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Interview with  
Mr. Emory M. Spencer  
October 2, 1971

Place of Interview: Rockport, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. A. Ray Stephens

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Approved: Emory M. Spencer  
(Signature)

Date: October 2, 1971.

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Oral History Collection

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Interviewer: Dr. A. Ray Stephens

Place of Interview: Rockport, Texas      Date: September 30, 1971

Dr. Stephens: Mr. Spencer, you've been associated with the South Texas community for fifty years, is this right? Would you mention where you were born, and when you came to the South Texas area.

Mr. Spencer: I was born in Bowie County, East Texas, 1905. My father was a school teacher at that time, and we moved around quite a bit. In 1910 we moved to Lockhart, Texas. He quit teaching school as school superintendant in 1916, and about the year 1920 he became interested in the extension work of A&M College and became a County Agent. Before this he had read law at night and became a lawyer. In 1921 he accepted the job of County Agent of San Patricio County, and in July or August the family moved to Sinton but I remained in Lockhart until the latter part of September. I had attended the first three years of high school at Lockhart, and really wanted to stay there and finish with my class, but I moved

to Sinton with my family in the latter part of September. Everybody at Sinton schools were very nice to me, including the teachers, as well as students. I joined the senior class, which consisted of twelve, being four boys and eight girls who graduated the following May. Of the four boys that graduated, three of us went to college--Walter Sparks, Southwestern University; Dick Gerdes, A&M College, and I went to Rice, and I don't remember how many of the girls went to college, but I expect the percentage was rather high for 1921. Since my father was county agent and interested in farming, livestock, I learned a great deal about the area, and at that time there were just putting the raw land into cultivation. I remember specifically about a large area in the Sodville area that was being put into cultivation. The grubbing was done by crews of Mexicans, in all probability were Mexican national wetbacks, and all of the work was done by contract. After the land had been cleared and grubbed, it was plowed deep with a root plow, which was pulled by a tractor. The use of gasoline tractors were just, gasoline tractors were just coming into use about this time as there remained a few of the old steam tractors. After the land had been plowed with the

root plow, the Mexicans picked up the roots, piled them, and burned them. There were a few little things that I learned at that time. I learned the meaning of the word swale, which is a low place usually caused by wind erosion, which later catches water and is the last to dry up after a rain. Another thing that I learned is you can judge the quality of the land by the size of the mesquite--the bigger the mesquite, the richer the land, the better the land. In July of that year before going to Rice in September, at the beginning of the ginning season, I went to work for Caspar Gerdes, Jr. at Edroy. I learned many things in this first season's work. The first time that I went to work, I went to work on the night crew. There were three of us running the presses and tying out the cotton--weighing and tying out--one man on each side of the press and one man weighing and tying out. The first night nearly killed me. We ginned eleven bales of cotton. The Gerdes gin consisted of four stands of 440 saws each. One stand could gin one bale of cotton per hour. Consequently, four stands would gin four bales per hour. Sometime after the rush they cut the number of the crew on the presses down to two. In other words, one man worked one side of the press, weighed and tied out, while the other man, who, incidentally, was black, got ready to press

the next bale of cotton which was being packed. Before the season was over, on one occasion, the two of us in a fifteen-hour period ginned sixty bales of cotton and I didn't feel as bad as I did on the first night when I had ginned only eleven bales of cotton. Working in the gin taught me one thing--I have never smoked, and part of it is due to the early influence of working in the gin where smoking was forbidden. In other words I would see my fellow workmen suffering for the want of a cigarette when I wasn't bothered at all. Later on another employment was similar to this and that is working in an oil refinery, so I had the advantage because I did not smoke. I went to Rice in the fall of the year, attended Rice, returned to Sinton at Christmas, and the following June, and also I worked the second ginning season at the Gerdes gin at Edroy. Thereafter, I never returned to Sinton, except on a visit. During the time that I lived in Sinton and called Sinton my home, principally because my parents lived there, I knew Dave Odem, a colorful sheriff who was an old man at that time, Roy Jackson, Walter Sparks, and the various county office holders. The old timers of Sinton were the Irish Catholics, as the McGloin and McMullen Colony, was established along the Nueces River at old San Patricio. By 1921, the newcomers, so to speak, probably exceeded the

number of old settlers, and the situation was such that it was just ripe for such an organization as the Ku Klux Klan, to come in and to organize the newcomers. Although the Klan excluded Catholics and black people, which in those days were called Negroes, there were very few Negroes or Jews in the area, their exclusion really amounted to an exclusion of the Catholics only. However, many people who felt that the Klansmen were intolerant became anti-Ku Klux and aligned themselves with the Catholics. My father, whose full name was Cuthbert, C-U-T-H-B-E-R-T, Cuthbert Spencer was one of the ones who felt that the Ku Klux were intolerant and became an anti-Ku Klux. In 1923 it cost him his job as County Agent of San Patricio County, for the reason that the Ku Klux were in charge of the courthouse and they used a little device that is used quite often. They merely abandoned the office of the County Agent. During this time there were many tense moments. I remember one Sunday especially when a speaker of the Ku Klux was going to speak on the courthouse lawn. The anti-Ku Klux thought differently. Sometime before noon many of the old time ranchers started coming into town, and if one had looked into their cars, they would have found .30-.30 Winchesters. The Southern Pacific Railroad track was really the dividing line with everything to the east



being anti-Ku Klux and everything to the west being Ku Klux. Anyway, after several hours of consideration, the Ku Klux decided to hold their speaking somewhere else, and it was not held on the courthouse grounds, which happened to be east of the railroad tracks at that time. The Ku Klux Klan was different organizations in different places. I'm sure that in some places they were civic organizations, and did lots of good. In other places they were not so good. Ku Klux had main meeting places, Beeville being one of the centers, the Kool Koast Kamp down at Rockport being another place. The Kool Koast Kamp was spelled with three K's, was up on Live Oak Point, about the place where the Cochrans now live. I remember the location of the camp, and although there was nothing ever built up there of a permanent nature. The Kool Koast Kamp was principally for the family of the Klansmen who came up there for an outing. They pitched tents, and for the most part, enjoyed the beaches, and the breeze, seafood. As far as the Klan was concerned, in some parts of the country, and especially this area, the center of it was the Masonic Lodge, I guess partly due to the fact that in the Catholic organization there were the Knights of Columbus, and the principal objection to the Klan by people who were the anti-Ku Klux but not Catholics, such as my father, was that it

was a secret organization, which if left along would have even been superior to our government. As I said, the Commissioner's Court of San Patricio County discontinued the office of County Agent. My father went to work for the S. A. & A. P. Railroad as a farm and immigration agent. It was about this time that the S. A. & A. P. Railroad merged with the Southern Pacific lines, and for a while, he worked for the Southern Pacific lines in the same capacity. I recall very distinctly that in my senior year at Rice I was the proud possessor of an annual pass on the Southern Pacific Railroad. About 1925 my father came to Rockport where the Southern Pacific Railroad had an experiment station, experimenting in the growth of fruits and vegetables that would increase their tonnage. This was the original idea of J.S. Peter, vice president of the S. A. & A. P. Railroad, who dearly loved Rockport. At the time that my father came down here, the operation of the experiment farm had been cut and he was only a part-time employee, and some two years later the farm was discontinued altogether, and my father decided to stay in Aransas County. In the meantime, he had bought several truck farms, and he was also a lawyer, although I don't think he ever practiced law in Aransas County. He became the county judge of Aransas County in 1928 and was county judge in 1932 at the time

of his death. In the meantime I had gone to Rice where I graduated with a BA degree in 1926, majoring in Spanish. Of course, Rockport was considered in name as my home, as I kept in touch with various developments all through this time, including the deep water port at Corpus Christi about 1925. After I got out of Rice, I had majored in Spanish and business courses, intending to go to South America. Upon investigating the job possibilities or potentials, the only job that I could get in South or Central America was with the United Fruit Company at the sum of \$75 per month. Immediately upon graduating from Rice, a man who was then a sophomore and who is now Dr. ~~J. Lederick Kittrell~~ <sup>J. Roderick Kitchell</sup>, a professor in the medical school of the University of Pennsylvania, and I signed on a cotton boat of the Lykes Line in Galveston and made a trip to Le Havre and to Hamburg. I hadn't located any other jobs so in January of 1927 I went to work for the Texas Company of Port Arthur as a trainee for refinery superintendant. In the meantime, I had made application with Dr. C. B. ~~Bezoni~~ <sup>Bazzoni</sup>, the head of the geophysical department of Sun Oil Company, for a job doing geophysical work. After I had been in Port Arthur for about six weeks, I received a telegram one morning after I came off from the graveyard shift advising that Sun Oil Company had a job for me and for me to

