SPECIAL INTERVIEW

DATE: August 14, l987

INTERVIEWEE: WILLARD DEASON

INTERVIEWER: Christie L. Bourgeois

PLACE: Mr. Deason's residence, Austin, Texas

Tape l of l, Side l

B: Mr. Deason, I'd like to start this morning by having you tell me a little bit about Wilson County where you were born.

D: Well, I'd be glad to--what you want to talk about. I want to go back a little bit and tell you about other interviews I've had. I've been interviewed by Library people before you and Mike [Michael Gillette] came there, by Joe Frantz and by other folks when we were still in Washington. And, basically, we've always talked about Lyndon Johnson because that's what it's all about at the Lyndon Johnson Library but Mike has said a time or two, well, he would like have in his file something about my total life. And I'm not adverse to talking about myself so I agreed that I'd be glad to do this interview. I guess the best thing would be for me to say who I am and where I came from. To do that, I am going to use notes which I prepared fairly recently for my niece who is preparing a history of Wilson County as far as the Deasons' contribution to Wilson County is concerned.

I was born in Stockdale, Wilson County, Texas, on January 3, 1905. My father was Horace Martin Deason. My mother was Nettie Key Deason. Nettie Key was the

daughter of a Baptist preacher, George Key, who was pastor of the Stockdale Baptist Church back in the late 1890s when my father and mother met. My mother was a native Texan and her father had come to Texas from Georgia as a boy and lived in the Gonzales- Cuero area. [He] served in the Confederate Army during the Civil War, and started farming after the war was over but soon became a preacher, a Baptist preacher. His father had been a Baptist preacher in Georgia where they came from, so he became a Baptist preacher and moved around from church to church. Gonzales County, Dewitt County, Carnes County, Wilson County, and it was at Stockdale where he was pastor when my father and mother met.

Now, to go back and pick up my father. He came to Texas in the 1880s from Tuscaloosa County, Alabama. He followed his older brother, Charles Deason, who had come from Tuscaloosa County to Wilson County, Stockdale, in the 1880s. My father stayed around and worked on farms and helped his brother Charles get his farm started for a year or two and then he joined a wagon train that was going west. He wanted to still go further west and seek adventure so he went out into the Territory of New Mexico and for a couple of years herded sheep in the Pecos Valley around where Roswell, New Mexico, is now located. After two years of that he decided he liked South Texas better so he caught the stagecoach in El Paso and came back to San Antonio and on down to Stockdale where he lived the rest of his life.

In giving this history of Wilson County to my niece, I pointed out that Charles Deason, my daddy's older brother, was quite a community leader. I guess today we would call him an activist but he was instrumental in getting the first rural telephone line

put into that area. The line had come from San Antonio down to Stockdale and sort of deadended. He got out and worked the folks from Stockdale up to Nockenut down to Union Valley. There was quite a settlement of early settlers at Union Valley. So they put in rural telephone line from Stockdale to Union Valley and he was sort of the leader in getting that going. He was also the leader in getting a rural route established, Rural Route 1. I grew up on Rural Route 1. It ran out by the Charlie Deason farm and two or three other farms and then on over by the Horace Deason farm, my daddy's farm, and on up by the Martin farm and the Clements farm and on up to Nockenut again and circled back through the community of Alum and High Prairie and back into Stockdale. So we had a rural route of a man who had a little two-wheeled buggy and a horse and delivered the mail. Uncle Charlie Deason was instrumental in getting that started.

Then he made a contribution to the history of Texas. You remember the story of the Range Wars or the Fence Cutting Wars it was called, where the farmers had moved in and bought themselves 120 acres, fenced their field but let their cattle run open. Then the big ranchers started coming in and buying up large tracts of land and fencing it. The land that normally the cattle, the farmers' cattle, grazed for free. So there was a great conflict that took place there, and the farmers were out at night cutting those fences. The ranchers had their fence riders and they had shootings from time to time. But bad went to worse, and something had to be done about it so Governor [John] Ireland who lived in Seguin at that time called on some leading citizens from both sides to come and Uncle Charlie Deason represented the farmers and Terrell Ervin--not Terrell Ervin--it's old man Terrell Ervin that's right--of Union Valley represented the ranchers. They went to Seguin

through the sand hills and met with Governor Ireland and a bunch of other folks and worked out an agreement, ended the fence cutting war.

But, to continue with Uncle Charlie, he was looking for more worlds to conquer. So he traded his Stockdale farm for one out in Uvalde County and moved to Uvalde County and that was the end of his contribution to Wilson County.

Now, back to my father and mother. They were married there, raised six children, lived on a farm. The oldest one was Blake Deason. He married Annie Spear of Union Valley. Then my oldest sister Maggie Lou Deason married Elmo Spear of Union Valley. Then my second brother, Ray Deason, married Grace Radcliff of Union Valley. So it was sort of Stockdale-Union Valley affair until I came along. I was a little, I guess, retarded in life. I didn't get married very early. As a matter of fact, I didn't get married until I was forty years old. World War II came along and I went in the navy and met my wife, Jeannie Fitzpatrick, who was also in the navy. We had a military romance and a military wedding in a military chapel in Virginia. And after the war came back to Austin where I had been living prior to that time and here we are.

I need to go back and fill you in on--I've gotten away from the Wilson County history. That's where I grew up and went to high school. I went to college, of course, up at San Marcos to SWT [Southwest Texas Teachers College, now Texas State University]. But my oldest brother, Blake, stayed on in Wilson County and lived there all of his life. He was first a farmer, then a dairyman and then a trucker. He lived a long and useful life. Director of the bank, Stockdale Bank, and member of the board of trustees, school trustees of Wilson County for a number of years. My oldest sister Maggie Lou Deason

who married Elmo Spear lived most of her life in Wilson County, started there as a school teacher and ended up there as the postmaster. She became assistant postmaster back in the 1930s and when the old postmaster retired, she became postmaster in which she served for many years, retired I think in 1968. At the time she retired, Ben Deason, third generation of us, was living in Stockdale and working for her at the post office so he became postmaster. So Deasons have contributed to Stockdale and Wilson County a good bit.

