

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewees: **Angeline Falsone Cangelosi**

Interview Date: 05/08/2010

Interviewer: Pat Pollicoff

Transcriber: Jo Ann Cangelosi Hargrove

Comments: Also participating in the interview is Antoinette Cangelosi,
daughter of Angeline.

9 Pages



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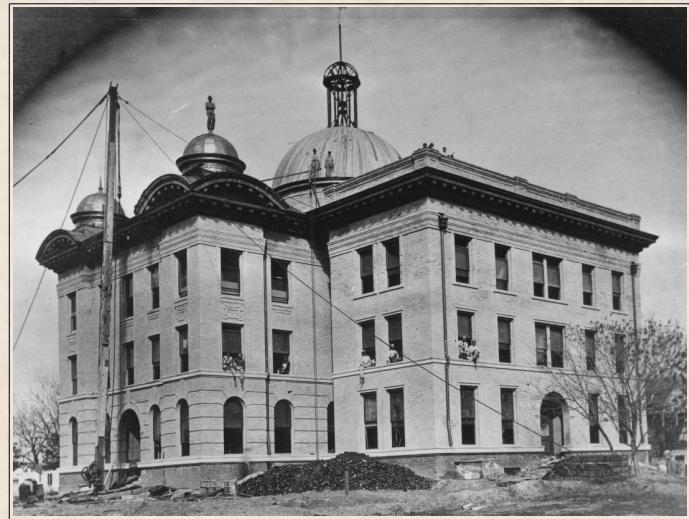
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Transcript

POLLICOFF: I'm very pleased to meet you. Will you tell us where your family is from?

CANGELOSI: I was born in Falls County in a small farming community called Highbank, Texas, which is a few miles south of Marlin, Texas.

POLLICOFF: Are you the first in the family to come to Stafford?

CANGELOSI: My husband's uncle, Frank Cangelosi, came to Houston on business in 1917 and discovered the area. He was a very good businessman who could see the potential in this area. Little by Little he brought his brothers down here from Bryan.

POLLICOFF: No Sisters?

CANGELOSI: There was one sister, Mary who later married Frank Triticco

POLLICOFF: Uncle Frank came in 1917?

CANGELOSI: Yes. He bought farmland and he had homes built which he rented out to families. He was married to Katy Court. The Court Family also migrated to Stafford at about that time.

My father-in-law, Carlo Cangelosi, operated a grocery store at the corner of Avenue F and Highway 90A in Stafford. The Court family built a grocery store across Avenue F from the Cangelosi store. [see Charles Court interview for Court family information]

POLLICOFF: Today that is called smart Marketing!

CANGELOSI: My husband's sister, Lunetta married one of my cousins, Robert LaBarbera. My future husband came to visit his sister frequently, especially when there was a wedding of friends or family. It was at one of these Italian weddings that I met him.

POLLICOFF: Nice early memories

CANGELOSI: As I said, I came to Stafford in 1941 and have lived here until 2000 when I purchased a home in Sugar Land. This area has grown so much. Originally, Stafford was a small farming community with businesses along the highway (US 90 A) and the railroad north of the highway and cotton fields surrounding the "town".

When I first came to Stafford at age 17, it rained, and rained. So much my beautiful clothes mildewed hanging in the closet. I cried. My mother-in-law said it rained like that when she first came to Stafford also. She said it would get better. I cried! Later we put in central heat and air and the clothes were okay. Our clothes no longer mildewed.

My father-in-law was in the grocery business until he became ill. On his deathbed, he made my husband promise to take care of his business and his wife, Lena, my mother-in-law. My husband was a family man so he operated the grocery store and farmed family land off 5th street and Moore Road. Originally, Tony began farming to avoid going into the army but he was drafted. He reported to the service in San Antonio. They were ready to board the bus to leave and Tony asked the recruiter if he could call his wife. He told the recruiter that he had a wife, a baby (Antoinette) and a mother at home. The recruiter said for him to go home and take care of his family. At this point, Tony's brother Frank was already serving in the military.

During the war, Tony farmed and took care of the grocery store. His older brother, John, helped in the store. One day, John walked out and left Tony to run the business alone. I had to go to work in the grocery store. I ran the store while Tony was in the field.

We had one child, Antoinette, born in 1942. Ours was not a thriving business; a lot of African-Americans living along 5th street came to our store. An old African-American man stayed with me and did the heavy lifting, and other than that, I took care of the store. Tony's younger brother, Pete, graduated from high school and married. My husband asked him to be his partner in the grocery business, so now two families were taking care of running the grocery store.

Tony's Uncle, Frank Cangelosi, had encouraged several relatives and friends to migrate to Stafford. He believed that Houston would grow and prosper making the land in Fort Bend county more valuable. Uncle Frank died in his mid-fifties, the first millionaire in Fort Bend County, had he lived longer, things would have been different.

POLLICOFF: It was a huge Italian Community?

CANGELOSI: In the "island" or the Golden Triangle, Mr. Wright had a filling station and garage. There was the Rudy Building, the Tartar Building, the Breaux Drug Store (pharmacy), Court's Store, and the Barber Shop owned by my husband's sister Mary's husband, T.J. Lampson, the only barber in town.

