

## AN INTERVIEW WITH JAMES LEE

Interviewer: Niel Johnson (corrections in parentheses) (FINAL –Ross Marshall 6/15/20, proofed by Mary Conrad)

NJ: I am Niel Johnson. We are here at the Trail Center, Harold Smith and I, to talk to James G. Lee Jr. about his involvement in the founding of the Trails Head Chapter of the Oregon-California Trails Association. And the date is February 25, 1997. And we do have a little background information but I think we'll put it on tape as well, genealogy maybe. So do you want to identify for us your full name, where you were born and when?

JL: My name, as Niel said, is James G. Lee Jr. I was born in Bonner Springs, Kansas, on September 24, 1918.

NJ: What are your parents' names?

JL: My dad's name is James G. Lee. My mother was Mame Coin. She grew up in North Carolina. Her folks moved to DeSoto, Kansas, area in the early 1980s. Her father came a year before and started farming near DeSoto. That was the year I think there had been grasshopper infestation. He went back to North Carolina and for reasons that are unknown to me, he brought the family back the next year by train. They lived in Lenape, which was just across the river from Desoto and is no longer in existence.

My dad, his folks grew up in Ohio. His father, who was in the Civil War, was incarcerated in Andersonville, but not too long, I think, a matter of a few months probably at the most. He was put on the train with, I guess, hundreds of others after the war was over and went to Memphis. He was on the Sultana. That ship blew up during the night and according to a story that I have a copy of that was written by a cousin of mine in the Kansas City Star, my grandfather was the first survivor that was able to swim to shore. He was in pretty good physical condition, not having been in Andersonville too long, and he, as I remember, got a big plank. There might have been another one or two with him. He was the first one who spread the word that the Sultana had blown up. Maybe others had seen it, I don't know, and got out people to help rescue some of the survivors. But that was interesting. I can imagine what went on because the ship was very heavily loaded, far more people than were ever intended to be on the thing. It was a fairly new ship. It was only two or three years old. But it was very heavily loaded and it was high water time, the current. So they had more buckle down on the safety valves maybe to make headway.

I can imagine what was on board ship because in September of 1945 I was medical officer on a destroyer in Okinawa. I had been on this destroyer for nine months. And we were just in Buckner Bay. It was renamed Buckner Bay from General Buckner, who was killed during that Okinawa invasion. It was called Nackoogoosooko Wong. I even remember the name. Anyway, Buckner Bay was filled with US. Warships. After the war, of course, there were many thousands of soldiers and sailors who had enough time to get out, once they got home. So the commanding officers said, "If you can get any transportation you can get, hop to it." The captain of the destroyer—I guess all the

ships, as far as I know—was ordered to take as many people as he could within the bounds of good sense and safety. And these soldiers just streamed aboard. Mine was a division command ship. We had a division commander who was higher than the captain. But he was immediately taken off the ship as soon as the war was over. So they had that state room available. We sailed from Okinawa and went directly to Hawaii. That's kind of a long journey for a ship. I remember we sailed at about 12 or 13 knots to save fuel. We were in no rush at all. I remember we went by Eniwetok and saw in the distance in late evening the lights. You had to be careful at night when you walked out on the deck of the ship because there were bodies every place in sleeping bags and blankets. I don't know how many hundreds of people they had on that ship. The mess hall went about 12 hours a day. But that was the same thing that happened with the Sultana.

NJ: Let me get this up closer. I'm glad that you didn't run into a typhoon. That would have been bad.

JL: There were typhoons the last two or three months of the war, two or three of them. But they were not a big deal.

NJ: But you didn't have any problems getting back.

JL: No. There were some of the older men on the ship at that time who were more concerned with typhoons than they were with the Japanese. The Japs had pretty much shot their wad. They lost two destroyers in November, I think, of '44. But they sort of found out what they think caused it. They think the ballast tanks of the destroyers were 40 or 50 percent unloaded with oil. So they were sitting higher in the water. And with a typhoon they may have taken on such a list that they began taking in salt water in the engine room vents. That shorted out their switchboards and they were more or less helpless. They think that's what caused it. So we were under orders, the captain was, if our ballast tanks got down, we were to transfer fuel and fill the idle tanks with salt water to keep the thing sitting in the water.

NJ: I think the Sultana is still considered the worst maritime disaster in American history, about 2,000.

JL: There were more lives lost there, and I think that includes the Titanic.

NJ: And the Lusitania. So on your mother's side you had a Southerner, a North Carolinian.

JL: That's right.

NJ: Were they Confederate? Do you know? Do you know anything about them during the Civil War?

JL: I don't know one thing.

NJ: But on your father's side you had someone fighting for the Union from Ohio.

JL: My grandfather. After the war he came back to eastern Missouri.

NJ: Do you have any idea why they emigrated out here, this part of the country?

JL: Why? Well, land was available cheap.

