



City of Alexandria
Office of Historic Alexandria
Alexandria Legacies
Oral History Program



Project Name: *Chamber of Commerce Project*

Title: *Interview with Gant Redmon*

Date of Interview: *September 27, 2005*

Location of Interview: *Alexandria, Virginia*

Interviewer: *Andrea Lasker*

Transcriber: *Jennifer Hembree*

Abstract: *Gant Redmon is a partner at the law firm of Redmon, Peyton, & Braswell, L.L.P., in Alexandria. He has practiced law in Northern Virginia since 1964; he has specialized in banking, commercial and real estate transactions, and estate planning. He was chairman of the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce in 1989. He talks about some of the activities of the Chamber and the issues facing the business community in Alexandria.*

Table of Contents/Index

Tape: *Tape 1*

Side: *Side 1*

Minute	Counter	Page	Topic
<i>Not available</i>	<i>Not available</i>	3	Introductions
		3	Outreach to the Community
		4	Activities of the Chamber of Commerce
		5	Relationship with Other City Groups
		6	Other Members of the Chamber of Commerce
		6	Metro Service for Alexandria and Other Highlights
		7	Getting Involved With the Chamber of Commerce
		8	Issues in Alexandria
		9	Final Thoughts About the Chamber of Commerce

Introductions	
Gant Redmon:	How long do you anticipate this taking?
Andrea Lasker:	About half an hour.
Gant Redmon:	That'll work. I told my wife I'd pick her up around 6.
A.L.:	Well, it might not even because I've been told some of the questions might overlap.
Gant Redmon:	Okay.
A.L.:	What years were chairman or president—you were president of the Alexandria Chamber [of Commerce]?
Gant Redmon:	Gosh, I don't remember. I think they changed that. I think I was chairman. But it was 1989.
A.L.:	Okay. And what years were you a member of the Chamber?
Gant Redmon:	From about 1980 'til currently.
Outreach to the Community	
A.L.:	Okay. What were the most significant initiatives and activities of the Chamber while you were chairman?
Gant Redmon:	The major activity while I was chairman was the outreach to the citizens—the civic associations and so forth. That was the first year that we had a representative of the civic association sit in on the Board meeting of the Chamber of Commerce. And I also had a positioning statement for that year that was—my theme for the year was, “Focus Alexandria,” and I'll show you before we leave—it was a large circle; it had three smaller circles inside. One [circle] was government, one was residents, the other was business. And whenever any one of those three segments made what I thought was a really foolish decision, their circle was—these circles were all on Velcro and I could move 'em and to the extent that they were out of focus—they went outside the circle. [chuckles]
A.L.:	So that was a new—that was new, the fact that you had that three-tiered—
Gant Redmon:	Right. The three circles inside the larger circle—bringing things into focus. It was an outreach program.
A.L.:	So what kind of activities fell under the outreach program?

Gant Redmon:	Actually all of the activities of the Chamber. In other words, we involved—there had always been a dichotomy, as there is, you know, a lot of times and it had really become a little acrimonious. And so having been a president of one of the largest civic associations in town previously, I felt like I could kind of bridge the gap, and so that’s why I tried to put them together. And I think it was a good idea.
A.L.:	Were those continued after you left?
Gant Redmon:	I believe so, yes.
A.L.:	Were there any other significant initiatives or activities that you would like to highlight [from] when you weren’t necessarily a chairman, but while you were a member?
Activities of the Chamber of Commerce	
Gant Redmon:	Certainly. In the early [19]80s, the Chamber was very much involved in the initiative of bringing the associations’ headquarters to Alexandria, and I served as a member of the Industrial Development Authority, which approved all of those financings along with Greg Jennings, who was chairman. I was on the Authority. Greg was chairman of the Authority. And we did any number of financing bond transactions. We authorized the issuance of industrial revenue bonds—IRBs—for the development of these association headquarters so the associations could get equity in their buildings.
A.L.:	What years was that?
Gant Redmon:	This was generally [19]80–[19]85. Then the law changed and IRBs were limited for all practical purposes to 501(c)3 organizations as opposed to 501(c)6s, which is primarily what we were doing. So they weren’t quite so popular after that.
A.L.:	How many did you bring in? More or less?
Gant Redmon:	Of course, now, there are over 300. So we brought in quite a few.
A.L.:	Were there any local social concerns that you all were involved in?
Gant Redmon:	Always. Always because Alexandria is a very social-issue conscious city, and affordable housing was one of the largest ones. We dealt with that a good deal in our long-range visioning report, and it was clear that bricks and mortar involved housing issues and education issues.
A.L.:	Do you feel that those were successfully addressed?
Gant Redmon:	I think it’s an ongoing challenge. Success is relative in those things.

