

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION  
NUMBER  
293

Interview with  
Governor Coke R. Stevenson  
March 11, 12, 1967  
May 13, 14, 1967  
August 2, 1967  
May 10, 11, 1969

Place of Interview: Junction, Texas  
Interviewer: Dr. Fred Gantt  
Terms of Use: Open  
Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)  
Date: May 25, 1976

COPYRIGHT © 1975 THE BOARD OF REGENTS OF NORTH TEXAS STATE  
UNIVERSITY IN THE CITY OF DENTON

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 Coordinator of the Oral History Collection or the University Archivist, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas 76203.

Oral History Collection  
Governor Coke R. Stevenson

Interviewer: Dr. Fred Gantt

Place of Interview: Junction, Texas

Date: March 11, 1967

Dr. Gantt: This is Fred Gantt. I'm speaking today from the ranch of former Governor Coke R. Stevenson near Junction in Kimble County on March 11, 1967, to record for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection the memoirs of a distinguished public servant. Governor Stevenson served ten years in various county and state offices and has the distinction of being, up to this time, the only Texan ever to have held the offices of speaker of the House of Representatives, lieutenant governor, and governor of Texas. He also has the distinction of having been the first governor of Texas to have served three terms.

Governor Stevenson, with such an impressive career as you have had, I'm sure there are a lot of influences in your boyhood that might have led you to the political field. Would you tell something about your parentage, your boyhood, your experiences that started you on the road to becoming governor of Texas?

Gov. Stevenson: I'd be glad to supply a few details, Fred. As you know, I've spent all of my life out here in West Texas,

practically all of it in Kimble County, except for the few years I was in Austin. My father, whose name was Robert M. Stevenson, was a schoolteacher and surveyor.

His father--my grandfather--was a Methodist preacher and old-time circuit rider who came from East Texas where he lived on a farm--that's now within the city limits of Texarkana--during the Civil War. In East Texas, he was pastor of the churches at Jefferson, the Linden circuit, Sulphur Springs, and other places. Sulphur Springs was the last one he served before he was moved to West Texas in 1876 and settled in Llano County. He later became presiding elder of the district of the Methodist Church in which Llano County was located. It was then called the San Saba District. He was on the San Saba District when the San Angelo District was organized and used to preach to soldiers at old Fort Concho. Later, he was sent by the Methodist Church to found the New Mexico Conference, and this was in 1889. He went out there, stayed four years, put all of that part of Texas west of the Pecos River in the New Mexico Conference, where it remains to this day.

My father had no advantages in school, as we know it today; but he nevertheless became a surveyor, and he became a schoolteacher. He taught schools for fourteen



years here in Kimble County, and we moved about from one locality to another, and I've lived in practically every portion of Kimble County in my boyhood.

I began work . . . got my first job on a ranch when I was ten-and-a-half years old--L C Ranch on Bear Creek in Kimble County, Texas. After that, I worked in several other places. I attended five schools. My father was the teacher in each of them. The five schools totaled twenty-two months. That is all of my schooling. I never had the advantage that I would have enjoyed if I could have attended a college or a university, but I did not.

When I was sixteen years old, I decided that I could make a little better progress if I could get in something else besides ranch work, so I got together two wagons and six horses and established a freight line from Junction to Brady, Texas. I drove that freight line one-and-a-half years. During that time, I studied a correspondence course in bookkeeping and studied that around the campfire at night when I would feed my horses and stake them out. It took six days to go from Junction to Brady and back--three days over and three days to return. I hauled all kinds of freight. I hauled the first bought caskets that ever came to Junction. Previous to that, the carpenters locally would make what was called a coffin when any of the inhabitants passed away.

After I had driven this freight line for a year-and-a-half, some of the prominent citizens of Junction organized the first bank in the town. When I heard of that, I applied for a job in the bank, but I was given the job as janitor, and for a year I washed windows, swept the floors, cleaned the cuspidors, and did everything that was necessary to keep the bank in orderly condition.

One day the cashier got sick and was out for a couple of weeks, and I stepped in and kept the books while he was out and was then elected cashier of the bank on my own account. I had to have my disability minority removed in order to qualify as cashier. This was accomplished in March of 1908, and the record is on the minutes of the District Court, Kimble County, at this time.

After I got into the bank, in addition to my duties as cashier of the bank, I began the study of law. A lawyer in Junction named M. E. Blackburn loaned me the books out of his office and coached me as much as I apparently needed at that time in order to complete the course. I then went to San Antonio and took the final examination before the Court of Civil Appeals in September of 1913. My law license now is dated October 6, 1913. I came back to Junction, stayed in

the bank until December 1, 1914, when I qualified as county attorney of Kimble County.

I held that office four years and then ran for county judge and was elected. I only held that office one term. During that term, the bond issue was voted, and we built the first roads which connected Junction to the highway system which is now known as Highway 290, running from San Antonio to El Paso. This was the first paved road that was built between the boundaries of Bexar County and El Paso County.

After holding this office one term, I was elected president of the First National Bank in Junction, and I did not run for re-election as county judge.

Gantt: Governor Stevenson, it's frequently said that being president of a bank injects a person into the political field, whether he likes it or not. Did your election as the bank president cause you to get interested in any state-wide races of that period?

Stevenson: Yes. I would say this from my experience--that if even a bank president is going to be successful in his community, he must take an interest in things political. Let me go back a little bit. In 1910, I was elected a delegate from Kimble County to the state convention which met in Galveston that year, and I heard some wonderfully eloquent speeches made at that convention. Senator Joe Bailey, on

the one hand--and his assistant in the debate was Congressman Henry from Waco--and on the other hand was the Honorable Cone Johnson of Tyler, and he was assisted by Yancey Lewis of Dallas. And as I sat there and listened to the arguments made by those distinguished and eloquent gentlemen, I believe I felt an urge to get into politics that I'd never had before.

In 1914, I was elected county chairman of the forces in Kimble County that were supporting the Honorable Tom Ball of Houston for governor. I managed his campaign in this county. I became interested in various other campaigns, notably those made by Governor Hobby and Governor Neff. I also supported Dan Moody when he became a candidate for attorney general of Texas and continued my support through his races for governor.

Gantt: One of the things that happened about this time, Governor Stevenson, was the oddity of having a woman candidate for governor of Texas, Mrs. Miriam A. Ferguson, in 1924. Could you tell something of the reaction of the people of that day toward a woman candidate for governor?

Stevenson: Fred, I don't know that I could talk about the reaction of the people. I know the division of forces. There were several candidates in 1924, if you will recall. Two of them were named Davidson. I supported the Honorable

T. W. Davidson in the first primary, who has in later years become one of the most distinguished judges that I think the federal system has ever had. When the run-off came about, it was between Mrs. Miriam A. Ferguson and Felix Robertson of Dallas. Robertson was widely known throughout this country as a member of the Ku Klux Klan, or at least they said he was being supported by the Klan. The people of Kimble County had never been identified with the Klan in any way. So I went with Mrs. Ferguson in that run-off.

Gantt: While you were serving as president of the bank, did you continue your practice of law at that time?

Stevenson: Yes, very actively. I had some of the most hotly contested cases of my career during the time I was president of the bank, and I continued my interest in politics up to the time when we sold the bank. And that gave me an opportunity to run for the Legislature in 1928.

Gantt: How many counties were in your district at that time?

Stevenson: Ten counties.

Gantt: And was there a lot of opposition in that race?

Stevenson: I had a very distinguished opponent who was a resident of Kerr County, Texas. And in the campaign, I became as active as I've ever been in any campaign. I made a speech in every schoolhouse in the ten counties, and

that was in a day before the consolidation of the rural schools with the main schools in the county seats. Nearly every community had its own school. But I made the schoolhouses, and I made the barbecues and the picnics and spoke as often as I could get two or three people together to listen.

Gantt: What were the principal promises that you made in that campaign?

Stevenson: My opponent had a very extensive platform of reforms, and many of the planks were good, but they were just too expensive for the people who lived in this community. Times were hard financially during those years, and I thought his platform was one that would require a lot of money, and I didn't think we were able to supply it. So I made the people this kind of a promise, that if they elected me I would not vote for any additional taxes or for the increase in any existing taxes. And I carried nine counties in the district.

Gantt: After you were elected to the House of Representatives in 1928, I believe that a race for the speakership shaped up in that Legislature. What was your position in the speakership race?

Stevenson: I supported W. S. Barron of Bryan, Texas, for speaker, and he asked me to make one of the seconding speeches for his nomination. The principal speech was made by the Honorable

Fred Minor of Denton, Texas, and I made one of the seconding speeches. That was the first day of my service in the Legislature, but I got before the House.

Gantt: It is often said that freshman members are supposed to be seen and not heard. What was your reaction to your first attempt at speaking before the House?

Stevenson: I felt very much at home there. I had, as I've already mentioned, been very active in practicing law. Why, I'd reached a point where I didn't mind appearing before any kind of an audience, and I spoke, I think, with as much confidence in behalf of Mr. Barron as I've ever enjoyed in the advocacy of any issue or in the behalf of any client in my life.

Gantt: Do you think that having made a speech on your first day as a member of the House of Representatives helped you to get better known among the membership than otherwise might have been the case?

Stevenson: I certainly do.

Gantt: What sort of advice would you give to freshman members of the Legislature today about this matter?

Stevenson: I would say when the opportunity presents itself, they should seize it, take advantage of it. I fully agree with the principle that ordinarily a man should serve his term before he attempts to engage the attention of the parliamentary body. But if the occasion arises as

it did with me, I sure believe that a man should take advantage of it.

Gantt: In this year that you were elected to the House of Representatives, Texas, for the first time since the Civil War, supported a Republican candidate, Mr. Hoover, for the Presidency of the United States. Did the fact that Texas went Republican have any effect upon local races at that time?

Stevenson: I don't recall any in this county that were affected by it. After I got to the Legislature, we had a contest which came up, I believe, between two districts--one over in East Texas, the Tyler district, and one down in South Texas--that I believe were affected by that. Anyway, I supported the position of the regular Democratic organization at that time. In other words, I supported actively the candidacy of . . .

Gantt: Al Smith.

Stevenson: Al Smith . . . Al Smith, yes. Couldn't think of that "Al" to save my life (laughter). The "Happy Warrior."

Gantt: The "Happy Warrior." Dan Moody was at this time the governor, entering a second term. Would you mention some of the major problems that were facing the Legislature in 1928, which were brought to its attention by Governor Moody?

Stevenson: Governor Moody proposed industrializing the penitentiary of Texas, selling off the farm lands and moving the



institution into the vicinity of Austin, and that precipitated a great debate in the Legislature. He also advocated a \$200,000,000 bond issue to extend the highway system, and that produced another great debate in the Legislature.

Gantt: What was your position as a representative on those two issues?

Stevenson: I didn't think the state was ready for a bond issue to build public highways. I advocated putting the state on a "pay-as-you-go" basis, and that for the future, while I was strongly in favor of good roads and good highways and a strong highway department, I believed then--and believe now--that we should pay for it as we go. On the penitentiary question I had an open mind, but I was appointed on the committee to inspect the penitentiaries in other states. I served on that committee, and we inspected penitentiaries in about twenty-two states of the Union and observed the working conditions. And when we returned, we were against any complete industrialization of the penitentiary. We did recommend certain minor industrial enterprises, such as the making of the tags for automobiles, which has since been done in the penitentiary. We emphasized the operation of a good printing office in the penitentiary to print the stationery and forms and other necessary paperwork for the different state departments. We

also thought they could make shoes for the other institutions of the state, and they've been doing that. I believe we've got it about as well-balanced now as the people of Texas are willing to support.

Gantt: So then the investigation of the penitentiary system and whether or not to industrialize it was one of the main issues in which you, as a freshman representative, were interested. Is that right?

Stevenson: I was appointed on this committee. As I mentioned awhile ago, when opportunity presents itself, take advantage of it! I was selected on the committee, I served on it, and when I returned, I knew a great deal more about the operation of penitentiaries than I did when I left here.

Gantt: Now a few minutes ago, we indicated that you supported Speaker Barron and made the seconding speech. Do you feel that taking this position got you better committee assignments as a freshman representative than otherwise might have been the case?

Stevenson: Yes, I do. Yes, I think that's correct.

Gantt: What other major issues occupied your time as a freshman representative? I believe the matter of fiscal stability of state government was an important issue at that time.

Stevenson: It was, and I devoted a great deal of my time to examination of the state's position, trying to see where the

money came from and where it went and how it was spent. And I introduced a number of bills in succeeding Legislatures to bring about a more stable and efficient system of this handling of state finances. Among them was the bill creating the office of state auditor, which I think has been a great help to the people of Texas. And then I succeeded in getting bills passed, requiring the reporting of indebtedness by the different municipalities of the state so that we might see what the debt was over the people in a local way as well as statewide. And I also wrote, and the Legislature passed, a bill which modernized the bookkeeping systems for the state treasurer's department and, to a certain extent, the state comptroller's department.

Gantt: I believe that this was the session of the Legislature that conducted an extensive investigation of the operation of the comptroller's department. Was your bill the outgrowth of that investigation?

Stevenson: Actually, the creation of the office of state auditor contributed to the investigation. Governor Moody appointed a very able man named Moore Lynn as state auditor. He and I worked closely together, and we finally arrived at conclusions. The result of that was the preferring of charges against the comptroller, and quite a bit of time was consumed in the House in the investigation of the charges made.

Gantt: Governor Stevenson, I believe that the first Legislature in which you served has the record of having had five called sessions during the biennium. Why do you think that this was the case? Why so many called sessions?

Stevenson: First of all, the regular session was only sixty days, and the salary of the members was five dollars for the first sixty days, and any day they ran over the sixty, they got only two dollars a day. And, naturally, members, when they reached the end of sixty days, were anxious to adjourn. They did. If the governor's program wasn't finished, he was put to the necessity of calling a session.

Governor Moody's program was quite extensive. He submitted matters that the Legislature hadn't contemplated and were not familiar with. A few of them were proposals for a two hundred million dollar bond issue to build highways, the re-location of the prison system and its industrialization, and the abandonment of the farm system and all of the other details connected with that kind of a program. The civil service proposal was one Texas was not then ready for--at least through its legislative channels. The members were not familiar with that. All of these things occasioned a great deal of debate . . . and a legitimate debate. It wasn't time killing; it was honest discussion of what was best for the State of Texas. In

addition to that, we had several investigations during that time, and they required a good deal of time. So I think it's no reflection on the governor that he called five sessions to try to get his program disposed of.

Gantt: That was the biennium during which the stock market crash occurred and the beginning of what is commonly called the Great Depression of the 1930's began. What impact did this stock market crash have on state government?

Stevenson: The impact was not evident during this session of the Forty-first Legislature. That came a little later. When Mrs. Ferguson became governor at the end of Governor Sterling's first term, she submitted a program of retrenchment by which the salaries of all state employees were cut 25 per cent. And the intention and the effort was to reduce all state expenses by 25 per cent.

Gantt: Governor Moody was very much an advocate of changing the prison system. Several of the special sessions listed this as one of the reasons for the call for the special session. You were on the committee to investigate the prison systems of the other states at this time. Do you recall any experience that you had while a member of that investigating committee which might be of interest to understanding the problem of prison reform?

Stevenson: I'd say that we had several. With a group of men, it's not possible to state the impressions made on the minds

of your associates. But with me, I knew of a number of the distinguished . . . well-known--they were not distinguished, perhaps--but well-known people who had been convicted and were inmates at the penitentiary.

When we reached Philadelphia, Al Capone, who was noted in the press and generally as a Chicago gangster, was in prison in Philadelphia. He'd not been convicted then of income tax evasion, but he was convicted for carrying a pistol and given a year in the Philadelphia penitentiary. I asked for permission to talk with him, and it was granted, and I spent more than an hour with him. It was a very interesting session. I found Capone to be a man of brilliant intellect. His language was excellent. I have said this on several occasions, that if I had walked into a crowd as another stranger, and someone had told me the governor of the state was in the crowd, I probably would have picked Al Capone out as that man. He's distinguished looking. But his record, of course, was one that was reprehensible.

When we got around to Chicago, the penitentiary that we were going to investigate there was called a "bird cage penitentiary." It was a round cylinder, and it was at Joliet, about forty miles from Chicago. We took taxis to go down there. And at that time, the convicts Loeb and Leopold were inmates of the penitentiary.

They had been convicted for killing a boy and stuffing him under a culvert there in Chicago as a thrill killing and were given life sentences. Most people who had followed the case in the newspapers thought they would receive the death penalty. Clarence Darrow defended them, and he was known then as one of the most famous lawyers in the United States. Anyway, he was successful in saving them from the death penalty, but they each got a life sentence to spend there.

This "bird cage" arrangement was 512 cells in tiers, several stories high. The guard's supposed to be stationed in the center. This was a reform movement, the idea being that the guard could see each and every inmate of these 512 cells just by turning his head and so on and so forth. But when I asked him what he thought about the efficiency of that arrangement, he said, "Why, sure, I can see every one of them, but when I'm looking this way, they're up here at my back. They know I'm looking that way." He said, "They do anything they want to." (laughter)

Well, going back to Chicago to our hotel, I noticed that the driver of the taxi--and I was riding with him on the front seat--was making a wide circle to the right, and I mentioned to him, I said, "I can see our hotel down yonder." He said, "Yes, but I can't go through there.

Hey, that's Al Capone's district, and I'm on the black-list. I can't go through his district. I've got to take you around." And by pursuing this route, he finally got us to the hotel.

When we reached the federal penitentiary at Leavenworth, Kansas, an inmate there was Dr. Cook, who had laid claim to being the discoverer of the North Pole. The committees of scientists who later investigated his testimony and his log books gave that honor to Admiral Perry. And Dr. Cook was later involved in prosecution by the government and convicted and sent to the penitentiary of mail fraud. I spent perhaps two hours with Dr. Cook and found the recital of his activities in life very interesting. He'd certainly had a well-rounded career of activities. Whether he ever got to the North Pole, I'm not qualified to say. But I do know he was in the federal penitentiary at Leavenworth, Kansas.

Gantt: Now from discussing the present conditions with those well-known inmates, what would your conclusion about the prison system in Texas at the time be?

Stevenson: My conclusion was formed about our own system, not only from discussion with the inmates, but from the wardens at the different penitentiaries. As an illustration, when we reached the Sing Sing Penitentiary in New York, Mr. Laws was the warden, well-known throughout the United



States. He said, "Any penitentiary ought to be so constructed and so conducted as to be of service to the people who are sent there." He said, "Now in my case, most of the people that are inmates of penitentiaries have had industrial training before they come here. We can operate an industrial penitentiary because the inmates know what we're talking about. I happen to know that down in your State of Texas a large per cent of your inmates are a class of people that have had no contact whatever with industrial enterprises. I think it would be a mistake to attempt to operate a complicated machine with one of those people that have no familiarity with it whatever."

When we got around to Minnesota, we talked to Warden Sullivan at their penitentiary, and he had recently had an industrialization program. He said, "Yes, and it's working successfully. But my main product is binder twine. I make it for these wheat-growing states out here in the West. And suppose some of them decide to put up an industrial penitentiary and make their own twine. Then," he said, "my market is gone." So he said, "I'm faced with great difficulty, but I keep thinking about all this time that my market will be gone. And maybe I could do something else."

Anyway, by the time we got back to Texas, our conclusion was that for the people who were being held

in our penitentiary, we had a system that was better than an industrial enterprise.

Gantt: This, then, was more or less in opposition to the program that Governor Moody had outlined. Your committee recommended that the prison system not be industrialized as Governor Moody had suggested it ought to be?

Stevenson: That's right. We suggested certain minor industrial things that could be handled successfully over there, such as making the license tags for automobiles in the state, a shoe factory, a printing press or printing plant to make stationery for the different departments, shoes for the different state institutions of the public. And I don't mean by that the departments conducted by elected officials. I'm talking about those homes and eleemosynary institutions, the asylums, state hospitals, and the like, where we're responsible for keeping the inmates. The larger part of their clothing can be made there in the penitentiary. But it's better to make it over there than it is to move the whole thing to any particular location . . . central location.

Gantt: Would you say, then, that the results of the findings of the committee on which you served to investigate penitentiaries resulted in the defeat of the governor's program?

Stevenson: It had an effect, yes. Now I've thought about that a good deal, and I don't mind going on record to this

extent--and it would be merely an opinion. My opinion is that if Governor Moody had gone along with us, he would have arrived at the same conclusion we did when we returned home.

Gantt: Gone on the trip with you?

Stevenson: Yes.

Gantt: One of the major events that took place about this time which we were talking about was a Democratic National Convention in Houston in 1928--the time that you were elected to the House of Representatives. You mentioned a few minutes ago that you did support Al Smith, the nominee of that convention. Would you give us your recollection of what went on at this convention, some of the impressions as a freshman . . . a new politician that's getting involved in politics in a national convention?

Stevenson: I didn't see all that went on and didn't hear all of it. There were many people at that convention. I did hear the nominating speeches. I heard Franklin Roosevelt make his famous speech nominating Al Smith, and I listened attentively to all that I could hear. But in those conventions, unless you're on the inner circle, which I wasn't, you don't become acquainted with all that goes on.

Gantt: It was the first campaign in which the radio was used very extensively, and I've been told that Al Smith's

Brooklyn accent was not too good over the radio. Do you have any recollections of Smith as a candidate at the convention?

Stevenson: Not a great deal. I didn't get the impression that he was out of the ordinary in any way.

Gantt: Now there was a considerable amount of talk at the time that Governor Moody, who was one of the youngest governors in the United States, might possibly have been his vice-presidential running mate. Governor Moody was not chosen, of course. Do you have any recollection of Moody's activity as governor of Texas and leader of the Texas delegation to the convention?

Stevenson: Well, I heard a good deal of conversation at the time, yes. As I say, I was not one of the inner circle then. That's the year in which I was a candidate for the first term for the Legislature, in which I was elected to my first term in the Legislature in 1928. But I had not yet become a member of the Legislature. My term didn't begin until January, 1929. But I enjoyed what I heard at the convention. It was a great experience for me.

Gantt: Along about this time, the issue of prohibition was very prevalent in national and state politics. Was the issue of prohibition brought up during your own campaign for representative at that time?

Stevenson: No. No, I didn't have any issue over that.

Gantt: Governor Stevenson, when you reached the end of your term, your first term, as a member of the Texas House of Representatives, what do you consider to be your major accomplishment as a freshman representative during that Legislature?

Stevenson: The passage of my bill creating the office of state auditor and the passage of my bill, House Bill 333, which, as I said, would take the load of indebtedness off the counties and road districts and pay it out of the gasoline tax. In other words, it put the state to building the roads and paying for them as they went along without a bond issue.

Gantt: And then, certainly, probably the matter of the prisons which we have discussed was a major accomplishment of this session, too.

Stevenson: Well, that was a collective accomplishment. You asked me a moment ago a question about my own. The auditor's bill was one I wrote entirely by myself and so was House Bill 333. The penitentiary solution that was finally reached was a composite one, a product of a number of minds.

Gantt: Overall, then, looking back on this Forty-first Legislature, would you rate it as being a rather productive session for this day and time?

Stevenson: I would, yes. I think it was a very fine session. Some of the best debating I've ever heard in my life I heard there in the Forty-first Session of the Legislature.

Gantt: In 1930, then, you were a candidate for your second term in the House of Representatives. And do you recall any particular issues that came up in that campaign for a second term?

Stevenson: I had no opposition for the second term nor any of the other terms that I've served in the Legislature.

Gantt: How do you account for that fact?

Stevenson: I believe that the people of my district agreed with my position on the questions down there.

Gantt: In 1930, Governor Moody announced his support for and actively campaigned for Ross Sterling for the office of governor. Did you support Mr. Sterling in that campaign?