- NJ: You were saying your father built the first telephone system in DeSoto, Kansas. They came out here by railroad, not by covered wagon.
- JL: They came by railroad. My mother was born in '78 (1878). She was seven or eight years old so the railroads were pretty well established. They came in down to the Union Depot, down in the west bottoms. They tell a story, my mother remembers very well.
- NJ: They took, probably a wagon, out from the depot.
- JL: My grandmother had loaded up what they had in boxes and a barrel or two. They were waiting in the depot there for my grandfather to pick them up with his lumber wagon, I think, to take them back to Lenape, where he had a house and all. They were waiting there in the depot. My Uncle Charlie, who at that time was three or four years old, came up to his mother and said, "Maw, our cow bell is being rung over there." She went over there. One of the boxes had broken open and there was a little boy standing there ringing their cow bell. That I remember was in the old depot. It was abandoned in 1914 when the Union Station was built.
- NJ: You've had experience with wagons in your youth, in the early days. When you grew up were you in town or on a farm?
- JL: Bonner Springs, lived in town.
- NJ: In the town. What was your father's occupation?
- JL: He was a physician.
- NJ: Did he drive around in a buggy and make house calls?
- JL: He graduated from medical school in 1892. His brother, during the few months before he graduated, his brother was in Colorado Springs and he was quite sick. My dad went out there on the train to take care of him. He survived. Dad came back but he kind of liked Colorado. So when he graduated, he thought he would go to Colorado. He bought a ticket on the Santa Fe Railroad for Pueblo. He heard that there was a doctor, an old Civil War doctor, by the name of Marks who wanted a young fellow in with him in Desoto. Dad went over and looked the town over and talked to him and he thought he'd go on to Colorado. He went back down to the depot and the train was late. So he decided he'd give it a try. So he stayed in DeSoto. He started practicing medicine the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May in 1892.
- NJ: So you went on, as far as education is concerned, to Kansas City Kansas Junior College. They had that back then?
- JL: One year.
- NJ: Then to Kansas University and then the University of Iowa. Was that for graduate work at the University of Iowa?

JL: I had my medical school at the University of Kansas and I interned at the University of Kansas. Then I had to go to the Navy. I went to the Navy in December of '44 (1944) and then I got out of the Navy in July of '46 and started my residency at the University of Iowa the 1<sup>st</sup> of September of '46.

NJ: Your major was bacteriology in college. So you got an MD degree at the University of Iowa.

JL: The University of Kansas. That was specialization training.

NJ: Post graduate.

JL: Obstetrics and gynecology.

NJ: You had a busy time, a busy career as a physician. What kind of an office, what kind of practice did you have?

JL: Did I have? I got through with my residency in September of '49. They invited me to stay on there as an assistant professor. I came to Kansas City. I liked Iowa very much. They had an opening six or eight months later and they asked me if I would come back to Iowa City. I thought about it. I agonized about it. I don't know. I had always lived around this part of the world. After a while I told them I would go. After thinking about it a week or two I called them up and I said I just can't do it. They didn't give me any problem at all. I don't know. I don't think I was cut out to be a teacher. I just practiced in Kansas City, Kansas. And I taught at the Medical School. I was on the clinical staff there for 30 years.

NJ: So you taught and also practiced. What was your specialty then?

JL: OB and gynecology in the four Kansas City, Kansas, hospitals, Bethany, Providence, St. Margaret's, and did some at KU besides some clinics.

NJ: Did you have much time for hobbies or a hobby?

JL: Oh, I've got two or three that take a fair amount of time. For some reason I have always been a railroad nut. That takes a fair amount of time. And I've played the piano. I like that. Then I've been kind of interested in history and all. That's kind of what got me started with OCTA.

NJ: History was one of your hobbies. What phase or what field of history?

JL: Nothing in particular. No phase of it except railroad history. I've got a lot of books that I thoroughly enjoy. I don't know what I'm going to do with them. I've had a trailer. I bought my first camp trailer in 1957, I think. I've had four of them and a couple of Air Streams. In 1983 I think it was, Jean and I got ready for a five week's tour of New England. I was going to take it to the East Coast. I noticed in the paper that there in Independence, Missouri, just a week before we left, an announcement of a meeting of the Oregon-California Trails Association. I said, "Shoot, I think I'll go over to Independence

and see what this Trails Association is all about.” I went over there and took out a life membership.

NJ: Was that the first meeting of the Oregon-California Trails Association here in Independence?

JL: That was it.

NJ: I believe that was in 1983.

JL: I said, I think, '83, whatever it was. That's when we went back to the East Coast. Then it was in '82 (1983).

NJ: How many were here for that first meeting?

JL: I don't know. There was a good representation.

NJ: About a dozen people?

JL: Oh, no. There were a lot more than that. There were many more than that. This was a convention. They had a full program. [130-140?]

NJ: That would have been the following year. But the first meeting they had to establish OCTA.

JL: I don't know. I'm not privy to that. Maybe I was right on the '83. But it was a convention down here at the Sermon Center.

NJ: In '83. So you attended that. What impressions, what memories do you have of that convention? How did it impress you?

JL: Obviously, I was impressed. The same thing impressed me then that has always impressed me with this organization, that it is full of very intelligent people who are well informed. I could learn a lot by sticking around them.

NJ: Now you said your main interest was railroad history at that time.

JL: It still is.

NJ: Transportation in general, is that what...?

