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HAMILTON COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH
VERNER WAYNE "DICK" KEETER

1 (INTRODUCTION)

2 MR. EIDSON: Good morning. I'm Jim
3 Eidson, Chairman of the Hamilton County Texas Historical
4 Commission, and I'm here today with Mr. Dick Keeter. It
5 is June the 14th, 2018. One of the things that we miss
6 in collecting history of our great state of Texas is
7 the -- the personal experience of -- of history. When
8 we read textbooks in high school and sometimes in
9 college, it seems a little bit dry, and you don't get
10 the information directly from the people who experienced
11 historical events. That's why oral history is so
12 important. They contain -- within the minds of the
13 residents of Hamilton County that we have just a library
14 of experience and perception and perspective concerning
15 the events that have affected all of our lives. So it's
16 a pleasure to be here today to talk to Mr. Dick Keeter.
17 Here in the room with us, Mrs. Keeter is present, Jamie,
18 our court reporter, Jason, our videographer, and Andy
19 McMullen, who will conduct the interview. Thank you.

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1 (INTERVIEW)

2 MR. MCMULLEN: Good morning, Dick.

3 MR. KEETER: Good morning.

4 MR. MCMULLEN: I'm Andy McMullen, and
5 we're here in my office today, and -- and we thank you
6 so very much for coming and -- to give us some personal
7 insight -- your personal insight about the history of
8 Hamilton County. This is a project of the Hamilton
9 County Historical -- of the Hamilton County Historical
10 Commission, and we're preserving oral histories. Dick,
11 would you state your full name.

12 MR. KEETER: Verner Wayne Keeter.

13 MR. MCMULLEN: All right. Where did
14 "Dick" come from?

15 MR. KEETER: I tell everybody that's my
16 exconvict name. Me and Billy Faulist spent time inside
17 the pen together.

18 MR. MCMULLEN: All right. But it's
19 just -- have you gone by Dick just your whole life?

20 MR. KEETER: That's all I knew.

21 MR. MCMULLEN: All right. Yeah. And
22 speaking of all you knew, I understand you started in
23 the agricultural business when you were two years old
24 digging potatoes; is that right?

25 MR. KEETER: The first money I made, two

4

1 years old. I didn't know I was working, but I was
2 picking those potatoes, and the more they bragged, I
3 more I picked up.

4 MR. MCMULLEN: And where -- where were you
5 born, Dick?

6 MR. KEETER: I guess around Dublin, Texas.

7 MR. MCMULLEN: Okay. And so you had a
8 history of Dublin and then you had some time in
9 Comanche, County?

10 MR. KEETER: Yeah. And Gustine --

11 MR. MCMULLEN: Gustine.

12 MR. KEETER: -- and went to school at
13 Pettit.

14 MR. MCMULLEN: All right. And when did
15 you come to Hamilton County?

16 MR. KEETER: I think in '48.

17 MR. MCMULLEN: All right. And we need to
18 make sure -- I'm going to try to make sure that -- that
19 I don't talk when you talk because, otherwise -- the
20 court reporter is great, but she can't take down two
21 people at once talking. So if we could just kind of
22 keep that in mind.

23 Dick, why I wanted to talk to you today is
24 because you have been so involved in, well, primarily

1 ranching, and I wanted to get your perspective about how
2 things have changed. So let's talk about what you
3 recall about -- and the oral histories that you've
4 heard. You've talked to a lot of people at livestock
5 sales, and you've heard histories of what people have
6 talked about in the livestock business. Tell us what
7 your first recollection is of Hamilton County ranching
8 and farming and what have you.

9 MR. KEETER: Well, a lot of things has
10 changed in the last, you know, 60, 70 years. Back when
11 I first got in the business, most people didn't have
12 highbred cattle.

13 MR. MCMULLEN: And what is -- for purposes
14 of students that will be looking at this generations to
15 come, what is a highbred cow?

16 MR. KEETER: Well, you improve them,
17 improve them, get them -- back years ago, most of the
18 cattle were inbred. You know what that means.

19 MR. MCMULLEN: It means --

20 MR. KEETER: They don't -- they just keep
21 their bull. Everything -- everybody's kinfolk. You
22 don't see it no more, but when they was doing that,
23 you'd come up with midgets. You know what a midget is?

24 MR. MCMULLEN: Well, tell us about that.

25 MR. KEETER: Cattle. They'd be three or

6

1 four foot high. Midgets. So that's what's called

2 inbreeding.

3 MR. MCMULLEN: Okay.

4 MR. KEETER: Now, once you -- you don't

5 use the same bull. You use somebody else's bull. That

6 improves your cattle.

7 MR. MCMULLEN: And it's a function of

8 inbreeding that caused those little --

9 MR. KEETER: Midgets.

10 MR. MCMULLEN: I guess they were called

11 dogies, weren't they?

12 MR. KEETER: Yeah. Some of them may not

13 be three-foot high, some of them would be born tailless,

14 ain't no tail. You ever seen cattle with no tails?

15 MR. MCMULLEN: No, I haven't.

16 MR. KEETER: Well, at the sale barn when I

17 started cattling, one would come in, and I'd say "We got

18 to retail it," you know. Ain't no tail. You ever seen

19 one?

20 MR. MCMULLEN: No. No.

21 MR. KEETER: So I've -- there ain't no

22 telling. Midget cattle. One time, I hauled a five

23 legged calf. It belonged to A.C. Watson's daddy. And

24 that leg was right here on his shoulder and it hanged

25 down that far with the foot on it but no bones in it.

