

An Interview with  
**Dorothy Burford**

at the  
Ripley County Historical Society in  
Doniphan, Missouri

**21 August 1997**

interviewed by Ray Brassieur  
transcribed by Teresa Jones  
edited by Renae Farris



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## PREFACE

The interview was recorded on two 3M AVX60 type I (normal bias) audio cassettes, using a Sony TC-D5 Pro II stereo cassette recorder and an Audio-Technica AT825 stereo microphone attached to a floor stand.

The following transcript represents a faithful rendering of the oral history interview. Minor stylistic alterations -- none of factual consequence -- have been made as part of a general transcription policy. The interviewee or narrator, carefully examined a draft transcript and indicated additional modifications, some of substantive value. Additional historical material expressed in his letter accompanying the returned draft are included in the following transcript. Any use of brackets [ ] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Parentheses ( ) are used to indicate laughter or a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation. Quotation marks [“ ”] indicate speech depicting dialogue, or words highlighted for the usual special purposes (such as indicating irony). Double dashes [--] and ellipses [ . . . ] are also used as a stylistic method in an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editor, N. Renae Farris.



**[Tape meter, 004; Begin side one, tape one of two]**

RB: I'd like to start out with your name. [I want to] make sure I have your full name correct.

Your name is Dorothy Burford?

DB: Yes. It was Dorothy Robinson Wright to begin with. And nearly sixty-seven years ago I married my husband [and] became Dorothy Wright Burford.

RB: And your husbands name was...?

DB: Peyton Jerome Burford, and we had almost sixty-seven years together. Isn't that wonderful?

RB: Wow, that's exceptional!

DB: It is.

RB: And you say that he passed on...?

DB: The 23<sup>rd</sup> of September of last year, and he was a wonderful, wonderful person.

RB: Well, that's a blessing that you had that long with one person.

DB: That's what I think. It's a *blessing*, but I miss him very much. And I'm thankful to the Lord for having made it possible for me to know him and for us to have such a happy life together.

RB: Yes, ma'am. Now, you were born in what [year]?

DB: 1903.

RB: 1903. And what is your birth date?

DB: October the 2<sup>nd</sup>.

RB: October the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1903. So you're ninety-...?

DB: Ninety-three, almost ninety-four. But I did go to the World's Fair -- do you mind my adding anything?

RB: I'd be glad to know about that.

DB: I went to the World's Fair in St. Louis in 1904.

RB: You did?!

DB: But my parents carried me.

RB: So you don't remember a lot about that. (chuckles) You were an infant. (laughs)

DB: I don't think I could; I was less than a year old. But I have a memento of the occasion, and of course they had told me about it.

RB: Now your dad's name again, what was his name...?

DB: Thomas Lyon Wright

RB: Now how did it come that your [middle] name was Robinson? Dorothy Robinson [Wright]?

DB: My grandparents [were] from Arkansas. They were named Robinson.

RB: That was on your mother's side?

DB: *[Affirmatively]* On my mother's side. Her name was Thalia Capps Robinson. And my grandfather was Don [M.] Robinson.

RB: So in those days they named a child with more than one last name.

DB: Well, it isn't a last name; it's a middle name.

RB: Sure, it was your mom's maiden [name.]

DB: *[Affirmatively]* My mom's [maiden name.] You know, just like you give a child today a

middle name. And they usually connected it with a family.

RB: Right, right. And how many brothers and sisters did you have, Mrs. Burford?

DB: I had nine living. Two died in infancy. And it happened this way: My father was married very young to his first wife [Mary Darling Bell.] And they had four children that I knew about.<sup>1</sup> There may have been some that died in infancy. We didn't keep a [written] record; I mean, [we did] *mentally*... Since that's past time for us to be talking about it... Anyway, they had four children: a boy and three girls. My father's first wife died at an early age after she had borne those four children.

RB: That must have been in the nineteenth century, right? When she died, that must have been in the 1800s.

DB: Yes, it was in the 1890s, but it was a boy and three girls. And then seven years after her death he met a woman [Clara "Doddin" Robinson] who was to be *my* mother. And they were married and had five of us living, two who died in infancy.<sup>2</sup>

RB: And of those, you have one that's still [living]?

DB: I have a brother and a sister. A sister, Edith Fowler, lives in Springfield. She married Walter T. Fowler. Walter Thomas Fowler, we kept that Thomas going.

RB: And your brother is...?

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1 Thomas Lyon Wright, Sr. married Mary Darling Bell on April 15, 1883. They had the following children: Nell (1884-1936); Thomas Franklin (1885-1887); Eunice (1887-1914); Joseph M. (1890-1974); and Claire (1894-1977). Source: History and Families - Ripley County, Missouri, Ripley County Historical Society. Turner Publishing Company, Paducah, KY, page 371-372.

2 Thomas Lyon Wright, Sr. married Clara Robinson on November 26, 1902. They had the following children: Dorothy (1903- ); Clifford (died in infancy); Virginia (died in infancy); Helen Winifred (1909-1992); Thomas Lyon (1912-1974), Jr.; Edith Thalia (1913-1999); and William Lyon (1917- ). Source: History and Families - Ripley County, Missouri, Ripley County Historical Society. Turner Publishing Company, Paducah, KY, page 371-372.

**[Tape meter, 050]**

DB: William Lyon Wright. And that Lyon is for General Nathaniel Lyon of Civil War fame, who was killed in the battle right near... Well, right here in Missouri, near where we are, in 1863.<sup>3</sup> And that's when my father was born, and that's why he was named for General Nathaniel Lyon.

RB: And your dad was born in 1863?

DB: Yes.

RB: Wow! And during the war; during that period?

DB: At the end of the war. The war was about to end when he was born.

RB: Do you remember your grandparents? Do you remember *his* parents?<sup>4</sup>

DB: No. No, I don't. I'm sorry, but I can't remember them, because... Well, for (chuckling) one reason -- I have to laugh -- they died before I was born.

