

## **R. L. Smith and the Farmer's Improvement Society Bank**

Excerpts from [\*Oral Memoirs of Carrie Skipwith Mayfield\*](#)  
(click on title for the abstract and catalog information)

Carrie Skipwith Mayfield worked in offices on Bridge Street in the 1920s, including the Farmer's Improvement Society Bank.

Interviewed by Vivienne Malone-Mayes on December 22, 1989, in Waco, Texas.

**Malone-Mayes:** . . . I am interviewing you concerning, well, your whole life, really, but I'm more concerned about your—when you were at the Farmer's—what was the name of the bank on Bridge Street?

**Mayfield:** Farmer's Improvement Bank.

**Malone-Mayes:** And it was owned and operated by whom?

**Mayfield:** R. L. Smith.

**Malone-Mayes:** Was the owner, but he did not stay in the bank every day.

**Mayfield:** Not every day.

**Malone-Mayes:** Where was he?

**Mayfield:** He was up in Wolfe City, Texas, at his little college [Farmer's Improvement Agricultural College] up there, teaching up there. He had a college up there, and he taught up there. He would be up there all the year in school time. When the school was out, he would come home and go on meetings all over the state of Texas, giving information about the society that was attached to the FIS Bank. That was a part of the bank, the college. . . .

**Malone-Mayes:** That group was the actual owner of the bank, right?

**Mayfield:** No. R. L. Smith is the owner and operator of it. The FIS had members and officers in it. I don't remember the name of the officers around, but every year he went on what they called encampment meetings to different cities, where they had one of these societies—the bank society. They had several branches all over the state of Texas, especially—not too much in the northwest, but mostly south and east around.

They had branches, and in the summer he, his wife, and his sister-in-law would travel to every branch that belonged to this FIS Society—the bank—it was the name of it—of part of it. They traveled to the headquarters, their headquarters. If it was in Itasca, they traveled from Waco to Itasca, to Italy, or wherever they had a branch—Houston, Huntsville, all those places down in South Texas, all around. They had branches. And they would go there and have meetings with these people to find out they operated, how—what method they were using, what they were doing, how well they were getting along, and to pay off any claims that they owed anybody. They carried a death benefit, and anytime that a claim hadn't been paid

off, and if this claim was in anything—if they didn't understand anything, they would get to the end of the issue and they would go on the encampment to find out why this claim was not paid when it was due. Well, they'd give different reasons why it wasn't paid. Then when a person died as a member of the FIS Society, he usually gets his money right away. If it's delayed for any reason and not paid during the encampment, which convened in the summertime and starts when school is out, usually by July—June—because school is out in June—starts in June sometimes and goes on through until they visit every encampment that they have. I don't remember how many. So many of them, I don't remember how many.

But they visited every one all over the state of Texas. His wife—he and his wife and his sister-in-law would go on these visits.