Stevenson: Yes, I did.

Gantt: Did you actively work for him in your own home county?

Stevenson: Yes.

Gantt: When Mr. Sterling became governor, then, and you were in your second term as a member of the House of Representatives, did you get interested in any particular area of legislation, such as you did in the first session that you served?

Stevenson: I pursued the same policies, yes. Governor Sterling recommended the state-wide bond issue to build roads and made a determined effort to get the constitutional

amendment submitted to the people for them to vote for this two hundred million dollar bond issue.

Gantt: This was basically the same position that Governor Moody had taken?

Stevenson: That's right, basically the same thing. Governor Sterling had been chairman of the Highway Commission, as you recall, and maybe had a little more interest in providing the commission with additional money to build roads and build them quickly. But he was never able to prevail upon the Legislature.

Gantt: So you found yourself, during this session, in opposition to the governor's proposal on road building, the same as in the previous session?

Stevenson: That's right.

Gantt: What relationship, then, did this build up between you and Governor Sterling?

Stevenson: Governor Sterling had been a very prominent and successful businessman, and he wasn't quite as forgiving toward his opponents in the Legislature as he might have been if he had had a little more experience politically before he became governor.

Oral History Collection  
Governor Coke R. Stevenson

Interviewer: Dr. Fred Gantt

Place of Interview: Junction, Texas

Date: March 12, 1967

Dr. Gantt: This is the beginning of a second interview session with former Governor Coke Stevenson at his ranch in Junction, Texas, on March 12, 1967. This is Fred Gantt interviewing the governor. Governor Stevenson, in the previous interview, we have discussed the fact that you had been re-elected to a second term in the Texas House of Representatives and that Governor Ross Sterling was elected in the spring election in 1930. Shortly after that term began, oil was discovered in East Texas, and problems arising with law enforcement faced the state government. I believe that Governor Sterling declared martial law in four counties in East Texas, and this became one of the points of political discussions during this term. Would you comment on the use of martial law in the East Texas oil fields?

Gov. Stevenson: To this extent . . . the governor's prerogative was to declare martial law if he thought it was necessary. The Legislature had nothing to do with that. We had no bills or legislation of any kind before us, but it was a subject of great discussion among the members.



Many members expressed regret that it became necessary to employ martial law. But on the other hand, many members who were not altogether familiar with the situation over there were quite willing to leave it to the governor's judgement as to what he thought was the best to get the oil business going again. It was reported at the time that oil had decreased in price to only ten cents a barrel. Keep in mind that the Great Depression was just beginning at that time, and many of the financial agencies of business in every category were in the doldrums. So I'd say the general temper of the Legislature was one where the governor's friends were quite willing to follow his judgement, and those that didn't agree with him were very vocal in their opposition.

Gantt: This declaration of martial law, then, became a rather controversial political issue?

Stevenson: That is right.

Gantt: Would you care to comment on your views of the governor's actions as a member of the Legislature?

Stevenson: I think I've covered it pretty well already. I was one of those that was unfamiliar with the situation and not sufficiently informed to say whether he was right or wrong in declaring martial law. Ordinarily, I do say that I'm opposed to the use of the military in civilian affairs unless it is absolutely necessary.

Gantt: Do you believe that the fact that Governor Sterling declared martial law might have caused him difficulty in the Legislature as far as getting his suggested programs enacted by the Legislature?

Stevenson: I'm confident that it had a very pronounced influence on a good many of the members. Governor Sterling was not adept in dealing with the Legislature. We've already mentioned the fact that he had no political contact with the Legislature. He'd been chairman of the Highway Commission in previous sessions, but as far as dealing with the Legislature, he had very little experience. And he was not particularly adept in getting his measures passed by the Legislature.

Another factor that needs to be considered in that connection, however, is the Depression, as I've already mentioned. Cotton was low in price, the same as oil and livestock. The general economy was in bad shape at that time, and I believe the members were more or less uncertain about what they should do in order to get the economy going again, if it could be done by any legislative proposals enacted by the Legislature. Governor Sterling was at a disadvantage in this respect. He had never engaged in the practice of law and was more or less unfamiliar with constitutional provisions. His recommendation, as you have probably observed, about

controlling the cotton crop was declared unconstitutional. He did not have that faculty as a lawyer in the constitutional authority of inspiring the Legislature to follow his judgement. That was his chief difficulty.

Gantt: During this session of the Legislature and the previous session, several problems arose for the Legislature to consider about charges against certain executive officials. Would you comment on the role of the Legislature in examining the charges against certain officials of that period?

Stevenson: I hardly know how far to go in commenting. I don't want to do any injury to any of the parties involved. It is a matter of record, however, that the comptroller's office was investigated, and it terminated in the resignation of the man who at that time held the office of comptroller. An investigation was also initiated against the land commissioner.

I believe I served on the committees which made both of these investigations. When the charges were finally preferred against the comptroller, I was selected by the House as the attorney to represent the House. When the report was made against the land commissioner, I was one of those that did not believe that the land commissioner had violated any laws, so I was very active in defending him. And he was exonerated by the Legislature.

Then we had an investigation of . . . I believe it was two district judges. I served on the committee that investigated the judge, a portion of whose judicial district was in my legislative district. And the culmination of that was that the judge resigned.

All of these things took a lot of time from the Legislature, and perhaps there might have been more legislation passed under Governor Sterling's term if it hadn't been for a good many of these things cropping up, although, as I recall, the investigation of the comptroller and land commissioner both occurred in the Forty-first Legislature. The investigation of the judge I referred to was in the Forty-second. The Forty-second was the first session of the Legislature at which the members' pay had been increased to ten dollars a day, and the regular session was extended to 120 days instead of the sixty days that had prevailed theretofore.

Gantt: What is your impression, having served both in the sixty-day session and the 120-day session, of the usefulness of the 120-day session?

Stevenson: It was a great improvement. It was divided so that a portion was set apart for the introduction of bills and a portion for the passage of bills, and all of that made for a more orderly procedure as far as the enactment of legislation is concerned.

Gantt: In discussing the investigations of the various officials by the Legislature, do you believe that this is an effective part of our constitutional system to the extent that it really keeps officials in other branches of government on their toes, so to speak--the fear that they might be investigated by the Legislature?

Stevenson: Yes, I do. I think there's nothing quite as beneficial to the public generally as the spotlight of publicity with reference to the actions of public officials. And I think the Legislature is the place to center the investigation, if there's any ground for it. Now keep this in mind: after the passage of the auditor's bill--the creation of state auditor--his office has been responsible for keeping a great many charges from being preferred because it has been a preventive measure instead of one to investigate and assess penalties afterwards. I'm a great believer in the old saying that "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." The auditor's office has functioned in that manner since its creation. We've had the benefit of a good staff of auditors that discover any errors that might be made in the administration of public officials and point out the way in which they can be corrected before they become too serious.

Gantt: This, then, relieves the Legislature of much of the responsibility it once had before the creation of the office.

Stevenson: That's right.

Gantt: Another matter that was along this same line was the question in the Forty-second Legislature over the seating of a member . . . over a contested election. Would you comment on your views on the appropriateness of the Legislature determining who has been elected to a particular body?

Stevenson: I think that is provided for in the constitution. Each house is the judge of the qualifications of its members and also their elections. We had two instances in the time covered heretofore in this interview. One came up from the Valley; one was from East Texas--I believe it was the Tyler district--and I think it a very wholesome thing that both of them were decided. The public was given both sides of the controversy, and I think the result, as a whole, was very beneficial to the improvement of public service.

Gantt: In your judgement, then, both as a lawyer and a former legislator and chief executive, you believe that it is appropriate for one of the houses to be the judge of the elections and qualifications of its own members.

Stevenson: I do. I firmly believe in that.

Gantt: Do you believe that this should be confined strictly to such qualifications as age and residence and citizenship and so on, or would it be appropriate for the House of

Representatives, for example, to say that a person was not qualified to serve as a member?

Stevenson: Well, I think it's appropriate, yes, to go into the qualifications of its members.

Gantt: On things other than specifically spelled out in the constitution?

Stevenson: That's right.

Gantt: A rather interesting matter occurred in this period also in which the First Lady of the United States, Mrs. Herbert Hoover, entertained a person of the Negro race at the White House, and this set off some reaction in the Texas Legislature. Could you recall your impressions of this particular incident?

Stevenson: Yes, I do, and I wrote, as I did on some other occasions, reasons for my vote on the resolution. I don't think I could improve today on the language that I used then, and my position would be just the same today as it was then.

Gantt: Basically this position is what?

Stevenson: That the resolution expressing our opposition to social equality of the races was all right. But when it began to offer advice to the voters of the country about what they should do in that connection, I thought it was going too far.

Gantt: Now during this session of the Legislature, undoubtedly a race for the speakership was being shaped up for the

next session. It turned out that eventually you were elected as speaker in the following session, 1933. Did you have any idea when you first went to the Legislature that some day you might become speaker?

Stevenson: I don't think I could say that I had such an idea. I hadn't intended to do anything when I was elected to the Legislature except make a good representative for the people among whom I lived. This is primarily ranching country. I intended to express the ranching viewpoint, or rather the viewpoint of the operators of ranches. And I did that to the best of my ability without any thought of the consequences. And I hadn't any idea that it might be a popular viewpoint over the rest of the state. So I didn't entertain any idea of becoming speaker until the beginning of this race for the speaker of the Forty-third Legislature.

Gantt: Governor Stevenson, it would be helpful if you would give your view on the role of the speaker in the legislative process.

Stevenson: I think the speakership is perhaps the second in importance in the state government to that of the governorship. The reason that I say that it's perhaps ahead of the lieutenant governor's office is this: the speaker is the presiding officer of 150 members, and the Senate is much smaller. The speaker



does not lose his seat when he becomes speaker. He's chosen by the membership, but he does not lose his function as a representative of his own district. He can still introduce bills; he can still assert his views on any matter of legislation. While he's in the chair, he's supposed to be fair to both parties, to every party that wants to be heard, and the degree of skill that he employes is responsible for the harmony that prevails among the members. The lieutenant governor cannot introduce any bills; he's the presiding officer of the Senate, but he doesn't have a similar function to the speaker except in the matter of appointing committees. The lieutenant governor as presiding officer over the Senate does appoint the standing committees and also special committees just like the speaker does. The speakership has more members to deal with. He has a wider field in which to operate in the selection of his committees, and in that process he can select men to serve on certain committees that more nearly represent his viewpoint about what legislation should be enacted than the lieutenant governor can do because he has a larger body of men to work with. So my judgement is, having held both positions, that the speakership is one of wider influence than that of the lieutenant governor.

Gantt: What do you believe to be the single most important function of the speaker of the House of Representatives?

Stevenson: The most important function would either be in the selection and appointment of committees or in the manner in which he presides over the sessions of the House. He has the right to recognize any member who seeks to speak on any subject that's under discussion in the House. But that right of recognition enables him to look across the hall and recognize a man that's representing a viewpoint that he would like to see prevail, whereas the man in opposition, who has the same rights, can be overlooked until the time allotted for the debate is expired.

Gantt: What devices does a speaker have to know who is on his side and who shares his point of view?

Stevenson: That comes from mixing with the membership. A speaker who's on his toes learns very quickly the different viewpoints of all of his members.

Gantt: What are some of the things that are taken into consideration in making assignments to committees?

Stevenson: First of all, the members are all given the opportunity to express the appointments they would like to have. A speaker is naturally influenced to a certain extent by that, especially among his friends. He'd like to accommodate them. If one is interested in agriculture, put him

on the Agricultural Committee. If one is interested in oil, put him on the Oil Committee. But when he comes to considering the interests of the state as a whole, he tries to pick men of talent and ability to man these committees because many questions arise in the consideration of bills, resolutions to be referred back to the House, either with a recommendation they do pass or that they do not pass. So the speaker who really intends to serve the state tries to pick men of ability to man his committees.

Gantt: Do you think that the speaker is frequently inclined to give lesser committee assignments to people that he does not believe share his point of view?

Stevenson: I think that is inevitable.

Gantt: What is your impression of the appointment of chairmen of committees? Is this a better system than, say, selection on the basis of seniority, such as in the national congress?

Stevenson: I think that our system is better than just one that's based exclusively on seniority. Many members stay in an elected position until they have lost their zeal for activity, and a new man that's been elected may have more talent and ability than an older one so that . . . keep this in mind: that I believe every member ought to serve at least one term in the Legislature before he

becomes the chairman of a committee. But I think one-term schooling is enough to acquaint him with all the processes of legislation, and in the second term he may be as well prepared to be a chairman of a committee--an important committee, I'd say--as any other man in the House.

Gantt: Well now, you've used the term "important committee." In your judgement, which are the most important, most powerful, committees in the House of Representatives?

Stevenson: I would rate the Committee on Appropriations as the most important, and that stems from my lifetime convictions of economy. I think the state's economy, the state's money, should be spent by men who know the value of a dollar, and, therefore, I classify the Appropriations Committee as the most important. The second one, I think, would be the Committee on Revenue and Taxation, and the third would be State Affairs. Now in classifying these with reference to importance, I realize that I run contrary to the interests or to the viewpoints of people who are interested in other matters. For instance, to the administrator of a college, he probably thinks the Committee on Education is the most important. To the man that's in the oil business, he thinks the Committee on Oil is the most important, and so on down the line, but that's enough to give you an illustration of what I mean.

Now then, when the speaker is looking at the state as a whole, he realizes that under our principle of local education--or the one that was in effect when I was speaker--that the people of each community around this school, they're going to run the schools the way they want them to run anyhow, so that the Committee on Education doesn't have the same influence over the state that the Committee on Appropriations does because the Committee on Appropriations appropriates the money to run these schools in the first instance. I think you can get what I'm driving at right there without having any more elaboration.

Gantt: In the selection of the speaker, what do you believe to be the appropriate role of the governor? Should he intervene in the speaker's race?

Stevenson: I don't think so. I think that there might be certain circumstances where he'd be justified in opposing some candidate for speaker because of some friction between them previously that has existed for, say, a long time. But, as a general rule, I think the Legislature resents any intervention from the governor's office or any other source when they come to choosing their own presiding officer.

Gantt: In view of your later service as governor, what do you consider to be the healthiest relationship between the

governor and the speaker? What situation should prevail from an ideal standpoint to get the governor's programs through the Legislature?

Stevenson: Well, first of all, I'd say that the governor himself ought to be a man that knows how to get along with people. If he does, he ordinarily . . . or at least this was my experience. I had no trouble with either speaker that was serving while I was in office--none whatever. In fact, my relations were good, and yet at no time did I try to tell the Legislature who they should choose for speaker. After they made the choice, I made it a point to get along with him.

Gantt: Mr. Stevenson, as speaker in your first term, you had the rather unusual situation of having a woman governor of the state. Would you tell us something about your relationship to Governor Miriam A. Ferguson while you were in the speaker's office?

Stevenson: Yes, I'll tell you this: that I got along with Mrs. Ferguson in what I thought was a very good relationship. She kept her place as the governor of the state. She made her recommendations to the Legislature, and she was especially interested in reducing expenses as far as we could because of the condition of the country. The Great Depression then was really on. She recommended a reduction. The Legislature agreed with her, and the reduction

was made. And I agreed with her. My relations with Mrs. Ferguson were very good while I was speaker.

Gantt: As a matter of interest, it is frequently said that Mrs. Ferguson's husband, former Governor Jim Ferguson, was perhaps more powerful in this administration than Mrs. Ferguson herself was. What do you believe to be Mr. Ferguson's true role in the administration then?

Stevenson: I think Mrs. Ferguson yielded to her husband's knowledge of the laws and the constitution, and to that extent, he was a great factor in her administration. I think when it came to making up her mind about the operation of the government by the individuals that she made up her own mind. I think she made her appointments and specified what her program was in the conduct of each office, and she made the appointees conduct themselves in accordance therewith. I remember on one occasion where the appointee had over-stepped the boundaries of propriety, and she fired him, notwithstanding that her husband was very anxious to retain him in that office. But he did not prevail. She separated the appointee from the conduct of his office.

I found Mrs. Ferguson to be reliable in anything that she said and that her promise was good, and she expected others to live up to the same standards that she had for the conduct of her office. In short, I thought

Mrs. Ferguson's second administration was a very good one.

Gantt: What do you consider to be some of the major accomplishments of the Forty-third Legislature in which you were speaker?

Stevenson: First of all was the economy program and the consideration for the people all over the state who were finding it difficult to raise enough money to even pay their taxes. I think that's the main . . . the main thing her administration will be remembered for is one of economy under distressing conditions.

Gantt: In connection with this, it was this Legislature that voted the twenty million dollars in so-called "bread bonds."

Stevenson: That is right.

Gantt: Was there much difficulty, in your recollection, of passing this bond bill?

Stevenson: I think not. I remember there was a good deal of debate, and that was because some figured it was an opening wedge that might . . . well, bring along . . . the welfare state at a little accelerated pace, but in the end the consideration for the people who needed assistance prevailed, and there was not any difficulty in voting the "bread bond."

Gantt: The Forty-third Legislature also created a new state agency known as the Boxing Commission. What is your recollection of the passage of this bill?



Stevenson: This was the bill, as I recall, sponsored by a member of the Legislature from Bryan, Texas. His name was George Butler. Before the session was over, he became known as "Battling Butler" because of his advocacy of a bill to promote amateur athletics, which was included in the term "boxing." There was no intention, and it was not so represented in any of the debates, to legalize in Texas any prize fighting for championships as such.

Gantt: This session also legalized horse race gambling, I believe.

Stevenson: That was the parimutuel bill. It was not passed as a bill. That entire provision was incorporated in a conference committee report on the appropriations bill, and members who voted on it had to either accept the conference committee report as a whole or reject it. You understand that a conference committee report, under the rules that were in existence at that time when I was speaker, was not subject to amendment. You either voted to accept the report or reject it. And from consideration of the other matters included in that conference committee report, a majority of the members decided to accept it, even though it had the parimutuel provision in it. My judgement is--my judgement was then and is now--that the parimutuel bill would not have been enacted if it had been voted on separately.

Gantt: Mr. Stevenson, you have the distinction of having been the first man to be elected speaker for two successive terms. Would you mention how this came about?

Stevenson: Yes, I'll be glad to do that. Toward the close of the session, which was the last one of that Forty-third Legislature, the representative from Fort Worth, Joe Greathouse, came down and talked to me. I was then sitting on the speaker's stand. He said, "The members want to give you a second term." And I said, "Joe, I hadn't thought about that." "Well," he said, "they do, and we've got a petition already drawn up, and I've got a hundred signatures on it." And he pulled it out and showed it to me, and I counted them, and he had the hundred names. That was two-thirds of the membership. And I said, "All right, Joe, if that many members want me to continue my service, I will do it." And that was the beginning of my candidacy for a second term as speaker.

Gantt: Did this come as a surprise to you?

Stevenson: I hadn't heard about it.

Gantt: Then you hadn't really anticipated that you would run for a second term as the speaker?

Stevenson: I certainly had not. I had no thought of running for a second term until Joe presented me with that petition.

Gantt: Now in the next election, which would be 1934, Governor Ferguson did not seek re-election, and the attorney

general, Mr. Allred, became the Democratic nominee for governor. How did this governor's race, then, affect the speakership race after the petition had already been shown to you?

Stevenson: Well, I was already in the race. And after it became known that I was a candidate, Mr. Ford, a member of the House from McGregor, Texas, was put forward by some of his friends as a candidate. But later, he withdrew, and Mr. Calvert became a candidate. And Governor Allred became quite interested in Mr. Calvert's candidacy, and this grew out of my activity in the governor's race. I had supported Tom Hunter in the governor's race. Tom Hunter had been a long-time friend of mine. He had visited on my ranch, slept in my guest room, and ate at my table. I thought a lot of him, so I supported him. And Governor Allred had the right to choose someone that he would like to support, and he did. But the members who had solicited me to run, for the most part, stayed with me, and I was re-elected.

Gantt: Was it a very close race, Governor Stevenson?

Stevenson: It developed into a closer race than I had thought. I think the record will show that I got eighty votes, and Mr. Calvert, sixty-eight.

Gantt: Do you feel that Governor Allred's support of Mr. Calvert might have worked against his race and

perhaps, in a roundabout way, in favor of your candidacy?

Stevenson: Well, it was a two-edged sword. It undoubtedly helped Mr. Calvert to some extent, but I think the resentment against Mr. Allred, including his efforts into the speakership race, helped me. I think I have gained by it.

Gantt: What would you say was the principal issue in this race between you and Mr. Calvert?

Stevenson: Oh, we had no issues between us. I thought lots of Mr. Calvert and still do. I don't think he and I would have had any issue between us. He was one of the men who had voted for me when I was first elected speaker. Now keep this in mind: I mentioned a moment ago that Mr. Greathouse presented me the petition with a hundred names on it. Not all of that hundred were re-elected to the Forty-fourth Legislature. Some of them didn't run again; some of them were defeated. So that accounts for the difference between the hundred and the eighty that I got. It doesn't mean that too many of those that had signed for me failed to vote as they had signed for because their pledge had been given. A few did. A few were switched over--I can now name maybe two or three--not many.

Gantt: Can you recall any of the techniques or tactics that might have been used in trying to win votes in that speakership race?

Stevenson: The only one that I can recall was the argument that, since I had opposed the man who was now going to be the governor, that he ought to have a speaker elected that he could get along with.

Gantt: And this presumably would be Mr. Calvert.

Stevenson: That's right.

Gantt: In your judgement, could it be that . . . the fact that Governor Allred had not had any previous legislative experience as to why he got this deeply involved in the speaker's race?

Stevenson: I think that was largely responsible for it. He didn't understand the functioning of the membership when it came to selecting their presiding officer.

Gantt: Once you were re-elected to the speakership for a second term, then, what steps were taken to form a better working relationship between you and the governor who had opposed you as the speaker?

Stevenson: I went right over to see him, and you understand that the speaker's election is usually the week ahead of the inauguration of the governor. I was required, of course, to participate in his inauguration. I let him know by every means available to me that our past differences were buried and that from here on, whatever he

had to recommend to the Legislature would be given all the consideration that it was entitled to. And from then on, we got along pretty well.

Gantt: His reaction was favorable to your conference with him, then?

Stevenson: That's right.

Oral History Collection  
Governor Coke R. Stevenson

Interviewer: Dr. Fred Gantt

Place of Interview: Junction, Texas

Date: May 13, 1967

Dr. Gantt: This is Fred Gantt, speaking from the ranch of former Governor Coke R. Stevenson in Kimble County, Texas, on May 13, 1967, for a third in a series of interviews with Governor Stevenson concerning his long record of public service.

Governor Stevenson, in the last interview that we had, we established the fact that you became the first person ever to serve as the speaker of the House of Representatives in Texas for two consecutive terms. At the time Governor Allred had just entered office, and one of the issues before that session of the Legislature was the establishment of the Lower Colorado River Authority. Would you give us your recollection of what went on in the establishment of that Authority?

Gov. Stevenson: I don't know that I can remember all the details at this time without refreshing my memory a little, but I'm sure you know there was a great debate that went on in the Legislature for some time about that, both in the House and in the Senate, and the lines were rather sharply drawn. It was believed by a good many that we were

being solicited to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for a private corporation that had started a dam on the Colorado River which they called the Hamilton Dam. The proponents of the bill, however, were steadfast in their assertions that the corporation which had been promoting the Hamilton Dam would not profit by the creation of this authority. It would be an authority to dovetail our activities in behalf of the people on the Colorado River with the program originating in Washington to put the natural resources of the nation at the disposal of the public. In short, it was the beginning of a struggle between the proponents of public power and the proponents of private power, and that power could be used to generate electricity or for flood control or for irrigation purposes. All three of these elements of power were talked about at great length by members of both House and Senate in the debate on the Lower Colorado River Authority. I wouldn't say that I'm entitled to any particular credit for the creation of the Authority except in this: that having ascertained what I thought was the best interests of all parties concerned from a public standpoint, I appointed the conference committee in the House which met with the Senate and wrote the bill. That was practically all that I had to do with the creation of the Authority.



