WILLIAM H. BORTHWICK

THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

William H. Borthwick

(1872 - 1973)

The late Mr. Borthwick was born in Barry, Illinois and came to Hawaii in 1916 with his wife and two sons, William Mendel and James Harold Borthwick.

He established and was president of Borthwick Mortuary, Limited and Honolulu Savings and Loan Company, Limited. He served as the Fifth District Representative from 1932 until 1934 when he was appointed tax commissioner by Governor Joseph B. Poindexter, a position he held until 1950. In 1948 he received a medal of honor from the Korean government for saving the life of Syngman Rhee, President of the Republic of Korea.

This transcript contains Mr. Borthwick's reminiscences during three separate interviews.

Katherine B. Allen, Interviewer

INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM H. BORTHWICK

At his Nuuanu Valley home, 420 Wyllie Street, Honolulu 96817

July 2, 1971

B: William H. Borthwick

A: Kathy Allen, Interviewer

B: . . . and we got very well acquainted. He [David Watumull] said that in regard to the Watumull Foundation they wanted to talk with some of the older people here and I don't know just what line in which I could help him.

A: Well, the purpose of this project is to record the history, reminiscences and stories of various people in order that this lore might be preserved. That's what we wish to do and so I'm going to be asking you some rather specific questions, to begin with in any case, because I need to know these things.

For instance, one of the first questions I had was about Barry, Illinois [his birthplace]. I wanted to know about where that is in relationship to Springfield, the capital. Is it near Springfield?

B: It's west of Springfield.

A: And do you recall what the population was about the time that you were born there?

B: Well, I was born in 1872 and the population was--oh, I suppose might have been--four thousand people there. I doubt if there was.

A: All right. I was just interested in knowing about the size of the town and all. Do you remember any great event that occurred in that year other than your birth?

B: Well, of course my birth was the most important thing. You can see that. (Kathy laughs) Well, I remember distinctly several things but it's been quite a while ago. (clock chimes ten o'clock)

A: Well, for instance, did you realize that it was President [Ulysses S.] Grant's second term of office as president

that year?

B: No, I didn't realize that, but I did hear that we had a president, his name was General Grant, and that he was from Illinois. I remember those things. I thought it was great to be able to be born in the same state (chuckles).

A: That produced a president, yes, of course. It was also the year of the death of Juarez in Mexico and it was the year before the one-cent postal cards were issued; and it was the year after the Chicago fire and four years before Custer's Last Stand in Little Big Horn. I was interested because, after all, there're not many people who are still living at ninety-nine. We're going way back in history now.

B: Yes.

A: So it's of great interest to me to know, in the year you were born, what else was happening.

Now, I wanted to ask you. I have the names of your parents, William and Martha Borthwick. And your mother's maiden name was Likes?

B: Likes. L-I-K-E-S.

A: Well now, do you remember your grandparents' names?

B: I remember my grandmother on my mother's side. My grandfather moved out to Illinois; started from Virginia and he stopped over in Pennsylvania. And his name was Butler.

A: Butler? That's your maternal grandfather.

B: Yeh.

A: What was his first name, do you remember?

B: Yes, it was one of the Bible names. William C. No, just a minute now. Butler was my mother's side. This is on my grandfather's side. William C. Likes. L-I-K-E-S. And I've lived ninety-nine years without ever finding out how that came to be.

A: William C. Likes. Now that's on your . . .

B: That's my mother's father.

A: And Butler is who, then?

B: Butler. My grandmother's maiden name was Butler.

A: I see. You don't know what her first name was?

B: Bethina. B-E-T-H-I-N-A.

A: Bethina Butler Likes. Now, how about on your father's side? Do you remember?

B: No, I never knew anything about them, only what he told me. He was born in Nova Scotia.

A: Your father was?

B: Yes.

A: That's cold country, isn't it?

B: Yes.

A: Do you know where your mother was born?

B: My own mother?

A: Yes.

B: She was born in Barry Township--B-A-R-R-Y--in Illinois.

A: Oh, Barry town where you were born.

B: Yes. A township is six miles square.

A: Uh huh. All right. Now, did you have any brothers?

B: I had one brother and five sisters.

A: My, that's a good-sized family.

B: Yeh.

A: And were you the youngest or the . . .

B: Yes, my mother died at my birth.

A: Are any of your sisters and your brother living now?

B: No. No, they're not. None of them. My oldest sister died just a few years ago. She was ninety-six. And my brother died three years ago. He was ninety-eight.

A: My goodness, longevity runs in your family then.

B: (chuckles) Yes, I would say it does.

A: Now, do you have any famous people in your family, other than yourself?

B: Have what?

A: Any famous people in your family, other than yourself?

B: Well, I'm not famous, I hope. I'd just about as leave be infamous as famous in this present day. (laughter)

A: Well, you're well-known here certainly, Mr. Borthwick, very well-known here, and I just wondered if your family--if you're in any history books, for instance.

B: No, I don't recall any. [The March 24, 1940 issue of The Voice of the Nation, a weekly magazine, recommended William Borthwick for President.]

A: What if you were to be in a history book, Mr. Borthwick? What would you want to be remembered for the most?

B: What would I want to be remembered for?

A: For the most, uh huh. What would you consider your greatest achievement?

B: I would say that in one instance I was able to organize something that has been a great benefit to the people. I was the organizer and promoter of the Honolulu Savings and Loan.

A: Yes, that is a contribution. Is there anything else among your achievements that you would like to be remembered for?

B: Oh, I don't know. They ask me, "To what do you attribute your long life?" Well, I've told several people, "If you don't think of anybody but yourself, you haven't got an awful lot to think about."

A: (chuckling) That's very true. Those are wise words, very wise words.

B: I discovered long ago that people responded to whatever kind of treatment you gave them and it's always been my purpose to help people. I think it was Soloman said, "A soft answer turneth away wrath." So I've tried to answer softly when I could.

A: Yes. Well, this is a very fine attitude, of course. Now, you consider this to be your greatest achievement and your

most significant contribution to Hawaii. I'd like to ask you now, when did you come to Hawaii first?

B: When did I come? March 1916.

A: March 1916. Imagine, remembering even the month. That's really something. Now, what was your earliest memory of Hawaii and what was your first impression of it. For instance, how did you feel about being here?

B: Well, I had left Barry. I'd gone to St. Louis, Missouri and from there I'd gone to Kentucky and stayed a few years. Then I went back to Illinois and I got married and it just seemed to me like I wasn't in the right place, so I went to Seattle. My wife and I had a couple of little boys.

A: What were your boys' names, Mr. Borthwick?

B: The oldest one was--forget just how we coupled it . . .

A: Pardon?

B: I say, I forget just how we named him. William Mendel Borthwick.

A: That's M-E-N-D-E-L? Mendel.

B: Yeah. That's the first one.

A: All right. And the other boy's name?

B: James Harold. They both died here.

A: They both died here in Hawaii.

B: Yes.

A: Were they both born here also?

B: No, neither of them was born here.

A: Where were they born?

B: Well, they were born at Barry.

A: Both born in Barry. Then you had your children with you when you moved to Seattle, is that correct?

B: Yes. Yes, they came out to Seattle some time later. I went to Seattle and I got a job and then I brought them out.

A: I see. Then you came to Hawaii in 1916 and you've been here ever since then.

B: Yes.

A: You've never gone and lived anywhere else then?

B: No.

A: Now, how did you like Hawaii when you first came? How did you feel when you first saw the Islands?

B: Well, we got off of a beautiful ship.

A: What ship was that?

B: It was one of Jim Hill's ships. He owned the Great Northern Railroad and the Northern Pacific Railroad, so he had two wonderful ships. [James Jerome Hill, 1838-1916]

A: You don't recall the name of the one you came on?

B: It . . . huh . . .

A: It might come to you later as you go along, so you just go ahead on the journey now and then maybe the ship's name will come to you as you approach the Islands and you see them rising from the sea.

