INTerview with j. w. treat

Date, place, and circumstances of interview: August 29, 1975 in the office of j. w. treat at abilene christian college.

Date of birth: March 10, 1907

Position: Head of the Language Department at Abilene Christian College.

Former positions: Teacher at Colorado City, Texas, High School, 1928-1929; instructor of foreign language at Abilene Christian College, 1929; became head of the department in 1951.

Education: B.A., Abilene Christian College, 1928; M. A., University of Texas, 1932; Ph. D., University of Texas, 1948.

Legal restrictions on use of interview: None

Reason for choosing interviewee: Treat and Morris roomed together while doing graduate work at the University of Texas; they worked together at Abilene Christian College for thirty-five years.
COSGROVE: This is Owen Cosgrove in the office of Dr. J. W. Treat, August 29, 1975. I am securing information through interviews in my research for a doctoral dissertation at North Texas State University on the administration of Don Heath Morris at Abilene Christian College. Brother Treat, may I express my appreciation to you for this opportunity to visit with you and to talk about the life and work of this man.

TREAT: I am delighted, Owen, and certainly you would know the place that Brother Morris would have in my heart because of the long association.

COSGROVE: When did you first know him?

TREAT: I guess it was when he first came to A.C.C. I really knew of his work when he was a teacher at Abilene High School before he came here.

COSGROVE: Can you tell me anything in particular about it?

TREAT: No, I just know that he was a debate coach and a teacher of public speaking at Abilene High which of course was his field, and he continued with that when he came to A.C.C.

COSGROVE: What can you tell me about his work at Abilene Christian College from 1928 through 1932?

TREAT: I was a student in the years 1927 and 1928 there, so my B.A. degree came in the spring of '28, and that
year I was at Colorado City. I was teaching Spanish and math out at Colorado City High School. So I was away his first year, but of course I was back on the campus frequently since it's only seventy miles over to Colorado City. And then I was invited back to teach in the fall of '29, and he was here at that time, and he and I have formed a friendship all along. I was active in alumni affairs and he was also, so we had a common contact there in addition to our work as teachers. And then, of course, on his work on his masters at the University of Texas, we had another contact because in the summer of 1930, he was finishing up his masters, and I was beginning mine, and through those depression years, it was a matter of my borrowing on my insurance and going to summer school at the University of Texas, so I finished in three summers there after having also spent a summer at the University of Mexico in Mexico City. So in 1930, our paths came directly together at the spring, both of us planning to be at the University of Texas in the summer of 1930. Well, in those years I was secretary and treasurer of the alumni association we had our meeting right after graduation, and so I had to stay for that and give my reports and so on, and so while I stayed for that meeting, Brother Morris and
Sister Morris went on to Waxahachie (that's where her people lived) and visited there a little bit. So the arrangement was for me to meet with him in Waxahachie, and then we would ride together in his car on down to Austin for summer school. This was, incidentally, my first plane ride, so I stayed over for the ex-student meeting, and then caught a plane for Fort Worth and then by bus on over to Waxahachie, and then brother Morris and I went on together to the University of Texas. That was the summer of 1930, and we were together a great deal. We were roommates, in fact. We roomed in an old shambling boarding house. Paul Patterson, I remember, was the Major Hoople of that boarding house. Brother Morris and I roomed together up on the second floor of that old rooming house which was just across the street from the University Avenue Church of Christ. And so many interesting things I could tell, but our close association was during that time. I would just hit one or two things. First of all, I can remember so well brother Morris as a driver of his car; in those days we had no air conditioning, and so the windows were down, and he had two gestures which remain in my memory. One was, with his left hand he would reach out and bring in a handful of cool air. Normally he would cool his hand this way. This was not so individual, but it was for him; it stuck in my mind.
Another, he had a way of taking the back of his hand and tapping up, adjusting, the rear view mirror. At the boarding house, I think there are two things that I would like to say. First of all, on the humorous side, well, both maybe, we were reading the papers, of course, when the comic strip of Major Hoople was prominent, and there were so many things that were parallel with Major Hoople and Paul Paterson that Brother Morris and I had a great deal of fun; and he was a good imitator, so until the time of his death, I guess, any time we would meet on the campus, we would have a repercussion of that in his humph, humph, humph, humph imitation of Major Hoople, and it was a joke between us from that time--from '30 until, would be from any time. The other was in regard to his academic work. He was writing his thesis that summer, so he left specific instructions with me, his roommate, that if that old boarding house caught on fire, for me to grab his thesis and get out of there. (Laughter) Brother Morris had a great sense of humor. We attended the Northside Church of Christ there. Since he had a car, we'd both go out together. Naturally, he was going home some too. But that summer of 1930 stands out, I guess, as probably the most intimate relationship, contact, one-on-one basis
that I had. And yet, as you would know, I felt that a very close, a very friendly relationship, and open as long as he lived. It did not matter when he became vice president or on through. This relationship continued and I just must put in a little incident here I think. There was a young man, and I'll save his name for the records, who was one of the most timid, I guess, that ever hit the campus. So, Brother Morris and I happened to get together that we were going to get old so-and-so, were going to pull him out of that, and so we would make it a point to speak to him heartily and slap him on the back, grab him by the arm as we were walking across the campus or to Chapel or something. So one day Brother Morris stopped me and said, "Well, I believe we're making some progress," and he called this young man's name, said "today he came along and very timidly, just lightly touched my shoulder, and said, 'How are you, brother Morris?'" (Laughter) And that was another joke that prevailed for a number of years with us. Well, the warmth, the good humor, and wholesomeness, soundness of philosophy and faith and all, these were the things that were outstanding. What I have been telling are just some personal reactions and incidents which were interesting to me.
COSGROVE: During this time at Austin, did he preach any?
TREAT: Yes, I think he preached there at Northside when they needed a preacher, I'm sure he did. And I believe at the Southside congregation also, at that time.

