

INTERVIEW WITH  
Mr. Charles Stapf

by

Maclyn P. Burg  
Oral Historian

and

Thomas Soapes  
Oral Historian

on

February 4, 1976

for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library



OH-#375 67 pages  
Stapf, Charles  
OPEN

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION  
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE  
DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interview of  
Charles J. Stapf.

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44,  
United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions  
hereinafter set forth, I, Charles J. Stapf, of Abilene,  
Kansas, do hereby give, donate and convey to the United  
States of America all my rights, title, and interest in the  
tape recording and transcript of a personal interview  
conducted on February 4, 1976 at Abilene, Kansas and  
prepared for deposit in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.  
This assignment is subject to the following terms and  
conditions:

(1) The transcript shall be available for use by  
researchers as soon as it has been deposited in the  
Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

(2) The tape recording shall not be available for use  
by researchers during the donor's lifetime. After the donor's  
death, access to the tape recording shall be for background  
use only, and researchers may not cite, paraphrase, or quote  
therefrom.

(3) During the donor's lifetime the donor retains all  
copyright in the material given to the United States by the  
terms of this instrument. Thereafter the copyright in both  
the transcript and tape recording shall pass to the United  
States Government. During the donor's lifetime, researchers  
may publish brief "fair use" quotations from the transcript  
(but not the tape recording) without the donor's express  
consent in each case.

(4) Copies of the open portions of the interview  
transcript, but not the tape recording, may be provided by  
the library to researchers upon request.



(5) Copies of the interview transcript, but not the tape recording, may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

*Tracy*  
Donor

*Sept. 15, 1978*  
Date

**ACTING**

*James E. O'Neil*  
Archivist of the United States

*November 2, 1978*  
Date



This interview is being recorded with Mr. Charles Stapf in Mr. Stapf's home in Abilene, Kansas on February the 4th, 1976. Present for the interview are Mr. Stapf, Dr. Thomas Soapes, and Dr. Maclyn Burg of the Eisenhower Library Staff.

DR. BURG: Let me begin by asking you when and where you were born.

MR. STAPF: I was born in Bellwood, Nebraska, Butler County, 1905, December 12.

DR. BURG: Now were you educated then in the state of Nebraska?

MR. STAPF: I only finished high school. That's as much education as I have.

DR. BURG: And then you went into business?

MR. STAPF: Went into banking in my hometown, Humphrey, Nebraska.

DR. BURG: What drew you to that, may I ask? Did it just sort of have an appeal to you?

MR. STAPF: Well the only place of employment there was a nursery which employed all the young men in the area who wanted to work. And one evening when I came home from the nursery, mother told me there was a call or message from John Hugg who was president of the First National Bank, he wanted to see me



that evening. Offered me a job in the bank; I went to work there the next morning.

BURG: This would have been about 1923 or '24, I suppose.

STAPF: July 12, 1921. It was between my junior and senior year of high school, so that I went back during my senior year only for one period to get the necessary credits for graduation and college entry if I chose to go, which I was not able to do.

BURG: So you stayed with banking then for the rest of your professional career.



STAPF: That's correct.

BURG: Now how long did you stay in Nebraska?

STAPF: Until 1930. I came to Abilene in July of 1930 and went to work for the Commercial State Bank here at that time.

BURG: Does it now have another name?

STAPF: It changed names, changed ownership some years back and then the name was changed to First Western. Then, the bank got into trouble; the capital was impaired, had to raise addi-

tional money or liquidate. They found a buyer, and I believe it was predicated on approval by the state banking board that they could move the bank to Junction City. So they bought the bank, moved it to Junction City. It's now called First State Bank at Junction City. But I worked for that bank for ten years, to the day in fact. Then I went to the Abilene National Bank the 1st of August of 1940. And was there until I retired July 1, of '75.

BURG: So you spent about ten years over in Junction City.



STAPF: No. That bank was here in Abilene.

BURG: Oh, I'm sorry. I thought that it had been--

STAPF: It moved some years after I went to work at the Abilene National. It was here for quite a few years after that, in fact.

BURG: Somehow I'd gotten the thought that it had had to move at about the time that it got into financial difficulty.

STAPF: Well it got into financial difficulty, oh, it must have been probably ten years after I left the bank, could have been a little longer than that. Couldn't say.

BURG: Now had you come down here because it was a managerial position or promotion kind of position?

STAPF: No sir. It was in the depth of the depression and anything that looked like a job was welcome. I was elected assistant cashier at the next annual meeting after I went to work.

BURG: Had your bank up in Nebraska, the one that you were associated with, had it--

STAPF: It had failed. It was closed.

BURG: One of those that failed during the depression.

STAPF: Right. It was an examiner's error in judgment, never should have been closed because any bank that could pay out eighty-five or eighty-seven percent under the worst years of agriculture, 1930-1932, never should have been closed.

BURG: Yes, good Lord. That's amazing. So that left you foot-loose and fancy-free and you came down here.

STAPF: Right.



BURG: Had somebody contacted you from here, Mr. Stapf?

STAPF: I went through the Charles Walters Company in Omaha. They specialized in bank sales and bank placement, positions.

BURG: Oh, I see. And this was one of the places that they came up with.

STAPF: That's right. They had this bank looking for a young man.

BURG: Who headed the bank when you got here, Mr. Stapf?

STAPF: Andy Blair.

BURG: I don't know the name.

STAPF: He was cashier and managing officer. Fellow by the name of "Bill" [William F.] Karl was president. He lived in Enterprise, retired farmer.

BURG: So you set up life here. Were you married at the time you got here?

STAPF: No, sir. No, we were married in '32.





BURG: Launched out in life in one of the better years.

STAPF: Right.

BURG: Couldn't have been better.

STAPF: You are so right!

BURG: Oh, what a vintage year.

STAPF: We were old enough to have known better--to take that step at that time--but conditions might have been worse.

BURG: Yes, and who knew how long it was going to be before they squared away a little bit.

STAPF: Yes.

BURG: Okay, now let me ask you this Mr. Stapf. Did you at that point of your professional career ever take any part in political affairs? Did you serve in any party organization, Republican or Democratic party organization?

STAPF: No, I did not. I was never active.

BURG: Stayed clear of that.



STAPF: That's correct.

BURG: Not let me ask you this--at what point did you go on to the Eisenhower Foundation?

