

An Interview with
**William Lester (Les)
Simpson, Jr.**

at his home in
Odessa, Missouri

04 March 1997

interviewed by Ray Brassieur
transcript edited by N. Renae Farris



Oral History Program
The State Historical Society of Missouri

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RB: This is Ray Brassieur. Today is March 4, 1997. I'm interviewing William "Les" Simpson at his residence in Odessa, Missouri. I'd like to start out with just a little bit of biography about you, just how it all first began, make sure I have that correct.

LS: Yeah.

RB: Your name is William L.?

LS: Yeah, William Lester.

RB: Lester, uh-huh, Simpson. And you say you were born in Columbia?

LS: Yeah.

RB: What year were you born?

LS: 1908. See, my dad was from Illinois, but for some reason he decided he wanted to come to [the University of] Missouri for... I don't know why. His folks wanted him to go to Illinois [State University.] He was their only child, and I guess for some reason he didn't want [to go to Illinois] so he come to Missouri. And he played football on Missouri, 1907, 1908.

RB: Your dad did?

LS: Yeah.

RB: So he came to the University of Missouri, and he was a football player in one of those old famous teams that we see?

LS: Yeah, yeah. Well, they had a pretty good team. Of course, he met this Columbia girl, see, and they got married. Of course I'm in the newspaper business, but he graduated in law. And he practiced about a year and he didn't like it at all. He got acquainted with

Walter Williams, who was, you know, a famous newspaper man and lived in Columbia. I guess Walter talked him into being a newspaperman. Anyway, he got him a little job shop there in Columbia, worked upon that a while, and I think worked some in newspapers for a few months. Then he had a chance to buy this paper in Rolla. (laughs) Why in the world he'd ever do it... There were two other papers there, the Rolla Times, and that was a *third* paper. So he bought the third paper and...

RB: What was the name of it?

LS: The Rolla Times.

RB: It was the Rolla Times.

LS: And they'd had trouble. The bank was backing them, and whoever was in this Times, give it up and they had to sell it to somebody, so he got a real good deal out of it. For a long time the Rolla Herald was the main paper there. And this other paper, the New Era, was just... Everything back here then, you know, was set by hand! For *our* paper, the Times, I could see those -- of course I wasn't very old -- but they had about, I think, four women, set up there, setting this up by hand.

RB: What type of machine would you call that? _____.

LS: Well, no machine -- they set this type up by hand. You know, as I said, they paid them a dollar a week to start.

RB: A dollar a week!

LS: Dollar a week.

RB: And that was at the Rolla Times?

LS: Yeah. And then, of course, later on after...

RB: What year did he move over there, do you know?

LS: 1913.

RB: In 1913. So they were setting type by hand at that point.

LS: Yeah. I was five years old. Of course, later on -- I forget when it was -- then we bought an Intertype, you know, when that come through. That was a big deal, see.

RB: The Intertype?

LS: Yeah.

RB: Now, what was the change? It was no longer setting by hand?

LS: No longer setting by hand. That was a big deal! (chuckles) And of course, later on we...

RB: Now, your dad had bought that?

LS: Yeah.

RB: While he was at Rolla?

LS: Yeah.

RB: So you moved over there. You were five years old when your dad moved?

LS: Yeah.

RB: And you can't remember why he would have gone on such an adventure, huh?

LS: Yeah, can't believe it.

RB: (laughs) But he *had* been working in Columbia, and he'd been working for a fellow by the name of Williams. Tell me a little bit about him, now.

LS: Walter Williams?

RB: Yes, sir.

LS: Williams, I think, was a professor or something in the University. He was known all over the United States as a newspaperman and writer. A lot of them down at Columbia still remember him! And I guess he taught my dad into switching over. (laughs) Otherwise, I'd have been a lawyer, you know.

RB: He talked your dad into switching over to the newspaper business?

LS: Yeah, yeah.

RB: But that's after he had already... Had he passed the bar and all that?

LS: Yeah, yeah!

RB: And then practiced law some, but then decided to...

LS: Yeah, he practiced law, I think -- of course, I didn't go with him then -- in Oklahoma and Tennessee.

RB: That's where he practiced law?

LS: Yeah.

RB: Was he interested in politics at all?

LS: Yeah, he was... Not as much as I was, but he was a good friend of the governor's, I think. Of course the main thing [with] him, there, he got sick. He had what they called a "nerve disease" -- ?locomotor ataxia?, they called it. And the last three years of his life, he was blind. But he had an old Oliver typewriter, and he'd write the editorials and all the stuff on that -- *blind!*

RB: Now, there in Rolla, you mean?

LS: Yeah, yeah.

RB: And he continued to work -- how long did he work? Now, you were five years old when you all went over there in the beginning.

LS: Yeah.

RB: How long did he hold that paper?

LS: Of course, he died in 1928. And my mother... Both my parents died early. When she was in Columbia, she had some kind of a rheumatic fever or disease or something, real bad. And she got over that. And she was a big woman -- she was a big, *tall* woman.

RB: What was your mom's name, Mr. Simpson?

LS: Her name was Blanton.

RB: She was a Blanton?

LS: The Schwabes in Columbia now, are all my second cousins. She was a Schwabe, and she married a Blanton.¹ And this old guy that she married was a doctor, and they had three children. He was an alcoholic, they said, and then one time he just... One morning he wasn't there. He took off somewhere, and we have somebody in the family that delved into all that stuff. We never did find where he went!

RB: He just took off?

LS: We don't know where he's buried! (laughs) He was a doctor!

RB: Uh-huh, he just took off.

LS: He just took off, left his three kids. His wife was real -- that's my grandmother -- she worked for some (I can't remember the name of it now)... She went where there were a lot of colored people in Columbia. The fact is, I used to go *with* her, and deliver

¹ Referring to his grandmother.

something like Sears Roebuck... [*Suddenly remembering*] Larkin! Larkin Company.

