

**Oral History Interview of
L. O'Brien Thompson**

**Interviewed by: Monte Monroe
May 27, 2005
Amarillo, Texas**

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Transcript Overview:

This interview features L. O'Brien Thompson who discusses his professional life as chief chemist with Texaco, his experiences with the Amarillo municipal government, and his involvement in the Garden Club.

Length of Interview: 01:58:55

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Monte Monroe (MM):

My name is Monte Monroe. I'm the archivist at the Southwest Collection at Texas Tech University. I'm here in Amarillo, Texas today, continuing my interview series with Mr. L. O'Brien Thompson. It is May 27, 2005. We're in Mr. Thompson's residence at Park Place Tower in Amarillo, room 506, it's on 1300 South Harrison Street, and we're going to continue our conversation where we left off a couple of years ago with Mr. Thompson's work at Texaco. Mr. Thompson, you left Texas Tech University and you went up to Amarillo and you went to work for Texaco, and you became, ultimately, their chief chemist—could you tell us a little bit about your position at Texaco, and your career there?

L. O'Brien Thompson (LOT):

Well, first, Dr. Monroe, I'd kind of like to tell you just a little bit about how I got here. Back in 1931, I was a—got out of Texas Tech, and it was kind of during the Depression days—and a professor friend of mine knew the name of the chief clerk here at Amarillo, and that's all he knew about him. But he contacted him to see if they'd be willing to interview me for a job. And that was at the early part of August—or middle of August of 1931. I "highwayed" it up here—by that I mean, you get on the highway and thumb you a ride, and most of us traveled that way in those days. But the man who came by to pick me up about three miles south of Abernathy was Mr. C. W. Furr, who was the owner of the Furr Food Stores back in those days, and I went with him all the way up to Amarillo, out to his home out on the southwest part of town, as I recall, and I asked him how to get out to Texaco—or at that time it was the Texas Company, not Texaco—and he told me how to get out there, and I started walking from southwest Amarillo to about two miles east of town to the refinery. And I got there at about one or two o'clock in the afternoon, and I was interviewed, and it surprised me but they said they'd hire me, and to report back to work about one week later after I got out—got through the graduation exercise at Tech. So that's how I got to Amarillo. Now, the interesting thing about that is that when I came back up to Amarillo to go to work, the chief clerk took me in to the plant superintendent and had him interview me and so he just hired me right there—or rehired me, I guess you'd say—but what was odd to me—I didn't realize at the time—he took me across the hall and introduced me to the assistant plant manager, who was a graduate of Texas A&M, and when he introduced me to him, well, he said, "This is Mr. O'Brien Thompson, he's not from A&M, he's from Texas Tech, I just hired him." Well I thought that was kind of an odd way of saying that, but some months later I found out that the assistant plant manager had hired two boys from Texas A&M and didn't say anything to the plant manager about it, and that made him about half sore about it, so he hired someone to prove that he could hire somebody not from Texas A&M. so I got a job, and I stayed with a job for forty-four years with Texaco—with the Texas Company at the time. So that's kind of the way I got started with Texaco. You don't start a job as—other than what they call yard laborer—I started at the—I'd get fifty-five cents an hour, but when I got there, the first thing they told me, they said, "Well, we've had to cut the pay from fifty-five cents an hour to fifty cents an hour." They said, "Do you still want it?" And I said "I sure do." So I started at fifty

cents an hour just to—what I call—digging a ditch, working in the yard labor gangs. And in about two or three months, they cut us—our pay again—five cents an hour. I was cut down to forty-five cents an hour, still digging a ditch in the yard in the yard labor gang. And after about three months, I was transferred from the yard labor pool to be a tester in the laboratory. And, of course, they knew that I had a graduate degree in chemistry, and it's hard to believe, but within another couple of months, the Texas Company, as it was called at that time, cut the pay from forty-five cents an hour—cut it ten percent. So I worked for forty-and-a-half cents an hour as a college graduate in 1931, and I was glad to do it. I found out later on that so far as anybody knew, I was the only person in my graduating class—which, my class graduated during the summer session in 1931—and so far as I know, a lot of them may have gotten jobs in some fields, but I at least got a job with a company that had some possibilities for promotion and so forth. So I was one of the fortunate ones to have a job, and as I said a moment ago, the various jobs that I had with Texaco lasted about forty-four years. Most of that time, I was in the laboratory, but I became chief chemist after some years by other people promoting out to—or resigning—and I would think that I probably had the title of chief chemist for about twenty-five years. And as chief chemist, your main responsibility is to make sure that all the product that you make come up to the specification that management have set down. And then, of course, you did a lot of testing of the different refinery streams as the products were being refined. And the people who worked in the laboratory were usually just high school graduates, but where I did the work as a college graduate—forty-and-a-half cents an hour—when I retired some forty years later, the high school graduates in the laboratory was getting \$13.50 an hour, just as high school graduates. But that's the way the times were at that time. During the latter ten years of my experience with the Texas—with Texaco, as it was called then—I was assigned to a staff-level position, comparable to the level of chief chemist, and a new assignment as supervisor of air and water conservation. And Texaco established a staff level position at all of their facilities throughout the world of supervisor of—what we call A&WC, or air and water conservation. And they had a vice president who had the same title, who supervised all of us at the various refineries throughout the world. And that was environmental work that I really enjoyed. Spent a lot of my time working with a state agency on the Texas Water Quality Board, the Texas Air Control Board, the Environmental Protection Agency, and various agencies like that. So I was quite involved with nothing but our relationships with those agencies who were concerned about the effect that the refineries were having on the environmental conditions. So that kind of sums up my time with Texaco—I enjoyed it, my last week of work, so far as I was concerned, was just as interesting and as challenging as any week of work during the whole forty-four years, and I've found that many people who work with a large corporation—many of them become kind of sour on the company in their later years because they don't get the right promotions they wanted to get and so forth, but I chose to stay right here in Amarillo. I had opportunities to transfer to some other places, and I would've, no doubt, have progressed to a higher level in Texaco had I been willing to transfer, but I had a lot of interest in the community, a lot of civic activities I was enjoying, and also my family lived on the South Plains, in and around Lubbock. So I had no

desire to transfer to a foreign country, or to any other place throughout the United States. And fortunately, I was far better off by having stayed right here in Amarillo, and was able to enjoy my life here for the forty-four years involved in a lot of civic activity and so forth that I have thoroughly enjoyed.

MM:

Mr. Thompson, tell me a little bit about—you mentioned your work with Texas Water and Air Resources boards. Can you tell me a little bit about those types of activities? What changes were taking place in the country and the company at that time, and at the state level in relation to a more active environmental concern?

