

C. A. (NEAL) PICKETT

Interview 018c

January 23, 1986, at home of C. A. (Neal) Pickett

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ABSTRACT: In this interview with Megan Lambert, Neil Pickett recalls his time helping Diboll take advantage of Federal Housing Administration programs to build the Walter Allen Housing Addition. He discusses President Kennedy and Arthur Temple's similar beliefs about home ownership and the importance it plays in forming responsible citizens.

Megan Lambert (hereafter ML): I am interviewing Mr. Neal Pickett at his home in Diboll. My name is Megan Lambert. The date is January 23, 1986.

[Also present is Margaret Pickett, **hereafter MP**]

Neal Pickett (hereafter NP): For some reason I got this, this is something you probably haven't seen.

MP: 1970 East Texas Development Council.

ML: No. I haven't seen that.

NP: It shows what we did with respect to – Margaret, what is this designation right here?

MP: DET over all Economic Development Program.

NP: Here are the items, and what is that one?

MP: Economic Development.

NP: There is another one in here that I was interested in, it is over here a little farther. What is this right here?

MP: Environmental quality.

NP: That is something that you are interested in because the environment changes so much that people begin to, maybe not only like over here in the – what's the name of that project that Arthur Temple and I did?

ML: Walter Allen Project?

NP: Walter Allen. That was the first place where people, some people had indoor toilets, where they had kitchens and they called it “central heat” and what it was, was one of those gas flares inside the house. It was a stove, it really wasn’t central heat but to them it was central heat, but in the environmental, and more importantly with respect to family living, it was the first time the black family had the opportunity of mother and father sleeping and living in this room and the kids in another room.

ML: Talk about quality of life that was very helpful, I’m sure. I can’t think of any one thing that would help more.

NP: Megan, don’t you think that that helped more than anything under the sun? I think I was happier to know that than most anything else. You will have to excuse me, I can’t tell one memorandum from the other. This, I think I am sure, is my FHA and this is DET. I don’t know how you are going to do it but I think if you and Margaret will excuse me for saying so, I think this is one of the better examples of where the government, the two branches of the government, with a local, not only the authority, but, Megan, there is more to building a town than for Arthur Temple to say “Margaret, you can have a house and Neal, you can have a house. There is more to it. I think in economic development in the FHA, we provided, we had over 130 million dollars, I think you have a figure in there some place, worth of work but you don’t know what it meant. I have had women with tears in their eyes almost say “I sure do thank ya’ll for the gas that we’ve got here and for the – and until you have some kind of a house they wouldn’t come in with electricity, and then electricity would come in. The little old town of Shepherd down here, they never had sewers, no sewerage disposal system and a young guy was mayor of the town, he was the pharmacist, too. His dad owned the store but the youngster had finished at Baylor and was mayor. He would work at the store at 7 o’clock and Margaret and I would go down and, Megan, we would get our meat and go at 9 o’clock at night and stay until 11 or 12 o’clock, but we finally worked out something where they could have the sewerage disposal system and you would have thought they had been given title to the First National Bank of Houston, it was something else. We – I got such a thrill out of it but – you haven’t got me on, have you?

ML: I’ve got you on, but I haven’t been able to get a question in edgewise yet.

NP: Well, that is my connection with the Yarborough member of my family. You know she is a sister of Ralph Yarborough?

ML: I know and I met him at a party in Austin one time and it was one of the most delightful experiences I have ever had in Austin. I really enjoyed meeting your brother.

NP: You would surely like him. He was in the senate 14 years.

MP: Would you like to see what he wrote in the (unintelligible) about Texas?

NP: Margaret, show it to her.

ML: I would like to see it and I would like to ask you about his activities in connection with the Big Thicket sometime, too.

NP: Oh, that is another story. I'll tell you, he and Charlie Wilson had it around and around and Ralph won, Ralph didn't win all, but had Ralph not been in the United States Senate there would be no Big Thicket today.

ML: I believe it. I know it.

NP: He is so wholly responsible. I'll bet you a nickel Arthur Temple would say yes. Of course, Arthur Temple would have benefited more than anybody else because he would have been cutting all that wood over there. But I've never found that Arthur was a butcher, I never found that he wanted to go in and tear things up.

MP: I don't know whether you have time to read this right now –

NP: Let me get a copy of this from the *Texas Magazine* or do you have it?

ML: I have it, Becky gave it to me when I first started this project and so I have it here in a folder.

MP: I think it says so beautifully what we want. I also have a copy of the Walter Allen story, who wrote that? Was that Elaine Jackson?

NP: No, that came from FHA, didn't it?

ML: I just don't know, what I have is just a typescript, but I think you have here something. Let me see, if that is the same thing, yes it is. Okay, it comes from FHA in Houston.

NP: Well, I was the Director and if I didn't write it I dictated everything except facts and figures. Does it go into the facts and figures; they made the pictures for me. They sent me the pictures to Houston.

ML: But there are a lot of nice quotes in here. "Many is the winter night I got precious little sleep because I had to keep that old stove poked up to keep from freezing."

NP: Do you have a copy of that?

ML: Yes, I do. I got it from the library, I got it from Brenda.

NP: Was it from my files, our files?

ML: Yes.

