

4-27-1973

Interview no. 85

Baxter Polk

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Recommended Citation

Interview with Baxter Polk by David Salazar and Mildred Torok, 1973, "Interview no. 85," Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Baxter Polk
INTERVIEWER: David Salazar and Mildred Torok
PROJECT: History of UTEP
DATE OF INTERVIEW: April 27 and May 4, 1973
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted

TAPE NO.: 85
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 85
TRANSCRIBER: Gilda Pena and Pat Quinn
DATE TRANSCRIBED: May and June, 1973

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Former Director of UTEP Library.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Work as a librarian; University professors and administrators he has known; acting as a hobby.

2 hours; 58 pages.

Baxter Polk
by David Salazar and Mildred Torok
April 27, May 4, 1973

S: We'll start with a biographical background. Maybe you could tell us your birthdate /and the/ date?

P: Yes. I was born in Santa Anna, Texas, on August 27, 1914. At that time (as you probably know, David) there was a great deal of animosity between the Anglos and the Mexican Americans in this country. But it was funny to me that the Mexican General, Santa Anna, spelled his name that way--with two n's. It was not the Saint, as in Santa Ana, California. So when I grew up and was old enough to realize what somebody had done, I thought, "Well, our Mexican American friends have a friend somewhere in that area."

It was pointed out to me one time that August 27, 1914 was the date that the Germans burned the library in Louvain, in Belgium, on their way to invade France. I think it was Dale Walker, here in Public Relations, who did that. He pointed out to me, he said, "Baxter, then you were destined to be a librarian, because you were born on a day that a library was destroyed." So later on I took that as kind of my special mission in life. During the Second World War they burned this library in Louvain again, the Germans did. But in the meantime, wealthy Americans and other people had contributed to the rebuilding of the library. This was an important thing and a very sad thing because the library at Louvain was one of the oldest libraries in Europe, and one of the largest. And they had a lot of the old, illuminated manuscripts and that type of thing collected there from all over the world. So it was a very bad thing. But it was rebuilt and they replaced as many things as they could. Of course, some were destroyed forever. But, again, it was destroyed in 1940, so I continued being a librarian. (Chuckles)

/Santa Anna is/ a little town down in central Texas.

S: And what about your education?

P: Of course, I went through grade school there, and later in San Angelo. In Abilene, Texas, I graduated from high school. And that was during the Depression, 1932. And I wanted to go on to college, so I went to Hardin-Simmons University, which I thought was the best of the three colleges in Abilene. And I got a job as secretary to the librarian on the NYA program--which is comparable to the Work-Study Program we have now--the National Youth Administration, which that wonderful man, Roosevelt, set up, at the whole total sum of 30 cents an hour. But it looked awfully good in those days. And I worked as her secretary at Hardin-Simmons, and that's where I got interested in becoming a librarian. She had be cataloguing books, mending books, ordering books, typing all the cards, and taking over the library even when I was a freshman in college. She had me take over when she was absent--the Head Librarian. Of course, I was kind of a shy kid at that time, but I knew the organization of the place.

T: Can you remember the name of this librarian?

P: Yes, it was Miss Thelma Andrews. I will never forget her. She's now retired. And I had a very lovely letter from her when I had a change in position here, when I was given the lateral assignment from Head Librarian to Director of Special Collections. She wrote me a beautiful letter and addressed it, "To one of my boys."

Well, at that time, Dr. D. M. Wiggins was Dean of Hardin-Simmons and a professor of Education. And although I had not had a course with him, he used to come to the library to get books and he always asked me to wait on him. This went on through the whole time I was in Hardin-Simmons. And in my senior year, he applied for and go the position as President of the then

College of Mines. But before he left, he said, "Baxter, what do you plan to do for your future? Do you plan to teach or something?" I said, "No, Dr. Wiggins, I'm not getting a teaching certificate because I don't like the courses offered, and I think I'd be bored with it." I said, "So I'll probably be some quiet little clerk somewhere in an accounting office," 'cause I had a double major in Business Administration and English. And believe it or not, I minored in Spanish. But in those days you were not taught to speak Spanish, you were taught to read it. I got a pretty good accent out of it. We took the classical courses and so on.

But to get back to Dr. Wiggins, he said, "Well, Baxter, you have been so wonderful here in the library, and Miss Andrews tells me that you have such a potential for this profession, I really think that you ought to go on to Library School." And I said, "Well, Dr. Wiggins, I can't afford it. I don't have any money." This was the Depression. Mind you, my father had lost all of his money in the bank failures and so on. He was an older man at that time, 58 or 60, and he couldn't find a job anywhere. And so I said, "I just simply can't afford to go to library school; I've got to get a job as soon as I graduate." He said, "Baxter, how much money would you need to go to library school? Where would you go? Where's the closest?" And at that time, Ma Ferguson--I think she was still Governor or had just been Governor of Texas--decided the University of Texas at Austin Library School was a frill and that there weren't enough people enrolled, and that little old ladies with nothing else to do could run libraries. And so, why educate people to be librarians? So she had cancelled the library school at the University of Texas at Austin. So I said, "Well, the only one left now, the closest one, is the University of Oklahoma." And he said, "Well, how much would it cost to go there?" I said,

"I don't know. I haven't looked into it. Because I'm a Texas resident I'd have to pay an out-of-state, non-resident fee." He said, "Well, find out. Let me know." I thought, "What is he up to?" It all sounded very encouraging. So I ran home and wrote a letter immediately to the Registrar at the University of Oklahoma.

I got a letter immediately back, and do you know what the total cost was? For out-of-state students, non-residents of Oklahoma (this is 1935), it was \$50 dollars a semester plus a \$10 dollar tuition for each semester. So it cost me exactly \$120 dollars in tuition to get my first degree in Library Science from the University of Oklahoma. And then, of course, I had to have money for board and room. But when I got up there I told my experience and I got a job immediately in the University of Oklahoma Library as a first-year student in the Library School, in the Reference Room. To me, this was the biggest library in the world because I hadn't been anywhere at that time. It had a great, big reading room that is about three times the size of the old main reading room here, with all those reference books. And the Librarian then was Dr. Jesse Lee Rader, who is quite a famous man in the library profession. Carl Hertzog has his book in his collection, a book called South of 40, which is a bibliography of all southeastern books at that time. I think it was published in the '40s. Anyway, he interviewed all the students working, and he gave me the job of being in charge of the Reference Room from 4:00 in the afternoon until 7:00 p.m.--all by myself! And he told me, "Now, Baxter, here's what you've got to do. You have to sit here and be able to answer questions. But in order to answer questions, start at that end of the room and work your way all around it and find out what's in every damn book in this collection." Good heavens! Well, there was an education in itself! And I did! I would

start with sets of books and I'd read the prefaces and introductions and look at the table of contents and the indexes and so on. And I just accumulated a vast knowledge of that stuff in about a month, because that wasn't a very busy period. And because I was inexperienced, he put me on /during/ that period. But he did me the biggest favor that anybody ever did me in my library schooling, by making me study those books and what was in them. And to this day, some of them come back to me--books that I haven't seen even reprinted.

And then they had a press, you know, a very reputable press at the time, and they were publishing books. And a lot of the authors who were writing books used to come over to me personally to look up information for them. I got acquainted with Dr. Grant Foreman, who has written a lot of books on the Southwestern Indians. And finally, he got so fascinated with my ability to find things for him that he asked me if I would index his latest book. He invited me over to the press and they put me on extra time, which I didn't have much of because library school kept you busy then. And I don't mean learning how to work computers, and how to be a technician, and how to sit behind your desk and do nothing but tell other people what to do. I mean we were busy reading books, studying books, talking about books--books in relation to people and so on. The only machines we had were typewriters and calculators. So, anyway, I went over to the press and learned how to index books. And I did the name index, the subject index, the idea index--I mean all of the various approaches of indexing a book. Plus, I had to work out all the cross references for various spellings of names. As you know, a lot of the Indians had two or three names. Sitting Bull, for example, had another name. I had to go through the book and find all the references to the person. This was all done from galley sheets, galley proofs.

Well, I was talking about this later on. /I'm/ getting ahead of myself. But several years after I came here, Dr. Braddy wrote his first book on Chaucer. He was talking to me one day about how he was going to index the book, did I know anything about book indexing. I said, "You've come to the right fella. I have had experience in indexing." So, I helped Dr. Braddy index his first book, Chaucer and the French Poetic Prasond. And in the /first/ edition, they left out an acknowledgement. This is never done--nobody is ever acknowledged for helping index a book. But in the reprint edition of that book he got it in there--"Index prepared with the assistance of Baxter Polk, Librarian, TWC."--which was very nice. I've never seen anybody ever given credit for an index before. But Haldeen, Dr. Braddy, was so pleased with the way I'd done it that he wanted to put my name in it. He tried to get it in the first edition but that publisher said, "We don't give that kind of acknowledgement."

T: Baxter, there's one thing that I wanted to ask you about. You said that Dr. Wiggins was interested in your education. You skipped over his involvement in it.

P: I'm sorry. Thank you for catching me on that, because I was so eager to tell you what I did at Oklahoma and the various things that I learned. To go back to Abilene, this was in the summer of 1935, after I got all this information--I was still working in the library that summer--I called /Dr. Wiggins/ to tell him I had all the information that I needed about Oklahoma. So he came up to the library and we decided I needed probably about \$1200 dollars, because board and room then was very cheap. I think I paid for my room and board something like \$25 to \$30 dollars a month. And we figured out that, and clothing, and all that, and I agreed not to come home for Thanksgiving, for Christmas, or any of the holidays. Well, he went off and got this money from somebody--

I don't know who. He didn't really have it himself, but he borrowed the money from somebody on his own name and loaned me the money, and promised me the job as Librarian here when I got my degree from Oklahoma. And all of that came true just like a Horatio Alger story. I think there's a little mention of this incident in that interview with Dale Walker in NOVA, but I don't think I told him about Dr. Wiggins borrowing the money for me.

So, I paid him back a small sum of money for two years after I came here. And sure enough, the job was set up for me. He had to fire, actually force out, the librarian who was here. I'm not going to call her name, because I'm going to say some things that maybe I shouldn't. But she was not a qualified librarian, for one thing. And the College of Mines, although it was primarily a mining school, had then added courses in the Liberal Arts, which were added in 1930. So they were trying to get accredited by the Southern Association of Secondary Schools and Colleges, and that meant they had to have a degreed librarian, among other things, with Ph.D.s mostly as chairmen of the departments and so on. And this degree, although it was a bachelor's degree at Oklahoma, it was a fifth-year degree for which they are now giving the Master's degree. But I got cheated out of it because I was way back there in the old days when they weren't doing it. But anyway, my degree was a professional degree, and recognized at the time. So, then I came here in September 1936 and took over the job as Librarian at the College of Mines. At really was a tremendous job, but as far as prestige was concerned, it wasn't much of anything then.

