

An Interview with
Ruth Bryant

at *The Historical Society of Missouri* St. Louis
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Oral History Program

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PREFACE

The interview was taped on a placed on a tripod. There are periodic background sounds but the recording is of generally high quality.

The following transcript represents a rendering of the oral history interview. Stylistic alterations have been made as part of a general transcription policy. The interviewee offered clarifications and suggestions, which the following transcript reflects. Any use of brackets [] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Physical gestures, certain vocal inflections such as imitation, and/or pauses are designated by a combination of italics and brackets []. Any use of parentheses () indicates a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation, or laughter. Quotation marks [""] identify speech depicting dialogue, speech patterns, or the initial use of nicknames. Em dashes [—] are used as a stylistic method to show a meaningful pause or an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech or when indicating a court case title. Particularly animated speech is identified with **bold** lettering. Underlining [] indicates a proper title of a publication. The use of underlining and double question marks in parentheses [(??)] denotes unintelligible phrases. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editor, Josephine Sporleder.

Blanche Touhill: Would you introduce yourself?

Ruth Bryant: I'm Ruth Bryant.

Blanche Touhill: Would you talk a little bit about your family, where you grew up, your brothers and sisters, your mother and father, your relatives, the people you played with as a child, and elementary school teachers or high school teachers that encouraged you to be what you wanted to be and we'll just chat.

Ruth Bryant: Okay.

Blanche Touhill: So talk about your youth.

Ruth Bryant: Okay. I was born in Memphis, Tennessee and lived there until I was transferred here to St. Louis in 1973. I'm the oldest. My parents were born in Northern Mississippi and they moved to Memphis where they worked and then that's where they met and so I'm here. I have two brothers. I'm the oldest of the family, the children and...you had asked me about teachers. I remember I was valedictorian in my high school and I was in the hospital for six weeks with pneumonia and the principal of the school had to come to the hospital to give me my diploma and I was supposed to make the speech because I was valedictorian. I didn't have to do that. But anyway, my 1st grade teacher, Flora Cook, came to see me and I thought, here, she remembers me 12 years after that and I was really surprised and really appreciative of her doing that. But also, there's some other teachers in grammar school. The 4th grade teacher and the 5th grade teacher, Miss Bloomingburg but they would always read...and the 6th grade teacher, they would read. So I guess that's where I developed an interest in reading, although my mother would always read to all of us. I guess we were always interested in books because now I'm so oriented toward libraries. I love libraries. If I'm traveling abroad even, I have to go to libraries to see what they look like. But I have had high school teachers who have created an interest in the theatre because I would usher. There was a little theatre in Memphis, the Pink Palace, where Clarence Saunders had built his huge home and it became a museum and then a little theatre. So, because the teacher that I had, Miss. Ellensworth, was very active, she got some of her students to go out and would usher and we always had to dress in the formal. It was kind of interesting that even at that time, that's how we were to dress.

Blanche Touhill: Formal?

Ruth Bryant: Yes, we had long dresses to wear to usher.

Blanche Touhill: So your parents had to buy you a dress to usher?

Ruth Bryant: That's right, that's right, and my father would have to take me out there and pick me up. My father was great about that sort of thing. When I was in high school, I was at the Latin tournament and he would always take me to Nashville because, if you were in the glee club, as I was, we would go to Nashville to perform and compete with other glee clubs around the state. Anyway, the Latin tournament, we'd have to go to Peabody College which is now part of Vanderbilt, for the Latin tournament. I had won it for West Tennessee. Anyway, my father was wonderful about doing...if we needed a ride, my father was always there. In fact, I guess it was because he would take me to Southwestern at Memphis which is now Rhodes College, when I was a freshman in high school, he'd take me and a friend of mine to Rhodes College to hear lectures about classical archeology. So consequently I've always been interested in archeology. So, I had wonderful parents who were very supportive. They never told me what I should be doing. They never said I had to marry and a lot of parents were always saying, "Oh, you've got to marry," but they just...all three of us are achievement-oriented, my two brothers and I and I think it's that we knew they expected us to perform at our best. So I had wonderful parents and my father was very supportive of me.

Blanche Touhill: I know he liked baseball.

Ruth Bryant: Yes, he did, and I guess that's where...all three of us, we would go...well, actually, there were leagues and he played on a team, a softball team and it was when people would go...at the fairgrounds, there was this huge ball field and there were bleachers all the way around. It was a whole block. It was really quite interesting. So we grew up going to baseball, these softball games where he was the pitcher. Then I guess we also would go to Russwood Park where the Chicks....I don't know what field team it was but anyway, they were baseball teams. In fact, some of the famous managers actually managed the Chicks. So I guess that's where I developed this keen interest in sports. In fact, even now, I subscribe to Sports Illustrated and I keep up with what's going on. Like, now, of

course, it's the World Cup that's taking place. I have interest in sports. A lot of people are a little surprised. They say, "You like baseball" but I do.

Blanche Touhill: Did your mother like sports as well?

Ruth Bryant: Yes, I think so, mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: So she liked to read...

Ruth Bryant: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: And then she also had that side, the athletic side?

Ruth Bryant: Right, right.

Blanche Touhill: Did you play sports in school?

Ruth Bryant: When I was a freshman in college, I was...I never did really play except I did win the intramural archery competition as a freshman in college, more spectator kinds of sports.

Blanche Touhill: Well, there weren't intercollegiate.

Ruth Bryant: I did play golf for a little while.

Blanche Touhill: But there weren't intercollegiate teams on the college level for women until...

Ruth Bryant: No.

Blanche Touhill: ...really, Title Nine came about, unless you went to a women's school and maybe they played sports, I don't know.

