

DR. BASIL BENNETT MEMOIR

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Dr. Basil Bennett Memoir -- Archives, University of Illinois at Springfield

PREFACE

This manuscript is a complete transcription of a tape recorded interview conducted September 13, 1978 by Horace Q. Waggoner for the Oral History Office. This is one of a series of interviews conducted in connection with the Old Shawneetown Bank Project. Memories of a Bank, an oral history and documentary inventory at Old Shawneetown was published in 1979 by the Oral History Office, Sangamon State University. Linda Jett transcribed the tape and Horace Waggoner edited the transcript.

Dr. Bennett was born near McLeansboro in Hamilton, County, Illinois, on October 12, 1886. He moved to Shawneetown in 1916. His primary memories of the bank are as a community businessman and customer of the bank.

Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that it is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, narrator and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. Sangamon State University is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for views expressed therein; these are for the reader to judge.

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Dr. Basil Bennett, September 13, 1978, Shawneetown, Illinois.

Horace Q. Waggoner, Interviewer.

Q. Okay. I'll start off with a couple of questions and we'll just go wherever it leads us.

A. Well, let me get these adjusted. (works with hearing aids)

Q. All right, sir.

A. The only thing they're good for is to turn my wife off.

Q. Oh, is that (laughs)--I see. Yes, sir.

A. You're not on record there, are you?

Q. Yes, sir. It's on there. Yes, sir. Where were you born, sir?

A. In Hamilton County.

Q. Hamilton County, Illinois?

A. Yes. Out west of McLeansboro about six miles.

Q. I see. And when were you born, sir?

A. Well, I was born October 12, 1886.

Q. I see. Yes, sir. When did you come to the Shawneetown area?

A. 1916.

Q. I see. Down to Old Shawneetown at that time?

A. Yes. Yes.

Q. And what were you engaged in at that time?

A. I was a veterinary surgeon.

Q. Veterinary surgeon.

A. Yes.

Q. And you set up business down there . . .

A. Yes.

Q. . . . and where was your office located?

A. In the livery stable.

Q. Was this in connection with Mr. Oldham?

A. Well, later it was. Later, we were partners. A fellow by the name of Potts, Oscar Potts, had the livery stable.

Q. How far was that from the bank?

A. Well. Here's route 13. (draws two lines on a piece of paper to indicate Route 13 extending eastward and terminating at Main Street) Here's the bank. (Draws a square on the north side of Route 13 at its intersection with Main Street) And here's the livery stable. (Draws a line across Route 13 to indicate the street behind the bank. Places a square to indicate the stable is located southwest of this intersection) There's a lot between there and the Route 13 and the livery stable.

Q. I see. The old Posey Building was right here on the corner, was it? (indicates the area directly south across Route 13 from the bank)

A. Yes. Only we were on the other street. Street was running north and south.

Q. Okay. When did you first enter the bank?

A. Well, I don't know. I guess that same year, I imagine I did.

Q. Was there anyone living in the bank at that time?

A. Yes.

Q. Who was that?

A. I don't remember. I believe it was McKelligotts. I'm not sure now. I don't know.

Q. Do you remember any people that were in the bank at that time? The officers of the bank or . . .

A. No. Well, unless it was the McKelligotts and Bess Ollinger were . . . Now, I believe that's right. Now, if they were, if that's right, it wasn't the present bank. It was the State Bank.

Q. And it was on down the street a little bit from the big bank with the pillars on it.

A. Well, it was in there and then they changed buildings.

Q. So the McKelligotts were doing banking business in the . . .

A. Now, that's my recollection, as far as I can remember.

Q. I see. Yes, sir.

A. Now, I don't know when they made change but then, you see, that bank was the National Bank and the other bank was a State Bank. Now, I personally did business with the National Bank.

Q. With the National Bank.

A. Yes. What little business I had. I didn't have much. (laughs)

Q. Yes, sir. Well! (laughter) Since you did business with the bank, do you recall what the lobby looked like? Could you describe the lobby?

A. (pause) Well, it was just kind of a circle, like that. (indicates concave shape) I think they had two windows or three, where you went up to make your deposits or withdrawals. And it was a kind of a . . .

Q. Curved, kind of.

A. Yes, as I remember it now. Now, I don't--the building wasn't curved, but seemed like the . . .

Q. Counter itself was curved.

A. Counter, yes.

Q. I see. On the right hand side--As you stepped in the main door, on the right-hand side, did the counter go all the way to the wall there?