But the summer before...I graduated from Oklahoma in June of '36, and they asked me to come back to Hardin-Simmons because I wasn't scheduled to start work here until September the 1st of '36, and take over the Head Librarian's job because she wanted a leave of absence for the summer. And they were just frantic.

They were trying to get in touch with me and I was on my way home from Norman, Oklahoma to Abilene, where I was living at the time. And they tried to reach me, and the University told them I had already finished, and my landlady said I'd already packed and left. What happened was that I stopped and visited a friend over in East Texas for a couple of days. Although my parents knew where I was, they couldn't get in touch with me. And the President of the University was frantically calling, and my friend, the Librarian--Miss Andrews--was trying to locate me to tell me I had this summer job. So when I got back, everybody had been notified. My mother frantically said, "Before you unpack your things, go out to the University. They want you to go to work right now!" And sure enough, I did, and I was Head Librarian there for the summer of 1936--at Hardin-Simmons.

S: So you officially started here...?

P: September 1, 1936. They used to give us what they call a contract--nobody has seen one in years--but this was just an acknowledgement of receipt of your salary. They were still doing that when you came, Mildred. All it said was, "You have been appointed Librarian at the salary of \$1800 dollars a year." I remember that figure very well, which was \$150 dollars a month. And at that time, Texas was operating in the red, we had O'Daniel as Governor or something--that hillbilly guy. And he said that it was better to operate in the red because people wouldn't spend so much money. Some foolish, stupid idea of economics. But we had to take a 1 per cent discount on our vouchers at the bank because the money wasn't any good. There wasn't any money in the state treasury, and the bank had to hold them until the money was appropriated, and then they could cash them in. I used to get very upset with old Dean Puckett--bless his heart, and I loved him dearly--because he was about the only one on the administrative

staff who had enough money not to have to take the 1 per cent discount. (Chuckles) And he took great pride in telling us, "You poor people should be more careful with your money." So, to eat and live, we were forced, after about two weeks of the month, to go down and borrow money from the shyster loan sharks, because the banks wouldn't honor our salaries out there, they weren't good enough. Now today, I have some very good friends in those banks, but in those days we didn't have enough money to have friends in banks, and we used to pay a high rate of interest. But we managed, and the dedicated ones of us stayed because _____ thing to do.

T: Baxter, you'd never been in El Paso before you came to work here?

P: No, I just barely knew where it was. But one of the appeals to me was the fact that I knew it was on the Mexican border, and I'd always thought it'd be fun to live where there were two intermixing cultures. And when I leave this year, I shall certainly miss hearing Spanish because it makes me feel so much at home. I remember the year I spent at Columbia. When I got back, the first thing in the bus stations I noticed was everybody speaking Spanish, and I felt so at home. But...I must go.

S: Well, you had a leave of absence to go to Columbia.

P: Yes, that was in 1950 and '51. Because by that time...Dr. Elkins was President then /and/ he decided that my Bachelor degree was being overshadowed by the Master which was being given. He didn't order me to go, he just told me that I probably wouldn't advance here unless I went ahead and got the Master's degree. Well, it was wonderful because I had the GI Bill then. I'd been in the Service for 38 months. I could pick and choose any school I wanted. Columbia is a frightfully expensive school. But I was told by my good friend, Thelma Andrews, "When you go on for an advanced degree, go to a school that they've all heard of,

whether you think it's any good or not, and you'll always get a good job." So, there's no doubt about it that Columbia was prestigious, being one of the Ivy League schools. When they sent me an application form to fill out, they wanted to know why I had chosen Columbia for my graduate work. I simply quite candidly and honestly answered, "Because it's in New York City and I want to spend a year in New York." And the Dean was laughing when I came for my interview and so on. I said, "Well, Columbia has a good reputation."

S: Who was in charge of the Library during your absence?

P: Let's see, Miss Frances Clayton. She was my associate when I left here. She came here to work while I was still in the Army and then I kept her on. And she had a degree from the University of Texas at Austin, because they later put the Library school back in. Oh, wait--she didn't have the degree at that time, she was working at the Public Library. But when I came back she went off to school and got her degree.

S: What about your years in the Service?

P: Oh, I had a ball. I mean, I hate to say that. I was not the fighting soldier type, so I had a very good time. At that time I was very proficient in shorthand and I could type over a hundred words a minute. But when they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima, a very funny thing happened to me. I lost the sensory control of the little finger on my left hand, which cut down my typing speed about 20 words a minute. It was such a shock when I found out it actually had been done. And this is true--people think I am making that story up. It really was true. I went around so angry and so nervous for days that I lost that. But I didn't lose any of my jobs because I was still good. Most of the time I was in what was called the Air Corps of the U.S. Army at that time. It's now the Air Force, but at that time it was not a separate department. And I always got

jobs in the command section answering generals' telephones and monitoring calls. Most of them consisted of ordering whiskey, or, "Have you got any good booze over there? Can you fly it in tomorrow?"--and so on. But my war experience is something else. But I did have a wonderful time because I was sent overseas to India and China, and spent several months there. I did not like India at all, but I thoroughly enjoyed China, and someday I'd like to go back.

T: Where in China?

P: Well, I was sent first to Calcutta in India, and then we were flown from Assam, over the hump into /a/ little town /in the/ westernmost part of China. There were no railroads there, no rivers, nothing. There was no access to that little town from any other part of China. Then we went to Chunking, the wartime capital, stayed there a little while, then /to/ Sian in the northern provinces, and then down to Shanghai, where I spent the rest of the time. Shanghai was a wonderful city because it was an open port and most of the exiled Jews from Germany were there, Italians escaping Mussolini--all the other people. A lot of the people even had come from Spain because they didn't like Franco and they couldn't settle in other places in Europe. But Shanghai took everybody without papers--nothing, you did n't have to have anything. It was a fabulous experience, really.

S: So, what years were these?

P: I was in the Army Air Corps from February, 1943 to April, 1946. And then I returned to the College of Mines in June of 1946. I came back with amoebic dysentery from the Orient because I was fond of Chinese food prepared by the Chinese. I ate in off-limits restaurants and it worked just like they said it would-- "You'll be sick, sick, sick!" And I was.

S: You have some brothers and sisters?

P: Yes, I have a brother and a sister living in El Paso. But I have four /brothers/

and one sister. My youngest brother is assistant superintendent in the public schools.

S: This is Hibbard?

P: Yes. He's in charge of the northeast high schools--Irvin, Andress, whatever they are. He's been an assistant quite a long time. He used to teach. I'm the next to the youngest. And my oldest brother has just retired from one of the clubs in Reno, that's one reason that I'm moving out there. He's there and he's almost blind. He's going to need quite a bit of help. But he's a wonderful guy, he's still physically in pretty good health. But I wrote him the other day and asked him if he was learning braille. He said, "Yeah, I just put my fingers in a hot waffle iron." He's a very funny man. One time I asked him how much he weighed and he said, "145 pounds of tired blood." (Chuckles) One of my other brothers is also retired, but he owns a turkey farm down in Rising Star, Texas. The next one... Oh, they're all retired, good heavens!--except Hibbard and me. But the next one works for a little farm close to Abilene. He raises pedigreed German shepards and I think he sells sand, too. Well, my parents have both died, and of course my first wife. So, except for my recent remarriage, I have no family, except a stepdaughter and a stepson.

S: I was noticing in one of the newspaper articles that your mother got the Mother of the Year Award.

P: Yes, she did. I don't remember the year on that. It was very nice. The Council of Garden Clubs here in town nominated her, and she was very, very pleased about that. She really was quite honored. I remember helping her go down and look for a pretty petal hat to wear, and gloves, and all this sort of thing. And she asked me 50 times, "Do you think I look all right?" And, of course, we went. They asked the family as guests to the luncheon or whatever it was. And my mother

made a beautiful speech.

My mother was also something of a poet. I don't know if we have a collection of her poems here or not. My first wife, Betty, and I got all these poems together, and I typed them up (she had written them out by hand) and got her to title all of them. And then we had the Hill Printing Company here publish them. And she gave most of them away. But people who had seen them and read them wanted to buy them. But when we started to have them reprinted, Hill had already destroyed all of the plates that they were printed from, so they actually became a limited edition. She could never have been a well-known poet, but it is interesting that church groups... She wrote just sentimental things, but they had quite a message in them. She had a nice sense of humor, a light sense of humor. I remember one of the poems was about a beggar at the back door. "He Asks for a Cup of Tea" was the title of the poem. And it was during the Depression when they used to put X's on the telephone posts--"Suckers live here." Of course, my mother was a pushover for that because she's a very kind, generous woman. But she wrote a thing about "he asked for a cup of tea," which startled her. Most of them would ask for milk or something of that sort. And little things like that she wrote about, experiences she had.

My father was a banker and a businessman for years, and was also the mayor of the little town of Santa Anna. He had the distinction of putting in the first water system. You have a tape on him and he tells you all that. He wasn't any more modest than I am. He used to tell me, "If you have something to crow about, crow about it!" He always dressed every day. They had to finish their lives in a nursing home. My mother was in very, very bad condition, my father not so bad. But he got up in that home every day, put on a coat and tie, took his cane. And at that time he had gone to wearing a little cap because he

suffered very bad sinus from the air conditioning. But he'd come out with his cane, all dressed up with this funny little cap, and sit out in the lobby and greet people. And it was really loveley. He took his fate very nicely.

S: Speaking about artists, you did some acting. You were in a number of plays, and one with your late wife, Betty.

P: Oh, my, yes. I was in four with her so that we became known sort of as the Lunts and Fontannes of El Paso. We used to call ourselves The Dancing Devors because we had a posed profiled shot of the two of us that just looked like somebody with a dance attitude, so Betty dubbed it The Dancing Devors.

The first things I did I've completely forgotten about. Are the reviews of these plays in the files here?

S: No, I looked those up in a lot of the newspaper articles.

P: Oh, for heaven's sakes! I remember "Old Gold on the Hills." It was an old melodrama, and I played some derelict, probably a drunk. Those were such fun. In the old days of the El Paso Little Theatre, we had plays every night of the week, and it was all local groups. I had not done any acting before I came to El Paso. Most people think that I majored in drama and theatre. But these old plays were my first appearance on stage. I was such a born ham that I loved it, I wanted to show off! But later we did some other things. My wife first appeared in a play called "Light of the Sky," directed by Lois Kibby, who is now featured on the NBC soap opera "Somerset." Well, Lois directed all of those plays, she used to direct them here. We appeared in "Light of the Sky," and this was out at the old Phoenician Club, which is now the Masonic Lodge on Alabama Street. It was wonderful because they had a cocktail lounge. We had a liquor license as a club. And people could go out at Intermission and get drunk, and then after Intermission they enjoyed the show much more than they had before. It was good

for the actors.