Ruth Bryant: No, but it was a co-ed so...mm-hmmm.

Blanche Touhill: Did you play in the neighborhood?

Ruth Bryant: Yes, it was at a time when the children could be out until 9:00 o'clock at night just playing. And then growing up, there was a young girl, she lived on Greenwood, we lived on Trigg Avenue and she and I would play. In her backyard, there were some bushes or something but there was a little open space inside so that would be our office and we would play boss and secretary and sometimes I was the secretary; sometimes I was the boss. And so later on, I became both so it was kind of interesting. But I was very young. I was in grammar school then, when we would do that.

Blanche Touhill: Did she go into an office to work later, do you know?

Ruth Bryant: Who? My mother?

Blanche Touhill: No, your girlfriend?

Ruth Bryant: You know, I don't know. It would be kind of interesting to know what she did because we sort of moved out of the neighborhood and I never did have that contact.

Blanche Touhill: But it's interesting that you liked the desk game.

Ruth Bryant: Mm-hmm, but my mother was a supervisor before she married and then when she married, she quit working but she was a supervisor.

Blanche Touhill: For what company?

Ruth Bryant: I don't know what it was but she was a supervisor.

Blanche Touhill: In charge of others?

Ruth Bryant: Right, right, which I think is kind of interesting. She never talked about it very much.

Blanche Touhill: But in those days, I guess when she married, she quit work?

Ruth Bryant: Yes. I think my father wanted her to, which it usually was.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, I think it was.

Ruth Bryant: Listen, that was in the '20s so that was kind of early.

Blanche Touhill: Yeah.

Ruth Bryant: I think she would have been a good supervisor too.

Blanche Touhill: Yes...Why do you think that?

Ruth Bryant: Just the way she operated. I mean, she was not a take-charge kind of person, but yet, she knew what she wanted to do and we respected her and so she had that...you know, she could command that sort of expectation from someone.

Blanche Touhill: What happened to your brothers?

Ruth Bryant: My two brothers, both of them, they went to Rhodes College where I went and they graduated and both of them...it was right in the middle of World War II...and so my brother volunteered for the Air Force. He became a second lieutenant and navigator on a B-29. He was at [inaudible 08:42] Air Force Base in Kearney, Nebraska, just when the atom bomb was dropped in Japan and that stopped him. He was supposed to be on his way to Hawaii which meant he was going to be part of the Pacific war. In fact, he died several years ago and he wrote his own obituary. He wrote beautifully. Somebody said, "I wonder who wrote it?" I said, "Russell wrote that." I'm Ruth, my brothers are Russell and Ray. My mother didn't realize it but we were all starting with R's. But anyway, after he was discharged from the Air Force, he started at Rhodes and he graduated. He was top 10 in his class. Then he later went on to University of Chicago to study economics. Then, when he came back, he started working at a bank, Union Planters Bank, and then he went with...it was Southern Bell at that time and then later became South Central Bell. So he was an executive with them and he was transferred around different places but that's what he wound up doing. My other brother, I remember, on D-Day, he had a paper route which was a morning paper route, the Commercial Appeal, and on the 6th of June, I remember, he came home and said, "They've landed in Normandy" to let us know before he finished his paper route. But anyway, so he was two years younger than my other brother and so he volunteered for the Marines and because he was such an excellent typist...he could type 80 words a minute...they were going to put him in some sort of an assignment in which he was going to have to go abroad. Anyway, he said, "Do you need any typist," and he said, "I'm a pretty good typist," and so they gave him a test and they said, "Stay here." So he stayed mostly at Cherry Point, and he knew when planes were going out. Sometimes he could hop a ride home or he could hop a ride to New York. So anyway, he was very fortunate. He didn't have to go abroad.

Blanche Touhill: Where was Cherry Point?

Ruth Bryant: North Carolina. He was at Paris Island, where I think he started and then Cherry Point is also in North Carolina. So anyway, he graduated from college and he, too, had top honors when he graduated. So he wound up with Southern Bell too so both of my brothers were with Southern Bell and then South Central Bell and both of them transferred away.

Blanche Touhill: When you left college, did you go to work right away?

Ruth Bryant: Yes, mm-hmm, at the bank.

Blanche Touhill: Why did you choose a bank? Did they have an opening?

Ruth Bryant: Because some classmates of mine had gotten some jobs there and so I said, oh. We had a neighbor who had always worked at the bank and it always sounded like a nice place. So that's where I went. A lot of people think, you know...you don't think about choosing banking, now people don't think, "I want to be a banker" because now a lot of people criticize banking, but if I had to choose it again, I think I would have chosen banking because it's a good career. It certainly has been one that I found interesting.

Blanche Touhill: I can remember the days when I was an adult and you never had a woman vice president of a bank. That came later.

Ruth Bryant: Oh, much, much later because I began working in the 40's. And the first job, it was so menial, I couldn't believe I was doing this but it was during the war also and then I gradually was promoted to various jobs and, as you say, women did not have opportunities like that. So finally, I became secretary, executive, to the manager of the branch. See, I was with the Federal Reserve Bank and the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis had a branch in Memphis, Little Rock and Louisville.

Blanche Touhill: So you went from this other private bank to the Federal Reserve?

Ruth Bryant: No, I started at the Federal Reserve.

Blanche Touhill: You started at the Federal Reserve?