RB: But at that time, in 1863, they apparently... They sympathized with the North side?

DB: They were Northerners. Yes, we've been strong Republicans ever since.

RB: Right. So that was an important event, important enough that a child was named after General Lyon.

DB: Yes.

RB: And that was your dad.

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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Brigadier General Nathaniel Lyon was killed at the Battle of Wilson's Creek near Springfield, Missouri on August 10, 1861.

<sup>4</sup> Records indicate that Thomas Lyon Wright, Sr. was the son of Thomas N. Wright and Annie Lyon Wright. Source: History and Families - Ripley County, Missouri, Ripley County Historical Society. Turner Publishing Company, Paducah, KY, page 371-372. This suggests that the story regarding the Civil War general is family legend.

DB: Yes, Thomas Lyon Wright.

RB: I wonder, did you hear a lot of stories about that period? Now, your dad was born during the war, but his memory may not have been strong.

DB: Well, he was strong in every way, and especially in memory. But I just don't remember hearing stories repeated that...

RB: In Missouri it was quite an event that tore people apart. Some were on one side, some on the other. Here you were way down in the Southern part of the state...

DB: Yes. But I have to tell you when you think... You've sparked a memory that I hadn't thought of in years and years, and that was my grandmother on the Robinson side. They were also in the Civil War but probably on the other side, but we didn't make a "to do" about that. She told about how (this is on my grandmother's side) their father had to be away at war, in the Civil War. He was away for some length of time, and he came home in the middle of the night. And my grandmother went in, waking up the children, [calling out in an emotional voice,] "Children! Children! Your Pappy come! Your Pappy come!" But I remember her saying it in that way.

RB: And that was the big event!

DB: That was a big event. He probably had to walk from wherever he had been.

RB: Right. And they didn't know whether he'd come back or not.

DB: Yes. He came home on a furlough.

RB: [In] what part of Arkansas did they live?

DB: They lived around Middlebrook, and Pocahontas.

RB: Do you remember your grandparents on that side?

DB: Oh, yes. They lived 'til... 1913, my grandfather. And my grandmother lived on 'til 1935.

RB: So that was two different branches of the family were on two different sides of the conflict.

DB: Yes.

RB: But now your dad grew up then... Did he grow up right here and around Doniphan?

DB: Well, I would say he was born in St. Louis. And then he came... His parents still brought the children down here. They evidently had connections here. I mean, they knew the...

RB: Kinfolk?

DB: ...ground. And because my father established the T.L. Wright Lumber Company in 1884... See he was only... He was born in 1863, so that made him just 21 years old.

RB: When he established this lumber company?

DB: *[Affirmatively]* T.L. Wright Lumber Company.

RB: So now, his dad, was he born down here?

DB: No, he was born in Lancashire, England.

**[Tape meter, 100]**

RB: Really?

DB: And we went there, (my husband and I)... I can't think how many years ago, but anyway,

we went around, oh, eight or ten years ago.

RB: Do you recall his name, your dad's father?

DB: Yes. Thomas... I think it was Thomas Francis, I'm not sure. But I'd have to look at the tombstone be sure.

RB: Thomas Francis Wright?

DB: Yes.

RB: And he was born in England?

DB: Yes. My grandmother [was born] in Tipperary County, Ireland.

RB: His wife, you mean?

DB: My grandmother. Yes, his wife was born in Tipperary County, Ireland.

RB: Wow.

DB: And they both came here... I don't know [exactly when.] We didn't keep as good records, or *they* didn't, in those days, as we do now. And they both came here. They met, though, and married in St. Louis. That's where my father was born.

RB: Well then, was it your father the one that first made inroads into the Doniphan area?

DB: Yes.

RB: Okay, so it wasn't his *parents* generation...

DB: They did come, but my father was the one that established the T.L. Wright Lumber Company, which still exists. As a corporation, that is.

RB: So as a young man, then, had he gotten an education in the St. Louis [area] that you know of?

DB: He had gotten what education he had. But he was a wonderfully self-educated man. He had a *wonderful* education. And I learned most of what I... Or a lot of what I've learned, [was] through his education.

RB: So he came down as a young man. And there must have been a business opportunity available for him...

DB: He made it. There wasn't any available, but he made it. In fact, he worked for the Prospect-News before he established the T.L. Wright Lumber Company, and that was as a young boy. I've heard them say he had to stand on a stool to be able to be seen across the counter there at the Prospect.

RB: And that was the newspaper, the Prospect...?

DB: That's in existence right now.

RB: It's still going on here?

DB: Yes, yes.

RB: So that's a very old paper!

DB: It is, yes.

RB: And he first worked for that when he came down?

DB: Yes, *very* briefly. You asked if there was no opportunity. He *made* the opportunity and started his own company.

RB: Right, right. That lumber company, was it principally to produce *lumber*? Or was it working for the railroad? Or what was the...?

DB: Well, in the beginning, there wasn't any railroad. He started it for home building.

RB: I see.

DB: And the use of the lumber and ties later for railroad tracks, that came into existence [with the coming of] the railroad. And then he branched out as to whatever [and] became [involved in other business ventures.] Evidently it was a good product. The lumber business... Maybe this is *my* idea, [but] the lumber business became a little *slack*. And he owned land that he had bought for the timber and lumber. It happened to have river property in it that produced gravel. We then started the gravel business which was used in home building and paving of streets (highways), and railroad beds, ballast for railroads.

RB: Do you recall when the gravel part of the business was started?

**[Tape meter, 150]**

DB: It was started in the early 1920s, because in 1927 when I was 22, my father died. In 1926 he died. And in 1927, I had to run the gravel business.

RB: You had to take over the gravel [business]?

DB: Because I was the oldest child -- at *home*. I had my three older sisters and brother, but I was the oldest one at home.