COSGROVE: Did you preach also?
TREAT: Sometimes. I'm not sure on that particular summer. Now, I did later on because I went back each summer, and then, when I started in on my doctoral work back in 1936, I was preaching. But during the summers, generally, I was working with the young people there at the University Avenue Church of Christ, especially after '30 I believe, but '31 and '32.

COSGROVE: Can you tell me anything about his preaching?
TREAT: Yes, in fact, I can tell you the title and almost the outline of one of the sermons which he preached in that summer of 1930 at one of these places. It was entitled, "On the Jericho Road." And, of course, this was the story of the good Samaritan. And he had an alliterative outline, and I remember, on the Jericho road there was SIN that day, there was SUPERCILIOUSNESS, and, of course, he wound up, there was SALVATION that day, which he would wind up his sermon.

COSGROVE: Was he pretty effective as a preacher?
TREAT: Very effective. Very effective. He had a way of
making it seem as though he were talking personally to each one in his audience. Naturally, he hadn't been a speech teacher for nothing, and a debater; and I suppose that in your interviews you have found out that he went undefeated as a debater throughout his college career.

COSGROVE: Can you tell me something about the situation when you both had just come back to the college, and the depression had just hit, and the school had just obligated itself very heavily for the new campus. Can you tell me something about your relationship with Don Morris during those years?

TREAT: Well, first of all, as a fellow teacher, of course, and we were all in the same boat in regard to what some people would call the sacrifice in salary and so on. Of course, those of us who are older and lived through, we don't think of it as a sacrifice, and I'm sure Brother Morris didn't. But then, as he assumed more responsibility, you can correct me on this, was it in '32 that he became vice president, well then, of course, he was bearing along with the board of trustees a responsibility of trying to do something about the depression and our indebtedness. You know, of course, at that time, the plan of the move to the new campus, and that's when I began teaching here, in the fall of '29, the first
semester on the new campus.

COSGROVE: You had been teaching at Colorado City High School?

TREAT: Right.

COSGROVE: Can you tell me something about the salary as you came from there to here?

TREAT: Well, I had started at $160, my first year of teaching, which was average salary (a month), and Brother J. W. Watson, who was president of the board of trustees of A.C.C. at that time was also president of the board of trustees at Colorado City, and an elder of the church there. I say that to say this: when Brother Baxter invited me to come here as a teacher in 1929, Brother Watson represented both groups. But he was very anxious for me to stay. He had boys, and I was working with young people, and he said that I had a greater opportunity there. Well, I had always thought in terms of Christian education, and I loved A.C.C. and knew what it meant to me; I knew what it meant to my friends and relatives and so on, and so I was glad for the opportunity. I had taught, by the way, in my junior and senior year; I had helped Brother Schug in Spanish. I taught one section of beginning Spanish my junior year and two sections my senior year, and so actually my
teaching at A.C.C. goes back beyond '29. But I came that fall at the salary of $100 a month, and it wasn't too long until that was cut in half as you know in your research on the matter of Brother Morris.

