

*The
Kerr County Historical Commission
presents*

An ORAL HISTORY

of

Bill Jonas

Kerr County Historical Commission

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Bill Jonas

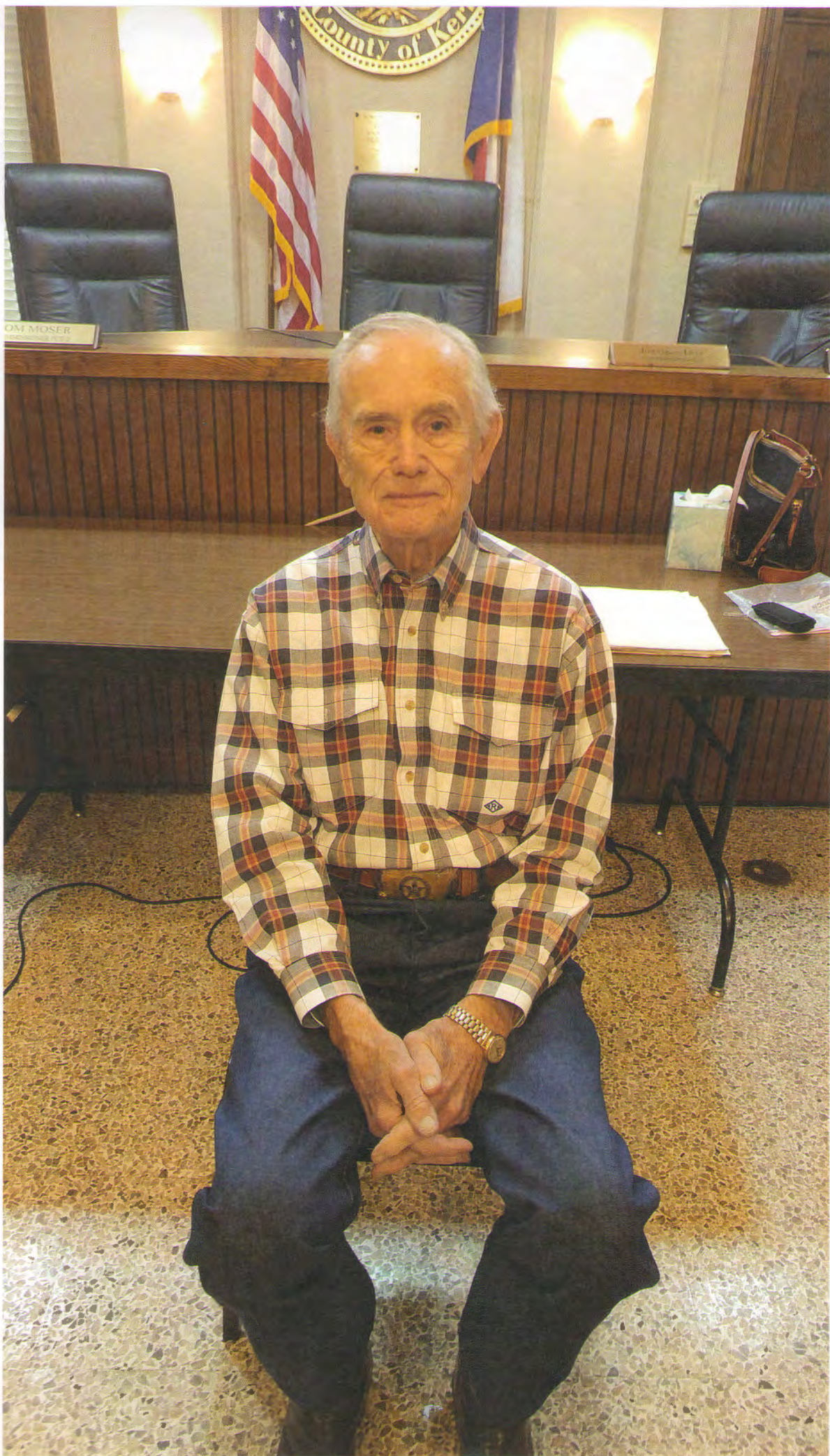
Interviewers: Francelle Robison Collins
Bonnie Pipes Flory

Date: October 23, 2018

Place: Kerr County Courthouse
Kerrville, Texas

*The Oral History Project is a project of
The Kerr County Historical Commission,
a volunteer organization. Oral History
Committee chair is Francelle Robison Collins.*

Transcribed and Edited by Rita Edington Odom



Kerr County Historical Commission

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Name: Bill Jonas

Date of Birth: November 11, 1936

Place of Birth: Kerrville, Texas

Education: Tivy High School, Kerrville, Texas
Schreiner Institute, Kerrville, Texas
Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas

