

**Boone and Crockett Oral History Project**

**OH 297-53**

**Interviewee: Arthur Popham**

**Interviewer: Dan Hall**

**December 2, 1994**

Dan Hall: This is December 2, 1994. This is Dan Hall. We're conducting an oral history interview with Arthur Popham. This morning we're in Houston, Texas. I'd like to begin the interview by asking you when and where were you born?

Arthur Popham: Louisville, Kentucky, March 31, 1915.

DH: And when and where did you get your education?

AP: Oh, I went to about six colleges before I got through. Do you want the whole thing? I started at New Mexico Military Institute the first year of college, and the University of Kansas City the year it was just opening. I'd gotten a taste of the desert when I was in New Mexico and liked it so went out to the University of Arizona as a junior. Got my first year of law there, knew I'd be practicing with my father [in] Kansas City so I went to University of Missouri at Columbia. Got my law degree there. I was at University of Colorado meanwhile and that went on and on.

DH: Can you give me just a brief rundown of your career?

AP: Well, I practiced law since 1939 in Kansas City in the Popham law firm founded by my father. That's about it.

DH: Who sponsored your membership into the Boone and Crockett?

AP: Milford Baker. He was an advertising executive in New York. Wonderful gentleman. I've known him from Camp Fire Club in Chappaqua.

DH: How did you feel when you were asked to join the Club?

AP: Very flattered.

DH: Have you sponsored other people to join the organization?

AP: I just sponsored several people. Just now, Richard Hale. He's a dentist from Ottawa, Kansas 50 miles south of Kansas City. He is a very keen hunter and keen conservationist, a fine young man. I also sponsored Erwin Wilson, son of "Engine" Charlie Wilson of General Motors, a good man. I sponsored Bill Ruger, a gunmaker. He's a genius, and a wonderful man. We hunted in Iran together and had a good time.

DH: How well do you know Bill?

AP: Pretty well. I mean from that trip and other associations.

DH: Can you tell me a little bit about that trip you took with Bill?

AP: We hunted from one end of Iran to the other. We hunted the Armenian sheep over Lake Reza now they call it, over near the western border, and went clear over to the other side of Iran near Russia, hunted the Ural (sheep) and ibex and came back and hunted in the Charlotte Preserve not far from Teheran and got red sheep there. I don't know how much of this you want but I had an interesting assignment in it. A member from Chicago (I can't recall his name right now), he's a fine biologist [and] doctor and he's done a lot of collecting, scientific study in the Russia area. He wanted to confirm that the red sheep is a cross between the Ural and the Armenian sheep. It's in the center of the country between them. So we had mutual friends at the University of Kansas biology department, and I got all outfitted with vials and alcohol and knives and stuff to collect tissue specimens of sheep and I was able to get them in each of the three areas. It wasn't very easy (laughing). When you get a sheep down there, you have native people with you and they immediately gather a lot of dry brush and build a big crackling fire and eviscerate the sheep and throw the viscera on the fire and when it gets good and brown, they eat it. It's quite a treat for them, apparently, or ritual or something. Anyway there would always be the ashes and dirt flying around and I was trying to get these tissue samples [laughter] but it worked. I got them back and they compared the chromosomes and found that the red sheep was a true integrate between (I think) 54 chromosome count on one side and 58 on the other and it was 56. Red sheep is 56. Something like that.

DH: Is it fairly common for Boone and Crockett members who are hunting abroad to collect tissue samples for biologists?

AP: Well, no, it isn't. It's pretty difficult to do under the circumstances and it's not ordinarily done.

DH: Who was the biologist?

AP: In Chicago? I'm trying to think of it. He's a Boone and Crockett Club member.

DH: Elmer Rustin?

AP: No. He is from Minneapolis. I'll think of it eventually.

DH: How was Bill Ruger to hunt with?

AP: He's had a good deal of physical impairment in later years and I think he was having a little trouble with his leg then, but he got around very well. I watched one long stalk he made on Ural (sheep) and it was fun to watch from a good vantage point we had. They worked it out and got

around them. We signaled the way the sheep had moved and he made a good shot; got his ram.

DH: Did you know Bob Ferguson?

AP: Yeah; I did. Spent many a happy time at his apartment there. It's near the Metropolitan Museum. He was a fine gentleman.

DH: How would you characterize his presidency of the organization?

AP: He was a great contributor, a great asset to the Club. He organized a lot of good things.

DH: The meetings that were held in his apartment, were those regular meetings of the Club or was this --?

AP: No, they were usually prior to the other meetings. They talked things out and had things pretty well lined up by the time the meetings came around.