And she delivered all this stuff to these black people, and done real good! She bought a house there right on Cherry Street, you know, and bought a couple other little houses, and she done real good.

RB: What was it, like merchandise and stuff?

LS: Yeah, merchandise.

RB: And it was like a catalog business?

LS: Yeah, yeah, a catalog business.

RB: And she delivered out there. And you say it was mostly to the black folks though...?

LS: Yeah, well, she'd sell it to anybody but she had... Those black people liked her, or something. She done real good!

RB: She had a good business.

LS: Had a good business.

RB: Where on Cherry Street did you all live?

LS: I can't remember. It was right in town!

RB: It doesn't look like it anymore, does it?

LS: Oh, no, no!

RB: (laughs) What kind of house was it, do you recall?

LS: Of course that house is gone now, but it was... Let's see, there was some kind of a... It was a big building right on the corner. You probably passed it time and time again.

RB: Uh-huh, yeah, I walk close to there.

LS: My dad's, the printing place was called the... It was a green house, where he had his little press and stuff like that, you know.

RB: You talking about in Rolla, now?

LS: No, in Columbia.

RB: So he started working in Columbia, prior to going to Rolla.

LS: Yeah.

RB: And what was he doing there, exactly, in Columbia?

LS: He had a little kind of a printing plant -- very small, you know. I don't think he hardly made a living out of it.

RB: Did he actually produce a paper?

LS: No. It was like envelopes, letters, and stuff like that.

RB: Well, there around the University, there must have been need for that. That was a good business.

LS: Yeah, at that time, yeah. Of course, he knew a lot a people, too, you know.

RB: Uh-huh. He had a press there -- the press that he had, I'm sure it was all hand-set, too.

LS: Yeah, hand-set too.

RB: So he got rid of that and went to Rolla. Did your mom participate much in the business?

LS: Well, she did until after he died. Then she took over, there. She'd come down and help him, you know, and she kept the books and things like that.

We had a little twenty-acre farm. (chuckles) My dad was raised on a *big* farm. In fact, his folks had money. Back there then, they were fairly wealthy. But he was the only boy, see, and he didn't get along too good with his parents. That's the reason I think

he went to Missouri. So I think they helped him once in a while, you know. In fact, they bought the farm, that little twenty-acre farm. But he, of course, being raised on a farm, you know... We had three cows, two horses, and raised pigs. And my brother and I, we'd milk those cows every morning, got up at four o'clock in the morning, milked the cows, and we'd eat breakfast and go to school. And of course, come back and had to milk them at night, you know. We done that for years. (laughs)

RB: So you guys were the farm hands.

LS: Yeah. We lived a mile-and-a-half from town. I'd walk there, and then I played basketball when I went to high school. That was at least ten miles a day. I played baseball on the town team.

RB: Uh-huh, so you were doing a lot of walking back and forth.

LS: Yeah. Of course my dad was interested in... When he was blind, I'd read all the news to him about Columbia, you know. He was interested in football and baseball. We had quite a time. There's eight in the family. I'm the oldest of eight children.

RB: Eight children! Now, were some of them, did you say, from an earlier [marriage]? You had half-brothers or...?

LS: No, they were all... I had four brothers and four sisters, and all of them... My brother next to me, Greene -- he's dead, he died just last year -- but he had a big printing plant in Kirksville -- a *big* one. He done real good.

RB: And what is his name then?

LS: Greene, Henry Greene [Simpson.] My dad named him after Nathaniel Greene, you know, the Revolution...[Revolutionary War general] (chuckles) My dad was running out

of names. I was a "Junior." My dad was William Lester [Simpson, Senior.] And the girls, two of them bought a newspaper in... *All* of them were in the newspaper business. They bought a newspaper in Jasper, Tennessee. And both Jane and Helen, they're still living in Jasper. And then one of them was real smart. She married a lawyer. And she's a millionaire! He died just a couple of years ago. The other one married a printer that's helped her in the newspaper. They had a real fine paper. And let's see, Betty Ruth, she lives in Wichita Falls -- she married a doctor. (both chuckle) So she done all right.

RB: They did very well, didn't they?

LS: Yeah. My other two brothers, the one younger brother, was a real nice guy, but he was an alcoholic. He just drank himself to death, he died early. And the other brother helped the two sisters -- he was the editor. He went to school someplace in Tennessee. Real nice -- he died about two years ago.

RB: And he was the editor on your sisters' paper?

LS: Yeah.

RB: What's the name of that paper?

LS: Let's see, what was it? The Jasper Journal. And then the younger sister, she... See, when my folks died -- of course we didn't have any money, you know, it was just *nothing* -- but this younger sister, somebody in Chicago, Illinois, (I forget how old she was, wasn't very old) well, they adopted her in Chicago, and she graduated from the University of Missouri, and got a big job in Chicago, working on some magazine. And she died about, oh, I guess ten years ago.

RB: Uh-huh. So she went into journalism too?

LS: Yeah, journalism. My daughter, *she* graduated. My grandson graduated, in Missouri, so we're... My daughter's real active at the University.

RB: Yeah, your daughter, she was head of the Missouri Press Association there, wasn't she, for a while?

LS: Yeah.

RB: And you say you have a grandson that's...?

LS: Yeah, he graduated. He's advertising manager of the paper here.

RB: Here at Odessa?

LS: Yeah. He graduated in advertising.

RB: Okay, let's go back now. You say when you were living in Rolla, you were the oldest son. You did a lot of farm work around the place, but what was your earliest participation in the paper?

LS: I guess I was twelve years old. I used to feed that job press. They'd put a box here for me to stand on. (laughs) I remember that. And I hated it! You know, I wanted to get out and do something. And then, of course, when he died...

RB: What was that job? You had to feed stock?

