

1972

Interview no. 19.1

Chris P. Fox

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.utep.edu/interviews>



Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), [Oral History Commons](#), [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#), and the [Social History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Interview with Chris P. Fox by Leon C. Metz and Ed Hamilton, 1972, "Interview no. 19.1," Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Institute of Oral History at ScholarWorks@UTEP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Combined Interviews by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UTEP. For more information, please contact lweber@utep.edu.

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Chris P. Fox (1897-)**
INTERVIEWER: Leon C. Metz and Ed Hamilton
PROJECT: El Paso History
DATE OF INTERVIEW: July 25, August 3, September 12 and 26, 1972
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted

TAPE NO.: 19A
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 19A
TRANSCRIBER: _____
DATE TRANSCRIBED: _____

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

(Vice President of the State National Bank in El Paso,
Director of Public Relations) Born in El Paso in 1897; graduated
from El Paso High School; elected Sheriff in 1932-1942; presently
with the State National Bank; known as "Mr. El Paso".

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Biography; expansion of the city; the Rio Grande; social life and
customs; neighborhoods and ethnic communities; El Paso during Prohibition,
the Depression, and World War II; history of Fort Bliss.

3 1/2 hours (3 3/4 tape speed); 94 pages

**See also No. 214

Chris P. Fox
by Leon C. Metz
July 25, 1972

M: What in the world does Chris P. Fox stand for? I always thought it was for Christopher, but someone said no, it ain't Christopher.

F: Well, my mother was a Hollander. She was born in Amsterdam. My father was with the Dutch East Indies Company before he was transferred over here. The name Christiaan is prominent in the family; and the middle initial, P., is for Petrus, commonly known as Peter. And Fox... My father was born in Milwaukee. His father was born in Germany, as was his mother. But, his father and mother married over in this country and the name was Fuchs.

M: This is your grandfather?

F: My paternal grandfather. When he finished college over there, veterinarian school in Europe (they used to call them horse doctors then), why he was at the ripe age of 21, where they were eligible to go into the Army. There was no request, no horsefeathers about it. 21 years old--boom! In the Army -- if you were breathing.

M: This is in Germany?

F: Yes. So he decided to the contrary and slipped out of there through Belgium, I think, and wound up with relatives in Milwaukee. Later on he married my grandmother.

M: Was she from Germany, too?

F: She was from Germany originally. But she had lived here since a little girl, in Milwaukee. My father's name was Charles Anthony Fuchs. He had a brother named Edward Walbertha Fuchs. So my father was born about a year before the Civil War started, about 1860.

M: Where was he born?

F: In Milwaukee. He and his brother both. As time moved on, with the Civil

War on and the Wisconsin Zouves, well, their garb took after that of the French Zouves or equivalent of the French Foreign Legion--the pantaloons, trousers, white boots, and all that stuff. They had a lot of horse stuff in their support elements--you know, for their supply wagons and artillery and this, that, and the other, so they just had a lot of horses. They needed horse doctors, so Grandfather Fuchs had the delight of getting away from the Army in Germany and getting in it here.

M: Did he get in the Army over here?

F: Sure, the Wisconsin Zouves National Guard Unit. It was taken into the regular Army forces. He got in the front of a cannonball down in Vicksburg, Mississippi--the Battle of Vicksburg--and that was the end of Grandpa Fuchs. Later on, following the war by a number of years when my father was about 19 or 20, his brother Edward developed an asthmatic condition, so the mother gave my father and Edward some money and told them to go West to see if it would help his condition, which it did. They both remained out here and in later years my maternal grandfather, Pels, was transferred (his name was Martin P. Pels) by the Dutch East Indies Company to take over the operations of the Maxwell Land Grant, which was a joint venture between the British and the Dutch. It extended along the Colorado-New Mexico border for many, many miles, into each territory about 20 or 30 miles. It held great deposits of coal, other minerals, and vast resources of timber and ranching, livestock raising, and agriculture. So he managed it.

M: Does anybody have records or are his records still intact?

F: Oh, yes; it was all in his records. A woman just wrote a book here a while back. She wrote it on the Maxwell Land Grant. I have a copy at home. She quoted my grandfather at some length. So anyhow, in later years

the difficulty of getting the name Fuchs properly spelled and pronounced out in this western country had the boys change it to Fox.

M: Was it changed legally?

F: Oh, yes. During the intervening years, my mother, my sister, and I would have these people from Milwaukee come down--these cousins of my father. They were all Fuchs' and we could not quite get it straight. My Dad said, "Well, someday I'll tell you all about it and get you fixed up." So, when we bought our first automobile, we were going back to Raton, New Mexico for a visit, and we stayed overnight in Santa Fe. It took us about four days to get up there with no paved roads. Every few miles you stopped and opened and closed a gate.

M: When was this, Chris?

F: 1914 or 1915. So we stayed overnight in Santa Fe, and my father told my mother the next morning at breakfast that we would be gone a few minutes, that he would take us to the U.S. Courthouse. So we went over there and my Dad told the clerk the time and date of the court's actions that he would like to see, and told him why--he told him about the name changing. And there it was on the book. It said that on such and such a date in 1879 that Charles Anthony Fuchs and Edward Walbertha Fuchs petitioned the court so that their name be changed to Fox, and the petition was granted. So that's how it came about.

M: They came from Milwaukee down to Raton, and then drifted down to El Paso?

F: Yeah. In later years, after my father married, they came down here.

M: Why did they go to Raton instead of straight on across to California or someplace like that?

F: Well, they wanted to come to the mountain country, which is supposed

to be good for their pulmonary ailments.

M: About when did they leave Raton to come to El Paso?

F: Well, I would say about 1894. I was born here in 1897. About that time my father went to work for what was then known as Ketelsen and Degatau. Later on it became Krakauer, Zork and Moye Hardware Company, and it is known today as Zork Hardware Company. He was a hardware and machinery salesman and was the first man outside of old man White of Carlsbad to go down into the present Carlsbad Caverns.

M: Was he sort of a spelunker or did he just happen to be up there?

F: No, he had his route that he traveled. One day when he came in they told him, "The next time you go to Eddie (that's Carlsbad today), you send a telegram to Mr. Jim White a day or two ahead. He wants to take you to a place where he's got a lot of bat guano and he wants to work up some kind of equipment to get it out of there. To haul it out on the back of a man isn't practical and you can't have livestock in there to move it out." So he got Mr. White in a buckboard and drove out to the place and my Dad went down with Mr. White and the bucket. He looked this place over, and of course they didn't see then... I mean this was before any thought of Carlsbad Caverns. They were just looking straight ahead at this great deposit of bat guano and made some recommendations. They picked up a lift on a cable and that took care of that.

M: Did your dad always remain a machinery salesman?

F: Yes; oh, yes.

M: Where did your father live in El Paso?

F: Oh, we lived in many places. You see, my father was quite active. His first job in Raton was as a Wells Fargo agent, assistant agent, and then later on he became an agent when the Santa Fe came through here.

M: What were the major duties?

F: Well, his duties then were more or less what you would call a baggage clerk, a glorified baggage clerk. Before the Santa Fe got to Raton, it stopped at La Junta at that time. That's called the meeting place--La Junta. Still it was on the main line of the Santa Fe, and it handled money and all of those things (valuables and perishables and whatever was the order of the day). That's what it was, an express company, in other words; Wells Fargo. So when he retired from that, in the meantime he got himself busy and got himself an interest in building a power plant and water works, and then resigned from Wells Fargo. I still have the lantern that they gave him when he retired.

M: Is this the power plant, water works at Raton?

F: At Raton. And then he got in and established a very thriving business called the Fox Hardware Company there. Today it's known as Hobb's Hardware Company. So along in the springtime of 1893... in the meantime my mother and her parents, sisters, and brothers had moved to Raton to take up headquarters there, with the Maxwell Land Grant. She and my father met and they got married and went to Coronado, California (below San Diego) on their honeymoon. My Dad was stretched out kind of thin here and there, financially, in all these operations which predicated that everything had to be always going well, you know. And by gosh, the Panic of '93 came along. When he got back off his honeymoon, they were well broke. So my mother, being the courageous type with him, why they took their lumps and filed for bankruptcy voluntarily and liquidated the best they could. They and my young sister Elizabeth (whom I never knew; she died after they moved to El Paso of meningitis) moved to El Paso. They had to go out and look for a living. So he went to work

first with H. L. Ilfeld, a widely known merchandising firm then, trading in goods, wears, and all that in Las Vegas, New Mexico. He was there about a year when better opportunity came here. But let me digress a minute. All during our younger years, at the time that my sister began to remember, my father would be out three weeks on the road and work three weeks in the store (a local plant of Krakauer, Zork and Moye). The other three weeks, why, he would be out hauling on the trail. So each payday I would note that my mother and father would sit around the supper table, after they would clean up; and we were sitting doing our lessons and they would do a lot of figuring. She would say, "So much for this," and he would say, "Yes, and so much for that." In the meantime they were building some houses and selling them. In that day and time you didn't have housing developers who would build a whole raft of them. You built one and usually got in it and sold it. We moved many places around town. I guess they must have built 25 or 30 houses here, and we lived in easily 20 of them.

M: Was this your parents who built these houses?

F: Yes. I was an expert in taking down and putting up window shades and making them fit. To make a long story short, what happened was that in 1915, it was a great day. They paid off every darned dime they owed out of that bankruptcy in Raton. People did that then. And they bought an automobile and we returned to Raton in triumph and style. Of course, that's where he showed us that [the name change] was on the book there in Santa Fe. So I had a very interesting boyhood. Our parents were, like I told you, not wealthy; but they came from good stock. We always had a good roof over our heads and never an empty stomach. We didn't have any fancy things, but we were from a good, middle class family at

that time. All of it was spent here and many interesting things have taken place. Now, that's enough of that. Just go where you want to.

M: Tell me a little bit about your mother. What was her maiden name?

F: Her maiden name was Antoinette Pels. When they came over here she entered East Denver High School and graduated from there while they were waiting for the house to be built in Raton. She was quite a lady.

M: I'm sure that she was. Can you describe your father? Was he a tall man like yourself?

F: He was about my height, six feet-one, but had a big moustache for many years. Bald headed from the beginning that I recall him, and weighed pretty good, about 250 or 260 pounds, but he thinned down a little bit. But he liked good food--not fancy food, but good food--and a lot of it, and enjoyed his beer and ale.

M: He sounds like an interesting fellow.

F: Yes, he was.

M: When did he die, Chris?

F: In 1921 at the age of 61, somewhere in there, of pneumonia. His greatest legacy to me, I believe, and my mother, too, was the fact that as I was growing up after his death and I'd get out in this southwestern territory, wherever my father had been before me, I met a friend. He opened many doors for me. He didn't know, of course.

M: When did your mother die?

F: My mother died in 1949. She was struck by an automobile in front of the Scottish Rites Cathedral. She was killed there in November of 1949. She was 79.

M: What do you remember most about your mother?

F: She was a very handsome, pretty woman. She always had a strong will, and always, until her dying day, she retained her Dutch accent--a delightful one.

M: Tell me, how did she look?

F: She was a tall woman, carried herself well, had a nice figure; she was always dressed modestly but attractively. She had a lot of friends here in El Paso among the old timers.

M: You were born here in El Paso on what day of December, 1897?

F: December 5, down at 1210 East San Antonio Street, across from the Sun Tower down there.

M: The high rise apartments?

F: Yes, right across from there. That house is still there.

M: What is your earliest recollection?

F: My earliest recollection? Of course, you have got to remember that a lot of people talking about how they remember things earlier and earlier, well, they don't. Somebody else told them about it and they thought they remembered it. But I recall down on that place how the river used to flood there quite often, on San Antonio Street. One of the street workers, oh, long ago, a nice old Mexican, had one leg off and he had a peg leg. I remember that he was stepping with that peg leg right in the middle of a great big frog. That's my first recollection. I was sitting there on the buggy step and saw it. The other one was when we moved from there over to 1131 Myrtle; that house is still there, too. I burned my hand badly on some hot ashes. I was playing with something that flew into some ashes there in the backyard and I reached over and got it. I still have a pretty good scar there. So those were the first two things. But there were too many things to recall now.

M: Where did you start school?

F: I first went to school at the Sunset School, which is now Rio Grande and North El Paso Street, where the administration office is now.

M: Did you consider yourself a good student?

F: No, I was having too much fun. I was playing ball and of course I broke my leg and was out for a year. A broken leg was a big thing then, you know.

M: How did you do it?

F: Up in Colorado one time, on a trip with my mother, sister, and dad; my horse ran away and I broke it. I lost a year there and another half a year with pneumonia; so I lost a year and a half. But I liked all kinds of sports and spent quite a bit of time with that. But I could get my lessons when the heat was on, and that was quite frequently. When I graduated from El Paso High in 1917, I got a provisional certificate until I made up some Spanish. I got into a big fuss with my Spanish teacher. She was red-headed and really mean at the time; but a good teacher. Later on we were good friends. So anyhow, I had what we would call today a football scholarship for West Point, Ohio Wesleyan, Brown, and Lehigh. But after graduation, it was wartime, and they were wanting these robust young fellows to go and save the world for the Democrats. So, there went the college education. Gladys Fox and I married shortly after that.

M: You were in World War I?

F: Yes.

M: I didn't know that. What was it that you did in World War I?

F: Well, I was six or eight months getting into it, but finally I got into the Marine Corps. They were on their overseas training. When we finished all that, we were transferred to Cuanaco, Virginia, and

we were sent out to what was to be called the Red Bank today, in New Jersey, for overseas loading out when the Armistice came.

Then we were delegated to go to Russia--Vladivostok. But when we got to Bremerton Navy Yard to load out there, that was all stopped. So then about six months later, I came home. I had a very uneventful and frustrating time because when war is on, you want to go where it is. You're not interested in being somewhere else. The interesting thing about that is this. I ~~want~~ determined to get into the Marine Corps and the first couple of times I was turned down because I had a fluttering heart, which later turned out to be a bunch of bologna; but it got into my record. I was delayed some six or seven months. But anyhow, my friends of the contemporary age, they got into the National Guard and somewhere else. They got over to France before I learned which end of the gun the bullet came out of. So that was it.

M: Coming back to high school, you won all these scholarships. Why didn't you go to, say, West Point? You wouldn't have been drafted.

F: Well, before I got out of the service, I came back here and we got married.

M: I see.

F: Nobody who's married goes to West Point. I don't think I would have had any problems scholastically, at any of the others; but then it was a job, you know. When you married, you said that you took this woman as your lawful wife; but also your job was to support her, too. And there were no wealthy parents in back of either one of us. Her father was a longtime railroad man, a Senior Conductor on the Golden State Limited, and a very fine person, as was her mother.

M: What was her maiden name?

F: Gladys Lundy.

M: Coming back to school again, I've heard that our friend Slam Marshall was talking to you out there at the base, reminiscing. Apparently you went to school with him.

F: Yeah. He was about one year later in school than me.

M: Do you recall much about him?

F: Oh, not too awful much at that time, although we lived in related neighborhoods. But he was a good ball player, baseball player, and after the war he used to play a little semi-pro ball around here.

M: I've heard that he referred to you as the "Little General" back in high school. Where did you get a tag like that?

