

An Oral History Interview

with

LESLIE ABBE

Sept. 1971

by

Anne Elsbree

for

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PUBLIC OFFICE:

Appointive:

City of Rockville Planning Commission--1955-1960

Chairman-1956-1959

Rockville Advisory Committee to Upper County Planning Commission  
Chairman

Rockville Board of Appeals--1960-1964

Rockville Civic Center Commission--1966-1970

History consultant to Civic Center Commission--1970-1972

Author of article published by Montgomery County Historical Society Feb. 1972

"The Story of Judge ~~Richard~~ Johns Bowie, Chief Judge of Maryland 1861-1867"

SPECIAL HONORS AND AWARDS:

Academic: graduation first honor 1913 Hazardville Grammar School

graduation first honor 1917 Enfield High School

Collegiate: Tau Beta Pi--Engineering Honor Society

Sigma Xi--Research Honor Society

Worcester Polytechnic Institute--1922

Salisbury Prize (one of top three honors)

Educational:

1st Annual Hornbook Award, Montgomery County Educational Association

"For distinguished contributions to public education"

National Congress of Parents and Teachers 1961 Life Membership

Maryland Congress of Parents and Teachers-1949 Life Membership

Richard Montgomery High School P.T.A.--1963 Life Membership

"Man of the Year" award, Hungerford Town Civic Association-1961

Rockville Little Theatre--1964 Life Membership (free pass)

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with Leslie Abbe

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This is the first of a series of interviews with Leslie Abbe at his home in Rockville on September 13, 1971. The interviewer is Anne Elsbree.

First, we should mention that for over twenty years Leslie Abbe's name was associated with organizations and action on behalf of public education in Montgomery County, Maryland, and the metropolitan area. At the same time Leslie Abbe was involved in efforts to reform and revitalize the municipal government of Rockville.

Mr. Abbe, can you tell us about when you came to Rockville and why you picked Rockville for your home in the national capital area?

ABBE: Well, as I recall now, when I came here at the beginning or really just before the war--the Second World War--I was looking for a place to settle with my family, which then included four growing children, a community that would be a pleasant and relatively quiet place in which these children could grow up and which we could enjoy in society as neighbors and not an urban--fully urban--setting.

Expense was a factor, too. We then searched about--or I did before Mrs. Abbe got down here, and my work brought me back to Washington--for the suburban fringe, as it is called nowadays, of the Washington area. I remember I visited Falls Church, which then was quite a tiny place and not the thriving young city that it is today; and I visited Riverdale over in Prince George's County which was a less well defined, I think, community area.

I came to Rockville on the suggestion of an acquaintance I had made in Washington and this man took me about some. I talked with him also about the place a little and something of the schools, and it seemed to me this seemed to meet our interests better than the other places I had seen, and we decided that this would be worth our choice.

Before I did this I, however, made two other inquiries. I visited the clergyman of the church of our preference and had a chat with him. I also visited the superintendent of the school system--that system, of course, being

very much smaller than it is today--and after some difficulty in arranging an interview, we had a pleasant chat. And I found that he got relatively confidential after he understood that I knew about budgets and showed me--among other things--his projected capital budget for the coming year. To my astonishment this budget had only five items in it.

ELSBREE: Oh my heavens!

ABBE: These were in three successive priorities, and there was no total on the budget. He was dealing with a political fact of life in which he asked for things in small dribblets and was happy about getting whatever he could, and he was not about to frighten any of the powers that were over grand totals.

ELSBREE: Who was the superintendent then? Was that Dr. Broome?

ABBE: This was Dr. Broome in his middle years--I guess that's a fair estimate of the timing. This indicates in a very simple way some of the extreme difficulties under which the man operated. I concluded in this relatively short interview that he was an able man working under great difficulties to accomplish as much as he could for the boys and girls, of which he was very fond. So much for that at that time.

Anyhow we came to Rockville and we found half of a double house that had been empty--that side of it--all winter, and we came in March. It took a little while to get adjusted to a different climate than we had been living in for a time, but this took care of itself gradually, and the social climate my twelve year old daughter adjusted to in six weeks, saying "you all" in no time.

ELSBREE: A southern accent?

ABBE: I, myself, had spent ten years either in--or crossing for business into--the Kentucky environs so that to say that sort of thing had

already come naturally to me--or at least familiarity with it--as well as a southern, more leisurely temperament, and it didn't take me long to settle into Maryland.

Some other things about Maryland that it took longer to get acquainted with--the habits and justifications for and understanding of, which I will talk about at another time or a little bit later.

ELSEREE: All right, let's stop just a minute and let me check the machine.

ABBE: Now, continuing, I think that perhaps I'd like to talk, first of all, about my concern about school affairs. It became important to me right away, of course, because of my children--three of whom were in public schools. The fourth didn't arrive until the next year. You see I wasn't ready for that as yet.

ELSEREE: I see.

ABBE: I found that the Maryland school system was administered on a county-wide basis and that it was run by a board of education chosen at the state level by the governor and not having anything to do directly with the people at home in the county. This was true all over the state.

This was an entirely new idea to me who had grown up on New England elected school boards in the various small towns or cities, as the case might be. This may not have been inherently out of line with good practice if the results were good, but I wasn't happy with the results I began to observe. I found, gradually, that inferior staffing flowed from inferior management at the top of the county level and that--this is not criticizing the superintendent, his hands were tied--but that buildings were not properly taken care of.

ELSEREE: How were his hands tied?

ABBE: Well, the management of the buildings was under an official over whom he had no control.

ELSBREE: I see. State control, I guess.

ABBE: There was a state law carefully managed by the local political leadership which provided a supervisor of school property. This official directed all of the janitors in all of the schools and fired same for good support--or lack of support--for the party. The floors in the nursery school or the kindergarten may have been cleaned once a week--if the janitor felt like it--and this sort of thing. The teachers and the principal could do nothing about this--neither could the superintendent. This was one of the evils of the existing administrative structure. It was nailed down in state law.

The bus drivers were also under the control of the supervisor of school property. There was considerable busing. It was done to bring in people from outlying areas--in the rural area and semi-rural--to the nearest schools. There wasn't criss-cross busing--very little of that. But we did have the beginning of a kindergarten system even then, and it began to be increased to other areas as time went by.

There were some good features. The superintendent had already engineered a pension system for his teachers beyond anything else around the state, I came to find out. But he did this on his own, and it had worked better as an attractive feature of his system.

Now the zoning structure though, being what it was, there was little incentive to try--at the parent-teacher level--to improve some of these conditions it seemed--at least on spot situations. The parent-teacher movement I found, in this area, had once had a collective enterprise known as a Parent-



Teacher Federation. This, for some reason that I wasn't fully able to learn about, had fallen apart and its limited treasury was held in abeyance. There had been one, and there was no such federation in existence in 1941 when I came to the county. Two or three years later an able member from the county of the state Parent-Teacher Association tried to bring about a rebirth, so to speak, of some unity among the local parent-teacher bodies in the county who had no connection with each other at that time--just tending to petty matters in their own schools--mostly raising money that the public purse would have provided for in their own set-ups. This person, Mrs. Thomas Pyle, got, I think, seven or eight school groups to send representatives to a meeting in the spring of '44, at the Richard Montgomery High School, to consider bringing together--forming a new body--a county PTA Council. After some chat they decided, yes, they would like to do this; and so a committee was set up to form some kind of a structure and to nominate some officers. Another meeting was held at the Woodside Elementary School in the fall of that year, and such a constitution was adopted provisionally and officers chosen. That was how the present PTA Council got organized in this county. The first president was one Howard Noyes.

Nothing much happened that first year. The group did not grow particularly--maybe one or two other groups, I don't remember. Came spring there was time for, under the new rules, a spring annual election. I was named to a nominating committee, I remember. The committee met and discussed candidates for office. They threw me off the committee and then nominated me as president, after which, it turned out, I was elected at the election meeting as the second president of the PTA Council. Well, I knew there was much to do, and I had some good help in the council of officers and the committee chairmen--which constituted the board of

the new county PTA Council. This, you'll remember, would be in the spring of 1945. This was--although we didn't know it then--the end of the war and the return to a more normal domestic situation.

ELSEREE: Yes.

ABBE: I would note in passing that during the war the school system had been static. It had not grown and had between six and eight hundred new additions annually--of students to enrollment--for the whole county.

ELSEREE: That's amazing, considering 5,000 today.

ABBE: And we consider facts today.

ELSEREE: Yes.

ABBE: Now against that burden, Dr. Broome had done pretty well in carrying along. He had been able to cope with teachers for that load and plant of some sort. But while we didn't know it, we were on the verge of a very large upturn of enrollment, and the first thing was more budget to get ready for the situation which we knew was bad without knowing anything about the big boom that was ahead. So our council by the spring of '46--before budget time--made a decision to go after an increase in budget--for a twenty-five percent increase in the school budget. Now this was astounding and unheard of. In the first place, citizens hadn't yelled about money before. In the next place, that was a great big shock to the comfortable-managed economy of the existing county government.

I should pause a moment to explain that the budget process had been a backroom affair of the ruling political party in which the school board--being tools of the county government--had only done what they had been told to do, and within the framework of a budget that was pre-set at a tax level of a

dollar and a half. Whatever the assessed valuation, they got that much total, but that was the rate. This had been going on for some time. There was a perfunctory hearing on the budget. I went to one of them--Oh, I don't know--a year or two before this date that we wanted more money, and was intrigued by the process. There was only a handful of people there and shadowboxing about a total amount, don't you know. This was in the big county courtroom in the courthouse.