LOT:

That goes into an interesting field. Back in those days, nobody was concerned about the environment—at least as far as I knew, they were not—and I know that at Texaco, it didn't concern us if we might have a spill of some gasoline and other petroleum products on the ground that might soak into the ground and get on down to the water table, which was about 275 feet below the surface, but the Texas Company bought out a little small refinery here in Amarillo in 1922, and it was nothing but a couple of railroad tank cars set up with a means of heating it. You'd pump crude into it and heat it up, and you'd boil off the different factions of the petroleum product, starting with like gasoline, kerosene, diesel fuels, and—or what we call reduced crude for burning in furnaces and so forth. But the Texas Company immediately built some expansion to the refinery—they did it in 1927, or thereabouts, and when I came with the Texas Company in 1931, we had quite a bit of equipment for refineries in this area, concerned with processing crude oil that came from the panhandle field through a pipeline about fifty to sixty miles long. And when we first started this activity with air and water conservation, we realized that the environment was going to be a real serious problem for the refining industry, and we didn't realize it, but we had some water wells—three of four—and we noticed some odors of gasoline in the water. And many years later, we found that there was several thousand barrels of gasoline on top of the water table, just under the refinery. And of course I feel free to talk about that kind of subject now because it's already public record, but for example, in answer to your question about my involvement with, for example, the Texas Water Quality Board was as soon as we found this gasoline, we immediately got in touch with the Texas Water Quality Board and told them what we had found. And I appeared on behalf of Texaco at a meeting with the Texas Water Quality Board meeting in Austin and just told them what we had found and how it had probably happened and so forth—that it developed from underground leaks in the pipelines that runs all over the refinery area—that over a period of years, as it leaks down and collects on top of the water table. And that's still a problem—that was some forty years ago now, but all the refinery now is completely closed down; the equipment's been dismantled, but on several hundred acres of land out there that Texaco still owns, we'd have to pump two or three water wells continuously in order to make what you might think of as a depression in the water table,

kind of like a saucer, and so that a lot the polluted water that's under the refinery will not flow out, away from that area and pollute other water. They pump it so that fresh water flows into the area under the refinery, and that was one of the main activities I was involved in, in seeking to control the pollution from the underground water. And we drilled about twenty-two test wells all over the property to find out just exactly where it was and how extensive it was and so forth, so it's a real big problem. And of course, I was pleased to be able to retire in 1975, not that I was afraid of what we might be running into, we already knew what the pollution problems, but it was lucky for me that I got out from under this train—and the responsibilities of the problems that are going to be developing over the years due to underground water pollution. And that was the main thing we had on our environmental problems we had while I was still associated with Texaco.

MM:

Okay. Mr. Thompson, I know that you have served on a number of boards throughout your life and career. Could you kind of step me through some of the organizations that you've worked with, both as a volunteer and in your professional life that had the greatest importance to you?

LOT:

Well, it's hard to—first, it's hard to remember all those kind of things—you talk about different boards, a lot of them are committees and so forth. But I suppose that my first interest in civic work was like a lot of other people who had a similar interest. You start out with doing some work in your schools and working with your children and so forth and their development, so you became kind of interested in what's going on in the schools and the churches and things of that nature. So I recall that we had a committee to review the Hale-Akin educational bill that was before the Texas legislature. And this was back in 1932 or '33, I believe, somewhere along there. I attended that large committee meeting on several occasions just to learn more about some of the problems in the state education field. But from those kinds of work, and working with the Parent Teachers Association—PTAs, as we call them—you naturally develop a knowledge of a lot of the problem that faces society and people and a lot of people worked in those areas. And I didn't do any more than anybody else, I'm sure, but I stayed with it and enjoyed it, and I've often said that my civic work just started out with Boy Scouts—Girl Scouts with my daughter, and with my wife, my wife was on the Girl Scout board for seventeen years, and so I worked quite a bit with the Girl Scouts, also with the Boy Scouts. And from those small beginnings, I guess you'd say, I did find myself on the Amarillo City Commission, Amarillo College Board of Regents, and things like that later in life.

MM:

Okay. I believe that Governor Smith appointed you to some boards too, dealing with the judicial commission. Is that correct? How did that happen?

LOT:

Yes, but before that, Governor Smith appointed me to an environmental board—committee, I guess you'd call it—a senate committee. And Senator Criss Cole—now deceased, of course—from Houston was chairman of the—the committee was called the Land Use and Environmental Control Committee—and had two senators—I know Senator Doc Blanchard from Lubbock was on it, and we had two people from the law enforcement field—the chief of police, Frank Dyson from Dallas, was on the committee, and then we had people from the courts area, for example, a prominent member, one Mr. Carol Vance who was district attorney for Harris County, in Houston. And another one was Dr. George Beto, B-e-t-o, who was head of the Texas Department of Corrections at Huntsville. So we had a very strong committee that Governor Smith appointed to review the structure of the Texas Criminal Justice Council. Let me back up just a little bit—now the Texas Criminal Justice Council was first started as a part of the 1968 Omnibus Crime Bill¹ from Washington, D.C. Now that bill provides that all states should set up a criminal justice committee of some kind, and specified that the governor of each state should be the chairman of that committee—and Governor John Connally was governor at the time, in 1968, and I was appointed on that committee not because of what I had done, and so forth, but at that time, I happened to be fortunate to have been elected to the president of the Texas Municipal League. The Texas Municipal League is an organization of—well, today it's about a thousand cities in the state of Texas who belong to a league that primarily is concerned with the legislation that affects the municipalities and so forth. So I'm sure that I was appointed on that criminal justice council by Governor Connally just because of my position as president of the Texas Municipal League. Now, Governor Connally did chair the meetings for several months—and there was about thirty-five of us on that committee from over the state. We met monthly in Austin, and after Governor Smith became governor, after Governor Connally, and Governor Smith chaired the meetings for a short time—two or three months—but he decided that it's just too much of a chore to handle all the details like that, so he set up a committee to revamp the criminal justice council, and he appointed me as chairman of it—the reason for it was that I was—represented the layman's view on all those things, but Carol Vance of Houston and Dr. Beto and Frank Dyson of Dallas—we were the committee to revamp or suggest some changes in the Texas Criminal Justice Council, and Governor Smith did request that he wanted to set up an executive committee of the council, and that he wanted to appoint a chairman of that executive committee. He just could not devote the time to it that it required. Well after we made a study over a period of three or four months, we met in Governor Smith's office one day to give our report and he approved of it and I was really surprised—he leaned over to me and slapped me on the leg, and said “I want you to be my chairman.” Well I was very much surprised and honored that the governor asked me to be chairman, and I told him, I said “I'm not qualified for something like this,” he said “Oh yes, I think you are. I want somebody who's not directly involved in the criminal justice field to chair this thing, because there's going to be a lot of activity. Now, the activity really required a committee to allocate the about thirty—as I recall—around thirty

¹ The Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968.

million dollars a year in crime reduction programs throughout the state of Texas. And all those states had allocations based on their populations and so forth, and we had monthly meetings, usually in Austin, but over a period of three or four years, we met in several other cities throughout the state. And I was the chairman of it for about three or four years under Governor Smith, but after he went out of office and Governor Briscoe came in, as a courtesy I went in to Governor Briscoe's office, and offered to resign so he could appoint somebody else. Well, he told me right off that he wanted me to continue as chairman of it for a while, and I did. But after some seven years I was on the committee, Governor Briscoe replaced me by one of his colleagues from the South Texas area, and I don't recall his name right at the moment. But I enjoyed my about seven years on the Texas Criminal Justice Council, and getting the opportunity to learn of all the problems that various cities have, regardless of their size, and criminal justice work and so forth. So that's two state committees that I really enjoyed working on, and worked at it a lot. We can back up if those things are too—am I going into too much detail?

