

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **David R. Beard**

Interview Date: 03/06/2017

Interviewer: Jane Goodsill

Transcriber: Sylvia Vacek

Location: Needville, Texas

16 Pages



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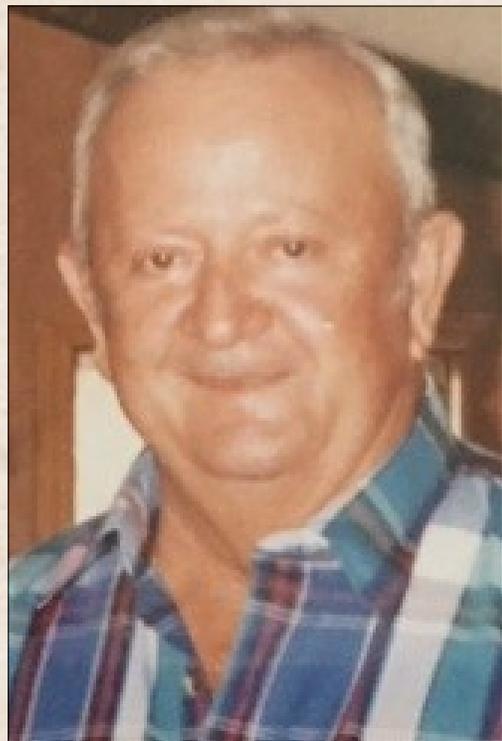
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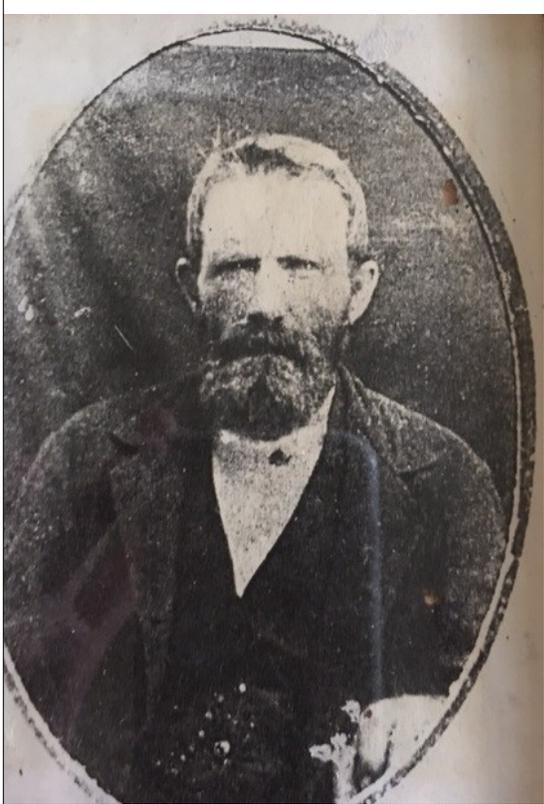
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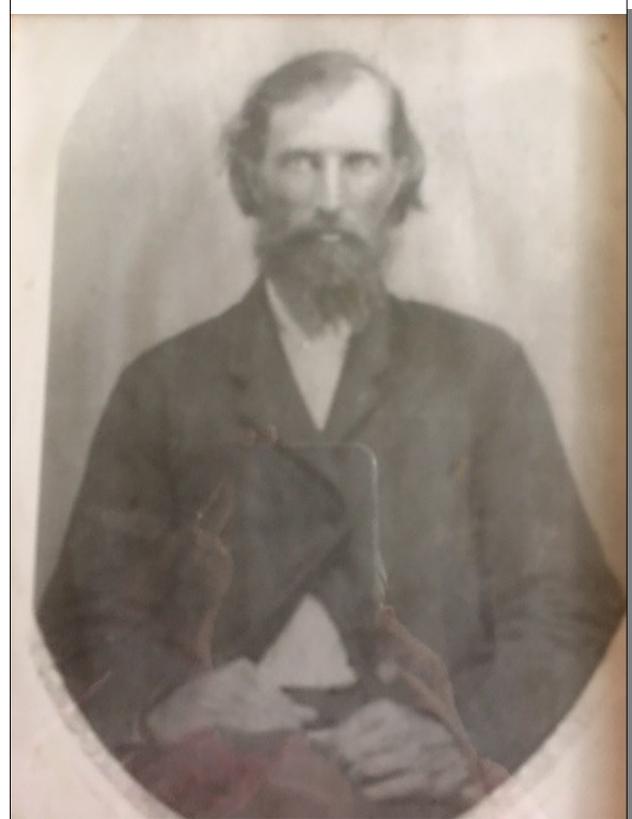
Transcript

