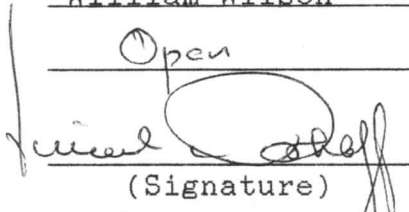


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Interview with
VINCENT L. ROHLOFF
October 31, 1989

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas
Interviewer: William Wilson
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Oral History Collection

Vincent Rohloff

Interviewer: William H. Wilson

Date: October 31, 1989

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Dr. Wilson: This is William Wilson for the North Texas Oral History Collection, and I'm interviewing Mr. Vincent Rohloff in his home at 5943 Joyce Way on the subject of the Dallas Citizens' Interracial Association, Mr. Jerome Crossman, Hamilton Park, and similar subjects.

Could we begin the discussion by my asking you when and where you were born and asking you simply to take your life up to the point where you met Jerome Crossman?

Mr. Rohloff: I was born in Toledo, Ohio, on April 30, 1914. I came to Dallas when I was still a teenager, and I went to work for the KATY Railroad. I was with the KATY for about two-and-a-half years

and studied accounting, taking a correspondence course.

Then I had an opportunity to go to Kermit, Texas, to handle the field accounting for The Illinois Oil Company. After ten months there, I was transferred to their head office in Dallas and stayed with them until 1939, when I went with Ryan Consolidated Petroleum Corporation in which Jerome Crossman was president.

Wilson: So your association with him then dates back to that time.

Rohloff: That's right.

Wilson: What prompted you to come to Dallas?

Rohloff: It was the bottom of the Depression, and Toledo had been hit very hard. In fact, the banks in Toledo, with two exceptions, had all closed even before the National Bank Holiday. I was fortunate to have a clerical job at the art museum in Toledo. I had been planning to become an architect and had taken some courses at the art museum. A second cousin of mine knew the frustrations which we had in Toledo. Her husband was manager of industrial development for the KATY Railroad in St. Louis, and she sent me a clipping from *Time* magazine giving the results of

college graduates in, I think, 1933 in getting jobs. As I recall, business graduates--75 percent--had gotten jobs, doctors about 50 percent, and down the list to architects. Not a single architecture graduate in the entire United States had gotten a job in architecture that year. She said, "How would you like to try railroading?" I was intrigued with the idea. She said they were having an opening come up in Dallas, so I came to Dallas and went to work for the KATY Railroad at the munificent salary of \$60 a month. Out of that I had to pay about four or five dollars a month for the Railroad Retirement Act and for hospitalization (KATY had their own hospital).

Wilson: So when you moved to the Ryan Consolidated Petroleum Corporation, you then worked with Mr. Crossman. Could you describe two things: the nature of the oil company itself, and then the type of relationship you had with him?

Rohloff: The oil company was a producing company that had production in Texas and Kansas, primarily.

After coming back to Dallas from West Texas, I had enrolled in law school, taking night classes at SMU. So then in 1942, I was admitted to the bar and

then graduated in 1943. I was doing land work and title work for Ryan because, in addition to production, we also were constantly acquiring leases which, of course, required title work.

Mr. Crossman was very active civically and as years went by became very active. It was at this juncture in the early 1950s when we had some bombings in South Dallas, and he was appointed head of a citizens' committee to determine the reason for those bombings and what to do about it.

Wilson: Did you have any indication through him, prior to this time, that he had given consideration to the problem, that he was interested in racial matters, that he was interested in the advancement of blacks?

Rohloff: Not specifically in that respect. He was very active or very concerned about the welfare of all mankind, regardless of race, color, or creed. He, himself, was Jewish but he was interested in all people.

One thing that particularly interested me was his relationship with I.B. Loud, who was the pastor of Saint Paul's Methodist Church, a black congregation. Mr. Loud was at one time highly interested in becoming a bishop of the Methodist Church. I forget the name of the denomination. It

was the black Methodists, as I recall. Mr. Crossman was very active in supporting Mr. Loud and, I think, gave him some money to make trips here and there and wrote letters extolling the capabilities of Mr. Loud.

Wilson: Was the fact that Mr. Crossman was Jewish and, therefore, although perhaps not on a personal basis, that he felt for other Jews the prejudice that he was involved in this way?

Rohloff: I don't know that he was. He was a so-called Reform Jew as contrasted with the Orthodox Jew. In fact, he was very interested and active on a national basis with American Council for Judaism, which was, you might say, anti-Zionist or, rather, they were not of the same ilk as the Zionists. Mr. Crossman and other members of the American Council for Judaism felt that Judaism was a religion and, as such, should not be involved politically. They considered themselves Americans foremost and what was good for America. They were not at all sympathetic...well, they were sympathetic with the Zionist movement, but they felt that Jews who were living in the United States should be primarily Americans and not Jews as a nationality.

Wilson: Before the bombings in 1948 and 1949, there were a number of efforts centered in the Dallas Home Builders Association to establish residential neighborhoods for blacks, all of which met white opposition of one kind or another and failed apparently for that reason. The only indication at least I have discovered, as far as any member of the banking and commercial elite of Dallas was concerned at all about the situation, was the concern of Karl Hoblitzelle, which he voiced in 1949, well before the bombings. He attempted through the Hoblitzelle Foundation to locate a black neighborhood in the Trinity River bottoms where there later was an effort made. Did Mr. Crossman react or respond to those at all, or did you have any feeling about these efforts?