F: I guess that's because I spent too much time in athletics.

M: I was under the impression that it meant that here was Chris Fox, President of the Class.

F: When we moved into the new high school we helped organize the first student council. They made me President. I got to see that I behaved myself. We organized the El Paso High School Athletic Association, and I was the first President. But in the neighborhood where I lived, that's where I got the nickname, "The General," because we had a little army of our own.

M: Like we have street gangs of today; is that what you are talking about?

F: No, no; they were neighborhood groups. But there would be a little combat, maybe, from time to time. But not the hooligan type that we have today. No comparison.

M: Were there more sports, then?

F: Yes, sports and everything. And we had more fun on Halloween; lots

of fun. But we never tore up a single dime's worth of anybody's property. We'd swap gates. Gates were removable then and we would take one and put it on somebody else's fence. A guy would have a red fence with a red gate, and we'd take it and put it on a yellow fence. But tear up anything, no. We wouldn't have any fun out of that, and we never tore up anything. We would just work ourselves silly swapping gates and having a great time.

M: What were the limits of El Paso when you were younger, Chris?

F: Well, it would be Cotton Street on the East, and maybe Nevada Street or Arizona Street to the North. Of course, to the West to the river, that area there of Sunset Heights was developed. And to the South, the river itself.

M: Tell me about the river. What was it like then, prior to the dam?

F: Well, it wasn't much of a river from August to the following April. But when she cut loose and we had a good snowfall in Colorado and a good runoff, there would be a lot of agua down there.

M: You said that it flooded your area. Did it flood the downtown area around the Plaza?

F: Whether it ever got up there, I don't know. But the old river bed used to be in front of where the White House is today. I don't think that it did. But it used to flood up toward Seventh Street; I do know that. What is called Cordova Island today, you know there's been much controversy about it. It was a horseshoe arrangement, a tight neck. Water would get backed up in there and flood over it. It could not make the loop there and flow freely. So in 1899, the City of El Paso asked the City of Juarez to cut the neck through there, which we did at our expense, and it became Cordova Island. All of the territorial rights always remained with Mexico. But even today you can see the

markings of the river bed. That allowed the water to go stright through, so that helped quite a bit.

M: The military out there on the mesa, which was a long ways from town at that time, wasn't it?

F: We had a great electical transportation service system here in the town, one of best in the West. Up to the time that the car line went out there, you would take the train and go out to what is Plane Fort today, or take a buggy.

M: What is Plane Fort? I never heard of it.

F: Well, the first airplane hangar was there. Fred Wilson and the intersection of Railroad, that's where Plane Fort is; to the left where they have those sidings. Right east of Beaumont Hospital, you just go east and you come to it.

M: Wasn't there a town out there, too?

F: Oh, up above it there was a little place called Tobin.

M: Yes, but I was thinking there was another one there off of Dyer. Of course, there must have been several.

F: Hartsville; that was a notorious place. It was nothing but a rendezvous for bootleggers, gamblers, prostitutes. Lynchville?

M: Yes, that's the one. Were you ever up to Lynchville?

F: I don't really remember. There was nothing, really, that separated it from anything else, so far as appearances are concerned. The whole area was loaded up with National Guard tents. One more tent didn't mean much and one more old shack didn't mean much. I know they had killings out there and it was a constant source of turmoil, and bad in any way you want to take it.

M: How far was it from town?

F: Well, it would be about a mile further than the present headquarters at Fort Bliss, up to the north of where Hinman Hall is at Fort Bliss.

M: Apparently it was off Army property.

F: It wasn't too far from this, yes. It was across the railroad tracks on the west side, not too far from Plane Fort and the railroad tracks in there. I don't know what the railroad siding was called originally, but they called it Plane Fort in later years as a designation because Biggs Field put up their first hangar there a long time ago, World War I time.

M: Was this the blimp hangar, the old balloon hangar?

F: That's right.

M: What about Tobin, the town?

F: Oh, well, it folded up. The Herald Post, I believe, had a nice story on it a while back. Frank Tobin built a spare railroad line out there from this Plane Fort. He had a steam-powered car that would carry 25 or 30 people. I would say that it would be just about where Sunrise Shopping Center is today; maybe a little bit further north, but just about that. He'd have excursions out there. He'd come out on the train from the depot downtown and get off there, and get his choo-choo and he'd take you out there on Saturdays and Sundays and show you some highly desirable sites, and always have a little equivalent of a bar-b-que, some ham and cheese and sandwiches and a keg of beer, for those who were famished, and then bring you back. He went broke about that time, I think, or got sick and died. He was quite a promoter, and I use the term "promoter" with due respect. He was a good man in my book. Before he started that, he started a Tobin addition that is across in that area below Evergreen Cemetery--Tobin Addition, Tobin Place. His

widow was Marie Tobin, long-time county treasurer. They had several sons, but I doubt if there's a member of the family still living here. There may be a daughter, but I'm not sure. But the name is well-known.

M: What did Tobin look like?

F: I have a hazy recollection of a man five-feet ten, well attired, and I think he was a good cigar smoker and a breezy character. I associate a derby hat with him all the time. Of course, derbies at that time were commonplace. The only people who wore white stetson hats were the people who were entitled to them--cowhands and ranch people. If you worked on a ranch as a cowboy or owned a ranch, well, you had one of those hats. But if you didn't, you didn't wear boots or a hat.

M: You wore what they called "city clothes."

F: That's right, because a pair of cowboy boots were used as working boots, with the high heel turned in. They are the most uncomfortable bloody things in the world. You didn't walk in them just for fun. I worked as a cowhand for about three years in the summertimes. I became a regular cowhand.

M: Where?

F: I'll tell you about that later on. That's a long story.

M: Okay. Tell me a little about Juarez.

F: Oh, I recall Juarez in the earlier times. It was just a case of going across the river to visit your friends on a Sunday afternoon.

M: How did you cross the river?

F: You could go in a buggy if you had one, or you could go in a streetcar. Your friends would pick you up in their buggy and they would come and visit you and you could go visit them. You would always exchange gifts of some kind. I know the Weber family; he was a German Consul. He had

a hacienda over there where people would go and visit on Sundays. I remember many times being over there. Some remnants of the family still live here, and others--the Sours and the Samaniegos. But it was comfortable. It was a much bigger place than El Paso at the turn of the century, as I recall. But, oh, dirt streets and typical Spanish-Mexican architecture. And a little tiendita here and there.

M: What are those?

F: A little tiendita was a little store where you might sell groceries. You might have some other things in there also. They had open gambling over there at that time; that was a part of the way of life. And a bullring. Those people led a good life. We didn't go in for this good neighbor business, there was no such thing then. We were just neighbors. Not good neighbors, just neighbors. Sure, for better or for worse. And more importantly, we were friends. It wasn't something synthetic that you try to create; it was just mutual respect for each other. Some people you liked and others you didn't, and the same way with them; but we just went about our ways.

M: What do you recall about Stormsville?

F: Well, when they had that big flood in '97 or '98, somewhere along in there, those Mexican families got tired of being flooded out every year, so they packed up their goods, wares, and merchandise and went up to the mesa; went to the hills, as it were. They built little houses up there and hauled adobes up there. Their route was up on what is the equivalent of North El Paso Street today. Their route was a long one to get up there because of the elevation. They had a street laid out, and a church.

M: You mean there was a street up there in Stormsville?

F: Yes. I don't remember whether D. Storms, who was a lawyer (and for whom the place was named), was the overseer or what, but it was called Stormsville because he ramrodded whatever went on up there. They had a very fine baseball field up there, just as flat as a table. We'd go up there and play ball on Saturdays in the summertime.

M: Where was this baseball field?

F: Oh, I forgot just where it was located. I know we went up Campbell Street to get there. If they won, they ran us off down the hill; and if we won, we'd stay up there a while and fight. But we'd finally have to retreat back down the hill. Then we would charge back again and get back our slingshots and soto stalks. But once you left it up there, why, you never made it back because they had the advantage on you. So you were bitter enemies until next Saturday, until the next game.

M: How did people get water up there? Did they carry it?

F: Oh, sure. There was a big water faucet on the corner of what is now Schuster and North Campbell Street. That was where the path went up. All those that worked in town would come down in the morning off the mesa. They'd have two five-gallon cans on a stick across their shoulders, just like over in Southeast Asia where they carry things on their shoulders. They'd set the cans down (all the cans had a mark on them) and there would always be a whole bunch of them. In the evening when they came home they would fill up these cans and take the ten gallons of water up the hill. They had a water wagon that would come up there from time to time and apparently that was more expensive than hauling it up there on their backs. But also in connection with the water, sometimes the wives, being devoted and enterprising souls like wives usually are, would come down late in the afternoon and have some of those cans already filled up

for the hubbies when they came by so they wouldn't have to fill them themselves. Wives would carry the equivalent of what we would call the old conventional bucket. They'd carry a bucket of water themselves, about two and a half gallons when they went back up the hill. That's how they got their water. As they came down, those that worked as yardsmen and gardeners, wouldn't haul their lawnmowers back and forth. They were prize possessions. They took good care of them because they would be the only one that they'd ever have; their lawnmowers, their clippers, their hatchets. You see, people got their wood delivered to them--mesquite wood in four or five good lengths. They'd just hire out one of these fellas to cut the grass or cut the wood if they didn't have robust characters at home like me. We took care of [a lawnmower] for an old fellow named Vidal for years. He kept it in our woodshed. He'd come down in the morning, and if he wasn't gonna work for us, he'd take his lawnmower and peddle off down the street. In the evening he'd come back and leave it on deposit. Life was indeed, as I guess in contemporary life, very simple. Everything about it was quite real, there was no phony business. None of that. You either were or you weren't. Our demands were simple, our likes were simple, and I guess in turn we were simple. But it was simply great, the way it was. if you want to make those comparisons. Now, a lot of people say, "Oh, way back then" and they think that people were not progressive, they were not dedicated, that they were not this and that. Well, they were real people, and they had young people talking then just like today. You'd think that the young generation today were the only young generation to come along. But they had them then. Of course, the politicians didn't curry them and make up to them like they do today, because we didn't vote. We weren't "rate" people, we were just youngsters in the neighborhood.

just a private residence.

M: Was there actually a mill there?

F: I saw the mill but I never saw it running. I guess it must have been in disrepair for many years.

M: I've heard some people say that it didn't really run off water, that it ran off steam or something.

F: That I know better. The dam was built, and that was where we used to cross into Mexico many times.

M: Where was the dam?

F: Right there at Hart's Mill; right there adjacent to it. That was where the first Mexicans took their canal water off to go down to Juárez, from that dam.

M: This is the acequia madre?

F: Yes, and that water used to run the mill. That's why the dam was built.

Second interview between Chris P. Fox and Leon C. Metz on August 3, 1972.

M: Chris, let's continue. The last time we shut it off, we were out there on the Rio Grande, on that little dam.

F: Yeah, Hart's Mill.

M: Is that the only dam that's been along in there, not counting the American dam?

F: It's the only one I can recall having been built on the Rio Grande in this particular area. There might have been some takeoff arms, where an arm was built out into the river to scoop up water that came down and throw it into the canal. But there was nothing that went all the way across.

M: Did the Hart's Mill actually dip into the water?

F: No, the dam went all the way across, backed up the water then had a flume that picked up the water, brought it in, dropped it on top of the wheel, and turned it. You see, the wheel was lower than the dam.

M: Was it a crushing wheel or a grinding wheel?

F: Oh, I imagine that they ground the wheat there, that it was a conventional stone; upper and lower platnum, they called it; a stone grinding wheel. I never saw them in operation.

M: How about the American dam? Did you ever know anything about that?

F: That was built in the '30s by the International Boundary and Water Commission when the great Lawrence M. Lawson was commissioner. That was to control the water up there and see that we got our share and the México got their share.

M: That's where the Mexican acequia madre cut off?

F: Yes, that's where they'd take off, up there.

M: The acequia is no longer in business, is it?

F: Oh, yes; sure. It runs right through town, like it always did. It goes down the valley and irrigates.

M: I know that there is one down there, but I didn't know that it was the same one.

F: Yeah. If it's changed, I never knew about it.

M: How about the old canals that used to come down where the railroad tracks are, near downtown. Do you recall those?

F: No. I recall seeing remnants of them, however, like those that used to run through the back end of the Magoffin Homestead, through their orchard. There was another piece of it that could be seen further down around the former Mitchell's Brewery, but I never saw them in operation.

M: Speaking of the Magoffin Homestead, how big was it?

F: It was several acres, as I can remember it. It extended quite a ways up towards town. Originally, before that, it almost came right to downtown El Paso, for that matter. Then as the years went on they sold property and then in the 1910s and 1920s they got it down to about where it is now.

M: What kind of orchard was it?

F: They raised several varieties of fruit. Octavia Glasgow could tell you, but I don't really recall what they raised. They had a regular, conventional garden or orchard of that day and time that was common here in El Paso: grapes and fruit and vegetables and all those things that they lived from.

M: Was it pretty common throughout the town?

F: Oh, yes. I would say that there were a number of people who had them. The Heid family down on Alameda had a big place in the back where they raised fruits and vegetables, and others through that area down there.

M: Coming back to the Rio Grande and that American dam, do you recall any particular troubles or difficulties they might have had in erecting it? Did this please everybody once the thing was done?

F: There was no hassle about it that I know of. They had everything all agreed to. This man Lawson, in addition to being a great engineer, was equally so a great diplomat. He was a forceful, persistent man. There are many evidences of his

handiwork and of his talent in El Paso. But no, there was no hassle about it. You see, the building of the Elephant Butte Dam, which actually started in about 1912, had been kicked back and forth a number of years. Even my grandfather Pels, who was manager of the Maxwell Land Grant, had a hand in it because it was part of the Rio Grande water shed. The first site that was selected with any form of unanimity was the present site, from an engineering standpoint. The others had to inject themselves into the picture with the idea of maybe benefitting personally, thinking that if it was put somewhere else they would benefit a little bit more. But the proponents of the Elephant Butte site were those people that were interested in doing the job right for the benefit of most folks. But there was one group that had quite a bit of power and they wanted to build it right where the Pass of the North is, right where those two big railroad bridges are between the Smelter and the cement plant. Well, of course, they were just thinking of something personal; they had to be, because it was pointed out in a public hearing that if they had the dam there, it would inundate probably half of the most valuable tillable soil--they'd put it under water--which would include the country club area and maybe as far as Las Cruces. But they were pretty stout and had some people on their side. But ultimately, as always is the case (I hope), a few stout heated fellas here in town got busy and scotched it and it went back to where it belonged, fortunately. And they also nailed it down to 166,000 acres--that's the project. No more land could be added to it. Some people wanted to make it about 250,000. They had a lot of fringe land that they could get in under the project. Even if the water wasn't there to serve it, they could sell it at a pretty good price. Oh, we had that kind of people then, too; but we've got more now because we've got more people now.

M: What about the bosques?

