

TEMPE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
Tempe Historical Museum
809 E. Southern Avenue
Tempe, AZ 85282

Project Director:
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Narrator: RUDY CAMPBELL

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BEGIN TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE

MILLER: This is Lisa Karen Miller for the Tempe Historical Museum. Today is Friday, April 6, 2001, and we are in the home of Rudy Campbell in Tempe. Mr. Campbell, can you please start by giving us some background on yourself, how long you've lived in Tempe, businesses you've been in, for example?

CAMPBELL: Well, I've been in Tempe since 1954. In February of '54 I came here and opened and was managing the second bank in town. There was one bank in town, and I was hired away from the Valley National Bank in Chandler where I was by a new bank in Mesa. This was their first branch. So I came in '54 to manage the bank in downtown Tempe at 617 Mill Avenue. Right now they have torn that building down. There is a five-story building going up on that site. That was, what, 47 years ago I came to town as a banker.

MILLER: Is that when you got involved with the Tempe Chamber of Commerce?

CAMPBELL: As a banker in Mesa and Chandler, we had always been a part of the Chamber of Commerce activities in our communities, so it was a very natural thing for me to join the Chamber as soon as I got here. So I became a Chamber member, I'm sure, before I even opened the bank, while we were constructing the building. I've been in the Chamber that long in Tempe.

MILLER: How did you get into the banking and insurance

industries?

CAMPBELL: I didn't seek a position in banking, but it just fell in front of me. I had been in the Navy. I came home from the Navy in '45. In 1946 I was working for the City of Mesa. There was a drugstore in downtown Mesa which had a soda-jerk counter and sandwiches. I was sitting there one day having a sandwich, and the manager of the bank was sitting by me having a sandwich. So he said, Are you looking for another position? I told him I hadn't thought of anything and asked him what he had in mind. He said, Were looking for some young men at the bank just across the street. Why don't you go over and talk to my associate, Leroy Callus (?). So I went over and talked with him, and he offered me a job at the same salary I was making at the City of Mesa. I thought it was an opportunity. I had no idea I would ever be a banker, but that's when I started. That was in the fall of '46. I stayed at the Mesa branch for five years. I was fortunate to percolate up into the management area, and after five years they offered me this assistant manager job at Valley Bank in Chandler. I went out there in '53 as assistant manager. It was the only bank in town. We had one bank in Mesa, one bank in Chandler, and I came to Tempe in '54. I changed banks and came over here to operate the Bank of Douglas in downtown Tempe. So I really fell into banking by accident, but it was a good career, and I was in for 14 years. I managed the bank here for seven years.

MILLER: From that you went into the insurance industry?

CAMPBELL: Yes, my last year in banking I was in the home office of the Bank of Douglas. It was kind of interesting. I was in charge of industrial development, which meant I was calling on the industry in town to come and let us be their banker. It was a sales job in a sense, but I discovered something that several businessmen were coming to me for financial advice. In looking at them, they were making a lot more money than I was, and yet they were coming to me for advice. They were all selling something. On calling on people for the bank, I had determined that I could sell, and so I decided I was going to change and go sell on a commission basis something. I didn't look for a job until I resigned from the bank after 14 years. I had three priorities. First, I was going to look at stock market brokerage firms; second, real estate sales offices; and, third, the insurance business. I ended up by choosing the insurance business for a variety of reasons. First, it required no financial investment. It did take some schooling and some learning (all of these would take that) and certification, of course, and licensing. But I decided it was the best for me, and so I switched to the insurance business and started in 1960 where I stayed for exactly 40 years.

MILLER: You had your own insurance company?

CAMPBELL: I was an agent for Connecticut Mutual Life, and we agents are pretty independent. That's the company through which we send all our own business, although we broker with other companies. But we are not an employee of the company; we're just a sales agent. I started out in

Phoenix, but I moved my office to Tempe. Then in 1996, Connecticut Mutual, one of the oldest companies in the country, merged with another old, old company, Mass Mutual, so we became Mass Mutual, the last four years of my life in the business. We had changed from doing mostly life insurance on people to investments for them.

