

**LOTTIE TEMPLE**

**Interview 98a**

**1986, Lufkin, Texas**

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**ABSTRACT:** Lottie Temple began working for Temple Lumber Company in Lufkin in 1944 and followed Arthur Temple, Jr. to Diboll in 1948 as his secretary. In this interview, she talks about her experiences working for Temple Lumber Company and Southern Pine Lumber Company, housing in Diboll, the intricacies of the payroll system, and the transition from a company owned town to a city with independent home and business owners. She also talks about Diboll's community spirit, Diboll Day, the increase in working women through the years, the day care center, and Green Acres Convalescent Center. Mrs. Temple also speaks on her role in starting the banking and insurance companies in Diboll, Diboll Development Company, and Exeter Investments.

**Megan Lambert:** This is Megan Lambert interviewing Mrs. Lottie Temple in Lufkin, Texas. What I want to ask you first is to keep in mind the differences that you may have observed between a community like Diboll and other communities in East Texas. Now, you have lived in Colmesneil, Rockland, maybe some others I don't know about.

**Lottie Temple:** Well, I've not traveled around very much. I lived in – I was born in Groveton but didn't live there very long. I grew up in Rockland and moved to Lufkin, where I worked for Temple Lumber Company, and then I came to Diboll.

**ML:** When was it that you started working for Temple Lumber Company?

**LT:** 1944.

**ML:** '44 – would you like to describe what it was like to work for Temple Lumber Company in 1944?

**LT:** Well, I was sixteen years old, just finished high school. The war was going on, and I didn't think I should have the privilege of going to college because the boys were all going off to fight. I went to Piney Woods Business College about two and a half months. They needed someone down at Temple Lumber Company to keep books. The man who ran the Piney Woods Business College sent me down and said I could do it, but I didn't think so. But I did. I worked there until '48 when Arthur went to Diboll. I went to Diboll as his secretary and worked for him forty-four years.

**ML:** What was your first impression of Diboll in 1948?

**LT:** It was a typical little East Texas sawmill town; people were very friendly.

**ML:** Was that the first time you had ever been to Diboll when you went down there?

**LT:** Oh no, I'd been down there. From time to time I'd go down. We were very close, the people that worked at Southern Pine Lumber Company and Temple Lumber Company. I visited people there and went through the plant. I knew a pretty good bit about Diboll before I went down there. I actually lived in Lufkin for a couple of years, I guess, and worked down there. The housing was very scarce in Diboll; the company owned all the houses. I remember they built some new little houses and I had applied for one. I had been told I could have it except that they needed a saw filer, I think it was. It was one of the positions in the plant, a sawyer. That's the man that sat on the carriage and told them what to make from the lumber, very important position. He needed the house so they said "Sorry, you can't have the house." But then another one came along pretty soon, and I did move down and I've lived there since. It must have been about 1950.

**ML:** Talking about the housing, it begins to seem to me that the change over in the housing from all company owned and rent housing to privately owned housing was maybe the biggest factor in the change over in Diboll. Can you describe that?

**LT:** Yes, I'd say you are right. The company had a feeling of being everybody's manager. They managed their finances. When I went to work down there we put up the payroll in cash. Someone came to Lufkin to the bank every Friday morning, or Friday. Everyone in the office, the secretaries, bookkeepers, everybody came in and we put together the payroll. Counted out the cash, put it in little envelopes. Every day they had a window that employees could come and draw against their wages and some people drew their wages every day. We just deducted that from the amount they got.

**ML:** What percentage of people would you say ended up drawing their wages every day?

**LT:** Oh, I'd say very few, but there were a few that just lived from day to day. But most people, probably most people working in the plant drew something on their wages. Their rent was taken out of their wages and their electric bill. We had a company doctor when I went there. The families paid \$1.00 a month, I think it was, and they could come see the doctor any time they wanted to. That was taken out of their wages. Almost anything they wanted was taken out of their wages. We withheld it. If they owed the bank or somebody else, that would be withheld; we would do it for them. The company was very paternalistic. It really, well, it did sort of control their lives. The housing almost went with the jobs, the house you got. It was really funny to me because they opened up what they called the Farley Addition, which is near our house now, but no houses were in there at that time. They had begun to sell off their houses to the people who lived in them. If they didn't want to buy it, they would sometimes sell them to someone else, but if the person living in it didn't want to buy it, they would let them stay and when they left they would sell it. But they sold them very cheap. Rent was very

cheap. When they started trying to sell these lots everybody felt they were way out there in the country. They didn't want to buy a house down there. So I finally bought the first lot and built the first house, and then people began to buy. Oh, mainly the lots on the highway sold, everyone wanted to live on the highway.