7

1 MR. MCMULLEN: And that was a function of
2 the inbreeding?

3 MR. KEETER: Inbreeding.

4 MR. MCMULLEN: Well, tell me about the
5 cattle -- the history of the cattle of Hamilton County.
6 It doesn't have to be limited by your life or your own
7 personal experience, but -- but how did Hamilton County
8 start off with cattle, to your knowledge, and what kind
9 of cattle were they?

10 MR. KEETER: I don't know how they
11 started, but back then most of your cattle is Hereford.
12 You didn't have all this crossbreeds. It's Herefords.

13 MR. MCMULLEN: Horned or --

14 MR. KEETER: Horned, and later on you'd
15 come up with some polled Herefords, with no horns, and
16 now and then, I call them the vanishing breed. You
17 don't see Herefords much no more.

18 MR. MCMULLEN: Why don't you?

19 MR. KEETER: They had a tendency to have a
20 bad eye, [sic] dry, big bags, don't give much milk, very
21 little milk.

22 MR. MCMULLEN: And when did that
23 transition start?

24 MR. KEETER: Around in the '50s. You see,

25 the price has changed. I remember selling two calves --

8

1 in 1942, it brought \$0.10 and \$0.11 a pound.

2 MR. MCMULLEN: Okay. And tell me how
3 that's changed until today.

4 MR. KEETER: Well, I guess more people is
5 eating beef. Back then -- years -- they just ate what
6 they had. Most of them has done away with hogs, you
7 know. The EPA.

8 MR. MCMULLEN: And I'm going to get to
9 that.

10 MR. KEETER: Most people -- hogs is nearly
11 as important as a milk cow. See.

12 MR. MCMULLEN: And why is that?

13 MR. KEETER: Well, you've got hogs, you've
14 got bacon, hams, lard. So that's why the hogs are very
15 important. Now they've done away with it because the
16 sales -- you don't see hogs anymore. They don't let you
17 unload them. The EPA said to never let a hog touch the
18 ground. It's got to be on cement. So the people
19 couldn't afford it.

20 MR. MCMULLEN: Okay.

21 MR. KEETER: So they've done away with
22 them.

23 MR. MCMULLEN: See, I -- and I shared with
24 you when we -- when I visited -- maybe it was with your

25 wife on the telephone -- that when I came to Hamilton

9

1 County in 1971, hogs was still a big deal.

2 MR. KEETER: Oh, yeah. Lots of these
3 people that couldn't hardly pay their bills, that's the
4 way they made their living was hogs right here in this
5 county.

6 MR. MCMULLEN: And most of the hogs would
7 either go to San Antonio or Fort Worth?

8 MR. KEETER: San Antone or Omaha.

9 MR. MCMULLEN: Omaha. Okay. Omaha,
10 Nebraska?

11 MR. KEETER: Uh-huh. I knew so much about
12 that -- I'd buy cattle for the Cornhusker Brothers, and
13 when they'd cart them trucks down here to San Antone,
14 they had a load of hogs. Speedway -- they done load
15 them hogs, cleaned them trucks, and they would like to
16 have them back -- hauled back.

17 MR. MCMULLEN: With cattle?

18 MR. KEETER: So I would load them, buy
19 cattle, and sales -- and other people -- we'd load their
20 trucks back, and they had them backhauled. Charge a
21 dollar a mile backhaul.

22 MR. MCMULLEN: For cattle?

23 MR. KEETER: Uh-huh.

24 MR. MCMULLEN: They backhauled cattle?

25 MR. KEETER: Yeah. Hauled hogs down.

10

1 See, most trucks -- they got the two way -- they just
2 one way and they going back empty and not drawing
3 nothing. But this way, it paid both directions.

4 MR. MCMULLEN: And when did that start,
5 that the hog -- that the hog industry began to come to a
6 halt here in Texas?

7 MR. KEETER: Probably around the '80s.
8 They've come up with some SPF. Do you remember what
9 that meant, SPF hogs?

10 MR. MCMULLEN: No.

11 MR. KEETER: It was a breed that even --
12 the owner didn't even walk in that pen with them hogs
13 without special clothes on, special shoes, and he had a
14 trough with a mixture of some kind of disinfectant.

15 MR. EIDSON: Was that path- --

16 MR. KEETER: We had to step in that --

17 MR. EIDSON: -- pathogen free hogs?

18 MR. KEETER: -- step in that, go in there
19 and tend to your hogs, and then you come out, step in
20 that, change your clothes, and put your regular clothes
21 on. SPF. We had them right here in Aleman.

22 MR. MCMULLEN: SPF. What was at Aleman?

23 MR. KEETER: I don't know. Hogs.

24 MR. MCMULLEN: Oh, the hogs.

25 MR. KEETER: See, a number of people had

11

1 SPF hogs. They had to be certain colors, everything.

2 So your hogs would have been very important until they
3 done away with it. Somebody on the -- on the EPA didn't
4 have a good brain.

5 MR. MCMULLEN: Yeah.

6 MR. KEETER: That's what done away with
7 the hogs. Somebody --

8 MR. MCMULLEN: Well, we've still got bacon
9 in the United States. Where does it come from?

10 MR. KEETER: North. They didn't -- they
11 didn't outlaw it out there.

12 MR. MCMULLEN: They didn't what?

13 MR. KEETER: They didn't outlaw hogs up
14 there. People got hogs in that country.

15 MR. MCMULLEN: Well, are they -- are they
16 having to be grown in the same -- with the same --

17 MR. KEETER: The same -- same regulations.
18 See, hogging, 20 years ago or something -- outlawed hogs
19 and dairies. They polluted their country. Their
20 government bought them out. Our government give them
21 money and facilities to come over here and put our local
22 boys out. Holland.