Ruth Bryant: Started at the Federal Reserve, yes. So that's the only thing I've known, although, in my job, I was very involved with other banks and so people usually thought...there's a bank here in St. Louis...they'd say, "Oh, you're with this bank," and I said, "No, no, I'm with the Federal Reserve." But anyway, I was. So I was always with the Federal Reserve. So anyway, so then I gradually moved up to being secretary to the manager. But I had a lot more responsibilities because I actually went to board meetings and did the notes and I was a member of the National Association of Bank Women, which was an organization that was founded in 1920 for women bank executives. So I was a member of that and I was making speeches a

lot of places. So the manager of our branch at that time had a request for somebody to make a speech at a bank over at Pine Bluff, Arkansas and it was about women and finance. Anyway, there were three speakers. It was three F's but I forget what they were. So he said, "Would you go over and make a speech?" Well, I went over there and made my speech. Anyway, I was always doing things much more than just being an executive secretary. Then, I later became national president of this organization, a 9000 member organization where I was traveling around the country. Well, by that time, I'd been promoted to assistant vice president. Anyway, but it took me a long time. I had a lot more responsibilities. Then all of a sudden, somebody was retiring and so I was promoted to assistant cashier. That was in 1968. Well, of course, I was thrilled with that.

Blanche Touhill: Is that a responsible job in the Federal Reserve?

Ruth Bryant: Yes, it is. I had responsibility for three different departments at that time. At different times, I had different...let's see, I had credit discount, which is lending to banks. I was even in charge of security and then the fiscal agency which is securities, treasury bonds and all that stuff. Anyway, that was that. So, yes, it had a lot of responsibility.

Blanche Touhill: When you took minutes at the meeting, then you began to see the whole bank?

Ruth Bryant: Mm-hmm, right, and so I was exposed to a lot of banking opportunities. So, yes, I did learn.

Blanche Touhill: Did the bank mind when you went around the country as the...

Ruth Bryant: They encouraged it. That was later, after I became an...well, anyway, they decided to eliminate that position for the branches, the head office did and instead of an assistant cashier, the assistant cashiers became assistant vice presidents. So I became an assistant vice president.

Blanche Touhill: Now, were you the first woman to be the assistant vice president?

Ruth Bryant: No, there were a couple of others.

Blanche Touhill: But not many?

Ruth Bryant: Uh-uh, not very many. Everybody knew who they were. There was one in Chicago whom I knew and there was somebody else someplace else. But anyway, that was in '68. Then I became national president of this organization in 1970 but before then, I was regional vice president and even as vice president, I had a budget and I traveled to many of the places with the president, to all the regional conferences. The bank encouraged me. They liked me, they did, because really, I was meeting bankers that later, when they needed to know somebody about, would need some suggestions for bank directors or something, usually they came to me because I knew all the bankers. So anyway, it served a very good purpose. Anyway, in 1970, I became national president which was a lot of responsibility because their national office was in Chicago so I had to go back and forth a lot.

Blanche Touhill: What was the goal of that organization?

Ruth Bryant: It was to encourage women. In fact, I sort of laid the groundwork because there were two women, Margaret Hennick and Ann Jordon, they taught at Simmons College but they also, they had gone to Harvard and they were on the faculty at Harvard. They were women that really encouraged women executives, really...

Blanche Touhill: In a banking world?

Ruth Bryant: In the banking, as well as just women executives, but particularly in banking.

Blanche Touhill: But in business?

Ruth Bryant: Yeah, mm-hmm. So I'd invited Margaret for the national meeting which happened to be in New Orleans that year. I wanted Margaret Hennick to be on the program, which, she'd been on the program before but I said, "No, we're going to have Margaret Hennick," and as a result of that, the next year we established this foundation, educational foundation with contributions from the members. We hired somebody, a Ph.D., Anne Bryant was her name...no relation...and we established this program where women who had not gone to college could credentialize their training in banks. It was a very complicated process. We had three programs, one at Simmons College, one at...it was a Catholic...up in Chicago...

Blanche Touhill: Oh, Mundelein.

Ruth Bryant: That's it, Mundelein and then there was one out West. At these three different colleges or universities, we set up this program and the women would have assignments during the winter but in January and also in August, they would go for two weeks' training. So, for example, the first one was at Simmons College and in January, right after Christmas, when the dorms are vacant and they would go there and they would have all these college professors teaching them. This was really a very good program. So we had people who actually got their degrees as a result of this program. So I felt like, by encouraging Margaret Hennick, I sort of laid the groundwork for that program. It's now called Women's Financial...something...they brought in all different, not just bankers, because the women were [inaudible 19:33] be so successful that they really sort of...it became an obsolete organization. So it's no longer the National Association of Bank Women, which is kind of good.

Blanche Touhill: But it moved into providing, like, continuing education?

Ruth Bryant: That's right.

Blanche Touhill: Yeah, that you could get college credit for?

Ruth Bryant: Yeah, mm-hmm. They credentialized your experiences. Like, if you were a leader in an organization that would count towards...

Blanche Touhill: And that still goes on?

Ruth Bryant: I don't think that program...because that organization...

Blanche Touhill: Oh, it was just bankers but...

Ruth Bryant: That was for just bankers, right. So we had a lot of people, women, who really wanted to get that degree and it was a good way to do it. Of course, they had to have the support of their bank to get to do that unless they paid it for themselves but they had to get away those two weeks, four weeks in all. That was in 1971 and then in December of 1972, the officers would have to go to St. Louis, come to St. Louis.

Blanche Touhill: For the Federal Reserve here?

Ruth Bryant: Right.

Blanche Touhill: So it was sort of like a main branch or something or it was just a regional bank?

