

A CONVERSATION WITH BEN LOVE

IN CONJUNCTION WITH  
THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

Interviewee: MR. BEN F. LOVE

Date: October 20, 2004

Place: Houston, TX

Interviewer: Leigh Cutler

## INTRODUCTION

Center for Public History  
University of Houston

### BENF. LOVE

Ben F. Love is retired chairman and CEO of Texas Commerce Bank, holding that position from 1972 until 1989. He was born in 1924 in Vernon, Texas and grew up in Paris, Texas. He flew twenty-five bombing missions over Europe as a captain in the Eighth Air Force during World War II before receiving a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Texas in 1948. Following graduation, he founded a paper products manufacturing business in Houston in 1949. Several years later he merged the company with a New York Stock Exchange company and in 1965 became president and CEO of River Oaks Bank and Trust. After creating a successful bank there in a year and half's time, in 1967 he moved on to Texas Commerce Bank in the Gulf Building in downtown Houston. He first served as senior vice president of the metropolitan division there, was made president in December 1969, and finally took over as chairman and CEO in December 1972.<sup>1</sup>

Beginning in 1977, Love set out to plan the construction of a new building for his expanding business. The completed seventy-five-story Texas Commerce Tower, which opened in 1982, became the tallest bank building in the world and represented the Texas Commerce banking organization's commitment to the region and the state.<sup>2</sup> Although retired now, Love still has an office in the Texas Commerce (Chase) Tower downtown.

### INTERVIEW

The interview provides a substantial amount of background information pertaining to the steps Mr. Love took to turn Texas Commerce Bank into one of the most successful banking operations in the world. The latter half of the interview focuses on the process involved in constructing the seventy-five-story tower in downtown; it gives specific attention to the decision-making process, design implementation, installation, and overall recent history of the Miro sculpture, *Personage in Birds*, which stands in the outdoor plaza of the building's ground level.

The interview was conducted in Mr. Love's office in the JP Morgan Chase (Texas Commerce) Tower, 600 Travis Street. The interview required approximately one hour. Mr. Love is an extremely articulate speaker with an accomplished business history to tell. He was responsive to questioning and gave thoughtful, comprehensive answers. Mr. Love reviewed the original transcript and made editing remarks. The following edition reflects the changes made from those suggestions.

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<sup>1</sup> Walter L. Buenger and Joseph A. Pratt, *But Also Good Business: Texas Commerce Banks and the Financing of Houston and Texas, 1886-1986* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1986) 255.

<sup>2</sup> Buenger and Pratt, *But Also Good Business*, 325.

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Side A

Cutler: This is Tape 1, Side A. I'm Leigh Cutler interviewing Ben Love in his office at JP Morgan Chase Tower, 600 Travis, in Houston, Texas. This is an interview for the Oral History of Houston project, to be housed in the Center for Public History at the University of Houston. The date of the interview is Wednesday, October 20, 2004.

Mr. Love, if you could start off by talking a little bit about your background, where your were born, where you went to school, a little bit about your family, and how you came to Houston.

Love: I was born in 1924 in Vernon, Texas. My father was what was known in those days as a cotton broker, or cotton buyer, but he traveled out of that west Texas city all over west Texas and Oklahoma buying cotton from the cotton farmers, and shipped it out through the Port of Houston. Cotton was then the commodity that drove the Texas economy. Earlier it had been timber, and then following cotton as the commodity that drove the Texas economy-oil. Oil in vast quantities was discovered in Texas about the time of the demise of cotton. After the great stock market crash of '29, in about 1930, worldwide depression conditions reduced the international demand for cotton. I later learned that the price of cotton, shipped out through the Port of Houston had dropped from twenty-nine cents a pound to six cents a pound in an eighteen-month period from 1932 to the middle of 1933 and the number of bales that were exported through the Port of Houston had dropped from two million bales annually to something around 100,000. So, cotton

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suffered a precipitous decline in price and in demand. That gives you background of the era when I grew up in, an era that quickly declined from a reasonably prosperous era into the Great Depression.

