

Abilene Oral History Series  
*Road Systems of Taylor County: From the Mud to the Pavement*  
Interview of Tom K Eplen  
Interviewed by Joe Dacy II  
Date: 4/24/1975  
History of Abilene audio series  
Length: 44 minutes

*Mr. Dacy:* ...Texas roads system as it was in Taylor County taking us from “the mud to the pavement.” Mr. Eplen, can you give me a little background on how Taylor County got its paved roads?

*Mr. Eplen:* I can’t give you much background now before 1923. I can tell you that in those early days prior to 1923 a great deal of our graveled and paved roads in Taylor County were built through the issuance of *time warrants*. Time warrants are in the nature, you might say, of a promissory note, payable over a period of years, as differentiated from bonds. Time warrants are issued by the Commissioners Court of the county where as bonds are voted by the people of the county.

*Mr. Dacy:* I see. How much were these promissory notes for?

*Mr. Eplen:* Beg pardon.

*Mr. Dacy:* How much were these promissory notes for? How much money...?

*Mr. Eplen:* Well, there were various and a sundry issues of them and for various amounts.

*Mr. Dacy:* When did we start getting into the bond program? How did that come about?

*Mr. Eplen:* Well, bonds and [*many, muni or mini?*] certificates were issued in 1923 at which time there were no roads in Taylor County paved with concrete or asphalt.

*Mr. Dacy:* They were all gravel roads?

*Mr. Eplen:* Well, not all of them were gravel. There were not too many gravel roads at that time.

*Mr. Dacy:* Did they have a lot of problems with the weather creating mud, bad road conditions and things?

*Mr. Eplen:* Well yes, you mean muddy roads?

*Mr. Dacy:* Yes.

*Mr. Eplen:* Oh yes, they existed on into even after the thirties. There was a slogan “get the farmer out of the mud” back there. And that’s when the farm-to-market roads and some of them are called “ranch roads” and so forth came into vogue, but that was way up toward even the forties, 1940s.

*Mr. Dacy:* Before they actually paved this whole area?

*Mr. Eplen:* Before we got those farm-to-market roads that were paved like we have in Taylor County today.

*Mr. Dacy:* In 1923, then how did they go about starting a project?

*Mr. Eplen:* In 1923, the Commissioners Court called an election and the people of Taylor County voted a bond issue of 350,000 dollars. That was for the purpose of paving the roads. And I’m speaking primarily now of the arterial highways running east and west through the county and north and south through the county.

*Mr. Dacy:* Are there any of those roads that we could identify with now?

*Mr. Eplen:* All of them.

*Mr. Dacy:* In location?

*Mr. Eplen:* Yes. The old east-west highway through the county once known, identified back there as the “Bank Head Highway” which also became known as US 80. And it still bears the 80s sign on it, which is now Interstate 20, except along South 1<sup>st</sup> Street in Abilene, of course, that’s not interstate, [*Mr. Dacy: Right.*] but then that 80, you find that old US 80 still has the signs up all up and down Interstate 20 east and west. Then the north and south arterial highway was the one that went to Anson and on north in Jones County and it went south headed to Coleman, Texas, and there was a “Y” down here about 18 miles south of Abilene, which went down through Ovalo, Tuscola, Winters, and on to Ballinger.

*Mr. Dacy:* I see. How much roadway in miles are we talking about?

*Mr. Eplen:* Well, it’s 30 miles across the county so basically on these arterial highways we’re talking about 60 miles plus that additional mileage off from that “Y” down there so I guess that’s about 20 more miles.

*Mr. Dacy:* So about 80 miles of road?

*Mr. Eplen:* Well someway 85 or so.

*Mr. Dacy:* Okay. When were these roads completed?

*Mr. Eplen:* The pave program was completed by the end of 1932. It began in earnest, the paving of the roads began in earnest in 1927.

*Mr. Dacy:* Why that four year gap?

*Mr. Eplen:* Oh it.....You mean between 1923 and 1927?

*Mr. Dacy:* Right.

