KENTUCKY CRAFT HISTORY AND EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, INC.

Interview with John B. Taylor
Interviewer is Bob Gates
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( ) This symbol refers to an inaudible word or phrase.

. . . This symbol refers to an interruption to the speaker

Gates:

This is Bob Gates and I'm interviewing John B. Taylor at his home in Louisville and we're going to talk about a different, well, we're going to talk about Louisville Pottery, and then Louisville Stoneware, I guess a little bit.

Taylor:

Very good. Well welcome. I'm excited to tell my little historical story here. It's not famous, like some of the big corporations, but you know, everybody has its way of…and I love history. Did you know, in high school days, they quit teaching Kentucky history for financial reasons. And so I love it now to be finding out all I can a little late in life.

Gates:

Is your family from this area?

Taylor:

My mother is, my father's from South Carolina, but I've lived here all my life until I took residency in Florida.

Gates:

Well, why don't you tell us a little bit about the company, what you know about it?

Taylor:

Well, I have a prepared a history of what happened prior to me being with the company. I wasn't born in 1904, so I had to play catch up a little bit, but you, would you like for me to read this or just start on it and you can…

Gates:

Yeah, just start on it. Whatever you want to do.

Taylor:

Well, the history of Louisville Pottery Company and I'm John B. Taylor, the president, which I'll get to that in a minute about the name change. Well, the company started in 1904 by my grandfather and his brother on my mother's side. And they purchased the Old Bauer Pottery and built a new state-of-the-art factory at Floyd and Bloom Street in Louisville, Kentucky. This factory was the largest pottery in the south. Stoneware and red flowerpots were the main products produced. Now, this is an interesting thing about stoneware. A lot of people don't even know what that is anymore, but, and at one time things were made out of stoneware it's a white clay, high temperature clay, which can make all kinds of things out of it. Now what was made in those days. And this is kind of a funny story, but we were making 50 gallon jars and, you know, stoneware, you've probably seen a stoneware jar, they're white on the outside and they're acid proof.

Gates:

Is that what people put sauerkraut and stuff in?

Taylor:

Not always. During prohibition, we were shipping two truckloads a day of these 50 gallon things. This was a big pottery now. And, of course I put in parenthesis, they were making pickles, right? And we also made another product during prohibition, which were the little brown jugs that were used for many things, mainly moonshine. Now I'm not disclosing something that was illegal, but we didn't care what they did with it. We, you know, made the product and they'd do whatever they want to with it.

Gates:

Was this your dad doing this?

Taylor:

Well, no, this is still back before my father came with the company. I'm going to have to look at my notes just to refresh me a little bit, but if you have questions well, historically a company of this age, it was doing well until the stock market crash and that didn't help sales. However, I've been told by the family, my father mainly, that they were able… Dad wasn't with the company at this point. Granddad kept the employees, even during the stock market crash.

Gates:

How'd he do that?

Taylor:

He never really knew, but he, he had to reduce wages some way, but he kept them going. We were very strong Methodist family and he felt obligated to these people, it wasn't their fault. And there were some sales for things like this, too. And, of course stoneware and what they put in it. (laughs) Seems to be popular. Well, anyway, let me proceed on a little bit here.

Gates:

I do want to ask you about the stoneware you sold and they sold and they knew they were going to bootleggers, how did they bootleggers use those big 5 gallon ones?

Taylor:

Well, most of it was made, were produced to make home brew. Beer. And they just couldn't get enough of them. Now, I don't know specifically who bought them. They had a distribution thing, but most of it was direct sales. Now my grandfather's brother, he was an interesting character. He kind of handled the sales.

Gates:

What was his name?

Taylor:

His name was…let's see now… My grandfather was Hiram… His name, another funny name like that, excuse me, I can't remember, but he was kind of a character and he used to do a little

illegal things too, like taking moonshine up to Canada and selling it and they could take moonshine and cut it and make other kinds of liquor. And that was illegal, but he lived a life like that, mainly because he had… not my grandfather, now, this is his brother, he was a wild and crazy guy, drank too much, drove fancy cars and ended up dying at 39 years old because of his lifestyle. But before he died, and this is part of the history of this company that I think is interesting… When you're an alcoholic, sometimes your thought process is a little different from most people. He ended up buying stocks during the depression. Stock market crash. And of course, for years they didn't say anything bad about him, you know, (laughs) and my mother was a recipient of most of this. So he never married, you know…

Gates:

So he made money or he lost money?

Taylor:

No, he made money. Buying stocks at the lowest price. Now that was his money, not the pottery money, but he made money working for the pottery because he was in charge of sales. Those are the things that fascinate me historically. For years I'm dragging this out a little bit, but for years we had no lakes, our bodies of water to, for enjoyment, like Cumberland, Kentucky lake and all those places. So this guy, he had a fancy automobile and he would take my mother and her mother up to the coast of Massachusetts in the summer. But now to get there and this fancy car, she would never let them put their luggage inside the car. And my grandmother, she didn't know about this, but see he was running booze. He'd take them and drop them off, go on to Canada. And of course he he'd bring back, you know, Canadian whiskey. So, you know, these guys, I don't know, my dad taught me to live within the law (laughs) but we had some family members that were, you know a lot of that led up to … and the distilleries were operating in Kentucky then just from medicinal reasons. But Brown-Forman in particular so, well, I'm getting a little off the subject of the pottery, but would you like for me to continue or do you have any questions? That's just kind of the beginning.

Gates:

I'd rather you not read from the thing if you could. I could ask you questions. Would that be okay?

Taylor:

Well, I can. I want to refer to it as notes, though. If you don't mind.

Gates:

Sure. You can either read through the whole thing right now and get rid of it or…I could just ask you questions at the end.

Taylor:

No, no, no. I know where we are.

Gates:

Okay. So, we got your grandfather bought this from Bauer, right?

Taylor:

Right. His father bought it for the two boys. Two boys, Sylvester Snyder bought it for my grandfather and his brother.

Gates:

Why? Because they didn't want to be farmers…

Taylor:

They didn't want to be farmers. That was too much work.

Gates:

It seems like being a potter is a lot of work, too.

Taylor:

It certainly was, but I think they conceive themselves to be management type people rather than farmers now that was a terrible mistake because of the values of the property up there. What it would be worth today, but of course they sold it back then.

Gates:

What was the layout of the place?

Taylor:

The farm?

Gates:

Not the farm, the pottery. What was it called back then, when he bought it, it was called the Louisville Pottery…

Taylor:

No, no, no. I explained a little bit earlier, they built this new factory and they called it Louisville Pottery Company. And that name stayed with it for 50 years or better, 60, 70.

Gates:

And what did it look like?

