

speaker 1: Recording. I think it's recording right now. I'm going to call **Hubert O. Davis, Jr.** Today is April 14th, Thursday. I'm calling his home number.

(operator) Can you please hold?

speaker 1: Yes, thank you.
So, I'm on hold right now. Hey, we're in some minutes going by already. I'll just put it on pause
I want him to speak with Mr. Hubert Davis

(operator) I'm so sorry about the hold. I had another resident on another line.

speaker 1: Sure, that's not a problem.
OK.

(operator) I'll transfer you up to Mr. Davis.

speaker 1: OK.

Davis: Hello.

speaker 1: Mr. Davis?

Davis: Yes.

speaker 1: This is Jim Winn in Houston. And I'm calling on behalf of the Houston Audubon Video History Project. I think you talked to **Julie Gold** previously?

Davis: Yes. So, I did a few months ago.

speaker 1: Yes. Well, that's what I'm calling about. She said to be sure and tell you hello. And of course, we're very interested to, to hear from you because you are one of the folks that helped start this wonderful organization.

Davis: Yes.

Davis: Well, yes, I was there at the beginning, yes.

speaker 1: Yes sir, you were. Can I ask you just a few questions? And incidentally I can't video you because I'm not there, but I can record it. So, if it's OK, I'll just record our conversation.

Davis: Sure,

speaker 1: OK, good.
OK, I think I've got it regarding now, so I'll just ask you a few questions that would be helpful to us to know a little about you and know more about Houston Audubon back at that time.
I'm interested to know what your, day job was, who your employer was and what your expertise was there.

Davis: OK. I worked for IBM down there and I worked in our federal systems division and so I was located down there, across the street from NASA. There's a contract. The fact is I came in to work on the Moon mission and then did a number of other projects. Finally, my last 12 years or so, something like that, 11 or 12, I worked with the computers onboard the shuttle.

speaker 1: Boy, those are interesting times.

Davis: And I retired February 1st, 1990.

speaker 1: OK, That's fascinating. Well, in the middle of all that. What happened that brought you to be the President of the Houston Audubon Society?

Davis: Well, that's quite a story in itself.

Armand Yramategui, I'm sure you know about him.

speaker 1: Yes, sir.

Davis: Armand was, he probably was the original conservationist in Houston, among other things. And I first met him through the, it seems called the TOS, Texas Ornithological Society in the early 60s. He was President of it and that's when I lived in Beaumont at that time.

And I got transferred around by IBM and I wound up in a, in Houston in 1967. I had a house built in the Clear Lake City. And then late 90s the Sierra Club was getting together and forming up a chapter and so I started going to the meetings there. And then had some local people there, among the others, **Katrina Ladwig** and a number of others decided that they wanted to put together a National Audubon Society chapter. Right at that time I was kind of busy at work, but I started going to some of the field trips and ran into Armand. He was the Conservation Chair (of Houston Audubon). ¹

Davis: One of the big reasons why it was organized is that people that really wanted to, they wanted to be activists. And the Outdoor Nature Club, they chose not to get into the activities, be activists, and so they formed up the Audubon chapter and so Armand had his Chairmen. Also, he bought a track of land up in, near Woodville to save the picture plants. And I remember that fall of 1969, I think it was September. We had a field trip up there and I

¹ Armand Yramategui – For a synopsis of this fascinating and influential man, read the *Houston History Magazine* article by James Hertzberg found in the ‘Stories to Tell’ section of this 2021 - Houston Audubon Video History project.

remember talking to him about it and I really need to be ?? in some things like that. And then the Texas Water Plan came about, that's all. I don't know if you've heard of that.

speaker 1:

No, I haven't.

Davis:

It probably became that very first real big battle that, well, we would now call environmentalists, but we weren't called that then, in the first big model we fought. So, we've basically, I still remember some of the numbers. Basically, they wanted to ship like 18-million-acre feet of water out to West Texas, up to Amarillo. And they were going to take water out of East Texas. But there's only about 11-million-acre feet (there).

S, there're going to have to find another 7-million-acre feet. This is going to involve a tremendous amount of shipping of water across the state and a lot of power. And I remember, let's see, **Terry Hershey**, had a friend who was an engineer and figured out, oh he was from Egypt and so he was used to having to transport water around, figured the pumps had never been built that would be required to get that amount of water out to the west anyway.