The company for which my father worked went out of business, so we moved from Vernon to my grandfather's old home place outside of Paris, Texas. My grandfather had fought four years in the War Between the States, been wounded in three battles among his thirty-three major battles. When he got back home he didn't record his history, such as what you and I are doing on one subject today. But, he did write on the back of an old photograph which I found by accident and preserved: "Came back to Huntsville, Alabama; Union army had burned everything; my sweetheart waiting for me; we married and headed for Texas." I don't know how they traveled. I don't know how he chose Paris, Texas. I know that his first staging area, he'd fought in and was wounded in the first Manassas battle, the first battle of the Civil War. His regiment was staged in Paris, Virginia. And I would assume his 4<sup>th</sup> Alabama Regiment could have been treated well by the local people, not unlike my experience in World War II. Where you were staged, many times the citizenry of the town... from Ada, Oklahoma, in my case, including Houston (that's the reason I'm in Houston). So that makes me believe that maybe he reacted the same way.

The people in Houston in my time really welcomed Ellington Field's Army Corps Cadets. Early 1943, late 1942, cadets from Ellington would get off base on Saturday afternoon and go to the USO in downtown Houston. Instead of there being some nice

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ladies pouring coffee, there would be some business people there and often they would take a couple of cadets and put them in the backseat of their car to show us Houston.

They were so proud of the city. Soon they would forget that we were in the backseat and they would start talking to one another about the future of Houston. That excited me at the time and I thought, well, if I get through the war, I'm going to come back to Houston and this is where I'm going to live. My grandfather might have had a similar experience in Paris, Virginia. The people in Paris, Virginia might have been so kind, so thoughtful of the Confederate troops that he had a good feeling about Paris, Virginia. But my conjecture is fantasism, just speculation. Anyway, that takes you up to a point.

I rode a horse twelve miles a day to elementary school in Paris, the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade. I then rode a school bus to Paris High School. My mother, who had taken summer work at Columbia and University of Chicago and Cornell, was very, very keen on education. She had taught English in the Dallas high school system and she was very dedicated, despite the tribulations of the Depression, on my getting as good an education as possible and my making good grades. I studied by the dim light of a kerosene lamp during those years on the farm because rural areas had no electricity. Anyway, that probably is enough on my background... but I was very active in debate in Paris High School and my partner and I met with unusual success on the debate circuit around Texas.

Cutler: Will you tell me a little bit about coming to Texas Commerce Bank?

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Love: Sure. I had started a business when I came to Houston. Jobs were not plentiful as they are today. I came to Houston in 1947 and married in 1947--still have the same wife. In 1949 I launched a paper products manufacturing business. In 1956, I was invited to go on the Board of Directors of River Oaks Bank and Trust. I ran my paper products manufacturing business that I had started with tight controls and budgets, the mechanisms that I had learned at the University of Texas. I finished my B.B.A. degree at U.T. after the war; I was in the war for three years, eleven months in combat.

The bank at River Oaks had no budget, no organization chart in 1965 when I was invited to serve as President, after merging my firm with a New York Stock Exchange company.<sup>2</sup> Their officers sat at their desk waiting for drop-in trade, as I called it. I changed that. I assigned our officers, over their protests, to go out and visit our customers' businesses, whether they were retail or manufacturing, or whatever, and to call on customers and prospects to learn precisely what they were doing and how River Oaks Bank could make the bank's services more valuable to these customers. We established budgets for the bank. Several of my board members said, "You can't do that because you can't control your cost of money. That's just a foolish exercise..." Well, it did work. We had defined numerical objectives. I bought ten percent of the bank and had agreed to be there for three years unless I were invited by a downtown bank to take a position that was of interest to me. Sure enough, about a year and half later, our deposits had gone up fifty percent, our profits had gone up 270 percent at River Oaks Bank and that got the eye of a man named John Whitmore, who was chairman of the National Bank of Commerce here

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<sup>1</sup> This company was Gift-Rap, Inc., which manufactured and distributed specialized wrapping papers nationally.

<sup>2</sup> The merger happened with Gibson Card Company. One year later, CIT Financial Corporation acquired Gibson.

