

**Oral History Interview of  
Jim Crownover**

**Interviewed by: Robert Weaver  
June 11, 2012  
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:  
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## Transcript Overview:

This interview features Jim Crownover as he discusses his career with the Soil Conservation Services. Crownover describes going to college, working for and practices of the Soil Conservation Services, and his interest in regional history.

**Length of Interview:** 01:18:24

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### Keywords

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**Robert Weaver (RW):**

This is Robert Weaver, today's date is June 11, 2012. I'm here with Mr. Jim Crownover in Lubbock, Texas. And Mr. Crownover if I could get your date of birth.

**Jim Crownover (JC):**

Yes, my date of birth is December 13, 1945.

RW:

December 13, '45. Wow so you didn't catch any of the war at all did you?

JC:

No, I sure didn't. I'm probably one of the first of the boomers I guess.

RW:

Yeah I guess so.

JC:

Maybe a little bit before them. I think first of January '46 was when they designated the boomer era.

RW:

Oh, really? They're probably not—that big a deal out of it

JC:

It doesn't make a whole lot of difference.

RW:

Where were you born?

JC:

I was born in Amarillo.

RW:

Oh in Amarillo. I guess, what'd you parents do?

JC:

My folks farmed there in Armstrong county, Claude is the county seat. We were in the farming operation there, my dad retired in '77. Let's see I think up until about '86 we still had land in the family there. It finally everybody either died out or sold out, one or the other.

RW:

There aren't windmills on it now or something are there?

JC:

No.

RW:

Okay good you didn't miss anything.

JC:

Or oil wells either.

RW:

Or oil. So you didn't miss out on anything, that's good. So you said they did that up through '77. So where did you go to school? There in Claude?

JC:

Yeah I went to school at Claude. I graduated in '64 then went to my first year of college at Lubbock Christian here in Lubbock and then transferred to West Texas State in Canyon. Got out of there in '68.

RW:

Why did you go to LCU first?

JC:

I had a cousin that was going there, and you know it seemed like—it was a junior college at the time, and it seemed like a good idea to kind of start off at a junior college because Claude was a small town, small school. If I'd have gone to a larger college right at first, tail lights are brighter than head lights but you never know I might not've done to well in college.

RW:

It's hard to say. What was the transition like? Were they real different, the two different schools?

JC:

Yeah they—of course LCU or LCC at the time, still is a private school, and of course, number one the tuition was quite a bit higher at LCC. And—I don't know I guess at the time that I went to school at LCC the activities on campus were—let's just say conservative. Probably going to a state university things were a little bit less conservative.



RW:

Yeah I can imagine. The difference is probably still there.

JC:

Dress, you know dress codes, just a lot of things that were different. I stayed in a dorm here at LCC, and then whenever I transferred to West Texas State I lived on a farm and then commuted back and forth. The expense was much less. Of course meals and everything. I was able to farm with my dad and help him, and then had a little part time job at the school. Later on went to part time with the soil conservation service, just kept on going.

RW:

What did you study at first at WT? Or was it the same thing all the way through?

JC:

It was pretty much the same thing all the way through at WT. I majored in plant science. I went to LCC with the idea of going into Ag. Economics and whenever I transferred to West Texas State they really didn't have that much of an Ag. Business program. I was pretty much turned towards plant science part of it or ecological sciences you might say.

RW:

Did somebody point you in that direction?

JC:

Well yeah a county agent by the name of Foster Whaley at Claude, later ended up being a state representative—was a real go getting grass judging team coach. From the time I joined 4-H until the time I got out of school I was on some of his grass judging teams or in FFA [Future Farmers of America] and sometimes both.

RW:

So in high school?

JC:

Yeah in high school all the way through. Then of course, in college that had pretty much attracted me to the botany part of it, the plant sciences, agronomy. I had one or two courses in rain science and so I got a pretty good background.

RW:

So you were working on the farm at the same time and going to school. Hop back for a second there I guess how was—was the city—when you came to Lubbock—was the city a lot different,

was there an adjustment to this other than just the school it being five, six times bigger than Claude?

JC:

When I grew up we lived in the center of a section of land and our nearest neighbor was a half a mile away. So it was quite an adjustment for me to live in a city. Of course Lubbock was much different then. 50<sup>th</sup> street was the end of Lubbock at the time, there was cotton fields. As a matter of fact Frankford on the west side of Lubbock Christian was a cotton field. Part of Lubbock Christian was crop land. There was really not much to Lubbock but it was still bigger than this country boy was used to.

