

**Oral History Interview of
Clara May Vick**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson
October 15, 2013
Dimmitt, Texas**

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Transcript Overview:

This interview features Clara Vick, native of Dumont, Texas, and historical ambassador of Castro County. Clara discusses her family history in this region, including her family's interactions with Quanah Parker. Clara talks in depth on her efforts to preserve the history of the area through the restoration of the Italian POW camp chapel in Castro County, along with her role in facilitating POW reunions.

Length of Interview: 02:30:45

Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
Introductions; Family history in Dumont, Texas	5	0:00:00
Native American heritage; Quanah Parker; life on a farm	10	0:08:00
Moving from Dumont to Battle Creek, Michigan	18	0:19:53
Meeting husband; moving to Amarillo	21	0:26:00
Husband's career; Clara's work in the title business	25	0:34:13
Clara's children; grandparents	29	0:40:35
How Clara got interested in the history of Castro County	32	0:46:53
Castro County history projects: Italian POWs	34	0:52:36
Clara's trips to Italy; Italian knighthood	43	1:06:55
The Italian POWs	47	1:16:57
Dimmitt community reaction to chapel restoration	51	1:30:04
Clara's other projects in Castro County	54	1:37:45
Increased diversity in Castro County	56	1:42:30
Goose Ramey	58	1:47:10
Kent Hance	61	1:54:00
Clara discusses other significant historic materials	71	2:14:54

Keywords

Castro County, WWII, Italian POWs, Criminal Camps, Hereford Military Reservation and Reception Center, Castro County, Quanah Parker

Andy Wilkinson (AW):

And I'm going to start this by saying this is—

Clara Vick (CV):

Here was my big family.

AW:

My goodness.

CV:

Here I am.

AW:

Oh wow, that was a big family.

CV:

There were three sets of twins.

AW:

Let me start this by saying this is Andy Wilkinson. It's the fifteenth of October, 2013. I'm in Dimmitt, Texas with Clara Vick and we're going to be talking about Clara Vick and a lot of other things about Castro County. Right now she's showing me in the Castro County history, the second volume, a picture of her family. Norris, I guess that's your maiden name? And little Clara on the front row. And you had how many sets of twins?

CV:

There were three sets.

AW:

My goodness.

CV:

Family of eleven. The first set was born premature, and back in those early days they didn't live. But this occasion was when my brother was in the army air force. He was home on leave and we came from Dumont, which is thirty-five miles from Paducah, Texas. And had this picture made.

AW:

Yeah. What direction is Dumont from Paducah?

CV:

It's directly southwest.

AW:

Were you one of the twins?

CV:

Yes, uh-huh

AW:

Is this your—

CV:

Twin brother. Uh-huh.

AW:

I noticed that you're dress alike, that's why I thought—

CV:

Yes. My grandmother was a midwife and we lived so far from Paducah at that time in 1935 that she was the one that attended my mother. And that was on her forty-fifth wedding anniversary that she helped my twin brother and I be born.

AW:

Wow.

CV:

So we always had a birthday cake.

AW:

Well let's start with—let me get this in my notes here. So it's Clara Norris? What is your middle name?

CV:

May. M-a-y.

AW:

M-a-y?

CV:

Um-hm.

AW:

Okay so what was your birthday?

CV:

June 23, 1935.

AW:

I'm June 26th.

CV:

Is that right?

AW:

D-u-m-o-n-t?

CV:

Um-hm. It's a little—not hardly anything there anymore. But at the corner of Dickens, King, and Motley Counties.

AW:

Which county is it in? Dickens? Is it in all three?

CV:

It's in Dickens. Well it used to be in all three, but it's now—

AW:

Not big enough?

CV:

No. (laughs) So I was born in Dickens County.

AW:

Did you grow up there?

CV:

We moved there, from there, in 1946. And that was because I have a brother that was a little older than my twin brother and I, and he was legally blind. He was hurt at birth, was sent to the

school at Austin, and was so mad because they didn't teach him anything. They set him on the doorstep and wanted him to see if he could recognize anybody by their footsteps or their smell or whatever. And so he refused to go back. So my brother had been in—

AW:

Hard to blame him.

CV:

Uh-huh. My oldest brother, that was in the army air force had been in six airplane crashes—

AW:

I saw that!

CV:

In seven months.

AW:

Wow.

CV:

And the last one pulled his shoulder completely out of socket, so he was sent to Battle Creek, Michigan which had the Percy Jones General Hospital there. Of course that's the home of the Kellogg Foundation and they have built wonderful schools for any type of handicap. So he read about the school, sent Mother and Daddy some pictures and said that my brother should not stay out of school, he needed to be in school. So Mother and my brother went up probably in August, and they furnished a place for him to stay until we could move there the next June. And it was— if you can imagine a large family moving from a place like Dumont, Texas to Battle Creek, Michigan.

AW;

That must have been quite a shock.

CV:

It was, but a wonderful one. They had so many things offered.

AW:

Just for a moment before we get too much into Battle Creek, what did your folks do in Dumont?

CV:

Farmed. Dry-land farming. My grandfather—

AW:

Dumont is cotton country? Is that right?

CV:

That's right. There might be irrigation there now but there wasn't then.

AW:

I don't think there would be much now.

CV:

We hauled water when our windmill went dry. You know, all the things that poor people would do, we did.

AW:

And you were born right in the thick of the Dust Bowl?

CV:

Yes. Right.

AW:

So do you remember?

CV:

I do.

AW:

Do you? What was it like?

CV:

Well, it was—of course I'd see it all my life, so you know I hadn't seen anything different. So I thought this just blows every day. We have dirt every day. And houses were not anything like we have now. And my mother was a fanatic on cleaning.

AW:

Well that must have driven her crazy. Golly. (laughs)

CV:

Oh well she cleaned all of us before we could go to this little store in Dumont five miles from where we lived. We didn't go with our hair messed up or dirty clothes on or faces dirty. We had

to have our shoes on and go like that. She said, "Just because we're a large family doesn't mean we're going to be nasty." So she worked herself to death trying to keep us fed and clean and at the right place at the right time.

AW:

Did you, on a cotton farm in Dickens County in those years, were you able to keep a garden?

CV:

Yes. And how, I don't know.

AW:

That's what I was wondering. (laughs) That sounds like a big job.

CV:

We were lucky enough to have a spring at the back of our pasture. And so when our windmill went dry, well then we had these fifty-five gallon drums of barrels and well I think we could put two or three in a wagon and that's how we got our water.

AW:

When you say your windmill went dry, it went dry and stayed dry? Or did it go dry periodically?

CV:

Periodically. And I don't know, they work them now. I don't know why they didn't then. Maybe there wasn't anybody there to work on them, I don't know. I know there were windmillers for all the ranch country there. The Four-sixes, the Matadors, the Pitchforks and all. But anyway, my great grandfather and my grandfather helped survey that part of the country.

AW:

Really? What were their names?

CV:

Carpenter. And my great grandfather knew, and my grandfather too, well they were part Indian. So they always felt sorry for the Indians.

AW:

Do you know what tribe—tribal affiliation that was?

CV:

They were about three or four different ones. We had a great grandmother that some of her grandsons brought back a sheepskin from Oklahoma. She was so embarrassed. She burned it. She said she wasn't about to have anybody know she had half-breeds.

AW:

Oh really? Yeah.

CV:

(laughs) That was the feeling. But when Quanah Parker and his scouts would come through he would always stopped at the windmill at their house. And they offered him a beef or however many he needed because my grandfather said they were starving. All the white men had shot and killed the buffalo just for the hides and let the meat spoil. And that was their way of starving out the Indians. So they had a very good relationship with Quanah Parker, and they smoked the peace pipe with him.

AW:

What was your grandfather's name?

CV:

Charlie Carpenter was my grandfather. And my grandmother somehow got a newspaper copy of Quanah Parker's obituary when he died in I think 1911, I believe it was. But anyway, we had land but land wasn't worth very much because you couldn't make—well you couldn't have a herd of cattle. But we milked cows, we had chickens and we sold cream in the cream can. That was our cash flow. Sell the eggs and the cream.

AW:

Uh-huh. Yeah. Yeah milk and egg money got a lot of people through the Depression.

CV:

It did. We could take a dozen eggs and go up to the store and get us a Big Chief tablet or a pencil or whatever we needed. So we carried that dozen eggs very carefully.

AW:

Where did you go to school when you were in Dumont?

CV:

At the only school there: Dumont.

AW:

There was a Dumont school?

CV:

Um-hm. After we left then they did away with the Dumont school and everyone went to Guthrie. Now that's a long way from—

AW:

I was going to say, long way from Dumont, right?

CV:

Um-hm, and maybe there were some from the western side that went to Patton Springs which is in the Afton area and Dickens area. But that's still a long way. Across that shinnery road.

AW:

Yeah. So, I'm still trying to get Dumont in my head, where was it in relationship to Benjamin?

CV:

Well Benjamin was further. It was closer to Guthrie and I'm going to say, southeast.

AW:

Southeast of Dumont?

CV:

Of Guthrie.

AW:

Right but I mean where was it relative to Dumont?

CV:

You know I never did go there from Dumont to Benjamin. That was a long way. We went to Paducah about twice a year, maybe.

AW:

So it would have been south of you?

CV:

Yes. South and east.

AW:
Yeah.

CV:
My grandfather and grandmother are from Munday, Texas and Benjamin and that area. That was kind of where they landed, maybe. But traveling was so hard to do, you know?

AW:
And that's rough country through there.

CV:
Oh there was no roads hardly, and what was there was across mesquite trees.

AW:
Did your grandfather ever mention why Quanah Parker would come through? I'm just wondering because Medicine Mound would be east of Dumont, right?

CV:
That's right. That was kind of on their trail. And I guess since he knew that he would be treated—if he needed fresh horses, my grandfather gave them to him. And he said, it didn't matter if they needed two beefs, whatever it was, they didn't take more than they needed. And he said, "If you don't give them to him, they're going to steal them anyway." (both laugh)

AW:
Where was your grandfather's place?

CV:
From Dumont? Well he had several places. But it was, I'm going say, probably three miles south and then half a mile east from Dumont. Then my great grandfather's place was about five miles south, and maybe a quarter of a mile east. And then the place we lived on that my grandfather gave us was four and a half miles south and then two miles west, then a mile and a half south, then a mile west. If we ever had to ride horses or walk, it was a very long way.

AW:
Yeah! But it was at your grandfather's place that Quanah Parker came to visit?

CV:
Uh-huh.

AW:

I'm just curious, one of the things I do besides this is write plays. Two weeks ago we premiered a play I wrote about Quanah Parker.

CV:

Is that right?

AW:

Yeah so, Quanah Parker is fresh on my mind at the moment. Plus my great-great-great-great-great-great uncle was Charlie Goodnight who did the same thing as your grandfather in terms of giving Quanah beefs and cattle. It was pretty interesting.

CV:

Thank goodness they learned how to—and of course that how we all surely have learned the nicer you are to people and see the need, the more you get from them and change their lives too.

AW:

Yeah. That sounds like a constant thread in your life. Well I've detoured you from Battle Creek talking about growing up in Dumont, but for that time and place that was quite interesting.

CV:

You know I remember two great grandmothers, and grandmothers and granddaddys, and we were so fortunate that we had ones that had fruit trees, cared about us and that's why it's hard to figure out now how these young girls with families—and boys—they don't have grandparents, how do they survive?

AW:

What exactly—I've got my first grandchildren, well they're four and two, but I can't imagine someone who wouldn't be just head over heels about them.

CV:

I can't either. I had a son and daughter and loved them dearly. And I had a wonderful husband. He died in 1982. Just went out to walk and had a massive heart attack I guess. But he was fifty-two years old.

AW:

That's too young.

CV:

It is.

AW:

But it's still a good way to be active when you go. But way too young.

