

Maureen and Mike

# Mansfield Library

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

## **Archives and Special Collections**

Mansfield Library, University of Montana

Missoula MT 59812-9936

Email: [library.archives@umontana.edu](mailto:library.archives@umontana.edu)

Telephone: (406) 243-2053

This transcript represents the nearly verbatim record of an unrehearsed interview. Please bear in mind that you are reading the spoken word rather than the written word.

**Oral History Number: 297-058**  
**Interviewee: Tommy Caruthers**  
**Interviewer: Dan Hall**  
**Date of Interview: September 13, 1996**  
**Project: Boone and Crockett Club Oral History Project**

Dan Hall: Friday September 13, 1996. We're here at the Boone and Crockett headquarters in Missoula, and our interview today is with Tommy Caruthers. Mr. Caruthers, I'd like to begin by asking you when and where were you born.

Tommy Caruthers: [full date of birth restricted] 1939, in Benton, Texas.

DH: When did you first hear about the Boone and Crockett Club?

TC: I was fairly young. I grew up hunting with my dad, so I was probably a teenager when I first knew about the record books. Long time ago.

DH: When were you asked to join the club?

Tc: I was asked to join somewhere about '86 or '87 by Dr. Duke (?) and he ended up (unintelligible) I guess it was about '89 when I actually got around to filling out the papers.

DH: Why the three-year delay?

TC: Well, it's sort of funny. Dr. Duke asked me to come on board to do the centennial for the Boone and Crockett. By that I mean, make the hotel arrangements and speakers and meals and all that sort of stuff, which is what I've been doing for years for other groups. I kept telling Dr. Duke that, "You know, you don't have to make me a member just getting to do that. I enjoy doing it." He ended up putting it together. Ironically as it turned out, I was co-chairing the Dallas (unintelligible) Club convention, and so I just put the two together. The Boone and Crockett centennial and the Dallas (unintelligible) club together at a hotel property in Dallas and just did both of them concurrently. It ended up being no problem at all, and Red kept insisting and insisting so finally a couple years later I finally filled out the forms and been active in it ever since.

DH: So was Red Duke (?) your sponsor?

TC: Dr. Duke and a gentleman who (unintelligible), Steve Christianson were my two sponsors.

DH: What was the second name on your—

TC: Steve Christianson.

DH: Where is he from?

Tc: He's from Dallas and Dr. Spiegel (?) who's also not a member anymore.

DH: What other organizations do you belong to?

TC: Texas Big Horn Society, Foundation of North American Wild Sheep. I'm the founder of Texas Big Horn Society, and been a director for what seems like forever, secretary right now. (Unintelligible) Foundation of North American Wild Sheep back in (unintelligible) and five or six of their conventions. Then Dallas (unintelligible) Club, I've done 15 conventions for them. I've been director officer, Dallas Ecological Foundation which is the (unintelligible) in the Dallas (unintelligible) Club. I was president of that for four, five, six years or something like that. Director up until just this month, I think it was 15 years. That's most I've been in. I belonged to a lot of others like (unintelligible).

DH: Let's go back and touch on the centennial you did for the Boone and Crockett. Can you explain that to me?

TC: Well we wanted to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the club. I guess we wanted to do a little bit more of a public display, and something the Boone and Crockett Club has never done before is to have a close convention type-atmosphere. But for the special occasion the club decided they wanted to do that. So we put together an auction and a luncheon. It was primarily for Boone and Crockett Club members, but people who attended the Dallas (unintelligible) Club convention could also attend and many did. We had a speaker, a sort of a funny thing—a lot of fun actually—my younger son was a DJ so he has all these smoke machines and everything. I sent out the invitation, an engraved invitation to all the (unintelligible) Club and the Boone and Crockett Club members to an event meeting with the president and with seal and all of that. Set up the stage with the presidential seal on the podium and then my son started up all of the smoke and the music, "Hail to the Chief," and out walks this Theodore Roosevelt impersonator, who put on just a tremendous oratory. This guy is so involved in it that he literally becomes him, you know, dangerously so. But he just did fantastic and (unintelligible) Mr. Duke was the emcee. Once the Theodore Roosevelt program was done, we had an auction and Don Corely (?) gathered up most of the auction items. Each one was he took a single outfitter for each of the huntable species of North American game and just put together a tremendous auction. Then two or three pieces of art. Everything just went splendidly. The club made a lot of money and had a lot of fun. It really turned out quite well.

