

NOTICE

Materials in our digital Oral History collections are the products of research projects by several individuals. USF Libraries assume no responsibility for the views expressed by interviewers or interviewees. Some interviews include material that may be viewed as offensive or objectionable. Parents of minors are encouraged to supervise use of USF Libraries Oral Histories and Digital Collections. Additional oral histories may be available in Special Collections for use in the reading room. See individual collection descriptions for more information.

This oral history is provided for research and education within the bounds of U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.). Copyright over Oral Histories hosted by the USF Libraries rests with the interviewee unless transferred to the interviewer in the course of the project. Interviewee views and information may also be protected by privacy and publicity laws. All patrons making use of it and other library content are individually accountable for their responsible and legal use of copyrighted material.

Carlton-Anthony Tampa Oral History Project
Oral History Program
Florida Studies Center
University of South Florida, Tampa Library

Digital Object Identifier: U11-00082
Interviewee: Ellsworth Simmons (ES)
Interviewed by: Robert Kerstein (RK)
Interview location: Unknown
Interview date: January 3, 1989
Transcribed by: Kyle Bradford Burke
Transcription date: February 12, 2008
Audit Edit by: Catherine Deshaies Cottle
Audit Edit date: February 27, 2008
Final Edit by: Nicole Cox
Final Edit date: April 9, 2008

Robert Kerstein: Can I ask when were you County Commissioner [Hillsborough County], from when to when?

Ellsworth Simmons: Approximately 1950 to 1971.

RK: Fifty [1950] to seventy-one [1971]. Oh boy...¹ Can I ask about some events I...² (inaudible)

So you did have the county bureaucracy providing services.

ES: Oh yeah.

RK: Now did we elect you at-large or by district?

ES: At-large.

RK: All five, at-large.

ES: Yeah.

RK: So that lasted for several decades I guess.

ES: That lasted for a long while. Back before my time, [the position] was elected by the district. And then there was a move and it went countywide and all the time I was in office I was elected countywide. You had to reside in a district.

RK: I see. So it was the way the city council [Tampa] used to be basically?

¹ Ellipses note a machine noise that indicates an equipment lapse of taping.

² *ibid.*

ES: Well I don't know how the city council was basically. But you had to reside in the district but you ran countywide.

RK: Do you know why they changed it to that?

ES: Why they changed it to what?

RK: From district to at-large. From district to running countywide.

ES: Umm, no. It was about, probably at that time, that you would get better representation by being elected at-large. That was probably the reason that was—as I understood it. But I don't really know what the politics behind it might have been.

RK: [It was] before you came in. Can I ask about the ah—I spoke to Congressman [Sam] Gibbons and he told that he was very active in the annexation of Palma Ceia into the City of Tampa. And you were on the County Commission then, I believe. I was wondering how the county commissioners responded. Did you support the annexation or did you feel it would hurt the tax base of the county?

ES: We did not support or object to it. We tried to get information to the voters as to how they would be affected and what effect [the annexation] would have. Basically, we felt, or I felt that it was time for the inter-bay area to be a part of the city [of Tampa] because it was necessary to extend many services, or [at least] some services, and there was a need for additional services that the county was not well-equipped at that time to provide nor [was] the tax base there to support it.

I would say the tax base, the tax there to support that particular service so there was a basic support for it. But basically what we thought our responsibility was to provide the information.

RK: I see. And what about the Port Tampa annexation. Did you get involved in that at all?

ES: Port Tampa was a municipality in its own. An old one that had been there for many years. And it was proud of its independence but it was not wise nor was it economically advisable to continue as a separate and independent municipality, being surrounded by the City of Tampa as it was.

RK: Were you in office when they made Temple Terrace a city or was that before you?

ES: That was before my time. I remember Temple Terrace and it being, but that was before my time. I was on the [Hillsborough County] School Board before going in on the Board of County Commissioners.

RK: Oh, I see.

ES: I was on the School Board for quite a while.

RK: While you were on the county commission, obviously, the county grew tremendously in terms of population and business and so on. I was wondering—could you mention some of the major actors who were involved in the growth as far as those who were very pro-growth in supporting it.