NP: Megan, I am very close to that bunch in archives in Houston and they paid us a pretty nice compliment, they said that the Pickett collection now is being rated as fourth, and you know they have had people down there, Jesse Jones and all, but, Margaret will tell you with tears in her eyes that I have never thrown away anything.

ML: I don't see tears; I see a set to her jaws.

NP: We have some of the most doggonest things you have ever seen. When I was Mayor I got some real nasty letters and I answered them, mean letters and I answered them. They are all in those files, they were giving me heck and I answered them. So that seems to me to be fair.

ML: Is this Mr. Marchiafava who is taking care of it? I haven't met him.

NP: For a long time – I want to show you what we did, Margaret and I have just gone nearly crazy. We had had a lot of people to help us but we made a file for Diboll, we made a file for Houston, we made a file for Nacogdoches and we made a file for Brazoria Library and we made a family file. They are all in boxes like the one you have, but of course, the one in Houston – they sent a van up here and Tom came up and they got a van nearly full of stuff and from my office over yonder. I had to sign a memorandum to release it because I've got letters in there from people writing me about somebody else and, as mayor I reduced the light rates, the telephone rates, the gas rates and the bus rates. In other words, I went to Ma Bell, Houston Lighting and Power, Columbia gas and the Electric Company, the transportation company and I got a lot of mean and nasty letters about jumping on those dear, dear utility companies.

MP: I am going to be up here, if I can add or subtract anything call me.

ML: We may need you to –

NP: Now, on this March 2nd, did you mark the calendar and we will see, Margaret?

ML: I sure did, and you will be getting an invitation in the mail, too, to remind you and to tell you where it is.

NP: Margaret, we want her to meet – what's her name?

MP: Dorothy Wright.

ML: I know Dorothy Wright. She was a good friend of my grandparents and I saw her just on Tuesday, we belong to the same women's club.

MP: I am so glad. We just love Dorothy.

NP: Gilbert, of course, was as hard as nails but just as solid as gold, or silver, he was a wonderful person and the thing against him was that he was a very poor boy, nobody

expected anything of him and then he ended up one of the richest men in Woodville, so of course, that was against him but we have been with him and he is – his greatest ambition was to be District Governor of Rotary, he was District Governor of Rotary and was in Boca Rotan, where Margaret and I had been 8, 9, or 10 years before, and died and never got to put on the District Governor’s pen, so had he been able to live for two more weeks he could have come on back, he would have taken his oath of office and it was his goal, but no.

MP: This meeting in Boca Rotan – his –

ML: For the District Governor. Oh, isn’t that a shame. Okay, we’ll call on you. All right, now we are going to have to get serious here. I have a gap in your 1982 tape that I think just has to be filled in. I am going to ask you to fill it in. It’s the transition between page 11 and page 12. It is so interesting and it somehow got left out here. Hope you can help me fill it in. A letter came back from FHA to the manager saying, “Tell that delegation from Diboll the project is going to be approved.” In Washington the President was very much interested in this program but some of the old timers in these offices were just a little bit reluctant, they didn’t have the same idea of what home ownership meant in the way of good solid substantial citizens. Somebody down at the White House probably called and said “Look, this is – now can you complete the sentence?”

NP: I was appointed by Kennedy with the help of Margaret’s brother and also the fact that I had been manager of the Lumberman’s Association of Texas, manager of Insurance Exchange. I knew insurance and I knew building and that FHA.

ML: That’s perfect.

NP: A perfect follow through. And – what follows that?

ML: What follows doesn’t seem to fit, it says – “They were all built later and they are duplex style, aren’t they?” And then you go on to talk about the rental houses that were duplex style. Anyway, it may have been just a few words lost, it was the anecdote about actually getting the approval from Washington, that’s when you called Ralph Yarbrough and you said “We’ve got a project down here, it is worthy, it has been approved by all the technical people. Temple is ready to go but somebody up there is holding it up.” Before we left we got a call from Washington, not to me, not to Doug, the Senator, but from FHA to the manager saying “The project is going to be approved.” Anyway this is really a minor point and I think we can leave it.

NP: I think it was this project right over here with all those houses.

ML: Walter Allen?

NP: Walter Allen, you see, that was most unusual, a most unusual project because they organized a separate corporation, as you know, and Arthur sold the lots, \$500.00 each, I think it was, and the corporation borrowed the money, so to speak, from FHA, and the

construction was done by people here, the people out of my office. The architects came up and approved all the plans and those little houses in Walter Allen are well built house. Washington, I'm trying to think, they may have hoped something could be worked out – but no, that was 221 B3 program. They were in hopes it would be worked out like, maybe the final ownership if they had to be taken back would belong to FHA. Because FHA has taken back a lot of property, but, Megan, it has made a lot of profit out of some of the property that it took back. We were not in the building business and housing business to make a profit because if we took a house back and then if we repaired it and sold it, all we got was what we paid for the house and the repairs and if there was any excess, sometimes there was three, four or five hundred dollars, it went back to the original owner. And under this 221 B3 when these loans are paid off, the property would belong to the city of Diboll and I was trying to say – I think some place in there I did say that, but some place right in there, read it again and let me see if I can complete it.

ML: Just this business about – “The old timers didn’t have the same idea of what home ownership meant in the way of good solid substantial citizens. Somebody down at the White House probably called and said, “Look, this is...what I imagine is something like...

