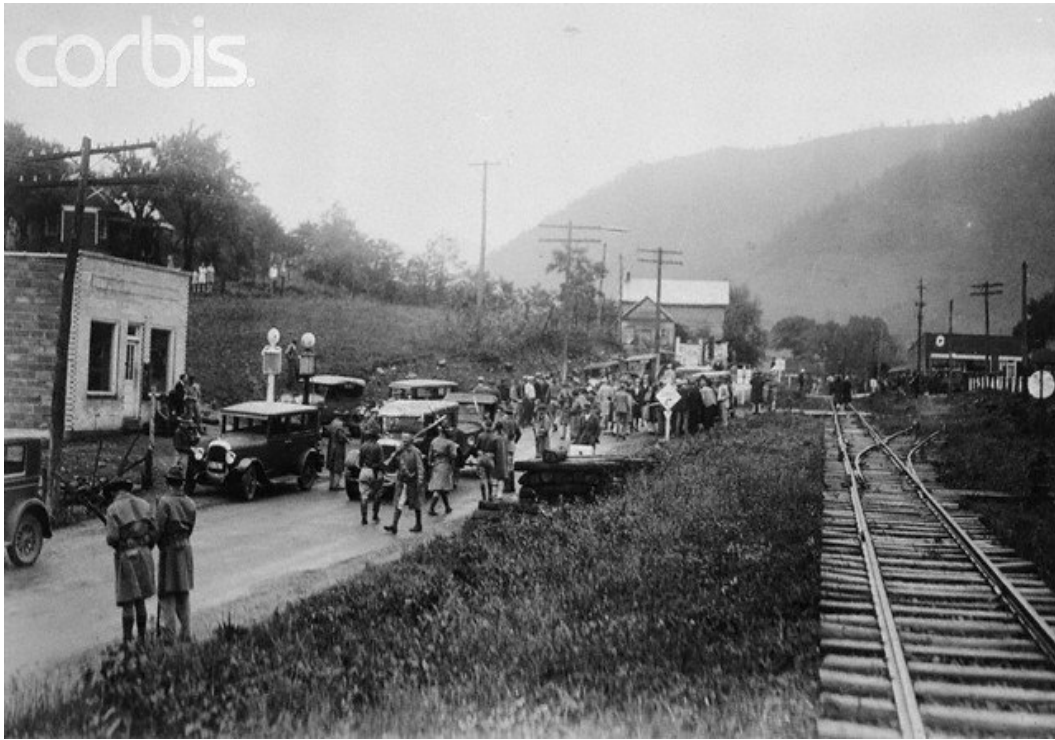


ELIZABETHTON RAYON PLANTS STRIKES, 1929¹



Elizabethton, Tennessee: National Guardsmen move in to quell picketing of strikers from textile mills. A grave situation has arisen due to the dynamiting of the chief water conduit of the city. One man has been arrested in this connection. May 17, 1929. <http://pro.corbis.com>

On 12 March 1929, Margaret Bowen, a worker at American Glanzstoff, led a walkout of 523 women operatives. After other shifts joined the walkout the next day, the plant closed on 14 March. Four days later Bemberg workers struck in sympathy with the Glanzstoff operatives. The workers' protests centered on low wages, unfair promotion policies, and petty regulations that applied only to females. Workers also objected to the pressure exerted to force them to rent houses at high rates from Watauga Development Corporation. At the time of the strike, Glanzstoff employed 1,099 men and 854 women, while Bemberg employed 886 men and 384 women. At Glanzstoff, although all employees had a fifty-six-hour week, wages for women were considerably lower than those for men.

When the strike began, there was no active union local at the plants. Local 1630 of the United Textile Workers Union of America (UTW) had been chartered in November 1927, when

¹ Essay taken from: The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture.
<http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/imagegallery.php?EntryID=S110>
Marie Tedesco, East Tennessee State University

Suggested Reading: James A. Hodges, "Challenge to the New South: The Great Textile Strike in Elizabethton, Tennessee, 1929," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 23 (1964): 343-57.

Bemberg workers struck for increased wages, and workers reactivated Local 1630 at a 13 March meeting. Dr. Arthur Mothwurf, president of the rayon plants, refused to recognize the union and refused to consider wage increases. At Mothwurf's request, the Carter County Chancery Court enjoined strikers from picketing, damaging plant property, interfering with plant workers, or assembling at the plant gates. Another injunction prohibited strike activities on roads near the plants.

Workers refused to end their strike, however. Charles Wood, a Department of Labor Conciliation Service mediator, and Paul Aymon of the Tennessee Federation of Labor arranged a meeting between Mothwurf and labor representatives. They reached an agreement, which provided for wage increases, assurances for strikers against discrimination, lifting of the injunctions, and recognition of an in-plant grievance committee. There was no union recognition. Initially Mothwurf refused to sign the agreement, but three days later he pledged his support, and the plants reopened on 26 March. Yet management refused to hire back strikers and UTW members. William Green, president of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), sent Edward F. McGrady, the AFL's Washington, D. C., legislative representative, to investigate. McGrady reported that over 300 union members had not been rehired. Early in April, a group of prominent Elizabethton businessmen kidnapped McGrady and Alfred Hoffman, a hosiery union official. They were driven across state lines in separate cars, released, and warned not to return. When they returned, 4,000 workers rallied in outrage at the kidnappings.

On 13 and 14 April, management dismissed union members of two Bemberg grievance committees. These dismissals led directly to the second strike, which began on 15 April. This time the UTW participated from the start. On 20 April, Governor Henry Horton appointed George L. Berry, president of the International Printing Pressmen's Union, to act as the governor's mediator. But Mothwurf refused to meet with Berry, who then resigned on 8 May.

During the second strike, Dr. S. C. Rhea, an employee in the Bemberg Chemical Department, organized the "Loyal Workers of Bemberg," which soon included Glanzstoff as well. Rhea claimed to have the signatures of 700 loyal workers. Mothwurf reopened the plants on 6 May. The number of returning union members is not known. The union counted only a few, but management claimed more than 1,100 employees at work on 11 May. Management admitted, however, that 500 were "new hires," or strikebreakers.