Taylor:

Well, when I say state of the art you probably laugh at that word, but every company has its own technological things, but to make ceramics of like flowerpots, and that's red clay now, different type of clay than stoneware, stoneware is a white clay. The red clay is same thing to make bricks out of and there's a lot of that around Kentucky. Well, this was so automated, it spit these flowerpots out by the millions and flowerpots were used by mostly in selling by them, by these growers around, they would buy them particularly a four-inch pot that was used for geraniums, for instance, now that was before other products came along. Now they grow them in plastic and peat pot things, and all sorts of things. And at the same time, the stoneware was used to

make the stoneware products, the jars, many, many products and gardenware was made out of the white stoneware clay, which happened to be mined in Kentucky. It was a rather crude mine that we bought the clay from. We did not own it.

Gates:

Where was the mine?

Taylor:

Well, there were several around toward the last, it was over in Indiana, but I want to give credit in Kentucky, the way they would get to that geology-wise, clay was laid down when Kentucky was covered by water millions of years ago, and clay consists of microscopic little animals and fish and all kinds of stuff. And when they died, it kept building up, building up and then when the water receded, then it became forested. And then that's when coal came in. So you would always find this stoneware clay under coal, but to get to it, you didn't have to have a coal mine. They'd go in from the side of a mountain or a big hill and drill in and get it like that. But they used that for years and they had a big ( ) at the pottery that they could bring it in by rail car and mass production. I mean, you're making 50 jars, two truckloads a day. That's a lot of clay.

Gates:

So, these weren't done by hand at all?

Taylor:

No, no, no. Well, semi. It's all done by a molding process. Now, those big jars, you had to have a mold and the clay would be put in the bowl and pressure applied to pull it up and make this shape of whatever you're making. And I took a heck of a man to do that because he could lift that thing out of the mold and go to the next one. Those were quite something. And as a little boy, I'd used to go out there and I'd watch him do all that stuff. And it was intriguing to me. And I think that's why I decided after college, I had worked part-time in the summertime doing odd things that I couldn't run a machine, but I could, you know, do the child labor law. But anyway, that stoneware clay. So there was an abundance of that and that we used for that. And then the red flowerpot clay, I know that came from a mine out in the south end.

Gates:

The south end of Louisville?

Taylor:

Yeah. We still got a hill out there full of it. I don't know what to do with it. I tried to sell it once, but I still own it at 30 acres. The company owns. I tried to use it as a bar pit material one time for the Watterson Expressway and I had a core drillings done to see if it would meet their criteria and it did, but it's a long story. It became a political issue and someone else got the job. Cost a lot more.

Gates:

So they would hire men mainly to do these jobs?

Taylor:

Well, no, no. They were men and women. And the nice thing about it was that a lot of them were related to each other, but the men did the heavy stuff.

Gates:

And that was pulling the pots out?

Taylor:

Yeah. And then when you take a wet piece of clay in a shape, it goes into a dryer which hardens it, but it's still clay. It has not been fired yet. Then it has to have a coating put on it, which they called glaze. And that glaze is sort of a refined form of glass. And when it melts, it gave the inside and acid proof container and the outside was white, just, I don't know why, but it was white. Now an interesting thing that happened, we used a Cherokee Indian head as a logo on these big jars like that. Well, the Cherokee Indians decided you're not going to use our name anymore. And they sued us. And dad said, you know, maybe we'd better not fight this. They've got a good reason. So we discontinued the Cherokee logo.

Gates:

When did you do that?

Taylor:

That would have probably been in the thirties.

Gates: Why did you have Cherokee in the first place?

Taylor:

I can't answer that. I don't know. Probably everybody used Indian names for something, you know, they still do. But what happened, the next disaster that hit the pottery and this was worse than the depression, the 1937 flood that hit Louisville. You asked earlier and I didn't answer your question. When I say state-of-the-art what I mean by that is they had dryers underneath the floors to continually, at night they would take the heat from the kilns and bring it to dry the pieces. So then they could handle them and glaze them. Well, when that water got in there and they used to burn those kilns with this black oil, everything went all over the place and just wrecked the plant. And it came very close to closing it.

Taylor:

Well, lucky dad got in… Grandpa's health was failing and people were dying earlier in life and they wanted to keep it in the family. So dad came in, he was with an insurance company, Liberty Mutual, but anyway, he quit that and he took over the pottery about the time the flood came. (laughs) And not only that I was born right in the middle of it.

Gates:

When were you born?

Taylor:

January, 1937. But what happened, the flood was caused from Bear Grass Creek backing up, and it flooded Louisville you know, from history and many businesses, but about that time, dad was not a ceramic engineer and he decided that he needed to learn more about ceramics in order to run this company. So he took a stay and for a year he audited ceramic engineering courses at Ohio State. He'd go up, you know on a Monday and come back on Friday. And he learned a lot, he audited these courses, so they weren't for credit, but he'd already been graduated from another college. But anyway…

Gates:

So he learned a lot learned a lot from that to help them out. To understand the whole process.

Taylor:

Well, the process is very technical too.

Gates:

Did your grandfather teach him a lot too?

Taylor:

Well, sure. When they started this factory, they had an engineer that ran the place, the factory, and, I'm going over a span of time. I mean, these people dying off and they were going into other businesses. We were never, unfortunately, a very high salaried or hourly work pay. Difficult. A lot of loss, a lot of breakage. When you take a raw material like clay, and it goes through a process to get it usable. You get screens to take out impurities, mainly coal, and then to fire it, stuff can slip through and then air gets in it. And just a lot of problems and a lot of breakage, particularly in that big stuff.

Gates:

Is it breaking in the kiln?

Taylor:

They'd come out of the kilns broken. It's a thermal shock. And now we used to use what they call beehive kilns. Like they fired everything. They still fire brick like that, I think. But we later went to these tunnel kilns where you would load it and it ran 24 hours a day. So we had to have people there 24 hours, you'd load it at this end and it go through, get good up to the top heat and then cooled down at the other end, they'd unload it. Very efficient.

Gates:

So it was actually on kind of wheels. That's going through the heater on to the other end? Kind of like a pizza thing. (laughs)

Taylor:

Well, a little bit higher temperature. ( ) a cone, which is a biometric cone that tells you how hot it is in there. So it had to be watched, but nothing like the old time, you controlled production…

Gates:

Did the movement of it break anything?

Taylor:

No, no, no. It's on a type of railroad car and they'd hook one up every two hours. And he was kind of the nightwatchman at night and during the… but they also had these jobs. So the pottery was under my dad's leadership was coming back. And when he was at Ohio State, and this is very important from the history. Ohio State was known for ceramic engineering. And unfortunately our federal government, after the second world war decided to give Japan a lot of the technology to get them back on their feet. Wasn't that nice of them. And it turned around and really hurt the big factories up in Ohio that mass-produced dinnerware. But anyway, dad met up there, a man that had a distribution worldwide of ceramics. He was an importer of Italian ware, and many things, and he talked to my dad and convinced him to start making hand painted dinnerware. Now, hand painted… and I'll show you I'll show you some pieces we have in a little bit. That's where the technology comes in. The glazes are difficult to control the colors. And we worked in a particularly in a green that was very technical and a competitor of ours here in town who used to work for my father, by the way, Mary Alice Hadley, they only worked in blue, which was the most stable color, but we were doing much more beyond that and a much bigger company. And so dad brought the technology back and they copyrighted things. And we started producing hand painted dinnerware to be distributed through this Carboni Company of Boston. And they did a wonderful job and we made it, they, they sold it.