ES: Well, I think growth—the [Greater Tampa] Chamber of Commerce and the [Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce] Committee of a Hundred was the focal point around which the various individuals rallied to move growth forward but there was a community leadership then consisting of Bill McGuiness, Howard Frankland, George Holsinger, Carl Brorein, George Howell and, uh, Jim Council—

RK: Who was he? Who was he with, Jim Council?

ES: Jim Council was publisher of the [*Tampa*] *Tribune*.

RK: Oh, I see.

ES: And those people were very supportive of the growth that they felt was in the best interest. And they—the chamber [of commerce] provided a great deal of leadership. It was up to government in many of the arenas to create a atmosphere and a climate for which growth was inviting to. And we tried to do that through the city and the county.

We had a very strong community leadership to work through. Chester Ferguson was a good, strong leader. I probably have omitted others. The entire community leadership, we uh—I always felt a complete freedom to go to them, and they to me, on behalf [of] the county to talk about an issue, [to] discuss an issue, to debate an issue, whether it was good for the people, whether it was in the community's best interest and [decide] what would be necessary to move the community forward.

That started way back [when] there was a lot of [problems with the port]. Way back there when we could not get an equal tariff. And we had to fight that out in Washington [D.C.] [We] were trying the get the tariff for shipping in and out of Tampa.

And then of course there was the first airport that was built on the far end of the property. I lived on an airplane, all between Fort Worth and Washington and Miami. Between the FFA³ offices and trying to get the airport property cleared up to where we could go ahead and build an airport. And also [we worked] to get the property where the University of South Florida is now located. A portion of that property was at the old Henderson Airport [Air Field].

And when I say “I”—I never accomplished anything. I tried to do my part and if [I was] in the position of being the motivator I did not mind trying to motivate or to provide the

³ Transcriber's note: It would appear that ES is referring to the Federal Aviation Administration [FAA] rather than the FFA.

leadership. But I never accomplished anything alone. Very few people do. It's through an effort of those people who have an interest and who are willing to give of themselves and put forth the effort that things are accomplished. They are seldom accomplished by one person alone. Or even several people. It has to be somewhat a community effort.

RK: Who helped you in Washington as far getting the tariff straightened out?

ES: J. Hardin Peterson was a man that worked very hard with us at that time. He was a congressman covering a large district and Spessard—I forget who was senator before him—but Spessard Holland was senator and they worked diligently with us. It was a long, long battle.

RK: And what about getting the USF [University of South Florida] land from the government, I guess?

ES: Well, it wasn't for the university that we got the lands. We got the lands for Hillsborough County from the FFA.⁴ We contributed to the property originally and it was to come back as they abandoned it. We only recently—I sit on a board that—We disposed of the remainder of the property out there for Hillsborough County. In fact it was completed last year I believe. That was the [Hillsborough County] Industrial Development Authority.

But [it included] all of that property on the south side of Fowler Avenue and part of it on the north side of Fowler Avenue. Then we acquired about nine hundred additional acres. When the battle for the location of the University of South Florida was really at its peak, the cabinet, I think, thought they would throw us out of the ballgame by raising the request for additional acres. We were able to work that out with a fellow by the name of Sanson.

RK: S-a-n-s-o-n.

ES: I believe that was the way it was spelled. [He] was a developer in the community and in the state and owned quite a bit of property out there and he worked out a proposition wherein we built Thirtieth [Street] to give him some highway frontage in exchange for some nine hundred and some-odd acres of property. And that completed the requirement that the state said they would have to have to move forward with the university.

Congressman Gibbons was then in the House [of Representatives] and he was responsible for sponsoring and passing the legislation creating the university. And that creation did not specify that he go [build] at a particular site. The site selection was left up the Board of Regents [Florida, State University System]—The Board of Control at that time they were called.

It was a real community battle, effort, a real struggle to locate it where it was. There was a group that wanted to locate it on what was called the Bower Tract. That's a large tract of

⁴ *ibid.*

land right on the border of Pinellas County and Hillsborough County and Upper Tampa Bay which has recently become a park site.

RK: And who wanted it there—Tampa business people or [people from] Pinellas?

ES: Some of the property owners in that area and Pinellas County offered that as a compromise.

RK: I see, I see. Did you see Pinellas generally as your primary competitor for growth? Or was it Orlando?

ES: At that particular time, it was basically Pinellas County, but not necessarily as a competitor of growth. Pinellas County during that era was attracting a lot of fine citizens but basically residents and basically retired citizens. Basically. They were not industrial. Hillsborough County was the payroll city, the industrial site at that time back there.