Gantt: What was your own personal feeling about this? Did you think it was a good bill?

Stevenson: I did. I thought it would eventually grow into an institution that would be very beneficial to the people that lived up and down the Colorado River.

Gantt: During this session of the Legislature there was also a considerable amount of other social welfare legislation enacted by the Legislature to bring the state programs in line with the programs of the New Deal. Would you mention some of the more important debates which you recall on social welfare legislation?

Stevenson: I remember several agencies that we created to deal with the agencies in Washington which would be in the nature of public welfare, such as the Texas Unemployment Compensation Commission. It was then called Unemployment Commission. But the purpose announced by the proponents of the measure was to relieve a large degree of unemployment in Texas. Then we had the old age pension program and social security. I don't know that I can give those in the order in which they came along, but I only served two years with Governor Allred, and I do remember that my second term as speaker was presiding over a Legislature that was largely engaged in debating the merits of the proposed welfare legislation.

Gantt: Now you are known pretty well as a political conservative. At the time that you were speaker, did you have any

particular feelings about the passage of these welfare measures?

Stevenson: I had the feeling that has been a lifetime conviction of mine that no institution is any better than the man that runs it, not even a bank or an insurance company. The theory behind all of this legislation was good as bringing assistance to people that needed it, but the vice in a lot of it was that the administration later became entrusted to people that feathered their own nest in doing so, and I, of course, was against that. On the whole I expect the legislation has proved beneficial, but I do know of many instances where it has been used to the advantage of the people that were administering the program.

Gantt: Governor Allred is frequently referred to as the most liberal governor that Texas has had. Would you agree with that classification?

Stevenson: I think that's correct, yes.

Gantt: What was your impression of Governor Allred's legislative leadership or his relations with the Legislature in general?

Stevenson: Governor Allred, as you know, had never served in the Legislature. He lacked the connecting link between the office of governor and the processes of legislation. If I were to indulge in any criticism of Governor Allred's dealings with the Legislature, I'd say that he thought

too much of his program and not quite enough of the viewpoint of those who might be opposed to his viewpoint.

Gantt: Did this cause him trouble, then, with the Legislature by failing to understand the legislators' viewpoint?

Stevenson: Yes, it caused considerable trouble although the record will show that a good deal of new legislation was passed under his administration.

Gantt: You feel, then, as a practical matter that service in the Legislature also well prepares a person to serve as governor later, that this is a good training ground to become governor?

Stevenson: I do, yes, sir.

Gantt: In your own experience, then, as later becoming governor of Texas, do you feel that your service in the House and as the lieutenant governor was very valuable to you in the operation of the governor's office?

Stevenson: Yes, I do.

Gantt: On the whole would you say, then, that you thought that Governor Allred was an effective governor in comparison to perhaps Governors Moody and Sterling and Ferguson under whom you had served before in the House of Representatives?

Stevenson: Well, I'd say that Allred was effective because he was in tune with the demand of the times. Depression was

on; people in many quarters in many walks of life were demanding assistance, and his liberal view coincided with their demands. Therefore, he was effective in getting over a good many of the welfare measures.

Gantt: It is frequently said that Governor Allred was very closely allied with President Roosevelt. Do you know anything about the relationship between the President and the governor in those days?

Stevenson: Not in detail, but it's a matter of record that they were very close. The President appointed him to a federal judgeship, if you remember.

Gantt: After your service then as speaker during a second term, what was your feeling about retiring from the speaker's office and becoming a member again?

Stevenson: Well, I hadn't any idea at all of being speaker a third term, but I did want to continue my membership in the House on account of the people that I was representing in my legislative district, so I ran again for that position and served one term as a member of the House.

Gantt: It is a matter of record that while you were speaker, near the end of your term your friends presented you with a fine handtooled saddle with the admonition "Ride this into the governor's office." Did you have any idea at the time you went out as speaker that you might wind up in the governor's office?

Stevenson: No, I didn't. Not at all.

Gantt: What was your feeling when you were presented with this saddle?

Stevenson: Well, I appreciated it as a gesture of friendship from the members that I'd served with up to that time for several years, and I thought it was all right, but that I'd just bring the saddle out to the ranch and use it here, which I did.

Gantt: During your service as speaker, a piece of legislation was also enacted, the law which required drivers in Texas to be licensed by the state. Do you have any recollection of the fight that might have taken place over the passage of this law?

Stevenson: That was not too much of a fight. A lot of people were fearful that it would be a nuisance, but I think most of the members recognized that something ought to be done to register the drivers of Texas and to impose on them a responsibility of operating their vehicles, and there wasn't so much opposition to the bill as there was consideration, debate, talk, of people earnestly seeking the best solution to the problem. It finally wound up with what we have since become accustomed to as the Drivers License Law, and I think it's been a great benefit to the people of Texas.

Gantt: I believe you had the honor of being presented the first drivers license ever presented in the State of Texas.

Stevenson: Well, I don't know whether the license itself was the first, but the number on it was Number 1.

Gantt: You are still carrying License Number 1?

Stevenson: That's right.

Gantt: After your service as speaker you were elected to another term in the House of Representatives in 1936. During that term of office, I believe that among other activities you were asked to go to Washington, D. C., to present the views of the Texas State Teachers Association before a Congressional committee on the tidelands issue. Would you comment on that trip to Washington?

Stevenson: Well, there wasn't very much to the trip. Several of us went up to Washington. Bill McCraw of Dallas was the attorney general at that time, and he went along to represent the viewpoint of Texas officially in behalf of the tidelands, and I made an argument before the Congressional committee which was printed and still in existence--some of the pamphlets are.

The argument centered around a resolution introduced by Senator Nye. As far as I recall at this time, that was the first effort ever made by anybody to turn the tidelands over to the federal government. Our opposition was to the Nye Resolution. We wanted to retain the tidelands of Texas, and we were supported

there by representatives from a number of other states that bordered on the Gulf of Mexico and also the Atlantic Ocean, and I believe we had a man from California there, too. All of us had the same viewpoint. Hatton Summers of Dallas was chairman of that committee, and the final outcome was that the resolution did not pass.

Gantt: What was the essence of the argument that you presented about the tidelands before the Congressional committee?

Stevenson: Well, I went into the Congressional Library in Washington after I got to Washington and found out what the committee would like to have authorities on and traced the history of the tidelands back to the time when each sub-division of government that bordered on the ocean was entitled to land as far as a cannon would shoot, and later when the cannons increased in power, it was necessary to fix some arbitrary definition of the land adjacent to the shore that would be under the jurisdiction of the country or state. They fixed it at three nautical miles, and in the case of Texas we had reserved up to ten-and-a-half miles in our dealings with the federal government when we were admitted as a state. Anyway, in my talk I related some of the history of the movement to give the adjoining state control over the three-mile limit, and then brought it right on down to our entry into the Union when we reserved ten-and-a-half miles.

Gantt: As far as you know, was this the first attempt on behalf of anybody who was a public official in Texas to present the Texas case before the federal government?

Stevenson: As far as I know, that's correct, yes.

Gantt: This conceivably then might be the real beginning of the debate and the struggle that was to follow for the next ten or fifteen years probably?

Stevenson: That's right.

Gantt: Another thing of interest during your service in the Legislature was the matter of prohibition. After the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment, this was an issue for several sessions. Do you recall any particular incident about the fight for prohibition, enactment of the local option law, or anything of that nature?

Stevenson: Yes, I remember a great deal of that, Fred, but I think that it so well accounted for in the public press that maybe we don't need to dwell on that much. All shades of opinion that you can think of were presented for debate in the Legislature about the proper way to control the liquor situation, and, of course, it's well known that what we finally established was the Liquor Control Board in Texas, and reserving to each of the counties the right of local option.



Gantt: Another thing that was done during your service in the Legislature was the passage of the constitutional amendment which would set up the Board of Pardons and Paroles, thereby relieving the governor of some of the responsibility that he previously had in that area. What was your position on that amendment?

Stevenson: I was strong for that amendment.

Gantt: Did you like the way that it emerged from the legislature--the form which it took?

Stevenson: I was satisfied with it. You know, all legislation of that character is subject to compromises, but, as you recall, it was passed by giving the judge of the Court of Criminal Appeals one appointment and the Supreme Court one appointment and the governor one appointment.

Gantt: When you became governor and had to exercise the pardoning power, did you find that this was an effective method of assisting you in that function?

Stevenson: Oh, yes, very much so.

Gantt: I assume that this is one of the most trying problems that a governor would have, and he would welcome some assistance and advice in matters on pardons and paroles.

Stevenson: That is correct. This board could devote full time to it, investigate the record of every inmate in the prison system, and make its recommendation. You are familiar with the way it operates. The governor can honor

the recommendation or he can veto it. He can't initiate the process of a pardon or a parole for an inmate, but he does have a veto power.

Gantt: You were in the House of Representatives for two terms while Governor Allred was in office. You were speaker during his first term and then a member during his second term. Did you notice any difference in the relationship between the governor and the Legislature in Governor Allred's two terms? Was he more effective in one than the other or about the same?

Stevenson: I would say about the same. That's my offhand recollection of it now.

Gantt: During your last term in the House of Representatives, then, was there any particular legislation you were especially interested in where you could use your experience as speaker in pushing the legislation?

Stevenson: No, I can't say that I had anything special. I did introduce a bill to perfect some of the legislation with reference to the public school lands and lands belonging to the state. The bill was not passed. Later, it was enacted in practically the same language that I had introduced it, but that was after I had gone over to the Senate as lieutenant governor.

Anyway, I've always been interested in the public lands of this state, not only the school lands, but the University lands. Now the University, as you probably know, owns about two million acres of public domain,

and it's been tremendously valuable to the University and also to A & M College--it's A & M University now, but we always called it the A & M College during the time I'm talking about--and the revenue derived from the royalties has been of great assistance to both of those institutions. Well, that gets back to what we talked about awhile ago, and any public money must be honestly administered.

I recall one episode that I had while I was in the Legislature when we found that one lessee of some of the University lands had installed a bypass from the place where the oil was taken out of the ground into the reservoir, and by means of that the royalties the University was entitled to could be diminished. As a result of the investigation that I started, it is a matter of record that recovery of more than a hundred thousand dollars for the University was put into the public treasury.

Gantt: Now looking back on your entire service in the House of Representatives, which was ten years, five terms, if I were to ask you what you thought your most important activity as a state representative was, what would your answer be?

Stevenson: I expect the creation of the state auditor's office.

Gantt: That's the accomplishment that you would be proudest of?

Stevenson: Yes.

Gantt: Another question about a person serving in the House after having served as speaker: what is the reaction of the membership to a former speaker who is now a member of the House?

Stevenson: I think they treat him just like any other member. Now I had served with a former speaker before I became speaker. Lee Satterwhite was speaker, and yet he came back to the Legislature as a member. We had great respect for Mr. Satterwhite, but he was just one of the boys like any other member. I had this further situation, as you know. Mr. Calvert, who was my opponent in my second election to be speaker, succeeded me as speaker, and I got along with him splendidly. He treated me splendidly, and I liked him and still do. He's now on the Supreme Court. He's been a very valuable public servant in my judgement.

Gantt: Was he fair to you, do you think, in committee assignments?

Stevenson: Yes, absolutely.

Gantt: And also in recognition to speak, etc.?

Stevenson: That's right.

Gantt: So the fact that you had been his opponent made no difference in your relationship with him as speaker?

Stevenson: I don't think it did at all, no.

Gantt: Governor Stevenson, in 1938, you announced your candidacy for the office of lieutenant governor. I wonder if you would tell me why you chose to run for that office.

Stevenson: Yes, I'll tell you. Let me preface my statement with what I've already told you about running for the Legislature in the first place and then for speaker. I got into all these races by accident; I did the same thing with the lieutenant governor. It had been traditional in Texas for many years that the lieutenant governor would come from the ranks of the Senate. I can mention dozens of them that had served as senators before they ran for lieutenant governor and were elected. I hadn't thought much about trying to interfere with that tradition until Senator Nelson, who was then a member of the Texas Senate, announced as one of his platform proposals the establishment of a unicameral Legislature, and you know, of course, what unicameral means: a one-house Legislature. I believe at this time we have one state in the Union that has the unicameral legislature, and that is Nebraska.

The more I considered that, the further I got from endorsing the proposal. I'm strongly committed to the two-house system. It's sometimes mentioned that it's patterned after the national Congress, but even so,

many measures that will pass one house that ought never to pass into law are defeated in the other house. It's a safeguard in behalf of the public, if you have a two-house system of legislation.

So I decided that I would offer my candidacy since apparently no other senator was going to run against Senator Nelson, and they did not, and because of my opposition to the unicameral legislature, I got in the race for lieutenant governor.

Gantt: I believe there were six men in the race, and you were in a runoff with Mr. Pierce Brooks of Dallas. Would you tell us something about the campaign itself--how it shaped up?

Stevenson: Well, in my campaign before the first primary, I knew I had to get acquainted all over the state, and I just devoted all my time to going here, there, and yonder--everyplace--in order that the public could see me and get acquainted with me, and I had a number of amusing incidents in that campaign.

One was I hit the Trinity River in East Texas when it was just beginning to have a little rise after a rain, and the only way to cross it was on a ferry, but the ferry was on the opposite side of the river from me. The man did not want to go out in the current because the river was rising and he did not know the extent, but

I told him if he would start over that I had a good rope in my car, and I would throw him the rope. So he did. He got about halfway across, and, as you know, the Trinity is not as large in some places as it is others, and this happened to be a good place for a ferry apparently. But when he hit the current, I threw my rope and lassoed him--I caught him right around the shoulders. He hung on, and I dragged him over to my side of the river. He was quite impressed when he found out I was a candidate for lieutenant governor. He said, "Give me all the cards you've got. I'll distribute them up and down this river to everybody I know." And I think he did, because I had a good vote from that locality.

I got over into Cooke County. I stood on the courthouse square until I had passed out one thousand cards; it was Saturday evening late and a lot of people were in Gainesville. Saturday then was a good trading day. Next morning, I was told to go up to Muenster. They had a dairy up there and a cheese factory and so forth. People would be bringing their milk in early in the morning, and then they would go to church. So I did. I got there, and the first man came up with a drum of milk in his vehicle, and there was no one to receive the milk and help him unload it,

so I offered to do that. And when we got through with that one, another one had driven up and still no helper showed up, and I kept that up until I got all of the people there who came with a milk drum unloaded. And I got fairly wet with the milk that sloshed out when we unloaded, but when the votes were counted, I had a great vote from that precinct.

I got around to Graham. It has the largest courthouse square of any small town in Texas. I went around that on a hot July day and spent nearly all day just going around that square, even ate lunch in a cafe. But when the votes were counted, I had a good vote there.

I only mention these incidents to show you that in my campaign, having very little money, I utilized my time in meeting the voters, which I still think is the best method of campaigning there is, if there were not so many voters now as there were at one time. It's almost impossible now to start out and meet the voters, but there was a time when there was no substitute for personal contact with the voter.

Now all of these that I'm mentioning occurred before the first primary, and after the first primary, it was discovered that Senator Nelson was not even in the runoff with me. But Mr. Brooks was, and then I had to resort to the use of the radio because I had such a



short time. And I had not been campaigning against Mr. Brooks; I had been campaigning against Senator Nelson, so I had to take a new look at the situation. So I got on the radio--not TV, mind you, but the radio--did the best I could, and the result was in my favor.

Gantt: What were the main issues that you discussed in this runoff campaign with Mr. Brooks?

Stevenson: The main issue was experience in government and the qualifications to hold the office. I had been speaker two terms before this campaign, and, as you have mentioned, served in the Legislature for several years. I thought I was acquainted with the processes of government; Mr. Brooks had not had that opportunity, and I believe I convinced the public that in this particular instance I was the better qualified of the two candidates.

Gantt: Now before we discuss your service as lieutenant governor, let me ask if you ever entertained an idea of running for any other statewide office such as attorney general or one of the other constitutional offices?

Stevenson: Never. I had never had any thought of that.

Gantt: In this campaign, also, after the runoff primary and at the time that W. Lee O'Daniel was also the nominee for governor, he took the rather unusual step of

endorsing other candidates for the other constitutional offices. Did you happen to be the person that he endorsed for lieutenant governor? What was your thinking about the endorsement of Governor O'Daniel?

Stevenson: I didn't think from the first that it would cut a great figure in the election, and when the votes were counted in the second primary, my judgement was vindicated. Some of those that he endorsed were not elected. I happened to be one that he did endorse, and I was elected, and I had a feeling of appreciation for his endorsement. I was gratified by the fact that he thought that I might be the better qualified of the two candidates, but so far as the net result of influence, the fact that some of those he endorsed were not elected and some were, well, just still leads me to the belief that the public voted for the individual candidate and not because somebody else told them to.

Gantt: You wouldn't think, then, that as a matter of practice that it is a very desirable thing for a gubernatorial nominee to endorse candidates for the other constitutional offices?

Stevenson: No, all of the experience that we've had before now leads to the conclusion that it doesn't benefit the candidate to have the endorsement of the governor's office.

Gantt: Now while it does not directly bear on your own campaign, as a matter of interest to the student of Texas government and politics, Governor O'Daniel used some very unusual tactics in his own campaign, such as a hillbilly band, etc. Would you care to comment on the reaction of the people in those days to a man who was trying to put on a big show politically to get elected to office?

Stevenson: The big show was an advantage to the man who could operate because it got the crowd. Then if he had a message to deliver, there was the audience to receive it. Which reminds you of what is many times said about Shakespeare's plays--that Shakespeare's genius would not have been perpetuated if there had not been an audience capable of appreciating his efforts at the time that he produced the plays. So all of that has a bearing on how Governor O'Daniel, Senator O'Daniel, was very successful in attracting audiences with the musical show that he put on for the people, but, mind you, he could not transfer that musical show to me. He couldn't transfer it to any of those people that he endorsed. They were on their own, and none of them had the facilities for a musical show, and the fact that he simply said that so-and-so is the best candidate in this race didn't make the

impression that it would have if he had had one of his shows with a tremendous crowd present and got up and put his arm around the candidate and said, "This is my choice." You see the difference?

Gantt: Yes. Had you ever met Mr. O'Daniel before you were running for lieutenant governor?

Stevenson: No, I never had.

Gantt: After the primaries were over and you were the nominee for lieutenant governor, Governor O'Daniel was the nominee for the top office. There was a very exciting Democratic Convention that took place in September in Beaumont, which was Governor O'Daniel's first attempt to deal with the political machinery of the Democratic Party. Would you give me your recollection of what went on at that 1938 September convention?

Stevenson: I attended that convention both as a delegate from my home county and as a nominee of the Democratic Party for the office of lieutenant governor, and to me the principal difference that Governor O'Daniel encountered there was this: I mentioned awhile ago that the show that he carried around with him, the musical show, attracted immense audiences. And then he would have the opportunity to present his message, and they were quite popular--the show and the message, also. In Beaumont it was an assembly of delegates from all over

the state. These delegates were not attracted to that convention by the musical show; they were there in the same capacity that I was--as a representative of the county or precinct that they represented. So there wasn't the same attraction, and when Governor O'Daniel attempted to speak in the vernacular of a campaign speech made at the conclusion of a stirring musical program, he was a little bit at a loss for what to say. He didn't have his constitutional or legal phraseology so that it was attractive to those who were there as delegates, and they just weren't impressed. I think that's the most charitable thing to say; they just weren't impressed with what Governor O'Daniel had to offer.

Gantt: Were you called on as the nominee for lieutenant governor to address the convention?

Stevenson: No.

Gantt: After the inauguration, which, incidentally, is said to be one of the biggest ever, when he became governor and you became lieutenant governor, Governor O'Daniel outlined a proposal to the Legislature that called for the enactment of a transactions tax, and in the Legislature this became one of the principal sources of controversy. Would you give me your impression of the O'Daniel transactions tax.

Stevenson: Let me mention this about the inaugural: it was out in the University stadium, if you will remember. There again, the appeal that I mentioned awhile ago about showmanship had its effects. An immense audience came out to hear and to see. But when we got into the sessions of the Legislature, the members who were elected to the Senate and also to the House were accustomed to hearing messages delivered by the governor in conformity to the constitution, which might be called in the language that applies to the Presidential message to Congress, a State of the Union message. Now there's a vast difference between a State of the Union message and an appeal following a musical show. Governor O'Daniel was never able to explain what he meant by the "transactions tax." When you talk about a transaction, that embraces nearly everything in human activity. Whether it's a horse trade or purchase of a milk cow or what might be the occasion, it's a transaction, and the members of the Legislature just couldn't fathom where the limits would be to this transactions tax. So he was never successful in getting it across.

Gantt: Was there a bitter fight in the Senate over which you were presiding about this matter?

Stevenson: Yes, there was, and a more bitter one in the House. I wasn't presiding over the House, but I still had all of

my connections, friendships, over in the House that I had acquired over the previous years of my service there, and I know that the debate was even more bitter there than it was in the Senate.

Gantt: Well, now that you've mentioned your relationships with the House, this would be an appropriate point for us to talk about your reaction to being lieutenant governor and presiding over the Senate as opposed to being the speaker of the House of Representatives. You are the only person, actually, who has held both these positions. Would you compare the position as presiding officer of the Senate with the position of presiding officer of the House?

Stevenson: I believe any comparison would be hard to make. The environment is totally different. The House has 150 members, and every one of them are a human element and in large part a freshman; they're new to all the processes of government. On the other hand, the Senate is usually composed of men who have seen service in the House. There have been a few exceptions where men had been elected to the Senate and never had service in the House, but the large majority through the years, if you'll check the record, is men who have been successful in the House and seek a promotion by going to the Senate. Once they're in the Senate, they're acquainted with the processes of

government, parliamentary procedure, the way to get thing accomplished, etc., and there's not the same opportunity for the presiding officer to exercise influence in the Senate that there is in the House.

Gantt: Do you think that this might result from the fact that he is elected by the voters rather than by the membership?

Stevenson: That has a large bearing on it, yes.

Gantt: If you were to compare the two positions, then, I take it that you would say the presiding officer of the House is in a more influential position than the presiding officer of the Senate in the legislative process?

Stevenson: That's my conviction, yes.

Gantt: It's sometimes said that the office of lieutenant governor is a very powerful office. Would you agree that it is a powerful office?

Stevenson: Yes, I would, but not as powerful as the speaker's office. That's the point I'm making in these comments.

Gantt: To what extent would you say that the office of lieutenant governor is a powerful office? How is it powerful?

Stevenson: Well, he has the opportunity to appoint all the standing committees and other committees of the Senate. He can pick out the best talent available to consider legislation when it goes to committees. He has the power of reference of bills when they're introduced as to which committee



he'll send it to. He has a number of prerogatives that are capable or susceptible of being used to promote influence, if he desires to do so, and he can vote in case of a tie, but he can't vote as a member like the speaker can. The speaker is still a member of the House when he is elected; he can vote anytime he wants to. As a usual thing, the speaker doesn't vote unless there is a tie, and then he votes the tie off, but he has the right to do it, to vote on anything he wants to. Another thing that makes the speaker's office more powerful is that he can still introduce any bill on any subject that he desires, whereas the lieutenant governor does not have the authority to introduce any bill on any subject. He is simply the presiding officer over the Senate, but he does not have any vote unless it's in the case of a tie, and he doesn't have the right or privilege to introduce any bill or resolution.

Gantt: You spoke a minute ago of the fact that many senators had served in the House. When you were presiding officer, were there very many people who had served in the House with you that had been promoted to the Senate?