COSGROVE: When Don Morris came from Abilene High to teach, do you suppose he took a similar cut in salary?

TREAT: I have an idea he did.

COSGROVE: Did his salary go to $50 a month.

TREAT: No, I'm sure he had a different scale. See, I was just an instructor, and then as he became an administrator, that would put him in a different bracket. But, frankly, I'll say, and that'll cut off any further question there, I have never known what any other teacher's salary was, and I have done it on purpose, so that no problem has ever entered my mind as far as salary is concerned or my faith in the administration. I've always known that I would be taken care of. I would be in it with everybody else, and I have been happy and contented with that situation, so don't ask me about anyone's salary. (Laughter) I don't know. I wouldn't mind telling you.

COSGROVE: I know that. The point I was trying to raise is, did Don Morris feel this sacrifice along with the rest?
TREAT: Surely. He was right with us. And I would go on to say now to advance the story a little bit, while he was there in the office, he and the president, first Brother Baxter and then Brother Cox, came up with a plan of trying to save the school. So the move to the new campus, and the division into lots out here, and those lots had been sold, but people who had bought the lots couldn't eat them, and they couldn't make payments, and they just turned them back. So, that was the situation financially. And, of course, we couldn't eat them either. But they came up with the Ten Thousand Club, well that came after another—, I'd better go back a moment, you know in your records that the thing that saved the school was the loan from Burkburnett, and you know the name of the man. But it was a loan, and then at the death of the last of the two, the man and his wife, it became a gift. But as long as they lived, we had to pay interest. So, how are we going to get money to pay interest? That was the Ten Thousand Club, teachers and friends and patrons everywhere subscribed a certain amount a month that would be paid in, and that would take care of the monthly interest.

COSGROVE: I think that it is safe to reveal, Brother Treat, that this Hardin gift of $160,000 on a six per cent
annuity took ninety-six hundred dollars a year to pay the annuity. So the Ten Thousand Club would cover that. What part did Don Morris have in organizing the Ten Thousand Club?

TREAT: I think he had a very active part. Now, I wouldn't know since I was not in the activity of the president and vice president's offices, and so on, and the trustees, and at that time, the Board of Trustees had their offices along with Don Morris, the vice president, in the main building. Mr. Reese was the secretary to the Board, and was here on the campus all of the time. But I know that he was very active along with Brother McKenzie and Brother Arledge at that time, not only in the--, I do not know who originated the idea, but certainly in carrying out the idea, he had a very important role.

COSGROVE: He was in charge of it, wasn't he?

TREAT: I think so.

COSGROVE: Can you tell me of any functions he performed outside the classroom from 1928 through '32, that there is some reason that the trustees, when James Cox became president, that they wanted a younger man to help with the vice presidency, and this was a new post created at that time. What qualities of leadership had Don Morris demonstrated that would cause them to select him to be
the new vice president?

TREAT: I'm sure that there were at least three things that I would think of. Number one, he left no doubt in his mind to anyone as to his loyalty to the church and to A.C.C. This was a big point certainly. Number two, he had demonstrated very well his ability to communicate in a public way and to be persuasive. And number three, his personality was such that in a public way, or on a one-to-one basis, or with an audience, he had a way of identifying and influencing for good the people whom he met. And I would think that these qualities along with a demonstration of being level headed, practical in his approach and in his philosophy in general, I am sure that these are the things that sold those in charge on him and his potential. And, of course, we can look back now and know that that was it.

COSGROVE: Do you know if he had any direct part to play in securing the Hardin gift?

TREAT: No, I'm not sure about that. I know that Brother McKenzie was directly involved in visits and talks and so on, and I believe Brother Arledge, I'm not positive on that. They were principal men at that point in the Board of Trustees locally, but I think that Brother Morris was along with them on those visits, but that
would be guess work on my part. I'm not sure.

COSGROVE: From 1932 to 1940, Don Morris was the vice president of Abilene Christian College. Other than administering the Hardin annuity and being in charge of the Ten Thousand Club, can you tell me any other administrative duties that he performed during that time?

