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Interview with

J. R. Parten

October 17, 1967

Place of Interview: Houston, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. E. Dale Odom

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Oral History Collection

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Dr. Odom: [This is] E. Dale Odom interviewing Mr. J. R. Parten in his office in the Southwest Bank Building on October 17, 1967. Mr. Parten, I thought we would start this memoir of yours by asking you to tell us about your early life in Madisonville. What influences shaped your life and your career and so forth? [Tell me] something about your parents, if you would, because all of these things are a key to a man's later career.

Mr. Parten: Well, I grew up with very little distinction in the town of Madisonville. My mother was Ella Brooks Parten. My father was William Parten. My father was a rancher and a farmer and a merchant. I was one of a large family of ten children--two boys and eight girls. I was inspired in my early days in Madisonville High School [to go on] to get a higher education, and I left Madisonville High School and took my examination and was admitted to the University of Texas in 1913. There I strived to get an academic degree, a B.A., bachelors degree, and also a law degree, and I completed my courses over a period of five years. My specialty and major in

academic work was political science, and the law was international law.

I was interrupted at the end of my fourth year by the start of World War I. I hurriedly finished my law studies in the summer of 1917, took the bar examination, and was admitted to the bar of Texas.

Odom: Were you at the University when Governor Jim Ferguson vetoed the appropriations bill?

Parten: No, no, I was not. That was before my time. No, it was after I joined the Army. And I went to Leon Springs, entered the School of Field Artillery, and was graduated as captain in the field artillery in November, 1917. From there I was held over and made an instructor in the Reserve Officers Training Camp in the field artillery at Leon Springs. The following spring, I was transferred to Columbia, South Carolina, to the Field Artillery Replacement Depot. There I became instructor of artillery fire on the firing range, supervising the course which was designed for field officers. By that time, I had [become a] major in the field artillery. I left the Army at the end of the war or soon thereafter \_\_\_\_\_ in January following. I went to Shreveport, Louisiana, and headed the \_\_\_\_\_. I helped organize a building company.

Odom: Pardon me just a minute. Had you had any intention to enter the oil business in the beginning?

Parten: No, no, I hadn't. I was definitely impressed that the market for young lawyers after the war was over-saturated. I had many friends in my class for instance in Houston, Texas, who were making an enormous monthly stipend of \$75.00 (facetious). And I felt that I should take my chance within this \_\_\_\_\_, and I have never regretted the time I put into my law because it [paid off] very well. And at Shreveport, Louisiana, in 1922, I was one of the founding directors of the Workett (?) Petroleum Company in Delaware. The giant company was finally reorganized.

Odom: Was it originally chartered in Delaware?

Parten: In Delaware.

Odom: Was corporation law the reason for this? Or was it the petroleum company?

Parten: No, Delaware's law has a lot of attraction for corporations. And, of course, we promptly were permitted to do business in Louisiana. Later on, we were permitted to do business in Texas. I went through the development of \_\_\_\_\_ field in Louisiana, Homer Field in north Louisiana, and the Eldorado, Arkansas, field, and Smackover fields. I put in about six years in the fields desiring to know something personally about corporations.

Odom: You were supervising drilling operations?

Parten: Supervising drilling and production operations.

Odom: Drilling and production operations.

Parten: That's right. At the time we were operating half a day drilling rigs, and we had established a pretty nice line of production. In 1935, I rode back to Texas, and I moved to Houston.

Odom: You had been living in Shreveport all this time?

Parten: Living in Shreveport, Louisiana, from 1919 until 1935. I moved back to Texas, and, of course, I pursued the oil business. At that time we had expanded into Texas, and later I was one of the founding directors of the Premier Oil Refining Company of Texas, which was established at Longview, Texas. And later, on behalf of the petroleum company, I was one of the founding directors of the Great Northern Oil Company in Minneapolis, Minnesota, another Delaware corporation, and Minnesota Pipeline, another Delaware corporation, and the South \_\_\_\_\_ Pipeline Company, the corporation in Canada. And about that time I had also become interested in sulphur in Mexico. I was one of the founding directors of Pan American Sulphur Company, which has become a producer in Mexico. Now it is on the big board. I still serve on that board.

Odom: Is its production entirely in Mexico?

Parten: Entirely in Mexico. We made some effort to expand it into this country, but thus far we had no production to speak of. Of course, I have operated all of my life as an independent oil operator. I sold out with the petroleum company, and as an independent oil man I feel that I have done well. We've had some success and some failures, I would say. Of course, I retain a very active interest in sulphur, and as most other country boys, when I commenced to liquidate some of my oil holdings, I reverted to my first experience of farming and ranching. Presently I have the responsibility of the management of three ranches in the vicinity of Madisonville.

Odom: Do you raise brahman?

Parten: We specialize in registered brahman cattle and \_\_\_\_\_ . Our business is cross-breeding. Cross-breeding is essentially mixed between the brahman and the angus and the whiteface. We produce them \_\_\_\_\_ both have one and then we cross them and find a desirable marking. And that's just about the extent of my business career.

I attempted to persuade my friend James D. Allred, after he became governor, to appoint a very good friend of mine . . . to reappoint a very good friend of mine to the board of regents at the

University of Texas. And Governor Allred declined, demurred, and said he couldn't because that certain person had opposed him [politically] and . . . but he said that he wished to appoint me. Well, I had no choice but to take the job offered me [by Allred], and I served on the board of regents for the term of 1935 to 1941.

Odom: Pardon me. Let me ask when you first became acquainted with Governor Allred?

Parten: Early in his campaign for attorney general of Texas for the first time, I became acquainted with him. I actually became acquainted with [the future] Governor Allred when he used . . . I remember very well that he used very handily the facilities of KWKH (?) of Shreveport in his efforts to cover the State of Texas.

Governor Allred was opposed by the main establishment of Texas. The history of Texas shows that most of the administrations here in Texas are pretty closely tied to the desires of the lobbyists, and I learned early . . . and, of course, Governor Allred was very positively an independent. Truly, he wore no man's collar. He considered himself [ready for the governorship] after finishing two terms as attorney general, and I had the privilege of working very hard for him in his campaign in Texas.