Then we did "Private Lives," directed by Polly Harris, who is now /doing/ public relations for the Empire Club. She and her husband have a public relations office. I did several other plays by myself, and then when we revived "The Man Who Came to Dinner" in 1957, this was the biggest hit we had. But unfortunately, Betty was stricken with hepatitis about the third week of the run of that, and she was playing the aging actress in the show. We had bought her a complete new wardrobe. She had absolutely beautiful clothes, including a muskrat stole that looked like white mink. (Everybody thought it was mink.) So, she had to go to the hospital and Lois Kibby took over the role--and never did learn the lines. It was terribly funny because she had to go into the part--and it was a big part--in two days. She just said, "Darling, don't worry about it. I'll give you all of your laugh cues, but you may not get any others." I said, "Just don't you spoil any of my laughs, Baby. If you try to upstage me, I'll run over you with the wheelchair." (Laughter)

But up here, my first really big thing was in a play called "The Play's The Thing," directed by Charles Baker, who is now using the name of Rube (?) Baker. His big hit on Broadway is "Fantastics," which is still running. The original was directed by Rube Baker. This was a comedy, and then later on he asked me to do a platform reading of "Oedipus Rex." I believe it was the Dudley Ditz (?) translation. We did two night's performances of that in formal clothing, just reading it as a platform reading. And we had 18 and 19-year-old kids crying at the end of that. (I'm stricken blind, and I have my two children and I'm telling them goodbye and so forth.) I was more moved by that...

PAUSE

P: Well, to go back to what you mentioned about James Cleveland, who is employed here at the Library, he was doing a play called "The Delicate and Deadly," a play that he had written. He was directing it and looking for...he had asked me to play the male lead, but he was looking for a female lead and we hadn't had anybody read for it. So this woman had come here from the East, who later became my first wife. Elizabeth Prescott, she was then--before that Elizabeth Scutter and Elizabeth Cram. She was the daughter of the late Ralph Adams Cram, who was the foremost Gothic architect in this country.

Anyway, Betty had come down to Roswell to visit a sister of hers and she was divorcing her second husband and needed work. She had gotten a job at KTSM. A friend of mine, Mary Hill, who is now Mary Hill Malooly, was working at KTSM. Betty said, "What does one do for fun in this town? Do you have a theatre? I've done some acting. I'm lonely, I don't know anyone." So, Mary Hill said, "Well, yes! A friend of mine has written a play and a very good friend of mine is playing the male lead. Why don't you go over and read for it?" So she told her where to go and so on, and Betty showed up and read for the part. And she was so good that I went to Mr. Cleveland and I said, "Oh, that woman's a professional; I couldn't play opposite her." He said, "You're just as good as she is. Shut up. I'm going to give her the role, and you're going to play yours."

So Betty was cast in "The Delicate and Deadly," by our own James Cleveland. He directed the show and it was a huge success. And Betty and I fell in love with one another during the rehearsals and performances of the play. This was in March of 1953, and the following August we were married. We were such a hit in that as a couple, and then when we became man and wife, that's what led to our being selected to play all these other things.

S: She used to write a lot of articles, didn't she?

P: Yes. For a while she worked for the White House Department Store and they let her do a kind of a little feature column on various topics. A lot of people have collected those--I have a complete collection of them--and some of them have been reprinted. I hope, when I retire, to put those together in a little book. Carl Hertzog has read them, and he think they would make a wonderful little special publication, and said that he would be glad to design it if I put it together. So we may do that. She wrote on things like graduation, Christmas on Beacon Hill (she was from Boston originally), and then she'd write on local things. They were quite beautifully done. They were very good. She had a marvelous command of the language, and she was a wonderful person. Unfortunately, I lost her in 1966 to cancer, so then I had to make a new life for myself. But during the time we were together, we starred in all these plays, and were in demand constantly to give readings for the A.A.U.W. We read "Othello," "Kind Lear," other Shakespearian plays.

At one time I did some narrations for the children's symphony. That was a rewarding experience. I did "Peter and the Wolf," "The Sorecerer's Apprentice," and some others. But the wonderful thing about that was working with our late, great Orlando Barrera. He was such a wonderful man. And I remember in rehearsals I used to say to him, "This is ridiculous," because he had me rehearsing without a microphone, over a full orchestra, standing right in front of them. I was to use a microphone in performance, and I was straining my voice terribly. And I kept telling Orlando, "If you keep this up and make me shout so you can hear me, I'm not going to have any voice when performance time comes," because I was straining it. But one night the orchestra kept making mistakes, and I had to stop and go back. Finally, he just stopped and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, you're being terrible, your manners are abominable! Here

we have the most beautiful voice in the world reading the narration, and all of you are playing sour notes!" (Chuckles) I was so pleased with his compliment. I was doing "Peter and the Wolf" the year that he died. He had conducted two performances, and then Larry Gibson here in the Music Department took over. But I was so pleased that I had had a chance to be with Barrera again before he died, 'cause he was such a wonderful man.

T: Well, you've had a lot of compliments on the quality of your voice, though, I know.

P: Well, all of my life this's gotten me in either good or in trouble. Lots of times it's gotten me in trouble because my voice has always been the first thing that people seem to notice about me. But sometimes it's taken wrong in some places. I remember a filling station attendant once in Alabama, a long time ago, decided that I was a Yankee and probably one with all those liberal ideas and all that. (This was before civil rights.) I really got quite frightened. I just handed him a five dollar bill. I had some change coming, but I just handed it to him and drove off because he was telling another one of the attendants, "I'm getting' tired of waitin' on those damn Yankees." I had a Texas license on my car, but the guy decided I was a damn Yankee, and I didn't know what was going to happen to me. This was in Birmingham, Alabama in the early 1950s. So I just drove off--I threw a five dollar bill out and took off.

Well, anyway, I did do a lot of radio announcing--not professionally, but I used to have a music program here in El Paso. I did the intros for a classical music recorded program a long time ago down at KSET. But I think Fred Hervey needed a little more money, and couldn't get a sponsor for the program, so he cut it off. I think he's doing all right now, but they had money problems at Mr. Hervey's establishment--which I find terribly hard to believe. Well, when they cancelled the show, they got lots of letters from people in town saying

that that was the best program on the air and why did they take it off? And people called me up, wanted to know why. I said, "Well, call Fred Hervey, it's his business. He fired me." He said, "I know it's a good thing but we're not making any money on it." Kaster and Maxon was the sponsor.

Speaking of Kaster and Maxon, one time we were doing "Light of the Sky and Lois Kibby was directing. She told us, because we'd been giving kind of lackadaisical performances, that there were some talent scouts from MGM, Columbia Pictures, and Paramount in the audience. "So, be on your toes, kids, you might be picked." Everybody thought, "I wonder where they are?" They used to go around the country and look for little theatre talent. So, we were all just showing off to our very best. At the end of the evening, Lois came back and said, "Pretty good show, kids, pretty good. The talent scouts were very impressed." We said, "Where are they, Lois? What happened? What'd they say?" She said, "Oh, they all went back to their jobs at Kaster and Maxon." (Interviewers' laughter) I've always loved that story, it's my favorite theatre story.

T: She got some good performances out of you, then.

P: Oh, she did. She was a task master. But those were fun days, they really were.

S: Were there any other personalities that you met?

P: Well, here on campus, I'd like to mention some. Of course, there's some fabulous people in town who have come and gone. When I first came to the campus one of my favorite people was Captain John W. Kidd. We called him Captain Kidd, because of Captain Kidd, the pirate. (Chuckles) He was a rough-cut old fellow--biggest heart in the world, and here I was, a delicate little 22-year-old, fresh out of college, just barely shaving yet. And the old fellow took such a delight and interest in me because I was scared to death and I was lonely. And at that time, I thought Ph.D.s were rally people you idolized because they were

the brains. I won't make any further comment about how that has changed--I think everybody knows. But I just had such tremendous respect for people like Dr. Quinn and Dr. Sonnichsen--all these fine people who were here--and my boss, Dr. Wiggins.

But anyway, here came old Captain Kidd--the poor man had this bad throat. (He later died of throat cancer.) And he kind of whispered. He came over one day and he said /in a hoarse whisper/, "Baxter, are they treatin' ya right?" I said, "Cap Kidd, I don't know. Everybody's mad at me because I can't get any money for the Library, and I can't get the place straightened out. I don't have any help." The job was not considered a full-time job when I first came here. They made me teach four classes plus run the Library with four student assistants. And people wanted the Library /to stay/ open more hours because what little we had was not available to them, because we closed at noon. They were closing at noon; I extended the hours till 5:00 o'clock in the afternoon. I had to teach these classes, grade papers, run the Library...oh, I was going out of my mind! So, Cap Kidd went to bat for me, went over to Wiggins and said, "That young fellow over there is trying to do a good job, why don't you let him do it? Relieve him of all that teaching; give him some help!" He was just marvelous. Everybody respected the man because he would say anything he felt like saying. He was Dean of Engineering at the time, and the engineers absolutely adored him, they really did.

S: The Quinns speak very highly of him.

P: Oh, yes; they were great friends. And, of course, Dr. Quinn was Chairman of the Geology Department at that time.

But anyway, at this time the Library was on the top floor of what was then Kelly Hall, which is now the Mass Communications Building. The outside staircase

on the west was the entrance to the Library. And the Reading Room was on one end and the bookstacks on the other. I had a sliding glass panel between me and the kids. When we started getting things we had no room to shelve them, so I'd pile things up by the wall in the Reading Room. And I'd go out there and say, "You roughnecks, keep your paddy paws off those things--they're valuable!" We were so small that that's the way we ran things. "Okay, Polk," they'd scream. "You're making too much noise, we can't study!" I said, "Well, if I find anybody going into those things, something will happen to them."

When we started to build this new building--which is now the old Library--in 1936 and '37, Cap Kidd was working with the engineers and the architects on the physical design of the building, because he was more or less in charge of buildings and grounds. So, he came over to ask me what I wanted. He told me what I could have, approximately. It was very little, as you know, but for us then it was tremendous. We were thinking about new quarters, and it was to be a combined Administration-Library Building, which it obviously is. But we had a WPA grant from the Federal Government to build the building. Do you know how much that old building cost, in total? One hundred thousand dollars.