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at Jesse Jones' old bank I was invited to come downtown and interview with him. I did so, and immediately I was invited to join that bank and run the metropolitan division, the Houston banking operations for the bank. Same procedure – this large bank had no budget, no organization chart, and lacked those basic mechanics that I had utilized in manufacturing and that had worked successfully also at River Oaks Bank.

Cutler: What year was that?

Love: I came down in April of 1967, so I was at River Oaks Bank for a year and a half, full time. I told you earlier I went on River Oaks Bank board in 1956. I'd been invited to come there as president and CEO in 1965. I forgot to tell you this – I had merged my company with a New York Stock Exchange company by that time and had finished my contract and I wanted to do something else because the company with which I merged wanted me to move to Cincinnati or maybe even New York, and I didn't want to leave Houston.<sup>3</sup>

The Houston downtown bank was where I wanted to go and was made available. The budget system, having specific goals, worked just as well in the metropolitan division of the National Bank of Commerce as it had at River Oaks Bank. The biggest protest I had there, insurrection you could call it, among the officers, was they too were not making calls on customers in a systematic way – not the lending officers – we had business development officers doing that and they couldn't lend a penny. They were backslappers and gladhanders and could find baseball tickets, and so forth, for customers, but that's all

<sup>3</sup> He is referring again here to Gibson Card Company.

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they could do. I thought the lender was the one who ought to be out there meeting with the customers. One concern we solved was placing a back-up officer on every account so if the primary officer happened to be out on a call when a customer dropped in the bank, there would be somebody in the bank who would know that customer's business and be able to handle their needs. It doesn't seem like much as you say the words, but at that time it was a dramatic change of procedure and system.

Again, to repeat, the officers- and I kept records on every officer, number of calls made, deposits when they started making calls, deposits (and I did it on a monthly basis) at the end of each month, for each officer. Kind of a third grade report card in a sense- nothing complicated about it. But they noted that there was a correlation between the number of calls made and growth in loans and deposits. At that time, the Texas National Bank of Commerce had fallen into third position in Houston in total deposits. It had fallen behind First City and Bank of the Southwest downtown. That was not a happy camper kind of a situation for the Jesse Jones Bank, which had been so dominant.

Cutler: Where was that office at that time? Were you in the Gulf Building?

Love: Yes, in the Gulf Building. That's right- it was called the Gulf Building. So...the numbers began to look good and we overcame the Bank of the Southwest in deposits and were moving up. I can tell you a lot more, but I think maybe that's enough.



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Cutler: That's great. So, once you got to that point, is that when you were able to start thinking about a new building?

Love: No, not really. I came downtown in April of '67, was made president of the bank in December of '69, and then chairman and CEO of the bank in December of 1972. We grew from that point forward. The law had changed and we were able to begin to expand across the state instead of being confined to one bank. Over the next seventeen years, while I was CEO, we grew from one bank to eighty banks, from one billion to about twenty-three billion dollars in assets and I guess the most noteworthy thing was that Standard and Poor's gave us a triple-A rating.<sup>4</sup> S & P accorded only two banks in the nation with a triple-A rating-J.P. Morgan in New York and Texas Commerce way down here in poor old Texas. TCB generated sixty-five consecutive quarters of earnings increases – we had a great team!

We began recruiting from college classes all over the country-the Harvards', the Whartons', the Chicagos', Northwestems', Stanfords', the Berkeleys'- concentrating our recruiting in Texas at the University of Texas and Texas A&M. I had one standard that was sacred in our recruiting; we were to recruit from the top ten percent academically of the graduating classes. I made two exceptions: one, if the individual had worked their way through school, we would make an exception there if they clicked on all other cylinders; and two, if they had been unusually active in extracurricular activities, leadership type things. We had a selection committee and they believed in that, too-not

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<sup>4</sup> Standard and Poors is the world's foremost provider of independent credit ratings, indices, risk evaluation, investment research, data, and valuations.

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trying to get the highest IQ necessarily, Leigh, but I always believed that those who had excelled academically also enjoyed competition, overcame problems, were disciplined in terms of a work ethic...It was the traits of character that I really gave more credence to than simply maybe they might have a little bit higher IQ. So, we built a great team.