report to Lubbock, Texas, which I did. I never could get used to the shift work, and I also found that that was the common case. One of my fellow employees made the remark, "Shift work is all right after you get used to it, and I've been doing it for thirty years now and I haven't gotten used to it." While I expected to go to work for Sun Oil Company doing seismic work, which at that time was refractioned, the job they put me on was magnetometer work, and my immediate job was to map in the Amarillo Ridge off of which production is found. In the Amarillo Ridge, the granite comes to within three or four thousand feet of the surface, and consequently is fairly easy to map. My party chief that I joined was Mr. D. M. ~~Hollingswood~~<sup>Collingwood</sup>, a Canadian major in World War I, and a Mr. Weaver, and a Mr. Faust. After I had had some three or four months training with other employees, I started working alone, doing reconnaissance work and really covered the territory. I worked then practically all of the state of Texas, the largest part of Oklahoma, southeastern New Mexico, and I spent one full year in the state of Mississippi. At the time of the great depression, and once again in the life of a Spencer, the work was discontinued. By this time, even though I was only about 25 or 26 years old, I had had a wide variety of experiences. In Lockhart, I worked in a grocery store who had a Jewish owner, and I learned

to speak Spanish fluently, a little Jewish, which, incidentally, is thirteenth-century German, and also a few words in Polish. When I came to Sinton, in addition to working at the gin, I also worked for Mr. C.C. ~~Cowley~~ <sup>Corley</sup> in a grocery store, and one of the men with whom I worked was the uncle of Charlie Hale, who is at this time a county commissioner of Aransas County, Texas. In Rice beginning my sophomore year, I went to work for the Houston Electric Company as a streetcar operator, even though I was only nineteen years old and had to make a statement to the effect that I was twenty-one years of age. I became Trainman #356. The Houston Electric used two of us Rice boys as an experiment. Before that time, a trainee went to work on the rear end of a two-man car as a conductor, later on on the front end as a motorman, and after several months or years experience he became an operator, being the operator of the one-man car. Our training was such that we became operators of one-man cars from the beginning, and incidentally it turned out very well. My experience as a streetcar operator has taught me many things--one of them being that the best way to do things is to run on schedule. I had streetcar schedules as tight as one car every four minutes, meaning that if I were one minute late I had to carry my load and one-fourth of somebody else's load, and it's just as

bad to be ahead of time as it is to be behind time. For instance, if I were one minute ahead of time, I got out of carrying one-fourth of my load, and incidentally these were no small matters, because these cars carried as many as forty and fifty passengers. Also at Rice, being a good student in business subjects, I was invited to work in the office of the bursar, Mr. ~~J.P. McCarne~~ <sup>J.T. McCants</sup>. I had made good grades in business administration, economics, and really, if Rice had offered a course in B.B.A., I would have received a B.B.A. degree rather than a B.A. degree, but the number of courses they offered were limited. In order to work and have my afternoons free in the second year, I took the second year of differential and integral calculus rather than take a science where there would be a three-hour lab. I did very well financially working for the Houston Electric Company. At the end of my sophomore year, working during the summer, I worked from the end of school to the beginning of the next semester when I was a junior. I worked one hundred straight days and made an average of \$5.55 a day, which represented about ten hours work, since I was drawing about \$.54 an hour, and when you take into consideration that bus drivers now for similar work get \$2.75 an hour for the same work, that is an appreciable sum. One year I worked and made \$1,000, which would be \$5,000 today. In addition to the

experience as a streetcar operator, I had gone to sea and had been an American seaman. I had worked for the Texas Company as a trainee as a refinery superintendent, and then I had worked for an oil company as a geophysicist, and incidentally, I had done real well. I got company credit for two fields, meaning that I worked over a territory, and together with my department head had recommended these fields to our company before oil was discovered. The first one was the Serpentine Club which I worked over in 1928 in Bastrop County, and the field was later discovered by Humble and bore the name of the <sup>Hilbig</sup>~~Hilbig~~ Field which produced some 63,000,000 barrels of oil. And then the larger of the two was Hobbs, New Mexico, which I worked over and we recommended to the company one year before the discovery well was drilled. I'm sure that my work in other areas resulted in some production, but those were the outstanding ones.

Stephens: You went to law school then after you quit work, and I believe you said before you didn't stay the full three years, but you passed the bar exam after two years of study.

Spencer: After the geophysical work was discontinued, in 1931, Sun Oil Company offered us jobs in East Texas that I decided that I would go to the law school at the University of Texas, where I had really intended to go ever since I

left Rice. So during the next two years I attended the law school of the University of Texas, coming home to Rockport during the summer, and during which time my father died. In 1933 Dr. Armstrong Price of Corpus Christi, Texas, had a magnetometer survey that he needed to have done in the Rio Grande Valley in the vicinity of Santa Rosa, and I took out to do that. Then in 1934 Sun Oil Company resumed their magnetometer work in the vicinity of Liberty, Texas, and I went back and worked a year. I attended the law school of the University of Texas during the summer of 1935. I then dropped out and took the bar examination in 1936, and after two attempts I passed it.

Stephens: And then you came, when did you finally make your residence in Aransas County? Your permanent residence, after, was it 1935, or before then?

Spencer: I never intended to live in Aransas County permanently until 1943. I came home after the law school summer session in 1935 principally to help my mother straighten out her property so that they'd make her a living. I received my license to practice law in 1936, but never practiced very much. I became County Attorney in 1939, and was County Attorney four years. I didn't want to stay in a rut, so in 1943 I ran for County Judge and was defeated, and thereafter for the first time I decided to make Aransas County my home and built the



office building where this tape is now being recorded,  
and married.

Stephens: Mr. Spencer, would you tell us about your experiences  
as an attorney in Aransas County.

Spencer: Yes, with pleasure. As I have said, I received my  
license to practice by taking the state bar examination  
and then received it in 1936. However, I did not  
practice law for several years thereafter. From 1936  
to 1939 and ever afterward, I was busy for the most part  
building rent houses for my mother that would bring her  
some income. At that time, I did not intend to remain  
in Aransas County. However, in 1936, when the Texas  
old age pension law came into effect, I worked for the  
state of Texas as an investigator for old age assistance,  
being one of the first ones. One of my fellow employees  
was Mrs. Hugh Roy Cook, who has continued in that work  
and is some kind of welfare director in Nueces County.  
Along the latter part of 1938, I was unhappy with the  
law enforcement situation in Aransas County, period.  
Actually, there was no County Attorney. The last County  
Attorney being Hollis Doty, who was a direct descendant  
of J. M. Doughty, but who had changed the spelling of  
his name to D-o-t-y. He came to Rockport during the  
time my father was County Judge, and Doty was appointed  
County Attorney principally to bring some delinquent  
taxes, but he had resigned and left here before 1935,

which was the time that I got out of law school. One of the requisites of a County Attorney is to be a licensed attorney, and for that reason there were not many people in Aransas County who would run for the office. James A. Steele was a practicing attorney here who had a delinquent tax contract with Aransas County, and Judge Eddings, who was an elderly attorney, up until his death practiced law. Incidentally, Judge Eddings was an uncle of Morris Sheppard, United States Senator from Texarkana for many years. It has been since said by James Rowel in a newspaper article that I "slipped into office," period. That is actually the case. I confided in no one, and at ten o'clock on the night of the July primary I filed with Mr. A.C. Glass, who was chairman of the executive committee of the Democratic party. Twelve o'clock was the deadline. Being elected in the July primary is tantamount to election, since there would be no other candidates in the general election. So you might as well say that I was elected to the office of County Attorney in 1938 to take office in January 1, 1939, period. One of the worst situations in Aransas County at that time was the operation of slot machines, marble tables, punch boards, and kindred gambling devices. This was headed by Mr. H.E. Stumberg, formerly of San Antonio, Texas. Mr. Stumberg owned a home here in Rockport, had