**ML:** Isn't that interesting?

**LT:** Then they sold off and nobody wanted to buy there. The lot I built on was half an acre and it had about 100 big pine trees on it. I think I paid \$400 for my lot. But that just encouraged people to begin to manage their own affairs and own their homes.

**ML:** Well, it sure interests me. It would interest me if you could remember some of the conversations about the time you came here. There must have been discussions about this whole philosophy of stopping being paternalistic. You know that phrase about giving sawmill people back their dignity. Do you remember any of those conversations?

**LT:** Yes, I think people were really slow to change but I can remember people coming in to, I was Arthur's secretary, and I can remember people coming in to his office to get him to settle their divorces.

**ML:** He mentioned that. Just very amazing how they must have used him.

**LT:** And they would – they really depended on the manager at that time, to run their lives. Almost anything that came up. For illness in the family, or anything that came up, they would come in to talk with Arthur. I think that once they got to handling their own affairs, it was a totally different town. Then people began to want to put in business. Up until that time there were practically no businesses except the ones the company owned. Nobody felt that Diboll was going to be a thriving, growing little town. And Arthur started encouraging other small industries to come in, which we do have a few now.

**ML:** How did he do that? What was the form of encouragement?

**LT:** Mainly through the Chamber of Commerce, I think. Until he went down there, I don't think they ever considered putting any of the plants in Diboll. The ones that were coming to the area, they put them in Lufkin. It was just normal and nobody asked about it, but then we all got pretty active in the Chamber of Commerce, and we just asked if they would consider Diboll also.

**ML:** Were all of the company owned businesses, prior to that time, centered around the commissary or were there some others in the town, in other parts of that area?

**LT:** The Company owned businesses? They were – well, they were all pretty well centered in that area. Are you talking about the Temple Industries rather than outside industry?

**ML:** Yes.

**LT:** When I went there they had a box factory, they made crates for Coca Cola, wooden crates for beverages cases, mainly. Pretty soon afterwards Temple Associates built an ammunition box factory.

**ML:** So those two factories were separate, huh?

**LT:** Yes, the one, in fact the beverage case factory burned and they did not rebuild it. I don't know if they moved it to Dallas or if they already had one in Dallas.

**ML:** You have just cleared up something because I thought there was just one box factory. I had a date on a box factory burning and later there was more box factory activity.

**LT:** It did not belong to – I'm sure Arthur told you how he organized Temple Associates.

**ML:** He told me a little bit about it but I would like to hear more from you.

**LT:** Well, while he was running the retail lumber yard in Lufkin, he started organizing these several little companies and he built houses. Then the war came long, and he couldn't build. All the lumber went for defense projects. Unless you could justify needed housing for defense, you just didn't build any houses. He got Temple Associates into the ammunition box factory, and they build mainly boxes for the arsenal in Texarkana but others. Horace Stubblefield ran it before he went to work for Temple, well, Southern Pine Lumber Company then. They had a furniture factory in Diboll which was his –

**ML:** How long did that last?

**LT:** I guess probably six to eight years but I'm not real sure. It lasted a good while, built a new plant. They started out, I think I'm right, after the war and after they quit having a demand for ammunition boxes, then they converted that building into a furniture manufacturing plant. I'm pretty sure that's right and then they later build a more modern facility to build furniture in. Finally I think it merged in with Temple Industries. I'm not for sure about that either. I know they merged Temple Associates into Temple Industries. I think Temple Associates owned the furniture manufacturing so it did go in as part of that.

**ML:** I see.

**LT:** And then the company operated it for a long time and bought a plant in Austin, Woodward Manufacturing Company that also manufactured furniture. Then they finally phased that out, both of them.

**ML:** You know, I hear talk in Woodville about a kind of dependent attitude that there was between the people who worked in the sawmill there and the sawmill owners. Apparently they were still issuing scrip in Woodville in 1961, and some people have said that it set that town back, you know, several decades behind towns like Diboll where it was just much sooner that they would just move away from the feudal relationship. Are there any other company policies you can think of?

**LT:** One thing we started having in about '55. Well, I'll go back further. One of the first things that Arthur started trying to do was get a bank in the town. People couldn't actually do banking because a lot of them didn't have transportation. At that time we had a train, a passenger train that came though Diboll and came into Lufkin. That was the way a lot of people got to Lufkin, either that or bus. So there was no way really for them to handle their own finances very well because they didn't have a bank. So he organized a bank, or helped to, got people interested in it.

