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Interview with  
Mr. W. P. Mullen  
May 29, 1969

Place of Interview: Taft, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. A. Ray Stephens

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Approved: W. P. Mullen by  
(signature) *W. P. Mullen*

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Oral History Collection

Mr. W. P. Mullen

Place of Interview: Taft, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. A. Ray Stephens

Date: May 29, 1969

Dr. Stephens: This is an interview with Mr. W. P. Mullen, Taft, Texas, May 29, 1969. Yes. Mr. Mullen, can you tell us when you first came to Taft?

Mr. Mullen: Well, I came here in the summer time of 1904 on vacation. Worked three months.

Dr. Stephens: Where did you come from? From Portland?

Mr. Mullen: Yes.

Dr. Stephens: You weren't born in Portland were you?

Mr. Mullen: No, I was born in San Antonio.

Dr. Stephens: San Antonio. And you came here to work for the ranch?

Mr. Mullen: Well, we moved to Portland to go . . . there used to be a private school there. And I was going there and I worked up here in the summer of 1904, in the summer of 1905. And then I started working regularly for the C. F. P. Co., Taft Ranch in January, 1907.

Dr. Stephens: What kind of work?

Mr. Mullen: Carpenter work.

Dr. Stephens: Carpenter . . .

Mr. Mullen: Building houses.

Dr. Stephens: For the ranch?

Mr. Mullen: Yes. Yes.

Dr. Stephens: Why were they building houses?

Mr. Mullen: Well, we built La Quinta in 1907. You . . .

Dr. Stephens: Oh, you were?

Mr. Mullen: You've heard of it, I guess.

Dr. Stephens: Yes.

Mr. Mullen: And . . . you see. You won't understand this, but in those days you didn't have banks and garages and oil companies to work for. And you did what you could. And that's all the kind of work there was. And I started there when . . . no, I was about sixteen when I came up here. And . . . well (chuckle), when I came to Taft there was only one house there and the other was a hotel--Old Taft Hotel--but it was about a fourth of what it was when they tore it down. And, oh, they . . . the company allowed those people that fed you twelve and a half cents a meal. You couldn't believe that either (chuckle). And you could get a meal--better meal--than you'd get for a dollar and a quarter in a restaurant today. And . . .

Dr. Stephens: Who stayed at the hotel?

Mr. Mullen: They also . . . they also fed all these men free, see, and then . . . in that time . . . and . . .

Dr. Stephens: Well, who stayed at the hotel?

Mr. Mullen: Who was there?

Dr. Stephens: Yes.

Mr. Mullen: Well, I think the first summer I was here there's a man by the name of . . . I believe his name was Warbucks. His wife was a Stoner from Victoria. And this man was what you call a fence rider. I don't know whether you know what a fence rider is or not, but . . . but in those days a fence rider got about \$50 a month and his board. And they ran this hotel that first summer I was here. And I don't remember who was here that second year. What? All the company people did that wasn't married or I suppose so. And that summer there wasn't any houses for a married man to live in. And we were started building houses. But . . . like I say there was just that one building. And then about the next summer they had built a building by the rail . . . anywhere anybody but Taft would have had this thing in the middle of a park. It was the first commissary, and it was the first school building. It was the first post office in this town. That same old warehouse was built on the railroad down where they took freight off the train. And you can see that if they haven't torn it down. And they had this commissary in one end of it and the rest of it is where they unloaded freight. And . . .

Dr. Stephens: Well, you worked for the ranch as a carpenter . . .

Mr. Mullen: Sir?

Dr. Stephens: You worked for the ranch as a carpenter . . .

Mr. Mullen: To begin with. And about 1910 I was a foreman and built this

farm near where McCamey is down there this side of Gregory. And I and about ten men and we . . . I went from there to Mexico. The revolution was going on in Mexico and I was gone about . . . most of three years. And got down there about February of 1911 and the revolution run us out in 1912. We's gone four months and got back and stayed till Sept . . . I come in out there the last time in 1913 and . . . and he was . . . I got back to . . . I . . . we left the mine, I think, about the 8th of May and the bridges were burned out on the railroad. And it took me . . . I got out of Vera Cruz about the middle of June. I was in Torre . . . Torreon a good many days and then us . . . went on up to Mexico City to take . . . to go to get a boat. You see, you couldn't come this way. The railroads were burned out. And I stayed in Mexico . . . I had a cousin in Mexico City so I stayed there. But it took that long to get a passage on a boat. But I was there about twenty days and saw everything that was to be seen in those days. He was in a Canadian . . . I believe it was Canadian British . . . Canadian Trade Commission Office. The . . . whoever the trade commissioner was, on account of this revolution, had come out with his family. And this cousin had worked there and he had charge of the office which was a pretty easy job. He went to work there about ten o'clock in the morning. And I think he went to eat lunch at one. And then he'd come back to work at

three and quit at four. And so he showed me everything that was to be seen in Mexico City in those . . . they hadn't dug out the . . . those pyramids in those days and . . . so I came back . . . got back to Portland in August, 1913, and I went to work for . . . went to work for a company of January of 1914. I didn't want to work . . . be a carpenter when I got old. I didn't know they was going to make \$40 a day. And so I went in the lumber yard for less money than I could have made the other way.

