

An Oral History Tape Transcription

Of

Betsy Webber

Interviewing

Don McLeod

February 19, 1975

BW: Friday, February 19, 1975, at Mont Belvieu City Hall. City Manager, Don McLeod is being interviewed by Betsy Webber of the *Baytown Sun* for the Baytown Historical Tape Collection.

BW: Don, I understand that you are willing to release the information that will be on this tape for use by the Baytown Municipal Library and other people who might be interested in historical research about Mont Belvieu and this area. Is that correct?

DM: Yes.

BW: Ok. Don, you've been in Mont Belvieu a long time. What was it that ever brought you here in the first place?

DM: I was sent here. I was working for Wilson Supply Company and they opened up store here and sent me out here to manage it.

BW: Where were you working originally when they sent you out here?

DM: Beaumont.

BW: Tell us a little bit about that business here. And when did they send you?

DM: Come out twenty-eighth day of August of 1929.

BW: What was here when you got here?

DM: Lots of dust, lots of activity, and no rooms, and no beds.

BW: Where did you stay?

DM: Slept on the floor.

BW: Where?

DM: Uh ... We had a ... they was building a store and a bunk on a cot. When I come out here and we had camp cots set up there in the store. Slept in that store for about a month, I guess, till finally got a house out here. Meantime, family lived in Baytown in an apartment over there.

BW: Ok. How long were you with Wilson Supply?

DM: February 15, 1922, to February 15, 1950.

BW: Well what was your job with them?

DM: Store manager.

BW: What kind of goods did they sell?

DM: Oilfield supplies

BW: Well I suppose you more-or-less watched the oil field in Mont Belvieu develop, didn't you?

DM: Ya, it was going pretty good in that year. But they bought the first deep well in 1928, latter part of '28. Yountlee Oil Company brought in deep production and everybody started drilling, and I ...

BW: Did you say 'John Lee?'

DM: Yountlee. Yountlee Oil Company.

BW: How do you spell it?

DM: Y-O-U-N-T-L, double E.

BW: Oh.

DM: Yountlee Oil Company.

BW: OK, they brought in the first deep well, huh? In 1928?

DM: Um-hmm.

BW: And did that sort of—was that sort of when the boom began in Mont Belvieu?

DM: That's when the boom began, ya.

BW: What companies were here then?

DM: Let's see, there was Humphries Corporation, which was later Texas Gulf, Yountlee Oil Company, Mills Bennett ...ahh...let's see ... Texas Company, Gulf Oil.

BW: Mills Bennett has been here all through the years, hadn't it?

DM: Ya, been here one of the longest.

BW: One of the longest ones.

DM: They've been here ever since things started. Still here.

BW: Didn't Sinclair have some leases here?

DM: Yes, that's right the ... Sinclair. Sinclair Oil Company. They had lease all on the Wilbourne.

And Sun Oil Company, too.

BW: Sun Oil? Yes. Sun Oil. Ya, we got a Sun Oil Road I suppose came from that...area.

Have you noticed much change in the business life and services in Mont Belvieu in the years that you've been here?

DM: Well, in what? Just what way do you mean actually?

BW: Ok, when was the time that there were the most businesses here? I believe there was a doctor who was here at one time.

DM: Oh ya we had Dr. Sherry was here, and I guess ...

BW: Dr. Bridges was here, too, wasn't he?

DM: Dr. Bridges come in...came in after Dr. Sherry more-or-less retired. I guess from '30 ... I guess all during the '30's, and up till World War II started, it was pretty good out here and had business quite fairly steady.

BW: How long did the oil boom last?

DM: Well that boom here lasted uh ... oh let's see, they were still celebrating in the late '30's. I guess that'd be enough to last about a good 10 years. It was fairly steady off and on, and sometimes be several rigs running and there would be times there wouldn't be very many. But off and on, I would say, all during the '30's it was pretty good.

BW: Do you know anything about the production out here? The quantity or quality?

DM: No, and I couldn't tell you. A long time, though, they had on the full ration we've had cuts and cut backs to around ... I don't know just exactly what it would be. I couldn't tell you. I should know because I handled figures on it all during that time, but it has been several years back.

BW: Ya, I guess so. Um now, there were the oil businesses here, and now today, it's not so much oil as it is storage.

DM: That's right. [Unidentifiable noise]

BW: Tell me about the transition from the actual oil drilling and oil production to the storage. Tell me what you know about that.

DM: Well they ... Storage is on top of the salt, which is not good for oil. Cause you don't find oil in a salt dome, except here at Barbers Hill the dome hangs over and there's some production. You hear? But these storage wells, they have to be entirely on being in a solid body of salt. Wash that out to where there comes a storage space that they can put gasses in or oil, whenever they have the oil. And that comes by – it's on top of the salt dome, which far as known, is supposed to be one of the biggest salt domes in the world. But Russia probably screwed that. But as far as known, and this is the most perfectly shaped one. This is shaped just exactly like a toadstool. Solid body coming up, and then...