23 MR. MCMULLEN: That's amazing.

24 MR. KEETER: You didn't know that?

25 MR. MCMULLEN: No.

12

1 MR. KEETER: Our government give them
2 money. They've -- I've met them. They come into Hico,
3 a suitcase in each hand. The next day or two, they've
4 got the biggest dairy in the county. Our government put
5 them into business and put our boys out.

6 MR. MCMULLEN: Now, this is hogs and
7 cattle?

8 MR. KEETER: Both. But once they get over
9 here, they didn't do no hogs. It's only dairy.

10 MR. MCMULLEN: You're going to have to
11 repeat that because I'm hard of hearing.

12 MR. KEETER: The only -- the Holland boys,
13 when they come over here, they just forgot the hogs.
14 They only have dairy cows.

15 MR. MCMULLEN: Oh, I see.

16 MR. KEETER: Right here at Olin when --
17 they've got 3,000. That's a lot of cows, 3,000 cows.
18 So -- but your government is footing all that. I say
19 us. They give them money to come.

20 MR. MCMULLEN: And so that was about
21 20 years ago?

22 MR. KEETER: Yeah, or -- probably
23 something like that. So a lot of people don't know it,
24 but you're helping foot them bills for all these

1 MR. MCMULLEN: Well, so -- so it's --
2 primarily, then, it shifted from -- from hogs -- that
3 cattle is the main product here?

4 MR. KEETER: Yep.

5 MR. MCMULLEN: And what about sheep and
6 goats?

7 MR. KEETER: There's more money in sheep
8 and goats than there are in cattle, but your coyotes and
9 varmints, they'll put you out of business if you ain't
10 got them guard dogs.

11 MR. MCMULLEN: Now, how do -- how do you
12 mean that there's more money in sheep and goats?

13 MR. KEETER: You got to have so many acres
14 to run a cow. You can run so many more sheep and goats
15 per acre, and so many of them sheep and goats are like
16 three dollars a pound. They're bringing in more than
17 cattle. So, see, you can make more money.

18 MR. MCMULLEN: And where do the -- are
19 sheep and goats -- are they -- are they still used for
20 hair purposes?

21 MR. KEETER: And meat.

22 MR. MCMULLEN: Okay.

23 MR. KEETER: So they're very important.

24 You can see why a man's got 20 acres and he's got a

25 lot -- 200 sheep and goats out there.

14

1 MR. MCMULLEN: And they can do that on 20
2 acres?

3 MR. KEETER: See, in cattle, you got to
4 have -- I tried to figure 12 to 15 acres per unit of cow
5 and gate a unit per year. You know, look how many goats
6 you can run on that.

7 MR. MCMULLEN: And the sheep and goats,
8 where do they go? Are they -- do they go -- are they
9 consumed in Texas or do they have to go to another state
10 to be --

11 MR. KEETER: They go everywhere. Go out
12 to the sale, a bunch of the 18-wheelers pull in here
13 from Oklahoma City with goats and sheep right out here,
14 and then they leave trucks here and go to Kentucky.
15 They go everywhere. Sheep and goats.

16 MR. MCMULLEN: And are they sold for food?

17 MR. KEETER: Both. And, see, another
18 thing about sheep and goats, nearly all your sheep and
19 goats will have twins, some of them will even have
20 three. Did you know that, three little ones?

21 MR. MCMULLEN: No, I didn't know that.

22 MR. KEETER: Just like deer. The game
23 warden told me. He said, "You don't see them much, but
24 nearly every deer will have twins, but they usually lose

25 one or two." So -- but in the end, that's -- that's why

15

1 the sheep and goats is important.

2 MR. MCMULLEN: I knew they were important
3 out in Uvalde country, but I didn't realize how
4 important they were in Hamilton County.

5 MR. KEETER: Yeah. There's quite a few of
6 them around, but his dad had a lot of sheep and goats.

7 MR. MCMULLEN: Okay. You're referring to
8 Mr. Newton here that's observing?

9 MR. KEETER: Yeah.

10 MR. MCMULLEN: Yeah.

11 MR. KEETER: I went out there and hauled
12 cattle for him. He said, "Would you love to have a
13 sheep dog?" I said, "No. I ain't got no sheep." He
14 had sold his sheep and -- on a lease place, and he
15 brought that dog home, and she'd go back to that place
16 to her -- where she took care of them sheep. She was
17 grieving herself to death. She now had no sheep. I
18 don't know what he ever done with her, but sheep dogs.

19 MR. MCMULLEN: And that's -- Pyrenees is
20 probably -- is the breed?

21 MR. KEETER: Yeah. Anatolias [sic].
22 Roland Pole had them, and he said them dogs make that
23 fence line every morning, their territory, checking. So
24 that's a pretty important dog.

25 MR. MCMULLEN: Yes. And Roland was very

16

1 involved in that sheep --

2 MR. KEETER: Oh, yeah.

3 MR. MCMULLEN: -- and goat business.

4 MR. KEETER: Yep. Part of --

5 MR. MCMULLEN: How would you compare the

6 two, sheep and goats? Which one is more important

7 economically to this county?

8 MR. KEETER: I would think a goat. Your

9 goat -- if you've got a pasture full of trees, you know,

10 you put -- fill that thing full of goats, and the next

11 thing you know, you can see all under there. They've

12 cleaned it up just as high as they can reach.

13 MR. MCMULLEN: Yes.

14 MR. KEETER: They don't cost you to

15 bulldoze it.

16 MR. MCMULLEN: That's right. That's

17 right.

18 MR. KEETER: So that's why they're

19 important.

20 MR. MCMULLEN: Well, how have you seen the

21 sheep and goat industry change in the time that you've

22 been involved with it?