Father: William James Jonas
Mother: Lela Koerth Jonas

Spouse: Davene Schmidt Jonas

Children: William James Jonas III
Russell Lee Jonas

SUMMARY

William James Jonas was born in Kerrville, Texas on November 11, 1936. He graduated from Tivy High School, attended Schreiner Institute and graduated from Texas A&M. He is married to Davene Schmidt Jonas. He became very interested in the subject of physics, working on a Master's degree at Colorado State University. It was at that time that he was recruited by the FBI and did investigative work in Alabama and Indiana, finding and apprehending fugitives, one of which was on the FBI's Top 10. He worked for a short period of time for Southwestern Bell. He was appointed U.S. Marshal by President Reagan for the western area. He was involved in many interesting cases, including the murder of Judge John Wood. In retirement he and his wife live on their ranch in Harper, Texas where they raise Spanish goats and mixed breed cattle, primarily Hereford and Angus.

An Oral History of

Bill Jonas

My name is Francelle Robison Collins and I am with the Kerr County Historical Commission, Oral History Project. Today is October 23, 2018, and I am here at the Kerr County Courthouse in Kerrville, Texas, with Bonnie Pipes Floury. We are talking with Bill Jonas, who understands that we are making audio and video recordings of this interview and that a typewritten transcript of this interview will be provided so that changes can be made. The audio and video tapes, however, cannot be edited. This information along with copies of any family pictures and documents provided by you will then be turned over to the Kerr Regional History Center, Schreiner University, and the University of North Texas' Portals to Texas History, where they will be available to the public unless specific restrictions are placed on them by you. These restrictions will be noted in the Release form after you have had a chance to review your manuscript. Are you clear on what we are doing today?

BILL: I am.

FRANCELLE: What is your given name?

BILL: William James Jonas, Jr.

FRANCELLE: When and where were you born?

BILL: On Lemos Street in a little one-bedroom house – it's still there. Dr. McDonald delivered me there. It was our home for a very short time. It was a home built by my father on property owned by my grandparents, Bob and Sally Jonas. For a short time after I was born my father was reassigned from the Kerrville Bus Company Kerrville Division to the San Antonio Division and we lived in San Antonio for a short time after that. We were transferred back here to Kerrville. My dad was a driver for the bus company. He was the last of the employees, of the drivers, hired by Hal Peterson. We were as a family close to Hal and his father Sid.

FRANCELLE: What was the date of your birth?

BILL: November 11, 1936

FRANCELLE: So, when you were born your dad was working for the bus company.

BILL: That is correct. His explanation of that was he had been unsuccessful in what he really wanted to do and that was to get a master plumber's license and open up a plumbing shop here in Kerrville.

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He was not successful in completing the qualifications for the plumber's certification. Hal Peterson offered him a job as a driver and he said "Well, I'll try it for a little while." He drove for the Kerrville Bus Company for a little over 50 years and had a safety record that I don't think will ever be challenged. He drove all that time without ever scratching a bus.

FRANCELLE: Was that back and forth to San Antonio or did he take different routes?

BILL: There were different routes. At the time he was hired his primary job was two round trips a day to San Antonio. I noticed on my birth certificate that he was listed as a chauffeur. That was the license that bus drivers were supposed to have in the state of Texas.

FRANCELLE: Do you have any idea what his pay was when he started and when he finished?

BILL: As I recall, most of the time from when he started to the end of World War II, the salary range was from ninety to one hundred dollars a month. The drivers got one day off every 27 days. Right at the end of World War II he had a Level 1 badge with the Kerrville Bus Company and was able to have any route that he would like to have. He drove round trip to Pecos. That was a good job because he was off every third day. He would drive to Pecos one day and back to Kerrville the next day and then have a day off.

FRANCELLE: So, if he drove to San Antonio it would be two trips a day.

BILL: Right.

FRANCELLE: And there was no interstate.

BILL: At that time there were people in Kerrville that worked for Kelly Field and other facilities that supported the military and so the bus for a long time carried the most part of the war. Kerrville to San Antonio was at 4 o'clock in the morning. The return from San Antonio to Kerrville was after 6 o'clock.

FRANCELLE: Did you tell me that he also drove the Tivy football team?

BILL: Right. There is quite a story on that. Hal Peterson wanted him to drive the team anywhere that they needed to go. He drove the team to every out of town game except in 1936 or 1937 – no, it was 1939 that Tivy had a team that played for the state championship and the team went on the train. So, my dad did not go to the game. The players always insisted that he was their good luck charm and that's why they didn't win the championship.

FRANCELLE: Tell us about your mother. I know she had The Rose Shop so how did that begin?

