

Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History
Special Collections Department
University of Arkansas Libraries
365 N. McIlroy Ave.
Fayetteville, AR 72701
(479) 575-5330

This oral history interview is based on the memories and opinions of the subject being interviewed. As such, it is subject to the innate fallibility of memory and is susceptible to inaccuracy. All researchers using this interview should be aware of this reality and are encouraged to seek corroborating documentation when using any oral history interview.

Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with

Marcus George
Little Rock, Arkansas
14 May 2005

Interviewer: Jerry McConnell

Jerry McConnell: [This is] Jerry McConnell. I'm here with Marcus George, and we're doing an interview for the University of Arkansas [Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History] project on the history of the *Arkansas Democrat* and the *Democrat-Gazette*. First, Marcus, I want to see if I have your approval to make this tape and to turn it over to the University of Arkansas History Department.

Marcus George: Yes, I approve it. I certainly do.

JM: Okay. And your name is Marcus George, just about the way it sounds. G-E-O-R-G-E.

MG: That's correct.

JM: Okay. All right. Marcus, let's just start from the beginning. Where and when were you born? Then, tell me a little bit about how you grew up and everything.

MG: I was born in a little town, New Braunfels, Texas, which is approximately halfway between San Antonio and Austin. It's in the southern part of Texas. I went to the University of Texas to their journalism school. My degree was Bachelor of Journalism.

JM: Before you even get to Texas—what year were you born? 1923?

MG: That's right.

JM: Okay. Who were your parents?

MG: Benjamin Hollis George.

JM: Benjamin Hollis. Okay.

MG: My mother's name was Hedwig Engel. E-N-G-E-L. She was a sister of Mr. Engel, who was the publisher of the *Democrat*.

JM: Okay. Now, the Engels, at any rate, were German. Is that correct?

MG: That's correct. Yes.

JM: Now, your father was not German, was he?

MG: No, he was not. I think he came from more Dutch than German.

JM: Yes. Okay.

MG: They were from Holland.

JM: Now, as I understand, there were a lot of Germans who settled in that area of Texas.

MG: In south Texas. Oh, yes. Many came in through Galveston from south Texas when they came up into Texas.

JM: I have some friends who live in that area, also. Did you ever hear why so many Germans happened to migrate to that area?

MG: I don't know what the hard times were in Germany at the time.

JM: Yes.

MG: Whether it was just the depression thing or whether it was some kind of political upheaval.

JM: Yes. But they were all in that area outside of San Antonio around New Braunfels and over toward Frederick. Is that the name of the town?

MG: Fredericksburg.

JM: Fredericksburg. Yes. There are a lot of Germans in there. And you were born in New Braunfels. Where was Mr. Engel born? Do you remember?

MG: I think he was born near New Braunfels on the farm.

JM: Okay. Now, did you go to high school in New Braunfels?

MG: That's right. I went to elementary school and high school both.

JM: And then did you enroll at the University of Texas before or after you were in the air force? Did you go into the air force or did you start school first?

MG: I started at the University of Texas first, and then the war occurred, and I withdrew and joined the army air corps.

JM: Army air corps. Yes. And at that time there was no U.S. Air Force. It was the army air corps.

MG: It was the army air corps. That's correct.

JM: Okay. What did you do with the air corps?

MG: I was a navigator . . .

JM: A navigator.

MG: . . . on a B-24 bomber. It was called the "Liberator," but we called it the "Vibrator."

JM: Yes. [Laughter] You were stationed in—I know you flew some combat missions. Where were you?

MG: Southern Italy.

JM: Southern Italy. Okay.

MG: And we bombed—and went northward into Germany and other countries. There are a lot of countries there.

JM: Yes. Romania—did you fly over Romania?

MG: The Romanian oil fields.

JM: The Ploesti oil fields in Romania was one of the biggest targets I think.

MG: That was a very tough target.

JM: Yes. I was wondering—and I didn't know this until I saw his obituary—that Bill Shelton was flying in that same area to Romania and Czechoslovakia out of there.

MG: Yes. I don't know where he was stationed.

JM: I think it was in Italy somewhere, but I don't know where in Italy. But I noticed that he was a pilot, and he got shot down over there.

MG: Yes.