*Mr. Eplen:* Well, that's where I came in...[laughs] ...that's where I came into the picture. Although this 350,000 dollar bond issue had been voted in 1923 and although time warrants had been issued to acquire right-of-way in addition to that, there was not one foot of asphalt or concrete pavement laid in the county in 1926. And I ran for the office of County Judge on the platform that we were going to sell the roads, pave those roads forthwith. And during the early part of 1927, the new Highway Commission came into being. Judge Ely from here was appointed and there was Ross Sterling [?] and [Colin?] Johnson as the three commissioners. A new policy was inaugurated in the Highway Department and it became apparent that the 350,000 dollars would not be sufficient [*Mr. Dacy: Uh huh.*] to build the program that the new highway commission had in mind. And so we began in 1927 by calling another million dollar bond issue in order to have sufficient funds. That was passed by the people and we really got to working on it.

*Mr. Dacy:* Why during that four year period wasn't, weren't the roads, didn't the construction begin?

*Mr. Eplen:* That was a lot of politics mixed up in it on the state level, not in Taylor County. The designation of the routes were uncertain over all parts of Texas as far as that's concerned, but especially here in West Texas where we had no paved highways. The arterial.... the only arterial highways that had anything to do with paving just had some gravel on it [*Mr. Dacy: Uh huh.*] Like, well like the old US 80 from here through Merkel and Trent was gravel. And, uh, they, the other people in surrounding counties and so forth, they were all, didn't know where the routes would be and the highway commission down there, they were all unorganized so to speak and politics mixed up in it and so forth. And there was quite a bit of argument here in Taylor County about things and all. All those things put together, there just hadn't been any, any roads.

*Mr. Dacy:* I see. On your platform, you said you ran on that platform, how did you intend to clear up this?

*Mr. Eplen:* By working with the Highway Department, the governor, Moody, made those new appointments in January immediately after his inauguration in 1927. And the type of men that he appointed, why I figured that we would cooperate with them. And we did. We got highways here.

*Mr. Dacy:* You said Texas held in 1932, this is what nine years after [unclear] were there ever any other bond issues in addition to this one million...?.

*Mr. Eplen:* There have never been any other countywide road bond issues in Taylor County since 1927. There was a later bond issue voted by Commissioners Precinct #1, which is the, was then the Abilene precinct which runs out in the country plus a shoestring district southeast down through Callahan County in order to build what is now known as 36, Highway 36.

*Mr. Dacy:* Can you tell me how long it would take, at that time, to build a stretch of road say a mile long.

*Mr. Eplen:* Well, I can't answer that any more definitely than in theory, but we built in mileage that we estimated at around 85 miles. Well, there's more than that because I forgot the Abilene to Albany highway in there, you see out here to the county line we must have about ten or twelve miles there. [*Mr. Dacy: Unclear*] So we're talking about close all together not quite a hundred miles. But we built all of that, paved all of those routes that I've mentioned, except the what is now known as 277 down through View and to Bronte and in that direction. And we had acquired the right-of-way, I had as County Judge, down through View, Texas, from the Santa Fe Railroad and we had laid an oil topping on that 277. The Highway Department, the county did that. We did that on our own, the county. Then came Barkeley, Camp Barkeley. And, of course, although it stood up real well, that oil topping. The base out to Barkeley, they did beat it out because it wasn't built for that kind of traffic. We built that and acquired the right-of-way and put in curbing on what is now South 14<sup>th</sup> Street and down to almost to Elmwood Drive. We put curbs on each side. See at that time there was a 40 acre field right in front of McMurry College there, and uh, but that was not designated as a state highway and the state didn't take that over as a state highway until, I can't remember, I don't remember the year. But anyway they did take it over. But we did not get that paved until my successor took over as County Judge, acquired the rest of the right-of-way the other side of View to the southwest county line down there, and then all of that was paved as you find it today, of course, with some improvements. All these highways have had improvements. They're just like everything else, they wear out and uh..

*Mr. Dacy:* How wide were they?

*Mr. Eplen:* Eighteen foot was the standard pavement at that time. Eighteen feet wide.