CV:

That would be a nice way to go but it sure is heck on the family that's left.

AW:

What kind of fruit trees did they have?

CV:

Peaches and apples.

AW:

And apples?

CV:

And of course we had wild cherries and wild plums.

AW:

Yeah? Wild plums? I know that Goodnight loved wild plums. In fact he didn't throw away the pits; he made people save them so he'd scatter them in the breaks. I don't know how many of them grew up.

CV:

Well that's the way they preserved everything. They didn't throw anything away.

AW:

Yeah. Did you have pecans?

CV:

No.

AW:

I didn't know whether there was enough water.

CV:

I guess not. We had only pecans and maybe walnuts at Christmas time. And we had oranges at Christmas time.

AW:

And hard candy?

CV:

Yes.

AW:

I remember. I didn't grow up that far behind you. We did the same. And it's amazing how special an orange was—

CV:

Absolutely.

AW:

In those days.

CV:

You didn't throw nothing away. You enjoyed all of it.

AW:

Right. You were far enough away your grandfather and great grandfather's places, going to see them or them coming to see you was not something you did every day was it?

CV:

No. But if they—we always helped all of our family get their crops. Of course they turned school out.

AW:

Uh-huh. Yeah.

CV:

And sometimes we'd work after school was turned out because this uncle or this grandfather still had cotton in the field.

AW:

And that was cotton we used to pull.

CV:

Yes. And that's why I have such big shoulders; I carried those cotton sacks on my shoulders. But we always did. And on Sundays we would have dinner. I don't ever remember wishing I could

go see them because we had some reason to go. And sometimes we'd go on horseback. And if you can imagine a nine or ten year old being turned loose with a horse going five miles—but we did. Our horses were just the gentlest and knew where they were going.

AW:

But otherwise you went in a car?

CV:

A car. And if we had somebody who had to go to Paducah or whatever and we needed to go to the field, we went in the wagon.

AW:

Um-hm. And pulled by—

CV:

Pulled by horses.

AW:

Horses. And not mules. Horses?

CV:

Horses. We got our first formal tractor about two or three years before we moved. And that was a [inaudible 0:19:07].

AW:

So plowing with horses?

CV:

Yes. And I said we had dogs. The dogs walked with us to keep us from getting snake bit because we had more snakes than we did anything down there. But anyway, we loved our horses, and our cows, and our calves. I didn't like chickens but I always had to gather the eggs.

AW:

We had chickens too and I never did like them either. I don't know anybody that could like a chicken. (both laugh)

CV:

But we had dogs but they were all outside dogs. But we loved our horses and cows and our other animals—pet them and when we were milking we would talk to the cow and the calf.

AW:

So when you left this place and moved to Battle Creek, not only were you moving from a very different kind of place to another quite different place, but your family went, but your grandfather and grandmother and those people didn't go with you, right?

CV:

No. They had already moved just about a year before we left to Amherst as they had a son that lived there and it was awful to try to have to leave them. And my grandfather on daddy's side had already died. My grandmother moved with one of her daughters to Washington State. So you know it wasn't like we were abandoning all of them.

AW:

So everybody was kind of moving at the same time?

CV:

Yeah. At age time they all had to make different choices.

AW:

So when you moved to Battle Creek, you were eleven?

CV:

Um-hm.

AW:

You were young.

CV:

Right.

AW:

So tell me about that. How long were you in Battle Creek?

AW:

I married in 1951, and we moved to Amarillo later that year. But I told you my brother was partially blind, and he had a blind teach that was there at N.J. Kellog's [?] [00:21:23], and she didn't teach everything, but she always had the group of the blind students. And as they went over different things, what was difficult for one, they had a solution for it and so on. So I got acquainted with her just because of my brother. So she invited me to come in and be a part of their volunteer group. And that meant I would look at—they had maps of the world and part of the United States. And let's say for instance the shape of Texas would be in corduroy material

and maybe Oklahoma would be velvet. Anything they could feel and tell the difference. So they learned all the shapes of the states and parts of the countries. And then she said to me, "Clara, I need to have you write this check. You do know how to write a check don't you?" And I said, "Yes my grandfather taught me how." So I kind of became her secretary. Then she would type and she'd say, "I forgot to look. I didn't mentally note what I left off on. Tell me the last word." And so I learned to read brail by sight, not by feel.

AW:

Not by feel but by sight?

CV:

Um-hm. And I got to go on my first airplane ride with blind students, telling them what we were seeing.

AW:

How old were you when you got to do that?

CV:

Oh, eleven or twelve or whatever. I started right in.

AW:

As soon as you got there.

CV:

Yeah. Got acquainted.

AW:

Where did you go on that first airplane trip?

CV:

We went to Kalamazoo and just around, and I had to explain to them all the trees, how green they were. It was always in the summer time when we would go on these trips.

AW:

Now that was a shock for you, wasn't it, coming from Dumont?

CV:

Yes. All those trees and it wasn't even a forest. And then there were lots of lakes around—and explained the lake, "Okay so is it round? How long is it?" Well you've got to estimate. I probably was like the fisherman, catching fish, "About this big." But I learned different things.

That was just part of my curriculum, was to go there after I finished school and help with whatever they needed, and then take a bus back to where we lived—a city bus, and then I walked a little while before I could get home.

AW:

How did your folks make a living in Battle Creek?

CV:

Well my dad started with the consumer power company. And that was electrical. And he started as janitor and then worked up to different things. My mother was an alteration lady for one of the big stores. They were amazed that she knew how to do all these things she had to do with us.

AW:

Yeah, she's the one who sewed that dress that you showed me in that photograph. It was remarkable

CV:

Yes. And she made—we had some cousins that had more things than we did. So they would send their hand-me-downs to us and she would re-make them and you know, she knew how to do that. And all of us worked at different things and we had responsibility. We did on the farm, so we did in town. And my brother had bought two lots.

AW:

This is your brother that was in the army air force?

CV:

Um-hm. That wasn't too far from him. In Michigan everybody has a basement. So we all helped dig that basement. And we were so happy to move to that basement because we had everything we needed. And then we built the house on top. But you know we did many things. There wasn't anything that we said we couldn't do.

AW:

Did your parents stay there the rest of their lives?

CV:

Basically, yes. They always called Dimmitt their second home. I said, "Your summer home?" And they said, "No second home."

AW:

So tell me about meeting your husband.

CV:

We went roller skating. And he had just gotten out of the army; he was a paratrooper. And the nicest, most mannerly person I had ever met. And of course I fell and he helped pick me up.

AW:

Did you fall on purpose?

CV:

I think I did. (both laughs) And we knew each other three months, and married.

AW:

You said 1951?

CV:

Uh-huh. We grew up together. When we came to Amarillo, our son was born in '52.

AW:

And why did you come to Amarillo?

CV:

I had an older sister that was a beautician there. Michigan is a hard state to get to know people. You could live next door to them and you didn't know their names and they didn't know yours, and they didn't care about it.

AW:

Yeah.

CV:

Well you know I'm not that way. I like to know people.

AW:

Yeah. Was the winter difficult in Michigan?

CV:

Yes, very difficult. You had snow boots and layers and layers of clothing. And then my husband said, "Well I'd like to go to Texas." So we came to Amarillo and he worked at many things. Then he got a job at Amarillo Hardware working in the appliance department. Then in 1954, when television came, we managed to buy a television. But he could fix a watch, he could fix a radio, he could fix anything [if] you had a problem with the stove, the car, whatever—self-

taught. And so anyway he said, "Now, we're not going to have a television for a day or two." I said, "What's the matter?" Well he said, "I want to know how it works."

AW:

(laughs) So he took it apart? Did it worry you?

CV:

Not really. I just hoped. He said that there's a better job at Amarillo Hardware for a TV repairman. Because you know, where do they get them? So anyway, it worked. He started working there. And then I began working as a secretary. Then in 1955 in October, some people from Dimmitt who had been bringing their television there to be repaired, they had bought them all from Amarillo Hardware and then they'd bring them back. So they got acquainted with Clyde—

AW:

Clyde is your husband.

CV:

Uh-huh. He said, "You know what, we've got an opening in our place in Dimmitt. We'd pay you good." And he said, "Well doing what?" and they said, "Fixing televisions." Of course they were putting up antennas and all the things we used to go through for television. And he said, "Well I'll talk to my wife." Well they came back the next day and they said, "Now we have a proposition for you. And it starts next week." (laughs)

AW:

That's pretty quick.

CV:

They said, "We'll pay you a hundred dollars a week, and furnish your pickup." So it was a lot more than what he was making at Amarillo Hardware.

AW:

And this was 1950—

CV:

Fifty-five.

AW:

Five. Yeah that was—

CV:

And they said, "Now there's an abstract company that's looking for a typist. Your wife is a typist here? She can get a job here, too." But they said, "We need you to move next week because we've got lots to do." Well there wasn't a house to rent.

AW:

Yeah.

CV:

So we had bought our house in Amarillo on the GI Bill, so there was one that was almost finished here in Dimmitt. And the man that was building it said, "Well I'll just trade you this one in Dimmitt for the one in Amarillo." So that's how we did [it] and we made payments on this house and sold that one. And I began working. Mr. Jack Cousert [?][0:30:40] was the one that I began working for.

AW:

In this building?

CV:

The one next door.

AW:

Next door—

CV:

And so he came up one night with Clyde, I don't know why, to just see if I really had two legs and two arms and so on. So he hired me. And that was when the courthouse was open six days a week. And of course all abstract work comes from courthouse. So I began working for a hundred and fifty dollars a month, six days a week, on a manual typewriter.

AW:

Yeah. So along with your shoulders, your fingers got real strong too. (laughs)

CV:

They really did. And we had two little kids to take care of. And they said, "There's a lady that takes care of children, Ms. Jones, we'll take you and you can go visit and see." So they had everything fixed up. There wasn't an excuse in the world not to move. (phone rings) But anyway, I thought, Well isn't that something? They must have needed us or wanted us.

AW:

I'll pause this for just a minute.

[Pause in recording]

CV:

So anyway, you'd be surprised what you can find—things you can do in a short time.

AW:

Um-hm.

CV:

So the TV repairman's shop was right down the street, so I'd walk down there. And we didn't have a car at that time. And Mr. Cunningham, who was the city judge, he always sat down there. They'd gather there and have coffee and discuss everything—politics and so on.

AW:

At the repair shop?

CV:

Uh-huh. And they had a bench outside if it got too hot, the politics or the weather.

AW:

(laughs) Either one.

CV:

So he said, they call my husband Vick, said, "Vick, I've got a car sitting in my drive that my son-in-law didn't like." And said, "I'm going to tell you to come by and get it." [Vick] said, "But we can't make a payment. We don't have that kind of money." And he said, "I didn't say anything about a payment. I said I want you to come by and drive it, use it, play like it's yours." And can you imagine that happening today?

AW:

(laughs) No.

CV:

So anyway, that's how we became a little more self-sufficient. And later we bought the car. But, you know, at first I tried not to like Dimmitt. I said, It doesn't have this, it doesn't have that. My husband would say, "Yes, but you've got the money and the car and you can go to Amarillo and buy it if you want to."

AW:

So he liked Dimmitt right from the start?

CV:

He did. He really did. And he worked for—

AW:

Had he grown up in Michigan?

CV:

Uh-huh. In Iowa and Michigan. His daddy died; he was a river boat captain on the Mississippi.

AW:

Oh really. That's pretty romantic.

CV:

Yes. And his daddy was killed when [Clyde] was eighteen months old, so he never had a dad. He had step-dads. And he said he went in service before he was old enough. That was the only thing that would save him.

AW;

Yeah.

CV:

But he loved anything organizational. He liked doing things on time and having a schedule and so on. And then he was called back into service in 1962.

AW:

In '62?

CV:

I think it was the Berlin Crisis.