STAPF: I can't recall. I think about the middle '50s, approximately twenty years ago.

BURG: One of the things we're having problems with is that the lists we have don't indicate when you gentlemen went on, which make it a little difficult trying to plot out what can we ask this one or that one?



STAPF: And I don't have anything to tie it to except that I know I was a trustee of the foundation when Eisenhower extended the invitation to all the trustees to come back to Washington to a luncheon.

SOAPES: That was 1960.

STAPF: 1960, right. I could tie that to the year our first two grandsons were born.

BURG: We have some other things here, some events, and I think we can probably place it in time. I'm sure that we have, salted

away someplace, the records that indicate probably precisely when you came on.

STAPF: I'm sure the foundation records would indicate.

BURG: Do you happen to remember who contacted you?

STAPF: It was either John Lehman or Carl Scupin.

BURG: Okay. That's helps, too, in pinning it down. Now I'm going to ask you before we move into the foundation things-- you knew Mr. [Charles] Harger I would assume.

STAPF: Very well.

BURG: Can we ask you--because we're trying to get ideas of what people were like, since we never knew most of them-- Mr. Scupin I did know, for example, but Mr. Harger, no. What kind of a man was he, Mr. Stapf, in terms of his abilities, his personality?

STAPF: He was one of the finest men I think I've ever known and a very capable individual and had quite a little weight politically.



BURG: Here within the state.

STAPF: Within the state and beyond. He was on our board of directors for just short of fifty years.

BURG: Of the bank.

STAPF: Right. Had he lived until the following annual meeting it would have been fifty years.

BURG: He was a fairly elderly man when he died, was he not?

STAPF: I believe ninety-four years and just as sharp right up until the last, remarkable.

BURG: That was something I wanted to know because I know that sometimes they are as bright and alert at ninety-four as they were when they were forty.

STAPF: It's too bad this wasn't done when he was alive. Believe me, he could have added considerably to the history.

SOAPES: You said that he had a number of political contacts. Can you give us some idea of who?



STAPF: I can't specifically give you any, no. Except that I know he was contacted frequently. When he made telephone calls of that nature, he always come to the bank and used the telephone in our directors' room so he could be private and away from his desk so that he would be able to say what he had to say without everybody in the front office at the paper knowing what went on.

BURG: Well very interesting. I'll be darned. Now, let me ask you about Sam Heller. Was he, to, a friend of yours, someone that you can comment on?



STAPF: Well I knew Sam fairly well. He was head of the United Trust company for many years and one of the finest tax men in the area at that time.

BURG: Was that his special field of interest?

STAPF: Yes, because he had at one time been with IRS [Internal Revenue Service]. He was very conversant with tax matters and procedures.

BURG: Were the two men--Harger and Heller--comparable types in any way or were there distinct differences in their--

STAPF: Not really as individuals, no. I could see none of their characteristics being the same.

BURG: You've spoken of Harger's being a man, one of the finest men that you've known--this extends over seventy-some years of experience. Would you put Heller anywhere near that same category, Mr. Stapf?

STAPF: No, not really. Sam was a very capable individual but an entirely different make-up.

BURG: Was he more reserved than Mr. Harger perhaps? A little harder to get to know?

STAPF: Yes, I would say, yes.

BURG: It's always interesting and it's always very useful I think when someone with your long experience is willing to make a statement like that about Mr. Harger, to rank him as highly as you did. It means something.

STAPF: I had worked with Mr. Harger for so many years in the bank. Worked with him, with his financial affairs, served on the board with him for many years and got to know him pretty well.



BURG: So your respect is based on a number of contacts with him in various ways.

STAPF: Right.

BURG: Including the business relationship.

STAPF: He was one of the original group to begin the work on the Eisenhower promotion, and Sam Heller, also, was one of that group. Two of the men in our bank, "Wes" [G.W.] Rees, "Ren" [Reynold G.] Rogers, Carl Scupin, John Lehmann, Paul Royer--

BURG: Now one of the names that of course we encounter in some of the earlier things that were done would be Emmett Graham, and I presume that you had acquaintanceship with him, too.

STAPF: Right. Yes, indeed. Over many years.

BURG: Now are we correct in our understanding that towards the end Mr. Graham had problems, drinking problems, that simply grew.

STAPF: They were serious problems; he was a sick man very definitely.

BURG: Do you happen to know, sir, was there a discernible



reason for it that you had observed?

STAPF: I couldn't pinpoint anything and say it would be the reason or one of the contributing reasons.

BURG: There had not been anything along the lines of tragic loss in his immediate family or personal ill health or any of the things that we might commonly look for.

STAPF: No. And he had a successful business operation. He was in the automobile financing business. Had Home Securities Company.

BURG: In the automobile financing, if I can move from Graham just for a second, was Mabel Mellor associated with him?

STAPF: Mabel was Emmett's secretary for many years.

BURG: You know I never connected a name until you spoke of what Mr. Graham was doing, Mr. Stapf. We knew about Miss Mellor and we want to talk with her, and I knew she was connected with an auto finance, and that's how it worked, it paired up. Now had Graham moved out of the foundation's affairs at the time you came in?





STAPF: No, no, he was active at that time and for a number of years following.

BURG: Did his effectiveness lessen in those--

STAPF: Gradually, through those years, right.

BURG: Well, that's too bad.

STAPF: It was sad to see it happen.

BURG: Now I gather, from what we have heard various places, that he was quite a dynamic man, quite a go-getter--

STAPF: Right.

BURG: --of a man. And this is your impression of him, too.

STAPF: That's absolutely right.

BURG: Likable?

STAPF: Very likable. Fine personality.

BURG: And I get the impression, again I'm thinking about things that are now twenty-some years or more in the past, but I get the impression that people did know about his problem but that



he continued to hold a place in the community. He had the regard of quite a number of people here and was still operating effectively enough to keep his business going.

STAPF: That's correct. It wasn't until he was almost down in the gutter actually before his effectiveness was gone and of course was removed from office.

BURG: And did he pass away not too long after that?



STAPF: Oh, it was a number of years following. Emmet's been dead now, oh, about two years I believe. Maybe a little longer than that. Time has a faculty of going so fast I can't keep up.

BURG: As recently as that. As recently as two years.

STAPF: That's approximate.