*Mr. Dacy:* And what were they constructed of? What was the material used?

*Mr. Eplen:* The 80, the east and west highway was first paved with concrete and, uh, I believe so was this down in through Tuscola and down through there. That concrete gave trouble. It became very, very bumpy. [*Mr. Dacy: Laughs.*] And they first went in there and bored some holes in there and took a mud jack and leveled it up, but eventually this, of course, this Interstate 20 now that took the place of that.... [*mumbles*]

*Mr. Dacy:* How long did we have the concrete roads?

*Mr. Eplen:* Oh, they were used several years. I don't remember when that... They didn't just wear out, but as I said, the soil, the type of soil out here, it was just, it proved to be inadvisable to build those concrete roads because you can't repair them like you can the asphalt.

*Mr. Dacy:* Did they have any kind of topping on them?

*Mr. Eplen:* No, no.

*Mr. Dacy:* How about did they have some kind of like they use in sidewalks today? They have cracks across them to take care of heat expansion and things like that.

*Mr. Eplen:* Oh yes, they had expansion going through them, but that didn't keep this soil. The great deterrent of the life of any roadway, paved roadway, is the type of soil that's under that pavement.

*Mr. Dacy:* I'd like a little explanation of that. What type of soil do we have that makes this...?

*Mr. Eplen:* I can't tell you about that. I do know this, that as time went along and the problems presented themselves, the Highway Department had a laboratory down at Austin and before they let any contract they'd take samples of that soil and analyze that soil. The soil and its reaction to water, that's what brings about the trouble. It's practically impossible to construct a roadway, a paved roadway, without some water getting in under that pavement. If it doesn't get in there through cracks or breaks to the pavement, it can soak in there in real wet spells perhaps from the shoulders and the sides. You get a reaction then from your soil.

*Mr. Dacy:* I see. Did they have striping?

*Mr. Eplen:* Eventually, yes, eventually. But there, you see back there, when they were only eighteen foot wide, why it wouldn't be but one stripe and that would be down the middle.

*Mr. Dacy:* What kind of vehicles used? Were they all cars and trucks at that time or...?

*Mr. Eplen:* Oh yes.

*Mr. Dacy:* How about horses and things like that?

*Mr. Eplen:* Well, there were plenty of motor vehicles in 1927, mostly motor vehicles traffic. That's what brought on the building of the highways is the motor vehicles.

*Mr. Dacy:* Now the state took over not only the maintenance, but the actual construction after a while?

*Mr. Eplen:* The federal government, to the best of my recollection, commenced to participating in the building of these, uh, national highways I'll call them, I refer to them as arterial highways, I think shortly after World War I, which would be, I guess, about 1919. I'm not sure about that. But by the time I went into office in 1927, their practice was they was all handled, the federal money was handled through, first through the state highway department in Austin and on these US highways, which were all of those that I have mentioned, except that branch I think down through View going to Bronte and so forth. It had not been designated even as a state highway. But I believe all these others that I have mentioned. You see they had a north loop and a south loop on this 80. The one up through Albany was they called that, I believe, 80A. That was known as the North Loop. And the one that went straight way through Clyde and Baird and on down through there was just 80. The federal government put up a third of that money and the state of Texas put up a third and the county had to put up a third and the State Highway Department would send a contract out here known, we called it an "escrow contract." The county had to put up its part of the money in escrow in the bank, and it couldn't be disbursed, except under set rules, and as the estimates of the contractor would be approved why he'd be paid out of this fund that had been put in escrow.

*Mr. Dacy:* Do you know or remember the name...?

*Mr. Eplen:* That was later changed, but that's the way it was over there the whole time I was in office.

*Mr. Dacy:* How long were you in office?

*Mr. Eplen:* Six years.

*Mr. Dacy:* Do you know or remember the names of the contractors?

*Mr. Eplen:* Umm. Can you cut that thing off there just a minute? [*Tape stopped momentarily.*]

*Mr. Dacy:* ...the contractors names now.