GOODSILL: Mr. Beard, will you tell us how your family got to Fort Bend County?

BEARD: Back in the 1820's William Beard and Andrew Jackson Beard came here from Missouri or Arkansas. William was Andrew Jackson's father. Andrew Jackson Beard married Sarah Pentecost, George Pentecost's daughter. George Pentecost was in the Old 300. Andrew was in the Battle of San Jacinto in Sam Houston's Army.



William Beard is David's great great grandfather.



David's great grandfather, Andrew Jackson Beard

GOODSILL: Do you know anything about what his experiences were?

BEARD: Not much. He did get paid, not by cash but by land. Texas had a lot of land then, but no cash, so that's the way he got paid.

GOODSILL: What land did he get?

BEARD: Well, it is uncertain. Some of the land may be down on Sawmill Road. Some say yes and some say no. Andrew Jackson had a son and his son is my grandfather, Sydney Andrew Beard. He was born around 1850. Then he got married, that maybe the wedding date. I am doing this by memory.

GOODSILL: Do you remember who he married?

BEARD: Julia Josephine. Sydney Andrew Beard was my grandfather. My father was Shirley Austin Beard, born in 1899.

GOODSILL: How did he get the name Shirley?

BEARD: That is what they gave him. He was the youngest of eleven children some of whom died in infancy. I was named after one of them; my name came from one of my uncles.

GOODSILL: Who did your father marry?

BEARD: Etta Crook.

GOODSILL: Do you know anything on how your mother's family got to Texas:

BEARD: They came from Georgia and some of them were in the Civil War.

GOODSILL: What do you think your grandfather, Sydney Andrew Beard's life was like?

BEARD: They lived on Sawmill Road and they moved out here on the prairie in 1891. He was a small farmer and rancher. When they moved out here it was a section of land, 640 acres. My father inherited part of it and then he bought much more land. We have sold some of it off since he passed away.

GOODSILL: This area out here was called the prairie?

BEARD: Yes, because it was just grass, and no woods. It was just for cattle out here eating grass. Good ranch land.

And good for farming as well, the soil is a mixture of black gumbo and sandy loam soil. Some area was sandy loam soil and some area was black gumbo.

GOODSILL: Is there a dividing line, a river or ridge or anything that divides it.



*David's grandmother,
Julia Josephine Beard.*



Old Beard homestead, ca. 1899

BEARD: No, It just blends. It just goes from one to the other. We have raised rice, corn, maze, cotton and some are farming soybeans now. We never farmed soybeans.

GOODSILL: Tell me about the water requirements of farming rice and where you got the water?

BEARD: We had a big irrigation well with a twelve-inch water discharge. Rice takes a lot of water. We would pump water out there in the rice field at certain times. We would hold a flood on it; usually a flood of four to five inches deep at certain times. Then at certain times it is dry.

GOODSILL: How do you keep it so the water stays where it is supposed to?

BEARD: We have levees for the contour of the land; it is what we call levees out there. A levee is as high as this table, maybe 3 feet.

GOODSILL: When you want to drain the water? How do you do that?

BEARD: You have ditches already cut in there and you cut a hole in the levee and it drains out. You go to the ditch and you cut a hole in the levee with a shovel.