NP: I think it must have been something – this is the kind of project the President is interested in promoting. I’d say that.

ML: That’s what I was hoping it would be because that would fit in very well with what you said earlier, that the President was actually looking for some situation to crystallize this project and spearhead it in East Texas and maybe, for other parts of the country. And it turned out that conditions were just right here.

NP: You are absolutely right. That is all it could be that I can think of right here, Megan. Because you say I go on to another subject.

ML: Yes, then you talk about duplex rental housing after that. That will be fine. Let me, though, get you to tell me about Walter Allen himself.

NP: I don’t know. He was an old black here, employed by the Company and somebody in the company could tell you that.

ML: As I understand he was the first black in management, is that true?

NP: For the company?

ML: For the company. I think I remember that that’s what it was.

NP: I think I paid very little attention to the naming of the project for an individual. Now, I may have met him. I didn’t even meet the first black but I think Walter Allen was something like a schoolteacher or something like that. I think he was a good, good citizen.

ML: I am going to have to look up my notes on that.

NP: I really don't recall. I was more interested in Mr. Temple's support, reaction and what he was agreeable to doing than the name. The name didn't mean much to me, but, as I recall, they said this is a good man. It was up to them to name it. I mean I had no authority as Director of the housing administration. I had no authority to name it. So we just took Walter Allen.

ML: Well, let me ask you if you will let me go back to this question of the consensus between the philosophy of Kennedy and the philosophy of Arthur Temple. Arthur Temple has just made an immense humanitarian and also political steps forward in East Texas, as far as I am concerned, in saying that people should have the dignity of owning their own houses, they should not live under what was basically a feudal system. Would you like to talk about the philosophies of those two men and also how it fitted in with your own philosophy?

NP: Yes, I think I could say something like when President Kennedy appointed me Director of the Federal Housing Administration, his philosophy was made very clear and that was that we should be in position, or we should desire to help those who wanted to help themselves, especially in the field of home conditions because the President knew that home conditions would be much improved if the individuals living in, not only in a home they owned, but in one that was built for their purpose. Now these were rent, there was a provision in there, I recall, that whoever resided in one of those homes could, if they wanted to, buy that property. When the federal loan was paid off they could buy that property.

ML: What year did that policy start, '61?

NP: Now, well yes, the policy started but we didn't get started on Walter Allen until – when?

ML: I forget. I'll have to look that up.

NP: Is this Walter Allen? Does it say in here?

ML: I have a copy of the same thing. I'm looking for it. '65 it says, a forty-year loan. '61 was the original housing act.

NP: That was the original, that was when I was appointed, but we didn't get started on this then until '63 or '64, did we? It took a long time to get it moving, but – well, wait a minute, maybe I had better start saying '63 or '64.

ML: It got started here?

NP: Well, 221 D3 I think I said – I came to Diboll, I don't remember when and I talked it over with Stubby and then we went over to Arthur Temple's, his office and I told him what it was, about the forty years and about the local corporation and about the good houses that could be built and long term pay out. And he said, "Stubby, you get with Neal and you stay with him until you learn all about this and this program, I want it. And

ML: Stubby must have already known that Arthur Temple was thinking along those lines.

NP: He might have but Arthur was usually just a week ahead of everybody else, to tell you the truth. I know I was so enthusiastic because I had been other places and couldn't get anybody interested in it, long term, could form their own corporation, and own the property when it was paid out. Uncle Sam was just guaranty that the property would be built, would be available and, of course rentable. Oh, I don't know whether it was a provision of the law, or whether it was agreed between Arthur and myself, that for everyone of these new houses that would be built, one would be torn down and I think it might have been Arthur's proposition which worked. Any kind of corporation like that made me stronger. You know, in my staff, I had a bunch of Republicans there in Houston who resented my being brought in over their heads and some of them were just not – our program had kind of stalled, they just really weren't interested in President Kennedy's programs but I was. I wish I knew now, in East Texas, where they really were, but even after I went out of deep East Texas, FHA those projects would be going. I think Woodville has one similar to this.

ML: Yes, I think it is that one on Pecan Street, isn't it?

NP: Gilbert and myself talked about it.

ML: Well, in this interview you list Cleveland, Silsbee, Center and quite a few others, San Augustine.

NP: I guess I should add Woodville.

ML: You have Woodville in here, too. You said you worked with Gilbert on that?

NP: Yes, I think Gilbert was the first chairman of the housing authority down there.

ML: I don't know.

NP: I think he was. That's how I got acquainted with him and in Rotary.

ML: You have been involved with so many interlocking organizations, they were not formally interlocking but the work they ended up doing have fitted together very nicely. This business about the Lumberman's Association and the Rotary, Young Democrats, etc.