Dr. Stephens: Manager of the Taft Ranch Lumber Yard.

Mr. Mullen: I went in there in 1914. You see in August, Germany and Italy and England went to war so cotton went down to about five cents . . . five cents on the pound.

Dr. Stephens: Yes.

Mr. Mullen: And . . . well, they did right here . . . no . . . yes . . . they had three lumber yards. Portland . . . Taft . . . no . . . at Gregory at that time. And . . . and I worked there . . . oh . . . it seems like two and one-half years and Mr. Green wanted me to take these carpenters over. And I told him the old foreman had been a . . . I wasn't married then so I could be independent. And . . .

Dr. Stephens: Yes.

Mr. Mullen: And I told him the old foreman had been a friend to me and I wouldn't undermine him at all. And so Mr. Green said, "Well, his wife died. He probably won't live six months."

And sure enough, this . . . in '16 he died, and I took those carpenters over. And . . . than . . . in '18, he wanted me to take these lumber yards. He got me to take these lumber yards by. I came to this Taft lumber yard in 1918 and . . . I've never been out of this here since. But . . .

Dr. Stephens: Well, let me ask this. When you first were here and building the farm houses near Gregory, what sort of plan did Joseph F. Green follow to build those?

Mr. Mullen: To do what? What kind of plans for what? Well, he built . . . he had twelve farms starting out . . . it's out towards Sinton on the river . . . he had four farms. And they were small farms. They were 100 acres. And he had one windmill in the center for the water for the four farms. That's something like right out . . . of course, most of those houses are gone. But he built twelve of those farm houses. And, fortunately, on sod land, and no fertilizer or anything, they made about three-quarters of a bale. You see, he was going to find out if they could raise cotton here.

Dr. Stephens: Yes.

Mr. Mullen: And . . . but most of this building was these little cottages here in town. But we built those . . . well, I didn't help on all of them. I was working on some of those last ones. And . . .

Dr. Stephens: Now, this land was cleared already?

Mr. Mullen: What?



Dr. Stephens: This land was cleared of brush already along the railroad tracks?

Mr. Mullen: What?

Dr. Stephens: Was it clear of brush?

Mr. Mullen: Kind of. This . . . they were right up the railroad . . . two on each side, four on a spot, but two on each side of the railroad. You've seen some of the old . . .

Dr. Stephens: Yes, was it covered with . . . was the ground covered by grass or by trees?

Mr. Mullen: Both.

Dr. Stephens: Both.

Mr. Mullen: They had to be cleared. And we had . . . they didn't have tractors to plow with. They broke this old sod land with mules. And fortunately they made good crops. And . . . but they . . . I went . . . Mr. Green wanted to help me on this carpenter business. And so . . . well, we're backing way up now because we're going back to 1907. But when they started La Quinta he sent me down there so I was there more throughout the building of the building.

Dr. Stephens: Can you describe the building of La Quinta?

Mr. Mullen: What?

Dr. Stephens: Can you describe the building of La Quinta?

Mr. Mullen: The building?

Dr. Stephens: Yes.

Mr. Mullen: No, I might have . . . I don't know whether I've got a

picture of it . . . it was . . .

Dr. Stephens: I've seen the picture of it, I just wanted . . .

Mr. Mullen: The building was . . . it was a two-story building. It was . . . the main building was ninety feet long. And the living room was about--I'd say just roughly--thirty feet square. And they had a sixteen feet . . . sixteen foot hall clear across the building and then about a thirty foot dining room. And they had a big fireplace in the end of the dining room and over in the . . . there was truly big fireplaces in that building. And it had a second floor but no roof over the second floor. It was just open. And they . . . there wasn't too darn many rooms in there. There was . . . I don't think there was over seven or eight bedrooms on that first floor . . . second floor. Of course, the first floor didn't have any. And the . . . the attic . . . what we called the attic had three dormer windows that made about a twelve or fourteen foot room, but they wasn't closed. You see, if they had a big crowd they could put beds and stuff up there. And the thing was ninety feet long and, oh, twelve or fourteen feet wide there, I guess. But these rooms' windows . . . open dormer windows . . . by the time wanted to get out of sight . . . they wasn't closed but the . . . they could fill them . . . did do it when they had a lot of people. I guess when President Taft came, they had more guests than any other time.

Dr. Stephens: Do you remember that visit by the President?

Mr. Mullen: Yes, I want to tell you something. You know, I had a thank-you letter from President Taft about my part in the saddle. You asked me how I got it (chuckle) and how was I supposed to get it (chuckle). No, I was here long before . . . I was here before Mr. Green, see. Mr. Green came about 1900 and this country was all in the brush and there wasn't any fence except the right-of-way fence through . . . from Portland to Sinton, well, all the way to San Antonio for that matter. But in Taft . . . Gregory cattle could move across without going through a gate. They could get from the south side and go clear to Chiltipin Creek. You see, they had a . . . the company had 120,000 acres at that time and . . .

