

C. C. DIBOLL

Interview 72a

November 10, 1984, at New Orleans, Louisiana

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ABSTRACT: Diboll Family descendant C.C. Diboll talks about the Diboll family's lands and the sale of the lands that eventually became Diboll and its mills. He talks about family history, their land ownership, and their interaction with the Temple family.

Megan Lambert interviewing Mr. C. C. (Collins) Diboll in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Megan Lambert: I wondered if you would tell again all that you can remember of the actual transaction that took place with T.L.L. Temple and how it was that the contact was made and so forth.

C. C. Diboll (hereafter CCD): Well the Diboll family, which was one half of the ownership of the Copes Estate being descended from Elizabeth Copes. And the other, her sister having moved to Arizona after marrying an Army officer represented the other half interest. We sort of took turns managing the affair, selling the timber and paying the taxes and other things. And at the time the transaction with the Temples took place, to my knowledge, it was my Uncle, Dr. Joseph Copes Diboll, who handled the transaction and signed for the two families. In selling the land and timber to the Temples he retained the mineral rights but he elected, with the families permission, to give the mill site to the Temples or it was part of the land purchase. I do not know the reason why they named the whistle stop on the Branch Railroad "Diboll" but I assume for the amity that existed between the two members of the transaction, Mr. Temple and Mr. Joseph Diboll. It is my understanding that the Temples named the town Diboll, we did not. It is a nice compliment, which we have been very grateful although in Texas it is pronounced DIBOLL and in New Orleans it is pronounced "Di-bawll." The family emigrated from Flanders to England during the wood trade era and Diboll was either a proprietor or a gentleman weaver and presumably they progressed with a basic education, etc. Until the Diboll that I met during World War II, when I came to England with an engineer combat battalion was named Percival Joseph Diboll, D I B O L L, and I accidentally discovered him so when I deposited money that I had won coming over on the Queen Mary. And the clerk noticed the spelling of the name and declared it was unusual because the secretary of the Barkley's bank of London was Percival Joseph Diboll. Is this what you want me to say?

Megan Lambert (hereafter ML): Yes, but you don't have to go into all that. I just wanted to know if there were any more specifics about the transaction I should know. For instance, was it exactly 7,000 acres that was sold or do you know the exact amount?

CCD: There is a dispute involving several hundred acres is not clear. But basically it was seven thousand acres and we always referred to it as seven thousand acres. How they came together I presume that the Temples seeking timber to be cut discovered the property and I presume made an offer to the family through Joseph Diboll and the family had been living, two families had their income greatly benefited by selling off the timber on the lands of Dr. Copes.

ML: Would you be willing to say what the price was per acre at the time?

CCD: This is a matter of material record and I don't even know if my father would have remembered it and I don't remember it.

ML: Would it be possible to see any of the deed records?

CCD: I wouldn't know where to look for them. We have them bundled up in great boxes whereas I do believe the original transaction is in the files of the Temple Company.

ML: Oh, I see, well, then they can answer that question. Okay, how about that deed to the pews in the First Presbyterian Church, is that somewhere where it can be seen?

CCD: I will have to find it, I found it and then lost it or misplaced it several times. But the owners of the pews at that time were the owners of the church, like stockholders in a corporation. Dr. Copes had at sometime in his attendance at the First Presbyterian Church and his friendship with Dr. Palmer, the pastor, acquired a pew having purchased it from Mr. West.

ML: Okay, my next question concerns the codicil to the will that your grandmother, or was it great grandmother, put in, what was the relationship of that codicil to the eventual land that was sold to the Temples or was there a relationship?

CCD: No, there was no connection. Miss Millie set up the fact that the children would not be distributed amongst friends but this English housekeeper, Mrs. Diboll, my great grandmother be employed and trusted implicitly was that she would conduct the household and the three children would live there until they became mature.

ML: So there was no ---

CCD: There was no heirship or anything at all, it was merely in relationship to the conduct of the children's progress.

ML: I see. Would you tell again your grandmother's full name and your mother's full name?

CCD: My mother's name was Frances Blocker and my grandmother's name, the mother of my father, was Elizabeth Copes and, one of the two daughters of Dr. Copes, and she married Collins Diboll, no, I have that wrong, she married Jason Torrey Diboll who also

came from the Philadelphia area to New Orleans to work for Dr. Copes and wound up marrying the boss's daughter.

ML: You had mentioned yesterday the absentee landlords that owned land in Texas, were most of them in Louisiana?

