

Tape 14, Side 1

CH This is an interview with Governor Victor Atiyeh at his office in downtown Portland, Oregon. The interviewer, for the Oregon Historical Society, is Clark Hansen. The date is January 19, 1993, and this is Tape 14, Side 1.

For the last few minutes we've been talking about your interest and collection in the Lewis and Clark Expo. I've read about your interest on that. What all does your collection consist of?

VA It's hard to describe, really. It's a lot of things. I think - well, I've just mentioned to you I have spoons, nine of them, all different. And it kind of crossed my mind, how many souvenir spoons do you need at a fair. But there are key chains, watch fobs, a pocket watch, purses of a variety of kinds, silk handkerchiefs that we had - the Government Building was there in the middle of ^{GULES} ~~Giles~~ [sp?] Lake, and they had the mint, and so they printed on - they're really very fine engraving, like a bill would be, currency, Lewis and Clark, and I've got several of those. You know, it goes on and on. I just have to think. Letter openers, pictures, post cards.

CH You said about four hundred items?

VA Four- or five hundred items. Different - gosh, I haven't even begun to enumerate all of them. There just is an enormous amount.

CH Were any of these items passed down through the family?

VA No. Well, the only thing we have, and, of course, Atiyeh Brothers has it, is our - the gold medal that was given to us.

And again, I say gold. They weren't gold, they were bronze. I have some, incidentally. Not Atiyeh Brothers, but I've collected them, and I think somebody has gold-plated them. But the gold medals were bronze. And we have a banner which is quite unusual, I've not seen that anywhere, but it says, Atiyeh Brothers, and there's a ribbon. We have the banner, and it's all at the store. But we really didn't have much, I mean, just that sort of thing and the certificate itself, so I collected everything else. Plates, glasses, cups, saucers. Incidentally, the cup and saucer is pretty scarce. Plates, there's a lot of those, but to get a cup and saucer, which would be the official - it's sort of a blue and white. I don't know how to describe these things, but it's blue and white, and it's Lewis and Clark Fair. Gosh, there's all kinds - stamps. Not postage stamps; these were sort of commemorative type things, you're supposed to advertise, and I've got those in full blocks, complete blocks. And I'm sure other things will come to mind.

The real interesting thing in that regard, when we were moving from where the Governor Hotel is now - we would have been there twenty-eight years, I think, or longer. That's really where my brothers and I really started. Anyway, when we were moving, I think - I don't know if we've talked about that earlier. I think I did. My niece was going through some papers and stuff, and I said, "If you run across anything that looks interesting, let me know." So she comes up with these negatives. They looked like mice had chewed them sometime in the past, the edges. And I'm looking through there. [Tape stopped.] She brings me these old what we call celluloid negatives, whatever the term is, and so I'm kind of looking through them, and there's a whole bunch of countrymen, and I have no idea who they are, and all of a sudden I look and I said, "Hey, that looks like the Lewis and Clark Fair, and it turns out, actual photographs of my father and my uncle at the Lewis and Clark Fair.

CH That's wonderful.

VA It is. It's grand. But there are just so many souvenirs, it was just incredible. There's one - there was a - different days. There was a New York Day and an Illinois Day, a Portland day, but Portland Day was pretty late. There was a little, round card, I'll call it, but it's round, and a little, tiny pencil with a string, and I guess you - I don't know, you tuck it in your button hole.

Incidentally, there was none of this short pants and sport shirt thing. Everybody was dressed up. They'd go in their suit to the fair, not the way you and I go to a fair anymore.

Anyway, this was Portland. The slogan was, Portland is great, Portland is fine, five hundred thousand in 1909. Well, I don't know whether they hit five hundred thousand, but it was 1909 [laughter]. Anyway, one of the things I did have, which the Society has - I've already given them that - is really a very attractive and in very good condition - I'm going to call it a circus-size poster. You know, it's a good size. One of the big attractions they called On the Trail. Now, the Trail was the entertainment section. It actually was - it was almost, I'm going to say, a bridge. Maybe causeway is a better word. But it was on that causeway that would lead out to the Government Building, and they had all kinds of entertainment kind of things. That was the Trail. As a matter of fact, there was a slogan, Meet me on the Trail, or Meet me at the Trail, something of that kind. Anyway, this was a big poster that was advertising the Trail, and the Society has that.

I don't know if we can really get together. I'd like to, you know, give them what I have, but I need a little cooperation and help from them, and rather than, as one instance when I walked, and they said, Now, here's what we have, in this room. I need a little bit more than that.

CH It wasn't itemized or...?

VA No - well, certainly they've got a list somewhere, but I've got a list of everything that I have. I took an inventory of it, which is a very tedious thing to do, but I did it anyway. But I'm thinking, well, I'm going to sell this, and this one collector is interested in buying. But I haven't done anything. I keep saying, well, I really ought to see what the Society would like to have, so it's just sort of dragged on, and nothing much has happened.