BILL: When we moved back from San Antonio to Kerrville in 1938, my parents had a home built on Valley View Drive. It's not an easy street to get to. It was north and east of the Tivy stadium. They bought ten acres, as many as they could afford, at \$1 an acre. They had 5 milk cows and two hundred fifty chickens. At that time we were selling milk to the creamery owned by the younger Petersons and she sold eggs to Tommy Wren Grocers. We were there until after World War II. They sold that house and we bought a house we remodeled on Lytle Street, next door to an electrician and the Kiefers. The electrician was B.L. Ward. My mother began to get involved in the culture – art and flowers. We sold that house and bought a house out by the Hesters and Clarabelle and Ross Snodgrass.

FRANCELLE: Out on West Main?

BILL: Yes. West Main and Cottage Street. She worked for a while at that time at Mostys and Mostys was running the flower shop.

FRANCELLE: That was Mosty Nursery out on 27.

BILL: Right. She got more and more interested in the flower business. In late 1949 they bought a piece of land at the end of Roy Street and built that house. She decided she was more interested in flowers than chickens and milking cows every morning. She went to work for Eloise Stewart and stayed with Eloise until she felt like she would be comfortable with a flower shop. We stayed there at what is now Jonas Drive. She went into partnership with Bookie Armenter and his wife and opened up Bookie's Flower Shop which was across the street from the Busy Bee Café. Bookie decided that he wasn't interested in being in a long time flower business so we took all of our resources in early 1955 and everything I had saved working for the Peterson Garage and Repair Company in the used car lot and service station and put what money in cash we had in Bookie's Flowers and changed the name to The Rose Shop. We relocated The Rose Shop next door to Black's Café and Kerrville Bakery on Water Street. They were there until after I graduated from A&M at which time my mother purchased the property next to the Rialto Theater and that's where The Rose Shop was. She enjoyed the flower shop and we enjoyed the business.

FRANCELLE: That was a business where you could really stay busy: prom, Mother's Day. I remember going in there during the prom and there would be mounds of flowers... homecoming too.

BILL: She had a lot of fun with that. Mosty's had decided to go out of the flower business and stay with the nursery business. So, she was having a lot of fun with it. On school functions she probably gave away more flowers than she sold. She was big on the blue and gold mums and the other things that were special at Tivy.

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FRANCELLE: There were more school dances then and the girls had to have corsages.

BILL: You bet. Everybody had to have their flowers. That was a good time. I had the good fortune of working for Peterson Garage and Auto and the auto distributor here.

FRANCELLE: You did that before you graduated? What did you do for them?

BILL: Pump gas and wash cars. I was involved in the development of the service station that was on the street level of Peterson Hospital.

FRANCELLE: A lot of people still can't believe there was a service station under the hospital. And Melody Corner. And air conditioning they put in your car while they filled it.

BILL: Oh yes. That station was pretty unique. Of course, safety regulations would not let you put a service station under a hospital anymore. We did everything cautiously.

FRANCELLE: People didn't fill up their own cars then either.

BILL: Not at all. We were one of the first stations in Kerrville that had pumps with automatic cutoffs.

FRANCELLE: Were there credit cards back then?

BILL: Yes. During the mid to late fifties, you began to see companies like Mobil that converted to Exxon and the various companies had their own cards

FRANCELLE: I just remember charging it.

BILL: Oh yeah. We carried charge books.

FRANCELLE: Did you start school at Tivy.

BILL: Yes. All twelve years. We just had a fifty-five year get together and we have one every year.

FRANCELLE: Class of '55.

BILL: We have, including spouses, about fifty to seventy-five folks. We have a luncheon on the first Saturday in October. We stay close.

FRANCELLE: That's a lot that show up. What were you involved in at Tivy?

BILL: I played all the sports. I didn't play basketball as a varsity player. Primarily

football. I'll try to find a photograph of the varsity team that my dad played on. They had a record that I don't think has been accomplished by any other team. They scored sixty points against their opponents and the opponents did not score that season.

FRANCELLE: Did you play both ways? Offense and defense?

BILL: Pretty much. We had some folks that specialized in the backfield. Where we were needed we played. We did not have a good season my senior year. There were two of us that made second team All-State.

FRANCELLE: What position did you play?

BILL: Offensive tackle and defensive guard on the line.

FRANCELLE: You were a big guy.

BILL: Big guy. So big that when I was ten years old, the theaters in town that had movies on Saturday morning, I forget what the age break was, but I had to carry a birth certificate with me to get the child's rate. That was also in the day when we had a swimming pool downtown and Howard Johnson, who was an older friend of mine, was taking care of the pool in the summer and I would go down with him to enjoy the pool and could even go a little early.