Ben Deason was the son of my second brother, Ray Deason, who moved out of Wilson County and down to South Texas around Falfurrias, lived there a number of years working for the oil industry in the oil fields and died suddenly one day while he was on work when he was about fifty years of age.

Basically--and my two younger sisters. I was about to forget them. Estelle Deason Meiners married Herbert Miners and they lived most of their life in San Antonio. He was a customs officer and served at various places: Laredo and other places, and ended up in San Antonio. My youngest sister, Virginia Deason, married Bill Bunker from Salado, Texas, and they lived various places, but ended up living in Salado where he was in business. And she taught in the Salado schools for many, many years. So that's the history of the Deasons, I believe, from Wilson County.

Now, that basically is I believe our contribution to Wilson County. By the way, I might say that Ben Deason still lives there and my oldest sister, Maggie Lou Deason, at this time is still living there. Ben Deason has one daughter living there and two sons, one living in Austin and one living in College Station where he is in vet school. But the

Deasons are still a part of Wilson County, Texas. Basically, that's the history and the background on it.

C: Why don't you talk some, Mr. Deason, about your growing up there in Wilson County?

D Well, I will. I want to go back and review for you my background, what makes me think the way--as far as I've been able to trace back my family history begins with Absalom Deason, old biblical name, who was born in Shelby County, Tennessee, in 1871. And he moved to Tuscaloosa, Alabama, some time later where he lived the rest of his life. He had nineteen children, eighteen who lived and one who died early in life. My grandfather was Washington Davis Deason, the twelfth child of old Absalom, and he married Diana Savage. My father used to say that he was part Indian; his mother was a savage. But Savage was good name and had been around a long time and we were proud of it. Well, as I related earlier my father came from Alabama, Tuscaloosa County, to Stockdale, Texas, when he was about eighteen or nineteen years old. He had followed Uncle Charlie out there who had come earlier, we talked about that, in the history of Wilson County. But there were ten children in my father's family. Eight boys and two girls. Four of the boys moved west. Uncle Charlie and Pappa moved to Texas. Uncle Jack went to New Mexico and Uncle Sam went to Oklahoma and settled there and lived their all their lives. The other members of the family, two girls who were school teachers and the other four men stayed in Tuscaloosa County all their lives. One of them, Dr. Robert Deason, was a rather prominent dentist in Tuscaloosa and among other of his honors he was the dentist for the famous Alabama football team back in the 1930s and 1940s.

My father came to Texas as I related and worked around different places and didn't get married until he was thirty-two years old. My mother was, I think, twenty-three maybe when they married, nine years difference. They raised we six children which I've related to earlier. We all, except Virginia the youngest one, started to school and spent our earliest school years at what was called the Arkansas School. I'm not sure why it was called Arkansas. It was about three or four miles out of Stockdale except that a good many of the folks that came into that community came from Arkansas and I guess they decided to name it the Arkansas School. It was a one-teacher, unpainted schoolhouse with potbellied stoves fired with wood, and we'd go to school five or six months out of the year. School would start in the fall in October usually after the cotton was picked. In those day[s], we made a living raising cotton. When the boll weevil came to Texas that was over with and so we had to turn to other endeavors to keep from starving. But I went to that one-teacher school for the first, I guess, five years of my life. There probably were twenty to thirty students there, everything from the first to eighth grade, and I honestly believe sometimes that the one-teacher school had a lot of advantages that the schools today don't have. And I'll tell you why. There would be maybe, say, three children in the first grade. The teacher would call us up to the front of the room, we'd sit on the front row and we'd recite our lessons and talk and do our ABCs on the board and things like that. Then we'd go back to our seats and she'd take the second grade and then the third grade. Well, I sat there and so did the other kids and we watched the second grade and the third grade and the fourth grade and I knew how to do short division by the time I was through with the second grade.

B: That makes sense.

D: And I knew Texas history because I heard my older brothers and sisters and the other kids talking about Texas history. I just sat there and listened. I don't think I ever really absorbed any algebra from them that way, but I absorbed English and history and geography. I'd never been out of Wilson County but I knew about the different continents of the world and the oceans and things like that by the time I was eight or nine years old which my grandchildren don't know today with the educational programs that we have. And I learned it purely through osmosis by listening to the older children recite their lessons and the teacher carry them along. It was that thing over and over and over. We had reading and writing and arithmetic and grammar and spelling and every Friday afternoon we'd have a spelling match. We'd take the whole school and choose sides and from the eighth grade to the first grade and you tried to learn to spell. And we could spell and I can outspell my children today. I think I learned it in the one-teacher school. Of course, there are a lot of things I didn't learn. They learn a lot of things today that I didn't the advantage of. When I was about in the fifth grade then the era of consolidation hit the one-teacher schools. The three one-teacher schools were put together at the crossroads a little farther away from home, and called the Crossroads School. And I went to the Crossroads School through the tenth grade. They were trying to keep the rural schools alive by consolidation and I was a victim of having to be the only child in the tenth grade at the Crossroads School because they felt like if we had a tenth grade then maybe we could get some more people in. At that end of the tenth grade, then I transferred to

Stockdale District which I never lived in--I lived in a rural area--and took the eleventh grade there. Then we had only eleven grades; the twelfth grade hadn't been put in.

B: How would you get to school?