his wife, two young sons, and a brother-in-law, Billy Booth. The Stumbergs were also in legitimate businesses. Mr. Stumberg built the Live Oak Apartments in Fulton, and then later on Palm Village, which is one of the finest locations in the area. Mr. Stumberg had his machines in restaurants, grocery stores, pool halls, and every possible location that he could get for them. He had every county official and district official under his thumb, so to speak, by having made paid petty gifts to them. By way of illustration, the District Attorney, Mr. Alex Cox of Beeville, enjoyed a two-weeks' vacation annually at Oak Shore Apartments through the courtesy of Mr. Stumberg. The talk got around pretty quickly that I intended to do something about the slot machines, which were admittedly illegal, and actually we had such a rotten situation existing, that some of the deputy sheriffs spent more time trying to recover some of Mr. Stumberg's slot machines that had been stolen than they did enforcing other laws. I took office on January 1, and I think that I am safe in saying that I didn't have a friend in the courthouse, but having once convinced them that I intended to enforce the law and intended to be fair and impartial about it, and having convinced them that I really didn't care what they thought, I got along better with them. B.S. Fox was the County Judge, who

had been elected County Judge at the first regular term after the death of my father; J.M. Sparks was County Clerk; J.A. Brundrett was the Sheriff, tax assessor-collector; D.R. Scrivner was the County Treasurer, and one of the peculiar things about his office was that he kept the books of Aransas County in a fish house. Nevertheless, the first Grand Jury met on the first Monday in February, and the night before the Grand Jury met, I was paid a visit by Mr. Stumberg, who had heard that I intended to do something about the slot machines. He made some veiled threats. He told me about how much good he did in the community, how much he contributed to the churches, how much he contributed to the poor people. I was noncommittal, but the next day when the Grand Jury met, the District Judge, Honorable W.G. <sup>Gayle</sup>~~Cole~~, did not even include me with the District Attorney as one of the ones that the Grand Jury could look to for advice. I sent word by one of the bailiffs that I wanted to appear before the Grand Jury, and I think it was the second day that the Grand Jury called for me. Mr. A.C. Glass was the foreman. I remember many of the others. Zeph Rouquette was on it. Alex Cox was the District Attorney advising the Grand Jury as to the laws. My statement was short and direct. I said, "Gentlemen, there has been existing in this

community for a long time the matter of slot machines and marble tables and punch boards, which are against the law. We have let them run so long that it would be unfair for you to bring an indictment and to prosecute anyone for violating a law, but that is no reason why they should be allowed to continue to run." The District Attorney spoke up and said, "Oh, that's a matter that we leave up to the local law enforcement officers." And I said, "Oh, no, that is not the case. They will either enforce the law, or I shall get somebody in here who will enforce the law." After a few questions, the Grand Jury, who made me appear as a witness, and made me take the oath of secrecy, dismissed me without a comment. On Friday of that week, before they adjourned, they called me back. Mr. Glass, who was the foreman said, "We like what you said about law enforcement the other day, and we want you to tell all the law enforcement officers the same thing." So they called up the Sheriff and all of his deputies, the City Marshall, and the constables to line them up, and I told them the exact same thing that I told the Grand Jury, and that beginning in the morning all marble tables and slot machines, punch boards, raffles were to be taken out. Of course, I had some troubles, but for the most part after I convinced everyone that I meant business, I didn't have any serious trouble.

So, things went along pretty smoothly, and while Mr. Stumberg ceased to operate his machines in Aransas County, he continued to operate them in Refugio County, parts of San Patricio County, and he used Rockport for a base of operations and for repair shops. I realize this was a serious threat, but really did not have the local power to do anything about. So I wrote Colonel Homer Garrison, head of the Department of Public Safety, of the situation that existed down here, and from Colonel Homer Garrison I got the usual political brushoff to come by to see him sometime when I was in Austin to discuss the matter with him. So, at a later date I was in Austin on other business, and I called up Colonel Homer Garrison, told him who I was, and wanted to come out and talk to him. He told me he was so very sorry, but he was just tied up that day and that he couldn't see me, that he would see me some other time when I was in Austin. Well, that's the last time that he heard from me, but it's not the last time I heard from him. I think it must have been about June or July, I was working up in my office on the second floor of the courthouse, about nine o'clock, Ross Terry, Delinquent Tax Contractor, was on the first floor. He called up and said, "Here's a man down here to see you." I said, "Okay, send him up." An elderly, wiry, small man walked into my office, and he said, "I'm Pappy Davenport. You

don't know me, but I know you. Colonel Homer Garrison has sent me to see you. What kind of man is Willis Stumberg?" I said, "Well, Mr. Stumberg owns the Oak Shore Apartments, and Palm Village, is active in business and civic work." Pappy Davenport said, "He's a son of a bitch and you know it. He made the mistake of sending Colonel Homer Garrison an expensive set of silver with the request that I be removed from Refugio County, and Colonel Garrison has sent me down here to clean him out." I said, "Okay, what can I do for you?" He said, "I want to, I'll walk into the office tomorrow night at nine o'clock, and I want a valid search warrant for his house, and all of his repair shops." I said, "Okay." The next night about eight forty-five, I called up Joe Smith, the Justice of the Peace, and asked him to come to the courthouse, that I had some papers for him to sign. When he came up there, he asked me what the papers were; I told him. He signed them without any questions, and he started to leave. I said, "Oh, no, Joe, just wait a minute." At nine o'clock sharp, why Pappy Davenport and two other Rangers, one of them named ~~Sam~~<sup>Sain</sup>, came in. I introduced them to the Justice of the Peace. I said, "Here is a search warrant, and together with it is a warrant of arrest. Now, let me tell you how to handle this case. You serve it on Mr.

and Mrs. Stumberg, who thinks she is a social leader in Aransas County, and tell her that I said that if they didn't turn the content of the warehouses over to you, that she was going to spend the night in jail, and I was going to see to it that she wasn't going to get out until the morning." After about forty-five minutes the Rangers came back. In the meantime Mr. Smith had gone home. The Rangers said that when I told them what I had suggested, that Stumberg turned over the keys to the warehouse located here in Rockport and the keys to the warehouse located at Tivoli. The Rangers and I spent the rest of the week destroying the slot machines, marble tables, which had a value at that time of approximately \$20,000. We got through with this work on Saturday, Pappy Davenport returned to his home in Edna, Texas, on Sunday and died. Well, from then on, I didn't have any trouble with marble tables, slot machines, although some people were waiting in vain for them to come back. There were other outstanding events along those lines. In early 1939, Johnny Wilcox had built a dance hall in Aransas County, just across the line from San Patricio County, in the town of Aransas Pass. The truth of the matter is, that he put it over in Aransas County just because we didn't have any law enforcement in Aransas County. It was a dime-a-dance taxi affair with all kinds of law violations. He held



a beer license. The Liquor Control Board was after him. So, one Saturday night we had a raid planned. Mr. W.R. Nicholson, agent for the Texas Liquor Control Board, the deputy sheriff from Aransas County, and myself paid them a visit about ten o'clock. Oddly enough, we were just a little bit late for the reason that they had been raided that night by Rangers headed by Quincy Lowman at the request of Sheriff Hunt of San Patricio County, who said that there was no law enforcement in Aransas County and the state officers would have to do it. Johnny Wilcox was told to show up at the courthouse Monday morning. When he showed up on Monday before Judge Fox, Quincy Lowman was there as a witness, in case we needed anything to file. I told old Johnny Wilcox substantially as follows: That he had just stuck that dance hall-gambling casino over in Aransas County because he thought there was no law enforcement in Aransas County, that he was guilty of several felonies, and that I was going to give him until the Grand Jury met again in September to move that place of business, building, equipment, and everything entirely out of Aransas County. Otherwise I was going to send him to the penitentiary. Mr. Wilcox believed me. He moved it

it to the south side of Aransas Pass, a distance of some four miles. That's one way to get rid of them. At the same time slot machines and marble tables weren't the only laws being enforced. In fact, I made a statement that all laws were going to be enforced, and this included the fish and oyster laws, fishing in closed water principally. Actually, my . . . several of my best friends were commercial fishermen. So I had no alternative, I just told them, "The law's going to be enforced. You know where the closed waters are, so if you go down there and get caught, you're going to have to pay a fine. I'll see to it that the fine is a minimum, and I'll see to it that the nets are not destroyed, but you're going to have to enter a plea of guilty and pay a fine." Furthermore, in several matters, I convinced them that I meant business. Prior to my becoming County Attorney, the county had entered into a delinquent tax contract with James A. Steele. One of the requisites of such a contract is that the County Attorney has to waive his constitutional right, his duty to bring the tax suits. I had not waived any such rights. The Commissioners' Court didn't take me seriously, so I brought a suit, an injunction, against them trying to get them restrained. I was represented by Alan Wood, Corpus Christi. We didn't get very far before W.G. Gale,

but it wasn't very long before James A. Steele gave up the contract. A little later, principally Judge Fox had a criminal charge filed against Ben Heeny who had been writing unfavorable newspaper articles about Judge Fox and some of the other officials. The warrant of arrest was served on Mr. Heeny, who at that time was well into his seventies, on Saturday afternoon of the day of the primary election. At that hour of the day he was not taken before the Justice of the Peace, he was not allowed to make bond, and consequently, mainly for the purpose of humiliating him, he was not let out of jail until the following Monday. Later on, he hired ~~Allen~~ Allen Wood and myself as attorneys, who brought a false arrest and imprisonment case against Fox and the sheriff, Albert Brundrett. Also, a necessary party in this case was D.R. Scrivner, who was the bondsman for Albert Brundrett. Once again, we didn't get very far with such a case, because when it was tried after many delays, and the courts held for the defendants, but once again we convinced them that we meant business, and that's the kind of stuff that's not going to be tolerated in Aransas County. So, at the end of two years, I ran for reelection. In the meantime, Mr. Stumberg had imported Fancher Archer, a licensed attorney, who was a clean-cut young man associated with the Chamber of