Rohloff: Not at that time. Of course, I was not involved until the Dallas Citizens' Interracial Association was formed, and I'm not sure if Mr. Crossman had any direct involvement. I do not recall any prior to the time that he was appointed to work on this problem.

Wilson: I see. Well, those bombings that you mentioned began in February of 1950, and they went off and on for a year and a half, roughly.

Rohloff: Yes.

Wilson: There was a lull in there where everyone thought they had gone away, and then they came back. As a response to that, of course, there was the Pelt suggestion--actually initiated before the bombing--that the Trinity Valley area be developed, but the black leadership rejected that because it was a river bottom and it would never be a satisfactory home site. Then more directly in response to the bombing came the genesis of the Interracial Association, which was the joint committees of the Chamber of Commerce and the Dallas Citizen's Council; and then there was that tour the civic leaders took to look at the places where blacks were living and went through West Dallas and so on.

One of their suggestions was for the Interracial Committee...and Mr. Crossman, who was on that committee--I'm not speaking yet of the incorporated association but the Interracial Committee that grew out of the joint committee of the Chamber of Commerce--appeared in July, 1951,

before the Chamber of Commerce, and what he asked for there was a commitment from the Chamber of Commerce for black housing. He suggested that the non-profit corporation supervise this settlement. At that time they took no action. They didn't have a quorum and so on to think about it. But, of course, the Interracial Association grew from that. Did he ever mention to you the Harland Bartholomew Report as of 1944? This was the master plan for Dallas? The reason I mention that is because one of our colleagues suggested that this is the way to do it, establishing a non-profit corporation.

Rohloff: I do not recall his ever mentioning that. I've seen references to that report from time to time, but I do not recall that he mentioned that.

Wilson: Well, shortly after that, of course, the Interracial Association did establish and get under way. The charters and bylaws were established late in October of 1951, and then it just gets going in 1952. It seemed to me from reading Mr. Crossman's statements that he called for a spiritual understanding of the problem, but it seems like that he was not a reformer. Was he concerned that he appear to be too

much a "bleeding heart," too liberal, too much in favor of black advancement?

Rohloff: I don't think that he was. He had the respect of the community, particularly of the business leaders who knew him, and I don't think that he ever suffered any pangs from being held up as a "bleeding heart." He was not the type of aggressive individual in that he was going to run roughshod over the community with his own ideas. He was a good negotiator, so to speak, and, as I say, held the respect of the community and wanted to do what was good for everybody.

Wilson: Did he ever suggest to you in the course of this that such activities coupled with many other things, of course, would lead to some fundamental change in race relations? Did he see any handwriting on the wall regarding that?

Rohloff: Well, of course, he was looking forward to improvement of the situation of the blacks and of harmonious relationships between the blacks and the rest of the Dallas community. He was interested in the development of Bishop College, for example. In fact, after the bills were paid for all the obligations of the Dallas Citizens' Interracial

Association, they had over \$25,000 left in their treasury, and upon his recommendation the association gave--I think it was \$20,000--\$20,000 to Bishop College toward the construction of their gymnasium or the swimming pool that they had out there. So it's not only in the Dallas Citizens' Interracial Association, but he was interested in the broad spectrum of racial relations.

Wilson: Did he believe that race relations could develop to a harmonious point and maintain that level in a situation that was somehow segregated with respect to schooling and residences and jobs for blacks and all the rest of it?

Rohloff: Well, we did not get into specifics, but he was optimistic. He was optimistic generally; otherwise, he wouldn't have been in the oil business. But he was optimistic that racial relations would improve and that blacks would develop professionally; otherwise, he wouldn't have been interested in Bishop College, for example. I know that he was very interested in the development of blacks.

Wilson: Yes, but would he foresee a situation that now exists at Hamilton Park, where whites live in what was founded as a black residential area?

Rohloff: No, I don't know that he foresaw that. In fact, I don't think he foresaw the fact that after Hamilton Park was established that there'd be an anti-Hamilton Park feeling among many of the blacks in South Dallas. Again, we talk about segregation between the blacks and the whites; however, I think back to many years ago when I was told that there was more segregation among the blacks themselves than there is between the blacks and the whites. I remember being told that in Chicago, for example, where there were about seven different strata of blacks economically; and that if you were in one strata, you associated only with blacks in that particular strata. Yet, one or two nights ago on one of the talk shows there--well, it was yesterday afternoon--my wife had Oprah Winfrey on, and there was a heated discussion between a couple of blacks. One of the blacks themselves said, "The problem with blacks is that there is more segregation between the blacks than there is between the whites," that they were fighting among themselves and needed to get united. This is one of the things that happened in Hamilton Park since its establishment. It was a

great achievement, I thought, and still do, but it didn't solve all of the problems.

Wilson: What was the nature of the resentment in South Dallas?

Rohloff: I think probably the fact that the area was newly developed. There were nice homes. In South Dallas you had areas where there were some rundown buildings, commercial buildings. Many of the homes were dilapidated. In Hamilton Park, however, everything was spanking brand-new.