MM:

No sir, you're doing just fine, just exactly the way I knew you would. As a matter of fact, I'm getting ready to ask you about any special issues, or maybe one particular critical issue that you recall dealing with on the Criminal Justice Commission Board.

LOT:

You're going to ask the question again?

MM:

Yes sir. Mr. Thompson, can you speak just a little bit on any critical issues, or what you thought were one or two major issues that you had to address in these criminal justice commissions and boards during that period of time?

LOT:

I don't recall any very serious problems that we had. Our committee was divided into three subcommittees. One of them was called the Courts Committee, and the other one was called the Police Committee, and the other one was called the Corrections Committee, as I recall. And we were always faced with various applications from over the state for funding for certain programs that they had. And I suppose one of the main problems that I recall we had, so many of the different areas would make applications for funds to build a new building for police operations, or the courts, and so forth, and we were not—the committee—we were not excited about just building bricks and mortar, facilities and so forth as we were building, or developing programs for control of crime in the cities and so forth. But I don't believe that I can recall any certain real problems that we had. We all recognized that we always had problems with the overcrowding of jail and penitentiary populations, and so forth. And I suppose that since Dr. Beto was a very active member of our committee, as chairman, I recall that I had more conversations with people

about the problems that different communities were having with the overcrowding of jails and the need for money to build more facilities. And I know that our committee—we were not enthusiastic about just building buildings; we were more active and more interested in building programs, and let them get funding for their building by local tax sources and so forth. I'd like to back up just a little bit. I served on a—what was called a National Budgeting Consultation Committee, and we can talk about that later on, but on that committee—I was on it for about nine years, and I was appointed on the executive committee of it, and as such, I was chairman of the subcommittees, and one of the committees that related to the crime field was the National Council on Crime and Delinquency. And I recall that we had several meetings related to that. At one meeting we had in Washington, D.C.—it wasn't necessarily related to our committee work, but they had a national conference on criminal justice, and Governor Smith asked me to represent him at this meeting in Washington, D.C., and I—of course, I had to get permission from Texaco to do these kinds of things, and of course, my expenses were paid by the criminal justice division of—out of the governor's office—but Texaco was not too enthusiastic about having their name and my name spread around a lot of those areas. So on this particular meeting in Washington, D.C., Chief Justice William Rehnquist, currently on the court, he was our principal speaker. And I guess there was about a thousand people at that meeting that night, but Texaco told me I could go, but be sure and keep my mouth shut, so I was at the meeting, and there was about ten of us at each table. Well there was some news man came up, and I heard him say "I'm looking for a Mr. L. O'Brien Thompson, is he at this table?" and somebody pointed to me, and he came over there and said, "I was told to interview you on your impression of this conference and so forth," and I told him "I'm sorry, but I'm just not at liberty to talk about it at all. Who's got you doing this?" and he said "I'm doing it for KGNC in Amarillo, Texas." And of course, I knew all about that, of course. But anyway, I told him I couldn't do it. Well, it was kind of embarrassing to me; he reported back to KGNC immediately that I would not make any comments about it, that my company told me not to. And KGNC that night carried it on the ten o'clock news, that L. O'Brien Thompson was in Washington, D.C., but his company told him not to say anything. Well, that didn't sit well with Texaco at all, so I stayed in hot water a lot of times over things like that you have no control over, whatsoever. But it was kind of comical in a way. But back to—I'm at the council on crime and delinquency. A very prominent man at that time, who had the—he had President Lyndon Johnson's ear—by the name of Whitney Young. And he was executive director of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency—it was a huge operation. I've forgotten what their budget was; it was several million dollars a year. And I got to knowing him through that activity and so forth, but when he found out that I was kind of involved a little bit with some of the criminal justice area in Texas, why he was very kind to advise me on a lot of the national problems of criminal justice and delinquency—particularly among young people. So I enjoyed my relationship with him on that.

MM:

So it was Preston Smith that got you on that board—on that criminal justice board—that national criminal justice board, right?

LOT:

No, I was appointed on that by the local United Fund organization. Now, the National Budget and Consultation Committee was a committee of people from all over the United States, and there was about a 125 of us on that committee, and I was selected by the local United Fund board, just because I'd been on the board, and I'd been—I think I was co-chairman of the budget committee here for a couple of years. I worked in that area quite a bit, locally, and—

MM:

United Way?

LOT:

Beg pardon?

MM:

United Way?

LOT:

At that time, it was called Community Chest, as I recall. And so I was appointed to that activity—it had nothing to do with the governor's office at all. Of course, I was a chairman of a subcommittee in New York—went over a lot of different agencies, besides that National Council of Crime and Delinquency—the National Cerebral Palsy Association, the National Social Organization of Nationwide, and various things like that. And the main purpose of that committee was to review different programs that called on the American public—primarily on the American corporations for funding for their programs and so forth. Now, a lot of agencies did not come before us, because we published what you might call a "Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval," and we published our findings on all these different agencies—about thirty, thirty-five national agencies. We met in New York for about a week in March, and four days in December every year, and Texaco paid my expenses to that. So I got to know some of our New York officials, since I went up there on that kind of thing. They were the ones that approved my being on it, so I got—when I go to New York, well I get a chance to visit with the—particularly the vice president of public relations, and he was a good friend of mine, and he sure helped out in later years.

MM:

Let's back up just a little bit, and let's talk about how you got on the Texas Municipal League, and your stint as president of the Municipal League.