Anyway, to get back to Captain Kidd, there were many, many other things that endeared him to me. And I want to tell you something funny about him, too. We would go through the building when it was being constructed, and he'd get mad about something. He chewed tobacco, and he would spit on the walls--spit here and spit there--to mark where he'd want something changed. And the workmen would say, "Well, Cap, what do we have to do now?" He'd say, "Go up there, and where I've spit tobacco juice, do it all over." And they'd look for the tobacco juice stains on the wall to put more plaster on some damn thing.

But he was just a marvelous person. He used to give parties. He lived in

this little house up here which for a while was the ballet studio. He lived on campus because he was so honored and revered. And he used to give parties, and he'd roll up the rug and want to dance. He was just a short, pudgy man, bald-headed and all that. Well, the four student assistants that I had were very pretty girls, and he had quite an eye for pretty girls. So he would invite me and tell me to bring my four pretty girls. And I'd say, "Now, girls, dance with him." His dancing consisted of getting up on the floor and just shuffling, flat-footed, back and forth from one end to the other. But these girls would all dance with him. Then he'd do something really nice for the,--he gave them gifts, all that sort of thing.

But he used to come over to the Library every day to see how "the young boy was doing." A terribly amusing man, and I was very, very sad when he passed away because he was really one of the great monuments here. And he just kept me encouraged to go on and do my work because he was very interested in all of my problems. And I had a lot of them, because at that time we were allocating funds to the various departments--there were only about 12 or 14 departments--and all the chairmen would gather around me and I was supposed to make allocations. But if English got more than History or History got more than English, or Geology got more than Engineering, a fight would ensue. And they'd fight one another, and yell at me!

T: Well, why were you appointed to allocate the funds?

P: 'Cause nobody else wanted to do it. We didn't have a library committee in those days--thank God! Dealing with the department chairmen was enough.

T: You're talking about allocating library funds.

P: Book funds for each department. The Library wrote them all down--Education, English, and so on. And \$2500 was our total book and periodical budget the first

year I was here. You can imagine what breaking that down was! Well, I never made anybody happy. They just argued and argued and argued, they wouldn't accept my figures. The PE Department would say, "We don't need books, we need basketballs and tennis nets." So they'd walk out and compromise and turn their money over to somebody else--very nicely. I've always admired and respected those people because they realized that their work was not really research and reading, so they were kind enough to give up their funds. Everybody else downgraded them; I don't, I really don't. Because those people were very nice about realizing that they really didn't need the money.

Department chairmen were bad enough. Library committees, later on, turned out to be worse. But I went over to Dr. Wiggins' office one day and I said, "I cannot continue with this madness, I can't please these people making these allocations." So he came to the next meeting. He reviewed what I had allocated and thought it was fine, well worked out, based on enrollment in the departments, how much research was required, who required papers and themes, and so on. All of these factors were considered. And, also, who had the most graduates. So, of course Mining, Geology, and Metallurgy had to come first because they were our only professional schools, and they got a little bit more because these people went off and got professional jobs as mining engineers and so on. So, Wiggins came over to the next meeting and he straightened them out. He just said, "From now on Baxter Polk's going to make these allocations. I've appointed him to do it and you're going to accept them." And there were all these people--Sonnichsen, Quinn, old Cap Kidd, and all the big shots. And Cap was always nice. He'd usually stay after the meetings and say, "Oh, Baxter, give History \$25 bucks from me," just to make me happy! He was such a dear, sweet man.

But I remember my first encounter with Dr. Sonnichsen, who became a very good

friend, almost immediately. The lady whom I had replaced was pregnant. And in those days pregnant ladies were considered...well, you just didn't stay in a job until your accouchement* was upon you. And this lady did. She stayed until the very last day and then had her baby the next. Well, [in] those days when a lady went around with a swollen belly, people were kind of embarrassed by it. It [wasn't] like it is today. We all accept the fact that children do indeed come out of their mothers. But this disgusted everybody, so she had to go. So when I came, I met Dr. Sonnichsen on the campus. And I guess he just realized that I was a stranger and [probably] the new librarian, 'cause they referred to me as "that kid running the Library." Although I was 22, I appeared to be about fourteen. So Sonnichsen came up to me and thumped me on the belly and said, "I hope you're not pregnant!" (Laughter) It just shocked me! That was my introduction to Sonnichsen. I didn't know then what the reference was, then I later found out that the librarian was pregnant.

S: What about the physical appearance of the campus at the time that you came?

P: Oh, my goodness. Well, everything was rocks, greasewood and cactus. It was pretty. It was much prettier than it is now, simply because they had left it in its natural state. We had blooming ocotillo, and we had blooming yucca, and other cactus, and Devil's Crowns and all these beautiful things. They were all over the campus, [with] the hills rising. We just had trails, we didn't have sidewalks or paved streets, or anything. And frequently, rattlesnakes would be found between classes. And just the little mass of buildings up here on the hill was here, plus the president's home which was on what was then College Avenue. I believe College was paved. But there were no sidewalks, you had to walk on the street. Then when you got on campus you'd stumble across the rocks and everything. And they just had this old stone walk in front of Old Main. Then there

* time to give birth

was an old mineshaft the boys worked in down near the Chemistry-Geology Building; the little old Mining and Metallurgy Building, which was tiny; and the old Burges and the Kelly, which is now the Mass Communications Building; Holliday Hall and Kidd Field; and one dormitory, which is now, I think, Miner's Hall. I stayed in the dormitory for a while when I first came here because they were trying to pay for it. And Dr. Wiggins asked me to help them pay for the dorm.

T: Was Dr. Berkman here at the time?

P: Dr. Berkman was here and at the time he was the dorm father. Mary Ella Pool was the lady's name, I think, in the women's dorm. I think they called that Worrell Hall, because Worrell had been President of the old School of Mines. Anyway, that's about all there was to the campus. There was also a little, tiny shack which was the women's gym house. And there was a wonderful woman in charge of that. She was a very good friend of mine.

T: Did you have a car in those days? Did all the faculty have cars?

P: Oh, no. Most of them didn't. There was a few old hacks.

T: How did you get there?

P: We rode buses and we had a streetcar, trolleys. There was a little streetcar that used to run right up the middle of North Oregon Street and over to Kansas, and up the hill--clankity-clankity-clank. And it was always jumping the tracks. And the kids up here'd get out and help the operator put the car back on the tracks. I don't think we even had buses, just that trolley. And then, gosh, people walked in those days.

T: From here to downtown?

P: Right. But those who had to come from the east part of town...but remember, El Paso was awfully small. All of this Eastwood stuff and all that was just plain desert. And we had a tiny, little airport which was more or less where it is now.

But it was way out in the country. You drove for miles and miles and miles to get to the airport.

S: You still do.

P: True! (Chuckles) Except you can take the freeway now. But transportation was primarily the trolley. And it clank-clank-clanked, and it was a nickel and you got a transfer /for/ no charge. You could buy a book of tickets.

T: And all of the public social life was downtown?

P: Right. And Juárez. I used to go every Saturday night with the engineers and geologists, and we'd go over to...there was a place actually called Sloppy Joe's. And I have a little talent on the piano. I used to be able to play all of their old fraternity songs--"I'm a Rambling Wreck from Georgia Tech." And we'd go over to Sloppy Joe's, and they'd take the front off of the piano, and the sides and the back, so it would be louder, line up the beers on the front of the piano, and I'd play all night Saturday night--just rousing it up. I knew every one of these kids and most of them were older than I. So, they treated me just like a brat.

But they were very nice when it came to bringing their books back /to the Library/ and all of that sort of thing, because I'd go through the dormitory on my way to work saying, "All books are due today!" I'd even call the names. "Albert, you have 15 books overdue!" At that time the fine was a penny a day. And I'd just go through the campus yelling, "Book return day!" It was so small. People would /come/ and apologize, "Hey, Baxter, can I bring them back this afternoon? Will that be okay?" I'd say, "Get them in there before 5:00." And we got our books back, no problems. I mean, everybody was friendly and nice. If we ever did have a problem, the kids were reasonable about it. I could call them in and say, "Now, look, you're keeping somebody else from these books," 'cause

we had so few.

Of course, the kids used to call me up from the dorm /where they were/ laying around drinking beer and smoking, to bring them a book. /They'd/ give me the title, and requeently I'd do it. But then later on they'd take me out and buy me a beer or a sandwich. Yeah, they'd call up and say, "Hey, Bax, bring me so and so, I need it for a theme." Lazy so-and-so's! BUT it was fun, and I really had a good time. I was close to the students and close to the faculty. And most of the faculty were very nice people. And some of those friends have endured. Of course, many of them are gone. Dr. Bachmann was Chairman of the Language Department, Dr. Lake form Chemistry, Dr. Knapp was then /with/ Math then. He's retired and still alive, but Bachmann's gone, Lake's gone, Puckett's gone. Pucket was the Dean. Berkman* has retired, he's still alive. All of the old timers...

I didn't say anything nasty about any president yet. Mercy! I didn't say anything nasty about the Regents.

S: We'll do that in the second session.

T: Yeah, let's get that in the second session.

P: Okay, why don't we do /that/.

* Dr. Antone Berkman died in May, 1973, soon after this interview.

Baxter Polk, Second Interview
by David Salazar
May 4, 1973

S: We're going to talk about your library administration. In the beginning, what was the appearance of the University? We went over it earlier.

P: Well, when I came, of course I came as Head Librarian, but it wasn't considered a full-time job. Have I told you that? So, they asked me to teach four classes and run the Library with a few student assistants. At that time, we just had a President, a Business Manager, a Registrar, a Dean of Engineering and a Dean of Arts and Sciences, I believe. I think that's about the only administration we actually had. We didn't have the Vice President structure that we have now, it wasn't that complicated. And, as I recall, I only dealt with the President and the Business Manager on budgets. Sometimes the Library Committee got involved in it, but we didn't have the committee actually until later. Well, there was a Library Committee composed primarily of all the department heads, but there were so few of them that that didn't make really an unruly committee.

The Library at that time was on the top floor of what is now called Mass Communications Building. It was then Kelly Hall but they've transferred the name Kelly I think to one of the dormitories. And all the campus was up there on the hill except that they had built..the President's home was over on College Avenue (now University Avenue) and that building was there. There was a dormitory down here, the old one which is now Miner's Hall, which they'd just built, and the Centennial Museum was on its little hill. And in between there were just hills and rocks and stones and rattlesnakes. There really were snakes on campus at that time. (Chuckles)

But the administration was not complicated, and of course neither were our budgets. And we were variously called The College of Mines and the School of Mines, but officially by legislature we were still School of Mines and Metallurgy,

which was supposed to be the Texas Mining Branch of the University of Texas. But we were called College of Mines locally and by the Regents in Austin. But as far as the legislature was concerned, we were not officially the College of Mines and Metallurgy.