B: Now, I thought that this interview was something to help Mr. Watumull.

A: Well, what we're trying to do is to record your impressions, your remembrances; your reminiscences, in other words--your memory of things past. And it <u>is</u> to help Mr. Watumull. It's going to be written into a kind of history --a history of your life--and all these things are a part of it. Does this not seem like a proper question to ask you?

B: Yes. Anything, if you're trying to find out about ME.

A: That's right. That's exactly what I'm trying to do. I'm trying to find out all about you and the only way that I can find out about you is to ask you things like how you felt about something or what was your impression of something. Then I get to know you better and this is the kind of material we'd like to have. Mr. Watumull wants to know some of the stories that you have, (clock chimes the half hour) anecdotes about your family or your friends or that you remember of the past. These are the things that we're

trying to get. I'm just trying to get it in some sort of order, is all.

B: Well, I'm beginning to see that it's ME that. . . . 'Course you never knew his daddy [Gobindram J. Watumull].

A: No. No, I didn't.

B: Well, I can tell you something. He was one of the finest gentlemen that I ever met and he had a sense of humor. And he and I, we crossed the ocean together three times.

A: Oh, you did, with Mr. Watumull?

B: Yeh.

A: Oh, I didn't realize that.

B: And, get up in the morning, sometimes I'd go out and sit on the deck chair. Here he'd come. He'd reach over and get ahold of my arm, says, "You're not developing that muscle. Now," he says, "we can't have a thing like that. You've got to keep your muscle up. You come with me." And we'd go to one of those damned one-arm bandits [slot machines] and put in quarters half of the day. (chuckles)

A: (laughs) This was on the boat. Was it the Lurline or the Matsonia or one of those?

B: It was the Matsonia. It later became the Lurline [that they traveled on].

A: Oh, it did? Oh, that's right, they did change the name. And they had the one-arm bandits on there then?

B: Oh, they sure did. They were in the room where the bar was and there was a woman there that just worked it. She was working when I got up in the morning and working when I went to bed at night. I could hear her pulling that machine. Johnny Turillo, the famous outlaw from Chicago, he had a home up here on Punahou Street and this was his moll. I asked the bartender, I said, "How much money has she had changed since she got on the boat?" He looked a little bit; he says, "A little over three thousand dollars." So she had fed into that slot machine a little over three thousand dollars." (chuckles)

A: Oh, my word. And what year was that? That must have been an enormous amount in those days. That must have been pre-World War II.

B: Yes. Yes, it was before World War II. Nobody smiled at her; nobody engaged her in conversation. She looked like she's colder than a stepmother's bread. (Kathy laughs)

A: Well, probably because she was so intent on that . . .

B: Well, she didn't want to engage anybody in conversation. See, we didn't know who she was and she didn't want to answer questions or get well-acquainted.

A: Well, she was too busy with her gambling, I suppose.

B: Yes.

A: Are there any other things, events on the boat or any other occurances, that you can recall?

B: Well. (long pause)

A: By the way, may I ask you: Is Jim Hill still around?

B: No, no, no. He's dead years ago. He was about six-foot-six inches tall. Wore a beard; it was gray. He only had one eye but, boy, could he see things. I was coroner of King County and on the first day of March 1910 there was an avalanche caught a passenger train on the Great Northern Railroad. Well, I was coroner and we had to get there, so they hooked a car--ox car--to an engine and I and two others got in there and they took us within seven miles of the wreck. And we marched that seven miles in and we took 117 dead people out of that passenger train and they took eighteen people alive. They were down in the snow, in the cars. I was there twenty-two days while the snow--well, it was terrible snow and it had just covered everything. I've seen some terrible things there, could have been avoided.

A: For instance, what?

B: Well, the train could have been backed into the tunnel. There's a tunnel through the Cascades there and it could have been. But some of the people said, when they spoke about it, they said, "Well, there's a lot of sulfur in the coal that we're using and the tunnel would soon be filled up with sulfuric smoke and it might make you sick."

A: That might kill them too.

B: Yeh.

A: Well, I imagine as a coroner and a mortician you've seen

quite a bit of what we might say would be unpleasantness; been exposed to it because this is the kind of thing that --well, it happens, doesn't it?

B: Yes. Yes, it does.

A: But I would rather not go into too many of the tragic-type things. What is your happiest memory?

B: Well, one of my happy memories is a morning in March in 1916. We got off the boat and as we started up Nuuanu Street I said, "Mommy, I feel like I am at home." And she [his wife] says, "I do too." And that was fifty-five years ago last March.

A: That was quite awhile ago and many things have happened since you walked up Nuuanu Street that day. And you're still coming up Nuuanu Street to your home, aren't you?

B: Yes.

A: You apparently had a notion that this was going to be your home in this area, so here you are on Wyllie Street in Nuuanu.

B: Yes, it's been wonderful. I told her, I said, "Mommy, I'm going to buy YOU a nice home someday." And I was tax commissioner here from 1934 to 1950 and a lady walked into the tax office and came over to see me and she said she was selling real estate and she said, "I've got a listing on the home at 420 Wyllie of Mrs. Wilcox." Well, we lived up here on Rooke Avenue and I went by there time after time. It never occurred to me that I'd ever get an opportunity to buy it. So I said, "What does she want for it?" "Well," she says, "there's a man has an option on it and if he don't make good on his option tomorrow, his option expires tomorrow." I said, "I'll take it." She said, "All right." So she called me up the following day and said that he was on the Coast and would not be back so, she said, "If you want the place, you can have it." And I sure wanted it. And I got it.

A: What year was that that you moved into this home? Do you remember?

B: No, I don't. It's been twenty-eight years and I can't figure anymore in my head. [1943]

A: Well, if it's been twenty-eight years, that's close enough. I just wondered if you did remember when it was you moved to this very nice home in a lovely garden. Now, are there

any other outstanding memories that come to you when you start to reminisce?

B: Well . . . (plane flies overhead) I'll be glad when that's over.

A: Oh, that's just terrible. It's a shame. They seem to come right directly over the house.

B: Yeh. I'm thankful when they get over (both chuckle) 'cause they can land in town. We had one land in Kalihi during the war.

A: Oh, really? Tell me about it. I don't remember that.

B: Well, it was a great big plane. I can see it now because I went out there. It burned down houses on both sides of the street, but the boys in it got out.

A: They got out safely?

B: Yes.

END OF SIDE 1/1ST TAPE

A: We were talking about the plane landing in Kalihi and no one was killed.

B: Yes, that's right.

A: All right. (clock chimes) Is there anything else farther back than that that you can remember? What kind of social events did you use to attend?

B: An undertaker don't attend very many social events.

A: Well, but surely you had some . . .

B: Oh, I got around. I've been a member of the Masonic Order, the Odd Fellows, and the Knights of Pythias. And on December 5, 1941 [December 3, 1941] my wife and I came home from--had been down to Florida at a big tax meeting and we landed here in the morning and they asked me questions 'cause I was tax commissioner and lots of people knew who I was. They wanted to know what I thought about the condition. I said, "They've got war in Europe and," I said, "before it's over we'll have plenty wars of our own." That was on the third day of December.

On December 5, 1941 I attended a Masonic Lodge and they were talking about chartering a boat in April 1942 and bringing down a bunch of members of the Masonic Order

B: Yes, I live here with her.

A: I see. And Mrs. Scoville helps you.

B: Well, I get from that agency for more that two years now. Seven days a week I've had some woman come here and sit here with me in case I need them. That doesn't tie Thelma down and she can go her way. I pay two dollars an hour, I think it is they get. That's been going for about three years, every day, and I have somebody here, you see, all the time.

A: Yes, that's wise.

B: But I'm getting so it's difficult for me to express myself.

A: I haven't had any trouble understanding you. You've been expressing yourself very well.