Gates:

So they did a good job of getting it out?

Taylor:

So we learned a lot from them because they would import Italian ware, now we couldn't afford to do all the intricate painting that Italian painters would do, but we would do it the way we could do it on stoneware. And stoneware's a little crude understand. Now it's not a manmade clay. It's a raw clay. All you have to do is clean it up. And that's kind of what stoneware is, but it's like stone, its hard as a rock.

Gates:

Well, let me ask you about hand-painted. What are you painting on there? What images?

Taylor:

Well, this Carboni Company recommended… they started out with what was called a harvest pattern. And I still have that. The new company now does not make that anymore. They've gone a little more modern and which they should, but it's called an underglaze. You would take a raw piece, let's take a plate for example, and they'd paint a pear and they'd put a different design on it. And then it's dipped in a white glaze and then it's fired. And the white glaze would stick where there wasn't colors, but it would mute in with the colors to give you what you wanted.

Gates:

So it would be a pear?

Taylor:

Well, on this particular pattern was a pear.

Gates:

The pear shows up…

Taylor:

And it had grapes in it and oh yeah, very much so you could recognize it, but it's hard work.

Gates:

It is. Who did the painting?

Taylor:

Well, years ago, Louisville had a… Aaron's trade school, which taught artists now, unfortunately, and I'm not implying, I really don't know about this, but there really wasn't much work for a lot of these gals. And most of them were women out in the art field to make a living. So they came to us and we put them through a training program.

Gates:

The school came to you?

Taylor:

No, no. We did it individually with people and we'd, give them a try out to see if they could do it. And some couldn't, it's not freelance because you don't know what you're going to end up with when you paint it. It's not going to look like what a piece of artwork would look like a watercolor or something like that or oil. So it all came down to technique and we valued these girls very much so, and tried to hold onto them. Most of them stayed. They were very, very loyal. And my dad being a Southern gentleman, he treated everyone nicely and that's the way to keep people.

Gates:

Can you remember some of their names, the women?

Taylor:

Oh, geez. (laughs) No. Well, their faces. Yes, but the names, no. And, and none of them are around anymore. The new owners down there, I'd asked if there's anyone in there, the only one down there is a Korean man who's been there forever. That for design work as far as the physical designs to making shapes, he was not a painter. He was a sculptor. Beautiful work though.

Gates:

So with these young girls, you brought them in, they tried painting directly onto the stoneware. Right. And how did you know when they did it good?

Taylor:

Well, we would take their pieces. And as I said before, they'd be dipped in a white glaze and fired, so no one would know for 48 hours. That's how long it would take.

Gates:

If it would've turned out okay?

Taylor:

Yeah.

Gates:

If they did good the first time and you hired them, were they supposed to do the same pattern every time?

Taylor:

Well, it was rather repetitive. Yes. But then the Carboni Company kept recommending different patterns to us and my dad and I would go to the sales meeting in Boston every year. And they would give us many things to think about. And new products. Now I learned how to sculpt and reproduce pieces. Now some are copied. I'm pretty good with my hands. I like that type of thing. I do have a brain, but I love working with my hands. Okay.

Gates:

And what do you mean carving? What are you sculpting?

Taylor:

Well, we had to produce a whole line of dinnerware. The only thing we ever had at all were plates or a bowl. Now they want teapots, they want cereal bowls, they want many different things. He's got soup tureens, canister jars. I mean, it goes on and on and on the line was extensively big and it was expensive, but they only called on marketing. They only called on a lot of the big stores, like Neiman Marcus and up in New York and all this stuff. And only good credit small stores. They we pushed them, but they wanted to get paid as everyone does.

Gates:

So when doing these tureens and these other things, is that what you're calling sculpturing? You're making those

Taylor:

That word sort of takes it all in, yes.

Gates:

So you're not really using automation anywhere are you? To make those different…

Taylor:

Well, for instance, the old way is still the same way today on making a plate for instance.

Gates:

And that's what you described earlier?

Taylor:

It was called jiggering. And you would put a mold in a spinning wheel and you put the clay on it and you'd have a lever that would come down and you made the plate upside down. And then you put it in a dryer and it would dry. And then plaster mold would absorb moisture and it would be ready to handle. But what I had to do when they taught me, you have to come up with a shrinkage component because everything has to be made oversize. Because it would shrink in the firing process and to make a five quart casserole, well, you want it to be not perfect, but you want it to be at least whole five quarts, but we made casseroles that were were nine quarts. Caterers would buy these things cheap. Jeez, you couldn't even pick them up. (laughs) And so I ran the plant, the one man he retired and another little story that came in. Well, I'm saying that was a good addition for the pottery after what had happened with the flood and other things.

Gates:

The addition of doing more…

Taylor:

We were leaning away from flowerpots and stoneware and the dinnerware, but the demand the demands shrunk considerably on stoneware jars. Plastics were coming in much easier, cheaper and less weight. You name it, but not as good though. That's all right.

Gates:

I'm still a little confused though about all these different… You said the plate was the thing you normally made, and then you moved into these other things.

Taylor:

Well, another method of making a ceramic piece that's not round, you use a casting method. This is where you have a mold and you pour the liquid clay in it. Now the clay that's used in the jigger thing, that's a sort of a semi plastic and not plastic, but it's consistency. They can work that, but casting is a liquid and you pour it in the mold and the plaster would suck the moisture out. So it would leave a piece in there. And the man that did a lot of that, they knew how long to leave it in there. And they dumped the rest out. I mean, casting has been like this and brass and all kinds of things. So you get the intricate shapes that way.

Gates:

So you had a lot of different jobs going on, the person who made the ware, then the women who painted on it and the glazing and the drying and the kiln and all that stuff.

Taylor:

Yes, yes. Dad said at the peak back then we had at least a hundred employees.

Gates:

How many of each job did you have?

Taylor:

Well, the art department was the biggest. I think there were 22 girls maximum at one time.

Gates:

And those were the painters?

Taylor:

Painters only. But then you had to have supply people and then you had to have glazing people and you had to have people to load the kilns, unload the kilns, but then you go back to the base of the whole operation is you get the clay in. And there was a called a clay room and it came in, it had to be crushed with these huge machines. And then it had to be liquified and run into what they call them a press and these pieces then would be taken out and put in a pug mill, which would put it back into a plastic thing, so the people could use it. It had the impurities taken out, hopefully with a screening and then it went into a vacuum to take the air out.