RB: I see. They had already moved away from home?

DB: Yes. One sister died early, and the other two sisters were married and away. And my older brother of the first marriage had his own family. So it was only logical (as was the custom in those days) for the oldest one at home to run the family business.

RB: Was your mom still living at that time?

DB: My mother was living. And she lived on until 19... I have to think, and I may have to

correct this, *[speaking slowly, pauses, thinking]* 1956.

RB: 1956?

DB: *[Affirmatively]* Mm-hmm.

RB: About that time. And she was at home, though, but she chose not to...

DB: She took care of the family.

RB: She wasn't the one at that time that would have taken over the business?

DB: No. Well, she was not -- that wasn't her vocation. I'll tell you about her sometime. She had one, a vocation. But anyway, my father had another business that pertains to my mother. And he started the telephone in Ripley County, and he... You want to hear about that?

RB: Sure, I will. I want to hear about it. I'd like to go back a little bit further though, and work our way up a little bit more. To begin with, you were saying your dad came over and started the timber business here. Do you recall him ever saying anything about what that timber was like? When he first came down?

DB: Oh, it was just a dense forest. He didn't have to say anything, I just knew by observing.

RB: What were the main species, what were the main trees that he was [harvesting]?

DB: Oak and pine and maple. Mostly pine and oak.

RB: So they had pine? Was it a white pine or a yellow pine?

DB: White.

RB: White pine.

DB: I'm telling you what I think. I haven't ever been asked that question before.

RB: Well, you weren't here, naturally, when you dad first came down. And yet the forest must have been *somewhat* similar when you started remembering what the...

DB: Well, yes, that's what I'm telling you. It was oak and pine.

RB: Sure, sure.

DB: I don't understand what you mean.

RB: Well, I was just interested in what... The environment must have changed quite a bit.

DB: You know, I just grew up in the atmosphere of forest.

RB: It was big woods in those days. I'm sure it would have been what they call a "virgin forest."

DB: It was. Virgin pine.

RB: Is there very much pine around here anymore?

DB: Oh, my. Oh, I don't know about now. They keep...

RB: Continue to cut...

DB: They continue to cut it. But I don't know. I haven't had any dealings in that in a while.

RB: But at any rate, you were born here in Doniphan, correct?

DB: Doniphan, yes.

RB: Could I ask: Were you born at home?

DB: At *home*! Yes, they didn't have a hospital here in Doniphan.

RB: Where did you all live? Did you live in town?

**[Tape meter, 200]**

DB: I lived in a house that my father *built* up on Walnut Street in Doniphan. He had the mill

at King Bee<sup>5</sup> which was out near Oxly, or nearer Oxly than Doniphan, because he made his rail shipments, that when the train finally came to Doniphan -- rail shipments, I'll put it that way. King Bee was nearer Oxly than it is to Doniphan. So he made most of his tie and lumber shipments from Oxly.

RB: Now *before* the railroad came, he probably had to *float* some lumber, didn't he?

DB: Yes. That was the custom to raft ties, and that would make a long string of ties connected. And they would float from twenty miles or thirty [or] more up the river [down] to Doniphan, because they didn't have highways in those days. And that was the only mode of their transportation to the destination.

RB: How long did those rafts continue?

DB: Well, I just have to go back in history and think about that. But they continued until my time. It had been going on for long years. And my father acquired riverfront property here in Doniphan to have a landing place for his ties that he would raft from up the river. And I'll have to ask you to give me some time, obviously. It takes a little research to know the dates and times.

RB: Oh, sure, sure. But you remember seeing rafts though?

DB: Oh, yes! But that hadn't been too long ago since they were not used. When the highways became good enough, it was cheaper to haul by truck, than it was to make a raft and float down the river. Or rather more *feasible*.

RB: Mrs. Burford, do you remember that house that you were born in?

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<sup>5</sup> This town, sometimes spelled "Kingbee," was located north of Oxly and northeast of Doniphan in Ripley County. Its post office operated from 1896 to 1909.

DB: It's still there.

RB: It's still there?

DB: Still there.

RB: Great!

DB: But it's for sale.

RB: It is?

DB: Yes.

RB: When was it built? It was built before you were born...

DB: It had to be built in the late 1890s, because I was born in it in 1903. And my father and mother were married in 1902. And they lived at... I started to tell you about her and why it was a different branch of the company, and you said [to] wait a while.

RB: She had started that early? I mean she was working at that time?

DB: Yes, that's what I was going to tell you.

RB: Alright, I'd love to hear about that.

DB: But I'll have to go back a little. My father also brought the first telephone to Ripley County. And he had heard and seen about the telephones.

**[Tape meter, 250]**

I don't know where, but anyway, in his travels. And he started someway or other, he started a telephone... Got *three* telephones in Ripley County. One in his home, one at his office, and let's see... *[Pauses, thinking]* One at King Bee, one at his office in Doniphan, then [one] at his home in Doniphan.

RB: About what year, around what time would that have been?

DB: Well, it had to be... I'll just have to guess at the time and look it up and tell you later. It had to be -- because I've got *stories* on all this, buried at home -- it had to be in the late 1890s, because he had the telephone in King Bee then, and then he had established the office here in Doniphan. And my mother... In late 1890s, it had to be, because I was born in 1903. In those days, women didn't work after they got married. So anyway, they came up from Arkansas, her people... I told you about them, right?

RB: Right, right.

DB: And she started working for the Wright Telephone System. They called it the Wright System. And that was down in downtown Doniphan, the office. She started working there.

RB: That must have been the first telephones anywhere around here.

DB: Yes, he had a telephone even before they had them in surrounding towns. I think it was the first one this side of Cape [Girardeau,] maybe Poplar Bluff and Sikeston, I don't know. But I know that the most of the surrounding towns didn't have them. But anyway, my mother started working for him at the Doniphan telephone office. The *Wright* Telephone [System], that's what it was, the *Wright* Phone. And later there was a competing company, the Mutual Phone. Different people banded together in competition. But anyway, we had the *Wright* Phone until he sold it in later years. But let me tell you about the start of it.