BW: Does anybody know how deep it goes down?

DM: They'd supposed to had the chinks keep digging at the bottom going down, but ... No, I ... nobody ever decided to go that deep. I don't how deep it goes. No telling.

BW: Do you know – do you remember when the first storage well was reamed out?

DM: Ya.

BW: When was it?

DM: Back in the ... si- ; fifty- ; must have been about '52 or '53. Company out of Tulsa, Oklahoma, put the first one down with a railroad track on it. On the land that was owned by Mrs. Thelma Parr.

BW: Thelma Parr?

DM: Mrs. Thelma Parr and her sons.

BW: What did they store in it?

DM: Propane tank.

BW: LPG?

DM: LPG gas, yes. It's now owned by Texas Eastern there. They bought 'em out.

BW: I thought that Warren Petroleum was the oldest and the largest company here. Is that right?

DM: It's the largest, but it's not the oldest because Texas ... I think the name of that company ... I'm not going to say for sure. But it seemed to me like it was Texas Natural Gas Company out of Tulsa, Oklahoma, who put the first well out here.

BW: Is that what mostly what Warren uses their facilities here for, storage?

DM: Ya, storage. Gas. LPG gas.

BW: Do you recall there being any natural gas around here when the wells came in?

DM: Ya.

BW: Was it ever piped or conserved in any way?

DM: No, uh-uh. Wasn't enough of it for that. Set a flare on it and got rid of it that away.

BW: Some of the wells, the oil wells, are still producing here, aren't they?

DM: Ya, we still got a bunch of health out of them there at deep production out here.

BW: Ok, we've got, let's see, Texas Eastern was here before Warren, would you say?

DM: Texas Natural Gas was.

BW: Yes Texas Natural Gas was, but they're not here anymore.

DM: No. Warren was next to them, to the best of my memory, to think Warren was the second company that come in here.

BW: Ok, and what are some of the others?

DM: They had Texas Eastern and Tenneco ...

BW: Kenneco? Conoco?

DM: No, Tenneco.

BW: Oh, Tenneco. Ya.

DM: They had Tenneco and Texas Eastern and Arco, which is ... there used to be a company called Arco Chemical.

BW: Um-hmm. How about Diamond Shamrock?

DM: Diamond Shamrock.

BW: And City Services is one of the newer ones, aren't they? The fraction, fractionation ...

DM: Yes. They just have fractionation plant out there, they don't have any storage. And incidentally, Warren has a fractionary plant also.

BW: Um-hmm. Um, this place, this hill today is – you might say – enlaced with pipelines, underground pipelines. Have you, uh, followed that development with any interest?

DM: No, not particularly, except from taxes I owe.

BW: Oh? How is that?

DM: The more pipelines, the more taxes you get. Goes to the school or for the city.

BW: Ok, and I believe that brings us to the you being the tax assessor-collector for the Barbers Hill District. How did ... did you have that position while you were still working for Wilson?

DM: Uh-hmm.

BW: Um-hmm. And that was what year?

DM: Well, I ran for trustee in 1930, and I was elected to the board in April of 1930. And, at that time, we'd just been made an independent school district. It had been a common school district up till that time. And we built a new building out here. And the tax assessor, uh, Sheriff's office was a tax assessor and collector for the county, and also for the school district. And for some reason or another, Sheriff's Department didn't want to handle school taxes, so the board asked me if I was to handle them, and I told them I would. So I resigned from the board and was appointed as Tax Assessor and Collector for the district in August of 1930.

BW: And you were appointed by the board?

DM: Um-hmm. Never had to run for it, I was always appointed.

BW: Hmm. You never did run for it.

DM: Uh-uh.

BW: Is that about the end of your political career? Your one term as a Trustee on the Board?

DM: Ya, that and the Democratic Party, which is not political in any sense of the word as far as I was concerned.

BW: Ok, you were the Precinct Chairman? How long?

DM: Let's see, from 19 ... I would say from 1948 or 1949. About forty-nine I would imagine. So '49 up till '68 or '69.

BW: What precinct?

DM: Four.

BW: Precinct Four. Chambers County Precinct Four.

DM: Um-hmm.

BW: And your voting place at ... was where?

DM: Mont Belvieu.

BW: I know, but the City Hall, the school, or the ...

DM: Over at the courthouse.

BW: Ok, at the sub courthouse? When was that built? Do you remember?

DM: The pink courthouse?

BW: Um-hmm.

DM: John Cobb went for his 10 year commission, but I couldn't tell you the year to save my soul, so... Cornerstone plate would, but I couldn't tell you.

BW: Hmm.

DM: I do remember that.

BW: You do remember its being constructed.

DM: Oh ya, still remember its construction. In fact, I was here when they didn't even have a courthouse.

BW: Had to go all the way to Anahuac?

DM: That's right.

BW: What were the roads like when you came here in the early days?

