

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION
NUMBER

Interview with

Ben H. Wooten

October 27, 1969; October 31, 1969;
November 3, 1969; November 10, 1969;
November 17, 1969

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas
Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello
Terms of Use: No restrictions
Approved: Ben Wooten
Date: Feb-19, 1970

Oral History Collection

Mr. Ben H. Wooten

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald Marcello

Date: October 27, 1969

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello introducing and interviewing Mr. Ben Wooten for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place at Mr. Wooten's office in Dallas, Texas. Mr. Wooten, for the record could you give us the date and place of your birth?

Mr. Wooten: I was born December 21, 1894, in Panola County, Texas, at a location just across the line from Shelby County. Our home town in so far as mail and trade was concerned was Timpson, Texas, in Shelby County. My ancestry is not known as well by me as I would like for it to be. My grandfather and his family moved from Mississippi directly to East Texas. I do not know the place at which he resided in Mississippi, my father was born in Panola County, Texas. My grandfather owned his farm for many, many years before selling it. It was some thirty years later that my father purchased it. I remember his stating that it cost him \$2.50 per acre.

Dr. Marcello: Were most of the people in your family farmers from way back?

Mr. Wooten: They were all farmers. I have not known of any member of my

family who did not farm. As I stated before, they settled in East Texas and, although not on the same farm, my father settled in East Texas after he became a grown young man. By East Texas I mean along the Panola-Shelby County line. His father upon selling his first purchased land in East Texas moved to within about six miles of Carthage which was the county seat of Panola County. My father grew up at this location. He and his family were always farmers.

Marcello: What were your father and mother like?

Wooten: My father was a positive character, a very religious man who believed in everyone doing his share of work and carrying his share of all responsibilities in the family, the church, and the local country schools. He believed in staying out of debt but giving one-tenth of what he made to worthy causes. He was a man of very strong character and motives and always regretted that he did not get any higher educationally than what would now be termed about the third grade. He learned considerable arithmetic and was a good speller and wrote one of the most beautiful hands that I have ever seen. He did not pretend to be more educated than he actually was, he lived by a philosophy that has always been a source of great strength to me. If he did not know the answer to any problem, he did not take any action until he found the answer. He was tolerant yet very firm in his belief in the way one should conduct himself. He was a deacon in our local church which he helped build about a mile and a half from where we lived. Its name was Corinth.

We had services there, one Saturday and one Sunday each month, and nothing but illness prevented our entire family attending both services. Many times the minister would spend Saturday night in our home. My father insisted that there be strict order in the church, and if youngsters or oldsters, either one, misbehaved, he as chairman of the board of deacons invited them to get out and stay out until they could behave themselves. (Chuckle)

Marcello: (Chuckle)

Wooten: My father and my mother were both very much of the opinion that my sister and I should get the best education possible. They did not have any excess funds that we could use, but they encouraged us to work for enough money to get us through our local school and to college.

I did not have any brothers, but three daughters were born to our family, two of which died when they were small, and the other lived to be about sixty-three years old. She was a teacher, having secured her education at a country school and earned a certificate to teach by state examination.

Marcello: What sort of a person was your mother?

Wooten: My mother was also very religious, and she, like my father, had about the equivalent of a third grade education. She strongly insisted that we children behave ourselves and work at whatever there was to do. She was an unusually good cook and homekeeper. We had a fine orchard, and she saw that peaches and apples and every vegetable capable of being canned was put up and stored away for winter use.

The school that was attended by my sister and me was known as Brushy Creek School. It was about a mile from our home. The teachers were always young women, and they boarded at our home. My mother felt that by having them in our home a good educational influence would be available to my sister and me. We always had to study our lessons in the evening after dinner. If we had a problem that we could not solve, she did not hesitate to call on the teachers for night work for us (chuckle).

Marcello: Describe your life on the farm near Timpson.

Wooten: Our farm consisted of about seventy-five acres. It was sandy land and was adaptable to raising cotton, corn, potatoes, and vegetables including watermelons and cantalopes. About fifty acres were in cultivation divided about equally between cotton and corn. We picked our own cotton and carried it to a gin which was about a mile and a half from where we lived.

Marcello: Was cotton the cash crop?

Wooten: Cotton was the cash crop, but the cash crops (chuckle) were not big. Many times we would get as much as ten or twelve cents a pound for our cotton and other times we sold it for six cents a pound. We would have made practically nothing if we had not picked it ourselves. During the growing season and before I was large enough to work, my father usually hired a hand, at that time \$10 to \$15 per month and board was the average pay. We had no difficulty in getting young men to work for that amount. The corn crops were not for sale. They were for feed for the horses, and and meal for the family bread. We always had some few cattle for

sale each year. I remember that one year I was given a pig to raise and told that if conditions justified, I could sell it after it got to be a grown hog and buy a rifle. But financial conditions were such that when it got old enough and fat enough to be converted into meat, we didn't have any other money, and it was sold to buy groceries and medicine that we had to have. I haven't yet owned a rifle.

Marcello: You would say then, essentially, that this was a subsistency type farm where you grew just about everything that you used yourselves and, probably, there wasn't too much profit left over at the end of the year.

Wooten: That's correct. There were not many banks, but my father never owed a bank anything in his life. He felt that he did not want to be burdened with debt and that he'd rather live in a very modest fashion and do without some of the necessities in order to stay solvent.

Marcello: Did your father play any active part in politics at this time? Was he interested in politics?

Wooten: He did not take any party positions as I recall it. He voted for men and principles. Of course, everybody in that area were Democrats. My grandfather fought in the Civil War on the side of the South. My father took an interest in all the civic affairs. He was a member of the Brushy school board, in fact, chairman of the board. In those days we had what we called road overseers. My father held this office for a long time. Every person was expected to put in at least two days in the year working on the

country road. It was the job of the overseer to call them out to work to see that the best road possible would be kept. In making this statement I am not inferring that the roads were good.

Marcello: What chores did you have to perform on the farm?

Wooten: Well, they were different at different times in my life. Let me say to that that our little country schools usually started the first of October and were over at the end of March. Not in one single instance did my mother or father keep my sister and me out of school to work. We always went to school as long as school lasted, but on Saturday there was no such thing as our not working. I learned to help my father saw the wood and split the rails that made our fence, and this was usually a Saturday job. The cutting of the stove wood and bringing in the fire wood was my job, and sometimes the milking of cows fell to me. However, usually my sister did that. I joined my father in feeding the cows and the horses. We always raised one or two colts a year, and I looked after them and, of course, regretted everytime one was sold.

My father participated in every phase of farming in a small way. That is illustrated by the fact that he raised cattle, not many, however. He raised mules and horses. He raised geese and ducks and sheep. We sheared our own sheep; therefore, had our own wool, and my mother converted the wool into yarn. We had a spinning wheel, and she made most of our clothes in the early days. We didn't have too many clothes, but she would knit our shirts and sweaters and socks. Really we were clothed and fed as the result of our own efforts. The first pair of trousers--pants or breeches

we called them--I ever had, my mother made them from the cloth of worn out pants of my father. The first pair of pants I ever had made out of new cloth I picked peanuts in an amount sufficient to sell for enough money to buy the cloth. Well, after the pants were made, I had to have something to hold them up. I had one chicken, a young rooster, and I walked three miles to a store, sold him for fifteen cents, and bought a pair of suspenders. Our life was very simple but rather complete.

Marcello: What did you do for amusement?

Wooten: Well, we played dominoes and checkers. We played with baseballs and bats. Then we lived a quarter of a mile from Brushy Creek, and we fished a great deal, at least my sister and I did. I remember the first fish I caught. I'd say it was about three inches long and two inches wide. I was fishing with a pole, and when the fish pulled the cork under, I threw him so hard and high that he went over a tree behind me. That was a great day. I had caught my first fish. A cousin lived not far from us. We were fortunate that we didn't get drowned because when the creek got out of the banks and running at terrific speed and muddy, we would go in swimming. Nobody lived along the banks so we would undress and take our clothes down the creek and then walk back up the creek, something like a mile, and swim down the creek together. This was most entertaining when the weather was warm. After each swim my mother would make me take a bath in what we called the smokehouse.

That was where my mother and father originally lived. That was the first thing they built. He cleared the road to the land

after he'd purchased it, and there built the smokehouse. Later they built a separate house and then added the rooms along as they could. The smokehouse was a log kitchen, but it met their needs until they could do better. Then my father built what was called a crib. There was a stable on each side of the crib for the horses, and the grain was put in the room between the stables. We had another building where we kept cotton seed and feed for the cows along with general storage. We had a hog pen. We never did buy any meat of any kind. We killed enough hogs to supply our meat. Hog killing day was quite an event in the fall. The weather had to be cold enough to justify leaving the meat out at night, to get it cooled off. To kill the hogs, we would either hit them on the head or stick something in their throat and hang them up by the hind legs, pour hot water on them and scrape the hair off their bodies before removing their intestines. So we really provided practically all the food we had. We did have to buy, of course, sugar, salt, soda . . . and coffee, but coffee drinking was rather light.

Marcello: Are there any other memorable events that you recall from your childhood?

Wooten: We, of course, bought some flour. We did not have biscuits every day, but we did buy some flour, and it was also necessary that we have meal. We would shell the corn, by that I mean taking the grain off the cob and carrying the shelled corn to a mill. That was always on Saturday morning. I would saddle my mule and put the corn across the back of the saddle. When I got to the mill

the sack of corn would be stacked in the order it arrived at the mill. The best way in the world to get into a fight with another boy would be to scoot your sack of corn ahead of his. That was a cinch fight because it was considered a personal insult. It would take some little time for the grist mill to convert the corn into meal. We would get impatient if we were about to miss out on going fishing or doing something else that we wanted to do on Saturday. I remember one instance where a boy was very anxious to get away. The mill was grinding ever so slowly. The miller usually wore a white shirt and the dust from grinding would get on his eyebrows and his hair. One day he was grinding and dipping corn meal out very slowly, and a boy said to him, "I could eat meal as fast as that thing can grind it." This angered the miller and he said, "Just how long could you do that?" And the boy said, "Until I starved to death." (Chuckle)

Marcello: (Chuckle) How did your upbringing on the farm prepare you for your career in the business world?

Wooten: My father was a man who took every step he could to motivate his children. He wanted us to be ambitious. He held to the belief that we could do anything we really wanted to do provided we would do the work necessary to bring about the desired result. So when our little school there at Brushy gave me all I could get--it was necessary that I attend school elsewhere. So after I had gotten as much as I could from Brushy School, I walked to a school in Shelby County three miles from our home by the name of Wedgeworth. It was a very good country school with three teachers. The head

teacher was named J. M. McGee, M-c-G-E-E. He was an outstanding educator.

Marcello: Was this unusual?

Wooten: It was unusual for a pupil to come from other districts there. Mr. McGee was elected principal . . . same being the second man in the Center High School. Center is the county seat of Shelby County. Mr. McGee and his wife did a wonderful thing for five of us boys. He wanted us to go on with him; he said he wanted to bring us to a certain status. He and his wife rented a home in Center and arranged for all five of us to board with them and go to school at Center. In later years I am pleased that I did have the opportunity to do him a great favor by getting him the superintendency of a large high school.

Marcello: Were there any other teachers who, perhaps, had a profound influence upon your life? I'm speaking now of your elementary or high school career.

Wooten: Well, a Miss Anna Vandergriff boarded in our home (chuckle). She was one of the greatest lady teachers I ever saw. There was no such thing as having really organized schools. She taught everything. She was a very good disciplinarian. A saw mill was about a quarter of a mile from the schoolhouse and all kinds of kids came to school. She did not spare the rod, and she had as complete discipline as a country school could have. If a student missed three words in a spelling lesson, any one lesson, she reached and got the switch and applied instantly.

Marcello: Did you ever feel her switch (chuckle)?

Wooten: Yes. (Chuckle) And when I got home I felt another one. That was the rule of most of the parents. When, for any reason, a child got a whipping at school, he got another when he got home.

Marcello: Who gave the whippings at home, usually your father?

Wooten: My father did that. I didn't get many whippings from offenses at home because my mother and father taught respect. I never refused to do anything that I was told to do.

Marcello: Do you believe that you got a good education in the elementary schools?

Wooten: Yes. When I finished high school and finally got enough money together to get to college, I thought more of my previous training. From Wedgeworth I went to Center High School, and that's where I met Mrs. Wooten. Mr. McGee knew we Wedgeworth boys were all poor. He thought maybe the way up was to teach, all five of us did become teachers. At night in his home he gave us special training in order that we might take a teacher's examination for a second grade certificate to teach school. This was one of the most important things in my life. After Center School term was over, I passed the examination for a teacher's certificate and Mr. McGee helped me get a job teaching in Shelby County at a school called Willow Springs.

Marcello: How old were you at this time?

Wooten: My total years were seventeen.

Marcello: (Chuckle)

Wooten: The trustees never asked me how old I was, and I didn't tell them (chuckle). All kinds of kids came to that school, and I was there

one year. The building was the original one in which the regulators and the moderators fought in the beginning of the Civil War.

Marcello: I see.

Wooten: I taught everything from beginners to about the sixth grade maybe. The second and third years of my teaching were in Panola County at the country school about six miles out of Carthage, called Antioch. My mother and father were getting up in years, and I wanted to be at home with them, and I taught at a school called Ragley, located in a sawmill area about three miles from our home. After four years of teaching I entered what was then called the North Texas Normal, not N.T.S.U.

Marcello: When did you begin your college career at North Texas?

Wooten: I entered North Texas in summer term 1916. I graduated in August, '17. I went to the summer school at North Texas Normal, while I won't say that I was normal 'cause I went, and I had five conditions. In other words, they took me on the account of the certificate, and then I took courses to make up those conditions.

Marcello: Do you remember what any of those conditions were?

Wooten: Oh, some were in mathematics; some were in literature, one in each of that. What is it before you get to trigonometry (chuckle)?

Marcello: Geometry?

Wooten: Geometry. Geometry. Then, let me see. I've forgotten. Oh, the other was in physics. (Check record)

Marcello: Why did you decide to go to North Texas?

Wooten: Well, my Brushy school teacher, Miss Anna Vandergriff, had attended North Texas. It had made a good teacher out of her, and everybody

said it was a good school. Furthermore, I had a limited amount of money, and I could go to North Texas for \$50 a year tuition. Money was a scarce object to me. I had worked on the Gulf Pipeline Company to get some money to go to school, and I had saved what I could in my teaching. My mother and father both got in bad health, and I had to help them while I was teaching.

Marcello: You worked for the Gulf Pipeline Company in the summertimes.

Wooten: Yes, between high school terms and later between teaching terms.

I was lucky in getting a job with the pipeline company. My father was plowing potatoes for the last time. The vines had to be turned or the plow would tear them away. I was turning vines. He said, "What are you going to do now?" "Well," I said, "I've got two things in mind: one, to go to college, and one to be a banker." (Chuckle) He said, "Be a banker! How are you going to do that?" I said, "I don't know exactly, but I'm going to do it." He said, "If you've made up your mind to do it, you'll do it."

Marcello: Why did you decide to become a banker?

Wooten: Oh, I forgot to tell you, I attended in Timpson, what we called the Timpson Normal. This was just before I took the examination for a certificate to teach school: The Timpson Normal was a special school in which students prepared to take teachers examinations. I didn't have much money to spend. So I roomed with a preacher who was a friend of my father. He owned a dairy. He said if I would help him milk the cows and deliver the milk while I was there, I wouldn't have to pay any board. In order to do this, I got up very early in the morning, and worked until the banks were open. I'd

go through town, and the bankers would be at work. I'd see them behind those dressed-up counters with a tie on. I decided that would beat teaching school or farming. I determined to be a banker.

Marcello: Did you ever become acquainted with any of the bankers in Timpson?

Wooten: Oh, yes. I made it my business to get acquainted with them. Not long after my father and I had the conversation concerning my plans for the future, I looked out about eleven o'clock in the morning and saw some surveyers coming through the woods in front of the house. I didn't know what they were doing although I knew they were surveying because I'd seen pictures of tripods. This was the first week in June, and we had one tree with the prettiest red peaches on it one could imagine. So I decided I might get a job. I got a bucket of these peaches, and I spotted the man they were calling the foreman. I carried the peaches to him and said, "Have some peaches?" He said, "Oh, they're beautiful, I sure will." He took the bucket of peaches and reached in his pocket and pulled out a fifty cent piece. I didn't have a nickel, a dime, a penny, nothing. He said, "You can have this." I said, "I don't want any pay for them." He said, "Well, you're the first damn kid I ever saw that didn't want fifty cents."

Before lunchtime was over, I'd told him my story, that I needed some money and I needed to go to college and to do other things, and I wanted to work. He didn't say he was going to give me a job, but around one o'clock he said, "Kid, get ahold of the back end of the chain."

So I worked with the Gulf Pipeline Company until I got enough money to sort of get me going and to keep me going. At odd times when I was at home from anywhere, why, if anything needed to be done to that pipeline, I did it. When I went home the winter of '16, Christmas, 1916, from Denton, I really had good luck but the pipeline's bad luck. It was very cold. In those days they didn't bury the lines as deep as they do now, and when it came to be a really cold spell, it would pull the line in two. It pulled it in two across Brushy Creek right near our home. Well, it was Christmas, and we had a telephone. So the company called me and said, "Would you get a crew together and fix the pipeline?" They said, "Our men are gone, and our daily operation means a lot." I said, "Yes, I'd do that." They said, "What'll you charge?" I just thought I might as well get some Christmas money. I said, "A hundred dollars a day." So they said, "That's all right." That was the most day pay I'd ever heard of in my life (Chuckle). So I got a crew of fellows around there and it took the three days to fix that pipeline. That did a great deal for me at Denton. Oh, I forgot to tell you, the same boys that Mr. McGee had with him at Center High School were in Denton except for one exception. One of them didn't go, but Mrs. Wooten's brother went. So we got to thinking about it. We didn't see any use in paying for board and everything else when we five could provide for our own comforts. So we rented a house on what was then Lula Street. Two of us cooked every 2nd week and one kept house, and we got by with a total charge of \$15 each per month.

