



Oklahoma Bank and Commerce History Project

a program of the Oklahoma Historical Society

Interview with Patricia Loosen and Joyce Treece
First Bank of Okarche, 8/30/2010
Interviewer: Michael J. Hightower
Audio taped and transcribed by MJH

MJH: It is Monday, August 30, 2010, and I am at the First Bank of Okarche, conducting interviews for the Oklahoma Bank and Commerce History Project. Pat, please give me your full name and spell it.

PL: It's Patricia Loosen...I was on the board for almost 40 years. The Loosen family originated from Germany. They came from Leischnesh and Cologne in the 1880s and became American citizens in 1885 in Polk County, Nebraska. The Kaiser was very anti-Catholic, and the Loosen family was Catholic. And so, they wanted to be able to practice their faith. But when they arrived in Nebraska, which was open to German immigrants, they saw this really wasn't established, and there was a German convocation here in Okarche, Indian Territory. They ended coming by train, which was the frontier—there were about 380 Arapaho and Cheyenne Indians living in the community—and they opened the bank in 1892 with \$3,000. It was just a wooden structure. My grandfather, Franz Loosen, and his brother, Emil, had \$3,000 to their name. A lot of people here could not read or write. There was a large black community outside of Okarche. My grandfather would go to loan money to these people, and they would pay him with chickens, and rice, corn, meat—and there was a gentleman's handshake. And that was over a hundred years ago. To this day, some black people will remember my grandfather, a German immigrant—they would say, he had a strong accent—would come out and check their cattle, see what they were doing, and they would sign their "X."

I did that with my father. When I was 13, my father wasn't very well, and so I learned to drive a car, and I would take him out to the blackjack country, which is the ranch area, and he would have to go and check cattle, and I would be the witness for the "X." And that was 1950. So there was kind of a tradition. And my father was a detail person—I mean a stickler for detail—and again, it was a gentleman's handshake. A lot of the farmers didn't have phones, or they would have a party line. It was still a frontier, it seemed, in those days. And of course we had maybe 500 clients, don't you think, about that time?

JT: Probably so, probably so. I don't really remember.

MJH: Joyce, can you give us your name too?

JT: My name is Joyce Treece. I started to work here about a week after I graduated from high school, and that was in 1960. I retired on May 31st, 2008. And I have really seen a lot of changes during my time. I was here 48 years. I've seen a lot of changes. I really loved my work, and like I say, there have been a lot of changes.

MJH: OK. Chime in any time you want. This is great. So, did it still seem like a frontier...

PL: Well, it was a true frontier. This was a community, basically German speaking, Catholic and Lutheran. And there was a unity, a harmony. People were very hard-working, a lot of cattle, they had corn, a lot of cotton in those days. My father got his high school education in Oklahoma City. He would take the train from Okarche to Oklahoma City, and he lived with a Jewish family, a very prominent Jewish family, and then he would come home on the weekends. And that was at the turn of the century, maybe 1914. Then after he graduated from Oklahoma City—he was in school with Horn, you know Horn Seed?—and Mr. Janeway (Mrs. Seagrave's second husband), and they were all good chums in high school.

MJH: What school did he go to? Was Bishop McGuinness around back then?

PL: No, this was a public high school. It was a public high school. In Okarche, we had—this was the Chisholm Trail, out on Highway 81—and Okarche was very primitive in those days. There were wooden sidewalks, it was a town of 5,000 people at that time, there were three hotels, the train station was the center of activity. The church... People lived around their parish church, and what made our community deplete was one World War I and World War II. There were opportunities to have a better life. People didn't want to just farm. But there was a dignity here. I mean, people brought their talents. There were printing presses. I heard German spoken here until 1948. Because there were so many older people. Kroner... Their mother, I remember, my mother would go and buy vegetables from her. And her daughter would have to translate. And that was when I was in high school.

MJH: You were born in ...

PL: 1939. I am going to be 72.

MJH: Happy almost birthday.

PL: I don't mind. I feel blessed. So, anyway, the community... There was always a loyalty among each other.

JT: Oh yes.

PL: There wasn't... flamboyant... People had opportunity... People were just down-to-earth. And your handshake meant something.

JT: Right. Right. Absolutely.

PL: Joyce, I think growing up here...I always felt a privilege in being here. I still see my old classmates from grade school. They are just...When you speak to somebody, they just look at you in the eye, and they're forthright. I think it's wonderful that my nieces are back here. And they grew up with a business sense. If they had to take over the bank today, they could do that, I think, because they are mathematicians. They know a lot about the oil industry and banking. My brother and my sister-in-law always spoke about business, and they grew up that way.