RK: Mr. Christopher—I spoke to Scott Christopher and he mentioned something about an industrial park in the county that the chamber played a major role in organizing, I think working with you. Do you recall something like that?

ES: Hillsborough County deeded, by trust, a large tract of the property south of Fowler Avenue, across the street from the university to the chamber of commerce as trustees for an industrial park. The reason for that being, it gave the community leadership, the chamber, the opportunity of offering sites, developing some property for an industrial development without the normal governmental restraints in handling it. Hillsborough County got all the proceeds from it.

RK: The tax revenue?

ES: Yes. Well not only the sale of the property. The revenue, after expenses were deducted, came back to the county. That's part of the property that I told you that we completed. I sat on the board after being out of office for many years. And that we completed the sale of the last part of that property last year.

RK: Oh, I see

ES: It brought about a few million dollars.

RK: Is that where the Busch Plant is?

ES: Yes. Busch Plant, at that time, Schlitz Brewing Company was the first one negotiating out there. In fact, it was very interesting. We were working the location of a brewery. We were working with the Board of Regents or the Board of Control trying to locate the university. And our competition in the university struggle said, "What are you gonna call it? Burp U?"

RK: (laughs)

ES: They said there'd be a pipeline running under Fowler Avenue and free beer flowing over there for the students. But we had to overcome all of that. And we did. But it was quite a struggle, negotiating with the Schlitz Brewing Company. And before we completed that job, we started negotiating with Anheuser-Busch, Mr. August Busch personally and his associates. And they were the second plant to locate there.

RK: What was attractive about our area for these major manufacturers?

ES: They were looking for an area that was close to transportation, all types: air, highway and water. And water was not as attractive to the brewery but we sold—one of the sales points that we used was [that] we were looking a great deal to South America [for] potential trade. The port and its facilities, that never did really develop that way so far as the brewery was concerned. [We had] a population growth that was conducive to and inviting [to] heavy industry. Tampa had had a brewery that [was] located there. The La Tropical Brewery—

RK: I didn't know that.

ES: —was located there. Oh yes. The building is still downtown. And [they] used to brew quite a lot of beer there.

RK: Right downtown?

ES: Yes. And therefore [there was] the whole atmosphere and it was geographically located to where distribution was not a problem. The airport was a real plus in it because we did not have the airport we have today, but we were very aggressive in [the building of] the airport.

I'll never forget when I picked up Eddie Rickenbacker for the first— (inaudible) he was a principal speaker for the first airport. And he told me—I knew him quite well—he said, "Ellsworth, I am happy to be here today to dedicate this airport. But it's obsolete on the day we opened [it]."

RK: (laughs) Where was that first [airport]?

ES: It was where, basically, where Hangar One is now located. Just a little bit to the east of that there. And of course I worked on the design, the construction, the financing of the airport we have today. I'm real proud of that. It took a lot of guts to do a lot of the things we did out there to get that airport moving. We created an Airport Authority.

RK: You said "we," was that the chamber and yourself?

ES: Well, the legislature passed the necessary legislation, but the chamber and the county had representation and was involved and we had to provide all the necessary financing

and that takes a lot. [For] the first airport we ever built there I went to Omaha, Nebraska with the Woodmen of the World. Which was a private organization to borrow the money to finance that. It was hard to get money.

RK: So a private organization borrowed the money for the first airport?

ES: No. A private organization loaned the money.

RK: Loaned the money to the county?

ES: Yeah. It was bonds [that were used] to finance it.

RK: I see.

ES: They bought the bonds. When I say loans I mean [that] they bought the bonds.

RK: Did you go to local banks? They weren't interested?

ES: Well, after we got it going and got it moving, yes. The local banks were always—(chuckling) I say, “always”—the local banks were always helpful.

RK: You said Northberg, was he a major person? Was that his name, with First National [Bank] I guess?

ES: That was Northcutt.

RK: Northcutt, I'm sorry.

ES: Victor Northcutt. [He was] a very conservative man, very fine. And a great gentleman. But conservative. Mr. Griffin was with the Exchange Bank. Mr. [George] Howell was with what was then the Marine Bank. It used to be an S. & L. Saving Bank to the Marine Bank, and later to The Flagship and then to—

RK: And were they generally conservative?