Commerce, but when the votes were counted, I was reelected by a two to one majority. So after two years, even though I had sued, either as a party or an attorney, every official in the courthouse, I was able to be reelected. From then on it was fairly smooth sailing. I served the second term as County Attorney, enforcing all the laws to the best of my ability, and at the end of the second term, the fourth year, I decided to run against B.S. Fox for the office of County Judge. As I have said before I was defeated in this race. That was 1943, which also was just about the beginning of World War II, as far as activities in this area were concerned. I offered myself as attorney in a number of government matters, Board of Economic Warfare. I used the expression, I even got so worse as to work for O.P.A. But I was unsuccessful in getting any of these jobs, so I just decided that I would stay in Rockport. So, as I said, I built an office out on Market Street, and the expression that I used about the office at that time is this: Not too far out in case anybody had any business with me, but just a little bit too far out from the sweaters. I opened up private practice, and it wasn't long after that that I became very busy in connection with the war effort on a local plane, which included the airport, air raid warden, airplane spotters, chairman of

Navy relief, which I believe is the only time that the Navy has ever gone out and asked individuals to help the Navy relief, and a number of other matters. I was not County Attorney. I practiced law, and in some instances practiced criminal law as a defense attorney. I had many other irons in the fire: sale of real estate, building houses. Then after having been out of office for two years, I went back in and spent almost another four years as County Attorney, but during the middle of the fourth year, Judge Fox died and there was a vacancy in the office of County Judge. I was appointed County Judge. In the meantime, oil had been discovered on Fulton Beach on my land, and I had no intention of ever holding those offices again, and as a matter of fact, shortly after 1948 I quit practicing law altogether. But backtracking a little, in the matter of practice of civil law, I was in general practice, handling everything that came about. Naturally, I couldn't compete with the best of attorneys in specialized fields in Corpus Christi, and so I had arrangements with several good firms over there to handle special cases. For instance, if a workman's compensation case came my way, I immediately turned it over to Judge Phillips, and in another instance I employed Walter ~~Leighwright~~<sup>Lewright</sup> involving

a case in federal court. During these years, I am sure that I made a favorable impression on all of the judges, including Judge W.T. <sup>Gayle</sup>~~Cate~~, who had taken me with a grain of salt in the beginning, and in 1947, I was notified that I had earned and was being classified by Martin Dale Hubbel as "Class <sup>a-v</sup>~~A~~" attorney, which is the highest rating that an attorney can have with Martin Dale Hubbel. After the discovery of oil in Fulton Beach Field, I realized that I wouldn't have the time to practice law and do justice to it, and about this time, Mr. Weldon <sup>Cabaniss</sup>~~Cabiness~~, who was a boyhood friend of mine from Lockhart, and who had attended Rice with me, became available, and I turned over to him my practice of law, which was a lucrative practice. Mr. <sup>Cabaniss</sup>~~Cabiness~~ is still here. Also, when I became County Judge, he was appointed County Attorney, and he remained in that office until about 1960, at which time Ellis Clark has been the County Attorney of Aransas County. So you might as well say that since 19 . . . [end of reel].

Stephens: Mr. Spencer, you've told us about your experiences as an attorney in Aransas County. Would you comment on the development of the airport and its importance to the county.

Spencer: In 1943, our attention was called to the fact that the C.A.A., Civil Aeronautics Administration, wanted to build for the United States Navy an auxiliary field,

known as a touch and go field, in Aransas County. They needed a governmental agency to act as sponsor, who had to furnish the site and had to agree to operate it as a civilian airport at all times, except in cases of national emergency. At that time, the County of Aransas was the only governmental agency that was financially able to furnish this site. So we tentatively agreed to furnish the site. The C.A.A. made a reconnaissance survey and recommended one of two sites, one of the sites being between Rockport and Aransas Pass, and the other site being at the present location about six miles north of Rockport. When I say we, I was not County Attorney at this time, but Judge Fox asked me to handle the matter as special attorney on airport project. The county selected the site north of Rockport for several reasons, one of them being that there were fewer ownerships of land in the area. The airport originally contained 688 acres and 488 acres were bought from one group of owners the Kent-Crane properties. Another factor that entered into the situation was that this port, airport, could be used for both a land plane base and a seaplane base, although the seaplane facilities were never developed. After the site was acquired, the contract let, and the airport built, it was turned over to the United States Navy for the duration of the war. We had to sign a rather

one-sided lease in order to satisfy the Navy, but no one was wanting to hinder the war effort, especially since we were doing this as our part of the war effort; and so I advised the Commissioners' Court to go ahead and sign the lease as dictated by the Navy, and I told them I would take care of the matter in the resolution of the Commissioners' Court, giving the County Judge the authority to sign the lease. This resolution reads something as follows: Aransas County, motivated by patriotic fervor, executes this lease as dictated by the United States Navy. Later on, this came in handy. Anyway, the war ended, and the United States Navy got ready to turn it back to Aransas County. At that time we were in a dilemma. The C.A.A. said it would cost \$25,000 a year to operate and maintain the airport the way they wanted it done. Aransas County did not have \$25,000. The Navy insisted, or rather the War Surplus Administration, who was handling the matter for the federal government after the airport had been declared surplus to the needs of the United States Navy, put in additional restrictions and obligations in order for us to get the airport back. I told them that I would not agree to the additional restrictions and obligations, and when they asked why I told them I didn't like the idea of leasing a piece of land to somebody, then having to agree to do additional things in order to get it back.



As a result, the Aransas County Airport remained in the hands of the War Surplus Administration for eighteen months after they were ready to turn it back. Later they cut down on some of their requirements and worked out an acceptable form of return to me. After the Aransas County Airport was returned to Aransas County, I then made an application to somebody in Washington for a reimbursement, a sum of money equal to putting the airport back in first class condition, using as an argument that when it was turned over to them it was brand new, that they had had it and had the full use of it and full maintenance of it for the intervening period and they should return it to us in a condition as it was brand new. As a result, I got a grant of \$21,000 for Aransas County to use as a seal coat on the runways, to clean some drainage ditches, to remove some brush, and to do a few other things. Later on the Navy decided they wanted to use the airport again for a touch and go landing field, and I worked out a lease with them based on a weight frequency basis where, in fact, the United States Navy bore 90 per cent of the current maintenance. A few years after that, some of the people in the area became tired of the noise of the airplanes, and the contract with the Navy was terminated, even though if the Navy had wanted to

keep it in defect they had the authority to do so.