DH: And this was in Texas?

TC: It was done in Dallas.

DH: What was the reason doing Dallas that year?

TC: Dr. Duke had wanted to have the meeting in Dallas, and I really don't know why other than maybe because I lived there, maybe that was the reason. We made arrangements for the hotel that he wanted to do the meeting in, and he decided late on that we didn't really have enough time to do it so we ended our contract with the hotel and I joined the two together. Because those aren't two in one, and I had planned on using the animal displays as part of this theme—27 species of North American game. Well, I had all of them left up—all 27 species. I was going to put them on display at the Boone and Crockett centennial and then move them from that hotel to the other hotel that we were using for the Dallas (unintelligible) club. Due to the lateness and a lot of other things, Dr. Duke decided that he would rather just combine them. We ended doing both at of them in Dallas in the hotel.

DH: Where can you possible locate 27 mounts, life-sized?

TC: The ex-member Don Corely has all 30 species. Even the ones that are not huntable today—life-size. So I took two of my 45-foot trailers, hauled them from his trophy room, and built the mountain. Actually, literally constructed a mountain all inside the hotel with running water, snow, live trees—the whole thing—and put these animals on display. I mean it was all the way from stone sheep, to the (unintelligible), and then down to all the different species of moose drinking water out of a running pond.

DH: How long did it take you to put that together?

TC: Well, I didn't have a lot of time. I did it, literally did the construction of all that in one day. I had done the pre-work, you know, go the murals painted and things like that. Backdrops, props and those things. I had those pre-done, but then the actual mountain was a series of stage tables, stage props, crates to make all of the different parts so that each animals wouldn't be standing on top of the mountain or at the bottom. I had them scattered all the way up. It was 170 feet wide and 40 feet tall to the tallest point. Then a sheep standing on top of it.

DH: Who was the president of the organization at that time?

TC: Dr. Duke.

DH: With all these organizations that you belong to, is there a belief that you have the utility of wildlife preservation organizations?

TC: What I can really answer...Obviously, my interest is in conservation of mammals. I admit I don't have much interest in squirrels and rodents. I've been so fortunate in all of the years my father took me hunting when I was nine years old and I've been hunting ever since. So I guess I have probably...I don't know...couple hundred, 300 animals that I've taken over the years, and it's just sort of my way to give back. I've been really active in conservation work like fundraising. This point I've been active in it for the last 15 years.

DH: What committees have you served on in the Boone and Crockett Club?

TC: Seems like I've been vice president forever, but as vice president I've had the historical committee, I had the strategic planning committee. Currently I have the records committee and the hunting ethics committee. I've served the grants and aid committee. Grants and aid is something I have done a lot of with the other groups so I've wanted to serve on it.

DH: Okay, let's just run down that list than committee by committee starting with the historical committee. What was your involvement there?

TC: Well as vice president, I was just to make sure to constantly keep rolling along, which was very easy. Dr. Bill Riot (?) is the chairman of the committee, and when Bill's on the committee you basically turn your back and walk away. I mean he runs them and he called me every month and told me what he'd done, accomplished at this point, what he needed to do, and he was never any prodding—Bill Riot. You just stand back out of the way and let him go on. So he was just really, more of a reporting to the board of his functions.

DH: Did you have clearly defined goals that you wanted to reach?

TC: What?

DH: Did you have clearly defined goals?

TC: Bill does. You know I didn't create the goals for any of the committees, but Dr. Riot has established that we need to do the interviews. He's had the minutes all reviewed going back from the beginning, and trying to create, or did create, a history of the club. I think all of this is leading up to a new book about the club. The one that's out there now was printed a number of years ago. A great deal has occurred since then. So with all the interviews, I think Dr. Riot plans to have the material available for a new updated historical of the Club, and then also to continue that. Never let the club lose part of its history or memory.