23 MR. KEETER: Most of the time -- a lot of

24 years ago, a lot of the farmers had cattle, and they've

25 started going to sheep and goats, just more money, and

17

1 not as rough to handle, you know. You ain't going to
2 handle a cow as easy as you can handle a sheep. You can
3 grab a sheep and hold him, and a goat -- you ain't going
4 to do that with a cow, you know. So the older you get,
5 some of these people went to that. Probably a lot of
6 women -- widow women, you know, couldn't hardly handle
7 the cattle. They said, "I can handle the goats easier."

8 MR. MCMULLEN: All right.

9 MR. KEETER: So that's why they went -- a
10 lot of them went to goats.

11 MR. MCMULLEN: All right. And back to the
12 cow. We got to the part about the cattle being inbred.
13 Do you have that same problem with sheep and goats?

14 MR. KEETER: That -- I didn't know that
15 much about them, but that's -- I guess it happens in
16 everything, even people. You know, you've heard of
17 inbreeding. That's a no-no.

18 MR. MCMULLEN: That's right. All right.

19 MR. KEETER: So...

20 MR. MCMULLEN: Well, Dick, tell us about
21 your personal history before we go any further about --
22 I know you began working when you were two years old
23 picking potatoes, but as far as what all you've been
24 involved in related to agriculture and farm and

1 MR. KEETER: Well, see, I bought my first
2 cows -- two cows when I was five, and that's when I told
3 you -- when I was six, I sold two calves at a Comanche
4 sale, \$0.10 and \$0.11 -- or \$0.11 and \$0.12 a pound.
5 And most of our neighbors was old people, and I could go
6 and help one, and by the time I got back to the house,
7 somebody else was wanting me to go help him, old people,
8 and that's the way -- and I kept that money just like a
9 Jew, you know. So I remember in 1947, somewhere along
10 there, my dad told me -- he said, "I need to borrow some
11 money from you." I said, "Okay." By the time I was
12 ten, I done had me a pretty good herd of cattle.

13 MR. MCMULLEN: Oh, really? How many
14 cattle did you have by the time you were ten?

15 MR. KEETER: About 20. And then we had an
16 old man that stayed drunk all the time, and I'd go whip
17 him. He told me -- he said -- "Dick," he says "I'm
18 getting old. Do you want this lease," and he let me
19 have that lease. He let me have the bull. So by the
20 time I was 12, I had bought me a pickup, you know.

21 MR. MCMULLEN: And you were driving a
22 pickup at 12?

23 MR. KEETER: No. I was driving a tractor
24 at five. I never will forget my dad told me to bring

25 that tractor to town, and I didn't know which side of

19

1 the road to get on. I had to sit there and cry and
2 watch the cars to see which cars -- which side I needed
3 to be on, you know. He wasn't going to let me -- so,
4 yeah, it was and old John Deere. You could put -- hand
5 touch. So -- but, anyhow, I've been in the cattle
6 business all my life. I've had many a people help me,
7 and I mean literally help me. I nearly had -- one or
8 two just nearly wanted to give me their place, and I
9 said, "I can't" -- "I can't take it." When I was in
10 high school up here, I was in -- I don't know what
11 school -- what grade it was, but the Petrie Ranch out
12 here. I was in school with their kids, and I leased the
13 ranch. The [sic] Tom Gold had out there. You know
14 where that --

15 MR. MCMULLEN: Yes.

16 MR. KEETER: It all ran down to the
17 Circle T, and, see, F. Lee Barkley tried to get me --
18 let me have the Brokerson [sic] place. It was
19 2,000 acres. Me, just a teenager, I couldn't handle all
20 that. So that's -- Seth Williams, that's another buddy.

21 MR. MCMULLEN: Well, just to -- to kind of
22 talk about history, Seth Williams was one of my favorite
23 people.

24 MR. KEETER: He was mine.

1 Seth Williams stories.

2 MR. KEETER: Well, I went to work for him.

3 The first time I ever met him, I was seven years old.

4 MR. MCMULLEN: You were seven?

5 MR. KEETER: Yeah. He was a -- I think a

6 professional baseball player and a tennis player. Did

7 you know that?

8 MR. MCMULLEN: I knew he was a tennis

9 player.

10 MR. KEETER: And a gambler, but he -- I've

11 hauled cattle for him. He -- he told his daughter -- he

12 said, "I can't make a" -- "go a day without seeing

13 Dick." Oh, we've got -- I mean, he -- he would win a

14 brand-new pickup at just the flip of a coin. That's

15 where he gets that. He never went to a sale in his

16 life. He never bought no cattle at no sale. He got

17 them in a poker game. He called me to haul his cattle.

18 I said, "Seth, where are we going?" Well, we went way

19 up towards Fort Worth. You know what, he had won them

20 in a poker game and would leave them. Every five years,

21 we'd go and harvest the calves. That's what I was

22 telling a boy in Granbury the other day hauling

23 cattle -- I said -- in about five years and he said I'd

24 be dead, and I said, "How's that?" And he said, "I got

25 mad" -- we harvested his calves every eight years.

21

1 So -- and the next thing you know, he said, "I've got
2 one in Plum, Texas, one in Granbury, Texas."

3 MRS. KEETER: Tell him how he sorted those
4 cattle.

5 MR. KEETER: Oh, yeah. He got a hundred
6 head down here on the river, and I had backed up there
7 to haul his cattle -- it was about 100 calves. And I
8 said, "Do you want me to help you?" He said, "No. Just
9 sit in the pickup. Don't move." I sat there and read
10 the paper, got to watching him, and he had a pistol on
11 each hip and it's air pistols. And as he rushed around
12 the gate, he'd just burn that cow with that pistol,
13 shoot at it. He started them cattle with pistols, air
14 pistols. So the next day he left one in the pickup, and
15 Darlene said "What is this," and I looked and I said
16 "Oh, my goodness," and that was his sorting gun.