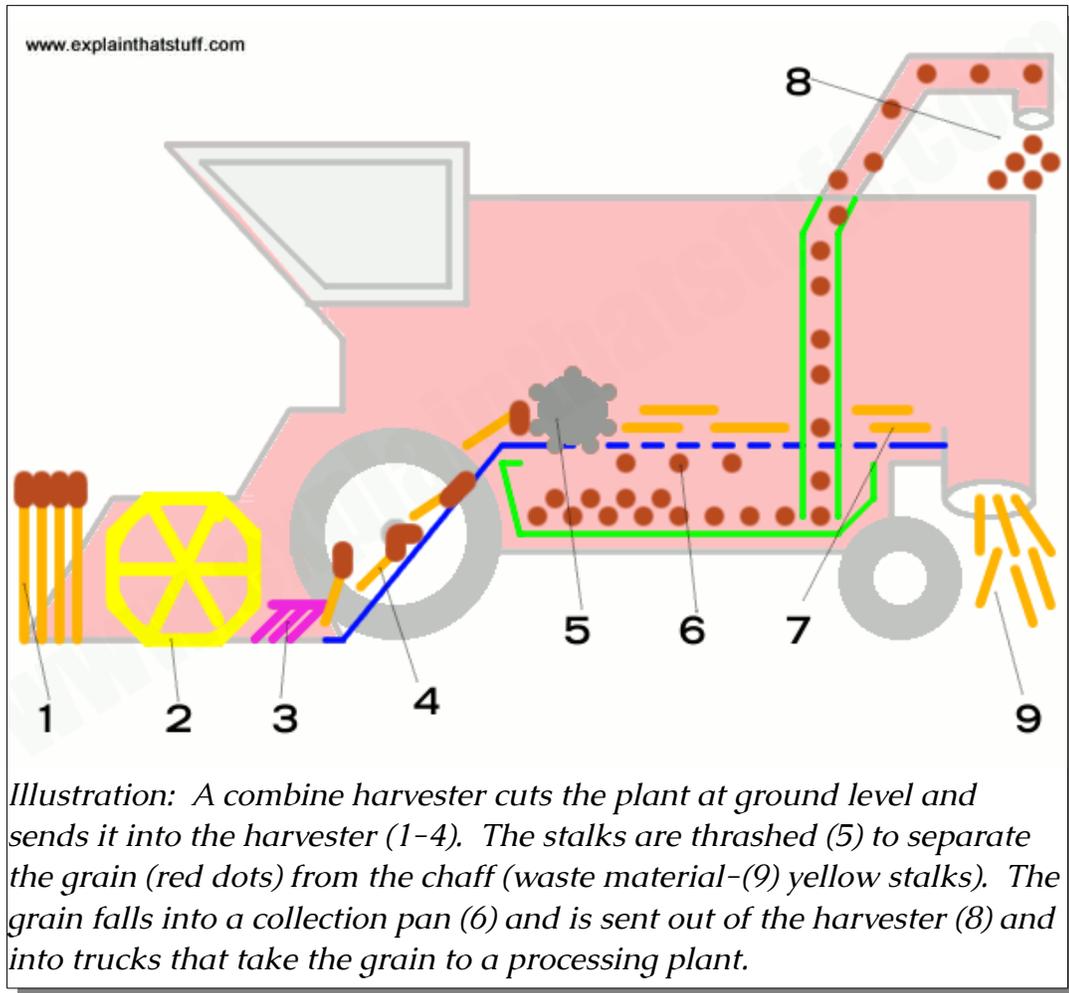
GOODSILL: The good old fashion way. How long does the rice like to sit in water?

BEARD: At first you want to plant it in dry land. Then as the rice comes up you will have to do what we call flush over it to get the rice to germinate to come up; but not hold a flood on it. You do not want to hold a flood on the seed. But once the rice comes up you can actually cover the rice but it will stretch up to the top of the water. During certain times you hold a flood on it during the growing season. When you get ready to harvest you drain all the water off of it. You want it dry when you harvest.

GOODSILL: How long do you have to have it dry before you harvest?

BEARD: Usually about two weeks. You harvest it with a combine. You go out there and the header on the combine cuts it and sends it up in there and it has a thrashing mechanism in it that thrashes it and it sends it into an area of the combine (see *Illustration*, below). The tractor and auger wagon come along and you auger it into the auger wagon and then the tractor and auger wagon go to the road where the truck is and then augers it into the truck.