Marcello: That was \$15 a month.

Wooten: \$15 a month for rent and food and a place to sleep. That cooking business later got me in some trouble, a few years later in the army. I made a mistake in telling the Captain about the incident. Our mess sergeant got transferred somewhere else, and the Captain called me in and said, "You're a mess sergeant." "Well," I said, "Sir, I don't know that I am qualified." He said, "If you are not, you've talked too much about Denton. You are mess sergeant." I am convinced that out of all the jobs in the world, the worst is a mess sergeant. We didn't have but eighty-seven cents a day to feed those soldiers, but in those days that was pretty good. No matter what you fed them, they didn't like it.

Marcello: What was North Texas like at that time? I'm referring to the college itself.

Wooten: Well, it must have had nearly 2,000 students. There were big classes, and you really got out of the classes what you put into them. The professors, men and women, were great. If they saw a boy or girl really trying, they'd put out whatever special effort was necessary to help them. You had to do your work, or you just got sent home. You didn't have to misbehave (chuckle). If you didn't do it, the state didn't pay out any money on you. I think that's a good philosophy. Dr. Bruce was president. I remember how he would stand before the crowds in chapel with his hands in his pockets and talk to us. We always went to chapel exercise. Dr. Marquis came along afterwards. We had a Miss Moore, who was a teacher in psychology. She died last year. We'd been friends

through the years. She'd been in my office when I was over at the First National Bank and the Republic Bank many times. She didn't like red on anybody anytime. One day I wore a red tie to the class because she insisted one wear a tie. She said, "Mr. Wooten is excused from the class until he changes that tie (chuckle)." I left and changed it. There was a girl that wore a red jacket one day, and Miss Moore said, "Miss . . . you are excused until you change that red jacket." I soon learned how to get along with her. And I know that her heart was right.

Marcello: Did you make any lasting friendships there?

Wooten: Yes, I did. And I greatly appreciate them. Most of them have, unfortunately, passed away. Carter Wedgeworth, Lula Street, lives in Dallas now.

Marcello: In what extra curricular activities did you participate while at North Texas?

Wooten: I was president of the Pine Burr Club. There were two clubs, namely the Lees and the Reagans. And sometimes we got along and sometimes we didn't. I was a Reagan. We had a devil of a fight one night on the campus. It was the Reagan's fault. We decided we'd make a coffin and put Mr. Lee in it, I mean a dummy, and bury it. Well, we didn't get it buried. The Lees took it away from us (chuckle). I was so doggone busy, though, trying to clean up these five conditions and graduate there, that I didn't take too much time in activities that didn't have something directly to do with my work.

Marcello: Did any of your teachers there play a profound influence upon your

life? You were there for a rather short time for any of them, perhaps, to have an opportunity.

Wooten: Yes, a rather short time. But Dr. Bruce impressed me as being a tremendously worthy man. I have a name here, my physics teacher. One was my government teacher, and one was my physics teacher. Both of them had a great influence on me. Miss Clark did also. She taught me English. She was the head of the English Department. Then in speech there was a woman who encouraged me a great deal in debating and speaking and like that. Speaking has meant a great deal and to my life, but I started that at Brushy School (chuckle). First speech, just a kid, I got up and thought I had memorized it, and couldn't think of a word. Then over in Wedgeworth School, we debated there. Then I went to the county debate.

Marcello: When did you finally leave North Texas?

Wooten: I graduated summer of 1917, but I left before they had the graduating ceremony. World War I was on and a lot of the boys had volunteered. I phoned my father and told him I felt like I ought to go. He said, "Well, I'd be ashamed of you if you didn't want to go." He said, "Wars are never over quickly." You see, this was about March. He further said, "Are you going to graduate?" I said, "Yes." He said, "How do you know you are?" I said, "Well, I know that my grades justify it." "Well," he said, "you'll have plenty of time to fight, and after you have finished there in August. My advice is to stay there, but when you graduate, I'm going to expect you to go."

Well, I graduated, and I didn't know just when I wanted to go. I didn't go quite as quickly as I thought I would. I'd never seen fifty soldiers together in my life. I was there about a week and went to see Miss Margaret Kay, now Mrs. Wooten, at Center. We were going to get married when I graduated. But I did not want to take the chance of leaving a widow, so we put it off. They were drafting boys nearly every week. If I went to San Antonio to volunteer, I had to pay my way to San Antonio (chuckle). If I went to Carthage and had the draft board take me, they had to pay my traveling expenses. I hadn't been called, so I went up there and turned myself in to go. They were getting a crew ready to go, and they put me in charge of getting about fifty boys down to San Antonio.

When we got there and checked them in, the fellow checking said, "Have you decided what branch of service you want?" I said it didn't make any difference. He said, "How about machine guns?" I didn't know that was the suicide squad, and I didn't know whether a machine gun weighed four pounds or 4,000 pounds. I said, "That's all right with me." So I went to machine gun training with 256 men. They were all green except a few that were brought out to train us. The second morning the captain says, "Anybody here know anything about a typewriter?" I had pecked around a little on one. "I do." "Well, step forward." (Chuckle) I did. Then he called me in and said, "You're a company clerk." That made me a private first class right then, and it gave me a chance to know the officers.

Marcello: Where were you taking your basic training?

Wooten: San Antonio at Camp Travis and, boy, it was work. So I learned the officers, and I did whatever they said if I had to work all night. It wasn't long until I was made a corporal. My work was routine in the office, and I got tired of that. One day I asked the Captain, "Captain, sir, could I be a drill sergeant?" He said, "Yes, if you want to." He said, "I can get somebody to take your place." So he made me a drill sergeant. I thought I was just getting along fine until the Captain called me in and told me I was mess sergeant. I thought of all the fool things. But, you know, in the army you don't pick what you do. He said if I couldn't supervise the cooking . . . I'd talked too much about my school days at Denton. Well, that ended it, and I finally got along at it pretty well. I had complaints, of course, when the inspector would come around, take a knife and even scraped the wooden handles on the knives to see if he could dig out something.

About that time the third officer training camp candidates were picked. They selected two out of each regiment. I didn't know they were considering me, but they picked me for one of the two. As luck would have it--I knew when to report and where--a week before reporting time I took the mumps and had to go to the hospital. But I didn't have a bad case of the mumps. On Sunday I bought a paper which named me and eight other boys and stated that if we didn't show up at the officer training camp Monday morning, we were going to be replaced. So, brother, that completely threw me.

Marcello: Why had they selected you for the officer's training in the first

place? Was it because of your education and your past performance?

Wooten: Education and the recommendation of the officers in that battalion. You see, while I was the company clerk I met the officers of the battalion and I met the majors commanding and they recommended me. On that Sunday morning I didn't have any fever, and I didn't have a bad case of the mumps. I had the paper and the colonel came by and I showed him the announcement and I said, "I 'd like to go, sir." He said, "I'll tell you when you can leave here." I just thought to myself, "You blankety-blank so-an-so, you think you can tell me. I'm going to decide that." I figured that the worst thing he could do to me was cut me back to a private and I'd been that. So that night, as soon as it got dark, I took off the hospital clothes, of course, and left them there, and the robe, and put on my regular clothes. I slipped out by the guard and got a taxi and went back to my company. You see, my company was in San Antonio, and I went in and happened to find my captain. He was there working Sunday night. He said, "What are you doing here?" He said, "I thought you were in the hospital." I said, "I'm going to officer's training camp." "Did they release you?" "No, sir." He said, "They'll arrest you." I said, "Well, they may, captain, sir, and they may bust me back to a private, but I can take that." But he said, "There will be an arrest order for you. I know the rules."

I said, "Well, I'm going to Captain Peddy of the third officers training camp. He was one of the first officer training camp captains. He commanded one of these companies. We grew up about

five miles from each other, and we'd debated each other in several country school towns in East Texas (chuckle). My captain says, "You know to get in you have to have your service record?" But he said, "You know where it is. I have some business somewhere else." He got up and left, and I got my service record. I got another taxi and went over to Camp Travis. But, boy, I had a job getting in. It was eleven o'clock, and I told the guard the whole story. I said, "Where is Captain Peddy's tent?" "Right down there." And he pointed it out to me. "Fine." I got to one of the guards, and said, "Captain Peddy will get up and come up here and tell you what to do if you'll tell him. He came up and said he'd take charge. He said, "Well, there'll be an arrest order for you. What do you want me to do with it?" I said, "Captain, sir, call me." (Chuckle) "Well, I'll do that." Then he took me over to the barracks late in the night, put me in, and said, "Now, you stay in here until I tell you to come out. I'll have your food sent to you. I don't know how sick you are." I said, "Well, I'm not very sick."

The third morning a runner came over, and said, "Captain Peddy want to see you." I thought, "Well, here it is." I went over there, and he wasn't there, and he wasn't in his tent. But on his desk there lay an order for my arrest. Well, it disappeared, and I never did hear of it any more.

After the training camp for three months, and it was real hard work, I ranked rather high, in fact, very high, so they told me. I never did see the written rank. But the general sent for me. I thought, "Well, it's caught up with me now. They've got

me." I went in and, of course, I saluted as best I could. He said, "Sergeant, I've got a request to make of you." I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "The next officer's training camp will start in ten days. Also, within thirty days your company will be in Philadelphia, and they're going to sail for Europe, and they will be in the St. Mihiel battle by August 12. I'd like for you to stay here and be an instructor for the officer's training camp." But he said, "I've been in the Army a long time, and this is the first request I've ever had from an enlisted man to go back to be an officer in the same battalion he was in. If you want to, you can do it, but it would be better for you to stay here with us." I said, "Sir, I'd like to go back to my company." And I went back, and, brother, it wasn't long until we were in Philadelphia, and on August 12 we were in St. Mihiel.

Marcello: What was the trip across the Atlantic like?

Wooten: Well, it was a very hazardous trip, a treacherous trip. We went to Halifax, Nova Scotia, to join the convoy. There were fourteen ships in this convoy. There was one battleship. It circled around and ahead. Of course, there was fighting equipment on every ship. We were headed for Southampton. It took us fourteen days because we dodged around. Our commanders knew that the Germans knew what we were doing. About the ninth day out the Germans sunk one of our ships, and they knew which one to sink. It had 60,000 automatic pistols on it.

Marcello: This was a German submarine?

Wooten: Yes, a German submarine sunk that ship. We were protected pretty

well. Our protection was tripled near to England. We had five or six escorts all around us when we got in. We landed at Southampton and went across and stayed in England about a month.

Marcello: Cherbourg?

Wooten: Yes. We landed at Cherbourg. We were billeted in homes. Being a second lieutenant, I got every job that no other officer wanted to do (chuckle). The captain called me and told me to go out, and have a fellow drive me on a motorcycle, arrange for billeting the regiment. I couldn't speak a word of French, but on the way before we left the United States, I got a book with an American word and a French word, an American word and a German word. Well, I got to the town where part of us were going to stay, and I took the opposite French word of mayor and went to a policeman. Anyway he got the idea. He carried me to the mayor and we spelled this thing out, and they treated us royally. We didn't have any trouble with the billeting all the way. In every town I went to I had that same luck. The people were very, very nice to us. We stayed and trained there until we went on up nearer and nearer to St. Mihiel.

Marcello: In other words, did you get any additional training after you landed in France?

Wooten: Oh, yes. Yes, we got training there. Then they sent me back to a special training studying the exact St. Mihiel trenches, where they were, and how to go about the whole thing, and how the attack was going to be. I went back and stayed two weeks and brought all the instructions to my battalion.

Marcello: Were you among the first of the American troops who had landed in

in France?

Wooten: No. There had been some of them there a year or more. But they'd been in Chateau Thierry and up in that area. We went in front of Metz, and we went in and took our places in the line in the trenches. The intelligence was very good. We knew, and of course, they knew us, what the German division was in front of us, what regiment was in front of us, and what company was immediately in front of us, and who commanded it.

Marcello: What was life like at the front?

Wooten: Well, it was rough. After we got actually in the front--not going over the top or waiting to go over the top--why we just weren't doing much firing unless they fired on us. We didn't have any hot food. It had to be brought down the trenches, but we got plenty to eat. We were always in danger, but not like that of an atomic bomb. You followed your instructions whatever they might be. I tell you there never was any better place for prayer than in a trench. I mean that absolutely.

Marcello: What were these trenches like?

Wooten: They were about seven feet deep and about three feet across where you could walk and the machine gun bullets, unless they happened to be falling down, would miss you, and the rifle bullets would miss you. There was one section for a toilet if you could get to it. There was usually a man about every ten feet, and we didn't gather up in bunches anywhere because if a shell came over, it would get all of us. The time that I shall never forget was the first time I went over the top. We were on one side of no man's

land and the Germans were on the other, and they had treated us rather rough and we had them. We know they know you're coming because you can hear the bullets zip over your head to, say, three or four feet. To know that in thirty minutes, twenty minutes, ten minutes, five minutes, one minute you've got to get out and go take that shooting guy, now that's something. The fellow that says he wasn't afraid is a liar. That doesn't mean that you didn't do it at all, that you didn't forcibly do it. But it meant that you prayed about it before you got up. Some way, somehow, I had a feeling I was going to make it, and I proceeded on that assumption: for the guy that makes it, the good Lord has his arm around him, I'll tell you.

Marcello: Now, what was your function in the trenches? Were you a machine gunner at this time, also?

Wooten: Oh, yes. The main thing was to keep the guns in action. I had a platoon containing four guns. There were four platoons in every company. We had sixteen guns. Regardless of what happened we had to keep those in action. If nobody else did it, I had to attend to it myself.

Marcello: Now the two major battles that you, evidently, were a participant in were . . .

Wooten: St. Mihiel and Meuse Argonne.

Marcello: St. Mihiel and Meuse Argonne. Do you recall any incidents from those two particular battles that you would like to discuss at this time?

Wooten: At St. Mihiel we drove the Germans back, and we followed them. We

drove them beyond no man's land. The Meuse Argonne was a determined action to get the war over. We wanted to get the war over, and it took experienced fighting men to do it. So we were replaced by raw fighting men. We were relined company by company and carried into Meuse Argonne. Fighting was raging there all the time. We'd go into a forest and when we got through, our artillery and theirs, only stumps would be standing there. But it was just that vicious. There wouldn't be hardly anything left there, and we had to live through that and fight through that. So we killed them, and they killed us. As we advanced, we would catch up with them, but you didn't pay any attention to them. We knew we were trying to bring the war to a close.

And we had a lot of men and officers wounded and killed . . . eleven o'clock the night of November 10, they sent a runner up to the place where I was. It wasn't in a trench. It was down in a low place. They told me to come back to headquarters and I went at 11 a.m. the next day. So, they told me to tell the fellows that the fighting would be over the next day at eleven o'clock.

About nine o'clock, we didn't see any use in shooting any more. The thing was going to be over at eleven o'clock. Well, we quit before then. We quit early. I don't know if we fired any after daylight really. But at nine o'clock, the Germans opened on us with everything they had and killed some of our men, for nothing. Well, I don't know how many of them we got, but, brother, we dealt it to them with everything we had until exactly eleven o'clock. When it was over, the Germans stood up, and when they turned around

to leave they started singing, and we were close enough to hear it. We stayed there two nights and then we followed them on into the Army of Occupation. But I'll tell you the amazing night of it all was that first night when everything was quiet. You could get up. You could walk around. You could stir about. Nobody was going to shoot you. You could do what you pleased. That was a night that will never be forgotten. We then followed up through Luxembourg on into Germany. I was stationed at Berncastle and our headquarters for the whole division was at Coblenz.

Marcello: You took part in the occupation then?

Wooten: I stayed there until I left Europe. I had a lot of things to do in Germany. I had to stay there anyway, and I wasn't going to sit around on my fanny and not do anything. There wasn't any fighting to do, just report for reveille at every night and every morning. I wasn't going to do that. The thought occurred to me that a lot of money was being handled in the Army of Occupation. I got a temporary assignment, not a permanent transfer, just a temporary assignment to the Quartermaster, and I got to handling money. I handled it in big amounts at the payroll office. One day I was called to headquarters and told that, "Our fellows are not getting any entertainment, and we've got some good singers and good actors here in the Ninth Division, and would you organize a show, take it to the various towns, and put it on?" Ever since I had been there I had done everything that the commanding officer wanted me to do. He said, "Well, do you think you could organize a show?" I said, "Oh, I can get these boys to singing if that's all there is to do.

I can't give them an example." So, I organized a show. I found one man who could train the choir. We went all over Germany for about two and a half or three months entertaining our boys, and that was a great experience. I had studied German at North Texas. I had learned how to do pretty well at speaking German. I couldn't do it now. But that's the way it was.

Before we sailed home they carried us back into France to Cherbourg and we were there a few weeks before we sailed for home. That was an interesting experience in Germany. My wife and I were back over there in 1962. We've been back several times but in 1966 we went out to Berncastle and went to the house where I stayed. A great tribute to the Germans is the fact that they take care of what they have. That house was in just as good repair in 1966 as it was when I lived there in 1919.

Marcello: Did your Army life influence your future life in any way?

Wooten: Yes, to a certain extent it did, as evidenced by the fact that I never have really been separated from the Army because I've never really gotten out of the Army. I've had something to do with it for years and years. I'm a Civilian Aide at Large, one of three, to the Secretary of the Army now. I go to their meetings each year. I do what they want me to do as a Civilian Aide to help the Army or the civilians in connection with the Armed Services.