Wilson: Was there any resentment that, for instance, some districts in South Dallas, Meadow Avenue, for instance, was cleaned out, that whole blocks of things had moved out of South Dallas into Hamilton Park?

Rohloff: Probably, probably.

Wilson: So the feeling was that if you're going to do something for blacks, it should be in a community that exists rather than reinventing the wheel elsewhere?

Rohloff: That's probably the situation. But, you see, at that time, if you displaced any of the people in South Dallas, for example, to build some Hamilton Park-type homes, where would you put the people that had

been displaced? This was one of the problems that gave rise to these bombings. You had this particularly in the black community that is now part of Love Field.

Wilson: Yes, North Park and Elm Thicket.

Rohloff: Elm Thicket, I couldn't think of it. In Elm Thicket a number of black families were displaced when Love Field was expanded, and they had no place to go; and this was a part of the problem that caused the bombings in South Dallas. They'd move in with relatives and friends in homes that were already overcrowded. For example, if you had cleared out a couple hundred acres in South Dallas to build new homes, where would you put the people that you were displacing? Whereas, with the Hamilton Park development, they were able to put people in another area that had not been previously populated.

Wilson: To return to Hamilton Park, in the minutes of the Interracial Association there are a number of meetings in 1952 when they are talking about sites. In the material that you allowed me to photocopy, the first mention of the major site and the development here comes in late June, 1952. The Site Committee report says that there are many Negro

families who live in the area already. Was that a consideration?

Rohloff: Yes, it was. This particular area had been inhabited by blacks ever since the Civil War. As you mentioned before, one of the problems of establishing a black community was the opposition from whites in various areas around the city. But in this particular case, with very few exceptions the inhabitants were black, so the prospect of white opposition was minimal as compared with other areas.

Wilson: Was Mr. Majors black?

Rohloff: I'm not sure (chuckle). There was a Majors in the real estate business here.

Wilson: Well, you referred to this as the Majors Site, or the committee refers to this property that eventually was purchased as the Majors Site.

Rohloff: I was using the term "major" as just an important site rather than...

Wilson: So it's Majors.

Rohloff: I've forgotten.

Wilson: D. ("Hick") Majors.

Rohloff: I think he was white. I'm pretty sure he was white.

Wilson: What was the land used for? Was it used for crop production or running cattle on it? Do you recall what he was doing with that property then?

Rohloff: I don't recall. I think he may have...I just don't recall if he had bought it as an investment. I didn't see the property until they started developing it.

Wilson: Well, the Fields family, owned land immediately north, and it became the extension of Hamilton Park. The Fields family was black, and they, indeed, still own some parcels. During the buy-out furor, some more of their property was purchased. Their house was off Schroeder Road, north of there--that section of Schroeder Road on the west side of Schroeder Road that's gone now. It's just a vacant lot. The Fields family was bought out. I believe that some heirs of that family lived in Hamilton Park. At least they carried that name.

Rohloff: Yes.

Wilson: But there was at that time no suggestion of buying any other property except in one other place called the Hexter Site. Do you recall where that was?

Rohloff: No. I know they were talking about additional property, but they decided that they'd better develop the original property and see how that went.

Wilson: Before they got into anything else.

Rohloff: That's right.

Wilson: There are some developments occurring very rapidly after that, and the association decided to purchase the land as of February, 1953. The loan from the Hoblitzelle Foundation to buy the property is dated the 13th--which brings Mr. Hoblitzelle into it. He, of course, had the long-standing interest in this and wanted a revolving fund established through the Chamber of Commerce subsequent to his own interest that was expressed and then prior to the purchase of Hamilton Park. Do you recall anything about the negotiations with the Hoblitzelle Foundation in relationship with Mr. Hoblitzelle?

Rohloff: No. I was really not involved in that at all other than Mr. Crossman told me that Mr. Hoblitzelle was going to loan the money to acquire the property.

Wilson: About the same time--well, several months later, in July, 1953--came the contracts for the sewers and water mains, which appears to be a very complicated

process involving loans for that, with the Republic National Bank being the lead bank.

Rohloff: Yes.

Wilson: A consortium actually loaned these funds. Do you have some recollection of that arrangement?

Rohloff: Of course, this was one of the big problems of the association. In all the other efforts to develop black housing, whoever proposed to develop an area, the first thing he did was to run to Washington to get some money. And invariably, for one reason or another, probably due to opposition from neighboring whites, but for one reason or another they'd come back empty handed. So they could never get any of these projects off the ground.

One of the basic tenets of the Dallas Interracial Association was, "We're not going to run to Washington. We're going to handle this ourselves." So this created the financial problem. Well, Hoblitzelle, of course, came to the rescue by providing the funds to acquire the land. But then the question of utilities was very important because Hamilton Park was located, I think, about three miles from the nearest city water lines and three-and-a-half miles from the nearest sewer line or

vice-versa. The association had to bear the expense of those extensions.

So how we were going to pay for this? Well, Mr. Crossman discussed this with the heads of the three main banks--Republic, First National, and Mercantile--and they agreed to loan the money, as I recall, at 3 percent to the association. As I remember, there were many meetings held of the board, and committees and phone conversations. I remember, after this had gone on several months, one day Ben Wooten talked to Mr. Crossman, and he said, "Jerry, these loans that the bank is making to the Interracial Association--are we going to get this money back, or should we just consider it a donation?" But the loans were all paid back with interest.

