

**Oral History Interview of
William Curry Holden**

**Interviewed by: Jimmy M. Skaggs
November 29, 1967
Lubbock, Texas**

“REEL ONE”

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Interview Series Background:

In the process of conservation and digitization, our Audio/Visual department transcribes existing interviews in the Southwest Collection's holdings for a new generation of listeners to rediscover. Such interviews frequently cover topics relating to the founding of Texas Tech and the settlement of Lubbock.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Dr. William Curry Holden. Dr. Holden discusses his family history, upbringing, and moving around Texas during his childhood. Holden talks about his early years as a teacher before attending the University of Texas to study history. Holden eventually obtained his doctorate, after which he taught at San Marcos, then at McMurry before coming to Texas Tech. Holden also discusses his growing interest in archeology and his excavation work.

Length of Interview: 02:10:17

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Jimmy M. Skaggs (JS):

Today, November 29, 1967, I am talking to Dr. William Curry Holden, Professor of History at Texas Technological College, Lubbock. Dr. Holden is going to begin giving us a background of his life and his teaching experiences. Dr. Holden, would you like to begin with your family background, your mother and father, if that would be all right?

William Holden (WH):

Yes, we can start with my mother, who was a great influence on my life. But this is not to say that I do not rate my father's influence as being very important too. But my mother was always the active one and the ambitious one and the one who pushed and sometimes prodded, sometimes she used most any kind of medium she could to try to get us to do what she thought we ought to do. And she was rather ambitious for all of us.

She was Grace Eleanor Davis. She was born near Greenwood, in Sebastian County, Arkansas.¹ Greenwood is a small little town, coal mine town at one time, some twelve or fifteen miles south of Ft. Smith, Arkansas. Her father was William Andrew Davis; as I recall him, he did live with us quite a while after I was grown. He was a rather larger man, a large-frame man, and had a mustache and was partially bald at the time. But he was a man of powerful stature, and a man who had done much work in his life. At one time he was a blacksmith, and he looked a great deal like a blacksmith is supposed to look. But anyway, his father was Thomas Matthew Davis. And his mother was Louisa MacCreary Davis and my grandfather was the third child in that family.² Now, my mother's mother was a Trammell, and I regret I cannot remember her first name at the moment. But she belonged to a rather illustrious family in a way, I don't mean illustrious by virtue of having been a great statesman or something, but the Trammell name has won a footnote in history. My grandmother's—who was my mother's mother—was the daughter of Dennis Trammell. And Dennis Trammell was born somewhere over in North Carolina, or – it must have been North Carolina. But anyway, in his migration west, he cut a rather wide swath. He was a little bit like Daniel Boone; he left his trace along. And one of the roads across the Appalachians is still today called Trammel's Trace, named for him.³ And he came into Arkansas, and incidentally this man's name shows up—you run across it very, very often. This, some rather lurid incidents connected with the family, which I can't remember at the moment. Only I think he had two brothers at one time who were hung for stealing horses. But anyway, Dennis didn't get hung. But he was a rather ingenious person, and he worked his way across Arkansas, and you run across his name as he went along in the records here and there, and got over to this little town of Greenwood. And that's where his daughter, my grandmother, met my grandfather. Later, Dennis, to get on with him a little bit more, he came down into Texas, and somehow or other, according to the family tradition, he acquired a league of land where Austin is. And—near

¹ January 24, 1870

² "A brother named Sumner, bigger than grandpa, lived at [illegible] Arkansas."

³ Corrects Appalachians to Arkansa, with the Trammel's Trace running from Arkansas to Texas.

Austin—tradition, of course, has it at the exact spot of Austin.⁴ But during the Civil War, the records were all burned, and the family scattered, and they were never able to reestablish their ownership to it. And frankly, I don't know what finally became of him; he kind of fades out of the picture. My grandmother had two or three brothers and sisters, and one brother was named Frank Trammell. And he became quite a land operator and cotton farmer and planter, in Limestone County, east of Waco County, the county where I was born. And it was because he had settled there that my grandfather and grandmother and my mother and her brother at the time who was very small about two years old—that's the reason they came from Arkansas to Limestone was because the Trammells had already gotten there. And they kind of came down to join them.⁵ And so that gets us into Limestone County.

Now let's see, had something—my mother had some cousins Trammell, belonging to the Trammell family. Tom Trammell, who was a pioneer at Sweetwater, and who was a ranchman of considerable means and extent—was my mother's first cousin. And then she had another cousin who, a female cousin, who married a Newman, who was also one of the founders of Sweetwater. And they were quite well-known in the ranching business, for a while it was Trammell and Newman [**partnership**]. And then they separated their business in some way and the Newmans later have ranched at several places, but they used to one sizable ranch just across the [**New Mexico**] line, right due west of Lubbock. And I think there may be a little community over there by the name of Newman today. Well, that's enough about the Trammells, I suppose. Now, on my father's side—

JS:

Now, before we go to that, could I ask you a couple of questions about your mother. For example, her occupation. Was she a housewife, or?

WH:

Yes, my mother, who has written a very interesting [**auto-**]biography in her later years, a very interesting account, she was a woman who was born with a style for writing. And I don't suppose she ever went beyond the seventh or eighth grade in school, and little, a small school's the thing. But when she was about in her late teens, early twenties, she took a teacher's examination of some kind, and anyway, she taught school in Limestone County. I believe at a schoolhouse called Hancock. Which was close to what they call Old Armor, some six miles west of the town today called Teague, T-e-a-g-u-e.⁶ Teague did not exist at that time. And she was teaching school at this place when my father came there from Arkansas into that community. And my mother's mother, Mrs. Davis, secured a post office in the community, and she was the postmistress, and so the people, for about eight or ten miles around, would come in there to get the mail. And my father, who had come out of Arkansas when he was about twenty-one or

⁴ "His younger brother was killed in the Alamo. The Republic of Texas gave a league of land to the nearest of kin of those who died in the Alamo. Dennis went to Texas to claim the land."

⁵ The Davis's

⁶ Corrects Teague to Cooledge

twenty-two—partially for his health, and partially because he wanted to see what Texas was like—came there and worked a year with a person that he had known from his part of Arkansas.⁷ And he met my mother by coming to the post office to get his mail. And so he worked there a year and I think they struck up a rather warm friendship. He went back to Arkansas—Pike County, Arkansas, where his folks lived—and stayed a year and went to school. And then he came back and, when he moved back, his whole family came, and they settled in this same region. And about a year after that, well, they married. I believe they married 1892.⁸ And so my mother was a schoolteacher, and you didn't have to know very much in those days, academically, to get a job teaching school, because they were glad to take most anybody who could read and write and who knew the multiplication table. (laughs) And who knew a little grammar. But my mother was an intelligent woman, and the type that grew as long as she lived. And sometimes they are the best-educated people, the self-educated people.

JS:
They certainly are.

WH:
And as I've said before, two of the best-educated people in Lubbock never got out of high school. And I'd put them up against a lot of our PhD's in Tech today; I'm speaking of Dr. Clifford Jones and Mr. Walter Posey.

JS:
Yes.

WH:
Do you want to stop it, and we'll discuss—

Break in recording

WH:
—My mother died in 1958. She outlived my father by—he died in '39. And that would be, how many years? Incidentally, in the last four or five years of her life, she and my father were living on farm at Littlefield, and my father died 1939, and she tried to run the farm for a number of years. But we finally persuaded her to let us sell the farm, and we moved her in, and I bought the lots right across the alley, and I built her an apartment over there, and she died there, in the apartment rather suddenly, she lived alone there, and my brother went over there, somebody always went over there every afternoon. And he [**Tom Holden**] made his afternoon visit and found her dead, dead in the bathroom. She died very suddenly, it seemed, of her heart or

⁷ “named Dan Corley, (I think)”

⁸ December 26, 1892

something.

Break in recording.

JS:

—then your father.

WH:

She was buried in our family plot at the Lubbock Cemetery. Right where my father was buried.

JS:

And your father's name?

WH:

My father was Robert Lee Holden, and you can guess what year he was born. The second year after the end of the Civil War.⁹ There must have been about a hundred thousand Southern boys born in 1866 and '67 who were called either Stonewall Jackson or Robert Lee. And his father—he was born, by the way, in 1867—and his father was Isaac Calloway Holden, rather a small little man, as I remember him, and he lived a long time, lived with us, rather unusual person in a way. He had been a lieutenant in the Civil War, and he was in several capacities, but mostly he was on detail service as a recruiter. And at the end of about the second year, about 1862, at the end of '62, he got in at the beginning of the war and he was in the Army of the West, not in Lee's army but—you know the army—

JS:

Trans-Mississippi.

WH:

Yes. I don't mean the Pacific, but I mean the one that operated around the Mississippi and so on. But so far as I know, he was never in any campaigns, because he was always on detailed service. And it was that time, when they were, the way they recruited then, the draft, they just went out and found somebody; **[if]** they had two legs and one tooth and one eye, they'd say, "You're in!" And that was his job, was to go down and latch onto them, and then induct them into the army.