We had Armond found some people there in Houston. And I remember we were meeting, that was in November and December of 1969. And here we are, about a dozen people sitting around this great big table working on trying to defeat this and somebody said, well, we need to get some money and so we all, .. you dig into your pockets and commit your ten or twenty dollars and you're recommitted.

And so, there's a handful of people, some way or other, we got the word out around the state. Armond really helped us get the word out and we defeated it. The Texas Water Plan.

speaker 1:

Wow!

Davis:

And then I met up with **Arman**. I met up with them later on that month on now the TB Association, something about air quality. Then he was murdered in January of 1970.

speaker 1:

Wow.

Davis:

So, I was asked to serve in his place, which is very something, there. And it took a while and so I think it took, oh let's see, it was probably, let's see, that was January. It was probably at least March or April before the board approved my taking over.

And I attended a couple meetings and I think it was in June I went to the meeting. We held our board meetings there at the museum. And I walked in there and I was informed that the

current President was transferred to New Orleans and I was the new President. The way the succession worked back then. The Board Conservation Chair became the President.

speaker 1:

OK.

Davis:

And so that's how I became President 1971 and I served until May or June of 1972.

speaker 1:

Yes, sir. Well, that's quite a story. Quite a story. I've got a list here of the people that were on the Board with you during your tenure as President. And if you like, I'll just read you that list and if there's anything you want to say about each of them you could.

Davis:

OK.

speaker 1:

Well, it shows **Nancy McDavid** was Conservation Chairman, Carl Aken was an editor for the newsletter and Charles Merrill. Go ahead.

Davis:

Sorry. He wasn't the editor of the newsletter. It was Nancy McDaniel.

speaker 1:

Nancy McDavid.

speaker 1:

Oh, ok. Well, that's OK. They showing her as a conservation person.

Davis:

I don't know what they mean by conservation person, but she was the editor.

speaker 1:

Ok.

Davis:

All right. That was up. And **Carl Aken**, I don't know what his actual title was, but he was the assistant manager of the Museum. I'm sure that isn't what his title was.

speaker 1:

Yes, the Museum of Natural Science, is that correct?

Davis:

Yes. He's at the Museum of Natural Science.

speaker 1:

Ok. And then **Charles Merrill**.

Davis:

Yes, he's an attorney and he really helped guide us on some legal things. Among other things, the National Audubon Society, all of a sudden took this ... Back then they had a system of sending people out that would talk and show pictures about natural history or whatever and they had usually was about five or six during the season of people that called. And they jerked this away from the Nature Club and all of a sudden gave it to us. Without even consulting us at all.

No idea. We didn't ask for it. And so, Charles Merrill took over and really handled it very well.

speaker 1:

Yes. OK. I'm trying to understand exactly what they took away from the Outdoor Nature Club.

Davis: It's a series of lectures.
speaker 1: Oh OK.
Davis: **The Outdoor Nature's Club** had been sponsoring it for, oh, for many, many years. I think probably gone back maybe into the '30s. I'm sure there wasn't anything during the war years. (WWII) And so, they thought it was theirs. This was many times, these were the names and the big names of people that were well in conservation circles or natural history circles or naturalists, whatever you might want to call it, and they had been doing that and routinely.

speaker 1: I see.
Yes, OK, I understand now. OK. **Julia Bradley**, does that name mean anything? They show her as a Recording Secretary.
Davis: Not while I was there. I don't remember.
speaker 1: OK. How about **Norma Oates**?
Davis: Norma Oats? She was one of the secretaries. I forget which one. and Katrina Ladwig was the other secretary. It seemed like, we had two different kinds of secretary.
speaker 1: Did you know **Katrina Ladwig** well?
Davis: Pretty well. In fact, as I remember, she's the one that talked to me about stepping up to take over for Armand's position. And of course, her daughter Laurel lives here in Albuquerque and I made contact with her.
speaker 1: And Katrina was a biologist by trade, was she not, by education?
Davis: Oh, I think so.
Laura is the one that can really confirm exactly what her degrees were in. I'm not sure if that's correct, but she certainly knew her birds.
speaker 1: OK. And **Howard Peacock**.
Davis: Yes, Howard, he served, at least he was on the Board for, I've forgotten one or two years that I've served.
speaker 1: Yes, they show him as treasurer.
Davis: Oh, that's right. I guess he was treasurer. Yes.
speaker 1: OK.
Davis: Yes, he was treasurer when I, when I took over and I think he served as treasurer the next year. And then **Jerry Aiken** and I met, Jerry Aiken and I met Jerry Aiken came on the Board and they had served for a while, but in fact he stayed on the Board for a number of years.
speaker 1: OK. **Reaves Johnson**. You, this Johnson had to do with education.
Davis: Oh, I don't remember.
speaker 1: OK. **Betsy Perry** with field trips, Perry P.E.R.R.Y field trips.
Davis: She probably was at the very beginning. Yes. We had an active leader of field trips. In fact, that's how they really got to know me,