JL: No. I don't know why. I have asked myself that all my life. People have asked me, "Why are you interested in railroads? Your dad worked for the railroad?" I have no idea why I was interested except the old Kaw Valley, used to be the Kansas City, Kaw Valley, and Western Railroad. It was an interurban between Kansas City and Lawrence. It went through Bonner Springs and their main headquarters, the car barn, the shops and all were in Bonner just a block and a half from my house. Frank O'Flaherty was the nephew of the superintendent of the railroad and he lived with the superintendent and he was one of my very best friends. I used to go down there all the time with him to the shops and all. I've ridden the Kaw Valley to Lawrence when I took music lessons way back in the '20s (1920s) and all that. I guess it dates from that.

Incidentally, Frank O'Flaherty, this good friend of mine, was in the Navy in World War II. He was in the Battle of Midway, flew a dive bomber. According to the story that I have, there were one of two dive bombers that may have scored a direct hit on one of the Japanese carriers. They don't know which one. His was one of them. Neither one of them survived, and both of them got the Navy Cross. When we were in Buchner Bay after the war I went aboard the U.S.S. O'Flaherty and talked to the captain and all and saw Frank's portrait in the ward room and none of them on the ship, captain included, knew a single thing about Frank O'Flaherty. But he was a good friend of mine all of my early life and if any person is responsible for my interest in railroads, it's got to be Frank.

NJ: Do you remember this depot building that we have here on the premises now at the Trails Center? The Chicago & Alton depot?

JL: No, I don't remember that.

NJ: Back there when it was in its original location. Of course you have now kind of explained your interest in railroads, but how about the Overland Trails, the wagon trails?

JL: Let's face it. I had no all-consuming interest or knowledge of them. I had heard of the Santa Fe Trail all my whole life. I had heard vaguely of the Oregon Trail, I guess. But the Oregon-California Trail, that as an entity, never entered my mind until OCTA was formed.

NJ: Now you'd been to Gardner and noticed their monument there to the trails.

JL: Oh, yes. That's where they bifurcated. That's where the Oregon-California Trail left the Santa Fe.

NJ: So you've been on the site where the trails diverged.

JL: Oh, you can thank John Leamon and others for that.

NJ: So you became involved with OCTA by attending that first convention in 1983.

JL: That's right.

NJ: Did you meet Greg Franzwa at that time.

JL: Yes. I think I gave him a check for life membership.

NJ: Did you get to visit with him?

JL: Yes, I visited with him several times before. In fact a number of years ago Franzwa and myself and it might have been Jim Budde or it might have been Barbara Magerl. We went to one of the planning people's offices down in city hall about the crossing out here by Swope Park, I think it was. I was just somebody to create another body. Those people, I'm not going to speak up much with Franzwa around.

NJ: You were dealing with landmarks here in the county? Could this have been like Byrum's Ford?

JL: Could have been.

NJ: Big Blue?

JL: It's on the Big Blue River, yes.

NJ: Then there's Red Bridge farther south with the swale. Minor Park.

JL: That far south.

NJ: When did you first visit that swale? Do you remember when you first saw it in Minor Park?

JL: When did I first? With one of the treks OCTA's had. I've gone on most of those because really they are so informative.

NJ: Of course the railroads put the trails out of business, the wagon trails.

JL: Oh, they put them out of business immediately.

NJ: So even before the convention, are you talking about this meeting before?

JL: No.

NJ: After the convention.

JL: The first inkling that I had of this new entity was in the newspaper. That's what got me over here to the convention. I was not privy to the year before at all.

NJ: Was there something about the trails in particular that was of interest to you? Since you are in medicine, for instance, did that ever grab your attention, the health problems, the medical...

JL: There was a lot of that in an article. You probably read it. It's been several years ago, now, four or five years ago. I forget the exact title of the article. It's in the Quarterly Journal about what a cesspool, about what an abundance of contamination and junk existed on the Oregon-California Trail. That was an eye opener to me. I never dreamed that there was the amount of traffic and all that they had and the problem that they had with health problems and all and typhoid fever and all, infectious diseases and everything. That's one of the most interesting articles I think I ever read. But I can well imagine the problems that they had. I'm sure you've read that there were a lot more people died from disease on the trails than ever died from Indians and probably accidents and everything else.

NJ: Now the germ theory of disease hadn't reached, that was after the 1840's wasn't it? Pasteur, was that in the 1860s or so?

JL: It was in the '60s when they really began to have (don't quote me on this even though I put myself on record). Well, Ignaz Semmelweis was an Austrian and he, incidentally, was an obstetrician. He was the first one who said, "Doctors, wash your hands." He wasn't sure there were little bugs but he knew that there was contamination from one patient to another. That was in the middle part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

NJ: But these travelers along the trails didn't realize that they needed to boil their water.

JL: No, I'm sure most of them didn't.

NJ: If they drank coffee, that was the safest thing they could do.

JL: Right.

NJ: So the coffee drinkers were more likely to avoid typhoid or whatever. Of course cholera could attack most anyone, couldn't it?

JL: Sure. Cholera is very infectious, very lethal.

NJ: That came from a variety of sources, cholera?

JL: It came from fecal contamination. Cholera is just the (unclear) bacillus that infects the lower intestinal tract and causes severe inflammation. It drains fluids from the body into the colon and they get horrible diarrheas and within hours, less than 24 hours, a healthy man is dead.