D: Horse and buggy. Sure. Sometimes horseback but there were several children so we'd go in the buggy and drive a horse. When I got to Stockdale for the eleventh grade, I had not had enough subjects in the rural Crossroads School to graduate. Normally, we took four subjects a year but the school superintendent knew of my father and mother and our father and he agreed to let me try to take six subjects instead of four. So I took six subjects and passed them all and graduated at the age of seventeen from the Stockdale High School. From there I went to a little private summer school training to take a teachers examination, went through the whole summer on a cram course and went to the county superintendent's office and took the examination and out of the eleven of us that took it, two passed. I got a teacher's certificate before I was eighteen years old but I couldn't teach until I was eighteen.

B: What was your motivation for that? Were you wanting to get away from picking cotton? Is that what it was?

D: Well, yes. That was a big part of it. I said that the boll weevil had come and we did not raise cotton anymore. It was peanuts and watermelons and tomatoes by then because when the boll weevil came, he just virtually killed the cotton industry in the sandy land country.

After I graduated from Stockdale High School, there I was seventeen years old and I had to make a decision. My older brother was a farmer. My second brother had

gone to the oil fields to work while the wages were higher, and my older sister was a school teacher and that's the only vision I had for making a living. I could become a farmer; I could go to the oil fields and work or I could become a teacher. So I decided I wanted to be a teacher. I thought my sister was doing a little better than my brothers were. So that's when I went to that summer training course and got my certificate. Then at the age of eighteen I started teaching in the rural schools and taught for four years and got along pretty well. During my fourth year my county school superintendent who was my boss got me in his office and said, "Now, I want to tell you, Willard, you're doing all right. You're ending up your fourth year but you've gone as far as you're ever going to go unless you go to college and get yourself a degree." I said, "Well, what do you think?" He said, "I think you ought to." I said, "Where would you go?" He said, "Well, the closest place to go is San Marcos. Go up there to the San Marcos State Teachers College." So I'd saved a little money during those four years and so I took off. 1927 enrolled and the Southwest Texas State Teachers College at San Marcos and through some breaks and ingenuity, borrowing money, I managed to stay in there until I got a degree in 1930. From there I started teaching again. Then with a degree, I got a job in San Antonio teaching in Alamo Heights Junior High School which was quite an uptown place for a boy who had been teaching rural schools. But I coped with it for fours years and when I started there teaching school on Monday morning, Monday night I started to this San Antonio school of law which was a night school. So I taught school full time and went to night school four nights a week for three hours a night. At the end of four years, I got a licensed to practice law and another chapter of my life began. I left my

school teaching job and went to Houston working for the Federal Land Bank as a junior attorney. In 1934 when the depression was on and the Roosevelt era was in full swing and the farmers were broke and many of the farms were being foreclosed and the Congress had passed the Farm Credit Act which extended help to the farmers who were losing their farms but the legal processes had to be all gone through the reserves, so I worked in that for a year and a half. Enjoyed it and planned to stay with the legal profession the rest of my life. But a friend of mine from Washington named Lyndon Johnson called me one day and said, "Have you had your vacation?" I said, "No. Why?" He said, "Well, take it and come down to Austin and meet me. Be there Monday morning." And I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, it's a long story. I can't tell you now. We're talking long-distance and that costs too much money. You just be there Monday morning and I'll tell you the whole story." So I met him there Monday morning and he had been appointed state director of the National Youth Administration and was coming to Austin to set up and wanted me to work for him which I did and worked until about the break of World War II. And that was a very interesting and a very helpful seven years of my life. I learned a lot of things about people in government and my vision widened. I saw the effects of the Depression. I saw the effects of the programs that were put in during the Roosevelt era some of which didn't do so well but in retrospect most of them did damn well. They carried us through a very difficult period up. After the World War, I went into the navy in forty-two and stayed in to forty-six. And I said earlier, that's where I met my wife. She was also in the navy.

B: Where was she from?

D: She was from Bayonne, New Jersey. It was a Yankee marrying a Texas or a Texan marrying a Yankee. It depends on who's telling the story. But I brought her back to Austin right after World War II to what had been my home for seven or eight years and went to work in the radio business as a salesman for KTBC, Lyndon and Lady Bird's station.

B: Did your wife have a hard time adjusting to Texas?

D: She sure did. She sure did, but now she's the greatest Texan you ever saw.

B: Is that right?

D: Yes. But she thought Texas was all bad and that we just ought to move to New York but I wasn't about to move to New York or New Jersey. This was my home and here's where my roots were so here's where we stayed. After two or three years she became a convert and now she's Texas 110 per cent. Raised our children here; they're Texans. One lives in North Carolina and the other in England. We're still very proud of our Texas heritage. One of the great pleasures in my life.

B: Can you remember what she didn't like about it at first?

D: Ask me if I can remember anything she did like about it, and I'll answer no. It was all new to her and people couldn't get used to her Yankee brogue and she couldn't get used to ours. Frankly, she and I had a little trouble communicating at times. But she learned pretty fast and she adjusted, bless her heart, and here we are some forty-three years later.

B: So then you were working for KLB--KTBC.

D: KTBC at the time; it later changed its name to KLBJ. It was radio station. There was no television at that time. I worked there for three years as a salesman and I got a chance to

move to KVET as manager which I did and worked there for nineteen years. It was owned by ten vets where it got the KVET, K-V-E-T. But, as John Connally said one time, who was the first president of it and the first manager, there were ten chiefs and no Indians. The chiefs began to move out and establish their own fiefdom in other fields of the work. I became the manager and part owner and ultimately, owner. At the time I sold it in 1965, ended another chapter in my life. It was very, very interesting one. One in which I think I grew some and my vision enlarged and I and--Jeannie and I had married during the war but we raised our family, two children, shortly after the war and became a part of Austin and a part of Texas. I was fortunate enough to get to be one of the organizers of the Texas Association of Broadcasters and went as first secretary and then as third president. So I knew practically all of the broadcasters in Texas. Most of them were my friends. So I thoroughly enjoyed it and [I] served on a good many committees and boards statewide and [I] was very much a part of, in a small way, of the scene in Texas.