JS:

The saying now is, "If they're still warm, they're eligible."

WH:

Yes, "If you're warm you're eligible." And he took a bad spell of pneumonia and nearly died,

⁹ December 2, 1867

and it ruined his lungs almost as long as he lived. He never—he had this bronchial, this bad bronchial malady, as long as he lived, and he lived to be eighty-nine.¹⁰ And he coughed, continuously, especially at night. He coughed up great gobs of stuff, you didn't know how such a little man could cough up so much and still keep going. But anyway, I do not recall too much now, well, there's something interesting too about that little aspect of the family. His mother, who married, I believe his father was named Isaac too. And incidentally, the father was six feet six inches high; my grandfather was about five feet six inches high, maybe seven. But my grandfather's mother was a little short woman and her name was Poor, P-o-o-r. She was of Dutch extraction. And they all came from, I believe they all originated in North Carolina. And my grandfather, my great-grandfather, my grandfather's father, was a typical frontiersman; he was in Andrew Jackson's army, by the way.¹¹ I don't know in what capacity he served. But he was a typical frontiersman who wore a buckskin and a buckskin cap and a buckskin jacket and all of that. Which was somewhat typical of the times. But he was a great marksman; the best in his part of the country.¹² And a sort of a feud developed, had developed, I suppose jealousy between rival marksman, and they had a big turkey shoot in the community at a little store, little country store made out of logs. And this was a sort of an annual occasion. And they put the turkey about hundred yards and buried him and whoever could hit him and shoot his head was best man. And my grandfather won the shoot. And then later on in the afternoon, they also sold what they called "busthead whiskey" at this store. And the rival got pretty well organized, and later in the afternoon my grandfather was leaning up against the corner of the store, with his long rifle hanging back like this—he had the stock, and it was hanging like this—talking to someone. And someone in the way he was facing hollered to him, said "Look out, Ike!" He said, "Look back!" And he looked back, and this guy was right behind him with a rock just fixing to crown him. And automatically he just brought that thing around and caved this guy's head in. And he must have hit him a pretty good jolt. He knocked him out and they thought that he was dead. And sure enough, he died. And he had a lot of brothers and cousins, and they were all—the feud had kind of been going for some time, and this was what it needed to kind of touch the thing off. And so he waited round until he was sure his victim was dead and he had with him, he had been—by the way, in Andrew Jackson's campaign against the Creeks. And he had—the government had paid the soldiers off in land, they had given them scrip, the scrip called for locating six hundred and forty acres anywhere on public domain. And he had his scrip. And so, before daylight, he knew that if he lived there, they'd get him. Either that, or he'd have to get them. The thing would go on. So, he told his family he was going to Arkansas. And he made arrangements that he'd go and locate his land and build a cabin, and then he'd send for them. And so daylight found him way down the road, walking, with his rifle, and a pack on his back. And he went on to Arkansas and located this land on White River in Lawrence [County], Arkansas. And he built the cabin and then sent for his family. And my grandfather's mother then,

¹⁰ Holden's grandfather

¹¹ Grandpa Holden's father

¹² In North Carolina

my grandfather at that time was—both of the kids were stair-stepped along, and none of them are over maybe ten or twelve years old. The youngest one was just one or two years old. And this woman loaded what she had in a wagon, and she drove that wagon all the way with these kids—

JS:

My goodness.

WH:

And this now before the Civil War, it was long about, it was in the late [18]40's or early '50's, and through Indian country and everything else.

JS:

I was starting to say, that was still wild country.

WH:

Oh, it was wild, for a long ways, and she made it, and she got there, and she found him. Which is one of the most remarkable things that I know of in our family history, is this woman bringing these kids by herself—

JS:

Oh, that's something.

WH:

All the way from North Carolina. And it was then, Isaac Calloway, during the war then, he was in his early twenties, and when the war was over, he married my grandmother, and my grandmother had been married previously.¹³ She was still very young, probably in her late teens or early twenties; I'd have to check family records on that. But she had married a doctor, and doctors in those days were, just knew how to give [laxatives and purgatives] and a few other things. But he was a doctor, and he had gone to the army along with her two brothers, and they were captured up in Tennessee somewhere and sent to that famous camp—where—was it in Illinois?

JS:

In Chicago, suburbs of Chicago.

WH:

No, no, it was somewhere on the Ohio River. In Ohio, I think. There's been a book written about it. And the, my grandmother's husband, the doctor, about three-fourths of them that they put in there died, due to the, they had no protection, not even, no sanitation—

¹³ Isaac Calloway Holden, "our great-grandfather"

JS:

Dysentery.

WH:

It was terrible, dysentery. And the doctor, and one of my grandmother's brother's died. The other one made it through; I think he escaped, Uncle Sam, and I knew him later. And I'm heard him tell the story so many times. And so when my grandfather got back in the war, too, he was discharged on account of this inability [**the respiratory ailment**] that he had. And he and my grandmother were [**distant**] kin in some way—I've forgotten just how it was, but anyway, they were something like second cousins.¹⁴ And he married my grandmother, my grandmother Holden. And he, they lived in Lawrence County, where my grandfather was born, and later they moved to Pike County, which is way over in western Arkansas. And then, I think my father then, who grew up in Pike County, came to Limestone County as I related a while ago, when he was about twenty-one.

JS:

And he farmed and ranched?

WH:

Yes. My father acquired a hundred and six acres of good black land in the old Armour community, right close to where my Grandfather Davis was living. And he farmed there for, let's see, they were married in '92, and he must have bought this farm, and started farming in '92. And then got married, and my older brother [**Harold**] and I were born there. Older brother was born in '94 and I was born in '96.

And then they decided to move to West Texas in 1898. And the whole family decided to move, I mean, my father and mother and my grandfather and grandmother Holden. And they had about six kids, and I believe at that time, that only my father was married. The whole business.[They] got an immigrant's car and loaded their stuff and everything into it, and went to some little town north of there, and got on the cotton belt and into Waco, where they got on the Texas Central [**Railroad**] up to Cisco where they got onto the Texas Pacific and came on out, they were headed to Colorado City. They left out there about Christmas '88, and got to Colorado City, I think, about January 3, 1889. The Texas quarantine law was going at the time. They had, it ran through Sweetwater, you know, they were trying to get rid of the ticks.

JS:

Texas fever?

WH:

Yeah. And everything, every animal that came west, I don't where it ran this way, but it did cross

¹⁴ Corrects second to fourth

the T&P [**Texas and Pacific**] Railroad at Sweetwater. And every animal that crossed that line had to be dipped. So they had to unload all of the animals, the cattle, and I don't know whether the horses were dipped or not, but all the cattle—and then my mother and my brother and I, my older brother and I, kept right on out to Colorado City, where we went to a hotel and stayed.

Now, I believe my grandfather and grandmother came on out, and my father and his brothers, after they dipped the cattle, drove them, from Sweetwater on up to Colorado City.

And my earliest recollection at that time, as I tried to figure it this morning, I think I was two years and about five months old, maybe four months old. I was born in July, and this was at the end of December. It'd be about five months old. My earliest recollection is what the end of the passenger coach looked like that we were riding on, I presume, between Sweetwater and Colorado City. I remember what it looked like, the old oil lamps up on the ceiling, and the seats are kind of these straight seats with red velvet on them, and so on. And that is one little thing that stayed with me all my life. And I begin to remember a few things, then, that happened pretty soon after we got to Colorado City.

We stayed in town for a few days while they scouted for a place to land. And my grandfather bought a—I think it was about a section of land, about four miles west of Colorado City on Morgan Creek, Morgan Creek is now dammed up, and there's quite a lake there and over on the side of the lake is a tremendous electric generating plant. I came along there not too long ago and tried to figure out about where that Morgan Creek place was; I have some vivid memories of that. And I think perhaps if I could go back there and pal around, I could find it, but the lake and all of these things were not a part of my childhood memories, and I'd have to chat around quite a bit, but I think I could get mighty close to it. And we stayed out there a year or two, I believe about a year. And then we moved into Conroy City, they got an old hotel, an old wooden hotel, and they ran that hotel for about part of a year.¹⁵ And along in 1900, then, the Davises came out, grandfather and grandmother Davis and Aunt Willie; My Aunt Jewel had already been married before they came out here, and then, they rented a house out on a hill east of the town called the Nance Place, and I have some rather vivid memories there of the way things looked and certain instances that took place. And my Grandmother Davis had always been a little bit sickly, you might say, not too strong. And she was a rather small woman. And she had TB [**tuberculosis**], and she died, at this Nance Place. And I remember the occasion of her death and the funeral, in 1900. By that time I was four years old. I was three-and-a-half, because she died at Christmas of that year. And then we moved I believe along, I believe, latter part of 1900 or maybe 1902, 1901. My grandfather Davis, who had a little money, and my father, bought a section of land on what we called The Divide, northeast of Colorado City, kind of up in the northeast corner of Mitchell County. And do you know where Annandale is?

JS:

About.