Then I've been connected with the U.S.O. In fact, I put in the forerunner club of the U.S.O. at Little Rock, Arkansas. I was Defense Administrator for the State of Arkansas in World War II. My duty was mainly to do everything I could to help the military.

Ninety-five per cent of all the known aluminum ore in America is within fifty miles to fifty-five miles from Little Rock. And Hitler had cut off our imports from South America. We had to have airplanes, and there was just one way to have them--namely, build the mills to convert the ore into aluminum. The Reynolds Mill was built, a very fine mill. The Jones Mill was built, a very fine mill. The Aluminum Company of America more than doubled its capacity. There were many, many, many things to do in connection with these developments.

Marcello: Surely.

Wooten: We found it necessary to build about 750 houses where workers could live. Camp Robinson had 30,000 men and there was no U.S.O. at all. My wife and I were in downtown Little Rock Saturday night. There were soldiers walking, wandering up and down the town in droves. They had no where to go. It struck me as Defense Administrator of the state, that I had a job to do for our soldiers. So Monday morning I called twenty-nine men into my office. I had a check written out, a goodsized one, for me, and I said, "It's going to cost you this amount of money to come to see me this morning. Here's my check with no payee name on it and here is a blank check for every one of you." They were good sports--everyone of them signed his check for an amount equivalent to my check. They were informed that it was contemplated that the money would be used to do something constructive for the soldiers in training at Camp Robertson. We all knew they should have a downtown visiting place. Committees were appointed to raise additional funds, provide a building that could be used as a meeting

place and to suggest a name for the center. The name decided on was the Civilian-Military Center. The soldiers in training at Camp Robertson were from the states of Arkansas, Mississippi, Georgia, and Alabama.

Marcello: You were in the process of organizing a military and civilian center.

Wooten: Yes. The Second World War had not been declared and the training was referred to as "for defense." The practices and policies of the Civilian-Military Center were carefully considered for adoption. Among other things the center was the meeting place of the soldiers with their friends and their families. Meals were served and secretaries were employed to assist in writing letters to the home folks. The Federal Home Loan Bank of Little Rock had a vice president by the name of Curran Conway. For several years he was the president of the Boys Club of Little Rock, a very fine institution--in fact, it was the largest boys club in America at that time. The bank gave him a three months leave of absence with full salary in order that he might devote his entire time to the organization and operation of the center. He did a splendid job and set the club up along the same lines as are now used by the USO Clubs in the United States. The USO law was passed in March, I believe, 1941. The first man that headed it was Thomas J. Watson. His title was president or chairman. He came to Little Rock and spent some ten days observing the operations of the Civilian-Military Center. It can be truthfully said that it was the forerunner of the USO. I have been connected in one way or another with the

USO since its establishment and I am now chairman for seven states
and a member of the Board of Directors.

Oral History Collection

Mr. Ben H. Wooten

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Date: October 31, 1969

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Mr. Ben Wooten for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. I'm interviewing Mr. Wooten at his office in Dallas on October 31, 1969. Now, Mr. Wooten, the last time we were talking we had stopped with your being mustered out of the armed services. Had you decided about what you wanted to do after you left the army?

Mr. Wooten: Every move that I made was more or less motivated by the desire to become a banker. Upon being discharged from the service, I was told that I'd be allowed to wear my uniform for two weeks. I was discharged at Camp Travis, San Antonio. Upon reaching home I happened to be in Timpson one morning and met one of my friends, and he asked me what I was going to do. I told him I had just gotten home and did not know. He said, "Well, you have had some experience teaching, and I have a brother that lives in Alba, Texas. He was home recently and told me that they were looking for a principal for the high school, and it seems to me that you could qualify. I called his brother by telephone, who was a dentist at Alba, and told him of the conversation. He made an appointment

for me to see the school trustees. I went to Alba . . . wore my uniform with my service ribbons, etc., and met with the board of trustees and with the superintendent of the school. They employed me as principal which was the second place in so far as importance was concerned. They needed a principal who could teach math, and I had majored in math at North Texas.

After they had employed me, I asked them whether they needed any lady teachers and told them that I was going to get married within the next month. They said they needed a history teacher. My wife to be had been teaching at Snyder, Texas. The Alba trustees employed her sight unseen.

Still thinking of the banking business, I made some inquiry and learned that there were two banks in the town, one state and one national. I hired a boy with a car to drive me around town and told him I wanted to see where the bankers lived. He showed me the residence of the heads of each bank and one of them lived in a two-story colonial house. His name was Mr. Jordon. He was head of the First State Bank. I inquired about his family. The boy said he had a wife and no children.

So after our drive was completed around the town, I went in to see Mr. Jordon and introduced myself. He said, "Oh, yes. You have just been elected principal of the high school, and your wife has been elected history teacher." I said, "Yes, sir, that's right." I told him I was looking for a place to stay and that we'd like to have a room at his home. He referred to his wife as "Miss Della," and he said, "Why, Miss Della wouldn't take in any boarders." I

said, "We do not want meals there, but we'd like very much to have a room there." "Oh," he said, "she wouldn't do that." I said, "Well, could I talk to her?" So he phoned and told her that I wanted to see her, and she agreed. I went in and had a visit, she first said, "Well, I don't think so. We've never taken a roomer." Then she said, "Do you play forty-two?" I said, "Yes, we do." So she agreed to let us live with them as far as the room was concerned, and I arranged for meals up the street at a boarding house.

I married Miss Margaret Kay August 7, 1919. We had met in high school and were in college together. She resided at Center, Texas. We came to Alba the first of September. However, before going to Alba we went to what we called a Teacher's Institute at Mineola, Texas, which is near Alba.

After the school started a few weeks about the latter part of September, I told Mr. Jordon that I would like to work on Saturday. On Saturday in September and October the small towns were crowded with farmers. It was cotton-picking and selling time, and both banks were very very busy on Saturday. I told Mr. Jordon that I would like to work for nothing on Saturday. "Oh," he said, "I'll pay you." I replied, "No, I would just like to have the experience." So I went to work as a teller on Saturday. My main purpose was to learn something about the banking business. There was a forty-two club in the town, and we were invited to become members of the club. The head of the Alba National Bank, a Mr. Armstrong and his wife, were members, and we learned to know them well.

I read in the newspaper about the 15th of October that the assistant cashier of the Alba National Bank, a Mr. Low (L-O-W), was going to become county clerk. I knew there'd be a vacancy in the Alba National Bank, but it never occurred to me to apply for the job. However, within about ten days Mr. Armstrong who was the cashier of the bank--in those days cashiers were the dominating officers in banks of all sizes and the presidents were inactive--called me at the schoolhouse and asked me to come by his office on the way home. I was hoping and praying that it had something to do with the resignation of Mr. Low, and it did. He offered me the assistant cashier's place, and I, of course, accepted. But it took me until December 1st to be ready to go to work in that I couldn't leave the school until there was someone to take my place.

Marcello: This was in December of 1919.

Wooten: December 1st was my first official day in the bank. My experience in paying the soldiers in Germany in the Army of Occupation was of great benefit to me in that I didn't get excited at the money.

Marcello: Now in the meantime you were, of course, principal at the high school.

Wooten: Yes.

Marcello: Do you remember any significant events there that you would like to have in the record?

Wooten: No, there was nothing special there.

Marcello: Evidently, would it be safe in saying that you had taken this job until something opened up in the banking business?

Wooten: Absolutely. I wasn't asked that question. I didn't volunteer that

information, but that is exactly what happened. I never lost sight of the fact that I wanted to be a banker. Mrs. Wooten kept on teaching in the school there for three or four years.

Marcello: Describe what Mrs. Wooten was like at this time.
(Break in tape).

Wooten: She weighed about 110 to 115 pounds. She had very black hair. Other than that she was not necessarily dark complexioned. She was a member of the Baptist Church and came from a large family of eleven children. She had a natural liking and interest in children. She was a rather strict disciplinarian and thought that children ought to obey their teachers as well as their parents. She was a very good and thorough teacher. She prepared her work at night for the next day and took much pride in her teaching. We stayed at the Jordons until we bought a home which was in sight of the Jordon home and across the street from the First Baptist Church of which we were members.

Marcello: What did she think about your leaving the teaching profession and entering the banking profession.

Wooten: She was very much in favor of that (chuckle). One member of the family was enough in the teaching profession, certainly, at that time. We spent much time in church activities. It wasn't very long until I was superintendent of the Sunday School, and she was a Sunday School teacher. We took great pleasure in the things we were doing. Everything went well with me at the bank.

In the fall of 1923, two men walked into the bank, said they were from Farmersville, Texas, and they invited me to come to

Farmersville to be interviewed by the directors of the bank relative to becoming the cashier, which meant the head of the Farmers and Merchants National Bank of Farmersville. Alba was about forty miles east of Greenville and Farmersville some twenty miles west of Greenville. So the date was set and I drove to Farmersville . . . I drove to Farmersville to meet with the group of directors. When I walked into the bank, there sat eight other men, and the directors were meeting in the back room. I was not told that I was going up to join a group (chuckle), and this lowered my hopes materially. It made me wonder just what I should say or do. I had told Mr. Armstrong, the head of the Alba National Bank, what I was going for, and he was very reasonable about it. He said, "If you don't trade, and I don't want you to unless you get what you want, it'll make no difference here." So one of the directors came out and spoke to me, and told me to have a seat. I remarked that I didn't know that I was coming up to be interviewed in a contest with a lot of people. I said, "Where do these men live?" They all lived in the county, and one of them lived in Farmersville. I said, "Well, this just wasn't my understanding. I thought I was coming up to see the board of directors and I appreciate the privilege of coming, but I think I better go back home." "No, no," he said. I left and from the look on his face I felt that it wouldn't be too long before I would hear from him again.

In about ten days the same two men walked into the bank in Alba and said, "Would you like to become cashier of our bank? If so, at what salary?" So we made a trade and I was very glad. I

was there two years. I really thought I would stay in Farmersville.

One day, just about two years from the time I went to work at Farmersville, the banking commissioner of Texas called me. I had met him when he was in the Mercantile National Bank in Dallas. He said, "I have a commission written out for you to examine banks. It's here on my desk. When do you want to start?" That was the first I knew that I was being considered for examining banks. I said, "I'll come to see you day after tomorrow." I went to Austin and the job appealed to me very much. Not that I was unhappy at Farmersville, but I would have a chance to learn more about banking.

Marcello: This was essentially the reason why you decided to leave private banking and become a state banking examiner?

Wooten: Yes. So I could learn more about banking. I was with the department from February 15, 1926, until October of 1932.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. Going back just a little bit, how do you think the training which you received from the bank in Alba and the one at Farmersville prepared you for the job of examining?

Wooten: Mostly in the clerical function, because I was not the lending officer in Alba. I was the head lending officer in Farmersville. And I learned a lending philosophy that has stayed with me from that time till now and applies to every phase of my life. If a question or a situation arises and I do not know what to do, I do not do anything until I know the exact facts. In other words, one should never make important decisions based on beliefs or suppositions. In examining banks I'm not so sure that I learned what to do, but

I learned what not to do in many, many instances.

Marcello: For the record . . . pardon me, for the record, also, would you please explain what a bank examiner does.

Wooten: Well, he goes into a bank and ascertains whether or not the bank is being operated in keeping with the law and sound credit principles. The major function, of course, is to learn what type of loans they make. Is their judgment good? Are the loans collectible? Is there any evidence of the misapplication of funds? An examiner makes a careful study of everything and then writes the summary of what he believes. The report is filed with the banking commissioner. The commissioner causes the report to be studied. Then it's sent back to the bank for the directors to study. A letter is written to the Banking Commissioner stating they have gone over every phase of the report. If there are instructions as to what they must do, the directors state how they've complied with instructions.

Marcello: How often were these banks examined?

Wooten: Twice a year if they were good banks. If they were poor banks they were examined as often as the bank commissioners thought they should be. Sometimes every ninety days and sometimes even oftener than that. I was assigned to the Beaumont area, and I worked there until late in 1927. I was then given an assignment that required to move to Austin. I was put on what we called a trouble shooting job. The right name would be special examiner. In other words, I didn't have any set district and the Bank Commissioner sent me from bank to bank that was believed to be in trouble. So that was,

may I say, a troublesome assignment in that I had to travel all over the state. When one bank was finished, I'd call the office and get my next assignment. I remember one instance. I went from home one morning to a bank over on the Louisiana line, a very small bank, expecting to be home the next day. I got back six weeks later and had been at El Paso all the rest of the time, and my wife had to send me some clothes. Soon I was transferred to Austin on the assignment that I've just mentioned.

Marcello: Generally speaking, in what condition did you find most of the banks in Texas that you examined at that time?

Wooten: Most of them were good. The Bank Commissioners' office had three parts, his office which had overall supervision of all banks, the deputy commissioner who was assistant to the commissioner, and the departmental examiner who was head of the examining division. And there was also a liquidating department.

In the fall of '27 I was made departmental examiner and supervised the examination of all the banks. The examination reports came in to me, I studied them. I decided which reports should be taken up with the commissioner and his deputy. Those were pretty hectic days. We didn't have any insurance of deposits, as such, as we have now. Texas banks did put in a mutual insurance fund a good many years before I went to work for them. But losses began to come, and we saw that fund wasn't going to be able to meet all the losses of all the banks in Texas, and yet we wanted to pay everybody as long as they put their money in the bank expecting funds. So we estimated about how long that would take and we got the law

repealed, but we paid everybody 100 cents on the dollar that had any claim on that fund.

Marcello: Now you were examining strictly state-chartered banks?

Wooten: State-chartered banks only, yes. I took an examination to go on the national examining force just about the time the commissioners got ready to make me departmental examiner, and I decided it would be better for me to be departmental examiner than to be on the national force.

Marcello: What useful training for your future career did you receive in this position?

Wooten: As departmental examiner?

Marcello: I'm speaking now of your whole career as a state banking examiner.

Wooten: I more or less got an overall picture of what one can and what one cannot do in a bank. I had worked only in small banks. I got acquainted with the functions, policies, and practices of the larger banks. It was really great training. Bank examining is fine training for any young man who is going to stay in the banking business. It's in reality a post-graduate course.

Marcello: In your career as bank examiner, and in your traveling around the state, what did you find as being, perhaps, the most serious malpractice that banks were engaging in at this time?

Wooten: The most serious acts of bankers, that get their banks in bad condition, was making loans that were not well-secured. Poor lending judgment have closed many, many more banks than dishonest management. There was nothing the bankers could do about it.

I remember the first day I worked in a bank . . . it was December 1st, 1919. Having grown up on a farm, picked cotton and sold it, I was interested in the cotton market. The farmers would have their cotton ginned and then drive their wagons to the square in the center of the town. The cotton buyers would come out and bid on each bale. A buyer would take a hand full of cotton from each bale, pull it apart and determine whether it was short, middling, or long. He would then tell the farmer what he would pay per pound. Then the farmer would bring the ticket into the bank and the teller of the bank would figure up how much his sale amounted to. When closing time came we would bundle each group of certificates for each buyer that did business with us, and he'd make a note which would hold until he sold the cotton. So I learned the first day I was in there that cotton was selling for twenty cents per pound. That was the first day of December, 1919. The first day of February, 1920, that same grade of cotton sold for six cents per pound. No farmer could pay many debts on six-cent cotton.

Marcello: Generally speaking, were most of the failures in the country banks rather than in the city banks?

Wooten: County bank failures were greater in number because there were so many more of them. Bank failures did occur in our larger cities. In the city of Dallas that was not true because the larger banks in Dallas felt that they had a responsibility to do whatever was necessary to keep the smaller banks open. Some of them made substantial donations. This was also true in Houston. The cities that took care of their banks are today the fastest growing in

Texas.

Marcello: Now how could a city take care of its bank?

Wooten: Large banks bought notes from the banks in trouble in order to supply the cash. Many times they took money out of their undivided profits account and just gave it to the bank in trouble in order for it to become solvent. Many times some of the citizens in the town would be called upon to make donations for the purpose of restoring solvency. Sometimes entire new capital stock were required. I was in a bank meeting one night when one man spoke up and said, "Ben, I'll give \$2,000,000." It was a big town and a big bank. I said, "Well, that's fine, Mr. _____, but you don't own any stock here. I wonder why." He said, "I know, but I own a lot of this town." He gave me \$2,000,000 and took the charged off notes for that amount. "But," he said, "I want the directors here to put up another million." And they did so.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. Now between 1926 when you took your job as state bank examiner and 1929 when the stock market crash occurred, did you have any inkling that such an event was going to occur?

Wooten: One could see something coming because more and more bad notes were showing up and deposits were going down. Incidentally, that was forty years from the 29th of this month.

Marcello: Two days ago.

Wooten: Oh, I remember that time exceedingly well. There are some similar conditions now, and there are some differences now. As an illustration, we had inflation. Loans in banks were excessively high. Inflation was preventing many individuals from purchasing usable

goods as they normally would do. The major difference between now and 1929 comes from the fact that in 1929 people with deposits in banks were more ready to withdraw their deposits because of fear of safety than they are now, in that we now have the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation for banks and the Federal Savings and Loan and Insurance Corporation for savings and loan. These agencies guarantee the payment of accounts not exceeding \$15,000. So there should be no rush for funds because of a feeling of panic. Except for investment purposes I am not expecting any great withdrawals from banks or savings and loan . . .

Marcello: I assume that there were quite a few runs on the banks in Texas during the stockmarket panic.

Wooten: Yes. All over the nation runs were comparable. And most anything could start a run. Some of the finest banks in America had runs. Not nearly all the banks closed that had runs. I remember one run I saw. Two women were in a line next to each other, and one of them, just before they got to the window, edged around in front of the other one. That started a fight with hairpulling. They were separated. It interested me to see how much money each one had. One of them drew out \$3.07 and the other \$11.20.