Gates:

Now who was doing all this?

Taylor:

Well, we had a crew in the clay room. Now, that's hard work and they were good men. Loyal. And I learned a lot from my dad how to work with people. I wasn't too happy when they wouldn't show up, sometimes and never let us know. (laughs) But you know, you work around those things.

Gates:

Did you employ blacks and whites?

Taylor:

Oh yes. And in the clay room were blacks. Good, black men. Hardworking. But in the warehouse, when we were making the flowerpots and all the stoneware, we had a huge warehouse. Now this whole pottery consisted of three acres.

Gates:

The whole place did?

Taylor:

Yeah. They were big kilns. These beehive kilns, then the warehouse where all the stuff was made. Now, the dinnerware had its separate department, where it came off the kilns, it was taken to a different warehouse where it was packed according to orders, but we had a big sales right here in Louisville and these big… Well, let me go a little further here. As the demand for

the stoneware and flowerpots decreased, dad sold those off. One company in Ceramo, Missouri bought the flowerpots. They are already making flowerpots and so they took over and then we sold the stoneware to someone else, but we ended up marketing for these companies. That was the deal. We'll sell you our company, our equipment, they had better equipment than we did.

Gates:

You're selling them your equipment?

Taylor:

Well, they had their own.

Gates:

Okay. So what you're selling to them is your business.

Taylor:

That end of the business and I always learned to call it goodwill, you know, and the technology that went with it. Now, we never sold the dinnerware line until later on. But dad got rid of that. Now, at one point we own two more potteries up in Indiana and dad bought them. They had not done well, and he felt like we needed some more capacity to manufacture. And after losing in the flood, this factory was limited, but that proved not to be successful because, (laughs) we used a lot of natural gas. We used to fire with oil and how it became natural gas. Well, he put it in these towns and then suddenly the gas companies triple the rate, you know, the gas… Goodbye. Couldn't make any money anymore. So that was a waste of time and money and, you know, just whatever he learned not to do that anymore. But I think this doesn't really applied too much, but as far as what we made, but we also, during World War II, Fort Knox was out here and the armor division and to service their battery system, you see, we made a product that was acid proof. Nothing else… I don't think stainless steel was invented then or something, but our ceramic glaze was acid proof. So they would carry containers of this acid for their batteries to start these things, you know, armored was a big deal in the war. And so we sold a lot of that, but here they look like, well, they were containers with clamps on them, not big, but every tank had one or more. I've always admired my dad for his brilliance on some things. During the second world war, and we ran trucks. We didn't have wagons with horses anymore. It gets ( ) (laughs). Sounds like rain, whoa. Here's what the advantage of selling to the government did during the war. You had an access to tires for your trucks. And without that, we couldn't deliver anything. That was a crucial thing. And we weren't being negative about the war. They had preference, but, we made something for the military. So we got preference. You got to think, you know, to me in small business, you better stay ahead of the game and you're out of it.

Gates:

How'd your dad figure out they needed that?

Taylor:

Dad was, was kind of a leader and I'm going to get, get to this in a minute. He was in the Rotary Club. Now the rotary club, you're connected with a lot of their business men. Now I'm not bragging about him being in the Rotary Club, I was too, but he met some people that gave him

this idea. So he went out and called on the Generals out at Fort Knox and he asked him and they got the engineers together and came up with this. So it was good. The company needed this. And for reasons that I just explained. I came into the pottery to work in the early sixties, but I'd been working in the summers and I knew how to do a lot of things. I just couldn't do it for the child labor law, and dad, he gave me the dirty work of painting the roof for instance, in the summertime. (laughs) Oh, thanks, dad. That's great. But at least I had a job. Okay. No complaints.

Gates:

But I wanted to go back just a minute and talk about how the women and the men, did they see themselves as artists or did they see themselves as just laborers?

Taylor:

Well, it's kind of a combination of both. They did repetitive work for instance. We got an order for 300 coffee cups. Coffee cups and plates sold more than anything. So they'd bring them to her and she would do the same pattern on everyone and then to keep them happy. And artists are a little respected, very emotional sometimes. And that was a difficult job just to kind of keep water around there with women. And I had to get married to find that out anyway. No, but they would they'd repetitive work. And yet here was the thing that we offered to them several times a year, the Carboni Company, the distributor, we would, they would send us new patterns. Can you do this? And we'd have a contest for money and we'd give them the time to create their own. Now one girl was really good. She developed a pattern that we ended up doing without the Carboni Company's suggestion.

Gates:

What was it?

Taylor:

Well, it was a I'm not very good at names after all these years, but it was a very popular, it was a blue and white type of decoration. I don't have a piece here to show you. And then we did like a Dogwood. Dogwood was a very popular flower. And I will say how difficult this business was when the second World War broke out, we used to buy uranium now to make yellow with. You seem to know about that, well, they called all that. And, oh my God, we used to use yellow like crazy. And so we had to find a substitute and we didn't know why they were calling it all, but we know today why they did. And I'm glad they did. So, the girls, the artwork, they were wonderful. And the people making the ware, they were good. Repetitive though. I mean, most of the women were very good. Women are very ambidextrous in finishing. Once you make a piece and it's dry hard, you have to trim it and take a sponge and clean it up before it's painted. And some of the girls asked to be switched around temporarily to get rid of the boredom. And we tried to accommodate them all we could, but you can't always do that.

Gates:

If somebody ordered a pattern, did it have to look exactly the same every time? Or was there a little difference every time?

Taylor:

Well, no, it's hand-painted. Each one is an individual.

Gates:

Did you play that up in your advertising?

Taylor:

Oh, of course. But now what people would not like, say they ordered a set of one pattern 10 years ago, and they broke some pieces. So they want to reorder. Now, it's hard to do a perfect match on that. I will tell this story. You talking about embarrassment, Neiman Marcus was a big buyer, very wealthy Texans, matter of fact Lyndon Johnson's family had it for their ranch, but this lady bought a casserole. Now that's a big container to make like lasagna and those things in. And she made it because her husband's boss was coming over for dinner. She puts it in the oven and she pulls it out. The bottom falls out. The piece cracked. Now, of course, the manufacturers always blamed for it, right? Usually cars, anything. Well, but ceramics are something that if, when you, when we would ship it to Neiman Marcus, how would we know that the stock people didn't drop it? It didn't maybe crack immediately, but when you subject to an oven heat, but we didn't have a lot of that. But boy, we sure heard about that for a long time. (laughs) And there was kind of an interesting way. You could test a piece, you'd take up a little tool, something metal and hit it, and if it rings it's okay. So we had to educate people before they'd use a piece because they might've cracked it themselves. It wasn't, you know, to compete with products that were, they would call it from freezer to oven. This was glassware, that stuff could withstand anything.

Gates:

Like Corning?

