



# ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

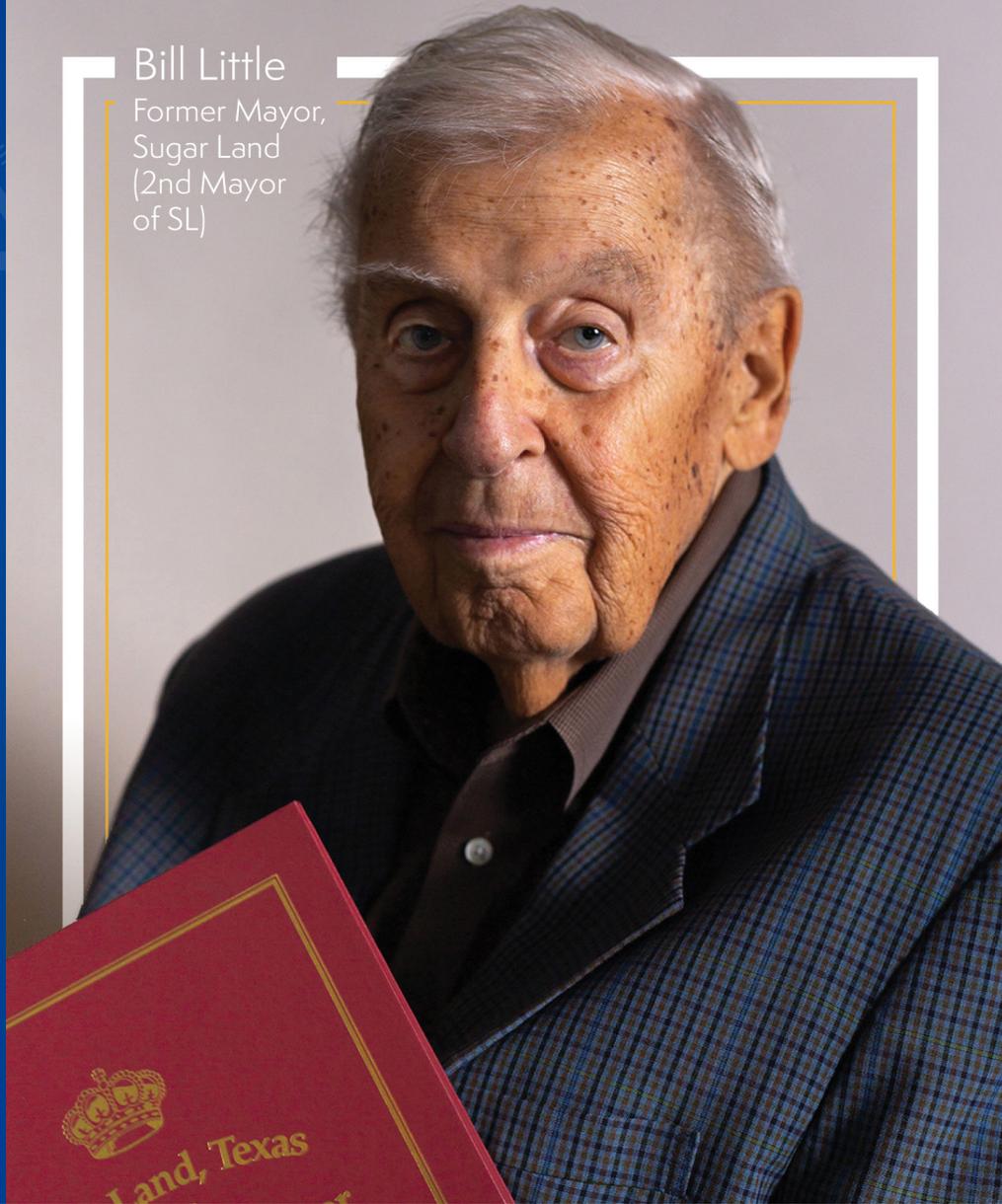
in Celebration of the  
City of Sugar Land  
60th Anniversary



CITY OF SUGAR LAND

Bill Little

Former Mayor,  
Sugar Land  
(2nd Mayor  
of SL)



**Bruce Kelly:** This is Bruce Kelly. Today is October 31st, 2007. I am interviewing Mr. William A. Little. The interview is taking place in the home of Bruce Kelly and Jane Goodsill at 110 Venice Street, Sugar Land, Texas 77478. This interview is being conducted by the Fort Bend County Historical Commission of Richmond, Texas and is part of the Fort Bend County Historical Commission Oral History project.

**Bruce Kelly:** The first thing I like to do is get a little family history. Where were you born, Bill?

**B. Little:** I was born in Sandusky, Ohio. We lived on a farm outside of Sandusky. It was my grandfather's. It was about a 300-acre farm. I attended the school system in Sandusky and graduated from Sandusky High School. Then I went to Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. I transferred my sophomore year to the University of Dayton, in Dayton, Ohio. I received my degree in Business Administration from the University of Dayton in 1953.

The Korean War had just ended in June of 1953 but the draft was still in process. So my next step was to be drafted. I happened to be sitting next

to a fellow in class who was a reserve major in the unit in Dayton. He said, "Since you've had two years of ROTC I can get you a private first class stripe and then you request duty as a reservist rather than a draftee." So I did and the draft board said, "I want you" and said I said, "You can't have me because I'm a reservist and I am requesting active duty." So we went from there to Fort Knox, Kentucky and from there to Fort Chafee, Arkansas and then had an opportunity to go to Officer's Candidate School and received a commission in the field artillery stationed at Fort Sill for two years as an instructor at the artillery school.

Upon graduation from OCS I was very fortunate to be married to Mary. She was from Dayton and I met her at the University of Dayton. The reason we could get married at that time was that the pay for a Private First Class was \$99.00 per month and a Second Lieutenant got \$222.00 per month. What a great increase in income. So we were married in January of 1955 and moved to Fort

Sill, Oklahoma. We were stationed there for two years and come time to get out of the service, I said, "I really don't want to go back to Ohio, they have snow back there and it's cold." Mary said: "That's fine with me." So, I had an uncle living in Galveston, Texas. We'd visited with Art and Lyda several times and Art said: What are you going to do when you when you get out of the service? I said: "I really don't know." He said, "Why don't you come down to Galveston and interview? Maybe there will be something down there that will be attractive." So, before we got out of the service Mary and I flew down to Galveston and we interviewed with the old Texas Prudential Insurance Company, which was owned by the Kempner's at that time. And then American National insurance and then they arranged for me to have an interview in Sugar Land.

So I came up to Sugar Land and was interviewed by George Andre, who was Vice President of Finance at the Sugar Company. And, Bruce, I took a look around the office and I think the average age of the employees was 75 or 80 years old. (all laugh) I said, "There's got to be an opportunity here!" So I talked to Mary and I said, "We are going to go to Sugar Land and we are going to live there." And she said, "Fine, lets try it." And so we accepted a job with Imperial. I reported for the job in February of 1957. This is our 50th anniversary in Sugar Land.

**Bruce Kelly:** What was your first impression when you came to Sugar Land?

**B. Little:** I had a great first impression of it. Even though it was a company town the homes were in such great repair and the yards were kept neat. And even though there wasn't a City involved, it was some place you could feel comfortable in and want to live. It was desirable.

**Bruce Kelly:** What was Mary's first impression?

**B. Little:** She said, "I want to go home." (all laugh)

**Bruce Kelly:** I've heard a lot of the wives have said that. (laughs)

**B. Little:** I said, "You've got to give it a chance." She said, "Well, that's what we are here for so we'll give it a chance." I had the interview with George Andre and then we went back to Fort Sill and I got a letter from George saying they really didn't know what I could do but they'd take a chance. And besides that, Houston is only thirty miles away if you decide you want to look around some place else. With that, we accepted the job and came here in February of 1957.

