

**Oral History Interview of  
William Curry Holden**

**Interviewed by: Jimmy M. Skaggs  
May 13, 1968  
Lubbock, Texas**

**“REEL NINE”**

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### Recording Notes:

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*Interviewer:* Jimmy M. Skaggs

*Transcription:* Jimmy Skaggs, John Clements

*Editor(s):* William Curry Holden, Elissa Stroman, Katelin Dixon

## Interview Series Background:

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

## Transcript Overview:

This interview features Dr. William Curry Holden. Holden talks about professors he worked with during his career.

**Length of Interview:** 00:20:53

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Transcript Page</b>	<b>Time Stamp</b>
Politics of Evetts and Judge Hamlin	5	00:00:00
Dr. Dale and Dr. Barker	8	00:07:40
Gus Ford	10	00:16:08
Clifford Casey	12	00:18:18

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### **Library of Congress subjects**

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Lubbock, Texas, politics, Texas Tech University

**William Holden (WH):**

It was—and we quit going, because the glamor was all gone up there—it's just go up there now, and listen to somebody make a speech.

**Jimmy M. Skaggs (JS):**

Kind of reminds me of the West Texas Historical [Association]—

WH:

So we—Evetts—since the death of Nita, of course, Evetts has been rather at loose ends, and he tries to carry on valiantly. Today, the only attraction to Canyon at all for us is Evetts—and you never quite know whether he's going to be there or not.

JS:

You'll see him chasing a rabbit.

WH:

Yeah. So we haven't been in a number of years.

JS:

I'm rather curious—one thing just popped into my mind; I didn't make the connection a while ago for some reason—you refer to the judge as being a relatively liberal gentleman in his political philosophy—how did he and Evetts reconcile their obvious differences?

WH:

By mutual respect—not ever discussing the things that they knew they didn't agree on. That's the way Evetts and I got along. We get along fine just by mutual respect. I'm—I guess you'd call me a sort of a conservative liberal, but Evetts is, of course, a conservative conservative.

JS:

Yes, one of the deans of—

WH:

On the great basic philosophy of life, though, we were mighty close together. We believe in individual enterprise, and after all, that people should keep the government, not the government keep the people, and a lot of—the basic things we were in agreement on.

JS:

I suspect the judge was pretty close to that, wasn't he?

WH:

The judge was willing to go quite a bit further than Evetts in that the judge said the more people you have in the country, then the more of your individualism you have to surrender—and there are a lot of things you have to do cooperatively with taxes and otherwise, like build highways, school systems, your defense, taking care of your—of the indigents, and a lot of things like that that you just can't ignore. It has to be done. The heart of that is making concession to state socialism, you see—it is—we're part socialistic. Old age pensions, now Medicare—we have all of these things which are brought on by mechanization, population, and all of these kinds of things. Evetts is—will not concede that there's been any change in the conditions of living from the frontier days until this highly mechanistic age we live in, you see. He wants to keep the old Andrew Jackson ways today—wants to go back to them—which is unrealistic.

JS:

Of course, with my generation it's not difficult to reconcile because we've grown up with it, and there's no problem.

WH:

Yeah.

JS:

I'm a little curious as to the Judge and Evetts on this point.

WH:

Well, the judge quite conversant with the limitations of the times—that you have to change with the times.

JS:

Having been in Santa Fe quite a bit, was the judge a friend of Peter Hurd?

WH:

He didn't know Peter Hurd so far as I know. Peter Hurd never—he never mixed with that Santa Fe bunch or the Taos bunch. Even as late as the judge died, Peter Hurd was relatively unknown, you might say. He had not become a national celebrity by any means at that time. I think they would have liked each other very much, really, had they known each other.

JS:

Well, judging by your comments on Hurd previously, it seems that the two would have gotten along pretty well.

WH:

Their political ideas and ideas of economics were very similar. And I think they would have hit it off splendidly, had they known each other.

JS:

I think the judge would have hit it off splendidly with anyone—

WH:

This was before we had very many very close relations with Peter Hurd.

JS:

Can you think of anything else that you'd like to add on the judge?

WH:

Well—

JS:

I've been asking you so many questions—

WH:

I believe we've about exhausted him. There might be a few things—maybe we better try to get on to somebody else, here.

JS:

Well I—if I think of anything else, I'll inject it later.

WH:

Dr. Edward Everett Dale—have you ever met Dr. Dale?

JS:

No, but I'm going to Norman, I hope, this summer for that purpose.

