

"GARLAND PERSPECTIVE"

INTERVIEW WITH DOCTOR CHARLES L. COCKRELL

OCTOBER 8, 1987

HAYSLIP: Hello, my name is Mike Hayslip and I am your host for today's segment of Garland Perspectives. A series of interviews with some of those special folks that have aided so much in Garland's growth and development in the first half of the twentieth century. This series is sponsored by the Garland Sesquicentennial Commission in celebration of our state's 150th anniversary. Our special guest here today in the Storer Cable Studio this April 16th, is Doctor Charles L. Cockrell, Minister of the First Baptist Church here in Garland. Doc Cockrell was born on March 25, 1909 in Murphy, a farming community just north of Garland. He was one of two children of Charles G. and Mae Thornton Cockrell. Mr. Cockrell had come from Alabama and Mrs. Cockrell had been born in Texas near Gatesville. Dr. Cockrell attended schools in Murphy and later high school in Plano. He attended Baylor University, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, he holds a B.A. Degree, a Master of Theology Degree and a Doctor of Divinity Degree. In 1936 he married Willie Mae Smith from Wortham, Texas and they have two daughters and four grandchildren. He has shared with us this picture of the family. In 1946, the Cockrell's came to the First Baptist Church here in Garland and there they served until 1974 during which time he was Senior Minister of the church. Here is a photograph he brought us of the way he looked when they came to Garland. Doc Cockrell is now a member of the South Garland Rotary Club, he was a member of the Downtown Rotary Club for many years. He has served in many, many capacities, but to highlight a few, he has been a Trustee of Baylor University, Baylor Medical Center, and Baylor Dental School. He served as a world class travel guide in the interim, he was selected as one of twelve ministers for an Air Force Religious Week Celebration. He has brought us a photograph which shows him during Lap Tour. He also was on a preaching mission to Japan and he has brought us a photograph taken during that preaching mission as well. And, has led so many tours to the Holy Land that he brought us this photograph of him on a camel. Dr. Cockrell tells us that there are very few countries in the world that he has not been to and I believe it. Does this sound like you? Is this information accurate?

COCKRELL: That's correct.

HAYSLIP: Good. Do you have any idea why you're here?

COCKRELL: Yes.

HAYSLIP: Why do you think?

COCKRELL: I'm here to be interviewed.

HAYSLIP: Well, but do you have any idea why we selected you?

COCKRELL: No.

HAYSLIP: Well, you are pretty well the Dean of the long time pastors in a town which is known for its very strong church contingent. We felt like you were representative of those people and we wanted you here even though we have certain charges we may want you to answer. The first of which is that you are

really a recruiter for the Baylor University football team, and you preached on the side. How would you answer that?

COCKRELL: That's correct.

HAYSLIP: Why did your family come to the Garland area, do you recall or know?

COCKRELL: Because they felt this was a strategic place for a good farming land.

HAYSLIP: Now, your father was a farmer?

COCKRELL: Yes.

HAYSLIP: What crops did he raise?

COCKRELL: Cotton, corn mainly.

HAYSLIP: I see, what's your earliest recollection of Garland? You grew up slightly north of here.

COCKRELL: I came to Garland in 1916 in a Model T Ford and we would come down on Saturday and buy groceries and they had an old picture show on the north side of the square and we would come down and see a picture show occasionally in that old picture house.

HAYSLIP: That was sort of a Trader's Day. When everybody came in to get provisions and supplies.

COCKRELL: That's right.

HAYSLIP: Anything physically you remember about Garland during those first years?

COCKRELL: Well, I remember they had a lot of mud and sidewalks that were wooden and everybody drove an old, old, timey brass radiator Ford or other cars that were very ancient.

HAYSLIP: Do you remember thinking Garland was a friendly town back then?

COCKRELL: Unusually cordial and friendly, because of great leaders.

HAYSLIP: They also wanted your money on the Trader's Day? They were glad to see you coming?

COCKRELL: That's right.

HAYSLIP: So, your parents brought you to town and they parked you in the picture show while they did their buying and their trading.

COCKRELL: That's right.

HAYSLIP: You told me I believe, that you went to schools in Murphy. Is that what we would call a country school?

COCKRELL: Yes. A country school.

HAYSLIP: What do you recall about your early school years?

COCKRELL: Well, we had a small school there, but it was very efficient and only went about eight months a year.

HAYSLIP: Why? Because of crop harvesting?

