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*Arkansas Democrat* Project

Interview with

Chester Garrett
Little Rock, Arkansas
30 July 2005

Interviewer: Jerry McConnell

Jerry McConnell: I'm here in the home of Chester Garrett [on] July 30, 2005, and we're doing an interview for the oral history of the *Arkansas Democrat* and *Democrat-Gazette* for the [Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History] at the University of Arkansas. The first thing I need to do, Chester, is to ask if I have your approval to make this tape and to turn it over to the University of Arkansas?

Chester Garrett: Yes you have my permission to do that.

JM: All right very good. Now just start out—tell me first what your full name is.

CG: Chester W. Garrett. G-A-R-R-E-T-T.

JM: Okay, very good. Where and when were you born, Chester?

CG: I was born October 25, 1915.

JM: So you will be ninety this year.

CG: Ninety this year.

JM: And where were you born?

CG: Well, that's—at that particular time it was called Hill Community.

JM: Okay.



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CG: In Oklahoma.

JM: Okay.

CG: It's about seven miles from a little place called Poteau. P-O-T-E-A-U.

JM: Okay, I know where Poteau is.

CG: It's thirty-five miles from Fort Smith.

JM: Yes, all right, and where did you go to school?

CG: Well, I went [from kindergarten] through the third grade at a little country school where they taught first through the eighth grade at a place called Gilmore. G-I-L-M-O-R-E. [It] is still on the map. I moved to Fort Smith in 1924 and I started third grade there.

JM: What were—I forgot to ask you—your parents' names?

CG: My father's name is William Oscar Garrett and my mother's name is Evie Irene Boozman.

JM: How do you spell that, do you know?

CG: B-O-O-Z-M-A-N.

JM: Okay, that's sort of like the congressman.

CG: That is my—I'm kin to them.

JM: Are you? Okay.

CG: That's my mother's nephew.

JM: Oh, is he really?

CG: [My mother's father] died when he was twenty-one years old. He was deputy sheriff of Fort Smith and tracked—of course Oklahoma was not in statehood then,



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but he tracked a man on horseback all night in December in the freezing rain and took pneumonia and died. My mother was three weeks old when he died.

JM: This was—who was this that died?

CG: My mother's father.

JM: Your mother's father, okay, and his name was Boozman?

CG: Arthur Earl.

JM: He tracked a man and died, and this was back before—obviously before 1907 when I think Oklahoma became a state—back before then.

CG: [Laughs] There were two brothers—two Boozman brothers—and two sisters named Turnham and the other Boozman married my aunt—my grandmother's sister—so there were two sisters married to brothers.

JM: Yes, okay.

CG: So these Boozmans [John Boozman's family] are an offspring of the other brother.

JM: Okay, now, Chester, you moved to Fort Smith in 1924, did you say?

CG: 1924.

JM: And where did you go to school?

CG: Public schools there in Fort Smith.

JM: Did you graduate from high school there?

CG: Yes.

JM: That would be Fort Smith High School—what became Northside—but it would have been Fort Smith High School then.

CG: We had one high school, Fort Smith high school.

JM: Do you remember what year that was?

CG: I graduated in the summer of 1933.

JM: Okay, right in the [Great] Depression.

CG: Right in the big middle of it, or just getting out of it, you might say.

JM: So tell me a little a little about your work as to when you got into the newspaper business.

CG: Well, work was hard to find and a paper route was valuable. When somebody got a paper route, they did not turn loose of it until they graduated from school. Then they would ask them to retire or get off the route and give it to some other boy. A boy by the name of Hickman carried our paper. He told me he was going to quit his route and he went to my church and asked me if I would be interested in it. He said he hadn't told anybody, so I went down and interviewed for it and everything. When he retired off his route, I was hired. At that particular time, there were two newspapers in Fort Smith published by the same company, *Southwest American* and *Southwest Times Record,* so we threw both routes. We threw in the morning and in the evening.

JM: And the *Times Record* was the afternoon paper?

CG: The afternoon.

JM: Yes, okay.

CG: And that, of course, was the most popular paper then, as were all newspapers at that time . . .

JM: The afternoon paper?

CG: Yes. Well, of course, we had two newspapers, and I carried it on a bicycle and it was a sixteen-mile route. I threw it twice a day. I got up at 3:00 in the morning and pedaled all the way down from past Dodson Avenue back into where the paper is located and picked up my papers and rode all the way back out to Dodson. My route started at Dodson and Towson Avenue and went—I guess you call it west—it was a sixteen-mile area and covered all the streets and everything. When I got through in the morning, I came in and put my bicycle up and washed—if it was muddy I washed it—and took care of my bicycle and got my feed bag and went out and fed the cow—washed my hands and milked the cow [laughs]—got ready for school.

JM: So how old were you when you first started delivering that route, do you remember?

CG: Well, I was about at least fourteen, I think.

JM: Yes, okay.

CG: I carried the route until after I graduated.

JM: Okay, then what did you do after you graduated from high school?