RW:

Would you remember anything in particular that stood out other than a few more people? I'm thinking it was the sixties and stuff's going on with Tech's campus—and I don't know things are—

JC:

I just took it kind of as I got it. I guess the sixties culture I don't think that we were even aware of the, you might say the hippie culture, or anything—well we knew of them but we didn't know much. Probably what we called hippy when we were going to LCC were probably guys that we'd call nerds. Just little different kind of folks, they really weren't the hippy culture and nothing like what it turned out to be later on in the sixties.

RW:

Yeah five or six years later.

JC:

Yeah. Probably the class behind me, or the couple of classes behind me were the ones that really got into that movement. The generation or the age of folks that I were we just came straight off the farm from working and all we knew was work. Yeah it was different. I got—in Claude where I grew up there were no Hispanics or no blacks.

RW:

Yeah it's just part of the world now.

JC:

It wasn't a big deal for me to get acquainted and know other races of folks but it was different. It took a little while—well to even understand how they talk, some of them you know. Of course we had Canadians, and we had people from Africa, and one or two guys from probably Iran or Iraq, something like that.



RW:

Yeah I know the Shaw's son was here in the seventies.

JC:

Yeah he was here at Tech in the seventies.

RW:

You know that something—you mentioned the Hispanics and Mexicans—if y'all had a small place you probably didn't have braceros come out there. But was that a thing going on up in Claude?

JC:

No. In Claude it was pretty much—we were dry land people, although we did have hired hands every once and a while. The braceros went more into the irrigation part.

RW:

The big cotton stuff down there. They really got into that

JC:

Yeah. They got into the more intensive type of agriculture. I had an uncle up North in Dumas country and of course they had a lot of water, farmed a lot of land. And so they had to have some help. The braceros at that time were available so they used them.

RW:

I guess the other thing that was going on—so you graduated you said in '64?

JC:

Um-hm.

RW:

So a lot of people were signing up for service. Why did you not do that? Or did you dodge a bullet there?

JC:

Well number one, I was going to school, and I guess I didn't think too much about it. I didn't really inform my draft board that I was going to school. I guess sometime during that year that I was at LCU—or LCC, I got a letter from my draft board to show up for my pre-induction physical and that got my attention. Of course, Vietnam wasn't in the picture that much at that time in '64 and '65. It still got my attention because I wanted to finish school before I went in the army. Anyway I got in touch with the dean of the college and he contacted the draft board and

we smoothed things over and got applied for a student deferment—I think it what they called it. So anyway, I dodged that bullet you might say. Then after I graduated in '68 of course I got another letter from the draft board, and I had to go take my physical. Sure enough I was not—I didn't make the physical. I had allergic allergy problems, stuff like that, they didn't want me.

RW:

That's what—I spent, my parents used to work at the museum in Canyon when I was little and we moved out of there in '87 or '88 and I used to—that stuff would blow down from Pampa or I don't know where, and I just couldn't even breath back. Maybe they had you in the right part of the world.

JC:

At the time we were growing a lot of sorghum, you know milo maize, stuff like that. Whenever it flowered out, well it just killed me.

RW:

I guess all this wrapped up about '68. What did you do after that? Was it straight to a job or did—

JC:

Yes. Matter of fact I wasn't even out of college before I was interviewed and hired by the soil conservation service. I lucked out, and one of my classmates there at West Texas State worked part-time for the soil conservation service there at Canyon. He kind of clued me in that they needed some more folks and so I went and visited with them, and I walked out of the office being hired for part-time job. I got to learn about the conservation business even before I got out of college. I went to work for them in '67 I think. And, of course, my whole senior year there I worked for the government on a part time basis.

RW:

That turned into the full job later on?

JC:

Yes it did. Of course I had to go ahead and make a full application just like any civil service job. I applied, and I was interviewed by a man named Marcus Loader, he was a personnel man out of the state office in Temple. He came up and interviewed several of the guys in the Ag. Department. He had known that I had applied and everything so we had discussed. He gave me pretty good assurances that I was hired. Then I guess a week or two after I graduated I got a letter asking me where I wanted to go, I had several choices. I ended up going to Brownfield in June of '68. I had about a two-week vacation after I graduated from college. I went to work at Brownfield as a soil conservationist.

RW:

So what did they start you out doing? And what was the typical day like I guess?

JC:

Well they of course a lot of training went on in that. Not that I didn't pick up a good bit when I was part time. But basically my position called for learning how to work with farmers and ranchers, and work with them in a planning situation, to be able to make some good conservation and land use decisions on their farms. What we'd try to do is work up a long term plan to treat whatever erosion problems there were on the land and then do whatever prevention we needed to, and then work in the cropping systems, or in the case of the ranchers—I'd work with them also. Work with them on their needs as far as any invasive brush control or any management that would encourage the native grasses to do a little better job.

RW:

Was anybody resistant to doing that? To getting involved with the program? I'm saying you don't have to tattle, but if you had any stories.