Odom: You were still living in Louisiana at that time, or had you just moved back to Texas?

Parten: No, I was in the process of moving back. I was in the process of moving back to Texas in '34, and I spent most of my time in Texas in '34. His campaign was in '34.

And Allred impressed me especially because he had the wisdom to see the disadvantages to Texas of the federal control of the oil companies. In '32 and '33, when most oil men had gone crazy, we had [almost reached the point of] federal control of the oil companies. There was just a handful of us which opposed that adventure, and I recall we went through a campaign in Washington for something like thirteen weeks struggling with Mr. Harold L. Ickes, Secretary of the Interior in the year of 1933, and Allred was solidly with us. He and General Thompson were the only two who were solidly with us. Governor Ferguson wasn't. He thought that federal control was indicated, was desirable, and most other state officers did, and most of our economists did, and most of our scientists did. In other words, the then Attorney General Allred [helped us during] thirteen weeks' fight in Washington, coupled with the effective help given us by Congressman Rayburn, who was then the chairman of the committee--Interstate Department Commerce Committee--of the House, and Vice-President Garner. Without the help of those three men,

I doubt very seriously that the Railroad Commission of Texas would be in charge of oil now.

Odom: Was there any significant division among the oil men as far as majors and independents on this matter?

Parten: A vast majority of both the majors and the independents thought that federal control would be desirable because the price of oil at the well had gone to ten cents a barrel, and everybody was crazy. And they were willing to take it. Just a handful of us opposed it.

Odom: Some were majors and some were independents?

Parten: We had no help from the majors whatsoever. The only people in Washington that spearheaded the opposition in that whole venture to federal control of the oil fields, other than myself and my attorney, who was then Jack Blalock of Houston, and Myron Blalock of Marshall . . . there were James Abererambie, Dan Harrison, and Roy Cullen, Jim West, and Mike \_\_\_\_\_ . And that was all, other than Ernest O. Thompson, who was then the chairman of the Railroad Commission, and Attorney General Allred. And we fought the battle through and we won it.

Then they transferred the fight to Austin, and for thirteen weeks we had a battle to save the Railroad Commission because the powers that be in oil decided that they weren't going to get federal control. They

wanted an oil and gas commission because they didn't trust the Railroad Commission. And we fought thirteen weeks right there.

Odom: You fought for the Railroad Commission?

Parten: The Railroad Commission. And all the way through I had a very high regard for Ernest O. Thompson. He was a senior at the University of Texas when I was a freshman, and I watched his career closely. And I thought that Governor Sterling had done a great thing when he appointed him to the Railroad Commission. And I lived to witness a great, great record that was made in that capacity. He wouldn't have had the chance at it if we hadn't won that fight before the Texas Legislature.

Odom: Do you recall your reaction when there was so much trouble in the East Texas oil fields, and Governor Sterling declared martial law in 1931, I believe it was? Were you actively interested in East Texas at that time?

Parten: Oh, yes, I was actively interested in East Texas, and I didn't like to sell oil for ten cents a barrel any better than the next fellow. But I faced this question of state proration with some misgivings because I knew that some people wanted it to be administered in what I thought was a very impossible way. But I was always sympathetic with the idea of proration in the interest

of conservation if that was all that they intended to do with it. I was against it for the purpose of fixed prices because I knew that if the oil industry went that far, very soon it would be put under the administration of the federal government, which I always opposed.

Odom: Do you think that in the 1930's--well, in the '20's and '30's--that the primary push was for proration to . . . at least in the 30's . . . proration for fixed prices?

Parten: To stabilize. Conservation was a major consideration, but that concerned me. It concerned me greatly as time went and the Railroad Commission struggled through with this Texas problem, and Texas was the only one who had enough money to have an important problem at the time. The Railroad Commission under the leadership of \_\_\_\_\_ greatly carried the thing down the line--this conservation matter--and I was always very, very sympathetic with them. I think that although many of my eastern friends say today that proration is being used to pull the profits of the oil man up, I point with a lot of pride to the fact that you can buy gasoline today, [minus] taxes, for less money than you can buy Coca-Cola or distilled water. That shocks some people, but it's true.

Odom: That is surprising. I hadn't thought of it.

Parten: And you wouldn't have gasoline available today for the motorists in a big land if it hadn't have been for the conservation program which we have implemented by the practice of proration. And I might say, too, that to my way of thinking, therein lies the validating reason for the 27 1/2 per cent depletion allowance that you hear so much crying about today, particularly in some of the northern and eastern states.

Odom: This is a conservation measure.

Parten: Well, it's a conservation measure, and also it's an incentive to the industry to keep finding this oil and make its products available to consumers at reasonable prices. I think the consumer today from the standpoint of oil and gas is very, very fortunate.

Odom: Did you get into politics any while you were in Louisiana, and take an active interest in it?

Parten: No, not a great deal. I knew Huey Long well, and, as a matter of fact, Huey Long handled the incorporation of our original company with the petroleum company, the Delaware corporation. I knew Huey when he was very . . . when he was on the Public Service Commission. He practiced law in Shreveport. I regarded him as a very, very brilliant man and a very brilliant lawyer. In Shreveport, there were just two kinds of people in those days--those for Huey and those against him.

Odom: Were you for Huey?

Parten: No. I admired Huey very much, but I couldn't agree with some of his policies. And I couldn't characterize myself as a Huey Long man, although I respected him very highly, as several of my friends didn't. I accused some of [them of] having made him governor. To this day I surely think they did. They mistreated Huey, and he finally got to be governor. As a matter of fact . . .

Odom: He mistreated them?

Parten: I accused the Standard Oil Company and its general counsel. His name was Tom Milling, of Shreveport. [I said], "Tom, if you don't change your practice, you're going to make Huey Long governor." I think he finally did make him governor because he didn't change his practice.

Odom: But you were actually a friend of Huey P. Long?

Parten: Oh, yes. I knew Huey well. I can't say I was afraid of \_\_\_\_\_ him, but I knew him. I was afraid of him, as a matter of fact.