CG: Well, in high school I had prepared myself to be a printer. In high school I had a course called Smith-Hughes Trade Printing. It was a three-year course, so when I got out of junior high school I went directly into this course and I had to take subjects that were required for graduation. I had to take them during the summer or double up at other times. Carrying a paper route made it difficult to do anything—you know, the times weren't good, so I carried it until after I graduated from high school. Then I went in and put my application in for a job at the paper,

and so they hired me as a part-time district manager. When I say part-time it was full-time, but they did not give me an automobile or anything and they said just [to] use my bicycle. They started me out at $9 a week on bicycle and my duties were to check the carrier boys—collect their money and turn their money in. Back then it was, I think, fifteen cents a week, a nickel on Sunday, and two cents daily. After six months, why, they raised me to $13 a week, told me to go buy me a car and paid me three cents a mile. From then on I worked until 1940.

JM: Now, this was in circulation, right?

CG: Circulation.

JM: Not as a printer.

CG: One man who was with the paper when I went to work there was district manager over part of Fort Smith and all of Van Buren. I was over about three fourths of Fort Smith and we had—it was a beautiful set-up—you just cannot imagine. I came down here to Little Rock and, well, I saw when I got down here it just—it was different, between daylight and dark. We had the most perfect set-up and arrangements and everything. A carrier boy did not have any control over circulation. All the stops and starts went through the office.

JM: In Fort Smith you're talking about?

CG: Yes.

JM: Yes, okay.

CG: Now the boy did take this route and pay his own bill, and if he didn't pay his bill, he didn't get his papers.

JM: Who owned the Fort Smith papers then?

CG: When I went to work there, two men named [J.S.] Parks and [George D.] Carney owned it.

JM: Did the paper sell before you left there, though?

CG: Oh, yes.

JM: [To] Don Reynolds?

CG: Yes, Don Reynolds.

JM: Okay.

CG: I was down at the paper one Sunday morning. I usually went down there and kind of picked up loose ends and things. It was about 10:00 [a.m.] and somebody rattled the back door. I went back and opened it up and there stood Don Reynolds and another man and he told me, "I am considering buying this paper, would you be kind enough to show me through it?" I said I would and evidently he liked what he saw. [Laughs] He went ahead and bought it.

JM: When was that? Was it about 1939? Does that sound about right?

CG: Sounds like it. Yes.

JM: Yes, but then you wound up—you said that you went to Little Rock in 1940. What were the circumstances of that?

CG: Well, I went to work. I quit the newspaper. We got involved in the war [World War II], building Camp Chaffee [Camp Chaffee later became Fort Chaffee]. About a year before they built it, the groundwork was being made, before buying the land and everything. There were several executives from this company from Georgia—this construction company—that came in there. They would come up to the paper every Sunday morning. I worked six and a half days a week. I

worked to noon Sunday. They would come up there and I would save clippings and everything out of the paper pertaining to the camp—anything that was related to it. Well, I kept a file for them and they would come up there and we would sit, laugh, and talk and visit and everything. They'd been doing that, I guess, for three or four months—nice people—and they said "What kind of money do you make here?" I think at that particular time I was making $25 a week, so he said, "How would you like to double your pay?" and I said, "What do you mean?" they told me, "Come to work and you've got a job," and so I resigned. I did the wrong thing. In my opinion, I consider it wrong now. There were six of us, really seven, in the circulation department at that time, road men and city workers. So I rented a room in a hotel, the Goldman Hotel. It wasn't the Goldman, it was one of them closer to the bridge.

JM: Ward Hotel?

CG: Ward Hotel. I rented a room up there and told all the men that we were going to have a meeting up there, so they all showed up and I had one of the representatives from the construction firm there. He wanted to know if anyone wanted a job. Just one man stayed, the rest of us all quit. And there was nothing wrong with the organization—the people—G.C. Gardner, who was the circulation manager—and he was the one who had it ship-shape. The first thing Reynolds did was to fire Gardner and bring in his own people and begin to tear our play place down, so we were a little bit unhappy about a lot of things, nothing that would cause us to quit work at that particular time in our lives during the depression, I'd say. But anyway we went to work and built Camp Chaffee. I

worked for them from 1940 to 1942—June 1942—and I was building Camp Attaberry in Indiana.  I had a draft card and a heart murmur and they kept turning me down for the service because of my heart, so I got a draft card to classify me.  I would come down to Little Rock and they would turn me around and turn me loose.  They did that to me three times.  So I was in Indiana and my mother called me and said that I had a draft notice there and I said, "Well, send it to me in the mail."  I got it, and the day I got it I thought, "Well, I'll just get in a car and just drive to Little Rock because that's what it's going to take."  So I got in and drove all the way back down and I got here in Fort Smith and the first thing I did was to call the camp and ask when they had a busload coming back to Little Rock, and they said, "We've got one coming in the morning" and I said, "Can you get me on it?"  They said, "Yes, we can get you on it."  I got on the bus fully intending to come back.  I had no idea they would take me, but they told me, "We're going to take you to Third and Broadway here in Little Rock."  So I went up there and there was an old doctor up on the third floor, and he wasn't busy or nothing, and I went in and he examined me.  I told him I had been turned down for a heart condition and everything, and he said, "Well, you're in the army now," [laughs] and that ended that.  I went into the army June 2.