JM: And R.B. Mayfield, I believe—he was either a navigator or a bombardier, I thought.

MG: I thought he was a fighter pilot.

JM: He might have been. I'll have to check that for sure.

MG: I think so.

JM: I know he was flying in that area, though. And then you were in the service. Do you remember how many combat missions you flew?

MG: We got credited for fifty missions, but it was actually about thirty-five.

JM: Your plane never was shot down or anything.

MG: No, but we had a lot of holes shot in the plane, but it never was shot down.

JM: Was there a lot of flack—anti-aircraft fire?

MG: A lot of flack, as well as German fighter planes.

JM: Yes. Did you all ever get any citations or anything for your war . . . ?

MG: We got a so-called presidential unit citation for some missions, and so on.

JM: You didn't get shot down, but you made a lot of bombing runs. Could you see the bombs hitting a lot of times?

MG: Not very often. You had to fly in big formations, and by the time you dropped your bombs, you couldn't see backwards to see exactly where they fell.

JM: You were wanting to get out of there, too, I imagine.

MG: Yes. Right! [Laughter] That's correct.

JM: Okay. Where in southern Italy was your base? Do you remember where that was?

MG: It was a little city called Cortaglia. Actually, the base was a grape orchard. It was cleaned up. Tents were what we stayed in. There was a headquarters building that was not a tent. But as far as sleeping and all that stuff, it was in tents.

JM: Yes. And you got out of there. You got out of the air corps after the end of the war.

MG: Yes.

JM: The war was over, and then you got out of the air corps. So you would've been getting out in about 1945 or sometime early in 1946. Does that make sense?

MG: That's correct. Then I went back to school.

JM: Then you went back to the University of Texas—journalism school.

MG: Yes.

JM: Then you got your degree at Texas. I think I remember—I may be wrong—but you got your degree in about 1947—somewhere along in there—1946 or 1947.

MG: Probably 1947, I imagine.

JM: I think I remember seeing somewhere that you came to work for the *Democrat* in 1947. Does that sound about right?

MG: I came to work soon after I graduated.

JM: Okay. Of course, you were married by then, weren't you? You and Ruby had already married.

MG: Yes. We married in 1945.

JM: Married in 1945. What was Ruby's last name—her maiden name?

MG: Wiley. W-I-L-E-Y.

JM: Okay.

MG: And she lived in Houston, Texas.

JM: She lived in Houston. Okay. So you married in 1945. So you all came up here in about 1947 and went to work for the *Democrat*. I think I remember you saying one time to me, and I don't think I got that on tape, that you were pretty sure that you were going to come to the *Democrat* and come to work for your uncle. Is that correct?

MG: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

JM: Had he made overtures to you at some point in time, saying, "Oh, come on up."

MG: That's correct.

JM: Okay. So your cousin, Stanley Berry was already here. I think he had been here for a little while, at any rate.

MG: That's correct.

JM: What did you do for the *Democrat* when you first got here? Do you remember?

MG: I started out as a cub reporter.

JM: Yes.

MG: I covered North Little Rock.

JM: Did you? Okay.

MG: Which included the police department, their city government, the mayor, and so on.

JM: Yes.

MG: [William F.] "Casey" Laman was mayor at the time.

JM: Yes. That was an interesting mayor to cover, wasn't it?

MG: [Laughs] Yes. Well, North Little Rock—"Dog Town."

JM: Yes. [Laughter] Was the beat, then, as bad as a lot of people let on? I always heard other people talking about, "Boy, I've got to get off that North Little Rock beat."

MG: No, it really wasn't that bad. North Little Rock on Saturday night was not a good place to be.

JM: Marcus, one thing before I get into where you went after the North Little Rock beat—who was the city editor at that time when you came to work here?

MG: Tilden. Allen Tilden.

JM: Allen Tilden. Okay. Who were some of the other people on the news staff at that time? What do you remember about it?

MG: Deane Allen was state editor.

JM: Okay.

MG: Old man Root. Root was his last name. I couldn't tell you his first name. He was the state editor for a while, and then he was succeeded by Deane Allen.

JM: Okay. Was Joe Crossley there at that time?

MG: Yes, he was on the desk.

