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## Interview no. 214

Chris P. Fox

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Chris P. Fox (1897- )  
INTERVIEWER: Oscar J. Martínez  
PROJECT: \_\_\_\_\_  
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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Vice President, Director of Public Relations for the State National Bank in El Paso.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Relations between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez; experiences as Sheriff; car-stealing racket in México; Operation Intercept; impressions of the Chicano Movement; court suit on unequal education in El Paso; Anglo/Mexican relations; Stormsville; Prohibition; border relations.

1 hour.  
23 pages.

CHRIS FOX

M: This is an Oral History interview with Mr. Chris Fox of the State National Bank in El Paso, Texas, January the 22nd, 1976. Interviewing is Oscar J. Martínez.

Mr. Fox, the focus of this interview will be the relations between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez. Going back historically, would you summarize for me the various roles that you have played, the various jobs that you have held in El Paso, that have a bearing on these relations?

F: Having been born here, my relations with Juárez started out in early boyhood days when my parents, with my sister and myself, used to go to Juárez and visit friends on Sunday afternoons. It started about then, I guess. Of course, they've all gone on to their eternal rewards by now, but that's my first beginning. Then I was raised here with them; I grew up with the Mexican people, went to school with them. Our lives have been interwoven always. And those who have been in the middle walk of life such as myself, I like them very, very much. They're good friends, they're solid friends. But the upper echelon of political life and those who have acquired a wide amount of the earthly goods, I don't have very much to do with them because we have little in common. Do you want to begin the extent of that question? It goes back to on up after I graduated from El Paso High School; World War I came along. Of course, those of us who were robust and able went in the Service to "save the world for the Democrats." Of course, the saying was at that time "To save the world for democracy." After that I had been working at learning my trade as a machinist and auto mechanic. I married and went to work for the

Popular Dry Goods Company. [There were] occasions when I would have business over in Juárez in behalf of the Popular.

M: What kind of business?

F: Well, merchandise handling, customs, and other related items like that. Later on, I was in the transferring and hauling business and heavy machinery moving. But we couldn't do any business over there because of their regulations--American trucks can't go over there and deliver merchandise. But, interestingly enough, their trucks can come over here and deliver merchandise. Well, that's another story.

M: A different tariff system.

F: Yeah. Just [like] the fellow says, "That's the way it's going to be," and that's the way it was. Then I was elected Sheriff and I had lots of relations with them then.

M: When were you elected sheriff?

F: 1932. I retired in 1941-42. Many of those relations were very pleasant on the semi-official side. I knew a number of Mexican officials and they knew me; and we enjoyed a good association. But then there were times when it wasn't so good. We had to take care of things as they came along.

M: Could you tell me about some of the times when relations were not so good?

F: Well, you mentioned casually about having seen something in the Consular Files in Washington. Along about 1934 or '35, the car-stealing racket here in El Paso got to be astronomical in its proportions. You could place an order for a certain model, certain color, certain style in Torreón, and in a matter of a week or ten days you'd have it delivered to you. It got where everybody was on my back. The police department wasn't involved in this, of course, although the thefts took place in

the United States, in the city limits. But those were very trying times, and we couldn't get any relief over in Juárez. Just too many people were involved; you can't take a car off the streets of El Paso and run it over to Juárez and get a México license for it without any papers. And you couldn't transport it to Torreón with any degree of success because there were practically no roads except one, and that had two customs ports of entries on it.

M: So what you're saying is that there was a lot of cooperation there with the border officials.