Dr. Stephens: Well, can you describe the visit?

Mr. Mullen: What?

Dr. Stephens: Can you describe President Taft's visit?

Mr. Mullen: Him?

Dr. Stephens: Yes. His visit.

Mr. Mullen: He weighed 300 pounds. This saddle they give him was a big saddle. Had it specially made for him. And they . . . I think all the employees gave about \$2 a piece and that's where I got my thank you letter from President Taft.

Dr. Stephens: Oh, you helped to contribute. Where was it made?

Mr. Mullen: Oh, I imagine in San Antonio. I wouldn't be sure, but San

Antonio was a pretty good ranch town in those days. And I imagine it was there. I know they made good boots there.

Dr. Stephens: Did the President ride a horse?

Mr. Mullen: What?

Dr. Stephens: Did the President ride a horse?

Mr. Mullen: I think so, but I didn't see him.

Dr. Stephens: You didn't see him (chuckle)?

Mr. Mullen: (Chuckle) You . . . the ranch had gone to, as you know, to Mrs. Charles P. Taft. Her father, Dave Sinton, gave her this ranch and, of course, she was married to Charles P. and they lived in Cincinnati. No, when he got so far along he made Senator Taft his, I guess you'd call it, manager of all their stuff. And he was down here. And I was running a lumber yard at that time. And he asked me where the . . . where the, I guess you'd call it, where the sawmill was. He didn't know the difference between a sawmill and a lumber . . . retail lumber yard, because . . .

Dr. Stephens: This is in 1920's.

Mr. Mullen: He took him all over there . . . Mr. Green . . . to study . . . well, have him sent everywhere to talk to these people without Mr. Green being there. So anything that anybody wanted to tell him they wouldn't hesitate.

Dr. Stephens: Oh,

Mr. Mullen: But there wasn't . . . there was no people like the Tafts. They could have foreclosed everybody in this country up into

the '30's and the depression. But they never . . . foreclosed anybody on this land. It's like that I had land and all my friends had land and . . . he . . . they even paid the taxes during the '30's for us. Of course, they charged it to the-- taxes--to what you owed them. But they . . . they . . . there wasn't any . . . there's just never been anybody like the Tafts. And Charles P., Senator Taft, was just too good a man to be President. But he would have been mighty good for this country.

Dr. Stephens: Well, I want to get back to the President's visit though, President Taft's visit.

Mr. Mullen: Well, there wasn't a man in San Patricio County that would have killed a President of the United States, in those days. There might be lots of them now, but not then. But they made them all leave, leave La Quinta. I guess they . . .

Dr. Stephens: Made who leave?

Mr. Mullen: . . . left somebody there to milk the cows (chuckle).

Dr. Stephens: Oh, oh, the employees.

Mr. Mullen: And like that. These secret service men, they said the first thing they brought in was liquor, see. See, Mr. Green didn't drink. He kept whiskey in the house, but he didn't drink. And neither did Mrs. Green. But these service men that was going to guard him, they all brought this great amount of whiskey right . . . they told me that was one of the first things . . . I suppose they must have left one or

two there. Somebody had to milk those cows (chuckle), and these secret service men wasn't going to do it. And . . .

Dr. Stephens: What did the President do?

Mr. Mullen: What did he do?

Dr. Stephens: Yes.

Mr. Mullen: He . . . Lord, they took him all over the ranch, I guess. And he . . . they went in a . . . from a boat from La Quinta to Corpus and he made a talk down there under the hill. You know how Corpus is? It raises a part upstairs. And they had a place down there where he would still be above the people down below him on a slope. And I've often thought now that with guarding . . . you know anybody that wanted to shoot him could have shot . . . shot him up there . . . from one . . . up those upstairs buildings and got clear away before they could have found him. But that's the way they do it anyhow.

Dr. Stephens: Yes. Well, did he play golf?

Mr. Mullen: What?

Dr. Stephens: Did the President play golf while he was here?

Mr. Mullen: That I don't know. We didn't have a golf . . . he'd have had to gone to Corpus to play golf . . .

Dr. Stephens: Didn't Joseph F. Green have a golf course?

Mr. Mullen: No . . . well, they said so, but they never did. They never had any that anybody ever played on.

Dr. Stephens: What about a community celebration on the ranch? Did they

have a community reception for the President?

Mr. Mullen: Well, I presume so. I don't know . . . I do remember this.  
The . . . you know what a horse wrangler is?

Dr. Stephens: Yes.

Mr. Mullen: An old Mexican that liked bananas . . . when they introduced  
him to the President . . . he introduced all the employees  
to him. And when they introduced him--this Mexican--to  
President Taft, he had a bag of bananas to give the Mexican.  
Of course, they furnished the bananas. But they knew this  
old Mexican liked bananas . . .

