

Northwest Arkansas Oral History Project  
 Dean Fladager Interview Abstract  
 May 2, 2018

Interviewee	Dean Fladager
Year of birth	1931
Place of birth	Sunburst, Toole County, Montana
Interviewer	Connie Fetters
Interview date	2018-05-02
Interview location	Kindley House; Gravette, Benton County, Arkansas
Keywords	<p>Fladager, Dean          Fladager, Wilma          Clinton, Bill          Evans, Robert (Dodie)          Evans, Louise          Huckabee, Mike          Hutchinson, William Asa          Hutchinson, Tim          Lincoln, Blanche          Bank of Gravett; Gravette, Benton County, Arkansas          First Christian Church; Gravette, Benton County, Arkansas          Kindley House; Gravette, Benton County, Arkansas          Shepherd's Chapel; Gravette, Benton County, Arkansas          ACE (Arkansas Community of Excellence) award          Bella Vista, Benton County, Arkansas          Gravette, Benton County, Arkansas          City government          Corp of Engineers          Elections          Engineering          Parks          Politics          Railroads          Religion          Shelling plants          Small town life</p>
Description	<p>Dean Fladager served three terms as mayor of Gravette. His stories tell of those years with a focus on his goal of making the railroad overpass a reality. Fladager does not consider himself a politician. But he knows it took the combination of politics, diplomacy, and engineering to reach this goal.</p> <p>Born in 1931 Fladager grew up in Montana. From the time Fladager worked with his father to build a chicken coop, he knew he wanted to be an engineer. With a college degree in engineering, Fladager's career included years employed by the Corp of Engineers as a civil and structural engineer. As project director on large projects including the VA hospital in Houston, he practiced engineering and learned diplomacy.</p>

	<p>In 1990 Fladager and his wife, Wilma, moved to Gravette. Appointed Mayor in 1993, Fladager knew of the need for an overpass. It became his reason for serving. After not running for re-election, he would run four years later and be re-elected twice. Fladager credits these experiences with providing valuable lessons in politics.</p> <p>By the 1990's the railroad running through Gravette, once a reason for the City's founding, had become "the enemy." When a train rolled through, the east and west sides of Gravette were separated causing safety, commercial, and convenience concerns. By 2001-2002 removing the grade crossing and replacing it with an overpass was a priority for Fladager. The Arkansas State Highway Department agreed on the need but had no funds to allocate to the project. Fladager had other ideas. He set out to get community backing and funding to convince the Highway Department to construct the overpass. His efforts began when he sat by the railroad crossing in his Jeep covered with the banner 'Overpass Now, Make it Happen'. Petitions were signed by thousands; the First Christian Church had a bean supper, a metal scrap drive brought in \$17,000. Next came generous donations from the Bank of Gravett and Shepherd's Chapel. He identified a culvert product to minimize costs and got land donated from owners of the old shelling plant. Politicians (including President Clinton, Governor Huckabee, and Federal and State Representatives) were copied on all correspondence between Fladager and the State Highway Department—Fladager's engineering, diplomatic, and political skills in action. The State Highway Department took notice of these efforts. By 2004 the overpass was finished; the railroad no longer separated Gravette. In Fladager's words, 'Where before Gravette residents listened for the train, now it is just a detail.' While getting the overpass was an accomplishment during Fladager's years as Gravette's Mayor, it was not his only one. He shares how the Kindley House was purchased by the City during his administration, giving credit to Dodie and Louise Evans and several other local residents. Centennial Park was improved thanks to his negotiations with the railroad. Winning the ACE (Arkansas Community of Excellence) award in 2004 was another proud accomplishment and example of community efforts.</p> <p>After leaving office, Fladager moved to Arizona and then back to Bella Vista, Arkansas. Today he enjoys daily walks, a good book on history, or discovering more about the Fladager family genealogy. A man of faith, Fladager shares his beliefs throughout the interview. He discusses how they have always influenced his life and philosophy. He is proud of the successful lives his three children enjoy.</p>
Duration	92 minutes
Audio File Format	MP3

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Questions or Comments	<a href="https://nwaoralhistory.org">https://nwaoralhistory.org</a>
Interview sidebar	Talking of his life, Fladager says 'that overpass was a high point of it. It was something I was able to sow and water and fertilize and cajole and have fun with...' [120.53]