With the reopening of the plant, Mothwurf persuaded Governor Horton to dispatch 800 National Guardsmen to Elizabethton, an action that turned the strike into a violent, bitter affair. Increasingly violent encounters between strikers and soldiers occurred along the roads leading to the plants. Troops used tear gas against strikers, and in one three-day stretch, from 14 through 16 May, they arrested over 300 strikers. Two houses were dynamited; two barns, one containing plant machinery, were burned. On 16 May, a water main leading into Elizabethton was dynamited. The violence resulted in a deluge of requests from labor and other sources to Governor Horton demanding the removal of the troops from the city; Horton refused.

On May 23 Mothwurf and a second mediator, Anna Weinstock, reached an agreement which stipulated that the plants would reinstate former employees, would not discriminate against union members, and would recognize worker grievance committees. Local 1630 was not

accorded recognition. The plants brought in E. T. Willson, an antiunion personnel manager from New Jersey, to carry out investigations of striking workers who had not been rehired. On 25 May, 2,500 workers grudgingly approved the agreement.

The strikes cost the plants an estimated five hundred thousand dollars in losses. In July 1929, Mothwurf left for a two-month vacation in Germany and did not return. The issue of discrimination against union workers continued to plague the plants. By his own account, E. T. Willson blacklisted between 200 and 300 workers. Strikes over this issue occurred in June and October 1929 and March 1930; workers called off a threatened strike in September 1929. Most blacklisted workers were never rehired.

The companies never recognized Local 1630. Instead, they created the Bemberg-Glanzstoff Council, which controlled labor concerns until 1938. The local briefly affiliated with the CIO's Textile Workers Organizing Committee when it took over UTW locals. After the UTW was reconstituted in 1939, a National Labor Relation Board election recertified the local as a UTW local in 1940.

The legacy of the 1929 strikes is multifaceted. As a consequence of Local 1630's defeat and the treatment of the workers, bitterness and mistrust have marked labor-management relations to the present. The violence of the strikes, however, generated union opposition among many workers; as the union weakened, workers dismissed it as useless. Company officials promoted their union and sponsored plant activities in the 1930s in an effort to establish a reputation as "good" employers. To an extent, they succeeded and solidified their place as the city's most important employers. A number of sources credit the Elizabethton strikes as the initiators of a wave of strikes that swept across the Piedmont textile industry in 1929 and 1930, although their exact role remains a much-debated subject among southern labor historians.

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT AT UNC-CHAPEL HILL

Abstract

George F. Dugger, Sr., had practiced law in Elizabethton, TN, for fifty-five years at the time of this interview. After detailing his family history, he describes his involvement in the dispute over unionization at the Elizabethton rayon plant. As the plant's lawyer, he worked both for and against unionization. In 1936, he helped smooth unionization at the plant, protecting a union leader's identity. But during a 1929 strike he worked with mill management to return strikers to their jobs. Most of this interview focuses on that strike, which turned violent as strikers attacked Dugger, the police attacked strikers, and Elizabethton citizens assaulted at least one union leader. This interview provides a useful, if sometimes difficult to interpret, account of the 1929 Elizabethton rayon plant strike and will be of interest to any researcher concerned with this incident.

Dugger has a remarkable family history. Researchers interested in learning about five generations of the Dugger family, stretching back 239 years, should read the first few pages of this interview.

Interview with George F. Dugger, Sr., August 9, 1979.

Interview H-0312. Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007)

Dugger, George F., Sr., interviewee

Interview Participants

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR., interviewee

JACQUELYN HALL, interviewer

[TAPE 1, SIDE A]

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[START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

Just what did you want to know?

JACQUELYN HALL:

I want to know mainly about the plants, but first I want to just ask you about yourself a little bit. When were you born?

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

I'm George F. Dugger, Sr. I was born December 28, 1896, in Carter County, Tennessee.

JACQUELYN HALL:

Who was your father?

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

My father was John F. Dugger, and my mother was Eliza Williams Dugger. I was the tenth child in a family of twelve. My people came here as the first settlers of Tennessee. The history book says that Julius Caesar Dugger came here in 1766, and the other history book said he was the first settler of Tennessee. And it's now been proven that he came here from North Carolina--and this was North Carolina in 1766--and he settled out here at Siam. And there's just been a picture of a log house published in the Star that was built in 1790, and there's a 106-acre farm there on the river, and Arvis from the State of Texas now has inherited it, and they've got it in the National Register. And we've got the accurate information now that he came there, and my people have lived in this county ever since. The common ancestor is one William Dugger, and he was a member of the House of Burgesses of Virginia in 1656, thirty-six years after the Mayflower and forty-nine years after Jamestown, when the first settlement was made on the river over there. And we know that that's true because his name is on a bronze plaque at Williamsburg. And just recently I read that the State of Virginia was trying to find out whether he came over here with the first settlement as a boy and stayed here, or when he came, and it's going to be published pretty soon, as soon as they locate and see when he came over here.

But they have lived in Virginia, but most of the Duggers went away from Virginia, and Dr. John F. Dugger

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was an author of subjects on agriculture from Auburn University, and his brother was Dr. Benjamin M. Dugger, and he was a great scientist, a professor at Harvard, and after he was eighty years old he discovered aureomycin, and he was a famous... He died about four or five years ago at ninety-five years of age. And there's a Benjamin C. Dugger who left here and went to Georgia in 1840, and he was not a metallurgist, but they had been engaged in making iron in this county. So he had \$3,000, and he went to Dufftown and brought forty acres of land that had red metal on it. He thought it was iron, because iron a lot of times is red, but it was copper, and he built him a forge and started to make iron, and when he heated it would break. So he decided that he couldn't possibly get along at that, and he got so disgusted that he started to haul iron for about forty miles, and he went broke, and he went over into Georgia and went into politics. And he was elected to the legislature there for many years, and also elected as a state senator. And then he was a great Republican, and during the Civil War, he had to leave and go to Ohio. But when he came back he ran for office again, and he stayed in office as long as he lived. I've got a record in 1876 from the Georgia Legislature, and they decided [recited?] that he was the only Republican in that legislature but that he was an honest man and they'd all say that he was. And at Dufftown there's a monument there to him at the copper company. His people all went to Texas from down there, and about a year ago there was a tall man with a Cadillac automobile and a big white hat at my home, and when I went in my wife introduced me to my cousin, Mr. John Dugger from Texas. And he was a grandson of this Ben Dugger, whose people had all gone to Texas.

