

Interview with Dr. Ralph Houston

Interviewer: Iris T. Schumann

Transcriber: Iris T. Schumann

Date of Interview: October 22, 1985

Location: Dr. Houston's Home, 217 Woods Street, San Marcos, TX

Begin Tape 1, Side 1

Iris T. Schumann: I'm Iris Schumann, a student in Dr. Ronald Brown's Graduate Oral History Seminar at Southwest Texas State University. As a class project and in conjunction with the celebration of the Texas Sesquicentennial, class members are interviewing and recording the experiences of significant San Marcos-area residents. I will be interviewing Dr. Ralph Houston, Professor Emeritus, at Southwest Texas State University campus. Today's date is October 22, 1985. The recording is taking place in Dr. Houston's living room at 217 Woods Street in San Marcos. The home is located across the street and next to Southwest Texas State University campus. Dr. Houston has agreed to review the transcript after the interview is complete and understands that he will be asked to sign an agreement that will give the contents of the tape to Southwest Texas State University. It will be used in the future for historical research purposes. A second tape will be placed in the San Marcos Public Library to be used for a similar purpose.

Is that your understanding, Dr. Houston?

Ralph Houston: Yes, it is.

Schumann: Dr. Houston, I think that people in the future as they listen to this tape would be very interested in knowing something of your background before you came to Southwest Texas State University and became eventually the chairman of the English department, the dean, and finally the first faculty emeritus on the staff here. Could you tell us a little bit about your growing up experiences?

Houston: Yes, indeed. I was born in Lewisville, a small community, at the time a town of about 1,200 people, in Denton County, Texas, about twenty-five miles north of Dallas. My parents both were Denton County people and farm people before my father took up the trade of barbering. He had a barbershop in Lewisville. I had one brother, two years younger than I. He lives now in Washington D.C. My father was Moses Walter Houston, 1883–1962. My mother was Pearl Stover Houston, 1887–1949. It was fortunate for me that North Texas State University had gone from a Normal School to a degree-granting college a few years before I came along. I doubt that my family would have felt they could support me at the University of Texas, for example. But in my class of thirteen seniors at Lewisville High School, going to college was

quite the thing. Later when I was teaching school in Big Spring, where distances to state colleges, well, colleges of any sort, are considerable, I was quite surprised that so few of the really promising youngsters of the community had given any thought to further study beyond high school.

North Texas had some good things going for it that the time. I went there knowing that I was going to major in English. Now, don't press me on how I knew that, but I had been knowing it for a year or two. I suppose it was that I had some good teachers in English. There was a time in my freshman year when for a week I considered changing my major to chemistry. I had a little persuasion from the chemistry department on that subject, and, indeed, a good friend of mine on the English faculty had suggested, "Well, you could make chemistry your professional work and keep your literary interest for a vocation." But I didn't have to study very hard to reach a decision. I knew that English was my field. I had the good fortune of being editor of the yearbook there, the *Yucca*, the last year, and it gave me considerable experience. I should say that I had barbershop experience before, as a shoeshine boy in my father's barbershop, oh, for three years, say. Then, as the editor of the yearbook, I got some wider, different type of experience.

So, though I hadn't reached voting age, I was a fully certified teacher, ready to seek my fortune in the world. Fortunately for me, Big Spring in 1930 was adding to its English faculty, and I went to Big Spring Senior High School, where again, to my good fortune, the political situation in town as related to the public schools was such that I became involved in every school board election. The superintendent, W.C. Blankenship, whom I respected a great deal, never managed to have more than four or five of seven members of the board in his corner. And sometimes it was nip-and-tuck! He lasted only twenty-seven years there and most of the time in those circumstances. When he retired, the board made him an almost honorary principal of a school. They lavished many an honor on him because they sensed how well he had done.

Then I was equally fortunate in my principal, George H. Gentry, a Baylor graduate. He and I went to summer school at UT together for two years. I had started my MA in the summer school right after graduation and before I got to Big Spring. George was capable of a great deal of work, and at that time the University of Texas apparently allowed somebody to take all the courses he felt he could manage because George completed his master's degree in two full summers at the University of Texas. His supervision and that of the superintendent brought me along so that I could have a perspective a bit beyond the classroom, I think, helping me to understand the operations of an educational institution.

I met my wife Francys when she was a teacher in junior high school there. She became a member of our senior high school faculty two years after our marriage on Christmas, 1933. She did not finish her BA degree until 1935. She, too, had done some summer school work at the University of Texas, though her degree was from Texas Christian University.