CCD: No, no, this was the general interest in property such as Texas, of course, because at one time it was a republic before it joined the United States and the rebellious armies that broke the relationship with the Spanish Mexico was supposedly generally recruited, etc. out of New Orleans, the New Orleans area. But there is no evidence I know of in the ownership of lands that was particularly related to Louisiana or New Orleans. Dr. Copes was merely fascinated with Texas and Texas lands and purchased many hundred thousand acres at five and ten cents an acre. The basic distribution of that I don't know. But it is possibly a matter of record although I don't have it. Referring to the acreage in Texas, I remember a story told that the contractor from Chicago that built the Texas State Capitol was paid off by a swap of three hundred thousand acres of Texas land for his bill.

ML: That was a lucky deal; it sounds like it to me. Next I have to make sure to get the relationship right between you and Wilkie Collins? Could you tell that again?

CCD: My ancestress Louise Collin's mother was a Huntington and the Collinses and the Dibolls are in the Huntington family books of American but this Miss Huntington married Wilkie Collins and I have a geography book given by Wilkie Collins, a short story writer of renown reputed to my father, Collins Diboll.

ML: Oh, I see, your father was also named Collins Diboll?

CCD: But he got that from my ancestress Wilkie Collins.

ML: I see, do you know, or do you remember stories about the way the early lumber industries were capitalized in Louisiana and Texas?

CCD: No, this is generally, I believe, a sort of family industry and Mr. Temple, of course, can enlarge on this. I think I remember I was told when they sold the 7,000 acres to the Temples that they moved an elementary sawmill equipment on there and operated the sawmill with his several sons and himself. But this is a family industry and due to the effectiveness of the Temples they have grown to where they are. This is true of other lumber interests, particularly in the northwest like Zellerbach, Weyerhaeuser.

ML: Yes, those were family industries also. You wonder about these family industries, it seems almost as if, at some point, their zeal for improving the family fortune translated themselves into civic zeal. Do you have that feeling about some of these?

CCD: Well, there are obviously indomitable, formidable family but with a great sense of leadership and compassion also because it is very evident that in the expansion of their business and the sawmill, which is one of the largest in the world, at Diboll have a steady

supply from people seeking employment and presumably they were to respond to the opportunities offered them by the Temples.

ML: Yes, it seems also that the Temples took advantage fairly early on in the industry of the new scientific knowledge that was available in their field and put that to good work, wood chemistry, etc.

CCD: They seem to have efficiently applied themselves to the advancements of themselves and the advancements and the techniques of the industry. Many of the details of the conduct of the operation I have no knowledge, merely observed the results.

ML: One of the things that strikes me in doing this work, talking to people about the growth of industry, particularly small families and one man's successes in America during this decade is the story of the big chance, the lucky break and of putting ingenuity and energy together in new ways to come up with entrepreneurial success.

CCD: Well, you see, the country in general is expanding and Texas was prominent in that and what they supplied to build the homes of people was lumber and it was an insatiable demand for that and they met the market conditions of supply and demand. I think, early on, they assisted in the financing of homes for which their lumber was used and what may have been a business interest actually came out as a result of being a humanitarian application. When one discussed luck I'm reminded of the definition that "luck" is opportunity implemented into action and this is the truth of many successful families.

ML: Yes, it certainly seems to be. Let me ask you also about this clause that was in the deed of the mill site about no liquor could be sold or consumed on the premises. Whose stipulation was it?

CCD: We only discovered this when the family sold off building lots into what became called Copestown and Dr. Copes was highly prohibitionist and evidently put into the deed of all these lots that none of that property would be used for the storing or selling of liquor. This was called to my attention by the Temples when they wished to get FHA financing and any qualification to a title had to be eliminated and this was the first we had heard of it but promptly circulated the necessary petition among the heirs.

ML: And it was then eliminated?

CCD: It was eliminated.

ML: I see. Was this when they were working with Neal Pickett to get Federal Housing Administration backing for what they wanted to do there?

CCD: I do not know the name Neal Pickett but either the Temples directly, or providing the push involved to help the lower income people to help build a home were very

effective in their connections of getting the FHA loans and Copestown approved as a small sub-division.

ML: I believe it was Mr. Pickett. I was wondering also whether Dr. Copes or whether Joseph Copes Diboll foresaw the lumber industry at the time they acquired the land and selling the land?

CCD: No disrespect to my ancestors, they were not developers but lived off the proceeds of diminishing capital by selling off their assets of both timber and land and, although the times were bad and they needed the money, I have no recollection of them engaging in any development activity of Dr. Copes' estate.

ML: Nothing like that, so it was a diminishing proposition?

CCD: It was a diminishing proposition if they had had the ability and the funds and the zeal to carry on Dr. Copes' intentions. It is impossible to believe what the development would have been because many oil fields in Texas have been developed on property at one time owned by Dr. Copes.