LS: Yeah, printing stock, you know, just put it in there. And, of course, my dad was pretty active. We had a pretty good business! Of course, he had to, had eight kids, you know, to feed all them. We had plenty to eat, you know.

RB: So they had to set the print by hand, and then it was your job to feed the stock in there.

LS: Yeah, feed the stock in there. Twelve years old. And then later on -- see, that's where I... My brother was a printer. He liked the printing end of it, you know, setting the ads and

stuff like that. I wrote a lot of the stuff for the paper, and run the Linotype, _____ . And lucky I did, see. In 1930, that's when I got married, 1930. I was twenty-one years old, and I married an eighteen-year-old girl. And I tried to get a job, you know, the front office or _____. I couldn't find a job at all! Put an ad in the... ?Linotype? operators were fairly in demand, you know. I'd run an ad there, so my first job as a ?Linotype? operator was at Pacific, Missouri.

RB: Pacific, Missouri?

LS: Yeah, close to St. Louis.

RB: Which paper was that?

LS: It was called the Pacific Transcript. And I stayed there about three months. I was everywhere. Illinois: Anna, Illinois; Golconda, Illinois. Worked at Larned, Kansas. I got out of Kansas as quick as I could! (chuckles)

RB: You mean, now, this was all during the Depression?

LS: Yeah.

RB: These were jobs that you took?

LS: Yeah.

RB: You wouldn't stay very long on a job or...?

LS: Well, some of them, I was just unlucky! I had one of them, the guy... It was at Anna, Illinois, I liked that [one.] I worked a lot of nights, but doing real good. And he sold his paper, and the guy that bought the paper had a ?Linotype? operator. So I told my wife after that, I said, "That's the last time I'm going run the Linotype." So that was a breakthrough. So I run an ad in the Publishers' Auxiliary, for a job as editor, you know,

and so forth. And I heard from someplace in Mount Vernon, Kentucky. A guy, he was a highway patrolman. I don't know how he got them, but he had three papers, he wanted somebody to run them. I went out there at \$125 a month. We had a car, had a car. And of course my little daughter... And we hid out there, and I stayed there all year. See, I'm a Democrat, and I went in and it was a Republican county. I got rid of these other two papers that didn't amount to anything, but the one at Mount Vernon, was the county seat. But Rockcastle County was (laughs) the poorest county in Kentucky. Right in the mountains, you know. But those people are absolutely wonderful. I made friends down there you just can't believe.

RB: Uh-huh. But you say they were a Republican county?

LS: Yeah, Republican county. But I got friends, one of the lawyers there was a Democrat, and we got [to be] real good friends, you know. We had more friends down there, you can't imagine. I hated to leave! They had a Renfro Valley Barn Dance. Had some guy that every week... A big deal! It was really a big deal. So we done all right. And the breakthrough one: At some press meeting, I met the editor at Danville, Kentucky. And for some reason or another, he took out... He was an older fellow -- real, real nice guy -- and for some reason he liked me, so he called up Mount Vernon and said they had a job shop up there, that the guy had left. If I would take over the job -- Danville was a town of 15,000 -- if I'd take that over, and all they'd have to pay was... I would pay fifteen percent to them of what I took in, you know. I figured I couldn't *help* but do pretty good. So I went over to Danville, Kentucky. And what I did, I just increased the prices fifteen percent.

RB: (laughs)

LS: So we done pretty good. And then this man died. Had a daily paper, he was the editor of the daily.

RB: In Danville?

LS: In Danville. And he died.

RB: What was this guy's name?

LS: Alcock. And when he died, they left it to a bunch of lawyers, you know, somebody that -- he did, so they could run it. They had to have an editor, and they asked me if I would take it over. (chuckles) So that was a big deal, you know, for me. Boy, I just loved it. Daily paper!

RB: Was that your first editorship?

LS: Yeah, except for Mount Vernon.

RB: Mount Vernon really was your first.

LS: Yeah, outside.

RB: And you moved there in 1931, you say?

LS: To where?

RB: To Mount Vernon?

LS: No, no. See, I had all these other jobs. I moved there about... I guess it was close to 1940.

RB: And then you became editor in Danville, not too long after that?

LS: Yeah, not too long after that. We done real good!

RB: Now, we skipped over your education a little. You were telling me you played basketball and baseball in high school. When you got out of high school, what did you do? Were you able to go to college?

LS: No, didn't go to college.

RB: Didn't go to college, you went right to work?

LS: Had to!

RB: But you had your training, then, at home, as far as the newspaper business.

LS: Oh yeah, that's where I was trained for two, three years.

RB: Now, in your early career, who would you say was most influential in your learning about editorship or writing?

LS: Just on my own! Because we had it really -- my mother being sick, and my dad, you know -- we really had it hard. I didn't think I had it hard. Of course, you know, like I say, we had plenty to eat. I played baseball on the town team and everything. I was captain of the basketball team.

RB: What did you play? Did you play a forward position?

LS: Yeah. (laughs)

RB: Forward? (laughs)

LS: Of course, back there then, you know, you didn't have... I had to take my glasses off when I played, you know, and I couldn't see very good. (laughter)

RB: But you could still shoot pretty good?

LS: Pretty good, yeah. Rolla was a pretty good town, you know. Rolla School of Mines was there. The fact is we practiced in their gymnasium. But I was into everything. In Mount

Vernon, Kentucky, I wasn't there six months, I joined the Rotary Club. And they elected [me] president. Of course, I made a lot of friends, a lot of people.

RB: And you say there was a music show over there?

LS: Well, Renfro Valley Barn Dance.

RB: Did you get involved in that?

LS: Oh, yeah!

RB: How did you...?

LS: I knew the guy that run it, by the name of John Lair. He was known all over, *everywhere*. He wrote a lot of stuff.²

RB: He wrote songs, you mean?

LS: Yeah.