JM: 1942?

CG: 1942.  I saw a letter in my files.  I shut the Camp Chaffee hospital down after I got out of the army.  Went out there on a civil service job and closed it down.

JM: You were in the army how long?

CG: Three years, nine months, and twenty-three days.

JM: Oh, you remember. Where all did you serve?

CG: My first year of duty was here in Little Rock. The day when I came down on the bus this general down at Camp Chaffee—my dad was a service manager for Yantis and Harper. Do you remember Yantis and Harper in Fort Smith? He was [the] service manager there. The morning that I left, the general came out to buy gas. Believe it or not, he didn't send somebody to get his gas, he came and got it. My dad always talked to him, you know, and my dad told him, "My son went down to Little Rock this morning," and he said, "Oh, he did," and he pulled a notebook out of his pocket and wrote it down—you know, and my dad never did tell me about it—of course, he didn't know it had significance. So when I went to close the hospital down—why they had sent all the service records and everything to Camp Chaffee to be stored and everything. There were seven Chester Garretts that were in the army from Arkansas. Three of them lived here in Little Rock, two of them lived in Fort Smith, so I got my personnel file and, boy, that was like finding gold. I got it down and there was a letter from that general to the commanding officer at Camp Robinson that said, "Today recruit Chester Garrett will arrive and I will take it as a personal favor if you show him any considerations." That was in my file from one general to another. That's how I stayed at Little Rock—they would call names out to leave and they wouldn't call my name out. There was a young boy there that I had a paper route with in Fort Smith, [and he] had been drafted. He was a photographer—crazy about photography—and there was a lieutenant who was a doctor, a medic, where the induction center was—where they brought the recruits in everyday—and I was

down there one night and we were developing pictures and he said, "Chester, how would you like to come work for me?" I said, "That would be great. Can you swing that?" and he said, "Well, we'll see what we can do." The next morning and I got a call over at the adjutant's office. I walked in and saluted, and he said, "What's this I hear about you wanting to go to the medics?" I said "Well, the lieutenant suggested he would like to have me down there, if it can be arranged." He said, "Well, pack up your gear and get there."

JM: After you served here in Little Rock, did you serve anywhere else while you were still in the army? Where else did you go from there?

CG: Well, I joined a hospital group. I went from here to Hot Springs. They had the Eighth Corps. They had decided to bust the playhouse we had here. We had all the favorite people at the induction center here. We ate family style. We had steak three days a week. The Fisher boys were the cooks. You wouldn't believe it. So somebody blew the whistle on us, so to speak, so they said to bust that playhouse up in Little Rock. They called me and said, "Now we're going to have to get you out of here, and you have two choices I think you will like," he said, "We'll either send you to Fort Smith as station complement and you can stay there probably for the rest of the war or you can go to Hot Springs, to the Army-Navy General Hospital. I said, "I'll take Army-Navy" because I was married by then.

JM: You met somebody here in Little Rock and got married?

CG: She was actually from Hope. She moved up here with her parents and went to work with Southwestern Bell [Telephone Company]. She worked for them for forty years.

JM: What was her name?

CG: Hopson. H-O-P-S-O-N. Clarette. C-L-A-R-E-T-T-E.

JM: And I think you told me that she is deceased now.

CG: She died [in] 1999.

JM: So did you stay at Hot Springs the rest of the war?

CG: No, so I stayed there until—I was in the reception area where we typed up all the records and everything into dispositions. The A and D office is what we called them—A and D—admittance and disposition. I stayed there, I guess, maybe close to a year, and every Sunday morning I would come to Little Rock. In fact, I came home three nights a week and I'd catch the last bus out of here to get back to stand reveille. I went by the A and D office to check and make sure everything was all right—the records and everything right—and I had just put my hat on and was walking out the door [when] the phone rang. It was the first sergeant and he said, "Garrett, get yourself over here." [Laughs] So I went to the first sergeant's office—I said, "What in the world?" I went over there and he didn't say anything. He walked in and shoved a piece of paper at me and said, "They're forming a Ninety-first General Hospital and you're going to be part of it." I said, "Wow, when do I leave?" and he said, "In the morning." So I had a one-day notice.

JM: So where was the Ninety-first General Hospital?

CG: Cirencester, England. I was a medic from the time I went into the induction center—I became a medic when I was at Camp Robinson and right on down until I was shipped overseas. I had three classifications: clerk typist, surgical technician, and medical technician. We were in Cirencester on D-Day [June 6, 1944] and we had a 2,500-bed hospital and we had maybe a half a dozen patients there—people that [had nothing] wrong with them, just normal things, you know. Citizens. All hell broke loose when the invasion happened—we filled our hospital up over night. Oh, Lord.