Dr. Stephens: (Chuckle)

Mr. Mullen: . . . and, oh, I don't even know where that took place. But  
I guess it would be in Taft because I would have been there  
wherever it was. But . . . when you . . . when you were here  
before, didn't you see this little booklet that had President  
Taft in it a dipping vat and all that kind of stuff?

Dr. Stephens: Yes.

Mr. Mullen: You saw it?

Dr. Stephens: Yes.

Mr. Mullen: Well, I've got one, but I don't know whether I could lay my  
hands on it. You said what he looked like, but I know . . .  
in this little booklet it has a picture of him and it's by  
the dipping vat out at the Rincon Ranch, see? And . . .

Dr. Stephens: Do you remember George H. Paul?

Mr. Mullen: Yes.

Dr. Stephens: Can you tell us something about him?

Mr. Mullen: Well, she can tell you more. She talked about him, but . . .

Dr. Stephens: Well, I might do that.

Mr. Mullen: George Paul in about 1909 they let . . . on the south side of the railroad . . . reserving a mile for the railroad . . . they let George H. Paul sell whatever land he could. And I think they sold it for \$35 an acre in the brush. And down on the bayfront nearest the bay--you know where that is--they got \$45. That was sure a little bit . . . we think thievery back in those days, see. But I would see these hacks start out from the commissary here in the morning with these tourists, I mean not tourists, but proposed . . . people who were going to buy land. And I guess there was a salesman on each hack, these two-seated hacks and no top. And they were going out in this style . . . in this type . . . in Sodville country to look at this land. Well, fortunately, the land was good. But these people like . . . what state is Mrs. Stephens from?

Mrs. Sparks: Nebraska.

Mr. Mullen: From Nebraska and all those durn countries and Kansas. They went out and looked at this land. They never talked to a banker or anybody to see if it was like they said it was. But they brought, in some cases, they picked the . . . we'll say a few locks off of . . . bolls off a stalk of cotton. Then they'd come there in a cotton ceremony and weighed that



thing. Well, just say they picked ten or a hundred, I don't know what they picked. But then they set a stalk at so far in the row and so many bolls to the stalk is so much cotton to the acre. Well, you . . . you've been in Texas long enough to know you can't figure cotton that way. And . . . but they did it. And they thought these people that lived here was crazy, I guess, to sell the land. And you produce that much stuff. But, of course, up to 1914 when England and Germany started the war, cotton never was over twelve cents in this country. I guess right after the Civil War--that was before my time--it got higher. But not in . . . up till then. And that is . . . this thing that the government bases, you know, the loans. It's all based in '14, what it would buy, see? You could buy more with five, six-cent, or eight-cent cotton than you could buy with thirty-cent cotton today. But it was based, originally, on 1914. But the cotton was . . . what a bale of cotton would buy we'll say. Now ask me something else (chuckle).

Dr. Stephens: (Chuckle) Well, what kind of a person was George H. Paul?

Mr. Mullen: What?

Dr. Stephens: What kind of person was George H. Paul?

Mr. Mullen: Oh, I've seen him. But I'd . . . she wrote . . . she looked up him and wrote about him . . . talked to him . . . up here at Rotary. But I don't . . . I know I saw him but I don't . . . I imagine . . . well, after he got through here, you know,

he went up and opened up some land at Saint Paul, this little town up here. And bought a whole lot cheaper model of the old Green Hotel. It wasn't good like the old Green Hotel but they built one that looked like it kind of from that . . . in the same . . . looked just like it and the porches and the halls. Everything looked like it but it was just a copy. Now the old Green Hotel, it was insulated with the kind of stuff that looked like a quilt. It was two pieces of paper and some kind of filler in that. All the walls and overhead so the noise wouldn't . . . and all the flooring was cut off in each room so it wouldn't telegraph over to the next room. But I was . . . Mr. George Paul . . . I was here when they used to take those men out and sell them land, but . . .

Dr. Stephens: Do you know any salesmanship tactics they used?

Mr. Mullen: Well, no. I don't think high-pressure like Catarina. Now the . . . did you ever hear of the Catarina?

Dr. Stephens: Yes.

