

Interviewee: Kellett, John

Interview Date: August 2, 2010

University of Houston
Oral History of Houston Project

John Kellett
GLBT History

Interviewed by: John Goins
Date: August 2, 2010
Transcribed by: Michelle Kokes
Location: Houston, Texas

JG: Today is August the 2nd and we're going to be interviewing John Kellett and we'll start with biographical information. If you would like to share your childhood and where you were born?

JK: Yes.

JG: These kinds of things.

JK: I was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1927, which means I'm now 83. I was an only child and I went to the usual grade schools and then I was fortunate enough that my teachers in grade school suggested that I go to a near by private school called Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts which is a very highly regarded school. I was a day student because I couldn't afford to be a boarding student and I also I was able to be a day student by taking the bus which meant leaving when my father took me to the bus stop at 6:30 in the morning and picked me up at 6:30 in the evening.

JG: That's a long day.

JK: That's a long day. It was a long day, partly because it included athletics for four hours, for a four hour thing from 1:00 to 5:00 or something like that. And so anyway, I went to school there at Andover, I'll have more to say about that. Then I was fortunate

Interviewee: Kellett, John**Interview Date: August 2, 2010**

enough to go to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, commuted there by train for the first couple of years until I was actually able to get the funds to live on campus to live in graduate school and then in my adulthood, I only worked for one employee, Exxon, now then it was Standard Oil Development Company, now Exxon/Mobil and that was from 1948 to 1986. Shall we go on to the next section?

JG: Yes, we can start with that well let's go quickly though, when you graduated and you went to work for Exxon, then you'd been overseas for most of the time before you came here. Is that correct? From '48 until the early '70's.

JK: Not most of the time but some of the time I had some domestic assignments, including a couple of summers in Baton Rouge where the weather was like it is today and then some overseas assignments and as I say, when I retired in 1986, I'll mention a couple of those overseas assignments simply because they involved interesting overseas locations. There's not much to say about them because I was not openly gay in any of those places for obvious reasons.

JG: Okay well let's go on into gender and sexuality and which point did you realize you were not alone in your sexuality?

JK: Well, actually, I think I felt somewhat different by the age of 10 and I remember a couple of my friends, I was aware of them being sexually attractive, although nothing much happened. And then I, as I say, went on to school living at home most of the time until my third graduate year at MIT where I had a ... where I lived in the dormitories; did not do much of anything. Commuting and a very rigorous academic schedule sort of took up all my time so from the standpoint of really realizing that I am a gay man, I was

Interviewee: Kellett, John**Interview Date: August 2, 2010**

certainly aware of it during that period. I don't know whether you know the novelist Paul Monette?

JG: Yes.

JK: But he has written a number of wonderful autobiographical books and novels, and so forth and one of them is about his being a student at Andover, being a gay student at Andover and he; it's really worth reading because I felt he covered my feelings as a closeted gay man. During that period, being gay was never mentioned, thought of, or anything like that, at least as far as the school management is concerned. Paul Monette says much more effectively than I can how frustrating that was to him since he was a boarding student that was all there was. Since I was a day student, living with my parents and having other friends that was different, although that was sort of all there was too, as far as sexuality is concerned. And, some of the same situation as after I went to MIT and then started to work for Exxon. In the Exxon part, the first part was all in New Jersey and involved a number of overseas assignments but didn't really involve any particular relationships. I did have very good friends in New York where I ended up my Exxon assignment in say 19... early 70's, I guess.

JG: Uh huh.

JK: I had some close relationships with two men, one in New York and one in London; were living with other men who had been their lovers so I did not feel I had any monogamous relationship with anybody. It was mostly some casual encounters.

JG: Through this period when did you feel that you became aware that there was a lesbian/gay world out there, a network, a lifestyle that could be called homosexual?

Interviewee: Kellett, John**Interview Date: August 2, 2010**

JK: Well, I did meet some other people involved in organizations. One of them was SAGE, which used to be called Senior Action in a Gay Environment and it's now modernized to Senior Services and Assistance for Gay Elders and it's still functioning. And in fact, they was talk about starting a chapter in Houston, although it never materialized but there were plenty of other organizations in Houston which I will get to. I'm not sure I ever thought of lesbians during this whole purpose. I mean, I was feeling my own attraction to certain other men but that was about it. So when did I become aware of the lesbian and gay world?

JG: And then if you, as you said, do you recall any books or magazines, any of articles, TV, or radio programs that made you aware of a larger gay world?

JK: Not particularly. This again, was in the early 60's when I was, I had, actually I had got tired of living in rural, relatively rural New Jersey and working for Exxon in a couple of locations there and going into New York every chance I could. And so I finally made the one move that I initiated, as opposed to Exxon, and said, "I really ..." (I'm not really I said I want to live in New Jersey and commuting into New York to go to the Opera and things like that) but I said, "I really want to live in New York and I would like to see if I can get a transfer with the parent company" which I did. The parent company was still in New York, at 30 Rockefeller Plaza, and I got a very good assignment which had some interesting overseas trips and so I became a New Yorker with some gay friends and some organizations but I don't remember ... well as I say, I'm not sure I was aware of the lesbian world at all during this period. I knew there were some gay men. I went to some events, you made a few friends and you would go out and so forth but I don't remember any gossip sheets, advertising, newspaper articles, or radio programs or any of

Interviewee: Kellett, John**Interview Date: August 2, 2010**

that kind of stuff during that period and that was up until I ended my New York work in 1967. I had an assignment in London for a couple of years, had a number of assignments overseas, including Japan, Okinawa, and some other places, a month in Australia. I certainly met some gay men. I'm not sure I ever met any gay women. So, but that was really making friends and being introduced to other friends. I just don't remember being much at all involved in any sort of publication or program or the like.