But I sold out and quit because again, my old time friend from college-days, Lyndon Johnson, had become president and after his election in 1964, he sent for me and he said, "Wouldn't you like to become part of my official family in Washington?" I said, "Yes, I've been looking forward to it for thirty years."

(Laughter)

And so he said, "Well, what will you do with your radio station?" I said, "I'll sell. I'm sixty years old and radios have been for just young men anyhow. Time for me to get out." So I sold it to Roy Butler for cash and moved to Washington where LBJ appointed

me a member of the Interstate Commerce Commission. And another chapter of my life began there. He appointed me for a seven year term and at the end of his term, which was some three and a half years away, he decided not to run for re-election. [He] came back to Texas but I stayed on. And then at the end of my seven years, through the help of some of my friends who did a little nudging, Nixon re-appointed me. So I stayed on there as a member of the Interstate Commerce Commission. And another facet of my life unfolded. I got to see Washington first hand, learned for the first time how to operate it. Takes you quite a while to understand the process. But before my ten years was up I had.

My ten year period ended when I became seventy years of age. It was mandatory retirement for people in government service sector. I was to retire in seventy years so I retired and came back home and [have] been living here for twelve years now, in the same house that I moved out of when I went to Washington. And I've been successfully unemployed for the last twelve years and that brings us up until today.

B: Sounds like a quite rich full life?

D: Yes, I don't regret a day or a facet of. One of my friends said not long ago, he believed that I was the most contented man in America. And I wouldn't deny that status. The world has been good to me and the creator above has been good to me; my friends have been good to me and I've tried to be good to some of them in return. And I have no regrets. As I say, I'm happy with every facet of my life, from farm boy, to rural school teacher, to college student. I didn't say that I held a number [of] campus offices when I was in college. I was business manager of the annual and I was president of the senior

class, student council and things like that. So I enjoyed that and I enjoyed my teaching in Alamo Heights, which was a four year stand to review, and my short year and a half at the Federal M Bank; seven years with the National Youth Administration, and four years in the Navy. And parts of that I enjoyed. The biggest thing [was when] I met my wife and married her. That's the best thing [that] happened to me. Then nineteen years in broadcasting; ten years in Washington, and every facet of my life I enjoyed and feel lucky. I learned a lot from each one of them. So if I had to give advice to any young man or young woman, I would say to them, "Be not weary in well doing."

B: Mr. Deason, let's back track a little bit and talk a bit about your boyhood on a rural farm in Texas. Can you tell what an average day would be like?

D: Well, yes. I told you earlier about going to school. That had to be there at eight and out at four. And before we left to walk to that Arkansas school--we later went to Crossroad to the horse and buggy. But we'd get up before day light and get the calves up and the horses and mules in then pen for feeding and be ready for work on the farm. And so in the summer time, days started between four and five in the morning. My father would get up at four first and [would] get the rest of us up. There were six children. We had to feed the horses and the hogs and milk the cows. We, of course we had our milk. [There was] no refrigeration so we had to have fresh milk everyday. And we'd milk the cows, bring in wood--we chopped our own wood. We had plenty of post oak timber in the pastures. So we had a wood burning stove and a wood burning fireplace. [We] took care of the chores and then by seven thirty, we were off to school during the school months. And during the spring and summer and early fall, we were planting and cultivating and

harvesting what little we could grow. We were busy doing that. So an average day for a young boy on a farm was twelve to fourteen to sixteen hours. Up early and then worked till dark. Then during school months, my mother was very diligent and seeing that her children were very diligent and studied. She made us do what is now called homework. And she saw that we did and kept up in school and I'll be forever grateful to her because I wouldn't have had the education that I have now if it hadn't been for the driving force of my mother.

B: Was that usually in the evenings, by kerosene light or--?

D: Oh yes, yes. We didn't have any electricity on the farm. It was kerosene lamps. After I had gone away from home, during the latter few years of my father and mother's lives, after the Roosevelt era came and we had rural electricity, then they had electric lights. But I lived, for the first eighteen or twenty years of my life in an unpainted house, on a hundred and twenty acres farm that had no electricity whatsoever. No ice except on Saturdays when we'd go to town. We'd buy a big chunk of ice Saturday night and Sunday we'd have ice, which was a great treat. They would say how did you keep you milk cool? Well, Mother had a cooler which she used old cloths for evaporation, and then we milked the cows twice a day so it would all come pretty fresh. As it got a little older, we had butter milk, which was great. I still like butter milk, out of homemade butter. She'd churn new butter everyday. So there were no questions about it, even without refrigeration, that we had fresh milk and butter and fresh eggs. We had our own chickens and gathered eggs everyday. So an egg was never a day old when she'd crack it in the morning. So we'd always had that and we grew our own vegetables. My father

was quite a gardener and we had a lot of fresh vegetables. He raised hogs and he butchered his hogs. We had hog meat in the winter time and bacon to cook with the vegetables in the summer time. And so we ate well.

We thought we were well off. By today's standards, we were poor folks but we didn't know it. No sir. We were just as proud as we can be.

B: And you were never hungry?

D: Never hungry. Oh, no. No. No. Never hungry and never missed a day of school because my mamma wouldn't let me.