NJ: Dried up.

JL: Dried up, that's exactly right. And his electrolytes, the calcium, sodium, phosphorus are so screwed up that his electrical system goes to pot.

NJ: They couldn't get cholera from drinking the water. Or was it typhoid that they got from drinking?

JL: Well, either or both. I spent time in India in 1981 working at a mission hospital there. We'd take some trips. We were cautioned whenever we went anywhere in India to the boondocks to make sure that the tea we drank was boiled. If you didn't see it boiled, don't drink it.

NJ: Now smallpox was a problem, wasn't it, at times on the trails?

JL: I'm sure it was.

NJ: But they already knew there was an inoculation of sorts for small pox.

JL: I'm not versed enough to tell you when vaccination took place in regard to trails.

NJ: I think that old Cotton Mather back in the 1700s had learned about...they had practiced some inoculation in New England. The cholera and the typhoid. They were the two main diseases, weren't they?



JL: Well, that would be my guess. It's not an informed guess.

NJ: So you didn't focus your interest on the medical aspects.

JL: Not really.

NJ: What about the trails seemed the most interesting to you?

JL: There was one very minor side aspect. The trail as it goes through Lawrence, Kansas, of course goes right through the campus and then it crosses old 40 highway. I can't tell you what street. I know just about where I could put my finger on it if we were up there. It goes north two or three blocks and then it heads back south and crosses the trail on the south side of old 40. In what is now Lawrence but it was west of Lawrence in 1897 when my mother taught school at the Brackett Grade School. If she had walked north about a block and a half, she would have been right in the middle of the Oregon-California Trail. I have thought many times...this was in the '90s, 30 years afterwards, if she had known that and take walks along that trail back then think of the artifacts she could have gotten. She was within a long stone's throw. She taught school there for two years.

NJ: They had some ruts and swales there at that time too.

JL: Oh, yes.

NJ: The transportation, the way they travelled, did that engage your attention, buggies, carriages, wagons, pack mules, however they got themselves from here to there?

JL: No, I never lost any sleep over that.

NJ: You're just waiting for those train tracks, right, the railroad tracks?

JL: That's exactly right. For some reason I would rather, I don't know. Going along a train track and especially...I've been an advocate. I've given money to these rails for trails, you know. I think that's an excellent program. I really do. I'm a bicyclist. I've put money down. In August I'm going to Europe, go on a 12-day bicycle trek over in Austria and Germany. I just love to get out on these. I haven't been on this Osage Trail, yet, the one where the old Katy railroad, west of St. Louis. But I'm going to get on.

NJ: What do they have, safe trails bicycling paths in Europe? Away from the Autobahns?

JL: Oh, it's completely safe. It just goes right through the country right where the railroads went.

NJ: Okay. Let's see. Do I have a roster here? After the convention, do you remember what your next involvement was, participation in OCTA events?

JL: No. I don't think that I went to an annual convention. I don't think I did. I just don't remember any affiliation. Then I did read, I don't know if people called me or anything. But they told me that they were going to have an organizing meeting, hopefully, for a local chapter out a Roeland Park Library. And I went one Saturday afternoon.

NJ: Okay, that's the Cedar Roe Library.

JL: Cedar Roe.

NJ: February 27<sup>th</sup>, 1986. Okay, and before that November 12<sup>th</sup>, 1985, there was a meeting at the Cave Spring Interpretive Center. You weren't at that apparently.

JL: I don't remember that. I've been to Cave Spring, but I don't remember that meeting.

NJ: That, I guess, was just a preliminary thing because on this memorandum of February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1986, it called for this organizational meeting at the Cedar Roe Library on February 27<sup>th</sup>. What do you remember about that meeting? Do you have some recollections?

JL: I remember that I met several people that I had known before. And I don't recall how much affiliation I had with them, other than maybe meeting them at the organizing meeting in '83. I just remember that. I think they elected officers.

NJ: Okay, so they had a vote on officers, right? And President Mike Duncan. These were the ones recommended. It says, "After discussion it was decided to recommend to the regional members of OCTA the following: President Mike Duncan; Vice President Richard Nolf; Secretary Barbara Bernauer; Treasurer John Leamon."

JL: No Barbara Bernauer is the only name with which I am familiar. She, I think, is as old as I am. I can't remember when she's been to a meeting. Those other three names are strange to me.

NJ: Also they were discussing a title for the chapter. And, I guess, one proposal was MidAmerica Chapter. The other was Trails Head Chapter. So apparently you were one of those who voted for the name Trails Head Chapter.

JL: I don't know if I was at the meeting when they named it.

NJ: That's when they got an okay next to Trails Head, so, apparently, somebody okayed that, either then or at a subsequent meeting. And they wrote up some bylaws here, it looks like. Did you work on a constitution and bylaws at that meeting?

JL: They had them shortly after because I was president for a couple years. I know that when we had a discussion about the future of Trails Head we went over them. I've studied those bylaws four or five years ago. (bylaws were not yet adopted in 1986)

NJ: Okay, what years were you president?