Ruth Bryant: Well, the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis is one of 12 Federal Reserve banks and we are the eighth Federal Reserve in the eighth Federal Reserve District and as I said, St. Louis had three branches, one in Little Rock, Memphis, and I was at the Memphis branch. But all the branch officers would have to come in periodically for seminars, all day seminars. So I was up here for one of those seminars and I was down in the garage waiting for a driver to take me to the airport and I got a call to come up to the president's office. I said, "Well, I'm on my way to the airport." They said, "We'll get you there." So I went upstairs and they said that this man who was retired, he was a vice president in charge of bank relations and public information as well as credit discount, which is lending to all the banks. Let me back up: The Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis has all or part of seven states. Let's see, the whole state of Arkansas, Eastern Missouri, Southern Illinois, Southern Indiana, Western Kentucky and Northern Mississippi...West Tennessee and Northern Mississippi. So anyway, he was in charge of all the bank relations and public information functions for the whole district and also, he did credit discount for the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis and at that time, the credit discount was very active because in '73, there was a recession and so there were a number of banks that were going under, as you might recall. But anyway, so they said he was retiring. He was a lawyer and so he was going to have a main professorship at St. Louis University and he was retiring early and since I was the only one in the district which I was pleased to know, with his experience, they offered me the job. So I said, "Well, let me think about it" because I'd always lived in Memphis. So then I said, I don't know why I'm saying that because I realized that there'd never been a woman who had been a vice president of a Federal Reserve Bank, of any bank, and so I realized the significance and then I said, "Well, I don't know why I'm saying that because I know I'm going to do it," and they said, "Well, we thought you would." So anyway, that was in December. I went home and I called up my mother...my father had died in 1971 and this was 1972...and so I said, "What would you say if I told you I was being promoted to vice president?" and she said, "Great." So she was going to be in Memphis all by herself but, as I said, my parents always encouraged me. In fact, my father...it was back in '71 when I was very involved as national president of this organization...he said, "Why aren't you vice

president of the bank?" I said, "Dad, women are just not vice presidents at the Federal Reserve Bank."

Blanche Touhill: They weren't, and rarely in any bank.

Ruth Bryant: I know, exactly, because I always noticed when I came up here, I had a position that really had some decision-making authority and I always said, "Well, this is what we're doing" and I would meet bankers where they'd say...and they were officers but yet the real leaders in the bank with authority, they said, "they" instead of "we" and I could immediately see that difference. They just didn't have that kind of authority. So it's really mostly for signing checks, really, as an officer. But anyway, women in banks have come a long way since that time which is, I think, wonderful. But anyway, my father...I remember, and unfortunately my father died in 1971. He never knew I was vice president because he had said, "I wonder why you're not the vice president." I always regretted that because he would have loved it, he really would.

Blanche Touhill: And your brothers were supportive too?

Ruth Bryant: Oh, they always were. You know, when I was traveling around, I was very fortunate. The two other branch officers, the other two, they didn't seem to...I mean, they just knew this was it, that was going to be gone and that I never did have a problem with that. I was very fortunate.

Blanche Touhill: When you traveled in those days, did you have a credit card or what did you use to travel?

Ruth Bryant: Well, I had a budget.

Blanche Touhill: No, but I mean, how did you pay your bills? Did you have a credit card or did you take traveler's checks?

Ruth Bryant: Gosh, I don't know. I hadn't thought about that. That's something. Well, I guess I had a credit card. I had to because I remember, I'll have to say, I remember, the Federal Reserve board is in Washington and and I, we'd always have to go to meetings at the board, like all the credit discount people have to go to the board about something and I remember going...and at that time, they would put us at the Watergate, which was really convenient to the Federal Reserve board building. And the head of the credit discount department and he was not quite ready to retire but

he was a white-haired man, much older than I...I was 45, I think, then...and so something...was describing his room when we had dinner that night, and I thought, gosh, he's got a better room than I have. So apparently when I went into...I went to the hotel and apparently they thought he was my boss and they gave him a much better room than I. I didn't let him know that. I didn't let him know that.

Blanche Touhill: So they gave him the better room?

Ruth Bryant: Yeah, right. I think that's the only time that I've ever...and I had to AVP's who reported to me and they called on banks, would go to a lot of meetings and occasionally I would go with them and they first, at some of these meetings, they thought I was their secretary.

Blanche Touhill: Secretary, of course.

Ruth Bryant: But, in my own bank, I really...

Blanche Touhill: You never faced that?

Ruth Bryant: I really didn't.

Blanche Touhill: Well, tell me, when you got to the Federal Reserve in St. Louis, how were you welcomed?

Ruth Bryant: I was accepted, mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: Did you have a female secretary?

Ruth Bryant: I'll tell you what: I think the other two AVP's, when I was promoted to even AVP, I think they were probably a little shocked because I went over...some other people that probably they thought they were going to be next in line but they didn't have the background that I had.

Blanche Touhill: Yes. Well, you got promoted because you had the ability...

Ruth Bryant: Mm-hmm, and so they'd realized that I was going to...and interesting, even this woman who later became my assistant, named first vice president of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, she knew...she and I became good friends because I'd see her at credit discount meetings. She rose to that, but everybody knew I was the first woman and so I really...I was very conscious that I had to do exactly what I should be doing because everybody was watching me and if I didn't, if I made a false

move, that was not good. So I was really representing a lot of other people. And when I retired, five women vice presidents, there were five of us, vice presidents at the bank. So I felt like, well...mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, yes, wonderful. Does the Federal Reserve promote from within or do they bring people from the outside?

Ruth Bryant: They bring people in from the outside, mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: In those days in Memphis, did you serve on community boards and things?

Ruth Bryant: No, not really.

Blanche Touhill: You were active in the banking association?

Ruth Bryant: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: When you came to St. Louis, did you begin to get active in...