DM: Well it's been – I promised I won't tell you just exactly how bad they were – but they weren't very good.

BW: What were they, dirt roads?

DM: Ya. To tell you how bad they were, when you left you had to go over to Anahuac. If you had real good luck, you could go from here to Dayton without getting stuck. And then from Dayton to Liberty, it wasn't so good, but you could get over it. But from Liberty to Anahuac, that was something else again. And I have had to go over to Baytown – not all over Baytown – but to get on that road from Baytown to Crosby.

BW: Um-hmm.

DM: And Crosby to Beaumont, and come back in from Beaumont.

BW: Good night!

DM: To get to there.

BW: Great day! There was a bridge over the Trinity River that was kind of famous for being ... or, kind of infamous. Do you remember that bridge? I think it swayed. It was a kind of a high bridge.

DM: You mean over at Liberty?

BW: Um-hmm.

DM: Ya. Crossed it a gillion times.

BW: How did people mostly travel, in cars?

DM: Um-hmm. I'd sure ask for once you rode a horse. Have better luck. (Laughter) Oh, managed to ride mine to get around part of the time. He was either up deep in water, or up deep in dirt one of them, dust. One or the other.

BW: Hmm.

DM: They put in and spread out some shell, and they finally got some roads we could get over.

BW: Shell roads first, and then later on, well I suppose highway, State Highway 146 was a real improvement.

DM: That's right. That came in during World War II. And the next one, then, was I-10 they finally got come in.

BW: And that was after World War II.

DM: That was after World War II, ya. But it make a difference in going to Anahuac. Go over there now 30 minutes, where it used to take, with good luck, three or four hours, maybe three or four days.

BW: Down here, I see that there was a time when you were a reporter for *The Baytown Sun*.

DM: Ha, ha!

BW: That would've been in '31 I believe, is that right?

DM: No, let's see, we started ... that'd been, let's see when ... Kept statistics for 'em during the Wanda years.

BW: During the what years?

DM: During the George Wanda years.

BW: Oh, ok.

DM: '41 through '45, I think it was.

BW: You also reported for what?

DM: Barbers Hill games times. I was kind of interested in the contract we – back in those days, up 'til 1946, let's see '46 ... up 'til '46, we didn't play, we didn't have lights to play at our games Friday afternoon. I keep their statistics on them. Played more on Friday afternoon than Friday night. Fred Hartman and I, we'd go to the games. Ganders games. After four or six, I had to put a stop to that.

That's... After getting paid by Barbers Hill School for his tax assessor and collector, I couldn't real well not take it.

BW: Um-hmm.

DM: So from then on, I didn't get to do much statistics for him, except after our season ended once in a while I got to put it out.

BW: You have kept a very lively interest in the sports program in, uh, Mont Belvieu, haven't you?

DM: Um-hmm.

BW: How, uh, what ... How have sports developed out here? What has been the big thing? What still is the big thing?

DM: Pride and winning.

BW: What?

DM: Pride.

BW: Pride? Oh, and I mean what sport? Pride in winning is what has made it go?

DM: Yes, it's that.

BW: Ok. And what sports were particularly interesting to the community, and to you?

DM: Well, football the main one thing there is. Period. But we've also had some pretty good basketball teams, and we've also always had a pretty fair track team. Now we're playing baseball. Now we played baseball one year we back down the road when Coach Dan Ellis was here.

BW: Um ...

DM: Football and basketball have been have been the two outstanding sports.

BW: Haven't you been rather faithful in your attendance at the games?

DM: Only thing kept me from going when I was sick. Couldn't get there.

BW: What was your record? What was your record of game attendance?

DM: What for?

BW: Do you go, have you been to most of the Eagles' games?

DM: I guess I've seen all the Eagles' games ... I would say off-hand, maybe since 1931, which was the first year they had a football team. I've seen all their games with the exception of about 10 or 12.

BW: Hmm. And you did go to Gander games.

DM: Oh ya.

BW: And, let's see, I believe that you didn't miss but three games.

DM: I miss three games that time I keep statistics for 'em over there.

BW: Um-hmm. From '41 to '45?

Do you still try to make the Eagles games?

DM: Ya. I missed one last year. Sick and couldn't go.

BW: When did the Barbers Hill begin to be pretty strong and start winning its games, or was it always on top?

DM: Well, no. When we first started out we was kind of underdogs. We had ... first year we had a team, started from scratch to [indecipherable] and Cedar Bayou had [indecipherable] pretty faithful every year.

BW: Um-hmm.

DM: Every year we got a little bit better and a little bit better, and long about the fourth or fifth year we began to winning. And we've been more-or-less on top ever since.

BW: Um-hmm. Now you did some coaching, I understand, during the war when there was not many coaches.

DM: Ya, I wanted to ... we didn't have a coach and um, I shouldn't say this, but we had a board that didn't particularly care if we had athletics or not. And to keep the situation going, I got permission from Mr. Jensen to ... boys come ask me if I'd coach 'em.