Coincidentally - this is interesting. I'm not sure the Society would like to hear this on the tape, anyway, as part of my history, but I had acquired two very interesting documents. One was a - well, let me call it ^Astock ^{collected}. I'm not quite sure what it - a relatively small piece of paper. I'm trying to remember the date of it. But anyway, it was for the Portland and Valley Plank Road. Now, the Portland and Valley Plank Road is Canyon Road, and this was opening up the Tualatin Valley, and it was a pretty important thing, and somebody had subscribed, I don't know, ten- or twenty dollars. That wasn't in particularly good shape, but I don't know where there's another one of those things. I gave that to the Society, but at the same time I had what I really knew was a very noted imprint from Oregon, 1847. A professor at the University of Oregon named Belknap, he'd written a book he called Oregon Imprints, and he did it chronologically, and this one that I'm speaking about now is number seven in his chronological order, and it's noted, "To the World." And we talk about campaigning, and scurrilous campaigning. I mean, this was really something, really - and J. W. Nesmith, who turned out to be our second U.S. senator from Oregon but not at that time, posted this "To the World" on election day against J. Quinn Thornton, who was running for territorial judge or something like that. He called him infamous scoundrel, liar, all kinds of

terrible things in this broadside that was apparently nailed up all over the place. It's pretty well known, because it really is kind of unique. I acquired it, and I went up and talked to somebody - fortunately for the tape, I don't remember who - and I said, "Gee, look at this." Now, I have some pretty good feel of what this is. The reaction was, "Oh, that's nice." That's nice? Belknap looked at it. There had been some reproductions of it. And there are actually four known copies; four. One at Yale, one at the University of Oregon, one McArthur - I think probably Louis McArthur; anyway, he's a descendent of Nesmith - and mine. And that's nice? It's really a strange reaction. I will tell you, ultimately I have given that to the Society.

And, coincidentally, as a gun collector, after some time and some worry I acquired a Colt navy pistol, a percussion cap and ball, but it's engraved on the back of the grip, Honorable J. W. Nesmith. I'm positive that Colt gave that to Nesmith. Colt had a propensity for doing that sort of thing, and Nesmith was on the military committee during the Civil War. But I don't have any ^{PG0000000000} [inaudible], I have nothing written. It's just my own intuition and being a gun collector. I had that for a while and finally said really, I'm not taking any chances on it, so the Society has that too. Anyway, this is interesting.

CH Well, who is the person who has the larger collection than yours?

VA His name is Cramer, Mike Cramer, I think.

CH Is that C or a K?

VA It's a C, I'm sure. I've talked to him on the phone. He keeps calling me, and I say, Well, Mike, it hasn't gone anywhere. He doesn't really know what I'm doing.

I have, incidentally - you know, I've talked about spoons, and spoons are known, and collectors have spoons, but I have a fork. Now, it matches - there are certain things called official. Official spoon, official cup, official plate, official, I'm going to call it, coin, but it's - oh, it would be a coin shape anyway. So there's an official spoon. But I have an official fork, and I hadn't heard about it, didn't even think about it, and I probably have the only official fork around. I don't know, somebody must have a - there's got to be a ~~fork~~^{knife} somewhere. Anyway, I have the official fork.

CH They didn't have an official dinner setting?

VA Well, somebody said there's a knife, and I don't know. I didn't know there was a fork, so how do I know there's a knife? Actually, I got the fork from a person - a lady that I knew. She was collecting spoons, and in the process of collecting spoons, she said she got that in San Francisco. The antique dealer said, "You really ought to have one of these. This is from Oregon," which, is of course, the fork. So I traded her a spoon for a fork, so that's how I got my fork, because she was collecting spoons, not forks.

CH What have you heard of that idea that was being put forth by Bill Naito and other people having another - a centennial of the Lewis and Clark Expo?

VA Yeah, in 2005?

CH Two thousand five on the island, Ross Island. At least I had heard that some time ago. I don't know whether he's still...

VA Well, I don't know, Ross Island's pretty well dug out in the

middle. I don't know how much dry land there is there anymore. Regardless of where it's put, I think it would be a very good idea. Now, whether or not we can garner enough enthusiasm to do it right is hard to say. I know that we celebrated the centennial of Oregon. Actually, that was my first session, in 1959, which was the hundred-year anniversary of the state of Oregon, and we had an exposition, but it was real Mickey Mouse. It really was not a - it was not a first-rate deal. So if we can do it first rate, first class, I think it's a wonderful idea. I really do. And certainly they can reach back and reproduce some of these old 1905 souvenir artifacts and sell them as, obviously, duplications, but - they can say, Portland is great, Portland is fine, five hundred thousand in 2009 [laughter]. I don't know. But I think it's a good idea.

