carrying there, Sandra, one of the part-time

	workers that were there, she was cataloging all of that stuff, and I don't know whether she ever completed that. And, as I somewhat read, and I haven't followed it too close, but the Lloyd House now, all the stuff moved across the street to the library,
M.W.:	Part, I think part of it has, yes. Anything that I think they... I think they house anything that before 1950, I believe, than anything after 1950, I think, goes to the library. I think that's how they said they do that. I'm not...Don't quote me on that. I believe that's how they have that set up now.
Charles Sampson:	Well, I haven't been there in a long time. And the...Well, I used to go there after I'd first retired almost every day. In fact, I'd had surgery and went there on days to occupy myself. And I was reading the tapes and whatever, and compiling information in the Gazette office, same as that, trying to read it on the files, tapes, and whatever. And then, as I say, this Mr. William Helmet, that had researched all that information at the Library of Congress, and family gave me the material after he had died. And all of that is compiled into written form. City Hall, some of the fellows mentioned it, I think, to one of the departments or something down there. And I think Vola was agreeable that the secretary pool would type the information from the notes and stuff that I had.
M.W.:	But you've never seen any of it?
Charles Sampson:	Oh yes, I have a copy.
M.W.:	Oh you did. So they actually completed that work?
Charles Sampson:	Yes, a number of copies distributed. And as I said, Vola and Patsy Ticer had a meeting of some kind at the Friendship. They presented them with a copy of it.
Fire Events	
M.W.:	I want to get back maybe to tie in a little bit of this history that we're talking about as far as some of these buildings that were demolished, etc. In your career in firefighting, were you ever called to any of these big historical houses or buildings that were on fire and were actually saved some of these from being demolished completely?
Charles Sampson:	I think they were better prepared and better covered as far as protective devices than they ordinary home.
M.W.:	Even back in '37 when you started then?
Charles Sampson:	Yes.
M.W.:	They were always taken care of? You never ran across any really severe fires in any historical buildings?
Charles Sampson:	Not right off that I can think of. No.
M.W.:	What about other really large events that you were at the scene? Do you recall any of those?

Charles Sampson:	The Southern Railway freight shed in the 400 block of N. Lee St. That's where, and it must have been had some antique value to it as far as age, and platforms there that they unloaded all the cars. And that burned in the, I'm guessing, in the early '50's.
M.W.:	And you couldn't save that?
Charles Sampson:	No, no. We got the call for the 200 block of Prince Street in the middle of the night And we went to the 200 block of Prince Street and we found nothing. No one knew anything at all about the call. And we happened to be looking around and looked across the yard of one of the buildings down there and could see this glow in the north end of town. And we chased that down and that's what it was. But a milkman or something had seen it at its earlier stage and reported it. But apparently the misunderstanding of Prince and Princess was what delayed the call. And then everything was framed: the building, the platforms, and everything else. Plus, the Alexandria Dairy - a lot of their cartons and bottle tops, and whatever, consumed with the fire, and all of that spread. And that was a large fire. Brown's Fertilizer plant on First Street. That was a large fire. Building about 300 feet long.
M.W.:	That's a different situation because you're dealing with chemicals. Is that correct? You have to approach that fire differently?
Charles Sampson:	To an extent, yes. Right.
M.W.:	And take precautions.
Charles Sampson:	We didn't have too much of a problem because most of it was in granular form, not liquid. And those two structures were old. I don't know that you'd classify them as being historic or anything, but the age was there.
M.W.:	And that was lost too, that building?
Charles Sampson:	Oh yes. All frame. Everything back in those days, it was frame. Didn't take too much with the dryness over the years. The wood, it would burn, burn free. That's one time ... you read about these things but you don't experience them and you wouldn't know to describe it to someone. But one time in my career with the fire service, I'd always heard of spontaneous ignition, spontaneous combustion. Oily rags and whatever just discarded. And I experienced seeing that one time, and I've forgotten where the house was out in the Rosemont area, but the lady could smell something burning. We went there and looked all over the place and finally found it. And there was a metal can with these oily rags in there. And the fumes were giving off. They had not gotten into open flame, but the heat was being generated. It was on the verge of being spontaneous ignition. Then that [inaudible] fertilizer plant - I had gone around to check on the back side of it. And, as you read in the paper, these, California, these fires, these winds, sand