JL: Well, there was an interrupted, I can tell you. I think that I was president in 1990 and they had had, it was sort of the custom that a guy took it for two years. My wife died late in 1990. And when the time came for new officers, they didn't give me much trouble. But they let me know it was for two years. I said, "I do not want to be president this year." They didn't argue with me. But a couple years later they let me know that I had to serve my term, so I took it again for another year. (late 1989 to late 1990 and late 1992 to late 1993)

- NJ: But you had been attending meetings after this organizational meeting in early '86.
- JL: I think I've attended as well as...I'm a good listener. I attended about as often as anybody.
- NJ: When they talked about programs and goals what did you feel at the time they should be striving for, what direction they should be going?
- JL: Well, there were three or four of us—I know I was president. That was the second year that I was president. I just told them that we had very loose bylaws. We have a group that meets. They are not an official board. But they are the ones that come. They are the ones that make the policy, etc. They are the same ones year after year after year after year. And we play musical chairs. I said, "I feel that you should when you get a new member, you've got to use him. If you don't, you're going to lose him." There were several who agreed very much with me. And there were some that didn't. I'm not the type who makes myself too obnoxious. And I told them what I thought. I don't remember the particulars. Barbara Magerl is sharper than I am. I don't think that her viewpoint is too much different from mine. She can tell you. You can get her version of that. But anyway, I just felt things were going along fine. We like the way they are. Keep it simple. So that was the way it was. That's why I say none of the three of those original officers, three out of the four, I never heard of. I don't remember a thing about them. I just don't remember.
- NJ: So what kind of projects or activities did you feel that the Trails Head Chapter should emphasize?
- JL: I wasn't critical of what they did. They had very good programs. They weren't monthly. That's a two-edged sword. Some say it's good. Some say it's bad. But their philosophy was when we get a good program, we'll have a meeting. They tried to have about three treks a year and then another program or two. They get the treks. They'll fill a 15-passenger bus. They'll fill a 25- or 30-passenger bus. They have on occasions. Most of the people that come on the treks we don't see very often. I don't know. They don't come to the meetings. They probably are not invited to most of them. They probably have been and they didn't show up. So it's the same old five or six.
- NJ: Now there are other organizations that overlap, I guess we could say, like Friends of the National Frontier Trails Center [Museum today]. And of course now there is the Missouri River Outfitters Chapter of the Santa Fe Trail Association. Does that sort of dilute the pool of people to draw from? Does that have an effect?
- JL: I suppose it could. Yes. I've known about the Santa Fe Trail. Nobody has ever put the bee on me and said, "Now why don't you sign up and join?" They know that I could. They know that I have never taken the trouble to do it. I'm like everybody else. I go to enough meetings. And so I don't particularly want to be a member of an organization and then have to go to the meetings. So you see I'm not a born again trails person. But I am interested. I am kind of like some of the others that for some reason I have stayed

with this outfit. The main reason I stayed with them is because of the quality of the people you meet.

NJ: You could argue, I suppose, that if you paid dues you are making a contribution, even if you're not attending. At least this is a contribution of sorts to the organization.

JL: That's right and that's the way it is with three-fourths of the membership. The only time we hear from them, I hear from them, and I think that's true with the vast majority of the others is at the time every year when they keep on writing a check.

NJ: Well, we have 140 members of the Friends of the National Frontier Trails Center but we can have as few as 15 or 20 at a meeting. Or we may have as many as 100 under special circumstances. So I think that is probably generally true. You'll have about four or five times as many dues paying members as those who ordinarily attend meetings.

JL: That's probably undoubtedly true. And that is true, I'm sure. Some would argue with your percentage, etc. with all organizations. But with this Trails Head, it almost seems to me, and it's no different than it was six years ago, moderately critical. You take away a half a dozen people. You just pluck them out of OCTA. As far as I'm concerned you've got a dead organization. That's not very many people.

NJ: So you think it is very important who is at the top, who's leading, who the leaders are. There's got to be strong leadership or there won't be any...

JL: Strong leadership, yes. I wasn't strong. I told them what I thought. I'm not presumptuous. If these were a bunch of knuckleheads I was talking to, I would push it through because I would know I was right. But some of these, most of these people have forgotten more than I'll ever know, it doesn't behoove me to make a big issue of it.

NJ: Do you know Thomas Hunt?

JL: Who?

NJ: Thomas Hunt, who was president of OCTA in the latter half of the '80s. Well, there's a letter from Thomas Hunt to Barbara Magerl. This is in October of '85.

JL: I know Tom Hunt on the national level. I know him. He doesn't know me.

NJ: He says, "I am delighted to hear that our OCTA members back in Missouri and Kansas are getting together to form a regional chapter." He also stressed in that letter that (1) OCTA policy dictated that no one could join a regional chapter that was not in good standing with the national chapter. And (2) that those belonging to the national chapter should not be pressured to join the local chapter and such involvement must be strictly voluntary. You think that is still the policy? I mean OCTA is...

JL: Yes. At the risk of being wrong, I'm going to say I know it is. But I definitely think that is still the policy.

NJ: There is much more concern that they be members of the national and not so much concern that they be...