Then when I was fighting federal control of the oil business diligently in later years, and after I moved to Texas about the year 1933, Huey was senator. I ran into Huey in the halls of the Senate office building one day. I knew that he and President Roosevelt were at cross-purposes on international trade,

particularly the reciprocal trade between South America which Huey was fighting. I didn't have any desire to get him into this oil fight because I felt that he would do more damage than good. But he met me in the lobby one day, and he said, "What are you doing up here?" He showed me into his office, and, of course, I told him that I was up there to register just a modest, perhaps feeble, objection to this ridiculous bill trying . . . \_\_\_\_\_ transfer the oil control to the federal government. And Huey said, "Well, why didn't you come to see me? Why didn't you ask me to help you on this matter?" And I told him, "Well, I was just making a modest objection." There was so many operations in favor of it, about ninety-nine out of every hundred which \_\_\_\_\_. But I said, "I'm just making a racket. I wasn't inviting any help because I was afraid it would hurt more than it would help." "Well," he said, "I'll filibuster this thing until frost (?)." He said, "Any man with any sense should know that this is not good for Louisiana and Texas." He said, "Can't you convince Tom Connally of that?" I said, "Well, I haven't yet." Well, anyway, Huey was quite a character, and I may say that he did give us lift on the Senate floor on the bill. But the bill never got out of Mr. Rayburn's committee.

Odom: Now was Mr. Rayburn about the only member of the Texas delegation that gave you much help on that?

Parten: He's the only one. He's the only one except John Garner, who was vice-president. Those two men were the only . . . practically all the help we had. We kept this thing away from Mr. Roosevelt because we were all Democrats, and we studiously kept it away from him until the last minute, and at the last minute we made a very strong appeal at it. And we won the fight after thirteen long, hard weeks.

Odom: What was Mr. Roosevelt's position on the [bill]?

Parten: He was just supporting it. When he got to see the true hazard in this thing, though, I won't say that he took the defeat very graciously. I'll put it that way. [He] just took it very hard.

Later in World War II . . . and I may say that I got along with him fine. I am very grateful for the experience. I think on this thing he was just misled by the oil tycoons. I think he was, to my way of thinking, one of the greatest public servants that I ever knew in government.

Odom: Well, now did oil come under the NRA codes?

Parten: Oh, yes.

Odom: So you still had some federal . . . so you had some regulations here.



Parten: Yes, yes. But that never . . . the NRA never worried us. We didn't want it to take part in the control of production and have it in the hands of the federal government, and I still think it would be an awful thing, and now everybody I know of agrees with us.

Odom: What about your reaction to Mr. Roosevelt over the years and your acquaintance and relationship with him?

Parten: I always admired Roosevelt. I was a great admirer of his. I think Roosevelt . . . I think history will be very generous to Franklin Roosevelt--a great President. He came in at a very difficult time, and he had a sweep of history that helped him greatly, and he got a lot of things done that few politicians could. I was a Roosevelt man right straight through.

Odom: He had the knowledge of history that many of our presidents haven't had.

Parten: That's correct.

Odom: Did that generation of Americans have a rendezvous with destiny?

Parten: Well, actually they did. I was talking to a state senator not too long ago, and he said he could understand the [preference of] college students who are taking some science and math, but he couldn't [think of] one who had taken history. And I observed, "My God, if there ever was anything in this day and time that is of great

importance, it's the teaching of history at this time." You can find example after example for every problem we've got today. If you just go back there's a replica of it. But I think history in our schools [generally is] slighted, particularly in our high schools.

Odom: And badly taught.

Parten: Badly taught. And I know that in my early days in school my mother used to tell me that "Now don't you take this as final authority on what happened in the Texas revolution and Civil War." You [must remember that] they've given a one-sided picture. And she gave me my first inspiration to read Lincoln--read Lincoln carefully and thoroughly. My folks thought Lincoln was a great man, although all of my family's background is Southern, and my grandfathers on both sides were shot up during the war, but . . .

Odom: I can see by your bookshelves that you're a reader of history.

Parten: I love history. I think history's a great teacher. Some people say, "Why look back?" Well, you need to look back. You take John Kennedy. I think the thing that made John Kennedy great as President was his knowledge of history. I think the thing that made Churchill great was his sweep of history. And that was also true of Roosevelt.

Odom: Some people have a feeling for history that others lack. When would you say, Mr. Parten, that . . . well, you are reputedly a liberal in politics. How do you think you acquired your liberal philosophy in politics?

Parten: Well, I think through reading. I think through reading--wide reading. And I've always been somewhat the underdog among the Democrats over the years--underdog.

Odom: The Democrats were certainly [the underdogs during] the years you were growing up. But since the 1930's they haven't been the underdogs, though, have they?

Parten: Well, when it comes to . . . when it comes to raising money for these campaigns . . .

Odom: You may be correct in that sense (chuckle).

Parten: When so many good Democrats who . . . their principles are somewhat taken away by the moneybags. And I've always been a stickler for a man of conviction who is certain to stand by.

Odom: What was your position on, say, organized labor in the 1920's?

Parten: I always considered that collective bargaining was an absolute essential because their working conditions were generally intolerable. I remember particularly many, many stories and records coming out of coal mining. I always regarded it as necessary in a democracy for the laboring man to have bargaining power. It's right and

proper. And you know we have a lot of people complain today that the anti-trust laws are not being applied to labor. I can see a lot of aspects for which I think the anti-trust laws are not very well applied to corporate conduct today. But the fact is that the laboring man has a hard time being heard. The utility president with his lobbyists in the state capitol . . . he has no difficulty being heard.

Odom: You never had much difficulty being heard?

Parten: Oh, well, no. I just have a way of popping off, speaking out.

Odom: Could you recall for us some of your experiences as a member of the University of Texas board of regents. You recalled awhile ago that Governor Allred appointed you in 1935.

Parten: Well, yes, I can. When I went on that board in '35, the budget was just about one of the smallest in the history of the University of Texas. And faculty salaries were fixed progressively, which was wrong, I thought. We struggled hard against that situation. We commenced to improve appropriations. When I came, I stayed six years as chairman of the Legislative Committee on the board. I had [a great deal of] pleasure in that.