(Laughter)

Some of the neighborhood would keep their kids out if they wanted to gather the crops. They'd just keep them out when school started in September, October. But not on our place. No sir. Every kid who was school age started school on the [first] day and they stayed in until they finished. Some of them would take them out early in the spring to hose the weeds out of the cotton and the corn. Not on our farm.

B: What would you folks do if the crops weren't in and it was school time? They'd just work harder or--?

D: Worked harder with our picking the cotton. What little we had, we'd do on Saturday. We'd do it on Saturday and just let it stay in gather it in November, December, the best we could.

B: What about Sunday at church?

D: Well, we nearly always went to church. We went to, sometimes to a rural church in a little community called Caddo, which was seven or eight miles out from Stockdale. We

lived half way between Caddo and Stockdale so we'd go to the Stockdale church, or we would go to Caddo or another one called Alum Creek. We went there some, always Baptist church.

B: There were a lot around then.

D: Father and mother. Father grew up a Methodist but when he married the Baptist preacher's daughter, (laughter) he turned Baptist. We children were all raised Baptist.

B: How big a congregation were most of those?

D: Oh, it's hard to say. In the summer time, when everybody turned out, why there would be from fifty to two hundred people at the Caddo Baptist church. That was a rural church and we had camp meetings.

B: I was going to ask you about that.

D: Oh, yes. Yes sir. We'd have, maybe a week or two weeks, the Baptist would have a big meeting going, had preaching every night.

B: Is this when an evangelical preacher would come through or traveling--?

D: Sometimes it would be that, but most of the times, our own pastor.

B: Oh really?

D: A little church like that, Caddo church, could not afford a pastor full time. So it would be a pastor that would preach the first Sunday at Caddo, the second Sunday at Union Valley, the third Sunday at another community, rural community, and the fourth Sunday, somewhere else. So each church helped to pay his salary, what little he got. And he would serve all four churches. But then in the summer time, when the crops were sort of laid by before the harvest season started, we would have camp meetings. It'd be too hot

in the church so the men members of the church would go down there and would make a brush arbor, cut down those trees with a lot of leaves on them and [would make] poles in lieu of the tent. Sometimes an uptown preacher would bring a tent, but mostly, it was brush arbors.

B: So that was the motivation for these camp meetings was the weather.

D: Oh, yes. The summer time, always has been the summer and you'd always have them. After the spring crops were in and before harvest time. So between June and July and maybe in early August was camp meeting time. And we'd go to the Baptist and then would go to the Methodist. I went [to] Sunday school at the Methodist. We only went to the Baptist because we liked the kids there better.

(Laughter)

My friends, best friends in school was what it was, went to the Baptist Sunday school and I went there. But we also went to Stockdale, the hometown some, and to Alumn Creek some.

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B: Were there any Catholics at all in the area that you recall?

D: Well, not right where I lived. Around Stockdale, there were a few Mexicans--we now call them Latinos. But they were there and they mostly belonged to the Catholic church. And there was a little Catholic church right on the edge of Stockdale and I believe it's still there. Of course there were one or two Catholic families in Stockdale and they attended that church. Further on, oh, some six or eight or ten miles away, there was a Polish community. Of course they were Catholics. In the lower end of the county,

around Kosciusko and Cestohowa, there was a big Polish community. It was one of the earliest settlements in that part of the country, very substantial citizens. And they all belonged to the Catholic church. There were a number of Catholic churches in that end of the county. In the west end, where there were more Mexicans than there was in Stockdale, as largely--people would come from Alabama and Arkansas and places like that and settled up, inhabited that end of the county.

B: And almost completely Baptist, Methodist?

D: Yes. The Church of Christ was strong, too, sometime called Campbellites for Alexander Campbell, who founded the Church of Christ. But the people called themselves Church of Christ. They didn't acknowledge to be Campbellites. It was sort of bad word to call them, Campbellites.

B: Is that right?

D: Now in these days, it's not. But rural custom and moral race, they wanted to be known as the Church of Christ.

B: That' s interesting.

D: I told you about the influence of my mother making us go to school and making us do our homework. See, four out of the six in the family became teachers. My three sisters were all teachers and I was a teacher for a while. I attribute that largely to the influence of my mother. But my father was a man who didn't say a lot. He was not like my Uncle Charlie who I related to you earlier. He didn't grab the lead; he didn't want to march in front of the band. But he always wanted to do his part. And he had a little code of life which he taught us. I'll see if I can remember it but he said, "Every man should pay his

debts. He should pay his preacher. He should pay his tax and he should serve on the jury whenever he's called on to serve." He said, "That's the least a man can do for his community." And that stuck with me.

B: That's a good code.

D: Now I'll tell you another thing, it's a great thing I think my dad and mother did for us; they subscribed to a lot of newspapers and magazines. A lot of rural folks didn't do that. But I know I counted one time--this was back in the teens and 20s I guess. I'm going to guess now and say it was back in the 1916, 1919, or 1920. We had fourteen papers and magazines that came to our mail box.

B: Is that right?

D: Yes. Of course we had the *San Antonio Express*, which was a daily newspaper. We had the *Stockdale's Standard*, which was a weekly; we had the *Florida Chronicle*, which was weekly. And then we had *Farm and Ranch*, which was a weekly out of Dallas, I believe, and *Holland's Magazine*, which my mother took, which was a woman's magazine. And we had, believe it or not, the *Atlantic Constitution* and the *Toledo Blade*. Now I asked my father one time, "Why, daddy, do you take so many newspapers?" He was a avid reader and a rapid reader. He could read the newspaper before I could get through with the front page. But he was just one of those fortunate people that could read rapidly. And he said, "Well I take them for a different point of view." See, his father had been in the Civil War and he had grown up as a Confederate and had grown up in Alabama with all the disappointments and oppression which came on to the folks right after the Civil War was over. The Era of Reconstruction had a very moving affect on his life and he

absorbed his life. He was a bright fellow, though as I say, he never talked much. But he says, "I take the *Atlanta Constitution* because I still get a viewpoint of the old confederacy and the South, which is beginning to emerge as a different place. And I take the *Toledo Blade* from Ohio. I don't know why I started taking it but it gives me the Yankee point of view." And we got other magazines. Mama took one called *Comfort*, I remember. It's long since out of publication, but it was historic and I read as a child. It had child stories in it. I read some of all of those papers and all of those magazines. That's contributed, considerably, to my wanting to learn more.