B: Well, I once was a--and I knew I could do it--I spoke to thousands and thousands of people when I was a candidate here for office.

A: Which office was that? Territorial . . .

B: Oh, I was elected to the House . . .

A: House of Representatives.

B: . . . and so forth. I knew what the people needed. That's why I started that savings and loan company. You hear about it. They don't do a great deal of advertising.

A: No, I've heard of Honolulu Savings and Loan.

B: Well, I started that in August 1929 and the bottom fell out [of the stock market] in October but we went right ahead, increasing.

A: Oh, that was during the depression, of course.

B: Yeh.

A: You kept on going, though.

B: Yeh.

A: If you got through the depression years as a new business, then it was meant to be, certainly.

B: That's right.

A: And it must have been well-organized and promoted to have survived that.

B: Well, somehow or another, people that sort of attach themselves to me, why, we just get along fine. Now that thing, people brought in just small sums to deposit because they didn't have large sums. I think their assets now are pretty close to $230,000,000.

A: That's remarkable.

B: Just out of that little thing that I started. I had people tell me, "Why, you shouldn't fool around with a thing like that. You don't know anything about it." "No, I don't know anything about it, but I can learn."

A: And you did.

B: I was president of it for several years. Then, when I got so I couldn't see, I got some wonderful people in there.

A: Well, it's still going strong. It's going--in fact, as you just pointed out--stronger than ever.

B: Yeh. Ethel that has the dress shops--you've heard of her dress shop, I suppose--she knit that yellow cover over there for me (a daisy-patterned afghan).

A: Oh, who is this? Who was it that did this?

B: Ethel.

A: Ethel. Oh, Ethel's dress shop.

B: Yeh.

A: That's a very attractive afghan.

B: (chuckles) It sure is.

A: The daisy design.

B: Well, she was working for me in the tax office and she crocheted that thing or knit it or what.

A: Crocheted, I believe, is what she did.

B: Yeh. She's an awfully nice gal. She's married now. She married a Korean named Hom and he kept the books. And

she's got a son. Yeh, he's back in Syracruse, New York in college. I remember a little kind of a wizened sort of a person. That was Ethel as I knew her, but she was here on my birthday. (chuckles) She and a lot more.

A: This year?

B: Yes.

A: How many did your have?

B: Really, I don't know. There was a book here. I was reaching to get it and let you see it.

A: Well, may I reach for it? Where is it?

B: It was supposed to be right here, but if somebody . . .

A: Oh. But it isn't there.

B: Might be over there; might be anywhere 'cause they move my stuff around. I've got to feel for it because I can't see and if it isn't where I can reach it, I don't get it.

A: Those are lovely flowers over there. Azaleas, I believe those are, aren't they?

B: Well, of course I can't see them, but I know what they are.

A: Are you able to see me?

B: No, no.

A: You can't see at all?

B: With my right eye, there's a little something there that I can make out, an object, if it's dark. Like if I'd start to get up and wheel across there and there was something out there that had shape to it, I could tell not to bump into it. But to tell what it is, no.

A: I see. I understand. That's probably the reason that you have this apparatus then, to guide you; to help you get around.

B: Yes. That's a pretty good rig too (a walker with a seat and wheels).

A: Those walkers are very good and your's has a seat, so it's very handy; very worthwhile. Well, how about--any more experiences that you can remember?

B: Well, I don't like to go in any further to the Japanese attack. There's no use of going over it. The Japanese war lords are off the backs of the people and they're prosperous and I've got many friends amongst them.

A: Well, we don't have to talk about--discuss--that part again. But can you go further back to the early days of when you were here, when you first came to Hawaii? What was your general impression of the Islands then? I know you said to your wife, "I feel like I'm at home." But how about your general impression of the place after you'd been here a little while?

B: Well, I just found the Hawaiians kindly and lovable and the older ones, some of them had great dignity. I remember three or four of them. John [C.] Lane, who was one, he was a big man. I think he was mayor here for a term or two [1915-17]. And Joe . . . hah--you see, there's where the breakdown.

A: On names.

B: Yes.

A: Hard to remember.

B: Yes.

A: Well, what did John Lane, for instance, do?

B: He was a good mayor. And Joe--oh, what a stinkin' shame--I knew him well. John Lane and Joe looked a great deal alike.

A: Farrington? Was it Joe [Joseph R.] Farrington?

B: No, that man was a haole; he wasn't Hawaiian.

A: Oh, John Lane was Hawaiian and Joe also, whoever he was.

B: Was Hawaiian, yes.

A: Are you aware of the current upset about the Bishop Estate trustees?

B: Yes, I know all about it. It was a shame that that happened. I understand it. I know what it is. I know why. [The controversy regarding the appointment of Matsuo Takabuki as a Bishop Estate trustee arose when Hawaiians declared a Hawaiian should be appointed instead.]
(Mrs. Thelma Borthwick came in to remind Mr. Borthwick of

the time--11:30 a.m. Permission was obtained to photograph him while we completed the interview.)

B: There'll be no sale for those pictures. You just as well not take them.

A: Oh, no. I don't want to sell them. (laughter) We don't want to sell them. No, I want to record you; that's the whole idea. You're going to go down in history, you know. I want you to be recorded and to have a record of you. Of course there already are many pictures of you, I imagine. I know I saw one in the [Honolulu] Star-Bulletin recently. That was a very good picture of you.

B: Yeh.

A: Do you like to go outdoors?

B: Well, I can't get around.

A: Oh, that's right. I forgot about that.

B: On account of I have to have this thing (the walker) wherever I go. And somehow or another, this morning I haven't gotten away down low. But sometimes in the morning it takes a bottle of beer. I drink three bottles of beer every day; or at least I uncap three bottles. (Kathy laughs) Sometimes I don't drink it but I have one at lunch, one at dinner, and one just as I go to bed. (chuckles)

A: Well, that's good for you. I understand the doctors prescribe such beverages.

B: It's a tranquilizer par excellence.

A: It is, isn't it?

B: Oh yes. It's the best tranquilizer you can get without a doctor's prescription.

A: Yes. Actually, since doctors do prescribe it, why, you don't have to worry about that. It's a food product and, as you say, a very good tranquilizer. (trying to converse while photographing him) I'm going to take another shot because I want to be sure that, in case one isn't too good, we'll have one.

B: Yes. Yes, I'd like for you to have a big sale.

A: Now let's see here. Well, that should do it, I think.

B: Do you know Pearl Allen?

A: Pearl Allen?

B: She's secretary to Ed [Edward] Berman.

A: I don't believe I do.

B: She's a big woman. Hawaiian.

A: Pearl Allen. And she's married to whom?

B: No, she's not married. Berman. Berman's married. Yes, he's an attorney here. He married a girl that I used to take to school in the morning. She'd be out when I went by and I'd take her and drop her off at the schoolhouse. She's the daughter of Goo Won Hoy [Yon Hoy Goo]. Awfully nice woman; good woman. She's got three children by Berman. One's a doctor, one's a lawyer, and one is teaching in Canada.

END OF SIDE 1/2ND TAPE

August 2, 1971

B: I was born May 22, 1872. This is August 2, 1971.

A: Very good, Mr. Borthwick. Now, if you will please, would you tell the story of how you saved the life of Syngman Rhee in 1948?

B: I don't remember the year.

A: It was 1948, I believe.

B: Yeh. Well, I had met Syngman Rhee in March 1916 and I found him to be a remarkable man and I got well acquainted with him. The more I saw him and the more I had the chance to talk with him, the more I realized that he was a very important man. After I had known him for some time, I met another man from Korea. His name was Ben Lim. L-I-M. He was well-educated, had been living in New York City, and we three--that's Syngman Rhee, Ben Lim and I--frequently got together. He was much interested in having Korea free so that he could go back there and help them organize a good government.

Can you shut that (the recorder) off now. (recorder turned off while he rests and then turned on again)

A: All right. Now you continue your story.

