

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Albina Agnes Talasek Babovec**

Interview Date: 03/04/2015

Interviewer: Roberta Terrell

Transcriber: Olga Barr

Comments: Interview conducted in Sugar Land, Texas. Cindy Poe, Albina's niece, also contributed to this interview

14 Pages



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Editor's note: This interview was taken when Ms Babovec was 99 years old. English was not her first language and she was shy about being interviewed. Ms Albina Agnes Talasek Babovec died on September 23, 2015 Her family wrote up an obituary with many fascinating details of her life. That obituary may be found in her Abstract.

Transcript

TERRELL: Would you please tell me your whole name including your nickname?

BABOVEC: Albina Babovec.

TERRELL: Where were you born?

BABOVEC: In Ratibor, Texas.

TERRELL: Is that close to Temple?

BABOVEC: It is.

TERRELL: Were you born in your house or in a hospital?

BABOVEC: In the house, I'm sure.

TERRELL: Your husband's name was Babovec? Tell us about him. You knew him your whole life?

BABOVEC: Well almost. I met him when he was about 18.

TERRELL: Do you know how old you were when they moved here?

BABOVEC: I am 99 now.

TERRELL: Do you know when you moved how old you were?

BABOVEC: No, I don't.

TERRELL: You were young. What kind of work did they do?

BABOVEC: They were in the cotton gin work. My daddy and Babovec owned a gin.

TERRELL: Did they do anything else? They were farmers or they just owned a gin?

BABOVEC: They would work at the gin because once you planted the cotton and then you have to grow it and then pick it and gin it.

TERRELL: Did you live on a farm or did you live in town?

BABOVEC: I lived on Ford Street right about a block down from the ice house.

TERRELL: Oh, you were right in town.

BABOVEC: I was right on Third Street almost.

TERRELL: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

BABOVEC: There were seven, four boys and three girls.

TERRELL: Did you know your grandparents?

BABOVEC: Yes, I did.

TERRELL: Did you visit them often?

BABOVEC: No, not too often. I lived with mom and daddy.

TERRELL: Where did your grandparents live?

BABOVEC: They lived in Temple.

TERRELL: So you grew up in Rosenberg.

BABOVEC: Um hum.

TERRELL: Was church important to your family?

BABOVEC: Very much. My daddy built three churches in Fort Bend County.

TERRELL: Do you know the names of them?

BABOVEC: I don't know. I can't think.

TERRELL: What was your church denomination?

BABOVEC: Well, when we moved to Rosenberg, daddy wanted a Czech church, Christian church. So he went about buying a lot and then working up the money to build a church. I don't know. He was always the head of it.

TERRELL: Did you always go to that church when you were growing up?

BABOVEC: Yes, there is where we went.

TERRELL: Where did you go to school?

BABOVEC: Fort Bend.

TERRELL: Do you have some memories of your school days that you would like to share. Like did you walk to school or did you ride the bus?

BABOVEC: No, I can't think of a thing, just walked to school. We didn't have any buses or anything.

TERRELL: Did you have a senior prom?

BABOVEC: No, I didn't.

TERRELL: What did you and your future husband do for entertainment?

BABOVEC: I'm trying to think, go to church I guess, to church parties. (chuckles)

TERRELL: Was there a movie theater?

BABOVEC: Yeah, Coles on Third Street. Do you know Cole?

TERRELL: I do. Can you remember a typical day? Did you help on the farm? Were you a good cook?

BABOVEC: Well, I guess I was. Momma wanted us to learn what working in the field would feel like, so she packed four or five little lunches and took us out to the field off of 36 and made us spend the day picking cotton out in the hot sun. She wanted us to learn what it would be like to be working out there on the field.

TERRELL: That was a good thing.

BABOVEC: Yeah, that happened to me.

TERRELL: I've heard that your father was a street commissioner for Rosenberg.

BABOVEC: Um hum. He was.

TERRELL: For about 16 years. Is that right?

BABOVEC: I guess so.