*Mr. Eplen:* Two of the contractors. One of them was McClung. M-C-C-L-U-N-G. Construction Company and then there was a Womack Construction Company that did some work. I particularly remember that Womack did the dirt and drainage work on this Abilene to Albany highway out here. And I'm sorry, but I can not at the present time recall. If you go and look at the minutes of the Commissioners Court over here at the County Clerk's office from about 1927, '28', '29 along there, you'll find all those contracts and records.

*Mr. Dacy:* Were there a number of contractors?

*Mr. Eplen:* I don't remember how many. There weren't too many that worked here in Taylor County.

*Mr. Dacy:* What kind of equipment did they use to build the roads?

*Mr. Eplen:* In 1927, it is all mules and *Fresnos*<sup>1</sup> and scrapers and plows. And I remember that one of the construction companies when they commenced to doing the dirt and drainage work on this Abilene -Albany road pitched a camp out here about where ACC's agriculture place, north of the school, is now located. The hands lived in tents and they had their mules and all of this equipment.

*Mr. Dacy:* I recognize most of the names, but what's a Fresno?

*Mr. Eplen:* A Fresno is wide scraper that is about, most, they are different sizes, but most of those were about six feet wide and were kind of made like a scoop with a long handle behind it and they go along and pull that handle and get that thing full of dirt and move it wherever they're going to move it.

*Mr. Dacy:* Were they pulled by mules?

*Mr. Eplen:* Yes, all of them had mules.

*Mr. Dacy,:* How big an operation was it? How many men did they employ?

*Mr. Eplen:* Oh, they'd have a good many men. Now, of course, along by the end of 1927, '28, along in there, the power machines begin to come in, like Caterpillar and another tractor was Holt and those machines commenced coming in and I, this concrete that was laid on this Abilene, like through Merkel and all, I'm sure they were using motorized equipment altogether by that time that was laid. That power machinery came in pretty fast there after 1927.

*Mr. Dacy:* Would you say that the demand for it rather sped things up? That the process was accelerated as there were more roads ...?

*Mr. Eplen:* Oh yes. When I went in over there, my recollection is that the county had one old Holt tractor that they had owned, and while I was County Judge, they bought several power, power maintainers and tractors.

*Mr. Dacy:* Tell me is there any place in the county now where those old concrete roads are still in use?

*Mr. Eplen:* I doubt it. I don't think so.

*Mr. Dacy:* They've all been replaced by modern asphalt?

*Mr. Eplen:* Uh, with some yes, while this, uh, what was then 30, Highway 30, that went south from Abilene and it makes a “Y” down here about 18 miles south of town...

*Mr. Dacy:* They call it 30 then, not 84?

*Mr. Eplen:* That, of course, all of that has been repaved. The pavement has been [*bridged?*] and widened and, uh, the right-of-way has been widened so you wouldn't recognize any of the original construction. However, the route is the same as it was, laid out then with the exception down here 18 miles below town, they've cut off, they've shortened that down a little bit there by cutting across some fields and outside of that wee bit of change down there though, the right-of-way is exactly where it was then.

*Mr. Dacy:* How were those routes decided? Who got together and decided...?

*Mr. Eplen:* Well these, these arterial highways that I'm talking about, with the exception of the one from Abilene out to the Hamby community, had already been decided. They were laid out by the Commissioners Court, laid down. They had been in existence a long time when I became County Judge, before I became County Judge. I don't know how long. [*Break in tape.*]

*Mr. Eplen:* ...gravel on the roads, for example, on this road south, for example, and east-west and north-south, those were gravel.

*Mr. Dacy:* Where did the gravel come from?

*Mr. Eplen:* Oh, out of pits, [*Mr. Dacy: In Taylor County?*] usually not too far from where it was put on the road.

*Mr. Dacy:* I see. Before, who built the gravel roads? The Commissioners Court....?