Wilson: What was the source of his concern?

Rohloff: Oh, I think the magnitude of the cost of these utility lines, and the fact that they only had 168 acres or whatever it was, and whether or not they'd be able to build the houses, and if blacks, once the houses were built, would be able to afford to buy them.

Wilson: Mr. Wooten was connected with which bank?

Rohloff: Well, he had been a vice-president of Republic Bank.
(Chuckle) One Monday morning the papers came out that he was now president of the First National Bank (laughter). He had cleaned out his desk over the weekend. It just went that fast. It was a big surprise in Dallas.

Wilson: So he looked at this as a very chancy undertaking.

Rohloff: Yes.

Wilson: But he went through with it anyway.

Rohloff: But he went through with it. He had already committed the bank, so there was not much he could do about it. What he was really asking was, "Are we going to get paid back, or we should charge this off right now?" If some of our bankers the last three or four years would have had the same concern and foresight that he did, I don't think the banks would have got in the trouble that they have.

Wilson: This was on a reimbursable basis with the city.

Rohloff: Yes.

Wilson: The city would eventually return the funds. Is that correct?

Rohloff: I don't think so.

Wilson: Well, there is a payment, for instance, in the...the statement on the tax return is a large payment from

Dallas on a 1954 tax return. I don't know whether this is a water and sewer reimbursement, but it's a payment then of a considerable amount--\$272,928.31. And other sums, not that large necessarily but other sums which are reimbursements from the city, show up on the account.

Rohloff: Okay. Those matters were handled by Mr. Norwood, and I was not familiar with that. It is very possible, but I was not familiar with that aspect of it.

Wilson: Well, didn't Mr. Crossman also, in order for that to happen, have to get this land into city limits?

Rohloff: Yes.

Wilson: At one time wasn't it outside the city limits?

Rohloff: Yes. That was another problem. I think that at that time...I'm going purely from recollection, but I believe that Northwest Highway was the northern extremity of the city along North Central Expressway. So they had a resolution go through the City Council to annex the very narrow strip along North Central from the then existing city limits out to Hamilton Park. I don't know how wide it was, but it was a very narrow strip along North Central.

Wilson: And he arranged for that?

Rohloff: Yes.

Wilson: There's also a contract with the Associated Construction Company, Incorporated, and T. J. Hayman...

Rohloff: Tom Hayman.

Wilson: ...signed that as vice-president. How did they come into this?

Rohloff: Well, there were a couple of concerns. One is that Mr. Crossman was concerned. He wanted to make this housing available to anyone who could reasonably afford it, so he wanted the houses to be very reasonably priced. He talked to a number of contractors, and he talked to Tom Hayman. I believe Mr. Inge was associated with Mr. Hayman at the time --Inge-Hayman. Mr. Crossman told them that he wanted these houses built with very little profit. Mr. Hayman agreed to this and priced the houses very reasonably. I'm not sure, but I think this company was Associated Construction. I think that may have been a company that was just formed expressly for that purpose by Mr. Hayman.

Wilson: You mentioned that some of the previous efforts to find black housing had involved people going to

Washington for funds. Where were they looking for money in Washington?

Rohloff: I don't know. It seemed to be the general consensus --in fact, it still is--that if you want to get something done, run to Washington, and you'll find the place to get money.

Wilson: But they didn't.

Rohloff: But they didn't, no. Of course, in those days it wasn't as easy to get money in Washington as it is these days.

Wilson: Mr. Carr P. Collins is also involved in this. I noticed that he was chairman of the financing subcommittee of the Interracial Association. His role was to put together a pool of money for the mortgages.

Rohloff: Yes, it was. I've forgotten about that particular angle of it. As I recall, he owned Fidelity Union Life Insurance Company, and I believe they committed themselves to furnish a certain sum of mortgage money. Then I think he got some of the other mortgage companies to go along with him, to provide the money. These mortgages were to be guaranteed by the AMFHA.

After all the financing was arranged, we thought everything was going just great, and then the problems with schools came up. The VA and FHA would not go along with guaranteed loans unless schooling was provided. This plan was in the Richardson Independent School District. Richardson at that time was primarily a bedroom community. It was mortgaged to the hilt--the school district--and they could not afford to build a school to serve Hamilton Park.

Then it was proposed that the Dallas Independent School District would swap some land for the Hamilton Park District, whereby the Dallas School District would give Richardson some land. On the other hand, they may not have even agreed to give it, but they were going to take over the obligation of Hamilton Park, and the Richardson School District agreed to that.

But when it came down to closing the deal, it developed that the Richardson School District was already mortgaged to the hilt, and they could not release the Hamilton Park land because of their high mortgage already. So we were back to square one.

Mr. Crossman learned that Dallas County was having to bus black children outside the city limits of Dallas to various schools, so he got together with the appropriate authorities and made an agreement that they would bus their students into Hamilton Park. And based upon that agreement, it's my understanding that the Richardson School District was able to raise the funds to build the school in Hamilton Park.

Wilson: And they raised taxes 20 percent to finance this thing, which was a substantial increase.

