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Interview No. 1637

Louis B. McKee

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Louis B. McKee

Interviewer: Barbara Dent

Project: El Paso History

Location: El Paso, TX

Date of Interview: March 25, 2008

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Transcript No.: 1637

Transcriber / Summary: Patrick Driscoll

Louis B. McKee is the son of Robert E. McKee, founder of the R. E. McKee General Contractors in El Paso, TX; he was born in El Paso in 1933; and graduated from Austin High School; he explains why he went to University of New Mexico, and studied civil engineering; he mentions completing Navy ROTC, being a Marine Corps Officer a few years; he recounts his family, working for the family's construction company; he reveals why he later quit the company, disagreed with the direction of new non-family leadership that didn't have the experience; he mentions the company was moved to Dallas, TX, lost revenue. Mr. McKee recalls his father starting the Robert E. and Evelyn McKee Foundation in 1952, philanthropic organization that has donated several million dollars to local groups in the El Paso community; he describes his father building several facilities for the Government during World War II, single largest privately owned construction company; he mentions he built Los Alamos Laboratory in New Mexico for the Government; he goes over his father's art collection of New Mexican artists; he details his various work in the company after leaving the military, lots of manual labor to learn the craft; he explains McKee construction's relationship with unions, utilized union labor; and discusses incidents and issues with Teamsters, he reveals union problems and legal issues were his least favorite aspect of construction; he goes over time as Chief Negotiator of Associate General Contractors of America, West Texas Chapter; he gives opinion that union demands went too far and killed labor requests in El Paso, quality has gone down now. He mentions buildings built by the company, UTEP Centennial Museum and Los Angeles Airport. He details the publication history behind Leon Metz's autobiography of his father "Robert E. McKee, Master Builder", he reveals he helped design the book; he describes the history of various items in his office; he states that the company had many employees that stayed for decades due to good treatment; he recounts the company going public in 1974; he reminisces about the Plaza Theater and Hilton Hotel, his father's relationship with Conrad Hilton; he covers efforts to preserve family records and pictures, his embracing of computer technology; he states he does most of the design for the

Foundation; he recounts stories doing estimating and bidding for the construction company. Mr. McKee recalls murdered attorney Ted Andress, played tennis with his family; he describes his ex-wife and his children; he gives a biography of his father, originally from Chicago, IL and ended up in New Mexico to work as a cowboy to support the family; he reveals his father's entrepreneurship and self-sufficiency. He explains the charitable contributions of the Foundation, work with the El Maida Shrine's and others in donating money for hospital care to those who can't afford it; recalls the building of a local cancer treatment facility so locals wouldn't have to leave town for care. He compares his family's business to that fellow local business Vowell Construction; goes over rationing and conditions during World War II; he talks about his siblings, their experiences in ranching and horse raising; details his daily schedule working for the Foundation. He highlights his father's independence in business, no debt or partners; he states his father rarely held meetings. Mr. McKee concludes by recalling his father's relationship to Lee Moore and his road building company; he reveals that his father favored supporting children charities due to his losing his own father at an early age; he gives his opinion on immigration and recalls his mother's struggle to become a citizen.

Length of interview 98 minutes

Length of Transcript n/a