We had an opportunity for a couple of company houses. The first one was located on the corner of 6th street and Wood Street. It was a three-room house. We'd had a daughter by that time so we really didn't see how the three of us were going to live in that three-room house. The other option was a thing that they called the old nurse's home, on Lakeview Drive. The Nurse's home was adjacent to Laura Eldridge Hospital. At one time there had been a lot of single nurses who occupied the Nurse's Home. They had their meals at the hospital, so there were no kitchen facilities in the house. It was all bedrooms. Each room had a lavatory in it that the nurse's could use. And it had a couple of bathrooms, but it was like a seven room house! We said, "Fine, we'll take that one." Otis Enquist was in charge of the housing for Imperial. He

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Bill Little

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said, "Well we've got to have a little bit of time to put a kitchen in and to take out the lavatories and things in the bedrooms. It will be a couple of weeks." Well, we stayed in Galveston for a week with my aunt and uncle then we came up to Bill Williams' Hotel, which was located between Sugar Land and Richmond. We stayed there for a week. It was an interesting thing because one of the residents of the motel was Oscar Armstrong. Who was Bob Armstrong's father. He had been Vice President of Imperial and been involved in the sales force. He had retired at that time and was living at Bill William's Motel. While I was working, he and Mary struck up a conversation and relationship around the pool at Bill Williams'.

We came here in February and the weather was great, just beautiful, Chamber of Commerce weather. And about the second week we were in the house, someone said there was a blue norther coming in. Well, we had lived in Oklahoma so we knew that blue northers were bad, they were cold. When we were in preparation for the blue norther I looked around for the furnace in the house and I didn't see any furnace. I thought, "Well, gee, what are we going to do for heat?" There were some little things sticking out of the floor with a black knob on them. I asked Bob Hanna, "Bob, what are those things?" He said, "Those are gas jets." I said, "Fine, what do you do with a gas jet?" He said, "You hook up a space heater to it." "Well, where do you get those?" He said, "You got to go to the Farm

and Home center. At the Farm and Home center they sell space heaters.” So we spent that first weekend in a cold, cold house. We didn’t get to the Farm and Home center in time. Finally we got the gas heaters. And of course the gas heaters were not vented. And they created a lot of moisture in the house. Under the bed there’d be a puddle of water and under the sofa there’d be a puddle of water (all laugh) It wasn’t living, it was existing.

But the house was great, as far as room went. Of course it was built up on blocks and had single pine floors and that didn’t keep the cold weather from coming up through the floor. But we felt fortunate to get a house that was large enough to move around in. At that time, the rent on that house was \$50.00 per month, which doesn’t sound like much. But the starting salary was \$375 a month, so that was the going rate. Mr. Andre assured me that was a fair rate for a starting employee with a degree. So we lived on that for a while.

I guess I was there about a year and Bill Louvier, Jr. was going to move to town. His father was president of the company.

His father went to Bruce Edwards and said: “Bill, Jr. is coming. He has to have a house on the lake” [meaning Cleveland Lake] Bruce said, “There’s some land between the last house and the school property, on Lakeview. Why don’t we subdivide that? I’d like to have a lot there too.” So, Mr. Louvier said, “Fine, you subdivide it and find out how many lots you are going to get, keeping one for Bill, Jr.” So Bruce did and they got seven lots out of it and they offered them to various people in the Sugar Company. George Andre said, “Would you be interested in a lot?” I said, “I’d definitely be interested in a lot! We are going to get out of the company house.” “Well, there are certain provisions. You buy the lot and you have to build within two years.” This was a policy that they had because they didn’t want people to speculate on the land. They wanted people to move into houses so that the company houses could be available for other people coming in. So we built within the two years on Lakeview, and we’ve been there for forty years, in the same house and same location. We kept that house and that location because of Cleveland Lake at the back door and the pecan orchard across the lake. We couldn’t find any place comparable in Sugar Land or the Sugar Land area that offered those amenities. So that was our home, and has been our only home for the forty-eight years that we’ve lived there.

**Bruce Kelly:** If I recall correctly, the bank from the lot to the lake is a very steep grade. The steepest grade in Sugar Land.

**B. Little:** It is.

**Bruce Kelly:** Do I understand you built a split-level house?

**B. Little:** Yeah, we built a split-level house. We have the two bedrooms; bathroom, living room and garage are on the upper level and then step down three steps and the lower level. So we kind of fit the contour of the house to the lot.

**Bruce Kelly:** Well, yours is probably the first split-level in town, right?

**B. Little:** Probably so, and Bruce, we had people come by who were long time residents of Sugar Land, and they took a look at it and said: “You don’t remember the depression, do you?” I said, “No, I don’t”. “Well,” she said, “You never know. You are building an awful lot of house – if something happens.” Of course these were people living in three room houses, paying twenty dollars a month rent. That all changed when the Sugar Company and the Industries began to sell the houses to the residents living in them.

**Bruce Kelly:** So they felt you were being a little extravagant, maybe?

**Bruce Kelly:** Yeah, they felt like we were being very extravagant, but these are people who had never been out of Sugar Land. And didn’t realize there were things other than gas jets and space heaters. (all laugh) There was air conditioning and there was central heat.

**Bruce Kelly:** I want to go back to your rented company house, the nursing quarters. Was the Laura Eldridge hospital still located next door?

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So we built within the two years on Lakeview, and we’ve been there for forty years, in the same house and same location.

*Bill Little*

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**B. Little:** It was still located next door when we moved in and it was there for a very short period of time because they were building a new hospital at what was the end of Lakeview and Eldridge Road. At that time Lakeview stopped at Eldridge Road. Now, of course, it is extended on into the Schlumberger property and the Baptist School is up there. They were building a new hospital at the time but we did see patients going in and out of the hospital. We saw the hearse there every once in a while. Of course there were two doctors in town, Dr. Slaughter and Dr. Kuykendall. Occasionally they would bring in another young doctor. That doctor would be on a salary rather than a percentage and he was doing most of the work. They had a pretty good turn over in the doctors that would come in.

**Bruce Kelly:** I recall one doctor when I was a little boy that my parents were friends with, his name was Knowles. Did you know him?

**B. Little:** Roy Knowles, he is somewhere up in East Texas now. But he was there and there was another doctor before him who was a nice fellow too, I don't remember his name. Dr. Slaughter and Dr. Kuykendall were quite a pair. They had a clinic at the corner of Kempner Street and Ulrich Street. Also in that clinic was [dentist] Dr. Leslie Wheeler, Sr. His son, Buddy, is the dentist here in Sugar Land and has his offices on Bayview (it used to be part of Oyster Creek Drive) and 90.

**Bruce Kelly:** Did you and your family get your medical care here in Sugar Land?

**B. Little:** We got all our medical care here. The company had a medical plan called the Laura Eldridge Hospital Association. Employees of Imperial and employees of Sugar Land Industries belonged to that hospitalization plan. It had a very nominal fee to it and all the services were provided. I think we had to pay a co-payment of three dollars at the clinic to see either Slaughter or Kuykendall. Maybe a couple of dollars for a shot or things like that. The clinic was divided into two waiting rooms. One waiting room was for the Caucasians. The other waiting room was for the Latin Americans and the colored people. Dr. Slaughter and Dr. Kuykendall were partners. Dr. Slaughter would come out into the waiting room and he'd see someone sitting there that he knew who might be Kuykendall's patient and he'd say, "Come on with me, I'll take care of you!" (all laugh) There was no love lost between each other. I'm not so sure that the medical care was the best that could have been provided. I know that the anesthetist at the hospital had no things other than ether.

**Bruce Kelly:** A nurse anesthetist, I guess.

**B. Little:** A nurse anesthetist. There was a drop of ether and that was the anesthetic for anything.

**Bruce Kelly:** I remember my tonsils being taken out with ether. I remember the mask!

**B. Little:** Our daughter's tonsils were taken out with ether too. (all laugh) Our second child, Susie, was born in that hospital, in the new hospital. That hospital opened, I believe, in about April of 1957. Scott Hanna, who was Bob Hanna's child, was to be the first delivered there.



We got all our medical care here. The company had a medical plan called the Laura Eldridge Hospital Association. Employees of Imperial and employees of Sugar Land Industries belonged to that hospitalization plan.

*Bill Little*



The hospital was quite an addition to the community compared to the old hospital that they'd operated out of. So that was the medical facilities for Sugar Land. The Laura Eldridge Hospital Association continued for a number of years, until the company started getting outside medical plans.