F: A lot of cooperation. Those people over there have a very good, intelligent system. I would say that the Mexican police officials and prosecuting officials have perhaps a better intelligence connection with their officials than they do in this country. They know just what's going on in other words. Finally it got, as I said a while ago, just practically unbearable. One evening I was bemoaning my fate to my mother (my father died) who came up to have dinner with us. In her earlier years, she and my father had been transferred over to Cananea, México by the firm he worked for--Krakauer, Zork and Moye (now the Zork Hardware Company). He became acquainted with a man by the name of Abelardo Rodríguez who worked for one of the mining companies there. They had become very attracted to each other, and many an evening he spent with them--his family lived over on the west coast. They had dinner together; one thing and another. So my mother asked me how I was getting along and I said, "Well, it's miserable, but that's the way it is." She said, "If you can't get any help here, why don't you write to our old friend? He's now President of México--Abelardo Rodríguez." Well, I didn't know Abelardo Rodríguez was an old friend of theirs. But, "any port

in a storm." So the next morning I went back to the office and wrote him a letter [giving him] greetings from my mother and advising him that my father had passed away several years before, and, as I say, what was going on and who was involved.

M: Oh, you knew who was involved?

F: Yeah, over here. Sure.

M: In Juárez?

F: In Juárez. I named names, [there was] no need to hold them back. And as I stated previously, I never was too sure that our American Consul over there was on our team because he always seemed to think that we should leave things alone. So, lo and behold, about 3 weeks later a Federal District attorney in Juárez came in my office and asked me why I did that to him. I said, "Did what to you?" He said, "You got me fired. I'm disgraced." I said, "I'm sorry to hear about that, but it's not unexpected. You should have been out of there a long time ago." Pretty soon it was the same story from the Commanding General over there and the Chief of Police and a few other people that got fired out of there.

M: Rodríguez cleaned house?

F: He took care of the situation very nicely. And we never had another stolen car for 2, 3, 4 years that went into México.

M: About how many cars were being stolen at that time?

F: About 2 a night; 3 a night sometimes.

M: How long did the situation last, that crisis? When was it?

F: That was about from '33 to '37. As I say, then we didn't have any trouble for about 2, 3, 4 years. But then, by gosh, it broke out again. So we didn't have any Abelardo Rodríguez as President--I forget who was--but it doesn't make much difference in this instance. So everywhere we went, we bumped our heads against something. I had a good

friend in the Police Department over there; he told me the score several times. He didn't know what he could do or what could be done. So, we came up with the idea that the interests of our people came first; and we tried something. In that day and time, you and I would have to carry papers showing that we were the owners of the vehicles we were driving--our ownership paper. So on a Friday afternoon (I forget just exactly what year it was), we put a couple of men at the Santa Fe Street Bridge, a couple at the Stanton Street Bridge, and a couple at the Zaragosa Bridge. Every car that came up, we asked the owner, "We'd like to see your driver's license." Very few of them had them with them. Pretty soon the word got around. We had traffic stacked up to Mount Franklin. (Ohhh my!) The American Consul was all over my back and the Mayor said that we were ripping good neighbor relations to pieces. And I said, "Well, that's all right. It has to work both ways. Maybe we can get our friends over there to take some interest in this. There's some good folks over there that keep me informed and I pretty well know what's going on." So we kept that on Friday afternoon, Friday night, all day Saturday, all Saturday night, all Sunday, all Sunday night. Monday morning about 11:00 I had a call from the governor of Texas (he was the boss of the Sheriffs, you know) telling me that the American Consul here had gotten in touch with the American Embassy in México City and prevailed upon them to get in touch with our State Department in Washington. The State Department met with people from the Mexican Embassy and recommended that this embargo be relieved and assure that the unsatisfactory situation that had been going on would be no more. So there was nothing left to do but to pull it off, and the rest of the years that I was in the Sheriff's Department (up till '42) we didn't have any more problems. So, that was an unpleasant relationship in a way; but I made some good friends and I still hear from them in México and Torreón and Monterrey. [There

was] one Mexican Consul here who was very much upset about it. He got all wound up and said he wanted to challenge me to a duel. [Laughter]

M: What motivated him to challenge you?

F: Well, he was with the first crew; he got the sack, too. I forgot to mention it. When [Rodríguez] fired the rest of them, well, he got the bucket, too. He was a coronel.

M: Now this is the Mexican Consul?

F: Yes. 1929. I'll have to say this for him: He stood up for his own people.

M: You really shook things up.