DH: Who would attend these sessions at Bob's apartment?

AP: Oh, Jack Parker and Bob Waters. They were great friends with Ferguson. Ferguson and Waters were great friends. He was from Pennsylvania, I think maybe Pittsburgh.

DH: Why would they have these get-togethers at Bob's apartment?

AP: Well, Bob would have a nice little party and have everybody. He was just a very generous man. Wonderful person who liked to be with everybody and we had great times together. Of course they helped to work things out in advance. Dick Mellon, of course, was a great contributor. He was a mainstay of the Club for a long time, I think, financially [chuckles]. Lovely gentleman. He and Bob Waters went on a trip to collect stone sheep which they got. They have an exhibit in the American Museum with sheep they got. Bob Waters (chuckling) had a little kidney problem for awhile and they called him "Running Waters". (Laughter)

DH: I would like to talk some more about some of the past presidents of the organization that you've known and your general impressions of these men. Bill Spencer. What did you think of Bill as a president?

AP: I think he was very effective, certainly. He could do anything he wants to do...conducting meetings and all that. He's a tremendously able man, wonderful guy.

DH: Jack Parker?

AP: Jack's certainly able too, good heavens. They know how to run things and do it well. Jack cuts right through all the fol-de-rol. [Chuckle]

DH: What about Dr. Red Duke?

AP: Duke's an interesting character. I think he ran things pretty well. Quite a personage. He'd done a lot of good things.

DH: What kind of person does it take to run the Boone and Crockett?

AP: The person who can be direct, I would say, know the ground he's on, ram things through if you need to. Incidentally, you may have heard Dick Mellon, Gen. Richard K. Mellon say he'd rather be president of the Boone and Crockett Club than president of the United States. He loved the Club. Wonderful people.

DH: When did he say that?

AP: Oh, years ago. I don't know. I don't know whom he said it to but it was reliably reported I think. [Chuckle]

DH: Do you think that the meetings of Boone and Crockett holds generally are very productive?

AP: Yeah, I think so. Our Records Committee, that's been my sphere mostly. We have a lot of nitpicking we have to do and little niggling things we have to work out but if they're not done, why, you lose the credibility of the program. That's a meeting that I attend principally, and the regular meetings are generally an outgrowth of the committee meetings. We have a lot of competent people. Sherman Gray is a wonderful man - he was a kind of a perennial secretary of the Club [and] ran things in that area very well.

DH: Has the general aim of the Records Committee changed since you've been associated with the Committee?

AP: Not basically. It's what the public knows the Club for ever since it started out as record keeping. To me it's always been important in a conservation way because if you promote the taking of the older animals that are over their breeding prime, you preserve the good breeding stock. I think the value of that was -- that was put into question at one time -- Douglas Burton, who had been a great game hunter, became more conservation oriented, I think, as time went on. He challenged the Club pretty much on that, I think, and I did a good deal of research, biological studies and things, that I became well convinced that it was true. It does serve that function, and I think that's the primary importance of the record keeping as far as conservation goes. Of course, it's a source for hunters and all that but it's valuable, I think. The publication of the books was a financial mainstay of the Club for many years. It's still a large contributing factor, I think. The whole Club better keep in mind, I think.

DH: How did others in the organization react to these concerns?

AP: How did they accept it?

DH: Yes.

AP: Well, there was a schism there for awhile in the Club and I was quite concerned about how it was going to go. It's like the tree lovers, the tree huggers, who were going to take control. But I think that got turned away and spoke out pretty directly with Mr. Berglund [?] at a meeting I said to challenge the whole thing. I think it had some effect.

DH: Who was the president at that time?

AP: I couldn't tell you right now. It was maybe 17 years ago - something like that, if that long.

DH: Can you tell me anything about the Boone and Crockett's activities with regards to the Rampart Dam in Alaska?

AP: No, I remember we had some meetings opposing it rather vigorously. Bob Ferguson was greatly opposed to it. I remember one meeting we had at his old home on Long Island. They were sending telegrams and things I know at that time. They were quite excited about this for awhile.

DH: Did you send any telegrams or write any letters on it?

AP: I don't think I did personally, no. I think I was in on the composition of a telegram or something.

DH: Is it proper for the Boone and Crockett to get involved in activities like Rampart Dam?

AP: I think so. It affects the environment very greatly. Habitat. That's what it's all about, I think, as far as we're concerned.

DH: What about the Boone and Crockett moving in the political arena to accomplish conservation means? Is that an appropriate action?