because I started going on them. And then this fellow started showing up in an old World War II jeep. and even just roll over and bird's very quiet.

I finally, I got around to talking to him and discovered he lived close to where I lived. And it probably had been close to a year when I finally found out he was an astronaut. **Bruce McCandless, II.**

speaker 1: No kidding! (laughter)

Davis: And Bruce was really a neat guy. And he eventually became President of the Houston Audubon Society a few years later.

speaker 1: Yes sir. Yes, well I'll be darn. And you knew him for a year before you realized he was an astronaut.

Davis: Yes.

speaker 1: I'll be darn. Well now there were some directors at large, Dr D C Hall. Did you know him?

Davis: We had some people at large that never came to the board meetings. And one or two of them weren't even members of the club, of the National Audubon Society. And so, I had the By-Laws changed. We had several things changed. In fact, Charles Merrill helped handle that; which required, if you're going to serve on the Board, you should at least be a member of the National Audubon Society.

speaker 1: Yea. How interesting.

Davis: Some of those people got dropped off and I can't remember ??.

speaker 1: Yes, well they showed **Terry Hershey** as a director at large.

Davis: Now Terry definitely came. She was a very valuable member of the Board. It really helped us out. And I have a sneaking suspicion that, you know, her husband was chairman of the Board of the American Barge Company.

And so, I think she helped fund the fights against the Texas Water Plan and she definitely helped fund getting the Armand Bayou Nature Center together. All of a sudden, I can't think of her name but really ramrodded that.

speaker 1: Yes, Terry Hershey, you mean?

Davis: Well, yes. Terry Hershey, she just helped fund the person.

speaker 1: Oh. OK, great.

Davis: But remember back in those days to call long distance, the three minutes was two or three dollars and every minute afterwards could be another dollar or more. It costs a lot of money to talk on the phone and she really, she put in a lot of hours on the phone every month and I think Terry helped that.

And then also, when I took over as a Conservation Chair, having a meeting place is very difficult in Houston, so she volunteered her house. And I'm driving down there. It turns out it was there in the River Oaks section. It was a very, very nice home. And so, we gathered up there for the Conservation Committee meeting for at least three years, I think.

speaker 1: Wow, OK. Well Terry, Terry was there at the very beginning and for all her life she's a very, very big factor with respect to conservation and Houston Audubon.

Davis: Yes. And I was looking at a map of Houston and they named part of the bayou for her too.

speaker 1: Yes, they did. They did indeed. Did you know, how about a doctor Pulley? He was a Director at Large. He might've been one that didn't come.

Davis: No. Dr. Pulley?

T.E. Pulley, I think he came.

Davis: And then we had another doctor use a PhD. David Merrick.

speaker 1: Oh, David

Davis: I don't think he, I'm not sure if he served on the Board or not, but I got to know him really well and he was a neat guy.
(inaudible)

And until I left the Board, I would help David with the Christmas Bird count down at Freeport every year.

speaker 1: Yes, OK.

Yes, they don't show David as being on the Board, but I know he was quite an activist.

Davis: And he probably came on the Board after I left.

speaker 1: OK.

Davis: But we, but all those early years though, he was a very much of an activist and very, very helpful.

speaker 1: Yes, and **Dr Margaret Sullivan** was on your Board at one time?

Davis: She was on the Board and then she took over as President after my term.

speaker 1: OK.

Davis: Yes, she and Katrina were good friends.

