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**Interviewee: John E. Rhea**

**Interviewer: Gyongyver "Kitty" Beuchert**

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Gyongyver "Kitty" Beuchert: This is an oral history interview with John E. Rhea, member of the executive committee and twice past president of Boone and Crockett Club held on February 17, 1977, at his home in Fort Meyer, Florida, by Gyongyver "Kitty" Beuchert, office administrator of the Boone and Crockett Club. Colonel Rhea, can you tell us something about your birth date and your birthplace?

John E. Rhea: Birthdate you already have—it's on the books. I was born in McKinney, Texas. Do you want some biographical material?

GB: Well, I'd like the name of your parents and a little bit about the rest of your family.

JR: My father was J.E. Rhea. He was basically a cotton exporter. My mother was Ida Dow Rhea. She came from quite an interesting family in Tennessee. Both parents came from the same basic area although they did not know each other initially. My maternal grandfather was in the hardware business and was the rest of his life. My father's father was a rancher and had quite a spread around McKinney, Texas for a number of years. It was split up after his death and unfortunately the ranch wasn't kept together but there's still quite a lot of land in that area. He organized a thing called "Rhea's Mill." It was really a cotton gin and I believe that lasted for thirty-four years. I think there's a town in Texas now called "Rhea's Mill" because the mill was located at that place. I don't think you need much more about them than that.

GB: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

JR: I had one sister older than I who died some years ago. That was all.

GB: How about a little bit about the schools you attended?

JR: (laughs) My schooling was pretty simple. I went to a local high school for one year, a public school, then was sent to New Mexico Military Institute from which I graduated and then on to Texas University. Graduated there, took a little work to the University of Vienna, then back and went into the service in 1942.

GB: Could you tell us a little about your military service?

JR: Well, I didn't have enough time in military school to get a commission. I only had two years there. I went in as a private in Fort Sill, Oklahoma and spent the first day or two doing things I knew nothing about. Mainly I was picking up cigarette butts off the parade ground which I found

very discouraging.

Then we had some sort of a test. It was cool and I had a terrible hangover. This was the first day in Fort Sill. (laughs) In this place they handed out some papers with some squares and round dots and that sort of thing and I was supposed to fill it out. I didn't feel like filling anything out so I sort of dawdled with it, not realizing its importance, and turned it in and we went about our business and I got put on latrine duty. I cleaned latrines for about a week and finally decided this really wasn't what a soldier was supposed to do so I got an interview through my sergeant to go see the commanding officer of the post, a major...no, I believe he was a lieutenant colonel. I reported to him and he asked me what I wanted, saying he was a very busy man and I assumed he was. I asked him what was this business about permanent latrine duty I seemed to be on? So he said, "What is your AGCT?"

I said, "What is that?"

He said, "Your Army General Classification Score." After a moment he called his classification officer in and asked him to pull my records. He looked at it and he looked at me and he said, "This I don't understand. You're a college graduate."

I said, "Yes."

He said, "Well, there's something wrong here because you don't score that way."

I said, "What do you mean, I don't score?"

He said, "The first day you came in here, or the second day, you were given a test."

I recalled that test was given in a nice cool room, and I said, "You mean those papers that came in the first morning?"

He said, "Yes."

I said, "Colonel, I don't think I did very well on that test. I only got there that morning."

He said, "You're right, you didn't."

I said, "It shows me not to be very bright?"

He said, "Hmmm. Moronic."

So I said, "Well, is there any way we can get this redone?"

He said, "Well, it shouldn't have been given that time anyway." So he called his classification

officer in again and read him the riot act, and the whole group that I came in with was retested. Of the group—I think there were 27 of us—there were, I believe, 12 college graduates. Six of the 12 were also classified as moronic, and after the test at least a number of the group was classified as "superior intellect" and even two "genius." So I did get off latrine duty.

After that I was taken into cavalry because I had ridden all my life. I was sent to Fort Riley where I stayed until the first officers' candidate class. I was selected for that and went through the OCS [officers' candidate school], was made aide to a General Pierce and he was sent down to Louisiana to be assistant division commander in the 103rd Division. I went to the war with the 103rd Division, landing in south France in advance of my division, spent a little time with the Third Division and back to the 101st where I was finally given a battalion. These were battlefield promotions.

I was shot three times, nothing terribly serious. The final part of the war I was given command of a task force called "Task Force Brenner" and we managed to take Brenner Pass without too much of a problem. I believe it was the first time since Hannibal that somebody had gone across the Pass and actually captured it. The war itself I thought was quite fun. There were times when we were terribly scared, hungry and cold and so forth but basically it was a good experience. I enjoyed it.

GB: Now the next question I would ask you is a little bit about your business career and how you selected it.

JR: I think the business, the initial phase of it, was selected for me. When I finished school in 1942 I went right in the Service and since I spoke German I was declared "indispensable" in an army in which no man is indispensable. So I wasn't allowed out so I stayed in the Service until 1954 I suppose it was, so I had quite a long career in the Army. I wondered if I shouldn't just stay as I was offered a regular commission but decided at the last moment that the Army really couldn't pay me what I wanted and I thought I could do better outside so I resigned. I went into real estate and returned to my father's secondary love, the oil business, and I stayed in that from that time until currently.