**Bruce Kelly:** Maybe you can clarify something for me? There was the Laura Eldridge Hospital Association and then the two doctors, Kuykendall and Slaughter, were they paid by Imperial? How did that work?

**B. Little:** They were paid by fees that they collected. They were not on a retainer.

**Bruce Kelly:** Okay, and then the Laura Eldridge Hospital Association served as the insurance company for the employees? And there was a fund, they took money out of people's checks, I guess?

**B. Little:** Yeah, and the hospital, when they would have a patient, they'd bill the Hospital Association and Slaughter would bill the Hospital Association for any excess over the copay that the individual patients had to pay. One person who was very instrumental in working with the Association was Ernie Wood. She was the

secretary for a long time. Prior to that Gladys Bailey, who was Laurence Bailey's wife, was the bookkeeper at the hospital. She did a lot of the billing for the Hospital Association. I guess the Hospital Association was formed many years ago by a contribution from Sugarland Industries and the Missouri Pacific Railway.

It was set up as a foundation. I don't know what ever happened to the balance of the funds that were in the Association when it was discontinued. Whether it was given to a charitable organization or where it was disposed of. We had our second child born in the hospital and Mary said: "Never again." When our third child was born, why, he was born in Herman Hospital in Houston. Mary just didn't think that the care that she was getting there was adequate. So she said the next child was NOT going to be there. She'd

had our first child in a military hospital at Fort Sill. So she was really upgraded by the time she had the third child.

**Bruce Kelly:** Lets go back to your career here in Sugar Land. Your first job was?

**B. Little:** My first job was in the accounting department. I had a degree in Business Organization and Economics. I was working for George Andre, who was the Vice President of Finance and headed up the Accounting Department. They really didn't know what to do with me too much in the beginning. So I did some statistical work and I did some time and motion studies trying to determine what a pound of sugar costs.

Then a great opportunity came along in 1958. The Sugar Company (and the Industries too, but primarily the Sugar Company) decided that the upkeep of the company houses was a real drain on the profits of the company. With the rent that they were charging versus the expense of maintaining the houses, it was more

than what they could afford. The Sugar Company was primarily involved in sugar. So the decision was made that they would sell the company houses on what's known as The Hill area, which is area north of Highway 90-A. I got the opportunity to sell the houses.

The first houses that were sold were the brick houses on Lakeview. The property was sold not as a subdivision but by meets and bounds. There was really no platting of The Hill. So the way the lots were decided was, (chuckles) we had a surveyor by the name of Henry Steincamp, from Rosenberg. Henry would send his engineers, or his surveyors, out and we'd look at the property line between the two garages. And that would be one part of the property. And then we'd look on the other side of the house at the next garage and take that furthest area and that would be the size of the lot. Some lots were 100 foot wide; some lots were 80 foot wide. There was no rhyme nor reason, nor any continuity; it was just how the house was upon the lot and how the improvements were upon the lot.

**Bruce Kelly:** Some of the houses shared a drive way?

**B. Little:** They almost all shared a driveway. That was the dividing line, was between the garages where the driveways would come down through. The employees were given the opportunity to buy the house they were living in and I think on Lakeview in the brick houses, just about everyone bought their house. The prices were, oh, anywhere from five thousand to seven thousand dollars for the house and lot. Really, as far as the Sugar Company was concerned, the houses were depreciated so really they were selling the property and taking capital gains on the land.

After the brick houses were sold it was decided that the rest of the houses would be sold from First Street down through 6th Street and along Main Street. So, I had the opportunity to work with those people. Those houses were less expensive because they were siding construction and asphalt shingles rather than brick. Just about everyone who lived in those houses bought them. The Sugar Company arranged with the Sugar Land State Bank, which is now Frost Bank, to provide financing for the employees. The bank said, "That's fine, we'll do that. What we'd like to

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have is \$5,000.00 down and the balance over ten years at five percent”, which was really pretty good at that time! As these people would come in to buy their houses, I would talk to them and ask them how they wanted to finance it. They could also use payroll deduction to make their weekly or monthly payments. Some of these people were pretty smart people. [taps his temple] They would sit there and figure out how much they were going to have to pay in interest. Some of them would say, “Now, would cash be alright?” (laughs) “Yes, cash would be just fine!” (all laugh) So, they’d write a check for seven, eight thousand dollars. And that was it.

But these were people who were paying \$20-\$25 per month rent and getting all the services. I think they paid [pause], no they didn’t pay anything for garbage, garbage was free. They did pay a small water bill and a small telephone bill. Everyone was happy to have their own house. It tied in very well because in 1958 and 1959 Houston was in a land-grab. And they were annexing all kind of land around the city of Houston. The Kempners were afraid Sugar Land would be annexed because of the value of the Sugar Company and the amenities that were out here.

So now that people owned houses and they were residents, it would be an ideal time to incorporate the City. And that is how the incorporation came about in 1959, to keep it from being grabbed. When the original incorporation was drawn up it was four square miles. It was basically all of the property that was owned by Sugarland Industries and Imperial Sugar. There was a little bit of land that on the north side of Highway 90-A, that was owned along Styles Lane, at that time. Styles Lane is now Dairy Ashford. There were some houses that were sold up there, Luke Cordemelian, some of those people lived in those three, three and a half acre houses on Styles Lane. So that was brought into the original incorporation also. And then there was a piece of property to the north of that, that Brooks, Ulrich and Guenther, those three were old Sugar Land families. They had bought some acreage there, north of where those houses were. And that was to be in the original incorporation. That was the only land north of 90-A, other than the Sugar Company land.

Between the time that the papers were drawn up and they were filed, the City of Stafford realized that the school district was going to have their head quarters and their high school on Sugar Land Industries property, which was on the west side of Lester Avenue, it is now Dulles Avenue. Stafford, in the school consolidation district between Missouri City and Sugar Land, did not have a school in its city limits. Missouri City had a school. Sugar Land has a school. The City Council in Stafford at a late night meeting came across Lester Road/Dulles Avenue and annexed an 80 acre piece of land that the school was going to be on. They went north along the power line and across 90-A to take in the Styles Lane area and the Brooks, Ulrich and Guenther farm. Part of Sugar Creek today is in Stafford and part of it is in Sugar Land because of the way Stafford cut that out. So they had to redraw the Original Incorporation of Sugar Land and leave that land out of it because it was already in Stafford!

That was how [the City of] Sugar Land got started; first of all by selling the houses, creating residents, creating citizens and then incorporating.

**Bruce Kelly:** After World War II, Imperial started selling lots to individuals so that they could build their own houses. You were involved in the Belknap development?

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**B. Little:** After my time at Imperial selling the houses I had an opportunity to join Sugarland Industries. I was with Imperial for five years then I joined Sugarland Industries in 1962. I was in charge of their retailing operations.

**Bruce Kelly:** You were working for Imperial Sugar when you were selling the houses on Lakeview? You had other duties too?

**B. Little:** I had other duties in the Accounting Department. I wasn’t really happy with where the career was going so when the opportunity to join Sugarland Industries came along -- of course it was the same people involved, just different corporations. Tom James ran the industries and Bill Louvier was president of the Sugar Company. I joined Sugarland Industries and had the retail operations and was also involved in real estate. Sugarland Industries was developing land on the south side of 90-A, to provide lots primarily for employees, but other people too. The area just south of where we are here, in your house, was the original part of Belknap.

**Bruce Kelly:** South of Guenther Street?

**B. Little:** Yes, south of Guenther Street.

**Bruce Kelly:** And bordered on the west by Brooks Street.

**B. Little:** Yes, and on the east by Oyster Creek. I think, I could be corrected on this, that when people bought a lot and built within a certain amount of time, the price of that lot was rebated to them. That encouraged people to buy lots, build and then get remuneration back.

**Bruce Kelly:** I think you are right about that, I think my grandmother did that. I think she paid eight hundred dollars for her lot on Belknap Court and then it was rebated to her because she built on it.

**B. Little:** That was the encouragement to build within a certain period of time. Then there was a development that was further on down to the south of Belknap. That was Alcorn Street and Borden Street and some of those streets in there, where newer houses were built. I think the first was in the older part of Belknap and then along Venice, which backed along Oyster Creek. Those lots were sold as waterfront lots.

