

5-28-1973

## Interview no. 92

Eugene O. Porter

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



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

---

### Recommended Citation

Interview with Eugene O. Porter by David Salazar, 1973, "Interview no. 92," 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](mailto:lweber@utep.edu).

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Dr. Eugene O. Porter  
INTERVIEWER: David Salazar  
PROJECT: History of UTEP  
DATE OF INTERVIEW: May 28 and June 4, 1973  
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted  
  
TAPE NO.: 92  
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 92  
TRANSCRIBER: Lupe Gaspar  
DATE TRANSCRIBED: June, 1973

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Former History professor at UTEP.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Biography; some points of early El Paso area history; his experiences at the University; professors and administrators he has known; his outside activities, including the El Paso County Historical Society and Password.

2 hours (3 3/4 tape speed); 42 pages.

Eugene O. Porter  
by David Salazar

May 28, 1973

S: Could you start off with some biographical data?

P: Well, I was born in Bridgeport, Ohio, on the 20th of February, 1899. I came to El Paso in September, 1940.

S: What were the circumstances?

P: I came here to teach.

S: Who hired you?

P: Why, Wiggins was looking for a man to teach Latin American history. What had happened, a man that had been in a junior college and came over to teach here at Texas Western College--Nole I believe was his name--had died in January of 1940. Wiggins had been offering Latin American history, I think, one semester every other year, and Mrs. Quinn taught that. So he had to get a history man to replace Nole, and he decided to get a Latin American history man. He told me later that he wrote to Chicago and Chicago had no one they could offer. Then he wrote to Ohio State University. Why, I don't know. The chairman up there was Dr. Washburn. I was an instructor there. I got my doctor's degree in '39 and then I taught that year as an instructor, '39-'40. My pay was for a full load, three classes. We had the quarter system: a three-hour class would be five days a week. So you taught fifteen hours, five days a week. One day Dr. Washburn called me and showed me Wiggins' letter. He wanted to know if I was interested. The job was going to pay \$2,500 and an Assistant Professorship, which was a lot more than I had there. I had no prospects there. The governor in Ohio was Bricker, who later went to the United States Senate. All he could think of was to cut down, cut the taxes. Also, in a big university

there, you couldn't get anywhere unless you published something. I was just getting started. So that's how I happened to come down here. I came down and started the fall semester of 1940.

S: Can you tell us about your education in Ohio?

P: I attended the Bridgeport Public School System. I was graduated from the Bridgeport High School and I went to Ohio Wesleyan University at Delaware, Ohio. I was graduated there with an A.B. degree, major in history. Then I taught high school for five years. I just got fed up, I quit, and went on the road with high school textbooks. I travelled from northern Virginia, North and South Carolina, and Georgia on the schools. Then came the Depression. The schools didn't have money to buy and textbook men were being laid off. So I decided to go back to school. I went back and got my Master's Degree and Ph.D. both in history at Ohio State University. For two years on my doctorate I had a graduate...what do they call it? I taught as a graduate student at Ohio University and then they kept me on afterwards.

Armed Service? In the armed forces I served in the Air Force from about February of '43 until August of '46 as an Intelligence officer. I stayed in the reserve and I was called back to active duty as of the 1st of June, 1951. I stayed in for two years. During that time, I had an 18-month tour of duty in Germany, where I was in Intelligence.

S: Did you have anything to do with the intelligence service in Russia?

P: In Germany I did. I guess you can talk about it now. Someone developed the idea of interviewing or interrogating German prisoners of war who were being released from Russia. So we had set up...I say "we", it had been set up before I got there. We set up collecting agencies. We had fourteen

of them over Germany. We had one in Berlin, which we had to fly in and out, and then we had one in the French Zone, two up at Bonn, one at Cologne in the British Zone, and the rest were all in the American Zone. Oh, we had one in Hamburg and also at Hannover, which were in the British Zone. But we had fourteen all together and our headquarters were at Wiesbaden, Germany, which was the headquarters of the United States Air Force. I became the operations officer for the whole intelligence thing, stationed at headquarters in Wiesbaden.

So, what happened, the German government, then, permitted us five minutes with a released prisoner of war. That's all the time we had. And the Russians were pretty smart. They didn't release two at a time, they released 10,000 at a time, something like that. They knew what we were doing. So as they filed through, we had only time enough to get their names, their education, their home address (where a letter could get to them), and where they had been stationed as prisoners in Russia. We made a card on each one. So, you see, we had thousands of cards. And then we divided those cards. If a man was living near Wanderhein (?) for instance, we would send /his/ cards down there. Then when we were ready for him we'd send him a letter and ask him to come down. If he would, we'd send him his railroad ticket, and we paid him so much a day. We paid him what he /was/ supposed to be making. If he said he was making five marcs a day as a farmer, that's what we paid him, plus his food while he was there. One of our places operated a hotel up in the Taunus Mountains, and we had a bar. We'd give him so many chips so he could drink beer at night, /whatever/ he wanted, and so forth. We had a colonel who defected--he and his wife and a child. We put them up at this hotel. They were /there/ for about six months, I guess.

Well, then, we would interrogate. Now, to interrogate, we had Americans. We had several college professors of German. I had one very good friend. He had been in the O.S.I. and he got back. You get a little restless if you've been in the Army. Something goes wrong and the first damn thing you think of /is/, "I'm going back. I'm going to ask for active duty." I don't know why it is. I felt the same way for two or three years. So Jim \_\_\_\_\_, I think, got a little restless. He was teaching Teutonic Languages, literature and so forth, at Washington University or George Washington, whichever it is, in St. Louis. So, he got a little disgusted and he thought, "Well, this is the best opportunity I'll ever have to get my wife over there." So he wrote to us and we hired him, naturally. And he brought his wife over. He had quarters and so forth--made a nice deal out of it.

So we would bring these /prisoners of war/ in and we would interrogate them all about this area where they were. We'd ask them, "How much do you make in civilian life?" or "How much do you make at home now?" They'd say, "I make 25 marcs a day," which in most cases they'd be lying. We'd say, "Fine." Then we had these slips prepared /we would say/, "Now, will you sign this?" "Oh, well, no. I don't make quite that much." They're afraid to death of the government over there. But we had doctors or someone /who would say/ 25 marcs a day and they'd sign it. We didn't do anything if they signed it, we didn't check on them at all. We just didn't want to be taken too much.

So we had a steady stream of these fellows coming in /and/ being interrogated. But I don't know, I look back on it. Remember that when I was over there... I was there in '51 to '53. We'll take '53. Some of these fellows had been out of Russia /for/ five years. What'd they know

about /what's/ going on there? There was a big change in Russia; over here, too, in five years. So I have often wondered, I often thought it was a waste of time. When we were getting clearance to return home, we had to sign a note that we'd never reveal the name of this outfit we were in, the program. Hell, I had no more than gotten to New York /when/ I bought a Time magazine or Newsweek, and here was this great big spread on our outfit over there. It was the wringer program, is what it was--wringing stuff out of these /men/. That's been so long ago. But that was my duty for 18 months over there, and I enjoyed it.

Some of these fellows would smuggle stuff out, little bits of metal and so forth, and try and sell it. Do you want to hear a little story?

S: Yes, sir. Absolutely.

P: Why, we had a pistol. One day the police of Frankfurt called us and said, "We got a man in jail down here. He's got some marcs on him and says that you gave them to him. Is that right?" So the old man and I went down /there/. I say the old man, I was a major and he was a major. He outranked me, though. And he was a West Point graduate, too. We went down to the police station in Frankfurt. We said, "Yes, he's been up there three or four days." /The policeman said/, "He says that you paid him forty-some marcs." We had our records. "No, we paid him 350 marcs." I couldn't understand why the difference. "Oh, no," he said. "Forty marcs is all you paid." What had happened, he had gone down to Frankfurt when we released him. In the park he met a fellow, and they decided to get some booze and get drunk--got some schnapps. And when he went to sleep this fellow stole all of his money. And the police found him drunk and his money gone. And he was telling how much money he had. Our records showed he had signed for 350 marcs.