AP: Oh, I think we should not get too deeply involved in that personally. There are always gray areas, I wouldn't want to be too positive about things.

DH: Has the Boone and Crockett always been engaged in funding wildlife research?

AP: Yes, we've always had grants, studies, students, things like that. That's a basic part of our work.

DH: Are there any wildlife studies that are particularly memorable to you?

AP: I know we worked a lot with the Craigs [Craigheads?] on banding, putting radio telemeters on various animals. Mountain lions and things of that kind. We had one study, I think, that people thought was a little amiss [chuckle], about the red wolf of Texas or something like that. It was more of a red herring (laughter) I think than a red wolf.

DH: It's been mentioned that the Boone and Crockett is losing their ties to New York and the East Coast. Do you think that's true?

AP: They're certainly being supplanted in some areas, sure. It was more or less of an elite Eastern group when I got into it, for some reason, from Kansas City. We've had a lot more members out in the western area.

DH: Were the annual meetings always held in New York?

AP: Yeah, for many years, [it was] standard procedure. They had some at the Carnegie Museum, I think, when we sort of moved over there from the American Museum. Dr. Revnetting[?] there was very helpful to us, set up our whole office and everything there. The Carnegie is a nice institution.

DH: How did you feel about being associated with the Carnegie?

AP: I enjoyed it very much. I loved to go to Pittsburgh. They've rejuvenated the city so wonderfully, they've rebuilt it and made a lovely thing out of it. I had a nephew who had attended Pitt University there and was in on some of the planning sessions up on the huge room they had up on top of the structure there. It was very interesting. That wasn't Carnegie, that was Pitt, I think.

DH: How many meetings would you attend on a yearly basis for the Boone and Crockett?

AP: When we had the meetings in the East there we had the pilgrimage to T.R.'s grave every other year, that was nice. Then we'd go out on Long Island to the old home out there and have lunch on the porch, which was delightful and look at the gun room and I enjoyed all that very, very much. I would go to probably two or three meetings a year.

DH: Do you think that was an adequate number of meetings?

AP: I think so.

DH: Can you tell me more about the meetings at the Roosevelt place?

AP: Well, we were the only group that had access on any group basis. Sherm (Sherman) Gray always ran it out there I think. We would have lunches catered there and eat on the porch, look out over there. I remember Archie Roosevelt used to tell us, as a child there, he shot crows (from) out of the window up in the attic. He was such a wonderful gentleman. I just loved him. Wonderful man. We had meetings there indoors too in the rooms. Sherm Gray took charge of the gun room and ran that.

DH: What was in the gun room?

AP: Teddy's (T.R.'s) guns there were preserved in the room. Some have been stolen since -- it's been a problem out there. They had some old bear hides and a few things like that up there -- his memorabilia. And we met numerous times at the family home in New York, Gramercy Park,

I don't know the address. Do you know about that?

DH: No, I don't.

AP: Oh, well, it's a National Park operated thing. It's about a four-story town house that was the Roosevelt home. That's where Teddy's first wife died about the same time, his mother did. It's nationally maintained now, restored and lovely, and up on the top floor is a big ballroom with a stage and that's where they had the impersonator, of Teddy. He did a wonderful job telling how he (T.R.) lived in that house. That's what made it so pleasant up there - it was like his house he was talking about. It was just great. We had very nice functions up there, real good.

DH: Is that an annual event?

AP: Yes, they had the annual meeting there for a number of years. I think they still can, and they would have the ladies nights, when the ladies came, (and have) dinner parties up on the top floor up there. We've had many meetings in the house there, on various floors on various committees. Worked very well. Hope we get back there.

DH: Does that help members to associate the organization with the Roosevelt family by having these meetings there?

AP: Oh, definitely. It was very, very effective. Very impressive. Good thing. I hope they keep it going. I don't think we ought to lose our Eastern Roosevelt connection too easily.

DH: You mentioned Sherm Gray and his role in these meetings. Tell me a little bit about what Sherman would do for these annual meetings at the Roosevelt place.

AP: He would plan the meals and work through the Park Department people there to ensure that we were well received and I think Bobby (Mrs Gray?) would plan the flowers for the tables which were very nice. They just managed that beautifully for everybody. I'm very, very fond of Sherm and Bobby. They've shot with us in England numerous times. We'd organize a group to go over there and we'd have a real good time.

DH: Have you had an opportunity to hunt with very many members of the Boone and Crockett?

AP: Well, Jack Parker quite a bit. Scotland, we've shot up there. Ray [inaudible] I can't think of who else right now on all of the shoots. Well, Charlie and June Gates go with us to England every year. Charlie's company at a great many of the meetings, I think. He's a marvelous man, a tremendous business organizer, in a very quiet way. His wife June shoots too. A delightful person.