I think she knew probably everybody else too.

speaker 1: Yes. Did we talk about Charles Merrill?

Davis: Yes.

speaker 1: OK. Yes, they showed him his Vice President at one time. Well, that's the list of names that I had. Let me ask you. Well, what was the central challenge, what was the central interest? Was it, uh, advocacy, activism or was it, uh, funding, finding money?

Davis: Well, it certainly was activism, probably the first lawsuit ever filed. It was over the **Wallisville Dam** against the Army Corps of Engineers. Because that was probably the first suit filed that required them to work better on their environmental impact statements.

speaker 1: Yes sir. Yes.

Davis: And I think they still want to build a canal all the way up to Dallas-Fort Worth.

The Wallisville was at the beginning and I understand though we won the battle but lost the war and that the gates for the lock were dug up out of the buds and are in place there at the mouth of the river, and they reconstructed the dam and it's in place.

speaker 1: Well, I think, you know, there was a Bald Eagle, well the story I've been given, there's a Bald Eagle found there at Lake Charlotte and it was an endangered species.

They kind of gave up the fight. The advocates for the project kind of gave up the fight and there was sort of a settlement in which there was a given amount of acreage, which is now managed by a government agency on one side of I10, but on the other side there's this, this large cypress marsh which is a haven for birds. And we feel like the, I'm not sure we lost that war.

Davis: Well, it definitely lost over the Wallisville Dam, because Wallisville Dam was built. It stopped all the breeding of those aquatic things that breed in the salt-fresh water and it's going out in the Gulf. And so, as a way to more justify it that they would, they would get 50,000 dollars from freshwater fishing, but they forgot about all the other things that would benefit would come from it. And I don't know about that because actually, at the Sierra Club was another, oh, what's the right term?

A suit filer and it became the Sierra Club and Audubon and **Charles Merrill** was able to get some money for the first few years because the attorney was really doing a pro bono and then the Sierra Club took it over and then at the corps of supposedly was working on it, on their EIS. But then it became very dormant and time went by.

By the time the judge that had it on his docket and was going to retire and he wanted to get that cleared off. And by then there wasn't anybody in Audubon Society knew anything about it. And the **Sierra Club**, not, not the local Sierra Club, but at that time the Sierra Club had the, what in the world do they call it? Anyway, it was a special organization of attorneys that would fight for conservation battles around the country.

It had gotten lost in their files and so I don't know who worked out the settlement and I don't know what, what came and got this property.

I was gone with all that happened and so I don't know anything about it.

speaker 1: Yes. Well, you know, I'll look into it and if I can find out any additional information, well, I'll send it to you.

Davis: Oh, some other thing. Where we got involved in was **the Big Thicket National Preserve**. We went in and over there and supported those people and we would have hikes over there too. And, let's see, there were some. Right offhand that I can't think of any. We were involved in several different things.

speaker 1: Yea. OK.

Davis: And of course, our meetings were designed for educational purposes and so it was a multifront. Now, I think when I took over in 1970 Earth Day had just occurred and I think the membership was like 500 people or something like that, and within a year and a half or so it was up to over 1000 people.

speaker 1: Wow.

Davis: In our budget we had a great big sum of, I think, about 1000 dollars to work with.

speaker 1: Wow

Davis: And about \$ 700 of that went for the newsletter. Now, the advantage of that is that you don't have to worry about getting into some really big expensive fights, because you don't have the money.

speaker 1: Yes, well, they certainly did well on the skimpy budget. Let me ask you a little more about **National Audubon**. You mentioned that they came down and they gave lectures. What was the extent of their, their activities in Texas at the time? Did they do anything else?

Davis: Well, when, I was President, they hired somebody that became, I don't know what his official title was, the Executive Director of National Audubon for Texas. He never came to visit us. Apparently, he was there to report back to National. He wasn't there to work with the chapters. But Carl Aiken apparently knew him. Maybe from college or something, I don't know. He knew him. And so, Carl Aiken would come back and tell us how much poorly we were doing as compared to New Orleans. That we certainly didn't help him.

Oh, but he never ever came, I never, ever met him. And let's see, there were some other things too that happened. One of them, the National Audubon, sent down an old timer, who was a here you could listen to it?