GB: Okay. I would like to know a little bit about how you developed an interest in the sport of hunting and the field of conservation.

JR: That was very simple because my father was an incipient biologist but he wasn't an educated one. I did study biology in school. He loved the outdoors. He loved fishing and hunting and he was a Texas champion skeet shot, I believe it was—a fine shotgun shot and an excellent rifle shot. We were more friends than we were parent and son. That was our relationship and we used to go out very, very often. There was a lake close to us where we shot duck and did some fishing and then we hunted deer in South Texas. I suppose my first deer hunt was, oh, at age 11 or 12 and we hunted every year, deer, turkey and quail, as well as doing a lot of fishing. I did not take any big game hunts with my father except white tail deer. He himself took a grizzly bear hunt up in Colorado long before I was born, I assume it was in 1917, and a write-up was made in the

McKinney paper—the entire whole front page of the experiences of my father and his two brothers. It was quite an exciting hunt in an area where since I have been and I have walked over areas where he hunted. There are no grizzly bear in there now but apparently there were a lot of them in those days.

GB: The next very natural question is, do you have any particularly memorable hunting trips yourself?

JR: Oh, I have lots of them over years but it would take far too much tape, [and] far too much time to describe them all. I suppose the most exciting of the hunts was in Africa because that's where you're facing dangerous game: but I won't relate any of them except to say that I have taken all of the "big five" dangerous game, plus most of the American species, and at least some, not the majority I suppose, but some of my trophies will reside at the National Rifle Association place down in New Mexico. I gave them to them.

GB: Okay. What led you to become interested in and then later a member of the Boone and Crockett Club?

JR: Well, it was a strange set of circumstances. I met a fellow called Phil Crow, who lived at—I believe it was a place up very close to Middleburg, Virginia. I knew that he had been out with, this fellow that I had been hunting with, (I was just lucky) called Tommy Walker. So I called him on the phone one day and said I'd like to come up and chat with him a little bit about Tommy's area. He very nicely said, "Do come up and have dinner." So I went and we had quite a lovely evening. He showed movies and pictures and we talked till the wee hours of the morning.

As a result of my talk with Phil—he discussed the Boone and Crockett Club of which I had heard but didn't know much about—he said, "You should be a member." I was very impressed by his comment but never thinking I would be one. Lo and behold he sent me a book with the members' names, asked who I knew. I knew Archie Roosevelt and two or three other people but how many of those Phil got to recommend me to the club I don't know. He wrote a letter and Archie Roosevelt wrote a letter and all of a sudden I got a notification that I'd been selected as a member and that I was to appear at a meeting in Bob Ferguson's place in Long Island. After many trials and tribulations, I finally got up to where I was supposed to be, called on the phone and said, "Well, I'm here."

He said, "It's fine you're here, but who are you?"

I said, "Well, I'm a member."

He said, "Well, come on out. We'll look you over." So I went out and met Bob Ferguson and Brand (?) and a number of people none of whom I really knew. I did know Phil Connors but I believe he had died by then. So, I knew nobody so I stood around sort of sucking my thumb for the entire meeting. Then we went to Sagamore Hill and went to another club and then went to Clay Frick's

house for lunch. I suppose I was spoken to maybe once or twice during the entire time and I was a little bit disturbed about the fact that I wasn't making an impression on anybody. That's the way it appeared to me. After this two-and-a-half or three-day meeting I went back to Virginia a little bit disappointed, not in the club but in my lack of influence on some of the people.

This went on for perhaps two years. At least, I knew more people and I was spoken to, but I had nothing to do. Then Bob Waters, who at that time was the president, asked if I would take over the Conservation Committee. That really pleased me because it was one of my major interests. I did take it over and from that went on to be president and it was the most satisfying experience I believe I ever had. (unintelligible) said he would rather be president of the Boone and Crockett Club than President of the United States. I think he meant exactly what he said. I feel pretty much the same way. I was honored to be president the second time. It was not because I had done such a good job but because the people that were coming on would probably elect a president who was not ready for the job yet.

GB: Can you tell me what year you joined the club?

JR: Yes. I was elected in 1961.

GB: Okay, now back to my question I wanted to ask you, what other conservation organizations did you belong to either before or concurrent with your association with Boone and Crockett?

JR: Before I didn't belong to any except this little duck club that my father really ran and that was not a conservation club per se. After joining the Boone and Crockett Club I became a member of the Board of Directors of the National Rifle Association and was closely associated with Clinton "Pink" Gutermuth and Ira Gabrielson in the Wildlife Management Institute, then I was put on the board of the Aspen Wildlife Leadership Foundation, which at that point was being run by Russ [Russell E.] Train after Russ was made Under-secretary of Interior. I was asked by the Board to take the organization over and very foolishly, I suspect, decided it would be a great fun thing to do and moved to Washington and took over the Foundation. I ran it for about six years as executive director, at which point I got a replacement for myself, a fellow named Robinson MacIvane, who is still running the organization. It is programmed basically to Africa and I suppose it's educationally oriented, as much as anything else, to teach the African youngsters the value of conservation, the value of game, what it means to their country, and to help them to avoid some of the mistakes made in this country before Theodore Roosevelt.