**Bruce Kelly:** Tell us about Venetian Estates.

**B. Little:** Venetian Estates was developed on farm land by Sugarland Industries and Belknap Realty Company, which was a subsidiary of Sugarland Industries. Venetian Estates built canals and the land was used to fill where the houses would be built. It was Mrs. Kempner's idea to call it Venetian Estates and to name the streets after Italian places such as Lombardy, Santa Maria, Gondola and streets like that. It was Mrs. Kempner's idea to do that development.

**Bruce Kelly:** Who came up with the original engineering design to create canals so that you dig the lake out and create land for the lots?

**B. Little:** The Industries were probably working with Henry Steincamp at that time to do the development. Steincamp was not only a surveyor he was also an engineer.

**Bruce Kelly:** It was a low swampy area.

**B. Little:** It was a low swampy area. Your dad [Charles Kelly] and I used to shoot dove down where the bank (Frost) is now. The lots were developed and nobody wanted to buy them.

**Bruce Kelly:** Nobody in town you mean?

**B. Little:** Nobody in town. The price – the basic lot was \$5,000.

The lots were 100 feet wide and 150 feet deep, which was a good size lot. But there weren't a whole lot of people who could afford a five thousand dollar lot at that time. This was in 1959, when it was opened. The first person that built in it was Virgil Mott. Virgil Mott was a homebuilder in the area. He bought a lot at the corner of Lombardy and Highway 90-A, in Venetian. He built the first house there. Then Belknap Realty Company and Mr. James persuaded some builders from Houston to come out and build some spec houses. One of the builders was a fellow by the name of Leo O'Neal. Leo had had experience building down in the NASA area. He built an unusual type of house, very modern. He built some houses along the first street in Venetian Estates that fronts onto Highway 90-A.

**Bruce Kelly:** Piedmont

**B. Little:** At that time the city had not incorporated and there were no building codes. There were no building inspections. What was between the brick and the sheetrock - let the buyer beware. (Kelly laughs) When Hurricane Carla came along in 1961 some of Mr. O'Neal's houses, and parts of his houses, ended up on 90-A! One of the first things we did when we incorporated the city was to get some building codes; southern building codes, electrical codes, plumbing codes. Things like that to offer the buyer some protection. There was no protection at that time.



**Venetian Estates was developed on farm land by Sugarland Industries and Belknap Realty Company, which was a subsidiary of Sugarland Industries.**

*Bill Little*



**Bruce Kelly:** There was a house on NASA Road 1 across from NASA that had a roof line that went all the way down to the ground. We have one in Venetian Estates just like it. Was that Leo O'Neal?

**B. Little:** That was Leo O'Neal.

**Bruce Kelly:** Okay. The Hilburns owned that house.

**B. Little:** The Hillbens owned that house, they sure did.

**Bruce Kelly:** Let me ask you, was there panic in the Industries, that they might not be able to sell these lots?

**B. Little:** Yeah, because they'd invested a pretty good amount of money in the development of the land. They hired a salesman by the name of John Dullahan to oversee the sale of the lots. He had a little office down on the corner of Lombardy and Highway 90-A.

**Bruce Kelly:** A little white wood building? Kind of a New England looking little shed?

**B. Little:** [nods] He worked on sections one and two. Those were the first two developments. And then John left. That building was moved behind the shopping center and Logine Foster had a law office in it.

**Bruce Kelly:** That's right.

**B. Little:** And Wynell Roberts had a real estate office in it. And then it was finally moved off when they started to develop the parking lot for the Sugar Company. We had to move that out of there.

**Bruce Kelly:** So the builders started building spec houses and things picked up?

**B. Little:** They started building spec houses. They were very slow in selling but the thing that really kicked off Venetian Estates was the fact that the service roads of the Southwest Freeway were opened from Sharpstown to the overpass of 90-A. That made travel to Houston a lot more accessible. People didn't have to go in South Main Street to get to Houston. They could go in the service roads. The area around Sharpstown was being developed. Sugar Land was suddenly an area that people found attractive. It was one of the few places that had waterfront lots. So that is what kicked off Venetian Estates and made it go.

**Bruce Kelly:** Now, you were Mayor at the time that the freeway opened and you were present at the cutting ceremony?

**B. Little:** I was at the ribbon cutting ceremony on the top of the overpass. I guess that would have been 1962-63. I remember it was shortly before Christmas of that year and they tied it in with the opening of Sharpstown shopping center. That gave a great access to shopping. People could go from Sugar Land on the service roads into Sharpstown and go to the mall.



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*Bill Little*



**Bruce Kelly:** Do you have any knowledge how the corridor was selected for the Southwest Freeway.

**B. Little:** I don't. I know that the development for the Southwest Freeway was greatly sped up by the fact that so many people donated land for right of way. Sugarland Industries donated land. All the land by the freeway through Sugar Land was donated. And that sped up the construction because the highway department did not have to buy right of way. Along the freeway from here to Richmond a lot of the land was donated.

**Bruce Kelly:** What was the philosophy of the Kempner family and the powers-that-be of Imperial and Sugarland Industries, regarding the growth of Sugar Land at that time?

**B. Little:** Well, they were in favor of the growth by doing some of the real estate developments. They also realized that the Company Town was fading away. And the development of the freeway and Sugar Creek led to the demise of the Company Store. The original idea of the Company Store was great because travel to anywhere around was nearly impossible because of the roadways – distances, road conditions and things. You couldn't complete with a unionized single grocery store; Weingartens, Safeway or other chain store that were in the Houston area.

And of course all of the retail operations in Sugar Land were Unionized. The employees belonged to the same union as the Sugar Company. They felt that whenever the Sugar Company got a raise, why, they should get a raise.

The Kempners kept looking at the retail operations and the results (I was with Sugarland Industries at the time) it was kind of like the Sugar Company with the company houses. They weren't making any money off of it. The thought then was, well, let's get out of the retailing business. We'll sell the stores to individuals. I guess the first one that was sold was the grocery store. There was a fellow by the name of Guillary who came from around Port Naches. He bought the grocery store and operated it as an independent super market. There was no one to buy the Western Auto, so it was closed down. There was a company out of East Texas by the name of K. Woolens and they bought the dry goods store and operated it for a period of time. Hugh Rouse was

the manager of the drug store for Sugarland Industries and he bought the drug store and modernized it and put in a pretty good eating facility in there. He operated that. The Farm and Home Center was the last thing to go. There was no one to buy it so it liquidated and closed down.

An early demise was John Deere Agency because farming was turning into real estate. So the John Deere Agency was sold. The lumberyard and the paint store were closed down. Of course, the cotton gin operated for a period of time but there were fewer and fewer farmers. The Industries sold their land to Gerald Hines and there was no more cotton growing on the farm so that was the demise of the cotton gin. Eventually the end of the company stores was in sight.

**Bruce Kelly:** The Mixed Right Feed, the feed mill went with it?

**B. Little:** The feed mill went with it too.

**Bruce Kelly:** Did they really look to the Industries to be a big money maker or was it just to provide support and services to the people who lived here?

**B. Little:** Well, the shareholders of Sugarland Industries expected a return on their investment. Of course that was primarily the Kempners, but there were lots and lots of children in the Kempner family by that time and they depended upon income from dividends to help them along. Farming operations was so dependent upon the weather that they could have a good cotton year or a bad cotton year and they hoped that the return from the grocery store and the other retailing stores would provide an income for them.

**Bruce Kelly:** How many acres did they have?

**B. Little:** Originally, when the Kempners bought the Cunningham Plantation they had about twelve thousand acres. Some of that was sold off over a period of time to Frost for his ranch. Some of the land on the east side of Dulles Avenue was sold to a fellow by the name of Brand. He did some development down there. The land that they ended up with that was sold to Hines, was approximately nine thousand five hundred acres. That is what was sold and became Sugarland Properties; the industrial site and the first colony site.

**Jane Goodsell:** Do you remember what the feeling of the population was at that time?

**B. Little:** People who didn't work for the stores thought it was a great opportunity. People who worked for the stores, didn't think it was such a good opportunity. [said with humor] I happened to be with Sugarland Industries at that time we were divesting. We were trying to negotiate a labor contract with the employees. One side was saying, "We are going to do this and that." We were saying, "We are shutting this down." The negotiations turned into, "What is my severance pay going to be?" They treated people very fairly on severance pay, so many dollars for so many years of service, based upon what their salary was. A lot of them turned around and went to work for the people who bought the retailing operations. The grocery store – all the employees were previously Sugarland Industry employees.