SOAPES: Were there particular activities of the foundation that he tended to specialize in or particular projects which we would associate him with, or was he just involved in everything?

STAPF: He was involved in everything. He was secretary of the foundation for many years.

BURG: Let us see if, and it'll be kind of interesting, to try to pick up this way exactly where you came in, as you think back to the things that you were active in. We've put together sort of a rough chronological outline for our own purposes so that we could steer our questioning. Do you happen to remember, if we started with 1950, when J. Earl Schaeffer from Wichita and Colonel A.E. Howse were involved in some of the attempts to finance things?

STAPF: I was not connected with it at that time.



BURG: Okay, so you came in--

STAPF: Because of the fact that the meetings were all being held in our directors' room I was familiar with everything that was being done and everything that was being talked about. Because we had two men in the bank as I say, Wes Rees and Ren Rogers, who sat in on all the meetings and we discussed the things after the meetings, or the following day. I recall the first attempt at financing was some group in New York said there was going to be no problems; they could raise all the money we'd ever need, but came up empty-handed. And that's

when they turned to Howse in Wichita.

BURG: Because one of the things that had preceded that--well there had been several attempts. There had been that veterans subscription which you may remember, about 1946, you know ten dollars--

STAPF: Ten dollars per name.

BURG: Right. And we also noted that the general had stopped any high-pressure fund raising in 1946. Then in '47 they'd involved the VFW and the American Legion in some kind of fund raising approach.

STAPF: That approach was not any more successful than anything else they had tried up to that point.

BURG: Apparently not. It seems to have completely fallen apart.

SOAPES: Can you assess any reasons as to why some of the fund raising was having problems during this period?

STAPF: Well I'm inclined to think that people outside of Abilene thought it was our local problem: we should be able to do it without any help from them. But it was too big for Abilene,



certainly, what was in mind, at least, what was contemplated.

BURG: So, in effect, if you wanted to get any support from other communities within the state, then foundation members would pretty well have to take their own time and go travel to Concordia or to Emporia or wherever and try to sell that community on this, and that's not a very effective way to do it. It may be that because of that in '48-'49 they tried to work it through the Jaycees.

STAPF: Right.

BURG: That didn't get off the ground either--

STAPF: That didn't get off the ground either.

BURG: --or pull in anything evidently or very little.

STAPF: No.

SOAPES: Was this a time here in Kansas when money was a little scare?

STAPF: Money was tight, indeed. The farmers were not prosperous and, as a result, business wasn't booming.



BURG: part of that post-World War II recession that caught people up and was dangling on. Well then this Schaeffer and Howse thing seems to have resulted in a certain amount of discord in the foundation. Do you remember any of the talk about that? This was before you were in, but--

STAPF: The only thing that comes to mind is having heard, I'm quite sure, that they raised about enough money to pay their own fees and expenses, and actually the foundation received nothing or practically nothing from that source.



BURG: About all that could be said was that they didn't leave you indebted to them.

STAPF: Right.

BURG: Well we have not yet heard--

STAPF: At least not to my knowledge.

BURG: As far as you know, yes. Well in '51 we have noted that there was a change in thinking as far as fund raising was concerned and for about the first time we note the names of Governor [Ed] Arn and Senator [Harry] Darby and Joyce Hall appearing.

STAPF: Right.

BURG: Were you on the foundation at that stage?

STAPF: No.

BURG: Okay, following that. You remember any conversations with your bank's two members about this Arn, Darby, and Hall arrangement?

STAPF: Well, they had a kick-off luncheon. They had a special train that they brought in some of the biggest names in industry at that time for a luncheon here in Abilene to kick off the drive that had Ben Fairless of U.S. Steel and others of the same stature. Governor Arn was here, Senator Darby, Joyce Hall. And it was through their efforts that they were able to contact either by phone or letter the major companies over the country and able to get sizeable contributions. And that's when it took off. I give Senator Darby as much credit for the success as any other one individual.

BURG: Now we note that Fairless seems to have begun heading the fund raising in 1955. Now was that Fairless participation just before you came in?



STAPF: Shortly before.

BURG: All right, that puts us in closer to where you were.

SOAPES: I have a note here also that says that Darby is the one that was responsible for bringing Fairless in.

STAPF: That's correct. They were personal friends--had-been, I think, for many years.

BURG: Before we get to that, let's ask this because you may know something about it. From fairly early on, as early as 1946, we occasionally encounter material dealing with a Citizenship Program. We see later on Sam Heller begins an Americanism Program. Then we see in that same year, 1953, Darby and Hall, Citizenship Program, and perhaps without the knowledge of the foundation. Do you recollect any of the discussions over those programs that really don't seem to have gotten anywhere, Mr. Stapf?

STAPF: No, I don't remember any of the discussions.

BURG: Well we're having trouble trying to pin down--well, I think we have occasionally some rough outlines of what they





might have had in mind but no real knowledge of why did it never go anywhere.

STAPF: I think possibly the thinking was that by tying it in with an educational or an Americanism program that they might be able to successfully sell the fund raising to the general public. I'm not certain, but I think that was probably the thinking.

BURG: That would make a certain amount of sense.

STAPF: And Eisenhower did not want it to be done just for his own glorification. And that's why the name of the foundation reads as it does. It's quite a lengthy name if you have all of it. I'm sure you do.

BURG: Hadn't thought about that tie-up either. We knew that he was very anxious to spread that out right from the very start with the memorial to veterans and every bit of it. When the Fairless group begins to work on the fund raising, one could get the impression that the foundation itself sort of is eclipsed by out-of-Abilene talent, if we want to call it that. Already, with Senator Darby and with Joyce Hall and with Roy Roberts,



we are moving into the Kansas City area and it would appear that a lot of the work is being done, a lot of the direction is coming from a Kansas City group. Now with Fairless we're moving still further afield and into higher power rankings. Does that square with what you remember, too?

STAPF: That's right, yes.

BURG: Just sort of passed out of the hands of the local people.

STAPF: Right. The local people still headed the organization and were responsible for the mechanics of the operation.

BURG: Did it create any friction, Mr. Stapf?

STAPF: Not to my knowledge.

BURG: Local people did not seem to, I mean those who are on the foundation, did not seem to take offense in any way or no mumbling of big city slickers stepping in here--

STAPF: I heard none.

SOAPES: By contrast, were they reasonably happy that the foundation was not taking on--



STAPF: Yes, right. Because it appeared at that time that these men had the ability to make it a successful thing.