JM: After D-Day.

CG: After that—I was attached to three other hospitals after that. I ended up in Paris, France.

JM: With the hospital in Paris?

CG: Yes.

JM: You had a lot of wounded coming back from the D-Day invasion.

CG: From then on we had wounded coming back. Of course, we were in a chain of treatment centers. There was a first aid station on the battlefield, then there were a couple of hospitals there—they're not really hospitals—then you had a station hospital. You would ship them from the station hospital to the general hospital. It was kind of a stepping stone to get back to the states when you were wounded. And if you made it back to the general hospital it meant that you were over the hump, that you were going to live. Our mortality rate was less than 1% because when they came back to us they were patched up. The amazing part of it, Jerry, is that if a kid gets shot out here on the street now, [his] chance of dying is pretty

high—odds are against him that he'll live. But over there, those kids would get shot all to pieces and they'd come out of it.

JM: They'd take care of them.

CG: Yes, I've seen everything, you would not believe it. We had thirty-six people in a particular ward, there wasn't anybody that went to that ward unless they had their nose shot off. We were skin graft specialists and we had [a] world-renowned skin graft specialist there doing the work. I saw some fantastic things—I have experienced a lot. I was in London one time for about seven months, about six blocks off Piccadilly. I used to ride a bicycle out to Stonehenge—it wasn't a tourist attraction back in those days.

JM: Stonehenge? Stonehenge, right? That's where they've got the big rocks. What was this hospital, was that a general hospital you were in there, in London?

CG: Yes.

JM: Then you wound up in Paris. When did you get out of the service? When did you get shipped back to the states?

CG: I got back to the states November 11, you know what day that is?

JM: Yes, Armistice Day.

CG: Armistice Day.

JM: What year? 1945?

CG: Yes, 1945.

JM: Okay, then you were in the service for a few more months after that, right?

CG: I didn't get out right away. I had a heart attack then. What happened—the war in Japan wasn't over, but the war had ended in Germany. So they packed up our

hospital and they called me in and said, "Now you can—in your particular case, you can either stay here and go home on points or you can go with the hospital, and they're going to be shipped to the Pacific." I thought I would just go ahead and stay in Paris. So our hospital unit came back to the states and they got a thirty-day furlough while they were there before they started to the Pacific. Well, during those thirty days, Japan surrendered, so they just mustered them out immediately because they were already in the United States so anybody that wanted out could get out, as fast as they could. But I was stuck over there in Paris and had to come home on points. I got back and stayed eleven days in New York City. I walked in and checked into the first sergeant's office and he threw a three-day pass at me to go to New York and have a good time. Of course, back then I wanted to get home and didn't care about having a good time. But in those eleven days I did have an enjoyable time, looking back on it. I saw all the plays and everything there is to see in New York.

JM: Then you came back and did they send you to Chaffee?

GC: No, I was discharged in Fort Hood, Texas.

JM: Oh, Fort Hood, okay. But you came on back to Little Rock then?

CG: Yes, I did come to Little Rock. Clarette was working for the telephone company. I didn't have a job so I went to Fort Smith and I went to apply for unemployment. I went down to the unemployment office and there was a girl in there [whose] brother [had] carried a paper route for me there in Fort Smith and she said, "Oh, I'm just glad to see you, I have a job I want you to look at, a civil service job." She saw that I was a medic. So I closed up the hospital and they had a bunch—



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twenty-three doctors up there—we gave all the instruments to the doctors and the medicine that wasn't open. They could take it and the rest of it we salvaged.

JM: So how did you get to Little Rock?

CG: Well, I worked out there—it was good money—and so I continued to work there and Clare and I worked that out between us. When that job ended—getting close to the end—I just came to Little Rock and decided that this was where we would make our home. We still hadn't made up our mind about if the telephone company was best for her or what. But, anyway, we needed the money. I went to the *Gazette* and asked for a job in circulation and they said, "Right now we don't have anything." I said, "That's fine," and I got in my car and drove around to the *Democrat* and saw Bob Sorrells and Vinson Allen. Do you remember Vinson Allen?

JM: No. I don't remember him. I remember Bob Sorrells.

CG: Well, Bob was the assistant circulation manager. I went in and told him I wanted to interview for a job if they had any. I went to his office and we sat down and talked for, I guess, an hour, and he said, "When will you be available to work?" I said, "I'm ready now" and he said, "Can you start in the morning?" and I said, "Yes, sir." I've got a letter that says when I went to work there—it's my work schedule and at $1 an hour.

JM: So when did you go to work for the *Democrat*?

CG: July 2, 1946.

JM: You worked at the *Democrat* from that time—you never left after that did you? Did you stay at the *Democrat* the rest of your career?

CG: Oh, yes, I didn't work any place else.

JM: Okay, so you wound up working at the *Democrat* fifty-seven years, is that correct?

