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Interview with  
James R. Heldenfels  
January 5, 1972

Place of Interview: Rockport, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. A. Ray Stephens

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Oral History Collection

Mr. James R. Heldenfels

Interviewer: Dr. A. Ray Stephens

Place of Interview: Rockport, Texas

Date: January 5, 1972

Dr. Stephens: This is an interview with Mr. James R. Heldenfels in Rockport, Texas, January 5, 1972. Mr. Heldenfels' mailing address is Post Office Box 4957, Corpus Christi, Texas, 78408. Mr. Heldenfels, would you say something about your background, and then comment please on the activities of the Heldenfels' partnership in Aransas County.

Mr. Heldenfels: I was born in Beeville, Texas, December 7, 1914. In 1917, my father moved to Rockport to construct wooden ships for the war shipping board in World War I. During the stay in Rockport as a young boy, I can well remember the ship yard construction; and the biggest event that stands in my mind is the storm of 1919 when we were flooded from our home. One of the ships at the yard went aground and it took many months with dredging and dynamiting to refloat the vessel. The Heldenfels Brothers Shipyard was a partnership composed of my father, F. W. Heldenfels, and his brother, Carl

Heldenfels, C. A. Heldenfels. This partnership was also a lumberyard in Beeville, Texas. But after the war and the financial reverses of the ship building operation, the partnership was dissolved, and my uncle remained in Beeville in the lumberyard and my father kept the Rockport properties. He went into the shell dredging business in 1921. At the time, the highway program was beginning to develop in the state of Texas. And from the basis of the shell operation, why, it expanded into highway construction--general highway construction--from into the gravel operation in the surrounding areas and he had acquired an interest in the '20's in the First National Bank in Rockport. And the family lived in Rockport, Texas, until the time of my completion of the third grade. Then my mother and the boys moved back to Beeville at this time because of the school situation. We felt like we had a better opportunity in Beeville for our education for the boys. I completed the education in Beeville public schools and from there I went to Texas A & M. In 1936 upon graduation from A & M, I became associated with my father in the operation of Heldenfels Brothers and have been since that time with my two brothers and myself a part of this firm. My

major responsibility has been the shell operation and the water operation of Heldenfels Brothers. We have up until two years ago, we had been actively dredging and selling shell for the building of the highways, airports, furnishing the chemical plants and various other industries with the shell. Currently, we have experienced considerable opposition to the taking of this natural resource from the conservationists, marine biologists, the Audubon people with the alleged that we're damaging the ecology of the bay that's irreparable. And we had to . . . chosen to . . . our part of it is to quit dredging shell and try to develop other sources of aggregates to meet our needs. And this we're doing, and I think that . . . oh, possibly in another year or two years there will probably be no more shell produced in the bays and their surrounding or Aransas County. We have operated and have had an office in a marine repair--boat repair--yard continuously from the shipyard days, and it's still operating today, where we repair our own . . . we do not do any work other than our own repair work on our marine equipment. We're currently barging shell from other dredges. We're barging sand and gravel from the Victoria area into Rockport and Corpus Christi. Heldenfels Brothers was

the successful bidder and did build the Aransas County Airport in the war years, and it was built when the CAA leased to the navy and upon completion of the war, why, it was sold and Aransas County has taken possession of it. As I mentioned earlier, my father has been involved in the . . . or has bought or . . . let's see . . . interest in the First National Bank of Rockport in the 1920's. And he retained his holdings in this bank, and upon his death, my two brothers, F. W. Heldenfels, Jr., H. C. Heldenfels and myself inherited his stock in the bank and we're now currently, all three of us, involved in it. We have also been involved in some of the real estate developments in Rockport, currently the Harbor Oaks Development. We're in partners with other people in putting on this real estate development. We're also . . . primarily all of the employees of Heldenfels Brothers in the water operations and marine operations are people that live in Rockport. And this dates back to the early years where Rockport was the home office of Heldenfels Brothers. We have found it necessary in the late 30's to move our main office to Corpus Christi primarily because of the rail connection, transportation, and the related industries that was more advantageous for us to relocate there than in Aransas County.