Rohloff: Well, it was based on the contract with the county that they were able to do whatever financial arrangements were made.

Wilson: Well, I know there is a letter from Mr. Crossman on the 27th of July, 1954, and he says, "I've been in discussion for a long, long time now with the trustees of the Richardson Independent School District." And that was in reference to that--getting the Hamilton Park School under way.

Rohloff: He spent an awful lot of time on this. I know one time he told me--and this was before they'd ever finished--that he had had over four hundred

conferences either in person or on the telephone on the Hamilton Park project.

Wilson: Was it the whole project or merely the school?

Rohloff: No, it was the whole project.

Wilson: There is also an interesting letter from John Rice, the secretary-manager of the old Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce.

Rohloff: Negro Chamber, yes.

Wilson: He's addressing Mr. Crossman with respect to a conference in Mr. Crossman's office at which A. Maceo Smith was also in attendance, and they are worried about the slow sales in Hamilton Park. One of the reasons for the slow sales was that the FHA and VA were taking a great deal of time and laboring over loan applications, and they decided that Mr. Crossman should write letters to these people to speed things along. Did he ever do that?

Rohloff: I don't recall.

Wilson: Was he concerned about this? Did he agree with the assessment that this was a slow process?

Rohloff: Oh, yes, he agreed and he was the type of person that liked to get things over with so he could get on to something else. Yes, I know he made a number of phone calls to the FHA and VA.

Wilson: Did these have any effect on those people?

Rohloff: Well, it (laughter) eventually got done.

Wilson: Well, they also suggested that it might be due to a lack of good public relations on the part of the builders--that there might be more newspaper publicity, better advertising, perhaps they ought to hire some blacks to push the houses. Was that ever done? Any of that?

Rohloff: I always felt that we had good newspaper publicity. I know when they had the dedication they had good publicity, and there were prominent blacks and whites out at the site. I was there. It's easy to say that there should have been blacks hired to do publicity, but I don't know that there were too many blacks, particularly in the advertising area, that could have improved that at all. It's so easy to find fault with what you're trying to do. In other words, here you have leaders in the white community that were trying to accomplish something, and they did. But it's so easy to accuse them of not going fast enough.

Wilson: Yes.

Rohloff: To digress a little, during the Johnson years, when we had all these programs for the disadvantaged,

Charlie Galvan, who was then dean at SMU, called me one day and said that SMU had a contract with the government to establish Dallas Legal Services for the disadvantaged, and he said, "A committee of the Dallas Bar Association came up with your name to oversee it. So I said, "Well, Charlie, I'm not interested in working for the government." He said, "You wouldn't be working for the government; you'll be working for SMU. We've got the contract with the government." So I was their...I forget what I was called. Anyway, I took a year out to supervise that program.

Well, one of the guidelines was that you've got to be fair between the races. You've got to have so many white lawyers, and you've got to have the blacks, and you've got to have the Hispanics--community representatives on your staff. Well, that was fine as to the white lawyers. I had no trouble in getting white lawyers--new graduates out of school. At that time I think our ceiling for paying lawyers was \$8,000. As I say, I had no problem. This was twenty-five years or so ago. I had no trouble getting white lawyers at \$8,000 or \$8,400 a year. There were only at that time, I think, two Hispanic

lawyers, and neither one of them wanted to work for Legal Services because they were making far more than that. Then there were about six or eight competent black lawyers. In fact, we had one or two of them on our board of advisors. They didn't want to go to work, either, because they were making more money in private practice. Yet, at the end of the first year, when we were evaluated...one of the chairmen of the evaluating team had been out of law school at the University of Hawaii, I think, for two or three years. Well, he had all the answers. One criticism they had was that we hadn't hired black and Hispanic lawyers. But we tried to hire every one in Dallas, and not one of them would take the job. The point I'm making is that frequently the people who do all the yelling are the very people that are doing well themselves, but they want to point their finger at the whites. The same thing happened here.

Wilson: With the perspective at the time, one of the criticisms of my project--and it's been voiced in the university--is that in part this is a study of paternalism. So I asked Mr. Smith, "Well, when you had the opportunity to move into Hamilton Park and

this opened up, did you think of this as an exercise in white paternalism?" He said, "No. We wanted a good place to live." This kind of concern simply wasn't on the surface then. You can go back and say, "Well, this is this and this that," but it is not a reasonable thing to do.

Rohloff: No.

Wilson: That was his responsive to that.

Rohloff: Well, we have a black community just about two miles north of here. The street is McShann, I believe.

Wilson: Yes.

Rohloff: And I don't think there was any particular problem. I think it was a black doctor that started on the corner on McShann and Preston Road, and I don't think they had too much objection, if any. But the point is, these are people who were able to afford to live in the area, and they were not people who were going to have three or four families all trying to live in the same house. I wouldn't object to a black living next to me as long as he could afford it and maintain his house.

This is one thing that the people in Hamilton Park have done. They maintained their houses. I think I mentioned the opposition of one of the

whites down the street who originally opposed the establishment of Hamilton Park.

Wilson: Yes.

Rohloff: Then several years after it got started, the cement company across the street wanted to...well, they were blowing dust over into Hamilton Park.

Wilson: Mr. Smith said they wanted to make their arrangement permanent.