F: Well, anyone of my age (of course, there's some that are younger, give a year or two) can remember the bosques. They were great; they were the habitat of much of our fauna, as it were. They were brought about because there was no dam, and the spring freshets would come down and flood everything, and cultivation was at a minimum here. So things would start to grow out there: native plants, cacti, trees, and many different varieties of flora, as it were. You could hardly go up through them they were so tight. In there lived all kinds of animals: fox, skunks, opossum--all of the smaller four-legged variety; much in the way of wild fowl, birds of all kinds. It was just delightful. The cattle used to like it too, because they'd get in there in the shade. Some of them were veritable forests. The last big one that went down was when they developed the Clardy Fox addition. That was the last standing bosque of any consequence. And they weren't too much up the valley because the water up there was pretty much confined to a stream.

M: It stayed within its channel.

F: That's right. But when it came through the pass there, it just scattered out and away it went. Of course, up there it's more straight than it is here. So they had a lot of them here, big ones; and I hated to see them go.

M: Are there any left now, Chris? I've heard that there is a small patch down around Ascarate or somewhere down in that area.

F: There could be; I don't know where it is, though.

M: Did it extend past Ysleta?

F: Oh, I can remember down in the island there, down around Fabens, there were some; but they stopped to any great extent on our side of the river between Ysleta and Fabens. In other words, they weren't as extensive. Of course,

they were equally so on the Mexican side. They had their bosques, too. But that's the way the cat hops. Then, you see, when Mr. Lawson's project of straightening the river from El Paso to what we called Fort Quitman (this side of Sierra Blanca about 80 miles) was put into effect late in the '30s, the river channel prior to rectification was about twice as much--about 160 miles. It would wander back and forth just like a snake so that it would cause flooding, and a lot of valuable land was swallowed up. So Lawson put it over. The only way he could do it was this: as you go through the S curves--right down the middle of them--some land that was formerly on the American side was thrown into México and some that was in México was thrown into the American side, as you can understand. So they worked out a formula where they engineered it right down to the last square foot. So when it was all finished, there was just as much Mexican land given to us as there was our land given to them. In other words, no one lost any acreage. The river was straightened. It cut the channel down quite a bit, enough to make all of downtown El Paso habitable, from the basement standpoint. It used to be that most of these basements used to be pumped because the water level was so high. So that was another great project that came into effect.

M: Where did the coal used in the El Paso area come from? Didn't people burn it mostly in the winter to keep warm?

F: Well, yes. All of our coal was mined in either central or eastern New Mexico. There was some of it that came out of White Oaks country in the Capitan area, but it was of no great consequence. But most of it came from the Dawson country, up near Raton, Gallup. Gallup American was a soft coal, what they called "kitchen stove coal." "You can almost start it with a match," they used to say. A very fine grade of coal came from Cerillos. That's where

they have the Christmas celebration up there. There were some areas that had very hard coal, almost anthracite, up in that area.

M: Did they burn much wood?

F: The Mexican families burned quite a bit of wood. You have to have a stove that's capable of the high heat that comes from the coal. The wood stove doesn't have to be that way. It can burn wood and not have the same problems. The Mexicans burned quite a bit of wood; they liked mesquite. From the mesquite they made the charcoal. They liked to use charcoal, a lot of them did; braziers. That's where the expression came in that this was a place where you climbed for water and dug for wood, because people would have to go to Mt. Franklin to get their potable water. There were a number of springs up there in the early days; I can remember a few when I was a boy. They'd get their drinking water up there and then they would have to go to the desert and dig to get mesquite roots for their firewood.

M: I've heard talk that there used to be a lot of tall trees in the Franklin Mountains.

F: There was, quite a bit. There used to be springs. The only running springs that I can recall were the one in Marble Canyon (it was in back of Kern Place, way up there), and another one over on the side not too far from where the KTSM tower is up there on the mountain. Of course there was one around by the tin mine, plus the one up near Las Cruces called Dripping Springs. Of course, before that time, there were many; but as more wells were drilled in the valley, the water level went down and away went your springs. In 1958 when we had about 18 inches of rainfall here (everybody was about ready to build an ark), some of those old springs up there got a little wet, a little moist. But if they ran, I never knew about it. I know one right off Scenic Drive on the west side got a little wet.

M: Was this what they commonly called Cottonwood Springs?

F: No, that's further up.

M: How about Mundy Springs? Were you ever there?

F: Well, that is the one I was talking about on the east side of the mountain, I believe. I've heard of Mundy Springs, but I don't know where it was.

M: How about hunting along the river?

F: Oh, there used to be a lot of hunting. Before the bosques left, ducks would come in here each winter by the endless millions.

M: I figured so. Our hunters now go around and chase one poor old duck.

F: There were ducks and geese to no end. Another interesting thing is that always about sunset, in the fall and early winter, there was a great flock of crows that would fly up the river going further up to where they could get something to eat. But the crows don't come anymore and the ducks don't come anymore in any great numbers. So man's society, as it were, has taken its toll in many ways.

M: You wonder if they've all just died or if they have just gone in different directions.

F: No, I think they've changed their flyways because of the fact of society moving right in on them. But in another way, they would like to go to where they could get something to eat, and nest down for the night and not be disturbed. I think that there's quite a bit in the valley over there by the Pecos River. They go through there. Of course, they are long-flying birds; they can fly a long way.

M: But you don't ever see them much over here.

F: Oh, no.

M: I can recall as a kid, over in the Ohio Valley, you could see them flying over in formation in the fall.

F: Oh, that's right; geese, too. Of course, the geese would come down from the

north, flying down for the winter.

M: Were there any wild animals, any large animals, around here, such as deer?

F: Oh, I shot a deer once over there in back of Juárez, where there's probably street lights today. You'll read about it in the Password.

M: You've got an article coming out in the Password?

F: Oh, yes, it was frequent that people would go right out here in the Franklin Mountains and get their deer, and halfway between here and Hueco Tanks to get deer. Rabbits in abundance--jackrabbits by the millions; cottontails, too. But they're all gone.

M: I figured that the rabbit population would be about the same as it always was.

F: No.

M: I didn't think that anyone could kill those rabbits off.

F: Yes, but you see, rabbits--they like to eat, too. And when you take and cover their places to eat under pavement and concrete, why, they move somewhere else.

M: What do you remember about the old College of Mines, Chris? Was it originally on the other side of the mountain?

F: Well, let's go back beyond that. Around 1905, '06, '07, there was established here the El Paso Military Institute, which was built on some land adjacent to Fort Bliss. It would be directly east. Our good friend, Millard McKinny has it all pegged down, right to the square foot, where it was just to the east there, and today it's right on the reservation. It lasted six or seven years and then phased out and went broke, and the buildings stood idle. Quite impressive buildings, some of them. Anyhow, then this College of Mines--it was called the College of Mines and Metallurgy or Texas College of Mines, or whatever it was in the early game--started up

there and that was their home. And lo and behold, it had been doing business for a couple of years and the place burned, and there was a big scramble. Then that land was given to them out where they are today, the start of that land. And that's where they went, and that's where they've been ever since.

M: I know that you used to play football. Do you recall any specific football games that stand out in your memory? Any particular sporting events that stand out?

F: Well, you see, we were well isolated out here from anywhere. So our athletic endeavors, whatever they might have been, were confined to this immediate area, where we could find somebody to play. So there for some ten years, El Paso High School had on its regular schedule New Mexico A & M, which is New Mexico State today. And they played two games a year, football, basketball, baseball, and they had joint track meets. In that little organization was New Mexico Military Institute in Roswell, and the college up in Silver City. At times we'd play ball with the University of Arizona; mainly baseball and basketball. So we were quite competitive here. And we had a lot of good semi-pro baseball; a lot of it. And the famous or infamous "Black Sox" team, they came down here. The individuals that were fired, played here. You see, we had what was called the Copper League, which was a pro league. El Paso, Silver City, Douglas, Bisbee, Cananea, México, and I think Hurley had a team. It was about a six-team league, and many great professionals played in it. Some of them left here and became top-flight pros. Others whose days kind of passed a little bit, they went to pasture down here and faded out. The great Matthewson came here and played for a while--Christy Matthewson, that

immortal man. As I say, the famous ball players of the Chicago White Sox and the Cleveland Indians, when they got messed up in that deal, they came down here and played.

M: Where did they play?

F: Washington Park. That's where our ball park was. And later on Río Grande Park was built, up there back up against the E.P. & S. W. stockyards, or the S.P. stockyards today, and where KROD is today.

M: How come they abolished the park?

F: They had money for some other reason.

M: How big a park was it?

F: Río Grande Park would be a conventional western-type baseball park. It was a good football park, too. I don't know how many people it would hold. But for a long time Washington Park was the place.

M: Tell me about Washington Park. More things took place in Washington Park. Was it the center of the community, more or less? Every time that there was an event, it took place in Washington Park.

F: Washington Park was in institution, let's put it that way. Washington Park was started by a man named Boone. Later on one of his brothers became sheriff, I believe, and later on a fire chief named Joe Boone is out of that family. Anyhow, they made a recreational center out of it. They had a half-mile race track. They had horse races, mostly buggy. They didn't go in too much for the gambling horse race like we do today. If some fellow had a horse that he thought would beat somebody else's, they would just get out there and have at it. And the great immortal, Barney Oldfield, used to come through here every year and race on that track.

They had a group that was kind of like the Sun Carnival, and they would put on some events here every year--businessmen of the town. The first airplane flight we had here nearly broke up the committee and the town. That was when they brought "Birdman" Hamilton in here. He was a bona fide aviator of the time, and he was doing a lot of barnstorming. Most of his efforts had been in the low areas--Midwest, Gulfcoast, and all that. So the committee hired him at great expense to come out here and show us how to fly an airplane, show us how it could be done. And naturally, we were really wild about it--we wanted to have it; because preceeding that by a little while, a French team had come through here. They had monoplanes. The fella who headed it up was a man named Bleriot. He was the first man to fly the English Channel. So they came out here and did a little barnstorming and went on. They packed up their airplanes, put them on the train, and went further west, because they didn't fly them between places. So anyhow we got Hamilton the "birdman." And he had a bi-plane and he came out here. There was great fanfare--horn blowing and stuff; and he unloaded the plane, took it to the park, and took several days putting it together. My father was on the committee, and there were some men on the committee that were opposed to this very much.

M: Why?

F: Well, the thinking was that it was "some new-fangled deal, no good," and "it will scare the horses." They just weren't sold on it, and besides, it cost a lot of money. But the money point

was all right because the people really went for it. But the first day--it was about a four-day affair--Mr. Hamilton came out and all the committee came out. In that day they had the people hold the planes back while they revved them up enough R.P.M.'s going, and then they would take off; so that dust flew back on them and they stood there with their dirty hats on and turned the plane loose. It bounced down that field for a ways, but Mr. Hamilton couldn't get it off the ground. He just couldn't make it. They brought him back, tried it again and he still couldn't make it. One wing kind of humped up a little bit. So he said, "Gentlemen, the problem is, that with this high, rarified air we don't have enough wingspread. We gotta have some more wingspread." He had what it took to put the wingspread on. In the course of the night they put about three or four feet more on either side. The next day the committee all got out there and everybody was there, and an old fellow named Fewel, he was razzing him. He told people through the medium of the press, that he could fly further in his shirt tail than they could in this airplane, and that brought a lot of problems. So the next day the man still couldn't get it off the ground. But he did a little better. About half way down he humped up a little bit and got off the ground. He got the wheels off just a few feet. So everybody was thoroughly disgusted. So he just put on some more wingspread that night; it was hanging out there like a duck's wing. And a lot depended on him getting off the ground that day or the committee would be asked to leave

town along with Mr. Hamilton. There were two great wireless towers built just to the south part of Washington Park for radio; World Radio--The Erikson Wireless Company, a European and American deal. And he was gonna fly between these two towers. Well, to make a long story short, he did get off the ground, and he did fly between those towers, and he flew over Juárez. That was the first airplane to ever fly over a foreign country. And it was terrific, all was forgiven. The next day, just to make sure, he put on a little bit more wingspread, and he had another great day. So that was the advent of aviation in El Paso. But they never had him again.

M: When was that, Chris?

F: I'd have to look it up in our books. The bank's book here and the Password shows the event. I would say along 1910, '11. Those towers stood there for many years, they were landmarks. Tremendous--650 feet tall, twice as high as this State National Bank Building.

M: What about the track, the oval track you were talking about?

F: Today it would be... when you go to Washington Park, well, everything was built around it. The road that's in the park to the east was part of the track, and part of the road that's on the west was part of the track, right next to Boone street. It went right around that area. It was a half-mile track. They had most everything out there; political rallies, church socials.

M: Was it a gravel track?

F: Dirt with sand on it. It's adobe soil out there, you know. If you didn't have that sand, why, when you'd get wet, you just aren't going anywhere. And the greatest bosque we ever had, in retrospect, was the one we called Woodland Park. It was just west from Paisano Drive to the river, or Alameda Street to the river, and it went from the side of the Coliseum, Washington Park, over about six blocks to the west. The streetcar built a loop line which people could rent. It turned off a the Alameda-Washington Park run, and has some switches up in there, and people would rent cars for the evening for picnics. The whole neighborhood would get on it, and the social groups. They'd bring their lunches, and there would be a keg of beer or two. So there would be several out there, and they'd just side them off on a little switch, and left the loop open for others. Well, of course mosquitoes out there in season were something to be reckoned with. So they'd hire some old paisanos around there to burn the green mesquite wood that would make a terrible smoke and get rid of the mosquitoes. But sometimes the mosquitoes were more acceptable. So, anyhow, that's the way life was.

M: Well, you mentioned cars; people would rent street cars?

F: Yes, for the evening.

M: My gosh, how would you rent a street car? It was a separate thing that ran in a circle down there.

F: Oh, it would come right up into your own neighborhood and, you'd

get right on it; a regular street car. You'd load your people on it there, make the loop around through town, go on to Washington Park, then to Woodland Park; you'd go on that side track, and when you were ready to go, why you'd get on and come back home. It would take you right up to your neighborhood.

M: What would something like that cost?

F: Oh gee, I wouldn't know.

M: These were electric street cars?

F: Yes, of course, you rode in them under the conductors care, so, they got in on the festivities, too. He was probably your next door neighbor, so it was all right. Oh yes, it was quite a device. You see, El Paso had many unpaved **streets**. Of course, there was no pavement here until 1902 or '03, when the Bithulithic Company came in. So before that, streets were sand streets through here. And in some areas, why the city fathers would take this caliche and put it down, roll it and water it, and it would make a pretty good foundation for the street. It was fine, but soon the horses' hooves would pulverize it as would the iron wheels on the buggies and wagons, and it would soon become a talc-like surface. And when the wind would come up, you can imagine what it did to the washing on the line, and the poor women trying to keep the house clean. Because life was tough here then and our women can't be admired too much. We owe'em much. Well, anyhow, they'd go around and have sprinkling wagons; a two-horse team, and I guess about 500 gallons of water,

with these tanks on the back they would go down the street to wet the street and lay the dust. But of course in our hot sunshine, it wasn't too long before the streets would dry again. But the street car company bought a big one, a big tank, on a regular motorized deal. I guess the Electric Company still has a picture of it. We have one, too, in the archives of our association. And they'd go swoopin' up and down where their tracks were. And they were hired out by the city, and they then went through the town. But anyhow, to get on Alameda Street you had to go out to Myrtle Avenue, and later on, Texas Street. You got on Alameda right there at Piedras Street. And if you were gonna be buried, you'd sooner or later be on Myrtle Avenue and Alameda Street, going either to Concordia Cemetery or Evergreen. It was not uncommon for the Mexicans to refer to Myrtle Avenue as "Calle de Muertos" the Street of the Dead, because all the funerals went out there. Some people said it was because they couldn't pronounce Myrtle; but be that as it may, they were always very respectful. A funeral would come by and they would all stand at attention, cover their hearts with their hats and stand there until every vehicle in the procession went by; whether they were cutting the grass, working in the streets, or what ever they were doing. It was a very beautiful thing to watch. So the funerals would go out on this street. Once they wanted to get the street car company to provide funeral cars, but that didn't do because all the outfits that rented horses, buggies, and carriages took care of that. And the Electric Company got the word that they'd stay in their business and these companies would stay in theirs. Funerals

were quite a thing with all those horse-drawn rigs. So they'd go out Myrtle Street out to what was then called Midway, in a sense, there at Piedras, then on out to the cemetery. Midway had one of the better class saloons and a terrific number of horse watering troughs around there.