He evidently had -- we used to call it in those days -- he had *eyes* for my mother.

And she probably looked up to him, too. So he moved her to his office at King Bee so he would be near her, I *guess*. But anyway, in those days, my grandmother -- and it these days it *should* be that way -- thought that she should have a *chaperone*, my mother.

**[Tape meter, 300]**

So she sent my Aunt Etta along with her to work in the store at King Bee so she'd be near my mother and could be her chaperone. But anyway, my father and mother, as I said, they became... Well, they had *eyes* for each other. That's a better way to put it. That's the way they'd said it in those days. And they decided to be married, and they took a train from Oxly to Neelyville on to Poplar Bluff to St. Louis to be married. They took a couple to chaperone, the Winkleblecks, who had bought his interest in the company at King Bee. They took *them* as chaperones on that trip.

RB: What was the family name?

DB: W-I-N-K-L-E-B-L-E-C-K. They were from Illinois, I believe. I'll have to check on that. And anyway, they took them as chaperones on this trip to St. Louis. My father had to get off, I believe... I'm not sure *where* he got off on the way to St. Louis -- I can tell by looking at the records -- and got the marriage license. And my mother and the couple (Winkleblecks) proceeded on to St. Louis. [They] went to a hotel as planned, and my father was to join them there. And she got a telegram, Momma did, from him from wherever he was. I'll look up the name of the town. And he said "Have documents. Will arrive on 'such-and-such' a train this evening." So they used telegraph as a really worthwhile means of communication. So when she got there she received that telegram,

and she knew he would be right on. They were married the next... Well, I guess that evening or the next day at the Centenary Methodist Church in St. Louis.

RB: (chuckles) So that was their honeymoon trip, to St. Louis.

DB: That was their honeymoon.

RB: Then I guess they came back down to make a home?

DB: Oh, yes! He came back down, and then he built the home there at the north end of Walnut Street.

**[Tape meter, 350]**

RB: So that was a pretty new home when you were born there?

DB: Yes, it *was* new. It wasn't very old. And then he built a home for his mother right beside it, and brought her in from King Bee, too. There's some of that... After all, it's over ninety years old.

RB: Sure, the house...

DB: You don't expect me to remember everything, do you?

RB: Why, no. That's the *early* period of your life. (chuckling) That's very early days. Your momma continued to work with the telephone service?

DB: Well, I'd imagine she quit as soon as they were married. I just have to assume some things, because she got too busy raising children to stay occupied otherwise.

RB: Now, when you were growing up right there with your folks, did you start school, what at [age] six or...?

DB: At six, at Doniphan.

RB: Six years old? What kind of school did they have at that time?

DB: They had grade school. I started at the grade school. The building was different then than it is now. It was an old grade school. And then they built a new high school, I believe in 1914. And later, of course, I transferred to that [school] and graduated in 1922.

RB: 1922?

DB: [*Affirmatively*] Mm-hmm.

RB: And you were through high school? How many grades was high school at that time? Was it eleven?

DB: Twelve.

RB: Twelve? All the way through? So you had gone to school here, right here in town?

DB: Yes.

RB: And then you...?

DB: We *walked* to school

**[Tape meter, 385. End side one, tape one of two]**

**[Tape meter, 002. Begin side two, tape one of two]**

DB: ...Mr. Hutton, and he had a store across the river at Doniphan, I would say half a mile from the bridge, maybe not that far. But he had a home over in the east part of Doniphan that I imagine was at least two or three miles from his store. And every morning he walked from his home in east Doniphan, (which is the *farthest* part of Doniphan) he walked over across the bridge, into his store in west Doniphan.

RB: Mm-hmm, right. That was a three mile [walk.]

DB: But I just thought that was kind of interesting. People wouldn't do that, they...  
Nowadays they think if they had to walk a block, they ought to be paid for it.

RB: (chuckles) *Right!* Speaking about transportation (you were talking about walking), do you recall what sort of transportation was going on here? I mean, in your very *youngest* days?

DB: Yes, I do.

RB: Do you remember the first *car* you saw, for instance?

DB: Yes, I do. It was about 1912 or '13 -- I'd have to check on that, too -- but it was a Ford automobile, and it was one of the first Fords that came around. And my father bought one, and he not only... Let's see, it could have been later that he taught us. I was about twelve years old when he taught me to drive. In those days, you didn't have to have a driver's license. Anybody that could touch the brake and had could steer the wheel, could drive. He taught me to drive at about twelve years of age, and all the other kids as they came along in our family.

RB: Now before that it was just... What was it, carriage...?

DB: Horse and buggy.

RB: Horse and buggy.

DB: [*Affirmatively*] Uh-huh, we had a *beautiful* team named Nell and Shorty. That was the name of the team. And in those days, we had all the operation of the [home] to take care of the family at one spot. In our lot, which occupied about a block at Doniphan, going... It was *wide* enough to have our home, which is [a] pretty good sized three story house.

And we had a barn [in the] back of it, and between the barn and the house was a woodshed. And that took care of the wood for the family. The cooking was done by a cook stove, and it's what required the wood from the woodshed. And then at the back of the woodshed -- well, in between there -- we had a playhouse. My dad had a playhouse built for my sister Claire, who was about ten years older than I. And when I came along, I inherited it. But anyway, we had the barn that housed the horses, and he had other horses that worked on our farm. They were *used* for work on the farm. They were housed in that barn, and we had a man that took care of them. The horses provided a means of transportation. We also had the cows in the barn -- they were housed in the barn -- as a means of milk, and for table milk, butter, and whatever.

RB: So that was right here in town?

