

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

NUMBER

121

Interview with  
Judge John D. Wendell  
October 1, 1971

Place of Interview: Rockport, Texas  
Interviewer: Dr. A. Ray Stephens  
Terms of Use: Open  
Approved: *John D. Wendell*  
(Signature)  
Date: Oct 1, 1971

**Copyright ©2016**

**THE BOARD OF REGENTS OF  
THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS  
IN THE CITY OF DENTON, TEXAS**

**All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system without permission in writing from the Director of the Oral History Program or the University Archivist, University of North Texas, Denton, Texas 76203**

Oral History Collection

Judge John D. Wendell

Interviewer: Dr. A. Ray Stephens

Dates: August 18, 1971  
October 1, 1971

Place of Interview: Rockport, Texas

Judge

Wendell: Okay, Ray, I took office in 1951, which makes me being in office for a period of twenty years. I guess the biggest highlight of my tenure in office would have been the oil activity in Aransas County. Our evaluation has increased from 1951 from around fourteen million to, this morning I ran some figures, to forty-one, approximately forty-one million dollars, so we've had a great amount of increased evaluation. Of course, part of this has been due to developments such as Key Allegro, Harbor Oaks, and other subdivisions that have gone in in the past eight years, but most of our valuations in the past twenty years have been oil. I don't know what the people of Aransas County would have done without the oil activity. We started, as I said awhile ago, somewhere around fourteen million valuation. Of course, the devaluation of the dollar has held us down quite a bit, but when I first came in as County Judge, I never will forget that Aransas

County owned one dump truck and a couple of old trucks with side dumps on them. It would take two men to get out and unload the shell off the side, and then take two scoops and unstick the truck because it would stick when they put the shell on top. So we've come a long ways with our equipment as far as road building and so forth, and we're on a voluntary unit plan. There's a 1947 road law that is in existance, and a lot of counties are now going to. Probably Aransas County will in the future, but this has been a voluntarily situation in Aransas County. Each one of the commissioners receives the equipment for a period of nine days each, and it is rotated from Precinct 1 to Precinct 4, then back, which has saved quite a bit of money by having one set of equipment.

Stephens: One set for the entire county?

Wendell: We have one set of equipment for the entire county.

Stephens: And that's since 1947?

Wendell: Now, this is ever since 1951.

Stephens: The '47 law?

Wendell: Yes, but it didn't go, we put it in effect in 1951, right after I was elected County Judge.

Stephens: And you estimate this saves . . .

Wendell: This saves a great deal of money. We have a road foreman that was hired, and he takes care of all the road activities, the dredgings and so forth, which relieves the commissioners of some of this burden, keeps them from following the equipment around.

Stephens: So what do they, the commissioners then become the county executive committee?

Wendell: They are the county executive committee. They are policy makers.

Stephens: In many counties they have . . . they run on the basis of who's the best road commissioner.

Wendell: Yes.

Stephens: And that's not your method here?

Wendell: That's right, we try to work as a unit and . . .

Stephens: No, I mean, when they have competition, say in an election, when you have two or more running for the same position, then they have to use something else as their campaign . . . for the campaign.

Wendell: You mean from the standpoint of who is the best road commissioner?

Stephens: Who is, who should be county commissioner, then. You see, in our area, they run on who is the best road commissioner.

Wendell: I see.

Stephens: That shouldn't have anything to do with it.

Wendell: That shouldn't have anything to do with it.

Stephens: So you hire one . . .

Wendell: We hire a road foreman . . .

Stephens: Do you hire an engineer?

Wendell: He isn't an engineer. He's just a practical man who has experience in road building.

Stephens: And one set of equipment.

Wendell: Yes. In case of emergencies, now, like Celia or other hurricanes that we've had, well then the equipment is pooled back again and is used where it's needed. Then we start over again. In other words, maybe Fulton Beach Road would wash out, or the South Beach Road in Precinct 1, or wherever it was needed for cleaning debris, well then it's pooled back and used where it's needed then. After the disaster, after its debris has been cleared, well then we go back on the same schedule again.

Stephens: Just rotating between the precincts.

Wendell: Rotating.

Stephens: Around the precincts.

Wendell: That's right, and it's worked out real good. It saves money. One set of equipment, actually. We buy through my office--I'm the purchasing agent, they

appointed me as purchasing agent--so I buy for all four precincts, and in turn they buy from me.

Stephens: I see.

Wendell: They don't buy from me, but it's just a matter of . . .

Stephens: A transfer.

Wendell: Yes. We keep a budget within a budget. I put the commissioners on six-month's budget. The first six months is a tax collections income. Then after June, the rest of the year, it's what we call car tag, or license plate money, and it's just about equal in monies, so we actually worked two, a budget within a budget. So, we give each one commissioner an equal amount of money, and all he is responsible for after that time is the amount of mudshell or caliche or culvert pipe or rock or asphalt that's needed to do this work in his precinct. All other expenditures which have been set up by me in my office here, such as diesel fuel, overhaul parts, buying new equipment are budgeted in that manner. So then all they have to worry about is how much money they've got to spend on rebuilding roads or building new roads, and we do this every six months. Each commissioner is given a little ledger book, and it's kept up to date each month. Each month after bills are paid they bring

their little book in and Mrs. Barber checks the book for them and gives them . . . it's just like keeping check stubs.

Stephens: Yes. Then you think this has worked out. How many counties in Texas have gone to this plan?

Wendell: I'd just estimate. Right now I don't think it's over about five counties in the state of Texas.

Stephens: Have you ever . . .

Wendell: I know Galveston County a couple of years ago had gone into it.

Stephens: Were you the first?

Wendell: Ours, maybe just as volunteer might have been one of the first.

Stephens: I see.

Wendell: But we don't actually work on it according to it, 100 per cent the way the law is written. I feel that probably in the future that the people of Aransas County will vote for the 1947 procedure.

Stephens: Oh, you, oh I see . . .

Wendell: They hadn't voted it in, but I feel like they possibly will.

Stephens: If they should want to have their own equipment they could. You'd be forced into it.

Wendell: We'd be forced into it.



Stephens: I see.

Wendell: It's just voluntary.

Stephens: I see.

Wendell: But I feel, though, in the future that this will come to pass, because other counties that have voted it in.

Stephens: Yes.

Wendell: And I noticed the other day where over in Alice, I believe it was Alice, one of the close-by counties, had voted the 1947 road law into effect.

Stephens: Well, Judge, would you mention something about the building of the courthouse, please.

Wendell: Yes. The courthouse is approximately thirteen or fourteen years old. We had a real picturesque architectural monstrosity, I think you might call it, Moorish architecture that was a very beautiful old courthouse, but it wasn't workable. It had no steel in it. It was made of concrete, poured concrete and concrete blocks with a brick veneer on the outside, and it had part of a slat roof on top. A very beautiful old courthouse. It was three stories, but it was not a workable unit as far as a courthouse was concerned. It was nice to look at and so forth, and one of the more interesting things, I guess you might say, about the old courthouse along about the

time, it was about the time they started breaking the sound barrier with jet aircraft. We'd have jet aircraft come in from the Gulf going back towards San Antonio. They'd break the sound barrier, and every time they would, the sonic boom, my desk would be filled with plaster, and everyone else's desk in the courthouse would be full of plaster when they'd break the sound barrier, and, of course, it was quite rickety, and some of the brick we tried to restore it, spent quite a bit of money trying to restore it at different times, repainting the brick to keep it from leaking, it was leaking so bad that moisture was coming through the walls and plaster would fall off. That's one of the reasons that when they broke the sound barrier that it would fall off so readily.

Stephens: Was it making the whole building structurally unsafe, then? Or was only part of it structurally unsafe?