GOODSILL: At this point the truck is just filled with grains of rice? It looks likes grains of rice but they are a little bit green.



BEARD: Usually you cut rice around twenty per cent moisture; from eighteen to twenty per cent moisture. It is much greener than milo. Milo or maize is cut below fourteen per cent, but rice is different.

GOODSILL: When you have it in the truck it is heavy and after you dry it, it gets a lot lighter.

BEARD: When they dry it at the drier it gets a little bit lighter, not a whole lot. They dry it with air and heat. They got certain areas in there where they can blow air and heat through it. They have to be careful not to put too much heat on it because it may burn it. Sometimes you have to use augers to stir the rice because it clumps up. You have to break up those clumps to get it dried properly. Then it goes into a storage bind, like a silo. It stays there until you sell it. The buyer comes and picks it up with a truck or if you own a railroad track, a railroad car will come and pick it up.

GOODSILL: They actually put the rice in a railroad car not in sacks; just pour it into the railroad car?

BEARD: Yes, auger it in there. They are particular about trucks being clean and railroad cars being clean. They do not come up there with dirty trucks.

GOODSILL: So then it goes off in the truck or railroad car and the buyer is responsible for sacking it?

BEARD: They take it to their area and they shell it and put it into bags where they sell it in grocery stores. Brown rice is just less of the hull off of it and white rice is where they take the whole hull off of it. That is the difference. You have long grain, medium grain.

GOODSILL: I know what I like. I like short grain, brown rice. I don't like long grain.
[Laughing]

BEARD: There is very little short grain rice raised in Texas. It brings a better price in this area. There is some medium grain and a little bit of short grain, but it is mostly long grain in Texas. Where your short grain is grown is in California.

GOODSILL: I like to buy Japanese rice; of course I am from Honolulu.

BEARD: Japanese rice is another variety of rice. Some of it is short grain, some of it medium grain. Arkansas is a big rice state and they mostly grow long grain. There are more of the medium grains than Texas.

GOODSILL: Do you eat very much rice?

BEARD: The last time I was at the doctor's he said, "You need to quit eating so many carbohydrates, such as rice!" [both laughing]

GOODSILL: The only thing I know about rice is what Jack Wendt said in his interview. He said he needed to be a rice farmer but he almost couldn't do it because it was so itchy. He couldn't take it. Finally they invented rice that was not so itchy and then he could be a rice farmer. Do you remember itchiness being a problem?

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read Jack Wendt's interview on this website at <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=30464>

BEARD: No, I remember itchiness in milo and maze but not with rice. I have gotten out there and combined milo and that stuff really itches. Back then we didn't have cabs and air conditioning like they have now. We cut maze in July and the first part of August and it was hot. You would sweat and boy that stuff burned. I was so happy when we were cutting rice in September. Maze you cut it below fourteen per cent moisture, it is real dry and dusty. Rice is not nearly as dusty as maze. Rice is at eighteen per cent moisture and there is hardly any dust off of it. At twenty per cent moisture there is hardly any dust on it. The drier says that anything over twenty two per cent they are not responsible for it if it does not dry right. You cut rice at high moisture and it is not near as dusty. I loved it when we got out of the maze fields and went to the rice field [both laughing].

We would put baby powder and talc on our faces to keep it from sticking on you. When it sticks that is when it burns. You are out there in the hot sun sweating and everything sticks to you. Back then we didn't have cabs with air conditioning; all we had was an umbrella over us and dust all around. It was tough.

GOODSILL: Did you wear sunglasses or goggles?

BEARD: Yes, I wore anything that you could get a hold of.