Rohloff: Yes.

Wilson: That was to be temporary, however, that that thing was to end with the zoning change.

Rohloff: That's right. I attended a meeting down at city hall and this white neighbor who had been so vociferous in opposing Hamilton Park was, I think, the first witness or one of the first witnesses at the hearing. He mentioned how he had opposed Hamilton Park, but he said, "I have reversed my position. These people are out there on Saturdays and Sundays taking care of their homes and their yards. I want to see this development continue. I'm opposed to the cement company." I congratulated him afterwards for admitting that he opposed this to begin with and now he was for them.

Wilson: Near the end of the most intensively active phase of the Interracial Association, there was a resolution in October, 1955, to authorize Mr. Crossman to enter into the contract. This is the resolution that authorized Mr. Crossman to enter into further contracts for land purchases. Did something precipitate this?

Rohloff: Not unless it was the fact that they wanted to extend this area to the north of Hamilton Park.

Wilson: And that was done by whom?

Rohloff: I think this was done by Henry Hoffman, who is the nephew of Mr. Crossman, and his partner, Jim Moran. Jim Moran has been one of the leading realtors in Dallas for many years. I guess it was about that time that he and Henry Hoffman formed a partnership, and I think this was one of their first projects, was to acquire that acreage there. But that was complete outside development. The Dallas Citizens' Interracial Association had no connection with that. But I think that it was probably looking forward to the expansion of Hamilton Park that this resolution was adopted.

Wilson: One other matter that is not coincidental but closely related to Hamilton Park is the expansion

of Love Field. This was a hot topic from 1952-1954. In 1953, by then, Mr. Crossman was also the president of the Chamber of Commerce...

Rohloff: ...Chamber of Commerce.

Wilson: ...and very much committed to the expansion of Love Field. He suggested...I'm not certain whether it was after the event...in March--I guess of 1952--he was saying that this was going to be a complete development, and this would be a place for the Elm Thicket people who were affected by the expansion to move into. Was there any direct connection between Hamilton Park and the necessity for it and the expansion of Love Field?

Rohloff: Well, yes. It's really an indirect connection because...I forget how many families were displaced in Elm Thicket, but I would guess probably between 100 and 200 families, and they had to move someplace. Well, I would say that most of them would probably not be able to afford a home in Hamilton Park, but I would think that a substantial number would have been able to. But those who couldn't afford it would be able to afford someplace in, say, South Dallas, where someone in South Dallas was able to afford to move to Hamilton Park by virtue of

position or improved standing in life and the ability to finance it. So to that extent, there was a connection, although it was indirect.

Wilson: Well, there was a black optometrist, Dr. John O. Chisum, in Elm Thicket who not only opposed the expansion of Love Field, and lost, of course, in 1953--in January of 1953. I believe it was dated correctly. I don't have the year, but I believe it was 1953 that there was bond issue or a vote to finance this expansion, and his group and other groups that opposed that lost out in that election.

But he also treated Hamilton Park as a humbug. In fact, in his papers there's an editorial from the *Dallas Morning News* just before the vote, and the *Morning News* was saying, "The opponents of the expansion of Love Field say, 'There's no place for these people to go.' That's not true. There's going to be a new black area." He has written on this, "The Big Lie." Then sometime later he gave an interview with the old *Fort Worth Press* in September of 1954, and they asked him, "Did anybody from Elm Thicket actually move to Hamilton Park?" He said, "Maybe, but I don't know of anyone. The houses cost too much, and there's a lack of transportation."

I'm not sure whether he meant transportation from Hamilton Park to jobs that people normally held or whether just a lack of transportation generally in and out of there. I know this was a problem in the early years of Hamilton Park. But at any rate, he was never reconciled that this was an honest approach to the problem at all.

Rohloff: Well, I know that no one got rich over Hamilton Park. I know that Mr. Crossman certainly didn't. He didn't get a penny, and he gave many, many hours of his time. Associated Developers, I know, did not make a killing. I don't remember, but I think that the development was set up so that they would make less than 10 percent on the sale of those homes. I've forgotten now, but it seems to me that those homes sold for \$5,000.

Wilson: A little more than that.

Rohloff: Or in that area.

Wilson: Seven to eight thousand, somewhere along in that line.

Rohloff: The property was sold virtually at the cost to Associated, to the developers, so that they could sell their houses. As I say, no one...well, the only people that would have stood to make anything were

Mr. Hayman and his group, and any profit they made was very minimal.

Wilson: Well, it wasn't exactly Dr. Chisum's contention that people were getting rich off Hamilton Park, rather that Love Field typified a problem in Dallas, which was that whenever anyone wanted to make a public improvement, and blacks seemed to be in the way of this, blacks were displaced; and there really was no provision made for the displaced people, but there was a white elite who sent up a smoke screen. And the result was essentially that nobody who was black benefited from the price of the land and the price received for the land and so forth. They can't move elsewhere, so they are left, once more, with the short end of the stick.

