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Oral History Interview

with

A.C.U. History Professors

A presentation made during National Library Week by John Robinson, Ralph Smith, and Earl Brown. The subjects dealt with Texas and ranged from the Indians of Texas to the Grange movement within Texas.

Abilene, Texas
April 25, 1974

Moderated by Mrs. Marsha Harper

Abilene Christian University
Abilene, Texas
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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

The following was a presentation made during National Library Week on April 25, 1974. The moderator is Mrs. Marsha Harper.

HARPER: Here with me today is Dr. John Robinson who has published in the last several months a book on David Lipscomb's travels in Texas and he is going to tell us something of Lipscomb's view of Texas as he saw it, the growing land, about 1872.

ROBINSON: Thank you Mrs. Harper and we're grateful to the library for their very good hospitality in letting us gather and talk a bit about Texas a hundred years or so ago. Back in 1872 there was a traveler through Texas who came across an old time Texan, an old rancher, and he asked him what he thought of Texas and the rancher said he thought it was really marvelous and he embroidered upon that and lavished praise upon his local neighborhood and concluded by saying he was about to sell out. So the traveler asked him, "Well, if this is such a marvelous place, such a fine country, why do you wish to sell?" And the rancher replied, "Well, they're crowding me too thick." So the traveler asked him, "How near is your nearest neighbor?" He said seven miles off. So when the traveler suggested perhaps that did not really constitute urban blight, the old timer countered with his own dictum. He said, "Whenever our herds water at the same stream, it's too close for me. I've got to go further west." Well of course, this traveler was David Lipscomb and the un-named rancher that he encountered typified to Lipscomb the frontier attitude of Texas and illustrates for us the paradox which was true of Texas in 1872 and perhaps in some ways is true in 1974 because when Texas was quite a young state, as Lipscomb moved through it he found much to indicate to him that it was still quite a frontier area.

Law and order, for example, was on the rough and ready style. Lipscomb commented that the Texans were known to ride off in hot pursuit of horse thieves and that they usually brought back the horse, but they rarely found it convenient to bring back the thief, undoubtedly leaving him at the end of the limb, which Mr. Galloway will talk a bit more on later on.

He also noted that the Indians were wild and woolly still at that time in Texas. He visited for quite a while in Fort Worth which was at the time a metropolis of about 700 people and he said that within a few miles of Fort Worth, the Indians were raiding and carrying off horses and cattle, and men and women for that matter.

A rather wild and rough land where a man really had to be a frontiersman, be his own carpenter, his own cobbler, his own blacksmith simply because these traits of skill were not yet hireable as Lipscomb said in Texas.

So it was a frontier land, very much so, but paradoxically it was also a very modern land, much more modern perhaps than

ROBINSON: we might think. For example, Lipscomb spent a little bit of time in Huntsville which then as well as now was the sight of the Texas State Penitentiary. And he noticed with some considerable surprise that the prisoners were allowed to leave their cells every morning and go into Huntsville and find jobs and work earning a little money. Then they would come back at night and go back into their cells. Well this sort of release time-work was the kind of thing that modern Penologists who are busy re-inventing the wheel think is very very modern and very up to date, and yet we were practicing that sort of thing back in 1872 in Huntsville.

The modern religionists would have us believe that the ecumenical movement is very up to date and yet it's true that when David Lipscomb was touring through Texas and preaching at various Churches of Christ, as he was, you know the editor of the Gospel Advocate, a very well known and widely liked Gospel preacher, the man after whom David Lipscomb College is named. When he traveled through Texas, if the local building of the Church of Christ was too small or perhaps non-existent, quite frequently the Methodist, the Baptist, or the Presbyterian would fully and freely offer their building and perhaps even attend the services as well, so the ecumenical movement perhaps is not quite as modern as our current theologians would have us to believe.

Texas was even modern enough for a generation gap and we'll read you something that Lipscomb had to say here. He was traveling by train at this point near Houston and he said, "We had heard that the Germans were cold and phlegmatic in their nature and quite undemonstrative lovemaking, but from the evidences seen among the youthful part of the crowd, we conclude that a few days of frolic and a free indulgence in wine and beer make them quite as demonstrative as the more impulsive involatile natives of the south. Perhaps the warmth of the southern sun melts away the iciness of the northern nature and supplants it with a fire of the more impulsive families of the earth. If with the impulsiveness they could also acquire the coyness of the more sensitive nations. We would not see these demonstrations in public so shocking to refined taste and culture." So generation gaps were present in the very modern Texas of 1872. Of course Lipscomb was a shrewd enough observer to note this and what made it particularly enjoyable for me as I was working on this was to see how perceptive and pointed were his views on Texas; Texans and things of the frontier and the modern part of the city.