(Those are relative figures. I don't know exactly.) So we identified him, he had been the victim, and the police let him go.

We had a lieutenant who was German, but he was an American citizen, you understand. He's the one who kept the secret fund which was actually accounted for in a lump sum. So we got back and West, my C.O., said to me, "What do you think?" I said, "I think someone's stealing." So we went up and this fellow was getting ready to rotate to the United States. He had applied to go to the University of Syracuse to take a Russian language course. Now, at that time, the Army had this Monterey Language School that taught about twenty-seven different languages in Monterey, California. But the Air Force had only a small quota it could send out there. So, we made contracts with various universities. First, the University of Indiana taught Turkish. It was a year course and it's tough--five or six hours in class a day and we studied not only the language but literature and so forth. And Syracuse offered Russian. So, he had put in for Russian, and he was getting ready to come back. So, we talked it over and I said, "Well, let's let him go. We can always bring him back if he's guilty. But if we start now, he may get suspicious." So he rotated. We had a young lieutenant with us who was with Payroll. Whenever there was a large sum, for example if the fellow got ten marcs we didn't say anything. But if he got a large sum we'd put his name and address down. Then the old man and I got a staff car and a driver, and we started to call on these fellows. "How much did we pay you?" we would ask them. What was happening was that this lieutenant who had charge of the money would change the amount on the records. If a fellow got paid 40 marcs, he made it 400 marcs. He had bought a new Chevy over there just before he came back. And in those



days--I'll digress--you could order a car from the United States for delivery in New York. You could pick it up there, but you a got a German price on it, which was much cheaper than over here. So he saved several hundred dollars buying it over there. He /had/ paid cash for it to /be able to/ pick it up there. So that's what happened. So time was coming for me to rotate, and the old man said, "Do you want to stay any longer over here?" I said, "No. I've got to get back. I got a job to go to." He said, "Well, I better take you off because they may call you as a witness, and you'll have to stay here." So to this day I have not been able to find out what ever happened to that lieutenant. He was called back and court-martialed. But I have written and they don't know. That's how secret /it was/. We didn't want to get it out because...you couldn't have it open.

But I found the best intelligence over there was the British. One day a British officer came to our headquarters and he had a lot of notes that were ours. Now what had happened, I interrogate you and I make notes. Then I write it up and we have a typist to type it. Those notes were to be burned. But this guy took the notes home and sent them through the channels to go to Russia. Well, the Bristh officer had worked his way into this chain, I'll call it, and he was getting these notes which he should have passed on. He knew which outfit they were from, they were from ours. So this fellow was a German. We hired Germans who had been given clearance. We thought they were good Germans who would hate the Russians. In this case, though, this fellow threatened to go into open court. Well, /if/ it went into open court we would reveal the whole program we were on. And so we just fired him, that was all. So you had all kinds of experiences.

I was in the Intelligence Service over here, too. I was thinking about

it the other night, talking about how over-classified things are. My God! I was stationed in Chicago where they had Army intelligence, Air Force intelligence, even O.N.I. was up there. There was one room for coded messages, where you fed it in and it was decoded. One day my outfit got a coded message, and I beat it over there. What it was, Elliot Roosevelt, one of the Roosevelt sons, was flying into Chicago at a certain time with his dog aboard. That was top secret, it was coded. I couldn't even make it out. I got over there, I was cleared for top secret. I got it decoded and here it was, I found out that his son was coming in with a dog! What the hell! That should have been restricted or something. Who cares? Who gave a damn what he was coming in with! If he brought a cow in, I wouldn't care! But that's what you would find. It used to be this--"overclassification is always better." They can't give you much hell for over-classifying but they can for under-classifying. So that's the reason for all this damn classification.

S: Getting back to the University, you taught classes. One had to do with Russia.

P: I didn't teach any Russian until I came back from the service. There was no Russian here when I came. I taught Latin American history when I was here. They put in a three-semester course of Latin American history. They had one semester with the Colonial Period, one semester with the ABC powers, and one semester with Mexico. We gave the Colonial Period every year, and we alternated with the ABC and with Mexico. One year we'd give Mexico, one year the other. That was given when I first came here. Then, while I was gone, Wiggins put in a course in Russian history, and I believe Strickland taught that. So, then when I came back Waller said, "You're going to teach

Russian." I came back in the fall of '46 and I started. I taught Russian history from then on. Gradually, I was weaned away from the Latin American history and Timmons took over, and then McNeely took over. McNeely more or less took my place. I was to come back for the spring semester of 1946, /but/ they wouldn't let me out. What had happened, they put out a program to study facilities. It was believed that it would take a facility eighteen months to convert from full peacetime production to full wartime production. That's a bunch of baloney. Today with this nuclear war you're not going to last eighteen months, so why bother? But anyway, they put Harvard University in charge of it. A lot of these fellows didn't want out, /because/ they didn't have any jobs to go to. A lot of them just went to O.C.S. 'cause they knew the alphabet up to "K" and got a commission. Hell, they never went to college. They were high school kids and so forth. Well, I know enough. If you've never written, you can't write; you can't play the piano if you haven't practiced. I had been promised to get out and I had told Waller, who was head of the department, that I would get out in time. So I turned in the last project I worked on, and the old boy said, "I've got a little disappointment for you, because all this stuff that's been written has been turned down up at Harvard." (Laughter) Well, I could have guessed that. They couldn't write. He said, "I am going to ask you to rewrite it." I went over to my desk, got in the phone, and called Colonel Williams over in the Pentagon. I told him what was happening. He was head of my project for the entire Air Force. He was a history man, taught at the University of Alabama. He was a pretty good American history man.

I might digress again. He had a radio program, news interpretation, down at the University of Alabama. A general stationed there had heard him

/and/ thought he was pretty good. When they set up a program in the Air Force, he recommended Williams. Williams came in as a light colonel and got one promotion.

So anyway, I called him and told him what was happening, and he said, "I'll call you tomorrow." He called me the next day and he said, "How would you like to go to Orlando, Florida? /It/ was an air proving ground headquarters. I said, "Fine." "When do you want to go, before or after Christmas?" I said, "After Christmas." All my friends were up here. So I went after Christmas. The old man came over and he said, "Do you know you got a transfer?" I said, "Yes." He said, "How did you get it?" And I said, "I asked for it." Oh, he was mad!

Anyway, then, when I couldn't come back and veterans were coming back, McNeely had got a master's degree and they asked the public school system who they could recommend /for the position/. McNeely came over that spring, and I came back the next September. McNeely stayed on because we needed him. But, as a matter of fact, before I went into the service Wiggins had put in a course on /the/ Far East. /He/ called me in one day and wanted to know if I could teach it. I said, "Yes." I had had work in the Far East. So then when I came back, Waller gave me Russian history. So that's how I taught Russian and Far East, too. Gradually, they took me away from Latin American.

S: I don't know if this is directly related to the University, but what about your research on San Elizario?

