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Interview with  
Edwin F. Flato  
March 13, 1970

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Interviewer: Dr. A. Ray Stephens  
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Oral History Collection

Edwin F. Flato

Interviewer: Dr. A. Ray Stephens

Place of Interview: Corpus Christi, Texas      Date: March 13, 1970

Dr. Stephens: This interview is with Mr. Edwin F. Flato, 209 Wilshire, Corpus Christi, Texas, 78411, March 13, 1970. Mr. Flato, would you mention here when you first came to the Coastal Bend area and the reasons why and then your impressions of the area.

Mr. Flato: I came to Kingsville first of June, 1904, to work for my brother. He was in partnership with . . . Kleberg and Wimbleton.

Dr. Stephens: Now he was in partnership with . . .

Mr. Flato: Kleberg.

Dr. Stephens: R. J. Kleberg.

Mr. Flato: Yes.

Dr. Stephens: Yes, okay.

Mr. Flato: We got a lumber load of construction train. And he came down a few months before I did and built a lumber shed. And we slept in the lumber yard and ate in a tent when I first went down there. Saturday nights it was kind of a picnic. We'd

go out to the King Ranch and stay till Monday morning since it was just about . . . not very far, just outside of Kingsville. And I was there about a year, and Mr. Kleberg . . . I wasn't . . . this was 1905. Mr. Kleberg asked my brother if he'd like to make me a proposition to go down to Samfordyce to open up a lumber yard. He and Mr. Yokum would put up the money, and . . . I'd have a third interest, a third of the profits. And I also slept in a lumber shed down there (chuckle). And it was quite a wild proposition down there. The . . . old Mr. Yokum invested quite a little money in building buildings and things. And he expected to put a bridge across at Samfordyce to go to Tampico, and the city of Mexico. And when he tried to get that permit, President Diaz was president but with the . . . and he ruled it with an iron hand. Told him he couldn't put a bridge across there that his revolution was started from Matamoros, and if there was a bridge put across it had to be at Brownsville to Matamoros. So after being there six months, my brother wrote and said that he had . . . anybody could look after that lumber shed . . . yard.

Wasn't going to amount to anything. He needed me very bad up at Kingsville. He wrote this, and I wired him to bring the fellow down there. I was sick of it, too (chuckle). And went back to Kingsville, but I didn't stay with him very long. After that I had a little money, and I put it into a hardware business over here and came here first of June, 1906. I was just connected with him altogether about two years. But I was . . . I . . . with my young experience I thought Corpus had a lot more future than Kingsville and put money into this little hardware business. And these were older men that I started a little \$10,000 company here. And the president of the company was a travelling man from Belaire Hardware Company. I was young, but I had more business sense and ability than he did. Shortly after I came to Corpus Dr. Heaney and I got to be very close friends, and I lived with them till I married, about three years. Dr. Harry G. Heaney. Well, this man that started the business . . . I mean that I was in. He didn't start it. We all put our money in together. At Christmas . . .

this . . . I came in at the first of June. We put the money in about April, but he . . . at Christmas time he went up to Summerfield and took his wife--I'm just rambling . . .

Stephens: That's alright. Fine.

Flato: . . . and left his wife up there. And I invited him to come to Dr. Heaney's to stay all night with me. I had a great big room and have supper with us. And that night we got to talking about the thing. Did you know Lorraine Jones? She was a young . . . well, a . . . Anna Jim, she was different from the rest of the Jones family. She was a builder (chuckle). They . . . she came around asked us for a donation for a corner lot in Artesian Park. It'd be the northeast corner, this one lot. And the Monday Club would mine it for \$300, so I gave her \$10 and charged it to expense. And that night we were talking, and I told him that, and the fellow just went all to pieces and fired me right there as it were. I was making twice as much money . . . getting twice as much salary when I left Kingsville as I was getting here. We were all just trying to see how little we could live on. And I could go back for

three or four times as much salary if I were looking for a salary job. So he went down and told the man that worked in there that they . . . W.J. Smith. They'd been in partners in a little hardware store before we started this larger one. And he told Smith he'd fire me, and so Smith said, "Well, I want to quit, too." And another guy, W.T. Blake, who was an old friend of ours that had put \$3,000 in the business, told him that he had fired me, and Mr. Blake said, "What're you talking about? You can't fire him. I wouldn't have put any money in there if he hadn't been in there." I was twenty-two. This was . . . instead of my being fired, he was fired (chuckle), and I was made president of the company. That was in January, 1907. And George Paul was building a building at Robstown where the Robstown State National Bank is. I guess it's right.

Sparks: Yes, that's right.

Flato: Is that the name?

Sparks: I think so.

Flato: Well, it's the big bank there on the corner, the two story . . . where Daywood started.

Sparks: That's right.

Flato: They were building this . . . on this building, and the foreman . . . they were from Richardson Center, Wisconsin. And he had cashed his check for \$750 for his payroll. And he was doing business with City National Bank and . . . I mean Mr. Paul was. And they wouldn't cash a check for over \$5. That was in 1907. This was . . .

Sparks: Panic.

Flato: . . . panic. And I told him I'd talk to his men and tell them he didn't . . . "Oh," he said, "no. They haven't any just confidence in us, and they won't stay here if we don't get them the money." And I said, "Well, I'll get you the money, \$750." I gave him the money, and the next week end Mr. George Paul came back to town . . . he came to Corpus. He called me up and asked me if I had time to come down . . . no, he said . . . he . . . if . . . time to see him if he'd come down to see me . . . down to the office to see me. And I said, "Look, Mr. Paul, you've got so much more business than I have, I'll come down to see you." So when I got down there, he gave me a letter . . . a copy of a letter he was . . . had dictated to all different salesmen, anybody working for him, that



they were to buy all the hardware they ever needed from me. And if I didn't have it, that they could wait till I got it. And to bring in all . . . everybody that bought land from them in my place of business to get their hardware and implements. So . . . and he lived up to that all the time he was down in this country. Different propositions . . . he had . . . he started a . . .