RB: What kind of music was it? Old-time?

LS: Country music. They had some of the main guys, you know: Red Foley. Of course, you don't know all those guys like I did.

RB: But they were hot at that time, wasn't it? That was right before World War Two?

LS: Oh, yeah, yeah. I was *in* Kentucky when the war started. I was about thirty-five years old, and I was, of course, drafted. When I went to Danville, see, I was there, oh, a couple of years. I was the next one to go, you know, limited service. And that, you know, made you so... I thought at any time I was going go. So I told my wife, I said, "I'm tired of

² Lair broadcast the Renfro Valley Barn Dance on Saturday nights on WLW radio out of Cincinnati, Ohio, and later on Louisville, Kentucky's WHAS. He also later broadcast a Sunday show, *The Gatherin'*, on a different network. Lair developed an area tourist complex at his Renfro Valley home community based on country music and pioneer life. By the mid-1940s he also published a monthly newspaper, the Renfro Valley Bugle. As of 2000, a nonprofit corporation was developing Lair's entertainment center into a Kentucky country music hall of fame and museum. Source: <http://www.berea.edu/library/Special/saafindaid/saa66.html> Accessed August 25, 2003.

this, I'm just going enlist." So I went over and enlisted in the Army, went to Cincinnati, you know, (chuckles) took the examination and everything. But I couldn't do it on account of my eyes. This guy told me, he said, "You'd make a real fine soldier, but you can't shoot." So that ended that, see. That's when I left Danville and went to... Let's see, [it] was about a week. This Publishers' Auxiliary goes all over the United States, you know, a printers' paper. I put an ad in there, and I had a job in Oregon at a newspaper. And I saw an ad in there with this Holden, was a paper wanted to be sold. So it wasn't too far from where I was staying [in] Cuba, Missouri, so I went on down.

RB: Why were you in Cuba, then?

LS: Well, that's where my wife's folks... We lived down there for about two months.

RB: And what is her name again?

LS: My wife's name? Blunt. Her name was Madeline Blunt. I couldn't have made it without her. She stayed right with me!

RB: And you were there in Cuba with her, and then you saw that ad for the Holden...

LS: Yeah, Holden Progress. And I was just lucky that the people that run it were older people.³ They were walking down the street one night, and somebody come up and a car hit them, and killed his wife and hurt him real bad. He couldn't work or anything. So the paper was sitting there, see. You know, wartime, they couldn't... So they had the guy, the president of a bank down there, was in charge of selling it.

RB: Was that that Hobart fellow?

LS: Yeah.

³ C. L. and Julia S. Hobart.

RB: Is that the one that had gotten hit by...?

LS: Hobart, yeah.

RB: That's what happened to him, then?

LS: That's what happened!

RB: And he got hit, and then he was...

LS: So when I went down to see him, he was in bed. And he was really a character! I mean, hard to get along with. He was _____ everything. _____ seems like that he'd lived in Rolla for quite a while, and I told him I was from Rolla, boy, he just... We talked about that. He thought that was okay! So we finally settled, because they almost *had* to sell it, you know. And I had a car back there then. I bought this car in Danville, almost new. Any car, then, you know, like that, was worth something. So I sold the car to somebody in Kansas City, and put that money [down] on the paper. Otherwise, I couldn't have done it, you know. That'd give me a little capital, too, you know. Our first receipts the first month were \$312.00 for the paper.

RB: That's how much it made?

LS: Yeah. That's the gross, everything. Of course the wife, that's the first time she'd ever worked. Of course she had a child, you know. But she was the bookkeeper. I didn't run the Linotype, I got somebody to run it, and got somebody as a printer. Got a printer for thirty-five dollars a week. See, back there, then, you know, *everything* was... You could go down and buy a lunch at noon [for] thirty-five cents, [in] 1944. But it didn't take long, I got things rolling.

RB: Now, to go back just for a second, why did you leave Danville? That was a pretty good job. You were editor there.

LS: Well, this guy had a son. It was kind of a funny deal. We were going to buy it. Had a friend that was a bookkeeper, and he was a friend with some of these lawyers, and he had a little money. And we were going to buy the paper on a long-term basis. You know, I was going run it, and give the... There was two of them owned it. One guy owned it was, he owned -- ?O. Fitzgerald Brewer?, lived in Louisville, Kentucky, and a millionaire, plus. They had half of it. And the other half belonged to the Alcocks -- _____, I think two of them. Well, we thought the roughest part of it [was over.] We got the lawyers together and everybody was okay. They worked out the whole paper, you know, how to do it and everything. We all went to Louisville, I thought, "Well, he'll never sign it. That old man will never sign it." Van Winkle (chuckles) was his name.

RB: Van Winkle?

LS: Uh-huh. Went out to his place, [and] it was a mansion! I mean, a...! He looked the thing over, just put his [signature], Joseph D. Van Winkle. I thought, "Boy, we got her made!" And the Alcocks backed out.

RB: Alcock backed out?

LS: Their daughter. They wanted it for... Their son, his name was Chauncey. I tell you, he was kind of a lazy kind of guy. We didn't want him in there. And they wanted some other stuff at the last minute, so we give it up.

RB: So you started looking for other positions then?

LS: Yeah.

RB: And you were able to find this with Mr. Hobart. Do you recall what year was it that you took over?

LS: 1944.

RB: In Holden. And you say you started off kind of slow, but you were able to hire some people.

LS: Oh, yeah.

RB: And that was a weekly paper then?

LS: Weekly paper.

RB: And it was already quite an old paper, though, by the time?

LS: Oh yeah! It was founded in 1904. But the old man, see, they'd let it run down and everything. Of course, they had a Linotype and all that stuff, you know. The equipment was there.