FRANCELLE: Did you also show animals?

BILL: No. I didn't show animals. The ranching and animal business all came later for me. When Davene and I got married at First Presbyterian Church in Kerrville, it was during that time I was trying to figure out what would be right for me and right for her and any family we might have. I had the good fortune of being asked to take Louis Burton's job at Tivy when he retired, and I taught Physics and Math at Tivy for 2 years.

FRANCELLE: Let's go back. Where did you go to college?

BILL: Texas A&M. And, in fact, Texan A&M was perfect for just the way my experience in life could have been projected. I was basically a warrior. I was in the ROTC and was commissioned second lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers. Things looked very positive in the direction for officer and making a career in the military. That changed rather quickly. It all started with a delay for active duty training after I graduated from A&M. One offsetting thing (I'll step back in time a little bit) was that I became infatuated with the study of physics. That was with Mr. Hammond at Schreiner. That's what I want to back up to. In the fall of '55 I had two opportunities to play college football. But we had an automobile accident

going to my grandmother's funeral in August of '55. As a result of that my mother was disabled for a period of time and someone had to stay and run The Rose Shop. So, I did The Rose Shop and we had neighbors that came in to work from time to time. Lois Hester and other folks – good neighbors. And so, I went to Schreiner. After 2 years at Schreiner, Dean Weir thought I might like A&M. So, I went down to A&M still thinking in terms of sports and went out and visited the football team under Coach Bear Bryant and I decided those fellows were too big for me to play with. Nevertheless, I graduated with a degree in Mathematics and a minor in English and Physics. Physics was the result that Mr. Hammond had on me.

FRANCELLE: Is that when you came back to Kerrville?

BILL: I came back to Kerrville and Davene came back to Kerrville and we got married in July of 1960. Everything was going well with teaching except for salary. She was going to get a job teaching at the elementary school working for Tom Daniels. Mr. Sandage offered me a job filling the position vacated by Louis Burton. I stayed on at Tivy for 2 years and then started working on a master's degree in physics.

FRANCELLE: Where was that?

BILL: Colorado State University on a Science Foundation Scholarship. That was fun but in the meantime I had coffee one afternoon with Joe Webb. Joe was an agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation here in Kerrville. Joe and Flo were friends but he decided he wanted to talk to me and see if I would be interested in being an FBI agent. The deal was that the Bureau laboratory was interested in me because of a study I was doing at Colorado State using the x-ray spectrogram. The FBI had just purchased 2 spectrograms from General Electric and they had also sold 2 spectrograms to Colorado State so it was that research I was doing in that area that created some interest on my part and also the Bureau's part of me possibly going to the FBI laboratory.

FRANCELLE: Was that at Quantico?

BILL: That was at the old FBI building in downtown Washington over in some temporary structures that were used in identification division and the lab. I went to DC and the first assignment I had was in Mobile, Alabama doing voter registration investigation. We had some rather large cases, the largest being they had four thousand voter eligible blacks and one registered to vote. The cases were pretty complex and we had to interview all four thousand eligible voters. We did similar investigations in about 4 different counties in Alabama. It was an interesting time, a challenging time. We got a lot of attention from the Attorney General at that time which was Robert Kennedy. So, it looked like I was going to be a career FBI agent. I was transferred to Montgomery, Alabama which was a resident agency,

not a field office. Then I was transferred to Indianapolis and Gary, Indiana. When I arrived in Indianapolis I was assigned to the fugitive investigation and we had quite a backlog of folks that needed to be arrested so to speak. There were warrants outstanding on them and I thought I'd have some fun, and I did. I had experienced unusual fugitive investigations in Alabama but most of my time was spent on civil rights.

FRANCELLE: These were people that were running from the law? FBI most wanted list?

BILL: Yes. I reported to work after going through some preliminary reviews and finding a place to rent. The supervisor on the fugitive squad asked me to take twelve cases he had. After studying those cases I decided it was time to pick them up – find them and arrest them. I started one Monday morning and by noon I had arrested 8 of the twenty.

FRANCELLE: How did you do that?