A. I don't remember.

Q. You don't remember that. And on the left, do you recall that?

A. No. No.

Q. Do you recall anything about the construction of the counter? What was the top made of, for example? Was it wood?

A. Well, seems to me like it was metal.

Q. Metal?

A. Yes. Wire, or something like that.

Q. I see. Did they have bars there in front of the tellers?

A. Yes. I think so. No, not in front of the tellers but . . .

Q. On either side.

A. On either side, yes.

Q. And above, I guess.

A. I don't remember.

Q. Do you remember any chairs in front of the counter? Could you sit down there any place?

A. No, I don't remember.

Q. How about the vault itself? Do you recall anything about the vault? What it looked like?

A. Well, you could see it. The door that opened into it back there.

Q. Square doors, I guess, that you opened?

A. Yes. Regular open doors, as I remember it.

Q. What color were they? Do you remember?

A. No, I don't. But I believe they were grey or lead color. But I'm not sure.

Q. You think they were metal or were they wooden doors?

A. No, I think they were metal.

Q. Metal doors. On . . .

A. Now, what the--Excuse me. Can I ask a question?

Q. Oh, yes, sir. Yes, sir.

A. How did that description fit with the other people that said it?

Q. Okay. It appears that the vault had outer doors, square outer doors, as you have described. Then, inside those doors, there was another door

which was round. A round door. And then, on the inside, of course, of the vault, was the safe itself.

A. Yes. A little round safe.

Q. Yes, sir. And that's the one down in the Harmon store, down here now. So does that fit with what you remember?

A. As I remember it, yes.

Q. Do you recall, above the doors of the vault there, was there a mantle of any sort?

A. Don't remember.

Q. Okay. How about the walls of that lobby? Do you recall whether they were painted or wallpapered or . . .

A. No. No.

Q. Were there any drapes at the windows?

A. Don't know. Don't know. Don't remember.

Q. The floor, do you remember what type floor they had at that time?

A. (pause) No, seemed like that they were stone or, you know--I'm not sure.

Q. Tile, maybe?

A. I don't know. Tile or stone, yes.

Q. On the left of this counter, which you say was a little bit curved around, on the left could you go back through a door to an office or to a room behind the lobby?

A. (pause) On the left-hand side?

Q. Yes, sir, as you came in the front door, on the left-hand side, could you go back?

A. Well, there was a room back there, way to the back, but I forget which--I don't know whether it was on the right or the left. I don't remember.

Q. On the right, you could go through a door into a small room. Do you recall that small room on the right as you come in?

A. Well, it was one or the other. Yes. Yes.

Q. Well, the one on the left goes back around behind. The one on the right goes right out--as a matter of fact, there's a door entry to it on the front of the building. Do you remember that door? Another large door to the right of the big doors you went in, in the center?

A. No, I don't remember.

Q. Do you visualize that small room there to the right?

A. No.

Q. Okay. So you couldn't say whether you remember anyone sitting in there or not?

A. No. No.

Q. Can you identify any of the people that might have been behind that counter, any of the tellers, or cashiers, or anyone that might have been there at the time?

A. Well. Edward Froelich . . . and Louis Goetzman . . . and Carroll Goetzman . . . and Max Galt. (pause)

Q. Now, Max Galt wasn't there in the early 1920's, was he? He came later, did he?

A. He came a little later, I think. Yes.

Q. Did you ever have occasion to go back beyond the lobby to Mr. Roedel's office, in the 1920's, for example?

A. Yes.

Q. You've been in Mr. Roedel's office?

A. Yes, yes. Roedel.* Yes.

Q. Roedel. Yes, sir. I'm sorry. Do you recall what it looked like? Where was his desk in that office, do you recall?

A. No, I don't remember.

* The interviewer had pronounced the name phonetically, as Raddle. Dr. Bennett indicated the correct pronunciation to be Raddle. [ED]

A. No.

Q. . . . in it, at all? None of that. Okay. And you never had occasion to go in and sit down and talk with anyone in the office part of the bank?

A. Oh, I guess I have. Yes.

Q. Do you have any memory of what the office part of it looked like? Where the desk were or . . .

A. Not too much. I usually just talked right across . . .

Q. The counter there.

A. . . . the counter there.

Q. Yes, sir. Now, at one time you were in business with Mr. Oldham.

A. That's right.

Q. This was a car business, was it?

A. Yes.

Q. What kind of cars were you selling?

A. Well, we sold--we were associate dealers. We were associate dealers with the Ford and the Chevrolet and the Starr. No, we were dealers with the Starr but associate dealers for Ford and Chevrolet. At different times.

Q. Was that at the location of the livery stable?

A. Yes. Well, that was where it used to be.

Q. Yes, I see.

A. Built a garage there.

Q. I see. Do you remember any later times with the bank? Well, in the 1937 flood, for example, there were some people that lived there. Did you have occasion to stay in the bank during the flood?

A. Yes. Yes.

Q. You did?

A. Yes.

Q. So you were upstairs there during the flood?

A. Yes.

Q. You had to be on the third level, cause the water was at the door.

A. That's right. (laughter)

Q. Where did you stay in that third level? Do you remember the rooms up there?

A. No, I don't. It was just--Seems like it was the first room we went into. I don't remember, now. Came down from New Haven in a boat and I know the water was about four and a half feet over the top of the levee. Couldn't get in the roads. Couldn't get in the roads down here. So . . . I was working for the State of Illinois, at that time.

Q. I see. As a veterinarian?

A. Yes.

Q. I see.

A. TB irradiation. In cattle. Testing cattle. Had about 36 counties down here and I'd leave on Monday morning and come in on Friday night.