¹⁵ Holden's mother and father

WH:

It's between Hermleigh and Roscoe. It's a little—nothing there but a [railroad] switch now, used to be a little town there. But there's a paved road that goes due west from Annandale and two miles up there, up from Annandale, up on top of a ridge, and that is, oh, the Wide Ridge. There's a cemetery there, on the north side of this paved road. And when we bought this place, this cemetery, it was a little planked one-teacher schoolhouse, and they called that Long Wolf School, and the cemetery was very small, then, but it's grown quite a bit, but the schoolhouse has disappeared. Well, this schoolhouse was right due north of our place, our place was right across the road, and went a mile south. And it was not improved, and they brought lumber out there, and built a little boxed house, a boxed house with an attic. And we lived on that divide about six years. And about three of those years was a complete drought failure, a crop failure, and the other three we had just about a half a crop. It was terrible, six years, and the family had to do everything on earth to keep alive. We made rabbits and had flour, about the only thing we could afford to buy was flour, salt, and some soda. And we got our meat where we could, and we had flour gravy, that's a term you've probably never heard about, where you take a little grease of some kind, put flour in it, and make something to put on your biscuits.

JS:

Sometimes add a little water, sometimes add a little milk—

WH:

Well, you added milk, perhaps, if you had it, and if you didn't, you added water.

JS:

Yes sir, I've eaten it.

WH:

Well, it made those biscuits go down. And so there, those years in our lives were very tough years, tough going. Seems like all my early childhood was tough going. My father, who had a fairly good secondary education, I suppose, because he was a man of a little bit of above intelligence and a man who had always read, and he was very good at mathematics. And he had studied the carpenter's trade a little bit. And the thing that I always marveled at about him, was that he knew the steel square. He could figure things on that steel square that engineers now figure on their slide rulers. He was absolutely phenomenal. And he was an excellent carpenter; he could take a saw and saw a board through in just the finest grain and everything when he'd get through with it. Later, at times, he followed the carpenter trade, and it was at a time when the roofs were very complicated, with gables and valleys and all kinds of things. And when my brother and I were, my older brother and I, by the time we were seven years old, we could help him. We knew how to nail, and saw after a fashion, we could shingle, we could do all kinds of things. But the one thing that was always a mystery to me, my father would get this roof pattern

in his head, or maybe he'd draw it out on a piece of board with pencil. And he would saw every rafter before he'd ever put one up, every single rafter. And then to hip, you'd have all kinds of different lengths, and he had, you have different bevels: up-and-down bevel and side bevel, in coming into a hip or a valley. And when that thing would go together, it was like a piece of furniture. It was absolutely phenomenal what that man could do, and everything absolutely in the right place, just exact. Well, getting back to our life there on The Divide during the early 1900s, he, we were about starved to death, and this little schoolhouse which was just across the county line, in Scurry County, that line there, our north line of our pasture was the north line of Mitchell, and across the line was Scurry. Well, this schoolhouse was just right near Scurry, just probably 150 feet from the county line. There were about a dozen families that lived around there and used the school but didn't have a teacher. And so, he spoke to the trustees about teaching the school but didn't have a certificate.¹⁶ And they said, "Well, you get a certificate, and you can have the school." So, he took our old beat-up buggy and our old beat-up buggy horse and go to Snyder. Snyder at that time had probably 200 people in it. And the county judge was also the superintendent. Well, I don't know who administered or what the examination consisted of, but he stayed up there two days and came back with what they called a third grade teacher's certificate made out to county officials, which was legal. And so they gave him a school, and his salary was \$40 a month, and the term was four months long, as I recall, had \$160 they had to run the school with, that year. But, \$160 then would buy as much as \$1,500 would today. And so, we ate that year.

JS:

This was all in addition to his farming?

WH:

Yes, but we made—that is probably, I've forgotten, but it's probably the year we made almost a complete bust on the farming. We always had a few cattle there, and we could have some beef, and we had milk cows who didn't give much milk, but we tended to always have milk; in fact, we always did, I think. The next year, then, over to the southwest a mile and a half, was another little school called Champion, right over by what's called Lone Wolf Mountain.

JS:

I don't know where that is.

WH:

Now they had Champion schoolhouse by Lone Wolf mountain, and Lone Wolf schoolhouse was about three miles the other way; it was kind of mixed up. But, this Champion was at the head of what they called North Champion Creek, they come together just south of Colorado City, South Champion comes in, and the Road 208 that goes from Colorado City to Robert Lee crossed both

¹⁶ Holden's father

of these Champion Creeks just above the Champion Lake. There are two different lakes over there near Colorado City: one the Morgan Lake, and one the Champion Lake. Neither one right on the Colorado River itself. So he taught over there the next year, and I think that was first year to go to school that he taught over there. I know I went; I don't think I was legal. But, my older brother and I went. So those two years constituted his school teaching. In 1906 we sold out there, and I think perhaps we got—we paid a dollar an acre for the land; I think we sold for two dollars, maybe and moved into Colorado City, where we stayed—that must have been in '95, I mean 1905, yes it was, because we spent the winter of 1905 in Colorado City. And I went to school in Colorado City. And I was in the second grade. And one of the teachers that impressed me more as much as any other teacher, I suppose, that I had in the school system was Miss Mamie Riordan. She died only a year or two ago, a very ripe old age, probably at ninety, something like that.

JS:

I believe we have some of her papers.

WH:

You have some of her papers?

JS:

I thought that name—

WH:

Yeah, you were the one that went down to see about them. You told me about it.

JS:

And all that was Bob Burk I believe. I've never met the lady—

WH:

Well, somebody in the Southwest Collection—it was Dave, I believe. It may have been—

Phone rings

WH:

—get. He talks for two hours, and he can't stop her. Let's see, we were talking about Miss Mamie Riordan.

JS:

Yes sir.

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WH:

Well anyway, we left there. I guess we must have left there in the spring of 1906 to go to McCaulley in Fisher County. The Orient Railroad had just built down from Altus, Oklahoma, I suppose. Down through Chitakape and I guess, at least through Hamlin and onto Sweetwater, and it was going on to San Angelo, and it was called the Mexico, Kansas City and Orient, and they were headed for Los Mochis way down on the west coast of Mexico, below Sonora.

JS:

Near Topolobampo, I believe.

WH:

Yes. The port.

JS:

Yes sit.

WH:

That's where they were headed for. And they never got, I don't believe, beyond—well, maybe they got as far as Presidio eventually. They were going through Presidio, and—

JS:

You know, the spur's right out of Alpine to Presidio there.

WH:

Yes. But I don't know where they were in 1906. They had just probably moved beyond Sweetwater. And they were staking out little towns about every ten miles. And they founded Hamlin—named it after—the towns were nearly always named after the directors of the company. And I think Hamlin was one, and the next one on down the road was McCaulley.

JS:

Judge Hamlin?

WH:

Oh no, not Judge Hamlin, somebody else—McCaulley, Sylvester, and then on down to south of Sweetwater, which is already named; the next one on south of there was Mary Neal. And Clifford Jones tells a story about Mary Neal. They were stockholders or directors in the road, and he tells about, either he or his father, I forgot which, was having dinner at the Neal house in Kansas City. And the Neals had a very beautiful daughter by the name of Mary. And while the dinner was interrupted, and they wanted to talk to Mary, and it was the president of the railroad,

and it was her birthday. And he told her, "Mary," he says, "I have a birthday present for you. I've just named a town after you in Texas, and the name of the town is Mary Neal." Well, anyway, these towns are just being started, and somehow or other, they heard that this town McCaulley was just being laid out and there would be a lot of building going on there. So my father decided to get over there and get in the contracting business, the building business. So we went from Colorado City over to this brand-new little town that just had a few houses in it at the time; they were all brand-new, unfinished, and in a covered wagon from Colorado City over there, it took us three days and we were out three nights; it was fairly cold I guess along that February. And my father built us a house, my grandfather-house, and we stayed there one year and the boom passed on. And then the Texas Central had built out from Stanford to Rotan. And they had laid out a town site there. So my father then went up to Rotan and built the first house there on the town site for a man named Lewellen. And soon as he could kind of catch up, he bought some lots and built a little barn that was going to be our house. We were going to live in the barn first, little house with and attic, very good house. Then we moved up there in 1907, and so my schooling was kind of interrupted, you see, from Champion to Colorado City and left there in I guess February and March, and the next year to Rotan. Now, it was at McCaulley I first knew Carl Reister. I was in third grade in McCaulley, the year of it we were there. And I had three teachers, the old wooden building with three teachers, with a bald-headed stupid man by the name of Lum Cooper as the superintendent. And one of the teachers was his sister. And the other one was Miss Molly Graybill. She was my teacher, and I loved her, although she was not impressive like Miss Mamie was; she didn't put the Lord in me like Miss Mamie did. But anyway, I was in the third grade, and Carl Reister was in about the eighth grade.

JS:

Now, this was in McCaulley?

WH:

In McCaulley. And this was in 1906, the winter of 1906, and '07. And Carl didn't know me very well because he was much bigger, and besides that, he was left-handed, and he was a pitcher on the ball team, and that made him a very important person in the school. And I knew his younger brother much better; his younger brother was in my class or something like that. But, also, I knew his [Carl's] wife, who lived just on the same block we did, who still lives here, Mattie [Rister].