BILL: Well, it was not complex. What I found out was that the person previously assigned to some of these cases had not really covered all of the territory that needed to be covered. Needless to say, by noon that day the supervisor called me in and told me to go look for housing or do some shopping or something else. I was unaware that he had any problem with what was going on and he didn't have a problem with me. What he did have a problem with was the follow-up paper work that he had to do to get caught up. He took an interesting approach – go find something else to do the rest of the day. I did that for most of the time I remained in the Indianapolis Division and even in Gary. The more sensitive or serious fugitive cases I was able to get assigned to me. I did have an interesting event with an agent in Mobile named Jack Faulkner who was the brother of William Faulkner. Jack asked me to go with him on a couple of cases and handle the arrest and they were theft mis-shipment matters involving burglaries of train cars. That was unusual. Then, in Gary, I had one arrest of the top 10, a guy from San Diego and it was an interesting event because he didn't give us any problems at all. But when he got back to San Diego and was charged with crimes he had been charged with, he was successful in crippling a deputy sheriff by jerking the sheriff down the stairs in the courthouse. It was pretty sad.

FRANCELLE: But you always had a partner with you, correct?

BILL: That is correct. We didn't do a whole lot alone.

FRANCELLE: Is this when Kennedy was President?

BILL: Yes.

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FRANCELLE: Was there any investigation with that?

BILL: I had a follow-up investigation with some folks that worked with Mr. Ruby in Dallas. He had some men's clubs. We had some follow-up after he killed Lee Harvey Oswald

FRANCELLE: Did you ever meet Robert Kennedy?

BILL: Things were significantly less formal at that time than later. But a good example of the way things were at that time – the FBI had a graduating class at the Academy while I was fortunate enough to be there in the new agents class and President Kennedy spoke. It was interesting to watch the heads of the Department of Justice and the President just kinda wander in and shake a few hands and there were chairs in the front of the room for the Department of Justice. When the President's speech was completed and these police officers in the National Academy were given their diplomas, everybody just said well, okay, we're going back to work. The Attorney General, Robert Kennedy, it was cold and rainy, and the Attorney General went to a side door, looked to the right and to the left, pulled his collar up and went off to his office.

FRANCELLE: By himself.

BILL: By himself. He didn't have to have an escort or anything. That wouldn't be tolerated today. The President had 2 Secret Service agents with him and Mr. Hoover was on his own. It was an interesting time to be in the Bureau. I left the Bureau to work for Southwestern Bell as First Security Supervisor that was based on the territory that you were responsible for. That was in '68.

FRANCELLE: Where were you then?

BILL: I resigned from the Bureau and worked in Houston for a short period of time with Southwestern Bell. Southwestern Bell then formed the San Antonio area and the area was basically defined by one hundred eighty thousand square miles west of Ft. Worth, west of Dallas, south and west of Houston. Houston Division had the rest and Dallas Division. It was during that period of time that I carried a Special Ranger commission with the Ranger Service here in Texas. I was able to conduct some investigations with the Rangers. One of the better times was investigations with copper thefts. We were losing copper wiring in large amounts out on open telephone lines. I spent a lot of time with a Ranger well known here, Joaquin Jackson.

FRANCELLE: Would that shut the lines down when they took the copper off?

BILL: Yes. It was a real problem. And they were stealing copper from electric co-ops. It

was through that that I was able to work with a Ranger named Zeno Smith that did not look like or act like a Ranger that we might typically think of them. He wore khakis, khaki pants, shirt, high top work shoes. You wouldn't know he was a Ranger except that he wore a Ranger badge and carried a pistol.

FRANCELLE: Stetson hat?

BILL: No. He wore a felt hat. He was quite an interesting guy to work with. The most skilled interviewer that I have ever known.

FRANCELLE: Does the copper stealing still go on today?

BILL: No. All the communication companies have gone to fiber. So, you don't see fifteen to twenty miles of copper strung out along the roads. It's a really interesting transition. I think this arises a little out of my experience with the fugitives. One of the more interesting investigations that looked like an absolute dead end occurred right here in Kerr County. That was a matter of a small company that was part of the Bell system. Southern New England Telephone Company. He, his son, had separated himself from the family and this company president had developed, through some calls that he had received, that his son, somewhere down here in Texas, had withdrawn some money out of the trust account in one of their banks in southern New England. To make a long story short, I called Henry Ligan who was a Texas Ranger in Kerr County at that time. Henry and I worked the case and were able to put this young man in the board room of one of our local banks here in Kerrville. We brought the father down and had them visit face to face. He did not know that his mother was quite ill. So, that was a rather complex matter but as Ranger Captain A.Y. Alley told me, "You don't do cattle investigations, what are you doing with a Ranger badge?" I have since retired. I do have one intervening factor. I didn't retire from Southwestern Bell. I ran for Sheriff of Bexar County in 1980 and was not successful in being elected. Nevertheless, Joe Neaves became Sheriff of Bexar County and since my President Reagan won the election in 1980, John Tower recommended me and Mr. Reagan appointed me U.S. Marshal of the western district of Texas. As a result of that I had twelve years at U.S. Marshal and it was an exciting time. We did some very serious and troublesome cases. Five trials altogether surrounding the murder of John Wood, U.S. District Judge. Judge Wood and I were friends as a result of his politics.