ELSBREE: I see.

ABBE: It looked very hollow--the whole operation--because it didn't matter. Everything was under control, you know.

ELSBREE: Were there many citizens that spoke?

ABBE: Oh, no, nobody spoke. There was a half a dozen there to look on.

ELSBREE: I see.

ABBE: And that was that. Now when I think about how a decade years later perhaps, when the PTA council had evolved its full strength, there were twelve hundred people at a budget hearing. You see what had happened in the interlude. That was a long jump beyond this beginning. Our first step was to say we want twenty-five percent more budget. Well, this was an astounding anathema to the complacency of the powers that be because more taxation might be unattractive to the supporters of a political party. One doesn't know.

When I talked to a meeting of the Board of Trade--I think that's the term--in Silver Spring in the spring of '46 about this interest in having a larger budget, it turned out to be an interesting occasion. The political chairman, Brooke Lee, was there, and a number of his lieutenants were sprinkled around the room--this being one of their strongholds, this Board, by which they

operated on the business sector, having themselves had a hand in evolving the Silver Spring community to their greater gain through planning.

I told them that I had noticed the sign at the entrance to Silver Spring which read, "Silver Spring, the complete community" and I told them that that was nonsense. It was not a complete community if they woke up and realized that their best industry was the national government in Washington, and that they were dependent upon that. They were not a complete community, and that if they had really been smart they would try now to begin to cultivate that community just like Miami did its tourist industry as a support for its economic life, and that this idea of increased support for education was one of the things that would make their community more attractive. As a complete community they were nothing. If the business of the national government were not there, they would be just a little village on the edge of another little village down at the falls of the Potomac where there were oyster fisheries.

ELSBREE: What was their reaction to your remarks?

ABBE: I went on with this. They didn't debate with me about it very much, but their liutenants began to move over and sort of bunch around the boss. It was clear that a dent had been made on their ego and two weeks later the chief had a meeting in Gaithersburg, which was their concentrated focal point of the faithful through the bus drivers and many of the custodians of schools. They had gatherings there anyhow and the word was passed that "This guy Abbe is going around preaching this doctrine of much more money for taxes. You won't like what he is saying but you've got to pay some attention. We've got to give a little on this." The word had got through that something had to give a little, you see.

ELSBREE: Now what about parents?

ABBE: Well, through the PTA we began to make some dent. Our first effort had to be to build up more membership. In two years we did it from a limited membership of say seven or eight or nine schools at the beginning of '45. In the summer of '47 when I left the presidency--I only served two terms--we had thirty-three members--and that was all but two very small schools in the upper county--as members of our County Council.

The sticking point among some of them had been, "But if I join I have to pay up money to belong to the state, and I don't get anything from the state. What do they do for me?" And at that point my private view was, "Damn little, dearie" but that was part of the deal. Their ten or fifteen cents dues, of course, went to the State and National. But we were working on that one, too, and presently it got to be a better working relation with the State and some benefits from that. But the fact that we got that membership in two years to all the schools virtually was considerable gain in backup prestige for this County Council and we went on from that to add, as they grew--as more schools were built to meet the demand for more space for more children--it kept coming in right along. And, incidentally, we were for some years at a place where we had one-fourth of the total membership of the State PTA.

ELSBREE: Yes. Let me ask you about the quality of education during those years. We've talked about the need for new facilities.

ABBE: Yes.

ELSBREE: Did Montgomery County have a good reputation and did it live up to that reputation, do you think, in the '40's?

ABBE: I can't document that at this point. I'm too far away from it.

ELSBREE: Yes.

ABBE: My impression is that it was pretty good because here was old Dr. Broome. In many ways he was like a mole under cover and you didn't

know just exactly the extent of his efforts and the quality he was getting, but he was oftentimes striving, and my impression is that it was above average within the limitations that had been imposed on him. He was ahead of the field. That may not have been as good as he himself, or you and I, would have liked at that day but I think he was getting a better class of teachers, and he was way ahead on curriculum planning. I know that. He had annual summer workshops very early for his teachers in planning. That was a part of his strong point. He was strong on curriculum; he was strong on buildings and, I think, on quality of teacher training--given his own freedom of action on all of these things. He wasn't good on community relations. When the PTA began to get some strength, he didn't know how to use it. He was afraid that they were breathing over his shoulder, you know, about what they were going to do. He didn't know, for a while, that they were his real friends. But he came to realize this, and the best evidence of that is that when there came his decision to have a man of professional standing to replace the Supervisor of School Property. Oh, by the way, that was one of the early fights the PTA Council won with the help of the State Superintendent, Dr. Pullen. We had made an effort, very carefully argued about, as to how we should go about getting rid of that state law. We had a public meeting to which we invited representatives of both political parties and the leading civic bodies and the PTA Council to sit down and have a little discussion. What's the best way to approach this problem of this Supervisor of School Property? What should we do about it? It was just bland as anything, out in the open.

As we knew, the Republican party didn't send anybody. The Democrats sent their best spokesman, Alfred Noyes, who was not a judge then. He was there quite early. They sent him around to represent the party, and the upshot of it

was we would draft some legislation to specify what kind of a guy it should be on that job. And then we went on to see Dr. Pullen, and he pulled a rabbit out of the hat and said, "Just move for a repealer. Then Dr. Broome can appoint a professional, and I have to pass on his qualifications." And we did just that.

ELSBREE: So the state superintendent was really helping you then?

ABBE: Oh yes. Oh yes, he was all for this. He knew all about the mess.

ELSBREE: So there wasn't this fight we have now between state and local?

ABBE: Well not quite. Oh no, I don't know about any local scraps now but Dr. Pullen, at that point, was all for improving this political-ridden county situation. He knew how good Dr. Broome was, sure, but he couldn't do anything except that kind of a counsel, you see. So we got the Legislature to repeal that. . . . After this publicity on that meeting--we knew it would be good publicity--that little meeting on what to do about that act. We didn't say we were going to have a meeting to repeal it. We said we were having a talk about it. You see?

ELSBREE: Yes.

ABBE: But in the meantime then, Dr. Broome had been scouting for a man and he got a line on Dick Carpenter, who was an engineering graduate from Dartmouth and who, if he had not taken our post, would have headed the Building Management of Columbia University.

ELSBREE: Oh, that sounds like an impressive job.

ABBE: Oh yes, Carpenter was playing around with something in West Virginia. No, he had another man from there, that was it. Ned Broome called in the PTA Council and said, "Look, I've got these candidates, what do you think about them?" Now this was the first overt

gesture like that that Broome had made to the Council of PTA, but it showed he respected our judgment, you see. We got the way open for him to do this, and we agreed with him that this man Carpenter looked real good. So he came on in the late fall of '46, if I remember it, to manage this business of maintenance--upkeep of the place--and run the buses. He got stuck--without his ever realizing it till he was on the job--with a five-year program of new construction that cost \$25,000,000 then.

ELSBREE: Wow!

ABBE: And he was dead tired when he got through with it. We gave him a "thank you" party after work. But we were so lucky to get him with this thing facing us--and we didn't realize it was ahead.

ELSBREE: Do you think that he did a good job?

ABBE: Oh yes, he did a first rate job. Then he was so tired he wanted to quit, and he did. He took a soft berth with NEA downtown in Washington on something similar as advisor, and so on, but I didn't blame him a bit. He had worn himself out managing two jobs in one really, you know, bossing all that construction design--I mean supervising it--plus this operation.

ELSBREE: Yes. Can you remember how the principals were chosen for the schools then?

ABBE: No, I don't know that I can say very much on that subject. It was an administrative decision of Dr. Broome's, I guess. Well he had, by this time, some one or two top administrative assistants. He was reluctant to do that, too--to delegate, you know, for a time--until he absolutely had to. You know for \$25,000,000 new buildings, he had a lot of new schools to manage.

ELSBREE: That's right. Yes, a lot of problems.



ABBE: I think he was slow about delegating top level administrative authority, as I remember it, but I'm so far away I can't really talk to this now. One person who I think is out of the system--or nearly so--Guy Jewell, might be able to talk usefully on that subject. But I can't really.

ELSBREE: Who was that?

ABBE: Guy Jewell. I think he is out of the system. You can check on that. As long as he is in the system it might be a little embarrassing to him to discuss it, but he was first a principal then a supervisor then a top-flight administrative assistant somewhere up the line in the system. He has lived in the county all his life--had grandfathers on both sides in the Civil War--from Damascus. So he's quite a guy.

ELSBREE: How about the time when we got an elected school board?

ABBE: Yes. Now first, after we got squared away on a better operating plant, then came the matter of. . . Well, even before that--no right after that--we began to be more and more uneasy about this inferior people under the thumb of the political party managing the school board, you see. We took counsel with ourselves and decided that the first step, usefully, might be to have a "study" of the mode of selection of school board members.

ELSBREE: I see.