Sparks: He was very appreciative of your friendship. You know, I met him in his later days not too long before he died, and he spoke so highly of you and said, "I hope sometime you can talk to Mr. Flato about our friendship."

Flato: Well, it extended over a long period. He called me up and wanted me to go out to this auction sale out at Robstown for lots and said, "You pick out some lots and put a hardware store out there." And I said, "Well, thank you, Mr. Paul, for the compliment. I haven't got enough money to run a good hardware store . . . one good hardware store much less (chuckle) . . . so he got right were the \_\_\_\_\_ . You know about where \_\_\_\_\_ is?"

Sparks: Yes, I did.

Flato: Robstown Hardware Company?

Sparks: Yes.

Flato: Well, I started Robstown Hardware Company later on in 1913. So he said . . . he told . . . I was . . . I had been biddin' on lots right all around. But when he . . . he figured that should be the best location for business, and he told the man if I bid on a lot there, to sell it to me no matter what I bid. And somebody said, "\$75." I said, "\$85," and he said, "Sold," and moved up the street. He was going to stick me (chuckle). So I paid the \$85 for the lot, but I could've had all the lots I wanted to have and at the same price. But I didn't even like to spend \$85.

Stephens: What type person was George H. Paul? Can you describe the man?

Flato: He was one of the nicest, cleanest looking fellows, and he . . . he was . . . he was just doing all this. He wasn't over thirty-five years old, I don't think, when he came down here.

Sparks: Probably younger than that. He might've been younger than that. I don't remember either.

Stephens: What about his personality? How did he strike you with regard to that?

Flato: He was very attractive to me. Of course, naturally,

he was one of the . . . he started a little . . . little addition out here at the edge of town. It was the edge of Corpus then, but it's right in town. And put in water and they didn't have electric lights what'd go out there so he ordered these street lights that they'd light every night with a match (chuckle), you know. And, of course, all the pipe they put in for the water and the street lights, anything they used there, it came from me. And when he went and bought this land from . . . in . . . from the Taft Estate, he told the salesman to sell me some land out there before they really had offered it to anyone else. And I went out there and looked. I bought a contract for 160 acres, and I liked . . . I didn't have any business putting money out in something else in land or anything, but I think contracts were thirty dollars an acre. You know the first land he bought out there, you know?

Sparks: Yes.

Flato: And I had a friend that was with the Cotton Belt Railroad. He came in, I guess, the next day after I was there, and I asked him whether he'd like to go in with me on this land. I'd have the real

estate man show it to him. He said, "No, I . . . I don't . . . it wouldn't do me any good to look at it. I wouldn't know. If you think it's a good piece to buy, I'll go in half with you." So later on I sold eighty acres of mine-- I guess this was in 1909--for twice what I had paid for it. And it was just not very long to Chris Daugherty died.

Sparks: Chris Daugherty.

Flato: Yes. And to tell you the truth I wanted to go up to Lanchita, Michigan, to see a girl that I was in love with and went up there, and I needed that \$750. So I got off of that right quick. (chuckle) And stayed up there until her people agreed to let her come back . . . marry me and come back down here (chuckle). But then Mr. Paul had a partner that was kind of a silent partner, in all of this stuff that I . . . I really didn't know him until afterwards. They had a falling out.

Sparks: Was that John Shary?

Flato: Yes.

Sparks: Was that John Shary?

Flato: Yes. And John Shary told me what happened was that Mr. Paul contracted for some land from Welder's up there at Saint Paul. Do you know anything about that?

Sparks: Yes.

Flato: Why'd they sell out?

Sparks: I know something about what . . . I know Mr. Paul's side of the story (chuckle).

Flato: Well, I . . . I never . . . I never did know Mr. Paul's side of the story and didn't know it until after Mr. Paul left this part of the country, and John Shary claims that Mr. Paul tried to make a profit off of him.

Stephens: Off of . . . Mr. Paul how to make a profit off of John Shary. In what way, did he say?

Flato: Yes, that he was paying more for it, contracted more for it, but, but I . . . I don't know if that's true.

Stephens: That he was getting to him? I understand . . .

Sparks: Ah, we were talking about a man this morning that also knew Mr. Paul's side. I don't believe that, because I ta . . .

Stephens: What was that contracting though?

Sparks: I don't know.

Stephens: There was a contracting for . . . what'd you say that George H. Paul was contracting for the Welder Ranch.

Flato: Yes. He . . . he . . . he bought it.

Stephens: Well, but . . . how . . . what was the deal? The  
'shady' deal that Shary was talking about?

Flato: Well, he . . . he claims that he tried to put  
an end to him at a higher price than he was  
contracting from . . .

Stephens: Oh . . . oh . . . oh.

Flato: . . . the Welder's for the land, but . . . but  
all of my dealings couldn't have been cleaner  
with Paul, and I didn't even know John Shary at  
that time in any of these deals.

Stephens: When did you find about Shary's part of this story?  
When did he tell you? Do you remember the year?

Flato: Oh, yes. I . . . I can tell you about the year.  
About 1922.

Stephens: Oh, '22, after you had moved . . . after Shary  
had moved to the Valley?

Flato: Oh, yes.

Stephens: And whatever happened to Paul? Do you remember?

Flato: He went to . . . where'd he go . . . to, oh,  
Denver, or . . . out . . . out in Colorado, didn't  
he?

