

Interviewer: Mr. Sewing, we're up until the time where you have gone to eight different banks, and you've got the plans ready, but in December of 1946, something happens within your family. Will you tell me about that?

Respondent: Now, I left in July... No, wait a minute.

[0:00:30] I believe in July 1946, to cover these eight banks. And before I left, my father was ill, and my mother was ill and had been ill for about three years. And I told my wife, if anything happened to my father while I was out, I wouldn't come back, I'd continue to work. So when I reached – first I went to Nashville, Tennessee.

[0:01:00] Penny Saving Bank would be the first. Then I went to Atlanta, Georgia, Citizen's Trust Company. And then I went from there to a little bank in Virginia. I forget the name of it right now. And then when I reached a bank in New Jersey.

[0:01:31] I have it in a book there. Anyhow, Mr. Ridley's bank, and there was a telegram waiting for me saying that my father had passed, and that was a thing that had happened while I was on the trip.

Interviewer: Upon returning back to Kansas City, you had made some arrangements for the Masonic building. According to the book, the lease had failed, and you asked a Mr. James – is it Macquarie?

[0:02:03]

Respondent: Yeah, McCurry.

Interviewer: McCurry, right. To sell his business, which was a filling station. And what was his reaction to that?

Respondent: Well, let me say this to you. I have found that if you see something that you need, and you need for a very useful purpose, get it.

[0:02:29] So we found that the Masonic building was not adequate. They didn't move fast enough, and I was glad they didn't. Wasn't adequate. See, I was in partnership with God on this sort of thing, and I knew that the thing was going over. I asked Mr. McCurry. I told him, Mr. McCurry, you have business here, but the bank needs this spot, and we would like for you to go out of business and let us have this spot.

[0:03:02] He said, well, my brother's part owner in this. And he said, you talk with him. So I talked with his brother, and his brother had told me that one of the big stores wanted that, and they had offered – I believe they'd offered \$6,000. I said, well, we'd like to have it, but we can't pay that. \$5,000 is the most that we can pay for it.

- [0:03:36] And finally, he decided that he'd go along, and then I talked to Mr. McCurry, that had the business here. And they agreed and I made arrangements to pay him on an installment basis, and he accepted that. But we paid for it in cash. We got the money from the Sentinel Loan and Investment Company that was going to liquidate to go into the banking business.
- [0:04:04] And so we paid the \$5,000 cash.
- Interviewer: Now, the groundbreaking, January 22, 1947, it snowed.
- Respondent: Ooh, see, what, it would be Monday? And that Sunday and Sunday night, it snowed quite a heavy snow. And we were to have it the next morning.
- [0:04:27] And we did, and we did have it. But what we did was went over here, we had a feed store over here, and got some bales of hay and spread out hay all over there. And the sun came out, and it was beautiful. And we had a tremendous crowd, a tremendous crowd. I don't know whether there are pictures in there or not.
- Interviewer: Yes, there is.
- Respondent: And the Sumner High School band furnished the music.
- [0:04:56] We had several speakers. And all the enthusiasm was very, very high.
- Interviewer: Okay, we're moving on to July 1, 1947. It was supposed to have been one of the tentative dates set for the opening of the bank, but a strike occurred by the building trades, which was in your favor. Can you explain how that was in your favor?
- [0:05:25]
- Respondent: Well, we were not quite ready, and we had specified that we were going to open at that particular time, but we were not ready financially. And it was a great favor to us, because August 25, we worked until midnight getting the bank ready that day, and the following day, we were ready.
- [0:05:59]
- Interviewer: Okay, the bank was actually opened August 25, 1947?
- Respondent: Well, we had our opening for the following Monday. The opening was on Sunday.
- Interviewer: Also, in the book, I think it should be noted that when the bank did open, you had all types of new machines to be used, and that Douglass State Bank was the first bank in Kansas City, Kansas that had that night depository.
- Respondent: That's right.

[0:06:29]

Interviewer: Which was really something. Okay, I noted none of the first employees had banking experience.

Respondent: Yes, yes, I would say that prior to that, we – in October '46, we sent our cashiers to Mechanics and Farmers Bank.

Interviewer: Now, that was Ewing at that time?