ABBE: And this produced what is ever since known as the Stowe Report. Mrs. Beatrice Stowe was chairman of that committee. And another person, who has gone on--as she did not--to high office in the state, Thelma Romoser, was also on that committee. They met with me and one or two other people of the Executive Board of the Council and knocked out a

study of the subject. They brought out a report in 1947 called the Selection of School Board Members in Montgomery County. They had references, study sources and their applications and examination of the particular problem here. It got a wide interest and was the beginning of an effort in the Legislature for the bill in 1948 to provide for an elected board here. Now this was unheard of in the Legislature, you know, none of the other counties had ever had anything like this. And next the bill was sent to the Judiciary Committee, not Education Committee. (Laughter) We consider this Judiciary. Well, there was a hearing. Dr. Pullen, the State Superintendent, came and testified against the bill. He didn't think it was wise to have a different scheme in one county than in the rest of the state, and he was against it. I testified for it. I don't know just what I said except that we thought that we ought to choose our own people.

ELSBREE: Was this for the PTA Council?

ABBE: Yes. It was reported out unfavorably, but it was reported out.

ELSBREE: That was some victory, I guess.

ABBE: Yes. And it was defeated quite decisively on the floor of the House, and that was that. We tried again. At that point we had biennial sessions of the Legislature--not every year as we do now.

So in 1950 we had another bill. This time it was referred to the Education Committee, which was something of a gain. In the meantime we had been having annual--I forget, maybe biannual--nominating conventions. We proposed this idea in the PTA Council. But in order to manage it on a non-partisan basis, we set it up to have five bodies plan the convention--the PTA Council, the Negro PTA body, (which then still existed. There were quite a few independent Negro schools. Remember this was before the Supreme Court decision of '54)

and the League of Women Voters, and the two major county civic associations-- the Civic Federation, and I don't remember whether it was the AAUW or the Allied Civic, it may have been that. Anyway, there were five bodies who were invited to plan the holding of a convention. Then all interested civic bodies in the county--and definitely excluding the political parties--were invited to send one or two delegates--I forget which--to a nominating convention, at which time candidates for the Board might appear and present their statements. Then the convention would vote on a choice of candidates. This technique was done twice.

The first time our little slate of. . . Oh, we acted to choose of three. . . in the convention to forward to the Governor who then still had the appointive power, you remember, from which we hoped he would feel able to choose one for the annual vacancy then accruing. That's the way it was at that time under the state law. He, the first time, ignored our request and made a usual political appointment. This caused a good deal of uneasiness in the county.

ELSBREE: Who was the Governor then? Do you recall?

ABBE: I'm not sure whether this was Lane or which one it was. The next time around we had a second convention and, with lots of public interest and press attendance, we named three people. The Governor then did a very interesting move. Just before the convention there was a vacancy created--not a normal vacancy. One of his strongest political supporters was on that Board. He suddenly discovered that he was too busy with his legal practice to serve any longer on the school board. Now he resigned, and that left a second vacancy. The Governor then named one of our candidates from our little list to the short term vacancy and filled the full vacancy with one of his boys.

ELSBREE: I see. So he was making some concession then to your. . . .

ABBE: It's what I like to call a queen's gambit in chess. Anyway these moves had occurred before the second round of the Legislature, in 1950, with our second bill. This went to the Education Committee, as I said. Now the Education Committee had a more sympathetic chairman. This man, I think, was from Prince George's County--a man who wanted to be friendly to everybody--very amiable, genial sort of person on the surface. When the chips were down I couldn't be sure how he would vote--ever.

Dr. Pullen came again, and again opposed the bill. This time we were pretty well ready for him. We said in testimony we were very fond of Dr. Pullen. We think he is a fine superintendent, but this is none of his business. This is a matter between you--the Legislature--and we--the people--on how we choose the people who will manage the remaining authority after the board carries out all of the provisions of the state law and the state school board regulations. It's not the superintendent's business how we pick out those people. And there was a little horse trading under the table. The Montgomery County delegation gave the Baltimore County delegation a little something that they needed for their political affairs. And the Baltimore City--I'm sorry, Baltimore City delegation, which is a big one--said in public, "Well, we haven't anything really hard against Montgomery County. If they would like to have this thing, let's give it to them. But there's just one thing: Let's find out if they really want it. Let's put a referendum vote on the bill." So they did. They said, "All right, we approve this bill so that it includes a referendum vote at home as to whether they really want it or not. They must vote yes or no on this particular bill."

ELSBREE: Just in Montgomery County--the referendum?

ABBE: Just in Montgomery County, yes, on this bill which applied to Montgomery only, for an elected board in that county. Now wasn't that sweet of the Baltimore City delegation?

ELSBREE: Do you mean that sarcastically?

ABBE: Well in a kind of a bland way. Anyway, that's what happened. I just learned the other day that it was a bit of horse trading that put that there.

ELSBREE: Were you fearful of not getting the referendum vote you needed?

ABBE: Now we come to that.

ELSBREE: O.K.

ABBE: So the next thing was: We take our bill home and we proceed for a referendum. Now look what happens. This session was in 1950--in the spring. The bill called for a referendum. So we proceeded in November 1950--I forget when--to hold a referendum on this measure as a sole issue on a referendum vote with no other issues and no elections for people--nothing else for the voters to come out for except to vote yes or no on this particular kind of an election law for a school board.

ELSBREE: Very interesting.

ABBE: An acid test.

ELSBREE: Yes.

ABBE: We won it about three to two on a total vote of ten thousand in 1950. That is a very interesting reflection on election support or apathy--I don't know which it was for that total electorate. It wasn't a very big turnout, but there it was. So then we had an elected school board by statute in the one county of the state, and that vote made it applicable to become effective on November 6, 1951, which in a couple of

months will be twenty years from today.

ELSBREE: Right. Yes.

ABBE: And we were noting it, a friend of mine and myself, the other day. We're up to twenty years with an elected board. They had an election in '51.

ELSBREE: Oh, they did?

ABBE: Yes. You see the vote was in '50. Under that law then, the next time there was an election, they voted for positions.

ELSBREE: But now we are on an even year.

ABBE: Well, that's been changed since.

ELSBREE: I see.

ABBE: Yes. There was an interim term, I think, there to get to an even year. Anyhow, that brought that thing to an end, and we had an elected board--the only one yet in the state. Down in Calvert they are toying with the matter, and I don't know what is coming of that. I've been told. I haven't followed it at all. But there are a number of counties that have had nominating conventions. This idea is catching on to advise the Governor of their wishes at home, so that the Governor knows that he doesn't have quite as free a hand as he used to on these board appointments.

ELSBREE: Why do you think Montgomery County got and wanted an elected school board and the other counties in the state have not in the twenty years?

ABBE: Well, Montgomery County has been an advance guard leader on new ideas. It also has, more than any other county, a mixed citizenry from around the country with ideas from around the country about ways to do things. It is no longer typically Maryland in its population, brought here by the National Capital and its governmental population. In other words,

it's more like a cross section of the national thinking. Maryland has been a traditional small town state. The City of Rockville, with 45,000 or 46,000 population, is the second largest city in the state today. It tops Annapolis and Frederick, which are the next runners-up.

ELSBREE: I didn't realize that.

ABBE: Next to Baltimore, you see, and Baltimore is 850,000 or something like that. Then you see we don't have big towns. Fifty thousand is not a big town; it's a good size town, but we don't even have those. Salisbury is coming along in there, and then there is Hagerstown and Cumberland. Then what else have you got? Nothing.

ELSBREE: Nothing.

ABBE: Elkton, Belair or Havre de Grace--they just don't have them and you see, so you have a small town psychology, sociology, too, and that also one that has stayed put, has grown, evolved over the last hundred years in a very slow way from earlier days. And then, too, it's been without the idea of meeting together to decide issues in town meetings. Now there's been enough of that leaven in Montgomery County, and some of it coming in Prince George's, that we've gotten this sort of thing. These county charters are catching on. There are five now, I understand.

ELSBREE: Are there that many? I didn't realize that.

ABBE: Yes. That's been moving. Baltimore County has it, and Anne Arundel has it, and I think Wicomico. I'm not sure of that one, but I think there are five besides Montgomery and Prince George's. But I know from the tempo in the state PTA meetings that Montgomery was regarded with suspicion and doubt as being a crazy pioneer on new ideas, you see. We have deplored this. We want to be neighborly and friends and not thought of as

the crazy, wild ideas place. But the elected board is here to stay. Now we have made some mistakes under it, I think, but that is another story. The point is that you are responsible for your mistakes. The other way, you can't help what somebody does to you. You can't throw a governor out on what he did in a county on the school board.

ELSBREE: That's true, but you can elect different school board members.

ABBE: Yes, it's your own fault if you. . . .

ELSBREE: Four years later.

ABBE: And you may have a bad time for a while. We did have one but we can do better another time, and this is the process of learning under a democratic system. In the long run, you benefit by it.

Now this is the lesson I brought from my training and maybe inherent background out of New England. But I would know also that it may be especially inherent in my own immediate forebearers because one of my ancestors came to Hartford with Thomas Hooker and that colony in 1639, made a deal with the two neighboring towns under the famous Fundamental Orders of 1639 when Hartford, Windsor and Wethersfield made the first written constitution.

ELSBREE: Oh.

ABBE: Yes. It's quite famous in political science. It was the first written constitution. It's different from the Mayflower Compact in which those people on the ship decided they would stick together.

Here were three towns--oh, ten miles apart--that said, "We will constitute a government and join together in these Fundamental Orders," and out of that the government of the state today is a compact of separate towns.