F: Oh, yeah. But we had to do something. I mean, its' nice to palaver around and to have everybody love you, but it's much better to be respected. So we got that job done. It left a few scars. Then there was another incident where there was a chap named Jeff Meers. This was in '33. His father had been killed in the Southern Pacific JH&SA payroll hold-up. He was a guard. Jeff was in high school, a little older, and married. [He did] too much drinking and over in Juárez one night some character in a bar there jokingly said, "There's the fellow that killed your father." Jeff took a couple of more drinks, I guess, and went out and got him a pistol and shot the fellow. And it wasn't the man at all. So they very promptly tried him and sentenced him to death, but they got that commuted to life imprisonment. They took him down to the penitentiary in Chihuahua where he stayed for a number of years. This preceeded my time as Sheriff. One of the men that was involved was hung down at Huntsville. They were all from Juárez and worked over here. Another one also was sentenced to death, but they said, "Well, we'll commute his sentence to life imprisonment if you'll do the same for Meers," which they did. But his mother-in-law all this time had been trying to get him out of there and back



over in this country. And finally I was successfully (and I say this with due modesty--I had quite a bit of help) able to get him out of the penitentiary and back over here. But he didn't stay married very long; he got a divorce and went to California. I don't know where his wife went. She married again and his wonderful mother-in-law died later on. So that was another experience, but that was a pleasant one.

M: How were you able to get him out?

F: I got some friends working down there and said, "We've got a man in our jail. He's not doing anything but getting fat. You've got one of ours down in your place doing the same thing. It's a stalemate. It's stupid both ways. Either send the fellow to your island colony or let's make a swap." Well, they said that the dignity of the state would be badly blemished if they did such a thing, even to become what they call a cause célèbre (celebrated cause). But, anyhow, [it] took care of the situation; it worked out.

M: Nowadays we have lots of problems with Americans who are in the Mexican jails for many problems, most of them having to do with drugs. Would that be a reasonable solution to that--one way of getting some of those people over here, would you say?

F: I don't know. We don't have many Mexicans in our jails or penitentiaries, when you stop to think about it. Those of ours that got in trouble down in México knew very well what the Mexican laws were; they should. They asked for it, and they're getting it. They didn't promise them any comforts of home. They're screaming about how difficult the Mexican jails are and this, that and the other. Well, that doesn't sound bad to me. That's the way it's supposed to be when you're in jail! So that, I don't think, is anything for us to concern ourselves about very much. Of course, the parents and wives and others of those that are in that

jail down there, I'm sure, wouldn't feel that way about it.

M: What other particular cases of that type stand out in your mind?

F: Later on when I was General Manager of the Chamber of Commerce, we used to have our little problems; but, you see, we're going back to a time in my boyhood. There was no immigration or customs business down here; we just went back and forth and we were all one set-up. But as time has gone on and society has become more complicated, and more people are interested in social problems and fouling them up than we used to have, naturally we have more problems. We've got more people! We have more people interpreting the laws differently. But in the Chamber of Commerce it was usually commercial problems that we resolved without any great amount of trouble on either side. The Mexicans over there are smarter than we are. They don't worry about [having] to take action, they take it. They don't stop and palaver and worry and have many meetings about whether it's going to injure us or not, or be to our liking or this, that and the other. They're to be commended for it. Their first allegiance is to México, to their people, to their city. If it affects us adversely, well, that's just unfortunate. They didn't create the situation over there in the first place. So their Chamber of Commerce, in my time there, went on quite well. We were successful in getting some roads built, in getting the road built to México City. Jokingly it was said that that road was paved with about 5 quarts of whiskey per mile. It probably was. But those years were all right. We never seem to have anything of a serious nature happen as long as we get well developed, mature people analyzing the situation.

M: What did you mean, "Five quarts of whiskey per mile"?

F: Oh, we used to do a lot of entertaining. We traveled from here to México City and the intervening points, trying to get the Governors to get

going on it, you know--to allocate some of their road funds to this particular project. So it was just a matter of entertaining.