We turned out what we called a Blue Book showing that performance not in 10,000 categories, but in basically five categories, that we would send every quarter to every bank in the system. And we ranked each bank in the TCB system-one, two, three, four, finally through eighty. Well, you're a bright looking girl, I would imagine that if you were ranked number seventy-nine, you'd try to do something about it. The CEOs, if they were ranked number ten or number two, or something like that, they began to show those Blue Books at board meetings to their boards of directors. So, the boards began to get into their bank's comparative performance vis-a-vis the other TCB banks. At the outset, this seemed somewhat dangerous, in terms of the intramural competition. It could have led to TCB banks cutting one another's throats within the system. It didn't happen that way. They sought to achieve, to perform competitively, to be measured regularly for all to observe.

Cutler: That's great background information that I think can lead us into talking about when this building that we're in here was constructed...

Love: Well, let me tell you of a poll I ran that I think is very pertinent to what you're looking for. When I first arrived, within the first week, I turned out a questionnaire to the officers

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in the metropolitan division, as it was then called, our Houston banking division: What was most needed? I got two answers back universally. We needed a garage because if they got customers to drive from the suburbs or from Pasadena downtown and those customers couldn't get in the garage, why, it was all for naught and worse than that, they'd probably transfer their banking. Secondly, we needed a new building. TCB was located in the Gulf Building. Gulf had been granted the right to name that building from 1928 forward. Gulf needed a prominent, visible building. That was 1967 and we continued to hear, as we expanded, not only the murmurs, "We wish we had a more visible image than a bank in the Gulf Building," but also TCB began to grow in personnel and we needed more space.

So, in 1977, I talked to my friends Durrell Carothers and Jay Leydon, who operated the Alright Parking system. The block that Texas Commerce (Chase) Tower is on now was a parking lot, Alright Parking lot. I got an option to buy that block at \$90 a square foot. \$90 a square foot in those times seemed like a fearful price, but I got an option. I'm kidded about watching expenses, I hope not in a stingy way, but being a good businessperson, I used to say banking was a business. And I believe that today. Our job is analyzing other businesses, but also soundly managing our own. So, I let the option go. Cowardly, wasn't it? But then, a few months later, I got my "what are we going to do?" and my ducks in order and decided we would go ahead and take the risk. We bought the property-had to pay a little bit more for it. I think it was close to \$100 a square foot, but we bought this property.

Next, we hired someone to come in with us as a developer, a partner. The final two were John Galbraith, from Pittsburg- at that time I think John also owned the Pittsburg\ Pirates. He was well known all over the country. And then Gerry Hines, who had been a friend of mine in Houston, but as Gerry knew, I could not play favorites simply because he and I had known one another a long time. I submitted it to the board for them to make their recommendations to my board of directors. John Galbraith had a slick presentation. Gerry was- I've laughed with him many times about being the worst salesman known to man- yet his honesty, his integrity, and eventually his knowledge comes through, and by not being glib and slick, he may be the best salesman of all time. But, in any event, one of our directors, I'll never forget – as soon as they'd made presentations, not in front of one another, but Galbraith first and Hines second- Bill Japhet, whose family had owned a lot of TCB stock for many, many years (his father had before him), said, "You know, I can't imagine a worse presentation, but Hines obviously knows what he's doing," and he said, "There's just something about his manner, not being a salesman. I think there's integrity there." So, to my happiness, the board unanimously voted to give the project to Hines as a partner.

Then Gerry and I set about to hire architects. We did something that was totally unorthodox. We asked eight different architects from around the nation to come to Houston and talk to us. And they did, and then when they found out that they were going to compete against one another, some of them were just too proud for that "architectural auction." I guess Cesar Pelli was the first one who told us, well, yes, he would submit a design proposal. We were going to pay each architect only \$15,000, which was a

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pittance, if they would submit whatever they wanted to. And if they didn't want to submit any design proposal, they still got the \$15,000. But, it was with the stipulation that each would have three months to prepare his presentation. Then, each would be given an hour and fifteen minutes to make his presentation to Hines and me. All of the presentations were to be made on the same day, so that we wouldn't be in one mood maybe one day and another mood, another. Again, that just wasn't the way that the great architects worked. Crass, it was commercial, it was, you know, unorthodox... but they did!