CH Is there enough enthusiasm now to launch something like that?

VA No. I think everybody's attention is turned in many other directions, and whether we can get them to focus or not, I'm not sure. The Lewis and Clark Fair was very important to us economically because it did identify there was such a place as Portland, Oregon, to the rest of the nation. And when it attracted the tourists that it did, a lot of them, they would go back home and tell about how nice it is and how good it is. It really was sort of the springboard for Portland to grow. The Society put out a paperback kind of thing. It's not paperback size, it's a little larger than that, very well done. But it was a very significant affair, at least in my opinion. Among the major things that happened, to identify Portland, identify the state of Oregon, and, then, to a lesser degree, the Northwest, and it was a big deal. It wasn't just something local consumption sort of thing.

CH There was a large population increase after that, wasn't there?

VA Yes, and we began to grow economically in businesses, and it really was a - as I use the word springboard, probably a correct word in terms of our economic growth.

CH What were the other significant events in Oregon's development that you've heard of?

VA Well, the major significance, of course, was the Oregon Trail and the great migrations of the years - I'm trying to remember - '42, '43, '44, '45, '46, throughout that period of time. It was interesting to me. I just read Joel Palmer's journal, which is republished by the Oregon Trail Coordinating Council, so I bought it and just finished reading it. The thing that was interesting to me, that - there were a lot of people trying to attract those on the Oregon Trail to go to California so that California would grow and be populated, and Joel Palmer, among many, many others, you know, they weren't influenced, and they kept going on into Oregon, which reminded me of a joke that I very judiciously use. The people were coming out on the Oregon Trail, and at one time there was a break, and indeed there was; you know, you could go to California or you could go to Oregon. And so one trail led south and west to California, and the other one had a sign on it that says, To Oregon, and those that could read came to Oregon [laughter]. But, as I say, I'm very judicious how I use that. It was an interesting journal.

I've read some others. I've read Nesmith's diary, I guess you'd call it. I found that very interesting. I relate it to today, the strength of the people of today, reading Nesmith. He'd been gone - I can't remember. Joel Palmer was about - he was about six-and-a-half months coming here. I think maybe the

journey might have been as short - as it got later on, you know - as short as maybe four months, but still it was a long journey. Tedious, tiresome, hard work. Nesmith had gone through the same thing, and so I was reading it. So now we're getting to the end of his journey, so one day he's at the mouth of the Columbia and the Willamette, the confluence of the two - and he's relating this all in his journal after, I don't know, four-and-a-half or five months of all this hardship. He reaches the mouth of the Columbia and Willamette. The next day he's at Oregon City, and the next day he goes to work. And I'm thinking to myself, you know, if I walked from here to the Lloyd Center, I'd probably want to take a week off and rest, exaggerating of course. But, I mean, you think in terms of the reaction, and - you know, self-reliant. You know, if anything's going to happen, I've got to do it. Nobody's out here that's going to help me do it. Maybe my friends will assist me somewhere, but - beyond that, we're getting into some philosophy of self-reliance and self-esteem and pride and all the rest of that sort of thing, much of which too many people have lost.

CH Well, I hope we can talk more about that as we get into some of your own personal philosophies on government and other matters. But that's all very interesting. It's an interesting era, and you've got quite a connection to it.

VA Well, it's fascinating to me. You know, my father comes from Syria, got here in 1900, and so - it depends on how you count. First generation born or second generation, I don't know how you count those things, but nonetheless, I - you know, I wasn't on the trail, I can't claim any relatives that crossed over in covered wagons. I may have told you earlier that I lamented that I didn't have a grandpa that left me a gold watch, which I always thought was really kind of nice, and some of my

friends, their grandpas had these big, gold watches, and I thought, oh, wouldn't that be neat to have one of those things. And I've always been interested in history. I think it's important. I really do.

CH I bet even your father's trip out here was not an easy journey.

VA I don't think so, but it was probably rail, but we never talked about that.

CH And he didn't say how long it took?

VA No, I have no idea. I told you the story of how they got here, but that's - I told you pretty much the way I got it. Not that he got on the train or that ~~Haziz~~^{Aziz} [sp?], which is my uncle, came first. I didn't get any details. All I got was this broad brush of how they got here, and at that time that was satisfactory to me. Today it would not have been, but that's too late for that.

CH Well, going back a shorter period in history to where we left off last time, we were talking about the 1971 legislative session, and we had talked, after the discussion on the '71 session, a little bit about the legislature in general and how you related to the media, your secretary, work that was conducted off the floor, and, then, we were talking about setbacks, controversies, disappointments that you had while you were in the legislature. Was there anything on that you wanted to add?

