



Oklahoma Bank and Commerce History Project

a program of the Oklahoma Historical Society

Interview with Margery Bird
First National Bank of Tulsa
Mrs. Bird's home, Tulsa, OK, 7/16/2010
Interviewer: Michael J. Hightower
Audio taped and transcribed by MJH

MJH: Introduction. Tell me about your family's early history with First National Bank.

MB: My father was almost a lifelong member of the board of directors. After he died, my brother went onto the board. Burch Mayo. Otis McClintock was a close family friend. And his son was a friend of mine. Matt McClintock.

So having that dual relationship, both business and friend, made for a very interesting life, for me. I can even remember selling war bonds when the bank was at Fourth and Main Street, before the new building at Fifth and Boston.

I remember that opening quite well, when Otis McClintock was still presiding as president of the First National. I believe he was selected to become the president of the First National due to Waite Philips. Mr. Philips was very much a man behind the scenes, quiet but I'm sure he spoke privately and effectively whenever it was necessary.

I think of it as a very strong board for Tulsa. At that time, the city was growing. I would have to look at a list of board members – I don't remember them off hand. I thought Tulsa's First National was probably the strongest bank. The Exchange National Bank of Tulsa – I have an uncle who was on that board for a long time – was also an equally strong bank. There are those who can more accurately give you the statistics.

The opening of that bank was very festive. I don't remember the name of the orchestra, but I remember that Arnie Palmer was here. He was a close friend of Matt McClintock, and he was thrilled to death to have him here. But there were different celebrities that were on the scene that evening—for that whole weekend.

MJH: When was this?

MB: In the 1950s. I need to have you check on that...

It was very, very festive.

MJH: And this was when the bank moved into its new headquarters?

MB: Formal opening at the corner of Fifth and Boston.

Matt McClintock...It was not too long after that when Matt was the head of the bank. But he had a stroke, and of course that was when his tenure ended. And I believe it was John Robertson who became president following Matt.

MJH: What can you tell me about Matt McClintock?

MB: Matt went to Choate, then he went to Yale, then to the Marines. He was a great golfer. He loved golf, participating as well as following. He was married to Pat Kennedy Hofstra, the Kennedy family. They were divorced and remarried.

MJH: That explains why he got to know Arnold Palmer.

MB: Exactly.

MJH: How about Mrs. McClintock, senior?

MB: Gladys McClintock. She was a close friend of my mother. They were more or less contemporaries. She was a lovely person. She was very prominent in our city. She was not the gregarious person in the business world at all. Her daughter-in-law was more so. Otis liked to take Pat to the different conventions because she was attractive and she was effervescent. So she would go with Matt. I was the maid of honor in their wedding.

MJH: Someone attractive and effervescent...What sort of organizations would she have been involved in?

MB: The arts. The Philharmonic was very active. My brother was the head of that for twenty-five years.

MJH: And your brother's name was...

MB: Burch Mayo. My father was John Mayo. My uncle, Cass (?) Mayo.

The bank was highly successful.

MJH: Do you remember social events [revolving around First National Bank]? Christmas parties?

MB: The closest thing we came to that was with the McClintocks. They did this not as a banking affair, although many bankers were there. They had their annual Christmas morning party at their home at Forty-First and Lewis. They later moved into the penthouse [at the First National Bank]. [Their home was on the northwest corner of Forty-First and Lewis.]

They built the home. They had lived off Nineteenth and Peoria.

MJH: That is unusual in itself. What banker would have a party in their own homes anymore?

MB: They did not in any sense call this a business venture. It was social. It so happened that they also socialized with a lot of the bankers, and members of their own board. Finally we—at that time, children—lucked out and were included in the Christmas party. My father used to describe it—that is, going to the home—as, you’d get there and get your hands up, and you could never get them down. People to people. But it was festive. Then you’d go home, and maybe you had already had your tree or go home and have it, and you had your Christmas luncheon.

MJH: That makes me think that banking families socialized...

MB: They did. You see, when you are a smaller city, it is easier to handle.

Having mentioned Waite Philips...They were definitely more private. They were social in their chosen way.