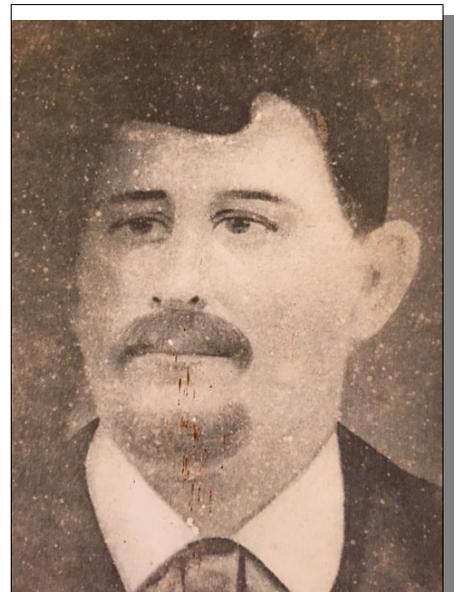
GOODSILL: When you got home from working in the fields what was the first thing you did?

BEARD: Go get me a beer [both laughing]. Drink it and go get another one. Then we would bath and wash all that stuff off.

GOODSILL: What was your grandfather, Sydney like?

BEARD: He passed away before my father was born. My grandfather passed away in 1898 and my father was born in 1899. He died of the bloody flux; it is like dysentery. My father's mother raised him and his ten brothers and sisters raised him.

GOODSILL: What was your father like?



*David's grandfather,
Sydney Andrew Beard.*

BEARD: He was a good man but he was a stern man. He did not put up with any bull corn and when he told me to do something, I found out it was better to do it instead of arguing with him because I always lost. I am glad he did me that way because it made a better person out of me.

GOODSILL: All your father's brothers and sisters died before you were born?

BEARD: All my uncles passed away before I was born. I was born February 26, 1935. I remember the sisters and in fact the oldest one lasted the longest. She lived up to the age of 96 and her son lived up to the age of 96 and I think he would have lived over a hundred if he hadn't had that car wreck.

GOODSILL: How many children did your mother and father have?

BEARD: There were six of us. Mary Jane, Austine, my brother, Shirley Jr., then me, my youngest brother, Sydney Pierce and my youngest sister, Barbara Ann.

GOODSILL: So tell me what your life was like?

BEARD: I think I had a good life. I went to school in Needville where I played football with Needville and I enjoyed that. I went to college at Sam Houston and graduated and got a degree in Agriculture Science. Then I got drafted into the Army and served two years in the Army in Germany. I was in Germany in 1958 and that was after WWII. But we were eyeball to eyeball with the Russians. If the Russians would have ever attacked we would have been the first ones to get it.

GOODSILL: It was during the Cold War and it got scary around that time.



*David's father, Shirley Austin Beard.
His first name was a family name.
One of his sons carries on the name.*

EDITOR'S NOTE: Cold War. A constant, nonviolent state of hostility between the Soviet Union and the United States. The cold war began shortly after World War II, with the rapid extension of Soviet influence over eastern Europe and North Korea.

--www.dictionary.com

BEARD: Yes, it did. When I came back home from Germany I was doing some weekend flying out of Sugar Land at Don Hull Airport. Don Hull built that airport there, he was a dentist and he taught me to fly. He later sold it and I think the city owns it now.

He bought the land for the airport right next to the prison farm. I used to drive through the prison farm to get to the airport. Don Hull was a stern type of person and if you were doing what you were supposed to everything was fine, but if not he would get on you.

I had flown some before I went into the service. When I came out of the Army I finished and I got my private licenses through Don Hull.

GOODSILL: Why did he pick Sugar Land as the place for his airport?

BEARD: Well I don't really know for sure but my guess is that where he could buy property and he also was a dentist for the prison system. Maybe there is a connection. He used to fly to Huntsville, which was right down my alley because I was going back and forth to Huntsville to Sam Houston. He would fly there and do some dental work at the prison there at Huntsville and then fly back to Sugar Land.

One time I went over there and said we are having a barbecue out at the ranch. "Well, get in that plane and fly me some back." So I flew out here and landed in the pasture, got some of the barbecue and flew it back to him. Then he rode back with me and we landed together right here in that pasture. Then he took off and went back to Sugar Land.

I loved to fly. When I got started I was going to elementary school right up here at Long Point. There was a guy named Rudy that always flew over the school in a red airplane and I would say, "There is Rudy in that red airplane." That kind of got me going about flying.