Taylor:

Yes. Like Corning. Good example. And so people say, well, why didn't yours do that? Well, it's a whole different game. We, we were subject to that. And we would replace things, usually no cost. And so those are some of the manufacturing problems.

Gates:

Did you have like a family feeling in that place?

Taylor:

Family?

Gates:

Did everybody feel… I mean, what was the culture in that place.?

Taylor:

Yes, well I mentioned that earlier. These gals that we hired to do a lot of the heavier work, like the finishing, they had to pick up trays of pieces, you know, how we we picked them? If they had been waitresses or they had been a mother, they knew what it was to pick up things. And they couldn't be real timid. I don't mean they were lifting weights or anything, but they were hearty, good people, and that was spread around.

Gates:

Was that part of the interview process to see if they had been waitresses?

Taylor:

Very much so. And I did a lot of that. I never seemed to have a problem with finding enough people and we'd train them and they were good. The only problem with too much family, if I might express that, that sometimes something goes wrong, they will tend to gather together. And that can be very difficult to solve those kinds of problems.

Gates:

Like what would happen?

Taylor:

Well, where maybe there's an argument between management and one of the people maybe they weren't working, right or what not. I had some arguments with a couple of guys and I didn't like that. And I had to watch myself too, because some of these people, I didn't know what they'd do, but we managed those things well. Very happy. Dad at Christmas would give Christmas gifts based on work ethics and being on time and, you know, productivity and the whole works. So they liked that.

Gates:

Everybody didn't get the same thing?

Taylor:

No and that could lead up to problems, too, sometimes. (laughs) But as long as they knew what was expected of them, and it's all about money, I mean, why do any of us work? I think that's…

Gates:

Money and satisfaction, too, right?

Taylor:

Well, excuse me. Yes. Yes. I was a lucky son. I was not born with a silver spoon. Dad made me work. Mother, both of them. Mother really owned the company more than my dad did because it came through from her father. But so I'm not bragging about me. I like to work and I didn't know I had a family business. Dad warned me about it before I got into it. It's going to be tough. You know, it's a rough one.

Gates:

Why was it going to be tough?

Taylor:

Well, some of the things I've mentioned, you got a lot of labor. When you got hand painted things handmade, you got to labor. It was easier… Probably today, it would be very difficult to

do from a mass production type of thing. Ceramics… I really admire people that have a home kiln and can do ceramics or any kind of artwork. It's beautiful. But you can't make any money making just one at a time. You've got to spit them out, so to speak. And we tried to maintain the quality. And dad, I want to break away and make this a point too, that after I'd been… Dad decided before I came into the company, but I'd been out there working enough in my time to learn how to do things, not only in the plant, but in the office up there, my dad was a leader in his life. He was president of the Rotary Club. He ran for mayor of Louisville under the Republican party. He won the primary and he lost the election, which Louisville's been pretty much Democratic over the years and still is. But he lost the election. But during that year myself and another man, we took over the whole place. Dad didn't have time anymore. And he wanted to win. He wanted to be, kind of went back to his, he'd had some law degree training and before he took over the pottery and all, but, the good thing that happened not too long after that, a division of the Federal Government called Urban Renewal came to us and urban renewal is a connection between local government and business. And the L & N Railroad, which happened to run… was the one on our plant. We had a seven car siding, but what the railroads wanted there was not our business because we weren't using them much anymore. They wanted to tear down that whole block. And they wanted to build for themselves warehouse and distribution. And do you know, they bought us out. When you sell under Urban Renewal, you have a combination thing. So you can treat combination things from a business standpoint, you either reinvest the proceeds in a business, or if you put it in a stock market, you've got to pay capital gains taxes. Now I'm really getting off the subject, but that was very important to us at that time. We had no choice, but, it was never used for that purpose. Today it still sits with a road builder equipment lot. Nothing to get taxes.

Gates:

So are you saying that the urban renewal that went through Cincinnati and we went through Louisville and went through here basically under that this railroad kind of closed you down? Is that what happened?

Taylor:

No, we weren't using it much anymore. Due to the volume. We were no longer making the stoneware and the flowerpots. That took a lot of clay. We could get the clay now by being a ( ). Much better.

Gates:

But why would that close your factory down?

Taylor:

Urban Renewal, working with the city and the city wanted more taxes on this land. These buildings were so old, the termites had already eaten about all they wanted and that old post and beam construction. It was a blessing in disguise for us, the whole place. And had this not happened, dad would have retired and I'd been running the company. And with those kinds of you just…But dad and I came to a meeting of the minds, which was really good. I said, well, dad, we're going to close the pottery, what am I going to do? Well, I'd been involved in some real estate investments on my own, now I'm really getting away, but this is part of the industry. And dad said, well, I'm going to retire. And Urban Renewal is going to pay us these proceeds. And you want to get into real estate. So that was our choice. We sold at this point, we'd gotten the money for the land and the buildings, but we sold the equipment and the technology and what they call the goodwill to a man who had been a ceramic engineer with American Standard

here in Louisville. And they wanted to move him to New Jersey and he wanted to stay here. So he bought the company.

Gates:

American Standard that makes toilets and things?

Taylor:

American Standard had a large experimental lab here in town because they used to make a lot of sanitary ware. And he was a ceramic engineer. So he knew something about pottery work or anything.

Gates:

Is that Mr. Robertson?

Taylor:

That's Mr. Robertson. Yes. And I helped him a little bit through the stages of some things that he asked for some help on, but basically we were out of it.

Gates:

Did he move it some place else?

Taylor:

Yes. Well, he had to. He moved it up on a street. It's Brent Street where it's presently located in Louisville and he found an old factory and he converted it over and his is much more efficient than our three acres of not using all of it.

Gates:

What about the drying under the floor and all of that?

Taylor:

Well, no, he didn't have any of that, but he managed to supplement it with other ways. When, when you have a kiln, you draw off the excess heat, you could heat in the wintertime, the working areas, but it goes into dryers, which then do the same thing. More efficiently to tell you the truth.

Gates:

I mean, did he take your old kilns?

Taylor:

Oh no, no, no. Kilns are built out of brick and the dome beehive kilns…no, no, no. They were not salvageable. Nobody wanted any of that. And as I said, when the flood came, see that got in everything and that's when dad elected to put in what they call this tunnel kiln. And it was still

subject to flooding of course, but Louisville had then built a seawall and we all felt better. A seawall-- a floodwall and we haven't had anything since now.

Gates:

Knock on wood.

Taylor:

We went on, but it wrecked things. It absolutely wrecked it. And Louisville's lucky to be here today because of that. They were in such financial trouble, everybody, you know? Oh goodness. And of course the west end was totally inundated by the water. And they started a new section in Louisville called Highlands.

Gates:

Were you in the west end or the east end?

Taylor:

Was I what?

Gates:

Was your pottery place in the east end or the west end?

Taylor:

No, it was in the middle down near U of L university down in... And when it was built in 1904, that was all open land. I think there's a little University of Louisville, but old crawfish land, which is not too good.

