

**DOROTHY BIRDWELL, J. D. JOHNSON,  
YVONNE LEWIS, GENE BECK**

**Interview 258a**

**1991 at Temple Inland Corporate Office, Diboll, Texas**

**Carolyn Elmore, Interviewer**

**Patsy Colbert, Transcriber**

**ABSTRACT:** In this interview with Carolyn Elmore, longtime Temple employees Dorothy Birdwell, J.D. Johnson, Yvonne Lewis, and Gene Beck reminisce about their career with Temple and the companies that preceded it. They talk particularly about the offices that were moved to Diboll after the merger with Time, Inc., including tax offices and land and timber offices in Hemphill and Jasper, former offices of Southwestern Settlement and Development and Houston Oil Company.

**Dorothy Birdwell (hereafter DB):** I've been with Temple since 1946. I started the day after I graduated from high school and I started at the Land & Timber office in Hemphill. At that time that is where it was located, but it's the same job and then later on in '54 they expanded the main office in Pineland for the Land & Timber group and moved us over here that year. Then I believe the merger with Diboll came in February of '55 and we were in the old office for quite some time there. Then we've been down at the new office since the '70's. I started for a real kind old gentleman, Reggie Goodrich, and in fact I did not even know I was working for Temple when I started. I thought he had a surveying business in Hemphill and I wasn't aware that it was for Temple for quite some time. Back then you didn't have an interview really, and no physical, nothing. I just went to work. I've enjoyed working for many years. I'm thankful to have the job because it has been a living for me.

**Tape stopped and restarted:**

I've had the secretarial job for the Forest Division since I started. I had a chance to move out one time but I didn't want to leave because I just liked the woods end of the deal and I thought I understood it a little better. When I started it was called McGee Bend Dam at that time and it was just in the talking stages really and then of course it has wound up being Sam Rayburn. And we were buying timber then for six and eight dollars a thousand for good hardwood, ten and twelve for pine saw timber and it took a good track of timbered land to bring fifteen to eighteen dollars per acre which is certainly been a lot of change since then. At that time it was just a small little family group, you knew everybody. You knew a lot about their way of living and of course it has grown to the point now it is sort of a number instead of just a little family group.

**Taped stopped and restarted:**

Some of the ones I've worked for after I worked for Mr. Goodrich, we came to Pineland and he retired shortly after for health reasons and then I worked for Kenneth Nelson for a short while. He came over after the merger from Diboll and then June of '55 Bill Nichols

came over and he headed up our department and I worked for him 22 or 23 years. Then we had David Robinson, Wes Wright, and there has just been numbers of them and they've all been awfully good to me. I couldn't have made it through some of the harder times if I had not had such understanding bosses and I certainly appreciate that.

**Taped stopped and restarted:**

Back when I first started we did everything with a typewriter and a pen and an adding machine. We received our pay in a little, about a 2x4 little brown envelope. All it had on it was your name and the amount of cash that was inside. Of course just a small amount of social security was withheld then and since then of course it has changed so much. We've gone to just about a complete computerized type of work now. You do very little the old hard way, but at that time we did a lot of mapping. You drew those by hand, you labeled everything with your little stencil and it was quite a lot of work to do then because it took so long to get it done. I remember setting up the filing system and making new files and you took the little hand stencil and did the printing on every one of them and that was for about seven counties, each tract of land we owned. I think one of the amazing things to me was I did not, naturally just getting out of high school and I halfway got the job by accident, I really didn't even want it. I thought I was so grown and I would just get a job and move and I'd be my own boss at 16 but it didn't quite pan out that way, but anyway after I went to work we had just bought the Gilmer Company purchase and it was a big purchase and of course the amazing thing to me was that the land had names, each tract – surveys had names and numbers and of course I didn't know anything about that. Going to the courthouse to get exceptions out of deeds the first week I was on the job was quite an experience. I hardly knew what they were talking about, but everyone was real patient and I learned it and I like it and it's been my life for me. Really it's all I know.