JG: Did you, for instance, back in New York, did you go to gay bars any? How were you meeting people?

JK: I guess I went to a few gay bars; although they were not an important part of my life. The way I met other people, the way I met other men was walking down East 54th Street to my apartment at 425 East 54th Street between 1st Avenue and Sutton Place South and you would catch somebody's eye and then you might go for a drink, you might go for a visit to their apartment or something like that. But there again, it was personal rather than communication mechanisms.

JG: Very good. And then, and then you might meet some of their friends and then network.

JK: Yeah! In fact I went to parties and things of that sort and that's ... I, I remember at one stage going to the New York Gay Pride Parade with a friend that I had met who was actually an Exxon employee with whom I'm still a good friend, even though we're all retired now. But no, it was very, very different than it is now with all of the media that is everywhere. So, does that ...

Interviewee: Kellett, John

Interview Date: August 2, 2010

JG: Do you ... Were you aware? I guess you've answered our question earlier so you wouldn't remember any of the articles that came out in 63 and 64 in the New York Times article on the gay neighborhood or the Life magazine article on the gay underworld?

JK: I don't remember those. I was there and I didn't need to read ...

JG: Yeah, yeah!

JK: ... the article is what that amounted to.

JG: Uh hmm.

JK: Is what that amounted to. I arranged my transfer from New Jersey to my work place from ... I arranged for my work to move from New Jersey to the Exxon Corporate Headquarters in 30 Rockefeller Plaza in the spring or in sometime during 1963, but I didn't actually move to Manhattan until early 1964. So when we're talking about my life in Manhattan and meeting the people and observing the activities, rather than reading about it, that was during that period.

JG: Exactly.

JK: I did have a relationship with a friend in both New York and London, whom I met by seeing him on the street or our eyes or our vision clicked or something like that and the one in London was particularly interesting because he was very much of an Opera fan and he taught me about Opera. We went to the Opera. His job permitted him periods where he could go off to the Opera House and stand in line and get cheap seats and things of that sort so we had, in both cases, it was a social relationship with it not being completely monogamous, I'm sure, but we didn't worry about that at that time. So in both cases, I was living in New York, which was wonderful from the standpoint of all the opportunities for culture and meeting other people and the same way in London and

Interviewee: Kellett, John**Interview Date: August 2, 2010**

because I lived in a, I guess I would say, a fairly gay neighborhood, in both places, and close to work, it took me 18 minutes to walk to work in New York, it took me 5 minutes to walk to work in London, and so and I would meet people (never fellow workers).

They may well have been there but there's the way things worked. So that's my New York and London and then over the next several years, I had assignments in other places which were wonderful and involved in seeing a lot of the country, in Japan, in Australia for a month. But there again, always with company people or other friends or friends in Australia, I met through friends in London that were not necessarily gay people (in fact I think most of them weren't). So that's my early career and having a social life is what it amounts to.

JG: Very good. Very good! What the next question I suppose is when you considered yourself to come out of the closet or how you look at that and how you define that and what it means to you?

JK: Well, I'm not sure I ever came out of the closet before I retired. Because there was work and then there were friends and most of them were not part of the same group and so I'm not sure that ... I think the answer is you know, really there really wasn't a lot of coming out until I actually retired which I will get to in a minute. I do remember a couple of instances, for instance, friends in New York urged me to go to a SAGE meeting, I think I mentioned SAGE, although I never became an active member, but there were some social organizations and that's what they were. They were social help organizations, that were like the Montrose Counseling Center and so forth and you know you did things with your friends or occasionally you did things to help the community but it wasn't...

Interviewee: Kellett, John

Interview Date: August 2, 2010

JG: Political, so to speak, marching around the streets.

JK: Well, that came later. But it wasn't, it was mostly a group, a social group of friends. And I remember a couple of things, I remember in Houston, shortly before, I think I'd already arranged to move to Manhattan and one of my best friends, Robert Schwab, an activist, he was active with the Texas Human Rights Foundation which I was asked to serve on the board so in that period I did get involved in activist organization in mostly because of the friends that I made socially, said that they'd like, you know, We'd like for you to serve on the Texas Human Rights Foundation Board and things like that." Robert Schwab was the key person, a key friend and he was dying of AIDS during 1983. He was the first person I had known to get AIDS and die from it, although, and very few people I knew were sick with this disease and a lot of other people got it but there were not many friends of mine, I remember this incidence very vividly because Robert, I think was diagnosed in February of '83 and died in November of '83 and during his last months, he started to call me at work once or twice a day and my first reaction was what will Exxon think? I'm being called up on the phone at work by this noted activist, this prominent activist, and then immediately I said, "What the hell! I mean Robert is more important than what Exxon thinks." And so we talked on the phone. Nobody said anything. My secretary who took the calls, I'm not sure whether she knew who Robert Schwab was, but anyway, that really, the end of my working for Exxon in that area was, well really my contact with the AIDS epidemic and also of course all of this assisting afterwards, but being ... that was '83 so that was while I was still working and working in Houston because after my overseas assignments, which were basically from '67 to sort of continuous to '77, I came back from Okinawa and immediately went back for another