M: There at the corner of Piedras and Alameda?

F: Oh, yes; I can remember it. Coming back, the drivers of most of the buggies were very considerate men. Their horses were dry and tired. So there is nothing to do but pull up there at the Midway Bar and let them have some of that cool, clear water and a little rest. Well, while they were resting, there was nothing else to do but do a little resting themselves. So the people went into the cool confines of the saloon, drank toasts to their departed friends, ate a few cheese sandwiches and some other stuff, then came out, got into the buggies again, and went on into town. Man was refreshed and so were the horses.

M: Were there houses there too?

F: Oh, yes.

M: But there were more saloons?

F: Well, saloons were placed stratigically to satisfy the needs of an area. And they didn't overpopulate themselves with saloons; they were out to make a living. Most of these saloon men were smart. If an area was supporting a saloon and they had a good guy running it, or a beer garden (which was part of it) why, they'd go look for someplace else. They don't have that much sense today, it seems like.

M: Was it called Midway because it was midway between town and the cemetery?

F: There were two Midways; that Midway, and there was a Midway up on Yandell. You see, Yandell Street used to be called, when I was a boy, Boulevard. Yandell Street is named after a very famous early-day physician, Dr. Yandell. They had a midway there; that was at Cotton and Yandell. But that wasn't for the same purpose; it was where the end of the Boulevard car line was for a long time, and the place where the Highland Park car line branched off. And later on, the streetcars went on out to Ft. Bliss and branched to Government Hill, and branched to Beaumont Hospital. We had a tremendous transportation system, one of the finest in the country. They had good service, good men; and practically all of the conductors and motormen, as well as postmen, were tubercular, arrested tubercular cases. Their chances of enjoying longevity were to stay in the open air. And so you could get a motorman or a conductor at a pretty reasonable price, and the same way with a postman. Oh yes, streetcar lines, we had Sunset Heights, we had the Union Depot, and we had the Second Ward line, and of course we had the inter-urban that ran down to Ysleta. Then we had Government Hill, which I already have mentioned, Ft. Bliss, Manhattan Heights, Beaumont, El Paso High School, Kern Place, Arizona, Golden Hill, Smelter, Juárez, and a few more.

M: Did they meet at the Downtown Plaza?

F: Everything revolved around the Plaza, just like it does today.

M: Has the Plaza always been the same size, to your knowledge, or did it use to be larger?

F: It used to be a little bit smaller, not much. Just what they did to straighten out a street there. But that was the hub of operations. There was a street car track on every street downtown.

M: You were going to say something about the bullfights in Juárez.

F: I can't tell you too much about bullfights. I went to one bullfight with my parents when I was a young fellow, and we all never went back anymore. But the bullfight rings were used in the '20's for boxing. Professional boxing, was really going hot here. The bullrings were a very good place to have a boxing match, and they still do it. There were quite some matches over there, and it would wind up sometimes where the referee's decision wasn't exactly to their liking and it was something! But, I never went back to any more bullfights.

M: Coming back to street cars again, do you recall any mule-drawn cars?

F: No. You see, street cars came here in 1902. I remember riding on the first street car that day. Everybody could ride for free. It started from the old Sheldon Hotel here on Pioneer Plaza right across from the White House. That's my first ride that I recall on a streetcar.

M: Where did it go?

F: Gosh, I don't know; but I remember being on it. "Be careful, don't get electricuted." It was a big deal.

M: While we are on street cars, let's switch to railroads. How about the railroads coming into town? Were there any other terminals besides the one we still have down here, Union Station?

F: The first station for the G.H. & S.A., later on the Southern Pacific, was at Kansas and Main streets, just where the Southwest National Bank Building and the Downtowner Motel are located today. That was their first depot in El Paso. The EP. & N.E. which first used to run between here and Alamogordo, Tucumari, that way, had their little station down here off Texas Street. You would cross the S.P. to get in there. But it didn't stay long because the E.P. & S.W. bought 'em out. They had their passenger and freight depot right up there where the freight depot is today, where the depot is right off the freeway, where Acme Freight is. That was their first freight and passenger terminal. The Texas-Pacific had theirs down on Ochoa Street, and their tracks between First and Second streets. You see, the T.P. was intended to go on right through to the coast. That's what brought Mr. O. T. Bassett and Mr. Charles Moorehead, the founders of the State National Bank, to El Paso. Because they were working, in a way, with the T.P. at that time, or the Missouri Pacific, to see about a route west from here to the Pacific coast. Of course, the Southern Pacific was already building it, and that was knocked into a cocked hat when the S.P. got to the Sierra Blanca Pass first. That's where the T.P. actually stopped

construction. But they had bought right-of-way through town and up to the pass. Where all their present yards are and everything, they bought that before they came into El Paso, before they were stopped at Sierra Blanca. So that was the end of the Texas Pacific Railroad right there at Stanton and First streets. I've got a picture of it. I also have a picture of it where it enters Texas at Texarkana. So that's the beginning and the end. Then there was the T.P. depot, and then, of course, the Santa Fe down on Sixth and South Santa Fe streets. They had their freight and passenger depot there. About 1905 or 1906, I believe, the Union Station was opened, and they all went there. The Mexican Central, later on the National of México, used the Union Station, and a shuttle bus would bring them to their cars.

M: Were relations pretty good between the city and the railroad in the early days?

F: The railroads built the city. El Paso can never forget it, should it forget it. This is just like the advent of the Standard Oil Company here in El Paso. The railroads were a great catalyst, so was when the Standard Oil Company was building their refinery and their pipelines. It brought Phelps Dodge Copper Refinery, Texaco Company, and jointly they brought on the El Paso Natural Gas Company. Yes, that was the beginning of El Paso. The year before, the census showed El Paso with 700 people, and a year after the railroads got here we had 15,000. They weren't all the kind of people that were building the city, however, but they

were part of life. And railroad people, as our State National Bank tablet will show you, up there in Pioneer Plaza, they were the first people who really wanted to build homes, and send their children to school. They solidified the town, in other words.

M: They didn't settle in any particular place, Chris?

F: Yes, yes, pretty much so. They followed out Missouri Street, out Wyoming Street; and of course in the early times of the railroad, they were down around Myrtle and Texas. But they were right in that area, generally. Quite a few would move into the Highland Park area at that time. But you see, many of the railroad people at that time, the men, were bachelors. They were boomers. They'd work here for a while on one railroad until something happened they didn't like, or get fired, and go to another one. But it began to be where they would marry, settle down, and bring their families here about that time of life where they did want to settle down and stop booming, and they contributed a great deal. Many, many, fine families among them.

M: The railroads brought in the Chinese. I know that there used to be a fair-sized Chinatown in El Paso. It's substantially gone. But there aren't very many people who can recall it. Tell some things that you remember about Chinatown.

F: Of course, I can't remember it in its heyday.

M: When was its heyday?

F: Oh, I'd say the Chinese influence in El Paso began in about 1885, when all the construction work of that kind (railroads, etc.)

and all of these little branch lines up to these mines, had settled down. I remember first, South Oregon Street from Overland down as far as you want to go, and on Second Street down in there, we just had a sizable Chinese population. Very few women folk, because none of them had their wives with them at that time. Later on, some of them married some of the natives down around here, and later on some of the youngsters through México came up here with their wives. You see, because of the Oriental Exclusion Act of 1909, (midnight, November 1st 1909), anybody that hadn't entered the port of Seattle, Vancouver, or anywhere else on the West Coast (or any place for that matter) or was on a ship in the harbor waiting, they could come in. But any one that wasn't whether they were on the high seas or not, they made them turn around and go on back; because they all had plenty of advance notice that that was the deadline. So, there were no more that could come into the country. But many did ease in here through México. It was a much easier deal to smuggle in. And they settled here. They had stores; lots of them ran chinese laundries, good laundries, too. Restaurants, (we preferred anglocized, in a sense types of restaurants), and a few under general merchandising. But I can't recall too many in my time. I do know that whenever there was a public event (a parade or show or fiesta or carnival or what have you), those Chinamen were in there strong. They'd send up to San Francisco for the big dragon. That dragon was about 300 feet long, and they'd

stuff it full of these Chinamen, you know. They would carry it on their backs and fire would come out of it's mouth.

M: Do you recall any strong Chinese leaders, or any outstanding leaders in the community?

F: Well, there was a fellow named Mar-Ben; there was the Chew family, Mr. and Mrs. A.Y. Chew. Up in Lordsburg there was a very famous Chinaman called Big Fat, who owned half of the town, ran the town; and everybody either liked or disliked him. But most people did, as he was a commendable man. That was about the extent of it. You see, not having any wives here, the wives of those who did have wives were all back in China, and they'd send their money in regularly every month. And later on, some of the children that were born over there, prior to the Exclusion Act, could come in here, or did come in here. That's how you got some of the younger ones.

M: Do you think most of them left here, or did they just intermarry and fade away?

F: Well, quite a few of them went back home. And, when was the changeover? The fight over there when they got rid of the imperial type of government? Anyhow, many of them went back and attrition, as the fellow says, "the silent artillery of time", took care of a lot of them. And they just faded out of the picture or just were assimilated in one way or another through intermarriage and whatever. There's probably three or four that I remember here as a boy, and they are very old people today.

They made good citizens.

M: It is almost impossible to find pictures of them. There are just not any photos around.

F: No, they just weren't into it. They were busy with their business and weren't too much interested in that, and people weren't too much interested in them. They were just a part of the scheme of things.

M: How about the Negroes, Chris? I know that there was a scattering of Negroes; there couldn't have been many, but there must have been a small community. I would gather that they did not first settle there at Midway on Alameda.

F: Oh, no, they were right in this area down here along where the Chinamen were: Second Street, First Street, South Oregon, and South Mesa, right around that little enclave there. Most of them came in here with the railroads in later years, when the pull-man services were brought in. That's where they came from. Of course, many of them, later on, became porters; and their stop-over was here, and quite a few settled here. Many of them were in the Postal Service. Some of our finer, more respectable postmen were Negroes; Mr. Collins, his son later was a dentist here in El Paso, but he has moved away now. But that's how they all got started. And their population didn't increase to any extent until World War II. Following that, a number of them came in here. But the population was pretty much static up until that time.

M: How did they come to settle down there off Piedras and Alameda, would you think? Is there any particular reason?

F: Well, you see, later on many of them worked at the Southern Pacific shops. There were right off Piedras Street, and that was a natural area for them to come to move out to; those that worked in the shops. There were quite a few of them, and that started that nest out there. They had a dance place out there, a saloon, a bar, or whatever you want to call it, that had the most hilarious name I ever heard. This is it--"The Pep-Up and Nightingale Club." Now you figure it out.

M: Was it a notorious dive?

F: Well, they were quite an enthusiastic people along toward about midnight; they had their fun.

M: How about the other nationalities, like the Jewish?

F: Oh, the Jewish folks were in here early in the game. They came here at about the advent of the railroads. A lot of them came in here from the West Coast; not too many, but a number. Most of them came out of San Antonio country, some out of México. They came in there, learned the language, learned the people, and many of them settled in México, along with the Germans.

M: Other than Chinese and of course the Mexicans, were there any other groups here that spoke different languages, German or French?

F: No, they didn't; and let me digress a moment. That is what makes me feel really sad. We grew up in this isolated country out here, where life didn't have too much to offer--a rugged living. But we had stout-hearted men and women that put together a good community which we're enjoying today. We all lived here happily together, for better or for worse. We didn't always agree with the other fellow's nationality or his views; we tolerated those things, recognizing that perhaps they weren't too stout for ours. So, as to the

Mexican people, they were part of our life, and we were part of theirs. We just all grew up here together. As people of my age, we played in together neighborhoods and went to school together; we went to war together, came home and got married, and we'd go to each other's weddings and birthdays. And our children would play ball together and all kinds of athletics. And we just grew up together. When our sons went to war and our daughters got married, we'd go to each other's weddings and all that. Many of them, like many of ours, didn't do too well in life. Sometimes their fault, sometimes the natural whimsies and adversities came into the picture. But here we were, all busy as we could be, happily building our community. Building schools where the Latins went to and they improved. Sure, for the first few years of our mass schooling, as you might say, it was difficult to see any progress. So about thirty years ago, one generation had been to school a bit, so when their children came home from school, they were in a family that spoke an amount of English; and then as other generations came along, it all benefitted. Bowie High School was a great contributor to the advancement of the Mexican people, as well as to the community. There was a time when they were an economic liability; but they became an economic asset, many of them, as time went on. They are today. They became lawyers, doctors, technicians, educators, musicians, in the trades, craftsmen of all types and kinds. So here we come up to this day and time where life is supposed to be better, when they are preaching tolerance and good will towards men everywhere; and we have those that want to separate our Mexican friends, our fellow citizens, from us Anglos. It makes me feel very badly. Most of it is done for political reasons, I think.

Some groups think that they can enhance themselves. And I question a lot as to the sincerity; I wonder how deep it is, how real it is. Because they've come a long way; true, they have a long way to go. But look here, I would say that they are no longer a minority group; they are about 55% or 56% of our community, population-wise. We're about 44% or 45%. And each year their part of it is growing up. Look at your city hall, your courthouse, your businesses; who do you see working in these various good positions? And they're a good people, that's what burns me up. They're a good race of people. When they're once you're friend, you've got a friend. They are pleasant and delightful. At least those in my category, the middle walk of life; I don't know too much about the affluent or the big shots, as you might say. So I feel sad about it to see how deliberately some are trying to divide us up into Anglo and Latin. What the outcome is going to be ultimately, I don't know. But whatever it is, I can only hope for the best. Because it took a lot of people a long time, with a lot of work, to put this thing together called El Paso, and I'd hate to see it go down the drain. The El Paso of 1920 wouldn't tolerate the Ku Klux Klan; we didn't want any part of them. This was our home town, for all of us to live together. We ran them off. So I hate to see disturbing things like this come in. Tragically, some of our educators are fomenting some of this stuff, too. They should be ashamed of themselves, anybody should. So, pardon the little sermon.

Interview #3 with Chris P. Fox by Leon C. Metz and Ed Hamilton on September 12, 1972.

H: When were you born, Chris?

F: In 1897, El Paso, Texas, at 1210 E. San Antonio Street.

H: What were your first impressions of El Paso?