I was handling investments for people-their profit-sharing plans, their IRAs, retirement programs of all kinds, and just plain investments. So I was doing most of that up through the end of last year. I decided to retire at the turn of the century. It's a good round figure.

MILLER: Of all your public service positions, which amounts to just about everything except governor-mayor, regent, state transportation board, hospital board, and I am sure a few others that aren't on there-you have said that your role as regent was the most gratifying. Why is that?

CAMPBELL: Education touches the lives of everyone in the state in a positive, or maybe, in a negative way. Negative if you don't go. The regents are over all of our universities. We have one board for the entire state, we're the governors of all of them. You take all the students and all their families, the legislature who appropriate a part of our money (not all of it), the employers who hire our students who come out and are looking for trained or educated people, and then you look at all the high school and grade school kids who we hope will come into the university system. We affect everyone in the state. Again, those who don't go to school have a great effect on our state. Often the ones who don't go to school end

up in jail. In fact, our jails and penitentiaries are full of dropouts, kids who dropped out of school and got into trouble. It was very gratifying to be in a position like that, to have such an enormous effect on so many.

MILLER: Do you think not going to college yourself was a help or a hindrance in your role as regent?

CAMPBELL: There is no way really to assess that. I have been chairman of a lot of boards on which I had people with degrees. I had to work harder than they did because, as an example, we would have a couple of lawyers on most boards I was on. They could glance through the minutes of our last month's meeting and get an essence of everything that went on. I couldn't do that. I had to read the minutes carefully, study them to get myself up to their speed. Well, I did that, but had I had a degree I might have skipped over things a little more lightly and not been so dedicated to the task before me. I don't know. I do know this. Not having a degree encouraged me to use what I already had, and that was a very strong work ethic. I really had to work at everything I did, especially when I became chairman. Every board I've been on I've ended up as chairman or president of it.

MILLER: Do you think it was that work ethic that is the difference between you and those who don't succeed?

CAMPBELL: I think it was almost entirely due to that, and the nature of the society in which I grew up. Have you read Tom Brokaw's book, *The Greatest Generation*? You should read it. It's about people just my age who were born in

the early '20s, went through the terrible Depression years, and just worked to survive, entire families. Then we went into the service and fought two wars in Europe and in Asia. Came back and then built a nation. From that, you get more than you could ever get in school, as far as education is concerned.

My folks were migrant farm workers, and when we came here from Oklahoma in 1935, we roamed the Southwest all the time. I usually went to three different schools every year. My mother saw to that. We would try to move on the weekends. I would come home from school on Friday afternoon and look down the street, and there our old Model A Ford was all packed up, and I knew we were on our way. I hadn't told my teachers I was leaving. I didn't tell my buddies good-bye. We were gone. Monday morning we would be somewhere, and my mother would send me to school. I'd have to go to the school, a ragtag kid and enroll myself or go to the principal's office and sign up for school. She kept me in school, and that was different than hardly any of the kids who came out from Oklahoma and Texas during the Depression years, especially the boys. At fourteen-years old, I could make as much money out in the field as my daddy could. Too many families made the terrible mistake of taking their kids out of school to work. I was fortunate. My mother insisted that I go to school. It was through her that I at least got through high school. I am forever grateful to her for that. Had I not done that, I'd probably be driving a truck all my life. We need truck drivers, but I don't think I would have fit very well.

MILLER: Maybe it was the times and the societal environment, it was the hardship that that generation went through that created that work ethic.

CAMPBELL: Not only the work ethic, but as I became an adult, there wasn't any assignment that they could give me that I was afraid of. I always in my mind [said] I can do that. One day I told my wife that the governor had appointed me to the state highway commission, which is the ADOT board. The first thing she said was, You don't know anything about highways. I said, Well, I'm going to learn about highways. That was always my attitude. When Governor Williams called and said he was going to appoint me to the Board of Regents. This was in 1974. That would scare most people half to death, especially one without a degree. I'm going to be a boss of all the people in the universities with degrees? I said, I can handle that.