GOODSILL: So did you use it in your career or your work?

BEARD: Yes, I did. When I was watering the rice fields I would fly over it to see where the water was. Instead of walking around checking it I would fly over it.

GOODSILL: To make sure there were no leaks and levees were holding.

BEARD: Yes, and I checked my cattle with the airplane and see where they were. Sometimes I would chase them with an airplane. I had some out one time and I chased them back into the pasture. You go down there like you are on a horse. You get over to the side and crowd them over that way.

There were a lot of blackbirds in the rice fields and my daddy had somebody else farming rice. The brothers were farming rice and they had an airplane, a J3 Cub and I learned to fly in their airplane. We moved it to Sugar Land and I learned to fly in it. I would be out here chasing blackbirds out of the rice fields with the plane.

GOODSILL: How long did it keep those blackbirds out of that field?

BEARD: Well, for a while. It did disturb them to keep them out because it was eating part of the crop. One time I flew through a bunch of them and one guy said, "Boy I looked up and there was blackbirds falling everywhere." That was a lot of fun. The brothers that were farming there said, "We will furnish all the gas you just stay out and keep flying and chase those blackbirds." Boy that was right down my alley.

GOODSILL: So you got out of the Army and you got your pilot's license and you already knew that you would be ranching and farming this land?

BEARD: Yes. United Airlines was buying a bunch of planes and they needed pilots and they offered me a job. I would have to work my way up from a private pilot up to an airline pilot. I was offered a job as a co-pilot and then I would build myself up to be a captain or something on an airline. I thought about doing that but my daddy told me, "I got this place together for y'all; I want you to stay here." So I stayed on the ranch.

GOODSILL: So you stayed and worked with your older brother, Sidney?

BEARD: No, Sidney Pierce went to school and he majored in music and was a music director at Centerville between Houston and Dallas. He got a job up there after graduating. He stayed up there and became the superintendent of the school up there.

GOODSILL: Does this ranch have a name?

BEARD: Beard Ranch.

GOODSILL: You got married at some point?

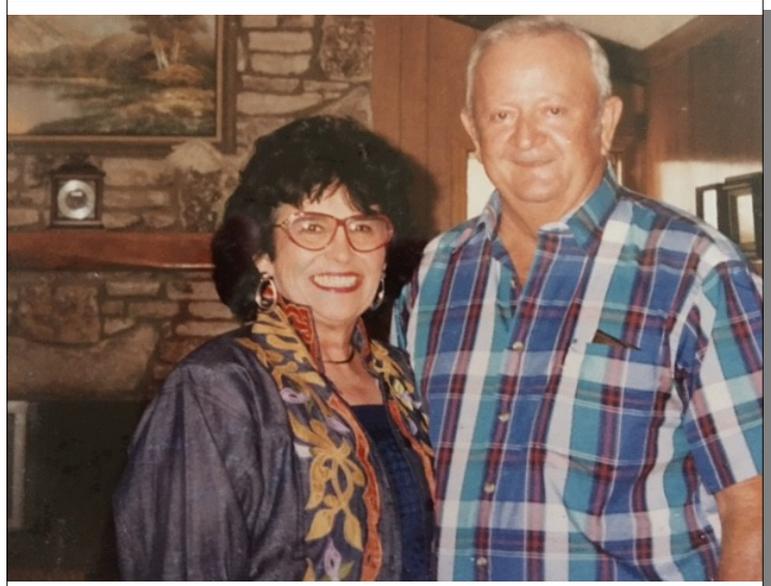
BEARD: I married Connie Thompson in 1967. She lived on the edge of Houston. We got married and lived the first year out here in the country and then we moved up to Rosenberg because she taught school up there. I drove out here every day to do my farming and ranching.

GOODSILL: At some point did you move out here?

BEARD: I wanted to but she wanted to stay up there.

GOODSILL: Whose house is this, originally?