Sparks: Yes. I think so.

Stephens: Did you ever hear of him after he left Saint Paul  
region?

Flato: Oh, yes, yes. He . . . he was down here, came to see me.

Stephens: Oh.

Flato: But we . . . we were always very fine, and I never had any dealings with John Shary, although my brother . . . brother and John Shary were very close friends. Politically, they tried to overthrow Archie Parr.

Ms Flato: That was good (chuckle).

Flato: And there was . . . an attorney for the St. Louis Brownsville Railroad Company. He was a good friend of my brother's. He handled that trying to . . . trying to put . . . had somebody run against Parr around . . . McAllen but they didn't. I don't know . . . I don't think that it ever worked out, they didn't overthrow him.

Stephens: Oh.

Flato: But the fellow they were running wasn't . . . wasn't much better than John (chuckle). Archie Parr. Oh, but this was a long time afterwards . . .

Sparks: Yes.

Flato: . . . that I heard from John Shary. My brother and I were down . . . down at brother'd, open a business down at McAllen, and he and I went down and stayed with Mr. Paul . . .

Sparks: You mean Mr. Shary?

Flato: . . . John Shary and really, we . . . he was a salesman.

Sparks: Yes, he was a salesman (chuckle). So I . . . well, do you know . . . why don't you ask him . . . the things . . . right now, why don't you ask him what experience he had, I mean, as far as homeseekers in this area. Of course . . . Mr. Paul brought in homeseekers to Robstown, and he brought them in to Gregory, and then, of course, John Shary took homeseekers to the valley. He got this train under Paul.

Flato: Snowdiggers.

Sparks: Snowdiggers, that's what they called them.

Flato: Well, those . . . those were brought to Robstown, was snowdiggers, and there's very few of them. I . . . I'd have them when they'd come in there and want to buy implements, on time, and the land hadn't been put in cultivation, you know. And I'd question these fellows about that, and they said, "Well," they'd tell us that, "Of course, this land won't make a bale to the acre the first year, but, after you get it in cultivation, and make a bale to the acre, and we figured we'd hire



these Mexicans to farm it, and we'd move to town." Well, I didn't have much faith in selling them, although, there was . . . there was a few of them that did make good, but there's one that . . . her husband's dead now, and she married . . . this \$85 lot that I bought at Robstown at that time . . . you're not taking this? You taking this?

Stephens: Yes.

Flato: I'm rambling so . . .

Stephens: That's alright.

Sparks: That's alright.

Flato: . . . this \$85 lot in 1913, I wanted to start a business out there because I had half the state on . . . no. I had the agency for the Reeves Tractor. They made big steam engines, and they made a gasoline engine, and I got the agency for the La Cross Plow, it was a five-disc plow. It was wonderful plowing these Mesquite roots, and five of them would make a carload at that time. And the man sold me these . . . these plows, and they'd been selling to somebody down here, but the fellow just owed them a lot of money and didn't pay them, so he kept trying to get his factory to ship me the plows, and they . . . they put us off

because he threatened he wasn't going . . . going to pay them any money if they . . . they shipped me any plows. So I had the orders for twenty-five. At that time that was quite a little money. They sold for 5 . . . \$500 apiece. So I met him at LaCross, Wisconsin, and he . . . and I talked to the people, and I said, "Well, you not going to get your money out of this fella anyway. You better sell me these plows and profit. You'll make the money back that he owes you." And I stayed there till they shipped twenty-five plows down here. And the Twin City Tractor Company . . . how long have you lived . . . you seem to know so much about this proposition. How long have you lived around . . . around Taft and Gregory?

Sparks: Since 1908.

Flato: Well, you . . . the Gilletts were friends of Mr. Green's. They sent the engineers down here and built a tractor called Twin City Tractor. And they also built a great big three-bottom plow that was . . . oh, it was a big thing. Well, they . . . they had . . . they sold the Reeves people the motor that went on that tractor. And we went--

this man \_\_\_\_\_ who had helped me get the LaCross plows--went to . . . to Wisconsin . . . I mean to Minneapolis. And I think Mr. Gillett . . . well, he was sales manager of the business. Wasn't much older than I . . . than I was, and I talked to him about getting the agency and so they gave it to me. Then Mr. Reeves and I started that Robstown Hardware Company because just the repair business out of the steam engines would make a profit out there. Wouldn't sell it unless they paid the cash for it, these contractors. And they gave me half of Texas on that Twin City. And the first thing they wanted me to do was to go to Victoria to see Mr. Jim McFaddin, the old, old, old man McFaddin up at the ranch.

Sparks: Yes. The one that McFaddin's named for.

Flato: Right.

Sparks: The one that the town McFaddin's named for.

Flato: Is it in Victoria?

Sparks: No, right out of Victoria.

Flato: Yes. And their salesman had thought he'd sold, but he agreed with Mr. McFaddin that he'd put the tractor out there and use it for thirty days . . . put a man out there on it thirty days. And

so Mr. McFaddin said, "Alright, if you want to do that." Well, they couldn't close the deal, and this factory asked me if I wouldn't go and see Mr. McFaddin to try and close the deal. And I went over there. Shoot, he's a smart old cow man. They . . . there wasn't about . . . he'd gotten about all the land put in cultivation he wanted so he didn't . . . he didn't buy it (chuckle). But I stayed there two or three days with him, and he knew Mr. Kleberg and I were very good friends, this old gentleman, R.J. Kleberg. And he said, "You know, Bob Kleberg is one of the smartest cow men in Texas. If he'd put some of this Brahma blood into those cattle down there. He brings these fine Shorthorns and Hereford cattle down to . . . mesquite and mesquites," and at that time we had ticks, says, "They just can't take it. They need some Brahma blood in them. Now way back there they had . . . they'd put Brahma blood with them. Well, Al McFaddin, his son, and one of the Thomas gave . . . sent Caesar Kleberg, foreman of the King Ranch, a very fine bull, and that . . . that started this Santa Gertrudis breed, but I . . . Mr. King . . . Mr Kleberg had been

away. So much difference in our age although he . . . he liked to have me out there with him and to go around, and he'd been away, and I was driving my car, and he had his Mexican chauffeur in the back of it. But we drove around this about forty very beautiful Shorthorn two year old heifers and this as pretty a Brahma bull as I've ever seen, and I've seen lots of them since.