Stephens: You mentioned something about the conservation minded people and organizations protesting your shell dredging. Could you say about any particular organizations that were more active, more vocal, against shell dredging than others?

Heldenfels: Well, the . . . no . . . other than the . . . no, this . . . the Audubon Society currently is the most vocal in opposition to it.

Stephens: When did all this start?

Heldenfels: Well, in the early days of the shell dredging, the opposition came from the oyster man, the oyster fisherman. And the . . . after the . . . then in the later years the oyster men, the oyster fishermen, haven't voiced their opposition to it except in some areas. It's been the sports fishermen. And this developed into the opposition from the U. S. Bureau of Fisheries with the alleged destroying of nursery grounds, feeding grounds. And currently in the San Antonio Bay area, it's the whooping crane and Audubon people that are . . . . And they are contending that the deepening of the bay creates difference in the tide flows and it destroys . . . it's affecting irreparable damage. There have been many studies and there's been many answers and one side won't believe the findings of the other side and vice versa.

Stephens: Well, do you have a record anywhere in your office of the various laws that have affected shell dredging and how this affected you?

Heldenfels: No, I don't . . . as laws as such . . .

Stephens: That is, how far from line reefs can one dredge?

Heldenfels: . . . it's been administrative . . . it's not a law that you can tie down . . .

Stephens: No law that says how far from the live reefs you must not dredge?

Heldenfels: No, no sir, no. This is not the law or what is now the Federal Environmental Act is what's triggered the . . . now I mean, anytime you do anything in the bay you have to have . . . an environmental impact study made of it. And, if you can't support your contention that the work that you're going to do will not adversely affect any marine life, why, you just can't do it.

Stephens: Who are your customers? Who have been your customers-- construction firms, municipalities for street work . . .

Heldenfels: Practically all of the shell that we have dug has been sold to cities, counties, and the federal government. Well, there's the chemical plant in Corpus--was Southern Alkali, now Pittsburg Plate Glass. But they have now converted to limestone. They're no longer using shell.



Stephens: I see. Well, this black land down through here in the South Texas area, of course Aransas County is solid sand, but when you get on the west side of the county in the black land, and San Pat County and those counties, I suppose they've always used a lot of shell because it was cheaper than hauling in gravel.

Heldenfels: That's correct. I mean the material that we call caliche, which is a soft limestone, is also used . . .

Stephens: But that's dug a distance from here.

Heldenfels: Well, from the immediate coastal area of Rockport, yes. It's around Mathis which is about fifty miles, about a fifty-mile truck haul.

Stephens: The transportation costs are then higher for bringing in caliche. Which does the best for roads?

Heldenfels: Well, they're both acceptable. The shell has a bad name in some areas with some people because of the way it was used. I mean, if handled properly, well, shell is a grade A-1 base. I mean it's . . . we're using it in our . . . currently today, we're using it in our expressway, IH-37, base work.

Stephens: Oh, is that right?

Heldenfels: Yes sir. And it makes . . .

Stephens: Where do you get it?

Heldenfels: The shell is being dug in San Antonio Bay. Parker Brothers.

Stephens: Does it come through on boxcars or do you carry it on barges . . .

Heldenfels: It goes into Corpus Christi by barge.

Stephens: On a barge.

Heldenfels: In the early days when the Heldenfels Brothers first started their shell operation, why, it was impossible to get to Corpus with any sizeable barge. The only way you could go from Rockport to Corpus by water was through what we called the Morris and Cummins Cut. And it was a small channel that went just off shore from Aransas Pass, and the way I remember it there was only a twenty-four foot draw span in there, it's width was twenty-four foot. And this limited you when . . . and the draft, you had no draft going in there. This is all preceding the ship channel development into Corpus.

Stephens: Oh, I see. Well, did that mean that you had to come through Rockport then?