17 MR. EIDSON: You ever heard of sorting
18 cattle --

19 MR. MCMULLEN: Sorting cattle.

20 MR. EIDSON: My gosh.

21 MR. KEETER: He had cattle on Morgan
22 Ranch, cattle up yonder -- that's where I told you them
23 cows in that barn are dead. Got to one place to load
24 his cattle, he hadn't been there in five years, the lots

25 had all -- the cattle would eat them. They didn't have

22

1 to salt or nothing. They'd just eat that wood. There's
2 an old granary out there, it leaned like this, 14 foot
3 long, seven foot on each end, and the doors are gone and
4 the bottom boards are rotted off. I thought, "Well, I
5 ain't going to get no cattle here. There ain't no
6 locks." He took a sack and put some gravel in it or a
7 little cake, threwed it in that barn, and them cattle
8 just tore the door up nearly getting in there. Once
9 they got full, he said, "Back up right quick." He
10 stepped out of the back of the trailer and opened them
11 gates, and he got up there in them rafters whipping
12 cattle out of there until I had a load of cattle. Then
13 I said, "What are we going to do now?" He said, "Let
14 that barn fill again." So the barn would fill in again.
15 And we sorted out what was in the trailer that he didn't
16 want. We wound up with five. We backed up again and
17 he'd whip them out of there, and we left there with a
18 load of cattle. Blacks. And I said, "Seth, whose red
19 calf?" He said, "I think that belongs to a man about
20 two miles over yonder." So we put him in the back, and
21 when we got there, there ain't nobody there. He said
22 "Just back up there," and I backed up there. We put
23 that red calf out and drove off. He thinks that's
24 funny.

25 MR. MCMULLEN: Oh, it's amazing.

23

1 MR. KEETER: He won this ranch and the
2 cattle and everything, William and Dicky Cattle -- Blue
3 Jean Company.

4 MR. MCMULLEN: Yeah.

5 MR. KEETER: They have 5,000 acres up
6 there at Bluff Dale. There's a canyon, I guess 500 foot
7 or 600 foot deep, and he always drove an El Camino. Do
8 you remember that El Camino? He had the tailgate down,
9 and he was headed towards this bluff, and these cattle
10 got to pushing and to pushing, and that went right off
11 down in there. I guess it's still in there. I don't
12 know. But, anyway, he called Jerry Durrant, one of his
13 spinning [sic] buddies, and he said, "Bring me a
14 brand-new El Camino." He said, "Bring somebody to take
15 you back." So he did. He got there, and Seth said,
16 "How much?" And I don't -- say it's \$20,000 back then.
17 Seth said, "I'll double you or nothing." Flip. It was
18 either Seth paid double or it was free. He got it free.
19 The dude said "Where's my pickup," and he showed it to
20 him down there. But he had -- when that pickup went in
21 there, he had walk five miles back to --

22 MR. MCMULLEN: Oh, me. Well, we'll
23 just -- we'll move along now, but Seth was -- was a
24 unique individual.

25 MR. KEETER: Oh, yeah, and his daddy, too.

24

1 MR. MCMULLEN: Yeah.

2 MR. KEETER: And it wasn't no little
3 gambling. He'd lose a thousand-acre ranch out here in a
4 poker game during the night. That's a pretty good loss.

5 MR. MCMULLEN: Well, I want to talk to you
6 about this ranch that -- and Gene Autry and his
7 connection with his part of the world.

8 MR. KEETER: Well, see, right here in
9 Lamkin, it starts the other side of the river and it
10 runs nearly to Proctor -- not to Proctor -- Edna Hill,
11 14,000 acres, and they called it the Lightning C --
12 ain't you ever heard of that, the Lightning C Ranch?

13 MR. MCMULLEN: I had not until you told me
14 about it.

15 MR. KEETER: And he had a partner named
16 Everett Colborn. He lived in -- over there. He had two
17 daughters. A buddy of mine's son married one of them,
18 and Harry Tompkins. They lived over -- five years' time
19 world champion bull rider, he married one of them, and
20 they put that rodeo on out there at Dublin, and they'd
21 drive their bulls right down the road. You know, we
22 used to -- that's the way we'd drive -- move cattle. We
23 didn't have goosenecks.

24 MR. MCMULLEN: Didn't have goosenecks?

25 MR. KEETER: Trucks -- we just drove them

25

1 down the road to the thing. And, you know, he'd come
2 out on his horse all the way around that ring with his
3 hat off, you know, and they'd load them bulls on them
4 trains or send them to New York or everywhere for the
5 rodeos. So -- but that --

6 MR. MCMULLEN: So these were rodeo bulls?

7 MR. KEETER: Yeah. But later on, I was
8 hauling calves. See, their ranch is cut up now. I was
9 still hauling out there. Different people is buying
10 that ranch cut up, but it used to be Gene Autry and
11 Everett Colborn.

12 MR. MCMULLEN: They were partners in that
13 ranch?

14 MR. KEETER: They was partners. That was
15 the two guys that owned that ranch. So -- but Harry
16 Tompkins, he's in the -- I guess a rest home now,
17 Alzheimer's, Harry is. But, yeah, that -- then Billy
18 the Kid -- you remember Billy the Kid?