NP: In the Lumbermen's Association one of my ambitions was to get out all of our members plans. You see, at the time I was manager of the Lumbermen's Association of Texas there were very few architects and there were very few places where you could go and get plans. I remember an old firm by the name of Garling House and our ambition was to get a house that would cost no more then \$3,000.00 to be built and we worked and we worked and I got a bunch of plans and sent them out to all of my members, so when I went into FHA I had all of this background and I really knew who was interested in humanity in all of these communities. I had been in touch with Arthur way back there. I came up to see Arthur, not Arthur, Arthur's father. See, I was manager of Lumbermen's Association of Texas in '35 to '40, and I came up here with my President, Lamar Forest from Lamesa, and Arthur's father, I don't know where Arthur was that day, but Arthur's father and my president had a long talk and then Henry Temple was a student of the war between the states and I had just finished reading that five volume book about Robert E. Lee, and I don't think we talked housing one minute that day. Henry and I – we went to lunch and I think Henry and I talked, the other talked business, but I guess I knew when I went into FHA, after having this experience and contacting Arthur's father and his uncle, Henry, I guess I knew that my best bet was going to be here. But, Megan, I didn't take advantage of it until I had been rebuffed, I had no reason to come to Diboll, it was so small, you know. I thought Lufkin, Nacogdoches, Silsbee, some of these other towns over here, Livingston and Cleveland, but I got cold shoulders every where until I came here and from then on, really, when I came to East Texas, well, they didn't' have any motels up here then. There was one over here in Lufkin where I'd stay. I pretty muchly made this my headquarters.

ML: Because of the reception you got?

NP: Because of the reception and then, when they got to looking for an executive director of Deep East Texas Council of Governments, my name came up and I guess I was so enthusiastic about it that I resigned at FHA. Of course, if I had stayed with FHA a few more years my retirement now would be very substantial, but I was interested in this challenge.

ML: Can I get you to hold still just a minute?

NP: And 89 miles down yonder at the mouth of the Gulf of Mexico.

ML: Well, I am sure pleased to have had a chance to visit you here in Diboll before you get down there.

NP: We might want you to come down there and visit us anyhow.

ML: I would like to ask you another question. You have been accused of mixing religion and politics and you agree that you mixed religion and politics.

NP: How did you find that out?

ML: It's in the interview that you did with Becky. And I admire your answer and I wondered if you would like to talk a little more about it? Just about everything I am learning about some of the people who have made a difference in East Texas has eventually gone back to their religious belief training.

NP: Is that right, Megan?

ML: Yes, I'm thinking particularly of T.L.L. Temple and his Christian Science belief, which were deeply humanitarian and he was committed to the work ethic partly because of his religious background. In fact, the man who owned the land here from which T.L.L. Temple bought the original 7,000 acres was a devout Presbyterian, very involved in his religion and was energized in a sense by that. I wonder if you would like to talk about East Texas and the religious background, etc. and development, humanitarian ideas?

NP: Well, you know, Megan, that has almost been my life's work, when I went to Mt. Pleasant as Chamber of Commerce Manager, our big project was getting natural gas in and then our big project was, since all that area up there was a one crop farming area and that was cotton, and we struck out and built a milk plant in Mt. Pleasant and it wasn't but a few years – it didn't cost much money then, but we bought a purebred Jersey bull and we organized what was called "bull circles." There would be one here at this farm, one here and one here. This one would stay for a year, this one would move down here and this one would move here. They were called "bull circles," it really was a square. So you see, it wasn't long, about three years we were able, of course, I wasn't up there quite three years, but in three years these circles had moved on and on and on and just about covered that area. It wasn't long before milk was producing more income for those farmers and their life changed because, it used to be in East Texas that every January you would see covered wagons, or poor wagons, people with all of their possessions, all of their kids, moving from one farm to another and now, when dairying was brought in and they could grow something else, they could grow vegetables, they were able to buy this land, they were sharecroppers, most of them, then when enough money came in to where they could start buying the land and building houses. I guess right after I left the university in 1926, I got interested in what you are talking about, like President Kennedy's philosophy, that if you can do something to help people to help themselves, it's worthwhile. Then when he came along his philosophy was such, I mean, his whole life, his whole understanding of the human race, was such that it just challenged my imagination. Then, since I've had some agriculture and then I had insurance and I had housing and then the Federal Housing Administration, frankly, pretty much geared in those days, under the Republicans, it was pretty much geared to sure fire projects. They would insure a loan for a person, in other words, who could obviously afford it and do it himself. But here came President Kennedy and he said – but we have another segment here, who, if given a chance, can prove their worth, their dependability and prove that they can own homes. I made many, many loans, signed many loans that a lot of people wouldn't have signed, but I didn't see any reason for not going ahead and building a good home because, if Jones didn't live there, Smith would live there, or somebody else would. I have gone all around this area and very, very proud to see places that I had a whole lot to do with, shed a little blood.

ML: I'm sure.

NP: Now, what do you want to tune in on right now?

ML: The next thing is you were involved –

NP: Oh, you were talking about religion. I had a real compliment paid me by Jesse Higgins who is PR man for Dow Chemical. He was making a speech, had it written up, and he said that Neal Pickett is one of my heroes. Jess is a highly educated and powerful man down there, been President of that Rotary Club. He was quoted in the newspaper saying that I was one of his heroes because when the underworld shook their fist in my face and said, "The trouble with you, Mayor Pickett, you are carrying your religion into politics." Neal Pickett answered, "Well, yes, I take my religion wherever I go." Between you and me, Megan, when that big burly guy stood there right across – the Mayor's chair was here and the council was here, he was as close to me right here, and just shook his finger in my face and said "The trouble with you, Mayor Pickett, you're carrying religion into politics" I didn't know what to say and, frankly, between you and me it was the only thing that occurred to me. "Well, you wear your clothes where you go, so I said, "I take my religion wherever I go." And it was a good answer.