JC:

Oh yeah. It wasn't—things were quite different back then in the sixties. It was a fully voluntary program. The way it worked is the soil conservation service was in the state and end each county by the invitation of soil and water conservation districts that were formed back in the forties and fifties. They were formed, I guess, right after the service was formed in '36 and then of course the districts were started in the thirties and forties. Then sometimes the districts would end up being a little too big—the soil and water conservation districts—and so they would sub divide and everything like that. Finally ended up one per county pretty much. Anyway what we would do is actually, you might say visit with the farmers and ranchers and just try to work a—develop a relationship with them to start with. Just a mutual respect.

RW:

Yeah don't come in and start telling them what to do with their water.

JC:

Yeah try not to tell them what they need to be doing with all their stuff. In the position I was in I learned—how I learned to develop those relationships was by the folks telling me, "Well son, I've eaten more dirt than you've ever seen," you know? [laughs] So I learned probably a lot more than the producers did. The thing that—I guess the key thing that I learned to do was to develop the people skills to be able to approach somebody, and tell them that I'm here to Just work with you and not to tell you what to do. And then offer some suggestions as far as some conservation practices that people have tried and have worked. It went on from there.

RW:

What were the ones that they tended to like the most? That they were willing to change to? Do you remember? Of the different sort of practices?

JC:

Well of course popular practices back then were just like it is now is to get better irrigation efficiency in irrigated counties. Of course crop rotations, any kind of improvement in crop rotations, tillage practices. I got in on a very first of the—you might say minimum tillage or no till type stuff back in the late sixties and early seventies. Those were very popular practices. With this country being what we might say limited irrigation well, terraces and contour farming were ways that were used to collect what rain fell and hold it on the ground until it could infiltrate.

RW:

Yeah before it burned off.

JC:

Yeah or before it evaporated off or ran off or something. People saw the value of that water. A lot of work that I did—and we did parallel terraces, which if the soils were adapted right to that, we'd do a topographic survey on a place and then try to design a set of parallel terraces that would fit their farming equipment. Then if they were irrigating we would have to figure out a way to take care of that too. It was interesting experiences there.

RW:

Do you remember any stories in particular that stood out? A particular person that was either happy or unhappy to work with?

JC:

In the early days—yeah there were people, especially some of the older folks that, they made you welcome. Sometimes they might not embrace the entire thing, and they'd say, "Well go ahead and write that plan up, kind of like you think I ought to and I'll do the best I can to follow it." Then we'd have guys that kind of took the bull by the horn and they would be out promoting, they'd kind of work themselves among their neighbors and everything.

RW:

Oh that makes sense. Did that work?

JC:

Yeah it worked. Then of course, the conservation district was formed by electing local farmers, people that really owned land in each county or in each soil and water conservation district. Those folks were very influential too. But yeah we had old sore heads you know, all through my

career. We'd have folks that were resistant to change. Some folks would want to plant cotton for year, after year, after year, after year, after year, and not rotate. We accepted the fact that we couldn't do the entire job of planning their conservation stuff so we tried to get them to agree to something and then called it what we call a progressive plan.

RW:

[laughs] Definitely working for the government.

JC:

The bureaucracy got started fairly early.

RW:

Well how long were you in Brownfield working that area?

JC:

Well I worked at brownfield for four years from '68 to '72. Then I was transferred to Snyder and I worked there, again, for another four years from '72 to '76. In September of '76 I accepted a district conservationist position, which is an office manager you might say, at Paducah in Cottle County. I worked there for sixteen years, and really enjoyed working with a very, very diverse bunch of folks. I'd work with anybody, some of the most, you might say, economically disadvantaged farmers on up to the mega-ranches like 6666 and the Pitchfork. So I got a good bit of good experience there.

RW:

What did you do with the 6666 and the Pitchfork or any other big place like that? Do you remember?

JC:

Well we would work with them on mainly brush control—mesquite control, some of it was cedar. I had one guy that worked for me or under my supervision that was a range conservationist. He came to work the same day I did, so we got to learn how to work with these big ranchers kind of together. It's one of those things where after we learned how to work with a big rancher, well since he was the range conservationist he kind of specialized in working with the 6666 and the others. Then I took on other tasks you know, terracing, pretty much anything that had to do with farming, well I did that, plus smaller ranches and stuff.

RW:

What was this fellow's name that you worked with?



JC:

John Widdle was his name, still is his name.

RW:

Where was he—went to school at Tech? Or where did he—

JC:

Yeah, he got his master's degree here at Tech. He worked for Bureau of Land Management—let's see—until '76 then he took a transfer to Paducah as a range conservationist to be able to get back into Texas number one, and to get back to something that was a little bit less regulatory as we were at that time. He was about maybe four years older than I was so he was a good source of, you might say, some of my experience and education too. If you don't learn from the folks you work with, well you're not doing very good.