19 MR. MCMULLEN: Well, the Brushy Bill
20 robber?

21 MR. KEETER: Yeah. He lived right here on
22 the banks of this creek right down here, right there
23 behind them little parks, you know, and little rock
24 buildings there --

25 MR. MCMULLEN: Yes.

26

1 MR. KEETER: -- at times. I knew him. He
2 wasn't Billy the Kid. He -- if he was Billy the Kid,
3 I'm Wild Bill Hickok.

4 MR. EIDSON: You are?

5 MR. KEETER: And he walked the sidewalks
6 in Hico picking up cigarette butts, put them in the
7 pocket of an old trench coat, and then on a cold day in
8 winter, he leaned up against a building and he'd undo
9 the -- put this tobacco in his pocket. He'd smoke them.
10 So he died right there on the sidewalks in Hico.

11 MR. MCMULLEN: In Hico?

12 MR. KEETER: Uh-huh. He's buried right
13 here, right across from Hamburger Hill out here.

14 MR. MCMULLEN: Yes.

15 MR. KEETER: You know, there's still that
16 monument?

17 MR. MCMULLEN: Yes. Yes.

18 MR. KEETER: Well, they -- I'd like to
19 tell you who it was -- dug a hole ten foot deep. You
20 can't steal it no more unless you go something to pull
21 that marker out of that ground.

22 MR. MCMULLEN: All right. Well, Dick,
23 what -- what would you like to -- the main -- one of the
24 main groups of people we're making these -- these

25 pictures of or this film of is so that future

27

1 generations of students in the Hamilton area can know

2 what it was like before their time.

3 MR. KEETER: Okay.

4 MR. MCMULLEN: And there will be future

5 generations that would look at this, and what would you

6 tell those young people of tomorrow about how you have

7 seen things change in Hamilton County and the history of

8 Hamilton County?

9 MR. KEETER: Well, see, years ago, you

10 made a living and you lived on them farms. Nowadays you

11 can't hardly live on one big enough to make a go.

12 You've got to have a job in town or something and run

13 that ranch or whatever you're in here do- -- from your

14 folks. One man in Hamilton County that had a lot to do

15 with lots of their cattle business was John Guest.

16 MR. MCMULLEN: John Guest. And tell us

17 about John Guest.

18 MR. KEETER: A very -- a very important

19 guy and a man of his word. See, in about the 1950s,

20 that went out. You don't hear of nobody is a man of

21 their word anymore. Do you know what I mean?

22 MR. MCMULLEN: Uh-huh.

23 MR. KEETER: If I tell you something, I'll

24 do it whether it costs me money to do, and he was. He

25 was a good feller. And, see, he had -- you know, and

28

1 [sic] Watson married one of his daughters. [Sic]

2 Gardener married one of them.

3 MR. MCMULLEN: Yes.

4 MR. KEETER: [Sic] Trammel married one of
5 them.

6 MR. MCMULLEN: Yes.

7 MR. KEETER: So they was all in the cattle
8 business. He started it, a very important feller. He
9 owned the auction sale down there, the old sale barn,
10 and I went to work for him. So he was very -- I guess
11 he helped start a big percent of the people around here
12 in the cattle business. He sold bulls. That's where a
13 lot of the people got their -- once they got away from
14 their inbreeding, they bought bulls from John Guest.

15 MR. MCMULLEN: All right.

16 MR. KEETER: So he was a very important
17 figure. So -- I don't know how long -- we've been going
18 a long time now.

19 MR. MCMULLEN: Do you -- when did he pass
20 away? I think he passed away before I got here.

21 MR. KEETER: I don't know. You know where
22 he lived up there on the hill?

23 MR. MCMULLEN: No.

24 MR. KEETER: You know that motel that's on

25 this side and that big rock cement wall over here?

29

1 MR. MCMULLEN: Yes. Well, that's where

2 Seth lived.

3 MR. KEETER: Seth won that house in a
4 poker game. That was -- what was that man's name? You
5 know the steel mill?

6 MR. MCMULLEN: Yes.

7 MR. KEETER: Won that in a poker game.

8 All that land across the road there, clean up to the
9 motel, and down to the old sale barn, the same deal.

10 Seth got all that. So very -- I think I've told you
11 this. He was in a big poker game in Fort Worth in a bad
12 area of town. He had just cleaned their plows, 2:00 in
13 the morning. He was wondering how in the world he could
14 get out of there alive. He told them -- said "I got to
15 go to the bathroom," they told him where the -- he was
16 in an old house. They told him where the bathroom was.
17 The story was he left 8,000 bucks laying on the table,
18 took all the other he had, and went through that window
19 and left there. He said him and Bunny took an old
20 Cadillac car and went all the way to Canada, and he said
21 "We cleaned everybody in Canada," and he said, "We
22 headed home in that old Cadillac." And he said "Every
23 time we'd stop, that car would follow us. Every time
24 we'd stop" -- and Bunny said, "Well, I've got to go to

25 the motel if" -- "we've got to sleep." He said -- they

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1 got a motel. He told her -- he said, "Don't take your
2 clothes off. Just lay down." And he said when they get
3 quiet next door -- and them people got one next to
4 them -- he said, "We left there and come to Texas." But
5 she was a pretty good gambler herself.

6 MR. MCMULLEN: That's Bunny Williams, his
7 wife?

8 MR. KEETER: Bunny.

9 MR. MCMULLEN: Bunny, yeah.

10 MR. KEETER: But I've done a lot of
11 business with them. That's where -- I've learned a lot
12 from Seth.

13 MR. MCMULLEN: And what would you say your
14 business was? I know you're kind of slowing down a
15 little bit but not much.

16 MR. KEETER: Oh, yeah, a lot.

17 MR. MCMULLEN: Because you were hauling
18 cattle yesterday.

19 MR. KEETER: Yeah. Well, see, at one
20 time -- I don't want to say -- sound like a bragger, I
21 had 36 places leased in five counties. I had cattle
22 everywhere. So that's -- I had cattle, cattle, cattle.