COCKRELL: Yes. People had to work and pick cotton and chop cotton and they could only have eight months of school.

HAYSLIP: O.K. So you had a eight month school year where all the classes were in one

room or were they divided?

COCKRELL: No, four rooms.

HAYSLIP: Do you remember any subjects that were favorites of yours or any special teacher?

COCKRELL: Yes, Mr. Dickerson was my favorite teacher there and he stood out wonderfully with all the students and he was a very learned man and we felt like that he got a good foundation going to high school.

HAYSLIP: O.K. Did he teach all subjects or special ones?

COCKRELL: Yes, he taught all the subjects in the certain grades.

HAYSLIP: What were your favorites? Do you remember?

COCKRELL: History and English and I did not like Math very much.

HAYSLIP: You never flirted with becoming a Mathematician?

COCKRELL: No.

HAYSLIP: What was it like being a teenager back then? What was your social life like and what opportunities did you have?

COCKRELL: We did not have much social life except a few parties. The country church was the only thing that we had to go to and the Baptist Church in Murphy was begun by my Mother in her front room in 1900. It produced six preachers and one missionary and I was one of them.

HAYSLIP: Is that right?

COCKRELL: Yes. Uh-huh.

HAYSLIP: How long did it stay in the living room before it moved out?

COCKRELL: Oh, just a few weeks until they could build a church.

HAYSLIP: Church was the center of social as well as religious life. Everything revolved around the church. What did you do for fun?

COCKRELL: Well, we had a few parties and pitched horse shoes and washers and went fishing and things like that.

HAYSLIP: Any other games you remember that were played back then?

COCKRELL: Well, we played basketball out on open courts. And, we had baseball. We played a lot of ball.

HAYSLIP: Well, what were your curfew when you went out to these parties?

COCKRELL: Well, everybody had to be in by 10:00 o'clock.

HAYSLIP: O.K. You probably had to get a good night's sleep to get up and do the work. And, you lived on the farm then, so I assume you had certain chores.

COCKRELL: Yes. Milking and slopped the pigs and feed the chickens and working in the field.

HAYSLIP: What do you remember about health care and public health back then? Do you think people were healthier back then than they are now? What did you do when you got sick?

COCKRELL: Well, everybody we just had an old wooden bucket and everybody drank out of the dipper and we never heard of Hepatitis or germs. Cholesterol,

we just ate what we wanted to and all drank well water, we didn't have city water. Very few people ever got sick.

HAYSLIP: What did you do when you did?

COCKRELL: Well, we had a good country doctor. Doctor Bellar was a good doctor and then Garland had good doctors and Plano. But, hardly anybody ever went to the hospital. You were almost dead when you went to the hospital.

HAYSLIP: Now, they'd come out and see you in a buggy or old car.

COCKRELL: Yes, that's right.

HAYSLIP: Did preachers make calls like that a lot back then?

COCKRELL: Oh yes, they went from house to house.

HAYSLIP: Let's talk a little bit about religion. That of course has been your life's work and your concern. You told us a little bit about the founding of the Baptist Church up there in the front room. What else could you tell us about that church? Apparently you built a building and that was probably the first time you were involved in building a church building and that would be something you would do many, many times.

COCKRELL: Well, I was not born when they built the church, but I grew up in that church, and ordained in that church and it was a very fine church. It's very unusual, that church ran more than Plano, Wylie or Garland in attendance.

HAYSLIP: It was a large church, but it was just a half time church. That is, a pastor just came down from McKinney every other week and he had two other churches. But, I grew up in that church and learned a whole lot of the Bible in that church. Wonder why that church was more active? Was it just the kind of people that were members there?

COCKRELL: Well, people didn't have anything else to do, and they concentrated on the church. In Garland, they had other distractions and Wylie and Plano, but in Murphy they only had the church, that was all they had.

HAYSLIP: How do you think churches are different today?

COCKRELL: Well, the churches cover a broader realm of activities and they are more efficient today than they have ever been.

HAYSLIP: Do you think so?

COCKRELL: Yes, I think they are. Yes, they have even schools and Training Union and different phases of church work. Seminars for couples on home life and we never had that. More versatile today than ever before. They have WMU And, they have I think they are

HAYSLIP: Let's talk a minute about churches in Garland particularly, I've had a number of people in this series of interviews and when I would ask them what they thought was significant or differentiating about Garland. I've had a number of people point to the churches. What are the differences you see, well you were around Garland before you actually officially came here in 1946, so you've had a lot of chances to observe churches in Garland and you must have made that observation before 1946 otherwise you wouldn't have come here.