AW:

I was going to say, that was too late for Korea and too early for Vietnam, so for Berlin.

CV:

He was in the reserves all this time and he planned to retire and get the retirement from the reserves. But after that year and a half of being gone, I said, "You know what, when your time's up, don't re-enlist."

AW:

So he was gone for a year and a half? That's a long time for that.

CV:

And then when he came back, he said, "Now, I've got some GI Bill, educational things," he said, "Do you care if I learn to fly? Take flying lessons here out at the airport?" And I said, "Well no, if you can do that, that would be great." Well that was one of his things he had dreamed about, he said, all his life. Being a paratrooper, and when they would rent the plane out for him here, "Now you be sure and bring this plane back. Don't be jumping out." (both laugh) But he excelled in it, in multi-engine rating and then got his instrument rating. And when he took his instrument rating, he didn't go to school for it. And they hesitated in Amarillo to even let him try to pass the test. And he said, "Well I'll pay you whether I pass or not." But he said, "I know that I can. I've been studying." And they said, "We don't even have them pass after they've been to school." Well, he passed, and with a great grade so they gave him one of those certificates for the Texas. I don't know what all it said, but anyway, he was so proud of that. And when he died, he had three small airplanes.

AW:

Wow. Did he fly for a living?

CV:

No.

AW:

Just because he enjoyed it. So all this time he was still working in the television—

CV:

Most of the time he worked at the telephone company, then he began his electrical repair shop business. And he worked for Missouri Beef Packers on wiring, doing their—what the plant at Friona and the one at Plainview, too. Then he went to Boise, Idaho and wired their new plant up there. So that was basically what his business was. Then my son and daughter and their spouses had a mobile home business in Amarillo. And they needed somebody a little older than them and that had some business sense and knew how to set up a mobile home when they delivered it, so of course that involved my husband. And so he'd fly to Amarillo. He'd fly anywhere he could get a chance to, you know. And I worried about him just like all wives do. And he said to me about a month before he died, he had passed his flight physical, so that had been renewed, but he said, "Now I want you to quit worrying about me. You know, it will not matter where I'm at or what I'm doing when it's my time."

AW:
Um-hm.

CV:
I never did worry about him walking.

AW:
Yeah, we wouldn't.

CV:
No. So, but anyways, that was a great loss in our family. But I was so grateful and so fortunate to have a business, already know how to work—

AW:
You were still at the title company?

CV:
Um-hm. Clyde and I had bought the abstract and title company from the Cousert [?] family in 1972. And then in 1976 we bought this building, then we moved here.

AW:
This building being the old bank building?

CV:
Yes. It was built in 1928.

AW:
I think I told you when we talked on the phone that my wife, she's not really in the title business, but she works in the title business. She works for an attorney in Lubbock.

CV:
Right. Well once it's in your blood you can't get it out.

AW:
Yeah.

CV:
Now I just work three days a week and they come on the days I'm not here. But I love it. I like working, I like keeping up with things and helping people. And you need to stay busy, mentally

as well as physically. I think that's what's wrong with us, Americans today. They retire and sit down.

AW:

Yeah. It's one thing to retire and go do something else, but it's a whole other thing to retire and stop doing anything.

CV:

Yes. Right. No I love it. [I] have business friends and after we finished, I sold the business in 2000-2001. And after we finished, from the time we bought it in 1972—with the State Board Insurance of course every year was an audit. Never once did I have a claim.

AW:

Wow.

CV:

And it was not me. It was good records, and we always had good attorneys that did good title opinions. We didn't do anything without an attorney's opinion. And a lot of people cut everything short. Well I'm not giving them half of what I make. Best money you can spend.

AW:

And so—

CV:

And they brought us work, and we brought them work. You know, it worked hand-in-hand.

AW:

Yeah my wife's office is in the title company I mean the law firm rents her part of the space. And you're still at it?

CV:

Yes, I love it.

AW:

That great. When did you—before we start talking about history of Castro County, what are your children doing?

CV:

My son and his wife are in Amarillo. They've all worked in the title business.

AW;
Really?

CV:
Yes.

AW:
So after the mobile home—?

CV:
Before the mobile home. Different times when my son and daughter-in-law moved back in 1988 from Austin. They have two little girls and they both worked in mobile home businesses across the road from each other but at different times. So that meant they each had to have a vehicle, and one had to pick up the little girls at daycare and so-on. Well, I told Johnny [?], that's my son, I said, "I need some help. You come back and I'll pay you." And he said, "Well we've got to do something because our little girls—we're just missing out." So he came back I think in February, and then when school was out the family moved. And I pay him a hundred dollars a week and furnished them a house. All they had to pay was their gas for their cars. And I moved upstairs in this building. I finally had enough, a little bit of money I could have a little bit finished it up. It used to be the hospital.

AW:
Upstairs did? Really?

CV:
It was twenty-one steps up there. So you had to be in good condition before you could—

AW:
I was going to say! How did the sick people get up there? (laughs)

CV:
(laughs) More people would say, "I was born right up there."

AW:
And no elevator?

CV:
No.

AW:

(laughs) Oh my goodness. What a place to put a hospital.

CV:

Right, but it was in the drugstore before then. And then after the POW camp was dissolved, abandoned, Castro County got all the hospital barracks buildings. That's what we had for a hospital until they built this building in 1960-something. So you know, everything works hand-in-hand.

AW:

Sure does.

CV:

I like the work and Johnny liked it real well. And then my daughter worked at it at different times. Now John and Janie [?], his wife, they live in Amarillo and they have two daughters, Jennifer and Jade. And Jennifer and her husband moved back from Austin back in December. They have two little boys. And Jade is a teacher in Borger and she has one little boy. So they're real close. These grandparents up there are getting to know these little grandchildren and that's so important.

AW:

Yes.

CV:

And I'm getting to know them and so-on. But when Johnny worked here, I told him, "Now you take your coffee break and pick up the girls. They don't need to go anywhere else." And they can come down here and do their homework then they can go home with you at five. That's what they enjoyed doing. And they learned many things. Jennifer got a scholarship to Southwestern University and she began working quickly after she got to school. And I said, "Honey, what are you doing? What are you working at?" And she said, "Doing the same things I did for you. Filing." (both laugh) And my daughter lives here now, and a granddaughter, and a little great grandson live here in Dimmitt. It's very nice. It helps. We all have our different schedule and go different ways, but we know where each other are. And I'm going to go back to my grandfather looking at abstracts, he asked me one day, I was probably ten years old, maybe nine, he said, "I've got this suitcase under my bed and I want you to help me read these abstracts." I didn't have a clue what an abstract was. But he had a suitcase full of abstracts and so I'd read the land description and he'd say, "Okay, that's the Johnson place." And he'd say, "Now write that down." His eyesight had begun to fail. And so I'd read the—

AW:

And this was your grandfather Carpenter?

CV:

Um-hm. Yes. And he died in 1954 before I started in the abstract business. But I really loved it.

AW:

You were already in it.

CV:

I would have loved to have told him he helped me get here.

AW:

Why did he have all those abstracts?

CV:

Land he owned.

AW:

Oh, land that he owned.

CV:

When they helped survey, there was strip land, then they filed on it and different things, but they loved land and horses more than—now my grandmother loved cattle because she milked and her cream check was her money. Women's lib, we think they started in the 1990s or whatever, well when my grandfather and grandmother sold their farm before the move to Amherst, they were in Paducah to do the closing, and of course they issued one check. And she said, "No I told you this is to be divided. Issue my husband a check and issue me one." Well they never had done that.

AW:

(laughs) So she was ahead of the curve?

CV:

She knew exactly she wasn't going to try to get the money from him. She would have her own. (both laugh) But anyway, she was a midwife to that part of the country.

AW:

In Dumont?

CV:

Um-hm. In Dickens and Motley—

AW:

But now by the time they moved to Amherst—

CV:

They were older, n their eighties probably.

AW:

Well when did you become interested in the history of—or just history in general, but in particular of this place?

CV:

I loved history in general. But—

AW:

What caused you to like it?

CV:

I don't know. Just because I think I grew up, everything was being told to me, my grandparents, my grandfather especially, Carpenter, would always tell me the history of something. And he loved to read and I love to read, so we talked about many things. Now he had lots of grandchildren, but it seemed like he and I had something in common. But my first week of working at the abstract company, Mrs. Teeny Bowden came in the office and Mr. Cousert introduced me to her. And said, "Mrs. Vick, this is Mrs. Bowden and she's a historian. When she needs a copy of something—" now we didn't have any copy machines.

AW:

You had to type it out.

CV:

Um-hm. Said, "You'll know that you do this for her. She'll come to the courthouse." Because that's where we stayed mostly eight hours of the day there. And he said, "And there's no charge for historians."

AW:

Really?

CV:

So she and I became best friends. She and her husband lived ten miles out south of Dimmitt. Very, very nice family. They had brothers and sisters, but she always involved me in whatever it was she was doing. If it was looking for arrowheads, "I want you to come out and see." And then her husband began kidney failure and was on dialysis for ten years before he died in '88. And he would come by the office and kind of help and prepare himself, for he knew he was not going to live that long—too many more years. And he'd say to me, especially after my husband died in '82, he said, "Now I know Tina's never worked a day in her life," and said, "She doesn't know the value of a dollar." She did, but he didn't think so. And he said, "I just hope that you'll be her best friend like you've always been, and I hope she'll get along just half as good as you have." And we went to Italy together until she became disabled. And I was her power of attorney and she lived in the nursing home ten years. And I took care of her and saw about her.

AW:

Wow.

CV:

But she would have me, had it been reversed. And [she] was always very generous when we were doing the second book. She said one day, "I want you to come out to the house." She had bought a computer. And I said, "Are they going to come give you lessons?" And she said, "Oh no, there's a manual." She said, "I've got to go to the eye doctor." Or the dentist I believe she said, "Saturday morning, I want you to come take me to Plainview." I said, "Okay." So anyway, she handed me the manual when we started out her door. She said, "Now, when you're waiting for me you can read the manual. I bet you'll know a whole lot about the computer when we get back."

AW:

(laughs) So that was a crash course?

CV:

It was. I learned how to turn it on and off.

AW:

Which for the first computers was a pretty big deal.

CV:

Yes it was.

AW:

You couldn't just turn them on and off like you would a light.

CV:

No. But anyways, and it was. It was the most helpful thing for us to do, this second book. We couldn't have done it in the time that we did. But that was her personality. She provided whatever you needed. They were very frugal in their management of money. She taught me many, many things. And I have to give her thanks. But there were many. Helen Richardson was a school principle.

AW:

Rich-is-on or Richardson?

CV:

Richardson.

AW:

Okay.

CV:

And the elementary school is named after her. But she taught forty-something years in the classroom.

AW:

Gosh.

CV:

Then became principle. And she was one of us that worked to restore the chapel, build a museum, get a museum and do the publishing of the history books. And she made you want to come help her, come do that volunteering, because she'd say, "I think I'll have time to bring a freezer of ice cream when we finish." (laughs) Or, "I've got some barbeque things I'm going to bring." And you know, she always enticed you, (both laugh) but knew how, and things like that.

AW:

Was the chapel the first big history project here?

CV;

I guess it probably was.

AW:

And the museum followed?

CV:

Um-hm. Well, the museum, we bought the—organized the museum in 1976. And then we bought the property later that year. And of course we didn't have any money. But the city gave us some money for manpower that they received every year. And we had many—I'm going to say a dozen people that would provide enough to pay the payment each year. And so we had paid off in less than ten years. That was thirty-six thousand dollars now. And we learned to do things and now we're having to upgrade the house, as it was built in 1909, and you know, wood deteriorates and so on and so forth.

AW:

Yeah, well a house is a lot of maintenance as we all know.