F: Like other young men of my time, growing up in a modest home, life was just one big panorama of good things and activity. Let me put it this way: You see, everything is contemporary, and as I have often said, life then was simple, our demands were simple, and maybe we were simple. But there was nothing blasé about it. Each day was another page, each day was another adventure, each day was something to look forward to. Everything we saw was new; every little advancement was looked upon with much wonderment. That's no answer to what it was, but it was just a great big experience.

H: Do you remember the first time you went to México, crossed the river, to Juárez?

F: I'd say I was six or seven years old. Going back and forth to México and Juárez then, there was nothing about it; it was just like going across the street. There was Customs, but no Immigration, no problems. Sunday afternoons you'd just hitch up the carriage and go over and visit your friends over there, and they, in turn, would come over on other occasions and visit you.

H: After you got older, after the turn of the century, did El Paso take on to the turn, to the transportation boom?

F: Mule cars, from the early '80s, were taken over by the electric trolleys in 1903, I believe. Soon we developed one of the largest and best urban transportation systems in this part of the country. I was on the first

electric streetcar; I remember that.

H: What did it feel like?

F: Down here at the Plaza everybody got on and away we went. It was quite an experience.

H: What about automobiles? Did El Paso take to those fast?

F: Rather slowly, not too rapidly. I would say that we never caught on to the automobile until about 1910. You see, there was an emergence there. The blacksmiths, the horses, the carriages, and the wagons ran the transportation system; and with the coming of the automobile, the blacksmith became the mechanic and the general store sold the gasoline in drums out on the sidewalk. And it just went along that way; it gradually came along.

H: But El Paso just didn't jump at it?

F: No, we were too far away from those things. And automobiles were quite expensive. We were a small, modest community.

H: How did El Paso react, and what kind of spirit did it show, towards the First World War?

F: Oh, hotter than a pistol. This has always been a great town for matching up to its responsibilities in a time of crisis. I doubt if there's any city in the nation that was more enthusiastic in assuming its duties of citizenship that our town was--World War I, World War II, any time. Of course now, things are loused up a little bit, but America will come back again.

H: Going back to the First World War, was there any big celebration when the soldiers left? Did they march? You know, before they left, were they presented with flags?

F: Well, we didn't have a big unit of our own here. We had a company of the National Guard, and it went in with the regular Army. And later on,

everybody went in, in implements, through the draft of whatever we called it then, or through the volunteer element. Of course we had, prior to World War I, a massive cantonment here at Deming of National Guardsmen from the eastern seacoast--some sixty thousand of them. Then along came Pershing's expedition into México. But those guardsmen were down here for training. They knew that we were going into World War I, I guess, and that's how it came. So we were always pretty well geared up.

H: Did any special celebration happen on Armistice Day?

F: I wasn't home then. I was away in the Service. But they say that "they put the big pot in the little one."

M: We have a picture in the Archives of a big celebration near El Paso High School.

F: That's right. I've seen that picture.

M: There are cars parked all around, horses and people by the thousands up there. Apparently there was some kind of Armistice celebration.

F: Oh, it was a massive one, for our town. And you know, during that time just immediately before and after World War I, all those debonaire, handsome young lieutenants from West Point and everywhere else, they gobbled up all the eligible girls and away they went!

H: We were then going into the '20s. Did El Paso take part in this so-called "'20s craze?" Of course, I think every period in history has its craze. But did El Paso go wild with the "Roaring '20s?"

F: Oh, we had those little funny suits. We looked like clowns, kind of like they do today, some of them. The women had those long, weird-looking dresses. Yes, they went in for it quite a bit. And that hoop-de-do dance, I forgot what it was.

M: How long did Stormsville last?

F: Until 1929.

M: What happened then?

F: Well, 1929 was a fabulous year here in El Paso, because in 1928 the Standard Oil Company of Texas (then known as the Paso-Tex Petroleum Company) came here and set up shop which really gave us a shot in the arm. We were kind of down a bit after World War I. Things were pretty seedy. Then that refinery brought along the Texaco refinery, and in turn, together, they brought along the Phelps Dodge Copper refinery (then called Nichol's Copper Refinery), and then followed the El Paso Natural Gas Company. So about 1929 or 1930, when the Depression was beginning to be felt in other parts, we were just poppin'; we were goin'. So Stormsville went by the board (I forget just who it was that bought it out), and Rim Road came into being. All those expensive houses up there, those beautiful, well-designed homes, came in '29 and part of '30. So that was the demise of Stormsville.

M: Do you remember Storms?

F: D. Storms? Oh, yeah.

M: How did he look?

F: He looked just like you'd think he'd look. He was a spare fellow as I recall him. Always wore a turned-up high celluloid collar, and looked just like a landowner of that time who was trying to get some money out of his poor tenants. I don't say he was all bad, by any means, but he didn't have a very good reputation, of being philanthropic (if there is such a word). As a lawyer, I don't know what his qualifications were.

M: Did you know Pete Kern?

F: Sure.

M: Could you tell me something about him?

F: My recollection of him is rather vague, but I remember his jewelry store and watch shop--Kern Jeweler. The big talk about town was when he took off and went to Alaska for fame and fortune. Before he left town, he had always been buying property, and a large portion of the property he bought was from a man named McKelligon. You perhaps have read a special story about him in our bank. We dug it all out in our Then and Now program. Then he [Kern] mapped out a bunch of things about what he was going to do. Present Kern Place was his, plus Crazy Cat Mountain, plus the land in back of it. In those long, cold winter nights up there in Alaska, he drew up a topographical map of it and he outlined all that he was going to do. And by gosh, he did; came pretty close to it. While he was up there, he married a woman named Madeline something. Madeline Street is named after her. Madeline Park is named for her. But it was a wedding that didn't last, and I'm not sure whether the two daughters were out of that wedlock or whether she had them from another marriage. But they both wound up here and went back east when their mother died; in fact, before their mother died. If they're still living, they're back in the New York area. Pete Kern was a pathetic soul. He made quite a bit of money when he came back from Alaska. He built a fantastic archway there at the beginning of the 2700 block of North Kansas Street; there's many pictures about it now. Tragically, it was torn down and with a little thought and care it could have been preserved. It was really something, I'll tell ya'. That was the entrance to Kern Place. But hard times fell upon Pete in later years, and he wound up in the old folks Masonic home between Fort Worth and Dallas. His mind had deteriorated quite a bit. One day when he was out stumbling around the tracks there, he got loose somehow or another, a T.P. train hit him and killed him. So

that was the tragic end of Pete Kern, who never hurt a soul in his life. He was a little pudgy fella as I recall him. About five-feet six or seven, round face, pixie face, and uh, well, he looked just like Pete Kern should look, too.

M: Do you remember anything about the old Hart's Mill area?

F: No, not too much. You see, the ladies of El Paso used to have occasions when they'd go out and visit the ladies at the Smelter. All of the officials' wives lived out there, and others, and they would go out in a buggy.

M: What is now Smeltertown?

F: Up Smelter Hill, on top where the plant is itself. There are a number of buildings up there where all these people lived. Some of them are still there. Always the manager lived there. Later on, the streetcar was built and that helped out. But even if you went out on a streetcar, you had to walk up to the plant. And the Smelter viaduct as we call it today (it was originally built as a tressle for the streetcar line) was put in to come over the railroad tracks. But the carriage road always followed the contour of the land. Of course, Courchesne lived further up and they had a settlement of their own, too, close by where the cement plant is today.

M: How about the old Army barracks and buildings? I know that there are only two left.

F: In my younger years there was the officer's quarters and the officer's club and a number of other buildings. But when the Globe Mills came in here and built their ice plant and grainery, they knocked down some. Later, when the Southwest Irrigated Cotton Growers came in, they knocked down some. Gradually, why one thing or another took the attrition. As they say, the old silent artillery of time brought them down. Hart's Mill was there. Nobody paid too much attention to it in my time; it was

H: How did Prohibition come into all of this in El Paso?

F: Oh, we never knew anything about Prohibition.

H: Because of the border?

F: Yes.

M: Weren't there many gun battles fought down there?

F: Oh, God, my, yes! Oh, that was something else. I thought you were talking about our normal way of life.

H: No, I was talking about the fact that because it was a border town, did you see a lot of shady characters coming in?

F: Yes. Later, as Prohibition advanced along in the mid-'20s, they began to develop quite a bootlegging business or rum-running business across the border--quite lucrative. A lot of Juárez fortunes were amassed then. Of course, those that were participating then are now distinguished and fine people in the community, so we don't bring that up. But that was followed by the hijackers, and that's when things were really rough. That was during the Pretty Boy Floyd days and the Capones and all of that, when you no longer had a nice "legitimate" rum-runner. He was pretty well out of business. A man could go over there and take a thousand dollars, and he used to be able to get about 12 dollars a case; anyhow, he'd get a hundred cases of whiskey for a thousand dollars, or a little bit more, and he'd have it brought across the river to him on mules at someplace. And he would load up his cars and away they'd go--if they weren't caught, of course. But later on, when the hijackers came into the picture, he'd try the same thing, and the hijackers would let him get his whiskey over here and they'd take it away from him, or kill him and rob it. They'd do it there or further down the road, and it was really bad. But, like all things, society demanded that law and order

should come about, and it did.

M: Who was sheriff during that time?

H: I was doing the sheriffing part of that time.

H: Did you have any run-ins with them yourself?

F: Yeah, and it was a mess.

H: Just a point. My grandfather was a fed agent and I have pictures of the broken stills and the dead police dogs. Now, we've talked about approximately a 20 year period, almost a 30 year span. From the time we started, you were talking about everyday and how you looked to the next day as another adventure, and you didn't worry about 10 years from now. In this period of time, with the influx of the '20s, the First World War, Prohibition and all of that, how would you describe the change in daily life? Did it change abruptly?

F: No. You see, and I don't say this with any disrespect, my growing up days and on up well into manhood and older manhood, were occupied with work. It was the order of the day, and everybody worked; everybody was busy. And they all had their duties of the day. But the remarkable thing about that period was their great, great interest in civic endeavors for the community's future and well being. Not only men, but women as well. They were dedicated. There might be little clubs and groups, but they all faded away when the fella rang the bell that said, "We gotta go"-- and away we went, united. And it was a time in the life of the nation when we were emerging, if you want to put it that way, from the rural life, from the frontier life out here, into a more sophisticated way of life. And the emergence was slow, it was gradual. We were able to assimilate it and we didn't have a lot of things jammed down our throats from other sources. It was our life; we were living and conforming with the

laws of the land and society, and we were just moving along. It was quite interesting.

H: Do you think by the end of this period, perhaps because of radio becoming more popular, this had something to do with it?

F: Oh, definitely.

H: You were saying that people in the early days were concerned with the city itself. But once you got into the Depression era, you find that people in all cities think more on a national scale, and the cities sort of lost out.

F: Well, we always had two very fine newspapers, and it's not too hard to remember that they were generous with their extras to bring us up to date with the latest news that they could get. But the radio came in, I would say, in the early '30s, somewhere in there, and I guess it did change things a bit. But it was just a way of life. Then, of course, the automobile was something that changed things around, too. But it was a gradual emergence that we could assimilate and not lose our family life or sense of well-being or sense of balance. We didn't go overboard; we were a steady, sturdy people, in a community that we felt had a future. And the only people that were going to bring about this future were ourselves. We weren't leaning on somebody else. It was quite a go-around. Wonderful.

H: If you were writing a history right now, or say, writing the pageant script that I will be working on, are there any very special names of important people that had a really important effect on the growth of the El Paso of this period, up until 1930?

F: Starting from when?

H: Starting from 1915, say a 15 or 20 year period. Was there a strong mayor that was in a long time?

F: There were some, but it's surprising how it was such a team. They might not have all liked each other, they might not have all gone to the same church, and maybe they didn't drink the same brand of whiskey or have the same habits; but when it came to El Paso, they just kind of melted there into a solid mass. Oh, yes, we had the Schwartz family, we had the Davis family, we had the Burges family, and the Shelton family. Oh, I'll tell you the best way to get that clearly in your mind would be to go down to city hall and look at the names of the mayors from 1900, the turn of the century, up until 1930, and in there you get a good cross section of the family picture, the community picture. So it's hard to single them out. Sure, there were outstanding ones. There was Félix Martínez, Mr. A. Courchesne, there were the Dudleys; there were others that were all big people in their way, and all good thinkers and producers. Many of those fellas got together and they really brought us the Elephant Butte Dam; they brought us other things. But they always had a kind of unifying effect wherever they went--all for the town, all for the good things. And don't underestimate the women. They played a terrific part in bringing about a better day in El Paso. They used to say, "All right, you brought us out here to this God-forsaken desert country. That's fine. We're your wives, we're the mothers of your children, we're going to do the best we can. But now you've got to forget the cash register for a while and think that we are entitled to a better way of life than we are having right now. We are entitled to some of the benefits of hard work and effort. We're entitled to a good religious background, education attainment, the social and cultural side of life." And by gosh, they hammered at it and brought it forth. And to them go the orchids; there is no question about it. We write glowingly about the holligans, the tramps

and the shoot-'em-up people and all of that. But, anyhow, I hope someday some talented person is going to write a saga, a story, about the women of El Paso and have it cover from about 1880 to about 1910. I think that was the formative period in the life of our city. So, anyhow, pardon me for digressing on that.

H: That's what I wanted.

F: You can look at the Women's Club roster, too, and get some important names.

H: Today in different areas of the country, they have different pastimes. For instance, you go into Ohio and bowling is the national sport. Here I noticed that baseball is very big. But during those early days, what would you say were some of the fun pastimes, without television or anything else?

F: For the adult life?

H: I would say for the family life. Did they do a lot of picnicking?

F: Well, a modest amount of that, back and forth. We had these tremendous bosques then, on the other side of the river, which were veritable forests. Women enjoyed their church-connected activities and the social clubs that went with it, and the reading groups. Plus the whist players. For the men, golf came into this town early in the game, and horseback riding. It was just an overall spread of simple, wholesome activities of the day which our community provided. Not too many, however; but people were so doggoned busy then, working hard. Men and women and all; children, too. Recreational aspects? There never really seemed to be too much. I guess a closer analysis of it will probably develop some things, but I can't think of anything outstanding.

H: I mean, today Americans almost seem to make their hobbies a lifetime.

- F: Oh, yes. They work at it. We've got some young folks that would come here on Monday morning just whipped to a nub, and they don't get rested until Friday evening!
- H: Okay, we're up to the Depression. Did the Depression hit El Paso badly?
- F: I'd say no. You see, El Paso had a well diversified economy. A modest economy, if you want to put it that way, but well diversified. And we never really hurt. A fella said one time that you didn't have too much to start of with, so you didn't have much to give up. But we were never over-expanded. Oh, sure, there were some hardships. But I can't say, really, that it was a grueling, hard, grisly, experience, like people talk about--which may have existed in some of the larger industrial areas of the United States. It wasn't that way here.
- M: Were there soup lines like we see in other places? Were there tramps coming through the town?
- F: Somebody might tell you that there were soup lines; there might have been a little of that. But you want to remember that during that period of time, from 1930 to 1940, the records indicate that there was an expropriation from El Paso to México City of some 20,000 alien Mexicans. They would have been the ones, under ordinary circumstances (if there hadn't been a place for them to go), who would probably have been a tremendous problem, with the soup lines and stuff like that. But, really, you'll have some that'll say, "Oh, gee, it was tough here." Well, everything is relative again, but I don't think it was. My family was a modest family, as were most of the people that we knew. Sure, we had to tighten up, and some of the things we then thought were extravagant (my gosh, today you wouldn't think about it at all today), we had to forgo. But it wasn't too tough.