	...
M.W.:	Brush fires, or whatever they were.
Charles Sampson:	Yes. Whatever these winds create ...
M.W.:	Yes, yes.
Charles Sampson:	... and more or less of a volcanic action of blowing stuff up in the air and spreading it around. My helmet just took off and I had no idea in the world where it went because of the smoke back there.
M.W.:	Just blew right off your head?
Charles Sampson:	Yes. The suction of that wind just did it. You see it a lot of times. The whirlpool in the grass out in a field or something of that type.
M.W.:	You can see it?
Charles Sampson:	Yes. But even though you read about those things, you don't experience it too often. Or maybe never.
Best Memories - Marriage	
M.W.:	I want to more or less try and wrap this interview up. Looking back over your years in the ... and living here in Alexandria, what are some of your fonder memories, I mean, does it go back to your childhood, or your married life, or... When are some of your happier times that you had living here?
Charles Sampson:	I've always told people and I still would say it, "I had two loves in my life. One of them was marriage with Helen and the other was the fire service." And, if I had my life to go over, yes, I'd go back to either of them, or both.
M.W.:	Or both.
Charles Sampson:	Yes.
M.W.:	Well, you're a lucky man then if you had two loves in your life. A lot of people don't even have one.
Charles Sampson:	Right. And it boils me over, every time I read in the paper about the unhappiness in families where either the man or woman would go berserk and kill the other, or the children, and just leave the children on the mercy of the public, or whatever. To think that if one would give in, they could settle the problem. My wife and I, we never had an argument. Had disagreements. We had discussions. But we solved the problems and never got into an argument.
M.W.:	How did you meet her? Or when did you meet her?
Charles Sampson:	I was a volunteer at the firehouse on St. Asaph's Street and before going into the firehouse and the rear entrance of Kresgee's ten cents store right across from each other in the alley way. We fellows from the firehouse used to go in there and match for milkshakes with the manager and assistant manager. Very friendly with them. And we'd go to soda fountain and match for milkshakes. And Helen had come from Tennessee. She had had

	this sick spell and she came up here to live with an aunt on Custis Avenue in Delray until she recovered. And while she was here she went to work at Kresgee's on the notion counter. And seeing her in there, and then she was moved over. The girl that was at the soda fountain in charge of that had left. And she went over to the soda fountain.
M.W.:	Where you spent more time?
Charles Sampson:	Right.
M.W.:	So that's how you met.
Charles Sampson:	I had met her in October. Halloween, we went to Maryland, first date, and went to a Halloween party over in Maryland.
M.W.:	Was it a hayride?
Charles Sampson:	No, in the car. It was just over there. These friends of mine had been over there for this party and invited us to come over. And we, as I say, the first date was in October, Halloween, and I went to work in the fire department February the first of '37 and we were married on April the eighth of '37. So knew each other just a matter of a few months. Were married. A lot of people say. "Those short-term marriages like that don't last." They're wrong.
M.W.:	It did.
Charles Sampson:	It's the people that don't last. It's not the incident.
Closing Thoughts about the Fire Department	
M.W.:	I went over some sort of some subjects and topics here. I wanted to leave this open to you at the end here. Was there anything that I didn't cover, or something that you would like to expand on that we talked about that's on your mind, or something that you would like to leave as the end of this interview? Any feelings or thoughts that you have?
Charles Sampson:	Well, the fire department today is not the fire department when I was in it. We had fun. We enjoyed our work and we were sincere and dedicated to our job. But at the same time, we had an awful lot of humor and fun in order to relieve stress. And we enjoyed the work. And even though you may be off duty, you made it a point to go by the firehouse and find out what was being done, what they were preparing for someone, and such as that. And all those things are forbidden today.
M.W.:	They're forbidden?
Charles Sampson:	You can't even have nicknames. I was just reading an article that I had uncovered at the house there of names that were given people. Some of them earned and some of them just given for incidents or whatever. If you got hurt, the manner in which you were hurt usually brought about a nickname. If you hurt your fingers in some manner, your name was Fingers. If you had a set of keys hung on