M: The El Paso Chamber of Commerce?

F: Yes.

M: What years did this cover when you were President?

F: '42 to '50.

M: As far as you can remember, has the Chamber of Commerce here and the Chamber of Commerce in Ciudad Juárez always had a Committee on International Relations, such as they have now? Is that fairly new?

F: No, we didn't go through all of that; maybe it's new; I guess so. No; we would just get together when it was necessary and take care of the situation at hand, and go on around to business. We didn't go through all of that. It's time-consuming and not very productive. If you've got something pinpointed over there and you want to get that thing moved, well, you go over there and move it. You don't have a committee meeting and discuss the thing a whole lot; and one [side] decides, "Well, maybe we can move it," and the other side says, "Well, maybe we don't want to move it," and there it sits. They're nice social gatherings. I don't think anyone gets skinned up very much.

M: Mr. Fox, you said that if the Mexicans over there see a situation that needs solving they just take the action. Can you give me some examples of something that they've done in that manner?

F: Oh, there's lots of things. It's a matter of, I'd have to sit down and think them out. [For example], I can't go over there and work. They feel that Mexicans should come first in México and be employed. Boom! Now, if you're going to get mad about that, that's all right. It makes it a little difficult for some interests over there that would like

to have some American take a part of it. Oh, there's a number of little nit-wit things; I don't have the time right now to analyze them all. But they're just things that come up and that's it.

M: I can think of a situation here not too long ago--Operation Intercept in 1969--which was a unilateral action on the part of the United States. The U.S. actually did what you say the Mexicans do. That, of course, hurt the relations here, and hurt Juárez particularly.

F: It really didn't hurt anything.

M: Didn't it create a crisis here?

F: It just upset some people who for some reason were perhaps in a cramp, but it didn't hurt anything.

M: Business went down in Juárez; tourism dropped.

F: That's what they say.

M: You don't think it stopped people from going over there?

F: No. It wasn't nearly what the people talk about what it was. Shortly after this had been put over, the Mexican Consulate at the time came over rather early in the morning. They stopped him over here and started asking some questions. He got all upset and said who he was and this, that and the other. They couldn't believe that anybody in his position would get as upset as he did and say what he did. He got all fired up. He was a good boy; had to make a play. But really, when you use that term "hurt"...no. All right, I'll tell you an example. The merchants on 16th of September Street got the impression that the streetcar operation was hurting their business. They couldn't figure out how to stop it and not "show their hand." So through devious means and a strike, they finally got rid of [the streetcars] and it hasn't improved the situation any for them. They were getting along all right anyhow because these dollars that were being spent in their stores were earned over here. So, that's one of

those things--it was damaging to us, but not hurt; it was damaging. So our merchants had their problems, but life went on just the same.

M: You're suggesting that this incident of the labor strike that put an end to the streetcars was contrived by the merchants. Is that the case?

F: No. I don't say it was contrived, but they took good advantage of it. Bang! They're smart enough to know that. They got it fixed up. Of course, in your country as well as ours, when there's something about labor unions, the politicians just fall on their backs and give up quick. And the labor union boys know they have that power or influence. You remember all of it; you were here I'm sure. So it was just a lot of hoopla and mess and stuff, and here life goes on as usual.

M: Of course, it causes a lot of inconvenience for a lot of people.

F: Sure, it's been a darn pain in the neck, and it shouldn't be. But they hold the whip hand and they're going to stay with the whip. Mexican people, as I told you, those in the middle walk of life that I know of, I have many very dear, solid friends among them. They're good people, the kind I know. I guess the others are, too, if you get to know them, but I never have very much. Yeah, we went to school together. As I say, we just all grew up here together, built a city together. Now we have the ones who want to drive a little wedge in us. But they won't be successful.

M: When you mention those who want to drive a wedge, are you talking about people in the Chicano Movement?