B: I helped Syngman Rhee in every way that I could and through him I got well acquainted with many of the Korean people. One evening after dark, a couple of Korean men came to me and told me that Syngman Rhee was to be killed. I said, "How do you know?" "Well, we heard some talk that he is to be killed." I said, "I know where he is, so I'll go get him."

I was living on Kinau Street at that time and I went down there to one of his friends and told him that I'd like to have him go home with me. He said, "All right." I took him home with me, put him upstairs in a room, and the next morning he told me that he would like to go to Korea but, he says, "I don't dare go on these regular boats because they stop at Kobi and I would be taken off the boat if I were on a boat that lands at a Japanese port." "Well," I told him, "I'll find a vessel that doesn't stop there."

Well, it took me about three weeks. Finally, a tramp steamer came in, a German Steamer, and I went and contacted the first mate and asked him if they landed at Kobi and he said, "No. No, we don't. We're going direct to Hong Kong." "Well," I said, "I have a person who wants to Hong Kong. In fact, I have two." And he told me what it would cost and he told me what time to bring them to the boat. It would be the following night at midnight. So the next night at midnight, I had Syngman Rhee and Ben Lim in my car and it was a torrential rain. But we got out and got in the boat, I shook hands with them, bid them goodbye, and they went on to Hong Kong.

I had a little code arranged with Syngman Rhee. He was to write to me and I would reply. So we corresponded for some time and I had a letter from him stating that he was going to Australia because he couldn't get a boat that didn't land at some port where he might be taken off. So he told me where he would be in Washington (clock chimes) and my wife and I went to Washington and met him there. And I have a picture of him that was taken at the Shoreham Hotel where he was living.

Now you can shut it (the recorder) off. (recorder turned off and on again)

A: Okay?

B: Yeh.

A: Would you like to continue?

B: I stayed in Washington a few days and my wife and I visited with Syngman Rhee and his wife and he finally got back to Korea. He went through here and stopped and got off the boat and I went down to meet him. And then he went on and

he tried to organize the government of Korea but the people, evidently, had expected too much of him. There were people there then that thought he ought to just take over and run everybody that he didn't like out of the country. Of course that was impossible.

It's quite awhile ago, dear, and I just . . .

A: Well, may I ask you this? Why were they trying to kill Syngman Rhee?

B: Because the Japanese knew that he might make trouble. Yes, they wanted him out of the way because they had taken over Korea and had been controlling the people there.

A: I see. All right. Then another question I had was: Do you remember the name of the boat that you got him on when he left here?

B: No. It was a German name and I've entirely--I knew what it was at the time. It was a tramp steamer.

You'll have to excuse me.

A: All right. (recorder turned off while he leaves the room and then turned on again)

B: After they had made it impossible for him to stay in Korea, he came back and he came to me and he sat in this chair (indicating chair to his right) week after week and he and I talked things over and the helplessness because of the lack of money and age was creeping on him and it had already bowled me over. So about all we could do was (chuckles) bemoan our fate and admit that we couldn't do anymore. And that was a difficult thing for me.

That isn't on there?

A: Yes, this is. The recorder is on.

B: Oh, it is?

A: Yes. Well, I don't want to miss anything you have to say.

B: Well, he was here for several months and he finally, when he left here, he was taken up to a hospital up on the top of the mountain over here and there he died. There are so many things that I don't recall and no one else probably knows them and so they can't question me and give me a cue as to what more might be useful.

A: Yes, it is difficult when one hasn't any knowledge of it. You have, I think, told the story clearly so that we do know what the award was for, so this is a very important

historical fact.

B: Well, when I quit the tax office here, it was the 30th of June 1950 and I had already arranged with Syngman Rhee to go there and help him in the establishment of government and for tax matters. I knew that I would be valuable to him because I was just seventy-nine and my mental ability had not left me like it has now. See, I didn't get to go to school.

A: Yes, I wanted to ask you more about that too; about your childhood. For instance, you mentioned that you went through the third grade. Now what I wondered was, what did you do when you left the third grade? What kind of work was your father doing? What did you do then after you left the third grade?

B: Well, I got a farm job.

A: Was your father a farmer?

B: He had a farm but he had been a grader of the right of way for a railroad. He had a contract between Springfield, Illinois and Hannibal, Missouri. It's now the Wabash Railroad.

A: Oh, that's interesting.

B: And then he got a job. He took a contract between Hannibal, Missouri and Sedalia, Missouri. And the Jay Cooke failure of 1873, everybody was broke. I mean everybody. [Jay Cooke, United States financier, 1821-1905]

A: What do you mean, the Jay Cooke failure?

B: Well, that was a big firm there and something like the Lockheed [Aircraft Corporation] is now. There was a money crisis and they went broke and it wrecked a lot of banks and financial institutions and my dad couldn't carry out the full contract in Missouri so he was broke with the balance of it.

A: But he also had a farm.

B: Yes.

A: And did you say that when you left third grade you got a job on a farm? Was that your father's farm?

B: No, it wasn't on my father's farm It was on a neighbor farm that had quite a lot of land.

A: What kind of job did you do then?

B: General farming. I plowed and I helped gather the crops in, I did whatever would be necessary to do on a farm but I didn't go back to school.

A: You never went back to school. Now, what I wanted to ask you too: I know that last time I talked with you, you said that you went to St. Louis, Missouri and to Kentucky and then you returned to Illinois. When did you first leave Barry, at what age? Do you remember?

B: Fourteen.

A: When you were fourteen years old. Is that when you went to St. Louis, Missouri?

B: Yes.

A: And what did you do in St. Louis, Missouri? Did you work there?

B: Well, I wasn't there very long, then I went South like any other hobo. (Kathy chuckles) That's what I was. That's what they called them, those fellas that didn't have a job, so I was a hobo.

A: At the tender age of fourteen.

B: Yeh. Yeh.

A: You were in Kentucky about a year, I think.

B: No, I was in Kentucky longer than that. I stayed in Kentucky, the first time I was in Kentucky--let's see now--from 1890 to 1894.

A: Oh, you were there quite some time then. What do you remember about your days in Kentucky?

B: Oh, I worked. I got a job in a furniture store, cleaning up and whatever was necessary.

A: And you had that job then for the four years you were there?

B: Yes. And finally, the man I was working for went into mortuary work and we had to learn how to care for the dead so I went with him to be taught embalming. And I guess I was pretty apt. Anyway, I was soon working at the mortuary.

A: Do you recall the name of that mortuary?

B: I know the man's name.

A: What was his name?

B: J. R. Tennelly.

A: Now, after you'd been in Kentucky awhile and you'd worked for the mortuary there, which gave you your start in what you later did, what did you do when you returned to Illinois? That's when you were married, I know, but also, what kind of work did you do when you returned to Illinois?

B: I took over a mortuary in a little town and 'course I knew everybody and everybody knew me. They were all friendly.

A: What town was this? Was it Barry?

B: Yeh.

A: Oh yes. That's where you were born. Naturally, they'd know you.

B: Well, I was really born six miles west of there in a little town called Kinderhook. Kinder means children and hook means corner. (clock chimes)

A: Is that what's on your birth certificate? Kinderhook?

B: Yes. Yes.

A: Now, you remained there for awhile and after your marriage you went to Seattle. Now do you recall what year you went to Seattle?

B: Nineteen seven [1907].

A: And, in Seattle, I know that you were coroner, but did you do any other type of work also?

B: No, that's the only work I did.

A: And you remained in Seattle then from 1907 until you came to Hawaii in 1916?

B: No, I bought a mortuary in Olympia.

A: Olympia, Washington.

B: Yeh, that's the capital city. And I didn't like the place.

There was nobody there except when the Legislature met, then it was a bustling little city. So I sold out and took the boat down here.