We chose I.M. Pei. I had in mind about a 40- or 50-story building. That would accommodate not only the bank's need for space, but also would give us some rental income on space we could lease. My idea was 40 or 50 stories, sidewalk to sidewalk. As you can look out the window, nearly every downtown building in Houston is built that way. Right off, I.M. said, "The architecture in Houston, I think is magnificent. This is a new city, it's going to be a great city," but he said, "Let me ask you a question. What do you think are the great cities of the world?" Like, you would answer...?

Cutler: London, Paris, Rome...

Love: London, Paris, Rome... yeah. And he said, "London, Paris, Rome...and are they not remembered more for their voids than their solids?" Well, I thought about Hyde Park and I thought about the open areas in Paris and in Rome. And I said, "Well, that's true." He

said, "Well, I want to propose something to you, and that is that we achieve the square footage that you need by height.

End of Side A



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Side B

Love: Let's leave three-quarters of the block open for people, and let's have fountains, and let's have Bartlett pear trees." I don't know why he wanted Bartlett pear trees, but he did. And he said, "Let's have a great sculpture. Houston downtown could use a great piece of sculpture."

Cutler: Meaning, by a great artist?

Love: A great artist. And so, we all liked the idea. We began to go through sculptures. Ann Holmes, who was the arts editor over at the Houston Chronicle, joined the team, in a sense, not paid, but she was enthralled with the idea, to help select a great piece of sculpture for a downtown Houston structure. To make a long story short, after some months, we had decided on the height and location in the plaza, but we had not decided on who would create the sculpture. We eventually narrowed the field to Moore, Henry Moore, and to Joan Miro. Henry Moore has a magnificent piece of sculpture out here off of Allen Parkway. We went to Dallas to see a piece of sculpture that he was installing there and met him, a very charming, dedicated, artistic man. We then said, well, we need to go see Miro. Gerry and I got as far as Barcelona, Spain when we got word from Miro that he did not feel like seeing us. So, great disappointment. We turned around and came back to Houston.

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We were prepared to leave again to go to Mallorca, Miro's home, and got word that he just was too busy, and, at his age, we should not come. Then, I.M. talked to Miro's agent, Matisse, in New York, whose father had been a great painter, too, a great artist. Matisse responded, "Well, let me go with you. Let's make it more of a social affair. Why don't, Mr. Hines, you bring your wife? Mr. Love, why don't you bring your wife? And, I.M., Mr. Pei, why don't you bring Eileen? And I will go with you, with my wife. I think that way, Miro will see us on a Sunday afternoon." So, we did as Matisse suggested.

Miro's son-in-law was there- we went out to Miro's home- and sitting in the sitting room, Miro had his son-in-law as an interpreter. He was a young man, maybe twenty-five. Miro's wife sat across the room on a couch and I would talk to his son-in-law. Gerry and I.M. asked me to be the spokesman. The son-in-law would translate to Miro, who never changed facial expressions. And I thought, we're losing it, we're losing it. He doesn't seem to be the least bit interested. We've come all this way (laughs) and he doesn't seem to be interested. Finally, it wasn't something I'd thought of to say, but I just kind of blurted out, "You know, another reason that you might want to have one of your sculptures is that the nearest major Miro sculpture to Houston is in Chicago. In Texas, the Texas Commerce Tower is going to be the tallest bank building in the world." His son-in-law repeated it, translated it. I noticed Miro turned his head and asked his son-in-law something. His son-in-law sounded to me as if in Spanish he were saying the same thing. Miro, not the most agile person in the world, almost jumped out of his chair, and walked as fast as he could across the room and started talking with enthusiasm, vigor



to his wife. He came back, sat down, looked up at his son-in-law and his son-in-law, to his *own* surprise, said, "He says he'll do it! He'll do it."