BW: Which is Jensen is that?

DM: J.J. Jensen, he was Superintendent at that time.

BW: Um-hmm.

DM: Asked if it would be alright with him if I coached, and he said ya it would be ok. So I coached for two years till we got Mr. Underwood. Mr. Underwood came here right after I did.

BW: What was Mr. Underwood's name? First name?

DM: Wilburn.

BW: Wilburn?

DM: Um-hmm.

BW: W-I-L-B-U-R-N?

DM: Ya.

BW: And he was Superintendent?

DM: No, he was a coach. He was hired as coach. He was later Superintendent, yes. At that time, he was hired to coach. And I'll tell you I was darn glad to see him get here.

BW: Um-hmm.

DM: Cause we just going out football, and the basketball, and we didn't have basketball courts. And I wasn't very much on coaching basketball.

BW: Um-hmm.

DM: Or football either as far as I was concerned. But I did want to keep, didn't ... I ... 'cause once you let something like that die down, it's awful hard to get it started up again.

BW: Well how'd you get mixed up at Hull-Daisetta? How was it that you helped the coach, the team over there?

DM: Cause I didn't know, another one of them cases where we started out from scratch. First year they had coach there name was Green. I can't remember his first name. We had two boys that played football, and three boys on it that had ever seen football game. The rest of 'em didn't even know what it was. Had to be able to re-structure ...

BW: What year was that?

DM: That was 1923.

BW: Um-hmm.

DM: Then the following year in 1924, we got a coach from up north. A man by the name of Wones. W-O-N-E-S. John L. Wones. W-O-N-E-S. He was really good.

BW: Um-hmm.

DM: He put Hull-Daisetta ... He started Hull-Daisetta off on that winning streak they had.

BW: Um-hmm.

DM: I helped out.

BW: How long did you help with the Hull-Daisetta?

DM: From '23 through '26.

BW: Well, that's kind of a piece down the road, isn't it? How did you get over there? Did you stay here and ...

DM: I was working ... I started for Wilson Supply over there.

BW: Oh you did? You had a store in the Hull-Daisetta?

DM: And they moved ... they moved me from Hull-Daisetta to Beaumont.

BW: Hmm.

DM: And I moved from Beaumont over here.

BW: Um-hmm. So your first ties then, here, were in Hull-Daisetta. And you went from Hull-Daisetta to Beaumont?

DM: That's right.

BW: And then from there to, um, Mont Belvieu.

DM: That's right.

BW: Um-hmm. Well, while we're tracing your beginnings, where were you born? Uh, what town?

DM: Born in Bancroft, Louisiana.

BW: Bancroft?

DM: Uh-hmm.

BW: You're a coon then, huh?

DM: Ya.

BW: Ok, what ...

DM: I almost be sittin with my sister standing on the back porch just throw a tin can into Texas right on the banks of the river.

BW: Just knew that. Uh, what, the date. What was your birthdate?

DM: September 30, 1900. And at about five days after 1900 storm, I've been just about that far behind ever since.

BW: You don't have any trouble keeping up with how old you are, you just ...

DM: No, all I have to do is look at the calendar ...

BW: Look at the calendar.

DM: Look at the calendar, and there I am.

BW: You can't lie about that, no way. Ok, and from Louisiana, you went to Beaumont?

DM: No. I went from Louisiana we moved to Houston in 1908. That's where I went to school in nine... Graduated from Old Central High School in January of 1919, and the darn thing burned down in February.

BW: Good night.

DM: Didn't have to burn it down to get me out, but they almost did.

BW: Ok. And then, after you finished high school, where did you, what did you do?

DM: I went to work.

BW: Where?

DM: In Houston first. Supply Company, Girtten Building and Packing Company. G-I-R-T-E-N. Worked for them from 19-- ... well actually, first job I had while I was still in high school, in January I went to work for the U.S. Government, I drove Camp Logan and the quarter mesh warehouse out there. I worked there for about six months, then I went to work for Girtten. I worked for Girtten from 1922, at which time I went to work for Wilson Supply.

BW: Is that when they sent you to Beaumont?

DM: No, they sent me to Hull-Dais- They sent me to Orange Field to begin with. I was over there at Orange Field for about five months, then they moved me to, into Houston, then sent me from Houston out to Hull-Daisetta.

BW: Um-hmm. Ok ... uh, somewhere along there you got married, didn't you?

DM: Ya.

BW: When?

DM: Got married in August 8, 1923.

BW: Twenty-three. And what's your wife's name?

DM: Annie Mae. A-N-N-I-E, M-A-E.

BW: Ok, and you ...

DM: Same woman.

BW: Same one all the time, huh? That's good. Where was she from?

DM: Mineola, Texas.

BW: Mineola, Texas? I thought Mineola was in Louisiana.

DM: No, Mineola's in New York.

BW: Oh really?

DM: Ya. There's a Mineola in New York.

BW: Everywhere. We got one everywhere, ok. Alright, and you have how many children?