**Tape stopped and restarted:**

Back when I started the big portion of the timber we operated on came from Southwestern in Jasper. We would do a joint cruise and we would buy it for say eight or ten dollars a thousand and there wasn't any restrictions much other than the size of the timber and you cut it. And we bought an awful lot from them at that price, you know, and of course it gradually eased up. One reason the people were prone to sell their places were after the war they had all gone to the cities to work and they were all anxious to get rid of old home places and old farms they had and they sold so cheap. They would sell for ten, twelve, fifteen dollars an acre.

**Carolyn Elmore (hereafter CE):** What about the story of how Pineland became? Didn't it start with Hemphill, there was a mill in Hemphill and then...tell me that story.

**DB:** Well, when I started they had what we called the little mill. It was located out on the Bronson highway and it was near the Sturgess Lumber Company mill and it then cut mainly hardwood. But I would say in six or eight years it phased out; but before my time Knox had a mill in Hemphill and then Temple bought it and operated it in Hemphill, but I

don't know a lot about his operation because that was in the '30s I suppose, the '20's or '30's. I recall hearing my dad talk about working there. But the only thing about in Hemphill when I started to work was they had some of the old company rent house and that was a big chore to go and collect rent every month. They rented for five and six dollars a month. I believe we had one especially big house that rented for eight and that was part of my job was to go around and collect the rent and hear all the tales of what all needed to be done. Of course, I admit a lot could have been done and they worked on them. They had a carpenter crew then and that is all they did was work on these old rent houses. I don't recall a lot about the mill before then. I had always lived eight or ten miles from Hemphill. I only went to Hemphill School my last four years and of course then that was some distance, you know. I remember Mr. Goodrich getting the first new car after the war. They allowed him to buy the first and it was a '46 Ford and in fact I didn't even have a driver's license at that time but, I got one. I guess I'd been working six or eight months and I used that car to get the driver's license.

**CE:** Well, when did you move over here?

**DB:** We came over here in September of '54.

**CE:** Say that again and say we came to Pineland.

**DB:** We came to Pineland in September of '54. They moved us in a new addition to the office up there, had new furniture, just real nice compared to what we had had in Hemphill. And then we merged with Diboll in '55 and of course there has been mergers since and it has changed an awful lot and it's just a big operation now, where it used to be very small. In fact after Mr. Temple came to Pineland, that was about '55 or '56 after the merger, well things started changing just drastically and it's built up just an awful lot from what it was back then.

### **Tape stopped and restarted**

**DB:** When I started to work I believe they had about a four man crew. They did the timber marking. They did anything you needed to do in the woods. We called them the woods crew.

**CE:** No foresters on staff?

**DB:** There were no foresters until Bill Fulmer came along. I would think that was in about 1950. I had been working quite awhile when he came and he was the first forester and the only one we had in this area for quite some time.

**CE:** Bill Fulmer?

**DB:** Bill Fulmer, yes. I think he has a son that is working now at Diboll or he works for the company somewhere. I don't know just where, but Bill is retired. I think he was from

New York and you know that was sort of a little joke, everybody thinking they had a Yankee to tell them what to do, but he did well and he hung in there regardless.

**CE:** You said your work hasn't really changed.

**DB:** Well, the basic part of it has not. We still try to keep up with the land and timber and the district now is broken down into regions and districts. When I started you had all what we called the Temple Lumber Company counties which were about seven I believe, reaching Panola County, Jasper, Newton, all the Temple holdings. I can't remember a figure then but it was not nearly the acreage it is now. They have grown that much. But this small crew did everything until they started hiring foresters and of course now they have numbers of them that do nearly everything or have some aids to help.