Originally, when the Kempners bought the Cunningham Plantation they had about twelve thousand acres.

*Bill Little*



**Bruce Kelly:** There is one entity we haven't discussed. Correct me if I am wrong, I think it was part of Sugarland Industries, was the Sugar Land Telephone Company, which really became a moneymaker.

**B. Little:** It really did. The Sugar Land Telephone Company was a separate corporation. There were a lot of corporations in Sugar Land. They were owned by the Kempners' but operated as separate entities.

**Bruce Kelly:** Like Fort Bend Utilities?

**B. Little:** Like Fort Bend Utilities. Like Sugar Land State Bank, telephone company, Belknap Realty Company, Foster Farms. They were all separate corporations. This was done back in the 1930's when you could borrow money as a corporation. So there was an attorney with Baker Botts, by the name of Walter Widdle. He was at one time Lieutenant Governor of the State.

**Bruce Kelly:** And he had married one of Mr. Edridge's daughters?

**B. Little:** I think he had. He was advisor. His suggestion was to start all these corporations. At one time Imperial Sugar was a department of Sugarland Industries. Then in the 1930's it became a separate corporation. These corporations could borrow money from the reconstruction finance. They could borrow \$25,000 here and \$50,000 there. That is what kept this place afloat during the depression.

**Bruce Kelly:** Probably Jesse Jones helped a little bit too.

**B. Little:** Probably so. I'm sure he and Mr. Kempner were good friends. That was the premise for all these corporations. And Sugar Land Telephone Company was operated as a separate corporation.

**Bruce Kelly:** When you first came to Sugar Land, what was the Sugar Land Telephone Company like?

**B. Little:** Sugar Land Telephone Company was an operator-company. There were about half a dozen operators, one of which was your grandmother. There was Villa Daniels -

**Bruce Kelly:** Etna Shindler, Mildred Rosell was the head.

**B. Little:** Mildred was kind of the supervisor. It was a pick up the phone, "Number Please." "I'd like 310." I think that was our phone number on Lakeview Drive. Everything was either double digit or triple digit. The interesting thing about the operator was you never knew when they were listening and when they weren't. I'd pick up the phone and say "310" and Edna would come and say, "Mr. Little, I think you better call Bob Hanna's house because I think Mrs. Little is up there playing bridge." (all laugh) The other side of that coin was that there were conversations between the company and their lawyers and labor and things like that. You don't know what transpired on pillow talk with things going on. (all laugh) The telephone company modernized, and Bruce, I'm not sure what time- probably some time in the 1960's.



And there was a remuneration that the Bell Telephone Company paid to the Sugar Land Telephone Company for long distance calls. Every long distance call generated income for SLT even though the call went through AT&T.

*Bill Little*



**Bruce Kelly:** I think late fifties; they went to a dial system. They built a new little facility.

**B. Little:** Built the facility here on 90-A.

**Bruce Kelly:** Yes, and you would dial 9 and then four digits.

**B. Little:** It was 9 and then it was Diamond. Diamond was the exchange.

**Bruce Kelly:** Diamond 9. But you couldn't dial directly long distance. You had to dial the operator who would connect you to long distance.

**B. Little:** Right. And there was a remuneration that the Bell Telephone Company paid to the Sugar Land Telephone Company for long distance calls. Every long distance call generated income for SLT even though the call went through AT&T.

**Bruce Kelly:** Really?

**B. Little:** The telephone company was a real moneymaker. I never thought that the telephone company would be sold as quickly as it was.

Robert Hill, the manager of the telephone company, was getting up in years. They were looking for someone to replace him. There wasn't anybody locally that they knew of, so they looked around and hired a guy by the name of Bob Brown from California. Bob came in and Bob was (is) a very aggressive individual. He made contacts around the country. There was a company in Little Rock by the name of Alltel. Alltel saw the growth that was happening in this area and made an offer to the Kempners', since the stock was primarily owned by the Kempner family. The Kempner family thought it was a good offer and since it was stock, they didn't have any tax problems with it. Alltel had been operating in other states, primarily Arkansas and Florida and some of the southeastern and southern states. They realized they could get a pretty good income from dividends plus the appreciation for what the SLT company stock would be in Alltel stock. So they sold the telephone company. Alltel has operated it through the years. Just recently

Alltel split off and did a land line system and a wireless – Alltel stayed wireless and Windstream was the landline company. The telephone company now is Windstream. Alltel is being sold, probably by the end of the year.

**Bruce Kelly:** When cable came into vogue, and came into this area, did Sugar Land Telephone have anything to do with that?

**B. Little:** They had a lot to do with it, except telephone companies were not allowed to own cable. Robert Hill was smart enough to know what he could do and what he couldn't do. One of the people who worked for the Kempners' in Galveston was Arthur Alpert. We formed a limited partnership on the cable company. Arthur was the general partner; he was the manager of it. All of the cable equipment and receivers were located at the telephone company. Robert would charge the cable company technician fees to take care of the cable company. I was fortunate enough to be one of the investors in the cable company. Unfortunately, Arthur Alpert was in bad health and older and didn't really want to take an interest in it any more. So there was a buyer for that --

**Bruce Kelly:** Prime Cable?

**B. Little:** Prime Cable was the buyer. It in turn, sold to Comcast. There was a tremendous potential for cable here in this area. (laughs) We just couldn't hold onto it long enough to get all of the potential out of it but we got some potential.

**Bruce Kelly:** The company was called Sugar Land Telecommunications? SLT?

**B. Little:** Sugar Land Cable Company. SLT was the Sugar Land Telephone Company.

**Bruce Kelly:** Do I understand correctly that they also owned the old Ocean Sweeny Telephone company?

**B. Little:** Sugar Land Telephone Company bought that company, yes. They operated it out of Sweeny. When Alltel bought the telephone company I think it was spun off and went back to an independent company. The telephone company was really the bell weather cow for the Kempners in this area. As the farms went down and the retailing went down, the telephone company went up because of all the growth of the area.

**Bruce Kelly:** Tell us what you know about how Gerald Hines came to be the developer, who the Industries sold the property to, up to when it was developed into First colony.

**B. Little:** Alright. Lets go back a little bit further. The first major real estate development was Sugar Creek. There was a developer by the name of Jake Kamin, who was president of a mortgage company in Houston. He had two partners, David Serles, who was with Vincent & Elkins (law firm) and Stewart Morris, who was with Stewart Morris Company. The three of them had done



**Robert Hill, the manager of the telephone company, was getting up in years. They were looking for someone to replace him. There wasn't anybody locally that they knew of, so they looked around and hired a guy by the name of Bob Brown from California.**

*Bill Little*



a development in NASA Bay, called NASA Bay Development. They built some really nice homes down there across the street from the space center. They were interested in spreading out and building some place else besides NASA.

