

"GARLAND PERSPECTIVE" INTERVIEW WITH A.M. BAKER

NOVEMBER 6, 1987

HAYSLIP: Hello, my name is Mike Hayslip and I am your host for today's segment of Garland Perspectives. A series of interviews with some of those special folks that have aided so much in Garland's growth and development in the first half of the twentieth century. This series is sponsored by the Garland Sesquicentennial Commission in celebration of our state's 150th anniversary. Our special guest here today in the Storer Cable Studio is Mr. A. M. Baker. Founder of a series of business which are now distilled in what we know as Baker Furniture Company. Mr. Baker is the senior merchant of the Garland Town Square. And, at 92, presides over the store he founded so many years ago. August Marvin Baker was the fifth of six children born to William Barton and Seretta Bray Baker on August 25, 1893 in Prairie View, Arkansas. The family moved to Blue Ridge, Texas later where Mr. Baker attended a one room school house. At sixteen, and we have a picture of him at 16, Mr. Baker went as he put it on his own working the farm crops. At 19 he came to Wylie as a cotton picker and made a deal which affected his life to come. The deal was with a lady in Wylie to run a farm which she owned, she was a widow and he did that for two years. In his spare time, however he courted the lady's granddaughter whom he married on January 16, 1916. The next day they moved to an Indian lease in Diboll, Oklahoma where they raised cotton, corn and wheat for seven years. It was during this time, that Mr. Baker's sons Ovid and Ferrell were born. We have a picture of Mr. Baker about this time in his life as well. After a time, Mrs. Baker tired of the Oklahoma sand and her husband gave her a choice of two places to move. Either West Texas or back to Wylie Texas where she had been reared. The choice was clear to her and they returned to Wylie in 1923 where Mr. Baker had some savings in his pocket from the successful farming operation. With that nest egg, Mr. Baker set up a hardware department in a harness and shoe repair shop in Wylie, Texas. Later on, he added plumbing services to the shop, and his merchant career had begun. When the Depression arrived, the banks in Wylie failed and Mr. Baker had to drive all the way to Garland to handle his merchant business with checks and cash. So, in 1930 he moved to Garland and rented a building on the north side of the Town Square. Within a couple of years, Horace James, Sr. sold him a building and some used furniture inventory that was in it at the time on the south side of the square where the Baker complex now stands. Much expanded I might add. And, the Baker Furniture business began. Mr. Baker does this sound like you? Do I have the right man here?

BAKER: Yes. That's right.

HAYSLIP: Good, the facts are correct. Tell me sir, I have not known until yesterday what A. M. Baker stood for. I have known you all my life by the initials A.M. Baker. Can you tell me where you got the name August Marvin?

BAKER: It's a joke. Wanna hear a joke?

HAYSLIP: Sure. We need a joke.

BAKER: Well, there was _____ and here I was and didn't know what to call me. They said, "January, February, March, April, May, June, July and August, that's eight. We'll just call him August.

HAYSLIP: O.K. So, you were named August because you were born in August. Mr. Baker, did you have a very wealthy family behind you and a lot of inheritance to start in business?

BAKER: No. Not at all.

HAYSLIP: Oh, you didn't? What was your family like?

BAKER: Well, I know very little of them. Nothing of my father, because he died before I can remember.

HAYLSIP: He died in Arkansas. Right? Before you moved to Texas.

BAKER: Yes.

HAYLSIP: So, you moved with your mother and the rest of your family down to Blue Ridge, Texas.

BAKER: That's right.

HAYSLIP: Without this inheritance you would have like to have had.

BAKER: Yes. We left it all up there.

HAYSLIP: That's right. And you farmed in Blue Ridge.

BAKER: Yes.

HAYLSIP: Why did you choose farming at that time? You are now a merchant.

BAKER: I didn't know how to do anything else.

HAYLSIP: Did you enjoy farming?

BAKER: Well, whether I enjoyed it or not that's what I had to do.

HAYLSIP: You enjoyed eating.

BAKER: Well, yes.

HAYSLIP: So, farming was a way to do that.

BAKER: That's right. That's about the only way to do anything in them days.

HAYSLIP: OK. So, you came back there and can you tel1 us a little bit about the time when you were down in Blue Ridge and Wylie and you met your wife. What you were doing on the farm down there and what maybe you thought you were going to do for the rest of your life, or did you ever think about that?

BAKER: Well, I used to go to town a farm boy and see how those town guys were dressed up with a coat and tie on.

HAYSLIP: You're pretty slick looking today.

BAKER: I guess so. I always thought I would love to do that.

HAYSIP: You had on overalls back then.

BAKER: Yes, I did.

HAYSLIP: You wore overalls and went to town and you saw they were slick looking.