DB: Right here in town, right up at the end of Walnut Street. He also had pigs. We raised our winter's meat there. And once a year, my older brother of the first family would come home (which his home wasn't too far away), and helped butcher the hogs. And we would have fresh meat, then, for the winter. Fresh and cured.

RB: So your dad's first family kept pretty good contact with you?

DB: *Oh, constantly!* We didn't know any different. You mean the *first* family, yes, and the second family? I was of the second family, but we still don't know any difference in the grandchildren of the first or second [families].

**[Tape meter, 050]**

We don't pay any attention which they're from.

RB: Right, right. So you actually had... That's kind of interesting that you had a telephone before you had an automobile here.

DB: Yes, yes. I hadn't thought of that, but we did. And we had the telephone, I know, in 1912.

RB: But there must have not been very many places to call. (chuckles)

DB: Oh, it was... We had a telephone in the late 1890s, but the reason I'm [able to] date this is because I had recent news of one thing that happened. There was recent...

*[Thoughtful pause]*

RB: Research?

DB: Well, it was something that nudged my memory.

RB: I see.

DB: I'm getting this all mixed up for *you*. It's not in *my* mind.

RB: Oh, that's fine, we can go back and listen...

DB: But we did have a telephone before we had an automobile, because my father had established the Wright Telephone System. And as I told you, he had one at the house, one at King Bee (his business away), and one at the office in Doniphan.

RB: There must've not been very many in town, though.

DB: There weren't very many. I used to have a telephone book and there was just very few people had a phone. But at the home in Doniphan... You want me to kind of branch out and go to 1912?

RB: Sure! *Sure!*

DB: And I'll go back to 1890s after while.

RB: Oh, no! We can go on ahead as far as you'd like. We've got you in school...

DB: Well, I just want to tell you this one instance, because I have a date on it. We were gathered around my mother's fireplace in what was her and my dad's bedroom, and also we used it as the living room upstairs. There were three stories to our home in Doniphan. And we were all (all of us children) sitting in there around the fire with Momma and Dad on one Sunday evening in May. In fact it was May the 12<sup>th</sup>. And the phone rang, and it was... My mother went to answer it, and she said, [*spoken with great emotion*] "My God!" And that wasn't her mode of speech. She never used the Lord's name in vain. She turned to us and said, "The Titanic has sunk." The people all around had been waiting [for] the Titanic to make her maiden voyage. That was her maiden voyage, and that's what happened. The way she got the news over the telephone, they called *our* telephone company from the nearest telephone company here, to tell them the news. That's the way we got news in those days, by telephone, if it was on a weekend. That was on the 12<sup>th</sup> of May.<sup>6</sup>

RB: And you remember the message coming in?!

DB: Yeah. Yes.

RB: Did you know about the ship beforehand?

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<sup>6</sup> The Titanic sank on April 15, 1912. It is unclear if it took several weeks for reports to filter into the Missouri Ozarks or if Mrs. Burford was mistaken about the exact date. Although it is possible that she was confusing the month of its sinking with that of the Lusitania, which took place on May 7, 1915, of the two ships Titanic was the only one on its maiden voyage and Mrs. Burford is correct in stating that May 12, 1912 fell on a Sunday. This gives more credibility to the theory that it took a while for the news to reach Doniphan.

DB: *Oh, yes!* Everybody in the world had been watching the news of the Titanic. In those days, people watched -- I guess they did, *we* did -- world news like they watch this county news nowadays. And we *knew* the Titanic was making her voyage. And we all were watching breathlessly. Otherwise, she wouldn't have used the language she did, to receive the news of it sinking. Because it was like to the whole world, a personal tragedy.

RB: And you recall that event happening, coming in?

DB: Why, yes. I was born in 1903 and that was in '12. [I was] nine years old. I wasn't dumb!  
(chuckles)

RB: No, you were old enough to realize some things that were going on.

DB: Yeah! (chuckles)

RB: Other things happened in your youth too, that were *world shattering*.

DB: But see, I wouldn't remember the dates like I remember the date of the Titanic, because they publish that, *frequently*, on the anniversary of the Titanic sinking.

**[Tape meter, 100]**

RB: I guess World War One was a pretty big thing.

DB: World War One; I've lived through World War One, World War Two. I have a funny story to tell about World War Two if you want to hear it.

RB: *Sure*, I'd be glad to hear it.

DB: But it doesn't have anything to do with any of this.

RB: That'd be fine; that'd be great.

DB: Some friends and I had a bridge club, some girls whose husbands (and they *were* girls in

those days) whose husbands were in the Army. And so were eagerly anticipating the end of World War Two. It was imminent, and we watched *breathlessly* for any news because some of the girls in the club had husbands in the Army. I had a brother [in the military.] One of the women was Sue Fulbright, and she happened to be postmistress at Doniphan. I guess she was the first woman postmaster. In those days, [with] the war going on, men were not as available. And so Sue had her own life, her own way. She usually went to bed early and she kept good hours, otherwise, in her business. But one time... In those days when we thought the war was going to *end* any minute, she said, "I'll tell you girls, I want you to do this one thing. If the war ends, I want you to call me, even if it's 9:00 at night!" (chuckles)

RB: (laughing) As late as 9:00 in other words! (laughs)

DB: So we've laughed about that all these years. (chuckles) "Call me even if it's 9:00. *Wake* me up even if it's 9:00 at night!" (both laughing)

RB: (chuckling) She thought that would be *very*, very late!

DB: Well, to this day, *midnight*'s early for me! (laughs)

RB: Uh-huh! *That is great!* Yes, that's something.

DB: But we were waiting breathlessly because it was expected to end any minute.

RB: I suppose there were a lot of men that had gone from here.

DB: Oh, yes!

RB: Reasonably few men left around.

DB: Oh! There were so many men from every family, not just one, but *several*.