Stephens: This is the red Brahma that he used or the gray one?

Flato: And Mr. Kleberg shore hated to do it, shore hated to do it.

Stephens: Why did they use mostly Shorthorns? Why not Angus or Hereford?

Flato: Well, this was . . . at that time way back then I was at A&M when they'd ship those Shorthorn cattle, beautiful Shorthorn cows down to him to have them vaccinated and innoculated for the Texas fever, ticks, and it was from that . . . that cross Shorthorn . . .

Stephens: Yes, Santa Gertrudis breed came, but I'm wondering why they had Shorthorn. Why didn't they . . .

Flato: There wasn't any Angus in this country at that time.

Stephens: Well, wonder why not? And why no Hereford?

Flato: Oh, they had Herefords. They had about all . . . they had about as many Herefords as they did . . .

Stephens: Oh, is that right?

Flato: . . . as they did . . .

Stephens: Well, they did their Brahma experimenting with  
the Shorthorns didn't they?

Flato: Right. But . . .

Stephens: \_\_\_\_\_.

Flato: Well, no, they wasn't thinking about Santa Gertrudis.

Stephens: No, but they were . . . they were selecting the  
Shorthorns over the . . . Shorthorn breed over  
the Hereford breed. Weren't they?

Flato: Yes.

Stephens: Any particular reason that you can think of?

Flato: No, except Mr. Kleberg liked the Shorthorn.

Stephens: Just liked them better.

Flato: They're . . . they're a fine animal.

Stephens: Yes. Yes, I know, but you have some people who  
prefer one and some another, and they usually give  
reasons, but which are their own personal reasons.  
I just wondered what his were.

Flato: Yes, yes. You know, according . . . according to  
Bob on stuff like that there's nothing to it. He'd  
say that the Santa Gertrudis breeder is about a  
third Shorthorn and a third Hereford . . .

Stephens: He would?

Flato: . . . and a third Brahma. But they mixed a lot of different stuff in it later on, but I would . . . they had a Richard Kleberg. You know, he was a congressman and was running the Laureles Ranch, and he had two cows . . . calves. One was Morkey . . . I remember . . . the original starter, yes. He was a red one then a brown bull. And the executive meeting. . . executive committee of Cattle Raisers Association met in Corpus was going out to Laureles to see these cattle . . . these calves. And Richard had fed the cows all they could eat and the calves suckered them, given them all their milk and any feed they wanted. And the cow men didn't guess anywhere around their weight, and they usually . . . a good cow man usually could just look at an animal and tell you what it weighed within not many pounds. But I gave the picture to Richard King and her son have offices together. They have it hanging up there because Richard gave it . . . gave me. We were very . . . very close friends. And I went out there to that barbecue and to look at the beef cattle and so on. But Mr. Kleberg he shore hated to cross that Brahma bull on those beautiful Shorthorns (chuckle), but they really did a wonderful job.

Stephens: Well, now, when did . . . when did farming start  
in a big way to replace livestock as the main . . .

Flato: In this county?

Stephens: . . . mode of living? Yes.

Flato: Well, I'll tell you. In 1907--and that seems a  
funny time--there was a Scotch syndicate owned  
the Laureles Ranch. The old man Miffin Kenedy and  
King had been kind of partners and very close  
friends. Didn't neither one of them know any-  
thing about cattle business, but Mr. Kenedy was  
a very well-educated man, and Mr. King wasn't,  
but he married a very lovely wife. She was the  
first . . . oldest daughter of a Presbyterian  
minister. Reverend Chamberlin was the first  
Presbyterian minister down in Brownsville. So  
this young son, R.J. (Bob) Kleberg, that's . . .  
he had a lot . . . he had more business ability  
than Richard did. Richard was a lovable character.  
Everybody loved him, but he wasn't as good a business  
man as Bob. And he put Richard off the King Ranch  
. . . off Laureles Ranch. Then later . . . 1931  
. . . 1929 we had another hard time here in . . .  
I guess it was in about 1930 that they were building  
a dam out here at Mathis. And the county . . .



the city commissioners had an unfortunate proposition over that dam. They . . . they had an engineer that was trying to drink too much, and the contractors was Smith Brothers. I don't know whether you ever heard of Smith Brothers or not. They were the ones that built that tower in the Plaza Hotel in San Antonio. They . . . they kept him . . . kept the engineer under the influence of liquor and didn't build a very good dam. And the first time a big . . . filled up, it washed out. They had a big overdraft at the bank I was doing business with, and they couldn't've gotten the money to build it back. So the businessmen got together and insisted that I run for mayor and pick my commissioners, and I was elected mayor. These other fellas saw they didn't have any chance, and they didn't . . . I didn't have any opposition and . . .

Stephens: This was Corpus Christi.

Flato: Yes.

Stephens: What year was that now?

Flato: 1931.

Stephens: '31? How long did you serve?

Flato: Oh, just two years. That's all I was elected for. I wasn't . . .