BAKER: Yes.

HAYSLIP: Did you think about being a merchant back then?

BAKER: No. It was a good while after that.

HAYSLIP: So, you were farming and you got married and you went to Oklahoma and you raised cotton and wheat. I believe you told me you raised or made 50 bales of cotton on that Indian lease.

BAKER: Yes.

HAYSLIP: What did cotton sell for back then?

BAKER: I believe it was about 20¢ a pound.

HAYSLIP: O.K. And, how many pounds in a bale?

BAKER: 500

HAYSLIP: O.K. So, that kept you going for a while and it brought you back down to Wylie. I believe you told me that when you came to Wylie you straddled a couple of things. Number one, you were running a farm just to make sure and number two, you put in this hardware business.

BAKER: Yes. I come there and rented this farm.

HAYSLIP: Now, this was 1923. You returned to Wylie.

BAKER: Yes. I went to Wylie and a man over there had a little shop to put a top on my car.

HAYSLIP: Excuse me. What kind of car?

BAKER: It was an old one. It was an Overland.

HAYSLIP: But, was it a touring car?

BAKER: Yeah. It had a cloth top. The snow broke it in.

HAYSLIP: So, you went to him to repair the top of the Overland Touring car.

BAKER: Yeah. And I got to talking to him, and he said you ought to think about opening a business.

HAYSLIP: Hardware business.

BAKER: Well, yes I was looking for an investment.

HAYSLIP: After that 50 bales of cotton.

BAKER: Yes.

HAYSLIP: You had to have something to do with that money. And, so he had a harness shop, and did he repair shoes also?

BAKER: Yeah.

HAYSLIP: So, anything that was cloth or leather he repaired in 1923 in Wylie, Texas.

BAKER: That's right.

HAYSLIP: And, so he thought that you would be a good fellow to put in an expanded part of his store. You had the capital. What did you know about the hardware business back then?

BAKER: Well, I was raised on the farm, and farmers know about hardware.

HAYSLIP: They've got to don't they?

BAKER: You bet they do.

HAYSLIP: So, where did you get the inventory of this hardware business? Where did you buy the merchandise?

BAKER: Well, we got in the car and drove down to Dallas to the hardware company and bought open stock.

HAYSLIP: Well, it was easy to do then, because you already had the top of the car fixed, right?

BAKER: Yes.

HAYSLIP: So, he fixed the top of the car, you got in that car and you drove down to Dallas and you bought your opening stock.

BAKER: That's right.

HAYSLIP: Do you remember how much opening stock it took in 1923? What were some of the goods that you bought?

BAKER: Well, we had housewares and hardware stuff that the farmers used, households, sweeps and all that kind of stuff. Dishes and stuff for the home. All kinds of shelf hardware.

HAYSLIP: Almost everything a farm family needed other than cloth or soft goods. You had nuts and bolts, pipe.

BAKER: Not too much pipe, but we had some.

HAYSLIP: Now you were up there in 1923, you were 30 years old and all of a sudden you were a hardware merchant. Had you had any experience doing that before?

BAKER: No.

HAYSLIP: Did anybody ever show you how to keep books or did you ever take a business course anywhere?

BAKER: No.

HAYSLIP: O.K. So, you at 30 years old were fresh off in hardware.

BAKER: Right.

HAYSLIP: How did it go?

BAKER: It went alright.

HAYSLIP: Must have. What were the troubles you had back then?

BAKER: Well, it depends on what kind of trouble you're talking about, with the change?

HAYSLIP: Sure. From a farmer to a hardware merchant. Let's talk about credit for just a minute. Was that a problem?

BAKER: Well, yes you had to sell on credit.

HAYSLIP: So, you didn't have Master Charge back then, VISA or anything.

BAKER: Oh, no.

HAYSLIP: And when a farmer came into your store he generally did it because he needed something.

BAKER: That's right and sometimes you had to carry them till fall till they picked cotton.

HAYSLIP: Alright, so you were almost in the banking business also.

BAKER: Very lightly.

HAYSLIP: But, heavier than you wanted I bet.

BAKER: A little bit.

HAYSLIP: So, you had these people on the cuff also. You did a cash business, but if they didn't have the money and you wanted to sell the goods then you wrote them up.

BAKER: Yes.

HAYSLIP: How and why did you come to Garland from Wylie?

BAKER: Well, the Depression come on.

HAYSLIP: Now, we're at 1930 aren't we?

BAKER: Yeah. 1929 was the Depression.

HAYSLIP: Well, that was the stock market crash so whenever you want to date it.

BAKER: Well, that's when the banks went broke. We had two of them there and one of them sold out to the other one, and then that one went broke.

