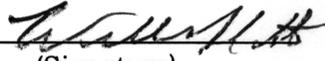


Harris County Archives
Houston, Texas

Oral History Collection

#03

An Interview with William M. (Bill) Hatten

Place of interview: Houston, Texas
Interviewer: Sarah Canby Jackson
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(Signature)
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Oral History Transcription
OH03 – William M. (Bill) Hatten
March 1, 2006

Tape 1 Side A

SARAH CANBY JACKSON: This is Sarah Canby Jackson interviewing William M. (Bill) Hatten for the Harris County Archives Oral History Program. The interview is taking place on March 1, 2006, in Houston, Texas. I'm interviewing Judge Hatten in order to obtain his recollections concerning Harris County, the Juvenile Protection Board, running for office, and the Port Commission.

Judge Hatten, could you please tell me your parents' names?

WILLIAM M. (BILL) HATTEN: My father was George Rennard Hatten and why I don't know except by the jobs that he held, he probably was the most senior, he was always referred to from the time of my earliest recollection to the time of his death as "Pop." He was born and raised in Hunlock Creek, Pennsylvania, and came to Houston at an early age.

My mother was Josephine Wilhelmina Yeager. She was from Illinois and came to Texas because she was diagnosed with consumption and the doctors at that time thought the climate here would be much better for her cure. Obviously she didn't have consumption; she came to Texas at an early age and remained here. She was born in Peoria, Illinois.

JACKSON: Were you born in Houston?

HATTEN: I was the first of four children of my mother and father and I was born here in Houston. My second sibling was my brother George, my third was a sister, Jessie, and the fourth child, the second daughter was Clara.

JACKSON: What date were you born?

HATTEN: I was born on August 26, 1913, this was out off of Quitman and Boundary in what was then known as the Fifth Ward. My mother and father lived in the Fifth Ward until I was about six or seven years of age, when, because of his

employment, we moved into the First Ward just off of Houston Avenue on Summer Street. We remained there for a very short time and we moved a block away over on Crockett Street, 2019 Crockett, which was just catty-corner from the Crockett School. It was very peculiar, while we lived catty-corner from the Crockett School, all of my brothers and sisters including myself attended St. Joseph parochial school which meant we had to walk about a mile down Crockett Street to Houston Avenue and then south on Houston Avenue to



Bill and George Hatten,
ca. 1921- 1922

Washington Avenue where St. Joseph had a parochial school at that time.

JACKSON: You attended parochial school in Houston.

HATTEN: All my first seven years. I did, my brother did, however my sister Jessie died at the age of ten or eleven. My sister, the youngest child, she attended Jeff Davis over in the Fifth Ward.

JACKSON: Was high school also parochial or did you go to public school?

HATTEN: Both, my brother and I attended St. Thomas High School, a parochial. It was located out on Hadley and La Branch, just north of San Jacinto High School, the public high school. One of the interesting things, the parochial school of course charges tuition. The tuition was \$2.00 per month per child. Two children attended for \$3.00 a month. Several friends of mine have children enrolled in St. Thomas High School today and the tuition is \$600 a month.

JACKSON: Quite an increase. What did your father do for a living?

HATTEN: My father, when he first came to Texas, he roamed around. He worked on the XIT Ranch, the largest ranch in Texas, he taught school. He had no education or degree for that purpose, but teachers were at such a premium, he taught school. Then later, when he decided to settle down and my mother and he were married, he went to work for Scholable Bakery. They were located on Franklin Avenue and he drove a horse and wagon delivering bread house to house. Later on he went to work for the Texas Bread Company that was located on Center Street and Taylor in the First Ward and that's how we come to move from the Fifth Ward to the First Ward, so he would be close enough that he could walk to and from work. Obviously, we had no automobile, no transportation, so people who had a job moved closer to their work so they could go to work. Later on, he drove a bread truck delivering bread to the grocery stores. Today the City of Houston is made up entirely of supermarkets. At that time, there was a Pop and Mom grocery store on almost every corner and most of them operated by Italians. The living room of

their home had a little grocery store and meat market and they lived in the balance of the house. The hours were tremendously long. From 1920 to 1940, my father was a delivery man for the Texas Bread Company and then later on for the Main Baking Company that had a bakery over on the 2400 block of North Main. This time I can remember he went to work by 3:00 in the morning, walked to work, then delivered bread until 2:00 or 3:00 in the afternoon and except on Friday nights, he went to work at midnight and worked until 6:00 or 7:00 on Saturday, an eighteen hour day.

The interesting thing about this is, he was so conscientious and the hours and the type of work that he was doing, he very seldom had an opportunity to use a restroom. By the time Saturday night came, he was stove up and it was just a ritual. He took a salt water drink so by morning time he was emptying his bowels and that happened all day Sunday so he would be in good shape to go to work on Monday. Epsom Salts, that was what everybody took when they got clogged up. It seems that he was clogged up week after week and year after year.

JACKSON: When you graduated from high school, did you know you were going to law school?

HATTEN: I did not know that I was going to go to law school. While I was in grammar school I had thrown the old *Houston Press*, a Scripps-Howard newspaper, a six-day paper. The plant was located a little better than half a mile from St. Joseph parochial school and I would go down. The plant was across the street from the Old Criminal Courts Building that was located on the corner of Bagby and

Capitol and the *Houston Press* was right across the street. The Press delivered the paper from whatever location you worked from. My route was down Bagby Street between Bell out to where the old West End baseball park was located. I had about 100 customers. They were all people who lived in two-story apartment buildings. The *Houston Press* was delivered to your front porch for 12 cents per week, 2 cents per copy or 50 cents a month. Another thing that stands out in my mind is even people would cheat me in those days and cheating little children. While I had 100 customers, they would make me take 110 papers so they sold 10 extra papers or 10 per cent of the papers that were not being delivered. And this was a big chunk of money when you had to pay a penny apiece for those ten. While a penny a piece wasn't much, by the same token, we were paying a penny a piece for them and selling them for two pennies. The type of residents that I covered were people who moved in these apartments and stayed a week and moved out, stayed a month and moved out, would argue with you that they hadn't gotten a paper, somebody had picked it up and stole it, and so the income wasn't that great.

Later on, I double-dipped ice creams for Redding's Ice Cream from a store they had over on North Main and we got twenty-five cents an hour for that. Probably the best job that I had during this period of time was working for Weingartens. I went to work at 7:00 in the morning, worked until 7:00 in the evening, twelve hours, twenty-five cents an hour, three dollars, but by the same

token, I was able to buy two full lunches for twenty-five cents. You could buy a loaf of bread for a nickel and a loaf of bread consisted of sixteen slices.

JACKSON: When did you work for Weingartens? Were you still in school?

HATTEN: I was still in high school. You could buy eight slices of baloney for 10 cents and you could buy a quart of milk for a nickel. So you got two quarts of milk for a dime, you got eight slices of baloney for a dime, and you got a loaf of bread for a nickel. So for twenty five cents you had lunch and dinner at night of four big baloney sandwiches and I had \$2.75 left. That wasn't bad.