	you, your name was Keys. There were some that their appearance earned them name. One was a buzzard. 'The Goat,' 'Billy Goat.' Oh, I don't know. 'Hooknose.' Mine, because during the war we had recruited these young boys below the age where they normally would have taken them and fellows in the other stations which weren't as fortunate at getting some of them, my name was 'Father Flannagan.' I had 'Boys Town.' Oh, I don't know. Names of all kinds seemed to stick to you. "Iron Jaw," if you talked a lot. If you maybe would do any singing and all around, you may be 'Elvis Presley.' Just anything that they could hang on you. You had to watch yourself, and as I say, tried to be around as much as you could to make sure you're not the butt of the joke. You were willing to have it shared with someone else, but not for you alone. And you had to kind of watch yourself.
M.W.:	So, you still keep in contact with the fire service? You must, because you're saying how it's changed so much, I assume that you keep in touch, or you're there or active somehow or another.
Charles Sampson:	Well, let's say that I became known again November the fourteenth when I had that spell. Because the engine company and the rescue squad, the paramedics, had to come down to get me, take me to the hospital. But, other than that, I doubt there's half a dozen in the fire department now that was in there when I was there. In fact, a lot of them that have retired came to work even after I had left there. And they already are retired.
M.W.:	What about some of the equipment? I mean the advances in equipment that you saw over the years? I'm sure that was great.
Charles Sampson:	There again I am not familiar with what equipment they have and its use, and I'm critical of their methods. I see it on television. I see pictures in the paper. And it's not only Alexandria. It's all over the country.
M.W.:	Is it lack of discipline, do you say, or organization, or what is the problem?
Charles Sampson:	Well, I'm ashamed to say they aren't doing any fire fighting. If you see a building that's completely involved in fire, flames up over the roof of the building, what's left of the roof of a building, and a man on an aerial ladder or one of these cherry pickers, as they call them, put water on the flames, for what purpose? That flame is a result of burning down below. And you ought to get to the source of the fire, not the flame. The flame is the result of burning. So get to the source. D.C. Fire Department lost that sergeant here few months back, year or so back. They didn't know whether he lost his life because of drowning or whether it was the fact of his air bottle giving out and he suffocated.
M.W.:	He could actually drown in there?

Charles Sampson:	Yes, he and his company, (he was a sergeant), and two men with him, they were in this burning building and they had orders, I think, to come out. And he got separated from them somehow. The floor had burned out and he fell through into the basement area. And the water that they were pouring in there was gradually seeping up. And that was the question. Was he in there too long and his thirty minute air bottle gave out and he suffocated? Or, did the air bottle maybe still hold him temporarily, but the water level drowned him. And we had, back in 1925, a young boy. He was called the baby of the fire department because he was 16 years old. The shipyard, they were getting rid of all those WWI ships that had been in the process of building. They had fires down there almost every day because the welders and cut torchers were setting fires.
M.W.:	Okay. They were scrapping these ships?
Charles Sampson:	Right. They had a fire down there one day and this boy, not being able to see because of the smoke and whatever, tripped and fell into the hold of the ship. It was an open cargo ship and he'd fallen down into there. He broke his back. He was screaming for help but no one could hear him because of the fire and maybe the distance that separated them. But finally they heard him. And they, in some fashion, got down there to where he was. And the water level was coming up almost to his face at that time. So [inaudible] it. He died as a result of the fire and all. But at the same time, he did not drown. And this was what happened to the D.C. fireman. We had a fire on Duke Street, an armature place, just west of Telegraph Road. before all that change in the roadways and whatever. And the fellows had put the fire out in the front and I had gone around to the back to check and make sure there was no embers or other parts of burning about there. And there's still quite a bit of heavy smoke. And I went in the back door and fell. The floor had burned out and I did not see that and I fell right on a furnace underneath there. And we, at that time, had a canvas pocket sewed to our coat. And a gas mask, which was a metal canister, on there. It was called an all service mask. And the face piece you snapped up behind your shoulder. So whenever you put your coat on, you had your mask there and you were ready to go in. I managed to climb out of there and no damage other than the soreness and all that I could feel. And that night, later, who had the fire in the 400 block S. Alfred Street, a couple little sheds, that didn't amount to anything. And then right after that, we had a fire at the Royal Apartment, 100 block S. Royal Street. And that was a fire. The water froze as fast it came out of the hose. The aerial ladder, the sections of that froze. Fact is, what they call the hydrant-thawer,