HAYSLIP: O.K. So, they combined and both of them went broke. And, there you were in business in Wylie. No bank.

BAKER: That's right.

HAYSLIP: How did that feel?

BAKER: Pretty bad.

HAYSLIP: Did you lose money in the bank?

BAKER: Yes.

HAYSLIP: You had money on deposit that you lost.

BAKER: I had a little bit, uh-huh. My little boys had a little account there too, they lost theirs too.

HAYSLIP: Well, now I believe we have a picture here of you and your family and your two sons at about 1930, and that's when you came to Garland. Can you tell me a little bit about the decision you made to move to Garland in 1930 from Wylie?

BAKER: Well, I didn't see any future in Wylie without a bank, so I just decided I'd move to Garland.

HAYSLIP: Well, why Garland? There were other towns that had banks.

BAKER: Well, it was the closest town to me.

HAYSLIP: Had you ever been here before for anything?

BAKER: To Garland?

HAYSLIP: Yeah.

BAKER: Well, I had been down there a time or two.

HAYSLIP: Had friends here?

BAKER: No.

HAYSLIP: Did you know anybody here?

BAKER: Then, no.

HAYSLIP: OK. So, what did you do? You didn't have a bank up there were you already coming to Garland for banking services?

BAKER: Yes.

HAYSLIP: So, you had already been coming down here because of the bank.

BAKER: Oh, yes.

HAYSLIP: And you decided to move.

BAKER: Yes.

HAYSLIP: O.K. You're 37 years old at that time. What kind of nerve did that take to pick up stakes and move?

BAKER: Well, you just do what you have to do. I drove down here and parked my car out on the square and set there and looked around. Didn't tell anybody what I was doing. Didn't tell my wife what I was doing. I saw an empty building and walked over there and asked them if that building was for rent and they said they just rented it to A&P Grocery. Well, I looked to my left and there was one on the north side of the square that they had just burned out, a grocery store A. J. Beaver's Grocery. And, they had just redone it. When I drove up to his house and walked in, it was colder than anything, I sat down before the fire and told him I wanted that building. He said "OK"•

HAYSLIP: Well, what did fixed up mean in those days? Did that mean a lot of carpet and air

conditioning and piped in music?

BAKER: No,

HAYSLIP: What did it mean?

BAKER: It didn't mean anything like that.

HAYSLIP: What was fixed up back then in 1930 for a building? What did it include if you wanted to rent or lease a building?

BAKER: Wasn't anything included. Just a flat building open.

HAYSLIP: What kind of floor?

BAKER: Concrete floor, I believe. Yea.

HAYSLIP: What kind of ceiling?

BAKER: Well, I guess alright.

HAYSLIP: If it was dry, it was alright.

BAKER: Yea. It was a fairly good building.

HAYSLIP: What kind of lights?

BAKER: Little drop lights with single bulbs in it.

HAYSLIP: O.K. Do you have any idea what a lease cost for a building like that back in those days?

BAKER: There wasn't such a thing as lease back in those days. They were just doggone glad to rent it.

HAYSLIP: O.K. So, in 1930 Garland didn't have a lot of people trying to rent buildings.

BAKER: Did not. No sir.

HAYSLIP: So, you rented that building and then what?

BAKER: Well, I went back to Wylie and told my wife what I had done.

HAYSLIP: Well, that was decent of you. Since you had done that.

BAKER: I figured I would lose her anyhow, so what difference would it make. I went to packing my dishes and things and wash tubs.

HAYSLIP: Your stock in your store.

BAKER: Yes. And, people came in and said what are you doing? I said I'm moving. They said "what building are you moving in?" I said "I'm moving to Garland". They said "Oh, no you can't do that". I said "Yes, I can".

HAYSLIP: How long did it take you to move?

BAKER: A day and a night.

HAYSLIP: To move from Wylie to Garland, and you set up shop in a new building on the north side of the square that you rented. Alright, now let's bring this up and we're at 1930 and you got here just in time for the Depression.

BAKER: Yes. Just after we had the storm and the hail beat the cotton into the ground and had to

plant everything over.

HAYSLIP: You got good timing don't you. We had a cyclone here and we had had a storm that ruined the crops and the Depression was starting and here you were 37 years old starting in a new business in a new town.

BAKER: It was following me.

HAYSLIP: Do you think you brought any of that stuff, or do you think it followed you?

BAKER: Well, the hail came the night that I started moving the next morning down here and beat the crops into the ground, the cotton was about knee high.

HAYSLIP: Did you ever think you had made a mistake?

BAKER: Well, when I moved off from Wylie the cotton was about knee high and didn't have any hail.

HAYSLIP: So, they had the hail in the town you moved to. Well, that must have made you think...what did you find Garland like in those days? What is your earliest recollections of Garland?