S: Well, among some of the problems that you might have had, I was reading in the newspaper clippings that it was censorship.

P: Yes. Well, it wasn't so bad in the 1930s. As a matter of fact, the Library had so little money at that time that there wasn't that much censorship of anything because we couldn't afford to buy any kind of material that was considered controversial. But as the war approached and Hitler was gaining his power in Europe, of course, there was a lot of propaganda sent out--even, as a matter of fact, from the German Library of Information in New York City. We used to get all their publications. There was one very famous one called Freud Und Arbeit, which was put out by Hitler's propaganda machine, was illustrated, and was in three or four different languages, including English. By the way, we have a very small file of it here. I think it's in Special Collections. I managed to save some, but some people came up and relieved us of copies of those things because they didn't think we should have them in the Library. And I said, "Well, it's not pro or con anything." But of course they pointed out that it was a great propaganda thing, that Hitler was trying to prove that the German people, as pure Aryans, were the only people in the world who'd ever done anything in the world that was worth noticing, and so on. Which was true in the magazine, but I wanted to keep them as historical documents because they indicated how very complete and compact and world-wide his propaganda campaign really was. And of course, if you read all those things carefully, you could begin to see evidence of the fact that the man was insane, as it later turned out he was. He had every psychopathic

syndrome I think that's ever been recorded by psychologists and psychiatrists, it turned out later. I recently read that book called The Mind of Adolf Hitler. Have you seen that?

S: Yes.

P: It was pretty dreadful when you think that that man was about to take over the whole world. And he took over the encyclopedias. There was one famous one, Der Grose Brockhaus, which was a very respected German encyclopedia. He took that over and had it completely rewritten. We had the last edition before the Nazi edition of Der Grose Brockhaus, which I think our set still has a letter in there from the publisher saying, "This is the last edition before Hitler revised it." And when it was revised, he edited every article in it--and it was something like 15 volumes--to be sure that somewhere down the line the Aryan German was praised for his work in that particular category: in Literature, the sciences, technology--everything. Every article praised the Nazi Regime and the German Aryan people. So, in other words, the Aryan and German would exclude of course Jews and any other minorities in the country, and he gave them credit, of course, for absolutely nothing. Well, we all know that story.

Well, anyway, there were a lot of people who thought I shouldn't put this out, that it would poison the minds of the young people. Then, of course, when the war began and right after the war, there was a great deal of Communist propaganda in this country. I got into a great deal of trouble with...not the McCarthy Committee, it was before that. The Martin Dies Committee sent a group of people down here to check all of the curricula of all the public schools and the public institutions, such as this one, and all the libraries for their holdings on pro-Communist literature. So the Dean who was head of the School at that time, he was acting President, came up in great panic and said, "Baxter,

you better hide all these things you've got." Because we were getting at that time the Daily Worker. I was not paying for it out of State funds, we weren't paying for it at all. As a matter of fact, the Communist Party was sending it free to libraries all over the country and I kept it because it was representative of that group of people. I thought everyone had a right to know, to read. Well, people told me, "No, these kids are too young. They can't make up their own minds. You're helping the enemy by doing all this," and so on. Well, he asked me to hide these things while that committee was here. And I wouldn't do it, so he did it. He just gathered up all the publications, the current ones, and took them down to his office and locked them up--which I thought was ridiculous. But when the committee came and went, he brought them back.

But I didn't get into any kind of trouble at all. They looked at some of the faculty check-out files. I thought this was interesting. I told them that that was personal information and confidential information--what the faculty had taken out. But this committee primarily wanted to see what certain people here on the campus were reading, particularly if they were in the classroom teaching, and whether or not they were promoting any of this propaganda or philosophy in their classrooms. And I protested that very strongly, but these people said they had every right in the world because they were Federal agents and appointed by the Federal Government to do this. So, I just sat there and let them do it. I don't know what they came up with, nobody got in trouble. But I was branded later by the community as kind of a "pink." I had so many friends that nobody really thought I was a violent pink, that I wasn't really threatening to overthrow the government or anything like that. And I had to constantly define what it meant to be a liberal. As a matter of fact, I said, "I hate to be branded as either one--liberal, conservative, whatever. I am a human being with a

reasonable amount of knowledge and certainly a great sense of proportion. But I am running a library, which should be all things to all men, because we represent the whole body of knowledge, the activity of man, and so one, whatever turn it may take."

I said, "You don't throw away, for example, your history books that tell you how awful Attila the Hun was. And had we all been alive, perhaps at that time nobody would have been on his side. But we don't throw those books away. We don't talk about the Spanish Armada, we don't talk about the Inquisition and throw those books away. And all of those things were just as bad, depending on which side you were on." So, I said, "You people only get hysterical about current things." They said, "Well, that's really all that people are paying attention to." I said, "No, it isn't, it isn't at all. This is part of either progress or digression of mankind. And so it's ridiculous to get hysterical about it when you might be destroying very valuable information for the future."

Well, there was one man that came up...this is a very funny story, in a way. A man came up and found a book out on the open reading shelf. I had selected books to put out on a display rack--current, new books that I thought might be of interest. Actually, this book had been given to us and it was a book that praised the Soviet economy, their whole economic system. The book wasn't exactly pro-Communist, it was really Soviet--which is now as we know totalitarian, but not totally Marxian, shall we say, because they've modified it a great deal, as you know. So, this book was out there. I didn't really pay much attention to the book, it was just a book that I thought might be of general interest to Economics students or somebody like that. This old man picked it up, took it out, brought it back and insisted on seeing me. And he told me that he thought that I should remove that book from the library, that he found it out there in the

open shelf and he had taken it out to read it, read it, and it would destroy the minds of these young people. He was sorry that his son had even gone here and graduated from here because we had that kind of books in the Library. So, he went on and on and on and on. Finally, I looked at the card. I said, "May I see the book, sir?" He had had it checked back in and then brought it to me. I said, "Well, apparently this hasn't defiled too many minds, as you say, because you're the only one who's read it. Your name is the only name on the card." "Well, other people will find it!" I said, "I don't think it's going to cause all that much harm." He said, "Well, I'm just sorry my son went here." I said, "Let me ask you something about your son, you seem so concerned. Is your son a Communist?" Of course that made him mad and furious, and he wanted to know why I'd asked him that. I said, "Well, you seem so concerned about what's happened to him. How long was he living with you?" He said, "Until he graduated from school." I said, "Well, didn't you ever talk to the young man, and find out what he was thinking, and what he felt about things? I mean, you had a certain parental obligation to direct the boy, whichever way you wanted him to go. So you shouldn't blame us. Certainly that book didn't defile him and I can't imagine that any other book would have, had he had the proper guidance growing up." And so the man just got up and said, "You are impossible to talk to," threw the book on my desk and left.

I mean, the whole business was that you're not to... I didn't see any reason in the world why I should let these people, who were reasonably foolish in their attitude, spoil our open-mindedness about the book collection for everybody else, and so I took it as my special obligation to handle them. I tried to do it courteously and kindly, but when this man opened up about his son had been defiled--his mind and his point of view--then that was throwing a guilt on me that I didn't deserve and I made him accept some of the responsibility, if indeed

it had happened. Of course they resent that; people resent that very much. Most of the time I just turn these things back on them and try /indirectly/, without too openhanded a manner, to show them how really ridiculous they were being.

Well, I think those are the most interesting incidents. We'd had other things come up. When the John Birch Society, for example, came into existence, I accepted all their publications from a lady here in town who invariably, when she came to bring them to me, was drunk. She just brought the packages of publications and dumped them, and said, "Baxter, I'm just amazed that you would accept these things because you're such a liberal, such a pink." I said, "Oh, shut up. You don't even know what you're talking about. I'm taking this stuff and I'm going to put it on the shelf, but I assure you I'm not going to read it. I'm taking this stuff because it represents a bunch of nuts in this country and what they think." Since she'd called me a pink I thought I could open up on her. Just because you're in a public office, you see, people thought they could make you vulnerable. And I resented that and I simply wouldn't let them do it. So I said, "I'm an agent for truth, wherever it may be found. These things will be catalogued and put on the shelf. Somebody will relieve us of them shortly, so I'm not worried about it." She said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, somebody will think they're just perfectly awful and take them and destroy them.

_____ have to worry about it. I'll do my part; I'll put them on the shelf." Well, she thought that was wonderful. I said, "That's what makes a liberal, dear. I mean, I am liberal because I will take your things. You wouldn't take somebody else's. I mean, if /members of/ the Communist Party walked to your door, you'd probably have them arrested. But I take them because I represent everything going on. But I'm not going to read that Eisenhower, for example, is a Communist. I just don't want to read that book." There was one in there that

said something like that about him. "I don't believe any of it and I don't need to believe any of it. I didn't vote for him for President and I don't care what his politics are," and so on. So, she just laughed and left.

But it came to a question of cataloguing the books--this is very funny. The Dewey System has a number that's very, very general: 008, which is collections of nothing. So, I suggested (laughter) to the cataloguers they'd put the John Birch Society publications in 008. They did, and sure enough what I predicted came true. After they had been on the shelf about a week they completely disappeared. So, you see, we always got relieved by one cult or the other of things they think are unpleasant and students shouldn't see. These people... stealing doesn't occur to them as being wrong when they're removing something they find objectionable. So, actually the things are always stolen by some zealot, either left or right. So they go; and I didn't worry about replacing them.

This business of calling people pink, I think that's not quite as popular as it used to be, because most people survived the witch hunt. Of course the McCarthy Era was very bad because there were people who were self-appointed censors and they would come around, talk to you and try to find things. And some organizations even did it. I know that there were some religious groups here--there was a Catholic group and also a Protestant group and a Jewish group--who tried to get things censored. I had a complaint about a gentleman who had a carrel up here /and/ had put up a Hitlerian poster. He had his poster in his office, which is really a collector's item. It was similar to Uncle Sam's "I Need You" /poster/. Well, I didn't see any objection to it at all, but a Jewish student came up and told me he thought I should ask the man to take that down, that they didn't want to be reminded of Hitler, and so on. I said, "No, I can't ask them...we had asked them not to put anything on the walls, their personal

things. I could ask him to remove it for that reason, but not just because it's a poster of Hitler." And they got very upset with me because I wouldn't do that.