FRANCELLE: Was he killed from a disgruntled trial?

BILL: No. The Chagra family was from El Paso. Judge Wood had been assigned their case involving the narcotics business and also some bank fraud. As a result of their having been charged, Judge Wood ended up with the case – to try it. We had 4 or 5 individuals in the Chagra family that were tried. The shooter was hired by the

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Chagra family and the shooter was Charles Harrelson. I had the responsibility of housing and producing all those folks in court. Harrelson, if I'm not mistaken, was tried in Waco. Jimmy Chagra was tried in Jacksonville, Florida. I'm wrong, Charles Harrelson was tried in San Antonio and Elizabeth Chagra was tried in Waco. We made it through those trials. It was sensitive. The only person that created a major security issue with us was Harrelson.

FRANCELLE: Was he local?

BILL: He was from Houston. I was assessing the family situation. The youngest of the Chagra family – the 3 of them were lawyers. One of the unique comments from the Jacksonville trial of Jimmy Chagra was that Joe was brought down there to testify and the 2 brothers really wanted to visit. The defense council for Jimmy Chagra was Arthur Goodman who later became mayor of Las Vegas. Goodman kept pushing me and Judge Sessions for these 2 guys to get together and we didn't want that so finally Goodman got his way. We got them together and Jimmy looked at one of the deputies there with me and asked if they could be alone. The deputy looked at me and I said, "No." And Jimmy said, "I just have one thing to say. If you want legal advice, don't ask my brother." Because he was the one that told them to kill the judge.

FRANCELLE: Tell us a little about Davene

BILL: The Kerrville centennial was in '56. She was Fair Queen in Gillespie County.

FRANCELLE: She was from Fredericksburg.

BILL: She was really from the house we are living in in Harper but she had gone to high school in Fredericksburg. I think they moved there when she was in the eighth grade. Anyway, she was in the Centennial parade and I was driving The Rose Shop float with Sharon Ann Werner, she was our lady on the float, beautiful pink float and Mickey Crenwelge between her and Clarabelle Snodgrass had cornered me and wanted me to do some polkas and other things with Mickey. Mickey kept telling me about this Davene Schmidt. Mickey was engaged at that time to Sonny Crenwelge, the father of the Crenwelge folks. So, I left where we were – parked somewhere out on Main with our float and I'm pretty sure that Mickey came by and said, "Hey, Davene is right up there. You better go up there and say hello." I said, "She won't know me." She said, "Yeah, she'll know you if you just tell her." So, I went up there and about the time I got there they started moving some floats and we didn't even get a chance to say hello. It was that December that Mickey finally got us together and we dated, not on a regular basis, until '57. I invited her to A&M for the Turkey Day game with The University of Texas. She was in school at The University at that time.

FRANCELLE: You have a mixed marriage.

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BILL: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Well, she has 2 brothers that graduated from A&M so she's already done all that.

FRANCELLE: At least Texas and A&M don't play each other anymore.

BILL: Well, there are some of us that are trying to recreate that.

FRANCELLE: You have children?

BILL: Two sons. William James III and Russell Lee. Russell is a veterinarian in Buffalo, Texas. He has the Buffalo Animal Hospital and he also has cattle services and that it's basically implants and AI, artificial insemination. They each have 4 children and Russell's oldest daughter is graduating from A&M in December and already engaged to be married. We're concerned about that. James' oldest is Margaret Elizabeth and she is in medical school in San Antonio— she's going to be a doctor. In '94 is when the U.S. Marshal's job ended and we moved to the ranch to the house she (Davene) lived in when she was a child we did some remodeling and things were not the greatest in the ranching business at that time. I went to work for The University of Texas, the Austin Director of Police and was the inspector for that section. I retired finally in 2004 and we've had a little improvement in the ranching business but we're not doing as much as we once did. For almost twenty years Davene had registered Angoras so we are no longer in the registered goat business. We have Spanish goats and mixed breed cows, mainly Hereford and Angus.

FRANCELLE: Just enough to keep you busy.

BILL: Maybe a little busier than I want to be right now.

FRANCELLE: Thank you for your time.

BILL: It's been good to sit here and reminisce. A couple of small items to mention. My grandfather, Robert Lee Jonas had a trucking business here. He hauled lumber for the YO Ranch, he and his wife Sally. His partner in all this was a man named Manuel Ayala. When my grandfather passed away he left all of his heavy equipment to Manuel. And now, his sons are in the trucking business. I wouldn't go so far as to say my grandfather was the first – but he was one of the first that had his buddy Manuel as a pallbearer at his funeral. And we are still close to his family.