Interviewee: Kellett, John**Interview Date: August 2, 2010**

6 months and so forth and then '86 was that situation and I was actually was planning to retire in '87, when I would have been 60 years old. The company had a major restructuring and thousands of people were given early retirement at a better deal than the normal deal so that was pretty good and so I became a Montrose resident. Well, I became a Montrose Resident in '77. I know my parents said, "Why are you moving half an hours commute from your office and I said because I want to live in a more interesting place, where I was living next to the Exxon office in Woodlake Square and that office isn't even there anymore. The building isn't even there anymore. Its apartments now so.

JG: Is it really?

JK: Yeah. But at any rate, I'm digressing. But at any rate, what I wanted to say, there John, is that it was my retirement in 1986 that freed me to start getting interested in more assistance to GLBT people, more involved in organizations and things of that sort and that basically started the end of about 1986. Sometime earlier than that, well I had moved to Montrose in '77, and my retirement in 1986 was a move where I was still working but getting much more involved in the Montrose community in a way that I had never gotten involved in Woodlake Square which where there wasn't much of anything going on.

And I remember somewhere along there seeing a notice in the Houston Post, which is what I read at that time, that a group of gay men were meeting at an outbuilding in Holy Rosary Catholic Church, which I thought was an interesting place for them to be and were going to organize a support group. And I, that continued to be a social and support group for gay men. At the same time, and I can't remember whether it was the same movers and shakers, but it was certainly about the same time, I was invited to joint EPA, the Executive and Professional Association of Houston and which I belonged to for 21

Interviewee: Kellett, John**Interview Date: August 2, 2010**

years and then I decided that I belonged to too many things ... But at any rate, right over here, is my EPA book with the names of all the members and the offices and all that kind of stuff so this was my first significant, well this was one of the two significant GLBT well GLBT yes because there were women as well as men, support organizations, support and social organizations. So this was and I mentioned when you first arrived that this one area was the outline that doesn't seem to cover particularly and that was organizations and I need to talk about for most of the rest of my talk here is the organizations that I have been involved in because they are my involvement.

JG: Yes! Ok.

JK: That's what it amounts to.

JG: Ok, very good. So, by the 80's, you'd retired and you had first joined and you'd become ...

JK: I ... I guess was still working when we said that this was ...

JG: Did they approach you because of probably your employment, right?

JK: Uh, no. The organization was started in I think it says here in like 1977.

JG: '77?

JK: Yeah. 1977. In 1977 I was still working for Exxon but I had just moved to Montrose is what it amounted to so I was here.

JG: The church group for what helped you find Montrose, right when you first moved here to town?

JK: Well, that's a good question. I think it was friends that I met that said let's go to eat in Montrose or something like that; maybe somebody from EPA, maybe somebody from something else, from the original Holy Rosary outbuilding which I can't remember

Interviewee: Kellett, John**Interview Date: August 2, 2010**

what it was. There were a lot of the same people. I think there was actually, that was actually a separate organization with some different people and I'm not sure what happened to that I don't even know what the name of it was but anyway the point was but organizations like EPA were being started about 1975, 1977 and so forth. And so a lot of the story, John, is things happened when it was time for them to happen and this was one of those instances.

JG: Yeah.

JK: The other thing that happened was I had been a member of the Unitarian Universalist Church. I had started to go to church when I was still in New Jersey. I had friends that invited me to go to their church and when I lived in New York and when I lived London, I never went to church because there was too much else to do. I went to Okinawa for 2 years to help build a new refinery in the years 1970 to 1972 (which was a wonderful assignment), I thought there were some Unitarian Universalists, and there were. In fact I have a I became President of the small congregation and upstairs I have a gavel that says that I am President of Unitarian Fellowship of Okinawa in 1971 and 1972.

JG: Wow.

JK: Anyway, when I got to Houston, when I came back from Okinawa and the company said you're not going back to New York, because in fact we're leaving New York, our headquarters is no longer going to be there and we're moving to Houston, I decided to see what there was. And First Unitarian Universal's Church on Fannin and Southmore is the church that I found, it's still my church. I'm quite active in it and after 35 years or whatever it is. There was another group and I can't remember now, it wasn't

Interviewee: Kellett, John

Interview Date: August 2, 2010

EPA, whether it was the initial Holy Rosary meeting place or not, but any rate, but anyway, there was about 1975 a group of men, I think they were all men that were called The Gay Group and they met at First UU church at Fannin and Southmore. Because that's the only place they would allow them to meet and so already being a Unitarian Universalist I joined the church and I'm still there.

JG: Ok.

JK: So those EPA and church were the initial groups that I belonged to socially and so a lot of that was that's one of the points that I wanted to emphasize, that a lot of my activities were as part of those groups rather than going to bars and things like that. I've never been a bar person. I like go to bed early and not drink.