[0:06:57]

Respondent: Ewing. And he spent eight months up there. And then we sent later on, in the new year, we sent two young ladies there, and they spent about three months each approximately. And they were doing teller work, getting a little brushing up. And then when we opened the bank, we borrowed a few from white banks.

[0:07:28]

Interviewer: With none of the employees having experience, did that have an effect on getting into the Kansas City Clearing House Association? Didn't have any effect?

Respondent: Mm-mm.

Interviewer: Okay, well, had you had any training prior to that, in banking?

Respondent: Training yes, in a finance company. Savings and loan and investment company.

[0:07:55]

Interviewer: There was a fellow mentioned in 1952, Wendell A. Robbins came to the bank. Would you tell me what he came to the bank for?

Respondent: 1952?

Interviewer: I believe this was about the time he was trying to get some money to build...

Respondent: Oh yes, I know what happened. You know, we had a flood. We had a flood, and it displaced quite a number of people.

[0:08:29]

And the government passed legislation possibly for a person that was qualified, provided that he could get backing from the bank, to build some of these houses, these low-cost houses. And Robbins, they had the account at the Commercial National Bank. He talked to me, and I told him, provided that they change their account to Douglass State Bank, we would help them.

[0:08:59] So we gave them the go-ahead to build those houses, otherwise known as Spears Crest at that particular time. So that was what that was.

Interviewer: Now, Ewing was a cashier. You had another cashier at this time, Tillman?

Respondent: Oh yes, we had five [unintelligible].

Interviewer: And Tillman was the new cashier?

Respondent: Yeah, that's right.

[0:09:26]

Interviewer: During the first year that the bank began operating, would you describe, tell me how that first year went?

Respondent: It did fine. We were told by the FDIC examiner that it would be about five years before we would be able to be in a profit. But we ended up the year, and we had a profit the first year. That's due to the fact that we were able to buy all the business of the Sentinel Loan and Investment Company.

[0:10:01] So we started with some business to begin with, and we were very careful. See, the Sentinel Loan and Investment Company did some of the work that a bank would ordinarily do anyhow. We had 12 years of that. We made installment loans, we made many automobile loans, and for the experience of it, we made a couple of mortgage loans.

[0:10:32]

Interviewer: Now, there was a name mentioned in your autobiography, Squires?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: What is the first name?

Respondent: LaVannes Squires.

Interviewer: Now, what part did he have at that time?

[0:10:57]

Respondent: What year?

Interviewer: It gave his name, and it says he joined the bank in January 1955.

Respondent: Yes, that's right.

[0:11:28] Well, Squires was working for a magazine. I forget the name of the magazine.

Interviewer: Look?

Respondent: Look Magazine. And what city was it? Anyhow, it was Look Magazine, and he wrote me a letter to get an appointment with me to discuss coming to the bank.

[0:11:55] He was making at that particular time \$65 a week. And so he came and talked to me, and I told him that our maximum beginning salary was \$50 a week. And he said he would take it. And I said, well, now, you were buying an automobile, and you would be \$15 a week less than that \$65 a month. How can you do it?

[0:12:39] He said, I'm willing to make the sacrifice. I've lived on less money before, and I can do it again. I see an opportunity here, and that's why I'd be willing to do it. So I hired him as a teller to begin with, and he progressed very, very fast.

[0:12:58]

Interviewer: I would like to make note that on June 1, 1968, he assumed the presidency of the Parkway National Bank in Kansas City, Missouri.

Respondent: Yeah. Well, yeah, you see, Ed Tilman was interested in that organization, and he told me about it, what they were doing. And I called his hand on it.

[0:13:25] I said, now, I'm not supposed to be getting rid of some of our employees in order to go there. He said he was going to be chairman of the board and Squires would be a president. And I took it up with the bank. They went underground. You know what underground [unintelligible]?

Interviewer: Yes, I do.

Respondent: And so we had a man here by the name of Davis.

[0:13:58] He was here at this particular time, and there was a bank in Houston that was in his organization, and we loaned him to the Riverside National Bank to spend two days there. And when he came back, Ed Tilman told me that Davis was thinking of going with this bank. And he also told me at that particular time that Squires was going over to this new bank that was being organized.

[0:14:34] That's the first time that we knew anything about it. Now, Squires had been with us about 13 or 14 years.