Marcello: I suppose all that it took was a rumor to get some of these bank runs started.

Wooten: That was true.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. Were very many Texas banks during the 1920's using depositors' money to invest in the stockmarket?

Wooten: No. Stocks are not legitimate investments for commercial banks.

They could and did make loans on stock as collateral. That's where some of the trouble came, in making loans to people to buy stock. The law has been greatly changed since then. In those days one could borrow 100 per cent of the price to buy stock. I understand that now one cannot borrow more than 20 or 30 per cent of the cost of the stock. So if a banker has stock as collateral with only 20 or 30 per cent advanced, he can protect his bank. In those days beginning with the national government down to every day operations of all kinds, there was a conservatism that does not exist these days. As an illustration, if the Federal Reserve or the Treasury printed money, in those days they had to have a gold content behind every dollar. The amount of money that they could print to come to the relief of business, banking or otherwise, had to be based on the gold that the Treasury owned. That is not true today. The gold requirement was reduced to twenty-five cents on the dollar and some two or three years ago was taken out completely. Money can be printed in any amount, now, subject to the judgment of the Federal Reserve Board and the Treasury. So the government is in position, if things should get really bad, to take care of the situation.

I don't believe that's going to come about. Our trouble now is more from inflation than anything else. I am very firmly of the opinion that we should now, and should have had for two or three years, a price control law. I would begin with interest rates and wages and goods and include everything. We had price control in World War II, and we protected the value of the dollar. We had

price control during the Korean War, and we retained the value of the dollar. Inflation is getting worse right now except in building materials. Lumber and building materials have gone way down. Other than that I don't know of anything else. There may be something, of course, that I don't know about. The dollar has gone down since 1940, down to 36 cents of purchasing power. That's moving pretty fast. There can be no such thing as putting value back into the dollar without a recession or depression. We can't do it. We could hold it where it is now, and if we had price control, without a recession. If we keep squeezing and squeezing credit many people will be thrown out of jobs, and we will have a rough time. One difference between now and 1929 is that there is no limit to the amount of money that can be printed if the government wants to do it, and the philosophy of government has changed greatly since 1929. We didn't practice the philosophy then that it was the government's duty to take care of everybody that wasn't working, and to take care of all the city improvements that the city didn't have the money to pay for, and to lend money to all the nations of the earth that are our friends. But that philosophy prevails somewhat now. Therefore in my opinion our grave danger, yet, is inflation and not a recession.

Marcello: Going back to the stockmarket crash and the depression, how did those events affect your position as state banking examiner?

Wooten: Well, it kept us busier and busier because more banks lost money because their stock collateral was not of sufficient value.

Marcello: Did you think that the federal authorities, namely, the Hoover

administration, took the appropriate steps for alleviating the banking difficulties?

Wooten: I think they did the best they could under governmental psychology at that time, as illustrated by the Reconstruction Finance Corporation which saved lots of banks. Many banks with very good notes, no losses, just didn't have the money to pay the depositors. In those cases the R.F.C. came to their rescue. That was one of the greatest governmental corporations of all time, if not the greatest. It was not supposed to take over losses--of course it had a great man, Mr. Jesse Jones, as the head of it--but it did billions of dollars of business and later liquidated, paid the government everything they put in it and a large profit.

Marcello: Now, Jesse Jones, of course, headed the R.F.C. under the Roosevelt administration. Do you remember who headed the R.F.C. under Hoover?

Wooten: No, I don't.

Marcello: I don't recall.

Wooten: I don't remember the exact date the R.F.C. was organized.

Marcello: It came in under Hoover but it was extended and its powers were broadened quite a bit more under Roosevelt.

Wooten: I don't remember who was on the first board. I think maybe Jones was on the first board but as I recall he wasn't the head of it. The Home-owner Loan Corporation was formed for the purpose of helping home-owners in financial difficulties.

Marcello: That was also a Hoover measure, I recall.

Wooten: Yes. Helping people if they were honest and had good value, helping

them keep their homes. Then we had the F.H.A. come along to insure notes under certain conditions. That was to encourage mortgage lending companies to make the loans.

Marcello: This was under the Roosevelt administration?

Wooten: Yes, that was the Roosevelt administration. The government made some successful efforts, but they were not necessarily of the give-away type.

Marcello: Well, the R.F.C. simply loaned money to banks, did it not?

Wooten: Yes.

Marcello: With the full expectation of being paid back.

Wooten: Yes. The Federal Housing Administration just guaranteed the mortgage. It expected it to be paid, and if they didn't get paid, they took the property. Of course, I don't have any actual count, but I assume they had some losses.

Marcello: Was the R.F.C. especially helpful in Texas?

Wooten: Yes.

Marcello: Did city banks benefit perhaps more than country banks from the lending policies of the R.F.C.?

Wooten: I would say in volume of loans, yes. The R.F.C. had the authority to buy stock in banks which was most helpful. The R.F.C. later sold all the stock and got their money back. The R.F.C. policies were most constructive.

In those days many people were without jobs. That's why I say we're now on the wrong tract in trying to squeeze inflation out. Consider the recommendation that President Nixon made on construction. If it should be followed workers would be out of work and the

government would likely feed them. In my opinion we have needed for some time price controls on everything. We saved the value of the dollar in World War II and during the Korean War by adopting price controls and it worked. Some say, "Well, there'd be black markets." Well, sure there are people who violate the law. They violate every law we have and they can be sent where they belong. We must save the dollar if we would save our freedom.

Marcello: Is there anything else that you would like to say with regard to your tenure as state bank examiner or the depression or the stockmarket crash?

Wooten: I shall never forget it, October 15th, 1932. I went to Little Rock as head of the Federal Home Loan Bank which served the states of Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, and Texas.

Marcello: Well, how did you receive that appointment with the Federal Home Loan Bank in Arkansas?

Wooten: I am glad you asked me that question. Mr. Nathan Adams, president of the First National Bank in Dallas, was appointed a member of the Federal Home Loan Bank Board in Washington. Mr. Ed Shelton was president of what was then Dallas Savings and Loan Association. He was a very warm friend of Mr. Adams and also of mine. Mr. Shelton recommended me to Mr. Adams and an interview was arranged in Washington, and I was employed as Chief National Bank Examiner of the new Federal Home Loan Bank System. The savings and loan system of Texas was by legislature authority placed under the supervision of the Banking Commission of Texas in 1928, and I was departmental examiner of the system at that time. The supervision of the

savings and loan associations was under my direction and it was in the savings and loan work that I met Mr. Shelton of the Dallas Savings and Loan Association. I did not know that a change in supervision in savings and loan was being considered by the Texas Legislature until I purchased a morning paper and read of the bill that had passed both Houses the evening before. I carried the paper into the office of the Banking Commissioner and he said, "I did not know anything about it either until I got the morning paper." I said, "We will need a man," and he replied, "We don't need a man. You just take over the supervision of the savings and loan in addition to your other work." At that time there were 700 state banks and 200 savings and loan in Texas. In the process of supervision I met Mr. Shelton and his friendship meant a great deal to me. Other than my father, he had the greatest influence on my life. In addition to recommending me for the chief examiner's job he recommended me for the head of the Southwestern Federal Home Loan Bank. I thought it would be in Dallas, especially with Mr. Adams on the national board. After I had gone to Washington with the understanding that I would be made the active head of the Southwestern Bank I learned that it was to be located in Little Rock. Mr. Shelton was one of the directors of the bank and helped me greatly in its planning. Twelve years later Mr. Shelton recommended me to Mr. Fred Florence, president of the Republic National Bank of Dallas, for a vice presidency and member of the executive committee; and I was greatly pleased to accept the job. I moved to Dallas, April 1, 1944, and remained with the Republic

National Bank until February of 1950 at which time I was elected the president of the First National Bank in Dallas, which position I held until 1960 when I became active chairman of the First National Bank and remained so until the end of 1963, at which time I became active chairman of the Dallas Federal Savings and Loan Association. I had been a director of the association for quite a number of years and Mr. Shelton asked me to become active chairman because of a serious illness from which he passed away in December of 1963. I have been asked, "Why did you retire from the active chairmanship of the First National Bank?" The answer is that I was largely responsible for the creation of a retirement fund for employees of the bank and the contract in general called for a retirement at age 65. It was not mandatory but implications were evident that it was considered the likely retirement age. I had remained four years over that age and felt that it was time for me to leave the bank in that able young men had been selected for its administration.

Marcello: Let's go back and refer to the Federal Home Loan Bank system. What, exactly, was the function of the Federal Home Loan Bank?

Wooten: The Federal Home Loan Bank is to the savings and loan associations what the Federal Reserve is to the banks. The bank would lend them money and they keep a portion of their deposits there. The bank president is the Federal Home Loan Bank's supervisory agent, and every Federal Home Loan Bank president is supervisor in his area. He is agent for the Federal Home Loan Bank Board in Washington . . . and supervision he represents the Federal Savings and Loan Insurance

Corporation. He is the head of the bank. He is officially elected by the Board of Directors, subject to the approval of the Federal Home Loan bank board in Washington. But the Board of Directors of a Federal Home Loan Bank has nothing to do with the supervisory work of the president. He has a tremendously important job. I noticed the other day that the Federal Home Loan Bank of Little Rock had about \$380,000,000 in loans. But there's no chance for them to lose a dime on a loan because the loans are all made to savings and loans. A creditor obligation comes ahead of anybody else in a savings and loan. The Home Loan Bank Board has to sell its bonds to the public unless the Treasury buys them. The Treasury has authority to buy a lot but they never have found it necessary. The Federal Home Loan Bank Board does not have authority to issue currency.

Marcello: I take it then that when you became president of the Federal Home Loan Bank, you had to organize it from scratch?

Wooten: Yes. It was just before the 1933 financial crisis. The Bank opened October 15th, 1932. Before we could take in a member, we had to examine it and see if it was solvent, and if it wasn't solvent, see how it could be made solvent before we took it in. There wasn't any insuring of accounts at that time. Well, the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis has a branch in Little Rock, and we were required to keep our money in the Federal Reserve Bank. We had \$11,000,000 capital funds. We felt that a moratorium on all types of banking institution activities would be placed immediately and that the result would be no withdrawal of funds for any purpose until the

moratorium period was passed. The moratorium was declared and the funds of the Federal Home Loan Bank of Little Rock could not be withdrawn from the Federal Reserve branch of St. Louis located in Little Rock. Anticipating the freezing of funds we withdrew a sufficient amount to care for our expenses of all types during the moratorium.

Marcello: Do you think Roosevelt's bank holiday was a good thing?

Wooten: Yes, I think it was a good thing.

(Tape break)

Closing all the banks was a good thing in that every bank had to have a special study to determine whether or not it was sound. This was well advertised in all the papers and all the press. When a bank was permitted to open, the average American accepted that as being the endorsement by the government and he left his money there.

Marcello: In other words it restored confidence.

Wooten: Yes. Greater confidence than I ever expected came back immediately. Then along came further need for some guarantees and insurance.

Marcello: It was around this time that the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation was put into law.

Wooten: Yes, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. Texas was the only state that I knew of that had ever had any experience in insurance of deposits of banks.

Marcello: Was there much banker's opposition to the F.D.I.C.?

Wooten: There was some but not a great deal.

Marcello: Why?

Wooten: Some banks didn't want to pay the premium. The unusually strong and well-received banks had an advantage that way that they wanted to keep. But there was nothing of any major importance in any opposition. By the year 1934 we had plenty of time to see that an uninsured savings and loan wasn't going to get any savings of any consequence, as compared to an insured saving account in a bank. My attorney and I drew the first draft for the Federal Savings and Loan Insurance Corporation. The United States Savings and Loan League had a meeting in Washington. Some members objected to the formation of a governmental insurance agency. They said the government would run the association. We spoke for the bill creating the Federal Savings and Loan Insurance Corporation. There were approximately 800 men from all over the United States there, and when the vote was taken it carried by a very large majority. It was the greatest thing that ever happened to the savings and loan business.

Marcello: Do you think the New Deal policies helped or hindered the development of banking and finance in this country?

Wooten: The government, either state or federal, granted bank and savings and loan charters. The government grants charters. Governments supervise the operation of these institutes; therefore, I feel like the government has some responsibility to see that the depositors money was safe rather than take the attitude of "We are sorry."

Marcello: Generally speaking, then, you would say that the New Deal and the policies which were passed during the Roosevelt administration did help strengthen the banking industry in the country?

Wooten: Yes, no doubt about it. In fact, I don't know where we'd be today if we hadn't had any insurance plus the R.F.C., the H.O.L.C.

Marcello: Did you ever meet any of the prominent New Deal personalities?

Wooten: Yes. I've been on some kind of committee or other in Washington many years and I have met all kinds of officials.

Marcello: Have you ever . . . or did you ever have the occasion to meet Franklin Roosevelt?

Wooten: Yes, I surely did.

Marcello: What were your impressions of him?

Wooten: I'd say my impression was that he was very keen, a very great politician, and that he could get done what he wanted done and he had no hesitancy to delve in the Treasury and spend any to get it done. When one is sick, he needs to have a doctor. Franklin Delano Roosevelt took office with the country economically sick. He didn't have much choice. I think he went too far on some things after the emergencies were cured.

Marcello: How about John Nance Garner? Did you ever meet him?

Wooten: Yes. I met Mr. Garner. I knew him quite well and I had great respect for him.

Marcello: Now he more or less goes back to the old Populist tradition.

Wooten: Yes.

Marcello: Was he rather suspicious of banks and bankers?

Wooten: Oh, no. He owned a bank. I used to examine his bank at . . .

Marcello: Uvalde?

Wooten: . . . Uvalde, yes.

Marcello: You've already mentioned, of course, that you worked quite closely

with Jesse Jones, who was the chairman of the R.F.C. What were your opinions of Jesse Jones?

Wooten: Jesse Jones was a truly great American. He was a very wealthy man, yet he deserved that wealth. He would help, especially in Houston, any worthy cause. He didn't let major financial institutions get in any serious trouble or close in Houston. His judgment on nationwide financial policies and problems was excellent indeed. I do not think he had a peer as a businessman in the United States. But if they didn't he wouldn't let the public suffer because of the deficiencies of, or bad-judgment of, individuals. The R.F.C., I judge, made one of the greatest records of any governmental lending agency.

Marcello: And you think this was mainly because of the fact that Jesse Jones was the head of it?

Wooten: Yes, I do. He picked good men to assist him. Mr. Jones had a faculty that a lot of people don't have. He gave the heads of his departments the responsibility of doing something, and then he gave them the authority to do it. So many people give responsibility, but when it comes to authority they want to make every decision themselves and therefore do not develop executives. He developed a lot of executives and I had great admiration for him.

Marcello: How about Senator Tom Connally. Did you know him?

Wooten: I knew him quite well, and I had great respect for Senator Connally. When the savings and loan institutions honored me, about fourteen southwestern states, the Senator came from Washington to the party in Dallas. I worked with him very well on many different kind of

things, and I had great respect for him.

Marcello: Did you ever meet any other prominent New Dealers such as Jim Farley or Harry Hopkins?

Wooten: Yes, I met both of them.

Marcello: What were your impressions of Mr. Farley?

Wooten: Politician first, really! And a good one about that.

Oral History Collection

Mr. Ben H. Wooten

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Date: November 3, 1969

Dr. Marcello: Now, Mr. Wooten, we left off the last time discussing the Federal Home Loan Bank Board in the depression. Now, with the coming of World War II, did the functions of the Home Loan Bank Board vary from what they had been in the depression?

Mr. Wooten: There was very little difference, except the demands on the savings and loan associations changed. The Savings and Loan Associations took care of their money from the savings of individuals, usually, and during wars much emphasis is placed upon the sale of government bonds for the purpose of financing in the war. Of course, these Saving and Loan officials, officers, directors, employees, they'd join in the program of helping finance the war. The funds are not needed in such great quantities during wars by savings and loans, in that, the building of homes always lessens in velocity and volume. It is safe to say without any memory of any special association that during World War II the activities of the association turned more into helping win the war than they did in aggressive building of their own institutions.

After the war, however, when industry turned from developing and manufacturing military goods and much money was needed for home financing, active and intense campaigns were carried on by savings and loan to get money to go into homes. So as a summary, I would say that during wars, especially where we had price controls and rationing, as in World War II, volume, growth becomes secondary because the needs of the nation exceed in every instance the need of the association.

Marcello: From a banker's standpoint do you believe that World War II was financed in the best possible way?

Wooten: I think it was. Of course, in all wars, public debt increases greatly, because enough taxes just cannot be collected to finance a tremendous expansion in military activities in a short period of time.

Marcello: I might also ask if during World War II, you had any functions other than your one with the Federal Home Loan Bank Board?

Wooten: Yes, I was very active in a civilian way for almost the entire war. I was Defense Administrator for the state of Arkansas. I was appointed by the governor, and the necessity for a Defense Administrator, on a state basis, came about from the fact that 95 per cent of all the aluminum ore in the United States is located within fifty miles of Little Rock. Immediately after the war began, Hitler and his forces stopped our imports of aluminum ore from South America, and in order that we might be able to manufacture planes, we had to have aluminum mills. So there was built in Arkansas the Reynolds Mill, the Jones Mill, and the

Aluminum Company of America doubled its capacity. Also, funds had to be raised, and many war activities, which the Defense Administrator had played a part. I also worked with the U.S.O.

Marcello: Now, in 1944 you were named as Vice President of the Republic National Bank in Dallas. Why did you decide to leave the presidency of the Federal Home Loan Bank?

Wooten: I wanted from boyhood to be a banker and my desire was that of a commercial banker. I have every reason to be grateful for my association with the Federal Home Loan Bank system, which was in fact a federal agency employment. We had our board of directors from each of the five states, but the activities were more or less routine in so far as advancing funds were concerned and making loans. I was the supervisory agent for the Federal Home Loan Bank Board and the insurance corporation. Supervisory jobs are most helpful in the development of an individual, but there is always a ceiling on possible achievements and I was ambitious. So I longed for the time to come when I could get back into commercial banking, which was really my first love.