**ML:** What year was that? Oh, approximately.

**LT:** I want to say '51 but it may have been later that that, it may have been around '55, but it was somewhere in there, early '50s. And I remember the state passed a law that to drive a car you had to have liability insurance with certain limits and there was no insurance agency in Diboll. The people, the only insurance they could get were salesmen who came around and sold insurance. They really took advantage of them. They had to pay so much more than they would have ordinarily. So Arthur encouraged me to go get an insurance license which I did, and I started writing insurance and I ran the credit union and I was –

**ML:** When did that get started?

**LT:** We organized the credit union, I guess, about '50s.

**ML:** So all of that was happening at the same time in the early '50s?

**LT:** Right.

**ML:** So all of those services were starting to be put in?

**LT:** Right, right. And there was a lot of excitement and it spilled over, you know, into the surrounding towns. People began to realize that it was really a little town now, not a – they called them camps. They called sawmill towns camps more or less because they used to just move in, camp out, cut out, and move out. Even the stationary mills were looked upon a little bit as being, you know, they may move off some day, but it didn't

have a lot of stability. I think that when people realized that the company really did not want to run their business or businesses. Then they – Arthur, when I say Arthur I mean management – built a little shopping center which gave people a place to put businesses.

**ML:** That was in the '50s, too, wasn't it?

**LT:** Yes.

**ML:** Well, actually when you think about it, if there was so much involvement, personal involvement between employees and the management, that in itself would put an upper limit on the size that the whole enterprise could grow to because there are just a certain amount of people you can see per day, and the company couldn't be that involved any longer.

**LT:** Well, when Arthur came down at first, he also modernized all the plants, which immediately, I'm sure, I don't know this by statistics, but I'm sure that the employment went up a good bit because they were doing so much construction work and operating the plants. They sold off their electrical distribution center to TP&L [Texas Power & Light]. When I went to Diboll, I think this is correct; there were town telephones in Diboll. One was at the main office and Mr. Henry Temple lived in the house we live in now, and I think he had an extension off of it to his house. And I remember a man named Pres Holcomb had a telephone in his house.

**ML:** Holcomb?

**LT:** H O L C O M B

**ML:** Why did he have one?

**LT:** I don't know. He never worked for the company. He had nothing to do with the company.

**ML:** He had a private telephone and that was it?

**LT:** If you wanted to call you had to go to the office and, you know, get somebody to call for you.

**ML:** Did a lot of people come to the office?

**LT:** Emergencies was the only thing, I don't think there were all that many. Soon after that Arthur encouraged – particularly after people started to own their own homes, they put in a new telephone system and people began to subscribe for telephones. Nobody even thought about a phone. Well, as I said, the electrical distribution center was owned by the company, they generated the electricity from waste from the plant, but then as they began to use the waste for other things, well, they sold it out to TP&L [Texas

Power & Light]. Everything, every step you took in that respect contributed toward making the town grow. People were more independent people, they were doing things on their own, and they were talking it up.

**ML:** They were in touch with a kind of wider world of responsibilities, too. That, to me, is what makes the story of this town so fascinating, is the way it went from being an absolutely isolated whistle-stop place and place fresh out of the woods, to the kind of town it is today. I don't know East Texas all that well, but I have lived here long enough to be able to see an immense difference between Diboll and lots of other towns of this size. It's just amazing.

**LT:** Well, what I started to say, still in the '50s we started having Diboll Day.

**ML:** That had a lot to do with it.

**LT:** It really did, I don't know if you really realize how much it still does.

**ML:** I should think it must.

**LT:** You know you just can't believe the spirit it generates in the community. I think – what I think happened – I've seen a lot of young people working in the office who really became recognized for their ability through their community effort, and a lot of it was Diboll Day.

**ML:** So it was a proving ground, in a way.

**LT:** Yes, you saw how enthusiastic they got over doing these things and it gets to be a real chore but everybody just keeps grinding. It really ties people together. The reason it has been so successful is that the company has always allowed the people to participate on company time. It's just part of the operation. Other little towns have tried it; they've tried to copy it and it just doesn't work. It's got to have the support of industry and everybody to do what we've done because we have raised a lot of money.

**ML:** An astonishing amount of money and just the sense of participation is a heady kind of mix of people.

**LT:** It is, and you know, for about a month down there it is hectic, but fun. It spills over. It's not only making money. We do a lot of things that are a lot of fun to do and people start playing pranks on each other, you know. It just gets to be a circus more or less.