RB: We started off talking about that when we were talking about World War One, but at any rate, you were living there through World War One...

DB: Well that was in World War Two I'm talking about.

RB: Right, you were talking about World War Two. But going back some, it probably was a somewhat similar experience. The men had to go to war again back in those days.

DB: That's right. My brother was in the Navy, my brother Joe. My old[er brother.] That's of the first family. He was in the Navy, a volunteer. And that's in World War One. I had an uncle in Arizona that was also... No, he wasn't in Arizona. Let's leave that 'til later. But I'm trying to think who else of the family [was] in World War...

RB: It wasn't long after World War One came to an end that you were getting out of school, then, at that time, weren't you?

DB: Well, the war ended in 1918.

RB: Oh, that's right, you were still in school at that time.

DB: I was still in high school.

**[Tape meter, 150]**

RB: Then when you graduated, how did you decide to go to school up in Columbia?

DB: I first went to Searcy, Arkansas. I went to Galloway College. That was then in existence, but [is] no longer in existence at Searcy, Arkansas.<sup>7</sup> The reason I went there [was because] my two older sisters went there twenty years earlier.

RB: And what sort of school? Was it a...?

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<sup>7</sup> By the time of this interview, Harding University was located on former site of Galloway College.

DB: *Girls* school.

RB: Girls school? Did you learn liberal art-type of things?

DB: Oh, just regular things.

RB: Courses?

DB: Regular course of study. I don't remember it being anything outstanding. I mean I don't remember anything except the regular course of study. I learned... *[thoughtful pause]*

RB: Did you graduate from there?

DB: No! I just went there one year. And then I went to Stephens College at Columbia, Missouri. And I don't know why (I can't remember why) I changed, except they didn't allow boys at Galloway. I had some friends that I wanted to include along with my course of study.

RB: Of course, Stephens was an all-girls school.

DB: Yes, it was, but you could have boys come and visit.

RB: Oh, I see, I see...

DB: I don't remember a single boy at Galloway.

RB: Oh. No boys anywhere in the neighborhood? (chuckles) Do you recall how you first traveled to Stephens College?

DB: Yes, I remember. I would drive to... I have to think just a minute.

RB: This would have been...

DB: I'll tell you how I went to Galloway [in] Searcy, Arkansas. You want to hear that?

RB: Sure! Sure.

DB: My dad would drive me to Neelyville. Or else I would take the train. By that time we had the trains in Neelyville. And I would probably stay all night there with the Giffens family. (The Giffens family lived there.) Then take the early train for Searcy the next day. Then we would go by train to a little town... I mean from Searcy, we went to *another* little town -- I'll have to think, my mind doesn't work -- where Galloway was located. We got off, not at Searcy -- that's where the college was located -- but at a little town on the railroad. Searcy was just off the railroad just a little piece. So I've forgotten that; I'll have to tell you that later.

RB: So that was a couple of days trip. It took more than one day just to go down there. How about Columbia? How long did it take to go to...?

DB: Now that trip can take four hours by automobile. But Columbia, I went to... I would go to get on the train here and go to Poplar Bluff, and then I'd take the train [from] Poplar Bluff for... I mean *Neelyville*. I'd go to *Neelyville*, and from *Neelyville* I'd take the train to *St. Louis*. And from *St. Louis*, I would go to Columbia by train.

**[Tape meter, 200]**

RB: Gosh. The train didn't run straight up to Columbia, you had to go to St. Louis.

DB: No. Yeah, I had to go to St. Louis.

RB: Columbia, I'm sure, was quite a bit different when you first arrived there. This was in *1923*, was it?

DB: Yes, yes.

RB: Did you stay there? For how many years?

DB: I just stayed one year, and graduated the next year.

RB: Did you graduate with a certain degree in those days?

DB: Just Associate Arts.

RB: And you came on home. You say your dad was in poor health at that time?

DB: Well, he wasn't in poor health, but he became ill later. No, he wasn't in poor health.

RB: Well, when you first graduated, did you come back home? Did you go to *work*?

DB: Oh, yes. I went to work. I had eyes on another job. My older sister, Nell, married Clyde Page. And he had a sister, Lillian, who was a Red Cross nurse in World War One. And she was sent to *France* during World War One. She served as nurse and *secretary*, because she was a good typist. And when the war was over, she went to Cuba because she had information on some good jobs down there. And she was making \$400 a month at Cuba. Imagine in those days! So I decided Cuba was my dish! And that was where I was going go!

RB: That's not Cuba, Missouri, now. That's Cuba in the Caribbean.

DB: Yeah, the land of Cuba. That was when Cuba was still *free*. In fact, my husband and I visited Cuba *personally*, when [it] was still free after our marriage in '29. But anyway, she went to work over at Cuba for a sugar plantation and made \$400 a month. Well, I had my eyes on \$400 a month! So I told my dad that's where I wanted to go, was Cuba. And he had other ideas. He put me to work in his office, and my first paycheck was \$10 for the first week. (sighs)

RB: (laughs) So much for your profession at that time! (laughs) What were you doing in his

office?

DB: Well, I took typing in school, so I hammered away at the typewriter for him. And I typed his letters and kept his books. I took bookkeeping and shorthand, but it took me forever for me to translate my shorthand [into] a readable deal.

RB: But you started learning more about his business, and about the company and that kind of thing at that time?

DB: Yeah, yes. I started learning. And it was [in] 1924 [that] I got out of school. And it's a good thing I got out rather than having achieved my ambition of going to Cuba, because I wouldn't have been ready to help the family, in that case.

**[Tape meter, 250]**

RB: That's right. Now when did your dad die?

DB: He died in 1926.

RB: '26. So that gave you just two years to sort of become familiar with the business?

DB: In 1927, I got my first job... I mean [I got] a bid in. When I say I got my first job I mean *contracts* for the company.

RB: And what was your position, at that time, with the company? Owner? You were the...?