MJH: It's Lisa and Sara, right?

PL: Yes, they're twins.

MJH: Are they both on the board of directors?

PL: They are both on the board of directors.

MJH: Are you on the board of directors?

PL: No, I left 10 years ago, after 40 years. I never was really active in the bank. At 16, I worked here one summer, filing paperwork, but I was never the mathematician...

MJH: So it was about 2000, when you went off the board...

PL: Yes. Yes.

JT: I started to work for Pat's father, J. Paul. And then he passed away in...'68...

PL: February 22, 1968, 42 years ago.

JT: And then his wife, Kathleen...

PL: Yes, mother was president for 12 years, because my brother...Mama didn't think that Mike would be ready at a very young age. So, she was not an active president, but in those days...Now, by federal law, you have to be physically active. And Mike finally became president, and he was president until the day he died.

MJH: And that's your brother.

PL: Yes.

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

PL: Kathleen. K-A-T-H-L-E-E-N. Mama was a beautiful woman.

JT: She really was.

PL: She was very charming—this was my mother.

Looked at photos

Well, because they were the presidents, you see, and of course Emil Loosen is not pictured there. I put that together for the 2002 party. My father and mother...were the best of friends and were very respectful toward each other.

Garbled

Michael, I don't know what else...

JT: Kathleen was president, and then when she passed away, Mike became president.

PL: Well, he became president before she passed away, because Mama had Alzheimer's.

PT: Oh, that's right. That's right, I forgot about that.

PL: She was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, and so Mama died 14 ½ years ago. But Mike was very capable, he loved ranching and cattle, and he was an oilman. He had his own company. My father was an oilman, he had a drilling company.

MJH: He did? What was that called?

PL: It's called Laura Corporation, after his mother, Laura. Laura came to the frontier...She was a Scottish woman, from Topeka, Kansas, and her father...She had a contract with the Rock Island Railroad in the 1890s. And they would go to new frontiers and set up restaurants, and there were very few women here in 1890. And my grandfather and his brother went to the restaurant at the train station, which was very important, and they saw my future grandmother. And my grandfather ended up marrying her and he settled with her in this new territory, Indian Territory. Of course, Okarche...Oklahoma didn't become a state until, what, 1907?

MJH: So Laura was your grandmother?

PL: Laura Loosen—her name was Gunn, G-u-n-n—she was Scottish. And my grandfather had only two children, J. Paul Loosen / Julius Paul Loosen, and Elizabeth. And my aunt went to private schools in Indiana. She graduated from St. Mary's of the Woods in the 1920s. Then she built a house here in Okarche across the street from my house in 1934. And my house is 1928. Then Mike and I were the only children...

MJH: And Mike is your brother?

PL: Yes. Mike and Pat.

PT: When was it that Mike passed away?

PL: Mike died in July 7, 1987...22 years... And then his only son was killed four years later on Easter weekend. We thought he would be groomed to take over. He was a mathematician, he was fifteen, and he was killed on the twins' birthday. Killed on their fourteenth birthday. It was the 2nd of April, 1991.

MJH: So the twins...

PL: He had two children. He had Fran, the oldest, who is 39—Franz Gardino, Francis—then the twins were born. Susan was pregnant with the twins when she adopted Hunter. She didn't know she was pregnant with twins, and so she had three children in diapers. And Hunter was the perfect child. Perfect, the most darling child, and things happen for a purpose. It was just devastating. He was supposed to go back to...the high school. His friends that were to take him suddenly said, "We'll go back at 1 o'clock," so he called Susan here at the bank. And she said, "Well, I think we'll all just meet at the gas station for a hamburger." The girls didn't get out of school. They were in the 8th grade. And Hunter remembered, he didn't have a card for the girls, and he always (they made their own cards) and he thought, "I'll go to Kingfisher and get a card." And he was killed on the road. He hit some gravel and was killed instantly.

MJH: Where is Fran?

PL: She is in Michigan, Ann Arbor.

MJH: I was there about four weeks ago.

Details about Fran's family...

So the twins are the family members who are active...

PL: Yes. Well, Fran is on the board, and they have conferences. I never married. I don't have children. So, I have just been involved in charitable programs my whole life, and projects...And I dig in the dirt...