JACQUELYN HALL:

Was Ben Dugger opposed to slavery before the Civil War?

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

You mean secession? He was on the side of the Union and a

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deathbed Republican. And he wouldn't give it up, and he would go to the legislature and camp on the Capitol grounds. He made corn whiskey, also, and he'd take the whiskey down there to entertain them. And he was a great speaker. But they all respected him because he stood for a principle, you know. At home I have a certificate from the secretary of state that was his record, and the legislature extolled him as one of the most honest men, although he was a Republican, they said. And they said in Georgia that didn't stand very well.

JACQUELYN HALL:

What about your grandfather?

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

My grandfather was David Alexander Dugger, and he was born in 1814 here in Carter County. He married Elizabeth Bunnunknown of Johnson County, and in 1863 their older son, my uncle Michael Dugger, was a prisoner in Richmond. And his brother-in-law came home and told his mother that he wouldn't live a week, that he couldn't crawl across the floor. They had offered him, if he would swear allegiance to the Confederate cause,

they would turn him loose, but he was so bitter because his cousin had been home because he was trying to escape and get to Kentucky to keep from being drafted in the Confederate Army-- they were all strong Union men from up in the mountains--that he wasn't going to do that. So she got on a horse with fifteen other people, and they started to Richmond to try to save their children. And they got over in North Carolina, and they ran into a band of Confederate guerrillas. That was people who just raided the country; they didn't belong to any army. And they shot and killed them all, and then they burned them. And my grandfather then had five children, and he didn't know what to do with them, so the Van Huss'sunknown here took my father--he was seven years old--and he was reared by them. And this William Dugger was married three times. He married a Miss Urser(unknown) the first time, and they had a few children; I don't know how many. Then she died, and he married

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a girl from Washington County, and they had some children. He met her in 1791 and then in 1809 she died, and by his two wives he had eight children. And he married a woman named Nancy Ann Brown Pierce, and she had eight children of her own. That made sixteen. And then she and her husband William had seven more, and that made twenty-three, and the fifteenth child that was born was my grandfather. He was born in 1814, and he lived to be eighty-seven years old; he died in 1901, and I was four and a half years old, and I remembered him because he was a great musician. He was a great fiddler, and my father was. And my father could sing in church till you could lift the roof, but none of the rest of us could sing. I had a son that I named for my father, John F. Dugger, and he's defending one of these cases in Nashville now. He's a very famous lawyer. He's been Assistant United States Attorney and state senator for ten years, and he lives in Morristown. We're very proud of all of those people. On William now, when they had seven children of their own that made twenty-three, and Julius Caesar Dugger was supposed to be the first settler of Tennessee and was known as that for years. And one time somebody wrote an article to the Star about thirty-five years ago that he was a myth; he didn't exist. And my young son, who's a lawyer here in Elizabethton--he's fifty-two--was about seventeen, and my daughter was about seventeen or eighteen. And these kids all hollered out, "It's too bad you don't know who your grandfather was." And they come home, and they were just as angry as they could be, and it made me angry, too. Well, I was ignorant about the family, but I had an uncle, David Alexander, Jr., and I went to see him. He was eighty-five years old. "Why," he said, "George, this is all wrong. Julius Caesar Dugger never come here from Virginia. In 1750 he was living in Wilkes County, North Carolina. We know from the pension records that his oldest son William was in the Revolutionary War, and he was born there on

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March 3, 1753. And then his youngest son was Julius C., Jr. The DAR is named here for him. And he was born there in 1760. And," he said, "that's all wrong." So I got in my car, and I was going to straighten it out. It takes adversity sometimes for you to do things that maybe you ought to do anyway. So I went to North Wilkesboro, the county seat of Wilkes County, and I inquired as to the oldest historian, and they gave me the name of a lawyer who was seventy-five years old and said his office was up near the courthouse. So

I went up there and told him that I had information that my great-great-grandfather lived over there in 1750, and I gave him his name. "Oh, yes," he said, "he lived down here on the Dugger Creek. It's a creek that flows into the Yadkin River. And when I was a boy I went fishing down there, and there was his cabin. The logs hadn't all rotted yet. But they're long gone now, and there's a mountain there, and the creek is still called Dugger Creek. It's a famous fishing place. And the mountain is Dugger Mountain, and he lived at the foot of that mountain." So I wanted to go down there, and he said, "You won't see anything, but you can drive down to the Yadkin River, and then you'll have to walk up there about two miles. And you follow the creek, and you'll come to the mountain and where it is." So I did that, and I got that all established that he lived there. And then he hunted. Daniel Boone was born in Burkes County, Pennsylvania, in 1734, and when he was sixteen years old in 1750, his family moved to the Yadkin River. And they were the only two white families in that whole country, the Boone family and the Dugger family. And our tradition of the family is that he went over there to visit Mr. Dugger, whose children were small, and he came in with a load of furs that he'd gathered over here. And he saw that, and he wanted to go hunting with him, so he came hunting in here, even in 1750. And the whole story, these old men, and some unusual situation. You see five generations of people living today;

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you'll see a little baby and all of them living. But five generations of my family goes back two hundred and fifty-nine years. And I've talked to all these state historians because I got interested in it, and I've spent about thirty years on it, and I'm writing a book. I've got about five hundred pages, and I've got a lot of things in it.

JACQUELYN HALL:

What did your grandfather do for a living?

