



William E. Brannon in his office at the old Park Elevator building.

Fire can't destroy fondness for Park Elevator Company

By **WILLIAM E. BRANNON**
Special to The Observer

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Charlotte-Mecklenburg is fast losing its familiar landmarks. But memories will remain, especially if we share them. Mecklenburg Neighbors is sharing readers' recollections about growing up here.*

At the end of World War II, I became bookkeeper at the recently-burned Park Elevator Company, where I stayed until 1954.

Park Elevator was founded in 1898, and manufactured and installed freight elevators in buildings throughout the Southeast, mostly cotton mills. The name "Park" was taken from the park in the South Boulevard/Dilworth area at that time.

The Park Manufacturing Company (its proper name) had its own foundry in the beginning and manufactured elevators from scratch.

Park's founder and president, J.C. Crowell, graduated from the School of Hard Knocks, typical of many entrepreneurs of his generation. Other principals were J.C. Crowell Jr., a Davidson College graduate; active in Little Theatre, president of the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra; J. Aubrey Chrisman, a Naval Academy graduate; chairman of the board of trustees of Presbyterian Hospital; and Thomas Snodgrass Jr., an engineering graduate of N.C. State.

Next door was Lance Packing Company. Its president, Philip Van Every, a former mayor of Charlotte, occasionally walked over to shoot the breeze with officers of our company. We supplied elevators for their huge building.

From Davidson, I had to take a Greyhound bus to Charlotte down old Highway 21. Of course, there was no Interstate 77 or Highway 115 at that time. Greyhound bus fare was 30 cents one way.

Upon arrival at the West Trade Street bus station, I caught a Duke Power bus to Park at 311 Arlington Ave., a one-block section between South Boulevard and the current trolley railroad. Fare was 7 cents, or four tokens for a quarter.

Our auditor at Park Elevator was George G. Scott & Co., a member of which was Randolph

WANT TO REMINISCE?

If you have memories of growing up in Mecklenburg County, please share them with us. We can accept stories of up to 650 words. Be sure to include your name, address and daytime telephone number, along with a photo and some personal information about yourself. Mail your stories to us at:

Memories: c/o Pat Borden
Gubbins
Mecklenburg Neighbors
P.O. Box 30308
Charlotte, NC 28230.

Scott, who later became a famous movie cowboy.

One of our auditors was "Pinky" Elliott, a football lineman at UNC. Pinky played with the old Charlotte Clippers at one time, coached by Gene (Bull) McEver, a Tennessee All-American tailback who coached the Davidson College Wildcats for many years.

After he retired from coaching, I was privileged to work with Gene while he was part-time administrator for the Town of Davidson.

Park Elevator was sold and later moved from the 1898 building, and a high-tower apartment building is planned for that address.

Recently, my wife and I visited the burned-out site. Nothing was left - even the ashes had been covered. People gone. Building gone. Nothing left but lingering happy memories of an old bookkeeper.

William E. Brannon, 74, graduated from Davidson High School in 1942 and served in the Navy during World War II. After graduating from Kings Business School in Charlotte, he got his first job at Park Elevator. He left in 1954 to work for Sealtest Foods. His last job was with the Town of Davidson, where he worked for 16 years in various capacities, including office manager and treasurer. He retired in 1990 and lives in Davidson with his wife, Deanie. They have two children, Jim Brannon of Charlotte and Donna Patterson of Indian Trail.