COCKRELL: That's right.

HAYSLIP: What is different about our churches here?

COCKRELL: Well, I have found the churches in Garland can be a little more fervent than

the average place. They have had great leaders here and we have had real good morals I think in Garland too. We have had a high class people in Garland. I've always considered Garland one of the most cultured minded communities in all of Texas. When I was just a boy I loved to drive through Garland just to see the beautiful homes and how well kept they were because the people had higher ideals and they were more aesthetically minded culturally because we had great leaders in Garland who set the pace for the people.

HAYSLIP: What are some of the cultural things that you remember about Garland passing through here as well as living here through the years? You mentioned the homes and the taste level, and what are some of the other things you recall?

COCKRELL: Well, I remember in the early days they would have very big patriotic rallies and like J. A. 'Hot' Alexander who was a big leader here. And, Mr. Williams, Cecil Williams and Mr. A. R. Davis the banker and many other great leaders here. Mr. [Ray] Olinger was Mayor and we had wonderful men that led our city and they had activities here that were outstanding. They had great speakers here, they had Pat Neff here, I remember one of the earliest speakers. He was governor of Texas.

HAYSLIP: Also, President of Baylor University right?

COCKRELL: Yes, later on he was President of Baylor.

HAYSLIP: I might have known you would have known that.

COCKRELL: They had lectures and seminars here and they would have many wonderful study clubs that many communities did not have.

HAYSLIP: And, now we're getting over into women's work a little bit. You have mentioned certain significant people and leadership, but they were all men and so I'm sitting here wondering what about the women?

COCKRELL: Well, they had great women here. I remember when I was a boy they had marvelous leadership in the women here and I did not know the women personally as much then as I did later on. But, I can remember Mrs. [Peter] Handley began the study club and she and her husband stood out very preeminently here in Garland as leaders of Garland. I felt like that Garland had more study clubs even when I was a boy than any community that I had ever been in.

HAYSLIP: That's very interesting. What you're telling us is that you feel like Garland had a very active church life because of the leadership involved in those churches. That leadership overlapped with cultural and other things.

COCKRELL: That's right. And, then there's another outstanding thing here, all the communities around Garland had open saloons or sold intoxicating beverages. But, as far as I can remember in all the history of Garland, we have not had open saloons or we have not had any sale of liquor or intoxicants.

HAYSLIP: I believe we will find as we study back here in history or over the history of the town and I can't find anybody alive today or I haven't been able to find anybody alive today that can pinpoint a date, but I believe we will find that there have been from time to time saloons in Garland and that the churches have sort of risen up against that. They didn't stay open very long. We have interviewed people who were in their eighties and late eighties who tell me very vaguely that they remember the fact that there were open saloons and they even

remember what part of town they were in, but they never went around them and they didn't stay long and the church people have always in Garland risen up against that and their opposition to it, which I think is a very interesting thing. If I were a minister, and ministers have various posts and places that they have to go, I'm sure you would consider a town before taking a church there. You would consider various aspects of that town and you had to do that with Garland, Texas back in 1945 and 1946 with the War just ending. You were at that time, I believe in Arlington at that time, were you not?

COCKRELL: I was in the First Baptist Church of Mart. Mart, Texas.

HAYSLIP: How did Garland look to you then? You had been looking at Garland for a long time.

COCKRELL: Yes. Garland it looked like it was a city of vision. It was only about 1,000 people then, but it had vision. They had already laid out more streets here and Mart, and Arlington and other places where I had been did not have that vision. But they had the vision here to bring in factories and bring in people and I would say of all the outstanding men that did that, Mr. Rip Davis the banker was more responsible for bringing in these factories and these big concerns than any other one man in all of Garland, and I think he will stand out in history as one of the great leaders that helped to build Garland.

HAYSLIP: How did that affect churches?

COCKRELL: Well, when Kraft Company came into Garland I received about 200 members from Kraft Company in the First Baptist Church of Garland and all the other churches reaped greatly and they were good members. Because Kraft was a very fine Christian organization coming from Mr. J.L. Kraft who was a great religious leader in Chicago.

HAYSLIP: I see. So, what you're telling us is that something that started out as an economic interest became a church interest.

COCKRELL: It helped the churches.

HAYSLIP: And, helped them grow.

COCKRELL: Yes.