LOT:

At the time, we had—there was only 675 cities in the state of Texas that belonged to the Texas Municipal League. This was in 1969, I believe it was. And I had been on a board of the Texas Municipal League for a year or two, representing the Panhandle area. And the Panhandle area has an organization—a recent organization, like the rest of the state does, and that organization voted me in as a director from this area. And then the state organization votes somebody in as president. Now I was somewhat flattered to be elected president, because normally the president of the state organization—Texas Municipal League is occupied by the mayors from some of the larger cities. I was just a commissioner. And the mayor of El Paso—Mayor Judson Williams—was the president when I was—started in on the Texas Municipal League—attending meetings. And then Mayor Erik Jonsson of Dallas followed me as president of the Texas Municipal League. Mayor Jonsson was the CEO of Texas Instruments. And I felt honored to be selected, just a small town commissioner to that position, and it so happened that the legislature was in session in 1969, and most of our activities while I was president, which was just for less than one year, was dealing with the legislature and different committees on legislation that affected different municipalities. So at that time Governor Smith was governor, and I guess we got to know each other there. But I never was one to associate with the people at that high level. Boy, I never gave a dime to anybody—state races, things like that. I always looked upon myself as kind of a workhorse-type person, and find myself in good positions just because I think because I was a good workhorse.

MM:

This is just a side line here, both you and Preston Smith are prominent Tech alums, did y'all ever encounter each other when you were in college?

LOT:

No—

MM:

I can't remember his vintage, but y'all had to be there around the same time.

LOT:

I guess he was there—see, I finished—I was there from 1927 to 1931, and Preston Smith graduated in 1934, I believe. So—

MM:

He would have been a freshman, then, I guess.

LOT:

I suppose he was a freshman the year that I graduated, so I did not know him at all at Texas Tech.

MM:

Did y'all ever talk about being Tech alums when you started working together at the state level?

LOT:

Not too much. I was pretty active in the Democratic Party up here, and of course this is a kind of Republican area up here, particularly in Randall County and Potter County—of course, I was from Randall County. I went to the state Democratic committee meetings for a few years, representing the Democratic Party here. But since Preston was a Democrat, and I was somewhat active, he would quite frequently call me up about different things, not of a lot of importance. I know on the night that he lost the governor's race, he called me up at home, about ten thirty at night. The first thing he said was "O'Brien, what in the hell is wrong with you people in Amarillo?" So I felt sorry for Preston on that, we just didn't vote for him here in this Potter County—Randall County area. Preston was an unusual person, I respect him highly. I know when I was on the criminal justice council, I'd call the governor's office about something—on three or four occasions, not often—and I just hoped that some secretary would answer the phone. Well, on two occasions that I can recall, I'd call the governor's office, and here a voice come on and said, "This is Preston." Governor Smith, if he was in the office and wasn't busy, he'd answer his own phone. And that made him pretty special in my judgement, and a lot of other people. Governor Smith was a people's governor, that's all there was to it.

MM:

Did you ever have an opportunity to work with Ralph Yarborough?

LOT:

No, I didn't, but I had—I can say this because he's deceased now, of course, but I say it with tongue in cheek, but it actually happened. I quite often would write letters to our representatives in Washington and the state about different legislative matters and so forth, but I wrote a letter on some subject, I've forgotten what it was, that's to Senator Ralph Yarborough in Washington. Of course, like all good politicians, they answer your letters every time—some secretary does. He sent me a letter, and I can remember the first sentence of the letter. It said "I, too, am very concerned about the subject you brought up in your letter of a certain date." It didn't say the subject, or anything. I got that, so I didn't pay much attention to it. But I'd always put my political letters in a different file, and keep it for some reason or other. And on three different occasions, when Yarborough was in Washington, I wrote his office about something—different subjects—and when I got one letter, it started off with the same sentence, and I got a kick out of it, so I got my file and I had three letters, and all three letters were exactly the same words on

three different subjects. And I thought, Boy, that's the way a politician works. If I was going to comment about it, I was in Washington D.C. one time with—I think it was the Amarillo College Board of Regents—and we were having a dinner meeting of some kind, and Senator John Tower was there, who's a staunch Republican from Wichita Falls I believe, and Senator Ralph Yarborough was there, and they were seated at this dinner table, and it looked like they were going to be side-by-side. Well, since I knew them both a little bit, I said, "You two gentlemen don't need to sit side-by-side," so I sat down in the middle of them at the luncheon table. We got a lot of kick out of that. And I remember when John Tower first got in office, my wife and I were on vacation, and we was in Washington, D.C., and I was going to try to get there in time for his swearing in, or similar ceremony, but we didn't make it. But the next day we did, so I went to the Senate chambers, and they were in session, and I said, "I'd like to see Senator John Tower." Well, there wasn't but just a few people on the Senate floor at the time—somebody was talking, so one of the boys—aides—whatever you call them, he went down and got John Tower and brought him out to the front, and I introduced myself to him, and he said, "Well, you're my first constituent to call on me since I got in office," he'd got in office the day before, and I wasn't a John Tower person, I just—out of courtesy. But he said, "Well if you'll excuse me, I need to get back there and hear what this fellow's saying," so he went right back to his desk and listened to that, but that was my only contact with John Tower I ever had.

MM:

Let's talk a little bit about your work on the Amarillo College Board of Regents—how you got that position, and what you did there, and for how long.

LOT:

I was appointed on the board, so somebody resigned, and I think this was in 1957 or '58, somewhere along there—or maybe '56, I'm not sure. And I saw in the paper where somebody resigned—I've forgotten who it was—and I called up a friend of mine on the board, and told him, I said, "I would like to get on that board. I'm interested in education, and so forth," so he brought it up at the next board meeting, and the board just appointed me to fill that unexpired term. Of course, at the end of that expired term, which was about a year, as I recall, I announced for election to the board, and I was elected. And I served on the Amarillo College Board of Regents for about—around six years, I think it was. Three different terms—maybe it was a little less than six years—two full terms, and one appointed term, like that. And the most significant things that I got involved in there—shortly after I went on the board, the president of Amarillo College resigned or retired or something, and the board asked me if I would kindly be the contact person with a lot of the applicants for the job. And then I was glad to do that, so every time anybody would—I recall that over sixty people throughout the United States applied for that job. And the secretary that was for the board—the clerical secretary—and she would supply me with applications, and who they were, and so forth, and I would review them and make kind of a critical review for their qualifications, and so forth, and I'd present that to the next board

meeting. It took several months to do all this, but finally it ended up with three or four people that were runners up, so to speak, and I had gotten in touch—I don't know whether I got in touch with him, or I heard of a man in University of Florida—Dr. A. B. Martin—and he was a vice president at Florida State University. So I handled this all by telephone, and I recorded it all the time. And so I called him at his home, and some man answered, and I said "I'd like to talk with Dr. A. B. Martin." He said "Well he's not here right now, but—he's down having his car serviced at the Texaco service station, which, I've got the telephone number if you want to call him there." And I said "Well, let me have it." So he gave me the telephone number of the Texaco service station. So I called that, and whoever answered, I said "Do you have a customer there by the name of Mr. Martin?" And he said "Yes, here he is right here." So he put him on the phone, and I identified myself, and he was so shocked. He said "How in the world did you find me at this Texaco station?" And I said "Well, I work with Texaco." He said "Yeah, but that don't have anything to do with how you found me down here." So I told him, I said "Well, some man inside your home gave me—said you were down at the Texaco station and so forth." And it was his father-in-law, I believe it was. Well, anyway, we finally hired him. We had he and Mrs. Martin come up here for interviews, and I'm proud of it, because he stayed there for over twenty years, and did more for Amarillo College than any other one person, and I was glad to have a part in selecting somebody like that. And he's the longest tenure of any president we've ever had. And incidentally, I did the same thing for the city commission when we get back into that a little bit—did the same type of thing, just for the—

MM:

Let's talk about your work on the city commission. How did—what finally brought you to the point of running for office, and how long did you serve, and what were some of the issues that you dealt with at that time?