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

He lived up at Roan's Creek. You see, all of this was North Carolina. Old man Julius lived over here in 1766, and he came here with a man named Andrew Greer. Andrew Greer was a young Irishman, and he was an educated man, and he came over here in 1750 and put up a store up in Augusta County, Virginia, and he met the young sister of Julius Caesar Dugger's wife. She was a Kincaid. We can't get the first names, because back then even the pension records said they were sons of Julius C. Dugger, but they didn't say what his wife's name was. She was a Kincaid, and he [Greer] married her younger sister. And then, being a merchant, he bought all the furs that Daniel Boone and all of them could get, and he had a way of getting them up to Baltimore and selling them. Daniel Boone hunted in this country, and we have the records of him down here in Forks of the River. But our people have forgotten history and just now are getting interested in things.

JACQUELYN HALL:

What about your father?

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

My father died in 1921. He had pneumonia and was sick a long time before then. My mother died in 1928. My oldest brother died at eighty-nine years of age. If he were living, he'd be 101 years old. But it's going to show you the five generations. And I've talked

with all the historians of the state, and they can't believe it. And I said, "Yes, but I have records." I was born December 28, 1896. That's one

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generation. But I was the tenth child, and that's thrown me away out. My father was the seventh child in a family of seven. He was the youngest. My grandfather was the fifteenth child in a family of fifteen. And then we go back to Julius Caesar Dugger, who was born in Rumford County, Virginia, in 1720. That's five generations, and you take 1720 off of 1979, and you've got 259 years of one family. And there's no other family... The historians can't believe it, but when they see it, well, they say, "We understand it, because that's so unusual. Your grandfather was the fifteenth child, and you're the tenth, and that's what makes it go so many years." But now they're restoring this house out here, and we're going out there to see if we can find any graves and a lot of graves all around there. But when my great-great-grandfather moved there, his oldest son William was thirteen years old. And his youngest son Julius C. was a very rich man. He owned W Lake is and all the mountains in there, and he owned over 8,000 acres of land. And they got the choice land; they come here early, you see. That land out at Siam is beautiful, level land. I found a boy out there the other day that had my Grandfather William's Bible and certain things that he'd made. I talked to him, and he'd let some old lady have it. The Bible is very old. He died in 1842 at eighty-nine years of age. We're now really interested, and we're going to get all of this up. And if that William Dugger from Virginia did come over here as one of the first Americans to settle here, his family all may have been killed out except his boy or something. But anyway, his name is preserved at Williamsburg. And all of that has just been fortunate; it hasn't been planned, but it just turns out that it's happened that way.

JACQUELYN HALL:

Tell me about yourself. How did you become a lawyer?

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GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

There was no high school in Elizabethton in 1910. I went to the little school at Gap Creek through the eighth grade. I was going to a private school, Harold McCormack. It goes by the elementary school here now. But it was an academy run by the McCormacks of Chicago; it was a private school. I went there two years. In 1912 there was no high school to go to. My father got very sick, and younger children and all, and I had to quit school. So I got a job at the chair factory down here, helping make seat bottoms. I got five cents an hour, and I worked ten hours a day, sixty hours a week, and I got three dollars. Well, I took that home with me, and I worked there for two years, and then I got made a foreman, and I got twelve and a half cents an hour. I bought me a horse and a wild West saddle, and I rode everywhere. I liked to ride, and I learned to ride that horse. Then in May of 1914, they had no way to get rid of the dust in there, and I only weighed 118 pounds, and I was conscious that I wasn't getting along very well. I got to thinking about, "Well, what can I do?" I didn't know no place else to go, so I resigned and went to the Army. I wound up down in Mexico in 1916, and I was a messenger boy for General Patton when he was a first lieutenant, and he taught me a lot of things. I sat out at the door to General Pershing's headquarters--he had a big tent--and any messages he had, he give them to me. They didn't have any telephones, they had no walkie-talkies, and the

only way they could deliver messages to officers in outlying areas was by some soldier. So General Patton would give me a order, and he taught me a lot of good things. He said, "Now, Dugger, that old colonel over there, you be awful courteous to him, because if you get fresh with him he can put you in the guard house and keep you there, and I couldn't get you out. So you'll have to be awful nice to him, because he drinks

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a lot. But don't you give him this order till he signs a receipt. The best way to do it is to hold that order in your hand and say, 'Colonel, Lieutenant Patton instructs me not to give you this order till you first sign the receipt, because he's got to show General Pershing that you've got the order.'

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[TAPE 1, SIDE B]

[START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B]

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

Then I came out of Mexico in February, 1917, and then I got with a motorcycle company, and I traveled the highways inspecting telephones and so forth along the border over there. Then they came to Chattanooga, and I was just a boy--I was only seventeen when I went in the army--and I hadn't seen my family in three years. So I came to Chattanooga, and I got a pass home for five days to come home and see my family. Then later on I wound up in France. I was one of the youngest officers in the army. I commanded a company, and I have a citation over there from General Pershing, and up there is one on the wall where I led the company in a charge and captured eighty prisoners. And I've got the French Croix de Guerre over here on the wall. And that picture over there is General Leonard. He was a second lieutenant in Mexico in 1916, and then he graduated. He's the man that captured the Bridge and shortened the War. He was commander of the Ninth Auto Division; he was a lieutenant general. He came to Fort Bragg, and I was the oldest soldier serving, so he invited me over there when he retired. They had a parachute jump and everything else, and me and my wife and son from Marstown and his wife went over there and stayed at his home two or three days, saw everything. And he came over here and made a speech on Roan Mountain

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and stayed at my home. He died about two or three years ago in San Antonio, Texas.

JACQUELYN HALL:

When you came home from the army, what did you do?