Later on I worked for Mr. E. F. Eason, he drove one of the last mule-driven ice wagons in the city of Houston. He would get up every morning at 4:30, 5:00 and go down on Taylor Street where his mules were put up. He would harness the mules, come by my house and pick me up, still dark, and we would go down to Burgess and Rogers Ice Company that was located just east of Houston Avenue. In fact, the old ice company is still there. We would load the wagon up with ice and go out Fannin Street to about where San Jacinto High School is today and our route was in that vicinity.

At that time the mules knew every person in the neighborhood that took ice and we sold the ice in blocks of 25, 50, 75, and 100 pounds. At that time the doors were open. The people, who did lock their doors, put the key under the mat or hung it somewhere on the porch and many of them did not lock their doors. Most of them bought coupons and left the coupon book out, so you could take out the coupon for your 25 or 50 pounds of ice you would deliver. Another aside to

that interesting thing, is that invariably you would not only put the ice in the ice box, you opened the top and placed it in the box, but you then looked in the bottom to see if they had peaches or grapes and you welcomed yourself to a peach or to a handful of grapes that you would take back to the wagon and share with your boss.

JACKSON: And that was accepted?

HATTEN: That was accepted. I don't think anyone was ever accused of being a thief. Nobody ever told you to do that, but it was just a foregone conclusion that you could do that. A got a dollar a day for that. The day was about from 5:00 in the morning until about 12:00 or 1:00 in the afternoon, plus we always stopped on the corner of Gray and Main which had a big Webber Ice Root Beer stand and Mr. Eason and myself would drink anywhere from two to four Hires Root Beers before we called it a day.

JACKSON: So, you stopped and had beer with your boss.

HATTEN: Yes, we did. Later he sold his wagon and mules and bought an old second-hand Model T Ford. One of those you had to hand crank to start. Then from that my father was, as I said, a driver of the bread truck and I naturally gravitated to that. I had worked with him several years in the summer time on his route. Later on, several of the truck drivers and managers from the Texas Bread Company pooled their resources and opened up a bakery they called the Main Baking Company located in the 2400 block of North Main. My father, while being a very, very minor owner, had a little interest in it and was one of the route drivers.

I drove a route then from Houston to Galveston and the hours were long and tedious and hard. It was at that time that I started going to Houston Law School.

JACKSON: You started working for him after you graduated?

HATTEN: After I graduated from high school.

JACKSON: You graduated from high school in what year?

HATTEN: Graduated from high school in about 1927. . . .

JACKSON: You were fourteen?

HATTEN: No, graduated from the parochial school at 14.

JACKSON: Was St. Thomas four years?

HATTEN: Yes.

JACKSON: Okay, so that would have been 1931 you graduated from St. Thomas.

HATTEN: I graduated from St. Thomas High School in 1931 and then it was from that period in 1931 that I drove a bread truck and sold carded notion items. Filling stations, convenience stores had a lot of articles on cards: razor blades, shoe strings, thread, Stop-It, which was a compound you put in your radiator to stop the leaks. Plus the fact, at one time I got the idea of being a big businessman and gave up the truck driving and took over the distributorship of Betty Lou Cakes that were made in Louisiana and shipped here. I went over to the depot and picked up the cartons of cakes at 5:00 in the morning, loaded them up, and then distributed them to the same customers who had been customers as a bread truck driver, thinking that I was going to make a whole lot more money, but I'd have been a whole lot better off if I'd continued to drive a bread truck because that was

a salary and I just worked on commission. Whatever I sold, I sold and my losses were my losses on selling the cakes and cookies.

JACKSON: Did you continue to live at home?

HATTEN: I continued to live at home and that was real good because, I don't remember, I paid a dollar or two, room and board, but it wasn't very much, I can assure you.

JACKSON: And they had all the cakes and cookies they could eat. . .

HATTEN: Most of those however, you picked up the cakes and cookies when they became outdated, of course some of those you could ship back and be reimbursed for, most of them you could not. You had to either throw them away or eat them, whatever you did with them.

JACKSON: Why did you decide to go to law school?

HATTEN: Well, one day I happened to be walking down Texas Avenue between Main and Fannin. There was a Pillot's Bookstore there. And they had the one big plate glass window full of beautiful bound law books, especially Blackstone's Commentaries. And I don't know what possessed me, but I just drooled over it as a kid would in a candy store looking at candy. That just impressed me a great deal. Add it to the fact that in high school, in my senior year, the president of St. Thomas High School was a fellow by the name of T. P. O'Rourke¹. He was a brilliant Catholic priest. He was the Brasillan Fathers out of Canada, which was a teaching order, and he and I became very good friends. We had a very limited curriculum, but it was a very solid one – History and Math and Latin and Spanish.

¹ Thomas Patrick O'Rourke, Teacher (1916 – 1924) and Principal (1927 – 1931) St. Thomas High School, Houston, Texas.

There was a German boy in my class had a real, real German brogue and we had some public speaking. I just drooled over listening to him, he was an outstanding speaker. If there were ten in that class, I was number ten I'm sure and he was number one.

Father O'Rourke called me in one day and we had a real nice chat, a very fatherly and son chat, and he told me, "Bill, you're not the most brilliant person in the world, but you've got an awful lot of common sense. Now we've got this problem." And he'd talk to me about a fellow that had a lot more money than most of us and had a Dussenburg automobile. We weren't allowed to go off campus from the time we got there in the morning 'til we left in the afternoon, but he invariably did as he pleased. He said, "Now what do I do about him?" And he and I chit-chatted about the punishment he should have. He said, "I don't know what to tell you. I don't know what your ideas are, but if you ever get a chance to, you might think about going into law."

So between his encouragement and seeing these Blackstone's Commentaries in beautiful hide covers, plus the fact that about the middle of the summer, there was an ad in the Houston paper that they were taking enrollments in the Houston Law School and you could go at night and work by day. I went down to talk to Ewing Werlein² and Jesse Mosley³ and decided to enter law school.

² Ewing Werlein, Attorney-at-Law, Houston, TX (1914 – 1957), Dean and Professor, Houston Law School (1927 – 1945), 157th District Court Judge (1957 – 1967).

³ Jesse Mosley, Attorney-at-Law, Houston, TX (1914 – 1940), Professor, Houston Law School (1927 – 1940).

JACKSON: How much did it cost, do you remember?

HATTEN: I don't remember. It was very, very limited. The library that we had was very limited. It consisted of the law books that Mosley and Werlein and Lichtenstein had in their law office in the Second National Bank. They kept their law offices open at the reception room where their law books were so we could make use of them. The law school enjoyed, at that time, a real good reputation. We had some people you would remember – Judge Hofheinz⁴ mayor and later county judge; a member of the legislature, then became county judge, and became mayor of Houston, graduated several years prior to my graduation. Carl Smith⁵, long, long, long-time Tax Assessor Collector, was one of the members of my class. Jim Heflin, who was a member of the House of Representatives, was a member of that class. A fellow by the name of Kenneth McCalla⁶, Judge McCalla, was judge as I recall, of the 127th District Court and later resigned to become General Counsel for the Railroad Association. The law school either disbanded or closed within a year or two after I left.



Bill Hatten, July 17, 1935

⁴ Roy Mark Hofheinz, Texas House of Representatives (1934 – 1936), Harris County Judge (1936 – 1944), Houston Mayor (1952 – 1955).

⁵ Carl S. Smith, Harris County Assessor and Collector of Taxes (1947 – 1998).