Our building was across the street. E. A. DeLate came to town, he had the Pontiac dealership, and the "Blue Room" restaurant. My mother-in-law lived behind the grocery store. She complained to Mr. Delate about the noise on Saturday Nights from the "Blue Room", where people would go dancing. I never went there.

POLLICOFF: What was the name of the Church?

CANGELOSI: Our church was Holy Family Catholic Church, just about everybody in the town went to church there. It seated 200 people.

POLLICOFF: Tell me about Lena and Carlo Cangelosi

CANGELOSI: I did not know my father-in-law, Carlo. He died before we married. I was told that he was a kindhearted, religious person. He closed his business whenever there was daily mass so that he could attend. My mother-in-law was entirely opposite. She was a businessperson who wanted to know everything. Carlo and his brother Frank owned the Cotton Gin. They convinced my father's brother, A.J. Falsone to come to Stafford and run the gin.

POLLICOFF: What was Cangelosi Grocery like?

CANGELOSI: It was a wood building. It had an upstairs with apartments that were rented out. The grocery was a good-sized building; we did not use all of it. We were in competition with the Courts who had a new building because theirs had burned down. We had a meat market where my husband cut the meat. We had feed for cows and chickens and produce; onions, potatoes, bare necessities, all canned goods, but it was not modern. It was a general merchandise store.

POLLICOFF: What were the hours of operation?

CANGELOSI: Open 7 days a week, opened on Sunday, we surely did. My husband went to the store at 6 AM and opened at 7 or 8, he got home at 8 PM at night

POLLICOFF: He stayed until all the customers were taken care of?

CANGELOSI: In the wintertime we had a potbelly stove, and we would sit around and pass the time, the Blacks told stories, it was real interesting.

POLLICOFF: What was a typical day like?

CANGELOSI: My husband cut the meat for the day, a man came in to clean up and sweep. Then I came to work later.

POLLICOFF: Did you cut meat?

CANGELOSI: No, John helped in the store when my daughter was an infant. A couple of people helped out, Tony and John ran the register.

POLLICOFF: Tell me about The First National Bank

CANGELOSI: My husband was a Director on the Board of the Bank. There were seven businessmen that applied for the charter to open the bank.

POLLICOFF: Was he one of the founders?

Cangelosi He was one of the founders.

POLLICOFF: Tell me about his community activities and dances in the Blue Room.

CANGELOSI: We had dances on Saturday night but I never went. We would go to church, and have big weddings with everybody invited

POLLICOFF: Plenty of food, nobody goes hungry?

CANGELOSI: Spaghetti and meatballs!

POLLICOFF: Tell me about the School Boards.

CANGELOSI: Tony was on three different school districts. First was the Missouri City School Board in the fifties. It was then that Missouri City and Sugar Land decided to consolidate forming the Fort Bend Independent School District. He continued to serve on the Board of FBISD until Antoinette graduated from college and she wanted to teach for Fort Bend. So he “retired” from the Board. In the following decade, Stafford decided to form its own school system and he was asked to run for the Stafford Municipal School Board of Trustees. We never moved from Stafford while he served on three different Boards of Education in three different districts.

POLLICOFF: You were on the St Joseph Altar Board? Tell us about that

CANGELOSI: The St. Joseph Altar Society is a church organization. At church I taught catechism. I also washed the altar linins for the church for over 50 years. Well, I worked at church wherever necessary. I was active when my children were in school in the Parent Teacher Association.

POLLICOFF: Back to the Church, what is the St. Joseph's Altar?

CANGELOSI: St. Joseph Altar is an Italian tradition originated in Sicily. When there was a serious illness; when a son went off to war, when the crops were bad, the people would promise St Joseph to erect an altar should their prayers be answered, they went door to door requesting donations to prepare this meal. It includes pastries and meatless spaghetti. It was free to attend; it takes place on March 19th. We make fig cookies, cookies, cakes, spaghetti with sauce...no meat as it came during Lent. Today they don't ask for donations; they have a donation box provided from the day of the altar. Three weeks prior to the altar 17 or 18 women make all kinds of cookies and pignolotti candy done in a haystack shape.

POLLICOFF: There were Italian people living in Missouri City?

CANGELOSI: The people of Missouri City looked down on the Italians. Italians were in Stafford. Sugar Land had the Imperial Refinery. I never went through the refinery, as many times as I could have. People from Missouri City attended our church in Stafford. Not too many Sugar Land people did. For shopping we went to Houston, to Sears & Roebuck, which was "way out there".

Antoinette had pneumonia at three months of age; I would depend on people to take us to the doctor. I decided to learn to drive so I got a driving book, and studied it and took the test and passed! I learned to drive. It was not too much traffic.

We went to Houston to the doctor. The Medical Center had not opened yet. My Aunt and Uncle always went to the doctor in Houston. There was a doctor and hospital in Sugar Land but we never went there.

POLLICOFF: Where did you live in Stafford?