HAYSLIP: You've been a minister how long?

COCKRELL: Fifty years this year.

HAYSLIP: O.K. So, you're at a half a century mark as a minister.

COCKRELL: Yes.

HAYSLIP: What are the differences you see in the way that ministers are perceived or treated today compared to fifty years ago when you entered the ministry.

COCKRELL: Well, ministers have always been received cordially, joyously and Garland has been very unusual. They received me from the first day until up to now extraordinarily good. They couldn't have done more for me than they did. They were just very considerate of the pastor and they followed my leadership and they were always aggressive people. For instance we were one of the first churches in all of Dallas County to build a beautiful auditorium in 1951, and we were the first church that put in air conditioning and when we did that in 1947 a lot of the people said that if they had to put in air condition to get people to come to church they would just close the church. It wasn't a year until all of those churches were air conditioned.

HAYSLIP: I can remember fans in the old First Baptist Church.

COCKRELL: Yes, we had electric fans and when we would get up from our seats to sing it would be so hot in there the people would be stuck to the seats and you would hear them getting up.

HAYSLIP: Did you have people stand more back then because of that or how did that affect the way you...

COCKRELL: No, we stand just the same.

HAYSLIP: What do you remember about the economic issues of this country let's say the depression as far as the way it affected Garland and with your particular perspective on churches. What do you remember about that?

COCKRELL: Well, I remember when during the depression days and early days that people had very little money and I saw people lined up on the square in Garland to receive food and blankets and they had no money. People were almost starving. We tell our present children that and they can't believe it. But, I saw people hungry and I saw people that had no jobs and they couldn't drive cars.

HAYSLIP: How did the churches in Garland respond to that?

COCKRELL: Well, they suffered severely.

HAYSLIP: I'm sure their collections suffered severely.

COCKRELL: Yes. And, the First Baptist Church of Garland when I was a boy they almost lost their church because they could not make the payments that came due because people had no money, and it was hard times.

HAYSLIP: If it affected your collections adversely did hard times affect the zeal of your membership.

COCKRELL: No. It is very unusual, people flocked to church because for one thing they couldn't make trips anywhere else, and nobody took a vacation, you never heard of vacations during the depression, and everybody came to church and when you would have a big revival you would hold them on the outside and everybody would come. You would have an acre full of people. And people were more fervent then than when they became affluent.

HAYSLIP: You think trouble sends people to church.

COCKRELL: Yes, it does. For instance, when our President was assassinated in Dallas the next day or the following Sunday the church and all churches were filled to capacity and running over and when trouble comes like in the War people flocked to churches.

HAYSLIP: You have listed a number of influential people in Garland and as we try to wind this up you have kept going back to Garland's leadership as it affected leadership, the economy, the whole thing. Why do you think that Garland which was founded about the same time as your own community of Murphy and Sachse, Wylie, why do you think Garland is now the tenth largest city in the state?

COCKRELL: Well, that's no secret, they had great vision here in Garland and for instance when we had a chance to get the railroad to come through here from Santa Fe going to Chicago, men like Mr. [A,R,] 'Rip' Davis of First National Bank, he and the leaders of Garland sought that railroad and got it. The difference between Garland and other cities is we had great men of vision and the Bible says you perish without vision. I feel like Garland was unusually gifted with men that

had vision, and then we were strategically located. We were located adjacent to Dallas, but other places were to, but we grew much faster than the other places, like Irving, Richardson, and Plano. We grew faster and quicker than they did. Because I feel like we had Mr. Davis because he was preeminently the leader and we had a good active Chamber of Commerce and we feel like we just had people who were ready to give their time and energy in bringing great people here.

HAYSLIP: What about your history in Garland. What are you proudest of?

COCKRELL: Well, I'm proudest of our church of course, the First Baptist Church it has done unusually well. The Pastor McDonald that followed me has done extraordinarily well and I'm proud of the church because it stands out, it's about the tenth largest church in Texas.

HAYSLIP: That's interesting. It's the tenth largest in the tenth largest city.

COCKRELL: Yes. It has great vision in giving the world wide missions and also supplying the needs here in Garland. It has seminars on home life and how to bring up your children and training in the Christian homes and I'm the proudest of course of our church.

HAYSLIP: I believe you spent 28 of your 50 years in the ministry there.

COCKRELL: Yes. Twenty-eight.

HAYSLIP: I hesitate to refer to you as retired because you keep moving so much.