F: Any movement; any movement that puts us head to head is not working for the best interest of either one of us. It's not supposed to be that way. I never really knew, to be honest with you, what "Chicano Movement" is. I'm no different from a helluva lot of other people that

don't know what it is--whether it's a part of a group that's using it as a political vehicle, or whether there's a genuine sympathy in there, or whether there's real need to correct all that's supposed to be wrong. They just don't know. Do you?

M: Well, I have ideas and impressions.

F: I have ideas too.

M: Could you talk about your impressions?

F: Well, obviously the leaders of the Chicano Movement have put out the impression, and the story, and the feeling that the Anglo element doesn't like the Latin, takes advantage of him, and is just his enemy--socially, in business, and any other way you want to talk. We won't listen to these jabbers that come out; it's stupid. But I don't think that too many of your people and my people pay much attention to them. I know I don't let it bother me because I know Pete and José and Juan and his wife Concha, Concepción, and all of them. But the interesting thing apart [is that] the older ones don't hold it in too much regard either, but they clam up; they won't open their mouth.

M: What is your opinion of this desegregation suit that was here in the courts?

F: They were going back to all the history of way back there. Hell, I've forgotten about all what they're talking about; I don't know what they're talking about, to be frank with you. I think we've done a pretty doggone good job of educating here in this town--Anglo and Latin alike. Yes I do. And if you talk about prejudices, you walk around this bank and see how many Anglos are employed and how many Latins are employed. You'll find them all working happily together, taking life as it comes and doing a good job; and would like to continue doing it. They don't want to be stirred up. What's the law suit supposed to be about? I read some of it.

M: The basic argument is that there has been a conscious effort to keep the Mexicans segregated in their own schools and apart from the Anglos, pointing out that most of the Mexican schools have always had upwards of 80% or 90% of students concentrated in those schools and then the Anglo schools also having their students in that proportion--lack of integration there.

F: Well, I don't see how in the hell that could be. In the neighborhood where I lived, the two blocks in which I lived, there were 11 Latin families and about 9 Anglo families. They went to our school and we went to their school; those that lived in the areas would go to the schools. I don't think anything deliberate was intended. Even back when we graduated from high school, back in the Spring of 1918, [it was] a class of 88; and I think there were 11 Latins. One of them developed into an Electrical Engineer [and has] a very fine job with Westinghouse. Another one became a doctor. Another one is a librarian for the state of Chihuahua. The others were the girls [who] got married and [are] happily getting along, and what have you. So you see, having lived a part of it all my life and knowing them intimately, and they me, why, all this crap (if you'll pardon the expression) just doesn't register with me. I can't understand what's in back of it.

M: One of the things that was argued was that Mexicans comprised a very small percentage of the teachers, a very small percentage of the principals, and a very small percentage of the School Board. For many years, Mexican Americans were not represented on the School Board, and then they've never had more than two since they've had representation. What accounts for that?

F: Well, what difference does it make whether there's 2 out of 7 or 6 out of 7? I mean, is the school getting along? Those two were doing a

good job. Oh, you can take and nitpick a million things to your displeasure. But the ultimate is to live and get along and make it worthwhile for everyone concerned. And certainly no one has been denied the right to progress and get along in El Paso. If you would look at the doctors' list and the lawyers' list, the mechanics' list, the engineers' list and a few other odds and ends, there hasn't been anybody held back, imposed on. Now they've got this poor old guy De los Santos out here. They're stomping on his coat tails about [that] he wouldn't hire anybody but Latins.

M: It's the reverse now.

F: Well, one thing you can say about living your life on this border, it's always interesting. It's never stagnant; it's always moving. It's a good life, though. We get along very well, I'd say.

M: According to statistics regarding Mexican American participation in El Paso's influential organizations or politics, since 1882 there has never been a Mexican American County Judge here; and since 1873, when the city was incorporated, there's only been one Mexican American Mayor. How would you account for the lack of participation?

F: Well, in the meantime, were there many of them that were candidates?

M: Yes. At least in the primary.