JS:

Yes, I've met her.

WH:

Yes, well, they were our neighbors then. Then at Rotan, our first school there, it was, they had four rooms they built a long shotgun sort of barracks house, and there were two rooms and then a

dog trot, and then two more rooms. It's all one business. And they had four teachers the first year. And my teacher there was Miss Ruth Stevens, who was a very small little woman. I don't believe she weighed over, couldn't have weighed over 100 pounds, I doubt she weighed over 95, very trim, well-developed little woman. And I believe now I was, by this time, I was in the fourth grade, and she must have had the fourth and fifth grades. And I guess altogether they had four or five teachers, and she, I'm sure, had the fourth and fifth grades. And I remember very vividly my roommate was one of the sons, about the third or fourth son of Don Biggers. Don Biggers, you know, had been all over the country, and he turned up in Rotan.

JS:

I didn't know he was ever there.

WH:

Yes, he, among other places, he was in Rotan. And this son of his, I can't remember his first name, I know there was a boy younger than he was and two older, and I think he had sister too. And he was one of the toughest kids I think I ever saw, at least he had more nerve. He and I were desk mates, they had these double desks, and we sat on the same seat. Well, he wasn't an especially mean kid, but he'd do something, and pretty soon Miss Ruth, regardless of what happened, she'd blame him. She would bring him up front, and she had a big stack of long mesquite switches. They weren't switches, they were poles; they must have been four feet long, some trees had been cut down there on school ground. And they had—sometime when it was a field, and they had bushed out. And she'd send some of the kids out there every day to get a new bunch of those. And so, since this Biggers boy would nearly always get the [inaudible 00:51:23] on time, when she'd send me I'd go out and get them, and I'd always notch them, so they'd break fairly easy. I'd notch them so you couldn't tell that they were notched, so. She'd get this old boy up front, and she'd take his hands, and she would just come down on him, "ka-wam ka-wam," and about the second or third "ka-wam" she'd break off a piece, and next "wam" she'd break it again, next notch. And he'd never say a word. And I've always admired his grit. Well anyway, I'd remember Miss Ruth, she'd take on the biggest ones, and all of them are big, nearly; she had some great big old clever-headed boys in there, and she'd whip 'em all. She believed in it. She spent more time whipping than she did teaching. But anyway, that's what I remember out of that year, going to school. The next year, they drug in two old schoolhouses, and they had six teachers. Old one-teacher schoolhouse in White Flat, and another one some other place, but they still had the shotgun arrangement. By the third year, they had built a schoolhouse. But anyway, I kept on through, kept on going to school there at Rotan, and finally graduated in 1914. And at that time, I think, they must have had about eight or nine teachers, maybe ten. And the school was not affiliating at the time, for two or three reasons. The main reason I think being that the terms are too short because they didn't have enough money to run nine months. The terms are seldom over seven months. They had certain standards, even then about affiliated schools, so our school was not affiliated at all. We got demoted every year. Later, when I went to the University

of Texas, I found my school credits were no good, and I had to enter on individual approval and so on. Well, where are we? You want to ask the questions?

JS:

Yes. What about, I have the date of your death in 1896, could you give me the exact date?

WH:

July 19.

JS:

Fine. And I believe you, do you have one brother, or more?

WH:

Well, I had three brothers altogether. At that time I had an older brother who was born on June 4, 1894. It was just a little over about two months and six weeks' difference in our ages. Two years, I mean.

JS:

And he was also born in Limestone County?

WH:

How's that?

JS:

Also born in Limestone County?

WH:

Yes, in Limestone County, I suppose in the same house I was born in. I think they lived in that one place until we left there. And then later on his side—

JS:

Excuse me, his name?

WH:

Harral. H-a-r-r-a-l. He was named for man named Harralson, but they left off the "son" when they named him, just called him Harral, the only name he had, which is Harral. My younger brother, then, was born on December 25, 1903, on the place, on what we called The Divide in Fisher County,¹⁷ at least I referred to just north above the old Lone Wolf schoolhouse. He's still living, and lives here in Lubbock, and he's been a schoolteacher nearly all of his life, he

¹⁷ Corrects Fisher to Mitchell

graduated from McMurray College, and later he took his master's degree here at the history department at Tech, and for a number of years he was superintendent of the schools at Cera Blanca, and then the last at least twelve years, he's principal [at the high school], I believe, out here at the high school at Wolfforth [Frenship School]. And he's still teaching out there and will be for a couple more years, I guess.

JS:

And his name is?

WH:

His name is (laughs), oh, he had a jawbreaker. His was christened Thomas Calloway Tucker Holden. Thomas, from my Uncle Tom, my Uncle Tom Stayton, my mother's sister's husband, whom we were very fond of, Calloway, for my grandfather, he was Isaac Calloway, and they always called him Cal. And then after we had him all named, my mother's, one of her very fond cousins, whose name was Tucker, wrote a letter and said, "You've just got to name him 'Tucker.'" So they tacked that on, too. But he never did like the Tucker, and when he got up and got to sign his name, he dropped it. So it's now just T.C., Thomas Calloway, Tom Calloway. Now, my older brother, who graduated from the Rotan High School two years before I did, in 1912, the first graduating class that Rotan ever had; there were three in it, a brother and Henry Burgess and a girl named Mabel Young. He taught school about three or four years, he got a certificate, and then he went to A&M College a year, and in the summer of 1918, he was drowned in a tank, as much of the people in the community went in a wagon over to a tank to have a picnic and the boys all went in swimming, and he got about halfway across the tank, and just went down.¹⁸ And it was too muddy to see him and get at him right quick, and it was an hour before they found him, it was sad, at the age of twenty-five.

JS:

Was he buried in Rotan?

WH:

He's buried in Rotan, yes.

JS:

You mentioned a few minutes ago that when you entered in the University of Texas, you had to enter on special permission. What did this involve?

WH:

It was one of their methods that they had of entrance then. I don't know whether they still have it or not. I think they do perhaps. If you had graduated from an uncredited high school, and had

¹⁸ Community east of Rotan, near Rayston. The picnic was in Dan Stephens pasture.

reached—and was more than twenty-one years old, and I forgot whether there any more provisos or not—you could enter on what they called individual approval. And that meant that you must pass your work your first year, and then you would have to make up and take for non-credit, for non-college credit, one or two courses, and I remember one I had to take was a course in Latin because it was assumed you had no language, which was true. So I took what they called Latin A, which meant no credit, it meant, it was to absolve entrance requirements. And, incidentally, it was one of the most useful courses I think I've ever taken. I think Latin is a very wonderful thing for anybody that ever wants to write, or in science, or it's just good for anybody, really, if you have to deal with words because I was never aware, until I took that how many of our English words have been derived from Latin. We think that we speak Anglo-Saxon, but the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary is mighty small when the Latin influence came into it. And it's still growing to this day with Latin and Greek. Many of the scientific words are derived from Greek words today, every new invention, every new concoction, every new formula or medical formula, it's nearly all—they have no word for it, so they either go to the Latin or the Greek. And you can take the dictionary and go through there, and you can see how many words have been derived right from the Latin or the Greek. So I count that one of the most valuable courses, didn't like it much, but I learned a lot (laughs).

JS:

Well, that's often true of more valuable courses.

WH:

Now I'd had Latin in high school but they didn't count that. They figured it was just one way I could absolve; I suppose there were other ways, but I chose that, to absolve that [entrance] condition.

JS:

What year did you enter the University of Texas?

WH:

Nineteen-twenty.

JS:

Nineteen-twenty.

WH:

Yes.

JS:

Did you enter with a specific major in mind?

WH:

No—yes, and no. I got a certificate by taking examinations. I went, I got out of high school in 1914. And I guess it was the summer of 1914, I went down to old Stanford College, a little old junior Methodist college at Stanford, where they had a summer course for teachers. And it was to prepare them to take the state examinations for a certificate. And I went down there—I think it's eight weeks—and took courses that would be examined on. And at the end of the time, the end of the period, the examinations were given. And by some miraculous reason, I don't know what, pure luck, I passed every one of them except agriculture. And I'd never taken a course in agriculture, and I didn't pass it. But you had, you could come back later, so I got a little book, a textbook and read it, and went over to the county seat, that winter sometime, and took [the examination on] this course on agriculture, and I made way up in the nineties on it (laughs). So, I got a first grade teacher certificate. Now, this was just out of the high school background, and then with this first teacher's certificate, the first year, 1914, '15, I went all over seven counties. We had a double-horse buggy, and I must have been out three or four weeks, going to every country school that I could find, trying to get a job. And these trustees would get together, and they'd look me over, and I weighed about one hundred and fifteen pounds and six feet tall, and I suppose looked pretty uncertain to them. And they'd look my over, and they'd say "Now, son," they'd said, "We've got a lot of ole boys here that could just whip you before you could turn around." And says, "That's our big job here, is discipline." And they said, "We just don't think you could handle it." And I heard that over and over and over. And so I never did get a job. So I stayed home and picked cotton and worked the farm that year in 1914 and '15. The next year, I started out again. But in our own little old school district, where we were out there in the country, one teacher school. By that time I had kind of gotten acquainted with the neighbors; we'd moved out there full-time. And so I went out, each little old common school district had three trustees. And I went out to see if I could get our own little Pleasant Valley school. And they all get together and they said, "Well, we know a lot of these old boys around here can just clean up on you," but they said, "Tell you what we'll do. We'll try you." And they said, "If they get too bad, we'll come in and help you." They said, "We'll beat them up." And so they did. And they hired me. And they hired me for sixty dollars a month; my contract was sixty dollars a month, I believe, I've forgotten whether it was four months or five. I believe it was five. So I made three hundred dollars that year.