A: I see. All right now. I know from when you came here a little bit about your history. But now I want to go back again to your grandfather. Your father's father. Now the last time I spoke with you, you said that you only knew what he told you about them; that you never knew them personally.

B: No.

A: But I would like to know what you know about them that he told you. For instance, what were their names? What were your paternal grandparents' names? Do you know that?

B: Yes, my paternal grandfather was James Borthwick.

A: And he married who? Do you know what his wife's first name was?

B: No, I don't.

A: Was he in Nova Scotia? (plane passes overhead)

B: No, my grandfather on my father's side, he was born in Scotland.

A: James Borthwick was born in Scotland.

B: And he died in Nova Scotia.

A: I see. But your father was born in Nova Scotia, is that correct?

B: Yes.

A: Now, what did James Borthwick do? What was his occupation?

B: Well, he came over there, I think, after he was fifty years of age and he was whatever was necessary. I know my mother said he built a little house there near Halifax and that is where my father was born.

A: In Halifax.

B: Yeh.

A: Did you ever know what kind of work he did? James Borth-

wick.

B: No, I really don't. I've heard them talk about the timber. He probably worked in, from what I have heard, a lumberyard. I know he spoke about being in the lumber woods and so forth.

A: And of course that area would be lumber country, wouldn't it?

B: Yes.

A: Now, from what you've told me just now, I would gather that you are Scotch; partly Scotch.

B: Both my parents were of Scotch lineage.

A: Any other? Any other nationality in there that you know of?

B: Not that I know of. Must have been some other nationalities though.

A: But you know only that you are Scotch.

B: That's all.

A: Oh, now there's another item. Do you recall your children's birthdates?

B: My children's birthdates?

A: Yes. William Mendel--when was he born?

B: Born December 1, 1897.

A: And Harold?

B: Well, he was born in July of 1900.

A: You don't remember what day in July?

B: No, I don't. I try to get rid of all those dates, of their deaths and my wife's passing, because when the day comes that is Harold's day, just . . .

A: Upsets you?

B: Ohhh.

A: Well, I don't want to . . .

B: I look back at that wonderful boy, great big six feet, 230 pounds. I stood by his bed while he passed away.

A: Well, that must be very difficult for you to think about, so let's not dwell on it, shall we?

B: Yeh.

A: Let's go on to something else. I'd like to hear a little bit more about your childhood, what you remember of it. Now you told about your brother, who was really your stepbrother, but I mean in general. You did have one brother. Would you tell something about him?

B: Well, he was two years older than I and he was put out to go and live with an uncle after my mother died. It broke up the family and I didn't know I had a brother, I guess, until I was seven or eight years old. After my grandmother died, I lived with my aunt and it was about a quarter of a mile from a little schoolhouse and I went to school. But when my father got married again, it wasn't like living with my aunt. He was stern and, as I thought, brutal because he whipped me so much that I just was a kind of a free lance, I guess. Anyway, I was hauled up and switched, just to teach me a lesson, I reckon. Probably that he was able to do it, I don't know what else. But he was a hell-roaring Methodist. He never preached like a lot of them but he was sure stern. So, when I got big enough that I knew I could earn my own living, I deserted him.

END OF SIDE 2/2ND TAPE

BEGINNING OF SIDE 1/3RD TAPE

A: (clock chimes) Yes, this pamphlet which is called "A Report to the War Department Concerning the Defense of Oahu," by James Harold Borthwick and Charles Stuart Reid is dated August 8, 1938, Honolulu, Hawaii. In this is an excerpt from the Honolulu Star-Bulletin, dated Wednesday, December 3, 1941. The headline is "Borthwicks Tell Of Close Escape From Accident." And this is when you returned from the [convention of] the National Association of Tax Administrators in Jacksonville, Florida. And it tells of how you escaped this accident. Do you remember that?

B: Yes, I remember we were pretty close to it and the conductor said afterwards that if they hadn't stopped when they did--I don't remember the details but if they hadn't stopped when they did, we would have gone into that tunnel and we never would have come out. (first-of-the-month civilian defense siren wails)

A: Yes, well this says: "A short time after their train passed through a tunnel outside of San Francisco"--then it's blurred so that I can't read this--"of the" probably "the Northern Pacific coast route, a freight train was wrecked in the tunnel and five men died in the flames when the train caught fire." That's what this says. It was a short time after your train passed through the tunnel.

B: Um hmm.

A: So, this article also tells what you spoke of before about your knowing that there was going to be war. It mentions right in this very article, which is dated December 3rd, "The people are behind President Roosevelt's policies. They like his strong stand in regard to Japan and think the war is coming and are ready for it." And yet, apparently, when it did come . . .

B: They weren't.

A: We weren't ready for it. Hmph, yes. Now is there anything else that you would like to talk about, Mr. Borthwick, of your experiences, of your stories, the story of your life?

A: Well, no, might seem like boasting.

A: Oh, now, now.

B: I organized the Honolulu Savings and Loan.

A: Yes, you mentioned that before and we have that recorded, fortunately, so if you can think of something else. We don't want to repeat.

Oh, would you tell a little bit about this: Paul B. Johnson, the Governor of Mississippi, on March 11, 1966 appointed and commissioned you an honorary colonel, general staff, of the State of Mississippi. Now, what I would like to know is, why was this honor bestowed and what does it mean?

B: Well, while the war was on--that was the war with Japan--Borthwick is a very, very uncommon name. So I got a call one Sunday and the man said, "I'm from Mississippi and my name is Borthwick." He said, "I'd like to come and see you. I never met anybody but my own father whose name was Borthwick." So he came and he was not a combat man. I forget just what function he was performing but he was privileged to come and stay with us frequently and then he would go away.

And he got sick and he came to our house. We lived

at that time out on the ocean front. I was just trying to think. Anyway, he came out there and we took care of him. I had the doctor to take care of him and when he got better, he said to me, he said, "I'm going to have you made an honorary colonel." "Well," I said, "my only war experience or army experience was I was with [Jacob S.] Coxey's Army [of the unemployed] in southern Indiana in 1893." So he got well and he went back home and I got a letter from Paul Johnson, saying that he had been requested to bestow on me an honorary colonel "and I'm doing it." So that's how that came about. [Jacob S. Coxey led Coxey's Army of 20,000 unemployed from the Mid-West into Washington on April 29, 1894 to demand a public works program when unemployment became widespread.]

A: I see. What was that man's first name?

B: James Borthwick.

A: Did you find that he was related to you?

B: No.

A: Isn't that extraordinary, though, he had your grandfather's name, too.

B: Yeh. Well, my father paid little attention to ancestors or anything of that kind. He could have told me more, probably would have, if I'd stayed with him but I didn't stay with him.

A: Well, that's an interesting story about this other James Borthwick. I'm glad that we got that on the record.

B: Yes. (chuckles) His wife was here. She and other friends came here last year and she came up to see me and she said that her husband's health was very poor. She almost intimated that she didn't ever expect him to be well again. But I haven't got their address. When I lost my sight, I quit trying to write to people.

A: Now is there anything else that you'd like to say, that you want to remember and have recorded?

B: No. If some of my family were here, they could prompt me on things because I can sit down and tell them things somehow or another much more than just being able to sit down and tell my life story. (his daughter-in-law, Mrs. Thelma Borthwick, is on the mainland for a visit)

A: Yes, I understand. It's never easy to do.

B: No.

A: Like a command performance, as it were. But you've done very, very well and I appreciate very much your giving me your time.

B: David [Watumull]. I don't think David ever saw this letter that my son wrote to the War Department.

A: Well, would it be possible to take this and have a copy made of it?

B: Yes.

A: And then return it to you.

B: Yes, I guess it could be reproduced.

A: Oh yes, on a Xerox machine. Let me just take a glance at it. I'll turn this off now. (recorder turned off and on again)

B: Yes, more than three years before [World War II].

A: If they had taken his advice--your son's advice--when he wrote this letter to the War Department, then they would have avoided . . .