JG: Well, let me ask, was EPA centered in Montrose at that point would you say? Or did you meet in this part of town?

JK: It was certainly centered in Montrose although there were a lot of other people ... I'm trying to remember where we did meet. Well we met in a variety of places and there was a monthly meeting, a monthly dinner meeting and I can't remember now where it was or whether it moved around. There were lots and lots of people still around who were members or still or even officers. After 21 years, as I think I mentioned that, I decided that I had to stop doing some of these, I had to stop belonging to some of these organizations and EPA was one after 21 years that I decided that I had gotten the benefit of that, although some of the people I met at EPA are still very good friends and some of them are still active in EPA even though I'm not. But at any rate, that is a significant point of my coming to Montrose or coming into Montrose if it was before I moved here from the year in 1977. Another point that I wanted to mention before I forget is that I

Interviewee: Kellett, John**Interview Date: August 2, 2010**

was that I was overseas, as I'd mentioned, from 1967 to 1972 so the answer to the question was what did Stonewall mean to you? It didn't mean anything because I didn't know anything about it. It was not until I came back to the U.S. from overseas in 1972 that that had happened and it took me a while to catch up with it and I was still living in Woodlake Square.

JG: Uh hmm.

JK: So that's what I wanted to say about that.

JG: Ok. Did you ... Did you touch on the ... So you had friends in these organizations, that would be what we would call your lesbian and gay world and did you notice stratification, cliques, race, and class divisions in that or in what you knew about Houston?

JK: Well, certainly not at church. I mean there was "the" gay group I guess it was called, that met occasionally. Our minister, who is still a good friend of mine, a terrific minister named Robert Schaibly, was minister at that church from 1982 to 2002. He came out as gay shortly after he had become the Senior Minister and so he was very much of a leader, not only of the church activities, but other activities, getting ministers to organize and support gay rights. He was very much involved in the campaign for partner rights or something like that. The one that was roundly defeated 1985 or something like that. At any rate, so church was extremely supportive, like going home. That was my gay support group. I went to one of the other churches just for a couple of years

JG: Did you say one of the Presbyterian Churches, did you say?

JK: Unitarian.

Interviewee: Kellett, John

Interview Date: August 2, 2010

JG: I've been thinking in our early conversation that you'd mentioned that you'd mentioned a gay group at a Presbyterian Church.

JK: Uh, no I'd mentioned that a news item in the Houston Post said that a gay group was going to meet at an outbuilding of Holy Rosary Catholic Church, now presumably, because there were some gay people at the Holy Rosary Catholic Church, it did not meet there ever again. And certainly it was certainly was not a church activity; whereas the group was welcome to meet at First Unitarian Universalist Church. Was indeed, welcome and became a basically a church organization, a welcome organization as it turned out, a very supportive ministry. Everybody has been very supportive but this minister, Robert Schaibly, who is retired in Oregon, but he was the minister from '82 to 2002 and very much of a leading figure in Houston in gay rights and also fighting the Ku Klux Klan and things like that. So, lesbian and gay social network and organizations, well, I think we've covered a lot of that and coming out, well coming out was somewhat of a gradual process. But there was nothing traumatic about it. It just sort of gradually happened and if you want to go on to the next one on your lesbian and gay stratification cliques, class, race, and other, I'm not sure I was aware of much of anything. There was certainly lesbians and some black people and Hispanic people in EPA.

JG: Right.

JK: And geographical, well you either lived in Montrose or you know, you were a commuter, is what it amounted to. I see in my notes here, "Moved for social reasons." That's right, that's why I moved. My parents asked, "Why are you moving half an hour away from work." I moved and I moved for social reasons is what it amounted to. And some of, I guess most of my Exxon colleges said, "Why are you doing this?" The ones

Interviewee: Kellett, John**Interview Date: August 2, 2010**

who knew where the good restaurants were knew why I was doing it. Cause that was... in fact, I remember one colleague at Exxon saying, or maybe it was his wife, "Oh, I wish we could live in Montrose; we feel we have to live in Spring Branch because of the children's schooling." That's the kind of reaction I got. I'm sure I had a reputation for being eccentric, like going into New York for Metropolitan Opera and so forth but the fact that I would move closer to the Museum District and the Theatre District and so forth...

JG: It didn't raise any eyebrows?

JK: It didn't seem to raise any eyebrows. They knew I was strange, already. Okay!

JG: So you've explained well that at that point, that Montrose was the center definitely.

JK: Yeah, yeah.

JG: And I included there, how has this changed over time, does it still remains that much of the center or would you say...?

JK: I think it still remains that much of the center.

JG: Okay.

JK: I mean you may be aware of the big flap when there was an effort to move the Pride Parade from Montrose to downtown, which was a disaster. And of course, the last Pride Parade ended in June, I had campaigned to have it in April or October...

JG: So we wouldn't have the heat.

JK: So we wouldn't have the heat.

JG: Yes.