Stevenson: Yes, I had a number of members there who had served with me in the House: Senator Aikin, Senator Morris Roberts. Well, there were several more. I could

enumerate a dozen, I think. Ben Ramsay was a former House member who served with me in the House. He later went to the Senate and later became lieutenant governor. There was quite a few of them in the Senate who had served with me in the House.

Gantt: Do you believe that the fact that you had this connection with some of the members in the House put you in better position as the lieutenant governor and presiding officer of the Senate?

Stevenson: Oh, I think it certainly had an influence. Yes, I do. I tell you two more who were in there: Weaver Moore from Houston and Senator George Moffett. They both served with me in the House, and then they were in the Senate when I became lieutenant governor. I could think of others if I had the list before me.

Gantt: Governor Stevenson, as the lieutenant governor you established some sort of a working relationship with Governor O'Daniel, I'm sure. Would you comment on the relationship that existed between you and Governor O'Daniel while you were lieutenant governor?

Stevenson: I feel like it was very pleasant. Governor O'Daniel appeared to me to realize that he was not a lawyer, and that he hadn't made much of a study of the constitution. And we got on a working basis to where he would discuss legal questions with me in measures he was thinking about proposing to the Legislature, and I believe I got

along as well or better than anybody else in the Legislature did with Governor O'Daniel.

Gantt: Governor O'Daniel followed the rather unusual practice of reporting to the people on a Sunday morning broadcast each week. Do you believe that this is an effective way for a governor to report to the people?

Stevenson: I think it probably antagonized more than most any other device he could have used, and I expect it was less effective as far as helping him was concerned than most anything he could have done. People who differ with you most of the time do so honestly, especially in the Legislature. They don't like to be held up to the public as recreant to a public trust just because they happen to differ with the governor.

Now in my relations with Governor O'Daniel, I explained to him at the outset that there was a difference between what a lieutenant governor could do and what a speaker of the House could do, and one of those fundamental differences was that the lieutenant governor could not offer amendments from the floor to any bill, and he couldn't introduce any bill--I've mentioned that already in comment on the lieutenant governor's position--but most of all, he couldn't engage in any debate. Now the speaker can vacate his chair and call any member of the House up to occupy the chair and get

down on the floor and make as long a speech as the members will permit, and usually they'll let him talk as much as he wants to. The lieutenant governor does not have that privilege.

So I explained all of this to Governor O'Daniel, that I couldn't be as effective for him as I might if I was over in the speaker's chair. For that reason I gave him no assistance in a number of his proposed measures, like the transactions tax and others that he proposed, and I think the accomplishments of the Legislature grew out of conferences among themselves, both House and Senate, as to what ought to be passed for the good of the state. They'd go ahead and do it, and some few of them I believe the record will show that he vetoed, but whatever they did, whether he liked it or didn't like it, it was a composite product of the brains of the Senate and the House.

Now that's the best analysis I can give to you about what I think about the governor and the Legislature. My personal relations were fine, but with the membership of the whole House and Senate, he did not get along too well with them.

Gantt: It is a matter of record that Governor O'Daniel got fewer measures passed through the Legislature which he recommended than any governor in perhaps the twentieth century.

Do you attribute this fact to the possibility that he was not a lawyer and perhaps did not understand the constitutional background of government as well as a legally trained person?

Stevenson: Undoubtedly that's correct, yes.

Gantt: One of the functions of the lieutenant governor is to serve in the governor's office when the governor is out of the state. Did you ever have this opportunity to do so while you were lieutenant governor?

Stevenson: No. No, I did not.

Gantt: Governor O'Daniel did not leave the state and leave the office of governor with you?

Stevenson: I'll say this: if he left the state it was at a time when nothing was going on in the Capitol, so there was no need for anybody to occupy his office. I don't think he left during the time.

Gantt: You and he both ran for re-election then in 1940 to your prospective offices, and in the second session over which you presided as lieutenant governor one of the major problems was the business of financing the highway program. Would you tell something of the background of that problem?

Stevenson: That was the bill that was originally House Bill Number 333, which I wrote and sponsored while I was a member of the House of Representatives. It would take some

time to discuss all the provisions of that bill, but primarily the trouble was this: the constitution provides that the Legislature cannot make direct appropriations for more than two years at a time, in other words, just provide for the biennium. They don't encroach on the function of the next Legislature.

Now it was necessary to have a continuing policy of road construction by the Highway Department, and to do that we provided what they should do--that was my bill--in order to pay off the road bonds that had been voted by the people of the respective counties and then to keep a continuing program of construction going. We laid down the guidelines but provided that succeeding Legislatures should make the appropriation to carry out these functions. One of the duties, then, of every Legislature was to make the appropriation for carrying out the provisions of this highway construction program.

During the second term of Governor O'Daniel, the Legislature wrangled over that appropriation for practically the entire time and never did pass it. After he was elected to the United States Senate and I became governor, I called the one special session that I ever called, and the membership completed the program in less than eleven days.

Gantt: Why do you think that the regular session was unable to agree on the matter?

Stevenson: Well, fundamentally there are a good many viewpoints about this road construction matter, farm-to-market roads, etc. That played a certain part in the failure of the members to come to an agreement about which was the best method of doing it, but I tell you my honest belief that a large part of the failure was due to the fact that many of the members had become offended with the Sunday morning broadcasts which you referred to, and they were just in the process of nettling the governor by not yielding to any suggestion hardly that he would make.

Gantt: The press of the day reported that Governor O'Daniel was practically inaccessible to the public. Was this your recollection?

Stevenson: Yes, that's right.

Gantt: Why do you think, probably, that he would make himself inaccessible to the public?

Stevenson: That would be a difficult matter for me to pinpoint for you, Fred. Undoubtedly, some of it was due to the fact that many people trained in the law have always sought the governor's advice on legal questions, at least to the point of discussing with him, and I believe he felt an inferiority complex so far as meeting with the business and professional men of the state that might want to come in and discuss matters with him.

- Gantt: Can you recall any other rather controversial legislation during the 1941 session other than the road financing problem?
- Stevenson: Well, I think we spent more days there than any session up to that time. Nothing of any particular prominence occurs to me right now. The general impression at that time was that, well, we're killing time, but we're not hurting the state.
- Gantt: One of the events that was to change the entire picture, however, was the death of Senator Morris Sheppard in 1941, and the opening of a vacancy in the United States Senate. Governor O'Daniel, I believe, was requested by a resolution passed by the Legislature to seek the office of United States Senator. Why do you suppose the Legislature would enact such a resolution?
- Stevenson: Well, (laughter) I would hate to say what I think was at the bottom of that resolution. Some people would say that they wanted to get rid of him (chuckle).
- Gantt: This is the impression that one gets from reading certain news commentators of the day, that the Legislature thought that perhaps this would more or less kick him upstairs and get him away from the state government. When the race for United States Senator occurred in 1941, there were several prominent candidates who had held positions in state office who sought the place, including Governor O'Daniel and Attorney General Gerald



Mann. Congressman Lyndon Johnson was in the race. I believe former Governor Dan Moody was a candidate. Did you ever have any idea of possibly getting in that particular race yourself?

Stevenson: Oh, no, not the slightest.

Gantt: When Governor O'Daniel finally was elected to the Senate then, could you tell me a little about your feelings as becoming governor of the State of Texas?

Stevenson: Naturally, I had some feelings about it. I was glad to have the opportunity to serve the people of Texas to the best of my ability. I was glad to have the honor that goes with the office, but I think I went right along with the members of the Legislature as "just one of the boys" just like I'd been doing ever since I'd been down there. I believe they felt that way about it, too; I think they felt like they could come in and talk to me as well in the governor's office as they could over in the speaker's office or lieutenant governor's or any other place that I had served in the Legislature. That's my honest belief about it; that's the way they conducted themselves toward me.

Gantt: What were some of the first things that you did when you became governor? Any change of policy of the previous governor or anything of that nature?

Stevenson: Well, the first thing I did was open up the big reception room that is part of the governor's suite of offices,

opened the doors to the public and took down the railing that had been separating--that's out in the rotunda--the public from the reception room, and the public seemed to like it very much. Now that's the physical change.

Having gotten the reception room open, all the visitors came in as much as possible. Sometimes I had a little business to attend to. I think that's about all there was to it.

Gantt: One of the problems you were faced with was the fact that the highway financing program had not been adopted by the regular session, and very shortly after you became governor, it was necessary for you to call the first and only special session that you ever called while you were in the office. Do you have any particular recollections of this first special session that you called?

Stevenson: Yes, I do. That stands out prominently in my mind. I knew it was important to get the attended to, and if you remember reading the message that I sent to the Legislature, I said that no matter of principal was involved; it was a subject for compromise, and having served with most of the membership of both House and Senate, I found them very receptive to the suggestion to get together and attend to the public's business and get on about their business, and they did.

Gantt: What was your own personal feeling toward the Legislature, many of whom you had served with, as now the chief

executive? What was your relationship to the Legislature?

Stevenson: The most pressing thing from my standpoint was the deficit in our state budget. We had a deficit of about thirty-four million dollars, and that meant that every employee of the House, the Senate, all the state departments, were receiving a check that had to be discounted over at the office of the money changers, and I thought that that was deplorable. We have laws on the books to prosecute individuals for giving hot checks, and I thought that the state was setting a bad example by giving hot checks. I regarded them as hot checks; the check that the employee received was not one that could be cashed at the state treasury. It had to go through the hands of some money changer who got his discount, and it was rather substantial because nobody knew just when the money would accumulate to pay off that particular check.

Now I think you know that any man who is running a business can stop up many leaks in that business. Some people refer to it as "cutting the fat" out of government expenditures. There is some "fat," and it can be cut out. I devoted myself to that. I went into the books, saw where certain things could be eliminated, certain other expenditures could be reduced.

I'll give you an example. In a state as large as Texas there is hardly a week that passes that there isn't a vacancy somewhere in some office either by death or resignation. I had a good many of these in the district judges over the state, and in every case I made arrangements with some judge of an adjoining district to take on that load for me and carry it until I could get my state finances in better shape. Some of those men have been my warm friends to this day; they responded splendidly, and they are due considerable credit for having helped me to get the state out of the red.

And, of course, as you know, when I left the office in January, 1947, there was a surplus in the treasury of thirty-five million dollars. It went from thirty-four million in the red to thirty-five million in the black, and we didn't hurt any of the actual service that the people need to expect, such as the continuation of the road program, carrying on the functions of the schools, educating the children. Nobody suffered at all from the plan that I had of chinking up the leaks in the state's finances.

Gantt: You consider that to be probably the most pressing problem that faced you in the early days of your service as governor?

Stevenson: I would say that that was by far the most pressing one, and it continued right up to the time of Pearl Harbor, which I believe was the seventh of December that same year, 1941.

Gantt: With the attack at Pearl Harbor this put you in the position then of being the World War II governor of Texas. What particular responsibilities did being a wartime governor throw on you which you might not have had otherwise?

Stevenson: A great many extra duties. Perhaps the most annoying one was dealing with the rationing program which was promulgated by the authorities in Washington. You could not buy as much gasoline as you needed; you had to be rationed. And as I expressed it at that time, there was no more real common sense in rationing gasoline in Texas than there was rationing cod fish in Massachusetts. I had a good many arguments with the authorities over that. I helped all of our business people as much as I could to alleviate the pains that go with a censored business establishment.

And on top of that, we had the civilian defense program which I was responsible for. We were supposed to carry out a lot of orders from Washington with reference to civilian defense, and we made an effort to do that within reason, but we didn't do everything we were told to do. It would have bankrupted the state if we had.

Gantt: In your role as wartime governor, this probably gave you a closer working relationship with the President of the United States, Mr. Roosevelt. Could you recall your relationship with the President?

Stevenson: I got along all right, I thought, with President Roosevelt. Now I didn't agree with some of his policies as I've already indicated, but I did it respectfully. I didn't assume any attitude of disobedience or one that would lead him to believe that I thought I had more intelligence than he did. I didn't do that, and when he would call me, which he did occasionally as he would on the telephone, I did my best to comply.

As you know, when we got into the war, there was some alarm that maybe Mexico might give us some trouble. He called me and asked me to go down to Mexico City, and, as he expressed it, "Keep them from sticking a knife in our back." So I went and stayed a week. Nelson Rockefeller came down and spent some time with me and General George Marshall. We got along nicely with the Mexican authorities, never had any more trouble with them, and in order to carry out a policy which was expressed orally to the Mexican authorities, I created without any legislative authority the Good Neighbor Commission in Texas. I appointed some sensible, level-headed men to serve on that commission,

and we ironed out a good many trivial matters that might have developed into some friction had they been left to go unchecked. But there was something to do all the time while the war was going on.

Gantt: Governor Stevenson, as the governor, what was your feeling about the utility of the Good Neighbor Commission after it got in operation?

Stevenson: I think it did a great deal of good, Fred. I heard of instances all the way from Brownsville to El Paso, up and down the Rio Grande, where they effected reconciliations and changed misunderstandings between the citizens of Mexico and our people into good arrangements, and I had fine reports from the Good Neighbor Commission, so much so that, as you know, the Legislature subsequently authorized it as an agency of the state government and gave it an official status which it had had up to that time only by executive order from the governor's office. A good many able men have served on that commission since. I think it's been really worthwhile in promoting good relations with our neighbors across the Rio Grande.

Gantt: Did you report to President Roosevelt after you returned with Mr. Rockefeller and General Marshall from the goodwill trip to Mexico?

Stevenson: I think that report went through what is called "channels," Fred. Now Nelson Rockefeller was an official

of the State Department in Washington at that time, and General Marshall, as you know, was Chief of Staff of the Army. I'm sure they carried the report back to the President. I did not make any official report except to write him a letter telling him I had done the best I could to carry out his wishes in the matter.

Gantt: Were there other instances during your service as governor where you were called upon to try to promote a better understanding between Mexico and the United States?

Stevenson: Well, I made several efforts which I enjoyed a great deal. For instance, down at Victoria . . . that's the capitol of one of the Mexican states; it's south of Monterrey. I'd been in Monterrey several times before and had also been in Nuevo Laredo, but on this occasion they were having the opening of a state fair at Victoria, and the governor invited me to come down and I went. I enjoyed it very much. They had on exhibit the cattle and agricultural products that they were quite proud of, and they were worth seeing. He had a duchess from all of the adjoining states, one from Nuevo Laredo, one from Matamoros, one from Raynosa, one from Tampico, Monterrey, Saltillo, other places, and the banquet given for these fine young ladies, which I attended, I enjoyed very much. They were intelligent girls, and I think all of them spoke English, at least I got along nicely with them.



The governor apparently was quite satisfied with my visit because he gave me a bear which I brought home, and having no place to keep it, I donated it to the Baylor Bears.

Gantt: Can you recall any other trips that you made to Mexico?

Stevenson: Yes, now I went on another occasion out west to El Paso--crossed into Juarez and spent some time there; went down to Chihuahua and spent a night there in a hotel and visited the schools in Chihuahua and made a speech to the children in two or three different schools there and how much of it they understood, I don't know, but it was a happy occasion that was evident from their expressions, and I know that's the way I felt about it. From there I went over to Torreon, spent the night there. Then I went to Parres, spent the night there; I went to Saltillo, spent a night there, wound up at Monterrey, and spent two or three days and then came home by way of Nuevo Laredo.

Gantt: Do you feel that as a result of good will trips like this that there is a better understanding promoted between Texas and Mexico and the United States and Mexico?

Stevenson: Well, I believe so. Of course, I'm not posted about the situation as it exists today, but certainly during the war we had a very, very nice arrangement between the

people of Texas and Mexico. We had no trouble from Mexico; nobody down there made any kind of an effort to embarrass the United States in its conduct of the war.

Gantt: Other than the good will trips that you were called upon to take, what were some of the duties that the wartime situation put upon you as governor of Texas?

Stevenson: There were many military installations being established in Texas at that time, and almost every time when one was opened I would be invited to come and participate in the ceremonies. I made all of them, I think, that I ever got an invitation to. I went to the airplane factories in Fort Worth and several other places; I went to Bergstrom Field near Austin on several occasions, and then all of the installations around San Antonio.

Maybe the one that aroused the most comment at the time was when the 36th Division was transferred to Florida. I got letters from several of the officers over there saying that the soil was too sandy to stick a flag pole in, and would I please fill up a tub of dirt and bring it over to them so they'd have something to stick the flagpole in, and I complied with that request. I got some of the blackest, stickiest dirt I could find around Austin, loaded it in the car, and

drove over there, and had royal good time with the boys over at Camp Blanding. And in the city of Jacksonville they gave quite a banquet in my honor, and I had a chance to meet and talk with many of them over at that place. Those are just examples of what went on constantly to keep up goodwill with the Army. Everybody knew I was not a military man, and yet under the constitution of Texas I was commander-in-chief of the Texas forces, so I had to at least respond to the requests that were made. I wasn't much of a commander, but I was a pretty good water boy.

Gantt: One of the incidents connected with this was the launching of the cruiser Houston, which was replaced after being destroyed in the war. I believe you participated in that.

Stevenson: That's right. The original cruiser Houston, the one which was afloat when the war broke out, was sunk by the Japanese. The citizens of Houston made up the money to replace it. It was built at the naval yard in Newport New, Virginia, and when time came to christen it, I was requested to go with a delegation from Houston, and I went along. And we went up to Washington, and there picked up the Secretary of Commerce, Jesse Jones. He went with us down to the launching and the christening. That's just another example of what was going on almost day in and day out over the state.

Oral History Collection  
Governor Coke R. Stevenson

Interviewer: Dr. Fred Gantt

Place of Interview: Junction, Texas

Date: May 14, 1967

Dr. Gantt: This is another interview with Governor Stevenson on May 14, 1967, at his ranch in Kimble County, Texas.

Governor Stevenson, one of the things that was reported about your initial service as governor was the creation of a better working relationship with the press of the state. Would you comment on how you went about establishing such a relationship?

Gov. Stevenson: From the time I first went to the Legislature, I had a few good friends in the press. One in particular you know about is Harry Crozier. He came from Paint Rock, which is almost in an adjoining county to mine, and anyway I had known him a long time. I had other friends of the press, so when I took over the governor's office, I invited them to come on in and ask any questions they wanted to. Up to that time their relations with the governor's office had been rather poor. As a matter of fact, I don't think they had the opportunity to make any inquiry about anything very much. They did respond. They came and the result was this: I said, "Now, let's just lay down this kind of

policy. Anything that is of public interest, the people of Texas are entitled to know about, and whatever I can tell you I'll tell you truthfully. If it's something that I cannot tell you about, I'll say so to begin with, and we won't have any misunderstanding about whether I said so-and-so." They agreed to that, and they kept to it, and I think our relationship was perhaps as good or better than that of any other administration that we've had in Texas.

Gantt: At one spot the press corps was referred to as a sort of "kitchen cabinet" of your administration. In what respect was this an apt description?

Stevenson: I took them into my confidence on many occasions. I would discuss with them appointments and qualifications that I thought ought to go with an appointee to any particular vacancy that I happened to have at the time and would ask their views about the matter. Quite a number of the members of the press, if you would recall, were good students of government. The big daily papers, as I remember them, had some excellent men representing them, men who wanted to do the right thing, and that seeking of advice from them, I think, cemented a relationship that was very helpful to the whole situation.

Gantt: Did you ever use this as sort of a trial balloon for an idea or an appointee?

Stevenson: Yes, I just mentioned that. I would seek their advice about what they thought the qualifications ought to be, and then I'd say, "Well, does so-and-so seem to measure up to that?" They'd think awhile, and then discuss it pro and con.

Gantt: What was your practice on holding press conferences?

Stevenson: We had one every day--every morning--and it usually lasted about an hour. And when I say every day, I mean every day that I was in the office. On these instances I have already mentioned in these interviews about these trips I had to make over the state to visit military installations and other things of that nature, quite naturally we did not have a press conference, but any-time I was in Austin we had a press conference.

Gantt: Now you apparently had no thoughts other than to seek election to your first full term in 1942. Would you give us your recollection of the campaign where you sought your first full term as governor of Texas?

Stevenson: It was not an ordinary campaign in this respect. As I've already mentioned, I was going over the state a great deal on matters connected with the war. I was meeting people, getting acquainted with them. I thought they approved the way I was handling the affairs of the office, so I did not campaign in a way that other campaigns have been conducted. That particular one sort of took care of itself.

Gantt: Your opponent, I believe, was Mr. Hal Collins of Mineral Wells. Were there any particular issues in the campaign that he raised that you thought significant?

Stevenson: No, I don't recall any. As it turned out, Mr. Collins was my chief opponent. I think I had two or three others, but I don't recall them at the moment. Anyway, he was the chief one, and I don't recall that there was much of an issue between us. I'm sure that I mentioned that I had long service around the statehouse in Austin and perhaps knew more about the operation of the state government than Mr. Collins did, although he was quite a successful businessman. I can't recall any other issue of importance.

Gantt: Do you think perhaps the fact that we were in war then probably cut down of what otherwise might have been a somewhat vigorous campaign?

Stevenson: Yes, I do.

Gantt: During your service as a wartime governor, I believe that you instituted a Committee on National Defense and made periodic reports to the people on defense matters. Would you comment on this?

Stevenson: I think I made what was called a "Monday Morning Report." I talked every Monday morning that I had the opportunity to the people and kept them posted about what we were

doing to coordinate civilian defense in Texas with the national program. Now when I was unable to make the talk myself, I had a few good friends that substituted for me. One that I will never forget--he's passed away now--was Mark McGee of Fort Worth. Mark had been a former Brownwood boy, and like Harry Crozier, I had known him a long time and well and thought a lot of him, and he would pinch hit for me on these Monday morning broadcasts. Then I had one or two others that did the same thing. They made a good impression, too, over the state.

Gantt: For the most part you got favorable reaction from this approach to keeping the people informed?

Stevenson: Yes, I did.

Gantt: Do you feel that it was helpful in your campaign for re-election to have had this rapport with the people?

Stevenson: I do. I think it was splendid. I frequently reminded the press and the people that the spotlight of publicity is one of the most cherished traditions in any free government.

Gantt: You were re-elected without very much opposition then; you were therefore required by the constitution to deliver a message to the Legislature after you were inaugurated for your first full term. Do you recall the preparation of that first message to the Legislature as governor in your own right?



Stevenson: Not in all the details, but I remember the essential points on which I proceeded. Having served with the members of both House and Senate for a number of years, I thought they were about as well-informed on what the state needed as I was, and I didn't presume to give them too much advice. Now I've always believed in the separation of the powers of government as outlined in the constitution: those of an executive nature to one department, those of a legislative nature to another department, and those of a judicial nature to a third department. Having that belief, I did the best I could to keep from encroaching on the functions of either one of the other departments. It was the duty of the governor--still is--to see that the laws are faithfully executed. I never conceived it to be my duty to tell the Legislature what laws to pass, but once they passed them, I did the best I could to see that they were enforced. I think that covers the philosophy that I used in the preparation of that address to the Legislature.

Gantt: Are you saying, then, that you believe that the governor should not outline an extensive program of proposed laws before the Legislature, but be rather available to them to advise with them when they come up with some ideas about appropriate legislation?

Stevenson: Yes, I think you stated it very nicely. Now keep this in mind: under the processes of government outlined in the constitution I've just referred to, the governor has the power of veto. If the Legislature passes any legislation that he thinks is unwise or inimical to the best interests of the people of Texas, he can veto it. Now, if they don't agree with his veto, and if two-thirds of them vote to override the veto, the legislation passes anyway; it becomes law. That's an example of the checks and balances that are in the provisions of our constitution which appear to me to have withstood the test of time, and that's the way the government ought to be run.