All these people, Jesus, they're just so wonderful. I just love them to death. When I come into a meeting and walk into a room, I just feel like putting my arms around everybody! (laughter)

DH: How did you feel about the organization's decision to move their headquarters West?

AP: Well, I think now that we have much more Western element in the membership, I think it ought to be more centrally located. I think Denver's a very good location for all the activity. I mean for meetings and things like that. Montana, I think, is a beautiful place and all that, but for meetings it's quite an imposition on people to get in there. The airfare is very expensive out that way. But it's fun to go to the ranch.

DH: What do you think about the purchase of the ranch?

AP: I think it's a good thing. I can't contribute financially much to such a thing, but it's a good demonstration. It was a good Centennial project. I think, it was well-managed and I think it will be. Certainly the connection with the University is valuable for both the University and the Club. It's a tremendous expense. You just wonder what else could have been done with that money, but if the powers that be can carry it off, that's fine.

DH: Did you play any role in either the purchase of the ranch or the decision to relocate to Missoula?

AP: Not really.

DH: What was your opinion of the headquarters in Dumfries?

AP: I never visited it there. I don't know. You mean what did I think of that office? I don't know. Things were very well run from there, I thought.

DH: What did you think about the national collection of heads and horns being moved to Cody, Wyoming?

AP: Well, I think that's a good thing. I think the museum at Cody's a wonderful place and love to be there. I think that's a fine connection; it's a good thing.

You mentioned people to hunt with, Walter White, we've hunted with a lot. Dr. Robert Robell, from Kansas State University, I got him into the Club. He's an internationally famous game biologist who runs a lot of shoots up in Scotland for people. I've been up there a lot with him, hunted a lot with Bob.

DH: Is that bird hunting in Scotland?

AP: Yeah. Grouse up there.

DH: How long have you known Walter White?

AP: Oh, gee. Fifteen years or more, I think. Whenever he came to the Club.

DH: Has he been a positive influence on the organization?

AP: Oh, yeah. He's very stable.



Side B

DH: What's your opinion of the Boone and Crockett's Fair Chase ethic?

AP: I think it's the mainstay of the club. The main function of the club is to promote fair chase. I've worked many, many hours with people defining that very, very carefully. It's been one of our best functions, I think. I've been heading the Fair Chase committee for a while, I guess. I think it's very, very important. It has to be stated very carefully and implemented very carefully.

DH: Can you tell me a little bit more about the Fair Chase committee, and your activities with that?

AP: Well, it was a matter of making a statement, very iron clad and not subject to picking at, evading. That's what we evolved. It's been revised a few times along with new, electronic aids come into it and all that, we have to rule that out. Period of time between flight [and] shooting, things like that. That's what it's all about.

DH: Who worked with you on the Fair Chase?

AP: Oh, I don't remember their names. There were numerous of them worked on it from time to time. I can't recall right now.

*Editor's Note: In 1995 the interviewee sent an addendum to the transcript which he requested be added at this place in the transcript. The next two pages are the addendum, followed by the rest of the recorded interview.*

August 29, 1995

This is Arthur Popham, Jr., of Kansas City, and this is an Addendum to my Interview of the Club's Historical Committee, that I believe would be of interest.

Something that I have not heard mentioned and should be of considerable historical interest to the Club in the development of the Fair Chase statement is the work that Grancel Fitz and his wife, Betty Fitz, put in on this. Grancel was a very famous photographer, and devoted big-game hunter and writer about big game. Betty Fitz was for many years the secretary of the Club. They were good friends of member Sam Webb and his wife. I have failed to mention the Webb's as particularly good friends, strong Club supporters and hosts also at their lovely Manhattan townhouse.

Betty Fitz was totally devoted to the Club in her paid position as secretary, and attended all the meetings and took care of the correspondence. I believe it was rather assumed that had she not been in that position, her famous husband Grancel would have been made a member of the Club.

Almost as an ex-officio member, he had been one of the original proponents and inventors of the scoring system for North American big-game animals, and, I believe, worked with Prentiss Gray, Sherman's father, in developing the system.

Grancel had a wonderful apartment at No. 2 Tudor City Place in Manhattan, with a two-story high photographic studio, where he composed many of the top advertising photographs. He had some great, mounted big-game trophies in his studio, and I frequently

stayed there when attending the Club meetings, sleeping on a cot under the wall-mounted head of the Great Brown Bear.