F: You got to get in there and run. Finally one of them just decided he'd get up and go--old Ray Telles; he was elected Clerk first. He took a swing at it and made it. Probably there'd been many others preceeding him who could have if they had wanted to.

M: You think that was the main problem there, that they just didn't get in and participate?



F: They'd rather play the game than get in there and get wet. In other words, [they'd] stay on the fringes and get little gratuities here and there, and jobs to their liking to take care of their friends and so on. But as to really getting in there to slug it out, I don't think many of them cared for it too much. I never saw any evidence of it, anyhow.

M: Do you think that's changing?

F: Oh yeah, sure. Now, the pendulum has swung entirely the other way. They've got about 60% Latin and 40% Anglo in this town. Naturally out of that number they'd feel that they'd have that; that's a pretty good backlog vote. But what worries me is, Anglo or Latin or whatever, for example can you get the people out to vote? A fellow says to me the other day, "We're going to try to get 10,000 more voters out." That don't make any difference. Percentagewise each year there's a less number of people who vote than they did in the previous two years or four years. I don't know why. Oh, I've got my ideas, but I can't support them.

M: Mr. Fox, do you recall your first impressions of Juárez when you were a boy going down there?

F: When I was a boy Juárez and El Paso were pretty much alike.

M: You don't remember any particular images that come up in your mind?

F: No. You see, when I was a boy there were burros and mules going down the streets of El Paso with wood on their backs. There were ladies going around with a tub full of tortillas on their head. It was the same thing in Juárez. The fellow would have the two ollas on either side of his mule, would go down selling sweet water. It wasn't anything. Life was quite delightful; not very complex.

M: I want to ask you some questions regarding the period of the Revolution, which is a very interesting period here in El Paso. I've read the newspapers from that time for certain years, and in 1916 there was an incident

here connected with the revolutionary problems in Chihuahua. Eighteen American engineers were killed in Santa Isabel, Chihuahua, and many of their bodies were shipped to El Paso. There was a big stir here. Do you recall what happened at that time?

F: I remember there was a big stew about it, yeah.

M: Well, what was the commotion all about here?

F: Nothing. We just regretted a bunch of people being murdered, that's all; just as you folks regretted it, too. I don't know whether they should have been down there or shouldn't have been. There were a lot of people, too, that were exploring that Revolution with the idea of maybe getting in on the winning side, to have an angle that they could use. I remember that because there was lots of steam about it. One of them was an El Paso boy--Geiger, I think, was his name. Yeah, it was a tragic affair. Later on in Carrizal, during the deal down there with Villa and Pershing, there was something; but those things come and they go. They leave a few scars, but that's life's way.

M: I remember reading in the newspapers that about 1,000 Anglos got together and wanted to clean out South El Paso of the Mexican population. And about 25 Mexicans, according to the newspaper, were beaten up out on the street. Do you remember any of that?

F: No. If it did happen, apparently it didn't make a lasting impression on me. Something like that could have happened. Oh, there were little combates, like we boys [did]. All those Mexican families lived up on the mesa--Stormsville; and every once in a while on Saturday we boys would attack them. We played baseball with each other; they had a baseball diamond up there. But we'd work up a little deal between us; and that was the fort up there and we were going to attack the fort.

They'd fire rocks at us and we'd fire rocks at them. And next Saturday we'd be playing ball again. Today you couldn't do that, because some welfare minded person or some sociologist would get in there and tie that thing up in a knot. But we went along.

M: When you say "them" and "us," you mean the Mexicans and the Anglos? In a friendly way there was an understanding there?

F: No; every once in a while we'd just say, "Well, we'll take that outfit up there," and they'd say, "Try it." And then probably the next day or the next week we'd be playing ball again up there, or they down here. It was just a reaction of life, regardless to whether they were Anglos or Latins.

M: It was just a game then.

F: Yes. That's the way life is. Life is a big game.

M: What recollections do you have from the Prohibition era here that made life interesting in El Paso and Juárez?