P: It's all been published in Password as articles. I was asked to do the book, but I got a little tired. It's always the "mission" down there. There was never a mission in San Elizario. There were two San Elizarios. I don't know whether you saw this or not, for /the Aniversario del Paso/. /Shows book to

Salazar.] Conrey Bryson wrote it. He's taken up some of the history people here--Sonnichsen, myself, and [others who] have written on this area. He uncovered a little-known story. He's discovered that San Elizario is not now on its original site, but it was founded some 20, 25 miles farther to the southeast on the Río Grande near the present Mexican village of El Porvenir. The fort was moved. I went into these records. They had microfilms of the records over in Juárez and [now] we have them here. I found an order dated the 14th of February, 1780, ordering that the Presidio of San Elizario be moved from its present site up to the ranch of the Tiburcios, and it was moved from up there. Also, Bishop Tabarrón came through in 1760, [and] there was no San Elizario. The only San Elizario was a fort in 1760. He pointed out how many people composed the parish of Socorro plus the number of people who lived at the ranch of the Tiburcios, and put those two together. There's no mention of this at all. And the La Flores map of 1772 did not show San Elizario where it is today. It showed Socorro and Ysleta and so forth, and San Elizario way down the river. Well, when they moved this over there in 1780, they built a chapel there. They are admitting now that it was a chapel there. It was not a mission, it was a chapel inside the fort for the troops who had daily worship. The Spanish army went to mass daily. They are calling it now the Presidio Mission. But even in your publications in Texas, the Texas Yearbook, they date that fort from 1772.

PAUSE

S: You were saying it was moved.

P: Yeah, it was moved up the river here. The order was signed by the Lt. Governor

of New Mexico. Now, let me explain that. The Lt. Governor in the Spanish colony or the Spanish political subdivision is not the same as ours. The governor of New Mexico was in Santa Fe. There was a Lt. Governor here in Juárez, and he was administrator of this area, just as if he was the governor. I have the order here in Spanish. It says to move /the fort/ and the order is dated the 14th of February, 1780. So they moved it up the river, then they built the chapel inside. When Pike was here in 1867, he attended services inside in that little chapel. The people did not attend services /there/ any more than the people attend services out at Ft. Bliss in the chapel. So, anyway, they speak of it as a Presidio Mission. There was never a mission at all.

S: Did you uncover any other important facts?

P: Well, something else old Pike mentions in his journal. He mentions San Elizario, then specifically states, "This is not the San Elizario where I attended chapel. This is the San Elizario down the river." So it kept its old name. I pointed out in what I wrote that when they moved this fort from the old San Elizario up here to the ranch of the Tiburcios, it carried its name with it. Ft. Bliss is the same thing. Ft. Bliss was at Magoffinsville, and then /when/ they moved it out here to Hart's Mill, it was Ft. Bliss. Oh, /when/ it was up at Concordia, it was Ft. Bliss there. They moved it out /to/ Lenoria (?) and it was Ft. Bliss. Standing where it is now after they traded with the college it was Ft. Bliss. /It/ always carried /that name/.

This other I noticed /here/, you have Lord Delaval and Lady /as the title of my book/. The exact title is Lord Beresford and Lady Flo. Now, that's not correct, and let me explain. You address a lord by his first name, always. This man's name is Delaval, so you have it right here--Lord Delaval.

That's what he would be called. I would never address him as Lord Beresford. But always, here in El Paso, he was addressed as Lord Beresford--always. In the newspaper, I have never yet seen his name Delaval in a newspaper in El Paso. I've run into /the name/ Lord Beresford. There was a mining journal--they have a pretty good collection of it in the Southwest Room--and there it's Lord Beresford. So, I deliberately called the book Lord Beresford. Oh, I asked old timers who remembered him when he still lived. He lived until 1906 when he was killed in that train wreck up in Dakota. "Did you ever hear of a Lord Delaval?" "No, I never did. Oh, yeah. He's the one that lived with that Negro." You see what I mean? So I deliberately called it Lord Beresford in violation of the rules of nobility, I suppose, so the people in town would know who I was talking about. The correct title of it, then, is Lord Beresford and Lady Flo.

The Falacies of Karl Marx, it was I think about the second book that was published on the Texas Western Press. It came out just about the time that Mills' Forty Years came out. Tom Lea made the drawings for /it/ and Strickland edited /it/. We came out about the same time, although I had an autographing party before he had his.

S: Did you have any meaning behind writing the Fallacies of Karl Marx? Was there any underlying meaning?

P: Did I have anything behind it?

S: Right. Any story?

P: For Marx? Well, naturally, I think you're always looking for something to write about. When I first came here, I hadn't been here very long, and Leland Sonnichsen said, "Gene, you got a wealth of material here in the Southwest." I said, "Leland, I'm not a Southwest historian. That's Strickland's

field." He said, "Well, I'm just telling you you're missing a lot." I realize now how much I was missing. Well, I taught Russian history, I talked about Marx's theories and so forth. I thought, "Well, there's no book on /Marx/ developed the way I'd like to see it developed." That's where I got the idea. Too, I can write on Marx without having to go to Washington to do research.

I pointed it out in the preface of Marx that there are actually three parts to his doctrine. It's a philosophy of history, it's economics, and it's a system of logic. What makes Marx difficult is, he put these together in his Das Capital, which is very difficult to read in translation, sentences that long. He doesn't distinguish between the two. So what I did, I wrote a preface and gave the background--why Marx came in when he did. We had these movements of socialism all over Europe and over here. The Reform Movement came about the time of Andrew Jackson. It's part of this movement that produced Karl Marx. So I pointed that out and then went into his philosophy of history. I mentioned several philosophies of history, or theories of history, interpretations of history. After I thought you knew what I was talking about, I went into Marxist theory. I discussed Toynbee's theory of history and so forth. Then I took up economics, where we took up the theory of values--that's the core of his whole economics system. And I took up his logic. Dialectics merely means logic--that's all it is. So I discussed deductive reasoning, inductive reasoning, and all that till you understood it. Then I came in with his dialectic materialism. It was something new--I think it's a damned good book. I know that Moscow University bought a copy of it from us. I don't know how many hardcovers they put out, but the press has one hardcover. And I'm going to /go/ down and give them a hardcover for another copy of Lady Flo. It sold pretty well.



S: Are those the only two books you've published?

P: Those are the only two. I've got this Southwest Study coming out in September, the next issue. It's not mine. I wrote the introduction and also the footnotes and edited it. It's letters of Ernst Kolberg. It's gonna be a good book. His granddaughter, who owns these letters, came to see me and wanted me to publish them in Password. I read them and they were too good to go into Password. I don't mean it that way. Password is damn good. But I'd /have/ had to publish them in four series, and it should have been in a book form. So I took /them/ to the Press, Dr. Antone, and I said, "Read this. Then give it to the editorial committee if you want to publish it." Well, first thing, Leon Metz called me. He had been asked to read it and he said, "My lord. I recommend this." They accepted this in two weeks and I know of one manuscript they had for two years before they did anything about it. So it'll be the next one.

Ernst Kolburg's wife--they're both dead /now/--was honored last November. She was elected to the Hall of Honor of the history society. So, they were worthwhile people. He was killed, he was shot in 1910. But he came here in 1875 at the age of eighteen as an indentured servant, or apprentice, if you wish. He became very successful. He wrote letters back to Germany in 1875, '76, and two or three in '77. He tells /that/ the man he came here with was Solomon Schutz, who was a politician. I believe he was mayor at one time, too. And he was also a German Jew and he had two stores--one in Juárez and one here. So he brought this boy over under contract. The boy was to pay his own way over here and he was to get his room, board, and laundry free. He was not to be paid for as much as twelve months, but he finally began to give him \$250 a year salary at the end of eight months. So, these

letters are excellent. They were translated by his son, Walter. Walter is the father of Mrs. Leonard Goodman, Jr., who owns them now. He had three sons, one daughter. The daughter is the mother of Dr. Branch Craig. So it's an excellent thing. But describing six years before the railroads came, there weren't a thousand people here. He tells all about this. It's very, very good. He's going to put some hardcovers out--Southwest Study, but it will be a hardcover. So I wrote the introduction for that, and then I also made footnotes. For instance, he happened to mention Maximillian being shot in 1862. Well, he was shot in 1867, and I made an explanatory footnote right there.