RW:

You're not going to learn ever. What did they usually do on those places up there? Now they've got all sorts of things that they do to manage mesquite. I was just thinking—I don't know if you've ever driven out towards Wichita Falls—that guy that has all those camels out there? And they eat all the mesquite. I've never seen anything like it. You hit this stretch of land where they're not piled up where they've uprooted them, they're just gone.

JC:

Yeah I've seen them and I suppose—

RW:

I don't know if I'd do that.

JC:

Yeah well there's not very many people that do with camels.

RW:

[laughs] Yeah I'd say it's pretty rare. But so they weren't doing that back then, was it mostly burning?

JC:

No not really. You know whenever I first started out doing brush control it was spraying, and we worked with-- at Brownfield with shinnery. We'd use chemicals, and do aerial applications of stuff on shinnery, and we'd follow that by a deferment period to let the grass kind of re-seed itself and recover. Then when I got into Scurry county and Borden county, that I worked at Snyder, well we got into what you call grubbing or just pushing mesquites, and then sometimes



root plowing, that was done on some of the heavier stands of mesquite. Of course, we did have on smaller or less infested mesquite, we'd do the chemical brush control just like they do now. The big ranches at Snyder and the ones at Paducah also we're doing the same thing, we're doing the brush control, and do the grubbing, and then the aerial application. Then—let's see—I guess it was in the—probably in the early eighties, mid-eighties we got in to the controlled burning. The Masterson Ranch, which Bill Masterson and Bob Masterson ran, those folks worked with Dr. Wright here at Tech, and they got started with the burning programs there, and I did for many, many years. I don't know if they're still doing or not, but that's where the, I guess, the prescribed burning really came to force. It wasn't an end it was just a management tool just like the spraying and the other—the root plowing and grubbing. Of course, after a while, the root plowing and grubbing became very expensive. It was expensive anyway, but with the way the economy would go up and down, there would be less of that and nowadays there's probably very little of that done now as far as the grubbing—not the grubbing the root plowing. Most of it now is grubbing, either using a small tract implement or what we call a tract hoe, an excavator or something like that. They still do a little bit of it but it's not near as much as it used to be on a grand scale. The big thing in all of it was management you know, management of the grass that came back, and then there was maintenance of the mesquite that would come back from seed. Of course the seeders, the red berry juniper and the rolling plains, and then in Caprock country here, came back from roots, you know it ended up being a maintenance type situation on that. It was the same thing with maintaining terraces, grassed water ways which was used to sometimes let the water out of the terraces—into to get to a water source or a water course you might say, creeks and lakes, stuff like that.

RW:

Did they—I was thinking for a second. Did they—I guess what I heard you say is they would put together a plan like a regular schedule of when they were going to do these things, and that was really what you were trying to get them to stick to whether they were big places or little places.

JC:

Right. The basis of the whole thing was a plan. One thing I haven't mentioned too much is availability that we had of aerial photography. That was, you might say, the candy that we enticed them with was the aerial photography because that was a great management tool for the farmer and the rancher. You know the rancher would use that in his everyday operations. We were able to work with our cartographic unit at Fort Worth, and do what we'd call mosaic photography, where several photographs were put together to make a great big ranch and a large scale map. We would use those, and of course, there was a good bit of labor went into identifying each pasture, and identifying the fences, tanks and the farm ponds, and where the windmills were, all this kinds of stuff. So it was quite involved.

RW:

Were they doing that in '68 when you got there?

JC:

Yeah.

RW:

So when they identified where all these things were, did you draw them on the map or—?

JC:

Yes we drew them on the map—

RW:

Or on the photos I guess.

JC:

We'd draw them on the photograph. Now the—you might say the archive photographs we didn't draw on, we used those to work with several different people. We learned to be able to interpret the photography, and of course, we had soils maps that was based on that photography also. We learned to—learned every soil that was in each county, and on each farm and ranch.

RW:

Did people ever haggle about where stuff was supposed to be in the photos? I mean I assume it was—

JC:

Well the biggest part at the time—you could see it on the photos. And—yeah probably there was some—might've been some, you might say, back and forth conversations about the location of something. We discovered quite early that the farmer was right a good bit of the time, most of the time. They'd lived on that land, grew up on it, and knew it better than we did. Of course as we learned to be able to read the aerial photography this was all in black and white at the time. On the bigger ranches, we would actually take the aerial photographs from the office and go out with the rancher and have him to tour us over the ranch, we'd locate the fences and everything right there on the ground and that made it a lot easier.

RW:

So it got to where you could look at one—at a photo and then be there on the ground and see how the two matched up pretty easy?

JC:

Exactly.