BAKER: Well, I had and right away I made a lot of good farmer friends. Because I catered to their needs.

HAYSLIP: O.K. In 1930, the farmers were still the basis of the merchants business?

BAKER: They was, yeah.

HAYSLIP: OK, so you made a lot of good farmer friends. Was the rest of the town friendly to you, or did they look at you like a foreigner, or what did they do?

BAKER: Well, I'd say I got my part.

HAYSLIP: What are your earliest recollections? Can you paint us a picture of anything that you remember when you came to Garland? Something that stands out in your mind's eye. Well, tell me this. When the farmers came in to buy, did they come during the week? Did they come on the weekend?

BAKER: Oh, they came all the time, but mostly Saturday and they come in on Saturday night and the kiddos went to the picture show.

HAYSLIP: They got rid of them in the show.

BAKER: Yeah. And, they gossiped out on the front. Talked about their crops.

HAYSLIP: So, the picture I get in 1930 is of the town's square basically laid out the way it is now. There were different stores in different places and the merchants on the square were primarily at that time selling to the rural community. Whatever they had to sell that's what they had to count on. And, the biggest sales day you had was Saturday.

BAKER: Usually, yes.

HAYSLIP: What time of day did the day start? What were your opening hours back then?

BAKER: It was whenever you could get up, eat your meal and get up there and open up. Sometimes about sun up or before.

HAYSLIP: What was sun up then? Say six o'clock?

BAKER: Well, depending what time we were using.

HAYSLIP: Six, seven o'clock in the morning on Saturday. Right?

BAKER: Well, every day.

HAYSLIP: Wait just a minute. Most stores today that we have on the square are open from say eight to five or nine to five or nine to six. What kind of hours did you keep in those days? In 1930.

BAKER: The farmer got up early, and he got out. And, you better be down there.

HAYSLIP: You didn't have any of this nine o'clock stuff did you?

BAKER: No, and no coffee breaks either.

HAYSLIP: About what time on the average did you open the store in those days?

BAKER: Well, you know the sun comes up at different times of the day.

HAYSLIP: Right. So, anywhere from six to eight o'clock in the morning you would open.

BAER: Yes.

HAYSLIP: Is that accurate?

BAKER: That's pretty good.

HAYLSIP: O.K.

BAKER: You didn't know I had ever been up that early, did you?

HAYSLIP: I didn't figure you ever had. Now, how late did you stay open?

BAKER: Well, just as long as there was any business.

HAYSLIP: O.K. So, you didn't have any of this stuff, "we're gonna close at five o'clock, you need to leave with the gong or the lights flashing on."

BAKER: No.

HAYSLIP: If you had a live one in there, you stayed right?

BAKER: They tried to get a deal to close up at six o'clock, my competitor, and he talked me into it, so I closed. Went home and the sun was still up there in the west. A farmer drove up down there and said "say, I wanted to get something out of your store". I said that's fine, I'll go back. I done that for a few days and I called my friend up and I said "listen, I'm gonna take care of my customers, you can close whenever you want to", and that was it.

HAYLSIP: O.K. So, that was the end of the agreement to close at six o'clock.

BAKER: They said "if you're not open when we need you I'll have to go somewhere else."

HAYLSIP: You wanted to make sure the somewhere else was you.

BAKER: Well.

HAYSLIP: That's good. Now, what was business like in 1930 in Garland? Did you still carry accounts at the store? If I were a farmer for example and I'd come in and I had broken something and needed a part to fix it and I didn't have the money, chances are would it have been on an account. Or, would that have been cash?

BAKER: Well, there wasn't too many had cash.

HAYLSIP: In 1930?

BAKER: No.

HAYSLIP: So, you had to carry some accounts.

BAKER: Had to carry some.

HAYSLIP: There you were back in the banking business again.

BAKER: Well, I didn't take deposits.

HAYLSIP: But you issued loans. What was Garland like back then? What were the churches like back then? What was life like in Garland for a merchant with a family? What was there to do in 1930?

BAKER: What were the churches like? They held the families together. People went to church more then than they do today, I'm sorry to say.

HAYLSIP: O.K. Now, you were an active member at that time I believe in the First Christian Church in Garland.

BAKER: That's right.

HAYSLIP: The church was for you and your family, the center of a lot of activities.

BAKER: It was.

HAYSLIP: What were the civic clubs like? I believe you're a charter member of the Lions Club here in Garland. What were the civic clubs like? What were your activities like?

BAKER: That was it.

HAYSLIP: So, the church and the Lions Club was it.

BAKER: Yeah.

HAYSLIP: There wasn't any other hoop de do or anything else. With a man working twelve hours a day it was kind of hard to have that wasn't it?