JM: Was he news editor then?

MG: I think that's right. News editor. That's correct.

JM: All right. And who were some of the other reporters at that time?

MG: Other reporters?

JM: Yes.

MG: I've already mentioned R.B. Mayfield, and yourself, and John Scudder.

JM: Okay.

MG: Bobbie Forster. There weren't very many women working at that time as news people. Other reporters-I can't think just off-hand.

JM: That's all right. Ken Frances was there then.

MG: Ken Frances was there. Yes.

JM: Okay. Had Roy Bosson come on by then?

MG: Yes. Roy Bosson was there.

JM: What do you remember about the *Democrat* as a newspaper at that time? What kind of work was the staff doing? Do you have any particular recollections of how well they were doing?

MG: I think they covered it pretty well. That was during the [1957] integration of [Little Rock] Central High School part of the time.

JM: Yes.

MG: That was a big story everywhere. We were pretty busy on that.

JM: Yes. After North Little Rock, you came back. What did you do after the North Little Rock beat? You got off the North Little Rock beat eventually, and . . .

MG: Yes. I was on the state capitol beat.

JM: Who was the governor at that time?

MG: I think Francis Cherry was governor at that time.

JM: Right.

MG: And Orval Faubus later.

JM: Followed him. Okay. Do you remember anything about Cherry in particular?

MG: No, not in particular.

JM: What kind of governor was he? Was he easy to deal with?

MG: I thought with the press he was fairly easy to deal with, but I don't know—some of the legislature might not have thought so. [Laughs]

JM: Yes, I understand that. But then you covered the capitol and the legislature for a while, and wrote a column, as I remember—at least you wrote a Sunday column about politics and everything.

MG: Yes.

JM: And then you came back into the office. Why did you go back into the office?

MG: I came back probably as assistant city editor.

JM: Okay.

MG: Gene Herrington was city editor at that time.

JM: Gene had replaced Tilden by that time.

MG: Yes. And then he became the managing editor.

JM: I always thought Tilden was a pretty good hand, but did he get fired or something?

MG: I don't remember why he left.

JM: Yes. I've heard various stories about that event. But I always thought he was a— he was the city editor when I first went there. So you came back as the assistant city editor. Is that what you were doing during the integration crisis? Were you the assistant city editor?

MG: I think part of the time I was.

JM: Okay. Tell me a little bit about the paper and its coverage during the integration crisis.

MG: Well, we thought we gave coverage in an unbiased fashion. That's what we thought. And we thought the *Gazette* covered it sometimes in a biased fashion. The *Gazette* was very anti-Faubus at that time.

JM: Yes.

MG: We weren't . . .

JM: You weren't particular pro-Faubus, though, were you? I don't recall that the *Democrat* was particularly overwhelmingly for Faubus then.

MG: No. But the *Gazette*—[Harry] Ashmore was the name of the editorial writer, and he was somewhat more liberal than our editorial writers were. So the *Gazette* had the reputation of being a more liberal paper than the *Democrat* at that time.

JM: Who were the *Democrat* editorial writers at that time? Do you remember?

MG: Oh, Bill Johnson was one. He had been their editorial writer for many, many years.

JM: Yes. Okay.

MG: He was pretty old at that time. Then there was one or two other younger ones, but I couldn't remember the names.

JM: Okay. What was the *Democrat's* editorial stance about what was going on out at Central High School?

MG: Well, they favored people obeying the law, not the mobs that we had.

JM: Yes.

MG: They were very much opposed, just like the *Gazette*.

JM: Okay. Do you remember who did most of the coverage—the reporters that were covering out there during all the turmoil—who the reporters were from the *Democrat* that you sent out there?

MG: Well, George Douthit, I think, was covering part of it at that time.

JM: He was covering Faubus, too, wasn't he? He was covering the governor's office there.

MG: Yes.

JM: Okay. Let's see—who else? Did Bobbie Forster . . .?

MG: She covered a lot of the integration, but I don't think she ever got into the mobs out there.

JM: And I think Ron Burnham might have been covering the city hall at that time. I don't know whether you sent him out to the . . .

MG: Could have been. Yes.

JM: Yes. I think maybe he was covering Woodrow Mann. Wasn't Woodrow Mann the mayor at that time?