⁶ Kenneth McCalla, 127th District Court Judge (1939 – 1944).

JACKSON: You graduated from law school in what year?

HATTEN: I graduated from St. Thomas in 1931; we called ourselves the “31 of 31.”

There were thirty-one graduates of St. Thomas High School. In that vein, there are only three of us still alive who graduated from St. Thomas High School. Then in 1934, I graduated from the Houston Law School and got my license in 1935. At that time you went to Austin and there was a three-day written examination, over a three day period. I got my license in November, I guess of 1935.

I talked immediately to Carl Smith who had graduated, he and I had become friends, and I had thought we possibly would open up an office together. But he had a very good job working for Jim Glass⁷, the county Tax Assessor and Collector, and was next in line to succeed him and he didn't see any reason why he would leave. He had a very good friend, Alvin Dawson. Alvin Dawson had worked for the S. P. (Southern Pacific) Railroad over in the Fifth Ward while he was going to the Houston Law School, and had started practicing and had practiced for several years and had a small office in the Citizen's State Bank Building on the corner of Main and Preston. Carl suggested that we go over and talk to him.

Carl and I went over and talked to Dawson. He had a reception room and a private office. We made a deal that for \$15.00 per month I could sit in the reception room. If I got a client, he'd get out of his private office and I could talk to him there. We started out on that basis. Later I had picked up a little business; he had quite a bit of business. He liked to do a lot of things, a lot of clients that he

⁷ Jim Glass, Assessor and Collector of Taxes (1935 – 1947).

had that he didn't want to fool with he gave to me and we would split the fee. Eventually, everything became so intertwined that we just automatically called ourselves partners. And so it became Dawson and Hatten Law Firm and the interesting thing about that is, at that time, the bar was made up of small, two-men partnerships -- and you notice I say men because there weren't any women practicing law -- and there were the large law firms -- Vinson Elkins, Butler Binion, Fulbright Crooker, Bates, but then there were several two person law firms -- Fowler and Conn, Hidensfeller, Tom Sanders. Just a dozen two- person law firms on the one hand and then the larger law firms on the other hand.

In 1935 and 1936 when I started practicing law, Houston had a population of 290,000, I think I recall. You knew every lawyer, I don't know how many lawyers there were at that time, there wasn't very many, and you knew all of them. You knew the smaller law firms, the two-man practitioners, the one lawyer person and you even knew those in the larger firms. I attended the last roll call of the moving of the courtrooms from the Old Civil Courthouse to the new building last week, and the interesting thing there was that, almost without exception, all of the old time lawyers regretted the fact that law practice today is so different today than it was then. Every lawyer knew each other, every lawyer respected each other, and the docket call was the thing, was a camaraderie type of thing.

My office was in the Citizen's State Bank on Preston and Main and a lot of the lawyers were there, across the street in the Scanlon Building there were a lot of lawyers, then behind the Scanlon Building, the Republic Building. Between

Main and Fannin on the north side of Preston was Peterson's Café. On Friday morning from 6:00 until a quarter to 9:00, most all of the lawyers who had any cases in court sat in there, drinking coffee, or eating breakfast and talking about their cases with each other. Not only soliciting help on the cases that you had, but working out the opposition that you had. You were drinking coffee and having breakfast with your adversary and there was an awful lot of trust, camaraderie. During the week, if some woman came in and brought me a citation that she had been sued by her husband for divorce, I had twenty days in which to answer the lawsuit or a default judgment would be taken, all you did was to call the lawyer on the other side, "Tom, I'm representing Mary. You're representing her husband, you've filed it. We'll get together sometime and get this thing resolved," and you didn't have any worry that they were going to woodshed you and take a default judgment. It was a very trustworthy group of people and you solved an awful lot of problems between 6:00 in the morning and a quarter 'til 9:00 when you went over to answer the docket call. Most of the lawyers who had these cases and reminisced over it at the Last Docket Call were all high-priced lawyers, but almost invariably, every one of them talked about the day when there was a lot more congeniality than it is today.

JACKSON: Here you are in the middle of the Depression, starting out. . .

HATTEN: I did not know until later on that there was ever a depression.

JACKSON: Really?

HATTEN: I did not know there was a depression. I don't know how to put it, I have a very, very good memory of everything that happened, I don't remember what happened from three, like a lot of people, but from the time I was seven I can almost remember. Our life at that time was limited to, I'd say, a radius of a mile. The only time that we got out of the radius of a mile around your neighborhood was probably on Sunday evening when you either had your allowance or later on after you were earning a little money, you would walk. Every once in awhile there was some transportation, but it was not unusual to walk. From Crockett School, across from where I lived, was about the center of the social activity of all of us youngsters. One or two of our group had automobiles, we would go downtown to James Coney Island on Rusk between Fannin and Main and spend our twenty-five cents – you got two hot dogs for a nickel apiece, a piece of pie for a dime, and you got a soda water for a nickel.

The only time I ever got arrested, four or five of us out of First Ward were down having our Sunday ritual, walked across the middle of the block to the exit of the Kirby Theater. There was a “friend” of mine who was an usher there and he invited us in. Making brownie points, he took us to the police and turned us in for sneaking into the theater. Why in the world they would ever arrest kids for sneaking into the theater is beyond me, but they took us to jail. I was under seventeen, so they turned me loose and I went home and got my father and he went down and made bail for several individuals that were being held in the police station for trespassing in the Kirby Theater.

JACKSON: Around this same time, mid-1930s, you're starting your law practice but you are also involved in community organizations such as the Eagles. Could you tell me when you first joined the Eagles and why?

HATTEN: I guess to answer that, I have been a joiner fortunately or unfortunately all my life. And before we get through, I want you to talk about the Les Amis Club. As I told you our social life resolved within a mile radius. There were the seniors and the juniors. The seniors were those people who were still hanging around the neighborhood who were three or four years older than we were. We were all high school children. The seniors had graduated from high school and they had what they called a "Les Amis Seniors." They had a football team, an amateur team, that won the city championship. They pooled their little resources and built a little club house down at Magnolia Gardens and we were the maggots, the youngsters, they would stalk on us.

About a dozen of us, how we did it I don't know, but we got together and called ourselves the Les Amis Juniors. And we formed a football team and we competed in the lower bracket and won several city championships. We played Eastwood, we played Cherryhurst, I have an awful lot of clippings of our activities as football players. We met in First Ward. A fellow had his old garage, a fellow by the name of Kramer. He had a little grocery store in the 2200 block of Shearn Street and he let us use his garage for our little meeting place and we met in there by candlelight or by lamplight and held our little meetings. It was all so innocent and it mostly revolved around our sports activity.

Out of all the people in First Ward I don't know of but one person ever getting into any type of trouble whatsoever. And I don't know why in the world they don't make use of what happened at that time. There was a woman who was the principal of Crockett School, a Mrs. Bastian. Looking back over it, she was just the most brilliant person in the world. During the summertime, the streets at that time were gravel and of course we didn't have anything to do in the summertime except to pickup stones off of Shearn Street and throw them at the school to see how many windows you could break out. So by the time school was taken up in September, there wasn't a good pane in the whole building. Mrs. Bastian, us not knowing what she was doing (I can see today what she did), she came to us and she said, "Look you people have a lot of control here and we know that with your club you wouldn't do these things, you wouldn't break these windows. What I'm going to do as a reward, if you'll see that nobody breaks anymore windows out, I'm going to see that you get baseball gloves and bats and balls," and she did. And she mustn't have spent more than \$25.00 and we thought that was so great we just quit throwing stones and breaking out her windows.