I am talking about my good fortune too much, I guess, but it fell my lot to teach senior English for four of my six years there, and, of course, it was traditional English literature that they studied, so teaching four sections of English literature—four different years in sequence, I acquired at least a general structural knowledge of English literature. In 1936, I took a leave of absence from the high school. Francys stayed in Big Spring teaching that year, and I went to the University of Texas to do serious work toward a PhD. I'd taken an MA in 1934. In the spring of '37, I received a letter from Deacon Wright, a member of the staff down here. They were going to employ somebody for the first six weeks of summer school and maybe for the next year. Would I be interested? I'd made his acquaintance and the acquaintance of Leland Derrick in a course at the University of Texas, and, of all people, in a course in John Bunyan. I would be interested. Well, the six weeks here enabled them to see me and me see the place; Francys and I were delighted with the vegetation and the beauty of the town, with the way the faculty received us, and with the community in general. So that when we were offered an opportunity to stay on, we decided to do so. Not that I came here to stay, you understand. I came here because I needed a job and some experience at the college level. Goodness me, the University of Texas had that big library with the center column that they light up when an athletic team is victorious, and our library down here could be housed on the second floor of Lueders Hall, which no longer exists now. I'll admit I was a bit condescending in the beginning for my learning to respect the operation here and to realize that they had a school before I arrived was a progressive matter over several months.

Schumann: I like that!

Houston: Well, Gates Thomas would be an instance. Deacon took me to meet Gates Thomas, the chairman of the department, on my first visit down here. And Gates sat on a divan with his legs crossed, folded up over his legs, and looking at me sideways. He had flowing white hair. My initial impression was, "Well, he's a fine old man, but he's sort of lost his grip!" I didn't have an office the first year and had to share one with Gates and Leonard Wright. Gates taught right across the hall. So, it was with considerable surprise that year that I discovered from the ripple of laughter that went through that classroom about every thirty seconds that Gates had the people following him step-by-step through his presentation. Of course, I came to have great respect for him, and we'll talk about him sometime.

Schumann: May I ask you something?

Houston: Yes.

Schumann: Where was the English department located at the time that you are referring to?

Houston: It was the third floor of Lueders Hall.

Schumann: Did you also office on the third floor of Lueders?

Houston: I might say that Dr. Evans built an office for me. When I got an office, it was on a little mezzanine in the southwest corner of Old Main that had been built by cutting down the ceilings in the offices that were below. Derrick and I moved into an office there. We had a large waiting room outside because the college had not determined any particular use for it. And we had a divan out there; I don't know how we conjured that up.

Schumann: So, actually, the English Department was kind of scattered around.

Houston: Yes. In this office, we worked while listening to the Director of Teacher Placement as he talked with students about their potential because the room wasn't completely sealed off from the office below.

Schumann: Kind of altogether!

Houston: Yes. Derrick and I moved subsequently to the third floor of Evans Academic Center when it was completed and stayed there until the war.

Schumann: So there really wasn't the idea of keeping the faculty from a particular department together?

Houston: Honey, that was beyond our range of imagination. Providing housing for staff was such a problem, the idea hardly occurred to them. Of course, disciplines were grouped pretty well. The home economics folks, for example, were all in the building they shared with manual arts—industrial arts it was, by that time.

Schumann: I don't want to interrupt you, but how many students would you expect to have in a class during those early years?

Houston: Too many! The English department had not added staff during the Depression, and their experience was fairly generally characteristic of the whole college. Lloyd Rogers and perhaps one or two others had come the year before in 1936. By 1937, they added two in English, Dr. Kenneth Gantz from the University of Chicago and me. Now, that wasn't two fulltime equivalents because Tom Nichols, who had taught some English sections, was being relieved to teach fulltime in business administration. But even with the new sections, though they tried to hold classes to thirty, I have had thirty-four at least in more than one. Sophomore sections were being taught at fifty. That was the largest class size because our rooms would not accommodate any groups larger than that.

Schumann: Were you teaching literature classes, or were you teaching grammar classes?

Houston: Well, let's see, we were teaching fifteen hours each, and for a new person on the staff, the assignment would be three freshman sections and two sophomore literature sections.

Schumann: You'd have no help, or would you have help?

Houston: Oh, no, no. No idea of help for quite some time.

Schumann: As the department grew and as things changed, which they must have done, or did they do so before the war? We're talking about the period after you came in 1937; say, up to World War II, when you left for military service. Did things pretty well hold level at that point as far as faculty and students and housing and everything is concerned because we're talking about Depression years?