They gave Philbrook to the city in the early forties...I could get those figures for you....And then they moved to California.

MJH: Do you have memories of Waite Philips and his wife?

MB: I do remember my family describing the first party when they had opened their home. They had a party. It was a black tie affair. Their guests arrived for dinner, and at this point, Genevieve—Mrs. Phillips—had not come downstairs, and the organ was playing. When she came down, all the guests applauded. This was from seeing their home for the first time. It was basically a dinner party.

At that time, I was older than Elliott, the son, and younger than Helen Jane, the daughter. And I was invited to this one [party]—let’s call it the “in between,” or “the gap”—and they had a floor that had lights underneath it, a glass brick floor, in the solarium, and we danced. As young people, we thought that was the most exciting thing in the world, the way the lights changed underneath while we danced.

MJH: So their oldest child was...

MB: Helen Jane Phillips, who married Bill Breckenridge, and...you know who she married in Oklahoma City...[speculation about who she married in OKC. Kirkpatrick? Not sure...I said I would ask Peter Walter.]

MJH: So Helen Jane was the oldest, and they had two children?

MB: Elliott, but they called him “Chope.” He presently lives in Austin, Texas. He loved the ranch. He never cared about...here. The ranch was his love. That’s where he went, and spent the majority of his life, until he went to Texas.

MJH: And that was Woolaroc?

MB: No, not Woolaroc—that was Frank Phillips. Waite Phillips’ [ranch] was the one in New Mexico—which is now the Boy Scouts of America.

MJH: Philmont.

MB: Philmont. Exactly. He gave it to them. And one of the beautiful things, I always thought, was Waite Phillips’ gifting. Whatever he gifted, he endowed. So that makes it a gift. As an example: The Philtower; the endowment for the Philmont.

MJH: That is unusual, to give these wonderful gifts and have them funded over the years.

MB: Yes, you’re appreciative of the gift, but then it’s a responsibility to maintain that gift.

MJH: So that was a hallmark of [Waite Phillips’ gifting].

MB: Yes, it was. It was, for him.

And he was very private. Publicity was something that neither Mr. Chapman nor Mr. Phillips sought. So that very often some of these things were an unknown quantity for a period of time.

MJH: Is there anything in particular that you remember about Genevieve? That’s a wonderful story about her coming down the stairs, everybody applauding...

MB: She was a lovely, delicate, fragile kind of person. She was very quiet. She was a very good friend, of course, of Gladys McClintock, and she had a small circle of friends. She did not lead what I would call a very active life. I didn’t know her as a child...I knew her, and admired her, and respected her...but she was very quiet and modest. So the glamour of her home almost seemed surprising to me. They had a home in California, which was quite different...And that is where they were both living when each of them died.

And they never came back.

MJH: Not even for visits?

MB: Waite never came back, that I know of. If he did, it was quietly, in and out. Genevieve, I think, came back, for just a few days, a few days visit with her good friends...Gladys McClintock...But she was not an active person during the day. It must have been so dreary...maybe a few luncheons...She never entertained. If she did, it was very quietly...

MJH: Maybe the house was too big for her.

MB: Yes.

MJH: Such a beautiful house for entertaining. Can you tell me something about the Mayo Hotel? Did your father build it?

MB: Yes.

MJH: What were the links between the Mayo Hotel and the First National Bank?

MB: From whence the blessings flowed...the building of the bank, you know...I mean, the building of the hotel. I'm sure the money was coming from there.

MJH: That was back in about...

MB: 1923.

MJH: By then, the First National had been around about a quarter of a century or so.

MB: What was the date on that? I'd have to see...

MJH: I'll have to go back and look...[Agreement to check on dates later.]

So your father...

MB: My father and my uncle. They were together in business, in different things. My father had never planned on, so to speak, running the Mayo Hotel, but it became necessary to do it, due to not feeling the person they had employed was successful about it. It was to be a temporary thing for my father. But it ended up being where he spent the majority of his life, on a daily basis. Not that they weren't operating their other businesses—my father officed in the Mayo, and my uncle officed in the Mayo Building, the Petroleum Building.

MJH: So, from day one, it was a hotel?