Now, it has given me some problem with my children and my grandchildren because they think, Look what you've done with only going to high school. I don't need to go to college. I say, But those days are over. I believe that sincerely. You couldn't walk into a place today and apply for a job of any consequence without a degree.

MILLER: You endured many hardships in your early life. Do you think they helped you in some way prepare for public service?

CAMPBELL: Again, it's back to the work ethic and developing confidence that you can do whatever you want to. I'll have to tell you why I became dedicated to public

service. I told you we were migrant farm workers. You just crossed the railroad over here where, in 1942, a train hit our car and killed my mother, father, and sister. My father was 50 and my mother was 45 and my sister was 14. That left me at home with a little five-year old brother.

MILLER: You were how old?

CAMPBELL: I was 18. All my relatives from Oklahoma came out here for the funerals. There was no money. We had no insurance. We lived in a little two-room house on South Robson in Mesa. I had never lived in a house that had a bathroom inside or a shower inside. All the folks went back home. Three or four days later, I was going to the mortuary and sign a note with the mortician for the expenses and start paying it off the best I could. There was a knock on the door at night. I was there with my little brother. I was reading to him. He was in the first grade. There stood a man with two big, thick cigar boxes under his arm, and he handed them to me. He said, Doc Peterson Brothers service station up here we put a bucket out to help the Campbells. So here's a little help. He gave me those boxes and left. I opened them, and there was enough money to pay the funeral bills. This came from the community. They didn't know us at all. We were not a part of the community. We had no church, we had no social contacts, we had no relatives—just a poor family down on the south side of town. Now, I wasn't erudite at the time to realize the importance of that gesture, but later on I did realize what a great help that was from my community. So, I sort of dedicated

myself to paying back and do whatever I could to help people.

MILLER: Do you have a favorite story about Tempe?

CAMPBELL: Not really, except that I remember just before I became mayor I was downtown Tempe doing something. I was on the southwest corner of 5th Street and Mill, where the post office is now. There was an old shack there. It was boarded up. It had been some kind of a retail shop or something. When they built the sidewalk back in the '30s probably they had inscribed in there, "The Busiest Corner in Town." I looked at that and looked up and down the street. Half the stores were boarded up. Litter on the streets. The winos were walking around. I thought, We sure have failed somewhere. [Laughter] Then later I became mayor, and we did start making strides, not necessarily to my credit. It was time.

We did have to overcome something. I was on the City Council from '56 to '60. Hugh Laird was the mayor. Hugh Laird was part of the old, old school. Clyde Gililand-good people but very conservative and very cautious about everything. Those kinds of people did not want to let a home builder come into town. They had individual home builders that would build a home here and a home there. They didn't want any subdivisions because they thought that would spoil their city. I argued that we had to have that because the other cities were bypassing us. Tempe was asleep at that time. We didn't have a hotel. We didn't have a decent restaurant. Monti's was open but it wasn't as well known as it is now, and it was the only

restaurant in town. No motels, no nothing. I was younger than them. I said, We've got to fix this. I finally helped persuade the Council to let Del Webb come in, and they started building over here south of 13th Street and west of the railroad. That little subdivision there was the first one we let come in. Then Knoell Homes started to build over here. Tempe didn't want to change. They were nonprogressive and so ultraconservative. We couldn't get anything to come to town, like a motel. They'd say, Let's go to Mesa or Scottsdale. So we couldn't get anybody for a long time. We finally started getting industry. The industry you see out here, there was a lot of resistance to that. When we talked to industry, people thought of black smokestacks. I told them that's not what's coming. We can fill this up out here with clean industry because of the airport. Now we hate the airport. We fought the airport for years [but] the airport is the reason all these hi tech buildings are over here, ten minutes away from the airport. So it is an asset we have in Tempe that too many people don't realize and we don't have to pay for it. We were suffering some noise problems and all that, but that airport has been a great economic boon to this city.