Interviewee: Kellett, John

Interview Date: August 2, 2010

JK: I said that to a number of people in that controversy on going downtown, I said, "You know, we used to have a lot of church people bring their little kids and strollers and whatnot when the parade was during the daytime and you don't see, they don't do that, I mean because, in fact, I went to the Pride Parade in June and there were a lots and lots of kids there and not many tiny babies but, and I was interested to read that it was now the 2nd biggest parade after the Rodeo, presumably, and so it's really been institutionalized. It's been institutionalized in Montrose. I don't see that it can move anywhere, after a long time. So, geographical Montrose what was the center? Well that's it, I guess.

JG: Yes. So, even today, there are people living here that don't live here as much as they used to, wouldn't you agree? There were so many people living here ...

JK: Well, it would be interesting to know what the statistics of that are, John, because many people right around here are gays and lesbians and there are more living somewhere else. There are more living out, I've forgotten the name of the subdivision, out near the south of the west corner of...

JG: Meyerland area?

JK: Yeah Meyerland and further and further out of the southwest corner of the loop.

JG: Yeah Beechnut and Bissonnet.

JK: Yeah there's lots of people there but the people I know that live there always lived there. So I don't know. There may be things changing because of new buildings and things like that. There may be things changing like the dreaded Sky Bar has finally closed much to the relief of me and some other people, I just hope they don't, although Berryhill's Sunday afternoon thing is even more of a neighborhood nuisance.

JG: Oh, is it?

Interviewee: Kellett, John

Interview Date: August 2, 2010

JK: Well, the other interesting thing that happened is that...

JG: You could hear the Sky Bar here in your house, I suppose?

JK: Uh, yes until I called what's his name, the owner, several times at midnight until I told him to point his speakers another way and he did and he actually moved to a house across the street to see what it was like but I think Montrose is still ... there were a lot more gay and lesbian people elsewhere. Are you running out?

JG: I'll turn this over.

JK: Oh, ok.

JG: There were a lot more gay and lesbian people elsewhere?

JK: I think there are a lot of more gay and lesbian people elsewhere then used to be but there's still plenty of them here so I think, you know, when I think of the other parades, the other Gay Pride Parades that I have been to, not lately, the New York one, which is, is it 5th Avenue?

JG: Uh hmm, I'm not sure.

JK: And the San Francisco Parade, which is Market Street, I've been to a number of those in both places and those are major cities thoroughfares. The equivalent would be Montrose Boulevard which of course, is not where the Parade goes but at any rate, I think it's become it's traditional as the trail ride on Memorial and things of that sort.

JG: Very good point.

JK: Well, let me move on to another thing, which is the rest of the organization story. I mentioned that I became involved and I'm still involved in First UU Church in 1975 because it was a gay friendly church and still is although a number of other churches have now become much more gay friendly and many in the Montrose area Bering, St.

Interviewee: Kellett, John**Interview Date: August 2, 2010**

Stephen's, Christ's Grace Church Cathedral and so forth but the other thing that I wanted to get to now is that at my Prep School, Andover, which Paul Monette wrote so disparagingly about their lack of awareness or recognition of gay and lesbian people. The school actually went co-ed in 1972, which is interesting after being a boy's school since 1789, but I became quite active in sort of suggesting, "You really ought to pay attention to gay and lesbian students or the like" and so I was asked to serve on a committee, the Multi-Cultural Affairs Committee. So for four years, 1997 - 2001, I was on a committee of the school concerned of Multi-Cultural Affairs and the head of that on the School Faculty was a gay black man and so things looked up, at least from the standpoint of recognition and the group put out a publication on well, on multi-cultural affairs, which covered Hispanics and Asians and blacks and gays and lesbians and so forth. That was very gratifying and I guess I got a reputation for being the gay the man on the Multi-Cultural Affairs Committee of the Alumni Council. Interesting enough, that and a couple of other things I'm going to mention occurred during the '90's and that was when things were looking good for Multi-Cultural Affairs. After the Clinton Administration ended and the Bush Administration started, both George H. W. Bush and George W. Bush were Alumni of Andover, as I am, although they would never say anything on the subject, but the point I'm making is that in, it's interesting in that in my high school, prep school which became a more significant factor in my life, as one of my major organizational activities, that had a high point in the 90's and it had a low point in the 2000's and I asked them, I asked one of the board members when I was up there for a reunion, "Why isn't the multi-cultural affairs doing more for gay and lesbian people? Why isn't the committee?" and the answer was, "Well, alumni are not that interested anymore in 2000."

Interviewee: Kellett, John

Interview Date: August 2, 2010

JG: That is very interesting.

JK: Well yes, that is why I am bringing this up. I thought this was extraordinary. The school, itself, has gotten the word but the alumni apparently had the word in 1990's that they don't have so much in the 2000's, although I think that's changing as the whole climate is changing. But I did have a major involvement in the school support of GLBT people and there is a, there has been, actually, for 20 years, an advisor for gay and lesbian students at the school and I'm a contributor to that effort of supporting it, as are some of my other gay classmates who have come out of the woodwork. So things are significantly better in support of GLBT people as far as the school administration is concerned. I don't think that they are as much as far as the alumni are concerned.

JG: Do you have any theories as to why it would have been active in the 90's and then...?

JK: My only theory is that the people that tried to, who volunteered to join the school management committees and things like that who were alumni were Clinton type alumni and the next decade, they were Bush type alumni, that's the only thing I can think of.