Wendell: Part of the building could have been structurally unsafe, particularly some of the wood floors and the ballasters in the third and second story, but as far as the structure itself, when they were about ready to tear it down it was quite strong, but the plaster that they had used back in those days--I don't know, they might have made it locally--I think the

brick and everything was made locally here for the old courthouse, wouldn't hold paint. It would burn the paint off--the plaster would burn the paint off. And it just wasn't designed for a courthouse from the standpoint of workability. The County and District Clerk's office had a little vault in there--I'd say it was about twelve by six--and that's where the county records were kept.

Stephens: When they built it they didn't have many records, did they?

Wendell: They didn't have too many records.

Stephens: Why did the issue fail so many times?

Wendell: The issue failed because of the site differences, opinions of where the courthouse should be, and they wanted to save the old courthouse. They didn't want to tear down the old courthouse.

Stephens: Because it was a landmark?

Wendell: It was a landmark, and, of course, like I said awhile ago, it was picturesque. But what most of them didn't understand, we had an engineer go over it and an architect to check it out, and from the standpoint of finances it wasn't economically good business to try to keep it. It would have taken so much money to restore it and then to maintain it. It would have

taken as much money to restore it, put it in shape, as it would to build a new courthouse at that time. Of course, we had the jail that was sitting right next door to it, and it was--everything was upstairs, narrow staircases. The sills weren't built proper like they are today. It couldn't pass state inspection.

Stephens: Oh, for security.

Wendell: Well, for security and for sanitation as well.

Stephens: I see. Who was the engineer?

Wendell: Lynn Evans was the architect and engineer.

Stephens: That looked it over and declared the other one unsafe?

Wendell: Yes.

Stephens: Lynn Evans.

Wendell: Lynn Evans, he's an architect from Corpus Christi.

Stephens: Oh, is he still there?

Wendell: He still is. It was Lynn Evans and Associates at that time. He's now by himself.

Stephens: But he did it personally. Do you think he would respond to a letter of inquiry, just asking for information?

Wendell: Yes, I'm sure. Or go by and talk to him. He'd be glad to talk to you. There's, actually the economics involved is one of the final determinations, and after a time the people finally saw the need of a courthouse,

and we had to destroy the old one--put the courthouse right back here on this spot. We built the jail first and moved part of the offices into the jail. My office was across the street over there at the \_\_\_\_\_ building--still there.

Stephens: That little wooden shack over there?

Wendell: Yes, we managed until we got the courthouse built and moved in. And it's a very workable plan, I think. I believe most of our citizens are proud of the new courthouse, yet there still is a little resentment, or just a little bit of doubt yet--they'd still like to have the old one, but you know when you start taxing people to keep something up like that, when they realize it's going to cost them, then they . . .

Stephens: They lose . . .

Wendell: They lose a little . . .

Stephens: Sentimentality.

Wendell: Sentimentality.

Stephens: You know, I've heard some express that it was such a nice, such a pretty building, so picturesque, it's just a shame that it had to go, but, of course, at the same time, they didn't realize . . .

Wendell: They didn't realize what it actually cost to keep it.

Stephens: You put in the paper . . .

Wendell: Oh, yes.

Stephens: About the maintenance . . .

Wendell: The maintenance . . .

Stephens: You still have an old courthouse that will have to be maintained that will still be nonfunctional.

Wendell: Still be nonfunctional, you still wouldn't have a place for your records, you still wouldn't have a commissioner's courtroom--we didn't have one then. The district courtroom was on the second floor. You had to go to what we called two hills of stairs, two turns of stairs--a lot of your older people, it was fairly impossible for them to get up into the district court. If you noticed the north entrance and the back entrance of the courthouse here, we have ramps built so that the older people can get in without climbing stairs--wheel chair people can get in. In other words, we have tried not to cut anyone out of the courthouse. We've done the same thing with the library.

Stephens: Now the library is full already, isn't it, and it's relatively new. What's going to happen there?

Wendell: Yes. Well, I feel that possibly there is some planning on the part of the city to possibly go in jointly with the . . .

Stephens: A City-County Library.

Wendell: A City-County Library.

Stephens: And build a new one?

Wendell: Build a new one.

Stephens: And you can get federal and state funds for that.

Wendell: We can get federal and state funds for that. We didn't on the old one, and we built it alright.

Stephens: I see.

Wendell: We didn't have a bond issue. We issued time warrants and built the library.

Stephens: Now, this courthouse has been paid off?

Wendell: This courthouse has been paid off, yes, several years ago.

Stephens: How did you pay it off so quickly, the oil and gas?

Wendell: Oil and gas.

Stephens: Is that right?

Wendell: We have to give the oil and gas people credit for it. It would have been impossible to have built the courthouse without oil and gas. We had some pretty lean years there.

Stephens: Yes.

Wendell: Even with the oil and gas--tight budgets.

Stephens: What would you think about the school system? Of course, you're not involved with that directly, though, are you?

Wendell: The ex-official County Superintendent of Schools was more or less nothing but a title now. I do have a school board.

Stephens: Do you work with Mr. Gray?

Wendell: I work with Mr. Gray.

Stephens: So you are acquainted with this.

Wendell: I am acquainted with this.

Stephens: Well now, tell me. It seems just an observation that the school district has benefited so greatly from oil and gas that they have a beautiful fiscal plant. Now, with the valuation going down, have they put something aside against that possibly dark future? To maintain what they have will they have to increase the ad valorem tax rate on property?

Wendell: They've had to increase the ad valorem tax on property in the last five years. They've had to increase taxes, even with, of course, oil is depleting, as I mentioned before, but the school is not, they will have to count on these better developments, subdivisions, in Aransas County. And, by the way, we have . . .

Stephens: You mean to make up the difference?

Wendell: Make up the difference. In the last eight or ten years we've witnessed . . .

Stephens: Of course, that not only involves oil and gas--that's part everything, I mean, excuse me, for schools, that's for the county.

Wendell: The whole county.



Stephens: The whole thing. Excuse me, go ahead.

Wendell: But we have a subdivision requirement that's quite rigid. The commissioners and myself admit that it is, but it keeps better developments.

Stephens: Absence of oil and gas money is made up by new . . .

Wendell: Subdivision developments.

Stephens: Subdivision developments, okay, of course . . .

Wendell: Such as Key Allegro, Harbor Oaks is a good example.

Stephens: These are the wealthy second home and retirement home areas.

Wendell: That's right. For instance, Harbor Oaks right now, their lots, I think around average is about twelve thousand to sixteen five, sixteen thousand five hundred dollars more a lot.

Stephens: And you turn around and tax it on that value, then plus the house.

Wendell: Yes. Then the average home, I would guess would be somewhere between thirty and forty-five thousand dollars, present-day building.

Stephens: Including the price of the lot or beyond?

Wendell: Beyond.

Stephens: Beyond the price.

Wendell: Beyond the price of the lot; so we're depending on that type of development, and so far we've been lucky

enough to get it. And as I said, we have a fairly rigid subdivision requirement.

Stephens: This is the county?

Wendell: This is County Commissioner's Court rule that this county . . .

Stephens: Policy . . .

Wendell: This is a county Commissioner's Court requirement.

Stephens: Well now . . .

Wendell: Before they will accept the subdivision if it's going to be a public subdivision that a county will accept the roads for maintenance . . .

Stephens: Oh, this is how you get around it. I was wondering because we didn't have--that's why the absence of, I remember, that we need in the state is a county zoning law.

Wendell: We need it, but we don't have a county zoning, but this is one of the ways we've gotten around it. We require that subdivisions meet our specifications.

Stephens: Oh.

Wendell: And this is to build the roads to our requirements--hot mix for an improved road. We require fireplugs--meets with the state's specifications.

Stephens: And the width of the road in the subdivision?

Wendell: The width of the road, the whole business, the easements.

Stephens: So actually this is the planning and zoning commission at work?

Wendell: Actually, it's the Commissioner's Court that's doing it under what few powers that we have, and the only leverage that we have is that we won't accept that plat for record at the Clerk's office unless it meets our requirement, unless they want to make a private subdivision out of it, then we don't accept the roads. You understand what I mean?