ELSBREE: Yes. Very interesting.

ABBE: It's not like Massachusetts where the Commonwealth is the show and the towns don't have much to say about it.



ELSBREE: Yes. Could you talk a little bit about your experiences on the Maryland State PTA?

ABBE: Well, yes, a little bit. There, as I think I have suggested or may have mentioned before, the Executive Board of the Maryland State PTA has evolved over the years into a pretty unwieldy body. Besides its elected officers--the usual ones--there are quite a large number of committee chairmen, all members of the board. All of the county council presidents, according to my last advice about it, if it is still true. . . .They've been toying with some adjustments. They may even have some district vice presidents, too.

ELSBREE: That is a large number of people.

ABBE: Offhand, about sixty.

ELSBREE: It makes it cumbersome.

ABBE: It does, indeed. The executive body is around ten or a dozen--I forget, about a dozen I think--and they meet in between times. The board meets two or three times a year, and it's pretty cumbersome, but it has been pretty staid and reactionary. One or two ideas that percolated through that came from Montgomery County--originated there, I mean--and were fought through on the floor of the convention, usefully--such a matter as the life membership regulations.

ELSBREE: Is this for the life membership award that you were given?

ABBE: Yes. The nature of it was originally invented purely as a monetary matter to get money in the state treasury.

ELSBREE: Oh. (Laughter.)

ABBE: One of our lively men, way back in my earlier days in the Council of Montgomery County came up with the idea that in order to have some honorary purpose and that it would be useful then to get that

spelled out, and so he proposed a measure to this end on the floor of the convention to be studied by a committee and referred back to the convention next year. This was at the time when every resolution or proposal for the convention had to filter through the Board of Managers. He shortchanged the Board by that resolution which was adopted by the convention, and the Board didn't have a look at it.

ELSBREE: Oh, my heavens.

ABBE: A chance to veto it. This is probably twenty years ago now, you see.

ELSBREE: Yes.

ABBE: It was a very nice piece of work. Well, the committee did report back, and after it was modified a little by debate, it was adopted. It set up--oh, I forget, not too great a sum--\$25 for the fee for this honorary membership, paid, say, by the County Council to the State Treasury, and except for the expense for some jewelry, it went into a kitty for scholarships, you see.

ELSBREE: Yes.

ABBE: And these scholarships go on now ever since. They've got a scholarship committee that administers them. I served on that--by the way--as chairman for a while--after the first one was retired--and we've done quite a bit of good with it, but primarily because a member who I got to serve on that committee was "pal-sy" with a rich woman who put in \$5,000 a year anonymously.

ELSBREE: Oh.

ABBE: Wasn't that nice?

ELSBREE: It certainly was. I think maybe we'd better stop for today.

ABBE: All right.

ELSBREE: I think we have covered a lot. Thank you very much.

ELSBREE: This is December 15, 1971, and this is the second interview with Mr. Abbe at his home in Rockville.

Mr. Abbe, we'd like to start again talking about the Maryland State PTA which is where we left off several months ago. Could you talk about the state PTA and particularly the Rules Committee that you were involved with?

ABBE: Well, somewhat later than the episode that we have already discussed, the incoming president of the state PTA asked me to come on the Board as Chairman of their Rules Committee, and to set about organizing a formal structure for the operation of the State Board itself. This is a study in the management of the Board, including the definition of the duties of the twenty-odd committees. The Board, incidentally, was an unwieldy body of some sixty members, including these committees to which I have just alluded and twenty-four county and City of Baltimore council presidents, as well as elected officers.

ELSBREE: It was quite a large group then?

ABBE: Well, it was too great. It still has kept about this structure. There was an executive committee, within this body, of about twelve or fourteen who carried on between annual meetings of the Board. There was also a summer meeting in connection with a so-called summer conference or workshop.

Now it should be noted that at this stage the state membership of local associations within this state framework had a membership, ranging over this term of years or in this period, of from 25,000 to 50,000 or more members and was potentially a powerful body to influence public opinion and even legislation, but was less than really effective because of ineffective leadership. It took me two years to organize completely that set of working rules for the Board's own operation because of limited interest of the Board itself in facing up to the problem of such restructuring of their own affairs.

We did it finally, and the proof of the pudding is that a succeeding Rules Chairman not only maintained that structure but proceeded to elaborate on it by a numerical identification system--which I thought was really going a little too far.

However, leaving that subject now, I think we need to talk about the later growth, which has grown faster than the state body--I mean the local membership growth with our rising school population. The state growth has outstripped the competence of the state over the years to keep pace with it, and that's another story which is not my province.

ELSBREE: Well, did you want to talk a little bit about the Junior College and how the idea came about--if there was any opposition to it?

ABBE: Well, to the best of my knowledge, the concept of Montgomery's Junior College--as it was known until recent times--began in the later years of World War II when Dr. Broome saw an opportunity with the returning men from service to provide them with a college level of education with federal funds that were being provided, if he had a plan to do it in. With his usual ingenuity, he secured one of the discarded military buildings--which were known as quonset huts--and installed that at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School and, with that plus the school buildings, set up a provisional junior college there in the evening. That was the beginning of Montgomery Junior College.

ELSBREE: When? Do you remember when?

ABBE: I can't pinpoint what particular year, but I think it was before the end of the war. The next step was acquiring the Bliss Electrical School in Takoma Park, about the time the private owners were getting ready to go out of business, as a permanent site for a junior college and it served reasonably well for some years.

The next major expansion was buying property in Rockville, with some planning help from the City Council of Rockville, for that major new step-- what is now the principal campus there in Rockville. The Bliss School had been an engineering technical school, and of course that served quite well for some of the scientific aspects of a proposed junior college program and had academic features grafted on to it. It's step by step, in this way, that Dr. Broome inched his way along into an entirely new field with his usual skill and vision. I had nothing really to do about the evolution of this thing, but I was much interested in watching it grow.

ELSBREE: Good. There were several things to do with the public schools that you were involved in. One was the Negro Schools Committee, and then there was the Maryland-Virginia Citizens Committee for public schools.

ABBE: Yes. The Negro Schools Committee is a little difficult for me to spell out at this late date. I think it essentially related to providing more modern schools for our Negro children. We had had long ago some frame school buildings, built with money from the Rosenwald Fund--which is spelled out in the Brookings Report, incidentally--in lieu of something practically next to nothing for Negro schools. Nothing much more had been done at the time when we still had segregated schools. This committee was hoping to improve such facilities. This was some time before the Supreme Court decision of 1954--this committee.

ELSBREE: Do you remember who was on the committee?

ABBE: No, I can't remember a thing about that. I think I talked about it with the Planning Division of the Community Chest and Council folks of Montgomery County one year, and I think that was also just before the county acquired the Bliss School, but I don't know just why I associate those things together.

ELSEREE: Well, I think that's enough on that.

ABBE: Yes.

ELSEREE: How about the Maryland-Virginia Citizens Committee?

ABBE: Well, that was an invention--an idea--of Mrs. Agnes Meyer, with the idea of pulling together the resources of the Metropolitan Area of Washington in behalf of better schools. Again I can't remember dates, but she had several meetings--one of them in her own front parlor on a Sunday afternoon--in this behalf. I remember distinctly that one, at the time when I think we were after some federal legislation. This was, in a way, related to the National Citizens Committee for the Public Schools.

ELSEREE: I see. Then one more thing on education. That has to do with the White House Conference, and you were a delegate to that.

ABBE: I attended the White House Conference from Montgomery County. I was from this county. I attended several sessions and sat with the delegates from Maryland. At one time I represented, by his request, a proxy for the State Superintendent, Dr. Pullen. The conference was interesting because its outcome supported more federal aid for capital construction, which is not in line with what the conference managers had expected--or even wanted. It met in one of the downtown hotels, I remember.

There is another aspect in Maryland that I think probably we should touch on, and that is the Maryland Council on Education. I guess that is the correct term for it. It was related to the National Citizens Council on Education in New York. I'm not sure I have the name right. But anyway, we met for several years in Baltimore--representatives from different school-interested bodies. The State PTA was one, the Teachers' Association was another member, and there were some citizen groups. I can't remember just what--large bodies. Some labor union, I think, had representatives in that.

Anyway, one of the things that evolved out of this gradually was a fact sheet-- published every month, or two months--about school affairs in Maryland, and one of them included data about the budget process around the counties. This was an eye opener because some of them had what amounted to closed sessions or no news to the public about how a budget was proposed or what its extent looked like. Another one was data on the capital debt and the tax assessment base in all the counties. Legislators who got these things as regular information grabbed for that one. Nobody had ever handed them anything like that. It was really prize money--that paper.

ELSBREE: I can see how there could be a great need for this. We don't do this any more.

ABBE: Well, the upshot of doing this for about a year or two. . . .By the way, the Research Chairman of the Baltimore City Schools, of the school system itself, helped with this process. I helped with it, and there were several other people. The upshot of this was that the State Department of Education--I think rather shamefacedly--started doing it themselves.

ELSBREE: Yes.

ABBE: They did, and I think they are still doing it some. I don't see the papers any more, but they prodded them into doing it. As a result of this, I went to a dinner in New York on the National Citizens Council on the Public Schools at which our then Ambassador to Germany came back. He was a former President of Harvard, and told that our American system was better than the German he had observed because they had a restrictive system of choice--of choosing youngsters for educational advancement to the upper levels. In ours we didn't have any restraints on it. That was the gist of it.