The City Recreation Department during the summertime saw fit to hire what they called recreational directors and put them on the school grounds at 10:00 in the morning and they stayed there until 5:00 in the afternoon. And we had volleyball, very little basketball that I can remember, baseball, softball, those kinds of things. And nobody ever got into any kind of . . . you had just real good

supervision. Some of the directors were interns from college working on some program and used them.

You were talking about joining the Eagles so the Les Amis Club was one of my first forays into fraternal work.

Later on I was president of the Ace of Clubs. The Ace of Clubs was a church sponsored, young people's group. It served an awful good purpose because I got my wife there and several other youngsters got their wives as a result of the Ace of Clubs.

Then later on after I got my license, my law partner, Dawson, was very active -- he was the Treasurer -- in the Fraternal Order of Eagles. It was to his insistence that I joined. Back in that time, fraternal organizations were very political. Not that they got out to solicit for candidates, but there was very little way to campaign so people joined organizations that had large memberships. The Fraternal Order of Eagles at that time had a membership of 2500 people. Judge Frank Williford⁸, now deceased, a Criminal District Judge, was a past local president, a past state president. Judge Canty⁹, out of Galveston, was a past national president. At one time in recognition of his work, when he wanted to show off, he brought a contingent of 500 people from Galveston up to Houston to be initiated as Eagles. The Eagles were very popular, by the same time token, I joined the Elks at the same time that I joined the Eagles but I immediately became an officer in the Eagles, so I saw fit to not try to do more than I could do. So, I

⁸ Frank Williford, Criminal District Court Judge (1948 – 1950).

⁹ James C. Canty, District Judge, Galveston, TX.

demitted from the Elks, but the Elks likewise had Judge Allen Hannay¹⁰, was the Exalted Ruler of the Elks. Alec Patton, county judge, was a member of the Eagles, Roy Hofheinz was a member of the Eagles, Glenn McCarthy¹¹ was a member of the Eagles.

Tape 1 Side B

So, I immediately joined at the insistence of Dawson and here was a place to pick up a few clients. I immediately became very active within the first year was given some position and within a two year period I was already going through the chairs to become president. My whole social, my whole fraternal, my whole political life, I've held everything that the Eagles have to offer - as local president, state president, District Four state president, every committee on the national scale, attended every national convention and I'm still today very active in it.

Fraternal organizations at the turn of the century were very, very prevalent, very powerful, there were lots of them. There were two things to do. Women went to church and men went to the bar at their clubs.

JACKSON: Where did your Aerie meet?

HATTEN: Nationally they were organized in 1898. They were organized by theatrical people so consequently traveling around the country they covered an awful lot of ground. And so within a year, they had number 48, which is a pretty low number, in Galveston in 1900, and the same year, 1900, we had 63 in Houston and 70 in

¹⁰ Allen B. Hannay, 113th District Court Judge (1930 – 1942).

¹¹ Glenn H. McCarthy (1907 – 1988), infamous Texas oilman and wildcatter, owner of the Shamrock Hotel.

San Antonio. We had the 1900 Hurricane and the Eagles in Galveston suffered a real devastating loss of their building and everything and the other local lodges around the country came to their rescue as so many people have done with Katrina¹² today. But this was done mostly by fraternal organizations.

We met down on the corner of Texas and Travis before I became a member. And they met over on Franklin Street on the second floor at one time. And by 1930 they had moved to 618 ½ Milam which was a three story building on the northwest corner of Milam and Capitol. There was a furniture store on the first floor; there was two floors above that the Eagles leased. The building originally had been occupied by the Ku Klux Klan. It had a beautiful hall on the third floor that had a stage and a balcony on all three sides. Today you go to a meeting you're lucky to have ten people, in those days it wouldn't be unusual to have four or five hundred people, the hall would be completely full. We stayed in that building until about 1958 we bought some property out at 2204 Louisiana and built a beautiful two-story building out there and continued to successfully grow until people just quit joining, taxes got too high, insurance got too high. We sold that building and now occupy one at 601 West 20th Street, a much smaller building. When I was local president in 1936, we had 2500 members, today I'm trying to hold it together as secretary and we have 80 members. And that rings true of all fraternal organizations, it rings true of the churches, even those that have a stronger bond such as the Masonic Lodge or the Knights of Columbus they are all having problems getting people to become members.

¹² Hurricane Katrina, August 23, 2005, devastated the Gulf Coast from New Orleans to Mobile, Alabama.

JACKSON: Later on we will discuss the Eagles and Harris County government because there were a number of county politicians and employees that belonged to the Eagles, not just the downtown lodge, but other lodges in the county, I mean Aeries, in the county.

So, you're an attorney, I assume you are married by now. . .

HATTEN: Yes, I married in 1938, I had five children. . .

JACKSON: I believe that in your campaign literature when you ran for county judge it said you had two children in 1946.

HATTEN: One of the things that the Eagles gave me the opportunity to do was to participate in a lot of high profile charities. One of which was KPRC and the Eagles joined together and held the Bob Hope Telethon in which we raised a million dollars, all of which, none of it was used for expense, the whole one million dollars went to the Huguenot School for Crippled Children in Port Arthur where they now have the Bob Hope Library and the Inky Dinky Pool dedicated to Jimmy Durante¹³ who is a very, very active Eagle on a national scale. Today we have our national conventions, today we have to pay a pretty good fee to get anybody who is anybody to come and entertain us at the conventions. Bob Hope¹⁴ never charged us a dime; Jimmy Durante never charged us a dime. They thought that much of the charities that we were participating in.

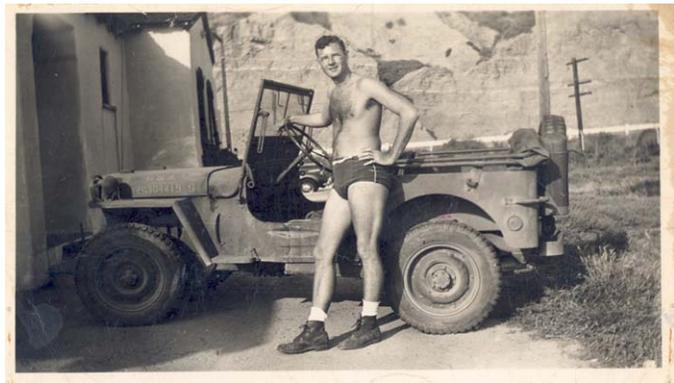
¹³ James Frances (Jimmie) Durante (1893 – 1980), entertainer, singer, actor.

¹⁴ Leslie Townes (Bob) Hope (1903 – 2003)

JACKSON: As you said earlier, it was a different time. Why did you go into the Marines in 1944? You had two children and you were married and I think you were exempt.