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

When I came home from the army, I got discharged in October 1919, and there was no way to get any work here. The chair factory was running, and they only paid a dollar a day, and I didn't want that. I had been drawing \$201 a month in Germany. (I went to Germany and stayed there for nearly a year.) I left here and went to Pawtucket, Rhode Island, where I had some army friends, and I got made superintendent of a textile mill, and I worked at night. Up there it got down to zero and twenty-six below zero; we were right on the Narragansett Bay. I had an English engineer who was teaching me, and I was going to be a manufacturer's representative. My captain had come from Texas, and he

lived in Boston. That was about forty miles away, and I got a letter from him. It shows you how your life changes. I went up to see him at his home in Boston. He said, "I've been thinking about you. You're twenty-three years old now. I want you to go to college." I said, "I don't know how I'd get in." "Well, you're not too old. You go to college, and I can get you a \$250 scholarship through the YMCA. I've already got it arranged for you." Well, I only had two years in high school. I decided to try it. So I came back home and got a job surveying the road to Roan Mountain. They had contracted it out then, and they had a man that stayed up at Hampton. I had learned in the army as a sergeant to survey and make a map by scale. I'd just learned it on my own. So I went to get a job, and he wanted to know what I could do. I said, "Well, I made a map." [Interruption] I told him I was ordered to make a map to the German border, riding a horse. The major called me one night and said, "You're the only one that can make a map. Now you'll get on this horse, and you'll count the steps of the horse."

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This horse will step so many inches, and you give him his rein and he'll never vary." So we went to the German border and made the map. I got back. I told him, "Well, they told me that the general was going to take 27,000 men over it, and if he got lost, me and the major both'd go to jail. And he didn't get lost." So I got the job. He laughed. He said, "You mean you can make a map riding a horse?" I said, "Yes. In the army they train you how to make a rap riding a horse." The horse steps so many inches, and you just figure it out and draw it." So I got the job, and we surveyed the road to the top of Roan Mountain. We worked there, and the Tweetsie came in every day, and we had no place to go. We worked in the dining room, had our office there, and in the fall I was trying to get into school. So I went down on the train to Tuscom College, because my high school principal in the Harold McCormack Academy here was a professor at Tuscom College. Fortunately, the records had burned, and he didn't remember everything. They gave me an examination, and I had gone to every army school that there was. I had gone to dozens of schools, and I was a pretty good student. I answered their questions, and they entered me in college as a freshman with two sophomore subjects. That got me in. I stayed there that year. Being out of school for eight years was an awful pill for me. I passed everything, but I didn't make any too good grades. Then I went down to the University of Tennessee. I was determined to get a good education. I had waited so long. I went to the University of Tennessee, and the dean registered me. He said, "This is the first time I've ever been called upon to enter a man without a high school diploma. What do you mean?" I said, "I left and went in the army after two years in high school, but I educated myself. I took the examination." He finally admitted me, and about twenty years after that I went back to the University

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to hire a lot of them to come here to the plants to study that gas down there. He was President, and when I went in I said, "Dr. Hoskins, do you remember me?" "Oh, yes, you're the man that didn't graduate from high school." I said, "Well, I went here one year. Elizabethton was so small that I didn't think I wanted to be a lawyer in Elizabethton. So I decided to go to the University of Georgia, where I had a lot of friends, and I transferred to the University of Georgia in the fall of 1922. I went there three years, and I graduated

with first honors. I had the highest grade that was ever made at the University of Georgia. I had 96.32%." But I was married, and I studied all the time. I had no money to spend at anything else. My older son is now fifty-six, and he was born when I was a freshman in the law school at the University of Georgia. He's a Georgia cracker. But the University now is one of the great law schools of the nation. The University of Tennessee is a good one, also. Then you want to know what I've been doing. I've been practicing law for fifty-five years.

JACQUELYN HALL:

You came back here when the plants were built?

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

After I got through at the University of Georgia, Bemberg and North American moved here, so I rushed home, and I took the bar examination here, because I thought everything was going to grow big and I'd get in on the swing of things. Then they had the Hoover Day. I don't know whether you've seen one of them, have you?

JACQUELYN HALL:

Yes.

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

Well, that good-looking man in there that was in charge of all the arrangements, that's me. There was an old man here had a fight over it. Somebody said, "That's not George Dugger. He never looked like that. Too good-looking a man." He said, "Now listen here, I knew George Dugger

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when he looked exactly like that." That was the picture that I used that was made in '25 when I graduated; it was just three years [later] in '28 [that] I managed Hoover's campaign [visit]. We had 150,000 people here. I had been trained in the Army in France how to make provisions for everything, so they put me in charge of all the arrangements. This old fellow said, "Why, I was good-looking back then, too. I resent that talk when we get old, but all of you people are not so good-looking now as you used to be." He just raised cain about it. Anyway, I had to laugh because I ...

JACQUELYN HALL:

How did the plants happen to come here?

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

They came here in 1925. World War I was over, and we were still in Germany in 1919 in the Army of Occupation. The Armistice was signed, but they didn't have peace for a long time. Part of the stock was owned by the Netherlands, and during the War they had confiscated the stock; they took it over. But they got it back out, and they came over here looking for a site. Of course, the South is the ideal place for industries, because the climate is good. They got a-hold of somebody, and the Chamber of Commerce of Johnson City took charge, and they got them located here. They wanted to locate up at Hunter, because they was afraid somebody'd contaminate the river. But the Johnson City Chamber of Commerce put up \$55,000; the Elizabethton Chamber of Commerce put up \$65,000. I didn't have any money at all. I went down to the bank, and they said, "We've assessed you at \$500 to help pay for the land." I said, "Well, I don't have any money." They said, "You don't need none. Sign this note. You'll have money." So I signed it. Then in 1928, the day Hoover was here, the federal judge from Knoxville was wandering

around, and we had committees for the dignitaries. I saw him out there by himself, and I walked over to him. I was head of the reception committee, too. I

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said, "Judge, you don't belong back here. You belong up there at the platform. We have a place up there reserved for distinguished people like you." And they got him up there, and when the thing was over with he came back and he said, "You put on the biggest show in history. You've been in charge of this thing. I want to make you judge of the bankruptcy court for twelve counties." So I was appointed, and I testified before the Senate committee of the United States reorganizing unknown. And then I've had a lot of honors. I'm a privileged member of the Tennessee Bar Association. And I called the secretary and I said, "What's this for?" "Well," she said, "You're seventy-five years old. You've paid your dues for forty-five years, and they want to honor you by making you a privileged member. You'll never pay any more dues or have anything to do. You'll be for life." So I got over here.