JL: That was a national officer that was talking there, and I can see his point. Because if they made that a rule that you had to belong to a local organization, okay, nobody knows how many. Well, shoot, it's too involved. I guess I'll just forget the whole thing.

NJ: But how about those who want to belong to the local without belonging to the national?

JL: I have no bone to pick with it.

NJ: Was that an issue at all? Was there any discussion about that situation?

JL: If there was any discussion, it was minimal. I don't remember it.

NJ: If they belong to the local chapter did you quiz them about whether they were members of the national? Is it possible that you had local members who were not members of the national?

JL: I don't think that's possible. I don't know. Jim Budde, being the national treasurer, and treasurer of the local, I would say that's not possible. [yes!]

NJ: It would be easy to cross check membership.

JL: That's right.

NJ: Now Gregory Franzwa. Do you get fairly well acquainted with him?

JL: Fairly.

NJ: What are your impressions of him?

JL: I'm not privy. I'm on a different level. I'm not privy to the falling out that he had with national OCTA. I know that there was a difference of opinion to the point where he just sort of severed himself. Isn't that fairly accurate?

NJ: That seems to be the case, although he still has some kind of...

JL: That's right. He still has some kind of. That's all I know about it. I'm not in on the inner circle and I know none of the politics involved there.

NJ: How did you evaluate his role in the OCTA organization over the years?

JL: I think very simply that if Greg Franzwa had never existed, I doubt that there would have been an Oregon-California Trails organization. You asked my opinion.

NJ: He was a prime mover.

JL: I think he is. If he wasn't, I would be kind of interested in knowing who it might have been. Merrill Mattes wasn't that type of an individual, I don't think.

- NJ: Was there anyone you can think of who sort of filled Franzwa's shoes that you see as being an effective or good, strong leader for the OCTA since Greg Franzwa's departure?
- JL: I'm not the one to answer that question.
- NJ: Do you involve yourself with national conventions? Have you been to national conventions?
- JL: I've been to three or four. I know of three and maybe four.
- NJ: Have you ever written any papers, presented any papers, been on any panels?
- JL: I don't think so. (This interview was recorded in February, 1997. On November 25, 1997, Lee gave a talk entitled "Early Day Railroads in Kansas City" and included Union Depot. Lee again gave the same talk at a Shepherd's Center meeting on March 20, 1998 and to a joint meeting of Trails Head and Friends of Chicago & Alton Railroad Depot on April 14, 1998. On Trails Head Trek XXVI from Lawrence to Topeka on June 23, 2001, the trekkers stopped at the Union Pacific Depot in Topeka. On the way to Topeka, Lee read excerpts from a talk he had given to Trails Head in early 2000, according to Ross Marshall's summary of that trek.
- NJ: At these national conventions have you seen any reason to raise questions or confront any members or leaders of the OCTA organization about their policies or the direction they're going? Do you have any questions about that?
- JL: Not particularly. When they met in Omaha and the year was 1990, there was an issue that came up and we had a special meeting and all. To be completely candid, I've forgotten what it was about.
- NJ: The controversy.
- JL: I don't think it was a big deal. But they did want...I remember Barbara Magerl was (unclear). (Trails Head sought to be both an OCTA chapter and a SFTA chapter. At the OCTA Convention, Trails Head asked OCTA Board if it also could be a SFTA chapter. OCTA Board at first approved the request, but then rescinded approval on the same day. Jim Lee was Trails Head President at the time and strongly wanted Trails Head to be a dual chapter.)
- NJ: What do you think was the most important activity done by the local chapter? The most important activity, perhaps accomplishment so far?
- JL: I would say from my standpoint the most important thing that they have done is organize the various treks through here. Because they have given the people an opportunity to learn as much as they can. While it would have been very nice if they could have had dozens of people who had availed themselves of these, I mean several dozen. There haven't been that many, but still there have been in the neighborhood of 15 to 30. That's enough and all. I think that's an end in itself. I would say organizing these and then

these book reviews like we're having, which is all Barbara's doing. That is the most important thing.

NJ: Harold, you probably had involvement with that too, the book review.

JL: She involved him, I think.

HS: Yes, and we met at your home to get this started. (Three book review programs were planned as Trails Head meetings for Jan., Feb. and March of 1997. Jim Lee was vice president at the time. The three planners of the book review meetings were Barbara Magerl, Harold Smith and Jim Lee.)

NJ: Who are the most important resource people who are able to lead these treks, who knew the most about the local sites and you most depended upon for the historical information?

JL: The local treks. You take Ross Marshall and John Leamon away and Polly Fowler and Eric and they have organized probably a couple of these. You take those four people away, and again I'm going to have to mention Barbara Magerl. She's just involved in about everything. She hasn't been quite as active in the treks, I don't believe. But you take those five or six people and then there are others with...Shoot, I don't know her name very well, very nice girl. It's the artist. I'm embarrassed that I can't...She's very active in the Springs over here.

NJ: Cave Springs? Sylvia Mooney.

JL: Sylvia Mooney is very knowledgeable and she's been kind of active, but she's had many irons in the fire. You take those people away and there wouldn't have been any treks.

NJ: But you think they have been enjoyable and instructive then?

JL: Oh, yes. I sure do.