MG: Yes.

JM: Do you remember any particular thing about any of the stories that the paper did at that time on the troubles out there at Central?

MG: I remember one thing—that was when I was on the desk—I got a call from a guy who said he was from Georgia, and that a bomb had been planted in Central High School. That was the first bomb scare story.

JM: Oh.

MG: And what do you do? You don't be quiet and let the whole high school blow up.

JM: Yes.

MG: But you hate to give a false report like that, too, so I just called the mayor and told him, and let him do what he wanted to. They emptied the kids out of the high school.

JM: Did you all report about the fact of the threat, or did you wait until after they had emptied the school or something? Did the paper report about the bomb threat?

MG: Well, I called the school people right away.

JM: Yes. Okay.

MG: And then it was up to them what they wanted to do.

JM: So you didn't report it before you called the school people?

MG: Yes.

JM: Do you remember any other circumstances or anything exciting about that time that you all covered?

MG: No, not particularly.

JM: Did the paper ever get any threats over its coverage or editorial policy or anything?

MG: No, I don't think so. The paper did not approve of the mobs and all that stuff.

JM: Yes.

MG: It criticized that.

JM: Do you remember any other reporters who might have been involved in that coverage that . . . ?

MG: That were at the scene?

JM: Yes.

MG: No, not particularly.

JM: You had one photographer that I remember seeing some of his work from out in there. That I thought really did some great photography. Was it Will . . . ?

MG: Will Counts.

JM: Will Counts. Okay.

MG: Yes, he was a great photographer.

JM: Yes.

MG: Yes.

JM: And he got some pretty spectacular . . .

MG: Yes, he got right in the middle of it.

JM: Yes. And I'm sure you all probably ran a lot of his pictures.

MG: Oh, yes. He won some prizes for some of his photography during the integration.

JM: Yes, I've heard various stories and people speculating that they thought maybe some of Counts' pictures might have won the Pulitzer [Prize], but they thought that the Pulitzer was a little biased against the *Democrat* and was for the *Gazette* because of its . . .

MG: That's the way I understood it, too.

JM: Yes. Is that how you felt? Did you ever hear of that?

MG: Yes.

JM: Okay. Of course, Will went on to be a teacher at the University of Indiana for a long time.

MG: He won some prizes, but he never won the Pulitzer.

JM: Yes. The *Gazette* won two Pulitzers, one for its editorials and one for its coverage of it. Did you all have any particular feelings that you all should have won a Pulitzer for your coverage, or was there any sentiment that way?

MG: Oh, I don't know that we ever thought of the Pulitzer or anything like that.

JM: You didn't think the *Gazette* had unfairly won its Pulitzer, then?

MG: I don't know. Not really.

JM: Yes. Okay. During that time span, what kind of a newspaper was the *Gazette*, say, in relation to the *Democrat*?

MG: Well, it was a morning paper instead of an afternoon paper.

JM: Yes.

MG: That had a big advantage statewide, because in the state there was something like forty afternoon papers. In the state of Arkansas at that time I don't think there

was more than a handful of morning papers, so they had far less competition from that standpoint.

JM: Yes.

MG: Their circulation was bigger.

JM: Yes. Was the *Gazette* basically a good newspaper?

MG: I think so.

JM: Was it in some ways a better newspaper than the *Democrat*?

MG: Yes. As I said, it was a morning paper. They had a larger circulation so they had more reporters.

JM: They had a larger staff, and probably more space.

MG: Right. A lot more space.

JM: They had a lot more room to report things. So you always thought that the *Gazette* was a pretty responsible newspaper.

MG: I always thought it was a good paper. Yes.

JM: And how about the *Democrat*?

MG: Yes, I thought it was, too.

JM: At some point in time, you moved up to become city editor. Is that right?

MG: I beg your pardon?

JM: You became city editor after a while, didn't you? Well, I think Gene Herrington became managing editor . . .

MG: That is correct.

JM: . . . and then you replaced him as city editor for a while.

MG: That is correct.

JM: And then Mr. [August] Engel died. I think if I remember correctly that I've seen that cited as about 1968.

MG: Whenever it was, then Stanley became publisher and I became editor.