JACQUELYN HALL:

Wonderful. Did you become an attorney for the plants?

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

I got down there, and I wasn't well either. I come back to Judge Bob Taylor of Knoxville, a great friend of mine. He was asking me about it. I said, "Well, Judge, there was six of us, and three of them was home in wheelchairs, and three of us got there. And we hobbled up to get our honors." And I said, "It was a pathetic sight to see men seventy-five years old crippled up. I've been paralyzed twice, so I couldn't walk very good." And he laughed, and I said, "Well, that's life for you. You never know how long you're going to live." But I've been paralyzed twice, and now my eyes have gone back on me, and I can't read. The retina in my eyes have deteriorated, and I'm hoping to get the thing straightened out here. I've got income tax and a lot of things, and I want to go to the eye doctor in Johnson City and let him study me and see if he can do anything for me. I can see the figures, but I can't decipher them.

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JACQUELYN HALL:

Did you become the lawyer for the plants?

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

Yes. They had a strike there. I think it was lack of knowledge in a lot of people. They had brought Dr. Mothwurf, a German official, over. They had big, fine horses and everything. They only paid fourteen cents an hour to start with, and they worked twelve hours a day because they had to have a continuous operation. And that was a big mistake. The man that's working twelve hours a day doesn't have any time for recreation or anything, and they got in terrible strikes. They were blowing up the water company and beating them up on the highway.

JACQUELYN HALL:

Why did they pay so little?

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

They kept it about two years. And people went to work. Then a man that had lived out here in the hills and had hunted and fished, it'd take a long time for him to get acclimated

to put him in a closed place. He was restless. I knew all those things, because I'd been in charge as a foreman for two years down here and then as a night superintendent, and I had a union to deal with up there. Now here's where the trouble comes in. Unions are all right if they're run all right. But the manufacturer does not want the politicians talking to the labor, because he stirs up trouble through politics and different things. We had a shop council down there. And because I knew everyone here, was born and raised here, what happened was that I was made attorney in 1929, and we settled everything. But then here'd come a man, and they'd fire some fellow. The general manager was a good man, and this fellow would come in with a family and he'd be worrying like everything. He said, "Now this is politics. I voted against that man's brother for sheriff, and they swore vengeance, and I'm not guilty of this." Well, Major Wolfe was the general manager. He'd call me in. He said, "Now, George, make a secret investigation and see what the truth is to it." Well, you couldn't ever find the truth.

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And so I went back to him, and I said, "Now, listen." He said, "I either have to fire that poor man and uphold the foreman, or I have to change the foreman, and I don't want to do an injustice." "Well," I said, "it's impossible for me to get the truth, and what you need is a union. Then they can have representatives." So we decided, and I installed a union, and we worked good, and we had 6,000 members at one time. And everything went off fine in this country; they built this country back.

JACQUELYN HALL:

How did you install a union?

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

We had a fellow here that I'm writing up in the book. He was a minister, and he got elected president of the union. And they'd come in there fighting mad, arguing and everything, and he'd say, "Now, fellows, let's all be quiet. We're going to have a prayer." And he'd start to praying a long prayer. Well, that quieted them all down, you know. He was a good, honest man, and I want to put his name in my book. I'm going to write the story of him. Because what happened was, they had a strike down there, and in these unions the smart unknown revolutionaries take charge, and they do a lot of injustices. And the solid people go home and get older; they watch the movies and take no interest in anything, just hoping it'll do all right. So what happened was, I was in New York, and General MacNider and I served together, and he was a Harvard graduate, the first minister to Canada unknown. We'd been writing each other every Christmas. He'd written a book about World War I and put my name on the front flyleaf of it. He wrote me in World War II that he was going to the Pacific. He was going to go over as a colonel, and since I was now educated with a distinguished law degree and a former judge with a good record, that I could get anything I wanted. And he wanted me to come in, and he had an agreement with General MacArthur that he could

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have any officer he wanted. "Now," he said, "I will be a colonel, and you can get a commission as a lieutenant colonel, because you're forty-four years old. You go to Washington and get an application, and you'll get a commission probably in the Air Corps, but we'll transfer you." I called Mr. Fuller, the president of the plants, and told him

that I was resigning and going to the Army, that I wanted to go back to the Army. And he said, "Don't you do that. I can't let you go. If you do, I'll never have anything to do with you as long as I live. I'll come to Elizabethton. You meet me there tomorrow." I come back to Elizabethton, and they had a strike on. They had about 300 out. And we talked, and he told me then that they was threatening to kill the Germans and that I'd have to be here because I was a major in the State Guard and I had three companies that I could call in at any time. So I didn't go into the Army; I stayed here, and he raised my salary to \$14,000 a year, and I worked there and helped look after everything all the way through. And we had two or three little strikes, but these boys here had 300 down and they was threatening to close all the plant down. The president of this union called me up on the telephone and said, "I want to bring my committee to your home, and I'll have to come through the back way, because if they knew we were over there they'd accuse us of settling out, but we want some advice." And he brought his seven men over there, and they told me the seriousness of it. But he said, "Half of those men, they fired seventeen of them, and there's seven of them are innocent, and that means the whole plant'll be closed down. So we want to know what you think ought to be done." "Well," I said, "now when I come in on the train this morning, I ..."

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B]

[TAPE 2, SIDE A]

[START OF TAPE 2, SIDE A]

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GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

... from having to close the whole plant down. We had 6,000 people working, and they'd all be out of work. So this man said, "I'll be there at four o'clock." "Now," I said, "you go back over there. You've got about 1,000 men over there, and you've got funds. You buy them Coca-Cola and drinks and tell them that the government man's going to be here, and if they act up now it'll go hard with them. Because you've called him in, and he said he'd come here and be fair about it." So he came in, and he ordered and put them all back to work. And Dr. Vadovichunknown and Judge Ben Allen declared they wouldn't do it. So they called for me, and I said, "Well, he says that he'll have a trial and he'll punish the guilty, because they've tried to beat up some people, and he'll fire every one of them that ought to be fired. But he's got to have time; he can't come back for about a week. He wants everything to cool off." So I talked them into signing it, and they signed it and they all went back to work. Then later on he had the trial, and he fired the guilty ones, and they went away, and they had peace for a long time. But it was this union committee that was trying to do the honest thing.

