



CENTER CITY

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MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

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Conversations with Downtown People: "the lowdown 'bout downtown"

*First in a Two-Part Series:
An Interview with Cecil Carter
of J. C. Carter Seed Co., 85 S. Front Street*

CENTER CITY: Mr. Carter, you said that you have been working downtown near Front since about 1910. Your seed store has been in four locations up and down Front Row during that time. What was the night life like back then? And what ever prompted the large movie theatres-- like Warner-- to tear down their movie houses?

MR. CECIL CARTER: ...At that time we had live shows here downtown-- the Lyceum at Second and Jefferson. ...They had a special play there, Bud and Pete: a tall man and a short one-- made Jack Benny and that crew look like nothin'. ...And the Lyric down here on Madison where the YMCA is today.

You got me there: why they began the knocking off of the uptown shows. ...I assume that the TV come down and knocked off the picture shows. It's possible that happened all over the country. ...We could use some more picture shows now.

CENTER CITY: What was Front Street like in 1910 and 1915?

MR. CECIL CARTER: ...You have a hide shop... then you have a specialty store where they handle lard and sugar; there was the Nagel, the Flanagan, and the Oakley boys.... ... The cotton exchange used to be on the street around the wagons.... But, [there was] stores up and down Front.

CENTER CITY: Did people live upstairs on Front Street?

MR. CECIL CARTER: That's where the people lived; you didn't have to go all over town- the people lived right over the shops. ...We had two leather companies, Dixie clothing, the Hanovers,...all them people moved out.... But Zimmerman, how come he moved? Tore down the building. How come Millstein? Tore down the building. How come Bland? Tore down the buildings. And they never replaced none of that stuff.

...Had two bakeries, three drugstores, up and down the street-- from Adams to Market. ...I don't know where there's a Laundry.... Where can you do your laundry now?

On Main Street you had the New Idea Cafe, George's Cafe, Nick's Cafe, from Market up to where the City Hall is.

I was located where the Convention Center is at 237 N. Main, then I went to Adams and Front-- the first urban renewal. But that's the times. And you got to get with 'em. But I didn't know they were going to take the whole town.

Now start down at the Convention Center-- Market Square-- there's nothin'. ...The Wolfe tailors was down there, and the Cook and Light....

Yeah, the Porter Building-- one of the best in town-- it had shops in the basement.

CENTER CITY: Do you think people want to live downtown?

MR. CECIL CARTER: ...I know they do. They have to run like ants to find a place to live. They don't want to live in the background or out on Perkins Road. They want to live uptown. Where can you live uptown now?

And people want to see shops. This is the only one. ...You've got the super-duper stuff in other parts of town. They're tearing down too much of the stuff....

All it need is shops, and don't tear down no more stuff. [pause] What they torn down forget about that. Can't get those back. ...We've got plenty of hotels, but I'm sure it's good to build a new hotel.

CENTER CITY: Have you ever lived up here?

MR. CECIL CARTER: Uptown? Never lived up on Front Street-- surely did not. I have to plead guilty and say I have not ever lived in the splendid city of Memphis at no time. I live in the county. I'm always glad to see the city jump. Maybe they'll take in my house someday, but they never take it yet.

CENTER CITY: It's a change of pace: living in the country and working downtown?

MR. CECIL CARTER: Well shucks, I feel like Mr. Snowden-- like the rich folks-- with my country estate. But it's a mere cabin.

CENTER CITY: What about the warehouses on the river? You mentioned the other day that they ought to put more shops in on Front Row.

MR. CECIL CARTER: You need a place for peoples to live-- that's fine-- but too, you need shops all up and down Front. ...We built the Federal Building first. I know, I used to stand in my shop and see the building that was there. ...And the cleaning shop was right in that same establishment.

Cliff Davis was the Congressman.... ...Anyhow, I tell Mr. Cliff: "Come down"; he don't stop; I say: "Come down, I got to see you".... But he came back by with Mr. Crump to take a walk-- Mr. Crump take a walk everyday. He come down with Mr. Crump-- when he was with Mr Crump, he's goin' to come down. "You goin' to tear down those buildings there." "Oh no," that there is Mr. Crump. Don't get me wrong, I didn't talk to Mr. Crump when they were building it. ...You need a government building, that's fine; I know Mr. Cliff needs a fine building to have his office in. But you see the space-- they leave so much space.

"You goin' to build me a store." I said I would build me a seed store on the platform-- you know where the Federal Building is-- they got plenty of room. Used to be stores right there.... Stores is needed in the town for the livelihood of the folks. ...I needed a shop for myself.

Then they build a big garage on the corner of Adams and Front. ...Course there were no shops there: that's public land-- you know. Was no shops there. ...No time put no shops there until you get up to this fire house. The city goin' to build a garage; I know the city goin' to put in the shops-- you know all that yard in the front.

...Public Works Commissioner, Mr. Joe Boyle, was the fella you could talk to,... he listens to what the people say. "I got to have me a store. You tore down my store." I was standing then on the south side of Adams and Front.

Do you see anyone walking up and down the porches at City Hall on the Front Street

and Main Street side. Same thing that happened to Beale Street down there. ...Goin' to tear down to build big buildings. That's fine, if you make some arrangements to take care of the little shops.

CENTER CITY: People don't leave, they are run out then?

MR. CECIL CARTER: Yeah, I've got to stay uptown.... I'll go upstairs: if I'm goin' to identify myself with Front Row, I ain't goin' to quit. No, I got to find a p'ace: I'm ready to go upstairs.