CANGELOSI: We lived in a frame house Uncle Frank had built. We heard about the Ruffino's moving to Sugar Land, we snatched up their house, which was next door to my Aunt Lena and Uncle Tony Falsone. They were like parents to me; I came to Stafford when I was 17 years of age. My aunt and Uncle were helpful to me.

I have another daughter, Frances . Today Frances is married to Travis Courville; she has a son and daughter who are married and Kimberly has two children making Frances a “grammie”.

I also have a son, Carl named for his grandfather. He is married to Judy Cook and they now live in Rosenberg. They have a daughter who is married to Lionel Medina and they reside in Sugar Land.

POLLICOFF: How long did you live in that house?

CANGELOSI: When we lived there, there was nothing behind us but fields. One morning we got up and my Aunt Lena called to say : “did you hear the commotion last night?” “No what?” A prisoner had escaped from Sugar Land prison and they had come through here with dogs. We did not hear a thing. We lived at 3023 North Main, that house is rented now. Next we bought property from the Jebbia family, one of the daughters was selling the land after her mother died. We bought two acres on Jebbia Lane, it is now a Buddhist temple.

My husband passed away in 1997. The house was too big for Antoinette and me. We had four bedrooms with a living room and a dining room. We decided it was too much house. So we sold it and moved to Sugar Land.

POLLICOFF: That is great! How much has changed in Stafford in your time?

CANGELOSI: For one thing, there are two highways through town now; when I came there was only what we call North Main now. It was a two way street then.

Our church has changed. We built a large church in Missouri City. Our church is very different. We used to walk out of church and we knew everybody. Mr. Laperouse bought the Breaux Drug Store and we would congregate there after church on Sunday mornings to drink coffee and visit.

We had Haas Café at the intersection of US 90A and now FM 1092, where people went for Sunday lunch. When we moved the church to Missouri City later on, things changed. Today our parish consists of Chinese, Indians, African-Americans, Nigerians, and Hispanics. We recognize faces but it is not the same, the church is the biggest change.

POLLICOFF: A favorite memory or least favorite memory?

CANGELOSI: Ah a bad one. It was horrible. The railroad tracks did not have the arms or bells to ring. It was a foggy morning. A truck had been hit by the train. I knew the owner of the truck. He was killed. It ran to my aunt's house. "The train hit a truck, it was pushing the truck." I saw the man's wife running after the train, she worked at the mercantile store that was run by Mr. Rudy. They brought the wife to my aunt's house. It took four men to stop the wife. The memory stayed with me forever. It happened in the late forties .We were watching the 10 O'clock news and there was a large noise. A big explosion, ball of fire, dark clouds and flames. We thought the world was coming to an end. It was a gas leak. We had one stoplight, a car ignited the escaping gas, and the driver of the car was killed. The gas could have wiped out the whole town.

POLLICOFF: How awful! About schools, was there a kindergarten?

CANGELOSI: No there were grades one through twelve. There were 11 grades when I went to school. We had an elementary, junior high and high school all next door to each other.

POLLICOFF: Do you remember racial segregation?

CANGELOSI: We ourselves never had any problems. I had a nanny, a black lady. She was just wonderful, later her niece worked for me. Our business had black customers; we trusted them. There were distinct parts of Stafford. The Blacks lived on 5th street in run down shacks. I am sure there were people with different opinions about Blacks. They had their own churches and school.

POLLICOFF: Hispanics as well?

CANGELOSI: There were two Hispanic families, the Arriaga and Lopez families. They attended school with our children and were members of the Catholic church.

Policoff: Did you feel any impact from integration?

CANGELOSI: I am sure some people did. Blacks and everybody shopped pretty harmoniously. They were polite and respectful, we had no problems.

POLLICOFF: Did you worry about kids playing on the tracks?

CANGELOSI: There was a street between the railroad tracks and the house. We always cautioned the children to not play in the street and to stay off the tracks. The tracks were not a problem for the children.

POLLICOFF: Have any hurricanes affected You?

CANGELOSI: Carla had to be the worse. When Antoinette was a baby we had a hurricane, we left home to go stay with my Aunt Lena and Uncle Tony's. About 2 O'clock AM the winds died down and the moon came out. We thought the storm was over. So we went home to our house. I wanted to put the baby in her bed. The wind started blowing again, we thought the roof would come off our house. We prayed so hard that night.

There were gaslights in the open fields behind our house. Tony was gone with his Okra to the farmers market; I was up waiting for him to come back, when I spotted these lights bouncing up and down in the fields. When Tony came home I told him I saw the gaslights in the open fields. I closed the shades for the night. I heard my grandmother and the Blacks talking about the gaslights in the fields

POLLICOFF: Do you have any old photos or documents, marriage licenses?

ANTOINETTE (daughter): When we were writing the history of Stafford, pictures were gathered of servicemen. They now hang at City Hall. Pictures of our old store seem to be lost. There was a Mr. Collins, Tom Collins, we know he took pictures but we cannot locate him.

POLLICOFF: When was the book published?

ANTOINETTE: About two years ago, all the families wrote their family histories but they were not used. Instead they wrote about the founding of the city

Interview ends.