Marcello: How did you get the job with Republic?

Wooten: The result of friends making recommendations, and my association with Mr. Florence in the examination of banks owned by the Republic National Bank Holding Company.

Marcello: Now, Mr. Florence was the man that you had spoken of in a previous interview who was also responsible for your getting other various positions along the way also.

Wooten: Mr. Ed Shelton was a friend of Mr. Florence, and when he needed to

expand his correspondent, bank account activities, Mr. Shelton recommended me to him. The Republic National Bank has always been most aggressive in the servicing of other commercial banks. My banker acquaintances extended from Texas into New Mexico, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. When Mr. Florence thought about some man who could help procure accounts for the Republic National Bank in these states, I appeared to him to be the logical one. But even more, I learned about credits in the examination of the various state banks in Texas. So I wanted to get back into the commercial business, and he wanted someone to assist in his credit department and in extending his banking relations. So I was elected a vice president and a member of the Executive Committee.

Marcello: Essentially then, you were appointed primarily to secure new commercial or savings account. Is that what you mean there?

Wooten: New bank business . . . new accounts from banks, and to assist in the lending of money on all types of loans.

Marcello: What was the state or condition of private banking in Dallas during World War II?

Wooten: It was very, very good. Banks had considerable growth, and the bankers were enthusiastic in their service to the government in all kinds of bond drives.

Marcello: What was the condition of Republic National Bank at the time you assumed the vice presidency?

Wooten: Republic was in excellent condition. It had no major problems, except seeking to grow as fast as possible. The bond drives consumed considerable time of the officers, and I was the head of

one United States government bond drive in Dallas, while I was with Republic.

Marcello: Exactly what part did the banks play in these war bond drives?

Wooten: Their officers were members of committees, and they made contributions in any way that civilians could be expected to in time and money. They purchased large quantities of bonds for their banks.

Marcello: Now, you were at Republic for approximately six years, I believe, between 1944 and 1950. What changes or improvements did you see take place in the bank during your tenure there?

Wooten: This is a little difficult to answer. We did grow tremendously. Before I went with Republic, it was an aggressive bank, seeking to expand and serve in every direction. It was a sound bank, and rendered tremendous service.

Marcello: What personal achievements are you most proud of during your tenure there?

Wooten: Well, this is hard to answer. Probably, in so far as my personal achievements are concerned, I learned a lot and was schooled in banking by watching the aggressive salesmanship of Mr. Fred Florence.

Marcello: I might ask you, did you have any difficulty in making the transition from government banking to private banking?

Wooten: No, none at all. I had the thorough cooperation of everyone with the Republic, and it was a very agreeable transformation.

Marcello: Now, of course, you took over that position in 1944, which was near the end of the war. How did the end of World War II affect banking in Texas?

Wooten: Well, with the end of the war, we started looking more for types

of business that would continue. We expanded our loans materially and sought to help industry grow in every direction.

Marcello: How did the banking policies of the Truman administration compare or contrast with those of Franklin Roosevelt? Truman, of course, would have come in in 1945 and would have continued through 1952.

Wooten: Mr. Truman's policies more or less of a stabilizing nature. The economy had to be transformed from a war to a peace basis.

Marcello: I would suppose we would have to make a distinction here, also, in that the type of situation which faced Truman was somewhat different from the one which faced Roosevelt.

Wooten: Yes. Mr. Roosevelt found a stagnant economy and he had to revive it. When Mr. Truman came in the economy was already going at a good pace. He had to more or less conserve and extend the principles upon which the economy could expand and grow and to help government to help various agencies and various communities. It seems that during the Truman administration, cities and counties and states began to participate some more in the activities of the government than they had before. All of them were perfectly willing, it seems, to be beneficiaries of government funds.

Marcello: What type of problems would a post-war administration face in the field of banking? I'm speaking now at the national level.

Wooten: The Federal Reserve system, of course, had to advance money to banks for the purpose of lending in the expansion of industry. The civilian needs were more or less, in some areas, stagnant during the war, because the war came first. But after that was over, competition increased greatly, and it became a question of

who could make the best products the quickest and get them out to the public. Especially this was true in the expansion of agricultural machinery, automobiles, furniture, and the building of new plants. So a broadening of credit had a lot to do with the policies. Then, of course, in times of rapid expansion you have to supervise a little more carefully. Not all corporations succeed, and the tendency to expand sometimes beyond justification has to be guarded.

Marcello: Was inflation a danger after World War II?

Wooten: Yes, it did pick up considerably during World War II. I do not know what would have happened to the value of the dollar in World War II if we had not had price controls of everything. That brought along with it some black marketeers, but they were very small as compared to the absolute good that came from price controls.

Marcello: Did you ever have any personal contacts with President Truman or any of his cabinet members?

Wooten: Yes, I knew him and some of his cabinet members. As time went by I learned to admire him. In fact, he had great courage, and he did not hesitate to speak his mind any time anywhere. You knew where he stood.

Marcello: You say as time went on you learned to admire him. Evidently your first impressions were not necessarily favorable.

Wooten: I didn't really look on him as a leader for a while. But when he decided to close the Japanese war and had the courage, the great courage, to do it, he became a real man in my estimation. We need more like him now.

Marcello: I might ask you, did he have very much knowledge of economics or

banking matters?

Wooten: I can hardly answer that. I do not think that he would be called outstanding in that respect.

Marcello: Is there anything else that you would like to say concerning your career with Republic National Bank?

Wooten: Well, it was pleasant every day and every way. Everyone was nice to me, and my efforts were certainly rewarded there. Friendships are still most lasting that I acquired while I was with Republic Bank, and there was no dissatisfaction of any kind that led to my leaving the bank. I left the bank because of opportunity.

Marcello: Now, this would have been in 1950 when you assumed the presidency of the First National Bank of Dallas.

Wooten: Yes, that's right. The First National Bank had been a great bank a long time, and Mr. Adams, its president, was the man on the Federal Home Loan Bank Board that recommended me for the presidency of the Federal Home Loan Bank. Mr. Ed Shelton, great friend of Mr. Adams, recommended me for the presidency of the First National Bank, as he did to Mr. Fred Florence when I went with the Republic Bank, and as he did to Mr. Adams to select me to become first chief examiner of the Federal Home Loan Bank system while he was on the national board, and to be president of the Federal Home Loan Bank of Little Rock.

Marcello: Were the opportunities for advancing to the presidency of Republic somewhat limited so far as you were concerned?

Wooten: Yes, they were limited so far as I was concerned, because Republic had a great president. He was not an old man, and it would have

been fool-hardy indeed to make anyone other than Mr. Florence president at that time.

Marcello: And I assume, therefore, that this was certainly an overriding factor which made you decide to leave Republic and go to First National.

Wooten: The opportunity at the First National was the only motive and the friends I had at the First were great in many respects.

Marcello: What exactly were your new duties at First National?

Wooten: Well, the new duties at the First National, I was the chief executive officer and the head of the bank. I did my best to exercise in the First National a policy, namely, to place responsibility and to give authority to the one upon whom responsibility is placed. In other words, do not give an individual a job to do and then have him run to you for every little decision that has to be made. Broad decisions, of course, should be discussed and determined by a committee, but when one is told of his duties and that understands his duties, it is good management to let him tend to his duties. I established that policy immediately upon my going to the First National Bank, and it really paid off.

(Tape break)

Marcello: What was the state of condition of First National at the time of your appointment?

Wooten: The First National has always been a good bank, an excellent bank, and I had no qualms whatever about its condition. The assets were good, and the policies were good. Its reputation for honesty and fair dealing and constructive participation in the community's

needs was uppermost. So I did not come to the First National for the purpose of correcting any faults. Its management, its president was aged, and so was its chairmen, and these were the reasons that I was permitted to come to the First National.

Marcello: What changes or improvements did you observe during your tenure at First National?

Wooten: We made a more strict departmentalization of the various departments. It was a big bank, and we defined the duties and made individual assignment of the duties a little more specific than they were. In other words, the commercial banking division was strengthened and defined, so was the trust department, so was the oil department. We met every morning and discussed any problem that might have come up the day before. We didn't stay in session very long, but our administrative committee met every day, unless there was some special reason for not meeting.

Marcello: Did First National Bank engage in the same sort of activities as Republic?

Wooten: Yes.

Marcello: How did the Korean War affect banking in Texas, since the Korean War would have begun after you had assumed the presidency at First National?

Wooten: Well, the Korean War produced more inflation, and we had to have price controls again, and it slowed down planned expansion and home construction. Everybody turned their attention to winning the war, but it was not as drastic as World War II, and as I recall no rationing was required. The condition then was very much like

it is now. Let me repeat that in my opinion, we are in a dire need today for price controls.

Marcello: Did any special problems arise at First National Bank as a result of the Korean War?

Wooten: No, we had to produce more oil and so our oil loans increased. In fact, the First National Bank is the original oil bank in the world. The First National Bank, long before I became connected with it, made the first loan on oil in the ground. So it is the original oil bank.

Marcello: Also, more or less on this same subject, did the shift from the Democratic to the Republican administration have any effects upon banking in Texas, that is from Eisenhower to Truman, or rather, from Truman to Eisenhower?

Wooten: It had no noticeable effects.

Marcello: Did you find that Republican banking policies differed very much from Democratic policies?

Wooten: Not a great deal, not a great deal. The supervision of banks, of course, changed, but the Federal Reserve Board members are appointed for fourteen year periods. There has never been any drastic change that I can remember from administration change in that the majority or at least half of the board members were already on the board. In fact, politics has affected, in my opinion, the activities of the Federal Reserve Board in a very small way. A fourteen year period is a long time; not many men wish to succeed themselves, and very few of them do. So they use their judgment without any political flavor, which I think is good.

Marcello: Did you ever have the opportunity to meet President Eisenhower or any of his top people?

Wooten: Oh yes, I met President Eisenhower when he ran for office. Then I was on some committees, national committees, while he was in office. I was on his financial legislative committee, about fourteen of us--some house and senate members. I was on various committees having to do with the finance.

Marcello: What did you think of Eisenhower personally?

Wooten: I think President Eisenhower was truly a great American. He was a man of honor, integrity, and more or less acted as a general through the entire service. He was a good leader, but sometimes I thought he trusted his political advisors without making the full investigation as to what their motives might be.

Marcello: What were your impressions of President Eisenhower's Secretary of the Treasury, George Humphrey?

Wooten: I had no particular dealings with him, and I'm not prepared to say. In 1961, the fall of '61, I along with thirteen others were invited to his plantation, or ranch, or farm, whatever you might call it at Gettysburg for lunch to discuss an economic matter. We got there about eleven o'clock in the morning. As I went from the airport to his house, I observed some fifteen or eighteen hundred people at the front gate to his ranch, which is about a quarter of a mile from the house. There was no special meeting; they were just tourists, stopped, hoping they might see the President, which told me the story of his popularity and how people really loved him. We drove around and saw his cattle . . .

and I must say they were high grade throughout.

Marcello: Now, of course, in 1960 we had another change in administrations in that President Kennedy was elected to that particular office. Would you care to evaluate the banking policies of the Kennedy years?

Wooten: I do not recall any major change in the banking policies during the Kennedy years. His term of office was rather short, and I feel that banking moved along about in the same channels.

Marcello: My next question is a little bit off the subject of banking, but do you recall anything from the Kennedy assassination, which took place in Dallas in 1963?

Wooten: Mrs. Wooten and I were invited to join in the parade in our car. Before we received the invitation, I had invited a general and his wife to ride with us, and since he was not included in the invitation to ride in the parade I excused myself from that, and went on to the dining hall where lunch was to be served to Mr. Kennedy and party. There were some twenty-five hundred people in the hall, and word came that President Kennedy had been shot. My wife and I were sitting next to the District Attorney and his wife, and he was informed, and moved on out, so the announcement was not made publicly at that time. In a rather short time, the announcement came that President Kennedy had been carried to the hospital and was pronounced dead. I shall always remember the silence and the awe of the situation at that time. Lunch was served, but the group broke up and dispersed without any speech or any comment being made. We soon learned that the governor had been shot. I shall

never forget my feeling at that time, that a tragedy like this could happen in Dallas. On the Sunday following, Mrs. Wooten and I went to the hospital to see if we could visit with Governor Connally and his wife. We did have the privilege of visiting with her, and while we were at the hospital, they brought in the body of . . . the alleged assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald.

Marcello: Did you know President Kennedy personally?

Wooten: Yes.

Marcello: What were your impressions of him?

Wooten: My impressions of President Kennedy were that he was a good President.

I knew him fairly well, met with him in several instances, and on various committees, and found him to be a man of honor, integrity, and of sound judgment.

(Tape break)

Marcello: Are there any other members of the Kennedy administration that you might care to comment on at this time, especially those who were concerned with banking and finance?

(Tape break)

Wooten: Well, the . . .

(Tape break)

My contacts with the other members of the cabinet were nothing more than routine observations. I had no special projects of any kind that would influence my thinking about them.

Oral History Collection

Mr. Ben H. Wooten

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Date: November 10, 1969

Dr. Marcello: Mr. Wooten, in 1964 you became chairman of the board for the Dallas Federal Savings & Loan. Why did you decide to leave First National?

Mr. Wooten: We wrote the retirement fund for the First National Bank after I became president of the bank in 1950. The retirement fund was made effective as of an age of sixty-five for a beneficiary. I remained with the bank until age sixty-nine. There were fine young men in the bank ready to take over, and I felt it was only just and fair that I move on to some other activity. I had been a director in the Dallas Federal Savings & Loan for many years, and was closely associated with the official personnel of the Savings & Loan. The head and manager of the association was Mr. E. E. Shelton. He was a great friend. He recommended me for a job in the Federal Home Loan Bank system, another at the Republic National Bank, and for the presidency of the First National Bank. He was ill, and he knew that I was going to retire at the end of the year in 1963. He asked me to become chairman of the Dallas Federal Savings & Loan because he felt that he did not have very long to serve. He passed

away in the early part of December in 1963. So it was my association with the group as a director over the years and my friendship for Mr. Shelton and his for me that led to my becoming chairman of the Dallas Federal Savings & Loan.

Marcello: What was the state or condition of the Dallas Savings & Loan when you moved in?

Wooten: It was excellent. There was no need in the Dallas Federal Savings & Loan, other than the fact that Mr. Shelton had passed out of the picture, for additional personnel or new officers. The association was then and is now recognized as one of the best operated in America.

Marcello: What changes or growth or improvements have you observed since coming over to Dallas Federal Savings & Loan?

Wooten: The changes in the Dallas Federal Savings & Loan up to date are very few. Its principal objectives are to make loans on homes to individuals, and to encourage savings. It is a conservatively operated institution, yet very aggressive in soliciting new business. The official family of the Dallas Federal Savings & Loan feel that they have done an individual a real favor if they get him to save systematically in that he can care for himself in old age with the funds, or he can educate a member of his family. Savings are insured up to \$20,000 per account. This insurance along with the value of the home securing every mortgage makes for absolute safety in so far as individual deposits are concerned. The Dallas Federal Savings and Loan Association does not own any property except its home office and its branch offices. Its delinquencies are very,

very few. The government is the keenest competitor by the sale of savings bonds. When our country is at war United States Bonds take the first thought in the minds of savers of the country, and in order to finance the war we cannot differ with that thinking. All savings institutions, whether savings and loans, mutual savings banks, or saving department of commercial banks, feel the competition from the government. There is no complaint about it. The government has to finance itself and we know that. The fact that the associations are not growing as fast as they formerly did is in no way a reflection on them.

Marcello: Now, of course, you went with the Dallas Federal Savings and Loan at a time when Lyndon Johnson was President. Would you care to evaluate the effects of the policies of the Johnson administration upon banking in Texas?

Wooten: Well, that's a little hard to discuss in that we were in war during the Johnson administration and tremendous expenses had to be met. I would say that there appears to be a more conservative attitude on the part of expenditures in this administration than there was in the Johnson administration. However, when it comes to a raise in personal salaries of government officials and members of Congress (chuckle), it seems that this administration is very liberal. (Chuckle)

Marcello: (Chuckle) Of course, here again, I guess that particular policy also goes back to the Johnson administration but it was completed during this administration.

Wooten: Yes, it was advocated.

Marcello: Right. If you have nothing further to add so far as your professional career is concerned, I think probably the next best thing then would be to move on to your activities within the community. Now, you were President of the Dallas Chamber of Commerce between 1952 and 1953, I believe.

Wooten: I was president two years.

Marcello: Yes. How did you get this post? Were you elected or appointed . . .

Wooten: I was elected by the directors of the Chamber of Commerce. It's been common practice in Dallas down through the years for the presidents of each of the three or four larger banks to ultimately become the president of the Chamber of Commerce. So it was nothing unusual for me to be elected president of the Chamber of Commerce.

Marcello: Why a banker, may I ask?

Wooten: Well, I don't know, except that banks are the largest businesses in the city and they are the larger contributors to civic enterprises. And they are, maybe, more persuasive because of their position.

Marcello: With all your activities within the banking business itself, why did you accept this post? Did you feel it was an obligation, a civic obligation, to do?

Wooten: I think it's a civic obligation, and then it is more or less a matter of pride for an individual to become president of the Dallas Chamber of Commerce. One can do a lot of good in that position. The outstanding thing that happened while I was president of the Chamber of Commerce was the progress made in the rebuilding of Love Field. We had to vote bonds and we had to conduct quite a

campaign. We were fought all the way. However, the vote was most decisive in favor of the bond issue.

Marcello: Are you still active in the Chamber of Commerce?