ES: Always helpful but yes, they were conservative. Mr. Howell I'd say was the most aggressive. Mr. Griffin thawed. Mr. Frankland came along later. At First National, he, I thought he was aggressive, bold, moved forward. But some of the earlier bankers were pretty conservative.

RK: In the fifties [1950s] we're talking about?

ES: Yes.

RK: I see. So you often had to go for capital outside of the area.

ES: Well you had to go for the big capital—the bonding capital—the big capital outside.

RK: Going back, you mentioned that the chamber, those who sponsored growth were interested in county policies that would encourage growth. Can you enumerate some of these policies?

ES: They were trying to stimulate payroll [because] payroll stimulates growth. To develop an industrial payroll basis—any time you can do that you are going to stimulate and cause growth. Growth is economy. But I can't cite any particular, but in the move such as the building of the Curtis Hixon Convention Hall, for years we had to just keep the University of Tampa propped up. It was struggling real hard. Dr. [Ellwood] Nance was there at one time and it was difficult years. And then there was Dr. uh—The name slips me.

RK: [David Marion] DeLo?

ES: Yeah. He was a great leader. He'd come a long way. Of course Dr. [John S.] Allen was the first president of the University of South Florida.

The railroad switching station used to be right downtown. The [station] was where now the NCNB Bank and the Curtis Hixon Convention Center and the Bill Poe Parking Garage [are now]. And all that used to be the switching station and a freight depot. I was in business right along Ashley Street when that was all happening there. And the Chamber of Commerce was very helpful in helping Mayor [Nick] Nuccio get those all removed out and then we come along and hired—The county government provided the leadership to build Ashley [Street], the double drive there, as a connector to the interstate system.

RK: You provided financing?

ES: Yes.

RK: I see. How did the chamber help Mayor Nuccio?

ES: They put together a group of people to negotiate with the railroads. Mayor Nuccio got crucified in it but the citizens worked very hard in negotiating with the railroad in trying to bring about a settlement of it that was financially feasible or accomplishable with the city. And [also] acceptable to Tom Wright who was then president of the railroad.

RK: Is it true that the county paid three hundred thousand dollars to help purchase that ACC property?

ES: I don't remember the amount. What we did was—in order to make it legal and proper, we bought right-away for the expansion of Ashley Street.

RK: I see.

ES: That was a proper expenditure for us. And you can call it any way you want to, but that's the way it wound up. And I think my memory is correct and I will stand corrected if I'm not. But we put money in it but it was on the basis that it was going to provide—because that was a little narrow street along there. And the interstate system was in the planning stages then. I don't recall if it was under construction or not, but it was during that era.

RK: And was the chamber very active and the state legislature as well?

ES: I would not say—the chamber was always—I'm supportive of the chamber number one. Number two is that I think the Chamber of Commerce is necessary. Number three is, let me say this with all due respect, chambers of commerce claim credit for all good things that happen. They may not have a damn thing to do with it but in my opinion the Chamber of Commerce has always been helpful, they could always be called [upon], and they provided good leadership and I always had good cooperation. I haven't any complaints. I always used to tell them they were great claimers. But they do a good job. They've done a good job. And they do today.

RK: How did you provide infrastructure for the beer plants and so on: the sewage and water? Was the very expensive?

ES: Oh yes.

RK: And it came from the taxpayers basically.

ES: Yes. [The brewing companies] paid for a great deal of that themselves. Water lines, the capacities [they] had to supply. But the actual cost of construction was borne to a large extent by the developers there. Not total, but to a degree. As an example, if the quantities was at a given point they would take all the construction costs from that given point to their delivery point.

RK: I see. So the way it would work [was that] a developer would buy property and build something for Budweiser for example?

ES: Budweiser bought the property direct. So did Schlitz.

RK: In other instances a developer would get involved?

ES: A developer never got involved except to contract to build the plant. I negotiated all of those; Scott Preston was very active in them. Dick Saunders was active in the University.

RK: USF?

ES: Yeah.

RK: I was curious about—you were with the county for Mayor Nuccio, Mayor Lane, Mayor Greco, at least those three right?

ES: Well I was there for thirty-six years.

RK: Oh you where there thirty-six years?

ES: Oh yeah. And before Hixon I was in office when um—

RK: Was it McKay?

