

Northwest Arkansas Oral History Project  
 Robert (Bob) Kelley Interview Abstract  
 October 24, 2018

Interviewee	Robert (Bob) Kelley
Year of birth	1947
Place of birth	Gravette, Benton County, Arkansas
Interviewer	Camille Hatcher
Interview date	2018-10-24
Interview location	Kindley House; Gravette, Benton County, Arkansas
Keywords	<p>Kelley, Robert (Bob)          Kelley, Sandra Parnham          Duffy, Glenn          Fladager, Dean          Fladager, Michael          McAbee, Bernard B.          Mitchael, John          Varner, Johnny          Hatcher, Camille          Beaty, Benton County, Arkansas          Gravette, Benton County, Arkansas          Noel, McDonald County, Missouri          Salem, Dent County, Missouri          St. Louis, St. Louis County, Missouri          University of Arkansas; Fayetteville, Washington County, Arkansas          Care and Share (Organization)          First Christian Church; Gravette, Benton County, Arkansas          Gravette Historical Museum; Gravette, Benton County, Arkansas          Kiwanis (Organization)          Baseball          Education          Farming          Gravette Days Celebration          High school sports          McAllister Grocery          Poultry industry          Recreation          Schools          Shelter Insurance          Small town life          Tyson Foods</p>
Description	<p>Gravette's Shelter Insurance agent from 1987 to 2014, Robert (Bob) Kelley traces his history--along with that of his family and the City of Gravette. An interview full of stories illustrating why he knows NW Arkansas living is special.          Kelley tells stories of his family coming to NW Arkansas from Tennessee. Both his grandfather and dad were life-long Gravette</p>

residents. His mother's family lived in Maysville. Kelley continues to live outside Gravette, residing on the property where he was born. His family bought the land following his Dad's return from overseas service in World War II. At that time, 30 acres of land could be bought for \$400 plus taxes. Later the family would add more acres. Some of the family lived close to Georgia Flats and Beaty.

Born in 1947, Kelley remembers when their home used kerosene lamps as there was no electricity, he carried water from the spring, and there was outdoor plumbing. When it came time for a new home, Dad built it on their property. Neighbors and family came to help. Dad also built chicken houses on the property. Soon Kelley and his brother fed 15,000 chickens. From first grade in 1953 until graduation in 1965, Kelley attended classes in the Gravette School District. The original classrooms were brick buildings brought from Camp Crowder. Lunch was eaten at school with the menus seldom varying. Polio and smallpox vaccines were received. Kelley rode the bus until high school when he, one of the few to have a car, became the owner of a 1941 DeSoto. Kelley's class was one of the first in the new high school.

Kelley pays tribute to several coaches, teachers, and school administrators. Coach McAbee hated loafing and showboating: athletes quickly learned to perform at their best. Kelley remarked 'if he told you to get out to second base...if one of my legs was broken, I'd crawl out there.' Gravette had baseball and basketball teams, but no football. Administrator, Glenn Duffy, and Coach McAbee went to the bank to borrow money on a personal loan to bring that sport to the school. First year the team won most of their games. Kelley shares memories from the trips teachers and counselors set up to University of Arkansas and St. Louis. These were eye openers for students who seldom left Gravette.

Living on a farm meant chores to be done; but left time for fun. Eating out was rare, but on his parent's anniversary they went to a restaurant. There was summer baseball with trips to Jane and Noel (Missouri) for games. Saturday night Gravette stores stayed opened late and for a while the City had a theatre. A date night might mean a trip to Noel to play miniature golf. While in high school Kelley worked at McAllister's grocery as a carryout boy and later as part of the Gravette Street Department. He recalls his City duties of digging ditches, working at the dump, and taking down a tree in the park where the airplane is now displayed.

Graduating from high school during the VietNam war (1965), Kelley went to the University of Arkansas on a 2S deferment. During his college years, he married Sandra Parnham. Kelley graduated with a teaching degree and went to work in Salem, Missouri. In Salem he taught high school for 18 years, implementing a vocational program to provide students not

	wanting to attend college an opportunity for work experience. In 1987 Kelley returned to Gravette as a Shelter Insurance agent with wife Sandra helping in the office. Their two children, Michael and Kathleen, both graduated from Gravette schools. When Kelley was thinking about retirement, he (in his words) worried, 'would I starve; would I be bored". He says neither happened. Today in addition to farming, he shares stories about the time he spends at Care & Share, the Gravette Kiwanis, the Gravette Historical Museum, and the First Christian Church. That's the joy of living in NW Arkansas.
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Questions or Comments	<a href="https://nwaoralhistory.org">https://nwaoralhistory.org</a>
Interview sidebar	Kelley serves on the Gravette Historical Museum Commission. He tells the story of the popularity of the annual Gravette Picnic (now called Gravette Days) in the 20's. People came by horse and buggy, spending several days in town. To commemorate the event for the Centennial Celebration in 1993, residents Johnny Varner, John Mitchael, and Michael and Dean Fladager as part of the Centennial created a diorama depicting one picnic. This diorama helped create the community interest that resulted in formation of the Museum. [01:15:23]