Ruth Bryant: Well, I was involved in, like, the Bank Marketing Association. I did some things with the Missouri Bankers Association and I was on...then the state...let's see, it was...I forget, anyway, some economic...I forget exactly. I haven't checked back to see what it is but anyway, it was economic education or something for the whole state and I would go to those meetings. But it was mostly with bank-oriented kinds of things until I began to be on, well, the first...let's see...I was always active at the Mercantile Library which was...the Federal Reserve Bank was located at 411 Locust Street and the Mercantile Library was located, I think, 510 Locust Street, so we were catty-corner across from each other. So I joined the Mercantile Library the first year I was here. I also joined and later became treasurer of the Archeological Society here in St. Louis.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, really?

Ruth Bryant: Right.

Blanche Touhill: So both of those go back to your youth, the library and the archeology.

Ruth Bryant: That's right, yeah. I'm not active anymore but I still am always interested in archeology.

Blanche Touhill: Did you begin to go to Cardinal games?

- Ruth Bryant: Yes, of course. I've always liked to do that. I never was a...I would go different times, but, yes. Well, we were Cardinal fans in Memphis.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, that's right.
- Ruth Bryant: My brother would listen to those games...both of my brothers...and one of them, particularly, would keep score. Oh, listen, they were...I just was around sports so much and I guess that's the reason I love sports.
- Blanche Touhill: So you joined the Mercantile Library...
- Ruth Bryant: I joined the Mercantile Library. I did not become a board member though. I was involved, there was a program that the Mercantile had, the Wednesday lunch and lectures and I was sort of involved in that in some way. I must have been some committee chair or something because I would arrange for some of the speakers and I was very involved in that. But it was not until 1989, I became a member of the board. I did become a member of the English Speaking Union in 1973.
- Blanche Touhill: How did you happen to join that?
- Ruth Bryant: That's really interesting. I had friends in Minneapolis. The woman was with the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis. That's how...and I would go up there sometimes and we became good friends because she and I were freshman at the Graduate School of Banking at Rutgers and that's how I got to know her so well. So when I would go up there for Federal Reserve meetings, sometimes I'd go in the night before and she'd be having a small dinner party for some people for the Minnesota Historical Society because her husband was vice president, which is located in St. Paul, across the river. And so anyway, I really liked what they did and I'd heard there was a Tennessee Society here so I wanted to join the Tennessee Society. So my predecessor of the bank, he was very nice. He'd say, "You have to know all the right people" and his job involved dealing with the media so he had different people from the media come in for lunch. So I got to meet them. So he said, "Okay, we'll arrange it. Gene Baker is very active in that. We'll have lunch with him." He had already retired then. But anyway, so we had lunch and so Jerry Dunn, who was my predecessor, said, "Now, Ruth would like to join the Tennessee Society" and so Gene said, "Well, I could sponsor her for the English Speaking Union but I'm afraid I can't sponsor her for the Tennessee Society because there are not any women who are members."

Well, I had an ancestor who fought with John Severe in the American Revolution over in East Tennessee and I was born in Memphis. I had more connections with Tennessee than a lot of the members. I always said, if anybody flies over Tennessee, they can become a member. Well anyway, I still couldn't become a member, and the funny thing at that time, I lived at the Port Royal which is at 4605 Lentil, right across the street was the women's club and there were only two events, I found out later, it was not quite like the Minnesota Historical Society, it was more social and they would have a cocktail party, stag party where they would introduce the prospective members and it was a "smoker," I think they called it a "smoker" because I remember, fraternities used to have smokers when I was in college. Anyway, they had a smoker and so anyway, I was interested in that anyway and then there was a...

Blanche Touhill: Now, which organization was that?

Ruth Bryant: Tennessee Society.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, the Tennessee Society, but they weren't going to admit women?

Ruth Bryant: That's right. And then the other event...they had two events a year...the other event was in January on the Saturday closest to the Battle of New Orleans because Andrew Jackson was a big hero of Tennessee. And so anyway, I lived at the Port Royal. I was on the 12th floor. I could look down and see all these people across the street at their dinner party. So I was invited to a couple of those but I was never invited to become a member. They finally did recognize me in some way because of my professional accomplishments here, but anyway, and also for being from Tennessee. But anyway, I always thought it was rather funny.

Blanche Touhill: That's the way you got into the...

Ruth Bryant: So anyway...I'm jumping ahead...so anyway, Gene Baker said, "I can sponsor her for the English Speaking Union but not the Tennessee Society. So he invited Jerry Dunn and his wife and me to the next meeting. At that time, the meetings were always formal and black tie and so it was at the University Club when the University Club was down on Grand and so I started going to that. Finally...I don't know, I was not very active, for some reason or another, anyway, I finally became a member of the Program Committee and then I would be introducing speakers and then Nick Francheau was president then. I became, I think, the vice

president or something. Nick Francheau was the one responsible for my being a...he recommended that I become a board member of the Mercantile. That was Nick Francheau was president...

Blanche Touhill: Was also the English Speaking...

Ruth Bryant: Yes. Then, when women had not come as active members, come into the University Club, he was a member, he recommended me.

Blanche Touhill: I remember the days when the University Club, women couldn't go to lunch.

Ruth Bryant: Mm-hmm. Well, anyway, when I became a member, there was something called "the men's grill" and particularly for breakfast and they did not...after I became a member and others, they brought in other women. That no longer was the case.

Blanche Touhill: They let you go into the group?

Ruth Bryant: Right. Times have changed.

Blanche Touhill: Times have changed.

Ruth Bryant: When I was at the Graduate School of Banking, we all had to write a thesis and my thesis was on the women executive: a view of the manager's role. There was not much in the literature about women in business. That was in 1973 and then I had to have it ready. See, I was going then, and then in 1974, I began work on my thesis which was...I've just give you the subject. And so I decided I'd interview a lot of women. Well, there were not many women executives, not in the true sense were the ones with decision-making authority, real authority in a company. So I finally tracked down...I had 35 but there was one...