Q. Oh, I see. Thirty-six counties, you say?

A. Yes.

Q. My goodness. That's quite a territory to cover, isn't it?

A. Well, we didn't--You see, I had a crew of men and they'd go in the county and test them and I'd go to the next county and for the county board and arrange for hotel rooms and stuff like that.

Q. Yes, sir. And evidently when the flood came you came back to Shawneetown by boat, you say?

A. Yes.

Q. And then, went to the bank, I guess, as one of the few dry spots around.

A. Yes. Had a room at the hotel, at that time. I wasn't married, see. And the lobby of the hotel was flooded and it was a . . .

Q. Which hotel was that?

A. Riverside.

Q. The Riverside.

A. Yes.

Q. Mrs. Pauline Harmon was telling that they served meals in the bathroom up there and that you sat on the edge of the bathtub to eat. Is that correct? Do you remember?

A. Well, I don't remember. Don't remember. Probably right.

Q. Let's see. Do you remember that small room that had previously been used as a bathroom up there?

A. No, I don't remember.

Q. In that back hall. Do you remember anything else about that second floor? Was there a fireplace up there?

A. Don't know. Don't remember.

Q. Okay. Say--do you know anything about the iron fence that used to be around the outside of the bank?

A. Well, I know there was one there but . . .

Q. Do you recall it when it went across the front of the bank?

A. Yes.

Q. At the bottom of the steps.

A. Yes.

Q. Do you know when that was removed?

A. No.

Q. There was a sign on the pillars--You know, at the top of the steps there, there was a sign placed between the two of the pillars on the left. It read "City National Bank," at one time. Do you recall that sign there?

A. No.

Q. We're trying to figure out when it got there and when it left.

A. Yes. I just remember when the City National Bank was in there.

Q. I see.

A. And then, they traded buildings.

Q. Then they moved on down the street to the other one.

A. Yes.

Q. I see.

A. And they moved back up there.

Q. Where did the National Bank operate at that time, do you know?

A. Well, it was on up the street up there. Where the old City National Bank went back . . . or went to after they changed.

Q. I see. They just kind of traded positions there, at that time.

A. Yes. Buildings. Well, I think the bank bought that building. I believe that's right. And then, they was in there.

Q. Do you recall a wooden structure which had been used as a kitchen on the northeast corner of the building, outside of the building?

A. No.

Q. Do you recall the carriage house that used to be out on the northeast corner of the property there?

A. (pause) Well, I'm not sure. I don't believe I do.

Q. They had a small building there . . .

A. Yes.

Q. . . . and evidently the Allens maintained horses there and that sort of thing. That would have been before you arrived there.

A. Yes. Before my time.

Q. Okay. In the lobby, when you walked up to the counter, the vault was just a little bit to the right of center. You'd look just a little bit to the right to see the vault doors. If you looked a little bit to the left, was there a fireplace there at that time, do you recall?

A. (pause) Yes, I believe there was.

Q. A fireplace. Did you ever see a fire in it?

A. I don't remember.

Q. Were you ever in the basement?

A. (pause) Don't remember.

Q. At one time, I understand the village or city offices were downstairs, Justice of the Peace.

A. I don't know. There might have been.

Q. At the time of 1913 flood, the sidewalk on the highway side of the building was brick. Do you recall it being brick or . . .

A. I wasn't here. See, I came in 1916.

Q. Do you remember the sidewalk, then, about that time? Was it concrete or brick when you came?

A. Where at?

Q. On the highway side of the bank.

A. I don't remember.

Q. Don't. Okay. And let's see, in 1916, do you recall any hitching racks around the bank?

A. No.

Q. Okay. You never had occasion to get to the attic, I guess?

A. No, I don't remember at all.

Q. Okay. Okay. (pause) Let's see. Those are the main things about the inside of the bank. Now, do you have any idea of where there might be any documentation, any letters, or correspondence of any sort? Any kind of paperwork that has to be with the bank.

A. No.

Q. Any artifacts that might have come from the bank?

A. Well, there's a magazine on sale down at the--What do you want?
(addressing Mrs. Bennett who had entered the room)

CB. Well, you've got your card.

Q. Oh?

CB. They don't consider that . . .

A. (pointing to recorder) It's picking up here . . .

Q. Yes. That's fine.

CB. The inkwell would be an artifact, wouldn't it?

Q. Yes, if it came from the bank.

CB. Well, it did, because Max Galt gave it to us and we kept it.

Q. I see. An inkwell. I see.

A. Yes.

CB. I'll get it. (goes to get the inkwell)

Q. Okay. Good. Well, that's what we're looking for is to identify the location of anything like that. Can you think of anything else?

CB. (returning) Here is the inkwell that he gave us. I've got one out of the post office down there. There's the inkwell that he gave Doc.

Q. And this came from the bank?

A. After the flood, yes. I don't know, I just don't--and here's the-- I'll let you see this. (holds out 1916 signature card) I know that's Jimmy Joe's dad's writing. That's Max Galt's writing.

Q. Oh, I see.

CB. I'm just sure of that.

Q. This is your authorization card for the account.

CB. Yes. I thought I'd take it and show it to Jimmy Joe. We found it in a box of stuff he kept.