Be that as it may, in the meantime the use by civilians had increased a little. Fishermen, some people who lived in the area who had airplanes, some of the people in the adjoining islands, but the big event about the Aransas County Airport was the matter of oil exploration. Sometime in 1946 it came to my attention that Mr. O.G. McClain, a geologist for Southern Minerals Corporation, had mapped in an oil-producing structure with the center of it on the Aransas County Airport. In order to make a satisfactory deal for the acquisition of the Aransas County Airport, which incidentally cost less than \$20,000, including \$1,000 to me for my services. The Kent-Crane's insisted that they convey no minerals. As a matter of fact, they received only \$25 an acre for this land which today I would say is worth \$2,000 an acre. As a matter of fact, the handling of this particular situation is rather involved. Judge Fox was representing the Kent-Crane's, and he was willing to acquire this particular site only in case we could acquire the Kent-Crane interest without condemnation. The Kent-Crane's said that they would convey the surface for the \$25 an acre but no minerals. The United States Navy and the C.A.A. said they had to have the minerals. Ordinarily you would say that that would be the end of it, but I proposed the following method of handling it, which was later done and acceptable by all persons. The Kent-Crane's

conveyed the property, minerals and all, with the provision that in case it was ever ceased to be used for airport purposes, the entire mineral estate reverted to the Kent-Crane's, and with the further restrictions that all the times that it was used as an airport, that the county and its successors in title would never explore for minerals. In that way, the minerals could never be produced from the airport, and at the same time the Navy and the C.A.A. would never be bothered by oil activities on the airport. In 1946, of course, the end of the war was in sight, and it became very important that we work out something to explore the airport for mineral purposes. After many attempts and many delays, Southern Minerals became disgusted and gave up the thought, and the ironical part of the situation is that if Southern Minerals had been successful in getting a lease on the airport where they could have drilled it, their proposed location would have been a dry hole, and the Kent-Crane tract already had two dry holes on it, one on the extreme northeast drilled by Humble to a depth in excess of 10,000 feet, and a well drilled in 1938 by Houch Thompson on the extreme southwest portion to a depth of 7,500 feet. Anyway, being a little tenacious, after the Southern Minerals gave up the idea of drilling it, I got the C.A.A. to agree to abandoning

232 acres for airport purposes so that they could be explored for oil and gas. And, incidentally, in this connection, as a part of the inducement, the Kent-Crane's agreed to give up one-half of the royalty to Aransas County, and that was the first time that Aransas County ever had any part of the minerals which could be developed. In 1947, Mr. O.G. McClain had left the employment of Southern Minerals and had induced an independent oil operator, Mr. George W. Graham of Wichita Falls, to take the block of acreage and to drill a test well. This well was drilled on a portion of the Kent-Crane lands to the north of the airport which had been sold to me in 1945 and resulted in the discovery of the Fulton Beach oil field, which is one of the better discoveries on the Gulf Coast. The discovery well was completed, according to Railroad Commission reports, on July 6, 1947. From this discovery well many fields were discovered in Copano Bay, in the Salt Lake area, and even across the bay at Lamar on the strength of the first well that was drilled in 1947. Oil production in Aransas County has been most significant from the standpoint of taxable values. When I was County Judge in 1947, Aransas County had about \$5 million in oil values, I mean total values, the oil values being just a little over a million dollars. Today, we have a 100 per cent prior market value of \$164 million, 50 per cent

of which is oil and gas values, and 50 per cent land improvements and personal properties. The oil values have been responsible for our having such a good school plant, the new Aransas County Courthouse, Library, and Jail, and many other improvements in the area, including practically all that has been done by the Aransas County Navigation District, with the exception of the Rockport Yacht Basin, which was built in 1938, mainly with tax refund money. The matter of oil values in Aransas County is a little bit unusual in this respect: the biggest part of the oil has been found in the bays, which belong to the state of Texas. Ordinarily, property belonging to the state of Texas is not taxable, but in the instance of oil, when the state of Texas grants or lets an oil and gas lease, then it becomes the property of the oil company and becomes taxable. So, really, about the only difference is that the royalty interest, which belongs to the state of Texas, is not taxable for ad valorem tax purposes. This also creates another unusual situation in a community, and that is where other communities, the owners of the land have received appreciable income from royalties. Since the state of Texas owns most of the royalties in Aransas County, the people who have profited from the income from royalties have not been so great. I happen to be one of the exceptional few.

The discovery well was drilled on my land, and some seventeen or eighteen producing wells were drilled on my land. As a matter of fact, beginning in 1948 I became an operator, drilling wells jointly with George W. Graham, all over the county as far as that is concerned but principally in the west Rockport area, where we with heat brought in a new field. I also drilled one well at Lamar, and I drilled several wells in the east Fulton Beach field in which George W. Graham did not have an interest; and at this time I have very little operating oil and gas, but I still have appreciable royalties from the Fulton Beach field, which has now been producing since 1947. What has really happened is that the original sands have been depleted for many years, but this being a multiple sand field, additional or other sands have been perforated, and at this time are producing mainly gas. There has been one deep test drilled on the flank of the Fulton Beach field by Hunt, Phillips, Sun, and others, and it was drilled to a depth of 18,500 feet without any favorable show, geologists are of the opinion that there are still areas in connection with the Fulton Beach field that have not been explored that will probably produce, but it's rather expensive wildcatting. I have recently seen some geology on the immediate area, and with the Fulton Beach oil

field being in the center, there is a prospective area extending from Lamar on the north to some three miles south of the discovery well in Fulton Beach field on the south with four limits east and west. A year or two after the discovery of the Fulton Beach oil field, say about the year 1950, 75 per cent of the ad valorem bill was borne by oil companies. Today, after some twenty-odd years of production, the oil companies bear only about 50 per cent of the tax bill. Of course, there have been many other fields, and one that is appreciable is the Saint Charles Ranch, where the Continental Oil Company is the operator, but unless new production is found, and I am of the opinion that Aransas County has been pretty well tested down to 9,000 feet, and some of the deeper tests have shown no promise, depletion will gradually diminish the oil and gas values, and if the present valuation, or rather total valuation, is maintained, it will have to be maintained from real estate improvements, for in my opinion, the raw land in Aransas County is already bearing all of the taxation that it can stand. And for that reason I have been an advocate of doing many things, or rather anything, that would encourage the improvements in real estate, such as the extending of one of the runways at the Aransas County airfield to 6,000 feet, the dredging of canals

for boats and boat storage, and anything along those lines, just to be able to maintain our present total value of \$164 million, and in case our total evaluation is not maintained, one of the governmental agencies that will suffer the most is the Aransas County independent school district, which is our school system, for the reason that they are not having only increased costs due to inflation, but they are having increased costs due to the increase in the number of students, and everybody either is or should be in favor of good schools.

Stephens: What about the Aransas County tax base?

Spencer: The Aransas County tax base is low as compared to other areas. So far we have a very favorable tax picture, and this matter hasn't just happened--it has been due to the efforts of many of whom I have been one. At the moment neither the Aransas County, nor the Aransas County Navigation District, nor the Aransas County Conservation and Reclamation District have any bonded indebtedness to be paid from general obligation funds. The Conservation and Reclamation District have some revenue bonds and both Aransas County and the Navigation District are entirely free of bonded indebtedness.

Stephens: Do you think it will stay that way?



Spencer: It will stay that way for awhile, as long as I live, anyway.

Stephens: What about the real estate value changes that you've seen in the thirty some-odd years you've been active in the county. I know it's gone up--it's gone up everywhere, but can you be able to tell me the particular time period when you've seen it increase and generally why?

Spencer: Before going into that I'll modify that last statement. I'm in favor of bond issues as long as the money is needed, as long as the money is well-spent, and it is well that it is matched with federal funds in case there are federal funds available. I have never been opposed to any bond issue that in my opinion was reasonable. As to real estate values, we have had a steady rising market for forty years, because forty years ago we were in the middle of the depression, and values have gone up many many times. I know of one instance where 116 acres of land three years ago sold for \$174,000, and when the tax-payer determined his cost on this land, it cost him less than \$5,000. In another instance the tract of land which is now Live Oak Point tracts--10,000 acres sold for, 10,000 lineal feet on Highway 35 sold for \$70,000, or \$7 a front foot. This land borders on Aransas Bay, overlooks Aransas Bay,

and today a going price is between \$300 and \$400 a front foot. There are many similar instances in Aransas County. Of course, not all of the land has gone up this way, but I believe that even the worst of the situation has gone up ten-fold in the past thirty years. In other words, in 1940 I bought 122 acres of land at \$20 an acre. The present value of that land is \$200 an acre, and that's one of the sorry deals.

**Stephens:** Have you seen it rise more in the last few years, say the last five years, than before? Have you seen any spurts through the years?

**Spencer:** Of course, this graph is not a straight line deal. It's more or less jagged, and there are times when the land is increased in price more so than other years, and I have noticed an appreciable rise in prices during the past twelve months, as well as the past five years. All this bears out what I consider one of my classic remarks, and that is I have been living here all these years, knowing the history, and knowing about all the paper subdivisions, the booms and the busts, my remark is that the best and highest use of Aransas County is to sell.