Stephens: Yes.

Wendell: But then they can't sell--there have been several of them try, and the people won't buy them because they know they're going to have to keep the roads up themselves.

Stephens: You won't accept them if they try to deed it over as a public road. You won't accept it unless . . .

Wendell: Unless it meets our requirements.

Stephens: Well, I'll bet that has upset some of them, because when they build it, you're supposed to take it.

Wendell: I have a set of those requirements if you'd like to look at them.

Stephens: Yes, I would. Well, that's good. This is how you're going to control development in the county.

Wendell: This is the only way that we can do it now. So far, we've been able to do it on our marina subdivisions

and other subdivisions, and it gives you a higher class, better subdivision. We also require now, and this is because of the storms, that all utilities are underground, including your telephone and high line. Central Power and Light people and Bell Telephone, all go underground in a new subdivision. If you'll notice the new phase of Key Allegro and Harbor Oaks, you'll see no telephone wires or high lines.

Stephens: What do they use for noncorrosive material, plastic?

Wendell: It's plastic-coated wire that they put under.

Stephens: And it will be noncorrosive?

Wendell: As far as they know.

Stephens: As far as they know.

Wendell: Even though if it was corrosive, if we had a storm every three or four years and blow them down, there you go, see? And you decrease the hazards of live wire with them there.

Stephens: You have power when you need it, too.

Wendell: And you enhance the beauty of the subdivision by not having lines stretched. It all costs a little bit more, but I think it's going to pay off in the long run.

Stephens: Yes.

Wendell: It'll make it a better place to live, we hope.

Stephens: Yes. Now, during the twenty years that you've been County Judge, what would you say would be the main points of the economy of the county; say, the present time, perhaps, as a place to start, and then look back over the last twenty years to see if it has been the same all the way through.

Wendell: It's been fairly the same all the way through. Of course, oil has been a major economy since I've been County Judge the last twenty years. Tourism.

Stephens: Now you're just listing not in any particular order right now.

Wendell: Not any particular order.

Stephens: Okay.

Wendell: I know that oil and gas would be number one.

Stephens: It would be?

Wendell: Number one.

Stephens: Over the last twenty years?

Wendell: Yes, and the shrimp and oyster industry, or fishing business you might call it, and, of course, what little industry we have like Rockport Yacht and Supply and Union Carbide and several off-shore drilling companies that work out of here, Caspary and Wendell, and there are several other people that have fairly large payrolls, but that is all connected with the oil activities.

Stephens: Could you include, which is the most important now, tourism or fishing, commercial fishing?

Wendell: I actually don't have any figures on it. It's hard to determine. I guess tourism would probably be ahead of fishing right at the present time.

Stephens: That spreads it around a little more through the community.

Wendell: Spreads it around, yes.

Stephens: Now all the fisheries, that's one of the things I haven't had time to do, and that's look into the fishing industry, but is it owned elsewhere, and do the profits leave Aransas County as soon as the ships dock and the fish are unloaded?

Wendell: No. No, that's one thing that I've always . . .

Stephens: It's home-owned.

Wendell: It's home-owned. I'm always in doubt about tourism, and sometimes the fishing industry. For example, in oyster season--I don't know, have you ever watched them opening oysters? There's a group of people that make a living doing this, and also there's heading shrimp in shrimp season and peeling shrimp, preparing shrimp before it's shipped off.

Stephens: Where is this?

Wendell: So there is a great number of people at this directly. Sometimes we don't stop to see actually, we'll say,

well, how many million dollars' worth of shrimp were brought into Rockport or Aransas County in the past year--maybe they'll give a figure, but it's not broken down onto how many people touched this X number of million dollars of handling the seafood after it's once brought on shore. Some of it's frozen and sent out, and a lot of it is just peeled, and some of them are frozen with the peeling on. Some of them are peeled completely and frozen deveined. Some of them in the Aransas Pass area are breaded down there in Aransas County and boxed and sent off.

Stephens: You mean in Aransas Pass, then they have some boat docks, some ship--what do you call those? Not a shipyard. It's a processing plant.

Wendell: Yeah, a processing plant.

Stephens: Is that what they're called?

Wendell: Yes.

Stephens: Sort of a packing house? Are those in Aransas County?

Wendell: They're in Aransas County, most of them are, yes. They have a huge industry. They have as many as seven hundred boats sometimes tied up in that harbor down there during shrimping season.

Stephens: Well then, Conn Brown Harbor is now in Aransas County.

Wendell: Aransas County. Just a short part of it is in Nueces County.

Stephens: Just the entrance to it.

Wendell: Yes.

Stephens: The harbor itself. Now what about the processing plants--do they contribute to the county?

Wendell: They certainly do.

Stephens: So they are in . . .

Wendell: Yes.

Stephens: I see.

Wendell: So when you take all these factors into hand and look at them, there are so many people involved in the fishing industry before they are actually sold. Same way with the fish.

Stephens: So it would be difficult to say which contributes the most to the economy.

Wendell: It would be difficult for me to say which actually, how many people actually got to touch that dollar. Of course, tourism, now then we go back again--our service stations, grocery stores . . .

Stephens: You see them coming and going.

Wendell: You see them coming and going.

Stephens: Restaurants, motels . . .



Wendell: But maybe the number of people directly makes a living. I'm in doubts whether tourism gets more dollars to more people than the fishing industry. Possibly there is more dollars left in the community by tourism, but I believe when you'd look at from the standpoint of how many people work in each industry-- you'd consider tourism an industry--I believe that possibly the fishing industry would touch more people.

Stephens: I see.

Wendell: And you should maybe take a tour of Conn Brown Harbor and through their ice plants, their freezer plants, and so forth, and, of course, we have one right down here, Jackson, and then we have a co-op here, and Casterline Fish Company in Fulton.

Stephens: Yes, I've met Mr. Casterline. When is shrimping and oystering season?

Wendell: Well actually, it's shrimping season pretty much the year around. They cut out shrimping in the bays during certain times and in the Gulf at certain times. You can go out over the three-mile limit or the nine-mile limit, and the larger boats go fishing year around if they want to. The larger boats go out and bring the shrimp back, red snappers, and so on.

Stephens: So the fishing goes on all the time.

Wendell: The fishing goes on the whole time, and oystering is the same way.

Stephens: Oh, really? I thought, what about . . .

Wendell: Oystering starts in September, the "r" months.

Stephens: The "r" months, yes, I've heard about that.

Wendell: Yes.

Stephens: What about all this mercury in the water now? Do you think that's going to affect the oyster business?

Wendell: It possibly could. What information I've gotten recently, it hasn't affected the oysters in Aransas Bay. Actually, your best oysters are out in the Aransas Bay right here. Rockport's full of them.

Stephens: Oh, really?

Wendell: It's not near as many as it used to be. I guess, probably has a lot of factors that are involved, like the Intracoastal Canal--silt from it, you know, covering up the weeds and so forth. The oyster industry was for years, and you still see it in different places on menus, Corpus Christi and other places--they have Rockport oysters.

Stephens: Is that right?

Wendell: We've had the best oysters, of course I'm bragging, but I should. I live here. I've eaten enough of them. We have had the best oysters on the whole Gulf coast, of anyplace, the ones that come out of this particular bay.

Stephens: I see. Judge Wendell, please comment on the subject of county boundary disputes.