DM: Have two.

BW: Ok, who are they?

DM: Well, the oldest girl is ... was my wife's cousin. We adopted her; her mother died. We took her in. Name's Theresa. And the natural child is Minnie Bob.

BW: Minnie Bob?

DM: M-I-N-N-I-E, B-O-B.

BW: This is the ...

DM: Named after her grandmothers. Annie Mae's mother's name was Minnie, and my mother's name was Roberta, and everybody called her Bob.

BW: Well that's ... What is Theresa's last name then?

DM: Moseley. M-O-S-E-L-E-Y.

BW: Does she live in Barbers Hill?

DM: No she lives in Monahans.

BW: Monahans?

DM: She works for the school system as one of the principal out there.

BW: Well, good. And Minnie Bob is a ... She lives in Barbers Hill.

DM: Um-hmm.

BW: Ok.

DM: And we got a, I guess you could say adopted grandchild that ... granddaughter that's going to A&M. Gonna graduate this year.

BW: Good.

DM: As a vet.

BW: Mmm. Ok, um, during the war, it's my understanding that you were on the ration board?

DM: That's right.

BW: And draft board. Is that right?

DM: I was on the ration board all during the war.

BW: Where? Where was the office, in Anahuac?

DM: Anahuac. [Inaudible noise]

BW: Can you ... You remember some of the things that you had to do? I know there were ration stamps for gasoline and ...

DM: Ration stamps for gasoline, ration stamps for tires, and car and everything else.

BW: Did you issue the, um, ration stamp books, or did you collect 'em, or what did the board do?

DM: We issued 'em.

BW: They were stamp books, weren't they? I believe you had to have stamps for shoes, too, didn't you?

DM: I don't know; the only thing we handled were automotive stuff. Go over to Anahuac for the gas, and tires and car. That's all we handled over there.

BW: How 'bout that draft board you were on? Uh, is it board number 86?

DM: Um-hmm. I believe that's right.

BW: Was that during World War II?

DM: Ya.

BW: And uh ...

DM: It was after World War II.

BW: Oh.

DM: I didn't go to work for 'em over there, I don't know [indecipherable] till after Dr. Sherry quit.

BW: And all this time you still, let's see know, uh, were, I, ya you still were working for Wilson.

DM: I worked for Wilson up to February, uh, 1950.

BW: Um-hmm. And so, all during World War II you were working for them, and you also had these other jobs.

DM: Ya.

BW: Um, did they provide supplemental income, or were they just um, these dollar a year jobs?

DM: It wasn't even a dollar a year job. Didn't even get a "thanks" job.

BW: I would imagine both those jobs were fairly thankless jobs.

DM: Not only thankless, but made all the...made all the neighbors mad. I thought I had that old ration book in here. I'm sure I got it someplace, um...

BW: And, somehow or another, you had to do with selling license plates. When was that?

DM: Heh. Don't bring that headache up.

BW: In Anahuac did you sell them, or over here?

DM: No, I ... over here. Old Judge [G---?], Jan [G---?] were judge out here for years.

BW: Justice of the Peace?

DM: Um-hmm. And he sold, he sold license plates for all the, uh, the Sheriff's Department or Sheriff's Deputy, sold 'em. And when Judge Nick retired, Sam Scherer wished it off on me. He was ... he was a Sheriff at that time; he wished it off on me.

BW: Sam Scherer?

DM: Um-hmm. S-C-H-E-R-E-R.

BW: He was a Sheriff.

DM: He wished it off on me. He was Sheriff, ya. He wished it off on me. I had it from then on, up till 'bout four years ago, I guess. I don't know how long it's been since.

BW: That would be about '71, huh?

DM: Ya, about '71.

BW: Let's see, and you started that – was it before the war, or when?

DM: Ya, it was before the war. There was uh, I must have started selling those things back in ... '38 or '39.

BW: Good night! '38 till '71. Did you ever sell poll tax?

DM: Sell poll tax?

BW: Ya, don't you remember for a while ...

DM: I used to accept the application from 'em down in Anahuac.

BW: Well, you know for a while you had to pay poll tax.

DM: Ya.

BW: Did you take that?

DM: I took that and sent it [indecipherable 0:32:48.8] down with an application.

BW: You took the money and the application?

DM: I took the application and mailed it to Anahuac and then mailed the poll tax.

BW: Did you, you didn't, let's see, didn't you write the receipts out for the poll tax.

DM: Ya.

BW: Then when people paid you. I guess this ... they came ... people over here who wanted to pay their poll tax came to you, huh?

DM: Ya.

BW: Ok. Now, somewhere along in here the Chambers County Water Control and Improvement District Number 1 was set up.

DM: 1948.

BW: '48, that's the year Baytown consolidated. Before that, how did people get water?

DM: We had a pump down at 1st Ave. Ben Trumpford, the Trumpford Brothers, they were teaming contractors here. Ben put in a well ...