I had the experience--the unique experience--of having been called in by Dr. H. Y. Benedict, who was

then president of the University when I went on the board. He said he had a problem that he wanted me to consider. I went to his office, and he had three Negro educators in his office from three of the Negro colleges. And they made an appeal to us to cause the University of Texas to sponsor the legislative appropriations to give them the beginning of a graduate school at Prairie View Normal. I promptly said to them, "Do you realize that the president is on the A & M board of directors? My friend, Mr. Law of Houston, would get all over me if I [interfered in his] backyard." They said, "We can't get any of them boards to do it." And after hearing those three college graduates for an hour and a half, Mr. Benedict and I conferred in his office and decided that we were going to take the challenge and that we were going to sponsor an appropriation in the next Legislature on behalf of graduate education at Prairie View College. And our board supported us. I'm glad to say they did.

We sponsored that appropriation and got Prairie View Normal the first appropriation for graduate study they ever had--\$75,000, I think, was the figure. I kidded my friend, Mr. Law, there by telling him that I'd gotten in his backyard. Well, he took it in good spirits and said that A & M was very happy to have this

appropriation. And since then, I think graduate study has expanded. I don't know to what extent. I hadn't kept in touch with them. That was an experience I had.

Of course, I was there when we had the upheaval in football, and the result was the selection of Dana X. Bible as head coach and athletic director. I had the responsibility of negotiating the trade with him. And he was recommended by the faculty athletic council because most of the board thought--and President Benedict, too--that he was the best. His terms were high, and they wanted me as the negotiator of the board to trim him down. After two days of talking, they were still high. And at the end of that day, we drove around Austin until 3:00 in the morning in my automobile, and I negotiated with him. And at three o'clock in the morning, his terms were just exactly the same as they were when we started the conversation [the day before].

So the next day we hired him on his terms, and I think it was a very fine deal. He was unanimously recommended by the faculty to the council. One of his terms was that he had to be chosen unanimously by the board of regents and the president. If there was any [dissenting votes, he would not accept]. He meant that. He meant that. So we met his terms according to the agreement. He did a big job at the University of Texas

getting \_\_\_\_\_ . And he did a lot to [upgrade] the standards, scholastic standards, at the University of Texas.

And then we had a big round in the medical school, and, of course, in my term we had to choose a new dean for the medical school. I had the difficult assignment of serving on the medical committee with two doctors whose views were diametrically opposed. One was the beloved Dr. Randall of Galveston, and the other was the beloved Dr. Andrew of Waco. I refereed a good many bouts. Well, the medical school went through quite a shock right after I left the board. We kept it under pretty close control during my term.

Odom: What was the matter of their controversy? Do you recall?  
I mean the main controversy.

Parten: Well, of course, Dr. Randall was probably just a little bit hasty in his selection of the dean. I say "selection" because he really didn't select the dean. At that time Benedict passed on, and John Calhoun was the interim president, and we were looking for a new president, and Dr. Randall . . . at least many faculty members thought Dr. Randall chose a new dean with too little concentration, and that was the seat of the trouble. And, of course, Galveston has always . . . has been afraid there would be a concentrated effort, with control at Austin, to move

the medical school to Houston or somewhere else. And so it was easy to have some problems, I might say, but this dean was chosen.

I may say, to give him credit, Dr. John Speed was a man that conceived the cancer-tumor clinic and got the first appropriation, with very little help from anybody, out of the Legislature. In getting the appropriation I am sure that he wore out a lot of shoe leather. He was the man that conceived the cancer hospital and got its first appropriation. It was some-time later--considerably later--that he got the Anderson Foundation and Trust Company interested in the project, and it was John Speed who first conceived it, and under my stewardship, while I was chairman of the Legislative Committee, we got that five thousand dollar appropriation. But I give him about 99 per cent of the credit for it.

Odom: You had to work with Mr. Stevenson during those years, didn't you, as speaker?

Parten: Yes, I always got along very well with Mr. Stevenson. I made an appeal to him at the time that the board of regents fired Rainey. And I felt that the board, when it fired Rainey, did the education system in Texas a great discredit because Rainey was fired under circumstances that didn't justify his dismissal.

Odom: I would like to get into that a little bit more in detail later on. Let me go back to the selection of



Mr. Rainey as president. You were involved in this, weren't you?

Parten: I was very much involved in it. I was vice-chairman of the board, and we knew we had a very difficult problem of selecting the president of a big state university, and we resolved that we were going to get a committee of the alumni--a working committee of the alumni--a working committee of the faculty, and a working committee of the board, and we were going to work very closely together on a confidential basis to the extent that it was necessary. Those committees all worked very hard. We looked the field over with the Grievance Committee with Mr. Grimes (?), with Dr. Randall, Mr. Leslie Wagoner of Dallas, and himself. And I'm not sure but what Dr. Aims (?) wasn't on that committee. But at any rate, Dr. Randall and Leslie Wagoner and I were on that committee.

Well, the first decision we took was the interim president that we had chosen--you see, Dr. Benedict passed away very suddenly--and the first decision we took to keep the road open was that the interim president. Well, [whoever he was to be, he must totally] disqualify himself for consideration for the presidency because we knew that the records show so many cases where the man had his foot in the door, and he more or less [attempted to make his position permanent].

Mr. John Calhoun qualified. He was talented and qualified very well, and he was intimately acquainted with [the operations] of the university. He took the job on that basis, very clearly understood by faculty, alumni, regents, and all.

Then we decided to canvass the field very widely. We felt that we should bring a man here outside of the faculty, and we looked at . . . we visited a dozen prominent institutions--Columbia, Michigan, Ohio, Chicago, Vanderbilt, several other institutions--and we visited the foundations. We came up with a dozen prominent names. Our purpose was to try to find three or four names where we could get a pretty good consensus that any one of them would do, rather than take just one man. We strove hard to get three or four men that were where we could get almost perfect consensus on. And then we purposely--just for the purpose of the record and to allay the feeling that we were afraid to have people that we were talking about subjected to conversation, dialogue--we purposely leaked the name of a half-dozen people that we were considering, including what we considered to be the man, and perhaps enable people to know exactly what we were looking for. They could come forward with any criticism that they might have about any of the men.