JG: Now that makes sense. I just always wondered why the Clinton's would have ... Maybe they, do they just kind of hand it over and say, "Okay well okay these people are going gonna..."

JK: It wasn't the Clinton's, personally,

JG: No, I know.

JK: But I think, I think, well, there was more of a support for things of that sort, even though Bill Clinton screwed up the whole business of lack of discrimination by the way it

Interviewee: Kellett, John**Interview Date: August 2, 2010**

was handled, you the know, the Bushes never did anything, and now we have someone who talks a good game but he isn't doing as well some people hoped.

JG: Right!

JK: But at any rate, I thought that interesting, but the main point I wanted to make John is that this school having refused to even think about gay rights when I was going there and when Paul Monette and I was going there. Now they have come a long way, as I think all the private schools have, certainly in New England. I mean, we have to remember that New England is different than Texas and things like that. So I'm really pleased that I was lucky enough to get a scholarship to go even as a day student to go to the school, I'm very pleased what the school is doing. There was one stage during the '90's when I was going out to meetings every 4 months to the Boston area, I was going up to meetings in the Boston area, because that's where the Unitarian Universalist Association Headquarters is and I was also going up for meetings because I'm an Alumnus of a Massachusetts Institute of the Technology which was late to come along with this stuff. I remember going up there to these meetings, wondering if I really should have moved back to Boston when I retired instead of staying in Houston. Incidentally, this is maybe not really pertinent, but my parents died, and as I said, I'm an only child and my parents died and as I said I'm an only child, my parents died in '83 and '85 and if they'd still been living, I would have moved back to Massachusetts when I retired. Since I had no close relatives, I stayed here. Sometimes I wonder how my life would have been, I would have more liberal government but I would have had a lower standard of living then if I were back in Massachusetts. But at any rate, initially, the prep school, the high school was moving faster than the university in GLBT rights and then it came, well I

Interviewee: Kellett, John**Interview Date: August 2, 2010**

guess part of this due to me because I was trying to also interest MIT in GLBT rights and they were not moving as fast as I would like. Of course the trouble with trying to do this in a school is you just convince some students that gay rights are important and they graduate and then you have to start over again. I remember having correspondence with MIT Alumni Association and their efforts to start a gay group which was probably in the '80's or '70's and I remember getting letters from some of the Alumni and saying, "You live in Texas! Why are you interested in this? I mean seriously!" And they couldn't imagine that anybody, any Alumnus who lived in Houston would be interested in gay rights for MIT Students and faculty and so forth. And so I worked with a wonderful school administrator who was not gay and finally I got a call from her and she said (I hope I'm not taking too much time).

JG: Oh no. You're doing wonderfully I'm just making sure there's tape.

JK: Okay well this is a favorite story of mine. I had taken several music tours to Europe through KUHF, I'm a big KUHF fan and anyway, and I got a call and it was the early spring of 2001 from my faculty contact who I'd been working with and she said, "Wonderful news! At the Annual Awards Convocation, where the school awards all sort of thing to all sorts of people on the first Tuesday in May, 2001, and I'd just gotten word that there's going to be a new award for GLBT support and it's going to be at the Convocation and it's wonderful." And I said, "Well, that's wonderful, alright, but I'm going to be coming back from a KUHF music tour from Central Europe and I won't be able to go" and she said, "Well, you've got to go because you're getting the award!"

JG: That's wonderful!

Interviewee: Kellett, John

Interview Date: August 2, 2010

JK: And so I did and everybody else on tour got back to Houston on time and my plane going to Boston because I had to go directly to the Convocation from Europe. The plane had to turn back in the middle of the Atlantic so I was 2 days late somewhat with some lack of sleep and so forth but it worked alright and so anyway all the Convocation Awards and all sorts of stuff were done, there were about 50 of them and then the Chancellor who is I guess 2nd to the President at MIT was to make the award and he made it and I'll show it to you because I have a whole bunch of stuff to show you. Anyway, he said "And the Gay and Lesbian Service Award, a new award is awarded to the John S. W. Kellett, class of 1947." And I went up to get it and he said, "Don't go." And he announced that this award would now be awarded every year for the best example that had been submitted of support of GLBT people and would be called the John S. W. Kellett '47 Award.

JG: That's wonderful!

JK: That's one of the pieces of loot that I will show you when we get to a stopping point.

JG: So you were very integral for Andover and at MIT.

JK: Much more at MIT. At Andover, I had much less of an influence but it moved along faster with other people. At MIT, I think took, took more starting, but once it started, it went very well. There was lots and lots of support ...

JG: That was in the 90's, as well?

JK: That was 2001.

JG: You received the award in 2001?