S: About the faculty members, I'm sure you've met a lot of professors there.

P: I don't know any over there now.

S: What about Dr. Timmons?

P: The less we say about him the better. Sonnichsen is one of the greats, one of the really greats. He and I have been friends ever since we came here. I don't owe him anything in writing; I mean I never went to him for help, although he would have given it to me if I /had/ asked. But I didn't consider this my field and it wasn't until I began to edit Password... Here's how many Passwords we've edited, all of these. These are annuals.

S: Bud Newman has a complete collection also.

P: I wonder where he got all his Passwords. He never told me he had them.

Joe Ray is a son of a bitch. Now that's all right to put on there. I've never in my life seen a man... The man is very able, I think one of the most able men we have had as President. But he was impossible. He had some queer quirk. I suppose it's due to the fact that he--this is not against him--I understand that both he and his wife spent their youth in an orphanage.

He could have developed his quirk then. But he didn't want anyone to hold any position unless he appointed him to that position. Now, I think this is /ā true story/. I was told that Timmons was over in his office. He used to park over there just to make conversation, I'm sure that's what it was. Because that man, when he thought he wasn't going to be chairman of our department, had a nervous breakdown. His wife feared for him. So he happened to make the remark, "You know, there's more work to this being chairman than you think. They're so many details." He wasn't complaining, he was just talking. And Ray said, "Maybe it's too much for you. Yes, we will rotate that, relieve you people." He grabbed the phone and called the secretary and he said, "Find Dr. Shover. Have him come over immediately." /He/ took Dr. Shover over and said, "Beginning next September you'll be the new chairman of the department." And here's a guy that lived for it, damn near had a nervous breakdown or did have a nervous breakdown when he thought he wasn't going to get it. Then it was announced that /Timmons/ wanted to do research. How much research has he done? Carl /Hertzog/ put out a second edition of his book with very few changes. He hasn't published even an article. /The book/ was /Timmons/ doctoral dissertation which had been completed before he came here. So he hasn't done much writing.

So then Shover, who was only an associate professor, becomes our boss. /He/ was really a clerk for three years. And then Bailey, Bailey served three years. Bailey is a gentleman, a nice fellow. Wayne Fuller is now chairman and I understand...I'm sure he's a good chairman. Wayne is all right. Wayne's a good scholar. So that's how this whole thing started.

I think the best President we've ever had over there was Wiggins, to be honest with you. You came out of Wiggins' office, you knew exactly how you

stood. But Wiggins was Dean of Women or something over at Hardin-Simmons, and the Depression was on. He came here in about 1936, I think it was. He came out here, he heard there was a vacancy in the principalship of one of the high schools--I think it was El Paso High. Someone told him to go see Bob Holliday, who was a lawyer. (Holliday Hall is named after him.) He went to see him and Holliday said, "We need a President here." So that's how Wiggins got to be president. He ran it as if he were the principal of a high school. And there were no jobs in those days. My God, Ph.D.'s were out on relief, you know. They didn't get a job; they came back, got a master's. They couldn't get a job, they stayed in for a doctorate, and they still couldn't get a job! Nobody was leaving, it was difficult to get jobs. There was no tenure here in Texas, either. But I liked Wiggins.

A strange thing--I just never got along very well with Waller, who was chairman of the department. And I didn't know why. I never argued with him, but he never threw anything my way. Long after he had retired, McNeely came into my office one day and we were talking. He said, "Do you know why Waller didn't like you?" I said, "I didn't know he didn't like me. I just knew I didn't get anywhere with him." He said, "No, he didn't like you." "Why?" "Well, you were Wiggins's fair-haired boy, and he hated Wiggins, just hated him. He hated everybody associated with him." And me, I never played up to Wiggins, I didn't go over to see him at all. But Wiggins heard good reports on my teaching downtown. And when I came back from the service in '46, he told me, "I hope you want to stay here. I have never had so many good reports, not only from students, but from the people downtown about you." Well, I'm not boasting, I'm telling you actual... Waller had nothing to do with hiring me or setting my pay, or anything else. But, boy, he did after

Wiggins left. Elkins came in and said, "Now we'll make the heads of the department heads. They set the salary."

I'll tell you a story about Wiggins. (Chuckles) Tom Barnes, he's still on campus, was in charge of the scheduling of classes. It was about the same thing every semester, once he worked it out. Well, the War came on and Tom left here and went over to Duke University for the Navy as a civilian employee. He was a physicist, and he was doing something in submarine detection work. Well, we had a math teacher here named Nate Schwid. Nate's a very nice guy, I like Nate. So, Wiggins called Nate and asked him if he'd take over Tom's job. Well, nobody was getting raises here during the war--they didn't have any money. Nate's wife was sickly and /had/ been in the hospital, and his two daughters--twins--were sickly. He was trying to get up enough nerve to go ask Wiggins for a raise. So one day Wiggins called him. And Wiggins would do this. Not another president that I know of ever did it. He'd call you and say, "Say, you're doing a good job. Just want you to know it." So he called Nate and said, "Doctor, you're doing a good job. I just want you to know I appreciate it." So Nate thought, "This is the best time in the world to ask him for a raise." (Nate told me this himself when I came back from the service.) So /Nate/ says, "Doctor, I've been planning to come over to see you. You know, of course, that the cost of living has gone up, and I've had some sickness. I'm having a pretty tough time." Wiggins said, "Doctor, there's not a man on this campus that I would rather give a raise to than you. But I still have to take care of the older people. After all, they have seniority." The oldest man on the campus in seniority was Speedy Nelson of Geology. So Nate ran into Speedy a day or two later and he said, "Well, I guess you're getting a nice raise." Speedy said, "What do you mean?" "Well,

Wiggins told me the raises are taking care of those with seniority." Speedy said, "That son of a gun! I just went over and asked him for a raise, and reminded him of how long I'd been here. And he said, 'Doctor, seniority doesn't mean a damn to me!'" (Laughter) That's true, that's the way it was.

Now this is typical of him. At a faculty meeting Wiggins said, "I hire teachers the way I buy mules--for what I can get 'em for." Another time he said he'd looked over the grades--the semester had just been over--noticed that the curve of failure was constantly rising. "That can be attributed to one thing only--poor teaching." Practically half of the faculty ran over to change their grades. (Laughter) But I liked him, he was good. He was a strong man. You came out of his office, like I just told you, you knew whether you had a raise or not, or you knew the answer to any other question.

Cleofas Calleros was one of the biggest phonies we ever had in this town. Now I mean that sincerely--he was a phony. When I found out about San Elizario they had almost a revolution down there. The principal there, who was later fired, his office was filled and they called the local paper. Marshall Hail called me and he said, "Gene, I'm going to have to give you some unfavorable publicity. I've got to give them space." He had taken my article and made a big blurb on the front page of the second section of the paper. So someone down there said, "Someone answer that man," meaning my arguments. And I wasn't trying to stir up anything, I wrote what I found out. So Calleros came out and wrote the damndest letter, that I had depended almost entirely upon Twitchel, and Twitchel has been proved to be erroneous from beginning to end. I had not depended upon Twitchel. I think I had only six or seven citations of Twitchel in a booksize, his History of New Mexico. Also, I asked Leland after that, "How do you consider Twitchel?" He said, "He's

very good." So that's the type he was. Later I /saw/ where he had admitted there was a Presidio down there. But it was a Presidio from 1780 on, and that church down there wasn't built till 1845. And something else... They don't know their history. By the end of the 18th century, the period of missions was over in Mexico. The great /period/ of missions was in the 17th century, and by the end of the 18th century no missions were being founded at all. And that's when that was founded, even if you accept their dates, you see.

S: What about some of the staff, like Baxter Polk?