BEARD: This is the home place of my grandpa and grandma. See this center part that goes through here, this side over here was the old house. It has been remodeled and it is not the same. In 1935 my daddy added that side. There is a wing in the back and he added that on for my little sister during World War II.



David and Connie Thompson Beard, a school teacher from Rosenberg, were married in 1967.

GOODSILL: So you were raised in this house, but didn't live here with your wife.

BEARD: My mother and youngest sister, Barbara, lived here up till 1996. When my mother passed away I was my sister's guardian. She had been injured at birth because the naval cored wrapped around her neck and cut off the oxygen to one side of her brain. She could talk and all of that but she could not go to school.

My wife and I put her into a nursing home in Richmond and we would go and see her on a regular basis. My wife really helped me a lot with her and she was the main one doing for Barbara. My sister lived away and they had their family and we didn't have any children. Barbara passed away December 1, 1999.

GOODSILL: Where did you brother Shirley live?

BEARD: Sometimes he lived in Guy and then he lived at another place over here.

GOODSILL: Did he fly as well?

BEARD: No. I am the only one.

GOODSILL: Do you want to tell us what happens to the Beard Ranch after you are no more?

BEARD: My oldest sister is living. She has two daughters and Austine had two daughters. That is all that is living, is four nieces.

GOODSILL: Are any of them in interested in running the ranch.

BEARD: They say there are but they don't show up very often.

GOODSILL: You can't run a ranch if you don't show up.

BEARD: That is right.

GOODSILL: Tell me what you know about the George Ranch? Did you ever have any inter action with them?

BEARD: I trained a lot of horses, and made cow horses out of them. My daddy got this stud horse from the George Ranch and then we had a bunch of brood mares and had a bunch of colts. Then we had hands out there, black and some white and they broke those horses and then I took them and taught them how to rein, and all of that. My daddy was watching me and the best one he always said I want that horse. I saw how he works.

GOODSILL: Your daddy would use it for his personal use?

BEARD: Yes. He rode horses up to the age of 66 up until he hurt his leg.

GOODSILL: Where you a good horseman as well as a trainer?

BEARD: I could rope and ride. My father taught me to train horses.

GOODSILL: Is that a particular skill.

BEARD: Yes, you have to know what you are doing. Horses are like people. You have fast learners and you have slow learners; that is the same with horses. I would take the horses at first and ride them around the house and get them used to being ridden. I have been on some bucking horses and I have been thrown many a times. I would get on this fresh horse and ride him around and get him used to being rode. Then I would start to training to rein. There were certain techniques that I used to make him learn how to rein. Then I would have them reining so good that I could shift my weight in the saddle and that would make him turn. I could shift this way and he would turn to the right. Then I would get out there and there would be some calves around and I would get that horse so they would watch those calves and when they tried to run by, watch them and cut them off.

You have to be stern at times. You have to let them know that you are the boss. They can't have their own way. They will try you and you have to teach them not to have their way. It takes a lot of work to train a horse. I mean, many hours.

GOODSILL: Once you train the horses and then you probably had to train the cowboys!

BEARD: Yes, that was another problem. After I trained the horses, the cowboys needed to be trained. You were right about that.

GOODSILL: So you would breed the horses and train the horses? Then they would be used on the ranch.

BEARD: Yes and they could be used for ranch work. Like I said, my daddy would always pick out the best one and then I would have the next best.

We got the stud horse from the George Ranch. As a youngster I used to go with my dad to the George Ranch. Daddy would go into the house and see Mr. George but he left me out at the barn with the hands. Paul Henry was foreman at that time. That was after Joe Bingham Crawford had left.

I don't know if you know it but Joe Bingham Crawford was the foreman and he was in line to inherit the ranch but he sold some cows and calves in his name and put the money in his pocket. Mr. George found out about it and Joe Bingham fled and went up the country. He knew that he could not stay here. Mr. George never filed any charges against him. He was almost like a son of theirs is the way I understand it. I know that it broke his heart when that happened. Some people are greedy, but look what he did. He would have inherited that ranch and look what he squandered for pocket change.

GOODSILL: Did your daddy teach you how to do business, how to sell horses and how to sell grain, and how to price things?