- H: When you read about the history of the area, you go back to the 49ers, and of course the area got flooded with 49ers going to California. Can you recall any situations of migrant workers during the Depression that were floating around the country? Maybe they wouldn't stop too long, but they did go through and build shack cities. Did this happen?
- F: Well, I would say so in the early '30s, although it really wasn't too much the Depression. We were affected by the dust bowl area migration up in southeastern Colorado, Kansas, and the panhandles of Oklahoma and Texas. That was really rough. A lot of those people loaded up their model T Fords, put the bedsprings on top, stuffed the children in the cars and away they went. And we had many families who camped out behind the billboards, and we'd take them out food and groceries and things and fix them up and get them on their way. But none of these people were looking to come to El Paso. They were on their way elsewhere.
- H: During the Roosevelt era, did El Paso have much to do with WPA or other government agencies of the time?
- F: Not as much perhaps as other communities did, and in some ways, not as much as we should have. About in the middle of the WPA business, when it was blooming and booming, we elected a mayor named Harlan who was highly controversial, and there was a constant squabble between him and those who favored most of the parts of the WPA program. The city was putting up certain parts of it, you know. We didn't have too much of it compared to other communities. So we never really got into it in a really big way, although we had it. One of the biggest things that came out of it was the paving of Scenic Drive. That's about the one thing that everybody can remember and think about. School fences were built and other things. But again, it didn't become a big business.

entertainment?

F: The movie was a terrific entertainment feature in this town. We had a lot of them; they played a big part. We were a town that enjoyed the theatre, and we had many fine shows--even since the turn of the century. You see, it was a long hop from Los Angeles and the Pacific coast to the East Coast and the Gulf Coast; and we had a very fine opera house here, the Texas Grand. The troupes would book a stop-over here, and we had the greatest shows on earth here in big bunches--and I mean opera stars of great stature. So we had a lot of that entertainment, and we used to enjoy baseball quite a bit. But in that period of time the greatest entertainment features we had were the movies and the theatre.

H: They followed the movies ardently.

F: Yeah, boy!

M: Who was your favorite movie star, Chris?

F: Oh, gosh, I don't know. I was very fickle. Oh, yeah, there were a lot of them. We had these serials, you know; they'd go on for weeks. No, I don't know if I had any particular movie star. I liked the two Barry-more brothers--pretty robust characters.

H: Did many of the stars come here? Did they make many visits?

F: Oh, yes!

H: Did they cause quite a turmoil when they arrived?

F: Well, no. There wasn't as much hoop-la then as there was a little later on--the squealing youngsters and the teenagers. The theatrical people were treated with respect, and there wasn't too much of that. In fact, they kind of held themselves aloof in a sense. For the two or three years that I worked down at the Texas Grand Theatre as a stage hand on Saturdays and Sundays, when these bigger shows would come in, I remember many

of them: Galli-Curce, Pavlova, and the other light opera people. But they never mingled with the local gentry. There was the great Scottish comedian, Sir Harry Lauder, and of course others that would come along. And some people looked upon people of the stage as not quite exactly someone that you'd want to have in your home, which wasn't right all together; but of course you did have your picky and choosey people. But I don't think that the performers wanted to have too much to do with us, either. Evelyn Edward Shaw came to town. You know, she came to be quite a star after that shoot-up in New York, when Harry Shaw shot up Stanford White. And, oh boy, when she came to town there was a lot of emotion. "Oh, why did they let that woman come to town?" But they had about four shows and you couldn't get in there with a fish hook!

M: Did you meet here, Chris?

F: Oh, sure.

M: What were your impressions of her?

F: Well, I'll tell you. I helped fasten up her corset strings! (Laughter) How do you like that? I was going along there in back of the stage when the star's door opened and she said, "Come here young man. Hoist on these strings, will you?" I cinched them up and tied them up and away she went.

M: Did she strike you as a pretty nice frau? When I say "nice" I mean someone who is comfortable to be around.

F: No, she was a very mature, worldly soul, I would imagine. You never think about those things on the stage. From a personal standpoint it was just another world. Pavlova, that poor gal, her show would get here in the morning and she would dance all day long, practicing, so that at night when she was on stage she was "the great Pavlova." And that's the only

way she would have it. The others, they were artists, they were perfectionists; they loved their work and they gave the public a run for their money--never chisled down, didn't cut a scene short, never did anything like that. Every time they put on a show, it was the best they had to offer.

H: Just for personal interest, when you went to see Pavlova, how much would you pay for a ticket?

F: Gee, I don't know, I never bought one. I always worked at the theatre. Oh, one more thing. During that emergence period of the movies when we were coming into the big melodramas, the big presentations, the one that came here and played for a whole, solid week was The Birth of a Nation. That was tremendous, and it had a lot of stage props to go with it.

H: How did they use stage props?

F: Well, when they would be showing a scene, let's say it was a battle scene (that was before sound), they'd have an orchestra back there with nothing but drums and bugles, and away they would go. Rifle shots and pistol shots would polish it up. Of course, later on, sound took care of that.

H: I've seen The Birth of a Nation, but I've never seen that.

F: Speaking of movies, pre-and-post sound times, as soon as they got the go for sound movies, a lot of these people were wiped out of the movie business--not because of them lacking ability to act, but their voices weren't any good. You'd see a great, big, robust slug-em-out-and-knock-em-down character and he'd have a little, high, pip-squeak voice. He'd ruin it for everybody. You'd expect him to have a voice like a bullfrog. So that had a lot to do with it.

H: Well, we're going up to World War II now. How did El Paso react to World War II? I imagine that it was as shocked as anyplace else in the country.

- F: It really knocked us back on our heels. But you see, we were always much closer the the military side of our national life, because El Paso and the military mingled--more so than most communities in the nation. Of course the soldier of that time, the enlisted man, was a professional soldier, and he stayed pretty much to himself. But the officer corps always mingled in El Paso. They were part of our social life, and they made their contributions too in many other ways. So we were always kind of close to what things were going on. We weren't just living in an isolated place, 500 miles from any military installation. We were kind of... I don't want to say, "In the know," but these things were closer to us. Pearl Harbor? We knew things were tight and rugged around the world, but we never expetted that. But we went right to it, and the town came through in good style. We had a group of women, not too many of them, headed up by Mrs. W.K. Ramsey. The draft boards were in the Chamber of Commerce Building, and I was a member of the Chamber of Commerce then. Sometimes three times a week, the women would be down there at five o'clock in the morning, getting the coffee going, and the doughnuts going. The draftees would come in to get their papers or one thing or another, and the ladies would give them a cup of coffee, give them some doughnuts. Old Joe Evans, bless his heart, he was the head of the Gideon Bible deal, and he would give them all a bible. I would give them a litte share of yak-yak, and the others would also. But that group, I guess for four years, as long as the war was on, they were down there every morning. I mean, others were doing great things, too, but that is just one that stands out in my mind.
- H: Did wartime El Paso have anything that was strikingly different, perhaps, than any other war city? I'm sure the women were working.

F: Oh, yes, the usual run-of-the-mill of that. No, I can't say that we did anything outstandingly different than any other community. As I say, again, we were close to the military; the soldier life, the military life, was interwoven with ours. So we just kind of took it in stride, only we stepped up the pace a bit.

M: How about the military? Did it really expand during the war years?

F: Oh, I'll say it did. You see, prior to World War II, Fort Bliss was a cavalry post. Prior to World War I, it was really an infantry post. But along early in the war, 1940 or '41, this anti-aircraft artillery was coming into the picture, so they moved in with force; and of course the horses were there, the cavalry was there. And in 1942, the word came out to get rid of those horses and get on foot, and they were an infantry outfit. They couldn't quite go for being called infantrymen, so what they said was "dismounted cavalry." They went to the Pacific, then the anti-aircraft artillery expanded and ballooned out and there was a lot of training activity going on here; and it was quite a go. Of course, another great impact on us was the transcontinental movement of military, by rail, through here. Airplanes were of no great consequence then for transporting people. But our Union Station was a busy place. We had women folk down there, taking care of those things. It was just a great big ball of fire, I mean to tell you. The big problem was to try and keep the young recruit, the young soldier, from exploring the possibilities of Juárez. And that was a chore.

H: Did they tighten up the border because of that?

F: At different times, they sporadically would. They'd declare Juárez off limits to get things kind of straightened out. But our life, to a great extent, was maintained normal.

- M: When I came in here in 1948, with the Air Force, as I recall by eleven o'clock at night we had to back. If they caught you in Juárez after eleven, you might as well dig a hole and bury yourself! We did not spend the night in Juárez.
- F: You've got to remember, there was a great German influence in México, and that required quite a bit of strong-style intelligence surveillance of things.
- H: After the war, did El Paso immediately shift back to the normal pace? Did you go with the other war boom?
- F: After World War II, we had a terrible letdown in all phases of our business for about three or four years there. It was pretty tough. Following World War II, we had been behind on our housing business quite a bit. Of course, the war slowed it down and there was a terrific backlog of construction; and it just started off, jet propelled, and it's still going on. Our economy expanded, different things came into our lives; the clothing business among them. Of course, the great shot in the arm was just before World War II, 1928 through 1930, when the Standard Oil Company came here, and later on the Phelps Dodge Copper Refinery; and then El Paso Natural Gas, the expansion of railroad activity, airline activity. And being at the crossroads of America, we benefitted from all of that. But in more recent years we have stabilized our industrial aspects and that's the way it is today. What we lost in territorial trade because of our neighbors growing up in these smaller communities, we made up in other things.
- H: In 1950, El Paso had a county centennial. Can you tell me anything outstanding about it?
- F: Oh, it was a nice affair. It didn't tear things apart very much. It was a modest affair, and I know that several people did an awful lot of work on

it. But I can't remember anything heroic about it.

M: I remember a stagecoach coming through town.

F: Yeah, things such as that. It started down in the county here. It wasn't perhaps what it should have been, and it certainly isn't what you all are going to produce next year. (Laughter)

H: How did the city involve itself? Did it get mass participation? Did we involve everybody or did we sophisticate ourselves?

F: No, it was handled on an amateur basis, in an overall way. It was a modest thing, as I remember. The biggest thing that took place was that barbeque and pitch out across from where the El Paso National is today. But we had a barbeque, and finally the wagon came to town, and it started out down the road. They did produce a very fine brochure, which involved a great amount of effort. But it was a very modest deal.

H: Okay, now we're coming to more recent times. We could go into the Korean conflict, but I think El Paso reacted to that much as they did to any other of the conflicts. What about peacetime El Paso, during the period after the Korean conflict in the '50s? Did the boom keep going? Did we have any powerful people that really carried it through?

F: Following World War II, we had a number of outstanding mayors. Their administrations had guidance and dedication. They were natives of this area and they looked upon it as a challenge. They did a terrific job. Everybody to his own, of course, as to which one was the best; but we're fortunate in that. Then we had (I shouldn't say this, perhaps) a dynamic Chamber of Commerce in this respect--they weren't afraid of any problems that arose. They looked upon their job as being that of a keeper of things, and they weren't afraid to get into an altercation or a controversy if they thought it affected the public good. They did a great job, a lot of those

men of that day and time. So it was just a continuance of things. But today--now, let me digress here a moment. This seems to be the time of "Me." Everybody's so busy with so many things, their time is too diversified, they're split up in their interests and their activities and their devotion, so that it's kind of hard to get them together. That's the reason I'm looking forward to the unifying influence that I think is going to come out of this 100th anniversary celebration of El Paso. It's going to make us count our blessings, give us horizons to look at, to see where we've been and where we're going to go. We have a terrific heritage that was put together by great people. They made many sacrifices, too. So it's just the beginning of the next hundred years.

H: The last ~~comment~~ I have is a comparison. Just out of personal interest, if you had to pick, what would be El Paso's biggest boon and El Paso's biggest problem?

F: Well, it's kind of hard to analyze; some people won't agree with me. I think El Paso's biggest boon is our location. I've always said that. It's location is one of our outstanding assets. Others would say that it's the climate, others would say that it's this, that, or the other. But if we weren't where we are--and this goes right back to old gold rush days that you talked about--if we weren't here at this pass of the north, if we weren't 820 miles from Los Angeles, if we weren't 812 miles from Houston, if we weren't 1240 miles from New Orleans, and if we weren't 1230 miles from San Francisco and so on, and that far from Denver and Kansas City... . Our location has been a great boon to us, a great lasting boon, and I think it will so continue. All right, we're surrounded by a lot of hungry country, I'll grant you that. But, still, in time, that will develop and be productive and be a part of our own. Of course, others will say that our

greatest asset is our people. Well, of course! But people can't do something without a place to do it in, and this place is whittled out of a little oasis in the desert, believe me. Now, detriment or handicap? The biggest one as I see it is that today our development has been a little lagging. You know, the difference between first and second class is about as thick as a postage stamp--a burning urge to go first class. You see, when you have the desire to go that way, you drag everything up with you, you pull it all up. There's a lot of things that we tolerate today and accept as a way of life, which doesn't have to be. Strangers come here, visitors come here, and the biggest thing that they damn us about is that they say that our town isn't very clean. I'm not talking about morally clean, I'm talking about physically clean. So, I think our biggest handicap right now is that we have a lot of people living off El Paso and we're short on those who are living for El Paso. We're right there in a tight cramp. And I don't expect everybody to go around carrying a sack on their back, or doing this, that and the other; but we're in that tight place. But the future of this community is absolutely what we want to make it. We're right here in a strategic location and the sky's the limit in many respects. Oh, sure, people say, "You don't have enough water." There's no community in the United States that has enough water, but we have ample supplies for the foreseeable future, to take care of anything but heavy industry. So I think it's a great day, and I'm looking forward to this recounting of the past hundred years because it's going to show a lot of people that there were many great people then.

H: You were talking about the difference between first class and second class. How would you grade El Paso's pride right now? If I were writing a show, where would I attack to approach a point of making pride? The problem I

see is this--let me give a little background to it. For instance, since I'm here until June, it is my job to become an El Pasoan, it is my job to be proud of El Paso, and it is my job to learn to love El Paso. There is no other way that I can take my job. But when you are talking about first class and second class, you have a transient element because of the fort and everything; they have no reason to be proud of El Paso. So I'm asking you, how do you grade the pride in El Paso? Do you think most of the people are proud of it? If not, how do you think we can approach it?