ML: Did it turneth away wrath?

NP: No, oh, I was engaged in politics there and it was terrible, Megan. But we had a law, city ordinance, that said "A beer joint could not be established within 300 yards of the schools" and the mayor that preceded me, all right, let's see, the beer joint is here and the school is here. Three hundred yards is closer than that, just across the street and about one hundred yards or two hundred and fifty yards. He said, the way you figured it, the beer joint is here, you come down to this corner and you go down to this street, you cross over, you come back up to the school building and then you go in. I said, "No, we are measuring it from here to here," And I put this guy out. He helped put me out, too, because I am sure he never forgave me for that. But, no, no, let's get your question that you want and get me on the subject.

ML: Okay, would you tell me which libraries that DET was involved in putting together? I understand that some of the projects of the DET were colleges, water and sewerage projects, libraries, etc.

NP: Megan, my memory is not what it should be.

ML: Well, I am sure I can look that up some place.

NP: That ought to be, that might be in here, you don't have a copy of this and I don't know that I have but one. Do you have a copy of that?

ML: I don't and maybe I ought to make a copy at the library so I would have the facts and figures.

NP: I have an idea you will have to read these headings and see if there is a heading in there that would say. Then that – I tried to do some review but when you can't read you have a dickens of a time. See what those headings are and see if there is one there that fits in with what you want.

ML: Very likely the one on economic development.

NP: How does that read?

ML: It just says economic development and on page 11. Oh, I see, here is a listing of all the different committees, some of them are highways and transportation and vocational, natural resources, industrial development, municipal water, and sewer survey sub-committee. This would be very good for me to have a copy of, as a matter of fact.

NP: I don't have but that one copy, I'm sorry.

ML: Could we copy it at the library?

NP: Oh yes. I think you will find some of the answers you are asking me in that.

ML: Yes, I see them already. There is a bunch of stuff in there that will be very good.

NP: All right, so I won't forget it, I'll just put that up there.

ML: Next, can you tell me – would you tell me about the screening process for the FHA loan? How rigorous was this screening process, was it like getting a bank loan, or was it more thorough than that?

NP: Megan, at one time it was as rigid as a bank loan. Don't think that I am taking credit for something, but I was trying to express and fulfill the wishes of President Kennedy and his advisors. And my brother-in-law, Ralph Yarborough was one of those that gave me a great deal of help. It did occur to me that home ownership, if it were just made available to those who could qualify for good loans would be inadequate for the general public. There are those that need some help and, at the same time that you were helping these people help themselves, you were adding a five thousand or six thousand dollar piece of property in a city like Diboll that would be paying taxes to the city government. So it was not a total loss, and then interest rates weren't so terribly high in those days but I know it was 7%, FHA raised it to 7 1/2, I raised cain, I said there is no reason for it at all, but they did raise it. I guess they had to. But I was always for keeping those interest rates down low, low, low. If you, myself, anybody wanted to go get a bank loan to build a house it was almost impossible to do that unless you have adequate resources. We know that when a man and his wife and children are in their own homes there is a different environment, that is a different feeling, of familiness, of love, consideration for your

neighbor, and everybody else and you have time for church work and all. When you are living in a rent house, not able to see that you are making any progress at all, you are discouraged and I have had many, many people come to me with tears in their eyes and say, "I've been paying rent and here are my receipts. If I had had an opportunity to have a federal loan I would have owned a home, I've paid enough money to buy a home and I am still renting." After two or three or half a dozen of those people came to me, I knew pretty well what President Kennedy was talking about. He had had more experience than I had had, at least. I knew what he was talking about and I became a little unpopular with my office in Houston and with Washington until – I let Margaret's brother know that Washington was kind of holding me back. Then I got some calls that they were coming down to see me and I was going to get cooperation. I never did indicate, you know, that they had been pushed a little, I was just happy and you will probably find that our Houston office, now the word "liberal" now-a-days, Reagan has made it appear to be something that isn't good, but the loans, true understanding, appreciation of people and all were a little more liberal. That's just the way I have always lived, I guess, because, and the truth of the matter is, FHA is a good paying proposition. FHA just made money, they have lost a whole lot but, as I said, it gives people homes and, any of these projects had to pay city taxes, all of them have had to pay city taxes, so it hasn't been a loss at all. Okay, where do you want me to start now?

ML: The next thing is – do you know of any other company towns, timber towns, or otherwise, in the United States where workers got titles to their homes in the way they did through the connections between Arthur Temple and the FHA?

NP: No, I don't, but I know that the Red Feeder Shingle of the Bureau paid for my expenses to come out to Washington and tell them what we had done here in Diboll and other places. Let's see now, that was in the housing days, of course, when I was manager of Lumberman's Association of Texas.

ML: Was that '35 to '40?

NP: That was in the '40's, in the late – '38, I guess it was, or '39. I don't know that I have had that philosophy but maybe I have. What they wanted me to do was to talk on – we called it "low cost housing," and really, homes, beautiful homes could be built for \$3,000.00, \$3,500.00 or \$4,000.00 in those days. Of course, they were interested in selling shingles and they had me come out and tell them what we were doing here in Texas. I must have a copy of that speech some place but I don't know where it is. I told them what we were doing in the housing association but my work has always been, it seems, aimed and directed toward helping people get homes. When are you going to start recording?