Gantt: Now that you've mentioned the veto power, perhaps we ought to talk about your views of that power of the executive. I believe that you did not ever have a veto overridden while you were in office. Do you recall whether you vetoed very many bills or not?

Stevenson: I don't recall how many. I certainly didn't want to use the veto power any more than I considered absolutely necessary, but when I did act, I acted positively, and as it turned out, I believe, the Legislature in the last analysis agreed with me. At least they didn't override any of my vetoes.

Gantt: It has been said that within the last twenty-five or thirty years which, of course, would include your period as governor, that there has been a trend in government

to discuss before the passage of legislation the position of the governor and the position of the Legislature and thus avoid the necessity of a veto. Is this true?

Stevenson: I think so. I think there's a large amount of wisdom in that, too. Any governor who is approachable and accessible and doesn't mind stating his position can be of great help to the Legislature in giving his views, and that would be distinguished from laying down a program and saying, "Now I want you to do this; my program must be enacted." You can see the dividing line there between those functions.

Gantt: Then you followed the policy of being available to discuss before the introduction of legislation ideas of members of they wanted to talk to you about it?

Stevenson: Yes, that's right.

Gantt: Do you recall any particular problem that was facing the Legislature about that time, that you were especially interested in, other than the war situation?

Stevenson: Well, I would say that I was interested in all the problems of the Legislature looking to a progressive and constantly high standard of public service, but I don't recall any particular thing now that would be worth recording for posterity any more than the books themselves reflect.

- Gantt: One of the interesting developments in that session of the Legislature in 1943 was that a young representative from Liberty County, the Honorable Price Daniel, who later was to become governor of Texas, was chosen as speaker of the House. What was your relationship to the speaker in that session?
- Stevenson: Just fine as could be. I liked Price Daniel and was glad to see him honored by the House in being chosen as its speaker. And while I did not take any public position because I'm opposed to that in principle--trying to tell the Legislature whom to choose as their presiding officer--I was very happy when they did choose Price Daniel.
- Gantt: The relationship between you and Mr. Daniel was quite workable?
- Stevenson: That's right.
- Gantt: In the election in which you were elected, John Lee Smith was elected as your lieutenant governor. What was your relationship to Mr. Smith?
- Stevenson: Just splendid. He had supported me--had made radio speeches for me--and I was glad to reciprocate by helping him to be elected lieutenant governor.
- Gantt: Did you consider, then, that the governor was an integral part of the legislative process in this advisory capacity that you have spoken of?

Stevenson: Yes, I think that's right. I think the definition in the constitution which defines executive powers and legislative powers and judicial powers says that the functions of each of these departments shall always be kept separate certainly would not preclude sitting down and talking over the business of the state in a heart-to-heart way and exchanging views, helping to iron out kinks in the legislative enactments and everything of that kind. It all goes to create not only a body of good will, but a body of intelligent service to the people.

Gantt: The record shows that this session of the Legislature passed what was called the Declaratory Judgement Act. Do you feel that that was one of the major pieces of legislation that might have come through that session?

Stevenson: Yes, I do. I think that's a good piece of legislation.

Gantt: We neglected a minute ago to talk about your inauguration as governor for this term, and perhaps we ought to mention that. This contrasted somewhat to the inauguration that you had gone through as the lieutenant governor, did it not?

Stevenson: It contrasted with my first inauguration as lieutenant governor, yes. The one we had out at the stadium at the University? Yes, this one didn't cost anybody much money. The war was on, and I've seen the statement in

the paper that the total cost of the inauguration was twenty-five dollars. I can't vouch for that figure; I never thought it was quite that much.

Gantt: So then the inauguration was actually sort of a "business as usual" type of operation, I take it.

Stevenson: That's right.

Gantt: Do you recall some of the people in the Legislature at that time that were especially dedicated to working with you in the war effort . . . other than the speaker and the lieutenant governor?

Stevenson: Why, I could mention dozens of them that I thought were very devoted to the war effort and to the best interests of the state. We had what I thought were able and excellent men serving in both houses at that time.

Gantt: One of the extra-constitutional duties of the governor is to be the titular head of his political party. Now as the gubernatorial nominee, you had the September convention. Was there anything that developed in the matter of party affairs that was significant along about this time--1942, 1943?

Stevenson: I don't remember any in either of those years. There was quite a commotion in 1944.

Gantt: That's right. We'll discuss that in a little while. So far as the party affairs were concerned, you considered them to be running fairly smoothly during the first term that you were elected?

Stevenson: Yes, I did.

Gantt: What was your relationship along about this time with the national party organization of the Democratic Party?

Stevenson: Now let me digress a minute there into one of my long-established views. I never found anything in the Constitution of Texas which said that the governor should be the head of his party or even an official of his party. By long acquiescence it became well-known that the candidates either run on the Democratic ticket for the nomination for office or on the Republican ticket or some other ticket, but to me that never meant that I should become what is termed the "leader of the party." The governor is just a member of the party in my viewpoint, and it's well and good for the party to have a chairman, which they do, but I never sought at any time to be a delegate to the national convention. I never went to any of them as a delegate from Texas; I never sought to be a spokesman for the party in any respect. I left all of that to the able party leaders.

I had a similar situation, to give you my viewpoint. We have in Texas what is known as the Interstate Oil Compact, one between Texas and many other states. Now as a matter of practice, the governors have become well-known to be leaders, etc., of that Oil Compact Commission. If you examine the record as it pertains

to me, I never functioned as such. I appointed a man in Abilene, J. C. Hunter, a very able man, to represent me at these meetings and to serve as my spokesman, to keep me advised, etc., which he did to my complete satisfaction. I pay tribute today to his memory because he was such a faithful ally of mine in that respect. But I personally didn't do that; I recognize the great oil industry for what it is to Texas, but let the oilmen run their business, and the governor should tend to his business.

It's the same way with me about the political situation. We have plenty of men who are capable of being chairman of the parties, both Democratic and Republican or what have you, without imposing that duty and that responsibility on the governor of Texas. That's just one of my views now; you may not agree with it.

Gantt: The State Executive Committee has sometimes been called the unofficial right arm of the governor. I take it from your position that you would hardly agree with that.

Stevenson: I just don't agree, no, all the way along. I got along splendidly with those officials of the party, put it that way. We had a good relationship, but I didn't try to run the party, and they didn't try to run the governor's office.



Gantt: So I take it, then, that you are saying in effect that the political role of the governor is, in your opinion, not as important as some would seem to believe it to be?

Stevenson: That's right.

Gantt: One of the things that is especially well-known about the governor's position in Texas is what we call the board commission plan of a disintegrated administrative system, and there are probably a hundred boards or so that run many of the major functions of government. What was your relationship to these boards and commissions, for example, the Public Welfare Commission or the State Highway Commission and so on?

Stevenson: I thought my relations with those departments were excellent. It turned out during my administration that I had another very able man named John Winters that I selected to run the Welfare Department. I thought he did it splendidly. I had no ambition to run his department; I let him run it, and he allowed me to run the governor's office. Now the Highway Commission was largely the same way. I am very fond personally and politically of a state highway engineer named Gib Gilchrist, who still lives over in Bryan, Texas. He later became president of A & M University or A & M College as it was called then. I thought he was a

high-class public servant in every capacity that he engaged in, and I could go on and enumerate many others. Those are just two examples that I have there, Gilchrist and Winters, but there are others that I could mention. I got along splendidly with these different boards, whether they were appointive or elective.

Gantt: Do you believe that the job of the governor of Texas is made more difficult by having the board commission plan than if you had, let's say, a cabinet-type government where the governor would appoint the heads of these departments similar to the President of the United States appointing his cabinet?

Stevenson: No, I agree with our state pattern of government more than I do the national. Fundamentally, I think the people have a right to elect their officials. They may sometimes use poor judgement in the selection, but nevertheless it's their right and privilege to do so, and I think that when they elect the different officers, like the attorney general and the state treasurer and the comptroller and on down the line, it makes them take a better interest in government. The very fact that we have campaigns for these different offices emphasized the importance of the office, and I'm strong for the elective process. I think it's much better to have our judges elected by the people than to have them appointed.

I never have subscribed to this modern theory of appointing judges to office. People have a right to elect their judges. Now having elected a set of officers, there's no reason why those officers can't get along. They can sit down and parcel out the different services that each of them is supposed to render, recognize the duties imposed upon each of them by the constitution and laws of the state and then proceed to get along with the different heads of the departments.

Gantt: Did you have any kind of meetings on a regular basis with the elected officials?

Stevenson: I did during the war, but after that I'd say that it was not as regular as it might have been.

Gantt: During the war what was the purpose of the meetings? Just to keep the heads of the departments informed as to the war effort of the state government, etc.?

Stevenson: That's right, yes, and to secure their assistance; we worked together as a team.

Gantt: One of the constitutional responsibilities of the governor is to appoint a large number of state officials. What was your impression about the appointment process, for example, the senatorial courtesy that is followed? Is this a good plan?

Stevenson: Well, I think it's all right, yes. It will have some defects, as you can point out some defects in any system

of government you can think about, but I think the one we operate under has as few as any that would be workable at all. If you get too much perfection in government, you sort of lapse into dictatorship, and that's not good in a democracy.

Gantt: Did you ever have any trouble with any of the appointments that you sent to the Senate--the Senate not agreeing with you on your selections, etc.?

Stevenson: Well, two or three times the Senate did not confirm the appointments that I made.

Gantt: What was your feeling on that?

Stevenson: I felt they had a right to exercise the responsibility that's entrusted to them by the constitution.

Gantt: And then when they did not confirm the appointment that you made, you simply chose somebody else and submitted their name?

Stevenson: That's right.

Gantt: Overall, then, would you say that the Senate didn't give you very much trouble on that score?

Stevenson: Not a bit, no. I recognized that they had a right to exercise their duties and to follow their best judgement, and I never criticized them in any respect for failing to agree with me. And I also realized that there were many other men in Texas of ability and character that I could select from, and so I'd just send up another appointment.

Gantt: What do you consider probably to be the single most difficult part of a governor's job?

Stevenson: I believe you have to consider that in relation to circumstances. If a depression is on, maybe the most difficult part is connected with the economy of the state, and that takes in the finances of the citizens as well as the state itself. If economical conditions are good, and you're running along smoothly in that respect, you may have something else crop up which creates a disturbance or difficulty, and that would become the most burdensome part of the duties of the governor in the operation of his office. So I don't believe you can lay down any standard that says any one particular line of operation is more difficult than another.

Gantt: In the same vein, if you had to pick out one part of a governor's constitutional responsibilities that you thought to be the most important, what would be the most important function that the governor has in state government?

Stevenson: To see that the laws are faithfully executed.

Gantt: Governor Stevenson, one of the most time-consuming responsibilities is frequently said to be a number of rather unusual requests that are made on them by the citizens. Could you remember some of the things that you were asked to do as governor?

Stevenson: Let me give you a little bit about the system that I followed. You know, of course, that the volume of mail which comes to a governor's office is rather sizeable; hundreds of letters come in every day. I arranged for one particular person to open all the mail--one of my secretaries. Then every letter was parcelled out to the person who had the responsibility of dealing with whatever was the subject matter of that letter. For instance, all the applications for appointment to public office went to one secretary; all requests for pardons or clemency in the prison system went to another secretary; all requests for football tickets went to another secretary; all requests for arrangements of social functions, etc., went to still another secretary. Each of these was authorized to call on other of the secretaries for assistance. For instance, if there was more in one day's mail in one of these divisions and another was light, why, the teams would operate together in answering the correspondence. We tried to see that every letter got an answer.

Now there was another secretary that had all of the unusual letters received, and most of those I never saw because they didn't think it was worth taking the time of the governor to have him look at some

frivolous request. So I guess I couldn't give you any concrete examples of the bizarre; I just don't recall them now, but I know they came in quite a body. The correspondence is tremendous.

One think I haven't mentioned is that very many of the letters during the time I was in office and the war was on had reference to civilian defense. Now I had an excellent man for that position. I don't mind calling his name: Bill McGill--W. L. McGill. He's passed on to his reward now, but he had a competency about him for organizing the state and communities in the state with reference to civilian defense matters.

Oral History Collection  
Governor Coke R. Stevenson

Interviewer: Dr. Fred Gantt

Place of Interview: Junction, Texas

Date: August 2, 1967

Dr. Gantt: This is Fred Gantt speaking from the ranch of Governor Coke Stevenson in Junction, Kimble County, Texas, on August 2, 1967, to record for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection another series of interviews with Governor Stevenson.

Governor Stevenson, in the last interview that we had you had won re-election for your first full term in 1942, and you were the World War II governor of Texas at that time. Now when 1944 came along, did you give any consideration to whether or not you might be considered to be running for a third term if you sought re-election?

Gov. Stevenson: Oh, yes, there was quite a little consideration given to that, and I discussed it with a number of people. And it was almost unanimous that I had not had but one term of my own since I had filled out an unexpired term, and I would be in the second term of my own if I could be elected. I had no thought of breaking any third-term tradition, but it was considered by my friends and those I did discuss it with that I would not be doing that to have two terms of my own.



Gantt: In that campaign, the record shows that you had eight opponents. Do you recall any of the details of running for re-election in 1944?

Stevenson: Oh, yes, I could give you a great many details, but I don't believe they'd be interesting to posterity. There was no principal issue involved. The war was on and the great majority of the people of Texas were devoting their energies to winning the war.

Gantt: You were re-elected by a very overwhelming majority, receiving some 84 per cent of the total vote. Would you say that you had a relatively easy campaign in receiving that?

Stevenson: Yes, I would say that it was relatively easy. I campaigned over the state, combining the campaign with every function that might aid in the prosecution of the war and in every community where I was called upon to appear.

Gantt: Did you make very much use of the radio during that campaign?

Stevenson: We did, quite a little, but it was in the form of reports to the people about the Red Cross and the other efforts that were being used to prosecute the war.

Gantt: There was no major issue, then, between you and your opponent?

Stevenson: No, I'd say not . . . no . . . no major issue.

Gantt: Now did the fact that this happened to be a presidential election year weigh in your campaign at all?

Stevenson: I expect to a certain extent, but I didn't get mixed up with the presidential campaign at that time . . . running my own boat.

Gantt: One of the issues in the presidential campaign that year was the pro-Roosevelt people versus the anti-Roosevelt people. The record shows that there was some discussion about how this could be handled so far as the Democratic Party of Texas was concerned. Do you recall anything about that controversy?

Stevenson: Oh, yes, quite a bit about the controversy. I believe we had two conventions that year--one which met in Austin and adopted a slate of presidential electors to be voted on, and then there was another convention in September, as I recall, which presented another slate of electors as the candidates of the Democratic Party.

Now between these two conventions, I tried to promote as much harmony as I could. I even went to Washington and conferred with the President about it at his request or at the request of some of his people that I construed to be speaking for him. Anyway, I met with the President, and he said that my proposal was fair. My proposal was to submit two slates of

electors and let the voters choose between them in the general election. He promised to send a telegram down to the September convention approving of my plan, but when the convention met, no such telegram was ever presented, and the convention went ahead and acted as I have already mentioned--by substituting a new list of electors for the one that had been proposed in the May convention. Later, I was told by the man to whom the telegram was addressed that he did receive it but that he didn't feel like presenting it to the convention.

Gantt: This was a rather unusual situation in that never before had a September convention substituted the presidential electors for what the spring convention had nominated. What do you think were some of the main reasons for this action on the part of the September convention?

Stevenson: Well, like most conventions are, the majority at that particular time imposes its will on the convention. The majority in the May convention seemed to be of the anti-Roosevelt people, and by the time September had come around, the majority had gone the other way.

Gantt: Can you think of any reason which might have brought this change of heart about?

Stevenson: No, except that just more activity on the part of the pro-Roosevelt faction than there was on the other one.

Gantt: Now I believe that it's correct that former Governor Jimmie Allred was a leader of the pro-Roosevelt people at that time.

Stevenson: That is right.

Gantt: And you would attribute this action of the September convention to being perhaps better organized?

Stevenson: That's right--better organized and more militant.

Gantt: Did you yourself as the titular head of the Democratic Party, as governor of Texas, participate actively in that?

Stevenson: Didn't participate in any convention--May or September.

Gantt: While we're on this subject of the governor's relationship to the Democratic Party, maybe this would be an appropriate place to ask you some general questions about your feelings on the governor's role as a political leader. What do you think is the appropriate relationship between a governor of Texas and the Democratic Party?

Stevenson: I thought about it this way at that time, and I don't think there's any reason to change my opinion now. A candidate of either party is the candidate, and as such he should do everything he can in behalf of the party--I mean everything he can do honorable in behalf of the party. Once he becomes the nominee of the party and you have the general election and one of the nominees of some party is going to be elected, then I think the governor becomes the governor of all the people and that he should lay aside his partisanship. He doesn't have to lay aside his convictions, but in my mind

there's a difference between partisanship and convictions . . . principles. And that's at least what I tried to do--be governor of all the people. I never attended, while I was governor, a single national convention.

Gantt: You felt that by attending a national convention this would be injecting the governorship in too much partisanship?

Stevenson: That's right. The governor ought to attend to his duties under the constitution of Texas, and that's what I tried to do. I didn't go off to other places to attend conventions that were national in scope.

Gantt: I take it then that in your experience you would say that the governor's role as a political leader is not as important as some of the other roles that he has under the constitution.

Stevenson: I certainly agree with you on that statement.

Gantt: Do you think that the role as the titular head of the Democratic Party is useful to a governor?

Stevenson: I can't see very much use in it. Keep this in mind: the party goes ahead and elects a chairman--state chairman of the party. He becomes the actual leader of the party. And the opposition parties do the same thing. They all have their own chairman. Now for the governor who is on the winning side in any general

election to become a partisan just never did fit in with my concept of the duties of the governor's office.

Gantt: The September convention which is held in Texas is sometimes called "the governor's convention" at which time there's a state platform drafted up and a state committee is elected. Did you get organized . . . did your forces get organized to run a September convention while you were in office?

Stevenson: Yes, we got along fine in the September conventions, so far as the state party is concerned. But I left that largely to my friends to do that. They elected the state chairman and the members of the executive committee--the State Executive Committee. I had no complaints from any action they took along that line, but I never thought it was the province of the governor to try to dictate who the state chairman should be or who the members of the executive committee should be.

Gantt: Governor Stevenson, it is sometimes said that the present day cleavage in the Democratic Party in Texas between liberals and conservatives was really begun in this fight between pro and anti-Roosevelt people. Would you agree that this is an accurate statement?

Stevenson: I don't know whether I could agree or not. It brings up this that is in my mind: what is a liberal? I've always been classified as a conservative. I have no

disposition to dodge that label, but to me a conservative is simply the type of man who goes along in the avenues of service that have become standard according to the way he's been raised. For instance, my conception of a good man is one that has church affiliation. Maybe a man who doesn't believe in churches at all and calls himself a liberal says, "I have no straight-jacket from any church to tell me how to live." So when you get to thinking about all of the activities of the human race, I wonder sometimes what is conservative and what is liberal. To me, being conservative just means to go ahead in the school of thought that I've been reared in and have adhered to all of my life. I'm still of that opinion now. That's conservative. When it comes to being liberal in politics I think that we are conservative--and that to me means, as I said, just what I said, the way I've been raised--that means to be frugal and thrifty, work hard, take care of my money, take care of the state's money, never get my money mixed up with any of the public money whether it's city, county, or state. In other words, be the kind of public servant, for instance, that I would want if I had the power to choose a public servant.

Now those that believe in a liberal policy of spending that money come to be classified as liberals

politically. They're liberal with everybody's money except their own, and pretty liberal with that to the extent they don't accumulate much in a lifetime. If you'll notice, most of those who do not pay any taxes have a tendency to be liberal with a taxpayer's money. Whereas the one who has got something to pay taxes on knows how he came by it, and he's frugal enough to resent any attempt to impose an unusually heavy burden on him.

He knows, of course--any conservative does; all of us do--you can't have a government without raising the money by taxation. You can't have a school, you can't have a city, you can't have anything that's worthwhile in service to the human race without paying for it anymore than you can have food on the table without paying for it. But you can be reasonable in all of those matters. You don't want to adopt a policy of luxurious living for yourself or your family. I mean that's my conservative belief. It'll cause you to squander more in that direction than you ought to be squandering. In other words, if you're going to be thrifty, if you're going to lay up a little to take care of you in your old age, and to support your family and so forth, you got to draw the line somewhere. Now to my mind, the faction that has come to be known as



liberals in many instances do not draw any line, as far as I can see. They're willing to spend the last dollar and then go in public debt for more to spend. Does that give you a sort (laughter) of a picture of . . .

Gantt: That's a good explanation of your position. One of the events that took place in 1944 was the decision by the United States Supreme Court called Smith vs. Allwright, which in effect declared the white primary of Texas to be unconstitutional. The record shows that many people clamored for you, as governor, to call a special session of the Legislature to try to do something about that decision. Do you have any recollections of your impressions of that decision on the white primary?

Stevenson: Yes, I have quite a bit of memory of that. The reason I didn't call a special session of the Legislature in response to the demands was that I, after careful thought, couldn't figure out anything they could do that would be effective to get around the decision of the Supreme Court of the United States in a legal manner. That would be a matter for the Congress to do--to regulate the authority of the Supreme Court of the United States to make decisions.

The next thing in my mind was this: I didn't mind Negroes who were qualified coming in to the primary and voting--exercising the privileges of the voter. I've

never favored repealing the poll tax. I thought everybody who wanted to vote ought to be willing to pay something for the privilege, and to me it seemed inconsequential that a poll tax would be a deterrent to a good citizen who wanted to vote. Now I thought that if there were enough Negroes interested in voting to come on and pay their poll tax like the white people did, I could see no reason for denying them the opportunity to vote for their public officers.

On the other hand, I have never favored just throwing the bars down and letting everybody go vote. There are a lot of people today that are not qualified to vote. They have no intellectual qualification, no training along governmental lines, never given any thought to the consequences of good government or bad government, and apparently have never thought of that old adage that "when the wicked rule, the people mourn." So I think until they learn that lesson, they shouldn't be permitted to vote. That's just something we can't control down here in Texas . . . the way I viewed it at that time.

Gantt: Did this decision open up a new bloc of Negro voters?

Stevenson: I don't think so, so far as Texas is concerned.

Gantt: There was a good deal of sentiment in Texas against that decision, though, brought to your attention as governor.

Stevenson: Oh, yes, yes, that's right. And it was probably an unwise decision . . . it seemed to me then--and it seems to me now--that since the primary is for the benefit of the members of the party, they ought to have the right to exclude anybody that they want to from that primary. They're merely making a nomination in that primary of an officer--nomination of a candidate for an office to be voted on in the general election. And if the people then in the general election don't agree with them--their candidate is defeated--that's all. So it looks like that would be fair, that the members of any party would have a right to prescribe such rules and regulations as they might see fit for the exercise of party membership. But anyway, I was thinking along that line . . . it's of no avail today.

Gantt: Well, after you were elected again in 1944, this was approximately at the height of World War II. Were there any additional activities that were put upon you as governor in the prosecution of the war that you can recall?

Stevenson: Well, I wouldn't know how to answer that exactly. Naturally, as the war grew in intensity, the activity of the people grew in all segments of government--the cities, the military installations,

the counties, the state government. All were drawn up into more accelerated movement, and to that extent I had more to do, but I can't specify at the moment anything in particular.

Gantt: Did you have very much personal contact with President Roosevelt during that time?

Stevenson: Well, there again, it would be relative, I'd say. I did have several meetings with the President. I've mentioned to you before that it was at the President's request I went to Mexico City, and he sent from Washington Nelson Rockefeller, who was then connected with the State Department and is now governor of New York. And he also sent General George C. Marshall. And the three of us tried to carry out his wishes there in Mexico, and I think we were successful.