LOT:

Well, there again—an opening came, there were some openings on the city commission. Well, all of them had to be reelected; the four commissioners and the mayor had to be elected at the same time by the public at large. And I just decided to try my luck at running for that office. I was already on the Amarillo College Board of Regents, and knew—already knew quite a few people that were knowledgeable about the city and things like that. So I just announced my candidacy for the city commission. And what was surprising about it, one of the most prominent men in town, who had been president of the Chamber of Commerce, was—I believe he was on the commission at the time, and I announced against him. Well, I have to be—there's a good story I've got coming up here right now.

MM:

Okay, you were serving—or you were running against the president of the Amarillo Chamber of Commerce.

LOT:

Yes, he was a member of the commission at the time, and the newspaper, right at that time, found out that he was patronizing a gambling thing just out at the edge of town. And the story got out in the newspaper about him doing that, so the people who were running my campaign got me some advertising and so forth, and one thing was kind of comical about it. My TV ads—the words would flash on the screen—across the screen, “Don’t Gamble with Amarillo’s Future,” just one right after that, it’s “Don’t Gamble with Amarillo’s Future,” and then it told “Elect L. O’Brien Thompson on the commission.” Well that caught on with a lot of people; it really did. And after I defeated him—he’s a good friend of mine, actually—and—

MM:

His name?

LOT:

He’s still living.

MM:

Oh.

LOT:

I don’t mind telling you. It wouldn’t bother him, his name was Blackburn. He owned Blackburn Brothers over here, it was a big department store similar to Hemphill-Wells there in Lubbock. But anyway, he would kid me a lot of times about, How in the world did you come up with that Don’t Gamble with Amarillo’s Future? I’d say, “Well, I didn’t want people to gamble with Amarillo’s future.” He said, “I know what you was driving at.” (laughs) But I beat him quite a bit. So I ran for two other terms on the commission, and then, in 1969—1967, I guess it was—the mayor, Mr. F. V. Wallace, who was vice president of Diamond Shamrock, he was the mayor, and I was one of the commissioners, and the other three commissioners, we all five announced for reelection. But we’d been elected before without any opposition, so we didn’t do any advertising at all. Well, we had a person who was very close to the John Birch Society, and conservatives in those days were very rampant in this whole Panhandle area. Well, he announced for mayor, and our present mayor, Wallace, he didn’t think there’d be anything to it at all, since this unknown was running. Well, they was really surprised; this conservative person got 60—as I recall, 64 percent of the vote, and Mayor Wallace only got 40 percent, something like that. So he was defeated very solidly, but I won my race. And I served with this fellow as commissioner for a couple of years. We had all kinds of trouble, and he and I would clash quite a bit. Of course, it came time for reelection, I told some of the community leaders here that I just didn’t want to be back on the commission anymore. I just didn’t want to serve with our present mayor; it was too much of a problem. And they wanted me to run again as commissioner, and I said “I’ll run for mayor against him, and if I beat him, he won’t be on the commission. If he beats me, I won’t be

on the commission. If you can find somebody you think can beat him on running for mayor, you get him to run, I won't run at all." Well, they couldn't find anybody—apparently they couldn't, so they finally got behind me on it. It was the biggest race that was ever had, I guess, at that time. And I was defeated, running for mayor, by this foe. And a lot of the information I have here in this file that I'm giving you relates to a lot of the work that people in the John Birch Society was involved in. I don't think there's a John Birch Society, but it was a real problem for all of us.

MM:

Can you tell me a little bit about how the John Birch Society gained such favor in this area? What is it about Amarillo to where John Birchers seem to thrive, and what were some of these issues that you and this gentleman—and I'd like his name—what caused y'all to have confrontations?

LOT:

The main subject that we had to deal with was water—fresh water. Lake Meredith had already been constructed, and it was furnishing water for eleven cities, all the way, including Lubbock, down to O'Donnell and Tahoka, and down in that area. And of course, since I was already involved with water studies with Texaco, people knew that I was familiar with water problems and so forth. And the man who was running for mayor—Mayor Stroud—he was a self-made millionaire. He had never been involved in the community through the Chamber of Commerce, or United Way, or anything, so far as we knew. And just then—he just passed away here in this facility about six months ago. And he was wealthy, but also two or three other people here who were quite well-known, and were wealthy. They were quite active in organizing what they call “cells” of John Birch Society. And a friend of mine, who was vice president of the Southwestern Public Service Company, he was a member of one of the cells, and he wanted me to come see what it was all about. And I didn't know what it was all about, of course, but I stayed quiet about it, and I decided not to get involved with it at all. Now the thing that they're for is good. They're for less government, they're for low control, and things like that. Well, we all are, but going about it the right way is a different thing. So John Birch Society in this particular area happened to be given support, financially and otherwise, by some pretty prominent people. They were quite prominent.

MM:

Can you reveal their names—is it common knowledge?

LOT:

No, it's not too common knowledge, and I wouldn't care if it gets out a hundred years from now—I wouldn't want it to get out now, because it would—there's several of them still living. Many of them are not, but for example, Mayor Stroud did this, since he's deceased. He organized, without saying a word in the world to the commission, he organized an auxiliary

police force—one hundred people—and the names of one hundred people are in that file that I've given to you. And three or four of them are still living, and some of them are pretty prominent. And these hundred people, he bought them all a black armband. If we ever had any racial problems come up—and of course, at that time, we were having a few little racial problems. We'd have—when I was on the commission—I've seen as many as fifty black people in a commission meeting about some little something—usually it was criticizing the police department for brutality and things like that. And Mayor Stroud set up this—or tried to set up this auxiliary police and we on the commission learned about it, and boy, we just said “no.” It was in the papers. But that indicates the widespread element of harsh conservatism that was in this area. And incidentally, on this book that you probably don't know anything about—an editor that's Terrell Blodgett of Austin. He wrote a book, and I've got a copy of it, *City Government that Works*. And I was selected to be in the book with a story on my situation as one of the public servants of the sixties. It's in there, and so forth. But in that article on me, I believe I remember, the author points out that a wave of conservatism hit the West Texas area at that time, and prevented me from being elected mayor of Amarillo. And that's substantially correct.