CG: Fifty-seven years.

JM: And you retired in 2003?

CG: 2002.

JM: 2002. But when you first went to work at the *Democrat* it was in circulation, right?

CG: Right.

JM: What were you doing then?

CG: I was the district advisor. Of course, we had some problems with the terminology of things back in those days.

JM: All right, Chester, now then, what kind of an operation was the—of course, you'd had some experience in Fort Smith—what kind of operation was the *Democrat* circulation at that time—*Democrat* circulation department?

CG: Well, the only problem was—the difference between Little Rock and Fort Smith was that I had my routes filled in Fort Smith, had boys on a long waiting list for carrier, didn't have any problems, and didn't have any problems collecting the money and everything. When I came down here, the district that I took over had eighteen down routes that we didn't have a carrier for, so we had to get our routes filled. [Of] course, it was just an afternoon paper, and we had to get the boys out of school, so I began to try to organize it. Sorrells was an excellent—Sorrells was

brilliant as far as circulations, otherwise, too. He left the *Democrat* and went into the insurance business.

JM: Sorrells did?

CG: Yes. We'd contract with boys who were twelve and thirteen years old. To carry the morning paper, of course, they had to be sixteen. I got by on the fact that I contracted for an evening route.

JM: But you could use younger boys here in Little Rock?

CG: Yes.

JM: Do you have any idea why so many routes were broken down when you took it over?

CG: Well, it—basically, Jerry, it just came it down to management.

JM: You eventually solved that situation?

CG: We didn't exactly solve it, Jerry, we did the best we could with it. We were conscientious about the boy paying the bills and trying to get the money. In Fort Smith, if you didn't pay your paper bill on Saturday afternoon, you did not get your paper. But I don't ever remember a boy not getting his papers. To my recollection, there was one person in all those times I carried a paper route that ever owed me any money. His name was Bishop and he owed me sixty-nine cents.

JM: That was in Fort Smith?

CG: That was in Fort Smith. And we had boys here in Little Rock that were lucky if they could collect on two-thirds of their route. There was a lot of moving at that particular time, and especially after desegregation. My operation here—the

relationship here—the black and white relationship—was excellent. I had to have sense enough to do it—in other words, understand what they were doing. I basically narrowed my problems down by working with the parent. When the boy took a paper route with me, it was almost like installing his parents. I made sure that my relationship, too, with principals of the schools would help me fill my routes. They would tell me what boys were reliable, who's good, who's not, who needs a job and who doesn't, and everything. That helped me tremendously. Right now I can say with all honesty that there is not a boy that ever carried a paper route for me who owes the *Democrat*—left owing the *Democrat* one dime. Now, I might not have got it when he went off the route, but I was able to collect it.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

JM: Do you remember what [the] circumstances were when you got out of circulation? I know that a lot happened.

CG: What happened was I was promoted to circulation manager, so I worked as circulation manager with Frank Simpson as the promotional circulation manager, and I was circulation manager.

JM: Was this overall circulation manager that you were promoted to?

CG: Right, I've got it right here in the folder.

JM: That's all right, we can look it up in a minute. But then as I remember—and correct me if I am wrong on this—Stanley Berry had been the business manager,

but when [K. August] Engel died, Stanley Berry and Marcus George [Engel's nephew] inherited the newspaper.

CG: Then became publisher.

JM: Stanley was the publisher and Marcus was the editor. And they changed you to business manager to replace Stanley Berry, is that right?

CG: Right.

JM: So you became business manager and you'd been in circulation until that time, right?

CG: Right.

JM: So you became business manager in 1968. Then it was only about six years after that before they sold the paper to [Walter] Hussman [Jr.]. Do you remember when you became business manager what kind of financial situation the paper was in at that time—do you have a recollection of that?

CG: As business manager?

JM: Yes.

CG: Oh, yes, here again I cannot quote you the figures or anything.

JM: Even in the late 1960s and early 1970s, before Walter bought the paper the *Democrat* was losing money.

CG: Right.

JM: That's what I had sort of guessed, I know they were losing circulation and I've got those circulation figures.

CG: The reason we were losing circulation, Jerry, was because we were an afternoon newspaper, and they were just drying up on the vine all over the United States.

Changing living conditions in homes and the job breakdown—women weren't staying home and raising kids, they were out getting jobs, and staying away from home—and then TV came in and radio. You've got to remember, I think it was about 1958 before we had TV.

JM: Do you remember what happened to the circulation after TV stations got established and we had two or three stations here? Did the *Democrat* circulation start going down even more then?

CG: Yes, there is just no way we could compete with [them]. To begin with, there is just no way we could compete because [of] the time element. The morning paper got out in time to get the papers out all over the state. We would go to press in the afternoon after 1:00. There was no way we could deliver all over the state. We had to fly the papers to get them to Fayetteville.

JM: I remember one guy [who] told me he had worked in circulation at that time, but he could remember—he was involved in street sales, and he could remember how the street sales really started dwindling when TV started getting established and people didn't want to buy the paper and read it when they got home because they wanted to watch television. So the circulation had been declining over a period of time because of those factors and then . . .