BAKER: Well...

HAYSLIP: O.K. What were the cultural activities like? Say, music or theater or anything else that you or were you ever aware of anything like that going on? What were the schools like?

BAKER: Well, I was very interested in school and my children to go to school.

HAYSLIP: Right. Were you pleased with the schools and the activities here?

BAKER: Well, we had good schools.

HAYSLIP: O.K. And, you feel like both your sons have been successful and lead constructive lives here?

BAKER: They sure have.

HAYLSIP: O.K. And, that is in part due to the schools in your opinion.

BAKER: Well, yes they never had a thought that they wouldn't go to college.

HAYSLIP: And, both did?

BAKER: Yes.

HAYSLIP: What did you do in Garland as far as civic work? Now, you told us you were in the Lions Club. You told us you were in the Christian Church and we know you were in the store twelve hours a day. What did you do in your spare time?

BAKER: Well, I was usually in on anything that was going on downtown. If they had somebody's house burn and they needed somebody to get out and solicit for them, well I did.

HAYSLIP: O.K. What sort of activities like that were there going on. You know today, generally when we have a disaster somebody is looking for government aid in some way.

BAKER: We didn't have that then.

HAYSLIP: Didn't have that then. Well, how did you handle problems with individual people?

BAKER: Well, a couple of us would take a piece of paper and go around to get donations and say we were with the church. They'd send you around to see the members to get them to pay in. the church and a fella said to me one day "it looks like we always catch it."

HAYSLIP: Yep. So, what you're saying if I hear you correctly is that the church is and the merchants as a group sort of took care of folks that needed it.

BAKER: Well, pretty well we didn't have anything else to call on you know for help.

HAYSLIP: But, you didn't have to do that. Why did you do that?

BAKER: Well, somebody had to and I thought it was just as much my duty as the other man's.

HAYSLIP: O.K. Let's go back to the store for just a minute now. At this time you moved in about 1932. You moved from the north side of the square to the south side of the square. Is that correct?

BAKER: Yes, about then.

HAYSLIP: When you did that, you bought a building that was probably 20% of what your store is now.

BAKER: Just at that day I didn't buy it. I was there awhile.

HAYSLIP: O.K. You rented it first. In 1932 you got a building and you got some used furniture.

BAKER: Yes.

HAYSLIP: Now, can you tell me how you got in 1932 to 1986 what I see down there when I walk in that store from one little building and all that used furniture? Now, you had hardware and you had some used furniture and you also repaired shoes on Saturday, I believe.

BAKER: And, made harness.

HAYSLIP: Made harness.

BAKER: And, saddles.

HAYSLIP: And, saddles. You did about whatever there was needed to be done. Didn't you.

BAKER: Anybody else could, I could too.

HAYSLIP: Ok. You got through the Depression. Let's say you got through the 1930s. Can you tell us something about that as a merchant down there? You know we got merchants around here trying to worry about advertising, trying to worry about employees, trying to worry about all these things you worry about, and you went through the 1930's in a store and you not only survived, you grew. And, you blossomed into what it is today.

And, you told us that in that time you were working ten and twelve hours a day. You were going to church, in the Lions Club and in your spare time that you had when people needed help the churches and the merchants got together. What can you tell us about business in those days? Did you advertise for example?

BAKER: No.

HAYSLIP: No advertisement.

BAKER: Not back then. I went to advertising after I got into the new furniture business.

HAYSLIP: When was that? About what year?

BAKER: Well, it was about the beginning of the War.

HAYSLIP: O.K. So, it would have been about 1940?

BAKER: Well, a little earlier than that...About 1935.

HAYSLIP: O.K. 1935. Why did you do that? Why did you get into the new furniture business?

BAKER: Well, you get into anything that looks like there's anything in.

HAYSLIP: O.K. But, you were always sniffing around for an opportunity it looks like.

BAKER: Well, I wasn't asleep.

HAYSLEEP: O.K. That's obvious. If you were asleep you wouldn't be there in the shape you are now. So, somewhere between 1935 and 1940 you put in the new furniture business. I can remember in my early days which would have been the forties in Garland there were two hardware and furniture businesses on the square. It was yours and one other. And, today forty years later one of them is entirely hardware and one of them is entirely furniture.

BAKER: Yes. He went out of the furniture business and I went in.

HAYSLIP: O.K. And, gradually the furniture business that you began in the late thirties over the next fifty years rooted out the hardware.

BAKER: Well, I closed out my hardware about five years ago.

HAYSLIP: And, you took that space and committed that to furniture.

BAKER: Yes. I just liquidated the hardware in order to expand my furniture. I had put in a second store and run it for five years.