GB: Can you tell me what offices you held in the Boone and Crockett Club and what committees you served on?

JR: Yes, I can tell you. I can't remember the exact dates but as I said earlier I was the director of membership in 1961 and became chairman of the Conservation Committee a couple of years later [1967] and I don't recall what the date was. I held office for two years and was a member of the Executive Committee at the same time. As a matter of fact, I think I've been a member of the

Executive Committee ever since 1963 or 4. I was President '68 through '70, a three-year span, and a one-year span in '74. So Conservation Committee, Executive Committee and President. I've never been vice president of the club. I've been on a number of smaller committees, but they dissolved very rapidly, had limited mission, but they're not important enough to list.

GB: Thank you. I was going to get a little bit into actual events and projects that the Boone and Crockett Club was involved in and one of the first that comes to mind is the Bighorn Sheep Transplant Project undertaken by the club originally in '54 and then carried through quite a few years. Do you remember?

JR: Yes, I remember it. I had nothing to do with it personally. It was a very good project of putting these sheep out in the mountainous area of Texas around Alpine. I believe Dick Borden had more to do with that than 'most anybody. Pink Gutermuth was involved in it. So my experience with that project was really peripheral and a follow-up report was done in 1962, I believe. But the majority of the genesis of the project and its implementation should be asked of somebody else rather than me.

GB: Okay. But you do know that it was a very successful project.

JR: Yes.

GB: Do you remember anything about the Atlantic salmon project that took place in '59? It may have been a little before your time.

JR: It was. I do know that it was instigated primarily by John Olin who was very interested in Atlantic salmon and saving that species. You'd best ask John Olin about that.

GB: How about the (unintelligible) study on wild burro and desert sheep?

JR: Without getting into this controversial issue it was a move by a lady, I suppose, we called "Wild Horse Annie" to protect all the burros and wild horses. Wild horses could use some protection, but the burros were a great threat to the desert sheep because there was a paucity of water in their natural area and these burros would go down to the water holes and kick the sheep off when they'd come in the water holes, which resulted in death because many of these sheep died of starvation and lack of water. So this fellow was asked to do a study on it, which he did. It didn't do much to protect the sheep, however, because Wild Horse Annie got the Congress upset and the Wild Horse and Wild Burro Act—I forget the proper name of it—was passed and they're still under protection.

GB: Okay. I know you know a little bit about this—really quite a bit—the Craighead grizzly bear study in Montana because you were on the committee that was involved with this.

JR: Yes. John and Frank were excellent scientists, have done some tremendous work with the

grizzly bear and the club has been supportive of them for a number of years. I know them both intimately and we worked with them on this grizzly bear study. It was one of the first times that these animals were knocked out by drugs and transmitters put on them. This transmitter idea, tracking by use of transmitters was absolutely first class. By radio signals you can tell exactly where the bear is and to some degree what he's doing. You can check his pulse rate, heartbeat, track him to his lair and to his den so that all of that sort of thing is the scientific basis on which to prognosticate what he will do in other areas.

You should know that a young fellow that was working for them called Maurice Hornacher—I believe, the way he pronounces it—he and I became very close friends and he wanted to get away from the Craigheads to do a research project of his own. So we pulled him from them and put together the mountain lion study and he is undoubtedly the world's greatest expert on the movement of the cougar. I worked with him out in Montana for a while in the most rugged country you've ever seen tracking these cats and instrumenting them, radio telemetry, tracking them down, studying their habits and as a result he wrote a wildlife monograph on it. Excellently done. We have also supported Hornacher through three series, I think, of studies on the cougar. As a matter of fact, it was his work and the work of the club that got the cougar made a game animal as opposed to a vermin. Certainly he's not a vermin --he's a magnificent animal and should be put on a proper game status. In some areas we had him actually taken off of any kind of status and put on complete protection because he was endangered in some areas. But the cougar is now in no endangerment as far as I can see and he is a very fine species for the American hunter to utilize.

GB: That was going to be one of my questions.

JR: Sorry. I got off on that.

GB: That's all right, you just naturally got into it but an interesting point here—and I don't know if it has any significance—is the first meeting of the Conservation Committee held in Washington since the time of Theodore Roosevelt was held in 1968 and one of the things discussed there was Mort Hornacher's study on the mountain lion, and I was wondering if there was any significance to the fact that it was held in Washington at this particular time or did it just happen?

JR: No. I think it was just happenstance. I've forgotten the club we met in but we had a very nice lunch and this was discussed at great length.