ES: No it was—I'd have to think. [Junie Lee] Young was mayor while I was in office also. Another one [was] Lane. Young, Greco, Nuccio, Hixon.

RK: Those are the major ones at least. I was wondering did you have much interaction with them?

ES: Oh yes.

RK: Over what types of issues?

ES: Anything that—whether it be traffic, water, sewer, garbage disposal, whatever.

RK: As far as the whole emphasis on development and growth was there much tension between the city and the county? Since obviously most of them went to county.

ES: No.

RK: At the same time the county was growing, the public sector was putting money into downtown. As you said, the county helped I guess. With Curtis Hixon and the [convention center].

ES: No. The county put very little money into the actual development of the Curtis Hixon [convention center]. The county put the money into some things. But very little money [went] into the major city developments.

The airport—that was a countywide function. The port was a county function. The Health Department was county function. At one time, the city used to operate TGH [Tampa General] Hospital, Clara Frye Hospital, they were all city hospitals. The finances, the maintenance, the indebtedness, the deficits were all handled by just the city taxpayers. In later years it was recognized that those were properly countywide expenditures, liabilities and were so accepted.

RK: Do you have any feeling as to why capital investment in downtown was relatively

slow? You had the public investment which, I guess, was primarily [from the] city. But you didn't have too much from private sector until that (inaudible) which was kind of late. Do you have any idea why?

ES: Well I think the economics of it and the demand was probably not there. And the economics of it was hard to come by. All cities that I am acquainted with went through an area of—Let [say this] very bluntly—And I don't have any proof of this but I think it—At that time, and basically all along, most of your downtown commercial properties had fallen in to second generation families. Who had become accustomed to living off of, and enjoying the benefits of the income from that property. And as things begin to move after the war [along with] modernization, air-conditioning, refurbishing, [and] modeling. In my opinion, those families who had been enjoying living off of that [property] did not see the handwriting on the wall and would not put a lot of money back into modernization, modernizing, modernizing elevators, modernizing buildings and things like that. But I don't say that about Tampa, I say that about—

RK: Generally.

ES: Generally. And I think it applied [here] too. And as a result of that, the developer that had come along and wanted to build a modern retail outlet, office buildings or something or other. Acquiring property was very, very hard because [property owners would think], "I have been, all my life, enjoying benefits off of it. So why would I want to sell it. It has provided me good money." And there wasn't much, it was hard to buy, unless it was on the outlet.

By the same token, and during that period of time, and again speaking very frankly the inner-core people begin to move back just a little. People and the less fortunate begin to move in to the older abandoned homes and places of business. And the population in many of your core cities, population begins to degenerate rather than to blossom and grow. Again I think that is a general statement. I have said often times I knew some of the families that owned some of the properties and I don't condemn them completely but they have milked the cow until the carcass was gone.

RK: That would be [the] downtown properties primarily?

ES: Yes, yes. And when the shopping centers began to move, and parking became a problem and when people began to realize that trying to build a modernized downtown, you was kidding yourself. And then they just began to move out. And as they began to move out, then finances become very, very hard to get to modernize downtown.

RK: As people moved out—

ES: As the business moved back and the merchants—the first was Britton Plaza, which is now abandoned but that was one of the first ones. Another one was up on Florida Avenue. It's now not doing so well. But those were some of the first ones. And when people began to see how convenient and easy and nice it was to go to them. And then of course

Westshore [was built]. Financing retail businesses became very difficult, if not impossible, downtown.

RK: Who were the major landowners downtown?

ES: I don't—Let me not say those things because I might be inaccurate. The records speak for themselves, you can find them there. There's not as much today as there was.

RK: You're talking about the fifties [1950s]?

ES: Yes. The fifties [1950s]. Sixties [1960s]. Early sixties [1960s].

RK: They were members of the Tampa upper crust that owned a lot land. And it guess was an active retail sector at one point.

ES: Oh yes. I worked downtown at the Cadillac Agency, the Hackett Agency. Let's see—Hackett and Cadillac were the big ones. They were all right downtown. And all the jewelry shops were right downtown. Alvin Magnon used to be right on downtown. Wolf Brothers was still downtown. And Maas Brothers was the shopping center. And all of the— there was a lot of small, fine shops right downtown.

RK: Were you involved—

ES: Part of the University of Tampa used to be the place where the best-kept women in Tampa lived.