HATTEN: That's a sore spot you don't want to talk to my wife about. I don't really have any good reason. My father was a very patriotic individual. My father had wanted to serve in World War I. He was rejected because of his eyesight. He

gave up everything that he had and moved out to the country to raise livestock and food because he thought that was the patriotic thing to do during the war. He



Bill Hatten, United States Marine Corps
Saipan, 1945

was so adamant about that and added to the fact my law

partner, Alvin Dawson, joined the Merchant Marine and due to the fact that I just thought it was a patriotic duty. If I probably had it to do again with hindsight and with a little bit more sensibility, I didn't add anything to the cause and it was certainly a sacrifice to leave a wife and two children, babies, to go in.

JACKSON: Do you think the Meyer case had anything to do with you going in?

HATTEN: I don't think so, no. The Meyer case was probably the end of 1944,

JACKSON: 1943.

HATTEN: I think I had already pretty well contemplated going into the Marine Corps at the time. The Meyer Case (United States of America vs Heinrick Karl Ernst

Martin Meyer) was a very traumatic type of case because of the hysteria that existed. It was very, very unpopular. It didn't make any difference, he was being a damned German, I mean you were automatically guilty. It was guilt by association. This fellow was unfortunately a very arrogant type of individual and he rubbed, seemingly gloated, in rubbing people the wrong way. He met his match when he met a fellow by the name of Moraud (Marcel I. Moraud) who was a French professor and of course he thought that French should be the only foreign language that was taught at any reputable university. Meyer thought that German should be the only one and between the two of them they just didn't get along and when this came, why it gave Moraud a chance.

You see Judge Hanny was a good friend of mine. I campaigned for Judge Hanny when he ran for district judge. He then went on the federal bench. We exchanged pleasantries a long time. But he was anti-German and the opinion strongly says this was a case born in war hysteria and then goes on to show there was no evidence to substantiate the verdict whatsoever. It was right after the finish of the case that I joined the Marine Corps and a fellow by the name Bernard Golden took the case up on appeal and did a fantastic job of getting it reversed. I should have, I don't know why I haven't checked to see whatever became of Bernard Golden; he's got to be dead by now. You're young; when I got back from the service I should have contacted him.

JACKSON: Well, you got back from the service.

HATTEN: I got back from the service in 1945. Listened to a lot of, you know I can't understand why people today run for political office when sitting on the sidelines it's very obvious to me they haven't got a Chinaman's chance in Hell to be elected and yet they don't see it themselves. The same thing is true of myself. I'd been gone two years. I did have some fairly good name identification up to that time, but two years of no identification. And looking back over it, people tell you, "You ought to run," "You're a veteran," "The man that's in there is doing a bad job," and "We'll support you."

Today I have a lot of people, when they get ready to run for political office hear, "Go see Judge Hatten and see what he tells you." Well, my first thing I say to them is, "Don't believe anything that your friends tell you that they are going to support you. If they are going to support you, let them give you a list of a hundred people. And I'll guarantee you that they can't give you the names of a hundred people that will support you. And let them give you a check for some support." Because after you commit yourself they are hard to find.

It was one of the stupidest things I ever did. I campaigned hard, ran a pretty good race. I do not know what I got beat by, but I got way more newspaper coverage. . .

JACKSON: You got tremendous newspaper coverage

HATTEN: . . . than my opponent. I got a lot more coverage. I had met Everett Collier¹⁵ over at the *Chronicle* and considered him a good friend. I got some good advice for getting newspaper coverage. But, again, I think at that particular time we

¹⁵ Everett D. Collier (1914 – 1992), *Houston Chronicle* (1937 – 1941, 1946 – 1979).

were still pretty much I think at that time the Masonic Lodge [Interruption]. He was an active Mason, Masons were very active [Interruption. Tape Stopped].

JACKSON: Tell me about running for political office in 1946. Let me preface this a little bit. From reading the newspaper coverage of the time, and I've been reading Glenn Perry's¹⁶ scrapbook that has all the coverage of you in there, there were a lot of public meetings where politicians spoke. There seemed to be good press coverage, your campaign issues seemed to be pretty well delineated. Did you have bumper stickers, push cards? How much of that kind of thing did you actually do when you campaigned?

HATTEN: As I say, these people who talk to you about running and all the support they are going to give you, don't come through. I don't [Interruption. Tape Stopped]. Unlike today, I would venture to say I didn't spend over five thousand dollars. And I would venture to day that was the hardest five thousand dollars I ever had to try to collect. We had push cards. I think I've got one of those cards somewhere. You went to every meeting. I had, on the one hand, I had been active in fraternal work. [Interruption. Tape Stopped]

JACKSON: We are talking about your fraternal organizations and running for office.

HATTEN: Back in 1945 when I decided to do the stupid thing of running for county judge, we didn't have any television, very little radio, KPRC – "Kotton Port Rail Center." Campaigning was either in the newspaper or the radio was expensive for what the job paid and what campaign funds you could raise. So, consequently the big thing was to get as much free newspaper coverage as you could. I was

¹⁶ Glenn A. Perry, Harris County Judge (1945 – 1950).

fortunate enough, as you notice from my scrapbooks I have an awful lot of clippings from newspapers, and I knew that newspapers were hungry for articles but they weren't going to write them and they weren't going to seek them out. You wrote them up and took them to them.

Glenn Perry complained very bitterly to the management of the news media that I was getting so much more coverage than he was. They told his people, "Well, you write it up and bring it in. We'll give you the same consideration we give Hatten. We don't care anymore about him than we do you." I was big in writing something up, trying to have something new, taking it down and giving it to the people who had something to say about doing it.

You had to have a forum. You couldn't write an article up and take it on down and expect them to publish it. You had to have a forum that you gave it to. These forums were very, very small. They could be beer joints. They'd back a pickup truck up, put a microphone there, and all the candidates would be invited to come out. They'd be charged \$5.00 or \$10.00 to speak, to pay for the microphone and buy the watermelon to give to the crowd. The crowd which would consist of twenty or thirty people, but you had a forum and you made the comments. I was very conscientious about not saying I said anything unless I actually said it. It might have been a very small forum. But that's what they looked for and that's what they wanted.

So, there were two things that you did. You'd go downtown to the larger buildings and go up the elevators to the top floor and just walk down the stairwell

to the 19th floor and go to every office there and talk to every secretary and if you could see anybody else in there, you'd talk to them. And then by night you covered the beer joints. And any places such as the waterfront, the longshoremen, the Reed Roller Bit, Hughes Tool, any place that had a large contingent of people coming and going through a gate. That way you got a chance to see or personally talk to five hundred people going in at 3:30 in the afternoon and the others coming out at 4:00.

And then there was an awful lot of small placard type signs that would be tacked up. My campaigning was mostly done by the stairwells of the buildings and going to the large manufacturing plants where, Grand Prize Brewery for instance, they had shifts and you could catch the shifts going in: Reed Roller Bit, Hughes Tool, the waterfront. I was just the opposite. I had labor, I say I had labor, I don't know how much of it I had.

JACKSON: You had an endorsement.

HATTEN: But labor was more inclined so I capitalized on that and then at the same time I was active in the American Legion, the VFW, the Sons of Herman, the Knights of Columbus, and the Eagles. I was not just a dues paying member, I actually attended the meetings and knew the people. Then there was a very small campaign from house to house, but very small, but that's so awful slow.

JACKSON: What effect do you think being a Catholic had on the campaign?