RB: Can you tell a little bit about that operation, to somebody who doesn't know an awful lot about it, Mr. Simpson? Now, you say you had a press and you had a Linotype, and there was two different people that were working there, right? You had to have a pressman, and then you had to have somebody to run the Linotype.

LS: Yeah.

RB: How did that operation work? To begin with, you...

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[Tape Counter 000; Begin Side 2, Tape 1 of 1.]

LS: I wrote all that stuff.

RB: Big stories that were happening?

LS: That broke, yeah.

RB: Did you have like national stories in there, too?

LS: No, no, all local. See, the county seat was in Warrensburg. We were in the western part of the county. We had, you know, a big territory. Of course, I was a Democrat, and I worked in with the County Court. It wasn't long there [that] I printed all the election stuff. I got a big business out of the courthouse! Back then, you didn't have to bid on anything, you know.

RB: Had to bid on the...

LS: Didn't *have* to. The County Court would give it to you. And if it's a Democratic court, why, of course, I was sitting pretty. The Warrensburg paper [was] independent. They had a daily, of course, in Warrensburg. They were independent. And the fact is, they were Republicans, everybody knew it. And of course the Democrats didn't like that, you know. (chuckling) I was sitting pretty good with them.

RB: So what kind of jobs? You mean you'd get printing jobs and that kind of thing?

LS: Yeah, yeah. A whole lot -- county clerk, county collector, assessor -- I got *all* that stuff!

RB: So, now, that was aside from the paper business?

LS: Yeah, besides the paper.

RB: Then you were printing also...

LS: Yeah, we had a print shop, too.

RB: ...brochures or any kind of...

LS: Envelopes, letterheads, all that, sale bills.

RB: ...posters. Uh-huh, and you got a pretty good business there.

LS: Oh, yeah. See, it wasn't long... My wife, when she come in on the train, and she looked up and down the... A lot of businesses' -- you know, that was wartime -- windows were boarded up. And [coming from] a town of 15,000, you know, where we [were], we had a real nice home, and then (chuckling) she looked out there and tears rolled down her cheeks. She thought, "Boy, we've had it!"

RB: You had to take a step down.

LS: Oh, Lord! We had a hard time finding a place to stay! Some schoolteacher there, she was a real nice woman, and she said, "Well, I'll put you [in] an apartment. I've got a little apartment upstairs. I'll get a stove up there." So we stayed up there for two years. Just a *wonderful person*. She helped us, too. Everybody did! Of course, they wouldn't have had no paper! If it hadn't been for me, they'd [have] had to lock it up, because they couldn't find anybody, you know.

RB: Right.

LS: So I got it pretty cheap. You can't believe though, after a few years, what I done.

RB: What did you do?

LS: I had a big business!

RB: You ended up with a big business out of it?

LS: Oh, yeah!

RB: So this one lady, you had a local reporter?

LS: Yeah.

RB: And she'd go out and collect news stories and...?

LS: Well, yeah, over the phone, [she] done all her stuff. She knew everybody.

RB: And you were typing, I'm sure, with what kind of typing machine? You'd just type up stories, I guess.

LS: No, it's on a typewriter.

RB: Then it went to the Linotype from there?

LS: Yeah.

RB: What kind of operation was that, mechanically?

LS: Well, you ever seen a Linotype?

RB: I don't know what much about the _____.

LS: It's really complicated. But after that, I was there, oh, I guess four or five years, they came out with something electronic, where you didn't need an operator. You turn this thing on that... You know, give them the copy, they do it. So we got that.

RB: What do you call that machine?

LS: I forget what that was, I can't remember now. But everybody had them.

RB: Let's see, was that a teletypesetter?

LS: Yeah, teletypesetter.

RB: What was the name of it?

LS: That was it!

RB: See, I pick up the word from the books, but I don't know, I don't have a good idea of what it actually did.

LS: (laughs) Yeah, that was a big help.

RB: I came across a place where you'd had a fire over there.

LS: Yeah. Oh, God, I forgot about that! I'm trying to think of when that was. That was, I guess, in the '60s. We just lost it all! I put it off, or something. I was lucky, see. Everything, I was really lucky. See, my daughter [Betty Spaar], she worked in Kansas City somewhere, and a good friend of mine in Odessa, the editor over there... See, I'd go out to the Kansas City Press Club in Kansas City, and he did. I'd come over to Odessa, and we'd go to this Press Club. It met once a month.

RB: Was that Mr. [William A.] Bray you're talking about?

LS: Well, he had it before him. This guy's name was Western, Joe Western. Bray sold it [the Odessan newspaper] to Western. And I guess, oh, I can't remember the year or number, but anyway, he got a job on the Wall Street Journal, and wanted to leave. So he told me, he said, "Would your daughter be interested in buying the paper?" I said, "Yeah, she'll *really* be interested in buying it!" So we worked out a deal with him, and she took over the paper from Joe. And then when I had the fire, see, then we came over here and set stuff and kept the paper running, and she'd print my paper over here. We'd take the forms we fixed up, bring it over here and print it. We done that for a couple of weeks, 'til we got back and bought new machinery and everything.

RB: Gosh, that thing... So it was a total loss?

LS: Oh, it was a total loss! Yeah.

RB: New machinery, new building, and everything.

LS: But it was lucky that... I didn't have enough insurance, I [had] thought, about, oh, I guess three or four months before. So I really tripled my insurance. And my God, if we hadn't done that, it'd been a bad deal!

RB: Uh-huh.

LS: It didn't hurt, it really *helped* us.

RB: It came out better than it could have.

LS: Yeah.

RB: But your daughter had already married. Now, prior to that, your daughter was working with you on the paper in Holden?

LS: No.

RB: She wasn't? But she had gone to school, right, to study journalism?

LS: Yeah, she graduated [from] M.U. in journalism.

RB: And she was very interested in it?

LS: Oh yeah, and she helped me a lot! See, I was in politics -- we haven't got to that yet. I was a campaign manager for Tom Eagleton, [State] Attorney General.