COCKRELL: No, I'm just retreaded. I preach nearly every Sunday, and during the week I'm very active every day and every night.

HAYSLIP: O.K. So, three fifths of your time has been spent in a church in Garland and that represents what you're proudest of. Anything else that you would like to mention to us?

COCKRELL: Well, secondly I'm proud that Garland has had extraordinarily good morals. I feel like because we have had great leaders in Garland and great churches. Our church is not the only church and I would say that one of the outstanding things that our church did was to begin six other churches like Orchard Hills, Calvary and many other churches.

HAYSLIP: As missions.

COCKRELL: As missions that are now great churches and our other churches like the Methodist and Presbyterian, Christian, Church of Christ, Catholic, all our churches here have contributed greatly and I feel like they have helped to make our community and keep liquor and intoxicants and keep our city better in morals than adjacent cities.

HAYSLIP: What regrets would you have over your time in Garland?

COCKRELL: My regret is that I did not have greater energy and greater time to give or time to give to religious, moral and civic work here in Garland. I tried to take an active part in civic activities, but that was secondary. My preeminent work was religious work in the church and I feel the greatest thing that any man can do is to build a Christian home and I feel like Garland has had great Christian homes that has stood morally, religiously and patriotically as a great center.

HAYSLIP: What would you have done civically other than just general increased involvement? I can remember you being involved in so many things through the years. It's hard for me to consider that you regret that you haven't been more



so because you were always out there in the forefront of so many things.

COCKRELL: Well, I took part in Rotary and Chamber of Commerce and all leading activities of Garland. I did not go to the City Council meetings and did not try to be a regulator of laws, but I felt that my role was not to be a regulator, but to be a leader and showing people that we were to live morally, spiritually and patriotically for our land.

HAYSLIP: How do you feel about ministerial involvement in let's say government issues or business issues or this sort of thing.

COCKRELL: I feel like that ministers should raise their voices on all moral questions, but I never did feel like that I should tell people how to vote. People did not know how I voted except where there was a moral question. If there's a race horse or gambling or liquor or things like that I lifted my voice whole heartedly against it.

HAYSLIP: I don't think that anybody was ever in question about how you stood on any of those things.

COCKRELL: But, if Republican or Democrat or Independent, I never did let people know how I was voting. I felt like it was none of their business and people had a right to vote as he liked.

HAYSLIP: I'm gonna give you a chance to give some advice now. What better thing could you do for a minister than to give them a chance to give advice and I would like for you to address both your advice for younger ministers considering coming to Garland or considering staying in Garland and then also deal with us with the category of younger people considering coming to Garland making the same decision you had to make in 1946 what would you have to say to them?

COCKRELL: I would say that no community in all of Texas would be finer than Garland. Because, of the morals and it's a dry city and because it has great leadership.

HAYSLIP: You think it's still great.

COCKRELL: Yes. Without any question •

HAYSLIP: You think that fifty years from now our people that follow us would be seated in chairs like this talking about Garland and looking back on the last fifty years and they would say the same thing you just said.

COCKRELL: I really do. I feel like the Apostle Paul said, "I'm a citizen of Knome Beam City", that characterizes Garland completely. I do not mean that we do not have immorality with the city of almost two hundred thousand because that's impossible. As a whole Garland is much better morally, religiously than most any community in all of Texas.

HAYSLIP: I've noticed you've chosen to stay here. You've made this your base of operations and no matter where you've gone to travel or to preach you've always come back.

COCKRELL: This is the best place in the world to live.

HAYSLIP: You like it.

COCKRELL: No place any finer. If I had advice to give the young ministers, if the Lord led them to come to Garland they couldn't find a better place to preach. And, the people will treat the ministers I think rightly and they will support them and they will enjoy their stay here in Garland.

HAYSLIP:, We have certainly enjoyed your taking the time to come out and visit with us

on this interview. Doctor Cockrell or Brother Charlie as he is known to almost everybody else in town told me before coming in here, and here the man is 77 years old and retired he was looking at his watch when I arrived and he said to me "I've got to go, I've got to be somewhere else and we need to wrap this up, I've got places to go and I've got things to do". And so we want to honor that and thank you so much for sharing this time with us. I think it's unique and unusual that you have continually returned to this theme of leadership in Garland and you yourself as much as anybody else I can think of over these past few years have really done your part as a leader in your area. And, so for this segment of Garland Perspectives we'll say so long. Thank you.

END OF TAPE