HATTEN: I think it had a little, but by that time it hadn't become quite as bad as it had been in the past. I think more so than anything, while I had labor and I had -- the

Eagles don't endorse anyone and none of these organizations I named endorsed anybody -- by the same token there was a lot of brotherhood. I remember a very, very good friend of mine and an associate in the law practice and the whole thing, twenty days before the election I was doing pretty good. But the word came down that the Masons were going to support Glenn Perry and they weren't going to support me. They were powerful. They had a lot of influence. It wouldn't be fair to say they defeated me or they elected him, but in 1945 and a number of years prior to that and only a few years after that, fraternal connections was the big way you contacted. Today you spend a lot of money on television. Then, we depended on our personal friendships.

JACKSON: Would you call that the good old boy system?

HATTEN: Yes, it very definitely was, there's no two ways about it. There was a lot of sitting around in the Houston Club, in the various fraternal groups. We know what this man stands for, he's our friend. They put the word out; this is who we're supporting. The larger law firms supported Glenn Perry. They represented the accountants, the contractors, the engineers and they put the word out that this is the man that they wanted. I didn't have the luxury of having people who carried any weight. Mine had to be a one on one personal contact, which was a stupid thing at that time. While I criticize people who run today can't see that, I should have seen it, but I didn't recognize it until it was way too late.

JACKSON: Would you say then that although the fraternal organizations and personal contacts were important, especially for someone breaking into their very first

elected office and running for county judge, that the people the law firms were talking to were the contractors, the people who hoped to make money off of the county and get the county business?

HATTEN: They represented the people who employed the great majority of the people. The people I was getting was the little Pop and Mom grocery out here, the little drive-in operator, the little barber, the little beer joint fellow and then I had to personally see three or four of them an evening while all they had to do was send a little memo to the CEO at Grand Prize, the CEO at Hughes Tool and they'd pass the word down that this is who we're supporting. We're supporting him because he supports us.

JACKSON: Do you think that your run for county judge and your subsequent loss hurt you when you had to start your practice back up as a lawyer?

HATTEN: No, it did not. It had no effect whatsoever. If anything, I probably gained a little by it. I got some name recognition. There are always some people who don't like the person who is in. I don't think it hurt my law practice one iota.

JACKSON: And that's what you started doing again?

HATTEN: And then I went back into law practice and continued the practice of law until 1960 when, just out of the blue sky, Squatty Lyons¹⁷ called me. We had not been -- Squatty played poker, I don't play poker -- we didn't have a lot in common except we came out of the north side. He belongs to the Les Amis Seniors while I was in the Les Amis Juniors. In those days, as I understand it, the Commissioners Court divided up appointments. Today it's your day, tomorrow it's my day, and

¹⁷ E. A. "Squatty" Lyons, Harris County Commissioner, Precinct 4, (1943 – 1990).

they went around and if you wanted this fellow you got him. There was no bickering or fighting over it, if you're stupid enough to want him, we'll go along with you. And why it was, we never discussed it, Squatty called me one day and asked me if I would like to be a Port Commissioner. "Hell, Squatty, what's a Port Commissioner?" "Well, it don't pay anything but it has a lot of prestige." "I don't know whether I can afford to take it if it don't pay anything but the prestige won't hurt." So he told me he was going to announce it and Commissioners Court was going to appoint you Port Commissioner. As result of that, I didn't seek it, so I held it and I guess I was reappointed because I'm sure it wasn't a four year term.

JACKSON: I don't know what the term was.

HATTEN: I was reappointed and then I resigned in 1964 when Judge Cole¹⁸ recommended me -- do you know Criss, his history or background or anything?

JACKSON: Why don't you mention that?

HATTEN: We were both Marines, he lost his eyesight in Tawara. We did not know each other. He came from the most humble background you could possibly imagine, sharecropper parents, the Tree Army (Civilian Conservation Corps) to help support his family and from there into the Marine Corps without any high school diploma to anything else and came back blind and accomplished a helluva lot. I was just riding down the Heights Street one day and saw a blind man and his dog and just what caused it; I just stopped and asked him. I told him, "I'm Bill Hatten,

¹⁸ Criss Cole, Texas House of Representatives (1955 – 1962), Texas Senate (1963 – 1970), 315th District Court (Juvenile) Judge (1971 – 1985).

can I take you anywhere?" He said, "No." The result of that conversation we became friends.

Handy Anderson who was a sports writer for the *Houston Press* was doing an awful, awful, awful lot to rehabilitate injured service people and he just took an awful liking to Criss because he had accomplished so damned much under such obstacles. He had gotten his high school diploma, he had gotten his degree from the University of Houston, he had gotten his law license. Anderson called me one day and he said, "We're going to elect Criss to the Legislature." I said, "Does he know it?" He said, "No, but we'll tell him." He called a fellow by the name of Leland Hamner, he said, "Leland, you're going to be the treasurer," he had a little machine shop. And he called Walter Boyd, the city attorney over at the City of Houston and said, "You three are going to handle his campaign."

So, I'd take him around at night. The greatest campaigning I ever did with anybody. Walk in with a blind man and a dog and order a beer and nobody would let you pay and they'd keep you there until they got you drunk and you could move on to the next place. He was elected.

So, Criss asked me if I would consider a judgeship. We had worked together on a few cases and visited with each other and I was godfather for one of his children and I said yes. So he gave the recommendation to John Connolly¹⁹. I think that's a very interesting thing. Connolly told him, "No, Hatten had never been on my side and I've never been on his." And Criss was very adamant.

When he wanted something he was a bulldog, there's no two ways about it. He

¹⁹ John Connolly, Governor of Texas (1962 – 1968).

came back to Houston on a Friday and he polled the thirty-one senators and told them what he wanted and he got the commitment of all thirty --of course he was one -- others that they would support him. He called Connelly and told him, "You passed your last piece of legislation unless Hatten gets the appointment." He appointed me, but with a lot of misgivings. He didn't think it was the greatest thing in the world. Later on I had to go down to his office and ask him to take the honorary chairmanship of the Jimmy Durante Telethon.

That was in 1960 and then in 1964 Preston Smith called me and I was on the bench. The clerk said, "Judge, that was Governor Preston Smith²⁰ on the phone and he wanted to talk to you, but I told him you were busy." "What in the hell is wrong with you? I'm not too damn busy to talk to the Governor! You've got to have your head examined." Fortunately, he called back and he had the greatest humor, "Judge," he said, "I was wanting to appoint you to Judge of the 176th District Court, but if you're too damn busy to talk to the Governor, I don't know if that's a smart thing to do or not." So I apologized to him and he made the announcement that day that I would be appointed to the 176th, which is a peculiar quirk because I followed Wendol Oldum on the Court of Domestic Relations when he moved to the 176th, I went on to Domestic Relations. Then, when he went to the Court of Appeals, I followed him to the 176th. At that time Preston Smith and I didn't have any contact either, that was done on the recommendation of Chet Brooks²¹ who was State Senator out of Pasadena.

²⁰ Preston Smith, Governor of Texas (1968– 1972).

²¹ Chet Brooks, Texas House of Representatives (1962 – 1966), Texas Senate (1967 – 1992).