Gates:

Low lands where water…

Taylor:

Yeah. And no one ever thought that a flood would come. As many factories had found out over the years and it's going to get worse over the years, but they used to fire these big kilns with this black heavy oil. And what happened when the water came in? The floodwater…Oil floats on top of the water and it just… black oil. (laughs)

Gates:

Did you go down there with your dad when it happened?

Taylor:

No, no. I was born in 1937, right in the middle of this thing. So dad had the flood and he had me and all this to deal with. I was very proud of him for his good sense of not caving in.

Gates:

How many kids do you have in your family?

Taylor:

How many do we have in my family? I had an older sister. She did not elect to have anything to do with the pottery. She married a banker here and along that part of the story, I ended up buying her out. Sometimes small companies got too much family. And then if someone dies, they go, uhh. So he was a banker, but he was in the trust department and he'd seen the civil fights over things. (laughs) So we separated and I bought her out and it was good for both of us.

Gates:

How long were you kind of the overall director of it? After your dad?

Taylor:

When Urban Renewal came…

Gates:

That's 65, 70s?

Taylor:

70. Dad retired, but he was still hanging around because we had to make some negotiation things and work out all the details, but he said, pay me a pension. But then two years after that, we, we consulted our accountants on the right thing to do to re-invest the money and another pottery, which meant building a new plant. And if you know what OSHA was coming in strong about that time. And we use a lot of high pressure gas. And when you got a lot of pressure gas, you're regulated like unbelievable. Because if that thing had ever blown up, it would take out the neighborhood. Our plant would have. Now the new one, he could turn it off and on. But that was some of the problems that we discussed. And I'm a third generation and I didn't want to be considered a quitter, Urban Renewal caused all of this to happen. And to be honest with you, I'm lucky because we'd have built a new plant and you'd still got the same problems manufacturing, but I loved it. We were fine. And so what we did, I took over the company and I was elected president and we decided, as I said, not to rebuild, we sold the business to John Robertson. Now he opened the new factory. I don't mean to referring to my notes, but I want to make sure this is clear. And he named his company, Louisville Stoneware. Proceeds, as I mentioned from the sale of this, for tax reasons we reinvested in you just don't go out and buy a company. That's pretty hard to do. We reinvested the proceeds in real estate. And I'd already been doing a lot of this on the side anyway. So, it was kind of a natural and we've operated for 45 years. Add up the years since 1970. Under the name of Taylor Properties, Inc, which is an operating company. And it's a holding company, so to speak of different things, real estate primarily. But my wife, Sally she's vice-president and we own all the outstanding stock and I have two daughters that are on the board of directors. So that's the way we control things.

Gates:

And you own a lot of property Louisville?

Taylor:

Yes. Yeah. Most of it is. I had a part of a shopping center in Naples, Florida where we live in the winter. I'm really a Florida resident. For you folks out there, I love Kentucky that's home and we come back here in the summer. I love it. I'm getting older, we don't know what our plans are down the road, but I love warm weather. (laughs) But we've had to be here for health reasons and lately, so we don't know what we're doing, but I want to live in a house. I don't want to be stuck in a nursing home. You know, that's getting really getting off the subject, but I think … what I told her to do with me, take me out in the backyard, like an old Southern sick hound dog and shoot me. And she said, well, they'll catch me and look what'll happened. I said, nah, we'll work that out. (laughs) So silly talk folks. I'm done with that.

Gates:

I want to ask you some more questions. Did you cover everything you wanted to with that?

Taylor:

Sure. I did and more.

Gates:

That was great. So you're now living down in Florida, coming up here in the summertime. Did you miss pottery when you were done with it?

Taylor:

Well, I did. And to be honest, I still do. However, I had thought about getting involved in Florida and I could teach ceramics if I wanted to in the community schools. I could I did some work for Habitat for Humanity and some things, but I can't do that anymore. I can't … my legs are in bad shape.

Gates:

But your hands?

Taylor:

Oh, yea.

Gates:

Was there a nice feeling about working with clay for you?

Taylor:

Well, you know, I think the clay helped my hands as far as arthritis goes there, they hurt a little bit, but they're workable. And I love to do things. I've got a shop. I like to putter around, but I learned a lot of that from the pottery because they had an engineer. When I came to work there, he taught me a lot of things. How to weld, how to make the pottery. I knew how to do it all. I could even paint a little bit.

Gates:

(inaudible), you could do it, huh?

Taylor:

Up until point. We had a second room as we call it where the rejects and we would sell those locally and we'd make more out of that than going through our distributor just due to the discounts we would give them. And so we weren't too concerned when we'd have defects in the dinnerware now I'm not talking about these great big jars that we used to make. You know, people would buy these and they, they were cheaper a lot cheaper.

Gates:

I think I've been there. The other place. And bought some things. (laughs)

Taylor:

Well, it's still going. And it's had two owners since John Robertson and for whatever reason, I hope Mr. Smith is successful. He does business a different way and he owned several businesses around town and you know, it's good.

Gates:

What do they make there now?

Taylor:

Well, the dinnerware that's all, that's all. But not just, well, I'm saying that's all, he makes a lot of very intricate things. Like we have a Steamboat here called the Belle of Louisville and this Korean man was very talented at designing it, but here's where they were favored. As technology went along, molds for molding pieces changed from plaster to rubber type things that you could do more intricate things. Because you could do under cuts and you could do a lot of those kinds of things. They're wonderful pieces that they've done, we did a lot of corporate work for, well, we used to make bottles in the whiskey industry years ago, way back, but you know, what was so difficult about that? The food and drug administration, they had such strict requirements because liquor is something you consume and it can't have any impurities in it. And, stoneware, it's not perfect. It's not like a glass bottle or a plastic bottle. But one thing I will say when the pottery closed we were contacted by a couple of people to invest in building a glass bottle plant in Bardstown, Kentucky. And we even… governor what's his name? We met with him and there was funds available from Kentucky called ( ), which would loan money to corporations. And this is kind of getting off the subject, but this would have still been under the Louisville Pottery Company, our own Taylor properties. And we really looked into it, but you know, the people in Bardstown didn't want that. And they went industry like that. You know why? It's highly unionized. Now I'm not opposed to unions. I'm just telling you that's why and what that did that competed with the liquor industry, because they were paid less and they, they were laid off a lot during slower times now, probably now not. It's improved a lot. Yeah. And it conflicted with it and the distilleries were big timers. They ran the town. So this thing, they said, forget that location. And we just got out of it and I'm probably good cause they make plastic bottles now.

Gates: Oh, yeah. That’s interesting. That part of the history.

Taylor:

But, I loved it. I discuss it. Even my son-in-law from South Carolina, he was interested in the pottery one time he could have, he could have bought it, I guess, with my help, but I talked him out of it. I just said, I've been through it and done it. It's too hard. You can't make enough money. But it depends on… I'm not a rich man, but you know, it costs to live and it wasn't worth the effort to, to do that.