Mr. Mullen: Did you know that Taft owned that? Not the corporation. Tafts owned 250,000 acres over there and they sold it to a man that got some money in oil for \$6 an acre. That was \$1,500,000. And . . . just for that thing. But this old boy, instead of buying good mules for \$200 a piece, he bought dapple grey mules for \$1,000 a piece, and all that kind of stuff like, he went broke. And somebody else had to take it over. Well, he had a shed out there that housed two railroad

cars, you know, like a garage. You drive in there and be out of the weather. But there was an outfit in . . . I can't think of their name, but their headquarters was San Antonio. They had to take that land over and sell it. And I was over there at times. I was with . . . when my carpenters went over, that was just a good outing for me to go over to Catarina because that was a dry climate and quite a difference from this. But I usually went with them. But I'd been there a month when these . . . they'd bring in two or four railroad cars, I guess sleepers no doubt, with . . . but they'd take them out of Catarina . . . out of the Catarina station before daylight. I never saw a one of them. I saw their cars and they took them out and they . . . a man with a Ford . . . of course, \$20 was a lot of money in those days. They'd pay a man with a Ford \$20 a day to haul these people, and a man with a Buick \$40 a day. And, but you see, that was to keep his mouth shut because he wanted . . . you see, they didn't let any . . . let these people talk to any local people if they could help it. Like I say, I was there a year and saw them come every week, and I never saw a one of them. They had a barbecue out in the country at noon. And this man would . . . well, he'd tell them this. Said, "Now, if you haven't got money enough to go into this, we don't want you to buy." Of course, that don't stop you when you tell him you don't want him to buy. But, anyhow, he had a stenographer--

if he'd had this it'd been better--but he had a stenographer taking down every word he said, see? And they sold that land for \$200 an acre. There's a man that's lived over there all his life--well, Mr. Patterson, Sr.--he told me he saw men that had lived there all their lives listen to the man talk and pay \$200 an acre for that old \$6 . . . it wasn't fit for anything but cattle. It was good cattle country. And . . . but here's the trouble. A man come down from the north and he's sold his farm and he's brought all his money. And he's made his downpayment. And then he's found out it cost \$10,000 to make a water well. It's way down there. I mean he's broke.

Dr. Stephens: What did they grow on that land?

Mr. Mullen: What?

Dr. Stephens: What did they grow on the land after it was bought by them?

Mr. Mullen: Well, I don't know. I don't imagine it ever grows anything.

Dr. Stephens: Vegetables?

Mr. Mullen: Well, I . . . I don't know that. I . . . that . . . that was the last of my experience with them.

Dr. Stephens: Oh, it was.

Mr. Mullen: Yes . . . citrus trees out of the Valley with fruit on them. And planted them there right on what we call Catarina. You see, there wasn't but two, three, or four houses where there was . . . but there was supposed to be a railroad station there. And they'd bring these trees in with this fruit

(chuckle), and they'd drag all these old sandy roads the night before these people would get there and. . . but let me just . . . I was glad the Tafts nor the Greens had nothing to do with it. They didn't do . . . they only got \$6 an acre. But that was . . . these . . . one of the boys who lives right across the street there, he did charge that all those people have gone . . . that's gone back to . . . somebody's bought it out from them.

Dr. Stephens: Is that right? Well, what about this land around here?

Mr. Mullen: What?

Dr. Stephens: What about the land around here? What sort of salesmanship tactics was used . . .

Mr. Mullen: Well, I don't . . .

Dr. Stephens: . . . any . . . any . . .

Mr. Mullen: I doubt whether on this side . . . her father was . . . yes, your father was in it. I don't imagine they high-pressured them at all on this . . . on this land. This was good land.

Dr. Stephens: Well, did they . . . did they bring them down to Taft. Do you remember anybody at Sinton, Taft, or where to . . .

Mr. Mullen: Yes, they used to start us out at Taft here . . .

Dr. Stephens: And how . . .

Mr. Mullen: . . . to go out towards Sodville country. That's six, eight, or ten miles out in the country there. And, like I say, they used these two-seated hacks, I guess with mules hitched on them.

Dr. Stephens: Yes.

Mr. Mullen: And they'd . . . I believe they'd be a salesman in each one of those things. But these people . . . like I say, they'd come in and they'd sign something to relieve them of all their money without ever talking to a banker or any farmer that lived here or anything.

Dr. Stephens: Yes.

Mr. Mullen: But the land was good. That's all that saved them.

Dr. Stephens: Yes. Did you ever work with mules?

Mr. Mullen: What?

Dr. Stephens: Did you ever do any farming yourself?

Mr. Mullen: Oh, not in those days. Mr. Green sold four of us a section out here--it was an unheard of arrangement--so poor people could buy it.

Dr. Stephens: Yes.

Mr. Mullen: (Chuckle) And . . . and I rented it two years after I got it. And I didn't want to farm but he was selling one . . . this big farm down below Gregory where Garrett owns and it had all new John Deere equipment, and Mr. Green wanted me to take those . . . he had about fifty mules there . . . he wanted me to take those mules . . . I didn't want to farm, but . . . then . . . I wanted to farm someday but not then. But all this equipment . . . he wanted to sell me this equipment on credit you see. And it was good . . . I sold the John Deere implements that they had down there and I think they'd used them about . . . maybe two years, not more. And then I

had . . . a man that ran the farm was a friend of mine, so he picked me eight good mules--that's what you needed on 160 in those days--picked me eight good mules out of that about fifty or sixty mules he had and . . . of course, now the first year the man farmed my land, there was a drouth . . . a complete drouth in this country. They made one bale of cotton. And my rent was \$16.10. But the next year was a good . . .