MILLER: You seem to have a lot of little pockets of industrial commercial parks in Tempe that are unobtrusive.

CAMPBELL: Through the years I think Tempe has had good governance. I grew up in Mesa and spent some time in Chandler. I play golf every week with two former mayors in Mesa, Don Strom and Wayne Pomeroy. We were all high school

classmates. I kid them about the lack of progress those cities are making compared to ours. Of course, some people in Tempe don't think it's progress, what we've done downtown, but I think it is. One thing I did as mayor, we were getting ready to build a new city hall and a new library. The people in town got together and said, Let's move everything out south here somewhere. I said, That would be a mistake. If we abandoned downtown Tempe, we would never get it back. Let's build a library out where the people are, and we chose Southern and Rural, but let's build city hall down here. They agreed with me. The next mayor after me built the city hall. I am proud of that decision because I think it was the right one. We hired Ken McDonald while I was mayor, and he turned out to be I think the most outstanding city manager we ever had.

MILLER: Do you have a least favorite story or thing about Tempe?

CAMPBELL: I guess what is happening right now. I think there is a very small group of people who don't like anything that we've done in town. They don't like the Lake; they think it's a waste of money. They don't like the rail that we're preparing to build. They don't like downtown Tempe. They think it was a mistake to do that that way.

I think they are wrong, but they are certainly entitled to their opinion. Now they're having a recall because of that, and they are saying a few things that caused the recall which I think are insignificant. That's the only negative that I can think of at this time. I know we will overcome that, but I'm sorry that (I call them grumpy old people) there are people my age who are on

Social Security and don't want to do anything. I have said that Tempe has been a conservatively progressive city. That's my only regret. I wish we had 100% of the people behind us, but I know we'll never get 100% on anything.

MILLER: Can you describe some of the changes you've witnessed over the years?

CAMPBELL: I've touched upon some of them, of course. We had a hard time convincing people that we needed industry and the right kind of industry. We've worked hard to have a good relationship with the educational system in the city. We're still a college town. Even though we've grown and grown the university and we have a good relationship (we call it the town/gown relationship), and I think right now it's on very solid ground. Of course, our mayor works for the university, but that's not the reason it's good. We just have a good relationship. I tell my Mesa friends, as an example, that the people way out on the south side of town supported the Rio Salado Project because they saw the benefit of it for the whole city. The people on the south side supported the redevelopment of the downtown because they saw the benefit. Over in Mesa, for example, the people who live two blocks away from Main Street can't see the benefit of fixing Main Street.

MILLER: Of the many awards you've won, which ones are the dearest to you?

CAMPBELL: Well, they are all very important, and everything that

you see in this office is an award for a service I've given, and when I get one of those I feel I've been totally repaid for all I did. The one right there is from the Samaritan Hospital, and when they gave me that after three years of chairman of the board, and that was a very difficult position, a lot of problems with healthcare and doctors and so forth, but what it says on there paid me. It says, "You made a difference." Last year, as you know, ASU gave me an honorary PhD. To me that paid me for the 16 years that I was a regent—all the hours, nights, and days that I spent, I was totally repaid. It was the way I felt when I came home from the Navy—Uncle Sam and I are even now. I paid my debt and we're even.

MILLER: A lot of people I have interviewed have said, in contrast to some other cities in the Valley, it's a place that if you really want to be involved in the community you can be, and you can see the results of your involvement. Would you agree with that?

CAMPBELL: I sure do. I think we have an outstanding homeowner's association organization [in our neighborhoods]. I think our entire city now has homeowners [associations] in almost all places. They are being heard and they have forums. We have the open forums. The mayor has a breakfast meeting once a month where they have different things on the agenda, and anyone can come and discuss. And then they have open times for the public at the Council meetings. Even the crankiest people in town can stand up and say what they want to. Once in awhile they will say something that we have missed, and that's find.