RW:

Because I couldn't do that, is what I was thinking. I could figure it out but—

JC:

Yeah we all learned how to do this. Now of course technology has given us the digital maps and everything. I was on the forefront of that too so I felt lucky.

RW:

When—

JC:

When we converted from—it started in the late eighties and—well let me take it back, it started in probably the early nineties. Real rudimentary type stuff and then later on is the computer software, and the hardware of all—we got to where we are pretty much now. I had moved on—

RW:

I was going to ask-- '92 would be about the last year.

JC:

Yeah '92 was the last year I was at Paducah. An area resource conservationist job came open, there were several of them that came open, and I applied for Lubbock, Amarillo and Big Spring, and I got Big Spring, and sixteen counties in the Big Spring area. The area resource conservationist was pretty much the leader in the ecological sciences part, you might say, he was the assistant area conservationist, which—

RW:

What was his name?

JC:

The area conservationist?

RW:

Um-hm.

JC:

Was Paul DeArmant. [?] [00:40:56] He was the last area conservationist at Big Spring. I was at Big Spring for four months, and at that time in '92 we got into a—I guess it was an economical

type thing. The budget was to where we couldn't afford to have so many areas, and we had less people, couldn't support that many people as we did. Some of the areas got to merging. So whenever the Big Spring area closed down I transferred to Hereford as the district conservationist again and a bigger county, different practices, a lot more irrigation. There was still some good ranching there. Had the Birdwell Ranch [?] [00:42:19] and let's see, Morris Ranch, several others there.

RW:

So did you work more closely with them when you went to Hereford—because like you said, you had sort of the team that you had that one fellow that could mess with the big ranches, was it mostly just you when you got up to Hereford?

JC:

Oh no, no. I had a team there too. I had a soil conservationist on my staff and then a technician, an engineering technician. He would do most of the irrigation and terracing practices, anything that you had to do much in the way of math, and calculations, and engineering stuff, he did that. Of course, we had engineers that worked with him that came from the area offices. I see you looking at your clock—

RW:

No I was looking at my finger—

JC:

Okay.

RW:

I was going to—like yours—and I pulled a piece of it off. No we've got all the time in the world.

JC:

Okay.

RW:

I'm going to check the battery while I'm thinking about it.

JC:

I'll tell you what, if you've got a water fountain or—

**[pause in recording]**

JC:

About every ten years they **[sets down recorder]** do a flight of new aerial photographs, and of course, we'd use those. The older ones—we got a lot of the old ones, and then of course, the ASCS [Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service] office had kept some of the old ones. Whenever they decided they didn't want to keep them anymore, well we ended up using them because we were all the time using their aerial photographs. When—really I guess until I retired we still had those in the offices, they might've been in a back room stored there, or I'm not sure what happened to a lot of them. Some of them may of even got destroyed. It's just a terrible thing. I'm kind of skipping around here, but even whenever I was at Paducah, we even had some of the old de-fenced department aerial photographs of this country. I can remember looking at some of them that were actually called classified—you know still, it was World War II stuff. The reason for that was we had little air bases all around, either glider or bomber training fields and then a lot of times there would be bomb targets.

RW:

Yeah I was just thinking they would need to know what everything looked like. They didn't need to hit some cows or a windmill, something.

JC:

We had several places where there were old bomb targets in some of these big ranches.

RW:

Oh really? Holes still there I guess, filled in?

JC:

Not really. These were practice bombs, the biggest part of them were.

RW:

So they just hit and stayed.

JC:

Yeah. Every once in a while you'd run into a place where they'd put up some strafing targets for the gunners on the planes to shoot. We found pieces of pipe that had been chewed up with fifty caliber machine guns and stuff. Still, I'm sure that they run into some of the vestiges of those targets. I don't know if there's any still visible from any of the aerial photography now. A lot of them were destroyed, and some of the land was farmed, some of them just—well I don't know if they ever deteriorated because they were pretty good sized piles of caliche that were put in a bullseye pattern, you know a circle, pretty good sized circle. Of course, depending on how high the plane was, well they'd always try to get to the center of the bullseye. We'd find old bombs out there, practice bombs that had been dropped, just probably hundred pound bombs. All the old



bombs, the old ammo, and the shrapnel that was scattered all over the place ended up giving us problems whenever we started putting pipelines in for water. That metal would get in contact with the plastic that the pipeline was being built with, and cause leaks. We had a few problems with that.

RW:

I've never heard that. I'll jump ahead then, you were in Hereford how long did you stay?