TERRELL: You were involved in the community.

BABOVEC: Yes, I liked to get into politics and work for them.

TERRELL: How old were you when you married?

BABOVEC: I was 18 and Ben was 21.

TERRELL: Did you have children?

BABOVEC: No, we never did have any children. We adopted David Allen. I never did have any children.

TERRELL: What kind of work have you done, both volunteer and paid? I know you helped during the war. I think you went to Houston with your sister-in-law. You worked very hard.

BABOVEC: Oh yeah, he joined the Army and I didn't want to sit at home with momma and daddy, so I decided to go to Hughes Tools in Houston. I interviewed and got a job welding. So I did my time there in welding.

TERRELL: Were you with your sister-in-law?

BABOVEC: She was one of the boys' wives. She was Lucille Talasek, Jerry's wife.

TERRELL: Do you know how long you did the welding?

BABOVEC: All the time that the war lasted.

TERRELL: Did you enjoy the work?

BABOVEC: Very much. It was in Houston. If you know anything at all about where, I guess that place would still be there now.

TERRELL: It is still there. I am from Houston. I grew up there. What kinds of volunteer work have you done? You said you liked politics.

BABOVEC: Oh, well, for one thing when I came here, I wanted to set up a desk in the entrance there and have new people that are coming in to get registered to vote here in Fort Bend County or here in Houston. So I would work a whole day trying to sign up people and get everybody registered to vote.

TERRELL: When did your husband become interested in politics? He ran for mayor and was mayor for a long time.

BABOVEC: Yes, he was in Rosenberg. He was a good Christian person, people knew that. That was important in our lives.

TERRELL: Was there a change in Rosenberg when he was mayor? Did he make some changes?

BABOVEC: He made a lot of changes, but I can't tell you what.

TERRELL: Did you follow him overseas when he was in the army and travel with him?

BABOVEC: I would. We had to usually travel alone. So I had to do wherever I had to go.

TERRELL: Do you remember exactly where you went?

BABOVEC: Gosh no, we were in all kinds of places. I lived in England for one year. I lived in the Philippines about six years maybe or more.

TERRELL: Did you run a grocery store?

BABOVEC: We had Pay-Less Grocery Store, a block across from the post-office in Rosenberg. Yes, I worked a full day every day.

TERRELL: Do you know how long your husband was in the military?

BABOVEC: We retired after 26 years. I think.

TERRELL: When you had the grocery store was he mayor at the same time?

BABOVEC: Part of the time.

TERRELL: Do you remember what organizations you were a part of? Was there a garden club or a women's club.

BABOVEC: VFW. We were involved in that because our men had been military. I worked with VFW over there on Highway 36. We tried to raise money and then we would use it for good causes.

TERRELL: Did you work at the church?

BABOVEC: Yes, I always tell people I went to church nine months before I was born. (everyone laughs) Momma worked in church, so I went with her being in her tummy (chuckles).

POE: What about later on, Aunt Binnie, you worked for the community bible study.

BABOVEC: Yeah, that was a senior citizens...

POE: Take care of children and teach.

BABOVEC: I've taught little children in church, I guess you could say all my life.

TERRELL: Was that like Sunday School?

BABOVEC: I worked like in Mother's Day Out. The momma would come in and check their baby in at about 9:00 and pick them up at three. We have them all day and teach them and help them.

TERRELL: I think that sounds nice. You must like little children.

BABOVEC: I do. I love little ones.

TERRELL: Can you tell something about your brother Tom, how he served the city of Rosenberg? Was he involved with the Rosenberg Volunteer Fire Department?

BABOVEC: Yes, now that was Tom. He was involved in that. Tom Talasek, my brother. He retired from being Fire Chief.

TERRELL: I think he was appointed Civil Defense Director. Which was later the Emergency Preparedness Director. Sounds like he did a lot.

BABOVEC: Yes.

TERRELL: What about Fire Marshall?

BABOVEC: Yes, he was a little of that for years.