	gasoline, or rather an alcohol propelled device that generated steam and was used on frozen fire hydrants. And they had to use that at the sections where they joined together because they were frozen there. And they had to send you to the shop and get sand to sprinkle on the ground for the firemen to have footing and also on the roof, because they couldn't stand up with the ice. So, the next day, I was still bothered with the chest and I went to the doctor and he sent me to the hospital to get x-rays and I had three broken ribs. But there again, as I say, what you see in the paper is a somewhat, not a common thing in the fire service, but it's not the first time it's ever happened. Almost anything you see as a problem, fireman injured or killed or whatever, it's happened before. It's one of the most hazardous occupations. You sort of try to prepare for it but, at the same time, it don't (sic) always work.
M.W.:	Do you think you were appreciated for what you did when you did it by the community?
Charles Sampson:	I don't know how much of it became known. Maybe, if it had been known, maybe it would have been more appreciation shown. But, as a rule, you figured these things were your job and that's what you were paid for.
M.W.:	So you weren't looking for the...?
Charles Sampson:	No, none of the glory that's normally attached to it. No. It was a routine thing. As I said to the fellows, now I was a battalion chief for 25 years, and no one has ever had the title longer than that. And, as I say, these, the men, they respected me and they used good judgment as far as things that they did. And they knew I wouldn't expose them to a hazard that was an unsafe thing. And, as I say, they had confidence in me. When I joined as a volunteer, I was an active volunteer. I went to fires anytime I could. And when I joined the fire department as a paid person, then it was that much more activity because I went to fires when I was working and I also lived right across the street from the fire station and went to fires when I was off. If I was going somewhere during the course of the day and my wife, working around the corner at Hayman's, she'd here the fire engines go out, she'd call me, and I'd go to fires. So the men knew that I actually was a born and bred fireman.
M.W.:	You lived it. You lived it.
Charles Sampson:	That's correct. And it worked out that Chief Duncan, (I went to work in, as I say, in '37), and in '42 Chief Duncan had a back problem and he was off for a week. And he picked me of the men in the fire department to act as chief for the period of time that he was off. And he was off about a week. But, as I say, I consider that and appreciated the fact that he seemed to recognize the fact that I could take care of a job that normally would take a more

	experienced person. Because I had seven years in the department at that time and there were men in there with a whole lot more service than I had. But apparently they didn't meet the standards that were set up as far as the overall picture. So, as I say, I don't regret a minute of my time in the fire service. And if it was (sic) still the same as it was at that time, yes, I'd go back in it tomorrow.
M.W.:	You'd go back in it tomorrow!
Charles Sampson:	Yes, yes. Knowing what I do about all of the conditions, the hazards, and everything else, yes, I'd face it again. No problem.
M.W.:	Would you consider doing consulting work for them, I mean as far as your experience is concerned? Or, has anybody ever approached you, as far as that's concerned? Or, would you even consider ...
Charles Sampson:	I had always said when I retired ...
M.W.:	That was it.
Charles Sampson:	... I was going to concentrate on writing a book of the fire service. One of the fellows told me, "If you decide to write that book, mark it as fiction. Nobody would believe some of the things that took place." I remembered that. Honestly, when you think back, nobody would believe some of the things.
M.W.:	Some, a lot of the, some of the things I hear as far as some of these fires, people say that things melt that don't normally melt that you wouldn't think of melting like, you know, metal, and things like that. So is that what you're talking about? Glass would turn back into liquid?
Charles Sampson:	Let's say this. Anything will burn. To prove it, take a fine grade steel wool and hold a match under it. It'll burn. Because if you can heat anything to its gassy form, it's going to burn. And they say fireproof buildings. No. Fire resistant. Not fireproof, because it still will burn. Concrete'll burn. All you got to do is get to the temperature and it'll burn.
M.W.:	That's the thing. People don't realize that the temperatures, the high temperatures that are involved. Incredible. Well, is (sic) there any other thoughts that you have that you would like to or do you want to conclude this now?
Charles Sampson:	Unless you can think of anything.
M.W.:	No, I think we went over quite a bit of material here and got a lot of insight. You have a lot of, gave me a lot of good responses to the those different, various areas on King St.
Charles Sampson:	You somewhat feel responsible when you lose a life at a fire, because you feel, well, if they had reported the fire just a couple of seconds earlier, we might have saved them. I have seen it in death in all forms - accidents, fires, whatever. If you approached a place that was burning, and if you've ever smelled cooked flesh, that is, on the stove that a pot, where it has exhausted all of the grease,