Heldenfels: Yes, we formerly loaded all of the shell in Rockport on a railroad car and shipped it into Corpus and various areas. And the first road that was built, the first federal aid highway program in Texas, or the first road that was built with federal aid in the highway program of Texas was this road from Rockport

to Aransas Pass, and this was built with shell. And shell was the base material for the road from Aransas Pass to Gregory and from Gregory on through San Patricio County. This was back in the '20's when they were originally built.

Stephens: I see. And then the first federal aid . . .

Heldenfels: And the first federal aid program in the state of Texas was the road that we call Highway 35 from Rockport to Aransas Pass.

Stephens: Is the airport base runways shell?

Heldenfels: All of the runways are shell, as well as the runways out at the naval<sup>a</sup> air station in Corpus. All the original work of all of the naval air stations in the immediate Corpus vicinity were shell base.

Stephens: Now do you throw the spoils back when you dredge?

Heldenfels: The process now, you put the spoils or the material that you wash out of the shell back into the cut that you dig.

Stephens: Oh, and that hasn't always been the case, has it?

Heldenfels: No, in the early days, why, they threw away . . .the fine shell where we were screening they threw a ridge, left a ridge or a spoil bank. But we would never leave anything in shallower water that we found it. In other words, these shell ridges are now productive in oysters. The oysters have grown back on them. I

mean, you have actually got new reefs started where what you mentioned is a spoil bank.

Stephens: Oh, that's not the right name for it?

Heldenfels: Well, it would be . . . it's a spoil bank because we threw back what we couldn't use. Now the reason for throwing this away is that you have a specification for size and cleanliness of the shell and you washed it and screened it. And the fine shell that you didn't reclaim you put back in the bay. But this is proven that fishes of a bed are of a nature of creating another reef. There had never been a spoil bank or . . . that would be . . . in other words, if you went into an area where you had two foot of water, the shell reef, and you dug it, why, you would still have over the top of the spoil bank you referred to, you'd still have more water over the old spoil bank than you had originally.

Stephens: Now you say that when oysters come back into the area they go to these shell ridges or spoil banks to start a new reef?

Heldenfels: Well, this was their nest. Anything like this in the bay will naturally attract the spad and the shell will attract this . . .

Stephens: So actually it is an asset then . . .

Heldenfels: Yes. Most of the shell that we dug for the last twelve or fifteen years had all been covered with a mud. I mean it hasn't been an exposed reef.

Stephens: Oh. Is that why they call it mud shell? It's sandwiched between the live reef and the dead . . .

Heldenfels: No, this was just a . . . in the early days, why, we dug reefs . . . we dug shell that . . . it wasn't screened. I mean, you just took everything in, and it was literally mud shell. I mean it had the mud, the binder, and everything with it. And it was in the developing in the forties when the technology of . . . and the laboratories came into play in designing base materials, why, they found out that the mud was a . . . you couldn't top it. In the early days, you didn't think about asphalt topping or anything. But when we got to the time when we wanted to top the roads, put asphalt coverings on them, why the mud, the quality of mud in the material wouldn't hold a top. I mean, when it was wet, why, it would expand and then when it would dry it would crack. So this is the reason for the evolving to where we started the spoil banks you mentioned so we had to screen the mud and the fine shells out to meet the gradation requirements that we had to meet.

Stephens: Oh. When did you start having to put the waste or the material you couldn't use back into the cut?

Heldenfels: This all started back in . . . oh, about 1939.

Stephens: Oh, that long ago?

Heldenfels: Yes. Up until that time, the problem was getting people . . . just getting them some hard surface to drive an automobile on. You know, there was no asphalt. It was just open shell or in some areas you used gravel. You know, just gravel a road. Whatever was in the reef when you dug it and brought it in and marketed it . . . as I say, along in the early '30's when they went to putting asphalt and other mixes on the roads, why, when they developed specifications on the basic materials it created a problem of where you had to process the material. Nature didn't give it to us in the right proportions and gradation. I mean, it had to be processed. And, of course, the economical thing to do was to process it there and leave the tailings, the spoils. And this is still being done, but it's . . .