CV:

It is. So that's what they're doing right now; we began about a month or two ago. And it's like home. It's always something. I've got to call the plumber. He's been here this morning. I needed the gas turned on and then I had trouble in the sink leaking. He said, "Let me just turn it off and I'll be back later this afternoon." It's never free of anything. But I'll live upstairs until I get to where I can't walk up them and then I'll probably go to the nursing home. The kids want me to live with them but I don't want to. I want them to have their freedom and go do what they need to do. And they all say, "You'll probably outlive us, so quit worrying about that."

AW:

Well the twenty-one steps will help you. That'll help you keep up. That's pretty good.

CV:

The Italians say, Every step you take you increase your life span one second at a time.

AW:

I'd be running up and down just to see. What got all of you interested in the POW camp and the chapel?

CV:

Well, Helen Richardson said to me one day, she said, "Clara, I don't know how to look this up, but you do. You've got the records here. I'm going to point to the map of where I think the little chapel is located. We need to find out about it." And so she did and went to our indexes and saw where the government was deeded for three different tracks of land, but it was a total of eight hundred acres. So we started there and drove out and looked at the chapel, there were about four or five of us that did. And then we contact the landowner, that was, I can't think of his name, where the chapel is located. And he was so mad at us. He said, "Now I'm telling you, I don't want any more visitors out at this little shrine," he said, "keep on." Well we put a marker there in

1983 but we started back in the, I'm going to say early seventies, looking and thinking about it. And he said, "If you just keep on bothering me with this, I'm going to bulldoze that old shrine down." Well now we know he couldn't have, but we didn't know it then. So we just walked away and said, Okay. We'll put a marker on the highway. We won't even put it at the chapel, in Deaf Smith County and Castro County too in 1983. So about 1984 this man came in the office and he didn't know me from Adam and he said he'd sold his land and we typed down all the information and he told us who he'd sold it to and he hoped to close it before the first of the year or something like that. And so I immediately, when he left, called Helen, and I said, Helen, I'll see if you know this name: Charles Schlabs. "Oh," she said, "Clara, he's one of my students."

AW:
Charles—

CV:
Schlabs.

AW:
S-l-a?

CV:
S-c-h-l-a-b-s.

AW:
Oh, S-c-h-l-a-b-s.

CV:
Um-hm. Nicest person you'd ever know. So anyway—

AW:
And he bought the land?

CV:
Uh-huh. So I said, "Now we can't do anything about it until the deed comes through. "Oh," she said, "He'll help us. Oh, that's a blessing." And she just went on and on. And so after Charles—the deed was filed we all called, I think, maybe I called him. And Helen said, "You call because you've been in business." So I said, Okay. So I called and he invited us to come up and meet with him. And of course he was glad to see Helen and she was him and so on. We said, "Well we need an easement or something so we can work on the chapel." He said, "Oh, I won't just give you an easement, I'll help you."

AW:

Wow.

CV:

So those were the best words you can imagine.

AW:

Yeah.

CV:

And we had to stop the water from running underneath, and so on.

AW:

How did—you mentioned that earlier—was it—

CV:

Irrigation water.

AW:

Okay. But it also said the foundation went—

CV:

Well we didn't know but that was foundation just two inches under the ground, you know.

AW:

Oh.

CV:

It was about four feet.

AW:

Yeah. But it was still running under that?

VC:

Yeah.

AW:

And is that clay soil up there?

CV:

No it's not.

AW:

So the water didn't move the building around. It was just a matter of the mildew and—

CV:

No, unh-uh. It was just standing you know, around the building and all. But anyways so that was the best thing we had heard. And then in 1986 we read in the Amarillo newspaper, Mrs. Rob [?], who worked at the museum, she called excited one day and she said, "Clara, you've got a letter to this Italian. He's a POW. He's asking if anybody remembers them, that they've been there celebrating their forty years of return to Italy." And so I wrote the letter and mailed it and told them about the marker and invited them to come back, to come visit. And of course at that time it took mail three months to get there. They had their reunion in September and I think they got the letter in November, maybe—a long time.

AW:

Um-hm.

CV:

So I think he said he got three letters. One was from the mayor of Hereford and one from the, I guess it was the priest in Amarillo or could have been [inaudible 01:00:13]. But anyway, and from me. So he wrote to us and he said they were going to talk about coming at their next meeting the next September. So they did and they came in May of 1988 with the group that's on the front of *Legacy of Peace*. And we met them in Amarillo and they were so excited. They couldn't have been more excited than us but they really were. And to think that people had come to the airport or to the hotel there to meet them or to come with them. We organized a bus because there was that many of them.

AW:

How many? Twenty? Thirty?

CV:

No I think there was fifteen or—

AW:

Still a big group.

CV:

Yes. And one of the wives came because her husband had already died, but they had the ticket to come so she came. But anyway, how affectionate Italians are, they gave you a kiss on each side of the cheek and gave you a hug. They all just could not imagine that the communities would turn out for them coming back to the chapel. And we had the television cameras there and different journalists and all. And they started handing over hundred dollar bills to help do the repairs and the refurbishing.

AW:

The Italians did?

CV:

Um-hm. \$1,140. And then they said, "We want you to not take ten years on this because we want to come back next year." (AW laughs) So they came back in 1989 and it was finished.

AW:

Wow.

CV:

We did many things—before, just at the same time they were here. They'd discovered Imperial Elephant skull about two miles from the camp on the road. So we were involved in that. But also here were the Italians coming back, so we had be two or three places at one time, all volunteer.

AW:

I would guess that was a lot of money that it took to restore the chapel.

CV:

Yes it was.

AW:

How did you raise it?

CV:

Well we had this little special lady Teeny Bowden, whatever we needed, she provided, and graciously. She would said, "Now I have some more. But just tell me what you think we're going to need, because I have CDs. They lived off the interest of their CDs. And many of us provided things, but most of us just did the volunteer work, but she was the one that kept us in change.

AW:

How did you know how to restore it?

CV:

Well we had Eddie Guffey who was an archeologist from Plainview.

AW:

Yeah.

CV:

Do you know him?

AW:

Uh-huh, yeah.

CV:

Very nice person. And he was so willing to—

AW:

Smoked a lot though.

CV:

Yeah (laughs) probably still does.

AW:

No, he's passed away.

CV:

Oh has he?

AW:

Yeah, not too long ago. Two years, maybe?

CV:

Oh I didn't know that.

AW:

What a great guy though.

CV:

The last time I saw him, I went back to the museum and I talked to him and he said, "I'll just meet you there." That was probably four or five years ago.

AW:

Yeah I went up and had a visit with him about some—I think our interests at the time was Comanche place names.

CV:

Um-hm.

AW:

Eddie learned Comanche.

CV:

Very smart person, very—

AW:

The only reason I know about the smoking was because we were in his house.

CV:

Well he smoked and he didn't—have you been in the Estacado museum?

AW:

In Plainview?

CV:

Uh-huh.

AW:

Um-hm.

CV:

(Showing AW pictures) There was that old—

AW:

Yeah. It's a great photo of Eddie, too.

CV:

Yeah. And we all learned from. But he helped us and he was like Teeny. And she would say, "Now I'm going to buy them some gas," or, "I'm going to get them something." And I said, "Well that's good because we can't do it without him."

AW:
Yeah.

CV:
You know, we could mess around but we couldn't finish it like it needed to be.

AW:
Yeah.

CV:
But thank goodness for people like that.

AW:
Um-hm, yeah, that's great.

CV;
But we were fortunate. We had many older volunteer workers. Men that wanted to do something, helped us with whatever it was: digging ditches or rolling up barbed wire, or whatever it was. We had those. And Charles Schlabs provided when they helped us with the fence. We used the same barbed wire that encircled the camp. And on their first trip back in 1988, we cut strands of barbed wire. I think they were thirteen inches long or eighteen, I've forgotten—thirteen I believe. We put American red, white, and blue ribbon on one side and red, white, and green for the Italians and tied it in a V. And those people were so happy. They'd hold it and they'd say, This is how we looked. [both laugh]

AW:
For the tape she was holding what would have been the wire under her chin.

CV:
Yes, uh-huh.

AW:
So this was the barbed wire off the camp?

CV:
Uh-huh, oh and that meant something to them.

AW:
Sure, sure.

CV:

I don't know how many dresses and suit coats it tore up going back into their luggage but you couldn't take it now.

AW:

No probably not.

CV:

You couldn't get through customs or anything.

AW:

So before we started recording you told me you had been to Italy thirteen times?

AW:

I think it's thirteen, it could have been fourteen.

AW:

And also you have a knighthood from the Italians? How did that come about?

CV:

I don't know. At the dinner in Dallas for the knighthood—

AW:

And that was what year?

CV:

Two thousand eleven, June the fourth I believe. And of course I had no idea what they were going to say or do. I didn't know anything because I had never been to a knighthood and didn't know anybody that had been. So the consul general from Houston, I can't think of his name, I had met about five or six different consul generals from Houston and they've all been very nice. But this one, he had not been—he didn't know anything about the chapel or anything but he read what they had reported in the newspapers in Italy. And I didn't know this, that they didn't know the lady's name that came every year, but she always wore a pink dress. (AW laughs) And I had on a pink dress at the dinner. So when I got up to thank them, I said, I have more than one pink dress. (both laugh) And there were dignitaries from different countries and they all gave me their cards. But the POWs, when I'd go back, they'd say, "Now we'll get you a hotel room or you can stay with our families." Well I'd much rather be with the families.

AW:

Sure.

CV:

And they'd say, "You'll be safe." But then our first trip, we stayed in the convent in Rome. And that was when Dr. Senebly [?] [1:09:11] invited us, or sent a telegram and said he could get us tickets to have an audience with the Pope. Well this little Teeny Bowden was so Baptist, such a wonderful person, but so Baptist. Now I'm Baptist, but not that Baptist. She said, "Oh I don't give a poot about that." (AW laughs) Well I've never had too many blessings, so I immediately sent a telegram back that we would be delighted. So then when he met us, we went on to Pesaro where the meeting was, but when we were coming back to Rome, he was driving and I was in the front seat and she was in the backseat with two other ladies and he said, "Vick, would you mind, would your group mind staying at the convent?" He said, "It's only two blocks from my home. You'd be safe and I can walk there or you can all walk to my home or I'll come pick you up." I said, It would be perfect. And Teeny said in the backseat, "I didn't agree to come over here and live with them. I was just going to have a meeting with them." I said, "Well if you see any Baptist homes you just point them out and we'll stop." (AW laughs) So in about five minutes she said, "I'll go with you." She didn't like to drink wine.

AW:

That must have been difficult in Italy.

CV:

She didn't like fish, well I love wine and fish. So I drank her wine and ate her fish. So when my daughter picked us up at the airport, after our first trip home, she said to Rita, she said, "Rita, I'm afraid your mother's an alcoholic."

AW:

(Laughs)

CV:

So I told Rita later, I said, "Well if I am, she caused it."

AW:

(laughs) So did you meet the Pope?

CV:

Yeah, well with ten thousand other people. He didn't call our names, he said, "There were Texans there that were invited to come to Italy by the prisoners of war during World War II. And they were from the Herford Camp in Texas." Well that was all but saying your name. We stood out like sore thumbs, you know, but couldn't have been nicer. And you know, just the fact that it was Pope John Paul II. Many languages he spoke and people from everywhere, every country you can think of. So what a blessing that was, and what an experience. And at the convent it was

the same thing. There were sisters there from everywhere, every country. And we saw exactly how they lived. They didn't have any of the frills that we have.

AW:

The sisters?

CV:

The sisters, the nuns. And we had the same. We had one towel while we were there. But that's okay. That provided us a safe place. And Dr. Senebly toured. He was born there in Rome so he wanted to show us everything. And he was a professor of political science, so as we would be looking off, or not paying attention, he'd say, "Now pay attention."