Rohloff: About that time there was the housing development--and, of course, this is a federal project on Washington--just south of North Central Expressway. I'm not sure if that's called Roseland Homes or what. But it had been developed for a number of years, and Sam Hudson was the, I think, manager of the Dallas Housing Authority, which oversaw that. I sat beside him in a civic luncheon one day, and I complimented him on how good the project was being

operated. I said that in Toledo there was a similar development about the same age as the one on Washington, but the one in Toledo was rundown. He said, "We have a constant problem of occupancy. We have people come in from out of the city, and we have to teach them how to live like civilized people. We have to teach them to use a bathroom." Then he said, "They're here for a few years as renters, and then they improve their economic standing, and they want to go out and buy a house. Then we get another group in, and we have to teach them all over again."

I think that this was probably a part of the housing problem here, that we had a lot of people coming to Dallas. The whites, of course, could find some kind of houses because there were more white houses available. But the expansion of blacks, not only from their own procreation but from these immigrants, so to speak, really put a strain on the black housing community. It's a fact of life that we had a need, and it's certainly improved now.

Wilson: Well, I asked Mr. Smith about this, and he said, "I can tell you that I came from Elm Thicket--an apartment on the edge of it--and so did my brother.

I could name seven or eight families that came from Elm Thicket." He was quite indignant (chuckle) that no one had moved over to build in there. You attended the dedication of Hamilton Park.

Rohloff: Yes.

Wilson: That was in October of 1953, and there was an opening in--what--May of 1954 after a few houses were built.

Rohloff: Yes.

Wilson: You were there at the dedication. There was a photograph of Mr. Crossman speaking in October of 1953 in what looks like a temporary shelter or type of arrangement. There are accounts of his speech and all of that.

One of the things that everyone was very proud of is that there were no defaults in Hamilton Park. Is that true to your knowledge?

Rohloff: Yes. That was an amazing thing, but I (chuckle) don't know if you attribute that to the length of time that the VA or FHA took in processing these things. But I know we were very happy about that. Mr. Crossman was very pleased.

Wilson: One of the things that strikes me as curious about this is that once this tremendous effort had been

made, there wasn't, apparently except for the resolution in 1955, much subsequent activity. The Interracial Association itself...well, the secretary's records indicate that it ran along for a number of years, and finally they sent a notice to Mr. Mitchell, I think, saying, "If you don't do something with the report, you're going to forfeit your charter." Finally, they said, after considerable delay, in the fall of 1965 or late summer of 1965, "You have forfeited your charter." Prior to that there was an effort by Frank Malone and Hugh Prather, Jr., to get the property that subsequently went to Texas Instruments as a kind of extension of Hamilton Park. I was wondering if you had any thoughts on that? Why did this seem to burn out with Hamilton Park?

Rohloff: I don't know. When was that on the Texas Instruments land?

Wilson: Nineteen sixty-four, after it was vacant a year or so up to that time. They thought they had it...what they were doing--the reason I know about is it--is that they were seeking help once more from the Hoblitzelle Foundation to support their efforts as it had those of the Interracial Association.

Rohloff: Those efforts were apparently made by Mr. Prather and...who was the other one?

Wilson: Frank H. Malone.

Rohloff: Frank Malone. I'm trying to think (chuckle). There was a Frank Malone at SMU with me when we were both in the SMU band. I've forgotten his middle initial, but Frank was later director of the SMU band. But I think he was in the real estate business.

Wilson: Yes, this Frank Malone was.

Rohloff: I mean, the one I know. I think he was. But I think Frank Malone, whoever he was, and Mr. Prather were acting on their own and not connected with the Interracial Association.

Wilson: No, this is clearly the case.

Rohloff: Getting back to your question, "Why didn't the association do anything," Mr. Crossman was the driving force in this association. Hoblitzelle, of course, was the moneyman, but Mr. Crossman was the driving force.

After Hamilton Park got under way, Mr. Crossman, as you've already suggested, became president of the chamber, and that took (chuckle) up an awful lot of time. I would guess that at that time he was spending three-quarters of his time on

Chamber of Commerce activities, maybe more, plus other civic activities that he was involved in. He was very heavily involved in Love Field at that time, because we had this fight between Dallas and Fort Worth. They had a tentative agreement to develop what later became Greater Southwest Airport, but they got at odds. They planned this thing and thought they had an agreement, and then it developed, through Amon Carter's (chuckle) efforts, that the main entrance to the airport was going to be on the Fort Worth side--I mean, childish stuff like that. And so they broke off relations.

Another problem is that they made surveys, and Andy De Shong was the head of the chamber at that time, I mean, the paid staff.

Wilson: He was an executive.

Rohloff: Yes. He was devoting almost all of his time to this fight over the airport. I remember they made surveys and came up with only one-tenth of the departures from Love Field came from Fort Worth, and yet Fort Worth was trying to run the thing.

So this was the type of thing that Mr. Crossman was facing, was this fight over Love Field. So since

Hamilton Park was taken care of, his efforts were in that area.

I was very active in the Chamber of Commerce, too, on the membership committee. I had got two life memberships for selling chamber memberships, and then I was well on my way to the third life membership when he went out as president. One day we were talking together, and he said, "Now, Vincent, you're going to have to let up on your Lasso Club activities. We're going to have to work for ourselves for a while."

So this one reason. Of course, the housing situation had been alleviated somewhat. There were no more bombings, and we had some of these housing developments go on, so there wasn't the need as pressing as it had been. Of course, hindsight probably dictates that we should have been doing something more. But, again, as I say, he was only one man, and he was the one that was doing it.