Developing and refining the Fair Chase statement was a much-discussed topic at the meetings then, and I remember many nights of coming home from the meetings with Betty and Grancel, and working with them until 2:00 a.m., on minute refinements and changes in the proposed statements!

Betty's position was finally replaced by a Club member as secretary, to the disappointment of numerous members who appreciated her devoted work and the contributions that she and Grancel had made to the Club's structure.

They continued as close friends of mine until Grancel's death, and Betty gave me his Swedish hunting knife with which he had skinned many wonderful trophies, and which I still treasure.

*Note: Recorded Interview resumes.*

DH: Is this something you promote to other hunters?

AP: Oh, indeed, sure. The prime function of the club, I think, is to promote ethical hunting and fair chase. Get away from the "Guns of Autumn" picture - that's a horrible thing. I've been very put off by CBS, for instance. They produced the "Guns of Autumn" that decries hunting and shooting and all of that, and they make their living off guns with just TV shows and guns, guns, guns shooting people, and it's crazy, but that's what TV lives on, now apparently.

DH: That's an interesting topic I hadn't heard, it didn't occur to me, what was the general reaction of the Boone and Crockett when the "Guns of Autumn" was put out by CBS?

AP: First the club was aghast, and I don't know if it took any function - I wrote CBS, and told them how I looked at it, that it was a disgrace to produce a thing like that. [It] doesn't reflect proper hunting at all. Just all those slob hunters put together.

DH: Has the Boone and Crockett had a problem with illegal hunting amongst its members?

AP: No, we had one recent problem, which was a sad thing, I don't remember any other occurrences.

DH: Do you think the organization is strong enough to handle an incident like [the one] that recently occurred this spring?

AP: Well, sure. It could handle it as it sees fit. It has the resources and needs to do that. That [incident] was just one small drop in a big bucket.

DH: Do you have children?

AP: Yeah, I have two daughters and a son.

DH: How would you like them to remember your association with the Boone and Crockett?

AP: Very happily. That's been a very fine portion of my life. I enjoyed and appreciated it very much.

DH: What direction would you like to see the Boone and Crockett move into in the coming years?

AP: I think, apart from the hunting aspect, which is declining all the time -- civilization -- I guess the Boone and Crockett should because of that think conservation. That's the direction we have to keep pushing.

DH: That exhausts the list of questions that I had for you this morning, is there anything that I'd forgotten that you would like to add at this point in time, there something you would like to go

back and touch on again?

AP: Oh, I don't think so, if you want me to expand on how I got in the club, I can do that, it was kind of interesting.

DH: That would be fine.

AP: I had gotten a moose in the Yukon territory, which is a territory of Canada, and it was, I think, at the time the largest moose taken by a white man apart from the Indians. I entered it. It was my first entry of anything in the Club, I think. I don't remember about that. Anyway, I was not a member then, and during the period of that contest, a three year period, why, they changed the rules after I had submitted my entry to put the Yukon moose along with the Alaskan moose. I thought [this] was not only wrong, according to the areas, but it shouldn't have been done [changed] during the period of the contest. It was more of a contest then. So I wrote the Club about it. They referred, I think, Dr. Anthony of the American Museum who was a fine biologist, no doubt. He wrote me about the differences between the moose. He thought Canada and Alaska, and he thought this [my moose] belonged that way. I thought this didn't make much sense, and I think that since then the statistics have shown that it belongs in the Canada connection. Anyway, we had some pretty pointed correspondence about it, and it was after that that they asked me to join, so I thought that maybe I had presented things alright, pretty personally. Anyway (laughing) it worked out.

So, Milford Baker, whom I had known at Camp Fire -- incidentally, Milford Baker had lost a leg as a young man in a horse riding incident on Bob Ferguson's ranch, out West, and Bill Kemp who was a fine lawyer in Kansas City ultimately, and a popular mayor there, was a young man out there at that time, and he had helped Milford Baker when he was injured out there. So it was an interesting connection. I enjoyed - and still do - very much going to Camp Fire Club. It's a great bunch of people, just like these. But that's how that worked out.

DH: Are you involved in other conservation organizations?

AP: Well, Camp Fire Club and Shikar [?] Safari Club International. I make the awards for the Shikar [?] Safari Club, and the game officer of the year is selected to make those for Kansas and Missouri and Nebraska farms. It's a very fine program. Very highly regarded by all the departments, incidentally. That's about it, I guess.

DH: Well, Mr. Popham, I'd like to thank you for taking the time for the interview.

AP: Pleasure, thank you, you can do it very well, Dan.

DH: Thanks, Arthur.

[End of Interview]