GB: Now I'd like to get back one moment to the grizzly bear. Can you give just a little insight as to why the grizzly bear has a much more difficult time than some of the other species of bear in coexisting with the human population?

JR: Yes, they just don't react well to man. They need a large area to roam over. They're considered to be territorial and they're pretty unruly animals. They're delightful animals really, and I enjoy hunting them but they just don't react well to human pressure. I think this is true probably about a number of species, but the grizzly is the most prominent of those, I think.

GB: And you feel that their habitat is diminishing very quickly?

JR: No question about it. This may be a lost species to us. We're going to lose some species of these animals and we have to do the best we can to preserve some, I hate to say, in zoos but this may be the final result because of the human population being what it is and increasing like it is, these animals simply don't react well and they die off. Their breeding range is considerably less.

GB: Okay, now. Do you remember anything about the predator/prey study by Victor Cowley?

JR: Only that it was made. I think that Dick Bordman can answer that better than I can. It was just before my time.

GB: Okay. I know that this committee was started well before your time, in the 1930s, but the American Committee for International Wildlife Protection, and the man most involved in it representing the club was Harold Coolidge. Can you relate some of the activities of this committee?

JR: Well, I think this was a result of Charles Frick's interest in the international aspects of (unintelligible) and he pushed it quite a bit as I understand it. Harold Coolidge at that point, or shortly thereafter, was involved in the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, so it came naturally to him to run that committee. The Club itself didn't do very much with it except getting a final report at the annual meeting every year from Hal Coolidge on the activities. A number of Club members were involved with it; I was, as were some of the other people, but the activities were really through Hal Coolidge, and later Lee Talbot and through IUCN.

GB: This just brings me to one question, kind of an aside. The Boone and Crockett Club was and always has been mainly interested in the protection and conservation of North American big game, but it has shown interest and gotten involved in some international conservation projects, right?

JR: Only peripherally. Only to a limited degree. Theodore Roosevelt had a major problem when this club was organized in conservation of all of our natural resources. There was ample for the club to do to concentrate on North America, and primarily the US, because there are political overtones to this sort of thing. So the club has stayed primarily with US and Canada, to a slight degree with Mexico, in conservation of the species.

GB: The next question I'd like to ask you a little about is the Francis Colby Room at the Boston Museum of Science. Why was it established, how much was the club involved, and what was the significance of it?

JR: Well, Francis Colby was a member of the club and a very dedicated member. I have to say that



what I'm going to tell you now is hearsay—as opposed to firsthand information—although other members of the club can give you answers to this, Bob Ely and Dick Borden. Now when he [Colby] died, under the terms of his will, his hunting cabin was moved to the Boston Museum. That cabin was not given to the club but the club was, according to the terms of the will allowed to use this room or this lodge for anything it so desired. Another stipulation was that he had a magnificent gun collection and any member of the club can, simply by signing his name, go and borrow any gun in the collection, use it and return it to the club. As far as I know we've never had a meeting there although we tried to at one point—and it just didn't work out—when we had the Executive Committee meeting in Boston some years ago.

GB: Getting back to another very important conservation program that the club was involved in, the Rampart Dam Study. I just would like to know the whole aspect of what you know about it.

JR: Well, I'm not the best one to answer the question. Pink Gutermuth is because, through his association with the Wildlife Management Institute, he was the one that was most involved. It was a gigantic boondoggle and would have destroyed enormous recruitment areas for wildlife. The Club became interested as a result of Pink's reporting the problem. Some money was allocated to hire Dr. Spur to do a study, which he did. Use of the study was very effective in at least partially stopping, assisting to stop, the construction of the Rampart Dam. There was a fantastic amount of land to be taken and the water isn't that badly needed. The destruction of the habitat area would have been just disastrous to wildlife.

GB: Well, I understand that it was supposed to be built in the permafrost area which would have meant that it would be frozen almost year round.

JR: That's right. Yes, that's one of the technical things that Pink can answer better than I.

GB: Okay. There's an interesting thing that is just slightly referred to in the Minutes but there is no specific result listed in the minutes on it and then the suit that was filed against the Boone and Crockett Club and you personally, I believe, by Sam Pencotta and Bob Householder. I was wondering if you could relate this situation. (laughs)

JR: Yes. (laughs) I hope this doesn't go anywhere other than on this tape because I don't want to be sued again. But there was a question of jaguar, and we had set a limit on the southern tip of Mexico for jaguar to be entered in the North American Big Game book. Sam Pencotta, with Bob Householder as guide, went down and got two jaguars. They were tremendously big animals. There was some question in our minds, and as a matter of fact we knew they didn't come from the area which they were reported to have come from. So we refused to accept them in the Book. As a result of which Mr. Pencotta decided he would sue the club and force them to accept the animals. Well, he was beaten in court, with prejudice as a matter of fact, and it was a very ugly sort of thing with all sorts of vitriolic telephone calls and one thing and another to Dr. Rustin, who was then chairman of the Big Game Committee and myself. We did not, however, give in to these demands. As I said, [we] beat him in court, with prejudice.