JM: Stanley Berry became publisher and you became the editor of the paper. What was Stanley Berry's mother's name?

MG: She was an Engel.

JM: Yes, I understand. You don't remember her first name?

MG: I just can't, offhand. Oh, it was Augusta. A-U-G-U-S-T-A.

JM: Oh, okay. That's kind of strange. His name was August and she was Augusta.

MG: Yes. That's right.

JM: So she was a sister, of course, of Engel.

MG: She was my mother's sister.

JM: Your mother's sister, also.

MG: And of Mr. Engel, too.

JM: So you and Stanley inherited the paper from Mr. Engel.

MG: That's correct.

JM: Incidentally, I've always heard him referred to as K.A. Engel or K. August Engel.

What did the K stand for?

MG: Kuno. K-U-N-O.

JM: K-U-N-O. Okay. That's an unusual-sounding name. Is that a German name?

MG: I think it was a German name. Yes.

JM: He had been with the *Democrat* forever.

MG: For many years. Yes.

JM: I think I saw somewhere that he was in with the group that bought the paper in 1911.

MG: That's right.

JM: And a guy name Clark and a guy named Branham. They came in here from New Orleans, right?

MG: That's right.

JM: And he came along as their business manager.

MG: Came with them. Yes.

JM: Okay. I have heard and seen reports that they actually bought the newspaper from the *Arkansas Gazette* owners, that the *Gazette* owned the newspaper at that time. Have you ever heard that?

MG: I'm not sure about that.

JM: You haven't heard that. I know that Fred Allsopp who was one of the *Gazette* owners and was their business manager at one time.

MG: Yes. That's right.

JM: Allsopp wrote a book, and then he said that the *Gazette* owners owned the newspaper for a period of about three years and sold it to Clark and Branham, and et cetera. But Margaret Ross asked him about it, and Mr. [J.N.] Heiskell said, "No, we never did own the *Democrat*." But Margaret Ross said she found a record of it, and Fred Allsopp just flat said, "Yes, they did own it." She never heard Mr. Engel talk about that or the circumstances. And is it correct that along about the late 1920s that Mr. Engel bought out the other owners, or at least bought the controlling share in the paper?

MG: Yes, he bought out the other owners.

JM: Did he? Okay. And he ran the newspaper from the late 1920s until he died in 1968.

MG: Yes.

JM: He at first—where was it he lived? Was it Capitol Hill Apartments? Was that where he lived?

MG: That's where he lived for many years.

JM: Yes.

MG: He later moved to—it's now a hotel—the Albert Pike.

JM: Albert Pike. Okay. I used to remember people telling me—I guess it was maybe on the weekends—that one of their assignments was to take him—I guess it was the Sunday paper up to wherever he lived.

MG: Yes. That's right.

JM: Somebody had the assignment every night of taking him the paper up there. As far as I know, the *Gazette* always had a lead in the circulation, didn't they? Except for a period during the integration crisis there.

MG: Yes.

JM: Then sometime during the integration crisis, the *Democrat* at least caught [up with] the *Gazette* in circulation, didn't they, or went ahead of it?

MG: Well, you see, what happened was the morning papers thought it was because they were good, and that was part of it. But when television came in, a lot of people spent the evenings watching TV, not reading the evening newspaper.

JM: Yes.

MG: So the morning papers had an edge there.

JM: Yes. But at one time, though, because a lot of the people got so mad at the *Gazette* and cancelled their subscriptions and advertising, the *Democrat* did catch them for a little while there, didn't they?

MG: I think so.

JM: Yes. I've always wondered, and I don't know whether you have any idea or opinions on that—it did not seem to me that—I know that Mr. Engel—they did fairly well at that time. I always wondered if he—or why didn't he take some of the money that he was making at that stretch and pump it back into the *Democrat*, and increase the space and maybe the staff, and make a . . .?

MG: I don't know.

JM: You never heard him make any kind of comments that . . .?

MG: No.

JM: But he did not expand a whole lot or anything, did he, or add staff or . . .?

MG: Not a great deal, I don't think.

JM: Maybe at that time, and I don't know—maybe he had seen the handwriting on the wall about afternoon newspapers. Do you think maybe that because of television and those things . . .?