**CE:** This area that you work with what counties or what is included?

**DB:** Now I work in Ray Melton's district which is the northern part of Sabine, San Augustine, Shelby and Panola. And when I first started we had Orange, Newton, Jasper, and a little in Hardin and I think just a tract or two in Tyler and Panola and San Augustine. We went from above Carthage back to Orange was the district then or was what we owned. We did everything that Temple owned because we called, you know, this was Temple's holdings over here and it was Southern Pine at Diboll and I believe the Angelina River was about the dividing line between us but we maintained the records on all those counties. Surveying, you had your survey crew and this four or five men that did everything else that you needed done.

**Tape stopped and restarted.**

**CE:** Okay, whenever you get ready. Try to keep it still because it's going to pick up that chair noise. Just whenever you get ready.

**J. D. Johnson (hereafter JDJ):** Okay, my name is J. D. Johnson. I went to work for Temple Eastex, Temple Inland in 1935 the first time. I worked for about six months and quit and went somewhere else and came back September in '56 and I've been here ever since, going on 35 years now. I went to work in the sawmill, tailing edger, what they called then "fighting the little bear". I think the pay rate at that time was ninety-two cents an hour is what I was drawing. After I worked there some time I was transferred to the Creosote Plant and worked up there a couple of years, then went into the service, came back from the service to the Creosote Plant and worked awhile longer and was transferred to the Fiberboard Plant on the car line. I worked on the car line a couple of years and went into the invoice department in the sales office and stayed awhile. From there I was transferred to the personnel office as Vernon's assistant and have been there ever since.

**CE:** And what are you doing right now?

**JDJ:** Now I'm the Corporate Safety Coordinator for the entire Building Products Operation.

**CE:** How many plants does that consist of?

**JDJ:** Well the Building Products Operations consist of ten plants located in five states, Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma and Georgia. I travel frequently to visit these plants and do the safety work and help the safety coordinator in each plant keep up with his job.

**CE:** Tell me what the town of Diboll was like in 1956.

**JDJ:** Oh gosh! In 1956 when I went to work here the town of Diboll was mostly dirt streets and they had the little shotgun company houses located all around where the people around town lived. They had none of the facilities that they have here now. They had a picture show and one restaurant, the old Antler Hotel, and that was about it for the city of Diboll at that time.

**CE:** Did most of the people that lived here work here?

**JDJ:** Yes, most of the people that lived here in Diboll worked for the company. We had of course the Plywood Plant came online later but we had the Fiberboard Plant, the Creosote Plant and the Sawmill and that was all that was here then but most of the people that lived in Diboll worked for the company in one of the plants.

**CE:** What sticks out in your mind as the most vivid memory of the company? I'm thinking maybe when the sawmill burned.

**JDJ:** Now that is probably when the sawmill burned was the most vivid memory that a lot of people have here that is still around, that were working and living around Diboll at that time.

**CE:** Can you talk about that a little bit? When did that happen, '68?

**JDJ:** January the 7<sup>th</sup> something like that?

**CE:** I don't know what day. I was thinking it was in '68. Talk about that a little bit.

**JDJ:** The fire at the mill was I believe January of '68. It was on a weekend the best I remember and I was in the hunting club and it was real cold. I went to my truck to crank the heater up and warm up a little bit and turned the radio on and heard on the news that the mill was burning. I left the club and came to the mill and stayed there for three days and nights without leaving. We fought fire and had out fire guards, bringing food to the people that were fighting the fire. Several people that are no longer working for the company who have retired or passed on, and myself stayed there all this length of time and kept fires out from the rest of the plant. I remember it was very, very cold during the time because when the fire trucks would pour the water onto the fire when it would start

to run off the chains and the structure that was left there would be icicles, great big icicles hanging down and a huge blaze above and icicles below. It was real...very, very, cold.