TREAT: Well, he was primarily the contact man with the general public and the brotherhood at large. So he was even at that point traveling a great deal. I would say even more so that would be the case of the average vice president, at least in those days. Brother Cox, who occupies almost a first place in my heart in many ways, my love and respect for him as a teacher, as a dean, as a president, and so on, he performed our wedding ceremony and so on, was not a public relations man; and Brother Morris, therefore, took over responsibilities, and they made a good team in that way, because he was, and had demonstrated, and grew during those year, and these were great years of contact with the public, public relations and so on, that I would say along with the internal workings of A.C.C. as an institution, he worked there of course. But he could pretty well leave this to Dean Adams, and then he would become the right-hand man of Brother Cox in the outreach and in the general
work with the Board of Trustees. I would say he was a moving force in the contact in those areas.

COSGROVE: Do you remember any particular work that he accomplished from '32 to '40? Any specific projects that he undertook or work that he did?

TREAT: Well, I recall during those years primarily his work in the vice president's office, and what was most important for all of us at that time, the Hardin annuity, the Ten Thousand Club, and his administration of that fund. But leaving that phase of it, he was busy during that time in many other phases of life here and in general. He was very active as a public servant. He was wanted as a public speaker on many occasions. He not only spoke to the church as he had opportunity, preached (and he was a good preacher), but he was also wanted at civic organizations, on special occasions, patriotic type of thing, and he could always be counted on there, because he was a solid believer in the American way of life, private enterprise, the basic honesty of the pioneers, things that we cherish in the history of our country, and he was always a defender of that and an exponent of those ideas. He was also active in the Rotary Club and served in various positions of leadership, now in these years, I'm not sure of, but through
the period of his life. Whether that fell during this period, I'm not sure. But always with the primary goal of the welfare of Abilene Christian College, and when I say it that way, I want to go back and say it the way he did, Abilene Chr-r-is-tian College. (Laughter)

COSGROVE: What about work that involved moral issues such as gambling, drinking . . .

TREAT: He was one of the leaders in the Abilene community that opposed any type of betting on horse racing, or liquor traffic or any other crime elements involved, legislation, and so he was active there and willing to lend his voice, and it was not only naturally as a voice, a heavy voice, but it was heavy with influence and authority also, whether it be at the state legislature or meetings in Abilene or wherever. A very prominent, West Texas citizen.

COSGROVE: Dr. Treat, I want to express to you my appreciation for your help in this interview. I know that it will make a substantial contribution to my research into the life of this great friend of this school.

TREAT: Thank you very much for the time to go back over this. It's a very dear thing to me. the relationship that I had with Brother Morris and, of course, A.C.C. These are years that have been rich, and often I have
said that I have never seen the time since the fall of
1929 to this day that I would change places with anybody
in the world. And such people as Brother Don H. Morris
made that possible, working with them, being a part of
the team, being a part of Christian education here at
Abilene, as well as other related works which I have
had in the church, particularly among Spanish speaking
people. These are the things which lead me to that
statement which I made with all sincerity.

COSGROVE: Thank you again.

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COSGROVE: This is a continuation of the interview with
Dr. J. W. Treat on August 29, 1975 in his office at
Abilene Christian College. Doctor Treat, will you
describe for me the American Studies Program here at
Abilene Christian College and specifically the part
that Don Morris had in securing and maintaining the
program?

TREAT: We were engaged in the program of carrying
American ideals in a more specific way to the teachers
of the United States. So we had the beginning of the
American Studies Program, and this has been administered
by Professor Ed Kirk in a tie-in with the Coe Foundation of New York City. Brother Morris was the contact man with the Coe Foundation people in obtaining grants for the scholarship money. This would be full scholarship to teachers here in Texas and in other states of the United States for the purpose of going back to the basics of the Constitution, economic organizations, and the growth of these, with the idea of teachers taking this back to the classroom and instilling more deeply into the students across the country the basic principles of our country once more, because of some of those who had left and because of conflicting ideologies, but back to the public school room this way. This program had been underway about three years, as I recall, when Brother Morris was visiting in the office of Coe Foundation in New York City, and in that visit, the man in the office there, I don't recall his name, raised the question, "Doctor Morris, what do you think about a program like this for teachers in Latin America?" And Brother Morris spoke up at once and said he thought it would be a wonderful thing. Then the man put it right at him and said, how about you folk putting on that program? Well, Brother Morris told him, I couldn't answer that, but I will go back and talk to my people, and then I'll let
you know. So Brother Morris came back to Abilene and had a meeting of Brother Kirk and Doctor John Stevens, and he called in Professor Miller and me, and talked over the matter. And as a result, we accepted the challenge of putting on a program that would deal with those. As we said laughingly, Brother Miller said well I had a minor in economics, so I could teach the economic history of the United States course, and I said I had course in the federal Constitution once, so I guess I could teach the constitutional history of the United States. At any rate, we accepted the challenge because we wanted to present it in Spanish, so Brother Miller and I were the ones here, of course, and we set up the program, sent it in and had it approved, and the money came, and so that was the beginning in the summer of 1962, and for thirteen years consecutively we taught, Brother Miller and I, lecturing in Spanish, he on the economic history, and I was lecturing on the constitutional history, and that turned out to be a very successful program, and Brother Morris was very close to that. And then later on, Dr. John Stevens, of course, was our contact man, and being a history major himself, he encouraged that program. So this was another program initiated through the efforts of Brother Morris.
COSGROVE: Can you tell me a little bit more about the Coe Foundation?

