

Oral History Interview  
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pp. 38 – 42

WICKMAN: Let's go back to Abilene for a minute. You want to tell me your badger story again; I think we ought to save that; I think that's one of the great stories.

FITZWATER: Well, now first of all I want you to know that this is absolutely true because (I was there.)

WICKMAN: We can probably find it: I'm sure we can find it in the newspapers, you know.

FITZWATER: This is not hearsay. Oh no, I was there, and I'm not making any of it up, this is absolutely true.

WICKMAN: About what was the date now?

FITZWATER: Well, of course to kids, dates didn't mean too much—

WICKMAN: Was it during the first time when you were in Abilene?

FITZWATER: Oh, the first time—

WICKMAN: The first time, O.K. You were somewhere between thirteen and sixteen?

FITZWATER: Oh, no, wait a minute. It had to be—it was before I went to work in the telephone office, and I worked there nights from 1908 on, so it was between 1905 and 1908; it had to be. So it was, I'd say, roughly guessing, about '05 or '06, along in there, because I wasn't too big a kid then. Well, this was to play a joke on the mayor, Abilene mayor. And to my recollection I think the mayor was Harry Litts at that time: I believe he was mayor. Now I wouldn't be positive, but I kind of think it was Harry Litts. Someone had a badger he'd captured, a wild badger, and they had a pen built

in back of what was then the old Central Hotel, the back of it was on, oh, I don't know what street that is but anyway—I believe it was Spruce Street.

WICKMAN: Second and Broadway, didn't we say or—

FITZWATER: No, what you say, mention the hotel that's there now.

WICKMAN: The Forster Hotel.

FITZWATER: Well it was in that location, I'm sure. Well, anyway, the back of this hotel, the old Central hotel, the way it was then—

WICKMAN: That's Spruce, I guess.

FITZWATER: Yes, facing the street, the back of it, you see. So they had this pen built for the badger and had a chain on him and a doghouse affair built for him with, I kind of remember, old burlap or rag or cloth or something hanging down over the door so he could go in and out, you know at will. And so it was publicized all over town—people talked about it you know. They were going to have a dog fight the badger—somebody was going to furnish the dog and they were going to get in there on a certain day and they were going to have the dog fight this badger, and it was going to be quite an event. As I remember, this went on for a couple weeks beforehand. And I even think, I'm quite sure the *Reflector*, (who was it ran the *Reflector*?) was in on this badger dog fight.

WICKMAN: Charley Harger.

FITZWATER: Harger. I always thought that Harger was in on that, too, and my Uncle Lease Duckwall, I'd bank that he was in on it. But they must have been pretty good at keeping secrets, whoever arranged this, because it didn't leak out and I would have heard about it if it had. But it absolutely came as a surprise. Well, anyway, the thing of it was they were going to honor someone by having him pull this badger out of his house when it came time for the fight, that was going to be quite an honor, whoever would do that. So they decided the mayor was the one to do that. So it came time for the badger fight, dog fighting the badger and, oh, gosh, drew quite a crowd—that street was just full of people—people sticking their heads out of the windows of the hotel and across the street you know, big deal for Abilene. And I was right up in front so I got to see it first-hand.

So it came time to pull the badger out of the house, doghouse affair. And they told the mayor, "Now you're going to have to pull pretty hard because he's kind of stubborn, might have a little trouble getting him out of there." So Harry Litts, (I'm quite sure it was Harry Litts), anyway the mayor, he gets a hold of the chain and gives it a real hard yank and here came one of these old thunder mugs hooked on the end of the chain, came bouncing out you know, it was one of these old stoneware chambers with a side handle on it, the kind that people usually kept under the bed, they were sometimes referred to as thunder mugs.

WICKMAN: Chamber pots.

FITZWATER: Well, chamber, one story high but a wide one. It was made of old stoneware, glazed stoneware, one with a handle on the side. And that was hooked on the end of the chain and the badger was gone. Now those businessmen, some of them, went to all that trouble just to play a joke on the mayor.

WICKMAN: Was this sort of thing very common in Abilene then, where people would play practical jokes on each other?

FITZWATER: Well, a bunch of business men, at that time business pressure wasn't anything like it is today, you know; they had time for a little fun once in a while. And my Uncle Lease, he had a sense of humor, he never lost that even when he was the busiest, you know. So I'd be willing to bet that he was in on that; I bet that he furnished the thunder mug.