Dr. Stephens: What year was that?

Mr. Mullen: What?

Dr. Stephens: What year?

Mr. Mullen: Well, that was . . . '25 was the dry year in this country.

Mrs. Sparks: And he was still running the lumber yard, then.

Mr. Mullen: And the next year was a pretty big . . . Mr. Wash Pullen was farming my land. And he made a good crop. And I don't know how much rent. But I paid off nearly all this stuff that I owed on this stock, you see. Then . . . that's when Mr. Green wanted me to take over. So I wore out eight good mules. But we got in that depression when cotton was five and six cents. And you know you can't make any money in five and six cents on this land.

Dr. Stephens: What about your working with mules? Did you have any particular experiences?

Mr. Mullen: Oh, I didn't do it.

Dr. Stephens: You didn't do it?

Mr. Mullen: I had my . . . no, I was in the lumber yard. By then  
Mr. Green . . . I took these carpenters over first in '16.

Dr. Stephens: Yes.

Mr. Mullen: Then in '18 he wanted me to take the lumber yards over. So  
I had both up till they sold out. And . . .

Dr. Stephens: I see. Well, did you use Mexican laborers in your lumber  
yards?

Mr. Mullen: Well . . . no. The men in the office were white.

Dr. Stephens: All white you worked with.

Mr. Mullen: Yes. And the Mexicans . . . those that lumber . . . hauled  
lumber . . . hauled lumber, we had a couple of Mexican  
there . . . here, and I had that lumber yard at Gregory.  
It was . . . had at least one Mexican in it. And Portland  
didn't hardly sell anything.

Dr. Stephens: Do you remember the relationships between the Mexican-Americans  
and the Anglo-Americans?

Mr. Mullen: What was that?

Dr. Stephens: How did the two groups get along?

Dr. Stephens: Yes, between the Mexicans and the Anglos.

Mr. Mullen: I'll tell you this, that when these Mexicans were making \$6  
a week, they were living better than now when they make \$50  
a week. You see the . . . we'd go to these, what they called  
balles, Mexican dances, on Saturday night. I never danced  
but we'd go there and watch them a little while. They didn't  
wait till ten o'clock to start. They started dancing (chuckle)



at sundown. But those girls were just as nicely dressed when they were on that floor as you see today when they make probably eight dollars a day or more--ten dollars, maybe. Now you can't believe that, that they could live better. But the money that they had, that six dollars would buy something.

Dr. Stephens: What else did you do for entertainment besides going to the balle?

Mr. Mullen: What was that question?

Dr. Stephens: What else did you do for entertainment?

Mr. Mullen: Oh, we had more entertainment in those days than we do now. They used to have Chautauqua courses here, and something else I've forgotten . . .

Dr. Stephens: What did you do at the Chautauqua?

Mr. Mullen: What?

Dr. Stephens: What did you do at the Chautauquas and lyceums?

Mr. Mullen: What did you do with them!

Dr. Stephens: What did you do at them? Lectures and concerts?

Mr. Mullen: The substance was . . . they had four entertainments a piece . . . during the year. The Rotary . . . what was it that Rotary . . . what did they call theirs? They had four . . . four . . . no, I don't know what it was. But they had nice speakers four times a year. And this other thing . . . I guess it was about four times.

Dr. Stephens: Yes. Did you have community meetings?

Mr. Mullen: What?

Dr. Stephens: Did you have community meetings at the school house?

Mr. Mullen: Oh, yes, the day . . . the Tafts . . . the company had a band and they furnished all the instruments. And they brought a man out . . . what kind of a school was that in Cincinnati, a musical school? What? Well, anyhow, they brought a man down from Cincinnati to train these people. And Mr. Green was the kind of man that if anybody could . . . had a good voice and could sing, that wouldn't be me, then why he'd find them a job. And these people that could play these instruments, they . . . they weren't paid anything to play in that thing but they were taught free.

Dr. Stephens: I see, good. You were in the Masonic Lodge here. When . . .

Mr. Mullen: What?

Dr. Stephens: When did you join the Masonic Lodge in Taft?

Mr. Mullen: Oh, it wasn't in Taft. It was in Gregory. I joined in 1910. You . . . do you know anything about the Masonic Lodge?

Dr. Stephens: A little bit.

Mr. Mullen: Well, I was the first one raised in this Lodge at Gregory. But they moved it up here later. The one here used to be in Gregory. What? No, I took the first Master's Degree.

Dr. Stephens: Oh. In Gregory.

Mr. Mullen: Yes. I don't know. I was Master about 1916. And . . . Oh, I was due it [the life membership] in '50 . . . in '60,

but they . . . they didn't give it right away. They . . . two or three years after. But I've been a Master Mason now fifty . . . fifty . . . well, this . . . this will be fifty-nine . . . will be fifty-nine years.

Dr. Stephens: My goodness!

Mr. Mullen: And . . .