Houston: The student body was growing each year, but our faculty remained pretty well what it was the year I came. I mean in numbers. I believe we were nine total then, and well, I have it in *Rosemary for Remembrance*, I don't recall exactly, but I do know it was not before 1949 or '50 that we began to get additional positions and that faculty growth was always a little late for meeting our responsibilities with the post-war student growth in higher education.

Schumann: I can certainly see that. Did you continue, or when did you move out of Lueders Hall into new quarters? Was that after the war?

Houston: Oh yes, much after the war. It was indeed. It wasn't until early in 1959. Flowers Hall was built in at least three increments. Sometimes I think four, but I can't quite divide it up into four. But the last part built was the upper floor. The whole floor, both east and west of the center entrance, was given to English. And so for the first time, we had more space than we actually needed and felt that we were living in comfort. It would be several years before we could discover that our temperature control mechanisms didn't work much better than they did in the old quarters; of course, we didn't have air conditioning before the war, and the heating system was being worked on all the time! From a teacher's point of view, things always got worse in Lueders instead of better. After the radiators had been removed, I was teaching in a room that had a blower placed almost across the hall from my doorway, and many times when the weather had not been too cold, about ten minutes into the class period, I would look out the door, and if nobody were in sight either way, I would push the button to stop that thing so I could continue teaching in relative quiet through the hour, turning the heat on immediately after the bell rang.

Schumann: That kind of competition with the blower is not too good when you're trying to teach.

Houston: It's difficult for people to maintain their interest when there's noise like that going. They can try, but after a while, the noise wins.

Schumann: Well, when you left, you were called into the service?

Houston: Yes. Several of us were recruited in 1942 by the Training Command of the Army Air Force to undertake the development of schools and the operations of schools.

Schumann: Where did you serve?

Houston: I served all the time in San Antonio—the Aviation Cadet Center most of the time, where Lackland is now. This was the big receiving place for youngsters who would train for pilot or navigator. It offered a conditioning to military life and to physical well-being with instruction in various subjects that the cadets would be studying subsequently in the primary training schools.

Schumann: But you were not teaching English during those years?

Houston: No. I started out teaching aircraft recognition. I'm surely glad that period didn't last long. If it hadn't been for a *LIFE Magazine* picturing the variety of United States aircraft, I wouldn't have had much instructional material. But I arrived at the base about six weeks ahead of the large contingent from the officer's training school in Miami, and so I had seniority and got administrative appointments. I was assistant director of a wing ground school.

Schumann: Then you stayed there the entire time?

Houston: Well, the war was winding down. It was early in '45 that I went over to the command headquarters at Randolph in Intelligence. We were already slowing our pace in the number of new recruits coming in before I left.

Schumann: Was there any questions about your coming back to Southwest Texas after the war?

Houston: No, no. Oh, I might say, I didn't have my doctorate until after the war. I had completed a dissertation and turned it in on April 30, I believe. I already knew the probabilities that I would receive a commission and be called up. And the finishing of my dissertation and keeping up my teaching commitments had about finished me off! So, I said that I did not want to take the exam then, and that seemed to please my director well enough. So the dissertation sat around in boxes over at the University of Texas until 1946 when I took the exams and got my degree. Now, let's see, I got off on a trail here.

Schumann: That's interesting. You had all your work done with the exception of the final exams on your dissertation before the war.

Houston: Yes. But I can't think the point I was making in telling you that.

Schumann: Well, we were talking about coming back to the university or to the college at that time.

Houston: Oh, yes. Well, that seemed to Francys and me a time to look around and make our plans for an extended stay somewhere. But again, it wasn't something we thought on for a long time. I did make myself available for appointment in 1946, but the offers I got were not

exceeding attractive, and when we started counting our blessings in San Marcos, it seemed as if we had landed right where we wanted to be.

Schumann: When you left to go into the military service, was Dr. Evans still president of Southwest Texas? Or had Dr. Flowers come already by this time?

Houston: Yes, when I left, Dr. Evans was still here. Dr. Flowers came in just shortly—well, the same year.

Schumann: About the same time.

Houston: Same year; he came in the fall of '42, and I had been inducted in June.

Schumann: I recently interviewed his daughter.

Houston: Mary?

Schumann: Mary, right. And I knew it was '42, and I didn't remember exactly when that year. Well, what changes did you find on campus when you came, or was it pretty much as it had been before you left?

Houston: I guess pretty much the same. They had gone through the real ordeal. Before the impact of the war, the enrollment increased steadily until it reached a total of almost 1,850 students who were registered in the fall of 1941. Enrollment fell to less than seven hundred when the impact of the war was greatest, but getting a college training detachment of youngsters who were waiting an assignment to Cadet Center, for example, made it possible for the college to maintain the faculty virtually intact, since several of us had gone away and reduced the number they would have to take care of.