JC:

I was in Herford for six years. I worked at Herford until 1998. The agronomist—I was on an agronomist position here at Lubbock came open. I was encouraged to transfer down here to that, and so I did. Let's see from '98 to 2002 I worked here, and I covered a fifty county area, which is zone one in the panhandle, the South Plains, and it still is the zone one and still covers fifty counties. I'm trying to think how many old areas were—I'm thinking probably five, maybe six different areas had counties that are now in zone one. The zones in soil conservation service now, are the same counties as the zones that the soil and water conservation board has. The soil and water conservation board is an entity of the state. State soil and water conservation board, then it goes down to the counties, and it's basically the same, it develops from land owners.

RW:

Is that where you finished out? It sounds like you must've moved one more time.

JC:

No, I finished out here at Lubbock. Let's see I retired in June of 2002. Then in 2003—and really starting in 2002 there was a push to outsource some conservation work, mainly conservation planning especially on—this is another deal but especially on CRP, conservation reserve program. I ended up being what's called a technical service provider, and I worked under contract with the soil conservation service either on local area, or on a state contract with the soil conservation service. I did that let's see from 2002 to about 2008. After the 2008 elections that pretty much came to an end as far as the conservation work under contract. Every once in a while there would be one or two contracts come up. But the bureaucracy got to the point that I had to go through a re-training process, and had to prove my credentials every three years. I thought, you know, I'm getting a little too old for this so I backed out.

RW:

It's a young man's game.

JC:

Yeah you bet.



RW:

They want to get ahead.

JC:

I went to work on a part-time basis for the High Plains Underground Water District.

RW:

That's what you were doing earlier today, is that right? Or—anyways you said that's what you do during the week.

JC:

Yes I do that during the week. I work mainly three days a week. Usually its Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays.

RW:

That's right, that's why we're doing this on Monday.

JC:

I'm not on a real strict schedule, you know I'm kind of my own supervisor on that particular deal.

RW:

Is it pretty much the same work?

JC:

Well a lot of it is—you might say the same. What I'm doing is locating irrigation wells using GPS satellite coverage. I'm putting those into the digital software, the digital aerial photography. So yeah, you might say I'm still doing—

RW:

You've done the whole thing. Wow I had no idea from the whole way that it's changed.

JC:

Yeah. While I was in Lubbock, I was chose to be on the implementation team to go in to that GPS and GIS [**Global Information Systems**] type technology. I ended up teaching that, and training the employees on GIS. I developed a team here in this Lubbock zone to set up and train these folks in the counties. We went from pulling metal tapes to going with one of the old fashion electronic revolution counters, you know that people used to measure acres with, to going to GPS technology and aerial photography. That was in a period of thirty, thirty-two—well thirty-four years is when I retired.

RW:

So that parts changed but what would you say stayed the same? Some stuffs going to always—you've got to have a plan, so a person's got to think of—

JC:

Yeah the planning part has pretty much stayed the same. The computer has been a blessing and a curse. You probably know as well as I do that the computer is a real good tool to record decisions with, to make calculations and do calculations with, but it also is a tool for your managers to manage you, and be able to manage your progress and stuff like that. So you end up having to feed that computer quite a bit. A lot—not everything, but a lot of things now is done on the internet. Of course when I retired we didn't have the cloud, but we've got the cloud now. Everything's managed on the cloud. There's a lot of folks in the counties that don't get away from the computer very much, so they're not able to get out in the field as much as we did. Now they do meet with the people, but they're limited on the amount of time that they can spend with them out in the field.

RW:

You know that makes sense, when we bring in—let's say we bring in a pile of photos here, we've got to conserve them, and find a way to do what we have to do. But then the bulk of our time—that takes maybe half the time, but the rest of our time is getting them ready to go online in some way, shape or form, so people can use them. We spend a lot of time doing that. It's interesting. So you do sort of lose touch if you can't mess with the photos, and I guess you lose touch if you can't get out there on someone's farm and see what's actually going on.

JC:

Yeah you do. I'm not going to say it's a tragedy, but it's something that we have lost I think. We lost the amount of people to be able to send out there too because we just can't afford—the tax payer and the government can't afford to put the amount of people in the offices like we had at those times. We might have five, six people in each county, including the manager, back in the sixties and seventies, and sometimes it was more than that. Then now, there may be two full time employees working in each county. They're not able to get out and do quite as much. You know, you suffer a little bit there because you don't have that personal contact, that long time personal contact with them. Whenever the producer wants something, he'll come in to the office, and it's not like if we were out there all the time seeing what was going on in the ground, and being able to wave at the farmers when they go by, and know where all these places were and all that. Things have changed a lot, I'm not going to say it's for the worst, but it's been a change.

RW:

But it's different.

JC:

Yeah it's different.

RW:

So I guess you retired sort of—and like we were talking about a while ago, when did you start getting into the history part? I'm thinking of Monty and everybody ran into you at Blanco Canyon with Sam—what's his name, Sam Watts?