MG: I don't know.

JM: I know that . . .

MG: I know he had joined a group that bought a television station.

JM: Okay. Now, he bought Channel 11.

MG: Channel 11.

JM: Okay. Did he buy it after it started?

MG: No, he was one of the original incorporators.

JM: Oh, was he? Who else was in with him on that? Do you know? Did he have any partners on that?

MG: I don't know, whatever year it went on the air?

JM: But who were his partners? Or did he have any partners?

MG: Oh. I think some of the people with the Shreveport newspaper.

JM: Okay.

MG: I can't remember their names.

JM: Yes.

MG: Anyway, they were Shreveport newspaper people, too. And he joined them, and he was one of the original incorporators.

JM: Yes. Okay. At some point in time—as I said, 1968—I think that's the year—you and Stanley Berry inherited the paper. Was it already losing a little money at that time when you all inherited it?

MG: It wasn't losing money. No.

JM: Oh, it wasn't?

MG: No

JM: Okay. But you were losing some circulation because of the competition from television and everything.

MG: Yes.

JM: So your circulation was dwindling.

MG: Yes.

JM: So in 1971—and I remember I was there at that time—you had hired me—you and I don't know who else was involved in it—to come back over there at the *Democrat* as managing editor in 1971. I remember coming over at that time. But then you sold the paper to the Hussmans in 1974—you and Stanley did.

MG: Yes.

JM: Why did you decide to sell at that time? Do you recall what was going on or what was in your mind set?

MG: I don't remember exactly whether we decided to devote all of our time to the TV [station]. That's probably it.

JM: Okay. So you sold the *Democrat* to the Hussmans.

MG: Yes.

JM: But then you had also inherited the television station.

MG: Oh, yes.

JM: So then you ran the television station.

MG: Yes, I moved my office over to the TV station.

JM: Yes. How did you split up your duties over there—you and Stanley?

MG: Oh, I couldn't tell you exactly, but we did a lot of things together.

JM: Okay.

MG: And neither one of us managed—we had a manager who was more knowledgeable about—more experienced.

JM: Yes. Who were some of the managers? Do you remember any of them?

MG: I can't remember. B.G. Robertson.

JM: Yes, I remember that name. And then news editors—somebody told me, and this surprised me, and I didn't know that—that Randy Tardy was the first news editor when they first went into operation.

MG: He could have been, but he wasn't at that time.

JM: Yes, I know he was not—well, I had hired Randy to cover business news by that time. He had come over to the *Democrat* as a business writer. So you all operated the television station, Channel 11, until—when did you sell Channel 11?

MG: Oh, goodnight, I can't remember. It seems like it was a stock swap with Gannett.

JM: Was it? Okay.

MG: Yes.

JM: Didn't it turn out to be a pretty favorable stock swap?

MG: Oh, heavens, yes!

JM: What were the circumstances? What made it so favorable at that time? What was happening that made it worth more than it had been? I'll put it that way.

MG: Oh, Gannett?

JM: No, the TV station. Why was the . . . ?

MG: Oh, I don't know.

JM: So you got stock, right?

MG: Stock doubled in value.

JM: After Gannett bought it?

MG: Yes.

JM: After you swapped with them, you got their stock, and then the stock really took off. Right?

MG: Yes.

JM: Yes. So it turned out to be a really profitable venture for you and Stanley.

MG: Exactly.

JM: Yes. I follow you on that. Would you rather run a newspaper or a TV station?

MG: [Laughs] A newspaper, I guess.

JM: Yes. Okay. When you were a reporter, do you remember any particular stories that you worked on? Is there anything you were proud of or anything that you actually did as a reporter?

MG: Well, one of the biggest stories was the Arkansas highway audit.

JM: Yes.

MG: I don't know whether you remember that or not.

JM: Yes, I do.

MG: That was a big story, and I covered that for it seemed like years, almost.

JM: There was a Highway Audit Commission . . .

MG: Yes, it was audited.

JM: Yes. And a lot of reports on what they were finding. They were having hearings, right?

MG: That's right.

JM: And you covered a lot of that, as I remember. Yes.

MG: That's right.