MJH: Can you think of any milestones in the bank's history? Near brushes with extinction in the thirties, maybe, or bank robberies...

PL: We had one bank robbery. You want to talk about that?

JT: You go ahead, I wasn't here.

PL: Well, my father was in Dallas at the Republic Bank, for a meeting, and I was in grade school. A man walked in to ask for a loan. And ___ Morris, who was a vice-president, began to get out a form, and this man pulled a pistol on him, and said, "It's a hold-up." And it was at noon-time, and there were maybe one or two people at the bank. I don't know where the article is—maybe you can look under "bank robbers" in *The Daily Oklahoman*—anyway, they only got \$3,000 in cash. And the man had been a fighter pilot

in World War II, and he had his girlfriend waiting outside the door here in a car, and they disappeared, and they went down to the river bottom near El Reno, where his aircraft was, and took off, and he started showing off for his girlfriend, doing flip flops in the air, and he crashed in a field. And the money went flying everywhere, but the money came back. So the man was picked up by the FBI and her served years in prison. After he was out of prison, he learned to paint quite well, and he did a landscape for Mr. Morris, and he came to beg his mercy and pardon for his bad decision to come and rob him. So my father drives in about 4 o'clock from Dallas, and he was getting gas at the gas station, and they said, "Oh, Mr. Loosen, it's so sad that the bank was robbed, but nobody was hurt." And my dad just thought it was somebody pulling his leg, but sure enough...

But you've had an experience with people coming in to write a bad check, and the young boy, Mrs. Jones' grandson...

JT: Oh yes, he came in and...

PL: forged a check...

JT: Yes, and then he left. And then after that, he went and shot his grandmother. And I think there was another boy that was with him?

PL: I think we let the amount go. It was a small amount of money. And you went ahead...because he was not stable...person...

JT: I don't remember the amount...

PL: It was like \$200...very little...

I mean, these are bits and pieces, but you used good judgment, to let it go, because it was discovered he had an AK...I don't know what all in his car.

...Two years ago, when somebody tried to rip the ATM machine out, and did \$10,000 damage to the door...

JT: And that's one thing I remember...

MJH: What about, say, episodes in the thirties...

PL: People did not go under. This is very curious. I think it was just so...conservative. And people just did not live beyond their means. I had an allowance, and if I spent that allowance, if I asked my father for an ice cream cone, and he said, "Well, you have your allowance," and I said, "No, I spent it or I gave it to someone," and he said, "Well, then, you have to learn to live within your means." And that's the way he was. And I think that's the way people grew up in those days.

JT: Oh, I think so too.

PL: But today, people live way beyond their means. And it's a real problem now, with individual people here in Okarche, who are into gambling, are addicted to gambling. They go out to Concho, you know—that's 12 miles away. And my sister-in-law has said, many times, "You're going through your trust, you going through this and this," and they say, "Mind your own business." This is something, it's a whole trend... We're living in a very dangerous moment.

MJH: Do you think... Do you find this in other towns in this area? Do you think it's peculiar to Okarche?

PL: Okarche was just very conservative. You just didn't see people living on credit cards...

JT: Right...

PL: You didn't see extravagance. A lot of people in the eighties had so much income. Local farmers might have \$100,000 income a month from their oil, they'd pay off their loans, they'd pay off their... And maybe they'd be in the same pick-up in their coveralls. That's what I remember, in the eighties, when all this oil was booming around us. People who would not know—they didn't build a grandiose house... but they saw that their grandchildren went to universities. They wanted to better the opportunities for their grandchildren. That's the way local farmers were here. It's a wonderful story.

MJH: In the eighties, were there any big repercussions at this bank when Penn Square brought so many down?

PL: I don't remember that at all

JT: No...

MJH: Maybe your loan base was more agricultural...

PL: That's basically what it is—agriculture. Farm loans.

Digression to photo of bank robbery... noted that we were in Susan's office...

PL: Joyce, what was the bank like when you first came here? Did they have the grills in the teller window?

JT: No. It changed before me. I can remember coming when the entrance was on the... east side... and I can remember coming upstairs...

MJH: What was your position?

JT: When I started? I started as a bookkeeper. And I got promoted to assistant cashier, and I got promoted to cashier, and that's where I was when I retired.

MJH: And basically you had responsibility for day-to-day operations?

JT: Yes.

MJH: About how many employees were there?

JT: Nine.

PL: Basically nine. It basically never got bigger.

JT: And we never had a turnover.