DH: What was your role with the strategic planning committee?

TC: I'm trying to think which president started that. I think maybe it was Steve Adams. Steve was trying to create a club to where it would be a committee—a function of committees—instead of the president running everything. So under the director Steve Nealy (?), it was decided that we'd create these committees that we really needed, combine the committees we already had into active, needed committees, which they did. It took us the better part of two years to do that. We met quarterly, probably 20 or 30 of us to each final committee. We kept developing the goals and purposes of the club and the committees, and the structure to achieve those goals and objectives, which we did. We've been operating under that system for two years now.

DH: Who were the key players in setting up the committee system?

TC: Steve Nealy by far. There were a lot of people who had a lot of influence into it, but Steve was the one who kept driving it and pushing it along with Steve Adams. Tim Hixon (?) had quite a bit of influence, and there were so many people involved I hate to keep start naming them for fear I going to leave some of them out.

DH: Was this a good decision to make?

TC: Absolutely. You know we were sort of a very loose-knit club up to that point without a whole lot of direction. One committee will head off and publish books. We had two or three committees publishing books, and now the way we've got it only one publishes. Another committee may gather the information, but one group's actually doing that. One group is doing the media, one group is doing (unintelligible), one group is doing (unintelligible). To achieve the many goals that the club currently has, we couldn't do it in that loose fashion we'd been running on.

DH: Was it difficult to meet quarterly, to conduct these businesses?

TC: I don't think it was. We'd fly somewhere and meet for two days. It wasn't a burden to me. I'm assuming it wasn't to any of us.

DH: Okay, what about the records committee?

TC: Well, the records committee—I've really been lucky there. We've had chairmen who are extremely active in measuring and records. Randy Byers (?) is the current chairman. Randy is the past chairman of the (unintelligible) records committee. Wrote their scoring manual. Randy's like Dr. Ryan—just get out of the way. Randy has done a splendid job of keeping everything going, keeping the records up, keeping information current. Going beyond that, going out and improving the awards, the record keeping the books that we put out. Prior to him

we had Walter White (?) who was equally dedicated for many years and just did a cracker jack job. So I've never had a committee where I had to work.

DH: Was this committee then just you and Randy or you and Walter? Or was there—

TC: Oh no. Each one of these committees have probably ten to fifteen members. So there are, to my memory, there were like 12 of us on the records committee. Historical committee truly is Dr. Ryan. He runs it with four or five other people. Let's see, which other one we had? The strategic planning committee, as I mentioned, there was almost 30 of us involved in that. It was huge. Obviously all 30 didn't always make all the meetings, but there was always ten to fifteen, well fifteen or so at all of the important the meetings. So there was a lot of influence to keep it going.

DH: So even with 30 members, that's not too unwieldy?

TC: It wasn't because luckily all 30 didn't show each time. It went rather...I guess that's why it took two years to do it, because there was a lot of influence of ideas. You keep trying to putting that many ideas up, you got to try to get them directed somewhere.

DH: How about the hunting and ethics committee that you served on?

TC: The hunting and ethics was started, I don't remember the year, we had our annual meeting in Denver. We were sort of a group assigned the project of coming up with a hunting ethics statement that the club could make in print, and Dr. James Keer (?) sort of spearheaded the original attempt. What he refers to it as the position paper. I guess that means the Club's position on hunting and ethics. Then a number of other people did (unintelligible.) There are currently, if my memory serves me right, seven position papers that we have in the committee now that we are looking at. The problem with that is hunting is different in different areas of the country. The attitude here in Montana, these critters that are on my ranch are mine. They don't belong to the state. In Texas it's the same attitude. This is my 12,000 acres, it's my fence, those critters are mine. I feed them every day, I water them. Then the methods you hunt. You know, in Texas we use feeders everywhere. I mean I've got four ranches and one of those ranches has got 25 feeders or so. Up here that is as unethical as walking down the street naked. It's been very difficult, or to this point it's been impossible to write a statement on hunting and ethics that would apply from California to New York, Texas, and Montana. Not saying it's impossible, just saying it's very difficult. We have a Norm Bratinger (?) as the current chairman of that committee, and he being a federal judge is trying to write or help the committee write something that won't incriminate us or hurt us. We don't want to put something out there if it

going to injure the club in the fundraising efforts. We are here for conservation. We are not here to publish hunting ethics. We are not trying to recreate the hunting world.