Stephens: You didn't want it.

Flato: I didn't want the job in the first place, but . . . they . . . they had built a gas . . . put in gas here, and they deserve a good deal of credit for it, too. But it was poorly . . . they used second hand pipe and second hand . . . very, very poor put in. And it was a time when you could buy copper pipe 13¢ a pound, and we just bought lots of it. Fixed all these water lines up that were in trouble and paid the overdraft at the bank and let the contract for . . . well, we picked the engineers of the . . . of the . . . when this dam washed out, we didn't have anything but a little loose rock dam up here at Calallen Island. And Welder owned the land on the other side, and he threatened to shoot these . . . any of these commissioners or any of those people if that got on his land. So I had Richard King and Edward Kleberg, knew them very well and had them telephone this Jim Welder to meet us up there at the dam. And, oh, I had a lot of engineers. At that time Colonel Adams was . . . we were having . . . started our deep water before then, and we had a man by the name of Cummins that was a very fine

engineer and had a great deal to do with the engineering on the ship channel at Houston and here. And Cummins had a man, an assistant, who was a very fine man named Howard, and when the . . . wait a minute I'll get back. On this little rock dam Mr. Welder finally agreed to let us raise the dam about five feet higher than it was and made it solid. Used sheet piling . . . sheet steel piling in front of it, and then we had to agree to . . . after we got our other dam built to drive it down. Well, I had told him when he . . . well, and then we had to build him . . . drill a well and put a windmill over further so that the cattle could water, cows could come there. But he worked us for everything he could, but it was very cheap for us. It didn't . . . didn't cost over \$10,000 for all he asked. And then when we did fill it up, then put sacks on top of this and made it about two feet higher . . . sand . . . sand in the sacks, you know, on top of this proposition, and that give us a lot . . . lot more water. Of course, wanting to talk about driving it down, he never . . . he forgot about that. It was just like the engineer said, "It wouldn't effect him anyway . . . his land."

Sparks: Well, Mr. Flato, you've been down here and being in the hardware business, you know a lot about the development of farming, the agriculture interests.

Flato: Yes. Well, I started to tell you about Laureles Ranch. Mr. Kleburg bought that in 1907, I believe at \$4 an acre.

Ms. Flato: From Mr. Kenedy?

Flato: No, Kenedy had lost it.

Ms. Flato: Oh, I see.

Flato: It was Scotch Syndicate bought it.

Ms. Flato: And . . .

Stephens: Oh, was it Texas Land and Cattle Company? Was that the name of the . . .

Flato: No, Scotch.

Stephens: Scotch Company?

Flato: Well, it could've been. I don't know. They had an old Scotchman that was running the ranch. He was a very tall old man, and I never will forget the bathtub he had out there. It was the biggest thing you ever saw (chuckle). It come to me when . . . you . . . you can find out. The records around here.

Stephens: Yes, that would be a good idea.

Flato: But I can tell you Mr. Kenedy . . .

Ms. Flato: I think . . . I can't remember anything that's happened. You have it written down.

Flato: Mr. King . . . Kenedy . . . old man Edward Kenedy . . .

Sparks: I thought about it a lot, but I can't . . .

Stephens: Yes.

Flato: . . . lost that trying to build San Antonio-Aransas Pass Railroad.

Stephens: He did?

Flato: Yes. He put that property up . . . I'll tell you, it had posts, and I remember the posts.

Stephens: Fencing?

Flato: What? Cypress posts.

Stephens: Cypress?

Flato: He . . . he was smart . . . a smart man, made a mistake\_\_\_\_\_.

Stephens: Who owns the wells now?

Flato: Well, the . . .

Stephens: The Klebergs?

Flato: . . . Klebergs own everything they wanted to keep. It was . . . I'd guess in my opinion that real estate man we ever had did more for Nueces County of settling it up, and . . . puttin' in real good central Texas farmers down here, than all the rest of 'em put together.

Stephens: Who was that?

Flato: F. C. Bishop . . .

Stephens: F. C. Bishop.

Flato: . . . and my . . .

Sparks: Do you think he did more than Mr. Paul? Mr. Paul brought a lot of people down.

Flato: Who?

Sparks: Mr. Paul.

Flato: Well, a lot of people he brought . . . not very many of those people made good.

Sparks: Oh.

Stephens: Who's that, Mr. Paul?

Flato: Yes. F. C. Bishop did . . . did more . . . what . . . you know Mr. . . . Mr. Green wouldn't sell people land along the railroad track . . . that was his salesman. He . . . of course, the McKameys, old man McKamey was the first man that raised cotton in this country, and he was a very intelligent man, and they got land along there just like Hattie Bell's father-in-law and stuff . . . and lots of land right . . . right along there, and . . .

Stephens: Do you own land?

Flato: What?

Stephens: Do you have any land?

Flato: Oh, little.

Stephens: How much is a little?

Flato: Well . . .

Stephens: Several farms?