RB: Ah! When did that start?

LS: Well, let's see, that was in the '60s, and I traveled all over Missouri, got him elected.

RB: Campaign manager! How did you meet him, how did you get to know him?

LS: Well, somebody that was in the Press Association recommended me, you know, that I knew everybody -- because I was president of the Missouri Press Association.

RB: That's right! Pretty early too, right?

LS: 1957.

RB: Okay, so you were president then. Now, that brings me up to a question, exactly what that Missouri Press Association is. (laughter) It's successful, I know.

LS: Yeah. Well, of course, I was in it. My wife was secretary one year, too, of the Press Association. The guy what was vice-president... You know, I'm trying to get to how they elected me president. They had a *second* vice-president. I was second vice, then we go to vice-president, then president. That's the way they operated. When I got in at the vice-president, and then he was elected president when I was vice. He was in the telephone business too, and he had a lot of stuff. And a lot of this stuff, we're going to meet, you know, district meetings and things. He'd call me up [and] ask me if I'd do it. So I'd go down to the southeast, down in Cape [Girardeau] and all over Missouri. And before I was president, I knew *all* those people. Then as president, then I done the same thing, see. So the state of Missouri, I knew practically every... I'd been in practically every newspaper in the state of Missouri.

RB: And you'd visit them as part of your role as an officer in the Missouri Press [Association]?

LS: Yeah.

RB: When you visited them, what did you do?

LS: Well, just come in and tell them, you know, _____ press, and [asked] if they had any problems and so forth and so on. Bill Bray would go with me. We traveled around practically *all* the papers. Bill would go with me. And of course, that's one thing, when I was a [campaign] manager, though, I knew all these editors, good friends of them.

RB: That's an important network, isn't it, that Missouri Press Association?

LS: Oh, yeah! And then after I got Tom there, why, I got another job as campaign manager for True Davis [William True Davis, Jr.] when he ran for senator.

RB: For who, now?

LS: True Davis. That was a *big* job. He was a multimillionaire.

RB: So you were interested in politics prior to that?

LS: Oh, yeah.

RB: Had you had any office?

LS: No. Just knew all these people. The governor... [*Slight pause, thinking*] (chuckles)
Trying to remember all this... You can't imagine the stuff I was in! I was on the Board of Regents of Central Missouri Press for eighteen years. And Jim Blair was governor, he was the one that... The governor appointed me, so he appointed me. And then Warren Hearnese was governor. We were real close friends! He appointed me twice. The fact is, there's a lot of things I could have went to Washington, D.C. [U.S. Senator] Ed Long -- I knew *all* those people, you know -- Ed Long wanted me to go to Washington as his assistant. 'Cause I'd have to give up... You know, my wife would run the paper, but I didn't... I backed out. Warren Hearnese wanted me to be chief clerk, and I backed out on that.

RB: So you had to choose at one point whether it was going to be politics or the newspaper business?

LS: Yeah. But it [would have] been rough on my wife, you know, [and] daughter, so I didn't do it. I'm glad I didn't. It'd [have] changed everything.

RB: But you still were able to keep your finger there as campaign...?

LS: Yeah, oh, yeah. While I was doing that, my wife run the paper, because I was home on the weekends, or she'd call me on the phone or anything. She done a good job!

Otherwise, we couldn't have done it.

RB: Now, after the fire, and you built back up, you got new equipment and everything else?

LS: Yeah, I had new equipment.

RB: And you continued there in Holden for how long?

LS: Sold the paper in 1975. I was there thirty-one years.

RB: And by that time, though, your daughter was already well established here?

LS: Over here, yeah.

RB: After '75, did you all stay in Holden?

LS: I stayed at Holden until... See, I've been up here now about six years, so I could be close to my daughter and the doctors, you know. I had a doctor in Odessa, good guy.

RB: You're really on the same road, aren't you? I saw that Highway 131, is it?

LS: Yeah.

RB: Just a little bit up the road.

LS: Just not too far, you know, twenty miles.

RB: So after '75, were you mostly just retired?

LS: Yeah.

RB: Were you also active in politics?

LS: Oh yeah, politics. I didn't _____, but I was active in the Press Association, you know. I still went to all the meetings and all that kind of stuff. And we done a lot of traveling. Been all over Europe. We had a newspaper group that went to a lot of these

countries, spent seventeen days. I've been to Yugoslavia [and] Poland. One trip we took to Great Britain. And all over Europe: Germany, Spain. Spent seventeen days in Switzerland.

RB: Wow, that's great. Did you ever hold office while you were in Holden?

LS: Oh, yeah! (laughs) Yeah, I was president of the Chamber of Commerce for a couple of years. I formed the Development Association. I was real active in everything. Got a lot of stuff in there that, you know... We had a real good baseball team there. I didn't play, but the guy that managed it was a real close friend of mine. We didn't have anyplace to play, so there was a little place out of town, about ten acres, so I got the Chamber of Commerce [and] we decided to buy it. The only way to buy it, it cost \$2,000. I had fifty dollars in it, and I'd run the names of all the people, you know, the money. We raised \$2,000 and put it in. And put lights in so we could play at night. We had a wonderful ball team.

RB: Was it softball or hard?

LS: Hardball. We played the Kansas City Monarchs.

RB: Oh, come on! Now, what years was this?

LS: That was in the '50s, late '50s.

RB: Kansas City Monarchs, they were in their...

LS: And we beat them one time! They come down to Holden.

RB: Wow!

LS: We had a fine team. We went to Wichita, I think we finished about third or fourth.

RB: Uh-huh. So this was like semi-pro league?

LS: Yeah, semi-pro. Yeah, we played all those Kansas City teams. Had a lot of those Kansas City guys played on the team, you know.

RB: Now, would they come to Holden to play?