**Tape stopped and restarted**

**CE:** Who were some of the people?

**JDJ:** Some of the people that I remember working with back at that time was Mr. Ben Donahoe was a mill foreman, Marshall Glover and A. D. Dean who later became mill supervisors were in the maintenance crew at that time. So was Willard Hickman and Wilbur Harris. I remember those guys and working with them up there. Eddie Shaw, C. F. Lord was at the creosote plant when I went there. Mr. Lord was the plant manager and Eddie was the assistant, later on Shaw became the plant manager when Mr. Lord retired. At the Fiberboard Plant I remember Mr. Shepherd, Fred Dangelison was the bosses there. Fred was over the shipping department and Mr. Shepherd was over the plant itself. I worked in the shipping department at that time. A lot of the guys that were foremen there are no longer here, Buddy Torbert, Buddy Patton, a lot of guys that I can remember their faces but can't remember their name right at the present time are no longer with us.

**CE:** So, what is it really like to work for Vernon? (laughter)

**JDJ:** I've been working for Vernon Burkhalter since 1962 and that is an experience. That is about all I can say about it.

**Tape stopped and restarted:**

**Yvonne Lewis (hereafter YL):** I'm Yvonne Lewis and I've been with the company since '56. I started to say 56 years and it does seem like it at times (laughter), 35 years. You want to ask me any questions?

**CE:** Your first job with the company, just talk a little bit about 1956 and what was going on.

**YL:** Well, Houston Oil had...Time Inc. had bought out Houston Oil, surface rights only and the ad-valorem tax office at that time was in Houston so when they moved the office from Houston to the Jasper office well that is when Pinky Scarborough called me and asked me if I would like to work for the company and I said sure. So I went to work for them. I had never seen a tax statement before. I knew absolutely nothing about it, but I don't know shortly after I went to work, well Glen Kirby came in as the tax manager and he was hard but he taught me well and I learned all of my tax work from Glen Kirby. Then Forest Whitworth was the lawyer that handled the title opinion work so that is where I got in with the legal part. So the title of my office was Tax & Title Department and that is where I went while I worked there in the tax for 24 years. And then when the corporate office was built here in Diboll after Temple had merged with Time, well Mr. Nelson and Glenn Chancellor told me that I had one of two choices. I could come to Diboll or go to the house, so I was transferred to Diboll. I had never worked for the

company in any other capacity but ad-valorem taxes and I loved that work. I knew so many of the tax assessors collectors, commissioners courts, and even after I...well I didn't work for Mr. Nelson and Glenn very long until Wayne McDonald brought me upstairs on the third floor. After I came up here I still got calls from different tax assessors and what have you. That was my life. I loved the work and I wanted the job as manager of taxes for the company. And this won't stay on the tape but the reason I didn't get it was because I was a woman. (laughter) They said that I couldn't entertain the commissioner's courts, well I didn't want that. We had tax agents that could entertain the commissioner's court and going to Boggy and this and that. I just wanted the tax job but I didn't get it. Now I'm glad I didn't because I work for the best men. I couldn't ask for a better person to work for than Clifford Grum. In talking about Glenn Kirby being hard awhile ago, Mr. Grum is too but he is fair, so I can truthfully say that out of the 35 years I have thoroughly enjoyed at least 32 of them. I don't know what else to say because that is all there is. That is my experience with the company there.

**CE:** We talked about your particular view of the changes that happened in those 35 years, talk about that a little bit.

**YL:** Well they had started the nursery at Newton, Stillman Nursery, and they grew these seedlings and we had foresters running out our ears and they sat out the trees and so forth and so on and then as you...it was really more like a family oriented company. We all were close and we cared for each other and you know it was a real good place to work.

**CE:** Look at the big view now with all the changes.

**YL:** I'm trying to think what year that you saw all of this...well of course Ollie Crawford came in and was running the company and he was more politically minded. He in fact, just like in those *Southwesterner's* I have got a tongue and cheek column in there because of the first time I ever wrote a column in the *Southwesterner* Mike Buckley liked it and told Glen Kirby that he wanted "On the Farm" continued in the *Southwesterner*. Well, I could go on and on and on about the way I was raised, so for a country hick and what-have-you that is what the article mostly concerned was my being raised in the country and so forth and so on. Of course I could have reworded it and I could have made a better...but that is what everybody led me to believe that they liked so anyway. Ollie even had me to...he told Spunny there wasn't enough room for my column to be continued with *Southwestern* so it started going to big political things and even NASA, the NASA program was coming in at that time and so, he started in that direction. So we all at once seemed like overnight we woke up and we were still a little bitty country town but trying to be a big time operator down there. Then when the Temple merged with Time, well of course Temple took us in because of the timber and everything so I've really seen it grow since then and you know what it is now. We have the container board, the paper board, building products, financial services so, you know, I've seen it come from a little bitty company to a...I wish I could think of really the right things to say about it.