F: I'm so glad you brought that up. That's the reason that I've been so interested in the 100th anniversary. I don't know of any one thing that we could be doing now that would give people a greater pride in their community and challenge them for the days and years ahead--great problems and all of that. The people say, "That's fine, but we had no part of it." But those people of that day and time set the stage for us to be here today. Now, are we as good, are we as dedicated, are we as capable? Are we willing to make the necessary sacrifices? Are we willing to put back in this place some of what we've been taking out of it for all these years? It's there--and I think this one will acquaint people with its history, with its historical artifacts. I think that it will be great. Now, let me tell you more; let me explain one more thing. I have found that in the last ten years more people are interested in the historical aspects of our community than any other period that I can remember. Why is it? Who are those people? They are the newcomers, the relative newcomers. They want to know why this and why that. They're intensely interested. And if you get them tied in with the life and the thinking, and the warp and the woof of the town, pretty soon they just want to have a part in that town of tomorrow. And through them, good things will come. So that's

my one thing. I think through this anniversary deal good things will come; but it might be a little tough going to get it off the ground. Here Leon can tell you about our historical society with the great work that he's been doing during the last year and a half of his two-year term. The thing has mounted. We have people attending the meetings now that never have attended them before. Because the programs are good? Of course. But they still want to know why, how what was, and why it is here today. What happened then? Gee, it's terrific. And you've got a chance too, kid. A good boot in the pants.

M: What do you see as the future of El Paso, Chris? We're coming to our 100th year. What do you think El Paso is going to be like in 2072?

F: Of course, there's so many things that affect the community that it has no control over, with the increasing part that Washington plays in the life. El Paso, if it's properly handled in the next century--I can't project a century, but within the next thirty, forty, fifty years, it'll settle down and get that desire to go first class. And it will become a city of destiny, in a sense. But everything it does is going to be something that is going to call for national attention. It's going to do things a little bit better, it's going to take full advantage of all the potentials that we have here--climate and otherwise--to extol it. And I can't see anything but a good picture. Now, I don't see any million people here in another ten years, I don't see anything like that at all. In fact, I hope there isn't, because we are not ready as a community, either in our thinking or our resources, to assimilate a million people and support them and have a great community. We just couldn't stand that. We haven't got what it takes, in other words, to do it yet. We have a lot of people who are hitting a blow here in town. This one's

interested in this, this one's interested in that; but we've got to have it unified. And this anniversary is going to do it. What do you think?

M: Actually, I wouldn't want to see a million people here either. My God, the town's getting so big now that one can't get from one end to the other. I'm not concerned about the water, and I'm not concerned about the resources. I'm simply concerned that there are people who do not regard El Paso as a town of destiny. They really don't think of it in one way or another.

F: No, each day is a day unto their life, and that's it. But I believe that if we're smart, and I give us credit for being smart, out of this centennial deal far more good benefits will come than we imagine today. I can't see it any other way. That's the reason why I've always been interested in it. Okay, you can see things around here--the Civic Center and the other problems that we have had, perhaps like the stadium and other things. But it is the way we handle them. And, you know, you like to be all things to all men, but there comes a time when the governing bodies of the community, if they are fit for the job, have just got to stand above the fear of reprisals at the polls. Daley is a good example of that in Chicago. I'm not looking upon him as mayor, but as a citizen. So we've got our good citizens in the weeds. They'll come forth; they'd better.

M: I agree 100% with that bit about taking pride and going first class. I say that this is what's going wrong with the country today.

F: Well, tonight I'm going to meet with the El Paso Illuminating Society. I'm going to have a little visit with them and chat a little bit, and I'm just going to hit them tonight about going first class. When you stop to think about going first class, what does it mean? It just

means the difference, that's all. I didn't coin that expression. An old county clerk here by the name of Greet was a kind of versatile character if there ever was one; quite something, too. He always said that the difference between going first class and going second class was the thickness of a postage stamp. There's just a little bit of difference in there, but it is a big difference.

M: I guess that will do it, Chris. We've touched a lot on the military, but I'd like to do a tape just on the military. I know that you were a civilian aid for the Army for a long time. I'd want to talk on this, but I'd like to talk about everything that you did for the Army, everything that you were connected with. Think about it for a week.

[Interview #4 with Chris P. Fox by Leon C. Metz on September 26, 1972.]

M: What's the first thing that you recall about Ft. Bliss? I guess it would have been down by the old Hart's Mill site.

F: No, that was before I was born. They moved the Hart's Mill over to the place on Lenoria Mesa in 1893, and it's been there ever since.

M: What is your first memory of Ft. Bliss? A building, a person, an event?

F: My first memory of Ft. Bliss is escorting my mother out on the streetcar to the end of the Ft. Bliss streetcar line; she and another lady. My father and the other person's husband were out of town. I escorted them to the annual charity ball, which was held on the top deck of one of the big barracks there. They rooted all the poor soldier boys out of there and they festooned the place and turned it into a gala gathering spot. And all of the town's lovelies as well as some of the great and near great were assembled, with an Army band furnishing the music to swing the light fantastic and drink punch on behalf of dear old charity. Then, when the thing was over and I was thoroughly bored, why, they got back and put us into those big hacks and carried us back to the end of the streetcar line. A lot of people, those on the affluent side, had their own carriages, and I think a few popped out there in their automobiles--the more adventurous ones.

M: The whole town must have turned out.

F: Oh, yes; but there wasn't too many to turn out, then. But they were there.

M: Three or four hundred, maybe?

F: Oh yeah, there were that many. And they had the place all spotless and cleaned up, you know. I don't know where the poor soldier boys

slept that night. Let's see, who would have been the commander out there along about that time? Well, I would say it would have been Colonel Hoyt; that would have been about 1906 or 1907. Colonel R. W. Hoyt.

M: What did they do with you youngsters then, while old folks were dancing?

F: Oh, not too much. That was just it; just sit around and talk was all we did. That was my first recollection of Ft. Bliss. And it was a long walk.

M: What's your first recollection of the military here? Not at the post, but here in town?

F: The first recollection of any consequence was in 1909, during the Taft-Diaz celebration, on October 15th or 16th. They turned out all the garrison, and they brought in several troop trains full of soldier boys with their horses from down at Ft. Sam Houston. They lined the downtown streets: South El Paso Street to the river, around the Plaza, and everywhere else; San Francisco Street down as far as the Chamber of Commerce, just boot-to-boot. There were soldiers everywhere. They were only here for a day. They came in during the night preceeding the ceremony and bivouacked somewhere close by, up there in Cleveland Square Park, I believe, many of them. And of course, they had the facilities at Ft. Bliss. They came down and took care of a lot of it. Then that night, when the affair was over about midnight (when the big party was over in Juárez), why, the soldier boys and the presidents all took off. President Taft went to the West Coast, I believe, and these fellas loaded up and went back home to Ft. Sam Houston, tired and sleepy, I guess. So that's the first big thing that I remember.

M: You mentioned Ft. Sam Houston; there just weren't enough soldiers here?

- F: That's right. There weren't enough of them to furnish the security. You see, that was the first time in the history of the United States, as well as Mexico, that a president had ~~ever~~ left the boundaries of his own country while in office--Diaz coming to El Paso and Taft going over to Juarez.
- M: Okay. As you know, Chris, a person can be proud of big things that he does, or even little things that he does. You've done a lot for the Army over the years. What would you say was your most proud accomplishment? I'm not necessarily asking you for your largest accomplishment, but your most proud accomplishment. There might be several. If there are, go ahead and touch on all of them.
- F: I guess it was the job of planning and executing the Ft. Bliss Centennial.
- M: That was in 1948. What do you mean when you say "planning and executing"? Just what part did you have in it?
- F: The whole business.
- M: It was a civilian undertaking then?
- F: Oh, no, it was a joint venture with the Army, Ft. Bliss, Washington, and the Chamber of Commerce of the city of El Paso. Since you asked me, I planned the whole program from soup to nuts.
- M: How did you get involved?
- F: Well, the Armed Forces Committee of the Chamber of Commerce, with Mr. George G. Matkin(now Chairman of the Board of the State National Bank) and Mr. Maury Schwartz, got to thinking about something that would be good to show the Army in general, here and elsewhere, that this was a military town that liked and appreciated the armed services of our country, particularly the Army, in this instance. We wanted to frankly tell them about ourselves, so that they would hear about it up in Washington, because there was a tendency then, you know, to shut down military establishments, and each congressman and senator was

lolligagging around, trying to latch onto some troops of their own. So the Centennial was born that way, not selfishly. What brought about the timing of it was that we happened to notice that General Order No. 58, which established Ft. Bliss, was issued in 1848, and we just went from there. General Homer was the commander at Ft. Bliss; I would say that he could be looked upon as the founder of the modern day Ft. Bliss. He was quite a guy.

M: How about other things that you're proud of?

F: Well, the other thing was this--and again I'll bring Mr. Schwartz into it. Maury Schwartz was a tower of strength with that Ft. Bliss Centennial. He was the general chairman and he was a great one. We had two of those housing things along about the middle of the '50s when they were trying to get housing established on military reservations, and they were making it possible through the Wherry Plan. Well, we had to put up a tough battle because the real estate people in El Paso, house builders and others, thought that a permanent barracks would just empty out a lot of houses in El Paso if a lot of them were built at Ft. Bliss. I was here at the bank then and Ponder was Mayor. He realized that if we didn't have a permanent establishment there at Ft. Bliss with plenty of permanent housing (troop as well as officer housing) that we would get passed up in Washington. When you have a lot of permanent housing of all kinds on installations, it's only natural that the command on the top side plus the congressional committees will say, "Gee whiz, we can't let all of that go to waste." So they've got to keep it occupied. About that time, the missile business was building up and we had an awful lot of opposition. There were some banks in this town opposed to it and we lost a lot of customers because of it. We took the position that that's the way it had to

be for the future of the town and the good of the town, and history has proven that we were right. It was a long, tough, and hard battle, but we won out. Even those who opposed us at that day and time realized that they were wrong. Then the other thing that amounted to something was that shortly after General Homer got here in about 1946, the military wanted to extend their ranges up into New Mexico because of the missile business building up; they needed more area. There was a little enclave where White Sands was, so the deal was to get the corridor about 40 or 50 miles wide and about 140 miles long, which would extend from Ft. Bliss to Carrizozo, New Mexico. That job was turned over on the military's side to General Homer. We got good help in Texas from Ken Rehab. At General Homer's request, I accompanied the committee, which was made up of himself and some other military people, plus the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, to preside at meetings at Alamogordo, Las Cruces, Socorro, and Carrizozo. Believe me, those were tough meetings. Every rancher that had land where the proposed missile range was to be had cattle there with grass up to their stomachs. The oil prospectors knew that in the next week they would bring in gushers. The hard rock miner and the prospector who had been there for years on the hungry side knew that his next stick of dynamite was going to open a big vein. They fought tooth and toenail, but we finally got the range. They came out of it all right, many of them smelling like roses. So we got the land and that made possible the White Sands Missile range of today.

M: When and how did you get involved with the military?

F: As sheriff.

M: How was that?

F: Well, Ft. Bliss was in the county, under the jurisdiction of the military force at Ft. Bliss, plus the Sheriff's Department of El Paso County. The

city limits didn't extend that far, so all of the many problems that came up in a day, naturally the military would be in contact with the sheriff's department, through the Provost Marshall and later on through the command and different things out there that brought us rather close together. That's what brought on the initial relationship.

M: Can you recall the first committee that you ever sat on for the military?

F: I guess the first one was when we were trying to get the housing, to get the land called Logan Heights today. As the war buildup came along, El Paso and the Chamber of Commerce (I was not in it then) were desirous that we receive recognition as a logical place to train troops. We had a pretty good record of it, preceeding World War I, but the military came back with the proposition of, "Yeah, that's all great, but you don't have enough land out there to do business." Now, this other proposition about getting the missile range was separate from this--this preceeded it. So the Chamber of Commerce very wisely set up a committee headed by none other than a very fine citizen by the name of Clifton G. Whyburn. He was in the insurance business here (and he died not too long ago). It was quite a battle getting people to understand that we had to have that land for the future of the Army, the war effort, and the future of El Paso. It was Logan Heights and some adjacent property. The largest part of it was the section belonging to the Logan family. But there were other properties and it was quite a hassle, but finally it was brought about. But that was the first committee I sat on. I was sheriff, too.

M: About what year?

F: I'd say about 1940 or 1941.

M: What was the funniest thing that ever happened between you and the military?

F: One time a very hard-bitten general at Ft. Bliss, who later on became a

four star general, was very prominent in certain social circles here--the country club group. I was sheriff and I had a phone call one evening about six o'clock. He said, "Fox?" That always burned me up to heaven, to have anybody call me "Fox." He said, "Fox, this is Lear." "Yes, sir." "You've got some mighty dumb people working for you." I said, "Well, I guess we all have our share, General. What's your problem?" "One of your men contends that we ran through a red light at the corner of the crossroads here and he gave my driver a ticket." I said, "That's really too bad." He said, "Well, what are you going to do about it?" "Oh, not anything. Why don't you have your Col. Batchelor (Vance Batchelor, he's now teaching school in New England) call me in the morning and let's see what this is all about." He said, "Why do I have to have him call you? I'm talking to you!" I said, "Well, that's the way I would like to have it. I'm sorry about this." Well, the general was not to be denied, so he thought he would begin to throw his weight around. (He was a great soldier, don't get me wrong.) He began calling all the great people in town about this horrible transgression. Today they would call it a violation of civil liberties. Well, when I got to the office the next morning, the phone began ringig. My good friend, Maury Schwartz, called and said, "My gracious alive! What's happened here?" I said, "I don't know. I haven't gotten the night report yet, but I'll let you know when I do." He said, "Be sure and look into it." I said, "Yes, I sure will." I finally got the report and it just so happened that he had run flat through that red light. The police officer stopped him and was talking to him, and the General said, "Don't delay us here. If there's anything, let me know about it." The officer said, "Yes, sir. Here it is." And he handed him the ticket, made out in the General's name. Well, anyhow, several important people in town called me: Mr. Charlie Bassett, President of the State National Bank; Mr. Sam D. Young, President of the El Paso

National Bank; Mr. C. M. Harvey, a very wealthy man; a whole lot of them. So when the last one called me, I said, "Listen, if there was at least a possibility that we were in error, I couldn't recognize it. But with all the storm that you've raised about this thing, there's nothing else to do but just let the judge decide what the factors are in this thing." Oh, it was terrible. They said, "Years of good military relations gone up the chimney," and all that stuff. I said that I didn't think it had. So, with that, there finally evolved something. The Honorable Judge Ward handled the case in the Justice of the Peace Court, and it resulted in that one Private Benjamin O'Leary was fined \$10.00 in costs. It wasn't Ben Lear by any means, but it was Benjamin O'Leary; and justice was upheld. The General was sore for a while, I guess, but he got over it, because he did me a great favor in later years. So that was one of the funny ones that took place.

M: What was the most disappointing thing that happened to you, in terms of your experiences with the military?

F: I can't think of any. I know of another thing that you don't ever want to do. You could probably arrest a general, a colonel, or any one of those officers; but you don't ever arrest a Stable Sergeant, because he is a very, very important person.

M: There's a story there. Let's have it.

F: No, we won't go into that; that's too long. No, I can't recall any disappointments or unhappiness. I just wish that more people realized and knew that mainly the difference between an Army person (a military person) and civilians like ourselves is that one is in civvies and the other wears a uniform. They all are supposed to love their family and their nation, and they are professionally equipped to do a good job and they represent us in that category. In the main, they are delightful people--nice folks, good companions, well-traveled, and class-1 citizens. A lot of people like to

think about them as coming from a world apart. Not any more; World War I and II took care of that. They're not; they are very definitely part of us. So that's the way that is.