CG: That's why Hussman switched it over to a morning paper.

JM: Yes. So when Marcus and Stanley took over the paper, it was already beginning to decline and suffer and lose money.

CG: [J.N.] Heiskell owned the *Gazette*—Engel had owned the *Democrat*, and they weren't hostile. They weren't bosom buddies but there was no animosity between

them. They did not believe in cutting each other's throat. We had every opportunity in the world to bury the *Gazette* during the [1957] integration crisis [at Central High School in Little Rock]. Mr. Engel said, "We're not going to do that, we're not going to do it."

JM: [That's] an interesting thing there, Chester. For a while during the integration crisis—it took a little while to accumulate as I remember—but [by] about 1959 [or] 1960 the *Democrat* caught the *Gazette* in circulation.

CG: Yes, we passed them in circulation.

JM: Passed them in circulation. Then after about two years it started going the other way again. The *Gazette* started building back up and the *Democrat* starting declining some. Do you remember—do you have any idea why that happened that way?

CG: Strategy, to a certain extent. We both belonged to the Audit Bureau of Circulation. We were held accountable for all the types of promotions and everything that we had. Circulation that you don't—papers you print and count that you don't sell is what circulators used to call "water." You have so much water. In other words, they [would] print 500 papers and they had 300 circulation, so they'd count a record of what was printed to substantiate everything. That's why the Audit Bureau of Circulation began to require [a] route list of all the routes. That's what they'd base their finding on—the examination of these route lists.

JM: How effective was Leon Reed over at the *Gazette*? Do you remember anything about that?

CG: I think as far as his success is concerned that he was—it wasn't a disaster [he didn't set the woods on fire?], basically he was a good circulation manager. They had a good man. Buddy Swor was a backbone over there, too. We had a lot of promotions. We had one of the best promotional ideas in the United States. Bob Sorrells owned a ranch up at Lake Nimrod. Are you familiar with that?

JM: No.

CG: Hidden Valley Ranch, and we had it for years. It was a homestead. We went up there and built three big concrete block buildings. We could sleep 112 people, had a big tile swimming pool, golf course—miniature golf course—but the main attraction was the lake. We had about forty-something horses up there all the time—about thirty-five of them were just barnyard, of course, they were fat and we took good care of them. We had six employees up there that were on the *Democrat* payroll. We had a kitchen. It was not an ordinary kitchen like you would find here somewhere—we had professional kitchen equipment. We bought two new school buses from Ward. Forty-three-passenger school busses, and we kept carriers up there year round. We had thirty-five saddle horses. During the summer, we would use the ski boats and everything. We had life belts—we had all the necessary equipment for safety and everything. Fortunately, all the time we were up there we never had a mishap. We had six donkeys up there and we let them ride the donkeys, that would just buck them off. One of the boys got bucked off and broke his arm. We'd take two- to three-hour horse rides up through the woods on the trails up there in the mountains on Highway 7.

JM: So you would use this as a reward to the carrier boys?

CG: No, circulation. [Editor's note: Carriers who met goals for selling subscriptions were taken to the ranch on weekends as a reward.]

JM: So who owned that place?

CG: Bob Sorrells.

JM: Bob Sorrells, okay. Who was paying the employees? Was he paying them or was Mr. Engel paying them?

CG: Mr. Engel was, indirectly. Everything was paid by voucher. We paid for everything by voucher. It might not have been according to Hoyle, but it worked. It was a really good program.

JM: You—maybe I misunderstood you a minute ago—I thought you said Leon Reed, after he came in here, was putting more papers on his carrier boys. Was that to build up his numbers, or his circulation numbers, or how did that work?

CG: That's about the size of it. He was capable of doing it and he did.

JM: But he shouldn't have had credit for all of those?

CG: We were doing things we shouldn't have been doing. We didn't get caught with our pants down too many times. And if we did, we didn't know it. We'd take a boy off a paper route if we caught him with extra papers [or anything else?] because we strictly—we didn't want that.

JM: What do you remember about Mr. Engel, what kind of manager was he? Of course, I've heard of people talk about his frugality, but do you have any particular memories of Mr. Engel?

CG: Sure. Beautiful memories. Mr. Engel was not necessarily an oddball at all as some people might think. He was a bachelor. He had a sweetheart for three or

four years when he was young, and then the girl abruptly broke it off and married another man. He never dated another girl. He turned his attention toward business.

JM: Do you remember when that was? Was it after he came to Little Rock?

CG: It was before he came to Little Rock. The publisher of the *Democrat* called K.A. Engel in as business manager.

JM: Yes, I remember that.

CG: Then Engel bought the paper.

JM: He was a good manager, Engel?

CG: Engel a good manager?

JM: Yes.

CG: One of the best. He made—you won't believe this Jerry, but I know it for a fact—because Mr. Engel told me he did, because we were kidding about being second paper—he said he would rather make money and be the second paper rather than be the number one and not make any money.