Then I've had other groups complain because they didn't think we should subscribe to...for example, I've had people ask me to stop subscribing to Time, Life, and Look magazines because they thought that was a waste of state money when students and other people could buy those. Well, they can also buy anything else we have. I try to point out that these represented popular thinking in this country, more or less, and that we preserve these--only to be told they weren't worth preserving. This was from a man that one of the presidents was begging for a big gift. He's a very prominent man, he's a very rich man, and he complained that we were spending money on this type of thing, [that] he didn't think we should. So censorship takes all kinds of forms. There were lots of people who, for example, objected to, when mini-skirts came in and these pantsuits and things, and particularly hot pants (which I never liked either, by the way), that I should absolutely make it a rule that the people working here should wear dresses at least down to their knees, or just above the knees, or something, and no pants and no nothing. And I said, "Good heavens, I can't dictate to these people what they wear. I don't allow them to come to work in bathing suits or barefoot, and that's as far as I can go on restricting this."

I was trying to think if there was any other really shocking incident. Of course, people got very hysterical during the war because there was so much propaganda coming out, particularly just before the war. We had to be very careful about displays of things and so forth. I used to keep what I called a Propaganda Shelf, and in order just to avoid any comment on these things (like that German publication I told you about), I just put a great big label, INTERNATIONAL PROPAGANDA. And propaganda at that time was a word that suggested non-true,

misrepresentation, exaggeration, special interests, and some other words. Most people knew what it meant. So when I labeled the stuff Propaganda, they thought, "Oh, boy, he's smart. He knows it's a bunch of junk." So it didn't matter because it covered it and I didn't have to deal with it, you know.

S: Could you tell us what your duties were?

P: Well, I was relieved, finally, of teaching. At that time, my duties were primarily to actually direct and supervise all the activities of the Library--coordinating book purchasing and selection with the faculty, working on budgets and planning buildings and all that sort of thing. And I might say here...I hate to say it, but in great disappointment I really never, never in any of these categories got what I wanted or what I thought this school should have. The Library has been much maligned and indirectly I have been maligned. I'm not trying to white-wash myself, but no one man fighting alone in this area could ever have achieved, I don't think, any more than I did because of the agencies we had to deal with.

In the first place, we had only about three really good presidents of the college here who really worked for it and really wanted it to be something, whom themselves left totally disillusioned because they couldn't do it. I think that Austin, primarily our representation in Austin has been weak. I also think that our Regents have not been too concerned about this college; it's kind of a left-handed concession to El Paso. They don't really think we'll ever be great and they don't want us to be great. We probably have not had the pull there that Arlington's had, or that Dallas is getting now, or the Permian Basin, or any of the others. For example, this is one incident. When they organized the Permian Basin and the University of Texas at Dallas and San Antonio and all those places, they gave their libraries enough money to set up a basic collection of 100,000 volumes. Okay. When I came here, we had 13,000 or 14,000. And I recommended

this--that for a college this size, even, a basic collection of 100,000 volumes would be a good collection to build on. We never got it. We never got it! And here it is 38 years later and we're still struggling between 300,000 and 400,000 volumes. But you see, they got this from the beginning.

Well, I worked for years trying to work through...well, I could only go through the presidents because people in my position could not address themselves to the Regents. I did occasionally violate a Regent regulation and talked to our Representatives and Senators, and later on some of them did try very hard, like Senator Joe Christie. He really worked for the school and the Library, but he didn't get any more than the others had gotten. And of course we're not in the populated area of Texas. We're not central, we're not oil, particularly; we're not the biggest cattle-raising thing, God knows there's nothing for the cows to eat out here. And you know, we just don't have much to offer. The little El Paso Valley doesn't produce enough wealth, even in cotton, to have the rest of the state much concerned about it. We don't have the oil and natural gas interests. We don't have all those big interests that they have at Houston, and at... Well, think how recently, for example, the University of Houston came into existence. When was it? About 1950, somewhere around there? All right. At first they were a city-operated school. They were not in the University of Texas System, they weren't even state. So just as soon as they had good opportunity, the vested interests down there, the establishment--whoever, people that run things--got that into the state, and just outstripped us completely as an independent institution. But Houston money supported that school. They have a fabulous library, I think they're approaching a million volumes. And you see, they're a little over 20 years old. And here we've been in existence...well, the school started in 1913 but as a liberal arts school since 1931, and we're

still struggling with all this.

S: Well, volumes is a basic problem. What about space and facilities?

P: Oh, space and facilities were absolutely lousy. If we had gotten the volumes, we wouldn't have had any place to put them. The first step for a new building was the old part of this building, which was built in 1937. We occupied it in '38, I believe. Anyway, it was the WPA Project and cost exactly \$100,000 dollars. And it was a combined Administration-Library, as you know, which was ridiculous--because those two things are not compatible, they have nothing to do with one another. So we had the top floor in the back annex. I called it a little car-buncle on the back of our neck. So we put up with that until 1956 when the administration built themselves a new building, and it should have been the other way around. After all, those people just need offices to work in with enough waiting space for people to come and see them. But they got the whole new building, because it was the President and the Registrar and the Business Manager. And everything took priority over the Library, and then the Library inherited that mess of a building.

So we were confronted with tearing down walls and pulling out closets and dealing with columns. And libraries need long areas of space to put the books and for people to sit and read. So we settled for that, because the President that we had at that time wasn't energetic enough and didn't care enough to do anything about it. We found out later that the two people who replaced Dr. Wiggins, the two succeeding presidents, spent all their time looking for another job. So they could hardly have been very interested in what was going on here. And I'm not saying anything ill about them. They didn't like the place, they were failing in their jobs. I don't know whether they admit it today or not, but they were. They weren't getting anything for the Library or the school or anything

else. So they left.

Then Dr. Smiley came and he stayed two years because they beckoned him somewhere else. I think he would have gotten things done _____. Then Joe Ray came and he got all kinds of help and he tried very hard to build up the Library and the school. We were still in the old combined Administration-/Library Building, but we were downstairs and upstairs and the basement and all over the place. Nobody could find anything. You couldn't organize it. So, then we sweated and we sweated and we sweated. And finally somewhere during that period we got this stack space--that annex back there was added--which relieved us a little bit, but we already had enough things to fill all that up. So you see, there was no extended expansion planned for the future.

So we used all that up and then we finally got bookcases on the staircase, started boarding up windows all over the place and everything for bookshelving space. Well, they sent a bunch of people out from Austin to look at our condition. One old guy said, "Well, your situation is serious but not critical." I simply said, "What does it have to be to be critical?" I mean, they couldn't even walk through the building! We'd taken down the handrails on the staircases and put up shelves and books. So they finally hem-hawed around and I had three or four nervous breakdowns. This was before the building use fee. You people pay for the buildings now and if you'd been paying for the Library you would have gotten a much bigger building. The Regents then appropriated out of what they called the Available Fund--and I never have found out what that means' it's whatever they want to make available, I guess--that we could have a million dollars for a new Library. Now, this was in 1966, I guess; '65, '66. A million dollars with costs what they were--labor, materials, all that sort of thing. Well, I could see that wasn't going to do anything, wasn't going to do us any good at

all. And it didn't. This monstrosity that we have now is living evidence of what happened.

So we got the million dollars and that wasn't enough to really build the building even, and they realized suddenly that wasn't enough for equipment and furnishings, so they got a \$500,000 dollar grant from the government. So we had one million and a half dollars for this addition to the Library. Now here is the fourth addition to an old building that wasn't planned for a library to begin with. So it's just, "Library take this, and Library take that." Just messed it all up. This building is so disorganized--I don't know why people just don't scream and yell every time they come in here. It's not anybody's fault in particular because there isn't any place to put anything--I mean a whole collection of anything. Like this stupid thing they've done now, putting those periodicals up in the old Reading Room. It's ridiculous! And then what they've done with those stacks. I don't know; none of it makes sense. But I can see that it is a problem trying to reorganize because you cannot find enough space for anything. Right now, Special Collections is in one big room and it's outdone itself. If we got a big collection, a private collection of nice books, we would have no place to put them. I was hoping somebody would offer a fine collection while I was still in this job (I don't think they're going to now) so that I could just simply tell them, "All right, we'd have to deal with the administration. Ask where they're going to be put. Keep them or give them to another library." I'd have had to have said that, really.

S: Going into donations, you've had quite a few people who have donated.

P: People have really been wonderful in this town. Now, I will say this, during Joe Ray's administration he set up the Development Office. I think it was organized under him. Steele Jones and those people took over to solicit funds from,

first of all, ex-students, and then from the wealthy members of the community who were interested in the University. And, although we haven't any really large gifts other than the Josephine Clardy Fox Estate and the Mae Belle Hocker Estate-- those are the two biggest. Mae Belle Hocker went directly to the Library, and the Library gets portions of the Josephine Clardy Fox Estate. But I'd like to mention here too that Mr. and Mrs. E. J. Ditmer have given us already \$20,000 dollars and are going to give an additional \$80,000, and their endowment will be \$100,000 dollars for the Library alone. I can take credit for that one myself, because they are friends of mine. She worked on her Master's degree up here and I helped her, and she stated in her bequest that she was doing it because of my kindness to her. And of course they have the money.

But Joe Ray promoted all of this and did very well. He probably did more than any other President we've had to start this gift-giving, and of course he did finally favor the Library. For a while he didn't because Dr. Ray and I had some personal difficulties which stood in his way and shouldn't have for the welfare of the Library. But that's beside the point. I did blame him for not fighting for more money than that million dollars from Austin. But he was in a very precarious position here himself at that time, so he didn't push it, he accepted it. And I was furious about it because I knew it wouldn't build the building we needed. Incidentally, I saw in the newspaper the other day they're planning a new Student Center, with a new field house. I don't know what this thing is all about, the paper described it. And Dr. Templeton was asked if there were any other plans for any other buildings. He said yes, but he was not at liberty to publicize them now. The Library wasn't mentioned anywhere, you see. So, we're still in the doldrums.

The Union Building--recreation more or less, and auxiliary services to the

main business of this University--has the biggest building on the campus. Fine Arts has done very well despite the fact that I understand the current administration is very anti-fine arts. That's what I hear from the people involved over there. But the Library, the very core of the place, the very heart of any institution, still suffers. I could never find out why. Everybody did lip service to it. "Oh, Baxter, we want to build a beautiful library, a big library, a wonderful library."--for a million dollars. We got, according to a construction man, not the people that actually built the building--he figured out the cost on this. He figured out an \$850,000-dollar building. But we were not /charging/ building use fee. So, we were the last of the available funds.

I don't know what the priority committees are doing now, planning for the future, but I doubt very much if this project is being pushed by anybody at the moment. I did hope, David, frankly that I would see a lovely, lovely, really first-class library built here before I left, and I did know the difference between a first-rate one and the building that we have.