There was also a mid-West conference, which was held annually and to which I went as chairman of this state group one year, discussing teacher education and training--a very interesting session in which they really struggled with the techniques of upgrading the teaching trade--or profession, I should say, I guess.

ELSBREE: This was back in the 1950's?

ABBE: The '50's, yes. I can't state it any closer than that.

ELSBREE: O.K.

ABBE: The mid-50's probably.

ELSBREE: Well, do you think we've about finished up on education?

ABBE: I think so. Yes.

ELSBREE: Good. Well, let's move on to your participation in the charter movement.

ABBE: Very well. The charter movement, of course, got its impetus essentially from the elaborate study by the Brookings Institution called the Government of Montgomery County, published in 1941. The story behind the story on that is that the county government was chivied into having a study made of the county government, and put up a few thousand dollars for Brookings to make such a study. Brookings then, with a man from our county among their staff, took the lid off--found so much wrong that they put a lot of their money into a while big book on the subject.

ELSBREE: Yes.

ABBE: It's a classic volume really, although the chapter on education is one of the weakest in the book. Too bad, but that's the way it is.

But the structure of the government is spelled out very thoroughly with a good deal of historical materials on that. It said that we should get rid of what we had and have a charter government. Well, various civic groups



went to work on this. The civic associations, the Civic Federation, the Allied Civic Group, and the League of Women Voters--all of them started studying and working toward doing something about this. By 1946 it had got to the stage of an election for choosing a charter committee. Would we or would we not.

ELSBREE: Had you been working on this through one of those organizations you mentioned?

ABBE: Well, yes. I had been helping with the research committee of the charter committee. This was in, say, '45. My good friend in the Budget Bureau, John Willmot, was the research chairman, and he and I worked quite a bit together on pulling stuff together for the committee to use in public meetings and writings and this sort of thing--on what we needed for campaign material. It very nearly carried, but not quite. The opposition, entrenched in office, was able to get enough literature to the absentee ballots to sway the election.

ELSBREE: Oh, it was the absentees, then, that made the difference?

ABBE: It was. It was, just about. Now let me see, that was in '46. In '48 charter won by a fair margin, as I remember it--I can't remember exactly. In the meantime, of course, there was much more work going on. Mr. Willmot, in the meantime, had accepted an offer to do about what he had been doing with us as the head of a pilot study body for Dade County, Florida--which is a county wrapping around Miami. I became the research chairman for the charter committee. We did about the same sort of things--digging up facts on background and implications of what our enemies were saying, spiking some misrepresentations. We didn't have a split populis on charter here as they did in Prince George's where the struggle has been much longer, until they finally won.

ELSBREE: It certainly has.

ABBE: I can't recall particularly amusing or exciting incidents at this late date from that campaign, but I know we elected women to office under that election in '48, maybe--interesting, in passing.

ELSBREE: Yes. (Laughter) Wonderful!

ABBE: And very able ones, too. Our Executive Director, Mrs. Stella Werner, was a tower of strength in getting on this. She told me, in private chat, about 1945. . . .No, it wasn't then, it was after charter won--some several years later. (She said) that she thought her early interest in charter--and she had been interested in legislative affairs long before this--really stemmed from her interest in education, that she felt the way to get good schools was to get a good county government. Maybe she's right.

ELSBREE: Yes. That's very interesting.

ABBE: Maybe she doesn't believe that any more, but I think it is pretty good doctrine yet.

ELSBREE: Yes, I think it is very appropos today, too.

ABBE: As we look the scene over, and I think I told you before that I thought an elected school board was important rather than the appointed one from the Governor's office, because if we made mistakes now it's our own fault. We couldn't do anything much about the Governor's mistakes, but we could of our own.

ELSBREE: Did you want to add anything more about the charter movement?

ABBE: Well, I'm trying to think of things that might be delightful or significant on that. I can't remember the margin of victory in '48. I do know that in the first year under the new government,

When Mr. Frederick Lee was chairman of that Council, they worked awfully hard and had a whole long array of zoning decisions to straighten out what had been a very bad situation of favoritism on zoning before. He created--with the Council at his elbow--a series of zoning decisions, and then at the end of the year published them in a brochure--like a set of law decisions, you know.

ELSBREE: Yes.

ABBE: I think there were about eighty of them in that neat little booklet--documenting, you see, what they had handed down as rulings on zoning cases--which made it a very handy tool for the future.

ELSBREE: Very valuable, I should say.

ABBE: Yes, it was one of the results of that first year. All of the members of that Council respected him enormously, and they had, of course, to overhaul the budget from time to time. Before his term there had been a "fusion government" which was part Republican and part Democratic, and which was supposed to be a gesture toward the reform momentum. It didn't amount to very much, and they had a so-called County Manager from Cincinnati, I think, who didn't have any authority really. The county could overturn him any time they wanted to. I mean the Council. But he did do one thing. He wrote a good, straightforward county budget, intelligently organized and all that. As to whether we had enough money for the different things, that's another matter, you know. But as a piece of budgeting work it was a first rate job, and one of the few that I had seen--and even since. But I do remember that that period--and this is before, well before charter won--my friend, John Willmot, wrote the City Managers Association--this was a national body--to ask about the status of this man that was purporting to be our County Manager. Was he really a County Manager in the work he was doing? The answer

came, charmingly, that he was in effect a member of the association but he wasn't working at it. (Laughter.) To that effect, you know.

ELSBREE: Oh, that's wonderful.

ABBE: We enjoyed that no end. Now there is another incident of the period. One that is only charming and delightful and not important was the birthday party that the League of Women Voters arranged one year after the charter victory. They came to the Council meeting with a birthday cake and Marie Bennett, as President of the League, made a little speech, which she wanted the Council to know distinctly that while charter had come a long way and succeeded, she wanted them to know that it was not an immaculate conception. (Laughter.)

ELSBREE: That sounds like Marie.

ABBE: Doesn't it?

ELSBREE: Yes, it certainly does. That's a wonderful story.

ABBE: They nearly fell out of their chairs at that one. (Laughter.)

ELSBREE: Oh that's great. Oh, dear.

ABBE: Now that's enough, I think, about charter.

ELSBREE: All right.

ABBE: It's had a few changes, you know, and in fact the substance of its intent was pretty well modified a few years later by the people who got elected. But that was changed again, too, and right now I think we're doing rather better.

ELSBREE: Well, a good bit of your time was also spent with the City of Rockville and their government. Could you talk a bit about your activities there?

ABBE: Well before we had a reform government--in 1954 there were a lot of things wrong with the city that needed to be reformed--we had a

group of business people who managed the town affairs quietly to their own ends and not to the general public's good. This began to get out of hand. After the war the town started to grow rapidly. It had about 7,500 at the end of World War II, then it started to grow and grow and grow. Subdividers were given anything they wanted, practically, in fact one member of the Council said he didn't see how they could do much of anything in the way of controlling growth. The town was providing itself with water by a system of deep wells, which was adequate in the simpler days. It had an inadequate sewer system, which had been equipped with a sanitary treatment plant under FWA days and was now greatly overloaded, turning some raw sewage down Cabin John Creek. The Health Department was breathing down the town officials' necks. The public didn't know this--I mean about the State Health Department. But more particularly, the water supply was getting real short, out of their seventeen wells for peak loads. There wasn't a great lot of storage capacity above ground.

ELSBREE: About when was this?

ABBE: Early 1950's. It came to a crisis in the summer of 1953. One July Saturday night when Momma was putting the kids to bed and Poppa was watering the new grass and shrubbery, there was no water.

ELSBREE: Oh, it really happened?

ABBE: No water, and it lasted for some little time till, of course, the pumps caught up a little bit. And there was an indignation meeting the next week. The mayor was invited to attend, and he made the mistake of not showing up.

ELSBREE: What would he have said if he had shown up?

ABBE: Oh he came to the next meeting the next week, and he said the wrong things. He wasn't too competent anyhow. He was a "front man" for

the more competent man who had been in office while most of this had been happening, you know--I mean in the past couple of years. This man was a building supply dealer who, with the town manager, sold the town most of its sewer and water pipe and building supplies, you see. Made it real handy. This man, the former mayor, had coached this present man who wasn't as competent about things, and whether he told him what to say in this other meeting, I don't know. Maybe he didn't. Anyway this man came and told the citizens--a couple hundred of them maybe in this indignation meeting--that they shouldn't want so much water, that they should ease up on their use in this peak period, don't you know. Well, that was the wrong thing.

ELSBREE: It made people mad?

ABBE: Madder.

ELSBREE: Madder.

ABBE: So they said, "Wait a minute. We will tell you how much water we want." From then on things began to happen under the surface.

This was mid-summer. There began to be evolved a full-fledged organization of revolt, and in February of '54 there was what amounted to a half page manifesto in the local newspaper which objected, of course, to all of this saying, "Come on, let's clean house. Let's get a new kind of government." There were 125 names signed to this. They, of course, were anathema then to the ruling authorities and their friends who hadn't yet realized that a new era was about to happen. My name was among the 125.

ELSBREE: I thought so.

ABBE: I had not been very much involved in this underground effort. They were more hotheaded people than I who were stirring the waters.