B: No wonder there were four school teachers in the family.

D: Yes. I think that had a part of it. I think that had a part of it. By the way, there's one thing I want to go back and tell you about. I told you earlier that after I got out of high school, I had to make a decision, if I was going to become a farmer like my older brother, I was going to go till those fields, like my second brother, or I was going to become a teacher like my older sister. And I decided to become a teacher and went to that little summer's cram course. What it was was eight or ten weeks of cramming to pass that teacher's examination. And there were eleven of us who took it and two passed it, myself and another neighborhood boy there, who lived on the farm, just one farm between us and his. That fellow, he's now Dr. Franklin Stovall, who's head of the math department at the University of Houston.

B: Really?

D: Yes. PhD, grew up right on the Sandelon [?] farm, but he was bright, real bright. He was the only one that I admitted was smarter than I was.

(Laughter)

He got a PhD and I barely got out of college and law school and he's done well.

B: That' s interesting.

D: Yes.

B: Well, how about your parents and their social life? Did they have much of one? Did they get together with other farm families at parties?

D: Yes, they did. They visited with--we'd visit around and sometimes, we had some folks in the community of the Chapels, who were about third cousins of father's, and we'd go spend the night with them, take six kids and have pallets on the floor, Saturday nights, you know, and eat ice cream and fried chicken. Oh, we had a good social life. And they'd come to our place and then we'd visit the other neighbors. And on Sundays, we'd go to the church either at Caddo or Alum and the women would all bring dinner because the noon meal was dinner. We'd spread out and have a picnic style; everybody would eat out of everybody else's lunch basket and had a great time. Kids would play, go get in the creek and get up to my ankles in mud and would get in trouble with my mother--

(Laughter)

--for getting my Sunday clothes dirty. But we had a great time.

B: That reminds of another question, getting in the creek. How was Baptism done in the Baptist church then? Was it done outside or was it done in the church?

D: Both ways. Stockdale was uptown. They built a new church and built a baptistry in the church where they would baptize in there. I'd join the church at one of these camp

meetings, I guess. I keep trying to remember but I was baptized in the creek and it's the Willow Creek.

B: W ere you?

D: Oh yes.

B: How old were you when you were baptized?

D: Well, we walked out into the creek to where it came up to your waist and the preacher held his hand above you head and said a little prayer, took you by the nose and by the back of the neck and ducked you under and you had to go all the way under. And he'd bless you when you came up.

B: Were you about twelve do you recall?

D: Twelve or thirteen, something like that, fourteen. I don't remember just how old. But everybody made their own decisions as to when they wanted to join. It was up to the children. Now, when my children came along, we'd take them and had them sprinkled on top of their heads and participated in church when they were a year old. (Laughter) They had no choice. But we made our own choice. We made our own choice. One or two of brothers joined the Methodist church. It kind of hurt Mama's feelings. (Laughter)

B: Were they baptizing the same way, the Methodist?

D: No, the Methodist sprinkles.

B: Even Texas southern Methodists sprinkle.

D: Oh, yes. At that time, nobody was--the Baptist and the Church of Christ people did immersions, but the Methodist uses the sprinkling system.

B: Did a lot of these conversions take place at these camp meetings?

D: Oh, yes. Yes. Oh, yes. And sometimes, there'd be a conversion and the next summer would be a reconversion because let's see, I believe the Baptist call it back sliding and the Methodist [call it] falling from grace or *vice versa*. You'd make, the second year, you'd make a confession that you've been sinning during the winter time. You didn't have to be baptized again but the preacher declared you back in good graces of the church.

B: You know, there's a saying that all government, government is local government and that's in a way, true today. People are much more concerned with what's going in their localities than they are with what's going on at the federal or even at state level. Do you recall, can you recall how thought about government then, because that was before the Roosevelt era and--?

D: Oh, yes. I was born during World War I. I guess I was eleven or twelve years old when it broke out in about--well, I was born in 1905 and it ended when, in 1917 or 1918?

B: Yes.

D: So I was twelve or thirteen years old. During that time, I think we got in at seventeen and got out--it was eighteen or nineteen, on Armistice Day, 1919, I think. Yes, I lived through all that and well, I, as a youngster, I would sit around and listen to my daddy and the other men talk when we'd have these family get-togethers. And that's another way I learned. While the other kids were out playing, sometimes I'd be sitting there listening to him talk politics. Of course then everybody were Democrats. It was sort of a heretic if you were a Republican. I didn't really--in the community I grew up in, I didn't know any Republicans. But Pappa and cousin Johnny Chapel would laugh and talk about the Republicans. They had read about them in the papers and you'd generalize that we nearly

always had Republican presidents back in those days because Democrats were mostly in the South.

(Interruption)

B: We were talking about how you used to listen to your father and some of the men when the families would get together, talking politics. I wanted to ask you--I know that prohibition was a big thing then--

D: Yes, all right.

B: --wet and dry. Were ya'll wet or dry?