Now Rainey's name had come to me personally by reason of a letter from the president of Minnesota University, Dr. Lotus P. Carlton, whom I had visited on one occasion on a mission for Dr. Benedict, the former president. Dr. Carlton wrote me a very short, but very firm, letter strongly recommending Homer Price Rainey as a former Texan: "You ought to take a good look at him because he has, in my opinion, all the qualities that should go into an outstanding university president." That was my first introduction to Rainey. Rainey was then president of Bucknell University in Pennsylvania, and he had a very good record. Finally, he was unanimously chosen by the faculty members, by the alumnae committee, by the regents.

And when he got in and commenced to operate, he saw immediately . . . well, he inherited a very difficult situation in the medical school at Galveston. He had no part in creating it, but he inherited it. And he inherited a very difficult situation because there was a move on in Texas among a lot of people--the high physicians, politicians, industrialists, whatnot--who wanted to fire some professors because they considered that almost any economics professor of any institution was sympathetic with the ideas of the New Deal [and was ready to associate with black colleges].

Well, he inherited that situation, and he also saw that there was a situation that existed then in Texas where our colored people had to take a modest stipend from the state and go outside of Texas to get a different branch of education which he was wanting. And he immediately thought that something should be done about Negro education in Texas higher education and had the intestinal fortitude to say so when it was less popular than it is now (chuckle). He made a speech to the Texas State Teachers Association in the course of which he said that the time has come that we must cease giving mere lip service to this idea of separate but equal and really do something about it, because if you're going to continue to have separate education for the colored people and white people, they have got to become more equal.

Now just a lot of people thought that was awful, but Rainey did it, and I'm sure he'd do it again today if he were in the same circumstances because he's been perfectly honest. And he's got a great conviction for that, and that got him into a lot of trouble. And so about the time I left that board, I sensed that there was a move on foot to get the then Governor O'Daniel to appoint some "firing" regents.

Odom: Where was the move, you think, on foot? From the alumni of the university or where?

Parten: No, no. It came largely from corporate executives. There was a big move, and there was one or two . . . at least one federal judge involved in it. But there was just a great clamor for firing some professors at the University of Texas. And one of the main men they were trying to get down there was my friend, Bob Montgomery. He's nothing but a damned good Democrat in my opinion--no Communist no more than I am. But to show you how . . . Pappy O'Daniel put three regents on the board. I was still chairman. The first meeting that Mr. Rainey attended as president was in Galveston. And this regent, Brannan, of Galveston, according to his own word to me, was put on that board by his employer, namely \_\_\_\_\_ Stewart. And Brannan told me he was put on there for one purpose--to get [Rainey and people like Montgomery]. And Brannan asked me, he said, "How do you fire professors?" And I said, "Brannan, it's not easy, but the way to do it is to lodge a complaint against them and try him before his peers, and they may clear him." He didn't want to do that.

Well, anyway this guy was at the meeting, and Rainey . . . it was the first University of Texas board meeting that he attended. The meeting was under way, and the budget came on--this is a June meeting--for

consideration of the following year. Brannan spoke up and he said, "I wish to move, Mr. Chairman, that line 22 of page 72 be \_\_\_\_\_." I was sitting at one of the tables; Dr. Randall was sitting at the other one. I said, "May the chair inquire what line 22 of page 72 applies to?" And by that time [the motion had been] seconded. Dr. Rainey's face blushed. He said, "Is Dr. Robert Montgomery's position at stake?" And I very promptly ruled him out of order. I said, "That's not the way to [remove] a professor [from his position]. At least give him a chance." But the chair sustained it. But that shows the . . . I know that that man was put on that board for that purpose because he told me so.

And there are many other incidents that I can recite to show that there was a move on to fire some professors. Men were on there to do it. I left that board in '41, and the then constituted board had a very prominent Republican on it from Wichita Falls. And Orville Bullington was in it. And my old friend Dan Harris from Houston was put on it at the same time. Well, there was opposition in the Senate for the confirmation of these two men. And Steve \_\_\_\_\_, attorney for the Hogg family here, came to talk to me, and he said, "Say, some of your friends are not going

to vote for the confirmation of Bullington and Harris because they're Republicans. And you surely don't think that's right, do you?" And I said, "No, I don't. I don't think that political stripe ought to be the basis for opposing or appointing the regents." "Well," he said, "would you mind talking to some of your friends up there. Maybe they'll just go ahead and accept these men." I said, "\_\_\_\_\_." And I didn't. I'll never forget Clay Cotton of Palestine \_\_\_\_\_.

I'd do most anything for him, and I won't \_\_\_\_\_ just because I'm not going to vote to put one of those Republicans on the board and he didn't, but they got on it. Well, pretty soon the regents got a complaint from Dallas, Texas, that three young economic instructors had attended this forum up there, and I forget their names. They were instructors.

Odom: One of them was Nelson Peach.

Parten: Right. They visited that forum and weren't allowed to speak. And so \_\_\_\_\_ weren't allowed to speak. They went out to the Dallas News or Times Herald, one or the other or both, later and gave out a public statement to the effect that it wasn't a public meeting or free speech; it was a rigged meeting that implicated Mr. \_\_\_\_\_.

And so apparently many, many people from Dallas made a violent complaint to the board of regents. So the board of regents summarily, over Dr. Rainey's violent protest, fired these three instructors, and, of course, Dr. Rainey had warned them and said it was coming, and it did come--an investigation by the AAUP. And the result was that before it was over, the AAUP made it so hot for the University of Texas that they offered to take back all three of those instructors--did take back one or two of them--at improved salaries. And I may say that Rainey, I'm sure, had a part in that.

Well, that caused the temper of the board to be, in a sense, so against Rainey that they said, "Well, we can't fire them, so we will just fire you!" They had a meeting down in Houston and did just that, and I thought it was an awful tragedy for the University. They made a mistake and Stevenson wouldn't do anything about it. And then three of the regents, after firing Rainey that night, resigned. They couldn't take it--they just couldn't--so they resigned. [They] included Dan Harrison \_\_\_\_\_.