JACKSON: Let me back you up just a minute. You were on the Port Commission but that wasn't a full-time job, you maintained your law practice, correct? Right. So, I know that from reading some of Jim Fonteno's²² campaign literature he had been on the Port Commission and he claimed that he had done a tremendous amount as a Port Commissioner. You're telling me it was just an honorable job with a lot of prestige, but there wasn't much to it.

HATTEN: In my day I can't say that I or anyone else except the chairman, the chairman was Howard Tellepsen, and Howard did do a tremendous amount of work as a Port Commissioner from the standpoint of talking to big shippers. We had at that time, an awful strong Port Director. This is hell to go on record for; he was very arrogant, strong, "do-it-himself." He knew port work and he knew what he wanted to do and he did not believe a whole lot in commissioners. Commissioners were to take the bows, approve, whatever you wanted. Today I'm the only one I ever know of that never made a trip to Germany or Ireland.

JACKSON: I was going to say, "What kinds of trips did you take?"

HATTEN: I went to Chicago probably once or twice and to New York probably once or twice where we entertained the big shippers at the dinner recognizing that we appreciated their business, that sort of thing. But that was the only trips. We negotiated contracts with labor unions, with purchase of additional berthing space for ships. But when I was on there, it was a strong Chairman / Director operation.

Today I think it's a little different than that. Most of the commissioners have strong input in the operation and by the same token, I think they are very

²² Jim Fonteno, Harris County Commissioner, Precinct 2 (1975 – 2002).

fortunate to have a strong director and a strong chairman. I enjoyed it and went on with the idea that it wasn't that way. I'd take off from time to time and have them send me a car and driver and go down to the port and visit various facilities and one thing and another. One time, the then director at one of these affairs had a little too much to drink and he'd come to let me know, he said, "You can have a helluva lot of fun being a port director if you just stay out of my damn business and let me run the port and you can have all the fun you want." He didn't want anybody. . .

JACKSON: Nosing around.. .

HATTEN: No. I was just the opposite. I didn't get in anything. . .if I was in Scouting I went to camp with the kids, if I was in Eagles I was going to be President, if I was in Catholic War Veterans I was going to be Commander. I didn't just pay my dues, I wanted to have some input. I really don't feel that I was one that it had to be my way or no way. It just was I wanted, if I was going to be responsible, I wanted to know what was going on.

JACKSON: Then in 1964, when you were appointed to the Court of Domestic Relations, you were also put on the Juvenile Board for the County. What were the functions and purposes of the Juvenile Board?

HATTEN: There again, I took it the same as we just got through talking about. I took it very seriously. I hadn't been on there too long before it was divided up amongst the members of the Juvenile Court, I wound up with chairman of the grounds committee. That was to oversee the construction and building of new facilities.

The first facility was the Chimney Rock facility. You need to talk to John Peters who was Assistant Director. This again was generally that type of position, the county judge was a strong head of the Juvenile Board. Well, if I wasn't going to be the chairman of the thing, I'm going to ask a lot of questions.

We decided to build these facilities and they built the twelve cottage type buildings. It was left up to the board to determine whether we were going to have one big facility or whether we were going to have it broken down into a home type facility. It was pretty well agreed that we would try that and we did. But again, architects, like judges I guess, are just hard-headed people and they've got their ideas of what they want and what they don't want. I had a lot of run-ins with the architects relative to the facilities, finally got them off the ground and got them built. And they immediately had water falling through the roof and one thing and another and I think it was the only time in the history of Harris County that Harris County has ever put the architects' feet to the fire to come up with some of the mistakes that they had made. So I was active in that. Then we had a second facility. We built a new facility down at Clear Lake.

JACKSON: I want you to talk about that a little bit. I noticed by reading the minutes of the board, almost from the beginning when you started in 1964, there were motions made to sell off the Boy's Home in Clear Lake, to sell part of the Burnett-Bayland property to build another facility. And you ended up finally keeping the Seabrook Boy's Home. What was behind that? I know there was a long history; it had been there since the early 1920s.

HATTEN: I don't have a good recollection of what happened. There was a lot of discussion. It was a costly operation. I think by that time and I don't understand why you didn't find it, I think by that time Chris Cole was very active on the board and was a strong advocate of facilities for the juvenile delinquent where they could have a place to live.

Tape 2 Side A

I don't remember too much discussion concerning the sale of the property at Clear Lake. It was off and on, an awful lot of discussion concerning the sale of the property on West Dallas. I know I was in favor not of the sale of the property where the buildings are now but we had the property across the street. As there was several of the members of the board that wanted to build a building on that property. There was considerable discussion and two sides as to whether they should sell it or not sell it and I was in favor in selling that property and enlarging the present facilities. Now have they not only enlarged that by not going in but they've gone downtown to take over the old Criminal Courts Building. I'd had no part in that, because I was off the board by that time.

[Interruption. Tape Stopped]

JACKSON: The Convent of the Good Shepherd closed down January 1, 1968 and apparently they took girls in who were referred by the county. Were you familiar with that? I had seen that in very early county juvenile files. That's obviously a situation that's a private enterprise and the county referred girls to them.

HATTEN: I don't recollect that we had a contract with the Convent of the Good Shepherd, we could have, but I don't recollect that at all.

JACKSON: Okay. A lot of these issues have been lost to time and hopefully we will be able to get into the records and resurrect some of this history.

HATTEN: What was the year of that, do you have any idea?

JACKSON: 1968 was when they stopped.

HATTEN: 1968?

JACKSON: They notified the board they would be closing down as of January 1, 1968.

HATTEN: Man, I just wasn't doing my job because I don't remember it.

JACKSON: Maybe you weren't at that meeting. You didn't go to all of them.

HATTEN: I didn't?

JACKSON: No. You missed some.

HATTEN: I went to an awful lot of them.

JACKSON: You were at most of them. They were also talking about something that I find interesting, which is the licensing of foster homes. The reason I find that interesting is during your campaign for county judge, one of your planks was moving children into foster homes and out of institutions. And at this point they area talking about licensing foster homes. I didn't realize they weren't licensed.

HATTEN: It runs in my mind; as you say you go back to the very beginning in my history, I've been a big advocate of foster homes. I think that foster homes can do a much better job by far than institutions can. It seems to me that at that time we were using foster homes but there were several incidents that we were unhappy

with, things that had happened in foster homes. That brought about the question of seeking legislation to have foster homes licensed so that they would be a little bit more controlled. One, that we would have more control over them and secondly, that we would have some background check on how they were being used. Originally, as I recall, there was no background check. We had members of our agency, the Harris County Juvenile Board, had people who were interested in seeking out people and then on the other hand you had people who were seeking that remuneration themselves, they wanted to make something. But, I think the reason that came about was that we had some criticism of some things that were going on in foster homes that weren't according to Hoyle. I had always, even long before I had gotten on the Juvenile Board been an advocate of foster homes rather than institutions.

JACKSON: Another thing that I noticed is the board minutes themselves. It seems that what the board did primarily, at least in their minutes, was to approve expenditures of funds. But that most of the work was done by and in the committees. Was that true?