ML: It has been recording.

NP: Oh, well, I didn't go enough on religion, did I?

ML: You can tell me more about religion if you like. I would be delighted. Any of these topics for you just to talk on about it. I've got more questions if you want to hear them?

NP: Yes, let's go ahead.

ML: Okay, would you mind talking about why labor unions made very few inroads in Diboll?

NP: I don't think labor unions were ever welcome in Diboll. I think there was a prohibition on the organizing of labor unions in Diboll.

ML: What was the prohibition, who put that out?

NP: It must have come from the very top but I don't think it was a definite "no," but I don't know of any encouragement that was ever given to labor organizations and – I know when they had that strike here, it was a pretty mean affair. You weren't here at that time.

ML: When was that?

NP: I don't know, but they had pickets out here on their entrance, I don't remember the date at all.

ML: Do you remember the decade?

NP: Allen Miller was Director of Publicity for them at that time. Yes, the decade must have been, well, we were living here then, we came up here in '67, so it must have been in the '70's.

ML: I need to learn more about that. I just moved to East Texas in '79 myself.

NP: This was in the '70's, or maybe the early '80's, but it would be early '80's because – well, this is the middle '80's, no, it was in the '70's. Allen Miller could give you some information on that.

ML: Good, I will check with him. What union organization was involved here, or should I check with Allen?

NP: You would have to because I don't know. You see, I went out of the council in '72 or '73 and I think it was after that. I was involved only as a citizen, just being concerned, hoping the thing could be settled. I think there has been a prohibition against organized labor here. If not announced, certainly pronounced.

ML: One of the things that has been said to me about that is that conditions were actually better here for people and the workers themselves did not accept labor unions as readily as they might have other places because they were in a better situation here.

NP: I have never talked to a laborer or partisan about it but that is what was said, what I heard was that there was no need for labor unions when the people are getting all that they need, or all they desire, or all they could learn, or more, then they would under a labor union. There is nothing a labor union boss could get from us that we aren't willing to give them anyhow. We have already given it to them. I understand that vacations, that pay and, I think they have a fine medical agreement here, and I guess if they added up all the assets they probably have a good case. But there is a desire of most working people to belong to an organization of which they are already a member or part, but it just wasn't permitted. I think if the people had rebelled they could have had a labor union but, apparently they didn't think the price they would have to pay would be worth it.

ML: You have lived in Diboll for nearly twenty years now, what was it that made you decide to make Diboll your home?

NP: Megan, it was when I came up here as Director of the Federal Housing Administration, and as I went throughout the district, Margaret was born over here in Chandler, Texas and she loved East Texas. She used to come up here with me and we were so well received and we got such a wonderful cooperation that when they organized the Deep East Texas Development Council they got in touch with me and asked me if I would like to take the job, Margaret and I gave it very serious consideration, we had a home in Houston and we were fortunate in that our children had been educated and were out on their own. Our three children, two daughters and a son, had received their education – the two girls were married, Neal was a Green Beret in Vietnam, in fact he came on his way back to Houston, he came through Diboll and visited with us for a few days. We just found the people here and found this spirit of cooperation that I received as Director of the Federal Housing Administration, I thought if that could be expanded into cooperation of these thirteen counties that we could accomplish many things worthwhile. Then as Director of FHA I traveled all over these counties, Shelby County, all of these poor counties in this thirteen area. Of course, Angelina wasn't too bad off, neither was Nacogdoches but the other eleven were and I just thought that this cooperation of Arthur Temple and his people here would be such that something worthwhile could be accomplished and, I guess it was just the challenge to do something for a lot of people and I'd always been interested in water, sanitary sewers, parks and playground, homes because that went along with the housing authority and as manager of Lumbermen's Association of Texas we knew you were not going to have a good market for the sale of homes, lumber, if you didn't have a good community, and it just occurred to me. Margaret and I talked about it, we took a reduction in salary to come up here and take the job. We just decided we would make our home for a while because when I came up here in 1967, I was 65, born in 1902, and I figured that that would probably be just about my last job, and it was. Of course, I was very active as District Governor of Rotary and those things but it was just a challenge to do something for a whole lot of people and it gave me a great deal of satisfaction to go to these little communities as I have mentioned, and there were many of them there, and see these housing projects, individual homes. I was just as much interested in individual homes, but I had always had an interest in water and sewer and utilities because you can't have a good home without those and that's where I

spent a whole lot of my time and effort and energy in getting loans for those people. Nothing gave me more pleasure than to go in one of these towns. – I'm trying to think of a little town, I thought of it the other day, we got them a loan, I think it was \$45,000.00 for gas and I went up to that town one day; it was raining. The mayor and nearly everybody in town was out with shovels and spades. They didn't have enough money for the big contract but they were digging the ditches themselves for the laying of these gas pipe lines. That kind of community cooperation just appealed to me.

ML: Brings tears to your eyes, doesn't it?

NP: Absolutely and you wanted to do things. As I said, I've had people say, with tears in their eyes "Oh, I've got electricity now and I've got a sewer and I'm happy." But it all fitted in, I guess, with the years I spent with the Lumbermen's Association going around in this area, the whole state of Texas and finding what it meant to individuals to own their own homes.