P: Well, I like Baxter very much. Very artiste, and I think he had a lot of ability. I was sorry that they didn't keep him one more year. He lost a good bit of his retirement rights. But Baxter was all right. (Chuckles) You know, Baxter couldn't stand a phony, and he was no phony himself. I'd be in his office and some woman would call, he'd say, "Oh, yes, Mrs. Johnson, this and that, a nice boy." You would think that he was just about the best thing that ever happened to women. Then he would put his hand over the receiver and say, "This old bitch better let me go pretty soon." But he was always a gentleman, always polite. As I say, he had a lot of ability. I think he wasted his talent. I think he could have done some writing. But then who am I to say a man wasted his talent. I don't know. But as a man, I liked him.

Now, Ray? Oh, that's Dr. Ray. I was thinking of Ray Small, that pinhead.

S: We've got to comment on him, too, then.

P: Well, that's it!

S: You've been involved in some activities, one being the Rotarian Club downtown.

P: I belong to Downtown Rotary, yeah. Well, there's nothing to say. My obligation

is to attend meetings, and I attend meetings. I like it, though. I have fellowship down there, and we have good programs and so forth. I like it.

S: What about the Council of Arts and Humanities?

P: I expect that is a misnomer. I don't belong to any Council of Arts and Humanities. I do belong to the Society of Arts and Letters. I think that's what that should be. I think the official name is National Society of Arts and Letters. It's a society made up of men and women. They have two categories. One category is artists, which is all-inclusive, and the other is patrons. And if you aren't an artist, you pay more to be a patron, then, of the arts. We have music teachers, writers, and literature as a classification for artists. My wife writes book reviews, has written articles for Password, so we both belong. You have dancers. Mayor Hervey, the woman he's about to marry, Stella Lee Bowman, I had her as a student. She's a dancer. She's very good; I think one of the most beautiful women in town, too. He just gave her an engagement ring.

END of tape #1



Eugene O. Porter  
by David Salazar  
June 4, 1973

S: Would you please go into depth on your involvement in Password and the Historical Society?

P: Why, to give the devil his dues, Calleros had the idea of a historical society. He gave a talk to the Junior Chamber of Commerce, wanted them to sponsor it; and he gave a talk to the woman's department of the Chamber of Commerce, and wanted them to sponsor it. The head of the woman's department at that time was Dr. Schusler's wife, Louise Schusler. I think the head of the woman's department is know as Chairman/Director. At least one each year picks a program and they try to put it through. I remember when I first came here, we were getting ready for the War, and some woman wanted to re-do the Union Station!

So Louise Schusler, then, adopted this program for her year, the organization of the Historical Society. She appointed a committee. Gretchen Gabriel, who used to teach Spanish at the college, was on it. I believe Gretchen called us and we became charter members, we were the first. Then I was appointed to the committee to draft a constitution. After we had the constitution, we elected officers. Paul Heisig was the first president of the history society, whereas I like to think of Louise Schusler as the organizational president.

Paul thought up a number of committees for the society, then he listed all these committees and sent them out to each member, and wanted us to designate our first, second and third choice. So Mary Ellen said, "What committee do you want?" I said, "I don't want any." She said, "You have to be on one." I said, "I dont have to be on any. I don't know anything about this history down here, my field is Russian and Far East. And I just don't have time."

She said, "I'm going to put you down for one." I said, "Well, I'm not going to be doing any research, so put me down for the editorial committee." About two weeks later we got notices of the committee appointments from Paul Heisig, and I had been appointed Chairman of the editorial committee. On that committee was Frank Feuille III, Annie Joe Sharp (who soon got mad at me and quit, I had taken her personality out of an article or something), and Mrs. Phyllis Mines (who's in the advertising business). We had a meeting of the Society down at the Library two or three days after we received /our appointments/, and so I said, "Paul, what are the duties of the chairman of the editorial committee?" He said, "Put out a magazine." I said, "Paul, listen. I have never edited anything in my life. This is not my field. I just am not your man." Paul said something, and I thought at that time /that it/ was unusual. He said, "We investigated you thoroughly and we find that you are without prejudices." I said, "Well, that's a hell of a way to choose an editor." I realize now it's a good way. I think this Society could have been destroyed, because if you destroy Password, your Society is gone. /I'm not saying this/ because I'm the editor. There are so many ethnic, racial, religious groups and so forth, I could be hung up on the Mormons, on the Catholics, on the Baptists, on Spanish-speaking people, and it would show. And so far as I know, I have never received any criticism of what I wrote, how I wrote, and so forth. So I think maybe Paul had more common sense.

On the other hand, Calleros... I might say that before Paul was elected president, Calleros showed up at a meeting and said, "I have organized a magazine we're going to put out now. We're about ready to go to press. I have written an article and Dr. Sonnichsen has written an article." /Then/ he introduced a Spaniard from Madrid who had written an article on /Queen/ Isabella,

and Calleros was going to translate it. Now, this is El Paso, and he's going to publish an article on Madrid, Spain. Also he had chosen his own editorial staff. He had twenty-two /people/ on it, including Bill Hooten of the Times, Cooley of the Herald Post, /and/ Hartman /of/ the public schools, who didn't belong to the Society. After the meeting, I called Louise Schusler and I said, "Louise, if this is a history society to glorify Calleros, I don't want any of it. I don't want to glorify anybody." Well, it so happened some of the /other members had/ called her and she said, "I was as much surprised as you are." So that caused...it was an inner fight there for a while. No one took his part. I think he still belonged /to the Society after that/, but he never was active.

Anyway, /our committee/ held all of our meetings at noon in the coffee shop at the Del Norte Hotel. I had a classmate--that is, he and I got our doctor's degrees about the same time--Dr. James Rhodabal. He's now a professor of history up at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. He had published two books before he got his doctor's degree, he's a pretty smart boy. At that time Jimmy was editor of the Ohio State Historical Quarterly. I wrote to him and /asked him for some advice/, and I told him the story. So he told me to write to Lord up at Wisconsin, who was editor of the Wisconsin Journal. He also told me to write to a woman who was head of a state journal up at Minnesota. He said, "They'll help you." Lord later left Wisconsin and took a position, I think a full professorship, at Columbia University, so he was a pretty good man. I had to laugh when I got a letter back from Lord. He said, "/Your/ letter surprised the hell out of me. I never dreamed that a Texan would go out of his state to ask for advice." But he gave me some nice advice.

So we had our meetings and I would get more material, we'd have another

meeting. So one day I said, "I wish we would begin to think of a name for it. I don't like calling it the El Paso Historical Quarterly. Even the state magazine is called the Southwestern Historical Quarterly. I'd like to have a name, descriptive." Before I had finished, Dr. Joe Leach said, "Gene, I've got a name. /Can/ I suggest it? " I said, "Yes." He said, "Password, word of the Pass." I said, "My lord, I like it. That's it. Wait a minute, we're supposed to vote on these things." That was the only title suggested and it was chosen unanimously. I try to give Joe Leach credit whenever I write up the history of it.

Then I wanted a frontace piece that would be characteristic, which we finally got. I had conceived something differently, to make the center of a circle in El Paso, and then draw a circle, and then to /have/ as much of the states of New Mexico, Arizona, West Texas, and Chihuahua fall into that. And that would be our area of interest, you see? Then within these subdivisions, for instance, Chihuahua, we could have a vaquero or maybe a fancy horse rider, we could have an Indian in New Mexico, and a cowboy in Texas. But make it something different. And I asked the head of the Art Department at the college if she would draw that for me. She went on and on--we didn't need it, but I wanted to get it off my mind. Every time I went over there for coffee she'd say, "I'm going to do that." So I brought it up at the meeting. I said, "Here's my idea, but I can't get anyone to draw it." And Joe Leach again said, "Why don't you ask José Cisneros?" I said, "I don't know him." I knew who he was, but I had never met him. I said, "I don't want to go to him as a stranger." Joe said, "I know him pretty well. Let me go." And José, I don't even know whether he saw my idea or not, but he drew this. /Shows drawing./ I think it's one of the best things I have ever seen on a magazine in history.