**ML:** What kind of pranks, can you tell some that you know?

**LT:** Oh, we do anything: cheat, lie, steal whatever, to get money for our division, you know, when we are working. We, oh, I've even had people go through my mail and take my checks that were addressed to me.

**ML:** Oh, really?

**LT:** And once you get your hot little hands on the money, there's no turning it loose. You just forget it, because whoever gets it, keeps it, but it all goes into the same place. That's the reason it is fun. We are so competitive; the divisions are.

**ML:** It's competitive but it all goes to the same good cause?

**LT:** Right.

**ML:** What a perfect combination.

**LT:** We all do a little bit of it, you know, a little cheating, a little stealing and a little of this. Nobody really gets upset because they've done it, too. But sometimes people have taken things, for instance, that we would get together for bingo parties or prizes and things that we would go around and get merchants to contribute. You keep them locked up or somebody will get them and use them for their division.

**ML:** Well, do the people who are very active in Diboll Day basically stay the same from year to year or have they changed a lot. Does everybody get into the act?

**LT:** Everybody gets into the act, and new people coming in are, you know, they are always kind of standoffish and they think "I don't want to do that". But before the thing is over they are getting right in the middle of it. It's really a community effort as much as anything I've ever seen.

**ML:** What are some of the special events that have happened around Diboll Day that you have been involved with?

**LT:** We have had, from time to time we've had entertainers come in and perform to raise money. We found that that was really not that successful. We had to pay them to come perform, but we have – we have bingo parties. Some divisions have dances. We have trail rides and chili suppers and any kind of food you have. We meet every Thursday for a month and it is really funny, everything that is going on. Police come and arrest somebody for stealing, or whatever, you know. They put them in the paddy wagon and they have to go pay their bail to get them out. We were doing that before they started doing it. Now everybody is doing it.

**ML:** It's kind of a carnival atmosphere.

**LT:** It's very much a carnival atmosphere every day.

**ML:** Well, whose idea was this in the beginning?

**LT:** Arthur's but I'm not sure, it just got started. We have a dunking stool and get people to sit on it, you know. People pay to knock them off into the water which gets kind of cold sometimes. I've been on that.

**ML:** How about things like contests having to do with the old timber activities?

**LT:** The forestry department at SFA [Stephen F. Austin] has been cooperative with us now to put on axe chopping contests and sawing contests, things that they do now. The way we logged in the days when I went to Diboll are totally different to the way they log now. We had the crosscut saw where two men worked. The first Diboll Day we had them and we had log rolling contests and chopping and sawing, shinnying up poles. They sometimes had to go up and trim the limbs and fell trees. That was all part of the Diboll Day activities. They still have that, but it's not the same contest that we had. We have a tug of war where the different plants get a team and they compete against others, pull them into a muddy pool. On Diboll Day they have all kinds of contests, like sack races. One year they had ducks out on the little island on the pond and the kids had to take a little boat out and get the ducks, see who would transport them back and forth quicker.

**ML:** I'll bet that was fun. I want to make sure I leave enough time to talk about your specific activities and involvements and the list is quite lengthy. Maybe you would like to start off talking about the Green Acres Convalescence Center or the day care center, any of those things.

**LT:** Green Acres Convalescence Center was a private company Arthur and I and a couple of others had. We just built the nursing home and it just turned out to be that the nursing home, I'm sure, through the administrator, but it is a well run nursing home. We have sold it now. We no longer own it. It was not a philanthropic endeavor, a money making thing, but it was run very well. The day care center is really something that interests me. I have, I guess I have been on the board since they started about '61 or '62. Arthur's mother was instrumental in getting the money together. Arthur and I have the site. I just love dealing with children. It's done such a great job providing a place for mothers who have to work to leave their children, not only as a baby sitting service but also they teach kids a lot. I still serve on the board and am very interested in it. Originally when they decided to build the day care center we really were having a hard time finding good people to staff the plants. There weren't that many women working because they didn't have any where to go, you know, to take in children. Someone found that a woman was working at one of the plants and was leaving her baby in a crib until she would get her break and she would come home and feed the baby and go back. She had to work but she didn't have anybody to look after the child. I think, maybe that pushed people into realizing that they really did need a facility, a good facility that would be a place that working mothers could leave their babies.

**ML:** How many working mothers do you think there have been over the years in Diboll? Would you be able to guess what proportion of women here work?