Stephens: What is the correct word, tailings or spoils?

Heldenfels: Well, you can use either one. Some of the people in there sure call it tailings.

Stephens: Have you been the only company to dredge in the Aransas County waters?

Heldenfels: Oh, no. We've had other people through the years.

Stephens: Any prominent ones that you could mention?

Heldenfels: Well, in the Aransas County waters, I think probably Bauer and Smith were the only others in this area, but in addition in our trade territory we had the W. D. Haden Company. Which was the original or the first shell producer on the Texas coast, I mean in the Galveston area. They had been in . . . but to my knowledge never dredged in Aransas County. In the trade area they did dredge shell.

Stephens: Are you the only one dredging in San Antonio Bay now?

Heldenfels: We're not currently dredging any shell.

Stephens: Oh, you're not dredging now.

Heldenfels: The Parker Brothers is our source of materials now. They're loading our barges.

Stephens: Oh. Oh, so you have contracts for road building and you buy from Parker Brothers.

Heldenfels: Parker Brothers, yes sir. And there are three dredges operating in San Antonio Bay. One of them is Parker Brothers, Horton & Horton and Lone Star Cement. And to my knowledge, that's the only three companies that are currently producing shell anywhere in the state of Texas.

Stephens: Anywhere up and down the coast?

Heldenfels: On the Texas coast.

Stephens: Is that right? Well, now you've been engaged in road building. Now you've built quite a few of the roads in Aransas County, the farm to market roads, the state roads. Was the reason you were a successful business because you had your own dredging equipment and you could supply yourself with shell? Did this give you an advantage, say, to operate with a contractor?

Heldenfels: Well, certainly it was some advantage to have your material source, but we had always had competition from other sources of material. I mean we were not the sole source of supply. There was either the situation where you were told to dredge in another bay or there was always a source other than my own source in competition there.

Stephens: Well, now look at the dredging and tie it in with Rockport. You said that the materials would be dredged and brought into the shipyard--I suppose you still call it . . .

Heldenfels: Yes, we call it the shipyard.

Stephens: You already had the property, so it would be brought in there and then transferred to railroad cars and then shipped out to wherever you were sending it.

Heldenfels: That's correct.



Stephens: So that gave importance to Rockport . . . was that material taxed upon landing here, or did it . . .

Heldenfels: No, in the early days . . . no, other than just the ad valorem taxes on the property . . . and the equipment. They were the only advantage of the operation being here.

Stephens: Is that what caused the railroad to cease operations or at least to curtail its operations greatly when you started using the . . . a wider need for a Corpus Christi ship channel?

Heldenfels: Well, it was definitely a loss to the railroad.

Stephens: You were the main shipper here, I suppose?

Heldenfels: In that particular time, yes. I don't recall it anything other than the marine products, fish and this type of thing, being shipped out of Rockport.

Stephens: What sort of equipment have you used in the past to dredge shell?

Heldenfels: Well, our dredging has always been just a regular cutter-head hydraulic dredge. And, of course, the material that is produced and loaded on barges and towed to some point where it was unloaded with the clam shell.

Stephens: Well, what is it . . . do you have sort of a crane operation that gets down in the . . .

Heldenfels: No, it's a . . .

Stephens: . . . mud?

Heldenfels: . . . what we call a hydraulic . . . it's a hydraulic dredge. It's a cutter head. It's a cutter head hydraulic dredge. It has a revolving cutter head on a ladder that's lowered into the water and then your pump sucks the material up.

Stephens: Oh, just on a conveyor belt?

Heldenfels: No, it's all pipe. It's a suction.

Stephens: Oh, it's a pipe.

Heldenfels: Yes. And then it goes over a series of screens and washing equipment and then on a conveyor belt onto a barge.

Stephens: Oh, just one continuous operation with machines.

Heldenfels: Yes.

Stephens: Have you always used complete machinery . . .