AW:

(laughs) So he was a teacher too.

CV:

But most generous, dynamic person. And he—

AW:

He's the one who lived two blocks from the convent?

CV:

Um-hm. He and his wife took us to the airport on a Monday morning, and three days later he died of a massive heart attack.

AW:

Oh.

CV:

But when it came to—he was one of the first group that came, he said to me, "Mrs. Vick, we have to become friends. We must become friends. We have got to get over this, being prisoners and you all being captive." He said, "We've got to become friends. And not just me and you—our children, and our children's children." And he said, "Now we must, you all must plan to come to our reunion. You just must. We have to get to know you." So of course Ms. Bowden buried her husband the last day they were there. So I approached her afterwards and a couple days later—and of course she had no children. One sister, her sister had kids and grandkids. And you know, Teeny, I was probably closer to her than any of the family because she came and we would eat a hamburger here or whatever it was. So I told her what Dr. Senebly said and she said, "Oh Clara, can you imagine what people would say if I went to say if I went to Italy in

September? After L.B. died in May?" And I said, Teeny, your real friends would think you were the bravest person in the world, and others don't even count.

AW:

Um-hm.

CV:

So she went to Italy with us. And it just went from one thing to another. They planned to come back the next year. Okay, so, then we didn't go in '89 but we went in '90 and we went several times. I think her last trip probably was in '94. But she began with dementia and some physical problems too. But she enjoyed it. And at the nursing home, one day they called and said to me, "Clara, Teeny is just absolutely out of her mind. We need you to come and talk to her." I said, "What's the matter?" They said, "Well she's talking off the wall. She said she met the Pope and she'd been to Italy." And I said, "Well she did."

AW:

(laughs) They thought she—

CV:

Yeah. So you know, when you go to a nursing home, be sure and tell them everything you know and where you've been. (both laugh) But anyway, she was a wonderful person to take care of because she didn't expect anything. She'd been so lonesome out in her farmhouse that when she got to the nursing home, she enjoyed people. And one day they called and said, "Can you come out here?" And I said, "No I'm out in the middle of closing. Can I talk to her on the phone?" They said, "Well maybe." I said, "Teeny, what's the problem?" She said, "Oh Clara, I don't have any seniority out here at all. They don't pay any attention to me, what I tell them." She'd been in charge of everything—Baptist Sunday school and everything—the pastors, whatever. And so I said, "I know how that feels and I'll be out to see you." But anyway, after you go one time, then you have to go another because they've got more things planned for you in Italy.

AW:

What was it like that, first reunion, to be there?

CV:

It was wonderful. That was the first time they had ever had any recognition from any United States government. And there was Maxwell Rabb, the U.S. Ambassador.

AW:

Did you help arrange that? How did the foreign service get—

CV:

Well they were pretty smart Italians. They were attorneys and they were journalists, they were educators. You know, part of them was in the government, one—Johnny Roberti [?] [1:17:41], I said, I asked him, he lived in Naples, and I said, “Have you ever been to the United States?” And he said, “Oh yes, as a diplomat.” Well his family was attorneys to the last Italian—what am I trying to say? Before they had become a government. I’ll think of it later. Anyway, they were very important people. They knew how to get in touch, how to work the government, we’ll say. And they knew—they helped us with many things.

AW:

Wow that’s great.

CV:

And when you think about them being called a criminal camp—(laughs)

AW:

Now explain while we’re on the recording, about criminal camp. That was because they wouldn’t agree to serve the U.S. Army and go back into the European theater of war and serve the US?

CV:

That’s right.

AW:

So that made them a criminal and not a POW?

CV:

That’s right. They were called the “nons,” n-o-n-s. That was because they were non-collaborators. They didn’t pretend to like the government. They were real, I guess you’d say, real determined. They were going to show them that they didn’t have to go back, they wouldn’t go back. Now some did, but not this group. And so when the nons were sent back to Italy in ’46, some went in January, but most of them went in May and June when they closed the camp. They were put in jail for three days.

AW:

In Italy?

CV:

Um-hm.

AW:

And why?

CV:

Because now, that government said they should have helped.

AW:

Right.

CV:

So they left one government and here was another one and they couldn't please them.

AW:

And most all of us would consider ourselves traitors if we were captured and turned our backs on our country.

CV:

Exactly. And I wouldn't do it.

AW:

Yeah.

CV:

You couldn't make me and I said, I wouldn't ask you to do something I wouldn't do. Oh they said, "Do you really understand?" I said, "I do." So that opened the door for our friendship to be historical. And exactly like, "I'm going to treat you just like I want you to treat me." And Maxwell Rabb, the ambassador, he was so kind. He thanked them for inviting us to come to their reunion, then he thanked us for coming. He said, "What you all are doing, your little group, has done more than millions and millions of dollars from both countries could do." And when you don't have to be involved with governments, you can do the right thing.

AW:

(laughs) Isn't that the truth? So when was the last time you were over?

CV:

Two thousand eight. The next to the last time, was I arrived in Rome on September 11, 2001. Now going over, we didn't have any news on the airline at all, just movies and so on. But when the Italian couple met me at the airport, they said, "Clara have you heard what happened in New York?" I said, "No." They said, "Did you not have any news on?" I said, "No there wasn't any." They said, "Well a plane hit the twin towers." And I said, "Oh an accident?" They said, "No.

terrorist.” Now when we got my luggage and got in the car driving back to their home, they turned the radio on, and they reported that the other plane had hit the other tower. So they knew right then. But I couldn’t imagine it.

AW:

Yeah.

CV:

I could not imagine it. So I stayed—but the Italians were so—knew how to sympathize with me, not knowing what had happened. But tears would just go down their cheeks when they would talk about it. And of course I began wondering, How will I ever get home? When will I ever get home? They said, “Don’t worry, you can stay with us as long as you need to.” I said, “Oh I don’t have enough money.” “You don’t need money.” I said, “I don’t have enough clothes.” “You don’t need clothes.” (AW laughs) So I was there a little over three weeks.

AW:

Three weeks before you could get back, yeah.

CV:

But we had CNN, but it didn’t answer all the questions. And my family was worried about me and I said, “Quit worrying about me. I’m safer than you all are.”

AW:

As far as we knew then.

CV:

But I stayed with different families. They all were so kind and wanted to participate. So I went most of the time by myself. Now we had two Italian ladies who had married service men. Rosa went with us in 1988 and Rosetta went with us in 1990. But the Italians said, You don’t need anybody. We’re here for you. We all understand. And it was a lot less burden to them to have one or two, rather than three or four. So anyway, I was at this one home that he had been so nice. He had a school in Milan and he had a daughter that was about twenty-five years old and he wanted her to get to know Americans and do things like that. So I was at his home one time and he was going to Florence, Italy for another—there were POWs there, four of them. So this man had called and said to Valentino [?][1:24:39], did he need to get a hotel reservation for me, or would I consider staying in his home? And they all said, as nice as can be, his wife had died about two years prior, and he had a rather big house. And Valentino asked me and I said, Would I be safe with him? “Oh, yes. We’d kill him.” And separate bathrooms and all, you know. But [he] couldn’t have been nicer. And he died this past couple months ago. But Angerili [?][1:25:28], the one that helped build the chapel, that was ninety-three in 2009, he’s still alive.

AW:

I was going to ask if there were any of them still alive because that generation is going.

CV;

Like ours. Just not many left. And there's a few left that I hear from on Christmas and Easter and different things. They're older than me and I'm too old to make that trip back. That's a hard trip.

AW:

Oh yeah, it's a long way. I know flying that long is just brutal.

CV;

It's the most educational thing I've ever gotten to do.

AW:

Do their children or grandchildren have interest in this?

CV:

Yes, but nothing like the POWs. They can't visualize.

AW:

No it would be hard, but I just wondered if they still have—

CV;

They really do but nothing is as important to them as it was to the POWs, you know. But we still invite them, have that invitation out, "Come any time." Some have stayed with me when they'd come. We try to take them different places. In 2009 when they came back for the rededication of the chapel, we had a chicken fry out at one of the communities—Bethel Community. So Monty Boosier [?] [1:26:58], one of the historical members, he said, "Clara, what are they doing between this time and that time on Friday evening?" I said, "Well absolutely nothing that I know of." He said, "Do you think they'd enjoy coming to the chicken fry?" I said, "I think it'd be great! Let them see how do, how we celebrate." They still talk about. They've never had anything like that—nothing. And all the community came out. Usually it's thirty people at the Bethel Community, well they had half of Dimmitt there because the Italians were going to be there. But they're very interested in seeing how we live. And when I'd stay with the different families, they'd say, "How is our family different to yours? How is their kitchen different?" I said, "Well we have microwaves and you have ovens." (laughs) They don't cook like we do. Well, we should be cooking like they do, from scratch, but we don't. We hurry up and do it. And they'd take me much more places you can't imagine, all over Italy. Now the last meeting I was there in 2008 was in Trieste. That's on the border of Austria and Italy. And they had a lot more problems with the Germans up there than they did in the middle of Italy, Rome, and south Italy.

So they suffered a lot more. They had many that they never did hear from—local citizens. And they don't know what happened to them. And they all remembered that and they want to never ever let anything go to where it's a war. And yet, like General de Bello [?] [1:29:13] would say, well we'd hear sometimes the younger people would say, "Oh that Americana." He said, "You're trying to be just like them and now you're cussing them." He said, "Let me tell you. They're fighting our wars for us. They're paying for everything that's providing us with liberty and justice and here you are condemning them." Oh he gave a—I wish I could have recorded that speech.

AW:
Yeah.

CV:
And it was true. But that's young people. Hasn't had that experience. And he had it and was a general and an artist and a very, very wonderful person.

AW:
What impact, if any, did restoring that chapel have on the people in here Dimmitt and in Castro County?

CV:
Well the ones that helped work, they were really pleased or happy that we were doing it. And some would go out and look at it and some didn't care a thing about it. We had all different reactions. But you know, I've never been a quitter.

AW:
Um-hm.

CV:
Somebody would say something derogatory and it didn't matter. [If] they're talking about me, they're letting somebody else alone, you know. I don't have anything to hide or anything—I'm not doing anything I'm not proud of. And they said, "You're spending so much time out there, why don't you do something here in Dimmitt?" Well, maybe you can do the things in Dimmitt. I'm out here. Volunteerism is, I say that's the best part of life. That's where you meet the nicest people because they're all there because they want to be. They're not there because of their job or because of what they're being paid. And I go to schools and talk to different age groups and they all want to know, they want to start volunteering but how long would it be before they'd get to go to Italy? (both laugh) [I] say, Well you have to start. Then we go from there.

AW:

That's pretty good.

CV:

But many, many, many of the persons are very proud of the work that's been done, and things that have happened, and appreciate volunteering. You know, all the historical markers, well somebody had to do that. And different things, but if you just live for your own self or your family, you've left off a great lot of life.

AW:

Yeah. Did you do this work on the chapel with any interest or help from folks in Hereford or Deaf Smith County?

CV:

We had a little bit this last time, but in 1988 we had none other than Charles Schlabs. We have to go back and give Charles Schlabs—if he ever—when he gets to heaven, I know he'll have several different things—blessings, because he provided so many things—knowledge of how to build that fence. And he suggested, "Don't put a gate. If you put a gate they'll cut the fence if they want in." And of course we didn't plan on them breaking the doors down and using it for target for their guns, but they did. And we never did catch anybody there. So we don't know who to blame. But you'd think, you know he built the most beautiful—out in front of the chapel, out where you start down the block to the chapel, a flag of the United States flag on the left, [and] over here on the right was the Italian flag colors in colored stones. No telling how much that cost and how much work that cost, and darn it if they didn't dig up the stars out of the United States flag and all that and the same way with the Italians, Now what good did that do?

AW:

Yeah. And that sounds like something more than vandalism. It sounds like somebody has a grudge.