	water, or whatever you're using to cook with, and you smelled the burning of that cooked meat, it's a horrible smell. When you smell that you know that there's a body…
M.W.:	...that there's somebody inside, yes.
Charles Sampson:	...either a human or an animal. Maybe a cat, maybe a dog, even a rat, or it may be a person. But, you'll smell it.
M.W.:	Above and beyond all the smoke and everything else?
Charles Sampson:	Right. That odor is there. And a lot of times you miss it because you've got a mask on and you couldn't smell anything through the mask. It's amusing. Some people a mask will suffocate them and they have to leave the fire service because of that. There's others, such as you are completely unconscious to the fact that you got a mask on. Had a fire one night down on Wilkes Street, Gibbons Street, and I crossed the room from where we had seen this fire and put this fire out. It was smoke in there but across the room you could see a flicker of a fire. And I though well that's over there we missed. And I went over there and it was a lamp, kerosene lamp that was still burning. And I thought, well, somebody walking around here in this smoke, they're going to dump that over and set something on fire. So I was going to blow the lamp out. It didn't work! I had the mask. I was blowing in the mask not at the lamp.
M.W.:	Didn't even realize it. Second nature to you. Didn't even realize it.
Charles Sampson:	That's what I say. You're so accustomed to it. But in other people, no. The minute they put that mask on, they feel suffocation and they pull it off.
M.W.:	They know they have it on. Well, maybe you were born to be a firefighter, then?
Charles Sampson:	I think so. My grandfather was a member of Number 4. In, I don't know how long, but in 1900's when he died, he was buried in his uniform from the old hose reel. So it was somewhat bred in me, I guess. My mother had always said, because of the celebrations and whatever that the firemen got loose on these conventions, the things that they did, no one of her family, she said, would ever be a fireman or a policeman with the reputation they had. So when I joined the fire department, I joined Number 4. That was not the closer one to my home. Number 5 on Patrick Street was the closer one at that time. And it would have been better for me to join Number 5 than to join Number 4. But Number 5 checked with the parents on a child eighteen and whatever. Unless you were of legal age at 21 at that time, they checked the family and made sure that the person had permission. And Number 4 didn't bother to do that, so my application went to Number 4. And I became a member. I was a member for quite a while before my mother ever found it out. But she found out that I had not changed and I had not created

	any problems such as she had always heard about and she accepted the fact and was proud of me.
M.W.:	You had to prove yourself a little bit to her? Or the Fire Department had to prove themselves, maybe?
Charles Sampson:	But had to leave it hidden for a little while until it was [inaudible].
M.W.:	Well, I want to think you very much on behalf of myself, and the Lyceum, and the City of Alexandria.
Charles Sampson:	You have my phone number if you want to call me at any time, and we'll see what can be arranged and done.
M.W.:	And I hope that somebody is going to take some interest in your, all that material that you have there.
Charles Sampson:	I doubt it. I think it's too late for it.
M.W.:	Well, I don't think it is ever too late. [End]