HATTEN: That's pretty well how it happened. I had the Grounds Committee and had it I guess my whole tenure that I was there. If you did the job, it took some time because as I say, we were dealing with architects and they don't like to be dealt with and you're dealing with contractors you don't have much say so over them. Then we had the Finance Committee who was mostly interested in what you were going to pay the director. Again, the Juvenile Board, while made up of a better

independent group of people than we had with the Port Commission. Because some people thought the port commission was just an honorary prestigious type of thing, in fact that is what it was handed to me when I took it, but to the contrary on the juvenile board you had all judges who are inherently independent.

Some of our discussions got fairly heated. It wasn't a rubber stamp type of thing. I'd bring back something back from the Building and Grounds Committee that everyone would approve of. They had some strong feelings at one time that we should build a new facility on the south side where the children's home is today. I don't know if we still have that piece of ground or not. We had a beautiful piece of ground there at one time. There was considerable discussion on that. Then we'd have strong discussions over the hiring of a director. We had several incidents where the news media would come in and criticize the operation of the facilities. Individually, I think the members were strong, by the same token I think the county judge showed a strong influence on what all the committees did.

JACKSON: Do you remember when the facilities were integrated? In the 1960s one of the suggestions was building a home for Negroes. So, it was obviously segregated if you were thinking in those terms.

HATTEN: I have never thought of the juvenile facilities being segregated. I don't know how they could have been segregated. They may have been segregated within the walls, but there was never two institutions, two buildings separate and apart where

the whites and the blacks. I don't recall us ever having a question of us being segregated. As far as I was concerned it was always integrated.

JACKSON: One of the other things I would like you to comment on was the relationship between the Judiciary and the Commissioners Court. Many people have related that there was a lot of friction between the judges and the Commissioners Court -- the judges wanting the moon, the stars, and the sky and the Commissioners Court not quite able to pay for that.

HATTEN: Actually, over the sixty years they have pretty much remained separate and apart, I think. Unlike a lot of people, I think the Commissioners Court has gone overboard, frankly, in being fair with the courts. There's a fine line that divides the judicial and the legislative or the executive -- the people who handle the purse strings and the people who want it. Judges have almost an inherent power to direct the Commissioners Court to give them what they need to operate their facilities. Very few of the judges wanted to have too much contact with the Commissioners Court. The Commissioners Court has always been critical of the salary raises that they wanted but more importantly, what they need to conduct their business. In 1936 -- and this is the most horrible thing in the world because this is what your daddy told you when he went out to chop wood to bring in to put in the fireplace -- we had two criminal district courts in Harris County. Today we've got twenty-two. Each of those criminal courts handled as many cases per court as each of the judges handle per court today. Those two courts operated

with a court clerk and a court reporter. They operated with Branch's criminal statutes.

The judges have wanted and gotten a lot of things. I don't think they have a right to complain. It would be astronomical the amount of money the Commissioners Court would have to expend if they got everything they wanted. The same criminal court today not only has a clerk and court reporter and a coordinator and two or three probation officers – they did have a bailiff – they've got a bailiff and a process server today. The bailiff was the process server.

The commissioners held a tight rein and if they hadn't of, it would have run wild. Squatty – and he appointed me to the Port Commission and I was on the bench at the time – he had very little use for judges. He thought they wanted too much and wasted too much time. I don't find too much fault with that. I don't know if I would have told you this twenty years ago. There's twenty-two judges down there that's not going to like this, but they've got facilities that you can't imagine sixty years ago – coffee bars, books. I still think that you've got twenty-two sets of statues, 600 volumes each. You could have one central library.

JACKSON: We do have a central library, Harris County Law Library.

HATTEN: I'd give them the benefit of more than that. I think they need a central library in the building where it would be accessible. I don't think the county library serves the purpose, but each one of them has their own independent library. Bob

Eckels²³ and Eversole²⁴ and scream and holler that you don't need all these things they're asking for.

JACKSON: Could you also comment briefly about the culture of county politics and especially of renowned places or events like the spaghetti lunches at Sacred Heart or the Crying Towel.

HATTEN: Did I tell you about the Crying Towel or did you come up with that?

JACKSON: You told me, but other people have mentioned it too.

HATTEN: McCain²⁵ was an active participant in the Crying Towel. Actually, the Crying Towel, the Sacred Heart - Whitney Drive spaghetti on Thursday are kinda like the old days meeting at Petersons. Lawyers today and politicians today don't spend the time fraternizing with each other or with the public. These are two of the last places where they have an opportunity to do that. Today each one has their own little agenda. They are separate and apart from anyone else. They don't participate.

The Crying Towel was just a fellow by the name of John Allien who was very, very active. He had a little ole place where he'd come down to his shop and let his foreman go out on a job and he'd call some friend and ask if he wanted "to come over and cook chili today," "You want come over and cook stew today." And then his secretary, his wife, sister-in-law would get on the phone. At one

²³ Robert Y. (Bob) Eckels, Harris County Commissioner, Precinct 3 (1973 – 1988).

²⁴ Jerry Eversole, Harris County Commissioner, Precinct 4 (1991 to present).

²⁵ J. E. "Mac" McCain, Harris County employee, Building Superintendent, Aide to Commissioner El Franco Lee (1954 – 2006).

time, people like Oscar Holcombe²⁶ hung out there, Price Daniel²⁷ made it a hangout. Who was the captain of the fire department? He hung out there. I don't think they had a great deal of influence on politics today. It's just an opportunity for some of the believers in the old type of camaraderie have a chance to sit out and talk to each other and reminisce and cry on each others' shoulders. I think the Crying Towel is aptly named.

JACKSON: When do you think the change came in county politics?

HATTEN: There hadn't been a whole lot of change in the make up in the Commissioners Court over the years. It's been a slow process. Kyle Chapman²⁸ was on there forever and a day and then Squatty was on there even longer than that and Jim Fonteno, as long as the two of them. I don't think you could put a date. It slowly evolved, just like what happened to the fraternal groups. Each of these lodges had 2500 and then they had 2000 and then they had 1500 and that all eroded over a period of 50 years. I think the same thing is true of the Commissioners Court. I think it just slowly evolved. The Commissioners Court probably has held the way they did business more in the old fashioned days than anybody else. I gather they still pretty much operate on four precincts and the central county judge's domain and he handles his domain without questioning what you do in your domain and each of the four precincts pretty much do what they want to do.

JACKSON: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

²⁶ Oscar Holcombe, Mayor of Houston, 11 non-consecutive terms (1921 – 1958).

²⁷ Price Daniel, Texas Governor, 1957 – 1963.

²⁸ W. Kyle Chapman, Harris County Commissioner, Precinct 1(1951 – 1972).

HATTEN: It's hard to say that it's for better or for worse. Who wants the old days? But it was a much friendlier, much laid back type of operation. People today are unfortunately money-hungry, the lawyers work eighteen hours a day, seven days a week, there's no camaraderie between any of them, by accident if there is. I think justice was served just as much or more so in the old operation, when a lawyer could sit down, two adversaries, you and I, you on this side and I'm on the other and we could sit down and have lunch and drink coffee and go into court and you could be as ugly as you wanted and I could be as ugly as I wanted to be and then tonight we could talk to each other. You don't find that today. I think the professionalism is much, much greater. You want to be admired and looked upon as being ethical and upright and today who gives a damn whether you are ethical or upright as long as you win your case? Win it at any cost.

JACKSON: Thank you very much for this oral history, I appreciate it.