Wendell: County boundaries. That's been a good one I think the last ten years, fourteen years. The county boundary dispute had several aspects that most people didn't consider. The Aransas County Navigation District was the first to instigate this little matter that took us so long to resolve. They found out one day that they were leasing some land over by Harbor Island and thought it was in Aransas County, and it ended up it was supposed to have been in the Nueces area. So they come to the Commissioner's Court and asked us to try to get our boundary lines straightened out for several reasons. This one little thing brought it to a head, but we didn't have a projecture or a line between Aransas and Nueces County and to the Gulf of Mexico, and as you well know of oil activity in the Gulf of Mexico, and we don't today exactly what may happen, exactly how much the valuation will be out there or what; but we didn't have a real line between Nueces and Aransas County, and I had gone to a meeting, I think it was in Austin, one time to meet with some of the county judges of coastal, on the Gulf Coast, all the county judges on

the Gulf Coast, so we could all try to sit down and figure out a way or try to come to some agreement on our boundaries and its projecture into the Gulf of Mexico and at what angle, straight out or what have you, and nearly every one of them had different ideas, and no one could come up with an answer. So one of our first, we tried to, we thought possibly that this thing would work out sooner with Nueces County, but it did drag out some thirteen or fourteen years, but most people thought what we was fighting over was just a little piece of land over here, but this was not the case. What we wanted to do is to move them. Of course, we would have taken this other land in the suit if . . . . We didn't know who would have won the suit, actually, if we'd ever gone to court on it. We didn't; we settled it, as you know, but we did, we settled the agreement at Nueces County--moved their boundary back off of our shore to the middle of the Intracoastal Canal between here and Aransas Pass, and that we use the jetties and the projecture from the jetties at Port Aransas at a certain angle and to the Gulf of Mexico and we have the coordinates all tied down now. But oil activities in those areas in the Gulf of Mexico and down between here and Aransas

Pass, we'll know what county they're in. We'll know who to tax. So it wasn't a matter, actually, of trying to fight over some marsh land. We didn't have a boundary, but we do now.

Stephens: I see. So this boundary dispute was just to establish it somewhere.

Wendell: We needed to establish a boundary, and I felt that possibly if the present County Judge in Nueces County, Noah Kennedy, Jr., was County Judge at this time, but I believed that we could work this thing out. The other judge was an older fellow. I went to school with this man's son. He probably didn't want to talk to me anyway, you know. He didn't want to talk to a kid, and I was twenty-seven years old when I was elected County Judge, so we just couldn't communicate. He was . . .

Stephens: He also came from a powerful community and this was small.

Wendell: We were small and he was hell-bend on, "We're not going to give them a damn thing, and I won't do this and I won't do that," and even when Judge Kennedy was elected he went before the Commissioners Court and asked them not to settle out with Aransas County. He's just a hard headed business man.

Stephens: Noah Kennedy.

- Wendell: No, Noah wasn't, but Jerome Jalufka was.
- Stephens: Oh, Jerome Jalufka was the judge then.
- Wendell: Yes. Of course, I was friends with Jalufka's boy, went to school with him. He and I used to ride back and forth to college.
- Stephens: But he was uncooperative on reaching a settlement.
- Wendell: Yes. I know if it was because, maybe because I was the age of his son, or just exactly what the problem was. Sometimes that does affect a man's mind.
- Stephens: Yes, I suppose. What did Aransas County actually gain then, once it was all settled this year?
- Wendell: We gained I don't know exactly how many square miles of land, but we did gain in an area, and one of the main things that we did gain--we moved their boundary, there was supposed to have been boundary, off of the shores of Aransas County between here and Aransas Pass and moved it to the center of the Intracoastal Canal. So our shorelines and water lines are all in Aransas County now, and they weren't before, according to what they contended.
- Stephens: You got Conn Brown Harbor, and you didn't have it before, is that correct?
- Wendell: No, we had Conn Brown Harbor.
- Stephens: You had it. That's in the Aransas Navigational District.

Wendell: Right. But we did receive a little more of Conn  
Brown Harbor than we had.

Stephens: You got part of the Harbor, the lighthouse . . .

Wendell: We got the lighthouse.

Stephens: And some of those islands inbetween.

Wendell: And we got the Talley Islands inbetween.

Stephens: Shellbank.

Wendell: Yes.

Stephens: Was that all, just Shellbank and Talley, or was  
Traylor Island part of that?

Wendell: I believe we did get part of Traylor. I'd have to  
look that up.

Stephens: Tommy [Griffith, the County Surveyor] would have that,  
wouldn't he?

Wendell: Yes, Tommy's got one of them. I've got one here,  
too, but you can check that out.

Stephens: Yes.

Wendell: One of the main things, like I said awhile ago, is  
the projecture of our lines nine miles out.

Stephens: I see. So but now it is for certain where the  
boundary line is.

Wendell: Well, Aransas County wasn't particularly interested  
in trying to take Port Aransas from Nueces County,  
because of the hardship of maintaining the roads over  
there. We'd have to go back and forth on the ferry,

police problems, a whole lot of things that we considered. Of course, anyone would have liked to have had Harbor Island, because it's a, have you been over to Harbor Island?

Stephens: No, we're going this afternoon.

Wendell: Okay. Well, then you look at the tank field over there, and you'll see all the valuation sitting around (chuckle).

Stephens: (Chuckle) That's the reason you didn't get it all. It's a ship channel, so you should have gotten it.

Wendell: Yes. That's right. It's no doubt in mind after talking to Mr. Hobart Huson, our attorney in this case, that what we asked for to start off with rightfully belonged to Aransas County, but let's face it and be realistic about it. You take Aransas County with a population of somewhere around nine thousand, and Nueces County-- I don't even want to guess what their population is. Do you know?

Stephens: No, I surely don't.

Wendell: It's way up there. The politics involved . . .

Stephens: Three hundred fifty thousand, at least.

Wendell: Yes, at least. The politics involved, but then how could we have gotten any more.

Stephens: That's right. So we're fortunate they settled it the way they did.



Wendell: We settled out.

Stephens: Of course, you had them, though.

Wendell: It was dragging too long. It didn't cost us a fraction of what it cost Nueces County.

Stephens: Judge Wendell, would you mind commenting on the importance of the Intracoastal Canal to Aransas County.

Wendell: The Intracoastal Canal has played a major factor in our off-shore drilling activities, as well as the shrimping industry in Aransas County. We have had in the past five, six, to seven years boats that run from one hundred ten to one hundred twenty-five feet in length come into the Cove Harbor for supplies, water for off-shore drilling, as well as boats from seventy-five to ninety-two to three foot in length that haul crews and personnel back and forth to the Gulf drilling rigs. If it wasn't for the Intracoastal Canal, boats of this size could not come into Cove Harbor or into the Rockport area. In recent years, I'm guessing now, five, six, seven years ago, the Intracoastal Canal detoured into the Cove Harbor and hugged the coast all the way into Conn Brown Harbor between Aransas Pass and Rockport, which gave a smooth water between these two towns and out to Port Aransas during rough weather, or rough water during bad weather.

Part of this Intracoastal Canal between Rockport and Aransas Pass has a spoil or island thrown to the eastward side, which protects from the rough winds and water.

Stephens: How deep is the canal did you say?

Wendell: The canal is probably--I'm not sure on this--I would guess somewhere around eight to ten feet in depth.

Stephens: Now with larger ships being constructed, is this deep enough?

Wendell: It's not, actually it isn't as deep as what we really need. We hope in the future that we'll get fourteen-foot of deep water all the way into Fulton Harbor and to the harbor here at Rockport. Also, the Rockport Yacht and Supply Company are building larger vessels at the present time. They run from seventy-five to eighty-feet in length, and a lot of these boats will draw from ten to twelve feet of water, and the Casterline Fish Company in Fulton--they have several boats that, when loaded with fuel or loaded with shrimp, either coming or going, they either have an overload of fuel leaving or, we hope, overloaded with shrimp coming in, so they'll draw quite a bit of water, and at the present time at Fulton those boats come in to the harbor up there have some difficulty, and it's the hope of

the Navigation District and the majority of the citizens, I believe, that this channel will be deepened by either the Navigation District or probably federal aid to put it to a twelve to fourteen foot minimum.

Stephens: Have you started with Congressman John Young on the federal aid?

Wendell: Yes, it has been considered, and the Navigation District is working on that project right now, and Congressman Young is, or has been, contacted on it.