JC:

Sam Watts. Well I grew up on a farm about eight miles Northeast of the Mackenzie Battleground in the Palo Duro Canyon, and so I knew that, and I'd always been interested in the history of the region. As you might say a consultant working with farmers and ranchers, I was able to pick up a lot of the history.

RW:

Did they tell you about it?

JC:

Yeah there was a lot of it, and a lot of it you could see. There were a lot of camp grounds we'd walk into, places where they'd might've had a water situation or something like that. I know in Eastern Cottle County, Southeastern Cottle County the Indians would pile up piles rocks in the monuments. I guess that was their communication tool to say that water was there or something.

RW:

I didn't know that.

JC:

Yeah. I was always interested in the history, and I read up on the history as much as I could get to, to be able to do my job. Even after I retired I was using the history of the country to determine what the native vegetation was. I did some contracts with the state to describe some of these, what we call ecological sites or range sites. What it is, is just a collection of soils that had different plant or had common plant characteristics. I contracted to do some of that. Looking at some of the early explores notes and everything, those folks named a lot of the plants and animals that came through here. We used that as our original source to determine what maybe tried to figure out what this country looked like back in the early days. We'd figure out kind of where it was in relationship to that.

RW:

How far back did you go usually? In the eighteen hundreds, 1830s—

JC:

Yeah 1840s I guess. Let's see I forget when Greg made his first trail up through the Canadian river country. I think that was around '46. Then Marcy—Captain Marcy and Lieutenant McClellan explored this country for about—from Fort Smith to Santa Fe and across this country. They went on to try to explore some other—explored on to the California gold fields during the forty-niner days. Then when Marcy got to Santa Fe he came back a different way, and went on down to El Paso, which was a trade center back in those days, still is I guess. Anyway he explored a good bit of Texas. Captain Marcy—Randolph Marcy—was one of our sources for a lot of information. You know the expeditions—see there was an engineer that did the navigation pretty much. He was in charge of the guys that would pull the old original sixty-six foot chains to be able to tell how far it was between places to camp and all that.

RW:

I'm listening, it just made a blinking noise. Okay there we go I guess it's fine, sorry.

JC:

But anyway.

RW:

We have the—have you ever looked in that west Texas historical association yearbook, the thing that I'm the assistant editor, and Monty is the editor for. We put in a thing for one of those expeditions last year. We put in some of the journals for it. I don't know how—

JC:

I'd like to see that.

RW:

Yeah I'll show it to you. We've probably got them sitting right in there.

JC:

My research needs now are just for me. If I ever get to be able to where I can share it with people, I'll do it. But what I would like to do is go through those expedition notes, and be able to find where those campsites were, and find where those roads—where those trails went. Like the—especially the one that Mackenzie took from—you might say—the Yellow House Canyon all the way to—let's see what was it—Fort Sumner in New Mexico. See that was, to my knowledge, was the first time that the American, you might say European Americans, crossed the Llano Estacado, relatively on top of the Llano. They went up to Fort Sumner and then, of course, they were scouting for—they was trying to run down a bunch of Comancheros you know, scouting to try locate the Quahadi Comanches also. I think they came back and explored a little bit on the Southern part of the—well let's say—they explored around the head waters of the

red river. The upper Caprock there, McClellan creek all around to the southern side of the Palo Duro canyon. That's my historical interest now is to try to ground truth, a lot of those trails and campgrounds.

RW:

Are you going to get the GPS involved with that, since that'll—

JC:

You bet.

RW:

Yeah. [laughs] I don't know if anyone's done it but I bet—

JC:

GPS and the GIS—I have the software. Yeah that's my interest, you might say now, is to be able to locate—my first goal was to be able to locate the Fort Sumner trail, and that's just for the simple fact that I live on it, I live on the Black Water Draw up North of Lubbock. That ties in a whole lot with the Black Oak Canyon Battle site. The military trails, and how they were explored, just really interested the dickens out of me. Like I say, I was explaining it to engineer—did the navigation work and everything, calculating where they were. The biggest part of the time they had a doctor, a contract doctor come on the expedition. He was a naturalist, and they were the ones that identified the plants and animals of this country. I've got one or two books that one doctor wrote, he went from El Paso to San Diego, did the naturalist stuff for that expedition. For now that's my interest, that's my reason for wanting to work with you guys here, to locate the reference material that I can use for research.

RW:

Have you been working here already? Or is this—

JC:

No this is my first go around here.

RW:

Well it won't be your last. We've got stuff that will help with that, I can guarantee.

JC:

Of course, I've got two partners here and you'll want to interview them too, to get their perspectives. Monty Dollar is one.



RW:

Oh I saw his name on a—yeah, yeah—on a list of people Monty Monroe gave me.