HAYSLIP: Right. You used to have two locations.

BAKER: Yes.

HAYSLIP: Now you just got one. But it's all furniture.

BAKER: Yes.

HAYSLIP: Looking back over the last fifty six years you spent in Garland, you being a relative newcomer to Garland and not a native here, you've only been here fifty six years.

BAKER: I'm not a native son.

HAYSLIP: Right. But that's alright fifty six years you pretty well qualify for I think in most respects. What do you remember as in that fifty six years the issues in Garland? For example, what were the government and law and order issue if you remember in that fifty six

years?

BAKER: Well, I don't know about discussing the cross ups. Maybe I should and maybe I shouldn't.

HAYSLIP: Whatever you like. This is your time. You tell us what you want.

BAKER: Well, there was kind of a battle going on here between Garland and Texas Power and Light. There was about ten men there organized the company and put in a light plant for the City of Garland.

HAYSLIP: O.K. Now we have been told in other interviews that we have had on this series that in the early twenties that was done, so we got that on record. We know that by the time you got here in 1930 that Garland had been very viable home owned electric plant and what you're telling us is you arrived here in 1930 the fight was on.

BAKER: Yes.

HAYSLIP: They didn't waste any time telling you about it.

BAKER: They sure didn't. They caught me right quick.

HAYSLIP: O.K. They caught you right after you rented that building and each side wanted to enlist you on their behalf. Well, how did you look at that? Coming in from out of town, you came into Garland this clash going on.

BAKER: Well, the manager of TP&L said "Baker we furnished you electricity in Wylie, we'd like to furnish you out here". I said "John, I like you but I've got too much sense to put in Texas Power and Light in Garland."

HAYSLIP: What made you feel that way?

BAKER: Anybody that lived here then could see it.

HAYSLIP: Do you mean that most of the merchants around the square and most of the businesses around the square was solid and had the bulk of the business there and everybody knew who was taking power from whom, right?

BAKER: I think so.

HAYSLIP: So, if you wanted to get along it was pretty clear.

BAKER: Well, these men were working for their own power and light. I mean, Garland men working for Garland.

HAYSLIP: What do you remember about transportation in the last fifty six years? You know, that's been an issue from day one in Garland. How to get in and out of Dallas and you moved in here from a smaller town up to the north and what do you remember about transportation?

BAKER: I used to pull a two wheel trailer behind my car. I'd go down and load as high as I could pile it with used furniture and haul it out here. Work it over and sell it.

HAYSLIP: You worked furniture over and sold it?

BAKER: Yes. Some of it.

HAYSLIP: So, you'd buy the used furniture and you would refurbish it?

BAKER: Yes.

HAYSLIP: And, then re-offer it.

BAKER: Yes.

HAYSLIP: Well, so far you're a cotton farmer, you're a harness maker, and you're a shoe repairman. I believe you told me you had plumbing facilities in Wylie.

BAKER: In Wylie, yes when they put in gas and sewage up there. I put in a lot of it.

HAYSLIP: O.K. A farmer, harness maker, shoe repairman, hardware merchant, used furniture merchant, furniture repairman, new furniture sales. What else have you done? You apparently made it all work.

BAKER: Well, that's bringing it down to where I am now.

HAYSLIP: That's all. Just seven things, right? That's a lot of careers in one lifetime. I never knew that you ever bought and refurbished and sold used furniture.

BAKER: Well, I did when I had the used furniture there.

HAYSLIP: What did you do with it? Did you paint it or did you re-glue it.

BAKER: I took the paint off, I refinished it.

HAYSLIP: Did you do that yourself?

BAKER: Well, a guy done anything that was to do.

HAYSLIP: So, then you re-sold furniture and that would be what today would be called a resale shop or an antique shop, I guess.

BAKER: Well, they didn't know anything about antique then. To them, that was just good furniture.

HAYSLIP: Didn't call it antique.

BAKER: No.

HAYSLIP: Probably was a better buy without the name antique on it. Wasn't it? O.K. That's interesting. What do you remember about health and medicine in Garland during that time? Was it a healthy town? Did it have a lot of doctors and drug stores?

BAKER: We had a lot of drug stores. We had about three.

HAYSLIP: We had three drug stores on the square. Now, we got one drug store.

BAKER: Yes.

HAYSLIP: O.K. What do you remember about the influential people in Garland? Let's say from 1930 on, which is when you came here. Who were the people that made it run?

BAKER: Well, A. R. Davis was a pretty good leader in the town. There was a bunch here that...

HAYSLIP: He was the banker, right? Who else?

BAKER: Well, Ray Olinger was Mayor for several years and he was pretty influential. Ben Jackson was a car dealer.