DH: How long have you been involved with the hunting and ethics committee?

TC: Since its inception, which I'm going to say that we must have started that committee about five years ago.

DH: How many members are on that committee?

TC: They've come and gone, but right now there are probably ten of us.

DH: What do you see the outcome will be for the committee?

TC: I think within a year we will either make the decision that we can write a statement or that we can't write one. There are a number of them...As I said, there are six or seven of them already written. None of which I can say I (unintelligible) for. You know maybe they could be modified somewhat to where they're more palatable to everyone. You know we've got write a position statement that all hundred members can live with. Right now, we don't have that.

DH: Sounds like a difficult task.

TC: I think it's a pretty good little task, but when we started the strategic planning committee, at the first meeting of that I thought, now this was impossible. This is never going to get done. We just kept working; Steve just kept pushing us and pushing us. (Unintelligible) until we finally did do it. Thanks to them we did do it. Maybe Norman can do this position statement too.

DH: Explain to me about the grants and aids committee.

TC: I've been on that committee since I joined the club so that's an area that I've had a lot of experience in. Served under several chairman, and Dan Flesher (?) is the current chairman. The Club, somewhere in its past, has been doing grants and aids, and it has nothing to do with the university chair or the University of Montana. We had the grants and aid long before we got involved with the ranch or the university. Basically these grants have been either research done by masters and PhD candidates that the committee felt like would be a benefit to wildlife biology or conservation throughout the United States, or whenever a state or group comes to the records committee and asks them to add another subspecies to the record book, like the California big horn, or the black tail deer, desert mule deer. Well, the records committee doesn't want to put an animal, a subspecies, on that list because that links that animal suddenly as a very desirable animal—one that a lot of people have to have. There are a quite a number of people that 26 or 27 species North American (unintelligible). And when you add the

California big horn, there are four other sheep that mix with this sheep. To my knowledge there are almost 5,000 people that have the four sheep. Immediately 5,000 people have got to have this sheep. We don't have 5,000 of them, and that research that was done through the grants and aids committee provided the information to the records committee that we couldn't do that.

DH: Was there good biology to add the subspecies or not?

TC: The subspecies is real. There's no question about that. The value of adding it to the list because of the potential damage to the subspecies was the reason it wasn't added. It wasn't that we don't think that the sheep exist. Like the desert mule deer. There is no doubt that there is a mule deer different than the Rocky Mountain mule deer in a lot of different ways. But how are you going to control it? Where does it end? Does it start in Sonora and go to Baja? Where in New Mexico does it stop? Is it desert Highway 40, the line like it is with the desert sheep? For that reason we've never done the mule deer—the desert mule deer.

DH: How does the grants and aids committee decide what to fund?

TC: We generally will receive 30 to 35 grant requests a year. Letters are sent to all of the major universities, or all the universities, who offer wildlife management as a curriculum. Then they're invited to send their requests to the Club. Then the records committee or any other committee can also request information. The grants and aids committee will go to a university and ask them to write a proposal to gather this information for us. Then we all review all of those requests, and there's requests for usually, probably, ten times more than we have money for. So we then start the process, which are the most desirable out of the 30 or 35, and process of elimination, and then we allocate the funds. Some projects we'll fund totally—the total request—and some of them we will fund pieces of those requests.

DH: What criteria do you use to evaluate these proposals?