Heldenfels: Yes sir.

Stephens: . . . or did you have to do it by hand once in awhile?

Heldenfels: No, it was always . . . production is much the same today as it was in the beginning, other than the washing and the screening operation. But there have been very few improvements on the hydraulic cutter head dredge since the hydraulic pump was first discovered.

Stephens: Oh. I see. How have hurricanes influenced your family operation in Aransas County?

Heldenfels: Well, we hadn't had too much influence other than just the financial losses that have been incurred.

Stephens: Have you been blown away. You mentioned about the hurricane of 1919.

Heldenfels: We have been blown away. We've always managed to be able to gather up what's been blown away and get it back. But in the early days, of course, we didn't have the insurance. We didn't have the government assistance and these type of things that we have today. But we have been very fortunate in not having a real major disaster or a loss disaster. We've always managed to protect our staff and take care of it without having a complete disaster.

Stephens: What size staff have you had? What has been your largest period of the year and the smallest as far as employment?

Heldenfels: Well, as far as Aransas County . . . we don't employ too many people in Aransas County at the present time. We have continually had and have had since 1940 our total payroll varies from 500 to 800 people. But the majority of these are other than Aransas County people. I would judge that there are only about . . . we're employing Aransas County people of about . . . oh,

twenty, twenty-five people at the present time. And this is probably the lowest . . . I mean it's . . . of any of them. We discontinued dredging operations a couple of years ago and this was a . . . took around twenty-five or thirty people in that operation that we no longer employ.

Stephens: Were your dredge boats headquartered at Rockport?

Heldenfels: Yes.

Stephens: Did you sell them?

Heldenfels: Yes, I disposed of all of the dredging equipment.

Stephens: You have.

Heldenfels: Yes sir.

Stephens: Now what are you going to use your Rockport grounds for?

Heldenfels: Well, as I say, we are still unloading and using it as a base for . . . we're still handling materials. And I still have a marine railway there that we service our floating equipment with where we haul them out and do our repair work. Part of my yard is under lease to Perry Bass where he services his island property-- St. Joe Island--and has been for . . . oh, I guess, for about fifteen years. He's been situated there. He was . . . he came to me . . . oh, without looking, being definite about it that to stay in Rockport they needed a place to carry their operation, needed it on

this side. And we leased them part of the yard there, and they're currently using it. And this is their base of operations for the St. Joe Island. And to answer your question, I assume that if our activities completely deteriorated in the materials, why, the piece of property will be subdivided and something else done with it. It is a deep water . . . we have a deep water harbor there, and it's the only place . . . well, Aransas Pass has a . . . it's the only place in Rockport that has a railroad track adjacent to water.

Stephens: Yes. How deep is that harbor?

Heldenfels: Well, it was dug to twelve feet, and it's . . . we hadn't been maintaining . . . we haven't redug it or cleaned it out in about fifteen years. It's needing it now again.

Stephens: Is that an expensive operation?

Heldenfels: Well, it's not too expensive, no sir. I don't know, in the next . . . when we get ready to clean it out whether . . . what the people will let me do with the spoils this time. Our original permit, they were spoiled into the bay. Now, it might be expensive to make the study for the ecologists and I don't know. I don't know what we'll be up against when we want to maintain our channel.

Stephens: Your property is joined to the Connie Hager Wildlife Sanctuary. Does that run all the way down to your property?

Heldenfels: I don't know whether it does. I assume that it does.

Stephens: Well, that might prohibit your throwing . . .

Heldenfels: I don't know what the attitude would be. Of course, if we have to bring it to shore, why, we don't have the land. We don't own the land. We'd have to get permission from some land owner to drop it ashore or somewhere. I don't know.

Stephens: I see.

Heldenfels: We haven't had to face that yet.

Stephens: Now, the high point of your employment would be the shipbuilding years in the post war period.

Heldenfels: That's correct. Yes sir.

Stephens: And your low point would be right now.

Heldenfels: Yes sir.