Anyway there was a town election due in April, and the campaign then

became very vigorous. There was a certain tactical error on the part of the, shall I say, old guard. They put two tickets in the field without consulting each other, and maintained that stance.

ELSBREE: You mean in the election?

ABBE: Yes, besides the reform ticket. The head of the reform ticket was a man who now sits on the County Council--Dick Hovsepian.

ELSBREE: Oh, no!

ABBE: Oh, yes, and that ticket won. But in the meantime there were such extravagant efforts of opposition as an effort to cow the revolt by use of federal prosecution against collecting money for political purposes. Well, the money was collected by wives, not by the candidates, you see.

ELSBREE: Yes.

ABBE: There is a federal statute about this. But the FBI was brought in to do an investigation and thereby shush up these people who were making big noises about political reform.

ELSBREE: Oh, I didn't realize this, that things had gotten. . . .

ABBE: That serious? Yes, yes. Well the FBI looked a while then sort of smiled and said, "Go ahead. There is nothing wrong here." But it took quite a while. Well this mayoralty candidate, Mr.

Hovsepian, stood in a public meeting at which I was chairman, as chairman of a citizens association, please, with all three tickets to be addressing the meeting. Mr. Hovsepian stood up and said, "We don't scare." Very charming meeting. And they won, and that was the beginning of a new day, in the spring of '54. Now it took them quite a while to get their hands on the facts about the public business because the Manager had most of the facts in his head,

including the underground water and sewer system--very few maps--and the budget. It took them five days of questioning in the public meetings to elicit from him enough to have a firm grasp of what the financial situation was of the public business. But they were finally able to come to grips with enough to write a new budget for the next year, you know. It was not so bad after that, but that's what they had to work thru to start with.

And no wonder they needed these extra utilities. They did something unheard of in the town. They went to the bond market and the big boys who had never heard of Rockville, and wanted a million dollar bond issue to buy these utilities--sewer and water systems. It worked.

ELSBREE: Amazingly enough.

ABBE: Well, you see it took imagination as well as intelligence to go at this thing this way. That was the beginning of a new era. Now properly enough, I think--and I'm coming to planning--the Mayor and Council did another thing before they invented a Planning Commission. They had to get the house in order real fast on other fronts.

ELSBREE: They had more important, urgent things at that time.

ABBE: Yes, they thought and they studied quite a while as to which of two or three different courses to proceed under for a planning structure for Rockville as an incorporated city, and at that time probably 20,000 population. I don't know, it had grown real fast after the war. The course they finally adopted was to organize a Planning Commission under Chapter 66B of the state statutes, which in general outlines the structure for a planning commission for a municipality or a county and provides for a commission of five with five year terms--one a year, succeeding, you know. They did this in the spring of '56, only about two years



after going into office--before their first two-year term expired.

ELSBREE: We're going to have to start another tape, so I'm going to stop this. OK?

ABBE: Well, I can abridge now on that.

ELSBREE: Would you continue now with your discussion of the Planning Commission in Rockville?

ABBE: Yes. After its initial beginning, it took some time to gather necessary data for a creditable master plan for the city, and that was not published until 1960. We had our own planning engineer, separate from the day-to-day planning which the Commission had to do. No, I'm wrong, the planning engineer had to take care of day-to-day planning, which didn't get done before, you know.

ELSBREE: Yes.

ABBE: There wasn't any in that process--as well as the long range planning. So it took quite a while, but the Commission was very close to the development of this general planning. We had contracted for some phases, such as a population survey, and I think maybe some highway consulting on it, too. But there was, for the first time, some orderly program for the development of the city, including a proportion of apartments in relation to single family units and a proportion of areas for business and where they should be, instead of growing like Topsy without any system. The plan had public hearings, too, before its final adoption.

Now under the state statute which governed, the Planning Commission, having adopted a plan, that was the plan for the city. The Mayor and Council looked to it for guidance. They could, from time to time--and have occasionally--departed from it in their actual decisions, but in general that has not been the case. They are not required to adopt it as such themselves

under the state statute. Now the process followed here and the technique, I think, had worked well. We have now moved on to a second master plan which was adopted by the Planning Commission in the spring, I think, of this year--1971. It took this present Planning Commission which, as you know, is a rotating body which changes one member out of the five every year. . . .

There are many new changes. We have the Community College in Rockville, which we didn't dream of when we had the first plan. We have more light industry, and have expanded the outer limits of the city. The first plan set up a "maximum expansion area" which was coincident essentially with the drainage area to be served by a sewage system, except where it impinged upon the already served area of the Suburban Sanitary Commission on the lower side of the city toward the urban area. This is still essentially the maximum expansion area. We jest among ourselves privately and say, "We should tell our friends, 'No, we do not expect to annex Poolesville.'"

ELSEREE: (Laughter.) Not for the next five years anyway.

ABBE: But the planning process has gone on continuously in working toward the second master plan, and we now have that one. Some of us felt it necessary--for your information--to advise the staff of the Planning Commission in the preparation of this second one that their first draft had ignored, practically, some aspects that we thought essential; that is, had made very little reference to the cultural aspects of the community as represented by the Rockville Civic Center. We talk about that as an important facet of the community life and attractiveness, and they'd jolly well better pay some attention to it in the plan itself, because it is touched on at one point as a good feature in listing the fine things about the city, but then they don't do much about it as far as planning goes.

Also there were inconsistencies between numbers of population and some financial accountings, and these got sorted out. But this is the kind of thing that public review can do.

ELSBREE: Can help with, yes, certainly. How many years were you on the Rockville Planning Commission?

ABBE: Let me see, I think about four. Oh no, it would be five. Let me see. I forget. I was chairman, not in the very beginning, but the man who was chairman left the Commission rather early, then I was chairman until about, well all but the last year. That would be three years, probably, as chairman. Say '57, '58, and '59, if we brought the plan out in 1960--as I think we did.

Then after that I was asked to be a member of the Board of Appeals. This is also tied to the planning process, but it has some other functions. The Board of Appeals reviews requests for deviations from the plan, and it also acts as an arbiter on complaints that the administration of the city is not dealing fairly with employees in spot situations.

ELSBREE: I see. It doesn't have just to do with planning then?

ABBE: No. This other happens only rarely. I've seen one or two cases. Usually they weren't warranted, but now and then there might be something. It provides a channel, you know.

ELSBREE: Could you compare the Rockville Board of Appeals and the Rockville Planning Commission with the county ones. Are they similar? Are there relationships to their governments?

ABBE: Well their broad purposes are comparable, of course. I think they are organized differently and not quite identical. I'm a little rusty on our county structure. The planning process now in the county, as well as I can remember it, is under the bi-county body, but the

county has some control of it. Both bodies are appointive by the county elected officials. But the decisions of the City are independent and the decisions of the county are entirely subject to the County Council's--the elective body--views.

ELSBREE: Yes.

ABBE: Now I think with a long term of membership on the City Board, I am inclined to favor that independence of judgment.

ELSBREE: Yes. So you would feel that the . . .

ABBE: Having watched the Board quite a while.

ELSBREE: That the City system is probably more successful?

ABBE: Well, it has worked well for them, let me put it that way. Now there has been no strong cross currents of conflict, let me say that, over the terms of years--fifteen years--in which this has been in operation. This must be said in its favor. If you had an opposition Council for two or three years, you might have strong resentment on their part for a plan and efforts to overturn major sections of it. I could see this possible. And the other way, you can get that result pretty awful fast, so I think this makes for stability of a plan once argued about and adopted. By the way, in the City plan, it includes provisions for creation by the Planning Commission of community planning by community groups or community councils--whatever you want to call it--bodies that they would appoint to come together and work out in detail applications of particular sections in their neighborhoods.

ELSBREE: Then there is a lot of allowance for local involvement?

ABBE: Yes there is. They hope for it, and this would be oh, maybe, six or eight different such in different parts of the city. That is,

Twinbrook might have two and the Rockville area, east of the railroad and north of Old Baltimore Road--if you know the area, it's quite extensive. . .

ELSBREE: Yes, I know where you mean.

ABBE: . . . would definitely have one.

ELSBREE: So they would be small enough groups to. . . .

ABBE: Bring together their own local outlook on the application in detail of the broad aspects of the plan, with a member of the Commission sitting with them--and staff--to help them in sorting over things that come to them. In the course of developing this last plan, by the way, there were strong feelings about how to deal with the situation where the highway and the railroad met at what used to be the Halpine Crossing, in the east part of Twinbrook. There is no grade crossing there now.

ELSBREE: There isn't?

ABBE: We have eliminated that by a bridge at the far east edge of the city over the railroad. It comes in east of P. J. Nee's plant on the Pike.

ELSBREE: I know where you mean.

ABBE: Yes. Well Twinbrook Parkway swings around past the new H.E.W. office building, or near it, and then crosses over there at that new bridge. Well, now what do you do about traffic in that area and extension of Lewis Avenue which parallels the railroad to get down through there. I won't go into detail but. . . . And there is a subway stop, ultimately--the Metro, I mean--involved in some of this for the future. That was a very knotty problem. The neighborhood was extremely concerned about it, and they will get together on a neighborhood planning for some details of that--although they got their main way on the master plan layout of it, I

think. But they weren't at all happy until they did.