TERRELL: As Fire Marshall, he had an opportunity, you correct me, to structure a fire protection program in schools and inspection programs for businesses and workers within the city. Is that correct? As a Fire Marshall, he could do more things to improve the protection of people in Rosenberg. I think he became Fire Chief in 1986. He retired in 1995?

BABOVEC: I don't know those dates. I can't remember.

TERRELL: Then in 1997, I read that he was elected city councilman at large for the city of Rosenberg. Was your husband mayor at that time?

BABOVEC: No, he was just getting into politics, I think. We had the grocery store and lost money on it and wanted to get rid of it. So he was getting involved in the political.

TERRELL: Did he like that?

BABOVEC: Oh, yes, he liked it. He was very good at it. You know he was a good Christian person, so people could trust him.

TERRELL: I know some funny things happened in your lifetime, like the time the medicine show came to town. Can you tell me about that?

BABOVEC: Well, they come to town with their trucks and animals and acts you know doing...

TERRELL: Did they have tents?

BABOVEC: Yeah, they came with their tents.

TERRELL: Was there a medicine show?

BABOVEC: Yes, it came with a party.

TERRELL: So did your mother ever buy anything there?

BABOVEC: Well I guess you are trying to get out of me that my sister...I was the one that had a problem with going to bed at night and wetting the bed every night, and night after night, after night. They were selling some kind of medicine at that show. Momma decided to buy a bottle of it and gave it to me and that cured my problem.

TERRELL: What else do you remember? What about the flood?

BABOVEC: Yeah, it used to when it would rain; the Brazos River would come up all the way to the railroad tracks.

TERRELL: Did it damage any of the buildings in Rosenberg?

BABOVEC: It always did because it would flood everything. The water would be way high leading close to our house.

TERRELL: Can you think of something you would like to tell me that I haven't questioned you about or mentioned.

BABOVEC: I don't know; I am just not very bright this morning.

TERRELL: I think you are doing great! I really do. You are wonderful. I really appreciate this.

BABOVEC: Thank you.

TERRELL: Cindy, can you think of some things? Binnie's niece, Cindy Poe, is going to tell us a little bit about family life.

POE: When Ben and Bennie retired from the Army, they came back to Rosenberg and built a new home off of Mons. Until the home was built, they lived with my grandmother, Mary Babovec, who lived right next door to us. Every weekend, granny would bake kolaches and fresh bread. On Sunday afternoons after we had had a little time to take a nap, after lunch and church in the morning, we would all gather at granny's house. Remember that Aunt Binnie? We'd gather at granny's house and she would put kolaches on the table, and everybody would bring food. I remember sitting there listening to Uncle Edmund, Uncle Ben. I think you were probably doing it too, and granny, and mother.

BABOVEC: Edmund, too.

POE: Remember how y'all would sit around and speak Czech, and none of us could understand what they were talking about. But they would carry on conversations in Czech. It was a good time for us to all keep up with the distant family members who lived in Temple, because we would share all the news that we heard about everybody in Temple. Then another time we would all get together was whenever the black-eyed peas and the purple hull peas were ready. Dad and Uncle Ben would go out to the field, somewhere out near Beasley, I think, and pick bushels, and bushels, and bushels of peas.

BABOVEC: In bushel baskets and take them home, and we would start shelling first of all.

POE: It didn't matter how old you were, you would get a bowl put in your lap with a pile of peas in it and you'd have to sit there and shell peas. But what would we do while we were sitting and shelling peas?

BABOVEC: Talk (laughs)

POE: Talk right. We'd get all the latest news and find out what was happening in everybody's lives. As a kid, I learned a lot, I think, just sitting there listening to all of y'all share with each other. It was good times, wasn't it?

BABOVEC: Yes, it was.

POE: Um hum, much simpler time. Then I remember the fig tree across the street. Uncle Ben and dad would pick all those figs. Granny, and mom, and you — y'all would all put fig preserves up. You remember we'd flavor them with something. What was it that we flavored, some type of Jello?