TREAT: The Coe Foundation, I can tell this related to us because the lawyer of the Coe Foundation on different occasions came in and observed our work and gave us some background there. They had similar programs across the United States related at least in this general way. This lawyer told us on one visit, they had fifty-seven programs. And of course the thing that I remember best about it that made us stick our chest out a little bit was that they considered this program at A.C.C. their very best. The history of the program is an interesting one in that we reached into all of the countries of Latin America. We even had representatives, through those who were refugees and so on, from Cuba. But we had also, not only Spanish speaking, but from Brazil, Portuguese speaking, with some special grants from other sources. In two different years, 1964 and 1965, we had twenty-five teachers from Brazil. And, of course, they were Portuguese speaking, and we had classes then in Portuguese with the help of a teacher we brought in from Brazil, Howard Norton, and I had them in class with me, and they could understand the lectures in Spanish enough to do the course successfully.
There were fifty Spanish speaking and twenty-five Portuguese speaking those two years in my classes, and that was quite a challenge. Brother Morris was in the middle of this program. He was meeting these people, getting acquainted with them, using his Spanish. He of course spoke to them on different occasions. He was the president; he gave them a welcome address each time, had a president's reception for them. And then later on, as chancellor, president or chancellor, he would be the speaker at the closing banquet. Each program we closed out with a banquet, and each of the Latin American scholars could invite a guest. The impact of the program on the community was evident then because they would bring in friends that they had made here, and frequently Brother Morris would be the speaker on that occasion, and if he were not the speaker, he was always present and would bring a special message, and it was always warm because of his relationship there and because of his travels during those years which took him through Latin America.

COSGROVE: How fluent was he in Spanish?

TREAT: He could speak, carry on a little conversation.

He didn't claim to be a Spanish student by any means or scholar, but he spoke what he said well and clearly,
and he could travel and get along pretty well, but he made contacts, and his friendliness and all carried over too.

COSGROVE: Did he and these Spanish speaking people enjoy each other quite a bit?

TREAT: Very much. A reception in the home of President Morris was a highlight of the program. That came usually the first week, and they came in and it was an informal matter. They moved in easily. He and Sister Morris were great hosts, and right at once, the difference in the formality that those people were used to in their own country of anybody higher in rank particularly and of the easy-going, smooth friendliness that they found even in the home of the president was a surprising thing always to them and a highly pleasing thing to them.

COSGROVE: Did this help him secure any other gifts or bequests from any other foundations, the success of this Coe Foundation program?

TREAT: Not being in the immediate framework of this type of program, public relations and so on, and in our expansion program here at Abilene Christian College, I couldn't say for sure. I do know, as I indicated a moment ago, that we did have some other grants that
came, and I'm sure this was largely through his influence, some grants that did include money for these twenty-five from Brazil, of course that was outside of the Coe Foundation money.

COSGROVE: Did Don Morris have a direct part in securing those grants?

TREAT: I'm not sure. I think so.

COSGROVE: Okay, thank you so much.

TREAT: You're welcome.
STATEMENT BY J. W. TREAT TO OWEN COSGROVE, FEBRUARY 25, 1976.

One September morning, Don H. Morris was walking across the campus of Abilene Christian College toward his office when a large freshman student in ranch-style clothes said to him, "Say, fellow, will you help me with this trunk?" Morris set down his briefcase, assisted the young man in carrying the trunk up to a second floor dormitory room, straightened his suit, returned to his briefcase, and proceeded to his office without telling the young man that he was the president of Abilene Christian College. When fellow administrators chided him about what had been done, Morris quipped, "He was a rather large young man. I was afraid not to help him."