END



2 BRAND NEW BUSES BROUGHT BACK FROM SYDNEY, OHIO
WILLIAM JONAS SR. & CLYDE BARLOW



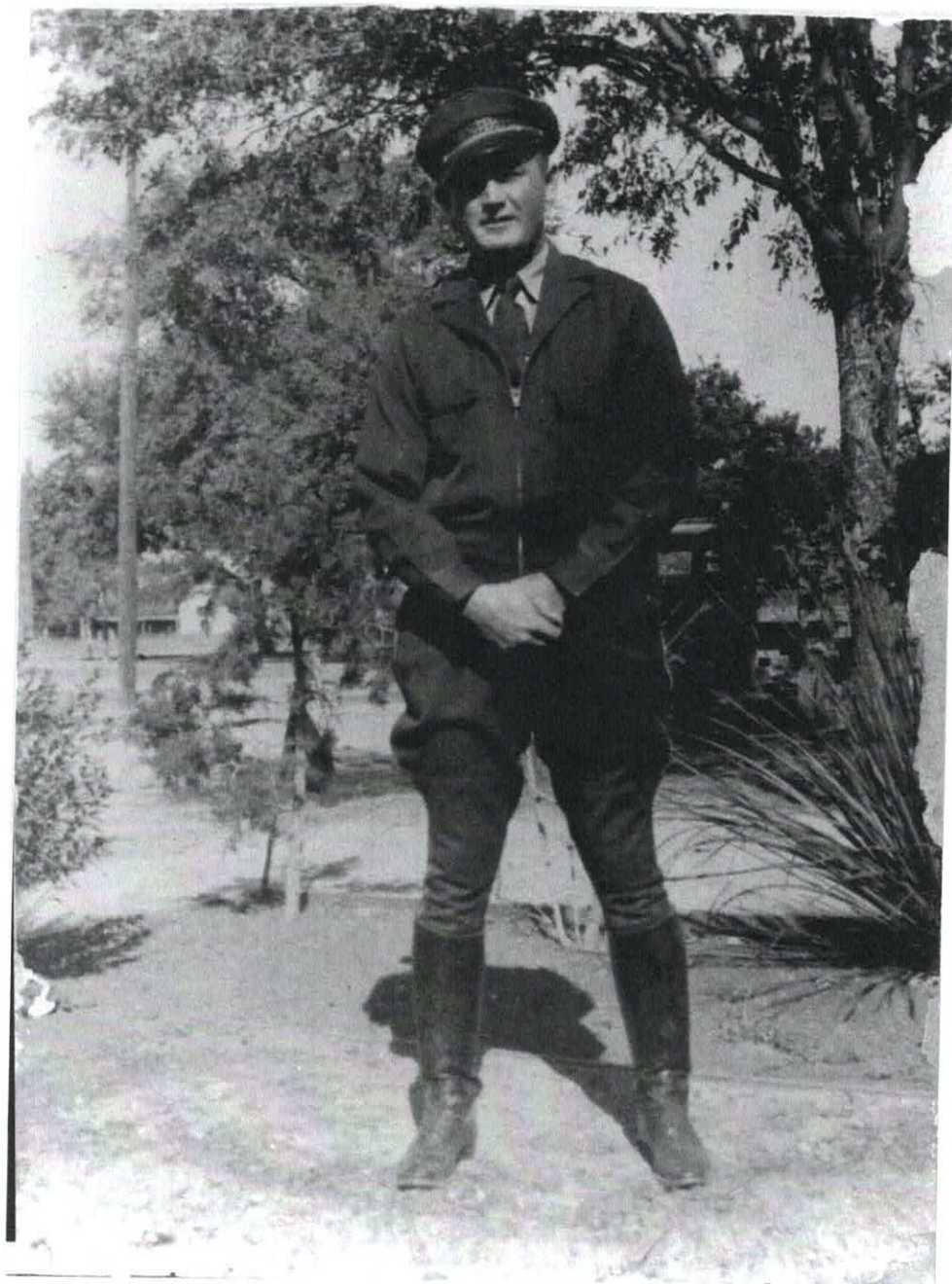
ROBERT LEE (BOB) JONAS
SALLY STONE JONAS