JACQUELYN HALL:

Could you tell me a little bit more about the 1929 strike?

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

This strike here was in the beginning of World War II, and we had a lot of trouble here, a lot of trouble.

JACQUELYN HALL:

I'm trying to learn about the 1929 strike.

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

That's when we did have all the trouble, but we went into the plant and took a vote, and most of the people wanted to work. And we pledged them all, said, "Now, we're going to give everybody a chance to come back to work, and those that don't come back to work, we'll not put them in here on you." We had 140 people that refused to come back. Then they wanted to get jobs, and they raised Cain. And I was the diplomat.

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I was calling the shots. I said, "Now make an announcement unknown. Let's show that we don't have anything against their family. Let's get the names of all their brothers and sisters, and let's go to hiring them. Give them the preference for a job, and then it'll look like a wart on a man's nose that these other people have done wrong out here, and it's not against the family. If we turn on 140 families here, we've got war. We've got to do this." So we began to call them to work. And it went over ten or twelve years, and then finally the thing got over and we began to slip one or two in. But we never had no more trouble over that, because they found out that we meant business. We went in there and pledged that, that "if you want to strike, that's your business, but if you don't want to strike and they try to run you out of here, we're going to stay with you." And that's what happens shooting at people. The unions gets out of hand, get mad and do a lot of things. And sometimes they've been wrong, and sometimes they have wronged theirself. Human relations is something that is hard to deal with. But the plants here had tax exemption. And they've talked about that, and they lie about that. What happened was that the plants gave the schools a lot more money than they would have had to pay in taxes. But we would give it to the county to pay schoolteachers. During the Depression was terrible. People starved. And I'm scared to death that's what's going to happen again. Because you once get it all out of pocket and they can't get money, something has to happen. And I'm just hoping and praying that we can get some things straightened out.

JACQUELYN HALL:

Tell me about the injunction that the company got against the strikers. You went into the plant to get the bond?

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

Yes. We got an injunction to keep them off the property, see. And I went in, and they had the officials all locked up in the plant and

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wouldn't let them out. The vice-president, treasurer, and everybody, the doctors. They was all in there, and they couldn't get out, because there was a mob out there threatening to beat them up. They were turning over cars and beating them up. We had the lawyers in Johnson City get the injunction, and then I had to take it in the plant to get the treasurer to sign it. When I got to the first entrance, there was about 300 there, and I thought, "Well, I can't make it." I went to the other entrance, and I put my car in low, and I had a ninety-two-horsepower; now you've got 400 horsepower. But I put that ninety-two horsepower, and there was about 300 people in front trying to hold the car. And it was jumping; I had it in low. And somebody hollered, "Get to the side and turn the SOB over." And when they broke loose, I touched forward. And I saw an old man with a brown coat on who was on his hands and knees, and I was bumping him and I didn't want to kill him and I stopped. And a big rock come through the back window. It weighed about two pounds

and landed on my steering wheel and fell down on the ground, but it broke the glass, and I bleed easily, and my face was bloody all over. Well, I got in there. The doctors was all scared, and I told them, "I'm not hurt. It just pricked my skin." And I got treated up, and I had to get out. And I had that injunction signed, and we never did get them all out of the plant. They was eating up the food down there; they couldn't get out. They had 2,000 people locked up in that plant, and they wouldn't let them out. They was marching around there with clubs and sticks and everything else. So I come out the front, and I had a wildcat whistle on. And I put my wildcat whistle on. I let it play. It'd sing like everything. They was out there whooping and hollering, and I started out. And I told some

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of them there then, "I think they've got sense enough to run out of the road, but I'm going across and hit that Bemberg road, and I'm going fifty miles an hour. But I think with this whistle that that'll teach them that there's danger." And they all ran out of the road, and I got across. Then I come uptown and gave it to the deputy sheriff with twenty deputies, all armed, and he went down there and ordered them off the property. He punched them off and got them all off and got it quieted down. Then we got the people out, and then we got back to work.

JACQUELYN HALL:

How did you settle the strike?

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

We settled it by just putting them back to work. We never had no settlements. We just called people back to work. They didn't have enough weight then to do anything. They all wanted to get back to work. Then we improved a lot of conditions and put them on a forty-hour week instead of twelve hours a day, and put them on three shifts. Then we went to raising wages, and we were high wages. We were high industry, and all these homes that you see here was built by those plants. They improved a lot of things. And then they messed them up. The politicians got in it, and a politician cannot handle labor. It's got to be done by the management that's got to deal directly with them. Then they can talk their language and remove a lot of the little frictions. But if the politicians get in there, they stir it up and make it worse.

JACQUELYN HALL:

What did the politicians do?

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

They go and try to control them, you see. They stir it up, talk and do a lot of things. They're only interested in getting votes, and sometimes they make a mistake and they go and get people doing crazy things. Just like up here on the highway, shooting. They shot a doctor up there yesterday. That's the worst thing they could do.

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JACQUELYN HALL:

Did the Chamber of Commerce tell the plant to pay low wages?