*Mr. Eplen:* The Commissioners Court would let contracts. The minutes over here, I, if you commence...the county commenced to letting contracts, of course, they were small contracts compared to those now, but they commenced to letting contracts for construction of improving the roads, I would say, probably as far back as probably around 1890. The minutes over there would reflect that, but that was gravel construction and the building of, well, there were a good many concrete dips built, in other words if there would be a what we call a little drainage coming across out of a field or something, cause a little low place you know, why they'd put in a concrete dip. That concrete dip would be from one end of it to the other, maybe be 100 feet and then as time went along they began to build concrete culverts instead of these lumber culverts. And also they commenced using a great many of these, well, I call them *iron culverts*, galvanized galvanized, iron, no tin, round tin culverts which they still use a good many of those out in these rural districts. [*Break in tape*]

*Mr. Eplen:* ...when the bond resumption was passed in 1931, as I recall, the state assumed all of the balance of the indebtedness that the counties owed on these time



warrants and bonds that they had issued that went into the construction of these arterial highways. And then when they finally got all those bonds paid off after quite a few years, why they commenced reimbursing the counties for what they had not assumed. At first they only commenced reimbursement on what is still due and then they went back and picked up from the beginning and, uh, each County Judge had to make up a full transcript and I had to do that. I think it was in 1931 when I worked up that transcript. It was one of the last major things that I did as County Judge and the counties were reimbursed for all of that, as to what went in to that, uh, shall we say, the federal system and U. S. highways. And then another important thing that took place of great importance following, I don't remember the year, but it was sometime, I would say, while I was president of the Texas Good Roads Association, and I was president there '44, '45, '46 and somewhere in that period there that the Colson-Briscoe Act<sup>2</sup> was passed. That was so named because the present governor, Dolph Briscoe, and Mz. Neville Colson of Navasota sponsored it in the Senate and in House, no, in the House, in the House, both of them. Mz Colson later became a senator. But at any rate, on to that, why this farm-to-market program really began, it took on [unclear] speed and out of that action came what we now have in Taylor County here as our farm-to-market system, so called. Now these ranch roads and so forth and they're all over the state for that matter.... [Break in tape]

*Mr. Eplen:* And then another important, very important thing that took place in 1946, the Legislature of Texas passed the amendment, the people of Texas adopted the amendment which so-called, it was so-called, it froze the gasoline tax money, one-fourth to the schools and three-fourths to build and maintain, and police these highways that we've been talking about.

*Mr. Dacy:* We're going to have to change sides here and then we'll get back to this in just a minute. [Break in tape.]

*Mr. Dacy:* This is the second side of our interview with Tom K. Eplen and we were just getting into the "dedicated road tax," which was passed when? I always called it the "dedicated motor fuel oil tax." [Both laugh.]

*Mr. Eplen:* That was adopted in 1946 by the people of Texas. And, uh, it dedicated the motor user's taxes that he pays, like on his gasoline and that's principally it, to the policing, and the building, the policing, and the maintenance of the highway system. And one-fourth of the gasoline taxes, of course, under that amendment have always gone to the schools and that, uh, one thing that the people of Texas, I think, do not appreciate is that the state of Texas has never issued any bonds to build roads and highways. It has all been on a "cash pay as you go" because the people, the motor users of Texas have paid in that money and the, that's not true of all of the states. Texas, because of the wise administration that we've had in Austin since 1927, beginning there in January, the Highway Department has kept out of politics. It has never been and is still not a political situation. The highway engineer and possibly the chairman of the commission is called before committees to give testimony and so forth, but, uh, before the Legislature. But the Highway Department has been kept out of politics. That's not true in many of the states of the union. It's been political football in many of the states and Texas is recognized

today as having one of the finest, if not the finest road system in the United States, when you take into consideration the total mileage involved and when you take into consideration the farm-to-market road system and so forth, it's tremendous.

*Mr. Dacy:* Do you think that it's because we've gone on a pay as you go basis?

*Mr. Eplen:* That and the keeping the subject out of politics and good management on the part not only of the Highway Department as a whole in Austin, but the Commissioners Court of Taylor County.

*Mr. Dacy:* You said awhile back that the state assumed the bonds outstanding and then went on to pay back the money that they already had. How much money did this amount to?