LS: Yeah, come to Holden. I announced all the games.

RB: Well, now, some of those became famous players, didn't they?

LS: Oh, yes! Famous players.

RB: Robinson played for one of those teams, didn't he? Jackie?

LS: Yeah, but we didn't have him. We played... I'm trying to think. We played the New York Black Yankees -- a lot of those traveling teams come in there, you know -- and one time we played a bunch, we had the All Stars, the pros in there, some of the big names. I can't remember all of them now. Howard, used to catch with the Yankees, played down there.

RB: Elston Howard?

LS: Elston Howard played in Holden. (laughs)

RB: Wow! He didn't play *for* Holden, though?

LS: No, he played with the Yankees, the Black Yankees.

RB: Uh-huh. I guess he was one of their earlier ones to come up into the majors.

LS: Yeah. And Whitey Herzog, he played for *us*!

RB: Oh, he did?!

LS: Whitey was going to... That's when he was in the service at Fort Leonard Wood. And they let him off weekends to come play with us. Whitey's a good friend of mine.

RB: Oh, really?!

LS: Oh, yeah! He managed the Royals, you know. I used to go up and go down on the field there with him. Yeah, I'd forgot all about that. That Whitey's quite a character!

RB: So you had to pull between politics, the newspaper business, and sports!

LS: (laughs) And sports. Yeah, I loved baseball!

RB: Could you tell which one you liked better, out of all of that?

LS: (laughs)

RB: You had to have all of them, didn't you?

LS: Yeah. I played baseball, see, center field. In Brunswick, see... I forgot about Brunswick, you know. We lived in Brunswick, Missouri, for seven years.

RB: Now, when was that, then?

LS: That's right after I got married in 1930. See, we went out to Larned, Kansas, for about four or five months 'til the guy sold the paper out there -- same kind of a deal, where the guy, his son was a Linotype operator. So when I got this job in Brunswick, was a Linotype operator. And I managed the baseball team there for seven years. They played all those Kansas City teams, played Columbia. I managed the team and played center field.

RB: You mean in Brunswick?

LS: In Brunswick.

RB: And what was the name of that team?

LS: Athletics. I'll show you, I've got a picture. Of course, I was thin then, you know, real thin.

RB: Now, what was your job in Brunswick?

LS: Linotype operator.

RB: For which paper?

LS: The Brunswicker. Of course, playing baseball and everything, there again, I knew everybody and their brother. We were Methodists then, and I taught a Sunday School class and had a bunch of kids. I also had a little league, little kids, you know, about eleven, twelve years old. And this Sunday School class, one of the requirements was that boys on the team had to go to Sunday School. I wish you'd have seen some of those kids! (laughter) I had a big class.

RB: They had to go to Sunday School if they wanted to play?

LS: Yeah. I had a lot of fun with them. Of course, some of the parents helped me, too, you know. We played some of the towns around there. That was a lot of fun.

RB: Now, Mr. Simpson, let me ask you a question. You talk about politics, and you're *still* in politics, aren't you?

LS: Well... Of course, I'm really *interested* in politics.

RB: But your daughter was telling me, are you mayor or something like that?

LS: No.

RB: Somebody was... I don't know where I got that from. Right now, you're not involved in politics?

LS: Oh, no, no.

RB: Well, the question I have for you anyway, I've talked to some publishers and newspaper people who try to tell me that politics don't really have a place in newspaper.

LS: Oh, that's wrong.

RB: (chuckles) That they try to have this balanced outlook, you know, where... But do you think politics really is somewhat involved?

LS: Oh, yeah. It is in the weeklies and dailies in the state. Of course, a lot of them say they're independent, see? Just like you're running the election stuff, you know. They run part of it as a Democrat and something Republican paper, see. You *have* to, according to law.

RB: You have to put both...?

LS: You have to say whether you're a Democrat or Republican.

RB: Oh, as the publisher of the paper?

LS: Yeah.

RB: Ah-ha.

LS: Yeah, in fact, the independents are not supposed to do it. Of course, if you have an independent in the county, that's the only one there, then they put it in the paper. But that's what I say about politics. It makes a lot of difference. Of course some newspaper people don't play it like I did, you know. It helped me tremendously! It helped me in Kentucky. This good friend of mine was a lawyer. Was an *influential* lawyer. He was a Democrat. But he was a friend to a lot of these people in the courthouse, see. Of course, I was the only paper there. I got the printing from them, and I printed the first financial statement that ever was printed in Rockcastle County. A page, you know, about *[gestures, indicates size]* (laughing) According to law, they were supposed to do it, but they never did it! And this lawyer told them, "You'd better do it." They did it. Of course, it wasn't *big* money, you know. Back there then every little bit helped.

RB: So now, of course, that's going to affect your editorials too.

LS: Yeah!

RB: You write your editorials according to how you...

LS: Because I played up... You know, in a small town, you can't be too much on that. It'd really hurt you.

RB: Uh-huh, so you do have to walk a line.

LS: That's right.

RB: Among your readership you have some Republicans and some...

LS: Oh, yeah, some of my best friends are Republicans, you know. You could overdo that, you know.

RB: It seems like today, it seems like to me now you have some editors who are purposefully far out on one side.

LS: Yeah, yeah. (chuckles) Of course, some dailies will do it, you know. They'll go all out. But a small weekly paper, you know, you do that, it'd hurt you.

RB: Yeah.

LS: Couldn't do it.

RB: So I guess it's only a bigger daily that can afford to have [a strong bias.] And then maybe they'd have a number of editors, where you have a balance -- some with different points of view, that kind of thing.