NJ: But now if you have the same people they may not want to go on the same trek more than once or twice. So then you have to think of new activities or new projects, I suppose. Are there still going to be more treks, do you think? Does that depend on whether you have new members? What do you see happening now or in the future?

JL: I don't know. We trek pretty well. These book reviews were Barbara's philosophy with which I could not disagree at all was that there are people who are sort of arm chair trails enthusiasts that don't want to go on treks but they still want to learn about them. That was the philosophy behind these book reviews. They have been pretty well attended. The last one, a couple weeks ago, there was a good crowd there at Antioch Library. They had a chance to pick up literature and all of that. I don't know what else you can do, except the ones that do profess an interest, let them know that you are interested in them too.

NJ: How about the signage project. Were you involved?

- JL: I've gone out with them and put up signs (what signs did the chapter put up?) and dedicated them and this and that. Of course John Leamon and Ross, they've photographed every DAR marker and got write-ups on every one of them within a 50-mile radius, maybe 100. I don't know. [actually all the way to Santa Fe and up to the Nebraska border on the Oregon Trail]
- NJ: Is it time to write a little maybe illustrated history of the local chapter using photographs? Of course there are maps. We do have these maps of the trails in Jackson County and also in Johnson County. In fact, is that a product of the local chapter?
- JL: I think so.
- NJ: Now here's a guide to the trails in Jackson County, Missouri, for instance.
- JL: These were passed out at the last meeting over at Antioch Library.
- NJ: Who's responsible for putting this together, do you know?
- HS: I suspect Barbara. (Actually, John Leamon and Polly Fowler composed the Jackson County trail map printed by Trails Head)
- JL: Mary Conrad, she's a librarian and she's been very active. She is an excellent secretary. She's very active as president. Mary is a trooper. I joined the Kansas Anthropological Association one year. Jean and I went to Coldwater, Kansas, and Mary is a big archeologist. She was there. Jean and I had never been to an archeological meeting and dig in our lives. And on the second day Jean, my wife, was head of the laboratory. (Jean washed artifacts in lab; Mary Conrad was supervisor of washers) We both agreed that it was a very interesting experience. But to see myself with a spoon digging and digging and digging and all of that—the temperature is 105—my enthusiasm was such that I have never enrolled on another one. But Mary Conrad, when she gets into something, she gets into it.
- NJ: Have you ever collected artifacts of any sort **or** found any artifacts related...
- JL: Railroad.
- NJ: To the railroads. You have that library, you say, on railroad history.
- JL: I guess I shouldn't say this publically, but let's face it. If there are two books side by side and I can only buy one of them, and one is about the railroads and the other is about the trails, I have an idea which one I might buy.
- NJ: Are you involved with the support group for the Chicago Alton Depot here? Are you involved with that group at all?
- JL: I'm not involved. I have supported them some. But I am not a big drum beater because it is such a big project and all. Well, I just...there are better men than I.
- NJ: But you do read some of the literature on the overland trails, the Oregon and California trails. You do read up on that literature?



JL: Quarterlies. I know of no ancestors who have anything to do with the trails at all. I have some relatives who went to California, but they went in the 1920s.

NJ: The same with me. They went to Oregon in the early 1900s by train. So you were president for two years and then you kind of dropped back into the ranks.

JL: Just back on the "board." I was treasurer for a year or two (late 1991 to late 1992). I think I've been able to sidestep being secretary. I've been vice president (late 1993 to late 1994 & late 1996 to late 1998). I shouldn't say this. I think I was chairman of the nominating committee this last year. If I'm not mistaken, I think I'm vice president. There's just nobody else.

NJ: So what do you think should be done or can be done to energize the group?

JL: The only thing I know to do is to get the members who pay dues to become more involved. I don't know how you can do it. There's a good friend of mine, a professor over at KU in internal medicine. If I had diabetes, he would be my doctor. He's a historian. I first found that he was interested in Wyandotte County history going to the Monday night historical classes that they have every year at the junior college. I've seen him at two or three OCTA meetings, maybe four or five at the most. But I see him in medical meetings more often. I've asked him, "Don't see you at the trails too much." He's just too busy.

NJ: There are three or four organizations here that kind of overlap. Trying to make the meetings, be regular with one of them, I suppose, is a challenge.

JL: Did you read the article in yesterday's paper about the Kiwanis Club?

NJ: Yes.

JL: I've been a member of the Kansas City Kansas Kiwanis Club since February of 1954. I'm the oldest in point of being a member. I've been an active member longer than anybody in the club. But when I joined the club, there were 150 members. Now there are 70, I think. Quite a number of those are pretty tenuous. Too many meetings, television and everything else.

NJ: Kiwanis meets during the day. They don't meet in the evenings.

JL: They meet any time. If you organize a Kiwanis Club and your club votes to meet at 3 a.m. that is fine. Up until two years ago, you had to have 50 meetings a year. But I guess from pressure the last year or two you can meet twice a month now.

NJ: This is kind of far out maybe. Is this internet situation, I mean the temptations to be at home in front of a computer screen, is that affecting meetings over generations too?

JL: Are you talking about me?

NJ: What you see.