*Mr. Eplen:* I can't give you the figures on that. And I didn't even keep one of those volumes that I made up. The auditor of Taylor County should have a copy of that bound volume because it was a pretty good sized volume by the time I got through with it. [*Mr. Dacy: Laughs.*] But I would imagine that probably the County Auditor should have that in his library or know where it is.

*Mr. Dacy:* Let's see if there's anything else we've missed about how we "got out of the mud."

*Mr. Eplen:* No, except going back now to around, well, the county was organized in 1878. The town lot sale took place in Abilene, as I recall, in 1881. The county seat, at that time, was in Buffalo Gap and I think it moved up here in either about 1883 or 1884. Now prior to that time, they had going way on back, these stagecoach routes across Taylor County just like they did over West Texas and to a rather large extent these roads, as they began to improve them pretty well followed those same routes. Now, for example though, I know, I remember that the old road, I think originally, went down through what they call Lemmons Gap down here. That's over west of where you to go through the mountains down there south of town, of where you go over the mountains now, and, but generally speaking I think those routes pretty well followed the old routes. And, uh, of course, those people that were living back in those days, they're just, they're all dead now so far as I know and you take the four County Commissioners. I was looking at some minutes over there, even just shortly before 1927. Not long before that, the four commissioners were Mr. H. E. Barr, and Mr. Dan O'Connell, [*spelling?*] and Mr. T. R. Lassiter and Mr. H. T. O'Barr. Mr. O'Barr later became sheriff of Taylor County. I knew him quite well. In fact, he was sheriff while, part of the time while I was County Judge over there. I knew Dan O'Connell quite well. And I, I knew Mr. H. E. Barr. [*Mr. Dacy: Why?*] Well, because he rode and bought cattle horseback back before he ever was elected County Commissioner and my father did the same thing and that's how come me to know Mr. Barr. He had a handlebar moustache. And there were no trailers, even behind, that they pulled behind automobiles you see back there, oh, in 1920. Those trailers and all that came in after that. But all four of those County Commissioners that I just named back there then have been deceased quite a while now. And, uh, most of the

commissioners, I guess all the commissioners that served with me as County Judge are deceased. When I went in over there, there was Mr. Trammel, the father of the recent sheriff of Taylor County, was commissioner. Philip Delph [*spelling?*] from Merkel was county commissioner. Henry Nuby from Guion down here was county commissioner and Mr. G. B. Tiddell went in the same time that I did. That was the Commissioners Court when we began this. All of them are dead.

*Mr. Dacy:* You mentioned the stagecoach routes. How many of them were there?

*Mr. Eplen:* I don't know, except I do know that there was an important one that came through, you see, I think, from Fort Griffin down through here and that a way. When you get in now to that subject like that, Dr. Richardson out here at Hardin-Simmons is the man you want to talk to about that because they put up markers on all those things and he can tell you that right off the cuff. I've never gone into that particularly. I, of course, spent all of my time working with the building of these highways during the six years I was in office and the building of this county jail over here.

*Mr. Dacy:* How long were you a member of the *Texas Good Roads Association*?

*Mr. Eplen:* I was, they say I'm one of the original members since 1933 or '4, I forget which. Now there was an old Texas Good Roads Association prior to that and it was organized because Governor Ferguson wanted to take the road money back there when the gasoline tax was low and bail the state of Texas out of debt. So the association was formed to combat that. And when it was successful and they didn't think there was any more need for it, it was disbanded. And then in 1933 or '4, they reorganized and started up again and they say, not long ago, I was listed I noticed in some of their literature as one of few, and perhaps the only charter member still living.

*Mr. Dacy:* Tell me, what were, what was their function then? What did they do?

*Mr. Eplen:* The Texas Good Roads Association worked for a better planned, an adequate and better planned road system for Texas.

*Mr. Dacy:* How did they go about that?