BURG: And the foundation in general had had a number of brushes of people that hadn't been able--

STAPF: Fiascos up to that point.



SOAPES: I have a note here about beginning to raise money for rebuilding the home in 1955. [Edward] Birmingham, Clarence Dillon are two names. Do you recall the attempts to refurbish the home?

STAPF: No, I did not know who was responsible for it, but I believe there was a foundation in New York that provided all of the money necessary to permanize the home, the understructure of concrete and steel so it would be permanent.

BURG: Right. Had to jack it up and insert that material.

STAPF: Right. I think they provided fifty thousand dollars, as I recall, for that purpose. And most of it, I believe, was spent on the strengthening and permanizing the home. I think it

was the Allen Foundation, I'm not certain.

BURG: I've seen the name of that group and I'm pretty sure we've got that in the record.

STAPF: I'm sure it would be.

BURG: We'll just mention that in '55 the Kansas state legislature created the Presidential Library Commission. Let me just ask for the record, did you play any part yourself in setting that up or in the discussion about it?

STAPF: No.



BURG: In '56 the plan was to redecorate the home, do some work in it. It had been ten years since Mrs. Eisenhower had died and the home had been opened to tourists, and so evidently there were problems, the wear of countless feet and I suppose hands on the wallpaper and this kind of thing. Do you recollect any problems, particularly with any of the surviving brothers over that redecoration of the home?

STAPF: No, I do not. But I know there were problems at the time the property was deeded to the foundation. There was at least one of the brothers who was opposed to deeding the

property to the foundation for this purpose.

BURG: Would that be the situation in '62 with Edgar Eisenhower?

STAPF: I thought it was Arthur. He was with Commerce Trust in Kansas City. It was my understanding that it was Arthur who was opposed to the deeding of the property.

BURG: Would it have been in the '60s, the early 1960s?

SOAPES: I think Arthur was dead by then.



STAPF: I think it was in the '50s.

SOAPES: Yes, he died while Eisenhower was still in the White House.

STAPF: At least I'm quite sure it was deeded sometime in the 50s.

BURG: Yes, because we had no real reference to that in the earlier period, which is not to say that you are not correct. It could very well have been. Do you remember--

STAPF: The register of deeds office would definitely indicate when the deed was recorded and dated.

BURG: Do you happen to remember what line the objection took? Let's say that it was Arthur's--what did he have in mind? Do you know?

STAPF: I couldn't say, I do not know. I understand that Ike finally persuaded him on it. They agreed to sign. It was, I'm quite sure, Ike's persuasian that--



BURG: It's interesting to contemplate what kind of alternative course of action would he have been holding out for.

STAPF: I don't know whether he--

[Interruption]

BURG: We have not a great deal of data for the foundation itself in the period 1957 to 1960. But at that time the Presidential Library Commission was functioning, the authority of the commission was expanded, the Eisenhower Library Fund Drive Committee formed, and about '59 you had ground breaking for the library. And in '60 the White House shipments begin to come in to the library. During that period of time, and this would be very shortly after you went on the foundation, can you recall

for us some of the things that may have been major concerns to the foundation. Anything now stick out in your mind as on the agenda at your meetings?

STAPF: Well one of the things was providing a place to keep all of the things that were coming out to be sure they were properly taken care of and then to see that they were properly catalogued and cross indexed.

BURG: Now you had Mr. [Earl] Endacott over there at the museum. He had been there, I guess, literally from the time the museum--

STAPF: No, he was preceded by Herb Rohrer.



BURG: Now your recollection is that Rohrer was there first.

STAPF: Rohrer was there ahead of, yes, he was there prior to Endacott.

BURG: That is most interesting.

STAPF: So Herb Rohrer should be able to add--

BURG: It had been told the other way to us.

STAPF: Oh, is that right. No, I'm sure that Herb was there

before Endacott.

BURG: Well that is very interesting. Now we understand that Mr. Rohrer lives now in the Sunflower Hotel in retirement. Yes, we put his name on our list and we thought we would talk to him. But I'm glad to have this other point of view expressed because we had understood it to be just exactly the opposite; first Endacott, then Rohrer. Now were you at all concerned, yourself, during this period of time with any of the site acquisition work that had to be done.



STAPF: Yes. I was on the board at that time when some of the adjoining properties were purchased.

BURG: And maybe you, out of your own recollection and also from your experience with regard to site acquisition, we have there on southeast Fourth the home itself and there was with it, to the east of it, a certain amount of land--two or three lots I would suppose, the equivalent of two or three city lots.

STAPF: Yes--a little more than that, I think. The original Eisenhower plot was three acres, approximately that. The only part of that ground where the home and the museum is located that was not a part of the Eisenhower property, as I recall, was



the house that was directly north of the Eisenhower home.

BURG: A fairly small house.

STAPF: Right.

BURG: And would be on the northwest corner of that block--

STAPF: Correct.

BURG: --between Fourth and the Santa Fe tracks.



STAPF: Right. It was next to the Santa Fe tracks.

BURG: Because I was going to ask you if anywhere else in that stretch of ground between the Eisenhower house, 4th and the tracks, down towards the pylons, if there were any other homes there.

STAPF: I can't remember any homes on that side of the street. The Eisenhower's and this, well as I recall it, fellow by the name of Gish lived there. I used to go down frequently to pick him up to play golf.

BURG: The house behind the Eisenhower's?

STAPF: North of the Eisenhower's.

BURG: North of the Eisenhower's.

STAPF: And the other houses were all on the south side of 4th Street.

SOAPES: Where the library building--

STAPF: Where the library and the chapel, Place of Meditation, are located.

BURG: Now do you remember, Mr. Stapf, approximately how many houses there were on that south side?

STAPF: Must have been at least six or eight.

BURG: One reason that we ask is that every once in a while someone shows up and says, "Well my grandfather or my great-grandmother used to live across the street from them." After a while you wonder how many houses--you get the impression there were high-rise apartments there, the number of people who said they lived across the street.

SOAPES: So this block was reasonably well filled with houses.



STAPF: Yes, right.

BURG: Yes, that would be the two blocks. The first one off Buckeye and then the one where the library is now standing.

STAPF: Right.

BURG: So we've got six or eight houses there in in your recollection.

