

CLYDE THOMPSON

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ABSTRACT: Angelina College student Vivian Holt interviews longtime Diboll Mayor and Southern Pine Lumber Company employee Clyde Thompson about his duties as Mayor of Diboll. He was first elected mayor in 1962 and held the post until 1977. They discuss local election processes, management of the City of Diboll, educational facilities and programs, housing, city services, city council, plans for the City of Diboll, sawmill history, and T.L.L. Temple and the founding of Diboll.

Vivian Holt: This is a tape of an interview with the Honorable Clyde Thompson, mayor of Diboll, Texas. Honorable Mayor, Mr. Clyde Thompson, I consider it an honor this privilege I have of interviewing you. My class at Angelina College requires that I interview two city officials. Let me thank you Mayor Thompson, in advance for your willingness to share some of your valuable time for this purpose. Mayor Thompson, may I ask you how old were you when you first became interested in serving as a public official?

Clyde Thompson: I was 62 years of age when I became interested in serving as mayor of Diboll.

VH: In your youth, did you ever have daydreams of ever sitting behind a big desk or leaning back in a swivel chair and saying to yourself: “Now I am governor of Texas or mayor of Diboll”? Most young fellows, if they would honestly admit, it would have to confess that they had secretly entertained some such dream.

CT: Yes, as far back as I can remember I had ambitions to be a lawyer and perhaps a politician. I graduated from high school at sixteen years of age and we were not financially able for me to go to college. I was promised a scholarship and living expenses to be secretary to the president of a college. I took a secretary course so that I would be qualified to do this. When I finished the secretary course, it was beginning the school vacation and I was offered a job as stenographer for the Southern Pine Lumber Company in Diboll. It was my intention to save money to help further my college education. However, I became interested in my work here and in the forest products industry. Plus the fact that I was getting promotions rather rapidly so I gave up the idea of becoming a lawyer.

VH: That is very interesting. Mayor Thompson, did any of your forbearers or family manifest a special interest in local, state or federal government?

CT: So far as I know, only to the extent of trying to elect qualified officials.

VH: As mayor are you appointed to office by Board of Aldermen or councilmen, or are you elected by vote of the townspeople?

CT: Elected by a majority of the vote of the people.

VH: How far in advance must you announce your candidacy?

CT: There is no time limit except it must be at least thirty days before the election. The election at Diboll is the first Saturday in April. Then, at that time, the mayor and two aldermen are elected in one year and three aldermen the next year.

VH: Is a petition with a certain number of names on it required to make certain your nomination?

CT: No.

VH: How many opponents have you faced in the race for the office?

CT: Approximately six.

VH: Well, that made the challenge to serve all the greater. How long have you held this office?

CT: Twelve years. My present term expires in April, 1977.

VH: You have really proven your true interest in your community by serving these twelve years. Mayor Thompson, would you please tell me a little about Diboll history, before it was incorporated into a city?

CT: In the early 1890's, Mr. T.L.L. Temple of Texarkana, purchased a tract of timber from the Diboll family living in this vicinity and began operating a small pine sawmill in 1894. He named the town Diboll, after the family, but down through the years usage has made it Diboll. He afterward acquired more land and built a second mill and a third mill cutting hardwood. The hardwood mill burned in 1915 and the second pine mill was operated on double shift cutting pine in daytime and hardwood at night. The manufacture of hardwood was discontinued in 1962 and the pine mill, one of the pine mills, was also discontinued and the other began operating on double shifts, cutting pine at daytime and hardwood at night. The operations at Diboll are the largest in the South and Diboll has long since been called the wood capital of the South. The third generation of the Temple family now manage the operations.

VH: Mayor Thompson how is the local government organized? Are there select men or aldermen under you?

CT: A petition of qualified voters is filed with the county judge asking that an election be called for the purpose of incorporating the city. If approved, an election is then held to select a mayor and five aldermen.

VH: How often do you meet and where do you meet?

CT: Regularly, once each month. But the mayor can call a special meeting at any time it is necessary.

VH: Do you and the aldermen make all the decisions for the town or are some issues brought up for a vote by the people?

CT: We always make the final decision, but at the same time we welcome the input from our citizens and always urge that they attend our council meetings and participate. And, if we have an issue that might be controversial, we hold special meetings and urge the people to come and give us their opinions.

VH: Are there certain types of business that require the residents to vote? If so, what?

CT: No.

VH: Have the votes on an issue been so nearly equally divided that a second balloting had to be done?

CT: No.

VH: When you became mayor of Diboll, did you have in mind certain plans for improvement and advancement for the town? Do you mind sharing a few of them?

CT: Yes, I had great ambitions. Among these being the free delivery of mail, providing paved streets to all our city, abolishing all substandard housing and providing standard housing and living conditions for all, especially in new housing growth.

VH: What more did you do?

CT: Modern sewage treatment plant with adequate capacity for the present and future needs, extension of water lines and sewage lines to all citizens, adequate fire and police departments, municipal library, city hall and police station, improvement of drainage systems, a municipal park and golf course, a municipal tennis court. I am happy to state that all of these have been accomplished.

VH: Did you meet with any great opposition in attempting to fulfill your plans?

CT: No. We have had complete cooperation of the industries and citizens.

VH: Are there still some programs yet in progress?

CT: Yes, and we expect many more in the future.

VH: If you had at your disposal a large sum of money to be spent for the good of Diboll, have you any ideas of visions or how you might use it and why?

CT: Yes. Further equipping of city parks with more playground equipment, paved trails for pedestrians and bicycles, trails for horseback riding, more tennis courts, increasing the golf course to eighteen holes from the present nine holes. The park is extensively used by many people and all for the comfort and pleasure of our citizens. We also need to redo some of our water lines and sewage lines. We would like to have an opportunity to beautify a creek that runs through our city. We need many things and could find lots of uses for almost any amount of money.

VH: Do you think the town fathers would give any opposition to your plan?

CT: No.

VH: Has the relationship between you and your co-workers always been pleasant and cooperative?

CT: Very fine. Our differences of opinion have always been attested satisfactorily.

VH: Have you ever been greatly disappointed because some of your suggestions were never carried out?

CT: Yes. I had one great disappointment. I violently opposed the operation of a private club in our city, but a majority of the council members voted against my recommendation. However, I would say that apparently the club has been operated in a lawful manner and has not given a great deal of trouble. I do not apologize for the fact that I am opposed to liquor in any form. I am proud of my convictions along this line.

VH: Mayor Thompson, if a younger man should ask you if you would recommend running for mayor, what would your answer be?

CT: If he is qualified to give the required services, has the necessary time and a desire to be of real service to his city, I would recommend it.

VH: If you should be elected to serve as mayor for another term, would you be interested in serving, or do you feel that after the years you have served a man should refuse to run for the office and let another have the chance to serve?

CT: I'll be 78 years of age when my present term expires and I just don't know how to answer that question at this time.

VH: Mayor Thompson, do you serve full time or part time?

CT: I am still employed as vice-president of Temple Industries and my service to the city necessarily has to be part time. But, I devote all that is necessary.

VH: Do you receive a salary or is it an honorary position?

CT: The elected officials of the city of Diboll do not receive a salary.

VH: I feel that I have taken enough of your valuable time to find out a few facts about our town. Mayor Thompson, I am exceedingly grateful to you for this interesting and informative time and if you are a candidate again next time, you can be sure that my husband and I will be voting for you. Thank you, sir.