CV:

Well that's what the Italians said. They said, "Did they do anything to the United States flag?" I said, "Yes they did." Well that was great. Because I don't want people to think, Hey, they don't like us. And if there's one person, well then there's ten thousand others here that like them. But this one—so I was glad to report, yes, the American flag received vandalism too. And that's awful.

AW:

Yeah it is awful.

CV;

And you know, it takes money, it takes time, it takes knowledge of people being able to do that work. It's not just a slam dunk.

AW:

No.

CV:

But the last time, in 2008, we did the last work—2009, when they came back, we had this group from, let's see, the Italians living abroad out of Dallas. And Vincenzo [?][1:35:19], I can't think of this last name, but anyway, his group provided about \$2,500 in that neighborhood. We gave them an estimate and they gave us a little more. And so the one that was going to do the work, or that did part of the work, he thought that we would give him that check and he could go do whatever, whenever. And I said, "No. Everything that you need to buy, you buy here at Higginbotham-Bartlett lumber company because this is where all the money—we have to spend every bit in Castro County. And tell me what you need and go sign a ticket and I'll go okay it." Well that didn't go over well. He said, "I have it a lot cheaper in Amarillo." And I said, "Well you may have but we're going to spend the money here in Dimmitt." And if you're going to live here, you've got to support it. So anyway, we came out with a little extra money and he got acknowledged for helping and being a part of it and maybe that changed his attitude, that it's not all the money, it's what you do and where you do it at.

AW:

Was this a local person?

CV:

Um-hm. It was a Hispanic man. And that doesn't mean that the white man wouldn't have done the same thing. Because you know, we're all in it if we can get it cheaper, go there, and so on. In small towns you have to go back and trade at home.

AW:

You'd keep going to Amarillo, eventually there wouldn't be a Higginbotham-Bartlett.

CV:

No, that's so true. And it's so convenient for us and if we buy more than we need they'll take it back and give us credit for it. They don't do that anywhere else.

AW:

No they sure don't.

CV:

But I've enjoyed all my work, volunteer work in Dimmitt and Castro County, I love it. And I hope I've made a difference with some of the local people, half as much as I have with the foreign people.

AW:

What other work have you done for the history of Castro County? Because when I talk to people, they say, "Well if you're going to do any interviews in Dimmitt, you've got to talk to Clara Vick." So you must have worked on something besides the chapel?

CV:

Yeah we've worked on different things, but now, I have to tell you my last—I've always wanted to work for the government.

AW:

Um-hm.

CV:

Okay well when the census came out in 2010, I got to work on the census.

AW:

I understand that was a tough job in 2010.

CV:

It wasn't too bad. I worked in the farming area—about four different counties. And I get along better I guess, with our farm people because growing up a farmer's daughter, you know all the circumstances. Yet it's so different farming now than it was eighty years ago. But anyway, I just enjoyed it and never had a bad experience, not one.

AW:

That's great.

CV:

And so when the supervisor from Amarillo called to see if I'd work on the next census, I said, Well if I'm here and not too busy. (AW laughs) He said, "I have to tell you something. All the people that come out of Amarillo, and going south of us, south, west, and east, they all have GPS in their cars. I understand you don't. Is that true?" I said, "That's true." He said, "Now how did you get along?" I said, "Well I've got maps." He said, "You were the only one that didn't call in lost." (both laugh) But I said, "Well I learned to read a map a long time ago."

AW:

I still prefer a map. I look at my GPS and it confuses me, but a map I can make sense out of.

CV:

Right, turn it around. He said, "Where did you get the maps for the different counties?" I said, "The sheriff's office." He said, "Oh we never even thought of that." But I've done a lot of things. I've helped with the schools, and I've tried to pass on a little bit of my knowledge of having a brother that was disabled. All of the children that were handicapped used to be out where the Mexican apartments are now, not on the school grounds, not there.

AW:

The one east of town for the migrant workers? Yeah.

CV:

Okay so one man came into the office and he was a trustee, so I asked him about it. I had been helping their secretarial group, had said, Any of the children that are disabled that are in that school, we would have Christmas parties for them. Well you learn a lot. So the trustee came in and I asked him, Why? Why do you not have them in the school right with you? I said, They all can learn, you should have facilities, things that will help them learn. And I said, Let them be part of the school. Well the next year they moved them pretty close to the school, they were at the tennis courts and not to a permanent building, but then they finally did get them into the school building. And I don't know what I had to do with it but I feel like I had a little bit of a hand in that. And the little children that came that we, our secretarial group had Christmas parties for them, they taught us a lot of things. I still meet them now at their grown up ages and they know who I am. I have to stop and think, Who are they? But you know, there's just something—compassion, I think everybody has some compassion, some don't know how to show it.

AW:

Some of them have to go look for it.

CV:

You just have to jump in with four feet and so I've just been real lucky.

AW:

One of the things that strikes me about not just Dimmitt and Castro county, but all of Texas, but particularly the Panhandle, is a big change in how many people of Mexican-American heritage are part of the community now versus what they were. Like back when I was a kid growing up on a farm in Slaton, we had Mexican-American people who would come through during harvest, but we didn't have many who lived there. And it's quite different now. How has that change going here?

CV:

It's going great. They're educated, we have leaders of Hispanic descent, we have leaders of blacks.

AW:

Really?

CV:

Yes. Our county clerk that retired—

AW:

I don't think about doing is having a large black population.

CV:

We don't but we have a few who have excelled.

AW:

Well there was a very famous football player from here.

CV:

Yes, Junior Coffey.

AW:

Right.

CV:

Everybody liked their coffee strong and black.

AW:

Yeah, especially when they can run the football.

CV:

Joyce Thomas who was our county clerk, a black girl—very good. She retired about two years ago, and we had a Hispanic, JoAnna. And I've worked with all different kinds. They're very nice. I'm so proud for them that they have a good job and they know how to do it and that they do their work. Our sheriff is Hispanic, Sal Rivera—very, very nice. Just does more things to help—they're proud of it. And we're proud to have them.

AW:

I was going to ask, is that true for the Anglo community as well?

CV:

Well there may be some, that you know, label everything as not quite equal. I pulled cotton right beside them, I worked just like they have and it didn't hurt me.

AW:

Who in town should I talk to, to get some history interviews about the black and Mexican-American populations? Who would be the good people to visit?

CV:

I'm trying to think. Would you mind going to the sheriff?

AW:

Not at all.

CV:

He's on our historical commission, a member of our museum board, and just the nicest person you'd ever, ever want to meet.

AW:

And tell me his name again.

CV:

Sal, S-a-l, it's Salvador, but—Rivera, R-i-v-e-r-a. And their number is 647-3311, I think, but I'll look it up to be sure.

AW:

I can look it up.

CV:

But we've had a lot of drugs that they've had to be so busy with these past few months, but he was in our museum meeting, I guess Monday morning.

AW:

Well I'm not in a huge hurry. We can take some time.

CV;

Yeah well he would be the one. And he's knowledgeable and he's proud of his job and he said, "Clara, I've made more Hispanics mad, and they promised I won't be in this position next voting time." And I said, "Well, just keep on working like you're doing. We all appreciate what you're

doing. A lot of them, it's just talk. They don't go vote." He said, "You're right." But he doesn't show partiality.

AW:

Well that's important.

CV:

That is important.

AW:

I mean, any way to show partiality.

CV:

It really is. Well I'm glad you're going to talk to Bill Sava.

AW:

Yeah I'm going to see him tomorrow and I'm going to see this afternoon, Donny—let me make sure I say this right, and then there are some—Donny Carpenter [?][1:47:08]. I wanted to make sure it was Carpenter. And then I'm interested in meeting and visiting with people who knew Goose Ramey because I've heard so much about, you know, how he influenced folks. The young PhD entomologists I met down in Stillwater, Oklahoma, who's from here, I asked him, "How did you get interested in this?" And he said, "Goose Ramey." So I thought that was interesting.

CV:

He was a very, very smart person and interested in things you wouldn't think about.

AW:

Yeah.

CV:

Like geese, like honey, like weather—

AW:

Yeah—bees and geese, those were big things. So you knew him?

CV:

Oh yeah. He was a special friend. He was on our historical commission and when they began talking about the book and what we were going to put on the front of it, this one boy, I've forgotten his name, he was Hispanic, drew—we had several—we had a contest to see who would draw the best windmill. Well, we were at the museum meeting trying to decide and he said,

“Well most of those windmills won’t pump.” (both laugh) So when he finally finished up and okayed this one, I said, “You know what, I believe that would pump water right off of that book.”

AW:

I think you’re right.

CV:

Teeny and I had some interviews with him and bless his heart, he was so interested in everything. He came by the office many times; when had something on his mind he’d come by and say, “I just want to see if you’re thinking like I am.” Well—

AW:

(laughs) It’s kind of hard to disagree with somebody when they say that.

CV:

It is. He brought by five sketch of the old Tascosa cemetery. And he had two or three different names and then he had this one that was blank and he said, “Trying to decide—trying to think of a name for this.” I said, “Do you not know who’s buried there?” “No, but they don’t know it.” (both laugh) So then he said whatever it was and I typed it out for him. He said, “You know, there’s nobody here older than I am so they’re not going to question me.” But he was something else. His birthday was in January and every two years the judge would say, We need new members of the historical commission. Help us pick them out. And so one year it was my turn to go call and visit different ones and see if they would. So I called him and he said, “Well, yes. Now let me ask you, do you have rules and regulations if you’re old? If you’re over eighty you can’t be on the historical commission?” I said, “No there’s not.” And he said, “Well there is about driving on the highways.” (both laugh) So anyway, I said, “Now I know your birthday is coming up. What day would you like to eat out and I’ll come get you? Or we’ll have lunch together.” He said, “Well now little lady, you’ll have to pick me up because I can’t drive anymore.” I said, “That’s not a problem. Now if it’s snowy and bad weather, we’ll postpone it for another day.” He said, “Now I get just as hungry on bad weather days as I do on sunny days.” But what happened, highway patrol had clocked him going to Hereford to visit his friend, they said he was doing eighty miles an hour. But he was in his old pickup so I doubt it was doing that. But they couldn’t get him to stop, so they called back to the sheriff’s office and the sheriff said, “Oh leave him alone.” They said, “No we’re going to try to stop him. We’ve got two highway patrols blocking the road.” Anyway, he just went around them. And so when they reported that back to the sheriff, he said, “Leave him alone, let him come home. We’ll take care of it.” So he came back to the courthouse and reported to the sheriff that those people in those black and white cars said they’re having lots of trouble with those cars. They’ve got the highway

blocked with them. They can't get them started. (AW laughs) So his nephew had to tell him, "We've got to take your license," and it just broke his heart. But he was a character.

AW:

Yeah I guess. He thought the highway patrol couldn't get their cars started, that's why they were blocking the road.

CV:

He was a step ahead of them all the way. He came back a shortcut. (laughs) But people like that—we don't have them anymore.

AW:

No.

CV:

You know, we've lost that generation. I'm going to go back—I read in the Amarillo paper where Kent Hance is going to retire in 2014.

AW:

We heard the announcement on Friday. But we weren't that surprised once they reached that huge goal of fundraising.

CV:

He got it there, so.

AW:

Oh yeah.

CV:

And I'm glad he's going to retire and enjoy.

AW:

Yeah, because he's still healthy and energetic and I doubt he'll sit in a hammock somewhere though.

CV:

No, I doubt it too. I don't know what I'd say he'd be doing but it will be doing something.

AW:

Did you know him when he was growing up here?

CV:

Oh yes.

AW:

How did you get to know him?