Later, he came to Texas himself in person, and I was requested to meet him over in San Antonio which I did, and he made an inspection of all the military installations there in San Antonio. Now I can't at this moment give you the date of that, but it was just before General Krueger was sent over to the Pacific to assist in the campaign which we claimed a lot of territory that we'd previously lost to Japan. I remember that well because General Krueger was along in the same car with President Roosevelt and me when we were making these inspections.

Gantt: Now as a matter of interest, would you comment on your impressions of President Roosevelt?

Stevenson: Why, I have no objection at all. I think I've told you before that personally I got along very well with President Roosevelt. I found him to be an easy man to talk to, and he did not show any anger or animosity if one didn't agree with his suggestions. And on this occasion that I'm speaking of in San Antonio, we had quite a discussion about a few things that applied to Texas that I didn't agree with him on. One was the rationing of gasoline, rationing of automobile tires, and one was the taking of too many young men from the farms and ranches of Texas. As I viewed it, I thought it interfered with our productive capacity for food, which was important in winning the war. But in all of that we got along very well, and the President . . . he was a forceful figure; he could present his viewpoint.

Gantt: But he was willing to listen to the other man's side if they disagreed with his viewpoint.

Stevenson: Yes, yes, he was . . . he was with me. I have no quarrel or complaint. Some of his friends in Texas chastised me occasionally for being anti-Roosevelt because I didn't agree with his policies. But now I tried to keep in focus, just as I've always tried to keep in focus, that you can disagree with the policies

of some of your best friends without falling out with them personally. That's the way I felt about it.

Gantt: Well, is it fair to ask you whether or not you supported President Roosevelt in 1944?

Stevenson: In the general election?

Gantt: Right.

Stevenson: I did not. I don't mind saying so. I voted for President Roosevelt twice, which I thought was the American tradition. Two terms was enough for George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, and it should be enough for President Roosevelt, and I did not vote for him for the third term or fourth term. But as I say, it was not through any personal animosity; it was just that I didn't think that Americans should elect a man for the third and fourth term.

Gantt: Well, after he was elected for the third and fourth term, though, what would be your general evaluation of his service as President?

Stevenson: He was elected first in '32--took office in March of '33. His second term began in '37 and ended in '41. Now by the third term, we were almost in war when he was inaugurated. It broke out during that year, '41 . . . in December it was Pearl Harbor. But before that he was making deals with England to sell them destroyers, as you remember, and other things.

Actually, we were in the war--no declared war but we were in it on the side of England. And I have no fault with him about that. I agreed that if we had to get in it, that's the side we ought to get on. But it's hard to evaluate now the third and fourth term . . . well, the third term. Although he was elected to a fourth term, he didn't get to serve any of it to amount to anything, as you recall. He died the 12th of April, 1945, and had hardly begun his service in the fourth term and what he had begun was still in the war. It was regrettable to me that he didn't live a few months longer to see peace come-- but he didn't. So I'd say that it's hard to evaluate his third term service on account of the war activity. He devoted practically all of his time to the war.

Gantt: When President Roosevelt died and President Truman became the Chief Executive of the United States, this was shortly after you had begun your second elected term as governor of Texas. Did you have very much relationship with President Truman?

Stevenson: No, I did not. No, I didn't have much with President Truman.

Gantt: He didn't come to Texas while you were in office, as you recall?

Stevenson: I can't recall if he did. Did he?

Gantt: I don't believe he did.

Stevenson: (Laughter) I don't think so.

Gantt: I just wondered whether or not you might have had some contact with him such as you have had with President Roosevelt.

Stevenson: No, I don't believe so.

Gantt: Governor Stevenson, the Forty-ninth Legislature met in 1945, and this was to be your last term as governor. What would you consider to be the most pressing problems before the state that the Legislature had to consider in that year?

Stevenson: Keep this in mind: the war was on and was reaching its climax when the Legislature convened in January of 1945. They elected my life-time friend Claud Gilmer as speaker, and I couldn't have had a more fortunate selection as far as I was concerned. Claud Gilmer was the man that I tried to get to run for the Legislature in 1928, the year that I was first elected, but he refused at that time to become a candidate. But later, when I ran for lieutenant governor, he was a candidate for the Legislature. He succeeded me as a member of the House, and in '45 he was elected speaker.

Now my relations continued to be very pleasant with the Legislature. I didn't have much of a program to present to the Legislature. As I've explained to



you privately--and I don't mind to make it public-- I've never taken much stock in this policy of the Legislature enacting the governor's program. I don't believe the constitution of Texas encourages the idea that a governor should have a program and that the Legislature should bend all of their wills and efforts to enacting that program for the governor. Legislation is a matter of responsibility for each individual member of the Legislature, and the governor's function is to see that the laws are faithfully executed--that's what the constitution says. Now it's true that it does provide for his making estimates for the amount of money to run the government and giving a statement of the condition of the state and so on and so forth. He's regarded, I believe, as the custodian while the Legislature's not in session, and it's quite fit and proper, as I view it, for him to submit a statement of what's gone on and what's happened while they've been in recess. But I never thought that it was proper for the governor to have a program that would take the place of all of the individual opinions and efforts of the individual members of the Legislature. And because of that, I think my relation with the Legislature was very good.

Now I did recommend a few things--the constitution provides that the governor may recommend certain things, but it doesn't call it a program. It doesn't say that he shall say to the Legislature, "This is what you shall do, and when you have done it you go home, and I'll keep you here until you do do it or you won't go home." I don't believe in that. I did recommend the farm-to-market road system, and they had been very generous in both the Forty-seventh Legislature and then in the Forty-eighth Legislature to go along with the idea of a farm-to-market road system which has been very beneficial to the state, as I view it. I've always been strong for the conservation of natural resources. I made that as a recommendation. I'm still of that opinion that natural resources need preservation and development. Outside of those two things, I don't think that there was much done in the Legislature, but I don't think that the Legislature did the state any harm.

Gantt: The record shows that you suggested judicial redistricting and also legislative redistricting. Was that a particular problem at that time?

Stevenson: Well, not a particular problem, except the constitution calls for the Legislature to redistrict the state for legislative purposes after each federal census.

Since that is a requirement, I thought it ought to be complied with, but yet I never did discover much harm done to the state by failure to redistrict legislatively. In other words, I feel like that if the population of a certain county had maybe doubled in the preceding years, a representative for that county could still look after the common interests of that particular county as well as he could for the previous number that was in the county. So I didn't feel too concerned about redistricting for legislative purposes, only to carry out the mandate embodied in the constitution that that's what we shall do. And I believe in obeying the constitution.

Now, so far as the judicial redistricting is concerned, that's an entirely different situation. The judge of a court in a county whose population has doubled or tripled has many more cases on his docket. It's not a matter of his representing any particular faction there or any particular interests that are common to the whole county. It's a matter of civic progress in civil matters, seeing that justice is done between litigants; in criminal matters, it's a matter of enforcing the law, keeping down crime, and seeing that those that commit crime are properly punished for doing so. So judicial redistricting has been a matter

that I've given lots of thought and attention to. I've recommended legislation. I'm still of the opinion that the Legislature ought to redistrict this state for judicial purposes.

Gantt: We've talked in previous interviews about some of the financial problems that the State of Texas faced, and you have indicated your interest as a member of the House of Representatives in the passage of legislation which would put the state on a sounder fiscal basis. During your service as governor, the state was probably in about as good a financial condition as it's ever been. To what do you attribute the surplus in the treasury? How did all this come about?

Stevenson: Along the line I mentioned awhile ago in discussing liberals and conservatives, you either are thrifty with your own money and the state's money or you're not thrifty. I think I was thrifty as an individual and have always been. I certainly tried to be thrifty with the state's money. We just plugged up all the leaks that were visible anywhere, for instance, along this matter of appointments to office. With the war on litigation was at a low ebb. One district judge could serve two districts. I had a number of close personal friends among the judiciary that volunteered to do this and helped me save the state money in that respect.

I've never forgotten those fine friends that enabled me to leave the positions vacant for two or three years because this particular judge would go over and attend to the duties in the vacancy in the courthouse.

Gantt: Were there any other ways that you can think of where corners were cut to save money for the state?

Stevenson: Well, yes, but I don't believe that it's any value to posterity to enumerate them now. They would appear inconsequential. Just like I mentioned about the spirit of thrift, it's the little things that build the dam, don't you know.

Gantt: Governor Stevenson, in the summer of 1944 when you were campaigning for re-election, one of the matters of concern in the state was the relationship between the president of the University of Texas, Dr. Homer P. Rainey, and the University regents. Would you give me your recollections of this controversy and how it affected your position as governor or how your position as governor was affected by this?

Stevenson: I can't recall at this moment the exact date when this controversy apparently became public, but it was during that summer. And charges and counter-charges were made. And as I recall now, it continued to get more bitter as each side had adherents that took part in it. And as I recall, Dr. Rainey in October of 1944 called a meeting

of the faculty at the University and made a rather extended speech during which he discussed a good many phases of the controversy. Following this, the regents met in Houston on November 1, 1944, and by vote which was recorded at that time as being six to two, Dr. Rainey was fired as president of the University.

I don't think I could truthfully be said to have been a partisan either way in the matter. The controversy was thrown into my office when the matter of appointing the regents came along and which everyone knew would be when the Legislature convened in January of 1945. Keep in mind the board was composed of nine members, and three are appointed every two years to a six-year term. The main fact, as far as I'm concerned, is that I did reappoint those members whose terms were expiring in 1945.

Gantt: Governor Stevenson, you have mentioned the appointment and reappointment of regents. This brings up the broad question of how a governor goes about selecting a person to serve on a state board. Would you discuss some of the problems that a governor faces in making appointments and some of the standards he uses in choosing certain people?

Stevenson: First of all, you need a man of high character, you need one who has the time to devote to the discharge

of the duty, you need one who's intensely interested in higher education, you need one that commands the respect of the public generally. And it is well known that there are thousands of such men in Texas. Now I didn't happen to know all of the thousands or so that would meet these qualifications, so it would boil itself down, so far as my method of operation is concerned, to men that I knew.

I'll give you one example. One of the men I appointed on the board of regents of the University was W. Scott Schreiner from Kerrville. I knew the Schreiner family for many, many years. I knew that Captain Schreiner and his son and his grandsons, which Scott was one, had been very much interested in the establishment of Schreiner Institute, which was an educational institution of high moral character. And I knew that Schreiner had the time and the means to devote to making the University of Texas a good regent. So I appointed him, and I had no reason to be disappointed in his service. This is just an example.

I knew other men whose appointments I made that I thought measured up to these qualifications that I've enumerated. Now that would bring into consideration a point that some people have mentioned--that the governor appoints his political cronies to these boards and

commissions. I never thought that was proper. I've got some high-class political friends that I don't think would be competent as members of the board of regents of the University of Texas. On the other hand, there are some well-qualified men to be regents who for one reason or another were not my political supporters. I don't think that's the proper line of demarcation to make the appointments to an educational office by depending on whether the candidate has been a political supporter. I tried to choose men that would reflect honor and credit on the University and also on the State of Texas.

Gantt: Now did you follow more or less the same general standards in making appointments to other offices in the state government besides the board of regents?

Stevenson: I did. That was my ambition to fill the offices that I was required to fill with men who would reflect honor and credit, not only on the office but upon the State of Texas.

Gantt: Now you have been at one time the presiding officer of the Senate, and we are told that the practice of senatorial courtesy in the confirmation of appointments is a very strong unwritten rule in Texas politics. What is your impression of this practice of senatorial courtesy?



Stevenson: Well, it's just as strong, I believe, as the public believes it to be. It's not in order for a governor to make an appointment in any senator's district of a man who's hostile to that senator.

Gantt: Do you believe that that is a good practice in government?

Stevenson: Yes, I agree with it.

Gantt: Overall in your service as governor, were there ever any appointments that you made that were not confirmed in the Senate?

Stevenson: I think I can recall maybe two that were not confirmed-- maybe three or four. Yes, I believe I can recall four now.

Gantt: For what reasons do you think they were not confirmed?

Stevenson: Political reasons.

Gantt: Governor Stevenson, we have been discussing the reappointment of certain regents who had voted for the ousting of Dr. Rainey as the president of the University. Do you believe that your reappointment of anti-Rainey men and the ouster of Dr. Rainey had any effect upon the political climate of the state about that time?

Stevenson: Yes, I do. I think it crystallized sentiment both ways. Those who felt Dr. Rainey was right in his position gravitated toward him as their leader, and the result was that in the course of time he announced as a candidate for governor. And one of the statements I

remember being made by many of his warm supporters was that it would be a vindication of his position. On the other hand, people who thought the government of the University should be left to the board of regents flocked to their assistance, and that sentiment crystallized.

Oursiders generally just ought not to be bothering the board of regents, not even the governor, and I had a very warm letter from the chairman of the board who complimented me on the fact that I had not interfered in any way with decisions made by the board of regents. I actually didn't. I didn't do . . . it wasn't my province to fire a president of the University or to choose one. My function was to appoint them that I thought qualified to be on the governing body of the University, and I did this always to the best of my ability. Having done that, I didn't think I ought to interfere with the discharge of their duties. It was their responsibility, and they should do it unhampered from any source. A number of people have that same viewpoint, and they rallied around the board in support of the board, and those of the opposite view rallied around Dr. Rainey. I'd say that it really brought on the main issue in the next election--1946.

Gantt: Do you remember the mail that you received about this? Was it favorable to reappointment of these men, or did

you receive a good many unfavorable comments on your action?

Stevenson: I received a good many expressing both viewpoints--a great many letters. But as the subsequent vote in '46 would indicate, the majority thought the board of regents was right.

Gantt: Now you brought up the 1946 election. Did you ever give any consideration to being a candidate for re-election in 1946, as governor?

Stevenson: I gave consideration to it. I was frequently asked in the press conference, which I held very often in my office for the benefit of the newspapermen in Austin, and they asked me my views. But before Dr. Rainey made any announcement of his candidacy, I had come to the firm conclusion that I would not be responsible for breaking the tradition in Texas that no man ought to be elected governor three times. I'd had two elected terms, so I would not run for the third. And I made a statement which the press carried verbatim, expressing my views about it.

And then later the other candidates began to announce. Dr. Rainey may have been the first. I'm not certain. But in the course of time, Beauford Jester and Grover Sellers . . . I don't know, one or two more . . .

Gantt: Governor Stevenson, after having been elected two terms and serving the greatest part of the remainder of Governor O'Daniel's second term, this puts you as the chief executive for some five-and-a-half years. Up to that time, this was the longest length of service that a governor of Texas had served. I think it would be appropriate, therefore, to ask your views about the general aspect of the office of governor in the executive branch. In the first place, would you comment upon the relationship of a governor to the various boards and commissions that have been established to carry on major functions of Texas government. Is this a good system?

Stevenson: Yes, I think it is. It might be improved on, but I don't think we should swing from the present system into what is ordinarily referred to as the cabinet system, where the governor appoints the main officers of the state government. Now these are my views about that. All of the departments that are elected by the people to serve in Austin, such as the comptroller, the state treasurer, and the attorney general, their duties are defined by the constitution of the state. A governor might pick a more competent person in some instances than the people would elect to that position, but the people are entitled to elect those officers, and if they make a mistake, it's their responsibility.

And as a general rule, I'll say that so far as my knowledge goes from about forty years association with the state government in Austin, they haven't made many mistakes. We've had a very efficient government in the main.

Now as to the boards and commissions that are created by the Legislature, anytime that any of those cease to function satisfactorily, the Legislature can change them . . . change the term of office. They can change the qualifications of the man that serves on it, and they can enlarge the board or diminish it. Whatever they decide to do, it's under the control of the Legislature. I think that it's a better system to have it that way. The Legislature, as you know, is composed of 181 men fresh from the different sections of the state after each election. I mean that literally, that though the senators have terms of four years, they have to look to the next election and keep their political fences up and in tune with the people, and they must give good service or they are not going to be returned. I would say that our present system is just about as good as I can think of that might be devised for the administration of state government.

Now since we have these boards and commissions, I hear it said even now--I heard it when I was in Austin

as governor--that we could consolidate some of them . . . save the taxpayers some money. I haven't yet known of a consolidation that I thought improved things. We've had a recent one where they consolidated the State Parks Board with the Game, Fish and Oyster Commission. I know from the statistics I read that it hasn't resulted in saving any money, and I don't think it has resulted in any better administration of either the game and fish and wildlife resources of Texas or of the state parks, either. So I don't believe that that argument is soundly based.

On the other hand, it's well known that efficiency in any of these departments grows with the opportunity of the holder of the office to become accustomed to the duties and responsibilities which devolve on him. Any man worthy of the name is going to do that. I think that we get good service by having all of these separately administered. I can't think of any one group of five or six men that would constitute a governor's cabinet that would be as qualified to administer the state treasurer's office, the comptroller's, the attorney general's department, and the various others of the elected officials of the state, as we now have. It's just too much responsibility to put in the hands of any four or five men.

Gantt: Under the constitution, the governor is charged with the responsibility of being the chief executive officer. Yet, there are many officials in his administration who are directly elected by the people, and to some extent you have to share the praise or the blame for what they do. What are some of the, you might say, informal ways in which a governor might influence some of the elected officials and members of the independent boards and commissions? What are some of the methods that you have at your command to get them to work effectively in his administration?

Stevenson: The old-time policy of persuasion . . . the gentle art of persuasion. During the war, we made it a point to have a little conference, oh, about once a week if we could get around to it. The various elected officials there in Austin would meet with me, and we'd discuss what was necessary for each department to do to make a contribution to the war effort. In that way we all got a rather intimate viewpoint about the administration and the other one's department. And I think it was quite wholesome, and I think that can be kept up at all times if the governor is a leader, if he's a man that can go and sit down and talk with his department heads without trying to be a dictator.

Gantt: This amounted, then, to sort of an informal cabinet meeting of the elected executive heads.

Stevenson: That's right, it did.

Gantt: And you found this to be a very effective means of communicating with people in the executive branch?

Stevenson: That's right.

Gantt: Now in looking back on your service as governor, what part of the job would you say is probably the most difficult part of being governor of Texas?

Stevenson: I expect the matter of making appointments is the most difficult. There was a time, I expect, when the people who wanted pardons for their relatives and friends took up more of the governor's time. But that's been largely shifted to the present Pardons and Parole Board. They now receive the applications first and make their own recommendations to the governor, and he can either accept or reject as he sees fit. But it takes an enormous lot of the work of making investigations off of the governor.

So I would think the next most difficult job now is the matter of making appointments. You understand when you think of 254 counties in Texas and how every one of them will be affected by some appointment the governor makes, either of a district attorney or a district judge or some vacancy somewhere in the elected offices . . . and they must be filled by appointment of the governor. So that takes an awful lot of your time.



I think it's the most difficult of all the duties of the governor.

Gantt: What do you believe to be the most enjoyable part of being governor of Texas?

Stevenson: You're familiar, I guess, with the response that one governor made to that: that the day that he was inaugurated and the day he passed the office on to his successor were the two most enjoyable days (chuckle) in his administration.

Gantt: Do you agree with that?

Stevenson: Well, not quite, no. But it's typical of what the governor has to contend with. Oh, there are a lot of pleasures. I guess the most enjoyment I had was visiting over the state, meeting the people, talking to them, attending their rallies, community gatherings generally. You get a great uplift when you get out amongst the people.

Gantt: This is the part of the job that you might call being the head of state?

Stevenson: Yes, that's right.

Gantt: Ceremonial functions and so on?

Stevenson: That's right.

Gantt: I've been told that although this is probably the most time-consuming part of the job, it is probably the most important--to keep good relationship with the public.

Stevenson: I think that's right.

Gantt: As the head of state government, I'm sure that it was necessary for you to be in contact with a lot of governors of other states. What were some of the experiences that you can recall about your relations to other chief executives?

Stevenson: I had what I thought was very cordial relations with the few governors that I came in contact with. I visited with the governor of New Mexico, with the governor of Oklahoma, and attended, I think, two of the governors conferences. One, I recall, was in Columbus, Ohio. John Bricker was the governor of Ohio. Had a very successful meeting, I thought. And at that meeting, I became favorably impressed with some of the governors as they made their speeches on the program. I was not on the program myself. Now I didn't think it was altogether advisable for me to spend too much time doing that. Keep in mind that the war was on during practically all of the time that I was in office as governor, and it seemed to me like I could find more important things to do than to go to a governor's conference, but I think I enjoyed two during that time.

Now on the Interstate Compact Commission . . .  
I attended one or two of those. I never did function

as the chairman of the commission at any time it came around for Texas to have the chairmanship. I made an arrangement with a man in Abilene named J. C. Hunter, who had been county judge of Culberson County at Van Horn, Texas, when I was county judge of Kimble County. We got along splendidly together way back in that day and time when we were trying to build a road from San Antonio to El Paso. That was many years before the time I'm talking about now, but all through the years I kept up my friendship and contact with Judge J. C. Hunter. So when the time came for me to qualify as chairman of the compact commission, I passed that honor on to J. C. Hunter, and he served as my spokesman and detail man in all the undertakings of that commission.

Gantt: Did you have much contact with other chief executives in matters of extraditing criminals? How did you handle that?

Stevenson: I think we had an extradition proceeding on an average of once a week in my office there in Austin. And I heard all of the proceedings personally. I did not delegate that to the secretary of state. I felt that any matter that involved the liberty of an individual, even though he might be a complete stranger, deserved careful attention and I gave it that. So we would have these extradition hearings about once a week. In

most instances I agreed with the demanding state, that being the action of the governor of that state. I thought that he was within his rights in extraditing the man charged with crime.

Gantt: Now for purposes of the record, would you comment briefly on the ways in which you had your staff organized to conduct the duties of the office of governor?

Stevenson: Yes, I'll tell you how I had it organized. I had one general secretary out front to meet the people; I had one secretary who opened all the mail in the morning and passed the letters out to whichever secretary should answer them. For instance, all letters about the inmates of the penitentiary went to one particular secretary. And if it was something that we needed to write about, she answered it, and if it was just an application for a pardon or parole, she sent it on over to the Pardon and Parole Board with, of course, proper notation as to who handled it.

And it was the same way with the other divisions. I had only about five or six divisions. One of the most important was the coordination of my staff with the military. I expect that they were about as busy during that four years as anybody. I had two leaders in this work. One was General Mark McGee of Fort Worth, and one was Bill McGill of Austin. We had an organization that functioned, I'll tell you that.

Gantt:           Approximately how many were on your staff when you served in your office?

Stevenson:       Twenty, I expect altogether.

Gantt:           Governor Stevenson, after having been out of office now for some twenty years, as you look back on your service in the office of governor of Texas, what do you consider to be the major accomplishments of your administration?

Stevenson:       I would put as number one the payment of the debt which the state owed, mostly to its employees. You will recall that every person that worked there for twenty or thirty years before I become governor had to discount their warrants at the money changers . . . finance offices around town. They usually took 10 or 12 per cent off in order to cash a warrant. I never thought that was proper in any way. In fact, I thought it was disgraceful for the great state of Texas to be paying its employees with hot checks. So I put that as number one in my book . . . as much in showing that it could be done, as in any actual achievement. Since that time, it's been pretty well kept on an even keel. In fact, we passed a constitutional amendment that the Legislature cannot appropriate any more money than the comptroller estimates will be received during the biennium from all sources

that are available to the state. All right, I'd put that as number one.

I expect the next in importance would be the coordination of all the state agencies with the national agencies that were engaged in the prosecution of the war--World War II. That required a great deal of detail and extended into every county in the state.

Next, I expect in importance, so far as its effect maybe outside of Texas is concerned, was the creation of the Good Neighbor Commission. That has certainly been beneficial in solving many problems that have grown up because of the relations among our different minority groups in Texas and across the Rio Grande.