Blanche Touhill: In the whole Federal Reserve system?

Ruth Bryant: No, no, no, in the city, in the St. Louis area. I interviewed some woman over at Granite City Steel and somebody at Belleville who owned her own company. Anyway, there were 35. I had to eliminate one because she just didn't measure up to my definition of a woman executive. Anyway, I interviewed 34 of them. I went to all of their offices and, you know, I was new to St. Louis. It served two purposes: It helped me in accomplishing that responsibility of getting the thesis, but also, I got to go out and see

some of the companies and one of the jobs that I had at the bank was, the president always liked to pick the brains of the CEO's, the business leaders, even the labor unions. He would have people from labor unions in. There would be seven people and there'd be the president, the director of research and myself. So I was very involved in that program. But it enabled me to get out and see what some of these companies like Anheuser Bush, I interviewed the woman who was vice president at Anheuser Bush long years ago, happened to later marry August Bush, Jr., Gussy Bush. They would help me get out and see what was going on in the city. As a newcomer, it was very helpful to me. But anyway, I had to interview these people and based on my what my interviews were, I wrote my thesis.

Blanche Touhill: And how was it received?

Ruth Bryant: Well, they listened. They had people...it's like being audited if you're getting your Master's or your Ph.D.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, yes, people who come in...

Ruth Bryant: They say they were sitting in the back room and I was being questioned about it, I guess to see if I really did the work. And so, apparently they were quite interested and actually, I got an excellent...I just noticed that not many years ago. I was just looking, I said, gosh, I did get an excellent on that. So anyway, it was well received.

Blanche Touhill: Now, do women do that today?

Ruth Bryant: I don't think that program exists either.

Blanche Touhill: This same one?

Ruth Bryant: Uh-uh.

Blanche Touhill: And was it for men and women?

Ruth Bryant: Usually it was just for men and I was one of the first women in that program.

Blanche Touhill: And did you have to apply and be accepted?

Ruth Bryant: Oh, yes, right, right, mm-hmm, and of course, the bank...and then later, when I graduated, I was asked to be an instructor for five years. So I'd go

back up in June and so I'd spend a couple of weeks there, yeah. It was a bank simulation program and we had all these different classes and so they had to run a bank and they'd get their printout every morning and so I was an instructor in that program.

Blanche Touhill: That sounds wonderful.

Ruth Bryant: Mm-hmm, it was.

Blanche Touhill: Did you make friends with any of these women executives as you went around and...

Ruth Bryant: Mm-hmm. Well, when I was president, I had to travel a lot and I remember, the president always was invited to...

Blanche Touhill: This is the president of the...

Ruth Bryant: ...the National Association of Bank Women, to the New York Bankers Association, mid-winter dinner at the Waldorf and there were three tiers and I was at the second tier and, from things I've discussed with my predecessors, they nearly always were seated by this man who was with...not Goldman Sachs...it will come to me. But anyway, and so he said, "You're at the Federal Reserve Bank. You've got to come down to see the trading floor." So he said, "Come down and have lunch with me" ...goodness, it will come to me...but one of the big firms like Goldman Sachs. So it was at the World Trade Center, is where it was, one of the upper floors, which is no longer there. So I took the taxi down there and I had lunch with him and he took me around to the trading floor and all these men had the earphones and they were trading and he said, "Sit down, let her listen to it" and he said, "Don't pay attention to the language." So they were even dealing with the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. It was even some of those things. Anyway, so then, Sidney Homer, who was a big economist with this firm, he was in a conference with somebody and he called him out, he said, "Meet her, she's the assistant vice president of the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. Talk to her and give her your book." And then I had lunch with him and I remember, we had rhubarb for dessert...I'll never forget that; I never had rhubarb before for some reason. Anyway, he was very interesting. Then he sent me back up to the hotel, which is the Waldorf, it was comp, I had a five-room suite. Can you believe that? At the Waldorf.

Blanche Touhill: Well, you were the president.

Ruth Bryant: I was the president, right.

Blanche Touhill: But a five-room suite was nice.

Ruth Bryant: It was, it was. At the Waldorf it was very nice. But he sent me back in the car...

Blanche Touhill: And what was the name of the man that was like your host, that was helping you?

Ruth Bryant: I don't remember that name. I don't remember that, but he was very interesting because they had hosted some big event at one of the big clubs in New York the day before for all the New York bankers. It was...what was that...that's bugging me...Schwartz is in the name, I think...go ahead.

Blanche Touhill: Didn't you go overseas with this...

Ruth Bryant: Oh, yes, when I was president.

Blanche Touhill: Was that with that same group?

Ruth Bryant: Mm-hmm, but they were not with that group, no, but I was...

Blanche Touhill: You were chosen because you were the president of it?

Ruth Bryant: Yeah, I was. I received this invitation from the Foreign Service Department, a division of the French government and there were six of us who were invited for two weeks to strengthen the friendship between the two countries. That was in 1971. We started off with a luncheon at the residence of the French ambassador and then after that...this was so nice and thoughtful of them, some of the members of the National Association of Bank Women in Washington came to see me off and we left from Dulles in an Air France plane and then we got to...at that time, it was Orly and we bypassed customs and they said come back and so anyway, it was kind of a nice privilege to be able to bypass customs. So anyway, it was an experience I could never duplicate because we were entertained royally. And then, everybody wanted to entertain these six American women, the "Americains" as they said, and so we'd be invited to parties, embassy parties and that sort of thing. We didn't have a single night hardly that we could do things on our own. We were invited to

lunch by Mrs. Watson whose husband was the French ambassador at the residence and all of her guests that she'd invited were Baroness...somebody; one was, her husband was head of IBM-France. Later I was at a dinner party visiting friends in France and my dinner partner was this man with IBM-France and I said, "Oh," He used to be my boss. So anyway, it was kind of a small world. It's sort of like that.