BABOVEC: What was it?

POE: Was it strawberry Jello?

BABOVEC: I think it was.

POE: I think that was the only way we all were able to eat figs because I don't think they are all that great by themselves. But the strawberry made them taste better.

TERRELL: Cindy do you know of changes that were made during his stint as mayor?

POE: I know that they were getting ready to build a city hall because at that time the city hall was right there in downtown Rosenberg just one block from where the grocery store was. Uncle Ben was part of the planning.

BABOVEC: He planned the whole thing and did everything about it in designing things and all, but he never got any credit for it because we had elections and Mr. Rains was running and people chose Mr. Rains. So Ben got none of the credit of working on the city hall for so hard.

POE: When he was young, who was it that he worked for? He worked for the water district or something like that with the City and he worked for a Mr. Cooper. That little bitty building the Water Department had over next to the Fire Department. I remember that little bitty, tiny little building. That was where the Water Department was.

She had a BEAUTIFUL scarf that she used to put over the dresser or over a piece of furniture that was made by Mrs. Cooper for Aunt Binnie and Uncle Ben on their wedding.

BABOVEC: It's crocheted. You have it. I gave it to you because I didn't want it to get lost somewhere or somebody wouldn't appreciate the history of it.

POE: Right, but it was made by Mrs. Cooper for y'all as a wedding gift when you were 18 years old, wasn't it? I cherish that because it is very old and very special.

TERRELL: So when he worked for the Water District, did you have the grocery store?

POE: No, this was in the twenties before he went to the army.

TERRELL: Who worked for the bank?

BABOVEC: That was Edmund Babovec.

TERRELL: That's your brother?

BABOVEC: Brother-in-law.

POE: In the Babovec family, Mary Babovec married Chupik. Babovec was my granny. Ben was the oldest. Then there was Edwin; he lived in California. Edmund was the banker.

TERRELL: Who did he work for?

POE: Rosenberg Bank and Trust.

TERRELL: Do you know how long he was there?

BABOVEC: Years, all his life, I guess.

POE: I think so because he was working for the bank when my mom and dad met in 1944 or somewhere in there. They met at the county fair.

TERRELL: That's a good story.

POE: Yeah. Edmund had been the banker when my dad worked for Houston Lighting and Power, something related to that. He would have to go and make deposits at the bank, and he knew Edmund from high school days because my father grew up in Richmond and played football. Edmund grew up in Rosenberg at Rosenberg High School and played football against EACH other. Back in the late 30s and 40s, I guess, Rosenberg and Richmond were big rivals in sports.

BABOVEC: They played the first football game that they ever saw or played in Rosenberg High School.

POE: Do you remember where that was?

BABOVEC: Where Weingarten's used to be...

POE: Between Avenue H and I. But Weingarten's now is like a Dollar Store, I think, or something like that. That whole area in there was the high school, Rosenberg High School and the football field was all right there.

TERRELL: Is that where Palais Royale is?

POE: But that is where they played football, right?

BABOVEC: Um hum.

TERRELL: They'd never seen a football game.

BABOVEC: No. They came from Temple, from the country.

TERRELL: That should have been interesting. Cindy, tell me who your parents were.

POE: My father was Charles Albert Candler who is from Richmond. He was born in Richmond on the other side of the river. There was some land and he grew up there. My mother was Lily Ruth Candler, but Babovec was her maiden name. My mother was the youngest. She started elementary at Robert E. Lee Elementary School. I remember her talking about that they only spoke Czech in their home, and that is all they knew.

BABOVEC: Momma didn't know a word of English when she went to school the first day.

POE: So my mother was worried that she wouldn't be able to talk to the teacher. She ended up having a really kind teacher who was understanding about the fact that she didn't know English. So as the older brothers and mom started school they began learning English and bringing English home. My father knew Edmund Babovec, mother's brother, and they went to the County Fair. My mother went with her parents and Edmund was with them. They ran into my father at the County Fair, the old fairgrounds on Avenue H. My dad, I guess, was interested and said, "Edmund, introduce me to your sister." So Edmund introduced them and I guess they went around the fairgrounds together.