MM:

What actually led to this wave of conservatism? Was it there when you first came to this region from Texas Tech—when you first started in the oil fields? Or was it something that developed over time? Was it led by ranchers, or just prominent financiers, or wealthy people in town?

LOT:

I would think that it came on after the Depression. I was not aware of it at all until the late fifties. I was aware of it when I ran for the Amarillo College Board of Regents. My first awareness of it was when one of my friends came to me and asked me to go with him to one of these secret meetings of a cell of twenty people. And when he said it was a secret meeting of a cell of twenty people, that raised a flag in front of me right there. The first thing I thought was, “I don't want to have anything to do with something like this.” I didn't know it was John Birch Society. But I know when I was defeated for mayor, for example, I got three or four real nasty letters—and I wish I'd have kept them. But one of them, for example, was Dateline in New Orleans, and all it was, just on a piece of paper, said “Ya, ya, ya,” —Y-a-Y-a-Y-a—“Ya, ya, ya, you didn't know there were so many of us Birchers, did you?” That's all it was. To indicate how serious it was at that time, I came in from work one day about five o'clock, five thirty, and my wife was crying. She was sitting in the living room crying, and I walked up and said, “What's the matter?” She said “There's a telephone call that came in, and somebody said ‘That SOB husband of yours is not going to live the next seventy-two hours,’” and hung up. And it really shocked her. Well, sure enough, while I was talking to her, as I told her, “That's some crazy person,” something like that, and it got her quite a bit. About that time, the telephone rang again, so I answered it myself—it was the same guy, and he said “You SOB,” —I think he says communist—“You SOB communist, you've only got twenty-four hours to live” —something like that. Well, I

recognized he was drunk. I recognized, I thought, Oh, she didn't, and he was just some drunk guy, you know. And I got—you take one of the things of interest in this file here, there's a great big picture—newspaper-sized—that somebody had printed with a great big spider web about fifteen inches across, and it has my picture in the middle of it—a caricature of me—says “Commissioner Thompson,” and other people, who were insects all the way around him, trying to look in and see what—or looking at me. And the byline says, ““Step into my parlor,’ said the spider to the fly,” something like that. And there were a whole bunch of flies, but they were people. And it's that big, it's in there. And I remember seeing it—it wasn't published in the paper, somebody just about like so.

MM:

Like a broadside, or something like that.

LOT:

Yeah. Now, the head of the Panhandle Region Planning Commission brought me that just last Monday—Tuesday. I'd asked him, I said—and we were talking about that, about getting PRPC—I said, “I think you've got quite a bit of stuff in your file on some of my activities with the PRPC.” And I wrote—(phone ringing)—hello. Yeah. Yeah, send him up. All right? Just send him up.

MM:

Dr. Carlson coming?

LOT:

He's down at the—

MM:

Well, I was thinking that it might be time—I've been watching the deal. I'll tell you what you might want to do is just kind of crack the door, and he'll just come in. And then we can kind of continue on.

LOT:

Well, I'm going to suggest this, because if he's downstairs, save some time.

MM:

Absolutely. Let's just very quickly go back to this before he walks in. One of the things I was curious about. Do you know—evidently, the Ku Klux Klan was prominent in Amarillo, or had some following in Amarillo in the twenties and thirties. Were there any connections, perhaps, between the Klan and the John Birchers that would follow later in the fifties that you could put a finger on?

LOT:

I don't believe so. I don't believe there's any correlation there at all, and to my knowledge, Amarillo back in those days was just a cow town. But I'm not aware that the Ku Klux Klan was ever active in this area, but I'm confident that the Ku Klux Klan was not—didn't follow—or wasn't followed by the John Birch Society here in this area. The John Birch Society here, it wasn't posting a paper or anything like that at all. You take when I was running for mayor. A friend of—see, I'd already been—well, I was president of the Texas Municipal League at the time—when I got a telephone call from somebody downstate, and I didn't even know him. He was a city official of some kind. He said, "I don't know why you're campaigning there in Amarillo, with the John Birch man," I don't know how he got the—I didn't use the words—I didn't use the word "John Birch" in my advertising or anything. But he said that "They're having secret meetings across the street from my son, who lives there in Amarillo. You can check it out if you want to." Well, one of the friends of my campaign, I told him about it. He checked it out, and sure enough, he went over another night or two or something, heard about it, and he told me later that he found Stroud's—well, it was his campaign crew—found Stroud's Cadillac car parked close by, and so forth. So the John Birch Society, it was a secret society. And I don't know the top people in Amarillo—or anywhere—they didn't let it be known that they were members of the John Birch Society. There's a wealthy man in Dallas, who's—I can't recall his name right now, but one of my friends who was in John Birch Society—they was having a meeting downtown one time, and she went—H. L. Hunt—he was up here. And she wanted me to meet him, well she was a John Bircher for sure, and I knew it. Well, I was at the meeting where he was going to talk, and some other people were going to talk, and boy, she took me around and introduced me to H. L. Hunt. Now that's when they thought that I was going to be coming in with the John Birch Society, and so forth—I don't know why, because I'd been in the Democratic Party, and the Democratic Party, at that time, was kind of looked upon as kind of the liberal party. Well, it's—I'm pretty sure right now, it's a dead issue here. In spite of the fact because I could name three or four people right now that are good friends of mine—at least, two of them are—that were at one time, active in the John Birch Society.

MM:

What was your encounter like with H. L. Hunt, as long as we're bringing his name up there, and what was his presentation like that evening?

LOT:

I don't remember what he talked about. My friend went down at intermission and introduced me to him, and that's all there was to it. I just met him and talked to him two or three minutes. Of course, I think I was commissioner at the time, and I don't remember what the occasion was that he was up here, but he was up here because this friend of mine, who is deceased, she was the one that worked up the program and everything.

MM:

We were talking about your career, and what got you on the city commission, and this struggle with Stroud, and the John Birchers—what about—you mentioned the issue of water. Talk to me a little bit about your work with water beyond what you did with Texaco, which we've already discussed, and any contact that you might have had with A. A. Meredith at the time.