JS:

That was pretty good wages, too.

WH:

I was staying at home, and had saved a great deal of it—

(End of Side 1)

Jimmy M. Skaggs (JS):

Dr. William Curry Holden, side two, tape one. Go ahead, Dr. Holden.

William Holden (WH):

Well, I really taught school—lived a mile and a half through the sand, and I walked to school every day. And I had it all to myself—they had just built a new two-room schoolhouse, and I believe I got to use that the first time. I just had one room because—and I taught from can to can't. I was up there every morning before sunup—usually about daylight—to build a fire. And as I remember, I had about—I started in with probably about thirty-five, forty students, and they were all the way from first grade to the ninth. But we got so much going that pretty soon, a bunch of the old big ones began to come in—by the time the year was over, I think I had fifty-two, and had nine grades.¹⁹ And I never left there before sundown, at night. So not only did I get to have all these grades—and was largely the janitor—but I started a basketball team. I got affiliated with the Interscholastic League, and I got a debating team started, and then we thought we should make a good showing, so we had some kind of program at the schoolhouse once a month, which had declamations, and then we had a play, and it took all kinds of coaching in the play, and if I ran out of somebody to play a part, well I'd be the coach and play that part. In one play we had I was the sheriff. So we really made that school the center of the social life. And we got tremendous enthusiasm, and we just got everybody in the country interested in the school,²⁰ so much so that the second year they employed another teacher [**Vernie Newman**], and we had a two-teacher school, and then had some help. But it didn't—by this time, we were having—we were matching track and basketball and playing the neighboring schools and engaging them in declamation and debate and going to the interscholastic county meet, and I remember the first year we went over, we all went over in a wagon to Roby. It was about eight or ten miles, and they put the kids up over there overnight. I had a wagon full, and we entered everything—every contest they had.

Phone rings

Break in recording

WH:

—and we won two or three, first place, where these country kids had never had any experience, had never had any training—nobody had ever taken any interest in this community of this kind of thing before. We had both a boys' basketball team and a girls'. I know my second year, my assistant teacher had to be—the basketball girls' teams had six on it, and I know my teacher had to make the number sixth place—we just didn't want to have five girls big enough to play. Well,

¹⁹ Corrects fifty-two to thirty-five or forty

²⁰ Corrects country to community

anyway, the second year we did the same thing, and we got a lot of—we won in the county at several places, which enabled us—entitled us—to go to the district meet in Abilene. So we went down—I guess it was the third year that we raided the district—and we went down, took our winners—there were five or six of them—and it was held at Simmons—Simmons College, they called it then—and this was the first time I ever saw Rupert Richardson. He was a young, very handsome, young Napoleon instructor. And he was in charge of all of the declamation and that kind of events—the academic events. And I know that we all met in one of the classrooms there, and he had this ministerial, senatorial voice, and he was tall and handsome. I remember very clearly the impression that he made on me the first time I ever saw him, and so he got us all organized and places to stay—and they stayed around with the various Baptists in the town, they put the kids up—and that was my first memorable—my first meeting, and rather a memorable meeting—with Rupert Richardson. He didn't know who I was at the time, more than probably I was just another country school teacher come to town, but I knew who he was from then on. Then, the next year—by the way, in the summertime, I was going to Canyon—1916, no, 1917, I went to school at Canyon [**the West Texas State Normal School, then usually called Canyon Normal**]
—took a summer term there—in 1918, I went back. I had just turned twenty-one in July, and while I was there I got called to the army, and I know I had to leave there a few days beforehand [**before the summer term was up**], for—to get home in time to go to the army, and I was in the army the latter part of 1918, until they—yeah, it was just 1918—until the armistice in—November 11—and then was discharged, I think, the next February, Camp Travis, and came back, and the year that I was supposed to go to the army, I was elected principal at Rotan, of the high school, but didn't get to go. I didn't get to serve because I had to go into the army. But the next year, they elected me again, and so the year of 1919-20, I was principal at Rotan. And that was the year I ran for—that summer—and this was just a little over a year after my brother drowned, which got our family all messed up—I ran for legislature.

JS:

I didn't know this.

WH:

Yes, and our district had three counties in it. They were in an “L” shape, and up here was Fisher and then Nolan, and over here was Mitchell. And so I decided—I was going to university—I decided by this time, I was going to university. I didn't have any money, and I thought, Well now, this would be a good way to work my way through school—be a member of the legislature—maybe make enough to go to school. And so I ran. Now by this time, we'd bought an old, beat-up Ford car, and I campaigned in this old Ford. And right after I announced, a man named Chitwood—**[Richard]** Mortimer Chitwood, this hall, here, is named after him—from Sweetwater announced, and then, over in Colorado City, Charlie Thompson announced. Now, Chitwood's claim to fame was he was a good orator—he was a man who had a hesitancy—he stuttered when he was in conversation—but he could get before a crowd, and he could throw his

head back, and he could—he never stuttered when he was making an address, and he was good. He was terrific. He could just set the hair on the back of your neck. And he was older, much—he was much older than Charlie and I. And Charlie's claim to fame was that—and the only claim he had—he was just an old country boy raised at Loraine. He was a big fellow, about six-foot-two, and he was on the state championship basketball team that won the interscholastic league the year before, and so his name had gotten in the papers as being on this. He was center, I think. And I didn't have any claim to fame at all, but we all got together somehow up at Sweetwater, and we all liked each other. And we decided that we would make all the country picnics together, and that would be fair, and everybody could say their little piece. I was the only one that had access to a car, and so I'd go down to Sweetwater, and Charlie would come down from—by this time—I think he's still living at Loraine, I believe. And so we made the country picnics, and I'd furnish the car, and I think it was Chitwood bought the dinners, and Charlie furnished the gasoline—or vice versa. And so we spent about a month campaigning around, and that's about all the campaigning we did. Then the election came—this was the Democratic primary—and out of these three counties—I've forgotten what the total vote was—I beat Charlie **[by]** fifty-seven votes, and Chitwood beat me **[by]** thirteen votes. And so, if we'd had a runoff, it would have been between me and Chitwood, you see, because it was just thirteen votes' difference. But we had had an agreement. We were all under the—Chitwood may have known better. Charlie and I sure didn't—we didn't know anything, much. We had a—we thought we'd have to pay for that second election. We didn't have the money. We thought we'd have to contribute maybe a hundred, two hundred dollars apiece, and we just didn't have a bit of money. So we agreed that whoever had the most votes in the first election—the runner-up would just withdraw and leave it with the other one, and then we wouldn't be out the money. Well, it was my job; I withdrew. I wrote a letter, withdrawing, to the committee. Well that winter, then, September came. I'd saved up a little money—enough to get to Austin on, and I went to the university September 1920. And it looked like we had a good crop on the place. It looked like we were going to make a bale **[of cotton]** to the acre. And the crop was late, but it was good. I'd saved enough money to go down there, and pay room, rent, and board for a little while—Christmas, at least. And so when we got along in September, we had a freeze that ruined about half of the cotton crop, and before we could get the—my folks could get the rest of it picked—what didn't ruin—cotton dropped from about twenty cents a pound to five cents a pound. And so my folks told me—wrote me and told me that we were absolutely ruined again, and there was no way in the world to keep me in school after Christmas, and to bring all my stuff home. Well, by this time, I was twenty-four years old, and I knew it was now or never. And so I didn't take my stuff home. Instead, I went to the lady where I'd been boarding and got a job waiting tables. I went to another place and got a little job where I could afford my room. And the only thing that World War One veterans got by way of their education was by state law, which gave them their tuition free. That's the only thing they ever got, and that was a state thing. And so I didn't have to pay tuition. And so I managed to keep my head above water. I'd even send my clothes, about every three weeks, home by parcel post—it cost about eight cents—to my mother to wash them and iron them and send them back.

Many a month—one month, I know, I went home, I put dime in my pocket, and I still had the dime a month or so. And the third—and I did four years' work in three years—I stayed right on through the summers—and not only did I do it in three years, but I had twelve hours to carry over for a master's June.

JS:

That would have been 1923, then.

WH:

1923, yeah, I graduated in '23, and I had six hours floated to count on a master's.

JS:

And that was with a BA?

WH:

BA.

JS:

What was your major, Dr. Holden?