B: There wouldn't have been 1102 of our boys, their bones laying down there in the Arizona.

A: Yes, this is "A REPORT ON THE UTILIZATION OF MT. KAALA THE HIGHEST PEAK IN THE WAIANAE RANGE--ISLAND OF OAHU--TERRITORY OF HAWAII--FOR THE PURPOSE OF CONSTRUCTING A NATURALLY PROTECTED AERODROME, ALSO THE ENLARGEMENT OR FORMATION OF AN ENLARGED CHAMBER UNDER KOKO-HEAD PEAK--ISLAND OF OAHU--TERRITORY OF HAWAII--WITH ENTRANCE FROM BLOW-HOLE, FOR THE SAFE HARBORING OF SUBMARINES."
In other words, he was suggesting all these things be done in order to defend the Islands from attack.

B: Yeh. Well, this man Reid was an engineer and he said Hanauma Bay could be covered over at a ridiculously low price compared with the sinking of one submarine. You know Hanauma Bay?

A: Yes, I do. I'm not sure that I understand what you mean by "could be covered over."

B: Well, he said that they could build a pier and put metal supports across it and then cover that and they could even

have planted something on it to make it look green. What he and Reid were figuring on was to protect some of our navy; and Hanauma Bay, there could be a lot of navy boats put in it. On December 7, 1941, my son had the cancer in his ear and he got up early and went down to the mortuary, which at that time was on the corner of School and Nuuanu [streets], and he phoned me that December 7th.

Roosevelt had just been here a few months before and I sat and talked with him at the governor's office and he said, "Is there anything that I can do for you, Borthwick?" I said, "Mr. President, we are operating the Tax Department in the basement of a building over here and," I said, "it stinks. Literally stinks."

About three months after that, there was a check came through for $189,000 and they bought that piece of property where the tax office is and put up a tax structure there and it was all new. And when I got there [on December 7th], I threw the doors and windows open because I knew if a bomb lit anywhere near there, there'd be no windows left in the place. The windows are not blown in by the blast; they're broken because of the vacuum that the atmosphere tries to fill when a blast is exploded. The glass was on the outside but didn't go in the building. And if you'd like to hear people pray, that Sunday morning did they pray, oh Lord, oh Lord. They came from all around Kakaako and they prayed in eleven different languages. They wanted the protection of God.

A: Where did they do this praying?

B: On their way to the tax office. Hollering and praying, "Oh Lord, protect us!" They filled the tax office. It was the biggest crowd amassed there in the shortest time that I had ever seen. People were just terrified.

A: Yes. Well, it was quite an experience.

B: Yes it was.

A: Anything else you can remember about that day?

B: That day? Well, there was no sabotage that day. None. I know people on the mainland asked me, "Did they do a lot of sabotage?" I said, "Not one dollar's worth of sabotage." They thought the Japanese here had a good chance to do sabotage. Well, they didn't do any.

A: How can you be so sure of that?

B: How can I? Well, I sure would have heard of it and if the building had been damaged to the value of anything, they

would have been around to get a reduction in their taxes and nobody came. So.

A: I see. I wondered because it seemed to me that I read in the newspaper at that time that there had been sabotage here; that, in fact, the Japanese alerted local Japanese by placing an ad in the paper. I can even remember seeing that ad.

B: I remember that ad but nobody ever knew what it meant. [The Hawaii Importing Company advertisement appeared in the Honolulu Star-Bulletin on December 3, 1941 and in the Honolulu Advertiser on December 4, 1941. Gwenfread Allen discusses the various interpretations of the advertisement in Hawaii's War Years 1941-1945, pp. 48-49, and points out that "a similar ad had appeared each December for several years previously."]

A: Well, they tried to interpret it and . . .

B: Yes they did.

A: It seems to me it said something about "LOOK! SEE OUR PARADE." [LOOK! Our SILKS ON PARADE] Or that was the code for letting certain local people know. That was what I heard and what I thought I read in the paper then.

B: Well, that crazy thing. I saw it and I kept a copy of it for several years but I never could. . . . Who could help with this sabotage, because there wasn't any? Well, the bombs did some damage of course. A number of Japanese were killed out on South Beretania Street.

A: In the McCully area, wasn't that?

B: Yes. Yes. (recorder turned off and on again) That is a picture of the most beautiful woman I ever met. (referring to a picture of his wife on a nearby table)

A: You say there's a picture of you and Syngman Rhee on the table here.

B: Yes.

A: Well, I don't see which one it is.

B: Well, it's just he and I. I hope nobody's stolen it.

A: I don't think anybody would have stolen it but it doesn't seem to be there.

B: Oh my goodness. Well, the only reason it isn't there is because somebody took it.

A: Maybe somebody put it away for safekeeping or maybe I didn't look in the right place. Oh, here it is. Here it is. It was on your wife's picture. A photograph. You and Syngman Rhee. He's sitting in the very chair that you mentioned.

B: Yeh. I wish I could see it. The one taken at the Shoreham Hotel is the one where just he and I are standing there.

A: You're both sitting in this picture. (recorder turned off and on again) Now please tell about it. It was during the depression of 1893 and the bars what?

B: The bars all had free lunch; that is, any bar that amounted to anything. Oh, they had spareribs and they had different kinds of sausage and cheese, different kinds of cheese, and you'd go in, lay down a nickel, get yourself a glass of beer, and then you could go over to the table there and help yourself to what was there. It came in mighty handy to me because wages were very low. Maybe I might be able to pay rent but I would not have been able to eat as well as I was had it not been for the free lunch in the different bars. If you didn't get quite enough at one, why, you could go to another and get another glass of beer and eat some more. And I kept in fairly good flesh. (Kathy laughs)

A: I guess so.

B: I remember when the Maine was sunk in Havana Harbor. I forget what year it was [1898] but the Maine was sunk there, and the next morning I was at the recruiting office volunteering to go and help destroy Spain.

A: How about that. Spanish-American War?

B: Yeh.

A: So did you? Were you recruited?

B: No.

A: What happened?

B: Well, I didn't weigh enough. You had to weigh 126 pounds and I weighed about 106.

A: You hadn't gone to enough of those bars and had . . .

B: (both chuckle) No. No, I hadn't qualified.

A: Well, that's very interesting.

B: Well, I tell you, it was a big day, that day. I know several of the boys that got in. They were recruited. Two of my buddies were killed. There weren't very many people killed, but two of my buddies were. I've had boys from here now--two of my great-grandsons live in Jackson, Michigan and they have served their term over in Vietnam and they've gotten back home all right.

The worst thing about this war, the very worst thing, is not that so many were killed but that so many are drug addicts. If it were my son, I'd much prefer that he be killed rather than become one of those addicts. And there really is no cure, I don't give a durn what they tell you, because the cure can not bring them back to their fresh young look that they had when they started taking that stuff. I've often said, "If there wasn't a hell, there should be because of all the things that could happen to you." That drug addiction.

A: That is terrible, just what it does to a person.

B: Ohhh. And we've got soldiers in every country on the face of the earth. Even we have some in Africa. Oh, what a chump of a nation!

A: What else do you remember about President [Franklin D.] Roosevelt?

B: Oh well, I remember that he had a sense of humor. (chuckles) I met him twice. I met him at the governor's office once. Well sir, I've tried to visualize it, get my mind back to the scene, but I can't.

A: Uh huh. Well, is there anybody else that you can remember that comes to your mind that you can visualize right now?

B: Well, I can visualize [William F.] Bill Buckley.

A: Bill Buckley?

B: Yeh. He's got a magazine back in New York and he's just come out with some pretty startling things. He came up here to talk to me about taxation and was here for an hour, I guess.

A: When was this, Mr. Borthwick, that he came?

B: Oh, it was April this year.

A: This year. (clock chimes) What was it he was interested in about taxation?