GB: Don't you think that this type of thing—and this is the only reason I brought it up—shows the care with which the club has always tried to screen the trophies that are entered into the North American Big Game Records Book?

JR: As you know, the first ten in the listings are screened by a panel of judges and there's no question that they're correct. Measurers do make mistakes. Some measurers, I'm sure, have tapes that stretch a little longer than others. But basically, I feel that our records are pristine pure, absolutely pristine pure. There may be a few mistakes, and with this many entries in a book there would be. Basically, I think we have done a superb job of keeping these records accurate.

GB: Going to a different subject now, has the Boone and Crockett Club ever taken a stand on firearms regulations? I know in '59 there was a committee formed to study regulations but I don't know what was ever done with that study and whether then the club took a stand on this issue.

JR: Well, the National Rifle Association is the one who started this battle and our stand has been that we're absolutely in accord with the principles taken by the National Rifle Association. We have not ever come out and fought this thing in public. I don't think this Club has ever fought any issue in public as a club. We've had some influence on a number of important issues but the club itself has never taken such a stand.

GB: Now, sometime in the early '70s there was a Club newsletter that was going to be done by Mr. Ed Zern and it's referred to in the minutes, but then nothing seemingly was ever done about it. Can you tell us about this?

JR: (laughs) It's discussed at a meeting and everybody waxes very proficient [sic] and enthusiastic about things and they just don't get done. This would have been quite a chore and it just wasn't done.

GB: Just as a side comment, since the club has taken on a much more national scope than when it was originally founded and kept very much on the East Coast, don't you think possibly maybe a quarterly newsletter might keep Club members more closely knit maybe?

JR: Well, when you say "scope" I'm not sure that the club has taken a broader scope. The scope's always been the same. The membership *is* geographically spread.

GB: I'm sorry. That's what I meant.

JR: Yes, I agree with you, if you can find somebody to do it, because the club is not a wealthy club and can't afford to hire somebody to write this thing. Besides, it would be an outside person anyway even if you hired one. But if this could be done it would certainly be very worthwhile.

GB: In '68 I believe you wrote this, "A Position Paper on the Administrative and Budgetary Matters

Relating to the club Operation." Can you relate the reasons behind it?

JR: (laughs) Yes, I can. I also got into all sorts of trouble because we set up an administrative guidance committee in Pittsburgh to try to coordinate some of the club activities. Unfortunately, personalities got involved in the thing and it worked out very badly. It just died a natural death. And there is no administrative guidance committee and since we are not any longer in Pittsburgh, I doubt that we need one now at all.

GB: That was going to be my next question. Do you think that this original idea and committee has any relationship with the present office arrangements?

JR: Oh, it probably made us realize that we had to have some sort of a central office with hired personnel. Originally, when I first came into the club, it was handled through the President's Office where ever he happened to be. Bob Ferguson did a very, very fine job with his own secretary, (Helen Becker I believe her name was) and for years he actually ran all the administration of the club, including assisting the Secretary and getting his reports out and the Treasurer and so forth. And now I think we were on the right track. We may be spending more money than the club has but at least our records are in better shape than they ever have been.

GB: At one of the annual meetings, the Sagamore Hill Committee was formed and I'd like you to give me a little bit about the background, the reasons for its formation, and then finally explain a little bit about the gun room that is the property of the Boone and Crockett Club.

JR: (laughs) The Sagamore Hill Committee must be differentiated from the Sagamore Medal, which has nothing to do with it. As you know Sagamore Hill, Theodore Roosevelt's home on Long Island was given to the club. But the club couldn't afford it, frankly, so it was given thereby, to the National Park Service and made a national monument. They maintain it and so forth, which is all to the good. The gun room, however, was retained by the Boone and Crockett Club as its "headquarters". It actually has never been the headquarters except in theory although we've had several meetings there. The Executive Committee used to meet there every other year. Now it's less often. It was difficult to get to and there were poor accommodations for people and so forth. It necessitates using the Piping Rock Club and Clay Frick's house and everything else to entertain the people although I'm sure Clay enjoys having the group out. But the idea was that we'd go to Theodore Roosevelt's grave every other year and have a little ceremony. I well recall the first one I went to. I believe Al Hoyt was President then and [he gave] the shortest message I believe I've ever heard said at the grave. He just got up and said, "To our founder." That was all. The remainder tried at least to have some little prayer or some little something to say in reference to Old T.R.

The gun room itself houses a collection of Theodore Roosevelt's guns and the Sagamore Hill Committee's major function really was keeping those guns clean, keeping them in order and keeping that room in order, which they did. Several members were instrumental in conditioning and keeping this room in order though it is deteriorating fairly rapidly.