ELSBREE: It's a good example.

ABBE: It is just a little example. I don't like to get into details, but it shows you what kind of things were listened to in evolving the plan and then as followup later for a detailed sorting. Now some broad things like holding to a certain limit on proportion of apartment units is something rather special for Rockville. I think it is fifteen percent units of apartments. I know it's not more than twenty percent.

ELSBREE: Is that what will be allowed? Is that it?

ABBE: Yes. In planning, yes. And not all of the maximum expansion area is developed yet, but in keeping this in mind, this has to be followed.

ELSBREE: I was going to ask you about the Rockville Civic Center which you mentioned. You were on the Commission?

ABBE: Yes, I served four years on the Commission. The city has a rule now--a policy--that no member of their many, many boards--almost twenty--may serve more than four years consecutively. The exception is the Planning Commission, which by statute has a five year term--I mean state statute.

ELSBREE: Can you be on more than one commission at a time?

ABBE: I think you may, although I can't cite an example offhand.

ELSBREE: Well your positions then must have followed pretty closely one after another.

ABBE: Yes; they were successive, one after the other.

ELSBREE: What was the purpose, or is the purpose, of the Civic Center Commission?

ABBE: To take off the shoulders of the Mayor and Council much detail in the management of a very busy operating plant, and to provide rules

for its management and see that they are carried out. Also to lead in providing useful entertainment on their own motion through that plant, which has not only the Mansion House but the auditorium, and the social hall underneath it.

ELSBREE: How is the Civic Center financed?

ABBE: Well there is a limited appropriation for its staff and maintenance, then capital expenditures are proposed from time to time by the Commission. For instance, there is a project to expand the backstage part of the theater to give it better working space and resources for doing the job it should be doing. There is a building down below that was built there by default for a housing and work plant for the Public Works Department, which is being replaced at another location, and then that building is becoming available for other uses and will serve more strictly the purposes of the Commission in the way of social activities. The large metal warehouse wing of it, where big trucks had been stored, will be used for meetings and for ballet practice--that sort of thing. The brick wing of it--two stories--is already being used by the Park Police. Rockville has a small police force--eight men, I think, something like that, and a chief--which is being designated entirely for park policing, and the county is doing all the rest of the street policing. We've just had a session from the Chief of the county police force outlining to the City Council how this is going to be worked out. There will be five beats--so called--within the City of Rockville and a bit of the environs, out of his total force, and the city seemed quite pleased about the proposed coverage that this will entail on the county force. So that one needs to distinguish that we have in the city Park Police for the city's many parks, and the quarters for them will be in the brick wing end of

that building in the back there--which will really provide more patrol service, accidentally, at that place. There is quite a lot of vandalism there.

ELSBREE: That's too bad. During this time when you were on all these commissions and boards, you also were involved in other community affairs such as the Community Chest and Council and the Recreation Council and the Citizens Planning Association?

ABBE: Well, the Community Chest and Council I had only a limited contact with. I went to them on one or two matters, mostly to stir their interest in some other concerns. I think I touched on that. What was the next one you said?

ELSBREE: The Recreation Council.

ABBE: Well that was a group very early in Rockville--before the city had any organized department under the new city government. It now has a very elaborate and booming Recreation Department but this was, we'll say in the early '40's when there was no organized effort about recreation, and a few people thought that there might be a little more done than there was being done.

ELSBREE: The Citizens for Good Government?

ABBE: Now that I should have spoken of earlier in speaking of this transformation of the kind of government we have. This has been the moving force, structurally, to put good people into office every two years to run the city affairs. Citizens for Good Government--its by-line is Rockville's Non-partisan League. It is non-partisan, and because it is and because the elections are non-partisan, everybody in Rockville--whether they work for Uncle Sam or not--is a first class citizen.

ELSBREE: And can participate by. . . .

ABBE: The Hatch Act which forbids federal employees to participate in political affairs does not apply, by specific ruling of the Civil



Service Commission. This applies also to a few other towns in the metropolitan area.

ELSBREE: How about the Montgomery County Citizens Planning Association?

ABBE: Well before I leave this other body I may say that in this Citizens for Good Government evolved very early--I think even in 1954--as the moving force and has operated in a very interesting way to organize, every two years, a nominating convention to which all its members can come and caucus their candidates for city office. By voting they choose their set of candidates for the five offices of Mayor and Council. In effect, it is the election, like the elections in the South, for a party. Do you see?

ELSBREE: Yes, I see what you mean.

ABBE: Now this isn't necessarily true, and any time there may be a rival set of candidates who may sweep the election, or even get one member.

ELSBREE: And that's happened?

ABBE: It has not happened--ever--but who knows what will happen next spring, you see.

ELSBREE: Yes. This being the case, it's a very dramatic occasion.

ABBE: Royce Hansen came two years ago and was greatly impressed, I think. I can't put words in his mouth, but that was the impression I had. We've had foreign visitors watching it. You see, the candidates for office appear and speak just like in a party primary campaign, and they are questioned--or may be--and people may speak against candidates. There are convention rules adopted by the convention, proposed by a rules committee, and it's really quite a paraphernalia. Now there were some seven hundred members at the last one.

ELSBREE: My, that's quite a turnout.

ABBE: I'd say.

ELSBREE: For something like this, then, you feel it's been successful?

ABBE: Oh yes, but entirely uncertain as to what may be the outcome for the future, because there is increasing individual strength which may or may not ask to be considered by that body in its nominating convention. Mr. X may decide to stand alone as an independent; Mr. X and four friends; Mr. Y and four friends, and Mr. X along. You see?

ELSBREE: Yes.

ABBE: Which makes for a very lively situation. One aspect of that that you should know is that we have an alert and modern election registration system now. It had not been so good, but it's being brought up to date right now with computerized records.

ELSBREE: (Inaudible)

ABBE: Well, that's just lately. Since the last election we have replaced a man who had been, I think, a carryover from the old regime.

ELSBREE: Yes.

ABBE: As chairman of the Board of Elections, (he has been replaced) by a more modern man who thinks modern and who is applying a new technique to the process of keeping books on the voter system. He doesn't want to interfere at all, but he wants to get the record up to date and keep it so--readily available. Now if you've got that computerized, you can provide Joe Blokes, and anybody else, with a full list of voters if you need to.

ELSBREE: Yes, it makes it much. . .

ABBE: . . . more effective and also you can keep up to date. That's just a footnote. I guess that's enough about that. The membership of Citizens for Good Government is pretty widely scattered. There has

been some feeling in the business community that this city has been run by individual residents, and the business community hasn't had much to say about it. Well, it's partly natural, but there is a little doubt and uncertainty on the part of such citizens on the point of what would happen if they didn't.

ELSBREE: So you don't feel it's really. . . .

ABBE: They certainly can't expect to outvote unless they get a strong candidate of their own who will mount a lot of neighborhood support.

ELSBREE: Yes.

ABBE: It's a very interesting question, and I can sit enough on the sidelines to enjoy watching it. I don't think the city is going to fall apart whatever happens, but it is quite possible that we may see some changes in the next election. You haven't asked me anything about Negro candidates. We have a Negro on the Council now, and what happens next, I don't know.

ELSBREE: What do you mean?

ABBE: Whether we will have more and whether we will have a candidate for Mayor who is a Negro. We have a substantial Negro population, and it's not increasing as a proportion. I don't know whether it is ten percent, fifteen percent of the population, and they have been met halfway, I think, by and large, by the city. The city tries to, and has made a number of improvements for them, and of course we have no limitation on residence now. The situation is better than in most places, I think. I can't be arbitrary on the subject. Now what were we going to talk about?

ELSBREE: The Citizens Planning Association, if you care to.

ABBE: Yes, one or two things there. I was a member of their board for several years. I didn't feel I was quite doing my job with them,

although I represented this upper area and sometimes could offer ideas, some perspective here. Oh yes, one thing that I did which I thought was useful to them: I persuaded our ex-mayor, this same Mr. Dick Hovsepien, to be their president one year--I being the chairman of the nominating committee.

ELSBREE: (Laughter.) Well, that sounds like a valuable contribution.

ABBE: I did do that.

ELSBREE: Yes, of course, this is a county group.

ABBE: Yes. They were careful to change their first name so that it now read Montgomery County Citizens Planning Association. Now they first said it was the Planning Association. It confused some people. What do you mean, the Planning Association? Don't we have a planning body? Yes, we do, but this is the citizens body interested in planning, you see. Neal Potter has been president of that body also. He's now on the County Council, and he's a very astute man to understand the aspects of planning.

ELSBREE: What do you think the value of the Citizens Planning Association has been?

ABBE: To keep the heat on the then Council about zoning and other aspects of planning when they really needed it and also on the Suburban Sanitary Commission. One of our ardent members, Mrs. Vinton, was the first citizen to ever attend regularly the meetings of the Suburban Sanitary Commission, and the meetings have not been the same ever since.

ELSBREE: It's a good thing for all of us that she has.

ABBE: She's an attorney, and she can keep notes--and does--and then she comes back and tells them what mischief is being concocted, as it often is. When one of the members was promoting a trunk sewer to serve a subdivision up Georgia Avenue, toward Olney, she came back and told us about so-and-so's memorial sewer.

ELSBREE: That's wonderful.