Wooten: Oh, I'm a member of a committee or two, but not working at it much. The younger fellows are doing a fine job.

Marcello: Okay, let's move on to another area. In 1952 you helped to organize the Texas Research League. Now what does this organization propose to do? What is its program?

Wooten: That was an interesting experience and one in which I take a great deal of pride.

(Tape break)

Mr. Hines H. Baker, President of the Humble Oil Company in Houston, was in Dallas, called me and said he'd like to see me. He came to my office and suggested that we organize the Texas Research League to do research in the line of needed legislation and taxation, our educational system; in fact, any governmental project. Projects that would be considered had to be requested by the officer in charge of the work for the state. The proposal got an enthusiastic reception and the League was formed. It has studied every major state system of every kind . . . and made suggestions where it was believed that improvements could be made, and in some cases where expenses could be reduced. We had a difficult time and were criticized for taking so long to procure a manager. But a manager had to be a special kind of individual. He had to know government, administration and business. We finally located Mr. Albin Burger who had been manager of a similar organization in the state of

New Jersey for sixteen years. He is one of the most able officials that I have ever known. The League charges nothing for its services. It is privately supported all the way. We felt that this must be done in order that there would be no bad financial results from making a decision. The League has had wonderful cooperation from the state and county officials. We feel that it is one of the finest organizations in Texas.

Marcello: What tangible achievements has the Research League accomplished thus far? Are there any that you would care to comment upon?

Wooten: No, I don't have enough details in my mind on any particular assignment.

Marcello: Moving on then to some of your other activities within the community. You were at one time, also, the past president of the National Bank Division of the American Bankers' Association.

Wooten: Yes.

Marcello: When did you assume that post? Do you recall?

Wooten: I became President of the National Bank Association in 1960.

Marcello: I see. What was the purpose . . . or what is the purpose of this organization?

Wooten: All the members of the association belong to the American Bankers' Association. There is a state bank division and a national bank division. The National Bank Division has some 5,000 members. It was organized mainly for the purpose of promoting banking and then making recommendations about proposed legislation and to propose legislation that affects only national banks. It has its meeting at the same time the American Bankers' Association meets. It has

a half day of its own, and so at the same time the State Banking Division meets. But it deals solely with national bank problems. It's a very effective organization. It considers operational, legislative, and advertising problems.

Marcello: Does this organization maintain a lobby either in Washington or in Austin?

Wooten: The National Bank Division of the American Bankers Association maintains an office in Washington. Their legislative work is done in the main through the American Bankers Association. State legislation is handled through respective state bankers' associations.

Marcello: I'm going to ask you another question on the subject, and it's probably a loaded one, but what is the relationship of this organization with Wright Patman, may I ask? I would assume the relationship would be a cool one.

Wooten: Well, I don't know just how to answer you. In using the term "cool" you are very conservative. I think more in the likeness of a hard freeze.

Marcello: (Chuckle) I don't think you have to say any more on the subject. Now, again, moving on. And the next thing that I want to talk about is something that you've mentioned earlier, and it's something about which you are, evidently, most proud. And that is that you were chairman of the A.B.A.'s commission for planning its 100th anniversary observance of the commercial banking system. I think you were named in 1958. What would you care to say about that?

Wooten: We had the celebration in '63.

Marcello: Yes.

Wooten: But it took us four years to get ready for it.

Marcello: I see.

Wooten: That was one of the most interesting projects that I ever had the privilege of working with. In 1863 the Civil War was in progress, or getting ready to . . .

Marcello: It was in progress.

Wooten: It was in progress and money was scarce. President Lincoln proposed the National Banking System and signed the law in 1863. The system had different privileges to what banks do now. What the government needed then--same as they need now--was currency. National banks, at that time, were authorized to issue currency, provided the currency issued was insured by 2 per cent Consul Bonds. They were, in fact, government bonds. If we wanted to buy consul bonds and issue currency, we would first put up a reserve of 10 per cent and then in addition the 100 per cent of the bills with the government. This gave us the right to issue currency then. It also gave the government money from that 10 per cent extra, and the purchase price of the 2 per cent consuls. It was a good deal for the government and the bank. The plan was later repealed. The 1963 celebration was expensive. The American Banker's Association put in some money to be used on the national basis. Each state association financed its own celebration and each clearing house its own separate celebration. The major function that was performed was one of explanation and instruction in the high schools, the colleges, and many other kinds of organizations; and the national banking system was explained as to why and what it did and how it functions.

We had our final meeting in Washington in September of '63. It was really a tremendous meeting. S.M.U. trained a male choir to go there and sing, and they sang patriotic songs and did a beautiful job. After they sang the first time, they were invited on a national broadcasting system to sing for national audiences. Before 1963 I was in Michigan and saw the Lieutenant Governor put on an act representing Abraham Lincoln. He looked like him, he talked like him. He impersonated him perfectly. I had arranged for him to come in the meeting and make the speech that Abraham Lincoln made on the banking deal in 1863. The choir was there, and as he came in at the back of the building they sang "God Bless America," and I announced, "The President of the United States." Well, everybody thought it was President Kennedy, and he did speak to us the next day, but they looked back and here came Lincoln (chuckle) with his long coat on and this hat on. When he left, I'd say that there was a minimum of 1,500-2,000 people weeping.

So, it was a great program and it did a lot to tell the people what the American Banking System is and how it helps every phase of American life. A book was written on American Banking Contributions to American Enterprise. I feel that the celebration did a good job. There were people that really went around and made these speeches all over the country. Another thing that did help me was that for three years I went to meetings of the various state bankers' associations in the country and told the centennial story.

Marcello: Now, also, sometime ago, and even at the present time, you are a

Civilian Aide-at-Large to the Secretary of the Army. When were you first appointed to this post? Do you recall?

Wooten: That was about four years ago. However for ten years previous to that I had been Civilian Aide for the state of Texas for the Army. Being a Civilian Aide is a very pleasant task in that you are the intermediary between all phases of the Army activities and the civilians. There are times when one can perform a worthy function. It does not pay any salary. We do get our expenses paid. That's the way it ought to be. We meet from three to four times a year. Also on individual projects anywhere in the country. If there is any misunderstanding between communities, between city councils or county judges, or state officials that can't be readily adjusted, we're called in and asked to do what we can. We do not try to force the Army wishes on the civilians or the civilians' on the Army, but we try to help find a solution to any civilian problem. I never have had a request from anybody to keep them out of the Army.

Marcello: What are some of the problems with which you might possibly deal or which would arise?

Wooten: Sometimes a boy would get in trouble and his parents would want me to do something for them. I didn't get into that. That wasn't in my field of endeavor. We are called in for advice on programs that are affecting civilians.

Marcello: Now, you are also very active in a great many other organizations in Texas or on a national scale. If, for no other reason than to get them in the record, I'm going to mention them. If you care to

comment on them, please feel free to do so.

Wooten: All right.

Marcello: You were also a member of the Board of Governors of the U.S.O.

Wooten: I take much pride in the U.S.O. I have been interested in it since before it was organized officially. The law was passed about March of '41. I had been instrumental in establishing of a meeting place for soldiers at Little Rock in the fall of 1940 when we were training men for so-called defense. I think everyone knew that we were getting very close to war; 30,000 men from Arkansas, Mississippi, Georgia, and Alabama were stationed at Camp Robinson across the Arkansas River from Little Rock. They were in town on Saturday night with no where to go. One Saturday night my wife and I were downtown and saw them moving all around everywhere, and I decided that they needed their own club. I took the lead in organizing what we called then the Citizen's Military Center because we didn't know anything else to call it. I did not start the U.S.O., but I organized the club that was the forerunner of the U.S.O. Mr. Thomas A. Watson, head of International Business Machines became the first head of the U.S.O. He came and stayed with us for about two weeks and set the national pattern of operation and it's going along about the same today. There's not much else you can do except organize a meeting place for them, a place for them to eat, a place for their families to meet, have secretaries to write their letters for them, and provide games for them to play, and dances for them, and ladies' auxiliaries. That's about all we could do.

Marcello: Right. You are, or perhaps were, the Vice President of the American Bible Society. Would you care to comment on this?

Wooten: I still am a vice president of the American Bible Society. That came about through my very warm friendship and acquaintance for the great preacher Dr. Norman Vincent Peale. I met him on several occasions and he asked that I become a member. I've been closely associated with him ever since and have done considerable work, not as much as I should, however, for the American Bible Society. I've helped support it financially and have persuaded some others to do so.

Marcello: You were also a Director of the Baptist Foundation of Texas. Is that correct?

Wooten: Yes, I am a Director of the Baptist Foundation and have been for some twelve years. The Baptist Foundation is a non-profit organization so far as any individual is concerned. It is an investment organization that handles foundation money given to various Baptist institutions. The monies are not mixed from the standpoint of one institution's money being used by another. They do have a common investment fund in which they participate. It is, really, a great organization because it has the best of management. It has about \$86,000,000 or \$87,000,000 in assets and earns money for the state Baptist schools, hospitals, and for any religious purpose for which the donor gives the money.

Marcello: You were also a member of the Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Wooten: Yes, but my tenure terminated some two months ago. I was a member

for some twelve years. That is an investment and insurance holding company for various segments of the Southern Baptist Convention and the corporations owned by them; also, for minister's life insurance and for life insurance of people that work for the Baptist organizations. It owns nearly \$200,000,000 in assets. It is conducted much like the Baptist Foundation. Each organization knows what part of that money belongs to it and what it's invested in. It also takes care and looks after the investments of the Retirement Fund for Ministers. Churches are encouraged to have retirement funds insurance for their ministers. The minister ought to be protected in his senior years just like the executive of any business.

Marcello: You are also a member of the Dallas Council on World Affairs. Would you care to comment on its activity?

Wooten: Well, the Dallas Council on World Affairs is an educational institution. Of course, it doesn't attempt to manage any world affairs. But any treaty, any project involving the participation by the United States government with other governments comes in for study. Its main function is to bring individuals to Dallas to talk to people and to hold seminars and help educate us on what is going on in the world and the part we play in it. It is well supported in Dallas by all segments of the people.

Marcello: At this point may I ask why with all of your duties in the banking business you are so active in all of these organizations?

Wooten: That is a little difficult to answer; however, I feel that every individual has obligations outside the one for which he gets paid.

It was a contribution of whatever I could give in the field of religious activities, educational activities, and the economic affairs of our cities and towns. In other words, it's the duty of every citizen to do what he can to see that these institutions have enough funds with which to operate and to have efficient people in charge of them.

Marcello: Just moving on to some of your other activities, you, of course, just recently retired as Chairman of the Board of Regents at North Texas State University. When did you first assume this post and how long did you hold it?

Wooten: I assumed it in 1949. I first became chairman of the State College Board. North Texas State University was originally a state teachers' college under the same board as the other state teachers' colleges. It was placed under a separate board in 1949 and the word "college" was added to its name. At that time the governor asked me to go on the board, and I was elected chairman. Later on the college was given greater educational powers whereby doctors' degrees could be granted and was named a university. It is, truly, a university. I served twenty years as chairman, and it was time for me to retire. There is no indispensable man. The good Lord proved that when he kicked Adam out of the Garden of Eden and he was the only one in there. My wife is a graduate of North Texas. My sister attended North Texas and two of my wife's sisters went to North Texas. So I took great personal interest in it and still have a keen personal interest in the University.

Marcello: While we're on this subject of your being chairman of the Board of

Regents, you were, evidently there, or in that position, when North Texas admitted its first Negro students. Is that correct?

Wooten: Yes.

Marcello: Would you care to relate any of the events or activities revolving around that admittance?

Wooten: We were sued by a colored man who wished to be permitted to enter. There were anxieties of course, but no more than at other universities relative to having integrated schools. That feeling was in the minds of many fathers and mothers as well as the trustees, etc. We knew that the colored people, according to the law, could enter. We also knew that a court decision to that effect would have a better reception by the mothers and fathers of our students than if the board just voluntarily did it. We, of course, felt that we would ultimately lose any suit of prohibition. We were represented by the Attorney General of Texas. We had an understanding, however, with the judge that if we did lose, which we knew we would, he would wait a reasonable time before demanding compliance. The case was decided against us. We did not appeal. Our case more or less set the pattern. We never had any criticism from anybody for admitting colored people by following that procedure. We still think it was the wise thing to do. It's rather odd, however, that after the young man got his permit to enter, we never heard from him again. (Chuckle) I don't know where he is. Anyway, he didn't go to school at North Texas, but he accomplished his purpose.

Marcello: Now, President Matthews, I assume, was the head of the university through most of your tenure as chairman?

Wooten: Dr. McConnell was president when I first became chairman of the board, and he served some four years, as I recall, afterwards. Dr. Matthews was the administrative vice president. He was a thoroughly able, capable, and outstanding administrator.

Marcello: Would you care to comment on his tenure as president of North Texas in any way?

Wooten: It was a period of great growth. I liked his policies very much. *He was an individual that did not ask everybody in the country what ought to be done.* (Chuckle) Some people seemed to think that he did not get enough advice from other people, but I place results over method. I was very favorably impressed with him, and our relationship developed into a friendship that I cherish very much.

Marcello: Also in the field of education you have been a past trustee at Baylor University, and also you have been past chairman of the Board of Trustees for the Baylor Medical Center. Do you recall when you held these posts?

Wooten: I was appointed to the Baylor Board in 1945 and I believe it was effective January 1946, and I retired from the Baylor Board November 1963. That was another one of these jobs to be done with no compensation. And I never charged one cent for traveling expenses or anything else to Baylor University. I even went to New York once for them and paid my own way. So I feel if you are going to give a service, give a service. And I enjoyed that tremendously. There was no conflict between that and North Texas so far as I was concerned.

Marcello: Did you hold these two posts simultaneously?

Wooten: Yes.

Marcello: That is, chairman of the Board of Trustees of NTSU and then also on the board at the Baylor Medical Center?

Wooten: Yes, I did. When North Texas offered me the chairmanship I contacted *Baylor people and asked if there would be any objections.* They said, "No." In fact, they saw no reason at all why I shouldn't do both. We had a lot of things to do at Baylor Hospital. We had to raise a lot of money. We had to, during the time, get new management. It was a very busy trusteeship, but I enjoyed it immensely. We went to board meetings at Baylor, but my activities insofar as what happened at Waco were limited. We didn't take any major step here and they didn't at Waco that would involve a lot of money or changing radically a policy without all of us agreeing on it.

Marcello: In addition to all of these activities in which you have participated, you have also won many, many awards and honors, perhaps as a result of these activities. Here, again, at least for the record, if for no other reason, I'm going to mention some of these, and if you care to comment upon them, please do. In December of 1950, you were named Dallas's Top Salesman of the Year by the Dallas Sales Executive Club. Would you care to comment upon this? What exactly was it for?

Wooten: Well, I was doing all I could to help promote anything that brought business to Dallas.

Marcello: '50.

Wooten: 1950. That was they year that I came to the First National Bank from the Republic National Bank. Whenever an opportunity presented itself to do something for Dallas or for business, I did it as best I could. I don't know how many committees I was chairman of or the various things I worked at. I was always trying to sell Dallas.

Marcello: In May of 1952, you were named as Dallas's Headliner of the Year by the Dallas Press Club. Would you care to comment upon this?

Wooten: Well, that was in 19 . . .

Marcello: '52.

Wooten: '52. I don't know that the award was so well justified, but I was greatly pleased that they gave me that honor. I was in the newspapers a good many times since having come over here in 1950. 1952 was one of the years I was president of the Chamber of Commerce. That had something to do with it. The press was very kind to me.

Marcello: Also, you were presented with a national citation by the National Conference of Christians and Jews as recognition for services in promoting understanding and civic cooperation among all faiths.

Wooten: I was one of the original organizers of the Conference of Christians and Jews here. I was on the board and was invited to make many speeches in towns over the country where they were thinking about organizing them. That accounted for my being given that award.

Marcello: Also, in June of 1958, you were presented the New York Sales Executives Club Applause Award. Would you care to comment on it?

Wooten: I was invited to speak to the Sales Executive Club. I didn't know that they were evaluating my talk. That was in 1958. Money was pretty tight then. I talked on "tight money," and went into detail

on it. Evidently, they liked the talk because I didn't know I was being considered until I was notified I'd won it.

Marcello: In May of 1959, you were presented the Horatio Alger Award by the American Schools and Colleges Association in New York.

Wooten: Yes. That, of course, is one of the outstanding awards in this country. They are supposed to give it to a fellow who starts with rags and got to riches. But as far as I was concerned, I think they changed their policy. They gave it to me for starting off without anything and holding my own. That's what I like to say because I'm not a rich man. I am grateful from the bottom of my heart. Dr. Norman Vincent Peale was one of the men that recommended me for the award. Another was the president of the Texas Company at that time. I shall ever be humbly grateful.

Marcello: And, finally, in September of 1967, you were presented with a United States Army Certificate of Appreciation for patriotic civilian service.

Wooten: That was in San Antonio and it was a splendid thing for me. It is the highest civilian award that the Army can give, and it was for my work with the Secretary of the Army as Civilian Aide and also my work with the U.S.O. and helping get it started and on its way. I shall never forget that ceremony. It was held at the Quadrangle in San Antonio. As the band marched and played, a young deer got in between the band leader and the band and kept step to the music all the way up and turned around and came back down the way. It was really a great event for me.

Marcello: Are there any other awards or honors that perhaps you might like

to talk about or which you might like to have in the record? I just might describe your office. Looking about, it almost looks like some professional athlete's trophy room with all the various awards and . . .

Wooten: I have at home some six or eight others, mostly plaques.

Marcello: Yes.