RK: Best-kept?

ES: Yeah. The Crescent Hotel which is part of the university now.

RK: Oh I didn't know that.

ES: It used to be the Crescent Apartments.

RK: Oh I see. So they would move there after they moved away from home. (laughs) I don't know anything about it. Were you involved in urban renewal, the Urban Renewal Agency?

ES: Not a—I guess no. I was involved, but not officially.

RK: I am very—I am having a very difficult time really figuring out who was involved in making decisions. I know you had the three urban renewal areas: downtown, [on] both sides of the river and a plan in Ybor City. I know you had an Urban Renewal Agency [City of Tampa], and I guess the mayor appointed the members to the agency. But, like for example, did the chamber get involved with urban renewal to the best of your knowledge?

ES: The chamber probably furnished some good—tried to develop and mold community thinking some. But not the decision-making part. [Instead] trying to mold support for their various projects. There was one—where the Performing Arts [Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center] is now located, it used to be the Canadian Dry Bottling Company. (inaudible)

RK: Were there warehouses also up there? And some residential I guess?

ES: Yes.

RK: Now do you know who designated this as an urban renewal site?

ES: Uhh, the city.

RK: And do you know how—I guess it was Mayor Nuccio initially and then Mayor Lane, I believe.

ES: (inaudible) I think it was recognized as trying to clean up the river. And I think that went along with cleaning up the Marshall operation that was right downtown. And Tampa Electric Company used to have a power plant where the—(inaudible)

RK: I was wondering about Ybor City. Do you know who decided that should be an urban renewal area? Do you know anybody who was active in it who might still be around?

ES: (pauses) I don't know whether is Nick is still around. I don't know. (inaudible) One of the people who can probably tell you is the fellow who had Ybor Square.

RK: Mullen?

ES: Mullen.

RK: He's been around for a long time.

ES: He's been around.

RK: Can you tell me a little bit about the background to the county? Congressman Gibbons told me that there wasn't any zoning in the county, or at least not much to speak of until he submitted a bill in 1958, I think. [Was] it the case that there was very little planning per se?

ES: Well, there was zoning. The county as a whole was not zoned. It was in the perimeter around Tampa where there was zoning on [the land]. And it was about fifty-eight [1958]—and if he said fifty-eight [1958] I would not question that—when the countywide zoning was initiated and put in on a countywide basis. That was about the

time that the Planning Commission [Hillsborough County City-County Planning Commission] was created and [it was] for the entire county. And uh—it has been in existence since then.

RK: And you sit on [the commission] now? You were just recently appointed?

ES: Yes.

RK: They seem to be going through a transition. I know they had a new director appointed about a year ago. It seems like a tough—it seems like a difficult agency because you have county representation, city representation—

ES: (inaudible) —and I'm no authority. Have you ever sat down and planned your life?

RK: (laughs) No, I've given up.

ES: That's the best explanation that I can give you.

RK: In the fifties [1950s] and the sixties [1960s] obviously there was some residential development going on in the county, along with industrial. Who were the major the developers? Were they local?....⁵

ES: [James H.] Shimberg was one the newer developers in town at that time. I don't remember exactly where he started but he developed Town 'N Country [a suburb in northwestern Hillsborough County]. There were some smaller ones that developed [the] inter-bay and that area out there. There used to be some custom builders that developed most of that, [but] not too much. A.J. Simms was a developer. Up on the northern part of town a fellow by the name of Wishart—there's a Wishart Boulevard south of Hillsborough Avenue—and on the west side of the river [he] developed quite a little bit in there. The developer in the Clair Mel City area, called his name—It slips me right now—

RK: And what did they need the county to be able to develop from the public sector?

ES: From the public sector, they didn't need a lot to own the land. And to get approval, plats, how they proposed to develop it and to get approval from the health authorities about the disposal of waste. But they had to go through the basic stages of approval that you do today. Although they were probably less stringent than they are today.

RK: Did the county extend the sewage system and so on?

ES: Yes. In many instances, this was one of the weaknesses at that time. Where there was no availability of lines for utilities they permitted what was called packaged plans to be built by the developer. And there was two methods of doing it. By the developer, and he owned it and ran the utilities—the water and sewer of [the development]. The county regulated it by setting the rates and the quality of the wastewater and that type of thing.