B: Well, how certain taxation was put over. And I told him, I said, "Bill, there's just nobody on this earth that knows how much we collect in taxes; just nobody." I mentioned that $1.76. Now, every new tire that is sold has an excise tax of $1.76. Well, I got somebody; we got some statistics; and there are 60,000,000 automobiles in the United States. There're 26,000,000 trucks. I didn't try to get the buses and all those. But there they are. Now when they buy a tire, the government gets $1.76 and the lowest estimate that anybody could make would be that there would be at least 1,000,000 tires bought each day. Well, $1.76, 365 times in a year, you can just see what it amounts to--millions and millions of dollars. They kick about the tax on their net income or what have you. They kick about that. And there are others; there are others.

A: Is he going to do an article on . . .

B: No. No, he isn't. Not that I know of. But we talked. Oh, Bill's a man of fifty, I guess [born 1925]. He's a millionaire and he's going to make that little magazine show up a lot of things. Now, Bill's name and address is over there on the piece of cardboard with several other names and tomorrow I'm going to write Bill. I have somebody to stay here and to stay and write. What I should have is a stenographer but the stenographer that I had for quite awhile, she disappeared. I think she went back to the mainland, so I haven't dictated any letters for quite awhile.

A: You have a lot of things happening to you all the time, don't you?

B: (chuckles) Yeh.

A: You have visitors often. Bill Buckley and recently . . .

END OF SIDE 1/3RD TAPE

August 3, 1971

A: All right. Now if you'd like to begin telling about the lepers, Mr. Borthwick.

B: When I came here, there was the leper colony just past

Kalihi and there were quite a number of people in it that had not been taken over to Molokai. I talked with Dr. James Wayson, who was a sort of a leader amongst medical men at that time, and he told me that there were children down at the leper colony (clock chimes) and that they had nothing to play with and no one taught them any games that they could play or anything of the kind and they just sat around there and didn't develop their hands or their bodies.

I heard that there was a brother of a man that I knew very well who was down there at Mount Happy and I went down. I saw him and I talked with him but I didn't go very close to him because there was a terrible feeling that leprosy was so easily contracted that people should beware and stay away, no shaking hands with a leper.

So one night at the lodge--Knights of Pythias Lodge--I suggested that there should be something done about those children that were there. But the people had seemed to take the attitude, "Well, they'll never get over it. What's the use of bothering with them? They'll never be able to go home; they'll never be able to circulate amongst the people, and so, just put them off down there and leave them alone. They'll die someday."

But I couldn't see it that way so I got a couple of fairly well-to-do people, men, and I talked them into $500 checks. I got two and I gave them to Dr. Wayson and about a month later he brought them back. He says, "I can't get anymore. People don't seem to be interested in the thing." He said, "I'm down there every day or two but nobody seems to want to take any interest in it." He gave me back their checks.

So, at the Knights of Pythias I told them. I said, "Boys, we can do something about this. Now let's get busy." So, Louis Silva, who died a couple of weeks ago, was one of the members and together we promoted the idea of a show. We'd get somebody could sing, somebody that could dance, and somebody that could tell jokes, and we got the theater. As I remember, they didn't charge us for the theater. But we made $1500 together with that $1000 that had been donated by two men.

We bought--oh, I don't remember what it was, but we bought all kinds of toys, little wagons that the kids could play with, and ball bats and all the things that go with a ball game; and we set a certain day that we would go down to the settlement. The people, a lot of people, were scared to go down there. Oh, they wouldn't go near that place. But I talked to the lodge and we went down. Now they had seats erected for us and there was--I don't remember the number but sixty or seventy of the people of the lodge, and we had quite a time. And that day, ten women marched out as cured. They were dressed in white.

A: What year was this?

B: I don't remember. I knew you'd ask me that, but I don't remember. (both chuckle)

A: Was it before World War II or after?

B: It was before.

A: All right, you continue.

B: When those women marched out--I had always been pretty glib at using my tongue and attracting attention to myself, but I couldn't speak a word. I stood up there and I mumbled and the tears were running and finally I said, "Brothers, we have seen something that has not taken place on this earth since Jesus Christ trod the earth. We have seen women walk away from a leper settlement and it is said 'they're cured'" I think that the boys, when we gathered down there, that they found that it was not like they had imagined it to be.

I think from that day on, there has been a tremendous change in their attitude of our citizens, and leprosy is not looked upon as it once was. I believe that that little deal that we started there has been a great thing. I think that my part in that was probably the most important thing I have ever been able to do; to let people know that lepers should not be fenced in like wild animals and isolated so that they can't meet their friends. I believe the day has come when we will be able to see that these people are healed. As Jesus said when He performed a miracle, He said, "Greater things than these shall ye do in my name." So, I believe that by starting that I did something very, very important.

The next thing I heard was that an instrument had been perfected so that the deaf could hear. It was something run by electricity and I began to inquire around and I found where this thing was. I also got the price. And we put on another show at the theater and we got the money and we bought one of these things and took it out to the School for the Deaf. When we turned it on and the children took that little--I think they call them electrode; I'm not much on electricity--and they placed it on that bone back of the ear, and I was watching their faces when the music came on. It was one of the most touching things that I have ever been privileged to see. All of them just smiled and nodded to each other as they sat around and listened to music, the first they had ever heard.

So, I hope that thing (the recorder) is still going.

A: Yes it is.

B: And I'm awfully glad that the thought came to me to get it because the smiles on those children's faces as they heard that, I tell you, it was something to me and I've seen most every type of horror that the human race is subject to.

Well, I've had it, unless you want to ask me some questions.

A: I wanted to ask you one thing. Do you remember telling about the gross income tax and how you brought that idea back from the mainland?

B: Yes.

A: Do you remember approximately what year that was that you went to the mainland and returned with that idea?

B: Well, now I was appointed to administer the tax in 1934. Walter Dillingham had sent me to the Coast and told me to go to all the states if I wanted to, but go and see if there was anything new in the way of taxes.

A: I remember that story. You told the story but what I wondered is, what year was that that you went to the mainland?

B: Well, it was--hmh--I once had a pretty good memory.

A: You have a very good memory. It's always difficult to remember dates. I just wondered if you could recall approximately when that was. Was it shortly after you were appointed tax commissioner?

B: Oh no, it was before.

A: It was before you were.

B: Yeh. Because when I came back, why, I appeared before the Legislature. I couldn't do a thing with them. They had all kinds of nonsensical ideas. There was one man proposed that they charge everybody fifty cents a year if they had a radio, but just imagine collecting fifty cents. Why, they'd see you coming and they could shut the radio off. It was one of the craziest things. I didn't try to enforce it. If anyone came in and said, "I want to pay fifty cents; I've got a radio," I suppose I took it, although I told other people, "I haven't got time to collect fifty cents. It'll have to wait until next year." So they finally just dropped it. That was before--I know it was before--because I got the idea talking with people on the Coast. And I just am not positive. I just am not

positive.

A: Well, I think that we could probably find out by determining when the gross income tax became effective. When that went into effect. If we determine that, then we can more or less know approximately.

B: It became effective in 1935.

A: Well then, it would have been before that that you went to the mainland, wouldn't it?

B: Yeh. That's why I was put in there. They thought I couldn't do anything with it and that they would be able to repeal it. (chuckles) Some people didn't like it. (clock chimes) So, I got my people that I appointed to jobs, most men and women, and they'd go in pairs. They'd go along a street, one on one side and one on the other, and they got the names of everybody who had any kind of business that they were pursuing at that time. Dressmakers, if you please. (chuckles) Believe it or not, we made them pay. We didn't have any trouble after we got rid of Professor Lutz of Princeton.

A: I remember you told about that, the debate with Professor Lutz. (Mr. Borthwick laughs) Uh huh. And I guess you won that debate all right.