D: I quite understand that. No, no, my father was dry and some of the neighbors were wet. And then there was also another term for it, pro and anti. You see, for prohibitionists, you were a pro and if you were anti-prohibitionist, then you were wet. So a lot of them, lots of time would talk about the pros and the antis. You might heard our recollections of the governor's race for Jim Ferguson's race. And the pros and the antis argued, oh, real hard. It got to be a hot thing with them. Of course, everybody was a Democrat but the pros and the antis--

B: Was it a split along religious lines, like were the Baptists generally pros?

D: Well, to some extent. But it wasn't all together that way. But to some extent that was true. The people who were strong Baptist and strong Methodist as a group, were prohibitionists. The ones in our community were. Now, in other communities that wasn't true.

B: Well, you were old enough to know what was going on during World War I. Do you have any recollections of that, do you remember hearing your father talk about, should we get in the war? Was that a question that people talked about in Texas, in rural Texas?

D: Now I don't recall that there was any anti-war sentiment at all. The thing just came on over a period of years and people fairly well accepted it. It was, the Kaiser [Wilhelm II of Germany] was the bad man in those days, like Hitler was in World War II. It was a job that had to be done and everybody in my community that I knew of, was pro-war. There was one bad thing that took place, not in my community but in my county, there were several large areas of German people. And since we were fighting the Germans, there was a lot of harshness and discrimination against those people that they didn't deserve. They were Americans just like we were, but they happened to be of German descent and we weren't. So we raised our eyebrows at anybody that was German. Yes, yes, there was a lot of bad feeling.

B: Did the Germans pretty much kept to themselves in order to keep away from them?

D: You know, I really don't know because, as I said, none of them lived next door neighbor to us or anything like that. We were these red neck folks from Alabama, Mississippi, and Arkansas in the community in which I lived. They lived, some German communities, some seven, eight, or ten miles away. They had, as a rule, better homes than we did. They were thriftier and I have to admit now that they were smarter than we were and worked harder, and had better farms, better homes, and got along fine. But there was some discrimination against them that shouldn't have been. And in retrospect, we didn't take part in it because we weren't neighbors. We would just heard of talks and it would

be in the newspapers. We had no radio and television in those days but it would be in there.

B: What sort of incidents, can you remember, would be in the newspapers? Do you have [any recollections]?

D: Oh, I don't remember too much but there was--we lived in an era of great patriotic fervor. My mother, I remember, she would not--as I said, my father was a quiet man who never talked much but she was the outspoken member of the family and she went all over the county, she was chairman, co-chairman. That's when women first started taking part in civic activities. But we had sales to liberty bonds and she was the co-chairman for the county in selling liberty bonds and before, we didn't have an automobile. She got in the horse and buggy and traveled all to those different communities, making patriotic speeches.

B: Is that right?

D: Yes, calling on folks to buy a war bond and they did. They'd buy them at the local banks but she sure did, she was the leader in type of things. So with us, the war was an effort. We had wheatless days and meatless days, you know, to save on certain days. Monday, we'd save, we'd have meatless day but we had plenty of vegetables so it wasn't any problem with us. [We had] big cans of black-eyed peas that we had stored up from the year before and corn in the crib to make corn bread out of. And so it didn't hurt us to go without meat for a day, and wheatless didn't bother us anyhow. We didn't have any biscuits for breakfast; we had corn bread three times a day but Mama knew how to cook it and a half a dozen different ways. So the wheatless days didn't bother us either. So we

got along just about as well as we--as a matter of fact, because of the war effort and we got more money for our farm crops I guess we got along better economically, during the war than we did right after because after the war, farm prices fell down to nothing. And the depression started, in my part of the state, not in the 30s but in the 20s, at the end of World War I.

B: Did that affect your family? Did it have a big affect on your family in particular?

D: Well, yes. On our income, we just couldn't buy as many new shoes as we'd like to have. We managed to get by always, but--

B: But you felt it huh?

D: --we felt it. Oh, yes. We were still trying to raise cotton then and cotton dropped from forty cents per pound during the war to five cents a pound the year after it was over with. Didn't need all that cotton. And the economy of the whole area changed. And I said, the Depression started then, in our part of the country or the state.

B: You talked about your mother being active selling liberty bonds. I was just wondering if maybe she had--was she active in trying to get the vote for women because that was going on?

D: No, she was for it but she never campaigned for that. She would take the lead as president of the PTA at our local school and things like that. But no, she never caught the fever of--she was happy when it came about but she never was active in the movement.

B: Okay. Was your father in favor of women getting to vote do you recall? Did he ever express an opinion on that?

D: Oh, yes, he thought it should be done.

B: Really?

D: Yes, he was pretty liberal in his thoughts. He was conservative in all of his actions but rather liberal in his thoughts. He never ran off much. I was telling you about my Uncle Charlie, one time joined the Populist party and was a leader in that for a while. But my father never deserted the Democrat party, saying, "No, no. That's a fad. It'll go away." And it did. It did.

B: Anything else about World War I or prohibition that you can think of at this time?

D: No, I don't think so. As I said, I was a kid, eleven or twelve years old or something like that. And what I absorbed at the time is sort of a blur now. I've told you about all I can remember about, the meatless days and the wheatless days and things like that.

B: Okay.

D: During the years leading up to World War I and during World War I, prices went high, particularly on cotton. And my father didn't do it but a lot of the farmers jumped out and bought additional land if they could get it and paid high prices for it and bought more plows and more mules and were sailing high for a few years. When the war was over, the price of cotton fell down. They were in the same shape then that farmers in Iowa that we cry about now were in. Many of them lost their investment and lost their home farms, which they had mortgaged. Of course, they could keep a homestead, but beyond that, they lost everything they had and never did regain it. Banks took them over and insurance companies, which had loaned money on them when the cotton prices were

high. But there were a lot of farm failures in our part of the state in the 1920s and of course, others came on in the 1930s still worse. But it started in the 20s.