MB: From day one it was a hotel, a very beautiful hotel. I always felt it was modeled somewhat after the Plaza in New York.

MJH: I can see that. Probably so.

MB: I know Daddy went back, and there were certain features that were employed in the construction of the hotel. The hotel was built on steel during the First World War. There was an excess of steel, come the armistice, and so that was available to them for a foundation. So they always said that hotel was there to stand...having been built on a steel basis.

The hotel opened up in '25, '24. And that was very festive.

MJH: So you would have gone to the party. Do you remember that?

MB: I remember, that was when photographers had these flashlights—you know, the flash picture?—and my brother and I were scared to death. We cowered! My mother said the next day, when it was in the paper, “Well, that was a good picture of you hiding behind me.”

Laughter

There were so many firsts at that time, which were taken for granted. When my mother and father were married, my father built their home on 14th and Cheyenne. My father wanted to build on a piece of property out on 19th Street...somewhere out there. My mother said, “You’re not going to put me out in the country.” That’s in town now.

MJH: Do you remember First National events hosted at the Mayo Hotel?

MB: I don’t have any specific memory. I’m not going to say there were not...The First National had their own when the Phillips entertained...

MJH: Do you remember any milestones in the bank’s history?

MB: This is an oft repeated one, I think, but I can remember Miss Jackson’s shop, which was one of the leading ones...you may have heard this story. They called in Miss Jackson, and she had been delinquent in her payments, and she said to the directors, “If some of your wives would pay their bills, I would not be delinquent!”

Laughter and small talk. Can’t prove story...

MJH: Do you have memories of bankruptcies...

MB: Did you say bankruptcy? I won’t touch that one, because I truly don’t know. It would be better to get Walt [Helmerich] to comment on that. He would be accurate, since he was on the board. And, of course, his father ahead of him.

MJH: Then we can move the whole narrative forward, through World War II...

MB: I know, for example, Tulsa was quite a focal point, due to the airport and American Airlines. And there would be meetings held in Tulsa relative to a lot of the military.

Speaking of the hotel, I know it was always well filled. My father was educated as to the ranks—generals...It was very active during the war. Construction was going on...Quite a hub...And don’t forget, over in Oklahoma City too...

Small talk about military in OK

MJH: Is your family still involved in First National today?

MB: No, my brother died.

MJH: What was his name?

MB: Burch – B-U-R-C-H.

...My father died, and at the time he sold the hotel, there was a contingency there that my mother—that they would be allowed to live there. At this point they had sold their home...And so, until they died...

MJH: It was empty for so long...

MB: Yes, my word, I was afraid it was just going to crumble to the ground.

Discussion of Snyders who invested in the hotel...

MJH: What do you remember about the oil industry in the eighties? I guess your family still would have been...

MB: No, my parents died in the seventies.

MJH: So that was pretty much the end of your family's relationship with the bank?

MB: Yes, and [the hotel] had already sold.

Discussion of the Skirvin Hotel in OKC...John Williams comments about finding VIPs in Mayo Hotel lobby, activity when pipeline was constructed...again, suggestion that I talk to Walt Helmerich...

MJH: What do you remember best about your parents?

MB: Loving this city and being active in it. [As my father used to say,] "buy in Tulsa." No catalog life...

Laughter

He said, "This is where we make our living, this is the city we love and want to support..."

MJH: Were they both born here?

MB: My father came in 1903, 4 years before statehood. And my mother, she came here after graduation...the superintendant of music, which tickles me, because there might have been 2 schools here. My father at that time was head of the Mayo Furniture Store, on the corner of Fifth and Boulder, which is in the Petroleum Building, next to the Mayo Hotel. And so, mother was just getting started here, and she went into the Mayo Furniture Store, to get a music stand, and my father was there, and this man who was working there was going to wait on her, and Daddy said, "I'll take care of her." Which he did for the rest of his life. That was in 1915. I was born in Tulsa...Burch and I were born in Tulsa.

I was born in 1916...A true antique.

I certainly love to leave the city as long as I know I can return. Traveling is certainly an exciting way of life...But I love to know that I am able to come back.

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