Schumann: And I imagine the student enrollment dropped, also, at that period.

Houston: I say it dropped from over 1,800 people to fewer than 700.

Schumann: Would you like to comment on departmental development during those years when you went—I remember reading in your book, you were talking about, you could not go into graduate school, or you could not get a graduate degree in English at some point.

Houston: Yes.

Schumann: And I was interested in that, it was a teachers college, and teaching training was the primary focus in those early years.

Houston: There was great resistance in the legislature and, I would assume, from schools that were already offering graduate programs too—a great resistance to offering graduate work

anywhere except the places that already had it. The teachers colleges as a lobbying group would have had a measure of influence, and the times were right, I guess.

Schumann: It was 1936, if I'm correct on that.

Houston: Yes. Though it was probably three years later before any degrees were granted. I know that in 1939 the administration showed keen interest in our pressing our graduate students to complete their programs of study.

The institutional need to award some graduate degrees turned Francys into a candidate for an MA degree. Having enrolled for courses she wanted to take each semester we had been here, she had acquired virtually all the requisite hours in language and literature. With encouragement from the English department, she signed for the education courses needed, expanded a term paper for a thesis, and qualified for receiving the degree in the summer commencement of 1939.

Schumann: Your undergraduate degrees, were they all education majors also?

Houston: No, no. No. You had the regular structure at the undergraduate level. But the foot-in-the-door for graduate work, at first, was the teachers colleges were authorized to award only teaching degrees—that is to say, with a major in education. Both Master of Education and Master of Arts degrees were offered. A principal difference in the study program for the two degrees was the six-hour thesis required for MA candidates. In 1938, it became possible for our English graduate students to major in language and literature. I think that it was almost 1952 before the transcript could show a major in English. People specialized in the subject fields, even when their major was still education.

Schumann: Was Southwest Texas pretty well staying on an even par with the other teachers colleges during this period? Or were they falling behind as far as offering degrees?

Houston: No, no, no. They were together. I do not know details of the part of SWT history I'm about to refer to here, but almost up to the time I came, periodically, Southwest Texas had been bothered by some threat that it might be closed down. President Evans had pretty well taken care of that, I would say, by the time I got here.

But there certainly was a time when, as now, the legislature was looking at its responsibilities and wondering if it couldn't cut costs by some sort of reorganization and reduction in the number of institutions was one possibility that they would always consider. Being considered too close to the University of Texas, we were somewhat vulnerable.

Schumann: The political influence, then, was it very—do you see the importance of president and the chairmen of the various departments to be politically active in order to help promote the college during that period?

Houston: President Evans was by nature, I would think, politically-oriented. But President Flowers has said to me more than once that he was sorry, he couldn't claim for himself any particular skills in the influencing of legislative actions. But that wasn't so with Dr. Evans. He did a lot of work with the legislature.

Schumann: I knew that he was quite involved in that. After you returned to the campus and the student body began to grow with the returning veterans, during that period, what was happening within the English department itself? What kind of changes were taking place, both physical as well as what was happening to curriculum?

Houston: Well, it seems to me that we moved very slowly. On the MA degree, the minor had to be in a generally-related area like language and literature or natural sciences or foreign languages.

Schumann: Had to be compatible?

Houston: The major would be a group thing, and it was several years before it got around to where people could major specifically in English or Spanish and so on.

Schumann: You returned in '46, and then in '58 you became chairman of the English department.

Houston: Yes. Pretty long period.

Schumann: During that period, there obviously was staff growth.

Houston: I think we had grown to about fifteen members by the time I became chairman. The curriculum had expanded a bit. We introduced alternate courses in sophomore level and added a few areas that had been insufficiently covered at the junior-senior level. We kept our graduate courses to a minimum, really, because at the time we weren't signing up more than seven or eight, say, in a graduate course, and sometime you had to scratch to get your five. The big growth later, which made possible an extensive spread of the graduate curriculum, hadn't touched us during the time I was chairman.

Schumann: During that period of time when you were chairman for those several years—seven years? What would you say if somebody asked you what is the most significant thing that happened to the department during those years?

Houston: I would say, in retrospect now, it was a time of relative peace and happiness. We had an opportunity to do our thing. Now, true, the faculty was pretty heavily loaded with college committee work. All of us—not all of us, of course, but most of us were active in college business, though we did not feel imposed upon as faculty would likely feel now. We were still teaching fifteen hours a week and until noon on Saturday, but some of our people were also

beginning to make time to get some research and publications. As I say in *Rosemary for Remembrance*, I think the time I had greatest satisfaction of being chairman of that department was the day we celebrated the publication in London of Gertrude Reese Hudson's *Browning to His American Friends*.