23 MR. MCMULLEN: Well, since you're talking
24 about cattle everywhere, I can't help but think -- I

25 just must ask you about the crash of '74 because I had

31

1 just come --

2 MR. KEETER: It got cheap.

3 MR. MCMULLEN: And what causes those
4 crashes to occur?

5 MR. KEETER: I don't know unless it's
6 over- --

7 MR. MCMULLEN: Supply.

8 MR. KEETER: Yeah, oversupply and not
9 enough demand.

10 MR. MCMULLEN: Uh-huh. But I remember --
11 I was -- I was young, didn't have any money, and all of
12 a sudden, my clients didn't have any money, and that was
13 in about the '74 crash.

14 MR. KEETER: Yeah.

15 MR. MCMULLEN: And it took -- but how did
16 people cope with that in 1974?

17 MR. KEETER: It wasn't easy. I guess
18 another man in this town that's very important was R.B.
19 Miller. Do you remember R.B. Miller, Bob Miller?

20 MR. MCMULLEN: Bob Miller, yes.

21 MR. KEETER: Used to have a big -- you got
22 their place. There used to be a big store right where
23 your lot is right here, a Firestone, and that -- he run
24 the gas deal here in town, Gulf. I wasn't but about --

25 I don't know how old, not too old, but plowing that

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1 field out there at Gentry's Mill. Robby Fuqua said,
2 "Dick, they're going to auction off that" -- I mean,
3 whoever bids on that building, school building, can have
4 it, the highest bidder. I said, "I don't need that
5 building." I bid \$506 on that building. A few days
6 later Robby said, "You got it."

7 MR. MCMULLEN: \$506 for a building that --

8 MR. KEETER: A school, that big school
9 building --

10 MR. MCMULLEN: That -- yes.

11 MR. KEETER: -- on R.B. Miller's place,
12 and they said you got to move it. Well, they was going
13 to charge me \$3,000 to move it, and I wasn't going to
14 pay that. Well, R.B. come to me one day and says, "You
15 know I own the land I had leased." I said, "Yeah." He
16 said, "I'd like to buy that building." And I said,
17 "Okay." He said "I'll give you \$2,500," but he said, "I
18 ain't got no money." He said, "Everybody in town owes
19 me." He said, "I am buying groceries on credit." So he
20 wrote me a note, gave me a note paying me interest for
21 the --

22 MR. MCMULLEN: And when was this?

23 MR. KEETER: Huh?

24 MR. MCMULLEN: When was this?

25 MR. KEETER: I don't remember -- can't

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1 remember dates. But, anyway, he called and he said --
2 "Dick," he said, "Ollie Tatum out here owes me a lot of
3 money, but he says he's got a milk calf and a bunch of
4 pigs to" -- "he wants to give me in on his bill." And
5 so R.B. told me -- he said "Go get them and take them
6 for sale" -- "and sell them in your name and you keep
7 the money, but I'll" -- "you give me" -- "I'll give
8 you" -- "you give me" -- "I'll give you enough
9 credit" -- I mean, on his bill, and then another deal in
10 Comanche County. Another Tatum had two calves and two
11 dozen hogs or something. I'd go and get them, sell
12 them, give R.B. -- he -- I -- the money he owed to me,
13 but that's R.B.'s payment -- paying me back. So that
14 was hard times.

15 MR. MCMULLEN: And what times -- what
16 times would have that have been, the '50s? Because Mr.
17 Miller, R.B., was already just gone when I --

18 MR. KEETER: Yeah.

19 MR. MCMULLEN: -- moved here.

20 MR. KEETER: Yeah. Mr. Miller owned
21 all that -- a lot of that land out there, and that's
22 back when they had some slaves. R.B. had a -- you've
23 heard of Nigger Alek?

24 MR. MCMULLEN: I've heard it.

25 MR. KEETER: Well, that was a slave for

34

1 R.B. Miller, and he had a wife. I can't recall her
2 name. They -- or Nigger Alek died, and they wouldn't
3 let him be buried at the Gentry's Mill, and they made
4 them bury him over there on their place over north of
5 the river. But R.B. later on got -- when she died,
6 she's buried at Gentry's Mill, that nigger lady. So
7 that goes way back there.

8 MR. MCMULLEN: Now, that's way back there.

9 MR. KEETER: Way back.

10 MR. MCMULLEN: Would that be in the, what,
11 the 1800s?

12 MR. KEETER: Probably in the 1880s or
13 something.

14 MR. MCMULLEN: Okay.

15 MR. KEETER: So a long time ago. But R.B.
16 was another big figure in this town.

17 MR. MCMULLEN: And, of course, a Bob
18 Miller, who was a war hero, and also he --

19 MR. KEETER: Yeah.

20 MR. MCMULLEN: -- that had the newspaper
21 here.

22 MR. KEETER: Another good feller.

23 MR. MCMULLEN: Another good man?

24 MR. KEETER: You bet.

25 MR. MCMULLEN: And who are some -- who are

35

1 some of the other people that you think were very
2 important to the history of Hamilton County?

3 MR. KEETER: I don't know. I know a lot
4 of -- Doc Brown is one of them.

5 MR. MCMULLEN: Doc Brown.

6 MR. KEETER: It used to be the Brown House
7 right here on the banks of that crick where Dr. Ford's
8 office used to -- for old bachelors. Maybe -- do you
9 know the Brown House?