Flato: Well, one . . . one . . . one night there was . . . Henry Bowan and I was director of the Guaranty Title Company. And he called me up one night and wanted me to help 'im sell some fellows from Kentucky a little piece of land right out from the edge of town I'm trying to think what it was, \$30 or \$35 an acre came right up to town, and . . . they were afraid to invest their money unless they could get a local person to go in. They'd go on in to Florida, that's how . . . got stuck, and . . . I said, "Well, Herry, I wouldn't go in with strangers, unless I controlled it." And I heard a story what . . . what he had the land listed for. It was \$30 or \$35 an acre. And . . . I . . . I called 'im out of the room, and I said, "Well, well, let's just stall these fellows a little, and let me call Bob Driscoll down at the Nueces Hotel. And, I . . . I think Bob Driscoll would go in for half, and I'll take a fourth, and the title company'll take a fourth." He said, "Do you think we can handle it?" and I said, "Oh sure." And so I called Bob Driscoll and he said,

"Well," they had an old sausage railroad . . . had a night pullman to San Antonio, and took him out and told 'em what we wanted to do with the train. He said, "Get an option on it for two or three days," and, I said, "Oh, we've . . . its listed with us, and we won't offer it to anybody else. We can take as much time as necessary." So, the next morning he called me up about 7:00 or 7:30, wanted to know how soon Henry Bowen and I could get up to San Antonio, and I said, "Well . . . we'll come right up in the car, an automobile, and it won't take us so long." So, he had two of his good friends that he had a lot of confidence in. One man was a Jack Fock, and Bill Luke was a land loan man, but Lock was a financier, and a very close friend of Mr. Driscoll's, so Bill Luke had . . . was his daughter that was gonna marry Dr. Rusk's son, and Dr. Rusk took the sixteenth, and Bill Luke a sixteenth, and Jack Lock an eighth, Gus took a fourth, I took a fourth, and the title company a fourth, no, I think the title company had three-sixteenths, and le . . . Glover Johns had a sixteenth, and . . . you know, we . . . we never did put any money into that land at all. We got



a lot more for lease money, leasing it for oil than we ever . . . ever put into the land.

Stephens: That's what I'm looking for (chuckle).

Flato: And I . . . I'm still gettin' . . .

Stephens: Any royalties?

Flato: Yes, I'm gettin' pretty good royalties.

Stephens: But you never had farmed as such, you've always been in hardward and then associated indirectly with farmers, then.

Flato: Well, I . . . I owned . . .

Mr. Flato: You farmed that out there, Edwin.

Flato: Yes. I . . . we put some of this land in cultivation out there, and when Mr. Driscoll died, he had an old lawyer in San Antonio named Ball. Was it John Ball, or . . . I forget, quite a prominent . . . and Ernest Miller and Mrs. Driscoll were administered the estate. And immediately this old lawyer that was on the . . . one of the administrators notified Henry Bowen for us to stop putting any land in cultivation. So I called Miss Clara and told her I wanted to come up and see her, and I showed her this letter. And she said, "Tell that damned old fool to go to hell." Said, "Whatever agreement you had with my brother Bob, you go right along and have it just that way. No need

to worry about it." (Chuckle) And she . . .  
she was hardboiled. But she stuck to it. We  
put it in cultivation. And we had two . . .  
two farmers on it and . . .

Ms. Flato: How many acres were in the whole piece?

Flato: What?

Ms. Flato: How many acres were in the whole piece?

Flato: Let's see, around 5 or 6,000 acres.

Stephens: Hm. Is that right?

Flato: Had . . .

Stephens: Now which way from town was that?

Ms. Flato: Right out here.

Stephens: Yes, but I don't know where that is.

Flato: Well, you know how to go to the ranch and how to  
go to Robstown

Sparks: Out toward the airport.

Stephens: Out toward Robstown, oh.

Ms. Flato: Where all those ponds are.

Flato: Well, at one time there were lots of ponds.  
They've all gone.

Ms. Flato: They're gone now?

Flato: Yes.

Stephens: But it's out towards the airport.

Flato: Well, the airport . . . it was all part of the  
airport . . . the airport was part of it.

Stephens: Oh, I see. Yes, well, I know where it is now.

Flato: And some on the left hand side and go on onto the right hand side. And it's like you . . . I don't know whether you've been . . . know where the bishop lives out here.

Stephens: No.

Flato: You do.

Ms. Flato: On Ocean Drive.

Flato: That was . . . old Culton built that house. Well, Culton was leasing land for us, and it's on the north side of the railroad track there and put down some wells, and he got a lot of oil. And a fella in with him, too, that . . . they thought they'd gotten rich.

Sparks: Yes. What was that other fella's name?

Flato: Oh, Tubby . . .

Sparks: Yes, Tubby.

Flato: . . . I don't know. We brought him down here originally. I . . . I'd gotten wiggled into the oil business, and it didn't turn out very good so I . . . I was very . . . did you know Mr. McCahn? A. C. McCahn that was mayor here.

Sparks: Yes.

Flato: Well, he . . . this fella that was sent up there to take over an oil proposition we had, and this

fella . . . name was Bailey. He'd been in the produce business, and he'd pulled some stunts, and I went up there and fired him and put Mr. McCahn in charge. Then . . . then . . . he got a well driller, and we had an outfit (chuckle). Brought it down here. That was the fella that . . . his name was Irving . . . Push Irving.

Ms. Flato: Oh, yes, of course, Push Irving.

Sparks: Yes, I remember him.

Ms. Flato: He was the coach, too, wasn't he?

Flato: Oh, well, no. He . . . he was very much interested in football and was . . .

Ms. Flato: That's all I know about him.

Stephens: But what about F. C. Bishop? Does he have . . . he's dead.

Flato: Yes.

Stephens: But does he have any relatives still around?

Flato: No, but I'll give you a little history. F. C. Bishop bought . . . he really created more good land put in this cultivation. He . . . he came down here . . . there wasn't much difference in our age, but he was hardup.

Stephens: Where was he from?

Flato: Oh, he was from Central Texas, I think. But just nervous and just running over with enthusiasm. And he went out to see Mr. Kleberg to list some land with him. I think Mr. Kleberg listed \$13 an acre. He'd paid four . . . four and a half for it. The only . . . Mr. Kleberg didn't want . . . really didn't want any land . . .

Stephens: He didn't.