Interviewee: Kellett, John**Interview Date: August 2, 2010**

JK: 2001, yeah. I'll show it to you. And so the award has been awarded ever since and also sorts of interesting people some of them I have met and some I have not met. One of them the Guthy Award, two years ago, and then went on to become the Head of Boston Pride and Grand Marshall of the Parade and all that kind of stuff. And the one this past year, which I haven't been able to go to was for a group of eight architects, a group of eight students in the Department of Architecture and City Planning who submitted a proposal to work in the Architecture and City Planning Department and out in the bigger world, on building buildings that reflect GLBT concerns, interests. I don't know whether they have different kinds of bathrooms, it doesn't really say, I got the copy of the official award statement and I probably have it around here somewhere but it doesn't really say what they're going to do. It doesn't give specific examples. It just says their proposal and they are busy doing it is alerting, making people aware of the importance that architectural and planning should reflect sexual orientation and gender identity, whatever that turns out to mean.

JG: That would be interesting to see how that's implemented.

JK: Well, it will. I want to follow up on that. So anyway, those are the things I wanted to say, particularly on the fact that my involvement has been recently (ever since 2001) in these organizations and one other organization is in 1992 my attorney, who was a gay man, now retired, unfortunately, I wish he was still here, instead of Santa Fe. But he suggested that I start a small foundation to in effect make small awards to move along the philosophy that I was trying to move along. We set this up as a non-profit, modestly called the John Steven Kellett Foundation and it's done pretty well. We've had some problems in the last couple of years probably because of the economic downturn which

Interviewee: Kellett, John**Interview Date: August 2, 2010**

required, it wasn't that we didn't have the money reserved, but what happened was that my financial advisor told me that in the beginning of 2009, it's because of the economic downturn I could save a lot tax money if I minimize the awards that we made in 2009 and then there have been some health problems with some of the boys. It's a volunteer organization of about 6 people and honestly, I'm surprised, the money I think the maximum we gave in any one year was \$14,000.00 to a bunch of you know was like \$1,000.00, \$2,000.00 lesbian health initiative and in fact, I'll show you some of my awards which are next door. But anyway, that's that. And so that whole area, John, is the area that I wanted to emphasize on working with organizations to support GLBT interests because that's the main thing that I'm interested in doing.

JG: Right. Well, very good and you've been very successful.

JK: Now, do we have more?

JG: There's this page but most of it was touched on.

JK: Yeah. Can we just run down this?

JG: Let's real quickly just make sure I've asked what influence do you think Houston, the GLBT community in Houston has had on the nation, as far as their community, if any?

JK: Well, let me get this out here. Ok. Well, it's certainly had a tremendous interest since Anise Parker...

JG: Exactly.

JK: ... was elected mayor. I don't know whether you've seen it or not but I am active in the gay and lesbian victory fund which is in effect supporting GLBT candidates that are vetted and trained and have a very good chance of winning and I went to the

Interviewee: Kellett, John**Interview Date: August 2, 2010**

banquette in which Anise was suitably awarded and so forth and I have a copy of the issue of Time and her having the most influential American which Anise is one and so forth and so, yes, certainly with that, and well, even before that, not so much... I can't say that we've had more influence than New York or San Francisco but compared to what our reputation was, I think that our reputation was, I think that Houston has, we have a lesbian Mayor and we're the biggest city in the country to do so and she seems to be doing a terrific job and all that kind of stuff.

JG: Do you have any theories as to why Houston was able to such an overt organized gay and lesbian community even though we're in the south and the conservative ...

JK: Well, I've had a great deal of thought John, but I think a part of it is, it would be interesting to see the demographics. The city of Houston is a small part of the metropolitan area. And I think to a greater extent than some other major cities, the city of Houston has the liberal voters and the suburbs have the conservative voters. You know, Harris County is not electing gay and lesbian candidates so I think that that's part of it but it's also part it's a, and we still have awful representatives, my personal representatives.

Our two senators and John Culberson are about the worst conservative representatives you can get and I certainly don't feel that I keep getting these messages from them and the American Association of Retired Persons saying, "Send your senator and representative this petition to do this and that" and I don't even do it because I ha, ha, they will throw it in the waste basket! But I think part of it is, it's a relatively young city, it's a relatively prosperous city, and it's got a good mix of liberals in the right places

JG: That's it. I agree. That's the points that I've come up with. Okay, I want to move onto LGBT life in Houston and harassment (briefly we've covered some of this) but did

Interviewee: Kellett, John

Interview Date: August 2, 2010

you feel the oppression or harassment through those years? You said you weren't really a bar person.

JK: No, I certainly haven't been involved in any bar harassment. No, I just moved into liberal organizations. That's what I do and that's what I do, church and the cultural groups, and the opera and stuff like that. Let's see what we've got here.

JG: The last one is, do you notice generational differences that played between older and younger gays and lesbians? In other words, with what you've gone through, coming up, do you notice a difference in the young ones today that have not had that rich experience?

JK: Well, I have to say, John, that I live a life of an older person. My main social group is Prime Timers which I helped organize the Houston chapter in 1991, I guess it was, and my friends are mostly, my friends are mostly gay men instead of straight women, older than 50 is what it amounts to and ... and there are ... a number of those are church members but I don't really have a feel for what 20 and 30 people who are age 20 and 30 are doing. I keep reading that they're more liberal than older people politically so forth, let's see. Let me just run down this and see if we have time to do that.

JG: We do and be sure at this point, if you have anything you want to add that we haven't really covered.