ABBE: And then the Park and Planning Commission, too. There seems to be sometimes a quarrel between staff and Commission over ability to achieve things--and they are alert to these things--and they can bring news of rights and wrongs as they see it to the Civic Federation. There are some interlocking directorates there. They have a planning committee in the Federation, and then appearing at hearings, you know.

ELSBREE: Yes.

ABBE: I haven't done any of that. I helped a little on one or two studies. There was something I wrote, I think, once. That's about all I can think of, offhand, on that one.

ELSBREE: OK. How about activities that you have been involved in since your retirement--recently--church, or are you involved in a senior citizens group?

ABBE: Yes, we have in Rockville a counterpart commission to the County Commission for the Aging--created last winter or spring--the Rockville Senior Citizens Commission. That body has created a senior citizens club which has chosen to call itself the Senior Associates of Rockville.

ELSBREE: What do they do?

ABBE: They meet every week--which is different than most of such bodies who meet once a month--and they have a business program and some entertainment, through a program chairman who is very clever about finding short things to entertain with. They have luncheon together, everybody bringing a sandwich, and then the rest is furnished by the month's group of two or three or four hostesses by dint of every member providing a quarter on arrival and checking in.

ELSBREE: It makes it fairly simple then.

ABBE: Oh, yes. And then after lunch, unless there is a speaker. . .

Sometimes there is. Councilman Hannah came one time lately--City Councilman--and talked about his own agency. He is Director of a very large operation of Social Security over in Baltimore that handles the processing of the Social Security records. He says that there are eight thousand people in his place out there in Baltimore to handle those records. But he was talking about the provisions of Social Security--present and under the proposed legislation. They found that very interesting and helpful. But the group, beginning with some thirty-five members--something like that--in March, now has ninety-six.

ELSBREE: Good.

ABBE: And it's growing quietly and steadily. There is a very friendly feeling among the members--augmented by this business of meeting every week, don't you know.

ELSBREE: Yes. Are there many people that you already knew?

ABBE: Not very many. I knew a few, and I'm finding very interesting accessions to the membership from all different kinds of backgrounds. It's most democratic and cosmopolitan, really. There are many more women than men, but the fact that there are any men distinguishes it from most such groups, I gather from what I have heard, because there is maybe twenty percent men in its membership--some single men, some husbands of the wives. They have various entertainments. A small group is doing oil painting, and there are various handcrafts besides. Then there are bridge teams and people who like to play bingo, and some of us like discussion groups in the corner, so that we have all sorts of things going on. Oh, then there

are trips out of town lined up ahead, with bus service. We've had four and another one planned in January.

ELSBREE: To places like New York, you mean?

ABBE: Not quite that extensive. The longest distance was, I think, up to the Amish country in Lancaster. We joined with the Rockville Chamber of Commerce to go down to Baltimore harbor in early November. They had two bus loads and we had one, and all joined on that trip-- quite inexpensively, that was.

ELSBREE: And you went on that?

ABBE: I didn't because I have been down to the harbor and I know what that is like, but we had a good turnout. The biggest lineup ahead so far--we have forty-three booked for a trip to Washington in January, in the morning, to visit the Portrait Gallery and have lunch at Woodies and a matinee at the Ford's Theater.

ELSBREE: That sounds like a lovely day.

ABBE: I think it will be fun.

ELSBREE: Are you on the Commission or on the Board of this group?

ABBE: No. They asked me to be travel chairman--to cook up some of these things--so that's what I am doing.

ELSBREE: So that's why you know so much about that aspect.

ABBE: Yes.

ELSBREE: That's wonderful. Well, I think. . . .

ABBE: I find it an interesting group. I wasn't sure that I would find it any fun at all when I went around originally, but it seems to be. They have pleasant folks, and if I can contribute a little from some knowhow about this sort of thing--and contact with an agency I

know of--I'm glad to help some. I think that there are quite a lot of people in it who find this a useful break in a rather monotonous life.

ELSBREE: Yes.

ABBE: I don't have to go there for that because I have enough interests.

ELSBREE: Well, I'm sure that you can help some with their planning since you've. . . .

ABBE: One useful thing I did was help in their evolving a constitution and bylaws.

ELSBREE: Yes.

ABBE: They had a draft from some place else that was too complicated in some ways and skipped some things that needed to be in there--like Robert's Rules--and so we got those in.

ELSBREE: Good. Well, in conclusion, would you care to comment on the state of affairs today in Rockville and the county?

ABBE: Oh I don't know. I don't feel that I am really abreast of the county affairs sufficiently to offer really any observation. In the city, I'd say we have a very highly organized community with all these many boards and commissions. Mayor and Council really reach out to ask for advice--whether they use it is another matter. I don't know because I don't go every time to Council meetings by any means. But the city is growing, and maybe I'm too close to the picture in some ways. We have an unusual city in that we have--from early times--a large proportion of low and middle income houses. We later built a lot of more expensive ones, but even so, the proportion of middle income--and some low income--houses is above average, I think.

ELSBREE: Particularly in comparison with the county as a whole?

ABBE: Yes. And still some people say we ought to be building a lot of



low cost housing. Well if there is a general need for that probably so, but I think our proportion may be about right. It's occupied. You don't throw them up and say, "Come on in, new people." It's people that have lived there. Now we do have one kind of an unusual turnover in some of these middle lower priced houses, and that is staff from the Navy Hospital--Navy Chiefs, that sort of bracket. They have a two or three year tour of duty there; they come and buy or rent a house--usually to buy--in part of Rockville--quite a good bit of Rockville--and then when they are on their way, it's up again for exchange. Chain turnover is what I mean.

ELSBREE: Yes, a lot of that.

ABBE: But there is quite a lot of that change of level. Many people don't stop to realize that we have that. Besides these few old big houses, like right along in this neighborhood, and a few spots of large, new houses, and then some that are not very good.

ELSBREE: It's quite a diverse community then?

ABBE: Oh it's very diverse--as a whole community.

ELSBREE: Then you would feel that this is one of its assets?

ABBE: I think that is a good asset, yes, and then an increasing amount of light industry--the Mayor and Council have sought to encourage that. One curious development recently is the city having acquired a substantial farm property at the north corner of the city--a great big farm--is all anxious to build an eighteen hole golf course on it, plus some other recreation facilities. It has developed a big pack of support for a public golf course. I've been allergic to that idea as not necessarily catering to a large enough slice of population for the expenditure.

ELSBREE: And the amount of land it takes.

ABBE: But they keep assuring all of us that it will pay for itself in revenue. I have no idea, really, whether this is well-grounded or not. Part of the deal was, though, that twenty-five acres of the site is prime industrial, light industry. That may, in the process of a decade, pay off the investment.

ELSBREE: Yes.

ABBE: I don't know, but it's good for the city to have a store of such land available. I'm sure of that. It's in a good situation on the north side. So these are some of the future problems of growth. But it has intrigued me to see that large amount of sudden support for--yes, we must have a golf course.

ELSBREE: Well, as a golfer, I might have to argue with you, but it is open space.

ABBE: Yes, I know.

ELSBREE: It is green.

ABBE: Well having visited across Canada and talked with recreation officials in two cities--Winnepeg and Vancouver, where they have handsome parks--and seen about their lavish park systems including open spaces, it doesn't run so much to that as it does to diversity of other open space uses, and so I just kind of wonder. But the outcome is that they are talking about some other things that one never heard of around these parts before--like a bowling green.

ELSBREE: Oh, what fun!

ABBE: I had questioned the man in Vancouver, who had just built some, about what it cost up there then--this is five years ago--hundred by hundred, so that you can play in two directions, alternatively

in different weeks, while the grass improves while you are not using it so much, you see, that's very good, about \$10,000.

ELSBREE: Well that's a lot less than a golf course, isn't it?

ABBE: Of course--maybe you'll want a couple of them--but it's an idea that hadn't cracked the surface five years ago around here.

Tennis, yes, and the tennis organized bodies want to have big tournaments here with ten courts and all that--new--and indoor tennis, too, in the winter. Now this takes some doing. See, they've got the elbow room, and so some of these things are being played with.

ELSBREE: Do you have any more comments, or do you think that maybe this has covered enough. I certainly think that you have covered a lot.

ABBE: Well one of the things that I think I would say is that the city, generally, is happy about having the Junior College--now the Montgomery College--in our midst here and has planned some things because of it quite extensively, including some apartments to serve that area--not only residences but apartments for students and faculty. In other words, they recognize a new situation and changed some roads through the development and the park adjoining.

ELSBREE: Yes, it's getting to be quite an extensive operation.

ABBE: Oh yes, they are pleased about that. About highway nets, I don't know. The city, of course, has been squirming over this trash dump. I don't know the rights of that one at all.

ELSBREE: Well I think you must be sort of tired right now after an hour and a half of talking.

ABBE: This has been very pleasant, really.

ELSBREE: This has been fascinating for me, and we do appreciate the time you have given to this project. Thank you very much.

ABBE: I don't think of it as a burden at all. I am heartily in favor of the general idea. I'd be interested to know, by and by, how many people have been able to contribute to your collection of reminiscences.

ELSEREE: Well I'll certainly find that out for you. We are going to have a workshop in January and some of the people, who have been doing interviewing like I have, are going to get together. So then I'll learn about who else has been interviewed, and I'll definitely let you know.

A. H. S.

ABBE: That will be nice. Thank you very much.