Wilson: There was no one else in the association who really picked it up.

Rohloff: No. Mr. Norwood had been very active, but he was well up in years and had to taper off. And, of

course, Mr. Crossman was getting up there too. He died in 1970.

Wilson: Just a couple of other things. You mentioned, when we were talking a while ago--not on tape but in one of my previous visits--about a relationship between your church and the Hamilton Park...well, now it's the Hamilton Park United Methodist Church.

Rohloff: Well, actually, there wasn't any relationship with the church I was attending, but Marshall Steele at that time was pastor, and a very popular pastor, at Highland Park.

Wilson: This is Highland Park Methodist?

Rohloff: Yes, Highland Park Methodist. One day he came to see Mr. Crossman about...in fact, Steele, I think, just died two or three months ago, I believe. He was living up in Arkansas. But, anyway, he came to see Mr. Crossman and said that Highland Park Methodist Church wanted to start a mission church in Hamilton Park. He did quite a bit (chuckle) of talking in this conference, and he got through talking, and I guess he asked Mr. Crossman for a donation of land to start the church. Mr. Crossman said something like this: "Marshall, I admire your efforts and your goal in starting this church and

the fact that you're putting out money to do it." But he told me that he said, "The association is a non-profit organization, and we've bought this land and are selling it to the residents at our cost. The only way we can get funds is by selling this land, and we're selling it at cost. So we don't have any land left over to donate for a church purpose or any other activity like that." Steele chuckled and said, "Well, Jerry, I guess I should have been listening instead of talking all the time."
(Laughter)

Wilson: But they did put the church there.

Rohloff: They did put the church there, and Highland Park bought, I think, just an acre or so, maybe two acres. But Highland Park paid for the land to the association. I'm not sure if it was the same price that the developer was paying or not, but I rather imagine it was. At least it was close because it was all being sold at virtual cost.

Wilson: There was a wrinkle in their agreement with the Hoblitzelle Foundation--I don't believe with Mr. Hoblitzelle personally--because the people at the foundation were concerned about the equity of the foundation. As a matter of fact, the association

had to repay for the early lots, at least, at a somewhat higher rate to the foundation than the loan in order to have the foundation recover its money.

Rohloff: Yes.

Wilson: One other matter that interests me about Hamilton Park was a rather different point of view between all the people who were concerned with the development of black housing and the residents of Hamilton Park themselves. Whether they were black or white, whether it was Mr. Crossman and John Rice, didn't make any difference. Their view was that the need among the blacks was very broadly based, and therefore various kinds of housing would be needed to respond to this need, including multiple-family housing as well as single-family housing. The residents of Hamilton Park thought that they were moving into a single-family area, and then, lo and behold, those on the south end of Willowdell discovered that they were across the street from land zoned multiple-family, which was roughly between the south end of the park and down kind of a fish hook that Willowdell makes between the south end of the Hamilton Park park and the United Methodist Church property. Here was this land that

was multiple-family, and they sued to have this zoning changed and eventually lost the suit. But from that I was wondering if this was also Mr. Crossman's concern. Did he actually say this--that he envisioned something in there which involved more than single-family, and did he have an interest in black housing beyond just those who could afford single-family housing?

Rohloff: I don't recall that we ever discussed this matter. I know that he was concerned about providing low cost, individually owned property, but I don't think that we ever went into this matter.

Wilson: When they built that original shelter in the park, they dedicated that to Mr. Crossman. I followed it up to the point where there was supposed to be a ceremony and a plaque placed on the building. Was there ever one?

Rohloff: Not to my knowledge. Not to my knowledge. In fact, I'd even forgotten about the shelter.

Wilson: Well, the Hoblitzelle Foundation put out most of the money for it. There's quite a bit of this correspondence between the Hoblitzelle Foundation and the Park Department about what sort of plaque would go on it, what it would say, and so on and so

forth. I've driven by the building, but I've never stopped and gotten out (chuckle) and walked over there to see whether or not there was a plaque. But I think they were talking about it in 1961, as I recall. Later in the year, when things cooled off a bit, about October, they were going to have this dedication with the plaque to honor Jerome K. Crossman.

Rohloff: I don't recall. I don't think that they ever did because I'm sure I would have (chuckle) remembered. I've forgotten a lot of things, but I would have remembered that.

Wilson: Well, that exhausts my questions. Are there any other comments that you would like to make either about the background or the founding or the founding ceremonies or anything at all?

Rohloff: No, I don't recall. I know that his relations with the black leaders at that time were very cordial, and his effort was all directed for the good of the black community. He had nothing to sell them. His livelihood was coming from investments that he had made in the oil business, which was far removed from Dallas. He was a very unselfish person and was a very devoted family man. I certainly enjoyed working

for him from the time that I went to work for him, and I still do some work for his family. Mrs. Crossman had a stroke recently.

Wilson: So this is strictly altruistic civic involvement.

Rohloff: That's right--absolutely. He never made a penny from any of this. He was given the Linz Award, and that was many, many years ago. But he had no business here from which he would have profited.

Wilson: Lots of involvement but not profit.

Rohloff: That's right. That's right.

Wilson: Mr. Rohloff, thank you.

Rohloff: Thank you.

[End of interview]