Stephens: Do you see any possibility of the fish companies or whoever used the canal and needs a deeper harbor, do you see any possibility of them leaving if the harbor isn't deepened?

Wendell: I think very definitely so, particularly in the Fulton area and even right here in Rockport where they're building these larger boats, they're having difficulty getting. They'll either move to Cover Harbor or move on into Aransas Pass, or ship it out, or they'll probably shrimp out of some other port along the Texas coast--maybe even Corpus Christi. However, Corpus doesn't have the facilities for receiving the product, shrimp product, over there. Port Aransas could become a bigger port, I think, in the shrimping industry if we fail here to get deep water, but I think it's a must, it is a must that Aransas County

get twelve to fourteen foot water in the next couple of years. We have to if we're going to compete with the other ports.

Stephens: Now this will be a substantial tax loss if those companies leave.

Wendell: Well, yes, it will be a substantial tax loss from the standpoint of taxation on boats and the fish houses and their equipment. Also, as we stated earlier in our interview, the shrimping industry and the fishing industry touch many people that work on the boats, as well as processing of the product.

Stephens: Okay. If we can move to another topic, then, while we're talking about the Navigation District, would you comment on the importance of the Navigation District to the community.

Wendell: The Navigation District has played a very important part to the community. We have our, as we mentioned the Cove Harbor, the Fulton Harbor, the Rockport Harbor, and what is known as Ski Basin, which, Key Allegro is located on this particular basin, or canal, and waterway that has been man-made partially by the Aransas County Navigation District. It also will affect Harbor Oaks, which adjoins the Ski Basin area. It brings--I think they have somewhere around five or

six feet of water that comes into Harbor Oaks and Key Allegro at the present time, and because of this waterway into these two subdivisions there is a spread of somewhere between twelve to sixteen to seventeen thousand dollars that these lots sell for.

Stephens: Oh.

Wendell: Consequently, the people that will spend this type of money for a sixteen, seventeen thousand dollar lot-- they will put somewhere close to thirty, thirty-five, forty thousand dollar home. In return, well then this helps the tax situation in the county and the school district, as well as the navigation district.

Stephens: Many of these are second homes, too.

Wendell: Many of them are second homes, but I've noticed in the last couple of years they're becoming permanent homes. We like to brag about Aransas County, but we feel that we have one of the best suitable climates and more to offer to retired people or anyone that wants a second home than anyone else on the coast.

Stephens: Is Neptune Harbor a part of this Navigation District dredging?

Wendell: No, it isn't. Neptune Harbor was an independent subdivision put on with a--they dug their own canals. They didn't have too far to go for deep water, but it is a private waterway.

Stephens: I see. Now, you didn't mention Conn Brown Harbor.  
Isn't that in this navigation district?

Wendell: Yes. No, Conn Brown Harbor is not in the navigation  
district of Aransas County. That belongs to the  
city of Aransas Pass.

Stephens: Oh.

Wendell: It is owned by the city of Aransas Pass, and--not  
owned, but it's, it is a project of the city of Aransas  
Pass--Conn Brown Harbor--and does not come under the  
jurisdiction of Aransas County Navigation District.

Stephens: So you go right up to Conn Brown Harbor, then, as far  
as your jurisdiction is concerned.

Wendell: That's right.

Stephens: Does your jurisdiction extend down to these new islands  
you gained in the boundary dispute?

Wendell: Yes. Well, actually the Aransas County Navigation  
District covers the whole county, but it's just like  
the city of Rockport or the city of Aransas Pass.  
They built these facilities and they have control  
over them. The navigation district doesn't control  
them, or try to control them. All the revenues off  
of the harbors, rents and so forth, go to the city  
of Aransas Pass, and in turn this is used to keep  
the harbor up. They maintain the harbor themselves,

so to speak, and receive what rentals that they get off them. It does mean a great deal to the city of Aransas Pass to have Conn Brown Harbor because, primarily, I would say, the fishing industry is their major industry in Aransas Pass.

Stephens: I would say in terms of Shellback Island and your side of Harbor Island--any possibilities of terminal facilities or industry being located there and using the intracoastal canal, I suppose the navigation district will have to approve any dredging, wouldn't it?

Wendell: They will have to approve any dredging. There is at the present time I've noticed--I was invited to a meeting several weeks ago, and was unable to go, in Aransas Pass--there is an attempt now to deepen water from Port Aransas to Aransas Pass to Conn Brown Harbor, and I feel that, in due time that this particular canal will be widened and deepened, and there's no reason why we can't get ships, or the smaller ships, into, we're talking about maybe fifteen or twenty years off, into Aransas Pass and on up to the Intracoastal Canal towards Rockport. This could develop as a large port for foreign shipping . . .

Stephens: Rockport, you mean?

Wendell: Rockport, and particularly Aransas Pass.

Stephens: Oh.

Wendell: And between Aransas Pass and Rockport because there is a causeway going over to Port Aransas from Aransas Pass, and the Intracoastal Canal is on the Rockport-Aransas County side, so all the deep development at the present time will come into that area which comes into Aransas County, Aransas Pass, and I feel that the potential is great for a natural harbor in there.

Stephens: I see.

Wendell: And the flow of the water, I've been told, helps open and keep, and helps maintain the channel to a certain extent.

Stephens: You mean it scours?

Wendell: It pulls it through there, yes.

Stephens: Is that right?

Wendell: Where on the opposite side it has a tendency to fill up.

Stephens: Now, this is right down through the middle of Harbor Island, isn't it?

Wendell: That's right.

Stephens: The Intracoastal Canal.

Wendell: Well, it's on the north side of Harbor Island.

Stephens: Oh, North side.

Wendell: But it does go right beside of Harbor Island.

Stephens: Oh, I see.



- Wendell: Maybe a portion of . . . through a portion of it in one spot, but we feel that from the lighthouse on into Cove Harbor, that area, in due time will develop, will be a tremendous port.
- Stephens: Oh.
- Wendell: It's protected in every way, and it's some about seven miles across over to Port Aransas, to Aransas Pass, maybe less than that, where the ships at present time go into Corpus Christi. We're talking about twenty-five miles, I guess. The distances coming into Aransas Pass and then towards Cove Harbor is shorter and is a more natural island, a natural facility, would be a more natural facility.
- Stephens: This doesn't really fit, but I'll ask it. Now we've mentioned it, the lighthouse is now in Aransas County.
- Wendell: Right.
- Stephens: Do you see any possibilities of making that a tourist attraction, and thereby advertising it in the name of the county?
- Wendell: No. I can't see any plans in the near future for that. However, St. Joseph Island, I believe in the next few years, within five years, will probably develop, which adjoins, is just right across the little channel there. We feel that probably the traffic and car traffic go

over to the ferry landing in Port Aransas and cross over to St. Joseph Island without any trouble at all, and St. Joseph Island will develop like Padre Island some time in the future.

Stephens: But it'll be a private development, being that it's owned by . . .

Wendell: It's privately owned and will be a private development, and, as far as I'm concerned, I hope it stays that way. Padre Island and Mustang Island will be a national seashore, and I feel like that's enough, enough mileage.

Stephens: Also you have another reason, don't you.

Wendell: I have another reason. Maybe it's selfish, but I like to see private enterprise develop properly.

Stephens: Well, I was thinking in terms of the tax money.

Wendell: Well that will--naturally, private enterprise will put the tax money into Aransas County.

Stephens: You've had experience with, while you've been County Judge, you've had experience with land taken out of private hands into public hands and the loss of tax revenue. Building up to that point, would you say something about the school and county tax revaluation controversy of the early 1960's and then from that into the Tatton Ranch attempt to sale and then eventual gift to expand the Aransas Wildlife Refuge.

Wendell: Yes. In the early 1960's Aransas County went through a tax revaluation program where the Thomas Y. Pickett Company was, tax valuation engineers, were hired to revalue all of the real property in Aransas County, including the homes on the real property.

Stephens: That's in Corpus Christi, the Pickett Company?

Wendell: Yes.