Flato: . . . in Nueces County because the taxes would be too much. He wanted it in Kleberg County . . .

Stephens: He controlled taxes there, didn't he?

Flato: Yes (chuckle). It did make a difference. And so Stockton and Walton and old man London and Leeman and a whole pile of those real good farmers that Bishop sold. And then in 19 . . . 1909 my brother called me up and told me he could . . . could buy Brooks Siding as they'd been giving this land-- the railroad company had--for \$19 an acre. Asked me whether I had any money, and I said I didn't have any but my wife had \$3,500. And I said, "Yes, I got \$3,500 I'll send you out in the morning." And he told me whether it was \$19 an acre or not. I says, "I'll mail it tonight so you'll have it tomorrow." "No," he says, "I can't let you do

that. I've got to take care of old man Ragland and Caesar Kleberg and John Finnigan." He's one of these very generous fellows. He didn't have to take care of any of them, but he didn't have to let me in either as far as that goes. But we'd worked so close together always, and I sent him \$1,500, and I got about . . . we sold it to Bishop but not to . . . I guess we got 3 . . . about \$4,500 back for my \$1,500 invested, you know.

Ms. Flato: He wants to know about Mr. Bishop. That's what he wants to know.

Flato: Well, that's what Bishop . . . Bishop was the one buying it, and that started the town of Bishop after him.

Stephens: Now what about his sales techniques? How did he go about selling land? Was he slick, or was he honest?

Flato: No, he . . . he . . . he sold good land, and it was worth more money, but he was always hard up.

Stephens: Did he have high pressure sales tactics?

Flato: Well, I wouldn't say that. No, I . . . everybody he sold . . .

Stephens: Satisfied them.

Flato: . . . made money. Now . . . but he'd discount these notes he'd take. Just . . . he was just so anxious to work. At 10 per cent . . . some Jews, Guggenheim and Cohn . . . they bought a lot of his paper. And then we had hard times for a little while, and old Guggenheim just picked at Cohn so hard that one Jew committed suicide (chuckle).

Stephens: Is that right?

Sparks: Is that the one that used to have stores here? Did they have store . . . did they have a store here or did he . . .

Flato: Oh, yes, Guggenheim, Cohn, and Leichin's. They were competitors. And old man Guggenheim was a nice old fellow, and Cohn was, too. Cohn was more adventuresome, and he had a great deal to do with buying these notes with a 10 per cent discount that was . . . people would put it in cultivation. And (chuckle) . . . but he was over-extending himself, Bishop. And then he . . . i-five . . . let's see . . . put in 5,000 acres in cultivation out at . . . the King Ranch had finally took over.

Stephens: That was Bishop's?

Flato: Yes.

Stephens: The total amount he put in was 5,000 acres.

Flato: He put in 5,000 acres in cultivation.

Stephens: In cultivation. How much did he handle altogether?

Flato: Oh, my he sold lots, lots of land.

Stephens: Do . . . you have no idea approximately . . .

Flato: No, I couldn't tell you.

Stephens: More than Paul did?

Flato: Oh, yes, more in this . . . this part of the  
country.

Stephens: I see, in Nueces County.

Flato: And it meant more to the . . . to Nueces County . . .  
worked for George Paul so . . .

Stephens: Is the land around Bishop more productive than  
around Robstown?

Flato: Oh, no. Well, a lot of that land . . .

Stephens: How would you compare the land between . . .  
around Bishop, Robstown, and Taft?

Flato: Well . . .

Stephens: Which is most productive?

Flato: Well, Taft . . . there wasn't any better land, and  
there wasn't any better land than this Laureles  
land . . . he sold out here. That was as good as  
. . . well, to tell you Mr. Kleberg afterwards  
sold the Chapmans 40,000 acres of that Laureles  
land.

Stephens: Oh, is that . . . is that out of the Laureles Ranch?



Flato: Yes.

Stephens: Are there any Chapmans still living?

Flato: Well . . .

Stephens: The originals who bought the land?

Flato: Well, his son is.

Stephens: His son is? Here in Corpus?

Flato: Well, he farms out there.

Stephens: He farms out there.

Ms. Flato: That's . . . John, you've seen him every Sunday.

Flato: Yes, but that's the grandson, isn't it?

Ms. Flato: No, he . . . he's . . . he's the son of old . . .  
the old Chapman that bought that land.

Flato: Yeah. He's got more sense than his father. Was  
a very peculiar kind of a bird. He tried every  
kind of business. Tried the packing house, chicken  
business, all kinds of stuff at . . . and he . . .  
he didn't trust anybody hardly.

Stephens: Well, what changes have you seen in the Coastal  
Bend? Can you just hit the general topics starting  
from when you first came here? Is . . . it was kind  
of primitive agriculture.

Flato: You know, Corpus was a big city of about 4,500  
people when I came.

Stephens: Yes. And what are the reasons for its growth?  
What would you list as some of the main reasons?

Flato: Well . . . well, first had to be put . . . land  
had to be put in cultivation. And fortunately we  
had a man. Roy Miller was a protege of  
Mr. Kleberg's, too. He's kind of like I was.  
We . . . well, we worked with him anyway. We  
sent him to Washington to work on getting deep  
water. And then like Mr. Kleberg says, "Edwin,  
it's just a matter of time we'll . . . we'll get  
deep water, and get all this . . . we'll get this  
land in cultivation." And I don't know whether  
you know it. We've . . . we have the best port  
in Texas. Do you know it?

Stephens: No, I don't. I . . . I'm not surprised. I'm sure  
that's true.

Flato: Well . . .

Stephens: What about Houston?

Flato: Oh, we're so far ahead of Houston, no comparison.