BW: Teaming contractors, did you say?

DM: Um-hmm.

BW: How to you sp ... what kind of contract is that?

DM: Hauling out here in the oilfield.

BW: Oh! T-E-A-M-I-N-G.

DM: Team. Nine hundred mules, and about that many niggers.

BW: Hmm.

DM: Excuse me, I should say, 'colored people.'

BW: Black.

DM: Uh, and he put in a ... he dug a well out here, dug a storage tank down there, and he laid pipes all over town everybody wanted. He furnished water at the time the water district wasn't here.

BW: Did the water district buy his system?

DM: Um-hmm.

BW: Um-hmm. Uh, what about the sewer service?

DM: Sewer service went in in 1949. Incidentally, the water district didn't start selling water till '49. It was formed in 1948, but it didn't get off the ground till 1949.

BW: Um-hmm. And then, and they did have the sewer service at that time, too?

DM: Um-hmm.

BW: Did they put in, did they have a bond issued?

DM: Ya.

BW: Bond election? Do you remember how much that first bond election was?

DM: I think it was \$360,000, but I wouldn't swear to it.

BW: Ok, and that, was that for water and sewer?

DM: Water and sewer.

BW: And it was within the bounds of the water district.

DM: Um-hmm.

BW: Ok. Now what was your relationship to the water district?

DM: I was a Tax Assessor/Collector for 'em, I was Secretary. Took the [indecipherable]

BW: Ok. And that was from 1948 to the end of ...

DM: Went to work in November of 1948, and with 'em up to February of 197...1, at which time the city took over.

BW: Ok, and I believe all this time there was a, um, fairly reasonable tax rate. And evaluations were pretty low, too. I understand your ... it was a dollar per \$100 at first, and then it increased to \$1.30?

DM: Water district never did increase theirs.

BW: It was always ...

DM: A dollar-hundred.

BW: What about the school?

DM: Well the school district went up and down. Some years was up, some years was down. I couldn't tell you too much about it. Which way it went on a map.

BW: Do you think \$1.30 was about as much as it got while you were Tax Assessor?

DM: Probably. Up till the latter year, the latter years probably went more than that.

BW: Um-hmm. Ok. Uh, were you tax assessor when the \$1.6 million bond issued for the high school on I-10 was, uh, was voted?

DM: Ya.

BW: Um, how did ... what year was that?

DM: 1969, I believe. No wait. That's not 1969 ... it must have been 19 ...

BW: It was before 1966, I ... sometime I knew.

DM: Ya. It's sixty ... It was either '65 or '66 they voted that bond. Cause I was relieved of my job as Tax Assessor/Collector in 1968, so I know good and well it was before that.

BW: Um-hmm.

DM: I think it was either the latter part of '55, I mean '65, or '66 that they voted that.

BW: Um-hmm. Ok. And, uh, did you know anything about the decision to buy land down there on Eagle Drive?

DM: I know the school looked at several tracts of land for 'em to decide on that one in order for 'em-- ; I think brothers from Houston.

BW: It's 75 acres, isn't it?

DM: Yes ma'am.

BW: Ok. You know, every once in a while on Mont Belvieu, people talk about it, uh, moving off the hill, you know, and that it's dangerous to live here. What's your opinion about the hazards of living in Mont Belvieu?

DM: Well I don't even worry about it myself. I'm kinda, more-or-less, a hard-shell Baptist, I guess. Although I belong to the Methodist Church, I think when my times comes, it won't make a difference where I am or where I was, I'm done. That's it. Period.

BW: You think you gonna move off the hill?

DM: Nope. Not unless God comes down and moves me.

BW: Where do you live?

DM: Over on Eagles ... I mean on Texas Avenue, 1715 Texas Avenue. The east side of the hill over there.

BW: Uh, when did you build your house?

DM: 1950.

BW: Ok. And you do own your property in the town.

DM: Um-hmm.

BW: I guess like everybody else out here you'd sell to a high bidder, huh?

DM: If they give me what ... they give me enough for money, I'd sure sell it to 'em. Not because I'm afraid of what's gonna happen, but ...

BW: You like money.

DM: Well, what's the use of sittin' out there all by yourself?

BW: I know that's right.

DM: The way I look at it, if they want to buy 'em all, then they might well buy mine, too.

BW: [Laughs] That's right.

DM: Course it ... the fact of the matter, uh, course it's been dangerous to live out here in Barbers Hill ever since there was oilfields cause the wells they might want to blow out, catch on fire, and cause trouble, but ... that's all part of the games.

BW: Um-hmm. While you were Tax Assessor/Collector of the Barbers Hill School District, did you ever run across any famous names of people on the tax rolls?

DM: Like what?

BW: Like Alan Ladd, or Greer Garston, or Julia Slarosa, or John Meacham?

DM: Well, I knew John Meacham.

BW: Who was he?

DM: Well, his daddy was teams contractor for Liberty. John had ups and downs at Lost Lake. Oilfield down there.