ML: Would you talk a little bit more about the Lumbermen's Association and the work you did there?

NP: I think I have a file on LAT.

ML: Want me to look in there?

NP: This is FHA and what is this?

ML: DET – let's see the one on top there is DET, there might be one below there.

NP: No, I think I have a file in yonder on FHA, could you disconnect me for a second?

ML: I will disconnect you. I would just like to ask you your personal views on Diboll as a town and on what you think would be the most very important thing for me to include in this book about the quality of life here, the community, how people cooperate, all that sort of thing?

NP: Just trying to think where to begin, Megan.

ML: You came in '67? What made you decide to stay, what was it about life here that you liked besides the job you were involved in?

NP: Okay, I'll tell you. I had made several visits to Diboll and was very much impressed with the energy, dynamics and the character of the people of Diboll and – discussed this with Margaret and we decided that, well, if they would make us a pretty fair offer we would be glad to move to Diboll. We always found that the spirit of Diboll, and I do not know how to describe it, but I think it is best shown when we have our annual Diboll Day. Everybody in Diboll, from the youngest citizen to the oldest come out on Diboll Day to express appreciation for the privilege of living in Diboll and I don't think that this

spirit emanates from any body high up in the community. I think it is part and parcel and soul of the citizens of Diboll. Because I wouldn't attribute to any man the ability to enfuse the whole city of the spirit of ambition and energy, dedication. It must come from within and I think that in Arthur Temple we have had a man who can stir imagination, but the imagination has to come from the littlest citizen as well as from the biggest citizen. We on South Meadows here call each other neighbors and the word "neighbor" is used a great deal in Diboll and I think it makes you feel good to be called neighbor by your neighbors. We have a feeling of neighborliness in Diboll that I doubt is excelled by a very, very few other cities, regardless of size. Cities are getting so big now that there is no longer any feeling of being good neighbors. Here in Diboll everybody seems to be obsessed with the idea that I should be a good neighbor, people have been so kind to me and a good atmosphere and I want to make a contribution. I think the feeling here is that "I have received a lot from Diboll, I want to give something to Diboll." Can you cut it off for a minute?

ML: Religion and the spirit of enterprise, that's the topic. That's a tall order but, you know, I got started on this – I know a whole book ought to be written on that but I got started on this when I was interviewing Latane Temple and I first thought about it when I was interviewing Arthur Temple because he told me his grandfather --- The question about Kennedy?

NP: Yes, how did you put it?

ML: I don't remember my exact words but it was something about the way Kennedy's philosophy of social service and Arthur Temple's philosophy of social service fit together and how similar the ideas of both of those men were to your ideas to social services.

NP: We ought to go farther in the acceptance by the public generally of his philosophy because it is not a philosophy that belongs to any one man but one that is shared in by many people and some are so eloquent, they can express it, others can't, but I am saying that if it is expressed, I would like to give you the names of these organizations and if I miss any you can tell me. All right, I will have to start off with something about Kennedy.

ML: I would like for you to start wherever you would like to about Kennedy.

NP: I will just talk to you, Megan, and you can cut it. Margaret and I were present at President Kennedy's inauguration and were standing in front of him when he made the thrilling statement "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." I believe, at that time, patriotism in America was at it's highest point and I don't think we have ever reached it since, I'm not sure we will ever reach it again but it so inspired and thrilled me that when I came to Diboll, representing the Federal Housing Administration, and learned the need for good housing was great, and met Arthur Temple, who also agreed that there was a great need for housing and for other good things for those who were not as fortunate as some of the other citizens of Diboll. I found that after several visits up here in 1961 to 1967, that the churches of Diboll made a

contribution, the good life of the community, the Rotary Club, the Lion's Club, the Pilots Club, Diboll Day participants and, in discussing the program of housing for Diboll I found that Mr. Temple was imbued with the spirit of Kennedy, that all people should be given an opportunity to make some sort of a contribution to a better life. I think it was very eloquently expressed in the work that Mr. Temple has permitted to go forward and assisted in going forward, about he had the goodwill and he had the determination and the will of the people to do things for themselves. This is an organization. This is a community where our schools play a very important part, our city government plays a very important part, and every segment, the library was a great contribution to the development of the Kennedy spirit, all of the institutions provided the people to do what they were able to do in a manner that was, not only acceptable to all of us, but acceptable to them, and was a result of getting. There was a spirit existing in Diboll, perhaps it was unsaid and might not have been noticed but if we work together as good neighbors, as concerned citizens, good fortune will come to all of us and we will have a law abiding, decent community.

ML: I would like to ask you a question. The question has to do with the racial implication of what you are saying. I have felt and have heard that Diboll was an exemplary community in terms of early integration of the school and of fairness between the races in labor practices, etc., and I would like to hear from you, if you feel that it was this special spirit of community fairness and social service that Kennedy, you and Arthur Temple shared, had something to do with minimizing racism in this community.

NP: All right, I think the President Kennedy attitude toward racial matters was understood by all who followed him and when I came to Diboll I found Arthur Temple very much in accord with Mr. Kennedy. In fact, Arthur Temple called me and wrote me in Houston and said that he had a good Negro employee who wanted to get an FHA insured loan on his home, that was Willie Criss, and we checked. We took Mr. Temple's word for it but the FHA is a very thorough organization, we sent one of our men up here, he interviewed the man and checked the value of the property and I had the pleasure of signing the approval of the loan for the first black in Diboll, maybe in Angelina County, in fact, probably the first in deep East Texas and it never would have come about had not Mr. Temple been as much concerned with even the least of these as he was with his top men and women in the community. Does that answer it?