WH:

Well look him up, and when you do, give him my regards.

JS:

I will. I'm told that he is very cordial towards graduate students, and almost takes them under his wing—and I have a couple of Dale books that I most assuredly want autographed, and—

WH:

Well go see him—you'll find he's—I imagine he's getting along. He's in his nineties now—

JS:

Yes sir.

WH:

—but I think he's still active.

JS:

Well, you recall Don Green, who did his master's here—he is now at Oklahoma, and he said that Dr. Dale is still on campus once or twice a week, and just lives a block or so off—but he is by no means senile. Of course, he's slowed down considerably, but he loves every day when students come by, and he buttonholes them, and so on and so forth.

WH:

Well, the first time I ever saw Dr. Dale, he filled in for Dr. [E. C.] Barker one summer at the University of Texas—and it must have been about the summer of '24 or '25. Let's see, I was doing graduate work, working on my doctor's there in '24, '25, '26, and '27. I put in four summers and one whole year. And Dr. Dale was down there either '24 or '25 for one term—and I think he had come down to take courses that had been scheduled for Dr. Barker, and he lived in Dr. Barker's house. Dr. Barker was gone, and so Dr. Dale just moved in—and incidentally, he looked a great deal like Dr. Barker. He was a rather tall man, slightly ungainly like Dr. Barker—their features were a little bit alike, Dr. Dale had a sort of a sharp face, and a sort of a twinkle in his eye, a high-pitched voice, a sort of a twinkle in his speech, you might say. When he talked, you thought, Well now, here's a man who is—he's very pleasant, he's a man who enjoys life, he enjoys talking—it's a man like "I've got something good to tell you" all the time"—that kind of an attitude—and Dr. Barker had pretty much the same kind of a voice, but without that aspect of it. Dr. Barker was more solemn, much more solemn. So I took his course that he had, and his—like Dr. Dodd, I believe—didn't I tell you my reactions to Dr. Dodd when I went to Chicago?

JS:

Yes sir.

WH:

My reactions to Dr. Dale were fairly similar—when you—the first day, when you saw him—and he was not too prepossessing, you might say and not a man whose appearance stunned you or anything like that<sup>1</sup>—and it wasn't until he began talking, and pretty soon, he had you, and then you were right with him. He was lyrical in a way—he interspersed his lectures with a lot of little

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<sup>1</sup> Holden simplifies to "when you saw him, you were not impressed."



homemade poems that he had worked up, and he could throw one of these into his lectures in the most beautiful way—all very homespun, the poetry, it rhymed beautifully—but it would be the meaning together with the lilt of the thing. So he—all in all, we just become greatly attached to him—and I know I went over to see him—pay him a visit—over at his house, and he was most gracious. Then, by that time, we'd built the—after we had built the basement of the museum [**at Tech**], and our little museum [inaudible 00:10:34]—little small, homespun affair—but we would try to get somebody to come in, and one time I got Dr. Dale to come over, be our speaker. We had the meeting, I know, in the north basement, there, of the museum—I guess we must have had maybe thirty or forty people—and he gave one of his lectures that had to do with the frontier, or the opening up of the [**Cherokee**] Strip or something—and he used a lot of his own homespun poems. It worked beautifully the way he did it; he just charmed everybody. Then, this sort of established a bond, that we—when we'd got through Oklahoma, we'd always make it a point to go back and see him—and I know one time I went back to see him, he and Dr. Rister were officing together, and both of them were there—and I'd known Rister since we were boys. So we had a splendid time visiting with both of them—both of them were full professors at that time. It seems to me like we had Dale back another time, later—but he was always a very popular man due to his personality—the sweetness of his personality as well as the content of what he said. He seems almost ageless. The last time I saw him, I wouldn't have thought he was a month older than the first time I saw him back in 1924. There must have been twenty or twenty-five years intervening between those two times that I saw him.

JS:

Yes. I've known people like that.

WH:

He's done, as you know—you know his works just as well as I—he has been a fairly productive historian, and I don't know that he—which one published more books, whether he or Rister have a longer shelf, but Dale has had—his greatest influence, I think, has been with his students. He will live with his students as long as his students live—they will always remember him as one of their outstanding professors. He had that trait that Rister did not have. Rister was a pretty humdrum, uninspiring sort of a person—very thorough—and a student that wanted to learn history got a great deal out of his courses, but you didn't have that inspiring thing that you got from men like Dale and Dodd and Boucher—

JS:

And Barker?