My dad ended up taking her home that evening. Mother would tell us, kind of embarrassed, that she didn't even know dad's name when he took her home. She had to ask him his name, and we always said, "Mother! I can't believe you went home with a man you didn't even know." She worked for the Draft Board in Rosenberg.

BABOVEC: At the courthouse, too.

POE: Yeah, later on. But she worked for the Draft Board when she was in her early 20s. She would know when names would come up. She would see them. My father kept saying, "Watch for my name; let me know." She kept telling him, "No, I haven't seen it come through. Your name has never been called up."

Then one Sunday morning, he got the delivery. It was time for their date and he said, "You told me I wasn't going to be called up, but I got notice that I was drafted." So then, he went off to the army and she stayed here. Eventually, they married in January of '44. My dad was stationed in Mission, down in the valley. He had to take a train to come back for the wedding. He had a weekend pass. I think the train had a wreck in Beeville. It derailed and my father helped get some people out. But he had to get home for the wedding. So he got out on the road and thumbed a ride to get to Rosenberg so he would be there for the wedding.

TERRELL: That might make you a little nervous. Did you go to the wedding? Do you remember that?

BABOVEC: No, no.

POE: Were y'all in the army then?

BABOVEC: Yeah, I think Ben was in the army, wasn't he, because you said he had to get home.

POE: Yeah, dad was in the army too. Might have been when y'all were stationed somewhere else. But my mom used to tell stories about going down to the river there in Rosenberg where the bridge goes across in Rosenberg. There were a group of them, high school age, Effie Hubbell. I don't know if you remember that name, Effie Hubbell and Miss Calendar, what was her first name? McKinley was her maiden name. A group of them would go on Saturday mornings down to the river, by the river, and the boys would cook breakfast for all the girls.

TERRELL: Well, isn't that nice!

POE: Yeah, and they'd get together down there, and that was like a little outing that they used to do. That bridge coming across the river right there, my father would tell a story about...they lived on the river in Richmond, over on the other side of the river from Richmond. When the river would rise, several times in his young lifetime, he had to leave. They had to leave their farm. They'd stay in town until the river would go back down because it would flood their farm. I guess FM 359 was the road. They would have to go all the way around and then come back in through Rosenberg because the ferry was their way of getting across in Richmond. The floodwater would be too difficult to get across there. So they would have to travel all the way around FM 359 and come back into town in through Rosenberg to come to Richmond and stay.

TERRELL: That was a trek. How did they do that, with a car?

POE: No, I think they had a wagon because he was telling us about how his sister had a kitten. The kitten fell off of the trailer, the wagon, as they were coming around by the river edge. They lost the kitten.

TERRELL: Let me ask you one more question. I know you are tired. What did you do when you were like in high school for entertainment? Like she said they went down to the river and the boys cooked breakfast on Saturday. Did you go shopping? Did your mother make your clothes?

BABOVEC: Sports were getting important, weren't they? The men were interested in...

POE: Did you watch the boys play?

BABOVEC: I guess so. I don't remember.

TERRELL: Did your mother sew your clothes?

BABOVEC: Yes, mamma would buy cotton sacks in the same pattern. She'd need three of those sacks so she could cut out a dress and sew a dress out of it.

TERRELL: She was talented.

BABOVEC: Yeah, mamma could look at a picture of a dress that one of us wanted and she'd go home and cut it out and sew it and make it for us.

TERRELL: Did you sew?

BABOVEC: Barely.

POE: Didn't you make all those pants that you have been wearing?

BABOVEC: You know when Weingarten was leaving Rosenberg, they were selling double knit. I bought ever color that they had, enough to make a pair of slacks. That was easy. You know I had one pattern and one size and one everything.

TERRELL: I want to thank you for your time and your memories.

Interview ends