JM: Was it not the case that maybe the *Democrat's* reporting had led to the formation of the Highway Audit Commission? Is there any truth in that stance?

MG: That what?

JM: That the *Democrat's* reporting about problems with the highway system and department had caused the state to decide to have an audit.

MG: That's possible. That's possible.

JM: As I remember—I don't know who else was—but I remember Roy Bosson was involved in covering some of those highway stories and everything.

MG: That's correct.

JM: I can't remember the circumstances now, but that Highway Audit Commission—after the hearings it fell kind of flat at the end or something. Did they? Didn't they back away from a lot of it?

MG: They might have. I don't remember.

JM: I remember it did lead to the Mack-Blackwell Amendment, though, did it not?

MG: Yes.

JM: That the people were so upset [about] the way politics had played a role—is this correct, and tell me if I'm not—in the highway decisions and everything, that they voted in an amendment in which they staggered the terms and gave them such long terms . . .

MG: Yes. They tried to divorce it from politics.

JM: Yes. So they made it such staggered terms and long terms that they thought no governor would ever gain control of the commission again. But they didn't count on Faubus being governor for twelve years [laughter], isn't that right?

MG: Yes.

JM: Before him, I believe maybe two terms was the longest any governor had ever served. I'm not sure about that, but there wouldn't have been—see, he was in six terms.

MG: Yes, I know. It was forever.

JM: But it seems to me that most governors were only there for two terms.

MG: Usually for two terms. Yes.

JM: Anything else you particularly remember about the politics at that time—state politics or how it operated and who the shakers and makers were?

MG: No, not particularly.

JM: Was covering the legislature a lot of fun? Did you enjoy that, or was it a big hassle?

MG: It was a big a hassle, but it was kind of enjoyable, too.

JM: Yes. I've always heard that Mr. Engel was very careful with his money.

MG: Oh, yes, he was.

JM: Yes. He ran a tight ship. Is that fair to say?

MG: Oh, yes.

JM: Now, I don't know if this is a fair way to put it or not, he tried to run a tight operation and made sure that he made money. Is that correct?

MG: Oh, yes.

JM: And he didn't overspend on salaries. [Laughter]

MG: No, never did.

JM: Okay. That's sort of the impression that I had. I always wished—well, I guess everybody wished that—that they'd spent a lot more money on salaries and then

kept some of those good people because you were always developing good people, and then they were going out to take some other job or something.

MG: Yes.

JM: As I remember, when I was there with you, the first time that I remember—I think Ken Frances—didn't he go to work for Arkansas-Louisiana Gas Company or something like that?

MG: Yes.

JM: Bill Secrest left and went with the telephone—no, he went with some sort of utility in Houston.

MG: That's right.

JM: Roy Bosson went somewhere else.

MG: Yes, a lot of them did.

JM: A lot of reporters went to other places. I've heard one report, thought, that during the integration turmoil and when the *Democrat* was faring well and everything, a lot of people were so mad at the *Gazette* that they came up to see Mr. Engel and tried to talk him into starting a morning edition to compete with the *Gazette*. Is that correct?

MG: I think that is correct. Yes.

JM: One story I heard was that somebody told him, "Well, we could probably do that without too much trouble," and it really bucked the *Gazette*, because the people who said—I think they were from over in the Delta area somewhere—that they didn't like the *Gazette* at all. But they preferred a morning newspaper, and they

said they would try to guarantee him, you know, or that he would get a lot of subscribers.

MG: He wasn't interested.

JM: And he wasn't interested. And one report I heard was that he said that he wouldn't do that to a friend when he was down. Is there some truth to that?

MG: Yes. That's right.

JM: Well, that's a remarkable statement. Apparently, he and Mr. Heiskell were friends.

MG: I would say they weren't enemies.

JM: Yes. At least they got along fine.

MG: Yes.

JM: What were the circumstances when you all inherited the newspaper, that you brought Bob McCord over?

MG: Yes.

JM: Did you sell him a part interest in the paper or something?

MG: That's correct. Yes.

JM: And you brought him over as, what, the editorial director?

MG: We sold him some stock.

JM: Yes. Okay. I've heard one report, and I don't know whether it's true or not—they said you did that—wanted him to run the editorial department because you didn't want to have to deal with Karr Shannon. [Laughter] Karr was your columnist, right?