LOT:

A. A. Meredith—well I knew him—I just met him and talked to him two or three minutes, is all. But you see, he was active while I was just a student at Texas Tech. And when I became interested in water up here, it was after I'd been with Texaco for several years, Meredith was out of the picture. Now John Williams, who was the director of Canadian River Municipal Water Authority, he and I served on some kind of a committee together. I've forgotten just exactly what it was. So I was quite interested in that. My one interest wasn't talked about at all. I was on a hazardous waste committee—and it wasn't with PRPC, it was with Texas Water Division, or something, but they had an office here in Amarillo. And I don't recall whether John Williams was on that thing with me or not, but one of my main concerns at that time, and still is, incidentally—it shouldn't be talked about very much—if you go across Lake Meredith out here, you go across on a bridge, and there's the lake underneath you, and twenty miles down is the dam. If somebody in a pickup truck at two o'clock in the morning drove up there loaded with poison—whatever it might be—dumped it up there, off that bridge—two o'clock in the morning—nobody would know it at all, nobody. And in a few days' time—let's say it's cyanide—maybe you'd find some dead fish showing up. And that might alert somebody, "Well, there's something wrong, all these fish are dying." But it might get by that somebody in Amarillo got sick from drinking the water, and they didn't know what was causing it and so forth. The point is we don't spend our time looking for something like that to happen. That's just like the planes that plunged into the World Trade Center. Nobody knew that was going to happen at that time, except the guys who planned it and everything. Well, you take New York City—they get all their water from a bunch of lakes. Well, I wouldn't be at all surprised if they don't have guards around the clock on those lakes. I don't know that for a fact—I know we don't at Lake Meredith. And I can imagine that one pickup loaded with some kind of a poison—no telling what kind of poison it'd be, there's all kinds of poison—could be dumped in that lake, and nobody would ever know about it until people started dying. And then panic starts, but it's too late. But also, if somebody turned to me and you and said, "Here's a hundred million dollars, y'all do something about this," I wouldn't know how to spend a dollar to do something about it. You couldn't place a guard every hundred yards around that lake, for example. We can't guard between here and Old Mexico. So you—society is living with a risk, and it's going to be a risk from now on. But I didn't have any—I wasn't involved whatsoever—I was too young when Lake Meredith was developed. And the only thing I had to work—relation to it now is the work I did when I was on the hazardous waste committee, and we didn't just—I wasn't there to bring up this discussion we had here in a committee meeting with the press there and things like that. Boy,

that'd be good news, that "Thompson said so-and-so." That'd be juicy news, you know, for anybody to say that. I wouldn't dare talk about it among—to where it would get out in public at all—even this day and time. I wouldn't want to be quoted, that I think that's a possibility.

MM:

Talk about your work—how did you get on the hazardous waste commission—or committee—and how did it relate to the Ogallala—I think you'd mentioned that to me once before—and your work with John Williams on the committee that y'all were on relating to water.

LOT:

John and I, we were on what's called the 208 committee—water committee. And as a recall, it was a function out of the Texas Water Quality Board—or out of the Texas Water Commission—I'm not sure which, or anything like that. And I don't recall—there's a difference between the Hazardous Waste Committee—that was under the state agency or something—the water commission or something. They had an office here in Amarillo. And the 208 committee—I don't know whether that was just a state committee, or whether a federal committee. It wasn't a PRPC committee, but I know this, though, we were appointed on that committee by the PRPC agency. So my biggest involvement with water—that we've already covered, I'm pretty sure—was with Texaco, on the pollution of the underground water, and also the use of reclaimed sewage water for industry.

MM:

We'll go just a couple of minutes here till twelve. And I recommend that we stop and then go eat lunch, and if Dr. Carlson has some questions before we go see Mr. Ware—we'll just leave everything hooked up here.

LOT:

Yeah, just leave it hooked up.

MM:

Talk a little bit about your work—how did you get on the PRPC—Panhandle Plains Planning Commission—and what some of your activities were there.

LOT:

In 1968, I was on the city commission, and the Panhandle Regional Planning Commission came into existence in 1968. Now I believe that's the time that John Connally was governor. And a man by the name of Dan Petty—P-e-t-t-y—he was one of the top staff people in John Connally's office. And this council of governments was a—it was a part of this 1968 Omnibus Crime Bill in Washington, and so was the Texas Criminal Justice Council part of it. So by my having that association, my original draft of the bylaws for the Panhandle Regional Planning Commission is

in that file right there, and I had Dan Petty, from the governor's office, he came down a couple of times, and I'm pretty sure that he helped me write that, I'm not positive of that. But so I became involved on the Panhandle Regional Planning Commission mainly because I was on the city commission, and there was also another committee that I can't think of—and I can't recall the name of it to save my neck, but I know we had—there was six of us on it. There was two of us—there's one of us from the city of Amarillo, city of Canyon, one from Potter County, one from Randall County, and we were a committee, and it had to do a lot of welfare programs and so forth. And I just can't recall the name of the committee, but by being on some of those, and now that committee was established by the Panhandle Regional Planning Commission, I believe. So I became involved with the Panhandle Regional Planning Commission largely through the fact I was on the city commission when it all came up, and this element of conservatism really came to light during some of my campaigns—that's the reason I've got so much stuff. You take—I got it anonymously through the mail—I still had it up until I came up here, but a T-shirt. On the front of it, a great big—somebody had it made here in Amarillo, I'm sure—it says, "Help Keep Our City Clean, Leave Town," and I got a big kick out of it. I got it just in an envelope one day in the mail, and I would show that to a lot of my friends there, and everybody'd get a big kick out of it. And I still had that thing until I was—let's see, when I moved up here from a big house, boy I'll tell you, I threw away stuff—I threw away a lot of my files—well, I'd already thrown a lot of them away. I had four or five file cabinets like that, now I've got it down to that one right there, right now. But you have most of it—down in Lubbock. But this element of conservatism, to my knowledge, it became very prominent up here before the council of governments started being talked about. That's all over the United States at the time. Now Bill Pitstick, who was the city manager of Lubbock at one time, as I recall, he was also head of the South Plains Council of Governments, and so forth. And he's still involved with it somewhere over in East Texas, I believe. So to my knowledge, the real conservatism element got ahold of everything back in the days of the council of government's formation. And boy, the council of governments was nothing in the world but an organization of all the governmental entities getting together to try to solve their own problems, that's all it was. I've got a speech in that thing that they gave me the other day that I made before the Amarillo Real Estate Board—that was an organization of about fifty to a hundred people—back in '68. My speech is in that thing, and when I got through talking about it, the element of the conservation movement was already on everybody's mind, and I was really surprised. When I got through with my talk, some gentleman in the audience—he liked it, and so forth—he made a motion that the real estate board pass a minute item approving the concept of council of governments. And they did that without me asking about a thing in the world—to do it, or anything like that. And I don't know whether it even made the papers or not, I don't recall. But in my judgement, these conservative philosophies was already among the people back in this area. A lot of the people out here, they were not the people who were on government payrolls and things like that. Well, they were ranchers and farmers and pioneers, and things like that. You take the prominent people here in Amarillo; half of them come from homes up here in dugouts, the Whittenburgs, for example—they owned the paper and

a lot of other things—very prominent people. I know their father bought a lot of land for fifty cents an acre in the Panhandle—bought thousands of acres, and they struck oil on every bit of it. And that's the way they got started. And a lot of the people in Amarillo—I say a lot of them, a substantial number of people in Amarillo came in to wealth because they bought cheap land and oil came in. The Harringtons, who were given millions of dollars, and you take the Wares, who we're going to go see this afternoon, they built a—they started up back in 1880-something, and there's a picture up over top—that top picture on that up—behind, on the wall—I did that in 1987 as part of the centennial celebration, and that's the Amarillo National Bank. Tol Ware, as we'll see this afternoon, his father was the one that was a part of getting that started. But that's the kind of people that was here, and they were ready to think in terms of real conservatism—whatever you want to call it.