TC: Everyone has a different criteria. Hal Salwasser has a list of 15 different items that he ranks each request that we get, and for a lot of maybe from a teacher's standpoint would be more of a benefit. This would be more benefit than that from a training standpoint. I personally look at them as which ones are going to be a benefit to somebody. I don't particularly think that we ought to just go up there and fund some guy getting a master's degree or a PhD. If the work he does can't be used by someone for conservation, I think it's a waste of money. My own personal preference is (unintelligible). I even put in the criteria that you'll have a better chance to be funded if a state game agency is requested. You know like if Montana needs, Fish and Game Montana needs study done of the (unintelligible) they give the criteria or study plan that

they want done and then that is given to the universities that do that kind of work. Then the university that has the best plan is the one that gets funded. That's my preference, but I take it from a business pragmatic standpoint.

[End of Side A]

[Side B]

DH: We're discussing the grants and aid committee. Where does the funding come from for the grants and aid committee?

TC: The grants and aid is a line-item budget item from the Boone and Crockett Club. It has nothing to do with the foundation. The club has traditionally budgeted 30 to 35,000 dollars for a year for grants and aids, up until last year, and then it jumped to 70. I believe this year it's 20. So it's just a line-item budget. Just like a salary or any other.

DH: I'd like to talk to you a little bit about the foundation then. Let's move on to that topic. Can you explain to me how this is set up and how it operates?

TC: You may know more about the foundation than I do. The foundation, of course, is the conservation (unintelligible) which includes the university chair and the students at the university, and also the lands. All of that is run under the foundation. The foundation is also the group to go—the portion of the club or the part of the club—that goes out with the funding requests. You now it's the group that has the goal, the 15 million dollar goal right now is what they're trying to raise for the university, for the ranch, and for continuing studies. As you probably well know we bought the ranch for research. The ranch was created...Originally, we had the idea that we could take the ranch and with research maximize the amount of dollars that a rancher would get off the ranch utilizing wildlife and domestic game. They've done this since...We do this in Texas all the time. We've been doing it or years. We thought that we could create a model here in Montana that we could take to other universities. That's what we've been working on for the last eight years. We've not been very successful in that the ranch loses money, and it's never had to make land payments, loan payments, interest payments. It still loses money. So our goal, I don't think we've achieved that. I'm not real sure that is the purpose of the ranch anymore. I think ranch may have turned into a pure research entity. It may never make a profit.

DH: What types of research occur at the ranch?

TC: They do all of the...Like the grass. How much grass is utilized by the wild game, how much is utilized by domestic stock. A model that they created is how many more domestic animals can you put in there. But you can't do anything about the wildlife. The wildlife is controlled by the Fish and Game, so you can't go out there and eliminate a lot of them. I guess we could fence them out. There's over 2,000 mule deer that winter there. Of course, 2,000 of anything is going to eat a fair amount of something. You have to take that into account. The paybacks—you measure the stream how the water comes through, how it spreads, how the stream moves,

what it takes with it. They've done a (unintelligible) of studies up there, and just now I understand getting to the end where that model is there. I'm assuming, and this is an assumption, that it'll be to one point you can plug into the computers (unintelligible) take it from other cows to other (unintelligible) and you'll get this result 99 percent of the time. That's what I'm assuming they are trying to do. I don't believe they've accomplished it, but they've only been working on it a couple of years.

DH: Well, that's the list of questions and topics that I wanted to cover this morning. Is there anything that I missed that you wanted to add?

TC: No I've read many of these interviews, you know having been on the historical committee, and what I was telling Bill I still feel that way. For what some of the guys have done in this Club and what they've seen and you get somebody like me, I just thinks it's almost like a waste of time. You think about the Lowell Derreck (?). Lowell Derreck nows more about the history of the club than most fellows would know if he was still alive. It's incredible the amount of effort and the energy that he's put into that. Then the university Steve Adams. Has almost created his own university program. There are some guys in here that j mou just can't help but admired them. I'm saying I just don't feel like I'm in that category.

DH: We'll it's certainly taken you longer than ten minutes to tell your story.

TC: We'll it did that, it did that.

DH: I thank you for the interview.

[End of Interview]