BW: He was an oil man, huh?

DM: Um-hmm. He was an oil man. Judas Wilson was on the tax roll for the Yantz royalty interest.

BW: Hmm.

DM: So was Mr. Stein. I managed the garters put out by Stein.

BW: Really? Remember his first name?

DM: Hmm? Oh, Frank I believe, but I wouldn't swear to it.

BW: Well how 'bout Greer Garson?

DM: She owns some royalty interest, too.

BW: And Alan Ladd?

DM: Alan Ladd, I never did hear ... never did know him on tax rolls.

BW: Um-hmm.

DM: Unless he been on that here lately, and that might have been, 'cause that's a big tax dodge by that royalty up there.

BW: Is that right?

DM: If you can get that depletion on that thing, that really ... really saves you some money.

BW: I understand that, between 1929 and 1966, the Barbers Hill School District grew from 480 to 2,051. Does that sound pretty near right to you?

DM: In the schools?

BW: Um-hmm.

DM: I think that that 2,000 ... I think that's kinda high.

BW: Um-hmm. About how many do you think there was? Uh, maybe that's the number of tax payers. That's probably what it would be.

DM: Might have been probably. Might have been them taxpayers. I think the school system is what's ...

BW: Took in Cove and, and Bay School Districts at one time.

DM: Ya.

BW: When was that?

DM: Oh, back about, uh, late '30's: '38, '39. Maybe even longer than that.

BW: Um-hmm. That must have been the number on the tax roll.

DM: Ya because I, well I'll tell you we just lacked about half a school for it to be double A.

[Knocking in background]

BW: When?

DM: I say we lack just ...

BW: I know you do now. Um-hmm.

DM: We're liable to make ... the next city kicked up to double A, I don't know.

BW: Ya, uh, Mr. Farmer said at the board meeting the other night that it takes two years because of the ... they decide what two years they'll pick, and it'll have to be next year and the year after that that they'll have to maintain that rating. OK. After that water district was taken in by the city, you became City Manager, didn't you?

DM: Uh-huh.

BW: Did your duties change much from what they had been before?

DM: Same. Not a whole lot of difference.

BW: Did you ever have anything to do with field operations for the water and sewer system?

DM: Nope, that was all outside. I had the inside job. I was the inside man to start with.

BW: Ok, and then I understand that you're an animal lover.

DM: I do like cats and dogs.

BW: How many you got?

DM: Frankly, too many. [Laughter] Oh let's see, I got two, three, four, seven ... I got seven dogs, and an unlimited amount of cats. I don't even know how many cats we've got. I got one stays in my office all the time. In backyard's two, and Minnie Bob has about ... she must have at least a dozen of them things. Cost more to feed them animals than it does to feed us.

BW: I guess so. You have any preference in the kind of dogs you like?

DM: Like dogs. Period. They've always been interesting to me.

BW: Just like dogs. Do you ever train your dogs?

DM: Nope. Never did have time to be trying to make a living training dogs. All my dogs are just pets, that's all I kept 'em for.

BW: Ok, do you like hunting or fishing? You ever done any of that?

DM: Nope. All I did all my life was hunt for business and fish for oilers. I was raised in the city and I didn't get to any of that when I was a kid, and I think if you don't get to do it while you're a kid, you never want to do it when you're grown. I was raised in Houston; I never did do any hunting or fishing even then.

BW: You worked with Mr. Pendergrass, uh, in Anahuac on the newspaper for a while, didn't you? Or did you? What were you doing when you and Mr. Pendergrass were associated? Preston Pendergrass was his son.

DM: Well he used to come over there and take in board meetings and at one time or another(45:10).

BW: What kind of board meetings?

DM: County

BW: Oh, county commissioners?

DM: Yes ma'am.

[Tape ends]

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[Tape 2 of 2]

BW: That's Preston Pendergrass?

DM: Um-hmm.

BW: Um-hmm.

DM: I'd been over somewhere, I don't know where I was, when I was coming down. So I'm standing on the side of the road, was run outta gas.

BW: Oh boy.

DM: I had to carry it back to Anahuac to get some gas.

BW: I bet he was really hacked off about that.

DM: He was very unhappy 'cause it was Fred Hartmann's car.

BW: [Laughs] You did some covering of games with Fred Hartmann, didn't you? Football games.

DM: Oh ya I did. Fred and I used to could make 'em all.

BW: Did you go with him sometimes? Ya.

DM: Then one time we ... this ... had a game over at Aldine, a district game I think, or semi-final or some quarter-final, I don't know. We set out to go over there, and Fred said he knew a short route to get there. We got where we could see the field lights, see the stadium lights, but we couldn't get there. We got there at the half. I bet we drove 50 miles out of the way trying to get to that blamed thing.

BW: In Aldine?

DM: Um-hmm. The best one on us, though, if you wanted a good one on us: when Hull-Daisetta had that hot streak going, they ran almost four consecutive years without losing a game.