B: It's a good thing your father didn't buy more land.

D: No, that's right. No, he just stuck it out and didn't owe anybody anything. And he never did finish up a year where he didn't break even anyhow. He'd pay all. He'd borrow the money at the bank in the spring time to make the crops with but he always managed to pay them off in the fall. [He] never had to default or defer to another year. He just didn't believe in living that way. Pay your debts. Pay your debts before you spent anything on anything else.

B: Times have changed hasn't it?

D: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. You remember what I've told you about, pay your debts, pay your preacher, pay your taxes, and serve on the jury. Some people tried to avoid it and he'd say, "Why, it has to be done and every man ought to do it." And he'd go nearly every year, they would have a court in Floresville, the county seat . . . just in the fall. In the winter, you see, after the crops were over and he'd go for a week and serve on the jury over there and [would] have a good time, I think.

(Laughter)

Got away from Mama and the kids for a week.

(Laughter)

Got to meet men from all over the county and I think he looked forward to it every year.

B: Well, we've been talking about your mother and father. Who do you think you took after more, you mother or your father?

D: Well, in a way, I took after them both. I always felt a conflict within me. My mother was, "Let's go; let's get it done" and my father was, "Take it easy; it'll solve itself if you give it a chance." And I've lived with those two conflicts all my life.

B: Is that right?

D: And I think as I grew older, I adopted my father's philosophy more because most problems will solve themselves if you could just be patient and wait, give them a reasonable chance. So I guess I'm more like my father, though I feel like mother urge in me when I want to grab a hold and sometime my wife would sit down and say, "You shouldn't have said that; you shouldn't have done that." But that's my Mama in me when I do that. (Laughter)

B: Is that right? She was more impulsive?

D: Oh, yes, yes, yes. If she saw something that needed be done, she'd say, "Let's do it." My father would say, "Let's wait and see if it won't solve itself."

B: Did that cause conflicts between them sometimes, she was--?

D: No, I don't think so. If there was ever any conflict between them they never let it show in front of the children. My mother told me after I was a grown man that they made a resolution that they would never argue in front of the children. And they never did. She said, "We have our differences but we never argue in front of our children," which to me, the older I get, the more I appreciate it.

B: Yes. How large was the house you grew up in? How many rooms?

D: Well, it started off--it was built a room at the time as the family grew, the house grew. (Laughter)

We had, when we all six kids were there, we had three bedrooms. Of course the bathroom was--we didn't have any bathroom. We had an outdoor john and washed up on Saturdays. So it was a great luxury to me when I got to college, where I could take a shower or a bath everyday.

B: I bet.

(Laughter)

I would imagine that while you were getting the crops in or while you were planting the crops that farm life was hard life during that time. But was it much easier after, for instance, there was a long period of time after the crops were in--I mean, I know you had your daily chores everyday and that was--

D: Well, after the crops were in we'd go to school. No, no. We had a routine. There was never a lot of luxury time or spare time.

B: I was thinking more for your parents than for the kids.

D: Well, there wasn't any spare time at all for them.

B: For them anyway, didn't get much--?

D: No, no. They had to keep the home going and we didn't know what a vacation meant. We'd read about it in the story books and the school books but vacation was just a word with us. Now, there was one big social event of the year I ought to tell you about. In the upper end of Wilson county, about seven or eight miles from Stockdale, there was a little town called Sutherland Springs. Sutherland Springs had actually a sulphur springs. It got the name Sutherland from a family, I think, that early lived there. But there was sulphur springs. In those days people thought [sulphur springs] were very healthful for

baths, you know. And the train out of San Antonio, which came down through Sutherland Springs, into Stockdale and on down to Victoria and Houston, would bring down on the Saturdays and Sundays excursions. People out of San Antonio would come down there to go swim in those sulphur springs. And it had hotels there and it was quite a resort. So the rural people, like we were, on the 4th of July would have a big get together there. And we'd go and the kids would go swimming, and there'd be baseball games in the afternoon, and public speaking, all the politicians running for county judge or sheriff or anything else turned out. And there was a lot of hand shaking going on and they'd always have a, they had a bandstand and they'd get some local band to play there. If a fellow is running for county judge or the state legislature and wanted to make a speech, he's got the chance to make it. And the kids played with one another and bought ice cream cones and things like that. And that was the big day. There were two days in our lives, the 4th of July and Christmas. We didn't pay very much attention to New Year, Easter, and any of those others. But Christmas and the 4th of July were *the* big events in children's lives. And with us, well the 4th of July would always meant a trip to Sutherland Springs.

B: And that was how far from Stockdale?

D: Oh, it was about seven or eight miles from Stockdale. About from where we lived, we went straight across about nine miles. We'd get in the buggies and on the horseback and leave early in the morning and get home at sundown, in time to milk the cows. But we had a big time. Saw folks from all over the county, made friends. Our vision was enlarged by meeting kids from the other end of the county. It was a county-wide thing.

B: What was Christmas like? Was it mostly a family affair?

D: It was a family affair and we had a few presents. Pappa would go out into the pastures and would find a nice looking live-oak bush and would chop it down and bring it in and set it up. And Mamma and the girls would get ribbons, tin foil and popcorn. Have you ever seen popcorn on a string?

B: Yes.

D: You'd get the popcorn and run a needle through it. And they'd have big strings of popcorn and decorated it up. We'd have a Christmas tree and have a good time and had presents that were in keeping with what we could afford.

B: Yes. Were they mostly things that your mother and father had made or store bought?

D: Store bought. Store bought. Not many things were made because--they'd make things but we got those throughout the year. But to have something at Christmas, they'd buy it at the store or ordered it from Sears Roebuck.

B: I see.

End of Tape l of l and Special Interview

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