- JL: Well, I would just be quoting the article. The article pretty well firmed up what I had sort of gleaned. Other people agree. Just things evolve. Kansas City Kansas, it's different. I can understand that because back in the '50s (1950s) the vast majority of members lived in Kansas City Kansas. Now you take away the banks, the schools, the courthouse, two courthouses, the county and the federal. You take away those institutions, those three. If they severed all the people who worked with those three organizations, left Kiwanis Club it would decimate the club. Most of them do not live in Kansas City Kansas. If they would change their meeting from a noon meeting to an evening, boy, there would be a number of them who would say, "Forget me. I'm not coming back."
- NJ: I think in Nebraska they have these trail jaunts where you actually ride in a covered wagon for a distance, kind of reenact the experience on the trail. Is there any place you can do that here in Jackson County, where you could do a trail ride in an actual covered wagon?
- JL: Now out at Quinter, Kansas, a number of years ago. You're familiar with that one. That was a commercial venture. I don't know how long that lasted. It's not in existence any more.
- HS: No, but another one has sprung up somewhere out in that area. Esther Creek was telling about it. But it is not the one that was out at Quinter.
- NJ: The attention the Lewis and Clark keelboat got coming up river last summer, that seemed to indicate that...Do you still believe that most American people, even the younger generation, still do have a fascination or at least an interest in that early period, the frontier, where you went by boat or you went by wagon?
- JL: There are always a certain number of people who would be interested in a fling like that. But I imagine, I don't know, just thinking out loud. But if you tried to do that on a regular basis you might find that the number of repeaters, the ones who are kind of interested, have already done it.
- NJ: There is an investment too, of course. You either build a boat or you build a wagon. There're not easy to do, not cheap to do at all.
- JL: It takes money to found it and get it started. Then you've got maintenance.
- NJ: What did you use your money for in the local chapter? How did you use your treasury?
- JL: Our expenses are (unclear). We've got several newsletters. Any more, that's a fair piece of change for postage, printing and all that kind of stuff. And then we've subsidized on some occasions, not always, but we subsidized the treks somewhat. We purposely put them as low as we can to attract as many people. We would rather get X number of people more to come and spend a little money than we would not have those X number of people and break out even. But you can only go so far with that.

NJ: Then there's that Civil War Roundtable. That's another group of people interested in that period. But they're focused on the Civil War. And maybe you have a few of those. But again you're overlapping with other organizations.

JL: I went to the Westerners. I was a member of the Westerners several years ago, oh, for a couple years. They meet every month. They met at a steakhouse. Those guys are sharp. They don't need to take a back seat to anybody.

NJ: I'm glad to hear you say that. One of the retired sheriffs right here...

JL: I saw him at a Westerners meeting and all. But to be candid, I'm not a big fan of steaks. I don't have any desire to spend \$14 for a chunk of meat that I really don't care that much to eat. There are other things to do. Too darn many things to do.

NJ: Are you still involved with the Trails Head?

JL: Oh, yes.

NJ: And that's the thing you are going to hang onto.

JL: I don't plan to sever them. I told Mary Conrad, she was talking about another meeting. I said, "Whenever you have your meeting, let me know. You can meet at my house." I'm very glad to have them. It's sort of a central location and makes me throw some of the garbage out beforehand and get it to looking a little better.

NJ: I think you said you were interested in getting newer faces, younger people.

JL: Obviously younger. I'm the oldest one that comes to any of these meetings. I'm 78 years old. You won't find anybody as old as I am very often at those meetings. One of your Westerners, I forget his name, a real nice gentleman, I remembered him before. He's several years on me. A nice little man.

NJ: Oh, yes, they've got two or three I suppose. Is there anything else you want to say to finish this conversation?

JL: I think you better quit wasting all this tape.

NJ: All these tidbits fit into the puzzle, you know. We appreciate you taking the time here to reminisce.

JL: I appreciate the fact that you let me tell you a little bit about my family, etc.

NJ: You've got the makings of an interesting family history. Have you done genealogy? Have you done any writing?

JL: You're familiar with HOCH Auditorium at KU.

NJ: I've heard of it.

JL: Incidentally, on a trek to Lawrence we were in a museum in the Frank Strong Hall one Saturday and it was about ready to break up. It was kind of stormy, cloudy all day and

all. It started raining when we were in the museum. I walked out and there is an areaway that separates the museum from Frank Strong. It's covered and you drive through there. I was standing there and it was raining hard as could be, a lot of lightning and all. And a fellow came around Frank Strong as hard as he could run. And he ignored me completely and I just sort of stood with my mouth open. And he flung that door open and was gone. And in a couple of minutes, or two or three or four, I thought I smelled smoke. I went through Frank Strong and looked over there and there was Hoch Auditorium billowing with fire and smoke and all. [yes-I was there!] And I guess that guy called the fire department. Because it was struck by lightning. But anyway Hoch burned that day. It was built in 1927 and my sister graduated from college in fine arts in 1927. And at the first concert that they ever had in Hoch Auditorium she was one of two soloists. She's kind of proud of that.

NJ: Thank you very much for sharing your thoughts and your recollections and for wearing your Oregon Trail tie, your necktie, which is appropriate for the occasion.

JL: That's fine.