The book was quite a coup for Gertrude in that she was publishing a collection of Browning's letters previously unknown to scholars. She had found them while going through the papers of a British publishing house. A call to Harry Ransom, the Chancellor of the University of Texas, had brought her authority to buy the lot for the University of Texas Library. She brought the letters to Texas and suspended work on her book in progress in order to bring this publication out. What a thrill it must have been, for Browning had long been her major topic for study. The same day, we could take notice of four other English faculty books that either had preceded it within the year or were coming up before September.

Schumann: So the English department sort of came of age during that year?

Houston: It seemed to get new vitality, and as I was trying to emphasize, we were having fun, I think. We had just acquired a faculty member, Mamie Smith, who had taught me at North Texas State and had resigned there on her marriage, teaching later in Minnesota and Oklahoma. Her husband had died, and she was available to come down here. Now, Mamie, at my suggestion, organized "Hour with Books," a series of books reviews or readings from books, about five or six each semester. We were getting a pretty good response over the campus. I guess we could feel better about our faculty and town response than we could about students because you never know the chain marks that are on the students when they show up there! But, of course, it was good for them, too, and such things are good for students who never manage to attend. Just the knowledge that it's there if they want it, I have always felt, is worth something.

Schumann: I think so too, the exposure and the, perhaps, follow-up on their part at the later date in their lives.

Houston: It's a little source of pride, perhaps, in your institution. The English faculty is alive; they like their materials. They even give up an hour or so once a week for six weeks, to share this enjoyment of literature.

Schumann: Is that what it was? It was weekly?

Houston: When it was on. I'm not sure that she always had six, but I think five would be a minimum.

Schumann: Then she would do kind of a review of that?

Houston: Oh, she didn't do more than one a year! She was the manager. She'd do one, but most of the folks on the program were other English department people or their guests from another

discipline. We got better acquainted with each other, and faculty colleagues got better acquainted with us, and students would identify a teacher—you know, I'd like to study with him or her.

Schumann: I certainly can see where that could be a growth for the department. Just having someone else to appreciate your work, and be there and hear what you have been doing.

Houston: Yes. It wasn't continued for long after I left the department, but I don't think it was a lack of appreciation of the activity so much as, almost simultaneously, the emphasis on publication became heavier—I say "heavier;" golly, there had been no previous emphasis on publication in this school. Good teaching is what we placed emphasis upon. Publications were appreciated but not required. But we began to place emphasis on publications, and spending time to get a book review together takes away from study for publication.

Schumann: I certainly can appreciate how that would be the case. Well, you mentioned Professor Smith. Were there other outstanding folks that were in the department at that time that would like to comment on or have something to say about their work, perhaps?

Houston: You said Smith, you mean Gates Thomas, I guess. Smith was in Biology, though a good friend of mine.

Schumann: I'm sorry.

Houston: Well, I guess, let's talk about Leonard Wright for the minute. From the time I first knew him he was rotund, not quite a Falstaffian sort of body, but a stout man who, on first appearance, was very quiet. But everybody who heard the quiet remarks he made would be impressed by his wit and good humor. He had done a great deal to integrate town and gown here, serving on the hospital board for many years. That was when our hospital was out on Belvin Street and when it was only the ingenuity of the board that would guarantee us hospital service in town here because it was always nip-and-tuck. Well, I would say the board; I'm sure that most of the doctors at least worked hard to keep the thing going, and for many of those years, Leonard was president of the board. He sang in the Methodist Choir, though he's a Presbyterian. I suppose that's a sort of indication that he didn't feel that the music at the Presbyterian Church was the best in town. He was a service club member; first Kiwanis, then the Lions. In time, he came to be local correspondent for the *Austin American*, an activity that he gave considerable time to because he felt it was important that both San Marcos and the college get better reporting in their local newspaper and Austin papers than they had had before. He broadcast athletic events. He wrote and read the presentation of Gaillardians each homecoming dance. He wrote the script and read it at the water pageant in the spring. He had a hand in student publications, sponsoring both the newspaper and the yearbook at various times. He was a leader in the Conference of College Teachers of English, a very active person in several contexts.

Schumann: The staff at that time, was there a lot of camaraderie outside of the context of the college itself—the department itself? You folks who were teaching in the English department, were you together, doing things outside, during your free time?