**Tape turned off and back on.**

**CE:** Would you say it is...

**YL:** You mean talking about from way back until now?

**CE:** Yes.

**YL:** There is not a doubt in my mind with Clifford Grum being at the helm that this company won't go to bigger and better things. There is just no way because even with someone as little intelligence as I have whenever he first started talking about the Guaranty Savings deal, I thought good Lord have mercy and look where it has got us now. So, you know, the man is brilliant and with that he is not only a smart man but he is very, very wise and I'm sorry that I'm not going to be around that much longer to see it grow bigger and better.

**CE:** So, you think say the 21st century that it may even be a better company than it is now?

**YL:** By far, by far, there is no reason that it won't be.

**CE:** What about people, Yvonne as you look back over the years, are there any people that stand out as really special to you and have really special qualities that you admire?

**YL:** There is one in the Jasper office, Nelda Lanier. I think that is one of the finest people that God ever gave breath to and she has been an inspiration to me. She has been a friend. Not too many people know what the word friend means. And going to the people that I've worked with, Glen Kirby is one that taught me so much, so very much. Let's see, and of course I had a friend in Pinky Scarborough but Pink and I were never as close as Nelda. Then I came up here and I think the world of Kenneth Nelson. He is one of the cleanest men, you know. He told me all about the company and the operations which I didn't know anything about at all. Would you believe being with this outfit 35 years you couldn't prove it by me that they make paper or pulp or anything else at Evadale? I've never been to the Evadale operations; I don't know anything about any of Temple's plants. Can you believe that? I have never, ever been to any of the manufacturing facilities. All I see is on paper. And getting back to people that have stood out in my mind, Clifford Grum is one too. He really is. I've just never seen a person as considerate as that man is and he loves his wife. Can you...show me a man that loves his wife and puts her first and I'll show you a genuine twenty-four carat gentleman. That is right!

**CE:** What about...can you think of any anecdotes about say were you here or had the people already moved into this office when you moved in here?

**YL:** Oh no we all moved together.

**CE:** Okay, can you think of any funny stories about moving into this office?

**YL:** No, and let me tell you why. It's because there wasn't but two people in the whole...the Forest Division was kind of looked down their nose at over here, you know,

like we were stepchildren or foreigners or something. And Juanita Amason always spoke to me and Billy Whitaker always spoke to me and outside of that the others would poke that nose in the air and turn their head and I just kept speaking and just went right on. I sat in the cafeteria and ate by myself I couldn't tell you how many months when I came over here. It was like I was from a leprosy colony, but you know, I just didn't care. I was over here, it wasn't by choice it was circumstance and thank goodness. You know, I thought that was the worst thing that ever happened to me and it was the best thing. Isn't that odd how God takes care of you? It is! He just knows so much more about us and He...here I am! I know you are going to have to take off about 30 minutes of that.

**Pause in tape.**

**CE:** Okay, say your name again and just keep going because it's recording.

**Gene Beck (hereafter GB):** My name is Gene Beck, Sr. I started to work for the company in 1961. I'm married and have ten children and my first job was at the Fiberboard Plant. I worked there about seven years and Tex-Lam about three months and then I been in the sawmill division.