PAUSE

P: Well, so much for the building program here. It is a shame that we can't seem to get the impetus we need to really build a fine library here. It could have been done and should have been done when the administration moved out of this old building. This building should have been gutted and a whole new library--just a specific library building--should have been planned and built. And I tried to get that done, but I got no cooperation from anybody. It was during that time too that we got on probation almost by the Southern Association because of the Library budget and building, and the Regents had to appropriate some extra money.

You can look this up in the papers, but I think it was in December of 1955 or '56 that the Southern Association called the institution's hand on library staff. So, the Regents appropriated some extra money right away to keep us off the probation list.

By the way, there is something I would like to have filed with this transcript, David, if you can find it. Mr. Hooten, Editor of the El Paso Times, got all worked up because he was asking in his column /of/ everyday events, "Who are those people trying to tell us how to run our college?" So, finally I got so angry about what he was saying-- and the President of the College wouldn't say anything--I wrote him a letter, a long letter, and told him who these nosey people were and why they were nosing in and what good things they were trying to do for us, and what it all meant. Well, it was a long thing. I think Miss Clayton and I signed it, and I believe Dr. Strickland, who was then Chairman of the Library Committee, Dr. Rex Strickland also was on the letter. We composed it together. And Hooten was so impressed with it that he gave his whole column to the publication of that letter. And actually I'd like to have a copy of it if we can find it. It would be in the El Paso Times and I think it's either December or January, 1955 or 1956. I know it's one of those years. It's in Hooten's column, it's the whole column. You'll see our names at the bottom. I'd like to have that if we could /include/ a copy with this, to explain what we did to explain the situation. I thought it was extremely generous of Hooten to be open-minded enough to publish our letter explaining who these people were and what they were up to and why it was benefitting the college. Because if we'd lost our accreditation even with that very low organization... Their standards are extremely low because it covers the whole South. We should have been in the North Central Association as Las Cruces is, New Mexico State. But because we were in Texas we fell into the southern. They have the lowest standards

in the nation, and we hadn't even met them. So, this is all pointed out in that letter we wrote to Hooten. Well, that was the end of that.

S: During the construction, the Library was supposed to be solid, not have that little patio, was it?

P: All this area was supposed to have been enclosed. The redesigning of the building took place because they said they couldn't afford to fill in that floor. It didn't require much more basic supporting structure to build levels clear across that courtyard. I daresay they spent almost as much money terracing and landscaping that courtyard as it would have cost to put floors across there all the way /to/ the top. You see, I had thought until I saw the final plans and the building under construction that these were all flexible levels--we could use them for anything. And there it was, a great big gap right down the middle. You see, from the outside it looks like total building, until you come in. And that's what I thought we were going to get.

I was in and out of the place at that time, unfortunately. I might have had a few things changed but I doubt it very much, because we were dealing with a group of architects /from/ Austin who didn't come out here very often. And then we got a group here that were not terribly interested, I must say. So, we had two sets of architects, all of whom were arguing with one another. But it was at the time that my wife was seriously ill, my first wife, and I was flying to and from Boston, where she was confined. And I wasn't here when a lot of major decisions had to be made. I was pretty upset at the time anyway because she was dying of cancer and I couldn't give my undivided attention to what was going on here. So, a lot of things happened that I might have prevented, but now that I look back over it, I'm sure nobody would have listened to me. They just didn't. This was a wholesale deal and, "Just give them whatever you can give

them for a million dollars," you know.

S: What about some comments on your staff?

P: Well, I think over the years I've had basically a very good staff. It took me a long, long time to get salaries decent enough to attract any so-called professionals. I think we've had about three people here whom I really call professional. I had a number of degreed librarians, but not many of them ever showed any professionalism. I have a particular definition of that, David, which I don't think really is the current interpretation of it. Apparently, library schools nowadays are saying that when you get the degree, the Master of Library Science of Service, or whatever they call it... Some of them are calling it Master of Information Services, which is probably just as good. My degree from Columbia University is a Master of Library Service, which I like very much. "Service" implies a number of things that I think are quite good, even more than Library Science. But just getting a degree doesn't give you the qualifications of a professional librarian. You are not a professional in my mind, in anything, until you have worked at a job and proved yourself to have professional capabilities, to be able to give what people can unmistakably define as professional advice, whether it be in the lines of research (no matter what the subject), in the organization of materials, in the expediency in getting the materials to the public, and all that sort of thing. These are to me professional jobs. You aren't a professional because you can go up and plan the moving of a periodical file, particularly when the moving of that file doesn't make any sense at all. And when a so-called professional separates the indexes to that periodical file from the periodicals which they serve, this is a blatant act of non-professionalism, because he has unrelated the two things and has forced the public to a great inconvenience. I hope that someday this library will again have a professional

librarian in charge. I don't see it in sight at the moment among the personnel currently on the staff. I think there is promise from the young man who took the third position.

I'm simply saying this objectively because I'm concerned about this library, naturally; I've given my whole life to it. I know that professional activity is recognized even yet by people who can delineate between an administrator who has done perhaps rather important work in one of the armed services for the military and can organize things that you could almost count out by a marching band, then is appointed to run a library. Then any professionalism that might exist in that library is automatically destroyed. When the whole important things become the keeping of supply records, personnel records--such as hours early that somebody leaves, that they stay over-long on a break, whether or not they have actually filled in their time sheets for every month and whether or not all the floors are clean... If they don't care whether the books are in order, and whether the books are where people can find them, and whether the people waiting on the public are courteous, knowledgeable and so on, then they don't have any professionalism. If there isn't a librarian who has time to consult with the best minds on the faculty and even the good minds among students, graduate or undergraduate,... The smartest people I have met here over my 37 years, David, and I say this honestly, have all been undergraduate students, and some of them are even just Freshmen. This librarian has got to meet all those people and help them in their creative work, whether they're teaching or doing something else, it doesn't matter. If a man's simply composing a poem and has a problem--he should be enthusiastic about any research going on. He should show this enthusiasm at all times, and certainly his door should be open to his clientele. It takes a lot of energy and, by golly, when you get to the end of the road, which I have now, you are tired and you're exhausted if you've

done a good job. If you just want to sit there and serve your time and let a few uninformed minions do all of your work, then there's not going to be any aura of professionalism about your library at all.

I just saw the report the other day from the so-called Professional Evaluation Committee; it's well worth looking at. Nowhere in this whole body of the thing is professionalism ever defined. We must be professional at all times-- in the library, in the community, everywhere. But what is it? What do they mean? I read this thing. There's several so-called professional librarians on it, and not a one of them has defined the word. A lawyer is not a professional man until he's won a few cases, done something worth noticing; a doctor is not really professional until he gets a reputation as being a good surgeon, a good GP, a good diagnostician. You've got to study not just the literature of your so-called profession, but you've got to study literature period. You've got to know things. What are the movements in contemporary writing? Who are the great historians currently? Who are the people doing the best research? Who are the wild radicals that are changing the world? Who are they? And give them quarter. Find out who they are. I haven't found but 1 or 2 people on the so called professional staff here that I could even converse with about anything, other than what they had for lunch or what they bought at The Popular the day before. This isn't professional librarianism. I have more professional conversations with friends in the community than I have right here in this building. It seems to me they're always in a stew about something, some idiotic thing, I don't know.

Well, I guess I've said enough about that, but I think I've made it pretty clear what I think is a professional librarian. His name would appear in the prefaces of books, and I can truthfully say that I have been given credit by almost everybody here who's published a book whom I knew. Dr. Sonnichsen, I'm very proud to say, mentioned me first in his Pass of the North. I'm the first

person mentioned, and there's a reason for that. Sonnichsen himself is a professional man, a professional writer, a professional teacher and a professional friend. I've never known a man more professional than that man is, yet he's clever and he's fun and he's delightful. But when I saw my name, the first mentioned there, I realized that here is another man /who/ has recognized the fact that I had practiced my profession. Dr. Braddy had acknowledged me, other people have. Well, its' bragging on myself in a way. But I had a job or professionalism to do, and I did it professionally.

I hear from so many people who've heard that I'm leaving that they just feel that it's a great loss, and they've told me this, and that's fine; but I think I've served my purpose. I couldn't possibly fit into the image and the attitude and the sociology of this library right here, now, any longer. I couldn't possibly do it. I don't want to be a library misfit, and if I stayed here I would be, because I do not like anything that's being done in this building right now. I think that the public, our patrons, and our faculty are being short-changed every day. And I hate to see it happening because a library is for the students and faculty of that institution. It also should be for the people in this community because they pay their taxes, they are willing to support us, and now they have to pay to use the library of their tax-supported institution. And I think this is criminal, I really do. I hope somebody's big enough to blast it and change it. It's ridiculous.

S: I agree with you, because I've been here in the Library both times when you were here and when you've been gone, and I have felt the difference, very much so.

P: Well, thank you, David. A lot of people have told me that. It's just a difference in attitude, but I think the current attitude is destructive. It is like a slow leak in a ceiling, or like a foundation that is gradually slipping and nobody sees it until apparently that structure has crumbled. When your image

gets built up as cold and indifferent, you are not wanted. When your welcome mat no longer says, "Welcome" but says, "Go away!"--which virtually to me is what this one does--then people will eventually go away, and you're not going to get gifts of support from anybody. People are cutting them out already; I've had telephone calls saying, "I just don't care to give that library anything else." I'm sorry about that.

S: I understand they're not willing to take anything either.

P: Well, we'll see what happens. I was asked the other day by the associate librarian if I wanted to make a flowery statement about my retirement. I said, "Yes, I'd like to say one thing: WHEE! And if you can spell it, quote me." Now, imagine my doing my own eulogy, shall we say? I mean, in other words, that's just... I have been insulted, really and truly, since November of 1971, and I don't mind admitting it. They will find out, and they're beginning to find out, some of the things I did here. They have found out already that I wasn't sitting over there twiddling my thumbs. I was even told by one of them that when I left, my name and my image would be greatly missed. And I said, "Well, I can assure you, I am taking my name and my image with me. If you want one, get busy and build it! But if you don't have an image to project, then you'll never have an image. There's got to be something inside you that wants to come out."