So, that's an anecdote, but we put forth a lot of effort and for us, a lot of expense, in trying to get Miro to create the sculpture for the Texas Commerce Tower. Then we looked at several of his pieces of sculpture while we there. He had *Personage and Birds*, which is down there in the plaza. It's fifty-five feet tall. That's why you need to go to the sixtieth floor-to observe how it fits in the plaza. Miro had a little wooden maquette of *Personage and Birds* and he painted it as he thought it should be.

Cutler: Had you seen a model before you went over to Spain, or was that the first time you were seeing a model of *Personage and Birds*?

Love: I.M. had secured a couple of models of other Miro sculptures, but they weren't really suitable for this. I.M. Pei is a brilliant, sensitively attuned man. He saw Jones Hall, which he thought was a magnificent piece of architecture, and decided that the proportion would be right if our sculpture were fifty-five feet tall, both in regard to our 75-story building, which is 1,049 feet in height, and to Jones Hall. It would be pleasing to the eye -the Jones Hall canopy that is fifty-five feet high. That determined the height of our Miro sculpture.

Miro was going to come when we opened the building in 1982. He fell ill, and died, so he never saw it in place. President Ford, Gerry Ford, was on TCB's board of directors

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then and I was sitting next to him during the unveiling and presentation. He is such a wonderful man, and when I looked at him, it was the first time I had ever seen anything resembling a frown. I couldn't tell if it was a frown, or he was just in deep thought. I leaned over and whispered to him. I said, "Mr. President, I don't think you care for this." "Oh!" He whispered back to me, "No, it just reminds me...in Grand Rapids, we had our arts people...and over the critical objection of the business community, who said it made fun of the city...in Grand Rapids we had a Calder<sup>5</sup> installed. The next issue of Time magazine pictured that Calder in full color and featured in their art section. The business community reacted promptly, 'Oh yes, we did this; Grand Rapids is a progressive city.'" He said, "I was just thinking, you have been a little worried as to whether it was too contemporary for Houston, instead of another statue of Sam Houston. That's what I was in deep thought of, thinking about Grand Rapids, Michigan and the Calder. This will be accepted by a city like Houston."

Cutler: And, was it? What was the mood of the Houston business community downtown when it was installed? Was it accepted?

Love: I think so. My best answer to you specifically on that, Leigh, is the colors are so bold... I was concerned that they would invite graffiti artists. Therefore, I stationed guards by the Miro twenty-four hours a day, for several months. Finally, the head of our bank security came to me and said, "Mr. Love, I don't know that we need to continue our Miro guards.

I know how you are on expense control." He continued, "The Miro has not been

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<sup>5</sup> Acclaimed twentieth-century American sculptor, Alexander Calder, renowned for inventing suspended, kinetic sculpture: the mobile.

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approached by anyone with a bucket of paint or a spray paint can. I think people are proud of it." So, I pulled the guards, and there was never any damage at all to it, not one bit. We also put benches out in the courtyard, in the open space in the "void". There was a concern that they would be whittled on, they would be defaced, they would be maybe even carried off. We've not had one time where they have been defaced, painted, carried off.

Cutler: Do you think that has anything to do with the physical space that it's in, the height, and the powerful feeling of the building?

Love: I think it has to do with the people of Houston. I salute them.

Cutler: Do you know of any specific reactions that people had, or anything that you had overheard, or that the guard had related to you-reactions that people in Houston were having to it?

Love: The reaction in the arts community, I think, has been predictably quite favorable. In terms of it being controversial... It has not been controversial. I haven't seen any articles deriding it. Maybe people wouldn't mention it to me, but there's been comment...you know, that it's not what you would expect in Houston.

Cutler: What do you think set it apart from other sculpture that was already downtown when it was installed?

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Love: The Dubuffet would be one.<sup>6</sup> Well, I don't know that it's set apart from them. It is a Miro-certainly his reputation has remained intact as one of the great artists and his influence on others. There haven't been a lot of copycats. I think that at the same time, the void-I think that developers are more and more conscious of people space now. I think it gives Houston a sense of happiness, a sense of upbeat, a sense of gaiety.

(Laughs)

Cutler: What would you say its relationship to being part of a corporation is? Some might argue that because it's actually part of this building, that makes it more corporate than public, because it's not put there by the city. Some may argue that perhaps it would be unstable because if something happened to the building or the company that owns it. .