Jake Kamin visited with Harris Kempner in Galveston and said that he was interested in buying a piece of land in Sugar Land, particularly after the Southwest freeway had been opened up. Service roads were still there but the main freeway had not been built. It was accessible and the overpass over 90-A was built. Kaman told Mr. Kempner, "If you sell me some land, I will guarantee that the balance of your land will be increased in value." From a tax standpoint, there was a corporation formed called Sugar Land Cattle Company and Sugar Land Cattle Company took 1300 acres of Sugarland Industries land that was on the east side of the freeway and on the south side of 90-A, and on the west side of Dulles Avenue. That 1300 acres was Sugar Land Cattle. Jake Kaman and Morris and Serles formed a corporation and that corporation bought Sugar Land Cattle Company. They built what is now Sugar Creek. And they did increase the value of the land considerably. No one ever thought that half million-dollar houses would ever be built around Sugar Land. Because they were used to what was in Venetian Estates and Belknap and that area. But Sugar Creek got started and Gerald Hines, approached the Kempners', well not really Gerald Hines, there was another developer first, that approached the Kempners' about buying -

**Bruce Kelly:** Didn't Shell Oil have something - ?

**B. Little:** Well, that comes a little bit later. There was a developer, I can't remember his name, he developed Pecan Grove. I think his name was Burn or something like that. He approached the Kempners about buying the balance of the land. The board decided that, they'd go ahead and sell it. So they got a price. They kind of let the idea out to members of the family and other stockholders, who were family members. One of the family members said: "That's not enough money. I'm filing a law suit against the directors of Sugarland Industries that they are not being fair to the share holders." He filed this lawsuit. The court decided that the only way to do it in a fair way was to take bids and put the property up for bids rather than negotiate with only one individual. So they put the property up for bids and Gerald Hines bid on it. He was the high bidder. That was the 9500 acres that became the Industrial Park and First Colony. Hines started out in a partnership with a company from Atlanta, by the name of Cousins. The Cousins were in the development business in Atlanta. This was in the 1970's and 1980's. They got into a real crunch in interest rates. Cousins had to pull out. That left Hines. Hines couldn't finance it by himself. So he got the Ford Motor Credit Corporation to come in as a partner and do the financing. That stayed that way for a period of years then the Ford Motor Corporation said, "Well, we really are not in the land business, we are in the automobile business." So the Ford Motor Credit sold their interest to Royal Dutch Pension Plan. That's how the Dutch Pension Plan got involved in it. Hines was the developer for all of the property and he had several different people who were financing it. He did a marvelous job.

The thing that makes Sugar Land so unusual, Bruce, is the fact that there was one owner selling to one buyer. That buyer could control what he did by having a



**That 1300 acres was Sugar Land Cattle. Jake Kaman and Morris and Serles formed a corporation and that corporation bought Sugar Land Cattle Company. They built what is now Sugar Creek.**

*Bill Little*



master planned community. I don't know many places around the United States that has had that opportunity. Fortunately the City had things in place with building codes and zoning and a comprehensive plan that Hines could follow in developing his master planned community. So it all fit together like a glove.

**Bruce Kelly:** Do you think it was by accident that that happened, one buyer- one seller or was that in the works for a long time?

**B. Little:** I think it was just by chance. The Kempners' decided that they wanted to get out of the land business and concentrate on the Sugar business. By doing so they looked for one buyer. That was a great opportunity for them and for the buyer to put in a community.

**Bruce Kelly:** Did First Colony meet all the expectations (plans) that Gerald Hines had for it from the beginning? Was it pretty much actuated?

**B. Little:** As far as I know, it was. By that time the city was pretty well organized. The city imposed a lot of restrictions on Hines in the way that he developed and the way that he put in his utilities and how he sold his bonds. That had a great deal to do with the proper development of it also. The city has a financial advisor by the name of Ernest Brown who was with a company called Moroni Bysler, investment bankers in Houston. Ernest had a lot of knowledge of how things should be done with MUD districts and utility systems and city overseeing and things like that. He was a great help to the City to impose the things that they did upon Hines in his development. It kept it from being a slipshod operation.

**Bruce Kelly:** That brings to mind, a legend or a truth: there was a small area of first Colony at the very beginning which didn't meet the standards of the City and they had to tear down some of the houses and start over. Do you know anything about that?

**B. Little:** That I'm not aware of.

**Bruce Kelly:** Ok, somebody told that to me and sometimes these things are legends! Lets back up a little. You have done a lot of public service for the City of Sugar Land, for the Sugar Land Area. Were you ever on the school board?

**B. Little:** Yes, I was on the school board.

**Bruce Kelly:** Well, lets start back with your service to the City. You were the second mayor?

**B. Little:** When the City incorporated they had an election for five aldermen at that time and a mayor. I ran for an alderman's position. I think there were 15 to 18 people, and they were going to select 5. Somehow I got the most votes to be on the first City Council. Ted Harman was the first Mayor. Ted had been manager of the dry goods store and had retired from that position. So there were 5 people on the first council. There was Jess Pirtle, who was an engineer/surveyor for Sugar Land Industries. There

was Melvin Pomikle who was shipping and packing superintendent at the Sugar Company. There was C. Mcfadden who was the manager of Marshall Canning Company, here in Sugar Land. There was Minnie Ulrich, whose husband had been General Manager of Sugar Land Industries prior to Tom James. And myself. Ted Harman operated as Mayor for about a year and half. Then they were calling a new city election for mayor and councilmen. I resigned from the council to run for mayor. I was elected Mayor in April of 1961 after the city had incorporated in December of 1959. It was a lot of fun because we were taking things over from the Sugar Company and the Industries. The Sugar Company and the Industries were very good to us. They didn't force us to take everything all at one time. There was a transition over a period of time.

**Bruce Kelly:** For instance, what had to be transitioned over?

**B. Little:** The first transition, I think, was probably the volunteer fire department. There were about three pieces of equipment. The City inherited that from the Sugar Company. The Sugar Company was very good about their employees continuing on as volunteer Firemen and when the fire whistle blew they would drop their jobs at the Sugar Company (so long as it wasn't a station job) and go to where the fire was.

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Somehow I got the most votes to be on the first City Council. Ted Harman was the first Mayor. Ted had been manager of the dry goods store and had retired from that position. So there were 5 people on the first council.

*Bill Little*

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We had to take over the garbage pick up. And that was an interesting one because the Sugar Company had provided the garbage service on a six day a week operation. The workers would practically come into your kitchen and pick up the lettuce leaves out of your sink and remove them for you. Anyone who lived in a company house, that was part of the rent. People who owned their homes, they paid a dollar a month. The Sugar Company said; "I think we want to get out of the garbage business." We looked around and there was a county commissioner here by the name of Johnny Davis. Johnny showed an interest in becoming a garbage contractor. So he bought a used garbage truck and hired two helpers and took over the garbage pick up. It worked pretty well except the people on the Hill area didn't want to put their garbage pails out at the curb. They said, "We have alleys behind our house! Lets put the garbage truck down the alley and we'll set the pails out there." That worked fine until the first rains came. The garbage truck got stuck in the alley and Johnny had to send county equipment to pull the garbage trucks out of the alley. We told the people on the Hill, "No, this is not going to work. You are going to have to be like everybody else and put your garbage out at the street." I think we then cut the collections from six days a week to two days a week and raised the rates two dollars for everyone.

**Bruce Kelly:** Outrageous! (all laugh)

**B. Little:** I would be out playing golf and Mary would get a call on Saturday morning: "My garbage is not picked up."

**Bruce Kelly:** They called the Mayor! (all laugh)

**B. Little:** Call the Mayor, Hell yes! (laughs) We did not have any form of City management. The Mayor was a strong mayor type of government. So the Mayor was the City administrator as well. That was an interesting thing about the City. And I'll digress a little. The City started out crawling, like a baby. Then it got its legs straightened out and it could walk. Then it could walk fast. And finally it could run. And that is the stage it is today, its running. We started out as a general law city under the laws of Texas, because our population was less than 5000. When our population reached 5000, we voted to become a home rule city. That meant we could put in ordinances that were a little bit different than what the State Statutes were. We still had the strong mayor form of government. As the City grew we realized that in order to get qualified people for Mayor, you couldn't get them to put in their full time service. I think during Roy Cordes' administration, the city administrator was hired. This administrator was there for a couple of years with the anticipation that we would move into a City Manager form of government. In order to do that we had to draw up a Charter. There was a group appointed to study the Charter Commission. I happened to serve on that board. We studied it and said, "Yes, there's a need for a City Charter." There was an election for the commission. I was fortunate to be elected on that. That group consisted of I think 10 or 12 people from the community. We studied City Charters from other cities and drew what we thought were the best parts of other city charters and put together a City Charter, which was then voted upon by the people. As part of the City Charter we recommended that we change from a strong mayor to a City Manager. That was when the first City Manager came and we went on from there. Now the Mayor is not a strong mayor, he is more of a figurehead,

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We had to take over the garbage pick up. And that was an interesting one because the Sugar Company had provided the garbage service on a six day a week operation.

*Bill Little*

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does ribbon cuttings, administers the council and serves as a chief executive manager. He depends upon the City Manager to operate the City.