10 MR. MCMULLEN: The Brown House. And
11 people would come and eat there.

12 MR. KEETER: Yeah.

13 MR. MCMULLEN: That's when the train was
14 there.

15 MR. KEETER: Yeah. And Billy Lawson's
16 granddaddy was a big figure in this town.

17 MR. MCMULLEN: And his name was W.P.?

18 MR. KEETER: Yep, it sure was, had that
19 gin over here. Wheeler Pig had the gin over yonder.
20 A.G. Thompson is another big figure. A swell, swell
21 feller, or I thought he was. So -- and, see, we're --
22 Thompson's Grocery Store, that used to be a Lemon
23 Brother's garage. You could just drive in there.

24 MR. EIDSON: I'll be darned.

25 MR. KEETER: Do you remember the flood of

36

1 '57?

2 MR. MCMULLEN: I've heard of the flood.

3 MR. KEETER: It washed the cars off the
4 square. The only -- the only place it was dry was
5 around this red light right here at 281 and 36. It put
6 logs on the courthouse -- Paul Gilliam had a car lot
7 right there where Happy's is.

8 MR. MCMULLEN: Yes.

9 MR. KEETER: It washed the cars off his
10 lot and they wound up nearly to the ball field down
11 there.

12 MR. EIDSON: Good god.

13 MR. KEETER: That was 1957. A lot of
14 people don't remember that.

15 MR. MCMULLEN: Well, as we close this out,
16 I want you to tell us about the time it snowed in
17 Hamilton in -- in the summer.

18 MR. KEETER: Oh, that -- Minnie Dayport,
19 she used to be the cook at the Sale Barn. She's dead
20 now. She lived to nearly 100. She was 13 years old the
21 day that it snowed up here. Everybody come in their
22 wagons, covered wagons. She said even some of them
23 brought their milk cow behind the wagon.

24 MR. MCMULLEN: This is out at the Fair

1 MR. KEETER: Fair Park.

2 MR. MCMULLEN: Fair Park.

3 MR. KEETER: And it stayed four or five
4 days. And it snowed, and they like to froze to death.

5 MR. MCMULLEN: And what --

6 MR. EIDSON: This is during the summer?

7 MR. MCMULLEN: During the summer. What
8 day was it?

9 MR. KEETER: June the 4th.

10 MR. MCMULLEN: Was it June --

11 MR. KEETER: July.

12 MR. MCMULLEN: July 4th.

13 MR. KEETER: July the 4th. That's what I
14 told you. Next -- this coming -- it will be 99 years
15 ago. Next year it will be 100 years that that happened.

16 MR. MCMULLEN: And it snowed?

17 MR. KEETER: It snowed. Billy Lawson's
18 parents had told him about it, but then nobody knew the
19 date. J.T. Massengale's daddy told him, but nobody
20 remembered the date, except Minnie Davenport knew. She
21 said, "I was 13 years old when it did that." That was a
22 bigger holiday than Christmas, and -- but they was all
23 in covered wagons.

24 MR. MCMULLEN: Wow.

1 you went to haul those sheep for Minnie Davenport.

2 MR. KEETER: Oh, yeah, this lady I'm

3 talking about --

4 MR. MCMULLEN: Yeah.

5 MR. KEETER: -- she lived right out here

6 on 36 -- I mean, 281 south, and nobody hauled her cattle

7 except me. Went out there to haul her lambs, and I

8 said, "Minnie, we're going to load them." She said,

9 "Back up right here." And, you know, a granary, it's

10 got a window up here about six or eight foot high -- six

11 foot, I guess, and I said, "What about it?" Well, she

12 said, "I'll open that window. So just back up there."

13 And I said, "How are we going to get them in there?"

14 Well, she said, "Just pick them up and throw them

15 through the window." I did that, and I give out. Well,

16 she's going give -- give me -- what's his name?

17 Brumlow -- Jeff Brumlow's wife, Lavenia, they was going

18 to take a milk cow. Minnie -- Minnie was going to let

19 them have a milk cow. Well, they couldn't load her.

20 She tore up everything. I went out there. Minnie told

21 me -- said, "I'm going to sell that old hussy." Well, I

22 backed up there. We just walked by that Jersey cow and

23 the mother's eye got low, and I had my shocker in my

24 hand, so I just buzzed her when I walked by. She made

25 around that log and jumped clean out. Minnie said,

39

1 "What in the world? That old idiot." I said, "I don't
2 know." Well, we got her back in there, and when we got
3 her back in, she run and jumped in the trailer, and
4 Minnie said, "I can't believe that." She said, "We
5 worked all day yesterday to try and load that cow."
6 Now, I didn't dare tell her about what I did.

7 MR. MCMULLEN: Well, Dick, thank you
8 for -- for telling us those stories and telling us about
9 the history of Hamilton. What -- what do you envision
10 for the future? Is it just going to be cattle and sheep
11 and goats in Hamilton County and it's going to be --

12 MR. KEETER: Probably the same, but
13 everybody is a re- -- what do you recall it? Like you
14 go from a 1984 to a 2000 car. They're upgrading every
15 year. You can get some high-priced cattle now. So I
16 couldn't say that years ago.

17 MR. EIDSON: No.

18 MR. MCMULLEN: All right. Well, Dick,
19 thank you so much, and it's just been a real pleasure to
20 hear you talk about old times and -- and the history and
21 the future of the livestock business in Hamilton. Thank
22 you.

23 MR. KEETER: Thank you.

24 MR. EIDSON: Thank you.

1 REPORTER'S CERTIFICATION

2

3 I, Jamie Cooley, Certified Shorthand

4 Reporter for the State of Texas, do hereby certify that

5 the above and foregoing interview contains a true and

6 correct transcription of all portions of the

7 proceedings, all of which were reported by me.

8 IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, witness my hand on

9 this the 22nd day of March, 2019.

10

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12

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