Blanche Touhill: Did you visit businesses in France or was it more social?

Ruth Bryant: Because Gilbert Beau was head of a women's...she was seated at one of the luncheons for us and she was head of a bank, consortium of banks and so she invited me to the bank to visit there but she said, "What are you doing tonight?" and I said, "Well, I'm going to this embassy party." She said, "Well, I am, too, but I'm having a dinner party afterwards." So she invited me and where she lived was on Isle de...anyway...

Blanche Touhill: With Notre Dame?

Ruth Bryant: Yeah, Isle Sanuit. Anyway, and so she drove me there and she had 20 people. One was the son of the president of the Philippines and he was with Union Bank, and one was this...and this man, Sir James Goldsmith, who was very prominent and he was going to be having lunch the following week with, the British prime minister. So anyway, he was knighted later on. But he was my dinner party, I guess because I was the Federal Reserve and he probably wanted to find out what was...I was not at that level because I was...as you would know, in...

Blanche Touhill: You were still in Memphis.

Ruth Bryant: In Memphis, I was in Memphis and even in St. Louis, I would go to briefings that our research department would have, but anyway....

Blanche Touhill: Then you came to St. Louis and you made friends and you particularly made friends in the Mercantile Library, with the English Speaking Union.

Ruth Bryant: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: And you had a nice job.

Ruth Bryant: I did have a nice job. So that was good. I was accepted because of my position which was very good and sometimes people say it's hard to meet people. Well, I was used to...I mean, I knew so many people in

Memphis and when I first moved here, I didn't know anybody which was kind of miserable to me, but I became involved in different organizations and so I really...everybody says, "You know a lot of people," but, when I knew I was thinking about retiring, I knew I'd read about men who had retired and they just couldn't deal with that retirement because they didn't have any hobbies to do, and so I said, "I'm planning my retirement. I'm going to get more involved...so I'm going to get more involved in the community. That's what I'm going to do, is a board member." So that's what I did and I seem to have wound up being president of several different organizations.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I know you were president of the Mercantile Library when they affiliated with the University of Missouri-St. Louis and that has been a wonderful addition to the University of Missouri-St. Louis. So we thank you very much for that.

Ruth Bryant: Thank you.

Blanche Touhill: And I know that you've been the head of the English Speaking Union for years and that you've encouraged young people to go overseas and teachers to go. They have a lot of good programs.

Ruth Bryant: Mm-hmm, then we have a Shakespeare competition for the students, high school students.

Blanche Touhill: That's right, and then they go to New York and compete.

Ruth Bryant: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: Does the winner get to go to England?

Ruth Bryant: Yes, for, I think, about three weeks, it's a special program.

Blanche Touhill: And I know you've been active in the Colonial...what is it...

Ruth Bryant: Center for...

Blanche Touhill: Center for French Colonial Studies.

Ruth Bryant: Yeah, right.

Blanche Touhill: How did you get in that one?

Ruth Bryant: Well, I have a friend who is French. Her mother came from Memphis. Anyway, we became good friends and she was very interested...I've always been a history buff. I love archeology, I always loved history. In fact, at one time I thought I wanted to be a history teacher but I don't think I would have been a good history teacher. But I do love history. And so, she was very involved in the Center for French Colonial Studies. In fact, she was one of the founding members. And so there was a meeting at Old Mines, Missouri and she said, "You want to go down there?" and I went and I liked it so I joined and then I became very active. I became a member of the board and then, like, about 2002, I became president and I was sort of used to being president. There were a lot of things that, you know, I tried to implement that I'd learned in other organizations. So anyway, I think we've grown and we've gotten a stronger board. We have a wonderful board now and so I've been pretty active in that.

Blanche Touhill: Now, are you still president of that?

Ruth Bryant: No, I stepped down two years ago.

Blanche Touhill: And then the other organization...

Ruth Bryant: Alliance Francaise, right, I was president of that for four years, although my French is not that good but I said, "I really shouldn't be president." They said, "No, no, you bring something else to it." So I guess it's my management skills.

Blanche Touhill: I think it's your management skills and I think it's your organizational ability and I was going to say, I know you had that as a child, you had your desk, did you always have that ability to reorganize things?

Ruth Bryant: I wasn't conscious of that but somebody said to me the other day, said, "Ruth, you just organize," and I just sort of start planning, just like...you mentioned the Center for French Colonial Studies, we always had just...we had these national meetings, wonderful locations. We met in Quebec, we met in Windsor, Canada, we met in Austin, Texas last fall, and all over, really wonderful. But that's the only meeting we have. So a friend of mine here who's a docent at the Mercantile Library, was doing research about some French Colonial person and he said, "Ruth, I saw your name on your website. What's that organization?" and he said, "Oh, I think I'll join." So he said, "When is the next meeting?" and it made me start thinking. I said, "You know, you might not be able to go to these

meetings but there's nothing for you except Le Journal which is our quarterly publication, and I thought, hmm, they really, really should have some local meetings. So after I stepped down as president, I always start organizing again. I don't know, it just comes naturally, and so I said, "Let's have local meetings." So we began that, the first one was in April 2013 and we had a big crowd. They came from all over this area.

Blanche Touhill: And you had a nice lecturer?