**Bruce Kelly:** In the early days, when you served as Mayor and Councilman did you have any idea where Sugar Land was going? Did that guide any of your decisions or did you basically make decisions on the present?

**Bill Little:** No, we knew where we were going through the fact that we developed a comprehensive city plan. That came about from a young fellow who was an engineer with Bernard Johnston engineers in Houston who came out and called on me one day and said that he was selling comprehensive city plans. This was a type of thing that could be paid for by the Federal Government if we would agree to do it. It would encompass engineering, it would encompass viewing the properties in the city and it would include a zoning ordinance. I took a look at it and said, "Well, we have this opportunity to really make an idea city and rather than fly by the seat of our pants we because none of us had any experience in administering a city. Lets go

ahead with this. The council was agreeable to it. So this engineering firm did a study and came up with a comprehensive city plan and thoroughfare pattern and things of that nature. One of their estimates was that by the year 2000 the city would have probably 55,000 to 60,000 people. With that comprehensive plan we were guided. When Gerald Hines bought the property he used that comprehensive plan for some of his major street layouts. It really paid off to do that.

**Bruce Kelly:** So the seeds were planted early on that resulted in what Sugar Land is today.

**Bill Little:** I think the first city council in the first few

days, built a foundation. The foundation has been built upon since and it's turned into a pretty fine building.

**Bruce Kelly:** I think it has too.

**Bill Little:** Yep.

**Bruce Kelly:** Anything else about the city you want to tell us before we move on?

**Bill Little:** Well, I think you probably will visit with some of the other people who have been involved in the City too and we'll let them ... I've kind of brought you up to 1965 on the city.

**Bruce Kelly:** Your service to the School district. Did you serve as mayor and a school board member at the same time?

**Bill Little:** No, I served as mayor until 1965 and then duties with Sugarland Industrial ... I didn't really feel that I could do justice to both. I had to depend on one of them for the income for the family so I decided not to run for a third term as mayor. I stayed out of politics for a year. There was an opening on the school board. The school board was comprised of seven members. Three of those members were from the old Missouri City district and three were from the old Sugar Land district and one was at large. The At Large member was Dr. Wheeler. Leslie Wheeler, Buddy's dad. Leslie had served his terms on the school board and he'd helped with the consolidation through the Sugar Land Board. He decided that he was going to retire. So his position was coming up for election and I was talked into running for School Board. That is like going from the frying pan into the fire. I served six years on the school board, two three-year terms.

**Bruce Kelly:** Who were some of the men you served with?

**Bill Little:** I served with Kenneth Landine, Herbert Shelton from Sugar Land.

**Bruce Kelly:** How about Bruce Edwards?

**Bill Little:** Bruce Edwards was on it. Tony Ariaga was on it from the Stafford area. Tony Cangelosi from Stafford. At that time the superintendent was a fellow by the name of Pat Rogers. Right after I was elected to the board in 1966, Pat passed away. That is when Ed Mercer was promoted to superintendent of schools. He served for a long period of time and then Lawrence Elkins succeeded Mercer.

**Bruce Kelly:** You said it was going from the frying pan into the fire. Will you describe that?

**Bill Little:** There was a whole lot more involved with parents and the area was beginning to grow. There were a lot of people who had ideas on how school districts should be run because they had moved from Illinois and California and New York and they did things differently up there and down there and we should do the same things here. It was a rural school district but it was fast becoming an urban school district. The meetings of the school board would start at 6:30 in the evening and they'd go on to 1:00 1:30 in the morning.



The council was agreeable to it. So this engineering firm did a study and came up with a comprehensive city plan and thoroughfare pattern and things of that nature.

*Bill Little*



There was no time limit on the thing! I had to get up and go to work the next morning, supposedly with a clear head. (laughs) So that was one of the reasons I thought two terms on the school board was enough.

**Bruce Kelly:** What was the most difficult issue you had to deal with?

**Bill Little:** Most difficult issue was the firing of a schoolteacher? Are you getting around to that? (laughs)

**Bruce Kelly:** I know who it was... (all laugh)

**Bill Little:** We had a civics teacher who was teaching philosophies that were really not agreeable to some of the parents in the district. They were a little updated for what the people thought he should be teaching. Civics was, of course, a senior course that had to be passed to graduate. It you didn't agree with his philosophies, as a student, when he'd ask a question and you gave a different answer, you might fail the test and the course. So there were several parents who complained to the school board about the instructions that this teacher was giving. Hindsight is a marvelous thing, Bruce! I mean it is 20-20. (all laugh) But when you don't have the hindsight and you make the mistake of letting a teacher go in mid term, that's bad. So we let this teacher go. The next thing we knew there was a federal marshal knocking at our front door serving papers saying that we were being sued individually and collectively for a million dollars. This teacher had filed suit in federal court in Houston. He was represented by the ACLU. We didn't know what the ACLU was down here. We went to federal court in Houston. His attorney was a fellow from Washington, D.C., who was representing him. He had the strength and the wherewithal of the ACLU, which was a pretty powerful organization, which was getting to be more powerful at that time. We lost the case. One of the things he was suing for was to be reinstated. He was not reinstated. He was awarded, I think, \$50,000 or \$70,000 in damages for loss of wages over a period of time. But he didn't miss a beat. After he was terminated here he went to work as a teacher in Okinawa for the federal government or Air Force and was teaching students of service people. I don't know what ever happened to him after that.

**Bruce Kelly:** (laughs)

**Bill Little:** We had a pretty good lesson that if you are going to let someone go, wait until the term is up and then don't renew the contract!

**Bruce Kelly:** Did the school district pay for the damages?

**Bill Little:** The school district paid for the damages and they paid the attorney and the court costs.

**Bruce Kelly:** So the individuals ...

**Bill Little:** We did not incur any expenses.

**Bruce Kelly:** What do you feel was your greatest accomplishment on the school board?



Fortunately the bond issues that were put up were passed with people realizing that the area was growing. At the time I went on the school board there was only one high school, which was Dulles High School. And one junior high school, which was Dulles Junior School.

*Bill Little*



**Bill Little:** Probably building new facilities and trying to keep up with the pace of growth in the area. Fortunately the bond issues that were put up were passed with people realizing that the area was growing. At the time I went on the school board there was only one high school, which was Dulles High School. And one junior high school, which was Dulles Junior School. There was an elementary school in Missouri City and there was an elementary school in Sugar Land and there was an elementary school in the Quarters of MR Wood and there was an elementary school down around the Fresno/Arcola area. The growth really started after that. I felt I got out at a good time.

**Bruce Kelly:** So you got out of that service at ...

**Bill Little:** In '72.

**Bruce Kelly:** That was before Stafford decided to succeed

**Bill Little:** Right, that was just before Stafford. That came about because Fort Bend School District was trying to economize. One of

the ways they were going to economize was to cut down bus service to any student living within two miles of the school. Most of the Stafford student lives within two miles of either the elementary school or the junior/senior high. When that service was cut out the citizens of Stafford said, "We'll form our own school district." The legislature allowed for a municipal school district to be formed I think it was the only one that's ever been formed. Then the law was changed so they couldn't have a municipal school district any more. That is how the Stafford district came about.

**Bruce Kelly:** What other civic boards or services did you do in Fort Bend County or the area?

**Bill Little:** Well, as I said, I was very fortunate to be on a lot of the City boards, such as the 4-A Corporation, which serviced the industrial needs of the city. We have a half a cent of sales tax that we could use to attract industry and could give some tax abatement and things like that. Charter review commission, I served on some of those. But I think probably the greatest contribution I've had and the greatest reward was being a Trustee for the George Foundation for ten years. That was a ten-year appointment, which was just over with a couple of years ago. Serving on that foundation board was very rewarding from the standpoint of being able to give money to very needy organizations and associations. One of the things we were able to do, which I was very proud of, was to get the University of Houston into the Sugar Land area by giving money to the building campaigns at U of H. That is going to expand in conjunction with Wharton Junior College. Citizens and students of this area will be able to go to a four year course and stay at home and sit down on a lot of expenses that they would have otherwise. Wharton Junior college, as I understand it, will operate the first two years then the students will go the last two years into U of H. But it will all be down here on this campus. I think serving on the George Foundation was probably the most rewarding thing that I've done lately.