WH:

It was history. I was carrying about the same amount of history and government. I never did tell you why I—

JS:

That's why I started this whole mess.

WH:

Well, let me finish this, and I'll come back to that.

JS:

Go ahead.

WH:

And it so happened that in the summer, I guess of 1922, Dr. James Winford Hunt—you run across him.²¹ I noticed you'd quoted his articles in the *Hollins* magazine about J. Wright Moorar. Well, he founded McMurry College along in the summer of—and he was a man who'd go around [**West Texas speaking**], and he was a great orator and wonderful man. He was miscast in life; he should have been in politics instead of the ministry because he had such great interests in

²¹ "A renowned Methodist minister"

politics—wonderful voice. Had he gone into politics, he would have been a United States senator. He had everything it took. But anyway, he'd been president of the old Stamford College when it burned down, and he decided that he'd organize McMurry College. He got the thing going and he got the building up along in the spring of 19—and he used to stay at our house when he'd come through raising money and that kind of thing, and got acquainted with me, and he knew I was down there, and I was majoring in history. And so I was just bowled over, along in, probably, May or June—I had a letter from him offering me the head of his history department at McMurry College.

JS:

My goodness.

WH:

Fifteen hundred dollars a year, nine months. That sounded like fifteen thousand to me, and so—no, I guess that was earlier—they had terms. Anyway, when I got that job that he promised, the last term I was in the university, I stopped working and borrowed two hundred dollars, so I could devote all my time and try to make straight B's or A's—and I missed Phi Beta Kappa by two or three A's. I might have made it if I hadn't been working all the time, but it wasn't because I was smart, it was because I was really working. And my roommate at the University of Texas was [William] Marvin Whyburn.

JS:

President Whyburn?

WH:

President Whyburn. I was about three or four years older than he was—no, about two years older than he was. But he was most studious, and we just—because I was—we were both mature, and we really buckled down and we worked. He did make Phi Beta Kappa and Sigma Psi and everything else that went along. He was just a lot smarter than I was. I'll get back to history. At these—we used to have county institutes for the teachers when I was teaching over there in Fisher County, and they always—it was a pain in the nose, but it was somewhere I'd go, and we thought it was pretty good. It must have been a very dull affair as they had over at the county seat. But I think it was—let me see, in 1915-'16 or '16-'17—they usually tried to import at least one speaker, and I went over that year to Roby and the important speaker was Dr. [J. A.] Hill, who wasn't a doctor then, but he became president of Canyon later. And he was the professor of history—practically the whole department at Canyon. That was when he was in his prime, and he was a handsome guy and a very impressive one. And he had the finest set of senatorial hair—just salt-and-pepper gray—and I thought he was the most distinguished person I'd ever seen. Of course, I hadn't seen many people outside of the county. His—he talked about some historical subject—I've forgot what it was—and it absolutely fascinated me, and I thought, If I can ever get

to go to college, I'm going where that man is and I'm going to take his classes. And so in 1917, I finally made it up to Canyon—that's the reason I went to Canyon. And I took—and got in his class. If he'd been teaching Japanese, I'd have majored in Japanese. I got into history because this man that fascinated me taught history. That's the only reason in the world—because of the influence of this man. He got me interested in history. I presume that up to that time, my major interest would have been government. I taught civics, and it kind of gave me a taste for that.

JS:

You were also interested in politics.

WH:

—and interested in politics, and when I to the university in my courses, I took a double major—as just as much government—I took my electives in government, so I really had a double major. But after I got this job teaching history, then I went for history good and strong for my master's. And that's how I got into history.

JS:

That's very interesting.

WH:

Now along the same line, you had here somewhere the teachers who had influenced me.

JS:

Can we stop just a moment, Dr. Holden?

WH:

Yeah.

JS:

—just worried about me.

WH:

There are three or four—I mentioned them a while ago. At the University of Texas my sophomore year, the first history that I took there was American history—was under this Dr. Boucher—and I mentioned him earlier—he was an inspiring teacher. And I was just absolutely fascinated with his classes. And of course, I studied like everything for him. I suppose he influenced my approach—maybe my style—more than any other man. I know I still tell some of his stories in my classes. I remember them so vividly. Then, later, after I married in 1926—

Phone ringing

WH:

Let me see. In the summer of 1927, my wife and I, we had a little Model T Coupe car, and we decided to go to the University of Chicago for the summer. And the reason I wanted to go there was because, for some reason I can't think of at the moment, I wanted to go and get a class with Dr. W. E. Dodd, who was the author of one of the books in the Yale Series—do you remember the name of that? It's the southern—it had to do with the old south. That may have been the name, *The Old South*. [*Cotton Kingdom: A Chronicle of the Old South*]

JS:

Possibly, it was.

WH:

And I had never seen Dr. Dodd, but his writing had fascinated me. So we went up there and took an apartment and registered in—I believe I'd registered for a couple of courses—and, I believe, for a lecture section and also for a seminar that he taught. I believe that constituted my registration. I remember the first day we met class; there must have been a hundred and fifty people in the class. It was a large classroom. And we were all there, and I remember the student assistant, or something, had come in and had seated us alphabetically. And it fell to my luck, there was one Negro in the class, and his name started with an H, and it fell to my luck to have to be sitting right by him. Well, I'd been raised on these old fashioned southern traditions and all of that about the Negroes and so on, and I was unduly prejudiced and had a lot of false pride and so on, and I know—I didn't know what to do about it, whether I get up and stalk out or wait and endure it or what. I just thought that it was going to be terrible, to have to sit by a Negro in the class and equality with him. But my great yearning to be in Dr. Dodd's class, of course overcame my prejudices and so we waited around for Dr. Dodd to come in. Well, after five minutes or so—after we'd been waiting—well, in he came. And I was never in my life more disappointed in the appearance of a man. He was little, small, kind of a grizzled-up, wrinkled-up sort of a man with a head about like a—almost like a gorilla in a way. Then, when he started talking—he had sort of a harsh, rasping voice, no style, no delivery—he was—I was never more disappointed, I don't think, in my whole life because I had banked on this. I imagined seeing another Dr. Boucher or something of that order. So he didn't bring any notes to class—he just came in and kind of—there was a rostrum up front and he kind of wandered over there and lounged around on the lectern and started talking. After a few minutes, I got to listening to him. At first, I was so disappointed, I didn't listen to him. And I got to listening to him, when, the more I listened, the more intent I became. Before I knew it, the hour was up, and I noticed I was sitting out on the seat like this—just in a strain. The man had a magic about him, and I've never been able to define it or analyze it, but in the—he had absolutely nothing that you could tangibly say “This is it,” but he started talking, and he'd just mesmerize you, almost—almost hypnotic. And from that time on, I could hardly wait for that class to meet. It only met four times a week, and I thought the other three days of the week were wasted. I don't think I ever enjoyed a class more than I did

that one. I think there was only one test, or a quiz or something—and I forgot what I made. I think I made a B+ or something, but that didn't matter. So I count him one of the great inspirational teachers. Then, at the University of Texas, after I was a graduate student—after—the first year after I got my master's at the university, I began to shop around to get some men, rather, at different places on my doctor's. The first year I went to Colorado, and I didn't have any outstanding professors there except an Indian who taught—gave a course on Muhammadanism—Islam, rather—and he was pretty good, and the material was all completely new, so I was—it interested me a great deal. Then, the next year, then—that was in '25—in '26, we—that was University of Texas.²² Now wait a minute, let me see—in '25, I went—no, it must have been '24 that I went to Colorado, and '25, the University of Texas—'26 we went to Colorado, '27 to the University of Chicago, and then '28—I got my doctor's degree in June, '28.²³ Then it must have been '24—I had the same experience with Dr. Webb. Webb—I'd missed him on the undergraduate work, but I caught him in a graduate course, and this course had to do with the Southwest—the reason I took it—and he happened to be the teacher. And at that time, I think he was probably an assistant professor or something. And he was the most dismal man—the most sad-looking man—the most disgusted-looking man I think I'd ever seen. He seemed to be mad at everything and everybody, and I didn't know at the time, but he really had a pretty good reason. He'd been **[teaching]** at the graduate school at the University of Texas two or three years, and when he came up—I don't know where, they turn you back there **[out of graduate school at the University of Chicago, where he was working on his doctorate]**. Every graduate school has its own way of throwing the folks out they don't want. Some people do it on their dissertation, others do it on one of the examinations, but they all have somewhere where they can put them out. Well, anyway, when he got to that point, they threw him out.

JS:

That was at Chicago?

WH:

University of Chicago, yeah, he was—they just threw him out of graduate school. Well, he was so disgusted that he became an introvert, down on the world, mad at everybody—and it showed in his features. His mouth drew all down; he just looked like he's mad—bite your head off. But, he'd kind had mellowed a bit, and he'd gotten a new idea.²⁴ He'd turned this class into a sort of seminar. There must have been about twenty of us in there. He was just—he had a concept—he didn't know what he was going to do with it, but he had a concept. This concept had to do with the Plains—it had been skipped by everybody. So he assigned each one of us a subject that had something to do with the Plains. He had a long list of topics that he'd just hatched up. I know I

²² Corrects to the Summer of 1924.