VA No. In general terms, because I don't recall when we passed the single-member - well, let's see. Maybe '71 would have been the first session of single-member districts. But over that

period of time, first of all, when I - again, this may be a repeat, but I can't remember. When I first went down, we were paid \$600 a year and one trip back and forth at ten cents a mile. That would be for the two-year period, one trip. So that amounted to, in my case, \$609 one year, because I had forty-five miles each way, ninety miles, and \$600 another year.

Our secretaries would sit on the floor, and they would spend an enormous amount of time amending bills. In those days, amending - you'd get an amendment sheet, and so you take the original printed bill, and then she would use scissors and scotch tape and would mark where the changes and cross things out, and so it was all kind of a patchwork kind of a thing. Today that doesn't happen. Today when there's an amendment, it goes back to the printer, and they reprint the bill. It is much more efficient, but there is a - I think a disadvantage because you can't see what the changes were. Obviously, you can't remember, and you can't really see what the changes were, where you could, obviously, when you have an amended bill.

The office was our desk. We had a filing cabinet along the side aisle. There was a typing room where there was just a whole lot of typewriters along the edge of the room. I can recall my secretary wanting to leave before the session ends so she can go get, quote, her typewriter. Apparently there was one that she liked better than the others.

And that was the whole situation. The legislators were pretty accessible. They didn't have anywhere to go. Unless they were in a committee or out of the building, they were at their desk, so people could easily reach them. Certainly, lobbyists could. But, you know, there they were. So there was a great deal of accessibility.

Now, okay, let's go back to it. Six hundred dollars a year, accessibility on the floor, elected, not in single-member district; I ran countywide in Washington County. And, then,

gradual changes took place. We eventually built the wings, so now legislators have offices so they can hide, so they can get away; bills are being reprinted; secretaries have their own typewriter; salaries have gone up, actually gone up to the extent where - well, it obviously depends on how many committee meetings you attend and how long the session lasts, but, you know, in the vicinity of 16-, 17-, 18,000 a year; and, as I mentioned, the single-member districts. And, then, I keep hearing about, you know, that we need annual sessions because things are getting more complicated and more complex. It's all a lot of nonsense, all a lot of nonsense. First of all, with the raised salaries it becomes, really, someone's full-time job, and, as a matter of fact, there are quite a few who - that's the only job they have. And you get a lot of people that really don't have any background of experience to make decisions, or having to make decisions, so they're reluctant to. They're not quite sure how to - you know, the lengthening of sessions comes about because there just isn't any - well, two things, one of which is they don't know how to make a decision, and secondly, one of their problems is, Which way do I vote so I get reelected, because that's my job. And legislators, as I say, are less accessible than they were before, and single-member district probably is the worst thing that we did. Well, it has to rank along with higher wages, because provincialism really exudes all over the place, where - and again, I may have mentioned this before - where I represent Washington County, I was from the urban to the rural. My replacement, when I resigned - having been elected as governor, my replacement was representing a much smaller district and didn't have this experience of all of Washington County. So they're voting just for that provincial interest, and really that also adds to the length and difficulty of a session. They don't have the broad perspectives we had.

So in a general way I've kind of gone beyond '71, but all of

these things happened over a period of time; none of them, I think, were good. And then I read, you know, we ought to pay people more. We'll get better people. That's nonsense. That's absolutely total nonsense, because the kind of people you really want, what you call really good people - and I don't mean that these are bad people. I mean people that are competent, experienced, have made decisions, have the courage to make decisions, all that sort of thing, that's what I mean. You know, they're pretty high-paying people. I don't think you can pay them enough to get that kind of person, because you'd have to start paying legislators, I don't know, in the range of 70-, 80,000, a hundred - I don't know, a lot of money to get, what they say, better people, because we're not getting better people at 17-, or \$18,000. And when we were getting \$600, there's a lot of people I know of who were there genuinely making a contribution. They could make a lot of money. I think of Tony Yturri in Ontario; bright, good, head screwed on well, which is the way I describe it. Clearly, as a lawyer he can make a lot more money than \$600 for - oh, then it was about four-and-a-half months' work. So he was making a contribution.

CH But at the same time, a lot of people did go to the legislature to be able to get a wider reputation and then would go back into their...

VA Oh, you'd find lawyers wanting to do that. They can't advertise, so that was a good way to do it. And I suppose some were there so they could make some contacts. But by and large, even then that was quite a contribution at \$600. You know, motel rooms eat up all that, plus the food and all the rest of it. Anyway, they're - without getting into a long discussion or dissertation, I think things have happened that didn't improve the process, actually made the process worse.

CH Are any of those situations reversible?

VA I say that the quickest way to improve the quality of the legislature is to cut the salaries. Well, you know and I know that's never going to happen, but if you reduce the salaries to \$600 a year - no one can live on \$600 a year. In other words, certainly they're ^{not} [inaudible] ^{rewarded} for their job, like they are today. So there's always these answers that are answers...

[End of Tape 14, Side 1]