Well, that's bitter, I know. I'm not really bitter, I'm just sorry that... I won't say that things are not what they used to be; they shouldn't be. But if change is just done because it has to be changed, then that's pointless. It's like falling in love with love. It's silly, because if you just erase an idea by merely changing it--and this has been more of an erasure of a good thing than it has been a change for something better--and just smudge it out... Like people who see a landscape and simply can't stand it because they feel they have

some power to change it and then plow it all down, like they're doing over here on Mesa /Street/--plowing down these hills, these beautiful, natural hills that are perfectly lovely. If they had any sense, if the local architects had any talent, they /could/ build on the side of these things. I heard Frank Lloyd Wright, the great architect, lecture about that one time. "Don't let your developers tear down all of your landscape. They should learn to use it and fit their structures into it." He kept talking about the rhythm of these arroyos and the rhythm of the gravity areas around here, and how beautifully things could sit on the side of the hill. He said, "Open cliff dwellers, if you will. You have cliffs, so you're cliff dwellers. Why plow them all down?" And it's the same thing if somebody comes in and says, "Oh, my goodness. We have to change this and that and the other." Because that is the only way, apparently, that they can tell their new public that they have arrived, that the management has changed. I keep remembering that quotation from Browning, _____ yearling place to new, lest one good custom should corrupt the world." I suppose that's what they want to do, I don't know.

Well, let's see... I've had some wonderful students here as student assistants, now called hourly assistants. A young lady came back to see me the other day who had worked here from 1938 to '42. She was such an apt person /that/ I got her to go on to library school. She's now a very successful librarian in a high school back in Ohio someplace. And she came to see me after all these years and said, "Baxter, you sent me into this profession." That's very gratifying. Or to have somebody come back and say to you, "When I was in school here about 30 years ago, you dropped everything you were doing to show me how to use the library, because I did not understand it." This was an older man. He said, "I will never forget you for that. You took me around and showed me how to use the

card catalog, how to use the magazine indexes, and all the resources the Library had. And I shall never, never forget it." He knows about my retirement. And I'm getting letters from people. It's really rewarding when you look back over those times when you have actually helped somebody get going on something.

There are two or three doctors in town whom I still meet in the street who tell me, "I would never have made it through that school and gone into med school if you hadn't given me a job," for example, as piddling as some of the jobs were and as little money as they made. But they got started. And that's professional, too. You have to help other people in other areas of professions, getting their foundation, all that sort of thing--trying to give them as good a library as you can, trying to inspire them. It's a matter of talking to people, finding out what their problems are. Anybody in a top position, if he doesn't do that he's not doing his full job, he really isn't. Because you're passing life on to people and getting them involved in new things.

S: You helped a lot of people here within the Library, like Yvonne Greer.

P: Yes. She was at one time my secretary, and I saw what a really brilliant talent she had, and I talked her into going on to library school. Jackie Willingham is another who worked here as a student, worked her way through, and I got her to go to school. Barbara Blair, Ken Hedman, /and/ Jess Duggan, who is now gone. I didn't get him through school, but I gave him his first big opportunity. He had worked in the library at Arlington, but not in a top position, and I put him in one here--for better or for worse. It's odd--I haven't heard from him since he left, but that's all right. He was in competition with me, it turned out later, and that's okay too. He didn't make it, as we all know.

But there've been just a number of these people. I would /have liked/, for example, for Frank Scott to have gone to library school, and I hope he will yet.

I've heard that there is a possibility he might get a scholarship and I hope this is true, because Frank has great potential. He's been recently demoted here and I was very sad to see that, because he is the one person in the area--periodicals and serials--who really knows what we've got in this Library, and has that professional attitude about caring about whether or not people get it. And he still does. But you see, that kind of service is not recognized anymore, and it's the most important thing anybody's doing. I mean, really, cataloguing and filing is not that important. If people can't get at the material, what's the use of doing all this technical and highly skilled cataloguing? It's pointless, absolutely pointless. But Frank was an eager, accomodating young man, friendly and all that, so he got demote. I will never understand that as long as I live. I hope that they will eventually recognize his ability and restore him to a position of dignity. I think he feels a little of his dignity has been removed. And that's a shame because the young man had all kinds of potential which I recognized and let him have. I've had more compliments on Frank Scott than I've had on most of the professionals, because he serves and he knows what he's got.

S: What about someof the faculty here at the University?

P: Well, I think over the years we've had some really wonderful people: Sonnichsen, of course, Dr. Haldeen Braddy have been good friends of mine. Old Dr. Bosworth in Psychology I was very fond of. I have some new friends in Psychology now. I think Dr. Himmelstein is a fine man. Dr. Bachmann in Language is now dead; Dr. Lake, who used to be Chairman of Chemistry, /is/ gone; Dr. Knapp is retired. There were just lots of very, very fine people here. Jess Hancock, for example, was a very fine man. He'd been in poor health recently and hadn't been too active. But over the years we've had some really, really wonderful people here on the faculty, and I'm very happy to say, David, that the ones most highly

respected by the University community and the El Paso community were my closest friends. I have had such lovely compliments from them about my cooperation as a librarian that I go away with a good feeling. Because the people I feel that really knew what good library service was had recognized what I had done, and the others--it doesn't make any difference. These people were people who did not seek personal privilege or interest. Those are the people I like most to work with.

S: You get donations from some of these people. To name one, Dr. McNeely.

P: Yes. Dr. McNeely, I should have mentioned there, is one of my best friends. Dr. Strickland also was, as a matter of fact. Yes, Dr. McN-ely got very interested in the Library when he first came here back in the late 1940s, and he wanted to build up the Spanish Language Collection. /That's/ what that /John H. McNeely Collection/ was originally designed to be--books published in Spanish, because he thought it was a shame that we weren't representing one of the major languages of the western hemisphere. Of course, we hadn't done too much about it because the faculty in the Language Department and even in History at that time had not been too interested in building that up. So McNeely started it and then other people picked it up--Dr. Timmons and some others later. Dr. Sharp became interested. But /McNeely/ started giving us those books, and he's given us in the neighborhood of \$20,000 dollars worth of books and these fine paintings. But they recently started dividing up his collection and he got very upset about it, and I didn't blame him, because we had promised that that collection would stay intact forever--anybody who had been that generous. Certainly it's a very notable collection because there are things represented there that would not be available anywhere else--things published in Mexico and some of the other Latin American countries, which one just doesn't find anywhere in this country. So it's

a very /good/ collection. I'm very, very grateful to John McNeely, and this whole library staff should be. And I hope they will continue to respect his gifts and keep them where they are, and publicize that people use them.

S: You spoke about the Memorial Fund. When was that started?

P: The memorial funds, we started in about 1962 or '63, and of course we have several. The permanent endowment and memorial funds are listed in the current University catalog. I believe there are about 15 or 16 of them now, which is good. I established one to my first wife, and quite a few people followed that up with memorials to their spouses, either husbands or wives. The most recent was the John Judy Middagh, set up by Mrs. Middagh, which was nice. Then Congressman White set up one to his wife who had died. That was nice, 'cause we had tremendous contributions to that. Mrs. Lockhart set up one to Ray Lockhart, who was President of the El Paso Electric Company for years, and that grew to quite a big size. Then the Ditmers--it's not a memorial, I believe it's in honor of her sister and brother-in-law, the Woodridges. And that was very nice. Marshall Willis, his widow set up one to him. We still get contributions to all those funds and they are now invested so that the Library gets the earnings on them. Then, or course, we got the Hocker, outright, and the Johnston endowment. There'll be some others coming in, I'm sure. They've just set up one to Brooks Travis.

Those are very useful to the Library and I hope that whoever takes my position (I understand they're not going to replace me, really), whoever is going to accept gifts will certainly have to be fully aware of who all these people are and who donated. People who've given anything at all appreciate it, when they're seen even casually, that you remember they've contributed something. And I've always made it a point to do that, to say, "We're to grateful for what you did."

You know, I've always carried that around in my head. But as I say, if you do a good job--professionally, anywhere--you're going to be exhausted at the end of your day, and you're going to be exhausted at the end of your run. So, I'm very tired and I'm glad I'm leaving. I'm going to do something else, I've done all I could do here. I don't think I'll go anywhere near a library. I just have kind of an ill-feeling about then now--they kind of haunt me. I told somebody the other day, "When I want to read a book, I'll just buy it!" I'll give my verbal support and my spiritual support, but...

S: Did you want to make any other comments?

P: David, I would like to just say one thing now. I have enjoyed what I've done here. It's been rewarding for me. I've enjoyed the people I've met, people have been extremely good to me, and extremely tolerant of me, and they have abided many of my upsets and my bad temper. Sometimes my bad temper got good things done, sometimes it resulted in nothing being done. I have liked El Paso, I liked the Spanish-Mexican-Indian elements here. I like all of that, I shall miss it very much. I mean, I just felt that I kind of melted into the community here. And I feel that I am as equally loved among the minorities as I am among the majorities--whoever they are not. I don't know which is which anymore. But I do feel that I got along very nicely and very well because of just my general feeling for humanity among the minority groups in El Paso.

S: To bring up a point about minority groups, I understand you were one of the first ones to hire Blacks.

P: I employed the first full-time Black on the staff at UTEP.

S: I understand you had a run-in?

P: Yes, quite a bit, with Personnel Section and the President's secretary at the time, /who/ was very upset. Quite a number of people were. Some of the faculty

were horrified. One faculty member came over to ask this girl if she were French. And she was quite dark, and she said, "No, I'm Negro." And of course that just /upset that person/. Yes, I was the first one to do that. I also worked with the Black groups in town, trying to get them in this school as students, before the Civil Rights thing came out. I just thought, it's a matter of conscience, we ought to do it, not wait until the Federal Government had to force us to do an act of kindness. People who call themselves Christians and whatever else were just being terribly hypocritical about all that. And so I exposed myself quite a bit in public and got a lot of criticism for it. Nobody ever threatened my job. Of course then we didn't have HEW as strong as it is now. But yes, I do have the distinction.

I'd also like to add this, which I think is terribly amusing. There was a sorority girl here one time, an Anglo, trying to get a job in the Library. I just figured at that time we had so few student jobs, /that/ I'd pass them out more or less to people who were fairly needy. I mean, I didn't really get personal with them, but I could tell if the students /would/ tell me their background that they really needed this kind of help. And I looked at it as kind of a student aid program as well as a training program. So, she didn't get a job and she got very angry at me. She went over and told the editor of the Prospector--and he printed it--that, "It seems nowadays that you have to be a Mexican to get a job in the Library." So he called me about that and I said, "No, you don't have to be, but it helps." And I got a chance to put that dig in, you know. I love that because that endeared me of course to all of my Mexican American friends, and I had a lot of them. But this school was not terribly friendly toward people with what they call Spanish surnames at that time; /it/ really wasn't. And, I mean, you didn't find many of them on the faculty. Texas was still coming from

the Revolution.

S: It still has strong hints.

P: Oh, yes, yes; there's still a problem. I know there is. But it would have remained the way it was if a few people like myself and others had not been bold enough to sound off about it, and just simply say, "It's grossly unfair, and you're letting a lot of talent go to waste that you could use," and so on.

Well, I think I am very loved by those groups. I have some good enemies, too, and I intend to keep them!