ML: Well, that's about all the questions I have unless you would like to wrap it up by discussing the politics of economics, what you saw. You were actively engaged in an entrepreneurial business in the years since the Depression and if you would care to comment on FDR and after? I know that is a bit of a tall order for a question but if you have any comments in that area I'd like to hear them.

CCD: Well, although Franklin Roosevelt was not popular with the capitalist, he simply sold himself to the general public and when he would come on the air with his opening phrase "my friends" he got immediate attention and support and the votes from national and local levels that the members of Congress whether they were as enthusiastic as he was or had his foresight, there certainly were opportunities provided and protection provided to lower income people and it is my understanding that the only national election that excelled the recent one by Reagan was Franklin Roosevelt's several elections. Huey P. Long caught the human football and carried it greatly forward in many things in anticipation of what Roosevelt may have done but he got the credit whether he was, to what degree he was sincere, I don't know, but it was very effective to bring common people into the main stream of politics.

ML: Well, that is all I wanted to ask you, do you have anything else you think we ought to know?

CCD: In my ramblings right and left if you wanted the records that we have of the Dibolls through the banker, Percival Joseph Diboll, whom I became to know of by accident and his statement to the effect that the Dibolls were a Flemish family and were Flemish weavers and in the wool trade of England, this was an important unit and what time he went to England and settled there and prospered in the wool trade I do not have the vaguest, one of these days I may try to run it down. But his descendants must have

been active because the only one I was able to identify was Percival Joseph Diboll, the secretary of Barkleys Bank in England and I met him in 1944, early 1944. My sister corresponded with him and they exchanged various things and then Dr. Virgil Miller Diboll came to London to Pennsylvania but seemingly estranged from his family because he never met with them nor did they come to America and this Dr. Virgil Miller Diboll was seemingly an itinerant and traveling minister and the family tree would show who he married and so forth. But the Dibolls' came into the interest of the Texas property through marrying into the Copes family. Let me get this family tree thing, you might find it of interest. I wish I had more knowledge of Dr. Copes' adventures and endeavors in accumulating this large degree of Texas property because, based in New Orleans he would either go overland by way of Donaldsonville which was a jumping off place to Natchitoches because there was a French fort at Natchitoches and there was a Spanish fort at Nacogdoches, Texas and these two Latin nations, although closely related in their acquisition in North America, was highly competitive and the Spanish fort was built to prevent further French expansion westward, because Spain had, at that time, all the way up to California. But he must have been a pretty intrepid person because he operated as far as Fort Worth and I don't think in those days of, I don't remember when he died but I have an impression that it was in something like the 1880's or '90's. He was active in business all that time and whereas his original holdings may have been after he came to New Orleans from his assignment with the Choctaw Indians and it would appear in his life, he went on such an expansion spree of acquiring Texas lands but his grandsons, by his two daughters, were not mature enough to have the spirit to be enthused and carry on the development of the property acquired by Dr. Copes. He is a little bit a man of mystery in that my father and his oldest brother were 18 years of age during part of this time but prior to Dr. Copes' death, they must have been 17 or 18 but still were not of sufficient maturity to have the capability of cohesively handling the properties and their lack of maturity and maybe ambition, and the knowledge of their deficiencies may be one of the reasons they did not make more forthright efforts. The other sister's husband, who was an Army officer, and there is only one descendant now, a George Alkire, who is the third generation from Dr. Cope's daughter. They had their endeavors up in Arizona but, again, displayed little or no interest in the property and how they could ignore this Alkire Army officer, for his career in the Army was carried on for a number of years, I don't know. But the boy, having died of yellow fever and no one of his sons were old enough to do anything, but through chance and of circumstances they dissipated the capital assets through possible necessity but there is no evidence of them doing anything of a developing nature. I am sort of down-grading the Diboll's.

ML: Well, my family is very much like that. I had a very enterprising grandfather and he got some land in East Texas and was a research chemist for Gulf Oil Company and developed the No-Knox and Gulf Pride Oil and the family since then has had a history of, what was your phrase "placid ineptitude"?

CCD: Just think, if he had acquired Gulf stock in that era of period or have taken, some of the executives must have taken participating interest, but presumably he was a scientist and interested in that engrossing character of his profession.

ML: He was, he did acquire some Gulf stock and his children have that, it hasn't passed to the third generation yet, though. But, yes, it was mostly the scientific aspects that interested rather than the entrepreneurial aspects.

CCD: Well, you see, since the era he would have acquired the Gulf stocks, the moment the stocks splits he could have a modest number of shares into large proportions but again it depends how that was subdivided among his descendants.

ML: Well, sometimes these things remain mysterious. Some people don't get to find out all these things.

CCD: Would you like to go to dinner?

ML: Sure, if you would like to.

END OF INTERVIEW