Houston: It depended on temperament of the individuals. There were, say of the nine—the Wrights, the Derricks, the Houstons, Sue Taylor—those four were pretty much in each other’s company. It was probably not until Derrick became chairman that we had a sort of *pro forma*; an all English faculty party, right at the beginning of each year. But the Wrights entertained extensively, and the faculty of the college was small enough at the time that we could be good friends across the discipline lines with a great many people. So, the faculty in general played together, too. Oh, in summertime, the river and the afternoon swim to reduce body temperatures for the rest of the day brought the faculty together.

Schumann: You became Dean of Liberal Arts, then, from ’65 to 1975.

Houston: Just to 1971, I believe. Wait a minute, maybe it was ’70. I think I was five years Dean of Liberal and Fine Arts. I’m the only one who ever held that title here.

Schumann: Oh, is that right?

Houston: I had nine departments and eleven disciplines. I left the office when the school was divided into a School of Fine Arts—I think they were called “Creative Arts” at first—and a School of Liberal Arts.

Schumann: What were your responsibilities as Dean?

Houston: Well, under James McCrocklin, the deans were expected to run their own show. I can’t remember President McCrocklin really making a whole lot of suggestions. I don’t mean that he didn’t give any advice or that at time he did not reject our recommendations, but he was holding his deans responsible for the operation. Our principal areas of responsibility were in curriculum, faculty, and student counseling. Starting when Derrick was chairman, we had a difficult time in getting a faculty together. We were not highly competitive in salaries, and we possibly were asking somewhat more in preparation than the institution had done in recent times before, that we had to bestir ourselves to get our classes met.

Schumann: So the dean’s office then would—one of the primary responsibilities was to be out searching for new faculty?

Houston: That’s not—I’ve given the wrong impression on that. His responsibility was to keep the chairman alert on what staff needs they were going to have and get them out looking for personnel. The chairmen, by and large, made the initial contacts. When they thought they had something going, they would bring the person to me. I would make a judgment whether to take him to the president’s level or not.

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Schumann: I didn't mean to interrupt you.

Houston: That's all right. I'd say the dean's responsibility was to act as the connecting point between the college administration and the instructional program, and, taking personnel as the instance, he had to look for somebody who was going to be equally satisfactory to administration and the department.

Schumann: Right in between. When did we start having deans on, as a part of the administrations?

Houston: It was in 1965. Before that we had one—well, we had a dean of women and a dean of men, and we had a dean of the faculty, just one instructional dean before '65, when the college was reorganized into schools. The institution had grown enough that this was the most logical development. Prior to '65, in—probably early in President Flowers's tenure, it was, the organization was in divisions, like the Division of Language and Literature and Division of Sciences and so on, and one chairman in the lot was named director of the division. But save for budget times, that organization was largely a paper organization. The chairman of biology, who was the director of the division of sciences, knew better than to try to help the chairman of chemistry in thinking out his problems.

Schumann: I can understand that. Who was the president of the university or the college, I guess it was at that time, when the change was instituted?

Houston: McCrocklin.

Schumann: Was that a period of great growth as far as student population is concerned?

Houston: Yes, well, the big push came after I left the dean's office, though in comparison with what the institution had been for years and the slow growth earlier, six or seven thousand seemed a large school to us. Well, we were getting pretty large, getting considerable growth yearly.

Schumann: And that is—from what I've read, that's a time when it really did mushroom.

Houston: Yes. Oh, poor Bob Walts, who succeeded me as chairman, was really pressed. Now, a considerable part of his solution to the staging problem was to use graduate students in freshman courses, in considerable numbers.

Schumann: I wondered when that time came. So you would use a graduate student to assist a professor in order to take some of the load off.

Houston: No, no.

Schumann: Or, did they actually conduct the classes?

Houston: Let me start back some. I suppose there'd never been a time when the possibility of assigning a class to a graduate student-instructor did not exist, but in the fifteen-year period from 1936–1951 we had made only four such appointments. After 1957, the use of graduate instructors increased yearly until, in 1967, a total of eleven received appointments. Suddenly, Bob had to employ as many for the next year as we had altogether in those years past. Employing only really distinguished students in those first years, we managed to get excellent students teaching and to feel pretty well about the instruction that was being given. When you begin to put sixteen and eighteen graduate students to teaching two sections each, however, you don't know for sure what kind of instruction you're giving. So, for a short time, the program didn't have the supervision it needed, I'm sure. We had to get another organizational structure, adding a director of freshman English. This director was responsible for standardizing the course of study in sections taught by graduate students and for supervising these apprentice teachers in the classroom—a sort of schoolmarm for the graduate assistants.

Schumann: As I see this evolving, eventually did faculty members assume some of that responsibility? Besides having a director of graduate—

Houston: Director of freshman English.