⁵ Ellipses note mechanical pause on tape.

RK: (telephone rings) Mr. [T. Terrell] Sessums told me that he sponsored a bill for the [Hillsborough County] Environmental Protection Commission, a county agency. And was there— I don't recall the date— but was there talk about that for a long period of time, to create some environmental agency?

ES: No.

RK: That was basically his initiative to a large degree?

ES: (sound of jet in background) Well let me say this—and I think I'm right but I will stand corrected—There was an interest by some that felt that all of the environmental issues were not being looked at as hard and as careful as they desired them to be looked at. And Mr. Sessums, Terrell felt that to get them looked at in that manner that was sensitive—(inaudible)

RK: As far as the different mayors that you interacted with, was one more pro-growth in development than the others, you know, really encouraging development in the city, I guess, or [the] county?

ES: Not that I recall. I never—you know—I just never had any problems with city government including Temple Terrace. Plant City included. Plant City is a very independent municipality. But I can't say that there was. I think that the economy probably had more to do with it than the individuals.

RK: And there's a chance that (inaudible)

Can you characterize the major differences now— since you're active on the planning commission and so on. And I'm sure you're very knowledgeable to the time and say twenty years ago in terms this area. [Is there] anything that strikes you as far as patterns of growth and development, orientation towards growth and development?

ES: Well, there is a great difference, not in the growth but in what people are looking for. And the thing that disturbed me then and disturbs me now is that for the citizen who has been accustomed to city living, whether it be here or elsewhere, and moves into an area and buys a hundred and twenty five foot lot and sees one open field to the east, one to the west, one to the south of him, [he'd say] "Oh my God, I'm in the country. I am next to heaven. Isn't this great!"

You ask him [about his property] and he talks about and he believes that he is living really in the country. And with all the open spaces and riding horses and seeing all the trees and see all the nature and you ask him how much property he owns, [he replies], "Oh I have a lot." Well "a lot," to me, indicates city living, urban living. If it isn't then, it will be. And he becomes and his family becomes upset when somebody starts to build something beside that home, in front of [it], in back of [it]. And that becomes very annoying to him.

Property rights used to have very, very deep meaning. I think property rights today still have great meaning. I don't think that we are all appreciative of the responsibilities of property rights of our fellow man, nor do I think [that] our fellow man is always conscious of his responsibilities, where property rights are concerned to his fellow man, and vice versa.

Nature has [been], and will continue to be—capacities will be loaded as population increases. I am a great believer, as I have seen so many of [nature's] cure so many of its own ills and wounds and so many things that [have been] destroyed, if given a chance, nature survives. I think we must understand it and give it some chances. I don't think that you can totally protect all of the environments unless you understand them and live among them as so.

And as development takes place today, [there] is one thing that bothers me a great deal—(to RK) and this may step on your toes. It may not; I hope not for it is not intended to. But with all of the history, with all [of] the knowledge that the universities and colleges can give us—and I said with all the history, well there is no substitute for history. But with all of the knowledge that you can cram into the minds of [the] youth today there is no substitute for history and experience [or] the fact that it is needed.

Whether it be flooding, whether it be disposing of wastewater, or whether it be conserving of many of our very, very fragile natural resources, I think that we need to understand some of it. I have been, when I was in public office— and I don't mean this with any reflection on anyone, but I will give you an example. This past weekend where [someone] was saying, “We got to take the water this way.” And I said, “It won't run that way. Nature provided for it to go there and that's where you have to follow nature and provide for it to go. It may not be where you want it to go but if you try to take it and turn it against nature, you are going to create problems.”

This weekend, [there was] a construction project that I'm involved in, in another county. It was a dispute with a contractor and we got out the plans and specifications and [they] said that the floors should be level. And the floor was level. The truth of it was that they wanted the water to all run from the floor to a certain given area. But it wasn't provided for! It said the floor should be level. One person said, “Well any fool knows that you can't pour water on a level floor.” And I said, “The hell you can't. If that floor is level I can pour water on it and it will stay there.” But not if you try and stack it up! If you pour a certain amount of water on a level floor—

So I think today that we are dealing with more people. We're dealing with a lot of people—let me rephrase that—We are dealing with some people that don't want any more people and doesn't want anyone around them and doesn't want to share the things they are enjoying now with someone [else]. And I think that's the big, big difference in development today than twenty years ago. Now besides the dollar and the number of them, certainly it makes a difference.

