

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Richard Alden McEwen

COLLECTION: 4700.0934

IDENTIFICATION: Baton Rouge City Planner

INTERVIEWER: Pamela Dean

SERIES: Baton Rouge History and Culture

DATE(S): March 25, 1998; March 31, 1998; April 21, 1998; April 16, 1998; April 30, 1998;
May 5, 1998

FOCUS DATES: 1940s - 1980s

ABSTRACT:

Tape 1357

Family history; elementary school career; plays in high school band; memories of the depression; attends junior college in Mason City, Iowa; enrolls at Iowa State University; works to help pay for his college education; earns degree in landscape architecture; after graduation begins work on army camp site planning; exempt from military service during WWII; meets future wife in Jackson, Mississippi; marries in January, 1943; moves to St. Louis, Missouri and begins working for Bartholomew & Associates; does planning work for St. Louis County; moves to Santa Fe, New Mexico in 1946; takes job as a city planner in Santa Fe; develops a master plan for Roswell, New Mexico; accepts job as resident planner in Richmond, California in 1947; two children born during stay in Richmond; moves to Kansas City, Missouri in 1950.

Tape 1358

recalls professional development during early career; discusses ramifications of the Federal Urban Renewal Act of 1949 for Richmond, California and Kansas City, Missouri; accepts job as Planning Director for the City of Baton Rouge, Louisiana in 1953; hired by Chairman of the City Council Charles Colvin; interviews for job in June, 1953; memories of first visit to Baton Rouge; recollections of Council members Heidel Brown and Fred Broussard; purchases house on Marion Drive in Ardenwood subdivision; community atmosphere of neighborhood on Marion Drive; children attend Bernard Terrace Elementary School; difficulties of school integration in late 1960s; participates in formal group that reviewed the master plan on street and drainage projects; group passes a five mil. property tax; discusses concept of millage; Acadian Thruway receives top priority after first property tax in early 1950s; discusses development of early subdivisions in Baton Rouge.

Tape 1359

Bill Singleton acts as McEwen's predecessor in Baton Rouge; Colonel J. Lester White was Director of Public Works for Baton Rouge in late 1940s and early 1950s; Ethyl and Esso

corporations were the major employers in Baton Rouge; coordinates subdivisions with Ray Burgess; Billy McGhee appointed to the Planning Commission as BREC [Baton Rouge Recreation and Park Commission] representative in 1953; W.J. "Red" Evans becomes Planning Engineer for Baton Rouge and member of the Planning Commission in 1952; works with Evans on the sewer master plan; works with Chester Jordan and Evans on the Capital Improvements Program; cooperation between Planning Commission and City Council; Whitter estate developed into Jefferson Place and Tara Subdivision; memories of Jim Watson, Chairman of the Planning Commission during part of the 1960s; Centroplex developed partially through the use of funds from the Federal Urban Renewal Program; Woody Dumas becomes mayor of Baton Rouge in 1964; recalls Dumas' attitudes toward planning; plan of government adopted in 1960; memories of Planning Commission member Durward Gully; Jerry McKernan joins commission in 1973; Charles H. Moran becomes first African American commission member; more recent development of Sharp Road; memories of Draftsperson Elfrieda Helfin.

Tape 1360

rehabilitation of South Baton Rouge through urban renewal; Community Renewal Program begins in the 1970s; description of South Baton Rouge prior to urban renewal; helps organize public meetings in neighborhoods that would be affected; development of Civic Center; memories of downtown Baton Rouge; relocation of people who were displaced by construction of the Centroplex; construction of the interstate through Baton Rouge; controversy involved in widening Acadian Thruway; community involvement in planning issues; memories of Heidel Brown; influence of petrochemical companies in the development of Baton Rouge; petrochemical corporations encouraged employees to become involved in city government and planning.

Tape 1382

Bob Dolese becomes assistant director to McEwen in the early 1970s; organized field surveys of substandard housing in Baton Rouge; discussion of criteria used to determine substandard conditions; city undertakes improvement of substandard housing; impact of housing improvements in South Baton Rouge; discussion of Community Goals Program and work of City Planner Ed Davis; competition between McEwen and Davis; politics involved in city planning; recollections of City Councilman Ken Osterburger; cooperation between McEwen and Dolese; McEwen retires in 1980; Mayor Tom Ed McHugh advocates adoption of master plan for Baton Rouge; development of Horizon Plan in 1980s; Wilbur Smith & Associates serve as consulting firm for the Horizon Plan; participation during public meetings; recognizes need for an outer belt to serve Baton Rouge; main features of the Horizon Plan.

Tape 1416

Dean of Students James Reddoch asks McEwen to help design a parking plan for LSU in 1982; research involved in designing plan; questionnaire on parking distributed to faculty, staff, and students; McEwen tours other campuses to investigate parking designs and problems; University architect Dee Glueck assists McEwen in development of plan; consultants to parking plan recommend parking garage for LSU; discussion of people involved in the Horizon Plan; generations of funds for Horizon Plan; study of Baton Rouge airport.

TAPES: 6 (T1357, 1358, 1359, 1360, 1382, 1416)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 8 hours 30 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 202 pages

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL: Proper name list; chronology; Horizon Plan Summary;
Urbanology; maps; photos

RESTRICTIONS: None