Some of my friends will classify the creation of the Big Bend Park as a major accomplishment. I signed the deed which conveyed that three-quarters of a million acres to the federal government, but I had not satisfied myself that the benefits that I thought we would receive from this creation are going to be received.

Another important accomplishment that I'm very proud of is the fine system of farm-to-market roads which we have in the state and which our own state highway department has given its very best attention to and deserves to be complimented for the fine manner in which they've served the people. I take pride in

this because it's the long-range outgrowth of a bill I introduced in the Legislature when I was a member, known as House Bill 333.

Gantt: After you decided not to seek re-election in 1946, did you in any way participate in the campaign for governor that year?

Stevenson: Well, not to a great extent. I really had had very little opportunity. The campaign in the first primary seemed to me like it just drifted along up to maybe a week before the vote was taken. I personally voted for the Honorable Grover Sellers, who was my friend and still is. He's now on the Court of Civil Appeals over at Tyler and giving a very fine demonstration of public service. In the run-off I voted for Beauford Jester, and he was elected.

Gantt: When you left the office of governor, did you anticipate that you might ever run for another political office?

Stevenson: No, I did not. I hadn't any plans at that time to make any race at all for another office.

Gantt: Governor Stevenson, I believe it's the custom that when a governor leaves the office, he marks in a Bible first bought by Governor Neff a passage of Scripture that he deems advisable to be followed by his successor in office. What passage in that Bible did you mark for Governor Jester, your successor?

Stevenson: The fifteenth verse of the second chapter of Second Timothy. It reads as follows: "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."



Oral History Collection  
Governor Coke R. Stevenson

Interviewer: Dr. Fred Gantt

Place of Interview: Junction, Texas

Date: May 10, 1969

Dr. Gantt: This is Fred Gantt speaking on May 10, 1969, with the Honorable Coke R. Stevenson at his ranch near Junction, Texas, for the purpose of recording another interview for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. This is the sixth in a series of interviews which was begun several months ago.

Governor Stevenson, in our previous sessions we have talked primarily about your associations with Texas politics. It seems to me that it would be highly appropriate at this time to talk a little bit more about your personal life and background. For purposes of the record, would you mention the names of your mother and father and your sisters and brothers?

Gov. Stevenson: Yes, I'd be glad to do that, Fred, if it's of any interest to society. My father, whom I think I've previously referred to, was Robert M. Stevenson. He came to Kimble County from Llano County in 1881. That was several years before I was born and before he married. He went back to Mason County in 1887 and married my mother whose maiden name was Virginia

Hurley. Her father had moved to Mason County in 1876 from Eastern Texas. He was a farmer and a school-teacher. He taught school shortly after he moved to Mason County in what is now Taylor County. The county seat at that time was not Abilene but was Buffalo Gap, and he taught a school there in 1878. I mention this briefly to show that my family--both father and mother's side--were frontier people, having lived in this section of the state all of my life. I've already mentioned in a previous interview about my father's teaching in Kimble County, and I think it's unnecessary to repeat any of that. My mother--and I'll say referred to--married my father on May 20, 1887, in Mason County, Texas.

After I became ten years old I had a riding job on the L C Ranch, which was located on Bear Creek in Kimble County, Texas, and covered 157 sections of land.

From that early experience I acquired a love of ranching, and as soon as I was able to acquire a ranch of my own, I started in. The first was one or two small places which I traded and sold, I made a little profit on. In 1914, I bought the place where we're sitting today--520 acres of land for which I paid \$8 an acre. Half of it was paid down, and the other half was in a note due in five years, which I paid at the end of that time.

Later, in 1918, I bought 3,520 acres of land adjoining the 520 from Mr. L. A. Schreiner, a banker of Kerrville, Texas, who, by the way, is still living and passed his 98th birthday last December 31. He's been a lifetime friend of mine--that is, all of my lifetime--and has helped me in many ways to finance my purchases. He sold me this 3,520 acres that I speak of. The total price was about \$5.50 an acre, \$1.00 an acre down and 20 years' time to pay the balance at 6 per cent interest. He carried me through the depression and has helped me in many ways financially. He has never been in politics but has always supported me in my endeavor.

From that time on this has been my home, and I've made additional purchases from time to time from my neighbors who wanted to get away to a different location. I have expanded the ranch until it now covers about 15,000 acres of land on both sides of the South Llano River.

I mention this to show that my interest has always been identified with the farming and ranching people of Texas. I was raised to believe that that is the foundation of a good citizen--to be able to own a little land that he can cultivate, raise some stock on, pay his taxes, send his children to school, educate them to the best advantage, and make of them people of character.

You asked me to mention my own brothers and sisters. My father's family consisted of eight children, and he and my mother raised all of them to be grown. I was the oldest child. I was born on March 20, 1888, in Mason County, Texas. I stayed there about two weeks, and my parents brought me home to Kimble County. My oldest sister was born on April 11, 1890. Her name was Ella, and she married Walter Tinsley of Mason County, Texas. My next brother was Bascom, and he was born on September 6, 1892, in London, Texas, which is in Kimble County. And then came my sister Mary, who was born on December 10, 1894, and then my sister Ruth, who was born on January 14, 1897. And then my sister Ida was born on October 16, 1899. My brother Pierce was next and was born on May 17, 1902. And my baby brother Mark was born on January 7, 1906. I've mentioned that my oldest sister was married to Walter Tinsley. My sister Mary married Frank Callcott. Frank became a captain in the Army of World War I, and after the war was completed he went to New York City and became professor of Spanish in Columbia University, a position which he continued to hold until his retirement several years ago. And my sister Mary also was a teacher at Columbia. My sister Ruth married Gardner Franks, and they lived on a ranch in Edwards County, Texas, until he died in

1950. She later moved back to Junction and is there now. My baby sister Ida is now a teacher at Sul Ross State College where she has been teaching for several years. Both Ida and Mary have received Ph.D. degrees. Sister Ella passed away at the age of seventy-one. All of my brothers have passed away. I am the only survivor of the boys in the family, but I have three sisters living at this time.

I married Fay Wright in Junction, Texas, on December 24, 1912. We had one son, Coke R. Stevenson, Jr., who is still living and resides in Austin, Texas. He, for more than twenty years, was associated with the State Liquor Control Board after I ceased to serve as governor of Texas. He has two daughters and two grandsons.

My wife, Fay, died in the Governor's Mansion in Austin on January 3, 1942, and twelve years later I married Marguerite Heap, whose maiden name was Marguerite King. Her husband was killed in World War II in a bombing raid on the Ploesti Oil Field in Rumania. Since marrying Marguerite, we have had one daughter, Jane, who was born on our second anniversary. We were married on January 16, 1954, and Jane was born on January 16, 1956. Jane is now a student in the Junction High School and is in the eighth grade. Marguerite and I have

continued to reside on the homeplace, and Jane lives with us, and all of us enjoy the ranch.

We have operated the ranch continuously since I first began ranching here in 1914, with different members of the family, and all of us have enjoyed our work on the ranch. We have enjoyed the development of the ranch, the improvements that have been made, and the upgrading of our livestock. In other words, we are identified with the soil. We run sheep, goats, and cattle on our ranch. When I first purchased the land upon which we live, I could not find any of the deer species except one old doe. But from that we have cultivated by feeding and proper management of the wildlife until today we have several thousand deer on the ranch and a large number of wild turkeys. All of this contributes to our happiness and enjoyment, and we consider ourselves very fortunate to be able to continue in good health.

We have had a program of improving the range condition on the ranch for many years. This necessitates the extermination of the underbrush and shrubbery that prevents the grasses from growing and the substitution in place of that a proper program of pasture rotation in order to develop the grazing capacity to its fullest extent. We are rather proud of the

progress we have made in converting the Wild Cedarbreak into a productive ranching enterprise.

We have built roads over the hills to the extent of eighty-five miles, and this has mostly been done with pick and shovel. Very little machinery work has ever been done on the hills or the canyons where we live. But we have been able to improve the road system to where we can get over it with the modern means of ranching which is the pickup and other related vehicles that have taken the place to a large extent of the horse work that used to be necessary to operate a ranch. We still use horses, but we are able by the road system to get there quicker and faster with the modern machinery.

We have sub-divided the land into smaller pastures having some twenty-five different pastures now which enables us to rotate and develop the livestock to the fullest extent as well as the range condition.

I've mentioned having land on both sides of the South Llano River. The river runs through our place for some three miles, and flowing springs and creeks empty into the river--they're tributaries. We have four on one side of the river and three on the other side, and these have never ceased to flow since we have owned the place. So the ranch is well-watered, but every benefit requires some work and industry to keep it

operating. The very fact that we have these creeks and flowing springs means the maintenance of water gaps. And when floods come along, which we sometimes have in large measure in this hill country, we have to get busy and go fixing water gaps which have been washed out.

In addition to the springs, we have set six windmills on the ranch. These require attention all times of the year, and we have good cement reservoirs at each windmill. The irrigation system comes from a spring on one side of the river, and the water is piped under the river to where the tillable land is on the opposite side of the river. By means of this pipeline under the river we have a continuous, constant flow of water every day in the year to irrigate the fields, and such has been our good luck that we have not had to purchase any hay to feed our livestock for the past thirty years.

By means of thrifty management and not being required to pay out the income from the ranch in feed bills, we have been able to discharge more rapidly the obligations that were incurred in the purchase of the land, and as of this date all of our debts are paid. We have no interest charges accumulating against us. We have no delinquent taxes. We are roughly in the



condition that we think speaks for good citizenship. In addition to the operation of the ranch, I have maintained my law office in Junction since I was admitted to the bar as previously mentioned in this record.

Gantt: Governor Stevenson, may I ask you at this point why you got interested in the legal profession as a career?

Stevenson: That developed early in my existence. I would attend court at the courthouse in Junction and hear speeches made by various able lawyers of that day and time such as W. C. Linden, Clarence Martin, Dayton Moses, Charlie Jenkins, W. A. Wright, W. A. Williamson, and many others that I could mention. We had a strong bar, as I now am able to judge the standards applicable to good lawyers. Thus, I'd made up my mind I was going to become one of them, and I did. I'd study at nights and on Sundays. Every other spare time that I could obtain from my work in the bank in Junction I devoted to study of law until I was able to pass the bar examination in San Antonio before the Court of Civil Appeals and received my law license. That was on October 6, 1913.

Since that time I have maintained the Stevenson Law Office in Junction. During the time that I was in

political office in Austin, my brother Bascom operated the law office. He had come up the same way I did and got his law license by home study in the same manner as I obtained mine. My second brother, Pierce, was a student at the University of Texas and got his law degree and license in the manner provided at that time for admission to the bar. After my brother Bascom passed away in 1950, at the later time my brother Pierce also came into the office and assisted me in its operation until he passed away in July of 1968.

Gantt: Did you ever have any idea of practicing law in any place other than Kimble County?

Stevenson: Very early I did. And at the time I took the examination for the license to practice law, I was in the office of a very prominent lawyer in San Antonio, R. L. Ball, who was president of the National Bank of Commerce as well as the head of a big law firm. After talking it over with him, he offered me a place in his law office. And then he asked me this question: "Would you rather have the job or would you rather have my advice?" I said I would rather have his advice. He said, "Well, go back to Junction; engage in the practice of law. Take every kind of a case that's offered you, and you'll make a lawyer. And you'll get credit for your own achievement. If you work in my office, no matter what you do, I'll get the credit."

Gantt: And so you took his advice and came back and opened your office.

Stevenson: I did.

Gantt: You've handled over the years, I'm sure, virtually every kind of case imaginable. What, as a lawyer, are your preferences on the type of cases that you like to handle?

Stevenson: That would be hard to say, Fred. I've enjoyed the practice of law in both the civil division and the criminal division. I've had major cases in both branches of the law, and I've always enjoyed my work. I still do. I go to the office every day now and spend at least a half a day and some weeks spend every day and then come up and run the ranch the rest of the time.

Gantt: So the practice of law and the practice of ranching works pretty well in this case.

Stevenson: It has worked very well, we think.

Gantt: You mentioned criminal cases. This leads me to ask you some questions about your work as a lawyer. What do you think of our present system of jury trials, for example?

Stevenson: I think it is the best that can be devised. You know, of course, that that has been the subject of consideration by the best minds in American history in the

development of our judicial system. I'm not afraid to say that many improvements could be made on any part of the system, but I certainly thoroughly approve of the trials by jury whether it's a civil or criminal case.

Gantt: Is it true that most people think that there is a good deal of emotionalism in criminal trials before a jury?

Stevenson: There is to a certain extent, but I don't think that emotionalism is a controlling factor in the jury's decision. I think they are entertained by the speech of a good lawyer and the arguments presented. But I think they go in the jury box and lay all of that aside and decide the case according to the evidence adduced on the trial.

Gantt: Do you happen to remember offhand any highly publicized cases in which you participated as a lawyer that might've been reported in the press?

Stevenson: Yes, I can remember several, but I don't believe I would like to make individual mention of them, Fred.

Oral History Collection

Governor Coke R. Stevenson

Also Present: H. G. Perry

Interviewer: Dr. Fred Gantt

Place of Interview: Junction, Texas

Date: May 11, 1969

Dr. Gantt: This is Fred Gantt speaking from the ranch of the Honorable Coke R. Stevenson, May 11, 1969. Also present is the Honorable H. G. Perry, former member of the Texas Legislature who was formerly a citizen of Junction, Texas, and a publisher of the paper, Junction Eagle. One of the notable events that took place when these gentlemen were in Junction was the visit of the Honorable William Jennings Bryan, who had been a candidate for the Presidency of the United States. I asked Governor Stevenson and Mr. Perry to give some reminiscences about the visit of Mr. Bryan and their reactions to it. Mr. Perry, what were the circumstances that brought Mr. Bryan to Junction?

Mr. Perry: Well, on the morning Emil A. Loeffler, who was a hardware man and a very progressive citizen of Junction-- I think Coke will agree with me on that, that Emil probably did more for the town than any other man that's ever lived in it--came down to the newspaper office and said he'd just gotten a telephone call from

Kerrville that a car in which Bryan was riding--we didn't know whether it was his car or what--but the car in which he was riding was on the way to Junction, and the roads were so bad that they suggested we go out and meet them and help them get into Junction. Riding over that road now you can hardly conceive of what it was then. So he had already contacted Judge Stevenson or he contacted him later, I don't know which, and the three of us went out to what is known as Midway--I think that's about where we met--Midway Station, where the old stagecoaches changed horses. Mr. Bryan and his wife and a driver were in a Model T Ford, and he got out and rode with us. And I believe you were driving . . . were you driving the Ford?

Stevenson: Yes.

Perry: You were driving and he rode in the front seat with you. And Emil and I rode in the back seat.

Gantt: At that time Mr. Stevenson was county judge?

Stevenson: No.

Perry: No.

Stevenson: Just after I had been county judge.

Gantt: After you had been county judge?

Stevenson: Yes. I was president of the bank, First National Bank, at the time this took place.

Gantt: What is your recollection of Mr. Bryan, the first time he talked?

Stevenson: Him?

Gantt: How'd you see him?

Stevenson: Well, I knew he was a very distinguished American. And I was quite surprised to meet a man that had all the qualifications of being three times the nominee of the Democratic Party in the nation for the Presidency. But I hadn't visualized just meeting him in person on a visit to California. He was on his way to California for his wife's health. Now his wife had arthritis.

Gantt: Yes.

Stevenson: You remember that?

Gantt: Oh, yes.

Stevenson: Her fingers were drawn to fixed positions like this (gesture), and she couldn't open them.

Perry: She told me she was ashamed to go in a hotel like that.

Stevenson: That's right. Consequently, we met him down there, and then on the way up to Junction the conversation was very interesting. He was a most interesting man. Mr. Bryan had a wonderful voice. He could be heard for a long distance by large audiences. Even in a conversational tone he was quite a distinguished man in that respect. Of course, he was well-informed on all national questions. So we had a very interesting trip coming up to Junction.

When we arrived at the point east of town that affords a view of the junction of the two rivers, the

North Llano and the South Llano, he looked it over and had us stop there. He got out and went off a little piece and looked up and down, and he said it was the most beautiful view he'd seen on the trip since he'd left his home coming in this direction. Of course, Mrs. Bryan remained in the car. That's the other car, you know . . .

Perry: Yes.

Stevenson: Grady? But the driver stopped also, and she got to take in some of the view, too. But Mr. Bryan was very enthusiastic about the beauty of that point where the two rivers come together and the general location of Junction. We spent, I think, five or ten minutes there, don't you?

Perry: I believe that, yes.

Stevenson: Yes.

Perry: That's the point now where the new Highway 10 comes across it, or crosses just a little below that.

Stevenson: A little below that, that's right. But there's a good highway there now that was built later.

Perry: Yes. Do you remember the definition he gave of a spring? I remember that in his conversation. I don't know whether I can give the definition, but he said a spring was something that produced energy and usefulness for a world that had a source higher than itself. Of



course, he used the flowery language and that's not exactly the way he said it, but that's the general idea out of it--that the source was from "On High."

Stevenson: Yes.

Perry: A higher plane.

Stevenson: That's right.

Gantt: Then when did he do when he got to Junction?

Perry: You tell it, Judge.

Stevenson: (Chuckle) I don't know.

Perry: Well, we stopped in front of Loeffler Motors . . . that's Loeffler Motor Company now.

Stevenson: That's right. That's right.

Perry: And, of course, there was somebody there that wanted to take his picture. I don't remember who it was. And I know all of us stepped out of the way so they could get his picture. As I remember he had a long coat on, not a winter coat but just a duster that you used to wear in automobiles. He insisted on all three of us getting in the picture with him. Of course, that made me feel good because I just never thought about getting in the picture with him. And the picture that I ran in the paper then was that picture of the three of us . . .

Stevenson: With Mr. Bryan.

Perry: Yes.

Stevenson: Yes, that's right. I remember that.

Perry: He called us--all three--and had the picture made of us.

Gantt: Well, did he make a speech somewhere?

Perry: No, no. He didn't make a speech here anywhere. I believe they did go over to the hotel and eat lunch. Now I believe they did. I'm not sure about that.

Gantt: He was just passing through, in other words.

Perry: He was going to California.

Stevenson: He was going to California.

Perry: Just on his way to California.

Stevenson: For his wife's health.

Perry: And following the old Spanish Trail, which, you see, runs all the way from Florida to California. It doesn't run where it is now exactly, but generally in the same general area.

Gantt: Now Governor Stevenson told us what his reaction was to the meeting. What was your impression of Mr. Bryan, the man, Mr. Perry?

Perry: Well, of course, I had had the idea that he was an idealist rather than a realist, just because I had read a lot of his articles and even then had some records of some of his speeches, including the "Cross of Gold" speech. And, of course, until he became secretary of state later and failed to measure up to what it took to be secretary of state, I had thought of him as being a

great man. And I think he was a great man, but he didn't have the capacity or the ability . . . I don't know . . . maybe it's the forethought of reality. It would be the same thing, I guess, in state politics as well as national politics. He just didn't have what it took to cope with the world problems.

Gantt: In other words, you doubt that he would have made a very successful President if he had been elected?

Perry: Yes, I do. I really doubt that. I think he was a great man, but I doubt that he would have made a successful President. He was more idealistic than Woodrow Wilson, even. Don't you think he was, Judge?

Stevenson: Oh, yes, I think that. He was just great on the theory of those things . . .

Perry: Yes, no doubt about that.

Stevenson: . . . but as a man who could translate that into realities of life, something was a little deficient, I think.

Perry: He seemed to project his idealism into other people that he had to deal with and other nations that he had to deal with, and he assumed that they had the same outlook on life that he did, which they didn't have.

Stevenson: That's right. Now keep this in mind, Mr. Gantt. He visited Junction after he had been secretary of state.

Perry: Right.

Stevenson: He was secretary of state under President Woodrow Wilson. Wilson's term had expired in January of 1921. Bryan was here about, I'd say, 1923, Grady.

Perry: That's what I think. Between '22 and '25, I know.

Stevenson: Yes, well, I think 1923. I believe that's right.

Gantt: Well, what sort of reaction did the town have to this? Was everybody excited about a man of this prominence coming here?

Perry: Well, I'd say most of them didn't know until he had gone, wouldn't you, Judge (chuckle)?

Gantt: (Chuckle)

Stevenson: (Chuckle) Well, I would, too. But those that did know it were excited like you're talking about.

Perry: It was quite an occasion for the few people that gathered there.

Stevenson: That's right.

Gantt: About how long did he stay in town?

Perry: Well, he stayed at that stop about thirty minutes, didn't he . . .

Stevenson: I'd say that.

Perry: . . . talking with people?

Stevenson: Yes.

Perry: He was still a natural politician. He shook hands with a lot of people and talked to a bunch of people, but he was concerned about his wife, and he wanted to get on

to California. I understand she died pretty shortly after they got to California.

Stevenson: I don't remember when she passed away.

Gantt: Do you have a recollection of--do either of you have-- of that written?

Perry: Well, I might add this. We had two other distinguished visitors out here just about that time. I guess, Judge, you recall them. We had the man who was attorney general under Woodrow Wilson and the man who was post-master general, Thomas W. Gregory and Albert Sidney Burleson. They came around here, and it fell my lot to take them fishing. I spent a couple of days with them. And Gregory smoked a pipe, and he was just an ordinary--very ordinary--well-met fellow, but Burleson was a little more distant, I think. Don't you think they were?

Stevenson: Yes.

Perry: The difference in the two?

Stevenson: Yes, that's right.

Perry: But I enjoyed fishing and hunting with them. And they convinced me that the statement that I'd often heard in the Army--I'd rather talk to a brigadier general or a major general than to talk with a second lieutenant, if I had the choice between the two, because in the manner of making judgements, well, he's more approachable than the man who probably is a little more carried away with

himself than his ability warrants. Those fellows are just as common, ordinary boys as I ever associated with. They told me lots of stories of the things that happened when they were in office, and, of course, Burleson, I guess, was from Austin, wasn't he?

Stevenson: Yes, he lived in Austin. He had an entire block that his house was located on in Austin.

Perry: I know he had a big old house there.

Stevenson: Yes.

Perry: And Gregory lived in Houston, I believe.

Stevenson: Yes, right. Well, one of the reasons they were approachable is that they had never lost the common touch.

Perry: Well, that's right. I think that's very true of any great man.

Stevenson: Right.

Perry: When they lose the common touch, in my estimation--and my estimation is not (chuckle) worth anything--but when a man loses the common touch he isn't a great man anymore in my estimation.

Stevenson: That's right. That's right. He becomes self-centered, and he's just for himself only, regardless of the rest of the human race.

Perry: Right. That goes back to what you said about Joe Bailey.

Stevenson: Yes.

- Perry: Now I think Joe Bailey was, by most standards, a great man.
- Stevenson: He was.
- Perry: But he became so egotistical, I mean, so egotistical in his later life that he destroyed most of the warm atmosphere that surrounded him when he was trying to climb the political ladder. Of course, a lot of that might have been false, but he had it anyway.
- Stevenson: That's right.
- Perry: And I think that's one of the things that I remember about him that makes me think that he wasn't as great a man as a lot of other people that I have known.
- Stevenson: Maybe matters of mind, Grady, but he was a great orator. There's no question about that.
- Perry: Oh, no, I didn't say that. I think he had a brilliant mind.
- Stevenson: Yes, he did. He had a brilliant mind . . . a brilliant mind and a great orator. And he was a magnetic personality.
- Perry: Oh, yes.
- Stevenson: You can say that about Joe Bailey.
- Perry: I don't think he ever lost that qualification.
- Stevenson: No.
- Perry: He was still magnetic when he was old and when he was still running for office.

Stevenson: That's right. That was right.

Perry: I think that's one of the characteristics maybe that Pat Neff . . . I don't think he ever lost the common touch.