People were interested in health twenty years ago. They were interested in a way of life. But they were not as concerned of being robbed of that twenty years ago or of losing it as they are today.

RK: There's some people pushing to slow down on growth today more than before. And I guess you see that on planning commissions.

ES: But without regards to other peoples' rights. And that bothers me.

RK: Peoples' rights to develop that land and do whatever they want to do with it.

ES: Sure.

RK: I think those are the major [questions]. Can I ask one other question? It won't take a lot of your time.

ES: Sure.

RK: Were taxes, the level of taxation, a big factor in business location to the county during the fifties and sixties? Were businesses concerned about that particularly?

ES: Yes. But the amount of taxes was not a big issue. It was the environment of those with the authority to level taxes and the attitude of those with the authority of those to level taxes. It was said—I hope [it was] never true in this particular area—that if your tax bill went to an out-of-town address, you were in trouble. That has never happened here, to my knowledge. And today I don't think that it happens.

RK: So they wanted fair taxation?

ES: They wanted to know that they were going to be treated fairly and that they were not in a climate of government that would treat them unfairly or expect them to pick up any other deficits or problems of a government. If they came in and wanted to talk to the government, they wanted to see where you stood financially, where you stood with your bonded indebtedness, how were you meeting your obligation—that type of thing.

RK: So they wanted a kind of fiscally responsible government. Can I ask you another question concerning business location. Unions—did they have concern about unions: wanting them or not wanting them?

ES: I never did deal with that question but I think the honest answer would be, they wanted a climate of the right-to-work and, I think, they had some concerns about the union leadership. But they were basically interested in the right-to-work law.

RK: Which we had.

ES: Most of them would pay—or [at least] the more aggressive ones—they were paying

scales above that [which] was being paid by a lot of the union workers. They wanted that freedom of the right-to-work.

RK. I see. Mr. Christopher said—it's nothing confidential—I think was either Busch Schlitz that they prefer having their workers in the union. Now that wasn't typical but at least one of those did that here. Said they tended to be reliable.

ES: Well I think that I would agree with that statement. They did not run from unions. They wanted some freedom of movement and the right-to-work law gave them that. That was my impression. But I never did really deal with that from the inner circles of business and labor—I can tell them about our experiences and all that (inaudible) But I never did get into that. I had no problems with labor unions. Didn't always agree with them, but—

RK: So you would probably contact the chamber as far as asking those questions.

O-kee-do-kee. Well I really enjoyed it there. Have you seen this...⁶

ES: —the Exchange National Building.

RK: Exchange National.

ES: Well, it was the Exchange National its in TNB [acronym for unidentified building] now. Their old building.

RK: I see. I see.

ES: That was where the Exchange National Building was.

RK. Peter O. Knight owned it.

ES: Well Peter was the principal. The Griffins were also the active, Lykes brothers (inaudible). Tom Rankin is still around. (inaudible list of names) Carl Brorein.

RK: He was GTE [General Telephone and Electronics Company].

ES: (inaudible)

RK: I can't keep it straight.

ES: There was a little independent telephone company. And the University Club was there and (inaudible) Tampa City Center was built— a real hassle. (inaudible)

RK: Was Mr. Ferguson involved in the bank when he was alive?

⁶ Ellipses note noise on tape.

ES: Yes. (inaudible) His family got involved. He didn't run the bank but he ran it in absenteeism.

RK: Who was it the president of the bank?

ES: Howard Frankland and then they brought in a man— I forget his name now. He died from cancer. And then they brought in Toliver [who] was one of the sons of one of the old original founders of the bank. And he cheated out some way or another. (inaudible)

[Transcriber's Note: Noise on tape runs from 1:09:47 through 1:10:50.]

RK: You know what I don't understand, one of many things, these bankers and so on are interested in growth, and then you and many people have said that they were quite conservative in their lending. Doesn't that seem contradictory?

ES: No. I still sit on a bank board. You have got to be conservative.

RK Some people say that they were more conservative in the fifties and sixties than in other [areas].

ES: Well I'll tell you a story if you can shut that thing off.

pause in recording

RK: I am just recording over what was here because that was confidential. And I don't know what else to say to cover it over except that my stomach hurts. (RK talks over remaining recording)

end of interview