HAYSLIP: O.K. And, they were the forerunners of what is now Newman Chevrolet.

BAKER: Jack Powell.

HAYSLIP: Mr. L.A. Powell. He was a dry goods dealer. What did these people do that made them

influential?

BAKER: Anything that come up, they usually called a meeting and they told us the way they wanted it to go. Which was good for the town.

HAYSLIP: I've always wondered that maybe you could help me answer.

BAKER: I didn't say M. D. Williams.

HAYSLIP: O.K. Mr. Williams. I cut you off, pardon me. Anybody else?

BAKER: Well, that's good enough.

HAYSLIP: Alright. Apparently it was good enough. The thing that I always wondered about and maybe you can help me answer. Why is Garland, Texas the tenth largest city in the state today, when we were founded at about the same time as Sachse, Rose Hill and Reinhardt and Pleasant Valley and Wylie? What is it about Garland that has made us different over the years?

BAKER: Well I tell you I was a member of the Chamber of Commerce, I was one of the Directors. We were trying to bring business to Garland. We were working on them and Southern Aircraft wanted to come here and they didn't have anything, he had an idea.

HAYSLIP: O.K. Now, Southern Aircraft, that's what now Intercontinental is?

BAKER: Yes. And, we bought the land out there for him to build a plant on and we paid it out by the month.

HAYSLIP: Now, who is we? The Chamber of Commerce?

BAKER: The merchants.

HAYSLIP: Merchants around the square bought the land to bring an industry to Garland.

BAKER: Every month they collected off of me and the other merchants too.

HAYSLIP: So, you bought the land and you gave it to these people to bring a plant to Garland.

BAKER: Yeah. And, we were also instrumental in bringing Kraft Food there. I was on the Chamber of Commerce then.

HAYSLIP: You didn't tell me you were on the Chamber of Commerce Board before.

BAKER: After the War, several people wanted to rent their building out there and we wouldn't recommend them.

HAYSLIP: Whose building, Mr. Baker?

BAKER: Where Kraft Cheese is now.

HAYSLIP: Right. There was a War time assembly plant out there during the War, I believe and that was called Continental

BAKER: It come here as Kraft Foods.

HAYSLIP: Right, but it was called Continental Motor. O.K. So, Continental Motor built motors during the War in the building which is now Kraft Foods.

BAKER: Yeah.

HAYSLIP: O.K. So, after the War the Chamber of Commerce people did what?

BAKER: Well, the Chamber of Commerce kind of governed what happened in the city in a way and people was trying to rent the building and we didn't approve for some that wanted it. We didn't think it meant much to Garland.

HAYSLIP: What were you looking for? Why did you want the businesses to come here?

BAKER: We wanted something that would bring jobs here for people.

HAYSLIP: O.K. So, you were looking for a payroll.

BAKER: Yes.

HAYSLIP: Because payrolls have to be spent.

BAKER: Right.

HAYSLIP: And, deposited with banks and spent with merchants.

BAKER: Yes.

HAYSLIP: So, you thought it was a good thing to have growth in Garland.

BAKER: Yes. It was, too.

HAYSLIP: So, how did you finally get Kraft Foods here? First of all you wanted Kraft Foods, you decided that would be a good payroll.

BAKER: Yes.

HAYSLIP: Looking back on it, you were right weren't you.

BAKER: Yes.

HAYSLIP: How did you go about enticing Kraft?

BAKER: Well, I don't know just exactly who sold the deal.

HAYSLIP: But, a number of the Chamber of Commerce people got together and they let it be known to Kraft Foods that Garland, Texas wanted them to be here.

BAKER: I think so, yes. And, when they came, we throwed a big fish fry out here north of town and fried fish in wash kettles. We had signs all along the road how to get there. Anybody could come and eat all the fish they wanted.

HAYSLIP: That was a big deal to get Kraft Foods here back in those days, wasn't it?

BAKER: Yes.

HAYSLIP: Right after the War and the Chamber of Commerce did that. Can I assume that you're answering my question when I say to you why Garland got to be the tenth largest city in the state? You're answering me that it got that way because of the number of merchants and Chamber of Commerce people. I'm not trying to put words in your mouth, but I'm just trying to summarize.

BAKER: That pretty well covers it.

HAYSLIP: Alright. They decided that growth was good and they went out to get it.

BAKER: That's right.

HAYSLIP: And, they did what it took even if it meant shelling out from their own pockets to buy land or go on trips or get them in here. What are you proudest of in the time you've

spent here in Garland these fifty six years?

BAKER: Well, everything I've done and proud of it.

HAYSLIP: Well, that's good. What would be the first thing that you would have to mention?

BAKER: For my benefit?

HAYSLIP: For anybody's benefit. I just want to know what you're proud of?