WH:

And Barker, yes. That's about all I can think to say about Dr. Dale.

JS:

I'll ask you one other question on him. Which of the two would you consider the better historian—Dale or Rister—having known both of the men and their work?

WH:

You mean aside from their personality and their—the way they handled their students. You mean based entirely on the printed page.

JS:

Yes.

WH:

I'm not familiar enough, I don't believe, with all their respective works to formulate a judgement on that.

JS:

I was just curious as to whether you—

WH:

I've only read about two things that Dale had written—they're nicely—he's a better stylist, I think, than Rister. Rister is a sort of a pedantic sort of a writer, and also of a classroom man.

JS:

Plodding type historian—

WH:

Plodding—a plodding—that describes him pretty good—a man who has gotten there by lots of hard, hard work—and he was a hard worker and, I think, a thorough worker, but plodding. And Dale will always have this—

JS:

—special sort—

WH:

—special clamber sort of a thing that went along with his—both in his writing and in his classroom performance.

JS:

Well some of that—*The Range Cattle Industry* is right on the verge of poetry—or at least, to me it is.

WH:

Yes, of Dale's—

JS:

Yes.

WH:

Yes.

JS:

It's wonderful stuff. Well, let's see—we have a few minutes left—what about Gus Ford?

WH:

Gus Ford—I knew him—I don't know that anybody ever knew Gus Ford too well. He was a hard man to know. He was a part of the original faculty here—

JS:

He had his PhD, didn't he?

WH:

No, he never got a PhD—never had one. Dr. Horn latched onto him somewhere, and brought him here as a part of the original faculty—Granbery, Ford, and Eaves constituted the original history department. Eaves had been a school superintendent—I don't know how he managed to latch onto him. Ford had taken a master's degree, I think, from SMU, and he'd worked with Gamble—however, he and Gamble were about the same age. Anyway, he was a product of SMU, and being a Methodist was the reason—accounted largely for the fact that Horn brought him here. Horn was a sort of a lay Methodist preacher, you know?

JS:

Ole Ford must have about been a contemporary of Clifford Casey's. He got his MA from SMU about—

WH:

Ford was just a little older, I guess, than Clifford. Clifford Casey was about my age, really, and Ford was a number of years older than I was.

JS:

Is that right?

WH:

Yes. I knew Clifford Casey—he was at the University of Texas working on his PhD—

JS:

—about the time you were

WH:

Yes, he was behind me just a little on his work.

JS:

Casey was my old prof.

WH:

Did you go to Alpine?

JS:

Yes sir—one of the finest gentlemen I've ever met in my life.

WH:

Well, Casey, I believe, worked in the library with my wife, Olive.

JS:

Yes, he said that one year he worked in the library, the next year he became a teaching fellow, I believe it was.

WH:

The year that I was there, he was working in the library, and he and Olive knew each other—that is, they worked at the desk, sometimes at the same time.

JS:

Well, I'll get you to comment on him, while we're at it, if you'd like to.

WH:

I didn't know him that well. I only knew him at that time. Later, I would—when we would have some function at Sul Ross, I would see him down there, and we always exchange pleasantries and reminisce a bit about the university, and that was about as far as we would go.

JS:

He's something of a cold fish, too.

WH:

Yes, I guess he was. But I think he was just a—he wasn't quite as old as Ford, so—Ford was an enigma in a way. I know we all officed in one office, and he was hard to know—to fraternize with—you couldn't joke with him very well. I tried to joke with him one time, and he took serious exceptions to it, and I never tried it again. He was good in the classroom. He had never done any research of any kind—I suppose he wrote a master's thesis for somebody somewhere. Until he got the year off to go and work on his cattle brand things, he had never published anything—and you know what, the cattle brand thing—which is largely just a list of things, it was more like a handbook on cattle brands.<sup>2</sup>

JS:

Yes, in fact he didn't even write those. He just edited them and compiled them.

WH:

Well, I think so. And I never did see him operate, but his students were very enthusiastic about him in the classroom. He had a very lovely daughter—and his wife was a lovely woman—but his daughter, Francis, was pretty high among the campus. We would call them sorority girls [today], only at that time they were clubs—

*End of Side A*

JS:

Well, I guess that's a pretty good run at it for the day.

WH:

Well, I guess maybe we better call it a day there, and let's see where we're at—

*End of interview*

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<sup>2</sup> *Texas Cattle Brands*, published 1926