Stephens: Now you say your father bought interest in the bank in the 1920's. So your family has been associated with banking in the county since that time. What would you say it's contribution has been through the banking . . . what has been the banking contribution to the community? How has it really helped the community? I know it's an obvious question. I just wanted to get your response.

Heldenfels: Well, as I recall in the early days when my father became interested in the bank, the controlling interest in the bank was held in the hand of people that were not residents of Rockport. And during the period when they were experiencing financial difficulties, why, he bought the controlling interest of the bank-- as he always figured--to keep it from going into the hands of some outside people or the Houston people at that time where the former controlling interest was pledged. So he bought the controlling interest in the bank mainly--where as he always said--to keep it in the hands of people that were interested in the local community, and it has remained there since then. And we've always felt that we're part of Rockport. We've been . . . the whole family has been . . . since 1917, we were either in Rockport or close by and we have a great interest in the community, and felt like we have maintained a good, sound, safe bank. And we're . . . might add, that we're also brothers and I say we're involved in banks other than this one bank.

Stephens: Oh, whereabouts?

Heldenfels: In Corpus Christi.

Stephens: Oh, in Corpus. Which bank is that?

Heldenfels: Both Corpus Christi Bank and Trust and Corpus Christi State National.

Stephens: I see. Do you or your brothers personally take . . . there's another way to say it . . . do you do anything like the management, or do you leave that completely to the local people?

Heldenfels: Well, the three of us are currently on the board. I would say that I'm more active in the bank because of my association with Rockport. I'm over here practically every day. And I'm Chairman of the Executive Committee . . .

Stephens: Of the bank?

Heldenfels: Of the bank, in the executive committee. And the examining committee.

Stephens: Are you chairman of the board?

Heldenfels: No, we don't have a chairman of the board.

Stephens: Oh, you don't.

Heldenfels: No, we don't operate a chairman of the board.

Stephens: I see.

Heldenfels: But as far as the mechanics, the everyday running of the bank, Mr. Sorenson and Mr. LaBounty and Eddie run the bank.

Stephens: On the real estate developments, you mentioned earlier about your interesting Harbor Oaks. You might go into that subject just a bit more. How long have you been involved in real estate development in the county and what led you to become involved?



Heldenfels: Well, of course, over the years--even going back now even to my grandfather and grandmother--why, they in the 1890's and even before that, I believe in 1880, they bought real estate and lots when Rockport was subdivided. And we still have quite a few individual lots scattered around that haven't been sold. And getting back to the Harbor Oaks Development, we were . . . through Mr. Sorensen and some of our friends in Victoria, why, they thought the Harbor Oaks Development would be an asset to the community, and it was a . . . it took a sizeable investment to start it because of the sewer problem. I mean, it was out of the . . . was off on the area to where it was a high cost subdivision, we'll put it this way. And we thought definitely it would be an attraction to Rockport and to the community is why we became involved in it.

Stephens: Now, that's the old Canoe Lake area isn't it?

Heldenfels: Yes sir.

Stephens: And when did you start that?

Heldenfels: I believe we originally started that in . . . I believe we started it in '69.

Stephens: And you got the canals dug . . .

Heldenfels: We have the first . . . what we call the first area there.

Stephens: First area.

Heldenfels: But that property goes all the way to the highway, and gets back into the oak trees there, and eventually it will be a very attractive and a beautiful place.

Stephens: How did you choose to name it Harbor Oaks?

Heldenfels: Well, it was just the . . .

Stephens: Who chose it?

Heldenfels: I would say Jim McCard and Mr. Sorensen. We were searching for a name, and it's unique along this part of the Texas coast to have a tree adjacent to salt water. I mean, you don't find that other than in the Rockport area. And eventually, the second development in that area will open to the bay with large oak trees and this will be unique on the Texas coast.

Stephens: Yes, it sure will be. I never thought of that.

Heldenfels: Some people have been surprised or a little bit when we called it Harbor Oaks. And the original development is in the old Canoe Lake. And, of course, there's no trees on that field, but next section of it, why, will be completely wooded.