JM: That's an interesting quote because I have heard some other things like that. I've heard that both—even there and at the television station that his profit margin was better than some of the other TV stations that had more viewership—Mr. Engel had a better profit margin. Apparently that is the same way he wanted to operate the newspaper.

CG: I could say, and I will say, he was a mathematical genius. He had some funny ways about different things, but he never would fail to listen to you. If you wanted to talk to him about anything he would listen. He would weigh it and then

he would tell you what's wrong with it and then he would say—when I was circulation manager—"This is the way it will work." I would go in with an idea and he'd say—I'd go on and we'd talk about it and he'd tell me, "This could happen and that could happen," and then he would end up telling me to weigh the two against [each other] and say, "You make the decision." He never did—I can't—the only time I was circulation manager he never rebuked me for anything as far as—not personally to me.

JM: He did not pay much money, did he? Is that sort of the case?

CG: He did not pay a lot of money, that's true. I told him one time—this is funny, but I was talking to him about the turnover we had, in district advisors and everything. He said, "What do you think is wrong?" I said, "Well, the only thing I can figure out is if all you're going to pay off is peanuts, all you're going to hire are monkeys." [Laughter] He laughed, reared back in that chair and laughed. The people that worked there were satisfied. There wasn't any animosity between the company and Engel or anybody. They [were] hired to do a job and they got paid [for] what they were hired to do. What we were doing was taking care of them in a time in their life when they needed money to live on, so to speak. As soon as we trained them and got them back on their feet and they straightened themselves out financially where they could find the time to get a better job, that's what happened to them. We trained a lot people.

JM: One thing in my recollection is, after the integration crisis and when the *Gazette* started going up and the *Democrat* started going down a little bit, that the *Gazette* started—sort of made an effort to publish more news. In other words, they started

letting the paper out and [were] hiring a few people and [were] trying to get more news in there. Trying to get more news in there, trying to compete—did they do that, do you remember that?

CG: Here's what happened. As long as the old timers, Engel and Heiskell, owned them, there was no competition, so to speak. It was competitive, but it wasn't a knock-down drag-out. It was just an honest, day-by-day, competitive situation. Of course, they could get their papers to the little cities and we had no way to complete with them as far as total figures were concerned. We couldn't cover the state—no way we could be a state newspaper. That had more to do with the national advertising than anything else.

JM: One more question. Do you have any more thoughts on why, besides the change in lifestyles and television, that in the late 1960s and early 1970s—until Hussman came in—why the paper kept going down hill? Any other impact on that that you know of?

CG: The thing—like I started to say a while ago, as long as Engel and Heiskell had [them], both of them made money. Both made money, for all these years, they were bound to make money. They made enough money in the newspaper to buy TV stations, good things. It all started when Heiskell died.

JM: All started when Heiskell died or Engel died?

CG: Heiskell.

JM: Heiskell, all right.

CG: You know why? Because Hugh Patterson decided they wanted to run the *Democrat* out of business. They figured in five years they would own the

*Democrat,* and they would have if Hussman had not bought it. Because we would have had to shut it down.

JM: Then Walter Hussman—the Hussmans bought the paper in 1974. Tell me your observations of what happened after that.

CG: Well, for one thing, the Hussmans had deeper pockets.

JM: So, Walter was still competing against the old *Gazette* when he first came in. I think he struggled for about four years and then things began to change a little. What do you remember about his management after he came in and took charge? What significant changes did he make?

CG: Well, one of the first things he did was organize his people to plug up any holes or loopholes or anything that could be done to justify changes. The next thing he did was change from an evening newspaper to a morning newspaper. Then [John] Robert Starr came in—you remember Robert Starr—and we had what we called the cold war [this is a reference to the war between the two papers] and—you're familiar with that?

JM: No, I was gone by then. I had left in 1978 and went to Oklahoma City, so I missed out on part of that. In your view, changing to the morning was a significant development.

CG: It was an absolute necessity, the demand for an afternoon paper—we were competing with the radio and people going out and having a good time—all the eating places. Used to, when a man came home from work he was tired and didn't have any radio or TV. The only thing between him and the bed was a newspaper. He wanted an afternoon newspaper, the latest news, he didn't want a

morning newspaper. Across the country, evening papers dominated the market, then the change in people's lives began to revolve around the home and entertainment—tie that in to the fact that we could not get our papers out to sell them on afternoon route, to get them delivered before dark. By the time it got there, it was dark.

JM: Traffic had changed some, too—there was more traffic to go through. So I'm sure when Walter came in he had some things he wanted to do and put his own people into certain places. What did you do after Walter came in? What did you do—what were your duties?

CG: I was the business manager at that time. When he came in I was a walking encyclopedia [of] everything at the *Democrat*, as far as knowledgeable . . .

JM: Who knew where everything was?