DB: Office girl.

RB: You were the office girl when you were working when your *dad* was there, but when he passed away...?

DB: Well, that was all there was. My brother was working in the bank at that time. He was running the bank at Doniphan. And my sisters were married and had families, my two

older sisters. And my others, the family of my... Well, the family that I was a part of, the second family, they were still in school. It was necessary for somebody to...

RB: Continue the...

DB: ...keep the family. My mother was living, and it was necessary to keep her and the family going. So she made all the family feel as if we were just *one*. And the first family and the second family (so to call [them]) were just one big family. And every Saturday we had "Bean Day" at our house, and everybody gathered in.

RB: What was it, Bean Day?

DB: B-E-A-N. She cooked a big pot of beans and we all went home.

RB: (laughs) But that was a lot of responsibility for a young woman at that time, when your dad died, for you to step up. And it was unusual too, was it not, for a young woman to take that much responsibility in business at that time? Was it unusual?

DB: Yes. It was. Let's turn that off just a minute because...

**[Tape meter 283. Recorder turned off]**

DB: I had really good help in continuing the business. My brother Joe, who worked at the bank, took care of that end of the business, and he helped and *advised* me. Helped me and advised me. And I had a brother-in-law, in Little Rock (my sister Nell's husband), and he helped make contacts for me with the highway department and the State of Arkansas. I knew people in the state of Missouri Highway Department. My brother-in-law in Little Rock knew because the Missouri Pacific ran through Little Rock [also] came through [nearby] Poplar Bluff, [we had a business opportunity] and so we started

furnishing gravel ballast for them.

**[Tape meter, 300]**

RB: Did you also have some pretty good helpers here? I mean like foremen or people who worked on...?

DB: Yes, but they came in about like I did, and learned the business from scratch.

RB: I see.

DB: I had wonderful people helping. Most of them are gone now.

RB: How long did you run that part of the business there then?

DB: Well, my brother T.L., graduated from Westminster College -- I mean he didn't graduate from Westminster, he was helping me run the business. And he had to stay home his fourth year in college to help with the family business. And he was helping, and I had a brother-in-law in Little Rock [who] helped until 1930 when he died. And then my brother Joe who had the bank and my brother T.L. ([who] graduated about that time from high school and then on to Westminster College), they helped.

RB: Did you continue to work in the business? How long did you continue? Are you *still* a part of the business?

DB: Well, yes I am. But I don't have an active... My brother Bill does most of the active participation. We only have land holdings now and we're not actively engaged in the work *ourselves*, but we lease the land that operates the gravel business. *Their* gravel business.

RB: How about the timber business? Were you involved in that too?

DB: We still just sell off the timber. You know, it doesn't go very fast, and we don't have to make a deal on that but once every ten years, or twenty.

RB: Did you incorporate as a...?

DB: We incorporated in 1884. My father did.

RB: So it's like a family corporation, then?

DB: It is.

RB: So you have the board members. Are they all members of the family?

**[Tape meter, 350]**

DB: Yes, they are. I'm trying to think who is actively engaged. My brother, Bill is about the only one *actively* engaged. But the others are... I just have to think a minute. My nephew Charlie Lee, whose mother was Claire Wright Lee of the first family of children, she helped until her death, which was about... I have to think to give you a date. It's anyway thirty years ago.

RB: But you've been involved in it all along then, over the years. You've continued to be involved in it. Another thing that you brought up that I find very interesting -- we haven't had a chance to talk about it at all -- and that is your political interests. When did you first become interested in politics?

DB: I have to laugh at that. I guess I attended my *national* Republican Convention in Chicago, in 19... I'm trying to think. Eisenhower, what year was that?

RB: Would that have been in the late 50s?

DB: No, *early* 50s. It was '52. I attended [my] first Republican National Convention as a

guest, not as a participant, in 1952. That was the year Eisenhower was nominated.

RB: Was your husband interested in politics too?

DB: Oh, he was kind enough to let me go the limits, but he didn't take an...

**[Tape meter, 386. End side two, tape one of one.]**

**[Tape meter, 003. Begin side one, tape two of two]**

DB: He was a wonderful person. And I wanted to say this: Both of us were Methodist, but we loved all religions. And we have a deep devotion and thankfulness to the Lord for giving us almost *sixty-seven* years. *Almost!*

RB: Wow, that's just *amazing!*

DB: Together.

RB: So you all were married then in '29?

DB: 1929.

RB: '29. Wow!

DB: And he was a wonderful, wonderful person. And he left this world in 1996, September the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

RB: He eventually developed an oil business?

DB: At the age of twenty-one, he started and incorporated soon after, yes.

RB: Was he from here?

DB: Yes, he was born at Lutesville, Missouri. His family moved here when he was three years old. His father was [the] depot agent here.

RB: The depot?

DB: Yes, Missouri Pacific.

RB: I see.

DB: And he later transferred to the Doniphan State Bank which was owned by my father. My father in the meantime, started the bank. The telephone company and then the bank. And then... Let's see, what am I telling you? Where'd I get [to]?

RB: Well, your husband had been working for the depot...

DB: No, not my husband, his *father*.

RB: Oh, *his* father.

DB: [He] came here as a *station* agent. Missouri Pacific Station Agent. That's what we called them in those days. *Depot* Agent. And he transferred his interest to the bank, and started working at the bank. And then he started (Mr. Burford, this is Jerome's father) several other businesses: feed store and all kinds of other things. He was a very smart man. P.J. [Peyton James] Burford, my husband's father.

RB: So did you know your husband...? Did you know him when you were young?

DB: We started going together in grade school.

RB: Oh, okay. (chuckles) So that's even *more* than sixty-seven years. You knew him for quite a while.

DB: Yeah. And then... You find when you ask me a question, you get into trouble because it just sparks a memory.