He was very able to pick up the problems of the Texas economy. For example, he noted the maneuverings of the railroad, how they would build out to a certain point, announce this was the end of the line, sell city lots around the railhead at a very great profit and then once they had done that, proceed to build on out to another railhead and do the same thing all over again. He advised the Texans about

ROBINSON: their economy in other ways. He talked about the cattle industry, recognizing this as the heart of Texas prosperity. He said unless the Texans could do something about a more active and knowledgable husbandry, then the cattle industry is going to collapse. Of course, as we know a few years after he toured Texas, the cattle industry did collapse, after which the Texans were then forced to pay a bit more attention to more scientific ways of raising cattle. So we're dealing in David Lipscomb, here with a very shrewd and capable observer of scenes, but yet a man who found a great deal to admire and a great deal to criticize in Texas.

He, for example, didn't appreciate the water in Texas. He was a Tennesian, used to the cool clear spring water and every place he stopped, almost, he complained about the water and in fact concluded that unless Texans did something about their water, they were not going to grow and prosper at all. This is a problem we still haven't solved yet, out here in West Texas anyway.

But when he concluded and he finally wound up his trip in Northeast Texas he had something to say about Texas which I think is a very telling observation for the times. He said, "Had we a set of children to raise, we would rather risk their morals to a new country like Texas than trust them to the fashion and follies of older settlements." This was of course high praise indeed for this particular Tennesian in Texas and it is of course praise that whether deserved or not, all of us who are native or transplanted Texans can perhaps glory in perhaps just a little more. Thank you for your time. (Applause)

HARPER: Thank you very much. The problems of the farmers and the farm life in Texas a hundred years ago is something that has engaged the attention of Dr. Ralph Smith, also of our history faculty. When I introduce Dr. Smith to you, you will be meeting the current President of the West Texas Historical Association and a prize winner for about the third time, I think, for the best article submitted to the Association's yearbook. So you will be listening to a very knowledgeable and scholarly man. Mr. Smith...

SMITH: A hundred years ago would be 1874, which was really a wretched period for the people of Texas. This was toward the end of seven years of terrible military dictatorship. It was an election year. The candidate for re-election was Edmond Davis, the carpetbagger governor. The democratic candidate was Richard Koch for whom the county of Koch which adjoins us on the southwest was named and this was a corrupt election that followed and a good bit of determination on the part of the democrats to win it. So Davis was equally determined to hold on.

So the farmers over the state got together a few things in their wagons and their guns and their families and whistled to the dogs and rolled off toward Austin to help dislodge Davis. An old gentleman who lived in Abilene and

SMITH:

died just a few years ago by the name of Green told me how his father did that and he went along in the wagon with his parents in 1874. These that came in, assembled down on the Colorado River following Henry McCullough for whom McCullough County takes its name, the brother of the more famous Ben McCulloch. They marched up what is Congress Avenue. There was a Negro Company that Davis had stationed on the square of the Capital lawn, it wasn't the same building. He used to tell up almost until the time before I got to the University of Texas, that he was living in those days how the events were and how he called the Company to attention thinking that McCullough and his followers would turn back when they saw the troupes getting ready, but he said they kept coming. He called them to attention the second time a little louder and that had no effect and then the third time extra loud and so they kept coming and he said then he turned and ran and his soldiers followed him and that was the way the destruction was ended in Texas.

At that same time there was living up in the county that is Bell County today and years later a man by the name of Archibald Johnson Robes, born in North Carolina 1830. He had moved with his parents to Missouri. He had been a forty-niner, dug the gold in California, returned to Missouri and then moved to Texas and settled in what is today the vicinity of Mernard. During the Civil War in the times when the Indians were a real danger and scores of white women and children were carried off into captivity. So he was in a number of engagements with the Indians. Then later moved to Salada 1873, an organizer of the Grange came in and organized the first lodge of the Grange in Salada and Robes became a member. The next year the state Grange was organized and several years later after holding all the offices up to the position of Grand Master and remained the Grand Master of the oldest and most respected of all the farm organizations, the patrons of husbandry, or the National Grange.

Texas became a member of the National Grange with Robes President of the Texas part championed a number of things. It was Granges primarily who made the present Texas Constitution. That was one of the first things that they got around to doing when reconstruction was ended. That constitution, you know is about to go out and we're about to adopt another one. To sum it up, let me say that the Granges were the pioneers in secondary education in the state. They organized the first high schools on the cooperative plan. They had as many as about thirteen hundred lodges. They organized the Texas Cooperative Association to supply their cooperative stores. They organized one of the first fires, organized a publishing company. They finally got into politics. Robes became a member rather early of the Board of Directors of Texas A & M and was a prime mover in the establishment of what is known as Texas Woman's University at Denton. In 1897 he was appointed by Governor Culperson, the commissioner of insurance, agriculture, statistics, and history which began the Texas Historical

SMITH: Association. There are many other things that could be said about the role of the Granges and their contributions, their concerns for the welfare of the farmer and how in their lodges were trained many public speakers, including some of our most famous women public speakers. I will stop there at that Point. (Applause)

HARPER: Thank you very much. Much more could be said about all of these topics and I refer you to the yearbooks of the West Texas Historical Association out on our shelves for several articles at least one of them by A.J. Robes about A.J. Robes by Dr. Smith. Our next speaker, Brother Earl Brown, is well known and well loved on this campus. He's Professor Emeritus of History and a familiar figure, not only on just the outer part of the campus, but in the library we see him every day. He's going to tell us about another distinguished visitor to Texas almost a hundred years ago. This was Elliott Roosevelt. He came for a rather unusual purpose - a buffalo hunt.