And he's got my people in there, you see, but he centered it better than I did, he centered it here at the Pass of the North. And everything we put out has that on it. He didn't charge us for that. Later he was given a life membership in the society. So since then, José and I have become very good friends, and he's illustrated a book for me.

Well, we finally got a bid on /Password/, and we gave it to Guynes. They gave us the best price. Paul Heisig and I went down to see the first printing. Guynes had printed it like this--/Password/--the way we wanted it. But when Paul saw it he said, "Gene, that won't do." I said, "What do you mean it won't do?" He said, "That must be hyphenated, two words." I didn't argue with him. And so the first two years it came out hyphenated. So when Paul died, I changed it, we took the hyphen out. (Laughter)

So anyway, I just started to edit. I found this out--I am not a dictator, but I discovered that if you want something done you have to do it yourself. I had given a paper to one of the members of the committee to rewrite it and make it printable. The night before I had to go to press with the first issue, he had done only half of it, and it was only a seven or eight-page paper. So I found out /I had to do it/. Frank Feuille III was working for Food Mart then, he was on the road a lot. So he would take a book or a paper and review it while he was on the road.

And then the second issue of Password /was/ the "railroad issue", because we celebrated the coming of the railroads. /It/ was the 75th anniversary of the coming of the railroad, 1881. And Annie Joe Sharp wanted to write on the Union Station, and she had /sentences/ like, "Through the doors pass the passengers." I wrote better in the eighth grade, and I completely rewrote it. I learned a lesson, though, at the time. When it came out and she got her

copy, why she called me and she quit. By changing it, it no longer reflected her personality. I'll give you a good example, Carl Hertzog gave it to me. Fugate is an excellent writer and editor. But when he edits a book or anything, it's his book. The personality of the other fellow has disappeared. He is superimposed. Sam Meyers, on the other hand, is a good editor. When you get through, you hardly know that he's edited it. So I learned that, and I learned a lot.

Well, we went on and on and no one ever appointed me. I thought each year they'd reappoint me, but no one ever said anything. Finally it wasn't till Fred Morton was president, I happened to say at a board meeting, "Do you people know that I have never been appointed editor of this magazine, except the first time?" Fred Morton says, "I appoint you." So we've never mentioned it since, and that is the way it's been. It's a hell of a lot of work. And I only hope that the person who takes over...because after all, I can't continue much longer. Death is going to get me before much longer. (Chuckles) Well, anyway, I hope that person is willing to work hard. There's a hell of a lot of work to do on it. So they need one man who will work hard to get the magazine out on time. For instance, our next issue of Password is due out the 1st of July, that's the summer issue. On the 17th of May I received this issue in page proof. I had gotten it in on the 1st or 2nd of May. So you get it in on time, they get it out on time. I gave them sixty days to get it out.

There's something else. In the beginning, I tried to save on money. I was afraid to spend money, I guess. So I would have these covers printed for the whole year, about 2,200 for a whole year. We get 1200 for one issue now. Also, the magazine said Password, but it did not say the volume or

the issue or the date. I saved a little money that way. Well, then I saw how some of them threw their money around, /and/ we started to put it on here, which is where it belongs, anyway. I also didn't have too many pictures or photographs, and then people began saying, "Gene, put more pictures in. It's interesting." So now we have maybe seven or eight pictures /in each issue/. This one coming out has more than that. We've got about twelve pictures in it this time. It does make it look better.

The Society has grown...

S: You say you are hoping somebody else will take over eventually. Do you have someone in mind?

P: I have two in mind--I won't tell you--who could do it very well. Very well, very able. Yes, I don't want to see /Password/ die. This is the 18th year for it, eighteen volumes there, and I just want to see it go. Because too many people have said to me, and I believe it, if the magazine stops, what's to hold them together? We don't get a very big crowd out the night we have a speaker. And who's going to pay seven dollars and a half a year to come out four times and hear a speaker, you see.

S: Concerning the Historical Society, you have received some awards.

P: The first year we received an award for the best historical publication of a local history society in the United States and Canada. I didn't even know we were /being considered/. And it was Dr. Rhodabal who submitted it for us. Here it is: American Association for State and Local History, Award of Merit to the El Paso Historical Society. It was given at its annual meeting in Columbus, Ohio on October 5, 1957.

S: This comes out in which volume of Password?

P: This comes in volume three, so it was for volume two that we got /the award/.

I had all kinds of praise from people I wrote to. We used to publish a little picture of the author, and we still have a little story about the contributor. I sent copies of /volume/ one to everyone who helped me. Dr. James H. \_\_\_\_\_ of the Ohio Historical Quarterly writes, "Congratulations on Volume I, No. 1 of Password. I think you did a fine job in all respects. It's a very nice looking magazine. I hope you'll be able to send me some other copies." Allen M. Wuinn, sales manager of the University of New Mexico Press, writes, "Thank you so much for this very stunning Password. It is a magnificent job -- so much so that I am wondering if I could have another copy of it. I would like to circulate it around the campus." Mrs. June Holmquist, Assistant Editor of Minnesota History, writes, "The first issue of your new El Paso historical quarterly reached me a few days ago, and I have read it with interest. Let me congratulate you on the quality for your first effort. The issue looks very /good/. The cover is handsome and you need not apologize for it at all. I was astounded at the figures you gave me concerning your publishing costs. In comparison with the best we can do in this area, they are exceedingly reasonable." (We got low costs because Mr. Guynes owned it at that time, he gave us a special rate. I don't think we get a special rate now because he sold out to the employees.) The director of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Clifford L. Lord, writes, "Let me offer you my congratulations on an interesting publication produced at a very reasonable cost. (And I said again, "We thank you, Mr. Guynes.") This should be a useful example to other county and local historical societies throughout the country, and I appreciate your bringing it to my attention."

We had all kinds of praise. We've never entered the contest since this first one. But I feel sure that /Password/ is still /a good publication/.



We had an experience. The Antiquarian Society of Massachusetts wrote--and they hadn't seen a copy, but Dr. Rhodabal had given us a big write-up in the monthly publication of the Society for State and Local History that gave us the award. So /a man/ must have read it there and he wrote and asked if we gave copies to organizations. He said, "We try to keep copies of every historical magazine published in the United States. You can see that no budget would stand for that, so naturally we beg as many as we can get." Well, here it is up around Harvard and so forth, so I talked it over with Paul and he said, "Well, let's put them on the list." After two or three /issues/, this man/ wrote me and said that it was the best he'd ever seen, and if we did not have Annie Oakleys to give away, he would be very happy to be a subscriber. So I read it at the meeting one night, and Paul decided he was so nice, we'd make him a sort of permanent. I think he's still on our mailing list. So it has received a lot of recognition.

A boy who was down at South Carolina University sent me a magazine for publication, I published it. So it's not just local. I published an article by a boy who was an instructor at Yale. He wrote on surveying, an expedition that came up the Río Grande--very good. Later it was published in a book of his--which is very good--on westward expansion. So /the recognition/ makes you feel pretty good.

S: You had other awards, personal awards, that the Historical Society has given, the Hall of Honor.

P: Well, that began several years ago. Now, Congressman White is the father of that. When he was president of the history society, he conceived the idea of having a Hall of Honor--or Hall of Fame, he called it. I was on the board, I've been on the board from the very beginning, as ex-officio member because

of Password. I was surprised /that/ a number on the board were opposed to it. Also, /White/ wanted to tie it in with the Sun Carnival and all that. Well, some of us pointed out that there was too much activity at that time and we were /just/ starting, it would be pretty hard to develop. So Dick was reasonable, he's not dogmatic, he said, "I don't care what you call it or when you have it. I think we ought to have it to honor people." So we wrote it in to have it, and to call it not the Hall of Fame, which is rather common and has become trite, but to call it the Hall of Honor. A committee was appointed that drew up the rules or qualifications for a member to be elected. We decided to have it in November. The rules are this: anybody can nominate, whether you belong to the Society or not, but you have to write a biographical sketch /of the/ person, what /the person has done/.