Stephens: Is that their home base?

Wendell: Dallas is their actual home base, but they do have an office in Corpus Christi.

Stephens: And this was the first one since when, your revaluation . . .

Wendell: This was the first revaluation program I believe that Aransas County had ever had, and the reason this was brought about is the request of the oil companies. The oil companies were paying what they felt was a fair share of valuation, oil valuation, and that the local taxpayers or landowners were at a different percentage, particularly the homes and a whole lot of the real property, too, the acreage in lots. In other words, they weren't equalized, so we did go into this program in 1962, so we, I think it was '61, '62, or the early sixties, and we revalued every piece of property in Aransas County, and out of this we got a lawsuit with the Tatton Ranch and also the St Joseph Island people.

Stephens: And several others, as I remember.

Wendell: Several others joined in on the suit.

Stephens: Were those separate suits, or was it one suit?

Wendell: The Tatton property was one suit, and the island was another suit. I may be wrong, and I believe there's some, a few individuals that went together on an individual suit that was dropped real quick, but the Tatton people then, we won the case. It took several years. They tried to give the federal government their portion, or not to give it to them, try to sell the federal government their portion of the ranch in Aransas County, stating that it was not any good for farming, or that it wasn't any good for ranching, and so forth, and, of course, we knew better, that it was. It was just Mr. Tatton was contrary, old gentleman, and we'd won a lawsuit against him, and he was still, he still wanted his revenge.

Stephens: Is it, you think that was his main motivation.

Wendell: There's no doubt in my mind.

Stephens: Oh. Now what was his name?

Wendell: Tatton.

Stephens: No, his first name. Virginia was the wife's name.

Wendell: Virginia was his wife. I can't remember Mr. Tatton's first name, but, and then in later years after we had

so many protests from different ones in the area, particularly the St. Charles Bay Club people and that area where we have private hunting clubs--this would have interfered with their hunting and so forth in that area by closing down all of that portion of Aransas County, because we have, as you know, hunting season, duck hunting and goose hunting in this area is very prominent. Each year we have many hunters come down here, and all of this would have been interfered. Later years, a few years ago finally Mr. Tatton got his revenge in one sense, that he turned around and gave it to them, gave a portion of this property that he was going to sell to the federal people.

Stephens: Do you remember how many acres?

Wendell: I don't have the exact number of acres, and . . .

Stephens: But it was the adjoining land, to the existing refuge.

Wendell: Adjoining land, and since that time they're farming, the federal government's farming this land and raising grain on it to feed the birds.

Stephens: Oh.

Wendell: It's excellent land, with a little know-how, and it has been proven that it was exactly what we said it was to start off with. We do get revenue off of it that the federal government has to pay us.

- Stephens: Now, what, but it's not to the extent that the taxation would yield.
- Wendell: Well, it's nearly as much as the taxation would have revealed back then, but there'll be no development on that area now.
- Stephens: Yes.
- Wendell: And it wasn't in--see part of it was on Copano Bay, head of Copano Bay and Saint Charles Bay, up at the head of Saint Charles Bay. There's a little slough that runs up there, well there is water, there's a waterfront on this property which is valuable.
- Stephens: Yes.
- Wendell: I believe it's . . . Cavassa Creek is the name of it that runs up into the area, but there is a waterway that runs into the Tatton property. That's the reason it was so important to the duck hunting and the goose hunting in that area.
- Stephens: Oh. Well, what about the controversy, now. You all marshalled your forces between here and Congress, didn't you?
- Wendell: Yes.
- Stephens: How did you go about doing that? Who was the field marshall for such a war.
- Wendell: Well, we had a, I guess most of it come out of my office. It was a lot of fun (chuckle).

Stephens: (Chuckle).

Wendell: And we also hired Mr. Jack Baughman at that time to do most of our publicity on it, and we had a letter writing campaign, and we had people from all over the state of Texas that protested at the time when he was trying to sell it, and we won that round, but when he wanted to give it away, why then, there's not a whole lot you can do when a man just wants to give his property away. Of course, I know that on part of it he retained probably his grazing rights for his cattle, so he didn't lose everything. He's still got a free tax ride, or did have a free tax ride there from the standpoint of what he gave them for the prairie chickens and so forth--they still run cattle on that area there, so he has free grazing on federal land.

Stephens: He doesn't pay any grazing fees?

Wendell: No. To my understanding he doesn't.

Stephens: But he still has the mineral rights.

Wendell: I'm sure that he owns the mineral rights. I haven't gone into that aspect of it, but as far as I know, in that particular area there, there is no oil development at the present time. There is on some of his other property.

Stephens: I see. Now, I understand from reading the Rockport Pilot that the controversy that you all raised at this time forced the federal government to re . . . well, let me back up, forced the federal government to look again at its in lieu of tax payments, and actually increased the payments that you received.

Wendell: Right.

Stephens: How much? Was it double or more?

Wendell: I don't have those figures. It could be . . .

Stephens: But it was a direct result of your raising a fuss.

Wendell: Yes. Right.

Stephens: So you accomplished that much, at least.

Wendell: Right. You know, you can federalize if you're not careful with all your property. That's another one of the reasons I don't want to see St Joseph Island go into federal hands again. We've got the Blackjack Peninsula over here--it's all federalized, along with what Mr. Tatton has given them now, and I didn't have, sorry I don't have all those figures, but it's a tremendous number of acres out of Aransas County that is under the jurisdiction of the federal government, and we have other areas here in the county that's under the jurisdiction of the state--Goose Island State Park and other refuge for birds in Aransas County.



Stephens: Well, what is that, Mud Island?

Wendell: Well, there's part of even Canoe Lake down here that  
. . .

Stephens: Oh, the Connie Hagar?

Wendell: The Connie Hagar and other areas along the beach that  
has been set aside as a sanctuary for birds.

Stephens: Oh. So, therefore it never can be developed.

Wendell: Well, it can be developed, but every time you go in  
to develop a piece of property . . . they've had some  
difficulty with Harbor Oaks and this development because  
of controversial controversies set up by bird watchers  
and certain people. They didn't want them to dredge  
in, bring in the deep water into that area. They  
wanted to leave it sitting there for the birds.

Stephens: Yes.

Wendell: But it was too valuable piece of property. I mean,  
I don't think a bird knows the difference between a  
sixteen thousand dollar lot than he does a hundred  
and sixty dollar lot. To me it's a lot of damn  
foolishness, if I may say damn foolishness on your  
microphone.

Shephens: (Chuckle).

Wendell: Just say that a bird has to have a certain spot in  
the . . . absolutely to stop all progress in the community,

and the people that are, some of the same people that are hollering don't chase away our birds--I don't believe in killing birds and destroying their nests or--but I think they can be put in places that they will thrive as well as a spot where there's maybe a third of the valuation of the county, it could exist. These same people that want all this, at the same time they're asking Aransas County for different things, but you know you've got to have tax dollars to perform.

Stephens: Yes. Now you do have some local conservationists here, don't you?

Wendell: Yes, we certainly do.

Stephens: Now, do they have a conservation society?

Wendell: They have a conservation society.

Stephens: For Aransas County, or is it part of the coastal bend?

Wendell: Well, I think they have one--here in Aransas County.

Stephens: Who is in charge of that?

Wendell: Mr. M. W. Cochran was in charge. I don't know who is the head of it at the present time. They send me a card. I belong to it, but I don't attend any of the meetings . . . not that I don't believe in it, because I certainly believe in conservation. I feel that we have to have . . . we all have to live together with the same things. We have to have conservation,

out I'm just looking through some cards here to see if I had, to see who's the head of it at the present time. It's a good organization.

Stephens: Yes. What do they do that's worthwhile?

Wendell: Well, they do try to preserve the different areas for the birds, and they try to preserve certain areas from dredging, if it interferes with the fish hatching and fish industry, and they, it's more or less, though, a sportsman's organization.