STAPF: Well the housing didn't begin right at Buckeye because on the corner, where the Place of Meditation is now, there was a filling station, and there was quite a sizeable piece of ground there that was with the filling station.

BURG: Sure, I see.

STAPF: I'd say at least three lots.

BURG: Now were you then one of those who worked on acquiring that property? When I say that property, let's think in terms of the Gish place to the north and the home and then this group of six to eight city lots or lots and a half of the south side of 4th.



STAPF: Not directly involved with acquisition, no.

BURG: Was it done during--

STAPF: It was board action, approval. I was on the board when we set the price we would pay and--

BURG: Now we had planned to speak to Mr. [C.L.] Brainard. We want to contact him because we understand that one of the things that he was very active in was the actual acquisition.

STAPF: Correct.



BURG: So in your estimation he would be a man who can probably tell us about that.

STAPF: I think he could give you all of the details.

BURG: Pardon me, Tom, I may have cut you off in a question.

SOAPES: I was going to mention him. Could you please give us some sketch of this man, of Brainard, of how you reacted to him.

STAPF: He's a very fine, very capable individual. He was with Duckwall Stores Company for many, many years. His wife was a

Duckwall. Chuck was an architect, and he was very active and very helpful in those early years and was on the state commission that was appointed. He was, I think, secretary of that commission.

SOAPES: Were there other people that worked with him very closely on that or was it kind of a one man operation.

STAPF: Well, I can't remember the other man--I think there were five on that commission as I recall. I think John Lehman was one. Not certain about Bob Gemmill. He was on the executive committee, I know. Scupin, I believe.



BURG: Brick Garrison, do you suppose?

STAPF: I don't remember that Brick was one. Can't remember Brick ever having been very active in--

BURG: It seemed, as I think about it though, was that Brick who was particularly interested in photography.

STAPF: Well, he is.

SOAPES: Yes, I think that's right.

BURG: And it may have been a lot of what he did, it seems to me, was to take a lot of the necessary photographs that had to be taken. That may be why I connect him with this.

STAPF: Well that's possible, because that has been his hobby.

BURG: Now during that period of time--let's ask this question just on the chance that you ran into it--that's quite a bit of land acquisition that's going on and it's for the purpose of putting in what clearly is going to be a fairly important enterprise. Did the foundation find itself faced with inflated prices as a result of what they were attempting to do?



STAPF: To an extent, but not beyond reason, in the early acquisition where the housing was acquired in the first two blocks. The filling station site probably was one of the most expensive sites. And that would be understandable. Then the property acquired subsequent to that, beyond the pylons, which is owned by the foundation now, was formerly the Woodson property, that was fairly expensive.

BURG: This is the property actually east of the pylons.

STAPF: East of the pylons, right.

BURG: The north boundary, I guess, is up there on the Santa Fe--

STAPF: It adjoins the Santa Fe--

BURG: --right of way.

STAPF: --right of way.

BURG: And extends down to the south, I suppose, what--to our present south borders of the center, or do you remember?

SOAPES: The Rock Island tracks.

BURG: Yes, the Rock Island tracks.

STAPF: Yes, it does, right.

SOAPES: That property to the east of where the library is now was purchased at the same time?

STAPF: No, no. That was quite some time later. That was in the '60s, well into the '60s as I remember. And that was done as a protective measure actually so that we wouldn't have someone acquire that property over there and find a lot of honky-tonks



right next to the Eisenhower Center.

SOAPES: I understand from some other sources that very early in the days of the library, like 1960, '61 or so, there were some attempts to put in some of that kind of business.

STAPF: Well there was an attempt on the west side of Buckeye, from the corner just south of the Catholic church to the railroad. Fellow by the name of Mayer, who was with Duckwall's organization purchased at least one or two of those properties and had options on the rest of them so that he had everything under his control in that full block adjoining Buckeye.



BURG: From southwest Fourth down to the Rock Island tracks.

STAPF: But he was stymied because he couldn't get the change in zoning that he was seeking. I was on the church committee at the time as well as on the Eisenhower board. And between the catholic church and Eisenhower Foundation, he was butting his head up against a brick wall. And as a result, the Eisenhower Foundation offered to buy the properties at his cost, which we did, so that he suffered no monetary loss.

BURG: What did he plan to put in there, Mr. Stapf?



STAPF: That I can't answer.

BURG: But you were all afraid.

STAPF: We knew it was not going to be good.

SOAPES: Is this about the same time that the Old Abilene  
Twon began? Was that in the early '60s?

STAPF: No, that began prior to this.

BURG: Then let's ask you that, because that was something that  
I wanted to ask about, too. At what stage did that enterprise  
start going up?

STAPF: That was sometime in the '50s.

BURG: The museum, I presume, had been built.

STAPF: Right. At least the first wing definitely, I think,  
built, and I'm not positive about the second wing.

BURG: By that I think he means that original museum which was  
then doubled a few years ago; actually started out with one wing  
and then--



STAPF: Well originally what faces 4th Street, that was built in two sections. The west portion of it first, and then the east portion was built, and the last addition, which was built by GSA [General Services Administration], the government, was the doubling again of the floor space to the north.

BURG: Basically to the north, right. So with the museum standing there and perhaps ground broken or plans laid to put the library in, they began the Old Abilene enterprise.

STAPF: Right.

BURG: Mr. Stapf, do you recollect now how community reaction ran to the Old Abilene enterprise being tucked in there right next to the center?

STAPF: There were some people who were quite disturbed because of the selection of that site for Old Abilene Town, and some of them thought it was just fine. They were both going to be supported primarily by tourist dollars, so why not have them next door neighbors?

BURG: Do you have any idea, any percentage, ratio of who was "fur" and who was "agin"?



STAPF: No. No, I think the majority opinion was that it was quite all right to establish Old Abilene there. Minority opinion was that we get rid of it.

BURG: The foundation, evidently, had not contemplated buying any land to the south to hold it off a bit.

STAPF: No. That had never been discussed to my knowledge. I think everyone thought that the division by the railroad was going to be sufficient, and then they did subsequently plant that row of poplars in order to shield the view, to an extent at least. And that row of poplars is there just for that purpose.