Schumann: Did other members of the faculty, then, assume some of that responsibility of sitting in on the classes and seeing how they were being conducted?

Houston: I forget the specific plans for staff evaluation then, but they existed. Later in Dr. Brunson's tenure as chairman, the evaluation process was organized more formally, I suppose, than before. And then came a time when we weren't having quite as much difficulty getting our courses taught as we had had for several years, so we decided to improve our standards a bit. We stopped giving graduate students the full responsibility for a class until they'd gone through a year as an assistant to an instructor in a double-sized class.

Schumann: I also noticed in reading the *Rosemary for Remembrance* that you were the first president of the faculty senate. How did this particular organization happen to evolve? Could you comment on that?

Houston: Well, that's a story I'm happy to tell. It happened in the fall of '58. We were getting ready for a visitation from the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges—Colleges and Schools, I forget which comes first in that name. Dr. Flowers had been somewhere to a meeting about the first of October. When he came back to the campus panting, he was ready to talk to some of us right off. He began with, "You know, we need a faculty council." The senate under its first constitution was called the faculty council. It was reorganized after that first year and in the reorganization was renamed "senate." The membership of the council continued on in the

senate. It was organized because Dr. Flowers had been so eager to get this council going before we had the visitation here that he had accepted a constitution with one provision that was really not acceptable. It was set up so the office I held was called chairman of the faculty, elected by the faculty council from its membership: no member of the administration was to be present when the faculty met as an organized, voting group. Dr. Flowers was strong on faculty meetings once a month. He took that opportunity to try to—well, a variety of things, to keep the faculty informed on what he was thinking about, or what concerned him most. And, he would have said, which would be true in some sense, to have the faculty debate matters. There were faculty members who felt there was no debate going when the question had already been resolved and the president was really asking for concurrence in the decision that he had made. We met right after the monthly faculty meeting, but all administrative officers had to get up and trail out of the room when I took the chair. Now, the Southern Association Committee came, and they said to Dr. Flowers, Look, you can't put up with a constitution like that. It's not proper that you do so.

Now, of course, that provision had been written in by some people who felt that the administration was making decisions before consulting the faculty, and there were people who didn't want to speak before the administrative officers in quite the way they would speak in our meetings, but the visiting committee said to the president, "You just can't tolerate that. Your folks need to be there if only to provide needed information that a meeting doesn't go off on a tangent because they don't know what the situation is." So, early in 1959, I think it was, we revised the constitution and started over again.

Schumann: Were you selected by the total faculty or did each department have a representative, or how was it?

Houston: All of us on the council were elected by the faculty, but I supposed the council—yeah, that's right, the council chose its own chairman, and I think the senate still does. Nobody is elected by the faculty as chairman of the group.

Schumann: But it does come from departments, is that correct, or is that the total or is it from—

Houston: Oh, I see. I think that under this first constitution, election was by the whole faculty. Later, members of the senate were elected to represent a specific part of the faculty.

Schumann: Well, this was then probably the first organization of faculty members in which they were able to discuss among themselves and then come forward with recommendations?

Houston: The first one that was integrated into the regular administration of the school. We'd had had AAUP, a strong AAUP chapter here since about 1938. In one year there—'38 or '39, we were the second largest AAUP chapter in the state, and interestingly enough, A&M was first, not the University of Texas. The difference is that the University of Texas was fairly calm right there and people weren't exercised about anything. Both A&M and Southwest Texas had come to face

the problem where we're soon to have a new president, and so the faculty chose AAUP, whereas there had just been maybe three or four members on the campus, suddenly more people belonged than didn't belong.

Schumann: That's American Association of University Professors?

Houston: Right. It has a long history and is nationwide, and its voice is significant.

Schumann: But prior to, with the exception—

Houston: Let me go on more. I'm talking about 1959 now. At that time, we also had the Texas Association of College Teachers on which several of us had the privilege of working in the organization. By that time AAUP membership had dwindled. It never did function locally, to my knowledge, as an advisor to the president. I mean in any semi-official way as a professional organization across instructional discipline lines. Now TACT was organized—this Texas Association of College Teachers—was organized to be a channel through which the faculty would communicate with its administrators.

Schumann: It actually was a kind of parallel—

Houston: To AAUP—a state-level parallel to AAUP. A professor of government at North Texas, Sam Barton, felt the need was so great that he took a leave in a spring term and toured the state organizing chapters. This was about 1956 in the post-McCarthy era when most of us realized this desirability of counseling with our college administrators more fully than the administrators had been accustomed to ask for counsel. Barton was succeeded by our own James Taylor, who was chairman of the social science division. That was the one division which functioned as a big department. He took a reduced load and continued Barton's organization business. When Jimmy became state president, he managed to get a leave over here and to get an appointment at the University of Texas so he could work for the organization out of an Austin office. Jimmy and three or four of us had attended the organizational meetings at Sam Houston and at North Texas State College. I don't know whether or not we had any more than those two meetings in setting up a proposed constitution to be put in place whenever we had our organizations.