Stephens: You're going to take salt water up into . . .

Heldenfels: Oh, the canals are dug, but the bulk headings, there's been no development of the bulk headings or anything.

Stephens: How will this affect those trees that aren't used to having salt water that close?

Heldenfels: I don't anticipate that it will bother the trees, no. We have . . . around this peninsula, we have the same situation in other areas where by nature . . . I mean, if the salt water would . . . I don't think it will bother the trees.

Stephens: What is the price of your lots?

Heldenfels: Those first lots, they're scaled from . . . oh, I think from \$8,000 to around \$12,000.

Stephens: So by having the price of the lots at that price, are you going to guarantee a particular customer then that will build an expensive home, and then it will be added to the tax roll of the county which should be more an ad valorem revenue for the city and the county. So in that sense, it's a contribution to the county, isn't it?

Heldenfels: Yes. Currently, it . . . of course, the Harbor Oaks Development is all in the city of Rockport. And it's the only development that currently has all city facilities, that is sewer and water and everything. As well as the county, it is also part of the city of Rockport.

Stephens: Now do you expect that the lengthening of the runways at the airport will have an effect on your subdivision? The sale of your lots? Is the type of persons that

would have second homes in Rockport, and could build a home that price on that expensive lot, would have an executive-type airplane that would fly into the airport after the runway is lengthened? Do you think that your sale of lots will pick up a little bit after that?

Heldenfels: I don't tie any significance into the lengthening of the runway and the development. I think . . . eventually, I think with the industrial development in the Ingleside-Aransas Pass area will probably be more of a . . . I think Rockport will eventually be more of a living or bedroom city to some of the industrial area that's between here and Corpus.

Stephens: I see.

Heldenfels: Rather than a second home. I mean, we're hoping that Harbor Oaks would be more of a permanent residence. However, we're not ruling out a second home proposition.

Stephens: Well, I was thinking in terms of those persons from San Antonio, Houston, Dallas, or wherever, you see, that want to come. And whenever they came, they'd want to get here quickly and would fly down.

Heldenfels: Well, the airport now is adequate for practically any executive-type airplane to my knowledge. I think it's . . . what, 4,500 feet, I believe.

Stephens: Yes, I believe they're lengthening it another 1,500, 1,000 or 1,500 for the executive jets.

Heldenfels: Yes.

Stephens: I understand that an executive jet needs a little more room to land and take off comfortably than what now exists.

Heldenfels: Yes.

Stephens: What do you see for the economy of Aransas County over the next few years. One thing could be the development of industry from Aransas Pass to Ingleside and then those homes being built in Rockport. What else might you see?

Heldenfels: Well, I think that eventually, with the development in the Ingleside area, particularly if Inland Steel is sincere and builds a steel mill in that area, I really think that you will find various types of light industry along the Intracoastal Canal from here to there. Fabrication, boat building or any type of steel fabrication.

Stephens: Oh, you think it might come to the county?

Heldenfels: I think definitely. I think the canal will eventually bring a light industrial sort of development. And now that they have the water, Mathis Lake water, coming through the peninsula there will be available, I think you will find a lot of light industrial developments in the next twenty to twenty-five years on the canal.

I know that there are some people in the area that have ruled out this type of development, but I think definitely you will have it. And, of course, as I say, it hinges on a heavy metal manufacturer. And this probably won't come about for a number of years. The steel industry in the country is bad right now, but when the steel industry has to renew their facilities in a lot of areas that they're now making steel they're going to diversify around the country because the steel ore in this area will come from outside of this country. And it's a whole lot more sensible to go into the South American countries where there is abundant steel ore than to fight all of that frozen lake situation up there in the north.

Stephens: Oh, and you think that around Ingleside will be a regular heavy industry area?

Heldenfels: I think that . . .

Stephens: Steel making, that is.

Heldenfels: Oh, yes, yes.

Stephens: I see.