BROWN: I have in my possession a diary or journal which was written by Elliott Roosevelt in 1876 and 1877. Elliott Roosevelt was a younger brother of Teddie Roosevelt. He was the father of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He came out here from New York, he and his cousin. They left New York in December 1876 and arrived at Dallas about five days later. In Dallas they picked up their equipment, outfit they called it, to go on a buffalo hunt. Now they thought that they would either have a lot of fun or they'd make some money by killing and skinning buffalos. So in Dallas they bought two wagons and about fourteen horses and they had with them six or eight dogs, bird dogs mostly to hunt buffalos. (Laughter) That shows what green horns they were. Anyhow they went from Dallas to Fort Worth and Fort Worth to Weatherford and from Weatherford to Graham and Young County and there they made camp for awhile.

But they did kill a lot of wild animals and birds between Dallas and Graham. They took the fresh meat and traded it for flour, coffee or anything that they didn't have or needed. They described this country here as a great gift of game country. They had never seen anything like it. It was a paradise of wild animals. At one time they said they had twelve kinds of meat; buffalo, antelope, deer, wild hog, turkey, duck, prairie chicken, quail, two kinds of rabbit, dove, and cat. I don't know what they meant by that cat unless it was fish.

When they left Graham they took a southwest course to Griffin, this little town of Griffin. What they saw in Griffin, it's one of these wild western towns with all kinds of evils, saloons and so on, They didn't stay all night in the town, they were afraid to. But the next day they went up to Fort Griffin and talked to the officers and left some of their dogs- the dogs were kind of worn out after ten or twelve days.

Then they went on up westward to the Brazos River and then finally they were out in the buffalo country. The first buffalo

BROWN: that was killed by this group was in Haskell County on Paint Rock Creek and then they moved on until finally they were to the Caprock, where the rocks rise higher than where we live here, the great plains. Now you see they were going to make their buffalo hunt between Albany, Texas and Blanco Canyon. There are three branches of the Brazos River; Salt Fork, the Double Mountain Fork, and Clear Fork. You know the Clear Fork is just several miles north of us here.

They ran into some problems though. (Somebody is going to have to notify me, I'm not a very good condensor like these others. I don't have very good terminal facilities. You know Brother J. P. Sewell who used to be the President of the school preached long sermons. So one day somebody asked his son, "Well what do you think of the sermons?" He said, "Well, they're good, but my father doesn't have very good terminal facilities.") They heard about the Indians. The Indians were breaking out of their reservations in Oklahoma and they were attacking these hunters. Now there were about 1,500 people hunting right in this area. So they didn't like the Elliott group because they were young and they were boisterous and they were singing "Pull Boy, Pull" and hunter songs and songs like that. And the dogs, don't you see, were there. It was alright when they had quail, or something like that, but a dog would bark at the buffalo and that would scare them and of course they were just unhappy about that.

They decided to get rid of them. Well, they had some fights with them, you know there were eight of them there and they were pretty good fighters, but the old tough buffalo hunters were ready to do a better job. But finally one of them told (Elliott records in his journal), he said, "Get, we got you, get.") O.K. I'm not quite through, if you'll just give me my money back.

Another problem was water. They were without water for thirty-eight hours one time and forty-eight the next time. Then another problem concerned these Indians. I've got a little story here, written out about that and I'll close with that.

They were afraid of the Indians and they believed everything anybody said about them, about how cruel they were and so on. They were all seated around the fire and they had their supper there at Fort Griffin yarnin, telling yarns, some risque stories too. They were thinking about these Indians, but they got interested in something else and maybe were singing or telling stories and the fear kind of went out of them, but they were around in a circle and it was getting dark and suddenly a figure appeared and slipped into the camp and sat down. Well, this group had just finished their supper so, the Indian, he moved toward where some food was left. And suddenly somebody recognized that an Indian was there, because everybody's clothes was on. They just didn't know what to do. The old Indian, he realized that maybe something was ruined back there in the mind of those white people and he said, "Me Tonk." Every

BROWN: Every Indian knew two words. These Indians were Tonkawa Indians and they were peaceful Indians. And he said, "Me Tonk," and he raced over and got the stew pot and cleaned it out. Well, anyhow, the Tonks were the scouts for the government army, United States Army. They had helped fight the Indians and help kill them and space them and they would scalp these Indians.

These boys were out here about two and a half months. I've had the journal some time. I'm kind of slow on doing something with it. I have permission from the Roosevelt Foundation to publish it, if it's worth publishing. (Applause)

HARPER: Thank you Brother Brown. I'm glad we waited to hear that Indian story.