Wooten: The University of Arkansas gave me an honorary doctor's degree in 1950, and Baylor gave me an honorary doctor's degree, and then North Texas gave me an honorary doctor's degree.* Some two weeks after the University of Arkansas gave me the honorary doctor's degree, Mrs. Wooten heard our maid talking to another maid. Our maid was from a family down in East Texas that we had known, and she was talking to another maid whose family lived in East Texas. Our maid made a descriptive expression when this girl told her she had read in the paper about my getting a doctor's degree from Arkansas. Our maid says, "I don't understand it. I just don't understand it. I know Mr. Wooten ain't no doctor or nothing, but he's a doctor." That is just about the best description that you can give of an honorary doctor's degree. However, I deeply appreciated it from all three.

Marcello: Okay. Moving on to another topic, this mainly concerns general information. In looking back over your entire career, what factors do you feel are most responsible for your rise in the banking world? Now by factors I'm referring to such things as perhaps any

*On December 19, 1969, Mr. Wooten received an honorary doctor's degree from Oklahoma Christian College.

personal qualities that you feel that you may have had, any particular people, or any significant event.

(Tape break)

Wooten: I wanted to be a banker from my earliest years. I observed our bankers in the home town, and I knew that I had to know something about mathematics in order to be a banker. My keen desire motivated me to preparing myself to be a banker. When I got enough money together to get to college, I told my teacher what I wanted to be, and he, of course, told me to major in math, and I emphasized math all through my college life. I studied books on banking and collateral--what made a good note, what didn't make a good note.

Then I, as much as any other individual anytime, anywhere, have been the beneficiary of great friends that helped me along the way. I doubt if there is a self-made man in the world. We hear that expression. But I've always felt that if a man believes he was self-made and would look in the mirror, he'd see a horrible example of unskilled labor. There's just no such thing as a self-made man. Somebody, some loved one, some friend, some relative, helps everybody along the way or they don't make the grade.

Marcello: If there was one person that you could single out as having helped you, who would that one person be?

Wooten: It would be my father. He didn't have much education, never got beyond the third grade, but he told me many times that I could be anything I wanted to be.

After I came to Alba to teach school, a Mr. Armstrong befriended me a great deal. He was head of the Alba National Bank and he gave

me a job as assistant cashier of the bank. He expressed a favorable opinion to the examiners, evidently, because they recommended me to go to Farmersville as head of the F. and M. National Bank. And, evidently, the examiners recommended me to become a bank examiner in that I didn't know the Banking Commissioner when he appointed me.

But after getting to be a bank examiner, savings and loan, then called building and loans, were placed under the banking department for supervision, and I became the supervisor of the savings and loans in addition to my other job. At that time I was the departmental examiner, the head examiner for banks in Texas.

As a result of supervising savings and loans, I met Mr. Ed Shelton of the Dallas Federal Savings and Loan, really a great friend. As time went by I learned to respect and to admire him. About that time the Federal Home Loan Bank Act was passed by Congress. Mr. Nathan Adams, President of the First National Bank in Dallas, a very close friend of Mr. Shelton's, was placed on the five-man national board in Washington. They had to get a staff and Mr. Ed Shelton recommended me to Mr. Adams for the appointment as chief examiner of the Federal Home Loan Bank system. When the Federal Home Loan Bank was organized for the Southwest, it was located at Little Rock. There were twelve such banks in the country. Mr. Shelton recommended me to head the Little Rock bank and came on the board. After I had been there several years Mr. Fred Florence needed a vice president to help take care of loans, especially to procure bank business, and Mr. Shelton recommended

me there.

Marcello: This was at Republic National.

Wooten: Yes, Republic National, and I was employed as vice president. Then when the First National decided to retire Mr. Adams and needed a president, Mr. Shelton was one of the main factors in my becoming elected to the presidency of the First National Bank. So of all the men, other than my father, that I am indebted to, it's the memory of Mr. Shelton. And when he asked me to come take his place as chairman of the Dallas Federal Savings Association, I didn't hesitate to do it.

Marcello: Let me ask you this question. Do you believe a person with a background such as yours can follow the same path today and hope to achieve what you have in the field of banking? In other words, is this "rags to riches" story still possible today?

Wooten: Oh, I think it is. It depends on whether the individual is willing to pay the price of advancement, if he's willing to study long and late. He cannot do it by studying just five days a week. When I went to Alba in the banking business, the first thing I did was to take a correspondence course on banking, and graduate from banking alone. When I saw I was going to have to supervise the savings and loan, the first thing I did was to get all the information I could on savings and loans, on law and practice, and the results. There's nothing like studying your subject, and then I had one philosophy. When I didn't know what to do, I didn't do anything until I found out, and that will keep one from losing a lot of the money that you're lending. I have had very, very good experience

in lending many, many millions of dollars. Oh, I had some losses, yes, but minor.

Marcello: Moving on to another area, what events or what situations do you feel are responsible for the establishment of Dallas as the financial center of the Southwest?

Wooten: Well, Houston will argue with you on financial center right now, because they have about \$80,000,000 more deposits in Harris County than we had in Dallas County. Dallas was for a long time the center of farming and more or less the center of ranching, and beyond that Dallas has always had a cooperative spirit of citizenry. Of all the competition you ever saw between banks, it is in Dallas. But when something comes up affecting the city of Dallas you found the heads of the banks together. They give money, they give time, they give talent, jointly for Dallas. I say the spirit of Dallas has largely been responsible for it, but of course, Dallas suffered from the lack of not having ocean commerce, suffered greatly, and Houston has it. But when aviation came along, Dallas found its fountain of youth really, and we owe aviation more in Dallas now than we might think. We owe it a great deal. And until NASA was built aviation didn't play a great part in Houston. And now I think it's mainly because of the people employed there. When you count the number of passengers that board planes here, I think we have been fourth in the United States. I don't know whether we are now. I haven't seen the statistics. Nevertheless, aviation is going to play a great part in the movement of our freight. As time goes on Dallas is going to benefit more and more

from aviation.

Marcello: We mentioned about the so-called banking war between Dallas and Houston. Would you care to comment on this? What is the nature of this so-called banking war?

Wooten: Well, the big banks didn't fight each other. They all cooperated, Houston banks all have accounts in Dallas, and most of the Dallas banks have some accounts in Houston. Their big fight was getting the bank out in the country to do business in Dallas rather than Houston and vice versa, and getting the big companies that could do business anywhere. Take the company in New York that has business in Texas. It's going to mean some money for some bank. Both Dallas and Houston are very, very aggressive, and Houston, I think, is more aggressive now than it's ever been. To show you how this aggressiveness has advanced in the last six months, you see, national banks cannot have branches in Texas and neither can state banks because the law won't let us, a state law. But, the Republic National decided it would have a branch in London and the First National has gone down in the Bahamas. (Chuckle) So they're still reaching out, and they're getting the business.

Marcello: Would you care to elaborate upon your own personal economic philosophy? How would you describe yourself on the economic spectrum--liberal, conservative, moderate?

Wooten: That's rather difficult for me to state. When it comes to voting, I vote for principle and man rather than for party. I have voted for presidents in both parties at different intervals, of course.
(Tape break)

Where I grew up it was laughingly said, after we got a mail route, that you had to be a Baptist and a Democrat or the rural carrier wouldn't deliver your letters. My people were all Democrats, of course. That was true of most Southerners in those days.

But my economic theory is that we have to keep people working, It's much better for them to work, even at a reduced wage, than to get their wages so high and inflation so high that they lose their jobs and have to rely on the government or somebody else. I feel that we shouldn't increase our national debt anymore, that we can live within our income, and that we ought to do it.

Marcello: What do you believe to be the proper role of government towards business or toward banking?

Wooten: Government's duty, of course, is to supervise banking. In times of depression I was in favor of them helping banking as they did other businesses. I do not think they ought to want to run every bank. And I do think there is a tendency, it seems like in government, to act as if they believe that regulation takes the place of judgment. Regulation does not and cannot take the place of judgment. There are certain principles that are laid down that should not be violated, but when you go to working out the details of every little transaction, I think the government should refrain from that. The government's attitude toward banking, especially since the depression has been constructive and, I think, good for the people.

Marcello: What do you believe to be the proper role of business in the community, or the role of banking in the community? What

responsibility does the banking business have to the community?

Wooten: Banking business has the responsibility of helping the community develop by lending funds to worthy borrowers for use in worthy projects. It has another responsibility to join in the leadership to procure new industries and new businesses and to assist in all kinds of charitable drives and Chamber of Commerce activities. But its first duty is to run a sound bank entitled to complete confidence.

Marcello: Then, in effect, what you are also saying, I believe, is that certainly business and businessmen do have certain social responsibilities and obligations toward the community?

Wooten: They do . . .

Marcello: That's your belief.

Wooten: Yes, because, after all, their livelihood comes from the community; and as individual businessmen their business is not going to rise above their community.

Marcello: Do you have any personal code of business ethics to which you subscribe? And, if so, would you care to elaborate upon it?

Wooten: Well, my code has always been, and I judge I got it from my father, don't ever do anything, knowingly, that would embarrass you or make you feel guilty of not dealing fairly with everybody. Along with that comes the desire to be helpful when it can be done with safety and for a just purpose. I feel that churches and schools deserve our best thoughts and best actions and we shouldn't try to profit personally through anything we do for any of them. If one is in an advisory capacity, certainly he doesn't want to draw any money

for it. I feel that the individual citizen has a duty to his country in addition to going to war when necessary. No one individual or leader can develop a country above the wishes and the objectives of the people that live there. Business should be so carried on that the community will be economically sound. And along with that, the individual should use his influence and money, if necessary, to see that degrading institutions do not operate in his city.

Oral History Collection

Mr. Ben H. Wooten

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Date: November 11, 1969

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Mr. Ben Wooten for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place in Mr. Wooten's office in Dallas, Texas, on Monday, November 11, 1969. Now, today, Mr. Wooten, I thought, we'd devote just about the bulk of this interview to the selection of President John Kamerick as the successor to Dr. Carl Matthews at North Texas as president of that institution. Let me ask you this, first of all, when did you first learn of Dr. Matthew's decision to retire.

Mr. Wooten: He notified the board almost a year, if not a year, before retirement date that he would want to give up the administration of the university at that time.

Dr. Marcello: This would probably have been some time around September of 1967. What were your immediate reactions to his announcement? Was it sudden; did you have some sort of inkling he had been contemplating this for some time?

Mr. Wooten: Yes, I knew that he had been contemplating it for some time, and I think he really wanted to retire while everything was going

excellent, and it was. My reactions were those of regret. I felt that he could have had three or four more years service there, and it would have been good for the university. But he had served it a long time and naturally if he wanted to retire, it was his privilege. There was no pressure on him, whatever, to retire.

Marcello: It was his own decision.

Wooten: His own decision, yes. We asked him why, and he reminded us how long he had been there and the growth of the university, and he said there were others that could do what he had been doing. He wanted to go back to teaching. He talked it over with the members of his family and they all concurred.

(Tape break)

Dr. Matthews had served the university so well and so long that nobody could claim at all that there was any reason for him to stay longer if he really thought it was time for him to quit. His judgment was very, very good all through the years as evidenced by the development in the university.

Dr. McConnell was president until about '52 or '53 I believe it was, I've forgotten exactly. Dr. Matthews was there with him and we had been watching Dr. Matthews develop.

Marcello: As chairman of the Board of Regents, what were the first official steps that you took after President Matthews made his announcement?

Wooten: We gave some consideration and tried to find out how to go about finding a president for a university. It's not an easy task. We felt that the responsibility was legally, of course, that of the Board of Regents. But we wanted to know what the professional

people could offer to help us, and they were indeed helpful.

Marcello: And I assume this is why you recommended that a Faculty Advisory Committee be formed.

Wooten: Yes, we authorized a Faculty Advisory Committee, and they formed their own committee. We did not want them to select a president, and they didn't want to select a president, but we didn't want one that they had some misgivings about. They were very cooperative all the way through. We interviewed many men and came to very definite conclusions about most of them. Not all the men that we interviewed wanted the job. They came because we had invited them.

Marcello: Let me ask you this the, Mr. Wooten, what did the Board of Regents feel to be the desirable characteristics and qualifications of potential candidates?

Wooten: That's a little difficult to answer. We wanted one that had proven his ability already to get along with faculty and to get along with students and with regents. We wanted one who was neither too far to the left nor too far to the right. We wanted a man who stood for something and one whose opinion would be respected, but we did not want a fanatic in any direction.

Marcello: Is this essentially the type of person that you personally wished to see as a replacement for President Matthews, also?

Wooten: Yes, it was. We wanted Dr. Matthews to talk to us about the fellows but he didn't do it.

Marcello: He didn't play much of a part.

Wooten: Yes, he kept his hands off; he said he didn't want to play a part. If we asked him a specific question, good or bad, he responded, but

he did not take a part at all in selecting the president.

Marcello: Was there any preference as to whether the person should be a business man or a military man or an educator?

Wooten: We wanted an educator, one that had proven himself.

Marcello: When you say an educator, do you mean perhaps somebody who had already been in college administration?

Wooten: Yes, that's right. First we naturally said, "Is there one in Texas that knows Texas people, Texas laws, and habits. Let's see first if we can find one that has made good in Texas." Well, we talked to the type man we wanted, and he already had a good job in Texas. There were several administrators we would have liked to have had, but there was no real reason for them to change, so then we went looking outside of Texas, and we contacted Mr. Logan Wilson, who is the head of some national teacher's organization. I don't remember the exact title, but it has to do with people, and he gave us some half a dozen possible prospects along with Dr. Kamerick's name.

Marcello: Before we get this far advanced, let me ask you this. Was there any desire on the part of the Board to allow either alumnae or the student body to play a part in the selection?

Wooten: The president of the student body was a member of the committee, but he never played any real part.

Marcello: He more or less had an ex-officio role, would you say?

Wooten: Yes, he might have attended one meeting, but I don't recall his having attended any more, but the three faculty members were there in every interview.

Marcello: There was a Faculty Advisory Committee which was selected and consisted of eleven people, was it not? Four appointed and seven were elected, and then of that Faculty Advisory Committee, is it not true that three of them sat in on all the deliberations?

Wooten: Yes, they were elected, there were three of them, and they reported back to that committee, I suppose. I was not present at any of their reports back to them, but they did. We wanted to get an administrator that the faculty was convinced was good, and that we were convinced was good. And Dr. Kamerick came down, and he was the unanimous choice of the entire group.

Marcello: Let me also ask you this. While you were in the selection process or shortly after President Matthews had made his announcement public, two of the professional organizations on campus, the Texas Association of College Teachers and the American Association of University Professors, passed a resolution which called for a president with a Ph. D. in an academic field and that he be selected from outside the university. Do you recall anything about this particular resolution, and, if so, what was your reaction to it?

Wooten: Well, it was passed before I even knew they were considering it, and it was passed early in the considerations. We felt that we had not centered on anybody there, and we were of the impression that if we picked someone on the university staff at the time that we'd start him off with difficulties because if the faculty went to the extent that they wanted an outside man, we felt that an inside man would have a rough sledding on his job.

Marcello: In other words, at least from a result of this resolution, you had

decided that it would perhaps be better to select someone from outside the university.

Wooten: Yes.

Marcello: Did you personally have any preferences along these lines as to whether the person should be from within or from without the university?

Wooten: No, I didn't have any preferences, because I felt that in many instances it's better to have some change. Now I hold Dr. Matthews in the highest esteem in every way. I know there were some that thought he was too conservative and some that thought he ran the whole show, or I'd hear that occasionally, but after all someone has to call the signals. This question of management of a university is much like management of a big business in that you do have people, you give them jobs, you expect them to exercise the functions of the job within the pattern laid down, and you give them responsibility, but still you hold the reins in that you want to know how that responsibility is being exercised. Now many executives that I have known make mistakes. They'll give a fellow the responsibility, a job to do, and never really give him the authority to do it. That is a common failure in business executives. In my opinion that applies just as aptly to a university as to anywhere else. You want the person to whom the authority has been given to follow the approved lines and policies of the business or the university. Now, if he's going to change the policies or change the practices, then it's well to talk it over with the executive.

Marcello: As time went on did the regents become more involved in the selection process than they had originally intended?

Wooten: Yes, when we found out that sixty people wanted to come to see us, we thought we would pick the cream of the crop of the United States, and really that was what we were looking for. But a good many came, and some of them didn't. These fellows came from all over the country, and we had a way of finding out about them. We could call by telephone and find out what we wanted to know about any president of any school but we kept it in confidence. Dr. Matthews would make any investigation that we requested then, or Logan Wilson would make any investigation we wanted.

Marcello: You said earlier that this was a rather difficult procedure, selecting a new president. What guidelines did you use or what precedents did you follow?

Wooten: Well, the one primarily is to get the men who have the recommendations, the reputation, at least, of doing the things that would meet our standards, and then we would get in touch with them directly or indirectly and ask them to come to see us. I've forgotten the number that came, but quite a number came. When we got to seriously considering Dr. Kamerick, of course, we sent one faculty member and the vice-chairman of the board, and the man who is now chairman to the university, and they talked to nearly everybody up there. They talked to the officials there, they talked to the professors, they talked to the judges. The people in town and the faculty had great respect for him.

Marcello: The board was evidently concerned with possible unrest and activism

on the campus. This was certainly one of the things that was paramount in the minds of the board.

Wooten: We talked about that to each man who came there. What the big question is, what is your idea about the relationship between the president and the faculty, and the student body and the faculty. we went over that with every one of them. I don't think we were ultra conservative. We leaned to conservative more than the other, but I think results have proven we haven't had any real trouble on the campus.

Marcello: I don't believe so, no. The disturbances have been very minor. What sort of relationship did you feel and do you feel that the president should have with the faculty?

Wooten: I think the faculty should be consulted, their opinions should be carefully considered, and the whole thing ought to be teamwork with no one trying to put over any pet hobbies. I know that on big faculties there honestly will be differences of opinion, and we have to respect those differences. We'll always do that. The faculty just must have for the good of the university a high opinion of the president. Now not all of them will do that, but certainly he fails if he doesn't have the great majority with him.