Heldenfels: Yes, National Steel has bought that site and originally had this in mind. And you'll have to keep bear in mind that Corpus Christi is the deepest port on the Texas coast. I mean, it's forty-five foot of water

in Corpus against forty, thirty-five and forty, in the Galveston and Houston area. So . . .

Stephens: Oh, you were a young person when the--quite young, in fact--when the Corpus Christi ship channel was completed.

Heldenfels: Yes sir.

Stephens: And you may or may not remember when the process whereby it was approved by Congress, but I'm sure you've heard your father talk about this. He probably was involved with the Corpus Christi area development at that time. Could you tell me something about the lobbying and the politics involved in getting the Corpus Christi ship channel built?

Heldenfels: No, I really don't remember too much about that. And my recollection of when they were lobbying with that, well, we were all more or less choosing up sides. Rockport was wanting deep water. Aransas Pass was wanting deep water. Corpus was . . . and, of course, we were at that time . . . where Rockport was fighting for deep water and a lot of those old scars are still there, semi-there. I mean, some of these old-timers, why, still carry the chip on their shoulder about the . . . . But Corpus eventually won out on the rail connection.

Stephens: Is that the reason for . . .

Heldenfels: That would be . . . that's what I had always been led to believe. They had three railroads coming into Corpus, and, of course, there was just the one railroad coming into Aransas Pass and Rockport. However, looking back, I think the choice was a wise one now, but the . . .

Stephens: Oh, you think it was wiser for Rockport?

Heldenfels: Yes sir, I think it is, and mainly because of the elevation of the surrounding land and it's adjacent to a better water source, water supply. They had the fresh water.

Stephens: Fresh water. Do you know of any influence that John Nance Garner might have had to help?

Heldenfels: No, I'm sure that . . . Roy Miller, former mayor of Corpus, was one of the major people that I can recall of being real influential in the development . . . and Bob Driscoll. Let's see, the Corpus people were a little . . . in a better position to lobby and promote their cause, and they just had a little better story to tell. And looking back on it, as I say now, from since 1927, why, I think the choice was a wise one. But I know that during the time that they were fighting for deep water, why, the community spirit was very strong in favoring the various communities. But I



think as far as Aransas Pass is concerned, I think they'll eventually have deep water from coming back up the Intracoastal Canal up in that area from between here and south Ingleside.

Stephens: Well, that's a short business area, isn't it?

Heldenfels: Yes and Corpus . . . we could call Corpus . . . we talk about the navigation district, of course, that includes the San Patricio County area along the Reynolds plant. They are rapidly running out of land. I mean, as far as development. They're going to have to look other places to find a sizeable tract of land.

Stephens: For Reynolds?

Heldenfels: For any industry, not just for Reynolds, but for any industry. You see, it's all . . . National Steel has all that Ingleside area and Dupont's bought all of the land that Reynolds doesn't have and then you bump into Portland.

Stephens: Yes.

Heldenfels: And there's only two tracts of land left in there. One of them's in the Welder estate and there's the old Ingleside Humble Refinery's tract. That's the only two tracts of land that are not . . .

Stephens: The Welder?

Heldenfels: Welder.

Stephens: Or Green?

Heldenfels: Welder. Rob Welder has a track of land in there around, close to the Jewel Fulton Harbor. That, I believe, is around 1,200 or 1,400 acres in this track. It has frontage on the Reynolds channel. And then the old Humble Refinery site. But being involved with the Industrial Commission in Corpus . . . when an industry wants to look you over, well, most of them are looking for 1,000-1,200 acres, and there's not this type of land left over there.

Stephens: So it's too late then?

Heldenfels: Well, I think . . . oh, we're . . . if you . . . I have read, or they are currently talking about expanding the port over into that area west of Portland to open up all of that White Point and that area of deep water . . .

Stephens: Oh, yes. I've heard about that.

Heldenfels: . . . which will have to be done if Corpus continues to grow. But then there's a lot of people that don't want it to grow.