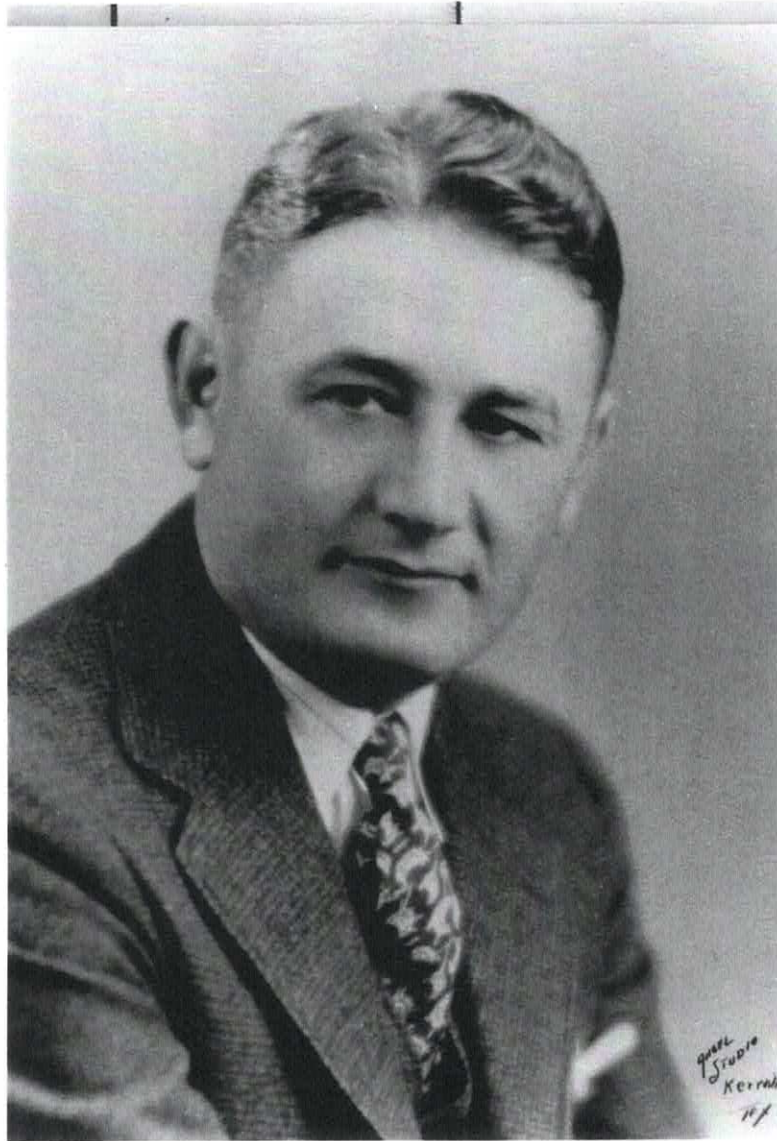
ROBERT LEE (BOB) JONAS
SALLY STONE JONAS



WILLIAM JAMES JONAS, SR.
LELA KOERTH JONAS



WILLIAM JONAS, SR. IN
BUS DRIVER'S UNIFORM

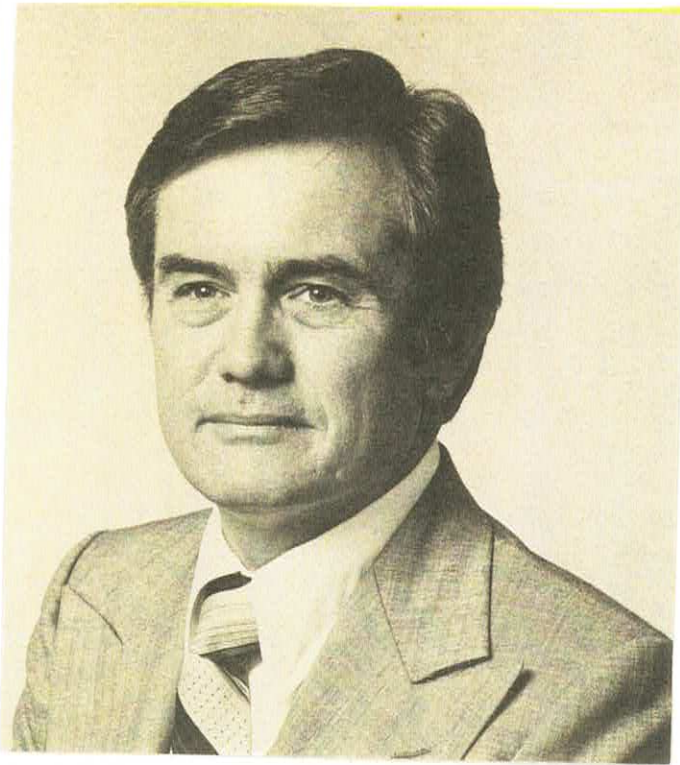


WILLIAM JONAS, SR.



BILL & DAYENE





BILL JONAS



BILL & DAYENE