PAUSE

P: The /nominee/ has to have been a resident of El Paso for thirty years. The number we have honored has changed once or twice. At one time, we had two /Living/ and two /deceased/, which we thought was too many. Now it's one deceased and one living. The committee which chooses them, the chairman is always known, he's appointed by the president; then he appoints the committee to select. For instance, when Conrey Bryson was president, he appointed me as chairman of the committee, then I appointed four persons to serve with me. Their names were never known. And I voted only in case of a tie. (Chuckles) To illustrate that, when I was elected in 1970, Fred Morton was chairman of the committee. And he said, "I just wanted to tell you that I didn't vote for you." Well, what had happened, it was unanimous and he didn't have to

vote. (Laughter)

The person elected gets someone to give a talk for him. I asked Rabbi Fierman to talk for me. I think he did the best that's ever been given--not because it was mine. About a page and a half, a printed page, and that was enough. One gave eight printed pages--the people get tired. Now, the /deceased honoree's/ family is notified and asked if they want to accept, then they select who they want. For instance, when I asked Rabbi Fierman if he would give the talk, Birdie Hewet's father was the deceased /honoree/. Birdie was Jewish but married a Christian. She asked Chris Fox /to/ give the talk for her father/. So we had Jews there to honor Bernard Krupp, and Chris Fox gave that, and the Rabbi gave it for me! (Laughter) But we were all very good friends.

I think we made some pretty good choices. (I'm not saying that about me at all, but we have.) Some of them were afraid that they would pick out too many men who had made money and call that success. Maybe they made money at the expense of El Paso and contributed nothing. The strange thing is that three campus people were picked in a row. Carl Hertzog was in 1969, I was in 1970, and Sonnichsen was in 1971. I had just completed my thirty years here when I was elected. I feel that I was elected because of my work with Password. That is a contribution, I think. Conrey gave me a nice write-up in /his book/ The Land Where We Live, which was put out /by/ the University/. He ends it with a chapter, Further Information he calls it, and this is various books and so forth. Here are the men he's giving credit /to/: Sonnichsen, myself, Tom Lea, Owen White (who was the first historian), Carl Hertzog, and Rex Stickland (who wrote Six Came to El Paso and edited Mills' book Forty Years).

S: Do you have a list published in Password of all the people who've made it into

the Hall of Honor?

P: Yes. /However/, I don't do it every year. I used to try to keep up with it, but it got too long. Here are the Hall of Honor honorees--the Hall of Honor honorees and the tributes. There would be one in each volume; /in/ each volume we publish it. We have honored twenty-two.

S: Of the presidents, which do you think was the most outstanding?

P: Oh, I don't know. They've all contributed. Paul Heisig was getting it going, and he couldn't \_\_\_\_\_. He spent money, though. We had a fellow come down from Silver City, and he was doing what you're doing, on his own--going out and interviewing these old-timers. He came down and almost cried about what it was costing him in gas and material. So Paul just gave him \$300 of the Society's money. We were to get all of his rolls, we never got any because he didn't follow it through. I gave a talk to the Silver City university, Western New Mexico I believe it's called. So I went over to the library where they had these /tapes/. /I was told/, "I'll give them to you if we can get a hold of /this/ man." Well, he was out of town. So I came down and told the president at a meeting, "If you just drive up there you can get them, because he is going to check." He never did, and now it's been 17 years ago. So I doubt if they're up there. Or if they are, they won't give them to us. I know the man is dead.

We've had some pretty good presidents, I think, who've tried to do things.

S: What about Leon Metz?

P: Leon was a pretty good president. One of the persons who doesn't hold an office called me and said, "How do you like Leon?" I said, "I like him." He said, "What do you think about giving him a second term?" There's nothing in our constitution that /says/ how many terms you may or may not serve. I said,

"I think it would be a good idea." He appointed people who went to work, and we increased our enrollment /under him/ and so forth. This person /who/ called me/ was afraid that Jim Crook, who was in line for the presidency, might get mad. I said, "Well, tell him. He has to be elected. He doesn't have any hold on this office." So we arranged to have Leon elected a second term. Someone whispered to Jim to keep /calm/, that he would succeed. /And/ he has. But Leon was a good president. He had ideas that I had--if you want something done, you've got to do it yourself. /If/ you want someone elected, you've got to have it all arranged before anyone else comes in. You may call that Ohio politics if you want, but that's true. That's what he did, and some of /the members/ didn't like him for it. Later, when he found out that he was going to be challenged, he sort of tamed it down. But it was nothing to destroy the Society. For instance, he asked Bill Hooten to become a director. Bill said, "Okay." So Bill came to the meeting and there he sat. "How are you going to vote?" You see? And that's the only thing Leon ever... Everything else was positive, for the good. He was a good president.

S: Getting away from the Historical Society, something else you were involved in, you were president of the Community College.

P: Yes. That was the old Baptist School. The man who was head of the Baptist School wasn't a college graduate. Oh, he was a dictator, I /heard/ from some of the teachers. They weren't making good financially, and he owed teachers money. He caught one of the teachers /who/ was a graduate student over at UTEP smoking. He wasn't going to pay him. So a group of men, most of them were Army men, got together and put up a little money and bought the Baptist College, and rechartered it, and called it The El Paso Junior College. It has no relationship to this Community College. They made one mistake that I

tried to correct but quick. The old president of the junior college--he owed some of his faculty--had bought a Cadillac and was paying for it out of the school funds. So when our group took over the college, they took over the payments on it. A couple of the directors went to Austin to see about getting /the college/ certified. None of them were administrators. So the man they talked with said, "We'll give you this advice: You don't have anybody with a higher degree. Go back and find yourself a Ph.D., it will give some class to your college." So they inquired around, and I had just retired. /They called me/ and asked me if I was interested in being president of the college. I said, "Well, I'd have to talk it over." /When I was/ interviewed it wasn't a question of applying for a job, they wanted me. They wanted my Ph.D. is what they wanted. So, I was sold on a junior college. It was privately owned, it would never come in for tax money, and so forth.

So, I took the job, and I was president for one year. And the next year it folded because of the Community College. We were charging about \$17 an hour, so a three-hour course was \$51. Well, this Community College /was only charging/ \$4 or \$5 an hour, and they were offering /courses/ that kids out of high school, that failed in high school, wanted to take. We were giving regular academic work, nothing else--all academic work. Finally at the end of the year we didn't see any hope after this college came in, so we just voted ourselves out of existence. The men who had the money invested lost it. We took over /the/ debts of most of the teachers who had been with the Baptist College, /and paid them/. We had a place on Piedras Street right across from the Empire Club /where we held classes/. But we didn't attract /students/ because /we offered regular/ academic /courses/. Now this Community College has a course in Cash Register Management. That's merely to teach /a person

how/ to be a checker in a supermarket. I don't want to be taxed to train cashiers for Fed Mart or Piggly Wiggly, and that's what they're doing, you see.

Anyway, I was president of the college one year. I used to have faculty meetings and tried to bring some reason out of chaos. But I really think that we could have made a go of it if this Community College didn't come in. Who's going to pay us \$51 for a course when they can get one for \$8 or \$9?

But I did end my academic year as Professor Emeritus of History and president of a college. (Laughter)

S: What about some comments of the future of UTEP?