Schumann: I think I'm hearing you say that the faculties of the various colleges and universities were beginning to get together, and I guess this was the formative years when you began to then maybe assert yourself a bit more than you had previously.

Houston: Well, you could say that. I could say that, but I won't. So far as this institution is concerned, I want to introduce a word of caution in what you read into that. Despite what some people thought then, there had been a great deal of faculty input into administration decisions here, but it wasn't formalized and it wasn't as a faculty, it came from individual faculty

members. We were going into an era then in which faculties of all colleges were going to assume more responsibility for their destiny than had been characteristic of any except a limited few. I doubt that there was any faculty in the state quite comparable to that at the University of Texas in the official responsibilities it had as a faculty.

Schumann: Well, it seems that the faculty here, the whole college here was almost at a stepping-off point at that—where the growth was coming fairly soon.

Houston: Yes.

Schumann: We're talking close to 1960, and then you talk about ten years later when the big push comes. It appears to me, though maybe I'm not evaluating properly, that you're growing toward that.

Houston: We're getting ready to—we hope—getting ready to handle what we felt was coming. Yes.

Schumann: I saw another couple of things that I wonder if you'd comment on. I saw that you were a consultant to the Steering Committee on the Therese Kayser Lindsey Chair of Literature. And this was, am I correct, that this was the first such chair on this campus? Or am I incorrect?

Houston: That's right.

Schumann: What did that involve?

Houston: President Smith had employed a vice president for development—created the position and employed one. And one of the things that the new vice president did to bring the faculty into his operation was to ask each department to submit a want list. If you could have what you wanted, what would you have? Well, I know one item the English department had submitted in their response was that we'd like an endowed chair—I don't know whether we called it a chair or not, but we would like an endowment to bring in the most able personnel in support of our program. I don't suppose we were the only one, the only department that suggested something like that. But, you know, in two or three months after those things went in, we learned that there was a high probability, and then we learned we had it! Well, this—I guess the fact that the English department received it is indication that we were the ones who described needs most accurately in term of what Mrs. Lindsey's daughter, Mrs. Louise Merrick, had in mind. It was a \$500,000 bequest. Now, since I was already retired and was teaching one course, I didn't want to be chairman of the committee. I felt somebody who was on active status ought to do it, but I did sit with the committee for at least two years. They have me the title of counselor. Was that it?

Schumann: Consultant to the steering committee.

Houston: Consultant, yes. And it just happened that Francys and I were vacationing over at Pawleys Island off South Carolina the summer that we were trying our best to get a professor in the chair. The committee had managed to get some show of interest from Arlin Turner, a former Texan, who was retiring from an endowed chair at Duke. I had known Arlin at the University of Texas just after he'd finished his degree and was teaching there until he got a suitable appointment. He went to LSU and then to Duke. So the committee chairman got in touch with me over there: would you go by Durham, North Carolina, and discuss the offer with the Turners? We went by and visited with them and found that they were just delighted to take this appointment in his first year out. In part, I know, because they had a son and a new grandbaby over at the University of Texas where their son was in graduate school. So they came to town, and things started off fine. But, Arlin had a fast-working cancer and died before his year was out. In fact, he managed to function completely only the first semester. Shortly into the second semester, he just had to give it up.

Schumann: That's too bad, but it has been a chair that has been filled?

Houston: That's the only time somebody has occupied the chair to date. I suspect they have built up a little additional endowment—well, they possibly don't count it endowment, but at least some reserves. But they have had several series in which people have come to the campus at a time and on a theme for the year. Women writers one year, the Southwest as a cradle of writers another year, and that sort of thing.

Schumann: They do sort of a seminar, or do they have individual speakers?

Houston: Both. Now they've been trying to get together with James Dickey for him to come back as writer-in-residence for a semester. And I think—well, the last time I heard, the possibility was still there that he might do so in the spring of next year. I don't know if that's still on or not.

Schumann: I have one or two more things here. At any rate, I will make another appointment with you, and we will discuss some of the other things, maybe in a week or two, and I'll try to get the transcript ready by that time. I should be able to do that and give it to you and give you a chance to look over it and make some corrections or whatever you want to do. Also, I want to thank you for this today.

Houston: You're welcome.

End of interview