Ruth Bryant: Oh, yes, we had a good lecturer about Elaine Duny who had owned a lot of property over in the east side and she became very active and very prominent not only the east side of the river, but in St. Louis too, the Duny family still live in this area. And then in October, we had a meeting at the Mercantile Library and they all loved the Mercantile Library because there was exhibition there that they loved about...there are seven indigenous Indian tribes in Missouri and so we had this exhibition which they loved and who couldn't help but love the Mercantile Library? But anyway, and our speaker at that time was...there were two speakers, one was Anna Amalon who talked about early court cases in colonial St. Louis. She was a wonderful speaker. Everybody loved that. And then Bob Moore, who's an historian at the Arch. I knew that they were doing some interesting things. They were developing their museum to encompass more of the French colonial history.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, as they're redoing the...

Ruth Bryant: Yes, that's right. So I said, "Bob, come tell us about that," and of course, he's an excellent speaker and he went into great detail and it's very exciting, what's going to happen. But he's also begun a program for French teachers, teachers of French and French history, colonial history and he said, "Ruth, there's never been anything like that." We wanted to do this and we just didn't have that much contact with the Board of Education and I actually (set up?) a program. We didn't have that much capability. But he's doing it and apparently he said they eat it up because they just don't have anything like it. So it's wonderful. So he talked about that. And everybody loved it and I said, "Well, do you really like doing this, to really continue?" He said, "Oh, yes, everybody said, 'Let's do this.'" So, actually, we had 20-some odd people from our area to go to Austin and a lot of them had never been to a conference before. So, really, we've increased our total membership for the center as well as

just develop this pool of people here. So the more recent one was somebody who talked about this French newspaper that was published in 1854 that's being translated, that she's translating and she talked about that. So anyway, we've had some interesting programs. Because we are having our national meeting here in October, we decided we won't have anything this fall but we'll start again in the spring of 2015.

Blanche Touhill: Are other members of the French Colonial Society, are they having local meetings now too?

Ruth Bryant: No.

Blanche Touhill: Are they interested in doing that?

Ruth Bryant: Well, you know, I really wanted to talk about this, really try to stimulate that kind of interest.

Blanche Touhill: Well, you might be able to do it at the national meeting.

Ruth Bryant: Probably so, but also, I've written an article, I wrote an article that's coming out in the issue, Le Journal and I had a wonderful picture of this group listening attentively to the speaker and so anyway, the editor said he's put it in for this issue. So I'm hoping that...and some have inquired about it so I'm hopeful that maybe it's a way to grow the organization.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, it's wonderful.

Ruth Bryant: Mm-hmm, but the wonderful thing is, I've always...because of the English Speaking Union, everybody thinks I'm sort of Anglo-oriented and I am but I was pleased last year to receive the Pomme Academy from the French government for my promotion of the French language and culture.

Blanche Touhill: Well, that is a wonderful honor.

Ruth Bryant: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: If you had been born 50 years earlier, what would your life be like?

Ruth Bryant: I certainly would not have been able to accomplish what I did. I might have been a schoolteacher maybe. Not that that...I mean, that's wonderful. I had wonderful teachers but I probably would...I had to do something. I don't know. Marriage was not really in...I never did think about getting married. I've had opportunities but I never did...really, I was

career-oriented and I'm kind of going back to what I've been talking about, but I was career-oriented and I always felt like, if I married, I just couldn't do what I really wanted to do. I still have nice men friends but back to your question, I don't think I could have accomplished, I know I couldn't have because the National Association of Bank Women was organized in 1920 and there were about eight women who formed this organization and they were senior executives.

Blanche Touhill: When you retired from the Federal Reserve Bank, were you honored as one of the first women to make it up the ladder?

Ruth Bryant: There was a reception for me.

Blanche Touhill: Did anybody mention that?

Ruth Bryant: Probably not, but you know what? The business school has a meeting periodically, graduates, around the different institutions and one time they had a meeting at the Federal Reserve and Julie Stackhouse, who was senior vice president in charge of bank supervision, and she's quoted a lot. She does a tremendous job. So I wanted to meet her and I'd had lunch with her one time and she didn't know anything about my background. She didn't know... anyway.. But she and I became good friends. But somebody invited me to attend that lunch and so she recognized me, which I thought was very nice.

Blanche Touhill: Is there a woman in charge of any Federal Reserve Bank?

Ruth Bryant: Yes, I think there are two women bank presidents. I know I attended something one time, they said, "Oh, Ruth, you should be..."...there was a book called "The Bankers" written by Martin Maher, who was a friend of Jerry Dunn, who had introduced me to him and you can see, I've made friends who have really been my mentors through the years. And so anyway, he wrote about me in the The Bankers. So this woman said, "Oh, you should read The Bankers." I said, "I'm in it." I'll never forget that because it was the greatest put-down I've ever...not that I wanted to put down but I said, "I'm in it." So anyway, no, I just couldn't have done what I've done and it's been a wonderful life. One time I was on my way to the board for a meeting...I later became chair of a subcommittee on bank information and I have to tell you, when I first became a member of that committee, some of the other Feds...one person particularly, they just weren't quite ready to accept me but then later on, when I retired from

the bank, they all wrote me letters and I became chair of the committee. So anyway, and I was for about six years.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I think you've had a wonderful life in banking.

Ruth Bryant: I have had it, mm-hmm. It's been a wonderful life.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, and then your work with non-profits has also been...

Ruth Bryant: Mm-hmm, I've enjoyed it.

Blanche Touhill: You are a reorganizer.

Ruth Bryant: I've enjoyed it and I've done what I really wanted to do.

Blanche Touhill: Yeah. Well, thank you very much.

Ruth Bryant: Thank you, it's a pleasure. Thank you for asking me.