*Mr. Eplen:* Uh, primarily just through getting together. You see they've always had a Board of Directors and an Executive Committee and the Executive Committee meets several times a year and the Board of Directors has for many years had an annual meeting. And it's rather large and the association is always attempting to get members from all sections of the state of Texas. And whenever there is some issue arises, why they go to bat to protect it, just like right now. The association, Governor Bell is scrutinized very closely and what is introduced in the legislature. One of the hot issues recently, I just got that from - I get all of the releases and everything on that, and I just noticed I got one yesterday or this morning. There's been a group in the House down there that's tried to get a bill through that would compel the state of Texas to buy all the right-of-ways for all roads so the counties would be completely relieved from. You see

only federal highways, it's been quite a while now, 90% of federal money and 10% the counties had to put up, but that was defeated in the house, this bill. There has never been a meeting of, the convening of the regular session of the Legislature to my knowledge going back to the time when I became president back there in '44 and I know it went on prior to that, but what there's always been people introducing bills down there and groups of citizens trying to get their hands on this highway money.

*Mr. Dacy:* I see. The constitutional convention...

*Mr. Eplen:* The constitutional amendment stopped that and they wanted to do away with that. So that they can get this money for various and sundry purposes, and when we had our highway, I mean constitutional commission that was set up, you know, to write a new constitution, there were several on that commission, including Dr. Pete Coe [*spelling?*] that they wanted to take that money, road money some of it, and they wanted to use it for these retarded people, mentally sick people, and for other purposes. And incidentally one thing that I haven't mentioned, you see, I forget the percentage, but a very substantial part of the money that the state of Texas sends to Washington, this road money, it's kept up there. It never does come back to the state of Texas. And, I noticed some figures here not, recently, on all of the money now that's sent to Washington, I'm not talking about just road money, but all of the money that's sent by Texas, is one of the, I think, about 27 states that does not receive as much back as it sends to Washington. And our percentage is, they keep a fixed percentage of our money up there. Henry, Senator Henry Jackson's state of Washington gets back 96%.

*Mr. Dacy:* That's right. Let's see. [*Break in tape.*]

*Mr. Eplen:* And one interesting thing, as I recall, was it was about along when we were first beginning to build these highways and bridge structures that's when the modern construction of bridges really began along in there. They had trouble with water. I remember here they had a highway, they had one contract going out here across Lytle Creek on what is now South 11<sup>th</sup> Street in Abilene. And driving pilings and how to control, cut that water off. You see they have to seal that water off so they can build the concrete foundations and footings in there and that really got started back in those days and law a world of other improvements that they learned. I remember, for example, back in those days when we were building those roads here, they would, when they'd do the dirt work, what we call the dirt and drainage work, they would let that set for a matter of months in order for it to settle and if they were in a great big hurry to try to get a certain inspection through, they put the water wagon, the sprinkler wagon on there and sprinkle it, you know, if the rains didn't come and everything. Now you see these big old machines, you know, with those teeth on them and they call them, they called them back there then "sheeps tractors,"<sup>3</sup> "sheeps," "sheeps" or something like that. They're spikes, you know, and they just go in there now and use that thing and they'll be laying pavement maybe on, on a dirt foundation like that they've built in just a matter of a few weeks. [*Mr. Dacy: Uh huh.*] And all that construction work has come up and changed and now those big machines, you know, that they use in building these highways they cost thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars. Whereas back there then, as I

said, they started out with mules and Fresno's and big plows and they gradually grew into the use of the tractors pulling those things, those graders, but it's sure come along way.

*Mr. Dacy:* This concludes our interview with Mr. Eplen. I want to thank you very much for your time.

*Mr. Eplen:* Okay, sir.

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<sup>1</sup> Fresno's were a type road scraper pulled by mules. They were invented in 1883 by James Porteous and were used in the twenties before mechanized equipment was in common use. They were the forerunners of modern earthmoving scrapers. See *em.wikipedia.org* for more information.

<sup>2</sup> The Colson-Briscoe Act was funded in 1949 to authorize the paving of minimally traveled rural roads called farm to market roads in Texas to get the farmers "out of the mud." See *tshaonline.org* for more information.

<sup>3</sup> Sheepsfoot or tamping rollers compact the soil through the use of protruding studs on a drum that rolls over the dirt. See *www.theconstructionmachinery.com*