Odom: Had these men been on the board when you were on the board?

Parten: No. \_\_\_\_\_ Wyler had, but not Dan Harrison. But they quit. They fired him and quit. And then on that



committee Coke Stevenson [proceeded] to appoint their successors, including the judge from Dallas--I forget his name--and of all things he presented to the committee of the Senate . . . that the board could not consider the re-instatement of Rainey for the reason that the federal judge in Pennsylvania, who was on Rainey's board of directors at Bucknell (?) University had complained violently about Rainey's administration at the university. When Rainey saw this, he informed us all why this federal judge had [opposed him].

"He's no good. He's under indictment \_\_\_\_\_ as a federal judge and has been tried and convicted in Washington."

The newspapers wouldn't say anything about it. The newspapers . . . Rainey was not allowed to hire time on the radio to tell the truth about the federal judge who had criticized him or what kind of a man he was. The \_\_\_\_\_ acquired the network \_\_\_\_\_ . He protested to the Federal Communications Commission, and they had a big hearing. Rainey was railroaded out of Texas, and he first went to Stephens College. The feeling was so strong that many of the people hounded or pursued him up at Stephens, hounded him so that he had to leave Stephens College after a couple of years. Then he became a

Distinguished Professor of Education at Colorado University. They were never able to unseat him up there.

Odom: He is still there.

Parten: Well, I always considered Rainey a loss, a great loss to Texas. And I think it's very tragic in the history of the University of Texas that this thing happened as it did. But [it was] all a result of two things: the coming of a change in the educational system that would give more education to the Negro, number one, and, number two, the idea abroad that the Economics Department of the University of Texas [was] honeycombed with Communists, which wasn't true.

Odom: You seemed to imply, sort of, awhile ago that you were perhaps instrumental in first putting Mr. Rainey's name before the board.

Parten: Of course, his name got before the regent committee and the faculty committee and also the alumni committee by reading that letter that a very distinguished state university president [wrote].

Odom: I see. I sort of got the wrong impression. I suppose that during the later years there in the thirties that you continued to develop an even more active interest in politics. Would you talk about that?

Parten: Oh, well, since my school days, I always had a very active interest in politics because I think it's every

citizen's duty to take an interest in politics. I think one of the great tragedies today is that too few people take any interest in politics. Some of my friends say, "Well, we don't want a politician as governor. We want a businessman." I say, "[Nonsense]. You want a politician. You want a good politician." "We want a businessman as President of the United States." Well, a businessman would be lost as President of the United States. It takes an able, well-educated politician. Politicians are like everybody else. There are good and bad and indifferent politicians. Oilmen, there are good and bad and indifferent oilmen. Lawyers are good and bad. Doctors are the same way (chuckle). And in my way of thinking . . .

Odom: Did you ever consider a political career for yourself at any time?

Parten: No.

Odom: Never did?

Parten: No. I was born and reared a poor boy, and I felt that I had to strive hard to improve my economic position, but I always felt that it was my duty to contribute liberally to the campaigns of people whom I have [decided] would do a good job for the people.

Odom: Did you ever meet Colonel House?

Parten: [I knew him] very casually, very casually. He was the great Woodrow Wilson advisor. As a matter of fact, Woodrow Wilson, I think, was inaugurated in 1913. I entered the University of Texas in the fall of 1913. But I didn't know Colonel House. He lived at Austin.

Odom: Who did you support in the governors races there in the thirties after Governor Allred left office?

Parten: Well, I was a supporter of Ralph Yarborough [in the] campaigns that he made.

Odom: I mean back in the 1930's, back during the days that you were on the board at the University of Texas?

Parten: I supported Earnest Thompson. I supported Earnest Thompson for the governorship back then, and I think he would have won if he would have taken . . . utilized his natural advisors against McCraw. But they had a feeling that they wouldn't fight. They were going to beat those fellows by rapping them on the wrist, and that won't get it. Old Pappy O'Daniel came out of the jungle beating those drums. I remember Jimmy Allred becoming disgusted with Thompson's campaign, and he later regretted it, I think, but he moved over and actually helped old Pappy.

Odom: He did?

Parten: Jimmy Allred wrote the famous speech that I heard Pappy O'Daniel deliver over the noon radio entitled "The Twin Sisters." Did you ever hear of that speech?

Odom: "The Twin Sisters?" I don't recall that name.

Parten: Jimmy Allred wrote that speech for O'Daniel. See, O'Daniel came from Ohio. Allred took advantage of that historical fact. McCraw was punishing him for being a foreign import. So Allred took advantage of the historical fact that the good women of Cincinnati sent "The Twin Sisters," two cannons, to Texas to help win the Revolutionary War. And he made a beautiful little speech, you know, regarding a man from Ohio and its conduct and identified O'Daniel with it and wound up by saying, "Of course, my opponent here, the attorney general, wouldn't know what "The Twin Sisters" was because if you asked him he would probably want their telephone number." (chuckle) But he didn't and it was a pretty cute thing. I heard Allred . . . Allred delivered that speech to me in his office one day, a week before Patrick used it. But I was for Earnest Thompson straight through. I didn't switch.

Odom: Perhaps I might return to the oil business just a little bit in the 1920's and 1930's. You spoke of some of the political problems you had. I wonder if you might recall what you think were the main economic problems that you had in the oil business back in the twenties and the thirties.

Parten: Well, the worst economic problems that we had [were in the] uncontrolled East Texas field, which at that time was considered the largest field in the history of man. The early production of it was such that the market was glutted, and nobody wanted to buy any oil. He simply wanted to run his own. And as I said awhile ago, practically everybody in the oil business went crazy and thought that turning the job of control over to the federal government was the answer. But some of us thought it wasn't.

Odom: What about in the 1920's? Did you have a problem there before the crash?

Parten: No particular problems in the 1920's except that you did have wider variation in oil prices from year to year due to discoveries that you had. And in the thirties that was due to the fact that consumption was getting larger and larger all the time. The oil industry had gotten along pretty well with state supervision, and I think our state supervision has been good on balance, very good.