I heard it said one time that a mayor became a mayor of a major city, and one of the old park people (people sitting on a park bench), he sat down by him one day. He said, Joe, you've been around here a long time. (Joe was a bum.) What do you think is wrong with this city? He said, There's a hole in the bucket. Mayor said, What do you mean? This guy proceeded to tell him the city had to attract things that create economic benefits for the community. If you fill your city with just homes, they are not creating anything. Of course, they pay taxes, but the people living there have to have a job, and they have to make something you can export out of the city and bring that money into the city. You've got to do something to plug that hole in the bucket to bring it back in. So, there's an example of an old guy sitting on a park bench giving the mayor a great idea for his city. So you have to listen to these people.

MILLER: Is there anything you would have done differently?

CAMPBELL: Well, probably. I don't know what it would be, but every job that I've left, or every chairmanship or every speech I've ever made, when I finished I said, You know I could have done better. I wish I had said this; I wish I had done that. They are not of any consequence perhaps, but you can always look back. On the whole, I have been quite satisfied with what I have done. There are always some little areas where you wish you had said something different.

MILLER: How do you see Tempe in 25 years?

CAMPBELL: As you know, we're hemmed in. We can't expand. That's a plus in some ways, but we do have a lot of vacant space in town. I hope we are filling that space very carefully with development that will be an asset to the city. With the high-rises now, that's going to change the way of living in many ways. Some people are opposed to that, but let me tell you what's happening in California. They had a great push over there by-I call them the environmentalists. They didn't want to concentrate people in high-rise cities. So, they went out and spread their communities, walled over the desert. And now they don't have enough electricity to run out to all those houses, and everyone of them has to have cars to go some place, and so their transit system isn't working. Had they concentrated-this is like Hong Kong perhaps, and I don't want to [be like] Hong Kong. But they are so concentrated they can have a mass transit system and eliminate the use of the need for power. We are going to have to go to that. We cannot just fill this whole state with people scattered all over and have enough power to run our electrical needs, our air conditioners, and all that.

So, Tempe as it develops in the next 25 years is going to be concentrated with people going up instead of out, and that will bring on solutions like mass transit, as an example. If a rail line is put in and there are a lot of apartments built along that rail line because there is transportation there, then that will solve that kind of a problem. I think Tempe in 25 years will be a nice place to be.

MILLER: Do you think that currently most people who live in Tempe work in Tempe as opposed to commuting to Phoenix and other cities in the Valley?

CAMPBELL: I haven't seen any figures on that recently, but we were a bedroom community for many years. We did not have enough payroll or positions here. I believe that that probably has turned now. I think the Chamber of Commerce probably has the statistics on it, but I would wager that we are importing employees now rather than exporting every day because of the pretty good sized hi tech companies we have in town now. I know the university does, of course. We have about 50,000 students over there, and I think there are 60,000 cars registered. Some of them brought two. [Laughter] We're still a commuter university, as big as we are, and there are only about 6500 students who live on campus. A lot of them live in the community, but most of them come in from all over, mostly from the East Valley but outside of Tempe.

MILLER: Do you have any closing comments, anything you would like to say if 100 years from now someone is listening to this tape? What would you like them to know about you, about Tempe, about any of the positions you've held?

CAMPBELL: Well, just that I've done a good job in the assignments that were given to me, at least for the times. Times change. I would make different decisions today than I did in the '50s on the City Council because everything is different. I hope I never get too old to where I don't want to change any more. I just hope that what we've done-and I haven't done all this. All the boards I've

been on I've had a lot of help. Although I was chairman, I had an entire board and a staff to back me up and then constituents. I think as a team we've done pretty well, and I hope it continues.

MILLER: I'd like to thank you again, Rudy Campbell, on behalf of the Tempe Historical Museum.

END OF INTERVIEW