JK: Ok, let's see. What everyday resistance have you utilized? I'm not sure I've ... Well, I'm known as a gay man to everybody I can think of from that standpoint. It's nice to belong to organizations that feel that way. I mean it's sort of a two way street. I belong to organizations that support me and I don't have to fight with John Culberson or any of those people. At what point did you decided to become politically active? Well, I

Interviewee: Kellett, John

Interview Date: August 2, 2010

just started going with the flow is what it amounts to. I'm more active than a lot of people I know. For instance, I am the only person of all of Yoakum Boulevard that has the political signs out front and that's always the case. There actually was one sign out briefly for somebody this spring but if you start from Yoakum Boulevard at Fairview and if you go to Bissonnet, you will see no other political signs on Yoakum Boulevard ...

JG: Except for yours?

JK: ... except for mine. I don't know what that means. So politically active, I don't particularly feel very politically active. I do belong to ROAD Women. River Oaks Area, Democratic Women and Men, probably because women friends of mine who are not gay, although a number of the women at ROAD women are River Oaks Area Democratic Women are lesbian, older lesbians and it's an older group. I go to the older groups because that's my group.

JG: Yes.

JK: Stonewall, well I covered that.

JG: Yeah you covered that.

JK: LGBT community, well we covered that, yeah, I think that Houston and its population of the city itself has a very good relationship with each other. What type of organizations, political, church or social environment? Well I happen to think the church organizations are probably the most effective.

JG: Do you have an opinion about that, about ... do you think that's more so because we're in the South or do you think that they just happen to be the ones that have reached out?

Interviewee: Kellett, John**Interview Date: August 2, 2010**

JK: Well, I think it's partly because we're in the South because churches count for more in the South and particularly the kind of churches that I don't particularly like. Now when I moved here, First UU Church was the only liberal church and it's the only church that would allow our gay group to meet. Now, we've got Bering, Methodist, St. Stephens Episcopal, I don't know, but actually, the Methodists like St. Paul's, that's where PFLAG meets, even the Lutherans were particularly, Grace Lutheran up the street has become ... has even a bi-sexual minister. So I think that churches have become more liberal because that's the kind of people that go there in this locality and most of them do that, even St. Anne's has gay clergy and I have a lot of friends that go to St. Anne's because that's a gay church. But that's because we're in the center city. That's where the people live. Now it's interesting, I'll take 8 or 9 Unitarian Churches in greater Houston and the ones that are doing well are basically in the inner city, not only Montrose, but River Oaks and stuff like that. The one interesting anomaly is Bay Area Church and they decided to build a new church because there were a number of Space Center people and said there were a number and other technical and liberal, they weren't very liberal actually, but anyway the point is that we had all these churches in here that are liberal and you don't get lots of people coming because they're liberal because they can go to their own Episcopal or Covenant churches. A good example of a new church is American Baptist which is about as liberal as you can get. It's really terrific and it has a good congregation of liberal Baptists of which there are some around here. In the Bay Area, Bay Area UU Church is the only liberal church in Southeast Houston and so they do very well and there were a couple there's one in the Woodlands and so forth. But anyway what all this means is that I think that churches has had the most influence, I

Interviewee: Kellett, John

Interview Date: August 2, 2010

mean, even more so than political it seems to me because I, for one, I for one, I tire of going to the political caucus meetings and things of that sort but I'll go to church.

JG: I think we've ...

JK: Uh, what is missing if the LGBT, how hidden do you think the LGBT has been decade to decade? Well, I don't know. It's getting better and better in some places it's pretty liberal. The thing that I don't know what you do a lot of, this has just struck me; the black and Hispanic churches of course, are very different. And I don't know of any black or Hispanic church that is a "liberal church." I mean they have liberal people. The Jews, on the other hand, are wonderful. I mean, Temple Emanu El is as liberal as you can get so anyway, that's all I have to say about that. How hidden do you think the LGBT? Well, it's a lot less hidden than it used to be. Harassment, I have never been harassed. What can I say about harassment? Well, I take that back. Once during my 38 year career with Exxon, I got sort of an anonymous gripe from I assume another employee, an anonymous employee, I mean it was just sort of a snide remark, I can't even remember what it was now, so the answer is no, I have not been harassed.

JG: Uh hmm.

JK: Some people have said they've been harassed because they live in Montrose, and as I said, I casually told Exxon that I was moving to Montrose because it had a lot more good restaurants and art and music and all that stuff, and I don't know what they thought but anyway. I don't know what they thought, but everybody thought I was pretty strange anyway.

JG: Ha, ha, ha

JK: OK.

Interviewee: Kellett, John**Interview Date: August 2, 2010**

JG: Is there an either obvious generational difference in play here? OK. Oh, that's gays and lesbians I don't know, it's interesting. I know some lesbians at church, I know some lesbians at EPA, we have lesbians on the board of the Kellett Foundation and all of the 6 members of the board are gay and lesbian and that's the way we do it. I don't know, I'm an older person, John, and that's what I know. I would never think of going to anything that involves staying up to 2:00 AM or hearing loud music. I see all this stuff in the bars and I would never go to that. The thought is incredible. So, anyway, that's the story.

JG: Well, that's good!

JK: Now, I would like to show you my show and tell things, if you're ready.

JG: I'm ready. Let me go ahead and stop this.

JK: Thank you.

End of Interview.