Odom: What do you think about the taxing policies of the State of Texas on the oil industry over the years? Would you comment on that, please?

Parten: Well, I think that Texas has generally been fair, county by county, with oil. Some counties are more difficult to deal with than others. The counties

take the lead in the matter of administering ad valorem tax policies, and, of course, the severance tax is a state-administered tax, and that's reasonably high. I don't think it's too high.

Odom: You think, then, in other words, that looked at from all sides over the years that taxing the oil industry in Texas has been rather equitable?

Parten: I think so. I'd say so.

Odom: Well, let's return . . . we were involved, I believe in talking about your political career or your actions in politics in the late 1930's. I was going to ask you if you ever had much of any relationship with Governor O'Daniel?

Parten: No. I never knew the governor well at all. Never made acquaintance with him.

Odom: He's been the only living ex-governor we haven't been able to contact and to get him to be interviewed for our Oral History Collection. You might tell us . . .

Parten: I think this about O'Daniel. I think he justly has the distinction of having been the biggest money-maker in the governor's office.

Odom: He made more money while he was in the governor's office?

Parten: He has that reputation. I think justly so.

Odom: What about telling us that story you told at lunch awhile ago about the Allred-Hunter campaign and Governor Jim Ferguson.

Parten: (Laughter) I better leave that off.

Odom: You better leave that off? When you left the board of regents at the University of Texas in 1941, was that occasioned by your going to work for the federal government on the . . .

Parten: No, no. My term was ended.

Odom: Your term was ended?

Parten: My term ended in January of '41. As a matter of fact, I had to continue to serve until February on account of the fact that these regents I mentioned awhile ago had difficulty in being confirmed. I had to attend one or two meetings beyond my normal term because my replacements hadn't been made.

Odom: What did you do at that time? Did you continue your business career here?

Parten: Oh, I continued my business efforts. Then in the fall of 1941, I was called to Washington by Mr. Ickes, by the way, to serve on the Tanker Control Board. When World War II was imminent, it became necessary for the United States government to institute a control over tank ships because their capacity was in such great demand due to the necessity for exporting more and more oil overseas. There was a great shortage of ships. And I was the Gulf Coast representative on that Tanker Control Board, and that was under Ickes. That was when I renewed my acquaintance with him.



Odom: I see. How do you account for the fact that you were chosen to do this?

Parten: I was more or less a compromise between the independents and the major oil companies . . . [That's how] I got the story. It came as quite a surprise to me because I had never been in shipping to any great extent. And this call came, and several of my major company friends, as a matter of fact, told me about it before Mr. Ickes did. As I say, I was told later by several that I was a compromise candidate between the major oil companies and the independents.

Odom: Do you recall any of your experiences there?

Parten: Yes, we had a great deal of trouble getting the British to cooperate with us in shipping aviation gasoline to Russia.

Odom: They didn't want to cooperate on the . . .

Parten: No, no, they didn't want to cooperate because they didn't think that the . . . at that time Moscow was . . . the fall of Moscow was imminent.

Odom: The fall of '41.

Parten: It was in the . . . well, yes . . . and all this was after we really got into the war. This was after . . . this was the summer of '42. Moscow was in grave danger of falling, and the British associates and this tanker control operation didn't think this gasoline could

possibly get there because winter was approaching--the winter of '42. But we got them to put in the ships. We insisted to put in the ships, and the gasoline did get there.

Odom: This is when your ships came to \_\_\_\_\_ and Murmansk.

Parten: Ships did get there . . . into Murmansk. And they kept that . . . they did what they said they would do. They'd keep that ice broke open.

Odom: The British did this part?

Parten: No, the Russians.

Odom: Oh, the Russians kept the ice open.

Parten: The British said they couldn't do it. The Russians said they could do it, and they did. Then the gasoline got in there.

Odom: Was this the only reason for the British opposition here or . . .

Parten: They seriously didn't think that Russia was going to hold out.

Odom: Oh, that was the reason they thought it was . . .

Parten: They were afraid that this gasoline would go to the Germans.

Odom: Pouring gasoline down a rat hole.

Parten: Of course, we reasoned that on our side . . . we reasoned that that was no decision for us to make. An

ally was calling for help, and they were hard-pressed, and we had to get the gasoline to them if possible. And we had to put these . . . all these ships under British control, but we had a call on certain capacities. And we did call it, and the ships were put in, and the gasoline got through--aviation gasoline.

Odom: How many men were on this Tanker Control Board?

Parten: Oh, there were, let's see, one from the East Coast, one from the West Coast, and one from the Gulf Coast. There were three of us and the deputy administrator, Ralph Davy. There were four of us on it.

Odom: And this was administered under the Secretary of the Interior?

Parten: That's right, the Secretary of the Interior.

Odom: What other . . .

Parten: And there was a representative on there from the War Shipping Administration, too. There were five.

Odom: What other wartime jobs did you take on?

Parten: Well, I finished that one. Before I finished that one, well, while I was still on the Tanker Control Board and right after Pearl Harbor, I was requested by Mr. Ickes to come up there and become the director of transportation and supply because we had a real transportation shortage, and transportation was a hot seat. Again, I've always understood that I was kind of a

compromise candidate between the majors and independents. He talked me into it, and I went up there and helped him. And I became the . . . I undertook that job early in the month of January of '42. And the first order of business was to get this whole pipeline system of North America revamped . . . the eastern half of North America revamped. Put all the pipelines at work and build the "Big Inch" and the "Little Inch" pipelines from Houston to the eastern seaboard.

And my job was to get the steel [from the] War Production Board. And, of course, I had a great deal of help from the industry committees. The first thing we did was to get all of the major oil company presidents together and to get a consensus on the proposition that we had to have these lines to win the war. That was number one. Number two was the question of how to build them. And we in the government at that time took the view that it was immaterial to government whether the industry combined to build, operate, and own these lines or whether the government financed them and owned them. And it was decided finally by the industry that they couldn't finance these lines. The government had to build them and own them. So we created the War Emergency Pipeline Corporation to build

and operate these pipelines. And the Defense Plant Corporation was to advance the money and own them.