BAKER: Moving here. I think it was a good move.

HAYSLIP: Looks like it was. Even with the hail storm. You're proud of moving here, what else? You got to be proud of your family.

BAKER: I am that for sure.

HAYSLIP: That's a good bunch of people. You got two sons. You got what, seven grandchildren?

BAKER: Yes.

HAYSLIP: You're proud of all of them.

BAKER: Every one of them.

HAYSLIP: You got one son and three grandchildren in business with you. Don't you?

BAKER: Yes.

HAYSLIP: O.K. We got a picture here of your son Ferrell, who is in business with you.

BAKER: Yes, he set me up my first bookkeeping outfit when he was in high school.

HAYSLIP: He did. He started working with you when he was in high school.

BAKER: Oh, yeah.

HAYSLIP: And, now you got three of Ferrell's children in there.

BAKER: Yes.

HAYSLIP: O.K. Have you got any regrets?

BAKER: Well, I'd say no.

HAYSLIP: Well, that's pretty good to be ninety two years old and never have messed up somewhere.

BAKER: Oh, I've let some things slip that I should have took. Some deals.

HAYSLIP: Did you take any you shouldn't have taken?

BAKER: No.

HAYSLIP: So, you played it on the conservative side?

BAKER: I had to.

HAYSLIP: Mr. Baker, looking back on this, what is your happiest moment that you have had in Garland in those fifty six years?

BAKER: Oh goodness.

HAYSLIP: Have you had a lot of them?

BAKER: Yes. I've been very satisfied with what I have done. I'll have to give for these later

expansions.

HAYLSIP: Of the store.

BAKER: Yes. These later expansions are mostly I'll have to give Ferrell credit for.

HAYSLIP: Your son. Well, now I ask you a moment ago what you were proudest of and you've hesitated a little bit and I could have answered that for you, but I'm trying to get you to do this in your own words. I came to see you yesterday morning and the first thing you said to me was let me show you my store.

BAKER: Yes.

HAYLSIP: Now, a man that does that it's pretty clear what he's proudest of.

BAKER: Well, today mostly what I do is stay down on the lower floor and I meet people and I see that they get took care of.

HAYLSIP: I noticed that when I showed up yesterday morning they were about three minutes late opening the front door and I noticed you had something to say about that. Might miss a sale somewhere.

BAKER: Well, Ferrell was off yesterday.

HAYSLIP: You've watched that business pretty closely all these years haven't you?

BAKER: Yes.

HAYSLIP: Do you think that's what it takes?

BAKER: It does.

HAYSLIP: When we close this interview, let me ask you for people like me or people just moving into Garland younger people, what sort of advice do you have to give? You have lived ninety two years, fifty six of it here in Garland.

BAKER: Well, they will disagree with me.

HAYSLIP: You're the hunter with the coons' skin on the wall.

BAKER: A fella said I sold my soul to the company store. Now, you just better do that.

HAYSLIP: Well, let me do this. Yesterday when I was talking with you, you said something about the golden rule. How do you feel about that?

BAKER: I feel the Bible says and I believe in doing to others like I would want to be done to.

HAYSLIP: And, that's the way you run that store.

BAKER: Well, some people might not think so. I haven't done anything that I feel like it wasn't right about it. I have been honest with people, my customers, I like them.

HAYSLIP: I think they liked you.

BAKER: I appreciated them.

HAYSLIP: You said something else to me yesterday. I wonder if you would repeat that for us today about advice to a man in business. What he ought to do, and how you thought he ought to handle business with his time. About the time you spent and how you worked.

BAKER: Well, if playing golf interferes with your business, give up your golf, don't give up your business.

HAYSLIP: Well, I think that's pretty good advice. Mr. Baker, I really want to thank you and I want to thank the store for letting you off. I don't know how much they docked you for coming down here.

BAKER: They gave me half price while I'm away.

HAYSLIP: Ok. They cut your salary down to half. Well, I want to thank you for taking the time to visit with us today. I think it's a real thrill for all of us to be able to talk to a guy that at ninety two years old is still hitting it. You never mentioned to me any plans for retirement anytime I ever talked to you.

BAKER: That's a dirty word.

HAYSLIP: That's a dirty word to you. Well, that's good. I hope you don't ever retire because if you do I'm not sure who would see that everything is dusted and doors opened. We really appreciate you taking the time to share some of these observations with us and what your opinions are and what your advice is. I think it's up to the rest of us to ponder some of these things and assimilate some of the lessons you have learned over the ninety two years into what we do in our day to day routines. So, for this segment of Garland Perspectives we'll say thank you for being with us and so long until next time.

BAKER: Thank you.

END OF TAPE