JC:

Yeah. Monty Dollar is one of them, JR Bell is the other one.

RW:

B-e-l-l?

JC:

Uh-huh. Monty lives here in Lubbock, he works part-time for the university in the Ken Rainwaters shop. JR Bell is a graduate at Tech and he's the foremost ranch conservationist in this region, in the high plains, rolling plains region. He's the authority on environmental and ecological issues. These guys are my contemporaries, we all started about the same time. Monty and I went to work on the very same day. He worked at Muleshoe and I worked at Brownfield. JR was at Post at the same time we were.

RW:

I better write that down for when I talk to them, I can tell them I knew—now what I might do then is send you an email. I'm also talking to a Mark Mosely, he's got a bunch of these folks information, so I know he's getting me Monty's phone number—

JC:

Mark and that's—see I was in that group that Monty toured.

RW:

Yeah, that's why I'm thinking I must've gotten these names from—

JC:

Really, when Monty pulled out the picture of the—not the picture—that book of the Matador Ranch survey—that was the first, you might say, detailed resource inventory in this country that I know of, is 1887. Of course, they did it section by section and you know, Goodnight was probably one of the first in this country to ranch. He did some but his—the starting of it was not near that detailed, later on it got to be. The reason that interested me so much is that a good bit of the Paducah country was on the Matador Ranch. Matter of fact, the Matador Wildlife Management area just North of Paducah, there's about thirty thousand acres there that was in the Matador Ranch. It was transferred from the Matador Ranch to the state of Texas. That's pretty historical information for me—



RW:

We've got—I mean just all of their records. I don't know if we have every last stitch of it but we've got a bunch.

JC:

The funny thing about it is—see I worked and was acquainted with a lot of the old cowboys that actually worked on the Matador Ranch.

RW:

Oh really?

JC:

Yeah. One of the first ranchers I worked with at Brownfield grew up on the Matador Ranch.

RW:

What was his name?

JC:

Bill Tilson. T-i-l-s-o-n. He had a ranch at Brownfield but he grew up on the matador ranch. Was a World War I veteran in the cavalry. I didn't get to—I don't remember a lot of these tales, apparently he was one of the foreman's boys or something, because they sent him to Virginia military institute, and he got his degree there. Then he trained there and then went right into the Calvary, ended up in Europe during the First World War.

RW:

So I guess he had been a hand there for a while by the time you were down there.

JC:

Of course, I knew him when I was at Brownfield not at Paducah. So there were—let's see—there was at least eight or ten years there that I didn't have any connection with the matador ranch. When I did—I worked on several ranches that split off from the matador ranch. It's been pretty interesting. I just think in my career, whenever I got out of college, there were computers but they were the great big ones that would take over rooms as big as the library. We had no electronic calculators, we did probability analysis, stuff like that, with the old fashion, what I call, corn picker calculators, that I guess really approximated the electronic slide rule. Whenever I went to work for the service we used the old crank add machines and slide rules.

RW:

Slide rules for sure, I couldn't even use one. My dad, he graduated high school in '55 and my mom graduated in, she's a lot younger, about the time you did '66, '67. They found one in a closet or something the other day and showed it to me, I couldn't figure it out.

JC:

I've still got one, one or two.

RW:

They use it. They just chop, chop, chop, and I was like I don't know what you're doing.

JC:

Well you know other than working with logarithms stuff like that, that was about the only way we had of doing some of the higher math at that time. I wasn't exposed to calculus or any of the real high stuff. We ended up having to do linear regressions type, statistical type work before we ended up getting an electronic calculator, a pocket calculator. You know the ability to be able to get square root was something that was just tremendous to have whenever we were working in the field. Especially to grab and haul around in your pocket. You could do calculations on yardage on the pond right in the field there, and if you needed to change it, well you could do it, rather than go back to the office and go through the drudgery of the math.

RW:

It's interesting the way technology just moved in on it. I know it's been a while I'm not saying you look a little antsy, but I don't want to keep you here until the end of the day—it's nearly five.

JC:

Not a problem.

RW:

But is there anything else you'd say about your career or any of this stuff before I let you go?

JC:

It's been a great career. It hasn't ended yet, you know, I still work with conservation, I've gotten into rain water harvest, and do a little consulting on that. I still kind of got my finger in the pot. One of these days I'll completely retire, but hopefully I'll have a little spot in the library I could sit and read.

RW:

They'll always be room here, and then maybe something else will happen in the next few years, and I'm going to have to interview you again.

JC:

That'd be fine, there's probably a lot of stuff that— we'll pick up a lot of memories that—

RW:

Like I said, you're going to remember fifteen things when you walk out the door, and we'll have to sit down next week, I guarantee it. Well I'll thank you for this I'm going to turn this off.

*[End recording]*



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