F: Plenty of bootleggers. Tragically many officers were killed on the line. That was really what started tourists coming our way--to go to Juárez and get a drink, or get a bootlegger and get a bottle or something like that. But it didn't alter things too much. It changed the town's attitude in some ways toward alcohol, but mainly it didn't. Then they had a big fuss about gambling over there. The Chamber of Commerce, that is [in the] early days that followed the Revolution, wanted to close the bridge at 6:00 at night and open it at 7:00 in the morning. They did for a while--to keep people from going over there and gambling and one thing or another. And none of them really made a whole lot of difference about anything.

M: Are there any particular stories or events that stand out in your mind about that situation with the bridge? It caused so much commotion.

F: No. These people that were a little bit late getting back, particularly the soldiers, tried to climb over the gate. The officers would hit their knuckles and knock them down. They'd get in trouble for not reporting on time. It was just a ring-around, but nothing serious. Just one of those things. And finally they decided to not blockade the bridge any more at 7:00, and that was that.

M: Do you remember approximately how long the bridges were closed during those hours?

F: Oh, I imagine all together at different hours, about 6 months. Then they found out how silly that was and forgot about it.

M: The Archives have a great deal of correspondence about many religious groups which made an effort to put pressure on the State Department, on the customs people, to close those bridges. How was it here in El Paso? Did the religious groups get involved in that because of the moral issues?

F: If they did, I don't recall.

M: In other places it was really strong--Tijuana, California, Arizona--they were very involved with that.

F: I just think it was a case of dollars and dimes here. The moral aspects, I don't think, entered the situation much. If it did, I don't recall it.

M: Did you frequent Juárez much during those days?

F: No. In the '20s, groups of us would go down there on Saturday night to eat; and we had a drink or two, dance around. But the years were younger then. I always got along very well in Juárez. I had lots of enjoyable acquaintances and experiences. [If] they'd just leave us alone, we'll get along all right.

M: You never got caught at an odd hour down there?

F: No. No indeed.

- M: In going through those State Department records, I found that in 1931 there was a great deal of commotion because of the Depression and the hard times that came. The Mexican commuters were coming over here and taking American jobs and there were the bridge problems that we've experienced many times. What happened during this recession that we've had and the problems at the bridge were very similar to what was going on during those early years of the Depression. Do you recall any interesting events then?
- F: I don't recall any then or now. What's going on now that's unusual?
- M: It's calmed down now, but about a year ago the problem at the bridge, connected with transportation too, brought about an effort to keep illegals from crossing. The Immigration officers were taking crossing cards from people, tearing them up; interrogating them, harassing them.
- F: Well, it all depends on how you use the term. A police officer or an enforcement officer or an Inspector has the right to ask certain questions. I did a little checking up on that card tearing up business and those weren't valid cards--valid from the standpoint of noncounterfeit, but up-to-date. But those men down there didn't knock anybody around or treat them badly. Most people, I think, have the patience of Job with some of the things they have to go through with down on the jobs down there. I sure wouldn't want one.
- M: Let me get into the final phase of the interview. I want to get your opinions on a couple of things. From your extended firsthand experience and participation in many events here in El Paso that have had a bearing on relations between the two sides, what has gone right and what has gone wrong in El Paso in terms of growth and progress here in this city that you can think of: I'm talking particularly now about the way El Paso has changed and progressed. What things have decision makers in El Paso

done right and what have they done wrong that stand out in your mind?

F: They've done some of both. But I don't know of any great heroic outstanding effort that's been put forth to make us bigger and better, that everybody hasn't participated in. I don't know of any one thing. It's just the growth of the community. I've said this before: I think that El Paso, city and county both, during my lifetime has been governed better than any city in Texas. Sometimes we've had some administrations that haven't been too much, but I don't know that anything unusual has taken place. It's just the growth. People were willing to invest their money, willing to interest themselves in civic affairs of the town; it's just gone its way. I don't know that there's been any unusual thing that's done it. How about across the river? The same way. They've expanded and grown and made improvements. And it's just people--where people are, good people. That will be the endpoint result. There's an old saying that if you're going to live off of a city, you've got to put a little back into it.