BURG: Because evidently we have had out of town people, we have had some newspaper people here, I think, at the time of the General's funeral, who were exceedingly upset. But of course at that point you are burying the 34th President of the United States right next door as these newspapermen put it, next door to a carnival, and they were a little unhappy about it. Tom, do you have any other questions along those lines or in that--

SOAPES: Yes, I wanted to go into one of the personalities whose name of course frequently has come up in some digging that I've

done into this question, that is a man you mentioned earlier that you knew, Scupin. Can you describe for us something about what his role was in some of this land acquisition?

STAPFL Well he was one of the powers on the board, very definitely. Went over quite a few years and everybody regarded his opinion very highly. An astute businessman.

SOAPES: Very much of a leader.

STAPF: Right.

BURG: Had he been operating here in 1930 when you reached Abilene?

STAPF: He was here; he was with the United Company, United Utilities and went on up in the company, progressed quite rapidly until he was treasurer and chief finance officer and then became president later and chairman of the board.

BURG: Was his work here, Mr. Stapf? Were the offices of United always here. He was not away in Kansas City for some period of time?



STAPF: General offices were here, in the United Trust Building. They had the second and third floor of the United Building.

BURG: So I would presume that you saw a fair amount of him--

STAPF: Oh, yes indeed.

BURG: --here in town. Now you yourself are a Rotarian.

STAPF: That's correct.

BURG: Was he a member of a service club at that time?

STAPF: He was not a joiner.

BURG: Would you say that he was an easy man to know back in those days, and by that I mean in the period 1930 up until his retirement.

STAPF: No, I'd say he never was an easy man to know for most people. Now with some people, his friends, his intimates, fine-- but beyond that, no.

SOAPES: Were these friends of his primarily people who were in similar lines of business, finance or--



STAPF: Not necessarily. Someone that he took a liking to, and if he didn't like you, he just didn't like you.

BURG: Can you tell us who some of the intimates were, the people that he commonly associated with?

STAPF: Yes. Ren Rogers was one his very close friends, Ames Rogers--a brother, half-brother of Ren.

BURG: We should ask, too, if you'll excuse us, R-e-n?



STAPF: R-e-y-n-o-l-d it is actually, and Ren, R-e-n, was the nickname.

BURG: And a half-brother of his.

STAPF: Ames Rogers. His widow is still living on North Cedar, Mrs. Virginia Rogers.

BURG: Virginia Rogers, I wondered. Other people who come to mind.

STAPF: Well Harry Armstrong, now deceased, was a very good friend. John Lehman. Walt Samuelson.

BURG: What was Mr. Samuelson's work?

STAPF: He ran the Sands Springs grain elevator.

BURG: I see.

STAPF: Managed it.

BURG: And the two Rogers, what were their occupations?

STAPF: Banking. They were in the Abilene National Bank.

BURG: Right. One man I knew was--

STAPF: Yes, Ames' death was in February of 1940, and Ren was in the bank at that time, came in sometime during the '30s. And Wes Rees was associated with the bank. And they employed me the 1st of August following Ames' death so that I worked with Ren and Rees through a number of years until--Wes Rees' death was in 1947 and Ren in 1950.

BURG: I came here in 1970 and met Mr. Scupin not too long after I'd come here and then saw him at a number of functions that the Library had. I kind of got the impression from what I heard that he was a rather different man when I met him from the man he had been. Not in the sense that he had deteriorated, but I would think I could use the word mellowed.



STAPF: Well I think that's probably right.

BURG: That he'd been a pretty hard driver in those early days.

STAPF: Oh, indeed he was.

BURG: A reputation as being a man of shrewdness and considerable ability and I believe amassed a respectable personal fortune following the enterprises that he did, the work that he did.

STAPF: But always fair in his dealings with everybody.

BURG: Was he really?

STAPF: Yes.

BURG: And had that reputation even in the early days--

STAPF: Oh, yes. Always.

BURG: Now I noted too in those last four or five years of his life he did not seem to, again, seek the limelight.

STAPF: Never did.

BURG: We always knew what Senator Darby was doing but you





sometimes got the impression if you stood off to one side as I did that Skip Scupin was capable of getting a pretty decent wrestling hold on someone if he needed it and was very quiet about it. Now am I correct?

STAPF: You're absolutely right.

BURG: He just never did seek a position where he could be seen and--

STAPF: Didn't want the glory. Rather be one of the boys in the back and pulling the strings.

SOAPES: And did that very skillfully.

STAPF: And did it very well indeed.

BURG: A man of considerable--well to use the older phrase--considerable clout.

STAPF: Right.

BURG: Friends in many different places and that he could call upon.



BURG: Did his outspokenness ever cause friction on the board?

STAPF: I'm sure it did. Not on the board that I know about, no.

BURG: But no sign of it on the board?

STAPF: None, no. They all had high enough regard for his opinion and judgment that, while it appeared he was driving something down someone's throat, actually he was working for the best interests of the foundation, and everyone knew that and were willing to go along if they could agree at all with his ideas. And they were sound.



BURG: In persuading people on the foundation, was he generally tactful?

STAPF: Very, yes.

BURG: And the fact that he had achieved a considerable measure of success, by anybody's standard's at least the man I knew gave no sign of that, either. He never reminded you whatsoever of the fact--

STAPF: He was just very ordinary. Some people, if they're a millionaire or multi-millionaire like to throw their weight around. Not Skip.

BURG: Never needed to.

STAPF: That's correct.

BURG: One thing that I couldn't help but notice, too, relatively speaking--I was much younger than he was--but I noticed that he seemed to be quite at home and happy, even if he was the only person his age in a group of people much younger than he was--seemed to fit in and be comfortable. And I'm not sure that that can always be said--



STAPF: That's right.

BURG:--about people of Skip's age. I found that very impressive about him. Did you want to follow any other leads, Tom, on Mr. Scupin?

SOAPES: I was just thinking in terms of anything you remember that he himself did in terms of some of this site acquisition.

STAPF: No, I don't remember, really.

BURG: All right, we'll check that with Mr. Brainard, too, and see what he can tell us.

STAPF: Yes, Chuck I'm sure can give you that information.

BURG: Now we had asked you earlier about this business where you indicated that you thought Arthur had been the one who had been dubious about turning things over, and our information had been that it was Edgar. We also had the note that it seemed to us that J. Earl Endacott had been the one who seems to have swung the brother around. Does that square up with what you know.

STAPF: That's something I know nothing about.