...The Bank of Commerce, they're good fellas, but they done tore down the whole block up there. ...They could put some shops there: all that space is loose. Yeah, you take a step to the basement, but you don't need a step a block long.

CENTER CITY: Is downtown getting better?

MR. CECIL CARTER: ...You don't have quite as much foot tracking. ...I was right there next to the Union Planters Bank Building-- where the parking lot is now-- for many years;... you had a tobacco shop there and a liquor store. ...At any rate, you know that you need that space for that bank, but that bank ain't using that street space.... I could have a seed store there.

Main Street is goo-oo-ood. You been down to Main Street? Walk much man? Customers all the time-- I mean all day long. Just like Christmas: packages, packages, packages. They go out of their way to come and trade with uptown.

Equal Representation? At-large:

Recently, Councilman John Ford proposed to change the present composition of the City Council and to redistrict the City into eleven defined districts, each having a Councilman. Thus, the city-wide seats would be abolished. This proposal is meritorious and it deserves serious community consideration.

Councilman Ford hopes to generate public discourse and debate on this matter. As he explains: "I'm not trying to get this thing passed today, or next week, or next year. My goal, as well as the goal of others in the community who see the fruits of this change,... is to initiate discussion so that we can be in a concrete position to get this thing passed as a referendum item."

Ford believes that the present Council composition is of questionable constitutional validity in light of the Supreme Court mandate for equal representation. Moreover, he points out: "Even if it [the present composition] is legal, in order for us to have more direct representation, more efficiency and more effective representation, we must eliminate some of the bickering and disagreement which really stems from the at-large members not being accountable to a certain constituency."

Since the Council is responsible for enacting laws by which the citizens are governed it should be responsive to the popular will, both collectively and individually. However, it seems humanly impossible for one Councilman to respond effectively

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An Apology to Some, An Explanation to All.

If you have walked over to eat lunch at First Presbyterian Church recently, only to learn that the food was sold out, or, if you have had to stand in a long line to be served, we apologize for any inconvenience you have suffered. We also feel that you are due some explanation concerning the present status of the Civic Center Community Culinary Club.

The CCCCC opened on January 13, 1972 as a service for government workers who had limited access to food service, with the desire and intention of fostering a greater sense of community within the Civic Center area. We initially served 35 to 50 people per day and wondered for awhile if the service would be feasible. We are now feeding 175 plus per day, and struggling to meet the demand. The cost of the meal has always been based on the cost of the service (food+labor+some new equipment). Additional equipment and better management are essential if we are to continue this service. Even more important, is your understanding and support as we try to work out the difficulties we face.

Any ideas or suggestions for improvement of the CCCCC are welcome and may be mailed to the church or given (in writing) to the cashier.

Downtown Festival

There will be a three day Oktoberfest downtown from October 2- 4. The festival will be centered around Court Square.

North and South Court will be closed for the celebration. North Court will house the Court Square Market with hours extended until 6 p.m. The first two days will feature the arts and crafts, and the third day, an antique flea market.

South Court will be the scene of a sidewalk cafe. The ladies of Calvary Episcopal Church will serve coffee and pastries from 8 a.m. until 10:30 a.m. Charlie Vergos of the famous underground restaurant the *Rendezvous* will take over at 11 a.m., serving hot dogs with chili and beer from one wagon, and cheese, ham and salami sandwiches from another.

Plans are being made for Schlitz to set up a beer garden around the gazebo in the park.

Noon concerts can be heard daily: Edwin Hubbard is scheduled for Wednesday, Nell Aspero and *Jeep* on Thursday, and bluegrass on Friday. The MSU girls' gymnastics team will perform Thursday at noon. On Friday there will be an antique car display with balloting by the people for their favorite. And Friday night *Pastiche*, a versatile new musical group, will play at 7 p.m. Delta Airlines will pull its mobile sales unit into the park each day.

In addition, there will be many activities in the Square's grassy clearings. Flowers, peanuts, and cotton candy will be sold; balloons will be given away; artists will be working; and photographs will be taken.

Center City

First Presbyterian Church
166 Poplar Avenue
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At-Large Continued ?

and expeditiously to the needs of 100,000 citizens. Citizens beset with numerous neighborhood problems, such as school affairs, street repairs, taxes, zoning changes and sanitation, deserve and need more receptive and accessible representatives. If there are smaller districts, the Councilpersons could be nearer and hopefully more familiar with and more responsive to their constituents.

Due to the high cost of a city-wide campaign most citizens have been prevented not only from holding, but from even seeking the at-large Council positions. Unless the present composition is changed, the six city-wide seats will remain the exclusive prize of the wealthy, who alone can afford the campaign across the City.

Since the right to responsive representation is a rudimentary right, preservative of all political rights, any proposal that will enhance the voice of the people must be carefully scrutinized and enacted.

CIVIC CENTER COMMUNITY CULINARY CLUB

Serving from 11:30 to 1:00

First Presbyterian Church, 166 Poplar Avenue

PRICE: \$1.25 per serving, including drink

MENU FOR SEPTEMBER 26- OCTOBER 4

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 26

Fried Chicken, rice and gravy, squash and rolls

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 27

Ham, potato salad, green beans and rolls

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 30

Country-fried steak, blackeyed peas, creamed corn, corn bread

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 1

Oven-baked chicken, rice and gravy, peas and carrots, & rolls

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 2

Spaghetti, cole slaw, and French Bread

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 3

Corned Beef, scalloped cabbage, buttered potatoes, corn bread

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 4

Beef stew, tossed salad, and corn bread

*Second-class
postage paid at
Memphis, Tennessee*