Stephens: Sportsman's organization. Now, do they also protest against the big mudshell dredgers out in the bay?

Wendell: They protest against mudshell dredging and oilwell drilling in the bay.

Stephens: Are they successful in keeping down pollution and destruction?

Wendell: In many cases they are. I feel like if it wasn't for this organization, that our drilling activities wouldn't be watched as close, and possibly that the dredging wouldn't be watched as close, but all these things--you have to live with it all. But everybody needs to be protected so you need an organization.

Stephens: Yes. Speaking of the birds again, does the New York Zoological Society or something like that have one of the Islands leased? Mud Island is it?

Wendell: If they do, I don't know about it.

Stephens: I've forgotten the exact name of that organization.

Wendell: It could be very possible that this is true.

Stephens: Now, does the Audubon Society play any part in the county?

Wendell: They, yes, they're in and out . . .

Stephens: Do you have a chapter here, do they just, people come and visit.

Wendell: I don't believe they have a chapter. Connie Hagar more or less had a little group here, but I don't know if it was an Aransas County group, or people from all over the states, or the whole United States used to come here and chat with her and talk about birds and so forth and have little seminars. She is a very interested person, a very interesting person, and we have many visitors just come by and talk to her.

Stephens: I see.

Wendell: I think about birds. I guess she knew more about wildlife on the Gulf Texas coast than anyone else, any one person.

Stephens: What about the Nueces County water district, or no . . .

Wendell: The Aransas County Conservation Reclamation District?

Stephens: Yes. It brings in Nueces County water.

Wendell: Yes. This district was formed I think somewhere around five or six years ago and has been successful, last year, getting water into Aransas County by this eighteen-inch water main into Aransas County from San Patricio, from the Nueces River shed, or water, and it's going to play a very important part on the development of the county, for the simple reason that we depend completely on water wells here. With the increase of population we also have an increase of building, more water wells, but right along with it we have septic tanks and sewer systems that are springing up all over the county, and there's going to be a possible chance of, this isn't guarded very carefully, of pollution of water wells, and there's many areas of the county that still doesn't have water, including myself out where I live, I live out in the country, I don't have city water, which I'd like very much to have, and I feel maybe that in the next couple of years that the Conservation Reclamation District, along with the aid, help of the city, will get water out our way. But right along with the pollution, and if you don't mind, and the water district, Aransas County Commissioner's Court is in the process now of passing an order down controlling septic tanks and their usage and their installation.

Stephens: Under what law?

Wendell: Under the Water Quality Act law that was just passed.  
I can't quote you the exact law.

Stephens: This year?

Wendell: Last year.

Stephens: Oh.

Wendell: It gives the Commissioner's Court the authority to  
pass orders controlling.

Stephens: You mean the Sixty-second Legislature?

Wendell: Yes. It'll give the Commissioner's Court the authority  
to pass orders controlling septic tanks.

Stephens: Now that's something that's been badly needed that  
they never had.

Wendell: Yes. Anyone that has a development like a motel,  
hotel that's over three units will have to go directly  
to the Water Quality Board and the State Health  
Department . . .

Stephens: Or mobile home parks.

Wendell: . . . or mobile home parks--to get their approval.

Stephens: I see.

Wendell: On their sewage, tax sewage that they'll use for  
those facilities.

Stephens: Now this . . .

Wendell: This in turn is going to bring about, I believe-- maybe I won't see it--a sewer system for Aransas County, which will also be needed.

Stephens: Yes.

Wendell: This all goes back again to our Water Quality Board and their, we were talking about conservation awhile ago and pollution of our waters and so forth, and the, to get back to our original subject the Conservation Reclamation District water has or will at least take care of a great number of people in Aransas County, or is at the present time protecting them from the sewage that may go into their private wells. They're hooked on to city water, which is approved water, and so this has been a great step towards development in Aransas County.

Stephens: Judge, who was responsible for the formation of the Conservation and Water District? I've forgotten that name.

Wendell: The, there's a group of citizens that, the committee, that got together and more or less drew up the standards that we're going to go by, and the fiscal agent out of Dallas was hired to draw up the charter, so to speak. I went to Austin on it several times, and . . .

Stephens: Do you have to get permission from the Legislature?

Wendell: Yes, we certainly did. We had to get permission from the Legislature. You get it approved--it is approved. It's in the law books.

Stephens: Did Nueces County protest?

Wendell: We had several different outside counties that protested to a certain aspect of the original . . .

Stephens: They were afraid you were stealing their water?

Wendell: They didn't want us to steal their water, and they didn't care about us having rights of imminent domain in their county, because after all we had to have water lines. It was one little thing after the other that stopped us and held us back.

Stephens: About how long did it take you from the time you started?

Wendell: It took us about three years . . .

Stephens: About three years before it became law.

Wendell: Yes. First we asked for tax. As it's formed now there is no tax to support the Conservation Reclamation District. It's your own revenue.

Stephens: Oh, you mean the users pay for it?

Wendell: The users pay for it. Whereby, if it was given by tax--they did give them seventy thousand dollars' worth of tax to start it off with, where they hired their engineers, Lockwood, Andrews and Newman, then did the engineering on the project.



Stephens: Was it Lockwood . . .

Wendell: Andrews and Newman.

Stephens: Andrews and Newman of Dallas?

Wendell: It was out of Corpus Christi, but I believe their main office is in Houston. I'm not sure. But it took some time to get the water in, and like I say, it's been in now a year, and I believe that it'll probably bring in some industry, but it certainly will increase our building in Aransas County, or aid in the building of Aransas County--simple reason you can go and hook onto this, their water line, if you're not too far away probably for a couple hundred dollars. You drill a well--it'll cost you five or six hundred dollars.

Stephens: And then you've got better quality water with the Nueces County water.

Wendell: You've got a whole lot better quality water, and it's safe water.

Stephens: Yes. You've seen several subdivisions come in in the past few years when you didn't have this available supply of water--good quality water, too--but now that you have it, do you think this will stimulate the addition of subdivisions?

Wendell: I certainly do. The Harbor Oaks subdivision that has just been developed has city water, and it's hooked onto this line we spoke of awhile ago, and I think this is going to be a great factor to that. I mean, you know, Key Allegro has been an operation under construction for the last eight years, and one of their main problems out there has been water. They're now getting city water on Key Allegro. Before this time they were . . . had their own wells drilled at one area. They were trying to furnish water to those people. Well, now they have their Nueces water from the city of Rockport Conservation Reclamation District, and it's helping those people a great . . . just a whole lot. Water is a little bit high over there at the present time, but I think they'll get that worked out in the near future. But there you are, Key Allegro, Harbor Oaks, Harbor Oaks went right in with their water, they've got city sewage, all the utilities underground. This is a requirement of Aransas County. Fire plugs placed every five hundred feet, or every thousand feet. Every fire plug must be available from one point to another five hundred feet, which would cover a thousand. Oh, telephone lines, and so forth, are under. Key

Allegro's doing the same, so the water, bringing the conservation water in helped all these people get all this together.

Stephens: I see.

Wendell: Consequently, we got a better development under hand now. We don't like the little bitty subdivisions that don't go in proper. Maybe I'd mentioned this earlier to you. It's been a month or two since we've talked. But you take a subdivision that's selling lots for five, six, seven hundred dollars or even a thousand dollars. It is a tax drag on the citizens of the county unless whoever buys that lot puts a pretty expensive home on it, and as a rule where you have lots that sell for that you don't find a more expensive home, and with thirty cents on a dollar, that's what you collect on a lot if it's valued at five hundred dollars. For instance, if we used to take 20 per cent of it, you can see how much taxable revenue we get out of it, out of that one lot, it would be a tax drag on the other citizens of the county. By the time we process a five hundred dollar lot and get it back on the tax roles with the cost of postage stamps alone right now, and, of course, the cost of all of our records--we'd be lucky to break

even on a five hundred dollar lot, and some of the people that own a five hundred dollar lot require or want just as much service from the county as the fifteen thousand dollar lot. Of course, they're entitled to it and should get it, and you don't go out and gather up all these poor people like myself and kill us because we don't have money. . . to buy these expensive pieces of property.