BURG: Okay, good enough. Now I'd like to ask about something in 1966, get your opinion on this. When the foundation approved the takeover of that center, the existing buildings and the future management of it by the government, do you recollect the reactions on the foundation in general?

STAPF: Everyone was very favorable toward that.

BURG: We have no holdouts there, no one who was very reluctant



or very unhappy--

STAPF: No.

BURG: --about what had occurred.

STAPF: No, indeed. We were all agreed that that was one thing we needed to accomplish to assure the perpetuity of the place. The people who were responsible for the inception and the promotion up to this point were not going to be here forever. The younger generation coming up were not going to have the interest in it. And so in order to assure the proper continuation and success, government takeover was the only answer.



SOAPES: A similar attitude to what you described when the fund raising went national in the mid-'50s.

STAPF: Right.

[Interruption]

BURG: I'm sorry for the interruption on tape, but what I asked Mr. Stapf was which of the brothers he had come in contact with during his life here in Abilene, and I'll let you respond to that question now yourself.

STAPF: Well Earl was the only one I ever met. And he was a very outgoing individual.

BURG: How did you meet him and where? You met him here in Abilene.

STAPF: He came into the bank because he was acquainted with Cecil Taylor who was in there at the time and came in to visit, in town. So he came in to visit, and I met him at that time.

BURG: So he was the first of the brothers that you met yourself.

STAPF: Right.

BURG: Did you have other contact with him?

STAPF: No.

BURG: Just the one occasion.

STAPF: Just the one time, just the one occasion.

BURG: You found him quite outgoing.

STAPF: Yes, indeed. Now I said I hadn't met any of the others; I did meet Arthur at the Commerce Bank in Kansas City. Just met



him and that was all. Commerce was one of our correspondent banks in Kansas City.

BURG: You never met Roy? The one over in Junction City.

STAPF: No.

BURG: Interesting. Nor Milton who--

STAPF: No, I'd seen Milton many times but I never have met him.

[Interruption]

BURG: You also said that you had not met the President until fairly late but then you recollected when he returned from his service in the Philippines with General [Douglas] MacArthur you had met him then.

STAPF: I did not meet him; I just saw him for the first time. He came into the bank and visited with Wes Rees and Ren Rogers, spent at least two hours sitting over in the corner, the three of them just sat and chewed the fat.

BURG: Was he in civilian clothes?



STAPF: He was in uniform.

BURG: In uniform.

STAPF: He was a lieutenant colonel at that time.

BURG: Yes, right.

STAPF: And when he left Abilene he went to Louisiana for the war games. It was just very shortly after that that the newspapers, the writer would say "Watch Eisenhower, he's going places."



BURG: Yes, I think they came back here to the states in '40, 1940. He was stationed out at Ft. Lewis, very close to where I was brought up, and in fact John Eisenhower and I went to the same high school.

STAPF: Oh, is that right?

BURG: In Tacoma. He was ahead of me in school a little bit. Did you ever have anything to do with the mother and the father, Mr. Stapf?

STAPF: Not with the father, but I used to wait on Mrs. Eisen-



hower, Ida. The Abilene National was the family bank, so she'd come into the bank to take care of the banking business and many times I've waited on her.

BURG: Well that's interesting. Your recollections of her-- how do you remember her?

STAPF: Very fine woman. Just very gracious.

BURG: You remember her as a fine woman and very gracious. Would you be willing to say that she was that to a marked degree, that it was more than the kind of politeness that you got from your customers?



STAPF: I would say yes, very definitely.

BURG: So she stood out a little bit.

STAPF: Right.

BURG: Without respect to whether her son later became famous or not.

STAPF: That's right. That was prior to the days of his fame in the military field even at that time, but no effect on her personality at all or her reaction.

BURG: She didn't change--

STAPF: She didn't change because of it.

BURG: A person you knew from the early '30s on, she--

STAPF: That's right.

BURG: Did she do most of the family banking?

STAPF: Prior to Mr. Eisenhower's death, I don't know whether he did it or she. I'm inclined to think probably she did because he was employed full-time and perhaps it was easier for her to come to the bank and take care of the business than it was for him.

SOAPES: One thing about her that we hear frequently is that she had very deep religious beliefs and and was very active in religious affairs. Were her religious beliefs something she wore on her sleeve, or was it something that was just within her?

STAPF: Just so much a part of her you're not aware of it really.



BURG: I think that's what would interest us because some people are religious to the extent--

STAPF: There's a word in German which describes it better than anything we have in the English, you'd say they were scheinheilig [?].

BURG: What does that mean?

STAPF: That means that you're putting on this holiness for a show.

BURG: Yes, all right, that's the phrase for which I would have searched. We wondered about that. It's possible, I think, to be so religious that one becomes rather nauseating. And you never saw that then in her.

STAPF: No, indeed, no. She was too genuine.

BURG: It's asking a lot to ask you to hark back all these years, forty-some years perhaps--did others in the community regard her as you do? When you got here, when you met her, when you knew her during the war years, was it, as you now think back, generally agreed that there was a pretty fine woman?



STAPF: As far as I know, yes. The entire family was very highly regarded.

BURG: Now would that be true, let us say, before 1941 when he really achieves some national notoriety?

STAPF: Yes, because they were, at that time just a very ordinary family. Hard-working, very industrious, frugal.

BURG: That appealed to you, Mr. Stapf. [Laughter]

SOAPES: Were they a family that was really well-known throughout the community prior to Ike getting his name in the headlines?

STAPF: Not particularly, no.

BURG: It's so hard--I think Tom is slanting this way, too-- it's so hard to try now to see what were they like before everything happened. And sometimes we think, yes, indeed, we're getting fairly close to it and sometimes we wonder how much of this is retrospect. You did see him again in '52? Do you recollect? He was back here to open his campaign for the presidency. Did you see him on that occasion?

STAPF: Oh, yes indeed.



BURG: And I should ask you, too, I know of at least one other trip, which would have been right after the war, he came back here.

STAPF: That was his homecoming, at the time of his homecoming?

SOAPES: Right, right.

BURG: I would suppose. About 1945, yes.

STAPF: June of 1945. Oh yes, indeed.

BURG: But you did not meet him on those occasions.

STAPF: Did not meet him, no.

BURG: Did you play any part in making any of the arrangements for the visit in '52 when he kicked off his campaign?