ML: It surely does.

NP: Can I say it another way?

ML: Surely.

NP: Tell me what you have in mind?

ML: There is a connected question and it goes back to something you said a few minutes ago. You said there was a spirit of involvement in this community that somehow made it special. Where do you think that came from? How did that all get started?

NP: Megan, I'm not willing to give full credit to any one person, it seemed to me that there were a number of people in Diboll who had that kind of thinking in their minds and Mr. Temple was in position to work with them and lead them to fulfill all the promises of the Kennedy administration.

ML: I think that says it very fairly, that is very similar to my own view of the things as it has been emerging in what other people have been saying.

NP: Megan, I'm glad to hear you say that – the understanding and competent leader of people who, themselves, who were understanding of what was involved and who were willing to share even the good and the bad. It wasn't too easy to go along with integration in every instance and in every case but we did and it was because of the will of the people and the spirit of the people. The people in the institutions and Mr. Temple have made Diboll.

ML: Well, you know, this gets into political philosophy, too. Would you like to talk about Kennedy's political philosophy and Arthur Temple's political philosophy?

NP: President Kennedy certainly believed that America was great because Americans were great and because Americans were good and he felt that any goal, whether it was in the field of housing, health or government, that the right kind of people, the right thinking people would control if the President, or in the case of Diboll Mr. Temple, went along with them. I think the knowledge on the part of the people of America that they had a friend in the White House and I think that is one thing Mr. Temple has pretty well demonstrated to the people of Diboll, that he is their friend. When the people of America realized that in President John F. Kennedy they had a personal friend. Megan, everybody who remembers that durable day when the word come out that President Kennedy had been shot, every person can tell you exactly where they were, exactly what they were doing. The man had such a grasp on every heart of every American, high and low, rich and poor, sick and healthy, together, something to be gained by everybody, but we are all working for our country, America. You might get something out of that during President Kennedy's administration more homes were constructed for poor and middle class America than had ever been accomplished before. His spirit, oh, it was a spirit of youth, of course, he had the marvelous brain but he had that great heart that he could share almost any kind of an experience with anybody, whether it was one of happiness, joy or sorrow in losing a loved one, or a house burning down. Kennedy just made everybody feel that their dreams could be accomplished and he was there ready to help in any and every way, for this great government of ours. I think the people had more respect for the government of the United States under the presidency of John F. Kennedy than every other president I have ever known and I voted for Al Smith in 1928 and have voted for every Democratic nominee since. I've seen many, many administrations but never seen patriotism, good will, understanding, working together, regardless of race, regardless of income, regardless of health or anything, that everybody was equal in so far as a chance for achieving something in life. Kennedy really was the spirit of youth doing things and everybody felt that "Here is a friend of mine, here is a friend of this country of ours, here

is the fellow I can certainly go along with.” I believe this country would have followed Kennedy any place he directed us to go.

ML: Let’s talk now about, if you wouldn’t mind, some of the management policies of the Temple Industries and his relationship to the ideals of the Democratic Party. Would you care to talk on that a little bit?

NP: Yes, I think the Temple organization has made it possible for the citizens of this community, in many cases, to own their own homes and to invest in land and to send their children to the very best schools, to get the best education and to feel that, regardless of race, color, age, that they were a part and parcel of the community. It is a spirit that very few men, or women, can instill in people, but President Kennedy had that ability and Mr. Temple, making it possible for his employees to buy stock in the company if they wanted to. I know that he has a good health program for the employees and good retirement program. Certainly his programs seem to cover men and women the day they come to work for him until they pass away.

ML: Yes, taking care of the whole person and the family. You said that the company had made it possible for people to invest in land, did you mean just because of the fair wages, or were there any programs for that?

NP: There wasn’t a program, but there was the inspiration for people to buy land. Mr. Temple was willing to sell some of his land so there was the temptation. Well, I can see that you can piece this together.

ML: It sure fits in nicely with things other people have told me, it really does, to have that perspective.

NP: You see, Mr. Temple has been interested in providing a cemetery for, I don’t know if I should say poor, you wouldn’t want – but

ML: Why not, we all know who we are.

NP: He has been interested in helping Diboll have a volunteer fire department, I think he bought the fire truck for them.

ML: Tell me some other examples of where the community had to provide something and Temple provided something. Seems to me every time I open the Free Press I read about another community grant they are getting here.

NP: Of course, it is unnecessary for me to mention the library as a typical example. There isn’t a church in Diboll that hasn’t received a contribution from the Temple Foundation when it was engaged in this most extensive project of building a new church.

ML: Every single one of the fourteen or fifteen churches that there are?

NP: I would say that every one of them have received some sort of help.

ML: Through the Temple Foundation?

NP: Now that, I don't know. If they have been just a straight gift from Arthur or it may have been the other way. Parks, playground, he made them available before we had a park system over here. We have always wanted a hospital here, but of course, that takes a whole lot of money, that may come along later.

ML: You think there will be one?

NP: Some day, sure. I think there will be.

END OF INTERVIEW