Marcello: What do you feel should be the relationship of the North Texas president toward the legislature?

Wooten: Well, I think the North Texas president should know personally the members of the legislature that have to deal with appropriations. He should go down there and take whatever of his staff he wants and tell his story, why he wants it, and what the need is for,

every phase of it. He must be always looking to the advancement of his school and reaching out and doing a real job that is expected of a university. The legislatures ought to know him and some of his other faculty. Now, I do not feel that it's a shining spot for a lot of politics. No at all!! I don't expect him to forego any rights that he has as an American citizen, but he is not to carry anybody's banner, as I see it: principles--yes, individuals --no, I don't think so, because Americanism fundamentally is the right to differ. When he takes a strong stand, and I've seen some of them do it, especially for a candidate, well, he's hurting the institution when he does it in my opinion. If he gets too far to the right or too far to the left, he's going to hurt. I don't think he ought to get out and challenge every conservative. Neither do I think he ought to get off on the other side and follow the gangs of the real liberals and the new left. I don't think that's his job. I don't want to take his right of citizenship away from him, but he can exercise that without getting too far either to the right or to the left. I'm not at all saying that he shouldn't have his personal opinion or whatever he wants to believe. His image should be one of genuine Americanism, with all that name implies.

Marcello: What do you think perhaps should be the relationship of the North Texas president to the Dallas business community?

Wooten: Well, the Dallas business community would like to know Dr. Kamerick. We really ought to have some kind of business meetings for Dallas, Fort Worth, and Wichita Falls businessmen. We should arrange for

Dr. Kamerick to speak to civic clubs in our larger cities.

Marcello: Probably, at least.

Wooten: That, and the more the people of Dallas know about the president and can see that he is just a human being why the better it is, I think.

Marcello: Did President Matthews have good relationships, steady relationships with the Dallas business community?

Wooten: The Dallas businessmen liked his philosophies of life, the student government, and things like that, and we had him down here to entertainments and to clubs, to speak, and other things.

Marcello: I see. What did you and the regents feel to be perhaps the most important educational requirement for the new president? Did you feel that he had to have a Ph. D.?

Wooten: Oh, yes, he had to have a Ph. D. He had to know how to get along with people, and that he have enough, well, I'd say guts when things went wrong and he had to straighten them out.

Marcello: All right, let's switch to another subject then. I think that sometime during the selection process the Faculty Advisory Committee submitted a report in which they laid down what they considered to be the necessary criteria in selecting a president, and among other things they felt that the image of North Texas needed improvement. How did you feel about that particular recommendation? Did you feel that the image did need improvement?

Wooten: Well, I did not go along with them on that. I think that the growth of the institution reflects the image. I have felt that everyone that wants to be liberal has the right to be, but I thought

the policy of the general picture of the university with Matthews was good. That is evidenced by the offices he held all over this United States of various and sundry things. Of course, I was prejudiced in his favor I guess. Then Dr. McConnell, a great friend of mine, was very strong for Dr. Matthews, and naturally that had something to do with my opinion.

Marcello: I think also the Faculty Advisory Committee felt, did they not, that North Texas must do everything possible to get away from its teacher training image, and I think that was the part of the improvements they felt was needed.

Wooten: Yes, that committee did a good job, too. I never found them getting off base at all.

Marcello: Evidently, there was quite a bit of harmony between the Faculty Advisory Committee and the Board of Regents throughout the whole selection process.

Wooten: Yes, there was. There was a very fine relationship all the way.

Marcello: Did you feel that there was a need to broaden the financial base of the university as the report suggested?

Wooten: I think so and I think we are weak now. Especially is this true of the alumnae association.

Marcello: It is pretty weak.

Wooten: Recently the University of Arkansas named a development board. I lived up there a long time, and I'm on that board to help them raise money. For this Baptist college here we got together last week and named a development board, and we have the leading businessmen of Dallas, some of Fort Worth, on that board.

North Texas needs some kind of money raising development board. It can do a tremendous amount of good with the alumnae. I don't know that alumnae associations should be the development board. A lot of universities are not doing that. The Dallas Baptist College has a new development board, and they include Dallas leaders of all faiths. We have the president of the First National Bank, the chairman of the Republic Bank, the president of the Mercantile Bank, the chairman of the Texas Bank. We have lawyers, retired men, every denomination you can think of. A member of the Christian Church is the vice chairman, and I'm the chairman, so we ought to build a school there. It will be an undergraduate college and will not have any graduate training, for we aren't ready for that yet, if ever. But they have 1,500 students.

Marcello: I might also ask you this with regard to that report by the Faculty Advisory Committee. They seemed to imply that President Matthews failed to delegate sufficient authority to his subordinates. Do you think this was true? Would you agree with this part of the report?

Wooten: No, I wouldn't agree with that because I don't know the details. Dr. Kamerick is delegating a lot of authority. There is no fault finding with that. If you are going to give them the responsibility, give them the authority. But keep a close check on them. Don't say you have washed your hands of it because you haven't. They do need the authority to act.

Marcello: That's true.

Wooten: A person has no business teaching socialism in any state school.

We have a lot of it in the United States today. I want equal opportunities for everybody. I don't care what his color is or anything else, let him have an opportunity. Then if he doesn't exercise it, that is his hard luck.

Marcello: Okay. Moving on to another area, around the time that this whole selection process was taking place, how much did the regents, including yourself, actually know about the general operations of the university, that is, the day to day operations of the university? Now perhaps you knew more than some of the other regents because you were very close to President Matthews, but as a group, how much did the regents know about the general operations of the university?

Wooten: I'd say that they don't know much except what the president and his staff tells them in the meetings. There just is no way to know a great deal about it. When a question comes up, then you check into it, but until then you have to rely on the people that have the assignment to do the job. There's no way that a board of regents can keep up with everything that hasn't come under special attention.

Marcello: Throughout the selection process were there always well-established channels of communication between the regents and the faculty committee?

Wooten: Yes, I think so. We had excellent working relations all the way, and everybody said what he thought, and there was no criticism of anybody.

Marcello: Were there any, let me put it this way, at first, were there any mutual suspicions on the part of the regents or the faculty?

Wooten: No, I didn't detect any at all.

Marcello: Who were the regents on the five man selection committee? Weren't there five men? Do you recall whom they were?

Wooten: The five members of the Board of Regents were Messrs. A. M. Willis, Jr., E. C. Pannell, Dean Davis, David A. Kimbell, and myself.

Marcello: There were five of you altogether. Did this regent's committee ever meet without the three faculty representatives?

Wooten: Yes, we did that many times, and they met without us.

Marcello: At what point did the faculty-regents committee start getting down to actual names?

Wooten: Oh, it took six months.

Marcello: Is that right?

Wooten: Yes, we gathered material and as I recall we had sixty or better names, but with most of them we just sent them in here to me. I took the name of the individual and what his education was and what he's doing, and I made a copy of that for all the members of the Board of Regents. I'd send them and let them study, so they could make any inquiry before we invited them.

Marcello: Up to this time, did the names and the credentials sort of drift in, also?

Wooten: Well, in the beginning they did. If I had a letter I'd write and tell them to send them in, and then the agencies that helped us told them to send them in.

Marcello: From what sources did you receive the nominations?

Wooten: We asked the University of Texas head, we asked Rice, and in fact we considered one man from Rice. Then we asked the state teacher's

association, and then we asked the national association to give us names.

Marcello: College placement services.

Wooten: Yes, college placement services. But we got the information on them before we invited them to come to see us, and this procedure eliminated most of them.

Marcello: Mr. Willis was particularly active, was he not, in soliciting the names of prospective candidates?

Wooten: Yes, he was. He's a very strong fellow, I was glad to see him chairman. I didn't know they were going to elect a chairman that day. I didn't know whom they were thinking about, but I was glad to see him chairman. He'll do a good job.

Marcello: Did you yourself recommend anybody or solicit any name for the position?

Wooten: Oh, about all I did was make inquiries. There were three or four whom I suggested, but they never were invited there. I did not try to dominate the selection.

Marcello: Did you see any differences between the names submitted by the faculty and those submitted by the regents? Did you see any pattern between the type of individual who were recommended by the faculty and those who were recommended by the regents?

Wooten: I don't recall any.

Marcello: In other words it was more or less a random and no general pattern.

Wooten: It was a committee that wanted to do the best thing for the University.

Marcello: Was a military man ever considered? Let me put it this way, would

the board and the faculty have objected to a retired military man or a former military man having been president?

Wooten: I don't know that we ever had an opportunity to talk to one. It seems to me that one came that was in the teaching business now who was in the military, but I don't think we ever had any likely candidates in the military.

Marcello: We mentioned this a little bit earlier, but just again for the record, what influence did Dr. Matthews exert or play with regard to the selection of his successor.

Wooten: He didn't do a thing that we didn't ask him to do. If we asked him to make an investigation about a fellow he would do that, but he didn't bring in a name. He was asked about a good many people, but we told him we want your frank opinion, we weren't going to repeat it, but we want it. But he didn't try to influence us at all, he really didn't. Some thought he might try to influence us as to someone already hired but he didn't do that. He said he thought they ought to be considered along with everybody else, which is right.

Marcello: How many names did you say were submitted in all? Around sixty? All right, then, what criteria did you use in sending out this original list of candidates. Evidently you certainly couldn't work with a list of so many names.

Wooten: Oh, well, I wrote and got their history, and if I didn't think I was getting all the real picture from them, I called somebody and got the information. Sometimes I'd ask Dr. Matthews to get the history. Then we put all that on one list telling just who they

were and what they are.

Marcello: What kind of a working relationship existed between the faculty members and the regents of the committee with regard to this thinning out process? Was it rather harmonious?

Wooten: Oh, yes, we asked them to send anybody they wanted. They made inquiries themselves on a lot of them and got this information that we assembled. They performed every function that the board did, except when it got down to the actual hiring.

Marcello: Were there any political pressures brought to bear on the regents who were on the committee, that is, pressure to favor one candidate over another, etc.?

Wooten: Yes.

Marcello: Would you care to discuss it?

Wooten: No, I don't believe I should discuss that.

Marcello: Were there any pressures ever exerted from Washington that you recall?

Wooten: There was no pressure. I had a letter, but there was no real pressure.

Marcello: Did the rest of the regents react to these pressures in about the same way you did, rather indignant, as much I suppose as anything?

Wooten: We didn't think that ours was a political job. We talked about that fact that politics was not going to play any part. Before we had any idea who it might be, we said no, sir, we aren't going to make a political decision.

Marcello: How did these political pressures toward any one particular candidate affect his chances of getting the job?

Wooten: Well I don't think we had any that we would have considered otherwise.

Marcello: In other words if any particular candidate had political pressures exerted, would this more or less have eliminated him, perhaps?

Wooten: No, not if he'd been qualified, if he had been the man for the place.

Marcello: Is there anything else that you would like to talk about with regard to the screening, that is, getting that list of sixty names pared down to the final three?

Wooten: Well, we met and we pared them down. I mentioned before, but the three men that went to the home university did a real investigating job, and no man ever had more perfect 100 per cent support than Kamerick had by the people there, whether it was about his college work or not.

Marcello: In addition to Dr. Kamerick, who were the other two candidates in the screening, do you recall?

Wooten: No, I don't.

Marcello: Was he more or less far a ahead above the other competitors?

Wooten: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Were there any patterns to the differences between faculty members and the board in their ranking of the various candidates during the screening process? Was their ranking of the candidates similar to yours?

Wooten: Some of us thought a little better of one candidate than the others. There's never any real misunderstanding about it.

Marcello: From what I gather, just about everybody, and this included faculty and the regents, at some place on their lists ranked Dr. Kamerick

rather highly. Is that correct?

Wooten: Oh, yes. In fact he didn't get a black mark.

Marcello: Of all the criteria which went into selecting the president, what criteria perhaps ranked highest so far as the regents were concerned? What did you feel was the most necessary qualification that any candidate had to have or that a potential president had to have?

Wooten: The ability to organize and to have his instructions carried out, and Kamerick seemed to have that. He impressed all of us most favorably, and everybody that knew him gave him wonderful recommendations.

Marcello: How many candidates were actually interviewed by the faculty-regent committee altogether?

Wooten: I don't remember exactly, but I think about a dozen.

Marcello: About a dozen of them came to Dallas. I think most of the interviews were held in Dallas, were they not?

Wooten: Several of them were. But we invited them to come . . . If a fellow insisted he wanted to come, we would let him come. One of them called and he just said, "You're not doing right telling me not to come when that is a public institution." I said, "Now you're going to pay your own way. If you want to come, come ahead, we'd like to see you."

Marcello: What sort of questions were asked in the interviews?

Wooten: Oh, more or less the type to find out how they felt about the responsibilities of the administrator, and what his ideas were of citizenship, what he thought ought to be on the campus and off the campus, and how much authority did he think the faculty and students

ought to have in running it. We went through the whole thing so far as their recommendations were concerned. Kamerick seemed to measure up all the way.

Marcello: Did the candidates generally give the same kind of answers?

Wooten: No sir, they had a lot of different kind of answers. If you talked to a fellow an hour or two, you can tell what he really is and what he thinks. There were other good men than Kamerick there, there's no doubt about that, but he came from a great school, and he had rendered wonderful work up there. We didn't feel that we were taking as much chance with him in getting a satisfactory man as with someone who had never really had to deal with management.

Marcello: On the other hand I might ask what kind of questions did the candidates ask?

Wooten: Well, they asked us everything you could think of. (Chuckle) They were interested in the kind of board they were going to be working for, and we truly told them that we depended upon the president to see that the university was run right. It was his responsibility, and we'd tell him what we thought any time.

Marcello: Were any of these deliberations ever made public?

Wooten: No.

Marcello: This was all done in private.

Wooten: All in private. We asked them what their religion was, what clubs they belonged to, and if they ever made any public speeches. We were tremendously interested in that.

Marcello: How many of the candidates interviewed were from Texas, do you recall?

Wooten: Not over four or five.

Marcello: Is that correct?

Wooten: About half of them that were interviewed were from Texas, but not all of them wanted the job.

Marcello: Was there any attempt to get some sort of a regional balance, that is in so far as the candidates were concerned?

Wooten: No.

Marcello: In other words you didn't decide, "Well, we ought to have so many candidates from the Northeast, so many from the Midwest, and so many from the South."

Wooten: No.

Marcello: There was nothing of that sort. How long did it take to interview all of these candidates?

Wooten: Oh, it took about three months at least, or maybe four. Sometimes I believe we paid their way, and sometimes we didn't, depending on the man.

Marcello: What types of sessions were held after each candidate was interviewed? I assume that you got together and talked about the candidate.

Wooten: Yes, we stayed in session first with three of the faculty members there, and then if all of us were not agreed, then we'd have a separate meeting with them gone.

Marcello: From what I gather, after each interview is it not true that one of the faculty members usually drove the prospective candidate up to the campus to look over the area? Did you ever go along with any of these prospective candidates?

Wooten: No, I never did.

Marcello: Later on, of course, as I think we've already pointed out, it was also agreed to visit some of the candidates in their home territory.

What was the purpose of this?

Wooten: We wanted to find out what the people thought about them in their home city, you know, where they lived, the church they went to, and what their record was. We didn't care what church they went to but . . . I believe Dr. Kamerick is Catholic, isn't he?

Marcello: That's correct and I was going to ask you if the subject of his religion ever entered the deliberations?

Wooten: No, before we started out we said if a man is a religious man we're not going to try to put all Baptists and Methodists or Catholics in there.

Marcello: The subject never came up then to any great extent.

Wooten: No, of course there are more Protestants in the university than there are Catholics.

Marcello: Quite a few more.

Wooten: I took the very definite position that I didn't think so, because in every denomination we have good Christian men. It isn't the denomination that one belongs to that determines whether he is going to heaven or hell. It's the man.

Marcello: Why did the final choice then finally narrow down to Dr. Kamerick?

Wooten: Well, we felt he was truly an educator and that he did know how a large university should be run and we felt that he would make very few mistakes, if any. The people in community where he lived--those not connected with education in his home town--expressed high respect for him every way. In other words there wasn't a derogatory

thing mentioned about him.

Marcello: What commitments was Dr. Kamerick able to exact from the board?

Let me give you an example. Didn't he ask for instant tenure among other things? Do you recall anything along those lines?

Wooten: There was quite a bit of discussion about that, but I don't remember how it turned out. We might have given him instant tenure.

Marcello: I think he did get instant tenure.

Wooten: Yes, I think he did.

Marcello: I think it's also true that he is a member of the history department. He is considered also a faculty member, a member of the faculty in addition to being a member of the administration.

Wooten: Yes, I remember that. I'd forgotten about the tenure but I can see why.

Marcello: Did the full Board of Regents know what was going on all along? Not all the regents served on that committee.

Wooten: They knew, yes.

Marcello: They were informed about everything that was going on.

Wooten: About everything and everyone. They knew all about it.

Marcello: As a result of all of these deliberations and as a result of this selection process, do you feel that a closer relationship was produced between the regents and the faculty? In other words do you think the regents got to know the faculty a little bit better as a result of these deliberations, and vice versa.

Wooten: Yes they did, no doubt about that, and we got to know their thinking pretty well.

Marcello: Then generally speaking throughout all of the deliberations there

was a good deal of harmony between all of you.

Wooten: There was complete harmony. We were very positive in our state of thought but we never had an argument, never.

Marcello: It was a very rational process.

Wooten: Oh, yes.

Marcello: In conclusion then, would you follow essentially the same procedure again in selecting the president.

Wooten: Yes, I would.

Marcello: Is there anything you would do differently?

Wooten: No, I'd follow the same procedure.