GB: Okay. Now I'd like to get into an area that I think you, better than any other person, has the finite details on. The Club at one point decided that they could no longer keep up the North American Big Game Competition and the records keeping as they would like to and it was decided that they would cosponsor it with NRA. What I'd like to ask you is how did—

JR: —this thing come about? I think I can give you most of the details. It all started with a conversation between Bob Ferguson and myself. It was readily apparent to all of us that the club could no longer afford to keep up this increasingly expensive operation in North American big game awards committee and awards competition. Medals are expensive, the record keeping is expensive, judges, the whole schmeer, and the fact that we lost Dick Mellon and his very substantial cash contributions to the club. Therefore something had to be done. We either had to go and solicit our membership, which we'd never done, for funds or get some fat cat in who could give us money. Nobody seemed to want to do that. Bob and I discussed this in great detail and without prior approval by the club at all. (I was on the Board of Directors of NRA.) I presented this to the Hunting and Conservation Committee for their consideration. They thought it was a good idea. I did not in any way commit the club. I said it was something we should look into. The Hunting and Conservation Committee of the NRA thought it was a great idea; so did I. So we took it a step further by bringing it up at the Executive Committee of the Boone and Crockett Club and at that meeting Jack Parker, [who] was then head of the Big Game Committee, suggested that we handle this very carefully and write up some sort of a paper to present to the whole organization.

I said, "Well, we have to go back to the full Board of NRA to get their approval and let's try to get an approval in principle." I was given the authority to negotiate with them in principle, not in detail. They accepted this idea and at that point I believe Jack Parker wrote most of the paper which he signed at an inauguration of this combine. I was in Africa at the time so I didn't attend the meeting. But Bob Ferguson and Jack were at least instrumental and I believe they alone represented the club. There may have been more Club members there. I don't remember. But this was signed twelve years ago or so. You can look this up.

As a result the NRA hired very fortunately for us, Harold Nesbitt. He's done a superb job in maintaining these records the idea being that the club would be the final authority, the NRA would do the administering and we'd share the responsibilities and such glory as what we can get from it. The first year I know it was costly to the NRA. Since then, I think—and particularly since we've given them the Book, out of which they'll make some money—this will probably equate financially fairly close. I think it's a good thing for both organizations. Boone and Crockett has official measurers all over the country and NRA has few representatives that cover most of the country. The coordination, therefore, between these two types of people is good. I think, in the final analysis, it's good for both. NRA has about 85 percent of its membership that are interested in hunting and conservation more so than paper-punching...Pardon me a moment while I interject. I think my memory's come back a little. I think this agreement was signed in '73 and Harold came on shortly thereafter. I had something to do with hiring him because I was on the Hunting and Conservation Committee of the NRA. You were asking me a while ago if my election for the second time as president of the club had anything to do with this operation. It did not. I could just as well

have functioned not being a president or having any official capacity because I had the authority from the Executive Committee.

I think this is the smartest move we made in a long time simply because of the details that have to be handled and the amount of money it cost. NRA is a fairly wealthy organization and this gave me many Brownie points for the thing through the hunting population of the world, of this country certainly.

If you have any other specific questions to ask, I think I told you about this thing, the origin and results so far.

GB: Okay. I do have one question, maybe a little sensitive and you may rather not answer it but there were obviously some members for this and there were some against it and if you remember who was for and who was against and why, it might be very interesting.

JR: There were lots of them [who] were against it but I can tell you that of those that were against it, none had a solution that was workable. If they had come up with a solution that could have solved our monetary problems that would have been one thing. But they were against it because they "didn't like NRA" or because they thought NRA was too much "pro-gun" and therefore our reputation would suffer a bit by being associated with them. I don't agree with that at all. But we didn't consider any other solution because there appeared to be none. Does that answer it?

GB: Do you remember who the exact negotiating parties on the NRA side were?

JR: Max Rich and Chuck Morrow primarily. Pink was president of the NRA at that point, so obviously he had a hand in it too.

GB: I have gotten an opinion from him on the subject and he said that he was very much for this idea too, although he said that his interest is primarily conservation. He thought this particular thing was very good. Do you think that NRA is aware how much this program has helped their image?

JR: If you mean the directorate of NRA, no, I don't think they do. The Board of Directors is made up primarily, actually, of target shooters. They're only interested in target shooting, and they're not interested in conservation and hunting aspects—except for the fact that a survey was made of the interests of the total membership of NRA some four years ago and it was very clear that the major interest lay in hunting and conservation as opposed to target shooting. Therefore some of these people had been forced to realize the importance of—or to give lip service at least—to the importance of the conservation ethic. Unfortunately, I don't think that the powers that be at NRA are as interested as they should be, nor do I think they realize, the importance of this to the image of NRA.

GB: Okay. Thank you. Now going a little bit into a completely different subject, I'd like to ask you

some questions on the original purposes and also the future of the Boone and Crockett Club. Since you are one of the very active members right now, you will probably have a very active interest in the future, more so than a lot of the older members who feel that their active time is past. What do you feel were the original true purposes that the club was formed for?