**Stephens:** We've had some important housing subdivisions to go in in the last few years. When did the subdivision boom hit Aransas County and how extensive is it today? What I mean is was Little Bay Shores the first subdivision,

planned subdivision, and then from that point on, with Key Allegro, Harbor Oaks, Neptune Harbor, whatever else they might have had.

Spencer: In 1919 a hurricane either destroyed or damaged most of the houses in Rockport. When I lived here in the late twenties and early thirties, there were many old structures here where the owners gave somebody the free use just to live on the place. However, it did very little good, because they did not take very good care of such places, and for that reason, of course, the owners did not keep the property up, and for that reason there was a demand in the thirties for new structures, rent houses, and I helped build some of them. There have always been subdivisions in Aransas County, and Little Bay Shores is recognized as the first large, nice subdivision with curvilinear streets, city water sewer, close to the bay but sufficiently high elevation of no damage from hurricanes. Since that time there have been many subdivisions, smaller, and some of them even nicer. For instance, Shady Side, near the high school, which was the first subdivision that had everything that Little Bay Shores had plus curb and gutter, and then Shady Oaks. Of course, another type of subdivision which has really meant much to the economy of the area, as well as affecting other facets of living in Aransas County has been Key Allegro. Key Allegro is

a subdivision of what was formerly a peninsula and now called an island, consisting between two and three hundred acres, which is a Florida type subdivision, having channels, some frontage on Aransas Bay, with places where people can live, have a boat dock in front of their house, as well as a automobile in their garage. This type of subdivision appeals especially to boat owners, and is very popular as a second home subdivision. As a matter of fact, for the first few years of its existence 80 per cent of the homes built on Key Allegro were built by people who had a first home elsewhere, and only 20 per cent of the people were residents, according to, for voting purposes to show you the trend, the present percentage is 65-35--that is 65 per cent of the owners live elsewhere a large part of the year, and 35 per cent are permanent--and I am of the opinion that by the time that Key Allegro is closely developed it will be a 50-50 proposition, and part of this is due to the fact that some of the people who, in the beginning, were second home owners have liked it so well that they are now first home owners in Aransas County, and for the most part all these people are people of wealth and influential people. There have been some other channel-lot subdivisions, but none that

have equalled Key Allegro. One to the south has been Palm Harbor, put on by Ervin and Brashear. Another one, which has gained a little notoriety due to some of those connected with this development has been City-by-the-Sea, which originally was sold to George Strickhausen and developed as Gulf Gate. Another one to the north on the Lamar side has been Neptune Harbor, which, for some reason or other, has never gotten off the ground even though it has everything it should have.

Stephens: Mr. Spencer, would you tell us of your connection with the Coastal Bend Regional Planning Commission and its importance to the county.

Spencer: About five years ago, the council of governments known as the Coastal Bend Regional Planning Commission was organized in Corpus Christi and it comprises some twelve or thirteen counties in this immediate area. Shortly after it was organized Aransas County became a member, and the Commissioners' Court of Aransas County asked me to be the Aransas County representative, and I have been on this work ever since then. I have enjoyed it very much for the reason that the representatives of the counties and cities and other governmental agencies are some of the finest people that I know of in the area, and at the same time many of them are former acquaintances of mine, being lawyers or I have known them in some other

capacities. Aransas County, up until date, has paid \$1,000 a year as dues and has received many hundreds of thousands of dollars in federal aid on projects for which the county and city of Rockport has been eligible. For the first two or three years we did not have a paid executive director, and the man in charge who did an able job was Don Cox of Corpus Christi, who is an employee of Pittsburg Plate Glass Company. About a little over three years ago, the first paid executive director was hired, and he happened to be Mr. Lon Stark, who lived in Key Allegro, Aransas County. Mr. Stark was a very able man, having some three or four college degrees and had had experience in similar work and really got the organization off to a good start. However, he had some shortcomings which finally took care of him, and the chairman of the executive board of the planning commission asked him to resign, which he did. The second man who worked as executive director was Herb Whitney, a former city manager of the city of Corpus Christi, who did a very able job in stabilizing the organization. Our third paid executive director is Charles I. Crow, who was formerly with the governor's office in Austin. This is a new concept in government, and its principal purpose is to channel the spending of federal funds on projects which are eligible. As I have said, Aransas County has received a lion's share

of these funds, one of the principal ones being a grant of almost a million dollars in connection with our Conservation and Reclamation District and the laying of a water line and other facilities bringing Nueces River water to Aransas County. The city of Rockport has also received several grants of small sums, and the position I take is one which I think is practical, and that is that as long as federal funds are going to be given away, I certainly want my share, or rather the share for Aransas County and other governmental agencies.

Stephens: Excuse me. Did you say that the water district received funds from the Regional Planning Commission?

Spencer: The so-called water district received a grant of almost a million dollars from H.U.D., but it was through the efforts of John Young and the planning commission that we received such a grant. The balance of the almost two and one-half million dollar project was financed by low-interest loans from the state of Texas, coupled with revenue bonds. We have a water system worth approximately three million dollars without increasing the general obligation bonds any, and that, in my opinion, is the proper way to do things.

Stephens: What about the users' fee, isn't that how the water district is maintained now rather than as a part of the tax, supported by the taxes?

Spencer: Of course the water district sells water, and at this time it hasn't been in use very long, and the rates for the water seem a little bit high, but I'm sure that in time it'll level off, and of course in time I'm sure that we'll feel that we could have never gotten along without it. In fact, I give this as one of the reasons that the community is growing.

Stephens: The presence of an adequate supply of good water.

Spencer: That's right. All of the other water we have is locally from wells which has a very high mineral content, including salt.

Stephens: Mr. Spencer, please tell me your opinion of the importance of the Aransas Navigation District to Aransas County.

Spencer: Of course, I've been familiar with the Aransas County Navigation District from its inception. As I have said before, it was organized back there shortly after the '19 hurricane, where the state of Texas provided for a refund of a part of the ad valorem tax that goes to the state of Texas for the purpose of building sea walls and storm protection. The Aransas County Navigation District has always had on its board some of the best citizens of the community who, for the most part, have served without pay, and who, for the most part, have not had an ulterior motive in serving on this board, and the Navigation District has been able to give us



many of the nice things that we have, such as our harbors, channels, and even some tourist attractions with a minimum of expenditure and a minimum of ad valorem taxes for the reason that the board that administered the Navigation District's problems have, for the most part, worked without pay.

Stephens: In the past we've talked about the importance of the subject of hurricanes to the county's history. Would you please share with me now your choice opinions and thoughts on the influence of hurricanes upon Aransas County.

Spencer: Well, of course, we've had hurricanes as long as we've had Aransas County. Aransas County was carved out of Refugio County in 1871, and in 1875 we had the first destructive hurricane. Then over the period of years, some to a lesser extent, and my knowledge of these is not as full as somebody that keeps up with the weather, but the most destructive hurricane was in 1919, and actually it set back the community one straight generation, because by 1938 we were still getting over the effects of the '19 hurricane, and there were still many signs of destruction in Rockport and Aransas County in 1938. Another thing which is not reflected by the government's census is that after the 1919 hurricane, that many of the good people of Aransas County had to move away from here to make a living, and the

pickings were rather poor for those that did stay. An example of this is that practically all young men had to go away from here to get a job, and the daughters stayed at home, I guess partially to take care of the folks as a result we really have had a large crop of spinsters in the community. Anyway, in my opinion, the effect of the 1919 hurricane has been very much more far-reaching than anyone has ever given it credit for. However, then we had hurricanes that in my memory 1934, 1942, 1945, and then for about seventeen years we were without any hurricanes, I believe was Hurricane Carla coming either in 1961 or 1962, and then Hurricane <sup>Beulah</sup> ~~Beulah~~, and then Hurricane Celia, and then, of course, this year we have had Hurricane Fern, which did some damage, but not appreciable. Beginning with Hurricane Carla, or even before that, they had started giving them girls' names. Before that time they were known only by the year in which they occurred. Beginning with Hurricane Carla, the federal government started giving some aid and relief in connection with hurricane damage and hurricane repairs, and by the time of Hurricane Celia, the impact of the hurricane actually turned into a financial benefit rather than a detriment. The money spent by Red Cross, by the Corps of Army Engineers removing debris, by H.U.D., the insurance payments, the expenditures of people from their savings, and even one

foundation, actually created a boom. And even though Hurricane Celia is more than one year past, and even though the loans and other payments arising out of Hurricane Celia amount to less than 2 per cent. I think a part of this is psychological. During a hurricane, for some reason or other reports get out that the area has been wiped off the map. Several months later people come through here and see the area actually booming rather than in a state of destruction, and they decide to invest in the area, and that is what has happened here. Rockport is not the only one, or not even the first one. The first area that came to my attention where this situation existed was the Mississippi coast about two years prior to Hurricane Celia. Identically the same thing happened over there, and some of that valuable waterfront property actually sold better after the hurricane than before the hurricane for the reason that in a number of instances the government came in there and paid for the removal of improvements which really had no value to begin with.