Stephens: Is that right?

Flato: See, there's this little crooked canal up there,  
and when they first started running the boat . . .  
the boat up there and had that big flood and then

had to pump the mud out to get the boats out.  
It . . . it's a . . . and . . . and they had  
forth foot of water where we have forty-five.  
And that's as deep as Galveston or any of these  
other ports that has forty feet to their shelf  
out there. And it won't be very long before we'll  
have fifty feet.

Stephens: Is that right?

Ms. Flato: Tell him the amount of land that they owned.

Stephens: The port authority, you mean?

Ms. Flato: Yes.

Flato: Oh, I . . .

Ms. Flato: I . . . I . . . I found it big to me.

Flato: They . . . they got a lot of land from the state  
that was submerged land, and I think they got it  
at a very low price. And fortunately they've had  
. . . Bob Driscoll was the first chairman of the  
navigation district. And then Richard King, I  
guess, was on there. Well, old man Jones was on  
there a little while. I guess I took old man  
Jones' place. But it . . . and Richard King is  
still the head of the navigation district. I was  
on there a good many years.

Stephens: Is this Richard King the congressman?

Ms. Sparks: No.

Ms. Flato: No.

Flato: That was Kleberg congressman.

Stephens: Richard Kleberg.

Flato: Richard King. He was . . .

Ms. Flato: President . . .

Flato: . . . the grandson of old Captain King.

Stephens: Yes, and Richard Kleberg was the congressman.

And I guess he would be . . . evidently was secretary  
to this Richard Kleberg.

Ms. Flato: Yes.

Flato: Yes.

Stephens: This is Richard King, III.

Flato: No. Richard King . . . yes, yes. He . . . his  
father . . .

Ms. Flato: Yes, yes.

Flato: . . . yes, he's the third.

Ms. Flato: No.

Flato: No, he's just Richard King.

Ms. Flato: Senior.

Stephens: And . . . and that's what his legal name is, the  
third?

Ms Flato: No.

Stephens: No? I've seen the third around here somewhere.

Ms Sparks: Oh, there is a Richard King, III. That's his son.

Stephens: Oh, that's his son.

Ms. Flato: That's his son, and then he has a grandson who's  
in the bank, too, so it goes on and on.

Stephens: Oh, okay.

Flato: Richard King is chairman of the board of the bank,  
but he's . . . he's turned over the chairmanship  
of the navigation district to someone else.

Stephens: Oh, I see.

Flato: But he's . . . why, he sits at the head of the  
table, and he's done a wonderful job at that  
navigation district.

Stephens: Are you on . . . are you on any of those now?

Flato: What?

Stephens: Are you on any of those boards now?

Flato: Not . . . I . . . I resigned so he could get some  
younger men on with him.

Stephens: Well, that's unusual for the older men to step out  
willingly, isn't it? (chuckle)

Ms. Flato: Well, they're doing it.

Flato: Well . . .

Stephens: Well, that's good because there comes a time.

Flato: Let me tell you, I didn't deserve any credit of  
the proposition with him. He . . . he's . . .

he did a . . . he's done a wonderful job with it.

Stephens: That's not the way I heard it (chuckle).

Flato: He's a very . . . he's done a very wonderful job.

Stephens: Well, you have, too.

Flato: But Roy Miller . . . I did have charge of raising the money to keep Roy Miller in Washington. And Mr. Kleberg told me not to say anything to any of the rest of them, but whatever money I was short just let him know and he'd put up the difference.

Stephens: Now this is R.J. Kleberg, Sr.?

Flato: Yes.

Stephens: The old Bob.

Flato: Yes.

Stephens: And there was young Bob who's entirely . . .

Flato: He's . . . young Bob . . . he's entirely different proposition.

Stephens: Yeah (chuckle). Oh, is he? oh, the young one, you mean?

Flato: Yes.

Stephens: Well, now there's the one . . . how . . . what age is he? 60?

Ms. Flato: 70.

Stephens: 70 now. R. J., Jr?

Flato: Well, let's see. He was . . . well, he was seventy.

Stephens: Can you tell us about the Marazac plow, Mr. Flato?

Flato: Well, it . . . they deserved a lot of credit these old Bohemians. They . . . it was a moldboard plow. Of course, it . . . when you got down to it, when . . . when John Deere Plow Company built a plow and also the Taft . . . the Twin City people built a plow, Marazac's wouldn't compare with it. But it was the first . . . it was the first one that those old steam engines pulled, and part of it was wood and the share and that old . . . of course, there was one Marazac . . . one of the sons is still living at Aqua Dulce.

Stephens: I have a picture of the Marazac plow.

Ms. Flato: They're Czechs now, but they used to be Bohemians, but now they're Czechs.

Flato: Oh, yes, I remember . . .

Ms Sparks: You know, talking about plows, Mr. Flato, you mentioned about buying this lot in Robstown. Did you sell it for a profit the one you . . .

Flato: Well, I paid \$85 for it, and then when we wanted to built a . . . put a hardware store out there,

I . . . it was only a twenty-five foot lot, and I put up . . . put a twenty-five foot building on it and rented it to the hardware company for \$100 a month. Now I forget what I . . . paid about \$3,000 for the building, and the lot was \$85. And then . . . then we bought seventy-five feet on the front there that we still own. The Robstown Hardware Company bought that. And I sold that lot for \$11,000 cash that . . . however, they tore it down and built a . . .

Sparks: Pretty good profit, I'd say.

Flato: Yes, I do, too.

Ms. Flato: It's a great many years since then.

Sparks: Oh, yes.

Flato: It has paid, right along.

Ms. Flato: Oh, the Robstown Hardware, yes.