Dr. Stephens: Well, now, what function has the Masonic Lodge played in this community?

Mr. Mullen: (Chuckle) I . . . I couldn't answer that because, you know, they're not supposed to do that. Only as individuals, they do things. They don't go out as a Masonic Lodge. In fact, just to back that, you were supposed to be a good citizen or you didn't belong to it.

Dr. Stephens: Well, what I was getting at . . . most of the . . . most of the adults . . . most of the adult males were members of the Lodge in this community?

Mr. Mullen: Oh, I wouldn't say that. There are a lot of Catholics here you know.

Dr. Stephens: You wouldn't say that. Oh, yes.

Mr. Mullen: Catholics can't belong to it. And . . . no, there's not . . . I wouldn't say the most . . . I don't know how many members. But we've got so many that's died since they . . .

Dr. Stephens: Yes.

Mr. Mullen: I don't know how many has been on the list here, but, oh, no, not all. We wouldn't get . . . 20 per cent, I suppose. Who?

Mr. Mullen: Yes, Papa was a charter member. They used . . . see, the way they . . . there was just one Masonic Lodge in Corpus and they all belonged to it, I suppose. And they have to learn how to do this work before they are ever allowed to have a Lodge. And . . . Corpus people taught them in it, you see.

Dr. Stephens: Yes.

Mr. Mullen: And then you have to get a permit out of Waco from the Grand Lodge to establish a Lodge. Of course, these Corpus people had to come over and let them see them put on degrees, see, before they'd okay them, you see?

Dr. Stephens: Yes.

Mr. Mullen: Of course, I was always glad I joined when I did because they were very conscientious, and . . .

Dr. Stephens: Yes. When did you become City Secretary?

Mr. Mullen: Oh, '54 was it? I worked for Taft, I think, twenty years. And I worked in the Compress twenty years. And I worked for the City about twelve years. Yes, after they sold . . . they sold the lumber . . . I . . . my lumber yard out in '28 when they were getting ready to liquidate. And I went to the Compress over there as a . . . bookkeeper and cashier. And my brother was manager. And he died in . . . he died in '46 didn't he? I went there in '31 as a bookkeeper and my brother died in '46 and I got to be manager from then on out till they sold. And I guess they sold out about '49, I think they did. And then another outfit . . . well, first the Crooks brothers, they got to . . . do you know about the Crooks or

were you lucky? But they . . . they . . . they . . . yes . . . their name . . . their names just fitted them. They were . . . they got hold of this lumber yard, well, I was afraid to work for them. I was afraid I'd get in the penitentiary because they stole enough loose--they owned a press in Corpus--they stole enough loose . . . do you know what loose is?

Dr. Stephens: Yes, the samples?

Mr. Mullen: They stole enough loose every year to pay for 160 acres of Nueces County. Well, at first you get these tags where they sample it. That's legitimate. The insurance company wants you to pull that off because, you see, cotton is just like dynamite for burning. And . . . but these people got it and the government wouldn't let them have a . . . well, part of that, they got . . . they got greedy. And when they were opening . . . you know when you are pressing a bale from a gin bale to standards; it's all the . . . all the bands are taken off. Well, while that was off, they rolled off a piece of cotton about that good, see. And a lot of it was government loan. And there's a secret service man . . . was working right on the platform with them. So the . . . oh . . . there's a whole page in the Coller about it, and I guess they got about \$185,000 that the government knew about. And so they were smarter than I am. They went--no doubt--went to Washington with \$50,000 and bought somebody off. If I'd gone up there,

they'd put me in the clink, see, and had me for offering a bribe. But, anyhow, I imagine that cost them \$50,000 in Washington. And they . . . then they fine the compress, not the men . . . they fine the compress \$50,000. Well, that'll still leave them \$85,000 cleared, see.

Mrs. Sparks: Festus, could you tell him what you told me this morning about those Negroes working on that compress platform truck for them. I thought that was . . . I enjoyed that.

Mr. Mullen: Oh, well, the Negroes just . . . you know anything about Negroes?

Dr. Stephens: Yes.

Mr. Mullen: Huh? They are just a natural man to handle cotton. I think God made them to work. I don't think he made them to be in Washington or mayors or anything of the kind. You . . . but anyhow these Negroes just loved this cotton handling and what I was telling her that they get this bale of cotton which weighs approximately 500 pounds balanced on a hand truck and they could . . . they'd get it balanced so good with their own weight that they could step 20 feet when they were travelling fast (chuckle). I mean they just rise off the ground and when they'd come down it'd be about 20 feet, but they used to love that kind of. . . . Of course, once they was wanting to get them in offices. Well, a Negro never was built for that. Some . . . you might get one out of 10,000 but not the average. But

they just loved working with cotton. And people that knew more about Negroes than I do, more about compressing said you could work a crew down. Well, this press . . . if you actually knew what a press involved, you . . . this wouldn't mean anything, but when you've got a good crew you can press 100 bales an hour. But somebody . . . and that didn't happen here but said that you could work a crew down and give one Negro 50 cents and tell him to start singing. And he'd . . . they'd all get to singing, and they'd go right in and do another day's work.