Stephens: Mr. Spencer, agriculture has played a part in Aransas County, changing at times. Your father was an agricultural agent from the County and the Railroad in this Coastal Bend area, and you have both an academic and a practical interest. So over your years of observation,

please comment on the subject of agriculture in Aransas County.

Spencer: When you first asked me about agriculture, I asked you what agriculture, which is very appropriate at this time for the reason that the only areas of Aransas County where there is any farming done are the extreme areas of the Rincon Ranch in the west, which is marginal agricultural land at its best, and a part of the Tatton Ranch on the north, where they are raising some feed, principally for their cattle. However, in the twenties, and even the early thirties, truck farming in Aransas County was an important idea, was an important item. I have told you that J.S. Peter of the S.A.&A.P. Railroad was interested in Aransas County, and the truck crops grown at that time were tomatoes and cucumbers and sweet peppers. Actually, those crops were shipped out of here in carload lots. There were package sheds on the railroad tracks, and, even though truck farms were small, I would say that there were several hundred acres in truck farms. One of the principal areas was the Sparks Colony area, and one of the principal farmers out there was Jim DeWitt. Also, another area where truck crops were grown was a subdivision of the Lucas Ranch. Incidentally, in connection with the truck crops there were fruits that were tried, and for several years we had many acres in grapes. The grape that was grown

in this area was the Carmen grape, and it had an excellent flavor, but in the thirties some time someone developed a grape that reached the New York market two weeks to a month before the Carmen grape reached the New York market, and from that time on it ceased to be a commercial grape, although some of the die-hards like Mr. Bullard had a vineyard for several years after it ceased to be profitable. Back before the turn of the century, there was an attempt to grow grapes in Aransas County by what was known as the Italian Colony. The Gulf Coast Immigration Company settled Italians here for the purpose of growing grapes, but for some reason or other this was not a permanent fixture after a number of years. Most of them drifted away although their names still appear on the records of the county, and in some areas, such as Lucas Ranch, one can find the old fashioned large wire that was used to tie the grape vines to the post.

Stephens: Tell me about the tax suits of Saint Joseph Island and the Tatton Ranch.

Spencer: Well, as I said, oil was discovered on Fulton Beach in 1947. We enjoyed a nice tax picture. However, about 1958, due to proration we were cut to eight producing days, and as a result our income from oil was cut appreciably, and the evaluation engineers hired by the county counted on income from oil producing properties

more than any other thing. So, as a result, there was a cut in the income in taxes from oil properties and a threat of an even greater cut. In the meantime, the governmental agencies, the county and the school district, had gotten used to spending this easy money, and they didn't like the idea. So about this time they hired evaluation engineers to place values on all real estate in Aransas County, and in addition to the oil values. This met with some serious objection, but later the Supreme Court of Texas upheld the authority of the counties to contract for such purposes, and as a result, when these evaluation engineers were hired and did their job, they raised the values on certain properties in Aransas County beyond what the owners thought the properties should be valued. Two of these people who were financially able to contest the matter sought relief in the courts, that is, the owners of Saint Joseph Island and the owners of the Tatton Ranch. However, even though at least one of these cases were taken to the Supreme Court, it met defeat in the trial court in Aransas County and the Court of Civil Appeals and in the Supreme Court. Actually, what you have is an unpopular type of case, especially when the school district is involved. So at this time, then, I would say, for the most part, the owners of property in Aransas County, including landowners and the owners of oil

properties, are fairly well satisfied with the values that are put on their properties, and I might say that Aransas County and the school district have a joint board of equalization, and about every three years a new evaluation is put on the property. That coupled with the fact that we have had a rising market in real estate, and even though some of the values may be too high by the time they are put on there by the board of equalization, it is not very long before they will sell for that price. In connection with the Tatton Ranch law suit, the taxing agencies won, of course, but to the way of thinking to some people including myself, they won the battle and lost the war. Inasmuch as the Tattons lost the law suit, they conceived of the idea of giving their land to the United States of America Department of the Interior similar to the acquisition of the San Antonio Loan and Trust Company lands which were acquired in the mid-thirties and are now the Aransas County Wildlife Refuge. According to my understanding in this incidence, all the minerals were reserved and the leasing for grazing rights, although it is supposed to be competitive, is handled in such a manner that only the successor to the San Antonio Loan and Trust Company graze cattle on the lands. In other words, while I think that the Tattons got when they gave 7,000 acres to the Department of the Interior, they were able

to reserve the mineral rights, and they were able to at least reserve or control the grazing rights, and yet, at the same time, they were not only relieved of the payment of ad valorem taxes in the future, but they received an income tax deduction in connection with the gift to the United States. So it would not surprise me but what eventually all of the 33,000 acres of the Tatton Ranch in Aransas County will wind up in the hands of the Department of the Interior for an expansion of the Wildlife Refuge. As a matter of fact, to date already 7,000 acres have been given for that purpose. Of course, this does not meet with the approval of the people who live in Aransas County and the county officials and the officials of the school district. Really, it is not so much of a loss of the value of the property at the time of making of the gift, but they also lose the enhancement in value of the property, together with any improvements that would otherwise be put on it, and what this really amounts to is the population of Aransas County at this time is less than 10,000 people and it is my understanding that it has never been any larger than this. This puts too big of a burden on too few people to pay the tax burden of Aransas County, and, but for tax income from oil, we would be one of the poorest counties in the state of Texas.



Stephens: Mr. Spencer, if you have no objections, would you please give your opinion of those individuals who have played an influential role in the county since you've known it. I might even name the categories and let you give your response by name of the person or persons who fit this role of influence in the county. First of all, the county and city officials.

Spencer: Well, while I have no objection to giving you my opinion on these matters, and I do think that the possibility of my being sued for libel is slightly remote, and I'll also be modest and will make the exception to myself in any category, I certainly have a reputation for expressing my opinion freely, and so here goes. In the county long before my time, but probably even though I knew the gentlemen in person, there is no question but what W.H. Baldwin, who served as County Judge many times, was one of the leaders of this community. For the most part, as far as the courthouse is concerned, the man in the office of the County Judge has been the leader of all of the county officials, and consequently has been a leader in the community. I really don't know much about my father's administration for the reason that I was not here, and he was succeeded by B.S. Fox who, without question, was a leader in the community. Unfortunately, he was in office during the great depression.

Otherwise, he might have left many more things to be remembered by, but he was a kind man. He took care of the poor, the needy, and the unfortunate, and as I have said, there is no question that he was one of the leaders in the community. In a like manner I would say our present County Judge, John D. Wendell, is a community leader, and he has done and is doing an excellent job, and one of the factors that enters into it is that he has no outside interests or activities that detracts from his performance in office, and he has made a study of the problems of Aransas County and its people, and he is very well informed. Of course, I will say that any county official has a hard job when he attempts to perpetuate himself in office and still at the same time run the county efficiently. As to the other officials, we have had many of them that have died in office, meaning that they have spent many years there and were fine people, but by standards set in other counties I can't say that I think that any of them have been outstanding other than the fact that they perpetuated themselves in office. As to the mayor of the city of Rockport, which is and has been a thankless job, especially since the city of Rockport has never had any money to spend, except most recently, the one man in my opinion who did an outstanding job was Jack Blackwell,

who also ran the newspaper and was active in Chamber of Commerce work and promotion, and even his work was such a thankless job that his tenure in office resulted in the resignation of the entire city council, mayor and four aldermen. There have been some of the others that have done a few little things worthy of mention, but I can't put any of them in any outstanding class. We had W.B. Friend who acted as city secretary for many years who, in my opinion, did a good job, especially in view of the money that he didn't have to spend, and as to any of the others I don't really think any of them are worthy of mention.

Stephens: Okay. What about attorneys that you may have known here?

Spencer: Well, back there before my time there was Judge Baldwin who was an attorney, and he was principally known for having organized the Texas Land Title and Abstract Company, and his son, Henry Baldwin, of course, organized the Guaranty Title Company in Corpus Christi. Also in the old days there was an outstanding attorney by the name of E. Gordon Gibson, who was a Canadian. He was a very fine attorney--able and was very much in demand here and he left after the '19 hurricane and eventually would up in Laredo where he died just a few years ago. At this time we have practicing law here Mr.