Relationship with Other City Groups	
A.L.:	What [was] the Chamber’s relationship with other groups in the city? Like the City Council, social service agencies, or, as you mentioned, civic associations.
Gant Redmon:	As I indicated earlier, one of my initiatives was to try to make the relationship between the civic associations and the Chamber closer. We had a good relationship with City Council, city staff. There was a time after I was chairman when that relationship wasn’t quite so close. And as a matter of fact, it became politically acrimonious, to say the least. That has now I think swung back 180 degrees. I think there’s an extremely close relationship, and actually to do the job right sometimes you can’t be too close.
A.L.:	That good relationship that you had when you were chairman—was that based on initiatives that were taking place under your [organization] or was it...
Gant Redmon:	Oh, I think there were some under mine, but it was a continuing thing. When you only have a one-year term...you know, those things run a lot longer.
A.L.:	Can you mention any specifics that helped that relationship be a good relationship?
Gant Redmon:	Well, by having the city manager attend Chamber board meetings and share with the Chamber board information that at that time she could share—’cause at that time it was Vola Lawson. And various other members of the city staff, and of course the Chamber always had representation on the Budget and Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee. I served on that for six years after I was chairman.
Other Members of the Chamber of Commerce	
A.L.:	Who were some of the other Chamber chairmen before or after your chairmanship?
Gant Redmon:	Harvey Boltwood was my immediate predecessor in [19]88. Greg Jennings was my successor in [19]90. And then Phil Johnson after Greg. Then Shawn McLaughlin. And I lost track after that. Maybe Mark McClendon.
A.L.:	Do you know if you have contact information for any of the four that you mentioned?
Gant Redmon:	Oh sure. All of them. Indeed. They all live here in the city.

A.L.:	Let me find out if I need that before I ask you to dig that up. Who were some of the other active Chamber members from your day that you recall?
Gant Redmon:	I'd really have to give some thought to that. I have to almost look at the members of the Board of Directors because Kathy...I can't remember Kathy's last name. Anyhow, she was the ED [Executive Director]. She succeeded Bart Middleton. Bart was the ED up until about [19]87 I guess. And then Kathy came. And she was here until maybe [19]95 and then Ken Moore came as the ED. Our president. When I was there, Shawn McLaughlin was always active, still is, being recognized as business leader this year. I was business leader in [19]95. I could help you out on that a little more, but I don't know the names right off-hand.
Metro Service for Alexandria	
A.L.:	Let me find out how much digging we need to do. What are some of your favorite memories of the Chamber?
Gant Redmon:	Well, one that has been captured in a photograph, was when Metro staff had decided that they were going to delay the opening of Metro service to the City of Alexandria, even though Alexandria had already invested \$42 million in the structures, and in the stations, and in the trackage and so forth. And we at the Chamber heard about that and we were very upset, so I have a red-white-and blue 31-passenger GMC bus that I use for political campaigning from time to time. So we put the Chamber Board of Directors on board the bus, we put the flags on, and we had on the marquee "Alexandria's Special," and we took a photographer with us, and we went to the King Street station. And the King Street station, of course, was closed, but low-and-behold we were able to access the station and got up on the platform, and what do you know, here came a train that said "Not In Service." And the operator, not knowing what in the world we were doing on the platform, slowed down, and then he stopped. I said, "Would you stay there for just a moment?" And we then had the photographer take a picture of us all pointing up at the "Not In Service" sign and when the Metro staff heard about this, they called Bart Middleton, and said, "What in the world is going on?" And he explained. And we simply told them, look, the silent majority is no longer silent. We got a \$42 million investment here. You claim you don't have enough cars to run sufficient trains, you think you're going to be overwhelmed—run four car trains! They ran four car trains until this year.
A.L.:	Right.

Gant Redmon:	Long, long time. And it was quite adequate. So, that was a good highlight. We still have photographs of that, by the way.
A.L.:	Do you have copies of those?
Gant Redmon:	I have a copy of those and I'll be glad to give you one.
A.L.:	That would be great.
Gant Redmon:	Let's see. Some other highlights. Well, we always had a great chairman's gala, for the installation. And mine was out at what was then the Radisson. Now it's the Hilton at the Mark Center. And the entire Alexandria Harmonizers, world champion chorus, performed at that gala. We had over 400 people there. It was a pretty good-sized affair.
A.L.:	Was that a gala that benefitted something?
Gant Redmon:	The proceeds went to the Chamber, and of course the Chamber uses it for all kinds of things here in the City. We would generally have retreats to figure out what it was that we were going to be doing during the year. Our retreat was very successful that year. Generally held either down at Airlie House or something of that sort. [Pause] Really getting cooperation among the three parts of the City were the big—the main thing I remember. We thought we were successful in achieving our objective, as evidenced by our position statement.
Getting Involved With the Chamber of Commerce	
A.L.:	What would you say today to someone who was considering getting involved with the Chamber? Do you have any advice?
Gant Redmon:	Yeah. The Chamber is like anything else. You always get out of something what you put into it. So in order to get benefit from the Chamber one must be active. One way to do that is through the committees, probably the most active committee during the years I was there was the Government Affairs Committee, where we dealt actively with the City as well as with the General Assembly on legislation, putting together the City legislative package. To really understand what's going on in this City, one would be well served by sitting on the Budget and Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee because that's where you really, really learn what's happening. All you have to do is look at the Capital Improvement Program—the seven-year budget—and you can tell what's coming down the pipe.
Issues in Alexandria	
A.L.:	Why do you think that the Chamber is an important organization in