JR: You just want what the club was originally organized for? Obviously I wasn't alive at that time but my interpretation of what the club's organizational basis was is this: they were a group of men, all explorers, all adventurers and all hunters, who got together, I think about fifty-fifty, to tell stories and relate and recount their experiences in the hunting field and down the wild rivers as well as the realization that if something wasn't done about our natural resources we wouldn't have any in terms of trees, forests, wildlife and so forth. The wildlife was the major interest so this is why they got together. After getting together, it seems to me from reading only, that they got more involved in the protectionist aspect of the wild rivers, the wild areas and the wildlife. Of course, you've got to protect habitat if you're going to protect wildlife. So protection of habitat came as a result of wanting to conserve the wild creatures of this country. So I think it's about fifty-fifty -- about half social bull session type things and the other half the realization of the need for stern, far-reaching, far-thinking conservation measures.

GB: From the very beginning most of the club members had held high-ranking positions in other conservation organizations also, so that at any given Boone and Crockett Club meeting, even to this day, many other organizations are represented. Do you feel that this is an important factor in the strength and effectiveness of the club?

JR: Today it's very critical. The Boone and Crockett has always operated with an aura of mystery. Nobody really knew who the members were. It was very difficult to get into the club: you had to know somebody, be proposed and seconded and have two endorsements and so forth. So the mystery aspect of the club made it operate as a "forum" group: decisions were made as to what to support in the various meetings. Individually people we would go to the other organizations that were more, perhaps, in the public eye and who took affirmative stands or negative stands on any given issue and by doing so the influence came back to the people who make decisions, primarily Federal people in high position. The results would usually prove the attitude of the Boone and Crockett. Some member of the Boone and Crockett Club would make sure that the powers that be knew, that this was a stand that this mysterious organization called Boone and Crockett Club took. As a result, I think it was actually vital that people from a variety of conservation-oriented organizations were members of the Boone and Crockett Club.

GB: Do you feel that the Conservation Committee today is as active and effective as in past years?

JR: That's a good question to ask me. You ask me if the Boone and Crockett is doing a good job and I say, "You bet." (laughs)

GB: (laughs) No, that's not quite what I was asking. I meant, the issues, are they as great as--

JR: Absolutely. In getting decisions, however, with our tremendous increase in population, the Eastern establishment no longer controls the power that it did and there are states involved that were nonexistent even when T.R. set up some of these things. The issues are great. Getting it across, getting the idea of conservation across, is more and more difficult. I think we are fairly effective still, not as effective as we were. We don't have a president of the club who is the President of the United States, either. But we do have some people of considerable power that we can influence pro-conservation and I think that's being done and done well. We do need contacts in Washington and that sort of thing has to continue if we're to maintain a position of influence in this whole area of conservation. We, I think, have done a good job. I don't think you could say that we can establish another Mountain Stanley Park or Game Range or National Bison Range either. But within our capabilities and considering the increase in population and the difficulty of getting things through state legislatures as well as influencing some of the bureaucrats in Washington, we're doing as well as we can under the circumstances. Yes.

GB: You may already have answered this, but are there any areas of conservation that the club should become more active in at the present time in your opinion?

JR: The Club has embarked, in the last three years, on conferences, a good example of which was the Wild Sheep Conference. This has had quite an effect on management because the people who are actual managers in the areas involved were invited to meet, and as you know, our publications do go overseas and have, I think, been used as a textbook in several wildlife management courses. This is the sort of thing I think that is vital for the club to do and will influence the management aspects of the conservation ethic tremendously. As a matter of fact, the current conference that were setting up to be held next month has been run by Harold Stokes who we hired to do it, and it's on the black bear. I think the management ideas that will come from this will be very far-reaching in the management of this very important wildlife species. So yes, I think that this is the sort of thing that the club can be most influential in doing. We should continue, if we can get the proper species and the proper people at the conference.

GB: Incidentally, that conference started today.

JR: It did.

GB: The 17th through the 19th of February.

JR: I didn't go; I believe our secretary's going to make the opening address, John Hanes.

GB: All right. Should Boone and Crockett be involved in trophy hunting in today's conservation-minded world?

JR: Well, actually I think so, or I would have resigned from the club or argued more the other way. Yes, I think so. The major argument against this was, I believe, the "slob" hunter and the guy who was climbing a social ladder: to get his name in the Book would have meant more than the ethics

of hunting. This is not as widespread as people would let you believe. There are mistakes made and there are illegal things done. But I think this is in the minimum and I don't want to get into the idea of discussing the gene pool or whether or not taking the measure of big heads reduces the recruitment rate or reduces the size of the upcoming youngsters. I don't think, however, that this is bad and again, if we let it go, somebody else would take it up who had less of an interest [and] less of a purist interest than we do. So I think we should continue just what we're doing.

GB: You've gotten a little bit into the records keeping program here. Do you feel that it can be used as a conservation tool, being done as correctly and carefully as it is now?