MM:

The last thing I'd like to visit with you about here, before we break, is your participation in creating the Amarillo Garden Club, and I know that you were the national president of the Men's Garden Clubs of America at one time.

LOT:

Not the national president.

MM:

Okay, local president?

LOT:

Well, yeah, local president. But I was asked by three different nominating committees of the national to let my name be placed in nomination for president of the national, but it's a poor boy operation, and you have to pay your own expenses and everything—I just couldn't afford to do it. I couldn't afford the time or the money, but I was on the board for a number of years, on several committees, and then I've attended thirty national conventions throughout the United States. But it's an organization that's going downhill. I know back when I was involved with it, we had around 10,000 members, now it's around 4,000.

MM:

How did you become affiliated with that group, and what drew you to that group, and your work with the Amarillo Garden—?

LOT:

The Amarillo Garden Club—or Amarillo Garden Center—back in 1966 or '67, all of the garden clubs here got together and formed what they called Amarillo Council of Garden Clubs. There was about a dozen different—and most of them were women's clubs, but one of them was a

men's club. And we got our charter from the national men's organization in 1953, and I'm one of the charter members in 1953 for the men's garden club. Well, by virtue of my being active in that—and we had, at one time, about seventy-five members. We had several lawyers, a couple of judges, several doctors, people like that. But now, it's become completely out of the picture; it almost doesn't even exist anymore. Now, in 1968, the garden clubs in Amarillo decided that they wanted to build a garden center, and I was involved in that somewhat. I was a treasurer of the Amarillo Council of Garden Clubs. This was a volunteer thing—handled dues, and things like that. So I was somewhat involved in building the Amarillo Council of Garden Clubs building out here, which is now close to a two million dollar setup, I suppose. I'm not a—I don't have any more to do with it. But really, all we did, each club would have a monthly meeting, and they just had programs on how to garden, that's what it amounted to. Now there were ladies' clubs, and they all—quite often, they just had meetings to have tea and coffee and gossip. But the men's club, boy we had real business meetings, and talk about how do you plant a row, how do you do this—it was real good. And so that's been a real hobby interest of mine ever since the 1950s, of course I was doing a lot of that kind of stuff long before then, at my own home. But the garden club still is operating under the name of Amarillo Botanical Gardens. Well, I was interested in what you call horticultural therapy for handicapped people. And I joined the American Horticultural Therapy Association several years ago; I remained in it for several years. I attended three different national conventions of the national organization in like Philadelphia and Tucson, and other places. And I was chairman of a horticultural therapy seminar here at the garden center, back ten or fifteen years ago, something like that. And it sounds boastful, but it's a fact, since I've already connected with the national, I knew a lot of people all over the United States. I got—for our seminar here, we had a person from Texas A&M, University of Texas, Texas Tech, The Menninger Foundation in Topeka, University of Kansas in Manhattan, and another person with the national organization. And we had a one-day meeting here in Amarillo, and had a big crowd. Those—they were our speakers for the day, and I was the one that arranged all of that. A few—a year or two after that, most of the people in our garden club who were instrumental in carrying it on—that built it—they were dying off. And we were getting some money for operations from the Amarillo Area Foundation. Well, I had been president of the council for a couple of years, and we had somebody from the Amarillo Area Foundation come out and talk to us, and she told us right there—I was presiding—that “You just have too many gray hairs to run this organization.” Well, my hair was just about as gray as it is now. And of course, what she did was tongue in cheek, but that's a fact. And most of them are good old ladies, and whatever they said, that's what we did. They controlled everything. Well, what happened after that, I was voted off of the board by one vote, of the directors, because there was, behind the scenes, among a lot of the women that “Thompson done them in,” Well if I did, I don't know for sure. But anyway, I severed my relation from them. I still pay my dues and everything, but the people who run it now are people who like to have teas, flower shows—which is good—and social events, things like that. And everything they have, it'll cost you anywhere from twenty-five to fifty dollars to attend, just to raise money. And I know you've got to do that, no question about it, but it's just

not my cup of tea, so I'm not involved with the garden center anymore, at all, because I wanted to go the route of horticultural therapy. Now, we won't get in to that, that's a big subject. I had—I invited all of the welfare agents in Amarillo, one time, to come out to the garden center on a program—there's about fifteen or twenty different agencies dealing with the handicaps and children, things like that. Made a survey, and among that group, there was at least 1,800 people in Amarillo who were handicapped one way or another that would benefit from horticultural therapy, as I had outlined with an hour's talk, there. But that is not something that the so-called "silver stocking" people like to be involved with. It's not easy, and I visited several horticultural therapy places throughout the United States—several, half a dozen—and I was really in concern about not having it, but what the board did, they postponed building a building that I had headed up the horticultural therapy committee, and we had an architect design a building—our architect's fee was a little over \$58,000, and they voted after I was off the board—I was at the meeting—and they voted on the long-range plan to wait ten years to build a building. Well then the president of it, who was one of the leaders in the—among the ladies—she was president and she immediately dissolved my committee. And I couldn't do anything about it at all, but I saw the handwriting on the wall, "You've got to do something else." Now Mrs. Sybil Harrington, who has this Harrington Foundation here, she's given over a \$100 million, and she's in trouble right now, or she's deceased now. She set up a trust with a \$100 million, and I don't know trusts too well, but it was some kind of trust that they had to spend it within a certain length of time. And they've only spent twenty million dollars; there's eighty million still yet to be spent, and the state agency, whoever it is, they're calling to task over the fact that they have not spent that money like they was supposed to. That's going to be a big—it was a headline in the paper here, last week. So the garden center, well Mrs. Harrington left a million dollars to build what they call a conservatory. Now a conservatory, as you probably know, is a place where you grow exotic plants. Well out here in this country, we darn sure can't grow exotic—we can grow cactus and things like that, but we can't grow exotic plants, except in a building. That's going to be the most expensive thing to operate that you ever saw, and they don't have any money for operations. I really don't want to be involved with it at all, I just see all the appointments coming up. And at my stage in life, I don't need to be worried about things like that.

MM:

Okay. Very good. Well, with that having been said, we'll stop right now for our little break, and then we'll come back here in a little while and continue our discussions. And you were worried you wouldn't have anything to say this morning. I swear, Mr. Thompson, you've been going—you've done a good job.

End of recording