Dr. Stephens: Oh, you went to Bayview College?

Mr. Mullen: I went there nine years.

Dr. Stephens: Good. Tell us about that.

Mr. Mullen: Huh? We moved to Portland just before the Spanish-American War. I'm inclined now . . . some day I'm going to try to figure it out. All my people that can tell me are dead. But I think that we must've started to school around September, '97, I imagine. I went to school. I finished there in May, 1906, and that's what has helped me on this carpenter business. See, I had a lot of geometry and figuring angles and the length of a rafter and all that by triangles, you see. I presume that's because . . . they made me a foreman when there were men much older than I had been, and in the game lots longer. But I think it's because I knew about geometry.

Dr. Stephens: Did you . . . you learn this geometry at Bayview.

Mr. Mullen: But, you know, after . . . yes. I was over at McCamey to

build a . . . well, you know, when we build a farm . . . a barn by architecture plans there.

Dr. Stephens: What did you study at Bayview besides geometry?

Mr. Mullen: Oh, in those days you studied everything. You had history and we studied Texas history and United States history and general history and algebra.

Dr. Stephens: So you had a good broad general curriculum then.

Mr. Mullen: Huh?

Dr. Stephens: You had a broad general curriculum.

Mr. Mullen: You could go in A & M in those days in the second year without being examined.

Dr. Stephens: I don't doubt that.

Mr. Mullen: That's about how far we went.

Dr. Stephens: How many people went to school in Bayview?

Mr. Mullen: Oh, about 100 a year. Not much . . . it's not like these 10, 15, 20,000, not like that. I'll tell you something else. When we . . . this was private school and nobody helped them. But when we moved there, they were only charging these children that boarded \$12.50 a month. And when they closed after . . . after my time, they were only getting \$16.50 a month--feed them and room them and so forth.

Dr. Stephens: This was the main industry in Portland then.

Mr. Mullen: And they always paid their bills. They had the railroad and the store and everything that depended on what they were going to make, of course, on that school.



Dr. Stephens: Well, what . . .

Mrs. Sparks: Entertainment was the school, too, wasn't it?

Mr. Mullen: Huh?

Mrs. Sparks: The entertainment of the town was . . .

Mr. Mullen: Yes.

Dr. Stephens: Centered around the school.

Mr. Mullen: In those days we didn't have a regular preacher which I'm glad of now. And the old Professor and I've heard he was . . . he could do anything. He taught me to . . . how to knit a catch net. You know what a catch net is? It's a thing to catch your minnows with to fish. But he could . . . he painted his own buildings. He could just do anything. He could play any kind of an instrument--violin, piano. He used to . . . wind instruments.

Dr. Stephens: Where did the children come from to go to school there? Just this locality or all over the country?

Mr. Mullen: Oh, they come . . . lawsy me, we had two boys out of Indian Territory which is Oklahoma now days. We had them all over Texas and West Texas, out of Corpus, out of San Antonio. See, there wasn't a school in San Antonio as good as ours in its day. Of course, my only cost was about ten cents. It'd probably cost you \$1,000 now. And they . . . those children are just as . . . were just as well-educated as far as they went.

Dr. Stephens: Well, now, this went out with the storm in 1916? Was that . . .

is that correct? The best I remember . . .

Mr. Mullen: No. See, we had a hurricane in 1916. I was in the Gregory  
lumber yard.

Dr. Stephens: Well, is this the reason that the school stopped?

Mr. Mullen: Oh, the building. No. I'm inclined to think it must've  
been '19 because it was a two-story building. The damages  
were enough that they cut it down to the first floor. Well,  
the first floor's still down there . . . I mean the dormitory.  
And they had another building for classrooms and so forth,  
auditorium. But I guess that storm destroyed the . . .

Dr. Stephens: At this school?

Mr. Mullen: Well, you know, in my day the teachers you have to have were  
spending all their time up trying to get more money, you  
know. And we had a teacher and that you could find as many  
a hundred boys in Texas as went to this teacher. She  
taught from the first . . . those starting up to about two  
years . . . we didn't have grades so I can't tell you that.  
But there're about two years of algebra and these took in  
history except general history was taught in another depart-  
ment upstairs. But this lady taught about sixty children  
from the start on up to these other things and swept her  
own floor and bought her own stove and bought her own wood  
and got \$60 a month. Now anywhere you can find them in  
Texas today they would sure give her a good name. Of course,  
she's been dead for many years but . . . yes, they tried

to . . . they'd . . . every so often they'd send over to  
Corpus to get twenty gallons of ice cream, I guess, and  
charge the . . . and have these things and charge ten cents  
a . . . but this lady . . . I was telling Eleanor the other  
day she would eat with everybody . . . with every one of  
those children that asked her. She sure did like ice cream.

Dr. Stephens: (Chuckle)