Gates:

Did you like coming in every morning when you worked there?

Taylor:

Oh yes. I worked a lot of weekends and I tell you I did something. I had a girlfriend before I was married and she was a beautiful girl. I made a living mask of her. She did everything I told her. You put soda straws in her nose and little Vaseline on her face and you take clay and put around their face, say they used to do this years ago with Napoleon and I made this living mask of her. And then I took it to the factory and made another mask, another pour, you had to make two or three to get a bust. So that was my master piece and I gave it to her at Christmas and we broke up. I asked my wife to pose. And she said I’m not going to do that.

Gates:

How long did she have to stand still to get the mask?

Taylor:

Well, I don't like to go into detail, but she had to be lying down now on a table and it took… See when you pour plaster it has to set up and I told her, now don't get frightened. I had a book from the University of Kentucky, how to do this. Don't panic because it's going to get warm when it begins to get hard. And she could breathe through her nose. She was a great candidate and everything worked right.

Gates:

But then she broke up with you. Or you broke up with her.

Taylor:

Well, it was mutual, whatever.

Gates:

Did she break the thing?

Taylor:

She was a neat girl.

Gates:

(inaudible)

Taylor:

Doing I was at the point of getting a little older, but many a day after we married, I'd be down there on the weekends, particularly getting samples ready for these shows. They had the big trade shows. Chicago used to be a big town for this type of thing. So I'd find out what they wanted and then I had to produce it and get it back up there for these shows. Back then stores, big stores, purchasing departments, came to these trade shows. Now they still do, but not to the extent that they used to.

Gates:

Like ( ) in Cincinnati and other places like that would go to these things?

Taylor:

Yeah. It's too expensive to travel and do all that. So they kind of, it can all be done through the internet.

Gates:

But in those days you had prepared and take it up there and have a booth or something?

Taylor:

Well, we didn't have a booth. No, we were the manufacturer. They, the distributor had the booth. However, Sally and I went to one of the shows in Chicago one time. And we were at the show in the booth and the people loved it because they would finally meet the manufacturer of what they were buying. And we had kind of a fun deal, you know, along with it. But that was very good. We had a great relationship with this Carboni Company. Unfortunately, the successor of ours, John Robertson, he elected to market another way through his own. He wanted to cut out the middleman now, whatever. John kept it for a long time, had the business and whatever he was doing was, you know, fine with me.

Gates:

But he didn't work with Carboni anymore?

Taylor:

No, no. And I think really Carboni Company kind of changed too. And it didn’t work. We really, dad had a great rapport, but this man was older at the time he met dad. So, you know, he sold his interest off and then it was difficult.

Gates:

Was he from Italy? The Cabonis?

Taylor:

No, no, no. He was an American, but he was a big Italian importer, but you carry more than one line. You know, but he'd go to Italy and spend a lot of time. Tuscany, all these places where the art really was great and he'd buy big time and bring it back, sell it. And he knew them all over

there. We later did a trip over there, but we didn't go through anything of the old potteries. I guess the biggest pottery nearby up in Cincinnati, y'all still have up there on top of the hill.

Gates:

Rookwood?

Taylor:

Yeah. I think they're still going.

Gates:

I remember going up there and eating at the Rookwood pottery. And you could eat in the kiln. Have you ever been up there?

Taylor:

Yes. Right. I did that. I did that. Yeah. Yeah. Mount Adams. Well, in my younger days, I didn't go up there to eat in the pottery. I went up there to.... (laughs)

Gates:

Was the same place though, right?

Taylor:

Right. I don't want to tell you what… it was. (laughs) Oh, well, never mind. (laughs)

Gates:

They were your competitors, right? Rookwood pottery?

Taylor:

No, not really. No. They were a different type of clay. Most potteries used what they would call a prepared clay. They would buy… it started out with ball clay, and then they would add different ingredients, ( ), a number of products to make the clay, but make it more functionable. And it wasn't stoneware anymore. It would be ovenproof, but it would not be the same thing. And it was mass production too. Oh, we made it one time, these little bean pods for Kentucky Fried Chicken. And I loved it. My dad working with Colonel Sanders, that was an education. (laughs) He was a tough old bird. And but I went to college with John Y. Brown that bought it and started it and made his money. But no, I loved the pottery. Actually, when I look back at it, other than having to build a new factory and I think the wisdom my dad gave me. If you want to do that, mother and dad were great. They were behind me because I had proven myself, I wasn't goof off and I could have done it and I could have run it. But I love people, but you know, I'd work people so long and it was kind of a pleasure not to have to work a lot of people. It's very demanding. And I don't know if I'd be here today, it had been very stressful.

Gates:

You weren’t union though, were you?

Taylor:

Yes. At one time. And I'll deal with that. The Teamsters Union of all companies, which usually was the trucking industry, they organized us back in the forties and the people had to pay dues. Of course. And finally, one man said to the people in the plant, we're not getting our money's worth belonging to this union. And they voted to decertify them. That's very rare. And in management, you can't get involved in that, or they'll get you for anti-trade laws and all these things. So that was better for them and better for us. You don't need a union in that type of industry, small industry.

Gates:

When you look at individual potters, like you said before, individual potters, making plates and things for people. Do you see a connection between what you guys did and what they're doing now? I mean they're considering their selves artisans. Did you guys consider yourselves artisans too?

Taylor:

Well, yeah, I think they really are more than we were. However, well smaller probably. You know, when you make any art piece, everyone's not going to like it. You have a limited market. Now, if they're smart, they'd be making utility pieces. In my opinion, like plates, cups, and saucers, some people can use and that's being done, but I can't name any of the places that are doing it. It's much more expensive to become a ceramist and you're on your own because you've got to have those kilns, you've got to have the technology and then know-how, whereas a true pure artist that can pick up a brush and paint a watercolor scene. What's that cost? It's much cheaper and maybe more salable.

Taylor:

But I just a layman in that field. I'm not going to say, but I hope for all the… Now there's a company called Bybee Pottery down in…

Gates:

Bybee. Right outside of Richmond.

Taylor:

Right, right. And they're still in business. We tried to merge with them back when urban renewal came. Cornelius and brothers. And if we'd done that, I probably would've ended up moving down there. Because they had a factory. They did not want to merge. And so with that, and then this Mary Alice Hadley pottery, which is located here, who had worked for dad, and they didn't have the best relationships because she left and I'm not going to go into detail there. I don't want to be quoted on anything, but she died before the urban renewal thing, but her husband, George Hadley, he wasn't interested either. So there weren't many buyers for our business because people don't have the technology to do it.

Gates:

Now Bybee Pottery. When I first came to the state to work here, couple of people gave me some Bybee cups. And they were kind of known for a certain color and a certain…

Taylor:

Oh, it's kind of brownish.