Davis: I don't know if we have the computers in the library that would handle that.

speaker 1: Yes. Well, the alternative is I could send you a transcript of it. So, I'll do that, OK? supposed naturalist, had talked to people about the Big Thicket and he never, ever came and talked to us.

So that magazine article had a lot of misstatements in it and I had to sit down and write a letter to try to get it corrected. They conveniently lost that on their desk for a year and I finally heard from them and said, well it's old news so they weren't going to do anything about it. Oh, back.

We were raising money for, for **the Armand Bayou Nature Center** and National Audubon was trying to raise money for the palms that are down there and they're very down near Brownsville, if you're familiar with them. And they got upset because we didn't help support them and they came into town and they were trying to raise money the same night we were trying to raise money for Armand Bayou Nature Center to completely take orders on that. But I was no longer connected with it. But I still, I think Pat Sullivan was President had reached a point where it was time to do something about the Armand Bayou Nature Center.

And so at that time National Audubon had on their staff of people, a man that was supposedly an expert on nature centers and he had a couple other guys and they came down and they were, they proceeded to tell us how and what, what to do and I overheard these two assistants talking about how, they were referring to us, these people have got to learn that you're going to do it this way or something to that effect.

And so, the net result was we threw National Audubon out of the picture and did it ourselves and that resulted in the old timer, he was retired from National Audubon and they laid off the other two people. And so, it was quite a while before National got back into Nature Centers.

speaker 1: Well, that's interesting. It's something that's a continual conflict of interest. Unfortunately. We worked with Audubon Texas on the coast and a number of things very well, but there's always some little tension there when it comes to funding, money raising. Well,

is there anything else that we should talk about? Anything else you'd like to say?

Davis: Oh, this is out of the blue so I can't think of anything just right now.

speaker 1: Yes, OK.

Davis: But it was an interesting time. That's when the Earth Day had just occurred and the decision to make it an annual affair and people were really getting interested. It is just right when women really were starting to go back into the workforce as professionals, and people also were having some spare time and so there's a lot of interest in the whole natural world out there. So, but no, I think we've kind of covered everything.

speaker 1: OK. Well, if I could get a mailing address for you, I'll see that you, I'll see that you get a copy of this recording.

Davis: Do you want my address?

speaker 1: Yes sir. If I could?

So, it's going to be **Mr. Hubert O. Davis Jr. at 900 Loma Colorado Boulevard NE, Apartment 4223, Rio Rancho, New Mexico, 87124.**

Correct?

Davis: Yes.

speaker 1: OK.

And do you, do, email, Mr. Davis?

Davis: No,

speaker 1: OK. That's all right.

Davis: I worked on computers and other things and I sold them all off. So, I don't have a computer.

speaker 1: OK. Well, if I sent you the recording, do you have access to a computer w

Davis: Yes.

speaker 1: Well, it's just been really great to, to speak with you. We really appreciate it. It's going to mean a lot to the people nowadays that want to know what it was like back then when you were President, and this is going to be a great help.

Davis: I think, that's been over 50 years ago.

speaker 1: Yes, sir, it really is.

Davis: And I guess you should know, but now Houston Audubon is a pretty big organization.

speaker 1: Well, yes, it's an eleven-county area that we operate within and I guess we've got a local membership that's around 800 or 1000 which is about where you were.

Davis: Yes.

Davis: But now Houston Audubon owns down there at **High Island** now too. Don't they

speaker 1: Yes sir.

speaker 1: They own quite a good acreage now, almost 4000 acres. It's not all at High Island, but most of it is on the **Bolivar Peninsula** . It's about a two-million-dollar operating budget each year. And of course, if depending on the hurricanes and storms, they may not spend that much each year. But if we can get that much money in during a year, that's the budget.

Davis: Wow, that's a pretty big budget for 800 or 1000 membership.

speaker 1: Well, that's true. That's true. I'll send you some information along with your transcript.

Davis: OK.

speaker 1: Well, it's been a pleasure to speak with you and if something else comes up I'll give you a call back, if that's all right.

Davis: Oh, sure. Yes.
If I'm not here to answer the phone, it just means I'm just somewhere else nearby and I can finally give that back with you.

speaker 1: OK. All right. Well, take care and take care of yourself. And once again, thanks so much.

Davis: I's been a pleasure.

speaker 1: OK. Bye.

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