Stephens: The Aransas County Airport has been influential in the development of the county, I suppose.

Wendell: Much more than the average citizen of Aransas County could visualize, I think.

Stephens: Since 1951, you were elected in '52?

Wendell: '51, I came in in '51--elected in 1950, took office in '51.

Stephens: So, in twenty years of observation, then, official observation, what have been the changes in the air field--airport--and its influence on the growth of the county.

Wendell: The airport has been relighted. A homer mechanism, or a radio has been placed out, somewhere out thirty to fifty miles. You can, if you have the proper radio in your airplane you can pick up our signal from the airport in bad weather and come right in to it. We've had a change in our light beacon, it's new,

right after Celia. That was forced on us. The old one blew down. We've resurfaced the runways. We've built a nice administration building. We've built hangars, and we have one of the nicest airports in south Texas--forty-five hundred foot runways, one hundred fifty foot wide. Small jets can come in. It is our hope, or intentions, that in the near future that one of our runways will be lengthened to from forty-five to fifty-five to fifty-six hundred feet to take in, then it'll take nearly all of the smaller jets that come into this area, and we do have a lot of people that fly in on weekends, and own homes here, that are maybe doing business in Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, but they'll weekend here and fly back and forth on weekends in their airplanes.

Stephens: So this is the kind of people you want to attract.

Wendell: We hope to attract that . . .

Stephens: By spending tax money on lengthening the runway you can more than make it back in the additional tax on new homes constructed, the large homes.

Wendell: That's right, although there is no tax to support the Aransas County Airport.

Stephens: Oh, really?

Wendell: It's supported, has been supported, by oil.

Stephens: Oh, the old drilled on the field.

Wendell: Yes.

Stephens: I see.

Wendell: Directional holes, and a portion of the airport was abandoned for drilling, and the airport has been solely supported since I've been in office by oil.

Stephens: What is the holdup, then, on the extension? If it's not tax money?

Wendell: Well, as far as I'm concerned, there shouldn't be a holdup on it. I've got some commissioners that don't quite see eye to eye with me on it, but . . .

Stephens: Even though it wouldn't cost the county and would help the county.

Wendell: Well, this is probably why it would cost the county. The federal government will participate in 50 per cent of the cost. The Texas Aeronautic Association, if the money is available, will participate in 25 per cent of the cost, so Aransas County will have 25 per cent of the cost. So we're speaking of about twenty-five thousand dollars for Aransas County with a hundred thousand dollar development.

Stephens: Wow.

Wendell: But what the airport brings into the community I think has been overlooked. Even if the extra thousand feet

would, what it would do, some of the jets that come in here could take on fuel--it would help the operator.

Stephens: Yes.

Wendell: They don't want to come in now, even loaded with fuel and with a load of people. They evidently try to come in with a half load of fuel and then so they'll have enough to go on back where they come from if it's not too far, and consequently, if they're leaving with a load of people they won't take on fuel.

Stephens: Oh.

Wendell: But if they've got this extra thousand feet they could then put fuel in with a load of passengers.

Stephens: That would be another . . .

Wendell: Whether it's fish or whatever they may be flying out and take off safely.

Stephens: There would be another business for the county.

Wendell: Well, it would have improved the revenues of the airport, whoever was operating it.

Stephens: I see.

Wendell: We have a deal worked out where, with Mr. Shindler at the present time, who is the operator, has a five-year contract, that all the fuel he sells out there is his, and we lease the airport to him for two hundred dollars a month. I'm talking about the

facilities, not the airport, but it is a county owned and a federal airport, runways, anyone can come in and land at the Aransas County Airport, but the hangars, the aprons are leased to him. In return he pays us two hundred dollars a month, pays the utilities, and keeps the whole field mowed.

Stephens: Yes.

Wendell: But it would increase his business, it would help.

Stephens: Yes, I see, so you think the runways may be lengthened  
. . . .

Wendell: And in turn, maybe more revenue could be paid to the county then, and say from two hundred, maybe three or four hundred dollars a month, which could be banked, just like we're doing now.

Stephens: In twenty years' time what has been the quality of the County Commissioners you've had to work with?

Wendell: Do I really have to answer that? (Chuckle) It's just like any Commissioner's Court. You have, we really haven't had too many commissioners, the turnover. I don't know why, but let's just say I don't always see eye to eye with my Commissioner's Court, and I'm sure this happens in any Commissioner's Court. I feel like I'm more closely connected with county government than anyone else because I'm here every day, and people are in my office all day long, and



people will call me when they want something or if they see something wrong, and the Commissioner's Court--none of the commissioners hold an office or maintain an office anyplace in the county. They, everyone of them, nearly, except one, I believe, works outside of the . . . outside of their commissioner's job, and . . .

Stephens: Does it not pay very much?

Wendell: It pays somewhere around, oh, six hundred, five hundred dollars, a little over five hundred dollars, about five hundred dollars a month.

Stephens: But it's considered a part-time job, then.

Wendell: Actually it should be considered a part-time job.

Stephens: I see. Well, then, one last question. If you would name names, who would you consider to be the most influential citizens in Aransas County since you became judge in 1951.

Wendell: Oh, we've had several people that continually work and strive to help the community. Some of them have reasons to. A lot of them own land, and like, would sell it and help develop their property. I think that the Picton boys, Harold and Dick Picton, who for the past week, just several weeks ago have been very influential in their . . . in the community.

I think that Fred Bracht and his boys, who own the lumber yard, have helped out greatly. Mr. Emory Spencer, who you know real well, has contributed very much towards development of the county, and has always been interested and has always had an active interest in the Aransas County Airport, and also served as County Judge at one time. He served an unexpired term. He was appointed by the Commissioner's Court. He has always had an interest, and still does, in Aransas County, and has done everything he possibly could to see that a normal development took place. And, by the way, even though he owns a lot of property, he has been very interested to see that his property that he sells is developed according to our requirements on our subdivision requirements that we spoke of earlier, and even though he owns property he doesn't like to see substandard developments and pushes and strives for first class development of the area. He can see the difference there. So I'd say Mr. Spencer has been very . . . has been one of our top leading citizens, and seeing the property is properly developed in the area, and has had it at heart. He is, at the present time, is our representative to the Coastal Bend Regional Planning Commission. Mr. James H.

Sorenson, Jr., at the bank has played a very important part, and has always been active in politics, not politics so to speak, I don't think going out and try to push to get someone elected, but he's been interested in what happens in the community, and attends many of the meetings, and so forth, for the betterment of the community. The Casterlines in Fulton, L. E. Casterline and his daddy and his brothers before him. Mr. Rocquette who passed away several years ago, his family had always been active in . . .

Stephens: Is this Mr. Zeph Rocquette?

Wendell: Zeph Rocquette, yes. They have always taken an active part. Recently Mr. Mitchell, of Rockport Yacht and Supply, Johnny Mitchell, he's taken an active interest in the community. Jimmy Hunt, South Beach, has always been active. He owns the tourist court down on South Beach here in Rockport. He also is our county veteran's officer, and I'm sure I'm sure missing a whole lot of them, but we can go on and on. There's always the same group that . . . the Jackson brothers, Norvel and Jim. Jim passed away several years ago. Mr. Ford Jackson has always been a top citizen in the community, striving for better schools. The Jacksons have always, they have their reasons for schools.

Wendell  
66

They've always been a member, it seems to me as long as I remember there's been a Jackson on the school board, and Shelley Roaten, a member of the school board that has been active community-wise. There's numerous other people that I know I'm missing, and I shouldn't. Paul Clark Sorenson, an old timer-- he always had interests, some interests that the people don't really know about that I do. He's in my office helping people all the time. Well, I should have jotted down a lot of names; I hate to leave so many of them out.