RB: Well, that's the purpose! (laughs)

DB: Jerome, then, grew up here. He started with a filling station right over here on the corner,

Burford Oil Company, or Burford Station. It's been Burford Oil Company so long, that's all I say. Anyway, he started his own business [and] incorporated the Burford Oil Company, which is still a corporation. [It's] still in active in corporate details, not active...

RB: In retail.

DB: Yeah. He used to have a retail business, and was active in that. But it's not as much retail now, and don't put all that ?clutter in?.

RB: So, he was a business man, and you were in business too (or came into business with your family's company) and I suppose it's sort of logical that politics would be involved somewhere.

DB: Oh, yes! Well, no, his family were Democrats. But the more Jerome heard about my side of the story (political,) the more he realized, the more he thought *I* was right, and he started coming over. And by the time he died he was an ardent Republican.

RB: (laughs) But it took you some years to get him over to that side!

DB: No, I didn't try. I just let him so his own thinking and he finally did.

**[Tape meter, 050]**

RB: Was your dad interested in politics?

DB: Yes, he was a Republican from the days of the Civil War. Of course, he was just born at that time, but his parents evidently instilled the thinking to him that they had had.

RB: Did he ever serve? Did he ever hold office?

DB: No. Neither of us have ever held an office. We've just been interested in keeping things

right. (chuckles)

RB: I see. But one of the sorts of work a person can do, is with (as you were saying) these political committees. Is that correct? Is that how you started working with the...

DB: No. Well, I started getting especially interested. I had always been interested, and I'd have to check my records, since 1940. I was on the County Committee. But I became a member of the *State* Committee about 1950, in the 1950s. I would meet the people that would come here campaigning. Senator [John] Danforth, Governor [Christopher "Kit"] Bond -- or Senator Bond (he was governor then)...

RB: Of course, [John] Ashcroft is one that was very important recently.

DB: Ashcroft, yes, Senator Ashcroft. I followed him all through his career. I was there when he first started. Now, I'm still here, and he's still there.

RB: Have you ever participated in the national political organization?

DB: I've gone to *eleven* national conventions. Last year, I went to San Diego to my *eleventh* national convention.

RB: Who do you go with? Do you go with other constituents in here town?

DB: Well, I've gone... Not here in town, but I have gone with other people, different ones, maybe, every time. Last time, I took my daughter [Virginia "Jerry" Wright Burford McAninch]. Or she took *me*, which ever way you want to call it, to San Diego. My husband was in the rest home at that time, and he was perfectly happy and willing for me to go.

RB: Would you say that Ripley County today is predominately Republican?

DB: I wouldn't say it was predominately, but we have elected or given some of the good men that ran for office, the majority. Sometimes. I won't put it all the time.

RB: But it's still a contest here in the county?

DB: Yes, we try to make it that way.

RB: And you never have thought of running for office yourself?

DB: *Heavens, no!* I couldn't get elected to anything!

RB: Well, I don't know about *that*.

DB: I just help [where] I can.

RB: Well, Mrs. Burford, we *have* been speaking for a good while now, and I really appreciate you taking this much time. I'd like to sort of end up with anything that you would like to add, for instance...

DB: Well, I don't think of anything except I would like to tell about the condition (that I would have to review in my mind) in World War One, in which my... [*pauses*] I'm trying to think. My younger brother, Bill, did not participate in that. My brother Joe did (of the first set [of children]). But I would like to think about that. But wouldn't you like to look at this and see if there's anything you'd like to talk about later, and let me kind of renew my knowledge about it?

*[Sounds of pages being flipped, papers shuffled]*

RB: Sure.

DB: For the next time.

**[Tape meter, 100]**

RB: For the next time, uh-huh. I certainly hope we do have the chance to get together again, and you've had a *lot* of...

DB: Can you read that?

RB: I see a lot of topics here about travel, and news, and *music* for instance. What about music? Are you a musician?

DB: No, I'm not. I can't even sing! But I love music, yes, and I have relatives that are wonderful musicians. In fact, my brother T.L. was in the Methodist choir for 40 years. He died about twenty years ago.

RB: Then highways, I'm sure that has changed so drastically in your time. The rafting of ties, we talked a *little* bit about that.

DB: You've talked about that.

RB: And World War Two, you had a neat story about that. I'd like to ask you one last final question. You've had the opportunity to live for quite a number of years. What would you say would be the major change that you've seen in your life?

DB: In my life?

RB: Yes, ma'am.

DB: [*pause, thinking*] I would say the loss of my husband in the last year.

RB: Okay. So then it's like a personal relationship? That was the important...?

DB: Well, he was just somebody I could come in and tell my day's trials and tribulations, joys and happiness, the good things and the bad things. I could talk with him and he with me the same way. And that personal relationship is gone *forever*. I can *never* have another

relationship like *that*. That has hurt me more than anything. But I'm thankful for the wonderful life we had together. Almost sixty-seven years. That's more than most people can *ever* dream of having.

RB: Oh, that's for sure.

DB: So I have to be thankful to the Lord for that.

RB: Well, that's very important. You know, some people may have said that changes in technology and changes in, oh... Television came along and in your life, airplanes, different things you've seen...

DB: I've just accepted them as they came.

RB: You sort of just rode the wave there. Whatever changes came about, you've kept up with them pretty well.

DB: Well, I've tried. But the transportation, we can talk about that sometime, but not... I'm *sure* you have to get on, but transportation... I can pull out some photographs of our old surrey. Two seated *deluxe* surrey, *without* a fringe on top! But it was the first surrey that we had, the first *motorized*... No, it wasn't the *first* motorized vehicle, 'cause we had a little \_\_\_\_\_ at first. A little less interesting one, but it was interesting to me! Yes, Model T Ford!

RB: Alright Mrs. Burford, I thank you very, very much for all your time.

[Tape meter, 138. End side one, tape two of two. End of interview.]