M: Two questions now. First, what would you like to do, if you were in a position to do it, for the military right now?

F: Right now I would like to raise \$40,000 dollars and fulfill or complete the quasi-committment that we made when we (the citizens) built the Ft. Bliss Replica. We led them to believe that in later years, when needed (and it is needed now), we'd come up with some more funds to finish our job and do it in a first-class way. I've broached that subject several times but I can't get any heat. Time marches on; people forget and become occupied with other things. But it's something that should be done, and something that will be done. There's no reason why we shouldn't go first-class. That's one of our weaknesses in this town, Leon. The difference between going first-class and second-class is just postage stamp thickness difference. It doesn't require much and you can tell the difference in a big way. So that would be one of the things out there.

M: What do you see as the future of Ft. Bliss?

F: Well, the future of Ft. Bliss, like any other military installation, depends on the whims and fancies of the populus at that time, plus Congress' attitude. I would say that as long as we are in an advanced technological field of weaponry, the future of Ft. Bliss and White Sands is very good. I don't think that there's going to be anything heroic like in other days when manpower increases were great, but it'll settle down to a more studious application of weaponry, and it will be more on the technical side. I think those technological evaluations and studies and their results will bring about use perhaps in other things--not exactly military connected, but pretty

close to it. That's what I think about the future of that. Of course, it's going to depend upon the population, too.

M: What would you like to see the future become for Ft. Bliss?

F: I'd like to see it remain pretty much as it is for the time being, because not only do we have the facilities here, but Ft. Bliss has a program that they're carrying on now that is over and beyond the military side of it-- it reaches out into all areas. And it's a schooling place for a lot of people. A lot of young men, if they have the desire, can take full advantage of that vast source of knowledge which can help them in their civilian pursuits, if they want to make it that way. But I'd like to see it remain pretty much as it is for the time being.

M: Was the Home Town News geared primarily for soldier boys?

F: Yeah; oh, yeah.

M: Who started it?

F: I did. Excuse me; I mean we did.

M: The State National Bank?

F: Yes, they helped out. You see, I was with the Chamber of Commerce when they put out the first one. I was Executive Vice President. That was in 1941. We began hearing how bad it was for the soldiers who did not receive any mail, and I remember that from my own experience. Day after day the young lads would come up to mail call, and nothing. It was crucifying. Furthermore, parents then were becoming a little negligent about what they were supposed to do in the way of writing and keeping things going. Not too many, but there were a few. So, we felt that they would feel better if they knew that someone at home, in a general sense, cared for them and were interested in keeping them informed about their home town that they were protecting. We were also under the influence, to a great extent, of

the draft board, which occupied quarters in the Chamber of Commerce. We had many mothers and fathers come and go, and each Monday morning there would be a lot of lads moving out of there, going into the Service. So we just thought that it would be a good thing to start up the newsletter. There was a money problem there, but Mr. Bassett of this bank was willing to help out, in addition to being the biggest contributor to the Chamber of Commerce Sustaining Fund, also. So that's how they were in it. And of course, I was here at the bank during the Korean War.

M: What was the subscription when you started and what was the subscription when it was stopped?

F: At the beginning we had about 1550, and when we quit last January 1, we had about 300.

M: I've got a question. What does A.U.S.A. stand for?

F: That's the Association of the United States Army, which is to participated in by membership of civilian and military personnel. It is to advance the cause of the Army. I was one of the joint founders of the El Paso chapter a number of years ago, and I've been regional vice president for a number of years.

I've never been president of the local chapter. I participated on the national council of the A.U.S.A. in Washington, and I was very thoughtfully honored a few years ago with a President's Gold Medal. So have a deep interest in it. The big convention is going on again next week.

M: Basically, what activities did you participate in?

F: Oh, whatever came up, just like an organization that's dedicated, as it is, to the furtherence of the interests of the Army and its personnel. We were always mixed up in something--congressional matters or dealing with civilian groups to encourage their support to bring about an understanding of a problem. We would go out and make talks to groups that misunderstood certain

phases of the operation of the military. It kept me busy.

M: Can you think of any high spots in particular, that come to mind?

F: Most of the time when I was active in it was during my years as a civilian aide to the Secretary of the Army, and that kind of dovetailed with those responsibilities.

M: How about the Veterans Administration here in El Paso?

F: Well, during those Chamber of Commerce years I had quite a bit of business with them. We worked together on a number of things, and that was immediately in the post-war era. But that has settled down pretty much. I think that it's going quietly on its way now, but for a while it was topsy-turvy and required a great deal of community or civilian interest.

M: What years were you involved in it, Chris?

F: Mainly during the war and on to about 1950.

M: Can you think of any particular problems that you got involved in there?

F: No. Our only problem that got us involved down at the Chamber of Commerce was the people were trying to blow up the veterans' problems to the extent that they were all out of proportion. The Congress was bucking and the military was worried about what they had been promised and what people had been promised, and who had done what. It just took a lot of effort to quiet things down and bring order out of chaos, so far as public understanding of veterans' affairs was concerned.

M: What position did you have with the Veterans Administration?

F: None in particular. I was just one of the boys.

M: How about the Selective Service Commission?

F: Oh, that was an interesting and rewarding assignment.

M: When was that, Chris?

F: It started one day in 1940 or early 1941. I was sheriff and I had a phone

call from the Governor himself, Pappy O'Daniels, telling me that he wanted me to set up five selective service boards with five members each, and that he wanted me to report back to him by telegram or phone call that evening as to who they were. They would all be paid \$350.00 a month. I thought that they would be interested in that. Of course, the war clouds were building up, you know. So my devoted friend and very fine police officer and public servant, Harry Wiley (he was my chief deputy; one of his sons still lives up in Las Cruces) and I got together and we put our heads on backwards and came up with 25 names; and we thought we ought to have a few others in case of turndowns. Well, we had only one turndown because we couldn't get hold of this fella, because he was out of town. So 24 out of 25 were agreeable to it and we selected one more, and those men served all during the war, through many a meeting. Some of them served until well after the war was over. I worked closely with them, getting it started. So, anyhow, I put in my phone call that evening and gave the Governor my report. The next morning I had a phone call that said that all the signals were off. I said, "What's the matter now?" "Well, you've got to get hold of all the men and tell them that we were in error. There will be no salary attached to the job." I said, "I'm glad to hear that. Besides, it's not going to make any difference to them. They're not the kind of people that I would have called in the first place." He said, "Well, you've got to call them up anyhow and get their release." So I called up a few of them; and the rest of them, if I saw them I'd tell them about it. And nobody cared and nobody expected to be paid, because nobody wanted it. So I worked with these men during the war, and it was a very, very rewarding experience. Each Monday morning the draft call boys would come down there at about four o'clock in the morning. And I had a committee of ladies (one of them is still living, Mrs. W.T. Ramsey; she was

was the chairman) who were working with some other woman's group. But anyhow, I called them my committee. The Golden State Cafe was next door, and the ladies would root them out and they would make lots of coffee and we'd get doughnuts and stuff for these youngsters when they would show up, because some of those winter mornings were very cold. And teary-eyed parents would come along too, in some instances. We would want them to know that somebody cared. We'd get down there and fill them up and then the sergeant would check them over. And old Joe Evans, bless his heart, either he or one of his associates would give them a Gideon Bible. Then we would give them a little talk and send them on their way and go out with them while they were getting on their buses, and give them a cheery-o and away they would go. Those ladies were down there for three or four years, whatever it lasted, every blooming Monday morning. And if they couldn't make it, somebody else would. How do you like that?

M: I think it's just great.

F: Oh, we had a lot of problems at times with the draft board but they resolved practically all of them themselves. They were competent and dedicated people, but sometimes I would have to be kind of an umpire.

M: What was your title then, Chris, in terms of the Selective Service Commission?

F: Oh, I was just an advisor. I would just always find myself in the middle of things. I guess I was kind of on the Selective Service side.

M: Were you involved during the Korean War also?

F: No. Some of the fellas were still on those boards during the Korean War, though.

M: How about the replica at Fort Bliss? We touched on that a moment ago. Were you primarily responsible for cranking that up, Chris? Who's idea

was it, and where did it generate from?

F: Well, that's an interesting little story. I've been doing too much talking about me.

M: Well, this is what I want.

F: But I get embarrassed about it. Anyhow, my first contact after we decided to do something was in the fall of 1947. I went up to Washington and made myself known, and the man who was in charge of the office of Chief of Information was a Major General Floyd Park, a great guy. And I had an entrée from I think Judge Thomason. So I went up to him to talk to him with his aides (one of them I still correspond with, Bill Donegal), and told him what we had in mind and what we would like to do and what it was going to take. And we couldn't do it by ourselves as far as manpower is concerned, but we would put up the money and do our share of the work and what have you. They said, "Well, why don't you give us an outline of what you have? We ought to have it here pretty quick now to get this thing wrapped up so we can go over it." Well, I went back to the old Washington Hotel that afternoon, and I bought me a sheath of this old yellow scratch paper, you know, legal sized, and I went to work. And by noon of the next day, the Fort Bliss Centennial was born. I never changed the original that I wrote up there at all.

M: Do you have a copy of that, Chris?

F: It should be in the Chamber of Commerce. Oh, it was about 25 pages. Of course, some of the things we did eliminate because of problems, but practically all of it was there. Yeah, it was quite a show.

M: Did you get the cooperation that you wanted?

F: Oh, yes. They came right through, and they said, "You go ahead." And in the meantime, of course, they talked to General Homer--he was the commander

down here--and he was enthusiastic about it. And away we went. That was, I guess, El Paso's finest hour in more recent years. The cooperation was terrific. We weren't worried about ethnic groups or who we were; we were citizen Joe, John, Pete, Lupe and José, and it was just the same spirit that built the town in the first place. And they all did a great job. Some people still contend that the Fort Bliss Centennial parade was probably the greatest pageant that this town ever had.

M: Did you have any problems with putting the centennial on?

F: Oh, yes.

M: What were some of the big obstacles?

F: They weren't big obstacles, they were small things. Like getting permission to fly a 28-star flag on a military installation. We got all mixed up with the Heraldry Department and had protocol running in and out of our ears, and the Daughters of the American Revolution and a few other odds and ends. But, yes, supplies, as you know, were still in short order. We got a lot of stuff for the replica up from the Sacramento Mountains. We had a little job there. The adobes we got over in Juárez. You know this Memorial Circle, where the flag is? That was part of it. And getting a flagpole of that size at that time was not easy. But Phelps Dodge Copper Refinery came through in great style, and fabricated it. There were moments of agony. The affair was to start on the big day, the day that General Order Number 58 was signed. We had an avenue of flags all the way down off of the mesa. Beautiful, right down to Dyer Street. You know where Pershing turns into Dyer and goes under the railroad and then goes up to the south gate? All the way down there was lined with these flags. By God, at about nine o'clock the next morning, a norther came in and we had flags flying to Fort Worth! The electric company was responsible for putting them up, and they did a great job.

The replaced and replaced. And finally it looked like Napoleon's retreat from Moscow. It was risky and raggedy, but finally the show opened with a ribbon cutting right up there, that night, at seven o'clock. Then nature was good: no more stunts, the weather was beautiful, crisp, nice. But it was rather disheartening. And I know that the committee that stood there--the Mayor and other official dignitaries--their noses were plenty cold when they were cutting the ribbon.

M: How long did it take to build it from the inception of the idea? Was it basically your idea, Chris?

F: Yes. And we started about June time, actively, and had it done by November.

M: This was in 1948?

F: Yes, 1948. It was quite a deal. It was good for the town, good for the Army, and good for national defense. And I'm hopeful that this 100th anniversary deal will have a tendency to unify our town again, bring it back to when we were one for all and all for one, and not listening to a lot of false leadership.

M: How about ROTC, Chris? How did you get involved in that?

F: Well, I thought we ought to have ROTC. So did some of my assistants.

M: You mean we didn't have an ROTC?

F: No. That's up at UTEP that I'm talking about. We didn't get as much enthusiasm there as you might have thought we would. Well, we started banging on this thing a little before the war. And of course, the war slowed things down. We couldn't get things going, and it was very discouraging. I think that we were being shot out of the saddle by a bunch of professors on the side, and that didn't endear them to me one bit. Well, anyhow, we finally got the thing over with and I and some

others went to Austin to meet with the members of the Board of Regents. We told them what we wanted and why we ought to have it in a town of great military stature, and that the success in the public schools was great, and that we just thought that it would be a mighty fine first for our town. Well, about that time, the war came on. Then we hit it again after the war, and we found a president out there who was agreeable, more so than the others had been (and I'm not going to mention any names, either). So, finally we got it on the road. It was in '46 or '47, something like that, and it was all worth the effort. Any school that has a good ROTC unit is a school that doesn't have too many problems.

M: What involvement have you had in it since it started, Chris?

F: Oh, every year I would try and raise a little money for their rifle meet and helped put that on. And I do other such activities that I'm called upon to perform.

M: Can you think of any activities in particular?

F: No; just the usual run of the mill things. We got the rifle tournament started. It has great possibilities, and can be exploited more than it has been, if you can get the academic side enthused. But ROTC has had pretty tough going in most of these universities. You know, these left-wingers get in there and mess things up. We haven't been hurt as bad as some of the other universities and I think there is a better day ahead for it. We've been blessed with having outstanding men as commandants. We haven't had a lemon.

M: You mentioned that you raised money for different projects out there. How has this money been raised, ordinarily?

F: Bu just calling up people that we can put the arm on, and we tell them that we need it for the Southwestern International. You know that we

used to have rifle teams from 35 colleges and universities? These were from places like Ohio, Tennessee, and around throughout the midwest, put the Pacific coast, and down to the south; and it was really good. Some of the boys got to see the campus of our university out here. Of course, they were already committed to a university, but they could tell others, and others would ask questions and they would say, "Oh, yeah, we know about that place." We'd give them a nice party and wrap them up in good style and zoom, zoom, zoom.

M: I've got other things that I want to touch on, but I'm going to skip them right now, because I've got a sneaking hunch that you've got some things that you want to touch on.

F: Oh, I may, a little later on. [Just as a final comment, let me say that] I think you will find that the Fort Bliss Replica Museum will gain added stature through the years. You see, we had a little problem there when we started it. Nobody wanted to go back into the yesteryear. Everything was advancing into the missile age, and everything else was yesterday. Then as time went on, they began to realize that it was those yesterdays that made the todays possible. So there was a little revision in their thinking when they started going back historically to the beginning and coming right on up to the present. The museum is quite a commendable place right now. I think that more El Pasoans would have a better understanding of a lot of things if they would take some time out to go and see it. But it does need some additional funds. As tight as money is in the Army, they're not going to get any there. And besides, it's incumbent on every post. Fort Sill has done a great job; the people of Lawton and Fort Sill. The people down there at Fort Benning have done

even more. So there is no reason why we shouldn't do the same. I understand that Fort Hood, a young post relatively speaking, has a terrific layout down there. So again, that's all a part of the big picture. I'm hopeful that during this 100th anniversary program that they're putting together for next year, they will thread through the military lines that have been built up, and go way back to the beginning and put a little out, here and there. Because I know that without the military it isn't going to be a true picture.