LS: Yeah. I know one guy that... I'm thinking of the guy that run against [Dwight D.] Eisenhower. I can't think of his name. But this guy was in Kansas City. [*Suddenly remembering*] Stevenson! Adlai Stevenson. I went to Kansas City and I met him. See,

they had a meeting, and I got to visit with him a little, and I really liked him! So I went back and wrote a little editorial about Adlai, you know, that I was for him. Had some red-hot Republican come in and he said... He was madder than hell! He said, "Just take me off your list. I'll never take this damned paper!" (laughter) I said, "Okay, we'll do 'er!" It wasn't long, though, he come back. Later on, he become one of my better friends. But he was madder than hell. (chuckles) He couldn't understand why anybody would be against Eisenhower.

RB: Right.

LS: That's about the only time I'd ever done that. Of course, by having met him, you know. He was a real intelligent sort of guy. Little bitty old guy.

RB: And so you eventually got in with Eagleton, then, on his campaign?

LS: Oh yeah, Eagleton was a good friend of mine. Still is!

RB: Now, wasn't he a baseball fan?

LS: Yeah. His dad was the director of the St. Louis Cardinals.

RB: Yeah! That's what I was trying to think, yeah.

LS: Yeah. They played the Yankees, and Tom got me two tickets to the World Series. Several times there, you know... Back there then they had a special box for guests upstairs. Tom would get me tickets to that. I'd go up there.

RB: You were in the press box?

LS: Press box! I sat up there. At one time, [August A., Jr.] Gussie Busch's wife, she played gin rummy with Tom. Boy, that was the place to be! They had all kinds of sandwiches, you know -- drinks and everything up there. Boy, you'd sit over there...! (chuckles)

RB: And they were playing gin rummy up there? (laughs)

LS: Yeah. And Gussie's wife. Yeah, Tom was real good to me. His old man, though, he didn't think that... See, with Tom, I traveled all over the state of Missouri with him. We slept in the same room. Of course, we had double beds. That's how close we were, for *months*. We traveled all over the state of Missouri. And his old man thought that wasn't necessary. He thought St. Louis would elect him, see, that would do it. Of course, that was a *bad* mistake, you know, if he had done it. And Tom knew it! Later on, you know, he knew a lot of newspaper people and stuff. But the old man, he didn't figure it out, he thought that was an unnecessary expense.

RB: All of that out-state stuff, huh?

LS: Yeah. He called me up one time, said he wanted to have breakfast with me. I said, "Okay." He took me to some fancy place. Then he told me all this stuff, about, you know, that Tom could carry St. Louis big enough. That was *bad*, you know.

RB: (chuckling) Yeah. Yeah, because I guess if you're in St. Louis, you get to thinking you're the...

LS: He did, you know. He had a big majority, but you can't [ignore] Kansas City, St. Joe, or all these other places, you know.

RB: That's right. So after he was elected, did you participate in the government too?

LS: Yeah. When he was elected attorney general, I was kind of a P.R. [public relations] guy. I'd go up there once a week. I made a little money, not much. But I was pretty close to him. But when he ran for senator, the old man thought that he ought to have a... I was going to be his manager, you know, and at the time I *would* have been, but the old man

was putting up the money. You know, his old man was really wealthy. The old man was putting up the money, so they got some other guy. And I didn't want to be a... If I'd have stayed out of it, you know, when I went with True Davis, I done real good. I was not only his manager, but... But he was a *wonderful* guy. _____ made some real money.

RB: Yeah, that's great.

LS: Let's see, was anything else _____?

RB: That's what I want to give you a chance... We're about out of this tape right here. Give you one chance to say whatever else you'd like to say about the newspaper business. It's changed a lot, hasn't it?

LS: See, I went from the hot type to the offset deal, and that made a lot of difference, you know.

RB: Now from which type?

LS: You know, when [we were] still on the Linotype, we called it "hot stuff."

RB: Hot type.

LS: Hot type. Everything. But now, you see, it's entirely different. Betty, just like she's got the computers and all that stuff, you know.

RB: Did you ever get into the computer business at all?

LS: Not the computer, but offset I did. We had the... Harrisonville printed our paper. See, we'd take it over there, and they'd print it for us. And Betty does the same thing. She has hers printed in Independence.

RB: What about these conglomerates? Tell me something about those. There are some large organizations that buy up a whole bunch of papers like that. What do you think their function is? Does that work pretty good?

LS: Well, it don't as far as the Missouri Press is... The thing about it is, you see, like -- and it's getting worse, you know -- where some guy will buy nine or ten of these weeklies, all the dailies. It's entirely different, see, because you take a guy to manage one of those papers, that's what they are, they're managers. Some of them now are a little different, but maybe he'll stay in there three years, four years, as far as working in with the... It works fairly good, you know. We got, let's see, some guy in Chillicothe, [the Constitution-Tribune] was owned by the American [Publishing Company.] He was president. They got so many of them now, you know. It's a lot different when, you know...

RB: That's right, that some of them are pretty large, too.

LS: Yeah. Down in Southeast Missouri, some guy [Gary Rust of Rust Communications] owns practically all those papers in the bootheel -- Cape Girardeau and Dexter -- a whole *bunch* of them.

RB: Do you think that affects the philosophy of the little paper?

LS: Well, it's entirely different. Of course, naturally, being an owner, you can't blame those guys. Ask them in there, you know, give them a big price for a paper. Like Sikeston. Those guys in Sikeston, the Blantons are real close friends of mine for... In fact, when we went to the Press Association one year on their hundredth [anniversary], he took a trip

to Europe, sponsored by the Missouri Press [Association], and I went. And this guy, Charlie Blanton, and his wife and my wife, we went together on...⁴

[Tape Counter 478; End of Side 2, Tape 1 of 1. End of interview.]

⁴ Referring to Charles L. Blanton, Jr., who owned the Sikeston Daily Standard Democrat. This newspaper was acquired in 1996 by DA Publishing, which in turn was owned by Gary Rust of Rust Communications; Michael Jensen, the paper's publisher; and Don Culbertson, the paper's former general manager.