Interviewer: 13.

Respondent: Yeah, 13 years. And so yes, he went over there as the president, after 13 years of training. And he came as a teller, and he moved up to the executive vice president.

[0:15:03] He became the executive vice president of Douglass State Bank here. So he went on this new setup.

Interviewer: Also, I would say one of your original employees, a Mrs. Garland...

Respondent: What about her?

Interviewer: That was here ever since – she started with the bank in 1946. Could you tell me a little about her?

[0:15:28]

Respondent: Well, number one, we needed a person at the Sentinel Loan and Investment Company, and we made some inquiries about Mrs. Garland, found that she was in west Kansas, and we had her understand that we had a job for her.

[0:15:57] In the meantime, she had to have no training in bookkeeping. And we started out with the training program for her. I was the teacher, and I taught her for several weeks, I'd say. Possibly longer than that. Several weeks. And she was hired as a bookkeeper for the Sentinel Loan and Investment Company.

[0:16:30] And she worked until the Sentinel Loan and Investment Company was dissolved and the Douglass State Bank began. But in 1946, we were going through an organizational process. Had to sell stock and do a number of things in getting ready for the opening of the bank in the following year.

[0:16:57]

Interviewer: I would like to read the group of officers and directors in 1947. H.W. Sewing, president. James H. Brown, vice president. Isadore Gross, vice president. Dr. W.A. Love, board chairman. W.C. Shelton, board secretary. Bishop John A. Greg, Dr. Sherman D. Scruggs, John T. Thornton, Wesley Elders, G.B. Buster, Reverend I.H. Henderson Senior, Charles S. Matthews, Reverend Thomas Napper, R. [Rostal] Mansfield, and Cordell D. Meeks, attorney.
[interruption - silence]

[0:18:37] ...daughter? What they're doing?

Respondent: Oh, there's not a great deal that I can tell you about. [Dimple], the baby, is 52. She married a boy that went to school here then went to the University of Kansas at Manhattan.

[0:19:00] He finished veterinary medicine, has a business of his own. Small animal hospital. Dimple is the richest daughter of the family, so to speak. The first house they had built, a nice house, and then they moved from that house to another new house.

[0:19:31] At the time, it was \$66,000. And they put money into it, ran over \$70,000. And then to my mind, they did the foolish thing of selling that house at \$72,000, and bought a house almost \$200,000. \$188,000. And the payments were between \$1,400 and \$1,500 a month.

[0:20:03] But they've had no problems so far, and I don't suppose they will. But I believe that when the newness wears off, they will have second thoughts about it. Now, he's been in an automobile accident, and it shook him up pretty badly. It's going to take him about – oh, I suppose it's going to be about two or three months before he recovers.

[0:20:31] Now, Dimple is running the business [unintelligible], and I suppose the income in that place is somewhere between \$75,000 and \$100,000 in business that they [unintelligible]. And they've done well. Now, Margaret, she's – Dimple is 52 and Margaret's 56.

[0:20:58] And Margaret was married to a young fellow. They broke up about five or six years ago. And she worked for the – I guess it's the welfare. She worked for a number of years, and then she quit and just decided that she wasn't going to work. But finally, she went back.

[0:21:29] And she was able to make up what she drew down of her pension money, and she has retired, and she's 56 years of age. And she does jobs that she wants. For a long time, she was just [making different articles] and informing them how to store [there].

[0:21:55] But she's done all right.

Interviewer: Mr. Sewing, I would like to thank you on behalf of the Black Archives. You've really done things for this community, not only within this community, all over the United States. You also told me – one thing I wanted to cover, there was someone who came to Douglass State Bank from Atlanta, Georgia. Am I correct? To do some kind of study on it?

Respondent: That was a fellow by the name of Ed [Hines]. He got his PhD from Harvard.

[0:22:34] In finance. And during that time that he was there, he made a study of the Mechanics and Farmers Bank in Durham, North Carolina, and the Douglass State Bank of Kansas City. He finally got a job as one of the professors at – I guess it's Southern State?

[0:23:03] It's one of the universities in Houston, Texas. Texas Southern I believe it is. And he worked at that for a number of years. And now he has a chair of banking at the Atlanta University where he's employed.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you, Mr. Sewing.

Respondent: You're welcome.