And we built the . . . we got the first pipe awarded for the 24-inch crude pipeline in the month of May, 1942. And we had the line completed to Norris City, Illinois, and were shipping 325,000 barrels a day from Texas to Norris City, Illinois, and transshipping by four railroads from out of the Eastern Seaboard before snow flew that winter.

Then we started the second segment of the pipeline from there to New York, and we had that in operation, I think it was, the following May. And then we doubled back, and we built the twenty-inch pipeline in two steps the same way.

And there is no doubt but what those pipelines made a great contribution to the war effort because the tonnage that they carried--325,000 barrels of crude a day. This was a lot of tank ships and equipment. There is a statement on the first joint of pipe that was manufactured by the United States Steel Corporation for the "Big Inch" pipeline. That was given to me when I finished my tour of duty up there and left in May, 1943.

Then, oh, we had many other problems. We had tank car problems. We had barge problems--barge canal

problems. Everybody had his way of solving the East Coast oil shortage. One of the most difficult problems that I had was to analyze the various proposals that were made and by process of elimination arrive at the one that we would support. For instance, one man wanted to build a vitrified tile pipeline from the Gulf Coast to the Eastern Seaboard. And another one wanted to build a wooden pipeline, pointing to the fact that the Russians had done a lot of the wooden pipeline. But the most difficult alternative that I had to deal with was the prospect of a concrete pipeline. And strangely enough, an oil man with the War Production Board was the chief advocate of a concrete pipeline. He was one of the major oil companies' chief executive officers.

Odom: What's the problem with the concrete pipeline?

Parten: Well, we finally solved the problem. Of course, everybody was advocating his plan to save steel. We had done everything we felt we could do by saying that we'll ask for no new pipeline steel for anything except the "Big Inch" and the "Little Inch." Otherwise, we would use the second pipe. But there was no such thing in existence as twenty-four-inch pipeline before World War II. There wasn't even a twenty-inch. And so we had no such pipe on hand, and so in order finally to

prove to the War Production Board that the steel pipeline [was feasible], we cut the wall thicknesses as much as we could. That only three-eighth-inch steel--three-eighth-inch wall thicknesses. Many people said it was too thin, but we did it to save steel.

But where we finally resolved the question was when we proved to the War Production Board that it would cost the United States more steel to build a concrete pipeline than it would to build a steel pipeline. That was a mathematical calculation. And that's how we got the steel pipeline. A couple of very smart engineers of Standard Oil of New Jersey figured it out, and they were right, too. So that's how we got steel, and we built these two pipelines.

I got through with that tour and came back to Houston and went to work busily in '44, trying to get back into the oil business, and I got called back to Washington to go to Europe on the German Reparations Commission after the European war was over. And I did go in May and came back in November. I spent the summer in Europe and Russia. Oh, I went all through the war damage--Germany and on through Russia. I never saw such destruction as I saw, for instance, at Stalingrad. Stalingrad was just leveled.

Odom: There were two or three questions I had, but was your general impression of wartime bureaucracy as favorable

as the one you had here when you got the pipeline built or some of the others?

Parten: No, the truth about the matter is that we have got to learn that if this society is to prosper and to continue to prosper . . . we have got to learn to do more things at home and ask Washington to do less things because I am very sympathetic with a statement that I heard a prominent agency head make the other day in Washington. He said that if any man thought that the United States Governemnt could run the whole affairs of this nation--the whole economy--he ought to be sentenced to a three-year hitch as a bureaucrat. And then if he still thought so after that, he should be committed (chuckle). And I pretty well subscribe to that because you get into a great . . . in those agencies you get into a great deal of confusion . . . a great deal of confusion.

Odom: Did you serve without compensation on all of your [government] jobs, or were you . . .

Parten: No, I resigned from all of my industries--salaries and \_\_\_\_\_ salary. I did it because I wanted to be very, very independent.

Odom: Do you think you lost very much in the way of financial . . . finances and \_\_\_\_\_.

Parten: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, I did.



Odom: Do you see any way that you might have gained in business through your activities [in government]?

Parten: No, except . . . of course, I developed much wider acquaintances than I had ever had in oil industry. And it might have helped me out in my later activities in Canada and in Mexico. It might have. It possibly did in Canada because come to think of it one of the men connected with one of the government agencies--a major oil company man of prominence--was the one that first called my attention to the possibilities of western Canada for oil. And it was during my service up there . . . but I never got any profit out of business that resulted from direct contract, nothing direct. I never was with a company that did any business contract-wise with the government.

Odom: Mr. Parten, how did you get to be a rather influential man behind the scenes in politics? Do you give them money? Is this the primary prerequisite, do you think? What is it that makes you influential?

Parten: Let me say that money helps. Money helps but you take most men in public office . . . they are looking for thoughtful and considerate friends, and they place a high value on thoughts and consideration. Money's not all of it. You know some people give you money without

strings tied to it, and some people give you money with strings tied to it, and the politician appreciates above everything else money given to them without strings tied to it and . . .

Odom: And appreciate someone who is considerate enough that they will talk to them about matters that are not just something they want or something . . .

Parten: Yes. They appreciate a friend who is objective and who advises not from a personal standpoint but from an objective standpoint, and politicians are not unreasonable people as a whole. And as I said awhile ago, they are not like other people. I believe in having the politician the head of the government, whether it be city, county, state, federal.

Odom: Do you believe in partisan politics at the state level?

Parten: Yes, yes, because I believe in the two-party system strongly. I wouldn't object to three parties because every party at times needs a watchdog. You know sin is not monopolized by any particular party. It can occur in either one of the parties--corruption, misconduct--and I believe a good watchdog's a healthy thing. We need more of it in Austin. I would like to see the Republicans have a good strong party. The hell of it is they're supporting the . . . just supporting the conservative Democrats. They're not trying to build up the Republican Party in Texas.

Odom: So you've never been a particular supporter of the  
middle-of-the-road Democratic philosophy in Texas . . .

Parten: No, no.

Odom: . . . trying to take in groups except the very far  
left and the very far right.

Parten: No, I believe that I haven't been a believer in that.  
I believe in the great value of the two-party system  
from the standpoint of checks and balances.