P: I don't know what the future of UTEP's going to be. It's not going to be anything if it continues to operate, as it is now, by the Board of Regents. Look at the presidents we've had--they kick them out right and left. Frank \_\_\_\_\_ over there is a dictator. You had the same thing over there at Austin. I was talking with someone who had been at Austin--that's when Frank Dobey was over there. They got rid of the president, appointed a faculty member as acting president. I think /the new president's name/ was Painter. He immediately notified the faculty, "This is temporary. I will not accept the presidency under any consideration." But the Board of Regents could tell him what to do and he would do it. That's what they want /at UTEP/, someone they can control. That's the reason we've changed. We've had very poor presidents. I /wouldn't say that about/ Wiggins. /He/ was the best president we have had, I'm sure. But he didn't have the problems we have now. He came here about 1936, I came in 1940. And that fall we had 1,053 students. We had seventy-seven on the faculty, which included typists. Now you got that many in some departments. So the problems are bigger now because the school's bigger. Elkins was not too popular, /but/ probably a pretty good president. If anyone had any trouble

with a professor, he could run over to Elkins, and he'd call the professor in. We had one /instructor/ in Education, I forget his name, and /he had a/ girl who kept reading the paper in class. He kicked her out. She went over /to see Elkins/. Elkins called him over and gave him a round, and /the instructor/ just got up and said, "Go to hell," and walked out. I didn't think Elkins would last. He had come from a junior college, which is not much higher than a high school. And I suppose he tried to run us here the way he ran /the junior college/. When he went ot Maryland there were too many big men on the campus, and so maybe he became a president and not a high school principal. But that's what he was here.

Then he was succeeded by Holcomb, who was miserable, miserable. He lasted one year, I think. They brought him down from Texas Tech. He was head of the Chemistry Department up there. Then when he left, they brought in Smiley. I always liked Smiley. But I think where Smiley made a mistake... He was no sooner here than the stories came out--and I don't know whether he was responsible or not--that he was too big a man for a little job like this. We wouldn't keep him long /because/ he was /moving/ up. Well, if you're not going to keep him long, or if he's not going to be here very long, he's not going to have much control. So he wasn't here long, and they finally moved him over to Austin. And he wasn't there very long till he wanted out, because he had nothing, he was a messenger boy for the chancellor. The first term he was over there a very good friend of mine /and his/ called me and she said, "Gene, how is Smiley liked on the campus?" I said, "I liked him. There are some that didn't; some did." She said, "Do you think they would accept him back? I said, "Well, they don't have to accept him. If they bring him over here, he's here." She and her husband had /had/ dinner with him and he



said, "I'd love to get back there." Well, these stories had caught up with him--too big a man to stay in a small school. Then he left over there because he couldn't get along with the chancellor, and went to Colorado. There he had a tough time for this reason. On the Board of Regents of Colorado there are six members; the president votes only in case of a tie. /They/ had three conservative members (the man who makes Coors, naturally; a millionaire, a conservative), and he had three liberals. And the Board was always split, and the result was that he had to make a decision. Now when you make a decision like that, you're caught. No matter how you vote, you have offended half the Board. So he was no sooner up there than he was wanting out again. So then he came down here.

Well, Joe Ray had come in the meantime, squeezed in, and he just about ruined the college. Finally it was the downtown people who got rid of Joe Ray. A certain fellow in town called me one day and he said, "Gene, what are you doing at noon?" I said, "Going home." He said, "Come and have lunch with me at the International Club." /This person/ was then in the process of getting rid of Joe Ray. He said, "I'll send you a copy of the letter I'm writing to Frank Erwin." I've got the letter that this fellow wrote to Frank Erwin about Joe Ray. So I knew Joe Ray was on his way out. I feel this way: maybe the college is getting too big now, but this has been El Paso's baby. When you had only 300 or 400 up there, and no money for football, they'd put the football players in hotels downtown, the people paid for them. You can't do /things like/ that over a period of years without saying, "It's my baby." In human life, we're still our momma's baby when we're fifty years old! And that's the way they thought about it. But Ray, he's going to run the school. He made a speech to the Rotary and offended all the Rotary, that, by God, he

he was the president, he'd do as he damned pleased! And yet he was a Rotarian. So that threw them over there. And the men in Rotary are pretty influential in this town, not because they're Rotarians, but because they've got money and in business and so forth. So I still think that the president has to cooperate; at least he has to make a pretense of cooperating and not just come out and tell downtown to go to hell. "We're too big now, we've outgrown your caretaking." I think that was Joe Ray's...

And of course he offended everyone on the campus. Not everyone, some benefitted from him. But the ones he had offended were willing to cooperate, as I was, /with the people/ downtown. Marshall Hale, due to my influence, called him and wanted to know his system of giving salaries. Oh, he raised hell and Marshall insulted him in the paper and so forth.

So finally, then, they began looking. I knew they were looking for someone, but I didn't know that Smiley would want it. But Smiley wanted it, to get away from this split board /in Colorado/. Down here I don't know what happened, but Smiley was removed. You don't remove people in public, you let them resign. But, I'm sure that he /was removed/, the same as I'm convinced that Pennington and George McCarthy were removed. I have no feelings for Vandenburg. I don't like him. He went to the Registrar's Office once and took half of the cards from my class and put his athletes in them. He /had gotten the cards/ the night before. When I heard about it, then, I called him and said, "If you ever do that again, I'm going to make history /so hard/, no one in this class is going to pass." He never did it again.

And George has been here a long time, and I like George very much. When he was Dean of Student Activities, he was a nice guy. But they tell me, when he got up on the hill, he sort of changed. But the reason I like him, he

gave scholarships when he was Dean of Student Activities. By that time, I had been here long enough that many of my students had children /that were attending UTEP/. They'd call me and say, "Say, can you get a scholarship for my daughter?" and so forth. I'd call George; George /would say/, "Well, bring her over." We would go over and George would talk with her. Then he'd say, "Well, I'll tell you, I can let you have \$75 for the year, maybe more. But I will promise that much." George would always keep his promise. Then he moved /to/ the Athletic Department, and Kelsey (?) /became the new Dean of Student Activities/. I had Kelsey as a student. And let me call Kelsey and try to make a date for /the/ son or daughter of one of my former students, he'd say, "Well, come over. My secretary has all those forms. Have her fill out one and we'll consider it." Well, from then on I just quit. I said, "I can't do anything." But of course /Kelsey/ had a big fight with Joe Ray, and Joe Ray bumped him out of here. But that's the reason I always liked George McCarthy, but others that didn't have my relationship with George didn't like him.

Pennington came here, as I understand it, as a basketball coach and worked /his way/ up. I understand he was telling Joe Smiley what to do, because he was strong with the Board of Regents.

I don't know why out of sixteen colleges, we, in the salary, scale, always rated fifteen. If there were eighteen, we were seventeen. We're next to the last. And always last, just below us, was Prairieview Negro College. (Laughter) /The Board/ would say, "Your salary is based upon your teaching load." In History and English we had the biggest loads. I had as many as four hundred /students/ for a year, which was a tremendous load. My classes were always filled. I'm not bragging--I guess I was too easy--but they were filled. I offered Russian history in a large room once and I had to grade those papers.

I had a grader for the freshman class. But they didn't count our /teaching/ load in History /alone/; that went for the whole college. Well, that year they put in the Nursing School, and the Nursing School averaged /a/ two and a half student teaching load. That brought the whole college down. We didn't get a raise that year. So now, I guess, they've got a lot of money and they're paying pretty good salaries up there.

S: What about the history trend?

P: I don't know. I do know that there have been tremendous strides made since I came here. We had as head of the department Dr. Waller, and he didn't think there was any history except United States history, and maybe a course or two in European history. /But Waller/ didn't hire me. I was hired in Columbus, Ohio, by Wiggins.

END of Interview