CV:

Well he was friends with the people who lived right across the street from us that had the son his age—the Cowens [?] [1:54:15]. He would go to their house and we knew him. And then my husband taught—he was an assistant Sunday school teacher, and most of the time Kent was in his class. And Clyde didn't believe in these long prayers. He believed in thanking God and everyone going home and being good. So the other teacher would do this long drawn out—on your knees, it would just kill you and the boys lost interest, and so we got to know him that way. And then his mother worked at the courthouse and a nice, nice, nice person. His daddy worked—I think he was a mail carrier and did other things. His daddy had a drinking problem. And Kent told me, “Clara, the hardest thing I ever did was to get a divorce for my mother from my daddy.” I said, “Well Kent, I'm glad you did because she deserves some quiet time.” And I don't know, we've just known him all the time, helped him when he ran for congress we were behind him. Everything he's done, we've helped do, and appreciated him and loved him for all the things that he's done.

AW:

Yeah, he's been great for us, Texas Tech.

CV:

Well he has a heart and a sense of sharing and of helping people make the goal. And our son got in trouble with marijuana when he was at WT. Flunked out of Tech, went to WT, and that day and time, it was almost a life sentence.

AW:

Oh it was a felony. It was crazy.

CV:

It was felony. It was life sentence almost. And so he went to see Kent and Kent told him ten thousand dollars, and Johnny had a motorcycle he could sell, but he didn't know what in the world he was going to do. Now you won't repeat this to anybody—

AW:

Oh do you want me to turn this off?

CV:

No—it's okay. Kent and I still know about it, but anyway, then Johnny went to Boise, Idaho to help his dad work up there and called and said, "Mother, I can't afford Kent. Would you call Ray Cousert," who was an attorney in Hereford, "and ask him if he would represent me? They'll probably indict me." And I said, "Yes you'll need a lawyer, Johnny, I'll call." I called Ray and explain to him and Ray was a nice, nice attorney too. He said, "Forget about it. I'll go do this." He called me back about two hours, three hours later, he said, "Clara, Johnny has an attorney." I said, "Well who in the world is it?" And he said, "It's Kent Hance." I said, "No Ray, Johnny couldn't afford him." He said, "Well he's on the books as his attorney. So you sure don't need me." I said, "Well what do I owe you?" And he said, "Not one thing." He said, "I'm just so glad maybe he's going to get a little leeway there."

Well, they didn't indict Johnny. Kent knew the DA there, they were best friends. So Johnny was paying him so much a month and about six months or a year later, Kent called, probably six months, he said, "Clara, Johnny's paid me enough. You don't have to do anything, I'm just going to call it even." I said, "No you're not. You've done your job and you've done it well, I want Johnny to pay you ever penny. I don't want to have to get him out of any more trouble." He said, "Well I was afraid you and Clyde were paying it." I said, "No, that's why it's so slow—Johnny's doing it." He said, "Well if you think that's okay." "I said, That's just perfect. You did your job and that's all I'm going to tell you—thank you so much." And about two or three years later, this past year, two or three years ago I told Johnny. He said, "Well it worked didn't it?" (both laugh) But that was the kind of person Kent is. He said, "I couldn't stand the thought of it being where he could never vote, always be known as a felon. It would be a disgrace for me not to be able to help him."

AW:

Um-hm.

CV:

And he was with some other boys and of course Johnny was the youngest so he got labeled with it. They were smarter. But that's okay, he needed that lesson. His daddy wanted him to learn to fly and he had taken flying lessons but he said, "Mother I don't care a thing about it. I don't like it." And Clyde said, "I can't imagine him not liking it." I said, "Do you know what?" This was before this episode with marijuana, I said, "We're the luckiest people, that he doesn't want to fly. Can you imagine what the news would be when they caught him with a plane load of marijuana with two or three other boys, in your plane? Unh-uh. We're the luckiest people that he's not wanting to fly." I believe that.

AW:

Yeah.

CV:

That would have been a vehicle where he thought he could make some money if that's what it was all about. But anyway, if you do the crime, you need to pay it. But like I say, Johnny hasn't been in any trouble since. (both laugh)

AW:

So it did work.

CV:

But that's our friendship.

AW:

Yeah.

CV:

And it's not just the money. It was the fact that he stepped way up above all, he didn't have to do that. But no, Kent is a very nice person and we've got a lot in the history books about him.

AW:

Yeah, yeah.

CV:

You've probably seen it. But I just—I've been after him to get us a picture for the museum and he says, "Oh I will when I have time." Well we still haven't gotten it.

AW:

Yeah, he's awfully busy. People schedule his time by the fifteen minute increments.

CV:

He's got the nicest secretary you'd ever want to meet. And that's the way to get in to see him. (laughs)

AW:

Yep, yeah. Well I mean, you know, he's open to come visit, but he's just so busy.

CV:

He's just so busy—scheduled. He's been very, very nice and helpful in many things that I've worked on. We're always proud to say we know Kent. We can call and he knows who we are, and it's a mutual feeling.

AW:

Oh yeah he's proud of Dimmitt. He talks about it all the time.

CV:

He had experiences here that [he] probably wouldn't have had anywhere else and he tells his history teacher—she asks him, "Don't you want to learn about this history?" He said, "No I want to make history."

AW:

(laughs) That's a good description.

CV:

It is. And that's Kent.

AW:

Who are some people that we should be doing interviews with here? Besides Bill whom I'll see tomorrow.

CV:

You know, like I said, nearly all my friends are at the nursing home. (AW laughs) Oh goodness.

AW:

Well if you think of someone call me.

CV:

I'll have to think about it and then give you a call.

AW:

That's alright. There's no hurry.

CV;

There's lots of historians here. But like I said, I'm lucky I'm not out there. So that's all that I can tell you. They're a lot younger than I am out there.

AW:

That's scary, isn't it?

CV;

It is. And I think every once in a while, what have they done with their time? So many of them never had adversities. And I don't mean you have to have a hard time to do things. Like this

morning I heard on television, it said you don't know how to appreciate anything until you pay for it. (laughs) But isn't that the truth?

AW:

Yeah. Yeah I'm really glad to have chopped a little cotton. (laughs)

CV:

It makes you have all that—oh I'll tell you like I told some of the Spanish and blacks, and most of them haven't done what I've done now—

AW:

No. Well not modern, contemporary people haven't.

CV:

Machinery and so on—automation, you know. But no, but I think my cousin that was POW for the Japanese, he was raised in Paducah, he said, "Clara, the boys that had grown up with everything that they needed, or had no problems, they didn't make it. The ones that wondered what we were going to eat tomorrow, or today—we made it." And he said, "It's that you've got to learn. It's growing up, you don't become this way just by getting to be twenty-one. You've got to experience some of those hard times." But he said it was so sad to see them just fall out. [They] couldn't march another minute. Just as quick as they fell out, then they'd come with a sword and cut their heads off. But he said, "We had to look straight on, know that we were strong and going to make it." And I guess that's the way life is.

AW:

What's your cousin's name?

CV:

Charles Bolt, B-o-l-t. I have a copy of that report.

AW:

I'd love to see if we could get a copy of that if you wouldn't mind.

CV:

I'd be glad to.

AW:

Is he still alive?

CV:

No, he died a few years ago. The Italians couldn't get over going to the—one of the trips, the tours that we did, was the veteran's hospital. And they couldn't imagine why we'd want to take them to the veteran's hospital. Well it's so different than what they have; they don't have a thing from their government, not one thing. And I guess my cousin knew that, but he said, "We have lots of things that nobody else has," as a veteran and as going to the hospital for needs. And Dr. Johnson was in charge of the hospital there and he just said, "Oh come, we'll invite you with open arms. It'll do our patients good to see somebody else." So when they got there—there was a big group that went, and the Italians would ask them how much did it cost. They'd just turn their pockets wrong side out, they didn't have any money, didn't cost anything. "What about your prescriptions?" They didn't cost anything. "What about living here?" Nope. Nothing. They said, "This is like a hotel. This is not like a hospital." So Dr. Johnson said it made an impression these that were at the hospital. That they had something that nobody else had. How they needed to go back, and they did appreciate it, but sometimes they get mixed up with, I'm here and shouldn't be, and so on. But he said, "Oh it made a big difference in all their feelings." But the Italians, Oh no, we don't have nothing. Not nothing. And this cousin said, "Of course they don't. America has the best. We forget that. But America has the best." And he said, "We have to quit listening to these politicians. We have to go on what we know we have."

AW:

Would you spell Schlabs?

CV:

Yes.

AW:

Did I get it right? S-c-h-l-a-b-s?

CV:

Uh-huh.

AW:

Alright, I wanted to make sure I had that right. I probably can't do it this afternoon because I have this other interview to do, but maybe tomorrow afternoon, I think I'd like to go see the chapel. I've never seen it.

CV:

Okay.

AW:

Is it easy to get to?

CV:

Kind of.

AW:

Kind of? (laughs)

CV:

You know, they put it as far away as they could so nobody would find it. But yes, I can probably go—

AW:

Could you?

CV:

Or Judge Sava might go—

AW:

Well why don't just call you tomorrow and see if that'll work. The weather may—I think the weather will be okay, there's a little chance of rain I think tomorrow, but—

CV:

There's a chance of something, I can't remember. But I know high wind.

AW:

Yeah well, if we stop doing what we're doing because of wind, we'd really be in trouble.

CV:

Isn't that the truth?

AW:

We'd never get anything done.

CV:

All we've got to do is hope we somehow end up with an interest in a wind turbine.

AW:

Well if we don't make it out tomorrow, I'll call you again and we'll come do it.

CV:

And I'm going to make some copies of different things, and if you don't need them, just put them away.

AW:

Oh we'd love to, we'd love to.

CV:

I've got a ton of letters that mean—it's history.

AW:

Um-hm. And these are letters—?

CV:

From the Italians to me and to the historical commission and some of my answers back to them.

AW:

We'd love to have that correspondence at the collection.

CV:

I've got books they've given me.

AW:

Would you be interested in us archiving the originals?

CV:

I'm thinking, you know, I have two kiddos who have been raised in history, but that doesn't mean they're going to appreciate it. Our museum, well you know how museums are, they're just as good as the ones taking care of them.

AW:

Right.

CV:

Like the libraries. If it hasn't been checked out in six months, we'll get rid of that book.

AW:

Yeah well the advantage that the Southwest Collection offers is that first of all, it's part of the university which is part of the state, so, once we get stuff, we can't give it away. It's illegal for us to do that, so that's a nice thing, plus we have a building that will house that material that's

temperature controlled and humidity controlled, and the other advantage is that we hope there will be people two hundred years from now using that collection, just like they'll be listening to you talk on this interview. So, that's to me the strong thing. Now I sure understand the sentimental value of many of these things.

CV:

You know, I think, and I'm not just thinking of myself, I'm thinking of the Italians, and of the future, and I think it would be more valuable there than in some box or some drawer.

AW;

Well it would be easier to get to, for one thing. And at some point, if we raise enough money to do this, we digitize documents like this. One of the reasons we like to have the original is that ten years from now there may be a better way to digitize it.

CV:

That's right. Exactly.

AW:

But we would like to see the bulk of our collection available on the internet. You can't do everything like that, but as much as you could so that a person wouldn't have to fly from Rome to Texas to get a chance to do some research on the topic.

CV:

And I hear from Italian POWs from France, from Australia, and somehow they got my name. And you know, what little something they want to know, or anything I can send to help them understand what the POW camp was. I've made many, many copies of different things and they appreciate it, for whatever reason, family, or just wanting to know, we have to share. There's no point in just having it, hoarding it, and saying, "This is mine."

AW:

Um-hm, yeah.

CV:

And the Italians, I think knew that. Of course when we started helping, getting things, well they first said, let's send a fax. Well we didn't have a fax machine. Jimmy Ross [?] [2:12:24], our attorney said, "Clara, just tell them to send it to our fax number." So he'd bring it up and say, "Well this is just not going to work. They're sending it in Italian and I thought I could read it." But we had these two Italian ladies who would translate for us and so on. But that's what we've all shared. Then they said, "What's your e-mail address?" They were way ahead of us. They had

cell phones back in 1988. Everybody had a cell phone. You know, we didn't. Thank God we didn't.