JR: It probably can be helpful in terms of area. If you continue to get magnificent trophies out of one area, then some investigation should be made as to why. Obviously the calcium, the horn-growing species. The horn-growing assistance from certain soil, certain minerals, is important. Can that be transmitted or translated to another area or can you add a little bit to an area in order to get better growth? As far as its use in conservation only to the degree that you examine more closely an area that continues to produce record class trophies. The fact is that we are still getting a lot of record class trophies now in the big game competition and they continue to get even better. There was at least one world record at the last awards competition in Atlanta so I don't see any diminishing of the numbers of records. I don't know what the current number of entries are, but they're tremendous. So I don't see that this aspect is hurting things as far as the scientific value of it. There's some doubt as to how much scientific value there is, although Phil Wright will argue with me and say there is a tremendous amount. Lee Talbot says there isn't. So there's an area for argument there but the idea of utilizing these records as research material is first class: as a conservation aspect only to the degree of the study of the habitat that produces the great heads.

GB: The records keeping has been one of the singular things that has made the Boone and Crockett Club famous. Do you feel that there's anything that could take its place as a unique function of the club in order to keep the club a unique organization?

JR: No, I doubt it. I think the fact that we are keeping records has kept us in the public eye of the hunter because of the Book and so I think the Book itself is a very worthwhile thing and the fact that it has a social significance is not as important as I think some people attribute to it.

GB: Can you elaborate a little bit about the role of the hunter in conservation?

JR: Certainly. There would be no wildlife to speak of if it weren't for the hunter. That's why all the money for conservation is coming. The State Fish and Game departments were organized and operated on funds provided by the hunter. These protectionists who scream and cry about the "Bambi complex" with which they seem to be affected, don't put up any money. It's money that counts. If these departments are allowed to lessen or reduce, then the conservation work is reduced and therefore your game will reduce and pretty soon you don't have any game species at all. There are a lot more white-tail deer here now than there were back in the days of Daniel



Boone and that's true of the antelope – antelope almost faded out at one point.

GB: This is a little bit what I was getting at. Do you feel honestly that if it wasn't for the foresight of some of the great hunters in the early days who had the occasion to get out and see the habitat, or the lack of it, or the encroachment on it, and also the decreasing numbers of game, if it wasn't for their foresight that we would have very little game left in this country?

JR: Absolutely true. There would be a few species but those species live contiguous to man easier than some of the others. The antelope was a good example. They were almost wiped out by the marks (?) hunters.

GB: And the bison.

JR: The bison was quite a different matter. Right or wrong, we felt we had to quell the red man, and he lived on bison. The bison herds were destroyed and he needed to eat and therefore he would come to terms much easier. Rather than killing people, they killed buffalo -- they killed the bison. So that's not really a fair example of what happens to a species although they were considerably diminished by hide hunters and the so-called sportsmen who just tried to get the big numbers in one day, for instance. So without the hunter, the game species would not be anywhere close to what it is now. That includes rabbit, it includes squirrel -- probably rabbit hunters are the most prevalent of all hunters.

GB: In November 1948, a special committee was appointed to study the problem of strengthening the club to its full membership again. Now (and this is a completely different situation) but again 30 years later, the club seems to have the same problem of needing to strengthen the membership. What do you think could be done to attract new members of the right quality?

JR: There's no problem at all. It's purely a matter of putting up capable people and having the club accept them. The Club apparently is not willing to accept any mass influx of membership and we are at 76 or 78 now. That's only 20-odd less than we're allowed anyway, so I think there's no problem at all. We can get all the members we want. So I don't think there's any problem at all with it. I think we should increase our membership every year till we get back up to 96 to 98 and always keep one or two out for special occasions.

GB: Well, the history of the club has shown that during most of the history of the club, they have tried to keep the membership up to its full strength.

JR: Not to its full strength. I don't buy that. Ninety-eight, ninety-nine, ninety-seven, yes. But there always should be kept at least a couple or maybe three memberships for special occasions.

GB: How can the club best continue to carry out its original purposes and retain its position of influence and prominence in this day and age?

JR: I think I've already answered this once in a question prior to this. The Club is doing very well like it is. I think our move toward having these conferences on individual species is a very good one and we should continue. In conclusion to all this, let me just sum up a little bit by saying that there have been a number of committees that have looked to some degree at future purposes, at the direction of this Club, where we're going. And also realize that the basic character of the club has to change to some degree with the changing times, with increasing population, with the political structures and so forth and with the political parties involved an especially so since we're dealing with a subject of national consequence and state consequence as well. There are fifty states now so we have to look at these things as we progress and sometimes we argue with ourselves about progression. However, the club itself, I think, is doing well. I think it's accepting and rolling with the punches as times change.

The Future Directions Committee, for instance, never reported per se as a committee. However, a number of discussions were held about where the club was going. I think these individual species conferences probably were a result of the talks held by this committee and by other people who happened to be involved at a meeting of some other committee. So these committees never operate really independently anyway. It's always in conjunction with another meeting -- an executive committee meeting or a rump session of some kind, so these things sort of evolve from general discussions in the Executive Committee for action. I firmly believe the club is on the right track, doing well, and I think it's here to stay.

GB: Thank you very much.

[End of Interview]