STAPF: No, no. I took a part in it, in a very small way. I was a member of the band.

BURG: Oh, really.

STAPF: Yes. We paraded on his homecoming, June 22nd I believe of '45.



BURG: Part of the town band.

STAPF: Yes. And I made both the trips for the inaugural parades with the band.

BURG: Oh, you marched in the band--

STAPF: We marched up Pennsylvania Avenue--

BURG: --in Washington, DC.

STAPF: --yes, indeed.

BURG: Was that the town band that went from here?

STAPF: The Abilene Band, it was augmented with some of the Isis Shrine Band members.

BURG: From Salina?

STAPF: Yes. Well they were actually mostly from western Kansas and southern Nebraska, the boys who played in the Isis Temple Shrine Band. I think probably not more than three or four from Salina--Bill Cole [Wm. Cole, president, Planters State Bank] and oh, fellow who has the music store over there [Cecil



Knight?], I can't think of his name now.

BURG: Were you uniformed?

STAPF: Western.

BURG: Oh, the cowboy hats and--

STAPF: Cowboy hats and--

BURG: --shirt, I suppose, just--

STAPF: --cowboy shirts and chaps.

BURG: Oh, yes. Most of which you provided yourselves, I suppose.

STAPF: Right.

BURG: Now did you have to pay your own way out there?

STAPF: No. The second time we did-- paid most of it. First time our passage was provided. There was a fund raising, and I can't remember the form it took.

BURG: Fund raising here--

STAPF: Right.



BURG: --within the state of Kansas.

STAPF: Right. To send the inaugural band back.

BURG: Now you were back then in '60 for the Adenauer luncheon, is that correct?

STAPF: That's correct.

BURG: And you met President Eisenhower, I think probably, on that occasion.

STAPF: Oh, yes. Normal procedure, as we were going from the Oval Room to the State Dining Room, you go through and are presented to the president and also to Adenauer. So everyone there met both of them there at the same time.

BURG: Yes. Well that must have been a very exciting thing.

STAPF: It was indeed. Quite an experience.

BURG: And a very kind gesture on his part.

STAPF: He had hoped to have an evening dinner so he could invite the wives, but it grew to such a size group it couldn't





be accommodated. So he had to make it a luncheon, just for the men.

BURG: Yes, my recollection from our work this past week--at that time the foundation has a membership of about twenty-five, twenty-seven people.

SOAPES: Right.

BURG: And it seems to me that all but about three of you went on that trip.

STAPF: The only one that I recall, and he had planned to go, the only one I remember who didn't get there was Chuck Brainard. We had terrific snowstorms right at that time.

BURG: Oh, and he got dumped someplace and couldn't get out.

STAPF: Someplace in Texas, I believe. And couldn't get out. I recall having gone down to Kansas City by train on Sunday. I was to fly with Howard Keel on Monday morning from Kansas City to Washington. Early that next morning there was a light cover of snow, probably an inch or two on the ground in Kansas City. Took a cab out to the airport and had our breakfast. And when



we'd finished we had some time--I called my wife and she said, "Are you going to be able to get away with all the snow?"

And I said, "Oh, there's a little snow here, probably an inch or two, but as far as I know it's not going to keep us on the ground."

She said, "Well, we've had a foot and a half here."

I said, "You mean an inch and a half."

She said, "No, I mean a foot and a half."

And I found out that our plane that we were to board was the last one that took off from Wichita to Kansas City. And we boarded there. Halfway across Missouri we were in sunshine all the way to Washington. Beautiful day to fly.

BURG: But Mr. Brainard had taken another way.

STAPF: He had gone south on another trip and was apparently going to fly back in, I don't know where, Kansas City or St. Louis, and then on to Washington. But he was snowbound. Never did make it. Then I remember the next day when we did arrive in Washington we had breakfast and then time between then and the luncheon at noon; so there were four of us took a cab to do a little sightseeing. Going down Constitution Avenue they pointed



out the Internal Revenue Building. I remembered then that I'd forgotten to sign and mail the bank's return and March 15 was the deadline. So I called the bank as soon as I got back to my hotel room to be sure that that was in the mail that day. Then I was informed that there was another foot and a half of snow on top of the one the day before. So that was three feet of snow in two days.

BURG: Boy, really something. Even by our standards out here. Well Tom are there any other areas that you want to pursue with Mr. Stapf?

SOAPES: There's just one question that comes to mind getting back to Ida Eisenhower and the family and your mentioning of the word "train" a minute ago brought it to mind. Some accounts I've read that talk about the early family life here in Abilene talk about the location of the home as on the south side of the town, the south side of the tracks, as being "other side of the tracks." Was that a connotation that everyone here in town would have recognized as--that's the other side of the tracks where they live?

STAPF: It was considered as being the poorer section as far



as housing was concerned. They were the older homes; many of the original homes in Abilene were on the south side and not any new housing going up or not very many houses being renovated. And as a result it was just south of the tracks. There was a connotation that that was a little lower level than the north side. As far as people were concerned, no. There was no feeling as far as the individuals were concerned.

SOAPES: They weren't considered the low class of the town.

STAPF: No, indeed, no.

BURG: Monetarily, maybe, not so secure as people in some other parts of town.

STAPF: And perhaps some of them on the south side could have bought out the north-siders and had change left over!

BURG: Let me ask you this, looking back into that period around the depression and, the '40s. We see the house today always freshly painted, the gardening always immaculately done--it all looks almost like a little carved white house that you might find in the Black Forest in Germany or something, all very neat and tidy. Was it as neat and tidy in appearance back then?



STAPF: My recollection, yes, it was always well kept.

BURG: Even after the boys went away.

STAPF: Even after the boys left, right.

SOAPES: Very much the image of the German clean household--

STAPF: Right.

BURG: It's interesting. I happened to think about that the other day that here's the way we see it now. I was wondering whether the tourist who comes here is seeing the house pretty much as it did look then.

STAPF: I would say yes. I don't remember that it ever had a run-down appearance.

SOAPES: Did it stand out in anyway from some of the other older houses down there?

STAPF: No.

SOAPES: That whole area was considered a very clean--

STAPF: Right.



Mr. Charles Stapf, 2-4-76

Page 67

SOAPES: --but just of a lower economic group.

STAPF: That's correct.

BURG: Well we want to thank you very much, Mr. Stapf, for your time today for this interview.