Stevenson: No.

Perry: As far as I was able to observe, he was still a good deal of a natural politician. But I mean he still liked to talk to people and work with people after he got old and after he had reached the zenith of his career. I always admired him for that.

Stevenson: I did, too. I thought Pat Neff was one of our great men who was produced in Texas.

Perry: You were telling us yesterday about some campaign in Dublin. I don't know what it was. But, anyway, my daddy told me he was in Dublin when Hogg and Clark ran, and they had a joint debate in Dublin.

Stevenson: Yes.

Perry: And, of course, Hogg had had the idea of the Railroad Commission in his platform, and apparently the railroads shunned it.

Stevenson: Yes.

Perry: And (chuckle) my daddy said that they let Clark speak first. And actually it was down pretty close to the railroad tracks, and after Clark finished speaking, Hogg got up to speak. However, the railroad had arranged



that they'd run one of their old steam engines up there about fifty yards from where the speaking platform was and let the exhaust steam . . . you've heard those things rumble steam out of the exhaust (chuckle). They turned that thing on and you just couldn't hear anything. You couldn't hear him speak. Then a bunch of those radical Hogg men got a gun and went over there and told that engineer that if he didn't cut that steam off, they'd kill him (laughter). And he cut it off (laughter).

Stevenson: (Laughter) Well, that's understandable, (laughter) knowing the nature of the West Texas people. It is.

Perry: Then there were those two governors of Tennessee, and one was a Republican and one was a Democrat, but both had served as governors of Tennessee . . .

Stevenson: And they were brothers.

Perry: Bob Taylor, and what was the other's name? I heard Bob Taylor speak in Dublin one time. He always played his fiddle before he spoke. He played two or three tunes on his fiddle, and he created a big crowd. They had a big crowd to hear him. Of course . . .

Stevenson: What was the name of the other Taylor? He was Bob Taylor's brother.

Perry: Yes, but I can't think. He established the Taylor Cottonwood Magazine in Tennessee and printed it for several years.

Stevenson: Yes, yes. They were brothers and bitter political opponents.

Perry: Yes. Both of them were governors of Tennessee and on different parties. One of them was a Republican and one of them a Democrat.

Gantt: Did they come from here?

Perry: No, but they used to speak on behalf of the national Democratic ticket and the Republican ticket--both of them spoke for them.

Stevenson: Yes.

A P P E N D I X

Oral History Collection

Former Governor Coke Stevenson

Place of Speech: Texas Women's  
University, Denton, Texas, before  
the Daughters of the American  
Revolution

Date: September 11, 1970

Bullock Hyder: It is with pleasure that I have in presenting to you the speaker for the day. If I had an hour it would be insufficient. I have two or three minutes, so I would like to pick out two or three things I'd like to say about him. I've know Governor Stevenson for--I won't say how long--somewhere over forty years. I have known him as a member of the Legislature, as Speaker of the House, as Lieutenant-Governor, as Governor, but primarily as a true, loyal citizen of Texas and the nation. Governor Stevenson has an inquiring mind, curious, in that he loved the law and he read the law. He loved history; he has studied history and he is well versed in the traditions and heritage of this country. I was thinking today when we talk of honesty and integrity in men, especially men in high office, these two attributes never gave Coke Stevenson

any concern because they were part of his fiber, part of his very make-up. I was talking to a citizen of Denton a day or two ago when we found that Governor Stevenson would be here. And we were relating back that when he was Speaker or Lieutenant-Governor or Governor that we couldn't recall a single decision of state, a single appointment to office that he made due to any pressure, due to any insistence, primarily. He's a man that never wore another man's collar. And one of the pleasures that I had working with him and others was that you always knew, in the vernacular, where to find him. And you always knew that you could rely explicitly upon his word. I had the pleasure of being his appointee on three different occasions to office. He never asked me for a favor; he never put a pressure on me. But I knew that he had confidence in me, and I knew to react to that confidence. And this is the way he worked with men. Coke Stevenson was and is a student of people, of men, and he knows their worth and their value. And in particular today I think you are very fortunate because if there is a student of the Constitution that I know, in law school or out, that through the

years have studied and cherished it, it's Coke Stevenson. In fact, he would have made this country a distinguished member, one we would have been proud of, of the United States Supreme Court. I wish I had longer to reminisce, but I want to say to you that I present to you a Texan of height and a Texan of strength, one who loves his country and served it well, one that has no apologies, and one that can look forward. As I was thinking the other day that I don't see him very often, haven't. But I know where he is; he knows where I am; and if we needed one another, we'd know where to go. It is a pleasure to present the Honorable Coke R. Stevenson. Mr. Stevenson. (Applause)

Stevenson: Thank you Bullock. My good friends in North Texas and the visitors who have assembled here, I am delighted to be able to come to Denton and try as I might to contribute a little to this meeting. I don't think it will be too much because great educational institutions like you have in Denton furnish a school for the entire community, not only those that are going to school within the walls of the building, but you build a product in which people become

interested in government and its functions. And I'm confident that you could find a 1,000 people in Denton who know more about a great many things than I do, so I don't come with any ideas of being a teacher. I come to bring you greetings and to say that the fact that you have this chapter of Daughters of the American Revolution in Denton is an encouraging sign to me of the character of the people who support it. You are to be congratulated on having it, and I came up here to say as much.

Now I'd like to say a few words about my friend Bullock Hyder. He said a lot of things about me that I don't deserve, but I want to tell you in a vein not quite as serious as he was using in his remarks about his coming to Austin as a member of the Legislature. After he'd been there a little while and in this fine style that he possesses and uses, someone said to him some day, some member, and they're always kidding each other, "Bullock, why don't you learn the rules?" "Well," he said, "I think I know the rules." "Alright tell me the first rule in the book." He said, "It's to represent your district and to get the most

from your district in the shortest time possible." Well, if you look about these great buildings you have on the campuses of these two fine institutions in Denton, you see that Bullock was successful in getting a great deal for his district. Now another member taunted him a little bit about his grammar. He said, "You say 'git, git' for your districts. You should say 'get'." "Well," he said, "I didn't come down here to study grammar. I came down here to do what I told you--to 'git' the most for my district." (Chuckle) And he said, "I know my predecessor was known as a 'go-gitter', and that's what I intend to be--a 'go-gitter' for Denton County." And I'm telling you ladies he was a 'go-gitter'. And this great institution here bears testimony to his ability to get along with his members, find out what was necessary to be done to foster education in Denton County and in the city of Denton and also, of course, the great state of Texas because every section of it, I guess, has had some student that has gone to Denton. My own sister was a student in the woman's college here in Denton many years ago, too long for her to admit.



I've never been sensitive about my age. Everybody knows I'm eighty-two years old last March and getting along fine except for my eye sight. I can't see the beauty of the women like I used to, (chuckle) but I've taken that philosophically. I'm remembering that the aging process takes its toll. It may start in one place in the body with one individual and another place with another. But we all pay the price of getting old, and the only way I've ever discovered that you could stop aging is just to die off, forget about it. But we don't want to do that.

Now when it comes to talkin' about the Constitution today, I'd like to say this: I don't pretend to know all about the Constitution. It has been a first love with me for all the years that I've known anything about the study of law. It has been the charter from which I undertook to chart my course in the study of the law. And I have done the best I could to understand it, but I don't know all about it.

I know a little about the history of it. I know that the history that was written at the time . . . and mind you there is no history

any better than the historian who writes it. Lord Macaulay said, "There is no history, only biography. All the advances that have shaped the destinies of mankind are woven about the life of some devoted man or woman who was able to influence the thought of the day and influence her neighbors and his neighbors to action when they decided to do something worth while."

Another historian said that that statement should be attributed to Carlisle instead of Macaulay. I didn't have the opportunity of personal acquaintance with either of those gentleman, so I can't tell you which one is the real author. But it sits alright that, "There is no history, only biography."

Well, the biography of the American Revolution is the history of George Washington; or rather I should put it the other way, the history of the American Revolution is the biography of George Washington. If you took Washington out of the Revolution, all you'd have perhaps are bands of disgruntled taxpayers who thought they were paying more than they ought to and who had resorted on one occasion to throwing the tea overboard in Boston Harbor. That's a matter of

history. I don't know which man led that band to throw that tea overboard. If we had his biography, it might be interesting. But anyway it might of been just a band of disgruntled taxpayers that would of been subdued in the course of time by the red-coated soldiers of the English Crown. But not so with George Washington. When he got into it, he stayed. He devoted not only his physical strength and his courage to the accomplishment of independence of the colonies, but he sacrificed large portions of his own fortune. It was said that he at one time was the wealthiest man in America. He had done that by devotion to the principles which make all of us accumulate something to take care of our families. Well anyway, he put it all on the line so far as he was concerned, and his good wife stood right by his side all the way up and down the line.

I used to be fascinated by this story of his mother. She was engaged in conversation with one of her associates on one occasion, and the little boy George kept coming up to her and saying, "Now, Mama, what did you tell me this was?" And the lady said to his mother, "Listen

you've told that boy that same thing twenty times over. Why do you keep telling him?" And Mrs. Washington answered, "Because when I told him nineteen times, he doesn't know it; and I want him to know it." (Chuckle) So she was an individual in her own person. They came of that kind of stock, the Washington's did.

Alright now then after Washington had received the sword of Cornwallis at Yorktown-- and he didn't receive it directly, you remember, according to history--Cornwallis was so humiliated that he sent that sword by one of his lieutenants. But anyway Washington got it, and that was the end of the fighting as an organized war between the colonies and the mother country. There were sporadic conflicts after that. There always have been apparently after every war, like Andrew Jackson's battle at New Orleans took place several weeks after the signing of the treaty of peace had been made over in Europe. Anyway that was the end of organized warfare in America.

Then Washington turned his talents and his attention to doing something to promote the general welfare. Six years went by, and nothing

was really accomplished. The Continental Congress had degenerated into a body that was disgruntled as many, many other people were in the colonies. Do you remember there were a band of Tories that even moved to Canada. They were disgusted with the war. Six years went by where the American colonies just floundered. The money that was supposed to come into the public treasury just didn't come. The Continental Congress had no power to enforce the collection of taxes. It depended on the voluntary contribution of each of the states as to what they would send to the congress. Well, they didn't send much. History, as I say, if you can believe it, says that a soldier's pay for a month would not buy him a replacement of the footwear that he had as a soldier whether it was shoes or boots. You didn't get enough in a month to pay for it. What I'm talking about is that currency wasn't worth enough to pay for the pair of boots. Well, that was a deplorable situation.

Washington had other problems too. People had won these new freedoms. Each man proceeded to exercise that freedom according to his own desire. If he wanted his neighbor's ox, he went

and got his neighbor's ox. He was fortifying his own personal position at the expense of the community.

Well, Washington stood that for awhile, and then he wrote a letter to one of his friends, again according to history. I didn't read the letter. And he expressed his disappointment at what was taking place. But he had some friends that were "true and tried." As Bullock Hyder mentioned awhile ago concerning him and his position and mine, we both know where each other is; and if we ever need each other, we can find him. He had some friends he could rely upon. They got together and decided to ask this Continental Congress to call a convention of the people to send delegates, and their first thought was to ammend the charter of the Continental Congress.

I believe it's the only incident in history where a government or a semi-government committed suicide, but the Continental Congress did. They decided to call on the states to send delegates to a convention to ammend their own charter. Well, further on down the line you find that the delegates, when they got together, decided that the charter was too full of holes; it couldn't

be ammended. So they decided to write a new one. Now when in the process of selecting these delegates, think of this. I'm sure there are many ladies in the audience who know more about the statistics than I do, but I remember this much. Seventy-four men were selected as delegates to the Constitutional Convention to meet in Philadelphia. Of that seventy-four, nine didn't even think enough of it to ever qualify as a delegate. That left sixty-five. Of those sixty-five, thirteen, twelve or thirteen . . . let's see twelve . . . twelve or thirteen . . . no, wait a minute. In that second group nine did not even qualify at all, and ten more did not appear in Philadelphia. They did send in the report of their election, but they didn't show up at the convention. That made fifty-five. Of the fifty-five, thirteen went home. That left forty-two men in the convention there to wrestle with the problems that would govern a nation. Forty-two. Of that forty-two, three refused to sign; and they were three of the ablest men in the entire colonies: George Mason of Virginia, Edmund Randolph of Virginia, and John Rutledge of South Carolina. Rutledge was later

on the Supreme Court of the United States, Randolph was governor of Virginia, and George Mason was one of the ablest lawyers, so recognized, that we had in the nation. These three were so opposed to the Constitution as written that they refused to sign it. That left thirty-nine signatures. Now thirty-nine out of seventy-four is just barely over half. We just got the Constitution by the devotion of barely more than half of those that had been chosen by their neighbors to go over there and write it.

Well, that brings us to our thought for the day. I sometimes think about half of our people today are on one side and half on another. At least half and a few more are strong for law and order. Right today, I'll say that more than half of our people believe in the principles of law, first as laid down by the Ten Commandments, and next as observed from time immemorial by the the people who believe in the divine leadership. But there's a close second to this half who believes that way. There's another half that wants to have their own way even to the extent of rioting, destroying buildings as beautiful as this one here by supplying the torch, tearing



up the principles by which we have lived here for nearly two centuries under the benevolent influence of this Constitution. Yes, they would like to do this. And those of us who believe in law and order and in living by the standards of humanity as promulgated by the divine sparks have got to be constantly on our guard to protect the liberties which we enjoy.

Well, that same division applied after the Constitution was written. Same one. They fought it out terrifically in the walls of the state house where they were assembled. Many of you remember this about that Constitution. They decided that their work ought to be kept secret until it was completed because if certain fragments of what they were doing was parceled out to the people, it'd be misunderstood. Everything should be observed in context and read together one paragraph with another in order to form that more perfect union that they set out to accomplish. Alright, the secrecy was observed by all of those members.

And it was not until fifty-three years after the close of the Convention that Madison's journal was first published in the United States.

I'm sure you ladies know that; you're students of this Constitution and the process which it has undergone in the making. Fifty-three years. And then those of us who care to do so have the opportunity to read that marvelous selection of notes kept by James Madison, who was the secretary of the Convention. Madison's notes reflect that there were six men in the Convention that made more than one hundred speeches each. Think of that. More than a hundred. The Convention lasted from the 25th of May til the 17th of September. It was supposed to start about the 11th of May, but the members were slow in getting there, even this forty-two who finally assembled. Gouverneur Morris made the most, a hundred seventy-three speeches, closely followed by James Wilson of Pennsylvania, who made a hundred and sixty-eight. Madison himself made a hundred and sixty-one. Then came Roger Sherman of Connecticut with a hundred and thirty-eight. Then this George Mason, whom I've already mentioned, made a hundred and thirty-six. Elbridge Gerry made a hundred and nineteen. Elbridge Gerry was one of the three who refused to sign the Constitution. After

all of that debate showing the division that was encountered there in the opinion of those men in the Constitutional Convention, it then became necessary to ratify it. When these thirty-nine signed it, it was up to the states to ratify it.

Well, just look at what took place then. Down in Virginia, home of the patriots that sparked the Revolutionary War, men like Patrick Henry were denied a place in the Constitutional Convention. He wasn't elected. So he fought the ratification of the Constitution and fought it vigorously. Randolph started out that way. He hadn't signed it, and he'd decided to fight it. But history records that after a visit from Washington, a personal victory, Edmund Randolph changed his opinion and decided to support it. And then, Virginia ratified it by the close vote of eighty-nine ayes to seventy-nine no's, just the majority of ten votes. In that colony--the oldest in America and the one that has enjoyed the most prosperity and had the most at stake at that time--just ratified the Constitution by ten votes. Well, up in Massachusetts, which was the of the Adam's,

another family of great patriots during the Revolutionary War . . . you know about all the events that took place around Boston, the battles there, so forth. They finally ratified the Constitution. The vote was one hundred eighty-seven for it and one hundred sixty-eight against it, a majority of only nineteen. It got down to New York, and in spite of the influence of Alexander Hamilton, who was an administrative genius, enough people were about to block the ratification until Washington intervened again with one of his personal friends, and the vote was finally thirty for ratification and twenty-seven against it. That's the official version of the ratification of the Constitution in the State of New York.

Now think if those three states had gone the other way. If twenty men had changed out of all those several delegates we wouldn't of had any Constitution; it wouldn't of been ratified by the people. You see how close it was in that day and time for those who wanted law and order and the preservation of these standards that you ladies are upholding by your association together here and revere and support of this old

Constitution.

It had a close call, but it's had a close call ever since. There have been many attempts made to amend it. Some of them have prevailed, and some have not. People who are students of the Constitution must study those that have been defeated the same as those that have been adopted.

Well, two of the bones contention in the Constitutional Convention were about the influence of the several states. The little states figured that they might be swallowed up by these larger ones like Virginia, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and New York. So that compromise on that point resulted in the election of two senators from each state regardless of size or population. Rhode Island with 1,100 square miles has two senators in the United States Senate, and Alaska with a half million square miles and more has only two senators also. And the smallest state in the Union in population has two senators. California now with approximately twenty million population has just two senators. So they got by that.

Then the next proposition . . . well, somewhere along the line there should be some repre-

sentation according to population. So they allowed the lower house of Congress. . . . First, they had to establish two houses in Congress to do that, you know, Senate and House of Representatives. The lower house is represented by men chosen from the standpoint of population. Each district in the United States according to the census of 1960 has something more than 400,000 people to the district. We used to have districts regulated by the people who lived in a particular state. But one of the interpretations of the Constitution made by the Warren court is that of "one man one vote," and therefore you've got to have an equal number in each district. I don't agree with that, but I don't know that it hurts anything particularly. Anyway that was one of the compromises that took a long time to be reached in that Constitutional Convention according to these notes in the journal recorded by James Madison.

Well, we had other things. There was a strong sentiment among the poorer states for a greater pronouncement on human rights, and that's true today. We have people today who

are strong for a statement on human rights to the elimination of property rights. Well, if you study history, and I said that many of you know more about it than I do, property has never actually had any rights; but the owner of property does have rights. And from the time that Genesis was written there's been a recognition of the right to own property. The very one of the Ten Commandments which says, "Thou shalt not steal," recognizes the fact that somebody owns property that another person can steal from; and the condemnation is on the person that is stealing from, not the man who is accumulating something. He's got to do it honestly, of course, because there are other recommendations in the Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's ox." Well, to "covet" recognizes that the neighbor owns that ox. You wouldn't covet anything from him if he didn't own it; and if he owns the ox, he had a right to plow his farm with that ox and another one to go with it, the yoke of oxen. I won't ask you ladies who are present here today if you ever watched a farmer plow with a yoke of oxen and hear that sonorous voice, "Hee, hee, haw."

Well, I've heard my father do that. That's one of the priviledges that I enjoyed in being raised a poor boy. We had a yoke of oxen when I was a boy, and my father could take that old whip and make them do anything he wanted. But now enough of this. This Constitution protected him in the ownership of those oxen. We didn't have any herd of cattle, not at all. We weren't rich people. But the oxen that pulled the plow, that raised the corn, that after it matured was shelled from the cob, put in a sack, and carried by me on a horse to the grist mill in Junction, Texas. It furnished meal for our cornbread twice a day for the family of eight children my father and mother had, eight children. And all of them lived to be grown. That cornbread raised pretty good children. (Chuckle-audience) So when it says, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's ox," it's recognition that the neighbor was entitled to own the ox.

And I could go on many illustrations like that, and I'm strong for the precepts of the Bible. I enjoyed the lady's recitation here awhile ago about this missing day. There are many other things could be explained by a close,



astute study of the Bible. And I believe in it, and I believe in living by it. I sure have no sympathy with a thief; I have none with a man who tries to get rich by underhand methods of stealing under the table, taking money that belongs to the taxpayers and getting twice as much for it on this side as he is supposed to get on this side. All of that I believe Bulloch Hyder expressed to you a while ago. It's just contrary to my belief about things. I sure believe in as close an adherence to the Bible as one is capable of. None of us are perfect. I'm not perfect.

And I said in the beginning about this study of the Constitution that I do not know all the answers. I do not know even when I read the great debates back there what prompted one man to take one position as contrary to the position taken by another. Or was it because he had vast possessions, and he wanted to protect them by the Constitution? We don't know. Was it because he had a relative that he wanted to get on the public payroll? We don't know. His position taken is reflected by the minutes, but the motives that dictated the position taken is

not there. And we're not to be the judge, for according to the Bible, "Judge not lest ye be judged."

Now then, we come down to the application of the Constitution today. Some people say we ought to have a new Constitution. Some say we ought to have a new one in Texas. I have said this to a good many people, "I'll go along with you, if you'll let me write it." (Chuckle-audience) But nobody wants to do that. (Chuckle) No, and I don't want the other man to write it. I'm willing to take the composite judgement of a group of men who were wise enough to frame it in the first place and let it be the landmark for me, and the yardstick and the limit beyond which I dare not go.

You know . . . one thought about this . . . the lady awhile ago expressed . . . there were people over the world striving for the freedoms which we enjoy. Now our freedoms are not solely things we can do under this Constitution, but it restrains us from doin' some things we ought not to do. And one of the great philosophers in England says the self imposed restraints expressed in the Constitution are the mark of a

great people. Think about that for a little while. We've already mentioned about how it recognized the right to own property. Property itself was not given any rights. Human rights were attended to by the first ten amendments. The first one was that, "Congress shall pass no laws regarding the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. . . ." Well now, you see, that is a self-imposed restraint. If you want to belong to the Presbyterian Church, I will not throw any obstacle in your way. I belong to the Methodist Church; you're not to throw any in my way. The Constitution says even Congress can't dictate which one of us is right. Nope, it can't step out here and say everybody has to belong to the Presbyterian Church. It can't say that everybody has got to belong to the Methodist Church. They can't pass any law like that; and if they did, the Supreme Court has to hold it unconstitutional. There was the first recognition of human rights. Well, the other nine are right along that line. It would take too long to discuss them here this evening, and I didn't come up here to wear anybody out and bore you to tears with technical

discussions. But the ten amendments, first ten, are those that deal with human rights. This was a compromise and a concession to obtain ratification of this Constitution, and everyone of them that I know of is alright. I believe in that. I don't think that Congress should have the right to pass any law respecting the establishment of a religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. I could go on down with the other nine, but they all deal with human rights.

Today we bask in the influence of this old Constitution. Some people, as I've already mentioned, say, "It's outmoded and and worn out. Let's have a new one." But I appreciate this thought that's been expressed by a master of the English language. He said, "Is a great gothic cathedral any less beautiful because the builders are all dead?" Is our Constitution any less the protector of these great human rights that we enjoy--and among them is the right to own property--is it any less useful today because Ben Franklin, George Washington, and James Madison are dead and gone? I think they devoted as much wisdom to it as it was possible in that day and time.

You remember what history says, too, about the closing days of this convention when so much of this debate had taken place and when it had looked like confusion and discord was the order. And some of the members even threatened to go home in addition to these thirteen that did. Benjamin Franklin arose and made one of the most important speeches made in that convention when he said, "Is it possible we can frame this without the approval of the deity?" And he suggested that they have prayer, and they did, and that discord and disharmony began to melt away sufficiently to afford these compromises that I've referred to, and they then reached agreements that could be signed by the thirty-nine who did sign it--just the bare majority of seventy-four selected.

Well, it ought to be heartening to all of us who live by the yardstick of the Constitution that they were wise enough to frame a document that has lasted now from 1787 down to 1970, nearly 200 years. We've made marvelous progress as a nation under its benign influence. Why should we change it? Why not let it alone? Let there be one thing that we're all agreed that

with its imperfections still is perhaps the best that a composite mind of this nation can produce. I'll just leave you with that thought. I hope you will not vote to amend the Constitution. (Chuckle-audience) Thank you very much. (Applause)