M: In the early 1960s the Mexican government started doing a lot more for their border cities than they had previously done. How do you see such things as the twin plants and the Pronaf and those kinds of programs?

F: I think it's helped them a whole lot. They say it has. It's got them more business. The Bermúdez family has made a tubful of money out of that Pronaf deal. And customers apparently like it, so that's that. The twin plant apparently must be satisfactory to Juárez and México because they're allowing it to continue. If it wasn't, it wouldn't be going on.

M: Has it been good for El Paso?

F: I don't think it's affected us too much, because you never could get the figures as to what they did in the way of employment--how it was. But it sure hasn't hurt us, that's a cinch. I don't think it has. If allowed to go on long enough, it might develop into something quite stable and lasting and contributing. You can't turn a town around overnight, you know. I don't care what they tell you. We've had our problems, too, just like every other community. I don't think we've had any more.

M: Mr. Fox, is there anything else that you'd like to talk about regarding border relations?

F: To show you an interesting facet of this thing, the Revolution of 1929. I was in the transferring and hauling business, and the Escobar outfit was over in Juárez. Now, they're pretty much on their last legs, but no one would know one way or the other. So, I hauled lots of oil over there, fuel oil for their railroad. And all of a sudden, BOOM! Mr. Escobar, the general, went to Canada; the paymaster went another direction. And the man that I'd been doing business with went with Escobar, I think, to Canada or New York. His name was Salvador Ateca. (I think he still has some relatives here.) Boy, was I sick. They used to pay us for each load, but towards the end they got behind a little bit. And he was the Purchasing Agent. He ran a gambling place over there, too, I think. Very good man, a very nice fellow. Anyhow, time went on and he went out of our lives, and I didn't hear too much about him. One day, about a year and a half later, a man came up to me who had a little briefcase and said, "Are you Mr. Fox?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "Did you own this business in 1929?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "Did you do any business during the Revolution over there?" I said, "Yes."

"What was it?" I said, "Hauling oil and bringing back refugees--a lot of them." (One of them was moving a dairy over here.) He said, "Do you recall the name of the man you were doing business with in the oil hauling?" I said, "Yes, Mr. Salvador Ateca was the man's name." He said, "That's enough. I wonder if you'd make me out a bill for what was left unpaid." I said, "Yes. It'll take a few minutes." We didn't have these copying machines then, you know. So I got busy and it took a little time. I told him he could wait or come back. So he came back in about an hour and we had it all set up. I think it was \$3500. And dollars then were about as big around as that ashtray. He looked it over, popped open his little briefcase, and there was good American money. He paid the \$3500 and some dollars. I gave him a receipt and he went his way, and he said, "Greetings from Mr. Ateca."

M: Well, I'll be darned. And where was Mr. Ateca?

F: Damned if I know. I guess he was back in México. Maybe not yet, but it wasn't too long that they were allowed to come back down there.

M: Were you hauling this oil that they were using for their revolutionary purposes?

F: I guess so. It was the trains, the railroads; and they controlled the railroads between Chihuahua and here and up in the mountains.

M: There was an element of danger in that for you.

F: No, no. It was just dollars and dimes, just a regular day's work. But it shows you that there's just not anything really unusual about this Juárez-El Paso make-up. They have their way of doing things and they're as strong as horse radish for their town and their nation; and we'd perhaps be better off if we were a little more so. But that's the way it goes. I'm very proud to say that I'm probably one man that always



could, after 1930 until this very day, walk around anywhere in South El Paso I want to go; and nobody's going to bother me. I think a lot of people that talk about South El Paso [being] dangerous, is a lot of baloney. You go tend to your business and you'll get along all right. If you go get your snoot full of whiskey and throw yourself around, you'll get in trouble, too. But, anyhow, that's the way the story is.

M: I want to thank you very much for all your time. I've enjoyed it; it's been very interesting.

F: Well, I've enjoyed being with you, too, and I hope you'll come back some day.

M: I will. Thank you.