AW:

No, if you had had one you couldn't have used it.

CV:

So truly they were way ahead of us on so many things. But their government is—they said, Oh we don't know. We take so many things for granted, they didn't know if the bank was going to open that day or post office. All they knew for sure was that the train was going to run on time.

AW:

It's a shock when you think about it.

CV:

We're just really spoiled. And I feel like, now not everybody, but there's so many feel like they're so much better than the rest of the world. I can't see that.

AW:

No. Everybody—

CV:

I say, we all have one god. But I sure like this Italian Pope now. But I sure did like John Paul II.

AW:

But this new guy is really something.

CV:

Oh he's going to turn some things around, and good for him.

AW:

Yeah. Jefferson said we need a revolution ever twenty years. I don't think he meant by guns and bullets necessarily, but we do need to get new blood in.

CV;

Yes we do.

AW:

Well I'm going to stop the interview for the time being, and I think we'll have more to talk about in the future, but thanks so much for the time, and we'll continue to talk afterwards.

CV:

Okay. And thank you Andy.

AW:

You bet.

CV:

I appreciate it.

[Pause in recording]

AW:

Well we may have, but it never fails that when the machine's not going, something really interesting happens that we should have—

CV:

Then you start to interview somebody and you're going to tape them and, Oh, they forget, they can't say a thing.

AW:

Till it's turned off. Right.

CV:

Teeny and I interview Goose Ramey.

AW:

And what did you do with the interview? Did you record it?

CV:

Uh-huh.

AW:

And where is it?

CV:

Bill Sava has a copy of it.

AW:

Okay.

CV;

He's used it for many different things. We've got it somewhere, but I don't have it right at my fingertips.

AW:

Well one of the things we do at the Southwest Collection is that we have a really great audio/visual department that can take audio tape which disintegrates over a period of time, or video tape, or film—photographs, slides—and we can digitize all of that. Photographs, unless they're color and fade, the photographs are probably okay. But tape is deteriorating every moment and at some point—

CV;

And especially if it's different climate. Hot—

AW:

If it's not take care—oh yeah. And we have to treat those. In fact we bake them to dry them out, and then we have a set up so that the first time we run the tape, we're able to capture it just in case it flakes off, because what happens is that coating comes off that mylar plastic that it's attached to and if it comes off, there's no fixing it.

CV:

Just like cake that has frosting on it.

AW:

Um-hm, slides off.

CV:

We also have a tape with the *Texas Country Reporter*.

AW:

Yeah.

CV:

Have you seen it? You probably have. And I believe they have this one film person that made the film in Italy and asked us to come back and then they came on to Dimmitt. Anyway, *Walls of Sand*, I believe is the name of it. And I have one of those.

AW:

And it's in Italian I would guess?

CV:

No, part of it is, but he was able to do the English part. Or he might have translated, I'm not sure.

AW:

Yeah do you have it on film or tape?

CV:

It's on film.

AW:

Film, okay. That'll work.

CV:

Well I say that—it's on video.

AW:

Oh like a VHS?

CV:

Yeah.

AW:

That needs to be digitized too because the tape is the same thing as on an audio tape, and we can do that for you. If you can round those things up—

CV:

I can, I just need to stop and think where—

AW:

Yeah, just wherever you've got them, but we can digitize those as well and get you a digital copy. That way—

CV:

Well, preserve it is the main thing.

AW:

Right, it's also easier to—

CV:

Handle, right.

AW;
Yeah.

CV:
No I'll help any way I can because it's just like so many things, we wait too long. This should have been done twenty years ago, or longer.

AW:
I know it, well I'm guilty of that too.

CV:
My little friend would have been a great person to interview.

AW:
Teeny?

CV:
Yeah. She just was into genealogy, Indian artifacts—arrowheads—they'd go hunting for them, and was so knowledgeable and never forgot a thing. [She] could repeat the Bible verses like crazy. And such a good leader. We're just so lucky to have had her.

AW:
It sounds as if there was not anybody else who was quite as involved as the two of you in this.

CV:
I was younger and that was the main thing because—and now I realize I could make the copies, I could send the telegrams, I could send the fax, make the appointments or whatever, and as I've gotten older I realize that was a real asset from somebody a little younger, because most of them were already in their sixties, seventies, and some in their eighties. But anyways, she paid her way to go to Italy and I paid mine. We never involved each other's funds. And if I had said, Teeny will you pay my way? She would have. But no, I want to have my freedom. Say, No I'm going to do this. But it couldn't have been nicer.

AW:
Right.

CV:
And you know, after she had the visit with the Pope and listened to him and understood what he was doing, he was reassuring. And that's what we all need to hear every day is that reassuring. Like the Pope is doing now, We're going to get through it. But we're going to change. She was

much better, but she never would have been guilty saying, I did like him. (both laugh) But the little three days and nights we were in the convent it was something else. It was an experience within itself.

AW:

I've stayed at the convent in Nazareth. I'm on the board in a group called the Ogallala Commons, and we would have events there and of course they don't have a hotel in Nazareth, so you stay at the Holy Family Church. It gives you pause. It's not like being at a hotel.

CV:

Nope. It makes you stop and think, This is what it's all about. It's not the frills we've gotten used to and the things we think we have to have, but it's the necessary things, the important things. And she thoroughly, thoroughly enjoyed every trip. And we would go to the historical meetings [in] Houston, El Paso, Dallas or wherever and she enjoyed that. She had never been anywhere. Her husband had been in service during World War II and stationed in Kansas at Fort Leavenworth, I believe, and that was the farthest she ever got from home.

AW:

Really?

CV:

Um-hm. And after he became disabled, in I think 1981 was our first conference that we went to as a historical commission, and had such a good time and our book won first place and so that makes you feel good. So we planned to go the next year and she said in 1982 she said—maybe we went in '82, and planned to go in '83, and she said, "Now maybe L.B. and Clyde would go with us" and I said, "Well that would be nice." And she said, "But you know LB may not even be alive." Well Clyde was the one that was dead, not L.B. Then that next year he asked me, "Would it be alright—would it make you feel okay if I went with you all? Or would you rather me not go since you and Clyde had planned?" And I said, "It would tickle me to death if you could go with us." He went every year after that.

AW:

Really?

CV:

Um-hm. And the last trip we made in '88 he said, "I don't think I'll go next year." A few days later he died.

AW:

Wow.

CV;

But that was the kind of people they were. He said, "I'll pay the taxi fair. I know the county doesn't pay that." Of course they didn't pay hardly anything. But that's okay. We still went and learned things and enjoyed it. But no, it's been—I used to think when I was in the cotton patch or milking the cows, how I hoped when I got grown that I would have at least one electric light bulb. (both laugh) Isn't that a hope? I hated washing those old lamp globes. And that was an everyday process.

AW:

Yeah, because they get dirty real quick, especially if some fool goes over there that doesn't know how to adjust the wick.

CV:

So there's three of us girls left in our family.

AW:

And where are the other—

CV:

One sister lives in Kalamazoo, Michigan, right out of Battle Creek, and one sister lives in Austin, Texas.

AW:

So y'all are scattered out?

CV:

Yeah. But my sister in Austin is coming to Dimmitt for Thanksgiving.

AW:

Oh that'll be nice.

CV:

And she's younger, four years younger than I am, and my sister in Michigan is three years older. And for whatever it's worth, the three of us are the ones who didn't smoke.

AW:

Yeah.

CV:

That ought to tell you something.

AW:

Yeah it sure does.

CV:

Because our twin brothers were the same ages, you know.

AW:

And they smoked?

CV:

Yeah. They both were in service, you know. That doesn't justify them smoking but they did.

AW:

Yeah I don't know how I made it out—my dad smoked, my friends smoked, and I was a policeman and all those policemen smoked. But I think it was trying cedar bark wrapped in newspaper when I was a kid that cured me of it. (CV laughs) It was awful. Do you have any correspondence or anything from you grandfather, Charlie?

CV:

I don't have any correspondence, I have my grandmother's scrapbook and it has a lot of interesting things in it.

AW:

Does it have any photographs?

CV:

I have some photographs of him, like I said, I don't know if I do have my great grandfather or not but I'll look and see. I've got quite a bit of things.

AW:

We can scan scrapbooks, too.

CV:

You can? Okay. Well this was one of those old green leatherette backs that had the manila looking pages and—

AW:

Did it have the screw posts so you could take it apart?

CV:

No I think it had—it's all come apart but I think it had—

AW:

That makes it a lot easier to scan.

CV:

Yeah. I've handled it with kid gloves and it's still deteriorating. I have it upstairs in the closet, that's where I keep things. Anyway, I think I have some things of them. And also I'll give you a copy of, or you can see in the scrapbook, of Quanah Parker's obituary. It's very interesting.

AW:

Do you know, and I learned this when I was in research for my play, that at his service, they sang the hymn "Tell It to Jesus" and as they lowered him into the ground they sang "Nearer My God to Thee."

CV:

I didn't know that. Don't know if that's—it reported so much. He died of rheumatism, now this is what the obituary said, and told of the wife that he liked best.

AW:

Yeah it was called his favorite wife.

CV:

Uh-huh.

AW:

Tonarcy [?], I think was her name.

AW:

Yes. But anyway, very, very interesting. It tells about how many children, and there was a white man that—let's see, was he from a preacher's family? Something of that nature, I haven't read that in a long time. But anyway, a preacher did his service. And Quanah Parker has several family members in Amarillo.

AW:

Yeah he's, you know, eight wives, he has a lot of descendants.

CV:

(laughs) And you know what, not any of them had ever seen his obituary.

AW:

I'm sure I've run across bits and pieces of it, but I've never seen the whole thing.

CV:

Well like I said I can't imagine how my grandmother at Dumont ever got a copy of this, but she did.

AW:

Well that's very interesting. He was actually very religious, you know, he started the Native American Church which combined Comanche and Christian ideas and rites.

CV:

He conformed more towards the Americans than I think anybody ever thought he could. But it was great that he did.

AW:

Yeah but he did so without giving up being Comanche which was a very difficult thing to do.

CV:

It was almost impossible.

AW:

Yeah he said, one time in his life, "Not many of the Comanche liked me and fewer of the whites," you know, because he was in both. Well that's good. I don't want to presume on your schedule, but would this afternoon be a good time to go see that chapel? Or would you rather try and do it tomorrow with Bill?

CV:

It doesn't matter, now what would work best for you?

AW:

It doesn't matter, I can do either one because I made my appointment with Bill tomorrow and I know that'll be—

CV:

Why don't we call him and ask him if he could go today?

AW:

You want to?

CV:
Yeah.

AW:
Would you like to call him or me to call him?

CV:
It doesn't matter.

AW:
You know, why don't you go ahead and call him.

CV:
I saw him last night in the grocery store.

AW:
Yeah I think he said—

CV:
We just said hello. He's busy, but I've volunteered him and he doesn't know this—

AW:
Maybe you better ask him about this before you tell him about you volunteering him. (laughs)

CV:
We have a new school teacher that is teaching fifth grade poetry, and she's trying to teach them how to read it. Well Bill can read it so good.

AW:
Um-hm. And he's a poet himself.

CV:
Yes. So I told her, "I'm going to call the judge but I want you to know we have someone that can help you teach these kids and read it in front of them." And she says, "Well does he have time?" and I said, "He'll make time."

AW:
Yeah I think he said he had time today and tomorrow. I had already planned out today so I scheduled tomorrow. But I'd be glad—I can drive, you know, we've got the state of Texas car out there.

CV:

Alright (walking away)

AW:

I'll stop this now.

End of Interview



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