MJH: How about correspondent banking? Did you work with Liberty, First National...?

JT: Yes, we worked with Liberty National Bank in the city, and then we had a correspondence with Republic National Bank, out of Dallas. Wasn't...

PL: My uncle was a vice-president of the bank in Dallas...Both of mother's sisters, two women, they were born in Okarche.

Digression to family... Worked way up in organizations...

In those days, people didn't have a lot of opportunity to inherit. And they just became...it guess it's the American Dream. Only in America. This is something, I think, is unique in America. We have the best country. We have the best people.

JT: Right!

PL: Real hard working. A little depraved at times...

JT: I think we had Liberty National Bank, _____ in El Reno, and then the Republic National Bank out of Dallas.

MJH: Thinking about some of these ethics in the old days, conservatism and so forth...This is a broad question, and you can answer any way you choose: What is your sense of where we are now?

PL: Well, it's depraved. Our society is depraved. There is no ethic. People are living way beyond their means. Credit cards...Their families have fallen apart. When I grew up, you had three meals a day with your family. You had communication. You had conversation. And today, marriages are just falling apart. If the family falls apart, the nation falls apart. I think, growing up in a little country town like this, you knew who your neighbors were, you all believed in things, they had the same moral values. They went to church. Their word was their word. And today, you don't know who people are. You don't know who you're marrying today. Sixty, seventy years ago, you married the girl you went to school with, or college with. And you met the parents. But today, the moral depravity is beyond

my imagination. And I'm glad I'm old. I'm glad I'm going to be seventy-two, because I don't mind. I feel blessed. And I take care of the girls' little kids, from time to time, pick them up at kindergarten, and it's so wonderful. I've had to go through baby boot camp. And I just see how wonderful it is that these young people decided to come home, and their husbands always loved Oklahoma—they love it!—although they have had so many privileges. And Lisa and Greg have a fabulous home in Philadelphia, it's 150 years old, 6 fireplaces, it's absolutely stunning. And I said, "Don't you miss that, the opportunity to walk down the street and have a wonderful breakfast or meet for a little supper at these marvelous restaurants?" No: they love being here. They feel safe. Okarche is a safe place.

MJH: I don't feel any attachment to [Oklahoma] City—it's 30 minutes from my house. Do you?

PL: Right.

Digression about Okarche...lack of grocery stores...shopping in OKC

Joyce, working with people right before you retired, did you see a difference in the way they kept their checking accounts, have their balances; were there a lot of people overdrawn?

JT: No, there weren't a lot that were overdrawn.

PL: What age group, would you say?

JT: I would say, probably the younger. I don't really know if that would be right or not...

PL: I think today, you see very ____ people. Tattoos...That is low self esteem. Definitely low self esteem. There is no reason...And I think as lot of people are calling for help today because they don't have a family identity. You have to have guidelines in your life. And I think with all of our employees over the years, I have just seen quality people employed here. I mean, we always had a Christmas party for our employees. And we had a lot of fun. Everybody is so appreciative. Everybody has something to say. We've done this for years.

MJH: That leads to another question. How about technology? There are obviously enormous benefits in terms of efficiency, but some would argue that something has been taken away. Comment on that.

JT: When I first started here, we had the big...We've had really good employees...Changes...

MJH: How would you characterize those changes, in terms of relationships with your customers? Has it changed appreciably? Do you see more people choosing to bank online rather than come in and visit?

JT: Like I said, I've been gone two years. I think they started banking online and everything. The elderly people—they don't, but younger generations, I'm sure that they do...

MJH: How about you, Pat?

PL: I'm not into technology. I couldn't begin to be into the Internet. I just grew up in this era when things were done for me, in many ways. In our family business, my sister-in-law always handled any big transactions, we were always in business together. And, as I told you Michael, I stayed with my mother for 12 years, caring for her, at home...

Digression to help w/ family while Susan, sister-in-law, worked... Family first... Susan died of cancer on April 2, 2010... You do what you have to... Family first... Praise for her nieces and their husbands..

My dad was a big Republican. He was active in the state of Oklahoma. He was a delegate for Eisenhower in 1956 in San Francisco with my brother. He was asked to run for state senator at one time, but he wasn't well...

Digression to the old days...

Wind down...

End

Interview with A. John Teague on separate audio tape (born 1924, retired from First Bank of Okarche in 1979) was not valuable enough in terms of the Oklahoma Bank and Commerce History Project to transcribe. He spoke mostly of personal life, military service, very little about bank.