**CE:** What was your first job?

**GB:** My first job was stacking fiberboard for Donnie Smith.

**CE:** Okay, how is it different from how they stack now? Was it different at all?

**GB:** Yes ma'am we were stacking by hand then. They have automatic stackers now.

**CE:** How long would it take for you to do that by hand?

**GB:** Well it depends on how fast they run it, how much they run and how long it take.

**CE:** Okay. What do you do at the sawmill now?

**GB:** Well I load fill chains and blow the rakes and rake ashes and help them with what they want me to do around there.

**CE:** What was Diboll like when you joined the company? What was it like in Diboll in 1961?

**GB:** It's been quite a few changes made but.

**CE:** What were some of them?

**GB:** Well they built the plywood plant and then they shut it down and then Tex-Lam was built and they shut it down and the mobile home place, Creative Homes, they shut it

down and then they shut down the treating plant and they build Rigid Foam. They build particleboard since then.

**CE:** So, you've seen...

**GB:** Quite a few changes.

**CE:** Seen a lot of changes. And what was your first job, a stacker at Fiberboard?

**GB:** Yes, a stacker at Fiberboard.

**CE:** And then what was your next job?

**GB:** Wrapping at Fiberboard.

**CE:** Then you moved from Fiberboard to the sawmill?

**GB:** To Tex-Lam for about three months, then I moved from Tex-Lam to the Fuel House. I worked there for about 11 months then I started spotting trailers for the same division. Then they stopped spotting trailers I went back to the Fuel House. I have been there ever since for the last 13 years.

**CE:** Is there anybody that you've worked with over the years that really stands out in your mind as somebody that was really inspirational or?

**GB:** Yes, C. B. Harrison for one. He retired about three or four years ago. They all in all pretty good people.

**CE:** Okay.

### **Tape stopped and restarted**

**GB:** Since I was over there that has been about 24 years ago, so it's been lots of changes made since then, lots of changes made.

**CE:** Is it a bigger operation now?

**GB:** Yes it's larger. They don't make as much stuff now as they did when I was there; we made different kinds of stuff. Building board, and all that now they mostly make hardboard and black board...

**CE:** ...and siding.

**GB:** Yes, when I was there we made stuff like that, all of that.

**CE:** Were you here, I know you were, when the sawmill burned?

**GB:** Yes, I was.

**CE:** Can you talk about that a little bit?

**GB:** I don't know anything about that. I was at the Fiberboard then, in the process of moving back I started work in the Fuel House then and they was working and building it back.

**CE:** Where were you when it burned? Do you remember where you were and what was going on?

**GB:** At home.

**CE:** You were at home.

**GB:** Yes, by Lufkin.

**CE:** J. D. was telling me he was hunting, J. D. Johnson.

**GB:** Yes, I've been knowing him a long time.

**CE:** Yes. And you have got ten children?

**GB:** Yes ma'am.

**CE:** Do they all go to school at Diboll?

**GB:** No, they went to Lufkin. My oldest boy works for the city, my oldest girl she is an LVN and I have 2, my second and third girl work at Pilgrim Pride and my second boy he got hit by a car when he was five years old and he can't do anything for himself. That has been sixteen years ago. He was five then and twenty one now. And, Jr. he is in Germany.

**CE:** Is he in service?

**GB:** Yes, he is in Germany. He got about another year and five months over there.

**CE:** What does he do in Germany?

**GB:** Something kind of like supplies and stuff like that.

**CE:** Stores or something?

**GB:** Auto parts.

**CE:** Did he get to go to the gulf?

**GB:** He went in August 6<sup>th</sup> last year and come home and then from there to Germany and I have four at home and one in school.

**CE:** What are you most proud of in your life?

**GB:** Well, you have lots of people that when they got children, they feel like it's a burden but I'm proud to say that I have never felt that away. I look at it like this, I have ten and they said how can you make it. Well, if you got your mind made up and don't mind it you can do it. I'm proud to accept things, you know, like that as they come instead of wrapping it because that just makes it harder.

**CE:** So you're proudest of your children?

**GB:** Yes.

**CE:** That is great!

**END OF INTERVIEW**