MG: Yes.

JM: Was he difficult to handle?

MG: No, not really.

JM: He was really set in his ways, though, wasn't he?

MG: Oh, he sure was. He was an old, old hand.

JM: Yes—been around a long time. What do you remember about the newsroom?

What was it like when you were a reporter there? What kind of working conditions were there?

MG: Well, like the typical newsroom at many papers—pretty messy.

JM: Yes.

MG: And loud and noisy.

JM: And no air conditioning, as I remember.

MG: Oh, no. They finally got some air conditioning. They had an air conditioner up at the front that blew some air, but the whole building wasn't air conditioned.

JM: Okay. Did Mr. Engel eventually have it air conditioned, or did you do that after you all took over the paper?

MG: No, he didn't have it. No.

JM: So you and Stanley put in the air conditioning?

MG: Yes. That's right.

JM: And as I remember, there had been some other changes. When did they change the habit of paying in cash rather than with checks?

MG: I don't know whether that was before we took over the paper or not.

JM: Yes. But it was the case, though, in the early years when I first went there, that you went in every Friday and got your money, and they paid in cash.

MG: Yes, it was cash in a little envelope. [Laughs]

JM: I never have figured out why they did that.

MG: I don't know why.

JM: Unless maybe they thought it would save money for having to cut checks or something. I don't really know.

MG: I don't know what it was.

JM: I don't, either. But you got that little bitty envelope . . .

MG: He may have thought that the employees preferred that. I don't know.

JM: I don't know, either. I heard another tale one time. Somebody said that he was watching the photographers go out, and said, "You know, every time I see one of your photographers somewhere, they always make a bunch of pictures and everything, or made at least two pictures. Why couldn't they just do one? Wouldn't that save a lot of money to just take one?" [Laughter] Would it be a fair summation, do you think, of Mr. Engel to say that he never had aspirations of taking over as the number-one newspaper in the state, that he probably thought it was not very likely or something—that he didn't have the aspirations to try to be a bigger paper than the *Gazette*?

MG: I think that's correct.

JM: You think that is correct. Yes. By the time you and Stanley had inherited the newspaper and were running the newspaper, the handwriting was on the wall, I guess, to a degree, about what was happening with afternoon newspapers.

MG: Oh, yes.

JM: That you realized that the TVs were—people just didn't want to read a newspaper in the afternoon. They wanted to come home and sit there and look at the television.

MG: Well, we sold to Hussman—and he had other newspapers at the time, you know? He had several newspapers at the time.

JM: Yes.

MG: Hot Springs, Texarkana—he had a number of papers.

JM: El Dorado and Camden, I think.

MG: Yes.

JM: Had you all advertised the paper, or did they come to you and make a particular—did they approach you all first, or had you all . . .

MG: They had approached us a lot of times in previous years.

JM: Oh, had they?

MG: Yes.

JM: Okay. How do you feel about how the newspaper war came out? How do you feel about the fact that the *Democrat* survived and the *Gazette* did not?

MG: I don't know. It was kind of sad to see the *Gazette* go. And I don't know why it happened that way, but that's the way it happened.

JM: Yes. Well, there were probably a lot of things in there that we weren't privy to, and things that were going on with advertising and everything else. But I know that at one time Walter Hussman says himself that he didn't think they were going to make a go of it. And he went to Hugh Patterson and tried to talk him into a [joint] operating agreement, and Hugh just flat said, "No." Walter said, "We'll

agree to stay an afternoon paper.” And Hugh just flat turned him down. Did you and Stanley ever go to Hugh and talk about maybe doing a joint [operating] agreement?

MG: No.

JM: You all did not do that. Okay.

MG: I don’t recall it.

JM: Well, the *Democrat* has been around a long time. It’s been an interesting paper. There have been a lot of great people who worked for the *Democrat* and went on to other things.

MG: Yes.

JM: Charlie Allbright and a bunch more. Is there anything else in particular that you remember about operating and running the paper—about what kind of paper that it was—that you want to—have we not touched on anything?

MG: I don’t remember anything.

[Tape Stopped]

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Cheri Pearce]

[Edited by Rebecca Willhite]