Weldon Cabiness who is an outstanding attorney and has done well with his colleagues and judges. He is conservative by nature, but he is well thought of wherever known.

Stephens: Okay. Then the medicine folks--the physicians, the osteopaths, and others who have practiced here. Tell me about those, please.

Spencer: I think that Dr. Charles F. Cron, spelled C-r-o-n, was an outstanding man. There is no question but his education and experience before coming here was better than usual. We had one doctor here who was a graduate of Johns Hopkins University, Dr. Hildebrand, but he didn't stay here very long, and I am of the opinion that an outstanding man in our community is Dr. Elliot. I think that he is outstanding not only in his profession, but he has also been an outstanding citizen. He has been on the school board for more than twenty years. He has been an active boy scout leader, and in general he has been an outstanding citizen of Aransas County. We have a number of new doctors, by that I mean they haven't been here very long, and really, they haven't been here long enough for me to say whether they will be outstanding or not. You will be interested to know that in this small fishing village we have no less than twenty-five doctors, active, retired, and semi-retired. I have recently used the expression that if doctors

have any vices, Aransas County must have a whole lot of it, for they really like to come here and live.

Stephens: Then, do you know of any engineers who have contributed to the community?

Spencer: Certainly Fred M. Percival comes in that category. He with his father have been, or were, civil engineers and surveyors for probably a total number of eighty years. Part of this time, especially after the '19 hurricane, he had headquarters in Sinton and probably surveyed all of the Taft Ranch lands, and later on he was District Engineer for the state Highway Department of Texas with headquarters at Laredo. Bachelor, and after he retired from the Texas Highway Department after he was seventy-five years of age, he came back to Rockport and was active until his death when he was about eighty-four years of age. His contribution to engineering and surveying of Aransas County are invaluable.

Stephens: Have you known any architects who are worthy of mention?

Spencer: As far as I know we have never had any architects.

Stephens: Okay, Any other professions which should be covered, such as bankers?

Spencer: I think Mr. A.C. Glass is an outstanding banker. Of course, he is conservative in nature, and in all probability that's a compliment for a banker. He has operated the Heldenfels Bank ever since F.W. Heldenfels bought it

from Cyrus P. Lucas, and I suppose that Mr. Glass was working for Cyrus P. Lucas at the time that the bank was bought. Also continuing in his place and following his same policies is Mr. James A. Sorenson, Jr. who has certainly been a conservative banker and has contributed very much to the civic aspects of Aransas County. I might say that conservatism has been the keynote of both of them, and that was probably induced if not influenced by F. W. Heldenfels, Sr.

Stephens: How long have the Heldenfels owned the bank here?

Spencer: Since 1925.

Stephens: Do they own the savings and loan, also?

Spencer: No, sir, the Wallace family of Corpus Christi owns the branch of the United Savings Association which is located here.

Stephens: So those profits go out of the community. Do the savings and loans profits go out of the community? Do you have any stockholders here?

Spencer: Oh, they have a nominal amount of stockholders here. In fact, I'm one of them, but it's not a very big deal for me.

Stephens: What about influential shipbuilders you have known?

Spencer: Well, this being on the coast, shipbuilding being one of the things that has been done all of these years, we did have several shipbuilders that have contributed much to the community. Before my time, of course, there were

Heldenfels Brothers who built boats in World War I, and following that there was Chick Roberts, a member of one of the old families in Aransas County who built a number of boats, and he was a recognized shipbuilder. Also, Westergard, who was a naval architect in World War I and started the building of boats here in World War II, and was taken over by Rice Brothers, principally Mr. R.R. Rice, Sr., and, of course, there is no question but what Mr. Rice is an outstanding shipbuilder, having built boats for World War II, and, of course, at this time, in my opinion, an outstanding firm at building ships is Rockport Yacht & Supply, which is owned by T. Noah Smith, Jr. of San Antonio, and I am sure that everyone that knows anything about the operation gives a large amount of the credit of the success to Albert Silchenstedt, S-i-l-c-h-e-n-s-t-e-d-t, a Norwegian who is a naval architect. It is outstanding that the Japanese buy shrimp boats that were built in Rockport, and I don't mean just once, but several times. Furthermore, the Rockport Yacht & Supply have built this type of boat, steel hull, designed by Silchenstedt, that have gone all over the world. An interesting aspect of this is what I refer to as the back yard boat industry. For many, many years, when the shrimp boats that were built were wooden hull, they were built by local people who

were carpenters, and such boats were built in their back yards, and they did a good job of fishing in the bays. Later on it became necessary to build bigger boats with steel hulls that go to the Gulf.

Stephens: Okay. Another category: developers of tourist facilities.

Spencer: Well, the first developer of tourist facilities that I knew personally was Fred Hunt and his father from Beeville, who came here and built Hunt's Court, and incidentally, it is still in operation, and is operated by Jimmy Hunt, who is the son of Fred Hunt. They built the first tourist courts here in 1928. Hunting and fishing has played a very large part in the history of Aransas County. As a matter of fact, it was a duck hunting trip in 1916 to the Port Bay Hunting Club where Francis J. Heeny of Arizona and California borrowed money from William Kent and Charles R. Crane, which gave them a mortgage on the Kent-Crane properties, which I have told you about which figured importantly in the Aransas County Airport and the Fulton Beach oil field. In 1928 it was duck hunting on Matagorda Island that attracted Toddlee Lee Wynne and Clint Mercheson. Mr. Toddlee Lee Wynne, in my opinion, is one of the biggest developers of tourist facilities in the Sea Gun over at Lamar which was formerly Mills Wharf. This is the nicest and largest complete complex which offers boat trips to



the whooping crane winter home, goose leases in the Tivoli area, fishing trips daily by charter boats and by the whooping crane, swimming pools, activities for children, for the families. Some of the others that have contributed along these lines have been Jack Sanders, who built the Sand Dollar Motel, which is almost as large as the Sea Gun, and years ago we had a mule trader from Missouri, Walter Bean, who has built more tourist courts in Aransas County than any other one individual. However, Mr. Bean is now dead and moved away from here before he died. Vic Dooley, who built the Tropic Motel, is one of the first to build something just a little bit better, and while it is not in the class of our three deluxe luxury motels--the Sea Gun, the Sand Dollar, and Key Allegro--it is a little bit better than the average that exists in Rockport. There are many, many small tourist accommodations which are operated by a man and his wife or one family, and, of course, due to the size, I don't believe that any of them are outstanding.

Stephens: Out of the many citizens you have had in Aransas County, you have had some to go on to greater things, if climbing to more prestigious positions is a greater thing. This morning Mrs. Wendell told about some artists who have gained national reputations. Can you think of any persons who have a national reputation that brings

credit to Aransas County?

Spencer: Well, there's no question that while in this category Mrs. Connie Hagar, as an ornithologist, deserved that credit. Mr. and Mrs. Hagar came here from Corsicana, Texas, in 1936 and built Hagar's Cottages. Sometime after that Mrs. Hagar, who had no technical education or training in the field, became a bird watcher, and at this time enjoys a national, as well as international, reputation as an ornithologist. She has spotted more rare birds and has contributed more to the flights of birds in this area than any other person that I know of, and there have been many people attracted to this area on account of Mrs. Hagar's activities. Mrs. Hagar is well into her eighties and at this time is not enjoying the best of health, but she has been very active up until this time. As to other people, I don't recall anybody in particular. As far as I know, we have only two students that have graduated from high school and and have received their doctor's degree, one of them being Dorothy Russel, who later taught English at the University of Texas, and another one being Monte Rouquette, Jr. who went to A&M and who is an agronomist. There have been quite a few, of course, who have masters degrees, and some have taught in colleges, but their reputations, I'm sure are confined strictly to the state of Texas, not national. We have had many people, and have

many people who have retired here to live, who had very wonderful and interesting lives before they came here, and who contributed a little to the life of the community, especially in making it interesting to live here, but I certainly wouldn't call them Rockport products. One of these men was Joseph Briggs Weaver, a graduate of Cornell in the class of 1903, a naval architect who spent many years in Washington working for the government, who traveled all over the world, including France and Russia, in some capacity for the United States of America, who came here about 1946 to spend his remaining days here, and who died here some fifteen years later. As I say, we have many interesting people who live here, but they're not Rockport products.