²³ "In the summer of '25, I went to Boulder, University of Colorado with 'Shorty' Roland House, and the summer of '26 I was at the University of Texas. In the summer of '27, I went to the University of Chicago; and full year of 1927 to '28 at the University of Texas."

²⁴ A new "interpretation of history. This is the time I entered his class."

took the one on the buffalo, and I bore in and I went to the library and I researched and I wrote a paper on the buffalo. And I forgot whether we had a reading of all the papers or not—I don't think we did. We met once or twice a week and talked about things. But anyway, finally, later—much later—when he brought out his book on the Great Plains, his chapter on buffalo was my term paper, almost completely. He just made a few footnotes and added a few little things to it, but it was basically my chapter on the buffalo. But since I had my own original chapter that I brought out—but I brought it out—I believe I got it out before he got the famous things out. Well I used it in *Alkali Trails*, but—he'd made some changes—but it was basically my—but still, he had not gotten his—the concept that he added to it—the interpretive thing—that thing of the influence of the frontier—the impact when it hit this new environment [of the Plains]—that came to him three or four years later.²⁵ He later explained to us—we became great friends after that, and I became very fond of him, and he had, I think, a great influence on me. He explained to me one time—well, to several of us who were having just a little book session—about how that concept hit him. He said that he was working—he had a very unhappy family life—and he was working one night—he and his wife didn't get along, and he had a daughter who was some kind of retarded child, and who was kind of a cross for him to bear—and he had a little room—he lived in an old two-story house with just a little room extended out that had a flat roof on it, and it was made of tin—and he'd stay out there all the time—stayed away from his wife and his daughter. One night—well, on the night a thundershower came up, and it was lightning and a little hail and he was in there studying, and during this thunderstorm, something—I don't know whether it was the environment or the noise or the lightning or something—but he said during that thunderstorm, this thing hit him just like **Error! Bookmark not defined.** that—what the theme should be—the environmental influence of the frontier when it hit the Plains. And after he got that concept, then he took all the stuff that—the next year—the next summer after that summer, he started on us.²⁶ He did this again. The third summer, he repeated it again. And this built a wonderful bibliography. He began, then, in terms of this one central idea: to build up *The Great Plains*.²⁷ And that's the way that thing held of him.

JS:

After he hit concept, it fits together like a jigsaw puzzle.

WH:

Yeah, it just went together like that. But he'd just been probing, you see, up until then. And so Webb was one of the—well, Dr. Barker was the other one that had great influence on me. Now, Dr. Barker—very much like in the category of Dodd and Webb—a very un-possessing man. He was rather tall, retiring man. He had a tenor—high tenor—voice. [**He was**] sort of a very uninspiring lecturer. He's hard to analyze—like Dodd—but the sum total of the man was

²⁵ “After the seminar, which he set down in the Great Plains.”

²⁶ He “reviewed” all the stuff “he had collected from his students.”

²⁷ To “develop the interpretation he set forth in *The Great Plains*.”

inspiring. He was such an honest, respected scholar of great depth—that you just had a tremendous respect for this man. When I decided that—on what I hoped would be my dissertation—which is a story all unto itself—and went back to spend my year in residence—I only spent one year in residence at this point—while I was at McMurry for four or five years, for the first two years—or three—I was the whole department for the academy and the high school, but we just had—the first year, we just had two—

Break in recording

WH:

After the first year, we added the junior and then the senior year, and by that time, I was out of the academy. But I took my advanced students and began—I brought in all of the old newspaper files that I could find in West Texas. I got in my old car and I pulled out and I went to Mason and found out they had five years of the *Mason County News* and found in Abilene—I think it was ten or twelve years of the *Taylor County News*. And I went down over to Albany and located the files of *The Frontier Echo*—which are priceless—

JS:

Oh, they are.

WH:

—and they loaned these to me—and three or four other sets of files. And I borrowed them from the owners and brought them all in—the loan to me—and I used my advanced students—I trained them on how to go through and pick out items of historical importance, and I'd have them copy these items—there was no Xerox or anything in those days—and I was picking stuff and having them, and I had some who were good enough to select themselves. And when I went to the University of Texas, I had five—and y'all have those file boxes up there, have you seen them?

JS:

Uh-huh.

WH:

They're about this long, about this high, and I used a paper like this, double and cut in two. Well, I had these things organized under subjects, and I was doing pretty much what Webb was doing. I was just—these things that seemed to fit together—every historical thing that had anything to do with the history of the country—from cattle to droughts to buffalo to newspapers and all that. And so, when I went to the University of Texas in 1927 to finish my year—they'd given me a half-time teaching job so we could live—and my wife was a librarian—got a job in the library. That was my first wife. Let's see, where is she—the one over yonder, she and Jane you see

hanging on the wall—name is Olive. I went to see Dr. Barker at his house—he lived in a little old box house over there—and I carried in these boxes and put them on the floor. And I'd had a course with him, and I said, "Now, Dr. Barker, I don't know whether this stuff is worth anything or not, but I want to tell you what I've done and what I got here. And if you think it's worth anything, I would like for you to direct my dissertation." And I showed him how it was organized and he saw what it was. He said "Well, this is terrific, what you've done," and he was very much impressed. I said "Well, do you think I have enough stuff here?" He said "You've got enough stuff there for five or six doctor's dissertations." And I said "Well, will you take it?" He said "I'd love to do it." And so that's the way I got started with him, and believe me, he was a great one. And so I started in—that was a tough year. I was taking two courses, I was teaching two courses, and I was writing this dissertation—and I started from scratch—and also, I had to take the writtens and the orals—all in nine months. And right in the middle of that, my wife got pregnant, and she was absolutely—oh, she was—she just couldn't eat or keep anything in her stomach for six weeks, and I had to wait on her and do the cooking and keep all of these things going. Anyway, I don't know how I did it, but I got four chapters on frontier defense finished, and my dissertation was different from *Alkali Trails*, and I dug up these social things, and I knocked out I guess, probably must have been eight or ten of those chapters dealing with the social movements, and I kind of tied it together that these social movements—that they had to get the military—the protection—before these things could move on in a way that was acceptable. And I was pounding away, and along down about middle of April, I carried these to Dr. Barker, and he would write a few little things on them—usually complimentary. And I didn't know when I went to the university, whether I'd be there one year or ten. And along, about the middle of April, I carried him in a thing and dropped in to get it, he says "Holden, you've written enough on this thing. It's—I'm sure—acceptable to the committee. You get busy and take your exams and get ready to get out of here in June." And that was that. And so that's the kind of man he was. And I remember in my final, there was one man in there from the government department, since I was using that for a minor—and he was a young smart-aleck [named **Stewart**]—and I'd known him quite well and simply didn't expect this—but in the final—they were awfully good to me in the final—and by the way, they had all of those twelve professors, these great ole boys like Ramsdell and Marsh and Duncalf—they were the great ones there, and they were all on my committee. And they were awfully considerate—except this one ole boy, his name's Stewart—and boy, he was—he got real nasty. And he asked me a few things—and was rather nasty about it—and he was just going to have a Roman Holiday at me. And I know Dr. Barker who'd sit there and listened to him a little bit, and directly he turned on him—he said "Mr. Stewart, I know Mr. Holden, here, doesn't know the answer to that, but I want to tell you I don't know it, either," and that just squelched him. That was the only trouble I had on my final, and Dr. Barker waded in and really laid him—though, he could do more with just a—he was a man of under-spoken, soft-spoken kind of a man, but he could just—absolutely would lay you flat with that quiet under-toned understatement that he had. Well, he turned that on ole Stewart, and that ended that. So I had no more trouble.

JS:

And you graduated in June of '28, I believe it says.

WH:

Yeah—June of '28.

End of that day's interview

JS:

December 15, 1967—this is Skaggs continuing the interview with Dr. William Curry Holden.

WH:

I believe we got up to June 1928. About a week before the commencement—and after I was quite definite that we were going to finish at that time, I received a telephone call from the president of Southwestern State Normal College—they called it then—at San Marcos—which is LBJ's old alma mater—asking if I would be interested in coming there for the summer and taking the classes of one of their regular men who had been called away from some purpose, and they were trying to fill-in for him. Well, after a year there and a sickness we'd had and everything with the family, it was just like Christmas coming in June. So we finished up, and the next day after the commencement, well, we packed our little Model A car and took off to San Marcos, where we stayed in an old house of one of the faculty members who was away—up on the hill—and put in the entire summer there, teaching as I recall American history.²⁸ And then we went to—we packed up along about the fourth week, I suppose it was probably, or third week of September, and went back to Abilene and resumed my work at McMurry College. About a week after we got there—or less than a week—our daughter [**Narcissa Jane**] was born, and it was a great surprise, I recall, to friends and faculty. We hadn't been there long enough for them to observe any promise of this event because that had just never shown up very much. I remember one dear old lady on the faculty—Mrs. Barrow—grand old lady, she was head of the speech department—and we'd gone to see her the day before, and she had observed nothing. And the next time I saw her—about a week later—she just couldn't believe it'd taken place. Now, when you can fool a person like that—you can see, it was really—appearances are deceiving at least. Well, we stayed on at McMurry that year—that was '28-'29—and along in the spring—I received a long letter—John C. Granbery, who at that time was the head of the department of history, philosophy, sociology—and something else, I can't remember.