**Bruce Kelly:** When you came to Sugar Land back in 1957, it was a segregated community. Today it is known as one of the most diverse communities in the United States. What are your thoughts about that?

**Bill Little:** Well, I think we helped on breaking that segregation. The people that lived in the area... there were two areas; one was Mayfield Park the other was the Quarters. The Quarters houses were owned by the Sugar Company, which their employees lived in. They were both Latin American and Negro. Mayfield Park was started a little bit earlier and it allowed some of the people to buy homes in that area, but was, again segregated, because it was either Negro or Latin American. We realized, and the city realized that the people couldn't live in those houses that had outdoor privies and cold-water faucets on the backside of the house. They were making good money at a sugar company but they were investing their money in automobiles and honkytonks and things like that.

The City was able to work with the Federal Housing Administration to start an urban renewal project. That urban renewal project allowed the Sugar Company to get rid of the shacks and for contractors to build new homes. Three bedroom brick homes with bathroom and all the facilities. By the FHA being involved, the loans would be at a very low interest rate. We were able to get a savings and loan to participate in it to make the actual loans to the people. The Sugar Company was agreeable to payroll deduction for those people. So on a weekly basis so much would be deducted from their pay roll and given to the lender to pay off the note. As you can see today, going through that area, the people have taken care of those houses and they are very proud of them. The City has done a lot to help them by putting in concrete streets and curbs and gutters and sidewalks and things of that nature. The whole area is known now as Mayfield Park. It's still pretty much inhabited by Negroes and Latin American but there are other people who are buying homes in there to invest in. So it's come along very well. That helped break the segregation in Sugar Land. When we first came here, at the shopping center, there were separate shopping centers for colored and white. Of course, the Latin Americans had the most problem because they could go to the Lakeview School whereas the coloreds had to go to the M.R. Wood School. The Latin Americans had to walk a pretty good distance to get to the school. One of the things the City did was put a bridge across from Main street to Mayfield Park area so the kids could walk that way. And they are still doing that today, coming into the junior high and coming into Lakeview.



**But I think probably the greatest contribution I've had and the greatest reward was being a Trustee for the George Foundation for ten years.**

*Bill Little*



**Bruce Kelly:** Did desegregation go smoothly in Sugar Land? Were there any snags? Were you able to work with the black leaders?

**Bill Little:** Yeah, there was a black leader by the name of Haywood Davis. Haywood was also president of the union at the Sugar Company. He was good. He wasn't a rabble-rouser, he understood what things were and he was willing to work with management. It went very smoothly. I think it went very smoothly in the school system too. Segregation, in our area was probably easier, Bruce, because whether you were a minority or not you had a job and you worked here. There wasn't a lot of unemployment or a lot of unrest as there might have been in a larger city or some other areas. I think that had a lot to do with the smoothness of the integration was the fact that everybody had a job and was working.

**Bruce Kelly:** I think it is Denny Kempner, I.H. Kempner's grandson, said he felt that rebuilding Mayfield Park, tearing down the old shacks and building new houses was probably what he considered the greatest accomplishment that his family had done.

**Bill Little:** Well, it was fortunate that they were agreeable to that. And it was fortunate that we could get the City involved with the federal housing administration. That happened during my reign as mayor. We worked with a federal administrator who was named Neil Pickett. He was the federal housing administrator in Houston for the district. He was also a former mayor of Houston. Neil was very much interested in the project down here. We even took some of the older homes that were in better shape and remodeled them and put in bathrooms and sold those. There was a builder here by the name of Ted Kossa. Ted was instrumental in building some of the homes there. The first home under that project was sold to a lady by the name of Aline McLemore bought the first FHA insured house in Mayfield Park. That was very successful. It really helped.

**Bruce Kelly:** I want to ask your impression of Mr. I.H. Kempner, Sr..

**Bill Little:** If there is a classification of a person who is a gentleman, Mr. I.H. was a gentleman. He was very interested in his investment and he was very interested in the people who helped that investment. As I say, Sugar Land was what you could call a Benevolent Dictatorship. He didn't over rule, but he made things available and took care of his employees. Bruce, in those days, you signed on for a job and the company was interested in you and you were interested in the company. That's probably what led to the long-term employment of people. Unfortunately, at one period of time, there was a fellow who was an advisor to the sugar company. He didn't think it was a good idea to have nepotism. So the Sugar Company had a policy for a period of time, no nepotism. That really upset the community because there were second, third and fourth generation people who were working for the Sugar Company! That was not a good thing. They finally realized that that was wrong. (laughs) It was interesting sometimes, particularly in the packing and shipping department. If there was a death or a funeral in the Lubojosky family or the Borowoski family they would shut down! (all laugh)

Mr. Kempner was a very, very fine gentleman and his wife was a lovely person also. He took a great interest in Sugar Land. He took a trip from Galveston to Sugar Land

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almost weekly. He had his driver drive him up. He would visit with Tom James for a while in the day and visit with Bill Louviere for a while and get all the updates on what the two companies were doing and how it was coming along. And then he'd go back to Galveston. His son, Harris, also took a great interest. Harris kind of succeeded his father. Really the person that his father had up here was I.H. Kempner, Jr. (Herb Kempner). But Herb contracted cancer and died at a very early age. Then Mr. Kempner assumed more leadership. And then Harris assumed leadership.

**Bruce Kelly:** We are talking about Denny?

**Bill Little:** No, I'm talking about Harris, who was I.H.'s son.

**Bruce Kelly:** Oh, Junior.

**Bruce Kelly:** Denny was Herb's son.

**Bruce Kelly:** Junior died in about 1952?

**Bill Little:** About 1952 or 1953. Denny worked for a bank in Houston. Bob Armstrong

was instrumental in getting Denny to come out and take an interest in the company. Denny served as chairman of the board. Then he brought his brother, Jim, along. I won't go into that.

**Bruce Kelly:** OK, we'll stop there.

**Bill Little:** That's not for the record.

**Bruce Kelly:** Bill, thank you. It was great to have you interviewed.

**Bill Little:** This has been fun. I hope that we contributed something to the historical part of it.

**Bruce Kelly:** You gave us information that nobody else has.

**Bill Little:** I was very fortunate to come while it was still a company town, see the transition and be a part of the transition.

**Bruce Kelly:** One little story I heard from Bob Hanna. Both of you came here close to the same time.

**Bill Little:** Two years apart.

**Bruce Kelly:** He was telling us one time that things were a little provincial here, especially when it came to how elections were run. (all laugh) Do you have anything you want to tell us about that?

**Bill Little:** Yeah, it was quite a shock to participate in an election at the shopping center. The way it was constructed, there was a corridor that went from the beginning of the shopping center to the end of the shopping center on a north south basis. That way you went through the corridor and you got to the elevator

or steps and got to the offices. Well, when they would hold an election, they would hold them in the corridor of the shopping center. They would bring in some tables and set them up and put some pencils on the tables. The election clerks would be sitting over at another table. They'd hand out the ballots and people who were going to vote would put the ballot down on the table. Right next to them somebody else had a ballot down on the table. "Who you going to vote for?" "I don't know who I'm going to vote for. Who you gonna vote for?" That's the way the elections were held. Well, after the city got incorporated, Bob and I were good friends and still are. We decided that there was a better way to vote instead of a table set up exposed to everybody. So I got the City Council to agree to contribute, I think \$50, something like that, to buy some ply wood from the lumber yard and Bob and I at his garage constructed the first voting booth in Sugar Land. (all laugh) They were used for a long period of time! There were four booths that we built and they were portable. They could be taken apart and put back together. The Sugar Company was good enough to store them because the city, at that time, had no buildings to store them in.

**Bruce Kelly:** I am going to keep an eye out for those booths. They may be somewhere on the Imperial property. If they are, we are going to put them in our museum.

**Bill Little:** Yes, I wonder what ever happened to those? The City of Sugar Land should have inherited those things somewhere.

**Bruce Kelly:** They are probably gone. But who knows, they may be sitting somewhere too. Be fun to have those again.

**Bill Little:** Bob was the contractor of the first voting booth. (all laugh)

**Bruce Kelly:** Well, thanks again, Bill.

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*Sugar Land*   
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