CG: Yes. In other words, I made all the decisions—the building and that part—and I didn't get around to circulation. When Engel bought the paper he fired Frank Simpson.

JM: When Hussman bought the paper, you mean?

CG: Yes, Hussman.

JM: Yes. Hussman brought in Gerald Doty, I believe—is that correct? As the circulation manager, [and] fired Frank Simpson, the circulation manager?

CG: Yes. Gerald Doty was—there is no question in my mind—he is one of the finest circulation managers in the whole South, and still a good friend of mine.

JM: I talked to him the other day.

CG: He tried his best—but he got crossways with Tony Biggs. Tony Biggs sold Hussman a bill of goods on himself, and Tony moved him up there to the front office where the secretary now sits. He tore the paper all to pieces.

JM: Who, Tony did?

CG: Yes.

JM: Okay.

CG: Finally, Walter found out the hard way what Tony was.

JM: Okay. Is that why Doty left, because of Tony, you think?

CG: Yes. Tony went and talked Hussman into putting him in as circulation manager, so they let Gerald go.

JM: I think he left about 1978, and, of course, Biggs left in 1980. Who replaced Biggs? Did Larry Graham replace Biggs as circulation manager after Biggs left?

CG: Yes, I imagine.

JM: What were your roles during that time and the rest of the time you stayed at the *Democrat*?

CG: What happened was, after—you have to remember to take in[to] consideration the way the paper was published and what we were doing. Right now—there is not one thing that we do now that is done the way we used to do it, unless it be the button on a camera. Other than that, everything is different, everything is computerized, the whole ball of wax. You went down that road to a certain extent before you . . .

JM: Yes, I did, I was there when they brought in the computers.

CG: I was too old to get involved with computers. I was past retirement age. So I took a job as—I paid all the bills—I took that chunk of it and paid all the bills.

JM: So you stayed until 2002, is that correct?

CG: Let's put it this way, Jerry. I earned my money until the day I walked out.

JM: You were how old when you finally retired?

CG: Eighty-seven.

JM: You were eighty-seven when you retired from the *Democrat*. You worked a little bit past the retirement age then?

CG: I retired about three different times. Yes, they gave me a beautiful—I've got a beautiful watch that they gave me. They gave me two [laughs].

[Tape Stopped]

JM: Okay, Chester. You became business manager in 1968, and I know you held the job thirteen years, so that would have been until about 1981. So you remained as business manager for about seven years after Walter bought the paper.

CG: Right.

JM: Then about 1981, or somewhere along in there, you became the purchasing agent where you paid the bills and you stayed in that position until you retired from the paper.

CG: Right. As a matter of fact, Walter told me that I was on the payroll as long as I could get in the front door. I quit voluntarily.

JM: What's your evaluation of Walter's operation of the *Democrat* and how he has handled the *Democrat* since he's bought it?

CG: It's brilliant, just absolutely brilliant. Of course, he had to prove himself, put it that way. Right now, looking back, he's brilliant.

JM: How significant do you think it was—one thing we haven't touched on—was when he started selling free classified [advertisements]? Was that a pretty significant development for the paper?

CG: It certainly was. I mean, it turned it around. There was a Canadian paper that started this—are you familiar with this? So we decided that we would give it a hustle. We had done surveys, and the classified pages of the newspaper is one of the most widely read portions of the paper—we knew that already—so one day we got to toying around with the idea of giving free classified ads to the people, [residents, not businesses]. Then it would bring other readers into it.

JM: To read the classifieds.

CG: And we're still doing it.

JM: You were aware, of course, of when the cold war [reference to the war between the two papers] started, or whether it was a hot war—anything and everything—was there any point in time that you began to suspect that the *Democrat* might win that war? Was there anything that was a clue to you?

CG: There was the assumption that the *Democrat* didn't have the money to do it. To win the war. Stanley Berry and Marcus George didn't have the money to compete with what the *Gazette* could do, and we just kind of weathered the storm and began to spend our assets, so to speak.

CG: Incidentally, I participated in something that I'll tell you a little bit about. Stanley Berry and Marcus both thought Don Reynolds wanted to buy this paper, and they

swore up and down that they would not sell it to Don Reynolds. No way they would sell it to Don Reynolds. But Don Reynolds was not the one who wanted to buy it. I was in the business office, and I spent months collecting and making copies to substantiate financial records. Five different people were interested.

JM: Five different people [were] interested in buying the *Democrat*? Who were they?

CG: Oh, I cannot tell you that.

JM: Were they local people? Were they Little Rock people?

CG: Yes, some of them were Little Rock people. They had the money, put it that way. Raymond Rebsamen was one of them.

JM: Raymond Rebsamen—were the Stephenses involved—Jack or Witt? But you don't think Don Reynolds was ever interested in buying the *Democrat*?

CG: He probably would have been, but I am not aware of any offers that he made. At that particular time, we had some other offers made.

JM: You had other offers besides those from the Hussmans? In addition to the ones from [the] Hussmans?

CG: Yes.

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[End of Interview]

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