JS:

Government, perhaps.

²⁸ Corrected Model A to "old Willys-Knight car"

WH:

No, government at that time was a big department all unto its own—Dr. William Jackson—Bill Jackson. As a matter of fact, it was bigger than the history department at the time. But anyway, Dr. Granbery wanted to know if I would be amenable to accepting the professorship at Texas Tech, beginning in September. And of course, I was very much interested in that—especially since the faculty was—the salary was just twice what I'd been getting, and also it was from taxation, and not from a few—oh, what the hell—Methodists—at the time, who were flush in flush times and stripped in bare times and so on. And so we lost no time in accepting this offer. I might point out—how did he [Dr. Granbery] come to know anything about me? It was a coincidence that perhaps, hardly explains it, but it was just one of those unusual things that would happen once in a lifetime. I believe it was the second year that McMurry had started, we had there three or four unusually brilliant students, and they all, somehow, managed to take my courses, and we got along very well together. They became, more or less, my champions, you might say—both there and abroad. And one of these was H. Billy Carroll, who was a sophomore, taking sophomore history, I think, at a time when I believe we only had the junior year done. No, sophomore—we just had two years of college—we added one other year the two succeeding years. And Billy had—when Tech started in '25 —of course, he lived here in Lubbock but he came back—and he projected into his admiration and loyalty to Tech what same admiration and loyalty that everybody in town had for Lubbock at the time. Everybody here was a whooping up sort of a booster. And when “the Tech,” as the all called it, got started, well, that loyalty was extended to the college. Well, he came back here in the opening year, and he became one of Dr. Granbery's very loyal and devoted fans. He always had to have a hero to be worshipping. He had transferred—hadn't transferred, exactly—he had simply added Dr. Granbery to his list. So he had, in his senior year here—when they were going to add another man—well, he insisted very strongly that Dr. Granbery consider me—and did a good job, I suppose, because Dr. Granbery just made this offer out of the clear blue. Not only that, but he wanted me for summer work that summer, fulltime—and that was in addition to the—I believe professors earned about three thousand dollars, which was an enormous salary—and then, the summer, they got in proportion—so it ran over four thousand dollars. That was more than the governor was making those days. The governor's salary was four thousand dollars.

JS:

Getting rich.

WH:

Yes, that was really something. And so we—the end of school at McMurry, we had to hurry to get up here to get located and get ready to start in the summer. So that was the way I came to Texas Tech. An interesting thing—it happened that at Easter 1929, that I had received—two or three weeks before Easter—a letter from another one of my students who had graduated from McMurry, and had gone to Perryton to teach in the high school. I think he was teaching science.

And he had heard after he got up there—he'd been there since, you know, the school year—and this was along probably in latter, latter part of April—February, or March—he'd heard about so-called "Buried City" out on Wolf Creek, out near Perryton—southeast Perryton—and had gone out and had visited this mound and had ascertained that it was some kind of an Indian mound. He said the natives up there always referred to it as a Buried City, and so he wrote me a letter suggesting that I come up at Easter and we'd get some people together and we'd dig into it. And so I got together, I think, five other people—Dr. Glass of the biology department and four of my students—and in two automobiles, a camping outfit, we set out up there and spent a week and we dug into this thing, and it was about a two-room slab-stone-type building, the likes of which I didn't even know existed. We worked that out, not too well—none of us could make it out in what was considered good technique, but we got it down—laid the foundations bare, and got a bucket full of artifacts for his times—potshards, and a few things—corn grinders—to show that whoever lived there were farmers. Then we decided to do some more exploring on other creeks, and we went down on the Canadian northbound for a long—and we'd heard, in the meanwhile, of some other ruins, and so we stumbled up on one. And we dug it out—it wasn't much of a mound, but we dug it out—had four rooms. But there must have been a thousand metates stones—great huge ones—there around the place, and there were far more—if we'd had a huge truck we couldn't have carried them all home on account of the weight.²⁹ And then we dug into another one a few miles from there. And then we went to—went back to and—to Abilene—and the newspaper had got wind of the fact that we were up on the Canadian River digging in buried cities, and they were laying for us when we got home. And being amateurs—not knowing any better—we just told them what we'd found—just the big haul I found. Well this story, it came out in the Abilene paper with two-inch—the headline was two inches high "Buried City Found by McMurry Party" and got on the Associated Press and was carried by every paper in the United States, I suppose. I got clippings from all over the nation. And also, it stirred up a storm. There so happened that a man at Amarillo by the name of **[Floyd V.] Studer** had known about these things for a long time, and his idea was to keep it quiet—not let anybody know about it—so he could have a lifetime digging. And he had been with a Dr. —oh, his name will come—but he was at Andover—Phillips Andover Academy. I guess that's up near Boston—maybe it's in New Hampshire.³⁰ And he'd been doing this some twenty years before, and had dug in some of those ruins. So we were all basking in our glory, and I received this memo—it came out over the Associated Press, "Amarillo Man Says McMurry Party **[ruins site.]**" I don't know, he just took a high—and that this thing had been on for a long, long time and so on—so it kind of took the wind out of our sails. And among other things, it taught us a lesson—which we have adhered to very strictly ever since, and that is that when you find something of scientific interest like that, the best thing in the world to do is to keep it to yourself—don't even tell your wife, hardly—and probably it was worth the lesson we got.

²⁹ Corrects thousand to hundred

³⁰ [Warren K. Moorehead—Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts]

JS:

Were you interested in archeology?

WH:

Yes, and I'd never had a course in it. My only interest in archaeology had been my wife had been—my wife, Olive—I think I showed you her picture the other day—had taken a couple of courses under Professor [Anjerant? 2:04:40] at the University of Texas. She and I graduated at the same time and same majors, but she had taken a couple of courses in archaeology, and one in the Pueblo Southwest. And on our honeymoon, in our little—at that time—Model A car, back in 1926, we had spent three weeks out there, and it was the first time I'd ever been around the Indians, or thought anything about them. She had a very good knowledge—she had a splendid mind, a splendid memory—and that had created—my interest in the thing was from her. And this thing that we had gone up on the Canadian was almost entirely a lark with us. It was just something that'd be thrilling. We never thought about the publicity angle until it all had broken. Then we had to ride it out. Well, later I got in touch with Mr. Studer, and we became very good friends. And I explained to him what we had done, and that this publicity—and we didn't know nothing about this until it had happened. We'd been victims of the press, but we didn't know we were. So after that time, we formed a sort of a working partnership with him. He took us—he'd known about something over a hundred and twenty of these ruins between the [New] Mexico line and the Oklahoma line on the Canadian. He turned over to us his very best ones to work, and he'd come out to help us and everything—so all of that turned out very well in the end. Let me get back to McMurry College. All of this is taking place just after Easter, and they read about it up here at Lubbock, and I had just—this was a short time after I had accepted the position here. And when I got here in June, Dr. Granbery informed me that he had scheduled—that he was adding anthropology to his coterie of things that he was trimming off and a course had been—two courses—at least six hours [of anthropology] had been put in the catalog and I was already scheduled to give them.

JS:

My goodness.

WH:

This was what I called background, general, or social anthropology. Well, I'd never even seen a book on it—

JS:

—much less taught a course—

WH:

—much less taught the course. And so what I did—I didn't argue with him about it. I sent and

got a textbook—Kroeber's book on anthropology—and I stayed—I had a big class—big, enthusiastic class—and I stayed just about two jumps ahead of the class. I'd get my texts and read my texts and then I would impart this knowledge to them. And we would work up tremendous enthusiasm, and I never worked harder as I had to, or enjoyed anything more than I did—and at the end of the spring—at that time we had terms; we had three courses. They were two-hour courses instead of three, as we now have in the semester. And I had—we had another thing in the winter term and another one in the summer—in the spring—and at the end of that time, for the next year, he scheduled about two or three more courses—and most of these people that had taken the first year wanted to take more. And so, at the end of the second year, I had taught six, twelve—twelve hours. And the third year, others were added. And I was usually just teaching one course each year. Now, by the third year, I was having to repeat this first one. And in that way, I got shoved off on it—and that's the way anthropology started at Texas Tech. and after about—no, it was within four years—we began to have majors in it, yet I was teaching all of them. And in the meanwhile, I was teaching our basic history course here, which was the history of civilization—and it was required of—well, it was required for all—I believe it was required for practically everybody—except for the arts and sciences type—they took government. And it was a splendid course—and it had been taught in other places, but not quite the way we did it. And so, it made a wonderful combination. I usually taught the first term of that, which went back into prehistory, and so it worked in beautifully [with the Anthropology]. Yes—still got a little more, there. And we—

End of recording