Love: The building is going to be here a long time and I think that the Miro is so securely anchored to the building itself that nothing would happen to it unless something happened to this 75-story building. I'll tell you one more story...I.M. Pei had designed a building in Boston and I had read in the press that the windows were falling out. The windows would just pop out. No one was killed, but it was not exactly a comfortable thing to walk on the sidewalk underneath that building. I.M. and I got to know one another well. I talked to him frankly, and told him I was concerned about that building in Boston-I think it was the John Hancock building-and I sure didn't want windows blowing out in the Texas Commerce Tower, especially during a hurricane. He said,

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<sup>6</sup> This refers to the sculpture in the outdoor plaza of the 1100 Louisiana Building in downtown Houston, *Monument to the Phantom*, by French sculptor Jean Dubuffet.

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"They won't. We know what the problem is in Boston, and yours will not." I smiled and responded, "Fine. I want twenty percent more steel put in this building than your engineers have currently drawn in their plans." He was a little surprised on that. I'm not an engineer, but I was insistent, and he said, "All right, we'll do that, but it will cost more money." I said, "Well, that's one time I want to spend money." So, we have a very strong building. The TCB Tower has undergone one hurricane and we didn't lose a window.

Secondly, I.M. gets credit totally on the granite facade. I've always liked the Shell Building; that's a Gerry Hines building, too, and I like that travertine marble. That's what I had in mind always for our building, white travertine marble. I.M. said, "I know you're set on that, but I would like to suggest something else." And I said, "No, I.M., I've thought of this for years. No." He continued, "Let me just show you something." I said, "Well, fine. You can show me, but I want you to know I have a bias." He said, "I think gray granite would appeal to one thing about you that I've learned. I hear your people talk about it, that you're expense control-minded. Travertine is much more expensive to maintain than what I'm going to show you, which is a gray granite. Gray granite will hold up for years after travertine begins to need maintenance." And I said, "Okay, you have hit my weak point. I'll look at it." So, he brought two different sections of granite and they looked pretty much alike. "A gray granite for a bank building just seems right to me," he said. But it was the cost element he had already gotten me on, and the maintenance. So, I said, "I like this maybe a little better, but if you want the other... but I'll take this, if I have a choice..." Gerry didn't mind which.

Lo and behold, I said, "Where does that come from?" thinking it would come from Italy. He said, "It comes from Barre, Vermont." I had flown my 9th Air Force combat missions over Germany with a bombardier from Barre, Vermont, who worked for, before the war, Rock of Ages. And sure enough, he was now the head of Rock of Ages. Of all the total coincidences in life... I told I.M. that. I said, "That looks like I knew beforehand." And he said, "I know you didn't know, and Gerry knows you didn't know, but that Rock of Ages gray granite facade would be just great." It turned out to be the largest construction material order that Rock of Ages had ever gotten up to that point in time. My bombardier, Fred Ralph and I shared the same cubbyhole together in 351st Bomb Group barracks when we were flying combat missions, so we were very close. His wife had him in an antique store a few Sundays before *he* was to fly down to Houston to see the building, and darned if he didn't drop dead of a heart attack that Sunday in the antique store. That's a little vignette that to me, the odds are so remarkable...

Cutler: One last question – what, overall, made this sculpture right for this bank building?

Love: I think it's consistent with our call program almost. I think it was to show that our thinking was more modern, more imaginative, more creative than the staid building. Across the street, Jesse Jones built a magnificent lobby, magnificent. I hope it will always stand - art deco. So, we had that. We needed something to say that TCB had seven foreign offices and eighty banks, for example, which we had at that time. We needed something to say that we can do anything that any other bank in the world can do.

Interviewee: Love, Ben F.

Interview Date: October 20, 2004

We are not manacled. We respect, we revere the history, the fine reputation that we have from our heritage, but we are not manacled to doing things the way they've always been done.

Cutler: Do you have anything else you want to add before we end?

Love: You're a good questioner... I think that would be it.

Cutler: Okay, thank you so much.

End of Interview



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