**LT:** Well, it changed a lot from the time I went to Diboll and now. I guess when I went to Diboll there were very few women who worked except in the offices there and the company store and things of that sort. I would say that surely less than 10% of the women worked outside the home. Some of them did sewing and things in the house, in their own homes but they didn't leave. And now I'll bet that 75% of them work.

**ML:** That many?

**LT:** Well, that's a guess, I don't know for sure but there are an awfully lot of women who work out of the home now. One of the reasons that Arthur was interested in having a place for the children was that a family with two working had a lot more money to spend. They were happier than when the man was working and they just could hardly make ends meet and, particularly when things became more expensive. We found that they were better satisfied employees because they were able to raise their standards of living by both working. The day care center also provides a place for, we have about twenty employees.

**ML:** That many?

**LT:** They don't all work the same shift but they come and go.

**ML:** Is it mostly women who work there?

**LT:** It's all women.

**ML:** What ages of kids stay there?

**LT:** Six weeks 'til school age except that we also provide a service that we go over and pick up the kids at school when they get out and bring them to the day care center and keep them until the parents get off from work. We also open at 6:30 so the parents who go to work at seven can drop the kids off. Sometimes a lot of the kids are dropped off who have to go to school, particularly now that we have kindergarten and now we have pre-kindergarten, the four year olds can go. So a lot of times they drop the kids off and we take them to school and then pick them back up. We run a little service. The Temple Foundation just this year and last year, gave us money to buy a little mini-bus to transport back and forth. It really has helped out a lot.

**ML:** Oh yes, gosh – comprehensive attitude toward what families need, I love that.

**LT:** We've also, as aside, had detected several child abuse cases which we've never come across, that kids were in that environment and the administrators and teachers are trying to observe and know when this happens.

**ML:** Would you like to talk at all, I don't want to keep you any longer than you need to be kept if you're going to a picnic.

**LT:** That's Saturday.

**ML:** Okay, if you'd like to talk about any of your other business involvements, like Exeter or T&T, or let's see, the Angelina County Medical Research Foundation, that sort of thing?

**LT:** Well, there's not a lot to say about it, I'm just enjoying working. Several of us formed Diboll Development Company and that was in '53 or '54 which later became Exeter, and I had always worked. When Arthur and I married I couldn't work for the company and so I just ran our personal companies. We have gone into one deal and then another. The T&T Corporation just owns some properties, mostly retail outlets, retail places. We own the nursing home and Exeter. I look after our books, somewhat manage some of the affairs, if there is anything big I usually ask some advice on it. But I continue to work because I enjoy it.

**ML:** That's interesting. Let me finish by asking you about the Temple Foundation, do you have any involvement in that?

**LT:** Not really, from time to time they have asked me to check into projects that have applied for assistance and I have checked them out for them, for the foundation. I've never been on the Board of Trustees or anything along that line. I have been a liaison between the day care center a lot. It would never have been the thing they are now without them.

**ML:** Well, let me just ask you if there are any memorable anecdotes that you think ought to go in this book that I probably haven't heard from somebody else.

**LT:** Probably not, I think you've probably talked to people that knew everything that I know.

**ML:** I don't know. You've been in a unique position to see things and any anecdotes or observations you can think of that I ought to be aware of...the most important things about the growth of Diboll and this company that you can think of.

**LT:** I think the most important thing about the growth of Diboll – I don't want to sound like I am promoting Arthur, he was so enthusiastic and so interested in the town and in the people, you know this secret has just spilled over. I think Diboll is probably a little town that – you could say any day of the week, that if somebody was in need and he

needed and I've done this a lot, when I was working, not the company money but anything that anybody needed, we'd just say, "Hey, we need some money now and we need to get together some money." And immediately everybody came to the rescue and the town has always had a very cooperative spirit, I've found. It has grown a lot now and I don't know every one now. I used to know everybody in Diboll, I don't know them now and so I'm not quite as close, but I still think that any person who had any kind of really serious problems would only have to make their needs known and people would pitch right in and help them out.

**ML:** Yes, I sure got that impression. I've wished several times in the last year that I lived closer to Diboll. It's a lovely place.

**LT:** I think that it is unique in that it, the town works together. I don't think we have too many factions pulling in different directions. And that may be – it could be because of there is just one main industry and people are working together in that industry. But I do understand what the company was trying to get at when it did certain things and felt that they shouldn't do it. But someone in the company was aware enough and interested enough that they would go and talk to these people and the people really didn't understand the problem. It has always, any major project that we embarked on I think we've managed to end up with everyone pulling together.

**ML:** That's wonderful.

**LT:** And that's all I can account for.

**END OF INTERVIEW**