BW: Um-hmm.

DM: In fact they lost the last district game in the fourth year is what they did.

BW: Um-hmm.

DM: Well, Fred and I'd been sweating it for two years. Boy, we seen every game they played. But that final game was at Humble, and Fred and I just knew good and well that that was snapped, so we talked, uh, Chester Rogers, into covering that game for us, and we'd cover one for him. We wanted to go someplace; I don't remember where it was now, but another game. And so help me Hannah, Humble beat 'em that night.

BW: Humble beat 'em?

DM: Ya, Humble beat 'em.

BW: Remember the score?

DM: Seven to nothing.

BW: Good night.

DM: Ya, we'd been sweatin' 'em for two years, and we missed a game. That Chester Rogers over in ... when they lost it ...

BW: There's one more thing I hadn't asked you about, and that's the Barbers Hill Gushers. Do you know anything about the Barbers Hill Gushers?

DM: It was the name of a ball team.

BW: Baseball?

DM: Baseball.

BW: Did you ever go to any of the games?

DM: Ya, I had to.

BW: Why?

DM: I was the scorekeeper.

BW: You were the scorekeeper, huh?

DM: Um-hmm.

BW: Ok.

DM: You got a pretty good write-up out of that with Bill Spears.

BW: Ya. What about the Oilers? Did you ever have anything to do with them?

DM: Who?

BW: The Baytown, the Humble Oilers, the Exxon Oilers.

DM: Oh, no I didn't have any ... I never had anything to do with them.

BW: Just, just when they played the Gushers at home.

DM: They never played the Gushers here.

BW: How long were you scorekeeper for the Gushers?

DM: Oh, from 19 ... let's see ... 30... 1932 through 1937, I guess it was.

BW: And your oilfield work was limited to selling supplies. Is that what you did?

DM: Um-hmm.

BW: I guess, did you meet many of the oil people as they came into Mont Belvieu? Did you deal with them?

DM: Ya, saw most of 'em, ya.

BW: Did any of the, uh, the really the, uh, bigshots in the oil game come down here during that time?

DM: Oh, ya every once in a while. Off-hand I couldn't tell you any of the names except D.B. McDaniels and O.C. Russell.

BW: Who was that McDaniels with?

DM: He had his own company, McDaniels Drilling companies ... he had drilling, had drilling rigs and leases.

BW: Um-hmm.

DM: O.C. Russell was the Superintendent.

BW: O.C. Russell was Superintendent for McDaniel?

DM: Um-hmm.

BW: Ok. Have you watched the growth of the school district and the, and the churches, and ... well actually, there hadn't been much growth in business here, has there? It's industries.

DM: Industry's where it comes from.

BW: Quite a, quite a big ...

DM: Fact of the matter, business. But other than that, just lost a drug store, and hadn't got but one grocery store in town.

BW: Why is that? Do you think it's because of good ... better transportation now or something?

DM: That's right.

BW: And people in Barbers Hill just like to go, uh, do most of their shopping other places I suppose.

DM: Guess that's the reason. I don't know.

BW: And they can ... well, I suppose it, uh, doctors are more ... are accessible in other areas.

DM: Ya.

BW: Oh ya, let me see. Did you have anything to do with the development of the Barbers Hill Volunteer Fire Department?

DM: Well, I was in it from 1949 till 19...59, '49 to '59, I believe. All the way up till '62. I was secretary for the fire department.

BW: Well, what year was it formed?

DM: Forty-nine.

BW: Um-hmm. Were you one of the charter members?

DM: No, I come in after it was formed.

BW: Were you ever a member of any civic clubs like Optimist or ...

DM: We used to have Lions Club back here.

BW: You were a member of that?

DM: Charter member of the Lions Club.

BW: And you're a Methodist? Are you a member of the Methodist Church out here?

DM: Um-hmm.

BW: Let's see, that's the First Methodist isn't it?

DM: First Methodist Church, ya.

BW: Ok, what would you put as the ... list as the biggest, uh, contributor to the tax roll? The oil industry, or the rice farming, or ... how do they compare, and have they compared through the years?

DM: Industry always more than rice. Because rice farming, all you get to tax them on is equipment, is land. You don't get to tax them on the rice.

BW: Is that right?

DM: Industry, industry you get to tax what they get out of the ground. You tax the oil.

BW: Um-hmm.

DM: No, industry ... oil and, and uh, jug wells are are going to get you to the tax roll.

BW: Ok. Never had a Chamber of Commerce out here.

DM: We had one that lasted about two months.

BW: When?

DM: About 1930 ... no ... ya, 1930. They started one, and decided it wasn't worth the trouble.

BW: [Laughs.] Ok, well, Mr. Don, I sure thank you for the interview that you have shared with us this afternoon, and I know that these facts will be important to people who remember Mont Belvieu, and who may someday come back ...

DM: Glad to accommodate you.

BW: ... and want to know some of the things that you have told us about the area.

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