Gates:

Yeah and that was kind of what they were known for. Right?

Taylor:

Correct. It was more solid colors than hand-painted designs, much easier to make, by the way, we had some solid colors too. But once you get more money, it's just like buying a car. You know, they put all this fancy stuff on there and you buy the car, you got to take it whether you want it or not. And, it was good. We, made money, but we had that old factory and yet every time he turned around, something would happen and goodness knows if a tornado ever hit down there, it would have taken the whole place. I lost this home in a tornado. I know what can happen.

Gates:

But, I guess what I was getting at with Bybee, they're known for that. What were you guys known for?

Taylor:

Well, as I explained it, at the end of the era of the Louisville Pottery Company, people didn't even know the Louisville Pottery at all because the ceramic name became John B. Taylor Ceramics. And that had to do with copyrights on designs. And we did it in conjunction with a Carboni Company. We didn't want anybody to steal what was going on, particularly ( ) can do things maybe cheaper than you. So you copyrighted that stuff, but nobody ever challenged it. I'm sure there's potteries today that do hand painted work. Now the Mexicans can do a lot of fancy colors, but you see their product is not stoneware. It's not open proof. Be careful on that. The glazes are not stable. The whole thing you might get very sick from using their stuff. Maybe I'm being too critical there, but uh huh. I love what we did. It was safe. We still eat off it.

Gates:

Did you have engineers working with you to make sure everything was?

Taylor:

Well, we became our own engineers. They had hired a management company to come in one time and paid them to try to do some things. My mother had an uncle that was a General Electric engineer, and he recommended… of course GE could pay for all these people in his business. And we got these authorities in. They didn't help. But dad, I gave him credit. He tried with the money we had to spend on things. And but I'm going to make it clear to this audience that again, to repeat I didn't have to get out of the business, but if you understand our conclusion, why we did due the fact that we were bought out, it was from a business standpoint, it was the right thing for everyone, but we were glad it went on and it's still going on. That makes me very excited. When the new owner calls me and says, John, come down, I've been doing history for a long time. Christy Brown with her husband Brown-Forman. She she'd get these interns to come in and I thought, and she called me, can you come down and tell your story again? (laughs) Oh, you know, because he know, you know what I'm going to say. And I don't know what her objective was there, but my idea of an intern was not what she called an intern in the political world, you know what I mean? But she tried to. But when Brown-Forman at one time owned Lennox, and I think the diverse themselves of a lot of those companies that weren't…

Gates:

Lennox is a plate company, right?

Taylor:

Lennox China. Well, she had advice from them, but that's a different product. I mean, it's not stoneware. It's not crude, so to speak. It's China and very expensive China. The reason things develop business-wise within a certain area is usually the raw materials. Like, for instance, if you're going to build a glass bottle plant, you better be located where the right sand is, because that's what it's made from. You don't want to have to be trucking sand for... And our clay was locally and paint companies, a lot of them were built here in Louisville due to the different ingredients that they put in paint. So that's smart. I mean, that's, our whole country was built. Most things kind of…but now they're splitting up and going every which way.

Gates:

So you had everything here that you needed. The clay and the paint and good workers.

Taylor:

We'll call it glaze. We didn't like that word paint.

Gates:

But you had good workers…

Taylor:

Good workers. When the new company was built by John Robertson, a lot of them went with him. He wanted them, but there was a pause of about six months in there that they had to do something else because of decisions we were making.

Gates:

Did you have to have a sad goodbye when you closed down?

Taylor:

Oh, yeah. And we justified it with monetary reasons, but no, it was hard, but it you can't cry over spilled milk. And I helped. I went to see John Robertson several times on some ideas that he was having problems with, and I knew the technology of it, but I didn't want to go to work for him. I was there for the friendship and success. I wanted him to succeed.

Gates:

The community you were in, where your factory was. It wasn't Germantown. Right? It was a different area of town. It was down by Louisville area. Right? Was there like a local restaurant or bar where all your workers would go to after work?

Taylor:

No, not really. A lot of the workers came from the Fairdale area where they were kind of a clan out there. But they'd bring their own lunch and break food. They bring it, we had a Coke machine that was about it. We gave them breaks. And when you work women you have to give

them more breaks than men, just due to their makeup. And you never could complain about that, that they needed some rest on certain days. And I still respect that.

Gates:

I've worked in an ice cream factory when I was a young man. And they always had the women wrapping the ice cream or putting them in the boxes because they were supposed to be better with their hands. And I was the guy to put it (inaudible). It was like, is that true? I mean, really that the women's hands were better at doing this kind of stuff? Or is that just what people thought?

Taylor:

Well, women today can do a lot of things men do. I don't know for sure, but in our case, I use word dexterous, which means you can use both hands. Now, dad, one time, this is interesting. We hired a former murderer that was being released from prison. And we found a job for him in the packing department. Now, what was interesting about it, he only had one arm, but he had a wooden arm to take its place. And he became very good because we would pack in these fiber drums with, with a straw and all this stuff to ship our stuff. He could get down and pack with it. And, you know, first people thought, God, this murderer, but he was one of the best employees we had. So appreciative, no one was afraid of him. You know, when people get in fights, they're usually due to drugs or whatever, or there, I don't know what went on, and he was a black man, very good. But, you know, we had a bad experience once. Some of our employees set stuff out during the day in the warehouse, they stole it and they'd come back at night and get it. Well, one night the police came by and caught them. And that rather discouraged dad because, you know, we treated everybody, right. And when you steal from your employer, it hurts. And I said, well, dad, you're going to prosecute them, aren't you? And he said, no. I say, how can we ever set an example of what we expect? And he said, well, let me tell you, son, wisdom is let's forgive them because you never know what can happen like that, when you convict someone, they're not going to stay in prison forever and they'd come back and do you really harm. And those are tough… That's a tough decision to make dad being smarter than I, and he's from South Carolina where they had worked, not slavery or anything. There was big cotton farm. And they hired a lot of good people and he learned to respect them for the help they did. And they had housing for them. They had to work. So…

Gates:

Anything else you want to say?

Taylor:

I've really enjoyed this. Thank you.

Gates:

Did we cover everything?

Taylor:

I think we… I tried to and you…

Gates:

Okay. Is there anything you want to ask? Okay. so, you know did you have drawings and pictures of the layout of the factory?

Taylor:

I have nothing. Now you can get that. Now, I don’t know…

Gates:

I don't want to make you do that. I just wondered if you had…

Taylor:

The pictures that I gave to them were things like the old stables, where they kept the mules to deliver the pottery back in. I mean, there weren't any thing. And there were some old pictures of dad and the local paper here was very helpful. They'd have a Sunday section and they'd come and say, we’d like to use your patterns in our picture, the Sunday paper, and people’d see that, and it's free advertising. Where did you get that? They’d always keep the pottery though, by the way, we didn't ask. (laughs)

END OF INTERVIEW