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

No. Now, there may have been somebody trying to do that at the first, you see, because this was a little place that they'd never had no wages. There wasn't no wages to get. A man died here three or four years ago, and to show you, when I decided that I had to

leave on account of my health, and there was no other place to go except go to the Army, a young man come and wanted a job. The superintendent was ashamed to tell him that they'd only get five cents an hour, so he'd send them to the foreman, and he'd write a little note to the foreman that this man's pay will be five cents an hour, and you explain it to him. That would make it look like I was doing it. So this boy come in; he'd got married the day before. He was nineteen years old, a bright-looking fellow. I had five or six men working under me there, and I said, "I've got a vacancy, but I hate to tell you I'm only authorized to pay you five cents an hour. And you tell me you got married yesterday. How in the world will you live on that?" And he looked at me very sad. He said, "Mr. Dugger, I don't know, but it's better than what I'm doing now. I'd like to try it." "Well," I said, "I'll give you the job." He went to work, and he'd like to throw his fingernails off trying to... He worked like killing snakes. And in about two months, I decided to leave, and I recommended him for my job. I went to the Army, and I'd come back, and I'd go down and visit him. And then he became vice-president of that chair factory and made a great success out of it. I was always proud of him, and about two or three years ago they was having a parade, and he was marching in the parade and he had a heart attack and died on the street up there. And he waved at me just before he started to fall. It hurt me very much, because he never forgot me giving him this job and

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then recommending him for my place, you see. He went on up to superintendent and vice-president of the factory.

JACQUELYN HALL:

How did the union come in 1936?

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

In 1936 Governor Lehman was Governor of New York, and he was director of the companies here. So he notified us that he'd like for us to have a union, that he thought it'd be better, and we all thought so, too. So there was a young man by the name of Christopher, I think it was, and he was the head of the American Federation of Labor-CIO of the area unknown. He was only about twenty-eight years old. He was located in Roanoke, Virginia, but we kept seeing his name, and they were demanding a union. They had a vote for a union, and sixty-five percent of them voted for it. So I, attorney, called him. I said, "Now, get hold of the Labor Board, and have them certify it. They'll certify it. Then we can act. We'll have sixty-five percent." They said, "The Chamber of Commerce and people here will maul us unknown." I said, "We'll fix them." So I called that fellow on the telephone, and I said, "Now I'm giving you an assumed name. I'm the attorney for these plants. You come to the watchman's post, and I'll have a card there in a fictitious name for you. We don't want the people to know you're here. You'll understand unknown. You come there and turn your name in and get that card, and the guard will show you how to come in the office. You come on in, and we'll be waiting; the general manager and the whole group of our people will be there to greet you. Then we'll talk about settling and having the union, and we'll sign a contract with you for two years." So we signed the contract, and then we installed the union. They'd already taken a vote to have one. Sixty-five percent of them had voted for it. We had it certified, and then we established the union.

JACQUELYN HALL:

Why did you want the union?

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GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

That gave us the right when they called a vote, you see. They had a right to vote. And they had cards printed, and sixty-five percent of them voted to have a union, and then we just adopted their vote and signed a contract with the union, and they took charge. Then they switched it over, and they went back and forth for a long time and had different organizations, but we still held to it.

JACQUELYN HALL:

In 1929, do you remember when the union men were taken outside of town and beaten up?

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

Yes. In 1929, I was a judge of the bankruptcy court for twelve counties. They had a meeting over at the bank, and a friend of mine come and told me that he wanted me to go down there, that they were calling me a "red" and he wanted me to be there. He wouldn't tell me what was going to take place. When I got in there, they elected officers and everything, and they voted to take this man from North Carolina by the name of Hoffman over there and beat him up. And I got up and said, "I didn't know the purpose of this meeting. I'm a high judicial officer. I'm judge of twelve counties here, and I'm supposed to keep the peace, not to join in an unlawful act. And I wouldn't be here if I had known what was taking place. But I want to warn you, you'll be tried in the federal courts of North Carolina for kidnapping, because you can't take a man across a state line, and that's where you'll all be." So then they voted to take him up there and flog him in Tennessee and then run him across the line. And I said, "Well, when you do that, it's three years in the penitentiary for flogging a man, and you'll be prosecuted and you shouldn't do that." So then they voted that they'd take him out and talk to him. There was a Presbyterian minister and a businessman, and they joined me in pleading not to do anything harsh that'd make things

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worse. So we went out, and we were going home. And the minister said, "These men are drinking, and they're liable to hang this man, and then that would bring us more trouble." We looked out the door, and the vice-president of the bank was carrying this man's suitcase--they'd gone in his room and got it--and a policeman had him under arrest. They put him in his car, and the policeman drove it. And they started on in a whole long row of cars. When we got up near the North Carolina line, there was a low road there. We drove down there, and the moon was shining and we could see them. They got up there, and they punched him in the stomach with pistols, and they threatened him pretty bad, and then they started him out. And when he started out, he was flying in that car. He had a Buick roadster. And they started shooting, and they shot 100 times there as he went across the North Carolina line. So the next day he come to town, and they had a deputy sheriff taking him around identifying the people that was there. He met me on the street. Well, he hadn't seen me, because I was 100 feet down in the hollow in a road, and he couldn't possibly have seen me. I just said to him, "Now, mister, the minute that you accuse me, an innocent man, I'm going to prosecute you in the courts here, because my

record is clear." He waited just a minute, and then he said, "No, I didn't see this man," so they didn't arrest me. But they arrested the rest of them and tried to indict them, but the grand jury turned them loose; they wouldn't indict them.

JACQUELYN HALL:

Why did they call you a "red"?

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

They called everybody that didn't agree with them, you see, back then the communists. This man was supposed to be a communist, and he was. The government finally certified him to be. We'd had a meeting at the Chamber of Commerce, and the assistant secretary of labor had made us a speech. He wanted to make a speech to the Chamber of Commerce

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and advise us how to handle the thing. And oh, they wasn't going to listen to him; he was a labor man. Well, I'd been an experienced labor man, and I knew there was good things and bad things in the labor movement. And this man here was the assistant secretary of labor, and he had belonged to the Pressmen's Union that had never had a strike in Boston. They took him out and put him in a car to Bristol, and he come back, and it caused an awful lot of trouble. It didn't do anybody any good.

JACQUELYN HALL:

What was his name?

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

I don't recall right now, but he was always a great friend of mine after that.

JACQUELYN HALL:

Paul Amon?

GEORGE F. DUGGER, SR.:

He's been dead many years now. I don't know exactly.

END OF INTERVIEW