	Alexandria?
Gant Redmon:	<p>The Chamber—there’s always a healthy tension that has to be maintained between the commercial interests and the City and the residential interests and, for that matter, the government. Businesses really have to band together—if you will—for their common interest, in order to address such issues as taxation, BPOL [business, professional and occupational licenses] fees, development of various areas.</p> <p>The King Street Improvement District is a good example, the Metro Group that works so hard up there around King Street Metro—KISMET—is another good example. And right now...I tried an initiative for the West End businesses when I was chairman, and now the City and the Chamber are trying the same initiative to try to involve the people of the West End more so because it’s like a different world.</p>
A.L.:	Is that changing as far as you know?
Gant Redmon:	I don’t think so! [Laughter]
A.L.:	Why is that? Why is it [the West End] so different?
Gant Redmon:	There are different issues, even though the taxation is all the same, yet different issues. In the Old Town area—it’s more intense. Out there you don’t have the same kind of issues, although they’re getting there, and the more that I think that the West End is developed, the more the issues will become the same. And of course, the open space issue is always a big one.
A.L.:	Like what? In terms of the open space?
Gant Redmon:	Well, for instance, you have the 47-acre preserve at the Winkler property, which is just really magnificent, together with the Adirondack Lodge that is built right in the middle of it on a lake that practically nobody in Alexandria realizes is there. You have the open space of course down in the Eisenhower Valley where the Northern Virginia Park Authority has quite a facility. I think we missed a good bet with regard to utilization of the open space at Potomac Yard. I don’t think we were aggressive enough with regard to what the recommendations were for that. There was a time when instead of the convention center being in downtown [Washington] D.C., it could have been right next to Reagan National Airport, but that window of opportunity passed when the Virginia Retirement Fund sold off the land.

Final Thoughts About the Chamber of Commerce	
A.L.:	Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about the Chamber?
Gant Redmon:	Well, the Chamber of course has been here almost a hundred years. It's been a responsible voice for business in the City. It has worked very cooperatively with City Council, certainly in the last 10 or 15 years. I'm sure it did previous to that, but frankly I'm just not familiar with what the background was, or anything of the sort, but as I mentioned, I have that membership button from the 1930s from a fellow who used to work for one of the electrical contractors and so I'm going to be presenting that to the Chamber for its 100 th Anniversary.
A.L.:	Great. How did you come to have the button?
Gant Redmon:	I came upon it via through the daughter of a lady who lived in Rosemont and who passed away and she wanted to be sure that button found its way into a rightful place because she had such fond memories of when her dad used to wear it when he was in the Chamber.
A.L.:	Is there anything else that I haven't covered in my questions that you'd like to [comment on]?
Gant Redmon:	I think the Chamber also is a good avenue for people to become involved. The real fact of the matter is, business people are not as involved in the City—particularly in the City government—as they ought to be. So often we hear people make points, but they always feel like they are too busy to take the time to become involved, and the more involved they are, the better they can understand the issues and more effectively address them. Really, getting business people to become involved is a big challenge because they are working hard, they have to make the payroll, they have to address all kinds of issues, and of course, the Chamber helps address a lot of those issues. The only other point I would make is that if we have a—the more accurate the representation on the governing bodies of the City—at all levels, but particularly at the City level, the better off I think we're all served.
A.L.:	Thank you very much. If you can think of anything else, please let me know...if you want me to stop by again. I'm happy to do that.
Gant Redmon:	My pleasure. Okay. I can send you an email.
A.L.:	I will follow up on the membership button. I was instructed to get it from you and to walk it over to the Lyceum.
Gant Redmon:	I think it's in my middle desk drawer - My middle desk drawer has so

	many photographs in it, I'll have to find exactly where I put it. I know I have it; I just saw it recently. And what I really want to do is, I want to take the button and then I think we'll need a little information underneath it and we'll put in a little frame. Make it nice.
A.L.:	I know they are anxious to have it for the upcoming exhibit. You mentioned you that might have a photograph from your story about the Metro?
Gant Redmon:	Right. That's in my album with the bus and I'll get that to you.
A.L.:	I'll just be in touch with you later in the week.
Gant Redmon:	I'll make a note of that. [end]