B: I guess so. He was so mad he couldn't talk. They told me he was an expert and I said, "Well, I never heard the definition of an expert that suited me except one, and that was one that Mark Twain gave. He said an expert was a damn fool away from home." And that, of course, cut Lutz to the quick (chuckles) because he was away from home.

A: He was from Princeton.

B: I don't know who furnished him his figures but he didn't know anything. The University [of Hawaii] hired him and they paid him. I heard that he got ten thousand dollars to come down here to educate them. I don't know. I know they were striking around in the dark trying to do something and they didn't know what. But I was tax commissioner from 1934 to 1950.

A: Yes, you mentioned that before.

B: Yeh. Well, it was quite a success. You see, that [tax] was on the dealer. He wasn't to tell the people that there was a $1.50 on a $100 worth of his sales. He was to absorb the tax himself. Well, Lutz said that according to

the figures he had it would produce $3,000,000 in a year and I said it would produce $6,000,000.

A: You told this story before. Uh huh. Yes, I remember. Are there any other stories that you remember about your tax commissioner days or . . .

B: Well, there was lots of things happened. They did when the war broke. Why, there was great companies were organized, you know, to come here and do things. There's a lot of tunnels that were built at that time out around in the Schofield [Barracks] neighborhood. They've got tunnels, or did have. I suppose they're still there. Stuff was stored in them.

Well, whoever proposed the planting of a big bomb to explode up around Alaska, I don't know. There's one of the most dangerous things that's ever been proposed.

A: Do you mean this recent [test] bombing that they have been doing up in Alaska?

B: No. They're going to set one off--one big blast--I think near Sitka and there is one of the most dangerous things that they could do. That country is frozen solid and if a big heavy bomb should explode there, no telling the damage that could be done, because I have seen ice breaking up and it doesn't look nice. But if some nut wants to do it, they'll probably go ahead.

A: I'm afraid so. They went ahead under protest before up there.

Just a moment. I'm going to try to see if this is working properly. (recorder turned off and on again) You would say what?

B: Well, one of the most important things I ever got connected with was the leper settlement down here, because within the last thirty years the entire attitude of the people here has changed regarding leprosy. I've heard people say fifty years ago, "Oh, don't go near that place. Don't go near that place." Well, I've handled everything, I think, that a person could die with and I got none of them. I've handled bubonic plague.

A: At the mortuary?

B: Yeh. Yeh. Leprosy, why, my wife went with me up there in the State of Washington. An old sea captain's wife had contracted leprosy and he had plenty of money. He bought a piece of land on the beach and the only way you could get to it was by the ocean. He built a house there, put

his wife in it, and he took care of her--had her taken care of--when she passed away. I was called and I went out, took my wife with me. We dressed her up, put her in the casket and sealed the casket and we had a funeral over her. I wasn't scared of the thing because I knew it didn't kill everybody and I just thought I'd be one it wouldn't kill. (chuckles)

A: Well, we've learned now, of course, that it's very difficult to contract leprosy.

B: Yes.

A: They still are not sure how it is contracted.

B: No, they're not.

A: So you weren't really taking any chances.

B: But what a terror people had. Oooh goodness.

A: Well, fear of the unknown, don't you suppose?

B: Yes, yes that's it. That's the scariest thing there is, is something that's unknown.

A: Yes.

B: I like what that woman said yesterday about that bandit that held her up. She said, "If I'd have been a man I'd have blocked his head off." (laughter) I don't know how she was going to block--block . . . (he is laughing so hard he can't finish) It's a great world.

A: Isn't it interesting?

B: Yeh. And this is one of the greatest spots on the face of the earth. I understand the astronauts have claimed the moon for the United States. They planted a flag up there. I suppose they'll put up a No Trespass sign. (Kathy chuckles) I was sure glad they didn't find any people.

A: You were? Why? Why were you glad?

B: Why we'd have been loaning them money long before this to develop their country. (laughter) We're trying that all over the earth. Why not touch up the moon a little. (Kathy laughs)

A: That's probably too true.

B: Yes, we've been a very generous people.

A: Well, is there anything else that you can think of now before I leave?

B: Not before you leave; it'll come afterwards. Well, the gross income tax solved the financial problem, no doubt of that.

A: I'm glad to hear that.

B: Then later, why, they turned it into a sales tax which I never was in favor of. Now you pay four percent on everything that you buy. I said at the start, I said, "It'll produce six million dollars annually." Lutz said it would produce three. The first year it produced $6,133,000 and was I proud of it.

A: I guess so, since that was pretty close to your figure, wasn't it?

B: It sure was. (chuckles) And there was no use to argue against it; it worked. There was a big combination gotten together to do some work. Dillingham was in with them in that war work and we sent them a bill for $994,000 and the attorney came on from Washington. He came up to see me and we sat down, was talking the thing over, and he said, "I've licked everybody that's tried to tax this combination." "Well," I said, "here's one you won't lick." "Oh," he said, "you'll see when I get through with you. I said, "When you get through with me, I'll have damn close to a million dollars of your money, I'll tell you that." And he went out just blazing mad. (laughs) Well, we got the money--$994,000. (clock chimes) And Rhoda Lewis was my attorney.

END OF SIDE 2/3RD TAPE

BEGINNING OF SIDE 1/4TH TAPE

A: All right.

B: I was telling the lady here about a certain poem that I learned when I was going to school and I haven't seen that poem in more than eighty years, so if I fail to get it across to you good, just remember I'm doing my darnedest and angels can't do any more.

[Although Mr. Borthwick's version of "Abou Ben Adhem" by Leigh Hunt is not entirely accurate, no attempt has been made to correct his remembrance of it. ed]

Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!)
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,
And saw, within the moonlight in his room,
An Angel writing in a book of gold:
Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,
And to the Angel in the room he said,
"What writest thou?" The Angel raised its head,
And with a look made all of sweet accord
Answered, "The names of those who love the Lord,"
"And is mine one?" Abou said. "Nay, not so,"
The Angel said. "I pray thee, then,
Write mine as one who loves his fellow-men."
The Angel wrote, and vanished. When it came
The next night with a great awakening light
And showed the names of those whom love of God had blessed.
And, lo! Bed Adhem's name led all the rest!

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed and edited by Katherine B. Allen

Subject Index

18 Liliuokalani

Princess Abigail Campbell Kawananakoa

19 Anecdote: Manuel and his Packard

20 Bob Krauss; Mamo Howell

The hula in Hawaii and on the mainland

Samuel (Sammy) Amalu

21 Borthwick family history

W.H. Borthwick's hypnotist stepbrother

22 Other hypnotists

The Borthwick family

23 Anecdote: the Schick razor

Thelma (Mrs. William M.) Borthwick

24 Honolulu Savings and Loan Company

25 Ethel Hom, dress shop owner

26 William H. Borthwick

27 Mayor John C. Lane

Joseph R. Farrington

Bishop Estate trustee controversy, 1971

28 W.H. Borthwick's liquid diet

29 Pearl Allen, secretary

Edward Berman, attorney

Yon Hoy Goo

Syngman Rhee and Ben Lim

30 W.H. Borthwick saves Syngman Rhee's life

THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

In May 1971, the Watumull Foundation initiated an Oral History Project.

The project was formally begun on June 24, 1971 when Katherine B. Allen was selected to interview kamaainas and longtime residents of Hawaii in order to preserve their experiences and knowledge. In July, Lynda Mair joined the staff as an interviewer.

During the next seventeen months, eighty-eight persons were interviewed. Most of these taped oral histories were transcribed by November 30, 1972.

Then the project was suspended indefinitely due to the retirement of the foundation's chairman, Ellen Jensen Watumull.

In February 1979, the project was reactivated and Miss Allen was recalled as director and editor.

Three sets of the final transcripts, typed on acid-free Permalife Bond paper, have been deposited respectively in the Archives of Hawaii, the Hamilton Library at the University of Hawaii, and the Cooke Library at Punahou School.