BEARD: Yes, he did. In fact my daddy told me that he wanted me to learn from his mistakes and I told daddy, "I don't know when you are making a mistake! You don't tell me, you want to hide it. I am not going to make fun of you if you tell me when you made a mistake." I tried to ease in so he would turn loose when he made a mistake. He loosen up some.

GOODSILL: You mainly learned from watching?

BEARD: Yes. I would always go with him and it was such a pleasure because people respected him.

GOODSILL: How old were you when your father died?

BEARD: I was 32.

GOODSILL: Oh, that is young. So you had to do a lot of learning on your own.

BEARD: Yes, I had a good background, daddy taught me a lot and I studied agriculture at Sam Houston and I got out here and did a lot on my own. I saddled up a horse and rode around and looked at these cows over here, check fences, and stuff like that.

GOODSILL: What role did your brother play in running the ranch?

BEARD: He was out there helping, we were working together.

GOODSILL: Was he better in the outdoor stuff or was he better in the inside stuff?

BEARD: Outdoors.

GOODSILL: Who kept the books?

BEARD: My brother graduated from Sam Houston too, with agriculture. Daddy kept the books. After he died we both kept the books. We had the training because we both went to school and learned how to manage stuff. I have seen so many farmers that do not train their sons to go and borrow money at the bank. It is not that terribly difficult but there is certain ways that you do it.

GOODSILL: Do you keep up with the current trends?

BEARD: In horse breeding, I do not because I am not in that business. I keep up with trends for cattle and prices of calves.

GOODSILL: You still keep up with that. Is there anything else that we need to talk about or I forgot to ask?

BEARD: I still have a little bit more about the George Ranch. I got a computer back there that I keep everything on. When the Loran [similar to GPS] came out for boats they had stations on shore and the boat could zero in on that station and go wherever they wanted it to go. The Loran started in an airplane and one of the airplanes that I had, had a Loran in it. Talk about something difficult to learn...

The only difference between a Loran and GPS is that the station you dialed to is on land, it is on the coast line and it is for boats. Then it started for airplanes. The same thing for satellites, it is for your GPS. You can dial into the station that is near you and if you are flying somewhere you can sit on the end of the runway. You just dial it in, it tells your speed and how long it will take you to get there. It took me a while to learn that Loran but after I learned it, it made GPS simple. GPS is very simple and I do not have any problem with it.

When we were breaking horses, we took some over to the George Ranch and their hands broke some of the horses. One year when my brother and I were in high school Mr. George donated two calves for me and my brother and we had them in the fair. We raised them out here, fed them up and took them up to the fair and did pretty good as far as position. We did not win champion but we did place. I was at the fair with this calf and this older man walked up. He asked me, "Where did you get that calf?" I said, "Mr. Albert George." He said, "I am Albert George." Boy it just shocked me. I had always heard about him, heard talk about him and to actually see him right there was a shock to me.

I was afraid to say anything. I was really afraid to say anything, it really shocked me. He said, "It looks like you did a good job on that calf." I said, "Thank you, Sir." and he walked off. I only met him twice and that is one time that I really remember.

GOODSILL: Do you think he connected on who you were? He knew you were your daddy's son?

BEARD: Yes, because it had our names up there and he could read it. That was one time and I was really excited about that. I have seen Mrs. George several times. One time she drove up. She always had her nurse with her after Mr. George died. He died when I was in Houston and I heard it on the radio because they announced it up there in Huntsville. I think it was in 1955.

My daddy always visited over there. They had business and then their foreman, Paul Henry, was a real good friend of my daddy's. He loved us boys. One time Mr. Henry got hurt, a bull hooked him and broke his hip and he was in the hospital and my daddy went over there and ran the ranch until he got out of the hospital.

My daddy really liked Mr. George and from all indications that I get Mr. George liked my daddy so they were good friends as far as I knew. I never did get into their conversations.

GOODSILL: You were a young boy. Your place was not to be in those conversations.

BEARD: That's right.

GOODSILL: Thank you so much for sharing your story with us!

Interview Ends